Keeping safe

The views of cross-sector stakeholders in relation to teaching “keeping safe” messages in primary schools in Northern Ireland

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Glossary of general terms

**Bullying**
Defined by Olweus (1994) as "aggressive behaviour or intentional ‘harm doing’ that is carried out repeatedly and over time in an interpersonal relationship characterised by an imbalance of power."

**Domestic abuse**
Violence that occurs within families or in the home.

**DE (NI)**
Department of Education (Northern Ireland).

**DHSSPS (NI)**
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Northern Ireland).

**MLA**
Member of the Legislative Assembly.

**NSPCC**

**NVivo**
A qualitative data analysis computer software package.

**OFMDFM**
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

**PD&MU**
The personal development and mutual understanding curriculum.

**Preventative education**
In this report, this term refers to teaching “keeping safe” messages about bullying, child abuse and domestic abuse to children in primary schools in Northern Ireland.

**SBNI**
Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland.

**Special school**
Article 3(5) of the Education (NI) Order 1996 defines a special school as “a controlled or voluntary school which is specially organised to make special educational provision for pupils with special educational needs and is recognised by the Department as a special school.”
The primary aim of this research was to engage with a range of cross-sector partners to explore their views about the strategic development of preventative education in all primary schools in Northern Ireland. Semi-structured interviews were employed to gain a better understanding of the views of those broadly responsible for the development of preventative education, including policy, curriculum and programme content, those who would be involved in the training and management of personnel delivery key prevention messages, and those involved in inspecting educational provision.

Key recommendations from the research

- Government departments in Northern Ireland should embrace the opportunity that exists to deliver effective preventative education in primary schools. The Department of Education (NI) should lead this development.

- All statutory and voluntary agencies should work collaboratively to provide an effective response to children’s need to receive consistent preventative education messages and to promote public education to support this within a wider environment of the home and community.

- The Department of Education (NI) should fully resource and implement a comprehensive package of training, development and support for teachers to equip them to deliver effective preventative education.

- Implementing effective preventative education should be an integral part of a school’s development plan and supported through the education sector’s training and development infrastructure, e.g., included in initial teacher training, continuing professional development and leadership training. This should include:
  - Training for school principals, exploring: the rationale for preventative education; the importance of embedding preventative education in the culture and ethos of the school; how to address challenges; models for effective engagement with parents; and the benefits of working more closely with external agencies.
  - Training for teachers, exploring: the rationale for preventative education; barriers and teachers’ concerns; resource materials; arrangements for support; and access to expert multi-professional advice.

- The Department of Education (NI) should provide a range of resources to facilitate teachers and parents to deliver key prevention messages to children attending primary (including Irish-medium) and special schools.

- The Department of Education (NI) should build on its ongoing work in exploring the processes schools use to engage parents in order to maximise parental support and involvement in preventative education.

NSPCC services in Northern Ireland focus on the most acute forms of abuse and the most vulnerable children at highest risk. The services provided include treatment for children who have experienced abuse, as well as support for those who have been exposed to domestic violence.

The NSPCC also provides support for looked after children and for young witnesses who have to go through the trauma of giving evidence in criminal trials. The new ChildLine Schools Service provides information to children in primary schools about how to protect themselves from bullying and child abuse.
The NSPCC Strategy 2009–2016 focuses on the following priorities:

- neglect
- physical abuse in high-risk families (violent adults, alcohol and drug abuse, and mental health issues)
- sexual abuse
- children under one
- children with disabilities
- children from certain black and minority ethnic (BME) communities
- looked after children.

**Background**

The maltreatment of children in the UK and internationally is a widespread social problem. International prevalence data confirms that a significant number of children continue to experience maltreatment within the context of the family and wider society, including bullying (and cyberbullying) and domestic abuse, as well as physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect (Asmussen, 2010; Cawson, 2002; Cawson et al, 2000; James, 2010; Scott, 2009; UNICEF, 2005). There is also considerable evidence that children with special educational needs or disabilities are particularly vulnerable to being maltreated (DCSF, 2009; Higgins and Swain, 2009; Mencap, 2007; Sullivan and Knutson, 2000).

**Impact**

Research evidence relating to the impact of child maltreatment confirms that these experiences have a negative and detrimental impact on children’s health, wellbeing and development, both in the shorter and longer term (Finkelhor, 2007; Goddard and Bedi, 2010; Lazenbatt, 2010). These negative consequences of childhood maltreatment are often exacerbated by children’s reticence or inability to tell of their experience and seek support (Allnock, 2010; Featherstone and Evans, 2004). The reasons why children do not seek help from adults are complicated and varied. Children may not know that what is happening to them is abusive or inappropriate, they may blank out their abuse and focus on more positive aspects of their lives or they may be too afraid of the consequences of telling (Willow, 2009). A growing body of evidence suggests that school-based preventative education is both cost-effective (Watters et al, 2007) and improves children’s knowledge, awareness and skills. Children who experience this education are better placed to recognise maltreatment experiences as inappropriate and abusive, to use self-protection strategies and to report the experience, therefore seeking help and stopping the abuse (Barron and Topping, 2009; Finkelhor, 2007; Taylor et al, 2010; Zwi et al, 2007).

**School-based preventative education**

Policy and legislative developments in the UK all assert the role of education in promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children and young people. Safeguarding in educational settings is viewed as having three main elements: vetting and good employment practices to ensure that only suitable people work and have contact with pupils; responding appropriately when child abuse concerns are raised about an individual pupil; and the preventative curriculum.
Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), personal development (PD) and citizenship curricula, 
cross-curricular themes and whole-school approaches provide the education system and schools with the 
opportunity to deliver preventative education to children and young people. In 2007, a new curriculum was 
introduced in Northern Ireland that included the statutory provision of a personal development curriculum for 
children and young people aged 4–16. Preventative education, characterised by teaching children how to: recognise 
inappropriate and abusive behaviour; understand that such behaviour is never right or acceptable; challenge the 
behaviour; and access appropriate help and support (Barron and Topping, 2009; Harries, 2006; Humphreys et al, 
2008; Vreeman and Carroll, 2007), could be delivered as part of the personal development curriculum. 
In recent decades, a number of preventative education programmes have been developed elsewhere, including in 
Canada, America, Australia, New Zealand and the Republic of Ireland (Briggs and Hawkins, 1994; Ellis, 2004; 
Kenny et al, 2008; MacIntyre and Carr, 1999). Those programmes that acknowledge the risk posed to children by 
familiar adults as well as strangers are considered effective (Kenny et al, 2008; Vreeman and Carroll, 2007) in 
increasing children’s awareness (Barron and Topping, 2009; Boyle and Lutzker, 2005), reducing the likelihood of 
children being targeted by abusers (Gibson and Leitenberg, 2000), increasing the use of protective behaviours (Zwi 
et al, 2007) and helping children who have been abused to achieve better outcomes (Finkelhor, 2007). A number of 
research studies and reviews have also documented the effectiveness of preventative education in decreasing the 
rate of bullying by 20–23 per cent (Farrington and Ttofi, 2009) and in enhancing awareness and knowledge of 
gender violence and sexual harassment (Taylor et al, 2010). 

Preventative education specifically in relation to abuse has also been found to be a cost-effective use of public 
resources in the longer term, when the direct and indirect costs associated with the impact and consequences of 
child abuse are considered (Watters et al, 2007). Caldwell (1992) reported from research carried out in Michigan 
that there was a cost advantage of 19:1 in favour of preventative child abuse education. Similarly, a US study 
examining child maltreatment and adult socio-economic wellbeing concluded that there was a substantial societal 
cost that “should encourage policy makers to focus on improving prevention, intervention and treatment efforts for 
victims of abuse and neglect” (Zielinski, 2009, p666). 

A number of meta-analytic reviews of school-based preventative education (Barron and Topping, 2009; Cornelius 
and Resseguiue, 2007; Davies and Gidycz, 2000; Farrington and Ttofi, 2009; Park-Higgerson et al, 2008; Rispens et 
al, 1997; Zwi et al, 2007) do not consider multidisciplinary or inter-agency collaboration when reviewing the 
effectiveness of programmes, and relatively limited attention has been given to these issues in the development of 
preventative education to date (MacIntyre and Carr, 1999). The need for collaborative working in children’s 
services has been a consistent theme informing the development of child protection systems for many years. 
Government guidance has developed and refined systems to support working together at both an operational and a 
practice level (DfES, 2005; DHSSPS, 2003; HM Government, 2006). While this guidance has contributed to 
improving multidisciplinary practice, there are still unresolved issues, as highlighted by the Victoria Climbié 
Inquiry in England (Laming, 2003) and the Toner independent review report (Toner, 2008) in Northern Ireland.

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in Northern Ireland
Arrangements for safeguarding and protecting children in the UK have undergone considerable reform in the last decade, including new legislation, policy and structures to better protect children, strengthen local cooperation and increase accountability. While there are significant differences in structures, policies and services to safeguard and protect children across the UK, the “direction of policy has moved from a narrow child protection focus on children who have been abused and neglected towards a wider focus on safeguarding and protecting all children” (Vincent, 2010, p11). Safeguarding incorporates all preventable harm that impacts on the lives of children, with a clear focus on children’s personal development and wellbeing, and on improving children’s lives.

In Northern Ireland, some of the most significant structural and strategic developments promoting preventative education include the following:

- The passing of legislation in the Northern Ireland Assembly introducing the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI). It is intended that this will be the key statutory body for safeguarding, and will facilitate enhanced inter-agency cooperation by improving the effectiveness of organisations responsible for safeguarding children. The SBNI and safeguarding panels based in each of the five health and social care trusts will have a strategic and operational responsibility for promoting inter-agency work to safeguard children, ensuring that individuals and organisations are aware of their child protection responsibilities and how to fulfil them (DHSSPS, 2009).

- The full implementation of two government strategies: Tackling sexual violence and abuse: a regional strategy 2008–2013 (DHSSPS, 2008) and Tackling violence at home: a strategy for addressing domestic violence and abuse in Northern Ireland (DHSSPS, 2005). These strategies, which include a focus on prevention and public education, involve a number of government departments, health care trusts and other organisations working collaboratively at a strategic level.

- The development of the pupil emotional health and wellbeing programme, led by the DE (NI) in partnership with all key statutory and voluntary and community sector stakeholders. The programme is intended to be a vehicle for integrating policies, support services and curriculum activities affecting all pupils’ emotional health and wellbeing in a consistent and coherent way, while addressing the needs of vulnerable groups.

Consulting with key stakeholders

Despite the growing evidence that school-based preventative programmes are effective in improving children’s knowledge, awareness and self-protection skills, they have not been developed at a strategic level within Great Britain and Northern Ireland, where a number of organisations deliver messages in schools about a range of related subjects, such as relationships and sexuality, bullying, child abuse and domestic abuse.
In 2008, the DE (NI) funded the NSPCC to conduct an exploratory research study into the development of comprehensive and effective preventative abuse education by carrying out an in-depth consultation with key stakeholders. This consultation represents a necessary first stage in the development of an evidence-informed programme that is attuned to the cultural sensitivities and specificity of a Northern Ireland context.

It is imperative that the consultation engaged cross-sector partners to explore their views about the strategic development of preventative abuse education in all primary schools in Northern Ireland. The aim of the consultation is to gain a better understanding of the views of those broadly responsible for the development of preventative education, including policy, curriculum and programme content, those who would be involved in the training and management of personnel delivering key prevention messages, and those involved in inspecting educational provision.

**Design**

**Figure 1: Study design**

This research study comprised two sequential phases. Phase 1 (Nov 2008–June 2009) employed an instrumental case study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Wellington, 2000), which facilitated an in-depth exploration of the experience and views of key stakeholders, including teachers and whole-school staff, children, parents and cross-sector strategic partners, with regard to preventative education. The case study geographical area was the Ballymena District Council within the North Eastern Education and Library Board. Grant-aided primary and special schools, including all management types across a broad range of socio-economic status bands, were involved in the study.
Phase 2 (Oct 2009–June 2010) extended the research study across all five education and library boards in Northern Ireland, and employed a range of methods to engage schools, teachers and parents in a process of considering and verifying the findings that emerged from the case study employed in phase 1. This assisted in formulating a robust representative picture of the experience and views of key stakeholders across primary and special schools in Northern Ireland.

This summary report presents findings that emerged from 22 interviews undertaken with key cross-sector strategic partners during phase 1 of the research. The objectives and methodology adopted are described first.

**Objectives**

- To explore the views of key cross-sector strategic partners about the development of school-based preventative education.
- To identify any developments in the legislative, policy and practice context that would present barriers to the development of school-based preventative education.
- To identify and describe any legislative, policy and practice developments that would facilitate the strategic development of preventative education in every primary school in Northern Ireland.

**2 Methods and analysis**

Semi-structured interviews (n=22) were conducted with cross-sector strategic partners. Semi-structured interviews are interviews where a pre-planned topic guide and open-ended questioning are used to focus the discussion on issues considered important to the research question, while helping the interviewee to expand on issues they feel are important and to explain their perspectives. Semi-structured interviews provide an appropriate level of privacy to explore and unpack the range of political and culturally sensitive attitudes and perspectives from the diverse individuals who comprised this stakeholder group (Gibbs, 1997). This method allows for the emergence of themes and ideas rather than relying only on concepts and questions defined in advance of the interview.

A topic guide was used to ensure that areas for consideration were explored in a similar order, but there was also scope for pursuing and probing for relevant information through additional questions when new themes emerged (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). In order to carry out a thorough analysis, an audio recording was made (Willig, 2008).

The issues that were central to the study and formed the interview guide were:

- the meaning of safety and what is already being done in schools;
- factors that would facilitate the development of preventative education;
- barriers that might deter the development of preventative education; and
- next steps – what needs to happen to ensure the development of abuse preventative education in every school in Northern Ireland.
Sample and participants
A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure that those who participated in the interviews were representative of departments, groups and organisations whose views and perspectives would be important in the strategic development of preventative education for primary schools in Northern Ireland. All individuals or organisations initially invited to take part in the research agreed to participate.

Data collection and ethics
The interviews were conducted between June 2009 and Dec 2009 following approval being granted by the NSPCC research ethics committee. Prior to attending the interview, all participants received a letter providing details of the study, the purpose of the interview and the intended use of any findings. Participants were assured that their anonymity would be protected in the reporting of the findings. However, participants representing small organisations or those holding specific roles within organisations were aware that they may be identifiable.

Prior to the start of the interview, informed written consent to participate was sought from participants (Morrow and Richards, 1996), including consent for the interview to be audio recorded. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time. One participant declined to be audio recorded but permitted an administrative assistant to attend the interview to minute the content of the discussion. When the interviews were transcribed, each participant received an electronic copy and was given the opportunity to comment. One interviewee asked that no direct quotes be used from their interview but agreed that the meaning of what they had articulated could be represented.

Analysis and reporting
Content or thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews was used to analyse the data using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software package. Ritchie and Spencer’s (1994) framework for analysing data in applied policy research was an appropriate method to draw on in this study. The framework approach has its roots in social and public policy research undertaken on behalf of local government, voluntary organisations, universities or other public bodies. It has been applied to in-depth and group interviewing, longitudinal studies, case studies and projects involving different groups or sub-populations of participants. The framework is defined as an analytical process that involves a number of distinct, though highly interconnected, stages.

The initial stages of the data analysis (reading/re-reading and generating initial codes) (Braun and Clarke, 2006) revealed that views and opinions around each issue were extensive. Dissecting the data was a crucial first step to ensure that potential themes were identified and that each theme could be debated in accordance with the views of the participants. The subsequent three stages of the analysis involved collating and refining themes to help generate a thematic map that represented the “story” of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).
3 Findings

Key findings from interviews with strategic cross-sector partners

- There was considerable support across strategic cross-sector partners for the development of preventative education that addresses bullying, child abuse and domestic abuse, and that involves the collaboration of the education sector, health and social services, other statutory agencies and families to offer children the greatest potential for keeping safe.
- A number of curricular, structural and strategic developments have the potential to assist the development of preventative education.
- A number of factors were identified that could impede the development of preventative education. These included cultural issues, the lack of inter-agency collaboration and barriers in the school system, as well as the developing of a comprehensive package of training and support for whole-school staff.
- Enhanced inter-agency collaboration is required to progress any legislative, policy and practice developments that would facilitate the strategic development of comprehensive preventative education, which is both embedded in the curriculum and recognised as fundamental to the ethos of every primary school in Northern Ireland.
- The need for effective leadership and significant financial resources were identified as essential for developing teaching resources, training and support for school staff, and the exploration of engaging with parents.
- Resources need to be developed that are: consistent with the revised Northern Ireland curriculum; appropriate for children across the key stages and with different levels of ability; user friendly, well structured and provide advice for teachers about how to discuss sensitive issues like secrets and touches; and linked to other programmes, for example relationships and sexuality education.
- A supportive environment for any school-based developments could be facilitated by the adoption of public education to maximise parental awareness and support, and by preventative education being undertaken in other sectors, eg the Youth Service.

In total, 22 interviews were carried out with key strategic cross-sector partners. These interviews elicited wide-ranging views and opinions of key representatives from various organisations. The views shared in the interviews included those of individuals and in some cases were representative of the organisation they represented.

Guide to interview participants

- **Barnardo’s** is a charity caring for vulnerable children and young people.

- The **chairperson of the board of governors** chairs the body ensuring the effective management of a school.

- The **child abuse prevention programme** provides capacity-building training and support to whole-school staff delivering the *Stay Safe* personal safety programme to children in primary and special schools in the Republic of Ireland.
The role of the **child protection coordinator** at **Stranmillis University College** involves ensuring that child protection policies and procedures are produced, maintained and followed. It also includes raising awareness of child protection issues during initial teacher education and during the preparation of students to work in the child care, community arts and leisure sectors.

**Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)** is the representative body for Irish-medium education in Northern Ireland.

The **Council for Catholic Maintained Schools** is the advocate for the Catholic maintained schools sector in Northern Ireland, and supports the management of Catholic maintained schools through boards of governors.

The **Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)** is a unique educational body in the UK, bringing together the three areas of curriculum, examinations and assessment.

The **Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS)** is one of 11 government departments in Northern Ireland. It has three main business responsibilities: health and social care (including policy and legislation for hospitals, family practitioner services, community health and personal social services); public health (covering policy, legislation and administrative action to promote and protect the health and wellbeing of the population); and public safety.

The **Education and Training Inspectorate** provides inspection services for a number of organisations in Northern Ireland, including the DE (NI).

**Love for Life** is a project in Northern Ireland that offers support on relationships and sexuality education to young people and their carers.

The **North Eastern Education and Library Board** is one of five education and library boards in Northern Ireland. Each board is responsible for education (including curriculum advice and support services for teachers), youth and library services in their geographical area.

The **Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)** coordinates efforts to develop integrated education and assists parent groups to open new integrated schools.

A **parent representative** is someone elected by parents to represent their views on a school’s **board of governors**, which has overall responsibility for the effective management of the school.

The purpose of the **Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)** is to make Northern Ireland safer for everyone through professional, progressive policing.

The **principal of an integrated school**, integrated schools are ones that bring pupils, governors and staff together in roughly equal numbers from Protestant, Catholic, other faith and no faith backgrounds. The schools are developed, supported and promoted by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.
The principal of a maintained school; in this report, this term refers to the principal of a Catholic Maintained school owned by the Catholic Church through a system of trustees and managed by a board of governors. Recurrent costs are met by the education and library boards, who also employ non-teaching staff. Teachers are employed by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

The principal and vice-principal of a special school; special schools are specially organised to make special educational provision for pupils with a statement of special educational needs.

The Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland (PPANI) refers to the arrangements established for the risk management of sexual and violent offenders and certain potentially dangerous persons, whose assessed risks require multi-agency input to the delivery of individual risk management plans.

The Regional Training Unit provides leadership, coordination and direction in the planning and delivery of professional development and training for the education community in Northern Ireland.

Together 4 All provides a tailored approach to improved behaviour, mutual respect and understanding, and bullying prevention through a social and emotional learning curriculum, health services, social-family partnerships and after-school activities within Northern Ireland.

Women's Aid is a national charity working to end domestic abuse of women and children.

The Youth Service within the Department of Education (NI) exists to support and encourage young people in Northern Ireland to mature and reach their potential as valued individuals and responsible citizens. The Department of Education (NI) has overall responsibility for the Youth Service, ensuring as far as is possible that policy is carried out with uniformity.

Identifying themes

From the interviews with the 22 strategic cross-sector partners, three key themes were identified:

Theme 1: Factors facilitating the introduction of preventative education

Theme 2: Barriers to the development of preventative education

Theme 3: Developing preventative education – what needs to happen?

Within each of these themes, a number of sub-themes also emerged.

Theme 1: Factors facilitating the introduction of preventative education

A number of factors were identified that would influence and inform any developments or future policies pertaining to safety in schools. Four sub-themes were identified:

1. We now have a “sharper focus” on emotional health and wellbeing
2. The personal development and mutual understanding (PD&MU) curriculum
3. Safeguarding structures and strategic developments
4. Increased public and professional awareness
Sub-theme 1: We now have a “sharper focus” on emotional health and wellbeing

The Regional Training Unit identified that by reviewing pastoral care in its inspections, the Education and Training Inspectorate has contributed to the “sharper focus” now placed on emotional health and wellbeing. The integration of preventative education into school life was seen as very important. “Stay safe” is one of the high-level outcomes of the children’s strategy, Our children and young people – our pledge. A ten year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland 2006–2016 (Children and Young People’s Unit, 2006); therefore, schools would be advised to work closely with statutory bodies and other agencies to ensure that the needs of children and young people are fully addressed. Furthermore, the Regional Training Unit stated that a significant number of the competencies within the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland competency framework make reference to what teachers need to be able to do to “best promote the personal development and personal growth of the young people who are in their charge”.

The urgency of the need for preventative measures is endorsed by the reported change in the school population. As the Education and Training Inspectorate noted, “very young children are presenting with highly complex emotional/mental health/pastoral needs”. This is a worrying development given that safety is a pre-requisite for learning. As the North Eastern Education and Library Board succinctly stated, “If children are not safe, they can’t learn”. In agreement, the Regional Training Unit said, “a pupil’s emotional health and wellbeing is much more conducive to optimising their learning than virtually anything else.”

Speaking in relation to those children being educated in the special school sector, one school principal affirmed the need for children to feel safe if learning is to happen: “A happy child will learn; a content child who feels safe will learn. A child who’s constantly on edge because they are worried about their relationships, about what’s going on at home or in some context like that, they’re not going to fulfil their full potential.”

The recognition of the link between wellbeing and children’s ability to reach their full potential provides further impetus for an increasing focus on preventative education.

Sub-theme 2: The personal development and mutual understanding (PD&MU) curriculum

According to the North Eastern Education and Library Board, preventative education was seen as fitting into the already established personal development curriculum, which is cross-curricular. The statutory requirements for the PD&MU curriculum at foundation stage include children learning “how to keep safe in familiar and unfamiliar environments”. The CCEA explained that, at Key Stage 1, the statutory requirements include children learning “strategies and skills for keeping themselves healthy and safe”, and at Key Stage 2, they include children learning “how to sustain their health, growth and wellbeing, and coping safely and efficiently with their environment”.

Teachers and other organisations are already delivering sensitive messages to children in the school context (see table 1 for a summary).
In addition, the introduction of the revised curriculum in the past three years has meant that all teachers in Northern Ireland – primary and post-primary – have had to attend compulsory training that included the creation of a supportive classroom environment and the skills teachers might need to facilitate the PD&MU curriculum. Nevertheless, while the foundations for the PD&MU curriculum are laid, the North Eastern Education and Library Board were of the opinion that there is undoubtedly more work to be done around developing teachers’ skills to a higher level, which will require working with a range of organisations. A hope was expressed that the “transferable learning” that is part of the revised curriculum might lead to a new level of confidence among teachers in being able to speak about sensitive issues. It was the view of the Regional Training Unit that school staff are committed and that “the antennae of teachers” are sharp and precise when it comes to the personal safety of the young people in the classroom.

The Regional Training Unit stated that “Every good teacher would recognise that the issues to do with personal safety as opposed to issues to do with car safety and road safety and so forth…probably impact more greatly on a young person’s capacity to learn than anything…If a young person, for example, is experiencing domestic violence or sexual abuse or bullying or some of the extreme forms of abuse, that those quite quickly translate in the school context into underachievement or low achievement.”

**Table 1: Programmes reported as being currently delivered in schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme name</th>
<th>Delivered by</th>
<th>To whom</th>
<th>Areas covered</th>
<th>Settings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship and Safety Education (CASE)</td>
<td>Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) officers</td>
<td>Children aged 4–18</td>
<td>Safety issues, such as internet use, drug education, personal safety and citizenship</td>
<td>All schools and youth clubs across NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education for Love (name since changed to <em>The wonder of my being - relationships and sexuality programme</em>)</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Children aged 4–11</td>
<td>Sexuality and relationships</td>
<td>Catholic maintained schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping Hands</td>
<td>Women’s Aid</td>
<td>Key Stage 2 – mainly Primary 5 children</td>
<td>Protective behaviours to prevent the abuse of children</td>
<td>In schools and community centres across NI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m special; You’re special</td>
<td>Love for Life project (but by teachers in the future)</td>
<td>Primary 7 children</td>
<td>Sexuality and relationships – self-esteem, friendship, choices and growing up</td>
<td>Catholic maintained schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living. Learning. Together.</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Aims to provide teachers with support in planning, teaching and assessing PD&amp;MU within the revised NI curriculum</td>
<td>All primary schools (PD&amp;MU statutory requirement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Together 4 All for schools (adapted PATHS [Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies] programme and integrated with lessons on mutual respect and understanding)</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Whole-school approach: Key Stage 1 and 2</td>
<td>A violence prevention programme that promotes social and emotional learning and character development, and bullying prevention and problem solving abilities</td>
<td>Pilot phase. Six schools in Northern Ireland are involved in a randomised controlled trial.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sub-theme 3: Safeguarding structures and strategic developments

The DHSSPS identified that the formation of new structures, initially within a single regional area child protection committee and within the proposed new Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI), would provide opportunities for a more “joined up working approach”. According to the DHSSPS, the expectation is that the SBNI will focus initially on its core business of child protection and give attention to “…preventative measures in terms of safeguarding children…linking into the ‘living in safety and stability’ outcome in the children’s strategy…Clearly children in schools getting the right messages to help prevent the abuse actually happening in the first place…have to play a key role in that.”

The education sector has been identified as having a key role to play in these new structures, providing opportunities to facilitate the development of preventative education in schools. Two government strategies were also highlighted as being important in the development of preventative education approaches: Tackling sexual violence and abuse: a regional strategy 2008–2013 (DHSSPS, 2008) and Tackling violence at home: a strategy for addressing domestic violence and abuse in Northern Ireland (DHSSPS, 2005).

A number of government departments, health care trusts and other organisations are committed to implementing these strategies, which include a focus on prevention and public education. Women’s Aid stated that the domestic violence strategy acknowledges that “everybody has their part to play” in tackling the problem and that it articulates the need to promote the delivery of messages to children about keeping safe in this context. Similarly, PPANI were of the view that engagement with the communication subgroup of the sexual violence strategy may help to facilitate the communication of key messages to the public prior to or alongside the development of a preventative education programme in schools.

The DE (NI) is currently leading a programme exploring the issue of pupil emotional health and wellbeing in the post-primary sector, which, they said, has made “a very compelling case for schools to put much more emphasis in terms of pupil development in the whole area of emotional health and wellbeing, and that of course then raises the question as to how well equipped schools are to do that”. The learning from the pupil emotional health and wellbeing programme will have implications for policy and practice development around meeting the emotional health and wellbeing needs of pupils in primary schools.

Sub-theme 4: Increased public and professional awareness

The Child Abuse Prevention Programme, who undertakes whole-school training to facilitate the delivery of the Stay Safe personal safety programme in the Republic of Ireland, reported that the development of the Stay Safe preventative education programme was initially conceived as a result of a significant rise in reports of abuse to the statutory authorities. According to the Child Abuse Prevention Programme, professionals working with children who had been abused had started to ask questions: “Why don’t they know to say something and to tell?”
The commitment of a number of key professionals therefore drove the development of new prevention approaches and services. In subsequent years, the volume of reports relating to the abuse of children, including the Ferns report about abuse in the Catholic Church and the consequent public outcry, motivated the Department of Education in the Republic of Ireland to reenergise their attempts to have the Stay Safe personal safety programme fully implemented in all schools.

**Theme 2: Barriers to the development of preventative education**

Participants identified a number of issues that could hinder the development of preventative education. The issues fell within six sub-themes:

1. “The new curriculum is massive and the changes that are coming are huge”
2. “…we haven’t yet got a society that is ready to listen to children”
3. Northern Ireland “reticence”
4. “…we are all on different planets and we never/very rarely talk to each other”
5. Schools have a “…significant distance…yet to go”
6. The absence of a coherent training and development strategy

**Sub-theme 1: “The new curriculum is massive and the changes that are coming are huge”**

According to the CCMS, an important consideration in terms of the development of preventative education is the impact of the new curriculum. Despite a firm and passionate belief that teaching children about safety is necessary, reservations were expressed that neither the CCEA nor the Regional Training Unit would have the resources to undertake the necessary training for this type of development, given the intensive training that was provided to teachers around the introduction of the personal development and mutual understanding (PD&MU) curriculum. While personal development is a statutory element of the curriculum, schools can choose whether or not to identify it as a priority within their school development plan.

Moreover, the North Eastern Education and Library Board stated that the PD&MU curriculum covers a wide range of issues around safety, while Love for Life explained that schools can make a choice regarding what aspect of safety education they teach. Children are often given messages about road safety and fire safety, for example, to the exclusion of abuse preventative education. The principal of a maintained school commented that schools may also choose to teach children about appropriate behaviour, including “when you shouldn’t be hitting people”, without addressing issues like domestic violence.

**Sub-theme 2: “…we haven’t yet got a society that is ready to listen to children”**

The Education and Training Inspectorate highlighted statistics drawn from research confirming that bullying, child abuse and domestic violence are a significant issue for children in Northern Ireland; this has profound implications for work with children in the primary school sector.
While there was recognition from the parent representative on a school’s board of governors that “…there are forms of abuse in every walk in society, every religion, every class”, it was the view of Women’s Aid that this “…is a very tough message for people to hear. People may not be able to stomach the fact that the most horrific incident a child has witnessed has been within its own home from its mother or father…We are teaching children to look at their distinctive feelings and to seek out help, but we haven’t yet got a society that is ready to listen to children.”

Sub-theme 3: Northern Ireland “reticence”
An additional barrier to teaching “keeping safe” messages was succinctly outlined by Love for Life: “I think it’s probably partly the Northern Ireland reticence to talk about sex.” The complexities of the Northern Ireland culture were identified as a hurdle that needs to be overcome. In relation to the sensitive issues of personal safety and abuse, the view of the DHSSPS was that “…there is something about Northern Ireland people, even when a child uses any kind of word, there’s a bit of a shock reaction I think”. The perspective of Together 4 All was that an underlying culture that could be regarded as conservative exists. The view was that perhaps in relation to other geographical areas, such as England, parents regard Northern Ireland as a safer society and therefore there may not be the same need to teach children about keeping safe.

Sub-theme 4: “…we are all on different planets and we never/very rarely talk to each other”
The view of Women’s Aid was that the present response to children is disjointed, with each agency coming with their own agenda, their own perspective and their own way of responding: “…social workers are looking at the child; Women’s Aid historically looks at the women; Police are looking at the crime – we are all on different planets and we never/very rarely talk to each other.”

Similarly, the child protection coordinator at Stranmillis University College summarised the situation as a “breakdown in communication between different agencies”.

Sub-theme 5: Schools have a “…significant distance…yet to go”
In terms of getting schools on board and thinking about moving forward with the development of preventative education, Love for Life were of the opinion that “…there probably is quite a significant distance the schools have yet to go”. Table 2 outlines a summary of the views articulated by the interviewees regarding barriers related to schools.
Table 2: Whole-school related barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Perceived barrier or concern expressed during interviews with key strategic cross-sector partners</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For schools</td>
<td>• “Initiative fatigue” (Regional Training Unit)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Competing priorities: “It’s not that schools don’t want to teach things, it’s just where they fit it all in and what are their priorities” (CCMS)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Denial and fear surrounds the issue of abuse and domestic violence (CCMS; CCEA; PPANI; Women’s Aid)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Most people think that [abuse] happens somewhere else, you know; they don’t like to think that it goes on. I think that’s the stumbling block...” (CCMS)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “It’s a rare child of this age [who] encounters that [abuse]. I know that some do encounter it, OK, but it’s a rare child who does encounter it” (Principal of an integrated school)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “…abuse generally stays hidden. If the ethos of the schools is that they don’t address it, don’t talk about it, they are not going to know about it” (Together 4 All)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Schools have a great value placed on their reputation” and do not want to “…be identified as a school that had a problem with children who were sexually abused because that would almost kind of tar or mar their reputation” (PPANI)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• There is fear and apprehension about the possibility of “opening a can of worms, like Pandora’s box” (Barnardo’s)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Negative past experiences of dealing with safeguarding issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>For school principals</td>
<td>• School principals are the “gatekeepers” (Police Service of Northern Ireland) and can create barriers to outside agencies (Barnardo’s; PPANI)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fears about the reaction of the board of governors and parents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>For parents</td>
<td>• Concerns around destroying the innocence of the child or causing them to be more anxious or worried.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For teachers</td>
<td>• “…our worry has become ‘are we stealing their innocence?’ and causing children to be worried and anxious by talking about issues they have no experience of” (Principal of an integrated school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “[Teachers] don’t see preventative education as part of their role” (Barnardo’s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers’ perceptions are that they “are not up-skilled enough” (CnaG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Lack of time, lack of knowledge, lack of training opportunities, lack of understanding and how they can actually integrate it” (Child protection coordinator at Stranmillis University College)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Lack of training, encouragement or support to develop their knowledge and skills required for any new programme being rolled out” (CCEA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personal experiences/anxieties and their level of comfort with the subject area (Barnardo’s; Love for Life)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fears about parent’s negative reactions (Principal of an integrated school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fears around children making disclosures and potential consequences (Barnardo’s; Education and Training Inspectorate; principal of a maintained school; Together 4 All), including consequences for their relationship with parents (PPANI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “…might highlight issues of abuse and increases in accusations” (Education and Training Inspectorate)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Sub-theme 6: The absence of a coherent training and development strategy

The absence of a coherent training and development strategy for school staff was identified by the North Eastern Education and Library Board as a barrier to the development of preventative education. At present: curriculum support is the responsibility of the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS); the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) provides resources, research and examination reporting; the North Eastern Education and Library Board provides the training for the curriculum; and the Regional Training Unit provides training for school leaders. Central to the development of preventative education in schools is the issue of how best to provide training and support to teachers and whole-school staff groups, and this is uncertain in the absence of a coherent training strategy.

Theme 3: Developing preventative education – what needs to happen?

This theme focuses on what needs to happen to facilitate and support the development of preventative education for children in primary schools across Northern Ireland. Nine sub-themes emerged:

1. Get the foundation right
2. Gain the support of the school principal
3. Maximise parental support and involvement
4. Develop good resources and models of delivery
5. Develop a training strategy
6. Provide teachers with “proper training”
7. Ensure ongoing inspection
8. Adopt a multi-agency approach
9. Use public education approaches to prepare the way

Sub-theme 1: Get the foundation right

Throughout the interviews, there was a view that a fundamental, underpinning philosophy needs to be in place before schools can move towards developing new personal safety strategies. For example, according to the Regional Training Unit, it is necessary for the teaching profession to concur that “what they are about, and the whole business of teaching and learning, is the pupils’ personal wellbeing, health and development”. The CCMS defined it as “teaching the whole child, not the head” and that there was a need to “give them [children] the skills to protect themselves”.

The Regional Training Unit were of the view that adopting this philosophy would enhance the “willingness and capacity” of schools to move the “crucial agenda” of preventative education forward. Both the chairperson of a school’s board of governors and the North Eastern Education and Library Board were of the opinion that the risk of non-acceptance across all sectors of the school community or of time constraints was that programmes could become “watered down”. Barnardo’s emphasised that preventative education is not just something that teachers deliver; rather, it is part of the ethos and the whole culture of a school.
Within a school that wants to fulfil the “script”, children are ambassadors in the playground and messages are reinforced by set things that people say and do. Essentially, children need to be encouraged to feel safe and powerful in their own family, community and society.

Love for Life noted the existence of “teaching moments” that could be linked with staying safe, that are embodied in the “full delivery of education”. In essence, “full delivery” includes: parents and teachers; the taught curriculum; the time children spend in school; links with parents; and the “context of connection with school around their child’s education”. The CCEA emphasised that in order to promote wellbeing, an “emotionally safe environment” needs to be created in which children know they will be listened to and taken seriously. They also stated that teachers should “…provide ongoing situations for children to talk about their worries and concerns in an emotionally safe environment, because they are not going to talk about those things if they think teachers are going to laugh at them, are going to not believe them, are going to roll their eyes at them, are going to say ‘don’t be silly’.”

The child protection coordinator at Stranmillis University College articulated the view that, if safety is seen by both the DE (NI) and the CCEA as central to the mental health and wellbeing of children and their overall learning and development, then it needs to be embedded in the curriculum: “it should not be ‘an add on’; something extra to do if we’ve got time”. Regarding the developing work in schools, the Regional Training Unit expressed the view that “the best approaches are those where the areas that are being addressed are seen as an integral part of the curriculum and an integral part of the learning entitlement of all pupils and that carries with it, I think, a greater guarantee that there will be a systematic…approach to the advancement of this agenda rather than it being seen as some kind of an ad hoc sort of add-on.”

If the school system is experiencing “initiative fatigue” (Regional Training Unit), or subjected to a constant wave of initiatives from both central and non-government agencies (principal of an integrated school), it is important that the emotional health and wellbeing of children is not perceived as an “add-on”. The Regional Training Unit made the point that, essentially, the PD&MU curriculum “underpins pupil growth and development” and as such is an “indispensable” part of the school curriculum. Similarly, the Education and Training Inspectorate stated that “keeping safe” messages should be delivered through the PD&MU curriculum, with links to other subjects across the curriculum.

The North Eastern Education and Library Board commented that consideration may therefore need to be given to the directives that are included in the documentation of the revised Northern Ireland curriculum to ensure that more sensitive issues, such as keeping safe from abuse and domestic violence, are taught to meet the requirement that “children should have the opportunities to explore their health, growth and safety”. Further advantages may ensue from this type of approach; according to the child protection coordinator at Stranmillis University College, if this approach is integrated into the primary school curriculum, it is going to have to be integrated into the initial teacher education curriculum.
According to PPANI, legislation needs to be introduced to ensure that preventative education, including messages about sexual abuse and domestic violence, is taught in every primary school in Northern Ireland: “Child protection agencies could influence the Minister for Education and the Education Committee sufficiently to put in place a requirement for stay safe education to be delivered…in every school…Social services, NSPCC, the police, all of those sort of agencies together getting a message across to the minister and to the committee that this is something that is essential and that you’re not going to be able to make a real impact on child sexual abuse unless you legislate for messages to be delivered.” Similarly, Women’s Aid expressed the view that “if it doesn’t come from the education department, some [school] principals may take it, some may not”.

The biggest hurdle in legislating for compulsory abuse-preventative education was identified as civil servants in education, rather than educators. PPANI suggested that legislation could be introduced “in the context of any revision or review of the Children (NI) Order 1995”, where the lead agency would be the DHSSPS.

**Sub-theme 2: Gain the support of the school principal**

The Regional Training Unit suggested that the extent to which the school leader is prepared to “buy in” to the new preventative education propositions could be the “key impediment” to the future, as it is the school principal who sets “the climate and the culture for much of what happens within schools in relation to learning”. Together 4 All concurred, stressing the importance of the school principal role in having their programmes accepted, and added that “if there are a hundred staff in the school and 99 of them support it [the new initiative] and the [school] principal doesn’t, it’s not going to happen.”

School principals are viewed as having a key role in schools, with the North Eastern Education and Library Board stating that principals occupy a “pivotal position”, moving back and forth between governors and teachers, and provide direction, leadership and support. They are therefore seen as having a key role to play in communicating with boards of governors and ensuring their support for any new developments in preventative education. The Regional Training Unit regarded it as important to address best practice with school leaders, including how to work much more closely with parents and external agencies. It was articulated that school principals needed to have greater understanding of who presents a risk to children in order to understand the importance of preventative education.

**Sub-theme 3: Maximise parental support and involvement**

While it was acknowledged that there would be varied responses from parents regarding programme content and the level of information provided, the need for openness and consultation with parents was considered necessary (Child Abuse Prevention Programme; North Eastern Education and Library Board; NICIE; principal of a maintained school; PPANI; vice-principal of a special school; Women’s Aid). In the Republic of Ireland, objections to the now well established *Stay Safe* personal safety programme led to the establishment of “Parents against *Stay Safe*”, known as PASS.
However, it is worth noting that, according to the Child Abuse Prevention Programme, the parents of children with special needs, perhaps due to the vulnerability of their children, particularly welcomed the Stay Safe programme. In terms of any new developments within schools in Northern Ireland, one principal of a maintained school stated that “parents’ approval” would have to be sought, particularly with regard to the content of any new programme. Similarly, the North Eastern Education and Library Board commented that such a new programme “cannot be a secret” as “you wouldn’t introduce any other area of the curriculum under those auspices” and that if something is “swept under the carpet” and not discussed in advance, parents may react badly to such a strategy.

The difficulties around achieving parental involvement were acknowledged by Barnardo’s and the DHSSPS, while the North Eastern Education and Library Board acknowledged that there is more likelihood of parental engagement if the school has built up a “good relationship” with parents. Barnardo’s commented that parental engagement was more likely where the ethos of the school promotes parental involvement. They also articulated the need to break down barriers with parents by building relationships, making them aware of events that were available, telling them about what was to be gained by attending and ensuring that the event was informal and non-threatening.

Teachers need to be aware of parents’ assumptions and ensure that these are addressed in communications with parents. The model currently used to engage and inform parents about the materials for relationships and sexuality education could be adopted: in the example described by the North Eastern Education and Library Board, 200 parents attended an evening event during which they met the class teacher and viewed the resource materials. The teacher and parents went through the materials line by line, with parents given the opportunity to discuss the materials or ask questions. In relation to preventative education, the principal of an integrated school felt that the continuum on which parents could be involved might range from parents co-delivering a programme, to being aware of what is being taught. Recognition was also given to the fact that some parents, particularly those from a medical, social work or caring background, had knowledge and skills that could be a useful “resource” for schools to draw on.

Getting parents on board is essential but it presents schools with a dilemma. Some may be resistant for various reasons, including ethical, moral or indeed more sinister reasons. Women’s Aid stressed that it was important to bear in mind that not all parents are good people; that some of them (maybe a significant number) will be involved in activities with their children that are not appropriate. Similarly, PPANI stated that “we need to be aware that abuse is not about ‘predators waiting at the school gates or men in dirty raincoats’; it may be happening in homes, at ‘your own table’…” They also went on to quote from Jane Elliott’s story, The Little Prisoner, which contained an important message: “Evil is always human; it eats at our tables and sleeps in our beds.” This presents a dilemma in producing materials aimed at assisting parents to understand or facilitate preventative education, as these materials could also educate abusing parents, enabling them to avoid detection and increase manipulation and control. PPANI emphasised that schools have to find an appropriate way to engage with parents and promote their involvement, particularly because if abuse is considered too sensitive to talk about, children and young people will continue to be abused.
Sub-theme 4: Develop good resources and models of delivery

The Education and Training Inspectorate highlighted the manner in which they considered safety and prevention should be embedded in schools: “Messages should start at nursery and continue right through the school – any future programme needs to build in suitable progression.” Barnardo’s were of the opinion that messages need to be “developmentally attuned” to the different ages and stages of children, and those messages need to be repeated to ensure that they are etched in the mind of a child. The Education and Training Inspectorate spoke of frequency of delivery, which is debated as helping dissolve the taboo, whereas a single lesson may perpetuate the “darker side”.

The Regional Training Unit pointed out that many teachers are committed to this type of work but need the appropriate resources as they are already busy people. It was highlighted by the CCEA and by Love for Life that any materials being produced should use the language of and be consistent with the revised Northern Ireland curriculum. The Child Abuse Prevention Programme advised that any materials being produced should be user-friendly, well structured and provide advice for teachers about how to discuss issues like secrets and touches. Many participants commented on key areas that should be included in any preventative programme (see table 3). Love for Life felt that it was also seen as important that links were made to other curriculum programmes, such as relationships and sexuality education, “pooling the strengths together of all the different strands to make a more effective model”.

**Table 3: Organisations’ perceptions of key areas to be included in preventative education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of organisation</th>
<th>Key areas to be included in a preventative education programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barnardo’s</td>
<td>• self-confidence, self-esteem, emotional and mental wellbeing, and children being aware of their right to be safe and to recognise appropriate relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)</td>
<td>• children need help to know that their emotions and feelings are right</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) | • give children a voice  
• conflict management, handling criticism, and sustaining and breaking friendships |
| Education and Training Inspectorate | • provide the knowledge, skills and understanding to identify potential danger, and make informed and responsible decisions in such situations  
• know what to do and what is safe to do  
• provide opportunities to prepare children for possible risky situations  
• the safe use of mobile phones |
| North Eastern Education and Library Board/Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) | • generic skills that can be used in any unsafe situation, eg assertiveness  
• self awareness; body awareness, understanding your feelings and how you react to situations |
| Principal of a maintained school | • keeping safe and identifying people who keep the child safe  
• scenarios about safe and unsafe secrets  
• growing up, discussing and naming things that are a necessary part of growing up (relating stories, scenarios and pictures)  
• making children aware of situations that could arise, how to deal with those situations and helping the child to see it is not their fault  
• children need to speak out and need to tell somebody |
| Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland (PPANI) | • materials about new technologies – children need to get the message about predators and grooming on the internet |
| Together 4 All | • explore what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour  
• identify people children could talk to |
| Women’s Aid | • teach children strategies for disclosure – keep on telling until “someone listens and someone does something about it” |
The importance of developing a range of resources, such as books, workbooks, leaflets, videos and/or DVDs, to support the delivery of messages in the special school sector was emphasised by both the principal and vice-principal of a special school. It was felt that children with special needs have particular vulnerabilities, partly due to their intimate care needs, and that, consequently, preventative education would have to be delivered and reinforced using a variety of teaching strategies. The Child Abuse Prevention Programme outlined research undertaken in special schools in the Republic of Ireland regarding children’s ability to understand the messages of the *Stay Safe* personal safety programme, which showed that “…children learnt the messages but it also showed that teachers teaching those children have to go to huge extraordinary lengths to get the messages across to some of them.”

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta commented that resources would also need to be produced in Irish for use in the Irish-medium sector.

According to the CCEA, activities like “Lets Talk Together” or circle time could be employed to facilitate discussion. However, the CCMS emphasised that the topic would need to be addressed sensitively, taking into account the particular needs of those children in the class who may be being or had been abused, or who were looked after children. The CCEA pointed out that exploring preventative education messages in small groups might assist these children in understanding that other children have had similar experiences, perhaps helping to reduce feelings of isolation.

The debate surrounding whether it is best to have external agencies or teaching staff deliver preventative education resonated throughout the interviews. While some participants, including the DHSSPS, felt that experts might know best how to deliver key messages, a number of other participants (Child Abuse Prevention Programme in the Republic of Ireland; CCMS; Education and Training Inspectorate; NICIE; PPANI) felt that there were distinct advantages to teacher delivery. In essence, messages were viewed as more meaningful for children if they were delivered by somebody the child knew and who had credibility.

Interview participants, including the CCMS, also explored whether, if the programme was to be delivered by teachers, all teachers should be involved or if only particular teachers who have a natural empathy for how an abused child might feel might be more suited to the role. The Education and Training Inspectorate suggested that some schools may prefer a “dedicated team of teachers” who feel confident in dealing with personal safety issues. The importance of schools being able to access “expert professional advice” and ongoing training was emphasised. If external agencies were delivering these messages, it was felt by Women’s Aid that teachers should be present or should co-deliver. This would assist teachers to reinforce protective behaviour messages as opportunities arise in the classroom, and to provide follow-up support for individual children as required.
Sub-theme 5: Develop a training strategy

A number of interview participants articulated the need to develop a training strategy. This would need to address the following issues:

Who needs to receive training

The views of the interview participants varied. Women’s Aid stressed the need for whole-school training, while the Child Abuse Prevention Programme (in the Republic of Ireland) elaborated on this view, stating that teaching staff, school secretaries, school caretakers, school bus escorts and special needs assistants should all be involved. Other views expressed by those interviewed ranged from a dedicated team of teachers with an interest in the topic, to embedding or integrating abuse prevention and “keeping safe” training into all courses for students who intend to work with children. The North Eastern Education and Library Board were of the opinion that integrating “keeping safe” messages into schools requires “discussion, agreement, movement and moving forward”, while the Education and Training Inspectorate agreed that assistance was needed for all, including teachers and school principals, around the content and delivery of a programme. The child protection coordinator at Stranmillis University College, the CCMS and the Education and Training Inspectorate were all of the opinion that the introduction of modules during initial teacher education and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes were viewed as important if teachers are to learn how to integrate preventative messages into the curriculum. It was also emphasised by the child protection coordinator at Stranmillis University College that such training should be available for those undertaking early childhood studies and national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in child care.

How training should be organised

The merits of a number of potential training models were explored, including whole-school in-service training, attending external courses, initial teacher training, the use of “Baker” days, school development days, new learning technologies and area learning communities (Education and Training Inspectorate). It was emphasised by the CCEA that training needed to be ongoing to keep “the momentum going and awareness fresh”.

Address the issue of funding arrangements

Participants emphasised that in order to embed preventative education in schools, a full commitment is required from the DE (NI), with Love for Life commenting that “significant financial investment” is required for the training of teachers. The DE (NI) also need to provide funding for substitute teachers to facilitate them in being released from their teaching duties to attend training. Budgets therefore need to be in place to support comprehensive training and ensure consistency and quality of delivery.

Ongoing monitoring of training needs

As preventative education becomes more embedded in schools, it will be important to monitor training needs to ensure teachers identify and receive training on emerging issues. The Education and Training Inspectorate commented that “there is a need for ongoing professional development on pastoral care issues throughout the working life of teachers.”
Sub-theme 6: Provide teachers with “proper training”

The commitment of teachers to their preventative role in schools was not questioned. However, it was felt by both the principal and vice-principal of a special school that a “very comprehensive and very thorough and very well-delivered staff training programme” was required to build the capacity of teachers to deliver preventative messages. The need for teacher training was a recurrent theme in discussions, with the chairperson of a school’s board of governors stating that it was necessary to “provide teachers with proper training”. Essentially, interview participants expressed the view that the content of teacher training needed to address the barriers for teachers, as previously identified in table 2. According to the CCEA, there is a need to overcome the attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes that lead to the conclusion that “this wouldn’t happen in our school”, a view that middle class teachers in particular may have.

The CCMS commented: “I think they need to be told that they couldn’t possibly have a couple of hundred children for a period of years and not have youngsters living with horrible things, they just couldn’t, it just doesn’t make sense…children live with horror, children live in unfair situations and if nobody helps them and nobody listens to them they carry it into adult life.” Barnardo’s felt that, having convinced teachers of the need to address these issues and to see preventative education as part of their role, the biggest challenge identified was getting teachers to be more comfortable with teaching the preventative education message. Teacher discomfort was described as a “real impediment” by the Regional Training Unit, although Love for Life suggested that younger teachers might be more open to teaching sensitive messages. There was agreement across the interviewees, including the parent representative on a school’s board of governors, that sensitive issues may prove difficult for teachers to deliver.

To address these concerns, the CCEA felt that training should provide teachers with an opportunity to become “more comfortable” with the materials. Barnardo’s, meanwhile, were of the view that teachers’ own personal biography and their reasons for feeling uncertain need to be considered, as these may pose a “real barrier” that is hard to breach. PPANI highlighted that teachers will have deep concerns about disclosures and how they are managed to minimise difficulties between teachers and parents. Concerns about how to respond to disclosures (Barnardo’s) and anxieties about relationships with parents (PPANI) need to be addressed directly if teachers are to commit and have respect and belief in what they are doing (Women’s Aid). Both the principal and vice-principal of a special school thought that ongoing support for the staff before, during and after was critical to the successful implementation of a programme.

The principal of an integrated school expressed the view that any training should involve teachers working in groups to explore resource materials. Discussions should help teachers to explore the use of age-appropriate language, situations that could be used to emphasise messages and the structuring of a programme to ensure progression. According to the child protection coordinator at Stranmillis University College, effective training would involve opportunities to be “…hands on; group work, role plays, scenarios, vignettes, multi-professionals coming together so they can bounce ideas off each other”.

Keeping safe The views of cross-sector stakeholders in relation to teaching “keeping safe” messages in primary schools in Northern Ireland
Sub-theme 7: Ensure ongoing inspection
According to Love for Life, the Education and Training Inspectorate should examine how a programme is delivered, the extent to which parents are involved and how children perceive preventative education, in order to ensure that messages are delivered sensitively and consistently over time. There was an expectation that choice is built into the programme. The Education and Training Inspectorate articulated that they would include an examination of preventative education within the overall inspection of pastoral care.

Sub-theme 8: Adopt a multi-agency approach
Participants in the study demonstrated resounding support for the potential development of preventative education in schools. A willingness to contribute to a consultation process and be part of a working group (if that is what is required) was equally endorsed and supported, while a key message emerging from the interviews was that it is everyone’s responsibility to ensure that preventative education is developed. There are many strands to such a development and therefore it demands different resources. The child protection coordinator at Stranmillis University College felt that across the different professional groups there may be barriers that need to be removed so that all stakeholders are together and “singing off the same hymn sheet”.

The CCMS, Love for Life and Women’s Aid all agreed that essential to the development of preventative education in schools is the back-up and support of social services and health professionals. According to the Regional Training Unit, teachers “need to be able to access expert professional advice quickly…because a lot of very useful expertise, a lot of the competence and skill required…reside beyond the school” in relation to the areas of abuse and domestic violence. Better working relationships between schools, child protection teams and “helping” agencies need to be maintained and improved. Suggestions for building trust and improving relationships between education, health and social services personnel included the latter working in schools and multi-professional training. The CCMS added that the extended schools developments are already helping in this respect, while the Regional Training Unit was of the opinion that “a dedicated team of professionals [from health] could be established, which schools could call upon for support in pupil emotional/mental health issues”.

The youth sector presents another opportunity to reinforce preventative education messages. Priorities in relation to youth sector provision are currently being explored, so the focus on preventative education is timely. It is felt that it might be possible to get safety messages across through the youth work curriculum to hard-to-reach children in a meaningful way. With primary school groups (4–11 years), messages can be delivered through play activities, whereas with the 11–14 age group, messages could be embedded in intervention or project work. The fact that children do not realise that they are learning is regarded as “key” (Youth Service within the DE [NI]).

However, as the youth sector largely comprises volunteers, it was anticipated that they would have a range of concerns about exploring sensitive safety issues. These might include the volunteers not feeling sufficiently skilled to respond to some of the issues young people might raise and not feeling that it is their role to deliver prescriptive programmes to young people.
Development of preventative education in this setting could be facilitated by policy and curriculum development; the fact that the extended schools initiative and Youth Service are together in one policy area within the DE (NI) could provide opportunities for a more joined-up approach to services.

To ensure an all-round comprehensive approach is put in place, a “one-stop shop” was the phrase coined by the child protection coordinator at Stranmillis University College as a way of pulling together the necessary resources. The key stakeholders identified in this approach were: the DE (NI), including those involved in developing, writing, managing and delivering the curriculum; the DHSSPS; the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM); the school community, including parents and young people; and policymakers and those responsible for drawing up legislation. Those with backgrounds in social work and child protection training would also be required.

Sub-theme 9: Use public education approaches to prepare the way

The development of preventative education that involves the training of whole schools, parents and children could play an important role in public education about the risk of abuse and violent crime. In order to create change in the wider society, it is advocated that strategies are employed to address the issues of sexual and violent behaviour. PPANI identified three components: enforcement, encouragement and education. Education is a critical component and includes getting the right messages into the public arena. Women’s Aid stated that a key message that needs to be communicated is that “where children are meant to be the safest and loved and nurtured, it can sometimes be the most dangerous place.” Similarly, PPANI stated that most abuse and violent offending takes place within the home.

One strategy might be to scrap the whole notion of “stranger danger” that contributes to the perception that it is the stranger of whom people need to be wary. This would entail engaging with public representatives, such as Ministers in the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), councillors and district policing partnerships members, as well as with “safeguarding groups” within, for example, communities, councils, community groups and restorative justice groups. In parallel, it is necessary for PPANI to engage more proactively and more positively with the media to ensure that key messages are highlighted where possible. The view was expressed that there is no room for “gentle” messages or a fear of being too explicit or too dramatic.

It was also felt that people in the media may not always appreciate or know anything about sexual abuse; there is a naivety about these issues, so key messages need to be communicated to them. PPANI commented that often because of legal restraints in place to protect victims, current media reporting focuses on paedophiles and predatory sex offenders, giving the wider public the erroneous impression that offenders are “out there” rather than being members of a child's family or individuals already known to them. A verbal commitment was given by PPANI to facilitate aspects of public education that might be required to promote the development of preventative education.
One contributor noted that, at present in Northern Ireland, there is a communication subgroup of the Sexual Violence Strategy responsible for rolling out a campaign on sexual abuse and violence. One of the messages of this campaign focused on sexual abuse and violence being unacceptable and wrong. PPANI warned against making assumptions that everybody knows that abuse is wrong, particularly as children who have been manipulated by abusers or by parents may not understand this. Getting this message across to adults and children may contribute to challenging, and ultimately changing, such perceptions.

The view was articulated that, in order to facilitate the successful implementation of preventative education in schools, work should be undertaken with the Sexual Violence Strategy communication subgroup to direct some of the public education attention towards safeguarding issues, specifically targeting messages towards parents and teachers.

4 Strengths and limitations

Strengths

- The use of semi-structured interviews provided a level of privacy that enabled participants to explain their perspective on the issues they considered most relevant to the development of preventative education.
- This study generated new evidence with regard to the views of all the key cross-sector partners about the strategic development of school-based preventative education in Northern Ireland.

Limitations

- The inability to provide complete anonymity due to the relative size and “intimate” nature of cross-sector working relationships in Northern Ireland may have impacted on the nature and level of the interview participants’ contributions to the study.

5 Discussion and conclusions

Discussion

This summary report has presented some of the most significant findings generated from interviews with key cross-sector partners with regard to the development of a preventative child abuse education programme. There was acknowledgement that bullying, child abuse and domestic abuse continue to have a negative impact on children, and that the need to explore the development of preventative education approaches is consequently of some urgency.

Keeping safe The views of cross-sector stakeholders in relation to teaching “keeping safe” messages in primary schools in Northern Ireland
Those consulted highlighted that preventative education would be facilitated by embedding messages as an “indispensable” part of the school curriculum delivered to all primary school children through PD&MU, with links to other subjects across the curriculum. This development also provides an opportunity to develop a more integrated approach to the delivery of programmes focusing on issues like bullying, domestic abuse and child abuse. Recommendations were made regarding the best way to ensure that preventative messages were taught, including making it a requirement within curriculum guidelines or introducing legislation in the context of any revision or review of the Children (NI) Order 1995. The potential of influencing the content of the youth sector curriculum to promote preventative education was identified as an avenue that requires further exploration.

This report also highlights the view that preventative education is not only about key messages being delivered through the curriculum, but rather about being embedded within the ethos and culture of the whole school, so that an emotionally safe environment is created in which children know they will be listened to and taken seriously. Preventative education in its widest sense will be facilitated by the pupil emotional health and wellbeing programme, led by the DE (NI). While the initial focus of the programme is on the post-primary sector, “it is hoped that the outcomes can be adapted through time for the pre-school, primary and special sectors. It is expected that the resulting programme will have more general application in developing and supporting pastoral care systems in schools” (Children and Young People’s Unit, 2009).

This report highlights the central role that school principals are likely to play in the development of preventative education, a theme recently identified in the literature around improving the wellbeing of pupils (West-Burnham, 2010). It also highlights the need to target information, training and support to school principals to encourage them to promote preventative education in the broadest sense. The development of a comprehensive package of training and support was identified as being of central importance in building the willingness and capacity of teachers to deliver sensitive preventative education messages. To promote such an approach, the importance of a training strategy was highlighted, which would address who required training, effective training models, monitoring of training needs and funding arrangements. Multidisciplinary training was identified as having the potential to build trust by providing opportunities for networking, thus enhancing inter-agency cooperation (Horwath, 2009; Sidebotham and Weeks, 2010). The inclusion of preventative education as a focus within pastoral care inspections by the Education and Training Inspectorate was seen as important to developments in this area.

In order to remove barriers to the teaching of “keeping safe” messages, interview participants recommended the development of a comprehensive package of resources that are consistent with the revised Northern Ireland curriculum. These would facilitate teachers in sensitively delivering age-appropriate prevention messages. Such resources should provide greater coherence with messages already being delivered in schools through a variety of different programmes and by a number of different organisations. Resources would need to be available for children being educated in the Irish medium. The need to develop a variety of resources that would meet the specific needs of children with special educational needs was also emphasised.
In order to maximise parental support, an approach based on openness and consultation was recommended. There is a need to examine models of best practice around the effective engagement of parents. Research carried out in England to explore how the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) could best engage with hard-to-reach parents concluded that it is important to affirm what those parents already do and then build on it. This approach may be more likely to empower parents, helping them to realise that they are more knowledgeable and equipped than they perceive (Sherbert Research, 2009).

Interview participants identified that the reform and delivery of child protection services in Northern Ireland in recent years has occurred within the context of a significant rise in demand. This has been partly reflected in official data, where there has been an increase in referrals to children’s services across all health and social care trust areas, and a higher percentage of children in Northern Ireland being on the child protection register than any other part of the UK (DHSSPS, 2009a). In 2008/09, there were 1,084 sexual offences recorded against children and young people: 46 per cent were against children under the age of 12, including sexual assaults/sexual activity, rape/attempted rape, exposure and other sexual offences. In 2009/10, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) recorded 9,903 crimes and 24,482 incidents with a domestic violence motivation (PSNI, 2010).

Achieving more effective multidisciplinary working and, arguably more importantly, inter-agency collaboration is essential to the development of preventative education in schools and to an external system that responds effectively if children disclose abuse. This report highlights the view that, currently, services for children and young people are provided by a number of different agencies, and that responses to children are fragmented. The vision for developing preventative education involves inter-agency and inter-departmental collaboration, where a commitment is given to senior managers working together at a strategic level to lay down the framework for multidisciplinary practice (Horwath, 2009). Sidebotham and Weeks (2010) commented that “at a wider level, effective inter-agency working can be promoted through organisational commitment, through building a trusting environment, through establishing opportunities for collaboration, through developing systems and processes that support collaboration, and through supporting individual practitioners”. It is highly significant for the development of preventative education in schools that, currently in Northern Ireland, the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) is being developed to facilitate inter-departmental, inter-professional and inter-agency cooperation, with the emphasis on prevention and keeping children safe.

Media campaigns have recently been shown to have a positive impact on public knowledge about issues like child sexual abuse (Self-Brown et al, 2008). Participants in this research study suggested that wider public education approaches have the potential to create a more supportive environment for preventative education. A number of participants highlighted that one of the key messages that needs to be communicated to the wider public is that children are more likely to be at risk from abuse committed by family members, adult acquaintances and peers. Participants viewed this as critical information required by parents if they are to help their child recognise, resist and report an abusive situation.
A number of strategic developments were seen as important in this regard. One such development would be the proposed development of a communication strategy by the SBNI to inform members of the public and statutory, voluntary and community groups in Northern Ireland about the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and to raise awareness about how best this can be done. Another strategic development would be the stated aim of the *Tackling violence at home: a strategy for addressing domestic violence and abuse in Northern Ireland* strategy (DHSSPS, 2005), which is to educate children and young people and the wider general public that domestic violence is wrong and unacceptable, and to enable them to make informed choices. Similarly, a final strategic development, and one of the key outcomes of the *Tackling sexual violence and abuse: a regional strategy 2008–2013* report (DHSSPS, 2008), is the raising of public awareness about risk factors and the promotion of personal safety.

**Conclusions**

This research study suggests that there is considerable support across strategic cross-sector partners for the development of preventative education to improve children’s knowledge, awareness and skills to protect themselves from bullying, domestic abuse and child abuse. Enhanced collaboration between the education sector, health and social services, other statutory agencies and families was highlighted as being central to the development of effective preventative approaches. A number of structures and strategic developments were identified as having the potential to promote the strategic development of preventative education. Significant financial resources will be required to develop teaching resources, training, development and support for school principals, teachers and other school staff, and the exploration of engagement processes with parents. Finally, the research highlights the importance of creating a supportive environment for any school-based developments and recommends the adoption of public education as a strategy to maximise parental awareness and support.
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