

**RUNNYMEDE**

**BRIEFING**

# **Over-policed and under-protected**

The road to Safer Schools

**January 2023**



# Over-policed and under-protected: The road to Safer Schools

## About us

The Runnymede Trust is the UK's leading race equality think tank.

For more than 50 years, we have worked tirelessly to build a Britain in which we all belong.

From broadening the curriculum to exposing the Windrush scandal, our work is rooted in challenging structural racism and its impact on our communities. Our authoritative research-based interventions equip decision makers, practitioners and citizens with the knowledge and tools to deliver genuine progress towards racial equality in Britain.

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## Summary

- Freedom of Information requests made by the Runnymede Trust of 45 police forces show that there are 979 police officers operating in UK schools.<sup>1</sup>
- This reveals that the full scope of police presence in schools is 43% greater than previous figures have suggested.<sup>2</sup>
- Our analysis shows that half of Safer Schools Officers (SSOs), or their police force-based equivalents, are based in London.
- Across the UK there are plans to further increase the number of SSOs by 7%.
- Police officers are more likely to be based in schools in areas with higher numbers of pupils who are eligible for free school meals, which also correlates with higher numbers of Black and ethnic minority students.<sup>3</sup>
- Black and ethnic minority children are overpoliced, for example, 58% of all strip searches conducted by the Metropolitan police 2018-2020, were conducted on Black boys.<sup>4</sup>
- By bringing the criminal justice system into schools, the placement of SSOs can facilitate the school-to-prison pipeline for many Black and ethnic minority young people.
- Given these disproportionalities and the over-policing of Black and ethnic minority children, urgent action must be taken to remove police officers from schools and end the practice of strip searching children.

## Background & Context

These findings follow the case of Child Q, which this year brought the presence of police in schools to national attention. In March 2022, a report from the Independent Child Safeguarding Commissioner revealed that a 15 year old Black girl was strip searched by the Metropolitan Police whilst she was on her period, in her school.<sup>5</sup> She was accused of smelling of cannabis by her teacher and taken from her mock exam. The school failed to consider the best interests of Child Q or to treat the matter as a safeguarding issue. The search was conducted by two police officers without an appropriate adult present. According to the report, Child Q has

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<sup>1</sup> This figure excludes Kent, Leicestershire, Cumbria, Derbyshire, Sussex, Northern Ireland and Lancashire Police Constabularies who either declined to answer our FOI, did not hold the information, or who had not responded to our requests when this briefing was published.

<sup>2</sup> Parveen, N. McIntyre, N. Thomas, T., (2021) UK deploys 683 police officers in school with some poorer areas targeted. The Guardian, [online] Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/mar/25/uk-police-forces-deploy-683-officers-in-schools>,

<sup>3</sup> Henshall, A. (2017) On the school beat: police officers based in English schools, British Journal of Sociology of Education, 39:5, 593-606, DOI: [10.1080/01425692.2017.1375401](https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2017.1375401)

<sup>4</sup> Children's Commissioner, 2022. *Strip search of children by the Metropolitan Police Service – new analysis by the Children's Commissioner for England*. [online] Available at:

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/strip-search-of-children-by-the-metropolitan-police-service-new-analysis-by-the-childrens-commissioner-for-england/> [Accessed 8 August 2022].

<sup>5</sup> Dodd, V. and Quinn, B., 2022. Black girl strip-searched by Met officers at London school tells of trauma. *The Guardian*, [online] Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/16/met-officers-under-investigation-over-strip-search-of-girl-at-london-school> [Accessed 29 July 2022].

suffered 'profound' harm and left with ongoing mental health issues.<sup>6</sup> The report concluded that racism 'was likely to have been an influencing factor in the decision to undertake a strip search'.<sup>7</sup> The report also concluded that 'adultification bias' was a factor, a process whereby 'Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities are perceived as being more 'streetwise', more 'grown up', and where they are treated 'primarily as a threat rather than as a child who needs support'.<sup>8</sup> This treatment was also replicated in another incident that occurred at the same time, involving the Metropolitan Police detaining a 15 year old mixed race girl, known as Olivia, for 20 hours, before strip-searching her whilst she was menstruating, in the presence of male police officers.<sup>9</sup>

A Freedom of Information request by The Guardian revealed that the Metropolitan Police conducted around 9,000 strip searches on children in the past five years.<sup>10</sup> In Hackney, where Child Q went to school, 60% of the children strip-searched last year were Black.<sup>11</sup> A report by the Children's Commissioner found that of the 650 children strip searched by the Metropolitan police between 2018-2020, 95% were boys, and over half of the boys searched were Black. In fact in 2018, 3 in 4 boys that were strip searched were Black (75%).<sup>12</sup> This confirms that what happened to Child Q was far from an isolated incident and that although on this occasion, it was a Black girl that was subjected to the strip search in school, it is Black boys who are much more likely to be subjected to this form of policing. The Children's Commissioner's report also highlights the 'dehumanising and traumatic impact' of strip searches on children and the long term psychological damage that it can cause to those who are subjected to this increasingly used police power.

Police have been present in schools in the UK since the 1950s. Their scope and presence, however, has been steadily increasing since the 1960s. In the 1970s a moral panic over race, youth and crime emerged which led to a political turn towards more punitive actions, in which young Black and ethnic minority people

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<sup>6</sup> Dodd, V. and Quinn, B., 2022. Black girl strip-searched by Met officers at London school tells of trauma. *The Guardian*, [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/16/met-officers-under-investigation-over-strip-search-of-girl-at-london-school> > [Accessed 29 July 2022].

<sup>7</sup> chscp, 2022. *Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review*. [online] Available at: <https://chscp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Child-Q-PUBLISHED-14-March-22.pdf> > [Accessed 29 July 2022].

<sup>8</sup> "Adultification bias within child protection and safeguarding." <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2022/06/Academic-Insights-Adultification-bias-within-child-protection-and-safeguarding.pdf> > [Accessed 29 July 2022].

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/may/24/girl-trying-to-kill-herself-after-strip-search-by-met-officers-mother-says>

<sup>10</sup> Badshah, N., 2022. Met police urged to admit racism after strip-search of black girl in Hackney. *The Guardian*, [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/01/met-police-urged-to-admit-racism-after-strip-search-of-black-girl-in-hackney> > [Accessed 29 July 2022].

<sup>11</sup> Badshah, N., 2022. Met police urged to admit racism after strip-search of black girl in Hackney. *The Guardian*, [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/01/met-police-urged-to-admit-racism-after-strip-search-of-black-girl-in-hackney> > [Accessed 29 July 2022].

<sup>12</sup> Children's Commissioner, 2022. *Strip search of children by the Metropolitan Police Service – new analysis by the Children's Commissioner for England*. [online] Available at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/strip-search-of-children-by-the-metropolitan-police-service-new-analysis-by-the-childrens-commissioner-for-england/> > [Accessed 8 August 2022].

were targeted by police. Under the Conservative government of the 1980s, policy makers became increasingly interested in developing and formalising the relationships between police and schools. High profile incidents during the 1990s elevated fears over school safety, namely the murders at a Dunblane primary school in 1995 and the fatal stabbing of headteacher Philip Lawrence in 1996.

It was in 2002 under the Labour government that the links between police and education shifted into a direct placement of police in schools as part of cross-departmental 'Safer Schools Partnership Programme'. This marked a development in the role and activities of police officers in school, who in the decade after, were tasked with a range of multi-agency preventative and enforcement work based in the school setting.

A key moment in the renewed interest of police-school partnerships was the nationwide protests that England experienced in August 2011, after the killing of Mark Duggan. In the aftermath, then Prime Minister David Cameron declared an 'all out war on gangs and gang culture'. This saw the launch of a new initiative called 'Ending Gang and Youth Violence', in November 2011.<sup>13</sup> This established the placement of police officers in schools as important to 'identifying potential at risk' young people and referring them for 'further intervention to address their behaviour'.<sup>14</sup> In the same period, the Metropolitan Police also established the Gangs Violence Matrix which Amnesty International has warned is a system that is fundamentally 'unfit for purpose' and operates as a 'racially discriminatory system that stigmatises young black men'.<sup>15</sup>

## Key Findings

Our recent Freedom of Information requests, from spring 2022, indicate that 979 police officers operate in schools across Britain, which is 43.3% greater than when figures were last collected with a similar FOI request by *The Guardian* in 2021<sup>16</sup>. 22 out of the 45 police constabularies<sup>17</sup> had some form of Safer Schools police officers (SSO's) or someone with an equivalent role, working either full or part-time in those schools. Almost half (489) of these police officers are based in London. Across the country, there are plans to further increase this number by around 7% (or 65 police

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<sup>13</sup> Nijjar, J., 2020. Police-school partnerships and the war on black youth. *Critical Social Policy*, 41(3), pp.491-501.

<sup>14</sup> Home Office, 2011. Ending gang and youth violence: a cross-government report (Vol. 8211), p.30 Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-gang-and-youth-violence-cross-government-report>

<sup>15</sup> Amnesty International. 2018. Trapped in the matrix: Secrecy, stigma, and bias in the Met's Gangs database. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/reports/Trapped%20in%20the%20Matrix%20Amnesty%20report.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> The previous figure to which we compared our results were from Parveen, N. McIntyre, N. Thomas, T., (2021) UK deploys 683 police officers in school with some poorer areas targeted. *The Guardian*, [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/mar/25/uk-police-forces-deploy-683-officers-in-schools>

In our FOI request, we specifically asked about police staff based at schools who may not have the job title 'Safer School's Officers' as it is our understanding that not all police staff deployed in schools have this title. We also understand that some of the rise in this figure will be due to differences in how *The Guardian* recorded staff who were less than full-time in school, who they discounted from the total figure but which we decided to include in our figure as this gives a better account of the police presence in schools.

<sup>17</sup> This figure excludes Kent, Leicestershire, Cumbria, Derbyshire, Sussex, Northern Ireland and Lancashire Police Constabularies who either declined to answer our FOI, did not hold the information or who had not responded to our requests when this briefing was published.

officers). Alarming, in many areas, there appeared to be little or no formal consultation from police constabularies about the role and scope of local school based police officers. Our Freedom of Information request asked about the level and regularity of consultation with communities about the presence of police in their schools, and we found there was little to no consultation with the school communities affected.<sup>18</sup>

A recent Kids of Colour report on Greater Manchester showed that police officers are more likely to be based in schools with higher levels of Black and ethnic minority communities.<sup>19</sup> Schools with high entitlement to free school meals are often likely to have higher numbers of ethnic minority pupils and research shows that these schools are more likely to have Safer Schools Officers deployed to them.<sup>20</sup> This means that Black and ethnic minority pupils are more likely to come into contact with the police as a routine part of their schooling and speaks to historically rooted concerns that Black and ethnic minority communities are subjected to disproportionate processes of surveillance, criminalisation and other forms of 'over-policing'.<sup>21</sup> Survey responses from a 2020 Kids of Colour report found that safer schools officers act in ways that discriminate against students of colour, and particularly Black students.<sup>22</sup>

This coincides with the concern that the presence of police in schools effectively feeds the school to prison pipeline, whereby minor disciplinary matters that might otherwise be resolved by internal school pastoral, reconciliation and disciplinary systems, are unnecessarily escalated into police matters, as happened with Child Q.

There is also no evidence that the presence of police in schools serves to successfully reduce youth violence.<sup>23</sup> The academic research suggests that models that involve taking a much broader public-health approach which lead with preventative strategies that invest in community, youth and mental health provision are more likely to reduce youth crime. There is also a need to consider the wider socio-economic inequalities that contribute to crime and which rely on reforming

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<sup>18</sup> According to FOI data, 6 out of 45 police constabularies ran consultations, with a further 4 out of 45 running partial consultations. Following this, 15 out of 45 constabularies did not run any consultation procedures, while 13 forces stated they lacked the requested information. A further 2 out of 45 forces declined to answer based on costs.

<sup>19</sup> Connelly, L., Legane, R. and Joseph- Salisbury, R., 2020. *Decriminalise the Classroom*. [online] Kids of Colour and Northern Police Monitoring Project. Available at: <https://nopoliceinschools.co.uk/resources/Decriminalise%20the%20Classroom%20-%20A%20Community%20Response%20to%20Police%20in%20Greater%20Manchester%27s%20Schools.pdf> [Accessed 29 July 2022].

<sup>20</sup> "On the school beat: police officers based in English schools." <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01425692.2017.1375401?src=recsys&journalCode=cbse20> [Accessed 29 July 2022].

<sup>21</sup> Nijjar, J. S. (2021) 'Police-school partnerships and the war on black youth', *Critical Social Policy*, 41(3), pp. 491–501. doi: [10.1177/0261018320964655](https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018320964655).

<sup>22</sup> Connelly, L., Legane, R. and Joseph- Salisbury, R., 2020. *Decriminalise the Classroom*. [online] Kids of Colour and Northern Police Monitoring Project. Available at: <https://nopoliceinschools.co.uk/resources/Decriminalise%20the%20Classroom%20-%20A%20Community%20Response%20to%20Police%20in%20Greater%20Manchester%27s%20Schools.pdf> [Accessed 29 July 2022].

<sup>23</sup> "Safer schools effectiveness - Sian Berry." [https://www.sianberry.london/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Sian\\_Berry\\_Nov2016\\_safer\\_schools\\_officers.pdf](https://www.sianberry.london/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Sian_Berry_Nov2016_safer_schools_officers.pdf) [Accessed 29 July 2022].

wider systemic and institutional structures such as housing, income inequality and access to liveable levels of welfare support.<sup>24</sup>

## Response from the Runnymede Trust

The Runnymede Trust believe that SSOs are detrimental to all students, but that their negative effects are most harshly experienced by working class Black and minority ethnic students.<sup>25</sup>

The punitive nature of policing, coupled with longstanding experiences of over policing in Black and minority ethnic communities, means that the police can be an intimidating and threatening presence for these students.<sup>26,27</sup> This is especially the case given that Black and minority ethnic students are already subject to racial discrimination in schools.<sup>28</sup>

Racial discrimination takes many different forms in school settings. At the time of writing, there is a disproportionately high rate of school exclusions of pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller and Black Caribbean communities. In some areas of England, the rates for exclusion of Black Caribbean pupils were five or six times greater than for white pupils, and similar rates occurred for pupils of Mixed White/ Black Caribbean heritage.<sup>29</sup> Racist bullying is also extremely common in schools. A report by *The Guardian* found that over 60,000 racist incidents were reported by school pupils in the last five years and it is estimated that this figure hides the scale of the true problem since the government advised schools in 2012 that they had no legal duty to report racist incidents to local authorities.<sup>30</sup>

The recent incident of Raheem Bailey, an 11-year old boy in Wales, who lost his finger fleeing bullies after months of racist abuse and bullying, is indicative of the racism that often goes undetected or not taken seriously enough in everyday school

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<sup>24</sup> "Counting the cost of UK poverty - The Joseph Rowntree Foundation." 1 Aug. 2016, <<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/counting-cost-uk-poverty>> [Accessed 29 July 2022].

<sup>25</sup> Joseph-Salisbury, R., 2022. *Race and Racism in English Secondary Schools*. [online] The Runnymede Trust. Available at:

<[https://assets-global.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/61bcc0cc2a023368396c03d4\\_Runnymede%20Secondary%20Schools%20report%20FINAL.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/61bcc0cc2a023368396c03d4_Runnymede%20Secondary%20Schools%20report%20FINAL.pdf)> [Accessed 29 July 2022].

<sup>26</sup> "Police-school partnerships and the war on black youth." 5 Nov. 2020, <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0261018320964655>> [Accessed 29 July 2022].

<sup>27</sup> Connelly, L., Legane, R. and Joseph- Salisbury, R., 2020. *Decriminalise the Classroom*. [online] Kids of Colour and Northern Police Monitoring Project. Available at: <<https://nopoliceinschools.co.uk/resources/Decriminalise%20the%20Classroom%20-%20A%20Community%20Response%20to%20Police%20in%20Greater%20Manchester%27s%20Schools.pdf>> [Accessed 29 July 2022].

<sup>28</sup> Connelly, L., Legane, R. and Joseph- Salisbury, R., 2020. *Decriminalise the Classroom*. [online] Kids of Colour and Northern Police Monitoring Project. Available at: <<https://nopoliceinschools.co.uk/resources/Decriminalise%20the%20Classroom%20-%20A%20Community%20Response%20to%20Police%20in%20Greater%20Manchester%27s%20Schools.pdf>> [Accessed 29 July 2022].

<sup>29</sup> McIntyre, N., Parveen, N. and Thomas, T., 2021. Exclusion rates five times higher for Black Caribbean pupils in parts of England. *The Guardian*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/mar/24/exclusion-rates-black-caribbean-pupils-england>> [Accessed 29 July 2022].

<sup>30</sup> "UK schools record more than 60000 racist incidents in five years." 28 Mar. 2021, <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/mar/28/uk-schools-record-more-than-60000-racist-incidents-five-years>> [Accessed 29 July 2022].



experiences. These incidents of discrimination have severe impacts on Black and minority ethnic students' psychological well-being. They can also have severe impacts on Black and minority ethnic students' performance at school.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, we are concerned that the widening of the role of police in schools may impact the racialisation of the Prevent duty. Prevent produces highly racialised surveillance of Muslim and South Asian pupils, and we believe that the presence of police in schools is likely to be particularly detrimental for students from those groups. The entanglement of Safer School Officers with Prevent will only add to the culture of surveillance facing Muslim students.<sup>32</sup>

## Recommendations

- The power to strip search children has been used disproportionately against Black and minority ethnic children and fails to uphold the rights of the child to be safeguarded and their right to privacy; the government should end the power of the police to strip search children.
- In any rare instances where the strip search of a child is essential, police forces should enforce their own rules and ensure an appropriate adult is always present.
- The government should require all police forces in England to discontinue any further participation in Safer Schools Partnerships and withdraw Safer Schools Officers from schools as their presence disproportionately impacts Black and minority ethnic communities and fails to support a safer school environment.
- The government should invest greater funding in local authorities and schools so that they are able to provide appropriate levels of pastoral, mental health and extended youth service provision to safeguard and support children in schools.

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<sup>31</sup> Levy, D., Heissel, J., Richeson, J. and Adam, E., 2016. Psychological and biological responses to race-based social stress as pathways to disparities in educational outcomes. *American Psychologist*, 71(6), pp.455-473.

<sup>32</sup> Connelly, L., Legane, R. and Joseph- Salisbury, R., 2020. *Decriminalise the Classroom*. [online] Kids of Colour and Northern Police Monitoring Project. Available at: <https://nopoliceinschools.co.uk/resources/Decriminalise%20the%20Classroom%20-%20A%20Community%20Response%20to%20Police%20in%20Greater%20Manchester%27s%20Schools.pdf> [Accessed 29 July 2022].





Intelligence for a multi-ethnic Britain