

SAFE TO LEARN PROGRESS 2019-2023 - JAMAICA

Call to Action Benchmark Assessment

The Safe to Learn Call to Action is a global commitment to end violence in, around and through schools. It sets out a shared 5-point policy agenda for governments, civil society, development partners and the private sector: implement laws and policies, strengthen school-level prevention and response, promote behaviour change and shift harmful social and gender norms, invest resources effectively, and generate and use evidence.

The Call to Action is operationalised through a set of benchmarks, informed by international child rights frameworks, United Nations guidance and minimum standards, and good practice from the field of child safeguarding and child protection. The benchmarks provide guidance to implement the Call to Action, setting out the accountabilities of the education sector and providing a framework for measuring progress. By meeting these benchmarks, countries can systematically address violence as a barrier to learning and uphold children's rights to safety, protection and education.

This report reviews national progress against the Call to Action benchmarks for the period 2019 to 2023. The report was developed based on a desk review of national policies, plans and partner programme documents. Progress against each benchmark was then rated by the government, in coordination with the UNICEF Country Office. The assessment can be used by stakeholders to identify priorities for future action and to strengthen national efforts to create safe and enabling learning environments for all children.

Benchmark Met: Yes, In progress, Unable to assess, No.

Call to Action area 1: Implement laws and policies

Benchmark

Benchmark Met

1.1 The national government includes prevention of violence in and around schools as a specific strategy in education sector policies, plans and budgets.

Yes 

The [Vision 2030 Jamaica National Development Plan - Education Sector Plan](#) includes a specific outcome on safe schools under Goal 2 "World Class School Environment". This states that "school environments are safe, alcohol- and drug-free, and individuals there are disciplined without violence, and demonstrate respect for others and uphold equal rights."⁽¹⁾ Activities in the Vision 2030 Plan include "developing mechanisms that encourage teamwork and collaboration within the whole school family, expanding partnerships with relevant agencies to promote safety, increasing community involvement so they can work together to ensure students have a safe and secure environment."⁽²⁾

The Education Transformation Commission report (2021) also recognizes the importance of schools as safe spaces within their communities and makes specific recommendations to strengthen this role.

1.2 There is explicit prohibition of corporal punishment in schools, and policies are in place to support positive discipline and effective classroom management.

In progress 

Corporal punishment in schools is prohibited by Ministerial Bulletin but is still legal except in early childhood institutions. The government has expressed its commitment to eliminating corporal punishment in schools and instructed all public schools not to use it.⁽³⁾

In 2017, Prime Minister Andrew Holness announced plans to amend the Education Act to explicitly prohibit corporal punishment in schools.(4) The National Violence Prevention Commission, mandated to review existing public- and private-sector violence-prevention programmes, has recommended a total ban on corporal punishment. The relevant legislation was under review as of the end of 2023.

The School-Wide Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support (SWPBIS) Framework, implemented by the Ministry of Education and Youth, promotes positive discipline through a whole-school, systems-based approach. It helps schools build a supportive social culture and provide individualized behavioural support so that all students can achieve social and academic success. The Framework emphasizes preventing challenging behaviour, developing prosocial skills, and using data to address behavioural concerns. It uses a three-tiered model: Tier 1 provides universal prevention activities and strategies that build resilience, while Tiers 2 and 3 provide increasingly targeted interventions and psychological support. There are also 930 Guidance Counsellors within schools providing guidance sessions and developmental counselling to individuals.

1.3 The roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education in response and referral to incidents of violence are clearly set out in the multi-sectoral national child protection policy framework.

In progress 

The Ministry of Education and Youth is one of the four ministries responsible for child protection according to the National Plan of Action for an Integrated Response to Children and Violence 2018-23, along with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of National Security. The Ministry of Education has responsibility for multi-sector coordination for the implementation of the Plan.(5)

The Jamaica Safe School Policy advocates for a zero-tolerance approach to violence in schools and provides training and materials, including the "Security and Safety Policy Guidelines."(6)

1.4 The country has endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and in situations of armed conflict is implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

Yes 

Jamaica endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration in May 2015.(7)

Call to Action area 2: Strengthen prevention and response in education systems and schools

Benchmark

Benchmark Met

2.1 Key violence prevention strategies are embedded in curriculum-based activities for children.

In progress 

The country has been implementing the SWPBIS initiative focusing on positive behaviour to reduce violence in schools since 2015 (see 1.2). SWPBIS aims to foster the development of prosocial skills and problem-solving techniques while advocating for non-violent and positive discipline methods. Its primary goal is to diminish violence and misconduct within schools.(8) It operates through three tiers of action, implementing school/classroom-wide strategies that benefit all students, as well as targeted activities designed for smaller groups of students requiring more personalized support. Over 500 primary and secondary schools were implementing SWPBIS as of the end of 2023.

The non-governmental organization Peace and Love in Society (PALS) has worked for many years to equip school administrators and students with conflict-resolution skills. Teachers are trained in close collaboration with school administrators and board members. These skills have been integrated into a comprehensive peace education curriculum and are reinforced through the annual celebration of National Peace Day.⁽⁹⁾

The Irie Classroom Toolbox is an evidence-based, school-based violence-prevention programme that trains early childhood teachers to use positive behaviour-management strategies, reduce harsh discipline, and strengthen children's social and emotional skills. Practitioners across 30 per cent of all early childhood institutions have completed the Irie Classroom Toolbox training.

At the primary and secondary levels, the national Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) curriculum includes content on personal safety and non-violent conflict resolution. Through the Spotlight Initiative, additional curriculum materials were developed on gender-based violence, including school-related gender-based violence, with a focus on supporting children with disabilities. The Initiative also supported the development of Leadership for Safer Schools (LSS), a four-module programme administered by the National College for Educational Leadership (NCEL) and targeting at least 30 school leaders each year. The Spotlight Initiative was implemented by the Government of Jamaica, with funding from the EU and UNICEF support.

The Ministry of Justice conducts ongoing training in Restorative Justice for school personnel, with over 1,200 workshops held in 2023.

2.2 Child safeguarding principles and procedures are in place in schools, inclusive of codes of conduct, and safe recruitment standards.

In progress 

The Child Care and Protection Act (2004), under review, sets out the legal responsibilities of duty, including for teachers.

There has been training of coaches and physical education teachers in safeguarding using the 'Fair Play: A Coaching Manual - Child Protection in Youth Sports Programmes,' including how to report and record all child protection concerns. There is a plan to scale this training up nationally and make it a requirement for all sports coaches.

2.3 Each school has at least one focal point who is capacitated to provide front-line mental health/psychosocial support to children experiencing violence.

In progress 

The Guidance and Counselling Unit of the Ministry of Education and Youth and the Ministry of Health and Wellness, with support from UNICEF, established a tele-mental health referral system during the COVID-19 pandemic. This enabled referrals of children within the SWPBIS framework to the 20 child guidance clinics across the island. As of 2020, over 800 families had benefited from this service, and the teletherapy system was set to become an integral part of the formal SWPBIS structure.⁽¹⁰⁾

In 2023, 40 mastertrainers completed Psychological First Aid (PFA) training to help guide the training of over 120 Communities of Care (COC) members in 2024. These trainings are part of a teacher professional development system that supports schools island-wide. The goal is to create at least one COC team per constituency to support Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)-based interventions. The COC members have completed police record checks and represent various stakeholders, including pastors, the National Council on Drug Abuse, the Victim Support Unit, the Jamaica Constabulary Force, the Guidance Counseling Unit, and retired guidance counselors. PFA resource kits have been curated for each education region.

Mental Health Literacy has now been included in Grade 9 content. This allows for the early identification of mental health challenges that can affect access to quality education on a consistent basis. Educators provide appropriate guidance and support for individuals and act as a liaison for interventions and wraparound services.

The Ministry of Education and Youth collaborated with the Ministry of Health and Wellness in training 500 school personnel in Mental Health Literacy (Guidance counsellors, Health and Family Life Education Teachers and School Nurses).

As of the end of 2023, 600 teachers had completed the PFA-focused Return to Happiness course offered online by the Jamaica Teaching Council and 31 school leaders had completed the online, asynchronous, free-to-access Leadership for Safer Schools Programme offered by the National Council on Education Leadership.

UNICEF also established a free U-Matter [counselling chatline](#) in 2022, which has delivered over 2,000 sessions. U-Matter was taken over by the Ministry of Health and Wellness by the end of 2024 and has been identified as a model for other countries in the region.

2.4 The physical environment in and around schools is safe and designed with the well-being of children in mind.

In progress 

There is a national inspection system in place from early childhood through to secondary education that includes safety issues as a core data set. Schools can access their reports from the Early Childhood Commission and the National Education Inspectorate. There is also a national Safe Schools Policy being finalized with UNICEF support.

Call to Action area 3: Shift social and gender norms and promote behaviour change

Benchmark

Benchmark Met

3.1 There is wide dissemination and engagement with stakeholders to build knowledge and appreciation of child rights and laws prohibiting violence.

In progress 

The annual Caribbean Child Rights Conference, hosted by a different Caribbean country each year, provides a regional platform for meaningful youth engagement.

The Spotlight Initiative has supported the production and screening of short videos in schools and communities based on survivors' experiences of gender-based violence, addressing intimate partner violence, child sexual abuse, domestic violence and discrimination against vulnerable groups.

The Initiative has also strengthened the SWPBIS framework by expanding access to continuing professional development through the National College for Educational Leadership. Training built the capacity of teachers and school leaders to prevent, mitigate and respond to school-based violence, including school-related gender-based violence, and to promote respect for girls and women. SWPBIS is now implemented in more than 500 primary and secondary schools - approximately half of all such schools nationwide.

3.2 Specific, evidence-informed interventions are researched and implemented, addressing social norms that drive key forms of violence and/or helping children manage risks.

In progress 

Jamaica is implementing the [National Plan of Action](#) on Children and Violence built on the INSPIRE Framework (WHO, 2016), which, along with the work of the National Commission on Violence Prevention, informs policy and practice in government ministries and agencies. An example is the National Child Diversion Programme managed by the Child Protection and Family Services Agency (CPFSA).

3.3 Young people, parents, teachers, and community members in and around schools are engaged and active on school violence.

In progress 

The Irie Classroom Toolbox(11), SWPBIS and HFLE deliver school-based strategies that benefit all students. Complementing these initiatives, the four-module Leadership for Safer Schools online training programme strengthens school leaders' capacity to create safer learning environments. This was developed through the Spotlight Initiative in 2021/22, in collaboration with the National College for Educational Leadership. In 2023, the first cohort of 31 school leaders completed the programme(12).

Call to Action area 4: Invest resources effectively

Benchmark

Benchmark Met

4.1 Domestic resources allocated to support interventions and capacity building activities to prevent and respond to violence in schools.

In progress 

The Government of Jamaica demonstrates its commitment of domestic resources by funding dedicated Safe Schools and Guidance and Counselling Units within the Ministry of Education and Youth. A significant share of both units' work supports the prevention, mitigation and reduction of school-based violence, providing sustained national capacity beyond externally funded initiatives.

The Government of Jamaica, with World Bank and UNICEF support, undertook an Education Public Expenditure Review (PER) to analyze the adequacy, efficiency and equity of public spending on education using spending data from 2018-2019. No mention is made of the allocation of funds to end violence in schools.

4.2 Development partners provide resources targeting national or subnational level to end violence in schools, investing in effective approaches.

Yes 

As of the end of 2023, development partners supporting efforts to end violence against children included the Inter-American Children's Institute of the Organization of American States (IIN-OAS), UNFPA, UNDP, UNESCO, IOM, ILO, USAID and UNICEF.

The Jamaica Public Expenditure Review notes that, between 2018 and 2020, USAID funded the Partnership for Improved Safety and Security in Schools.(13),(14)

UNICEF has supported the Government of Jamaica to strengthen the prevention of, response to and mitigation of violence against children through a range of complementary initiatives: SWPBIS; the Irie Classroom Toolbox framework; the Safe Schools Policy; the Jamaica Teaching Council-led Return to Happiness course; the NCEL Leadership for Safer Schools programme; and the aligned Child-Friendly Schools programme.(15)

4.3 There is private sector engagement in the provision of financial and non-financial resources including technical support, expertise and advocacy towards ending violence in schools.

In progress 

Launched in 2023, Project STAR, a social and economic development initiative in Jamaica, is funded by a consortium of companies.

Generate and use evidence

Benchmark

Benchmark Met

5.1 Information and reporting of incidents allow for disaggregated baseline information and monitoring of trends and that reflect needs and gaps in the system.

In progress 

A national Education Monitoring Information System (EMIS) was piloted in 2023. The EMIS behaviour component enables schools to record behavioural incidents and concerns, identify patterns requiring early intervention, and alert guidance counsellors where follow-up support may be needed. This is intended to inform evidence-based decision-making at the national and school level. The EMIS is being scaled up nationwide with support from multiple partners, including UNICEF, UNESCO, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the World Bank, and is expected to be operational in all schools within three to four years.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness provides some disaggregated data on violence against children. The National Plan of Action for an Integrated Response to Children and Violence 2018-23 identifies School Violence-Related Injuries by gender from 2013 to 2016. The data is derived from violence-related injuries reported at public hospitals in Jamaica, providing gender-disaggregated information on incidents of physical violence experienced by children at school and reported at the hospital level.

5.2 There is regular data collection on prevalence and forms of violence in schools using methods that follow high ethical standards.

In progress 

Two key national data sources are the 2022 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 6) and the 2022–2023 Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (VACS). The VACS was led by the Planning Institute of Jamaica, with support from UNICEF and the Center for Disease Control.⁽¹⁶⁾⁽¹⁷⁾

U-Report polls have periodically been held on violence against children (VAC) issues, with an average response rate of about 1,000. One example is a poll on Corporal Punishment.

5.3 Decisions on replication and scale-up of violence prevention initiatives are based on evaluations of trialled models and approaches.

In progress 

The evaluation of the SWPBIS pilot, conducted in 2020, served as the foundation for the initiative's scale-up plan. This included updating the Safe Schools Policy and associated training. This has now been adopted by the Ministry of Education and Youth as a flagship intervention for student support.

Acknowledgments

This publication is a joint effort by Safe to Learn and UNICEF. Grateful appreciation is extended to the Government of Jamaica for its valuable collaboration. The progress review was conducted by Catherine Flagthier, Safe to Learn Programme Specialist and lead author. Special thanks to Zoya Maaez, Safe to Learn Intern, for her in-depth contributions to the initial analysis and drafting.

For further information, please contact Gemma Wilson-Clark, Head of Safe to Learn Secretariat, gwilsonclark@unicef.org

This report was published in September 2026.

Notes and References

1. Government of Jamaica, *Public Expenditure Review of the Education Sector in Jamaica (2021)*, 6.
2. Government of Jamaica, *Jamaica Vision 2030: Education Sector Plan*, https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/jamaica_vision_2030_education_sector_plan.pdf
3. *Corporal Punishment of Children in Jamaica (August 2022)*.
4. Government of Jamaica, *National Plan of Action for an Integrated Response to Children and Violence (NPACV) 2018–2023* (Kingston, Jamaica: Government of Jamaica, January 2018), 12.
5. Government of Jamaica, *National Plan of Action for an Integrated Response to Children and Violence (NPACV) 2018–2023* (Kingston, Jamaica: Government of Jamaica, January 2018).
6. UNICEF, *Reducing Violence Against Children: A Multi-Country Evaluation of UNICEF-Led Interventions in the Latin America and Caribbean Region: Evaluation Report—Jamaica*.
7. Government of Norway, “Safe Schools Declaration,” https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/foreign-affairs/developmentcooperation/safeschools_declaration/id2460245/
8. UNICEF, *Action to End VAC in Schools: Review of Programme Interventions Illustrating Actions to Address Violence Against Children in and around Schools, 2018–2020*.
9. Fayval Williams, “What Jamaica Is Doing to End Violence in Schools: A Pathfinder Country in the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children,” March 18, 2021.

10. UNICEF, *Action to End VAC in Schools: Review of Programme Interventions Illustrating Actions to Address Violence Against Children in and around Schools, 2018–2020*.
11. UNICEF, *Action to End VAC in Schools: Review of Programme Interventions Illustrating Actions to Address Violence Against Children in and around Schools, 2018–2020*.
12. UNICEF, *Action to End VAC in Schools: Review of Programme Interventions Illustrating Actions to Address Violence Against Children in and around Schools, 2018–2020*.
13. UNICEF, *Public Expenditure Review of the Education Sector in Jamaica*,
<https://www.unicef.org/jamaica/media/3541/file/Public%20Expenditure%20Review%20of%20the%20Education%20Sector%20in%20Jamaica.pdf>
14. UNICEF, *Action to End VAC in Schools: Review of Programme Interventions Illustrating Actions to Address Violence Against Children in and around Schools, 2018–2020*.
15. *Evaluation of the School-Wide Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support (SWPBIS) Framework in Jamaica: Summary Presentation (August 2020)*.
16. Together for Girls, “Jamaica,” accessed October 2023,
<https://www.togetherforgirls.org/en/countries/jamaica>
17. UNICEF, “Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS),” October 2023, <https://mics.unicef.org/surveys>