School behaviour and attendance

Research priorities and questions

March 2014

Contents

General approach to research needs and priorities

This paper is one of a series of 15 which aims to:

- promote the importance of robust quantitative evidence, in combination with other methods, to increase understanding of 'what works' in education and children's services;
- identify evidence gaps and promote discussion of them with the research community, practitioners and other stakeholders;
- initiate collaboration with the research community, practitioners and other stakeholders to research these issues; and,
- support work that helps understand and tackle the barriers to evidence based practice, including how to make evidence accessible to practitioners.

The principles behind the department's research strategy are inspired by Ben Goldacre's vision[1] in the Department for Education Analytical Review[2]. In future, the development and use of evidence should be increasingly driven and owned by the research community, sector bodies and practitioners.

The published suite of priority and question papers between them cover the department's key areas of work and provides a coherent strategic context for the research community, sector bodies and practitioners as well as the department, to plan and prioritise research. The department will continue to commission research, informed by the published priority questions

Views about the research questions and priority papers, recent findings, on-going research or evidence gaps are warmly welcomed. We will also be arranging a series of discussions throughout 2014 with practitioners, the research community and other stakeholders to discuss views and help shape departmental plans to filling evidence gaps. If you want to be involved please email us at: Research.PRIORITIES@education.gsi.gov.uk, follow us on Twitter (@educationgovuk) or like us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/educationgovuk).

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[1] Goldacre, B.(2013), Building Evidence into Education
[2] The Department for Education (2013), Analytical Review: The Department

The high-level research need

There is a need to understand the use and impact of interventions to improve behaviour. There is much being done by schools and we need to understand and share more widely how they are using their powers and to identify those exemplary practices, to further improve the standard of behaviour and levels of attendance. Similarly a better understanding of alternative provision (AP) commissioning is needed, as well as ascertaining the benefits of military ethos in AP.

Behaviour and Attendance: the policy context

Behaviour and Bullying

The need for good behaviour in schools is because pupils will be happier and achieve more if they are free from disruption and the fear of bullying. Tackling poor behaviour is also important in attracting good people into teaching and for keeping them in the profession.

Research has shown that teachers lacked understanding of their powers to discipline and felt in some cases that senior management were not supportive. That is why the government has sought to communicate a clear, strong message that teachers have the right to impose discipline in the classroom and they should be supported by senior management when doing so.

The government has strengthened teachers' powers to discipline pupils; clarified guidance to make it more accessible; and sharpened the Ofsted accountability regime by reducing the criteria for inspections from 27 to just 4, one of which is behaviour and safety.

Requirements on schools

All schools must have a policy which outlines measures to encourage good behaviour and prevent all forms of bullying amongst pupils. These should be communicated to all pupils, school staff and parents.

Ensuring teachers have the powers they need to maintain discipline

In order to ensure teachers have the powers they need to maintain discipline and enforce the school rules, the government has introduced a number of reforms which include:

- Stronger powers to search pupils.
- Removal of requirement to give parents 24 hours' written notice of 'after-school' detentions.
- Clarification of teachers' power to use of reasonable force.
- Revised and updated advice and guidance to schools on promoting good behaviour and maintaining discipline. This includes the "Charlie Taylor checklists" on the basics of classroom management.
- Simplified advice on how to prevent and tackle bullying.
- Anonymity for teachers when accused by pupils until such time as they are charged with an offence.
- A new system of independent review panels that ensure that a school's decision to exclude is not undermined by an appeal process that can force the reinstatement of a permanently excluded pupil against the best interests of the school and its pupils.

It is up to teachers to use these powers as they judge necessary, and for school leaders and parents to support them in doing so.

Strengthening accountability – The current Ofsted framework

Since January 2012, school inspection focuses on four core areas: teaching, achievement, leadership and behaviour and safety. When evaluating the behaviour and safety of pupils at the school, inspectors must consider pupils' behaviour towards, and respect for, other young people and adults.

Ensuring teachers are properly equipped to manage pupil behaviour

Teacher Training for Behaviour

Teachers' Standards were introduced from 1 September 2012. The standards set a clear baseline of expectations for the professional practice and conduct of teachers, from the point of qualification. One of the new standards is that teachers must "manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe learning environment."

The Teachers' Standards are used to assess all trainees working towards QTS, and all those completing their statutory induction period. They are also used to assess the performance of teachers in maintained schools as part of the annual appraisal process.

Training for New Head teachers

The new National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) was introduced in September 2012 and the approaches on behaviour were strengthened following the engagement of Charlie Taylor, the former government's expert adviser on behaviour.

School-to-School Support

In looking to improve behaviour, a school can seek to draw on the school-to school support framework of Teaching Schools; National Leaders of Education (NLEs); and Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs). By the end of 2014/15 the NCTL aims to have designated 500 teaching schools, 1,000 NLEs and 5,000 SLEs. SLEs are outstanding middle and senior leaders who have the skills to support individuals or teams in similar positions in other schools. They understand what outstanding leadership practice in their area of expertise looks like and are skilled in helping other leaders to achieve it in their own context. There are currently around 3,800 SLEs including nearly 280 with a specialism in behaviour.

Attendance

The Secretary of State has committed to ensuring schools improve the attendance of all their pupils. Setting the legal and procedural framework for school attendance including the appropriate sanctions schools can use to address poor attendance.

The Taylor Review of Attendance made a number of recommendations that the department has implemented. These include:

- Changing the law to remove the ambiguity about term time holidays, absence should only be granted in exceptional circumstances.
- Widening publication of school absence data to include reception classes and the last half term of the school year (excl year 11).
- Increasing penalty notice fines and reducing the timescales for paying them.
- Revising school attendance advice to make clear schools' and LAs' responsibilities to promote and improve school attendance.

Alternative provision and exclusion

The 2010 Schools White Paper, The Importance of Teaching, provides the context for the government's policy on exclusion and alternative provision. The government supports schools in maintaining good behaviour, including through the lawful use of exclusion. We do, however, believe that schools should intervene early to address the underlying causes of poor behaviour that could contribute to a subsequent exclusion.

Further context on alternative provision is provided by The Taylor Review, 2011[3]. The attainment of pupils attending alternative provision (AP) is stubbornly low, with only 1.3% of pupils in AP achieving 5+ A*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent including English and maths in 2011/2012. The government accepted and implemented all 28 of the review's recommendations, which are based on the principles of: better providers; better commissioning and better-trained teachers. The recommendations include that schools rather than local authorities should be responsible for commissioning alternative provision. We are also trialling the principle of greater school responsibility for excluded children in 11 local authorities.

Military Ethos

The project aims to use the benefits of a military ethos to improve pupils' attainment, behaviour and attendance in both alternative provision (AP) and schools through establishing and supporting a military ethos market. Military ethos organisations, whilst still operating in a relatively immature market, will nonetheless be making tangible differences to pupils' education. They will be addressing behaviour difficulties and instilling values of teamwork and discipline, providing structure, organisation and boundaries and developing pupils' self-esteem and confidence. The military ethos organisations will be increasingly self-sustaining financially and supporting pupils in both mainstream schools and AP.

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[3] Improving alternative provision (2012).

Research summary and gaps

Although we have access to a large amount of data and information about schools, there remain some important evidence gaps, particularly on how to extend more widely the exemplary practices used in schools for managing behaviour.

Data from Ofsted (2013)[4] shows that 92% of schools were judged to be good or outstanding on behaviour at their most recent inspection. Similarly, the results from a survey of teachers' shows that 77% perceive the behaviour in their schools to be 'good or very good' and this has improved by seven percentage points since 2008[5].

However, poor behaviour in the classroom, particularly low level disruption, still persists in too many schools. This may be the result of behaviour not being sufficiently well-managed by school leaders and teachers, or it could be that the approaches adopted by schools are fine but undermined by a lack of support from parents. The 2013 Teacher Voice survey found that lack of parental support or poor parenting skills, reported by 72 per cent of respondents, were the biggest factors associated with poor pupil behaviour in school. Parental lack of respect for teachers and authority' was the second most frequently selected factor, selected by 22 per cent of all teachers.

The department has introduced a greater range of powers and tools to maintain discipline and there is a wide range of literature on effective behaviour management. However, it is not clear if all teachers are aware of these behaviour management approaches and techniques. Over half (53 per cent) of teachers in the Teacher Voice survey, 2013, said that they were not aware of the department's updated advice on the powers teachers have to discipline pupils. While the same survey found that 42 per cent of teachers were aware of the department's updated advice it is not clear why some schools do not employ them effectively or chose to ignore them. It would therefore be helpful to policy makers and schools, particularly those charged with improving behaviour in schools, such as Teaching Schools, to have a greater understanding of these issues so that they can better promote existing approaches and techniques or develop new ones.

Given the high profile of bullying in general and cyber bullying in particular, teachers need to know more about how schools can successfully combat cyber bullying. Schools tell us anecdotally that cyberbullying is a growing problem for schools. Such estimates that are available on cyber-bullying vary widely and it would be useful to get a handle on the extent of the problem. For instance, estimates from an evidence review carried out by the Childhood Wellbeing Centre (at the Institute of Education, University of Kent and Loughborough University) for the department in 2011, found that between 8 per cent and 34 per cent of children and young people in the UK had been cyberbullied.

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[4] Ofsted (2013) Maintained Schools Inspections and Outcomes.
[5] DFE, 2013. Teacher Voice Omnibus: May 2013 survey - pupil behaviour.

The particular challenges are that this form of school bulling is less easy to spot than face to face bullying and can happen at any time of the day making it particularly challenging for schools to deal with. It would be extremely helpful to schools to know more about practical strategies that schools have adopted that they could copy or adapt for their school. It would also be useful to establish what teachers say they would find most helpful in helping them to tackle cyber-bullying.

Parents are crucial in supporting good behaviour in school but not enough is known about what effective schools do to engage parents in improving behaviour and the strategies they use to connect with parents in general and 'hard to reach' parents in particular.

Parents have a legal duty to secure their school registered child's regular attendance at school and to understand the messages about the impact of poor attendance. There is a clear relationship between absence from school and poor attainment. Further research is needed to identify how schools can influence reductions in in eth levels of persistent absence.

The Taylor Review of alternative provision (AP) identified poor commissioning of alternative provision as a significant barrier to improving children's attainment. Particular concerns include a failure to accurately assess pupils' needs and to set appropriately challenging outcomes for attainment and progression. The department is currently trialling the concept of greater school responsibility for permanently excluded pupils. One of the aims of this trial is to identify examples of effective practice in the use of alternative provision. Given the diversity of provision and differing local contexts, this is an area where schools could benefit from further evidence-based practice on the effective use of alternative provision to improve pupil attainment and progression.

The AP market is currently in a state of transition, in part as a response to commissioners' higher expectations. There is a need for commissioners to think strategically about the provision they require. Commissioners may, therefore, benefit from evidence on how to best influence the local AP offer to ensure it meets the needs of their pupils.

The Government's ambition is for pupils to use the benefits of a military ethos (ME), such as self-discipline and teamwork, to achieve a good education. The department is funding several organisations to deliver alternative provision military ethos projects that help prevent pupils from becoming disengaged from education and/or re-engage pupils outside mainstream education to improve attainment[6]. The impact of the ME intervention on the attainment, behaviour and attendance of those pupils needs to be assessed.

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[6] For further information see the gov.uk website

Future priorities

The research questions identified below are intended as broad prompts; they have been formulated to help identify where further analytical and evaluative work might most usefully be focused - whether that work is undertaken by Government, by independent researchers, or indeed by schools themselves. The department also needs to understand how these issues vary across the full diversity of England's school system. **These questions are intended to be reviewed at regular intervals, as gaps are addressed and new areas for investigations arise.**

Behaviour and Bullying

- What factors influence teachers' behaviour management in the classroom?
- What are schools' most effective strategies for tackling behaviour?
- What strategies are used by effective schools to engage parents, especially hard-to- reach parents, in improving behaviour? How do these schools ensure that parents know their duties and responsibilities?
- What successful strategies do schools deploy to combat cyberbullying?

Attendance

- What approaches are used by schools with zero or low persistent absence?
- How do the approaches used by schools with zero or low persistent absence actually affect parent and pupil attendance behaviour?

Alternative provision

- How do effective commissioners assess pupils' needs to identify individuals who would benefit from AP? How is this information used to inform commissioning and monitor progress?
- What are the most effective (and cost effective means) of delivering AP in terms of improving pupils' attainment and progression?
- How can commissioners effectively influence the local AP offer in order to meet their pupils' needs?

Military Ethos

- Does a military ethos have an impact on attainment, behaviour and attendance? Are these potential impacts affected by pupil characteristics such as gender, race, and eligibility for free school meals, for example?
- What are the most effective/least effective aspects of military ethos? Which organisations are the best performers and offer value for money?

- How do schools fund military ethos? Are there any funding blockages/issues?
- How is military ethos used in schools?
- What lessons learned/best practice is emerging from the use of military ethos? Can this be carried over to other elements of school practice?
- What are schools/families/pupils perceptions of military ethos?

Engaging with future priorities

We would like individuals or organisations to respond to this and you can do this in various ways:

- Share with DfE any existing research evidence or current work relevant to questions. Email to Research.PRIORITIES@education.gsi.gov.uk.
- Prioritise research effort or bids in the light of the evidence questions.
- Debate evidence gaps and priorities with your own associations or other stakeholders. DfE would be interested to hear any views emerging - email as above.
- Follow us and join the discussion on Twitter (@educationgovuk)
- Like us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/educationgovuk)