May 2025

Evaluation of the Ariel Trust Violence Reduction Education Programmes in Primary Schools across Merseyside

Summary report of delivery and impact between 2022-2025

Nadia Butler, Charley Wilson, Ann Marie Farrugia, Zara Quigg

Contact: Nadia Butler
Email: n.l.butler@ljmu.ac.uk
Phone: 0151 231 4148
Public Health Institute / School of Public and Allied Health, Liverpool John Moores University, Tithebarn Street, Liverpool, L2 2QP.

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

MERSEYSIDE Violence Reduction Partnership

ariel trust

EVALUATION OF THE ARIEL TRUST VIOLENCE REDUCTION EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS ACROSS MERSEYSIDE

Summary report of delivery and impact between 2022-2025

Nadia Butler, Charley Wilson, Ann Marie Farrugia, Zara Quigg

Public Health Institute (PHI) / School of Public and Allied Health, Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), *World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Violence Prevention*

May 2025

About this report

Merseyside is one of several areas allocated funding in 2019, and each year thereafter by the UK Government, to establish a Violence Reduction Unit. To inform the continued development of the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP) since November 2019, Liverpool John Moores University were commissioned to evaluate the MVRP both as a whole [1, 2, 3] and some selected work programmes. This report forms one of a suite of outputs from this evaluation work programme, and specifically presents an evaluation of the Ariel Trust violence education programmes in primary schools across Merseyside. It is a summary report of findings from the evaluation between 2022-2025 Evaluation outputs are available via the author or on the MVRP website: www.merseysidevrp.com/what-we-do/

Contributions

NB designed the study, oversaw data collection, and contributed to report writing. AMF designed the infographic, conducted the interviews, analysed the qualitative data and wrote up the findings, CW analysed the quantitative data, conducted the literature review, and contributed to report writing. ZQ supported study design and reviewed the final report.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following people and organisations for supporting the evaluation:

- The evaluation funders, MVRP.
- The intervention deliverers, Ariel Trust, specifically Trish Conning who supported school recruitment to the evaluation.
- All study participants who took part in surveys and interviews, particularly children.
- Agence Olloweb on Unsplash for the front cover image.
- Rebecca Bates, LJMU for proofing the final report.

Contents

Infograph iii
Executive summary iv
1. Introduction 1
2. Methodology 4
2.1 Methods 4
2.2 Data analyses 5
2.3 Ethical approval 5
3. Findings 6
3.1 Overview of the programmes 6
3.2 Dose and reach 15
3.3 Facilitators and barriers to implementation 17
3.4 Areas for development and sustainability 22
3.5 Impacts of the programmes 25
4. Summary and recommendations 33
References 37

Evaluation of the Ariel Trust Violence Reduction Education Programmes in Primary Schools across Merseyside

A. Introduction

This report presents updated evaluation findings from violence prevention programmes delivered by Ariel Trust in Merseyside schools between 2022 and 2025. Supported by funding from the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP), these programmes were designed to build resilience and refusal skills in young people through the use of interactive, skills-based educational resources. Initially implemented in primary schools, the programmes have since been piloted in a secondary school and a special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) school. The report provides a summary of the 2022/23 evaluation outcomes, alongside key findings from the pilot studies, offering a comprehensive overview of the initiatives' impact to date.

B. Methodology

Student Surveys

Pre and post programme surveys were distributed amongst schoolchildren who were in receipt of an Ariel Trust programme. These surveys measured knowledge on the content covered prior to and following the programme/s, help-seeking behaviours and patterns, bystander attitudes and overall perceptions of the programme.

School Staff Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with school staff involved in the implementation and delivery of the Ariel Trust with their school. These interviews explored perceptions of the training received, programme delivery, perceived impacts, sustainability, and areas for development.

Stakeholder Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the Ariel Trust lead and practitioners as well as with an MVRP team member. These interviews explored content development, model of delivery, programme implementation, perceived impacts, sustainability, and areas for development.

C. Findings

Grassing or Grooming Programme

Percentage of students agreeing that they would feel confident explaining what grooming means to a friend

Pre 26.6% — Post 82%

Percentage of students agreeing that if someone calls you a grass or a telltale they are trying to control you

Pre 18.2% — Post 50.5%

Percentage of students agreeing that if they thought they saw someone who was trying to get involved in illegal behaviour they would report it to an adult

Pre 82.2% — Post 95.2%

Percentage of students agreeing that they they should always keep a secret

Pre 37.2% — Post 17.9%

Send Me A Selfie

Percentage of students agreeing that they understand what the word consent means

Pre 46.7% — Post 82.9%

Percentage of students agreeing that there is no harm in sending a selfie to someone you trust

Pre 57.1% — Post 40.6%

Percentage of students agreeing that they would feel comfortable saying no to a friend if they wanted them to do something that made them uncomfortable

Pre 77.9% — Post 82.5%

Percentage of students agreeing that they should always keep a secret

Pre 39.1% — Post 27.4%

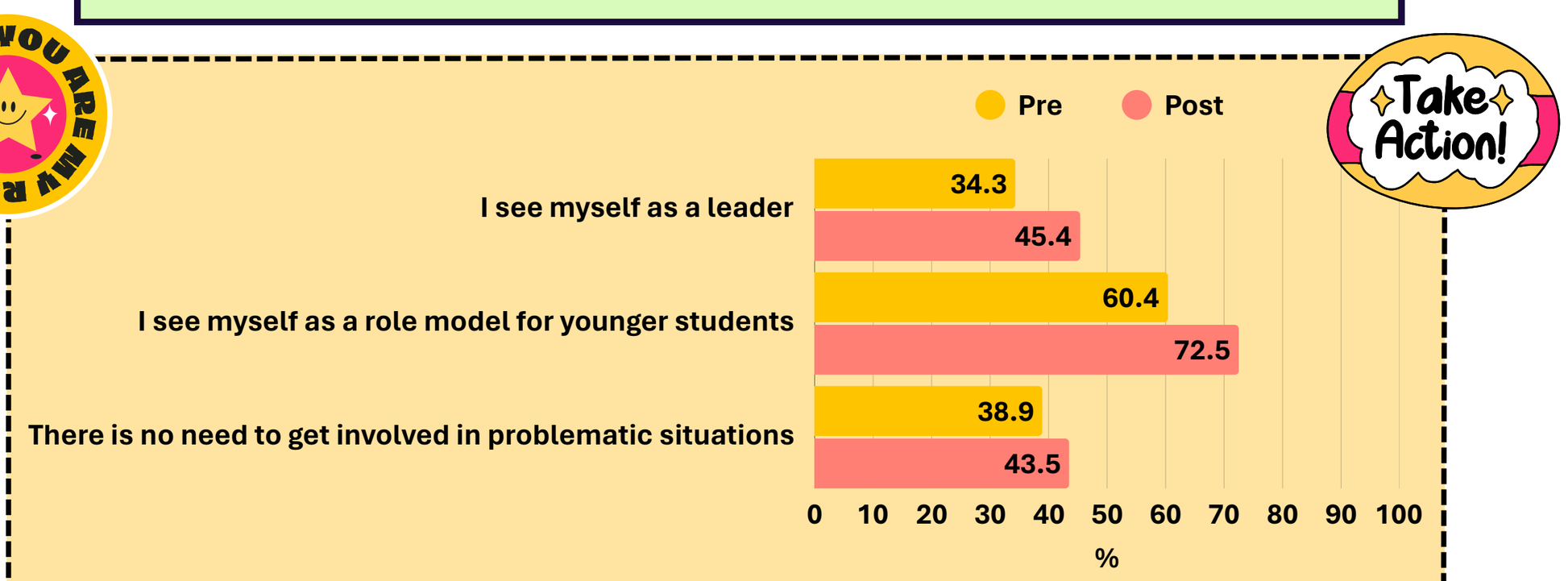
D. Findings

Changes in Help-Seeking Behaviour

In both programmes combined, post-programme, a larger proportion of students indicated that they were more likely to seek help from:

Parent:	Trusted Adult:	Helpline or Website:
Pre - 87.4%	Pre - 39.1%	Pre - 26.3%
Post- 90.2%	Post- 41.6%	Post- 31.0%

Changes in Leadership Skills and Bystander Behaviours



In both programmes combined, an increase in students' mean score on leadership and role model subscales was found, with more children reporting seeing themselves as leaders and role models, and more students agreeing with statements related to bystander behaviours following their involvement in the Ariel Trust programmes.

E. Summary

Findings from the 2022/23 evaluation of the Ariel Trust violence prevention programmes suggested staff and students' perceptions of the programme content, and particularly the delivery style were very positive, with only a very small minority of students reported not enjoying the programmes. Critically, the programmes had significant positive impacts on students' knowledge and attitudes related to the topics covered, including knowledge on how to keep safe online, a strengthened understanding of grassing and grooming concepts, who to reach out to for help, and how to navigate difficult situations. Whilst further research and evaluation is required, findings to date suggest a number of key learnings for programme development, and overall support the continued implementation of the programmes across Merseyside schools.

Executive summary

As part of a range of activities to develop, implement, and promote a system-wide public health approach to violence prevention, between 2022 and 2025 the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP) funded the development and implementation of a suite of programmes delivered by Ariel Trust, an education charity in Merseyside. Ariel Trust developed three programmes called 'Send me a Selfie', 'Grassing or Grooming', and 'Skills to Resist Radicalisation' and trained teachers to deliver them to primary school children across Merseyside. These programmes used action-based learning and role play aiming to improve children's knowledge and attitudes, identification of risks such as: online risks and consent (particularly around sending images to others), criminal exploitation and peer pressure, and around extreme messaging they may see online. The programmes not only aimed to improve children's knowledge and attitudes in both online and in-person settings, but also aimed to equip children with the skills to respond appropriately to situations by acting as a positive bystander and seeking help from a trusted adult – with action-based learning playing a critical role in the development of such skills.

As part of the broader system-wide evaluation of the MVRP, LJMU were commissioned to evaluate the implementation of Ariel Trust programmes in primary schools across Merseyside between 2022 and 2025, and evaluate the pilot implementation of Ariel Trust programmes in one secondary and one SEND school in Merseyside. This report includes findings from pre and post programme surveys with students, interviews with key stakeholders including programme implementers and school staff, a review of secondary information collected by Ariel Trust to explore programme dose and reach, perceptions of programme implementation and delivery, and the impacts of the programmes on students.

Dose and reach of the programme

By the mid-point of the 2024/25 school year (May 2025)[1]:

- In the 2024/25 academic year there were **212 attendances at the staff training** sessions across the three programmes (246 in 2022/23; 230 in 2023/24).
    - In 2023/24 representatives from 79 schools attended the Grassing or Grooming training (29 in 2022/23).
    - In 2023/24 representatives from 74 schools attended the Skills for Healthy Relationships training (56 in 2022/23).
    - In 2023/24 representatives from 29 schools attended the Skills to Resist Radicalisation training (56 in 2022/23).
- In the 2024/25 academic year **144 schools had delivered at least one of the programmes** (154 in 2022/23; 107 in 2023/24). In the 2023/24 academic year 86 schools delivered one programme (57 in 2022/23), 50 delivered two of the programmes (26 in 2022/23), and 18 schools delivered all three programmes (24 in 2022/23).
    - In 2023/24 58 schools delivered the Grassing or Grooming programme (32 in 2022/23).
    - In 2023/24 83 schools delivered the Skills for Healthy Relationships programme (50 in 2022/23).
    - In 2023/24 32 schools delivered the Skills to Resist Radicalisation programme (48 in 2022/23).

[1] Dose and reach data here includes programme delivery in all primary, secondary, and SEND school settings. Data was not available by programme type for 2024/25 delivery.

- In the 2024/25 academic year **5,420 students took part in at least one of the programmes** (6,166 in 2022/23; 5,980 in 2023/24)**.**
    - In 2023/24 2,365 students took part in the Grassing or Grooming programme (2,509 in 2022/23).
    - In 2023/24 4,290 students took part in the Skills for Healthy Relationships programme (3,547 in 2022/23).
    - In 2023/24 2,039 students took part in the Skills to Resist Radicalisation programme (3,287 in 2022/23).

Overall, findings from the evaluation of the Ariel Trust violence prevention programmes to date suggests that school staff and students' perceptions of the implementation, content, and particularly the delivery style were very positive. There has been a wide reach of the programmes across primary schools in Merseyside, supported by the concise training and accessible and useful programme materials. Findings also highlight how the programme content and delivery style was flexible and could support a range of students with different learning styles to understand the programme material. Critically, the programmes had significant positive impacts on students' knowledge and attitudes related to the topics of each programme, and evidence of positive impacts of the programmes on students' help seeking intentions and bystander attitudes. Whilst more robust research and evaluation methods would strengthen the evidence base further, findings to date highlight the positive impact of these programmes for primary school children, suggesting learning and adaptations that may be needed for these programmes to be implemented in other school settings.

1. Introduction

School-aged children and young people can face a range of harmful experiences that may increase the risk of disruptions to long-term healthy development across the life course. Such experiences can include bullying victimisation, dating violence victimisation, discrimination, or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as neglect or growing up in households with issues such as domestic violence or substance use, and childhood criminal exploitation [4, 5, 6]. Concerningly, such experiences are not uncommon for children and young people living in the UK. For example, a 2017-18 study of young people aged 10-15 years in England indicated that 17% had been bullied in the past year [3], whilst a representative household survey of adults in Merseyside, found that half (49.9%) had experienced one or more ACE, with 18.9% experiencing one ACE, 18.8% two or three ACEs, and 12.2% four or more [8]. Such negative experiences in childhood are linked to short-term outcomes such as impaired academic achievement, mental health issues including self-harm and suicidality, substance use, and further violence victimisation and perpetration [4, 5, 6, 7, 1]. However, the effects of such experiences are not limited to short-term outcomes, with impacts experienced across the life course. Longer-term impacts include increased risk of engagement with health risk behaviours (such as alcohol, smoking, and substance use), engagement with criminal behaviours, reduced mental wellbeing and suicidality, violence victimisation and perpetration, and non-communicable diseases such as cancers [2, 8, 9, 1].

In more recent times children and young people face a wider range of potential threats. For example, a large proportion of children and young people will spend a significant proportion of their time unsupervised in online environments, and such environments can increase risk of cyberbullying, and criminal or sexual grooming [6, 5]. Another current threat for children and young people in the UK is 'county lines' exploitation, a form of criminal grooming and exploitation by older peers, where often more vulnerable children and young people are targeted, with a range of adverse outcomes arising from this type of exploitation [16, 17]. Therefore, multiagency approaches to safeguarding children should be flexible and responsive to address the risks of emerging and developing threats. To be most effective, approaches to tackling such problems must include multiple components, including making the wider contextual environments that children interact in safer, and targeting interventions at perpetrators, and young people who are most at risk [11]. However, universal interventions can also aim to equip children and young people with the skills to identify such risks, respond and seek help appropriately (including as bystanders), and promote protective factors against negative outcomes such as increasing resilience and developing supportive trusting relationships with adults and peers [12, 13, 1].

As a key contact point with children and young people, schools are an ideal setting to implement such universal interventions. Such school-based interventions may also form an important part of schools meeting the requirements of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) also emphasise that schools have a responsibility to develop pupils holistically, including fostering positive behaviours and attitudes. However, in a 2013 review of PSHE provisions, Ofsted found that it was 'not yet good enough', with inconsistencies in provision and a lack of confidence in teachers providing education across numerous topics, particularly educating about healthy relationships [15]. Further there is a lack of training for teachers on how to deliver such education to pupils [16]. Research on the impacts of school-based programmes which aim to foster prosocial outcomes, and prevent health risk behaviours, anti-social behaviour, and violence, has found that such interventions can be effective across a range of outcomes including reduction in alcohol and substance use, improvements in wellbeing and social

skills, and reductions in anti-social attitudes and behaviours [14, 16, 17, 18, 19]. However, outcomes are not consistent across all programmes and interventions, particularly in terms of longer-term positive behavioural outcomes [17, 18, 19].

Ariel Trust, an education charity in Merseyside, provides a range of school-based interventions across a number of subjects, using action-based learning theatre and role-play methods to teach primary and secondary school aged children about problematic situations, giving them the skills to respond appropriately, and ask for help if they are involved, including as a bystander. Action-based learning can be broadly defined as 'anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing', and may involve a variety of activities, such as role-play, simulations, group work and discussions [20]. Research has indicated that action-based learning may form a critical part of educational approaches aiming to equip children with key skills, as children get to apply and practice what they have learnt, actively participating rather than passively listening [21, 20, 22, 23, 16]. Evidence has further suggested that educational approaches without action-based learning are unlikely to be effective for children learning key social competency skills, if they cannot 'actively demonstrate how to incorporate the information into their behaviours and choices' [24, 19]. Therefore, approaches which are overly reliant on didactic methods alone (whereby teachers simply provide information to pupils), without effectively incorporating elements of action-based learning, are unlikely to be successful in influencing behaviours and attitudes long-term, thus making the Ariel Trust pedagogy approach a potentially key mechanism of change.

In 2019, the UK Home Secretary allocated £35 million to Police and Crime Commissioners in 18 areas to set up multi-agency violence reduction units. Merseyside was one of the areas allocated funding and established the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP). During 2019/20, the MVRP supported the development and implementation of a range of interventions to prevent violence. Since then, the MVRP has been allocated additional funding, and as part of a range of activities to develop, promote and sustain a whole system public health approach to violence prevention, the MVRP funded a range of programmes. Over the past three years Ariel Trust has received funding from the MVRP to develop and oversee the delivery of a skills-based violence prevention project in primary schools across Merseyside. This allowed the development of the violence prevention resources, 'Grassing or Grooming?' and 'Skills for a Healthy Relationship: Send Me a Selfie', to complement the 'Skills to Resist Radicalisation' resource which had already been created. All three programmes aim to build resilience and refusal skills through an action learning approach. The resources are available for schools to use indefinitely and are designed to support schools to meet the broader requirements of the new relationship education curriculum. As part of the broader system-wide evaluation of the MVRP in, the Public Health Institute, LJMU were commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the Ariel Trust primary school programmes between 2022 and 2025. Findings from the 2022/23 evaluation of the programmes have previously been published and are available online[2] [32]. Further, while primary schools have been the key target for these programmes, they have also been piloted in one SEND school and one secondary school. Full evaluation findings from this pilot can be found elsewhere[3] [33]. This report includes an update of the findings from the 2022/23 evaluation [32], and a summarises the key findings from the pilot in secondary and SEND schools to provide an overall summary of all evaluation findings between 2022-2025.

[2] https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/-/media/phi-reports/pdf/2024-01-evaluation-of-the-ariel-trust-violence-reduction-education-programmes-in-primary-schools-acr.pdf

[3] For full case study findings see Farrugia et al. 2025.

1.1 Study aims and objectives

A process and outcome evaluation of the violence reduction education programmes was conducted. The evaluation had two core objectives, which include a number of research questions.

1. To monitor, document, and describe the implementation of the programmes (process evaluation).
    - To describe the implementation of the Ariel Trust programmes in and across schools in Merseyside, including set up and training, and programme content and delivery
    - To understand the extent to which the intervention was implemented as planned (fidelity)
    - To identify how much of the intervention was implemented (dose)
    - To explore the uptake of the intervention amongst the target population (reach)
    - To elicit the facilitators and/or barriers to programme implementation
    - To identify areas for development and sustainability
2. To assess the perceptions and impacts of the Ariel Trust programmes (outcome evaluation).
    - To explore staff and students' perceptions of the programmes
    - To identify changes in students' ability to identify inappropriate behaviour/risk situations and respond appropriately, bystander knowledge, social competency, and readiness to seek help from a trusted adult
    - To explore any other potential outcomes of the programmes on students

2. Methodology

To meet study objectives, a range of methods were implemented with findings triangulated to inform the process and outcome evaluation. Whilst programme delivery was expected to take place in 150+ schools, the evaluation focused on a subset of schools (representative of different local authorities, type of programme and level of support) to conduct the main evaluation study methods (student survey and staff interviews). Additionally, two case studies were developed on the pilot implementation of the programmes in one secondary school setting with Year 7 pupils and one SEND school.

2.1 Methods

2.1.1 Review of project documentation

Documentation, materials, and correspondence produced throughout the implementation of the programmes were collated and reviewed. This included information on programme content, any individual-level school changes to content or format of the programme, and data collected by Ariel Trust (e.g. dose and reach). Researchers also observed the staff training sessions. Information collected through such review and observation is used throughout the findings to complement data collected by other methods.

2.1.2 Stakeholder semi-structured interviews

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders who had a key role in the implementation of the programmes. Participants included stakeholders from Ariel Trust involved in programme design and implementation, and teacher training (n=2), the MVRP education lead (n=1), and school staff (n=8). Case studies were informed by interviews conducted with school staff delivering the programmes in one secondary school[4] (n=1) and one SEND school[5] (n=1), and a stakeholder from Ariel Trust (n=1). Interview length ranged in time from 15-60 minutes and were carried out online (n=13) and face-to-face (n=1). Interview questions focused on: perceptions of training and materials; programme content and delivery, including any adaptations; factors supporting and impeding implementation of programmes; areas for development; and perceived impacts on students, school staff and the wider school context.

2.1.3 Student surveys

Pre and post programme surveys were implemented with students taking part in two of the programmes, 'Skills for a Healthy Relationship: Send me a Selfie' and 'Grassing or Grooming?'[6]. In total, 378 primary school students completed the pre survey. The post survey was completed by 322 primary school students, which represented an 85.2% retention rate. 277 pre and post surveys were able to be matched and included in the analyses. Surveys completed by students in the secondary school and SEND school (60 pre; 51 post; 32 pre and post matched) are not included in these numbers and were analysed separately with key results presented here in the case studies and full results reported elsewhere [33]. Surveys aimed to identify individual-level changes in attitudes and knowledge related to each programme's specific content; help seeking behaviour; and bystander

[4] Secondary school students took part in the Grassing or Grooming programme.
[5] SEND school students took part in the Send me a Selfie programme.
[6] The Skills to Resist Radicalisation programme was not implemented by any of the schools participating in the student surveys.

attitudes. Survey questions included: basic demographic information; perceptions of the programme (post only); and a number of validated measures (pre and post) including:

- **General help seeking questionnaire (GHSQ)** [34]**:** Amended version of the GHSQ (previously validated with children aged 12-19 years) with more appropriate language[7] for younger children. Participants are asked 'if you were having a problem, how likely are you to seek help from the following people' and then are provided with a list of eight help sources (e.g. parents, friends, helpline, teachers, other trusted adult). Participants rate their help-seeking intentions on a ten-point scale how likely (ranging from 1-very unlikely to 10-very likely) for each help source including a 'no one' option.
- **Bystander Intervention Survey** [10]: 6-item scale measuring perceptions of leadership skills and attitudes to intervening in problematic situations. Participants indicate on a five-point scale how much they agree with each item (1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree).

In addition to the validated measures, knowledge and attitudes were measured using bespoke questions which were developed as part of a previous internal evaluation of the programme. Seven questions were developed which related to the topic of each of the programmes (e.g. 'I should always keep a secret'; 'I understand what the word consent means'). Participants indicate on a five-point scale how much they agree with each item (1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree).

2.2 Data analyses

Quantitative analyses were undertaken in SPSS (v29) using descriptive statistics. Where data was available to match students' pre and post surveys, paired samples t-tests were used to identify statistically significant changes on a number of measures (e.g. mean scores on statements relating to knowledge and attitudes pre and post programme). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the interviews [11]. The analysis is presented with illustrative quotes where appropriate to highlight key findings.

2.3 Ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained from Liverpool John Moores University (REC no. 23/PHI/002), and the study adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki.

[7] Developed in consultation with Ariel Trust practitioners.

3. Findings

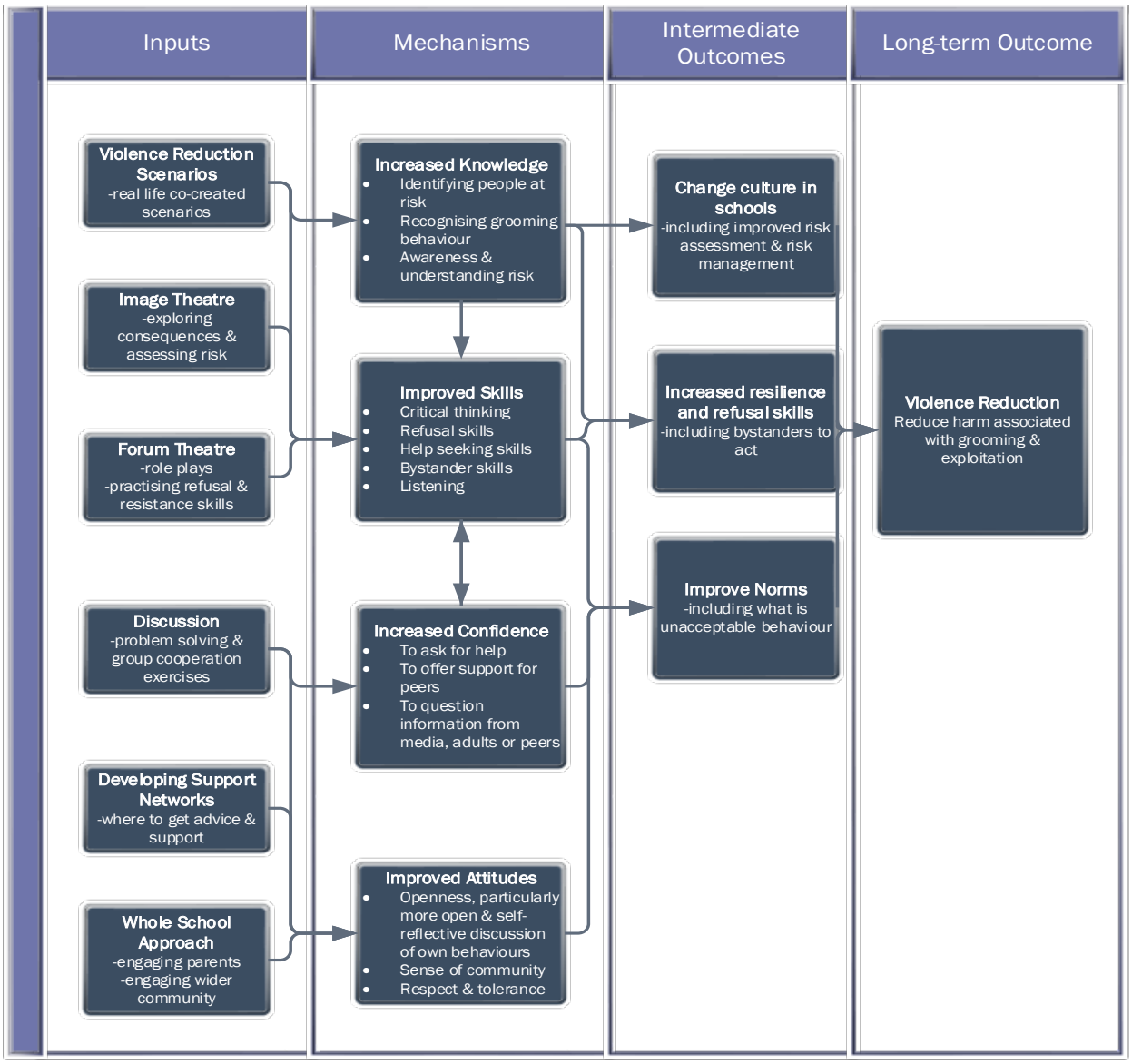
3.1 Overview of the programmes

This section presents an overview of the three programmes including the overarching logic model for the programmes, school staff training sessions, and programme content and delivery. Throughout this section the main text refers to implementation in primary schools, and where relevant perspectives from the pilot in the secondary and SEND schools are included in separate case study boxes.

3.1.1 Logic model

An overarching logic model for the three programmes was produced by Ariel Trust and is provided in Figure 1. This provides the inputs and resources needed to implement the programmes, the activities which are implemented as part of the programmes, the theorised mechanisms of change, and the anticipated short-term and long-term outcomes.

Figure 1: Overarching logic model for the programmes



3.1.2 School staff training

In 2024/25[8] teaching staff and year heads from 104 primary schools (167 in 2022/23; 141 in 2023/24) across Merseyside were invited to take part in training sessions delivered by Ariel Trust. Separate training sessions were run for each programme and were delivered online by the head of Ariel Trust. Each session was one hour in length. Training content included: background to each topic including relevant local and national statistics; evidence for the use of drama and role play as methods of learning; practical implementation advice, including step-by-step guidance for teachers on implementing sessions; and a demonstration of the media resources available as part of the programme resources. The overall aim of the training was to introduce school staff to the content covered by the programmes' respective resources as well as any supporting programme material, such as worksheets.

Findings from the school staff interviews showed that staff enjoyed the informal and concise nature of the training, citing that sessions did not require a great deal of time to take part in and were effective in preparing them to deliver the lessons. Furthermore, staff members expressed that the resources that complemented what was covered in the training were made easily accessible to them to be able to use following the training.

"They were with a really lovely guy. We always say it was really, really beneficial and the time of it was quite good because it wasn't something that took the entire day where we had to go out of class. It was quite short but what was being delivered in that time was everything that we needed." – ***Teacher, School 5***

"It's very informal, which is good. It's not delivered in a patronising way, and it was very easy to pick up. So, with the training what I found is that I could watch what was being delivered, but then I wouldn't need to do much reading up afterwards. It's very easy just to pick up and even if I didn't always have the transcript with me, the PowerPoints are very self-explanatory with the videos and they were all very easy to access and navigate through." – ***Teacher, School 2***

Many staff reported that the training sessions were both relevant and practical, with no surplus content or activities. However, some members of staff highlighted that it would be advantageous if more interactive elements were incorporated in the sessions in order to improve their ability to engage with the training even further.

"We obviously do a lot of training on different things throughout the year and some training sessions have a bit of dead time where it's like 'Oh, go off and discuss this or ponder this' or whatever. There was opportunity to do that but it was very specific and to the point and I think because of that we left feeling, for both sessions actually, we left feeling very confident in what we were delivering." – ***Teacher, School 5***

"I think potentially sometimes in the training if I'm being deadly honest, when the videos were played, that's when people kind of, well, when I found I was zoning out because you know, I've had a really busy day. Sometimes I think it was very much like the training was very kind of just delivered. There wasn't much of an interactive element to it, which is handy in some ways because it can just be there and you can go back and watch it but I think sometimes an interactive element helps people engage and helps you have a kind of chat about things." – ***Teacher, School 4***

[8] Data includes delivery from September 2024 to May 2025.

3.1.3 Programme content

Send Me a Selfie Programme

The 'Skills for a Healthy Relationship: Send Me a Selfie' resource was developed as a result of government-led reports outlining the pressures that young people can face to share images online, and had funding attached to it from the Home Office's Safer Streets initiative. It outlines the principles of staying safe and aware on the internet, and specifically examines issues arising from the sharing of online images. It focuses on the potential adverse consequences of sharing images, helping young people to understand the risk of image sharing to peers or strangers, and explores issues of consent and the importance of building trusted relationships. Additionally, the resource aims to make school children aware of legislation behind illicit image sharing and the functionality of image-sharing platforms. Findings from the interviews, showed that programme implementers felt the resource was relevant to students and educated them on concepts and ideas which may have been new for many of them.

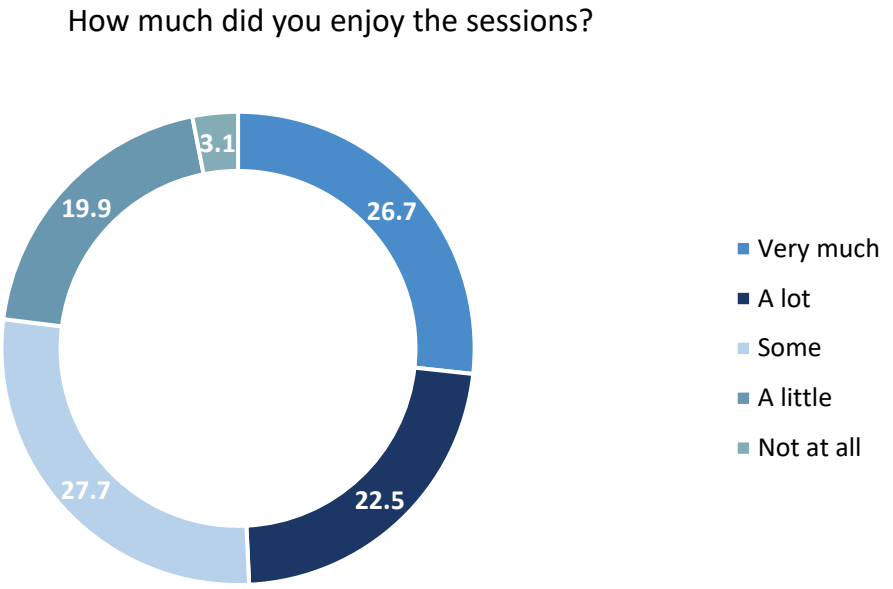
"Send Me a Selfie has got to do with sexual violence and consent. That's a really big one. So obviously at the minute with mobile phones, you cannot contain it, it is out of control. So going in with the younger children to talk about consent was quite eye opening because when I told them that just to take an inappropriate image of themselves was illegal, they were like 'What?' and I said, 'You're holding an underage person's image', and they said, 'but it's me', and I said, 'yeah, but it's illegal'. And then they were like 'oh my god' and it sort of started to click actually how dangerous it is to them and to others." – **Ariel Trust Practitioner 1**

"In Year Five we find that a lot of the kind of behavioural issues this year have actually been outside of school. So it might be something that has happened on WhatsApp or something that happened on Snapchat. PSHE touches on kind of elements of the Send Me A Selfie but it's not kind of just social media based or just kind of sending pictures based, it usually just touches on elements of them, whereas we felt like this was a lot more in depth for them." – **Teacher, School 5**

Case study findings: Emerging insights from the case study highlighted that the content covered across the Send Me a Selfie programme is particularly well-suited to the needs of SEND students, as it presents complex topics in clear, accessible language, making it easier for vulnerable young people to understand and engage with. The content also supports teachers in addressing sensitive issues confidently, filling a gap where existing online materials are often inaccessible or inappropriate. According to an Ariel Trust practitioner, this is especially important given the disproportionate involvement of SEND students in cases related to illicit image sharing.

Additionally, findings from the student surveys, demonstrated that the majority of the children enjoyed the programme, with 49.2% responding they enjoyed the sessions 'a lot' or 'very much' (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Students level of enjoyment taking part in the Send Me a Selfie programme, post programme survey (%)[9]



Case study findings: Findings from the cohort of SEND students who took part in the Send Me a Selfie programme show that 23.7% reported enjoying the sessions 'a lot' or 'very much', compared to 49.2% of primary school pupils.

[9] The total percentage may deviate slightly from 100% as a result of rounding employed during data analysis.

Grassing or Grooming Programme

'Grassing or Grooming' was developed in response to the growing national concern around the criminal exploitation of children and young people. It is designed to educate students about exploitation, including the different types that can occur such as sexual and gang-related exploitation. It demonstrates how exploitation can occur as a slow-moving relationship and the subtle steps that may be taken by individuals whose intent is exploitative. The programme aims to develop the skills needed to refuse and resist grooming behaviour. Findings from the interviews highlighted that teaching staff used the resource to educate children on how to identify exploitative relationships and underline the importance of resisting peer pressure, in addition to encouraging them to report instances of such behaviour to a trusted adult that either they or other peers experienced.

"Through one of the videos, children could see that grooming starts with something so small like someone on a game giving you a code to get to the next level. I told them that small things can then escalate, and we talked about why it may escalate to someone for example giving you a phone. They could really see how easily and subtly people could be manipulated. When they heard the word 'grass', the kids were originally saying, 'well, you just shouldn't grass' but when we talked about how that can be someone trying to manipulate their choice and taking choice away from them, they really managed to understand that." – **Teacher, School 2**

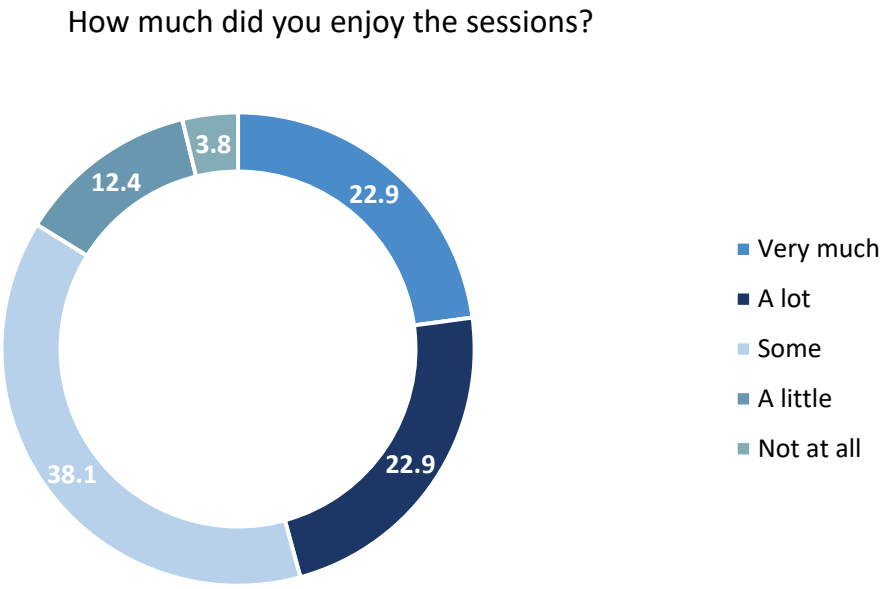
"It just reiterated that if you are in trouble or if you have got yourself in a difficult situation, then these are the people that you can speak to." – **Teacher, School 4**

"I have heard the saying, 'snitches get stitches' in our school. So, this is about telling them to keep themselves and their friends safe and the moment that someone is telling them not to grass, they realise that is them trying to get control of a situation and get control over their voice almost." – **Teacher, School 2**

Case study findings: To make the programme more relevant for older Year 7 students, the secondary school teacher added topics such as online gaming communication and older-to-younger student grooming, which they felt were pertinent to secondary school-aged children. This approach allowed the teacher to follow the core content while incorporating additional topics relevant to older students.

Findings from the student surveys demonstrated that the majority of the children really enjoyed the programme, with 45.8% responding they enjoyed the sessions 'a lot' or 'very much' (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Students level of enjoyment taking part in the Grassing or Grooming programme, post programme survey (%)[10]



Case study findings: Findings from the cohort of Year 7 students who took part in the Grassing or Grooming programme show that 60.0% reported enjoying the sessions 'not at all' or 'a little', compared to 16.2% of primary school pupils.

Skills to Resist Radicalisation Programme[11]

Skills to Resist Radicalisation aims to encourage young people to think critically about extreme material that they may encounter and build their resilience to these messages. Content includes how to develop language to discuss intolerance; feelings around different value systems; critical thinking skills and strategies to ask for help; and knowledge around social media echo chambers and how the internet can encourage and sensationalise comments to drive online activity.

3.1.4 Programme delivery

Programme delivery primarily relies on providing training to teaching staff to equip them with the necessary knowledge and information to deliver the programmes to their students. However, following previous implementation of the programmes, it was identified that not all teaching staff are confident in delivering programmes which use action-based learning such as forum theatre. Thus, to explore whether additional practitioner support supplemented the online training and improved programme delivery and outcomes, five schools in the 2022/23 school year, four schools across the

[10] The total percentage may deviate slightly from 100% as a result of rounding employed during data analysis.
[11] This programme was prior to MVRP commissioning and took place before the evaluation began, thus was not covered by primary evaluation methods, namely interviews and student surveys, just secondary monitoring and programme data and information.

2023/2024 school year and fifteen schools in the 2024/2025 school year, were identified for additional support from an Ariel Trust practitioner skilled in forum theatre techniques. These schools were selected and identified based on school needs in addition to having a previously established relationship working with Ariel Trust. The three resources were covered at least once across these schools.

The key premise of programme delivery was the model of action-based learning, specifically through the use of forum theatre. This is based upon the assumption that students may have been previously made aware of the risks of certain behaviours but lack the skills to effectively navigate risky or problematic situations or seek help. Delivering the programme using action-based learning aims to support students to practise and thus build these skills and resilience.

"I and hundreds of other people have spent loads of time telling children that if you use social media and you add people to your network that you don't know, you put yourself at risk. The evidence seems to suggest that children have acquired that knowledge, but those same children go home, they start playing Fortnite and immediately start adding people they don't know to their game network. So, I think the evidence tells us that those types of knowledge-based interventions don't change children's risk-taking behaviour." – ***Ariel Trust Practitioner 2***

"Scenario-based learning to me is the best kind of learning. So there's no point going and telling a group of teenage boys at age 15 'don't go and carry a knife' and then just letting them out in the world and just telling them not to carry a knife but if you play it out and you show them these are the consequences, real time, improvised, no practise and you've just got to go with it then they get a sense of what might happen." – ***Ariel Trust Practitioner 1***

"I think that active learning style is something that is massive for Ariel Trust and that helps us do real time change because when you put someone on the spot, they are most likely to be honest because they haven't got time to think about a lie. When that happens, that's where the magic happens because they'll say something and then they'll catch themselves, and then we'll have to stop, freeze, and then we'll discuss that and that's fine because, you know, that's what it's about. We say wrong things sometimes as adults. So children say wrong things all the time, but it's only wrong because we haven't really thought about what the consequences are." – ***Ariel Trust Practitioner 1***

Forum theatre allowed young people to act out whatever the issues may be and to consider potential strategies that deal with any of those barriers through the use of roleplaying strategies. In the majority of schools, forum theatre activities were delivered by teachers to their students, actively involving both in a number of different roles, such as a parent and child or police and child. In the five schools identified for additional support, a theatre practitioner from Ariel Trust delivered forum theatre activities to students, and teachers were encouraged to participate in order to be able to replicate them later. In addition to the use of forum theatre and roleplay techniques which were the main method of programme delivery, teaching staff also used a mix of class discussions, worksheets and groupwork in the session. Teaching staff reported how they found forum theatre to be effective in providing students with the ability to decide on the appropriate response in certain situations and to be able to translate their own thoughts into effective dialogue.

"[I liked] the roleplay and the videos/scenarios because we got to answer questions about it and then act it out." – ***Student, post survey***

"I liked the part where it asked me who I would talk to if I was in a problem. It made me feel safe." – ***Student, post survey***

"I hadn't really thought about that in that we tell children, 'Oh, don't get yourself in these situations' or 'If somebody does this you, shouldn't do that but actually we don't, or what I never did was actually give them the words that they need to say and show them how to actually respond in those situations because it's all well and good saying 'Oh, you shouldn't do this, and you shouldn't get involved with this person'. We can't stop that person approaching them on the street or we can't stop them falling into that friendship group. So, I realised that actually, what we need is to roleplay and model those situations and show them those situations and show them what to say if that ever happened because otherwise, they're not going to get to that themselves."- ***Teacher, School 4***

*"The role play side of things helped our cohort become confident in knowing how to report to a trusted adult and, you know, that if the worst does happen then you know they know what to do because they've seen it or they've acted it out themselves or that they've already talked about what they can do to get help." -****Teacher, School 5***

Findings from the student survey also showed that the parts of the programme that students liked best were the activities like role play, games, watching the videos and the group discussions. The word cloud below gives an overview of the different aspects students enjoyed about the programme.

Although proficiency in the use of forum theatre or roleplay in classroom-based activities differed amongst teaching staff, all those interviewed revealed that they felt both confident and content using such a method of delivery with their students. Those who reported that they had never explored such methods before described how their experience using forum theatre to deliver the Ariel Trust resources had encouraged them to start incorporating such methods into their teaching.

"It hit me in that training, and I realised how useful it actually is for them to practise what they would say in that situation. Which is bizarre. I feel silly saying it, but I never did that before but now from that I know that when I'm teaching PSHE in my new year, whatever the topic is, it'll be something that I will implement there because yeah it was just one of those things where you think 'Oh my, why haven't I done this before? Of course our children should be doing this!'" – ***Teacher, School 5***

"I was more than happy to use it because I'm experienced in doing drama. It was really nice to have the amount of time we had to give to the drama as well to be able to dig deeper into it a lot more. With PSHE you only have a set amount of time in the afternoon, so it was really good to be able to dedicate so much time to it." – ***Teacher, School 3***

Interviews also demonstrated that the time over which the resources were delivered differed across schools, with some dedicating one whole day to the resources and others delivering the five sessions once a week. Differences were also noted in the time of delivery, with some schools delivering sessions in a condensed period at the end of the year, with others delivering individual sessions across the whole school year. The target population for the programmes was Year 5 and Year 6 students, however, schools were free to choose which resources to implement with which group, with many implementing the delivery of Send Me a Selfie with Year 5 students and Grassing or Grooming with Year 6 students.

"On the morning when we were delivering it, the website we found really easy to access and navigate. So, there were loads of session overviews and they were really useful because they were just really easy to follow and like it was good how the sessions were really clear. Like they all stated 'This is session one and these are its activities'. That meant that we could deliver this one now and this one we're doing before break time and then we're doing this one." – ***Teacher, School 5***

Case study findings: The Grassing or Grooming resource was delivered to Year 7 students over three sessions. This structure allowed them to first watch the video material, then reflect, explore how they would respond to the scenarios, and refine their approach with their teacher. The format also gave teachers flexibility to adjust the content based on student feedback after each session. Interactivity and adaptability were key, especially in SEND schools, where teachers shortened and adapted worksheets to better engage their students. Sessions in SEND settings were highly interactive, involving role-play, discussions, and even outdoor activities.

3.2 Dose and reach

The aim was to have at least one of the programmes delivered in 160 schools across Merseyside during each academic year from 2022-2025. By the midpoint of the 2024/25 academic year[12]:

- In 2024/25[13] there were **212 attendances at the staff training** sessions across the three programmes (246 in 2022/23; 230 in 2023/24).[14]
    - In 2023/24 representatives from 79 schools attended the Grassing or Grooming training (29 in 2022/23).
    - In 2023/24 representatives from 74 schools attended the Skills for Healthy Relationships training (56 in 2022/23).
    - In 2023/24 representatives from 29 schools attended the Skills to Resist Radicalisation training (56 in 2022/23).
- In 2024/25 **144 schools had delivered at least one of the programmes** (154 in 2022/23; 107 in 2023/24). In 2023/24 86 schools delivered one programme (57 in 2022/23), 50 delivered two of the programmes (26 in 2022/23), and 18 schools delivered all three programmes (24 in 2022/23).
    - In 2023/24 58 schools delivered the Grassing or Grooming programme (32 in 2022/23).
    - In 2023/24 83 schools delivered the Skills for Healthy Relationships programme (50 in 2022/23).
    - In 2023/24 32 schools delivered the Skills to Resist Radicalisation programme (48 in 2022/23).
- In 2024/25 **5,420 students took part in at least one of the programmes** (6,166 in 2022/23; 5,980 in 2023/24).
    - In 2023/24 2,365 students took part in the Grassing or Grooming programme (2,509 in 2022/23).
    - In 2023/24 4,290 students took part in the Skills for Healthy Relationships programme (3,547 in 2022/23).
    - In 2023/24 2,039 students took part in the Skills to Resist Radicalisation programme (3,287 in 2022/23).

A breakdown of reach by programme type and by area and delivery year for 2022/23 and 2023/24 is provided in Table 1[15]. The reach of the Ariel Trust programmes by area and delivery year is provided in Table 2.

[12] Dose and reach data here includes programme delivery in all primary, secondary, and SEND school settings. Data was not available by programme type for 2024/25 delivery.
[13] Data includes delivery from September 2024 to May 2025.
[14] Staff may have attended more than one session thus the figure relates to attendances not individual staff.
[15] Data was not available by programme type for 2024/25.

Table 1: Reach of individual programmes by Local Authority and delivery year

Programme		Merseyside		Knowsley		Liverpool		Sefton		St. Helens		Wirral	
		2022/23	2023/24	2022/23	2023/24	2022/23	2023/24	2022/23	2023/24	2022/23	2023/24	2022/23	2023/24
Grassing or Grooming	Schools trained	29	79	4	12	7	33	8	14	6	4	4	16
	Schools delivered	32	58	2	4	7	25	5	11	5	3	13	15
	Pupils engaged	2509	2365	305	90	510	642	410	502	530	143	754	988
Skills for Healthy Relationships	Schools trained	56	74	8	14	14	31	14	17	11	6	9	6
	Schools delivered	50	83	6	10	10	33	9	17	9	6	16	17
	Pupils engaged	3547	4290	695	462	793	1950	664	717	563	209	832	952
Skills to Resist Radicalisation	Schools trained	56	29	7	6	34	10	6	7	2	5	7	1
	Schools delivered	48	32	4	5	25	11	2	3	3	3	14	10
	Pupils engaged	3287	2039	365	447	1543	691	260	87	240	150	879	664

Table 2: Reach of the Ariel Trust programmes by area and delivery year

	2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
	Schools delivered	Pupils engaged	Schools delivered	Pupils engaged	Schools delivered	Pupils engaged
Merseyside	107	6,166	154	5,980	144	5,420
Knowsley	11	900	22	792	13	750
Liverpool	41	2,286	59	2,362	57	2,132
Sefton	16	954	31	962	25	828
St. Helens	13	638	14	355	17	344
Wirral	26	1,388	28	1,509	32	1,366

3.3 Facilitators and barriers to implementation

3.3.1 Facilitating factors

Stakeholders and school staff identified a number of facilitating factors to programme implementation including:

Locally relevant and co-created with children

The development of the programmes content has been informed by consultation with children, resulting in the development of scenarios and contexts which are relevant and realistic to real life scenarios which they encounter. This is done with the aim of increasing engagement with the programme, its content and activities, to ensure that it is relevant to the needs of young people, teachers, schools, and their wider communities.

"We listen to the stories that children tell us, we develop them as dramas and role plays, we make them into films and around the films we build programmes and learning that we share with teachers. So, what we offer is a response to the evidence that allows us to engage with children, teachers, parents, and others as well." – ***Ariel Trust Practitioner 2***

"There's an authenticity to working together with children that's different from imposing something on children."– ***MVRP Team Member***

"What we do is we knock on the door and say to teachers 'We've got a problem. We want to work with you. Are you willing to work with us and help us? We're going to listen to you'. So whenever we go to a school, we start off by listening to teachers and children and we build interventions around the needs of those teachers and those children." – ***Ariel Trust Practitioner 2***

Critically, the programmes and materials have been adapted to fit the local context in Merseyside. Teaching staff identified the use of locally relevant materials and resources as a key facilitating factor of the programmes. For example, it was highlighted that the use of local accents in films and videos enabled school children to relate to the characters in the resources.

"I enjoyed the video because of the scouse accent."
– Student, post survey

"I have a lot of children in my class who, you know, have experienced difficult circumstances and have experienced trauma in the past and are particularly vulnerable to things like grooming and child sexual exploitation and things like that. There are instances within the school and within the class that I have at the moment where that has happened. So that's why I feel that delivering things from the Ariel Trust really benefited our children in particular because it's their reality. It's the life that they live, and the videos fit the local context. Other things through our PSHE curriculum that we do can sometimes feel a little bit like they've not been written by or for children from our kind of schools. So I really liked that about the Ariel Trust's content because it felt so relevant to local children and children from our kind of school." – ***Teacher, School 4***

"I remember the first time I saw the videos that we show the children, the fact that, and I know this sounds silly, but the fact that there's local accents, that really engaged our children. They were like 'They sound just like us', and I was like, 'Well, it's a Merseyside organisation that is delivering the training'. And so I think that really engaged our children." – ***Teacher, School 2***

"We actually had an incident where we had somebody being groomed and there was no support material or anything to help our children recognise what was going on and recognise those kind of coercive relationships with adults, and what they can do to try and tackle it. So the material the Ariel Trust produced was basically spot on for what our kids and kids living in our area need." – ***Teacher, School 3***

Age appropriate

A key facilitating factor identified through the interviews was the adaptation of language used in the resources to make it appropriate and comprehensible for primary school children, particularly as the topics could be quite sensitive, upsetting, and difficult to understand at that developmental stage. Teaching staff felt the appropriate language supported engagement and understanding amongst their students. Furthermore, it was felt by some staff that the target group of the programmes was particularly important given their developmental period and the potentially vulnerable transition period to secondary school.

"*The thing around the Ariel Trust material is that they're talking about these things which can be quite sensitive issues, but they use appropriate language that actually brings children on board as well. So it doesn't feel as if there's something insensitive or inappropriate." –* ***MVRP Team Member***

"And I actually had this discussion with the children. And I said, 'Why do you think it's so important that we're doing these lessons now?' And they actually, they're totally on it. They were like, 'We're going to secondary school soon and we're getting more independence and going out on our own more'. We had a class discussion around that and why we were doing it now because I said, you know, the more independence you get and the more you're allowed more time on your phone and the more people you're around, the more vulnerable you are to this." – ***Teacher, School 4***

Case study findings: Findings from delivery with the cohort of Year 7 students indicated that the content of the Grassing or Grooming programme may need adaptation for delivery with older students, providing more detailed information on the dangers and risks associated with criminal activity and grooming, and risks which are more relevant to an older group of students.

Flexible delivery

Both teaching staff and stakeholders outlined how the flexibility of the programme was an essential factor in facilitating successful delivery. Although teachers were provided with preliminary training and briefed on the activities that can be conducted with their students, the content allowed teachers to be able to fully adopt a mix of classroom activities to deliver the resources. In particular, teaching staff members delineated that this same flexibility ensured that the resources catered for all types of learners within their classes.

"The children really liked it because I think they felt like they weren't writing all the time and that it was really interactive. So sometimes it would have been role play, sometimes it would be writing things down, sometimes it would be talking. It was like a nice mix of all the different kinds of ways for them to learn and that was definitely why it worked for us." – ***Teacher, School 5***

"We've got a lot of like SEN children, so they responded well to the discussion because sometimes when we're doing group work, they don't participate, or they start fiddling or messing around. So the teacher-pupil discussion really helped like maintain their level of concentration. Yeah, it could be delivered in any way, couldn't it? It could be delivered in groups, and I could see how it could be you know, it could be like going away and chatting in your little group and then come back and feedback. It is a flexible programme." – ***Teacher, School 2***

"It helped all the different types of students that we have in Year Five. There are some children that really like to write things down and you get a lot more from them when they don't have to verbalise it. There are some children that are the opposite and, actually, you really get into the nitty-gritty of what they are thinking when they can verbalise it. Others are very much into the role play and you think, 'Wow, that's the perfect blend of learning'." – ***Teacher, School 5***

Furthermore, stakeholders also reported how the flexibility to adapt the programme content allows the resources provided by the organisation to remain relevant and engaging. They highlighted how this flexibility enables the content to be tweaked following any feedback received, allowing for new content to be developed and added on.

"There's a model but if you step out of that model, that's fine. We always say, 'Let's see what works and what doesn't' and we come back, and we go again. I think that in the Ariel Trust culture is massive for us to deliver such a good programme because we're going at it in real time. We're learning as we go along and creating and adding to the programme." – ***Ariel Trust Practitioner 1***

Case study findings: Findings from the delivery of the programme with both the Year 7 cohort and within the SEND school highlighted flexibility as a key factor in its success. The teachers appreciated the flexibility because it allowed them to tailor sessions according to their students' age, needs, and learning styles. This adaptability was particularly important within the SEND school, where teachers were able to adjust the material, content, and delivery methods to suit individual learning needs, including approaches that supported memory recall. Additionally, the Year 7 teacher noted that flexibility with regards to the teacher training also helped the overall delivery of the programme, as the combination of clear, accessible materials and support from Ariel Trust allowed teachers who were unable to attend the training sessions to still deliver the resources effectively.

Alignment with PHSE curriculums and other school activities

Teaching staff noted how some of the subject matter aligned with the themes covered in their school's PSHE curriculums. Others pointed out how the resources merged with previous activities, such as workshops, that their school would have held or that their students would have been invited to participate in. Staff members added how this alignment between programmes and other curriculums and activities enabled their students to pick up on the content covered with much more ease and that it helped build and reinforce the students' knowledge on such topics, all the while helping teachers meet their PHSE priorities.

"I could say what it's done as well is it's complemented things that we've taught throughout the year. So, our local area puts on workshops where our children are invited to attend, and all sorts of services do sort of 20-minute workshops with the children and some of those workshops are based on social media. So we are constantly sort of dripping this thing in and Send Me a Selfie was another way for us to reinforce it and keeping it on the children's radar I suppose in terms of being safe online." – ***Teacher, School 5***

"We take a very heavy approach in our school, there is lots of PSHE in our curriculum and we use the phrase 'trusted adults' a lot too so it was nice that that was reinforced again all the way through. I really felt like the materials blended in well with our curriculum." – ***Teacher, School 3***

Case study findings: Findings from the Year 7 case study highlighted how Ariel Trust resources are developed using a co-creation process, whereby schools are in communication with Ariel Trust about the priorities set out to them as schools, as well as the needs of their student population. As a result, the current three resources developed by Ariel Trust are directly related to the curriculum needs that schools have, as well as addressing the current issues facing students. Secondary schools are consulted as part of the co-creation process as secondary school children may already have knowledge and experiences relevant to the topics covered in the Ariel Trust resources for primary school cohort, which can inform the development of the resources. In their interviews, both the Year 7 teacher and the SEND school teacher explained that the alignment of Ariel Trust's resources with the national curriculum was a major facilitator. They felt it allowed them to deliver important content in a way that was both engaging for students and easy to implement, without needing to carry out all extensive research by themselves. However, the Year 7 teacher pointed out that in secondary schools, there is often an expectation for students to produce written work during PSHE lessons for assessment, and that in this respect, the programme had to be adapted further by the teacher to fully meet the school's expectations for how these lessons are usually delivered.

3.3.2 Barriers to implementation

Although two barriers were identified through staff interviews, teachers outlined how these barriers related to issues which did not completely hinder their ability to deliver the resources successfully, nor did they perceive them to have any major impacts on students' learning.

Time required

Some teaching staff reported how they felt like some of the material that was provided to aid the sessions felt quite bulky, which inevitably required them to allocate more time for background preparation, including accessing materials individually and printing multiple worksheets. Whilst all teaching staff interviewed expressed that although such high-volume of resources did not directly hamper their lesson delivery, condensing some of the materials and changing the way they are accessed would make the lesson delivery logistically easier.

"I think one thing that could be useful in terms of the website design, it would be good to be able to download all the handouts or all the materials in one pack, rather than having to flick through each one." – ***Teacher, School 3***

"The kids said as well actually, I mean they really engaged [..] but they were like 'Not another sheet!' So whether that's something that needs adapting as a whole to make it a bit more cohesive and maybe make more of the activities on one sheet. Because also printing-wise like that's just the thing that kind of factors into the day-to-day reality of a teacher. If you've got to print 30 copies of six sheets for one lesson that's a lot, isn't it?" – ***Teacher, School 4***

"I think it's just about looking at those worksheets and sort of telling us which ones do we need and which ones could just be a discussion point or which ones could just be included as a PowerPoint. Because when I first looked at them, I was like 'Oh my God, I have 15 worksheets for just one lesson' and I was thinking that we are not going to be able to get through these in one session." – ***Teacher, School 1***

The time allocation as a key barrier to implement the programme was also perceived as critical because of the target group. This was particularly because the programmes aim to target students in the last two years of primary school. Other academic demands, such as preparations for exams, were perceived as a barrier to implementing the programme.

"There's just so much to fit in, isn't there? Like throughout the end, it's not just PHSE but every other subject. I think it's just a time thing because obviously alongside this we've got our PSHE curriculum that we are still doing throughout the summer term alongside every other subject in the curriculum. I think it's just maybe a time thing, but obviously this is something that is so beneficial to do." – ***Teacher, School 5***

Case study findings: Both the secondary school and the SEND school involved in the case study reported experiencing time constraints. The Year 7 teacher specifically mentioned that the increased academic workload in secondary schools made it challenging to find time for additional content. Despite this, both teachers were able to cover the programme materials, largely due to the flexible design of the resources, which allowed them to adapt the delivery to fit within their schedules.

Audio-visual issues

One barrier to implementation for a small number of teachers related to the ability to play the films and videos provided. This was also highlighted by students in the survey as being frustrating when they couldn't watch the videos. Some staff suggested that it might be beneficial to provide accessibility to offline copies of the audio-visual resources.

"The one thing about the actual programme itself, on the videos that you follow, the one that has the introduction with just the man talking, we found the volume was different to the actual, you know, the scenarios that you watch? When we watched the introduction and the conclusion with that man, he was very quiet, so we had to put the volume right up and then when we switched to the scenario video it come on really, really loud. I thought it was just my laptop on my computer. So I tried it at home and the same thing happened." – ***Teacher, School 2***

"I don't know how it works in terms of copyright but if there was an offline version of the slides or the videos that could be used, that would be useful if there is ever any technical issues." – ***Teacher, School 3***

Case study findings: The SEND school teacher interviewed for the case study also mentioned facing some challenges when using the website, including occasional issues with videos not playing correctly. These problems sometimes required restarting the session, which made it necessary to spend additional time planning to ensure everything ran smoothly.

3.4 Areas for development and sustainability

This section provides an overview of the identified areas for programme development and sustainability based on the interviews with key stakeholders and school staff.

3.4.1 Development of programme content and material

Although teaching staff deemed the programme content to be relevant to their students and the social situations they may face, some expressed how developing and incorporating more targeted information within the resources, such as information on particular social media apps and entertainment outlets, could provide the programmes with an opportunity to extend their scope and reach even further.

"When children are on their Xbox or on the PlayStation or something along those lines, they think that's safe because they think only children have access to those devices [..] and they will quite happily say 'I was chatting to a random person who is 25 on this game last night' and they'll be like 'Oh no, I don't know who they are'. I know they would never do that on a phone but when it's a game and its social games with children and so on, they would. So that will be something that obviously we touch on in our PSHE stuff, but if they're looking to develop the programme by adding something else, something specific on games would be what I would suggest." – ***Teacher, School 5***

"I think having some room to talk about specific social media rather than in general might be nice in there especially things like the idea of using Snapchat and the thought that, you know, you take the photo, and it disappears after a few seconds." – ***Teacher, School 3***

Case study findings: In the case study, the Year 7 teacher suggested that the resources could be expanded to include more content on gender-based grooming, particularly involving girls, as they perceived that this is a common issue in Merseyside where women may become secondary accomplices to crime. They also recommended including more detailed information on crimes and their consequences, as older students are more capable of understanding the risks. In the SEND school, while students engaged well with the visual elements of the programme, the SEND school teacher suggested adding more movement to the animations as increased motion could improve engagement amongst students with SEND.

3.4.2 Early-years introductory material

Both teachers and stakeholders highlighted how it would be beneficial for the programmes to also be delivered to children in Year 4 or younger. Both groups revealed how the development of age-appropriate forum theatre activities that draw on the topics covered by the programmes would introduce students to elements of online vigilance and speaking out, while preparing them for what the programme would eventually cover when they reach Year 5 or Year 6.

"So, if we talk about the long-term development of these things, we should have what is sometimes referred to as a spiral curriculum, where at the lower levels you're practising basic skills that you might use, then, as you get a little bit older, the skill development becomes more sophisticated, but you continue practising those as you become more mature. So absolutely, the work that we do should be connected and there should be building blocks that younger children can use." – ***MVRP Education Lead***

"In the school that we work in, we know that children are going out to play on their own, we know that they're spending time in relatives' houses or friends' houses, and we know that they're using their own phones. So we know that it could have potentially been done even younger at our school." ***– Teacher, School 4***

Case study findings: Supporting these findings, insights emerging from the Year 7 case study described how Ariel Trust had strengthened their organisational priority to deliver resources with primary school aged children. Ariel Trust's organisational priority is shaped by the needs of wider organisations, including schools, and the needs of young people. As wider regional needs require early interventions targeted towards younger children, this has guided Ariel Trust's decision to focus on strengthening their approach in terms of delivering resources with younger students.

3.4.3 Parental and police involvement

One element that was discussed as having potential importance in how the programmes can be developed further was that of actively involving and engaging parents and the police. Both stakeholders and teaching staff expressed how including both groups in forum theatre activities with students would foster a mutually beneficial relationship, one where students can practice confiding in either group, in turn providing parents and those in authority with new rhetoric on how to effectively support and respond to children. Although the inclusion of parental workshops and police involvement within classrooms are currently being piloted by the organisation amongst a small number of schools, it was felt that formalising such involvement and expanding it to cover all of the participating schools across Merseyside would also be a major development point for the organisation going forward.

"Last week, for the first time, I worked with some boys, and we discussed, you know, why wouldn't you speak to the police? Why might you think it's scary? Why wouldn't you ask for help? We did all the stuff that goes with the resource, but then the brilliant thing was that we were able to bring two police officers in uniform in the afternoon, and they got to see that they actually weren't scary. The police were great. They got up, they did scenario-based stuff, and they acted as the kids sometimes and other times they were acting as the teachers, and it was just really good, and just by the end of that hour, there had already been a culture switch. They were speaking to them, and they were telling them things which if you had just put them in a room with them, that would have never happened." ***– Ariel Trust Practitioner 1***

"We want police officers to be to be involved. So right across Merseyside we want skill, refusal and resistance skill workshops in 167 schools that involve teachers, parents, police officers, and children all working together so that the children in those schools can really practise talking about how these issues affect them, sharing that with responsible adults, teachers, parents, and police officers, and those three groups, teachers, parents and police officers working and getting together to support those children. If we can get that far, I believe we will make a difference to the safeguarding of children right across Merseyside. That's what we want to develop towards." ***– Ariel Trust Practitioner 1***

"It is problematic in that we're asking children to be active bystanders and to challenge behaviours or challenge language when the most difficult thing would be for a child to challenge a parent that's actually exhibiting these. So I'm not saying we're going to solve all those things, but I think we might solve a number of them, and that's why I think actively bringing parents on board more than we have done in the past is definitely a development point for us." – ***MVRP Education Lead***

Case study findings: Findings from the SEND school case study described how Ariel Trust have not only started to focus on the inclusion of parents and adults, but it has also begun prioritising delivery of their resources in schools for students with SEND. Through collaboration with local stakeholders, Ariel Trust was made aware that there is a disproportionate representation of young people with SEND in the criminal justice system. In response to this, Ariel Trust have increased their efforts to engage with and support SEND schools to deliver their programmes.

3.5 Impacts of the programmes

This section triangulates findings from the student pre and post programme surveys and school staff interviews to identify any impacts of the programmes for students.

3.5.1 Changes in attitudes and knowledge

Across both programmes, qualitative feedback from interviews demonstrated perceived changes in students' knowledge and attitudes. Specifically, it was noted that the programmes provided students with the knowledge around vocabulary and rhetoric to use to be able to express themselves.

"I think one of the biggest impacts has actually been giving them the knowledge and opportunity to use some of the language and the vocabulary that was in the lessons. I was actually saying, 'Okay, what's the best way to use this vocabulary?' and I was so impressed. Some of the stuff that they came out with was very powerful and well structured." – ***Teacher, School 3***

"I have definitely observed children using a vocabulary to refuse and resist peer group pressure. So I've seen children in role play activities saying, 'I'm not going to share images with you. If you want a relationship with me, you have to treat me with respect. I have boundaries and you do not have consent to share images of me or with me'. So, they've learnt vocabulary that includes words like consent and boundaries and respect, and I've observed children using that language in real-time." – ***Ariel Trust Practitioner 2***

Furthermore, interviewees reported that students had developed confidence in their understanding and knowledge of the topics covered and spoke about sharing their knowledge with family and friends.

"One of the children said he went home and said, 'I was talking to my dad about grassing and grooming and he didn't even know what I meant at first and then I explained it all to him and it was really good'. So yeah, they are having those conversations too. I think that's good that they go back and talk to their parents about that as well." – ***Teacher, School 4***

"One of the girls sort of came up at the end and was like 'Now I know what to say if I'm ever in a situation' she also said, she has got cousins who are a similar age and she said 'Oh, I'm going to see if they've done the same thing in their school and share information with them." – **Teacher, School 5**

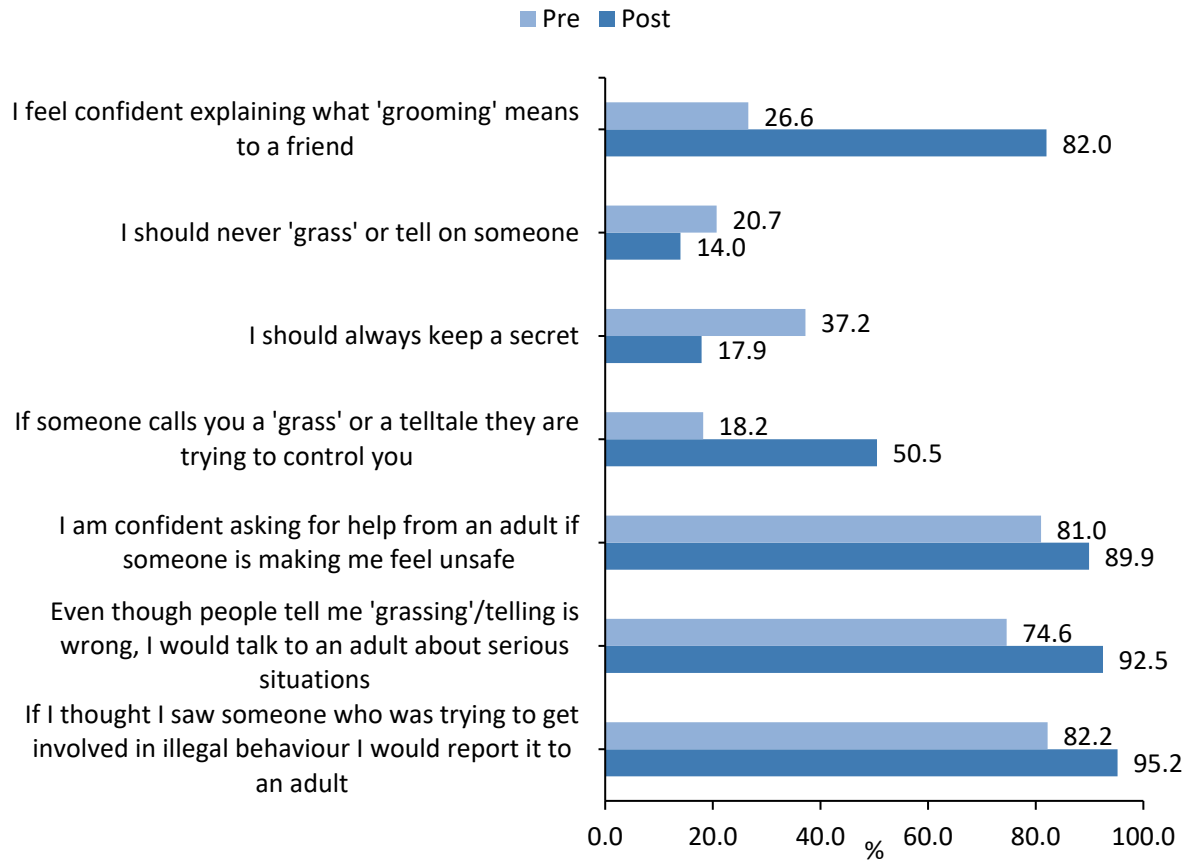
Case study findings: When asked about the outcomes and impacts of the Ariel Trust resources within their classrooms, both the SEND and Year 7 teachers noted that it was too early to report on long-term effects, given the short time between the programme's delivery and the interview. However, both identified increased confidence in seeking help from adults and a greater willingness to speak out without stigma as anticipated outcomes of the programme. Interestingly, findings from the Year 7 case study detailed that some of the Year 7 children still remembered the Grassing or Grooming programme content from having received the programme in primary school. Findings from the SEND school case study highlighted how children who received the programme could easily recall visual elements of the programme. These findings highlight how the key learning from the Ariel Trust programmes were memorable for children over the longer-term. Together, these findings point towards strong long-term retention of the programme's messages and content amongst students.

Grassing or Grooming programme

From the pre to post programme survey, a higher proportion of students felt confident explaining what grooming means to a friend (Figure 4). At post programme survey, of the 82.0% (n=82) who indicated they felt confident explaining what grooming means, 72.0% (n=59) gave an accurate description of grooming,[16] 13.4% (n=11) gave no description, and 14.6% (n=12) gave an inaccurate description.

The proportion of students agreeing with the statement 'If someone calls you a grass or a telltale they are trying to control you' increased from pre to post programme survey (Figure 4). The proportion of students agreeing with the statements 'I should never grass or tell on someone' and 'I should always keep a secret' decreased from pre to post programme survey (Figure 4). The proportion of students agreeing with the three statements relating to seeking support from an adult all increased from pre to post programme survey (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Proportion of students agreeing with statements relating to grooming, pre and post programme survey



[16] Descriptions of grooming were assessed as accurate if students mentioned elements such as an individual trying to control, manipulate, or take advantage of them, or if students mentioned an individual trying to use somebody particularly including giving gifts or building a friendship/relationship.

In matched survey analyses (paired samples t-tests), from pre to post programme survey, there was a significant increase in mean levels of agreement with the statements: 'I feel confident explaining what grooming means to a friend' ($p<0.001$); and 'if someone calls you a grass or a telltale they are trying to control you' ($p<0.001$; Table 2). There was a significant decrease in mean levels of agreement with the statements: 'I should always keep a secret' ($p<0.001$); and 'I should never grass or tell on someone' ($p<0.01$; Table 2).

Table 2: Students' mean level of agreement with statements relating to grooming, pre and post programme survey

Statement	n	Pre mean (SD)	Post mean (SD)	p
I feel confident explaining what grooming means to a friend	80	2.70 (1.11)	4.10 (0.96)	<0.001
I should never grass or tell on someone	92	2.77 (0.85)	2.43 (1.04)	<0.01
I should always keep a secret	93	3.25 (1.06)	2.77 (0.92)	<0.001
If someone calls you a grass or a telltale they are trying to control you	93	2.53 (1.04)	3.35 (1.10)	<0.001
I am confident asking for help from an adult if someone is making me feel unsafe	85	4.24 (0.95)	4.44 (0.64)	NS
Even though people tell me grassing/telling is wrong, I would talk to an adult about serious situations	90	4.31 (0.87)	4.42 (0.60)	NS
If I thought I saw someone who was trying to get involved in illegal behaviour I would report it to an adult	90	4.39 (0.87)	4.44 (0.67)	NS

Case study findings: Findings from the Year 7 case study student surveys showed, from pre- to post-programme, there was a significant increase in students' mean levels of agreement with the statement 'if someone calls you a 'grass' or a telltale they are trying to control you' (n=15; pre mean, 2.80 (SD 0.77); post mean, 3.60 (SD 0.74); $p<0.01$).

Skills for a Healthy Relationship: Send Me a Selfie

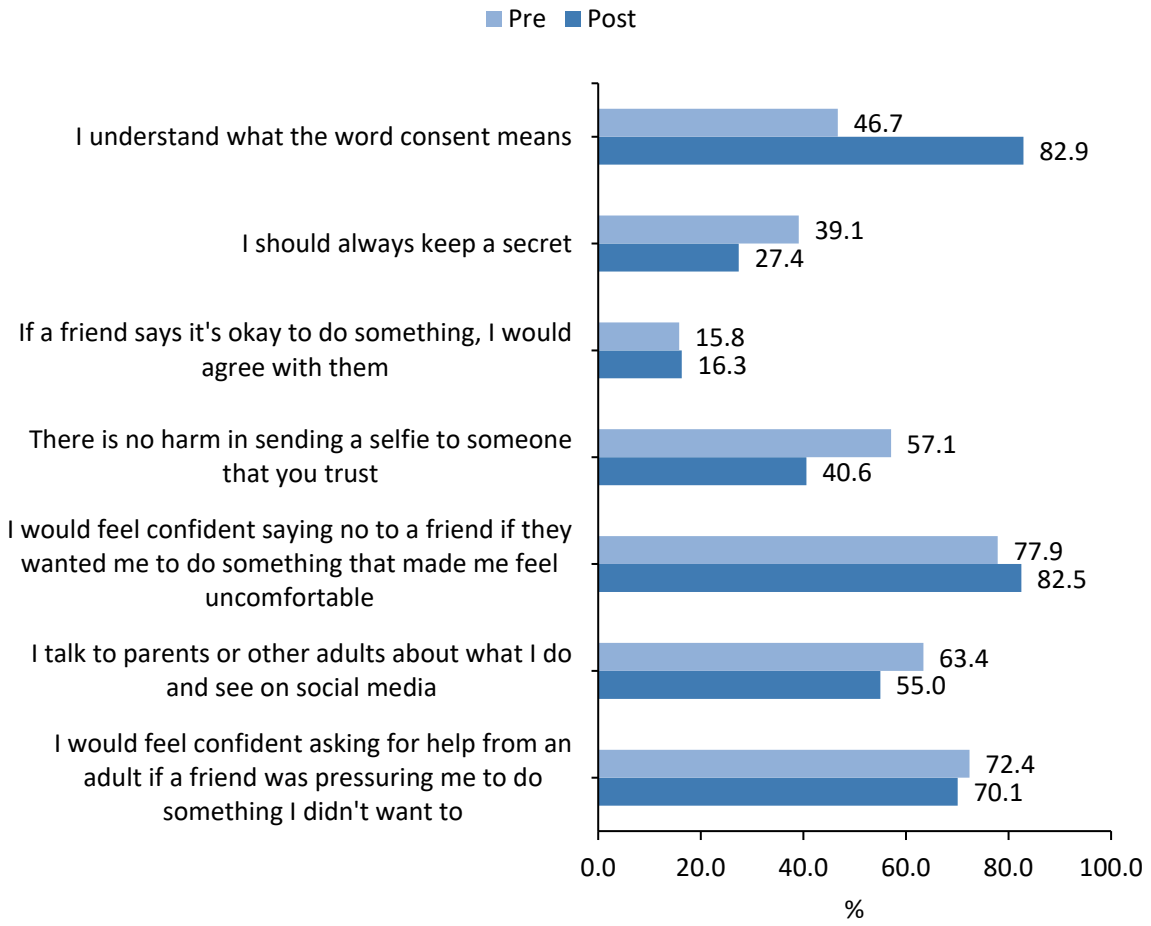
From the pre to post programme survey, a higher proportion of students reported that they understand what the word consent means (Figure 5). At the post programme survey, of the 82.9% (n=170) who indicated they understand what consent means, 86.5% (n=147) gave an accurate description of consent,[17] 7.6% (n=13) gave no description, and 5.9% (n=10) gave an inaccurate description.

The proportion of students agreeing with the statements 'I should always keep a secret' and 'there is no harm in sending a selfie to someone you trust' decreased from pre to post programme survey, however, the proportion agreeing with the statement 'if a friend says it's okay to do something, I would agree with them' slightly increased (Figure 5). While the proportion of students agreeing with the statement 'I would feel confident saying no to a friend if they wanted me to do something that made me feel uncomfortable' increased from pre to post programme survey, the proportion of students agreeing with the statements: 'I talk to parents or other adults about what I do and see on

[17] Descriptions of consent were assessed as accurate if students mentioned giving or receiving permission to do something, or other words to that effect.

social media'; and 'I would feel confident asking for help from an adult if a friend was pressuring me to do something I didn't want to' both decreased (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Proportion of students agreeing with statements relating to consent, pre and post programme survey



In matched survey analyses (paired samples t-tests), from pre to post programme survey, there was a significant increase in the mean level of agreement with the statement: 'I understand what the word consent means' ($p<0.001$; Table 3). There was a significant decrease in the mean levels of agreement with the statements: 'I should always keep a secret' ($p<0.001$); 'if a friend says it's okay to do something, I would agree with them' ($p<0.05$); and 'there is no harm in sending a selfie to someone that you trust' ($p<0.001$; Table 3).

Table 3: Students mean level of agreement with statements relating to consent, pre and post programme survey

Statement	n	Pre mean (SD)	Post mean (SD)	p
I understand what the word consent means	169	3.36 (1.31)	4.22 (1.04)	<0.001
I should always keep a secret	173	3.34 (1.12)	2.90 (1.10)	<0.001
If a friend says it's okay to do something, I would agree with them	171	2.86 (0.84)	2.68 (0.88)	<0.05
There is no harm in sending a selfie to someone that you trust	170	3.62 (1.10)	3.00 (1.24)	<0.001

I would feel confident saying no to a friend if they wanted me to do something that made me feel uncomfortable	177	4.18 (0.93)	4.19 (0.90)	NS
I talk to parents or other adults about what I do and see on social media	172	3.76 (1.25)	3.60 (1.21)	NS
I would feel confident asking for help from an adult if a friend was pressuring me to do something I didn't want to	176	3.90 (1.03)	3.95 (1.01)	NS

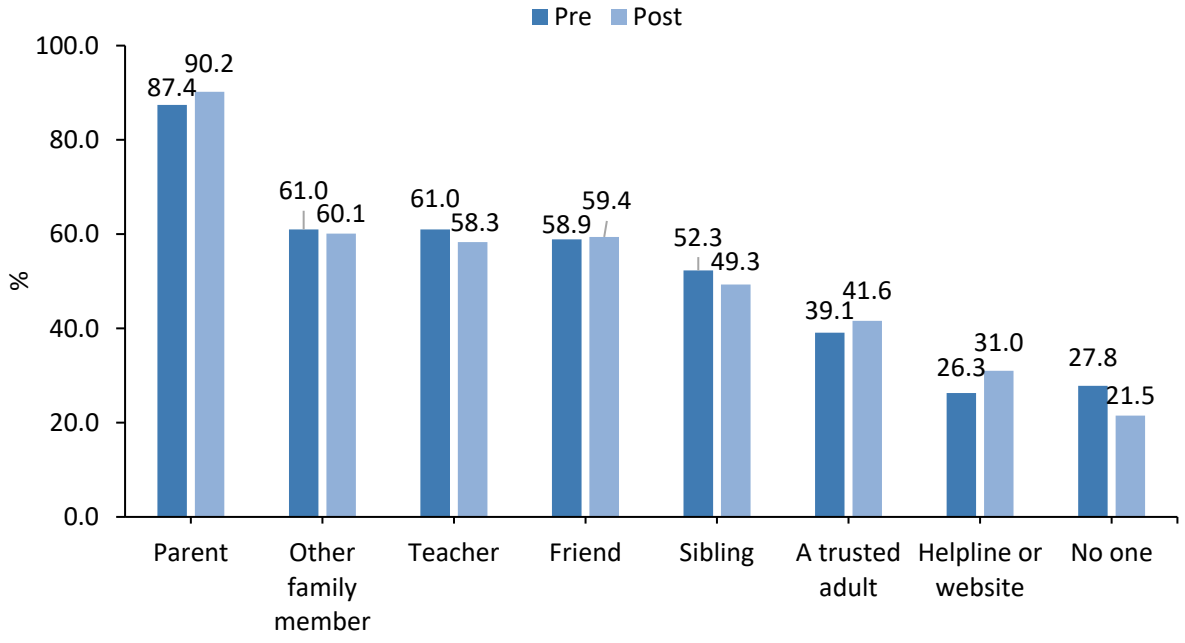
Case study findings: Findings from the SEND school case study student surveys showed, from pre- to post-programme, there was a significant decrease in mean levels of agreement with the statement 'there is no harm in sending a selfie to someone that you trust' (n=9; pre mean, 2.78 (SD 0.97); post mean, 2.33 (SD 1.11); $p<0.05$).

3.5.2 Changes in help seeking behaviour

Both programmes combined

From pre to post programme survey, a higher proportion of students indicated that it was likely that they would seek help from their parent, a friend, a trusted adult, and a helpline or website (Figure 6). A smaller proportion of students indicated that they would seek help from no one (Figure 6). However, a smaller proportion of students indicated that they would seek help from other family members, a teacher, or a sibling at post-programme (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Proportion of students indicating likelihood they would seek help from different sources, pre and post programme survey



In matched survey analyses (paired samples t-tests), from pre to post programme surveys there was a significant increase in mean score in help seeking intentions from a helpline or website ($p<0.05$; Table 4). There were no significant changes in mean score on help seeking intentions from any of the other sources (Table 4).

Table 4: Changes in likelihood of students seeking help from different sources from pre to post programme

Help seeking source	n	Pre mean (SD)	Post mean (SD)	p
Parent	269	8.58 (1.94)	8.62 (1.86)	NS
Other family member	263	6.16 (2.80)	6.03 (3.04)	NS
Teacher	262	6.08 (2.97)	6.03 (3.12)	NS
Friend	265	6.25 (2.78)	6.28 (2.57)	NS
Sibling	254	5.64 (3.42)	5.52 (3.41)	NS
A trusted adult	264	4.70 (3.03)	4.77 (3.12)	NS
Helpline or website	262	3.11 (3.26)	3.70 (3.61)	<0.05
No one	266	3.07 (3.62)	2.82 (3.34)	NS

Case study findings: Findings from the Year 7 case study student surveys showed, from pre- to post-programme, there was a significant decrease in the mean score in help seeking intentions from a parent (n=14; pre mean, 7.93 (SD 2.16); post mean, 6.14 (SD 2.93); $p<0.05$).

Findings from the SEND school case study student surveys showed no significant changes from pre- to post-programme in students' help-seeking intentions from any source.

Across both programmes, qualitative feedback from interviews showed that teaching staff felt that the programmes encouraged students to seek help and resolved fears they may have had about the implications of doing so.

"I just think that if there was a little boy that was thinking, 'Oh, should I tell somebody?', I think especially some of the quiet kids who do not say a lot, it just reminded them to not be frightened to speak out because it is so important." – ***Teacher, School 1***

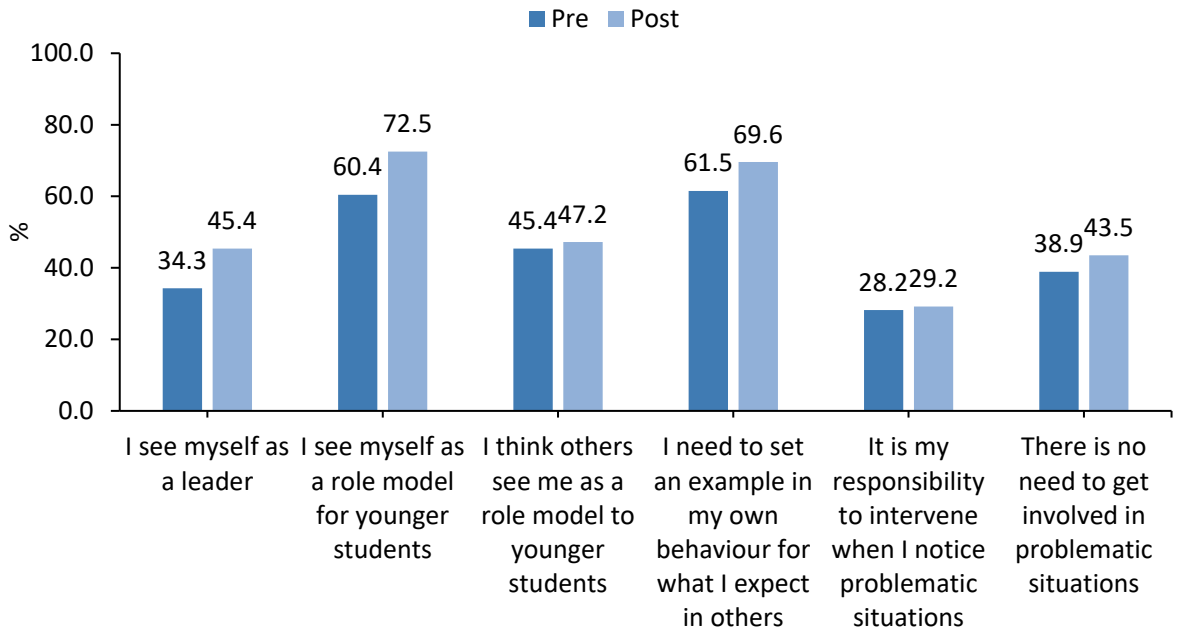
"And a lot of them, when we were talking about the resolution of the situation, we talked a lot about that and about how the victim would be feeling and finding it difficult to speak up. And that was something else that I think had an impact in that even when a victim feels like they themselves have got into trouble or they're going to end up in trouble if they speak up, there's always somebody to support them if they do that. It's also about remembering that they are a victim. That's another thing that I think is not uncommon for our children to experience or have experienced where they've got themselves stuck in a situation and they don't want to speak up because they don't want the repercussions on them. So I think that was and will kind of be a long-term impact of doing the programme as well." – ***Teacher, School 4***

3.5.3 Changes in bystander attitudes

Both programmes combined

From pre to post programme survey, there was an increase in the proportion of students agreeing with three statements relating to their own and others' perceptions of themselves as leaders: 'I see myself as a leader'; 'I see myself as a role model for younger students'; and 'I think others see me as a role model to younger students' (Figure 7). There was an increase in the proportion of students who agreed with the statements 'I need to set an example in my own behaviour for what I expect in others' and 'it is my responsibility to intervene when I notice problematic situations' (Figure 7). However, a higher proportion agreed with the statement 'there is no need to get involved in problematic situations (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Proportion of students agreeing with statements relating to their perceptions of themselves as a leader, and statements relating to bystander behaviours, pre and post programme survey



In matched survey analyses (paired samples t-tests), from pre to post programme surveys, there was a significant increase in mean level of agreement with the statements 'I see myself as a leader' ($p<0.001$) and 'I see myself as a role model for younger students' ($p<0.001$). Changes in levels of agreement with other statements were not significant. However, there was a significant increase in the overall bystander attitudes score ($p<0.05$; Table 5).

Table 5: Students' levels of agreement with statements relating to their perceptions of themselves as a leader, and statements relating to bystander behaviours, pre and post programme survey

Statement	n	Pre mean (SD)	Post mean (SD)	p
I see myself as a leader	251	3.11 (1.10)	3.36 (1.12)	<0.001
I see myself as a role model for younger students	249	3.70 (1.03)	3.94 (0.88)	<0.001
I think others see me as a role model to younger students	247	3.38 (0.98)	3.47 (0.99)	NS
I need to set an example in my own behaviour for what I expect in others	235	3.84 (0.99)	3.85 (1.02)	NS
It is my responsibility to intervene when I notice problematic situations	244	2.97 (1.06)	3.04 (1.08)	NS
There is no need to get involved in problematic situations	248	2.71 (1.11)	2.69 (1.15)	NS
Bystander attitudes total scores	228	19.68 (3.30)	20.18 (3.31)	<0.05

Additionally, there was some evidence from qualitative interviews that, following the programmes, students were motivated and empowered to report on other students being in difficult situations.

"Today, when we did the questionnaire, a few children I would have said if we hadn't done this programme they would have still said 'No, you shouldn't grass', these same ones that I really had in mind today went 'Well, if my friend was in danger, I would go and tell someone' so it's putting that flip on that silence sort of thing which I think is a positive impact." – ***Teacher, School 2***

Case study findings: Findings from the Year 7 and SEND school case studies student surveys showed no significant changes from pre- to post-programme in students' bystander attitudes.

4. Summary and recommendations

Evidence suggests that some children and young people can face a range of harmful experiences that may negatively impact long-term healthy development. Such adverse experiences can include bullying victimisation, dating violence victimisation, racial discrimination, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as neglect or growing up in households with issues such as domestic violence or substance use issues, and childhood criminal exploitation [4, 5, 6]. In more recent years, and particularly with the increasing popularity of social media, children and young people who spend a significant proportion of their time online, may be at increased risk of exposure to cyberbullying, and sexual or criminal grooming [6, 5]. Thus far however, little research, and specifically intervention evaluations, have investigated this topic. Over the past three years Ariel Trust has received funding from the MVRP to develop and oversee the delivery of a skills-based violence prevention project in primary schools across Merseyside. This has included the development of three violence prevention resources, Grassing or Grooming?, Skills to Resist Radicalisation, and Send Me a Selfie. All three programmes aim to build resilience and refusal skills through an action learning approach. The resources are available for schools to use indefinitely and are designed to support schools to meet the broader requirements of the new relationship education curriculum. As part of the broader system wide evaluation of the MVRP since 2019 LJMU were commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the Ariel Trust primary school programmes between 2022 and 2025, and evaluate the pilot implementation of the programme in one secondary and one SEND school in Merseyside.

The evaluation found that both the Grassing or Grooming and Send Me a Selfie programmes[18] had significant positive impacts on students' knowledge related to each programme topic. Findings from the interviews suggested that the programmes had developed students' language and vocabulary related to each topic and this supported their ability to understand the risks related to sharing images or grooming behaviour. Both programmes also showed significant reductions in the level of students' agreement that they should always keep a secret, which has important implications for disclosure of potentially unsafe or risky situations. Whilst there were some changes in likelihood and confidence in asking an adult for support, these were non-significant. Although there was a significant positive change in students' mean score in their likelihood to seek help from a helpline or website, no significant changes were found in students' likelihood to seek support from other sources (e.g. parents, friends, teachers etc.). Further research is required to explore these non-significant changes, and in particular whether the programme has long-term impacts on actual help-seeking behaviour, rather than just likelihood and confidence to ask for help. There were also key significant changes in some statements related to bystander behaviour, particularly around leadership, and a significant positive change in students' mean overall bystander attitudes scores. Leadership skills are a key driver in promoting and increasing likelihood of bystander behaviour; in order to be an effective bystander an individual has to assess a situation, consider their options, and take action, factors which are basic leadership protocol [22]. An interesting area for future research is to explore whether it is the action-based learning approach and role play techniques which support development of such leadership skills.

Findings from the evaluation also demonstrated the wide reach of the programme. The aim was to have the programme delivered in 160 schools across Merseyside during each year of delivery from

[18] The Skills to Resist Radicalisation programme had concluded implementation by the start of the evaluation and thus was not assessed for impact using student surveys/interviews.

2022-2025. By the mid-point of the 2024/25 academic year (May 2025) overall 144 schools had delivered at least one of the programmes, in the 2023/24 academic year 154 did so, and 107 did so in the 2022/23 academic year. This represents around one quarter of all primary schools across Merseyside being reached by these programmes each year. Overall, by the mid-point of the 2024/25 academic year 5,420 students benefitted from taking part in at least one of the three programmes, in the 2023/24 academic year 5,980 students were reached, and in the 2022/23 academic year 6,166 students were reached. The concise online training was identified by teaching staff as a key facilitating factor. Most teachers felt that the training, along with the easily accessible programme materials, was sufficient to prepare them to successfully implement the programme. Furthermore, teachers highlighted that the flexibility of programme delivery facilitated the integration of the programme into the school timetable. For busy teaching staff, with often multiple priorities and training offers, a short training and a flexible programme delivery format is key to increasing the likelihood of participation and delivery, and thus may be a key reason for the wide reach and high engagement with the programmes. Furthermore, whilst the topics of the programmes differ, the core methods of delivery (i.e. action-based learning) are consistent, thus it is likely once teachers are proficient in the skills needed to deliver one programme, it is easier to transfer these skills to deliver one of the other programmes. This is further evidenced by the fact that half of schools delivered two or more of the programmes in the 2023/24 and 2022/23 academic years. Critically, some teachers also discussed how they used the skills learned in the current programmes, to implement action-based learning and role play in other school curriculum. This highlights the broader value and impact these programmes may have, by introducing and training teachers in action-based learning techniques. It also suggests important potential scope to extend the current curriculum to include other violence prevention topics. For example, role-play-based learning has been used in school-based violence prevention elsewhere, particularly across areas such as child abuse, bullying, and teen dating violence prevention [28, 29, 19]. Promisingly, there were a large number of attendances at the staff training sessions across the 2024/25 (212), 2023/24 (230), and 2022/23 (246) academic years.

Overall, teacher and student perceptions of the programmes' content and delivery were positive. Only a very small minority of students reported that they did not enjoy the programmes at all (less than 5%), with a slightly higher proportion of students enjoying the Send Me a Selfie programme than the Grassing or Grooming programme. The interactive nature of the programme and the activities which formed part of it such as the role-play, group discussions, videos and games were highlighted by students as the aspects of the programme which they enjoyed the most. Critically, the forum theatre and role-playing approach was noted by both teachers and students as being a critical part of the programmes. For students it was the aspect of the programme many of them mentioned as enjoying the most. This is in line with existing evidence on role play which has shown it to have benefits over traditional didactic teaching for student learning outcomes, including improved interest and engagement with the subject, which in turn facilitates deeper learning and understanding of topics [21]. Teachers in the current study also perceived that this action-learning approach had a greater impact on students' knowledge and attitudes, and confidence in seeking help compared to traditional methods. Critically, previous research has shown that school-based anti-bullying interventions which utilised informal peer involvement (through action-based learning methods such as role-playing and group discussions), had significantly larger impacts on reducing bullying perpetration and victimisation than interventions which did not utilise such approaches [30]. Whilst some teachers felt confident in these techniques and using role-play with their students, findings demonstrated that this may not be the case for all teachers who may initially be nervous or wary. To support a subset of schools, an Ariel Trust practitioner, skilled in the use of forum theatre supported the implementation of the programme, and during which teaching staff could observe them delivering sessions to the students.

This approach however is resource intensive and thus not available to all schools, in particular given the very wide reach of the programme.

Findings from the secondary and SEND school case study[19] student surveys showed significant positive changes in one statement related to grooming (secondary school cohort) and one statement related to consent (SEND school cohort). However, case study findings from the secondary school cohort showed a significant negative change in students' likelihood to seek help from a parent. There were no significant changes in students' bystander attitudes for either the secondary or SEND school cohort. Findings also indicated that compared to delivery in primary schools, Year 7 and SEND school students had lower levels of enjoyment from taking part in the programmes. Several elements of the Ariel Trust programmes that were highlighted as strengths by primary school teachers were also recognised by the teachers delivering to the Year 7 and SEND school cohorts. Flexibility emerged as a particularly valued feature, with both educators noting that they adapted the materials throughout their sessions to suit their students' needs and to incorporate topics relevant to their local contexts. This adaptability was especially important in the SEND setting, where the teacher tailored the resources to align with content that better engaged their students. Similarly, the Year 7 teacher was able to integrate issues more pertinent to secondary school students. Both teachers also praised the programme's visual and interactive components for supporting student engagement and memory recall, with this being seen as particularly helpful to learners with SEND. Additionally, teachers have also outlined a number of recommendations and described how programme materials could be adapted for future use in their school settings. This was seen as particularly important in the SEND school setting given that Ariel Trust has begun to prioritise the delivery of their programmes with students with SEND.

Recommendations

In light of the key findings from the current evaluation, a number of considerations and recommendations for future development and implementation of the programmes are suggested.

- Consider incorporating an additional practical session focused on action-based learning and roleplay techniques, which could be offered to all teaching staff as an additional workshop which would support teachers who are not as confident in forum theatre approaches. This could be run by the Ariel Trust drama practitioner and would ensure all schools have access to this support rather than just some selected schools, thus providing wider reach for similar resources. This session could be an optional offer so that it doesn't become a barrier for programme reach for teachers who do not have the capacity to attend a longer, in person workshop.
- Consider reducing the number of worksheets needed for each session and provide offline copies of audio-visual resources.
- Explore if and how the programmes could be adapted for younger children.
- Consider developing further programmes on other violence-related topics, for example bullying, to add to the suite of violence prevention programmes currently offered.
- Explore the feasibility of involving other key stakeholders in programme delivery, specifically parents and police, to increase students' confidence to report risky situations and seek support.
- Continue to evaluate the programmes and specifically explore the feasibility of a quasi-experimental approach with the use of a control group to increase the reliability and validity of the findings.

[19] For full case study findings see Farrugia et al. 2025 available at: LINK

- Consider conducting in-depth evaluations that specifically examine the delivery of the programmes within SEND schools, with a focus on the adaptations made to the Ariel Trust resources and the long-term impact on students attending SEND schools.

Conclusion

Findings from the evaluation of the Ariel Trust violence prevention programmes to date suggest staff and students' perceptions of the programme content, and particularly the delivery style have been very positive. There was a wide reach of the programmes across Merseyside primary schools, and this was supported by the concise training and easily accessible and useful programme materials. Critically, the programmes had significant positive impacts on students' knowledge and attitudes related to the topics, and evidence of positive impacts of the programmes on students' help seeking behaviour and bystander attitudes. Whilst more robust research and evaluation methods (e.g. randomised controlled trail) would strengthen the evidence base further, findings to date highlight the positive impact of these programmes for primary school children and suggest learning and adaptations that may be needed for these programmes to be implemented in other school settings.

References

[1] Z. Quigg, H. Timpson, M. Millings, N. Butler, C. Lightowlers, S. Ashton, J. Hough and R. Bates, "Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership 2020-21: Whole System Evaluation," Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, 2021.

[2] Z. Quigg, M. Millings, H. Timpson, N. Butler, R. Harrison, E. McCoy, R. Bates, Z. Bell, C. Wilson and C. Lightowlers, "Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership Whole System Evaluation Report 2021-22," Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, 2022.

[3] Z. Quigg, H. Timpson, M. Millings, R. Bates, E. McCoy, C. Bigland, S. Ashton, L. Burton, L. Hough, R. Harrison, E. McCoy and N. Butler, "Evaluation of the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership 2019-20," Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, 2020.

[4] M. A. Bellis, S. Wood, K. Hughes, Z. Quigg and N. Butler, "Tackling Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): State of the Art and Options for Action," Public Health Wales, Wrexham, 2023.

[5] Home Office, "Criminal exploitation of children, young people and vulnerable adults: County lines," Home Office, London, 2023.

[6] Anti-Bullying Allicance, "Bullying, school experiences and wellbeing: A picture of pupil experience in England 2022," Anti-Bullying Allicance, 2022.

[7] Department for Education, "Bullying in England, April 2013 to March 2018: Analysis on 10-15 year olds from the Crime Survey for England & Wales," GOV.UK, London, 2018.

[8] M. A. Bellis, K. Hughes, N. Leckenby, C. Perkins and H. Lowey, "National household survey of adverse childhood experiences and their relationship with resilience to health-harming behaviours in England," *BMC Medicine,* vol. 12, 2014.

[9] P. Clarkson Freeman, "Prevalence and relationship between adverse childhood experiences and child behaviour among young children," *Infant Mental Health Journal,* vol. 35, no. 6, pp. 544-554, 2014.

[10] J. Heerde and S. Hemphill, "Are bullying perpetration and victimization associated with adolescent deliberate self-harm? A meta-analysis," *Archives of Suicide Research,* vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 353-381, 2018.

[11] T. Schoeler, L. Duncan, C. Cecil, G. Ploubidis and J. Pingault, "Quasi-experimental evidence on short- and long-term consequences of bullying victimisation: A meta-analysis," *Psychological Bulletin,* vol. 144, no. 12, pp. 1229-1246, 2018.

[12] I. Zych, C. Viejo, E. Vila and D. Farrington, "School bullying and dating violence in adolescents: A systematic review and mata-analysis," *Trauma, Violence & Abuse,* vol. 22, no. 2, 2019.

[13] M. A. Bellis, K. Hughes, N. Leckenby, K. Hardcastle, C. Perkins and H. Lowey, "Measuring mortality and the burden of adult disease associated with adverse childhood experiences in England: A national study," *Journal of Public Health,* vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 445-454, 2015.

[14] K. Hughes, M. A. Bellis, K. Hardcastle, D. Sethi, A. Butchart, C. Mikton, L. Jones and M. Dunne, "The effect of multiple adverse childhood experiences on health: A systematic review and mate-analysis," *Public Health,* vol. 2, no. 8, pp. e356-e366, 2017.

[15] Public Health England, "County lines exploitation: Applying all our health," GOV.UK, London, 2021.

[16] Department for Education, "Working together to safeguard children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children," GOV.UK, London, 2018.

[17] M. A. Bellis, K. Hardcastle, K. Ford, K. Hughes, K. Ashton, Z. Quigg and N. Butler, “Does continued trusted adult support in childhood impart life-course resilience against adverse childhood experiences - a retrospective study on adult health-harming behavioursand mental wellbeing,” *BMC Psychiatry,* vol. 17, 2017.

[18] N. Butler, Z. Quigg, R. Bates, L. Jones, E. Ashworth, S. Gowland and M. Jones, “The contributing role of family, school, and peer supportive relationships in protecting the mental wellbeing of children and adolescents,” *School Mental Health,* vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 776-788, 2022.

[19] W. Caan, J. Cassidy, G. Coverdale, M. Ha, W. Nicholson and M. Rao, “The value of using schools as community assets for health,” *Public Health,* vol. 129, no. 1, pp. 3-16, 2015.

[20] Ofsted, “Not yet good enough: Personal, social, health and economic education in schools,” Ofsted, London, 2013.

[21] PSHE Association, “Key principles of effective prevention education,” PSHE Association, London, 2016.

[22] M. Sklad, R. Diekstra, M. De Ritter, J. Ben and C. Gravesteijn, “Effectiveness of school-based universal social, emotional, and behavioral programs: Do they enhance students' development in the area of skill, behavior, and adjustment?,” *Psychology in the Schools,* vol. 49, no. 9, 2012.

[23] R. Langford, C. Bonnell, H. Jones, T. Pouliou, S. Murphy, E. Waters, K. Komro, L. Gibbs, D. Magnus and R. Campbell, “The WHO Health Promoting School framework for improvingthe health and well-being of students and their academic achievement,” *The Cochrane Library,* 2014.

[24] C. Lee and J. Wong, “Examining the effects of teen dating violence prevention programs: A systematic review and meta-analysis,” *Journal of Experimental Criminology,* vol. 18, pp. 1-40, 2022.

[25] P. Herbert and D. Lohrmann, “It's all in the delivery! An analysis of instructional strategies from effective health education curricula,” *Journal of School Health,* vol. 81, no. 5, pp. 258-264, 2011.

[26] L. Jarvais, K. Odell and M. Troiano, “Role-playing as a teaching strategy,” April 2002. [Online]. Available: https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=20e6b6c7c4ebe9c5380944892c09d651470e12cc . [Accessed 29 August 2023].

[27] A. Clarke, S. Morreale, C. Field, Y. Hussein and M. Barry, “What works in enhancing social and emotional skills development during childhood and adolescence? A review of the evidence on the effectiveness of schoo-based and out-of-school programmes in the UK,” National University of Ireland, Galway, 2015.

[28] P. Kilgour, D. Reynaud, M. Northcote and M. Shields, “Role playing as a tool to facilitate learning, self-reflection and social awareness in teacher education,” *International Journal of Innovative Interdisciplinary Research,* vol. 2, no. 4, 2015.

[29] R. Thomas, J. McLellan and R. Perera, “Effectiveness of school-based smoking prevention curricula: Systematic review and meta-analysis,” *BMJ Open,* vol. 5, no. 3, 2015.

[30] C. J. Wilson, F. P. Deane and J. V. Ciarrochi, “Measuring help seeking intentions: Properties of the General Help Seeking Questionnaire,” *Canadian Journal of Counselling,* vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 15-28, 2005.

[31] Nebraska Consortium, “Bystander Intervention Survey,” 10 November 2014. [Online]. Available: http://www.nebraskaconsortium.org/documents/resources/bystander-intervention-survey-behavior-11-10-14.docx . [Accessed 08 03 2021].

[32] V. Braun and V. Clarke, “Using thematic analysis in psychology,” vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 77-101, 2006.

[33] J. Katz, “Bystander training as leadership training: notes on the origins, philosophy, and pedagogy of the Mentors in Violence Prevention Model,” *Violence Against Women,* pp. 1-22, 2018.

[34] M. Brassard and C. Fiorvanti, “School-based child abuse prevention programs,” *Psychology in the Schools,* vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 40-60, 2014.

[35] H. Gaffney, M. Ttofi and D. Farrington, “Evaluating the effectiveness of school-bullying prevention programs,” *Aggression and Violent Behavior,* vol. 45, pp. 111-133, 2019.

[36] H. Gaffney, M. Ttofi and D. Farrington, “What works in anti-bullying programs? Analysis of effective intervention components,” *Journal of School Psychology,* vol. 85, pp. 37-56, 2021.

[37] D. McLennan, “The benefits of using sociodrama in the elementary classroom: Promoting caring relationships among educators and students,” *Early Childhood Education Journal,* vol. 35, pp. 451-456, 2008.

[38] E. Trefusis, “A study of primary school pupil perspectives on the implementation of role play in their lessons,” *Journal of Trainee Teacher Educational Research,* vol. 13, pp. 27-52, 2022.

[39] M. Banning, “Approaches to teaching: Current opinions and related research,” *Nurse Education Today,* vol. 25, no. 7, pp. 502-508, 2005.

Contact: Nadia Butler:
Email: n.l.butler@ljmu.ac.uk;
Phone: 0151 231 4148
Public Health Institute/School of Public and Allied Health, Liverpool John Moores University, 3rd Floor Exchange Station, Tithebarn Street, Liverpool, L2 2QP.

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

MERSEYSIDE Violence Reduction Partnership

ariel trust