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Enacting the Prevent Duty in Secondary Schools

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Abstract This chapter explores the ways that context shapes the enactment of the Prevent Duty in secondary schools. Drawing on interviews with educators and Prevent practitioners, it argues that the practice of counter-radicalisation in secondary schools is shaped by regional, professional and institutional contexts, and that a greater focus on contextual factors, which are often neglected in the existing literature, might better explain how counter-radicalisation is practised at the local and institutional levels. Through this discussion, it highlights that it is such factors that ultimately determine whether secondary schools are able to enact Prevent in ways likely to be effective, or that enable them to avoid any potentially harmful impacts.

This work was supported by an Economic and Social Research Council PhD studentship through the North West Doctoral Training Centre [grant number ES/J500094/1].

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Keywords Prevent Duty • Radicalisation • British values • Secondary schools • Safeguarding

Introduction

Whilst all educational institutions are now subject to the Prevent Duty, secondary schools have faced particular public scrutiny in the wake of what has become *the* exemplar of radicalisation for many (Lundie, 2019, p. 329): the case of three schoolgirls from a Bethnal Green secondary school who travelled to Syria in 2015. Extensive media coverage around this case served to frame secondary school students as particularly vulnerable to radicalisation. And today, this age-group appears to face particular scrutiny given that the median age of all individuals referred to Channel from the education sector in 2018/2019 was 14 (Home Office, 2019, p. 9).

Secondary schools face distinct challenges in enacting the Prevent Duty. Prevent is underpinned by the disputed assumption that radicalisation is a product of ‘vulnerability’ (see Chap. 2), yet this concept becomes increasingly problematic as secondary school students progress into adolescence and increasingly come to be seen as actors in their own right. It is widely agreed that secondary schools should be fostering the political agency of their students, but signs of growing political agency, when viewed through a lens of vulnerability, can potentially come to be seen as indicators of risk (see Coppock & McGovern, 2014, p. 250).

Primary school pupils are undeniably children, whilst students in colleges have many of the legal rights of adults, and some are legally adults, having turned 18. However, many secondary school students exist somewhere between childhood and adulthood. In serving those who are neither ‘villains’ nor ‘victims’ (see Sieckelinck, Kaulingfreks, & De Winter, 2015) secondary schools must balance questions of vulnerability and agency in specific ways, whilst being subject to a public discourse framing their students as particularly ‘vulnerable’ adolescents.

This chapter argues that these discourses of vulnerability go some way towards shaping Prevent work across secondary schools. However, it also

contends that educators are able to exercise agency to shape Prevent work in their own institutional contexts. To illustrate these processes, the chapter draws on the framework of ‘policy enactment’ to explore how four contextual dimensions shape Prevent work in secondary schools: *Situated Contexts*; *Professional Cultures*; *Material Contexts*; and *External Contexts* (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, p. 21). Building on previous research using the enactment framework (e.g. Busher, Choudhury, & Thomas, 2019; Vincent, 2019a), it argues that context is an ‘active force’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 24) that shapes the practice of counter-radicalisation in secondary schools.

In making this argument, I take a different position to those who view the Prevent Duty as evidence of a ‘securitisation’ of education (see Chap. 2). For such authors, the risk of childhood radicalisation has been ‘securitised’ and thus removed ‘from the realm of “normal” politics’ (see Lister, 2019, p. 419). Yet, whilst these analyses are extremely valuable, Durodie (2016, p. 22) suggests the Prevent Duty may be equally emblematic of the reverse process, whereby a ‘therapeutic culture’ in education that has long treated students as ‘vulnerable’ has shaped security policy. My research suggests that for many educators who have long viewed their students as vulnerable, the Duty is far less exceptional than some have argued.

As Lister (2019) writes, one consequence of treating any policy as exceptional is the neglect of ‘broader debates about the content and direction of public policy as a whole’ (p. 419). I contend that the Prevent Duty is a continuation of longer-term political trends, and like Lister (2019, p. 426) I draw links between counter-terrorism policy and neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism is a practice of governance that ‘seeks to create self-regulating, autonomous and responsible citizens’ (Elshimi, 2017, p. 95). Education has long been seen as instrumental in creating such citizens, (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2016, p. 31). As a result, the history of neo-liberal education policy has been a series of ‘problematisations’ (Ball, 2013, p. 28), whereby schools have been tasked with tackling an increasing range of societal ‘problems’ seen as detrimental to this goal.

Most educators interviewed as part of my doctoral research understood radicalisation to be the latest in a long line of problems that they had been asked to tackle under the logic of ‘safeguarding’. This meant

that many were unopposed to the Duty. Of course, depending on one's position, this non-problematisation of Prevent could be seen as either a positive or negative finding. If we take educators at their word, it may be analytically useful to view radicalisation as the latest problem that has been designated to them by the neo-liberal state.

Whilst I disagree with the notion that radicalisation is no different to other harms, the role of the neo-liberal educator has expanded in recent years to what one interviewee termed a 'lower-level social worker'. I therefore argue that non-opposition to the Duty may be emblematic of what has already changed in education, not of how Prevent itself has transformed education (see Sukarieh & Tannock, 2016, p. 31). Revell and Bryan (2016) argue that education is now marked by 'impermanence', and have highlighted how schools that are now used to responding to new policies might pragmatically respond to growing workloads by '[taking] the same approach to every policy' (p. 351). Within this context we might expect educators to deliver the Prevent Duty with the same pragmatic acceptance that Busher et al. (2019) identify. In this chapter, I explore how such pragmatism specifically shapes the enactment of the Prevent Duty in secondary schools.

Methods

This chapter draws on semi-structured qualitative interviews with 32 educators from nine secondary schools, and 14 local Prevent practitioners conducted between October 2017 and September 2019, as part of the author's ESRC-funded doctoral research. It also draws on supplementary interviews with six academics. The schools were a mix of local authority-maintained and academy schools, including one alternative provision for those not in mainstream education. Most were non-faith, with one a Catholic faith school. Six were located across three Prevent priority areas (PPAs), those deemed to have higher levels of local radicalisation risk, with the others based across two non-priority areas.

Prevent practitioners included Prevent Co-ordinators and Education Officers or their equivalents, as well as those for whom Prevent was only

part of their function. All were based across eight PPAs, but a handful also supported institutions in non-priority areas in their role.

Interviews were analysed using ‘thematic analysis’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss four themes that capture ‘something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represent some level of patterned response or meaning’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Drawing directly on the words of educators and Prevent practitioners, I use each theme to outline how ‘context’ shaped Prevent work in secondary schools. To guide the reader, where a respondent is quoted in the main text, a respondent number is shown in brackets, ‘E’ delineating an educator, and ‘P’ a Prevent practitioner.

Understanding Prevent in ‘Context’

In the analysis that follows I discuss how each of the four contextual dimensions identified by Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) shaped the enactment of Prevent. I first discuss each dimension in turn, before pointing to important intersections between them.

Situated Context

The ‘situated context’ refers to the specific locational and historical context of schools (Ball et al., 2012, p. 21). In this section I discuss three situational features that were important in shaping Prevent work: local ‘risk’; institutional histories; and student cohorts.

Educators operating in PPAs often noted how they worked in ‘*high-risk*’ areas, or contextualised non-opposition to the Duty by discussing local cases of radicalisation reported in the media or highlighted during Prevent training. Non-opposition to the Duty was thus often rooted in an internalised view of the local area constructed by external forces. This effect was also evident in one non-priority area where respondents from two schools discussed media reports of a local case of radicalisation. And as many respondents came to believe that radicalisation was a real and local risk, Prevent work came to be shaped to address risks that were

specific to the physical location of each school. For example, one educator had included the threat of far-right activity at a nearby local landmark in a Prevent risk assessment.

Whilst many ‘risks’ discussed in interviews were hypothetical, every school had a distinct *institutional history* of risk. Most schools had either made a Prevent referral or asked for external advice around Prevent concerns. In a minority of schools, students had received support through Prevent. This institutional history often shaped perceptions of Prevent in one of two ways. Most respondents saw incorrect referrals as having had no ill-effects, whilst rare instances where students had gone on to receive support through Prevent had, as one respondent (E22) put it, ‘woke us up’ to the issue. In this way, having some kind of direct or indirect experience of referrals often seemed to shape respondents’ non-opposition to the Duty.

At the same time, most respondents had never personally raised a Prevent concern, nor had any concerns about a student being radicalised. Many therefore felt the Duty had little impact on their practice. For these respondents, Prevent had faded into the background. They may now do what the Duty asks of them, but they may not see this as ‘Prevent’ work. As one respondent (E21) noted then, ‘on a day-to-day basis’, the ‘name Prevent doesn’t really come into it’.

However, just as Robson (Chap. 5) finds in early years settings, some educators now interpreted certain behaviours differently as they came to view students through ‘the lens of terrorism’. For example, one respondent (E27) spoke of an interest in Hitler having gone from being seen as ‘weird’ to ‘weird and worrying’. This reflected a broader trend of respondents becoming increasingly aware of the threat from far-right extremism, something that is important in the current climate. However, some respondents had come to view behaviours in more alarmist or problematic ways.

For example, one respondent (E6) had been concerned about the potential radicalisation of ‘a semi-school refuser’ on the back of their training, even though they recognised that this interpretation of such behaviour was ‘putting two and two together and coming back with five’. And most problematically, a handful of respondents discussed referrals made by colleagues that appeared to reflect biases in broader discourses

around radicalisation (see Chap. 2). For example, one respondent spoke of a colleague raising a concern with safeguarding staff about a Muslim student praying in the common room given that this was uncharacteristic behaviour for that student. Such incidents were rare, and were predominantly confined to the early days of the Duty. Nevertheless, this case demonstrated how discourses on radicalisation might sometimes shape educators' perceptions in problematic ways (see O'Donnell, 2017, p. 179).

Finally, respondents also spoke about shaping Prevent to *school cohorts* or to 'the community you serve' (E3). For example, one respondent contrasted their work with an overwhelmingly White British cohort to another local school whose students predominantly came from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and which had a much larger Muslim cohort:

Their approach will be very different in terms of how they discuss it with their pupils, as to how we discuss it with our pupils, just in the sense of the type of people, so we will concentrate on people that they can relate to, so community leaders within their own communities ... at the [other] school it will be Imams from the local Mosque. (Educator 21)

There was much agency in how educators shaped Prevent work to their cohorts. However, in some cases, this creativity was seemingly constrained by a tendency to view specific communities as vulnerable (see O'Donnell, 2017, p. 184) or segments of local communities as in specific need of intervention (see Vincent, 2019b, p. 27). For example, one respondent clearly saw intolerance to be a specific feature of 'our cohort' which, they had noted earlier, was a predominantly White British cohort with 'significant' levels of deprivation:

[W]e feel that with our cohort that come to our school, maybe beyond our gates, some of the attitudes are not quite what we want them to be, and if they weren't managed properly they could ultimately not meet British values. (Educator 27)

This respondent had recently updated their PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic education) curriculum to tackle an increase in

students using intolerant language. There was clear value in this work. However, this response demonstrated how even valuable work might be underpinned by what Vincent (2019b) terms ‘blunt categorizations, assumptions and generalizations’ of cohorts (p. 26) as concerns arising from a small number of students had shaped a perception that the entire student body needed to be taught in a different way. As Vincent (2019b, pp. 26–27) argues, assumptions can sometimes be indicative of underlying biases. However, whilst my earlier discussion of referrals suggests that some educators were not immune to bias, this respondent was not only able to identify and discuss a range of biases that exist in society, they, like many others in my sample, saw it as their role to tackle bias wherever they saw it—a point I return to below. This belief suggested that Prevent work was underpinned by a specific understanding that respondents had of their role.

Professional Cultures

The ‘professional culture’ refers to ‘less tangible’ features of the educational context, namely ‘ethos [and] teachers’ values and commitments within schools’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 26). In this section I discuss how institutional, professional and departmental cultures all served to ‘inflect policy responses in particular ways’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 27).

Distinct *institutional cultures* drove varying responses. For example, whilst many schools adopted the language of ‘British values’ unproblematically, one school had repositioned them as school values on the back of concerns about the ‘British’ label (see Vincent, 2019b, p. 24). This school also took a distinct approach to teaching students about British values, with one respondent (E18) noting how they drew on an existing ethos of ‘critical pedagogy’ to challenge students to think critically about notions of ‘British’ values, and of ‘Britishness’ more broadly.

Three respondents invoked school cultures to argue that the Duty itself was not needed, on the basis that existing safeguarding procedures were effective. In making this argument, two pointed to media reports of alarmist referrals made by other schools, but both clearly felt that their internal procedures would prevent similar referrals being made by their

school. Notably, one of these respondents (E8) did argue that being asked to refer students ‘compromises teachers’. This was not based on any personal or institutional experience, but on concerns raised, not only in the media, but also by trade union colleagues. The role of the trade union was interesting here as it highlighted how perceptions of policy might be shaped by external as well as internal institutional contexts (see Ball et al., 2012, p. 62).

However, opposition to the Duty was extremely rare, with school values often seen as being aligned with Prevent. Educators often invoked a culture of safeguarding and a ‘duty of care’ when discussing referrals. In doing so, they pointed to a *professional culture* of safeguarding that had clearly shaped educators, as they came to see their role as more than simply teaching:

[T]eaching in the classroom is a small, small part of what teachers are expected [to do] these days, you know, you’re a social worker, you’re a Prevent Officer, there’s so many things that you have to put in place, but that’s the role of the teacher. (Educator 20)

This professional identity had been shaped by the recent history of national education policy. One respondent (E21) noted how the government had regularly ‘add[ed] more of a burden to the job role’ by introducing ‘reactive’ policies asking schools to tackle a range of issues. Junior staff had never worked in a context where Prevent was not part of their role. However, more experienced staff often felt that, rather than schools being changed by the Duty, the ‘world’s changed’ around schools (E30). Several respondents viewed the threat of terrorism as unprecedented, and in turn the latest in a long line of issues they had been tasked with tackling.

Interestingly, one respondent (E6) who saw the current threat to be more pronounced reflected that perceived terrorist threats had previously been addressed in a different way. They noted that, in the case of the IRA, ‘we never really thought of that as a Prevent issue’. This spoke to how radicalisation is framed differently to ‘older’ terrorism (Elshimi, 2017, pp. 30–31), but also to the changing function of schools, as one academic interviewed for this study explained:

[T]he professional identity of teachers is a fundamentally different beast now than it was 20 years ago, or 30 years ago even. You couldn't have had Prevent in 1988. And, remember in 1988, you had actually a real terrorist threat, through the IRA. (Academic 6)

Many respondents had come to see safeguarding as one of the defining features of their role, making their non-opposition to what many saw as an extension of safeguarding unsurprising. One teacher (E20) even argued that 'anybody can teach' and suggested that the real skill of an educator was in dealing with safeguarding concerns. This seemingly undermined the traditional view of teachers as holding specialist knowledge (see Bryan, 2017, p. 224) which raised some interesting questions about the role that expertise played in the enactment of the Prevent Duty.

Respondents valued specialist expertise on radicalisation, with many schools using external 'experts' to deliver sessions to students. However, most did not problematise their *own* lack of expertise on the topic (see Bryan, 2017, p. 224). For example, one respondent (E21) argued the 'idea of having a Prevent specialist [on the staff] would be a bit much'. Some respondents identified colleagues with specific knowledges that might deliver Prevent work—a point I return to below. However, for most, the role was 'to report, and it ends there' (E9). As a result, many did not feel as though they needed any specialist knowledge on radicalisation as they had always passed safeguarding concerns of any kind to those that *did* have the relevant expertise.

Classroom staff would raise issues with safeguarding teams, who would ultimately decide on whether to pass concerns onto external bodies. This process was often underpinned by a risk-averse logic, with one safeguarding lead (E17) arguing that 'there's no grey areas, there's no opinions, if a child presents in that way we pass that information on'. Interestingly, whilst this respondent saw such an approach to be common sense, they recognised that those who don't work in schools might argue that such a risk-averse approach to referrals is 'not really helping anyone'. This comment suggested that there might be something distinctive about the safeguarding culture of schooling that shaped how educators engaged with the Prevent Duty.

Two potentially distinctive features stood out in my interviews. First, whilst the notion of educators monitoring students for signs of radicalisation is contentious (see Chap. 1), schooling has increasingly been marked by a growing culture of surveillance (see Chap. 3). This surveillance has been enabled by a growth in technology—a point I return to shortly—and by legislation that has increased educators' powers to, among other things, search students' belongings (Ball et al., 2012, pp. 100–101). Interviews suggested that surveillance in the name of 'safeguarding' had largely been normalised, with one respondent unproblematically discussing having searched a student's phone, for example. To a non-educator like myself, such surveillance was unexpected. However, it was perhaps unsurprising that educators working in an existing culture of surveillance would deliver Prevent in this way.

Second, one safeguarding lead (E7) argued that educators are generally less opposed to Prevent than the general public 'because the nature of our bubble in which we operate is that young people are vulnerable'. This suggested that support for the Duty was underpinned by a pre-existing 'therapeutic culture' that, as discussed earlier, fundamentally viewed young people as vulnerable. Respondents regularly used a language of vulnerability to express concerns about students being exploited, and of a need to build 'resilience' through the curriculum (see also Chap. 8). As one respondent remarked, aside from core skills, 'the one thing I want [students] to have when they leave is awareness and resilience' (E26). For them, this meant using PSHE to build students' resilience to a range of potential vulnerabilities, again demonstrating how radicalisation came to be treated in much the same way as other issues.

In many schools, curriculum work of this kind would be tailored to different year groups. Younger students would often focus on British values, whilst older year groups might learn more explicitly about radicalisation or Prevent itself. Sixth-form students might also be asked to lead assemblies for younger year groups. This highlighted how adolescents came to be asked to play a role in enacting Prevent, with some schools even teaching students the indicators of radicalisation so that they could recognise if they, or their peers, were being radicalised. Notably, I heard of one Prevent referral where students had alerted staff to content a classmate had posted online. As students progressed into adolescence then,

building resilience seemed to increasingly rest on using the curriculum to foster students' agency to keep themselves safe.

This work often took place in PSHE lessons, which meant non-specialists often delivered work around Prevent. However, subject specialists were tasked with leading this curriculum work in some schools, demonstrating how individual roles were often shaped by *departmental contexts* (see Ball et al., 2012, pp. 28–29). For example, several schools had come to deliver Prevent work through the Religious Education (RE) curriculum.

In many schools, extremism was already being discussed in RE classrooms before 2015. For example, one Head of RE (E29) spoke of historically being asked to 'drop everything' in the wake of terrorist attacks so that they could lead discussions on terrorism with students. Prior to the Duty, they had been the only teacher expected to do so. However, they noted that the Prevent Duty had forced other teachers to discuss a topic they had previously avoided. Where they saw colleagues as feeling pressurised by the Duty, they now personally felt more freedom. Where before they would have discussed incidents in a 'reactive' way, discussions of extremism were now more formally embedded in their curriculum and in other subjects on the back of the Duty. This meant they now felt as though they could refuse to 'drop everything' in the wake of a future incident, as the topic was now more routinely discussed across the school.

The fact that a Head of RE had been specifically asked to 'drop everything' highlighted how specific subjects were often perceived to lend themselves to Prevent. This is not without controversy, with some authors opposed to any attempt to 'politicise' Religious Education (see Jackson, 2015). However, many respondents felt that RE, and other subjects such as History or English, were appropriate for Prevent work. This might be because they saw an overlap between Prevent and topics such as Nazi Germany, or because they felt that discussion-based lessons were most appropriate for this work. In such classes, discussions related to Prevent would sometimes be planned, but they were more often ad hoc (see Vincent, 2019b, p. 25):

And some of our subjects lend themselves to it as well, like English, you discuss everything [...] openly a pupil said, 'Well, this kind of people, duh

de duh de duh', and I would have done what I would usually do, I stopped, and I dealt, and I addressed that. (Educator 14)

Several respondents discussed challenging students who espouse biased views in this same way, with many seeing it as their role as an educator to tackle intolerant views. Interestingly, this role often extended beyond challenging biases that students might hold, as shown by one respondent working with local Prevent practitioners, to address what they and several colleagues had seen to be biases in original Prevent training materials.

Respondents were willing to tackle biased opinions regardless of the subject they taught. However, some subjects were not seen to lend themselves to formal Prevent curriculum work. Prevent Practitioners noted this might be down to a lack of confidence that some teachers have around this topic. However, the professional role of teachers might also vary across departments. For example, the aforementioned Head of RE recounted how a colleague had asked them to speak to a student holding concerning views long before the Duty existed:

[T]his was a Science teacher talking to me, and they saw their job was to get through their Science GCSE, whereas the job of the RE teacher was to be a little bit more [about] building relationships. (Educator 29)

This exchange suggested that departmental context might shape how educators perceived of their own, and their colleagues', potential role in Prevent. Many educators were willing to perform the roles set forth for them. However, their ability to do so was shaped by the material realities of the setting, which at different times might enable or constrain Prevent work.

Material Context

Material features such as 'buildings and budgets ... levels of staffing, information technologies and infrastructure' (Ball et al., 2012, p. 29)

shape the conditions in which policies are enacted. In this section I point to three such factors: infrastructure, finances, and time.

First, Prevent was able to draw on pre-existing *technological infrastructures*. For example, one respondent (E18) spoke of installing a Prevent ‘add-on’ to existing Internet filtering and monitoring software, and another (E21) of a Prevent ‘tick-box’ being added to software used for reporting safeguarding concerns. The use of such pre-existing technology highlighted how enactment often rested on simply adapting existing tools (see Chap. 3) that enabled Prevent in different ways. The use of the former was further evidence that surveillance had already been normalised before the Duty, whilst the latter literally eased the process of enacting the Prevent Duty as reporting concerns of any type had become ‘literally a two-minute job’ (E23).

Second, schools had varying levels of resources. Prevent work was shaped by *financial constraints*, which are ‘the most “material” of all the contextual factors’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 34). Budgets for Prevent work varied. One Prevent practitioner (P14) spoke of an institution that was ‘fortunate’ to have the funds to pay a private contractor to deliver workshops every year, yet noted that most schools would not have the funds to do so. Some respondents sourced external providers in a similar way. However, respondents often relied on providers funded by local authorities, noting how they would ‘jump at the chance’ (E30), or try to ‘seize the opportunity’ (E31) whenever such sessions were offered to them.

However, respondents were not always able to take up such offers as they lacked the *time* to do so. Prevent had to fit into existing time-spaces, which inevitably varied across schools:

[E]verybody’s got different restrictions on them in terms of time, and how things can be delivered, so it’s all about just, adapting things so we can get the best results ... (Educator 31)

Subjects often cited as useful for Prevent are often given little curriculum time (see Vincent, 2019a, p. 57). In my sample, standalone Citizenship lessons were rare, RE was often taught for as little as one hour per week, whilst PSHE was mainly delivered in form time, and in wide-ranging drop-down days. Several practitioners noted that the structure of the curriculum

and levels of contact time with students left more time for Prevent work than in colleges. However, this space remained limited as schools predominantly came to deliver Prevent through the PSHE curriculum which is, as Vincent (2019a) notes, a ‘baggy holdall of topics’ (p. 45).

This limitation was perhaps especially true in the early days of the Duty, with one Prevent practitioner (P13) noting that ‘most schools delivered [Prevent] as standalone modules’ as their PSHE curriculums had already been finalised when the Duty became law. Yet, even as Prevent had been formally embedded in the PSHE curriculum over time, it came to be treated as just one issue among many that had to compete for attention. In some schools, there were more spaces for Prevent. Some schools had Prevent-related drop-down days, whilst one respondent (E26) kept the PSHE curriculum ‘malleable’ to leave space to discuss emerging issues, or take advantage of any sessions offered by the local authority. However, even in this malleable curriculum, Prevent was but one of over a dozen topics to be discussed throughout the year.

Some schools had developed their approach over time by ‘taking ownership’ of Prevent and producing their own resources (P4). However, not all schools had time to do this. For example, one safeguarding lead (E7) hoped curriculum work would become more embedded, but wanted the government to drive this by producing a dedicated curriculum since ‘schools don’t have the time or capacity’ to do so. In this way then, even respondents who may wish to do more Prevent work did not always have the resources to do so. These resources may be further reduced over time as secondary schools adapt to an ever-changing external context.

External Context

The final set of factors was pressures from ‘*wider* local and national policy frameworks’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 36). Here, I draw attention to three particularly important external factors: local authority delivery structures; Ofsted; and wider policy requirements.

First, *Prevent delivery structures* varied across regions. Schools in PPAs had access to local authority Prevent practitioners and Prevent-funded projects that were less common in non-priority areas. These practitioners

performed the role of ‘mid-level policy enactor’ (Vincent, 2019a, p. 17), with local authorities interpreting the Duty and in turn shaping their support for schools in different ways (see Chap. 2). Enactment was marked by ‘interpretations of interpretations’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 3), as the resources available to schools varied according to the approaches adopted at local authority level. For example, whilst the educator above wanted national government to produce a Prevent-related curriculum, local authority Prevent practitioners in other PPAs had already developed similar resources.

The landscape was different in non-priority areas, with the Police often taking a more central role in training (particularly in the early days of the Prevent Duty), and as the first port-of-call for concerns. It was interesting that one local authority Prevent practitioner (P6), who now led on training schools, described the previous approach of the Police training schools in their area as a ‘securitised model’ of delivery. This raises the possibility that concerns about ‘securitisation’ are more applicable to those non-priority areas in which the Police retain a role similar to that during the much-criticised ‘Prevent 1’ phase (see Chap. 2).

As touched on above, a range of private and third-sector providers also delivered Prevent work in schools, with the Duty providing a ‘market opportunity’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 106) for ‘expert’ providers wishing to commercially create resources or offer guidance (see Vincent, 2019a, p. 54). In this way then, Prevent work relied on a network of different actors.

However, the most significant external actor was the school inspectorate, *Ofsted*. A need to prove compliance to Ofsted was a core driver of Prevent work for many respondents. In turn, there were clear signs of ‘performativity’ as described by Ball (2003) as some schools adopted a tick-box approach to enacting the Duty (see also Chap. 5). Some respondents explicitly used a language of ‘box-ticking’ (see McGlynn & McDaid, 2019, pp. 134–140) to describe Prevent training or mapping British values across the curriculum. Moreover, one educator’s (E29) discussion of potentially introducing a British values display despite noting ‘I don’t know how useful it is’ was the essence of Ball’s understanding of performativity.

Performativity was even evident in how some educators discussed Prevent work that they clearly felt *was* useful. For example, one respondent (E26) had adopted an approach of ‘repetition and re-enforcement’. This meant discussing individual topics, including Prevent, across multiple PSHE lessons throughout the year. They did so both because it was seen to be an effective approach for ensuring that key messages ‘sink in’, but also so they could demonstrate to Ofsted that students would learn about a topic, even if they missed one session.

External pressure was clearly important (see Vincent, 2019a, p. 137). In the immediate aftermath of the Duty’s introduction, Prevent had been a priority for many respondents as they arranged whole-school training, or mapped Prevent across the curriculum to prove compliance. However, respondents did not find it unusual to be asked to tackle new issues in this way:

I mean to be honest there’s so many different legislations and acts coming into place that you can’t remember what you’re doing, you just know you’re doing it, [laughs] you don’t know what it’s called. (Educator 22)

Prevent came to be seen as part of a *broader policy ensemble*. In some schools it was even introduced alongside other responsibilities, with one respondent (E6) noting how the Duty was presented as one of ‘two new balls up in the air’ alongside new training on LGBTQ equality. To borrow an analogy from earlier, the Duty entered a ‘baggy holdall’ of policies competing for attention. Prevent may have been a priority back in 2015, but as with many other policies, it had faded into the background, only to be thrust into the foreground again at certain times.

Priorities were often determined by events outside of the school. The attention schools gave to a specific issue would often be dictated by external agencies, with one respondent (E17) noting how different topics would be ‘fashionable’ to local authorities at different times. More directly, respondents often noted how classroom Prevent work, and in some cases their own concerns about radicalisation, might increase in the aftermath of a terrorist attack. It was therefore unsurprising to hear one Prevent practitioner (P5) remark that in some months they receive no Channel referrals, but in others ‘there are spikes around major incidents’.

In discussing this trend, this practitioner remarked that Prevent had ‘an advantage’ given the disproportionate media coverage that terrorism receives. Educators were clearly aware of this media discourse, with one respondent framing the Duty as evidence that ‘the front pages have jumped into my classroom’ (E30). In turn, several respondents remarked that schools could not shy away from Prevent work given that many students would be equally aware of media coverage of terrorism, and would want to discuss it in their lessons (see Chap. 4). In this way then, events outside of the school had the power to impact the day-to-day work of educators.

Prevent was therefore enacted within a specific and ever-changing external context (see Vincent, 2019a, p. 137). As this external context evolves, new priorities will emerge. Already, in the wake of growing public concerns about rising knife crime, the government has announced plans for a new ‘Public Health Duty’ requiring schools to report young people at risk of such violence (Hymas, 2019). Just as radicalisation was not the first problematisation of education, it will not be the last. And perhaps as new responsibilities emerge, the widespread perception amongst educators that the Prevent Duty is unexceptional might continue to grow.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how a range of contextual factors shaped Prevent work in the secondary schools that participated in this research. First, educators tailored Prevent to risks they saw as specific to the historical and geographic locales in which they worked. Second, a professional culture of safeguarding contributed to a widespread acceptance of Prevent, whilst distinct institutional and departmental cultures shaped practical responses to the Duty. Thirdly, Prevent work was shaped by material considerations such as time, money, and technology. And finally, local and national government policy shaped how schools engaged with Prevent.

None of these dimensions operated in isolation. Many respondents internalised external discourses framing students as vulnerable to radicalisation. This meant there were fleeting signs of alarmism, and even bias. However, educators retained the scope to mediate these discourses as they were filtered through distinct professional and institutional contexts. As many came to understand radicalisation as but one of many local issues emerging in distinct situated contexts, respondents came to enact Prevent in much the same way as any number of earlier policies, tailoring it according to the institutions and departments in which they worked. And whilst many of the approaches schools adopted in 2015 had seemingly remained unchanged, Prevent work did not remain entirely static, as it constantly had to respond to emerging external events. Taken together then, the precise form that Prevent work took was shaped by how multiple contextual factors intersected in specific institutions at specific times.

Such a conclusion mirrors many of the findings from the other studies in this volume. However, the realities of secondary education afforded particular opportunities and constraints for Prevent. This suggests that the impact of the Prevent Duty can only truly be understood by exploring how Prevent is enacted in specific contexts. Ultimately then, ‘taking context seriously’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 19) seems essential if we are to truly advance our understanding of how counter-radicalisation is practised at the local and institutional levels.

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