

## A MORE THOUGHTFUL RESPONSE TO CRIME

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To respond to an alarming increase in knife crime among young people, the Labour party announced that it would be issuing police officers with metal detecting wands and would impose tougher punishments on offenders. The Conservative party had much the same answer, promising in its manifesto at the last election that anyone found carrying a knife would face an automatic jail sentence.

Thankfully, Brooke Kinsella, the former East Enders actress whose 16-year-old brother was a high-profile victim of knife crime and who was appointed an adviser to the Coalition on the subject, is pushing a more thoughtful approach.

After spending the summer consulting with community workers and youth project leaders Ms Kinsella has come to the conclusion that the most effective way of tackling knife crime is through the classroom, not the courtroom. In a report to be released this week, she will recommend the introduction of knife crime awareness workshops in schools to educate youngsters on the terrible consequences of carrying a knife.

Ms Kinsella argues that the motivation for most people who carry a weapon is fear, rather than aggressive intent. If this is so, the key to changing this behaviour is not to threaten them with jail, but to make it clear to them that carrying a knife makes you less, not more, safe. She acknowledged yesterday that some head teachers might be wary of introducing such classes because of the message it could send to parents about a school's safety. But if schools fear parents would be alarmed by such measures, the answer is to educate parents, too.

For too long, ministers have tried to address the problems of antisocial and dangerous youth behaviour through the criminal justice system. Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) were introduced in the UK in 1998.

This Act defines anti-social behaviour as behaviour that "caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household." ASBOs stop people from doing stated things or going to stated places and last for a minimum of two years, but can last longer.

They were 'reinforced' by the Anti-Social Behaviour Act in 2003. The people who are given ASBOs can be 'named and shamed' in local media, and sometimes are. Orders have been granted for abusive behaviour, vandalism, fly-posting, and harassment.

But ASBOs, long custodial sentences and greater stop and search powers for the police have made little difference to the public's sense of security.

What Ms Kinsella proposes is for the Government and schools to get tough on the causes of knife crime, rather than just its street-level manifestations. Her recommendations mark a welcome break with the usual thinking and ought to be heeded.

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