



SCHOOLS NEWSLETTER

As the new Schools & Youth Engagement Officer for Chiltern & South Bucks I have put together a termly newsletter which focuses on issues that affect young people and schools. There are many topics to cover so I'll start with the most current relevant issues, which I hope you'll find useful.

Safer Schools Partnership (SSP)

Thames Valley Police embraces the 'Safer Schools Partnership' (SSP) approach to engaging with schools in Chiltern & South Bucks. The four principles of Safer Schools are:

- to reduce the prevalence of crime and victimisation amongst young people
- to provide a safe and secure school community thereby enhancing the learning environment
- to ensure that young people remain in education, actively learning and achieving their full potential
- to deliver a partnership approach to engage young people, challenge unacceptable behaviour and develop a respect for themselves and their community.

Any incident which occurs on a school premises, spills out of school, is between students attending the same school, and is classified as a 'minor incident' should be dealt with under SSP. This also includes online harassment between students out of school as a result of students attending the same school.

Parents should report incidents to the school who take primacy in investigating. If an incident is reported to the Police we record it, notify the school, liaise with the investigating teacher, and deal with the incident under SSP guidance. The approach is restorative and our priority is to educate / safeguard, not criminalise. Police should not be used for additional punishment if parents aren't satisfied with the schools actions.

County Lines & Child Criminal Exploitation

County Lines is an exploitative crime that is currently taking place across the country. It is a phenomena that has evolved significantly and has been recognised as a national threat by the Home Office and the National Crime Agency. The County Lines model is different from the more 'conventional' drugs supply methods that currently control the market and is possibly driven by excess supply, resulting in suppliers seeking to exploit new markets in other towns and areas.

County Lines often involves the criminal exploitation of children. A key characteristic of this criminality involves the exploitation of a vulnerability - usually drug dependency, attachment/emotional issues, poverty or mental health. It is a very lucrative business model and increasingly we hear how groups utilise violence as a control mechanism in order to maintain discipline with their workforce and distribution network.

This is how it works...

1. A group (not necessarily a gang) establish a network between an urban hub and county location, into which drugs are supplied.
2. A branded mobile phone line is established in the market, to which orders are placed by introduced customers. The line will commonly (but not exclusively) be controlled by a third party, who is generally remote from the market.
3. The group exploits young or vulnerable persons to store and/or supply drugs.
4. The group, or individuals exploited by them, regularly travel between the urban hub and the county market, to replenish stock and deliver cash.
5. The group is inclined to use intimidation, violence and weapons.

Recruiting and grooming of children

Older dealers/gangs set up markets and drug lines and control young people through placing them in debt for drugs. For example, young people naively accept their first few deals as 'gifts' only to be told later they now owe their supplier and need to work off their 'debt'. The debt can involve financial and sexual exploitation. Young people are often targeted where they are likely to have reduced monitoring and supervision such as PRUs (Pupil Referral Units) and Children's Homes. However it is also been heard of gangs targeting children with no links to services, as was highlighted in Brighton where middle class children were targeted alongside more obviously vulnerable ones; an indication that gangs are becoming more creative in their recruitment methods.

The importance of school attendance

Young people excluded from schools can be advantageous to the County Line model. Increasingly schools are excluding pupils for a wider range of behaviours and even if the exclusion is temporary there can be difficulty reintegrating back into mainstream education. The exclusion of vulnerable young people from full time school exacerbates their vulnerability and increases the risk of being targeted for exploitation.

Early help and intervention

Early intervention is key to prevention and requires recognition of indicators showing involvement in 'gang' or 'county lines' activity. Awareness and training for youth services, schools and families on the dynamics of exploitation, drugs and grooming is important.

Consequences of Illegal drug use/supply

Any involvement with illegal drug use and supply is a criminal offence which can lead to arrest and a criminal record. However young people who have been exploited to sell drugs may be treated as exploitation victims and dealt with as such.

Useful links

www.thinkuknow.co.uk - CEOPs (Child Exploitation & Online Protection) education programme aiming to educate and protect children and young people from sexual abuse and exploitation.

www.barnardos.org.uk/rusafebucks - support for vulnerable young people at risk of exploitation.

Drugs

Unfortunately in modern society illegal drugs are easily accessible to young people. This includes Chiltern & South Bucks. Parents should be aware of this and discuss the dangers of drug use with their children.

There is a misconception amongst some young people that drug types such as cannabis are legal within the UK. This is incorrect and cannabis *is* an illegal substance. As with all illegal drugs, if cannabis is found in someone's possession, cultivated and/or sold they can be arrested and can receive a criminal record, or a possible custodial sentence. This can reduce their chances of future employment and can also limit their freedom to travel to certain countries around the world. More to follow on this topic in the future.

Useful links

www.talktofrank.com – government site giving information and advice on drugs / substance misuse.

Searching by Schools & Stop/search

Most young people know that Police officers can search them if they have 'reasonable grounds to suspect' that they may be carrying certain prohibited items. The 2011 Education Act gives members of staff at schools the power to search and seize prohibited items from pupils, i.e. items on the schools banned list and articles used in commission of an offence or to cause personal injury or damage to property. This includes drugs, knives, cigarettes and more.

Some future topics: Domestic Abuse, Hate Crime, Bullying, Online Safety, Exploitation, Crime Prevention, Substance Misuse.

If you have any ideas for future topics, would like further information or have any questions please contact claire.annison@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk or your child's school.