

Schools

Understanding crime
in schools so design
can intervene



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Design Out Crime is an initiative from the Home Office's Design & Technology Alliance Against Crime and the Design Council. The Alliance is tasked with bringing about innovation and encouraging others to 'think crime' in the first stages of design, planning and product development. It is comprised of experts from the world of design, industry and law enforcement.



Introduction

The Design & Technology Alliance Against Crime was established by the Home Office in 2007, tasked with encouraging innovation through ‘thinking crime’ in the first stages of design, planning and product development.

As part of the Alliance’s work, the Design Council commissioned The Sorrell Foundation to run a Schools Project, exploring the issues young people identify about crime and how they might be resolved through design. The project gave young people a voice, established communication routes with policy-makers and provided insights that can help develop briefs for designers.

We believe it will help designers, manufacturers and policy makers to better understand the scale and effects of the problem and encourage more design commissions in tackling it.

The Alliance aims to:

Generate positive design solutions to specific crime and disorder problems, based on an understanding of the methods used by offenders.

Advise on strategies for the wider implementation of these solutions.

Inspire designers to produce positive design solutions (through commissions, awards and publicity).

Raise consumer awareness and increase demand for secure and attractive products.

Demonstrate the business case for Design Out Crime by showing that it adds value.

Raise the profile of Design Out Crime within industry, placing it at the core of corporate social responsibility.



The context

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School violence in the UK

Everybody wants children to have safe, healthy environments in which to learn and develop and fortunately, most schools provide this. Some, however, have problems with crime and violence that can put children and teachers in danger and undermine teaching and learning.

In 1997, 482 UK young people aged 10–17 were convicted of carrying a bladed weapon. In 2006, when schools were given the legal right to search pupils suspected of carrying knives, this nearly tripled, rising to 1,265.¹

An Ipsos MORI survey for the Youth Justice Board found that 29% of secondary school children, along with 57% of those excluded, admitted to routinely carrying knives.² This is a self-perpetuating, dangerous trend with horrific consequences.

29%
of secondary
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The 2009–2010 British Crime Survey was expanded for the first time to include 10 to 15-year-olds (of which there are reportedly approximately 3,909,680 in England and Wales). Figures from the survey suggested 24% of young people were victims of crime in the previous year – mostly at school.³ The Survey indicates that more than 2.1 million children suffered violence, robbery or theft, suggesting they are at greater risk than adults.⁴

Furthermore, this leaves out a significant area of youth victimisation: bullying. No official crime statistics currently exist to capture the extent of bullying as it is technically not classed as a crime. It has only recently become a requirement that schools record incidents of bullying.⁵

In recent years, a new form of bullying has been made possible by technology: cyber-bullying, which targets young people, usually anonymously, through their phones and the internet.

‘These new figures reinforce our longstanding belief that, to date, crime measures have offered either a partial or confused picture about the level of offending. However you look at these statistics, they reveal what people know only too well – that crime affecting young people is a serious problem which must be tackled.’

— Police Minister, Nick Herbert.

What’s already being done

The Government has made tackling bullying in schools a key priority.

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) has encouraged all schools to set up a peer mentoring scheme to combat bullying and peer pressure. Results have been shown to include improvements in behaviour, self-confidence and student-teacher relationships.⁶

The Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 has substantially strengthened schools’ powers to tackle violent crime by enabling the screening of pupils using arch and wand metal detectors.

‘We’re giving Head Teachers the extra powers they need to make their schools safer for all pupils and staff. If they feel it appropriate they can now both screen and search pupils to prevent weapons coming through the school gates. Parents will welcome the fact that we are sending out a clear message that bringing a knife into school is a criminal offence and will not be tolerated.’

— Former Education Secretary, Alan Johnson



The project

There is a two-way flow of influences with bullying in schools: what happens in schools is often influenced by factors at home and in the community and, in turn, bullying in schools can spill out into the wider world. This strongly suggests the problem cannot be successfully dealt with in isolation.⁷

A Sorrell Foundation project was set up to gather information from young people about their experiences of crime and bullying, not just in school but in the community in general.

Beginning with a pilot project in London from autumn 2008 to spring 2009, it then moved on to run projects in other UK regions from autumn 2009 to spring 2010.

In total, the project engaged 150 ‘young advisers’ from 6 regions (London, Basildon, Bolton, Bradford, Merthyr Tydfil and Nottinghamshire) in workshops games, inspirational visits and presentations.

Mapping crime issues

At the Young Design Centre, during trips to London, each group of young advisers split into three teams to identify crime issues in three different situations: at school, on the journey to and from school and in the community.

Developing ideas

Working in their teams, the young advisers examined the crime issues they had identified. For the 2009-2010 project, advisers were asked to apply for the role of team reporters, with the task of investigating crime issues in more depth. The reporters shared their findings during the next workshop, using photography, film and PowerPoint presentations. A reporter from the Nottinghamshire group produced an eight-minute film about crime in her local area, which included interviews with police officers and shopkeepers.

Visualising

The young advisers created visual boards about the crime issues they had identified, then worked with Sorrell Foundation facilitators to develop their boards into a presentation with scripted short role-plays and, in one case, a video.

Final presentations

The 2008-2009 Design Out Crime pilot project culminated in a presentation at the Home Office, followed by another, specially requested, to the 32 London Metropolitan Borough Police Commanders. Advisers taking part in the 2009-2010 project presented what were called their Young People’s Briefs – summaries of their findings on crime issues – to audiences of decision-makers and community leaders. After each presentation, audience members were invited to join the groups onstage for further discussion.



The six locations

Design Out Crime engaged 150 advisers from the following six regions

London

In London, the young advisers came from Dagenham, Northolt and Whitechapel.

- Dagenham is a high-crime area with low educational achievement.
- Northolt is economically and ethnically diverse, with decent employment prospects and good educational achievement, but also crime rates above the national average.
- Whitechapel is ethnically and economically diverse, but with high rates of deprivation and crime.

Basildon

This area has low educational attainment and an above average number of young people classed as NEET (not in education, employment or training), but crime rates are average and seem to be falling.

Bolton

There is high deprivation and unemployment, with average crime statistics, though burglary and car theft are high. Educational attainment is very low, with above average numbers of NEETs.

Bradford

Employment is rising, but youth unemployment worsened in the recent recession. Low educational attainment and above average numbers of NEETs. Racial segregation is a problem. A 2006 study ranked Bradford the second most dangerous urban area in England and Wales.

Merthyr Tydfil

The area has high unemployment and crime rates above the Welsh average. Drug and alcohol misuse are serious issues. Educational attainment is low and there are a high number of NEETs.

Nottinghamshire

Young advisers were from the north-east of Mansfield, the largest town in Nottinghamshire. Unemployment and child poverty are high here, as are crime rates, especially for assault, violent crime and theft. Educational attainment is low. However, the number of young people classed as NEET is slightly below the national average.



The young advisers' findings



At school

The most common problems at school were with bullying and intimidation. Fighting and vandalism were also cited.

Pupils also talked about theft of both cash and possessions. 99% of young people now own a mobile phone and these were the most commonly stolen items, followed by bicycles.

Almost all the groups said problems mainly happened in unmonitored/unsupervised areas such as toilets, changing rooms, playgrounds, school gates, car parks, stairwells and corridors.

According to BullyingUK, 30% of bullying in schools happens in the playground, 21% in corridors, 14% in the lunch queue and 7% in the toilets.⁸

Bullying

Many pupils said bullying decreased confidence, especially among younger pupils – who were often the main targets. Bradford students said pupils perceived to have more than others were also often targeted.

A national survey carried out by BullyingUK revealed that most children do report bullying to a teacher. However, 48% said that they had reported it over five times, and 60% of those felt their complaint was not taken seriously.⁹

Pupils said they did not feel they could turn to teachers for support against bullying and that punishments issued by teachers often do not fit the crime.

At the same time, young advisers complained of feeling they were treated unfairly by teachers and judged by them.

‘Lots of fighting happens in corridors. There’s pushing and kicking and other pupils encourage it. The teachers don’t stop it happening.’
— young adviser, Merthyr Tydfil

‘Nobody stops it. Teachers say they will sort them out but they never do. Nothing works. You just have to put up with it.’
— young adviser, Basildon

CCTV

Basildon and Bradford advisers thought CCTV could be helpful, but also worried that it was bad for the school’s reputation and atmosphere (intimidating and invasive). Merthyr Tydfil advisers felt CCTV was helpful in dealing with the school’s high level of mobile phone theft and thought constant watching of monitors could also be useful against bullying. Bolton and Nottinghamshire were unconvinced by CCTV, the former saying most cameras are in the wrong places, the latter that cameras simply move the location of offences rather than stopping them.

Findings from individual schools

Bolton said bullying at school had decreased, but only because it had been replaced by cyber-bullying through social networking sites such as Facebook.

Bolton said it was too easy for unwanted visitors to enter school buildings.

Merthyr Tydfil students cited particular problems with gangs and fighting, often fuelled by easily available alcohol rather than discrimination. They also said drugs were easily available.

Basildon, Bolton and Nottinghamshire students all said bike theft and vandalism was a problem and that this discouraged them from riding to school.

‘The biggest issues at school are bullying, CCTV and peer pressure.’
— young adviser, Bradford

‘The bullied have nowhere to go’
— young adviser, Nottinghamshire

‘We could have lockers but they’ll get vandalised and broken into. We need safes!’
— young adviser, Merthyr Tydfil

There were calls for

- Better use of websites to share information, especially about communal events (London)
- More extended school services and extracurricular activities to help students make friends and build confidence (Basildon)
- More active school councils (Basildon and Bradford)
- Increased responsibilities for prefects (London)
- Closer monitoring of CCTV to deal with bullying (Merthyr Tydfil)
- Better lockers or other secure facilities. In some cases, pupils had no lockers at all. (London, Bolton, Merthyr Tydfil, Nottinghamshire)
- Secure, lockable bike sheds. (Basildon, Bolton)
- Graffiti to be allowed in designated areas, but cleaned off immediately everywhere else (Bradford)

‘Because of the way the school is built, there are a lot of hidden places.’

Young adviser, Bolton

‘Crime – it’s after school, that’s when it all starts.’

Young adviser, Bradford



Journeys to and from school

Young advisers in all areas reported feeling vulnerable on journeys to and from schools – and as a result of a very consistent set of factors.

Threats were from gangs, sometimes defending territory, and rivals from other schools.

‘Environment is like the backbone to all behaviour we see.’
— young adviser, Basildon

Basildon young advisers said poor environmental problems were the core of all problems faced. The findings of the other groups seemed to back this up. Bus stops and buses were repeatedly cited as problem areas where pupils might be threatened, e.g. by rivals from other schools. Pupils walking to school repeatedly spoke of feeling intimidated in parks and other public places, alleys and street corners. Inadequate lighting was said to make this worse and London young advisers also cited inadequate CCTV.

‘Dealers look out for young people at the shops or outside school.’
— young adviser, Merthyr Tydfil

London, Basildon and Bolton, meanwhile, also cited problems with adults, police especially, but also bus drivers and shopkeepers, having negative perceptions of young people.

Basildon advisers said that the police were often inactive where they were needed, but spent time stopping and questioning young people who had done nothing wrong.

Other problems included

- Peer pressure (London and Bolton)
- Fear of carrying valuables – cash and electronic devices such as phones and MP3 players (London)
- Poor road safety (Merthyr Tydfil and Nottinghamshire)

There were few recommendations for solutions, but London advisers said pupils feel more responsible and respected when wearing a uniform.

‘I think it’s mainly about the fear of crime, not the actual crime that happens.’
— young adviser, Bolton

‘Fighting between schools doesn’t get sorted because it involves pupils from different schools. Nothing gets done.’

Young adviser, Nottinghamshire

In the community

The wider community was where the greatest number and widest variety of problems were identified.

Drug and alcohol abuse

- Bolton cited the role of peer pressure in leading young people to smoke and drink.
- Bradford said having nothing to do drew young people to drink and drugs and often led them into crime.
- Merthyr Tydfil said drugs and underage drinking were by far the biggest problems in their area (ahead of arson, burglary, fights, knife crime and car theft).
- Nottinghamshire said alcohol was too easy for young people to obtain and caused them to gravitate to isolated areas.

Gangs and intimidating groups

- London said rivalry between groups from different postcodes keeps them confined to their own areas and that they join gangs mainly for protection.
- Basildon noted an increase in gang membership, increasing numbers of female gang members and a rise in the use of dogs.
- Basildon and Bolton also said gang dominance of many youth clubs keeps others away (as does the religious basis of some clubs in Basildon).

‘Some people are scared to walk around.’
— young adviser, Merthyr Tydfil

‘Teachers often feel powerless to stop bullying outside school, so students feel all on their own.’
— young adviser, Basildon

Lack of facilities, activities, training

- London said a lack of amenities drove young people into parks and disused areas to socialise. They said working and being successful and respected were important to them, but they did not know where to get help or training.
- As stated above, Basildon and Bolton youth clubs had a problem with gang dominance.
- Nottinghamshire said youth clubs rarely provide the facilities and activities they would like.

Boredom

This was cited as a problem in all areas and, in many ways, is the thread that ties all the previously cited problems together. The link to inadequate facilities is obvious. It was pointed out that young people lack the money to pursue many activities and that boredom led to young people loitering in groups – contributing to negative perceptions of them and to alcohol and drug use.

‘People walk around in gangs because they have nothing to do.’
— young adviser, Nottinghamshire

Poor relationships with the police

Among consistently poor perceptions of the police, Bradford’s seemed to be the worst. Its young advisers said that, of all the people in the community its young people found difficult, the police were the most problematic. They feel mistrusted by officers and will rarely go to them for help.



‘Boredom turns to violence, drinks and drugs. If we weren’t bored, we wouldn’t turn to these things.’

Young adviser, Bradford

Other problems cited

Negative perceptions (London)

There was concern about young people being negatively represented by the media, encouraging adults to stereotype them.

‘The media plays a big part in adults’ perceptions of us because we have quite a lot of negative news. We are young adults, and should be treated as young adults, and not as thieves and thugs.’

— young adviser, London

Fear of theft (London)

Young people worried about being robbed of electronic devices, jewellery and trainers and would often go to great lengths to conceal valuable items.

Cyber-bullying (Basildon)

Every Basildon young adviser had some experience of this and often did not know the identity of their abusers. Cyber-bullying might seem less serious than real-world bullying, but it is, in some ways, more distressing since it follows victims home, leaving them no refuge, and is often anonymous.

‘If you can’t be safe in your own home, where can you be safe?’

— young adviser, Basildon

Dangerous roads (Bolton)

These were said to be a result of young people speeding.

Racial discrimination (Bradford)

There are sharp divisions between racial groups in Bradford.

Serious crime (Merthyr Tydfil)

This included burglary, arson, knife crime and fighting, criminal damage and car theft.

Carrying of knives (Nottinghamshire)

These were said to be carried for intimidation, not with the intent to use them.

Poor environmental conditions (Nottinghamshire)

Young advisers said estates create a depressing environment that encourages disrespect and leads to vandalism and crime.



Results

After the London presentation, Chief Superintendent Joe Royle of Safer Transport Command, Metropolitan Police, asked to meet a selection of advisers to discuss crime issues relating to transport. This meeting gave rise to several new issues for discussion, including pressure points on bus networks, ways to promote understanding between young people and bus drivers and ways of encouraging positive relationships between young people and members of the police service.

In Basildon, a community safety manager for the council expressed interest in inviting members of the group to present to the Community Safety Scrutiny Committee. The head teachers of the schools taking part were also very keen to take the presentation into assemblies to demonstrate positive collaboration between pupils from schools with rivalry issues.

After the Bolton presentation, Chris Cauldwell, Vice Principal of Bolton St Catherine's Academy, spoke about the need for the project's work to continue and make a lasting impact on the community. Local police officers and police community support officers said they were keen to explore and improve relationships between them and the pupils by holding further meetings at the Academy. Representatives from the Bolton Youth Offending Team also expressed an interest in continuing working with the group, paying particular attention to victims of crime.

In Bradford, integrated Youth Worker Tamara McDonald said her team would champion further work with Community Safety and Drugs and Alcohol teams, supporting the young advisers in taking the project further. One young adviser agreed to speak at an upcoming Community Safety Partnership meeting.

The youth social regeneration manager for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council explained the powerful effect that the presentation could have on securing further funding for prevention projects. A police officer from the town also spoke directly to the advisers about improving relationships between young people and the police.

In Nottinghamshire, a Mansfield community safety manager identified opportunities for the group to present their findings to key partners, while the Youth Offending Team intends to share findings with councillors.

The nine challenges



How designers can help

School-related crime and bullying issues can easily appear intractable. In some cases they may even seem like unpleasant, but ineradicable facts of life. However, the information collected by the Schools Project also gives a clear indication of how this kind of research can help designers make a difference.

Laying out the most common problem areas and the factors that contribute can turn an apparently chaotic morass into a clear set of material problems for which solutions can be attempted.

Designers' addresses to the problems identified will, to some extent, depend on how they interpret the data. Is it a question of finding individual solutions to each problem or should these problems be seen as symptoms of something wider? Is a mix of targeted and more systemic solutions required? Is carrot better than stick or vice versa?

The nine challenges

Working from the issues identified in The Sorrell Foundation's work with the young advisers, Design Out Crime has issued the following nine design challenges, grouped into three categories:

- 1. Problems facing young people at school**
- 2. Problems facing young people on journeys to and from school**
- 3. Problems facing young people beyond school**

The aim is to stimulate thought in the design community about how young people's concerns around crime can be addressed.



Section 1: At school

1a. Reducing the opportunity for bullying, violence and vandalism in schools’ unmonitored areas

The problem

Unmonitored areas are hotspots for bad behaviour in schools, with corridors, stairwells, school toilets and remote parts of the playground cited as key areas where violence, intimidation and vandalism occur. Poor design such as dim lighting, poor lines of sight and narrow corridors are cited by young people as being to blame for the sense of fear and risk associated with these out of the way places. The situation is so bad that some young people actively avoid using the toilet while at school.

Lack of monitoring has made these out of the way locations prime spots for vandalism and graffiti. Some young people are concerned that graffiti and vandalism negatively affect their schools’ reputations, creating an atmosphere of disrespect and contributing to the feeling of being unsafe.

The design challenge

Use design to reduce opportunities for bad behaviour to happen in these unmonitored hot spots by

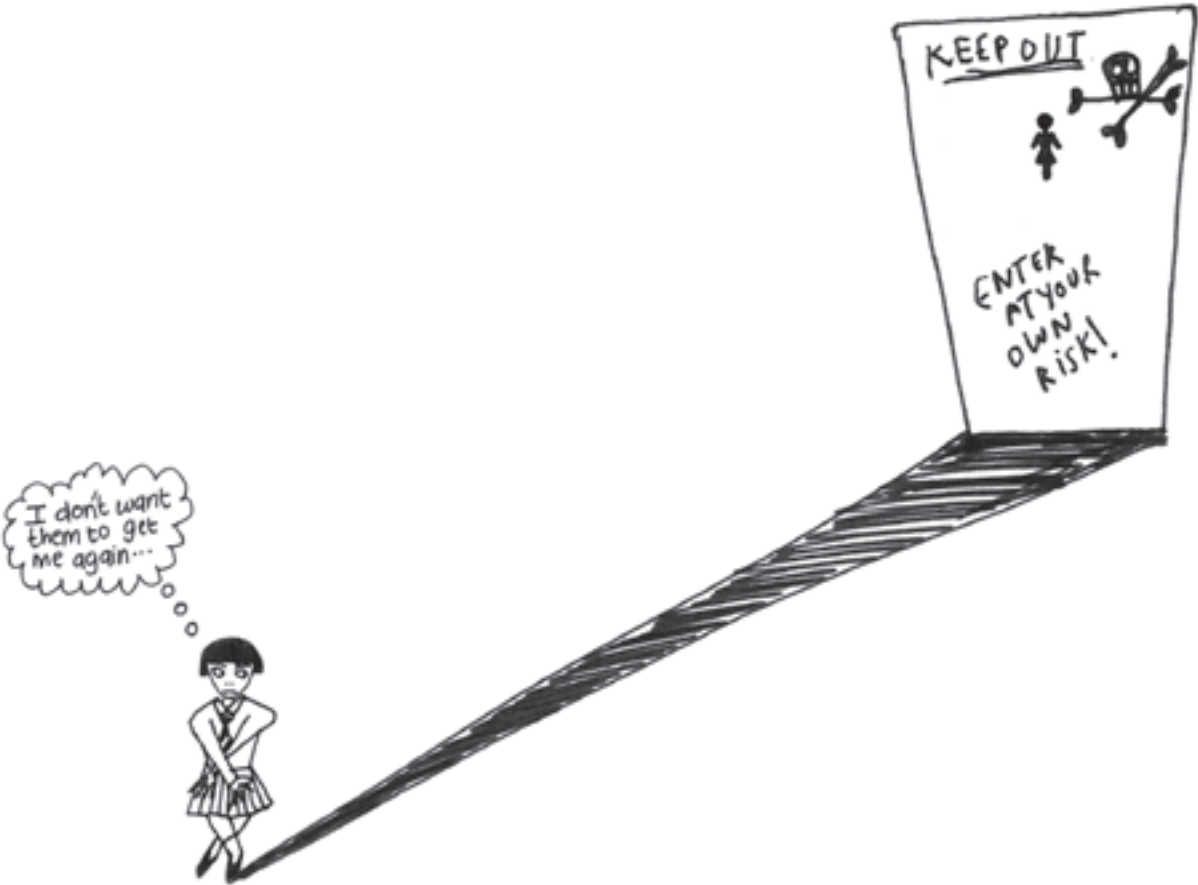
- Leveraging leading examples of school toilet design to create low cost/ low space toilet solutions that provide safety and privacy
- Using new and innovative lighting design to remove the sense of threat associated with out of the way spaces and dark corners
- Instilling young people with a sense of pride and respect for the school environment

Under the Building Schools for the Future initiative there were some good examples of how school environment design can tackle unmonitored spaces. What can be learned from this and leveraged for smaller spaces/budgets in existing schools? How can designers and technologists work together to develop new low-cost/low-space products, systems and services that address these problems?

Solutions might lie in new product design (e.g. an affordable, safe and attractive toilet cubicle) or service design to make these spaces feel more inhabited and well monitored. The aim of instilling young people with a sense of pride about the school environment might be achieved through physical design or perhaps even a communication-led solution.

‘How do you make schools safe without them looking like prisons?’

Young adviser, Bradford



1b. Reducing theft and vandalism of personal property brought into schools

The problem

More and more pupils are bringing mobile phones onto school property. Along with cash, these have become a prime target for theft, often being stolen from bags or coats. Changing rooms are a hot spot for theft. Inadequate lockers in many schools make the problem worse and some schools have no lockers at all.

Many young people also reported that they would not cycle to school because inadequate lock-up solutions on school grounds made theft and vandalism of bicycles easy.

The design challenge

Use design to protect the security of personal possessions brought onto school property by

- Making mobile phone handsets harder and less desirable to steal
- Leveraging best practice in locker design to create low cost/low space alternatives that can be retrofitted into older schools
- Leveraging best practice in bike shed design to create low cost/low space secure storage solutions

There are some good examples of best practice in the design of lockers and bike sheds but these are often expensive and require space. What can we learn from best practice and how can we leverage this for smaller spaces and budgets? How can designers work with manufacturers to develop new low-cost/low-space products, systems and services that address the problem of theft and vandalism to personal property brought onto school grounds?

In addition to new security products, solutions might lie in new software to protect phones or systems and service design thinking creating new identification systems for linking owners with property or monitoring property on school grounds.



1c. Providing in-school security measures that help people feel protected and secure

The problem

The pervasiveness of CCTV affects us all, but young people in particular are subjected to even higher levels of monitoring than adults, with many school spaces and classrooms being under the watch of CCTV. There are concerns amongst young people that this presence adds to the sense of mistrust, leading them to feel that their every move is being monitored.

Pupils want to feel that schools are watching out for their safety, but many are concerned that the very mechanisms in place to do this – CCTV, metal detectors and police presence – also undermine the feeling of security by increasing the sense of school as a hostile place.

They also point out that cameras are often in the wrong positions, are not watched enough to stop bullying or simply result in bad behaviour moving to other locations. There is a general lack of faith among pupils that CCTV will provide the safety they desire.

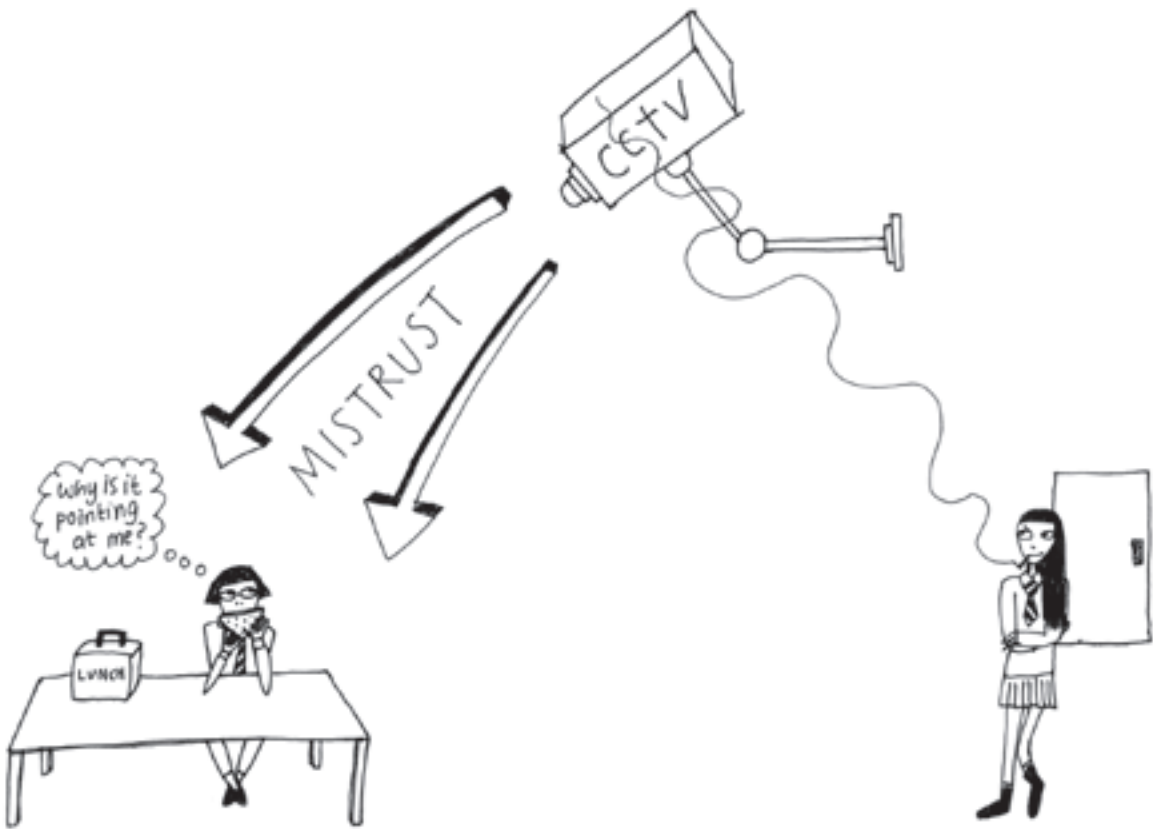
The design challenge

Re-invent school security measures by

- Designing more discrete security measures to reduce mistrust and negative impact on a school’s reputation
- Building confidence in CCTV and moving the perception from monitoring to protecting
- Rethinking school security beyond the use of CCTV, and without re-designing the school

Some new schools have been developed around the principle of self-monitoring; with a focus on space planning that allows greater visibility. What can we learn from this and how can we make it work in existing schools? How can designers, architects and technologists work together to develop new products and services that address these problems? What is the potential for human solutions?

Security products might need to become more integrated or discrete. Non-technical solutions might be arrived at through service design or looking at roles and responsibilities. Communication design could also be considered as a means of instilling confidence in CCTV or improving perception of a school.



1d. Improving security and safety at the school gates and school car park

The Problem

The school gates mark the boundary between school grounds and public space and can become a hotspot for trouble. School car parks are another example of unsupervised places where pupils congregate and fights break out. Rival groups often meet in these places, making them prime locations for after school bullying and fighting.

The young people commented that teachers often feel powerless to prevent antisocial behaviour, when it spills beyond school grounds. Some students were also concerned that it's too easy for unwanted visitors to enter the school, a factor that can increase the risk of violence. As well as feeling threatened and intimidated, young people are concerned that antisocial behaviour outside the school has a negative effect on the school's reputation.

The design challenge

Improve the security and safety at the school gates and car parks, by

- Designing new systems for monitoring, reporting and reprimanding poor behaviour outside the school
- Working with the local community to prototype solutions aimed at enhancing the reputation of the school
- Designing new solutions to prevent unwanted visitors from accessing the school

How can designers, architects, schools and councils work together to address this issue? What is the scope for technological solutions and human solutions that could help?

New layouts might create improved lines of sight, improving surveillance and general visibility and generally make public areas feel safer. Human solutions might also be prototyped, such as new roles for monitoring and reporting offences, or working with the community to tackle problems in areas that seem to fall between jurisdiction of the school and the surrounding area.



Section 2: Journeys to and from school

2a. Improving safety, trust and respect when travelling by bus

The problem

Young people often feel threatened on the bus journey to and from school, with bus stops being the site of the most problems. During peak hours, they become crowded and frustrating places, acting as flashpoints for poor behaviour, including conflicts between members of rival schools, general bullying and theft and targeting by gangs and drug dealers. After school, some students said they hung around at bus stops just because they had nowhere else to go.

The relationship between young people and bus drivers is often poor, with young people feeling that drivers look at them as criminals automatically, sometimes denying them a place on the bus on these grounds.

Conversely, some young people talk about drivers' inability to police the bad behaviour that occurs on their buses, which can include theft as well as bullying. At peak times, when buses can be full of young people, there is little the driver can do. CCTV was said to be ineffective as it can be covered up and there were calls for the return of bus conductors.

The design challenge

Use design to improve safety, trust and respect when travelling by bus, by

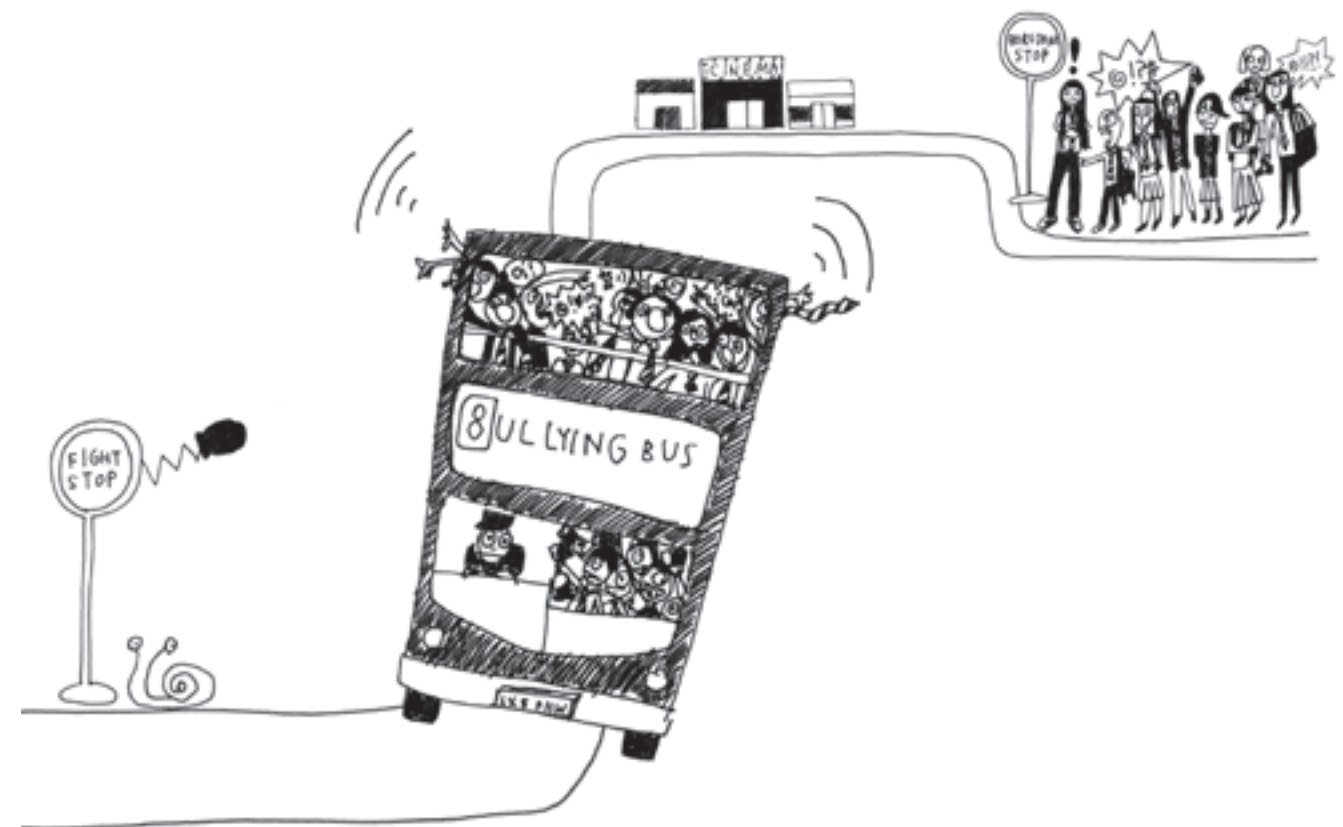
- Redesigning the bus journey system to reduce conflict and fear
- Improving communication and respect between young people and bus drivers
- Reinventing the role of the bus conductor or bus monitor

The bus journey to school needs to be re-designed with today's context in mind. It seems clear that, in many ways, in its current form, the bus system is not fit for the purpose of getting large numbers of young people to school, but continues to be used like this regardless. How can the many problems that result from this be addressed? How might solutions to this issue relate to more general issues to do with bullying, getting to school and general facilities for young people?

Approaches to the problem might be anything from localised, material redesigns of buses and bus stops to more service oriented solutions around scheduling and the driver's role. Equally, some solutions may be found outside the parameters of the immediate issue – in providing better facilities for young people so they don't hang around at bus stops after school and/or building better relationships between students from different schools.

‘Bus stops become crowded after school, with people just hanging around. There’s nothing to do so young people start on each other.’

Young adviser, Bradford



2b. Reducing crime, bullying and intimidation when walking to and from school

The problem

Children often feel threatened on the journey to and from school, walking through public spaces, alleyways and other crime hotspots. The fact that many of these spaces are dark and unpopulated, adds to the perception of fear and risk. Many don't feel safe on this journey, coming into contact with gangs, drug dealers, bullies or groups of children from other schools.

Lack of lighting is one of the main concerns, with poorly lit public spaces often becoming territories for gangs. Poor lines of sight are also an issue, with people fearing what may be hidden around the corner. Many of these poorly lit spaces are also unpopulated, allowing violence to occur without any 'witnesses' to the crime. Some young people claimed that they would rather take the bus where there are other people around, than walk through an alleyway alone. They would even rather walk the long way around to school in order to avoid high-risk areas.

The design challenge

Create safe walking routes to and from schools, where children can travel free from intimidation and threat, by

- Designing new, innovative and sustainable lighting solutions to light the routes to school
- Improving visibility and lines of sight along existing routes and alleyways
- Using design thinking to identify ways to make under-populated areas feel populated, monitored and safe

How can designers, manufacturers, lighting technologists, schools and councils work together to address this issue? What might both the technological solutions and human solutions look like?

Ideas might include new forms of low-cost, responsive, sustainable lighting, or improvements in urban planning that see young people working alongside planners to design a safer environment. This could result in a prototype for an improved physical space or perhaps generate ideas that involve a more human response such as chaperoning systems, or buddy systems for walking to and from school.

'If the environment is better – open and lighter – then the behaviour of people will change and get better.'

Young adviser, Basildon



Section 3: In the community

3a. Reducing cyber bullying on mobile phones and the internet

The problem

The high levels of mobile phone use and social networking among young people have enabled new forms of bullying to emerge: cyber bullying, which can take the form of abusive text messages, hate campaigns and threats online and the posting of humiliating photos and videos, among other things.

Approximately 90% of the young advisors in the Sorrell Foundation's research had been affected by cyber bullying to some extent.

The anonymity provided by some forms of technology mean that many victims do not know their abusers, making cyber bullying easy to commit and hard to avoid and control. This affects young people not only when they are at school or out and about but also in their homes, leaving them no refuge. The effect can be extraordinarily upsetting. Some teachers have warned recently that young people can experience mental health problems as a result of being subjected to cyber bullying. While some comments may be meant in jest, the tone can be lost through these new forms of social media, leaving young people feeling intimidated.

The problem is so common that young people almost take it for granted, seeing it as a fact of modern life. However, the psychological impact of being cyber bullied is a significant problem, well worth putting under the lens of design thinking.

The design challenge

Use design to reduce cyber bullying by

- Working with social media and technology companies to eliminate opportunities for cyber bullying to take place
- Creating mechanisms to improve reporting and punishment
- Developing a social media led campaign to tackle this specific form of bullying

Cyber bullying is easy for the perpetrators as they are protected by the anonymity of the communication channels they use. How can designers, technologists and communication agencies work together to develop new services and communication tools to make life harder for them?

Ideas might include a new application, site or service for reporting and blocking cyber bullying, or new methods for unveiling the identity of perpetrators by logging and publishing evidence of their behaviour. Broader design thinking might address the question of how schools and teachers could get more involved in tackling this issue.



‘Cyber-bullying happens a lot! As a perpetrator you feel safe because you’re removed from the victim. It can be done from anywhere.’

Young adviser, Nottinghamshire

3b. Tackling boredom by providing access to information and activities

The problem

Young people consistently said they saw few opportunities for activity outside school hours and had nowhere to go.

Boredom is cited as a key driver for bad behaviour and the lack of social inclusion and places to go can lead to young people joining gangs and taking to the streets. Their age and lack of money further restricts the places they can go, pushing them to peripheral areas like street corners and outside shops for ‘entertainment’.

Many young people express anxiety about the kinds of activities to which boredom tends to lead: hanging around in gangs, taking drugs and stealing cars.

The young people said that social communication is central to their lives. Many are unaware of local youth provision and feel that those services targeted at them are not making appropriate use of the internet and social media to reach them. They feel no affinity to local youth clubs, viewing them as boring or ‘owned’ by religious groups or gangs.

Schools have a role in providing access to information like this and it was felt that this was currently an opportunity being missed. Young people also talked about the effectiveness of word of mouth – when combined with the internet and text messages, details of an event can reach a wide audience in a short space of time.

The design challenge

Use design to tackle the boredom and enhance young people’s lives by

- Using relevant communication channels to provide access to local information and activities
- Reinventing the youth club for today’s young people
- Opening up access to the other places and activities that could be utilised for young people

Initiatives like the Sorrel Foundation’s Joined up Design for My Place, have worked with young people and architects to reinvent youth clubs. How can this be carried further?

How can designers, architects, communication agencies, schools and government work together to develop spaces, services and communication tools to reach young people?

These questions might be tackled from the point of view of everything from architecture and interior design – for youth clubs and other places where young people can meet – to communication and service design creating more opportunities for young people and making sure that the information reaches them.

‘Boredom turns to violence, drinks and drugs. If we weren’t bored, we wouldn’t turn to these things.’

Young adviser, Bradford



3c. Improving relationships and trust between young people and adults

The problem

There is a lack of trust and communication between young people and adults in authority positions, such as teachers, the police and shopkeepers. This ‘them and us’ divide often means young people feel unfairly persecuted.

In particular, there is high mutual mistrust between young people and police officers, with many feeling that the police view them only as potential criminals. They said that the police repeatedly subject them to questioning and searches when they have done nothing wrong while leaving real crimes unpunished. There was also a complaint that police rarely, if ever, speak to them in a friendly way about anything other than alleged bad behaviour.

There are also significant problems with teachers, young people saying they felt a lack of support and respect – especially over sensitive issues like bullying, where teachers are not seen to take action. Punishments from teachers are often seen as unfair.

Young people also feel falsely stereotyped by shopkeepers who will only allow one or two school pupils in at a time. Young people are frustrated by the fact they are all viewed as potential troublemakers and that they have restrictions imposed upon them, regardless of their individual behaviour.

Finally, there was concern about the way negative perceptions of young people are fuelled by the media, with many stories that portray young people in a negative light.

The design challenge

Use design thinking to build trust between young people and adults by

- Improving communication between young people and police
- Improving communication between young people and teachers
- Improving communication between young people and shopkeepers

The issue of the lack of trust between young people and adults was seen as a central theme. Young people want responsibility and respect and are frustrated by their interactions with certain groups of adults. How can design thinking help to address this issue?

It is likely that any idea here will involve prototyping solutions between young people and adults, suggesting that service design approaches may be key. Ideas might include a new service, new roles and responsibilities, or new community led initiative to improve trust and open up communication. Other approaches might include campaigns to influence the press to widen the scope of their coverage of young people.

‘We are young adults, and should be treated as young adults, and not as thieves and thugs.’

Young adviser, London



The big picture

As well as identifying individual problems, the Schools Project also gives designers the opportunity to consider school-related crime issues in the round.

Looked at as a whole, the data suggests strongly that young people face their greatest difficulties in the wider community. As one young adviser from Bradford put it, ‘Crime – it’s after school, that’s when it all starts.’

How might this pertain to what happens in schools?

In unpicking the connection, one might observe that in Community the thread that linked almost all the other problems was boredom. Meanwhile, in the Schools section there were consistent calls for schools to offer more activities after school hours. It seems likely then that, by meeting this demand, schools could significantly reduce problems in the community. But how can schools with limited resources offer pupils more activities?

Sometimes by looking at several problems at once, designers find that one can be the key to fixing another. Might shared activity between schools be a way of decreasing rivalry *and* making best use of limited resources for extracurricular activity? Young advisers also asked for better information about the opportunities on offer to them: might a web resource on existing opportunities reveal that the need for schools to offer extra activities was not as great as first imagined? Or might deeper analysis reveal that an apparently expensive measure actually creates cost reductions that effectively pay for it?

To a large extent, these are just examples, suggesting roles for designers in laying out, interpreting and acting on the data as a whole. The Schools Project began from the premise that issues in schools could not be looked at in isolation. Indeed, overarching analysis of its results delivers insights that can not only suggest solutions, but radically shift our sense of what the real problems are.

As such, the project demonstrates perfectly just how integral this kind of research is to design. Whether dealing with products, information systems or services, design is about interventions in the material world and only by understanding real-world circumstances in depth can designers ensure that their interventions are effective.



Endnotes

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Design Council
34 Bow Street, London
WC2E 7DL United Kingdom

Tel: +44(0)20 7420 5249
Fax: +44(0)20 7420 5300
Email: info@designcouncil.org.uk
www.designcouncil.org.uk

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Design: MultiAdaptor
www.multiadaptor.com

The Home Office's Design & Technology Alliance Against Crime has brought together industry, the public sector, designers and crime prevention experts to create the Design Out Crime programme.



Aiming to develop design-led ideas for crime-proofing products, businesses and communities, the programme has worked on five priority areas:

Alcohol

Finding design-led approaches to reduce the harm caused by alcohol-related antisocial and criminal behaviour, especially assaults in pubs and clubs.

Business

Using design to help minimise crimes such as shoplifting and retail theft that affect businesses, their customers and their employees.

Communities and housing

Embedding design-led approaches to help communities become safer by reducing crime and the opportunities for it to occur.

Hot products

Developing innovations in technology, services and product design that help make personal electronics more crime-proof.

Schools

Understanding the crime problems such as bullying, fighting and petty theft that affect young people in schools so that effective design solutions can be created.