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HOW TO ENTER

Simply enter at www.bmag.com.au or send your name, address and daytime telephone details to Solar Panels, *bmag*, PO Box 477, Albion, Q. 4010. Entries close 5pm 30 March 2012. Entrants agree to receive promotional offers from *bmag*.

*b*informed

Battle against vandals

Schools are upgrading security to protect them from vandal attacks. Alex Bernard reports

It's been almost a year since fire destroyed close to a third of Wavell Heights State School and while the school was able to restore power, water and data for classes just two days after the incident, complete restoration, estimated to cost more than \$3million, aren't expected to be finished until July this year. The fire was the work of young vandals, one of 30 cases of arson attacks on schools reported last year.

Eagle Junction State School is also operating in construction site conditions while damages are repaired following an arson attack during the summer school holidays. The school, which has 800 students, was established in 1895 and damage to its heritage buildings was extensive. "Because of all the construction work and limited space, they've had to stagger all the kids lunch times," says Eagle Junction P&C President Louise Kynaston. "They lost their PA systems, their computers, the admin staff lost everything, all their resources."

While schools can access the Queensland Government Insurance Fund to help pay for repairs, the cost can be financially devastating to schools. Eagle Heights' P&C has put off other projects it had planned to divert funds to rebuilding. "We're having a fête in June so the focus will be the rebuild, not air conditioning or new whiteboards in classrooms. It's going to affect us for years to come," says Kynaston.

Wavell Heights has been able to continue with support from the state government, other schools, local businesses and the school's P&C. "As awful as it all was, the generosity we were shown and continue to be shown has been really remarkable. We've been very well supported by local businesses and our P&C is fantastic, but for me it was the kindness shown by other schools, student councils organising fundraising for us and making donations,

"Fences aren't a deterrent, people just jump over them"

it's been very humbling," says the school's principal John Cattoni.

It's also a costly exercise to keep schools protected. During 2010-11 the School Security Program provided grants totalling \$237,000 to 35 schools to upgrade their security. The program was established in 1995 to improve security at Queensland's schools. It works with schools to identify problems, give risk management advice, advise on Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) and security patrols, and helps schools to address patterns of crime and ongoing malicious damage.

There are 22 schools considered high risk in Queensland, 17 of them in Brisbane. Since 2009, those schools have had security fences installed through the School Security Program at a cost of more than \$6million.

However, a private security company employee (who asked not to be named) who has carried out security patrols for a private school on Brisbane's northside says fences are not a solution. "Fences aren't that much of a deterrent. People just jump over them," he says. "Ideally, having someone living on campus is best, but that's only the case for a select few. Cameras are an excellent deterrent because often the offenders are students themselves or young people. When they know they're going to get caught on camera it significantly decreases the chance of acts of vandalism taking place."

Mayor of Ipswich Paul Pisasale has embraced the use of cameras throughout his council area which has significantly reduced

crime in the Ipswich CBD, and that has had a flow-on effect for local schools.

Ipswich Girls Grammar School deputy principal Rhonda Nolan says the cameras have made a noticeable difference. "We are in quite a vulnerable position because of our location, on a very big corner site opposite a park and very close to the city, with really easy access to our beautiful grounds, so we take our security very seriously," she says. "But over the last five years we've had no major incidents, in fact, not even a bit of graffiti on a fence! We do have our own private security but there's so little petty crime in Ipswich, especially in the CBD, and that has a rolling effect throughout the town."

Dr Annemaree Carroll, a psychologist and senior lecturer in the School of Education at The University of Queensland, is researching child and adolescent behaviour disorders relating to delinquency and substance use. She says the offenders are often students themselves. "There are two groups of young people perpetrating these kinds of offences," she says. "One is young people who haven't given any thought to the vandalism itself - it can often be born out of boredom or a group mentality; and the other group, which is only one to two per cent, for whom the behaviour is intentional and callous. Sometimes those offenders are students who have had a very bad experience at school."

And while vandalism has devastating effects on schools, what is often forgotten is the effect it has on the students who are also the victims. "Vandalism is an enormous issue for our society. The impact it has on students when their school is attacked is that they often feel helpless, overwhelmed and traumatised," says Dr Carroll.

The School Watch hotline is available for people to call 24 hours a day on 131 788 to report any suspicious behaviour or acts of vandalism.

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