

# Shifting the agenda on education & extremism

It's time to support schools and young people to build safe space for discussion and develop active citizenship opportunities that foster social cohesion.



Think  
Global



Learning for a just and sustainable world

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Learning in a  
Global Context



# ABSTRACT

This article has been commissioned by UK education charity, Think Global and reports on research undertaken with 11 to 17-year-olds and their teachers in 8 schools in England. This research aimed to build an understanding of young people's idea of diversity, identity and extremism as well as how schools and young people can be better supported to promote social cohesion and engage in active citizenship opportunities.

The research found that young people are highly motivated to tackle discrimination, often identifying it as a pressing challenge in society, but need guidance and support to develop and participate in active citizenship opportunities that empower them and foster social cohesion.

This report contends that there is significant scope for building social cohesion if schools can be better supported. This support will help young people engage in constructive discussion of extreme views and build the critical thinking skills they need to recognise and challenge prejudice of all kinds in themselves and in others. If this is then combined with active citizenship initiatives, it can represent a powerful opportunity.

There has never been a more urgent need to equip schools and educators to help young people make sense of the world around them and empower them to respond to challenges with constructive, positive action. During the research period alone there were 3 terrorist attacks in rapid succession across the UK. Yet, young people's understanding of these attacks as motivated by extreme views was limited.

We are faced with increasing challenges to mutual tolerance, including frequent terrorist attacks across Europe and the rise of far-right parties in mainstream politics. The need to ensure that young people can make sense of such events, think critically, recognise that extremists of any kind do not necessarily represent the social grouping they claim to, and, ultimately, mature into tolerant, global citizens, could not be more pressing.



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## Age ranges of English school year groups:

Year 7	age 11-12
Year 8	age 12-13
Year 9	age 13-14
Year 10	age 14-15
Year 11	age 15-16
Year 12	age 16-17

In all instances 'young people' refers to students age 11 to 17, the age range of those involved in the research.

## Acronyms:

DT	Design Technology
F	Female
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
M	Male
NE	North east
PE	Physical Education
PREVENT	UK Government's policy on prevention of extremism in public bodies
PSHE	Personal, Social, Health Education
RE or RS	Religious Education, also known as Religious Studies
SMSC	'Social, Moral, Spiritual & Cultural' development, (in the English education system)



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has been commissioned by Think Global, the UK charity that works to promote global learning and action for a more just and sustainable world.

Research was conducted between March and June 2017 with over 300 pupils, age 11 to 17, and their teachers in 8 schools in England. This research aimed to develop understanding of young people's ideas of diversity, identity and extremism, as well as relevant global issues and how they relate to these concepts. It also aimed to gather students' opinions on what support they need to manage the challenges they face, promote a more cohesive society and participate in active citizenship activities, as well as teachers' understanding of how they can encourage and develop such opportunities.

During the research period, there were 3 terrorist attacks in rapid succession in the UK, providing an especially relevant backdrop to participants' responses and highlighting the urgent need to support teachers and young people to make sense of what is happening around them and build social cohesion.

As highlighted by Matthew Francis in *Radicalisation Research*; "Schools are increasingly seen as being on the front-line<sup>1</sup> of the battle to prevent extremism", with their statutory duty to help prevent radicalisation and identify pupils at risk of exposure to extremism enshrined in law under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, (2015). As this research and previous research by Think Global and others suggests, while many schools feel relatively well prepared to reactively safeguard pupils in the unlikely event that a child appears at such risk, it is in the 'proactive' arena that they want more training and support; to better facilitate discussion of potentially extreme views and build understanding.



This report and other commentators contend that there is significant scope for building social cohesion if schools can be better supported to help young people build the critical thinking skills they need to recognise and challenge prejudice of all kinds, in themselves and in others. Think Global is engaged in a multi-partner European initiative called 'Start the Change' to develop and pilot ideas in this arena with schools and educators. This research will inform the project design in the UK, which hopes to combine two powerful opportunities; firstly, the opportunity to support schools and teachers so they feel capable and confident to engage with students in constructive discussion of extreme views and foster their resilience to prejudice and extremism in all its forms, and secondly; the opportunity to support schools to provide young people with active citizenship opportunities that empower them and foster social cohesion.

It is hoped that this research will not only guide the work of Think Global and 'Start the Change', but also provide some guidance for further research, policy development and wider global citizenship education. In the context of seemingly increasing challenges to mutual tolerance; including frequent terrorist attacks in Europe and the rise of far-right parties in mainstream European politics, the need to ensure that young people can think critically, recognise that extremists of any kind do not necessarily represent the social grouping they claim to, and develop as mutually respectful, global citizens, could not be more pressing.

<sup>1</sup> 'What can schools do about radicalisation?' – Matthew Francis, *Radicalisation Research*, June 2015. p. 1

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Young people are highly motivated to tackle discrimination, often identifying and prioritising it as a pressing challenge in society:

Interestingly, young people do not strongly define their own identity in terms of aspects most likely to be the target of discrimination, such as ethnicity or religion. However, they do display high levels of concern about discrimination of all kinds. They also have a strong sense of diversity and immigration as dynamic forces, with the potential to both bring benefits to society and give rise to challenges and social division. Many young people feel they have an important role to play to tackle discrimination and 'bring society together', although they are not necessarily sure what form this action might take.

**This presents an opportunity to support schools to develop active citizenship initiatives that empower young people to tackle discrimination and build social cohesion.**

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Regional variations related to the level of ethnic and cultural diversity locally, must be given due consideration in any work to support schools to develop active citizenship opportunities.

Participants from schools in small towns in north-east England, an area of very low ethnic diversity, showed some common variations in responses compared to participants from London, the most ethnically diverse region in the UK. Students from the north east generally perceived the level of immigration into their communities as disproportionately high, held slightly higher levels of concern over immigration, had limited exposure to and understanding of other cultures and were more likely to express discriminatory views or remarks at school without fully understanding the implications. While varying perspectives were found across students from all schools, this regional contrast was noticeable. Such regional differences should be taken into consideration when supporting schools to develop active citizenship opportunities, especially where such initiatives aim to build social cohesion.

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Young people do not readily contextualise extremism in wider geo-political issues. They do not strongly associate the word 'extremism' with recent terrorist

attacks, suggesting they have limited understanding of such attacks as ideologically or politically motivated. They have an awareness of relevant global issues, mentioning for instance ISIS, Syria or Trump's ban on travel from certain predominantly Muslim countries. However, they do not readily make the links explicitly between those geopolitical contexts elsewhere, and current terrorist attacks in the UK.

Young people most strongly associate extremism with violence, hatred, religion and racism. However, they do not strongly associate it with terrorism. Even after discussion to better develop their understanding of the word 'extremism' they often perceive it as a historical rather than a present-day phenomenon, citing historical examples more often than recent terrorist attacks. Participants were aware of relevant geo-political issues and mentioned topics such as 'ISIS' and 'Syria', but they did not readily make connections between incidences of terrorism in the UK and what is happening politically here or elsewhere else in the world.

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**Such limited understanding of extremism and terrorism as having geo-political context is dangerous; increasing the risk that stereotypes remain unchallenged. We need to ensure teachers can help students recognise that extremism has context, so they can think critically about what is happening and foster resilience to prejudice.**

We cannot and should not expect teachers or secondary school pupils to fully understand complex geo-political situations relevant to extremism in all its forms. However, we do need to help students better understand that acts of extreme hatred or violence such as terrorist attacks have context. They are perpetuated by people with a particular ideology or interpretation of the faith or social group they claim to represent and, critically, not all people of that social group hold the same set of extreme or violent beliefs. This is something that many teachers are no doubt well-aware of and are trying to help their students understand. However, the 'disconnects' presented by young people in the research, between the concept of extremism and present-day terrorist attacks suggests more needs to be done to help young people understand such events and form their own views on them.

Both teachers and young people feel that schools are a safe space for discussion of sensitive topics such as extreme political or religious views, but they also see scope for improvement. The most effective solutions may require a whole school approach. The input of Religious Education teachers could also be vital.

Teachers made various suggestions as to how such 'safe spaces' could be further enhanced, which incorporated staff, students and parents, suggesting the need for a whole school approach. They also expressed a desire for more training on how to facilitate discussion of sensitive topics and extreme views and want more scope to deal with these issues proactively, both in the formal timetable and through active citizenship opportunities. Religious Education emerged as important in the provision of safe space for discussion of issues such as religious discrimination, stereotyping and terrorism. A better understanding of the potentially powerful role that RE plays in developing critical thinking skills of students and building mutual tolerance would be instructive and could have implications for education policy.

Young people would benefit from more opportunities for facilitated discussion, where they can identify the challenges they see in their community and wider world and determine the action they want to take:

There was a noticeable difference between responses to 'semi-cold' survey questions about young people's potential role in social change versus their responses in facilitated discussion. In the facilitated workshops, participants were much more willing and able to identify issues of concern and make suggestions for how they could take action. This demonstrates the simple but critically important need to create a space for facilitated discussion so that young people can generate ideas with their peers about what they want to change and how; something where schools can play a vital role in developing young people as active citizens.

Young people perceive their age as both an opportunity and a barrier to fulfilling their role as active citizens;

They feel both positive about their capacity to have a co-operative and positive attitude towards each other and society and frustrated by a lack of space for young people's voices in society and a lack of access to or influence on decision makers. Initiatives to develop active citizenship opportunities need to both tap into these opportunities and tackle these barriers.



The role of social media must be given serious consideration in any initiatives, activities or research related to young people, social cohesion and citizenship.

Teachers presented a set of challenges related to social media as pervasive and of high importance, influencing the emotional development and well-being of pupils as well as their critical thinking skills. Social media clearly plays a pivotal role in how young people gain information on a whole range of issues and form their understanding of the world around them, as well as their views about their peers and other social groups. Initiatives targeted at developing critical thinking and fostering active citizenship, especially if focussed on tackling discrimination and building social cohesion, must integrate social media as a critical component.

Teachers are unsure about what they need for their schools to be able to further support their students to engage in active citizenship activities, highlighting their need for support in this area.

When asked what they felt they needed, teachers gave a wide variety of responses including external visitors, more student leadership and a voice from young people that somehow feeds into policy. Several commented that they weren't yet sure. There is clearly an opportunity and a need to support schools and teachers to explore their ideas in collaboration with students and more clearly identify how they can develop and promote opportunities for active citizenship.



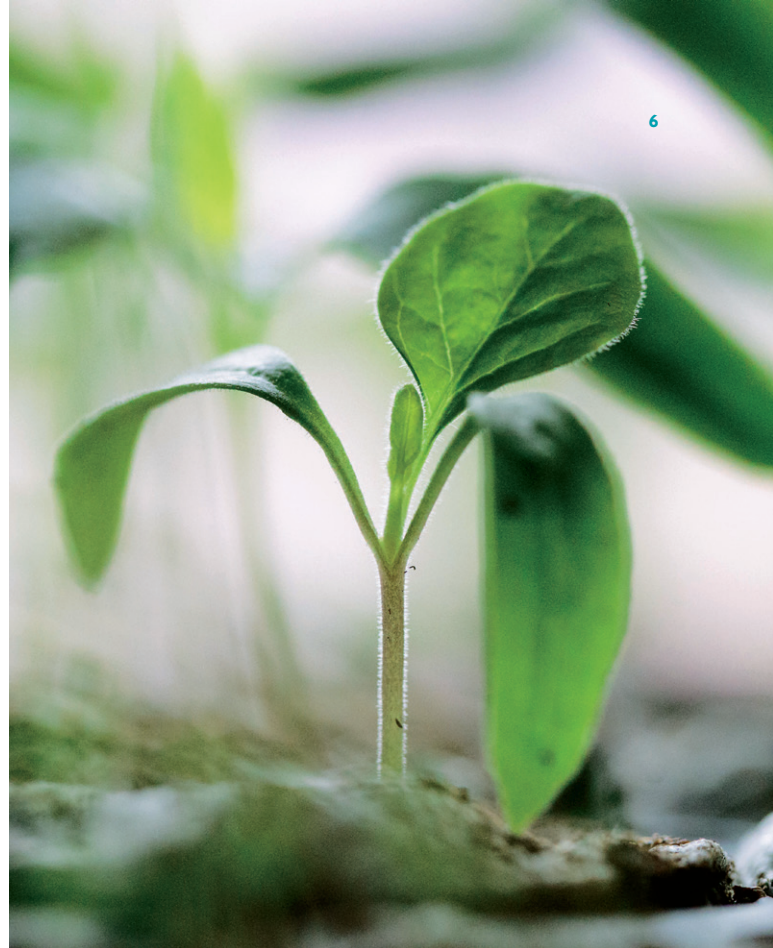
# INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEXT AND AIMS OF THIS REPORT

This report has been commissioned by Think Global, the UK charity that works to promote global learning and action for a more just and sustainable world.

The research that informs this report has been undertaken as part of the 'Start the Change' project; a multi-partner European initiative to develop social and civic competences among young people, fostering knowledge, understanding and ownership of democratic values and fundamental rights. Start the Change also aims to support educators to handle social conflicts in the context of diversity and to encourage youth participation in social and civic life through the development and promotion of active citizenship opportunities. The research was carried out between March and June 2017 in 8 English schools, all signed up to participate in Start the Change.

The research activities were designed both to initiate programme design with the schools and to develop the understanding of Think Global and the wider education sector on:

- Young people's ideas of diversity, identity and extremism
- Students' opinions on what support they need to manage the challenges they face and for promoting a more cohesive society



- Young people's understanding of relevant global issues and how they relate to diversity, identity and extremism
- Students' understanding of how they can participate in volunteering or active citizenship in their locality

Research activities were comprised of:

- 10 workshops across 8 secondary schools, each of approximately 2 hours, with 7 to 10 students
- Worksheets completed by students during the workshops and collected for data analysis
- 17 interviews with teachers across the same 8 schools
- An online survey of young people; with 316 respondents from across the same 8 schools
- A brief review of literature on key topics, including young people's understanding and attitudes towards radicalisation and extremism, UK government policy on extremism prevention in schools and youth social cohesion initiatives in the UK. This review was intended to supplement the in-depth literature review that informed the design of the international Start the Change programme

3 of the 8 schools involved were from small towns in north-east England, located in pre-dominantly white British communities with very low ethnic diversity. The remaining 5 schools were in London: the most ethnically diverse area in the UK, with this high diversity reflected across the schools. One of the London schools was an all boys' school, providing some opportunity to identify any gendered differences in responses. No such notable gendered difference emerged. However, there were marked differences in findings between schools in north east England and London, and these are outlined further below.

During the research period, there were three terrorist attacks in the UK in rapid succession; one in the Westminster Bridge area, London, (22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017; a week before the first workshop took place), another at Manchester Arena, (22<sup>nd</sup> May,



3 days before the final two workshops took place) and finally, one in the Borough Market area, London, (3rd June; after all the workshops were completed but while the online survey remained open). All three incidents received a very high profile in the national media. Participants viewpoints and understanding on extremism and terrorism are particularly interesting, given this context.

### Current education policy on extremism and the potential power of active citizenship:

As highlighted by Matthew Francis in *Radicalisation Research*; “Schools are increasingly seen as being on the front-lines of the battle to prevent extremism.”;<sup>2</sup> with their statutory duty to help prevent radicalisation and identify potential exposure of their pupils to extremism enshrined in law under Section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, (2015). Known incidences of extremism among school age young people remain rare in the UK and make the national headlines when they do occur, for example, the case of the three 15 and 16-year-old girls from Bethnal Green, London, who left the UK to join an extremist organisation in Syria in 2015. Despite the rarity of such situations, schools are arguably under intense scrutiny and pressure from policy makers and wider society to be prepared, ensuring designated staff are trained and competent to identify the potential for such incidences and intervene if they feel a young person is at risk.

While the particular statutory requirements placed upon schools have proved somewhat controversial, the potentially powerful and positive role that education can play in tackling dangerous extremism in society is undeniably important; something supported by the literature review that has so far informed the design of the Start the Change project. A body of evidence indicates that radicalisation is most prevalent among young adults, age 15 to 30.<sup>3</sup>

**There is perhaps, then, a crucial window of opportunity for schools to have a positive influence on young adolescents even before they reach this age.**

Not only to prevent radicalisation but encourage them to be respectful, tolerant citizens and build the critical thinking skills that will enable them to recognise, question and challenge prejudice when forming their understanding of what is happening in the world around them. Research has shown that, if parents and teachers educate children to become democratic citizens, to respect the rights of others and to tolerate beliefs that are different to their own,<sup>4</sup> this education cultivates beliefs and dispositions that oppose radicalism and extremism.<sup>5</sup>

This insight highlights that the government policy focus on prevention of radicalisation in schools has perhaps somewhat missed a broader opportunity to support schools and teachers to develop respectful, tolerant citizens. Under the PREVENT duty, radicalisation is defined by the UK Government as “the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups.”<sup>6</sup> However, as Paul Thomas points out, the PREVENT strategy “asks schools to really only focus on those at the apex”, that is, those most acutely at risk of radicalisation.<sup>7</sup> He contends that this focus on spotting radicalisation is highly problematic with the “worrying potential for a negative and stigmatising focus on Muslim students” and, in some cases, misguided measures such as “only monitoring black and minority ethnic pupils and primary schools that have asked pupils to fill in radicalisation-seeking surveys”.<sup>8</sup>

Such misguided measures are worrying but likely not the norm. The concern remains however that, while the safeguarding of children at risk of harm through exposure to extremism cannot be ignored, there is a wider opportunity at hand. Teachers need guidance and support on how to discuss potentially extremist views of all kinds with students, whether they be religious, racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise discriminatory, and on how to challenge them constructively where students express such views. As Thomas explains, the focus on looking out for students potentially ‘at risk’ could negate the opportunity to address potentially divisive discriminatory or intolerant views where students express them as their own or repeat them from elsewhere, (home, the media, and so on), and to actively build tolerance and social cohesion. Thomas suggests:

**We need “genuine educational processes” that “provide a positive and non-stigmatising basis for work on radicalisation. It must be one that supports the democratic values of equal citizenship that we are defending in the face of terrorist violence.”**

Schools do, in fact, have a statutory duty to provide SMSC; that is, to promote the ‘Spiritual, Moral, Cultural and Social’ development of pupils. Through SMSC provision they are asked to fulfil several objectives including the furtherance of

<sup>2</sup> Francis, *Ibid.* p. 1

<sup>3</sup> Buijs et al. 2006; Sageman 2008; Sloodman and Tillie 2006. References taken from the literature review for the Start the Change international programme design

<sup>4</sup> Davies 2009; Webber 2011. References taken from the literature review for the Start the Change international programme design

<sup>5</sup> Pels, de Ruyter, 2012. References taken from the literature review for the Start the Change international programme design. Francis, *Ibid.* p. 2 ‘Schools should offer anti-extremist education for all, not spy on those at risk’, Paul Thomas, *Radicalisation Research*, June 2015. p. 1

<sup>6</sup> Francis, *Ibid.* p. 2

<sup>7</sup> ‘Schools should offer anti-extremist education for all, not spy on those at risk’, Paul Thomas, *Radicalisation Research*, June 2015. p. 1

<sup>8</sup> Thomas, *Ibid*

tolerance and harmony between diverse cultural traditions, encouraging respect for other people and respect for democracy as well as the promotion of 'fundamental British values', including tolerance of different faiths and beliefs, as protected under the law, and an understanding of the importance of identifying and combatting discrimination.<sup>10</sup> However, it appears that more could be done to help schools fulfil this duty. As this research and previous research by Think Global suggests, while schools feel relatively equipped to react in the unlikely event that a child appears at risk of radicalisation or harm through exposure to extremism, it is in the 'proactive' arena, of facilitating constructive discussion of extreme views and challenging divisive stereotypes that they are seeking more guidance, training and support.

As Francis further explains, many of the criticisms of the broader PREVENT agenda, not just within education but in broader public life, have argued that it singles out and scrutinises Muslim communities.<sup>11</sup> It has been suggested that a longer-term and more successful approach to tackle radicalisation can be found in strengthening community cohesion by focusing on the links between all communities. The InterACT project, run by the Citizenship Foundation during 2009–12 is one instructive example of young people from diverse cultural backgrounds working together successfully to tackle community challenges. Run across 12 cities in the UK and involving 385 young people and 23 delivery partners, the initiative focussed on bringing together young asylum seekers or refugees with locally resident young people to identify, design and run a community action project.

The project evaluation outlines its success in encouraging young people from otherwise segregated communities to interact, often for the first time, and in the process, tackling their misconceptions about each other. The project clearly demonstrated the benefits of joint social action to provide a "unifying narrative of community participation" and, specifically for the participants, to build a shared sense of belonging, a deeper and nuanced respect for diversity and an appreciation for the power of mutual co-operation. 94% of participants also cited improved communication skills as a benefit of taking part.<sup>12</sup>

The Start the Change Project aims to build on the findings from this research to combine the two potentially powerful opportunities highlighted above. Firstly, it provides an opportunity to support teachers and schools to build safe spaces for constructive discussion of sensitive topics and extreme views in order to build critical thinking skills and mutual respect and tolerance among young people. Secondly; it aims to facilitate active citizenship in the form of collaborative social action by young people, which will build social cohesion. It is hoped that this report will not only guide the project and work of Think Global but could also provide some guidance for further research opportunities, policy development and future global citizenship education resources and practice.



<sup>9</sup> Thomas, *Ibid*, p. 2

<sup>10</sup> 'Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools. Departmental Advice for Maintained Schools.' Department for Education, November 2014. pp. 5–6

<sup>10</sup> Francis, *ibid*, p. 2

<sup>11</sup> Francis, *ibid*, p. 2

<sup>12</sup> 'InterAct Evaluation Report', Citizenship Foundation, Lalitha Foster and Laila Nicholas, October 2012, pp. 3, 25, 28

# METHODOLOGY

## The research team:

### **Louise Wilson, Consultant, Project Researcher**

Louise has authored this report and designed and delivered the research that informed it. Louise has over 16 years of international experience in sustainable development and development education, specialising in fair and ethical trade and in delivering research and project management. Through diverse roles spanning business development, campaigns and advocacy, and youth and education, Louise has gained a valuable multi-stakeholder perspective on sustainable development and global citizenship education. Louise has worked with the education teams in organisations such as Trading Visions, Comic Relief and the Co-operative College and has written a range of teaching and learning materials. Louise holds a BA in Politics from the University of Durham and an MPhil in Development Studies from the University of Cambridge.

### **Kate Jones, Programme Manager, Think Global**

Kate is responsible for delivery of the Start the Change project in the UK and undertook the role of research assistant, supporting with the design and delivery of the research undertaken for this report. Kate joined Think Global as a Programme Manager in February 2017. She is a Geographer by trade, but started out as a Modern Languages teacher in London, then the Bahamas. She worked in local government and on community projects, before moving on to leading education programmes at several international charities, including Comic Relief, ActionAid, Greenpeace and Fairtrade. Kate also works with private and non-profit organisations to help them engage with teachers, young people and the education sector in the UK and around the world. She holds degrees from Birmingham, Institute of Education, and London South Bank Universities.

## The research schedule:

### **N.B:**

- All dates given are for 2017.
- The dates of three terror attacks in the UK, which took place during the research period, have been inserted for context. The final attack took place after all the student workshops and teacher interviews were completed and after most, but not all, of the online survey responses were submitted.

## Schedule:

- 22<sup>nd</sup> March: Terror attack on Westminster Bridge area, London

### **North East England based research:**

- 29<sup>th</sup> March: 1 x student workshop, 2 x teacher interviews
- 30<sup>th</sup> March: 1 x student workshop, 2 x teacher interviews
- 31<sup>st</sup> March: 1 x student workshop

### **London based research:**

- 4<sup>th</sup> May: 2 x student workshops, 2 x teacher interviews
- 5<sup>th</sup> May: 2 x student workshops, 3 x teacher interviews
- 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1 x teacher interview
- 12<sup>th</sup> May: 1 x student workshop, 2 x teacher interviews
- 18<sup>th</sup> May: 1 x teacher interview
- 19<sup>th</sup> May: 1 x teacher interview
- 22<sup>nd</sup> May: Terror attack on Manchester Arena
- 25<sup>th</sup> May: 1 x student workshop, 1 x teacher interview
- 26<sup>th</sup> May: 1 x student workshop, 2 x teacher interviews
- 3<sup>rd</sup> June: terror attack on London Bridge area

Online survey open from 24<sup>th</sup> March to 16<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

## The research sample:

### **Overview:**

- 3 co-educational secondary schools in small towns in north-east England.
- 5 secondary and sixth form schools in London; 1 all boys, 4 co-educational, 4 inner-city schools and one in outer London.
- 86 participants took part in student workshops, (7–10 students per workshop).
- With the exception of one school, all workshop participants were in year groups 7–9, (age 11–14). One workshop was held with year 12 students, (age 16–17).
- Young people participating from schools in north east England were predominantly white British and of no religion.
- Young people participating from schools in London were of highly mixed ethnic origin and mixed religious backgrounds, though predominantly Christian or Muslim.
- There were 316 respondents to the online survey, all from these 8 schools.
- Respondents to the online survey were 65% male, 41% white British, (otherwise ethnically diverse) and fairly distributed in terms of religious identity across Christian, Muslim and of 'no religion'.
- 17 teachers with varying responsibilities and subject specialisms, were interviewed across the same 8 schools.



**Profiles of participating schools:**

Location	School type	Diversity profile
NE England	Coeducational secondary with academy status	Predominantly white British
	Coeducational secondary, specialist sports college	
	Coeducational secondary school and sixth form	
North London	Coeducational secondary with academy status	Ethnically and religiously diverse
London	English Church of England free school for boys	
	Coeducational secondary, specialist Business & enterprise college	Diverse but predominantly Bangladeshi / British Bangladeshi
	Co-educational academy for ages 11 to 19	
	Free school sixth form specialising in creative arts	Ethnically and religiously diverse

**Workshop participant profiles by school:**

School name (abbrev. for anonymity)	# focus group participants	Male	Female	Prefer not to state gender	# ethnic groups represented	# religions represented	# students of no religion	Year group of participants
PA	10	4	4	2	2	1	8	8
LIS	8	4	4	0	2	2	5	8 & 9
HA	8	4	3	1	2	1	7	8
FB1	8	8	0	0	6	2	2	7, 8 & 9
FB2	9	6	0	2	9	3	1	7 & 8
CH1	10	4	6	0	9	5	0	8
CH2	10	4	6	0	10	2	0	8
SS	7	4	3	0	2	1	0	7
GSA	7	4	3	0	4	3	1	8
EL	10	4	6	0	9	4	3	12

Further detail about the profiles of participants, including teacher profiles, can be found in the appendices.





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### Description of the research process:

In designing a research process, we recognised the potential sensitivity and complexity of the range of topics we aimed to cover; identity and diversity, extremism and radicalisation and the desire and opportunities for active citizenship in schools. Given this, we chose to speak directly with young people, gaining insight through facilitated, focus group discussion, where participants had the opportunity to build context, break down complex issues through activities, or seek clarification, enabling them to give an informed opinion in a safe space. The workshop discussion activities were supplemented with worksheets, (completed anonymously), often used to generate ideas or start dialogue on a topic. Participants completed these worksheets individually and they were collected for data analysis, giving opportunity for anonymous input where students may not have felt comfortable to voice something aloud. To protect the anonymity of participants, the research team did not collect any participant names.

We also provided young people the opportunity to provide anonymous, individual responses on key topics through the online survey, where they could 'speak' openly without fear of judgement. The online survey was designed to yield quantitative data on key topics, through a format where respondents were able to select the statements that most reflected how they felt about a given topic. It was also designed to yield qualitative data, with opportunities for free text responses on some topics. Respondents were also asked to give information on their gender, ethnicity and religion or belief, to allow for some analysis of findings along these indicators.

We also wished to speak with teachers on a similar range of topics, to be able to compare their perspectives with those of their students, hence undertaking interviews with 17 teachers, each lasting 20 to 30 minutes and using an open question framework. Through these interviews we hoped to gain insights that could inform project design for the Start the Change project and potentially, have wider applicability for the design and delivery of effective global citizenship education in schools.

The teacher interview framework, online survey questions and full statistical survey findings can be found in the appendices.

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### Participants' reflections on the workshops:

Where time allowed, the research team built a final reflection activity into the end of the student workshop. This was not possible in every case, due to the constraint of having to cover a wide range of issues in a relatively limited amount of time. Participants' brief, personal reflections were highly varied, as would be expected. However, two leading themes emerged:

Firstly, participants were highly engaged on the topic of extremism, suggesting that they would engage with further learning and discussion to develop their knowledge and critical

thinking on the topic. 14 of the 46, (i.e. 30%), separate final reflection comments referred to this topic. Participants often commented either it had changed the way they think about extremism or that they had learned something more about it:

**"This session has changed the way I think about extremism...it's much more than people dying."**

**"I really liked discussing our own opinions on extremism and it made me think about my own... It expanded it."**

**"I didn't even know what extremism was."**

The second strongest theme to emerge, mentioned by 8 participants, (17%), was how much they had valued the opportunity to share their opinions and ideas with each other, sometimes explicitly remarking on how they had especially valued the 'safe' environment for doing this, suggesting that they would welcome further opportunity for this as the Start the Change project evolves.

**"Sharing ideas helps us come together."**

**"I felt safe – people's opinions really changed in this environment."**

**"I feel optimistic because we're actually raising these issues. You know, if you ignore it then it's never going to go away but if you talk about it then that's at least a step in the right direction."**

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### The research questions:

The research questions that informed the design of the workshops, online survey and teacher interviews were as follows:

1. What are young people interested in? What do they like doing with their time?
2. What do young people understand by 'identity' and 'diversity' and what do they think about these concepts?
3. What do young people understand by the word 'extremism' and what do they think about it?
4. How do young people understand and contextualise global issues in relation to these key themes of identity, diversity, social cohesion and extremism?
5. What are young people concerned about, in their school, locally and in the wider world?
6. What challenges do young people want to tackle in their community, (including their school)?
7. What challenges do young people want to tackle in the wider world?
8. What do young people feel they need to take action on these challenges?

# THE RESEARCH FINDINGS IN FULL

## How participants like to spend their free time:

### Key findings:

- Taking part in a sport emerged as by far the most frequently cited pastime, (30% of participants). Interestingly, participants often described how sport helped them relieve stress or clear their mind.
- Participants were otherwise found to have a wide variety of interests, including creative activities, (writing, art, photography), music, (listening to music, making music or playing an instrument), computer gaming, and socialising with friends.

### Further detail on the findings:

The workshops began with an icebreaker, designed to introduce the discussion on self-identity and which gave some insight into participants' interests and hobbies. Participants had been given this instruction ahead of the workshop:

*Please bring something to the workshop that you feel represents you in some way. It could be an object or a picture. It might represent a hobby or something that you're really interested in, your values or beliefs. It's entirely up to you.*

To start with, students had paired discussions about their objects; what they had chosen to bring and why. We then had a whole group discussion where participants were encouraged to share what they had brought and why with the whole group. 58 participants chose to speak to the whole group and, of those, 33 chose to bring an object associated with an interest or hobby. Below is a list of what the objects represented, giving a snapshot of the interests across participants, (numbers represent frequency of mentions):

Art (2), break dancing (1), computer gaming (2), doing card tricks (1), chess (1), electronics (1), football (4), gymnastics (1), Lego (1), listening to music (3), making music (1), playing an instrument (2), reading (2), rugby (1), running (2), singing (1), skateboarding (1), socialising (3), sport (1), travel (1), writing (1).

Comments from young people on why sport was so important to them included:

**"Athletics helps me take my mind off things."**

– Year 8 pupil

**"Rugby can distract me from what's going on in the world."**

– Year 7 to 9 pupil

**"When I'm having a hard time, I just go for a run and it helps me sort things out."** — Year 8 to 9 pupil



25 participants chose to bring objects to the workshop that represented other aspects of their identity such as their religion, family, ethnicity, personality traits, or cultural heritage. Objects included religious symbols, photographs of family or artefacts from the countries where they or their parents were born. The discussion on self-identity was expanded through the next workshop activity.

## Young people's perceptions of identity

### Key findings:

- **Young people most often define their self-identity by something they do or take part in, rather than their ethnicity, culture or religion.** When asked to choose what they felt to be an important aspect of their self-identity, participants were, by far, most likely to choose an activity or interest, (55% of participants). By comparison, only 19% cited an aspect of self-identity relating to their ethnicity, culture or religion, (the next most frequently cited category after activities or interests).
- **Participants very rarely referred to gender when asked what aspects make up a person's identity.** This suggested that they do not see it as an important part of identity at this stage of their adolescence, (most participants were aged 14 or under). It was beyond the scope of this project to investigate why participants responded in this way, but could be an interesting topic for further discussion or research.
- **Young people do not strongly define the concept of 'identity' in terms of aspects most likely to be the target of discrimination or extremism, (i.e. ethnicity, culture or religion).** When asked to consider what factors make up a person's 'identity', participants offered a wide variety of responses and were just as likely to state an aspect relating to behaviour or actions towards others, personality, interests or hobbies as they were to suggest something relating to culture, ethnicity, race or religion.



**Further detail on the findings:**

In the second workshop activity participants were asked to complete a worksheet exploring any aspect of their self-identity that they felt to be important to them. Many students chose to write about a hobby or pastime, rather than an aspect of their cultural identity, (e.g. ethnicity or religion). The aspects of self-identity chosen by participants can also be categorised under sub-headings, with aggregated counts as follows:

- Something young people do, i.e. an activity: 53 counts, (55%)
- Ethnicity, culture or religion: 18 counts, (19%)
- Personality: 11 counts, (11%)
- Personal appearance: 6 counts, (6%)
- Other: 9 counts, (9%)

The specific aspects of self-identity chosen by students in order of most frequently selected first were as follows:  
(*N.B: Numbers represent frequency of mentions. Some students chose to write about more than one thing. As such there were a total of 97 separate counts across the 86 participants*).

- **Taking part in a sport** (24)
- **Ethnicity, culture, background or heritage** e.g. the country or UK city they or their parents were born in, their religion or their family's culture (14)
- **An aspect of personality**, e.g. sensitivity, confidence, 'being weird', 'being a nerd', (11)
- Playing a musical instrument or making music (6)
- Computer gaming (5)
- Family or social circle (4)
- Art, design or photography (4)
- Academia, e.g. being good at a subject, (3)
- Appearance, e.g. skin colour or hair, (3)
- Clothes or shoes (3)
- Religion (3)
- Listening to music (2)
- Using social media or my phone (2)
- Travelling (2)
- Being a magician (1)
- Skateboarding (1)
- Playing chess (1)
- Being a volunteer lifeguard teacher (1)
- Creative writing (1)
- Memories (1)
- My pet (1)
- Not being religious (1)

**Participants' exploration of what makes up our 'identity':**

In an open, whole group discussion, following the above activity exploring the students' own self-identity, participants were asked to consider what things made up a person's identity. The most frequent responses can be categorised as follows, most frequent first, (numbers represent frequency of mentions):

Total number of distinct aspects of identity mentioned: 32

- Culture, ethnicity or race, (8)
- Behaviour or how we act towards others (7)
- Interests or hobbies (5)
- Personality (4)
- Religion (4)
- Appearance or physical characteristic, (4)
- Family or social circle, (4)

Other aspects of identity mentioned were: ambitions, beliefs, morals, body language, clothes, community, date of birth, fingerprints, job, opinions of others, language, name, photos, and 'social prints' on social media.



## Young people's and teacher's perspectives on diversity, immigration and social cohesion:

### Key findings:

- **Young people have a strong sense of diversity as a dynamic force in society.** This provides the potential to either bring people together or lead to social division.
- **Participants readily expressed views on both the positive aspects and challenges of living in a diverse society.** Responses were varied but common themes emerged such as the benefit of learning from different cultures and challenges to do with the related areas of racism, discrimination, prejudice or stereotyping. However, there was not sufficient time to explore this in great depth in all the workshops, so further discussion would be interesting.
- **Most survey respondents, whether living in an ethnically diverse community or not, perceived the level of integration into their community as either 'quite a lot' (34%) or 'high', (31%).** Participants from the schools in north east England, all in areas of relatively low ethnic diversity, were equally likely as those from London, the most ethnically diverse part of the UK, to respond with 'quite a lot', indicating that their perceptions of how high integration into their community is, may be disproportionately elevated.
- **When asked how they feel about immigration, the majority of survey respondents were quite evenly distributed between 'it's a good thing', (38%), 'I'm not sure', (33%) and 'I'm a bit concerned', (23%).** Participants from schools in north east England showed slightly higher levels of concern. Respondents gave a number of reasons for their feelings, which are explored below.
- **Young people raised additional issues when asked to think about the potential benefits and challenges of immigration in society compared to when asked the same question about diversity in society.** For example, when talking about immigration in the online survey respondents referred to the moral imperative to allow people to immigrate for humanitarian reasons as well as the perceived challenges of 'over-population', 'running out of space', and immigrants 'taking' jobs, and, very occasionally, the perceived threat of terrorists coming into the UK; things that did not come up when participants discussed diversity.
- **Both young people and teachers were generally positive about the level of integration between students of diverse backgrounds in their school;** 59% of young people surveyed selected the most positive response; "there's good integration. Students from different backgrounds and cultures get on and mix together without problems." The next most frequent response, (27%), was: "It could be better. Students from different backgrounds and cultures do mix together but there are some tensions." Participants from schools in north east England were slightly less likely to say they felt integration was good, so there is scope here for some further discussion around this regional variation. Teachers, almost always described the level of integration between students of diverse backgrounds, (e.g. ethnic,



religious & socio-economic), as either very good or good. None expressed any notable concerns about social divisions or tensions among students.

- **While integration among students in school was perceived as good, teachers in schools where the student body was not very diverse identified other notable challenges.** Two common themes emerged; teachers in schools in the north east of England in predominantly white British communities all spoke of students having a limited exposure to and understanding of other cultures and a tendency to express discriminatory views without fully understanding the implications. Teachers in London schools with a high proportion of Bangladeshi or British Bangladeshi pupils, (alongside an otherwise diverse student intake), referred to what they perceived to be the limited exposure of students to the world beyond their immediate locality, and the dominance of specific religious perspectives as a barrier to open discussion on certain issues. Occasionally they also highlighted gender divides arising from the cultural background of students, which could be problematic in the learning environment. These scenarios are by no means representative of the ethnic communities concerned, but they illustrate the varied challenges that teachers working in a community of low diversity can face.
- **Teachers in predominantly white British schools described how students often expressed discriminatory views, including anti-Muslim views, but were very open to discussion and reflection and often changed their perspective as a result.** Teachers believe such comments are often repeated from things young people have heard at home or in the community, and made without malice or even serious prior consideration as to their impact.



### Further detail on the findings:

#### Young people's sense of diversity as a dynamic force in society:

In an open, whole group discussion, following on from the activities and discussion on self-identity and identity in general, participants were asked what came to mind when they saw the word 'diversity'. Participants were most likely to offer a response that related either to social acceptance or togetherness (25% of all unique responses) or to social division or conflict (19% of all unique responses):

#### "Differences can cause contradictions.

#### People don't like those that don't agree with them."

– Year 7 to 8 pupil

#### "Splitting people into groups causes disagreement

#### Living together means people can get on.

#### They can learn and prevent violence."

– Year 7 to 9 pupil

#### "It [diversity] might cause arguments between, like, different groups or different people, so, like, it's hard for the community if these arguments are going on."

– Year 8 pupil

All the responses have been categorised below, in order of most frequently cited first:  
(Total number of separate words or concepts mentioned: 64)

- **Social acceptance or togetherness** (16 counts or 25%)
- **Social division or conflict** (12 counts or 19%)
- Differences between people (10 counts or 16%)
- Race (8 counts or 13%)
- Appearance (6 counts or 9%)
- Discrimination or prejudice (5 counts or 8%)
- Culture (4 counts or 6%)
- The dance group called 'Diversity' (3 counts or 5%)
- Learning from each other and other cultures, (3 counts or 5%)

The following words and concepts received 2 mentions each:  
*Background, beliefs, languages, music, and opinions.*

The following words and concepts received 1 mention each:  
*Age, equality, ethnicity, extremism, gender, hobbies, how you fit into a place, how others judge you, life experiences, media influence, meeting new people, money, multi-culturalism, views, personality, different places, where you grew up, pressure not to be yourself, religion, tradition, being your own person, limitations for some (e.g. non-Christians have to take Christian school holidays such as Christmas and Easter).*

#### Young people's views on the positive aspects and challenges of diversity in society:

In 3 of the 10 workshops, the research team had sufficient time to explore diversity a little further and ask participants what they thought the positive aspects or benefits of diversity in society could be, as well as the potential challenges. Below is a summarised list of all responses:

#### Positive aspects of diversity in society:

- New experiences
- Cultural awareness
- Money: the diversity between rich and poor could be positive or negative
- Can learn from each other
- 'Happy, cultural community'
- New foods
- Sense of belonging
- Can learn different things
- Socialising with new neighbours – can love their religion and celebrate what they do.
- Learn about each-others' cultures

#### Potential challenges of diversity in society:

- Arguments in communities
- Bullying
- Discrimination
- Need to be careful with your words and not upset people
- Idea of superiority and inferiority
- Immigration: some people are negative about it
- Jobs: some ethnic minorities are excluded
- Media as biased or misleading (about certain groups)
- Not everyone is accepting. Some people don't like change
- People get scared, e.g. that all Muslims are terrorists like ISIS
- People making jokes about serious subjects, e.g. about Muslims
- Prejudice
- Racism
- Segregation
- Some don't accept what is different to what they're used to
- Some like only their culture and are scared of change
- Stereotypes
- Threatened: some people feel their own culture under threat



**Young people's perspectives on immigration:**

Most survey respondents perceive the level of integration into their community as either 'quite a lot' (34%) or 'high', (31%). 21% were 'not sure'. Interestingly, participants from the schools in north east England, all in areas of relatively low ethnic diversity, were equally likely to respond with 'quite a lot', (31%). 24% said 'not a lot' and one might have expected this to be higher. It would be worthwhile to explore how perceived levels of immigration in these communities compare to actual levels, and the reasons why they are perceived as higher by some young people.

When asked how they feel about immigration, the majority of responses were quite evenly distributed between 'it's a good thing', (38%), 'I'm not sure', (33%) and 'I'm a bit concerned', (23%). Only 6% of respondents said they were 'really concerned'. Participants from schools in north east England were slightly more likely to say they were really concerned, (12%) and slightly less likely to say they felt it was a good thing, (27%), so there is some scope here to discuss further their feelings on this topic.

Many of the free text comments that were positive about immigration referred to concepts such as diversity, the opportunity to learn from other cultures and the need to help people who were fleeing war or other problems in their home country, for example, (text as original):

**"I like diversity, and how immigration has offered us a range of different cultures."**

**"In another countries, they are many issues and problems and the only way is to immigrate to another country."**

**"Because if your country is under threat it is better to move to a safer one."**

Many of the comments that were negative about immigration referred to perceived challenges of immigrants 'taking' jobs or houses, or of over-population. A handful (5 comments in total), referred to the perceived possibility that some immigrants could be terrorists. This is interesting given that perpetrators in the very recent terror attacks in London and Manchester have been identified as British-born citizens. *This misconception of terrorists 'coming in', which evidently could fuel both anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment, suggests that there is a need to challenge and discuss these issues in school.* Indeed, some of the teachers in north east England schools explained that they already had. Below is a selection of comments to illustrate the range of concerns about immigration that respondents presented (text as original);

**"Because in a few years there will not be anymore space to live"**

**"Because we can't let the country overcrowded with people coming to our country; it also means it would waste the governments money because many of them**

**live on benefits. There are loads of terrorist shown on the news and some of them are people who have immigrated from the country."**

**"I am a bit concerned because of all of the terrorist attacks that have happened around the world."**

**"I am only a little concerned about immigration because i feel like jobs will be limited because of people coming from other countries and taking them when im older."**

It is interesting to note that the online survey, which asked respondents to think about the potential benefits and challenges related to immigration, raised some additional issues than the workshop discussions about the potential challenges and benefits of diversity in society, for example, the moral imperative to allow people to immigrate for humanitarian reasons, the perceived challenges of 'over-population', 'running out of space', 'taking' jobs and so on, (see next point). It is possible that participants were not comfortable about being so open with what they saw as some of the negative aspects of immigration, or perhaps that they don't readily link the two concepts of diversity and immigration, so did not raise the same issues.

It is also interesting to note that quite a high number of respondents were unsure about the level of immigration into their community or how they feel about the issue of immigration. This could indicate they simply have not thought about it much, (potentially because they have grown up with diversity and accept it without question), or that they have thought about it but not reached a clear point of view. The free text comments gave some insight into why people had responded in this way, citing potential perceived challenges such as immigrants 'taking jobs' or 'not paying taxes'. It would be interesting to explore these mixed views held by some young people further. Below are some illustrative comments, (text as original):

**"Because sometimes immigration can be good by taking the people back into their home countries if they came to this country for no reason, but also at the same time people flea from their country to get to safety so i think we should help them and give them somewhere safe to stay."**

**"I do not think immigration is a good thing or a bad thing so I am not sure."**

**"Its because immigrants come to this country to work and pay taxes to the UK. But some immigrants come here and work but don't pay taxes which is illegal and is a current issue."**

**"Immigration isn't a subject that I am too interested in"**

**"I think immigration is a good thing because it gives people new chances and opportunities but the country is also getting very full"**

### Young peoples' and teachers' perspectives on integration among students:

Responses from teachers on how healthy the level of integration is between students of diverse backgrounds, (e.g. ethnicities, faiths), were all positive and quite evenly split between 'very healthy', (8 teachers) and 'good, but could be better', (7 teachers). (N.B: Two teachers did not explicitly address the question about integration, focussing instead on related but separate issues.) The comment below is typical of teachers' responses:

**"It's so broad here that it's difficult to find 'someone like you'. There aren't many groupings of particular students; possibly some racial groupings but it's not very strong. They don't think about diversity much; they've grown up with it. It's not an issue for them".**

– Assistant Headteacher, London

No teachers expressed any notable concerns or felt that there were tensions between students that could prove divisive. In schools which were not ethnically or culturally diverse, teachers still perceived integration between students of diverse backgrounds to be good, for example:

**"I mean, although we do have the boundaries there where there is a lack of (cultural) understanding we don't have or we have very little racism. And comparing the amount of students we have that class themselves as 'white British' and those that have other backgrounds we don't have those clashes... even homophobic, xenophobic; we don't have a lot of clashes of that nature. Not that we've witnessed anyway or had reported."**

– RE teacher, north east England

Some teachers did feel that integration between groups could be better, citing not only ethnic or cultural peer groupings but groupings along other lines such as gender or sport, although they were not very concerned:

**"Integration is improving. Certain kids do tend to stick to themselves e.g. Afghani boys, Romanian kids... they just feel comfortable with their own culture or nationality. The Afghan boys don't always want to hang out with the girls; the Somali girls also tend to stick together."**

– Teacher and Head of Year, London

**"Integration is not as good as it could be, especially as you get up the school. There is a split between boys who do sport and those who don't; that bleeds into your persona. It's cool to be into sport."**

– Teacher in a boys' school, London

### Challenges identified by teachers arising from a lack of diversity:

In the six schools where teachers described a low level of diversity among students, they explained that this brought particular challenges. In the three schools where the vast majority of students are white British, all three teachers interviewed described common challenges of students having a limited world view due to a lack of exposure to other cultures:



**"I think it brings challenges in the fact that a number of our pupils don't see the world outside of (this town).... They're very kind of set on what they hear, what they're told, with regards to extremism and the things that happened in London recently, (i.e. the Westminster Bridge terror attack). There are quite a few of them that will just have that whole idea of 'well, every Muslim is a terrorist' because they just haven't lived amongst Muslims and they haven't lived amongst other nationalities so it is hard to make them see that there is a bigger world out there."**

– RE teacher in a predominantly white British school, north east England

**"The biggest challenge is the cultural understanding... They are predominately white working class within the school. We have a very small number of minority ethnic and I think the challenges it brings is a lack of understanding of culture and of religion and of diversity, and as a subject lead for RE we do come up against a lot of questioning and especially when events such as London last week happened (i.e. the Westminster Bridge terror attack) and the whole context that 'every Muslim is a terrorist' and that, unfortunately, is the viewpoint of a lot of the students."**

– RE teacher in another predominantly white British school, north east England

Teachers in predominantly white British schools in north east England also explained that students have a tendency to unquestioningly repeat viewpoints they hear at home or in the local community, some of which could be racist, anti-Muslim, (in the context of discussions at school about Islam or terrorism), or otherwise discriminatory. These teachers also explained, however, that students that do express such viewpoints are challenged by teachers and often, when probed and given the opportunity to reflect on and discuss what they have said, they are open to adjusting their view. Often the discriminatory comments have been said 'off-the-cuff' and without serious prior consideration or malice. For example:

**"It's comments that you hear off-the-cuff that people don't realise are offensive. Certain words that they use and you think 'well you can't say that, that is a racist term.' 'Well why, why is it racist?'... It's not necessarily that the students have extremist views, it's that they're unaware that those views are unacceptable ... I think if you're open to discussing it here with the students they are open to discuss it with you."**

– Director of Student Voice and Empowerment, north east England school



Occasionally some of these challenges posed by a lack of diversity in the local community and school were explicitly recognised by students as well:

**“I think a lot of people in the school are xenophobic... because it’s just that like pre-set idea that just because they are Muslim, dark-skinned, whatever; they’re not me and therefore I dislike them... and therefore I’m going to be discriminatory towards them because I don’t understand them. I think if there was education on, you know, Islam is a peaceful religion, then there’d be a lot more support.”**

– Year 9 pupil in a predominantly white British school, North East England

**“When I wear a certain hat, people tell me I’m extremist.”**

– Year 8 pupil, London

A further challenge relating to low diversity was related in one London school, where many students are Muslim. A teacher explained how they felt this had precipitated a lack of diversity of “viewpoints”, with students often being unwilling to even enter into discussion over certain issues because their religion “did not allow it”:

**“Statistically the school is very diverse. But in terms of students views and parents’ views, there’s quite a large Muslim group so there comes a block when it comes to discussing issues that Islam finds challenging: so, with kids the response is ‘my religion says this can’t happen’ so there isn’t the scope for discussion. There are also issues that come up that come from other communities. If you think about diversity in terms of respect and allowing different viewpoints, there’s a lot of work to do.”**

– Maths teacher, London

However, in other schools with a high proportion of Muslim students, teachers did not express this concern. It is interesting to see, however, that an ethnically and culturally diverse educational environment is not necessarily without challenges in terms of encouraging and facilitating open discussion on sensitive topics.

Finally, teachers working in the two London schools with a high proportion of Bangladeshi and British Bangladeshi students related a different set of concerns; namely a perceived lack of exposure to the world outside of their immediate locality and, occasionally, a gender divide which could be problematic in the learning environment:

**“When we go on trips, they haven’t seen much outside of (this part of London) ...everywhere else seems like a different city. Is this about money? They’re not exploring enough, even the free things. They’re lacking experience so this limits their language, conversation, understanding of the world. Their outlook can be quite narrow.”**

– Teacher in a London school with students of predominantly Bangladeshi and British-Bangladeshi origin

**“Girls are encouraged to be more vocal (here). Some boys are too vocal, aggressive. You can see how the boys are treated very differently at home; they can be arrogant and disrespectful to female staff.”**

– Science teacher with pastoral responsibilities in a London school with a high proportion of Bangladeshi or British Bangladeshi students

It must be remembered that these comments represent the personal opinions of teachers given in a relatively short interview. To form an in-depth understanding of the cultural dynamics in a school and their impact on the learning environment and student’s perspectives would require much deeper observation and wider discussion with students and staff. However, the concerns raised by teachers suggest there may be a need for support, resources or initiatives in these schools to help teachers with constructively challenging discriminatory stereotypes, tackling the lack of cultural understanding of varying kinds, and tackling barriers to open discussion, while maintaining sensitivity and respect for the cultural context of students. Such solutions would need to be tailored to each school’s specific context, but the learning about what works well could have wider applicability.





## Young people's understanding of extremism

### Key findings:

- **Young people most strongly associate extremism with violence, hatred,** religion and racism, closely followed by xenophobia and intolerance of other people's views.
- **Young people strongly perceive extremism as a historical phenomenon.** When asked to give examples of extremism, approximately half of all individual responses related to historical figures, eras or events. Of these Hitler, the Nazis or the Holocaust were the most frequently mentioned specific examples.
- **While participants offered several historical leaders as examples of 'extremism', President Donald Trump was the only current political leader cited.** Participants specifically mentioned his 'views' on Muslims, the (proposed) ban on entry to USA of citizens from predominantly Muslim countries and desire for a wall with Mexico as 'extreme'.
- **Young people do not readily associate the word 'extremism' with terrorism.** When asked to give examples of 'extremism', terrorism or specific terror attacks were not very frequently mentioned, although ISIS was specifically mentioned in some workshops.
- **They have an awareness of relevant global issues, mentioning for instance ISIS, Syria or Trump's ban on travel from certain predominantly Muslim countries. However, they do not readily make the links explicitly between those geopolitical contexts elsewhere, and current terrorist attacks in the UK. Several sets of responses support this suggestion that young people do readily contextualise extremism in wider geo-political issues.**
- Firstly, as mentioned above, historical examples of extremism were much more commonly cited than present-day conflicts or international tensions that have given rise to extremist activity or terror attacks in the UK.
- Secondly, participants were fairly evenly split on the question of whether extremism is 'to do with politics'. The time available for the workshops did not always allow for in-depth discussion on this. Potentially this response is related to young people's understanding of the word 'politics'; a broad term which may be understood in various ways by respondents. It may also be related to a low awareness or understanding of geo-political issues and events. However, it is interesting that while respondents were aware of a range of extreme viewpoints, political groupings and high profile geo-political events and conflicts, they did not readily make connections between them. Deeper discussion and further research would be required to understand why this is the case.
- Thirdly, participants were also fairly evenly split on the question of whether extremism is 'about what people do'. This may suggest that young people do not readily associate high-profile incidents and the actions of those involved, (e.g. terror attacks, murders motivated by extreme views), with extremist views. However, this is conjecture based on the workshop discussions, and would require further discussion and research with young people to understand fully.
- **There is a lack of consensus among young people as to whether people should or should not be free in society to voice extreme views.** Participants presented mixed responses on the question of whether extremism is 'about what people say' and intensely debated this issue in the workshops.



### Further detail on the findings:

#### What do young people understand by the word 'extremism'? How do they contextualise it in global issues?

Working in small groups of 4 to 5 people, students were asked to sort 12 potential descriptors of extremism into two piles, headed, 'extremism is' and 'extremism is not'. They were asked to do this 'cold', i.e. with no introductory discussion about the word extremism, its potential meaning or related concepts, (group discussion on these issues happened after the activity). The most frequent responses across all the groups were as follows, (in order of most frequent first):

1. Extremism is being violent towards people you don't agree with, (19 out of 20 groups)
2. Extremism is holding views that are violent towards other people, (16 out of 20 groups)
3. Extremism is holding views that are hateful towards other people, (16 out of 20 groups)
4. Extremism is to do with religion, (14 out of 20 groups)
5. Extremism is to do with racism, (14 out of 20 groups)
6. Extremism is not about holding beliefs that most people think are unreasonable, (13 out of 20 groups)
7. Extremism is to do with xenophobia, (13 out of 20 groups, N.B: most groups asked for an explanation of the word 'xenophobia', before deciding).
8. Extremism is refusing to accept other people's views, (13 out of 20 groups)
9. Extremism is holding offensive views, (11 out of 20 groups)
10. Extremism is about what people do, (11 out of 20 groups)

Groups were fairly evenly split as to whether extremism could or could not be described as:

- To do with politics.
- About what people say.

The above responses indicate that the participants most strongly associate extremism with violence, hatred, religion and racism, closely followed by xenophobia and intolerance of other people's views:

#### **"Racism, xenophobia, extremism – they're all linked. It's behaviour and acts that demonstrate them."**

– Year 8 student, London

#### **"Racism; it might not be overt but it's still a thought and it influences behaviour therefore it is extreme. No matter what you might think, it will influence the way you act."**

– Year 12 pupil, London

#### **"I think it [extremism] is about religion because it's misconstruing the teachings of the bible and Koran etc. ... misunderstanding then acting on it."**

– Year 7 to 9 student, London

#### **"You've got discrimination and then the next one up is extremism. I just think that offensive views is more like discrimination and not extremism."**

– Year 9 student, north East England

It is interesting that there were such mixed responses on the question of whether extremism is 'to do with politics'. This suggests that young people do not readily contextualise extremism in wider geo-political issues. One way to try and understand how young people contextualise extremism is by considering the examples that they give of extremism. Workshop participants were asked to give such examples in an open discussion format. This yielded a wide variety of responses, the most frequent of which are listed below, (numbers represent frequency of mentions):

Total number of responses: 54

Total number of separate examples given: 39

- Historical events or eras, e.g. the British Empire, colonisation, Puritanism, slavery, segregation and the Ku Klux Klan in the USA (14)
- Historical figures, including dictators and monarchs (10)
- 'Terrorism' or specific modern-day terrorist attacks, (Westminster Bridge, Manchester Arena, 9/11 Twin Towers attack) (8)
- Present day conflicts or international tensions, e.g. Syria, North Korea, Nigeria, 'blood diamond' conflict (4)
- Present Donald Trump, (the only present day political leader mentioned) (4)

Other responses given were often generalised words or terms including: 'dictators', 'stereotyping', 'genocide'. Notable mentions of specific groups or individuals were:

- Hitler, the holocaust or the Nazis, (4)
- President Donald Trump, specifically his 'views' on Muslims, ban on entry to USA of citizens from predominantly Muslim countries and desire for a wall with Mexico, (4)
- ISIS (3). Although interestingly, students were equally likely to mention the Klu Klux Klan in the USA or apartheid in South Africa as they were ISIS, with these concepts also receiving 3 specific mentions.

The comments below illustrate why respondents cited such leaders and groups as examples of extremism:

#### **"The Holocaust was extreme because it was an attack on specific groups of people like Jews and homosexuals. They were specifically targeting people that they didn't want in society."**

– Year 9 pupil, north east England

#### **"Lots of these [extreme] ideas in the past came from people in charge. They had power. People thought they were correct because of who they were."**

– Year 12 pupil, London

**“You can understand Trump’s view on protecting the US, but it’s an extreme reaction.”**

– Year 12 pupil, London

**“Donald Trump has lots of anger. He’s racist, but not always.”**

– Year 7 to 8 pupil, London

Several teachers also made comments about students’ interest in President Trump and how they understood or contextualised his statements and policies:

**“Donald Trump getting in as President is huge with them and it makes you realise just how much they listen and they watch the Western media and what they digest from that. I think we’ve had more discussion of that than we did of the London attacks last week.”**

– RE teacher, north east England

**“Donald trump is a bit of a running joke but the boys are worried... They don’t understand much but they know the world is a bit of a scary place at an international level.”**

– PSHE Co-ordinator and Head of RE, boys’ school in London

The question of whether extremism is ‘about what people say’ generated mixed responses and intense debate by participants. This was interesting as participants had displayed strong consensus in the statement sorting activity and discussion that it was ‘extreme’ and unacceptable to hold or express views that were violent or hateful towards other people; i.e. they felt strongly that people should not be free to say certain things. The debate often centred not around the original question of whether extremism could be ‘about what people say’ but whether people should be allowed in general in society to say anything they like. In these discussions, students often made a case along the lines of whether people should be allowed to say something or not depended on the impact that would have on other people; whether it would offend them, hurt their feelings or make them feel discriminated against. The mix of opinions is illustrated by the range of comments below:

**“It’s their personal view. They can say what they want.”**

– Year 8 pupil, London

**“You should have freedom of speech, but be open-minded to other views.”**

– Year 12 pupil, London

**“You might think something but you don’t need to say it.”**

– Year 8 pupil, London

**“Everyone has their own feelings. You need to know how far to go. Not all thoughts need to be said.”**

– Year 12 pupil, London

**“We’re human. It’s a free world. You’re allowed to think what you want. You’re not allowed to say anything you want in case it offends other people but you can think anything you want.”**

– Year 8 pupil, north east England

## Young people and teachers’ perspectives on school as a ‘safe space’ to discuss extreme views or sensitive issues

### Key findings:

- **Incidences of extremism in schools were found to be rare.** Only 4 of the 17 teachers interviewed reported that such incidents had occurred. These included issues that gave rise to safeguarding concerns, students being caught up in a local anti-Muslim demonstration, an incident of serious violence and an expression of extreme views. Young people mirrored these responses. Most survey participants, (67%), said they had never been in a situation where they had experienced extreme views being expressed at school. 15% said they had experienced extreme views but almost as many, 16%, were not sure. This is perhaps not surprising as what could be classified as ‘extreme’ is subjective. Incidents cited included things like racism, being called a ‘terrorist’, religious insult, sexist comments, bullying and ‘making fun’ of aspects of people’s culture or ethnicity. Interestingly, a few comments referred to ‘banter’ or ‘jokes’, reflecting teachers’ observations in interview that sometimes racist or otherwise discriminatory comments are made without serious intent to hurt somebody or because the implications are not properly understood. There were no incidences of radicalisation or awareness of radicalisation of any kind cited.
- **When asked if they felt the school provided a safe space for discussion of any potentially sensitive issues, including extreme views, the majority of teachers felt emphatically that it did.** A wide variety of means and channels were used to create such safe space opportunities, as outlined further below
- **However, young people saw more room for improvement. Around half of young people surveyed felt that school is a ‘pretty safe space’ for discussion, (54%), only 23% felt it is a ‘very safe space’.** 16% said they don’t feel school is a safe space for discussion and 8% were not sure. Participants from schools in the north east of England were slightly more likely to say they felt it was not a safe space for discussion, (24%), and slightly less likely to say they felt it was a very safe space, (10%). These findings are all interesting given that most teachers interviewed felt that their school was a very safe space for discussion of sensitive issues. Potentially, they may have the classroom or other formal school setting in mind whereas the young people responding to the survey may have been thinking in broader terms, for example, about discussion among peers in the informal setting, (breaks and lunchtime for example). This would be interesting to explore through further discussion.
- **Around half of students, (49%), feel their teachers do a good job of helping students discuss sensitive issues, like racism, sexism or extreme political or religious views.** However, 34% felt they were ‘OK, but could do more’ and 8% said they don’t do a good job and it was really difficult to discuss such issues, indicating significant scope for improvement.



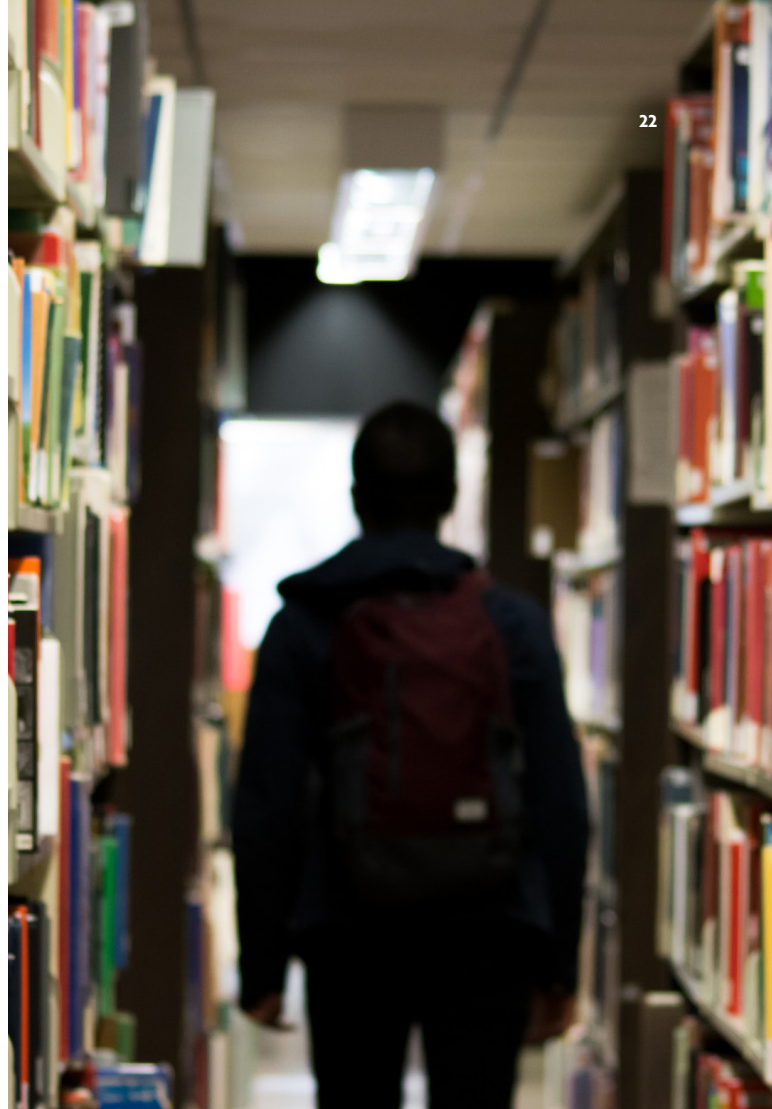
- **While staff generally felt that the school was a safe space for discussion, they also recognised challenges and often saw potential for improvement.** Where teachers did identify challenges in creating or improving school as a safe space for discussion these included; a varied willingness and capability across staff, time pressure on teachers making in-depth treatment of issues difficult, or a tendency for boys to be either unable to articulate their feelings or, conversely, to be more expressive and confident than girls, sometimes inhibiting discussion by girls.
- **Religious Education, (RE or RS), emerged as an important subject in the provision of a safe space for discussion of sensitive issues in school.** RE lessons were often the place where discussions on issues such as recent terror attacks came or discriminatory views from students came up. RE teachers spoke often of how they were prepared to and did engage in discussion on such events and challenge expressions of prejudice or discrimination.
- **Schools generally feel equipped to deal with safeguarding children potentially at risk from extremism but feel that some staff would benefit from more support and training to facilitate discussion about extreme views and sensitive topics:** When asked whether they felt that generally staff in school felt equipped and confident to deal with an incident of extremism or a child potentially at risk, should this arise in school, most teachers said yes, they did. However, they often commented on the variability of confidence and capabilities across the staff body to engage in discussion about potentially extreme views and felt that more training could be helpful, including for those staff tasked with delivering PSHE.
- **When asked what teachers felt they needed to create a safe space and support students to have respectful dialogue on extreme views or sensitive issues, they expressed a wide variety of ideas.** These related to staff capacity building, curriculum content, student opportunities and parental engagement.

#### Further detail on the findings:

Teachers were questioned on the extent to which they felt their school provides a safe space for students and staff to discuss extreme views or sensitive issues such as racism, sexism or other forms of discrimination. They were also asked if incidences of extreme views or actions had occurred in the school, how the school had dealt with this and the extent to which they felt they and other staff are equipped and confident to handle situations of extremism, should they arise, and to ensure a safe space for discussion on sensitive or potentially divisive issues.

#### Incidences of extremism in schools:

When asked if incidences of extremism, (i.e. extreme views or actions) had occurred in their school, most teachers, (10 in total), replied that no such incident had arisen to date. In 4 schools, such incidents had occurred and included issues that gave rise to safeguarding concerns, students being caught up in a local anti-Muslim demonstration, serious violence and an expression



of extreme views. (3 teachers did not give an explicit response on this question, stating either that they felt they could not comment with certainty as they were new to the school or because not all such incidents would be known about by all staff):

**“Things have come up. For example, some kid brought up the ‘je suis Charlie’ poster. Some Muslim children were upset. They came into school wearing their religious clothing and were told they should be in school uniform. Another kid went to Germany. He was having some personal problems. People were worried but it was totally innocent.”**

– Geography teacher, London

As mentioned earlier in the report, teachers often commented that, where extreme views had been expressed in school, young people often hadn’t fully formed an opinion or even given much thought to what they were saying, but were rather repeating something they had heard outside of school. They were often willing to discuss what they had said and change their mind:

**“Extreme views are bound to happen with a thousand people (in the school)...Extremism may come from the point of ignorance but they are willing to change their opinions.”**

– RE teacher, London

**“I’ve experienced a pupil putting forward a viewpoint that could be extremist as a bit of a joke or to wind someone up: in that case, I’ve challenged them and then they’ve apologised or were just showing off. You need to get to the nitty gritty and ask them without jumping to conclusions.”**

– Teacher in a boys’ school, London

Most young people surveyed, (67%), said they had never been in a situation where they had experienced extreme views being expressed at school. This mirrors teacher's responses in interviews, which indicated that incidences of extremism were very rare in schools. 15% of young people said they had experienced extreme views but almost as many, 16%, were not sure. This is perhaps not surprising as what could be classified as 'extreme' is subjective. Incidents cited in the free text responses included things like racism, being called a 'terrorist', religious insult, sexist comments, bullying and 'making fun' of aspects of people's culture or ethnicity. Interestingly, a few comments referred to 'banter' or 'jokes', reflecting teachers' observations in interviews that sometimes racist or otherwise discriminatory comments are made without serious intent to hurt somebody or because the implications are not properly understood. There were no incidences of radicalisation or awareness of radicalisation of any kind cited. Below are a few examples of responses from the online survey, (text as original):

**“someone insulted me about how I have a religious symbol on my forehead. the person said that ‘go home and go wash your forehead’. this really upset me due to the fact i had a religious symbol on my forehead.”**

**“I’m not sure if its 100% extreme views but in my school there is a lot of racist ‘banter’”**

**“A kid had once said ‘all Muslims are terrorists’”**

**“I used an extreme view once or twice but as jokes”**

#### **School as a safe space for discussion:**

A requirement for schools to provide 'safe space' for discussion is enshrined in the Prevent Duty, though arguably not in the most helpful terms. The Prevent Duty guidance for schools in England and Wales explains that:

**“Schools should be safe spaces in which children and young people can understand and discuss sensitive topics, including terrorism and the extremist ideas that are part of terrorist ideology, and learn how to challenge these ideas.”**

The guidance further explains that while *“the Prevent Duty is not intended to limit discussion of these issues”* schools should *“secure a balanced presentation of political issues.”*<sup>13</sup>

The phrasing of these requirements in this way has arguably led to some caution and confusion for schools on how they should 'respond' under the PREVENT duty, to opinion voiced by students where such opinions could be seen as 'extreme'. Staff who are less confident or able to challenge such views and facilitate discussion may be inclined to disengage or cut off debate. While the PREVENT duty requires that schools create such safe spaces for discussion, there is no guidance provided for schools on how to ensure staff are prepared and confident to encourage and maintain a safe space for

discussion of sensitive issues. Instead, the guidance on training and protocol is heavily geared towards safeguarding of children most at risk of radicalisation or harm due to extremism. This has been a notable source of frustration for some in the education sector. Think Global's previous research, surveying 100 teachers in 2016 about the Prevent duty, has demonstrated a lack of confidence in 'proactive safeguarding'; that is, creating a safe space in schools for young people to talk about global issues connected to extremism and radicalisation. While generally confident in their ability to meet safeguarding duties and respond reactively to incidences, **teachers commonly expressed a desire for more support in proactive safeguarding, specifically for resources, training on critical thinking and general advice and guidance.**

The research that has informed this report reinforced these findings; teachers and young people see schools as safe space for discussion but see scope for significant improvement; young people in particular expressing that things could be better, as is further explored below.

When asked if they felt the school provided a safe space for discussion of any potentially extreme views or sensitive issues, the majority of teachers, (12 out of 17), felt that it did. A wide variety of means and channels were used to create such safe space opportunities, including RE (Religious Education) lessons, PSHE (Personal Social Health Education) sessions, assemblies, focus groups, School Councils, designated staff with pastoral duties, (e.g. Heads of Year, Child Protection Officers), external speakers, life-coaching and extra-curricular events:

**“The school is a safe space; the heads of year are good along with the BEST (pastoral care) team and other teaching staff. We broach some difficult subjects in PSHE e.g. religious views of relationships and sex, which includes a discussion on FGM. The students are usually comfortable with these. For example, we studied the history of gin; this had relevance for some young people who are affected by alcoholism in their families.”**

– Teacher and Head of Year, London



<sup>13</sup> 'The Prevent Duty. Departmental Advice for schools and childcare providers.' Department for Education, June 2015, p. 11.



**“The school is a safe space. We have a number of platforms for this: it’s a family atmosphere – a small school principle – they can talk to each other and us. There’s not a limit on expression. We have focus groups on issues. We follow the KS4 content in terms of a PSHE programme and a plan has been put together. This means they hear about a range of issues e.g. FGM, different backgrounds. Today it was about energy drinks. This wasn’t in the plan but we are reactive to what we see going on and trying to be socially responsible. The student council has reps that meet weekly.”**

– Vice Principle, London

**“The school has a lot of opportunity for safe space discussion – in class, or there are lots of people available to talk things through with e.g. the chaplain. Lessons and topics don’t shy away from difficult subjects. Maybe because the staff body is young?... The boys give the impression of feeling safe and willing to talk. As long as it’s conducted in the right way, it works and they have opinions about things.”**

– Teacher in a boys’ school, London

**“(Pupils) know they can go to their tutor, their year leader, we’ve also got the anti-bullying ambassadors... we’ve got a Child Protection Officer and assistant Head for Pastoral. So, they’re all aware we’ve got posts they can go to and staff are aware.”**

– RE teacher, north east England

**“The school is a safe space; there’s a huge amount of support... We do so much to consider everybody’s viewpoints. Heads of Year have more information about, for example, bullying, radicalisation etc. We have a lot of externals coming in and supporting too.”**

– Science teacher with pastoral responsibilities, London

5 teachers felt that their school provided quite a safe space for such discussion but that it could be better. They identified specific and diverse challenges including:

- A tendency for students to be willing to challenge a teacher’s viewpoint or suggestion, but less willingness to challenge each other.
- The fast pace of a growing school, which could sometimes lead to time pressure for students and staff and curtail opportunity for in-depth discussion.
- A varied willingness and capability across staff to have such discussions with students.
- A tendency for younger boys to struggle to articulate their feelings and manage emotions.
- Conversely to the above, a tendency for boys to be more expressive and confident than girls, sometimes inhibiting discussion by girls.
- An overt (publicly stated) Christian ethos, which welcomed students of all faiths but may sometimes make non-Christian students hesitant to be open about their views.

When asked whether they felt school was a safe space for discussing sensitive topics, young people were less overwhelmingly positive than teachers. Around half of young people surveyed felt that school is a ‘pretty safe space’ for discussion, (54%), only 23% felt it is a ‘very safe space’. 16% said they don’t feel school is a safe space for discussion and 8% were not sure. Participants from schools in the north east of England were slightly more likely to say they felt it was not a safe space for discussion, (24%), and slightly less likely to say they felt it was a very safe space, (10%). Potentially, the fact that students and teachers had slightly different perspectives on this issue is because teachers had the classroom or other formal school settings in mind whereas the young people may have been thinking in broader terms, for example, about discussion among peers in the informal setting, (breaks and lunchtime for example). This would be interesting to explore further.

Around half of students, (49%), feel their teachers do a good job of helping students discuss sensitive issues, like racism, sexism or extreme political or religious views. However, 34% felt they were ‘OK, but could do more’ and 8% said they don’t do a good job and it was really difficult to discuss such issues, indicating significant scope for improvement. Participants from schools in north east England were less likely to say they felt that teachers did a good job, (30%) and more likely to say they did not do a good job, (14%). There was not an opportunity for free text comment here and it would be interesting to explore further with students what they feel teachers could do better or differently.

While staff generally felt that the school was a safe space for discussion, as with students, they did recognise challenges and often saw potential for improvement. Where teachers did identify challenges in creating or improving school as a safe space for discussion these included: a varied willingness and capability across staff, time pressure on teachers making in-depth treatment of issues difficult, or a tendency for boys to be either unable to articulate their feelings or, conversely, to be more expressive and confident than girls, sometimes inhibiting discussion by girls:

**“There’s a level of formality and some boys have trouble opening up. It’s been discussed. For example, we’re now doing sex education in year nine. Also, we have an equalities programme ready to put in place, looking at gender identity and so on. Boys don’t have the words to express what they’re feeling. They don’t feel unsafe but they’re not free to talk”.**

– Assistant Headteacher, London

**“It’s all about time though... You’re just dealing with the day-to-day all the time. There’s stuff in the here and now that stops you planning and doing anything for the future.”**

– Science teacher with pastoral responsibilities, London

**“It’s down to the individual teacher more than is this a safe space or place – the school is really open about difficult issues. As for whether the children feel comfortable with that, that’s about the teacher.”**

– Teacher, London school



**“Sometimes I’ve tried to broach particular challenging topics within my teaching; in art, perspectives comes up a lot. To be able to deal with those, it’s about your confidence, about how they’re going to respond to you. It comes with experience.**

– Art and Design Technology teacher, London

### **The importance of Religious Education as a space to discuss sensitive topics:**

Previous research and commentary has highlighted in various ways, the potential importance of RE as a space to discuss sensitive topics and constructively challenge extreme ideas and prejudice.

Francis highlights an approach that has been tried in universities, which have increased the religious literacy of staff and students to facilitate better quality conversations about beliefs and values. This approach, they believe:

**“taps into a broader conversation about whether Religious Education (RE) in schools could be better used to educate pupils about different religions and, indeed, if RE needs to be re-thought to help it achieve this”<sup>14</sup>**

Clarke and Woodhead go further, making a series of recommendations to change the requirements and status of Religious Education in English schools, including:

**“a change from Religious Education to Religious and Moral education, to describe this part of the statutory curriculum, the introduction of an agreed national syllabus with similar legal status to other subjects in the National Curriculum and a broadening of the requirements of Religious education at Key Stage 4 to include religious, spiritual, moral, ethical, social and cultural values”<sup>15</sup>**

This would perhaps integrate several of the requirements of SMSC into the formal curriculum and increase the potential remit, time and capacity of schools, to do the following:

1. To develop the critical thinking skills needed to recognise and challenge prejudice.
2. To develop respectful mutual tolerance in a diverse society.
3. To foster resilience to stereotyping and discrimination when making sense of extreme and terrorist incidents.

Lynn Davies further reminds us of the powerful role that RE can play. She warns that it is dangerous for schools to ring-fence religion as somehow above critique, at best, missing an opportunity for students to develop critical appraisal skills, and at worst, leaving young people vulnerable to dogma, and therefore potentially less able to critique extreme views of any kind:

<sup>14</sup> Francis, *Ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> ‘A New Settlement, Religion and Belief in Schools’, *Westminster Faith Debates*, Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead, June 2015, pp. 64-65

<sup>16</sup> ‘Religion is Risky, Secularism Safeguards’, Lynn Davies, *Centre for International Education and Research (CIER) at the University of Birmingham*, 21st January 2014



**“In my work on extremism I have found it crucial that young people learn to analyse religious messages, to question sacred texts and to be aware of rights around free speech... In a democracy, we have the right (and duty) to freely critique government and politicians, economists, environmentalists – in fact any of our opinion leaders. Religion and religious worldviews should not be exempt from this critical appraisal... Unless young people learn the skills and habits of healthy doubt, healthy enquiry, healthy politics and healthy satire, we leave them highly vulnerable to dogma”<sup>16</sup>**

In the research that lead to this report, Religious Education, (RE), also called Religious Studies, (RS), emerged in very practical terms as an important subject in the provision of a safe space for discussion of sensitive issues in school:

**“The school is a safe space for discussion of issues. RS is a constantly evolving subject and influenced by geopolitics; if it’s not controversial it’s not RE. (The hard thing is) running out of ideas as to what to teach them to challenge them. I’m introducing philosophy to year 8 to try this out.”**

– RE teacher, London

**“From an RE point of view they know they can say anything but it will be challenged and that’s what I like about RE. So, with year 7 we’ve just done ‘Is religion dead’; we’ve looked at hate crimes against Muslims and Jews and a comment’s been said that was ‘oh well, they don’t belong here’ or whatever. Now I challenge that, I don’t let it go. We’ll look at it and I’ll say, ‘well actually did you not hear that Muslim lady had an English accent, she was born here’, and they’ll go ‘aaaah’ and it makes them think.”**

– RE teacher, north East England

### How equipped teachers feel to respond to extreme views or incidences in school:

When asked whether they felt that generally staff in school felt equipped and confident to deal with extremism or extreme views, should this arise in school, most said yes, they did. Overall responses from the 17 teachers interviewed were as follows:

- Yes, very well prepared: 8, (e.g. through PREVENT training, specific teaching content or external support).
- Yes, well prepared but could be better: 2, (e.g. depends on the confidence or experience of each teacher).
- No, generally not well prepared: 1, (only a limited number of staff have been trained).
- Not sure or did not give explicit response: 6, (often teachers who responded this way felt unable to comment on behalf of other staff).

However, teachers often commented on the variability of confidence and capabilities across the staff body and felt that more training would be helpful, including for those staff tasked with delivering PSHE:

**“More training on prevention of extremism and picking up on the signs earlier, is needed. There’s not enough support with how to deal with extremist views whatever they’re on e.g. animal rights, gender equality balanced with cultural norms; walking that line between cultural norms, British values, the law, is hard... There is so much emphasis on exam results and then whatever hot issue just gets pushed into PSHE which is delivered by non-specialists that don’t have confidence.”**

– Teacher and Head of Year, London

**“Staff aren’t prepared for the possibility. The vast majority of staff don’t want to teach PSHE and don’t know how to respond when kids say something provocative or unexpected. Besides saying ‘this is against the school rules’, which doesn’t actually challenge what the child believes, they feel they can’t say anything. So, the kid carries on with the same view.”**

– Maths teacher, London

**“The staff body has the expertise but it depends on the specifics of the incident. We’ve had solid Prevent training though.”**

– Assistant Headteacher, London

### What do teachers feel they need to create a safe space and support students to have respectful dialogue on difficult issues?

When asked this question, teachers gave a wide variety of responses, relating to various areas including staff capacity, curriculum, student opportunities, and parents. They did not display any strong weighting in the responses, suggesting that what is needed may vary considerably depending on the context of each school. More in-depth discussion with a wider variety of staff in each school would be needed to ascertain more clearly the needs of each. The overall range of responses has been categorised and summarised below:

#### Staff capacity related:

- More training on prevention of extremism and picking up on the signs earlier.
- More support with how to deal with and talk through extremist views of any kind e.g. animal rights, gender equality.
- Teacher recruitment should better consider ‘the kind of people attracted to the profession’ and not just focus on academic qualifications.
- More support to plan and teach PSHE, (Personal Social Health Education).
- More time to deal with issues when they come up, rather than compartmentalising discussion into certain lessons.
- Time, (teachers are so time pressured), and dedicated groups to focus on issues.

#### Curriculum related:

- School should be more proactive and embed in teaching; not just react to incidents.

#### Student opportunity related:

- Take issues out of the tutor sessions, e.g. through student-led, non-compulsory activities and debate.
- More student ownership of the agenda on what to tackle and discuss.
- Exposure to other (diverse) communities in action; through visitors to school or going out on field trips, as well as teaching resources to help students understand those communities.

#### Parent related:

- More work with parents on their capacity to deal with challenges of social media, (bullying, aggression, intimidation, discrimination etc.)





**Specific comments from teachers included:**

**“At the moment, we deal with things on an incident basis but we need to be more proactive with open discussion, tolerance, diversity and so on. And PHSCRE (Personal, Health, Social, Cultural, Religious Education); we need to embed it through these topics.”**

– Geography teacher, London

**“What would help is tackling it (extremism) through PSHE – that’s about us planning those sessions, so outside support about what to teach and how to teach it. I was teaching it on British Values; I was fine but could have done a better job with some support.”**

– Teacher in a boys’ school, London

**“We do talk about things when they come up. We don’t let things go...Maybe we could do more for some staff to help them follow up and talk through (issues).”**

– PSHE Co-ordinator and Head of RE, London

Thomas reinforces some of these comments from teachers. He highlights the need to:

**“support and encourage schools by giving them permission to bring political debate into schools and to discuss radical ideas with all young people.”**

Thomas adds this should be done both in a planned way, for example thorough religious education lessons and “re-prioritised” citizenship studies, and in a “reactive way”, when national and international events impact on young people. He stresses this would require:

**“more focus in initial and in-service teacher training on how teachers can facilitate difficult debates”<sup>17</sup>**

Thomas also reflects the ideas expressed by teachers on how exposure of young people to diversity in community could be a powerful way to help break down stereotypes and help young people reflect constructively on prejudicial perspectives. He describes the Think Project, supported by Radicalisation Research and the Institute of Community Cohesion, where:

**“White young people with strong racist views about minorities and at risk of influence by far-right groups” were taken through an educational programme “that includes meetings with Muslims and asylum seekers, so that young people can experience the human reality behind the stereotypes. This experience has enabled profound learning and attitudinal shifts among most of the young people talking part.”<sup>18</sup>**

<sup>17</sup> Thomas, *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Thomas, *Ibid.*, p.2





# The social challenges that concern young people

## What makes young people worry, feel excluded, or feel safe or unsafe?

### Key findings:

- Young people often said they were worried about being ‘judged’ or fear of ‘failure’ of some kind, or meeting expectations related to exams or their future career.
- When asked what made participants feel ‘excluded’ the most frequent responses were feeling disempowered, not listened to or excluded from voting and decision making, due to their age, being ‘left out’ socially by peers or their appearance, e.g. hair, clothes or ‘the way I look’
- Extremism & high-security presence is of low concern for young people in relation to ‘feeling safe’, suggesting that worries about extremism or terrorism are not front of mind for many young people, even in London. This was interesting given the Westminster Bridge, Manchester Arena and London Bridge area terrorist attacks took place during the research period. When asked what made them feel ‘unsafe’, participants often talked from the perspective of personal security, about feeling unsafe alone in public or out at night.
- When asked what made them feel ‘safe’ responses most often centred around familiar people and surroundings.

### Further detail on the findings:

Prior to a whole group discussion, workshop participants were asked to complete worksheets, outlining:

- What made them worry
- What made them feel excluded
- What made them feel safe
- What made them feel unsafe

Their responses are explored below. (N.B: Some students chose to write about more than one thing. As such, all counts represent the number of times any one topic occurred.)

### What ‘worries’ young people?

When writing about what ‘worried’ them some themes occurred among participants. These are listed below in order of most frequent first:

- **Being ‘judged’ or fear of ‘failure’** of some kind, or meeting expectations related to exams or their future career, (14 counts spread across all schools)
- **Bullying**, (7 counts spread across 2 schools)
- **Discrimination or stereotyping**, including racism and sexism, (5 counts spread across 3 schools)
- **Specific phobias**, e.g. spiders, plane travel, (5 counts across 2 schools)

- **Nothing**, (5 counts across 2 schools)
- **War**, (4 counts across 3 schools)
- **Family related worries**, (3 counts spread across 2 schools)

### The following ‘worries’ each received 2 counts spread across 1 or 2 schools:

- **Terrorism** or related international situations
- **Future of the world** in general
- **Death**
- **Being alone**

### Other ‘worries’ that were each listed by only one participant were:

- Islam - what people think of it
- Lack of work ethic in young people
- Violence
- Crime
- Loss of diversity in the world

### What makes young people feel ‘excluded’?

When writing about what made them feel ‘excluded’ some themes occurred among participants. These are listed below in order of most frequent first:

- **Feeling disempowered**, not listened to or excluded from voting and decision making, due to their age, (8 counts spread across 2 schools)
- **Being ‘left out’ socially** by peers, e.g. excluded from social media chats or not being invited out, (7 counts spread across 4 schools)
- **Their appearance**, e.g. hair, clothes or ‘the way I look’, (7 counts spread across 5 schools)
- **Being ‘different’ to others**, e.g. in terms of ‘norms’, ‘hobbies’ and ‘trends’, (6 counts spread across 3 schools)
- **Discrimination or stereotyping**, (3 counts spread across 2 schools)
- **‘Bad’ students getting preferential treatment** by teachers, (3 counts, all within one school)

The following issues that made young people feel ‘excluded’, each receiving 2 counts spread across 1 or 2 schools:

- Being shy
- 2 participants said they do not feel excluded
- 2 participants gave no response, (and 3 participants gave an illegible response)

Other issues that made young people feel excluded, each listed by only one participant were:

- Bullying
- Being vegetarian
- Not following a rugby team

The issue of feeling excluded due to a perceived lack of decision making power or opportunity to influence politics or to vote, (below the age of 18), was the subject of quite intense discussion in the workshops. For example:

**“It’s kind of worrying when there are decisions that are being made for you that you haven’t got control over. So like, in the government, they can make decisions but they’re looking from a political point of view but you can kind of see things from a community point of view.”**

– Year 8 to 9 student, north East England

**“When you have the polling stations and that some people are actually interested in that when they’re younger so they should make a decision in what they want for their country.”**

– Year 8 student, north East England

The time available in their workshops only allowed for relatively limited discussion of how young people would like to see this situation change or be involved in changing it, but that is something that would be worthy of further discussion in the context of the Start the Change project and could be a topic for further research.

Social exclusion by peers was also one of the most frequently cited worries, for example:

**“A lot of times people who think they have more friends than you...present themselves as what they think is better or what we would class as popular people. When you’re in a group with them sometimes and it’s not your choice then they look at you like an outcast and stuff.”**

– Year 8 to 9 pupil, north east England

#### **What makes young people feel ‘safe or unsafe’?**

When writing about what made them feel ‘safe’ or ‘unsafe’ some themes occurred among participants:

Familiar people and surroundings make young people feel ‘safe’. By far the most frequent type of responses were those relating to feeling safe when around friends, family and familiar people or when at or close to home (16 counts spread across 7 schools). For example:

**“I feel safe when I’m in a big group or with family.”**

– Year 7 to 8 pupil, London

**“When I’m at home surrounded by family and friends.”**

– Year 8 pupil, north East England

When describing what made them feel unsafe, participants quite frequently referred to people they ‘don’t know’ or who they perceive as threatening, e.g. ‘bullies’, ‘shady’ people, people with ‘hoods up’, (9 counts spread across 4 schools). Being alone and/or in the dark was also often cited as something that made participants feel unsafe, (5 counts spread across 4 schools). For example:

**“When I’m out alone in my village at night ‘cos like I’ve only lived there for a year so I don’t know who’s around there.”**

– Year 8 to 9 pupil, north east England

**“I feel unsafe when I’m in the dark and on my own outside. I just don’t like it.”**

– Year 8 pupil, north east England

The threat of extremism or high-security presence were not often cited by participants in relation to ‘feeling safe’. Extremism and the related threats of violence or terrorism hardly came up when the participants were asked to think about what made them feel unsafe. This was despite the fact this part of the workshop immediately followed extensive discussion about extremism, placing it front of mind for participants and despite the two terrorist attacks that occurred in London and Manchester during weeks when the workshops were conducted. When asked what made participants feel ‘unsafe’, terrorism received only 1 mention and an absence of ‘security’, only 1 mention. Similarly, when asked to consider what made them feel safe; protection from terrorism received 1 mention and protection by the police received 3 mentions.

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#### **A note about this section of the workshop:**

The research team found when asked to think specifically about what made them feel ‘worried’, ‘excluded’, ‘safe’ or ‘unsafe’, students interpreted these concepts in variable ways, sometimes remaining focussed on their immediate environment and issues affecting them directly, sometimes thinking more broadly. As such, this line of questioning did not always lead participants readily into the next part of the workshop, which focussed on what participants would like to change in their local community or the wider world and the part they would like to play in that. Taking this into account, for the final 3 of the 10 workshops the research team slightly shifted the line of questioning, asking participants to give feedback not on worries, exclusion or feeling safe or unsafe but instead asking them to think about how they would complete these two statements:

- The things that I think need to change for the better in my school or local community are...
- The things that I think we as young people can help change for the better in the wider world are...

This worksheet activity, along with breakout group and whole group discussion, has informed findings for the next section.

## What challenges do young people want to tackle in their school, community, and wider world?

### Key findings:

- Around half, (53%), of survey respondents said there were no problems or challenges in their school or local community that they would like to do something about, and they did not explain why. The remaining respondents were fairly evenly split between ‘yes, there are’, (20%), and ‘not sure’, (20%). The free text comments did not yield an insight as to why such a high number of respondents had said they did not wish to take action to change anything, with none of the comments explaining this ambivalence, and this would be very interesting to explore further with students in the context of their awareness of and desire for active citizenship opportunities.
- Where survey respondents did note specific issues in the school or local community that they wanted to change the themes of bullying and discrimination of various kinds, especially racist, were cited frequently. This mirrors the strength of feeling on these topics displayed in the workshops.
- Young people feel they get some support from school to help them take action to tackle problems or challenges in their community, but would like more: When asked if the school did a good job of helping them take action on problems or challenges in their community the majority of respondents were evenly split between, ‘yes, they do a lot to help us’, (42%), and ‘it’s OK but I want to know more about what I can do’ (41%). This is quite interesting given that around half of respondents previously said there were no problems or challenges they wanted to take action on.
- Changes young people want to see in school: When asked to consider what they would like to see change for the better in their school or local community participants most frequently identified a perceived need for changes in the school lunch or break routine e.g. long lines, queue-jumping, more activities, different food etc. (However, this was partly due to a bias caused by strength of feeling across participants in 2 schools.)
- Changes young people want to see in their local community: The next most frequent responses given in relation to the question above, (after changes in the school lunch or break routine), were more community spaces for young people and tackling discrimination & building social understanding.
- Changes young people want to see in the wider world: The most frequent responses given when young people were asked what challenges in the wider world they would most like to take-action on were, (in order of most frequent first):
  - Tackling discrimination or stereotypes & building understanding.
  - Making sure young people can voice their opinions; both in terms of speaking up and having more opportunities for this.



- Positive attitude and working together. This heading has been used to group a set of responses which referred to the capacity of young people to have a positive attitude towards each other and society and the opportunity this provides to co-operate and take positive action.
- When asked what barriers young people perceive in tackling social challenges, they often refer to feeling disempowered because of their age, citing a lack of listening or attention to young people’s opinions or voices and a lack of access to power to influence decision makers in society.
- When asked where or who participants would like more support from to tackle social problem challenges they most commonly referred to, (in descending order), the government, school or teachers, and the local authority.

### Further detail on the findings:

#### Changes young people want to see in their school or local community:

Around half, (53%), of survey respondents said there were no problems or challenges in their school or local community that they would like to do something about, and they did not explain why. The remaining respondents were fairly evenly split between ‘yes, there are’, (20%), and ‘not sure’, (20%). The free text comments did not yield an insight as to why such a high number of respondents had said they did not wish to take action to change anything, with none of the comments explaining this ambivalence, and this would be very interesting to explore further with students in the context of their awareness of and desire for active citizenship opportunities. There was also a slight variation between boys and girls; although half of girls also responded with ‘no’, they were somewhat more likely than boys to say they were not sure, (36%); again, the reasons for this slight gender difference would be interesting to explore. In free text comments on the specific issues in the school or local community that respondents wanted to change, the themes of bullying and discrimination of various kinds, especially racist, were cited frequently. This mirrors the strength of feeling on these topics displayed in the workshops.



Young people feel they get some support from school to help them take action to tackle problems or challenges in their community, but would like more. When asked if the school did a good job of helping them take action on problems or challenges in their community, the majority of respondents were evenly split between, 'yes, they do a lot to help us', (42%), and 'it's OK but I want to know more about what I can do', (41%). This is quite interesting given that around half of the respondents previously said there were no problems or challenges they wanted to take action on. It was also interesting to see that participants from schools in north east England were less satisfied than those from London on this topic; they were equally likely to respond with 'it's OK' but only 31% said they felt that the school did a 'good job'. The free text comments yielded some insight as to why respondents felt like this, and further discussion to understand what students feel schools could do better or differently would be useful, (text as original):

**“I think we should more about issues worldwide”**

**“they don't talk about gang violence enough”**

**“Most things we talk about concern inside school. We could talk about more important points that concern our wider community.”**

**“We talk about things going on in our community, but occasionally we are not informed on how to get involved in ongoing projects, competitions, etc.”**

In workshops, the most frequently cited issues, with the most frequent listed first, were as follows:

- Changes in the school lunch or break routine e.g. long lines, queue-jumping, more activities, different food etc. (11 counts spread across 2 schools)
- More community spaces for young people, (6 counts, all within 1 school)
- Tackling discrimination & building understanding, (4 counts spread across 3 schools)

The following issues were each cited twice across the three workshop groups:

- Young people being active and healthy
- Violence or violent crime
- Police brutality
- Safety in school
- Having a positive attitude and working
- Better job and wage opportunities for young people
- Poverty

The following issues were each cited once across the three workshop groups:

- More opportunity for young people of the community to voice their opinion
- More field trips from school

- Transport in London, (delays, overcrowding etc.)
- Respect for the law and government 'changes', (meaning not explained further by participant)
- Local road safety
- Being allowed to use phones after school (so can contact parents)

It is interesting that when asked to consider what they would like to see change for the better in their school or local community, participants most frequently identified a perceived need for changes in the school lunch or break routine e.g. long lines, queue-jumping, more activities, different food etc. This was partly due to a bias caused by the strength of feeling across participants in 2 schools. However, in discussion on this topic, participants often displayed a notable strength of feeling, describing how they felt certain arrangements were unfair or how they didn't 'make sense' because teachers had not taken certain things into account. It would be interesting to see how opportunities for student voice (e.g. School Councils), have been or are being used effectively to have student-staff dialogue on these issues in the schools concerned, and whether there may be scope for improvement here.

In talking about the changes young people want to see in their local community, the next most frequent responses given, (after changes in the school lunch or break routine), were 'more community spaces for young people' and 'tackling discrimination & building understanding'. On the former, the time available in the workshops did not allow for much depth of discussion but participants referred specifically to things such as 'green space' and 'space to develop our skills, like (music) recording spaces'. It would be interesting to hear more from participants within the context of the Start the Change project. On the issue of discrimination and stereotypes, young people also talked about this in relation to their concerns about the wider world, and further detail has been provided below.



### Changes young people want to see in the wider world:

The most frequently cited issues, with the most frequent listed first, were as follows:

1. Tackling discrimination or stereotypes & building understanding, (10 counts)
2. Young people voicing their opinions; speaking up and having more opportunities for this (7 counts)
3. Positive attitude and working together, (6 counts)

The following issues were each cited twice across the three workshop groups:

- Poverty
- Spreading awareness through social media

The following issues were each cited once across the three workshop groups:

- Charities and community work
- Less reliance on social media
- Police brutality
- Pollution
- More positive influences and role models for young people
- ‘Places where people can go for help’
- ‘Young people should think independently’

Participants often displayed strong feeling about the injustice of discrimination and stereotyping and a desire to change this for the better, for example:

**“My ethnicity doesn’t mean prison, drugs, violence... you’re not really black unless you fit the stereotyped image of a black man.”**

– Year 8 pupil, London

**“You can’t really say people are like ‘X’ when your experience in only one person...to generalise – it’s ridiculous.”**

– Year 7 to 9 pupil, London

### What do young people feel they need to take action on these challenges?

When asked what barriers young people perceive in tackling social challenges, they often refer to feeling disempowered because of their age, citing a lack of listening or attention to young people’s opinions or voices and a lack of access to power or influence decision makers in society. When asked where or who participants would like more support from to tackle social challenges, they most commonly referred to, (in descending order), the government, school or teachers and the local authority. The fact that the government emerged as important on this latter point perhaps reinforces the frustration that many of them felt at a perceived lack of political influence.



Paul Thomas highlights a project that may be instructive on this point, undertaken in partnership between Radicalisation Research, the University of Huddersfield, Kirklees Council and parliament’s education service:

**“The “My Country, My Vote” project has involved young people in local high schools forming campaigning groups on local, national and international issues, standing for elections in which hundreds of fellow students voted. The project has encouraged passionate and engaged involvement from young people, with young Muslim women at the fore. It involved community cohesion within and between schools and has shown young people the power of democratic involvement.”<sup>19</sup>**

It could be interesting for the Start the Change project team to learn more about this initiative and its impact.

Although the workshops allowed for some time to identify and explore the social challenges that were of concern to participants in the school, local community and wider world, the time available only allowed for limited discussion of whether participants wanted to take action to tackle these challenges and if so, how. This topic is very worthy of further exploration. In the context of the Start the Change project, the key topics that have come out of these workshop discussions, as well as the teacher interviews, (see below), could be explored in more depth and with a wider range of stakeholder representatives, (staff, pupils, parents and guardians), in each of the schools participating in the project, in order to refine understanding of what social challenges are of highest priority and where stakeholders most want to take action. The format and channels for such discussion may already exist in the participating schools and how best to undertake this next step should be discussed with them.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas, *Ibid*, p.2.

## Teacher perspectives on the challenges facing students in their school:

### Key findings:

- Teachers identified common themes in terms of the challenges they felt that young people in their schools faced, either in the context of the local community or commonly expressed worries about the wider world. These themes were, (in descending order of frequency):
  - Insufficient parental support or engagement, e.g. low aspiration, lack of social maturity.
  - Problems caused by or manifested over social media, e.g. arguments and aggression between peers, lack of understanding by young people of what is reliable information (online), and a lack of understanding of the real-world impact of their communication or actions over social media, (e.g. ‘sexting’).
  - Emotional challenges, e.g. anger management, pressure to achieve, low confidence or a lack of confidence among girls.
  - Financial pressures, e.g. low-income families, further education as ‘too expensive’
 (N.B: emotional challenges and financial pressure were equally frequently cited)
- The set of challenges related to social media was presented as of pervasive and high importance to teachers, having a significant influence on both the emotional development and well-being of pupils as well as their critical thinking skills. It is an area highly worthy of further discussion and research.

### Further detail on key findings:

Teachers interviewed were asked if they felt able to identify any common themes in terms of the challenges that young people face, either in the context of the local community or commonly expressed worries about the wider world. The types of concerns identified are summarised below, most frequent first, (numbers represent the number of teachers who identified a concern of this type):

- Insufficient parental support or engagement (8), e.g. low aspiration, lack of social maturity.
- Social media (7) e.g. arguments, lack of understanding of what is reliable information.
- Emotional challenges (6) e.g. anger management, pressure to achieve, low confidence.
- Financial pressures (6), e.g. low-income families, further education as ‘too expensive’.
- Bullying or aggressive behaviour (4), e.g. ‘macho lad’ mentality, intimidation.
- Equality of opportunity for girls (3), e.g. not permitted on school trips due to cultural perspective.
- Students’ ability to make sense of the wider world (2), e.g. deciphering what is reliable information from the internet, lack of understanding about how society works.

- Terrorism (1), in this context many students were performance artists and worried about the possibility of terror attacks when performing in public spaces.
- Transport to school (1), due to delays, overcrowding etc.

The comments below illustrate the views of teachers on the most frequently expressed themes, for example, on what they perceived as insufficient parental support or engagement, e.g. low aspiration, lack of social maturity.

### **“Our biggest challenge is educating parents to support boys to aspire”.**

– Assistant Headteacher, London

**“We do have a mentality with some of our parents where once they’ve [young people] left the house they’re our responsibility. So, if they get into trouble on the way to school, they’re our responsibility. If they get into trouble on the way to home, they’re our responsibility. We have some parents who are kind of, if they’re in trouble in school, they don’t want to know. That’s a small percentage of our parents. 90% of our parents are great and will do everything but that’s one of the things we face on quite a regular day.”**

– RE teacher, north East England

On the range of problems caused by or manifested over social media, (a topic explored further in a separate section below):

### **“Self-confidence is an issue. Social media is an influence here. If they don’t look great they are ostracised”.**

– Teacher and Head of Year, London

**“Social media and fake news is a challenge; children trying to filter what’s real and what’s not. Israel-Palestine, Donald Trump – whatever is in the media comes up in school. They’re not watching the news. I don’t know exactly where they’re getting it from but it’s from the internet.”**

– Geography teacher, London

**“We had an incident of sexting in year 7 so we took the main characters involved in that situation and did some specific work with them over a period of six weeks. Unfortunately, it is an issue...the idea of sending nude or explicit photographs to each other...like I say that ‘blipping’ (blurring) of where the boundary is for the online and the real world.”**

– English teacher and Head of Year, north east England

**“Friendship fall outs (over social media). How people deal with that. Parents are often just as irresponsible in how they manage situations too.”**

– English teacher and Head of Year, north east England

On emotional challenges, e.g. anger management, pressure to achieve, low confidence or a lack of confidence among girls:

**“No other major challenges except maybe boys who haven’t learned coping mechanisms; anger management, irrational behaviour, they don’t understand cause and effect.”**

– Assistant Headteacher, London



**“It would be great if all the children were more self-aware about their emotions, had that intelligence and it’s a difficult job trying to teach the curriculum and then pick up the pastoral side too. Time constraints are an issue. Every subject teacher would say they wish they have more than an hour.”**

– RE Teacher, London

**“We do tend to have a bit of a macho lad mentality with some of our students where they think to deal with any situation it’s just ‘scream, shout, swear, use your fists’.”**

– RE teacher, north East England

**“Confidence or lack of confidence amongst the girls; this is on the school’s agenda with little initiatives, for example... the boys display a lot of challenging behaviour towards girls and women, being men; ‘squaring up’. This stuff comes from home, there’s only so much we can do, we can tell them something but then they go home and hear something different, so we are kind of powerless to try and change things.”**

– Teacher, London school

On financial pressures, e.g. low-income families, further education as ‘too expensive’:

**“For a few of them...it’s the money, its college, can they actually go on and do further education? Will the funds be there for them to do further education?”**

– RE teacher, north East England

#### **Teacher’s concerns regarding social media:**

Teachers spoke particularly vociferously about the challenges presented by social media and of a range of concerns in particular. With only a relatively short amount of time to interview each teacher on a wide range of topics, the research team was only able to draw out and highlight key concerns. These included:

- The sometimes extremely high amount of time spent by teachers dealing with confrontational situations between pupils, which escalate over social media outside of school and then flare up within school.
- The damage to self-confidence of pupils, caused by interactions or comments over social media.
- The lack of awareness and understanding from parents over what was happening between young people over social media; in some cases, parents were totally ignorant of the bullying and aggressive behaviour that their own children had displayed over social media.
- The sometimes-limited capacity of young people to filter what is reliable or trustworthy information received online and how that may impact their view and understanding of the world
- A lack of understanding of the potential ‘real world’ impact of their social media interactions with other young people, for example, the impact of ‘sexting’, (sending explicit images or messages).

This set of challenges seems to be of pervasive and high importance to teachers as having a significant influence on both the emotional development and well-being of pupils as well as their critical thinking skills. It is an area highly worthy of further discussion and research. These comments from teachers illustrate the range and depth of concerns that they expressed:

**“Smart phones have made things change so rapidly for this generation. Social media is a necessary evil.”**

– Religious Studies teacher, London

**“Social media is a huge challenge and time consuming. It’s happening at home but the parents expect the school to take action during school time. The IT co-ordinator delivers assemblies about online safety and teachers are saying ‘stay off it’. But still the problem goes on. The parents aren’t aware of what kids are watching, for example, some were caught watching porn in a lesson. The parents don’t have the know how to deal with this at all. Sometimes it feels like you have so many hats on you have to balance this and find out what is needed”.**

– Teacher and Head of Year, London

**“I think we need to blanket ban phones in school. Arguments start at 8pm at home. They carry on through social media at school and by lunchtime they are actually arguing and fighting. If they hadn’t carried on it would have cooled off and been forgotten about.”**

– Geography teacher, London

**“Abuse of social media is the biggest problem. Heads of years spend all their time dealing with fights that spark from Snapchat etc. Without this you’d have time to do some of the other things we’d like to. But it’s not just the scraps, it’s also glamorisation of a culture that feels inappropriate; so, a lack of manners, how to communicate with each other. This is a minority of the children, but you end up spending all your time on the few who aren’t nice.**

– Science teacher with pastoral responsibilities, London

Some teachers felt that parents needed to be actively brought into the equation and provided with support or training to tackle the challenges posed through social media:

**“Maybe there is something needed about parents and social media and capacities; sessions inviting parents to hear from experts on dealing with sexual health, media, porn with your kids. It feels like we’re the sole carers and responsibility holders as we’re the only ones held to account.”**

– Teacher and Head of Year, London

**“We need to train parents about locks on the internet, parental controls or whatever they need to do. Parents have no idea what their kids are saying. I had a situation and I printed everything out and showed it to the parents. They were crying. They were so shocked when they saw it.”**

– Geography teacher, London

Several authors have highlighted how important it is for educators and those responsible for the well-being and development of young people to tackle these challenges. The importance of internet literacy, ensuring that young people are not only protected from but also understand how to recognise and deal with potential exposure to extreme, explicit or otherwise harmful information online, is self-evident. But teachers raise a more nuanced set of concerns around the capacity of young people to understand what are reliable sources of information and to critically appraise what they see, as well as their capacity to appreciate the likely real-world consequences and impact on other people of social media interactions and content they themselves produce (for example, their posts on Facebook).

Francis highlights a pressing need to do more to help young people develop the skills that allow them to critically appraise online sources of information.<sup>20</sup> A 2015 pilot study undertaken in partnership between the Centre for Child Protection at the University of Kent and Kent Police, also considered this and demonstrated the promising potential for online simulations and teacher training as a way to help develop these critical thinking skills and better equip teachers to work with young people to develop them. The pilot study put to the test an interactive classroom tool and teacher training package. The main component was 'Zak', a research based simulation on the radicalisation process in a social media (Facebook) type format. The pilot study recognised that the:

**“current generation is unique in how it uses, becomes immersed in and understands contemporary technology,”** learning in different ways including visually, auditorily and kinaesthetically and behaving as ‘digital natives’ with high visual literacy skills and an ability to cope with multiple streams of information. The authors remind us of Brennan’s assertion that it is therefore essential that teachers “form an understanding of the development of children’s moral reasoning in the information age”, recognising that the interaction with others that will help young people form their moral reasoning framework will include a significant amount of social interaction not in person but online. He further explains that this online environment is one:

**“where there is little effective feedback from the other person. With fewer or no visual signs and a physical distance between the young person and the consequences of their actions, there is less chance they will develop a clear understanding of the cause and effect relationships.”<sup>21</sup>**

The Zak simulation game allows teachers and young people to inhabit the same online space and gameplay as the character at the heart of the simulation goes through processes of being manipulated and eventually pressured to act illegally.

This approach, combined with teacher training, left teachers feeling significantly better equipped and more confident to discuss with pupils the difficult issues raised by the simulation in an online context. The Zak simulation and teacher CPD workshop is now available nationally through the University of Kent’s Centre for Social Protection and may be useful to consider for any schools participating in the Start the Change project that wish to address these kinds of concerns over social media interaction and internet literacy.

Young people involved in the research didn’t express concerns about social media nearly as strongly as or as frequently as teachers. This is perhaps not surprising; social media activity is so deeply woven into their everyday life, social interactions and the way they understand the world that they take it for granted. However, social media did come up occasionally, especially in relation to discrimination and stereotypes, an area of high concerns for participants:

**“People are always judging, especially on social media. Everyone can’t be themselves. It brings them down.”**

– Year 8 pupil, London

**“I hate it, [tech] but that’s how I communicate with others. I want to avoid judging or being judged.”**

– Year 8 pupil, London



<sup>20</sup> Francis, *Ibid*, pp.2-3.

<sup>21</sup> Addressing Radicalisation in the Classroom – A New Approach to Teacher and Pupil Learning’, Dr Jane Reeves and Alamgir Sheriyar, Macrothink Institute, February 2015, pp. 24-25

## What do teachers feel they need to enhance their school's role in supporting young people to engage in active citizenship activities?

### Key findings:

- When asked what they felt they needed for the school to be able to further support their students to engage in active citizenship activities, teachers gave a wide variety of responses including external visitors, opportunities for student leadership and a voice from young people that feeds into policy.
- Several commented either that they weren't yet sure what they needed and / or that they felt the Start the Change project was what was needed, indicating that the project is welcomed and needed to provide direction and guidance on active citizenship.

### Further detail on the findings:

Given the relatively short interview time available and the range of topics the research team aimed to cover with teachers, the depth of discussion on this topic was limited. However, it did offer some insights, which could be explored through further discussion. Teachers generally described how their schools were already engaged in some level of activities to encourage active citizenship among their students. When asked what they felt they needed to encourage this even further, they provided a range of ideas. These are summarised below:

- Not yet sure what else is needed, (4 mentions)
- Taking part in the 'Start the Change' project, (2 mentions)
- External visitors and speakers to 'make the outside world more real', (2 mentions)
- Giving more leadership on activities to students themselves. (1 mention)
- Measures to help students feel 'special' and recognise their achievements (1 mention).
- Engagement with politicians and government; 'a voice from young people that feeds directly into policy', (1 mention)
- More activity directed at generating change in the community, (1 mention)

It is perhaps not surprising that, when teachers were asked what they felt they needed to encourage active citizenship even further, the most frequent response was that they weren't yet sure. They were coming, after all, from the point of view of starting at the very beginning of the 'Start the Change' project and not yet sure of the direction it would take. The comments below illustrate the range of ideas offered:

**"There are some mechanisms in terms of student government within the school, prefects etc. but more things that the school can do, like CPD for the kids and distributing leadership would be better."**

- RE teacher, London

**"Maybe giving pupils the ability to give their views, their opinions on things. Maybe get them to think 'is there something we want to look at...and then maybe link it through Student Voice, which is our student council.'"**

- RE teacher, north east England

**"Engagement with MP, outside visitors, making the outside world real – that would be helpful. Parliamentary something? A voice from young people that feeds directly into policy. The ability to feed back to government etc."**

- Music teacher, London

**"If boys have ideas of things they want to change in the school they have outlets for that. Maybe we could do more in terms of change in the community."**

- PSHE Co-ordinator and Head of RE, London

**"Having different voices saying the same thing helps, they will listen more. Made more impact on them than the same teachers. It's a challenge, making time in the timetable but it has benefits. They are vocal and expressive. They will take it home."**

- Vice Principal, London

Some teachers highlighted the particular importance of external visitors in a context where the school and local population was not diverse, as a way of breaking down stereotypes:

**"We try and get people in so that it kind of puts a face and a person, it's not just what they hear in the news. So, the four Muslims that came in for Diversity Day; I think the kids were kind of like 'they're not how you see them on the TV, you know the ones you see with their guns and their knives and stuff'. One of them was like 'they spoke with Newcastle accents'. I said, 'Yes; because they were born here!' It's kind of dispelling that myth, that's the big thing."**

- RE teacher, north east England

**"I think we need people from other communities coming into school to discuss with students. Because, as I said, a lot of the time it is naivety. They don't understand other religions. They don't understand other communities. You see something on the news and then they believe that everybody must be part of that. I said 'well, if you were a minority group in another country and somebody bombed the country would you like to be classed as the same?' they say: 'Well, no, 'cause I'm not like that.' So, I think it's getting students to see other communities in action and meeting people from other communities and having that discussion with them without the fear of being judged."**

- Director of Student Voice and Empowerment, north east England school



# CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

## – Young people are highly motivated to tackle discrimination and should be given opportunities to do so as part of ‘Start the Change’:

Young people do not strongly define their identity in terms of aspects most likely to be the target of discrimination or extremism, for example ethnicity, culture, religion or gender. However, they do display high levels of concern about discrimination-based bullying or mistreatment among pupils and about discrimination of all kinds in wider society. They also have a strong sense of diversity and immigration as dynamic forces in society, with the potential to both bring benefits to society and give rise to challenges, prejudicial misconceptions and social division. Many young people feel they have an important role to play here, feeling willing and able to ‘come together’, whatever their background, to tackle discrimination, although they are not necessarily sure what form this action might take. When determining what challenges the Start the Change project should help address for participating schools, these concerns should be given high priority, both in terms of supporting schools and teachers to work effectively with students to challenge prejudice and stereotypes where they arise, and secondly in terms of developing active citizenship opportunities for young people to tackle discrimination and build social cohesion in the schools, communities and wider world.

## – The context for working with schools in small towns in north-east England, an area of very low ethnic diversity, compared to working with schools in London, the most ethnically diverse region of the UK, is markedly different. This must be given due consideration in the Start the Change project:

The research in schools in predominantly white British communities in north east England revealed a set of insights and areas for further exploration, which any work undertaken as part of Start the Change project needs to take into consideration going forward. The research indicated that participants from these schools often perceived the level of immigration into their communities as disproportionately high. They also showed slightly higher levels of concern over immigration than participants from London schools, citing perceived challenges such as ‘overcrowding’ or immigrants ‘taking jobs’. Finally, they were slightly less likely than their London counterparts to say they felt integration was good among students of different background in their schools, (however, given the very low ethnic diversity this could be because they feel the question is less relevant to them). Teachers from the north-east England schools also voiced some common concerns not expressed by their London peers, namely students having a limited exposure to

and understanding of other cultures and a tendency to express discriminatory views or remarks without understanding the implications. These differences in context between small towns in north-east England should be taken into consideration and potentially explored further if the Start the Change project aims to support schools and teachers to work effectively with students to challenge prejudice and stereotypes and to develop active citizenship opportunities for young people to tackle discrimination and build social cohesion.

## – The survey findings suggest that holding a religious faith of any kind could have a significant influence on the attitudes of young people to the issues covered in the research.

Participants from the schools in the north east of England were not only much more likely to be white British, (93%) but also significantly more likely to hold no religion, (79%). As such, looking at the data from these schools provide a filter not only by region but also ethnicity and religion, (or lack thereof). It was not within the scope of the research to examine the possible impact of the religion or faith of young people, (or lack thereof), on their attitudes to the topics explored. However, variations between participants of predominantly no religion versus those of predominantly Christian or Muslim faith are interesting and could be the subject of further exploration. Full survey results can be found in the appendices.

## – Young people do not readily contextualise extremism in wider geo-political issues or even strongly associate extreme ideas with terrorist attacks. They have an awareness of relevant global issues, mentioning for instance ISIS, Syria or Trump’s ban on travel from certain predominantly Muslim countries. However, they do not readily make the links explicitly between those geopolitical contexts elsewhere, and current terrorist attacks in the UK. Supporting teachers and young people to develop this understanding would empower them to teach and learn more effectively and develop active citizenship opportunities that will build social cohesion and foster resilience in the face of serious present-day challenges to mutual tolerance and co-operative global citizenship.

Young people most strongly associate extremism with violence, hatred, religion and racism, closely followed by xenophobia and intolerance of other people’s views. However, they do not strongly associate it with terrorism and often perceive it as a historical phenomenon; being more likely to cite historical examples of extremism

such as Nazism, political dictators or apartheid, than to cite present-day examples of terrorist attacks or associated geo-political issues. Participants were certainly aware of recent terror attacks and such issues, referring for example to the very recent terror attacks in London and Manchester as well as to international issues such as 'ISIS' and 'Syria'. However, it is interesting that while respondents were aware of a range of extreme viewpoints, political groupings and high profile geo-political events and conflicts, they did not readily make connections between them or understand that it is often extremist viewpoints of specific world views that motivate terrorist activity. Deeper discussion and potentially further research could help better understand this 'disconnect', and such better developed understanding would have a number of applications for young people and teachers within the context of the 'Start the Change' project and beyond. For teachers, a better understanding of how students do or do not understand or connect extremism, terrorism and geo-political issues would help them deal with these issues in the classroom more effectively and support students to develop the broad context and critical thinking skills they need in order to understand what is happening in the world around them. For young people, this is especially important in the context of increasing threats to mutual tolerance in our society, including frequent terrorist attacks across Europe and the rise of the far-right in mainstream politics. Only if young people are empowered with some understanding of the relevant issues and with appropriate critical thinking skills can they foster resilience to prejudice and stereotypes, form their own opinions and develop ideas for active citizenship activities that will build social cohesion and resist such serious challenges to mutual tolerance.

- **Both teachers and young people feel that schools are a safe space for discussion of sensitive topics such as extreme political or religious views, racism or sexism. However, both groups see significant scope for improvement, especially young people. The most effective solutions may require a 'whole school' approach, something that could be piloted as part of the Start the Change project. The input of Religious Education teachers in developing solutions will also be important.** Teachers made various suggestions as to how such 'safe space' could be further enhanced in their schools, which incorporated a number of stakeholders and suggest the need for a 'whole school' approach. They gave ideas relating to staff capacity building, curriculum content, student opportunities and parental engagement. They also often commented on the variability of confidence and capabilities across the staff body and felt that more training on how to facilitate discussion on sensitive topics and handle extreme views or discrimination should they arise, could be helpful.

While the scope and capacity of research could only yield a certain amount of insight on this topic, it strongly suggested that teachers want more scope and capacity to deal with these issues proactively, not just reactively, and with more time and capacity, both in the formal timetable and through extra-curricular and active citizenship opportunities. Religious Education, (RE or RS), emerged as an important subject in the provision of a safe space for discussion and the place where sensitive topics such as religious discrimination or stereotyping came up. For example, several RE teachers had discussed the recent terror attacks in their lessons and been tasked with providing information that could be used elsewhere across the school to discuss what had happened with students. Continued input from RE teaching staff will be valuable as the Start the Change project develops. Furthermore, a better understanding of the potential power of RE to develop the critical thinking skills of students and build mutual tolerance could have implications for education policy, as already highlighted by some of the commentators mentioned earlier in this report.



- **The Start the Change project could be highly valuable in providing an opportunity and a framework for facilitated discussion, where young people can identify the challenges and problems they want to tackle in their schools, community and wider world as well as help them determine the action they want to take. This, in turn, could yield further learning to inform how education practice and policy could better support schools to develop young people as active citizens.**

There was a noticeable difference between responses to 'semi-cold' survey questions about young people's potential role in social change, versus their responses in facilitated discussion. In the online survey, young people were ambivalent about acting to tackle challenges and problems in the school, local community and wider world; around half said they did not want to take action to change anything and the remainder were quite evenly split between wanting to change something and being unsure. Though given opportunity to comment in their own words, survey respondents didn't offer much insight to explain this ambivalence. It would be very interesting to explore further with students what was driving it, be that low awareness of social challenges, low concern, a lack of belief that they can make a difference or any other factors. However, the online survey also demonstrated that, while young people feel they get some support from school to help them take action to tackle problems or challenges in their community, they would like more. Furthermore, in the workshops and through facilitated discussion participants were much more willing and able to identify and discuss issues of concern. This perhaps demonstrates the simple but potentially important need to create a space and framework for facilitated discussion so that young people can generate ideas with their peers about what they want to change and how; something that the Start the Change project can help schools to offer more of. This may be highly valuable to participating schools and could yield a deeper understanding of the processes and initiatives schools could put in place to develop young people as active citizens.

- **Young people perceive their age as both an opportunity and a barrier to fulfilling their role as active citizens, feeling both positive about their capacity to have a co-operative and positive attitude towards each other and society and frustrated by a lack of space for young people's voices in society and a lack of access to or influence on decision makers. The Start the Change project should seek to understand this further and build and test initiatives that both tap into these opportunities and tackle these barriers.**

In discussions about the changes young people want to see in the wider world, participants frequently talked about making sure young people have opportunities to voice their opinions and influence political decision makers, and making use of the 'positive attitude' of young people and their capacity to work together. They also talked frequently about their desire to tackle discrimination and stereotypes and to build social understanding, echoing the high levels of concern about these issues that came up in the context of discussions about diversity, immigration and extremist ideas.

- **The role of social media must be given serious consideration in any initiatives, activities or further exploratory discussion or research that is undertaken as part of the Start the Change project.**

Teachers identified a set of challenges related to social media that were presented as of pervasive and high importance and which have a significant influence on both the emotional development and well-being of pupils, as well as their critical thinking skills. It is an area highly worthy of further discussion and research. This high level of concern and assertion that social media plays a pivotal role in how young people gain information, form their understanding of what is happening in the world around them, form their views about social groups and interact with each other, was also highlighted by several commentators in the literature review. There is no doubt that any initiative targeted at developing critical thinking skills and fostering active citizenship, especially those focussed on tackling discrimination and building mutual tolerance and social cohesion, must integrate social media as a critical component. The project partners may wish to consult or work with other partners with expertise in this area to ensure that this happens.

- **Teachers are unsure about what they need for their schools to be able to further support their students to engage in active citizenship activities, highlighting a need and the valuable role that the Start the Change project can play in determining and supporting this.**

When asked what they felt they needed teachers gave a wide variety of responses including external visitors, opportunities for student leadership and a voice from young people that somehow feeds into policy. Several commented either that they weren't yet sure or that they felt the Start the Change project would help them identify what they needed. There is clearly an opportunity for teachers to explore their ideas in collaboration with students and more clearly identify how they can develop and promote opportunities for active citizenship.





# APPENDICES

## List of appendices:

- A. Detailed participant profile, (young people and teachers)**
- B. Start the Change online student survey questions**
- C Note regarding survey responses**
- D Full statistical survey findings**
- E. Teacher interview questions**

## Appendix A:

### Detailed participant profile, (young people and teachers)

#### Profiles of student workshop participants:

Total number of workshop participants across all schools: 86

#### Participant numbers by gender:

- Males: 46 (53%)
- Females: 35 (41%)
- Preferred not to state gender: 5 (4%)
- Did not select any option re gender, (including 'prefer not to state'): 2 (less than 2%)

#### Participant numbers by ethnicity:

(In descending order):

- Selected either 'white English', 'white British' or both: 28 (33%)  
N.B: 23 of these 28 were from the 3 schools in north-East England.
- Selected either Bangladeshi, British Bengali or both: 9 (10.5%)
- Black African: 8 (9%)
- Selected either Romanian or Romanian and white European or Romanian and white British: 5 (6%)
- Black Caribbean: 3 (3.5%)
- Other ethnicity: 33 participants (38%) N.B: Each of these 33 participants selected a unique option for ethnicity.

#### Participant numbers by religion or faith:

(In descending order):

- No faith or religion: 27 (31%)
- Muslim: 27 (31%)
- Christian: 23 (27%)
- Other faiths or religions: 10 (11%)

#### Profile of online survey respondents:

- Number of responses: 316

#### Profile of respondents:

- 65% of respondents were male. This slight bias was due to the participation of one all boys' school, which co-opted a large number of students to take part. However, when

filtered by gender this presented no significant variation in survey results. The only minor exception was in question 11, as noted in the findings.

- 21% of responses came from the one other (co-educational) school where two workshops were carried out. The remaining responses were spread quite evenly across participating schools.

- 41% of respondents were white British. The remainder had a diverse ethnicity profile. The most frequent responses on ethnicity were: \*

White British: 41%

'Other': 16% (with varied responses given by respondents in the free text box)

Bangladeshi: 11%

Black African: 8%

The remaining respondents were split across 10 other ethnic groups.

- In terms of religion or belief, the majority of respondents were evenly distributed between Christian, (33%), Muslim, (28%), or no religion of belief, (31%).
- There was a notably different profile of participants from the NE England schools compared to the London schools. Participants from the NE England schools were much more likely to be white British, (93%) and significantly more likely to hold no religion, (79%). As such, looking at the data from these schools provided a filter not only by region but also ethnicity and religion (or lack thereof). There were some noticeable differences in responses between respondents from schools in predominantly white British communities in north East England versus those in diverse ethnic communities in London, which have been noted in the findings and could be explored further. Also, while it was not within the scope of the research to examine the possible impact of the religion or faith of young people, (or lack thereof), on their attitudes to the topics explored in the research, including identity, diversity, extremism and active citizenship, the variations between participants of predominantly no religion versus those of predominantly Christian or Muslim faith are interesting to note. This could be the subject of interesting further research.

\*N.B:

- Ethnicity descriptors used in the survey were taken from ACAS' model Equality and Diversity Monitoring Form.
- In the 2011 census 86% gave their ethnic group as 'white'. London was the most ethnically diverse region in the UK.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Office of National Statistics:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/ethnicityandnationalidentityinenglandandwales/2012-12-11#key-points>

**Teachers research sample:**

Total number of teachers interviewed: 17, (spread across 7 schools).

The following table lists all teacher participant profiles and interview dates:

Gender	Location	Subject taught	Other responsibilities	Date of interview
F	NE England	RE	Inspire Day Co-ordinator	29.03.17
F	NE England	English	Head of Year, PREVENT Officer	29.03.17
F	NE England	RE	Lead for SMSC	30.03.17
F	NE England	N.A	Student Voice & Empowerment	30.03.17
F	West London	English	N.A	04.05.17
F	West London	Music & drama	N.A	04.05.17
M	North London	RS	N.A	05.05.17
F	North London	History, PE	Head of Year, PSHE Co-ordinator	05.05.17
F	North London	Maths	KS3 co-ordinator for Maths	05.05.17
M	North London	Geography	International Co-ordinator	10.05.17
F	East London	Maths	N.A	12.05.17
F	East London	Art & DT	N.A	12.05.17
M	West London	Geography	Assistant Headteacher	18.05.17
M	West London	RE	PSHE co-ordinator, Chaplain	19.05.17
M	East London	Science	Lifelong Learning	25.05.17
F	East London	N.A	Vice Principal	26.05.17
M	East London	Music	N.A	26.05.17

Further detail about the profiles of participants, including teacher profiles, can be found in the appendices.



## Appendix B:

### Start the Change online student survey questions

#### Questions about you:

This survey includes questions on issues such as diversity, how students talk about difficult topics in school, and taking action to tackle problems in the community.

#### Let's start with a few questions about you.

You won't be asked for your name. All the information you give in this survey will be anonymous.

#### 1. What is the name of your school or college?

#### 2. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

#### 3. Your ethnicity: Ethnic origin is not about nationality, place of birth or citizenship. It is about the group to which you perceive you belong. If none of the choices below are right for you, please select 'other' and enter your ethnicity in your own words.

- White British
- White Irish
- White Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Mixed white and black Caribbean
- Mixed white and black African
- Mixed white and Asian
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Black African
- Black Caribbean
- Arab
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

#### 4. What is your religion or belief?

- No religion or belief
- Buddhist
- Christian
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

#### Diversity and integration

The next few questions are about diversity and integration between people from different backgrounds and cultures.

#### 5. First of all, how would you describe the level of immigration in your community?

- Not a lot. We don't have many people from other countries come and live around here.
- Quite a lot. We do have quite a few people from other countries come and live around here
- High. A lot of people from other countries come and live around here.
- I'm not sure.

#### 6. How do you feel about the issue of immigration?

- I think immigration is a good thing.
  - I'm a bit concerned about it.
  - I'm really concerned about it.
  - I'm not sure.
- Please tell us why you feel this way about immigration.  
(Free text space)

#### 7. Do you think there is good integration between students from different backgrounds and cultures in your school?

- There's good integration. Students from different backgrounds and cultures get on and mix together without problems.
- It could be better. Students from different backgrounds and cultures do mix together but there are some tensions.
- They don't mix together very much at all. People tend to stay with other people from similar backgrounds and cultures.
- It's a bad situation. There's a lot of tension between students from different backgrounds and cultures.
- I'm not sure.

#### Safe spaces:

The next few questions are about dealing with sensitive topics in school, such as racism, sexism, or political or religious beliefs. It's important to have a 'safe space' to talk about these things. A safe space is an environment where you feel comfortable to discuss difficult things and where people talk to each other with respect, even when they disagree.

#### 8. First of all, do you feel that your school is a safe space to express your views, even when other people might disagree with you?

- I don't feel it's a very safe space to talk. I'm very careful about what I say in school.
- I feel it's a pretty safe space and usually say what I think, even if I know some people will disagree with me.
- I feel it's a very safe space. I never worry that other people will treat me badly for anything I say.
- I'm not sure.



**9. ‘Extreme’ views, (also called ‘extremism’), are political, religious or racist views that are hateful or violent towards other people. Have you ever been in a situation where a student expressed extreme views in school?**

- No, I have never been in that situation.
- Yes. I have been in that situation
- I’m not sure if I have ever been in that situation.

If you have answered ‘yes’ or ‘not sure’, please describe what happened. (Free text space)

**10. Do you think your teachers do a good job of helping students discuss sensitive issues like racism, sexism or extreme political or religious views?**

- Yes, they do a good job of this. Teachers encourage us to talk about sensitive issues and help make sure that students respect each other’s views.
- It’s OK but teachers could do more to help students talk about sensitive issues.
- They don’t do a good job on this. It’s really difficult to talk about things like that in the classroom.
- I’m not sure.

**Challenges in your school or community:**

So far, you’ve answered some questions about diversity, having a ‘safe space’ to talk, and about extremist views. The next few questions are for you to tell us about other problems or challenges in your school or your community.

**11. First of all, are there problems or challenges in your school or community that you would like to do something about?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

If you have said yes, please tell us about the problem you would most like to do something about: (Free text space)

**12. Do you think your school helps you take action on problems or challenges in your community?**

- Yes. The school helps us a lot with ideas and opportunities to take positive action in the community.
- It’s OK. We talk about this a bit in school but I would like to know more about what I can do.
- No. We never talk about this in school.
- I’m not sure.

Is there anything else you want to add about your answer to this question? (Free text space)

**Appendix C:**

**Note regarding survey responses**

A relatively high number of respondents, (around 10%), skipped some of the later questions in the survey. This could indicate that respondents either got bored or lost concentration or ran out of time to complete the survey in the slot allocated at school. While the research team aimed to keep the survey as short as possible, given the data we aimed to collect, it is perhaps a learning for future research to either make surveys shorter still or ensure teachers allow a longer time frame for their completion. Below is a list of the missing responses, (questions are abbreviated for reference):

- 1 respondent did not select a response for their school
- 2 respondents did not select a response for their gender
- 1 respondent did not select a response for their ethnicity
- 2 respondents did not select a response for their religion of belief
- 12 respondents did not answer question 5, (perceived level of immigration in their community).
- 16 respondents did not answer question 6, (how they feel about immigration)
- 14 respondents did not answer question 7, (level of integration between students in school).
- 18 respondents did not answer question 8, (do you feel that your school is a safe space to express your views?)
- 32 respondents did not answer question 9, (have you ever experienced extreme views at school?)
- 28 respondents did not answer question 10, (do teachers do a good job of helping students discuss sensitive issues?)
- 31 respondents did not answer question 11, (are there challenges in your school or community you would like to do something about?)
- 31 respondents did not answer question 11, (do you think your school helps you take action on challenges in your community?)



## Appendix D

### Full statistical survey findings

#### Full survey findings

NB: Free text comments have not been included due to the large amount of comments collected.

#### 1. What is the name of your school?

(N.B: School name abbreviated to maintain anonymity)

FB:	23.5% (74)
LJ:	9.5% (30)
PA:	8.2% (26)
SS:	9.8% (31)
HA:	7.6% (24)
CH:	20.6% (65)
GS:	9.9% (25)
EL:	12.7% (40)

#### 2. What is your gender?

Male:	65%
Female:	33%
Prefer not to say:	2%

#### 3. Your ethnicity: Ethnic origin is not about nationality, place of birth or citizenship. It is about the group to which you perceive you belong. If none of the choices below are right for you, please select 'other' and enter your ethnicity in your own words.

White British:	41%
Other (please specify):	16%
Bangladeshi:	11%
Black African:	8%
Mixed white & black Caribbean:	5%
Black Caribbean:	4%
Mixed white and Asian:	3%
Indian:	2.5%
Prefer not to say:	2.5%
Arab:	2%
Mixed white and black African:	2%
White Irish:	1%
Pakistani:	1%
Chinese:	0.3%

N.B: Responses add up to over 100% as respondents could select more than one option.

#### 4. What is your religion or belief?

Christian	33%
No religion or belief	31%
Muslim	28%
Hindu	3%
Prefer not to say	3%
Other	2%
Jewish	0.3%

### Diversity and integration

The next few questions are about diversity and integration between people from different backgrounds and cultures.

#### 5. First of all, how would you describe the level of immigration in your community?

Not a lot. We don't have many people from other countries come and live around here.	14%
Quite a lot. We do have quite a few people from other countries come and live around here.	34%
High. A lot of people from other countries come and live around here.	31%
I'm not sure.	22%
Total number of responses	304

#### 6. How do you feel about the issue of immigration?

I think immigration is a good thing.	38%
I'm a bit concerned about it.	23%
I'm really concerned about it.	6%
I'm not sure.	31%
Total number of responses	300

#### Please tell us why you feel this way about immigration. (Free text space)

(162 free text responses collected)

#### 7. Do you think there is good integration between students from different backgrounds and cultures in your school?

There's good integration. Students from different backgrounds and cultures get on and mix together without problems.	59%
It could be better. Students from different backgrounds and cultures do mix together but there are some tensions.	27%
They don't mix together very much at all. People tend to stay with other people from similar backgrounds and cultures.	3%
It's a bad situation. There's a lot of tension between students from different backgrounds and cultures.	0.6%
I'm not sure	11%
Total number of responses	302

**Safe spaces:**

**8. First of all, do you feel that your school is a safe space to express your views, even when other people might disagree with you?**

I don't feel it's a very safe space to talk. I'm very careful about what I say in school.	16%
I feel it's a pretty safe space and usually say what I think, even if I know some people will disagree with me.	54%
I feel it's a very safe space. I never worry that other people will treat me badly for anything I say.	23%
I'm not sure.	8%
Total number of responses	288

**9. 'Extreme' views, (also called 'extremism'), are political, religious or racist views that are hateful or violent towards other people. Have you ever been in a situation where a student expressed extreme views in school?**

No, I have never been in that situation.	67%
Yes, I have been in that situation.	17%
I'm not sure if I have ever been in that situation.	16%
Total number of responses	284

**If you have answered 'yes' or 'not sure', please describe what happened.** (Free text space)

(49 free text responses collected)

**10. Do you think your teachers do a good job of helping students discuss sensitive issues like racism, sexism or extreme political or religious views?**

Yes, they do a good job of this. Teachers encourage us to talk about sensitive issues and help make sure that students respect each other's views.	49%
It's OK but teachers could do more to help students talk about sensitive issues.	34%
They don't do a good job on this. It's really difficult to talk about things like that in the classroom.	8%
I'm not sure.	10%
Total number of responses	288

**Challenges in your school or community:**

**11. First of all, are there problems or challenges in your school or community that you would like to do something about?**

Yes.	20%
No.	53%
Not sure.	27%
Total number of responses	285

**If you have said yes, please tell us about the problem you would most like to do something about:** (Free text space)

(49 free text responses collected)

**12. Do you think your school helps you take action on problems or challenges in your community?**

Yes. The school helps us a lot with ideas and opportunities to take positive action in the community.	42%
It's OK. We talk about this a bit in school but I would like to know more about what I can do.	41%
No. We never talk about this in school.	10%
I'm not sure.	7%
Total number of responses	285

**Is there anything else you want to add about your answer to this question?** (Free text space)

(35 free text responses collected)





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## Appendix E: Teacher Interview questions

### 1. What are your job responsibilities in school? (e.g. subject, year group, other responsibilities)

Want to talk first about diversity...

### 2. How diverse is the community and the school? What is the level of immigration into the community?

### 3. Do you think there is good integration between students from different backgrounds and cultures in your school?

Want to talk now about the role of the school as a safe space for students to talk about difficult issues and, in particular, talk about extremist views, whether that be racism, political extremism, religious extremism and so on...

### 4. Do you feel this school is a safe space for student to discuss potentially sensitive issues like racism, sexism, religious beliefs? Do students feel able to express their views, even though people may disagree with them?

### 5. How would you feel if extreme religious or political views came up in your school? Has this already happened? How did staff and students respond / deal with it?

### 6. As a teacher, what do you feel you need to create a safe space and support students to have respectful dialogue on these difficult issues?

I'd like to move on now to think about any other key challenges you think this community faces and the school's role in supporting students to tackle those challenges:

### 7. What other main challenges do you think this community faces? What comes up when you talk with students and families?

### 8. Is the school supporting students to take positive action these challenges? How?

### 9. What do you feel you need as teachers and as a school to do be able to this better - support students in active citizenship?

### 10. Is there anything else you want to add before we close?



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