



West Midlands Police

Guidance Note for Schools

Responding to Bomb Threats & Hoax Bomb Threats

(Issued 29 January 2016)

Purpose of this Guidance Note

This guidance note sets out a summary of the actions schools in the West Midlands should take if they receive a bomb threat/hoax.

It does not replace the detailed emergency and business continuity plans all schools should already have in place but is designed to be a timely reminder in light of recent events.

Further information and guidance is available from Local Authority emergency planning officers and Local Policing Units. National advice has been provided to all leaders of schools and other educational establishments in the UK by the National Counter Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO).¹

Background

In recent weeks there have been a number of hoax bomb calls to secondary schools in the West Midlands and across the UK.

On the morning of Tuesday 19 January 2016 four schools in the West Midlands and seven schools in West Mercia, Bristol and Cornwall received hoax bomb threats.

On the morning of Tuesday 26 January 2016 six schools in the West Midlands and nine schools in Cornwall and London received hoax bomb threats.

On the morning of Thursday 28 January 2016 13 schools in the West Midlands received hoax bomb threats.

Many of the schools evacuated their staff and pupils and a number chose to close for the day.

The hoax bomb threats are all suspected to be linked because they occurred at similar times and involved pre-recorded messages. However, at the present time, the motive for the hoax calls is not known and there is no information to indicate why the specific schools were selected. A police investigation into the hoax bomb threats is on-going.

Since the linked offences took place at least six schools in the West Midlands has received a suspected copycat bomb hoaxes.

¹ NaCTSO Guidance Note 1/2016

Joint Statement of Purpose

In light of recent events West Midlands Police, Local Authorities and Schools have restated their commitment to work together to:

- Protect school staff and pupils from harm
- Share information so that the threat from a bomb call can be accurately assessed
- Provide a proportionate response to a bomb call which minimises disruption to schools and daily school life
- Reassure school staff, pupils, their families and the wider community
- Identify and prosecute those responsible for making hoax bomb calls

There are six stages to responding to a bomb threat:

Stage 1: Planning & preparation prior to a threat

- Ensure the school has an up-to-date Bomb Threat Response Plan which all staff know and understand. All Local Authorities provide guidance on emergency and business continuity plans and/or checklists.
- Ensure school staff, particularly reception office staff, have ready access to a Bomb Threat Checklist sheet. (An example checklist is attached to this guidance note)
- Ensure all school staff know who the designated senior decision maker will be in the event of a bomb threat (e.g. Head Teacher, Deputy Head Teacher etc.)
- Ensure teachers, caretakers and cleaners routinely check buildings and classrooms and report anything unusual or suspicious.

Stage 2: Person receiving a bomb threat

- The person receiving the call should allow the caller to finish the message without interruption.
- Immediately afterwards attempt to trace the number by dialling 1471, if possible. If the call is received via the switchboard, or a phone that shows the telephone number on an LCD screen, try to make a note of the number before the caller rings off.
- Notify the Head Teacher or designated senior decision maker.
- Complete the Bomb Threat Checklist as fully and as soon as possible after the call.

Stage 3: Contacting West Midlands Police

- The Head Teacher / designated senior decision maker *along with* the person receiving the bomb threat should call '999' and provide the information from the Bomb Threat Checklist.
- The following additional information should also be provided:
 - A mobile contact number so the Head Teacher or designated senior decision maker can be contacted should they evacuate from the school.
 - The number of pupils and staff at the school.
 - Whether a decision has already been made to evacuate / close the school. If yes, the location of the assembly area.
 - Whether or not there is a 'buddy' school.
- West Midlands Police will use the information from the Bomb Threat Checklist to make an initial threat assessment. West Midlands Police will liaise with colleagues in counter-terrorism and check all available intelligence and information databases.
- A West Midlands Police duty officer (normally the local Duty Inspector or Duty Sergeant) will then contact the Head Teacher or designated senior decision maker.
- The West Midlands Police duty officer will advise that either (a) they believe the threat has come from a terrorist group or individual with the capability to carry out the threat (i.e. it is a *credible* threat)² or (b) they do not believe the threat has come from a terrorist group and there is no other intelligence or information to suggest any further risk (i.e. it is *not* a credible threat)³
- The initial West Midlands Police assessment will be completed as quickly as possible and will be updated as more information becomes available. It is recognised that some Head Teachers may decide to take action before the initial police assessment has been completed.

Stage 4: Deciding to evacuate

- The decision to evacuate a school is the responsibility of Head Teacher or designated senior decision maker.⁴
- West Midlands Police will share information with the Head Teacher and provide advice to help them assess the risk and determine whether an evacuation (partial or full) is necessary and proportionate. In making their assessment Head Teachers will need to consider the

² This is part of a national classification and may be described by police as a '**RED**' or an '**AMBER**' risk

³ This may be described by police as a **STANDARD** risk.

⁴ In exceptional circumstances police can order the evacuation of private premises using the Terrorism Act 2000

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nature of the threat (vague, indirect, inconsistent or implausible v specific, feasible, evidence of planning etc.), whether any suspect device has been located, whether there has been recent suspicious or unusual activity and the impact upon pupils (e.g. inclement weather)

- As a rule of thumb consideration should be given to evacuating if there is a credible threat. Consideration should be given to not evacuating if there is no credible threat.
- If the decision is made to evacuate a school then it should be conducted through word of mouth (i.e. without the use fire alarms) and staff/pupils should use assembly areas which are different from fire evacuation assembly areas.
- If the decision is made to close a school then consideration should be given to how parents/carers will be informed to prevent emergency services switchboards becoming overwhelmed.

Stage 5: Police attendance and searching buildings

- In the event of a credible bomb threat police will attend the school to maintain cordons and co-ordinate the emergency response. A police-led search of the school premises is likely to be undertaken.
- In the event of a non-credible bomb threat police *may* attend to provide visible reassurance and enable face-to-face contact with the Head Teacher. A search of the school premises by police will only be undertaken on the rare occasions it is considered necessary and proportionate.

Stage 6: Post-Incident investigation

- Making a hoax bomb threat is a criminal offence under Section 51 of the Criminal Law Act 1977 and Section 1 of the Malicious Communications Act. West Midlands Police treats such matters very seriously and will always work to bring malicious callers before the courts.
- Witness statements are likely to be required from (a) the member of staff who received the original call and completed the Bomb Threat Checklist and (b) the Head Teacher / person in charge of the school to describe the impact of the disruption caused by the hoax threat.

- End of Guidance -