

Perspectives of the police, school staff, parents and pupils of Safer Schools Partnerships

Understanding the expectations and perspectives of stakeholders within Safer Schools Partnerships in London.

Key details

Lead institution	Canterbury Christ Church University
Principal researcher(s)	Steven Sweeney
Police region	South East
Collaboration and partnership	Metropolitan Police Service
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	October 2023
Date due for completion	September 2028

Research context

There is a lack of research on the aims, purpose, roles and activities of Safer Schools Partnerships (SSPs). This gap is especially evident following recent high-profile cases like the ‘Child Q’ report, the Runnymede Trust report and news articles portraying negative attitudes, in contrast to the Metropolitan Police Service’s continuing investment in Safer Schools officers (SSOs).

While the role of an SSO can be described as predominantly about crime prevention, there are many elements of the role that have not been explored sufficiently within the literature. There is a lack of understanding of how SSPs:

- provide positive engagement to build trust and confidence

- improve safety and enhance safeguarding in schools
- develop prevention strategies
- support vulnerable young people

In addition, there is no academic research on understanding their effects on young people and parents.

This research engages with the following areas of literature.

- Literature on criminal justice reform, which often focuses on re-evaluating law enforcement practices, reducing over-policing and promoting alternatives to traditional punitive measures.
- Educational psychology, which gives insights into the psychological and developmental aspects of students within the context of school safety and crime prevention.
- Community-based interventions, emphasising collaboration between schools, the police, families and local organisations, while focusing on holistic approaches to address risk and involving the community in creating strategies. This area shows how partnerships and engagement with stakeholders can contribute to SSPs, providing ideas on restorative approaches, conflict resolution and prevention measures.

Exploring these areas can provide insights into the reimagining of policing within educational establishments and fostering positive relationships between school communities, the police and wider communities.

Research methodology

Using mixed methods, the researcher will carry out semi-structured interviews, focus groups and online surveys to examine partnership relationships and activities within an SSP during school and after school. They will analyse the expectations of school staff, parents and pupils.

Qualitative and quantitative data will be collected from:

- head teachers and the school point of contact (SPOC), who have daily contact with SSOs and semi-regular contact with the school's sergeant and inspector
- school pupils who do and do not have contact with the SSO
- parents who have and do not have knowledge of SSPs and the work of SSOs
- youth/Safer Schools inspectors who have oversight of local SSPs

- Safer Schools sergeants who coordinate local SSPs, allocating resources to schools, and who have daily contact with the SSO as their supervisor and periodic contact with head teachers and SPOCs
- SSOs who have daily contact with head teachers, school senior leadership teams and school staff, and who will provide a specific point of view on how their SSP works

The researcher will also consider interviewing SSOs from other forces to gain further insight into different ways a SSP might work.

Following the interviews, analysis of the data will pick out strengths, weaknesses and common themes. This will include descriptive analysis for the demographics and statistics, and thematic analysis of the qualitative interview data.

For online surveys, the researcher aims for at least 200 responses from SSOs, at least 100 responses from school head teachers, and around 60 individual interviews. The researcher will also aim for 10 focus groups of 10 young people in each. Data collection and analysis will continue until saturation is reached.

Research participation

Any head teacher or any police officer working with schools is welcome to get involved. Send expressions of interest to s.p.sweeney852@canterbury.ac.uk.

Tags

- [Operational policing](#)