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safer school partnerships



A summary of the national evaluation of the Safer School Partnerships programme

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) would like to thank Roger Bowles, Maria Garcia Reyes and Rimawan Pradipto of the Centre for Criminal Justice Economics and Psychology, University of York, for their work in writing the full report on which this summary is based.

Bullying, truancy and exclusion from school are known to be linked with higher risks of offending and anti-social behaviour: excluded young people, for example, are more than twice as likely to commit offences as children in mainstream education. The Safer School Partnerships (SSP) programme aims to reduce these problems by placing police officers in schools. In order to evaluate its success, and provide a general overview of the programme, the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) commissioned the research on which this summary is based.

BACKGROUND

The SSP programme was introduced in 2002. While all the partnerships share the aim of building closer working relationships between police and schools, they are organised in different ways, depending on how they are funded, and the local police's schools strategy.

- **The three projects the YJB funded, which were designed in collaboration with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), have a wholly operational police officer and supporting team located full-time in a secondary school.**
- **In the Behaviour and Education Support Team (BEST) approach, a police officer is part of a multi-agency partnership attached to a cluster of schools (a secondary, plus three or four of the primary schools that feed into it).**
- **There are also local variants, with the police presence in school playing a less central role. This group, which constitutes the majority of SSP, includes police officers who specialise in youth work being based in a central city location and supporting a variety of schools and youth organisations. The time allocated to a single school is thus limited, sometimes to as little as half a day each week.**

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OBJECTIVES

The principal objectives of the SSP programme are:

- to reduce victimisation, criminal and anti-social behaviour within the school and its community
- to work with schools on whole school approaches to behaviour and discipline
- to identify and work with children and young people at risk of becoming victims or offenders
- to ensure the full-time education of young offenders
- to support vulnerable children and young people through periods of transition, such as the move from primary to secondary school
- to create a safer environment for children to learn in.

a general overview was established through interviews with senior school staff and youth offending team managers

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A general overview of how successfully the SSP programme had been implemented was established through interviews with senior school staff, and with the youth offending team (YOT) managers of several of the areas in which programme schools are located.

To assess how far the programme has achieved its objectives, a sample of 15 schools in which an SSP intervention has been implemented ('intervention schools') were matched according to truancy and exam pass rates with 15 schools in which it has not ('comparison schools'). A before-and-after matched pair comparison was then made, based on two groups of data:

- **offending statistics**
Pupils' self-reported incidences of committing, fearing or being the victim of crime; and crime data from the YOT, school and police.
- **educational statistics**
Absence rates, both unauthorised (truancy) and authorised; exclusion numbers; and examination success.



FINDINGS

Success of implementing the SSP programme

The feedback on SSP was mostly very positive. The comments of staff tended to cluster around some common themes on the advantages of the programme:

- more activities and pastoral work for pupils
- a quicker response to behaviour problems
- more engagement with the local community
- better attitudes and ethos in the school, with greater emphasis on mutual respect and inclusion
- the presence of SSP staff was 'supporting, challenging and engaging pupils'.

Pupils, parents and staff became accustomed to having a police officer in the school and were normally prepared to trust the police more as a result, provided that the officer demonstrated commitment to the school.

However, setting up a team of non-teaching staff to work with teaching staff and senior management in a co-ordinated way to improve school safety proved to be a delicate and time-consuming task. Some school staff were uncomfortable with the idea of having a police officer in the school, and/or remained unclear about the role of the officer.



pupils, parents and staff became accustomed to having a police officer in the school

Impact on offending outcomes

Making schools safer and reducing offending by pupils are complementary but distinct objectives. The SSP intervention aims to contribute to both. In principle, it should be straightforward to establish how successful it has been in this: if offending levels at school have been falling and if the pupils at the school say they feel safer from crime, then there would be evidence that the project is succeeding. By comparing the scale of the crime reduction (or the increase in the proportion of pupils who feel safe) in intervention schools with that in non-intervention schools, it should be possible to estimate the scale of the improvement attributable to the SSP intervention.

Establishing the impact of SSP on offending is, however, difficult because safety and offending have not been measured much in schools, meaning 'before' data are weak:

- three surveys of pupils' self-reported involvement in offending and anti-social or problem behaviour were used: the Policy Research Bureau questionnaire, the Viewpoint survey, and an Essex police survey
- the two most promising sources of data – from pupil surveys conducted by schools, and YOT database information on convictions and Final Warnings broken down school-by-school – are not sufficiently developed to support year-by-year analysis of changes in offending and school safety.

Therefore only a partial account of pre-intervention offending rates and school safety could be compiled. This meant the matched comparison way of assessing the success of SSP (used for examining its impact on educational outcomes) was impossible across the sample.

It follows from this lack of evidence on the level of offending or problem behaviour at school level that there is little scope for using changes in levels to measure the impact on schools of SSP (or any other) intervention. However, YOT data on offending were available for the three YJB/ACPO schools and their

comparisons. Within this sub-sample, the researchers compared the numbers of incidents occurring before and after SSP was implemented, and estimated that it had prevented around 139 offences annually across the three YJB/ACPO intervention schools, relative to what would have been expected, had they followed the trend in the comparison schools.

The limited evidence also seems to suggest SSP has an effect on reducing offending rates. Pupils in intervention schools felt safer than their counterparts in comparison schools, something that would not be predicted from the characteristics of the schools. Likewise, there were signs that a smaller proportion of pupils at the intervention schools were falling victim to crimes at school.



absence rates in the intervention schools fell significantly

Impact on educational outcomes

The impact of SSP on educational outcomes is a central issue in determining their overall success. The measures were:

- absence rates (authorised and unauthorised)
- exclusion numbers
- examination success, with the baseline being the achievement of five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C: although a significant increase in attainment was not anticipated at this early stage, because the programme was expected to have the greatest impact on Year 7 pupils, who are considered most at risk of victimisation.

A fourth indicator would be the number of 'incidents' recorded in a school: but the lack of a systematic method of recording these meant that making meaningful statements on the impact of SSP was impossible (although the volume of classroom incidents fell in the one YJB/ACPO school where this number was plotted weekly).

The research found that:

- absence rates in the 15 intervention schools fell significantly, relative to the corresponding rates in comparison schools
- exclusions fell in both intervention and comparison schools, to the extent that it is not possible to isolate a net impact attributable to SSP
- examination performance did not improve significantly, in relative terms, across the intervention schools as a whole.

These findings were broken down to look for differences between the three YJB/ACPO schools and the remaining 12 intervention schools.

- In the YJB/ACPO intervention schools, average truancy rates fell by 0.97 percentage points between 2001–02 (the year before SSP) and 2003–04 (the second year of SSP). The sample is too small to support statistical inferences, so this finding is a promising indication, rather than definitive evidence of a positive impact. In the 12 other SSP intervention schools, the mean truancy rate fell by 0.62 percentage points in comparison to the non-intervention schools.
- Both types of intervention schools and comparison schools reported a significant reduction in exclusion numbers. The trend they followed was the same and therefore cannot be attributed to the intervention.
- The mean pass rate in the YJB/ACPO schools rose, with the proportion of pupils at schools achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A*–C up by 8.5 percentage points, relative to their comparison schools. In the 12 other SSP intervention schools, there was an improvement in the pass rate, but not in relation to the comparison schools. Impact is therefore mixed.

The sub-samples are too small to derive statistically significant results for each version of the intervention individually, but indicate a positive impact in the case of the YJB/ACPO schools.

intervention and comparison schools both reported a significant reduction in exclusion numbers

SSP schools have made good progress towards introducing a whole school approach

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Referring to each of the objectives of SSP in turn, the key findings are as follows.

Objective 1

Reduce victimisation, criminality and anti-social behaviour within the school and its community.

There is evidence that victimisation outcomes are improving in intervention schools, particularly YJB/ACPO schools. But data on school-level offending are weak, and action needs to be taken to rectify this.

Objective 2

Work with schools on whole school approaches to behaviour and discipline.

SSP schools have made good progress towards introducing a whole school approach. There remains scope for increasing clarity about the role of staff teaching, support staff and police officers, and for improving communication between the senior management team and other school staff.

Objective 3

Identify and work with children and young people at risk of becoming victims or offenders.

SSP schools have sought ways of identifying and working with children and young people at risk of becoming victims or offenders. In cases where less money has been spent on the intervention, this has been harder to achieve.

Objective 4

Ensure the full-time education of young offenders.

The SSP programme has achieved its objective of reducing truancy rates. It has also helped reduce total absence rates in intervention schools relative to comparison schools. Permanent exclusions have fallen across most schools, whether or not they have an SSP intervention, so it is not possible to attribute the improvement to the implementation of the programme.

Objective 5

Support vulnerable children and young people through periods of transition, such as the move from primary to secondary school.

There are positive signs of intervention schools devoting greater attention to vulnerable groups, and also of reduced offending by the Year 7 group in YJB/ACPO intervention schools. But, in more general terms, there are few data that distinguish outcomes for vulnerable children. This limits the findings that can be derived.

Objective 6

Create a safer environment for children to learn in.

There are clear signs that pupils in SSP intervention schools, particularly YJB/ACPO schools, feel significantly safer than their counterparts in comparison schools. Exam achievements have increased across most schools (both comparison and intervention), so there is no evidence as yet that the improvement is any greater in intervention schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For schools and local agencies

- Continue the development of closer links between primary and secondary schools in order to improve the information flow about vulnerable children and to smooth the transition between schools.
- Develop closer links between schools and local agencies (such as the YOT and the police) in relation to youth offending and problem behaviour.
- Make greater use at school level of electronic recording of attendance and ensure follow-up of truancy and other absence.
- Develop greater dialogue between schools and the police, either directly or through partnerships, about school and community safety and youth offending.
- Encourage police area commanders to review both the role of schools in their community policing plans, and how best to support officers working in schools.

the **SSP programme**

has achieved its objective of
reducing truancy rates

Centrally

- **Review the possibilities of giving the reduction of youth offending and anti-social behaviour greater priority in performance monitoring and management (such as in the best value performance indicators used for the police).**
- **Develop a mainstreaming policy for the SSP in a form that supports school-police dialogue (e.g. action templates, criteria for selecting a particular form of SSP).**
- **Review YOT database software with a view to encouraging greater use and development of its analytical and reporting capabilities.**
- **Review data-sharing arrangements between YOTs, schools, police, and other agencies with a youth offending focus.**
- **Review the case for, and the means of, encouraging schools to run regular surveys of pupils' victimisation, fear of crime and involvement in offending and bullying.**