



Public Services Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The role of public services in addressing child vulnerability

Thursday 27 May 2021

10 am

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Members present: Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (The Chair); Lord Bichard; Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth; Lord Davies of Gower; Lord Filkin; Lord Hogan-Howe; Lord Hunt of Kings Heath; Baroness Pinnock; Baroness Pitkeathley; Baroness Tyler of Enfield; Baroness Wyld; Lord Young of Cookham.

Evidence Session No. 10

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 73 - 81

Witnesses

[I](#): Simon Bailey, Chief Constable for Norfolk and Child Protection Lead, National Police Chiefs' Council; Tim Bowen, President, National Association of Head Teachers and Head Teacher, Maple Primary School, St Albans.

Examination of Witnesses

Simon Bailey and Tim Bowen.

Q73 **The Chair:** Good morning, everyone. Unusually, the committee is meeting twice this week. This morning we have another important session in evidence about what leads to child vulnerability. I am very pleased to welcome two guests this morning. We have Tim Bowen from the NAHT, the National Association of Head Teachers, and Simon Bailey from the National Police Chiefs' Council. Both of them have been working a lot on these issues.

Thank you very much for joining us this morning. When I ask my first question and you respond, just say a little about what the role you have entails and how it links to the issue of vulnerable children. We are grateful; we know how busy a time this is for both of your professions. Simon, we have been hearing a lot this morning on the news about the issues that you no doubt have in your sight, but we may come to that later.

We have heard that the number of children at risk of being involved in crime or exploited, or whose parents or guardians have challenges that mean their children are vulnerable—addiction, being involved in crime, mental health or domestic abuse issues at home—seemed to be on the increased even before the pandemic. The pandemic has made that even more stark. What is the gap in provision between the number of children at risk and the level of support and intervention available? Has the number of such children and the severity of the risk changed during the pandemic?

Simon Bailey: Good morning. Thank you very much for inviting me to appear before you this morning. As you said, I am the chief constable of Norfolk Constabulary. Until very recently, but only due to my impending retirement, I was the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for child protection and abuse investigations. I also had portfolio responsibility for violence and public protection, which covered 17 bespoke working groups dealing with a range as far-reaching as missing children, rape and serious sexual offences, female genital mutilation, online child activist groups—the list goes on.

To answer your question directly, if I could paint a picture for the committee, I hope it might be informative and help you to understand the risk and what children are now having to deal with. It is safe to say from my perspective that every child is now potentially at risk purely because of the way the world has evolved and the internet developed. Smart devices are described as telephones. They are not telephones; they are incredibly powerful computers, which have high-definition cameras on and streaming facilities available. There is now an opportunity for people who would seek to exploit children to use technology to do just that.

I fear there is a perception among parents in particular that, while their sons or daughters are upstairs in their bedrooms, they are safe and secure. Unfortunately, there is a risk, which we have seen during the

pandemic, that while they are in their bedrooms they are being groomed and exposed to external threats. In just the last four months of this year, we have seen a 117% increase in the volume of self-generated sexual images. The vast majority of those images are extracted from videos that are taken in children's bedrooms and within their homes. The most prolific group of young people within those groups are young girls aged 11 to 13.

We have also seen, in more recent weeks, the testimonies posted on the Everyone's Invited website, which describes what young girls are now having to deal with inside and outside school. It is not just the sexual threat. That is a huge issue and there is no doubt that we are not dealing with that in the way you would want us to. Until such time as the tech industry is held to account for what it is permitting and facilitating on its sites, I fear we will not be able to significantly alter the risk and manage that threat to young people.

During the pandemic, we have seen more children spending time online. We have undoubtedly seen an increase there as a result of exploitation, but we have also seen an increase in violence, and a normalisation of carrying sharp objects and knives. Children will undoubtedly have been exposed to domestic abuse. We are now getting a far broader appreciation and understanding of the impact of adverse childhood experiences.

The voluntary sector, which I have worked with very, very closely through monthly calls throughout the pandemic, is showing, without exception, an increase in demand and an inability to meet that demand. These charitable groups are struggling, quite frankly, to meet the expectations not only of parents but of children, unfortunately. I fear that, as we ease out of lockdown, we will see more and more reports of online-based abuse.

We have seen the impact of county lines-related drug activity and violence with injury, as well as the risks associated with those, against the backdrop of a challenging economic environment. It is safe to say, certainly from a position as a chief constable, that I am now starting to plan how to carry on providing the best service I can with what I anticipate will be a reduced budget.

I hope that has given you a flavour of the challenges we face in the provision of services from my perspective.

The Chair: Thank you. I am sure we will come back to some of those issues.

Tim Bowen: Good morning, everybody. I appreciate the opportunity to join you today. I am currently the national president of the National Association of Head Teachers, known as the NAHT. We represent over 34,000 school leaders, heads, deputies and assistant heads in all sectors of education. I am a serving head teacher, and in my 25th year as a head teacher. Until Easter this year, I was the head teacher of Maple Primary

School in St Albans, a single-form entry primary school with a specialist base for deaf pupils. I am now on a year's secondment to take on the role of national president.

To answer the question I will give you two bits of data. As you can imagine, the NAHT has surveyed its members quite a bit during the pandemic. In our most recent survey, nearly 4,800 members responded, 60% of whom said that during the pandemic they had raised safeguarding concerns with social care, the police and other services. In the same survey, respondents were asked to rate the support they had received for pupils from particular agencies during the pandemic. Some 18% of respondents said they felt poorly supported or very poorly supported by social care, and 15% said they felt poorly supported or very poorly supported by mental health services such as CAMHS.

The other bit of relevant data was published in November 2018, before the pandemic, and was from the Association of Directors of Children's Services. It noted a significant increase in demand across all aspects of children's social care. This included new and greater risks to children and young people—for example, from county lines, gang violence, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. There was clearly an increase even before the pandemic started, but, as we have just heard from the chief constable, the risks have almost certainly increased during the pandemic.

For children at risk of being drawn into crime or exploited, early intervention is crucial. School staff are in a unique position to identify concerns early. Many children and young people at risk of being involved in crime or exploited are supported in alternative provision. These can be educational placements for children who, for whatever reason, are unable to attend a mainstream or a special school. Some of these are privately run, others are local authority maintained, and they are often referred to as pupil referral units. Many of our members are leaders of such, on an alternative provision basis.

Those school leaders have noted that pressures within other services, such as social care and the police, have impacted upon the ability to monitor and to intervene early when risk factors are noted. During the pandemic, and certainly during the first part of lockdown in March, April and May last year, when on-site attendance was reduced, criminal gangs and county lines gangs appeared to exploit the situation. School leaders in this sector were increasingly concerned about their pupils. Yes, there was concern long before the pandemic, but clearly the situation has worsened over the last year and a half.

The Chair: Simon, can you say a little more about the exploitation of young people and how that is leading them into situations that they then have no control over, such as county lines or sexual grooming? How do we need to respond to that more effectively? You talked about better control from the tech companies, but that will not be enough. We need to be doing things to pick up what is happening that is putting so many children at risk, as we have heard today in the discussion on the news about county lines, to perpetrators who seem to be becoming better and

better at it, recognising where the vulnerabilities are and how to target.

Simon Bailey: I will try to paint a picture for the committee. There is no doubt that the people who would seek to groom children online or in the real world are very adept at identifying weaknesses. Once they have identified those weaknesses, they will seek to exploit them. In the real world, the owners of these county lines—the owner of the handset, the owner of the telephone number—are simply identifying drug mules, the young boys or young girls whom they can exploit by targeting pupils in pupil referral units who have been excluded from schools and children who are vulnerable to being enticed into a world where they are being told that there are rewards for what they will do: new trainers, an iPhone 11 or whatever it might be. They are seeing the potential opportunities that are afforded to them.

In some cases, I fear that a number of them believe that the only way they are ever going to be able to afford a nice car or nice clothes, which are important to them, is through criminal routes. We have heard today, and I am sure committee members will probably have read, the case described by an officer in Northamptonshire where a child had probably been tortured and was certainly the subject of a violent physical assault. Again, that is not uncommon. We see people being abused and exploited simply because they are seen as disposable items that are there simply to facilitate a business that sees drugs being trafficked around the country.

In the online space, that exploitation has fundamentally changed during the last few years. Individuals will endeavour to groom thousands of children, with a view that if they get a couple of hundred that would be successful. Look at the case of David Wilson in King's Lynn, in my own county. Wilson sought to groom 5,000 boys, and 500 of those boys ended up sharing images of themselves with him, not realising that it was a man behind what the young men saw as an attractive young lady. He then blackmailed them to abuse siblings on video for his own sexual stimulation. That gives you, in a case study, just one example of how groomers are using the material they have garnered to drive the most appalling behaviours.

The evidence is probably the best way of getting this message across. This is all awful stuff, but one of the most harrowing videos is of a young girl who has been groomed online. She is having to livestream her abuse to her abuser. She is in her bedroom at home. She is inserting into herself an item in her en suite shower room for his stimulation, and you can hear her mum downstairs shout up, "Darling, dinner's nearly ready". That should send a chill down most people's spines, because quite frankly I find that horrific. It demonstrates what is going on. It demonstrates the risks that are there, and how groomers exploit a photograph of a naked chest to then say, "If you don't show me a picture of you without any underwear on, I'm going to put your image all over Instagram and Facebook". Then the cycle begins.

That is just one of many, many examples I could give you where exploiters in the real world and in the virtual world are seeking to operate their businesses or fulfil their sexual desires through the exploitation of children.

Q74 The Chair: The real issue that we are trying to grapple with is what on earth we can do to tackle this. We will talk about that as the morning goes on.

Tim, other colleagues will ask you about mainstream schools, exclusions and PRUs, I have no doubt. When Sir Alan Wood did his review of safeguarding, he said that there were increasing numbers of vulnerable children who are now simply invisible to services because they receive education, or what is called education, in unregulated school settings or at home. How can these children be better protected from harm? Would you like to see a home school register? What do you think of the suggestion that there should be a requirement that parents obtain some sort of academic status or recognition before they are given permission to home school?

Tim Bowen: The NAHT believes that a statutory register of home-educated children is definitely required. The fact that there is currently no official source of data on the number of home-educated children is a clear indication that the current arrangements are unsatisfactory. Registration and data collection processes must be improved to identify and support all children who are home educated, and local authorities effectively resourced to support these children.

To maintain an effective register, and above all to safeguard children, providers of education and parents must be under a duty to provide relevant information to the local authority. Interestingly, Ofsted has reported an increase in the number of parents withdrawing their children from school to be home-educated. This is partly due to concerns about Covid-19. It is highly likely that we will see an influx of these pupils returning to school. It would not surprise me if it was from September onwards, when the pandemic may be less of a concern. But it is very important that local authorities work together with schools and other education providers to ensure that the right resource and support is put in place for these returning pupils in order to help them reintegrate into the school environment.

Regarding your comment about the need for qualifications, it is very difficult to teach a child GCSE maths or A-Level English if you do not have the qualification and the subject knowledge yourself. That said, just because you have the qualification and subject knowledge does not mean that it will be effective for teaching. Many parents who have had the joys of home education during lockdown will pay testament to that.

I can speak from personal experience as a teacher. My youngest daughter is now 17. When she was nine, she was struggling with her maths work at home, and I thought I would help her every weekend. Goodness me, it was a nightmare. We almost came to blows. Perhaps I

should not be saying that with a chief constable on the call. I like to think that I can teach well to a class of 30 pupils but, goodness me, trying to support my nine year-old with maths? In the end I gave up, we all had a much happier weekend, and thankfully last year she managed to pass her maths GCSE and saved us all a lot of grief.

On a more serious note, I would say that there needs to be some form of qualification if you are going to home educate, so that you have at least the subject knowledge, which is crucial.

The Chair: I have lots of other questions, but I need to move on and allow other colleagues to come in.

Q75 **Lord Hunt of Kings Heath:** Good morning. Thank you for the evidence you have given, which has been both very worrying and compelling. Setting aside the issue about the tech industry, which is really being covered by other Select Committees, although I do not diminish what the chief constable has said on this, is there enough evidence of good practice to suggest that early intervention and prevention for the children at risk you have described can work?

Given that, and given the interrelationship between the police, schools, the health service and social care services, do we have enough co-ordination at local level? If we do not, do we need to beef this up, either through a lead agency or through some statutory provision, or can you leave it to local agencies to sort this out together?

Tim Bowen: Early intervention is crucial at all levels, from when children are first starting school right the way up until the age of 16. If you can get support and help to families sooner, working with them, you will not eliminate, but you will reduce, the risks. Even at the moment, as head teachers, we are looking at the very other end of the scale from the risk of going into crime: the concern we have even for the reception pupils starting school in September of this year. Most of these pupils have lived a quarter of their lives under lockdown. They have not had the opportunities to play, to share and to socialise. We are particularly concerned about the effect it will have on their speech and language development.

That is one example of where putting in speech and language support would help the youngest pupils. Pupils who come from disadvantaged backgrounds will be particularly affected. If schools work where they can with social services, and where there is the capacity for social services and healthcare to support pupils and their families, before the situation escalates and more vulnerable pupils are put at even greater risk, that has to make a difference. School leaders are finding that the capacity of social workers, and of social care and health, means that more and more onus is put upon schools to put in increasing levels of support, beyond what they were doing, to meet the needs of their pupils. Schools are doing that; they are stepping up to the mark, but this cannot be sustainable on a long-term basis. They have to go back to their core

function of educating, not doing jobs that previously would have been taken on by social care and health.

Simon Bailey: I am a complete believer in early help and early intervention. I also strongly believe that so much of what Tim and I see on a regular basis is both predictable and preventable. I suspect that Tim and his teaching colleagues will know which children in his school are most at risk. I am now seeing the children of the people I was locking up 20 years ago in my custody system. That tells me that it is both predictable and preventable. There is good evidence that the troubled families initiative works. We should be targeting our efforts collectively across the whole public sector to work with families that are most in need. We should collectively be wrapping around them the support they need, be it through education, health or social care.

I am sorry, but the multiagency safeguarding arrangements that currently exist between the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Education and the Home Office are simply not as advanced as they should be, on the back of Sir Alan Wood's review and his recommendations. He has identified some really good practice, but there is so much more to do.

Certainly from a health perspective, I do not see enough recognition that safeguarding and the welfare of children is one of their primary responsibilities. It should be, but I do not believe that it is. I recognise that during the pandemic the Department of Health and Social Care has had to deal with an unprecedented crisis, but my own experience is that trying to work with health in this space is terribly, terribly difficult. Colleagues across the whole of the policing sector would say that is the case.

We work increasingly closely with schools. I have officers in 14 of my secondary schools in Norfolk. The work they are doing there with the dedicated safeguarding leads is exceptional and is making a real difference. Ultimately, we will not shift the bar in the way committee members would wish us to unless there is far greater emphasis on that tripartite arrangement and a far greater commitment from those tripartite partners to drive forward the Wood recommendations. That is where our efforts should really be.

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath: Simon, on the interagency working and particularly the health service, do you think that some statutory provision to require the health service to engage more is needed, or is it much more about ownership and leadership at local level? What would actually provide the impetus to get this on a much stronger footing?

Simon Bailey: It has to come from the very top. The clearest direction, the clearest mandate, has to be given. The expectation has to be set that all CCGs and trusts will work with their partners to ensure that the well-being and safeguarding of young people are woven into the core of their mission. Unfortunately, I do not believe that is the case.

About a month ago, I was interviewed by an academic, who said to me, "Simon, do you think the police service has now gone too far in its safeguarding responsibilities?" I chuckled and said, "I would take that as a compliment, because that is music to my ears". On the occasions when we go too far, we do so simply because of the failings in other services, and because I would never countenance a police officer walking away from a child in need. Unfortunately, on too many occasions and too frequently, police officers are having to step in to deal with complex issues that would be better served in the domain of our other statutory partners.

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath: Tim, can I come back to the point you raised that other agencies might be able to help if they had the capacity? You are having to take up the slack, which you said you could not carry on long term because of your prime duty to educate. The possibility that public finances in the next few years will be pretty tight when it comes to health and education would suggest that capacity remains an issue. What can you and other agencies do to make the best of what they have?

Tim Bowen: NAHT members are providing a huge range of services in their schools; they have significantly increased over the last few years, particularly to benefit vulnerable pupils. There has been a significant increase in the employment of counsellors and family workers. We have set up nurture rooms, behaviour and learning mentors, and homework clubs, and have subsidised school trips.

Some of this can be paid for by the pupil premium funding, but schools are finding that they increasingly have to eat into their already tight and dwindling budgets, with all the additional costs because of the pandemic, to meet the demand. Demand is there, and school leaders will do everything they can to continue to provide these services, but unless more money is forthcoming for schools it will not be sustainable. Certain aspects will have to be cut.

School leaders and their staff, first and foremost, are educators. I will give you the example of the mental health support teams in schools, which is a tremendous initiative that NAHT fully embraces and my school has been very fortunate to be a part of. Our job is to recognise the early signs if a child has a mental health issue and, at a low level, to put support in place. Where issues become more complex and a child is in greater need of help, that is not the role of school staff. We are not doctors, nurses, therapists or mental health specialists. There comes a time when we need to pass on to organisations such as CAMHS to give that more specialist support, which is what they are trained for.

Schools, teachers, teaching assistants and school leaders will do everything they can to continue to meet the needs of their pupils, but there comes a point where, first and foremost, we are educators and where specialist support is needed. That is where we have to pass on to social care and health, but unfortunately, because of capacity issues, many children in need of help are not meeting the thresholds. That is just building up problems for the future.

Q76 Baroness Wyld: Good morning to the witnesses. Thank you very much for all you are doing. I need to start by declaring an interest as a non-exec at Ofsted and DCMS, given the discussion of online. Tim, having home schooled my three primary daughters on my own, I am reassured by what you said, mathematician or not, so I will let you know in 10 years' time.

Lord Hunt has opened up the conversation about collaboration between agencies, and I wondered if we could delve into that a bit more deeply. Simon, you talked about a lack of leadership and needing direction from the top. Would you say that was the main barrier to effective collaboration? Equally, given that this committee will have to come forward with recommendations, I wondered whether either or both of you have any examples of best practice where things have worked well, and whether you might give us some lessons from those.

Simon Bailey: Yes, the leadership is critical here. In the review he has just published, Sir Alan identifies that leadership is a real issue for us all. Ultimately, it has to come at a ministerial level within the respective ministries that make the delivery of his multiagency safeguarding arrangements a priority. We need to start looking at the independent scrutiny, the funding arrangements, the leadership and the decision-making that is taking place within those environments.

I would be able to provide the committee with examples of best practice, because there are some examples. Sir Alan has identified some really good examples in his review, but I chaired a meeting of assistant chief constables a few months ago, and every one of those senior leaders in the police service was struggling to get a true partnership approach to the delivery and improvement of those arrangements. I would describe the country as a patchwork quilt in terms of how it looks.

Sir Alan's recommendations in the initial review were quite rightly permissive when it came to understanding the local political profile in each area, but the leadership has not come from the heart of the ministries. The best example I can give you is this. The Home Office has had a facilitator working with me for the last 18 months to oversee the police's delivery of this. The Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education are still struggling to identify those facilitators to work with the Home Office facilitator in order to make this all happen. That just tells me that it is therefore not a priority for those ministries, and there is the really significant weakness.

Baroness Wyld: Tim, would you agree from all that? You spoke in particular about your core purpose being education and then often having to refer parents on, presumably helping them to navigate the landscape. Could you reflect on that, given what Simon has just said?

Tim Bowen: I agree with what he says. There is only so much that head teachers and local authorities can do. The leadership ultimately has to come from the top.

You asked us to reflect on something that has worked and an example of multiagency working that has been effective. The one that has impacted me most as a primary school head teacher, which I have been really impressed with, is something called Operation Encompass. Simon will obviously know a lot about this. It operates in all 43 police forces in England and Wales, and aims to ensure that schools have timely information about all police incidents where they have attended in relation to domestic abuse. As a head teacher, I have found this particularly helpful. It was introduced only a few years ago, but I will now get emails informing me of children at my school where there have been incidents of alleged domestic abuse. In the past, I would almost certainly have had no knowledge whatever about those, unless the parent or carer had come to see me to say that this had happened.

To have this information and to share it confidentially with the staff working with the pupils means we can be not only more supportive of the young children but more vigilant, because sometimes there could be a change in mood or behaviour. We do not know the reason, but if we know that there has been an alleged incident of domestic abuse and the police have been called, we can just keep that closer, watchful eye. It increases our pastoral ability to care for the children. That is a relatively recent development, but is one really good example of where, if it is done right, ultimately school staff are better empowered to protect and support the children.

Q77 **Baroness Wyld:** That is very helpful. I have a wider question about prevention and taking things right back to the home. Simon, it really struck me at the very beginning when you said that every child is now at risk and that it is a different generation. In many homes, as you have said, the parents themselves have very complex needs and there are a lot of things going on.

You have said that every child is now at risk in a way they were not before. Can anything be done in the average home to improve things? What would your advice be to parents? You talked about these mini-computers, but would you say, therefore, that no child should have a phone and that it is a parental responsibility to remove a phone? I am really interested in what you think can be done at the very root.

Simon Bailey: At a very, very early age, parents and grandparents need to be talking to their children in such a way that the child starts to understand the risks in their online presence, their online footprint, and the people who might seek to exploit them in that online space, so that the child has the courage and confidence, should they receive an unsolicited approach, should they be victim of some form of harassment or assault, to come forward to report it.

There is no doubt in my mind that young girls in particular, at this moment in time, are being subjected to misogyny, sexual harassment and on occasion sexual assaults by peers. Having been the victim of that offence, they are then weighing up the pros and cons of making a disclosure. Children's lives are now so based on what is taking place

online—on average, children are now spending 14 hours a week in the online space—that they are concerned about what will be said about them on social media. They are concerned about the impact it will have on their friendship group and what their friends will say. In lots and lots of cases, they are simply deciding, “I’m not going to do anything about it, because I value everything that I have in my online world too much to risk losing it”.

I talked about everybody being at risk. I have dealt with many families of a professional background, with the most loving, caring parents you can imagine, whose child, without their knowledge, has been exploited because of somebody seeking to abuse them, in the first instance by grooming them in the online space. That is why every parent—and I mean absolutely every parent—needs to ensure that the security settings on their children’s devices are right. They need to encourage their children to be open about what they are doing online. If their computer—and their tablet, although that has a less fixed nature—is in their bedroom, what are they doing? Who are they talking to?

Have those conversations. If a girl receives a picture of somebody’s penis, encourage them to report it. I know it sounds terrible, but unfortunately that is what children are now having to contend with. As a society, we need to call out the tech companies and get them to do something about it. To protect a generation of children and generations of children’s children, we need to start having this conversation and an open dialogue.

We need to start talking to our sons and our grandsons about their viewing of online pornography. It is not an easy conversation, but so many young boys are now going online and viewing pornography. Pornhub has 18 billion or 19 billion hits a year. The consumption of online pornography went up 20% during the pandemic. Young men’s lives are being framed by what they are viewing in pornographic videos. That is a source of great concern.

We need to be having these conversations. We need to be open and honest with our children. Those messages need to be reinforced and reaffirmed in the relationships and sex education classes in schools. The culture in schools needs to call out misogyny, sexual harassment and sexual assault, but I reinforce the message that I hope that the majority of pupils are hearing it at home as well. It has to be a completely joined-up response by families, in schools and in universities. There has to be that really deep, hard look at what is going on in the online space as well.

Tim Bowen: I completely agree with everything Simon said about educating all parents. Until a few years ago, we tended to have an evening’s presentation workshop for year 6 parents. We would cover everything from secondary transfer to residential visits in the summer. We spoke a lot about keeping children safe online, particularly in preparation for teenage years and on to secondary school. We now have a similar presentation about keeping children safe online at the beginning

of reception. When the parents send their children to school—they come to us at the age of four—as part of our induction programme, we plan a very careful presentation so that parents are aware of the risks, particularly outside school, which their young children are subject to. Simon spoke about making sure that you have the highest privacy settings.

For some it was shocking. They are parents of four and five year-olds, and here we are as school staff talking about the dangers of online, but we have to do it then, because if we were to leave it any later we would be failing in our responsibility, our duty of care, and in educating parents as to the risks when their children are online, as well as all the benefits of going online. Again, it was made much worse throughout the pandemic. Education to parents right at the start, when they come into school, can, I hope, reduce the risks to the pupils.

Q78 Lord Bichard: Tim has picked up the point that I was going to make. A lot of parents do not understand the capacity of the technology. They do not understand how the technology works. Therefore, while they might understand at a very high level that there is a risk here, they do not know how to ameliorate and manage it. What you talked about, Tim, seems to be exactly the sort of thing that should be going on in every school in the country, and goes beyond just describing the risk. Is it happening broadly across the country?

Tim Bowen: An important development for all schools has been the introduction of the relationships, sex and health education programme at the start of this term. Prior to that, we had PSHE—personal, social and health education—but it is now statutory for all schools to provide relationships, sex and health education. This is a significant step, and schools are very committed to this. I do not know of a single school leader who is not in favour of this.

Primary is obviously my area of expertise. Just to give you some understanding, we teach the children about the concept of privacy and the implications of it for both children and adults. We talk about what sort of boundaries are appropriate in friendships and among peers. We emphasise digital content. We teach children at primary school how to report concerns or abuse, and give them the vocabulary and the confidence to do so. Many, many more things are covered.

Going into secondary education, the “being safe” section goes into aspects such as the laws relating to the concepts of sexual consent, exploitation, abuse, grooming, female genital mutilation and how people can actively communicate and recognise consent from others, including sexual consent.

This relationships, health and sex education is statutory in all schools. It is a very, very important initiative. All schools will be taking this on board and developing their PSHE programmes to encompass this. Again, it is not just about educating the parents, but about ensuring, at an age-appropriate level, right from the start of primary school through to

secondary school, that the young people in our care are informed and equipped with how to deal with the situations and challenges they will inevitably come across, particularly online and out of school.

Lord Bichard: That is rather different from ensuring that parents understand how the technology works, how their children really are at risk and how they can manage that risk on behalf of their children. It is the lack of understanding of the technology. I know it is a cliché, but young people are better able to use social media and technology than some of the parents. Is it not really the parents who we need to educate about the technology, which then enables them to manage the risk?

Tim Bowen: It is both. It is educating the pupils so they are better equipped to deal with whatever they come across. You are absolutely right: more and more schools are educating the parents so that they can be more aware, savvy and, I hope, take better measures to protect their children. That is why, as I said earlier, right at the start when they join as parents—in my case, at Maple, when their children are four—we now emphasise that in our induction programme. That has been a recent development over the last few years.

We are educating the pupils to take responsibility and ownership, because ultimately, no matter how well you educate the parents, it will come down to how the young people regulate and control their lives and the impact they can have on others.

Q79 **Lord Hogan-Howe:** Simon, it is good to see you again. You made a broad point that every child is at risk but we have to prioritise, because otherwise we could get defeatist about things. You made the point that there should be leadership on data sharing, yet it took a small charity of two people to address the simple task of sharing police data about domestic violence with local schools where those children were going. Why can the individual services not achieve what that charity did?

Simon Bailey: It is good to see you again too, Lord Hogan-Howe. The headline is that there are too many people who are zealots about the Data Protection Act and are too frightened of the implications of sharing too much information. My view is that nobody has lost a life through data being shared, or it is incredibly rare. Unfortunately, there is a reluctance on the part of too many data protection experts to share information for the greater good. We need to challenge that. We need to call it out and say that clear statements have to be made about that. Culturally, in too many cases, organisations are loath to share.

Lord Hogan-Howe: I get that, but why did Operation Encompass manage to do it? It was two people acting alone.

Simon Bailey: The honest answer is that everybody recognised the benefits of it. It started off in the West Country, I believe in Dorset, and it gained momentum. It has then gone nationwide. It is one example of where people have managed to get through it, but there are far, far broader issues. I do not want to be seen as highly critical of the

Department of Health and Social Care, but the health data is always the difficult data to get hold of. Operation Encompass has improved data sharing between the Department for Education, the police and the Home Office. Multiagency safeguarding hubs are apposite there, but how many MASHs have health representatives making significant contributions? That is where our focus should be and what we should be looking at. I have spoken to two doctors about the same circumstances and they could not agree on whether they would have shared the information in the hypothetical situation I gave. That speaks volumes.

Q80 **Baroness Tyler of Enfield:** I want to try to pull together some of the themes that we have had this morning, with the need for joined-up partnership working. The Department for Education has told us that the Government do not have an integrated strategy on vulnerable children. If there was such a strategy, would it help with the sorts of things we have been talking about this morning, or would you just view it as a piece of paper sitting in Whitehall? What would your top priority be for a joined-up strategy?

Simon Bailey: Ultimately, this needs to be driven by Ministers. It needs to be driven from the very top. The departments need to get on and work with their respective police officer colleagues, teaching colleagues and health colleagues to make it happen. Over the last four years, I have created the national vulnerability action plan, which means that there is one action plan for vulnerability across policing. Every police force in the country is now using that plan and it is making a really big difference. Plans can definitely make a big difference, if they do not sit on the shelf and gather dust.

We need that plan. We need the recommendations of Sir Alan Wood's review to be implemented. That would be a significant step forward. In the way the Government are now having the conversation about violence against women and girls, there should be an expansion of that conversation that talks about vulnerability, exploitation and abuse, because, candidly, 50% to 60% of all my front-line officers' time is now spent dealing with domestic abuse, mental health crisis, vulnerability and exploitation. It is crying out for that leadership from the very heart of Government and from the very top of Government.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: Simon, earlier you referred to the troubled families programme. I think it is now called the supporting families programme, but I am not quite sure. What should the next stage be, in priority terms, for that programme, as part of what you have been talking about?

Simon Bailey: We should use the evidence base which the programme has produced. I go back to the point I made earlier. Unfortunately, some families will struggle, for whatever reason. We should be trying to support those less fortunate families and children, so that we can genuinely say in years to come that we gave that child the maximum chance to lead a successful life where they contribute effectively to

society. That is where all our focus and emphasis should be moving forward.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: Tim, would a joined-up strategy in Whitehall help? If so, what would your key priorities be for it?

Tim Bowen: A successful strategy should reasonably expect the Government to provide appropriate funding in each sector for the high-quality, specialist support and cross-sector systems required to deliver effective intervention in our schools, in particular the support our vulnerable children and young people need and deserve. A needs-led approach is crucial, and this is rightly advocated in both legislation and the code of practice. However, the current system remains resource-led. Even with the recent additional funding for the SEND system, it will still leave significant numbers of pupils without adequate provision to meet their needs.

As we have heard in the past hour, there is currently insufficient capacity in children's health and social care services to put vital early interventions in place for the increasing number of young children starting school with severe difficulties. If we do not put that support in very early on, it will have a long-term impact on their learning. If a child has problems at four, five and six, you have to support them then; otherwise you are just building up problems for the future.

Where early intervention from specialist health and social care expertise occurs, vulnerable children and young people, especially those with special needs and disabilities, are more likely to make successful progress. When this takes place with the more complex and challenging cases, the risk of a young person ending up within the youth justice system can be and has been reduced. If we do not invest, prioritise, look to the wider picture and really deal with many of the issues of poverty in society, the cost, both personally and financially, of not addressing early intervention will be significant.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: I have a very specific final point, picking up on something you said earlier. It is about the mental health support teams in schools. You have made the point two or three times that teachers are primarily educators, not mental health experts. We heard yesterday about the role that these teams could have in helping to train teachers to spot some of the signs of mental health concerns among the children, so that they were in a position to identify that and make referrals to the experts. Do you think that sort of approach would be helpful?

Tim Bowen: Definitely, yes. I am fortunate that Maple was one of the pilot schools for the mental health support teams project, so before the pandemic we had a mental health support worker assigned to our school. It has been invaluable to have her support during the pandemic as well. Only about 20% to 25% of schools were involved. I am delighted and privileged that Maple was. She ran in-house training sessions for teachers, and very importantly for support staff—it is often the teaching

assistants who do the one-on-one or small-group work with the children—to help us to spot the early signs and give us strategies, looking at ways of engagement with parents.

At a lower level, all you say is absolutely right. I am fully convinced that to roll out the mental health support programme to teams in schools would be an expensive but absolutely valuable initiative. Even with training sessions and some experience, there will still be a limit to the knowledge and skills of education staff. We are educators. That is what we have been trained for at degree and postgraduate level. We are not doctors or social workers.

For the percentage of children for whom it cannot be dealt with at a low level or where there are significantly deeper problems that are clearly beyond our scope, our job is to recognise those and to work with the parents, and then to look to get support from agencies such as CAMHS. We can do more in school, at a low level, because that is all part of our pastoral support, but we cannot be seen to be health specialists. We would need to do another however many years' training for that.

Q81 The Chair: We are at the end, but I want to ask one you more question, Tim, largely because it would be unfair of us to leave it and not ask you. A number of witnesses in previous sessions have said to us that exclusions are now a real issue, and that children who are excluded then become most vulnerable to the sorts of things we have been talking about today. There are some witnesses who say that we really need a different approach to exclusions from school. What is the NAHT view of that and what schools would want, if that became the mood, in order to help vulnerable children?

Tim Bowen: It is a key issue. The issue of exclusions is one of the most problematic things for school leaders to deal with. When looking at current exclusions policy, we need to look at some of the drivers in the wider current education policy, especially the accountability and the system-wide responsibilities. As school leaders, we believe that progress rather than attainment should be the main accountability measure for schools, because an overemphasis on formal testing will have a really negative impact on children, especially those deemed to be vulnerable. We are constantly setting them up to fail.

School leaders are very aware that the challenging behaviour of many pupils, which can lead them to be excluded, may well be a manifestation of their special educational needs and disabilities. We believe that many exclusions can be avoided if schools are appropriately resourced and supported by their local authority multiagency team, allowing, as we have talked about, for the early identification of need and, where appropriate, a smooth transition towards a suitable alternative provider.

The bottom line, and I feel this very strongly, is that schools must retain the right to exclude pupils who present a serious risk—and I truly mean serious—to the health, safety, education or well-being of other members of the school community, both other pupils and members of staff. It is

vital that school leaders are supported when making these difficult decisions.

I do not know of a single head teacher who will not do everything he or she can to avoid an exclusion. You will put in more strategies of support, maybe more teaching assistant support, training for staff, different resources, part-time timetables. You will do everything you can to make it work for that child, but if, when you have done that, there is still a significant risk posed to the adults and other children, and their education is being significantly disrupted, yes, sometimes you have to exclude.

To my mind, and that of the NAHT, providing more power for the director of children's services to prevent school exclusions does not resolve the issues that bring a pupil to the situation where a school might need to consider their exclusion as a final option. It is far better that we involve local authority officers working with schools to source appropriate support for such pupils once we are starting to consider exclusion. This would be a much more constructive solution and would provide for a co-ordinated, cross-sector approach, ultimately to better meet the needs of the pupils.

The Chair: It may well be something that people want to write in about. Thank you both very much. We really appreciate you coming and sharing your views and ideas with us. If there is anything that we have missed or you think we need to hear, please let us know in writing. We are very grateful to you for spending this time with us. Thank you very much.