

Police move from proactive to reactive approach in schools: Dufferin OPP

Written By **Paula Brown**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Dufferin OPP Insp. Terry Ward says police are facing an 'uphill swing' as fights between students break out at Centre Dufferin District High School, two of which have been deemed 'racially motivated'.

During their meeting on Monday (June 13), Shelburne Town Council received a presentation from Dufferin OPP Insp. Ward. When questioned by Deputy Mayor Steve Anderson on the reoccurring incidents at the local high school, Ward informed Council of two incidents that had occurred that day (June 13), and added there is little police can do unless a call to service is given.

'There were two occurrences today. I hate to say it both appear to be racially motivated,' Ward said to Council. 'I wish I had the answer for you on what the fix is to that? I don't. Our hands, as police, are tied. As you know, the school board and elected trustees voted not to have us in the school or property unless it is a call for service.'

In 2020, the Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) established a taskforce to review police presence in schools within the board. The UGDSB board of trustees approved seven recommendations from the taskforce's review including discontinuing the School Resource Officer(SRO) program.

Ward said that Dufferin OPP is now in a place of being reactive to incidents at the schools rather than proactive. He added the police have to work with community partners to build trust.

Deputy Mayor Anderson also questioned if Dufferin OPP was seeing any trends or concerns.

'As we all know, kids can be mean. It's appearing to be happening especially at the high school, where it's dividing into different groups and they're getting into scraps amongst themselves,' said Ward. 'It becomes a community problem that we have to be able to unite everybody.'

'We're here, we're willing to get engaged, but there's a couple road blocks that hinder us from doing anything,' concluded Ward.

Anderson acknowledged the honesty surrounding police involvement within the current school incidents.

'It doesn't stop us as elected officials to reach out to the school and see how we can work together, combined with other community partners to try to bring some resolution,' said Anderson.