

Working Group on School Security

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Report of the Working Group on School Security

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The Group's Report

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1. The group was established by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment following the fatal stabbing of London headteacher, Philip Lawrence, in December 1995. It worked to the following terms of reference:

“To identify good practice in maintaining and improving security in and around schools, including effective ways of handling incidents, to advise on dissemination, and to make recommendations. Consideration will include the role of relevant external agencies, ways of involving parents and the local community, and the effectiveness of current legislation.”

2. The Group was originally asked to report to the Secretary of State by Easter 1996. It met on three occasions between January and March and was in the process of finalising its report when, on 13 March, the horrific killing at Dunblane Primary School occurred. Members requested, and the Secretary of State readily agreed, that the Group should meet again to consider further its report in the light of that tragic event. It was fully recognised that the details of the incident and its circumstances were matters for the separate public inquiry under Lord Cullen announced by the Secretary

of State for Scotland on 21 March. The further meeting of the Working Group took place in early April.

3. For the Group, the Dunblane tragedy starkly reinforced the dilemma faced by schools and their local communities. On the one hand, schools want to be open and welcoming places – for pupils, parents and the local community. On the other, staff and pupils must be able to work and learn in a safe and secure environment.

4. The Group recognised that there are limits to what could be done in terms of securing school premises to prevent something as extreme as had occurred in Dunblane, and it was possible to over-react to one aberrant event, however horrific. But the Group believed strongly that there were ways of maintaining reasonable security without turning schools into fortresses. The precise balance was ultimately a matter for each individual school to decide, in the light of its own circumstances and those of the surrounding community, the views of parents and advice from the local police, the local education authority, and others. The Group's recommendations are primarily designed to support schools and their communities in reviewing and improving the security, but it was very aware that it could not provide a blueprint for guaranteeing security in schools.

5. Throughout its deliberations the Group gave prominence to the fact that ensuring the safety of staff and pupils, and the security of school premises, required a partnership of effort. There were limits to what schools could achieve on their own. For action to be effective, schools needed the support and active co-operation of parents, the local community, the police, local authorities and other relevant agencies. Where the key partners worked positively together, effective progress could be made against activity which threatened personal safety in schools or disrupted school life.

6. Against the above background, the Group's consideration of the relevant issues is reported under the following headings:

- i the effectiveness of existing law and its enforcement, including the need for guidance;
- ii the extent of other existing and planned

guidance on personal safety and the security of school premises, and the dissemination of guidance;

- iii the need for risk assessments and security reviews;
- iv funding;
- v the role of school governors;
- vi training for teachers and school support staff;
- vii national dissemination and discussion;
- viii the wider context.

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Existing powers

7. The Group noted the range of existing powers available to the police and the criminal justice system to deal with trouble-makers in and around schools. The police could of course take action to deal with criminal acts committed on school premises as elsewhere. In addition, the Group noted in particular:

- i. section 5 of the 1986 Public Order Act, which makes it an offence to use threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, or to display any writing, sign or other visible representation which is threatening, abusive or insulting, within the hearing or sight of a person likely to be caused harassment, alarm or distress thereby. A person who ignores a warning to stop such offensive conduct can be arrested. The offence carries a maximum penalty of a level 3 fine (currently up to £1,000). This law was introduced to deal with non-violent disorderly behaviour and can be used to deal with such behaviour in and around schools;

ii. section 40 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, which makes it an offence for a person to cause or permit a disturbance on the premises of a maintained school, including schoplaygol rounds and playing fields. The offence is covered by a level 2 fine (currently up to £500). Section 40 also provides for the police, or a person authorised by the local education authority (or by the governing body in respect of voluntarily aided, special agreement or grant-maintained schools) to remove from the premises anybody committing such an offence;

iii. section 8 of the Criminal Law Act 1977, which makes it an offence for a person who is on any premises as a trespasser, after having entered as such, to have with him or her, without lawful or reasonable excuse, any offensive weapon. The police may arrest anyone who is, or whom a policeman with reasonable cause suspects to be, in the act of committing this offence. It carries a maximum penalty of 3 months imprisonment and/or a level 5 fine (up to £5,000).

Offensive weapons

8. The Group noted that certain other parts of the criminal law relating to the carrying of knives and other offensive weapons, and to police powers of search for such articles, applied only to public places. While school buses on the public highway were normally considered as such, schools themselves did not normally count as public places for most of the time and were therefore excluded from these provisions. The Group considered that this situation was no longer tenable and that relevant parts of the criminal law on knives and offensive weapons should be applied explicitly to school premises, but without reclassifying schools as public places.

Recommendation 1

The Government should take the opportunity provided by the Offensive Weapons Bill to make it an offence to carry a knife or other offensive weapon on school premises, along the lines of

section 1 of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 (which makes it an offence to carry an offensive weapon in a public place without lawful authority or reasonable excuse) and of section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (which makes it an offence to carry a bladed or sharply pointed article, other than a folding pocket knife with a blade or three inches or less, in a public place). This new offence should apply to both maintained and independent schools. 'School premises' should include school playground and playing fields.

Recommendation 2

The Government should extend police powers of search in respect of knives and offensive weapons to school premises, including playgrounds and playing fields, at both maintained and independent schools, and should issue guidance on the sensitive use of such powers.

9. The Group considered whether the exercise of these powers of search should be made subject to the prior consent of the headteacher or governors of the school. It concluded that it would be good practice for the police to take all reasonable steps to gain such consent but that, to avoid possible practical problems, there should be no statutory requirement for prior consultation with the headteacher or governors. The need for sensitivity in the use of police powers of search would be best covered in guidance.

10. The Group was also concerned about firearms control, particularly in the light of the Dunblane killings. It wished to add its voice to those who had called for a review of existing controls. It therefore welcomed the Secretary of State for Scotland's statement, in announcing the Cullen inquiry, that "work will be carried forward within Government to review relevant aspects of firearms legislation.... so that we will be in a position to respond promptly to recommendations from the inquiry".

Enforcement and local liaison

11. Despite existing laws, there was a feeling among

schools that the police and the criminal justice system could not always provide schools with sufficient protection from trouble-makers. The most common problems faced by schools concerned general nuisance, disturbance, abusive behaviour and vandalism by young people in and around school grounds. Such activity could quickly lead to a general atmosphere which made a more serious incident more likely. Schools needed to be confident that the police and the criminal justice system could deal effectively with these problems. This meant not only the ability to remove offenders from school grounds and to stop the particular offence, but also effective sanctions to act as a deterrent and prevent reoccurrence. It was not clear whether the solution lay in further changes to the law (for example, strengthening section 40 of the local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982), or in the more effective enforcement of the existing law, or both.

12. There was, in any event, significant anecdotal evidence that the extent and nature of existing powers were not sufficiently well known and that local practice in the exercise of these powers varied. There was therefore a strong case for central guidance.

Recommendation 3

The Government should arrange for guidance to be made available to schools, the police, local authorities, the local Crown Prosecution Service, local magistrates and other relevant agencies. Such guidance should seek to ensure that all involved give high priority to school security. It should, among other things:

- i. describe the range of existing powers available to the police and the criminal justice system to deal with trouble-makers in and around schools (including on school transport);
- ii. cover any new powers introduced as a result of Recommendations 1 and 2 above, including the need for close school-police liaison to ensure the sensitive

use of police powers of search;

iii. give examples of good local practice, including examples of how the police and schools can work effectively together and of wider multi-agency approaches, including the involvement of parents and the local community

iv. be endorsed nationally by all the relevant bodies so that the guidance carries the necessary authority locally.

The Government should establish a small project steering group, including representatives of the main interest groups, to oversee the production of this guidance.

13. The Group believed that the experience of producing and consulting upon this guidance would give a clearer indication of the extent to which the effective tackling of the problems identified above also required the further strengthening of the law.

Recommendation 4

In parallel with producing guidance, the Government should also review – with schools, the police and others – whether there is a need to further strengthen the law, giving particular attention to section 40 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provision) Act 1982, which was widely perceived to need strengthening or more religious enforcement or both.

GUIDANCE ON PERSONAL SAFETY AND THE SECURITY OF PREMISES

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14. The Group considered that, while a lot of other guidance existed or was planned on matters related to school

security, there was a need for a fresh push to bring what was available to the attention of those with an interest. In addition to guidance on the law, its enforcement and local liaison (Recommendation 3 above), the key needs were for practical advice on ensuring the personal safety of staff and pupils, and on the security of school premises.

Personal safety

15. The Group noted the large amount of existing or planned guidance, including:

- i. publications from the Education Service Advisory Committee of the Health and Safety Commission. These give guidance on the requirements of health and safety legislation, in particular how to manage health and safety in schools, the legal responsibilities of school governors, and how to manage the risk of violence to staff. The Group welcomed the fact that the publications on school governors and on violence to staff were to be updated in the coming year;
- ii. the work of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, including the comprehensive guide to personal safety for education staff to be published later in the year, and resource packs for use with primary and secondary pupils.
- iii. guidance from the Home Office, local police forces, and teacher and support staff unions;
- vi. guidance from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

16. The Group also welcomed the fact that the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and the Scarman Centre for the Study of Public Order at the University of Leicester were considering research into personal safety in education, the aims of which would be:

to assess the risks (including the number and type of recorded incidents); and

to evaluate the strategies used to deal with these risks, including the training offered, and to identify best practice.

17. The Group felt that this research would be potentially valuable and should be supported by the Government.

Recommendation 5

The Government should support the research proposed by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and the Scarman Centre for the Study of Public Order at the University of Leicester into various aspects of personal safety in education.

Security of School Premises

18. A key activity of the Group was to consider in detail drafts of further DfES guidance on how to improve the security of school premises, aimed mainly at headteachers and governors.

Recommendation 6

The Department for Education and Employment should publish its guidance on improving the security of school premises, after taking account of the Group's comments, including comments on the need to highlight the important roles of governors, support staff and parents.

19. The Group believed that, as well as improving the security of existing school premises, it was important that the need for good security should be fully taken into account when designing both new school buildings and significant alterations to existing buildings. The Group welcomed the fact that the DfES's 1987 guidance on this (Building Bulletin 67- 'Crime Prevention in Schools') was due to be replaced in the coming year.

Recommendation 7

The Department for Education and Employment's forthcoming guidance on how to improve security through the design and planning of schools should include a strong message about the priority to be given to security in designing both

new school buildings and significant alterations to existing buildings.

20. These two publications would complement the range of existing DfES guidance covering more specific items such as the use of intruder alarms, closed circuit television and security lighting. Other guidance was also available from local police forces, local authorities, and teacher and support staff unions.

Dissemination

21. The Group considered that the existence and availability of guidance should be further disseminated to schools.

Recommendation 8

Existing and forthcoming guidance on school security should be publicised by means of a Department for Education and Employment leaflet for schools which should include a ready reference on sources of information and support on different aspects of school security. The leaflet should be periodically updated.

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22. The Group considered whether it should go beyond guidance and recommend the implementation of particular security measures for all schools, such as perimeter fencing, single entry points and 'panic button' systems. It concluded the circumstances of individual schools varied to such an extent that what would constitute the most effective security measures could only realistically be decided at school level. The requirement therefore was not for centrally prescribed solutions but rather for individual schools to make a realistic assessment of likely risks, review their existing security in the light of those risks, and implement any improvements appropriate to their particular circumstances, drawing on the support of their local education authority where necessary. Many schools already did this. The DfES document referred to in Recommendation 6 would provide guidance on one way of approaching the task. The Group felt that, particularly in

view of Dunblane tragedy, particular attention should be given to the effective and practical control of access to schools.

Recommendation 9

Schools should continue to review their security, drawing on published guidance from the Department for Education and Employment and others, on the views of parents and on advice from the local police and the local education authority (in the case of LEA maintained schools). Particular attention should be given to the effective and practical control of access.

23. A particular aspect of controlling access which concerned the Group related to public rights of way through school grounds. The Group recognised that there were statutory procedures laid down for the consideration of changes to rights of way, not least to allow the full range of views of local people to be taken into account. The Group hoped that, within these procedures, local authorities would consider seeking to change an existing (or proposed) right of way if a school identified this as a significant security risk.

Recommendation 10

If as a result of a security review, a school should identify a public right of way through its grounds as a significant security risk, the relevant local authority should consider seeking to change the right of way so as to eliminate or at least reduce that risk.

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24. The Group considered that the availability of sufficient funding to enable schools to enhance their security arrangements where necessary was a major issue. There would always be competing priorities for funds but creating a reasonably secure environment should be a key aim for every school. There were a number of existing funding channels, but by their nature none of these could ensure that significant priority would be given to security improvements in schools as against other national and local pressures. The Group

concluded that there should be real additional funds made available to ensure that security priorities could be addressed without further squeezing school budgets or such close targeting that only very particular localities would be covered. The following paragraphs set out the Group's thinking on this more fully.

25. The main existing sources of funding were:

- i. for country and voluntary controlled schools, the LEA's capital formula allocation for improvement/replacement work;
- ii. for voluntary aided schools, the minor works programme and the voluntary rationing scheme;
- iii. for grant-maintained schools, their capital formula allocation from the Funding Agency for Schools;
- vi. LEAs' and schools' general revenue funds.

26. The Group noted that the bulk of central Government capital funding for improvement and refurbishment at LEA and voluntary aided schools would be made available through the 'Schools Renewal Challenge Fund' in 1996-87. Bids may be made to this Fund for money to improve the security of school buildings, including as an integral part of a bid for larger-scale new building work or alterations. The draft criteria for bids, issued for consultation at the end of February, included the statement that "projects which include measures to improve the security of school premises will be especially welcome".

27. This however, was no guarantee that such projects would be funded given that they would be competing against other capital bids. The Group believed, therefore, that there was a need for the stimulus of new central Government money specifically earmarked for school security, to ensure security received the attention it warranted at local level. Some schools already had more safeguards in place than others and measures needed to be proportional to likely risks. Improvements, where necessary, across the country would take time to deliver; but that was all the more reason why the earliest opportunity should be taken to plan and implement a

new specific grant programme.

28. The Group noted that the 1990-91 Education Support Grant programme, which had supported expenditure of some 2m on the installation of security systems in targeted areas, had proved effective and had resulted in significant reductions in break-ins and vandalism. The Group believed that the successor to ESGs – Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) – provided a good mechanism for getting earmarked grant to LEAs and their schools for such purposes.

29. It felt that LEAs could play an important role in ordering priorities as part of a rolling programme which, over time, should help fund improvements. The security reviews recommended in paragraph 22 above would make an important contribution to sensible planning and should inform applications for grant. Subject to that, the objective should be that every LEA received an allocation, weighted according to the number of schools/pupils and possibly other measures of the likely level of need. A significantly larger GEST programme than the ESG programme in 1990-91 would be needed over a number of years to enable real progress to be made towards a general enhancement of security across schools. Parallel arrangements would need to be implemented for grant-maintained schools.

Recommendation 11

The Government should take the earliest possible opportunity to make available, through an addition to the Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) programme, substantial new money specifically earmarked for the improvement of school security. Every LEA should receive a grant allocation, subject to schools reviewing the security and the outcome being used to allocate money initially where improvements are most urgently needed. The Government should weight the grant allocations largely according to the number of the LEA's school/pupils and relevant risk factors. Parallel arrangements should be implemented for grant-maintained schools.

30. The Group also noted that schools could bid for funds

from the Home Office's £15m CCTV Challenge Competition for 1996-97. The Group was however concerned that, on past experience of this scheme, there would be very few successful bids involving schools.

Recommendation 12

In considering bids to its CCTV Challenge Competition, the Home Office should give every possible priority to soundly-based bids involving schools and should if necessary consider increasing the total amount of money available to the scheme in order to fund such bids.

31. The Group put forward its funding recommendations on the basis that they would be implemented in such a way as to ensure that the security needs of all schools would be adequately met. The key point was that, whatever precise funding mechanism were used, there should be sufficient new money to meet those needs.

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32. The Group considered that governors had a vital role to play in ensuring, and as necessary improving, the security of their school, working closely with the headteacher and with the local education authority (in the case of LEA maintained schools). Governors already had statutory duties under health and safety legislation, even where the main statutory responsibility lay with the LEA as employer. The Group felt that the role of governors should be further highlighted.

Recommendation 13

The Government should consult on the possibility of adding school security to the list of items on which governors must report annually to parents. In the case of LEA maintained schools the report should also include action taken by and with the LEA to ensure the schools security.

33. The Group also felt that governors needed more help in fulfilling their responsibilities.

Recommendation 14

Local education authorities should ensure that the governors of LEA maintained schools receive the necessary guidance, support and training to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities for ensuring the security of their school.

Recommendation 15

LEAs should also seek, and school governors should provide, sufficient feedback on security to enable LEAs to fulfil the health and safety responsibilities, including the production of a written assessment of risks to health and safety.

Recommendation 16

The forthcoming Department for Education and Employment guidance on the security of school premises should include guidance on the role of governors.

Recommendation 17

In updating their guidance document, 'The responsibilities of school governors for health and safety', the Education Service Advisory Committee of the Health and Safety Commission should consider including guidance on how governors' responsibilities for health and safety relate to their responsibilities for school security.

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34. The Group noted that:
- i. all initial teacher training courses must cover the maintenance of discipline and management of pupil behaviour;
 - ii. these elements would also be covered by the Teacher Training Agency in taking forward work on their national priorities for the continuing professional development of teachers, and would be an important component of the new National

Professional Qualification for Headteachers;

iii. training in the management of pupil behaviour could be funded from the Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) truancy and disaffected pupils programme, and from Special Purpose Grants (Development) in respect of grant-maintained schools;

vi. advice on training related to security and personal safety was available from various organisations, including local authorities, the police, the Health and Safety Executive and Suzy Lamplugh Trust.

35. The Group felt that, in addition to the above, more emphasis on training in wider pastoral care might well result in improved pupil behaviour and thereby reduce the risks of violence by pupils.

Recommendation 18

In developing criteria for teacher training at key points in the profession, as part of its continuing professional development initiative, the Teacher Training Agency should give due attention to the importance of training in pastoral care and its implications for pupil behaviour.

36. It would also be helpful for the Teacher Training Agency to draw attention to the desirability of schools and LEAs providing teachers with opportunities for training in personal safety.

Recommendation 19

The Teacher Training Agency should also give due attention to the importance of training in personal safety.

37. The Group recognised that support staff were often in front line when it came to dealing with problems of security, safety and discipline. They also should be given opportunities for training.

Recommendation 20

Schools and local education authorities should ensure that support staff, as well as teachers, receive appropriate training.

NATIONAL DISSEMINATION AND DISCUSSION

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38. The Group considered that the issues it had discussed, and progress on the further work it had identified, should be shared more widely in a national forum.

Recommendation 21

The Government should call a national conference on school security, to include representatives from Government departments (including DfES and the Home Office), schools, teacher organisations, school support staff unions, the police, local authorities, governors, parents, the Health and Safety Executive and others with expertise in security and personal safety. The main purpose of the conference should be to identify and share good practice.

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39. In the limited time available, the Group had necessarily concentrated on practical issues most directly and immediately relevant to school security. It believed that there was further work to do on other wider aspects of ensuring the safe, orderly and productive operations of schools, not least in considering issues of pupil discipline and behaviour. It recognised that there would be other contacts and meeting on these matters but thought that the Group, or a group with similar composition, could helpfully consider developments at appropriate points. It could also review progress on the recommendations in this report.

Recommendation 22

All or some of the interests represented on the Group should be brought together at appropriate points to consider such issues as arrangements

for dealing with disruptive and disturbed pupils, violence by pupils on staff, the exclusion framework, the effectiveness of provision for pupils out of school, and the security vetting of regular visitors to schools (for example, volunteers), as well as progress on the recommendation in this report.

40. The Group also took the view that important trends in society more generally, including the breakdown of family networks and the apparent erosion of moral values, had a significant impact on safety, security and discipline. The Group did not feel that its remit extended into these areas, but the interests represented on the Group stood ready to assist in any wider consideration of such issues.

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