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Perspectives on safeguarding and child protection in English schools: the new educational landscape explored

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Structured Abstract

Background

Changes in England's education policy have increased the autonomy of schools, thus substantially altering the nature of the role played by local government. Concurrently, a sharp rise in referrals to children's social care services, together with budgetary pressures, have led local authorities to seek to manage demand by emphasising the role of other agencies in providing early help to children and families.

Purpose

This article focuses on schools' engagement with safeguarding and child protection from the perspective of senior education and children's social care professionals employed within local authorities. It considers the effect of policy developments on the relationship between local authorities and schools in meeting their statutory duties to identify and support vulnerable children and families (safeguarding) and intervening in those considered to be at risk of significant harm (child protection). This research was undertaken as the preliminary stage of a study investigating schools' decision-making in child protection, their engagement in multi-agency working, and the support available to schools.

Methods

Scoping interviews were conducted with 68 professionals working in children's social care or education services in 20 local authorities across England that varied in terms of geographical location and socio-economic diversity. Interview transcripts were analysed qualitatively, using a two-phase process. The analysis included the identification of a thematic framework, mapping and interpretation.

Findings

In-depth analysis of the rich interview data allowed exploration of the participants' perspectives, which elucidate and give insight into some of the emerging pressures that are challenging schools and local authorities, as well as the agencies supporting them. Key factors identified were: increasing school autonomy; the upward trend in the rate of referral to children's social care services and rising thresholds for accessing those services; and the availability and nature of 'early help' for children not meeting the threshold for social care intervention.

Conclusions

Pending later data gathered through surveys and directly from schools, the findings from this preliminary study suggest that local authorities face new challenges in working with a fragmented educational community: while their statutory responsibilities remain, the channels by which they are carried out have been severely weakened.

Keywords

Safeguarding; child protection; decentralisation; local authorities; education management; child social care

Introduction

Several sustained changes in English education policy (see Baginsky et al., 2015) have significantly altered the previously close relationship between schools and local authorities¹. One such policy change has led to an increasing number of schools becoming ‘academies’² (Learning and Skills Act 2000). As academies receive funding directly from central government rather than their local authority, and are run by an academy trust, they have increased autonomy. However, few studies have examined the effect of this changing relationship in terms of schools’ engagement in their statutory responsibilities in relation to the important areas of *safeguarding* and *child protection*.

Purpose

This article reports findings from the analysis of scoping interviews at the outset of a larger study investigating the nature and quality of schools’ decision-making in child protection practice, their engagement in multi-agency working and the support available to schools in fulfilling their safeguarding functions. Later stages of the study included surveys of education and social care departments in all English local authorities, as well as surveys of the multi-agency bodies charged with oversight of inter-agency collaboration for the protection of children (known as Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs)³. The surveys were

¹ In England, local government authorities (such as county councils and unitary authorities) hold responsibilities for local services including education and social care (see further <https://www.gov.uk/understand-how-your-council-works>).

² In England, Academies (see further <https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school/academies>) and Free Schools (see further <https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school/free-schools>) are independent schools that are publicly funded.

³ In June 2018, Local Safeguarding Children Boards were abolished by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and replaced by multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

informed by the data from the scoping interviews reported here and will also provide the opportunity to test the national representativeness of the interview data against the results obtained from national surveys. The final stage of the project consists of a detailed study of 58 schools in five local authorities and a Multi-Academy Trust (a group of academies, often crossing local authority boundaries), the results of which will be available in late 2019. The scoping interviews were conducted with 68 professionals working in children's social care or education services in 20 local authorities across England. The purpose of the scoping interviews was:

- a) to inform the areas to be included in the surveys by collecting the views and experiences of professionals close to decision-making processes; and
- b) to understand the contexts in which a multiagency approach to safeguarding and child protection is occurring.

In the absence of contemporary research to draw on, these scoping interviews produced rich data which served to provide preliminary understandings to inform the main study. The in-depth analysis of the interview data reported here also offers valuable insights on an under-researched area.

Context

Child protection is devolved to national governments within the UK. This study is confined to England, where child protection policy and legislation reflect a history of concern over perceived failures in inter-agency working (see, for example, Brandon et al., 2012 and Laming, 2003). Since 1999, statutory guidance *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (currently HM Government, 2018a) has provided a national framework for agencies and professionals to coordinate local safeguarding arrangements. *Working Together* defines

‘safeguarding’ as: ‘protecting children from maltreatment’; ‘preventing impairment of children’s health or development’; ‘ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care’ and ‘taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes’ (ibid, p102).

Each local authority holds overall responsibility for arrangements to improve the well-being of local children (Children Act 2004 section 10), and has specific statutory responsibilities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children ‘in need’ and to make enquiries and take appropriate action to protect children who may be at risk of, or who are suffering, significant harm (Children Act 1989). An important aspect of child protection and safeguarding in England is that each local authority works within a common framework but has its own child protection procedures and protocols. The lead agency for child protection is social care, which, after the Children Act 2004, has typically merged with the education department to create a single children’s services department under a Director of Children’s Services (DCS) (HM Government, 2005). Prior to this, education was the responsibility of a distinct agency within local government, the local education authority.⁴ All schools are subject to a specific duty to exercise their functions with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children (Education Act 2002 section 175 and regulations made under section 157). Statutory guidance for schools (Department for Education, 2018) expects school staff to be able to identify children in need of ‘early help’ and to coordinate support within the school, as well as liaising with other agencies in the assessment of needs and provision of services.

⁴ Following the Children Act 2004, the term "LEA" became obsolete in practice. It is still used in legislation passed since 2004 to distinguish local authorities with education functions from those without. See further details in Thomson Reuters, Practical Law, 2019
[https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/Browse/Home/Practice/LocalGovernment?transitionType=Default&contextData=\(sc.Default\)&firstPage=true&bhcp=1](https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/Browse/Home/Practice/LocalGovernment?transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default)&firstPage=true&bhcp=1) Accessed 21 August 2019

Ultimately, oversight of safeguarding in maintained schools, academies and free schools falls to the Department for Education, but, on a day-to-day basis, local authorities assume this responsibility through the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCBs). This multi-agency body coordinates actions to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and ensure that each organisation acts effectively. LSCBs publish policies and procedures for local child protection. Under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 section 30, LSCBs are to be replaced by multi-agency safeguarding partnership arrangements by September 29, 2020. The local authorities, chief officers of police and National Health Service (NHS) clinical commissioning groups are the named ‘safeguarding partners’ which are charged with making arrangements to work together and with other ‘relevant agencies’ to fulfil their child safeguarding functions. Schools have been identified as a ‘relevant agency’⁵ although many respondents to the Government’s consultation on the proposed arrangements wished to see ‘education’ included as a fourth safeguarding partner (HM Government, 2018b). Responding to the consultation, the Government declared it would “seek to give greater emphasis to the role of schools in the published guidance” (HM Government, 2018b, p5). Subsequently, the updated guidance (HM Government, 2018a) set out the “pivotal role” of schools in the new safeguarding partner arrangements, stating that their “co-operation and buy-in...will be vital for success” (p76). It expects that the local safeguarding partners will name schools as relevant agencies and “make arrangements to allow all schools (including multi academy trusts), colleges and other educational providers...to be fully engaged, involved and included in the new safeguarding arrangements” (p76). Where schools are a designated relevant agency, they have a statutory duty to co-operate with the published arrangements.

⁵ The Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Relevant Agency (England) Regulations 2018, SI2018/789

While local authority-maintained schools and academies must cooperate with local authority children's services departments in local safeguarding arrangements (Children Act 2004, section 10), the development of schools receiving funding directly from central government, rather than local authorities, presents significant potential challenges for safeguarding and child protection work. The severing of financial and education links between schools and local authorities raises questions such as the extent to which schools are obliged to engage in the sharing of information that may have safeguarding implications, such as that relating to attendance or exclusion, and the provision of 'early help' services for children and families. Fifteen per cent of local authority Directors of Children's Services responding to a National Audit Office (NAO) survey (NAO, 2014) reported that they neither monitored safeguarding in academies nor would they intervene if pupils' safety was 'under threat'. The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2015) found the Department of Education's oversight of safeguarding to be insufficiently robust. It identified a lack of consistency and concluded that local authorities needed to be reminded about the extent of their safeguarding duties, noting that "some local authorities do not understand their safeguarding duties towards pupils in academies" (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2015, p4).

Although academy status was initially limited to poorly performing schools under the aegis of a sponsoring organisation, the Academies Act 2010 allowed all maintained schools to apply for conversion to academy status. By December 2018, there were over 8,000 academy-type schools in operation or awaiting approval (HM Government, 2019). There is, however, wide national variation, ranging from 10 to 90 per cent of schools in local authorities (NAO, 2018). Some academies are standalone schools while others are part of a multi-academy trust (MAT), which may operate schools across different local authority areas, increasing the complexity of safeguarding oversight. As the number of academies increases, funding for

local authorities to provide discretionary services, including those which support safeguarding, has fallen (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2018a). The current study, therefore, provided a timely opportunity to consider the effect of ‘academisation’ on the relationships between schools and local authorities in terms of their safeguarding duties.

Methodology

Ethical considerations

The study received ethical approval from the relevant Education and Management Research Ethics Panel at King’s College London. No further research governance approvals were required. Interviews were conducted in 2017. All participants were provided with information sheets and they signed consent forms before interviews. Information included assurances regarding anonymity and confidentiality.

Sample

All English local authorities were stratified into groups according to the type of authority (in England, these are county councils, unitary authorities, metropolitan districts and London boroughs) and geographic location, with the aim of recruiting from 20 local authority areas for geographical range and socio-economic diversity. Within each group, authorities were randomly allocated a number to represent the order in which they would be approached. Five authorities declined because they were undergoing an inspection or reorganisation when approached. Where this occurred, the next authority listed in their group was approached. The 20 authorities that constituted the achieved sample were spread across England. Table 1 summarises the type and general location of these authorities. Location has been generalised and type merged for reasons of anonymity.

[Insert Table 1]

The initial approach to a local authority was through the office of the Director of Children's Services (DCS). After a discussion of the nature and purpose of the study, individuals with sufficient seniority to represent their agency were identified, through discussion, in both education and children's services. These early discussions were guided by Stake's (1995) case study research advice that 'The researcher should have a connoisseur's appetite for the best persons, places, and occasions' (p56). A total of 68 individuals was interviewed, most in groups of two to ten, although 11 one-to-one interviews were conducted, including three by telephone.⁶ Table 2 summarises the number and type of interviews. Moderation of group interviews included attention to ensuring all participants felt able to contribute. However, it is recognised that, particularly in larger groups, the researcher may not have been aware of the full complexities of specific group dynamics and this was borne in mind during data analysis.

[Insert Table 2]

Interview procedure

Interviews drew on Robertson et al.'s (2012) definition of scoping interviews as 'loosely-focused and loosely-structured...designed to evaluate, ground and refine the initial understandings, assumptions and concepts of a research team...' (p517). The interviews explored participants' views on the most significant issues affecting schools' engagement with multi-agency safeguarding and child protection arrangements and any changes in the last decade; the scope and usefulness of statutory guidance; and the organisation and

⁶ Organisations that were deemed relevant by way of their work on the subject, as well as relevant national organisations, were also approached to contribute to the scoping stage. Data from these 20 interviews will be reported elsewhere.

adequacy of support provided to schools by local authority and other agencies. The researcher encouraged ‘conversations with a purpose’ (Webb and Webb, 1932, p30), adopting a flexible and interactive approach. All but one of the interviews or discussions were led by the lead author and the proceedings were digitally recorded and transcribed. Group interviewing differs from one-to-one interviewing both because data are generated by the interaction and because a group discussion may inhibit some views (Bryman, 2012): attention was paid to such dynamics in analysis. Findings from the early interviews informed subsequent interviews, as did interviews with key informants not working in local authorities (not reported here).

Data analysis

The analysis of the data was also conducted by the lead researcher. The first phase of analysis comprised an iterative and reflective process that continued while the data were being collected (Stake, 1995) and enabled the identification of themes to inform subsequent interviews. It facilitated a ‘reflexive process...key to sparking insight and developing meaning’ that ‘refines focus and understandings’ (Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009, p77). The second phase was based on the data from all transcripts. It was guided by the Framework approach (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994) of familiarization, identification of a thematic framework, indexing and charting followed by mapping and interpretation. The approach allowed themes to develop both from the research questions and from participants’ accounts. However, as noted by Srivastava and Thomson (2009), issues underpinning the research questions were liable to be prominent and it is important to recognise that the analysis was driven by the areas on which the researchers sought to reach a better understanding.

Findings and discussion

Analysis of the interviews provided a rich and valuable picture of how professionals in the participating 20 local authorities had experienced the policy shifts detailed above, offering many insights into the ways in which they were responding to the changes. Some key findings, which are presented and discussed thematically in the sections below, reflect the views of professionals working in education and children's social care in widely differing areas of England. Where relevant, anonymised quotations from the data are included to illustrate and illuminate points.

Increased school autonomy

Although local authorities continued to offer some level of support to all schools in their local area and many participants reported that academies collaborated well with their authority, three core concerns were highlighted: (i) reduced resources resulting from revenue being diverted directly to schools; (ii) reduced access to information about pupils; and (iii) less engagement with inclusion policies. In two areas where very few schools remained in local authority control, the education function had virtually disappeared and, at first, it proved difficult to find anyone to interview there. Not surprisingly, it was reported that, in the event of safeguarding concerns, schools in these areas would look more to children's social care than to the local authority education staff for even basic information and guidance. However, from the perspective of most participants, the relationship between local authorities and schools within their boundaries was usually working well, irrespective of the proportion of schools that were academies or the balance between standalone academies and those in MATs. In some authorities, academies that had been initially resistant to working with them were reported to be becoming more open to re-establishing the relationship. If, for example, a

school inspection by Ofsted⁷ highlighted a concern in one school, other local schools often swiftly commissioned a review of safeguarding and sought bespoke training. One participant noted:

I think when schools went to academies they felt that they could deal with all the issues that were within their own school and I think there has been a realisation from academies that they need a relationship back with the local area to deal with some of the complex situations...We treat all schools the same ... (the) whole national perspective of 'actually local authorities aren't helpful to schools' ... I think has now been almost demystified.

(i) Resources: Most local authorities had maintained some level of support to all schools, regardless of schools' designation. Approaches to service provision ranged from making all support free on the one hand to charging for everything on the other. Existing offers of 'traded' services had been extended to academies and other educational institutions, in competition with other providers and, in the case of schools that were part of large academy trusts, the trusts' corporate provision. With a few exceptions, provision was usually related to the proportion of schools still under local authority control.

(ii) Access to information: One of the first checks often conducted when a referral is made in relation to a school-aged child is of their school attendance, since this is a key protective factor (Sidebotham et al., 2016). Academies are required to report their pupil attendance and temporary exclusion information to local authorities, but local authorities do not have automatic access to their registers, introducing potential delays in access to information.

Some participants reported difficulties when they wanted to check the accuracy of reporting

⁷ Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills in England. It inspects services providing education and skills for learners of all ages and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

on Year 11 (usually age 15-16) attendance in particular, or to monitor placement on part-time timetables.

(iii) Engagement with inclusion: In just over a quarter of authorities involved in the research, participants expressed concern that academisation had led to some schools disengaging from the ‘inclusion agenda’ and so avoiding a commitment to meet the needs of all local children, usually attributed to the desire to create a more ‘academic’ setting. According to participants, some pupils who did not settle well or whose behaviours meant they cannot engage with this ethos were not being safeguarded. Several participants considered that too many pupils were ending up in alternative (non-school) provision, such as pupil referral units, particularly if excluded from schools in Year 10 or beyond, when it was difficult to return. This view is supported by (Driscoll, 2018) in relation to ‘looked after’ (in the care of the local authority) young people and, more generally, by the House of Commons Education Committee (2018).

Wider policy changes

In addition to the increasing number of academies, wider policy changes, including the impact of ‘austerity’ measures on both authorities and schools, and encouragement of commissioning of services, were seen by participants as contributing to challenges facing joint working between authorities and schools. Prior to academisation, safeguarding was often within the remit of School Improvement Teams in authorities, where a specific professional usually provided advice and guidance, as well as training, for Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) in schools (Baginsky, 2003). Budget cuts alone, or in combination with academisation, had reportedly reduced this service. In one large authority, for example, a School Improvement Service adviser now concentrated on crisis-led work

with about a fifth of schools, visiting those where Ofsted had identified that safeguarding needed improvement and confessed:

It would be hard for us to say we offer all schools safeguarding support to the same level when we have to look after those who need our help more.

Another reported factor affecting local authority support to schools was the turnover of head teachers and DSLs, which most participants considered had recently accelerated. Participants acknowledged that where a DSL had been in post for a while they were usually very competent, but lack of confidence and experience amongst new appointees led to many more demands for additional support. The quality of inter-agency collaboration was also affected by the resulting instability, particularly if senior staff in schools were judged by other professionals not to be as informed or as competent in their safeguarding role as they should be.

Schools are free to commission independent trainers and most local authority participants did not know the extent to which such trainers on safeguarding and child protection operated locally. Yet many voiced anxiety that schools considered it appropriate for their staff to access generic on-line training, not tailored to local procedures and policies, rather than authority-based training. Similar concerns were expressed about contracting external providers, thought to be more common in the independent sector and in the large academy chains. These related to both the overall quality of the input and the extent to which these consultants were well-versed in local procedures. For example, one participant referred to a situation where a school had attended a training session for DSLs offered by an independent provider where online safety had not been covered. Following an incident, the local authority's investigation showed that staff had not only failed to follow local procedures but were not even aware of them. To counter this, some LSCBs were reported to maintain a

‘bank’ or list of accredited trainers and in one area such trainers were required to offer a certain number of sessions annually for the LSCB.

Referrals and Thresholds

There were reported tensions around rising numbers of referrals by schools to children’s social care and the local authority’s response to those, particularly for children with complex needs. Budgetary pressures and changes in the nature of the relationship between schools and local authorities may be a factor here. Schools are an extremely important source of identification of child protection concerns. Referrals to children’s social care by schools comprised 18.2 per cent of all referrals in the year ending March 2018: the second most prolific source after the police (Department for Education/National Statistics, 2018). An Association of Directors of Children’s Services’ (ADCS) (2018) survey found that 92 per cent (140) of English local authorities with responsibility for 95 per cent of children and young people reported that referrals had risen by 22 per cent in the decade surveyed and that the number of children who were the subject of child protection plans increased by 87 per cent.

Many participants reported a substantial increase in the number of children and young people presenting to schools and local authorities with complex needs, at a time when social workers were being directed to cases perceived to carry higher risk of harm. There were several references to the tensions arising when cases were referred to children’s social care but then failed to meet the eligibility threshold for a service. At the same time, those from local authority children’s social care also frequently reported not receiving enough information or evidence from some schools to enable them to make a timely decision. As earlier work evidences, this is a long-standing complaint (Baginsky, 2007). Participants provided accounts

of various approaches taken by local authorities to encourage a better understanding both of what constitutes significant harm and of the point at which social care would become involved. The intention was to enable schools to seek advice or share information with social care: sometimes, but not very often, through a dedicated consultation service. Wherever the source of support was based, participants working in children's social care felt that they had articulated a clear expectation that schools would consult these services before making a referral to social care, in the hope of reducing inappropriate referrals.

Early Help

Participants thought that most schools had developed greater understanding of their role in multi-agency approaches to supporting children and families where the threshold for children's social care had not been met. However, there was great variety in the availability of 'early help' services, their accessibility through the local authority, and the extent to which provision was offered within schools themselves. Several years ago, in an important government-commissioned review of child protection, Munro (2011) recommended placing a duty on local authorities and statutory partners to secure sufficient provision of local early intervention services for children, young people and families. She identified a risk-averse climate in which agencies prioritised assessments, but these did not necessarily lead to a flexible response to need or improved outcomes for children and families. Her review recommended a legal framework to secure 'shared accountability' for early intervention where cases do not meet the statutory threshold for social care services (Munro, 2011, p78). However, the government's response to this review maintained that existing legislation was adequate (Department for Education, 2011). More recently, statutory guidance advises that 'local authorities should work with organisations and agencies to develop joined-up early help services based on a clear understanding of local needs' (HM Government, 2018a, p12).

Despite this, though, participants in the present study suggested they felt that the ‘shared accountability’ envisioned in Munro’s terms, had not been realised. Most authorities had introduced an early help strategy, but a minority did not accept any ‘early help’ cases, thus pushing responsibility back to the referring agency. In the majority of interviews, participants described a system based on the conceptual and widely used ‘windscreen of need’ or ‘threshold’ model (see Children’s Workforce Development Council, 2009). The aim of such a model was reported by participants to be ensuring children and young people receive the right support when they need it, based on an efficient step-up and step-down process being in place.

Participants from some areas reported that requests for ‘early help’ had to be made to ‘dedicated teams’ who were able to support or conduct an assessment. However, there were considerable variations over what these encompassed, their target population, and at what stage help might be offered. For example, in one local authority, ‘early help’ had developed into an intensive support service to divert cases which previously would have progressed to children’s social care. Another local authority had introduced small local teams to provide schools with assured access to a social worker for referral or advice. Thresholds had been abandoned and it was said that, as a result, more positive relationships had developed. This authority declared its aspiration to provide the right service by the most appropriate person or agency when a need is first identified. However, in many other authorities, similar aspirations were reportedly thwarted by inadequate resources to match the level of need. The majority of participants from both children’s social care and education services voiced concerns that high thresholds were operating for many early help services, resulting in more cases being ‘pushed back’ to referring schools.

Despite these and many other challenges described in the data, most participants agreed that the last decade had seen greater shared understandings of early help and intervention, although this was threatened by resource cuts. One such example was where Troubled Families programme⁸ funding had paid for family support workers in schools. When this funding ceased, these staff became part of a ‘traded service’ (to be paid for by the schools), which many schools could not afford. Other participants suggested that where a significant early help provision was removed completely or targeted at ‘high end’ cases, schools would inevitably turn to social care if they had a concern about a possible safeguarding risk, only to find that cases would fail to cross the threshold for support. As well as a reduction in the number of services, in some areas key posts were disappearing. Many participants reported that local schools were very apprehensive about their capacity to maintain their current raft of support.

Study Limitations

All studies are inevitably limited by scope. Although local authorities were randomly sampled within purposively created groupings to cover a broad range of local authority types and to provide a geographic spread, it was not possible to reflect every type of situation. Nonetheless, a breadth of views was expressed and common themes emerged across the data. Assurances of anonymity appeared to have fostered frank responses, but it is possible that group interviews may have curtailed some discussion. The strength of the data, however, lies in focusing on an under-researched subject and the range of participants engaged. It is hoped

⁸ The Troubled Families Programme (England) is a government ‘programme of targeted intervention for families with multiple problems, including crime, anti-social behaviour, truancy, unemployment, mental health problems and domestic abuse. See further <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7585> Accessed 21 August 2019

that the present study's surveys and planned interviews in schools will help to illuminate the subject further through different perspectives.

Conclusions

Overall, thematic analysis of the interviews identified a high degree of consistency between the views of those working in the education and children's social care sections of children's service departments. The analysis also exposed the complex and diverse relationships that now exist between local authorities and state schools in England in relation to child protection and safeguarding.

Whilst early intervention has the *potential* to reduce the pressures on children's social care and keep children out of state care, the experiences of many of those who were interviewed indicate that Munro's (2011) vision of early help services has been thwarted by other policy decisions related to public expenditure. While there appears to have been an increase in the number of early help teams, often constructed by reorganising pre-existing services, provision is evidently not consistent across the country. As many participants reported, thresholds for early help, as well as for children in need, have risen in recent years as available resources decline (see All Party Parliamentary Group for Children, 2018). Indeed, Webb and Bywaters' (2018) analysis of expenditure in England between 2010 and 2015 concluded that increases in expenditure on children in care had come at the expense of budgets for prevention, early intervention and family support, while safeguarding spending remained fairly stable.

Overall, it is clear from the analysis that local authority participants from both education and social care expressed commitment to working with all schools on safeguarding and child protection. Yet their responses suggest they are struggling to adapt to the greater diversity in school provision.

The findings of this exploratory phase of this study suggest that policy designed to grant schools greater autonomy from local authorities in educational management runs the risk of overlooking the potential implications for safeguarding. In addition, for local authorities, the major challenges in working with a fragmented educational community have yet to be overcome.

Both education and children's social care participants reported that the role of the education arm of children's service departments in relation to child safeguarding had been diminished. While their statutory responsibilities remain, the channels by which they are carried out have been severely weakened. In this context, there is a need to analyse the impact of the wide diversity of models for the delivery of support for schools' safeguarding responsibilities, in order to ascertain what promotes effective outcomes, practice and systems. We hope that the later stages of this research, of which this exploratory stage was the initial phase, will contribute to this. Finally, whilst this study focuses on England, the broader educational systems and management themes that emerge from the analysis presented here are potentially relevant and will be of interest to those involved in safeguarding and child protection in many international settings.

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Tables

Table 1: Type and location of local authorities

Type of authority	North	South	London borough	Midlands	East	West
Metropolitan borough / Unitary authority*	4	1	-	3	1	2
London borough			3			
County council	2	1	-	-	2	1

*Merged to maintain anonymity

Table 2: Number and type of interview / discussion conducted **

Type of authority	Number of one-to-one face-to-face interviews	Number of one-to-one telephone interviews	Number where two people in interview	Number where small group conducted (up to five participants)	Number where larger group conducted (up to ten participants)
Metropolitan borough / Unitary authority*	1	1***	3	2	2
London borough	2	1***	2	-	-
County Council	2	1+1***	1	2	2

*Merged to maintain anonymity

** Number is more than the number of authorities participating as multiple interviews conducted in a small number of authorities

***Supplementary contacts in addition to face to face interviews.