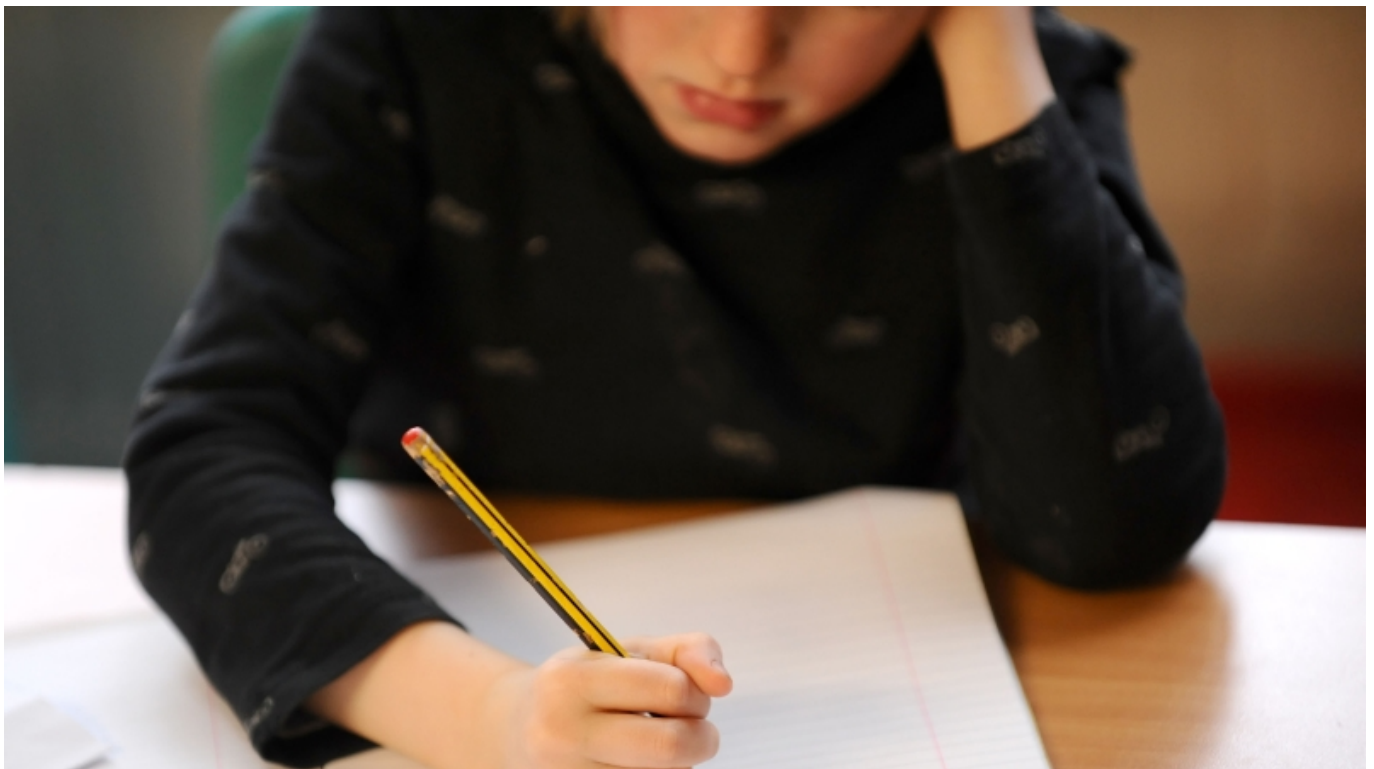


Preventing radicalisation in schools

Written by Alexandra Korn & Alexander Ritzmann on 9 March 2017 in Opinion Plus
Opinion Plus

We shouldn't forget the importance of empowering educators in the fight against radicalisation, argue Alexandra Korn and Alexander Ritzmann.



Prevention initiatives aimed at intervening at a very early stage can prevent youngsters from following the lure of extremist narratives | Photo credit: Press Association

In schools across the EU, teachers are increasingly facing challenges of integrating students from different cultural backgrounds. Discussions and disagreements linked to political events at home and overseas occasionally meld with broader patriarchal traditions in the classroom.

This interplay increasingly impacts on everyday school life and can jeopardise a pupil's learning success.

At the same time, issues such as the role of patriarchal traditions and conservative or extremist

interpretations of religion (especially Islamism and Salafism) in a 21st century liberal democracy, can be emotionally charged and quickly lead to a sense among educators of being overwhelmed.

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They wonder: How can I engage my students in a discussion about sensitive topics they care about, such as the war in Syria or the conflict between Israel and Palestine, without it escalating? How do I talk to a student who says they are not European or Belgian or German but Muslim only? How can I differentiate between a student simply challenging authority and someone flirting or even engaging with an extremist ideology?

In order to help teachers find answers to these questions, the European Foundation for Democracy and the Counter Extremism Project (CEP) have developed a Practitioner's Guide on Preventing Radicalisation in Schools for use in Germany. It tackles key challenges educators face daily in German school life and was created via a methodological bottom-up approach by teachers for teachers.

Following its official introduction and launch in Berlin at the end of March 2017, the guide will be available to download, free of charge. A similar guide with a focus on far-right ideologies and extremism is in the planning stages.

The aim of the publication is to contribute to a differentiated assessment of potentially concerning behaviour among pupils and to empower and equip educators with practical advice and knowledge on how to engage with their students individually, rather than ignoring apparent problematic cases or prematurely involving law enforcement and security authorities.

Based on interviews and workshops with teachers from all over Germany, the most frequent questions and challenges were identified, with practical options for specific actions presented.

In addition, the content is based on a review of existing literature and provides an overview of various advice centres in Germany, which teachers can approach for further information and facilitate access to help in case of emergency.

The guide has been produced for use by teachers in Germany; each member state needs a version to address national specificities. With a visible - and concerning - increase in all forms of extremism within European societies, supporting teachers and other educators to protect young people from being preyed upon by radicals and extremists does merit the support of the European Parliament and the EU institutions.

MEPs could support by persuading national governments and the European Commission to support the roll-out of the teachers' handbook across the EU.

While hard-edged security measures, such as police and intelligence investigations, are still the preferred means for implementing security policies in EU member states, it is important to realise that so called “soft” approaches can also produce concrete results.

Prevention initiatives like the teacher’s guide, aiming at intervening at a very early stage and on a community level, are not only much less expensive than security measures.

They can also prevent youngsters from following the lure of the extremists’ narratives in the first place.

About the author

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