

**Institution: The University of Edinburgh**

**Unit of Assessment: 25 Education**

**Title of case study 3: Improving behaviour in Scottish schools**

### 1. Summary of the impact

As a direct result of the research conducted by the University of Edinburgh (1994-2009), policy and practice in relation to behaviour management in schools has come to emphasise the importance of i) the centrality of school ethos in promoting positive behaviour; ii) the need to tackle low-level negative behaviour, and iii) a range of interventions, including restorative practices. The significance of the research is that it fostered a cultural and policy change that led to continuous decreases in indiscipline and disciplinary exclusion from school, and a demonstrable increase in teacher confidence and skills in dealing with indiscipline. Beneficiaries of the research were pupils and teachers in primary, secondary and special schools, as well as parents. The research changed national policy and guidelines and positioned Scotland as a leader in research on behaviour and relationships in school and its application to policy and practice.

### 2. Underpinning research

Concern about behaviour in schools arises from various sources, including media accounts of bullying, perceptions of rising levels of anti-social behaviour, lobbying by teacher unions and doubts about the inclusion of pupils with additional support needs in mainstream schools. The research provided i) independent evidence about the occurrence of positive and negative behaviour in classrooms and around the school, ii) comparisons over time, iii) a demonstration that schools can influence the behaviour of their pupils and iv) collaboration with schools and local authorities to evaluate specific interventions.

Three projects from a larger programme of research are central to this case study.

1. *Alternatives to Exclusion from School* (1994-96) identified elements of school ethos that promoted positive behaviour and responded to negative behaviour, derived through studies of schools with similar populations but different rates of exclusion. Evidence on the number and characteristics of excluded pupils was collected for the first time, revealing that i) boys rather than girls, ii) ethnic minorities, iii) those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and iv) those with additional support needs are significantly more likely to be excluded than the general population. Boys were four times more likely to be excluded than girls, for example (Munn et al 2001).

2. *Behaviour in Scottish Schools* (2008-09) provided robust comparative statistical evidence about perceptions of behaviour from 2,000 teachers, head teachers, support staff and pupils. It showed positive changes in perception of behaviour by staff, particularly secondary school teachers, compared to 2006: i) the overwhelming majority of staff (80%) perceived pupils to be generally well behaved, ii) physical violence and aggression towards staff were rare (<1%) but iii) more common among pupils and iv) staff (90%) frequently encountered low level negative behaviour and found this wearisome. The research also provided information on perceptions of the range and effectiveness of interventions related to behaviour management (Munn et al 2013).

3. Research on *restorative practices* (2004-2006 and 2008) focused specifically on building community to reduce anti-social behaviour in schools. Findings from two large-scale surveys (school staff N=627, response rate 45%; pupils N = 1163, almost 100% response rate) showed that restorative practices can be effective in promoting harmonious relationships and the successful resolution of conflict. Strategies employed included i) ethos building, ii) curriculum focus on relationships/conflict resolution, iii) use of restorative language, scripts and conversations, iv) mediation and v) circles and informal and formal conferences (McCluskey et al 2008a, 2008b; McCluskey et al 2011).

Funded by the Scottish Government, the projects used a range of methods: large-scale surveys and policy analysis combined with eight case studies in project 1, fifteen case studies in project 2 and collaborative evaluation in project 3.

The research was primarily undertaken by Professor Pamela Munn, Gwynedd Lloyd, Stephen Sharp, (senior lecturers) in post since 1994 or earlier, Professor Sheila Riddell (since 2003), and Elisabet Weedon (senior research fellow), Gale Macleod and Gillean McCluskey, all in post since 2004. All were full time staff at the University of Edinburgh at the time the projects were undertaken. MacLeod and McCluskey were doctoral students of Munn (2000-2003) and now hold senior lectureships at the University of Edinburgh.

### 3. References to the research

Evidence of the quality of the research is from continued funding from the Scottish Government, peer review and publication in high impact journals. The article *Can Restorative Practices in Schools make a Difference?* was among the top cited articles in Educational Review between 2005-2009 and in 2011 was selected for inclusion in Routledge's 'Top Cited Articles' marketing campaign.

Munn, P., Cullen, M. A., Johnstone, M. and Lloyd, G. (2001) Exclusion from school: A view from Scotland of policy and practice. *Research Papers in Education* 16:1, 23-42.  
DOI: [10.1080/02671520010011851](https://doi.org/10.1080/02671520010011851).

Munn, P., Sharp, S., Lloyd, G., Macleod, G., McCluskey, G., Brown, J. & Hamilton, L. (2013) A comparison of staff perceptions of behaviour in Scottish schools in 2009 and 2006. *Research Papers in Education* 28: 2, 135-154. In REF 2 (Brown).

McCluskey, G., Lloyd, G., Kane, J., Riddell, S., Stead, J. and Weedon, E. (2011) Teachers are afraid we are stealing their strength. *British Journal of Educational Studies* 59: 2, 105-119. In REF 2 (McCluskey).

McCluskey, G., Lloyd, G., Kane, J., Stead, J., Riddell, S. & Weedon, E. (2008a) Can restorative practices in schools make a difference? *Educational Review: Special Issue: Truancy, Disaffection, Anti-social behaviour and the Governance of Children* 60:4, 405-417. In REF 2 (McCluskey).

McCluskey, G., Lloyd, G., Stead, J., Kane, J., Riddell, S. & Weedon, E. (2008b) 'I was dead restorative today'. From restorative justice to restorative approaches in school. *Cambridge Journal of Education* 38: 2, 199-217. In REF 2 (McCluskey).

Full data and analysis as well as the report to the government on project 2 were made available on the Scottish Government website.

### 4. Details of the impact

All projects were designed from the outset to achieve impact on policy and practice through:

- Steering committees of representatives from national and local governments, teacher unions, Inspectorate, parents and distinguished academics who were kept informed of emergent findings and became advocates of the research.
- Conferences (some attended by politicians and senior civil servants), workshops, media appearances and articles in professional publications. Munn gave interviews to BBC Scotland news and Scottish Television in November 2009 on the results of the behaviour survey and articles appeared in the Times Educational Supplement Scotland (eg 27/11/2009).

A strong and continuing relationship with the Government's Positive Behaviour team has resulted from the restorative practices (RP) evaluation. McCluskey represents the Heads of the Schools of Education on the Scottish Advisory Group on Behaviour in Schools. She co-convenes, with a senior civil servant, a new working group, representing all Scottish HEIs, tasked with reviewing the teaching of issues of behaviour, children's rights and health and wellbeing across initial teacher education.

The restorative practices evaluation forged new ground in working directly with policy-makers, key

local authority personnel and schools. An iterative analytical process drew on quarterly meetings with stakeholders, clarifying what they saw as valid evidence and serving to build, embed and sustain a robust relationship between Government, local authorities and schools. This led to one of the local authorities stating that it recognised the need 'to develop restorative approaches across all schools over a three-year period to improve relationships and behaviour' [5.4].

Identifying the variety of ways in which restorative practices and associated conditions surrounded successful implementation enhanced the credibility of research findings and this, in turn, encouraged take-up in local authorities and schools beyond the pilot period. Two years later, the follow-up report [5.5] noted that four additional local authorities were using restorative practices alongside a continuing commitment and expansion from the three pilot authorities. *'Research into the impact of restorative approaches has been widely used across Scottish Local Authorities and schools'* [5.6].

Informed by the findings, training was developed on the benefits of inter-professional working, the time needed for change in schools and the value of building a positive ethos based on strong relationships rather than punishment. All have become features of Scottish behaviour policy [5.2].

*Alternatives to Exclusion* helped provide the foundation for current national and local policy by building the case for encouraging positive behaviour through interventions to promote a positive school ethos, evident latterly in restorative approaches. It also encouraged the Scottish Government to start collecting national statistics on exclusion, a continuing practice (see statistical bulletins) [5.1]. The Government [5.2] reported its priority actions based on the research of project 2, Behaviour in Scottish Schools:

*'We will further develop learning environment checklists to support the creation of peaceful learning environments and manage low level negative behaviour.'*

*'We will promote further:*

- *restorative practices and solution-oriented approaches ... to address more serious negative behaviour between peers in schools*
- *nurture groups ... in early years, primary and secondary schools*
- *anti-bullying policies and practice to address serious negative behaviour and contribute to social and emotional wellbeing*
- *social and emotional wellbeing programmes for staff and parents ... to support [their] implementation ... for children and young people.'*

A statement of government policy on how behaviour management features in Curriculum for Excellence [5.2] gives information about its behaviour policy and makes explicit reference to the research from project 2. On page 1, for example, it says:

*'The purpose of this leaflet is to inform you of the recent Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research 2009 and how the Scottish Government and the Scottish Advisory Group on Behaviour in Schools have identified the next steps and priority actions to further improve relationships and behaviour within Curriculum for Excellence in response to the findings of the research.'*

In a statement of government policy on exclusion [5.3] paragraph 8 refers to statistics gathered in project 2 to represent a 'picture of exclusion in Scottish schools' and Annex C on 'approaches to improving relationships and promoting positive behaviour' refers to project 3 (p.76).

Key beneficiaries of *Restorative Practices* include schools and their partner agencies throughout Britain. The Scottish Government [5.3, Annex C] now recommends the use of restorative practices as one of the most effective approaches to building positive relationships in schools and in managing exclusions. The international ESRC-funded seminar series *Restorative Approaches to Conflict in Schools* held in 2009-11 continues to foster links between different jurisdictions and disciplines. The involvement of Dr Derrick Wilson (University of Ulster) has led to strong links between the Scottish Government and initiatives in Northern Ireland to introduce restorative

practices into schools, prisons and communities [5.7].

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Sources to corroborate the impact are indicated in square brackets in the text. Web pages have been archived at [www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/REF2014REF3B/UoA+25](http://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/REF2014REF3B/UoA+25)

[5.1] *Statistical Bulletin: Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland*, No.1 2010 Edition: 1st December, 2010 (amended 13th June 2011) (Project 1)

[Evidence of collection of data on exclusions. Statistical Bulletins on exclusion have been published since 2000/2001 as a continuing result of that project, although the precise form has changed over time.] <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/91982/0119944.pdf>

[5.2] Scottish Government report (2010). *Building curriculum for excellence through positive relationships and behaviour*. Edinburgh. The document explicitly cites the University of Edinburgh research. [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/welfare/Behaviour](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/welfare/Behaviour). (Projects 2 and 3)

[5.3] Scottish Government report (2011) *Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2: a positive approach to managing school exclusions*. Edinburgh. Cites statistical data from project 2 and findings from project 3. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/345984/0115162.pdf>

[5.4] HMIE (2010) Perth and Kinross Council Validated Self-Evaluation, p.19 and p.35. States the need to develop restorative approaches based on findings from Project 3. <http://www.pkc.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=9799&p=0>

[5.5] Report by Lloyd, G. and McCluskey, G. (2009) *Restorative Practice Pilots and Approaches in Scotland - Follow Up*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Evidence that four additional local authorities were using restorative practices. [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/images/RPfinalevaluationOct08\\_tcm4-517280.doc](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/images/RPfinalevaluationOct08_tcm4-517280.doc)

[5.6] Factual statement that additional local authorities were using restorative practices dated 1 August 2013 from Rights Support and Wellbeing Team, Education Scotland, The Optima, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow G2 8DU (Project 3).

[5.7] Campbell, H. Chapman, J. Wilson, D. (2013) Report on contribution of restorative justice to peacemaking, Project Report 7.2 for *Developing alternative understandings of security and justice through restorative justice approaches in intercultural settings within democratic societies*. [www.alternativeproject.eu/assets/upload/Deliverable\\_7.2\\_Report\\_on\\_the\\_contribution\\_of\\_RJ\\_to\\_peace\\_building.pdf](http://www.alternativeproject.eu/assets/upload/Deliverable_7.2_Report_on_the_contribution_of_RJ_to_peace_building.pdf) (Project 3)