

CCTV in Schools:

Is surveillance in Schools appropriate?



*A White Paper from:
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Introduction

There has been much media coverage in recent months regarding the use of CCTV in schools and, in particular, their use in sensitive areas such as classrooms, changing rooms and toilets. Does the use of CCTV in schools help to provide reassurance to pupils and their parents or is it an unacceptable intrusion into pupil privacy?

A school is a place of work as well as study and school management have a duty of care to ensure the safety and security for all staff, pupils and visitors to the premises; CCTV surveillance can play its part in meeting that requirement. Equally, regard must be paid to the rights of the individual for reasonable privacy and the avoidance of unacceptable, intrusive monitoring for whatever reason. Furthermore, the images and other personal information captured by CCTV must be adequately controlled.

There are equal and opposing views regarding the use of CCTV in schools, but the most often cited concern is the intrusion of privacy of the individual. There are clearly benefits to be had from the use of cameras, but is it justified? The Department for Education has suggested that the use of CCTV is down to individual head-teachers.

This short paper considers some of the advantages and disadvantages in the use of CCTV in schools, together with the legal requirements that are mandated on organisations that use it.

Background

CCTV is used extensively in a very wide range of individual institutions and businesses in both the public and private sectors; this includes schools. In such circumstances, CCTV is used for safety and security purposes such as:

- To protect staff or pupils from violence or other criminal acts;
- To provide evidence following an incident;
- To safeguard property from vandalism;
- To deter unacceptable behaviour within the classroom;
- To deter or detect theft of goods or valuable items;
- To deter truancy.

The use of CCTV in schools is an interesting one. There appears to be an equal body of support both for and against its use. The Department for Education has stepped back from the debate, indicating that it is the decision of individual head-teachers whether to use the technology or not. Despite the obvious “invasion of privacy” issues that arise from the use of CCTV in sensitive areas such as changing rooms or toilets, there is support even for this application from parents, pupils and teaching staff.

So what is the issue? There are always going to be those that support the use of technology, such as CCTV to deter crime, bullying or other inappropriate behaviour within schools. Equally, no matter how well the arguments are articulated, individuals will oppose their use on the grounds of its intrusion into their privacy.



The case against the use of CCTV

The use of CCTV within the UK has become so widespread; it has got to the stage where British people are considered to be among the most monitored in the world. Due to its widespread use, it has become acceptable for the public to expect to see CCTV cameras wherever they go, but concerned parents do wonder at the necessity for cameras to be installed within school classrooms, communal changing areas and toilets.

It is now estimated that there are in excess of 100,000 CCTV cameras in secondary schools and academies across England, Wales and Scotland.¹ Furthermore, of these, there are a total of 825 cameras located in the toilets or changing rooms of 207 schools, according to the figures provided by more than 2,000 schools.

¹ Big Brother Watch Website
<http://www.bigbrotherwatch.org.uk/home/2012/09/the-class-of-1984.html#.UFcHUbkuaSp>

There is no real evidence that the use of CCTV prevents crime. There have been extensive and detailed reviews to determine the effectiveness or otherwise of CCTV systems. In his study of 14 CCTV systems in 2005, Professor Martin Gill found that in the majority of cases, the use of CCTV did not reduce crime or the fear of crime.²

This is significant because many of the stated objectives of the use of CCTV relate to crime prevention and crime detection. In some circumstances, the presence of CCTV may in itself act as a deterrent, reducing the incidence of crime. Some however argue that it may simply displace crime to another location, and there is mixed evidence regarding this.³

Another major disadvantage is the cost. Although the cost of technology has reduced generally over recent years, the installation of a CCTV system is still a substantial financial investment. Furthermore, if it is used in an inappropriate way, fines can be levied up to £500,000 by the Information Commissioner.



The Case for the use of CCTV

In addition to the quality of the school's education provision, one of the most important factors parents consider when choosing a school for their children is their child's safety. It is unrealistic to expect there to be no use of surveillance CCTV in school grounds and buildings, and the feedback from parents about the use of CCTV cameras has generally been overwhelmingly positive.

In the majority of schools, there is insufficient school staff available to ensure that all areas of the schools grounds can be monitored, particularly where inappropriate behaviour may take place. Furthermore, school management have a duty of care to ensure that everyone that works, studies or visits their premises are safe. Therefore, to protect pupils, deter theft, criminal damage and general crime, the proportionate use of CCTV surveillance has to form part of the solution.

² Assessing the impact of CCTV: Home Office Research Study 292 February 2005
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110220105210/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/hors292.pdf>

³ Effects of Closed Circuit Television on Crime Brandon C Welsh, David P Farrington (Campbell Systematic Reviews 2008:17)

For any organisation, the use of CCTV can be beneficial. Some of the most often cited reasons to install a system are:

- Deter crime such as vandalism, violence and bullying;
- Helps stop misbehaviour in lessons;
- Stops students “bunking off” lessons;
- Combats smoking and drug use;
- Helps prevent theft;
- Reduces the fear of crime;
- Helps deter intruders from entering the school.

Images captured by CCTV can be of significant evidential and forensic value in identifying perpetrators (depending on the quality of the images), or of clearing the suspects of any involvement. This latter point has proven to be of immense value to teaching staff accused of various inappropriate acts by troublesome pupils. They can also be invaluable for informing lines of enquiry and investigation, for example by establishing the movements of a victim or suspect or spotting suspicious behaviour.

The Data Protection Act and the CCTV Code of Practice



The use of CCTV has grown significantly and the UK is recognised as a leading user of the technology. The public are used to seeing CCTV cameras on virtually every high street and in general are supportive of their use to provide reassurance, deter crime and identify/prosecute offenders. However, the use of CCTV can raise wider privacy concerns.

It is essential that all organisations and individuals that use CCTV systems understand that images of people are covered by the Data Protection Act⁴, and so is information about people which is derived from images, for example, vehicle registration numbers. Most uses of CCTV by organisations or businesses will be covered by the DPA, regardless of the number of cameras or how sophisticated the equipment is.

The use of CCTV in schools has grown significantly and as schools themselves have grown in size, so has the extent to which CCTV has been deployed. The images captured by CCTV cameras are considered to be personal information and as such must be controlled in an appropriate manner. The ICO CCTV Code of Practice provides clear guidance on the planning and use of a CCTV system as well as the important

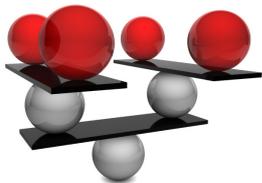
⁴ The Data Protection Act: 1998
http://www.ico.gov.uk/for_organisations/data_protection.aspx

aspects of protecting images captured by them. The Code of Practice is based on the legally enforceable requirements of the Data Protection Act and the eight principles defined within it.

Everyone expects CCTV to be used responsibly with proper safeguards in place and the guidance provided by the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) to be followed.⁵ Schools operating CCTV systems need to ensure that they comply with the Law and the best practice defined within the CCTV Code of Practice. As discussed earlier, failure to observe the requirements of the Act can result in significant fines.

Conclusion

It can be argued that CCTV surveillance is a useful tool when undertaking an investigation following an incident taking place in a school, to corroborate or dismiss claims. Although there have been a number of studies regarding the installation of CCTV, there is no conclusive evidence that it actually prevents crime or even negative behaviour. Whilst some schools report significant reductions in bullying and vandalism apparently following the introduction of a CCTV system, there are other suggestions that it simply displaces bad behaviour (or more serious incidents) to other places not covered by any surveillance.



It is essential that a balanced, reasoned and proportionate approach to the use of CCTV surveillance in schools is taken. There are clearly opportunities for inappropriate use, particularly if little thought or planning is carried out before a system is deployed. Equally however, there is the potential to reduce crime, stop bullying and provide reassurance to parents

and pupils that the common areas of the school are monitored to deter inappropriate behaviour and protect individuals.

The most important factor is that CCTV is not simply used to cut teaching or support staff posts, and that any system is only deployed within a wider context that includes effective management, appropriate levels of pastoral care and the proactive support of all school staff.

⁵ The CCTV Code of Practice: 2008 published by the ICO
http://www.ico.gov.uk/for_organisations/data_protection/topic_guides/cctv.aspx

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