



Tilley Awards 2004

Valley School

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Summary

The Valley Infant and Junior schools are situated on the Mirehouse estate to the south of Whitehaven. Both schools are contained within one site. The schools are situated in the centre of the estate and are bordered by a road to the front, railway line to the rear and public footpaths to the side and rear.

Both schools suffered from continuous and varying degrees of burglary, attempt burglary and damage, which had occurred over a number of years. Many of the incidents at the school would go unreported as the staff felt that there was nothing the Police could do.

Prior to partnership working damage at the school had cost several thousands of pounds to repair.

Although Community Police Officers paid regular visits to the schools the catalyst, which caused them and the schools to work together to address the problems, happened in March/April 2002 when the school was burgled six times.

On one of these occasions damage in excess of £5000, was caused by two seven-year-old pupils.

The second incident involved the vandalising of a nature area, which had recently been planted by children from the Infants School.

Through crime prevention measures, Communities Against Drugs funding a 'Look after our school' campaign and pupil awareness/education, incidents at the school have been dramatically reduced.

In the ten months prior to this work starting there were 54 incidents reported at the school including six burglaries, seven attempt burglaries and numerous incidents of damage and disorder.

During 2003 there were 15 incidents reported at the school of these one was a burglary at an outbuilding the others related mainly to minor disorder offences.

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1, SCANNING

Valley school is situated in the centre of the Mirehouse estate, to the South of Whitehaven, although contained in one building the school is regarded as two separate units, Infants and Juniors.

In April 2001 two Community Officers were appointed to Police the South Whitehaven estates, which included the school. Initial contact was made with the school through regular visits to speak to the pupils. Although it was widely known that offences of burglary, minor damage and disorder occurred on the school premises school staff thought that nothing could be done about this. They felt that this had always happened and was always going to happen, so no attempts were made to address the problems encountered.

Scanning of incidents at both schools immediately showed that they could be broken down in to three main areas;

- Burglary
- Minor damage caused to windows
- Disorder/damage resulting from youths climbing onto the school roof.

Although all burglaries would be reported, minor damage and disorder was not as the school staff would merely repair broken windows and roof tiles then carry on as normal.

The school is surrounded by a 1.8metre high security fence and is equipped with a fixed external CCTV system. This system had been fitted as a result of a Crime Prevention survey carried out two years previously.

In March/April 2002 the school was burgled on six separate occasions. Two seven-year-old pupils committed one of the burglaries, causing in excess of £5000 of damage.

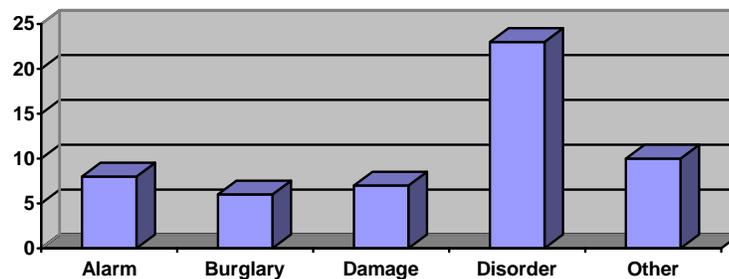
As a result of this it was identified that the problems occurring at the school had to be addressed through partnership working between the school staff, local residents and the Police and pupils.

2, ANALYSIS

The Mirehouse Volcano

Analysis of the POLIS Command and Control system for incidents occurring at the school site revealed that between 1 June 2001 and 1 May 2002 54 incidents had been reported to the Police at Whitehaven.

These were broken down into the following categories



Alarm Activations

These involved responses to the school where the alarm was activated but no evidence of crime was obvious.

Burglary

Five of the burglaries occurred where entry was gained via the rear of the premises, the remaining burglary occurred via the main door during school hours with no forced entry. On each occasion either computer equipment or cash was stolen.

Damage

This involved damage to windows either by stone throwing or by footballs and the analysis revealed that this occurred either to the rear or side of the school.

Disorder

These incidents either related to youths running along the school roof, which at its highest point is four storeys' high. Youths playing football in the school grounds or youths being in the school grounds outside school hours.

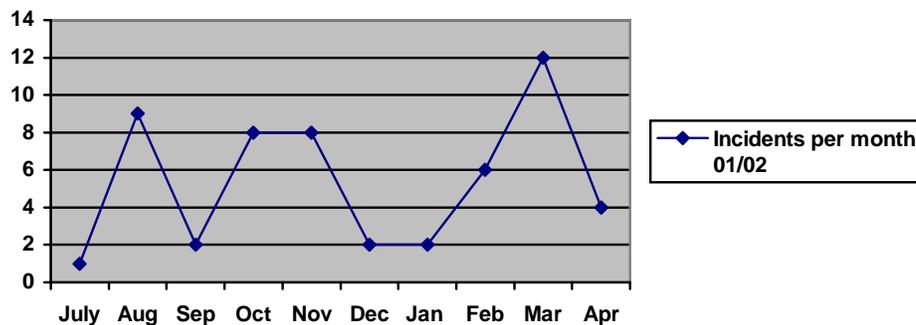
Other

These incidents mainly involved people acting suspiciously in the school grounds but also included two where drugs (cannabis) was found to the rear of the premises.

The analyst translated this information into a 3 dimensional map of the Mirehouse estate, when this was looked at, it gave the impression that a volcano had erupted in the centre of the estate, that centre being Valley School.

Time Analysis

The analysis revealed that the majority of incidents were occurring outside school hours and also confirmed an increase during school holiday periods in August, October, November and March, which the chart below shows.



Muddy Boots

Although we all knew the school well, there had never been any reason to have a good look at what was at the back of it, we all assumed it was just the playing field. A walk around the school, onto the field and surrounding area revealed why the bulk of incidents were happening at the rear of the premises.

The rear of the school affords good cover from view.

Two access gates in the rear fence had been given ornamental designs. This made them very easy to climb defeating the object of the security fence. Trails worn through the grass and vegetation to the sides of these gates confirmed that, this was the access point when the gates were locked. This was also confirmed when the two seven year olds who burgled the school were spoken to.

A low roof to the rear of the school afforded easy access to the main roof.

The fixed CCTV system was ineffective due to the large space it covered with a small number of cameras.

A ten metre gap had been left between the school and rear fence to allow grass cutter access, this gap also allowed access to all, from the schools' side yard.

No property within the school was security marked.

No exact figures for the cost to repair damage were readily available. The head was able to state that over the years this had run in to tens of thousands of pounds to replace or repair school property.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

These objectives were agreed between the head teacher of the school and the Police to reduce the number of incidents occurring on the premises.

- Through crime prevention measures, deny access to the rear of the school.
- Deny access to the roof.
- Make school property less attractive to potential thieves.
- Involve the pupils in the project, making them more aware of their environment.

It was agreed that this had to be achieved without turning the school in to something, which looked like a high security prison.

3. RESPONSE

CCTV

Although the CCTV existed we felt it didn't point in the right directions and was used to cover far too wide an area. This was adjusted to try to cover likely areas where the school would be attacked. This was seen more of a deterrent rather than a tool to catch someone in the act of committing a crime.

'Look after our school' campaign

In the analysis it was identified that the bulk of incidents occurred outside school hours. It was shown that a large proportion of these involved youths including pupils from the school. To address this we worked with teachers, educating the children placing emphasis on them to take pride in their school.

We also outlined the dangers of climbing on the school buildings especially the main roof which as already mentioned was four storeys' high at its' highest point

The site survey had also shown that the school was overlooked by a number of residential properties. The occupiers of these properties reported many of the incidents reported to the Police. We realized that they were key players in watching the school when it was not in use.

As the summer holidays 2002 approached we asked the children to write to residents explaining the problems, which the school had and in view of those problems to report any incidents to the Police.

It was felt that a letter from the pupils would have far more effect than a pre-formatted letter from the Police. These letters were then hand delivered to residents by the children accompanied by the Community Police officers.

Property Marking

No property within the school was security marked. It was agreed with the head that all property would be marked with a unique code for Valley School. All property was marked over a period of two days.

Signs were then purchased to display on the outside of the school advertising the fact to potential thieves that all property was etched. These signs were also used to warn of CCTV coverage.

Main Door Security

Scanning and analysis revealed that access was available through the main door of the school at any time of day no security measures were in place. An electronic lock and buzzer was purchased and fitted, which only allows access by first contacting the school secretary.

Continuous Analysis

Continuous scanning and analysis of the problem was carried out. The initial measures, which were put into place, prior to the summer holidays 2002 initially, appeared to have some effect as a reduction in incidents compared to the previous summer could be seen.

From 1 July 2002 to 1 October 2002, 20 incidents were reported at the school in comparison to 15 during the same period of 2003.

This gave us a good evidential base for continuing the work as it could be seen that incidents could be reduced.

Communities Against Drugs

Although the aforementioned measures were easily implemented with little cost, improvements to the fence and preventing access to the roof was going to take a more substantial amount of money to achieve.

A local fencing contractor was contacted and site improvements were discussed with him an estimate of £5000 was given to improve the following areas identified in the analysis. **See; Valley School Plan**

1. Replace two ornamental gates with security gates
2. Heighten the fencing to either side of the gates.
3. Provide ten metres of gated fencing to close the gap between the school and the rear fence, thereby totally enclosing the school field.
4. Provide 30 metres of razor wire and signs to deny access to the school roof..

Using the information provided in the analysis about the two drug finds and using historical burglary information, whereby it was identified that previous offenders were drug users who had burgled the school to feed their habit, a bid was submitted to the Communities Against Drugs Fund. The project was granted a total of 5500 by this fund.

Work commenced on these improvements, in November 2002. They were completed by January 2003.

4. ASSESSMENT

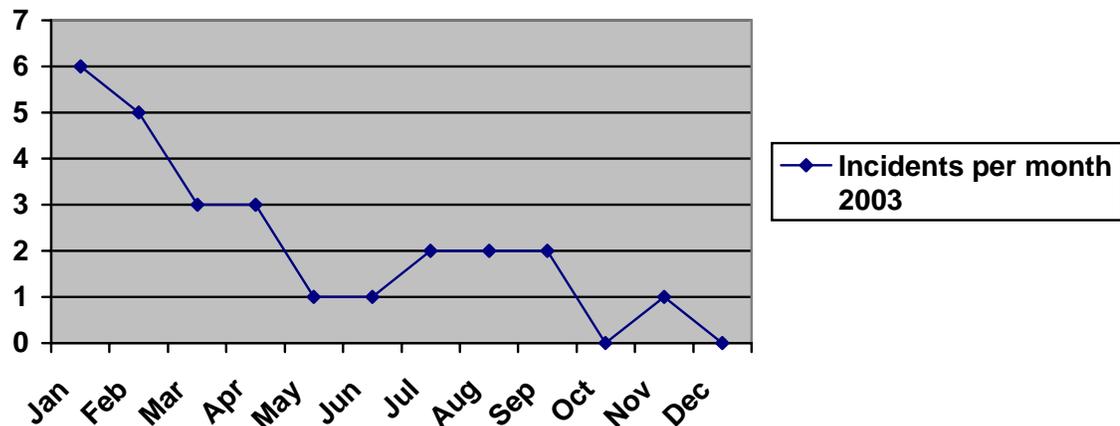
The initial response to the project was cost effective and relatively easy to implement.

Access to the rear of the school has now been denied by closing the gap between the school and the rear fence with a gated security fence. By changing the rear gates and raising the height of the fence access has been denied via these points. This can be visibly seen as the trails worn in the grass have grown over.

Access has been denied to the school roof, no further incidents have been reported involving youths on the roof.

These security improvements have been achieved without making the school look like a prison.

A reduction in incidents can be seen in the table below

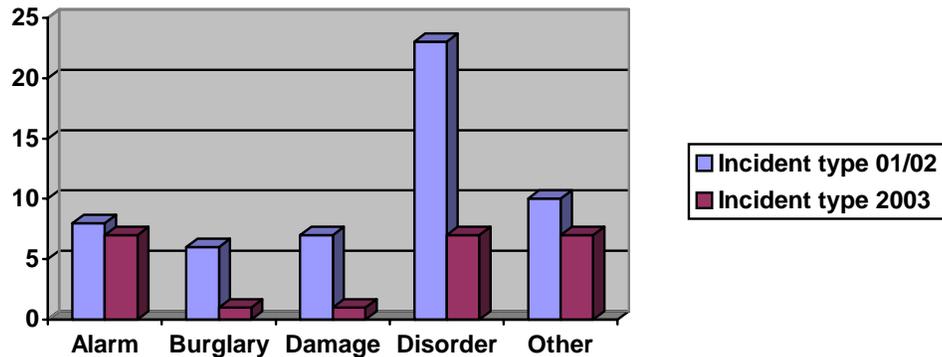


Staff at the school, were keen for the children to work with the Community Officers on the 'look after our school campaign' as it not only enabled the children to interact with the Police but also enabled them to interact with the local community as they worked with them to 'look after the school.'

Work with the school children has continued and during the main school holidays, summer, Easter and Christmas the children still write to local residents asking them to look after their school.

The project cost less than anticipated; approximately £4000 was spent in total. This under spend was due to the fact that we didn't realise that we didn't have to pay VAT, we live and learn!

Although youth disorder still makes up the bulk of incidents occurring within the school, this now happens in the yard to the side of the premises and mainly involves children playing football. The table below gives a break down of incidents in 2003.



The head teacher is far happier with the reduction in incidents and the type of incident occurring, as the incidents which are reported, youths playing football, don't cost the school any money in repairs..

Only one burglary has been committed at the school since April 2001, this has occurred in an outbuilding away from the main school premises.

Overall the project has worked well and achieved the objectives without incurring excessive cost. The school incurred no cost whatsoever to improve security.

Work with the school children continues.

Jean Beverly the head teacher said, 'Incidents of damage and burglary at the school have never been so low'

VALLEY SCHOOL PLAN

