

Evaluation of the Merseyside Fire Champions programme

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What is Fire Champions?

- An early-intervention, multi-agency initiative delivered by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, with support Merseyside Police, and St John Ambulance.
- Aimed at Young People aged 9-10 in primary schools (a period that often brings heightened vulnerability to the associated risks (Home Office, 2023)).
- Awareness raising physical activity sessions.
- Schools selected from Evidence Data.



Aims / Objectives

- To keep YP safe, away from risk in their community.
- To strengthen their protection factors.
- To build their self esteem, self confidence and self control.
- To strengthen relationships between blue light services and communities.
- To diminish YP negative perceptions of emergency services.
- To take a Public Health Approach.



Delivery

- 3 schools targeted each term.
- Student selections vary depending on schools.
- Sessions delivered :
 - Fire, Road & Water Safety
 - Gang Exploitation
 - Hate Crime, Hoax Calls
 - Anti Social Behaviour
 - Online Safety
 - Casualty Care



Messages through Games

- Blindfold navigation tasks
- Parachute Activity
- Role Play
- Bean bag
- Practical First Aid inc CPR
- Fire Engine and Crew
- Police car and equipment



Final Presentation



Evaluation Objectives and Methods

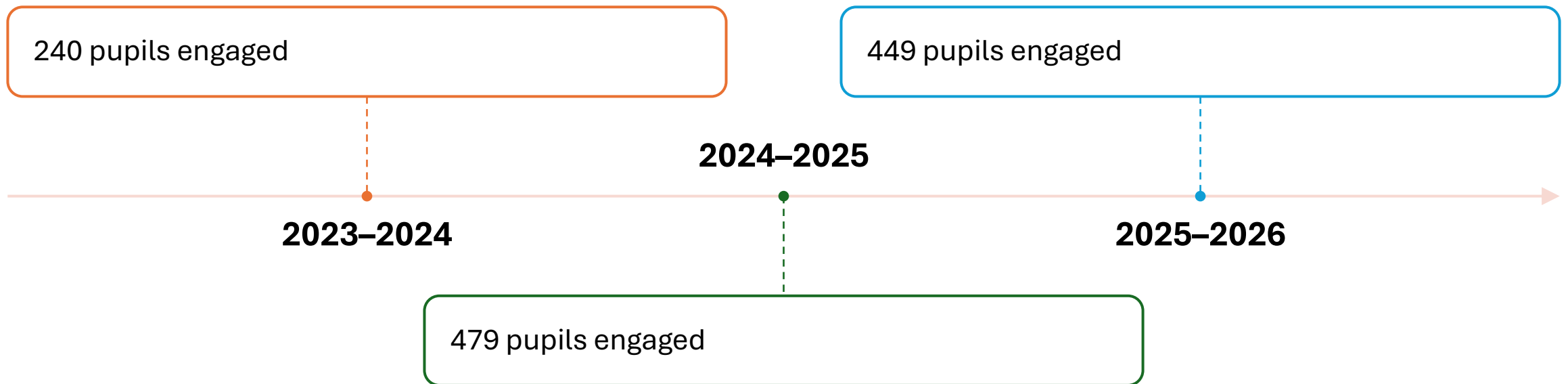
Objectives

- To assess the delivery of the Fire Champions programme and identify barriers and facilitators to its implementation.
- To examine the role of schools, staff, and delivery partners in shaping and adapting the programme.
- To explore the outcomes for participants, families, and the wider community.

Methods

- Qualitative data: In-person **focus groups (n=6) with young people (n=33)**, interviews with **key stakeholders (n=11)**
- Quantitative data: school-level **pre-programme (n=8)** and **post-programme (n=3)** survey data, completed by teachers in participating schools. Data was collected for participating schools between October 2025 and March 2026.
- An in-depth exploration of the adaptation of the Fire Champions programme in a local primary school, including its rationale, delivery, and early outcomes.

Reach



Facilitators

“They’re the type of people who are like heroes” (Young person, FG4).

“I like the champions they’re all really friendly and helpful... and kind.” (Young person, FG1)

“They were really good at like including every single person.” (Young person, FG6)

“It’s better by playing games because kids understand by playing games not like talking for ages.” (Young person, FG3)

Dedicated and enthusiastic delivery team

Interactive delivery

Reiterating messages

Honest messaging

Adapting to the needs of the young people/school

Visibility of emergency services

Partnerships between emergency services

“They know that I’m going to tell the truth the way I do it, I’m always quite honest with the answers.” (S5)

“I think it's good the police are involved; they obviously need to build a lot more relationships with some of the kids than we do... they're consistent as well... It's really good.” (S11)

“It's a partnership, that's the big thing that makes it work.” (S1)

Barriers

“I didn’t not like anything, it’s all been really good” (Young person, FG1).

“Realistically, we wanted three people from the fire service on each session, but we never tend to get that because a lot of us are doing it on our days off, so we have to work it around the days that would work.” (S11)

“We’ve got loads of schools crying out asking me, sending me emails through the VRP websites, but unfortunately, we just can’t do it because it doesn’t fall into the category.” (S1)

“There’s some schools where things are underreported.” (S2)

Scheduling and capacity

Engagement with schools

School selection

Preconceived ideas coming from family and parents

Barriers to applying knowledge at home

Difficult quantifying outcomes

“I don’t like the police” (Young person, FG4)

“Parents have stopped the kids from doing the programme in the past as well... they just point blank refused and said no, my kids not taking part, so family members can be a challenge sometimes.” (S11)

“I could never be bothered because my fire alarm is centred where all our rooms are so it’s so annoying to click it.” (Young person, FG6)

Outcomes and impact

“It’s changed the way I see... police officers, because in movies they make them look dead like scary and like you just don’t want to be around them, but then when I’ve actually met a real police officer and...they’re actually not even scary, they’re just actually dead nice and they’re only there for your safety.” (Young person, FG3)

“It gets you really thinking and it’s stuff what you don’t know before” (Young person, FG1)

“I’m more self-aware” (Young person, FG5).

Shifting attitudes and building relationships with emergency services

Development of knowledge and skills

Becoming positive bystanders and making informed decisions

Increased confidence

Improved engagement in school

Professional growth and strengthened relationships between staff members

Parental and family impact

Teachers and the wider school

“Some children really came out of their shells during the project and participated in activities that they may not have previously.” (Teacher, post survey – school 1)

“That’s the only reason I wanted to go to school.” (Young person, FG5)

“As a police force, get a lot out of it. And I think it's the same with the fire brigade. We all gain something out of it and it's beneficial.” (S7)

“At home I kept on telling my mum what to do. I was a bit bossy.” (Young person, FG3)

Case study



Challenge:

Initial delivery faced significant behavioural issues

Disengagement, disruption, and limited participation

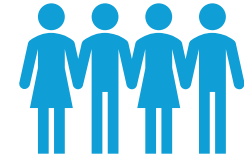
Risk of reinforcing negative perceptions of emergency services



Response

Programme redesigned with school and partners

- Smaller groups
- Shorter, focused sessions
- Added 15 minutes informal discussion time
- Introduced incentives (trophies)



Impact

Improved behaviour, engagement

Stronger relationships between pupils and staff

Greater retention of safety messages

“Those are the children that we needed to work with. If we'd have just walked away from them then it probably would have just instilled in them what everyone else thinks anyway, that they're not worth it and no one can cope with them so, what's the point?” (S2)

“We actually learnt something on the second time” (Student)

Conclusion

- The programme is successfully reaching students from areas with the highest levels of violence
- Flexible, partnership-led delivery is central to effective implementation
- The programme supports positive outcomes for young people
- Adaptations to delivery can prevent disengagement, strengthen relationships, and enhance impact
- Continued investment, partnership working, and adaptability will be critical to sustaining impact

