

Cover Note from the Mayor's Office for Policing & Crime (MOPAC):

In his Action Plan for Transparency, Accountability and Trust in Policing, the Mayor asked the MPS to review the role of Safer Schools Officers (SSOs) to ensure that their deployment in London's schools harboured no disproportionate impact on Black students.

After reviewing the MPS report seeking to fulfil this request, MOPAC have agreed with the MPS that further research is required to ensure that this report fully responds to the issues raised in the Mayor's Action Plan.

This report is an important part of the Mayor's work to address disproportionality in policing and rebuild trust and confidence in the MPS – particularly from Black Londoners, which is why it's vital that the review is comprehensive and addresses all of the concerns of the Mayor and of Londoners.

Report: Safer Schools Officers (2022)

1. Purpose

This report presents options to the Deputy Commissioner's Delivery Group Steering Group in relation to the action below, associated with Safer Schools Officers, from the Mayor's Action Plan.

This report provides an overview of the work undertaken by Safer Schools Officers (SSOs), the improvements made in their service delivery following a civil action against the MPS and a summary of the review undertaken by the Deputy Commissioner's Delivery Group (DCDG) in conjunction with the MPS Strategic Insight Unit (SIU), supported by the Continuous Improvement Policing Command (CPIC) and to provide options as to next steps.

This report does not include any commentary in relation to the Child Q learning, as its work was completed prior to the publication of the relevant reports and that matter is currently under review by the Independent Office for Police Conduct. It is noted in this report that the officers who completed the search on child Q were not Safer Schools Officers.

2. Background

Following a legal case raised against the Metropolitan police on behalf of the family of a Black, autistic young person, an agreement was reached where the roles of Safer Schools Officers would be considered and reflected on in relation to any identified or potential disproportionality. CPIC, as the central lead for Safer Schools Officers, initiated the MPS review.

Following the publication of the Mayor's Action Plan in 2020, further review work was undertaken by the Deputy Commissioner's Delivery Group, as the leads for delivering the Mayor's Action Plan¹. This action is as below:

The MPS will ensure that the work of the Safer Schools Officers is monitored and assessed to ensure the positive work they do can continue and that there are no disproportionate impacts for Black children.

¹ Mayors Action Plan, <https://www.london.gov.uk/publications/action-plan-transparency-accountability-and-trust-policing>

Safer Schools Officers perform a vital role in the MPS and historically have been a highly valued addition to a school, both by the school itself and by those interacting within the school environment. Safer Schools Officers numbered around 120 officers in 2011, rising to 181 officers in 2015. A further uplift took place in 2018, in line with the MOPAC Policing and Crime Plan 2017-21², with the number growing to the present position of over 370 officers being employed as SSOs.

It is notable that there are high levels of support for Safer Schools Officers. (93% of Londoners overall and 88% of Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds³).

3. Review detail

The review was completed in two stages; firstly CPIC and then secondly DCDG and SIU with CPIC support. To complement this work, MOPAC hosted a public meeting, supported by the MPS, focussing solely on the role Safer Schools Officers. At the workshops, teaching staff, parents and young people shared their experiences of Safer Schools Officers. Further consultation took place with a selection of school leaders within Haringey which reinforced the positive support demonstrated in the Public Attitude Survey referenced above.

CPIC reviewed the role of Safer Schools Officers, identifying the need for additional guidance for SSOs, increased governance for their deployment and a fundamental consideration of any equality impact from having SSOs within schools and other educational establishments.

The DCDG and SIU undertook a bespoke review of the work completed by SSOs. This included analysis of crime reports (CRIS), reports initiated due to concerns around an individual's vulnerability, called Merlin reports, and a small sample of the outcomes for Black people charged by SSOs.

4. Challenges

The core data forming the DCDG/SIU bespoke review is not as robust as is required to draw fair conclusions, about any disproportionate impact on Black children from having Safer Schools Officers in place. This is because the data is reliant on ethnicity data being entered by the relevant officer and is not a mandatory required field. This is wholly appropriate in a crime report where a suspect is not identified, but for those where they are known, this position does not allow fair or reasonable conclusions to be drawn on the impact of SSOs on Black children.

5. What is a Safer Schools Officer

A Safer Schools Officer is a Police Officer that regularly works within a school or across a number of schools and supports agreed Safer School Partnerships. They will provide a visible and familiar point of contact with their assigned school/s helping to advise Head Teachers and their staff on policing issues and work in partnership to investigate crime and deal with relevant issues. Additionally, they are part of the information sharing in relation to pupil behaviour linked to crime or Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), or for safeguarding in accordance with data sharing agreements.

² MOPAC Police & Crime Plan 2017-2021, <https://www.london.gov.uk/mopac-publications/police-and-crime-plan-2017-2021>

³ Public Attitude survey 2021, Q3, <https://www.london.gov.uk/questions/2021/2752#a-199308>

The concept of the Safer Schools Officer was initiated in the MPS in 2002 under a pilot scheme between the Department for Education and Skills, the Department of Justice and Association of Chief Police Officers (now National Police Chiefs Council, NPCC). This resulted in a pilot of 100 officers deployed into schools in 10 London Boroughs. By 2009, this pilot had expanded so that every London Borough had Safer Schools officers. By 2017, the value of Safer Schools Officers was formally recognised in the MOPAC Police and Crime Plan, with a mayoral commitment to increase provision of schools officers across London.

A large part of the role of a Safer Schools Officer is to prevent young people from committing crime in the first place or from re-offending. SSO's support school behaviour policy and will not intervene in altercations between pupils where a member of staff is available to do so, unless the officer believes there is a possibility of injury to a person or damage to property.

There are over 370 MPS Safer Schools Officer that work across London's secondary schools, primary schools, special educational needs (SEN) schools, colleges and universities, including 41 SSO's that cover Pupil Referral Units (PRU's) and alternative provisions of education.

The policing commitment to schools and young people is further bolstered by an additional 107 officers working within youth engagement and police cadets, all of which are supported by a supervisory structure of 32 safer school sergeants, 12 safer school Inspectors and a small central team of tactical policy advisors (TPAs).

It is worthy of note that, although Safer Schools Officers are a dedicated resource to schools, they are very much operational police officers and are therefore part of the wider policing family in relation to supporting BCU and pan London priorities such as critical incidents or aid requirements.

Safer Schools Officers are also bound by national and MPS policies in approaches to policing, most notably the Home Office Crime Reporting standards, placing them under a positive obligation to record a crime reported to them. This obligation is equally applicable both inside and outside of educational settings. Whilst this leads to the potential for higher volumes of crime to be recorded in educational establishments where an SSO is present, it should not be viewed as an indication of direct criminalisation of young people through court or other proceedings. As demonstrated later, the reviewed data sets showed that 90% of crimes recorded by Safer Schools Officers resulted in no further action. This shows that a non-criminal justice outcome has been the result in the greater majority of recorded incidents.

6. Framework for MPS SSOs working with schools and other provisions

The Safer Schools Partnership (SSP) is the framework for Safer Schools Officers and the schools/educational providers. The SSP is a formal agreement between a school and the police to work together in order to keep young people safe, reduce crime and the fear of crime in schools and their communities. The underlying assumption is that by reducing bullying, truancy and exclusions from school, SSPs will impact both directly and indirectly on offending and antisocial behaviour.

An SSP is a positive way for the police and all schools to demonstrate their commitment to promoting a safe environment to learn and prevent crime. This will involve a safer schools officer regularly working at a school or across a number of schools on a full time or part time basis.

The aims of a SSP are to; i) provide positive engagement to build trust and confidence, ii) improve safety and enhance safeguarding, iii) develop strategies which disrupt experiences of victimisation and

future involvement in crime, and iv) deliver early intervention and diversion, promoting positive pathways for young people

The MPS has 622 SSPs with schools, each site has officers assigned. A further 392 schools not signed up to a partnership are still supported with a named police contact. This means we are currently engaged with 1,014 schools across London.

A Safer Schools Officer handbook⁴ for police officers provides the framework for services delivered by safer schools officers. The handbook was reviewed after the recent judicial review and further consultation conducted as part of the completion of an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) in response to the judicial review. The updated version of the safer schools partnership handbook has been incorporated into new policy for SSO's.

7. SSO internal training programme (training we provide to our SSOs)

Youth Officer Course. On commencement of the role of an SSO, a four day Youth Officer Course is made available and is delivered by Met training. The course is a prerequisite to induct newly appointed SSOs to understand their role and responsibilities and what is required to deliver an effective Safer School Partnership. The four modules covered are; Safer School Partnerships, Restorative Approaches, Presentation Skills, Policing in a Pupil Referral Unit and Managing Partnerships Workshop. The training consists of theory and practical exercises in given scenarios, as well as completing pre-reading in advance of attending the course, to ensure all officers are well informed of the guidance and policy set out within Safer Schools Handbook.

Delivery of domestic abuse training in partnership with the charity Tender⁵ and the Continuous Policing Improvement Command domestic abuse TPAs. This training was funded by the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) and the Mayor of London and delivered to 32 schools officers representing each borough, to upskill officers on topics that will assist their understanding of domestic abuse and how best to support of young people.

Partnership working with the charity 'Local Village Network' (LVN) provided Safer Schools Officers' with bespoke LVN training, which supports an increased awareness amongst school children around the services and engagement opportunities available to them. This network of enhanced trained LVN SSO's are instrumental in increasing the promotion of external support availability, endorsed by the Mayor of London, to young people during their normal interactions.

Trauma informed awareness training around how adverse child experiences (ACEs) have long term effects on behaviour has been provided to all SSOs. The provision of this training improves the Safer Schools Officers' understanding of trauma & adverse childhood experiences, which directly informs and supports the early intervention and diversion decision making by the officer.

8. SSO training delivery programme (what our SSOs provide to others)

The roll out of a blue light collaboration, Safety First, between the Metropolitan Police Service, London Ambulance Service and London Fire Brigade. Safety First is a Pan-London, three year, youth engagement project run under the MPS London Safety Centre (based within the Crime Prevention,

⁴ MPS Safer School Partnerships handbook v1.63, <https://mps.box.com/s/nfiaalewpehn2898p7u343y60nlxeh4>

⁵ Tender Charity, <https://tender.org.uk/>

Inclusion and Engagement Command). The project focuses on increasing young people's knowledge and understanding of safety issues, dangers and consequences of choices in order to promote more informed decision making by young people. This is achieved through interactive workshops where the school selects the topic most relevant to their students. Pre and post session evaluations are carried out; 73% of students rated the Safety First day between 7-10 out of an overall score of 10.

Facilitation and hosting of a London wide Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) Network

webinar. The webinar focused on key subjects such as violence against women and girls (VAWG), to improve contextual safeguarding and encourage crime prevention and early intervention to support victims. Key stakeholders helped facilitate the webinar and presented on topics around girls in gangs and referral processes and girls at risk of exploitation. Policing procedures were also covered to support best practice amongst officers, upskill safer schools officers and enhance their ability to tackle VAWG and serious youth violence.

Launch of the MPS Clever Never Goes campaign in partnership with the charity 'Action Against Abduction'. This initiative, focused on building on the outdated 'stranger danger' messaging was delivered to primary school children via 66 presentations across 37 primary schools within the MPS, with 33 schools providing feedback that is currently under review. New junior teaching resources were piloted in preparation for the external launch in collaboration with the Department for Media and Communications (DMC) and mainstream media.

9. Background to the review undertaken by the DCDG in collaboration with the Strategic Insight Unit

This research was commissioned, as noted above, as a direct result of the Mayors' Action Plan action namely; the MPS will ensure that the work of the Safer Schools Officers is monitored and assessed to ensure the positive work they do can continue and that there are no disproportionate impacts for Black children.

10. Research and review detail

The Analytical approach of research and review is noted below:

- a. Some stand-alone MPS data is available from 2015 to 2019, but has been used only as a subsidiary and reference source, due to its limitations and the lack of an option to make direct future comparisons.
- b. September 2018 to June 2019 was selected as the main data source range, as this period ensured that there was no impact from Covid-19 and the SSO role was clearly defined on MPS HR systems. Data from later years has been obtained, but the impact of C-19 on the school population/attendance remains unclear.
- c. MPS HR systems were used to identify SSOs by their warrant numbers. MERLIN and CRIS were then used as the data sources for capturing the activity of those SSOs identified. MERLIN reports and CRIS reports were researched to capture ethnicity of suspects, accused and victims (other elements captured also include sex, age and report outcomes), to consider any potential disproportionality.

- d. The comparison dataset used, to the MPS data, was the Department for Education percentage of secondary school age pupils by ethnic group for each London borough, except for the MERLIN reporting, where primary school age pupils are also included.
- e. A deeper dive of SSO investigation quality was conducted (59 CRIS reports). This focused on police contact with solely Black victims and/or Black suspects to consider the service they had received.
- f. A further review was then conducted of solely Black suspects charged by SSOs, considering their future pattern of offending, post-charge.
- g. Lastly a review of the most recent MOPAC Public Attitude Survey was collated alongside direct feedback from teaching leads in Haringey and North Area SSO leads.

11. Limitations and challenges

As noted above, data quality, in relation to ethnicity, is of concern notably in relation to the 'UNKNOWN' ethnicity category on both CRIS and MERLIN.

The data is taken only from SSO reporting of incidents, but it is not possible to limit it to those reports where they are action in their role as Safer Schools Officers. SSOs perform many duties and it was not possible to differentiate the reporting between those other duties and in their role as a SSO.

12. Discussion and implications

The CRIS data demonstrates that Black suspects are represented more in overall percentage terms, on relevant Safer School Officer (SSO) CRIS reports, when compared against White suspects. This could be interpreted as SSOs disproportionately investigating Black children as suspects. This is echoed with the higher percentage of Black children charged/people proceeded with by SSOs, albeit those charged/cautioned equate to 4% of all reports. Further research, with improved data quality, is required to draw legitimate conclusions.

When considering MERLIN reporting, the data shows that Black people under the age of 18, are represented more on safeguarding reports even when considered against the DfE baseline. This could support that a safeguarding and intervention approach *is* being taken and that young people are referred appropriately into the relevant Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub⁶ (MASH).

A review into individual investigations, solely in relation to Black suspects (White suspects were not included) and post-charge findings from 59 CRIS reports was completed. This showed:

- a. A lack of any contact being made with suspects (17% of cases), parents/guardians (5% of cases) and victims (3% of cases).
- b. Delays in concluding an investigation, notably during school holidays was seen (16% took more than 6 months to conclude).
- c. Exclusion (permanent or temporary), as the school sanction, occurred in 40% of all reports.
- d. No police action, from an allegation reported to police, accounted for nearly 90% of all reports.

⁶ Multi-agency safeguarding hubs are structures designed to facilitate information-sharing and decision-making on a multi-agency basis often, though not always, through co-locating staff from the local authority, health agencies and the police

- e. 25% of those charged⁷ by SSOs, shown as Black, appear as suspects on 10 or more subsequent CRIS reports following this charge.
- f. 15% of those charged by SSOs, shown as Black, receive custodial sentences following this charge (related to the case reviewed or other cases).

Again, the data provides opportunities for differing interpretations, but it is evident most matters have a non-criminal disposal (in that nearly 90% of all CRIS report, no police action was the final outcome) and instead school intervention was taken (exclusion or suspension) in 40% of reported crimes.

The data, although limited, does highlight that there are improvements to be made in the contact with suspects, parents/guardians and in the expeditious handling of crimes recorded against young people as a whole. This has been fed back to the CPIC Safer Schools team for further guidance to be provided.

13. Outputs of the MOPAC Workshop

This workshop gave members of the public the opportunity to discuss the Safer Schools Officer role with a cross section of our schools officers. This was broken down into views provided by:

- Parents/Carers
- Teachers and Youth Work Professionals
- Young People

The findings demonstrated a positive view from those attending, particularly with the workshop attended by young people. Young people especially recognised that Safer Schools Officers play a vital and significant role in making the school environment safe for everyone linked to the school.

Areas of constructive feedback were received, with a common theme across all groups relating to levels of Safer Schools Officer absences for other police duties, thereby breaking the continuity of contact with the schools communities. Further areas for development included improving cultural awareness and special educational needs awareness training and a greater desire to build closer links with families connected to the education establishments.

14. Actions already undertaken as a result of this review

- A review of the criteria for the nomination of 'priority schools' is currently being undertaken. This has been commissioned by the MPS chief officer lead for Violence. This is currently in the draft stages with an aspiration to introduce in time for the autumn academic term (September 2022). This will ensure consideration of:
 - a. Balancing alignment with current MPS priorities of violence, particularly serious youth violence

⁷ Every charging decision is based on the same two-stage test in the Code for Crown Prosecutors; Does the evidence provide a realistic prospect of conviction? That means, having heard the evidence, is a court more likely than not to find the defendant guilty? And; Is it in the public interest to prosecute? That means asking questions including how serious the offence is, the harm caused to the victim, the impact on communities and whether prosecution is a proportionate response.

- b. Ensuring equality impact assessments are applied
 - c. Ensuring consistency across MPS
 - d. Transparency stemming from a robust evidence-based approach to the designation of priority schools allocation.
- An increased focus on earlier diversion opportunities in primary education. This includes police pilot programme 'The Awareness Academy' (Westminster) and a police funded pilot in Croydon Borough, supported by local charities.
- The introduction of a Safer Schools specific Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and supports the public sector equality's duty placed on the MPS as a public body.
- A review of the MPS hierarchy of abstractions⁸ has been undertaken, with Safer Schools being moved further down the hierarchy as of September 2021. This aims to mitigate the abstraction and consistency of delivery concerns raised by the workshop.
- A completed review of the Safer Schools Partnership manual, ensuring a focus on current MPS priorities, notably serious youth violence.

15. Further actions being undertaken

- A review of MPS policy to require ethnicity to be a mandatory field for all relevant databases is in progress. This is being undertaken by CPIC, in conjunction with the CONNECT team. This is supported within the MPS and is currently being pursued in consultation at a national level, as it would encompass all Police Forces using CONNECT. As an interim measure, all SSOs have been instructed to complete the relevant fields where ethnicity is known.
- An SSO conference, set for October 2022, will incorporate presentations linked to this report and the importance of cultural competency for all SSOs. This will be further supported by the launch of the MPS Cultural Awareness Portal, generated as a result of the Mayor's Action Plan action, and other MPS officer training programmes.
- The Met's Strategy for Inclusion, Diversity and Engagement 2021-2025 (STRIDE) sets out the changes we are committed to achieving, by working with our communities and partners, to improve Londoners' safety and their trust in the Met. It also includes the actions we will undertake to improve the experience of our own people and the culture they work in, as well as setting out how we'll continue to develop our professionalism and capability, in order to deliver for Londoners. We have reflected deeply on the Met's relationships with Black Londoners and have supported and welcomed the creation of the Police Race Action Plan (developed jointly by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and the College of Policing). In our determination to become an actively anti-racist organisation, we have added a new commitment to this year's STRIDE plan, Commitment

⁸ Hierarchy of abstraction is the order in which the MPS identifies which policing resource to redeploy officers from in order to meet immediate critical needs (e.g. central London events).

17under the Protection programme, to ensure we continue to prioritise and hold ourselves to account in how we improve policing for Black communities.

- We want our Safer Schools officers to provide a service that reflects the needs of the young people in the schools they serve. Recognising that policing is only one element of a Safer Schools Partnership, we will work with partners to establish a governance structure that will bring senior partners together to evolve, maintain and oversee the delivery of the Safer Schools Partnership. Partners will include MOPAC, head teachers, teaching leads, the Youth Justice Service and others with an interest in schools and the development and safety of young people.
- We will ensure our Safer Schools officers' work is reflective of the needs of all young people in London, and take action to minimise any potential for adverse impact on young, Black pupils. This work will be overseen by the partnership described above with a specific focus on Black pupils. Within this, we will share our research into the impact of schools officers and work with MOPAC and partners to develop joint strategic oversight of prevention and diversion work within schools.

16. Conclusions

This report has taken into consideration data sets held within the MPS and the Public Attitude Survey, qualitative information drawn out of the MOPAC workshop and the bespoke review of 59 CRIS reports relating solely to Black suspects. This was supported throughout by a review of central and local policies guidance and training.

The qualitative review, consisting of the MOPAC workshop and feedback from the PAS (stating 88% of Black, Asian and minority ethnic respondents are supportive of the role of Safer Schools Officers) demonstrates that the role of Safer Schools has wide ranging support and plays a key role in both engagement and diversionary activity.

The quantitative research unfortunately does not provide conclusive answers to the key consideration of disproportionality. However, it does provide the MPS with the opportunity to improve its services to young people and ensure it seeks to not increase unexplained disproportionality into its services.

A review of the central coordination of the Safer Schools Programme will help to demonstrate that the MPS is committed to providing responsive and up-to-date guidance and training to Safer Schools Officers. This provides SSOs with the best opportunity to minimise the impact of wider societal disproportionality and maximise effective working with teaching staff and pupils to make schools safe spaces for all young people.

The MPS is committed to improving ethnicity data capture so that it can effectively measure the impact of Safer Schools Officers in relation to MPS priorities. As highlighted earlier in report, CPIC are working closely with Connect at both a London and National level to influence the introduction of a mandatory field capturing ethnicity data.

17. Recommendations and next steps

The MPS recognises that there is a significant gap in ethnicity data which is an inhibitor to drawing evidence based conclusions to the question posed and is committed to transparency in its deployment of Safer Schools officers. The MPS therefore commits to the following actions:

- Addressing the relevant recommendations around data capture improvements and then consider commissioning further qualitative and quantitative research.
- Recognising that policing is only one element of a Safer Schools Partnership, we will work with partners to establish a governance structure that will bring senior partners together to evolve, maintain and oversee the delivery of the Safer Schools Partnership.
- Give consideration to the implementation of a performance framework for Safer Schools Officers focussed on diversion/intervention activities. This could be discussed as part of the agenda when the Strategic Safer School (youth) Partnership is formed.

Glossary of terms

ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers	Merlin	Missing Persons and other Linked Indices (safeguarding and sudden deaths)
ASB	Anti-Social Behaviour	MOPAC	Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime
CPIC	Continuous Improvement Policing Command	MPS	Metropolitan Police Service
CRIS	Crime Report Information System	PAS	Public Attitude Survey
DCDG	Deputy Commissioner's Delivery Group	PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
DfE	Department for Education	SEN	Special educational needs
DfES	Department for Education and Skills	SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
DMC	Department for Media and Communications	SSO	Safer Schools Officer
DoJ	Department of Justice	SSP	Safer School Partnership
EIA	Equality Impact Assessment	SIU	Strategic Insight Unit
HOCRS	Home Officer Crime Reporting Standards	TPA	Tactical policy advisors
LVN	Local Village Network	VAWG	Violence against women and girls
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub	VRU	Violence Reduction Unit