

Alternative versus the traditional

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Instead of excluding pupils for bad behaviour, schools adopt alternative methods

A problem-solving approach to pupils' bad behaviour has led to a significant cut in the number of exclusions in Glasgow.

The decrease is particularly significant in secondary, where there has been a 41 per cent drop in the number of half-days lost over two years.

Over the same period, the number of exclusion incidents in secondary dropped by 35.7 per cent.

John Paul Academy, in the north of the city, which has seen a 95 per cent cut in the number of exclusion incidents over the past year, has used the Solution Oriented Schools programme to improve school relations, while Lochend Community High, which has seen a 57 per cent drop in incidents, adopted a restorative practices approach to managing behaviour.

The number of permanent exclusions across all Glasgow schools has also dropped - from 59 in 2007-08 to 19 last year, a reduction of 68 per cent, and of 86 per cent from the figure of 140 in 2006-07.

Attendance has also improved year on year. In 1999, in secondary it was 82.4 per cent; last year it was up at 89.1 per cent.

A report by Margaret Doran, executive director of children and families, to the council's education committee this week - her last committee before she leaves post today - attributes the reduction in permanent exclusions to the work done with families by area education managers and schools and the use of alternative education providers. These include further education colleges, EVIP (Enhanced Vocational Inclusion Programme) and CLASS (Community Learning and Support Service), all aimed at ensuring that young people remain within education as much as possible.

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John Paul Academy has cut the number of half-days lost to exclusions from 220 in 2007-08 to 11 last year - and these related to only three pupils (two who set off the fire alarm, and another involved in a fight).

"We serve the area of Milton and Possilpark and I don't believe in sending children home for long periods. Often they are not supported by their parents - they don't keep them in and the kids end up playing in the street, or worse, offending," says Vincent Docherty, the headteacher.

He believes in adapting the curriculum or putting in better support structures.

Since he took over in September 2008, he has increased the number of pupil support teachers to 25 - it means "client groups" are smaller and teachers get to know the pupils better.

Attainment has risen in line with attendance. This year, 90 per cent of pupils gained 5+ awards at levels 1-6 at Standard grade; before, the highest was 77 per cent. Part of that is attributable to the work of the pupil support learning centre, set up last year, where a former modern studies teacher at the school, Gerry Flynn, renowned for the way he relates to pupils, has been called out of retirement to provide concentrated support to youngsters who would otherwise have achieved no exam passes. Budgetary constraints mean Mr Flynn can be employed only from October to March, but his input is regarded as significant.

Some 90 per cent of staff have been trained in the Solution Oriented Schools programme, and this year, S6 pupils will also be trained in the approach. Mr Docherty used SOS previously at St Andrew's High in Clydebank, where he was depute head, and was impressed with the results. It is based on principles such as: "the problem is the problem - not the person"; "if it works, do more of it - if it doesn't, do something different", and it is "about teachers reflecting on all aspects of their practice, and how they speak to and listen to children", he says.

The school also has a campus officer, PC Peter Glancy, who spends a lot of time in the classroom delivering lessons on everything from drugs education to why pupils should not carry weapons.

In the past year, a stricter uniform policy has also been introduced, with S6 pupils, for the first time, having to wear blazers. "Uniform is the engine oil that has brought us back together. We are challenging the idea that because a child goes to a school in Maryhill, they can't go to university. Uniform helps create good order and discipline - it has helped the school ethos."

*This article has been shortened in length, highlighting comment regarding the SOS school improvement Programme. The original, full version is available online at:
<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6021610>*