

**with  
all respect**

**reviewing  
strategies**

**Kay Kinder  
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**WITH ALL RESPECT  
REVIEWING DISAFFECTION STRATEGIES**

**by**

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## FOREWORD

*... The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts, and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who live faithfully a hidden life.*  
George Eliot

This is the fourth and final report from the research project entitled ‘School Attendance, Truancy and Exclusion’. It attempts to honour the last of the data-set gathered from schools, parents and pupils during the course of the study’s two-and-a-half-year history, and to provide updates and final evaluative comment on a range of school-based initiatives to combat disaffection which has been the focus of the study. It is important to stress that the report is a continuation of the project’s findings and also an evaluative summation of some of the key factors in addressing disaffection. It does not in any way supplant the three previous reports, but is intended to add further to the picture of the kinds of circumstances in which some schools operate daily.

Another important aspect of the research for the reader to note is that it has been entirely qualitative in both its methods and reportage. It has not used statistical data or performance figures to judge the merit and worth of the initiatives, but instead has elected to listen and then relay the accounts and viewpoints of those who are closest to the problem of pupil disaffection, as manifested in attendance or behaviour difficulties at school. The perceptions of school and LEA staff, pupils, and parents have been given primacy because it was felt that their collective experiences and insights needed a wider audience and higher status. Ultimately, it is up to the reader to consider how far such qualitative data can inform policy and practice, and whether voices from 40 schools and off-site units in 19 LEAs, as well as 160 of their pupils and 20 parents, should be listened to. It is intended that these testaments will convey something of what is really involved in supporting – or indeed being – a disaffected youngster; and with that fuller appreciation, the opportunity for effective policy and practice in the area of disaffection is broadened.

Over the course of the project’s life, the dedication, empathy, compassion and expertise of the professionals who work with disaffected pupils have been a constant

and powerful feature. The research team remains indebted to so many of these people, just some of whom are mentioned below for their particular assistance both methodologically and conceptually during the study. However, the final word from the project must be to suggest that any sense of indebtedness should be spread far wider than a single research team: in our view, the efforts of staff from schools, EWS, BSS and other agencies to address the issue of disaffection need greater national recognition and respect.

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**Introduction**

This short chapter continues reportage of the interviews with 20 parents from four schools serving different socially deprived areas which featured as one of the central components of the study's fieldwork programme, and took place during the summer of 1995. As noted in Report Three of the project, *Exclusion: Who Needs It?* (Kinder *et al*, 1997), each of these were parents of pupils being given specific support by their school for attendance and/or behaviour difficulties. Access to the sample was gained through the support of staff at the school who had actively forged links with home and the community. The interviews were, however, undertaken in private and usually in the parent's own home. The topics under discussion included:

- views about the strategies employed by their child's school which addressed non-attendance and disruption;
- general perceptions of the causes and solutions to these manifestations of disaffection; and
- the story behind their own child's particular history of school disengagement.

It has to be said first that these interviews were a very humbling experience for the researchers. In the midst of often harrowing tales of domestic and/or neighbourhood problems, what shone through was the parents' – and school staff's – determination and dedication to provide the youngsters with opportunities for achievement. Some of these testaments are featured as cameos within the present chapter; other quotations and viewpoints about specific strategies have already been incorporated into Report Three.

A second general point to be made about this component of the project is the fact that the sample size reflected the low numbers of schools which felt able to provide access to the parents of their disaffected pupils. This in itself may be a



powerful indicator of where development work is needed, especially given the responses to the question of 'solutions' offered by the parent interviewees, and in the stories of positive resolutions to problems which are apparent in the cameos.

Equally, it has to be acknowledged that, given the way access was gained, these parents may represent a distinctive voice and hold particular pro-school viewpoints. However, this in itself could intimate the positive outcomes of investing in home-school partnerships – and perhaps also suggests the value of the various school-based liaison work in furthering such attitudes.

As well as featuring in Report Three, the parent interview material was further analysed to capture the range of viewpoints on factors underpinning disaffection. This was to complement the perceptions of educational professionals and pupils themselves which were reported in the first two discussion papers of the project, *Three to Remember* (Kinder *et al.*, 1995) and *Talking Back* (Kinder *et al.*, 1996). Clearly, the small numbers involved in this parent sample can only provide at best possible indicators and issue-raising discussion points. However, the results do raise interesting issues about the national focus of initiatives to combat disaffection and, to this end, parent comments are given in some detail. The question raised by these data is how far parents adjudged schools' systems for dealing with behaviour or attendance difficulties to be in some way lacking, or whether they pinpointed problems within the 'infrastructures' of school life, in terms of current curriculum imperatives, subsequent classroom delivery and teacher/pupil relationships.

### **Listening to Parents: Causes of Disaffection**

Stressing the importance of collecting parental views, the question '*What, as a parent, do you see as the main causes of youngsters playing truant?*' was posed, and, later in the interview, the causes of '*... youngsters misbehaving/disrupting at school*' were similarly elicited.

The rank order of responses mentioned by more than one parent was as follows:

| <b>FACTORS WHICH PARENTS ASSOCIATED WITH ...</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>NON-ATTENDANCE</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>DISRUPTION</b>                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Peer pressure and bullying</b></li> <li>• <b>Boredom at school</b></li> <li>• <b>Teacher relationships</b></li> <li>• <b>Lack of school discipline</b></li> <li>• <b>Parental influence</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lack of parental control</b></li> <li>• <b>Boredom at school</b></li> <li>• <b>Learning difficulties</b></li> <li>• <b>Peers</b></li> </ul> |

In addition, individual respondents mentioned factors such as **drugs** and **society generally**. One parent only nominated **lack of school discipline** as the cause of disruptive behaviour, while three saw this as a factor in non-attendance.

There are a number of striking aspects in this audit of parental views. First, the low ranking given to 'lack of school discipline' is very apparent, particularly in the area of disruptive behaviour. In effect, parental opinion here seems to be indicating that it is not schools' expectations in relation to behaviour and non-attendance which are mainly responsible for disaffected conduct. Disaffection is rooted in other factors. Indeed, the frequent mention of 'boredom at school' as a factor underpinning both non-attendance and disruption does suggest that these parents particularly detected some dislocation or breakdown between their children and the whole curriculum on offer in the school. This mirrors the views of many educational professionals who work with disaffected youngsters, as reported in the project's first publication, *Three To Remember* (Kinder *et al.*, 1995). Here, the National Curriculum was seen as a particular problem, though clearly the parents, with their selection of 'boredom' as a key factor, are not adding any further insight as to whether this is a classroom delivery issue or one related to current national imperatives for the curriculum. Beyond that, however, the impact of the quality of teacher/pupil relationship, particularly in the context of unmet learning needs, does figure in these parent perspectives, as it did so strikingly in the pupil accounts outlined in Report Two, *Talking Back* (Kinder *et al.*, 1996).

Equally, the influence of peers, particularly on non-attendance, mirrored the views of the pupils in Report Two. Another notable feature of the audit is the high ranking given to parental responsibility for disruptive behaviour, compared with the lower numbers nominating home factors in relation to non-attendance.

| <b>PARENT SAMPLE: RANK ORDER OF VIEWS ON FACTORS IN ...</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>NON-ATTENDANCE</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>DISRUPTION</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Peer pressure and bullying</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Lack of parental control</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <p><i>... bullying, some having money and some haven't. [My daughter] has stolen off me because she had second hand clothes, in order to wear the in thing, they're victimised, out of their gang, you're nothing if you've not got the latest. There's talking among themselves, back-chat and swearing in class.</i><br/>(Mother of KS4 female)</p> <p><i>The main reason is bullying, not wanting to face it. Some children are easily led and have to do the same as their friends.</i><br/>(Mother of KS3 male)</p> | <p><i>...lack of control when little</i><br/>(Mother of KS3 male)</p> <p><i>parents – they've no interest in their kids, don't bother with them. The school is doing the best they can, but it's a very hard job.</i><br/>(Father of KS4 male)</p> <p><i>If a home is poor but stable with lots of love and attention, then the child will function in school. There will be temptations at school but if the support at home is there, the child will be able to withstand them. Some kids are easily led but if there is a solid base at home: and I'm not talking about wealth now ...</i><br/>(Mother of KS4 male)</p> |
| <b>Boredom at school</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Boredom at school</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p><i>They don't like school, they are not enjoying it, so don't go, They go elsewhere and have fun.</i><br/>(Mother of KS4 female)</p> <p><i>boredom, the subjects – though sometimes they hit it off with a certain teacher.</i><br/>(Mother of KS3 male)</p> <p><i>They get bored – my son just don't like school.</i><br/>(Mother of KS3 male)</p>                                                                                                                                                                   | <p><i>Children find school boring.</i><br/>(Mother of KS3 female)</p> <p><i>The attitude of not liking school so they misbehave.</i><br/>(Mother of KS4 male)</p> <p><i>They are bored with the activities, not enough choice ... it's what they are learning: the basics, the values, the rules have gone – there's no time for sport or clubs – if there's not time for those things, it's a loss for kids, just sat in school all day.</i><br/>(Father of KS3 male)</p>                                                                                                                                                 |

| <b>Teacher relationship</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Learning difficulties</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>Depends on the kid – some have pressures in school – some have certain teachers who don't like them, some teachers' kids don't like.</i><br/>(Father of KS3 male)</p> <p><i>Not getting the help they need or bored with lessons, getting frustrated and not supported enough in learning.</i><br/>(Mother of KS3 female)</p>  | <p><i>It is a mixture of frustration in certain lessons, home and his temper. He is not very good at reading and writing and when he can't get things down on paper, it all builds up and his frustration spills out in bad behaviour.</i><br/>(Father of KS4 male)</p> <p><i>X is not that clever, he's bored, he sits and dreams and won't do anything, he irritates and plays up for attention from the other kids, so they think he is clever.</i><br/>(Mother of KS4 male)</p> |
| <b>Lack of school discipline</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Peers</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <p><i>Teachers are scared of the pupils – they are thugs. Not enough discipline, just put on report, they need the cane, it all plays into the kids' own hands.</i><br/>(Mother of KS4 female)</p> <p><i>Lack of discipline in schools, there's only so far teachers can go, it's a vicious circle.</i><br/>(Father of KS3 male)</p> | <p><i>They get in the wrong group.</i><br/>(Mother of KS3 female)</p> <p><i>If someone is silly, he'll set the others off.</i><br/>(Mother of KS3 male)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Parental influence</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <p><i>It is the parents' attitude, some don't want to get up in the mornings. With younger ones who depend on their parents, this can soon become a habit.</i><br/>(Mother of KS2 female)</p>                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

### **Listening to Parents: Solutions to Disaffection**

Given the prominence of factors other than schools' particular procedures in handling truancy and misbehaviour raised by the parents, their responses to the question asking what they saw as solutions to non-attendance and disruption in school are perhaps especially worthy of attention.

The rank order of these responses, and examples of comments, are given below.

| <b>SOLUTIONS WHICH PARENTS ASSOCIATED WITH ...</b>                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>NON-ATTENDANCE</b>                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>DISRUPTION</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Listening to children</b></li> <li>• <b>Parent/school partnerships</b></li> <br/> <li>• <b>Praise and encouragement</b></li> <li>• <b>Stricter regime</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Parent/school partnerships</b></li> <li>• <b>Changing class size/classroom routines</b></li> <li>• <b>Change to curriculum</b></li> <li>• <b>More respect for teachers</b></li> </ul> |

Perhaps particularly notable is the focus on parent-school partnership(s), listening to children, and to accommodating the youngsters' problems in relating to the curriculum currently on offer. School discipline and greater respect for authority are ranked among the lowest responses – again suggesting that it is the infrastructure of schools and not the existence of attendance or behaviour policies and practices within it which are most in question. Moreover, it seems that a particular correlation between curriculum alienation and disruptive behaviour is suggested, and this was also reflected in the pupil data reported in *Talking Back*. It should be noted that occasional reference to lack of extracurricular activity was also made by parents. Put together, these parental views present a cogent argument for reconsidering both the pastoral and curriculum opportunities available within schools, particularly those which serve communities existing in difficult economic and social circumstances.

However, it was noticeable that when the sample was asked about improvements to their school's attendance- and behaviour-related procedures, a small number of parents did suggest 'stricter' regimes, but this was in no way the majority view. Individual examples – perhaps predictably – included '*bring back the cane*', '*longer detentions*', '*more discipline*'. Notwithstanding this, most of the responses were not of this order, and the sample as a whole gave greater emphasis to supportive and inclusive measures. Typical comments which indicated a rejection of any harshening of the school's regime were, '*detentions only make the kids not care*', '*different children need different approaches*', '*give more support*'.

Areas for improvement that were suggested included:

- greater home-school links/parental involvement: *'working more with parents'*, *'better communication to home'*;
- more rewards, especially for good behaviour;
- rewards of greater currency and relevance: *'trips'*, *'better treats'*; and
- more within-school strategies: *'provide a lunch time activity session'*, *'keep them in school and supervise them, not suspend'*.

| <b>PARENT SAMPLE: RANK ORDER OF VIEWS ON SOLUTIONS TO ...</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>NON-ATTENDANCE</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>DISRUPTION</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Listening to children</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Parent/school partnerships</b>                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <i>Understanding the child's point of view, listening.</i><br>(Mother of KS4 female)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <i>Joint partnership between parents and school.</i><br>(Mother of KS2 female)                                                                                                                                   |
| <i>Talking to the children more.</i><br>(Mother of KS3 male)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <i>If schools recognise that the support is there at home, then they should be able to work in partnership. It needs effort on both parts.</i><br>(Foster mother of KS4 male)                                    |
| <i>Schools need to be attractive and make it fun to be there. It would be helpful for kids to have an identified person to go to if they had a problem. This need not be formal, just someone they feel close to, it might not be the same person for each child. They need to be able to talk.</i><br>(Mother of KS4 male) |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Parent/school partnerships</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Class size/classroom routines</b>                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <i>It has to be partnership all the way through, it's never 100 per cent just school. There has to be some connection between home and school. It might be boring sometimes but it's never just down to a bad teacher.</i><br>(Foster mother of KS4 male)                                                                   | <i>More time in lessons – the bells go too soon, they are not getting into the work, it's time to stop – the speed is hectic, the teachers are writing on the blackboard too fast.</i><br>(Mother of KS3 female) |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <i>Smaller class, away from friends, with lots of teacher attention.</i><br>(Mother of KS4 male)                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Praise and encouragement</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Change to curriculum</b>                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>They need to put a lot more confidence into the children, build it up more. My child wasn't getting the confidence, they should praise and encourage more ...</i><br>(Mother of KS4 female)                                                                                                                              | <i>If they had more choices, extra choices as well as ordinary lessons.</i><br>(Mother of KS4 female)                                                                                                            |
| <i>There should be better treats for good behaviour and attendance.</i><br>(Mother of KS2 male)                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <i>It should be in the curriculum, a class for behaviour, motherhood classes, they should be made more aware.</i><br>(Mother of KS4 female)                                                                      |
| <b>Stricter regime</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <b>More respect for teachers</b>                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <i>Ought to be stricter.</i><br>(Mother of KS4 female)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <i>Respect for the teacher, they don't bother, a smack would do them no harm.</i><br>(Father of KS3 male)                                                                                                        |

### **Listening to Parents: A Little More Understanding**

The final section of this chapter focuses in more detail on the individual accounts of five parents who formed part of the sample. Each story raises issues about the potential of collaboration between school and home, and about the positive achievements of the innovative roles which the schools had instituted. The

significance of innovations offering both pastoral and curriculum dimensions is exemplified in the following cases.

Joe is 15 and lives with his dad. Mr C, who is bringing up Joe by himself, has two older children and explains that his wife left several years ago. Mr C is a retired carpenter, with a disability pension. He chooses to describe his neighbourhood as '*full of scum*' and gives graphic accounts of the next-door children being '*trained to steal by their parents*', deploring the swearing, illiteracy, drunkenness, petty jealousies, drugs, violence and vandalism he says is all around him. '*The district is terrible. Stealing is a hobby; when mum is in the pub, the little kids are locked in their bedrooms ... they don't care about nothing, only what their kids can pinch and bring home.*' He explains how he'd had five break-ins while he went to collect his income support on Mondays and Wednesdays for a couple of hours ('... *they pinch anything here ... there's evilness, they come in and cut your furniture up*'), and so used to keep Joe at home to guard the house. Now he's stopped bothering. Mr C speaks of Joe, the youngest of his three children as '*always slow with his reading, he gets frustrated*' adding '*it hurts me to think about it...*' But, Mr C insists '*Joe is a good boy ... helpful, never in trouble with the police ... we've talked through drugs*'. Whatever the supportiveness and care of his parent, Joe has had a history of violent verbal and even physical outbursts at school. For Mr C, Joe's real salvation has been due to the individual attention and support given by the female school-based EWO, who has provided help with reading, encouragement to attend a vocational course at college and opportunities for outdoor pursuits such as rock climbing. According to Mr C, Joe has '*turned around*' from being an aggressive, disaffected pupil who disliked school to a youngster who '*is trying, really trying with his reading, ... thinking for himself, ... coming out of his shell ... getting confident in himself ... wanting to get to college and achieve*'.

**COMMENT:**

**In this case, the question as to whether there have been certain missing ingredients in Joe's affective life is raised. Certainly, through working in a one-to-one relationship with a skilled professional within the context of mainstream schooling, Joe appears to have been offered the opportunity to experience a sense of personal achievement through physical challenge and constructive leisure opportunities; and personalised educational/career guidance and encouragement, including a focus on literacy.**



Rory is 11 and lives with his dad, Mr B, who works as a long-distance lorry driver. Mr B is a single parent with two children: he has custody of the children due to his ex-wife's drug addiction, though the children are still on the Child Protection Register. According to Mr B, while with their mother, Rory and his sister Sally (aged nine) missed vast amounts of school, and *'got out of control ...'* with Rory learning only *'how to get what he wanted – through temper tantrums, cheekiness and just carrying on doing just what he wanted'*. Mr B talks about the estate as one where *'parents don't seem to be able to do anything – they don't bother – lots of kids are out on the street, tapping on doors all the time, f-ing and blinding'*. Mr B sees his task with Rory and Sally as *'trying to keep things constant, so the kids know where they stand'*. In their sparsely furnished house, all the reward cards which the children's schools send home are prominently displayed on the mantelpiece: *'I keep them there, it defeats their purpose otherwise ... rewards make them realise if they does good it benefits: [the kids] are chuffed to see them piling up'*. But Rory has already demonstrated problem behaviour at school, even though, according to Mr B, *'he likes school on the whole, because of the regularity of it'*. Mr B describes this anti-school conduct as *'getting cheeky to teachers and out of hand, having tantrums'* and attributes it to the influence and learnt behaviour patterns from the time Rory spent with his mother. There seems to be a breakthrough now that Rory is spending time in a small withdrawal unit at the school, and in the establishment of a positive relationship with the teacher who is based full-time there. Mr B sees that Rory has *'calmed down, his behaviour is better – Mr S is a good influence, he can talk with Mr S, he likes him as a person – he's gone on camp with Mr S, of his own choosing, he's getting more mature, can make sensible decisions for himself'*.

**COMMENT:**

**This may be another example of mainstream specialist facilities providing a teacher/pupil relationship which offers a caring consistency and closeness. Indeed, the firm and supportive boundaries proffered by the unit seem to mirror Mr B's own efforts with his son. Again, there may be significance in the shared leisure activity giving an extra dimension to Rory's relationship with his teacher. Does this case also show how generalist measures of reward will be inadequate to address particular needs?**

Sam is 15. His mother, Mrs W, has four children and Sam's elder brother, aged 18, has recently returned to the family home on a short-term stay from Care due to his drug addiction and record for petty crime. Mrs W cites *'the drugs, there's so much of it on this estate'* as the main factor in pupil misbehaviour at school, and the *'lack of things for kids to do'*. She describes the *'three drug houses round here'*, and notes that Sam and his younger sister *'do see needles around here, there are big fights'*. Mrs W describes Sam as *'keeping a lot inside ... it's hard to get his trust, he worries about things'*. Sam has had a history of bullying (now resolved) and more recently has been demonstrating disruptive behaviour in certain lessons. For Mrs W, this is because he *'likes being the clown of the class, the main attraction ... if he clashes with a teacher in one lesson, he has to get something out and the next lesson he messes about, to get attention'*. Sam's elder brother, Michael, was permanently excluded from school (*'he just then got in trouble, thieving, smoking, drugs – he couldn't break away, excluding him didn't give him self-control – where they sent him was just an apprenticeship into crime, he learnt shop-lifting'*). Michael (who was present at this part of the conversation), like his brother, depicts the reason for disruptive behaviour as *'it's the people looking at you, that's what's good, it's the BUZZ'*. Sam has been given the opportunity to attend a vocational project based at a local college, constructing a go-kart. Mrs W notes the difference this has made to him: *'It's done a lot for his character, his attitude has changed ... he's beginning to respect older people, to respect your rules. The project has given him authority figures, but the college also lets him choose what he wants to do as well.'* Mrs W also cites the ongoing involvement of the school's deputy/community liaison officer as a positive factor in Sam's story: *'Mr X do try and do the best for the kids, if they've a problem ... he knows this family ... the school monitors Sam, Mr X do a lot of watching, they have really helped.'*

**COMMENT:**

This example may again indicate the value of investing in a sustained pastoral preventative and monitoring role, with opportunities for developing longer-term and ongoing relations between school and home. Equally, it may be an illustration of how valuable it is to offer relevant curriculum experiences, especially those which provide a different type of learning relationship between pupil and trainer.

Darren is 15 and one of three boys that his mum brings up on her own. Mrs H explains how Darren and his brothers (aged 17 and 14) always show her respect: *'they will listen'*, unlike Darren's friend, Philip, whose mum *'can't handle him, 'cos he had a macho father till he was 12, who then left and she can't give any discipline which the boy values'*. Darren has been socialising with Philip around the estate, truanting and missing school. This has involved being found playing with a car on the estate dumped by older joyriders, and cautioning by police. Mrs H explains that she *'cannot watch him all the time, I have to work'*. Mrs H describes Darren as *'academically able but doesn't want to know about school'* – she describes how he writes poems at home on his computer, is interested in *'solving problems ...'* particularly in the area of engineering and cars. A series of fixed-term exclusions for unacceptable behaviour at school has *'not bothered'* Darren. Mrs H explains how he has *'got out of the habit of school, he's got lazy, he finds he can't just get back into the swing of it'*. Darren has now got an 18-year-old girlfriend, who is actually pregnant by another boy, and Mrs H, while recognising *'he's far too young'*, believes this has actually had a positive effect – *'it's some kind of leverage'* on his behaviour. Darren is being responsible. Mrs H wanted to stress how *'the majority of us on the estate are ordinary, caring, sensible people'*. She outlined her view on bringing up children in the circumstances of the estate: *'Whatever the pressures out there, I tell my boys I could keep them safe inside the four walls of our house with me, but I say "That way you won't grow ... and that's crueller than letting you go out into the outside world".'* Darren has been given the opportunity to attend a six-week vocational course (which he loved), and there is close liaison between Mrs H and the school-based EWO (whom Mrs H valued highly). Mrs H indicates that Darren feels a proper college course would be useful. Ultimately, however, Darren was not able to manage to stay in school, being permanently excluded some time after this interview.

**COMMENT:**

This case may particularly illustrate issues about the timing and longevity of alternative curriculum provision. Should Darren have been allowed earlier and/or sustained involvement in vocational education which stretched his problem-solving aptitude? The need for progression and continuity in vocational opportunities may be illustrated here. Equally, an enrichment of extracurricular activity may have helped maintain a pro-school attitude. Could more intensive pastoral support, more sustained home-school links offered earlier have made a difference? For Mrs H, the partial success was for Darren to recognise the value of his EWO and, from there, other school staff (*'Before, he just saw them as teachers, not human beings with the same feelings as us'*). All agreed the vocational opportunities and pastoral investment ended up being too little and too late to 'save' Darren.

Jaynie is 16 and the youngest of seven children. There had been a history of sexual abuse within the family, and Mrs D, her mother, describes how school refusal began in primary school: *'There was a teacher who looked like her father; she dreamed up stomach aches, made out she was ill, that began the educational welfare involvement.'* Other professionals (psychologists, social workers, doctors) have been involved with Jaynie's case. Jaynie's school refusal had recommenced at high school. Mrs D explains it was due to a fear of bullying and teasing by other girls on her way home: *'They would wait for her, pick on her, girls can be very cruel – about clothes, appearance.'* She also describes how Jaynie is *'the baby of the family, she wants attention, but she didn't like school – she didn't have confidence, she didn't like to ask for help, perhaps she needed to be praised more'*. According to Mrs D, Jaynie is now working for her GCSEs, has a steady boyfriend and has *'settled down'*. This turn-around, she explains, is due to the involvement of a young school-based Education Welfare Assistant who offered individual support within and outside school and negotiated a careful re-entry programme. *'M is like one of the family, I find it easy to talk to M too – she is like a big sister – Jaynie has no sisters at home, M's been able to get at what happened ... with M she did attend school, she settled to do her homework. M's done a pretty good job'*. This success was replicated by the Welfare Assistant with other school-refusing children, particularly girls of 15+, at the school.

**COMMENT:**

Does Jaynie's case show another variation in the impact of affective support? This appears to be an example of a 'buddying' strategy (delivered by a role model with youth credibility), achieving positive results in particularly complex circumstances. It perhaps illustrates that in some instances, specialised pastoral provision can turn around disaffected behaviour without the need to provide alternative curriculum opportunities. Ensuring personalised affective support and a flexible timetable at the point of reintegration also seems a key factor here. Has the potential for Jaynie to successfully operate both academically and socially been opened up through this particular relationship?

## Summary

This chapter has conveyed perspectives from parents of pupils who have exhibited disaffected behaviours in school. On the causes of disaffection, parents particularly cited '*boredom*' at school, the '*influence of peers*' and the '*teacher pupil relationship*', especially unmet learning needs. Their suggestions for solutions to disaffection had considerable focus on school-parent partnerships, and to accommodating youngsters' problems in relating to the curriculum currently on offer.

The cameos which conclude the chapter attempt to provide some illustration of the home backgrounds and personal histories of disaffected pupils. They equally indicate that successfully combating disaffection may involve redressing certain missing factors in youngsters' capacity to operate as effective pupils. Positive outcomes were particularly associated with strategies offering supportive personal relationships with skilled professionals, as well as opportunities to achieve academically and/or vocationally. The value of establishing good relations between home and school was also in evidence.

The chapter thus begins to raise the importance of diagnosing the needs and underlying causes of each disaffected youngster and then providing different combinations of support for different pupils. It equally suggests schools need multiple strategies in order to resolve disaffection. Some of this range of school-based initiatives is described and evaluated in the following chapters.

Throughout the academic year 1995-96, revisits to ten of the original sample of secondary schools which had participated in Phase One of the project were undertaken. The purpose of this fieldwork programme was to acquire further information and evaluative comment about the original initiatives which had been audited in Report One (*Three To Remember*), and these are discussed later in the report. As well as that, details of any new developments in the schools' strategies for disaffected pupils were sought. In addition, another four schools, illustrating new variations of disaffection initiatives, were added to the sample. In the present chapter, it is these updates and new developments which are first audited and reviewed.

The full audit of 'new' initiatives is shown in diagram form at the end of this chapter, using the same structured framework which was devised for the first overview of disaffection strategies outlined in Report One. The original framework had suggested that there were three kinds of focuses for schools' work in the area of disaffection: those initiatives which concentrated on **maintaining and monitoring attendance**; those which were **non-curriculum-related** (i.e. directly addressed pupil behaviour, attitudes and relationships); and those which had a **curriculum-related** focus (i.e. involved some change to the content, processes or context of pupils' learning). In addition, the audit had framed the strategies into three different levels: those which were undertaken within existing school resources (*whole-school level*); those involving *new school-based roles* for staff, LEA personnel or fellow pupils; and those which directly utilised some sort of *external support* from the LEA or other outside agencies. In addition, the audit had particularly highlighted the commonalties or overlap between strategies focusing on either attendance or behaviour difficulties, as these disaffected pupil behaviours were often seen as two different reactions (*flight or fight*) underpinned by similar causes.

All ten schools had examples of developing their work in the area of disaffection, often despite reductions in the original staffing and/or funding for this. That being the

case, it is perhaps not surprising that continuation of the work most often involved an extension of practices and policies undertaken within existing school resources (i.e. whole-school level), rather than any large-scale expansion or innovation in new staff roles or external support.

Overall, a number of common features emerged among the updated initiatives. Whether done within school resources or as part of expanding the roles of school or LEA staff, they involved one or more of the following:

- general **enhancement** of existing provision (e.g. improved surveillance of attendance or behaviour difficulties, or some general extension to provision within curriculum-related initiatives);
- greater **analysis** of links between and trends in attendance, behaviour and achievement, using data collated by the school;
- more specific **targeting** of pupils who exhibited attendance/behaviour/attainment difficulties according to certain criteria (e.g. pupils with 75 per cent attendance, those with discrepant achievement between teacher and SAT assessment); and
- more **involvement of pupils themselves and/or parents** in addressing or monitoring disaffected behaviours (e.g. contracts, adding records of behaviour/attendance to pupil planners).

### **New Initiatives: Maintaining And Monitoring Attendance**

This category of initiatives dealt exclusively with the issue of attendance, and included strategies which sought to improve school's surveillance in this area, or to remediate the attendance levels of certain children who were causing concern. At *whole-school level* (i.e. strategies characterised as involving only within-school resources), there were examples of enhancing the surveillance of potential truancy,

either by using IT registration on a subject lesson by lesson basis (although there were clear financial implications here), or by conducting regular spot checks or blitzes (e.g. following up all absences of particular year groups on certain days of the week). One school that had not employed IT registration devised a 'suspicious absence form', which every subject teacher completed and passed to the relevant form tutor if they felt a pupil's non-attendance in their lesson was a cause for concern. Significantly, pupils were also made aware of the existence of these forms. Another school employed monitoring sheets in the staffroom in order to record centrally concerns about individual pupils' punctuality (as well as their behaviour, and also curriculum 'readiness' – using the criteria of homework and equipment).

A focus on increasing the involvement of parents and pupils was also evident in this category of initiatives. There were examples of greater dissemination of attendance policies, with mailshots of reworded school policy and expectations sent to all parents. Giving pupils some greater self-responsibility for attendance emerged as a strategy in more than one school, with all pupils being asked to record their own attendance (and also behaviour) in planners and organisers.

Other examples of enhancements in general maintaining and monitoring strategies included instituting changes to the reward system for good attendance (e.g. as a half-termly event or offering extra breaktime to all high attenders).

New initiatives in *school-based roles* for maintaining and monitoring attendance also emerged. These were characterised by either some adaptation or addition to the work of existing staff, or by instituting new posts. The appointment of additional office staff to monitor and follow up all first day absence was a prime example of the latter. One school now employed five office staff for the first hour of each day entirely on the task of following up absences, thus relieving teaching staff of some clerical duties.

Changes to existing staff's responsibilities in this area were also in evidence among the sample, often involving senior and/or middle managers with pastoral responsibilities undertaking some mentoring role for pupils with attendance problems.



In these instances, the targeting of certain pupils was usually evident, although the criteria used showed some variance: one school ensured all its pupils with less than 90 per cent attendance met regularly with the deputy head; another specified that home visits by the head of year would be instituted for all youngsters with less than 60 per cent attendance; while attendance contracts for pupils with 75 per cent attendance had been set up in a third school. Similarly, the sample had one case of targeting pupils whose punctuality (rather than non-attendance) was problematic. Beyond that, one school with a withdrawal unit for disruptive pupils had expanded its criteria to include youngsters with attendance problems, with the option of self-referral by the pupils.

A rather different role regarding monitoring attendance was the further development of staff undertaking research-type activity, particularly analysing school data such as the links between pupil attendance and achievement, or any notable trends in post-registration truancy.

Further developments in *external support* for generally maintaining and monitoring pupil attendance such as Truancy Watch Schemes were less in evidence, perhaps suggesting the limitation of generalised community surveillance. However, one school had instituted the wearing of badges for pupils out of school with authorised absence. There were examples of schools' increasing involvement in inter-agency work on targeted children, with regular case conferences on individual pupils between Educational Welfare Service (EWS), Educational Psychology (EP), Health Service and school staff. Equally, closer liaison between EWS and pastoral staff was reported in several instances, with one school referring to its Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) now targeting '*low level non-attendance*' and working much more in a '*preventative capacity*'.

Put together, there seemed three key factors in the development of maintaining and monitoring strategies:

- the rigorous collation and analysis of school data on attendance patterns;

- the awareness by pupils themselves – and parents – of the school’s surveillance of attendance; and
- the sustained support and mentoring of pupils with attendance problems by school and/or EW staff.

### **New Initiatives: Non Curriculum-Related**

This category referred to strategies which had a direct focus upon remediating the behaviour, relationships and attitudes of disaffected pupils within school. Again, the work of the school sample in this area showed examples of general enhancement or awareness-raising of the issue of behaviour, an increase in the analysis and targeting of behaviour problems, as well as initiatives aimed at generating greater pupil/parent involvement.

At *whole-school level*, refocusing upon or regenerating interest in behaviour policies and procedures was evident, with examples of pupils, staff and parents being involved. Typical occasions for including pupils in any discourse on behaviour procedures were form tutor time, the school council and assemblies. The beginning of the school year was often the time for engaging pupils in this area. Another way of raising the awareness of behaviour, for parents and pupils, was the use of pupil planners or organisers to record positive as well as negative behaviour patterns. Finally, there were instances of schools setting up working parties on behaviour, with representatives from all levels of staff (e.g. senior and middle managers, mainscale teachers as well as Newly Qualified Teachers).

Surveillance of behaviour through specially adapted IT programmes was also evident in the sample. In addition to the behaviour patterns of individual pupils, there were examples of schools monitoring general trends in disruptive incidents using such criteria as: times of the school day; locations within the school building; and areas of the curriculum where a high incidence of problem behaviour might be apparent

(though the presence of supply staff was also acknowledged to be an intervening factor in some instances).

Targeting of specific pupils exhibiting behavioural difficulties also featured. The use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Individual Behaviour Plans (IBPs) or behaviour contracts was in evidence, with a key role for special educational needs (SEN) staff here. Beyond that, the use of in-school units for such pupils showed some developments: extending the facilities and also the length of time which youngsters were able to stay in the unit occurred in more than one instance. In one case, an option for certain Year 11 pupils to stay within the unit until they left school was instituted, as well as contracting with pupils and their parents prior to entry.

There were examples of extensions to *school-based roles* which directly addressed behaviour, attitudes and relationships. The general *enhancement* strategy of INSET provision on behaviour policy and procedures by senior staff for teachers new to the school and NQTs was evident. In other instances, this was provided by LEA Behaviour Support Staff.

More specific innovative targeting roles for staff included, in one school, the allocation of a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) to each year group with a brief to liaise with Heads of Year over programmes of support for pupils exhibiting emotional and behavioural difficulties. In another instance, the Heads of Year themselves had been given a particular responsibility for counselling pupils exhibiting troublesome behaviour.

The use of non-teaching staff, such as adult and peer mentors, also featured in the sample, as did the continuation of the role of the school counsellor, school-based EWOs or Behaviour Support Staff (including working with parents). However, a major issue here revolved around the often temporary nature of their tenure or indeed of the post itself, and how an abrupt cessation to this type of relationship-based support might adversely affect the targeted pupils and their families.

*External support* was again mostly in evidence from Behaviour Support Services, with pupil caseloads involving both individuals and groups, as well as supporting individual teachers or whole staff (e.g. in the development of school behaviour policies, behaviour targets/IBPs and so on). Other individual examples included inviting local youth workers, community and church groups for involvement in extracurricular activities.

Within this category of initiatives, three key factors emerged in the developments:

- placing behaviour high on the agenda of issues for all the school to consider, and particularly clarifying the role, function and status of any specialist support staff;
- embedding and sustaining the existence of support systems for pupils and their families within the school; and
- getting wide recognition that behaviour problems are a form of ‘special need’, and that targeted children with behaviour problems were to be in receipt of restorative rather than merely retributive strategies

#### **New Initiatives: Curriculum-Related**

This final category of initiatives was defined as those involving provision of a different curriculum content or learning context for disaffected pupils: in effect, recognising that there was some dislocation or alienation from the school’s current mainstream learning opportunities and/or locations. Again, developments showed the general characteristics of enhancing general provision, analysing and targeting of pupil need, or increasing pupil and parent involvement.

Thus, at *whole-school level*, there were examples of schools further enhancing vocational opportunities for all pupils, offering life-skills courses or General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) – in one instance as part of a Personal and Social

Education (PSE) programme. Developments in the provision of basic literacy and numeracy skills, by restructuring the timetabling of mathematics and English, were also in evidence. This allowed more intensive support for underachieving pupils. Some of the schools were targeting pupils whose attendance or behaviour patterns had appeared to impede academic progress and were providing individual programmes of support. Greater pupil and parent involvement in achieving homework targets through the use of pupil planners was also instituted. Using extended form tutor time to teach study skills was also being attempted in one school.

Examples of new *school-based roles* in curriculum-related strategies also emerged, most often related to intensifying the examination support available for pupils. Innovations here included specified staff with a mentoring role for Year 10 and 11 pupils, or the running of revision courses for GCSE candidates during the Easter holidays. Other school-based roles recently implemented involved giving one staff member the brief to undertake closer liaison about curriculum issues in the transfer between primary and secondary school, and the use of sixth-formers to assist in literacy work with younger pupils. A community liaison role for a senior staff member also had been instituted in one instance, which included a brief to develop literacy and other education programmes for the school's catchment area and draw in parents to the school. Finally, a continuation of senior staff undertaking a within-school INSET role on curriculum-related issues was also in evidence among the sample: with a focus variously on reading/basic literacy; teaching and learning styles; and differentiation.

*External support* included extending the use of local further education (FE) colleges for vocational courses as a general option for Year 10 pupils. Working with Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) initiatives, local business contacts and initiatives in the voluntary sector also featured, though accessing the array of opportunities coming from other agencies and sectors within the authority was not always easy. There was one instance of a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) utilising the LEA Advisory Service specifically to enhance the curriculum content of its subject teaching.

Key factors associated with these curriculum-related strategies appeared to be how effectively the school could:

- raise the status of vocational education among pupils, parents and – equally significantly – staff;
- adapt timetables to intensify learning support for vulnerable pupils’ literacy and numeracy skills; and
- expand and personalise curriculum support (including examination-related learning).

### **Overview**

Finally, very speculative comment can arise from looking at the updated audit to see in which areas there appeared to be little in the way of development work or new initiatives. With the important caveat that another academic year has passed since this audit (not to mention the change of government), it is nevertheless notable that the audit in 1996 showed no examples of :

- whole-school policy-making or dissemination on curriculum and the disaffected;
- school-based INSET provision on attendance related matters; or
- the development of any new approaches to sanctions.

It is at least possible that this listing reflected several national trends of that time: most notably, a general reduction in the focus on truancy compared with disruptive behaviour, and the continuing largely piecemeal development of vocational curriculum provision. The lack of any development work regarding sanctions may also require comment: as noted in Report Three (*Exclusion: Who Needs It*), the view was that schools’ options for effective reprisals were limited. It perhaps suggests that

ways of successfully reprimanding anti-social, anti-school behaviour remain an area still requiring both funding and research.

Equally, there were few examples of new school-based initiatives focusing on extracurricular ('constructive leisure') activities for the disaffected: the thrust was very much more on mainstream curriculum achievement. Indeed, a small number of schools indicated some reductions in this pastoral dimension due to funding and staffing constraints. Again, this could well reflect national imperatives on schools, and the significance of such a curtailment may have a particular resonance for work in the area of disaffection. This issue will be discussed further in the following chapter.

## Summary

This chapter has provided updates on the initiatives from ten secondary schools during the academic year of 1995-96. These new initiatives are expressed in a diagram form overleaf, using the audit structure first devised for '*Three to Remember*' which indicated how particular strategies may have a focus on one or more of the following: maintaining and monitoring attendance, non-curriculum-related or curriculum-related support.

Overall, the new initiatives involved certain common key developments, which were summarised as: enhancing existing provision (e.g. improving attendance surveillance or extending vocational opportunities); greater analysis of school data to detect correlations between attendance, behaviour and achievement; more specific targeting of pupils exhibiting difficulties in these areas; and more involvement by pupils themselves (and sometimes their parents) in addressing or monitoring disaffected behaviours.

A recurring issue in each of these was the need to convince existing staff of the merit and worth of new approaches to counter disaffection, in order to embed them within schools' structures and systems. This in turn is likely to require new understandings of the causes and meaning of disaffected behaviour, and suggests the importance of professional development and awareness raising for teachers in the area of disaffection.



## DISAFFECTION STRATEGIES : UPDATES & DEVELOPMENTS

| <b>NEW INITIATIVES: WHOLE-SCHOOL LEVEL</b>   |                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                    |  |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
|                                              | <b>ATTENDANCE RELATED FOCUS [MAINTAINING AND MONITORING STRATEGIES]</b>                                                                                                                        | <b>NON-CURRICULUM RELATED FOCUS [PUPIL BEHAVIOUR, ATTITUDE, RELATIONSHIPS ]</b>                                                                                                             | <b>CURRICULUM RELATED FOCUS [CURRICULUM ADAPTATION STRATEGIES]</b>                                 |  |
| <b>Policies</b>                              | <b>Attendance policy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more accessible literature to all parents</li> </ul>                                                                         | <b>Behaviour policy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• regenerating pupil interest in school rules (e.g. school council)</li> <li>• Staff working parties on behaviour</li> </ul> |                                                                                                    |  |
| <b>Structures (organisation - timetable)</b> | <b>Registration by IT:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• analysis leading to identification of potential truants</li> <li>• regular spot checks</li> <li>• lesson checks</li> </ul> | <b>IT programmes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitoring behaviour</li> </ul>                                                                                              | Achievement classes – focus on numeracy and literacy                                               |  |
|                                              | <b>Manual registration system:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• suspicious absence form (filled in by all teachers)</li> </ul>                                                     | <b>Form tutors: extended time for study skills</b>                                                                                                                                          | GNVQs<br>PSE as GNVQ Part One<br>Yr 9 pupils - life skills<br>SEN individual programmes            |  |
|                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attendance</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                 | Individual pupil planner/organiser to self-monitor/record                                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• behaviour</li> <li>• homework completion</li> </ul>       |  |
|                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pupil self-referral</li> </ul>                                                                                                                        | <b>In-school Support Units</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contracts with parents for entry</li> <li>• extension of time in unit</li> </ul>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increase in resources, e.g. computer installed</li> </ul> |  |
|                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• punctuality</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                | Monitoring sheets laid out in staffroom <i>re:</i>                                                                                                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• behaviour</li> <li>• homework, equipment</li> </ul>       |  |
|                                              | <b>Rewards and Sanctions</b>                                                                                                                                                                   | Increasing the timing and currency of rewards, (e.g. half termly for attendance) mugs, pens, book tokens, etc.                                                                              |                                                                                                    |  |

**NEW INITIATIVES: SCHOOL-BASED ROLES**

|        | <b>ATTENDANCE RELATED FOCUS [MAINTAINING AND MONITORING STRATEGIES]</b>                                      | <b>NON-CURRICULUM RELATED FOCUS [PUPIL BEHAVIOUR, ATTITUDE, RELATIONSHIPS]</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>CURRICULUM RELATED FOCUS [CURRICULUM ADAPTATION STRATEGIES]</b>                                                                                     |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Staff  |                                                                                                              | INSET provision for new staff on behaviour policy and practice                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | INSET on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading/basic literacy</li> <li>• teaching and learning styles</li> <li>• differentiation</li> </ul> |
|        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EWS staff</li> </ul>                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Closer liaison role with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BSS staff</li> <li>• FE college</li> </ul>                                          |
|        | Appointment of additional office staff                                                                       | School Community Education Officer developing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• home/school/community links</li> <li>• parents' support group/parental involvement in school</li> <li>• learning opportunities for parents in school</li> <li>• extracurricular provision</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                                                        |
|        | Mentoring of targeted pupils with attendance/punctuality difficulties                                        | SENCO for each year group re pupils with EBD                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Mentoring for Y10-11 pupils through GCSE. In Y11 15-20 minutes per fortnight                                                                           |
|        |                                                                                                              | Counselling by H of Y for pupils with behaviour difficulties                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Staff member i/c curriculum links re Y6 and 7                                                                                                          |
|        | Research into links between pupil performance and attendance and behaviour                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                        |
|        | School Counsellor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• extension to role</li> <li>• screening</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                        |
|        |                                                                                                              | Pupil Support Programme Coordinator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pro-active role in counselling and supporting academically pupils at risk of exclusion</li> </ul>                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                        |
|        |                                                                                                              | GCSE Revision courses in the Easter holidays                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                        |
| Adults |                                                                                                              | Mentors (from community)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                        |
| Pupils |                                                                                                              | Senior students to mentor new Y7 pupils                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Sixth-formers helping with reading                                                                                                                     |

**NEW INITIATIVES: EXTERNAL SUPPORT**

|                                         | <b>ATTENDANCE RELATED FOCUS [<i>MAINTAINING AND MONITORING STRATEGIES</i>]</b> | <b>NON-CURRICULUM RELATED FOCUS [<i>PUPIL BEHAVIOUR, ATTITUDE, RELATIONSHIPS</i>]</b>     | <b>CURRICULUM RELATED FOCUS [<i>CURRICULUM ADAPTATION STRATEGIES</i>]</b>                        |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Community and other institutions</b> | Wearing of badges by pupils when out of school to authorise absence            | Initiatives involving youth workers and local community groups (e.g. anti drugs campaign) | General option for vocational courses at local college<br><br>TEC and local business initiatives |
|                                         |                                                                                | Voluntary sector initiatives                                                              |                                                                                                  |
| <b>LEA-based services</b>               | Increased inter-agency working with EWS, EPS, Family Therapy                   |                                                                                           | Advisory Service subject specific support                                                        |
|                                         |                                                                                | BSS working with schools re behaviour policies                                            |                                                                                                  |

### CHAPTER THREE                      DISAFFECTION STRATEGIES: REFLECTIONS AND EVALUATION

The final aim of the 'School Attendance, Truancy and Exclusions' project was to evaluate the effectiveness of innovative strategies aimed at tackling truancy and exclusions. The original audit, outlined in Report One (*Three to Remember*) and updated in the previous chapter, had been intended as a preliminary 'reconnoitring' contribution to this end. Throughout the study, the views of key school staff and pupils on each of the initiatives encountered were collected. In addition, during the 1996 fieldwork programme, all school-based staff interviewees were specifically asked about the challenges and successes of their institution's initiatives and whether, in hindsight, they would have done anything differently. This section of the report summarises and extends their evaluative comment; and provides illustrative extracts from pupil interviews.

As already noted, the many individual initiatives aimed at addressing disaffection in effect covered improving **'maintaining and monitoring' strategies, behaviour-related support programmes** and/or **alternative curriculum provision**; and one outcome of the original audit was to identify the considerable overlap in the activities of staff operating with youngsters experiencing attendance or behaviour problems.

A further level of interdependency was recognised from the original audit: success in strategies involving innovative school-based roles or external support undoubtedly worked best when complemented by a whole-school policy – and particularly senior management – commitment. In the same way, new policy initiatives and intentions were likely to be better realised when additional roles and external support were incorporated in strategic planning.

This chapter attempts to take evaluative comment further, and directly reviews five of the most commonly adopted new initiatives to emerge from the additional Grants for Educational Support and Training (GEST) funding opportunities available to schools since 1994. These are:

- IT systems (attendance and behaviour surveillance);
- rewards and sanctions;
- within-school units;
- school-based support roles; and
- alternative curriculum provision

An official evaluation of the GEST 20 initiatives has, of course, already been completed by Learmonth *et al.* (1995), and some of the findings of this study certainly reinforce their conclusions. Nevertheless, the present chapter attempts to provide a further level of analysis and depict the key qualities of success in addressing disaffection.

One aspect of this review is to note from the outset that the five initiatives can have a very different emphasis: they may be intended as a strategy to **detect** and generally **discourage** disaffected behaviours, but not directly address or **diminish** underlying causes of pupils' dislocation from school opportunities. Hence, any straight comparison between the relative effectiveness of the five major initiatives seems fruitless: successfully combating disaffection is likely to require attention on all these fronts simultaneously.

As a preliminary comment, it is also worth pointing out that a striking feature of the final review was the relentless recurrence of two very simple main factors underpinning an initiative's success – the attitude of existing staff to the innovation and the amount and permanence of the resourcing it received. The implications of this are discussed in detail in the concluding section of the chapter – but, as an overview, the fact that it is **people** as well as **money** which make the difference is worth highlighting from the outset.

## **IT Systems**

Schools which had implemented an IT system for registration pinpointed a range of actual or potential benefits: speed of information; the potency of its printout as a record with parents; the possibility of analysing general trends in non-attendance; its invaluable administrative support in compiling attendance figures; the capacity to generate letters of concern; the potential to incorporate other information (e.g. on behaviour and achievement) for comprehensive pupil records.

Notwithstanding these advantages, the issues consistently raised by the schools included:

- the amount of clerical time required for utilising the system's full potential, the conviction (as well as competence) of office staff in running the system, and the equable ('no blame'!) relationship between office staff and teachers, especially during its introductory period;
- the advantage of training more than one senior staff member as a key operator or supervisor of the system, and the inclusion of Heads of Year (or equivalent pastoral middle managers) in any formal training;
- sensitivity to form tutors' concerns about a new non-manual system – hostility and negative attitudes generally were frequently reported; convincing staff of the system's advantages was acknowledged as a particular problem in a number of instances, although the additional resources available with some systems (such as pagers or the capacity to monitor behaviour) may be an incentive;
- the value of piloting the new system in a limited capacity (e.g. within one year group first) prior to whole-school introduction;
- the need for providing training for staff about IT's potential for analysing trends and the statistical significance of quantitative output; and

- the requirement for sufficient hardware resource back-up.

Beyond that, the power of an IT system itself to inhibit and reduce truanting behaviours among some pupils clearly depended on its prominence within the school, and the only occasion when researchers found any significant impact of IT registration upon pupil consciousness was when the system was applied on a subject lesson by lesson basis, and/or when the existence of first day absence follow-up was well known to pupils and/or parents.

Put together, this all suggests that IT systems require a considerable investment in time, resources, staff and training before real benefits can accrue. Those benefits certainly were felt to empower schools to accurately identify the nature and scale of their non-attendance problems. Notwithstanding this, pupil comment appeared to fully recognise that such systems do not alone resolve or address some of the causes of disaffection which underpin the action of truancy.

**PUPIL EVALUATIVE COMMENT: IT registration systems**

*We've got a [IT system]. It's like an electronic register and you can go through it ... that's a good system. If teachers have got suspicions that you're wagging it with a mate, all they have to do is look it up on the [IT] register, and look at their attendance and other people's attendance, and work it out from there that they've been wagging it.*

(Female, Upper School)

*[The IT system's] been brought in cos with the other registers people could register at dinner and then bag a lesson they didn't like. With [this system] soon as you register at dinner, at the next lesson your name automatically flashes up if you're not there, and it automatically sends a letter home, so that's why they brought it in – to stop truancy. It definitely encourages some people to come to school cos they don't want to get caught truanting ... it scares some people, they don't wag it any more ... they're quicker at chasing people up ... but there's still truancy going round.*

(Female, Upper School)

*They use an IT register ... They've made it worse, I think it's stupid having these registers ... there's no point, [the kids] are going to do it again ... I don't know much about [the system], the teachers don't explain it. It doesn't make any difference to me, it's just like another registration I don't normally go to.*

(Female, Upper School)

## **Rewards and Sanctions**

Rewarding attendance (and also behaviour as well as curriculum achievement) was a universal component of schools' general maintaining and monitoring strategies. A rich array of points or merit systems, certificates, badges, material prizes or privileges ('perks') was in evidence among the sample, with the schools also demonstrating that perhaps the one common feature of any effective reward system was that it was prepared to change and adapt its 'currency' in order to remain a relevant incentive to the pupil recipients. Varying rewards for different key stages was one aspect of this, and particularly an issue at key stage 4. Equally, target groups varied across the schools – whole class, individuals, and even self-selected syndicates of pupils were in evidence. Children with attendance or behaviour problems were sometimes singled out for special treats (such as educational trips out of school), if they could maintain a good or improving record in these areas of difficulty. Lotteries and raffles for 'star' prizes also featured. Other key factors mentioned by staff included:

- the popularity of 'leisure'-oriented prizes (vouchers to McDonald's, outings, etc.); and
- the need for any scenario of reward-giving to be sensitive to pupils who may not like public acclaim.

Pupil perspectives on their schools' reward systems for attendance proved quite dramatically that the effectiveness and value of incentives were indeed in no way unanimous. One in eight of the pupil sample spoke of rewards for attendance as being irrelevant and/or inappropriate, and stated they either threw them away, did not bother to achieve them or felt they simply suffered a surfeit of such tokens. However, about one in six did feel rewards were some encouragement to come to school. Reward systems being useful for Records of Achievement and future job prospects were mentioned predominantly by upper school pupils, while younger pupils tended to mention benefits in terms of increased self-esteem. Notably, a high number of boys spoke positively of rewards if they had a currency which could be exchanged for, or pooled towards, something of more value (prizes, trips, privileges, etc).



Sanctions for non-attendance were felt to be effective by a quarter of the pupil sample; however, one-quarter stated that in their view such sanctions did not work. Pupil responses suggested that the key factor in any attendance-related sanction's effectiveness or lack of it was parental reinforcement of the punishment. Other negative responses referred to not caring about the punishment, believing the sanctions were not strict enough or could be avoided by 'beating the system' through intercepting letters, forging signatures, getting friends to ring school and so on; or averring they would not 'do' the punishment anyway. The prospect of punishment for non-attendance 'worked' for those pupils who were concerned about their school record affecting job prospects; for those who said they didn't like to be in trouble; or were concerned about the particular sanction threatened.

When behaviour was discussed, pupils in the sample focused overwhelmingly on school systems of sanctions. Almost half of the sample thought that the system of sanctions currently operating in their school was effective. As with attendance, views of why they worked included: getting into trouble at home; fear of having something on their record which might affect future prospects; and the loss of some form of privilege (often extracurricular activities). A particularly strongly felt component of punishment was where loss of contact with peers and friends was involved.

Just over one-third of the sample chose to comment that the system of sanctions for behaviour was not effective: a higher negative response rate than for attendance. Examples of these negative responses included those pupils who said they were not bothered about the punishment; those who felt its effects were only temporary; those who felt it made pupils worse (this was especially evident where some injustice had been perceived); those who saw the involvement of parents as a determining factor; those who perceived it to be unfair; and those who felt parents did not support punishments.

Overall, the pupil sample were not as aware of rewards for behaviour as they were of rewards for good attendance. Approximately one-fifth thought that the system of

rewards in their school for behaviour was effective, again suggesting they had less impact than attendance rewards. Positive responses were similar to those given by pupils when asked about rewards for attendance: namely, their value for Records of Achievement (upper school pupils); their benefits in terms of self-esteem (mainly lower and primary school pupils); as a form of encouragement (mainly primary school pupils); and their value as a form of currency to exchange for prizes or privileges.

Negative responses to rewards for behaving well formed two main categories: those who commented on the irrelevance or inappropriateness of the reward itself (*'It's just like a piece of paper'*), and those who commented on the unfairness of the way they were given out (some teachers did not give them out at all). As with attendance rewards, some pupils again commented on the embarrassment of going up in front of peers to receive rewards for behaviour.

Put together, pupil perspectives would suggest that the existence of penalties and rewards largely only confirmed existing pro-school attitudes, rather than actually creating such attitudes among the already disaffected. Rather like IT surveillance strategies, their potency was minimal for pupils whose non-attendance or behavioural difficulties actually reflected some underlying social and personal or curriculum-related problem, unless they were associated and integrated with other forms of focused support and corroboration from home.

**PUPIL EVALUATIVE COMMENT: rewards and sanctions**

*I used to think [certificates] were just a load of rubbish and rip 'em up ... since I've been talking with [EWO] I've got ten in two weeks. I shows me Dad and he gives me some money for being good.*

(Male, Upper School)

*If they gets merits, they rip them up cos they're not worth having ... just like little card papers.*

(Male, Lower School)

*... makes me do my homework cos I don't want to get put on report for not doing my homework, and attitude and behaviour as well cos then I'll get in serious trouble when I get home ... cos you have to live at home, but you don't have to live at school.*

(Male, Upper School)

*[sanctions] don't work, cos some people get a kick out of it, say, like, they think 'Ooh look what I've done' and like they think it's really good to be bad, and they show off about it. So then they'll do it even more so they can show off even more. [Detention and the isolation room] is like an achievement for some people. It works for some people, but not everybody – it only works for those that are not often bad.*

(Male, Upper School)

**Within-School Units**

The variation in the titles, usage and purpose of within-school units, where children with behavioural and sometimes attendance problems were placed, was much in evidence among the sample, and has already been commented upon in Report One. It was noted that, for some schools, locations entitled 'isolation' or 'withdrawal' units were among the first line of sanctions, and time spent there was short-term (e.g. for the rest of the lesson, for up to a day); whereas in other instances, entry to such units took place at a later stage in the sanction system, and was for longer periods of time (for a week or more), and so was associated with more serious or sustained offences. A key variation was the degree to which entry to any such unit was meant as a censure, with very overt deprivation and restrictions to pupils' social opportunities or whether it was intended as a remediating strategy, with specially appointed staff providing focused behaviour modification programmes and/or learning support. These latter units tended to be characterised by the fact they offered open-ended

and/or part-time placements and often included self-referral opportunities for pupils. Perhaps the other major difference lay in the value system underpinning the unit, and whether its underlying purpose was ultimately to support and protect staff and other pupils (and maintain the school discipline system), or to assist pupils whose behaviour was a recognisable 'special' need.

Key factors of successful units are perhaps hard to pinpoint when such variance of purpose exists. Indeed, it is possible that schools could simultaneously run both types of unit (short-term reprisal and longer stay remediation). Nevertheless, collating parental, pupil and staff perspectives, it would seem that for in-school units involving some longevity of stay, the features which do effect some change in pupils' disaffected behaviours invariably included at least some of the following:

- a programme of support for managing or modifying problem behaviour;
- the opportunity to establish a relationship with an adult who demonstrated understanding and respect for the child, as well as clear expectations of behaviour;
- the opportunity for some kind of academic-related achievement; and
- parental involvement – or at least cooperation – with the processes of remediation being attempted.

For those units operating with a stronger emphasis on reprisal and restriction, such underlying features, or indeed principles, did not seem to apply so overtly. Typically, they were operated by existing senior school staff rather than those with a particular special needs expertise, and were responsive to the behavioural outbursts or 'breakdowns' of pupils, rather than functioning in any proactive and preventative capacity. Immediate containment of and reprisal for difficult-to-manage behaviour was a prime function. Notwithstanding this, the expertise of experienced staff to offer sensitive support alongside skilful control was in evidence. Common issues emerging from examples of these units in the sample included:

- difficulties with the logistics of staffing;

- the adequacy of curriculum resources, including the availability of work from subject teachers; and
- lack of clarity and consistency in a unit's usage by staff as part of any hierarchy of sanctions.

Those units which were in use as reprisal-oriented placements often had pupil views reflecting this last point. Youngsters would refer to the inequity of referral, and, in consequence, very much express indifference to the sanction. Others stated their dislike of isolation from friends, their concern about parental reaction and so on. This division of viewpoint again suggests it may be that any sanction *ipso facto* can impact upon pupils who operate within certain pro-social, pro-authority boundaries. Yet for those with lower capacities to conform to social expectations and norms, formal expressions of non-acceptance and penalty such as isolation units do not resolve or solve the problem. In contrast, there were examples of pupils suggesting that their experience of within-school units offering longer-term placements did make some positive impact, but in these instances, reference was also made to one or more of the kinds of features which characterised those units offering supportive remediation.

Equally, there were accounts of the value of schools' offering a safe location for some kind of supportive and temporary 'time out' to those children who found managing their own behaviour difficult.

**PUPIL EVALUATIVE COMMENT: within-school units**

*It's made a bit of a difference to my behaviour ... cos when I was in the unit if you were shouting out you'd get into trouble, if you never had the equipment you needed you'd get a detention and when you went back to normal classes it makes you well-prepared and put your hand up cos you're used to doing it in the unit and everything. But with some pupils it just doesn't work.*

(Male, Upper School)

*You're just like using the unit to do your work, you're not allowed to talk and stuff. Doesn't really work, cos you are just doing what you would've done in class really. You just have to be quiet and get on with it. You still feel angry.*

(Female, Lower School)

*[In the unit] Mr R treats you properly, not like a normal teacher would, cos a normal teacher shouts at you but when say, if you're doing something wrong he at least he give you a warning and tells you not to do it again, the normal teachers they shout at you.*

(Male, Lower School)

*... a lot of people come here to the unit, and the people who come here say it makes it a lot easier, because they have stress at home, some of them, and problems and that.*

(Female, Lower School)

*The unit has made a difference to me – I don't get in any trouble and I'm getting good at reading ... it's like a smaller group, they don't make a lot of noise, but if you're in a big class they do and you can't do your work. ... I don't get into trouble now cos I'm not hanging around with my fellow pupils ... before I was fighting people in my class, but I don't do that anymore now.*

(Male, Upper School)

### **School-Based Support Roles**

Many of the schools within the sample were utilising received funding to initiate some version of innovative, non-teacher, school-based role, the purpose of which was to support (by counselling, mentoring, ‘buddying’, supervising, etc.) individuals or groups of pupils exhibiting disaffected behaviours. The origin of the personnel appointed to these roles varied – they may have had Educational Welfare, Behaviour Support or Social Service backgrounds and varying amounts of psychotherapeutic and counselling training. However, essentially the role was characterised by the establishing of positive personal relations with a small number of pupils – and often their families – in order then to begin to remediate the behaviours causing concern. There were many accounts of extremely successful interventions of this kind: parents and pupils invariably spoke of the people undertaking these roles with high regard and gratitude for the positive outcomes they achieved. Specific examples of ‘turning around’ school-phobic behaviours and also effecting change to pupils exhibiting very disruptive behaviours have been given in earlier reports, and the common factor underpinning these achievements appeared to be the youngsters’ sense that someone was valuing them, giving them understanding, respect, positive regard as well as specific support in their effort to change. Variations in the role clearly existed: in particular, the degree to which the focus was on targeted children (as opposed to being responsive to pupils’ and staff’s requests for support); how far individual or group activity characterised the intervention; whether the mentoring included any academic and career-oriented or leisure-focused support; how much parental involvement could be pursued. Another common feature of this school-based support role (and a component of its success with pupil and parent clients) was the sense that it was distinct and different from that of school staff, conveying a *‘neutrality of interest’* to the parents and pupils involved. Yet this very singularity could sometimes produce ambiguity and confusion about the role for other pupils and teachers. That being the case, key features for the successful integration of these support workers included:

- the adequate provision of resources, particularly a physical location with an appropriate ambience for individual and group encounters;
- clarification of the role’s purpose and parameters with staff and pupils;

- recognition and acclaim for successful outcomes of the role, so that any positive achievement or improvement in behaviour and/or attendance is acknowledged by existing staff; and
- senior management support and backing.

The successful implementation of the role clearly depended on other factors, not least the individual skill, expertise and energy of the support workers themselves. More than that, however, the accounts of particularly positive outcomes came from those schools where the support role offered more than just in-school counselling opportunities, but also included such features as specific behaviour management techniques; outreach work to pupils' homes; contact with the school's community and its primary partner schools; liaison with other agencies; involvement in extracurricular and/or vocational education activities; and even classroom-based support. Being on hand to respond to incidents of unanticipated difficult behaviour by pupils in school also featured as a further valuable aspect of the role in some instances. All these components most obviously required time to establish personal relations, trust, respect, as well as contacts within the community and with other agencies, etc. Equally, time was needed to develop resources and materials to support such behaviour-related activity: in effect it was a specialised 'remediating' PSE curriculum which was sometimes under construction. Thus, a major irony surrounding the institution of these support worker roles must lie in the fact that their funding and hence very existence was largely short-term. Developing the role's full potential was undoubtedly seriously curtailed by the very nature of the initiative which brought it into existence.

Other key issues to consider within the role's implementation included:

- the specific skills of counselling youngsters, particularly when family factors would need taking into account, as well as the sensitive and 'thorny' issue of confidentiality for minors;
- the composition of any group work for pupils experiencing behaviour difficulties;



- the opportunities made available for liaison with key teaching staff – form tutors, Year Heads, special needs teachers; and
- the range of personality types and disaffected behaviours any one support worker could work with successfully: the precise mix of gender, the particular skills and strengths of the support worker, as well as the expression of disaffection being addressed (school phobia versus disruption in school) may influence the outcome and effectiveness of the role .

On this last point, it was clear that certain youngsters related to the support role more successfully: there were examples of particular rapport between a young female Education Welfare Assistant and her school-phobic girl clients; and between an ex-police physical training instructor and disruptive boys. Indeed, perhaps one of the examples of the role at its most effective was when the support worker or counsellor could operate as a ‘matchmaker’ to link up students with appropriate support services, vocational opportunities or voluntary sector initiatives. However, again the issue of time and the embeddedness of the role emerged: success undoubtedly was connected to the range of contacts and networks created by the support worker.

‘Matchmaking’ might also include the use of peers from school or adults from the local community as mentors, and this was a further development of school-based support. Variations on the peer support role were in evidence: some schools had used the Years 7 and 8 pupils to support children at the transfer stage; others used key stage 4 or sixth-formers to mentor targeted pupils experiencing problems. Very positive feedback did emerge about these roles, particularly the use of sixth-formers, or pupils who themselves had had a history of disaffection now reformed. Actually being a peer mentor was also affirmed as a particularly valuable experience for those on the fringes of disaffection. Equally, the merit of peers in more generally responsive ‘first-line listening/counselling roles’, mediators or as part of anti-bullying initiatives was asserted. Indeed peer support roles were described by one respondent as ‘... *an enormous and, as yet, largely untapped resource in the fight against disaffection*’.

Equally, adult mentors were said to offer a particularly strong role model, and another reported advantage of this initiative was the better understanding of school which accrued for those members of the local community undertaking a mentoring role.

Key issues to consider in this type of initiative included:

- the time investment required to train pupils and adults for a support role;
- monitoring of the system to prevent pupils exploiting its opportunities to miss lessons etc;
- the necessity of back-up and a continuum of support for complex cases emerging from the mentor system; and
- the clarification of the role with existing staff.

The kinds of qualities offered by these adult and peer mentors undoubtedly incorporated a number of the successful features of other school-based support roles, such as the formation of a relationship with a non-teacher who could offer positive regard, neutrality, easily accessible opportunities for sympathetic listening, an alternative pro-social peer influence, and particularly a role model. For pupil types who might feel particular dislocation from the school – ethnic minorities, boys, those already displaying anti-social behaviour in the local community – this may be a highly significant contribution. However, it would be important to acknowledge that the peer and adult support role was not in itself commensurable with the work of school-based EWOs, Behaviour Support Service (BSS) staff, etc. Clearly, peers and adults from the local community would have neither the *gravitas* nor the expertise to engineer key remediating factors like alternative curriculum opportunities, parental involvement, access to other agencies, programmes of self-management and so on. Thus, such alternative support may be seen as a contribution to a school's efforts to improve the attitudes and interpersonal or affective relations of its disaffected students – and perhaps particularly valuable for those pupils only on the brink of disaffection and alienation from their institution.

**PUPIL EVALUATIVE COMMENT: school-based roles**

*She's a really nice lady, she is the only one I can talk with. ... She makes me happy, right, and she gives us a little star for being in every day ... and she's my best teacher and I've been working well.*

(Female, Lower School)

*... it's alright cos you're getting all your problems off your chest so you feel better ... It's nice cos it's so friendly ... my attendance is getting better and my attitude altogether is getting better as well ... it's better to get all my problems off my chest and after I'd done that I just felt happy altogether ... [We] think she's really nice. People in my group would like to have her all through school.*

(Female, Lower School)

*... when I started seeing [the EWO], she said "if you don't understand something just say", and I didn't understand something so I put me hand up ... and then the teacher said he was pleased with me for not messing about if I didn't understand something. So I'm with [the EWO] on Tuesday as well. On Tuesday it's like about ... temper and all that, cos I've got a short temper. Just talks about it, how you calm it down and all that. And I have help with reading cos I got trouble with reading, I'm not saying I'm thick or nothing, it's just that I can't read certain words. It's just me on Tuesdays, for about an hour. We have like little work-sheets and that ... then we just sits there like talking ... for the rest. Like what I could do to improve my temper and all that. She just says "Look, when you gets in a temper just try to calm down. Talk to someone about it", like a teacher or ... something ... or go to her and talk about it. She goes like if I goes off in a temper, like don't hit 'em just walk away. Cos normally when I used to get in a temper, I used to go like mental and just used to hit 'em. ... I mean she made me improve quite a lot. Maybe cos I gets on alright with [the EWO], cos a load of the teachers I don't get on with and they don't get on with me. Like I ... work with [the EWO] and gets on alright with Mr P ... If I don't get on with 'em, I just does the work and if I needs help ... I just ask ... I've been well-behaved for quite a bit.*

(Male, Upper School)

*... we ... had to sign a contract to say that if we're naughty or anything on Wheels we ain't doing it again or in school we'd miss one week. We had to build a go-kart. Yes I enjoyed it. ... we went off on a Sunday ... of our own time ... and went go-karting at the go-karting centre and one Friday we went off again and done it, we went with [the EWO]. There was two men and they was helping us but ... and [my EWO] was there as well helping us. [We learned skills like] tools and all that, learning what a tool ... like oh that's a screwdriver and a hammer and all that ... you knows it all now ... and welding as well ... before I went to Wheels I used to like get loads of detentions and all that but then I said to myself 'Like I'm doing this Wheels, I knows what I gotta do' and when I'd finished it I knew everything and I thought 'Well I'll just look forward to getting a job when I leaves' ... now like it's me trying to do me work ... if anything goes wrong, I usually just be naughty ... and now I just ask the teacher can he repeat anything.*

(Male, Upper School)

### **Alternative Curriculum Provision and Contexts**

This range of initiatives for disaffected pupils directly addressed the issue of the appropriateness and relevance of the curriculum on offer in school by providing other than National Curriculum or GCSE learning goals. Examples from the sample covered both short-term opportunities and also more sustained provision leading to alternative certification, and the focus could be on either vocational training or basic numeracy and literacy skills. Equally, the provision might be targeted at small groups of already disaffected youngsters, or be a more general option within the school. A further dimension was the locus of provision, i.e. whether the alternative learning opportunities were offered within school resources or involved the facilities and staff of outside agencies, such as FE colleges, the Youth Service or community police.

Examples of short-term vocational provision in the sample usually revolved around specific initiatives run by outside agencies, and typically involved technology-oriented activity such as making a go-kart, car maintenance, etc. The target group was often disaffected boys, and involvement was usually dependent upon the pupil achieving previously agreed targets for behaviour or attendance; hence perhaps its underlying function was as an incentive or reward, rather than a 'parity-of-esteem' alternative to existing curriculum opportunities. That being the case, any lack of opportunities for more sustained involvement and accreditation may be a significant omission in the design of these initiatives, particularly when the reported outcomes were extremely positive in terms of pupil engagement with the task and equally with the personnel who ran the courses.

Within the sample, there were examples of schools or agencies that provided more sustained vocational opportunities, typically involving regular, part-time attendance at an FE college, involvement with Youth Award schemes etc. Positive outcomes were reported, in terms of increased motivation for learning and equally renewed respect for the 'teacher/trainer' role, and this again suggests the effectiveness of alternative curriculum provision as a strategy for the disaffected. Notwithstanding this, the issue of follow-on and relevance to existing curriculum provision within the mainstream school did surface as a concern.

A further variation was evident in some of the sample schools that were attempting to initiate or extend vocational opportunities within school by setting up GNVQ courses or developing alternative courses offering school-based certification, for pupils who could not manage GCSE courses. This in-house provision might typically involve a combination of work experience, community service, physical activity and residential experience, skills-based learning, everyday technology, etc. Again, positive outcomes were reported, though the financial and time implications could mean these initiatives had a limited lifespan, and hence opportunities to extend staff expertise, further develop contacts and refine the provision were lost. Staff also spoke about the need for accreditation of some sort in order to ensure that such alternative curriculum experiences were injected with a formal acknowledgement of achievement.

Finally, some schools were providing alternative accreditation and courses in basic literacy and numeracy such as Achievement in Literacy Awards, graduated assessment schemes in mathematics, and again positive outcomes were reported in terms of pupil motivation and the possibility of continuing with accreditation post-16.

As an overview, a number of the same key issues in all these different kinds of provision did surface. These included:

- whole-staff commitment to and recognition of the value and purpose of alternative curriculum initiatives;
- the status and value placed on such alternative learning opportunities by pupil and parent culture;
- the alternative provision's lack of opportunities for follow-on (continuity and progression) in the pupils' learning; and
- restrictions to the further development of provision due to financial constraints, including resources, staff time and opportunities for training.

Within the sample, alternative curriculum opportunities were often in the hands of individuals who had a particular interest or commitment in the area, and successful

implementation was dependent on their individual initiative, energy and skill in linking with other agencies. Yet, clearly, the requirements for embedding alternative curriculum provision in the mainstream school culture included major tasks such as raising awareness among teaching staff, pupils and parents, networking with relevant outside agencies and procuring sustained funding. The likelihood of lone enthusiasts achieving all these fundamental prerequisites is at best precarious, especially given the kinds of other commitments daily life in school inevitably demands. Thus, while the views of those involved in and receiving alternative provision were highly positive, the mechanisms for its sustained presence in schools seem extremely under-resourced.

**PUPIL EVALUATIVE COMMENT: alternative curriculum provision**

*They teach you and you do lots of practical work, hardly any writing. Sometimes they show you how to do something, sometimes they tell you how to do it, or you finish something off. There's only two different areas in school where you can do practical work ... the rest is all writing, there at college it's all practical work.*

*It's made me sure that I know I want to be an engineer, eventually I want to be self-employed. In past years when I was misbehaving, I thought I wouldn't get anywhere, but I now know I can do it, I'm more confident in myself. I get on with my work a lot more and I've calmed down a lot. I think kids feel more responsible at college; the reason they mess about at school is to get teachers back and things like that, or teachers wind them up ... but none of it happens at college. People act more sensible when they're there, cos they get treated like an adult, so they'll act like an adult.*

(Male, Upper School)

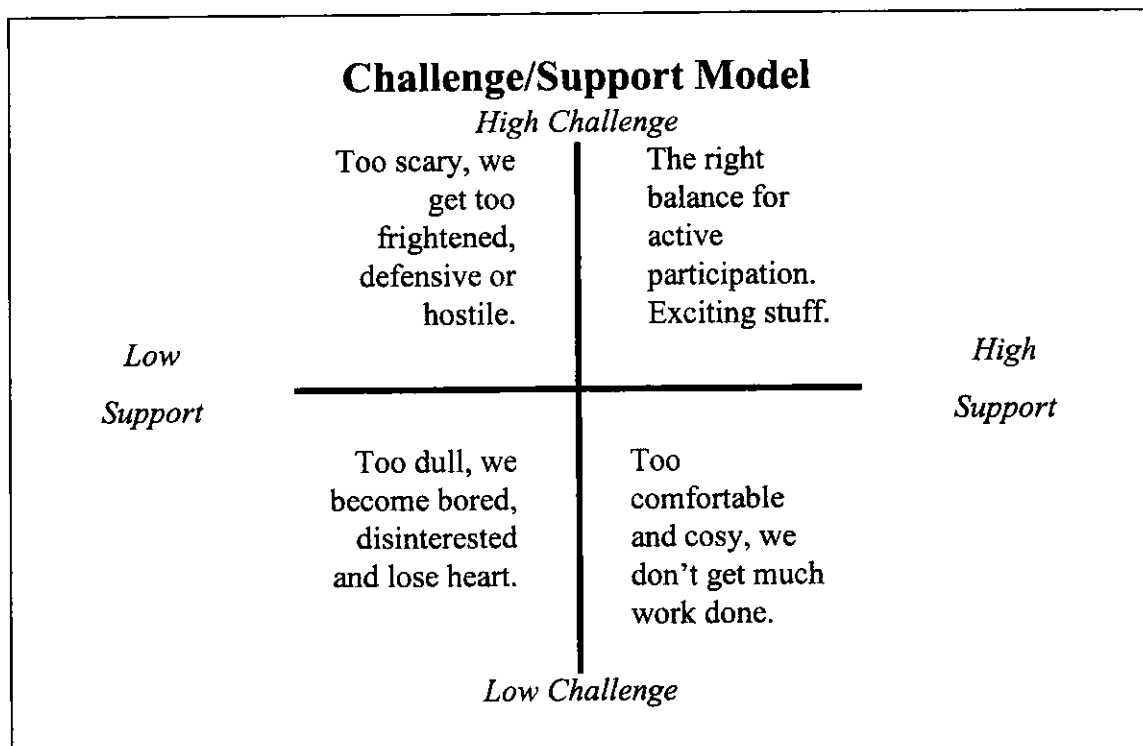
*There's less pressure on you. It sounds strange but ... because it's less strict you behave more; because you can have a laugh, you behave more. I suppose it's sort of reverse psychology; [at school] you just get the odd teacher you can mess around with but at college you can have a laugh whenever you want so the novelty wears off ... they speak to you in different ways and because they speak to you in different ways, you learn in different ways, because the college tutor will show you more about it, he'll show you what it looks like, you remember the practical things about the object, but a teacher at school they'd make you write about it, its properties and stuff and you'd learn more of the written stuff...*

*teachers at school they've got a thing about this power thing, they think they've always got to be on top, but at college they're not like that, they try and put you on the same level as them. It's a bit of a loss that college is totally separate from school, what you do at college you don't bring it back to school, that's college and this is school. It'd be better if you could come back to school and be given a chance to try and do what you've been shown, or try and do it again without any help at school. I like the freedom, I enjoy the freedom of getting there by myself. It's like they're giving you a sense of responsibility, trust, to get there by yourself. Having had a taste of it, it leaves you with a taste for more.*

(Male, Upper School)

**Overview: Three to make sure**

While direct comparison of initiatives – and individual schools – was eschewed in this final evaluative chapter, analysis has begun to expose quite clearly that certain approaches do have more impact upon particular types of disaffected pupil. The evidence would suggest that IT systems may be a particularly effective tool in detecting patterns of pupil disaffected behaviours and also, if rigorously applied, can deter some youngsters (and their parents) from flouting certain attendance and behaviour expectations. Rewards and sanctions similarly may usefully encourage and reinforce pro-school behaviour and attitudes. Nevertheless, the strategies which most effectively remediate the more sustained or serious examples of alienated or dysfunctional behaviours invariably appeared to offer some extra dimension of support and opportunity for the youngster. This is perhaps best explained by applying the ‘challenge and support model’ which is commonly proposed in counselling and therapeutic intervention.



Source: *First steps in Counselling* (Sanders, P., 1994)

Clearly, this figuration indicates that a ‘high challenge/high support’ model offers particular advances. School-based initiatives to address disaffection that seemed to incorporate these characteristics best were those offering a combination of positive affective relations mixed with the presentation of opportunities for success and achievement – whether in the area of academic, vocational or ‘constructive leisure’ activity (and possibly, at its best, in a number of these fields simultaneously). In this way, the success and potential of the ‘matchmaking’ component of school-based roles (i.e. an individual with the capacity to network and tailor programmes of support and opportunity to individuals) become clearer. This may explain why there are so many reports of the effectiveness of initiatives in the voluntary sector which incorporated both pastoral support and vocational/leisure activity.

‘High support/low challenge’ could perhaps characterise those initiatives which offered more limited pastoral counselling. While some youngsters, particularly those with the self motivation and ability to achieve already in their academic, social and/or leisure lives, might be well suited by these kind of interventions, they appeared to be less successful with others whose difficulties revolved around an academic, social or interpersonal dysfunctionality.

‘High challenge/low support’ may characterise those initiatives with a strong reprisal element – withdrawal units, exclusion and suspensions and so on – or even reflect the way some disaffected pupils experience mainstream classroom expectations. The likelihood of successfully addressing disaffection is low in these types of intervention.

Similarly, general surveillance strategies (e.g. IT registration) and school reward systems could perhaps be best explained as a ‘low support/low challenge’ model of intervention, in that they often appear merely to symbolise a school’s normative expectations which the already disaffected pupil finds great difficulty in relating to.

Notwithstanding this speculative overview, above all it seems likely that individual pupils will have very different and personalised versions of what constitutes ‘challenge’ and ‘support’. ‘Effectiveness’, then, may involve first diagnosis and then



careful construction of an intervention which incorporates particular elements from the repertoire of measures that are known to achieve success, and in this way provide the right combination of challenge and support. Whatever the particular combination or emphasis, the elements which do effectively address disaffection would appear to be threefold:

- **the opportunity to establish positive personal relations** with an adult who can represent and model pro-social values;
- **the opportunity to achieve academic/vocational success** which also offers a sense of coherence and progression for the youngster's career and learning pathway; and
- **the opportunity to appreciate constructive leisure activity** which provides a sense of enjoyment, personal achievement and self-worth.

In conclusion, it is rectifying these deficits in young people's lives which appears to turn around disaffection. In order to construct effective strategies for disaffected pupils, these three elements appear to be the basic tools of repair, with some adjustment or varying emphasis to suit particular cases of disaffection.

Back in 1996, the first report from this project presented findings about the causes of disaffection and the focus of school-based strategies to address the problem. It was appropriate to entitle that document '*Three to Remember*'. The present chapter has taken that analysis of effective strategies further, and its conclusion must be that it is the careful calibration of **positive personal relations, coherent academic/vocational achievement** and '**constructive leisure activity**' which ends up being the essential '**three to make sure**'.

## EPILOGUE

## LISTENING TO PUPILS

*... to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling – an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects – that he had an equivalent centre of self, when the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference. George Eliot*

This brief section completes the report by presenting four more case studies or cameos of pupils, and its purpose is to illustrate in some detail the kinds of behaviours and attitudes which disaffected adolescents can express. The cameos are also used to raise questions about the range of school-based initiatives which may be particularly appropriate to support their palpable needs. It is hoped these may be useful for stimulating discussion and help readers to consider the ‘equivalent centre of self’ in those pupils who display some degree of disaffection.

From the original 160 pupils interviewed as part of the project, these youngsters were selected for further study because they represented a range of academic ability, a diversity of family circumstances and different degrees of alienation from school and education. At the time of the research, two were in mainstream school and two were being educated at a PRU.

The methodological approach involved a series of informal conversations, in and out of the school setting, with a young researcher who built up a one-to-one relationship with each of the young people, involving social encounters and home visits.

Put together, the four stories perhaps illustrate the report’s recurrent theme of the need to reappraise the amount and range of curriculum and pastoral support available in schools serving disadvantaged communities. These cameos certainly reveal how the personal and academic lives of pupils are inextricably linked and ultimately indivisible. Equally, they perhaps raise questions about whether the extracurricular life of a school could play a more significant part in countering disaffection. Above all, the case studies seem to demonstrate how single-focus and short-term initiatives may fail to address the range of needs within a school’s pupil clientele – it is only a major and sustained investment of resources in both

pastoral and curriculum opportunities that can help resolve disaffected behaviours. Indeed, a redefinition of 'parity of esteem' may be required so that supporting the affective and leisure lives of youngsters is given as much status, consideration and investment as their academic or vocational opportunities.

**THE CAMEOS**

## CASE ONE: Kylie

Kylie is just 16 and lives with her mum, Mrs H, and a younger brother and sister. Mrs H is currently studying for a BTec in menswear at a local college, which follows on from a previous course on women's clothing. Kylie has a different father to her younger siblings but neither man lives with the family. Kylie says she has not seen her father since she was about two years old and maintains that this does not bother her 'cos I've lived without him now for so long ... I'm not really interested'. Yet, she talks about him often to the researcher and imagines meeting him ('If he wanted to look me up, he could'), adding 'If he wanted to find me and talk to me, I'd talk to him.'

Kylie admits she is somewhat combative in her attitude to school: 'If the teacher is saying "If you don't like the school you can leave" ... the more determined I am to stay ... just so I can annoy them ... cos they don't like me at the school, cos they see me as a person that expresses my opinions.' She has experienced more than one period of fixed term exclusion. Despite this, Kylie appreciates that qualifications are important: 'If you haven't got an education behind you, you're not going nowhere, are you?' Kylie's commitment to her education appears once again to be somewhat influenced by her feelings about her father. She wants to go into fashion design or law and talks about being noticed and becoming rich like her dad: 'I thought if I ever become famous, then he'll notice me.'

Kylie says she had enjoyed her primary schooling where 'they made it fun to learn', but feels that secondary school is less supportive and caring. Her mum also appears to be critical of Kylie's current school and quoted two incidents when she also had been angry with the school. In one of these, she felt staff had not acted quickly enough when Kylie had been seriously ill and, in the other, she felt they had criticised Kylie unfairly for helping in a medical situation, even when the staff themselves had not known what to do. Kylie herself refers to the latter incident as being unfair. Her mother's hostility is interesting as Kylie asserts that her mum is the biggest influence on her own behaviour: '... the only person who encourages me to behave, or anything like that, is my mum.'

Kylie asserts that the school is 'racist', citing as evidence of this the negative attitudes of some of the teachers towards Asian and black pupils like herself,

something she feels is not helped by the fact that nearly all the teachers are white. Kylie believes: 'I didn't even know what racism was until I came to [this school]'. She thinks that staff at the school hold stereotypical views about black and Asian pupils, 'if you wear a hooded jumper, you must be a criminal; if anything goes missing the blacks or Asians must have stolen it ... if there's too many black or Asian people sticking together, automatically [they think] there's going to be a fight.' She was asked to attend a discussion group for black pupils and feels that the thinking underpinning this was good: '... [the group leader] understands us, so it's cool ... we need to find more people to put more points across and help us in this school'; but the way the project was portrayed (as being for those with 'bad attitudes'), was wrong: 'Everybody felt it was racist, just being singled out, just a way of flinging [you] into a group what you didn't even want to go into.' Nevertheless, Kylie seems to have enjoyed talking in the group about black issues: '... you know, how it's good to be black.' She talks a great deal about her father and her family out in Africa, and despite stating 'you have to move on, just leave all that behind', her desire to learn more about her roots within the discussion group ('... we learn about our history and that') would seem to be indicative of a significant interest.

Kylie appears to be very independent, she has a couple of part-time jobs and mixes with people several years older than herself 'I've got friends everywhere.' At school, she feels she is unfairly victimised: 'I don't have to be doing anything and teachers want to know what I'm doing, where I'm going.' Kylie believes she has been labelled as having a bad attitude and has consequently kept her own records of confrontations with staff: 'It's constant harassment.' She had been a peer mentor for a while, something she felt she had been successful at: ('All the kids used to come and talk to me'), but says the school did not want her to continue with it. She does not believe anyone starts off with 'an attitude', but maintains that 'if the school isn't willing to give you a try, you just give up don't you?' She believes that teachers could do more about the way they treat the pupils: 'If you give respect then they'll respect you.' As an example of giving respect, she cites awareness of different cultures and beliefs.

## **ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION : Kylie**

This case perhaps illustrates a type of disaffection which is highly attitudinal, rather than ability- or achievement-related. Kylie seems to constantly stalk the very limits of acceptable school behaviour, and in so doing, uses up enormous energy which otherwise might be channelled more constructively into her school life.

### **What *positive personal relations* could diminish Kylie's disaffection?**

Roles such as an adult mentor, someone from her own community providing a supportive and encouraging relationship might have helped to develop a pro-school attitude. Equally, some continuation of a peer-mentoring role for Kylie herself seems a possible approach.

### **What *curriculum: academic and/or vocational* issues does this case raise?**

Kylie's drive for finding out about her own cultural identity perhaps says something very significant about current curriculum imperatives in English schools. Reappraising curriculum-design characteristics such as 'relevance', 'breadth' and 'enjoyment' may apply equally to pupils for whom academic attainment is an entirely appropriate route, but whose learning interests are not fully stimulated by the existing specified content.

### **What contribution might school-centred *constructive leisure activities* have made?**

More meaningful and on-going extracurricular activities, particularly incorporating her own culture, might have made some difference, and equally allowed a different relationship to develop between Kylie and some of her teachers.

The limitation of short term, bolt-on strategies to address disaffection perhaps is well illustrated by Kylie's account of the 'black group' initiative. The lack of co-operation or linkage between parent and school may also be in evidence here.

## CASE TWO: Darren

Darren is 16 and lives with his dad, Mr A. His parents were divorced when he was at primary school and he moved away to live with his mother. From the age of six to ten, he, his mother, his brother and his sister suffered from domestic violence at the hands of his mother's boyfriend. When Darren was 11, he and his siblings moved to live with Mr A.

Darren started his new secondary school (School A) later in the school year when friendship groups had already been established, and found it difficult to settle at first. He says he found it much stricter than his previous school and with much more of a work ethos. Some of the work he had found quite difficult, *'and some teachers just wouldn't give me enough help and explain properly'*. However, he does speak positively of some lessons, in particular science. There was a great deal of homework which became a source of contention as Darren says he does not believe in working at home as well as at school. Mr A worked long hours and Darren and his brother and sister had to fend for themselves in the mornings and after school.

There were many arguments at home and at school which led to a great deal of stress. Darren says he became very disruptive, getting into trouble for bullying and fighting:

*I was getting into more trouble and getting suspended and stuff, and fighting more cos I was going home and getting shouted at for not working properly at school, falling out with my dad and arguing with my brother and sister, and then just falling out with everyone altogether, and then getting grounded and stuff ... and waking up next morning, arguing with [dad] then and then going to school and taking all my problems to school.*

Darren says he became friendly with other disruptive pupils and drifted into petty crime outside school. He started taking drugs to try and relieve some of the stress: *'I couldn't really afford it, and I had to pinch money and all sorts to be able to afford it.'* Darren feels that if there had been someone at the school, someone who was not a teacher, who he could have gone and talked to (*'If you're upset or feeling down ...*

*or just general things that are annoying you at school, making you feel unhappy and unwelcome'*), things might have been different.

After he had been given several fixed-term exclusions, a Behavioural Support Teacher started coming into school once a week to work with him for about an hour. This had a positive effect initially, but Darren is of the opinion that *'it was too late really'* as his behaviour soon began to deteriorate again. The next step was to try part-time attendance at the PRU together with part-time attendance at school. However, this was not totally successful, as Darren says he found it difficult to cope: *'I'd just had enough of it really.'* His behaviour at school worsened; he got into more fights and was subsequently permanently excluded towards the end of Year 10. As a result of all the stress he felt he was under at this point in school, Darren says his initial reaction to the permanent exclusion was one of relief. He then attended the PRU full-time where he worked very conscientiously and behaved well: *'You get more attention and if you sort of like get really wound up with work, they allow you to have a five-minute break.'* He liked the smaller groups and less stressful atmosphere, and was keen to complete his education there. However, Mr A was keen for him to go to another school despite the fact that neither the staff at the PRU nor Darren himself felt he was ready for that. He was reintegrated into a new school (School B) at the beginning of Year 11. This placement failed as a result of what Darren believes to be a lack of support on the part of the school and its failure in his eyes to live up to his previous school:

*I didn't like it, but then I thought 'Fair enough', you're not going to like your first day really, and I went there a couple more times and I thought 'No, I really don't like this school' ... I think I was depressed - I was wanting to get back to [School A] and I couldn't and I had to go to [School B] and I didn't like it ... my Head of Year showed me round once, dumped me in a class of people that I never even knew, and I had to find my way around really. And I was quite astonished at how they did it really, because it was very, very poor.*

It was decided that Darren should start attending the PRU again.

## **ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION : Darren**

This case perhaps exemplifies the reverberating impact that long-standing, difficult home circumstances can have on pupil disaffection, and also raises the key issue of reintegration for permanent excludees.

### **What *positive personal relations* could diminish Darren's disaffection?**

Perhaps Darren's case is an example of a need in schools for pupils to have someone fulfilling a counselling or mentoring role, or the value of a 'matchmaker' who could put Darren in touch with a local drug-related disaffection initiative. Darren himself says he found the support of the Behavioural Support Teacher effective at first, but feels it came too late for him. Looking back, he speaks positively of his former school referring to it as '*welcoming*' and reflecting '*You feel safer there than you do at any other school*'. Could more intensive pastoral support have been put in place earlier which might have sustained a positive attitude towards school?

### **What *curriculum: academic and/or vocational* issues does this case raise?**

Could an initiative such as a Homework Club or individuated curriculum mentoring have counteracted some of Darren's antagonism towards doing schoolwork at home? His academic ability to operate successfully within the mainstream curriculum is not in doubt.

### **What contribution might school-centred *constructive leisure activities* have made?**

The value of extracurricular activities, offering challenge with a sense of personal achievement and productively harnessing peer culture, may have been a benefit for Darren.

The issue of careful re-entry to mainstream education is particularly raised by Darren's case. Would an intensive programme of supported reintegration into his new school have made any difference for Darren, or does this case show how much successful reintegration requires appropriate timing (including the pupil's own motivation to return to mainstream)? Finally, his success at the PRU perhaps indicates that, for some pupils, a mainstream classroom at certain times is not always the most suitable option: instead, they can flourish in the smaller and more nurturing environment provided by smaller units.



### CASE THREE: Tracey

Tracey is 16 and lives with her parents, three younger brothers and two younger sisters. An older brother no longer lives at home, having been taken into care a few years ago. He had caused Tracey much unhappiness during her primary schooling because of her fear of his violence towards her: *'I never really got settled ... until my brother left, and then I was too unsettled to settle into anything.'* She suffered from anxiety at this time because of the stress, and ran away from school a few times. Tracey feels that she had to protect her mother and her siblings from this older brother who was violent towards them whenever her father was away. As a result, Tracey believes she grew up too quickly.

On moving to secondary school, she was initially very happy, but this did not last. There were some problems with bullying at first, which resulted in her wanting to change schools. By the end of Year 9, Tracey had started misbehaving and was being excluded from lessons. This involved her sitting outside her Head of Year's office to work. She felt that this put her behind in her work: *'I know you've done something wrong, but it's silly to say you can't get any help cos that's what you go to school for.'* Tracey attributes her difficulties to relationships with some of her teachers yet, by her own admission, she is very outspoken: *'If I think something's wrong, then I'll tell the teacher and I aren't bothered what they say ... But if you do that, they tell you to shut up and sit down.'* After this, she began to truant on a regular basis, deciding that if she was being excluded from lessons *'... you might as well not be there'*. By Year 10, both Tracey's attendance and behaviour had deteriorated: *'I wanted to get treated with the respect of an adult and I wasn't, so I put them in their place'*. She feels that the school was very strict, and, whilst appreciating that a certain level of discipline is necessary, thinks that staff in the school took things too far: *'Why do you have to have a go at the kids 24 hours a day?'*

A contributory factor in her mind is also the fact that she smokes, something she thinks teachers fail to take into account: *'I'm dying for a cig, that's where it all starts.'* She believes that pupils who smoke quite heavily get very wound up when they are deprived of cigarettes during the day.

As the work began to increase during Year 10, Tracey found she was having more and more problems at school and was becoming increasingly unhappy. Finally, she decided she could not stand it any longer and absented herself from school, which resulted in her running away from home for five days. When she returned, she found that her parents did not resolve any of her problems as they had promised to try and do and so she inflicted self-damage. She was then off school for three or four weeks. When she came back to school, she felt no one believed her when she said that school had been the problem: *'... all they wanted to do was talk about stuff.'* Deciding that nothing had changed, Tracey inflicted self-damage on two other occasions. Eventually, she was offered a place at the PRU and was able to avoid the waiting list because her problems were considered to be so severe: *'... they realised it must be serious, cos I kept on running away and doing these things and stuff.'* She began attending the PRU four days a week and her school one day a week. However, Tracey found attending school for one day difficult to sustain: *'I couldn't be doing with it, so I just stopped.'* After consultation between school and the PRU, she then began attending the latter full-time where she found she had no problems with attendance or behaviour. Tracey attributes this to the more relaxed atmosphere of the PRU and the smaller teaching groups: *'... if you can't handle it in your class, all you've got to do is say something and they just let you go out and have five minutes ... If you feel upset, you just tell them.'* She points out that everyone there is well aware that there is a waiting list and consequently does not want to do anything to jeopardise their place: *'They treat you like proper human beings and you don't get that at school.'*

Tracey was studying for her GCSEs and enjoying work experience at a local training centre where she was learning welding and electronics. Unfortunately, by the time of Tracey's third interview, this situation had changed. The Head of the PRU, with whom Tracey had enjoyed a very close, supportive relationship, had left and her relationship with the new Head was not as successful, *'... that's when everything went downhill.'* As a result, she has stopped attending the PRU and is now waiting to receive home tuition. She is no longer using drugs after ending up in hospital as a result of drug abuse, and is planning to undertake an apprenticeship in engineering. The present Head of the PRU is hopeful that he will be able to persuade her to return there to continue her studies.

## **ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION : Tracey**

This case perhaps exemplifies how the complexity of emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) can underpin disaffection. It raises issues about the capacity of school's current pastoral systems to handle such behaviour, and the need for multi-agency support.

### **What *positive personal relations* could diminish Tracey's disaffection?**

Would Tracey have profited from having someone, in a counselling capacity, to talk to about her problems earlier on in her school career? Perhaps she really required social worker/child mental health intervention at a much earlier stage. Could some intensive pastoral support have been put in place which continued once she moved up to secondary school and before her problems became so intense?

### **What *curriculum: academic and/or vocational* issues does this case raise?**

Tracey's obvious aptitude for practical skills perhaps could have been channelled into vocational activities and this might have eased some of her antagonism towards the constraints she feels are imposed by current curriculum options. Would advice or mentoring on managing her exam-related learning have helped?

### **What contribution might school-centred *constructive leisure activities* have made?**

Tracey's attitude to teachers and authority may well have been remediated by constructing new relations with school staff in the context of extracurricular activities, and equally, given her some sense of personal achievement.

Tracey perhaps represents a particularly difficult case of pupil disaffection. Could the school have provided strategies to contain her volatile behaviour, and 'time out/cooling off' techniques and locations have been implemented? How do schools best handle behaviour like Tracey's with such clear emotional difficulties underpinning it?

## CASE FOUR: Tony

Tony is 15 and lives with his mum, Mrs C, and an older sister: two older brothers no longer live at home. His father left when he was at primary school. Mr C is a school caretaker; his mother does not work. Tony has learning difficulties and was statemented in the year before leaving primary school. He thinks much of the work was not appropriate for him his pitily reference to learning difficulties was '[The teachers]... *speed things up*.' Although he did not receive any special needs help until his last year, he does believe primary school built up his confidence and prepared him well for secondary school. However, his grandmother died during his first year of secondary school, which he says upset him badly and, he feels, pushed him further behind. Tony soon began to play truant from school and act aggressively (he commented '*I used to bang my head when I got angry*') problems he attributes to frustration arising from his learning difficulties.

He was eventually excluded from this secondary school after getting into a fight and refusing to do as the teacher asked. He states that the exclusion itself did not bother him because he wanted to attend his current school; it is closer to his home and therefore not as far for him to travel. He started his current school in Year 8 and now receives six hours of special needs support a week, something he believes he could have benefited from earlier in his school career.

Soon after starting this school, where he was also beginning to get into trouble for aggressive behaviour, he asked to join a project which had been set up for pupils experiencing some form of disaffection. Pupils attend the project, which operates from a room in the school, undertaking the work they would be doing in their lessons. Each pupil has an individual action plan with agreed targets and builds up to full lesson attendance again. Tony began attending the project two-and-a-half days a week and going to normal lessons the rest of the time. He says he found it much easier to get on with his work while in the project room: '*... we can do our work quietly without the class disturbing us*.' The pupils also have access to lap-top computers for some of the time. The pupils attending the project recently went on a

trip to Wales, where they went climbing and gorge walking and visited the seaside: '*It was wicked*.' Tony began to find that he did not get into as much trouble in class for fighting: '*I'm a changed man*.' His mother had warned him that he might not get a job if he didn't '*buck up* [his] ideas', and he did not want to jeopardise his place in the project by messing about.

His special needs teacher comments that Tony has a very low level of literacy, recognising probably less than 100 words in the English language. His ability to take something in and retain it until the next day is poor. As a result, he has a lot of problems keeping up in class. Tony himself recognises that he has problems getting work down in his books from the board before teachers rub it off, and thinks there should be more help in class for students like him. Other suggestions he makes are smaller classes or separate classes for special needs pupils. He also feels that there should be someone, '*a counsellor or something*', in school for pupils to talk to about their problems. This is interesting given Tony's experience of bereavement at a particularly sensitive point in his school career. He suggests an older pupil who would understand how they feel, not a teacher '*who might talk about them in the staffroom*'. Tony feels that the project has been very beneficial for him. He now only attends it for one lesson a week and is coping better in lessons, only playing truant for the odd one. '*I'm getting in for my lessons, getting comfortable with my life, everything*.' Tony thinks he would like to be a graphic designer and talks about going to college when he leaves school, one that caters for students with special needs. He speaks positively of the special needs teacher he works with in school, and of the help he has received from the project coordinator. The latter believes that Tony has a clearer image of himself since attending the project and a greater sense of self-worth. Her comments would appear to lend weight to Tony's perception of how he has changed for the better, whilst still recognising his learning difficulties.

## **ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION : Tony**

This case perhaps well illustrates the connections between learning difficulties and disaffected behaviour. Tony was clearly finding life in mainstream classrooms problematic, and it is perhaps also important to recognise the significance of a bereavement in this particular story. Tony's entry to the specialist unit, offering targeted expertise and support within mainstream education, seems a particularly successful strategy.

### **What *positive personal relations* could diminish Tony's disaffection?**

Tony clearly has had the opportunity to establish a close relationship with the project co-ordinator and the Special Needs staff, and it appears to have done much to enhance his self-esteem and reverse his aggressive tendencies. Tony himself can recognise the value of pastoral support for troubled pupils.

### **What *curriculum: academic and/or vocational* issues does this case raise?**

The changed context of learning i.e. smaller groups and more intensive support within the project, was obviously a highly appropriate strategy for Tony, and seems to have done much to alleviate his frustration at his own learning difficulties.

### **What contribution might school-centred *constructive leisure activities* have made?**

Tony's delight at his extracurricular opportunities was very apparent and again may signal the value of integrating such activity into strategies for the disaffected.

This particular school-based strategy did appear to offer a successful calibration of the 'three elements to make sure'. Tony clearly felt he was coping much better in school and had positive plans for the future. The question of earlier identification and intervention for special learning needs is perhaps also raised by this case, as is the issue of transfer at Year 7, and the value of responsive pastoral support for troubled pupils.

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## **With All Respect: reviewing disaffection strategies**

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This is the fourth and final report in a series to accompany the NFER project 'School Attendance, Truancy and Exclusions', offering updates and final evaluative comment on school-based strategies to address attendance and behaviour problems. It also presents perspectives from a sample of parents whose children were involved in these strategies, as well as detailed case-studies of disaffected pupils.

Like its predecessor (*Three to Remember; Talking Back; and Exclusion: Who needs it?*), this short paper provides ideas and insights which might help those LEA and school staff who are planning and evaluating initiatives to address the important issue of pupil disaffection.

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