



# Evaluation of the Impact of the GEST Programme on School Attendance and Behaviour



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi Dros Addysg  
A Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru  
Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
For Education and Training in Wales

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**BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL**  
**INVESTOR IN PEOPLE**



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## Introduction

- This report provides an evaluation of the impact of initiatives, funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, at school and LEA level, to improve pupils' school attendance and behaviour.
- Grants for education support and training (GEST) have included a category on attendance and behaviour each year from 1999 to the present. This shows the importance which the Welsh Assembly Government attaches to improving these two aspects, which can have such a marked effect on the quality of pupils' learning and the standards they achieve.
- GEST funding is allocated to LEAs so that they can support schools' attendance and behaviour initiatives in ways that match local needs and circumstances.
- LEAs are encouraged to use the GEST funding in conjunction with other sources of funding, and to plan strategically using those various sources of funding, in order to set and achieve their local targets. In any evaluation of the impact of GEST funding on school attendance and behaviour, it is important to bear in mind that other sources of funding may also have contributed to successful initiatives and improvements.

## Section 1: School attendance and pupils' behaviour

Inspection evidence shows a largely positive picture, particularly in terms of attendance in primary schools, and behaviour in both primary and secondary schools. The main concerns are that only about a quarter of secondary schools reached the Welsh Assembly Government target of 92% attendance this year and that about 20% of secondary schools fall well below this target. There is a close link between poor attendance and pupils' failure to achieve a basic level of qualifications, such as 5 A\*-G at GCSE, after 11 years of compulsory schooling.

There is room for improvement in about 25% of secondary schools and 20% of primary schools where the impact of pupils' behaviour on the standards they achieve is satisfactory, rather than good or better. There is also a minority of schools (less than 5%) in both sectors where pupils' attitudes to learning are unsatisfactory. In most schools, there is a proportion of low-level disruption and inattentiveness that presents a challenge to teachers' skills in classroom management.

### Primary schools 2000-2002

- Overall attendance rates continue to improve.
- Attendance in primary schools was satisfactory or better in 95% of schools inspected in 2001-2002, including 40% where it was good or very good.
- Attendance is unsatisfactory in about 5% of schools.
- Almost 90% of schools comply with the legal requirements for recording and reporting attendance and meet targets to improve attendance.
- Pupils' punctuality is satisfactory or better in almost 95% of schools.
- The number of exclusions in primary schools continues to be small and most are temporary; 94% of excluded pupils are boys.
- Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory or better in all but a few schools; the impact of behaviour on standards of achievement was good or very good in nearly 80% of schools.
- All primary schools inspected make good efforts to prevent bullying.

## Secondary schools 2000-2002

- Only 25% of schools reached the Welsh Assembly Government target of 92% attendance this year.
- Many schools are just below this figure, but about a fifth of schools are well below.
- In most schools, attendance has improved since their last inspection.
- Punctuality is satisfactory or better in 80% of schools inspected.
- Standards of behaviour are satisfactory or better in almost all the schools we inspected this year, and good or very good in about 80%.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are satisfactory or better in all schools inspected, and good or very good in 64%.
- The impact of pupils' behaviour on the standards they achieve is satisfactory in 95% of schools and good in 72%.
- Schools' effectiveness in promoting good behaviour is satisfactory or better in all schools, and good or very good in 79%.
- Schools' efforts to prevent bullying are satisfactory or better in all schools, and good or very good in 92%.

## Section 2: Local education authorities' (LEAs') policy and planning

### A. Education strategic plans

LEAs are required to submit education strategic plans (ESPs) to the Welsh Assembly Government every three years, with supplementary plans in each of the intervening years. Most ESPs make specific reference to improving attendance and behaviour as one of each LEA's key strategic priorities in order to raise standards achieved by pupils and to promote inclusion.

Each ESP has a target-setting section which refers to, among other issues, reducing the number of permanent and fixed-term exclusions. In some LEAs, the baseline is relatively high (for example, over 30 permanent exclusions per year), while in others the number of permanent exclusions has been low (between one and three) over a number of years. However, the data are not always comparable because some LEAs count the number of exclusions while others count the number of individual pupils excluded.

The target-setting section also requires LEAs to provide data about attendance. Some LEAs provide data for both authorised and unauthorised absence and base their targets on these, while others refer only to unauthorised absence.

LEAs generally have regard for minority groups (for example, the children of travellers, and children looked after by local authorities) in setting targets for attendance and exclusion, where this is relevant. This is a recent and valuable addition in most cases and stems from the requirements of the ESP. Before 1999, little, if any, data had been collected for these and other vulnerable groups.

Examples of interesting developments to improve attendance and behaviour in LEAs' plans include:

#### LEA 1

- establishing an exclusion placement panel;
- developing individual action plans to address disaffection prior to exclusion, particularly in key stages 1 and 2;
- targeting advice and support to schools with identified patterns of exclusions; and
- focusing on looked-after children as a high-risk group.

## LEA 2

- a looked-after children project - a team working with 70 pupils provides support within schools to reduce exclusions and improve attendance;
- a project, focusing on the transition between key stage 2 and key stage 3, which aims to prevent bullying;
- distributing leaflets and posters throughout the community to raise awareness of the risks attached to truancy;
- employing behaviour support assistants to work in primary schools to reduce exclusions; and
- nurture assistants in one comprehensive school to support vulnerable pupils in transition from key stage 2 to 3.

## LEA 3

- a leaflet on the effect of condoned absence sent to all parents of children whose attendance falls below 80%;
- a pilot project in one comprehensive school aimed at improving attendance and reducing truancy levels;
- help from the LEA for the temporary transfer of pupils to a neighbouring secondary school, to reduce levels of permanent exclusion;
- a prosecution policy whereby court action will be taken when a pupil's attendance falls below 65%;
- establishing a work experience policy which will allow appropriate alternative education for pupils showing disaffection in year 11; and
- involving the social inclusion team in supporting pupils' behaviour and attendance in primary schools in disadvantaged areas.

## **B. Behaviour support plans**

Section 527A of the Education Act 1996 places a duty on LEAs to prepare a plan setting out their arrangements for the education of children with behavioural difficulties. The first plans, which are referred to as behaviour support plans (BSPs), were to be published by 31st December 1998. In addition, LEAs must have regard to the guidance issued by the Secretary of State (NAW circulars 19/98 and 3/99).

LEAs are then required to review their plans after the first two years and publish a revised BSP between January 1st and April 1st 2001. Thereafter reviews can be every three years, although reviews can follow more frequently if necessary and can be linked to other reviews.

The behaviour support plans generally link effectively with other plans, such as the education strategic plan (ESP), early years development plan and children's services plan. In producing these plans, education departments have consulted widely with other relevant organisations, such as social services, youth service providers, relevant voluntary organisations, youth offending teams, and headteachers and governing bodies.

Most BSPs have three main aspects in common:

### **(i) support to schools**

LEAs outline the help they provide for schools through behaviour support teachers, educational psychologists, special educational needs teachers, education welfare services, the home tuition service and, where appropriate, teachers of English as an additional language.

### **(ii) support for individual pupils in mainstream schools**

Many LEAs have looked at how to involve parents and carers more fully in strategies to support individual pupils. These include developing close links with the SEN code of practice and making effective use of statutory assessment procedures.

### **(iii) provision available outside mainstream schools**

LEAs also outline their methods of provision for pupils being educated otherwise than at school (EOTAS). This provision includes pupil referral units, home tuition and education for pregnant and post-natal teenage girls.

Many LEAs have also included most of the following strategies in their BSPs:

- early intervention to support pupils who show signs of behaviour difficulties;
- training and professional development of staff;
- providing guidance to schools on specific matters;
- improving attendance through first-day response;
- introducing out-of-school-hours learning programmes;
- providing support for looked-after children;
- working jointly with health, social services and other agencies;
- assertive discipline training for staff;
- developing a youth offending team;
- providing learning support and behaviour support teachers;
- where necessary, making use of out-of-county provision;
- introducing Sure Start programmes for children under five; and
- training for parents.

Overall, the ESPs and BSPs give good attention to strategies for improving attendance and behaviour.

## Section 3: GEST-funded initiatives

There is a strong link between the key priorities set out in LEAs' ESPs and LEAs' applications for GEST funding - although there is generally no explicit reference to the funding source in the majority of strategic plans.

Within the GEST programme 2002-2003, the objective for Priority Area 5D is:

*'To promote community and school-based action to address pupil disaffection and behaviour difficulties, including multi-agency working, aimed at meeting targets to reduce absence and exclusions.'*

A number of principles appropriately underpin GEST activities in most LEAs:

- the need to work collaboratively with social services, the youth service, the health service, youth offending teams and other agencies in order to prevent pupil disaffection, support reintegration, and improve attendance levels;
- the need to target schools and pupils most at risk and in need of support; and
- the need to maintain a data base to track trends, measure outcomes, and compare areas and schools within the LEA.

The two main strands of GEST activities to promote inclusion and combat disaffection across most LEAs are:

- behaviour support programmes; and
- providing flexibility within the curriculum in key stage 4.

### 1. Behaviour support programmes

Some LEAs appoint behaviour support teachers or learning support assistants to work with schools which have the greatest task in managing challenging behaviour by pupils. In other LEAs, youth service workers undertake some of this work. The main responsibilities of these LEA staff are to work face-to-face with youngsters, individually or in small groups, to gain their trust, provide support and set targets for improvement.

Estyn evaluations show that at least some of these programmes are very effective in helping pupils face up to and find solutions for their problems. Pupils value the individual or group work during which they set targets for improving some aspect of their school work, their attitude or their behaviour. They learn to talk about the progress they have made and what they have yet to achieve. An important aspect of the support programmes is that they provide certification for individual pupils who have met their targets.

One LEA has identified three main aspects in their behaviour management programme. Teachers in schools receive training in:

- solution focused brief therapy;
- handling emotion, aggression and safe pupil restraint; and
- anger management techniques.

Another LEA is developing the Birmingham 'Framework for Intervention', and has a rolling programme of training staff in assertive discipline to help teachers manage pupils' behaviour. The strategy promotes safe classroom environments through fostering mutual respect. It encourages praise and positive behaviour in order to foster effective learning.

Some LEAs have used a particularly useful whole-school approach to behaviour management whereby all staff, including mid-day supervisors and nursery nurses, are trained together.

Most LEAs identify the need to work with the parents, carers and families of the youngsters concerned. In one LEA, education welfare officers are trained to support parents in parenting skills. In another LEA, family group conferencing has been established. This strategy involves the young person, his or her family, and a range of relevant agencies in developing an action plan in which the needs of the young person are central. It aims to avoid the need for exclusion by addressing the problems in a blame-free atmosphere.

Most LEAs agree that early intervention is crucial in promoting inclusion, and therefore often place particular emphasis on providing training or support for primary school staff in how to recognise and address underachievement.

## **2. Providing flexibility within the curriculum in key stage 4**

Many LEAs support the development of an alternative curriculum for pupils in key stage 4 who are disengaged or at risk of dropping out of mainstream education. Programmes are often provided jointly with a local further education college, and may have a strong element of work experience.

Two LEAs are developing emotional intelligence programmes with youngsters at risk. These out-of-school sessions are taught by specialists in drama and therapy work. LEA officers and schools consider these pupils to be in need of 'time-out from the curriculum' to overcome blockages to learning and attainment. Estyn evaluations show that these programmes often help youngsters to mature, by coming to terms with their particular home and school circumstances, and to improve their attitudes and ability to learn. Another LEA is also developing an affective curriculum, although no further details are provided in the GEST bid.

The main activities included in the GEST bids for improving attendance are:

- first-day-absence contact with home; and
- electronic registration.

1. Targeted schools in some LEAs have been provided with administrative support or attendance support officers to contact pupils' homes on the first day of absence. These support officers work with pupils whose attendance averages between 75% and 90%. First-day-absence contact with the home is a strategy which a number of LEAs have adopted and almost always with good results.

2. A number of LEAs have used GEST funding to provide schools with the means to register pupils electronically. This system makes it possible for senior management teams to monitor the attendance patterns of long and short term absentees. However, this system is not always used as effectively as it might be.

## Section 4: What works well - a sample of School and LEA initiatives

### School A: Motivating disaffected pupils

#### How this school used GEST funding

GEST is used to fund supply cover and expenses for various INSET courses. Each primary in the cluster uses the GEST budget for a half-day's INSET each term, at the secondary school, for each primary headteacher and for pastoral staff from the secondary school itself. The secondary school used GEST funding in conjunction with funding from its own and other sources to deliver a package of initiatives designed to improve pupils' motivation. The actions taken include the following:

- the school appointed eight learning support assistants (LSAs) from its own funds to support particular pupils targeted as having particular needs;
- a curriculum co-ordinator for inclusion, together with co-ordinators for literacy/numeracy, IT, PSE, careers, data and transition, form the pupil support team within the school;
- alternative curriculum arrangements have been made for some pupils in key stage 4. The course includes extended work experience and relevant college courses. A youth worker provides counselling and support for those pupils in year 10 who are following the alternative curriculum. Many year 10 pupils have overcome their behaviour difficulties because they are happy with their new curriculum;
- an 'Internal Inclusion Unit' is used as a halfway house before formal exclusion. While there, pupils follow a behaviour modification course, rather than complete work set by subject teachers. This unit is permanently staffed by one teacher;
- a behaviour database has been set up with General Teaching Council for Wales funding. Every six weeks each teacher records details of any behaviour problems, including those which would not normally be referred to a head of year or a head of department. This is done quickly and simply with an upwards, horizontal or downwards arrow against each name. When details are collated, the behaviour support team is able to identify and target pupils who are slipping back, and causing a lot of low level disruption. The team can then pre-empt more serious disciplinary action;
- here is a comprehensive reward scheme, which includes achievement boards, form competitions, motivational posters, assemblies and trips;

- partnership arrangements with external agencies are good. There is a protocol for exchanging information with the police; and
- partnership arrangements with cluster primary schools are good. The primary schools are considering adopting the same reward system, and are developing a similar behaviour database so that problems can be detected early.

### What has been achieved so far

Taken together, these actions provide a comprehensive and successful package of measures which have already made a significant difference to individual pupils' attitudes, behaviour, attendance and achievement. The measures also contribute to a more co-operative and productive ethos within the school as a whole.

### School B: Tackling poor behaviour

In this primary school, GEST funding has been used effectively to tackle behavioural problems at the very start of pupils' school careers. The school also has a range of solutions to deal with poor behaviour and disaffection at later stages.

#### How this school used GEST funding

GEST funds were used to pay for staff to attend a course on 'nurture groups' at London University. Further funding from GTCW provided time for additional work at the school. On the London course, the teachers were introduced to the Boxall Profile, a system to assess and measure individual pupils' developmental progress. This system provides a detailed range of criteria and descriptions which allow close analysis of individual problems.

The teachers used this system to assess all pupils in the nursery class, then selected the six pupils who most needed support for nurture group work. The nurture group work provides children with the kind of experiences they would receive if brought up very skilfully by a full-time parent, and aims to compensate for what they may not have received in their upbringing. Daily activities were provided for this group, with a progress plan for each pupil.

Other initiatives in the school include the following:

- The school has used GEST funding for a learning support assistant to work with selected pupils. The assistant has an expanded role and works with the behaviour support teacher (BST), usually working for an extended period with a few pupils at a time.
- The staff have done a lot of work on learning styles, and teachers held a residential week for pupils to help them learn study skills.

- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) has set up a new system for early identification. This involves a detailed individual pupil profile, which teachers can complete quickly if they identify a problem.
- A Time-Out Club addresses problems which start in the lunch break. In effect, this is a games club, lasting 30 minutes each day, for specific pupils. Held in a classroom, it involves music, board games, keyboards, pinball, pool and painting. All Year 6 pupils, whose behaviour has a calming effect on the younger children, are allowed to attend.
- The school has developed a new system for serving lunches in an attempt to replicate the kind of family meal which many of the pupils may not get at home. The tables have tablecloths and the pupils bring the food to the tables and serve themselves.

### What has been achieved so far

The school has recorded significant progress by the pupils in all of the strands identified by the Boxall Profile. All six children improved considerably according to all or most of these criteria between February and June this year. These measurements cover five main developmental strands:

- relationships with others;
- organising experiences;
- display of negative behaviour or anger;
- poor attachment/inconsequential behaviour; and
- not engaging/poor self-image.

Children with behaviour problems have learned how to play in a civilised way. Some rather solitary pupils are also developing their social skills. The number of pupils taking school meals has gone up.

## School C: Changing the curriculum

### How this school used GEST funding

The school has initiated a scheme which offers identified groups of students a variety of options, including an alternative timetable. The school serves an area with significant social problems. It has identified the scale of the problems facing it with particular reference to:

- the poor attendance of a number of students;
- the large number of students who require a special or alternative curriculum, or schemes to combat disaffection; and
- the significant number of students who have major learning difficulties, as well as the small core of students who are not able to access the mainstream curriculum successfully.

The school adopted the name 'Training Tracks' to identify the initiatives, as this was considered a positive and meaningful title. Three different 'Training Track' groups were created, including:

- a Year 10 learning support group;
- a Year 10 group experiencing poor and irregular attendance; and
- a Year 11 group containing poor attenders.

Base rooms were allocated to the two attendance-related groups. This enabled the staff to move to the bases, rather than the pupils having to move to different rooms for different subjects. The base rooms are well furnished and create a positive and welcoming environment for the students.

The students involved follow a curriculum which is very similar to the mainstream provision in many respects. However, differences in the mode of delivery for the subjects, and the atmosphere created in the teaching situations, make the courses distinctive. The course content is student-centred and recognition of achievements is a high priority.

The alternative curriculum for the identified groups involves basic work in communication skills, numeracy and science. Personal and social education is provided, along with a number of optional elements for students, including:

- IT or drama;
- art or motor vehicle studies;

- history or traffic education; and
- construction, hair and beauty, or life skills.

The sessions are delivered by carefully-selected school staff and supported effectively by the youth service.

### **What has been achieved so far**

The success of the scheme is variable. The school reports that the approach is very successful with at least half of the students involved. It has brought non-attenders into school and there has been a reduction in student truanting. The school has received some positive responses from students.

However, the school also recognises that the initiative has failed to motivate or change the attitudes of some students. It is clear that to begin such an initiative in Year 10 is probably too late, as attitudes of disaffection and non-attendance are already firmly established by this stage. The school acknowledges that some students 'take advantage' of the more relaxed teaching atmosphere created.

The initiative is a costly option for the school to pursue, but future developments may include a similar scheme run jointly between a number of local comprehensive schools. These developments would:

- be aimed at permanent non-attenders;
- focus on getting these pupils back into school;
- set up a base in the school for these pupils;
- involve a completely different approach; and
- set up courses that are more user-friendly.

### **LEA 1: Tackling disaffection, attendance and behaviour problems on a wide front**

This is a LEA with 160 schools and a behaviour support service which has a team of 50 staff.

#### **How this LEA used GEST funding:**

- Central GEST funding for behaviour has been spent on behaviour support assistants (BSA) and the Promoting Looked-after Children's Education (PLACE) project;

- Central GEST funding for attendance and behaviour has been spent on a variety of initiatives to support primary schools; and
- Much of the GEST funding was delegated to the secondary schools.

### 1. Behaviour support assistants and behaviour support teachers

There are three behaviour support assistants for the first time this year. A satisfaction survey showed that their work is highly valued by the schools. Each assistant spends a half day in each school, monitoring and helping with programmes for individual pupils, for example, teaching them how to play, or running behaviour support programmes devised by a behaviour support teacher. The LEA has bid for five more behaviour support assistants, from LEA funds, because of the success of the pilot. There are also four behaviour support teachers for primary schools and three for secondary schools.

### 2. PLACE (Promoting Looked After Children's Education) project

This involves three teachers who work with looked-after children in four community homes. They aim to support looked-after children in mainstream school placements. The PLACE teachers liaise with behaviour support teachers in schools.

At one community home, all seven pupils are maintained in education placements because of the help of the PLACE teachers. The links provided between education and social services, and the early intervention where difficulties are identified, are vital. They succeed in keeping all of the home's looked-after children involved either in full-time education or on alternative curriculum programmes where the children can contact the PLACE teacher for support.

The following is an example of the PLACE teachers' work.

One of the looked after children had behaviour problems in school. The PLACE teacher:

- visited the school to negotiate continued attendance with the school;
- supported the pupil in some lessons;
- withdrew the pupil from some lessons for one-to-one sessions on behaviour management;
- provided rewards; and
- gave information to the mainstream teachers about the pupil's problems.

PLACE teachers also help looked-after children to find alternative curriculum placements, or placements in further education colleges. They arrange career interviews if pupils are not in mainstream schools. When the pupils leave school, the PLACE teacher keeps in touch and continues to support them.

PLACE staff also do some preventative work with children who live at home but are at risk of needing foster care. They help to encourage non-attenders to attend school.

### 3. Support for primary schools

The education welfare service and Spectacle Theatre ran a joint initiative called 'Speak Out', which included a hard-talking play about bullying called 'Good for Nothing.' This was funded partly with GEST funds, and partly by the Arts Council of Wales. Thirty primary schools have been involved, and all pupils receive an attendance pack.

The project team ran truancy workshops in all primary schools. They provided a truancy workbook which dealt with different aspects of the problem and informed pupils about the risks and the legal requirements. An attractive pack includes a well-designed and colourful booklet for parents, badges inscribed 'It's cool to be in school', bookmarks, a booklet about friendship, an NSPCC flier on bullying, and biros.

All Year 6 pupils visit the 'Safety Zone' in Treforest.

### 4. The transition project

This is a project aimed at improving attendance.

- Each year the project involves three different comprehensive schools and their associated primary schools. The project targets pupils whose attendance is below 80%. Different schools are chosen each year.
- Pupils are identified in Year 5, and followed through Year 6, up until Christmas of Year 7.
- The project officer visited families in the summer holidays and gave talks on truancy. She visited the school two or three times a week, and made follow-up visits to the families. The school sends a letter to parents each half-term to praise improvements, and give notice of certificates or prizes.

### 5. The play-scheme project

A GEST-funded play scheme, organised by the behaviour support teacher, has run since September. The behaviour support assistant provides one lunchtime play session in each school, involving playing games with targeted pupils, usually in a separate part of the playground. They concentrate on active games with a focus on teaching pupils how to play socially, follow conventions, and take their turn.

## 6. Secondary school initiatives

The secondary schools received £4,000 each, which most of them used mainly for first-day response schemes to improve attendance. However, two secondary schools have developed more unusual initiatives. One school won an Objective One bid to run an alternative curriculum for Years 9 to 11, but started this off with £11,000 from GEST funding. Another school developed a counselling service with £15,000 GEST money, which paid for a part-time teacher to release another teacher, who is a trained counsellor.

### What has been achieved so far

As a result of these combined initiatives:

- permanent exclusions have been reduced from 54 in 1996 to six so far in 2002, well below the NAW target of 19;
- there are 120 pupils on alternative curriculum placements in key stage 4, 35 in further education colleges, 60 in community education, and the rest on work experience;
- for each comprehensive school and its linked primary schools, there is a meeting every half-term of a multi-agency Pupil Review Panel. Led by a senior LEA officer, the panel is able to identify problems at an early stage;
- in the transition project, figures provided by the project officer showed variations from one transition project year to the next, but in most years an average improvement of at least 7% in Year 7 pupils' attendance compared with the same pupils' attendance in Year 6. Some groups improved by more, up to 13%. Pupils supported from Year 5 generally improved more than those supported from Year 6. The lowest average improvement was 4.6% for the Year 6 group in 1999; and
- the play-scheme sessions are helping the targeted pupils to behave better and are improving their social skills. In a few schools where the play-scheme is in operation, the playground supervisors have begun to get involved and are realising that they can do more than just patrol the school yard.

## **LEA 2: Setting up projects in school clusters to promote consistency and continuity**

This LEA launched an initiative some two years ago to establish the role of behaviour co-ordinators in each of its primary schools. The initiative arose from discussions with headteachers and built on the assertive discipline strategy and training already underway.

### **How this LEA used GEST funding**

The LEA has used GEST funding to support the initiative and to train the co-ordinators. It has also provided a financial enhancement for each person appointed to undertake the role. The behaviour co-ordinator in each school is seen as a well-trained staff resource, who is able to promote better behaviour and advise on behaviour and assertive discipline issues.

The LEA has developed this initiative further in one cluster of schools in a socially-disadvantaged area where five schools covering all phases from nursery to key stage 4 agreed to work together. The schools recognised that they shared common pupil behavioural problems which adversely affected the teaching and learning opportunities provided. All staff in the cluster received discipline training to ensure a consistent approach in classrooms and other school environments. The behaviour co-ordinator and another member of staff in each school were trained as trainers of assertive discipline, who are consequently able to ensure that all staff have constant access to expertise within their school. Each behaviour co-ordinator has non-contact time to undertake the role effectively.

In one school, the behaviour co-ordinator receives a full day of non-contact time each week. This has been funded from the school budget and a grant from the General Teaching Council of Wales. On the non-contact day, the co-ordinator undertakes a range of work including:

- visiting all classes in the school and checking patterns of pupils' behaviour;
- rewarding pupils who have behaved well;
- sending letters to parents whose children have misbehaved;
- meeting parents by appointment to deal with issues of poor behaviour by pupils;
- providing training for support staff throughout the school; and
- meeting behaviour co-ordinators from other schools in the cluster.

The school has introduced a system of discipline which involves all staff, including support staff and lunchtime supervisors, in order to apply a consistent approach. Parents understand and support the school's approach to discipline and have become firmly involved as partners in the process. They are offered advice on behavioural issues and meet the behaviour co-ordinator regularly. Pupils are motivated to behave well and they, too, understand and support the process operating. When pupils behave well they are rewarded with certificates and vouchers which they can use in shops. When pupils misbehave, they understand that the behaviour co-ordinator will discuss their behaviour with their parents. In fact, in some cases, pupils who have misbehaved have telephoned their parents to explain what they have done. On some occasions, when a pupil's behaviour is particularly poor, the parents are required to accompany their child around the school for part of a school day.

### What has been achieved so far

This strategy is having a very positive impact. The school is a calm, orderly environment with good levels of attendance. Staff feel there are support mechanisms within the school for both teachers and pupils, and there is a consistent approach to discipline. Staff, pupils and parents are all involved in the discipline process and this has been crucial to its success.

The challenge for the future is to maintain the level of non-contact time available for the behaviour co-ordinator in order to maintain the high level of support for the initiative within the school.

## LEA 3: Involving the parents of primary school pupils

### How this LEA used GEST funding

In this LEA, the Assertive Discipline Pilot Project for primary schools has been operating since 1998. The strategy involves training for some central and school staff as leaders, for all teachers and support staff in project schools, and for parents in every school that has key stage 1 classes. Those involved are normally trained during two full in-service days, although some have used weekly 'twilight' training sessions.

The LEA is promoting the same approach to discipline across all its schools. The initiative has a number of advantages:

- it provides a common methodology and a common language through which support staff can discuss pupil behaviour issues with schools;
- pupils who move between schools find their behaviour is managed in a similar way;

- teachers and support assistants who move from one school to another do not have to adapt to new systems and methods of behaviour management;
- lunchtime supervisors have been introduced to the system; and
- parents are informed of the assertive discipline approach through a training package called 'Coping with Kids'.

The development of this twin-track approach, with schools and parents being trained, has proved successful. In one school, the initiative has had a whole-school focus, which has also involved parents. Pupils 'sign-up' to 'Golden Rules' and are provided with clear expectations of good behaviour.

In another school with recognised poor pupil behaviour, the assertive discipline strategy and training have been the catalyst for a number of other developments. Pupils, teachers and parents were asked what they felt worked well in the school and what did not work well. The school has used this information as part of its self-evaluation. In response to the replies it received, it has initiated some changes. In particular, a school council has been established which meets regularly and suggests improvements. Some pupil council members are now 'trouble-busters' who act as mentors and mediators for others. Pupils, who may have a problem, know that they can discuss it with a 'trouble-buster'.

### What has been achieved so far

The LEA's experience of assertive discipline is generating great support in the schools involved. Its strategy for behaviour management is coherent, practical and provides continuity between staff, schools and different phases of education. The LEA's strategy has had greatest success in schools where all staff, including support staff, and parents, are involved and where back-up is provided by a multi-disciplinary team of external support workers.

Rewards for good behaviour are motivating pupils to behave well. The strategy has improved the ethos, reduced shouting, reduced the number of lunchtime problems and given all pupils and staff a focus on good behaviour.

The involvement of parents has had a positive impact. At meetings, parents were often surprised to find that other parents experienced the same behaviour problems with their children. As a self-help strategy, some parents have set up their own friendship groups, which meet at the school each week.

The 'trouble-buster' strategy has helped pupils to recognise problems and distinguish between what they can deal with themselves and what they might need to refer to a teacher.

## **Section 5: Conclusions**

### **Conclusion 1. Common elements of the initiatives**

All the projects and initiatives which schools and LEAs have established with GEST funding, together with funding from other sources, recognise the major adverse impact that poor attendance, behavioural problems and general disengagement with education can have on pupils' learning, attitudes to learning and standards of achievement. These factors can also influence pupils' future learning and achievement, their inter-personal skills and the quality of their contribution to community life when they have left full-time statutory education.

### **Conclusion 2. Effective ways of tackling the problems**

The LEAs and individual schools which are most effective introduce a whole package of measures to tackle disaffection, behavioural problems and low attendance, and to promote inclusion. This is because they recognise the inter-relationship which often exists between these aspects and see the need to tackle them together on a number of fronts. They use GEST funding wisely in conjunction with other sources of funding to make this possible.

### **Conclusion 3. Targeting GEST funding where needs are greatest**

The funding is generally well targeted to support those schools and pupils which are most in need of improvement. Some initiatives which are found to be successful are subsequently introduced into other schools which may have similar difficulties. On the basis of identified common problems, albeit with a very small number of pupils in some schools, some initiatives are considered to be useful for all schools within an LEA. Where this is the case, staff are invited to undergo the relevant training in preparation for implementation or adaptation of the strategies in their own schools.

### **Conclusion 4. The use of GEST funding to tackle the underlying causes of poor attendance and behaviour**

GEST funding has been used effectively to try and tackle the underlying causes of disaffection, poor behaviour and attendance, as well as targeting pupils and schools which need immediate support. Many LEAs and schools have carefully considered curriculum content, teaching styles and pupils' emotional learning in order to change aspects of their provision which are believed to be at the heart of the problem for some pupils within the system. This is a positive and proactive approach which effectively complements their reactive response to current problems with individuals and groups.

### **Conclusion 5. The influence of the multi-agency approach**

The multi-agency approach to tackling difficulties related to pupils' behaviour, attendance and attitude is proving very successful, although it is often difficult to organise and sustain. The expertise of individuals and agencies, working with schools and LEAs, provides a range of alternatives for ensuring that young people remain within the system and receive effective support at crucial times.

### **Conclusion 6. Working with pupils individually and in small groups**

Schools and LEAs recognise that many pupils who are disengaged from education, who attend school intermittently and who display poor behaviour often have low self-esteem and a negative self-image. In these cases, GEST funding has been used to good effect to provide individual and small-group sessions for these pupils, often with the support of youth workers or Behaviour Support Assistants. The main aim of these sessions is to improve pupils' motivation and reintegrate them successfully into mainstream education, or to find them alternative routes to success. In general, pupils benefit from this provision and some re-engage with mainstream education. However, the success rate is higher with younger pupils than with older pupils.

### **Conclusion 7. Targeting specific groups of pupils**

Some projects successfully target specific groups of pupils (for example, PLACE and Nurture) and achieve good results. Some of the pupils who benefit from these projects are among the most vulnerable children and young people in our society.

### **Conclusion 8. Collaboration by schools**

Tackling attendance and behaviour problems can be very time-consuming for teachers and schools. Schools that work together can share costs, training, expertise and resources, and can make more efficient use of their time. Cross-school and cross-phase initiatives also promote consistency and continuity of strategies and expectations, in order to improve pupils' attendance and behaviour over a number of years, and particularly when pupils transfer from one school to another.

### **Conclusion 9. Working with parents**

Working with parents to improve pupils' attendance and behaviour has been a valuable feature of some projects.

## Section 6: Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** In order to make further progress in improving attendance and behaviour; there is a need to address curriculum content, teaching styles, the ethos of classrooms, and pupils' emotional learning in a wider range of schools across all LEAs.

**Recommendation 2:** Intervention of all kinds need to be targeted as soon as possible when the first signs of disaffection become apparent.

**Recommendation 3:** Projects need to be funded over a longer period in order to attract and retain high-quality and experienced staff. Sustainability is often a problem. The projects need to operate within a well-defined, long-term scheme to combat pupil disaffection and its often concomitant behavioural and attendance problems. Quick-fix solutions rarely bring long-term benefits.

**Recommendation 4:** More schools need to work together to tackle attendance and behaviour problems in order to share expertise and costs, and make more efficient use of their time. In particular, primary and secondary schools that work together can introduce more consistency and continuity of approach.

**Recommendation 5:** Working with parents to improve pupils' attendance and behaviour is an aspect which merits further development and inclusion in other school and LEA-based initiatives wherever possible.