

SEVEN KINGS HIGH SCHOOL

A Specialist Science & Technology College

HEADMASTER: SIR ALAN STEER, B.A., F.R.S.A.



"Friendship, Excellence & Opportunity"

Ed Balls
Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families
Department for Children, Schools and Families
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

14th July 2008

Dear Secretary of State,

Behaviour Review:

I have pleasure in forwarding to you the third stage of my Behaviour Review. In my report I have attempted to meet the terms of the remit you set for me in your letter dated April 3rd 2008. I have been able to complete this task due to the kindness and expertise of those groups who I have been able to consult. My especial thanks should go to the Secondary Heads Reference Group, the teacher professional associations, the Drug and Alcohol Education Advisory Group and the national drugs co-ordinator for the Association of Chief Police Officers. I am particularly indebted to the Behaviour and Families divisions of DCSF as they have given me exemplary support and guidance.

You will see from my report that I continue to be impressed by the degree of commitment being shown inside and outside government to improving the lives of children and by the range of initiatives that exist to support this work. While specific and targeted interventions are essential, children's behaviour can never be seen out of the context in which they live. I remain convinced that as we see the implementation of the proposals and aspirations of the Children's Plan, we will also see a positive impact on the social harmony of schools and society at large.

Since 2005 when I first became involved in working on the issue of behaviour in schools, I have shared the view of others that young people can be presented in a negative and unjustified manner. As a Headteacher of 23 years experience who visits many schools, I do not recognise the picture of teenagers that is sometimes presented in sections of the media. I consider this misrepresentation to be extremely unhelpful and damaging.

In the original remit that you gave to me you asked me to suggest actions that might help to promote high standards of behaviour among the young. I would now like to respond to that invitation outside the confines of my formal reports.



It has long been my view that society insufficiently recognises the huge contribution made by young people through voluntary work, or when they act as carers in the home, or elsewhere. I have witnessed a generosity of spirit and depth of social conscience among the young that should shame many of their critics. I would welcome action that would encourage young people to be more active in their communities. This could explore whether there are unnecessary obstacles that hinder their involvement. It could involve consideration of the case for establishing local, regional and national systems of recognition for young people, similar to the Teacher Awards which have proved so successful inside my profession. The engagement of and sponsorship by those sections of the media that are most critical of the young would be particularly advantageous.

I look forward to submitting to you in November the next part of my review into behaviour.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gower', written in a cursive style.

Sir Alan Steer
Headmaster

Introduction.

This is the third instalment of the Behaviour Review conducted at the request of the Secretary of State. Since commencing this review it has been gratifying to note external verification of my perception that standards of behaviour in English schools have risen and are continuing to rise. OfSTED now report that the number of schools with serious behaviour problems is at the lowest level ever recorded. The number of children needing to be permanently excluded from school continues to fall (June 2008). This is not to suggest that problems do not remain, or that further improvements cannot be made. It does confirm the belief of the Practitioners' Group that *'most schools successfully manage behaviour to create an environment in which pupils feel valued, cared for and safe.'* Practitioners' Group Report 2005.

This section of the review covers the following areas :

- Parental engagement and responsibility for pupil behaviour.
- Learning and Teaching and the promotion of greater consistency.
- School powers to deal with problems of alcohol, drugs and other illicit items (including whether the existing power to search for weapons should be extended)

In addressing these issues I have consulted widely and I am grateful for the contributions and the advice I have received.

1. Whether further action is needed at either national, or local levels to help secure parental engagement and responsibility for pupil behaviour.

1.i *'Families are the bedrock of society and the place for nurturing happy, capable and resilient children. Parents' support for their child's learning is an essential foundation for achievement.'*

'Government does not bring up children – parents do – so government needs to do more to back parents and families'

These quotations from the Children's Plan express a universal agreement on the role of families and parents in bringing up children and that the full engagement of parents in their child's education should always be the ambition. *'Where there is a climate of mutual regard, trust and understanding between schools and parents the chances of a successful educational experience for the child are greatly increased.'* (3-11

Influences on children's attainment and progress in Key Stage 2. DCSF Research Brief) Where that climate exists parents are likely to accept appropriate responsibility for the behaviour of their children.

1.ii The potential to effect radical change when parents and schools work closely together and do not give up in face of difficulties is significant.

'A Year 12 pupil of Black Caribbean heritage talked passionately about how important this was to him I was in trouble on and off consistently in the early years of secondary school. I rebelled against school and frequently got into trouble for arguing with teachers. The school worked closely with my parents. I suddenly realised that it was nearly too late for me and I wanted to change. The school hadn't ever given up on me, even though I was really bad.'

(OfSTED : Reducing exclusions of black pupils from secondary schools March 2008)

1.iii The level of parental satisfaction with their child's school is consistently high. A DCSF survey of parents in 2008 indicated that 92% felt involved in their children's education and that 51% felt that they were very involved. These figures indicate an upward trend of parental involvement which reflects the success of national initiatives and the presence of much good practice in schools.

1.iv Even if parental engagement in schools has been transformed from the situation existing a generation ago, we should not be complacent. Parents may feel more involved with schools than ever before, but 66% of parents surveyed still wanted a greater involvement. Levels of parental engagement also vary, as not all sections of society are equally involved. For some parents engagement with schools may present a personal challenge, possibly due to their own school experience in the past. For all these reasons, a key objective for schools should be to continue to develop parental engagement in the education of their children.

Current initiatives and areas for development.

1.v In recent years there have been a number of new initiatives, or pilots aimed to support parents in their parenting role.

- Family Intervention projects.
- Family Pathfinders and Extended Family Pathfinders
- New Parenting Experts/Practitioners.
- Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinders.
- Parent Support Advisers.
- Respect Parenting Practitioners.
- Sure Start Centres.
- Transition Information sessions.

These initiatives are laudable and I commend those responsible for their commitment to this important work. The initiatives need to operate for sufficient time for a proper analysis of their impact to be made and for the knowledge gained to then drive further development. Time is generally needed with projects of this nature for trust to be established and for new practices to become embedded.

1.vi The number of active initiatives requires that there is co-ordination and that all involved parties are aware of the parent support provision that is available. It would be helpful for this provision to be 'mapped' and for this information to be circulated to schools and to Local Authority Children's Services.

1.vii I am particularly supportive of the introduction of Parent Support Advisers as this initiative was one of the key recommendations of the Practitioners' Group in 2005. It is my view that Parent Support Advisers can play a crucial role in enabling schools to deliver the objectives of Every Child Matters and the Children's Plan, particularly by creating the capacity for schools to offer greater support to targeted and vulnerable members of their communities. I was very pleased to note the commitment in the Children's Plan to create this capacity and the emphasis placed on the vital importance of early intervention.

1.viii Parent Support Advisers provide schools with the capacity to work with the most disengaged, or troubled, pupils and parents. The Warwick University evaluation of the Parent Support Adviser pilot (January 2008) reported that parents working with P.S.A.s were overwhelmingly positive and particularly appreciated the greater amount of time that a P.S.A. could offer them.

'I wanted a home visit as I wanted her to see my son's home environment. It's important to me.'

'I was in tears and it was as if something had been lifted, and I felt: I can deal with this. She'll break the problems down and tries to get to the bottom of them. She made me feel that he is not abnormal. I was so stressed and she puts you back in control.'

1.ix Vulnerable parents and vulnerable children often need a champion to assist them in accessing the provision that is available. If a parent is not able to access a service, the provision of that service will not effect the desired change. Assisting access is a key function for the P.S.A. who can help the parent, or the school obtain the support that is needed for the child to learn. This support can relate to issues that may not appear educational, but which in reality are central to the child's development.

'She helped me with the housing and the cockroaches and took me to sort it out.'

1.x The expansion of the Parent Support Adviser initiative in April 2008 was very pleasing. It should continue to be evaluated, but I look forward to it taking a central role in enabling schools to meet the objectives of the Children's Plan.

Areas for development.

1.xi Parent Councils. These currently exist in many schools, particularly in the primary sector. They can be an excellent means of engaging parents in the life of the school and in enlisting their advice and support. Clearly it is important that the role of the Parent Council is defined and understood and that the role of the parent governor is not adversely affected.

1.xii Information Technology and on-line reporting. The use by schools and parents of information technology offers great opportunities to improve communication and engagement. There is an expectation that by 2010 all secondary schools and by 2012 all primary schools will be offering regular reports to parents by on line reporting and many schools are already in the process of introducing this facility.

1.xiii It is my view that on-line access can only be a force for the good in engaging parents with schools and I fully support this imaginative initiative. Regular reporting of pupil progress will enable parents to intervene at an early stage when that is necessary and will provide them with the information to have meaningful discussions with school staff. Successfully implemented on-line communications with home will produce a better school environment, make a positive impact on teachers' workload and greatly benefit our young learners.

1.xiv On line access will also allow a parent to monitor the school attendance and punctuality of their child. This will be helpful in preventing truancy and the potential for greater engagement of parents for this purpose needs to be recognised by schools.

1.xv The prime use of I.T. must be to promote learning. Further action should take place to encourage schools to enable parents and pupils to access from home school schemes of work, homework assignments and learning materials. In doing so, schools will promote greater parental engagement and will assist the child to become an independent learner.

1.xvi Parental involvement in school self evaluation represents best practice. It engages parents in the education of their child and provides the school with information to aid its development. This is particularly helpful in ensuring successful transition between Key Stages. Schools are required to identify for OfSTED how they have taken into account the views of pupils and parents, but many already take parental engagement in self evaluation to a far higher level. This should be encouraged across all schools.

1.xvii Home School agreements exist in all schools, but these are not always effective. Where these are effective the school is pro active in working with parents and in carrying out the school responsibilities.

1.xviii Parental Complaints. Schools that commit themselves to working closely with parents and who allocate skilled personnel to this task are generally successful in resolving parental complaints at an early and informal stage. For a positive school-parent relationship to exist, a commitment to transparency and openness is essential.

1.xix All schools are required to have a complaints procedure and to publicise this to parents. In the relatively unusual circumstance of a parent wishing to formalise the complaint, they would initially be referred to the headteacher. If this does not lead to a resolution of the complaint it will be heard by the school governing body. If the complainant remains dissatisfied after this stage the complaint can be forwarded to the Secretary of State for Education.

1.xx I share the view that it would be beneficial to reform this process, but I do not wish to see an over bureaucratic complaints system that could result in unintended negative consequences. I recommend that the right to refer a complaint to the Secretary of State should be replaced by a local referral system. The complaints procedure should allow a parent dissatisfied with the decision of the governing body to take that decision to be reviewed independently of the school. In my opinion the remit for this review should relate to whether the school had observed legal requirements; had followed the correct procedures and had acted reasonably. The remit should not involve hearing the case again. There are a number of ways in which this role could be exercised. My own view is that this role could be exercised best by a panel convened by the relevant Local Authority who would understand the local context. If this option was to be pursued, there would be need for further consideration of the panel's composition to ensure that parents would have confidence in its independence.

1.xxi While wishing to see a fair and robust complaints system, I am concerned to avoid any action that could undermine the disciplinary authority of the school.

1.xxii In 2005 the Practitioners' Group strongly supported the right of parents to be able to appeal against the decision of the school to exclude their child. This remains

my firm view and I do not support those who call for school exclusion to be made easier.

Recommendations.

1.xxiii Parent Support. The range of parent support provision should be mapped and the information supplied to schools, Children's Trusts and other interested parties.

1.xxiv Parent Support Advisers. The expansion of this initiative should continue with a commensurate future increase in funding levels. How existing funds are allocated should be reviewed for April 2009 so that those schools most in need receive sufficient funds to ensure significant change can take place. To avoid double funding, local authorities should take into account whether the school has already received funds under the criteria of deprivation.

1.xxv Parent Councils. Guidance should be issued to schools to assist the establishment of Parent Councils. Guidance should indicate the possible role for a Parent Council and give examples of best practice.

1.xxvi On-Line Communication. DCSF should continue to work closely with teacher professional associations and parent representatives to ensure that on line communications meet the needs of all parties and represent the best practice available. On-line reporting has important potential in informing parents of their child's attendance, punctuality and behaviour (both positive and challenging).

1.xxvii Parental Complaints. There should be a local referral system for parents dissatisfied with the outcome of the hearing of their complaint by the school. A complainant should no longer be able to refer their grievance to the Secretary of State. In my view, the Local Authority would be well placed to convene a panel to undertake this role, for complaints from all state funded schools including Academies.

2. Learning and Teaching and the promotion of greater consistency so as to support the development of high standards of behaviour.

2.i. The interconnection between learning, teaching and behaviour was identified by the Practitioners' Group as being a fundamental truth in education. This remains my strong opinion. Behaviour in schools cannot be seen in isolation from the entire experience of the child and particularly the experience gained in the classroom. I remain unshaken in my belief that teachers working effectively together in a school can effect significant improvement in their pupils regardless of the social and educational context of those pupils. This improvement is seen in behaviour standards as well as in the academic outcomes achieved. It is a tribute to the teaching profession that in the majority of schools, that is the experience that children receive.

2.ii. *'The quality of the outcomes for any school system is essentially the sum of the quality of the instruction that its teachers deliver. You could define the entire task of a school system in this way: its role is to ensure that when a teacher enters the classroom he, or she, has the materials available, together with the knowledge, the capability and the ambition to take one more child up to the standard today than she*

did yesterday. And again tomorrow. How the best performing school systems come out on top. McKinsey & Company 2007.

2.iii. The paramount importance of the quality of teaching is generally recognised, though the obvious consequents to that recognition still require greater acceptance. It is my view that the general standards of teaching to be found in English schools are at a high level and continue to improve. The standard of initial teacher training is incomparably better than that experienced 30 years ago and schools are now more able to recruit teachers of high quality. This is having an impact on behaviour standards in schools and this impact should be continue to increase.

2.iv. The engagement of pupils in their learning is a basic prerequisite for good behaviour. The development of Assessment for Learning pedagogy in schools is making a significant impact. The work of the National Strategies in promoting AfL is to be greatly welcomed.

2.v. All organisations striving for maximum efficiency need to address the issue of internal consistency. This is a truth in education as it is elsewhere. Baseline consistency of best practice needs to improve within individual schools and between individual schools. In particular it needs to improve between the Key Stages of education, especially at the point of primary-secondary transfer. It is encouraging that there are signs of greater recognition of this truth and I welcome the work of the National College for School Leadership in producing 'Schools learning from the best' and the work of Professor David Reynolds at Plymouth University, among others.

2.vi. This is a complex part of my review and for successful progress to be made it is essential that all relevant parties are properly involved and consulted. For that reason I do not intend to submit recommendations before the Autumn.

3. School powers to tackle alcohol, drugs and stolen property (including whether the existing power to search for weapons should be extended)

3.i. The obligation of schools to exercise a duty of care towards pupils and staff requires that checks are made to ensure that dangerous or illicit items are not brought into school. Schools have already been given power to search for weapons. However as noted by the Practitioners' Group in 2005, schools may also face issues around pupils bringing alcohol or drugs into school or being in possession of stolen property. My view, supported by a number of those I have spoken to during the course of this review, is that alcohol is a particular problem.

3.ii Schools need to ensure that there is compliance with reasonable requirements of their own disciplinary code. It is customary for schools to search pupils on occasions and it is my belief that this action, if carried out properly, has the full support of parents who understand that it is in the interests of their children. However, despite the customary practice of schools, teachers do not possess a general legal power to search and this can expose them to difficulty. I believe that it would now be beneficial to extend the power of search and that this power should be framed in broad terms, so as to enable schools to search for any item that pupils ought not be bringing into school. This will provide protection to schools and teachers who are currently carrying out such actions in a responsible manner and in the interests of their pupils.

3.iii. Enquiries have failed to discover instances of headteachers searching pupils for dangerous weapons without their consent. In my view this indicates the exercise of good judgment as if and when that situation arose, it would appear to be more sensible to involve the police. A number of schools now have a police officer specifically allocated to them, as part of a Safer School Partnership. This is an obvious resource for schools to draw upon, if a general search power was introduced. More generally, I believe there are important benefits to school safety and crime prevention in being part of a Safer School Partnership. Schools cannot tackle these problems alone, and I would therefore hope to see more schools working with police in Safer School Partnerships.

3.iv. The power to search is a power that at all times should be exercised with caution. The existing power to search pupils for weapons is supported by clear guidance on how this power should be exercised and on its limitations. It is essential that, if schools' powers to search are widened, clear new guidance is issued to them and that this guidance is re-issued at regular intervals. The guidance should stress the importance when a child appears intoxicated either by alcohol or drugs of engaging medical, or support services. The engagement of parents is also essential and requires particularly skilled and sensitive handling. The guidance should also make clear that application of the search power insensitively, or on a random basis would be contrary to the rights of the pupil and would be likely to undermine school discipline.

3.v In addition to a power to search pupils for alcohol, drugs and other items, it is my view that there is a need for better training for school staff in recognising and dealing with situations of alcohol and substance abuse. This training should take place on a regular basis and be for key school personnel as is the case for child protection training. Guidance should be issued to schools and this guidance should be updated regularly to reflect the importance of the matter and the changing nature of the issue.

3.vi. Educating pupils in the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse is important. All schools have teaching programmes relating to drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse. These are supported by local advisory workers and for most pupils are helpful in assisting them to make their life choices. Schools which are particularly effective in this work recognise that formal programmes of study only play a small part. Pupils who are helped to become self confident learners and self confident individuals and who see responsible behaviour being modelled for them at home and in the school are less likely to indulge in substance abuse.

3.vii A combination of education on the dangers of drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse; guidance and training for school staff on recognising and dealing with these problems; plus the creation of a new legal power to search pupils for inappropriate and dangerous items should do much to prevent pupils bringing illicit items into school.

3.viii I believe that the strategy outlined above will be far more effective than drug testing pupils in schools. In taking this position I share the views of the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Drug and Alcohol Education Advisory Group. It is highly unlikely that a substance abuser would agree to be tested and available tests are not effective in identifying users of the most likely drug which is cannabis. Moreover, testing would need to be carried out in such a manner as the results could

not be challenged for accuracy, and this would be problematic across 3,500 secondary schools without a continual training programme that would consume resources better spent on other substance related projects.

Recommendations.

3.ix. The power of search for teachers should be extended to cover a broad range of items. This would include alcohol which, for most schools, is a bigger problem than drugs. It should also include stolen property and any other item contrary to the school's behaviour policy.

3.x This power should apply when pupils are on the school site, or off site on school trips and activities.

3.xi The power should be supported by clear Departmental guidance, circulated to schools on a regular basis to ensure that search powers are exercised to the highest standards. The guidance should help schools recognise alcohol and substance abusers and promote best practice in dealing with such problems.

3.xii The search power guidance should be based on the following principles.

- The power can only be exercised by the headteacher, or by a person designated by the headteacher.
- A search can only be made by a person of the same gender as the pupil and in the presence of another responsible adult.
- All searches of pupils should be recorded and parents informed.
- Where there is a risk to staff safety, the police should be involved.

3.xiii Minimum standards should be established for the training of designated school staff in dealing with drug and alcohol problems. These should include the frequency of training and the use of common assessment framework procedures (CAF) when appropriate.

3.xiv A combination of education on the dangers of drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse; guidance and training for school staff on recognising and dealing with these problems; plus the creation of a new legal power to search pupils for inappropriate and dangerous items should do much to prevent pupils bringing illicit items into school. This is the overall strategy that I recommend.

3.xv Drug testing in schools is unviable and likely to be ineffective. A pilot programme should not take place.

3. xvi Schools cannot tackle these issues alone. More schools should work with police in establishing Safer School Partnerships. Schools should use their Safer School Partnership officer to help deliver the overall strategy outlined above, including where searches of pupils are deemed appropriate..

Sir Alan Steer
July 2008