The Behaviour Improvement Programme: Good Practice Guide

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As part of the Government's Street Crime Initiative, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) funded 34 Local Authorities to support measures to improve pupil behaviour and attendance in 2 to 4 selected secondary schools and their feeder primary schools. Over 700 schools were involved in Phase 1 of the programme. The Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP) has now been rolled out in three further phases. This good practice guide is based on an evaluation of Phases 1 and 2 of the programme.

Impact of the programme

In the schools visited there was evidence of positive changes in:

- the status of behaviour and pastoral issues;
- school ethos, policies and practices;
- the way that schools supported families;
- children's behaviour, well being and learning;
- relationships with parents;
- staff stress; and
- time spent managing poor behaviour.

The secondary and primary schools participating in Phase 1 of the BIP made greater improvements in attendance over a two year period than similar schools that were not involved in BIP (the control schools) and those in Phase 2 of BIP. Relatively little funding was specifically targeted at improving attendance suggesting that the whole programme had a major impact on pupils' experiences in school leading them to want to attend.

The BIP Phase 1 schools showed significant improvement in some elements of attainment at KS2, KS3 and GCSE but these were not significantly greater than any other groups of schools. Impact on attainment might be expected to take time to become apparent.

There was a reduction in fixed term exclusions in the BIP Phase 1 secondary schools in relation to both the number of incidents and the number of days of exclusions. BIP Phase 1 secondary schools had a small but significant increase in permanent exclusions, reflecting national trends, compared with matched schools, those in Phase 2 BIP, and EiC (non-BIP) schools. There was considerable variability between schools with 50% showing a reduction in permanent exclusions and 16% no change. Phase 2 BIP secondary schools showed a statistically significant reduction in permanent exclusions. There were no statistically significant changes in exclusions at primary school (fixed or permanent) which given their normally low levels is unsurprising.

The most successful LEA performance

Consideration of the implementation of BIP in the LEAs with the highest levels of improvement in relation to attendance, attainment and exclusions indicated that BIP was most effective when LEAs:

- offered support at the level of the individual, the school and the community;
- adopted a multi-agency approach through the operation of BESTs;
- provided strong support within schools through the use of audits and the appointment of LBPs and learning mentors;
- ensured that there were strong links and co-operation between schools and the BEST;
- ensured that there was good communication between all involved parties;
- had strong management structures for the planning and operationalising of initiatives;
- had clearly focused aims and commitment to carrying them out;
- built on existing provision.

The LEAs that improved the least well overall had:

- invested few resources in whole-school policies;
- invested more resources on alternatives to exclusion, and at risk pupils;

- neglected to stress the importance of communication, coherence and strong management.

The data suggested that a combination of BEST work alongside the appointment of LBPs, learning mentors, the implementation of the audit and other whole school initiatives was the most effective in raising attendance and attainment, improving behaviour and reducing exclusions.

Management and implementation of the programme

Effective management of the programme at LEA level was important for its success. The most successful LEAs shared in common clear structures, an approach which insisted on resourcing based on need, and parity between primary and secondary schools. BIP Phase 1 provided LEAs with a wide choice of initiatives. This facilitated empowerment and increased commitment to the programme but led to a lack of focus in the programme. In schools the work of BIP was not easily identified as distinctive.

The operation of clusters varied between LEAs. The most cohesive clusters appeared to meet regularly in real partnership and shared good practice, problems, decision-making, resources and training.

Where schools lacked strong and effective leadership, interventions had little or no impact. Where Lead Behaviour Professionals were part of the Senior Management Team BIP was better supported within the school.

BIP was more successful where it built on and complemented other existing initiatives in the LEA, when training was undertaken collaboratively and there were agreed common areas of work and co-operation to avoid duplication.

There was wide variation in the extent to which funding was devolved to schools. Where funding was devolved schools had greater control and commitment to the programme but LEAs had little control over the way funding was spent.

Crucial to good relationships between LEAs and schools were consultation and good communication. Good communication within schools was also crucial. This was particularly problematic where staffing was transient and there were temporary teachers.

Implementation in schools
Key to the successful implementation of BIP was the way it operated at the individual, family, school and community level.

Within schools, the behaviour audits were key in forcing schools to acknowledge and address their own problems. Although the behaviour audits were valued and viewed as working well, they were time consuming to complete. The audits provided information to stimulate self analysis, data to support the development of behaviour improvement plans, a baseline for monitoring progress and a means of making comparisons with other schools. They were useful in enabling schools to identify where they needed to focus their resources. They provided evidence on which to make changes to improve behaviour.

The commitment of Senior Managers was crucial for success. Where schools had insufficient capacity to cope with organising new initiatives, where senior staff were overloaded with other responsibilities or were resistant to the school changing its practices BIP was not implemented successfully.

Lead Behaviour Professionals (LBPs) played a pivotal role in the extent to which BIP was successful. The LPBs raised the status of pastoral support and behaviour management. They were particularly effective in secondary schools when they were members of the Senior Management Team. Their managerial and leadership role was seen as crucial to the success of BIP. Work overload was common and constituted a major obstacle to the successful implementation of BIP initiatives. The impact of the LBP was greater where they were able to challenge and influence whole school policy. They were able to influence school policy and how schools developed support systems most effectively when they:
- had sufficient time;

- had clearly defined roles;
- were school-based; and
- were able to have an impact on the SMT (mostly as a result of being a member).

Multi-agency working in BESTs
There was wide variability in the way that BESTs were structured and the nature of the personnel working within them. Crucial to their effective working was the way that they were able to embed their work in schools. They needed to have a base in schools, work closely with all school staff and tailor their activities to the needs of particular schools. Successful BESTs developed interventions which operated at several levels including those of the individual child, the family, the school, and the community forging links between them.

Good communication between staff at all levels was essential to effective functioning. Building the relationships required for multi-agency working required time. BIP enabled much better communication between a wide range of services including police, schools, YOT and social services. There was an increase in the extent to which interagency working took place. This provided opportunities for a range of professionals to share ideas and think about approaches to problems in different ways. There were particular benefits in offering some services, e.g. family therapy, parenting classes, on school premises as this reduced travelling time and expense for families and made it more likely that they would attend the sessions.

Overall, there was considerable evidence of the effectiveness of BESTs in supporting children and their families and reducing pressure on school staff as they were able to act quickly when there were problems facilitating access to a range of non-education agencies. There were difficulties in recruiting appropriate personnel for all of the multi-disciplinary teams. Differences in working practices, the nature of contracts for different members of the team and in advertising posts created difficulties in the early stages of BIP.

Learning Mentors
Learning Mentors were sometimes members of BESTs and sometimes employed by schools. Their role offered flexibility enabling them to focus on the particular pastoral needs of children, their parents and the school within which they were working. The work of Learning Mentors was particularly valued in primary schools reducing staff and head teacher stress by supporting at risk pupils, improving behaviour and freeing up staff time. The key element of the role was the availability of an individual in school in a non-teaching role who could take on the role of supporting children, and act as a link with parents.

Key workers and supporting at risk pupils
The numbers of pupils identified as being at risk varied enormously between schools and LEAs. There was little consistency in the way that 'at risk' pupils were identified, criteria varied widely. 'At risk' pupils were supported in a range of ways depending on their needs. It was important that procedures for signing off 'at risk' pupils were established. A range of staff undertook the role of Key Worker including teachers, LBPs, Learning Mentors, members of school management teams, members of BESTs. Allocation of Key Workers depended on LEA and school policies or the needs of the child. The role was implemented more successfully when it was well defined.

The provision of full-time education on the first day of exclusion
All participating LEAs were committed to the provision of full-time education on the first day of exclusion. This proved to be a very effective initiative and acted as a deterrent to poor behaviour. The arrangements made included:
- use of the PRU;
- reciprocal exchanges between schools;
- the setting up of internal exclusion centres and LEA centres;
- buying in outside agencies to make provision;

- adopting a flexible school day for excludees (a later start to the school day and later finish); and
- providing monitoring of work undertaken at home.

Particularly successful were initiatives where schools shared provision.

Attendance at school
Despite the significant improvement in attendance in BIP schools, relatively little funding was directly targeted towards reducing truancy suggesting that it was the implementation of the whole programme which addressed the underlying causes of non-attendance which led to the positive outcome. Initiatives to directly improve attendance at school adopted during BIP included:
- truancy sweeps;
- the development of materials to promote good attendance, e.g. videos;
- ICT initiatives within schools to monitor attendance and follow up non-attendance;
- the placement of Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) in schools;
- the appointment of home-school liaison officers;
- rewarding pupils for good attendance;
- target setting; and
- naming and shaming staff who did not follow up non-attendance.

Safer school partnerships and police in schools
Police in schools was perceived as an overwhelmingly successful initiative. The greatest impact was when police worked in schools on a regular basis contributing to the everyday life of the school, had a permanent base in the school offering drop in sessions, advice and support or worked as active members of the BEST team.

Alternative curricula
Alternative curriculum were referred to as particularly successful by a number of LEAs. Specific reference was made to Notschool.net.(an online education system), Re-Entry (a project operating within the community to re-engage highly disaffected pupils) and Skill Force (a practically based curriculum operating from a school base but including a range of off site activities) which had operated to reduce permanent exclusion from school and re-engage students with education.

Nurture groups
Nurture groups for extremely needy pre-school and infant children were effective in supporting the development of personal and social skills and improving behaviour. Staff required appropriate training to undertaken this work. Where it was successful its impact was felt across the whole school.

Support for parents
Work with parents was demonstrated to be of real value in improving children's behaviour and creating greater understanding in parents of how to manage their offspring's behaviour at home and in persuading them to attend school. The availability of support for parents in schools ensured a better take up than if it had been available at a central venue.

Long term sustainability
The extent to which BIP was perceived to be sustainable in the long term depended on how well its principles were embedded in the way that schools and LEAs addressed issues of inclusion and pastoral care. For long term success schools needed to adopt a proactive, preventative, solution-focused approach to behaviour improvement rather than a punitive, reactive approach.