
EVALUATION OF THE PRIMARY BEHAVIOUR AND ATTENDANCE PILOT

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Background

Behaviour and attendance are amongst a number of key priorities for the Primary National Strategy. The Improving Behaviour and Attendance Unit and the School Standards Group are working together within the DfES to ensure that strategies to improve behaviour and attendance are embedded in whole school policy and practice and work on teaching and learning. The Primary Behaviour and Attendance Strategy pilot took place from 2003-05 and involved 25 Local Authorities (LAs). The four strands of the pilot included a universal element providing professional development opportunities to all schools in the pilot authorities (the CPD strand); a targeted element providing focused support to schools where behaviour and attendance had been identified as key issues (the school improvement strand); a universal element providing curriculum work focusing on the social and emotional aspects of learning for all children in pilot schools (the curriculum materials or SEAL strand); and a targeted element providing group work for children needing extra help in this area, and their parents/carers (the small group interventions strand).

Key Findings:

- Following a national trend there was a significant reduction in authorised absence among the pilot schools on average. However, schools involved in the school improvement strand (either on its own or in combination with small group work) saw significantly greater reductions in unauthorised absence than non-pilot primary schools. This may be because these schools had higher rates of absence than the other schools at the start of the pilot and may have had more scope for improvement.
- The school improvement strand and small group strands had the greatest impact on improved writing scores in national tests at KS1. The school improvement strand had the greatest improvement on English and mathematics at KS2.
- The CPD cluster work provided LAs with a way of sending consistent messages about behaviour policies to schools and was effective in encouraging a solution focused approach and enabling consideration of behaviour issues in a non-threatening environment.
- The work of the teacher coaches in the school improvement strand was highly successful and greatly valued by teachers, who also thought that it had had a positive impact on children's behaviour.
- As perceived by teachers, the SEAL programme had a major impact on children's well-being, confidence, social and communication skills, relationships, including bullying, playtime behaviour, pro-social behaviour and attitudes towards school. It increased children's awareness of emotions in others and the calmer environment in the classroom also led to some perceived improvement in learning and attainment.
- The small group work was effective in improving the emotional symptoms and pro-social behaviour of the children participating in it.
- The pilot operated effectively at a number of different levels. The cluster groups provided support for all schools. The school improvement strand and the SEAL programme operated at the level of the whole school, addressing the needs of teachers and pupils, while the small group work enabled a focus on children with particular needs.

Background

The Primary Behaviour and Attendance Strategy pilot took place from 2003-05 and involved 25 Local Authorities. The pilot aimed to:

- enable schools in the pilot LAs to access high-quality professional development on behaviour and attendance issues, that was sustained and collaborative;
- develop and test out models of LA support where behaviour and attendance were key school improvement issues;
- trial curriculum materials which develop children's social, emotional and behavioural skills and materials for school self-review and training in improving behaviour (SEAL);
- implement and evaluate small group interventions for children needing additional focused help with their social, emotional and behavioural skills;
- promote the development of a common approach across the 25 participating LAs and the Department's Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP) LAs.

The pilot had four strands, a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) strand, a school improvement strand, a curriculum materials or SEAL strand, and a small group strand. The LAs selected to participate in the programme were those which were not eligible for other funded programmes. They were LAs with above-average levels of social deprivation, often bordering EIC areas with significant numbers of schools where behaviour was likely to be a key issue.

For the CPD strand, LAs were provided with funding to free school-based 'leading teachers' to work with teachers visiting to observe their practice, and to provide supply cover for all schools to send a representative to termly cluster/network professional development meetings. For the school improvement strand, they were funded to employ a 'teacher coach' to work with existing services (educational psychology and behaviour support) in schools experiencing difficulty, using a systematic process of audit, action plan, and professional development that included on-the-job solution-focused coaching. Funding for supply cover was provided for ten schools in each LA to receive training and have time for planning their use of the curriculum materials in the SEAL strand. For the small group interventions strand each LA was

funded to appoint a specialist professional (usually a mental health worker) to work with children and families.

Aims and objectives of the research

The evaluation aimed to test out the effectiveness of the range of measures proposed by the DfES, singly and in combination, assessing the impact of the measures in relation to:

- improvements in behaviour, attendance and attainment for individual children;
- teacher skills and confidence;
- and the promotion of effective whole school approaches to positive behaviour, attendance, and improvements in attainment.

Emerging best practice, particularly for the more innovative measures, was identified as was their sustainability within schools and LAs, and transferability to other LAs.

Methodology

The research involved a range of methods:

- Analysis of each Local Authority's plans for the implementation of the pilot;
- Telephone/email interviews with the 25 LA pilot coordinators;
- Selection of 10 LAs for more detailed evaluation work. This involved sending questionnaires to school staff on their perceptions of the impact of the pilot; and interviews with LA and project staff. Note that schools/LAs which were self-evaluating their pilot work were also able to fill in and return these questionnaires;
- Visits to 16 schools which were identified as exemplars of good practice. This involved interviews with school staff, pupils and parents/carers;
- Children in schools involved with SEAL or the small group work were asked to complete pre- and post-intervention questionnaires to assess change in their social, emotional and behavioural skills;
- Case studies, parental, teacher and children's self-assessments were used to assess the impact of the small group work.
- Analysis of attainment and attendance data in the pilot schools between 2002/03 - 2004/05 to assess levels of change. These were also compared to data for all primary schools.

The sample

Questionnaire responses were received from 46 head teachers, 156 teachers/teaching assistants, 23 non-teaching staff, 26 parents with children involved in the SEAL programme, and 22 parents whose children were involved in the small group work. Questionnaire data were available for 4237 children at Key Stage 1 prior to the introduction of the pilot initiatives and 2163 following it. At Key Stage 2, 5707 children completed questionnaires prior to the pilot and 3311 following the pilot. Interviews were undertaken with 13 head teachers, four other senior school managers, 34 teachers/teaching assistants, 19 parents and 102 children. The children were interviewed in small groups which varied in size according to their availability.

Twenty case study examples of pupils receiving individual support and attention were collated. Pre and post Strengths and Difficulties (SDQ) data were collected for some pupils participating in the small group work (517 children pre-intervention, 175 post intervention), while others completed the same questionnaires as the children participating in the SEAL strand (243 pre-intervention, 215 post intervention).

Detailed findings

Management of the programme

The specific management structures adopted in LAs varied considerably in size and makeup. Communication and feedback were enhanced by wide representation on steering groups. Staff recruited for the pilot were extremely well qualified. Good management and the adoption of problem solving approaches were important for effective multi-agency working.

Issues arising in relation to management of the pilot included:

- competition between initiatives;
- poor communication;
- joint line management;
- the need for an overarching strategic view.

The Continuing Professional Development Strand

Attendance at CPD cluster meetings was at the 50-60% level in most LAs. Some schools were never represented at the cluster group meetings. For effective dissemination in schools the CPD attendee

needed to be in an influential position in school. Particularly valued activities included solution focused approaches and sharing practice in relation to improving behaviour.

The CPD clusters were valued by LAs as a means of communicating consistent messages about behaviour. This was particularly important in rural areas. Long term sustainability was perceived to depend on schools continuing the work.

Key issues related to:

- variable attendance;
- lack of appropriate accommodation;
- difficulties for staff in travelling long distances;
- lack of information about who had overall responsibility for behaviour issues in school;
- work overload of CPD facilitators.

School improvement where behaviour is a key issue

Schools participating in this strand were those identified by LAs as in need. The behaviour and attendance audit was perceived as time consuming but valuable in identifying issues requiring attention.

A whole-school approach to the coaching was successful in reducing the defensive position of staff and ensuring cross phase consistency in behaviour policy implementation.

The coaching was highly successful and valued by teachers. The supportive, collegial, non-judgemental model gave teachers confidence to admit to problems and be open and reflective about finding solutions to them. Leading teachers provided valuable role models particularly for NQTs.

The majority of head teachers believed that the coaching had improved the skills and confidence of teachers in promoting positive behaviour. 95% of teachers believed that it had improved their skills and 100% their confidence.

There was a perceived positive impact on children's behaviour, the working climate in the school, children's well-being, confidence, communication skills, social skills and control of emotions. Some impact was reported on learning and home-school relationships.

Factors reported to contribute to the success of the school improvement strand included:

- the commitment of the senior management team;
- a whole school approach with the participation of

all teachers;

- sufficient time being available for trust to develop and feedback to be given.

Curriculum materials to develop the social and emotional aspects of Learning (SEAL)

There was variability in the extent to which the SEAL programme was implemented. The programme was most effective where it fitted in with existing PHSE work or circle time, was complementary to the school ethos and was adopted across the whole school.

Appropriate training was crucial to successful implementation and management of the materials which were themselves perceived as excellent.

The programme increased staff understanding of the social and emotional aspects of learning and helping them to understand their pupils better. This changed their behaviour, enhanced their confidence in their interactions with pupils, and led them to approach behaviour incidents in a more thoughtful way.

All staff perceived a positive impact on the children's behaviour and well-being. Classrooms and playgrounds were calmer. Children's confidence, social, communication, and negotiating skills, and attitudes were perceived to have improved. There were positive perceptions of the impact on the children's work. Overall 90% of teachers indicated that the SEAL Programme had been at least relatively successful.

The impact on reducing exclusions was perceived as limited. A small number of children did not respond positively to the programme and additional support was needed to engender change in these children.

Parents were reluctant partners with the programme. In the longer term the introduction of the family activities within the SEAL materials may assist with this.

Analysis of the responses to the children's questionnaires revealed a range of complex relationships between age, gender, questionnaire responses made prior to the pilot, and school factors which all contributed to children's perceptions of their emotions, self-esteem, social skills, attitudes towards school and academic work.

At KS2 children's responses to statements about attitudes towards school, relationships with teachers, and perceptions of academic work were less positive after the pilot. However, questionnaire responses before and after the pilot revealed age related differences in responses which became more negative with increasing age suggesting that the changes were related to age rather than the impact of the pilot. Responses to awareness of emotions in others and social skills and relationships showed positive changes following the pilot, which may also have been as a result of increasing age. However, multiple regression analyses suggested that the positive changes in social skills and relationships and awareness of emotion in others were due to the impact of the programme. Without a control group it is not possible to say whether other factors may have contributed to these changes.

Multiple regression analyses suggested that the positive change in Social Skills and Relationships may have been as a result of the implementation of the SEAL programme. Although other external influences cannot be ruled out, the data from the teachers support the change hypothesis. The positive changes in Awareness of Emotions in Others may also have resulted from the impact of the programme.

There were clear gender differences in response to almost all of the measures girls demonstrating more positive responses.

School ethos was an important contributory factor to children's personal and social development.

Factors perceived to contribute to the success of the programme included:

- the commitment of the senior management team;
- allowing sufficient time for staff to understand the conceptual basis of the programme, recognise its importance and plan how it was to be implemented;
- appointing a designated co-ordinator in the school;
- the focus on topics over a period of time within a spiral curriculum;
- the adoption of a whole school approach;
- building on existing work.

Further improvements suggested included:

- visits to schools where the programme had already been implemented successfully;
- the provision of briefing sheets for non-class

based staff;

- greater involvement of parents.

Barriers to implementation were few. The following were raised:

- staff resistance;
- the lack of commitment of senior managers;
- the low status of PSHE in the school.

Small group work

Children were included in the small group work because of poor behaviour, risk of exclusion, lack of response to rewards or sanctions, withdrawn behaviour, social difficulties in relation to other children, or fears of attending school. It was important to have a balanced group, not one focused entirely on children with poor behaviour.

The multi-agency approach was crucial to the operation of the small group work. There were sometimes tensions between educational and health approaches. There were differences in the language adopted by each group of professionals, ways of working, and the perceived aims of the group work.

Issues arising from the implementation of the small group work related to:

- the need for some children to have 1:1 attention;
- the integration of the work into the classroom;
- inadequate time for teachers and small group workers to communicate. This problem was partially overcome by the involvement of Teaching Assistants (TAs) in the small group work.

Teachers welcomed the small group work as an additional resource to support children with particular needs. They learnt from the expertise of the group workers.

TAs or other staff working with the group were trained 'on the job' and indicated that more formal training was required.

There were difficulties in engaging parents in the group work. When parents did participate in the programme they reported that it was worthwhile and of benefit to the whole family.

Assessment using the Goodman Strengths and Difficulties scale showed statistically significant

improvements in emotional symptoms and pro-social behaviour of participating children. The benefits to the children depended on the particular problems that they were exhibiting initially. 82% of parents perceived that the programme had helped their child.

Factors supporting success included:

- the commitment of the whole school, teachers, parents and children;
- integration of the work into other school initiatives, e.g. the SEAL programme.

The Small Group work revealed that some children had serious problems requiring further support, some related to Child Protection Issues.

The impact of the programme on attendance and attainment

There was a statistically significant reduction in authorised absence across the programme as a whole over the period of the implementation of the pilot. There were no statistically significant differences between the different elements of the programme in their impact on authorised absence. There was no statistically significant change in unauthorised absence for the pilot schools. The largest decrease in unauthorised absence was seen for those schools which implemented the SEAL programme, the school improvement strand and the small group interventions together, followed by schools which implemented the school improvement strand only, and schools which implemented the small group intervention work and the school improvement strand together. These decreases were statistically significant.

At KS1 across the programme as a whole there were no statistically significant changes in relation to scores in reading, writing or mathematics in national tests. However, there were statistically significant differences between the various strands of the programme in relation to improvement in writing. The writing scores for schools implementing the small group work and the school improvement strand were improved more than those for the other strands.

At KS2 across the programme as a whole there were statistically significant improvements in national test scores in English and mathematics. These reflected national trends. Schools participating in the school improvement strand appeared to make significantly greater improvements than CPD-only schools and non-pilot primary schools. This may have been because of their lower levels of performance at the start of the

programme. Schools implementing SEAL and small group interventions together, and those implementing SEAL, the school improvement strand and small group interventions together appear to have made consistent improvements across all subjects from 2003-2005.

Conclusions

The pilot encouraged the involvement of a range of teams and agencies working together in supporting schools. This inter-agency work was seen as a particular strength of the pilot

The pilot operated effectively at a number of different levels. The cluster groups provided support for all schools. The school improvement strand and the SEAL programme operated at the level of the whole school, addressing the needs of teachers and pupils, while the small group work enabled a focus on children with particular needs. All of the elements operated very successfully in some schools. What emerged from the evaluation was that for a small minority of children, ongoing individual attention was required. This was not always available.

There were differences in the extent to which individual schools implemented elements of the pilot effectively. Much depended on the leadership within the school and the extent to which the head teacher and staff were committed. In some schools there was initiative overload. Risk factors identified included:

- a change of head teacher;
- OFSTED inspections;
- being in special measures;
- staff turnover.

A small number of LAs and schools perceived that there was a lack of input relating to attendance. While the programme hoped to improve attendance by making schools better places to be some schools wanted a more specific focus.

LAs held different perceptions about the sustainability of the pilot. Overall, every strand appeared to be sustainable in the long term if schools and LAs were sufficiently committed.

Transfer of initiative to other Local Authorities

There was consensus that the pilot would transfer positively to other LAs providing that there was:

- sufficient lead in time;
- good communication;
- identified people to contact in case of difficulties;
- centrally coordinated specialist training prior to the start of the project for teacher coaches and small group workers;
- ongoing supervision built into the projects for both teacher coaching and the child/parent work.

Overall the pilot was successful in attaining its aims. There was evidence of improvement in attendance at school, behaviour while at school, and in attainment particularly at KS2 across schools participating in the pilot. The management of the programme was effective overall, and the CPD provision, which was available to all schools was well received, although there were issues relating to attendance at meetings. The school improvement strand was effective in identifying areas within school which required improvement through the behaviour and attendance audits and the coaching was particularly well received by teachers. This strand was particularly effective in improving attendance and attainment. The data gathered in relation to the SEAL programme demonstrated positive changes in the children's behaviour particularly in relation to their social skills and relationships with other children. The small group work was effective in supporting pupils with specific problems relating to their emotional and social needs.

Additional Information

Copies of the full report (RR717) - priced £4.95 - are available by writing to DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.

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