

# Education Committee

## Oral evidence: [Knife crime](#), HC 2081

Wednesday 27 March 2019

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 27 March 2019.

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Lucy Allan; Ben Bradley; Marion Fellows; James Frith; Ian Mearns; Lucy Powell.

Questions 1-54

### Witnesses

I: Mark Simmons, Assistant Commissioner, London Metropolitan Police; Sir Michael Wilshaw, Professor of Education and Director of Multi-Academy Trusts, St Mary's University; Will Linden, Deputy Director, Scottish Violence Reduction Unit; and Carlie Thomas, Senior Caseworker Rescue & Response, St Giles Trust.

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Mark Simmons, Sir Michael Wilshaw, Will Linden and Carlie Thomas.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning, everybody. Thank you very much for coming today. It is a very important session for us. There is a world beyond Brexit.

For the benefit of the tape and for those who are watching on the internet, could the witnesses introduce themselves from our left to right, please?

**Will Linden:** My name is Will Linden and I am the deputy director of the Violence Reduction Unit in Scotland.

**Carlie Thomas:** My name is Carlie Thomas. I am the senior caseworker at the St Giles Trust county lines project.

**Mark Simmons:** I am Mark Simmons, Assistant Commissioner in the Metropolitan Police. I am responsible for frontline policing.

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** I am Michael Wilshaw. I used to be head of Ofsted between 2012 and 2016.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you. My first question is directed primarily at Mark, but please anyone else feel free to come in.

A couple of weeks ago, police commissioners wrote to the Prime Minister saying that children who are excluded from our schools are at risk of being sucked into criminality. What evidence do you have or are you aware of to suggest that this is the case?

**Mark Simmons:** The principal evidence is the correlation we see between the young people we deal with, either from being victims of crime or from being involved in crime or in gangs, with exclusion—that is one factor that crops up significantly in that picture. It is not really the case that we would see a causal relationship in that, but there is very clearly a correlation, and that comes out from a lot of the research that people outside the police have done. We see that as being one factor that can lead to young people becoming either involved in criminal activity themselves or being more vulnerable.

**Will Linden:** In Scotland, the Edinburgh youth transition study, which is a cohort study of about 4,000 young people in Edinburgh from birth, looked at the single biggest predictor of crime and antisocial behaviour. The one that came back time and time again was exclusion from schools. That was not necessarily just for knife crime and gangs, but went across all forms of criminality. Separate studies done in prisons and youth offender institutions show that about 80% of those within our institutions have been excluded from schools. The more time they are excluded from schools—as in length of time or separate exclusions—the more likely they are to be involved in it as well.



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**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** I am speaking not just as head of Ofsted but as an ex-head teacher. On the rare occasions when I used to exclude youngsters, I realised that I was often committing them to a miserable few years afterwards, so it was a very painful decision to make. We sent very negative messages to those youngsters—usually boys—and to their families about themselves. We realised very quickly that even if they went to a decent pupil referral unit—and there were not that many about—they were in great danger of being drawn into crime.

**Carlie Thomas:** I absolutely agree with the gentlemen and their comments so far. Our young people, when they are in school, are not on the roads, so that is seven hours of keeping them away from risk, keeping them in a safe place, and keeping them in a secure place where they are able to find help if they need help and are able to access those sorts of services.

When our young people are excluded from the education system, it is another life that we could lose on that day. That is what I am seeing across the board for the young people I work with. The minute they are excluded, they are placed at risk. These young people are already at risk, but that is another seven hours for their elders to get to them on a daily basis, to groom them and to encourage them to get involved with criminal activity.

For me it is an absolute nightmare. For my young people it is an absolute nightmare. For their families it is an absolute nightmare. That nightmare has a massive impact on the community and so it is definitely something that needs to be addressed.

Q3 **Chair:** Thank you. I welcome that you used the word “correlation” because when our Committee has written and published recommendations and talked about this before, there has been a backlash from some sections in the education sector saying that there is no causation. By focusing on causation, we deliberately are distracting from the issue, because discussing a causational link between exclusion and knife crime is a red herring when we know there is a correlation because the profile of young people at risk is the same. A higher proportion have special educational needs. A higher proportion are eligible for free school meals. A higher proportion are consistently absent from school. My colleague Lucy Powell will come on to this in a bit, but if these children can be identified, given the correlation that you have said and that others have indicated, clearly the priority must be early intervention.

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** Absolutely. If we are going to reduce the number of exclusions, then we must intervene quickly. Most of the youngsters who get excluded come from difficult, often dysfunctional and chaotic homes. They present behavioural problems often at an early stage at primary school before they reach secondary school.



If we are going to make an impact on their lives, if we are going to make sure that they do not get excluded, then early intervention is absolutely critical. It is not just about ensuring that the school runs tight behaviour policies, although that is important, and has a very structured environment and has internal exclusion and good behaviour management systems in general; it is about making sure that schools have the resource to deal with all sorts of emotional and mental problems that these youngsters present. There are two sorts of kids who get into trouble: some have the odd bout of misbehaviour that can be dealt with internally, but the really serious stuff is manifested by youngsters who are deeply troubled, and schools need to have the resource to deal with those troubles at an early stage.

**Carlie Thomas:** I absolutely agree again. We need to approach this with a trauma-based practice because for lots of our young people, there are a lot of tell-tale signs before they have got to the point of carrying a knife or being excluded from school.

I feel really sorry for our teachers and I feel really sorry for our education officials because they have not been given the relevant training or the right training. They have been hung out to dry and expected to deal with these situations on their own. They do not have a clue what is going on.

Training is really important. With the trauma that goes on with a lot of the young people I work with—within the household domestic violence, bullying at school, sexual abuse from a young age and older, a whole host of things—these young people are not even ready to face education sometimes. They are dealing with monumental issues that are breaking them right now. It seems that a lot of schools are unable to deal with that situation. Training is definitely high up there on the agenda.

Q4 **Chair:** In 2018, the Ministry of Justice found that 21% of students who committed a knife possession offence were excluded from school. Of that 21%, 50% were excluded after the offence. Taking this stat into consideration, what should we reasonably expect from our schools?

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** I found that a really worrying statistic when I looked at it last night because I suspect that some of those youngsters who may have been carrying a knife were probably not that much of a problem in school. They may have been carrying a knife for all sorts of different reasons, including self-defence. But if they had behaved well in school and had a pretty good record, there is no reason why they should be excluded.

**Mark Simmons:** I was going to make more or less the same point. There are different stages. First there is the decision on the individual case that takes into account the circumstances. I was looking at a case study of a young man, small in stature, who was caught with a knife in school. The school, with us, did the inquiry into the background. He talked about 18 months of being bullied that had driven him to that position. He had very



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high scores in attainment in much of his work at school. The decision was to exclude him.

There are going to be circumstances of course where exclusion is absolutely necessary, but the first stage is that decision so that the opportunity for intervention, wherever that takes place, takes place in the right place, whether that is in school for all the reasons that Ms Thomas said about the stability schools can offer, or whether it is in a separate environment in a PRU. Again, the right decision is the first stage so that you have the opportunity to have the right interventions in the right environment.

**Q5 Chair:** Looking at the work of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, would you say that the reduction in knife crime is a direct result of the work you have done to reduce exclusions? Is the current practice of fining parents for their child's absence working?

**Will Linden:** It is not necessarily a direct result of what we have done; it is a direct result of what everybody in Scotland has done. There has been a cultural shift.

Education is a classic example of that. Back in 2007, Glasgow itself had 140 permanent exclusions in one year. Last year there was one. This year there have been zero so far. There has been an 81% decrease in temporary exclusions as well.

I was speaking to the director of education for Glasgow and talking about policies, procedures and so on. The thing that was underlined about this was that this was a cultural shift. It was a cultural shift away from exclusion towards exclusion being the last resort. Glasgow still excludes, but there was this new idea. How can we intervene? Who intervenes? What do we need to do in terms of risk management? How do we consider the whole world of the young person and the world that they come through? What are the unintended consequences of what we do with that child, not only in terms of taking somebody off the roll when, for example, they are entitled to free school meals and they come from a chaotic background? What happens to them in the meantime? All of that was considered. That is not just in terms of where we sat with them in education; it was putting young people at the heart of what we were doing in Scotland in our health service, our justice service and our education service.

We are not finished yet. Scotland still has high levels of violence and high levels of youth violence, but the trajectory is in the right direction.

**Q6 Chair:** Finally, before I pass over to my colleagues, do you believe that in areas where there is a problem with knife crime and a problem in particular schools, there should be stop-and-search for pupils?

**Mark Simmons:** The broad answer is yes. We know that stop-and-search is an effective measure in trying to increase safety and reduce the likelihood that young people will carry knives. There are all the qualifiers



that go with that around how we do it, particularly with young people and particularly around schools. It needs to be done in conjunction with engagement so that there is not only one side of policing—the use of intrusive powers—that young people see, which is behind our current investment in more officers working full time in schools and educational establishments. We absolutely believe that stop-and-search is an important tool when used in the right places with the right intelligence behind it and in the right way.

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** We know that stop-and-search alienates some groups in our society and so it has to be used sensitively by the police. Most head teachers I know would stop and search youngsters they suspect of carrying a weapon. Certainly I did that and my senior staff did that. I resisted putting barriers, alarms or metal detectors in the school to identify the metal when they came in. I resisted that because we do not want our schools to be prison-like. But a lot of these youngsters will go home and pick up a knife and, if they are in a gang, will use it.

**Will Linden:** We need to be very careful. I am a proponent of stop-and-search when it is appropriate and when it is proportionate. However, we must also realise that the overwhelming majority of young people do not engage in crime, do not carry guns, do not carry knives, do not take drugs, and actually live law-abiding lifestyles.

If we take stop-and-search into schools or have higher levels of it, we are then alienating; we are segregating; we are creating an us-and-them situation.

One of the biggest changes we have seen in a single school was the first time we put a campus officer into a school. The campus officer's role was not to police; it was to engage, it was to mentor, it was to build and break down the bonds between the gangs, between the individuals and policing. That school had never had a single applicant to the then Strathclyde Police to become a police officer. In the space of one year, it had eight applications from the school to join policing. We have seen a change in attitude.

In terms of what we want to do in policing, policing's most important weapon in this is not your ability to stop and search. It is your ability to engage; it is your ability to talk, to de-escalate, to understand and build relationships. It is not stop-and-search.

Q7 **Chair:** You said you do favour stop-and-search in response to my question. Could I ask you to respond to what the others have said?

**Mark Simmons:** I have no disagreement at all with those comments. The qualifier is that it needs to be balanced with engagement and it needs to be conducted in the right way with the right approach because, yes, of course it is an intrusive power and it does alienate people if that does not happen. That is why, for the Met, we are investing heavily in more officers working full time in schools. We have gone from 280 or so



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12 to 18 months ago to about 420 officers full time. Our ambition is to get to just under 600 and we are recruiting currently to try to get to that point, which is absolutely the point that Mr Linden was making. We need young people to see police officers not just as the people who stop them in the street and search them, even though that may be an absolutely proportionate and legitimate thing to do, but also someone who can become familiar to them, who can be approachable, who will be engaging with them not just in that environment but day-to-day within the schools. It is a really important part of our approach and it is a major investment for us.

**Q8 Chair:** Why are some PRUs in England much better at fighting the scourge of grooming by gangs than others? What are they doing that other PRUs are not?

**Carlisle Thomas:** It comes down to training. Are these education officials aware of exactly what they are getting involved in? PRUs are not mainstream schools. I also agree that that name needs to be changed very soon because it is a big detriment to the young people who are attending at the moment.

**Q9 Chair:** What would you call them?

**Carlisle Thomas:** Each pupil referral unit should have its own name. They should come up with that together. It should not be down to us to name them.

**Will Linden:** Maybe just call them schools?

**Carlisle Thomas:** Yes, because that is what they are. The minute they get sent into that environment, a young person who already feels like they have failed and like they have been failed sees no opportunity. Their opportunities are reduced even further.

On stop-and-search, I believe that it is a tool that is required. I would like to know how much money it costs and where we could put that money instead of stop-and-search, because it is minority groups that are being stopped and searched.

There is this moral panic that goes across the media. In turn, the Government need to react and implement policies, but these policies sometimes seem to be short-term policies. That is what scares me about the way the media is behaving at the moment. This moral panic starts and, the next thing, you guys in power believe that you quickly need to react because the public are terrified and are in uproar. But the solution is always short term. We are not thinking about two or three years down the line. We are thinking about two weeks down the line.

I believe we need more police presence. We do, but we need mentoring in schools. We used to have pastors in schools back in the day. Every school would have a pastor you could go to. Whether you did not have money for lunch or you had a problem with dad at home, there was



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somebody you could turn to. Now we need mentors who have lived experience and who are in these schools and can identify with these young people on a daily basis—maybe ones who are not in education but who have been involved in knife crime; maybe ones who have experienced bereavement. We need these frontline workers. We need them to build the bridges with the police.

I work with some amazing police officers. I am terrified for them. I am terrified on a day-to-day basis that I might not make it home after work because of the risks that we are taking as frontline workers. For police officers, I am not sure if they know whether they are going to make it through the next hour.

**Q10 Ian Mearns:** Assistant Commissioner, what can the police do to support schools in identifying and protecting at-risk pupils? Is there anything specific? Let us say we have a blank cheque and a perfect world. What would you like to see police being able to do in schools?

**Mark Simmons:** The point that Ms Thomas made is absolutely to the point. Stop-and-search and that sort of enforcement activity is effectively treating the symptom and of course what we want to do, for all the reasons we have heard, is to be working upstream of the challenges. It is about funding for policing, but it is also about the funding available for all the services that jointly can provide the best opportunities to intervene successfully with young people.

I am not an educationalist, so I am probably not the best person to say exactly what those interventions might be. The kinds of things we have been talking about are the right things. It is providing security, stability, routes out and alternatives to being drawn into gangs or criminality, and providing physically safe environments that you can use to build that. But the thing we see right across the sector is that all services have contracted, leaving a gap in which the joint effort, whichever agency is leading any particular aspect of it, is much more challenging now.

**Q11 Ian Mearns:** Sir Michael, earlier you said that in your experience as a head teacher, you have on occasion had to employ a stop-and-search tactic when you believed a youngster was carrying a knife. Would it be useful from your perspective, Mark, as a senior police officer if every school had a specific policy that said that any pupil carrying a knife would automatically lead to a referral to the police?

**Mark Simmons:** It is important that when we—all the people involved—are making decisions that affect the future of that young person, we have the fullest knowledge of all the factors that might come into play. Some of those factors will be known to the police, some of them will be known to the school, some of them will be known to the health service, and so on. We see this where our schools officers work really well. The sharing of information that each agency has is a really important part of getting to the best possible decision in terms of what intervention is appropriate for that young person. In that respect, certainly, yes.



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If the question then takes you to whether the criminal justice system is the right response, that is another question, but it is part of the decision-making. Share the information, share the intelligence, share what is known and have a joint approach to making the best possible decision.

- Q12 **Ian Mearns:** Given that answer, you are talking about a context where all of the support services have contracted. There are fewer out there than there used to be to support young people in their daily lives. Should there be one agency within that mix that automatically has a responsibility for trying to join the dots and bring it all together? Otherwise, if every agency is a bit responsible, nobody takes overall responsibility.

**Mark Simmons:** This is always a tricky balance. On the one hand, you need some clear accountability for who is the decision-maker and who is responsible for following through on whatever decisions are made. I would not like to see that landing on one agency or one person to the extent that others feel able to step away from their responsibility. It is about getting that balance between clarity of accountability in decision-making and, equally, accountability for all the parties to deliver their part of the decision. There is a balance in that, if that is not too woolly an answer. Those are the two opposite ends of that spectrum.

- Q13 **Ian Mearns:** Does anyone else want to comment?

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** I am going to be quite critical of the police on this one, and that is not just from my own experience as a head but from talking to lots of head teachers in London and elsewhere. Often they say that if the community police officer spent time—and by time I mean months and years rather than a few weeks or months—they could make a profound difference to the culture of the school and make a profound difference to those youngsters on the edge of crime.

The trouble is that the community police officers—even if they are good and not on the edge of retirement and posted there because the police force wants them to do something they think is marginal to core activities—they need to spend time in a school, working with the school and the senior staff and building relations with those youngsters who are at risk of crime. But they are whisked out and moved on and there is a turnover.

This Select Committee could possibly look at the statistics in terms of how long community police officers remain within a school.

**Will Linden:** That is a really important point because is not just about services—policing, education, social work or whatever—developing trust with client groups; it is also about services developing trust among each other.

For example, let me take you back to an earlier point about referrals from schools being mandatory, or whatever, to the police. If that teacher or that organisation does not trust the police in terms of their outcomes,



they are not going to refer, which means that young person will fall through the gaps because they will not go near official systems and they will not get the services or the support they need. This is about us developing trust among each other as well. We can do that by identifying good outcomes, support services, networks and critical pathways for young people in order to help and support them.

In Scotland, for example—you asked a question about whether there is a lead agency—there are multiple lead agencies depending on the age and stage of the young person, everything from concern hubs through to early and effective intervention, which the police run, through to our children's reporter, who looks after those under the age of 16 or over the age of 16 if they are reported to social work. Therefore, it would depend. Some agency does have to take the lead, but it is not a single agency. It would depend on the need of the child, and that has to be at the centre.

**Carlie Thomas:** We have not really touched on family involvement. It is really important for the family to be pulled into the situation. For a lot of the families I work with—you were talking about the trust the professionals need to have among each other—it is about building that trust between families and professionals as well.

A lot of our parents are finding knives in their children's rooms. They are finding drugs. They do not know whether to report it. They are terrified. They don't want social services involved and do not want the police involved because their experiences have been really, really bad previously. We see bad press about social workers and social services and children being taken away. Every social worker I work with does their utmost to make sure that child stays with their family. The last thing we want is for that child or that young person to be removed. But parents do not really understand that. They think, "If I report this to social services or if I phone the police, what is going to happen to my child? Is he going to be removed from the family home?" Do they want him removed from the family home or do they want to be burying him or witnessing him at the morgue? It is such a different balance for them to weigh up.

There are so many different aspects but the family is number one and definitely pulling the community in, too.

Q14 **Lucy Powell:** Thank you very much indeed. I represent inner-city Manchester and we are dealing with a lot of these issues that you describe.

In terms of early intervention, we have talked about resources. We have talked about joining up, about having longer-term relationships and about it all being relational. What do you see as being the one, two or three key barriers to flipping this around to an early intervention model from what we are doing at the moment, which is dealing with the consequences of failure? Kids dying and carrying knives are the consequences of failure, in my opinion.



**Will Linden:** As an outsider looking in, and looking at the Scottish experience, I will be honest and say that this does not take money. Money helps, money allows you to accelerate, money allows you to develop services and have support services where required, and sometimes we might need more money, but you can make system changes now. You can make changes in terms of the culture and attitudes that we have among our services and what outcomes we are moving towards without any money.

Right now, we spend a considerable amount of money across all of our services, with the exception of the third-sector services, which are struggling because of the funding models we have, and we might need to look at that. But actually, we need to think about how we combine our efforts and how we look after the outcomes of that individual, rather than think about our own silo spends, silo KPIs and silo performance measures. The only performance measure in this is the outcome for that young person.

Q15 **Lucy Powell:** How would you do that? Give us some practical tips.

**Will Linden:** It has to be about case management in terms of what you are looking at. There are several aspects to this. If you have a young person who is on the edge, who may have brought a knife into school, who may have been in significant trouble, there are case management and risk management processes. There is understanding the family. There is looking at how you can tackle some of the issues underneath it, rather than just excluding. There might be some temporary form of exclusion, but it is very temporary.

Q16 **Lucy Powell:** How do you get everyone working together around that? I hear what you are saying and I completely agree with you, but how do we make that happen such that different parts of the system are talking to each other and are consistent and are doing that?

**Will Linden:** That is why I am saying it is cultural. Legislation allows us to do that. Under GDPR and under even the old Data Protection Act, we can share information with each other at a strategic level.

Q17 **Lucy Powell:** Are these meetings that should happen?

**Will Linden:** Yes, they are just meetings. If a young person is identified, who are all the key actors?

Q18 **Lucy Powell:** Early help meetings and that kind of thing?

**Will Linden:** Yes, bring them in and everybody can sit there, talk about that young person and look for the best outcomes and the best support. That best support might not be with social work. It might be with something like the St Giles Trust. It may well be another agency. It is to understand what is available in that area. These are very local solutions to local problems.

Q19 **Lucy Powell:** These are place-based local solutions?



**Will Linden:** Yes.

Q20 **Lucy Powell:** You work with Manchester and so you are supporting that. Describe for the whole Committee and for everybody else what that looks like and how we might encourage people to do it. We say it but then it is not happening, is it?

**Carlie Thomas:** It is happening in some places in London. When I first started out in this field, I worked alongside Southwark's anti-violence unit and that had a great approach. We were all working together as a team. We had two mentors, caseworkers from St Giles; we had probation; we had a YOT member; we had an education, training and employment person; we had someone from the jobcentre; we had a mental health practitioner. All of those people sat in a room once a fortnight and we discussed those cases. That is still continuing now. Their funding will run out very soon and I hope that it gets renewed.

That is the kind of approach. You are right that it does not take money. It takes heads to get together.

Q21 **Lucy Powell:** Who commissions that?

**Carlie Thomas:** Southwark Council.

Q22 **Lucy Powell:** Is it the council often that needs to convene this.

**Mark Simmons:** It can be the council. The council is a player in all of this and is a significant agency. Whether it is necessarily the lead agency, I am not sure.

I wonder about the incentives that mean that the issues we are talking about—the reduction in violence and risk for young people—is sufficiently incentivised for all the people involved. The police have a headline responsibility around safety on the streets. Other agencies have headline responsibilities that can feel different. I wonder about the incentivisation.

We have a programme we are trying to implement at the moment called Schools Watch, which is about safer routes for young people after they leave school. We know that a peak time for violence for young people is broadly between 3 pm and 6 pm. Schools Watch is a pretty simple thing. It is us and other people who know the young people and are engaged with the young people being present in the places where young people go on their routes home. We have 78 schools across London that have taken that up and are working with us on how we implement that. We have 40-something that have declined to do that. There may be good reasons for some of the individual ones where that may not be appropriate, but there is something about what incentivises organisations and agencies to be involved and to own the problem in the route.

Q23 **Lucy Powell:** I am talking about the early intervention piece and, as you say, how you change the incentives, change the culture and change the approach so that, as was said earlier, we are not all dealing with how we



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get the numbers down over the next two months, but are thinking 10 years before that about how we deal with trauma, difficult home lives, behaviour and all of that.

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** Early intervention is absolutely critical. Good schools in the sorts of areas that I have worked in for most of my life adopt the view that they have to be surrogate parents for the children. That means starting early with a breakfast club, making sure that the school day goes on beyond the end of the school day to 6 pm or 7 pm in the evening, giving the youngsters a meal at the end of the day and working with them on their homework. We use that phrase “wrap-around support”. Good schools do that a lot.

Also, they ensure that those youngsters achieve well at an early stage and build their confidence so that they can see themselves achieving well, whereas previously they may not have. They also ensure that there is great integration between the pastoral staff in the school and the academics like heads of departments and so on, so that there is strong integration there.

Q24 **Lucy Powell:** Is some of that getting harder with funding pressures?

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** It is harder with funding pressures. An example of what I mean by that is that there were some youngsters who were so off the wall, who were so difficult and who could not be coped with in a mainstream classroom that we had to provide a therapeutic unit for them. That means a qualified teacher, a teaching assistant and medical services coming in when required. That cost—going back eight years—about £50,000 to £60,000. We would not be able to afford that now. But it meant that those six or seven youngsters were not excluded and could continue with their education and, most importantly, could continue in the environment they had become used to.

These youngsters need continuity. Change breaks up the continuum they have been used to. There will be some good pupil referral centres, but it means that those youngsters leave the routines, leave the culture they have been used to and leave the staff they have formed relationships with, and go off elsewhere to meet other youngsters in the same position. That cannot be a good thing.

Q25 **Lucy Powell:** Might there be a correlation between some of the funding challenges we are seeing in schools and a rise in the number of exclusions?

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** There is no question about that. I have spoken to the executive head of the school I worked at. We could not afford that facility now. There is undoubtedly a connection.

Q26 **Chair:** In our Select Committee’s report on exclusions and alternative provision, we looked at the learning support centres in schools and suggested that probably they should be more widespread and have properly trained staff. Some of them have teaching assistants.



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Would you prefer that to alternative provision? Are you saying that we should have proper learning support units in most schools, properly resourced, with properly trained staff? Is that the answer to this problem?

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** Absolutely. We have now developed a structure. This is basically a secondary issue. I know that some youngsters get excluded from primary schools, but in the main it is a secondary schools issue and it is a key stage 4 issue. There is every reason why, with the sophisticated structure we now have of multi-academy trusts with schools working together within those trusts, those sorts of units can be set up.

Q27 **Marion Fellows:** Good morning, everyone. It is nice to see you, Will. You will understand what I am saying. Neither of us wants to pretend that everything in Scotland is perfect, but there is more partnership working and a more child-centred approach to what we do.

Will, what can the Committee learn from Scotland's public health approach to tackling violence and what schools do in this approach?

**Will Linden:** The realisation that it is not an education problem is crucial. You might be an Education Committee. You might be looking at what we can do from an education standpoint, but the phrases, "Teachers can only teach what parents provide," and, "It takes a community to raise a child," are absolutely on the nail. Schools can be up against it. We often put pressure on schools: "You must tackle knife crime. You must tackle gangs. You must look at drugs. You must look at healthy eating. You must do this. You must do that." We put a lot of pressure on schools. Schools are there to educate. We need to think about what we want.

At the same time, schools are there as places of safety, places where people can grow emotionally with wellbeing. That has been recognised in Scotland, despite funding cuts. If we go back to the point earlier about funding cuts possibly leading to exclusions, there may well be a correlation with that, but there also may well be a correlation between that and the growth of the academy system or the growth of, for example, competitiveness, league tables and performance measures.

We have learned in Scotland that there is no single solution. There are multiple solutions to multiple problems. There is not one easy fix. If you ban exclusion tomorrow, it is not going to fix the problem. If you introduce trauma-based therapies into a school, it is not going to fix the problem. However, looking at exclusion, introducing trauma therapies, and having a better connection to social services, to education, to policing, to communities and to families will start to improve it.

The thing I have preached about in terms of Scotland is that you cannot copy what Scotland has done. Scotland is its own separate space with its own separate set of problems. But you can do what we did in Scotland: try to understand where our problem is and develop the solutions that we require. That is what we need down here. It is what London needs. It is



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what England and Wales need. Look at your own individual problems and develop your own bespoke solutions.

**Q28 Chair:** The level of exclusions in Scotland is so low. What happens to these pupils who are not excluded and who have significant difficulties? What are the outcomes for those pupils who probably in England might be excluded but in Scotland are not?

**Will Linden:** We are probably at a natural level of exclusion now rather than exclusion being a first choice and saying, "That is a troubled child. That is a knife-carrying child. We will exclude," with almost a zero-tolerance policy. We still exclude in Scotland, but it is at a low level. We try to keep them in.

At the time, there would be case conferencing, there would be looking at the risk, there would be working with mentors, there might be working with social work. It is an individual solution for each individual child. There is not a single policy saying, "You will go to a pupil referral unit," because we do not have them, or, "You will do this. You will go there." It is child-centred. It is all part of our GIRFEC model—getting it right for every child—and putting a whole world around that child. At the same time that schools have adopted this and social work has adopted this, policing is adopting this through our early and effective intervention, and it is Government policy. We are all singing from the same policy area. There is not a separate policy; it is one Government policy.

**Q29 Chair:** Do you have special learning support units in the schools for pupils with significant difficulties, as we were discussing a moment ago, or mentoring in every school?

**Will Linden:** We will have some support but not to the degree they have down here. We will have some support for it. The system is entirely different in Scotland. We may well have some throughout the country and I could not comment on the actual numbers, but certainly not to that degree. We try to keep children in mainstream schooling as much as possible.

**Q30 Chair:** What happens to the few pupils who are excluded? What are their outcomes? Where do they go? What goes on?

**Will Linden:** There is a commitment for X number of hours per day in terms of education. They have to be educated. We will provide private tutoring. We will provide various different forms of tutoring, usually in the home or in their care or somewhere else if they are in another place.

**Q31 Chair:** What are the outcomes for these excluded children?

**Will Linden:** I could not give you the number. I have not seen the statistics on that.

**Q32 James Frith:** We are waiting on the publication of the Timpson review, Timpson being the former Children's Minister. He was set up to do a review, initially prompted by the race disparity audit, particularly about



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which groups are excluded. It has had added to it, as has been referred to in answers to parliamentary questions, a focus on the exclusion numbers rising, the knife crime epidemic, the SEND education system, and the representation of SEND children in exclusions, which is now at 70%.

What should we be expecting from the Timpson review? He has been tasked with rather a lot, has he not?

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** I have huge admiration for Mr Timpson. I worked with him when I was at Ofsted. He has a difficult job. It is undoubtedly true that those youngsters who are in most need of support—special needs, SEND youngsters, those on free school meals—are the most likely to be excluded. That is a scandal. We need to make sure that the services for those children are good and of high quality.

It comes back to the point made by your colleague: have the cuts in education had a detrimental effect on the services for those sorts of children? It is absolutely so. Talk to any head and they will say that. This is a funding issue. You cannot get away from it. We can say, “Yes, money is not the complete answer,” but unless you have those services for those vulnerable children, they will cause problems in school.

**Q33 James Frith:** Is the knife crime epidemic a response to a failure of SEND education in mainstream schools?

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** I think it is complex. That could be one of the things. If you take London—I know London well because I was a teacher and a head in London—it has the best schools in the country. If you measure it by progress measures, outcome measures and what Ofsted says, London has the best secondary schools in the country. Yet the biggest problem in terms of knife crime is in London.

If you look at the north of England, it has the top 10 local authority areas for the highest rates of exclusion. They are all in the north: Middlesbrough, Barnsley, Redcar and Cleveland, Doncaster, Knowsley, North East Lincolnshire, Sheffield, Telford, North Lincolnshire and Rotherham. What is the correlation between exclusion and knife crime?

The reason why we have great schools in London but there is a lot of knife crime is because of the proliferation of gangs, which in my time grew and grew and grew. This is a police issue. You talk to head teachers, and they will tell you who the gang leaders are. Unless the police get a hold of these gang leaders and the senior teams in those gangs and do something about them at an early stage—we are talking about early intervention, but early intervention with those gangs—this problem will continue. The correlation between exclusions and quality of schools very quickly—

**Q34 James Frith:** Part of that journey of early intervention includes the process of exclusion, which you talked about having presided over yourself. You are essentially feeding that chain of pupils or former pupils



into harm's way.

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** There will be some occasions when you have to exclude for the safety of others in the school—for example, if somebody has become so dangerous and so persistently disruptive in the school. Because there is not the provision out there—this therapeutic unit that I am talking about saved lots of children, but it did not save all of them—these youngsters became a real danger in the school, particularly if they are associating with gangs outside the school. You have no option but to exclude to protect the great majority of children in that institution. What we have seen is a huge rise in serious gang violence.

Q35 **James Frith:** Carlie, are you awaiting the Timpson review as a silver bullet to this problem?

**Carlie Thomas:** Yes. I hope that there are some good suggestions and recommendations that we can all follow, but again I think it is about all of us coming together. In terms of what Sir Michael just said, we can take out these gang members, we can take out these foot soldiers, we can exit them from what they are involved in, but the minute we take those ones out, another one is ready to step in line. They are all ready to climb up that ladder very quickly.

I was part of the county lines pilot project in Kent, which was an amazing experience. It was absolutely terrifying and daunting because I thought that I had seen and heard and witnessed everything in London, but the moment we arrived in Kent I was like, "Wow, this is the next level." A lot of that was down to the education system, around our young people being put in pupil referral units. When they were excluded from the pupil referral units, there was nowhere to put them. There was no funding for home tutoring. Suddenly, we had these boys running county lines. They were running shifts. They were making £200 a day, some of them. Some of them were making £1.80 a day. Everybody was confused—professionals were confused. Nobody knew which way to go or what to do with these young people, and I think we need clarification.

In London, you are right, we do have some of the best schools. We have some amazing professionals all pulling together. We need to consider the rest of the country as well, and this is not just a London-based issue. This is spreading out far, far, far.

Q36 **James Frith:** Mark, would you like to just respond to Sir Michael's comment that this is a police matter?

**Mark Simmons:** Yes. I have to say, I think the idea that if the police sorted out gangs, all the problems that we are talking about for young people—vulnerability, being drawn into crime—would go away does not meet the point that gang culture is not a single, coherent thing. You do not have "gang" and then "not gang"; you have all the different degrees of young people being drawn into criminal activity in all sorts of ways, whether it is about county lines, sexual exploitation or all those sorts of things.



The phenomenon we see around gangs in London is a circular one. Yes, there is a market around drugs that will drive some of it. There are various things that happen in the drugs market that create an environment where that is attractive and financially rewarding for young people if they do not see alternatives. You see the process—which is absolutely at the heart of what we are talking about—by which young people get drawn into gangs as an alternative to other family, other stability and all those sorts of things that we hear about. All the issues are linked. It is not as simple as: if the police sorted out gangs, the rest of the problem is not there.

In the same way as Mr Linden said, neither am I saying this is all an education problem. The challenges we are talking about are ones that have perspectives from all sorts of different places. I do not think it is as simple as that. You could go behind that and say, if we sort out drug importation into the UK, then we sort out a big element of the economy that drives some aspects of gang culture, but we know that is a huge international problem.

This is about the role that all the different agencies, different organisations and different groups have in working together. It is not about saying, "It is over to you. It is your responsibility." It is a bit like the answer to Ian's question about who is accountable. Everyone has to be accountable for their part in achieving something. It is the whole system—

**Q37 James Frith:** On power and authority, do local authorities have enough power to monitor those kids that do get excluded? Is there a lack of power for local authorities to monitor kids that have been excluded? Which other agencies could do with more power in relation to this?

**Carlie Thomas:** I do not think it is necessarily about power. I think it comes back down to funding again, and what we are able to provide in terms of training and really bringing in the third-sector organisations. They are a massive part of this, and I am not just saying it because I work for St Giles Trust. It is really, really important. We see the work that third-sector organisations do. We see the bridges that they fill.

I explain to my young people—I am going to say how I speak to them—that I am not a "fed", I am not part of the gangs unit, I am not probation, I am not YOT, I am not the church because we are from St Giles. I am an ex-offender who works very closely with those people who are trying to provide, empower and support these young people on their journey. I do think it is important that we pull the third sector back in.

In terms of who is best placed to work with these young people, I think we should have almost one leading the way. We are all working together, we are all sharing information the whole time, but it might be that the social worker has the best relationship with that young person. It may be probation. It may even be a police officer. I work with a lot of Trident officers who have really good relationships with my clients because they



have built that, because they have an understanding. They are not saying, "You are a perpetrator, you are a perpetrator. We see you as a victim. We see you as being exploited." They have to use their words quite carefully because these young people do not want to hear that they are being exploited or that they are victims.

Again, I do not know if it is about power. I think it is about us working from one point and working alongside each other. We are losing lives left, right and centre, guys. This really has to stop—it has to stop.

**Q38 Lucy Allan:** Thank you very much for the powerful evidence that you have all been giving this morning. Will articulated extremely well the burdens on schools and teachers, and Sir Michael, you were talking about the duty to protect other children. Schools are in this awful position where if they exclude a child, that child be in a much more detrimental situation than if they did not, but equally they have these other children to protect. How do we, as legislators, get around that?

We just had a debate yesterday in Parliament on this issue. Children with knife crime convictions will not be allowed to go to a pupil referral unit. What happens to them, and how can we square the circle? I will start with Sir Michael.

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** It is a good question and it relates to the previous question about the role of local authorities. You will know that local authorities in many ways have been marginalised in terms of the oversight of what goes on in schools over the last 10 to 15 years. We have had the growth of academies and autonomous institutions. I think the picture is confused at the moment. I am not sure local authorities know what is happening in their schools, and particularly in schools that are not their own—academies and free schools—and feel wary of intervening with very powerful chief executives who will say, "Hold on a minute. You have no control, no power, no influence on my institution or the schools within my institutions."

There has to be a better balance, and local authorities need to have a part to play in monitoring what is happening in all their schools, including academies and free schools, not just these regional schools commissioners who have a huge part—

**Q39 Lucy Allan:** Would you have all heads under a duty to report to local authorities where crime is—

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** Not just a duty to report to the local authority on exclusions, but the local authority should have a duty to monitor. Since a lot of these exclusions involve children with special educational needs and difficulties, local authorities should be able to track what happens to a youngster from a poor background with special educational needs from nursery to key stage 1, to key stage 2, to key stage 3, to key stage 4. I have said this many, many times. The should be able to track them and make sure that they do not fall through the net.



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Q40 **Ian Mearns:** There was a proposal that was being worked on in the north of England called ContactPoint. I am afraid that Michael Gove abolished it. It was a tracking system for every single young person, and it would have worked. The pilot was very effective.

**James Frith:** It was multi-agency.

**Ian Mearns:** Yes, multi-agency, absolutely, but it was abolished.

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** I have worked in systems with local authorities, and I was head of an academy and have worked with academy trusts. We need a better balance in our system. I was no great fan of local authorities, and they presided over a system that declined over 50 years. We have shaken it all up, but there has to be a part that they play in monitoring what is happening in all their schools, including those that are autonomous.

Q41 **Lucy Allan:** I just want to move on quickly to Mark. I used to be involved in a pupil referral unit, and the thought there was, "If we have somebody with a conviction for knife crime, we do not want them." Why would anybody be reporting to the police if that conviction would have such a dramatic consequence for that child? What would you say to me as a pupil referral unit head, for example?

**Mark Simmons:** The broad thing I would say is that if everyone says as soon as someone has a conviction for knife crime, "I don't want them," where do they end up? Where do they go? We already know that absenteeism for people who should be at PRUs is very high. We cannot just cast people adrift because they have a conviction for anything.

Q42 **Lucy Allan:** You can see why they would, given their duties and responsibilities.

**Mark Simmons:** Of course you would. That is behind the point I tried to make earlier on about, "How do you incentivise people?" I know the example I used was a here-and-now tactical thing, but it is important to upstream the interventions that have a longer-term potential effect.

On the local authority piece specifically, there is a role for local authorities. I agree with Sir Michael on that. I think we have to be careful about seeing local authorities as the answer. We know that one of the other things we could spend just as much time talking about probably is the correlation between looked-after children and criminality and vulnerability, and all those sorts of things. It is not as if local authorities do not have a significant chunk of challenge on this already.

We know that in other areas of partnership working, whether it is in other aspects of safeguarding or where the statutory responsibilities are really clear, the police and the local authority will be working jointly, whatever effect that has. Other organisations are more difficult to bring into that. Yes, there is a role for local authorities. Yes, they clearly can be one of the hubs around which some of this work revolves, but it goes back to the point that that is not to the exclusion of the responsibility and



accountability of all the other people who engage in the same way, if that makes sense.

**Q43 Lucy Allan:** Did you want to add anything to that, on squaring the circle between the duty to society as a whole and the duty to the children under your care as a school head?

**Carlie Thomas:** In a school, as a school head, as a teacher or as a parent, if you have one child that has been caught with a knife in the school, then obviously you are thinking about the risk to all the other children in the school as well. If we do not place those young people anywhere, the risk is just going to increase. You have 20 people in the PRU that are at risk from that one young person. If that young person is not placed in any form of education, you are going to triple that. You have the family. You have the community.

Where is that young person for seven hours of the day? They out there selling drugs, doing what they are doing, carrying a knife, trying to find another way to get on in life, somewhere else to fit in, somewhere to belong. You almost have 20 people versus 200. We cannot leave these people to their own devices—they do not understand; they really do not understand what is going on for them.

The other thing—I do not want to open the topic up even further—is that our education system is not fit for every young person. It is not fit for them. Not everybody is academically on point. For me, I left school with no GCSEs. I left school with nothing at all because I was not in that mind-space. There was bereavement. There were other issues going on. I did not have that support around me. I was really good with my hands, I was good at physical aspects, but nobody ever highlighted my good points. Nobody homed in on the positive aspects of me. That is what we need to do with our young people.

With every young man that I work with, when I first meet them, we put together a support plan. Whether they are 14 or they are 21, I am like, "Right, what do you want from me?" "I want you to help me get my GCSEs." That is what they want. They want their GCSEs. We think that they are all out there and they do not want GCSEs and they do not care about qualifications. They do. They really do, but at that point, if they are good at woodwork—I know we are going basic—let us really home in on the woodwork aspect.

I have a young man at the moment who I am working with. He is 15. He is due to take his GCSEs very soon. He is really good at English. He is not so great at maths. We do not have time to get him up to the standard in maths, but do you know what? "Let's get you passing your English." In September he is going to do an apprenticeship, so he will do his maths GCSE then, but let's come away from school with something, even if that is high self-esteem and confidence.

**Q44 James Frith:** Should schools be kept responsible for the results of the



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pupils they exclude?

**Chair:** That is the recommendation of our Committee report. Yes and no answers. Do you agree? You do not?

**Will Linden:** I do not know. I would say yes, but I do not know enough about the issue.

**Carlie Thomas:** I think we just need to know the reasons behind the exclusions, and if that is documented, we will be able to tackle the situation a little bit more.

**Mark Simmons:** My instinct is to say yes.

Q45 **Ian Mearns:** Just a quick response to your comments about local authorities, Assistant Commissioner. Most youngsters in the care system have gone into the care system as already troubled teenagers. It is not necessarily the local authorities' fault that the youngsters under their care are in trouble or having some real problems. They have quite often gone into the care system as already troubled teenagers.

**Mark Simmons:** I absolutely accept in the same way that for troubled children at school, the troubles may originate from before they got to their schools, so I take the point, absolutely.

Q46 **Ben Bradley:** I have a question about early intervention. We have covered it in quite some depth, and I have some variations on the theme. Carlie, you mentioned inner cities and then going out to Kent and the different elements that exist there. Sir Michael, you talked about the places in the north-east, in particular with high levels of exclusion rates. They tend to be fairly deprived industrial towns, similar to Mansfield, which I represent. There are clear differences in the challenges and in the services in particular, if we talk about those kinds of towns where the concentration of those services does not exist in the same way as it does in inner-city London. Does the approach to this in terms of intervention need to be different, therefore, across those different parts of the country, or is there something that we can say: "Local authorities need to do X"? How do we balance that?

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** We need better secondary schools in the north of England. I produced two reports in my last two years at Ofsted that highlighted the yawning gap in outcomes, progress measures and Ofsted judgments between secondary schools in the north of England and in London in the south. If memory serves me right, of the 16 local authorities that had the worst outcomes in terms of Ofsted judgments, EBacc scores and GCSE scores, 13 were in the north.

We need good schools everywhere in England and Britain. We do not need this disparity. As long as we have poor schools or underperforming schools in the north of England, we will have high rates of exclusion, as we have here. I do not think there is a correlation between high rates of



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exclusion in places like Middlesbrough and knife crime, but there are high rates of exclusion, with all the consequent effects of that.

**Will Linden:** I do not think knife crime is your only measure when you are looking at issues regarding violence and exclusion in schools. Knife crime is a very small part of it.

In terms of our understanding of what is happening in the north, and in terms of exclusion versus the south as well, I am not sure it is just as simple as needing good schools. The teacher training is roughly the same. The teachers are all connected across the country. There is something else going on there, rather than just saying it is a schools issue. There are other social factors at play. I appreciate when we are looking at school scores and performance measures that comes out, but what is adding to that and what is creating that? I am not an expert in that area.

When we are looking at the issues of schools and of violence, we have to think about violence in the whole. We have to think about the problems in the whole. Whether it is just bullying in the schools and kids getting excluded for bullying, or whether they have been domestically violent, or whether they have been involved in other crime and criminality, the drivers that are causing the young person to behave and to communicate through their behaviour in certain ways are just the same in London as they are in the north of England.

Q47 **Ben Bradley:** Sir Michael, you mentioned parents earlier on. It caught me. Are you talking about extending the school day—7 am until 7 pm or whatever—and having that structure and support? I absolutely understand that. It makes perfect sense. The other side of the coin and one of the challenges that I certainly find visiting schools is how they engage with parents. Obviously, at some point the kids have to go home. I visited a school last Friday where the kids went home after primary school. Their parents never emerged. The following morning, they got themselves dressed and brought themselves back in. They are primary school kids. How do we do that? We cannot just take kids away for more and more of the day; we have to engage parents in those processes. What is happening to try to do that?

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** You are quite right. The family is still a great educator. I am what I am and you are what you are, because of the families we came from probably. Schools can only build on the values and the support and the love that families give them. If a child comes from a dysfunctional family, a family that is not working and where there is little love, little care and attention, then they are more likely to get into trouble in school. The idea of a child who struggles to get dressed in the morning and leaves home without a breakfast—to then have to come in to school and start learning. If you look at the groups of children who get excluded the most, they are white youngsters from low-income backgrounds, and Afro-Caribbean youngsters, or youngsters from an Afro-Caribbean heritage, particularly Caribbean. There are lots of reasons



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for that, but one of them is lack of support from family members and dysfunctionality within the family.

Q48 **Ben Bradley:** You talk about police engagement in schools, which is something I very much welcome. Does that extend to home as well? Do parents engage with that?

**Mark Simmons:** The locus is around the school—the relationship with the school is the foundation for the work those officers do. In some places there is greater parental involvement with the officers, whether it is about groups of parents wanting to do something or whether it is about individual parents, when it comes to resolving and deciding around a particular individual. That is variable. Officers will do home visits with young people as part of the process, particularly if they come to notice because they are carrying a knife, say, and so on. Home visits will be one of the things that may well happen as part of that, or meeting with the parents.

Q49 **Ben Bradley:** Great, thank you. This is my final question. Carlie, I guess you work with this day to day. What is our trajectory at the minute if we do not bring this together, if we do not tackle this? What is that going to look like?

**Carlie Thomas:** As I have already said a few times, we have lost too many lives up until now, and even today we are talking about school exclusion and knife crime. In six months we are going to be talking about school exclusion and gun crime. This is escalating massively.

I need to come back to the family as well—the parents. The majority of parents that I work with are loving individuals. They want the best for their children. They are out there working 12 or 13-hour days because they are on low-paid jobs and zero-hour contracts. They are not able to get breakfast ready for their children before they go to school because they have already left the house. They are not there for their children when they get home from work to put dinner on the table because they are doing their fifth shift of the day or fifth different job of the day. We really need to support these families. We do need to look at maybe after-school clubs—those basic, simple things where our young people do have a safe space that they can go to and they are not at risk.

In Forest Hill the other day we had a young man, at 4.10 pm on Monday, pulling a 12-inch blade from his chest where he had been stabbed. He was in his school uniform. What on earth is going on? It is absolutely bonkers out there. This is only going to get worse. It is only going to get worse. I do not want to sound negative, but right now, for me, it is not going to get better any time soon. We really have to escalate. We really have to pull together on this one.

Q50 **Chair:** Did you want to comment briefly?

**Mark Simmons:** Very briefly, yes. A lot of the activity, certainly the police involvement, is the suppression activity. That is having an impact.



It is not the long-term solution. We are already seeing indications—and there is independent research that suggests this is the case—that the traditional factors that took people out of crime, such as getting a job, getting married and all those things that the long-standing criminological research would say is why people stop offending, are reducing in impact. We are seeing people staying involved in criminality and particularly in the gang culture longer, and that is clearly a concern if that is not something we can interrupt.

**Q51 Chair:** Sir Michael, you are not known as a kind of woolly liberal on these matters. When we did our report and whenever we have written on this, there has been a huge backlash from traditionalists about this subject of exclusions, and you have made clear that you want to as much as possible stop exclusions today, and you expressed how damaging they are.

The DfE behavioural advisor, Tom Bennett, as one example of this, described our report in *The Guardian*, suggesting that the children that our report forgets “are the vast majority of students who don’t tell teachers to go to hell, who don’t commit routine acts of violence against others, persistently bully terrified peers, or wilfully and continually disrupt the learning of others. To ignore the needs of all children and staff in schools is extraordinarily shortsighted, and almost callous by default.” He actually said that our report should be turned upside down and read backwards and it was wrongheaded—he did not mince his words.

As I say, the reason why I ask you specifically this question is because you are not seen as a woolly liberal, and you are a traditionalist in many respects, are very keen on high standards and are known for that in our schools, yet what you have said today is quite contrary to what people like Tom Bennett and others are saying. How would you respond to that?

**Sir Michael Wilshaw:** I know Tom Bennett well, and he is wrong on this one. We are all members of a society that we want to work. Our education system now—and I have been in it for half a century—is better than it has ever been. There are high standards across the key stages. There are pockets of problems and underperformance, particularly in the north of England’s secondary schools and so on, and I am worried about GFE and skills, but we have a better education system now than ever before. More poor children are going to university and so on; you know the statistics. Why do we have violence on our streets in a way that I have never seen?

We have always had youth crime, from the teddy boys and the razor gangs to modern rockers beating each other up on Southend beach and football violence. We have always had that, but this is different. This is vicious; it is planned. We have a generation of young people who are frightened—frightened to go home in the evening because they are worried about crossing the road into another postcode, and then landing in the territory of a gang they know will do them harm. We have a generation of very frightened young people who are doing well in school,



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but as soon as they leave the school gates are fearful for their lives. You talk about youngsters carrying knives who get in trouble because of one incident. Often they are carrying that knife to defend themselves. That is a real social issue for all of us. We have mean streets developing in parts of London and Birmingham and elsewhere, and children and young people are frightened.

**Q52 Chair:** Thank you. Please, go on—it is what you are here for because your answers are brilliant.

**Carlie Thomas:** I know—sometimes I talk too much, so I do apologise, guys.

**Chair:** No, it is wonderful. It is wonderful, honestly. I wish we had more time, but please.

**Carlie Thomas:** Thank you. On the back of what Sir Michael said, it is amazing that the education statistics are improving, and university numbers are going up, but that is not improving for my young people. They are not profiting. They are not going to university. For me, I went to university five or six years ago. I got those GCSEs that I left school without. I got the A-levels. I got the degree. It cost me £50,000 to go to university. I do not care about that. For me, I do not care, but these people are looking out, looking in, and with how much it is going to cost them, they are like, “I can’t do that. I don’t have access to that kind of money.” I had to borrow everything to go to university. I am sure I will not pay it off by the time I leave this world, but that is fine because it has enabled me to do what I am doing today and to try to give my young people the best knowledge.

There is scaremongering in the media—this moral panic. It all comes back to the media, as well, for me. On the back of what you were saying, Sir Michael, the majority of our young people are carrying knives because they are scared. They are scared of what is going to happen to them if they do not. The fact is, if any one of us in this room was to carry a bladed article and someone was to approach us and we felt threatened and we felt scared, the likelihood is we might pull that knife out ourselves. I am not a violent person, we are not violent people, but if we are put in a situation where we are scared and we have a bladed article, we may use it. I understand what is going on on roads right now for these youngsters.

**Q53 Chair:** Thank you. Just a very final question to you, Mark Simmons—I am going to ask you a couple, but if you could just answer briefly because of time. This is about the safer school partnerships. Given the lack of hard evidence on the efficiency of safer school partnerships, what plans do you have to gauge their impact on school-level offending? How does the MPS decide who becomes a safer school officer? How can you be confident the best officers for the job are being recruited to the positions, and to what extent are the resources going to be spread across schools? There is quite a lot in there.



**Mark Simmons:** When we are looking at the safer school partnerships, we look at a range of indicators around both the school and the environs, around crime and antisocial behaviour. There is a range of things we look at that drive where we prioritise in terms of investment, and we would clearly look for those to have an impact on those things through the partnership.

In terms of the officers, this is not a role that every police officer is going to be suited to doing. We are investing quite heavily in the training for them and in their professional development. Sir Michael's earlier point about continuity is absolutely critical. No, the majority of them are not people at the last stage of their careers. They are people who have an enthusiasm and commitment for this work. Identifying the right people, getting the right investment in them both from our point of view, but also with other agencies that can help with their professional development, is really important.

Q54 **Chair:** What resources are you putting in to make sure these safer school officers do their jobs well?

**Mark Simmons:** There is investment in terms of the training and professional support for them, and there is investment in terms of the structures that support their work in school, but our organisation sits outside the school, so there is supervision, oversight, and additional staff to come and support them on particular initiatives, particular pieces of work and so forth.

**Chair:** Could I thank you all very, very much indeed? We will probably publish something on what you have said, but I hope that policymakers read the transcript of all the evidence today. Thank you for your public service, all of you, and for what you do. We must hope that it will help.

**Carlie Thomas:** Thank you for having us.