

CHAPTER

8

**PROJECTS FOR SAFER SCHOOLS IN
THE UNITED KINGDOM**

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Abstract: In the United Kingdom, the government has been increasing capital investment in schools in an effort to raise the quality of the learning environment and thus improve educational standards. Projects such as the Safe Schools Initiative and Classrooms of the Future are ensuring that adequate returns are being made on this investment by helping to create safe and innovative schools.

Safe Schools Initiative

Objective

The Safe Schools Initiative (www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolsecurity), which is administered by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in co-operation with the Home Office's Police Scientific Development Branch (PSDB), aims to investigate the benefits of an integrated technology approach to reducing crime using two case study schools. These case studies and the Crime Reduction Toolkit will be used as a model by other schools, and may help reduce the cost and fear of crime in and around schools. The technologies used in the study were selected to address the specific security problems identified in the two schools. These technologies are:

- Access control systems, which prevent unauthorised access to buildings, thus protecting pupils and staff from abuse or assault.
- Closed-circuit television (CCTV), which can monitor inside and outside buildings, alerting staff to intruders and protecting property. Recordings from CCTV can also be used as evidence in assault cases.
- Radio frequency identification (RFID) tagging technology, which enables all property to be tracked, aiding the location and identification of stolen property.
- Biometric sensors, which are capable of uniquely identifying individuals, thus controlling access to key assets or areas, such as computer facilities.

School selection

Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were asked to propose schools to participate in the case study. A shortlist of seven schools was drawn up, and each of these schools was visited by a survey team of specialists from the PSDB and DfES and an independent insurance surveyor. Wylde Green Primary School, near Birmingham, and Eastbourne Comprehensive School, a secondary school in Darlington, were selected.

First, a detailed risk assessment was undertaken at each site, and fear of crime surveys were conducted in the schools and surrounding communities. A spatial analysis of each school site was also carried out to identify the location of incidents. The analysis highlighted a problem that is common in many schools: the recording of incidents tends to be sporadic and inconsistent, and many incidents are not officially reported. This occurs for a number of reasons. First, the school often takes independent action, without calling the police or fire brigade, especially when the incident is not covered by insurance. Second, anecdotal evidence suggests that schools are reluctant to report incidents for fear of damaging

the reputation of the school or worrying parents. Third, terminology for incidents to be reported is unclear; for example, it is difficult to distinguish between vandalism and criminal damage, and between threatening behaviour and assault. To address this problem, the PSDB has created a database template to standardise incident reporting. Both schools used this template, which could have more widespread application.

Wylde Green Primary School

Wylde Green Primary School is located in a residential area of Sutton Coldfield, a suburb of Birmingham. Students are generally well-behaved and easy to control. The school is fenced – although fencing is mainly low level – and external areas are clearly identified as closed to the public. However, older children and young adults often enter the site outside of school hours to socialise in small groups, to hold parties and to skateboard. Recently, the school discovered that it is named on a skateboarder's Web site as a good skateboarding venue. As a result, there is much damage to school property, and play areas must be checked for broken glass and discarded needles before students can play outside. Local residents are also disturbed.

Constructing a 1.8 m to 2.4 m fence, using a mixture of rounded-steel bars and welded mesh, was one of the first security measures proposed at the school. The colour of the fence was decided by the school. Defensive planting is also being used adjacent to areas of 2.4 m fencing, with a low wooden fence constructed on the inside to protect children from the thorny vegetation. In addition to fencing, proximity cards are being used to improve access control; secure external doors installed with warning alarms that are activated if locked doors are opened; and external lighting and signage improved. As a camera was already located in the main entrance, additional CCTV was not considered necessary.

Eastbourne Comprehensive School

Eastbourne Comprehensive School is located in an area of two-storey housing blocks. A large number of its students live in a lower socio-economic area further away. Entrances and facilities such as halls are duplicated, as the original building was designed as two separate school blocks for male and female students. A collection of smaller units is located next to the main building, which creates a number of secluded areas and alcoves. As a result, vulnerable windows are covered with grilles or blocked up. The site has security fencing around the playing fields at the back of the school, although this is not extensive enough to be fully effective.

The school has a number of security issues. Before the initial survey visit, for example, recently-installed plastic rubbish containers located close to the main building were burned by students. The design of the school building also contributes to student misconduct: narrow corridors can lead to pupil disturbances during class changes, and entrance and exit points are often congested. One of the project's priorities is therefore to reduce congestion and improve access to buildings, as well as to improve access control and general surveillance of circulation routes. Access to the secluded areas of the school will be restricted with new fencing. A CCTV system will be installed to allow more effective

surveillance of vulnerable areas. These cameras will meet the "identification" level of performance, with improved monitoring compared with the old system. Existing cameras that do not provide a security benefit, and that may be a target for vandalism, will be removed. Improved asset marking will be introduced to prevent theft.

Current status of the project

At this early stage of the project, many measures have not yet been implemented. For example, planning permission for the fencing at Wylde Green Primary School was only obtained at the end of 2003. A detailed progress report will be published at the end of 2004. Other school security-related initiatives – such as Classrooms of the Future, in which new design ideas for schools are tested in a series of pilot projects – are currently underway.

Classrooms of the Future

Objective

The Classrooms of the Future initiative (www.teachernet.gov.uk/futureclassrooms) aims to challenge current thinking about school building design by constructing a vision of future school design, focusing on creating safe, imaginative and stimulating learning environments for students. The projects involve the wider community and many have links to schools and learning centres located inside and outside the United Kingdom. Twelve LEAs are developing 27 pilot projects, at a cost of GBP 13 million. Lessons learned from these pilots will be used to guide future school design.

The project draws on the Children's Manifesto, which describes how 15 000 children would like their schools to be designed. Students reported that they would like:

- **A beautiful school**, with glass dome roofs to let in light, uncluttered classrooms and brightly-coloured walls.
- **A comfortable school**, with sofas and beanbags, cushions on the floors, tables "that don't scrape our knees", blinds that keep out the sun and quiet rooms.
- **A safe school**, with swipe cards for the school gates, anti-bullying alarms, first-aid classes and "someone to talk to about our problems".
- **A school without walls**, "so that we can go outside to learn, with animals to look after and wild gardens to explore".
- **A school with drinking water in every classroom**, clean toilets that lock, large lockers and a swimming pool.

A selection of schools involved in the project are presented below.

Schools

- *Brunswick Primary, Sheffield.* Acts of vandalism had been occurring at this school outside of school hours. Children were causing serious damage by climbing on the roof.

In the pilot project, the main school building was extended and part of the existing playground used to develop flexible accommodation for two classrooms, with breakout spaces for small groups. The roof of the new building now serves as a playground and assembly space, thus transforming a vandalism-prone area into a recreational space.

- *Telford and Wrekin*. In these two pilot projects, teaching and learning spaces were equipped with extensive information and communications technology and video-conferencing facilities, including a number of breakout spaces. A conservatory was developed at the front of each building, which opens on to the main area through sliding/folding glazed doors, creating a larger space. The doors are closed and protected by discrete mounted roller shutters after school hours. The shutters and small internal grilles at the rear of the building do not have a forbidding appearance. Each classroom is equipped with a smoke generator that will fill the space with harmless smoke if triggered by an intruder.
- *Bournemouth*. The development of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at Hengistbury Head is the only project in Classrooms of the Future that is not constructed on a school site. It can be used by schoolchildren and visitors of all ages, although these two groups do not share the same areas. The main educational space contains three circular hubs, which can accommodate 30 students each. Each hub can be opened up, the combined space housing up to 100 children. The other part of the building, the visitors' centre, consists of one hub. The design allows for the use of hubs in various combinations, without affecting security. For example, if students are only using two hubs, the other can be used by adults, in combination with the visitors' centre, without encroaching on the children's area.
- *Richmond upon Thames*. In this project, new flexible, stand-alone, multi-purpose classrooms spaces were constructed. The aim of this initiative is to prevent graffiti. The spaces are also self-contained, so that people from local communities can use the area without disturbing the rest of the school. Architects encouraged students to help design the spaces. Students were also involved in designing decorations in the form of removable transfers for the external curved walls.

Other projects

Teaching Environments for the Future, which is the follow-up to Classrooms of the Future, is a series of pilot projects involving 18 LEAs that focuses on how design can affect school workforce issues and still address safety and security concerns.

Building Schools for the Future (www.teachernet.gov.uk/bsf) is a major new capital programme, which involves replacing or transforming all secondary schools in England over the next ten to 15 years. As part of this project, 11 design teams were commissioned to produce exemplary school designs: five for primary schools, five for secondary schools, and one for a school for three to 18-year-olds. The issue of safety and security is a briefing requirement being addressed in all of the designs.