Safeguarding not Securitisation.

A resource for educators navigating Prevent

PUBLISHED BY

PREVENT WATCH

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

LIBERTY

SECTION · ONE

01

Why this resource matters to you

SECTION 01 · WHY THIS RESOURCE MATTERS TO YOU

Schools are responsible for creating safe, supportive environments where children can learn, develop and express themselves. This aligns with the statutory duty under section 175 of the Education Act 2002.

Since 2015, education providers in the UK have been required to implement the Prevent duty as part of safeguarding. Section 26 of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 places a legal obligation on schools and other public authorities to "have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism".

Placing Prevent, a security initiative, under the umbrella of safeguarding creates a fundamental conflict. Safeguarding is centred on the rights and welfare of the individual, whereas counter terrorism prioritises the protection of the wider public. These competing logics are one of several reasons why Prevent has resulted in harm to individuals referred, their families and communities.

In response to concerns raised by educators about how to maintain rights-based safeguarding in an environment increasingly shaped by Prevent and other securitisation programmes, Prevent Watch has created this resource to help educators understand the Prevent duty in context, navigate their obligations confidently, and move away from suspicion- and surveillance-led approaches towards understanding context, unmet needs, and the most appropriate support.

SECTION · TWO

02

Clarifying key misconceptions about PREVENT in education

SECTION 02 · CLARIFYING KEY MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT PREVENT IN EDUCATION

Prevent operates within education settings as part of safeguarding, but its purpose, legal basis, and practical implications are often misunderstood. The following myths and clarifications address common areas of confusion and are intended to support educators to understand their role clearly, apply professional judgment, and protect pupils' rights and wellbeing.

I	**The Prevent duty applies personally to individual educators**
II	**Prevent is just another safeguarding measure**
III	**Prevent does not target Muslims or racialised groups**
IV	**"Gut feeling" is enough to warrant a Prevent referral**
V	**Promoting Fundamental British Values protects pupils from extremism**
VI	**Increased referrals for right-wing extremism have 'balanced out' Prevent**

MYTH

The Prevent duty applies personally to individual educators

TRUTH

The statutory Prevent duty applies to institutions, not individual educators, and does not create a personal legal obligation to make referrals.

- The Prevent duty set out in the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, places a statutory obligation on institutions such as schools and colleges, rather than on individual staff.
- Prevent training is made mandatory through employment requirements and inspection frameworks such as Ofsted, however this is frequently misunderstood as a personal legal obligation to make Prevent referrals, or as an expectation that referrals must be made to demonstrate compliance.
- Educators are expected to act in line with their organisation's safeguarding policies and procedures, applying professional judgment and considering Prevent alongside other safeguarding and legal duties, including equality, disability, and human rights obligations.

II MYTH

Prevent is just another safeguarding measure

TRUTH

Prevent conflicts with safeguarding in several key ways.

- It is grounded in counter terrorism legislation, not child protection and human rights frameworks.
- Prevent processes do not address the root causes of harm, such as trauma, unmet needs, or discrimination – instead it focuses on an individual's behaviour or expressions, often without considering context.
- Prevent processes lack transparency and often proceed without parental knowledge or consent.

III

MYTH

Prevent does not target Muslims or racialised groups

TRUTH

Prevent has always disproportionately targeted Muslims.

- Prevent was originally developed through a racialised security framework during the ‘war on terror’. Treating Muslim communities as a primary source of risk shaped its early risk indicators and assumptions.
- Despite claims that Prevent addresses all forms of extremism, current training continues to identify “Islamism” as the primary threat.
- The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 2024 recommended the suspension of Prevent due to its discriminatory impact.

IV MYTH

“Gut feeling” is enough to warrant a Prevent referral

TRUTH

Safeguarding must be grounded in evidence-based concerns, not instinct.

- Encouraging educators to rely on “gut feeling” increases the risk of bias, particularly where race, religion, disability, or gender shape how behaviour or expression is perceived.
- Referring individuals based on instinct deprofessionalises educators’ safeguarding role and shifts them towards acting as informal extensions of national security, rather than as rights-based practitioners.
- Acting on instinct rather than evidence can expose children and families to serious and unnecessary harm, including referral to counter terrorism processes and long-term data retention, even where no further action is taken.

NATIONAL EDUCATION UNION GUIDANCE

> *Referrals to Prevent should not rely on gut instinct: reliance on such 'instinct' may explain the very high number of referrals made by schools and colleges. To ensure proportionate, considered, and non-prejudiced referrals, it is crucial to follow your safeguarding policies and procedures. Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) should exercise their professional judgment and consider the context for the individual, before determining if a referral is proportionate to the assessed risk.*

— NATIONAL EDUCATION UNION

V MYTH

Promoting Fundamental British Values protects pupils from extremism

TRUTH

Fundamental British Values does not function as a safeguarding tool.

- The notion of Fundamental British Values (FBV) was first defined within the UK's counter-terrorism strategy, and its embedding into school life shifts educators away from inclusive, anti-racist education and towards monitoring and policing pupils' identities and viewpoints.
- FBV is a vague concept that allows educators to interpret it with personal or cultural assumptions, which creates space for individual bias.
- FBV operates as state-sanctioned norms of "acceptable" identity and belief, reinforcing racialised ideas about belonging and contributing to institutional racism in schools.

VI MYTH

Increased referrals for right-wing extremism have ‘balanced out’ Prevent

TRUTH

Increased right-wing referrals do not remove the harms of Prevent.

- Even with the increase in right-wing referrals, since Muslims make up 6% of the UK population, they are still 6 times more likely to be referred to Prevent than non-Muslims.
- Many right-wing cases still involve children, often autistic, who are flagged for misinterpreted statements or atypical behaviour without appropriate context.
- Prevent Watch’s casework shows that many right-wing referrals, like those described as “Islamist” concerns, are based on misinterpretation, rather than genuine risk.

SECTION · THREE

03

Your Rights and Duties: Protecting Pupils and Yourself

SECTION 03 · YOUR RIGHTS AND DUTIES

All educators have a legal and professional duty to safeguard pupils while respecting their rights. The Prevent duty can undermine these obligations, and it is well documented by civil society organisations that Prevent has resulted in discrimination against students' disability, race and religion, privacy, and freedom of expression. This section sets out key areas where educators' existing legal and professional duties intersect with pupils' rights, and where Prevent can create tension or risk of harm if applied uncritically.

Remember: When considering the Prevent duty, educators must also consider their obligations under safeguarding, equality and human rights law.

Your Duties in Relation to Disability Equality

Your Duties in Relation to Racial Equality

Your Duties in Relation to Freedom of Speech

Your Duties in Relation to Disability Equality

According to research by Amnesty International and studies documented by Prevent Watch, autistic people are more likely to be “misunderstood or misperceived by other people”, including public sector staff subject to the Prevent duty.

Prevent training can frame neurodiversity and mental health needs as “risk factors”, meaning autistic behaviours or expressions of distress may be treated as signs of extremism rather than as unmet support needs.

In schools where SEND provisions are lacking, this can result in Prevent being used in place of appropriate care and support.

YOUR DUTY UNDER THE EQUALITY ACT 2010

Disabled pupils must not be subject to direct or indirect discrimination or harassment. Schools must ensure that pupils receive appropriate educational or clinical support, rather than securitised intervention.

SECTION 03 · YOUR DUTIES IN RELATION TO RACIAL EQUALITY

Your Duties in Relation to Racial Equality

In education settings, Prevent can result in ordinary and lawful expressions of faith, culture, or political views being treated as concerning, especially when expressed by Muslim pupils.

This includes assumptions based on clothing, language, religious practice, or engagement with political issues.

Such practices risk reinforcing stereotypes, increasing fear and self-censorship, and undermining trust between schools, pupils, and families.

YOUR DUTY UNDER THE EQUALITY ACT 2010

Educators must not discriminate on the basis of race or religion. Prevent referrals must not be influenced by cultural misunderstanding, appearance, language, or lawful religious practice, and any genuine safeguarding concerns must be assessed in context.

Your Duties in Relation to Freedom of Speech

Schools are spaces for learning, debate, and critical thinking. Treating Prevent as the default response can displace educators' professional judgment, blurring the distinction between genuine safeguarding risk and lawful but challenging discussion.

The chilling effect of Prevent on free speech is well documented by various human rights organisations and UN Special Rapporteurs, especially in schools and universities, where discussion and expression have been treated as a "risk".

Most recently, discussions surrounding Israel's genocide in Gaza have been subject to increased security and Prevent referrals. The National Educators Union guidance provides guidance on navigating conversations around this topic.

Prevent Watch and other human rights organisations have noted that the DfE guidance on political impartiality has been misapplied in ways that restrict discussion and expression. However, this guidance does not require schools to avoid such topics and cannot be used in ways that conflict with obligations under human rights law.

YOUR DUTY UNDER ARTICLE 10 OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS ACT 1998

Freedom of expression is protected by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and reflected in domestic law through the Human Rights Act 1998. Schools, therefore, have a legal duty to uphold freedom of expression — and students have the right to hold opinions and express ideas, including political, religious, ethical, and other controversial views. These rights can only be interfered with in ways that are lawful.

SECTION · FOUR

04

The Impact of Prevent

SECTION 04 · THE IMPACT OF PREVENT

Prevent referrals can have consequences for pupils, both within educational settings and beyond. Examples of these impacts, documented by Prevent Watch, show what that looks like for real pupils and families.

CASE STUDY · DATA RETENTION

Data retention on police databases

CASE STUDY · ACADEMIC CAREER

Data sharing impacts future prospects

CASE STUDY · WELLBEING

Mental health consequences

CASE STUDY · DATA RETENTION

Data retention on police databases

Prevent referrals can result in information being recorded and retained across multiple agencies, including on police databases and school safeguarding systems, following pupils throughout their academic career and later life. The consequences of misinformed or disproportionate referrals are often underestimated, particularly where it's assumed that cases resulting in no further action will have no lasting impact.

In one Prevent Watch case, a five-year-old child was referred to Prevent when his teacher raised a concern about him reciting a special prayer in Arabic. The child's information was retained on police databases and when the family requested its removal they were sent this response by the police:

> *"The Police are obliged to retain records…for a policing purpose, including safeguarding and the prevention of threats to public security…Such records are retained lawfully in accordance with the Management of Police Information (MoPI) 2006 and the National Retention and Disposal Schedule which the Constabulary has adopted.*

POLICE RESPONSE TO A FAMILY'S REQUEST TO REMOVE THE DATA

The family had to pursue the removal of this data for over a year and sought legal advice before it was eventually deleted.

CASE STUDY · ACADEMIC CAREER

Data sharing impacts future prospects

In another case, information linked to a Prevent referral made while a pupil was in secondary school was shared with a sixth form college after a pupil had already been offered a place. The offer was subsequently withdrawn when the sixth form saw the details of his Prevent referral in the safeguarding file. The college stated:

> *“…following receipt of relevant information…it was not deemed appropriate for the offer to continue and it was therefore withdrawn.*

SIXTH-FORM COLLEGE, ON WITHDRAWING A PLACE

In this instance, the “relevant information” referred to was the Prevent referral and this case demonstrates how the retention of Prevent-related concerns can impact pupils’ future education prospects.

CASE STUDY · WELLBEING

Mental health consequences

Prevent referrals can have a serious emotional and psychological impact on pupils, especially where they feel misunderstood or criminalised. This can be heightened where underlying issues such as bullying or distress are not recognised or addressed.

In one Prevent Watch case, a 12-year-old pupil who had been experiencing bullying was referred to Prevent after using the word “jihadi”, in what he thought would be a joke. He was questioned by his teacher and his personal devices were searched by school IT staff, and he was later questioned by a Prevent officer and recommended for Channel.

Following this he told his mother:

> *I don’t want to live anymore.*

A 12-YEAR-OLD PUPIL, AFTER BEING REFERRED TO PREVENT

Thankfully, his family were able to seek support for him privately as they did not trust the NHS support services for mental health as they too are bound by the Prevent duty. However, this case is a stark reminder of how security-led responses can intensify harm to the pupil and damage trust between pupils, families, and schools as well as in wider support services.

SECTION · FIVE

05

Support and Guidance

SECTION 05 · SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

Alongside existing safeguarding policies and procedures, educators may find the following resources helpful in supporting contextual, proportionate and rights-respecting safeguarding practice, particularly where there are questions or concerns relating to Prevent:

Prevent Watch

Provides a free helpline for anyone impacted by Prevent. Offers independent, case-informed guidance to support educators' understanding of Prevent, safeguarding responsibilities, and students' rights.

Telephone: 03333 443396 · Email: contact@preventwatch.org

Prevent | National Education Union

Provides union guidance on Prevent, professional judgment, and proportionate safeguarding, including advice on avoiding instinct-led or discriminatory referrals.

Radical Safeguarding — Maslaha

Offers practical approaches to safeguarding that prioritise care, dialogue, and understanding context, helping educators respond to harm without defaulting to securitised intervention.

Watching Over Working With | Contextual Safeguarding

Resources on safeguarding approaches that work collaboratively with children and families, rather than positioning them as risks.

Resources for teaching across different age ranges by human rights themes — Amnesty International

A range of resources written by special advisors to encourage classroom discussions about human rights.

Prevent: What are my rights? — Liberty

What is the Prevent duty? What happens if you have been referred to Prevent? What are your rights?

All external links featured are the property and responsibility of the respective organisation named. We are not responsible for the accuracy, reliability, or content of third-party websites.

Continuing the Conversation

These conversations are essential to maintaining safeguarding that is ethical, lawful, and rooted in care rather than securitisation.

01 Share this resource with colleagues and discuss how Prevent is shaping safeguarding practice in your setting.

02 Contact Prevent Watch to request a tailored workshop for your school, college, or education provider.

03 Share your experiences of Prevent or Prevent training to help inform wider understanding and support.

*To learn more, visit **preventwatch.org.uk** or read The People's Review of Prevent, an independent, evidence-based review documenting the harms and impacts of Prevent, at **peoplesreviewofprevent.org**.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To those who shared their stories, and those who keep speaking.

To the children, families and communities whose experiences shape this resource, and to the educators, lawyers, researchers and allies who continue to raise their voices — thank you.

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First published May 2026

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