

Mind the Gap

A Model for School Inclusion

Mark Dewhurst

May 2001



The Thames Valley Partnership

Our Mission

“To promote and strengthen partnerships to reduce crime and the fear of crime, adding value to the quality and scope of work in community safety”.

Mind the Gap was researched and written by Mark Dewhurst, a Thames Valley Partnership Associate. Mark is a freelance researcher and consultant and can be contacted either through the Thames Valley Partnership or at

51 Vicarage Road
Oxford
Oxfordshire
OX1 4RE

Tel: 01865 245116
E-mail: mark.dewhurst@virgin.net

“I used to get myself excluded because I wanted to go fishing. I’d have my fishing bag all ready”

Foreword

Young people excluded from school are much more likely to get involved in criminal activity. When out of school, young people have much more time and temptation. Equally those excluded from school share many of the risk factors which are known to contribute to criminality. Almost two thirds of young offenders have no educational qualifications and a very large proportion of them have been excluded from school.

There is a link between school exclusion and community safety. The Thames Valley Partnership's commitment is to try and reduce exclusions from school and instead, support positive intervention in young people's lives to keep them, wherever possible, in education.

Mind the Gap is the culmination of three years of work by the Thames Valley Partnership which aims to promote, support and evaluate ways of reducing exclusions from school. We have found numerous innovative and exciting initiatives which support young people at risk of exclusion and no shortage of commitment, imagination or optimism. We are also delighted that in the last few years there has been both a greater recognition of the link between school exclusion and community safety, and an increasing commitment to inclusive approaches which engage with and try to hold on to young people who at times can be a source of anguish and a real challenge to teachers and other pupils.

Mind the Gap draws together the findings from our evaluations of school inclusion initiatives. It is clear that no single approach provides the answer and that effective intervention must be interconnected and interdependent. We offer a model which identifies the key components for an inclusive approach and we illustrate this with a range of examples from the Thames Valley.

We could not have done this work without the time, and openness of all those who participated – teachers, education officers and the young people themselves. Thanks also to the School Inclusion Working Party and representatives from the nine local education authorities in the Thames Valley, who shared their experiences, contributed examples and commented on the work as it progressed.

And of course, thanks to Mark Dewhurst for his energy and enthusiasm and for producing a report which we are confident will be enjoyed and valued by a large number of people from a range of organisations. We hope that the report will give encouragement to practitioners and managers who share our belief that it is our responsibility to make our education system work as much for those who challenge it most, as for those who contribute to its targets for achievement!

Read and enjoy this report – and **Mind the Gap**.

Sue Raikes
Chief Executive
Thames Valley Partnership

Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	7
• Background to the Thames Valley Partnership's Work on School Exclusion	7
• A Model for Reducing School Inclusion	8
• The Model	9
• The Intention and Presentation of this Report	9
• Some Emerging and Abiding Themes	10
2.1 The Pupil Repertoire	13
• Illustration 1 – 'Cog' Skills at Drayton School, Banbury	13
• Illustration 2 – Work-related Learning at Icknield Community College, Watlington	14
2.2 The School Repertoire	17
• Illustration 3 – Dramatherapy at Beechwood School, Slough	17
• Illustration 4 - The Behaviour Modification Programme at The Radcliffe School, Milton Keynes	19
2.3 The LEA Repertoire and Shared Resources	23
• Illustration 5 – Football in the Community - Slough	23
• Illustration 6 – Wycombe Grange Pupil Referral Unit - A Collaborative Role for PRUs	24
3.1 and 3.2 Information and Communication Between Pupils and Their Schools	27
• Illustration 7 – A Stepped Approach to Behaviour Management at The Cressex School, High Wycombe	28
• Illustration 8 – Communicating With Pupils at Risk, Northern House School, Oxford	30
• Illustration 9 – Some Brief Reflections on the Enhanced Role of Form Tutors at Brooke Weston City Technology College, Corby	33
3.3 Information and Communication – Local Education Authorities and Other Structures	35
• Illustration 10 – Identifying and Responding to Pupils at Risk in Reading	36
• Illustration 11 – Oxford Education Action Zone (EAZ) - Integrated Support Services and Rapid Response	37

4.1 The Pupil Context	41
• Illustration 12 – Danny - Learning for a Change, Drayton School, Banbury	41
4.2 The School Context to Support Inclusive Education	43
• Illustration 13 – Teacher Peer Mentoring at St Paul’s School, Milton Keynes	43
• Illustration 14 - A Whole-school Approach based on Restorative Justice	45
– Peer Mediation at Geoffrey Field Junior School, Reading	
– Restorative Justice in a School Context	
4.3 Inclusive Education in the Context of the Local Education Authority and Beyond	49
• Illustration 15 – The Designated Teacher Scheme in Slough	49
• Illustration 16 – Links – Transition Project, Reading	50
5. Conclusion	53
Appendix A - Some Comments on Fixed Term Exclusion and Internal Suspension/Isolation	55
Appendix B - References	57

1 Introduction

Background to the Thames Valley Partnership's Work on School Exclusion

Over and above the consequences for individual young people, school exclusion has a profound impact on the well being of the whole community. In the short term, it is always expensive and often ineffective to educate pupils once they have been excluded. While excluded, pupils are at significant risk of involvement in criminal and anti social behaviour. The longer-term consequences are indicated by the stark fact that almost two thirds of young offenders have no educational qualifications (Home Office 1997). There is a clear link between school exclusion and community safety.

Since 1998, the Thames Valley Partnership has been reviewing and supporting initiatives to reduce exclusions from school as part of its wider community safety remit. This work has been carried out with support and guidance from Thames Valley Partnership's School Inclusion Working Group, including representatives from the local education authorities.

Initially the work focused in the evaluation of interesting initiatives in local schools. This work was carried out by Rob George during 1999 and resulted in a number of individual reports and a summary document 'Reducing School Exclusion – *One End - Many Means*' (available from Thames Valley Partnership). These school based evaluations had two parallel objectives: firstly to provide honest and supportive feedback to the school from an independent perspective and secondly to identify aspects of good and interesting practice for the benefit of a wider audience. This report draws substantially on Rob George's earlier school based work.

During 2000 the Thames Valley Partnership concluded and reviewed the original school-based evaluations and carried out new evaluative work on five further sites. The focus extended to voluntary and youth support initiatives working alongside schools. In recognition of the fact that schools working in isolation cannot tackle exclusion on their own, it has also been important to consider the wider context of the support offered by LEAs and voluntary sector initiatives. This has involved visits and discussions with LEA and EAZ representatives (among others), again with the objective of identifying elements of good practice to inform the wider discussion.

The strength of the Thames Valley Partnership's evaluative and reflective work is to bring an independent perspective to bear on the operation of schools and the broader educational context – a new pair of eyes, if you will. We have found numerous innovative and dynamic school based initiatives to support pupils at risk of exclusion but, at the same time, it has not been sufficient to review school based initiatives in isolation. We need to consider the broader picture, moving out from discrete initiatives to whole school practice and out from there to the wider educational and multi-agency context. And, having gone wider, we need to refocus on the actual experience and understanding of individual pupils at risk – because, if the system doesn't work for them it doesn't work at all.

A Model for Reducing School Exclusion

1. Repertoire

1.1 Pupil	Skills to behave differently – a personal repertoire
1.2 School	Interventions to support/enable change Staff capacity to respond to individuals and groups
1.3 LEA and other agencies	Structured interventions which can be impractical/less efficient at school level

2. Information and Communication

2.1 Pupil	Know where you stand
2.2 School	Identify and record specific behaviours. Review, negotiate and contract with pupils at risk
2.3 LEA and other agencies	Identify and track pupils at risk to avoid limbo. Facilitate wider and more effective communication

3. Context

3.1 Pupil	A wider context in which to apply and 'own' new skills (eg in the mainstream classroom, at home, at work)
3.2 School	Whole school approaches to managing behaviour. Ongoing support and training for class teachers
3.3 LEA and other agencies	To provide a context for school based work which would include support and validation for schools and staff as well as provision and/or co-ordination of supplementary specialist and interagency services

The Model

In drawing together the findings from our evaluations it was evident that no single approach would provide the answer and that effective interventions would always need to be interconnected and interdependent. As a result we evolved a model as a way of considering these issues widely and in relation to one another.

In outline, the model works on three levels as follows:

1. **Repertoire** – in order to avoid being excluded, **pupils** at risk require a repertoire of skills, **schools** need to deploy a range of targeted interventions and **LEAs** and other agencies need to contribute a range of specialist support services.
2. **Information and Communication** – where these elements were effectively in place they played a major part in supporting pupils at risk. Conversely, failures in information and communication can be significant contributors to exclusion. This applies most starkly to the isolated **pupil** who is at risk of exclusion but doesn't understand what he can actually do about it. The same heading continues to be relevant to **schools** and, in a different way, to **LEAs** as well.
3. **Context** – **pupils** exist in a context, supportive or otherwise, which will include the mainstream classroom, the playground, work and home. This is where their ultimate inclusion or exclusion will be played out and tested. **Schools** provide a context which ranges from their physical infrastructure and training and support for staff right through to whole school policies and collective systems of values and beliefs. **LEAs** and other organisations provide a context for this work which can be constructive or not – either way it is highly significant.

These provide the main topics and chapter headings for the report, aiming to offer digestible chunks of food for thought. However, it will also be quite evident that the propositions and illustrations from one section overlap with those from another. **The point of the model is that its elements are fundamentally and crucially interdependent.** If one or more component is missing then the whole machine is liable to stall. So, if you have brilliant specialist provision for pupils at risk but fail to incorporate that ethos into mainstream classrooms then any gains will be short lived. Similarly, however excellent a school may be, the pupil is set up to fail if he or she spend long periods in limbo outside the system and is then thrust back into school with inadequate preparation. If you support challenging pupils but neglect the staff there will be problems. And so on.

Where the necessary components are not integrated at each level then there will be gaps and those gaps will result in a lot of otherwise excellent work going to waste.

The Intention and Presentation of This Report

The report is drawn from a range of sources and it is proper that a variety of voices and styles should emerge. Specific illustrations of good practice and interesting ideas are presented in shaded boxes throughout and are listed in the contents. As I have already

indicated, several of these illustrations are drawn and adapted from Rob George's evaluations, while the remainder were written by me with contributions and support from members of Thames Valley Partnership's School Inclusion Working Group.

This report aims to illuminate perspectives and offer possibilities rather than defining limits or claiming authoritative solutions. In this situation it is a ticklish point to determine how far the writer's voice and opinions can be allowed to intrude. In reality of course there is no such thing as objective report writing - choice of examples and choice of phrases always bring their weight to bear. However, in this report I am aware that there are occasions where my observations are not backed by specific illustrations and are the aggregate of my own experience, both in carrying out this research and as a practitioner with young people in schools and elsewhere. I trust that it is sufficiently clear where this is the case and that readers will be in a position to take or leave my opinion as they see fit.

Some Emerging and Abiding Themes

We have looked at such a variety of projects that it is hard to single out one approach as preferable to another. It is also probably unhelpful to do so because in the end certain themes emerge as more important than specific initiatives: -

- Communication is central throughout, but nowhere more so than in ensuring that pupils at risk have clear boundaries and clear contracts so that they know where they stand and have a chance to take ownership of their own future.
- Support, validation and training for staff lie at the core of any real progress. All school staff, but most particularly class teachers and LSAs are the consistent and ongoing point of contact with pupils at risk of exclusion. Policies, beliefs and initiatives various will only bear fruit to the extent that they are embodied in the mainstream staff and this will happen in turn only if those people are comprehensively encouraged and supported.
- No single, discrete initiative will make a real and sustainable difference on its own. We are right to look at a whole range of strategies to reduce exclusion but in the end the **type** of initiative chosen will matter much less than **how** it is implemented and the quality and consistency of the **supportive context** around it.

I was slightly surprised to find these themes so closely echoed in the DfEE Evaluation of Behaviour and Discipline Pilot Projects (1996-99) published towards the end of our period of evaluations. A range of projects were supported under the Standards Fund Programme. Projects fell under three broad headings: multi disciplinary behaviour support teams, in-school centres and secondment of teachers from mainstream schools to PRUs (although there was not much uptake of the latter).

According to the DfEE evaluation, a number of factors were common and significant to successful projects. Among other things, they: -

- Established effective communication and collaboration with all concerned parties
- Assisted in the establishment of practices in the mainstream school which became the norm
- Involved the whole school staff including the management team, teachers and support staff
- Had positive effects on teacher behaviour, enabling teachers to develop a wider range of skills and the confidence to use them
- Gave pupils a responsibility for their own behaviour

The report goes on to say that; 'The evidence did not suggest that one *type* of project was more or less successful' (my italics).

Of course projects can be well conceived or poorly conceived, well or poorly executed. However, it seems evident that initiatives succeed or fail substantially and sustainably on the basis of how well they are grounded in the whole school culture and practice. I accept that I may be hammering at an obvious point, but I suspect that an understandable (if unacknowledged) element of wishful-thinking tempts us to believe that discrete and labelled initiatives will provide a solution (and so protect the rest of the school and wider community from needing to get involved).

This report offers and celebrates numerous examples of exciting work in the Thames Valley area which, taken together, provide an optimistic prospect for more inclusive schooling. Just don't pin your hopes on a single marvellous intervention.

2.1 The Pupil Repertoire

Put crudely, the point at issue is how to keep pupils in school and how to do so as productively as possible. A variety of structures, strategies and devices can be set up around the pupil but in the end the most significant socially inclusive gain will be measured by how far and how well he or she is equipped with independent skills to cope in school ... and beyond.

I have termed this the pupil's personal repertoire – the skills to behave differently and, ultimately, the ability to recognise and make choices about how to behave in different circumstances.

Illustration 1 – ‘Cog’ Skills at Drayton School, Banbury

The Cog(nitive) skills programme is a major component of the Learning Centre's work at Drayton School. Selected pupils are withdrawn from one mainstream lesson each week to develop skills for understanding and modifying their behaviour. This is a planned on-going intervention, intended to continue for between one and two years for each pupil identified. Here some pupils reflect on what they gain from the sessions: -

“It helps me see early warning signs for my behaviour – like when it's going wrong”

“It's helpful - how to get round a problem”

“In cog skills we talk about why it happens and how to deal with arguments with a teacher”

“It's how to control yourself”

“He shows you how to control your mouth and think first”

“It's made me think about what I'm going to do and say”

“There's the method **and** the style” (ie not just knowing what to do but practising **how** to do it)

“It helps you not to be in their (the teachers) face”

The designated Cog Skills sessions take place with small groups of about six students. The environment is safe, boundaried and consistent. A variety of techniques are used to help the students to understand their behaviour and its impact on others and to understand how they can behave differently – and why they might choose to. The learning is incremental and new skills are practised against real life, recognisable situations (see also illustration 12 – The Pupil Context).

Similar gains for individual pupils have been seen from therapeutic interventions such as counselling or drama therapy.

However, pupils' repertoire of skills, along with their self-esteem, can also be enhanced in widely differing contexts without any overtly therapeutic agenda:

Illustration 2 – Work-related Learning at Icknield Community College, Watlington

At Icknield Community College a number of Year 10 pupils are on extended work placements. These are intended as long-term stable placements which need to be recognised and valued by the pupils as part of a proper purposeful programme. Passing the time and containment are not enough. Significant preparatory work is put in with pupils and parents as early as Year 9. Pupils on work placements continue with core subjects and options, using supported free periods to catch up on missed work. It is also crucial to the success of the scheme that employers are properly consulted and effectively involved and that proper accreditation and checks are in place.

The following comments are from self-confessed disaffected pupils now on two days work experience.

“I got into a lot of trouble in Year 9 – teachers criticising – I got angry – I’ve got a short temper. In the end I was excluded from most lessons”

“In Year 9 I had a lot of grief. I felt angry at school. I was getting down and it all built up. Five days full time in school would probably be hell. I used to get so ... built up and angry. I’ve started to get my friends back again now”

They report a new and different motivation to do well: -

“They’re friendly (at the work placement). They treat me like an adult. I wouldn’t stay if they treated me like a kid.”

“It’s brilliant – I’m doing well with something I like (the placement) and then I **do** do better at school as well”

“It works because I **want** to work on cars. They know now that I can be trusted at work”

There is also an awareness that actions have consequences and that the pupils may be able to take some control over what happens to them (this is a big change for pupils at risk of exclusion who often perceive delinquency as the only power they have): -

“I know that if I doss around at school I’ll get behind and they’ll stop the work experience”

“I’ve got a set programme. I know what I’ve got to do when I am in school and mostly I get on with it”

“I’ve realised that if I want to keep this job – well **get** this job – I’ve got to do my GCSEs”

Most pupils find sufficient strategies which will enable them to cope in school and in the wider world. They may sometimes stray and they may not be totally fulfilled human beings but their behaviour conforms, more or less, to the norms expected by society and, in microcosm, by schools.

A minority of pupils fail to acquire sufficient skills or, acquire an excess of anti social skills which society at large and schools in particular will not tolerate. These are the young people most at risk of exclusion, both from school and in the wider social context. The

following sections attempt to identify and illustrate some necessary and interdependent components whereby the school system can at least contain a greater proportion of pupils and might, more ambitiously, equip them better to succeed in the wider world.

2.2 The School Repertoire

In part, and indeed crucially, this is a question of the skills and techniques owned and practised by individual members of staff – class teachers, learning support assistants, lunchtime supervisors, heads of year etc. Much of the school's repertoire is embodied in how these people respond to individuals and groups of pupils. Aspects of this are also considered further in terms of information and communication (section 3) and the context of training and staff development (section 4).

This section is particularly concerned with **school-based initiatives** intended to sustain pupils identified as being at risk of exclusion. A whole range of discrete interventions, ranging from in-school units through to individual counselling, have been tried and have met with some success in different schools. I will offer just a couple of examples to indicate what can be achieved.

First though I would first like to sound a note of warning and stress a major finding of our research; **that no one initiative offers a miracle solution and that any initiative is only as good as the whole school setting in which it takes place.**

That being said, what part can discrete school based initiatives play?

Illustration 3 - Dramatherapy at Beechwood School, Slough

The application of Dramatherapy is at one end of a continuum – it isn't the kind of approach which would often evolve as an extension of most schools' mainstream repertoire – it has to be introduced as a specialist response to identified behaviour problems.

For a variety of reasons, Beechwood Secondary School, Slough found itself working with a substantial number of pupils whose behaviour was persistently challenging and whose management required the investment of a lot of time by staff at all levels. Dramatherapy sessions were introduced as one of a range of measures designed to respond to the problems presented by these pupils.

Selected pupils met with the dramatherapist in pairs or small groups, in a safe and contained space where the children could creatively learn to express themselves and explore alternative ways of behaving. The fundamental aims were to:-

- Learn to value themselves and others
- Try out ways of behaving which are successful
- Manage and accept feelings
- Communicate and share ideas
- Build on strengths and work on weaknesses
- Work on relationships with peers and adults
- Develop self-esteem and identity

These are likely to be core aims of anyone trying to bring about sustainable change for pupils at risk, but can dramatherapy achieve these aims?

The views of the pupils about the content of the dramatherapy sessions were overwhelmingly positive: -

“It’s fun, you always get to say what you feel like and you want. In ordinary lessons you don’t get the chance”

“It’s a chill-off lesson, I express things, get things out”

“You talk about problems, get it off your chest, don’t feel so mad about it afterwards”

“I’m laughing more, it’s lightened me up a bit in school”

They also appreciated the fact that they could influence the content of dramatherapy sessions: -

“We give suggestions, Gail picks one. If someone’s in a rage, we might do a game to relax him”

This is a small example of a theme which runs through this report – the extent to which pupils feel ownership and can exercise some control goes a long way to defining extent of their inclusion.

Most thought that the dramatherapy sessions had improved their behaviour in school:-

“My behaviour’s got better, I lose my temper less”

“For the rest of the day I’m good. I’ve behaved for about a week now”

Heads of Year also felt that the sessions had helped to produce an improvement in behaviour:

“They’ve both settled since Christmas. The paired work being done with these two has been very significant – one was bullying the other. They get on really well now. I’m very impressed with the ground they’ve made”

“He still makes mistakes and gets preoccupied with things happening outside school. But he loves dramatherapy and is going from strength to strength: he’s even stopped truanting”

“Staff find it particularly difficult to teach him. He’s still unsettled, though his behaviour improves under medication. Dramatherapy’s a good way of bringing positives out, a release”

“He’s definitely improved. He enjoys going and it makes him feel special”

Following the pilot, the school has engaged the dramatherapist on a regular basis. Quite apart from the sessions’ contribution to improved behaviour, they were also seen to be of value in offering the school another option, another ‘string to the bow’ in seeking a range of ways to respond to persistently disruptive or self-damaging behaviour.

Referral to a specialist resource such as dramatherapy is unlikely on its own to provide ‘the answer’ and it won’t be suitable for all pupils at risk (there are many who would run a mile!). However, it can offer a glimmer of hope, which can generate a more positive approach and help to set up a virtuous, rather than vicious circle. As such it has proved to be a really useful element in the repertoire of Beechwood School.

If dramatherapy is a rather specialist response, what can be achieved by focusing a school's existing resources more precisely to engage with challenging behaviour? A targeted programme of behaviour modification, working alongside the day to day function of the school, provides one example: -

Illustration 4 - The Behaviour Modification Programme at The Radcliffe School, Milton Keynes

This programme is managed in-house by a teacher with senior status (with about $\frac{1}{3}$ timetable dedicated to this work) and one LSA (half time for the programme at time of evaluation but now full time). The programme is designed to support pupils and staff in the management and reduction of unacceptable behaviour. At any one time, between 18 and 30 pupils will be on the programme register, most in Year 10.

The programme can incorporate various interventions (for instance, counselling sessions, social skills work, short term withdrawal from class or behaviour support in class and so on) but the crucial and distinctive elements are as follows: -

- A Behaviour Report Form, which specifies the particular behaviours which the pupil needs to work on and gives teachers the chance to give **instant** day-to-day feedback
- **Daily** contact with Programme staff, which ensures that pupils are held to account for their behaviour and provides the opportunity to give praise where it is due, to reinforce the need for the pupil to work harder on certain behaviours or to adopt new strategies, and to amend the timetable if necessary
- An overview of each pupil's behaviour and circumstances which the Programme staff develop and which facilitates better communication between relevant school personnel and with parents

Observation of pupil contact with the programme staff, particularly in the morning sessions, showed that pupils took the programme seriously, were delighted when they were praised, and suitably apprehensive when their Report Forms drew attention to disappointing behaviour. The staff were able to concentrate very precisely on specific behaviours and suggest (or demand!) particular strategies, eg not to sit next to a named pupil. There were many examples of offering incentives – *'two more good weeks like this, and you'll be off the programme'* – and of negotiating deals – *'you owe me four detentions, I'll halve that if you have a good day today'*. Pupils were given a strong sense of the programme operating **in the middle** of an effective communication network involving school staff and parents.

All pupils consulted spoke positively about the programme and thought that it had improved their behaviour. Most saw the Behaviour Report Form and the daily contact with programme staff as being the key to the success of the programme: -

"The daily check-in works. You know you're going to have to get it [the Report Form] looked at, then come back again next morning"

"If it wasn't every day, things would drift"

"Checking in means you **have** to be better"

They also valued the emphasis within the Programme on recognising positive achievement, and were proud when their Report Form described a good day or a good week and when the

Programme staff praised them for an improved performance.

The value of having access to two members of staff with different but complementary strengths was emphasised:

“They made the difference – they thought I was worth it. With other teachers I didn’t feel the same way”

“They’re very strict, but they listen to both sides of the story. They don’t always take the teachers’ side, they’re prepared to say who is right. Other teachers blame it all on you”

“They support us, so we get on well”

“She came down on me hard, put the responsibility back onto me”

“She can be scary – when she gets stressed, you know it’s bad”

“She tells me how to handle things differently”

The aspects of the Programme which were valued most by parents were: -

- The contact which they had with Programme staff, through letters, phone calls and home visits
- The accountability to Programme staff required of their children: *‘the daily checking meant that the teachers all had an eye on him all day – his behaviour improved dramatically’*
- The qualities brought to their roles by the staff: *‘She’s tough – but she’s got more out of my son than anyone before. She knows how to take control without belittling him’. ‘They praise him when he gets things right.’ ‘They’ve got so much patience’*

Other members of the teaching staff also saw the Behaviour Modification Programme as successful and effective. They saw the following elements of the programme as central: -

- The opportunity it offers for programme staff to build rounded relationships with pupils based on a broad knowledge of their circumstances, potential and behaviour drawn from home and from school
- The extra layer of support and structure provided by the programme to pupils and to teachers
- The daily contact with pupils which stresses their accountability for their own behaviour and reinforces the link between actions and consequences
- The capacity of programme staff to respond rapidly to crises and new developments
- The contact maintained with parents, which enables a joint home/school approach to be taken to the management of behaviour

This is a particularly interesting intervention because it lives at the centre of school life. The programme utilises existing school resources (a teacher and an LSA) and gives them the remit and (some) time to address challenging behaviour directly and on a regular basis. The programme manages to combine compassion and authority with high expectations in a way which pupils understand and which is integrated with their **daily** school lives. Equally important, the programme **integrates** a behavioural response with the main work of the school (ie getting on with teaching lessons) and with the home life of the pupils.

A word about sanctions and punishments as part of the school repertoire:

Alongside a whole variety of creative and constructive measures, schools will continue to have recourse to sanctions and punishments as part of their repertoire. In the course of our evaluations, many pupils talked about the impact and effectiveness of the various sanctions available. There was a consensus that, while for some pupils fixed term exclusion was experienced as a punishment (at least for the first or maybe second time), for many it was experienced as a welcome break from school, 'just like a holiday' or 'saving the trouble of bunking off'. This seemed to be particularly the case when the pupil concerned was often absent anyway as a result of truancy (with exclusion apparently legitimising behaviour which in other situations was seen as unacceptable). Most pupils agreed that detentions and internal exclusion were more effective punishments than fixed term exclusion. (See Appendix A for additional material on the relative effectiveness of fixed term exclusions and isolation as punishments)

School based interventions, like the ones outlined in this section, can play a significant part in reducing exclusions (fixed term and ultimately permanent). In order to be properly effective, such interventions need three levels of credibility: -

- To be respected and understood by pupils
- To be acknowledged and supported by colleagues
- To be appreciated and endorsed by parents

Two themes, of integration into home and school life and of communication between all concerned, emerged again and again during our research and will be seen to be vital at every level of an inclusive approach to education.

2.3 The LEA Repertoire and Shared Resources

There has been a progressive shift in recent years towards autonomy for schools and away from LEA control. Setting aside ideological arguments for or against this shift, there continue to be aspects of provision which individual schools are not best placed to deliver on their own. These are areas where shared provision and co-ordination can be an invaluable component in reducing exclusions and where there seems to be a lot of scope for exciting and effective developments. Such co-ordinated activity or shared support will not necessarily be under direct LEA control (interagency and voluntary sector interventions bring particular strengths) but they will most often be shaped and frequently funded through LEAs.

So, in terms of a practical repertoire of provision for pupils at risk of exclusion, there are a number of important interventions which can be seen as impractical or at least inefficient on an individual school level. For instance, it is only a minority of pupils for whom alternative provision (work based learning, college etc.) is likely to be needed and yet these options, if they are to be run well, are specialist, time consuming and expensive for an individual school to initiate and administer.

Here is one creative example of what can be achieved:

Illustration 5- Football in the Community - Slough

Football in the Community provides young people in danger of exclusion with regular, one-day, weekly placements with Slough Town Football Club. The programme offers students a range of experiences and the chance to develop a variety of skills: coaching, administration, time management, planning, communication, customer service, teamwork etc. Essentially, the ongoing placements can provide a motivating opportunity for schools to re-engage pupils.

Football sounds like a sure-fire winner for capturing the imagination of the more sporty disaffected pupils. Indeed, the credibility of sport, combined with coaches who can be acceptable near peer role models does contribute greatly to the success of this particular scheme. However, finding an attractive hook is only one part of providing successful alternative provision. The rest of it comes down to planning, organisation, ongoing support and effective interagency working. These attributes are central to almost any type of alternative provision. In this example some of the key components work like this: -

- Students are referred via Slough's Key Stage 4 Alternative Curriculum Panel where their suitability for the programme can be considered
- The programme is managed by The Education Business Partnership, an independent body facilitating links between the LEA and the local business community. The EPB runs a number of schemes as well as checking the suitability of all work experience placements in Slough and so has a sophisticated and realistic understanding of the requirements for effective work related learning
- Students attend an interview at Slough Town Football Club before the placement is agreed
- Students remain on roll at their mainstream school. The programme will be part of a wider package of alternative provision designed to re-engage their interest and provide an opportunity for success. Two students have recently come off the programme to return to full

time school and GCSE courses

- Expectations are made absolutely clear at the outset. Students will not be playing football all day. They will be required to carry out a variety of demanding tasks during a full working day, helping to coach and support groups of students (ranging from year 3 to year 11). Above all, they will be supported in taking responsibility, something which many of them will not have experienced
- Students complete a skills profile for the sessions and are encouraged to go for recognised qualifications (eg Junior Sport Leadership)
- The programme co-ordinator (Deputy Manager at the EBP) is in regular contact with the football club as well as feeding back to the Key stage 4 Alternative Curriculum Panel to ensure monitoring and evaluation of the programme

The scheme offers a rewarding and empowering opportunity for pupils at risk of exclusion who would otherwise have precious little experience of success or recognition. The point to emphasise here though is that a highly structured process underpins that personal break through for ten pupils at risk each year. This is not achieved casually and it is not a cheap and handy alternative to keep difficult students busy. Expert and specialist project management is crucial to support both the students and the employers (in this case a football club).

The football club has demonstrated an abundance of good will and community spirit (in common with many employers) but they have neither the experience nor the capacity on their own to provide a satisfactory and supportive scheme for vulnerable young people. Expert project management (in this case provided by the Education Business Partnership and funded by the LEA) is required both to set up and to sustain a specialist and successful scheme of this sort.

Pupil Referral Units represent a substantial and flexible central resource, operating independently and yet alongside mainstream schools. There is huge variation in what PRUs set out to achieve as well as how successful they are in doing it. One characterisation of PRUs has them as a last resort for multiply excluded pupils or chronic non-attenders. Indeed, in the best examples, PRUs do provide an excellent service for this minority of pupils who are unlikely to return to mainstream schooling. However this is essentially a service for pupils already excluded and there are a variety of other ways in which PRUs can function as an expert central resource to support schools and individual pupils with the objective of maintaining those pupils constructively within mainstream schooling.

Illustration 6 – Wycombe Grange Pupil Referral Unit - A Collaborative Role for PRUs

At the time of the Thames Valley Partnership's evaluation in 1999 The Wycombe Grange Pupil Referral Unit was developing ways to work flexibly in co-operation with mainstream schools. The maintenance of pupils in their schools, the avoidance of permanent exclusion and the successful reintegration of excluded pupils into a new school were all seen by the staff of the Grange as important objectives and as measures of the PRU's effectiveness.

To this end, individualised programmes of learning and support were devised for each pupil, ideally in close collaboration with the pupil's mainstream school. The programme would be tailored to meet the learning needs of the pupil and where possible to fit with the mainstream timetable. Pupils were offered an experience of close individual attention, care and support in small groups (although not necessarily for large periods of time – the contribution of the PRU being seen as quality rather than quantity).

The Thames Valley Partnership's evaluation found that The Grange's intervention contributed to the improved behaviour of a majority of the pupils with whom it worked. Its contribution was valued by staff in mainstream schools, with the following elements being specified as particularly helpful: -

- The Unit offered a flexible and responsive service, wherever possible in partnership with mainstream schools
- Staff were willing to amend programmes to take account of changing circumstances, and responded promptly to referrals and requests for additional support
- The Unit provided respite to schools whose staff were nearing the end of their tether
- Staff gave helpful advice, consultancy and training about behaviour management

The evaluation identified a number of possible areas for developing more effective co- working with schools and a number of developments have since taken place: -

- One senior member of staff is now the designated link person for all school liaison, streamlining **communication** and enabling schools to use the PRU more confidently and appropriately
- There are now earlier meetings when a student presents problems, enabling a staged and more effective response
- Strategies have evolved to ensure that the school retains '**ownership**' of the pupil wherever possible. For the pupil to remain nominally on the school roll is a starting point, but much more is possible - meetings now take place at the school, there is scheduled contact with a designated teacher and the schools are encouraged to set targets for pupils
- The PRU is taking a more active role in developing whole school policies and INSET

Overall there is better communication and the schools are felt to be able to use the PRU more appropriately. All of which is a far step from the potential negative connotations of PRUs as a dumping ground. Working on this model PRUs can play a major role in supporting inclusion rather than being staging post on the way to exclusion.

Local and regional initiatives from LEAs and other bodies (such as EAZs) can play a crucial roll not only in providing ongoing services but also in piloting and testing new ideas which are beyond the scope of individual schools. The relationship between schools and outside agencies (including LEA provision) sometimes resembles that between teachers and parents – it can feel like they're pulling in different directions but where there is communication and mutual respect, their combined efforts can make a profound difference to pupils at risk of exclusion.

3.1 and 3.2 Information and Communication Between Pupils and Their Schools

Having broken down the components of school inclusion into neat subdivisions, according to my model, I now find myself combining what were originally two distinct boxes, one dealing with Pupil Information and the other addressing School Information. When I first reviewed our school based evaluations **information** seemed to be the key component. However, while information continues to be vital, **communication** has gradually emerged as an even more important ingredient.

Three themes stand out: -

1. Do schools have sufficiently accurate and specific records of **actual** behaviour by pupils? Do they know when a student is improving and when they are getting worse? Without accurate records there is a serious danger that the pupil will be responded to according to a **reputation** of wrongdoing rather than what they have actually done. While it is true that children and adolescents (along with the adult population at large) are often reluctant to own responsibility for their own shortcomings and mistakes, it is absolutely **certain** that they will react badly to being accused of things they haven't done. The same also applies when they are held solely responsible for a collective misdemeanour.
2. Do the students know what the boundaries are and what the consequences of breaking the rules will be? Do they know how they can improve things for themselves? Is there a way of letting them know they are doing well?
3. Is there an active relationship? The recording systems and the transparent policies might all be in place but this doesn't amount to **communication** unless there is an active process of reviewing, negotiating and redefining between the student and the rest of the school community.

So, because the information systems are redundant without effective communication and because communication has to be a two way process, I have grouped the pupils and school levels together for this section. In part this is to acknowledge that my divisions are artificial in any case. Beyond that, however, it is worth emphasising that good communication lies at the heart of this whole issue of school inclusion and nowhere is it more important than in the pastoral relationship between pupil and school.

Pupils are generally aware when they have done something wrong. However they frequently are not clear about: -

1. Which aspect of their behaviour they are being punished for?
2. Whether the sanction fits the crime rather than being arbitrary retribution against themselves?
3. How they will know when they are making amends (or even digging themselves into a deeper hole)?
4. What will happen next?

Clear and transparent whole-school policies can start to satisfy these needs.

Illustration 7 – A Stepped Approach to Behaviour Management at The Cressex School, High Wycombe

During my visit to the Cressex School I was using the mechanics of a behaviour management system (based on colour coding of report cards) as a way of measuring how well the students **understand** and are kept informed of where they stand when they have done wrong.

It is important to recognise that I am commenting here on the ‘tip of the iceberg’ – the actual implementation of the whole school behaviour policy at the school involves a sophisticated range of strategies and interventions at every level. However, staff and pupil perceptions of the outward signs remains an important indicator and the school is explicit about the central importance of clear boundaries being consistently applied and recorded: -

‘For pupils to learn and staff to teach we need to have a sense of security borne out of clear boundaries and appropriate responses when those boundaries are crossed.

The stepped approach to behaviour is the central plank of our behaviour management system. Consistent application of clear boundaries over time by all staff creates that sense of security.’

Briefly, the stepped approach is a numerical system ranked one to ten relating to unacceptable behaviour. The behaviour and the score are recorded. A cumulative score over a week (which could be the result of one major incident or a sequence of low level disruptive behaviours) of five or more, results in a letter home and a **green report** card for the following week. There is then an escalation of sanctions and a ‘traffic lights’ system of **amber** and **red** report cards involving more senior members of staff when higher scores are recorded. Each of the report cards allows for target behaviours to be identified daily and a response provided by each subject teacher. The card is signed daily by the relevant member of school staff and by the parent.

All of which may not seem remarkable in itself – after all most schools have some type of report card. However, my interest was to discover if this ‘traffic lights’ system and its attendant sanctions were clearly understood on the ground. This is what the limited evaluation indicated: -

- Whether or not they thought it was a good idea, **all** pupils interviewed **understood** the stepped system and how it worked (in fact the pupils did the best job of explaining to me how the system worked and correcting my misunderstandings)
- Most pupils saw the new system as a good thing which had brought about change: -

“People behave better in lessons”.

“Teachers can keep track of you”.

“You know when you’ve got four points so you take care”. (Five points in the course of a week results in a Green Report and a letter home).

“Now you know where you stand – you know where you are heading”!

“Before you just got detentions **all** the time”.

Without pretending that the new system was perfect or that it resolved every problem, the staff also saw it as a positive development: -

“It is clearer than the previous system – most pupils understand it and benefit from it”.

“The reports are for a specified **purpose** (rather than being a generalised sanction) and the learning and /or behavioural targets can be restated or refined day by day”.

The system encourages class teachers and form tutors to take responsibility for behavioural issues.

“The system works well to initiate contact with parents”

“There is a systematic recording of behaviour and interventions”

“Previously we had an earlier reliance on fixed term exclusions”

After one term, this new system was recognised and understood by staff and pupils. Because the system was **understood**, it can be seen to offer **clear boundaries** - one of the prime objectives. All the teachers and most of the pupils felt that the new system provided **appropriate responses** – a second objective towards creating a sense of security which will enable learning.

The system works because it is clear, purposeful and capable of being responsive. As an outside visitor to schools it is evident that explicitness and transparency are qualities greatly valued by pupils. This applies even where they disagree (as they will) about the importance attached to certain rules such as wearing a tie or not wearing trainers. If pupils know what they have done wrong and know what response or punishment is properly due to that transgression then they can be expected to feel more secure.

The next stage towards independent and responsible action is for the pupils to be aware of what they need to do to improve and, vitally, to know when they are doing well. Progression up or down the sanctions and ‘traffic lights’ of report cards at Cressex school and the flexibility to pin point and refine behaviour targets along the way go some way to achieving this.

Less easy to measure or demonstrate are the detailed interpersonal as well as organisational transactions required to communicate effectively with those most at risk. To establish **systems** is less than half the story.

Information Giving and Receiving in Schools

It is clear that those most at risk need clear boundaries and need to understand when they are doing well and when they are transgressing. It is also arguable that that young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties define themselves by repeatedly failing or refusing to recognise boundaries.

Can we square this circle? A special school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties has to tackle this question on a daily basis.

Illustration 8 – Communicating With Pupils at Risk, Northern House School, Oxford

Northern House School is a day school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. It caters for 78 children in Years 1-8. Pupils are identified as having a complex range of special educational needs which include ADHD (attention deficit hyperkinetic disorder), OD (oppositional defiance), CD (conduct disorder), and neurological dysfunction including behaviours which fall into the autistic spectrum.

In short the intake of the school defines itself as working at the edge of what is possible and these children present the school with significantly, and in some cases, profoundly challenging behaviour. The school believes that such behaviour requires a clear response in the form of a consequence. Incidents of difficult behaviour are meticulously recorded, four levels of incidents being identified. All the staff agree the criteria for each level. Incident sheets are completed daily and handed into the head teacher, who puts them into a database at the end of each week.

The pressures on the effective operation of the school's behaviour policy were thrown into even sharper focus by a decision in 1998 to implement a No Exclusions policy at the school (on the basis that you would be excluding pupils for the precise characteristics which define their special educational needs and hence their attendance at the school in the first place).

While our research was concerned with the effectiveness of the No Exclusion policy in particular, a key component to making it work was clear and consistent application of the school's behaviour policy. If you remove the ultimate sanction of exclusion for pupils presenting serious behavioural problems, will they take this as carte blanche to do as they please?

I have already proposed that the quality of communication between home and school is vital to achieving a coherent response. When parents were asked if they were clear about the ways in which Northern House School rewarded good behaviour and dealt with unacceptable behaviour, 94% said yes. A similarly high proportion of parents thought that the way in which the school operated in these respects was either 'very good' or 'quite good'

“We are extremely impressed with the firm, consistent, caring and positive environment and management that Northern House provides for our child”

“It is a very good and warm school to children and their parents”

“Children cannot use unacceptable behaviour to get out of school”

“I think it is very good with the certificates as it encourages their good behaviour”

The recognition of success is a crucial element in effective communication with challenging pupils, and one which is often lost amidst the application of sanctions and punishments. Northern House has a detailed and extensive reward system which ensures that academic effort and achievement and good behaviour are noticed and acknowledged, both with the pupil and on more public occasions like school assembly. All those pupils interviewed spoke highly of this system, and seemed to have **a detailed and accurate knowledge of how it operated**. They appeared to respond to the opportunity to achieve targets, gain ticks, receive certificates and awards, and qualify for treats – day-trips, camping etc. As important as these tangible rewards was the **way** in which all staff seem sensitised to the importance of acknowledging positive behaviour and improved learning by offering congratulations, encouragement and hugs.

As striking as the knowledge that pupils had about the school's reward system was their **detailed**

understanding of the range of responses used in the face of unacceptable behaviour. Almost all described accurately the various occasions when different approaches would be used; physical restraint, different categories of incident sheet, time out, finishing work in break times, contact with parents, interviews with the Head, missing out on treats or rewards and delays in moving towards reintegration into a mainstream school.

While several of those interviewed said that, in the short term, some of these approaches caused frustration and anger, almost all saw them as sensible and effective in helping them to eventually calm down, and to learn something about the limits of acceptable behaviour and different ways of dealing with bad feelings. Losing the opportunity to qualify for treats and rewards was felt as keenly as any of the other responses, an indication of the school's success in making the reward system one of the pivots of their behaviour policy.

In the very special context of Northern House both pupils and parents felt that they knew where they stood. Information gathering, with regard to good and bad behaviours, is thorough and explicit. Just as vital, however, is the quality of the relationships, and hence the communication, between staff, pupils and parents.

How does this translate to the less specialist environment of a mainstream school? Here there will obviously be a much lower proportion of pupils presenting profound behavioural challenge. However, there may also be less emphasis on, or capacity for, high quality interpersonal communication.

Information, Communication and Pastoral Responsibility to Mainstream Schools

In truth pupils at risk in mainstream schools often do not feel very confident about where they stand – apart from knowing that it is generally the wrong place to be!

Large numbers of students and low staff to student ratios can militate against good and accurate information gathering and usage. The shortfall is even more acute when it comes to effective communication between staff and pupils (and parents). The problem is perhaps at its most acute in large secondary schools where many subject teachers either don't have the time or don't see it as their job to attend to pastoral matters. A school's inability to make the best pastoral provision is nowadays most often blamed on 'league tables.'

In fact there is an old divide in the teaching profession which has been brought into sharp focus by the current preoccupation with league tables and competition between schools. If a teacher sees themselves as a subject specialist, then an emphasis on academic results can justify their reluctance to engage with the wider development and well being of the young people in their charge. If the teacher is ambitious to fulfil a wider pastoral role then a school's overwhelming concern with academic results can frustrate those instincts.

Either way, the outcome can be the same – everyone is running round chasing exam results and has less and less time to attend to the students. It is as if the two are not connected. I believe that the reality could be quite different; if schools were places where the quality of relationships was as important as information transmitted, then academic

results could be better, not worse. It is as if we have become preoccupied with the end result without paying sufficient attention to how we get there.

I will return in a moment to a brief illustration from one secondary school which **has** taken steps to give a more central pastoral role to all its staff (Illustration 9).

First, however, I would like to give a brief demonstration of how and why I believe that an obsession with the documentary 'end result' can frustrate a much more fruitful, interactive process, a process which could help pupils at risk to regain ownership and take real responsibility for their own progress:

Individual Education Plans – How an Informative Tool can Confound Communication

- Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are basically a good idea. They can offer a concise and accessible tool for targeting change and growth
- They have been used as an effective tool to support pupils with learning difficulties for years
- They have a built in expectation of review, which is fundamentally a good idea

But

- On the whole no one except specialists (usually SENCOs) has been able to take ownership of them as a tool to address behavioural issues
- Most specialists are not in a position to have an evolved working relationship with all the students presenting behavioural problems in even a medium sized secondary school
- The outcome can be that IEPs are written up to comply with organisational demands rather than to match the needs of the pupil

(By extension, the same argument applies to the implementation of Pastoral Support Programmes.)

In effect, the piece of paper becomes more important than the process. And yet the process of sitting down with a student to **review** and **negotiate** a plan based on specific behaviours which are owned by the student and written up in their own words is far more important than the piece of paper could ever be. The problem is that this process requires both teacher time and engagement and it can't just be delegated to 'specialists'.

One logical way to address this conundrum is to share the load by both allowing and insisting that form tutors play a more central pastoral role.

Illustration 9 – Some Brief Reflections on the Enhanced Role of Form Tutors at Brooke Weston City Technology College, Corby

Our attention was drawn to Brooke Weston as an example of a radically different way of running a school. Even though Corby lies outside our specific Thames Valley remit, it seemed worth paying a visit in the interests of widening our perspective.

Brooke Weston is a city technology college with benefits accruing from a purpose built school site and, I would argue, from a purpose built staff. This means that the teaching staff have been recruited on the explicit understanding that their pastoral role is to be considered on a par with their curriculum responsibilities.

The college places real responsibility and some power in the hands of tutors. They stay with a form group throughout their college career and are both advocates for their students and responsible for their behaviour. The form tutor is the first line for pastoral responsibility. There is a very flat structure – no heads of year, just a pastoral deputy. This allows for small tutor groups of between 20 and 25 students for each tutor. Tutors are responsible for home school links, record keeping and tutor group extra curricular activities as well as the delivery of the personal and social education programme.

I'm not pretending that all schools should be newly built or even that they could recruit an entire staff from scratch. However, elements of delegated pastoral support **could** be applied in more conventional schools. It should be possible to **recruit** teachers on the basis that pastoral responsibility for a small number of pupils is fundamental (not incidental) to their job description and to train them for that task. The recent Ofsted report on Strategies to Promote Educational Inclusion (Improving Attendance and Behaviour in Secondary Schools – February 2001) also draws attention to shortcomings and potential in this area: -

- Form tutors frequently have a significant influence on pupils' attitudes and progress, although more often than not tutors are not trained specifically for the tasks they are asked to undertake.

Admittedly it might be difficult to convert a minority of existing staff to embrace a more active and central pastoral role for form tutors - but others would welcome the opportunity.

I would like to conclude with three points to draw this rather expansive section together:

1. The maintenance of accurate information about pupil behaviour as well pupil attainment is absolutely vital.
2. A well thought out and consistently applied behaviour policy which details rewards as well as sanctions and which is understood by all members of the school community is a must.
3. Pupils are seldom given ownership of the formal methods of recording information about themselves. Many students, including a significant proportion of those at risk of exclusion are, in any case, reluctant to engage in formal written systems. Accurate record keeping can be neat, efficient and academic. Communication can be messy, time

consuming and frustrating. Both are important but real communication is probably more wanting and ultimately more important for individual pupils at risk.

3.3 Information and Communication – Local Education Authorities and Other Structures

When we consider the significance of information and communication for LEAs we are in quite a different ballpark. Of course the sophisticated processes of interpersonal communication are still vital but another structural level of gathering and working with information is also at stake.

Somebody needs to comprehensively identify and track all pupils at risk (indeed all pupils) to avoid them falling through the net. Beyond that there needs to be a proactive responsibility for ensuring that appropriate provision (as far as possible) is in place and that individual students are not left in a state of limbo. Who, apart from the LEA, is in a position to keep track of the whole school aged population and watch out for gaps?

I recognise that this way sounds so basic as to be obvious – indeed it probably is obvious. However, experience indicates that this state of basic good practice at a competent professional level does not always exist. Take an instance: -

- A pupil excluded from a school relocates to a different area. For a while he is out of touch with the education system. He is then allocated 5 hours of home tuition per week for the better part of a term. No school placement is made because an appropriate place can't be found and any way it's nearly time to change to the next phase of schooling. The child is allocated a place at a secondary school but his parents, after a lot of effort to get an answer, are only informed of this in the penultimate week of term. The child is given no access to preparatory visits to gain confidence in the new school. The school doesn't know the child is coming to them and has no access to records to prepare for his particular needs. At the end of the summer holidays the child is expected to turn up at school he knows nothing about and make a success of it after the best part of two terms out of formal education. OK, he is officially back in the system, but the chances of him remaining and thriving there can be seen to be really fairly slim.

Of course that is a difficult and messy example and it is atypical – but pupils at risk do tend to be awkward and define themselves by not fitting with 'normal' expectations. And it is not uncommon for pupils at risk to be faced with extraordinary demands – even where they have not moved from one geographical area to another: -

- A child spends periods of time in EBD special schools. She is then reintegrated on a part-time basis to a main stream school with special support. The reintegration enjoys some success at first but is never more than half time at best. This deteriorates and has more or less fallen apart by the end of the summer term. In September the child is expected to move with her peers to a much bigger school for the next phase of her education. She is required to cope full-time with this new environment. Again the school is not provided with specific information or advice about her needs.

These are both fictionalised situations but they are based on real circumstances. No one individual could be expected to hold all the answers to these problems. However it is not unreasonable to expect someone (and it certainly can't be the responsibility just of an individual school) to at least hold accurate records and take responsibility for ensuring that the child is not placed in an impossible and self defeating situation. Administration in itself is not enough – but we do need to ensure that competent organisation is in place and that it is coupled with professional judgement.

Illustration 10 – Identifying and Responding to Pupils at Risk in Reading

Local education authorities have a statutory responsibility to ensure that all children receive a suitable education. Like many bold statements of human rights and responsibilities, this is easier said than done. However, one place to start would be sufficient, reliable information about children and young people in the local community and, specifically, about the education they are receiving.

Reading, in common with many authorities, uses a computerised data system to record pupil information and has a contract with a specialist company to manage this system. This makes it possible, in theory at least, to track all pupils who are attending Reading schools or who have attended at some point in their history. This should mean that once a child has entered the education system he or she will not become invisible. As the application of the system evolves and with an improved flow of data from schools, the computerised system should generate a more sophisticated profile for each and every pupil. For instance, with systematic input from schools, the system should be able to generate up to date attendance and attainment figures for all pupils in the borough.

So, given a modicum of computer literacy and with specialist support it becomes possible for Educational Professionals within the LEA to know quite a lot about the children and young people in their area. In particular, they will be able to identify who is attending school and, crucially, who is being excluded from school on a fixed term basis.

All of which is well and good, but does the LEA hold this information to benefit the individual pupil or merely to locate and label them? I would argue strongly that children at risk of exclusion (and it is important to remember that we **are** talking about **children**) are damaged by being ignored or becoming invisible, not by being noticed and responded to. Certainly, the Education Authority will not always be the most appropriate lead agency for interventions in young people's lives. However, if systems work as indicated above, the statutory nature of education renders the LEA the most likely overarching body to become aware when a young person might be in difficulty – non attendance or problematic behaviour at school are seldom divorced from other problems in a young person's life. At this level the question of school inclusion becomes structurally linked to the wider agenda of social inclusion and community safety. It becomes essential that the education department doesn't function in isolation but that it should be integrated with a network of Social Services, Health, Youth work and voluntary sector provision. In Reading the education department is helped in this by being located within a department of Education and Community Services. In this broad context, Reading LEA often functions as a broker rather than a provider of services.

The role of broker also has a substantial reality in the LEA's involvement with specifically educational exclusion. Certain requirements, notably that LEAs should be involved when a Pastoral Support Programme is put in place, ought to ensure that the authority does have a part to play when a pupil is at risk of exclusion. Sophisticated data recording systems, alluded to above,

should ensure that this opportunity is not missed. But then what? Schools are substantially autonomous institutions. They manage their own budgets and compete for pupils. Beyond requiring that due process is gone through and now requiring the refund of a proportion of the Pupil Retention Grant, the LEA has limited direct power to enforce school inclusion. Indeed, it can be argued that school inclusion more substantially requires enabling than enforcing.

So, holding information on the whole pupil body, how can Reading LEA respond appropriately to pupils at risk of exclusion? Support is provided by two multi disciplinary teams: the Primary Behaviour Support Team and the School Inclusion Service (working at Secondary level). These teams do provide support directly to retain or return pupils to mainstream schools but they can also provide access to other relevant support services (Youth Offending team, Youth Service, Counselling or Drugs services etc). There is also a Pupil Reintegration Panel which meets monthly and, at which, senior school staff and LEA officials can work together to ensure proper and appropriate responses, including managed moves where a pupil is likely to benefit from a fresh start in a different school.

The point here is not that the LEA can enforce any miracle solutions but, rather, that they need to be properly informed about the bigger picture and also sufficiently trusted by the schools to provide a useful response. They are then in the best position to broker a one-stop approach in response to the wider needs of the universal school community. Without this overview, market forces can result in pupils at risk of being treated as commodities or liabilities, recruited or discarded according to the competing needs of individual schools.

If we know **who** the pupils at risk are and **where** they are, we can then look to achieve effective communication between schools and other professionals to put the best response in place and do so promptly at the time of need. The Oxford EAZ has been working to establish practical and reliable systems to achieve this.

Illustration 11 - Oxford Education Action Zone (EAZ) – Integrated Support Services and Rapid Response

Oxford EAZ works with 12 schools (8 First, 3 Middle and 1 Upper) in an area with high indications of social need. In almost all the schools more than 50% of the pupils are on the Special Needs register. The EAZ has been running for four terms and has placed an emphasis on establishing mechanisms which are clear and applicable and, at the same time, responsive to the individual needs of pupils and schools.

Central to this is the **Integrated Support Services** model. Each school has a consultation team which will typically include the Educational Psychologist, EBD Outreach Worker, Educational Social Worker, PRU representative, Home School Links Worker along with school representatives (The initial focus is to enable local authority support services to work more effectively. A next step will be to extend this to Health and Social Services, YOT and voluntary sector where appropriate.) This team meets termly with the objective of enabling smarter working practice and reducing reliance on crisis management.

There is a recognition that, while teachers and allied professionals are very good at many things, they are not always at their best in running practical and effective meetings. With this in mind, there is an explicit emphasis on practical outcomes with an action plan to be reviewed at half term. These two hour meetings are for decision making and an abiding agenda has been established: -

1. Pupils with multiple and complex difficulties
2. Pupils requiring a Pastoral Support Programme
3. Broader school based issues
4. Attendance

In reality there may be evident and purposeful links between these items. However, it must remain clear that, while an individual pupil can serve to focus minds on a wider issue, this is not the place to rehearse the detailed stories of every child at risk. The role of the chair is crucial in holding this distinction and also in ensuring that pre and post meeting responsibilities are owned and achieved.

These consultation teams allow for regular and purposeful communication between the professionals working in each school. A further step is to link the EAZ schools together with a strategic overview. This is done by means of a **Core Team** which meets monthly and includes representatives of first Middle and Upper Schools and the LEA. This Core Team considers the action plans from the school based Consultation Teams with a view to combining threads and making strategic responses which can include targeting of resources and establishing partnership work (practical outcomes have included setting up Speech and Language therapy, Home School Links work and a Rapid Response mechanism (see below)). The fact that the Consultation Teams' action plans 'feed' this group ensures that the business remains local and pertinent. It also ensures that the consultation teams don't become invisible or fall into disuse.

To complete the circle, we should consider the specific role of the EAZ in supporting schools to reduce exclusion. The principle mechanism for intervening where a pupil is at serious risk of permanent exclusion is the **Rapid Response Meeting**. This meeting can pull together representatives of key agencies (EBD Outreach, Educational Social Work, Educational Psychology) at short notice, thus providing a response at time of crisis which is both speedy and considered. This is achieved by those key agencies agreeing to always have a worker available between 2.30 and 4.30 on Thursday afternoon (other agencies can be invited and have been very responsive even though their time is not ring fenced).

It is evident that there can only be a finite number of these meetings and triggers are very specific. The process of initiating the meeting is in itself an important part of the Rapid Response service, allowing head teachers to make direct contact with the Integrated Services Co-ordinator via a dedicated hot line. This contact with another experienced professional can, in itself, help to reduce isolation and frustration from which even head teachers are not immune (particularly when presented with yet another crisis from a persistently challenging pupil). In most cases a Rapid Response meeting will be called. In order to meet the tight schedule, the school needs to produce a one page briefing sheet and the ESW service will contact and support the family.

Again the format and conduct of the meeting is crucial and the role of the chair is central (meetings are chaired by the Integrated Services Co-ordinator and, crucially, not by the head teacher who can be liberated by not being in charge for once). The meeting is limited to one hour and must conform to certain requirements (for instance, there can be no rehashing of the incident and the meeting must remain solution focused). Everyone has the chance to have their say and put their suggestions forward. The meeting provides an opportunity to explore new strategies and look at things from a fresh perspective. Crucially, it seeks to identify creative and practical responses, resulting in specific outcomes with named responsibility wherever possible.

The role taken by Oxford EAZ and that of the LEA in Reading are essentially similar in the emphasis they place on making effective links and supporting both pupils and schools to find constructive strategies which can avert exclusion wherever possible.

4.1 The Pupil Context

Of necessity this section will be very short. It simply acknowledges that the crucial context for a young person is, on the one hand, vast and, on the other, intensely personal and private.

The vastness first. A young person is evidently the product of all of his experiences; his family, his community and the culture in which he has grown up. School can play a significant role in shaping and supporting the young person but it will never be the dominant factor for anything but a brief period. Interventions and lessons learned in school or through other educational opportunities will play out their success or failure on a bigger field – in the mainstream classroom, in the playground, at home, in the shopping centre and then at work and in the pub and so on. This wider context will both shape and provide the testing ground for what a young person learns. Educational interventions cannot control this but they do need to recognise it and sometimes provide access to other types of interagency working to become properly effective.

On another level, the internal landscape of the individual young person and their unique and highly charged personal relationships provide a crucial context. By definition these areas are private and access is strictly limited. However, it is not difficult to understand the problem, that a young person constantly preoccupied with, say, an abusive home life, will find it difficult to take seriously the relative minutiae of school rules or school achievements.

So, what might success look like in the real life, personal context of a young person at risk of exclusion?

Illustration 12 - Danny – Learning for a Change (Drayton School – Banbury)

One morning during my visit, a fifteen year old likely lad breezed into the Learning Centre at Drayton School (see Illustration 1.1). We will call him Danny. Danny had been on the Cog skills course for some months. He had also had the chance to practice different ways of behaving and coping with conflict within the safe environment of the Learning Centre.

This morning Danny was proud and full of himself. He had got out of bed late and walked straight into a row with his mother. This was clearly familiar territory, with a well-established pattern of escalating conflict, blame and simmering recrimination. But this morning was different. Danny actively chose to take some control of the situation. He removed himself from the house and from the argument. He won himself some space to think. He recognised how he was feeling and considered what was probably going on for his mum. He considered his options, made a decision, returned and negotiated a satisfactory outcome.

The details of what Danny had done never came out but what remains with me is his pride in the knowledge that he had done a good thing. He had used skills learned in very specialist environment but, having once applied those skills in his **real** life and having recognised what he had done, Danny had the potential to apply that learning in any number of future contexts.

4.2 The School Context to Support Inclusive Education

All aspects of school life can contribute to a supportive context for inclusion. This would include the quality of the buildings, the number and range of extra curricular activities, the quality of the lunches and so on. However, I propose one central issue for consideration here:

School staff need to be actively supported to achieve and maintain good and effective working relationships with pupils and they need to do so on the basis of policies which are relevant and consistently applied.

If a school's behaviour policy is understood and sanctions are consistently applied then pupils and staff will at least know where they stand. If the school is confident in the validity of its boundaries and how it applies them, then it should be better able to challenge and indeed reject unacceptable behaviour while containing and accepting the child (ie not excluding them!)

All of which is well and good - in theory. But, how does a school provide a supportive context for delivering and maintaining high and consistent standards in practice? Rules (or standards) only really exist in the version that they are delivered from one person to another person. Teachers, who have often received little or no training in behaviour management, are at least as idiosyncratic and individual in their own behaviour as any other group of people. Beyond that they are placed in the peculiar position of almost always being in charge of large groups of smaller people – and, in secondary school, those groups change at hourly intervals. Added to that, teachers almost always conduct their business in isolation behind closed doors. Accepting that teachers are, by and large, highly professional, skilled and intent on doing a good job, how are they to maintain and refine their practice if they work in effective isolation?

Ongoing training, support and supervision for all staff are clearly central to providing such a context for good practice. This can take many forms but one option is to open the classroom doors to supportive peer observation.

Illustration 13 – Teacher Peer Mentoring at St Paul's School, Milton Keynes

In 1996 St Paul's Catholic Secondary School introduced a mentoring scheme as a way of supporting its teachers' personal, professional and career development.

The mechanics of the scheme are quite straightforward. Each teacher has a mentor and the expectation is that they observe lessons at least twice during the year. The timetable of school meetings also allocates regular sessions for mentoring. Thus there is a clear message that mentoring has status and is not a year-end 'bolt on', as some appraisal schemes are prone to become.

The scheme is characterised by a flexible non-hierarchical approach. At the outset, mentors were identified by discussion and negotiation, not simply according to line management status. Novel pairings can ensue, according to the learning needs of the participants rather than their curriculum specialisms. So, the head of languages could be mentored by the head of science and the head

teacher was in fact mentored by the second in charge of the maths department.

Sometimes the mentoring relationships will be characterised by a perceived equality of status – on other occasions the mentor may bring the benefit of greater experience. In either case the relationship will be built on the idea of the mentor as a critical friend, giving constructive feedback on what the teacher does, rather than issuing judgements about who they are. Equally, it is a two way process and there is recognition that there can be as much learning in sitting still and watching someone else teach as there is in being observed.

This system has also benefited from the capacity to negotiate and home in on specific targets as the need arises and the relationship develops, rather than necessarily predetermining targets at the start of the year. This provides the opening for getting beyond generalities and down to the specifics of classroom practice. For instance: -

‘ Will you just watch how I **start** the lesson? Could I do something different?’

‘Those three at the back always say they don’t understand what they’re supposed to be doing. Why?’

or: -

‘I know you’re enthusiastic about the subject and the kids like that – but if you wait until **after** the bell before you set the homework they all get it wrong **and** they arrive late for Maths.’

These are simple examples and feedback could clearly be at a much more sophisticated level. However, specifics do count and this sort of detailed feedback is often only afforded to student and newly qualified teachers (and not always to them). Giving and receiving honest feedback between professionals is something which will only happen when there is real trust.

That such a system should thrive indicates an acknowledged wish to learn on the part of a staff team who are not overly defensive and who don’t see peer observation as a threat. Equally, to introduce such a scheme successfully to a school will depend on a degree of self-confidence and shared ethos already being established – it can’t just be parachuted in, fully formed.

It is worth noting that the **structure** of the mentoring scheme at St Paul’s is felt to have been less important than the **spirit** in which it has been undertaken. This year we have Performance Management in all schools. It will be relatively easy to abide by the letter of the law but much more challenging (and rewarding) to develop a system of effective peer review which actually improves the quality of what goes on in the classroom. Whatever structure is set up will depend on the staff believing that it is useful and trustworthy. Whatever is imposed from outside, unless it is owned by the school, is likely to result in lip service rather than any real improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. And the quality of teaching and learning is, in turn, fundamental to a school’s ability to be inclusive - or not.

This is a version of peer support could be applied in different ways throughout the school community (at St. Paul’s there is a parallel scheme for non-teaching staff). It represents one pragmatic step towards making the context of school relationships more healthy for all concerned (at least people will be talking to each other about what they actually do!).

A much more radical option is to revisit the whole question of rules and relationships in responding to inappropriate behaviour in the school community. A restorative approach questions not only the validity but also the effectiveness of sanctions and rules applied without negotiation:

Illustration 14 - A Whole School Approach Based on Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice stresses the importance of relationships over and above rules. It seeks at all times to restore the relationships between people in a community when these have been damaged by inappropriate behaviour.

To embrace this as the basis for a **whole school strategy** has profound implications. It revisits the understanding and practice of **every** member of the school community – teachers, LSAs, lunchtime supervisors, head teachers, governors, office staff and pupils. As such it would be a highly ambitious scheme and current plans for implementation in a whole school context establish an initial two-year time scale. On the next page you will find a practitioner’s outline of some aspects and some of the potential gains envisaged in whole school application of Restorative Justice principles.

However, before moving to the big picture, the prospectus if you will, I would like to give a more limited and specific illustration of the principles in action:

Peer Mediation at Geoffrey Field Junior School – Reading

The scheme had been operating in the school for three years at the time of evaluation by Thames Valley Partnership. The underlying principles were introduced by an external trainer, who worked with lunchtime controllers, teaching staff and pupils to establish the scheme.

Mediators are elected by all the members of their year group and many of the pupils commented that it was vital that mediators were truly representative of the student body. Mediators commit themselves to one mediation session per week at play times plus a weekly training and support meeting after school. Two or three of the mediators are available to any of their peers who want to resolve minor disputes arising in the playground. Mediation follows a specified format which includes gaining the explicit agreement of both parties to participate, finding a quiet location, enabling both parties to have their say, summarising, and helping the disputants to find agreement.

All pupils interviewed were aware of the scheme and most were able to describe the key elements and identify what made a good mediator: -

“They’ve got to have patience, like a priest”

“They hear one side, then the other”

“They make you feel safer”

“They ask you why you feel sad”

“They don’t sort the problem out for you, you’ve got to solve it for yourself”

“You mustn’t butt in when the other person’s talking”

There was strong support of concept of mediation **by peers**: -

“It’s important that someone your own age does it, it’s harder to speak to a grown- up”

“A child’s a friend, grown-ups don’t understand children’s feelings”

“Children **know**, they’ve had it done to them. Teachers moan all the time”

This application of restorative principles has clearly made an impact at Geoffrey Field School. It was noted during the initial Thames Valley Partnership evaluation, during the follow up visit and by OFSTED inspectors that the scheme was of undoubted benefit to the mediators themselves. They were seen to grow substantially in maturity, understanding, self-awareness and social skills. It is worth bearing in mind this proven capacity for growth and development by those **actively** involved when considering the following outline of the application restorative principles in a whole school context.

What follows is a **practitioner’s** proposal, in outline, as to why and how the application of Restorative principles can have a profound impact on the whole school community: -

The principles

- Openness
- Fairness
- Self-determination
- Collaboration
- Flexibility
- Equality
- Non-discrimination
- Non-violence
- Mutual respect

The skills and qualities needed

- Self-esteem
- Self-control
- Non-judgemental approach
- Tolerance
- Understanding
- Empathy
- Emotional awareness
- Active listening skills
- Articulation needs
- Conflict management skills
- Curiosity in other points of view
- Balance

Restorative Justice can inform policy and practice in the following areas

- Reducing exclusions and encouraging a culture of inclusion
- Reducing truancy
- Fostering active citizenship skills
- The role of the tutor
- Staff morale and professional development
- Staff absenteeism
- Debriefing challenging situations creatively
- Bullying in the playground, classroom and staff room

Active applications of Restorative tools – putting relationships at the heart of the process

Circle Time for students

- as part of the morning tutor time
- as part of PHSE / Citizenship programme
- to be integrated into curriculum time

Circle Time for staff (teaching and non-teaching)

- for staff development
- for sharing difficulties in a spirit of open learning
- for supporting year teams, curriculum teams, lunchtime staff, etc.

Workplace mediation for discipline issues amongst staff

Mediation between parents and staff

Peer mediation for student conflict

School councils for developing active citizenship skills

Conferencing

- as a Circle Time approach to class conflict
- as a tool for dealing with inappropriate behaviour
- for case conferences
- for special-needs assessments involving parents, school staff and LEAs

These are some examples. Individual schools will design their own action plan.

Belinda Hopkins, January 2000



4.3 Inclusive Education in the Context of the Local Education Authority and Beyond

Schools can no more afford to be shut away in their own boxes than can individual pupils or isolated teachers. Pupils move between schools at least once in their lives and in many cases much more frequently. Schools can't aim to be independent entities – they need to be both interdependent and also provided with a range of support from other quarters.

The scope for the LEA to provide a useful and supportive context for inclusive education is huge. Sometimes this can impact directly on pupils – if the LEA doesn't know when a pupil has slipped between the gaps (and pupils at risk can be slippery customers) and if they aren't there to ensure that proper provision is in place then who else will do so? More often, however, the effective role for the LEA lies in supporting schools to provide a better service. This can take a huge variety of forms, ranging from the co-ordination of specialist services and access to funding through to providing clear policy statements and advice on difficult issues and training for school staff at the sharp end. I would like to look at just one creative example of how an LEA can support and validate, as well as extend, the skills of teachers taking particular responsibility for pupils at risk: -

Illustration 15 – The Designated Teacher Scheme in Slough

In outline, the idea is quite simple: each secondary school is invited to devote 0.2 FTE teacher time to focus on issues of behaviour and attendance. In return the school will receive £10,000 of Standards Fund money. Over the past two years, the uptake has been good and the impact has been considerable.

Crucially, an effective channel of communication has been established between school-based staff, the LEA and central support services. This works in a variety of ways: -

- The designated teachers attend a regular half-termly meeting where they can be updated about borough strategies and opportunities and also share good practice. It is significant that this meeting is chaired by the Assistant Chief Education Officer – the message is clear - behaviour and attendance are important and so are the teachers with designated responsibility for those issues
- Within their own schools, the designated teachers provide an expert resource. They have an explicit role in promoting inclusion and they provide a direct point of contact for the LEA. Equally, they are available and authorised to act as an advocate in the interests of pupils at risk
- The teachers also spend half a day a week for half a term working at Northbrook PRU. This is a two-way opportunity; in addition to strengthening the curriculum offer of the PRU, it also gives teachers the scope for significant professional development. They get the chance to understand the full range of EBD work and to try out new strategies in small group situations. Effective strategies for managing challenging behaviour can then be taken back into mainstream schools

The Designated Teacher scheme has evolved as a flexible tool to support school inclusion. Each school makes its own decisions about how to use it and who to send – designated 'teachers' have

ranged from youth workers to senior managers and different strategies have been used to disseminate good practice. However, the basic structure offers a supportive and pragmatic way for the LEA to keep inclusion high on schools' agendas. The issue of inclusion becomes the explicit responsibility of the Designated teacher, there are clear channels of communication between schools and the LEA and new strategies can be brought back to schools with added credibility by practising teachers.

Having argued for a central, expert and empowered LEA, it is also important to recognise that the LEA isn't best placed to fulfil all needs and cannot work effectively in isolation in any case. The context of school inclusion extends much wider both in its causes and its consequences and any effective response must reach wider as well. Other agencies – Social Services, Police, Youth Service, Careers, Youth Offending Teams, Health Service among others all have a crucial part to play. LEAs can often act as vital catalysts and innovators, bringing services together and creating new opportunities. However there are also instances where voluntary sector organisations are well placed to initiate change and explore new responses to well know problems. Being non statutory, such agencies can straddle professional compartments or sit outside them completely and they are sometimes in a position to pilot services which may later evolve as part of mainstream provision.

Illustration 16 – Links – Transition Project, Reading

The Links Project is run by Turners Court Youth Trust and is jointly funded by the Trust, the LEA and Social Services. The project is staffed by experienced workers from education and social work backgrounds working closely together and sharing their expertise. The team provides a range of support to primary schools in the Oxford Road area of Reading. The particular focus of the Thames Valley Partnership evaluation was the project's work to support Year 6 pupils at risk at the critical point of transition from primary to secondary school.

The aims of the Links Project transition group are as follows: -

- To support vulnerable children during the period of transition to secondary school
- To raise self-esteem and confidence through discussion, role-play and group activities related to secondary school
- To be willing to act as an advocate for children and families as they 'find their feet' in their new schools
- To provide strategies to help children and families manage challenging situations and minimise conflict

The team offer an initial meeting with the family, group work in the primary school during the summer term, a programme of activities and support during the summer holidays and follow up visits during the pupils' first half term at secondary school.

It was evident that a good working relationship had been established with the pupils during relatively short periods of group work during the summer term. The use of role-play had been developed as a particularly effective tool with a significant level of ownership by the pupils. It was a purposeful working environment within which pupils could develop useful life skills to cope with a potentially stressful transition to secondary school.

The relationships initiated during the six term-time sessions were clearly bearing fruit when it came to the summer holiday activities. With good organisation and realistic last minute prompting, the majority of these, potentially disaffected pupils were voluntarily involving themselves in an out of term activity (30 of the 40 pupils took part in at least one holiday activity).

In the morning of my observation the pupils were engaged in an unusual and potentially challenging experience (a visit to an outdoor sculpture park in a wooded rural setting). In the afternoon a different group (all boys) had to come into **school** out of term time to engage in meaningful work (this was made accessible through art and drama but was real work nonetheless). This level of voluntary participation again speaks volumes for the quality of the relationships developed by the project staff with these pupils at risk. Pupils had been recruited to groups on the basis of their receiving secondary school and so were able to make links with their future peers. They were also starting to discuss specifics and practicalities regarding the new school term and enquiring about visits from the Links workers to the new school. It was evident that the sessions provided a safe opportunity for pupils to develop skills of coping in new situations and with new people and so to grow in confidence.

The two secondary schools consulted provided a clear endorsement of the usefulness of the transition work: -

“The staff here were recently commenting on how some of the children fall apart if they don’t have the skills to cope before they arrive at secondary school. It is quite evident that the Links project has played a significant part in increasing the capacity of those it has worked with to cope with the new school”

“It has been brilliant to be able to work with Links, mainly because they have known the children well before they came up to us and could inform me accordingly”

“I think I would have had a great deal more problems to deal with if Links hadn’t been there to support the children”

So, the project is capable of paying significant dividends in terms of support, personal development and confidence building for pupils considered at risk. It can do this by providing the following: -

- A dedicated and evolved relationship for both the children and their families
- Access to meaningful group work, with new contacts and future peers
- Effective and time limited intervention in the new secondary school which can provide a reference point, a chance to iron out problems and access to other support systems if needed

A benefit of this sort of multi-disciplinary intervention is that it can operate in the gaps – gaps between school terms, between school and home and between one school and another.

5. Conclusion

Over the past two and a half years, the Thames Valley Partnership has benefited from visits to a dozen schools and suggestions and contributions from all sorts of educational practitioners. This willingness to share and test new ideas has revealed a fascinating range of strategies to address school exclusion, many of which are outlined in this report. These strategies will continue to be refined and improved but there seems to be no shortage of promising approaches.

The components are all out there, in the hands of individual teachers, schools, LEAs and other organisations. They just don't always join together to make a convincing whole. One way or another, when pupils get excluded they have usually fallen through a gap. Sometimes these are gaps in provision but they are just as likely to be gaps in communication, information or co-ordination.

Mind the Gap.

The Effectiveness of Sanctions Some Comments on Fixed Term Exclusion and Internal Suspension/Isolation

The following comments are a representative sample of those made on this subject at various times and in different locations.

Fixed Term Exclusions

Comments from some students: -

“Suspension’s like a holiday. They shouldn’t do that, you’re not getting an education”

“They shouldn’t send you home for like, wearing trainers. What’s that got to do with having an education”

“I used to get myself excluded because I wanted to go fishing. I’d have my fishing bag all ready”

“I got suspended 16 times [from my previous school]. I felt happy, but I missed lessons and didn’t catch up”

“Exclusion’s a treat. I got suspended from for six weeks before I came here. I enjoyed it, mum gave me treats”

“Suspension is stupid – all you do is get a lie in. There’s no punishment in it - unless your parents give you a hard time”

“Suspension isn’t a useful punishment – well it only is if your parents care”

And from some parents: -

“We feel that excluding children is no good at all for the child as this does not solve the problems – also some children think it’s great. Some are on the streets”

“Children can use unacceptable behaviour to get out of school”

“Children see it as a long school holiday if suspended and find it hard to go back to school”

“When children are excluded it moves the problem elsewhere, rather than facing it”

“A lot of children would feel rewarded by being excluded from school. It must seem to them that responsible adults cannot cope with their behaviour and have given in”

“Excluding a child sends a message that it’s a failure”

“In my son’s case he would keep misbehaving to get off school!”

And a few views on internal suspension: -

“Internal suspension is much worse – I mean it’s a better punishment – it’s horrible. It’s a better punishment than being at home”

“I hate to get internal suspension”

“Isolation (internal suspension) is better than exclusion – it has more effect”

“Internal suspension does work as a punishment” (teacher)

“The internal exclusions are distinctly punitive. They work well so long as they are kept separate and don’t get confused with supportive work elsewhere in the school.”

Comment

In almost every case those at risk of permanent exclusion or already on the fringes of the system did not experience fixed term exclusion as an effective punishment. In several cases they considered it a benefit.

I have never encountered a pupil who considered internal suspension (sometimes termed eternal suspension!) anything other than an effective punishment. It is demanding of staff and space but seems to be an effective sanction so long as it is rigorously applied and never confused with planned supportive interventions.

References

- Evaluation of the Behaviour and Discipline Pilot projects (1996 – 99) Supported under the Standards Fund Programme – DfEE 1999
- Strategies to Promote Educational Inclusion - Improving Attendance and Behaviour in Secondary Schools - OFSTED 2001