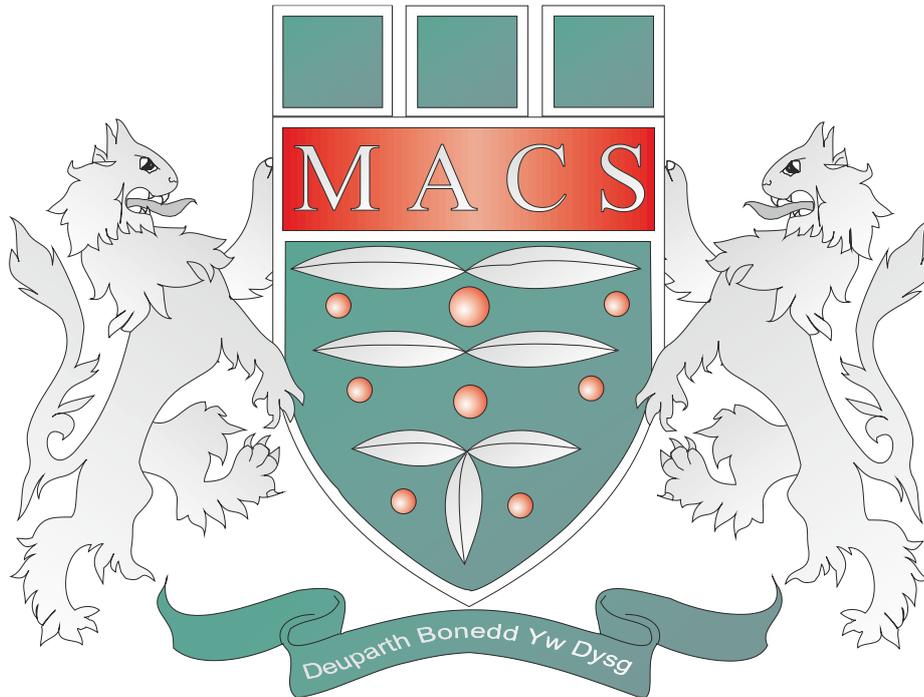


# MOUNTAIN ASH COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL



## ARSON PREVENTION POLICY

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ *P. J. Jones* \_\_\_\_\_ (Chair of Governors)

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Oct 17 \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewed: October 2017  
Next review: October 2020

## **Introduction**

Arson, as defined by the Criminal Damage Act 1973 is the 'unlawful damage by fire of property belonging to another'.

According to research carried out by the Arson Prevention Bureau, school fires, accidental as well as malicious, are all too common. Every fire in a school has the potential to cause considerable damage and disruption, and can also threaten the lives of children, school staff and others who may be on the premises.

Arson is committed for a variety of reasons and there are many kinds of arsonist. Arsonists may not be strangers to the school, but children and adolescents feature prominently. Fires in schools are most likely to be started by pupils, ex-pupils or their friends, or others with knowledge of the school. According to research, of the 4,600 individuals prosecuted, cautioned or found guilty each year for arson offences, almost half are aged from 10 to 16. Girls as well as boys may be involved.

The Arson Prevention Bureau's research shows that the great majority of malicious fires take place outside school hours with a peak at around 11pm. Many fires are started outside school buildings often with material found easily to hand (such as in bins or rubbish skips). The use of accelerant, such as petrol, is comparatively rare.

## **Purpose**

It is the School's aim to secure a high standard of fire safety and security throughout all premises for which it has responsibility. The application of this policy and associated procedures will ensure the opportunity for any arson attack will be reduced. This in turn will benefit staff and pupils, as well as the wider community, by:

- providing a safer environment for staff and pupils;
- ensuring that buildings, facilities and resources are not lost due to the effects of fire;
- protecting the financial resources available for the provision of educational needs by minimising the risk of these resources being required to meet the cost of damage caused by fire.

## **Assessment**

An Arson Risk Assessment (as provided by the Arson Prevention Bureau) has been carried out for Mountain Ash Comprehensive School. This has confirmed that the school could be vulnerable to an arson attack. The main weaknesses have been identified as followed:

- The materials used to build the School could be classed as combustible.
- Not all parts of the School perimeter are observed easily by surrounding houses, leaving blind spots in the school.
- Although the School is fenced in, there are gaps in the fencing and areas that are easily penetrated. Gates are also open throughout the school day and during holiday

periods to provide access to the School site. All of this means that members of the public are able to regularly access the School site.

- There are problems with windows around the School, many of which are not secure.
- The visitor monitoring procedures at the School are not robust enough.
- The School is not fitted with an automatic sprinkler or a fire detection system linked to the Fire Service.
- Although the school premises are monitored by CCTV, there are areas where the system does not work and there are blind spots. The system is also fractured, as the footage is not monitored in one central place, but monitored in separate areas.

However, it must also be noted that the School has of yet never experienced an arson attack, other than skips being set alight. The School has also experienced very few instances of vandalism and break-ins over recent years.

## **Action Plan**

As a result of the arson assessment, the next priority for the School is to address the weaknesses identified. The prevention of arson attacks falls into a logical process:

- Deter unauthorised entry onto the site.
- Prevent unauthorised entry into the building.
- Reduce the opportunity for an offender to start a fire.
- Reduce the scope for potential fire damage.
- Reduce subsequent losses and disruption from a fire by preparing a disaster resulting recovery plan.

### **1. Deter unauthorised entry onto the site**

- The School will continue to maintain the perimeter fencing in good order. The issues regarding the low level of the fencing, gaps and areas that are easily penetrated are currently being discussed with the Local Education Authority. It is intended to address these issues in the near future, although this is obviously dependent on the availability of funds.
- As most incidents of trespass and associated vandalism occurs out-of-school hours and often under the cover of darkness, the School will continue to maintain the external lighting. The School, in collaboration with the Local Education Authority, has recently replaced the building perimeter lighting.
- The Senior Caretaker carries out patrols of the School during periods of school shutdown.

## **2. Prevent unauthorised entry into the building**

- There are a few recesses and alcoves around the School which could be particularly vulnerable as they are out of sight. The School will look into ways of managing these areas.
- The weakest points of entry into a building are its doors and windows. At Mountain Ash Comprehensive School, most doors are of an industrial metal construction. Where there are still wooden doors remaining, the School will look to replace these in due course. To add reinforcement, the external doors in particularly vulnerable areas have also had mechanical roller shutters fitted. There is a security issue with regard to the windows at the School. The School has sought advice and assistance from the Local Education Authority on this matter and it is hoped that a rolling programme of window replacement will be commenced shortly.
- Any low level glazing around the School will be laminated or toughened and securely fixed within its frame.
- The School has recently replaced the security alarm in the whole of the school building. The Caretaking Team are fully aware of the importance of ensuring this alarm system is activated on locking up the School every night.
- The installation of CCTV has a high deterrent effect. The School has CCTV in operation. However, this is not monitored on a regular basis and has blind spots. The system is also fractured, as it cannot be monitored from one central area. This issue is currently being discussed with the Local Education Authority.
- The School is often used out of school hours (eg hire of sports hall to local clubs). Anybody attending the School site after hours for such purposes has limited access.
- It is part of the routine of the Caretaker on duty to check that all external doors and windows are secure and all internal doors are locked once the School is vacated at the end of the day. There have been occasions when windows and/or doors have been found open in the morning and have obviously been open throughout the night. These instances are always brought to the attention of the Caretaker who was on duty, as well as the Headteacher. This situation is monitored and will be seriously addressed if it continues.
- The School will look at putting in a more robust system of recording visitors on site and will provide any training required to ensure that all office staff adhere to the procedures at all times.

Many of these measures will not only prevent arson, but will also keep the School more secure generally.

## **3. Reduce the opportunity for an offender to start a fire**

If an arsonist intent on causing damage is unable to enter the premises then the opportunity to light a fire on the outside of the building is often exploited. In many circumstances wilful damage can get out of hand. For this reason, it is important that the opportunity to ignite combustible material is eliminated.

- The School's refuse skips are sited at a suitable distance from the main buildings. They are emptied on a weekly basis every Friday morning. This ensures there is very little

refuse left in the skips over weekends and holiday periods. If skips are not emptied for any reason (eg truck breakdown), the skip company is contacted to ensure they are emptied at the earliest opportunity.

- The canteen's refuse bins are stored in a secure compound at a suitable distance from the main buildings. They are emptied on a weekly basis every Thursday morning.
- The School recycling is kept in wheelie bins a suitable distance from the main buildings, although the bins are not chained in place. The bins are emptied on a weekly basis every Tuesday morning. This could be seen as a potential risk, as there would be recycling left in the bins over a weekend period. Before School holiday periods, staff are reminded to empty their classroom recycling bins and place this waste into the central recycling bins well before the collection on the last Tuesday of the term.
- External waste bins are emptied on a daily basis.
- All external gates are kept locked at night.

#### **4. Reduce the scope for potential fire damage**

Should a fire be started, either deliberately or accidentally, it is important that its effect is minimised by containing the fire to a limited area, or ensuring that high value contents are protected.

- The Local Education Authority is responsible for ensuring that compartmentalisation (fire-stops in the roof/ceiling voids) are in place. During the asbestos removal that has been carried out over the last few years, compartmentalisation has been included as part of these works.
- All fire resisting doors and screens will be maintained by the School. However, it should be noted that this is a continual problem as the corridor doors have such a heavy traffic flow through them. In the future, the School plans to look at linking the fire doors to the fire alarm system.
- Partition walls are regularly inspected and any gaps or holes are rectified as necessary.
- The Local Education Authority is responsible for linking the fire alarm system to a fire monitoring company. Although some remedial work has been carried out in this area, the link has still not been activated. The School has chased this up with the LEA on several occasions over the last two years, but the situation has still not been remedied.

#### **5. Reduce subsequent losses and disruption resulting from a fire**

- In the event of a fire and/or fire alarm activation, the primary objective according to the School's Fire Safety Policy is to evacuate the School buildings. However, in cases where a small fire could be prevented from turning into a more serious problem, it would be sensible for the fire to be tackled by use of a fire extinguisher. In so doing, recognition should be given to the provision of the most appropriate form of extinguishing medium, eg water is the most effective medium for most fires, but inappropriate for fires in electrical equipment. The School ensures that appropriate types of fire extinguisher are made available in each area of the premises, as advised by the LEA's contracted professional company.

- The Headteacher is responsible for ensuring that members of staff are adequately trained in fire procedures, including how to summon the Fire Service, building evacuation and the use of fire extinguishers (where appropriate).
- In the event of a fire, the School Emergency Management Plan will be put into action.