

# POLICE IN THE CLASSROOM

## improving young people's trust and confidence in the police

### BACKGROUND

Levels of trust and confidence in the police for some groups of children and young people are low and the more contact they have with the police, the less they are likely to trust them<sup>1</sup>. This matters, because 'policing by consent' depends on:

- public *trust*: the belief that the police are effective, behave appropriately and are well intentioned towards those they govern and serve.
- the police being seen as *legitimate*: that they are justified in holding power and have the authority to dictate appropriate behaviour.

Without public trust and legitimacy, the foundation of policing in the UK is threatened. It is increasingly urgent for policing to address the issue of youth trust and confidence, particularly following the Covid-19 pandemic and police enforcement of unprecedented restrictions on young people's freedoms.

Between 2018-2020, the National Police Chiefs' Council, in partnership with the PSHE Association and the London School of Economics, set out to establish whether police officers could build better relationships and trust with students in classrooms.

Our evaluated intervention provides new insights into how we can improve the relationship between young people and policing and best develop the role of police in schools.

### POLICE IN THE CLASSROOM

The PSHE Association designed a programme for police consisting of:

- A rigorous two-day training course, co-delivered by a PSHE teacher and a police officer.
- A set of lessons on 'drugs and the law' to be delivered in the classroom as part of PSHE education
- A handbook 'Police in the Classroom' providing practice principles for police officers to follow when working with young people in schools

The training and curriculum materials were informed by 'procedural justice theory'<sup>2</sup> and aimed to enable police officers to engage in 'procedurally just' interactions in the classroom, in particular offering youth participation, behaving neutrally and treating people with dignity and respect.

Trained police officers delivered one lesson as part of schools' PSHE curriculum, preceded and followed up by a lesson delivered by a teacher, ensuring young people were aware of the police visit and able to provide reflections and feedback.

The impact of this one lesson delivered by a trained police officer was tested using a three wave randomised controlled trial in over 80 schools.

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1 Crime Survey for England and Wales, "It's all about trust": Building good relationships between children and the police (Inquiry by the APPG for Children 2014); On Our Side – Young people and the police (Howard League 2012); Final Report: Youth Violence Commission July 2020; 'No respect: Young BAME men, the police and stop and search' (Keeling, P 2013)

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of procedural justice theory see '[Police in schools: an evidence review](#)' (Bradford, B; Yesberg, J 2019)

Participating schools were assigned to one of three groups: a control group, where no lesson took place, or one of two treatment groups, where the lesson was either taught by a teacher or a police officer.

Students filled out a questionnaire assessing attitudes towards the police three times: firstly, two months before the teaching had taken place, a second survey right after the class, and a third survey two months after the lesson.

## **RESULTS**

Using three different approaches to assess the impact of the intervention, we found robust evidence that the police-led lesson significantly increased young people's trust in police fairness both in the short and long term and helped students to learn new concepts.

The effects of the intervention were similar regardless of the gender or ethnicity of the participant, the diversity in the area in which they lived, or previous experiences with the police.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

This intervention successfully increased young people's confidence in the police and helped them learn new concepts about drugs with lasting impact two-months later. The magnitude of these effects was the same regardless of a pupil's background. These findings suggest this is a scalable way to build better relationships between young people and the police.

We should be clear that we are not recommending that police officers go into schools in an enforcement, surveillance or protective capacity. The focus here is on education and building confidence, and police officers engaging with schools in this way may help foster the type of positive experiences that generate a mutual sense of trust and legitimacy.

If this intervention was rolled out more widely, rather than young people largely having interactions with police officers out in the street, where the officers are acting in a regulatory capacity, they would have more humanised interactions in their early teenage years that can help foster a sense of trust between police and young people.

## **NEXT STEPS**

We want this report to be the beginning of a partnership between NPCC, PSHE Association and LSE to:

- Establish a national training programme for officers who deliver classroom
- Develop national resources for officers who go into schools
- Conduct further research into how this type of intervention can be most effectively delivered