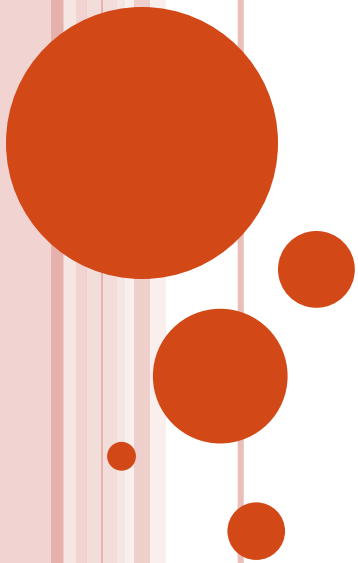


SAFETY IN SCHOOLS: THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL AND THE SGB

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SATU Workshop for School
Management Teams
6 June 2019**



SAFETY IN SCHOOLS...

- Credible research tells us that virtually nothing is more calculated to drive parents away from the school than the perception that the school is not a 'safe place' for their children to be
- Some would argue that school safety lies in the domain of the Department and the individual
- I would argue, though, that the SGB cannot escape moral responsibility, and that, in practice, if they don't take the lead, safety will not be satisfactorily addressed.
- Remember, of course, that the principal is a full member of the SGB and plays an important part in the development of safety consciousness and initiatives
- In the end, though, safety is a whole school thing with everyone having a part to play



SCHOOL SAFETY...

- Looking at school safety, one can easily identify four areas of concern which are demanding of attention:
 - Learner safety
 - Staff safety
 - Institutional safety – buildings and facilities
 - And an overlooked aspect – reputational safety

 - For the first two the safety can be:
 - Physical safety
 - Emotional safety
- And then we also have to look to
- Cyber safety
 - And the special case – reputational safety of institution and individuals



SAFETY AND CODES OF CONDUCT

- Safety does not simply look off to itself – it needs definite attention and action
- When looking at retaining or maintaining the safety of individuals, realize that it all starts with the codes of conduct
- So - build safety-appropriate behaviour into your codes of conduct – you cannot act against anyone unless their actions are identifiable as misconduct in terms of school regulations
- I have specifically spoken of codes in the plural: I believe that you need separate codes of conduct for, obviously:
 - Staff
 - Learners
 - but also
 - Parents
 - Spectators
 - Coaches
- And again, in these times, don't overlook cyber-safety and a code of cyber-conduct or best practice



Apart from putting in place a set of pretty bullet-proof codes of conduct, what more can the principal or SGB do to enhance the security of the school and those in it?

General school safety

A LITTLE POSITIVITY ...

- If I may offer a guesstimate, I would suggest that, in about 98% of the schools represented here, the Department has, to a reasonable extent, done its bit when it comes to school safety
- It has provided the following basic safety measures to most of your schools :
 - They are almost all properly fenced
 - They almost all have pretty sturdy doors – inner as well as outer – that can lock
 - In schools where the pressures are greater, there is in most departments some form of support available from a “Safe Schools” or similar section
 - Generally speaking, the departments have got some or other co-operation agreements or safety initiatives in place with the police or local policing forums
- *Where the above are not in place, I would strongly suggest that the SGB (possibly with a bit of push from the principal) needs to ensure that all of them are put in place!*

The times they are a-changin'

A FEW REALITIES OF THE TIMES

- Frightening figures
 - 90% of British teachers reportedly physically or verbally abused at school in past year
 - Complain of being “thrown to the wolves”
 - “Management and governance support essential”
- Moving beyond the individual and looking at the broad picture, the entire issue of school safety, as well as its alter ego – school non-safety – is in the first instance a community or social problem rather than a school or departmental responsibility
- The protection and security of traffic routes, roads, sidewalks, pedestrian walkways and the like can not be reasonably laid at the door of the education department
- This is where we are at the mercy of the support which comes from – or ought to come from – social and community actions, policing, and, under extreme circumstances, even the defence force
- Unfortunately, though, it remains so that, until such time as safety at a community level is brought under control, it is in the first instance, the individual’s responsibility – so choose your times of movement, or access and egress routes and (if you can) use all of them together, not alone
 - Look at various possibilities – e.g. “walking buses”

THE SCHOOL'S EDUCATIONAL AND PROTECTION ROLE

- The preceding actions must be brought strongly to the attention of staff, learners, parents and others the school context
- They need to be regularly repeated and impressed on all
- The school needs to reconsider its safety approaches – towards both the school and the individuals in it
- It is again a guesstimate, but I would suggest that the safety plan in most of our schools still revolves around evacuation – i.e. how you get people out of the building when danger comes knocking, in cases such as fires, bomb threats and the like
- Rules and requirements need to be brought into line with the changing times and circumstances – because there is a new reality

THE NEW REALITY

- Is it not far more likely these days that the real threat comes from outside the building rather than from within it?
- Does your safety plan make provision for keeping protesters and others out, and for the protection, rather than the evacuation, of those inside?
- By evacuating you simply walk straight into the trouble instead of getting away
- Have you got measures in place to ensure that you can communicate effectively with both those inside and outside the building – even if you're under siege and the telephone lines have been cut?
- What about getting right away if the school is under siege– is it provided for?
- Is everyone aware that even entirely positive intentions and actions can be misconstrued and result in dangerous re-actions – cf. Schweizer-Reneke?

THE BURNING AND VANDALISATION OF SCHOOLS

- I can only repeat – is it not far more likely these days that the real threat comes from outside the building rather than in it?
- We need the opinion-formers in the community on our side
- There was a time when the school was the symbol of a hated enemy, or a despised regime – we need to change that
- School should these days be a symbol of our possibilities, it belongs to the community, it is the future of our young people – we can't destroy it
- I wouldn't propagate violence and burnings at any time or in any shape or form – but if people must indulge in it, let them do it to facilities that will not damage the fabric of what we really want or need.
- Slogans: “Hands off our schools – “Take ownership of our schools” – “Schools are not for burning or robbing”
- Get the community on your side – will return to this later

SO – INSIST ON SAFETY-CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL

- The unfortunate reality is that the SGB is more likely to be concerned with learner safety – i.e. the safety of their own children – than the safety of staff or facilities
- That is not a complaint or criticism – it is simple realism around a human response
- What this means is that the SGB needs to be “pushed” by the SMT to broaden its outlook and intentions when it comes to safety issues
- My experience is that, if the problem is brought to their attention, they respond positively – they just need a gentle shove ... so
- Give it to them!

WHAT CAN THE SGB DO IN REAL TERMS?

- Funding must be made available and maintenance actions put in place to ensure the effectiveness of that which the department has provided – gates, fences, doors, windows, fire hydrants and hoses, etc.
- Fire extinguishers must be regularly maintained and there must be people in place who know how to work them
- There must be first aid stocks and equipment in place, and trained first aiders to use them effectively
- These things will cost both money and time – so there must be provision in both the budget and the school programme to make sure they happen
- May need fundraising or other forms of funding

Securing the school terrain

SECURING THE SCHOOL TERRAIN

- This is a particularly difficult task – schools are places where our “default-action” is to allow people to enter – even to invite them to enter – not to keep them out. After all:
 - Learners need to come to school
 - Parents and others come and support
 - Crowds and audiences at sports and cultural activities are not just allowed in, but welcomed
 - The general public are an essential component of fund-raising activities
 - Delivery people have to be able to deliver
 - Past pupils come to visit
 - Prospective learners and their parents want to come and see “what this place is like”
 - Etc., etc., etc.

SECURING THE TERRAIN (CONTINUED)

HOWEVER –

- As we have seen – times have changed – “things are no longer what they were!”
- Experience has taught us that it is often precisely the aforementioned that hold significant danger for both our staff and our learners – for example:
 - Attacks on staff by parents or learners
 - Spectators who attack coaches (commonly these are verbal attacks, but also on occasion physical)
 - Rogues or robbers who target staff – particularly financial staff
 - Staff who are attacked at school by family members

SECURING THE TERRAIN (FURTHER CONTINUED)

- Members of gangs follow their opposing gang members onto the school grounds or even into the school buildings, and staff and children then land up entirely innocently in the crossfire
- Protesters who attack the staff and their belongings – especially their motor cars
- Children who attack their teachers in class
- Learners – particularly older learners – indulge in sexual molestation of staff – sometimes physically (although this is relatively rare), more often through social media or by means of gossip or slander
 - Kimberley, Waterkloof, “hammer-case” and many others

*Ensuring the safety
of the staff*

THREATS ARE NOT ONLY PHYSICAL – THEY OFTEN OCCUR ON AN EMOTIONAL LEVEL

- Can be face to face
 - “my father pays your salary– I will see to it that...”
- Often takes place using social media or cyber-activities
 - Direct messaging
 - Posts on Facebook, Instagram and so on
- Can also be indirect
 - Letters on the teacher’s desk or slipped under the door
 - There are indicators that somebody has been in the classroom or office – clear evidence of access to drawers, cupboards, etc.
- Can be embarrassing, but also sometimes quite frightening

NB: there is a strong perception amongst staff that when parents complain, management and governors, by “default”, side with the “victim” without considering both sides of the matter – this is something which is highly emotive, and which requires urgent attention from all concerned

WHAT CAN THE STAFF DO THEMSELVES?

- Retain the moral high ground
- Do not provoke:
 - No names or name-calling
 - Avoid social media comment and relationships - can land you in real trouble
- Never touch a learner in love or anger
- Always keep a piece of furniture between you and a learner if either of you is angry
- Follow the prescriptions already mentioned
 - Time, routes, numbers together, locks, attitude

*Reputational safety of
both school and staff*

“REPUTATIONAL SAFETY” ...

- Do not overlook the importance of securing the good name of the school and the staff – their “reputational safety”
- There are many ways in which one can make a strong case for the fact that the good name of the school and the staff are the most important asset of the institution
- As with any other asset, this reputation needs to be maintained and protected
- In reality, sometimes also polished and honed
- As with all other assets, the care of reputational assets is a joint responsibility of the principal and SGB
- But also of the individuals themselves

*Safety which costs
little or nothing*

NOBODY ELSE WILL LOOK AFTER SCHOOL SECURITY AND SAFETY

- To emphasise matters – safety costs both money and willpower
- SGB's should consider the following:
 - Education, education and more education – of everyone – children and parents, staff and, even the SGB itself
 - Security guards – obviously those at entrance points, but also additional security patrolling the grounds
 - Security gates and panic buttons
 - Electronic or biological access control
 - Security cameras – at entrances to both grounds and building
 - Also in passages, around “soft targets”, kit and computer rooms, finance offices, etc
 - Possibly also in classrooms – but obviously not ablutions

AIDS WHICH COST NOTHING AT ALL

- Use the schools neighbours as additional security, by making them your partners, not your enemies
 - Give ADVANCE notice of activities and apologise for noise and inconvenience
 - Invite them to school activities
 - Give them access to the grounds and allow walking of dogs
 - Hold an annual “Neighbours function”
 - Instigate a “365 Club” or similar
- Make friends with the police and policing forum
- Engender pride in, and a love for, the school among learners and the community – it’s “our” school and it’s a “good” school

OTHER POSSIBLE SUPPORT

- As long as staff do their bit, and are not on the moral “low ground”:
 - Management and governors should support them to the hilt
 - Remember, support cannot be unconditional – you must play your part from the outset and earn it and deserve it
 - Make use of all possible measures and codes
 - What about a data bank of lawyers, psychologists, social workers and social media authorities who are prepared to provide assistance, advice and support?
 - Insurance policies
 - But be careful here – there can be certain problems which arise, so seek assistance from a trustworthy broker
 - Possibly even a “support fund”?
- In short, the governing body and management need to take a lead in putting in place the right safety atmosphere, and offer maximum support where difficult situations arise

Any questions?

Thank you!