

Skills to Resist Radicalisation, prevention education in primary schools

1 Executive summary

Skills to Resist Radicalisation (StRR) is the latest in a series of safeguarding resources, developed by the “It’s not OK!” partnership, that are used in schools across Merseyside. During the summer term 2018/19 we evaluated the impact of this new resource, which is designed to build young people’s resilience to radicalisation and extremism. This report sets out the results of this evaluation process.

Skills to Resist Radicalisation is one of three resources alongside CyberSense and SafeSkills that are designed to be delivered together across Years 4,5 & 6 to build and reinforce a complimentary set of resilience, critical thinking and communication skills.

Evaluation data collected from 4 primary schools (190 young people) demonstrates that StRR programme delivered the following results:

- The resource delivers important outcomes specified in the new relationship education curriculum, which will be compulsory from September 2020. (Section 2.1)
- The resource delivers positive changes in behaviour for young people who have been identified as at risk of radicalisation. (Section 2.2/Case Study 1)
- There is evidence, in all the schools who have used the programme, that the resource promotes safe spaces and encourages young people to communicate more openly about issues associated with radicalisation and extremism. (Section 2.3/ Case Study 2)
- There was a significant improvement in language skills required to talk about radicalisation and extremism. (Section 2.4)
- Positive changes are demonstrated in critical thinking about extreme materials. (Section 2.5)

This skills based approach fits in with the key principals of effective prevention education that were identified by PSHE Association in 2016. They argued that there is growing evidence within a UK that highlights *“the importance of active skills-based learning”*.

2 Impact Evidence: Skills to Resist Radicalisation

2.1 Delivering positive outcomes in relation to the new compulsory Relationships Education curriculum

In Mersey Park Primary School there was a 93% change in pupil's response to the statement, "I understand what the word 'radicalisation' means", after they had taken part in the StRR programme. Although the responses to this statement was slightly less dramatic in other schools they all showed significant positive change. This is particularly important because the new, compulsory, Relationships Education curriculum requires that young people develop the vocabulary required to report and discuss different forms of abuse.

All primary schools will have to deliver new Relationships Education curriculum from September 2020, this means the academic year 2019/20 is a key period for those schools who are looking ahead and beginning preparations for the introduction of the new curriculum.

The guidelines for the new relationship education curriculum include a number of outcomes that can be delivered effectively using the StRR resources. The guidelines state that young people will know:

- How to report concerns or abuse and the vocabulary and confidence needed to do so
- How to respond safely and appropriately to adults they may encounter (in all contexts, including online) whom they do not know
- Recognise who to trust and who not to trust, how to judge when a friendship is making them feel unhappy or uncomfortable, managing conflict, how to manage these situations and how to seek help or advice from others, if needed
- How to ask for advice or help for themselves or others, and to keep trying until they are heard
- Critically consider their online friendships and sources of information including awareness of the risks associated with people they have never met

Teachers in our partner schools said,

"The vocabulary exercises were really important. They provided the language that children needed to talk about the issues. I saw them become more confident using complex vocabulary".

"Very useful resources which covers important areas of the curriculum"

"Useful for awareness of radicalisation but also useful for other areas of the curriculum – ICT and English"

2.2 Delivering a positive response in relation to recommendations of a Channel Panel

The StRR resource has been shown to be valuable in circumstances where schools are sufficiently concerned about a young person to make a referral to a Channel Panel.

The prevent duty requires schools to have *"due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism"*. While local authorities have a responsibility to convene a Channel Panel to consider cases where identified individuals are at risk of being drawn into terrorism. The panel can make a range of recommendations including, where relevant, mainstream prevention education initiatives delivered through an individual's school. It has been demonstrated that the Skills to Resist Radicalisation resource can play an important role as part of that type of prevention education. The resource provides teachers with appropriate materials and helps build their confidence to address a challenging issue in a way that focuses on their strengths as communicators and educators.

CASE STUDY 1: supporting schools responding to an identified risks

One of our partner schools identified concerns about a young person to the extent that they made a referral to Channel and the panel recommend a preventative educational intervention directed at building resilience of the whole year group and wider school community.

Ariel delivered a teacher training session for 8 teachers in the school and the Skills to Resist Radicalisation programme was delivered across Years 5 & 6. The young person's classroom teacher feels the programme has had a positive impact on the young person, saying

"The programme gives young people clear strategies when facing challenging situations at school and at home. Although there has been no clear 'breakthrough moment' the young person has shown a willingness to engage.

At the start of the lessons using the Ariel resource this young person was angry, feeling targeted, but as the lesson went on it became easier and this young person began to engage in the small group discussions. They now understand the values of the school and behave in line with these, they recognise that the values at home are different but are now willing to take part in learning about the Muslim culture and has recently taken part in lessons about the Quran.

I have noticed an improvement in the young person's behaviour"

The Deputy Head at the school said,

"We believe that this intervention has provided an effective response to the issues that we took to the Channel Panel."

2.3 Young people feel more confident talking teachers about extreme materials which they may have seen.



Evaluation data from partner schools showed important changes in children's confidence in approaching teachers about extremism. Across all four partner schools there was a positive 18% change in response to the statement; I am confident approaching my teacher or another adult if someone sends me extreme materials.

This is important because governmental advice about the Prevent Duty suggests that:

"Schools should provide a safe space in which children, young people and staff can understand the risks associated with terrorism and develop the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments".

A key aim of the StRR resource is to provide a context in which young people feel safe to talk honestly about their experiences of radicalisation and extremism. Young people often understand the messages from school focus on treating others with respect and that we should be open to all cultures and respect and celebrate people's different backgrounds. However it is important to recognise that these are not necessarily the same messages that they are hearing outside of schools; in their families, in their communities or amongst their peers. The positive 'rules' within schools can cause young people to stay silent about these messages because they know school considers them to be wrong. Our resource is designed to create a space where those ideas can be shared, discussed and challenged rather than them remaining hidden and unchallenged.

CASE STUDY 2: Creating safe spaces for discussion of challenging issues

In one Wirral school teachers remarked on the fact that *"the resource removed the guilt so that children could talk about the issues as they see them"*. This particularly referred to children who came from families that might include parents who would have shared some of the negative viewpoints of the grandparents depicted in module 1. Teachers felt these children are often silenced, but that the resource provided a space that felt space in which to discuss and explore this tension between family and school values. *"The use of cartoon characters empowered children to talk about real issues in a way that was safe"*

"The children were definitely more open and were able to talk about two different worlds; on the one hand the 'this is right, this is wrong' world of school and on the other the more morally ambiguous world outside of school".

"The resource created an environment in which children could talk openly about their understanding of community tensions".

2.4 Positive change in language skills required to talk about radicalisation and extremism

The quantitative evaluation completed by pupils focused on their confidence in defining two key terms 'radicalisation' and 'judgmental'. Pupils were also then asked to provide a written definition in order to give a sense of their actual level of understanding.

Radicalisation

Before the programme young people were very unsure about the meaning of this term, which was reflected in them scoring their understanding at 'Slightly Disagree'. Very few young people were prepared to attempt to write a definition and, where they did, this largely reinforced a lack of understanding.

'I think it means where your social online'

'Being safe and respecting one another'

'radical like cool'

'Maybe if someone is racist and they are being rude and disrespectful about it'

After the programme the confidence score across all 4 schools had increased 55% and the quality of definitions given supports this dramatic shift in understanding, most young people also felt confident to write definitions after the programme.

'When someone starts to believe / support extreme things because someone else has encouraged them to look at it'

'The process where somebody starts to support extremist views'

'It is the journey to extreme behaviour'

Judgmental

Before taking part in the programme young people demonstrated a level of confidence in defining the term 'Judgmental', on average indicating 'Slightly Agree' to the *question 'I understand what the word judgmental means'*. This was borne out by the definitions that they gave, which indicated a level of understanding that it relates to making judgements about people.

After the programme the confidence score had increased 16%, despite the relatively high starting point. The quality of definitions had also improved.

'You judge somebody according to their appearance or religion'

'When you judge someone or thing without knowing them'

'Judging people by appearance or first impressions'

'Judging people without knowing the full story'

2.5 Development of Critical thinking skills required to identify extreme material

Evaluation data from partner schools showed important changes in children's critical thinking skills there was a positive 16% change in response to the statement; 'When someone sends me information I always ask myself is this fact or opinion'.

The 'before' and 'after' questionnaires asked three other questions. In some schools pupils show a high level of agreement with the statements before the programme, leaving little possibility of a positive change being demonstrated. However in other schools the base line score is lower, and in these cases the changes are more significant. The strongest impacts on a school-by school basis for these questions are as follows:-

- I understand that it is important to treat other people with respect **+7%**
- I understand that some people are not always respectful **+12%**
- If something is published online it must be true **+11%**

This suggests that where schools haven't already addressed similar issues of respect and critical thinking the resource is able to deliver a positive contribution in these areas.

When the data is averaged over the total population of young people who have taken part in this evaluation process the analysis still shows positive results but the movement is smaller.

- I understand that it is important to treat other people with respect **+2%**
- I understand that some people are not always respectful **+3%**
- If something is published online it must be true **+4%**
- When someone sends me information, I always ask myself is this fact or opinion **+9%**

3 Research evidence to support this type of skills based approach

The the skills based approach that underpins the StRR resource is supported by a broad range of research evidence exploring what works in relation to prevention education. A literature review suggests that if we only aim to help children to **understand, identify and raise awareness** of issues then we are not doing enough to change children's risk-taking behaviour. *"A range of research agrees that primarily non – interactive strategies, or those based on knowledge alone are not effective."* (UNODC, 2004; Jones et al., 2014b; Thomas et al. 2015). There is a clear need for a strategic approach to the development of educational programmes that move beyond this to influence behaviour change.

The skills-focused approach to preventative education builds on evidence gathered through randomised controlled trials and independent evaluation of similar programmes in the USA; *"focusing exclusively on attitudinal or educational components will likely not be effective in changing behaviour, as such the skills building component is a crucial component"* (Foshee & Langwick, 2004).

There is also growing evidence within a UK setting that highlights *"the importance of active skills-based learning – defined as 'anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing' (Herbert and Lohrmann, 2011). Opportunities to practise skills are identified as important by a number of reports (UNODC, 2004; Jones, 2010; Thomas et al., 2015)".* **Key Principals of effective prevention education, PSHE Association 2016.**

A review of the best available literature does suggest that there are certain characteristics that increase the likely effectiveness of prevention activities (Axford et al, 2018). These are largely drawn from small scale evaluations looking at prevention across a range of issues, such as bullying victimisation and intimate partner violence.

- Firstly, children should be involved in the process of co-designing the materials used (Bovarnick and Scott, 2016; Kingston University, 2009).
- Secondly, prevention should not simply be about awareness raising but involve skill building activities such as role-plays, group discussion and modelling (Topping and Barron, 2009; Kingston University, 2009; PSHE Association, 2016; Finkelhor, 2009; Zeuthen & Hagelskjaer, 2013).
- Thirdly, that a routine system of evaluation focusing on child reported outcomes beyond knowledge and awareness should be in place (Kingston University, 2009; Eaton, 2018).
- Fourth, that prevention should not focus solely on the child - programmes should seek to engage the whole school and wider community (Bovarnick and Scott, 2016; Axford et al, 2018).

These four elements are all key components that underpin the design and ongoing refinement of the Skills to Resist Radicalisation programme.

3 Conclusion

The Skills to Resist Radicalisation programme focuses upon the development communication and critical thinking skills that are required by a young person who might find themselves on the receiving end of a radicalisation process. They are asked to analysis of extreme materials, identifying the difference between fact and opinion. They are presented with real life scenarios and asked to practice communication skills when people they know preach intolerance and disrespect. They are also asked to develop a vocabulary that they can use to discuss key stages in the radicalisation process.

This skills based approach fits in with the key principals of effective prevention education that were identified by PSHE Association in 2016. They argued that there is growing evidence within a UK that highlights *“the importance of active skills-based learning – defined as ‘anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing’ (Herbert and Lohrmann, 2011).*

By presenting children with a series of critical thinking and communication problems the StRR resource requires them to practice the skills they will need to solve these problems. Foshee & Langwick, argue that this approach to, “skills building is a crucial component in the chain of events that can lead to positive outcomes”.

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During the academic year 2019/20 the plan is to offer StRR resource to many more primary schools and conduct further evaluation and a programme of ongoing refinement. The aim is to develop the most effective skills based resource to tackle radicalisation and extremism that is possible

Appendix 1

Skills to Resist Radicalisation Pupil Evaluation

Name of School _____

Year Group _____ Date _____

To be completed before and after taking part in the project.

Please tick the box below:

Before After

Have a go at answering the questions below and circle the smiley face that you think fits best; your teacher will help you if you're unsure.

1. I understand that it is important to treat other people with respect.



Agree Slightly agree Unsure Slightly disagree Disagree

2. I understand that some people are not always respectful.



Agree Slightly agree Unsure Slightly disagree Disagree

3. I understand what the word judgmental means.



Agree Slightly agree Unsure Slightly disagree Disagree

Judgmental means

4. If someone is saying things that are inappropriate, I would be confident about talking to them about what is wrong and what is right.



Agree Slightly agree Unsure Slightly disagree Disagree

5. I don't talk to adults about things that I see online.



Agree Slightly agree Unsure Slightly disagree Disagree

6. If something is published online it must be true.



Agree Slightly agree Unsure Slightly disagree Disagree

7. When someone sends me information, I always ask myself is this fact or opinion.



Agree Slightly agree Unsure Slightly disagree Disagree

8. I understand what the word radicalisation means.



Agree



Slightly
agree



Unsure



Slightly
disagree



Disagree

Explain what the word radicalisation means

9. I am confident approaching my teacher or another adult if someone sends me extreme materials.



Unsure



Slightly
agree



Disagree



disagree



Agree

Slightly

Thanks for your help

Appendix 2

Data by school	Mersey Park	Great Meols	St George's	Longmoor
Q1 I understand that it is important to treat other people with respect	7%	-3%	2%	5%
Q2 I understand that some people are not always respectful	12%	0%	1%	3%
Q3 I understand what the word judgmental means	37%	11%	12%	10%
Q4 If someone is saying things that are inappropriate, I would be confident about talking to them about what is wrong and what is right	12%	3%	8%	-2%
Q5 I don't talk to adults about things that I see online	12%	-1%	5%	-1%
Q6 If something is published online it must be true	11%	3%	4%	-2%
Q7 When someone sends me information, I always ask myself is this fact or opinion	16%	-5%	20%	11%
Q8 I understand what the word radicalisation means	93%	30%	43%	77%
Q9 I am confident approaching my teacher or another adult if someone sends me extreme materials	18%	0%	15%	-5%