



4 Good practice in... improving behaviour in schools

Introduction

Positive behaviour and engagement with school is crucial to good educational attainment. Improving the behaviour of young people in school and increasing engagement with education is now a feature of education policy across the UK.

Recently policy has also aimed to tackle truancy and exclusion from schools, and set targets to monitor progress. Improving the behaviour and engagement of school pupils is instrumental in achieving this.

Research has shown considerable benefits for young people, projects and communities as a result of improved behaviour in school.

This guide outlines the approaches to improving behaviour in school that worked well for projects funded through the Big Lottery Fund's (BIG) Young People's Fund (YPF). This guide provides advice and practical examples for current and future projects based on the findings of the five year UK wide evaluation of YPF. The evaluation was carried out by GEN Consulting and Wavehill Consulting.

Why tackle poor behaviour?

Disruptive behaviour in the classroom reduces children's ability to concentrate and take in information, and causes great stress for teachers. Behaviour which is persistently poor and disruptive limits the ability of children and young people to realise their potential in the classroom¹.

Poor behaviour can lead to suspension or permanent exclusion from classes. In 2008/9 there were 6,900 permanent exclusions from UK schools². Persistent

disruptive behaviour accounted for 30 per cent of all permanent exclusions and 23 per cent of all fixed-term exclusions³.

Effective intervention at an early stage is essential to ensure that this behaviour does not become persistent and lead to exclusion.

The evaluation of YPF found evidence that youth sector projects have the potential to positively influence the behaviour of young people who are at risk of disengagement or exclusion. This is reflected in research and policy which shows how important it is to establish engaging provision for disruptive pupils as part of strategies to improve behaviour⁴.

What are the benefits to improving behaviour in schools?

Children who are excluded from school because of poor behaviour are more likely to underachieve academically. They are at risk of disengagement from education and, consequently, from making a positive contribution to society⁵.

Identifying and addressing the causes of disruptive behaviour early makes the everyday experience of classroom learning easier, and removes the barriers to concentration and progress which are created by a disrupted learning environment.

The benefits of improved behaviour are felt by disruptive pupils, as well as those having their learning disrupted by the poor behaviour of others. They are also felt by teachers, parents and the wider community. Benefits include:

¹'Behaviour and Discipline in Schools' House of Commons Education Committee first report of session 2010-11. www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmeduc/516/516i.pdf

²www.poverty.org.uk/27/index.shtml

³'Not present and not correct; understanding and preventing school exclusions' – Jane Evans, Barnardo's.

⁴OFSTED: Improving Behaviour in Secondary Schools

⁵'Behaviour and Discipline in Schools' www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmeduc/516/516i.pdf

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Benefits for young people...

- ▶ Improved learning environment.
- ▶ Better engagement with school leading to higher educational attainment.
- ▶ More positive relationships with teachers, making school a more pleasant environment.

Benefits for parents...

- ▶ Children are less likely to be excluded, reducing stress and worry for parents and promoting more positive family relationships.
- ▶ Parents can be confident that their children are engaging with education and not having their learning disrupted.

Benefits for teachers...

- ▶ Less stressful working environment.
- ▶ More time for teaching as less time is spent on discipline issues.
- ▶ Opportunity to build positive relationships with pupils.

Benefits for the community...

- ▶ Young people are less likely to truant and become involved in anti-social behaviour.
- ▶ Young people are more likely and able to make a positive contribution to society.

What works?

Early intervention

It is important to identify at an early stage those young people who are:

- struggling to focus and engage with education; and
- starting to show negative behaviour due to lack of focus.

Early intervention provides you with the opportunity to re-engage young people in education before their behaviour becomes embedded and such a problem that they face exclusion, and the associated damage to their long-term prospects.

The benefits of early intervention to improve behaviour are illustrated by case study examples 1 and 2.

Case Study Example 1

Country: Scotland

Project: Award Inclusive

Organisation: Friends of the Award Edinburgh (FOTA)

Friends of the Award (FOTA) in Edinburgh was established in 1998. It supports and enhances the local delivery of the Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) Award in Edinburgh and the Lothians.

The Award Inclusive programme encourages the re-engagement of young people who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from education. Young people are given the opportunity to work towards the DofE award as part of their curriculum. The project works with young people in their fourth year of secondary school. Young people involved include those who are disruptive in class, those with poor attendance, those with low self esteem and those with low academic achievement. By engaging with these young people early, whilst they are still attending school, the programme aims to improve their behaviour and engagement, and remove the need for more intensive intervention later on.

To be a part of the programme young people must make a long term commitment to the award and agree that continued participation is reliant upon their increased engagement with education, good attendance and behaviour. For many of the young people the award is the first personal and academic challenge that they have committed to.

The programme has been successful in encouraging engagement with education and the achievement of positive post school destinations. School staff provided anecdotal evidence to FOTA that the time spent on disciplinary matters for young people involved in Award Inclusive decreases by around two thirds once they are involved in the award.

For more information see:

Evaluation of the YPF Year 5 (2011)

Or

www.fota.org.uk

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Case Study Example 2

Country: Northern Ireland

Project: After school clubs for young Travellers

Organisation: Armagh Travellers Support Group

The project supports young Travellers in afterschool clubs at their school. The project works with primary school children to help increase their participation and educational achievement. It also supports children in the move from primary to secondary school; a period when Traveller children are at high risk of disengagement.

Activities include one to one help with homework, role play to allow children to explore their own and other cultures, a local library scheme, physical activities and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. The project works closely with schools to provide support which is tailored to the needs of individual pupils.

Project workers highlighted the story of a nine year old boy. The boy was disruptive in the classroom and struggled to complete homework. His parents were unable to help him due to their own literacy difficulties.

The afterschool club gave him the opportunity to play with his peers, to talk about his culture and to hear others talk about their lives. He was given the chance to enhance his learning in a safe and comfortable teaching environment.

As a result of the extra support received the boy has shown himself to be academically gifted. Teachers report that he performs well in subjects across the board. He is now highly motivated and shows great enthusiasm. This is shown by his excellent attendance, positive behaviour and attitude.

For more information see:

Evaluation of the YPF Year 5 (2011)

Or

www.armaghtsg.org/

Partnerships with schools

It is important for you and your youth project to ensure that interventions to improve behaviour in school target young people who are most in need of support and who are likely to benefit the most.

Effective targeting is best achieved if you can work in partnership with schools.

There are a number of benefits to a partnership approach. Partnerships mean that:

- ▶ **Teachers can select the pupils:** Teachers who know the young people and work with them on a daily basis are often best placed to identify those most suited to project activity.
- ▶ **It is easier to control the group dynamic:** In delivery of group work and project activity it is often best to work with a mixed group. For example, if a project tried to work with a group made up entirely of non-attenders, they may find it difficult to secure engagement. Similarly in a group where all the young people display highly challenging behaviour it may be difficult to retain discipline. In a mixed group (where personal and behaviour issues differ), young people can learn from each other. Where positive behaviours are rewarded others will pick up on this and behaviour change can begin to occur.
- ▶ **Project activity is integrated and aligned with school based activity:** Where there is a strong partnership with the school, young people associate the project with school. If young people enjoy their project activity they often report beginning to enjoy school more as they see the project as a part of school. They also begin to see the value of school activity and how it links to other things. For example, where project activity involves literacy and numeracy, young people learn the value of these skills and they way they can be applied.

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- ▶ **Structured fun:** Where projects work closely with school and where teachers are involved, young people benefit from the discipline and structure of the school environment while also having the chance to learn and develop their skills in the more practical and informal ways that project activity allows. In many cases, young people who display challenging behaviour in the classroom do so as that environment is simply not suitable to their style of learning.

Award Inclusive (case study example 1) also illustrates the importance of effective project/school partnerships. Project staff noted this as one of the most significant successful factors for their project. They felt that:

...The partnership approach ensures that the most appropriate young people are included in the programme and allows effective planning to integrate DofE into the school timetable and align with Curriculum for Excellence (national curriculum) outcomes.

Young people involved in Award Inclusive spoke confidently about the activities in which they have taken part. One girl said that previously she did not enjoy school but now that as part of her timetable she is doing DofE, which she really enjoys, she is more motivated in school generally.

For more information see:

Evaluation of the YPF Year 5 (2011)

Or

www.fota.org.uk

A formal process and mutual understanding

Key to improving behaviour in schools is to clearly set out exactly what behaviour is expected of young people. This can be done through informal discussion and setting of ground rules or more formally with, for example, a behaviour contract. This can help young people develop a sense of personal responsibility for

their behaviour: Young people should:

- ▶ Sit down with you [project workers], school staff (and sometimes their parents) to talk about how they are expected to behave.
- ▶ Make a commitment to the behaviour contract.
- ▶ Be involved in deciding and be fully aware of the consequences of breaking their commitment to positive behaviour. This gives them something to think about if they behave poorly or receive a warning about their behaviour.

This is illustrated in case study example 3.

Case Study Example 3

Country: England

Project: Rev 'n' Go

Organisation: Rev 'n' Go

Rev'n' Go encourages good behaviour in and out of school by taking young people off-road motorcycling. Young people's engagement is dependent on their commitment to a contract of behaviour.

The project is intended to reduce anti-social behaviour, improve behaviour, literacy and numeracy and increase educational attainment.

Young people sign a behaviour contract when they join the project. Young people decide as a group what should happen if the terms of contract are broken.

The project highlighted evidence that it has successfully helped previously excluded school pupils to engage in school and helped them progress to positive post-school destinations.

For more information visit:

www.rev-n-go.org

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Listening to and involving young people

Disruptive and challenging behaviour is often a sign of frustration. Young people's projects are well placed to give young people a voice and the time and space they need to express their concerns and address their frustrations.

When young people feel listened to, supported and involved in decisions that affect them this can go a long way towards encouraging positive behaviour change.

Further information and advice on the active and meaningful involvement of children and young people is included in the guide 2 'Good Practice in Active Involvement' that accompanies this series.

Where can I find out more?

If you would like more information on research, policy and practice in the UK in relation to improving behaviour, attendance and engagement with education see:

HMIE: Information about the role of the inspector, and a library of reports on schools, colleges, education authorities, and community education provision

Visit: www.hmie.gov.uk/

Also see:

- ▶ The Climate for Learning: www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/rbblr.html
- ▶ Case Studies of Good Practice in improving the Climate for Learning: www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/hmie_csgp.html

OFSTED: The agency which inspects and regulates to help achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages.

Visit: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Also see:

- ▶ Improving behaviour and attendance in secondary schools.
- ▶ Improving behaviour and attendance in primary schools.

ETINI (The Education and Training Inspectorate)

Visit: www.etini.gov.uk

Department for Education:

Visit: www.education.gov.uk

- ▶ Also see: Improving behaviour and attendance: Guidance on exclusion from schools and Pupil Referral Units, 2008

www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/DCSF-00573-2008

- ▶ Pupil Participation Guidance: Working Together – Giving Children and Young People a Say, 2004.

Visit: www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/Pupilsupportwelfareandbehaviour/Page6/DfES%200134%202004

The Scottish Government:

Visit: www.scotland.gov.uk

- ▶ Better Behaviour – Better Learning Report of the Discipline Task Group; The recent report of the Discipline Task Group containing 36 recommendations aimed at improving discipline in schools, June 2011, available online at: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2001/06/9337/File-1

The Welsh Government:

Visit: www.wales.gov.uk/?lang=en

- ▶ Practical Approaches to Behaviour Management in the Classroom: A handbook for classroom teachers in secondary schools.

www.wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/100824practicalen.pdf

Department of Education Northern Ireland:

Visit: www.deni.gov.uk

- ▶ School discipline and promoting good behaviour www.deni.gov.uk/index/21-pupils-parents-pg/21-pupils_parents_school_discipline_promoting_positive_behaviour-pg.htm

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Ways of involving young people:

- ▶ Participation Works
Visit: www.participationworks.org.uk
- ▶ The National Youth Agency – Hear by Right
Visit: www.nya.org.uk
- ▶ The Northern Ireland Participation Network – supporting the public sector to engage children and young people.
Visit: www.participationnetwork.org

If you would like information about the national evaluation of the Young People's Fund contact:

BIG: 0845 410 2030

YPF evaluation reports and supporting documents are available online from BIG at www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/eval_ypf