# Strengthening Young People's Resilience to Extremism in NSW

Research Report

February 2022

NSW GOVERNMENT

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# Executive summary

## Background

An independent evaluation of the NSW Government's Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Program identified a program gap in relation to whole-of-school or curriculum-based approaches to CVE, including curriculum development to support citizenship and social cohesion outcomes. The evaluation noted the evidence base on the role of education in strengthening social cohesion and building community resilience and recommended further action.

The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), in collaboration with the Department of Education (DoE), commissioned ACIL Allen to undertake research on opportunities to strengthen the resilience of young people to violent extremism, with a specific focus on global citizenship and digital intelligence.

## Key findings

**Resilience of young people is key to P/CVE efforts**

Social cohesion, community resilience and violent extremism is a developing area of policy. Young people are recognised as playing an important role in the prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE). Contemporary research promotes a strengths-based approach that focuses on building the resilience of young people to violent extremism, rather than only addressing vulnerabilities and risks.

This approach recognises the need to improve the resilience of whole communities, building positive influences that increase the capacity of young people. Key factors that support the development of resilience to violent extremism for young people include cultural identity, connections between groups with diverse social identities (bridging capital), trust and confidence between communities and government (linking capital), and anti-violent attitudes. There are also recognised underpinning skills in social and emotional capability, critical thinking and digital intelligence that enable the development of these factors.

Education is widely recognised as having an important role in P/CVE. Schools provide a unique setting to engage young people at a formative stage of their lives, strengthening social connections, developing knowledge and skills, and supporting interactions between different communities.

**Young people report gaps in education**

The educational needs of young people to support P/CVE efforts are changing as social, cultural and economic conditions shift. Young people are increasingly experiencing social isolation, racism and discrimination. This negatively impacts on engagement in education and society more broadly, which can present threats to social cohesion and P/CVE efforts. COVID-19 has increased specific risks, with violent extremist organisations using digital channels to reach and attract vulnerable young people.

Specific educational needs identified by young people include increased curriculum content on diversity and cross-cultural understanding, a focus on connecting traditional skills with contemporary environments and issues, improved teacher capability (including cultural competence, the creation of safe spaces and integration of online environments), and strengthened school cultures that support inclusion and respect. Young people also highlighted the need to strengthen skills in identifying and addressing misinformation, particularly in online contexts.

**Education must be aligned to needs of young people**

There are current educational supports relating to these needs in the curriculum, programs and resources. While these supports provide an appropriate platform for developing the resilience of young people to violent extremism, stakeholders and young people reported that variation in teacher capability, local priorities and school cultures may impact the extent to which young people are able to access the required learning opportunities.

There is a need to ensure that the education system remains current and aligned to the needs of young people as social and cultural contexts change. The evidence base to demonstrate 'what works' in an educational setting is somewhat embryonic as there have been few evaluations conducted with a specific emphasis on P/CVE.

# Opportunities

The range of opportunities identified to strengthen resilience of young people to violent extremism through the education sector are summarised below by following areas of emphasis:

- **Teacher capability** – improving ability to deliver against the content of the curriculum
- **Student capability** – strengthening the knowledge, skills and attitudes of young people
- **School culture** – building the capacity of schools to develop pro-social environments
- **Curriculum** – strengthening the NSW syllabuses through the NSW Curriculum Reform
- **Evaluation** – ensuring efforts are appropriately targeted and evidence-informed.

| Opportunities | |
|---|---|
| **Teacher capability** | 1. Develop global citizenship teaching and learning materials, with targeted activities to help students engage in age-appropriate supported discourse. |
| | 2. Develop (or expand the roll out of) professional learning for teachers on responding safely and supportively if students are engaging in extremist related material or conversations. |
| | 3. Develop (or expand roll out of) professional learning for teachers on creating safe spaces. |
| | 4. Develop professional learning to integrate online environments. |
| **Student capability** | 5. Develop a strengths-based identity and belonging program for young people that builds skills in understanding, acceptance, and positive sense of self. |
| | 6. Develop a program that teaches students about civics and citizenship in the contemporary environment, building skills that help to engage and participate in a global society. |
| | 7. Develop a digital intelligence program that enables young people to be informed citizens who can participate meaningfully in their communities. |
| **School culture** | 8. Develop a whole-school approach to belonging, resilience and respect. |
| **Curriculum** | 9. Work with Department of Education and NESA to ensure that the revised NSW curriculum has sufficient coverage of, and references to, the dimensions of resilience, belonging, critical thinking, global citizenship and digital literacy as identified as important by young people. |
| **Evaluation** | 10. Develop a monitoring and evaluation approach to measure the presence of key factors for the resilience of young people to violent extremism. |

# 1. Context

## 1.1 Background

ACIL Allen's independent evaluation of the NSW Government's Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Program (2019) identified a program gap in relation to whole-school or curriculum-based approaches to CVE, including curriculum development to support citizenship and social cohesion outcomes.

This recommendation stemmed from the evidence base on the role of education in strengthening social cohesion, building community resilience and supporting resilience of young people to violent extremism. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to strengthen supports for young people as increasing engagement in the online environment and different platforms for civic participation present new opportunities and vulnerabilities.

### 1.1.1 Purpose

The NSW Government commissioned ACIL Allen to undertake a research project on opportunities to strengthen the knowledge and skills of young people in NSW, with a specific focus on global citizenship and digital intelligence. This research report:

- summarises contemporary literature on CVE protective factors
- identifies programs currently available to schools in NSW, Australia and internationally
- examines the evidence base of such programs, including key success factors
- identifies opportunities to strengthen the education system and build the resilience of young people to violent extremism.

A Steering Committee has overseen the project, including representatives from DCJ and the Department of Education (DoE).

### 1.1.2 Structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2: Education and P/CVE** outlines the key factors that build young peoples' resilience to violent extremism and the contribution of the education sector
- **Chapter 3: Changing needs of young people** explores areas where young people require additional or new support to strengthen their resilience to violent extremism
- **Chapter 4: Current education approaches in NSW** examines the extent to which curriculum, programs and system supports are in place to address the needs of young people
- **Chapter 5: Key findings and opportunities** summarises the research and identifies potential next steps for the NSW Government.

### 1.1.3 Method

This research project comprised four phases to design, capture and analyse relevant data and insights (Figure 1.1).

**Figure 1.1 Research method**

#### Establishment

- Inception meeting
- Project plan
- Research framework and stakeholder consultation plan

#### Desktop research

- Literature review on good practice including components of program design, implementation, alignment with curriculum and evidence of effectiveness.
- Environmental scan of curriculum and school-based programs and initiatives in Australia and internationally.

#### Stakeholder consultation

- Targeted consultation with government agencies, academics, not-for-profit organisations and subject matter experts
- Engagement with Youth Reference Group

#### Analysis and reporting

- Synthesis of qualitative and quantitative data against research framework.
- Testing with Steering Committee
- Development of opportunities for NSW, including specific initiatives and good practice principles that should inform curriculum design or program selection.

*Source: ACIL Allen, 2022.*

# 2. Education and P/CVE

This chapter explores the role of young people in P/CVE, and the contribution of the education sector to strengthening their resilience.

**Box 2.1 Summary – Role of education in P/CVE**

- Young people can make important contributions to P/CVE efforts. Key factors that support the resilience of young people to violent extremism include cultural identity, connections between groups with diverse social identities (bridging capital), trust and confidence between communities and government (linking capital), and anti-violent attitudes. There are also underpinning skills that contribute to the development of these factors, including social and emotional capabilities, critical thinking and digital intelligence.
- The education sector can play an important role in strengthening young people's resilience to violent extremism, with a unique ability to engage young people at a formative stage of their lives. School settings provide a range of opportunities, including building the capacity of all young people and identifying and supporting at-risk individuals.
- The evidence base to demonstrate 'what works' in educational settings is developing. There have been few evaluations conducted with a specific emphasis on P/CVE outcomes. There are good practice principles that can be drawn from the literature, including youth-led and co-designed processes, peer-to-peer learning, age appropriate content and internally facilitated programs.

## 2.1 Young people and P/CVE

Social cohesion, community resilience and violent extremism is a developing area of policy. Research on the involvement of young people P/CVE has traditionally focused on the push/pull elements that drive attraction to violent extremism.[1] Historical efforts have concentrated on protecting against these elements, exploring individual and environmental characteristics that can prevent recruitment efforts to violent extremist ideologies.[2]

This approach has received some criticism for being deficit focused and potentially stigmatising young people and communities, implying that all individuals are vulnerable to radicalisation and require concerted prevention efforts.[3] It also has the potential to inadvertently expose young people to unnecessary or counterproductive levels of awareness of violent extremism and related content.

Contemporary research is increasingly adopting a strengths-based approach that focuses on the resilience of young people.[4] Resilience is understood as a social process supported by intersecting factors at individual, family, social, institutional and economic resource levels.[5] This approach recognises the need to build on the capabilities of whole communities to develop positive influences and support pro-social capabilities.[6]

1 Penal Reform International. 2017. Children and violent extremism: International standards and responses from criminal justice systems.
2 Commonwealth of Australia Department of Home Affairs, Countering violent extremism (CVE) intervention programs. Retrieved from https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/national-security/countering-extremism-and-terrorism/cve-intervention-programs
3 Feedback gathered through stakeholder consultations with government agencies and academics.
4 United Nations. 2020. A Child-Resilience Approach to Preventing Violent Extremism.
5 Gielen, A.J., 2019. Countering violent extremism: A realist review for assessing what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and how? Terrorism and political violence, 31(6), pp.1149-1167; Grossman, M and Ungarr, W. 2017. Understanding Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism: A Standardised Research Measure. Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation; Stephens, W. and Sieckelinck, S., 2020. Being resilient to radicalisation in PVE policy: a critical examination. Critical Studies on Terrorism, 13(1), pp.142-165.
6 Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development. 2017. Youth led guide on prevention of violent extremism through education.

## 2.2 The role of education

Education is crucial in establishing connections between young people and society, while building knowledge and skills.[7] Schools are widely recognised as having an important role in P/CVE as they present an ideal setting to influence young peoples' development and identity formation given the extent of students' time at school, which provides an ongoing opportunity to facilitate change.[8]

School-based programs can strengthen social connections, develop the knowledge and skills of young people, and support interactions between different communities.[9] They provide an environment for developing critical thinking skills, delivering interfaith education, and establishing socially inclusive behaviours with diverse peer groups through formal and informal contexts.[10,11]

Schools also have a role in addressing violent extremism through the identification of at-risk individuals and referral to support services.[12] In NSW, this is undertaken through the DoE Safeguarding Kids Together (SKT) initiative which builds cohesive and respectful school communities, identifies and supports students with vulnerabilities, manages incidents and plans for recovery.

While recognising the importance of addressing specific at-risk young people, it is essential to remember that this only accounts for a very small proportion of the total population. There is a need to ensure that the wider student population is considered in P/CVE efforts in school settings.

## 2.3 Key factors that influence resilience in a P/CVE context

Resilience can be explored from a range of perspectives, including:

- counter-terrorism (focused on resilience to violent extremist organisations)
- emergency management (considering disaster resilience for young people)
- social studies (examining resilience as a broader social construct)
- child and youth psychology (exploring cognitive and non-cognitive bases for resilience)
- education (addressing the role of learning and skills development in promoting resilience).

Resilience to violent extremism specifically encompasses prosocial adaptation in challenging circumstances, protective factors that support withstanding violent extremist ideologies, and challenging of those who promote such messages.[13] For the purposes of this research, key factors[14] that drive resilience to violent extremism have been adopted. These factors, listed below, translate across the fields listed above but align closely with the role of education and school settings in developing young people. The key factors are:

1. **Cultural identity and connectedness** – knowledge and understanding of one's own, and others', cultural beliefs and norms; pride and acceptance of own and others' cultural identity

2. **Bridging capital** – connections between groups with diverse social identities to a common sense of community; trust and confidence in others

3. **Linking capital** – trust and confidence between communities and government or authority figures; skills, knowledge and resources to engage with civic processes

7 Ghosh, R., Chan, W. A., Manuel, A., & Dilimulati, M. 2017. Can education counter violent religious extremism? *Canadian Foreign Policy, 23(2), 117-133.*

8 Ghosh et al, 2017.

9 Biccum, A., 2018. What Can Counterterrorism Learn from Cognitive Justice in Global Citizenship Education? International Political Sociology, 12(4), pp. 382-400; Ghosh, 2017; Ho, C. 2011. Respecting the presence of others: School micropublics and everyday multiculturalism. Journal of Intercultural Studies, 32(6), 603-619; Pels, T., & de Ruyter, D. 2012. The influence of education and socialization on radicalization: An exploration of theoretical presumptions and empirical research. Child & Youth Care Forum, 41(3), 311-325.

10 Pels, 2012.

11 Ho, 2011.

12 Ghosh et al., 2017.

13 There are diverse ways of characterising these three dimensions. See, for example, Sieckelinck, S. & Gielen, A. J. (2017)'s 10 featured of resilience and Grossman et al (2017)'s 14 item measure.

14 These factors have been adapted from Grossman (2017) *Understanding Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism: A Standardised Research Measure* to align with the needs of the education context.

4. **Violence-related attitudes** – degree to which violence is normalised by individuals / community and willingness to speak out publicly against violence.

5. **Underpinning skills** – In addition, there are underpinning skills (social and emotional capability, critical thinking and digital intelligence) that enable the development and application of the key factors for resilience.

### 2.3.1 Cultural identity

Strong cultural identity, personal meaning and belonging have been linked as factors that help engender pride, positive social identities, and community resilience.[15] This includes both individual cultural identities and the ability to negotiate identity tensions – such as multiple cultural identities encountered in multicultural societies.[16]

For young people, cultural identity and connection can be supported through educational initiatives that aim to build an individual's positive identity and a sense of belonging with their community. Schools have an important role to play in developing positive self-understanding, belief and belonging, with the critical development occurring primarily in the adolescent years.

Key learning activities can include discussions on identity and exploration of the self. Strengthening and validating identities can foster dialogue to achieve understanding on individual, community and social levels, giving voice to minority identities.[17]

### 2.3.2 Bridging capital

Connections between and across communities help to support community interaction and the development of a collective identity whereby all groups perceive a benefit. The absence of these social bridges can lead to discrimination, racism and marginalisation which can, in turn, increase vulnerability to radicalisation.[18]

There are several ways that the education sector can build bridging capital. Key examples include activities that increase cross-cultural understanding and interfaith knowledge.[19] This could include schools or programs that facilitate opportunities for young people to engage across cultural groups – for example interfaith programs, school-based cross-cultural events, community activities (for example, sporting programs).

The research base in relation to these initiatives emphasises that programming should be aimed at promoting intercultural understanding and respect for diversity among students. UNESCO[20] emphasises that "integration efforts undertaken at the expense of the students' distinctive backgrounds can be counter-productive".

### 2.3.3 Linking capital

Linking capital requires communities to trust both government institutions and the individuals in positions of power (relevant here, authority structures within schools) to exercise their authority appropriately. Communities must also perceive the ability to influence outcomes and feel they are able to participate in decision-making processes.[21]

15 Borum, R. 2014. Psychological vulnerabilities and propensities for involvement in violent extremism. Behavioral Sciences & the Law, 32, 286–305; Brendtro, L., Brokenleg, M. Van Bockern, S. 2001. Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future, Bloomington, IN: National Education Service. Ellis, H. B., & Abdi, S. 2017. Building community resilience to violent extremism through genuine partnerships. American Psychologist, 72(3), 289–300; Grossman, M., Tahiri, H., & Stephenson, P. 2014. Harnessing resilience capital: An investigation of resilience and cultural diversity in countering violent extremism. Canberra: Australia-New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee; Nassar-McMillan, S.C., Lambert, R.G., Hakirn-Larson J. 2011. Discrimination History, Backlash Fear, and Ethnic Identity Among Arab Americans: Post-9/11 Snapshots. Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development, 39, 38-47. Reynolds, W.R., Quevillon, R. P., Boyd, B., Mackey, D. 2006. Initial development of a cultural values and beliefs scale among Dakota/Nakota/Lakota People: A pilot study. American Indian & Alaska Native Mental Health Research, 13(3), 70-93; Schils, N. & Verhage, A. 2017. Understanding How and Why Young People Enter Radical or Violent Extremist Groups. International Journal of Conflict and Violence, 11, 1-17; Theron, L.C., Liebenberg, L., & Ungar, M. (Eds.). 2015. Youth resilience and culture: Commonalities and complexities. Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer; Zimmerman, M.A., Ramirez, J., Washienko, K.M., Walter, B., Dyer, S. 1995. Enculturation hypothesis: Exploring direct and protective effects among Native American youth, in H.I. McCubbin, E.A. Thompson, A.I. Thompson, J.E. Fromer (eds.) Resiliency in Ethnic Minority Families: Native and Immigrant American Families. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 199-220.

16 Reynolds et al., 2006; Strand, J and Peacock, T. 2002. Nurturing Resilience and School Success in American Indian and Alaska Native Students. ERIC Digest: Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

17 Gearon, L., 2019. How and Why Education Counters Ideological Extremism in Finland.

18 UNESCO, 2017. Preventing violent extremism through education: a guide for policymakers. Lyons-Padilla, S., Gelfand, M., Mirahmadi, H., Farooq, M., and Van Egmond, M. 2015. Belonging nowhere: Marginalization & radicalization risk among Muslim immigrants. Behavioral Science and Policy.

19 Ellis & Abdi, 2017; Grossman, M., Peucker, M., Smith, D., & Dellal, H. 2016. Stocktake research project: A systematic literature and selected program review on social cohesion, community resilience and violent extremism 2011–2015. Melbourne, Australia: Victoria University and Australian Multicultural Foundation.

20 UNESCO, 2017.

21 Ellis & Abdi, 2017.

The absence of linking capital correlates to an absence of trust in institutions and services, and the trust gap in turn accelerates vulnerability to alternative influences that can make people more vulnerable to social harms.[22]

For young people, an essential pre-cursor to linking capital is understanding of civics and citizenship. This can involve the promotion of human rights principles and effort to instil democratic values in social norms.[23] The most common example is evident in civic participation and citizenship programs, often delivered to secondary school students. These types of initiatives have been shown to promote a sense of belonging and purpose, and enhance access to socio-economic opportunities.[24]

### 2.3.4 Violence-related attitudes

Attitudes that support violence are reflective of the socio-cultural norms of a given community, reflected at both the individual and group level.[25] Preventing violence requires attitudes to shift from condoning to challenging violence, in recognition of the positive correlation between beliefs and violent actions.[26] This also helps to mitigate risks associated with recruitment to violent movements and subsequent acts of violence.[27]

Addressing violence-related beliefs often requires a generational shift, as evident in the recent efforts to prevent violence against women. Educating young people on social and emotional skills, respect, equality and diversity is a key strategy used to generate attitudinal change in young people. Initiatives address both concepts of gender) and acceptance of violence (as a tolerated or celebrated part of society).[28]

Some educational initiatives have explicitly focused on CVE and national security issues, providing research-based information. This aims to educate both youth and the wider community on radicalisation and national security issues, encompassing a narrow focus on extremism.[29] Often overlooked in these security-focused initiatives is the role of gender and masculinity, which can be central to violent extremist organisations and their recruitment strategies.[30]

### 2.3.5 Underpinning skills

Underpinning the key factors are other skills that influence the resilience of young people to violent extremism. These include:

- **Social and emotional capabilities:** the ability to understand self and others, and manage relationships. Social and emotional skills include recognising and regulating emotions, developing empathy for others, building positive relationships, and making responsible decisions.

  Social and emotional skills are developed through the general capability development in schooling years and are a core component of the curriculum. Targeted educational initiatives include respectful relationships education and student wellbeing initiatives, generally at primary levels.

22 Putnam, R. 2000. Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.
23 Sjøen, M.M. and Jore, S.H., 2019. Preventing extremism through education: Exploring impacts and implications of counter-radicalisation efforts. Journal of Beliefs & Values, 40(3), pp.269-283.
24 Ellis, B. H., Abdi, S. M., Lazarevic, V., White, M. T., Lincoln, A. K., Stern, J. E., & Horgan, J. G. 2015. Relation of psychosocial factors to diverse behaviors and attitudes among Somali refugees. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 86(4), 393.
25 Grossman et al, 2017.
26 Bowes, N. & McMurran, M. 2013. Cognitions supportive of violence and violent behaviour. Aggression and Violent Behaviour, 18, 660-655.
27 Coolsaet, R. 2017. Anticipating the Post-Daesh Landscape. Egmont Institute Paper 97, October. Brussels: Egmont — The Royal Institute for International Relations.
28 Walker, J. S. 2005. The Maudsley Violence Questionnaire: initial validation and reliability. Personality and Individual Differences, 38, 187-201.
29 Vidino, L. and Hughes, S. 2015. Countering violent extremism in America. The George Washington University Center for Cyber and Homeland Security.
30 OSCE. 2019. Understanding the Role of Gender in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism Good Practices for Law Enforcement; Sommers, M. 2019. Youth and the Field of Countering Violent Extremism. Washington, DC: Promundo-US

- **Critical thinking:** the interpretation, evaluation and ability to process information without acceptance or rejection based on preconceived notions. Individuals with developed critical thinking skills have shown fewer negative decisions and more positive decisions relating to wellbeing, longevity, and social relations.[31] International CVE programming has recently increased the focus on educational initiatives for young people, including facilitating complex dialogue between students and school staff. Activities that build problem solving skills and intellectual curiosity have been shown to "teach [students] to challenge ideas, construct rational thoughts, and engage in meaningful debate".[32] In turn, this supports students in building resilience to violent extremist ideology.
- **Digital intelligence:** more than just technical digital literacy, this is the ability to critically evaluate evidence, data and information sources, and to undertake further research to uncover sources with integrity, all within the digital environment.[33]

  This also incorporates the sum of social, emotional and cognitive skills that enable individuals to engage in a digital environment.[34] Digital intelligence includes abilities in participation (access, security), engagement (algorithms and platforms), empowerment (civic participation and misinformation) and wellbeing (identity and relationship building).

## 2.4 Learnings from the international context

### Types of programs

CVE programming in the international education context has included the trialling of a wide range of initiatives in different environments, and approaches are still evolving (see Attachment A). The most common approaches focus on school-based programs that develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes of young people, including:

- **Personal empowerment initiatives** which aim to increase the resilience and wellbeing of young people, developing their own identity and social / emotional skills.
- **Knowledge empowerment** initiatives which develop the understanding of young people of a specific topic, ranging from those specifically focused on P/CVE (e.g., legal frameworks and referral pathways), and broader topics such as global cultures and religions.
- **Skills empowerment initiatives** which build the capacity of young people and can range from broad based skills (such as critical thinking and digital intelligence) to specific skills relevant to P/CVE (such as conflict resolution and mediation).

### Effectiveness

Evaluations of these initiatives are limited which impacts the ability to comment on what works, for whom, and in what context. Initiatives that have been shown to be successful demonstrate improved outcomes by:

- providing an opportunity for students from different religious and cultural backgrounds to share a social space, interact in both formal and informal contexts and develop mutual understanding[35]
- building an individual's positive identity and a sense of belonging with their community through civic participation and citizenship programs [36]
- developing critical thinking skills that facilitate complex dialogue and meaningful debate, particularly in the online environment, reducing vulnerability to violent extremist ideology.[37]

31 Butler, H.A., Pentoney, C. and Bong, M.P., 2017. Predicting real-world outcomes: Critical thinking ability is a better predictor of life decisions than intelligence. Thinking Skills and Creativity, 25, pp.38-46.

32 Chowdhury Fink, N., VeenKamp, I., Alhassen, W., Barakat, R., & Zeiger, S. 2013. The role of education in countering violent extremism.

33 Jerome, L.E.E. and Elwick, A., 2019. Identifying an educational response to the prevent policy: student perspectives on learning about terrorism, extremism and radicalisation. British Journal of Educational Studies, 67(1), pp.97-114; Kybernetes. Chang, Y.K., Literat, I., Price, C., Eisman, J.I., Gardner, J., Chapman, A. and Truss, A., 2020. News literacy education in a polarized political climate: How games can teach youth to spot misinformation. Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review; Third, A. at al. 2014. Children's rights in the digital age. Young and Well CRC; Cismaru, D.M., Gazzola, P., Ciochina, R.S. and Leovaridis, C., 2018. The rise of digital intelligence: challenges for public relations education and practices.

34 Cismaru, D.M., Gazzola, P., Ciochina, R.S. and Leovaridis, C., 2018. The rise of digital intelligence: challenges for public relations education and practices. Kybernetes.

35 Macnair, L. and Frank, R., 2017. Voices Against Extremism: A case study of a community-based CVE counter-narrative campaign. Journal for Deradicalization, (10), pp.147-174. Taylor, E., Taylor, P.C., Karnovsky, S., Aly, A. and Taylor, N., 2017. "Beyond Bali": a transformative education approach for developing community resilience to violent extremism. Asia Pacific journal of education, 37(2), pp.193-204; McCowan, T. 2017. Building bridges rather than walls: research into an experiential model of interfaith education in secondary schools, British Journal of Religious Education, 39:3, 269-278.

36 Maria Magdalena Isac, Ralf Maslowski, Bert Creemers & Greetje van der Werf. 2014. The contribution of schooling to secondary-school students' citizenship outcomes across countries, School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 25:1, 29-63,

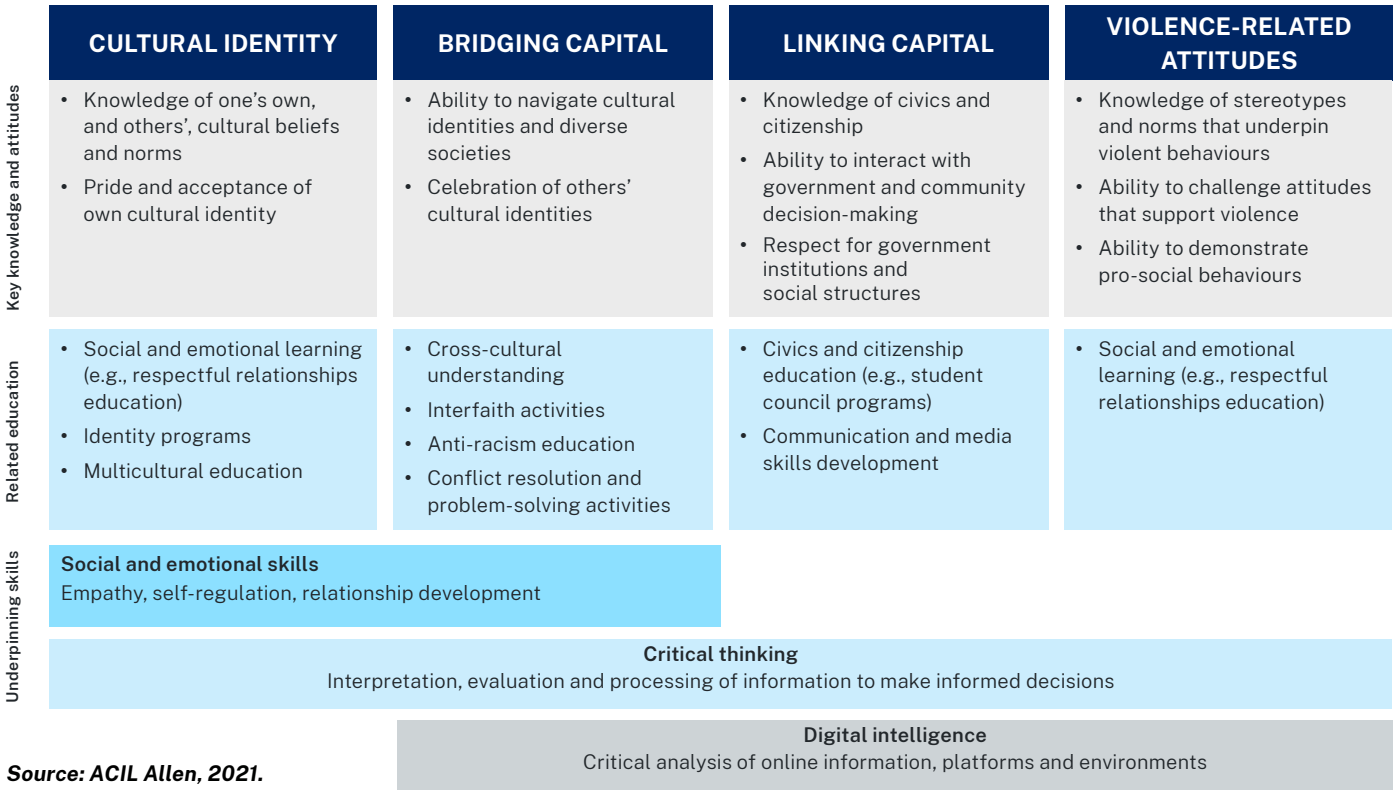
37 McNicol, S., 2016. Responding to concerns about online radicalization in UK schools through a radicalization critical digital literacy approach. Computers in the Schools, 33(4), pp.227-238. Masters, G.N., 2020. Nurturing wonder and igniting passion, designs for a new school curriculum: NSW curriculum review.

### Good practice principles

The literature provides good practice principles that should inform the design of educational initiatives. These include:

- **Co-designed** – programs should be developed in consultation with young people to understand issues, needs, objectives and approaches. This helps to ensure that young people are engaged rather than having programs delivered to them.[38]
- **Youth led** – programs should be delivered by, or with, young people to help ensure that information is delivered by credible messengers. Peer-to-peer learning is most effective, but may require training and ongoing support to build the capacity of young people to lead programs.
- **Inclusive** – programs should be designed to engage young people in the target cohort, regardless of their background. As an example, school-based programs should include both high performing and marginalised young people in education and delivery.[39]
- **Age-appropriate** – content should be tailored to the developmental level of young people, and scaffolded where appropriate to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes. This requires consideration of what content may be too sensitive or harmful, particularly for younger audiences.
- **Contextualised to local environment** – programs should be tailored to the school community, recognising that issues and drivers for violent extremism differ. A one-size-fits-all approach is generally not appropriate, and programs should address local characteristics such as culture, gender, and socio-economic status.[40]
- **Internal** – school-based programs should be delivered by school staff, where possible, to ensure that students are provided a safe space and ongoing learning opportunities to ensure that outcomes are sustained. One-off initiatives are less effective in producing longer term outcomes.[41]

**Figure 2.1 Overview of key factors that influence resilience**




***Source: ACIL Allen, 2021.***

38 Saltman, E.M., Dow, M. and Bjornsgaard, K., 2016. Youth innovation labs: A model for preventing and countering violent extremism. *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, pp.1-44.

39 Sjøen, M.M, 2019.

40 Saltman, E.M., 2016. Sommers, M., 2019. Youth and the field of countering violent extremism; British Council 2020. Building Pathways: What works on developing young people's resilience to violent extremism.

41 Phillips, J., King, J., Boyer, I., Augeri, A., 2019. Young Digital Leaders 2019: From Safety to Citizenship Online. Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

# 3. The changing needs of young people

This chapter explores the changing needs of young people in relation to their education and the development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be resilient to violent extremism.

**Box 3.1 Summary – Changing needs of young people**

- The educational needs of young people to support P/CVE efforts are changing as social, cultural and economic conditions shift. Young people are increasingly experiencing social isolation, racism and discrimination. This negatively impacts on engagement in education and society more broadly.
- Changes in online environments and as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted a need to help young people identify and address misinformation, form meaningful connections and support their wellbeing.
- Key needs identified by young people to support their resilience to violent extremism included increased teaching on diversity and tolerance, improved cultural capability in the education system, the development of safe spaces, integration of technology into education and an increased focus on connecting traditional skills with contemporary issues.

## 3.1 Current trends

Australia is a fast changing and culturally diverse nation in terms of country of birth, languages spoken and religious affiliation. The most recent census data in 2017 found that 49 per cent of Australians were born overseas (or had at least one parent born overseas) and over 300 languages were spoken in Australia homes.[42]

This increasing diversity presents both opportunities and challenges to resilient societies.[43] For young people, recent changes have included:

- **Sense of belonging has decreased**, down from 96 per cent between 2007-12 to 90 per cent in 2019.[44] In the school context, based on the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report, more than 30 per cent of Australian students said they didn't belong at school.[45]
- **Reported experiences of racial discrimination have doubled** from 9 per cent in 2007 to 19-20 per cent in between 2016 and 2019.[46] For young people aged 15 to 25, the proportion who experienced racial discrimination was even higher at 26 per cent based on the results of the MY Australia Census.[47] Racism and discrimination are major threats to belonging, inclusion and participation.[48]

42 Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2017. Census reveals a fast changing, culturally diverse nation, Media Release 073/2017 27 June 2017, 2016, Census: Multicultural.
43 Ezzy, D., Bouma, G., Barton, G., Halafoff, A., Banham, R., Jackson, R., & Beaman, L. 2020. Religious diversity in Australia: rethinking social cohesion. *Religions, 11(2), 92.*
44 Markus, A. 2019. Mapping social cohesion: The Scanlan Foundation surveys. Retrieved from: https://www.monash.edu/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/2040268/mapping-social-cohesion-national-report-2019.pdf
45 OECD. 2019. PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris.
46 Markus, 2019.
47 Wyn, J., Khan, R., Dadvand, B. 2018. *Multicultural Youth Australia Census status report 2017/18.* Melbourne, Victoria: Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne.
48 Centre for Multicultural Youth. 2016. The people they make us welcome: A sense of belonging for newly arrived young people.

- **Negative stereotypes continue to be promoted in public discourse** which fuels racism and discrimination, particularly of Muslim and African young people, and further adds to feelings of marginalisation, even among those who are well connected in society.[49]

This is reflected in findings from the 2017 Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR) surveys that the proportion of students who reported at least one experience of racial discrimination both by peers and by teachers was highest among African students (47 and 30 per cent, respectively).[50]

Taken together, lack of belonging, experiences of racism and discrimination compound negatively on young people, putting them at increased risk of disengagement from education and anti-social behaviour. While the majority of Australian students are engaged at school, there are about 10 per cent of students with low engagement, another 7 per cent with very low engagement and 3 per cent that have persistent, serious disengagement.[51]

## 3.2 Changing digital environments

The integration of digital environments into everyday life presents challenges to the resilience of young people. Changing platforms and algorithms are shifting patterns of exposure to content, which can work against inclusion and diversity.[52]

Misinformation, and the impact on linking capital, is a particular concern. Taking COVID-19 as an example, less than half of young people trusted social media for accurate information relating to the pandemic and responses, whilst 74 per cent trusted federal government leaders to provide accurate information. A significant proportion of young people (43 per cent) indicated confusion with the volume of conflicting information available to them across a variety of platforms.[53]

Conspiracy theories and misinformation in the online environment has been shown to lead to a prevalence of 'us versus them' narratives that consequently promotes social isolation and separation.[54]

## 3.3 Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the systemic and continuing nature of these issues. During the pandemic, the two greatest concerns for young people aged 15 to 19 in the 2020 Mission Australia Youth Survey were identified as education and mental health. Recent research has found that:

- **Social connectedness has decreased** – 42 per cent of young people aged 13 to 17 reported a negative impact on their social connectedness in a July/August 2020 survey as a result of COVID-19. Connections are important protective factors for P/CVE.
- **Psychological distress has worsened** – for those aged 18 to 24 in April 2020, when compared to February 2017. Mental health and wellbeing is important for the engagement of young people in society.
- **Participation in education and employment has been negatively impacted** – The proportion of young people not in education or employment rose from 8.7 per cent to 12 per cent from May 2019 to May 2020, and stabilised at 11 per cent in February 2021. [55]

49 Bull, M., & Rane, H. 2018. Beyond faith: Social marginalisation and the prevention of radicalisation among young Muslim Australians. *Critical Studies on Terrorism,* 12(2), 273-297.

50 Priest, N, et al. 2019. *Findings from the 2017 Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR) student and staff surveys*. Retrieved from: https://csrm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2019/8/CSRM-WP-SOAR_PUBLISH_1_0.pdf

51 Hancock, K. J., & Zubrick, S. R. 2015. *Children and young people at risk of disengagement from school. Retrieved from:* https://www.ccyp.wa.gov.au/media/1422/report-education-children-at-risk-of-disengaging-from-school-literature-review.pdf

52 Hancock and Zubrick, 2015.

53 Hancock and Zubrick, 2015.

54 van Mulukom, V., Pummerer, L., Alper, S., Cavojova, V., Farias, J.E.M., Kay, C.S., Lazarevic, L., Lobato, E.J.C., Marinthe, G., Banai, I.P. and Šrol, J., 2020. Antecedents and consequences of COVID-19 conspiracy theories: a rapid review of the evidence.

55 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). 2021. *COVID-19 and the impact on young people*, viewed 17 September 2021, https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/covid-19-and-young-people

The pandemic has negatively impact individual attitudes of young people, including fear, uncertainty, frustration. [56] Violent extremist organisations have the pandemic as an opportunity to target young people online – for example, using gamification and new online spaces to engage vulnerable young people. Propaganda has also increased, with groups increasingly leveraging conspiracy theories and misinformation to reach young people online.

In the longer term, it is anticipated that the COVID-19 pandemic may limit future economic opportunities and that minority communities could be disproportionately affected.[57] This presents risks to both social cohesion and P/CVE, with low economic participation historically associated with a growth in appeal of radical ideologies.[58]

## 3.4 Support through the education system

The changing social and economic context impacts upon the educational needs of young people. A Youth Reference Group (YRG) was convened to explore the perspectives of young people on how the education sector has supported their resilience to violent extremism and how school settings could be improved. Key opportunities identified by young people to improve education included:

- **Changing language** – the language of P/CVE is seen to be owned by adults which impacts on the relevance to young people. There is a need to focus on the precursors to violence such as division, hate speech, and racism to help young people to connect with the content. Strengths-based approaches were also valued, including promoting respect, pride and cultural competence.
- **Connecting traditional skills with contemporary environments** – while schools are seen as good at developing academic skills like analysing texts, these are often not connected to contemporary platforms (like Facebook or YouTube) or current issues (like Black Lives Matter). Teaching should focus on integrating these elements in day-to-day learning.
- **Teaching about diversity** – young people noted that education is largely Western-centric, which means young people are often not exposed to the different backgrounds, traditions, norms and practices of other cultures (theoretically or practically). This can contribute to discrimination, misunderstanding and prejudice. Consistent anti-racism and religious literacy education was seen as a priority, particularly in addressing misconceptions and microaggressions.
- **Building the cultural capability of teachers** – noting that the teaching profession is not reflective of the diversity of Australian society, cultural capability of teachers could be improved to help them connect with and understand their students in day-to-day interactions. This was also important for strengthening 'upstanding' capabilities so teachers would call out racism, further supporting belonging and inclusion.
- **Developing safe spaces** – young people reported that they often weren't comfortable discussing 'big issues' with their teachers, and didn't have many opportunities to engage in facilitated peer-to-peer conversations that allowed them to explore contentious issues. This was particularly important for exploring identify, culture and belonging. Teacher capability was also identified as an obstacle here, with a need to shift from shutting down conversations to mediating safe discussions.
- **Integrating online mediums to educate young people** – with clear opportunities to use TikTok and Instagram-style videos to help transmit messaging and connect with young people, particularly to support civic participation and engagement.
- **Shifting school culture** – young people noted the importance of school leadership in modelling respect, inclusion and cultural celebration. School leadership should encourage staff and students to engage in critical discussions and explore what is important to them as a learning opportunity, while also calling out bullying, sexism and racism.

56 Marone, F., 2021. Hate in the time of coronavirus: exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violent extremism and terrorism in the West. Security Journal, pp.1-21.

57 OSCE. 2020. *Streamlining diversity: COVID-19 measures that support social cohesion.* Retrieved from: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/a/450433.pdf

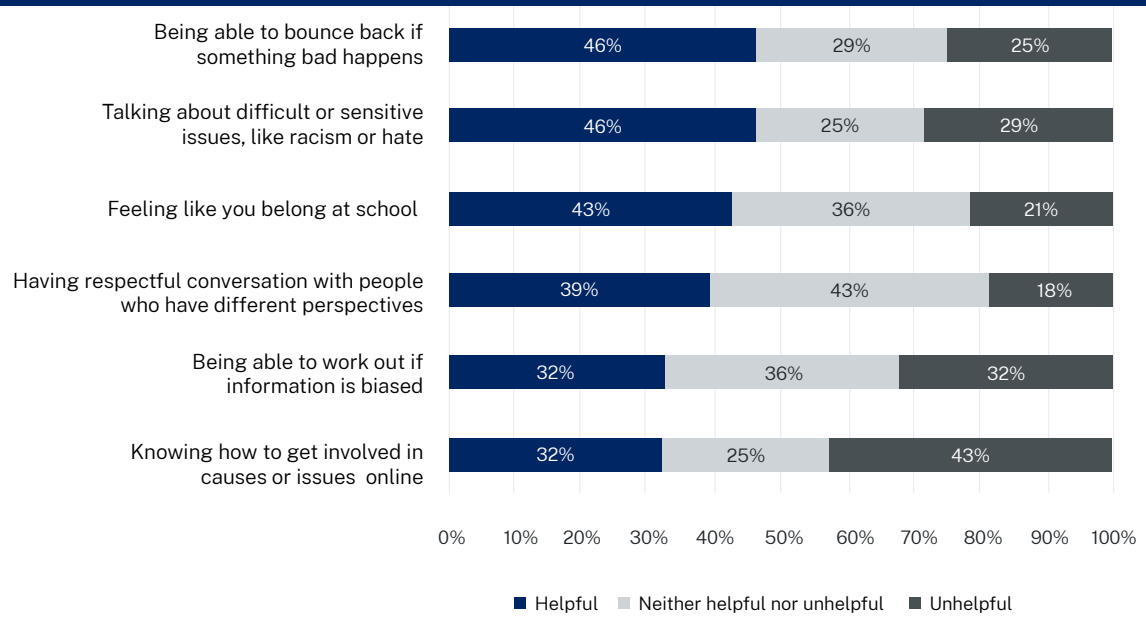
58 Avis, W., 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic and response on violent extremist recruitment and radicalisation.

- **Incorporating lived experience into facilitation** – having education delivered by young people (where possible) or adults with specific experience, particularly when providing education about racism, discrimination, and civic participation.

In addition to the YRG, additional feedback was collected from young people via a survey to explore the extent to which school had assisted in building resilience-related factors. Figure 3.1 summarises the themes from the survey results, which indicate that young people have diverse experiences of the education sector but consistently highlight key educational needs or priorities in relation to facilitating respect, inclusion and discussion. Also of relevance is that few young people felt comfortable talking to school staff about extremist content.

**Figure 3.1 Feedback from young people on educational needs**

**Young peoples' perspectives on how much school helped them with resilience-related factors**




*"It would have helped if teachers actually called out bullying, sexism and racism rather than ignoring it or pretending it's not happening in their classroom."*

*"Teaching us that we deserve to feel safe at school…Having strategies and procedures in place to make students feel included within the school community."*

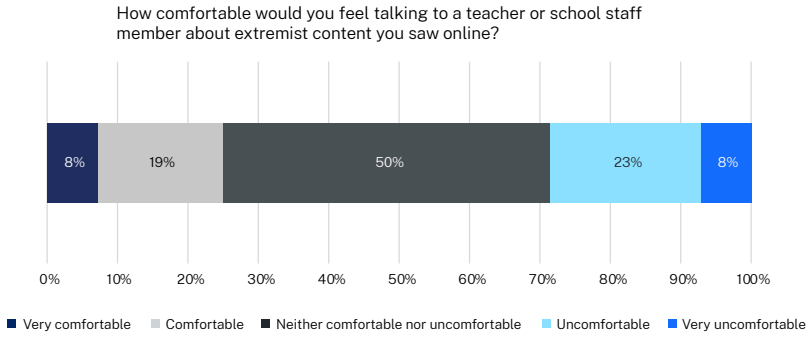
*"Giving some training to students on some of the strategies that can be used to become more resilient."*

*"Supporting individuals overcome past experiences or interactions with extremist violence…by initiating workshops that educate about such circumstances and possible responses to such circumstances."*

**Young peoples' priorities for school supports**

1. Teaching students to respect each other
2. Helping students to feel like they are included
3. Providing space for students to talk through difficult or sensitive issues
4. Helping students to understand whether online information is factually correct
5. Showing students how to get involved in causes or issues online

**Young peoples' perspectives on extremist content**




Survey n=35 young people from NSW. Characteristics and research instrument provided in Appendix C.
***Source: ACIL Allen survey of young people in NSW, 2021.***

# 4. Current education approaches in NSW

This chapter explores the extent to which the existing curriculum and programs in NSW align with the key factors for strengthening young people's resilience to violent extremism.

**Box 4.1 Summary – Current approaches in NSW**

- The Australian and NSW curriculum provide a range of learning opportunities related to the key factors for resilience across key learning areas (like civics and citizenship) and general capabilities (like social and emotional learning). Potential gaps exist in relation to digital intelligence and religious and/or cultural literacy, with limited content coverage.
- While the curriculum provides an appropriate platform for developing the resilience of young people, education stakeholders reported that varied teacher capability is a key obstacle to the extent to which young people are exposed to contemporary issues and learning opportunities via the curriculum.
- There are a diverse range of programs available from external providers. This includes those with a broad focus (such as wellbeing or mental health) and a specific topic (such as multiculturalism). The extent to which these programs align with good practice principles varies, and there is limited evidence available on their longer term effectiveness.

## 4.1 Overview

There are different components that comprise the education sector and inform the education of young people, including:

- **Curriculum** – Education in NSW is based on the mandatory NSW syllabuses for students from Kindergarten to Year 12. Syllabuses are developed and endorsed by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) and endorsed by the NSW Education Minister. They also align with the Australian Curriculum, which is coordinated by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)
- **Programs** – Outside of the syllabuses, schools are able to offer educational programs that meet the needs of their local community. These may align with the curriculum or may be related to other local needs (for example, religious or ideological teachings that do not conflict the Education Act). Schools individually identify and engage providers to deliver programs, or may develop their own internal approaches.
- **System supports** – The Department of Education provides a range of supports and resources to schools, which include professional learning, dedicated support staff, teaching and learning materials and guidance information. These supports are generally focused on government schools, but may also include supports for catholic and independent schools.

## 4.2 Curriculum

The extent to which the curriculum addresses the content required to build the resilience of young people, including both NSW syllabuses and the Australian Curriculum,[59] was examined using a mapping process.

Overall, the mapping identifies that the curriculum covers many of the key learning areas required to build the resilience of young people to violent extremism. This includes coverage of content in key learning areas (Human Society and Its Environment (HISE) and Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE)), and general capabilities such as Information and Communication Technology, Intercultural Understanding, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding, and Critical and Creative Thinking. Potential gaps were identified in relation to:

- Digital intelligence, where the syllabus content has limited coverage of online environments and how they relate to learning areas such as civics and citizenship
- Religious and cultural literacy, where the syllabus has focused more on broad-based multiculturalism rather than exploring and understanding diverse world views.

Consultations with education stakeholders noted that there were a range of teaching and learning opportunities across year levels and subject areas in the existing curriculum, and that the more systemic issues related to the capability of teachers to translate curriculum to contextualized content. For example, while the HISE curriculum provides for students to 'critically analyse information and ideas from a range of sources in relation to civics and citizenship topics and issues,' teachers may not link lessons to contemporary issues that are relevant to young people which negatively impacts the learning opportunities.

## 4.3 Programs

Currently available programs were identified through an environmental scan (see Attachment A). This found a range of private and not-for-profit providers delivering programs for school students on either broad-based subjects (such as social and emotional learning) or more specific issues (such as anti-racism and multiculturalism). The scan also identified that:

- There are no publicly available holistic approaches that support schools to address multiple factors that build resilience of young people to violent extremism. For example, programs will focus on anti-racism initiatives or civics and citizenship education, but often not both.
- Programs are generally short term interventions delivered by external providers, rather than initiatives that engage with students on a sustained basis and build the capacity of school staff to support educational outcomes. This is likely to limit their effectiveness, with longer-term education correlated with positive impacts.
- Programs are not often youth-led or co-designed, which can decrease young peoples' perceptions of the relevance and engagement in learning activities. Where programs are youth-led, they are smaller in scale due to the resource intensity of development and rollout.
- There are comparatively few digital intelligence-related programs, when compared with global citizenship education. Initiatives related to the digital environment often focused on cyberbullying or sexting, as opposed to online engagement in civic processes or extremist content.

The evidence of effectiveness varies. Few programs have been independently evaluated, and those who had provided public evidence of short-term outcomes or participant satisfaction only. This makes it challenging to identify initiatives that are likely to have strong impact.

Consultations with education and community service stakeholders noted that there is a great deal of inconstancy across schools in the use of programs. This is not surprising, given the level of autonomy of individual schools, but may result in variable access to and support for students across the different school contexts.

59 At the time of drafting, the NSW Curriculum Reform was underway which may impact key learning areas in future.

## 4.4 System supports

In addition to the curriculum and programs that are delivered at the local level, there are system supports that help schools to develop the resilience of young people. DoE is responsible for government primary and secondary schools. This includes providing processes, dedicated staff and resources. Key examples of currently available system supports include:

- State-wide supports for schools to support at-risk students. The most relevant example here is the Safeguarding Kids Together program, which was shown to effectively build school capacity in manage risks through an independent evaluation.
- DoE professional learning, generally offered as an opt-in approach to school staff, covering a range of topics from critical and creative thinking, problem solving, and deep dives on syllabus areas.
- DoE policy guidance for schools on managing controversial topics in schools. This aims to help schools provide learning experiences to students, exploring topics that may relate to things like global citizenship and civic participation.

## 4.5 Challenges for the education sector

While stakeholders recognise the important role of education in developing the resilience of young people to violent extremism, there are contextual factors that impact on the ability to prioritise efforts. These barriers include:

- **Curriculum** – The full curriculum creates a contest for attention between academic and social/emotional learning, with schools often asked to integrate new topics or learning areas in response to changing community expectations, commissions and enquiries.
- **Capability** – There is variation in skills and culture across schools, which means students may have different educational experiences. Areas of difference include metropolitan and regional environments and socio-economic status of the area.
- **Community** – Schools operate in partnership with their local community and need to be responsive to the attitudes and preferences of local families. This can, at times, limit the ability of schools to approach potentially contentious or difficult areas of learning related to CVE.
- **Capacity** – The expanded role of schools means they are time and resource constrained. Increasingly schools are expected to provide a range of supports and services outside of teaching and learning, with an increasing scope of expectation.
- **Language of CVE** – More specifically, the terminology and positioning of CVE is challenging for schools to engage with. The language of violent extremism, threat and risk is not commonly used within schools, and school communities engage better with notions of belonging and inclusion.

## 4.6 Assessment against key factors for resilience

The extent to which the key five factors are addressed through the current educational initiatives and supports is summarised in Table 4.1 overpage. This assessment recognises that some elements of the system are state-wide in design (noting implementation may vary) and others are more local in nature (meaning individual school contexts determine the priority given to them).

**Table 4.1 Summary assessment of existing approaches in NSW against key factors for resilient young people**

| | Cultural identity | Bridging capital | Linking capital | Violence-related attitudes | Underpinning capabilities (social & emotional, digital, critical) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Findings** | Clear links in curriculum. Consultations identified that primary students are well supported, but focus decreases in secondary years. | Clear links in curriculum. Consultations identified that practice varies between individual teachers / across schools in use of programs. | Clear links in curriculum. Consultations identified that content is not consistently taught from a contemporary and contextualised lens. | Limited links in curriculum, though developing through support for respectful relationships education in secondary years. | Varied coverage in the curriculum – critical thinking and social / emotional addressed, but visibility of coverage and supports is limited. |
| **Curriculum** | • **PDHPE** contains relevant elements on own identity, respectful relationships<br>• **Intercultural understanding** contains relevant elements on recognising cultural identity<br>• **Personal and social capability** contains elements on self-confidence | • **PDHPE** contains relevant elements on empathy, inclusion and respect for others<br>• **Intercultural understanding** contains relevant elements on culture, respect, and cross-cultural interactions<br>• **Personal and social capability** contains elements on appreciating diverse perspectives | • **HSIE** contains elements on critically analysing information, negotiating difference and role as a citizen in democracy<br>• **Personal and social capability** contains elements on contributing to civil society | • **PDHPE** contains relevant elements on promoting inclusivity, equality and respectful relationships<br>• No explicit references to violence-related beliefs | • **Technologies** contains relevant elements on technologies, data, hardware, software and the roles of people involved in information and software technology<br>• **PDHPE** contains self-management and interpersonal domains<br>• General capabilities contain relevant information on **Ethical Understanding, Critical and Creative Thinking, Information and Communication Technology, Personal and Social Capability**. |
| **Programs** | SEL / Identity activities, teaching resources and tools produced by external providers | Anti-racism / Interfaith / Multiculturalism activities, teaching resources and tools produced by external providers | Civics / global citizenship activities, teaching resources and tools produced by external providers | DoE mandatory Life Ready course on respectful relationships for secondary students, but few external providers focused on violence-related beliefs | Diverse range of government and external providers for SEL and critical thinking, but few for digital intelligence |
| **System supports** | • The Wellbeing Framework For Schools | • Anti-Racism Policy Training<br>• Anti-racism state-wide staffroom<br>• Information for Teachers about Racist Bullying<br>• Racism: No Way resources<br>• Intercultural understanding through texts / Using picture books for intercultural understanding | • Teaching and learning activities (Years 6 to 10) on civics and citizenship | • Teaching and learning resources for respectful relationships<br>• SKT provides resources, supports and some professional learning for at-risk youths | • Evaluative thinking professional learning<br>• Digital citizenship resources for teachers, parents and students<br>• Social-emotional learning lessons for K-2. |

***Source: ACIL Allen, 2021.***

# 5. Key findings and opportunities

## 5.1 Key findings

**Young people, and school settings, are important in P/CVE**

The evidence base on youth and P/CVE is developing, as the involvement and role of young people is becoming better understood. This research project has found that the education system can play a critical role, helping to build resilient communities by strengthening the knowledge, skills and connections of young people. Key factors include cultural identity, connection within and across communities, trust in institutions, and behaviours/beliefs that condemn violence.

**Needs are dynamic and young people report gaps**

Young people have identified specific needs that need to be addressed to respond to changing social and cultural dynamics. These needs span curriculum content (diversity and understanding), staff capability (cultural competence and creation of safe spaces) and school culture more broadly (inclusion and respect).

**Social context for young people is changing**

There are significant social factors that are contributing to the needs of young people. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted inequality, impacted economic opportunity and increased the isolation of many young people: The increasing integration of digital environments into everyday life brings new platforms and algorithms that influence the content young people access and their online interactions. While examples only, these two factors represent the significant changes that are occurring in both the physical and online environment for young people.

**It is important for the education system to remain current**

There is a need to ensure that the education system remains current and aligned to the needs of young people, as social and cultural contexts change. There are different elements of the education system that can be strengthened, including curriculum, school culture, and teacher and student capability to support P/CVE efforts.

**Opportunities to strengthen skills for all young people**

Significant work has been undertaken by the Department of Education to support young people in NSW, through the development of policies, programs and resources. Feedback collected through consultation indicated that the implementation of these across the state is not consistent, and that further action may be required to ensure all young people are supported – either through expanded roll out, consistent requirements or increased access to initiatives.

## 5.2 Opportunities

The range of opportunities identified to strengthen resilience of young people to violent extremism through the education sector are summarised below. In considering the five key factors alongside the components of the education sector, the following areas of emphasis emerge:

- **Teacher capability** – opportunities to improve the capabilities of teachers to deliver against the content of the curriculum
- **Student capability** – opportunities to strengthen the knowledge, skills and attitudes of young people through targeted efforts
- **School culture** – opportunities to build the capacity of schools to develop environments that support the development of resilient young people
- **Curriculum** – opportunities to strengthen the NSW syllabuses through the NSW Curriculum Reform process
- **Monitoring** – ensuring efforts are appropriately targeted and evidence-informed.

| TEACHER CAPABILITY | |
|---|---|
| **1. Develop global citizenship teaching and learning materials, with targeted activities to help students engage in age-appropriate supported discourse.** | |
| **Rationale** – Need to increase coverage of cultural and religious diversity in schools to ensure that students are exposed to, accept and celebrate differences within and across their communities.<br><br>While there are existing teaching and learning activities produced by DoE for civics and citizenship, there are few widely used supports that assist schools to develop bridging and linking capital for their students. | **Design** – Materials would aim to address skills in cultural and religious literacy, cross-cultural understanding and embracing diversity. A key support would be the development of teachable moments resources that help teachers to maximise unplanned opportunities to build critical thinking / global citizenship.<br><br>Development of teaching and learning materials would need to be aligned to the NSW Curriculum Reform and scaffolded to be age appropriate. There would also be a need for regular review to ensure that the activities are aligned to contemporary issues as relevant to young people. Consideration would need to be given to rollout to ensure uptake across schools, noting the voluntary nature of materials. |
| **2. Develop (or expand the roll out of) professional learning for teachers on responding safely and supportively if students are engaging in extremist related material or conversations, and how to differentiate between real and perceived risk.** | |
| **Rationale** – Current practices within schools are heavily focused on risk management, and that teachers do not feel confident on how to respond to possible interest or engagement with extremist material.<br><br>Building teacher capability would help shift practice from risk management into positive learning moments, where appropriate, recognising that there are supports in place through SKT to address risks. | **Design** – The professional learning would build upon the activities delivered through the SKT, with an increased focus on building the capacity of teachers to support students to examine, unpack and process extremist material. This would ensure the professional learning supported the broad student cohort, while ensuring schools have the capacity to identify and respond to at-risk students.<br><br>Consideration will need to be given on how to reach schools who do not perceive this as a priority, recognising the voluntary nature of the professional learning. There may be a need to increase resourcing provided to SKT to support broader rollout across schools. |

## TEACHER CAPABILITY

### 3. Develop (or expand roll out of) professional learning for teachers on creating safe spaces.

**Rationale** – Young people are not provided with enough avenues to engage in safe discussions of controversial issues, which limits the development of critical thinking and understanding of complex social and political matters.

Teacher capability is a key obstacle, with practice focused on risk averse conversation management rather than facilitation and enablement.

**Design** – Professional learning would focus on conflict resolution and mediation techniques, to ensure teachers have the capabilities and the confidence to effectively manage challenging discussions in the classroom. NSW has voluntary professional learning available in critical and creative thinking in practice, but information was not available on whether this covers the skills mentioned. Development would need to ensure that activities are not duplicated.

### 4. Develop professional learning to integrate online environments.

**Rationale** – Education is heavily dependent on traditional mediums and mechanisms, and continues to draw a distinction between online and offline environments. This does not align with the experience of young people, who increasingly perceive a more singular experience.

Improved teacher capability would increase contemporary practice. There are opportunities to strengthen knowledge and skills on the use of current technologies and platforms.

**Design** – Professional learning would be targeted to secondary school teachers, recognising the focus on critical thinking and contemporary issues in later years of schooling. Content would need to cover both current technologies and platforms (such as TikTok and Instagram), how these platforms are used to distribute information, and practical suggestions for contemporary teaching practices (for example, linking to HSIE content). There is extensive literature on this subject, but few publicly available professional learning activities which means a tailored product would need to be developed. There would also be a need for regular review to ensure that the activities are aligned to contemporary issues as relevant to young people.

## STUDENT CAPABILITY

### 5. Develop a strengths-based identity and belonging program for young people that builds skills in understanding, acceptance and positive sense of self.

**Rationale** – Young people identified a decreased sense of belonging and inclusion, which are important protective factors for a variety of social challenges.

The level of prioritisation varies across schools, with some engaging external providers for short-term initiatives.

**Design** – Co-design with young people, particularly in secondary school, would help to ensure content was contextualised and relevant. Good practice would involve addressing the concept of identity safety (including multiple identities), understanding and supporting difference, and developing psychosocial skills.

Recognising that there are a broad range of programs available, it may be beneficial to conduct a deeper analysis on existing offerings to identify whether existing activities can be built upon or leveraged – rather than developing a program from scratch.

This program would ideally connect with the whole-school approach to belonging and resilience discussed below, but could be pursued as a standalone opportunity.

**Comparators** – There are few evaluated interventions that aim to support young people's belonging at schools, which limits the availability of best practice comparators.

Project Wayfinder, developed by Stanford University and delivered across 35 countries, has been shown to help young people feel more hopefully about their futures. Program delivery is tailored to the school context, but provides scaffolded learning throughout the academic year to build skills in identity, relationship building, and connection to community. Lessons are delivered primarily by in-school staff, and supported by a range of resources.

In addition to programs, there are resources available for schools – such as Belonging and Inclusion in Identity Safe Schools: A Guide for Educational Leaders – which include evidence-based strategies and practical programs to engage young people in discussions about identity.

### 6. Develop a program that teaches students about civics and citizenship in the contemporary environment, building skills that help to engage and participate in a global society.

**Rationale** – Young people identified that learning activities do not consistently align with contemporary content on global citizenship or build skills in civic participation.

The level of prioritisation varies across schools, with some engaging external providers for short-term initiatives.

**Design** – This program would ideally be delivered internally by school staff and scaffolded through clear links to HSIE curriculum. Co-design with young people, particularly in secondary school, would help to ensure content was contextualised and relevant.

Good practice would involve addressing vertical capital (interaction with government agencies) and understanding of community participation processes. An important focus will be complex thinking to counter 'black and white' thinking, recognising the plurality that exists in contemporary society.

**Comparators** – High Resolves is a school-based citizenship education program that helps students develop critical life skills. Programs are externally facilitated and address social responsibility, empathy and resilience, exploring contemporary social issues to help students learn how to think independently, collaborate and problem-solve. High Resolves also offers educator training resources and free online activities.

An independent evaluation of High Resolves (2014) found "High Resolves is ...effectively engaging and helping to empower young Australians to take part and be active in their communities".

## STUDENT CAPABILITY

**7. Develop a digital intelligence program that enables young people to be informed citizens who can participate meaningfully in their communities.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Rationale** – Young people identified that current learning activities do not assist them in identifying and responding to misinformation in contemporary environments.<br><br>There are trials underway of various programs in different states, but few fully developed offerings. | **Design** – The educational program would cover technical, media and social literacy. The program could also teach young people how to address, process and seek help if they are exposed to violent or extremist material online.<br><br>The program should be co-designed with young people and ideally be delivered over multiple sessions to support scaffolded learning. | **Comparators** – The eSafety Commissioner 'Be an eSafe kid: Fake news, real harms' is a virtual classroom activity for primary school students, run as a standalone 45 minute learning activity. It involves teacher notes, student worksheets, and follow up activities to help students explore misinformation and understand how to identify fake news. The activity is linked to the curriculum. |

## SCHOOL CULTURE

**8. Develop a whole-school approach to belonging, resilience and respect.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Rationale** – The literature identifies that respectful relationships education is an important foundation for building cultures of inclusion, challenging violence-related attitudes.<br><br>Current respectful relationships education is primarily delivered through external providers, though there are some components embedded in curriculum delivered internally. | **Design** – Supporting schools to develop whole-school approaches will help to generate long-term change in attitudes and norms. This opportunity should align with the principles for effective whole school approaches including supporting teaching and learning materials, professional learning activities, leadership support and partnerships. | **Comparators** – The Victorian Department of Education and Training has developed the Respectful Relationships whole-school initiative, with supporting resources across each of these principles, which has been developed through a gender equality and family violence lens. Consideration would need to be given to whether an expanded perspective was needed for P/CVE purposes.<br><br>The Resilience Doughnut whole-school program, which involves data collection and analysis on resources and skill levels, training for staff and parents, coaching and mentoring for school staff, and targeted activities to support resilient schools. This is facilitated by a for-profit provider to schools. |

## CURRICULUM

**9. Work with Department of Education and NESA to ensure that the revised NSW curriculum has sufficient coverage of, and references to, the dimensions of resilience, belonging, critical thinking, global citizenship and digital literacy as identified as important by young people.**

**Rationale –** The current Australian and NSW curricula include these capabilities across learning areas and general capabilities. References are general in nature and do not identify the specific gaps identified through the research as related to the needs of young people.

**Design –** More explicit references would improve the consistency of teaching and learning across NSW, helping to ensure young people are supported to develop the skills they need across the key factors supporting resilience.

The NSW Curriculum Reform is underway, with updated new curriculum due to be completed by 2024. Acting on this opportunity would require engagement with DoE and NESA in the immediate future to leverage the opportunity presented by the comprehensive reform.

## EVALUATION

**10. Develop a monitoring and evaluation approach to measure the presence of key factors for the resilience of young people to violent extremism.**

**Rationale –** While there are recognised issues impacting young people, there are limited data available on the extent to which the key factors for resilience are present for young people in NSW. This makes it challenging to identify the scale of the need, or relative need across schools or areas.

NSW currently collects student data through the Tell Them From Me survey, which includes some elements on student engagement and wellbeing (such as sense of belonging and positive relationships).

**Design –** NSW Government could include additional items in the Tell Them From Me survey to gather improved data on the levels of resilience factors across young people in NSW. This would help to identify areas of particular need – for example, individual schools that could then be assisted to pilot programs, or specific factors that require increased universal support through state-wide initiatives.

Items could be drawn from the Grossman's BRAVE standardised measure (or similar) such as *'It's important to me to maintain cultural traditions', 'I am familiar with my cultural traditions, beliefs, practices, and values', 'I trust authorities/law enforcement agencies', and 'I am willing to speak out publicly against violence in my community.'*

## 5.3 Prioritisation of opportunities

The previous section has outlined a diverse array of opportunities to increase the capacity of the education sector to strengthen the resilience of young people to violent extremism. Recognising that not all opportunities can be actioned at once, there may be a need to identify specific opportunities that could be pursued in the short-term to generate lasting change.

The opportunities identified range in terms of the:

- **Impact** for young people in NSW, which will be dependent on whether actions are rolled out state-wide or in a more localised manner
- **Resourcing**, noting some could be funded at a unit-level (i.e., professional learning) and others would require a higher level of financial support to implement (i.e., whole-school approaches)
- **Implementation complexity**, where the opportunities vary in the degree of difficulty and time involved in designing, developing and delivering.

The table below provides an assessment of the opportunities by priority (as identified from feedback provided by young people) and implementation complexity (considering resourcing and ease). It is intended to provide a guide on the respective value of opportunities.

**Table 5.1 Implementation priority – Assessment of proposed opportunities**

| | Higher importance | Lower importance |
|---|---|---|
| **Lower complexity** | **Implement first**<br>6. Student program – Global citizenship<br>5. Student program – Belonging and identity<br>3. Professional learning – Safe spaces<br>1. Teaching and learning materials – Global citizenship | **Future priorities**<br>10. Monitoring – Data collection on resilience factors<br>2. Professional learning – Extremist content<br>4. Professional learning – Digital intelligence<br>7. Student program – Digital intelligence |
| **Higher complexity** | **Commence preparatory work**<br>8. Whole-school approach – Belonging, resilience and respect<br>9. Curriculum review – Coverage of resilience factors | N/A |

***Source: ACIL Allen, 2022.***

# Appendices

# A. Research framework

## A.1 Research questions

**The table below outlines the key research questions that informed the research. These research questions were developed by ACIL Allen and tested with DCJ and the DoE.**

| Area | Research questions |
|---|---|
| **Education** | • What is the role of education in developing CVE protective factors?<br>• What are the linkages between digital literacy, global citizenship and CVE protective factors?<br>• Are there other areas of knowledge or skill that should be supported to build CVE protective factors? |
| **Needs** | • What are the needs of young people in NSW regarding digital literacy and global citizenship?<br>• What are the needs of the supporters of young people, e.g., their parents/carers and school staff?<br>• How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on the digital literacy and global citizenship needs of young people? |
| **Curriculum** | • What elements of digital literacy and global citizenship are covered in the Australian and NSW curriculum?<br>• What other relevant elements are addressed that may relate to CVE protective factors (for example, critical thinking)?<br>• What curriculum approaches are used internationally to strengthen digital literacy, global citizenship and CVE protective factors? |
| **Programs** | • What programs are available in NSW and other Australian jurisdictions to strengthen digital literacy, global citizenship and CVE protective factors?<br>• What program models are used internationally to strengthen digital literacy, global citizenship and CVE protective factors?<br>• How are programs tailored for different age groups?<br>• What are the evidence base and key success factors for these programs?<br>• What intersectional factors (for example, gender) may impact the threats and needs related to types of programs? |
| **Opportunities** | • What opportunities exist to strengthen the NSW curriculum to integrate CVE protective factors?<br>• What specific programs could be considered by NSW to support the strengthening of digital literacy and global citizenship skills for young people?<br>• What factors contribute to sustainability in terms of young people continuing to connect learned content with their experience of the world? |

## A.2 Detailed assessment of opportunities

**Table 5.2** **Assessment of proposed opportunities**

| Opportunity | Implementation considerations | | | Alignment with resilience factors | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Impact | Resourcing | Complexity | Cultural identity | Bridging capital | Linking capital | Violence-related attitudes | Underpinning skills |
| **Curriculum review – Coverage of resilience factors** | High | High | High | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| **Professional learning – Safe spaces** | Varied | Low | Low | | ● | | ● | ● |
| **Teaching and learning materials – Global citizenship** | Varied | Low | Low | | ● | ● | | ● |
| **Whole-school approach – Belonging, resilience and respect** | Med | High | Med | ● | ● | | ● | ● |
| **Student program – Belonging and identity** | Varied | Med | Low | ● | ● | | | ● |
| **Student program – Global citizenship** | Varied | Med | Low | | ● | ● | | ● |
| **Professional learning – Responding to extremist content** | Varied | Low | Low | | | | ● | |
| **Professional learning – Integrating online environments** | Varied | Low | Low | | | | | ● |
| **Student program – Critical thinking** | Varied | Med | Low | | ● | ● | | ● |
| **Monitoring – Data collection on resilience factors** | Med | High | High | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |

***Source: ACIL Allen, 2021.***

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# C. Survey instrument

## Survey respondent characteristics

| How old are you? | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Count | % |
| 14-12 | 1 | 3% |
| 15-17 | 10 | 29% |
| 18-24 | 18 | 51% |
| Other (please specify) | 6 | 17% |
| **TOTAL** | **35** | |

| Are you currently going to school? | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Count | % |
| Yes, I still go to school | 13 | 37% |
| No, I have finished school and am doing further study | 4 | 11% |
| No, I have finished school and am working | 15 | 43% |
| Other (please specify) | 3 | 9% |
| **TOTAL** | **35** | |

| How do you identify? | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Count | % |
| Male | 18 | 51% |
| Female | 17 | 49% |
| **TOTAL** | **35** | |

| Were either of your parents born overseas? | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Count | % |
| Yes | 20 | 57% |
| No | 15 | 43% |
| **TOTAL** | **35** | |

# Survey instrument

**About you**

**1. How old are you?**

a) 18-24

b) 15-17

c) 14-12

d) Other [Free text]

**2. Are you currently going to school?**

a) Yes, I still go to school

b) No, I have finished school and am working

c) No, I have finished school and am doing further study

d) Other [Free text]

**3. How do you identify?**

a) Female

b) Male

c) Non-binary

d) Self-described [Free text]

**4. Were either of your parents born overseas?**

a) Yes

b) No

**Protective factors**

**5. Over the last 12 months, how have you been feeling about the following? Likert Scale – not good to good]**

- you feel welcome in your community (belonging)
- you can bounce back if something bad happens (resilience)
- you know how to work out if information is biased (critical thinking)
- you respect different cultures and traditions (global citizenship)
- you know how to get involved in causes or issues online (digital literacy)

**Role of education**

**6. For those in school] How much do your teachers or your school help you with these things? [Likert Scale – Not helpful to very helpful]**

Feeling like you belong at school

- Being able to bounce back if something bad happens
- Being able to work out if information is biased
- Having respectful conversations with people who have different perspectives
- Talking about difficult or sensitive issues, like racism or hate
- Knowing how to get involved in causes or issues online

**7. [For those not in school] How much did school help you with these things? [Likert Scale – Not helpful to very helpful]**

- Feeling like you belonged
- Being able to bounce back if something bad happened
- Being able to work out if information is biased
- Having respectful conversations with people who have different perspectives
- Talking about difficult or sensitive issues, like racism or hate
- Knowing how to get involved in causes or issues online

**8. How comfortable would you have felt talking to a teacher or school staff member about extremist content you saw online?**

a) Very comfortable

b) Comfortable

c) Neither comfortable or uncomfortable

d) Uncomfortable

e) Very uncomfortable

**Support**

**9. Schools can provide different kinds of support. Please rank the following supports for young people from most important (1) to least important (5). [Ranking]**

- Helping students to feel like they are included
- Teaching students how to respect each other
- Providing space for students to talk through difficult or sensitive issues together
- Helping students to understand whether online information is factually correct or not
- Showing students how to get involved in causes or issues online

**10. Are there any other areas where you think schools should be doing more to support people your age to be resilient? [Open text]**

**11. For those that are now out of school, what are the things that you wish would have been taught in school that would be helpful to your resilience? [Open text]**

## More information

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