

# Turning around life chances



Continuing our series on behaviour management, **Pete Hrekow** offers advice on meeting the needs of pupils with the most challenging behaviour.

**W**orking with pupils with social, emotional and behavioural development needs (SEBD, BESD) in mainstream, short stay schools (pupil referral units) and special schools is demanding and requires understanding, commitment, resilience and huge amounts of time. So why do we bother?

Children and young people with special educational needs are eight times more likely to be excluded from school. Those with SEBD/BESD form the vast majority. Exclusion goes hand-in-hand with involvement in crime and failure in adult life, which costs the country dearly and the individual immensely. Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs), often go on to experience poverty, ill-health, illegal drug use and failed relationships.

Considering anecdotal research from August 2009 looking at long-term NEETs over a ten-year period, a senior civil servant in the Department for Children, Schools and Families noted a shocking finding – of those young people who had been outside the system for a long period of time, 15 per cent were dead by the time the research was being done.

Youth Justice Board data (2009) suggests that, of young people in custody, 83 per cent were excluded from school, 86 per cent were involved in substance abuse, 38 per cent were diagnosed with ADHD and 31 per cent had diagnosed mental health conditions.

These chilling statistics lead me to conclude that we need to do our utmost to provide an effective service for these children and young people. So how can schools turn around their life chances?

## Early intervention

Intervention as soon as an individual's difficulties emerge is most likely to be successful. Early identification is therefore crucial.

Paul Box/reportdigital.co.uk

Teachers and support staff, who know their pupils well, are the first line in raising concerns about behaviour.

Accurate assessment of emerging needs is also central to developing appropriate

Teachers and support staff are the first line in raising concerns about behaviour.

responses. A range of quick, easy-to-administer behaviour assessment tools can complement observation and help inform thinking and understanding of an individual's needs.

The links between SEBD/BESD needs and other special needs are well-documented, particularly in respect of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Failure to identify SLCN often leads to misdiagnoses of SEBD/BESD with tragic consequences.

## Appropriate provision

Provision in school needs to be at two levels; general and specific. General provision is about incorporating elements of good classroom practice that work for pupils with SEBD/BESD needs, such as clear instructions, short-timed tasks and frequent feedback, practical activities, and not over-burdening pupils with writing tasks.

Staff must model desired behaviour in a calm and consistent climate, with firm yet flexible boundaries. Effective classroom management techniques and assertive adult behaviour are the cornerstones of the security these children and young people need to thrive. By providing structure and teaching pupils how to behave pro-socially, we can provide the foundations for success in school.

A focus on building relationships is also a crucial element of effective provision for pupils with SEBD/BESD needs. Successful practitioners show their unconditional care for these pupils and set high expectations, thereby setting the scene for positive outcomes.

Specific provision needs to target those areas of behaviour that we are aiming to change. Skilfully devised and delivered programmes that impact on specific aspects of behaviour (such as reducing anger, coping with difficult emotions, assertiveness skills and taking responsibility for one's actions) are more likely to lead to successful outcomes. Provision for pupils with SEBD/BESD should not solely revolve around a teaching assistant attached to the pupil as a 'minder'. This is not effective and leads to poor outcomes.

Finally, it is worth remembering that individual adults can have a positive impact with individual pupils. However, it is planned, co-ordinated provision that is delivered within a multi-agency context that will be most successful.

Is it worth it? Several years ago, I stopped for lunch at a swish pub. I asked the barman, who I later discovered was the manager, for a menu. He exclaimed "You used to be my head teacher!"

- Pete Hrekow has been providing training on the NUT CPD programme for ten years through Dreyfus Training & Development, tel: 0845 467 2816. [www.dreyfusltd.co.uk](http://www.dreyfusltd.co.uk).