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Introduction to the "Safer School" initiative

The "Safer School" initiative is a creation of West Mercia Police.

West Mercia Police and Shropshire Council are jointly working to promote and support Shropshire schools through the initiative.

The initiative is a holistic, practical and realistic approach to school security and personal safety. The initiative has two separate roles:-

- The primary role is to address the security and safety issues of the school environment i.e. school staff, pupils, property and the premises.
- The second and significant role is to deter/reduce future crime, not only on the school site but in local communities and into the future. Commencing with good citizenship at nursery age, by year 11 the curriculum element of the initiative will give pupils a better understanding of crime and its consequences.

This initiative is appropriate for all schools, irrespective of school size, location or crime. It sets a minimum standard for school security and addresses any specific issues, problems or nuisances that are a concern at individual schools.

The Essential Elements of the Process
- Creating an active security policy for the school. (A requirement of the School's Health and Safety/Premises Committee.)
- Taking ownership of the site through shared involvement. This involves establishing a "Safer School Group". This Group is a partnership of school stakeholders and it can be an extension to a Governor meeting.
- Implement good practice and essential work applicable at all schools i.e. signs, property marking, visitor passes etc. Regularly reviewing security/safety measures for staff, pupils, the site and assets.
- Establish a daily procedure for recording incidents i.e. trespass, burglary, theft, anti-social behaviour, vandalism, arson, suspicious activity etc., both during school hours and out-of hours.
- Solving real problems rather than perceived problems. Prioritising work (if any) and reviewing action.
- Education of pupils as per the "Safer School" pack.
- An audit trail of the school's Safer School commitment.
- Very important. Publicity of Safer School to school staff, pupils, school neighbours, parents and prospective parents.

Positive benefits and aspects of the "Safer School" initiative are as follows:-
- It comprehensively fulfils the requirement of an "active" security policy for the school's Health and Safety Committee.
- The initiative provides a school with a written security/safety policy and a structured framework to implement the policy.
- The school/governors would be implementing essential minimum standards in security/safety, recognised by the Council and the West Mercia Police.
- The initiative demonstrates to the Police, staff, pupils, school neighbours, parents and prospective parents, the school's commitment to addressing security/safety issues.
- When a school is following the initiative, it will ensure a continual review of security/safety issues and regular Police involvement.
- The flexibility of the initiative permits other school issues/problems to be assessed i.e. bullying.
- Where there are security issues i.e. vandalism, anti-social behaviour etc., the intention of the initiative is to reduce/eliminate the problems.
- The classroom activities are designed to bring an understanding of the "Safer School" principles to all pupils.
- The initiative complements and assists in the completion of the Fire Risk Assessment.

- The "Safer School Initiative" is a shared initiative, requiring participation by all members of the Group i.e. the Police, caretaker, parents, governors. This relieves the potential work load for one person.
- Involvement in the initiative is good for Ofsted inspections.
- Its purpose is to achieve realistic and practical security/safety for minimal funding.

Support

- The initiative has the backing and support of the West Mercia Police and Shropshire Council's Risk Management Group.
- The Council's Crime Prevention Officer is committed to the initiative and available to assist schools through the initiative.

Accreditation

- On completion of the process, schools are recognised for their commitment to security/safety by receiving the "Safer School" accreditation. This accreditation is reviewed every two years.
- The accreditation can be attained by all schools. For schools that have few problems, it is possible to achieve in 6 - 9 months.

Illustrations of different achievements/issues that have been addressed by Shropshire Council schools following the Safer School initiative.

- **Establishing the route of a problem**. - The evidence indicated drinking/drugs but the real problem was skateboarding. Outside agencies were brought in with a view to provide alternative suitable skateboarding facilities.
- **Surveying a perceived problem of daytime trespass**. - With the aid of parents, a survey proved the need to take action. The subsequent action further benefited the school by reducing vandalism and anti social behaviour.
- **Recording playtime accidents using the Safer School format of recording**. - The results of the recording highlighted most of the incidents occurred in the last five minutes of playtime when children were tiring. The school shortened the playtime.
- **School vehicular access obstructed by regular illegal parking of parents**. - Parents were warned and the school surveyed the problem to primarily highlight persistent offenders. Police would act on information supplied.
- **Reviewing and implementing basic essential security/safety measures** - As a result of changes to the school building, the external signs needed reviewing i.e. clear direction and instruction asking all visitors to report to the reception office.
- **Anti-social behaviour on a school site disturbing and aggravating neighbours** -The activity of the Safer School group indicated to the neighbours that their concerns were being addressed. By involving two neighbours, the good relationship between the school and neighbours was maintained.
- **Trespass and vandalism** – A school that had vandalism for some years followed the Safer School process and recorded incident details. On a school site plan, the location of the incidents indicated a pattern. Taking into consideration the neighbourhood, it was clear that trespass was a major contributing factor to the vandalism. The perimeter boundary of the school site was reviewed.
- **Main entrance Access control** - Parents and members of a Safer School group expressed concern for the lack of access control at a school entrance, especially following an unauthorised access. The school felt access control was not a practical option but to prove a point, a survey of the entrance was implemented.
- **Entrance fencing** - Where pupils played in close proximity to a staff and visitor car park, a dividing fence was installed. This was purely a pro-active measure to increase pupil safety and reduce risk.
- **Nuisance Fire alarm activations**. – When a school started having false fire alarm activations during the school day, the details were accurately recorded. A clear pattern of activations developed and as a result, the culprit was caught in the act.
- **A person loitering by a school site**. – During the school day, a person was seen loitering in close proximity to a school site. The school took immediate action and recorded details of the event. The Police were subsequently informed and following repeat incident, the Police responded quickly. Using the information recorded by the school, the Police were able to take positive action quickly and resolve the concern.

The "Safer School" policy statement

"The school has recognised the link between a successful school, pupil contentment, parent satisfaction, community involvement and the implementation of an effective risk management system.

Through the risk management system the school intends to establish the safety and security of staff, pupils and their property as a priority. This will be achieved by monitoring activity in and around school in a structured manner. Stakeholders in the school will be fully conversant with the system and will be actively encouraged to make constructive contributions.

The school will undertake to reduce levels of anti-social and/or criminal activity through the accurate recording of incidents with specific details and locations: this will allow preventative actions to be taken in conjunction with all stakeholders.

The school has committed to developing systems which will enable staff and pupils to concentrate on the process of education, secure in the knowledge that the environment in which they are working is as safe as possible"