

North Devon Conservatives

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New figures reveal shocking number of arson attacks in schools Teachers need more powers to deal with violence and disruption says Philip Milton

PHILIP J MILTON, Prospective Member of Parliament for North Devon, expressed alarm at new figures which reveal that the police have been called into schools across the country over 1,000 times in the last two years because of arson attacks – the equivalent of almost two incidents a day.

According to information uncovered through Freedom of Information Act requests by the Conservative Party, in the Devon & Cornwall Police Force area there have been 74 reported cases of arson or suspicious fires on school property.

The total cost of arson attacks in schools has been put at over £100 million, taking fully into account the disruption to pupils, teachers and parents, and waste of fire service and police resources.

93 per cent of school arson attacks have been found to have been carried out by young people under the age of 18. Most of these are by pupils, ex-

pupils or those with siblings at the school. One third of attacks are carried out during school hours.

The figures underline the need to implement Conservative proposals to give headteachers the power to ban, search for, and confiscate any item they think likely to cause violence or disruption in schools, including lighters and matches. Labour Ministers are against these essential reforms.

Philip Milton, commented:

“Action is needed in response to the shocking news that there have been 74 arson attacks in Devon and Cornwall’s schools in the last two years alone. Teachers must have greater power to deal with violence and to remove disruptive pupils. Head teachers must be able to search for, and ban, any items that could lead to deliberate damage to school property, violent behaviour or disruption. Only Conservatives have committed to taking the action that is needed so urgently.”

Notes to Editors

OVER 1,000 CASES OF ARSON IN TWO YEARS

Freedom of Information Act requests by Conservatives have uncovered the scale of arson attacks in schools.

Police authorities were asked ‘how many times in each of the last two years (the calendar years 2007 and 2008) you have been notified or called in for cases of arson or suspicious fires of schools or on school property’.

<i>Police force</i>	<i>Arson attacks in schools January 2007 to December 2008</i>
England	1,249
Bedfordshire Police	22
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	23
Cheshire Constabulary	33
Cleveland Police	21

<i>Police force</i>	<i>Arson attacks in schools January 2007 to December 2008</i>
Corporation of London Police	0
Derbyshire Police	73
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary	74
Durham Constabulary	5
Essex Police	41
Gloucestershire Constabulary ⁷	13
Greater Manchester Police ³	85
Hampshire Constabulary ⁵	75
Hertfordshire Constabulary ⁶	28
Humberside Police	47
Lancashire Constabulary ⁴	67
Leicestershire Constabulary	76
Merseyside Police	22
Metropolitan Police ¹	101
Norfolk Constabulary	50
North Yorkshire Police	12
Northamptonshire Police	20
Northumbria Police	56
Staffordshire Police	47
Surrey Police	47
Sussex Police	34
Thames Valley Police	61
West Mercia Constabulary	27
West Midlands Police ²	66
Wiltshire Constabulary	23

¹ Could include nurseries

² Location contains word 'school'

³ In school with 'fire brigade turnout' code

⁴ Nurseries and sixth forms included

⁵ Have words school in location and are also education premises

⁶ School and college

⁷ Includes universities and colleges

Police authorities not included in the tables (West Yorkshire, Suffolk, South Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Cumbria, Kent, Nottinghamshire, Avon and Somerset did not respond, or cited high cost as an exemption to providing the data).

GROWING CONCERNS ON ARSON & VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

£100 million cost of arson attacks: A report in 2001 found that arson attacks in schools cost over £100 million in terms of disruption and inconvenience to pupils, teachers and parents, and waste of fire service and police resources. <http://www.arsonpreventionbureau.org.uk/saveddocument/EducationUnderThreat%20A4.pdf>

Arson attacks carried out by pupils: Research suggests that 93 per cent of school arson attacks are carried out by individuals under the age of 18. Arson is most commonly carried out by pupils, ex-pupils or someone with siblings at the school. One third of attacks are carried out during school hours.

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<http://www.arsonpreventionbureau.org.uk/saveddocument/EducationUnderThreat%20A4.pdf>
http://www.arsonpreventionbureau.org.uk/viewDocument.aspx?Document_ID=183

Children as young as five suspended for violence and sexual misconduct: Last year over 1,000 children aged 5 and under were suspended for assaulting another pupil, and 20 were suspended for sexual misconduct (*Hansard*, 3 November 2008, col. 195W).

344 children are suspended from school every day for assaulting other pupils: The number of fixed period exclusions for physical assault has risen by 2,720 – from 62,670 to 65,390 in just one year (*House of Commons Library Deposited Papers 2008-24.60*, October 2008).

Head teachers overruled. Head teachers are increasingly having their authority over discipline undermined. Exclusions appeals panels overrule head teachers on expulsions in a quarter of the cases they hear, and 40 per cent of these pupils are then returned to the school from which they were excluded (DCSF, *Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions from Schools in England 2006/07*, 24 June 2008).

CONSERVATIVE PLANS TO IMPROVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Good discipline is essential to ensure that all pupils can benefit from the opportunities provided by education, without disruption from others. Conservatives have set out detailed plans to give teachers back control of the classroom:

- Schools will be given the final say on the exclusion of disruptive pupils, by abolishing the appeals panels which too often overrule them.
- The law should be changed to give teachers unequivocal powers to maintain discipline, including confiscating items such as lighters and matches if the school has banned them.
- Home-school contracts will be made enforceable as requirements of admission and grounds for exclusion.
- To ensure better provision for those excluded, there will be greater use of voluntary and independent providers of remedial education, rather than relying solely on Pupil Referral Units.
- Teachers should be given greater protection from malicious allegations made by pupils.

The Government has rejected calls for a general search power for headteachers. Labour Minister, Sarah McCarthy-Fry, has asserted: “Children have human rights as much as adults do, and it comes down to the fact of it [a general power to search] being proportionate” (*Times Educational Supplement*, 20 March 2009).

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