



# SAFE TO LEARN

Peter Jackson highlights vital protection considerations for education establishments

**O**ur children are the future. Young minds are inspired, practical skills are imparted and fresh passions are formed within the four walls of classrooms across the nation, and these will be tapped into for generations to come. But first, we need to look at the boundaries and physical solutions protecting these educational institutions to ensure that outdated security measures are not affecting the performance within.

Security should be a top priority from the outset when designing and developing any facility for the education sector. Pupils' attendance is recorded to be approximately 80.8 percent in 2022, which is still

inconsistent following the Covid pandemic. Are safety concerns a possible reason why parents are becoming increasingly discouraged from sending their children to school? Almost 8.5-million children attend schools daily across the UK, therefore parents need to be able to trust the school's head teachers and their employees not only with their children's education, but also their personal safety and security.

The school fence, entrance gates and access control are important factors to consider during renovation projects or the building of a new school. A perimeter should offer a reasonable and realistic level of physical security against the hazards it might encounter, while also either standing out on its own or blending in with the surroundings.

**Any school security policy should begin with a risk assessment**

For a special report titled 'Protecting the Future,' Jacksons Fencing commissioned research in which we surveyed 1,000 parents (a nationally representative sample), 280 teachers (including roughly 50 heads), and 75 architects on various security-related topics. According to our research, 75 percent of head teachers feel directly responsible for the safety of their students. However, three out of ten teachers continue to feel that the grounds of their schools are not safe enough.

According to the teachers we questioned in the course of our research, criminal damage is an issue at 28 percent of schools. This is one of many threats in addition to burglary, vandalism, arson and anti-social behaviour. Public buildings are occasionally targeted by thieves for their materials, such as copper and steel. Other dangers can include heavy traffic or the possibility of equipment and fencing accidentally serving as a climbing frame for young pupils. Any school security policy should begin with a risk assessment, which will serve as the foundation for the points we make. It is crucial to keep in mind that facilities managers must establish security methods for schools on an individual basis because no location can be adequately protected by a single, robust rule. These results led us to develop our top five categories to take into account when assessing the security of an education site.

## ENTRANCE POINTS

Any school's security strategy must include access control. The majority of teachers (56 percent), report that there are multiple entrances at their institution. One central entry should be placed in plain sight of the reception area or school office, and access points should be tightly restricted and centrally monitored. For safety reasons, make sure to incorporate a pedestrian gate close to any entry points for vehicles. If you do have additional gates, it is a good idea to restrict access to them to peak hours only. For example, you may designate a one-way system through the premises. Make sure you display signage showing the hours of operation and pointing them to the main entrance.

## AESTHETICS

Finding the right balance between keeping out possible intruders and embracing students and guests is difficult for any institution. Utilising colour in inventive ways can soften the look of a perimeter and enhance the school's image. While some schools might benefit from metal railings, nurseries and primary schools will gain more from timber fencing, which still offers security and protection, but has a friendlier aspect and increased privacy.

## USER-FRIENDLY

At the busiest times of the day, many schools deal with considerable pedestrian and vehicular traffic. To maintain safety during these busy times, consider designing distinct designated pathways for cars and pedestrians, and spend time devising a plan for site security during off-peak hours. Are there any maintenance or delivery trucks entering the school grounds, for instance? While younger students may be picked up by parents at the halfway point of the school day in primary schools, sixth form students are

frequently allowed to leave the campus during lunch or free study periods in secondary schools.

## LOCAL SURROUNDINGS

To identify hazards and potential issues, it is critical to take a close look at the local environment. For instance, are the foundations stable enough to support fences, gates and barriers effectively? Or are there any obstacles that should be avoided, such as hanging branches, parked cars or storage containers that could serve as climbing aids? If your place of education is located in a residential area, think about how security measures can affect the nearby residents. In addition to minimising noise entering and exiting the school grounds, acoustic fencing can offer privacy and security.

## MATERIAL CHOICES

There are fencing and gates made of steel and wood which are suitable for schools of all risk level. Panels should be oriented vertically to make them harder to climb, even if a slatted style is preferred. Smaller gaps between the horizontal and vertical meshes in welded mesh designs increase the resistance of fences against climbing. Overall fence height must be at least 1.8m and it must be able to stay that height over varying ground levels without leaving gaps.

## A PERIMETER SHOULD OFFER A REASONABLE AND REALISTIC LEVEL OF PHYSICAL SECURITY

Schools located in areas with a higher crime rate risk should think about ordering LPS 1175-certified solutions and fencing that is at least 1.8m high. The security ratings, which are given to goods only after thorough independent testing by the Loss Prevention Certification Board (LPCB), show the resistance perimeter fencing systems can provide against various assault tools.

Additionally, noise pollution has a significant impact on health and learning. It is often overlooked during schools' design processes; only 30 percent of specifiers have employed acoustic solutions for schools. Less than 35dB of noise in classrooms is recommended by the World Health Organisation for optimal teaching and learning settings. But, according to the EU, it is estimated that over 100-million Europeans regularly experience noise levels above 55dB. Acoustics need to become a priority for headteachers when consulting architects and specifiers, with acoustic barriers being one solution which can create a quiet environment for optimal learning. There are a range of options available; timber acoustic barriers, steel and aluminium barriers, and earth bunds or berms.

The perimeter of Chesterton Primary School, based in Battersea, London, was originally built from a combination of chain link fencing, timber featherboard fencing and hedging. Despite these providing privacy around the perimeter, they needed replacing to ensure the grounds were protected from potential intruders.

The featherboard fencing was in a state of disrepair, creating a security risk and a safety hazard for the students. The hedge, while adding a pleasing natural element, not only increased maintenance as it needed to be trimmed multiple times a year but it did not provide adequate security either.

## THREE OUT OF TEN TEACHERS FEEL THE GROUNDS OF SCHOOLS ARE NOT SAFE ENOUGH

Working together, Jacksons Fencing and Chesterton Primary School agreed that a boundary solution that balanced low and high visibility was required to provide maximum safeguarding and security without compromising on aesthetics and longevity. Due to this 187.5m of low visibility fencing was installed, Jacksons' EuroGuard Combi fencing, with its unique timber and steel combination design, was specified for the perimeter of the grounds. Galvan zinc alloy-coated steel V mesh panels have strong, pressure-treated timber slats threaded into the panel to endure any tampering and stand the test of time.

The total height of the fence installed is 3m, with timber covering 2m of the height. Keeping the timber to 2m high ensures that the fence does not create a hostile environment and allows enough light to enter the playground and classrooms while providing concealment and preventing litter and other items being handed through the fence. Around the school entrance, EuroGuard Flatform fencing was installed to enable a clear line of visibility from

the school office to ensure staff can easily monitor who is coming and going, as well as any external risks. With a twin wire construction and installed at 3m high, this form of fencing is robust and cost effective. Additionally, two pedestrian gates were installed at 2.5m wide and one 3.7m wide vehicular gate was installed for staff parking, emergency services and maintenance access.

To blend with the school's visual aesthetic, the steel was powder-coated white, providing a clean and neutral background for the playground, and allowing colourful play equipment and planting to become focal points. Also adding a layer of protection, the powder coating ensures the fencing and gates can stand the test of time by avoiding rust; increasing durability and sustainability in the process.

While there is not a one-size-fits-all fix for the variety of security concerns schools face today, architects are in a good position to support head teachers in protecting and welcoming their students.

No matter how good the quality of a fence is, if a climbable tree or other object is close by, getting in becomes a trivial task. Therefore, experts, architects and contractors should all be invited to work together and communicate with school leaders to evaluate any security measures that are being installed or maintained at a school.

It is impossible to emphasise enough just how important it is for our children's safety that schools are well planned, designed and protected. School designs require considerable attention and due time. There is little question that the safety of our education establishments can significantly increase as a result of improved communication among security specialists, designers and teachers, and the sharing of their specialised expertise and knowledge ●

### Peter Jackson,

Managing Director Jacksons Fencing, joined the family business in 1993, working for his father Ian Jackson in a variety of departments, and going on to specialise in the high security sector. Working on large fencing projects, he has built a wealth of experience valued by major organisations and government departments throughout the UK and overseas.

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