

CREATING RESILIENT SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

A Senior Leadership guide to leading whole-setting
confidence in difficult discussions

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0. About this document

This guide forms part of a wider suite of resources designed to help schools and FE settings conduct sensitive and controversial discussions safely, confidently and lawfully. These resources are designed to be accessed by teachers and lecturers across Primary, Secondary and Further Education settings.

0.1 Purpose and Outcomes

The purpose of this guide and the associated resource suite is to empower Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) to strategically embed whole school/setting confidence in managing sensitive and controversial discussions. By providing clear strategies, practical tools, and a supportive framework, we aim to ensure that all staff feel equipped and competent to handle these complex conversations effectively and productively.

This guide and the accompanying resources are designed to provide the structure and support necessary to achieve these outcomes:

Consistent classroom handling of difficult discussions, ensuring all staff feel equipped and supported.

Clear escalation pathways for issues that cross into safeguarding territory, notably via the Resilience Ambassador Programme.

Confident application of political impartiality by teaching staff, ensuring balanced presentation and facilitation.

A strong safeguarding culture that is proactive, visible, and extends to countering extremism and wider online harms.

Maintained parental confidence through transparent, consistent, and well-managed responses to controversial issues.

Ofsted-ready evidence demonstrating a structured, leadership-led approach to safeguarding, Prevent, and personal development duties.

The next section, '0.2 Indicative Whole School/Setting Model', translates these desired outcomes into a practical, structural framework, clarifying the key components, leadership levers, and accountability necessary for successful implementation.

0.2 Indicative Whole School/Setting Model

Whole school/setting resilience is not achieved through one off training or isolated lessons. It requires alignment across curriculum, pedagogy, behaviour systems and safeguarding structures, led clearly by senior leaders. The resource suite has been designed to support this alignment in practical ways. A whole school/setting approach requires clarity not only about what must be in place, but who is accountable for making it work in practice. The model below sets out six interdependent components, each aligned to a clear SLT lever and named owner.



This guidance can be operationalised by distributing clear, designated ownership across the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) for the key components that ensure consistent and high-quality practice:

Culture & Expectations (Head/SLT) sets the non-negotiables, tone, and behavioural boundaries for handling sensitive and difficult issues across the school or college community. This defines 'how we do things here'.

Curriculum & Pedagogy (AHT: Teaching & Learning) ensures discussion of sensitive topics is structured, professionally facilitated, and age-appropriate within both subject lessons and pastoral time. This defines 'what and how we teach'.

Safeguarding Pathways (DSL) establishes and communicates clear thresholds, referral processes, and escalation routes so staff are never left making high-risk judgements without support. This defines 'when and how we escalate'.

Staff Capability & Training (CPD Lead) builds the necessary staff confidence, knowledge, and consistency required to ensure lawful, impartial, and expert practice when dealing with complexity. This defines 'how we skill our people'.

Pupil Voice & Reporting (Pastoral/DSL) guarantees young people have multiple, safe, and trusted mechanisms for raising concerns, reporting issues, and being heard. This defines 'how we hear our students'.

Community & Parent/Carer Communications (Comms/Head) maintains transparency, builds trust, and coordinates consistent messaging when communicating beyond the classroom about complex or sensitive matters. This defines 'how we talk to our community'.

Together, these roles create a coherent operating model: leadership sets direction, systems provide protection, and practice is reinforced through capability and accountability.

1. Why this matters for SLT

In educational settings across England, both schools and Further Education (FE) providers are dealing with an increasingly challenging and complex safeguarding environment. It is the SLT that must provide strategic oversight and protection, ensuring that individual teachers and staff are not unduly burdened with managing these significant risks on their own.

As mandated by Ofsted's inspection framework, the fundamental question guiding all safeguarding practice is:

How effectively are learners supported and protected to ensure their safety and well-being?

Teachers are responding daily to:

- Online grooming and exploitation
- Violent and extremist content encountered through social media
- Racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, homophobia and misogyny
- The influence of the manosphere and gender-based hostility
- Conspiracy theories and disinformation
- Community tensions and international conflict that spill into classrooms
- Young people are often encountering these issues online first, without context, moderation or support.

At the same time, settings are expected to:

- Facilitate balanced discussions
- Uphold political impartiality
- Identify early vulnerability to radicalisation
- Protect pupils from harm
- Maintain parental/carers confidence
- Withstand public scrutiny

This creates pressure for classroom staff. Many teachers report feeling unsure about:

- How to respond when controversial issues arise unexpectedly
- How to balance impartiality with safeguarding
- How to manage polarising viewpoints safely
- When a comment crosses into safeguarding territory

A resilient setting is crucial for the well-being and success of both students and staff. It functions as a comprehensive protective shield, fostering a supportive environment that mitigates the impact of challenges and promotes emotional strength, both within the immediate classroom context and across the wider school community. This resilience ensures that all members of the setting can thrive and adapt effectively when faced with adversity.

2. The strategic role of SLT

Extremism-related safeguarding, and wider risks linked to online harm, grooming, exploitation and violence, cannot sit with individual teachers alone. It requires clear governance, defined escalation routes, and visible senior leadership ownership.

This is not an operational add-on. It is a leadership responsibility. Without coordinated oversight:

- Risk can move quickly beyond classroom discussion into safeguarding concerns
- Inconsistent staff responses increase vulnerability and reputational exposure
- Public controversy can escalate rapidly without agreed protocols
- Ofsted will evaluate culture and safeguarding systems, not isolated activity

A whole-setting approach ensures staff are confident, responses are consistent and lawful, and early vulnerability is recognised before harm escalates. The aim is not to turn all staff into specialists. It is to ensure they are supported, protected and guided by a clear operating model owned by SLT.

3. Introducing the Resource Suite

This guidance forms part of a wider suite of resources designed to help schools and colleges conduct sensitive and controversial discussions safely, confidently and lawfully. The suite supports three levels of engagement.

3.1 Resilience Ambassador Programme

For settings seeking culture change, the Resilience Ambassador model provides a cascading structure. A small group of trained staff act as internal champions for safe discussion and extremism related safeguarding.

Their role includes:

- Taking part in training on conducting difficult discussions with pupils and learners
- Supporting colleagues with difficult classroom situations
- Tracking local and national risk patterns
- Advising on rapid response following divisive events
- Coordinating assemblies and parent/carers communication

This creates visible, accessible leadership without requiring all staff to undertake DSL level training.

Membership: Should include **DSLs**, with SLT oversight.

Who is this for:

- Teachers, DLSs with an interest in current affairs, facilitation and civic education.
- Staff looking for development opportunities, training experience, leadership development

Minimum Viable Implementation:

- Quarterly meetings (2 hours)
- Engaging in ALL training modules (5 x 90 mins to be accessed via e-Learning or personal reflection)
- Cascading relevant training modules to wider staff (using training modules provided)
- Assembly planning/delivery in rapid response circumstances, e.g. post terror attack, community conflict
- Communications with parents

Please note: the resource suite provides structured guidance on the implementation of the Resilience Ambassador Programme, including recruitment guidance (copy for marketing and a set of application questions, a suggested meeting structure, assembly planning templates, parent/carers communication guidance (including 2 x copy for parent/carers comms).

Required time and resource:

- 5-10 staff recruited as Resilience Ambassadors
- 8 hours on Resilience Ambassadors meetings over the academic year
- 7.5 hours of individual CPD training
- Up to 7.5 hours facilitating training to wider staff cohorts

All resources to deliver this are included within this Creating Resilient Schools and Colleges pack.

3.2 Staff Training Modules

What this is: 90 minute training modules that can be delivered as CPD, or act as individual reflection (either via e-learning or engagement with powerpoint) E-Learning modules can be accessed flexibly based on teacher work-load, but in total will take up to 60 minutes each,

Who is it for: Any teacher in any setting (Primary, Secondary, FE, SEND) interested in the subject

Time commitment: 60-90 mins per module

All training materials are available as standalone CPD or e-learning modules, including:

- Teacher impartiality and balanced presentation
- Teaching controversial issues
- Preparing and researching sensitive topics
- Facilitating structured debate
- Risk assessing classroom conversations

These modules strengthen professional confidence while supporting the protection of settings legally and reputationally. All members of the Resilience Ambassador Programme should take all the above modules, but they are also available to engage in as one-offs for interested teachers/lecturers.

3.3 Ready to Use Classroom Activities

The suite also includes practical tools teachers and lecturers can use immediately:

- Structured discussion games
- Debate formats
- Role play scenarios
- Assembly templates

These are low preparation and curriculum adaptable. Schools and institutions can engage flexibly, but the greatest impact occurs when the materials are embedded strategically through SLT leadership.

4. Statutory and Inspection Duties: How this Resource Suite supports compliance

Below is guidance on how these resources support compliance against the following policies:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education
- The Prevent Duty

- Independent School Standards
- Further Education and Skills Inspection Toolkit
- Political Impartiality in Education
- Ofsted Inspection Framework

Duty / Framework	What it requires	How the Resource Suite supports compliance
Keeping Children Safe in Education (Statutory Guidance, DfE)	Schools and colleges must have regard to their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and staff must understand their safeguarding role and be able to act on concerns appropriately.	Equips staff to recognise safeguarding concerns that surface during difficult discussions; clarifies escalation routes and referral thresholds via the Resilience Ambassador Programme; builds confidence in identifying early signs of vulnerability; strengthens whole-institution safeguarding culture, demonstrating that safeguarding is embedded in practice, not confined to policy.
The Prevent Duty (Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015)	Schools and colleges must have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism, and must be alert to both violent and non-violent extremist narratives linked to terrorism.	Supports staff to identify vulnerability indicators safely and proportionately; provides structured approaches to discussing extremist content without legitimising it; reduces over-referral risk while strengthening early help identification.
Fundamental British Values (DfE)	Schools must actively promote democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs, and challenge opinions or behaviours contrary to them.	Supports schools in facilitating discussions that reinforce these values; builds internal expertise through the Resilience Ambassador model; embeds structured, balanced classroom discussion as standard practice.
Political Impartiality in Schools and Colleges (DfE)	Teachers must not promote partisan political views and must offer a balanced overview of opposing views when political issues are taught, relying on professional judgement and expertise.	Provides structured formats for balanced discussion; supports teachers in maintaining neutrality; clarifies the difference between facilitation and endorsement; offers risk assessment guidance for controversial topics.

Duty / Framework	What it requires	How the Resource Suite supports compliance
Ofsted: Safeguarding and Personal Development	Schools must maintain an open and positive safeguarding culture that puts pupils first, and demonstrate how pupils are prepared for life in modern Britain and supported to understand online risk.	Strengthens safeguarding culture, media literacy, critical thinking, digital resilience, and safe reporting mechanisms; provides evidence that the setting's approach to controversial issues is structured, risk-assessed, and leadership-led.
Independent School Standards (ISI / DfE)	Independent schools must meet standards across eight areas covering quality of education, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, welfare, health and safety, staff suitability, and quality of leadership. Curriculum policies must not undermine Fundamental British Values, and schools must actively promote democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance.	Supports independent schools in demonstrating that sensitive and controversial topics are addressed through structured, professionally facilitated discussion; equips staff to uphold Fundamental British Values through balanced classroom practice; and provides the leadership frameworks and accountability structures that evidence strong governance and whole-school culture to ISI inspectors.
Further Education and Skills Inspection Toolkit (Ofsted, updated November 2025)	FE providers must establish an open and positive safeguarding culture that puts learners first, ensure staff understand and implement the Prevent duty, protect learners from radicalisation, grooming, exploitation and online harm, and ensure that learners are taught how to stay safe. Inspectors evaluate whether safeguarding is embedded across the whole provider, not confined to policy.	Builds staff capability to identify vulnerability indicators and respond proportionately; provides structured approaches to discussing extremist and controversial content without legitimising it; supports implementation of the Prevent duty through the Resilience Ambassador model; and creates evidence of a whole-provider safeguarding culture that is leadership-led, risk-assessed, and consistently applied across the setting.

5. Key Benefit for Senior Leaders

When embedded strategically, this approach ensures:

- Staff respond sensitively, safely and consistently
- Legal duties are met with confidence

- Difficult discussions do not escalate into unmanaged risk
- Pupils build resilience to extremism and wider harms
- Safeguarding culture is visible and robust

Most importantly, teachers are not left managing complex societal issues alone.

References

Department for Education

Keeping Children Safe in Education (Statutory Guidance for Schools and Colleges).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

HM Government

Working Together to Safeguard Children (Statutory Guidance).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

HM Government

Prevent Duty Guidance: for England and Wales.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance>

Department for Education

Political Impartiality in Schools: Guidance.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/political-impartiality-in-schools>

Department for Education

Promoting Fundamental British Values as part of SMSC in schools.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-fundamental-british-values-through-sm-sc>

Ofsted

School Inspection Handbook.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif>