Evaluation of the Primary Behaviour and Attendance Pilot: The School Improvement strand

J Rhamie

University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom

The context of the research

Poor attendance and disruptive behaviour in primary schools have a negative impact on learning and teaching. For those children whose attendance is continuously disrupted or behaviour is particularly difficult there can be a substantial impact on subsequent life chances. Improving attendance and behaviour in school depends on addressing a range of inter-related issues at the whole-school level, in the classroom, and in relation to individual pupils. Evidence suggests that schools with high levels of communal organisation, adopting a whole-school approach, show more orderly behaviour. The Primary Behaviour and Attendance pilot took place from 2003-05 and involved 25 Local Authorities. The pilot had four strands, a 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. The school improvement strand of the pilot aimed to develop and test out models of LA support where behaviour and attendance were key school improvement issues. Each LA was 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.

The focus of the enquiry

The evaluation aimed to test out the effectiveness of the school improvement strand 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.

The research methods

Multi-methods were adopted to undertaken the evaluation of the school improvement strand. Interviews were undertaken with LA co-ordinators and teacher coaches. Field visits were made to 9 schools implementing the strand and interviews were undertaken with head teachers and other staff. Twenty-eight head teachers and 31 teachers completed questionnaires following the completion of the programme and data relating to pupils' attendance and attainment were analysed.

The findings

The evaluation showed that the behaviour and attendance audit was perceived as valuable but time consuming to complete. 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. 86% 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. A whole-school approach to the coaching process was successful in reducing the defensive position of staff and ensuring cross phase consistency in behaviour policy implementation. 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.