



# Restorative Justice in Schools



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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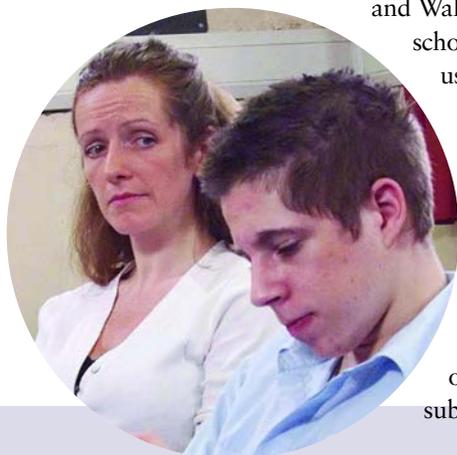


# Summary of the national evaluation of the Restorative Justice in Schools Programme

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## THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

In May 2000, the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales launched a pilot initiative in two schools in the London borough of Lambeth using restorative justice conferences to tackle exclusions, truancy, bullying and other forms of anti-social behaviour. Following early signs of promise, in April 2001, the Board gained three years, funding under the Treasury's Invest to Save scheme to extend the programme to the borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, and two other London boroughs, which subsequently withdrew from the scheme.



The programme was then extended across England and Wales. Youth Offending Teams (Yots) were invited to apply for funds to implement restorative projects within schools in their local area. Seven Yots were successful – Barnet, Blackpool, Medway, North Lincolnshire, Oxfordshire, Rhondda Cynon Taff, and Somerset.

They joined the existing Restorative Justice in Schools projects in Lambeth and Hammersmith & Fulham to make a total of nine Yots in all, covering 26 schools (20 secondary and six primary), each taking a different approach to the introduction of restorative practices.

**following early signs of promise, the Board gained funding to extend the programme**

Restorative justice interventions implemented nationally included:

- **the organisation of restorative justice conferences by school staff and outside agencies (Yot staff, police and mediation service personnel)**
- **training school staff to implement restorative practices (including 'active listening', restorative enquiry, 'circle time' and mediation)**
- **developing peer mediation.**

## **PROGRAMME AIMS**

The aims of the Restorative Justice in Schools projects were to reduce offending, bullying and victimisation, and to improve attendance. Restorative justice enables offenders and victims to communicate and agree on how the harm caused by offending behaviour is to be repaired. In non-school contexts, it can empower victims and reduce fear – especially of being victimised again by the same offender. When implemented well, restorative justice leads to consistently high rates of victim satisfaction; and offenders have the opportunity to learn about the consequences of their behaviour for others, and to take responsibility for repairing the harm.

Within school, restorative justice, in practice, can take a wide range of forms. In one case, a student was caught setting off the fire alarm between lessons. A conference was held that included the young person, his mother, the local fire safety officer and a pupil who had previously set off the alarm. The student's mother concluded that the conference was far more likely to make her son take notice of the seriousness of what he had done than if he had simply been told off or punished by school staff.

In another case, a student was withdrawn from school by his mother after he had been repeatedly bullied. It emerged that the bullied student often provoked the bully by acting in a silly manner. As a result of the conference, the bully agreed to stop her aggression, and the bullied student agreed to stop his provocative behaviour.

## THE RESEARCH

The evaluation began in September 2001 in schools in Lambeth and Hammersmith & Fulham. Other areas were included in the evaluation from October 2002. Data were collected until March 2004.

Key data were collected for each school at the beginning (the baseline survey) and at the end (the follow-up survey) of the evaluation. These included contextual data (such as the percentage of pupils receiving free school meals and the school roll) and performance indicator data (such as exclusions, attendance, staff sickness and turnover, and the number of restorative conferences).



### Pupil surveys

All Year 7 and Year 9 pupils in the participating secondary schools completed victimisation questionnaires as early as possible before the interventions were introduced (4,604 pupils).

The survey was repeated in each of the schools with the same year groups between January and March 2004 in order to find out whether the restorative justice initiatives had made a difference to the levels of victimisation, bullying and degree of safety felt by pupils. Their attitudes were also measured according to a number of key variables such as their perceptions of how well (or how badly) the school was doing at stopping bullying, and whether telling a teacher about being bullied was seen as 'grassing'.

**the aims of Restorative Justice in Schools projects were to reduce offending, bullying and victimisation, and to improve attendance**



Studies have found that bullying peaks in Year 7, following the transition from primary to secondary school.

The evaluation aimed to detect any changes in the school environment, as experienced by the pupils, rather than looking for changes in the pupil group itself.

The same survey was also conducted in one additional school in each of the nine areas (2,077 Year 7 and Year 9 pupils). These nine schools were termed ‘non-programme’ schools. They were used as comparators to see whether any changes between the two surveys in the programme schools had also taken place in the non-programme schools. This was done to identify any effects that restorative justice may have had in the programme schools.

If changes happened in only the programme schools, they could be attributed to restorative justice interventions – apart from any other interventions in the schools to improve behaviour. If changes were seen in the non-programme schools, they could be attributed to the normal range of interventions that all schools use to improve behaviour.

Both programme and non-programme schools deployed a range of other initiatives to influence behaviour. It would clearly have been impossible to have had ‘control’ schools that were not trying to do this.

**the evaluation aimed to detect changes in the school environment, as experienced by the pupils**

The non-programme schools were selected because they were seen as having roughly similar characteristics to the programme schools. It was not possible to find exact matches, as no two schools are identical in terms of pupil rolls, exam results, the socio-economic status of its pupils, ethos and so on.

Similar surveys were conducted at baseline and in spring 2004 in the primary schools, with pupils in Years 5 and 6 (381 pupils). Only four of the six primary schools agreed to undertake the surveys. Based on negotiations between the evaluation team and the individual schools, the surveys were administered in one of three ways:

- **by a member of the evaluation team in a whole year group assembly**
- **by a member of the evaluation team in individual tutor groups**
- **by school staff in tutor groups.**

Surveys were then either collected by a member of the evaluation team, the Yot or mediation service, or sent by registered post.

The use of these different approaches was intended to ensure maximum co-operation from schools, as participation was voluntary.

In two schools, there was considerable variation between the numbers of surveys received at baseline and at follow-up; but these effects were cancelled out across the data set, due to the large number of questionnaires collected.

### **Staff surveys**

Staff's views on changes in pupil behaviour, and on exclusions and the amount of teaching time lost due to poor behaviour, were canvassed at baseline from programme and non-programme schools, with follow-up questionnaires in spring 2004.



Response rates varied widely between the schools (**23%** to **47%**). The total response rate was **39%** for the baseline survey and **32%** for the follow-up.

### **Interviews with participants after the conference**

Research staff visited all the programme schools regularly to interview participants as soon as possible after conferences had taken place. Those who attended in order to facilitate or support the conference were also interviewed. Participants were given guidance on what information could be treated as confidential, and what information would have to be disclosed to the school or to the police.

A total of 538 participants were interviewed initially, with 166 (**31%**) of these being reinterviewed three months later to see if the agreement had been upheld and learning sustained; 26 facilitators were interviewed, following conferences, and 25 supporters who had attended conferences (including parents) were interviewed by telephone.

### **Key stakeholder interviews**

These were conducted with school and project staff in spring 2004. A total of 85 staff were interviewed using open-ended semi-structured qualitative schedules. Key stakeholder interviews were conducted in 24 of the 26 schools.

These data were analysed thematically. The interviews were also used to discuss emerging themes and to test the validity of the findings.

## **FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION**

There were 625 conferences during the pilot, involving 1,434 pupils (perpetrators and victims) and 220 supporters. A variety of other restorative interventions were implemented during the national programme. These ranged from restorative enquiry,

‘circle time’ and developing peer mediation, to school staff and outside agencies (including Yots, police and mediation service personnel) undertaking restorative justice conferences.

### **Levels of victimisation, bullying and robbery at baseline**

The baseline pupil surveys showed that, overall, **21%** of pupils attending secondary schools in the programme and non-programme schools reported that they had been bullied by another pupil in the past month. There was much variation across schools. Levels of bullying were found to be higher in primary schools, with **35%** of primary pupils in the baseline survey reporting that they had been bullied in the past month. These findings are consistent with other recent research.

Boys were twice as likely as girls to be involved in incidents involving physical violence, while girls were three times more likely than boys to be involved in name-calling and gossip.

Only **2%** of secondary school pupils reported that they had had things stolen from them in the past month; **7%**, however, said that they did not feel safe at school, and **49%** of school staff said that behaviour had gotten worse in the past year. Only **14%** said that it had gotten better.

### **Conference outcomes and participant satisfaction**

A total of **92%** of conferences resulted in an agreement. These ranged from apologies; repaired relationships; stopping the behaviour that had led to the conference in the first place; and maintaining distance between the parties, through to formal reparation. Only **6%** of conferences failed to reach a satisfactory agreement.

**92% of conferences resulted in an agreement, ranging from apologies to repaired relationships**

The remaining **2%** of conferences had not reached a final agreement at the time of reporting, although a follow-up conference had been planned. Conferences that failed to reach an agreement were not characterised by any underlying trend in the demographic features of participants, or the type of incident.



Although, in almost all schools, there were no formal post-conference follow-up procedures conducted by school staff, the researchers did follow up **31%** (166) of conference participants. These were interviewed between two and three months after the conference. In the vast majority of cases, the follow-up interviews were corroborated by interviews with the other party to the agreement. As a result, it appeared that almost all (**96%**) of the agreements made had been upheld.

Pupils reported high levels of satisfaction with the process, with **89%** saying that they were satisfied with the outcome of the conferences, and **93%** saying that they thought the process was fair, and that justice had been done. Having an opportunity to be listened to and heard appeared to be the most important part of the process.

There is evidence that restorative approaches helped perpetrators gain a better understanding of the full effects of their actions and take responsibility for them. There is also evidence that restorative approaches helped increase victims' confidence, in that they were better able to speak about their victimisation and to stop the behaviour that was causing it. Only **4%** of agreements had been subsequently broken three months later.

Restorative justice was seen as a way of encouraging change, and enabling staff to work in more productive ways. It allowed children and parents to be heard and to have a voice. It was also seen as offering new approaches to solving longstanding problems.

## Wider effects of restorative justice approaches

Overall, there were no statistically significant differences in attitudes or levels of victimisation between the baseline and follow-up surveys when comparing the programme and the non-programme schools.

The programme schools, as a whole, showed more improvement in the attitudes of pupils than the non-programme schools, but this was not statistically significant.

These results may not be surprising, given the short period between the baseline and follow-up surveys. Furthermore, the exposure of pupils to conferences was fairly low in all but a few schools.

## almost **all** of the **agreements** made had been **upheld**

Results were stronger in the schools that had had longer to implement the restorative justice approach. The results of the pupil surveys were stronger still in Lambeth, compared to Hammersmith & Fulham. This was partly due to the fact that the implementation of restorative justice had been variable in Hammersmith & Fulham, following changes in leadership in one of the programme schools (where a preference for punishment and exclusion undermined the programme for several months) – and staff morale at the other programme school dropping dramatically when the school was put under special measures.

But the results from the teachers' survey showed much stronger results in the programme schools, compared to the non-programme schools: there had been a significant improvement in pupil behaviour in the former, while behaviour had declined in the latter. Of staff in programme schools, **6%** reported that pupil behaviour had improved since the introduction of restorative justice approaches, while there was a **5%** decrease in



staff who reported this in non-programme schools. There was a **9%** reduction of staff in programme schools reporting that pupil behaviour had got worse between the two surveys, while there was an increase of **12%** of staff at non-programme schools reporting this.

With only three exceptions (all from the same school), staff interviewed believed that their school had benefited from restorative justice approaches.

No empirical evidence was collected on peer mediation, but there were many comments about the success of these schemes. Peer mediation was seen as freeing staff time from dealing with petty squabbles, while providing a way of increasing pupil responsibility and giving pupils more choices as to how and where to resolve difficulties.

Circle time was another useful way of resolving sensitive and complex matters with young children.

## **School exclusions**

It is difficult to ascertain exactly the impact of restorative justice practices on school exclusion, as exclusions are affected by a number of factors. First, schools have developed a number of strategies to reduce their exclusion figures. Second, many of the schools in the study had not made any fixed-term exclusions during the period for which the key data were collected. Third, there were multiple interventions in all schools to improve behaviour and to reduce exclusions, making it impossible to tease out the effect that restorative justice had on reducing exclusions. Finally, school exclusion rates are also subject to changes in school leadership and behaviour policies.

Some schools used restorative justice conferences to reintegrate pupils after fixed-term exclusions. Twelve of the programme schools in the study used restorative justice in some way in relation to exclusions, either to prevent them or to reintegrate into school pupils who had been excluded for a fixed term.

## **SOLVING PROBLEMS WITH IMPLEMENTATION**

One of the most important factors in introducing restorative interventions in schools is the headteacher's commitment to the process. To help secure this, schools need clear information about what restorative justice is, how it will be implemented, and by whom. They need to know what commitment and resources will be required from the school – for example, making time for in-service education and training on restorative approaches has been the single biggest barrier to implementation. Only eight of the 26 schools did so, and five of these were primary schools.

Less than half the programme schools had integrated restorative approaches into their general behaviour policy. Most of the schools that had done so were still in the process of revising their behaviour policies, so it was not possible to ascertain the degree to which restorative justice had been integrated.

Because the structure and culture of schools vary enormously, there is no standard answer as to what type of person is best placed to implement restorative justice practices. But it is clear that it needs to be led by someone in a position of authority with a vision about how restorative practices can benefit the school.

**one of the most important  
factors is the headteacher's  
commitment to the process**

Finally, the experience and credibility of the person introducing restorative approaches are vital. Those appointed to lead restorative justice initiatives who had no experience of conferencing or mediation had an uphill battle to establish the credibility of the approach. This was particularly the case when the Yot staff's first exposure to restorative justice training was alongside staff from the schools with whom they would be working.

One of the challenges of the programme was to define what a restorative justice conference actually was. Each Yot area obtained their initial training from a variety of providers, so different areas used different definitions. Some used the concept of short or informal conferences (which were not recorded in the monitoring), while others favoured long or formal conferences (which were recorded for monitoring purposes); and some used a formal script, while others did not.

Running conferences is a time-consuming activity, and can only be offered by professionals who are either external to the school (such as the Yot, police, mediation service or volunteers), or school staff who have some time off from teaching (e.g. learning mentors, heads of year and inclusion/counselling staff).

As a result, more than half the schools depended on outsiders to run conferences. Staff at several schools were keen to have the police facilitate conferences where the incident was more serious; but one headteacher wanted all the conferences to be run by police officers, and expressed dissatisfaction that the Yot was bringing in volunteers to do so.

The two police officers interviewed thought that it was a positive thing for police officers to be involved in running conferences.



In many respects, it is valuable to have a variety of different personnel trained in restorative approaches. In addition, teachers can benefit from using restorative practices in their everyday classroom activities.

## CONCLUSIONS

Restorative justice is not a panacea for problems in schools but, if implemented correctly, it can improve the school environment, enhance learning and encourage young people to become more responsible and empathetic.

The pupil surveys showed no statistically significant effects on attitudes across the study, but there were some important improvements in pupils' attitudes in schools that had implemented restorative justice in a way that involved the whole school.

The interview data found that, with only a few exceptions, staff believed that their school had benefited from restorative justice approaches. They felt that restorative approaches had helped to improve the school, and results were stronger for schools that had implemented restorative approaches across the whole school.

**restorative justice is not a panacea for problems in schools but, if implemented correctly, it can improve the school environment**

Conferences had no discernible effect on exclusions (as many schools used conferences to reintegrate pupils following exclusion).

Nevertheless, the vast majority of conferences (**92%**) resulted in successful agreements between the parties. This is a very high rate, especially given that almost a quarter of these disputes were long term. There was a high degree of satisfaction among pupils that participated in restorative conferences – **89%** reporting that they were satisfied with the outcome, and **93%** reporting that they thought the process was 'fair' and that 'justice had been done'. The fact that only **4%** of agreements had been broken at the time of the three-month follow-up suggests that restorative

conferences were an effective way of stopping the behaviour that had brought them about in the first place.

However, the study did highlight the following issues.

- **There was a consensus that this initiative needed to be sponsored by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in order to make it more relevant to the agenda of schools and education.**
- **The most successful implementation of restorative approaches was characterised by leadership and vision; integration into school behaviour policy; and adequate staff training.**
- **There was a lack of any clear definition of what defines a restorative conference.**
- **There was little in the way of formal follow-up to check whether participants adhered to the agreements made in conferences.**
- **The language of restorative justice (e.g. 'victim', 'offender') did not transfer easily to the school setting. This was particularly true of the term 'justice' itself.**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The main recommendations that emerge from this study are as follows.

- **There must be a commitment to adopting an integrated approach across the whole school when implementing restorative justice.**
- **A restorative justice conference should be defined as follows: 'A facilitated meeting with parties to the conflict – including family members, peers and others who have a significant relationship to the parties – which seeks to encourage the perpetrator(s) to accept responsibility and find ways to repair harm caused'.**
- **There must be formal procedures to monitor agreements made in conferences, and to check whether they are being adhered to.**
- **The language of restorative justice needs to be adapted for use in schools. For example, the term 'restorative conference' may be more appropriate than 'restorative justice conference'.**
- **The promotion of restorative justice in schools would be significantly enhanced by greater involvement on the part of the DfES.**
- **Restorative justice in schools could facilitate inter-agency co-operation. Extended and community schools could provide effective vehicles for the development of this approach.**

A best practice guide on the development and embedding of restorative conferences in schools, together with case studies, can be found at the end of the full report on which this summary is based. This is available at [www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk](http://www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk).

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The full report on which this summary is based is available on the Youth Justice Board website.

Further copies of this summary can be obtained from:  
Telephone 0870 120 7400 or Facsimile 0870 120 7401



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