



Ministry
of Justice

Transparency data

Patterns of education, social care and youth offending: Executive Summary

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1. Introduction

This suite of reports has been produced by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Data First programme, funded by Administrative Data Research UK (ADR UK). It presents new insights into the education and social care background of children and young people in England who have been cautioned or sentenced for any offence, with a focus on knife offences, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and acquisitive offences, and violence against women and girls (VAWG) offences. These offences are key areas of focus within the Government's Safer Streets mission.^{[\[footnote 1\]](#) [\[footnote 2\]](#)} The offence

groups are defined in the separately published Technical Guide, with offence codes provided in Annex A.

The analysis is descriptive and intended to deepen understanding of the education and social care backgrounds of children and young people who had been cautioned or sentenced for these offences, including their attainment outcomes and characteristics. It also explores sequencing of education and social care factors in relation to a child's first offence, overlaps across offence groups and patterns of prior offending and reoffending.

Whilst this analysis does not imply there is a causal link between educational outcomes, characteristics and offending, improving the evidence base on these associations is critical to informing early intervention, targeting support effectively, and preventing escalation into more serious and persistent offending.

2. Methodology

The analysis draws on administrative MoJ and Department for Education data, linking data on the Police National Computer and the National Pupil Database.

It focusses on a cohort of children and young people who finished key stage 2 (KS2) and who were aged 10 at the start of one of the academic years from 2008/09 through to 2013/14. As a result, the cohort has key stage 4 (KS4) academic years of 2013/14, 2014/15, 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 or 2018/19. The cohort comprises approximately 3.13 million pupils and covers offending between ages 10 to 21 years. [\[footnote 3\]](#)

These reports present descriptive statistics only. The analysis looks at overall patterns without making causal claims or inferential statistical testing.

3. Key findings

3.1 Education and social care backgrounds

- **Offending was rare amongst children and young people**, with 5% of pupils in the cohort cautioned or sentenced for any offence. Amongst those, half (51%) had been cautioned or sentenced for an ASB and acquisitive offence, 5% for a VAWG offence and 1.5% for a knife offence.
- **Most first offences occurred between ages 15 and 19**, but knife offences tended to occur later, peaking at ages 16–17 and rarely occurring before age 15 (12%, compared with 26–29% for other offences).
- **Indicators of vulnerability were more prevalent**, with persistent absence and contact with children's social care substantially more common across all offence groups than in the overall pupil population, particularly among those cautioned or sentenced for knife offences.
- **Special Educational Needs (SEN) was highly prevalent across all offending groups**. Between 72% and 87% had recorded SEN compared with 42% of all pupils.
- **Educational attainment was lower for all offending groups**. Knife offences were associated with lower attainment at both KS2 and KS4; ASB and acquisitive offences showed a decline by KS4; and VAWG offences showed lower KS2 attainment but similar outcomes by KS4 to those cautioned or sentenced for any offence.
- **Suspensions were common among offending groups**, with 65% of children cautioned or sentenced for any offence having been suspended. This was highest for knife offences (87%) and for ASB and acquisitive offences (73%), compared with 15% of all pupils.

3.2 Sequencing of education and social care factors

- **Most education and social care risk factors pre-dated offending** among children cautioned or sentenced for an offence.
- **Persistent absence almost always occurred before offending**, with 97% of children cautioned or sentenced for any offence who had ever been persistently absent having their first record in any term before their first offence.
- **Among those with an offence who were suspended, suspensions also tended to precede offending**, with 85% experiencing a first suspension in any term before their first offence; this was less consistent for permanent exclusions (59%).
- **Education Health and Care (EHC) plans were usually recorded in any term**

before offending, applying to three-quarters (75%) of children with an EHC plan who were cautioned or sentenced for any offence, and higher proportions for knife (94%), VAWG (89%) and ASB and acquisitive (77%) offences.

- **Children were more often recorded as children in need (CIN) than on a child protection plan (CPP) before offending**, except for knife offences, where similar proportions were recorded as CIN (81%) and CPP (87%) in any term prior to a first offence.
- **Knife offences showed stronger pre-offence concentration of risk factors**, with a higher proportion of children first recorded with education and social care risk factors in any term before their first offence compared with other offence groups.

3.3 Offending overlaps and journeys

- **Most children and young people (94%) who were cautioned or sentenced for an ASB and acquisitive offence did not have a knife or VAWG offence.** For VAWG offences, 61% were only cautioned or sentenced for VAWG, with no involvement in the other two offence groups.
- **Prior offending was most common among children and young people cautioned or sentenced to a knife offence**, with two-thirds (67%) having a previous offence, compared with 29% for ASB and acquisitive offences and 35% for VAWG offences.
- **Reoffending of any type was common**, with the highest rates among those cautioned or convicted for a first knife offence (60%), and lower rates for an initial ASB and acquisitive offence (47%), or first VAWG offence (35%).
- **Reoffending within the same offence category was less common**, with 5% of those cautioned or convicted for an initial knife offence committing a subsequent knife offence, compared with 34% for ASB and acquisitive offences and 9% for VAWG offences.
- **Knife offences were preceded by more extensive prior offending**, averaging 5.85 offences before a first knife offence, compared with 0.66 for ASB and acquisitive offences and 2.55 for VAWG.

4. Caveats

- All analysis is descriptive and does not imply causal relationships between education, social care and offending outcomes. Associations do not imply that most children and young people with particular characteristics offend.
- Offence groups represent small, overlapping subsets of the wider offending population; findings are not additive or generalisable.
- Offence groups are based on selected offence codes and may not capture all offending within each broader category.
- For the analysis of offending overlaps, individuals may appear in more than one offence category, and so findings across offence groups are not additive.
- The periods used to identify prior offending and reoffending vary in timing and duration, meaning comparisons across groups should be treated cautiously.
- Reoffending is measured up to age 21 and differs from [MoJ proven reoffending statistics](#). Custodial sentences are excluded from disposal-level reoffending analysis.
- Findings are not directly comparable with other published government statistics.

For more detail on the findings, caveats and limitations, as well as the methodology and definitions of offence types, refer to the individual reports and the Technical Guide.

5. Contact details and feedback

These statistics have been produced by [Ministry of Justice: Data First - GOV.UK](#)

Any enquiries and feedback on these statistics can be sent to Ministry of Justice at datafirst@justice.gov.uk

5.1 Media contacts

Press enquiries should be directed to the Ministry of Justice press office: 020 3334 3536

2. [Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy - GOV.UK](#) ↵
3. The cohort for the sequencing of education and social care factors analysis only includes children who were cautioned or sentenced for an offence committed between the ages of 10 and 18 years old which comprises approximately 117,000 pupils. ↵

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