



PARENTS & SCHOOLS NEWSLETTER

Welcome to another edition of my termly newsletter. As the Schools & Youth Engagement Officer for Chiltern & South Bucks I cover 23 schools and with this newsletter I hope to focus on issues that relate to school communities and the student population.

Schools Officer

I am PC 6553 Claire Annison and I have been the Schools & Youth Engagement Officer for Chiltern & South Bucks since September 2018. I have been with Thames Valley Police for over 11 years and am currently the only Schools Officer covering Chiltern & South Bucks – that's 23 secondary schools!

My role within schools is to enforce the law in a positive way. I act with professional discretion to avoid young people being brought into the criminal justice system unnecessarily. It's all about finding a balance, keeping a "police head" on and at the same time being aware of the needs of the school and, where possible, avoiding criminalising students.

However if someone needs to be arrested they should be; if someone needs a restorative approach within the ethos and disciplinary procedures of the school, then that is what should be done.

As part of the educational approach I engage with students through assemblies and talks where I deliver specific programmes (e.g. knife awareness, child criminal exploitation, cyber safety, drugs, bullying & harassment, etc).

I also aim to continue this termly newsletter providing parents and careers with information on the law and other subjects relevant to the school community, so I hope you find it useful.

Police working with schools undertake a diverse range of roles and activities along a wide spectrum of work. Activities can be broadly grouped into three areas:

- Enforcement and safety of young people (e.g. tackling crime, discipline and behaviour in school)
- Supporting improvements in young people's knowledge and quality of life e.g. curriculum activities, extra-curricular activities, pastoral support)
- Strategic and multi-agency preventative working (e.g. sharing intelligence, police presence).

Safer Schools Partnership Thames Valley Police embraces the 'Safer Schools Partnership' (SSP) approach to engaging with schools in Chiltern & South Bucks so it is worth briefly explaining what this is.

Any incident which occurs on the school premise or spills out of school having started immediately prior to school end and is between students attending the same school and fits the classification category should be dealt with under SSP (this also includes online harassment happening between students out of school but as a result of the students attending the same school). This is not an optional process, it is a Home Office requirement, and so parents should report incidents to the school.

The school takes primacy in investigating by taking statements from those involved and witnesses, and giving an overview of the incident. If an incident is reported to the Police we would notify the school, liaise with relevant investigating teacher, and deal with the incident under SSP guidance. Police are not there for additional punishment if parents are not satisfied the school have dealt with it appropriately.

The 4 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.

You Said; We Did

You said you were concerned about **Knife Crime** in the area.

We did... Although knife crime remains relatively low in C&SB the schools officer and the Neighbourhood Police teams have been working together with local secondary schools using knife arches to detect and deter this type of crime, and have given talks to educate young people about knife crime. There has been a positive response to this from the schools and we will be doing more in the future.

TVP are working with other agencies like Fearless to educate young people and to report knife crimes. For more information contact fearless.org.

Online Grooming

What is grooming

Grooming is a process used to prepare a child for sexual abuse. An offender's aim when grooming will be to gain access to a child and build a relationship with that child.

Grooming can take many different forms, from one off contact which may include sexual advances, to a series of events over time. It may start with an adult scanning websites to identify a vulnerable child or befriending a child, perhaps by pretending to have common hobbies or interests or using flattery to trick a child into trusting them.

How online grooming works

It is easier for an offender to lie and gain one to one contact with a child online than offline. They can share images or videos relating to their claimed common interests and build a 'relationship' away from any adult supervision.

- Games, social media and chatrooms enable people to make contact with children to try to groom them.
- They can create multiple online identities and even pretend to be children and young people to trick real children into chatting and sharing.
- They can find out a lot about individual children before they make contact by looking at the things the child has posted.
- Using this information they can target children who are particularly vulnerable and carefully plan what they will say and show an interest in.
- They can also contact lots of children very quickly in the hope that one will respond

Once a relationship is established an offender may then introduce sexual themes to the conversation, like asking the child about their sexual experiences, sharing pornography with them or asking them for sexual pictures of themselves. This process can be very quick or it can take days, weeks or months. Often an offender will attempt to get a child to meet them in the real world, and some offenders are also getting children to perform sexual acts on webcam. Encouraging or forcing a child into sexual activity on webcam or through images can be just as harmful as 'contact' sexual abuse.

Spotting the signs

Online grooming can be very hard to spot. When a child is being groomed they will probably try to keep it a secret from parents or carers.

- **Have they suddenly become very secretive?** People who abuse will try to stop young people telling their friends and family about the abusive relationship.
- **Are they sad or withdrawn but won't say why?** If something is going on it might be really upsetting the child. They might feel trapped, like they can't talk about it.
- **Do they seem distracted?** If a child is unusually preoccupied it might be because things are weighing on them which they feel they can't talk about.
- **Do they have sudden mood swings?** Mood swings are not uncommon in adolescence but they can be a sign that someone has built a relationship with the child which is affecting their moods.
- **Are they unable to switch off from the internet, their phone or social media?** Lots of us find it hard not to check our phone or the internet, but if a child gets particularly worried or stressed when they can't, this can be a sign someone is controlling them.
- **Are they planning to meet up with an online friend?** Offenders may try and persuade a child to meet up with them in person in order to contact abuse them.

Sexting & Sexual Images: the rules

This issue reoccurs year after year. In recent years we have seen a rise in the reporting of a variety of sexual image related offences among students. These include pressure for photos, taking provocative pictures of each other or themselves, sharing and possession.

The NSPCC reported that nearly every male child by the end of year 8 (age 13) has accessed unprecedented levels of porn online; they believe this has driven an unrealistic expectation of sexual conduct. Their report indicated girls in turn feel pressured to participate due to a variety of reasons, from social pressure to insecurity. The vast majority of children aren't sharing 'nudes' but the pressures to do so are there, with six out of ten saying they have been asked for them.

It is a criminal offence to make / take / possess / distribute / publish / show indecent images of a person under 18 or incite someone else to do so, even if the person doing any of these things is under 18 themselves. This also includes downloading, storing and printing images from the internet, and children sending / showing images / movies of adult porn. That means it is illegal to create or share sexually explicit images of people under the age of 18, even if the person in the picture is you.

The law was designed to protect children from adult sexual predators, not to criminalise teenagers for exploring sexual feelings. As incidents often come to light when pupils share images at school, it's often teachers who have to deal with the situation and the school can handle the incident internally. When image offences are reported to Police we are required to record a crime, but if we believe that coercion or abuse has not occurred our resolution will be restorative with safeguarding not criminalising in mind (unless there is reason to follow the criminal path).

When to call the police

If you find out an adult has shared a sexual image with your child, has shared one of your child, or asked them to send them one, you can report it to CEOP at www.ceop.police.uk/saftey-centre.

[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.ceop.police.uk/saftey-centre - for reporting

www.kidshelpline.com.au – information for parents about the impact of sexting.

www.nspcc.org.uk - contains information about the risks of sexting.

www.parentzone.org.uk - a range of resources to help parents meet the challenges of the digital age.

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