The Alice Ruggles Trust Assembly Project Evaluation:
County Durham and Darlington

Research Team

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Executive Summary

Stalking is a widespread and devastating crime yet is often glamourised in popular culture. Given societal misconceptions of stalking and high prevalence rates, it is essential to educate and empower young people to identify unhealthy behaviours, including those associated with stalking, and to know where to access appropriate support. In view of these issues, the Alice Ruggles Trust (ART) developed a free 30-minute school assembly package (assembly) that is suitable for pupils in Year 9 and above and seeks to help them: (1) recognise what stalking is; (2) understand that stalking should be taken seriously; (3) know where to go for support or information; and (4) know how to help a friend or family member.

In December 2023, the ART secured funds from the Durham Police and Crime Commissioner to pilot the ART Assembly Project in County Durham and Darlington. Working in partnership with the ART, an independent research team – based at Goldsmiths, University of London, the University of Kent, the University of Derby and the University of Bath – completed a combined process and outcome evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the assembly in achieving its goals. The **process evaluation** aimed to assess the capacity of schools to deliver the assembly as intended, ensuring that educators had the necessary tools, resources, and support to present the material effectively. The **outcome evaluation** was designed to assess how well the assembly achieves its goals, with a pre-post design and a specific focus on increasing pupils' understanding of stalking, its seriousness, and the support available.

Importantly, the ART Assembly Project evaluation adopted a phased approach, which enabled the research team to audit the assembly slides during Phase 1 (February-June 2024) and revise them prior to Phase 2 (September-December 2024). In total, 11 schools and an estimated 5,200 pupils participated in the ART Assembly Project across the two phases. Key findings from the **process evaluation** include:

- **Increased awareness**. School representatives reported that the assembly effectively increased pupils' understanding of stalking, including risks, warning signs and legal consequences.

- **High likelihood of regular offer**. All representatives stated they would be 'very likely' to offer the ART assembly on a regular basis.
- **Positive reception**. Representatives described the assembly as 'powerful', 'excellent' and 'really well presented'.
- **Effective visual materials**. Assembly facilitators referred to the impactful nature of the animated and non-animated videos.

Key findings from the **outcome evaluation** include:

- **Conceptual understanding of stalking**. Pupils showed statistically significant improvements in their conceptual understanding of stalking, including its definitions, warning signs and impacts post-assembly.
- **Recognition of stalking behaviours**. Pupils showed statistically significant improvements in their ability to identify stalking behaviours and warning signs in relationships.
- **Knowledge of response strategies**. Pupils were generally more likely to correctly identify appropriate support resources and how to access help post-assembly.
- **Phase comparison**. The assembly in both phases was effective in improving pupils' knowledge and awareness, but in some cases Phase 2 showed greater knowledge gains than Phase 1, suggesting that revisions to materials and delivery had a positive effect.

Overall, the two-phase ART Assembly Project evaluation offered valuable insights into the pedagogical effectiveness of a school-based assembly designed to raise awareness and understanding of stalking among young adults. The **process evaluation** affirms that the ART Assembly Project is not only implementable but also well-received and impactful. The **outcome evaluation** suggests that when young people are presented with clear definitions, emotionally resonant stories and relatable scenarios they are not only getting better at identifying harmful and complex behaviours like stalking, but are also more inclined to consider the emotional impact on victims and the importance of seeking support.

It is important to acknowledge that the ART Assembly Project evaluation was limited by low response rates and its focus on short-term change in pupil's conceptual understanding of stalking.

Therefore, further research is needed to replicate and extend the evaluation to strengthen confidence in the current findings and measure longer-term behavioural change (e.g., weeks or months after the assembly). There are also challenges with how best to scaffold psychological concepts within the assembly, including those represented by the FOUR acronym to describe the key features of stalking as a crime (that the behaviours are Fixated, Obsessive, Unwanted and Repeated). There is a need to inform pupils about stalking and equip them with the confidence and clarity about how to take concrete action in response to stalking. Ideally, schools should consider embedding this content more deeply into the wider safeguarding curriculum, creating continuity between the assembly, Personal, Social, Health and Education (PSHE) lessons and school policies.

Overall, the marked improvements in pupil's conceptual grasp and empathic responses, following the revised Phase 2 assembly materials and delivery, underscore the importance of intentional design, language accessibility and narrative engagement in safeguarding education. Therefore, it is important to develop clear protocols that ensure the continuation of research that is mindful of the logistical and ethical considerations relevant to tackling this vitally important, but sensitive subject, with young people.

Key Recommendations

Based on the process and outcome evaluation findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of the ART Assembly Project in educating pupils about stalking and improving their capacity to respond appropriately:

1. **Refine messaging around 'telling someone' vs. 'reporting'**. While the increase in pupils referencing reporting behaviour post-assembly is promising, it is important to ensure that this is framed within a broader understanding of how to seek support safely and effectively. Given the decrease in pupils referencing 'telling someone' in Phase 1, the assembly should:

- Emphasise the importance of confiding in a trusted adult (e.g., parent, teacher, school counsellor) as a first step.
- Provide practical guidance on what constitutes an appropriate authority to report to, including when police involvement is warranted.

2. **Clarify legal definitions and support systems**. Although pupils demonstrated increased understanding of the repeated and unwanted nature of stalking, misunderstandings remain around the behaviours and thresholds that define stalking legally. The assembly should:

- Reinforce that stalking is a criminal offence in England and Wales using developmentally appropriate language.
- Consider the complexities of stalking behaviours needing to meet certain legal criteria.
- Provide direct links or contact details for relevant support services (e.g., National Stalking Helpline, Paladin Young People Services, Childline) via a takeaway leaflet or slide.

3. **Strengthen content on supporting others**. The findings indicate limited progression in pupils' ability to support peers. To foster empathy and practical bystander support the assembly should:

- Incorporate scenarios or testimonials that model supportive peer responses.

- Emphasise the importance of active listening, belief in disclosures, and accompanying friends when seeking help.
- Explicitly differentiate between 'comforting' and 'confronting' to avoid promoting risky or unsafe behaviours.

4. **Introduce behaviour logging strategies**. Given that only a small number of pupils mentioned logging the behaviour post-assembly, further efforts should be made to:

- Educate pupils on the value of keeping a record (e.g., dates, times, screenshots) to support disclosures, and on how this information can be used to facilitate police and court action Importantly, pupils must not feel as though they have to 'prove' what happened to them.
- Offer a simple template that guides pupils in how to log behaviour efficiently and safely.
- Provide pupils with an overview of what the police do with information received.

5. **Enhance accessibility and delivery format**. To ensure the assembly achieves its goals and impacts as many pupils as possible, the ART should:

- Consider hybrid delivery models (e.g., in-person, video-based) to accommodate schools with different policies around phone and internet use.
- Provide assembly facilitators with updated training and guidance to ensure consistent delivery and messaging across different schools.

6. **Continued evaluation and co-development**. To build on the positive impact of the ART Assembly Project, the following practices should be embedded:

- Conduct regular audits and updates of content based on evidence-based recommendations and feedback from pupils and staff.
- Include young people in the co-development of for future assembly materials to ensure relevance and engagement.
- Expand current evaluation measures to capture longer-term changes in awareness, attitudes, and behaviours beyond the immediate post-assembly period.

Introduction

The Alice Ruggles Trust (ART) is a UK-based charity dedicated to raising awareness about stalking and providing support to those affected by it. The ART was established in October 2017 by Clive Ruggles and Sue Hills in memory of their daughter Alice, who was tragically murdered in October 2016 by Trimaan Dhillon after a relentless stalking campaign. The ART works to prevent stalking, educate the public about its harmful effects, and aid victims of this crime through the following key activities:

1. **Raising awareness**. The ART works to raise awareness about the seriousness of stalking, particularly amongst young people, through primary prevention initiatives that include educational programmes, resources, and campaigns. They aim to help people recognise the warning signs of stalking and understand the impact it can have on victims' mental and physical health.

2. **Educational programmes**. The ART provides schools, colleges, and universities with educational materials to teach pupils and students about stalking, its signs, and how best to respond. Their primary prevention initiatives, including the ART Assembly Project, were designed to empower young people to understand the importance of healthy relationships, respect, and boundaries.

3. **Victim support**. The ART offers signposting to specialised services and supports victims to use their experiences to raise awareness and campaign for greater support through their Expert by Experience Group.

4. **Advocacy and policy change**. The ART is committed to influencing public policy and improving laws related to stalking. They work closely with lawmakers, law enforcement, and other stakeholders to ensure that stalking is taken seriously and that those who are affected receive the support they need. They also hold an annual conference that forges strong links between practitioners and academics to improve strategies for the protection of victims, and the management of perpetrators, of stalking.

5. **Fundraising and awareness campaigns**. The ART organises events and campaigns to raise funds and awareness about stalking. These efforts help to keep their educational and support programmes running and provide vital resources for those affected.

Stalking and young adults

There is no universal definition of stalking, which can cause difficulties with the perception and understanding of what constitutes this behaviour (Mellins et al., 2023; Scott, 2020). Consequently, there is no universal stalking legislation. Stalking is described as a victim-defined crime, meaning the crime only occurs if the victim's self-certified emotional status is one that meets the requirements of the stalking legislation (Fullerton-Chalmers, 2024). Despite the lack of a universally accepted definition, stalking is widely understood as a targeted pattern of unwanted, repeated and persistent behaviour that can cause distress and fear (Mullen et al., 2009; Wheatley et al., 2022). Stalking encompasses a wide range of behaviours, that in isolation could appear to the observer as benign, harmless or simply uncomfortable (such as pursuing a person for a date or attempting to reconcile a relationship), but that constitutes a course of conduct that cumulatively is intrusive and harmful with the potential to result in disastrous consequences (Purcell et al., 2009). The UK Police coined the FOUR acronym to describe the key features of stalking as a crime, which are that the behaviours are Fixated, Obsessive, Unwanted and Repeated (Wheatley et al., 2022).

While stalking can affect individuals of any age, adolescents and young adults can be particularly vulnerable to this behaviour due to their stages of development, their use of social media, and their nascent involvement in romantic relationships (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000; Purcell et al., 2009). The nature of stalking, its forms, and its impact on young people require specific attention, as the consequences can be profound, affecting their mental health, emotional wellbeing, and overall sense of safety (Roberts et al., 2016).

The normalisation and minimisation of stalking behaviours represent a significant societal issue that exacerbates the challenges faced by victims (Blake, 2023). Stalking is often trivialised or misunderstood as a form of romantic or harmless attention, especially within peer groups, where unhealthy relationship dynamics may be accepted or even encouraged (Rothman et al., 2020). This normalisation is particularly dangerous because it leads to a lack of recognition of the seriousness and harmful potential of stalking (Coleman et al., 2021). Young people in particular, may not fully comprehend and verbalise the psychological and emotional impact of being stalked, as the signs and consequences of such behaviour can be easily dismissed in social

settings. For many young people, stalking may be perceived as a form of persistent affection, often fuelled by unrealistic portrayals in the media or social media platforms where obsessive behaviour may be normalised or even glamourised (Blake, 2024; Rothman et al., 2020). As a result, behaviours such as repeatedly texting, showing up uninvited to places, or monitoring someone's activities online may be seen as signs of love or admiration, rather than violations of personal boundaries. This misperception is especially common in young people who are still navigating their understanding of healthy relationships, boundaries, and respect for others. Such attitudes contribute to the minimisation of the risks associated with stalking, creating an environment where victims may not feel empowered to speak out, and perpetrators may not recognise the harm they are causing.

These attitudes and misconceptions can have a profound impact on victims, who may feel isolated, unheard, and unsupported by those around them. Research has shown that a significant proportion of young victims of stalking report feeling that their experiences are not taken seriously by their peers, parents, or professionals (Korkodeilou, 2014). Furthermore, when victims do seek help or confide in others, they may face disbelief, victim-blaming, or a lack of adequate support, which discourages them from taking further action. This leaves many young people vulnerable, without the necessary resources or guidance to escape the situation or seek protection (Paladin, 2025). The consequences of underestimating stalking are potentially catastrophic. The failure to recognise stalking as a serious issue can lead to severe psychological and emotional harm for victims, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Storey et al., 2023). In some tragic instances, this minimisation of risks associated with stalking has led to physical harm, and even loss of life. The emotional toll on victims can be exacerbated by the isolation they feel, compounded by the belief that they are alone in their experience and that their distress is somehow their fault. Alarmingly, statistics indicate that a significant percentage of victims (around 33%) blame themselves for being stalked, further deepening the sense of helplessness and shame they experience.

The scale of the issue is also deeply concerning. In the UK alone, an estimated 500,000 young people experience stalking each year, highlighting the widespread nature of the problem (Crime Survey of England and Wales, 2024; Office for National Statistics, 2025). However, the true

extent of stalking may be even greater, as many victims are reluctant to report their experiences due to fear of not being believed, concerns about privacy, or not recognising the behaviour as criminal. Consequently, this estimate could represent only a fraction of those affected by stalking.

The normalisation of stalking, combined with the minimisation of its risks, contributes to a culture where young people are less likely to recognise unhealthy behaviours in relationships or seek help when needed. This underscores the urgent need for educational initiatives and societal change to better inform young people about the dangers of stalking (Page & Scott, 2021), encourage open conversations about healthy relationships, and ensure that victims have access to the support they need.

The Alice Ruggles Trust Assembly Project

The ART Assembly Project aims to educate young people about the seriousness of stalking, its impact, and the necessary steps for both prevention and support. By engaging with this project, it was hoped that pupils would learn to recognise the signs of stalking, understand why it should not be trivialised, and explore the crucial resources available to both victims and those who wish to help. The assembly's key aim focused on empowering young people with the knowledge and tools to identify unhealthy behaviours in relationships, offer support to friends or family members, and know where to turn for professional assistance if they themselves or others are at risk.

Through interactive discussions, real-life case studies, and the sharing of available resources, this assembly aimed to help pupils:

1. **Recognise what stalking is**. Defining stalking and its different forms, from physical harassment to cyberstalking, and recognising its warning signs.
2. **Understand that stalking should be taken seriously**. Highlighting the harmful emotional and psychological effects that stalking can have on victims and emphasising that it should never be dismissed or ignored.

3. **Know where to go to for support and information**. Offering clear guidance on who to turn to for help, whether it's trusted adults, local support services, or national helplines, and ensuring that students feel empowered to act.

4. **Know how to help a friend or family member**. Providing practical advice on how to support someone who may be experiencing stalking, ensuring they know how to listen, offer comfort, and encourage them to seek professional help.

Overall, a key purpose of the ART Assembly Project was to create a safe space for pupils to discuss these difficult topics, fostering empathy, understanding, and proactive behaviour in safeguarding themselves and others. The ART developed a free 30-minute school assembly package (assembly) to help prevent stalking that is suitable for pupils in Year 9 and above, and included slides, videos and walk-through notes. Although the ART sought feedback regarding the assembly prior to the current evaluation, it was limited in scope and content. Regarding scope, there were no questions relating to the process of delivery. Regarding content, the questions were limited to pupils' confidence in their ability to recognise, respond, and support a friend who is being stalked.

In December 2023, the ART secured funds from the Durham Police and Crime Commissioner to pilot the ART Assembly Project in County Durham and Darlington. A research team led by Dr Adrian Scott (Goldsmiths, University of London), in collaboration with Drs Afroditi Pina (University of Kent) and Tom Page (University of Derby) proposed the completion of a combined process and outcome evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the assembly. Arthur Smith (University of Bath) joined the research team at the start of Phase 2 and was responsible for data entry and coding. The **process evaluation** aimed to assess the capacity of schools to deliver the assembly as intended, ensuring that educators had the necessary tools, resources, and support to present the material effectively. The **outcome evaluation** was designed to assess how well the assembly achieves its goals, with a pre-post design and a specific focus on increasing pupils' understanding of stalking, its seriousness, and the support available.

Importantly, the ART Assembly Project evaluation adopted a phased approach, with four schools (12 separate year groups and an estimated 2,400 pupils) participating in **Phase 1** of the

evaluation (Feb-Jun 2024), and seven schools (14 separate year groups and an estimated 2,800 pupils) participating in **Phase 2** of the evaluation (Sep-Dec 2024).

Process Evaluation

Method

The process evaluation used two surveys. One involved a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis to understand the feasibility of implementing the assembly from a school perspective (**school survey**). The other involved a reflection on the implementation of the assembly from a facilitator perspective (**facilitator survey**). Importantly, feedback from the assembly facilitators during **Phase 1** of the evaluation fed into the research team's audit of the assembly slides prior to **Phase 2** of the evaluation (see Materials section of the Outcome Evaluation for further details).

Participants

Three school representatives (Assistant Head Teacher, Learning Mentor, Safeguarding Lead) completed the **school survey** (one during Phase 1, two during Phase 2), and 10 assembly facilitators (all PCSOs during Phase 1, all volunteers during Phase 2) completed the **facilitator survey** (five during Phase 1, five during Phase 2).

Materials

The **school survey** asked school representatives to provide basic information regarding their school and the year groups who received the assembly. It also asked the following five questions:

1. What are the key benefits of the assembly? (open question)
2. Are there any limitations with the assembly (i.e., are there key areas that could be improved)? (open question)
3. How likely would you be to offer the assembly on a regular (e.g., annual) basis? (scale question with five response categories: very unlikely, unlikely, neutral, likely, very likely)
4. Are there any internal (school-based) or external (curriculum-based) obstacles to offering the assembly on a regular basis? (open question)

5. Do you have any final thoughts or recommendations you would like to share? (open question)

The **facilitator survey** asked assembly facilitators to provide basic information regarding the school, the year groups who received the assembly, the capacity in which they delivered the assembly (PCSO, volunteer), and the video they used during the assembly (animated, non-animated). It also asked the following four questions:

1. What went well with the assembly? (open question)
2. What (if anything) went less well with the assembly? (open question)
3. Is there anything about the assembly that could be improved? (open question)
4. Do you have any final thoughts or recommendations you would like to share? (open question)

The school and facilitator surveys were available in online (hosted in Qualtrics) and paper formats and did not change across the two phases of the evaluation.

Procedure

The process evaluation was administered by the community engagement manager at the ART, who used QR codes to distribute the school and facilitator surveys (with paper surveys available on request). The **school survey** started by thanking school representatives for their participation before asking them to provide some basic information regarding their school and the assembly. Representatives were then asked to answer five questions regarding the ART Assembly Project. Similarly, the **facilitator survey** started by thanking assembly facilitators for their participation before asking them to provide some basic information regarding the school and the assembly. Facilitators were then asked to reflect on the assembly they had just delivered and to answer four questions.

The community engagement manager was responsible for liaising with the representatives and facilitators, answering their questions, and sending reminders when necessary.

Analysis

All data was entered into Excel. However, it was not deemed suitable to perform thematic analysis on the school representatives' or assembly facilitators' responses to the eight open questions given the small sample sizes and the brevity of their responses. Instead, brief summaries were produced that outline their opinions and reflections on the assembly.

Results

School survey

When asked about the key benefits of the assembly, school representatives commented that it increased pupils' understanding of stalking, including the key risks, warning signs, and available support services. One representative also commented that the assembly raised awareness of the legal implications of stalking. Regarding any limitations with the assembly, one representative commented on the dated nature of the 'Stalking in popular culture' slide and suggested the use of updated movie references.

Importantly, all representatives stated that they would be very likely to offer the assembly on a regular basis, and only one representative highlighted a potential internal obstacle regarding access to a suitable room during exam time. Finally, when asked for any thoughts or recommendations, representatives stated that the assembly was 'powerful', 'really well presented' and offered an 'excellent, reflective presentation'.

Although limited to the opinions of three representatives, findings from the school survey were encouraging. Representatives commented on the strengths of the assembly and were all 'very likely' to offer the assembly on a regular basis in the future. Furthermore, the few weaknesses and threats they identified were straightforward to address via careful timetabling and slide revisions (see Materials section of the Outcome Evaluation).

Facilitator survey

When asked which video they used during the assembly, assembly facilitators indicated that they presented the non-animated video on six occasions and the animated video on four occasions. Interestingly, video selection was not determined by year group, with the non-animated video

being presented to pupils from Years 9, 10 and 11, and the animated video being presented to pupils from Years 9, 11 and 12.

When asked what went well with the assembly, facilitators referred to the pupils being respectful, attentive and engaged. They also referred to the impactful nature of both videos. Teachers who were present believed the assembly was informative and well-received. Finally, facilitators in **Phase 2** commented on how the assembly flowed well and fit within the allotted time.

When asked what went less well with the assembly, facilitators in **Phase 1** referred to pupils experiencing difficulties completing the pre- and post-assembly surveys online due to time and internet limitations. Facilitators in **Phase 2** commented on difficulties getting pupils to participate in discussion during the assembly, as well as the need to ensure all materials are accessible to hearing impaired pupils.

When asked if there is anything about the assembly that could be improved, facilitators in **Phase 1** commented on the need to update the movie references on the 'Stalking in popular culture' slide, and the need to ensure all key information is presented in the slides. Facilitators in **Phase 2** commented on the need to have professional subtitles for the videos, and to spend more time introducing Alice before the video and describing how things have changed after the video. They also commented on the need to modify the 'Can you think of any examples of stalking in everyday life?' slide so that the question is presented before the examples, and the 'Helping a friend' slide so that the key points (displayed as post-it notes) are presented one at time.

Finally, when asked for any thoughts or recommendations, one facilitator in **Phase 1** commented on the need to develop an internal process for the handling of disclosures when the assembly is delivered by volunteers.

Consistent with the school survey, findings from the facilitator survey were positive. The facilitators believed the overall message was clear and impactful, and that the pupils were attentive and engaged. Although facilitators commented on issues with timings and use of the

online surveys during Phase 1, these were resolved prior to Phase 2 of the evaluation. Furthermore, facilitator suggestions during Phase 2 were fundamentally different to those during Phase 1, focusing on improvements to, rather than issues with, the assembly.

Outcome Evaluation

Method

The outcome evaluation used a pre-post survey to examine change in pupils' knowledge, understanding and confidence in their ability to respond in the context of the four aims of the assembly (recognise what stalking is, understand that stalking should be taken seriously, know where to go for support and information, know how to help a friend or family member). Importantly, the research team audited the assembly slides during **Phase 1** of the evaluation and revised them prior to **Phase 2** of the evaluation.

Participants

The initial sample for **Phase 1** comprised 333 pupil responses (209 pre-assembly and 124 post-assembly). However, 223 responses were removed because they could not be matched ($n = 219$) or contained missing data ($n = 4$). This resulted in 110 responses, and a matched sample of 55 pupils, for the purpose of this outcome evaluation. The average age of the sample was 13.63 years ($SD = 0.53$, ranging from 13 to 15 years), with 56.4% ($n = 31$) of pupils identifying as female, 40.0% ($n = 22$) identifying as male, and 3.6% ($n = 2$) preferring to self-describe or not say. Regarding ethnicity, 96.4% ($n = 53$) of pupils identified as White, 1.8% ($n = 1$) identified as Asian, and 1.8% ($n = 1$) preferred not to say.

The initial sample for **Phase 2** comprised 1,891 pupil responses (1,014 pre-assembly and 877 post-assembly). However, 1,423 responses were removed because they could not be matched ($n = 1,165$) or contained missing data ($n = 258$). This resulted in 468 responses, and a matched sample of 234 pupils, for the purpose of this outcome evaluation. The average age of the sample was 14.71 years ($SD = 1.13$, ranging from 13 to 18 years), with 47.4% ($n = 111$) of pupils identifying as female, 45.7% ($n = 107$) identifying as male, 2.6% ($n = 6$) identifying as non-binary, 0.9% ($n = 2$) identifying as transgender, and 3.4% ($n = 8$) preferring to self-describe or

not say. Regarding ethnicity, 84.6% ($n = 198$) of pupils identified as White, 6.0% ($n = 14$) identified as Mixed or Multiple ethnicity, 3.4% ($n = 8$) identified as Asian. 2.6% ($n = 6$) identified as Black, and 3.4% ($n = 8$) preferred to self-describe or not say.

Note. Unmatched data in **Phase 1** was caused by pupils only completing one rather than both surveys, or pupils failing to provide the same unique code pre- and post-assembly. Considering these issues, we merged the pre- and post-assembly surveys to form a combined pupil survey. Unfortunately, the unmatched data in **Phase 2** was caused by some school representatives splitting the combined pupil survey and distributing it as two separate surveys. This was an issue because we only requested basic demographic information and a unique code for the purpose of matching at the beginning of the pupil survey, so had no way of matching pupils' pre- and post-assembly responses.

Materials

The **pupil survey** asked pupils to provide basic information regarding their school, year of study, age, gender (female, male, gender non-binary, transgender, prefer to self-describe, prefer not to say) and ethnicity (Asian, Black, Mixed or Multiple, White, prefer to self-describe or prefer not to say). It also asked the following five questions that pupils completed pre- and post-assembly:

1. How would you describe stalking? (open question)
2. What would make you think you are being stalked? (open question)
3. What would you do if you thought you were being stalked? (open question)
4. How would you support someone who thought they were being stalked? (open question)
5. Is stalking a crime in England and Wales? (closed question with three response categories: yes, no, don't know)

The pupil survey was available in both online (hosted in Qualtrics) and paper formats. Although minor changes were made to the presentation of the survey across the two phases, the key questions remained the same throughout the project.

The assembly slides were initially developed by the ART prior to the start of the ART Assembly Project and then revised following an **audit of the assembly slides** by the research team during Phase 1. In brief, the **Phase 1** assembly began with Alice's story, followed by 'what is stalking?', example stalking motivations, and example stalking behaviours. The assembly then focused on how it feels to be stalked and stalking in popular culture. The assembly finished with advice on how to respond to stalking, how to support a friend who thinks they are being stalked, and sources of support. Importantly, the research team raised several concerns during their audit of the assembly slides (some of which were also raised during the process evaluation), and made several associated revisions prior to Phase 2 of the evaluation:

- **Narrative**. The first set of revisions related to the overall narrative of the assembly and the need to incorporate key information that contributes to this narrative in the slides. For example, the research team thought it important to introduce the ART and to ask pupils to think about stalking in everyday life before challenging their pre-existing views of stalking. They also thought it important to clearly state that things have changed since Alice's tragic murder in one of the slides.
- **Definition**. The second set of revisions related to the definition of stalking, including use of the FOUR acronym. The research team expressed two key concerns with the definition provided in the slides. First, they disagreed with use of the FOUR acronym when defining stalking because a victim may incorrectly infer a person's intent or psychological state. Second, they disagreed with reference to the behaviour causing fear of violence or serious alarm or distress when defining stalking because a victim may not experience these severe emotional impacts. Therefore, the definition was modified to read, 'Stalking is a pattern of repeated, unwanted behaviour that makes you feel uncomfortable and uneasy'.
- **Perpetration**. The third and final set of revisions related to the inclusion of a slide that focuses on engagement in stalking behaviour. The research team thought it important to include a separate slide that provides advice to anyone concerned about their own behaviour. Previously, the assembly slides were solely victim focused with a brief mention of engagement in stalking behaviours included in the facilitator notes.

The **Phase 2** assembly began with a brief introduction to the ART, followed by examples of stalking in everyday life, Alice's story, and 'what is stalking?'. The assembly then presented potential stalking scenarios, example stalking behaviours, and advice to anyone concerned about their own behaviour. Consistent with Phase 1, the assembly finished with advice on how to respond to stalking, how to support a friend who thinks they are being stalked, and sources of support.

Procedure

Consistent with the process evaluation, the outcome evaluation was administered by the community engagement manager at the ART, who initially used QR codes to distribute the pupil surveys (with paper surveys available on request). The primary format of the survey was later modified following requests from school representatives to use paper surveys (with the QR codes available on request). This change was implemented to overcome challenges associated with pupils using their mobile phones within school time (e.g., contravening mobile phone policy, poor internet connection, increased disruption).

During **Phase 1**, pupils were provided with two surveys, each comprising two sections. One survey was completed before the assembly, and the other survey was completed after the assembly. During **Phase 2**, pupils were provided with a single survey comprising three sections. Two sections of the survey were completed before the assembly, and the third section was completed after the assembly.

The **Phase 1** pre-assembly survey thanked pupils for their participation; requested basic demographic information and a unique code for the purpose of matching (Section 1); and asked five questions regarding their knowledge and understanding of stalking (Section 2). The post-assembly survey requested the same demographic information and basic code (Section 1); asked the same five questions regarding their knowledge and understanding of stalking; and asked two questions about the assembly and anything else they would like to know (Section 2). The **Phase 2** pupil survey thanked pupils for their participation; requested basic demographic information and a unique code for the purpose of matching (Section 1); asked five questions regarding their knowledge and understanding of stalking pre-assembly (Section 2); asked the same five

questions regarding their knowledge and understanding of stalking post-assembly; and asked two questions about the assembly and anything else they would like to know (Section 3).

The community engagement manager was responsible for liaising with the representatives and assembly facilitators, answering their questions, and arranging the collection of paper surveys.

Coding and analysis

All data was entered into Excel. Thematic analysis was then performed on pupils' responses to the four open questions, both pre- and post-assembly, to identify key themes in the data. Identified themes were reviewed and refined prior to coding to ensure they were distinct and interpretable. All data was then coded and imported into SPSS for the purpose of analysis. Descriptive analyses were first performed to explore the number of pupils drawing on each theme for each question. Statistical analyses (Nemar's test) were then performed to compare the number of pupils drawing on each theme pre- and post-assembly.

Results

How would you describe stalking?

When pupils were asked how they would describe stalking, they often referred to following and/or watching. Some pupils commented – either directly or indirectly – on the repeated and unwanted nature of the behaviour. Finally, some pupils commented on the information gathering aspect of stalking, and/or described stalking as harassment (see Table 1).

When statistical analyses were performed to compare the number of pupils drawing on each theme pre- and post-assembly, there were two consistent differences for **Phases 1 and 2**, and three differences for **Phase 2** only.

- **Phases 1 and 2**
- There were significant **decreases** in the number of pupils who referred to watching pre- to post-assembly: Phase 1 = 34.5% vs. 9.1%; Phase 2 = 27.8% vs. 3.8%.

- There were significant **increases** in the number of pupils who commented on the unwanted nature of the behaviour pre- to post-assembly: Phase 1 = 16.4% vs. 43.6%; Phase 2 = 20.5% vs. 62.8%.

- **Phase 2 only**

- There was a significant **decrease** in the number of pupils who referred to following pre- to post-assembly: 59.8% vs. 21.8%.

- There was a significant **decrease** in the number of pupils who commented on the information gathering aspect of stalking pre- to post-assembly: 20.9% vs. 1.3%.

- There was a significant **increase** in the number of pupils who commented on the repeated nature of the behaviour pre- to post-assembly: 31.6% vs. 56.0%.

Table 1

Number (percentage) of pupils drawing on each theme for 'How would you describe stalking?'

Theme	Phase 1				Phase 2			
	Pre-assembly		Post-assembly		Pre-assembly		Post-assembly	
Following	47.3	(26)	41.8	(23)	59.8_b	(140)	21.8_b	(51)
Watching	34.5_a	(19)	9.1_a	(5)	27.8_b	(65)	3.8_b	(9)
Repeated behaviour	30.9	(17	43.6	(24)	31.6_b	(74)	56.0_b	(131)
Unwanted behaviour	16.4_a	(9)	43.6_a	(24)	20.5_b	(48)	62.8_b	(147)
Information gathering	12.7	(7)	3.6	(2)	20.9_b	(49)	1.3_b	(3)
Harassment	5.5	(3)	5.5	(3)	3.4	(8)	3.0	(7)

Note. Themes are not mutually exclusive, and column percentages sharing subscripts represent significant differences pre- to post-assembly.

These findings suggest the assembly increased pupils' understanding of stalking. Not only was there a general reduction in the number of pupils describing stalking in terms of specific behaviours (e.g., following, watching, information gathering) post-assembly. There was also an increase in the number of pupils who described stalking in terms of repeated and unwanted behaviour. It is important to note that the change in pupils' understanding was greater in Phase 2 compared to Phase 1 of the evaluation.

What would make you think you were being stalked?

When pupils were asked what would make them think they were being stalked, they often referred to being followed, the repeated nature of the behaviour, and/or being watched. Some pupils referred to being visited at home. Finally, some pupils commented on the unwanted nature of the behaviour including the receipt of unwanted gifts (see Table 2).

Table 2

Number (percentage) of pupils drawing on each theme for 'What would make you think you were being stalked?'

Theme	Phase 1				Phase 2			
	Pre-assembly		Post-assembly		Pre-assembly		Post-assembly	
Being followed	58.2	(32)	45.5	(25)	59.8_b	(140)	29.9_b	(70)
Repeated behaviour	50.9	(28)	49.1	(27)	48.3_b	(113)	59.3_b	(139)
Being watched	34.5_a	(19)	10.9_a	(6)	11.1_b	(26)	5.1_b	(12)
Visited home	9.1	(5)	14.5	(8)	2.6	(6)	3.0	(7)
Unwanted behaviour	5.5_a	(3)	29.1_a	(16)	7.3_b	(17)	30.3_b	(71)
Unwanted gifts	0.0_a	(0)	21.8_a	(12)	0.4_b	(1)	13.2_b	(31)

Note. Themes are not mutually exclusive, and column percentages sharing subscripts represent significant differences pre- to post-assembly.

When statistical analyses were performed to compare the number of pupils drawing on each theme pre- and post-assembly, there were three consistent differences for **Phases 1 and 2**, and two differences for **Phase 2** only.

- **Phases 1 and 2**
- There were significant **decreases** in the number of pupils who referred to being watched pre- to post-assembly: Phase 1 = 34.5% vs. 10.9%; Phase 2 = 11.1% vs. 5.1%.
- There were significant **increases** in the number of pupils who commented on the unwanted nature of behaviour pre- to post-assembly: Phase 1 = 5.5% vs. 29.1%; Phase 2 = 7.3% vs. 30.3%.

- There were significant **increases** in the number of pupils who commented on the receipt of unwanted gifts pre- to post-assembly: Phase 1 = 0.0% vs. 21.8%; Phase 2 = 0.4% vs. 13.2%.
- **Phase 2 only**
- There was a significant **decrease** in the number of pupils who referred to being followed pre- to post-assembly: 59.8% vs. 29.9%.
- There was a significant **increase** in the number of pupils who referred to the repeated nature of the behaviour pre- to post-assembly: 48.3% vs. 59.3%.

These findings suggest the assembly increased pupils' understanding of how to identify behaviour as stalking. There was a general reduction in the number of pupils who referred to specific behaviours post-assembly, as well as an increase in the number of pupils who commented on the repeated and unwanted nature of behaviour. The increase in the number of pupils who commented on the receipt of unwanted gifts likely reflects the narrative of Alice's story. Furthermore, consistent with the previous question, the change in pupils' understanding was greater in Phase 2 compared to Phase 1 of the evaluation.

What would you do if you thought you were being stalked?
When pupils were asked what they would do if they thought they were being stalked, they often referred to telling someone and/or reporting the behaviour. Some pupils commented that they would focus on self-protection and/or the logging of behaviour. Finally, a few pupils commented that they would run or confront the perpetrator (see Table 3).

When statistical analyses were performed to compare the number of pupils drawing on each theme pre- and post-assembly, there was one consistent difference for **Phases 1 and 2**, and one difference for **Phase 1** only.

- **Phases 1 and 2**
- There were significant **increases** in the number of pupils who referred to reporting the behaviour pre- to post-assembly: Phase 1 = 41.8% vs. 74.5%; Phase 2 = 56.0% vs. 66.7%.

- **Phase 1 only**
- There was a significant **decrease** in the number of pupils who referred to telling someone pre- to post-assembly: 61.8% vs. 45.5%.

Table 3

Number (percentage) of pupils drawing on each theme for 'What would you do if you thought you were being stalked?'

Theme	Phase 1				Phase 2			
	Pre-assembly		Post-assembly		Pre-assembly		Post-assembly	
Tell someone	61.8_a	(34)	45.5_a	(25)	49.6	(116)	55.1	(129)
Report behaviour	41.8_a	(23)	74.5_a	(41)	56.0_b	(131)	66.7_b	(156)
Self-protection	10.9	(6)	1.8	(1)	6.8	(16)	4.3	(10)
Log behaviour	3.6	(2)	1.8	(1)	0.4	(1)	2.1	(5)
Run	3.6	(2)	1.8	(1)	1.3	(3)	0.9	(2)
Confront perpetrator	1.8	(1)	0.0	(0)	4.7	(11)	1.7	(4)

Note. Themes are not mutually exclusive, and column percentages sharing subscripts represent significant differences pre- to post-assembly.

These findings suggest the assembly was less effective at increasing pupils' understanding of how to respond to stalking. Although it was good that pupils were unlikely to make humorous comments or confront the perpetrator, there was little change pre- to post-assembly. For example, very few pupils commented that they would focus on self-protection or the logging of behaviour post-assembly; the latter of which is vitally important when contacting the police. It was also concerning to see a reduction in the number of pupils who referred to telling someone, and a large increase the number of pupils who referred to reporting the behaviour in Phase 1. Although the reduction in telling someone was absent in Phase 2, the increase in reporting the behaviour was still present. Therefore, it is important to ensure that pupils understand when and how to report behaviour to the police so that it is not dismissed as non-threatening or insignificant.

How would you support someone who thought they were being stalked?

When pupils were asked how they would support someone if they thought they were being stalked, they often referred to telling someone, reporting the behaviour, helping protect the victim, and/or comforting the victim. Some pupils commented that they would help the victim tell someone and/or report the behaviour. Finally, a few pupils commented that they would confront the perpetrator or help the victim confront the perpetrator (see Table 4).

Table 4

Number (percentage) of pupils drawing on each theme for 'How would you support someone who thought they were being stalked?'

Theme	Phase 1				Phase 2			
	Pre-assembly		Post-assembly		Pre-assembly		Post-assembly	
Report behaviour	32.7_a	(18)	61.8_a	(34)	20.5_b	(48)	13.7_b	(32)
Tell someone	32.7	(8)	27.3	(15)	11.5	(27)	9.4	(22)
Help protect victim	29.1	(16)	16.4	(9)	18.4_b	(43)	4.3_b	(10)
Comfort victim	14.5	(8)	12.7	(7)	13.2_b	(31)	35.5_b	(83)
Help victim tell someone	12.7	(7)	14.5	(8)	14.5_b	(34)	7.7_b	(18)
Help victim report behaviour	12.7_a	(7)	36.4_a	(20)	16.7_b	(39)	24.8_b	(58)
Confront perpetrator	1.8	(1)	0.0	(0)	3.4	(8)	0.4	(1)
Help victim confront perpetrator	0.0	(0)	0.0	(0)	1.3	(3)	0.4	(1)

Note. Themes are not mutually exclusive, and column percentages sharing subscripts represent significant differences pre- to post-assembly.

When statistical analyses were performed to compare the number of pupils drawing on each theme pre- and post-assembly, there was one consistent difference for **Phases 1 and 2**, one difference for **Phase 1** only, and four differences for **Phase 2** only.

- **Phases 1 and 2**
- There were significant **increases** in the number of pupils who commented that they would help the victim report behaviour pre- to post-assembly: Phase 1 = 12.7% vs. 36.4%; Phase 2 = 16.7% vs. 24.8%.
- **Phase 1 only**
- There was a significant **increase** in the number of pupils who referred to reporting the behaviour pre- to post-assembly: 32.7% vs. 61.8%.
- **Phase 2 only**
- There was a significant **decrease** in the number of pupils who referred to reporting the behaviour pre- to post-assembly: 20.5% vs. 13.7%.
- There was a significant decrease in the number of pupils who referred to helping protect the victim pre- to post-assembly: 18.4% vs. 4.3%.
- There was a significant **decrease** in the number of pupils who commented that they would help the victim tell someone pre- to post- assembly: 14.5% vs. 7.7%.
- There was a significant **increase** in the number of pupils who referred to comforting the victim pre- to post-assembly: 13.2% vs. 35.5%.

Consistent with the previous question, it was good that pupils were unlikely to confront the perpetrator or help the victim confront the perpetrator. It was also good that pupils were more likely to refer to comforting the victim post-assembly in Phase 2. However, it was concerning that some pupils referred to 'supporting' the victim without considering their perspective (e.g., telling someone, reporting the behaviour). Therefore, it is important to ensure that pupils understand how to work with victims to support them in an appropriate and sensitive manner.

Is stalking a crime in England and Wales?

When pupils were asked if stalking is a crime in England and Wales, most correctly believed that stalking is a crime, both pre- and post-assembly. However, some pupils did not know, and a few pupils incorrectly believed that stalking is not a crime (see Table 5).

Table 5

Number (percentage) of pupil who believed stalking is a crime in England and Wales

Response	Phase 1				Phase 2			
	Pre-assembly		Post-assembly		Pre-assembly		Post-assembly	
Yes	80.0	(44)	96.4	(53)	79.5	(186)	91.0	(213)
No	1.8	(1)	0.0	(0)	0.9	(2)	1.7	(4)
Don't know	18.2	(10)	3.6	(2)	19.6	(46)	7.3	(17)
Total	100.0	(55)	100.0	(55)	100.0	(234)	100.0	(234)

When statistical analyses were performed to compare the number of pupils who believed that stalking is a crime with the number of pupils who did not know or believed stalking is not a crime, the difference was consistent for **Phases 1 and 2**.

- **Phases 1 and 2**
- There were significant **increases** in the number of pupils who believed that stalking is a crime pre- to post-assembly: Phase 1 = 80.0% vs. 96.4%; Phase 2 = 79.5% vs. 91.0%.

These findings suggest most pupils already knew that stalking is a crime in England and Wales, and that the assembly increased their knowledge and understanding. However, all pupils should have been able to answer this question correctly post-assembly, but some did not know the answer or answered the question incorrectly. Thus, it appears some pupils did not engage with the assembly and/or did not take the post-assembly survey seriously.

Discussion

The ART Assembly Project evaluation adopted a phased approach to assess the effectiveness of the assembly in achieving its goals. A process evaluation was conducted to assess the capacity of schools to deliver the assembly as intended, ensuring that educators had the necessary tools, resources, and support to present the material effectively. An outcome evaluation was also conducted to assess how well the assembly achieves its goals, with a pre-post design and a

specific focus on increasing pupils' understanding of stalking, its seriousness, and the support available.

Process evaluation

The process evaluation provided a nuanced view of the feasibility and implementation quality of the ART Assembly Project, drawing on perspectives from both school representatives and assembly facilitators across two phases. Overall, feedback was encouraging, highlighting the assembly's strong potential as an effective and sustainable tool for raising awareness about stalking amongst young people.

School survey

The school survey revealed that representatives valued the assembly's educational content, particularly its role in enhancing pupils' understanding of stalking, its warning signs, legal implications, and the support systems available. Their unanimous endorsement of the assembly as something they would be 'very likely' to offer on a regular basis reflects both the perceived relevance of the topic and the suitability of the materials and delivery format within the school context. While a few barriers were identified (e.g., access to a suitable room) these were manageable and underscore the importance of early planning.

Facilitator survey

The facilitator survey offered further insight into the implementation of the assembly, with facilitators noting high levels of pupil engagement, attentiveness, and respect throughout the assembly. Importantly, facilitators highlighted the emotional and educational impact of both video formats, which supports the decision to retain multiple visual resources to allow for flexibility in delivery. However, Phase 1 facilitators noted practical challenges with the use of online surveys (e.g., time and internet limitations) which were successfully addressed prior to Phase 2, demonstrating the benefit of phased approach to the evaluation.

Reflections from Phase 2 facilitators were especially constructive, shifting from concerns around logistical barriers to targeted suggestions for enhancing clarity and emotional resonance. These included refinements to the slide structure (e.g., adjusting the overall narrative of the assembly),

improvements to accessibility (e.g., the need to have professional subtitles for the videos), and the need to spend more time introducing Alice to deepen understanding of her story. Their feedback not only demonstrates a shared commitment to pedagogical quality, it also offers a clear roadmap for further refinement.

Crucially, the involvement of volunteers in Phase 2 highlighted a salient safeguarding consideration: the need to establish robust internal mechanisms for handling disclosures in contexts where the assembly is not led by trained police officers. This highlights a broader institutional challenge: ensuring that all facilitators, regardless of professional background, are adequately supported and trained in safeguarding protocols. Addressing this issue is essential for scaling the project with integrity.

Outcome evaluation

The outcome evaluation, conducted across two phases, revealed meaningful improvements in pupils' conceptual understanding of stalking, their recognition of stalking behaviours, and to a lesser extent, their knowledge of personal and supportive response strategies pre- to post-assembly. Furthermore, the revisions made between Phase 1 and Phase 2, informed by an audit of the initial assembly slides, appear to strengthen these positive outcomes.

Conceptual understanding of stalking

Across both phases, there was a significant shift in pupils' conceptualisations of stalking. Pupils moved away from simplistic and specific descriptions such as 'watching' or 'following' towards more nuanced understandings that emphasised the **repetition** and **unwantedness** of the behaviour. This change aligns well with the revised definition introduced in Phase 2, which focused on the emotional impact and pattern of behaviour rather than specific behaviours. The observed reduction in references to 'information gathering' and 'watching', coupled with the increase in comments on repeated and unwanted behaviour, suggests that the assembly was successful in helping pupils understand stalking as a psychological and emotional threat, rather than merely a set of observable behaviours.

Notably, Phase 2 showed more pronounced improvements in pupils' understanding. Revisions made to the assembly slides, particularly the clearer narrative structure, simplified and enhanced definitions, and incorporation of scenarios and advice for potential perpetrators, have likely contributed to the stronger post-assembly shifts observed in this phase.

Recognition of stalking behaviours

Pupils' responses to the question about what would make them think they were being stalked, further reinforce the assembly's impact and key aim to shift away from descriptions of stalking as a set of isolated behaviours or physical surveillance ('being followed', 'being watched') and towards a more nuanced understanding of a set of **repeated** and **unwanted** behaviours, including more subtle behaviours such as **unwanted gifts**. This particular increase may reflect the influence of Alice's story, which appears to have effectively illustrated the real-world warning signs that are not always perceived as threatening at first glance. These findings suggest that the narrative elements of the assembly had a strong emotional and cognitive impact on pupils' ability to identify stalking behaviours.

Knowledge of personal response strategies

While there were some improvements in pupils' knowledge of how to respond to stalking, particularly increased mentions of reporting behaviour to authorities, this was not consistent across all areas. Worryingly, in Phase 1, there was a decrease in the number of pupils who said they would 'tell someone', although this trend was assuaged in Phase 2. This inconsistency may reflect a need to more clearly differentiate between **formal reporting** (e.g., to the police) and **informal disclosure** (e.g., to a teacher or trusted adult), and emphasise that both are valid and important steps depending on the situation.

There was also limited reference to other practical response strategies such as logging behaviour or implementing self-protection measures, both of which are vital for building evidence and ensuring safety. These findings suggest a gap in pupils' knowledge regarding the practical actions victims can take and highlight an area that should be strengthened in future iterations of the assembly. Pupils must not only be told that they should report stalking but how, when and to whom, as well as what to expect afterwards. This includes understanding support systems in and

outside the school (e.g., safeguarding leads, family, police) and how to advocate for themselves if initial disclosures are dismissed.

Knowledge of supportive response strategies

The findings regarding how pupils would support a peer experiencing stalking were mixed. Encouragingly, there was a significant increase in pupils who mentioned offering comfort to peers being stalked, especially in Phase 2, which may reflect a growing empathy and emotional engagement with the topic. However, the frequency of responses referring to active interventions such as 'reporting behaviour' or 'helping the victim seek help' either remained low or reduced. These findings indicate that while pupils are becoming more emotionally attuned to the issue, they may still lack confidence, clarity or resources in how to assist others effectively. Further development of the curriculum should ensure that bystanders are equipped with both the motivation and practical tools to support peers in a safe and effective manner. Educators should continue to integrate emotional literacy and empathy-building strategies into the assembly and Personal, Social, Health, and Economic (PSHE) lessons, reinforcing not only safeguarding facts but also the human experiences behind them.

Phase comparison and pedagogical implications

While the sample sizes for the **process evaluation** were small, the reflections gathered point to several important pedagogical and logistical implications. First, they underscore the value of involving implementers and recipients in shaping content: a participatory approach that aligns with best practice in public education. Second, they reinforce the need for accessible, emotionally intelligent delivery materials that are adaptable across year groups and facilitators. Third, they highlight the importance of continuously revisiting the assembly's cultural references, digital formats, and safeguarding procedures to ensure both relevance and responsiveness.

The comparative findings of the **outcome evaluation** between Phase 1 and Phase 2 underscore the importance of pedagogical clarity, narrative coherence and appropriate definitions when delivering sensitive educational content (Bolkan, 2015; Heath et al., 2017). There were marked improvements in pupils' knowledge, understanding and conceptual framing of stalking in Phase

2. Specifically, pupils showed a marked reduction in their reliance on specific behaviours pre- to post-assembly and a stronger reliance on conceptual indicators such as 'repeated behaviour' and 'unwanted behaviour'. This suggests that the revised assembly successfully supported a deeper shift in pupils' conceptual understanding, moving away from stereotypical and oversimplified portrayals of stalking, towards a recognition of its psychological, persistent and coercive nature. This trend was consistent across other questions as well. When considering signs that they might be experiencing stalking, pupils in Phase 2 were more likely to recognise contextual cues (e.g., repeated, unwanted behaviour) rather than relying solely on overt behaviours.

The more nuanced outcomes of Phase 2 likely reflect the improved narrative structure of the assembly. By starting with relatable examples, introducing the ART and situating Alice's story in the broader context of stalking as a public issue, the assembly created space for pupils to challenge pre-existing assumptions. Framing stalking as repeated and unwanted as opposed to merely surveillance or following, allowed for building incremental complexity of understanding (Driscoll, 2000).

The revisions made to the stalking definition (i.e., removal of the FOUR acronym and reference to fear of violence) resulted in a more simplified and inclusive definition of 'a pattern of repeated, unwanted behaviour that makes you feel uncomfortable and uneasy' likely contributed to pupils' improved understanding in Phase 2. It likely gave them a clearer heuristic for identifying stalking in various contexts, without requiring them to judge intent or severity, which are tasks that could be developmentally challenging for young people (e.g., psychological research shows age-related neural development of mentalising moral judgement; Harenski et al., 2011). It is important, therefore, to use developmentally appropriate language in sensitive topics and to ensure definitions are broad enough to capture lived experiences, but specific enough to be instructive (Danis, 2016; Lowe, 2015).

The inclusion of a slide that provides advice to anyone concerned about their own behaviour was an important addition in Phase 2. Though its impact on pupils' responses was not explicitly tested, its inclusion is consistent with a whole-system approach to safeguarding education (Joel, 2024; NSPCC). By addressing perpetration, not just victimhood, the assembly implicitly

challenged harmful norms and may have encouraged pupils to reflect on boundaries, consent and healthy relationships.

Limitations and future research

Response rates and sample representativeness

A key limitation of this evaluation relates to response rates across both phases of the outcome evaluation. While pupil engagement was generally high, the optional nature of pre- and post-assembly surveys and time constraints during PSHE lessons may have resulted in incomplete or uneven data. In particular, not all pupils answered every open-text question, and some year groups were underrepresented in post-assembly responses due to curriculum scheduling. This raises concerns about **non-response bias**. It is possible that those most impacted by the assembly or with stronger prior knowledge were more likely to respond fully, potentially skewing the findings toward more positive or articulate perspectives. Future evaluations should seek to ensure **consistent administration** and, where feasible, incentivise or embed response collection to improve completeness and reliability.

Further refinement of educational materials

The improvements observed in Phase 2 suggest that the revisions made to the assembly were meeting the key aims of enhancing understanding and confidence around defining stalking. However, there remains room for refinement. For example, while the new definition of stalking was simpler, it omitted reference to psychological intent (as previously captured by the FOUR acronym). Although this was an intentional decision to reduce the onus on the victim to make a judgement as to a person's intent or psychological state, future iterations should explore ways to reintroduce these concepts in the context of perpetration. Similarly, the balance between emotional engagement and procedural clarity could be improved. While pupils resonated with Alice's story and empathic actions increased, responses suggested persistent uncertainty about **how to take concrete action**, particularly when it comes to logging incidents or making formal reports.

Interpreting nuanced and ambiguous responses

The qualitative nature of much of the data, particularly open-text responses, presented both richness and complexity. Many pupils used vague or ambiguous language that required **subjective interpretation** by the research team. Furthermore, it was not possible to determine whether the under-representation of particular themes reflected a lack of understanding or was an artifact of the materials used. For example, pupils may have been aware of the need to log behaviour but focused on what they deemed to be the more important responses of telling someone or reporting the behaviour. While coding frameworks were developed to mitigate issues of subjective interpretation, there is a risk of misinterpretation or overgeneralisation, especially with culturally specific or colloquial language. This highlights a need for further methodological development: future research should consider **triangulating pupil data** with qualitative interviews, focus groups, or teacher observations to better contextualise responses and validate emerging themes.

Revisiting the FOUR acronym and the role of psychological framing

While the decision to remove the FOUR acronym from the definition was driven by concerns around accessibility and clarity for young people and placing the onus on the victim to define obsessive and fixated, it is worth reconsidering its role in future materials especially for use in the context of perpetration or in sessions with school personnel and facilitator training. Future research could also explore **tiered learning approaches**, which involve introducing simplified definitions during the early years and then progressively layering complexity (e.g., to include intent, psychological impact, and escalation dynamics) as pupils develop. Evaluating the effectiveness of such scaffolding on long-term retention and behavioural understanding would be a valuable contribution to the safeguarding education literature.

Need for replication and longitudinal evaluation

Finally, this evaluation, though encouraging, was limited to two implementation phases within a single academic year in a single region. To strengthen confidence in the findings, future research should aim to:

- **Replicate**. The evaluation needs to be replicated across a broader range of schools, regions, and age groups to test its generalisability.
- **Track outcomes longitudinally**. The evaluation needs to be extended to assess whether pupils retain key concepts and behavioural strategies weeks or months after the assembly.
- **Measure behavioural change**. It is important further extend the ART Assembly Project to measure behavioural change in addition to pupil's conceptual understanding, including disclosure rates, peer support behaviours, and uptake of safeguarding procedures.

Moreover, expanding the remit of the evaluation to include **staff perceptions and safeguarding lead experiences** could yield insights into how well pupils are applying their learning in real-life contexts.

Conclusion

The two-phase ART Assembly Project evaluation has offered valuable insights into the pedagogical effectiveness of a school-based assembly designed to raise awareness and understanding of stalking amongst young people. The **process evaluation** affirms that the ART Assembly Project is not only implementable but also well-received and impactful. Feedback from both school representatives and assembly facilitators has played a pivotal role in shaping the project's evolution, particularly between Phase 1 and Phase 2. Continued collaboration with stakeholders and a commitment to ongoing review will be key to sustaining and scaling this important educational initiative in the future.

The **outcome evaluation** suggests that when young people are presented with clear definitions, emotionally resonant stories and relatable scenarios they are not only getting better at identifying harmful and complex behaviours like stalking, but are also more inclined to consider the emotional impact on victims and the importance of seeking support. The shift in pupil responses, from vague discomfort or misunderstanding stalking in Phase 1 to more accurate, empathetic and action-oriented reflections in Phase 2, speaks to the importance of such interventions to shift understanding and behavioural intentions in a short timeframe.

It is important to acknowledge that challenges remain around response rates and the ongoing consideration of how best to scaffold psychological concepts (including those represented by the FOUR acronym), as well as the need to not just inform pupils about stalking but also equipping them with the confidence and clarity to act as potential victims, bystanders or peer supporters. Nevertheless, the marked improvements in both conceptual grasp and empathic responses following the revised Phase 2 assembly materials and delivery underscore the importance of intentional design, language accessibility and narrative engagement in safeguarding education.

Moving forward, future research should seek to replicate and extend this evaluation and the ART Assembly Project across diverse school contexts and consider the value of longitudinal approaches that would track learning and behavioural outcomes over time. Additionally, schools should consider embedding this content more deeply into the wider safeguarding curriculum, creating continuity between the assembly, PSHE lessons and school policies.

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