

## **Supporting the Return of Pupils with EBD to Mainstream School from Specialist Provision**

**This article identifies and discusses the factors that may have an impact on supporting pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties who return to mainstream school from specialist provision. Although the literature on inclusion suggests that support for the re-integration of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties remains a constant challenge, there have been a number of examples of successful practice. The outcomes of five case studies of successful re-integration are discussed and key issues for possible future practice explored.**

**BARRY GROOM is a senior lecturer in Special Educational Needs and Inclusion at the University of Northampton, UK.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Studies over the last few years give a hazy picture of the success of re-integration programmes for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) returning to mainstream school from specialist provision. On a national basis in England, current evidence, as reported by Ofsted (1999), indicate that although more pupils with EBD are being successfully managed by mainstream schools, once such a pupil enters special provision the chances of a successful return to mainstream is limited. Farrell and Tsakalidou's (1999) nation-wide study of the trends of re-integration of pupils with emotional and behavioural problems attending special schools and units between 1992-1996 found that very few ever returned to mainstream schools (approximately 6%). A previous small scale study in Scotland (Lloyd and Padfield, 1996) also found a marked resistance amongst many mainstream schools to the re-integration of pupils from special provision and felt that "Re-integration was often seen as a kind of professional favour: special provision staff using connections or identifying particularly sympathetic colleagues" (p. 181).

Previous research (Chazan, 1994) into the attitudes of mainstream teachers toward pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties found that many had little sympathy and limited tolerance and often held negative perceptions of pupils who presented difficulties. As Tootill and Spalding (2000) point out, "The systems and attitudes, which saw the pupils excluded in the first instance, can be the same barriers to their inclusion on their return" (p. 117).

### **INCLUSION AND PUPILS WITH EBD**

In their recent report of the progress of English mainstream schools toward including pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities, Ofsted (2004) highlighted pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) as constituting a greater challenge to schools for inclusion than all other areas of SEN. Contrary to a

common perception of a decline in special school placements, the proportion of pupils placed in special schools (including pupil referral units) has remained more or less the same since 1999. While some special schools have closed, new special schools have opened, sometimes as a result of amalgamations. The proportion of pupils in pupil referral units has risen by 25% between 2001 and 2003. Since 2001, there has been a 10% increase in the number of pupils placed in independent special schools by local authorities. Many of the pupils concerned demonstrate behaviour that is challenging and some have been excluded from maintained mainstream and special schools.

## **SUCCESS STORIES**

However, although this presents a less than optimistic picture, this may not be the full story. It is likely that there are wide regional variations (as in exclusion rates) and these may be dependent on a range of local factors as the successes of many small-scale initiatives demonstrate. For example, Tootill and Spalding (2000), tracking the progress of a re-integration initiative in one Merseyside EBD special school, reported a six-fold increase in the number of pupils [re-integrated into mainstream schools](#) over the period of their study, between 1999-2000. Similarly, Jenkins and Miller (1995) identified in their study a four-fold increase from 1987-1992 for the number of pupils with emotional and behavioural problems successfully reintegrated into mainstream school. In a single school study of 12 pupils reintroduced into mainstream school from an EBD school, Swinson, Woof and Melling (2003) charted their development and the responses of teachers. Again, as Tootill and Spalding (2000) found, it was often the attitudes of teachers in the receiving school that determined the success of the re-integration.

Most of the previous stories of successful re-integration have demonstrated innovatory practices devised by special school and support service personnel working collaboratively with colleagues in the mainstream sector. This has often been without an overall Local Education Authority (LEA) re-integration policy or protocols being in place, but based on building informal constructive working relationships between the sectors.

## **DEVELOPMENTS TOWARD A MORE SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO RE-INTEGRATION**

Since 1998 English LEAs have been obliged to set out their strategies for supporting schools in their management of pupil behaviour and detailing the provision in respect of behaviour and inclusion services, pupil referral units, special schools and units. Since this time, LEAs have been in the process of restructuring and refocusing their services toward a more inclusive approach – supporting mainstream schools to sustain and foster inclusive practices, developing further systems to prevent exclusion and providing specialist support personnel to advise on behaviour management. Similarly, local support services for behaviour and learning have developed a range of effective strategies to work jointly with mainstream schools to support inclusion. Often the brief

of behaviour support workers has included work beyond working with the individual pupil to include:

- classroom observation and assessment
- advice on behaviour management strategies
- contributions and advice on IEPs, target setting, rewards and sanctions
- support for curriculum initiatives (especially at Key Stage 4)
- work with school governors (on exclusions)
- support for developing additional support programmes (i.e. lunchtime clubs, social skills, circle of friends, group work)
- involvement in professional development of teachers

Concurrent with these developments has been the shift in emphasis in the role of many specialist schools and units that have extended their collaboration with mainstream schools to provide further expertise and support, including joint working to establish re-integration programmes for pupils with EBD to return to mainstream school. A positive step forward in many LEAs has been the setting up of Review and Re-integration Panels to oversee this development and advise mainstream schools, special schools and services on re-integration programmes for individual pupils. However positive and hopeful this development in a systems approach proves to be, as previous case studies identify, successful re-integration programmes are often based on the direct initiatives taken by special school or support services personnel and undertaken jointly in voluntary agreements with colleagues in local mainstream schools.

## **FIVE CASE STUDIES**

The following discussion of key factors for successful re-integration programmes have been identified from five case studies in one English LEA involving pupils from 8 years of age to 15 years of age. All pupils had a statement of special educational needs (DfES, 2001) for emotional and behavioural difficulties; three of the pupils (aged 8, 10 and 12) were initially in EBD special schools and two (aged 10 and 15) were in pupil referral units. Three of the pupils had been placed in specialist provision following exclusion, whilst two of the youngest had been placed in EBD schools from the age of 6. All of the pupils had been identified for re-integration from their annual reviews. In the case of the oldest pupil, a fixed term of twelve weeks had been set for attendance at the pupil referral unit and re-integration was a stated aim from the beginning of the placement. All of the pupils returned to 'new' mainstream placements, rather than ones they had previously attended or were on the roll of initially. All of the pupils expressed a wish to return to mainstream school. During the initial phase of the re-integration, pupils were supported by special school support teachers in the case of the EBD school and support workers from the Behaviour Support Service in the case of the pupils from the pupil referral unit.

In all five cases staff had assessed the ‘readiness’ of the pupils to return and had established good liaison and relationships with staff at the mainstream schools from their previous re-integration work. According to the support workers and the schools, this ‘credibility factor’ was a key determinant in the success of the programmes.

### **PREPARATION FOR RE-INTEGRATION**

The support workers and mainstream school teachers emphasised the importance of preparatory work for a re-integration programme to start off on a planned basis. This included:

- the identification of named ‘key workers’ for both specialist support and mainstream school
- ongoing work with the parents/carers
- early induction visit by pupil to the mainstream school
- visits by mainstream key worker to special school/unit

In this preparatory period the sharing of a range of information was seen as essential. Some of the areas covered included:

- pupil’s achievements and levels of attainment
- successful strategies, rewards and sanctions
- the contexts in which difficult or challenging behaviour may arise

The visit(s) by the key worker from the mainstream school to the special school/unit was viewed as an important relationship-building opportunity between the new school and the pupil. Likewise, the first visit by the pupil to the mainstream school was planned to ensure that the pupil could have a positive experience.

### **CURRICULUM OF SPECIAL SCHOOLS/UNITS TO SUPPORT RE-INTEGRATION**

Rather than providing what would be considered as an ‘alternative’ or reduced curriculum in the special school or unit, teachers and support workers identified that it needed to be ‘focused’ on developing skills and experiences for the pupil to be re-integrated into mainstream school or to achieve measures of success on leaving school. It was seen as essential that all activities and curriculum areas were seen as potential for building self-esteem and confidence in learning. As identified by De Pear (1995), the low self-worth of many excluded pupils together with low teacher expectations often results in the self-fulfilling prophecy of repeated school failure.

The focus of the activities and learning experiences within the special school/unit was identified as building up a range of pro-social skills that would assist the pupil in taking more responsibility for their own behaviour and learning. The range of pro-social skills identified included:

- developing resilience skills
- emotional literacy
- conflict management and friendship building
- anger management
- social and problem solving skills
- understanding of the norms and expectations of a mainstream school
- pupil's understanding of, and coming to terms with, their own behavioural difficulties
- organisational skills for learning

Teachers and support workers identified that during the preparatory period for re-integration the transferability of these skills was highlighted and directly focused around situations that might be encountered by the pupil in the mainstream school. Particularly emphasised were potential situations in which pupils might experience difficulties in managing feelings of anger, stress and confusion.

### **RE-INTEGRATION PROGRAMME**

Each of the pupils in the case studies had a gradual introduction to their new mainstream school. This varied from one pupil initially only attending specific lessons (in GCSEs), to another attending mornings only, and yet another attending two full days. The initial pace of the re-integration was considered an important aspect of building a successful programme based on maximising positive experiences for both the pupil and the school. This flexibility in initial arrangements was identified as essential for supporting a successful transition. A major element of this process is to enable the building up of new relationships and to eventually transfer the individualised support from the special school/unit to the mainstream school. The mainstream key workers identified that putting into place the following arrangements had particularly helped to overcome initial fears of both the pupil and the school staff:

- 'buddy' system of peer support for pupil
- programme outlined to all school staff
- practical strategies and interventions explained
- 'what to do if...' situations explored
- setting realistic and consistent targets
- pupil being aware of the school support systems
- weekly pupil diary recording progress, fed back to staff
- celebrating successes

### **THE ROLE OF THE SUPPORT TEACHER/WORKER**

In the preparatory period for re-integration it is essential that the role of the support teacher/worker is clearly defined within the mainstream situation. In respect of the five

case studies this varied from pupil to pupil and school to school. Mainstream colleagues stressed the importance of support teachers/workers undertaking a role that:

- demonstrated an appreciation of the day to day pressures of a mainstream school
- provided direct support to the pupil when required
- could be contacted in an emergency
- provided support and advice to all staff

It was rare in all cases for the mainstream school to require the support teacher/worker to provide individual classroom support for the pupil; rather, the support teacher/worker was perceived as an ‘expert’ resource – able to provide support and guidance on teaching strategies, rewards and sanctions and behaviour plans. Often they were also perceived as the key contact with personnel from other agencies, such as health and social services. A specific role undertaken by support teachers/workers in direct work with the pupil was in providing counselling support and initially initiating reviews of the pupil’s progress on a weekly basis. Across the studies support teachers/workers were also involved in:

- classroom observation and assessment
- team teaching
- group work on self-esteem/emotional literacy
- training for teaching assistants and lunch-time supervisors
- taking a class whilst the teacher could observe

### **KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL RE-INTEGRATION**

From the case studies a number of general conditions were identified as significant in planning and supporting the process of successful re-integration of the pupils:

- a local protocol outlining expectations
- early identification and support to aid return
- curriculum of specialist provision aimed towards re-integration

It was also identified that the following specific factors were important across the studies:

- the younger the pupil, the greater the chance of successful re-integration
- the pupil is admitted to a new mainstream school rather than the one they originally attended
- good liaison and relationships are built with mainstream schools who have a shared understanding and commitment to pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties
- the pupil and the pupil’s parents/carers should want a return to mainstream
- flexible arrangements can be realised

Many pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties now in specialist provision may be supported further to take a place in mainstream school. As Tootill and Spalding (2000) identified, it is often pre-conceived perceptions that block and inhibit developments related to pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Successful models and examples provide a basis for exploring further possibilities for practice. The setting up of local protocols that provide systems to support this process may help to raise expectations and bring further into the mainstream those pupils who remain on the outside.

## REFERENCES

- Chazan, M. (1994) The Attitudes of Teachers Towards Pupils With Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, Vol. 9 (3), pp. 261-74.
- Department for Education and Science (DfES) (2001) *Revised Special Educational Needs Code of Practice*, London: DfES Publications.
- De Pear, S. (1995) Perceptions of Exclusion with Special Needs. In Lloyd-Smith, M. and Davies, J.D. (eds) *On the Margins: The Educational Experience of 'Problem Pupils'*, London: Trentham Books.
- Farrell, P. and Tsakalidou, K. (1999) Recent Trends in the Re-integration of Pupils with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties in the United Kingdom, *School Psychology International*, Vol. 20 (4), pp. 323-337.
- Jenkins, S.M. and Miller, A. (1995) The Re-integration of Pupils with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties from Special Schools and Units into Mainstream Schools, *Educational Psychology in Practice*, Vol. 11 (2), pp. 45-51.
- Lloyd, G. and Padfield, P. (1996) Re-integration into Mainstream – Gi'e Us Peace! *British Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 23 (4), pp. 180-186.
- Ofsted (1999) *Principles into Practice: Effective Education for Pupils with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, London: Ofsted Publications.
- Ofsted (2004) *Special Educational Needs and Disability: Towards Inclusive Schools*, London: Ofsted Publications.
- Swinson, J., Woof, C. and Melling, R. (2003) Including Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Pupils in a Mainstream Comprehensive: A Study of the Behaviour of Pupils and Classes, *Educational Psychology in Practice*, Vol. 19 (1), pp. 65-77.

Tootill, R. and Spalding, B. (2000) How Effective Can Re-integration Be for Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties? *Support for Learning*, Vol. 15 (3), pp. 111-117.