

Positive Ethos, Positive Discipline, Effective Learning

Hilton Edinburgh Grosvenor Hotel



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ORGANISATION

Vale of Leven Academy, West Dunbartonshire

FOCUS

Support Groups for pupils with SEBD

"It taught me respect for people around me. Making a clown of myself – people laughing at me – not with me. Others are trying to learn – they don't need me disrupting them."
(quote from pupil involved in the initiative)

Can you describe briefly any initiatives or projects in place that illustrate the focus of our conference i.e. Positive Ethos, Positive Discipline, Effective Learning?

This initiative, which has been supported by the Gordon Cook Foundation, has been established for five years within a secondary school serving a deprived area. It consists of a series of pupil workshops, led by guidance and behaviour support staff and myself (DHT), which help pupils to gain understanding of themselves and of others so they can develop positive relationships and more positive attitudes towards learning and towards school. The inspiration for the group work comes from a variety of sources – Goleman's Emotional Intelligence; Gardners' concepts of intra- and inter- personal intelligences; Pekin's theories of Teaching for Understanding and the field of Thinking Skills.

How are these initiatives being monitored and evaluated?

This initiative is being very rigorously monitored and evaluated as it is part of a PhD study at Glasgow University. Very detailed data, drawn from a wide range of sources – interviews with pupils involved in the initiative; questionnaires completed by class teachers, group leaders and parents; self-evaluation checklists (pre- and post- intervention); attendance and truancy statistics; discipline statistics; attainment in relation to 5-14 National tests; and other relevant data have been gathered together and analysed. In addition, detailed Case Studies of six pupils have been undertaken involving interviews with the pupils themselves, their parents, their guidance teachers and their Support Group Leaders.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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What are some of the biggest challenges faced by teachers and young people or members of your organisation, in implementing the initiatives or projects?

The initial challenge was to gain acceptance within the school of the approach itself and the philosophies underlying it and, most importantly, to gain the support of staff who lead the groups on a voluntary basis. Staff training and mentoring were crucial in developing staff confidence and regular opportunities for staff to meet and share practice were important elements of this. Staffing of the groups is clearly a resource issue for schools.

The major challenges facing the young people involved in the initiative are:-

- to begin the process of developing self-responsibility
- to help them to understand the nature of their difficulties
- to have the motivation to want to do something about it
- to have the confidence to know that, with the support of the group, they can address their problems and achieve success
- a major challenge is to try to get parents on board.

What has worked well?

Pupils have responded very positively to the groups and generally make a worthwhile contribution to group activities. Pupil responses to the initiative are generally very positive as are responses from group leaders. Almost all pupils have gained in some respects but the responses are very individual to the pupil.

For a small number of pupils, the response has been truly remarkable, resulting in significant reductions in discipline referrals and suspensions and in other, less tangible ways. One of the major challenges is to sustain improvements when they occur.

What did not work & lessons learned?

Individual behavioural targets which are negotiated with pupils have proved to be one of the most difficult areas. Whilst some pupils respond extremely well to this approach, others lack the organisational skills and/or the motivation to co-operate. We are exploring alternative means of monitoring such pupils.

Experience has taught us that it is best to restrict group size (4-6 max) and that, whilst it is not always possible to do so, it is advantageous to try to maintain the guidance link with the pastoral care teacher working with his/her own pupils.

Future plans?

Now that the approach is incorporated into the school's development plan, it is the intention to continue to expand the approach across the different year groups within the school offering a range of groups to meet different needs.

Any materials the school/organisation is willing to share or relevant publications that are for sale?

It is hoped that in the future, the materials will become available and we are intending to produce a training pack (together with ICT illustrations) which could be used for training purposes in other schools. The research will be written up as an evaluative study.

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