



Report

Summary report

Police Officers in Schools: A scoping study

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October 2011

Police Officers in Schools: a scoping study

In recognition of the growing role of police officers in schools across the UK, the NFER funded a scoping study of practice in this area. The study explored:

- the range of ways that police are working with schools
- the impacts of this kind of work
- the challenges experienced
- and the key ingredients for success.

What are the core benefits of police officers working in schools?

A wealth of benefits result from police working with schools - for the police, for schools, their teachers and pupils, and for the wider community.

Core benefits (those that benefit more than one group) include:

- increased accessibility (e.g. between pupils, the police and schools)
- improved relationships (between police and schools, or police and pupils)
- an increased sense of safety for pupils, teachers and the community
- improved attendance
- raised achievement
- reduced levels of offending behaviour and poor behaviour in school.

Specific benefits for each group are set out overleaf.

How do police work in schools?

Police work with schools in a range of ways. It can vary by where they are based, the type of contact they have, the number of schools they work with and the time they are able to dedicate to it. For example:

- Police can be based on the schools' premises and work solely with that school, or a cluster of schools. Alternatively they can be based in their usual station or have bases in a number of different schools with which they work.
- Police can be formally dedicated to a specific school or group of schools and work independently, or they can be part of a wider team serving one or a number of schools.
- Sometimes officers act as a dedicated contact for a school, whilst in other cases they provide support in a team as part of their formal duties, as and when requested.

- The police also work with schools on an ad hoc one-off basis to address a specific need in the school or local area.

What roles or activities do the police take on?

A police officer's role in school can comprise any number of roles and activities.

There are three broad areas of activity:

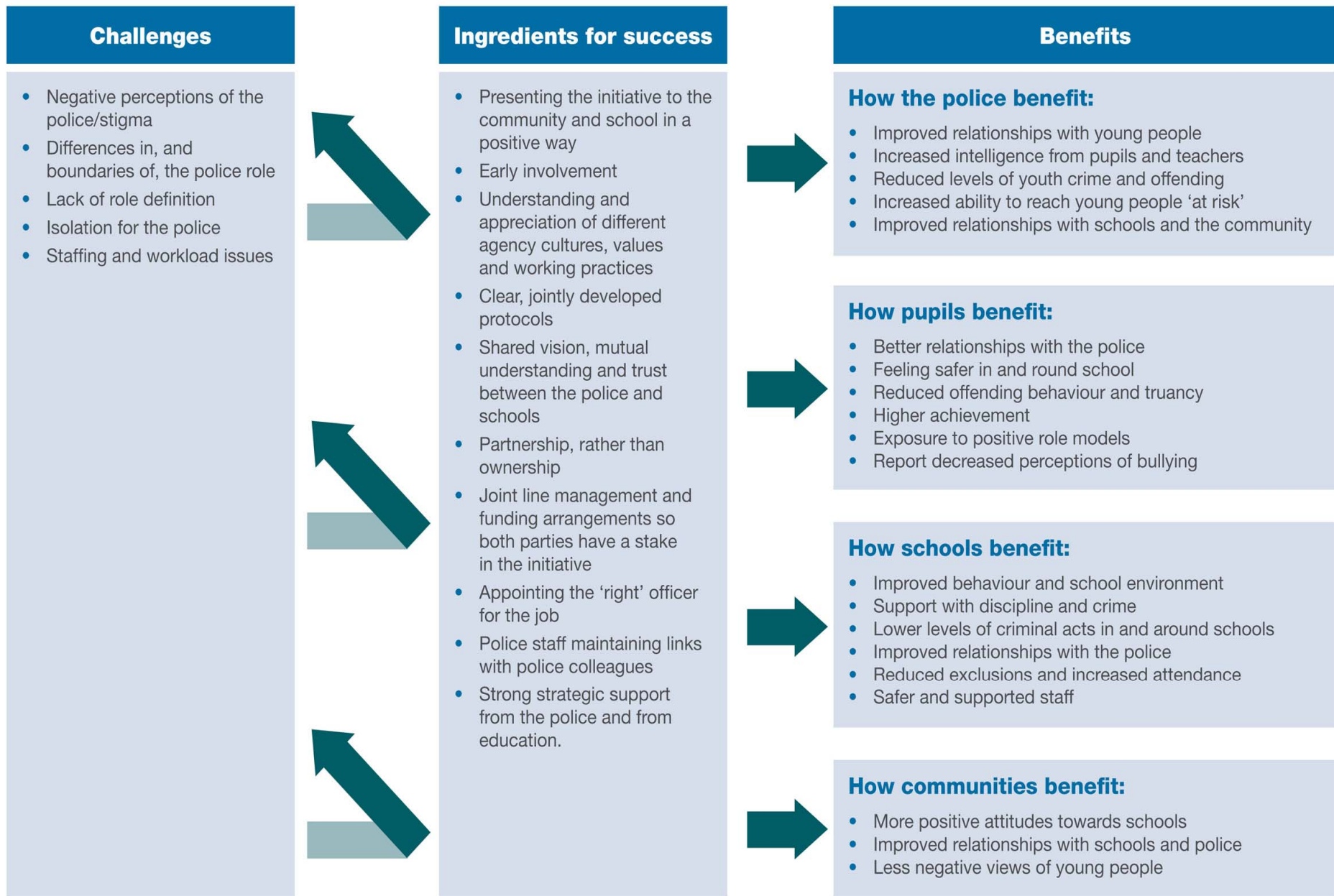
- Enforcement and safety of young people (e.g. tackling crime; discipline, safety and behaviour in school; restorative justice)
- Supporting improvements in young people's knowledge and quality of life (e.g. curriculum or extracurricular activities; schools assemblies; pastoral support)
- Strategic and multi-agency preventative working (e.g. sharing intelligence, working with other agencies; police presence and profile).

How does it work in practice?

The research looked at staffing arrangements, funding, training and line management.

- **Staffing:** there is some distinction between the use of police constables (PCs) and police community support officers (PCSOs). The most common deployment involves PCSOs working with junior or primary schools, with PCs predominantly working with secondary schools. Secondary school staff prefer to work with PCs rather than PCSOs as PCs have greater powers to protect themselves, staff and others from harm, and deal with incidences of criminal behaviour.
- **Funding:** sources of funding for police working with schools varies. Historically, police resources funded officers in schools; however, in some areas there are moves towards more equal divisions of funds or a 50:50 basis between police and schools. Funding also comes from agencies such as youth offending teams or area based initiatives such as Behaviour Improvement Partnerships (BIPs) or Behaviour and Education Support Teams (BESTs) (as was).
- **Training:** training for officers in schools is patchy. Some informal, on-the-job training is apparent, as are some bespoke programmes designed by individual Safer Schools Partnerships.
- **Line management:** Officers tend to remain part of the formal line management structures of their police force, but this is usually supplemented by some form of oversight and/or reporting arrangements with senior school staff. This 'joint' management can be on a firm and equal division of responsibilities between the police and schools, or on a more informal basis.

The figure overleaf provides an overview of the range of benefits and challenges of police work in schools, as well as the ingredients of successful approaches.



What difficulties are schools and/or the police likely to encounter?

- **Negative perceptions of the police/stigma:** some schools are initially reluctant to have officers in school and are wary of local perceptions of why they might 'need' a police presence. Police wearing full protective clothing in school can also be contentious as some schools feel this gives out the 'wrong message'. However, to not wear it would contravene police regulations.
- **Role definition:** School staff and police officers, particularly at the outset of this type of work, can be unaware of the responsibilities of the police role. This can lead to different interpretations, causing confusion; to uncertainty about the level of autonomy expected of officers; and, in some cases, a lack of accountability or too many restrictions on the role.
- **Role boundaries:** Officers report that the role is very different to 'normal' policing and can involve a steep learning curve. The role is felt to require a balance between keeping a 'police head on' and being aware of the needs of the schools and of not criminalising pupils. Where a balance is achieved, pupils report different relationships with the police out in the community to the 'human face' they are accustomed to in school.
- **Isolation:** There is a danger that officers can become isolated from police colleagues when working autonomously in a school.
- **Officer availability and consistency:** In some cases officers are pulled away from schools for other police duties. Changes in personnel are problematic, and if an officer is moved from their school and replaced by another officer, this can be very frustrating.
- **Working hours:** School-based officers tend to work predominantly from 8am until 4pm, so they are usually on different shift patterns to their peers. This can exacerbate isolation. They are usually expected to take their holidays in school holiday times, which may not suit all officers. Furthermore, in the police, any over time worked is typically taken back or paid, whilst in schools, working outside of school hours is standard practice.

How can I ensure it works well in my own context?

The difficulties set out above can be overcome by trying to build in some of the features listed below. Where these key ingredients are in place, the benefits of police work in schools outweigh any initial challenges.

- **Presenting the initiative to the community and school in a positive way:** ensure it is seen as part of the whole school approach to safer environments
- **Early involvement** of police, rather than waiting for problems to arise
- **Providing incentives** to schools to encourage them to engage with the police
- **Understanding and appreciation of different agency cultures**, values and working practices
- **Mutual trust** and a willingness to share information
- **Clear, jointly developed protocols**, setting out expectations in a flexible framework
- **Shared vision and mutual understanding** between the police and schools

- **Partnership**, rather than ownership
- **Joint line management** and dedicated staff in schools to oversee the work of the officer
- **Appointing the ‘right’ officer for the job** (who understands schools, is flexible, and who can work effectively and appropriately with young people)
- **Police staff maintaining links with police** colleagues and their central base
- **Joint funding** arrangements so both parties have a stake in the initiative
- **A model/way or working to best suit the local context**
- **Strong strategic support** from the police and from education.

How will this help meet our local needs?

The benefits set out earlier are a key motivation for schools and the police to develop a closer working relationship, where both parties, as well as the local community, benefit. Other rationales for establishing this way of working stem from a particular local need and can include:

- Using multi-agency approaches as a vehicle to respond to national policy initiatives or agendas e.g. safeguarding children
- Reducing the prevalence of crime, anti-social behaviour and victimisation among young people
- Providing safe and secure school communities
- Developing relationships between young people and the police, between schools and the community
- Improving the way that information is shared and the integration of services around children and young people
- Identifying, targeting and accessing ‘at risk’ or vulnerable children and young people.

What evidence has been used to inform these findings?

Four sources of evidence informed the findings: a review of UK literature; interviews with six strategic-level representatives from the police and education sectors; two case studies in areas with established Safer Schools Partnerships; and an online survey of headteachers in the two local authorities from which the case studies were drawn.

Where can I find out more?

A longer report, with more detail on all of the areas covered here, can be downloaded, free of charge, at:

For further information, please contact Emily Lamont (e.lamont@nfer.ac.uk) or Shona Macleod (s.macleod@nfer.ac.uk).

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