

Ofsted and successful SEBD schools

Ted Cole [article from SEBDA News, Issue 10]

As part of my work for DfES in the early summer, I got to look at fourteen Ofsted reports on SEBD schools, conducted under the new inspection framework, which had commenced in September 2005. The success of most of these schools was reassuring - given media claims that children are getting worse and are deemed 'unteachable', also given accounts that reach me of schools in serious trouble and good staff struggling to get back on top of things. The reports cited are a tribute to the dedication and skill of the staff.

My study indicated (no surprise to me) that there remains validity, value and vitality in the special school model (subject to conditions so difficult to meet: good leadership, staffing, LA/governing body support, some control over who is on roll and resourcing). Residential provision can enhance the chances for a school's success - and be money well spent.

Commonly, if the grades awarded by the inspectors are 3s (Satisfactory) or 4s (Inadequate), this is because national standards eg in relation to attendance levels or attainments (eg in GCSE passes) are being inappropriately applied to the special circumstances of the SEBD school. Ofsted is aware of this unsatisfactory situation and hopefully this will be addressed by government in the medium term. In a positive report on Wendover House School, Buckinghamshire, the inspector showed awareness of the shortcomings in the inspection model: 'The poor attendance of a minority of pupils means that the overall attendance rate is below the national average although it is similar to that found in other schools of this type.'

Many months have now passed since these inspections but we should celebrate the following reports (replete with Grades 1 - 'Outstanding' or Grade 2 - 'Good'):

- Wennington Hall, Lancashire (September, 2005): 'The pupils are proud of their school and happy to attend. The curriculum is good, taught well and enriched by an exceptional range of extra activities. Parents are very positive about the school. The leadership of the head teacher is both skilled and inspirational ...The school provides good value for money.' (p2)
- Capenhurst Grange, Cheshire (October, 2005): 'This school is good and offers good value for money... Boarding experiences, links with mainstream schools and a wealth of out of school activities enhance the education of the pupils...Success is constantly celebrated and pupils' achievement and personal and social development are good as a result of high quality teaching...Parents are delighted with what the school offers and see positive changes in their children. All of this is possible because of good leadership, management and governance.' (p2) 'Pupils behave well in lessons and around school and they work hard. They feel safe in school and trust adults.' (p4)
- Wolverdene, Andover, Hampshire (November, 2005): 'It is a good school with some very strong features. Pupils throughout the school achieve well and make good progress because teaching is good, relationships are excellent

and the curriculum is very well suited to their learning and emotional needs...Children enjoy their time at school and place great trust in the staff while parents value the school very highly. The school is well led...The very well led residential provision is outstanding, offering a warm and friendly environment combined with necessary structure and security.' (p2)

- Muntham House, Horsham, West Sussex (November, 2005): 'Muntham House is a good school with some outstanding features, particularly in the pupils' personal development, in care and guidance and in the post 16 provision...Pupils and parents are very positive about the school. Parents are happy that their sons will be safe and free from anxiety and are making very good progress ...Pupils learn to behave very well, to get on with other pupils and adults...Boarding provision is of a very high standard...' (p2). 'There is a calm atmosphere because pupils know what is expected of them' (p4) 'There are very good procedures for updating staff training in health and safety and in approved restraint methods. The school gives a high priority to helping pupils to manage their own behaviour..' (p5) 'The school is exceptionally well led and managed' (p6).
- Kynaston School, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire (January, 2006): 'This is an outstanding school with has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The pupils love coming to school and this is a tremendous step forward from their generally negative and suspicious attitudes towards education before their arrival. Parents are happy for their children to attend, knowing they will be safe, free from bullying or intimidation. Pupils are making very good progress because of skilled teaching, extremely effective record keeping and high expectations of what they can achieve...The pupils throughout the school enjoy their lessons and join in the wide range of activities with enthusiasm. The standards of care and the guidance for pupils are exceptionally good.' (p2)
- William Henry Smith School, Brighouse, W. Yorks (non-maintained: Feb. 2006): 'WHS is a good school with a number of outstanding features. The principal provides an exemplary role model to all in school. His collegiate leadership style sets the tone for successful delegation. A 'can do' culture of success, where the achievements of all pupils are celebrated, permeates the whole ethos of the school. Pupils are proud of their school and speak positively about the fairness and levels of care they receive from all adults. The curriculum ... is effective in raising achievement from the outset. This is enhanced greatly by the high quality boarding provision and the '24 hour curriculum', designed to raise confidence and self-esteem. Parents and carers have full confidence in the school.' (p2)

Highlight in different shade??##

The Ian Mikardo School, Tower Hamlets (June, 2006)

Finally, I am delighted to quote verbatim sections of the Ofsted inspector's report on an inner-city London school, led by SEBDA London Committee member, Claire Lillis (Claire, this justifies another bottle of bubbly...). It also shows that day schools can deliver the goods in difficult social settings. If only those blinkered organisations (such as CSIE) who see all special schooling as a denial of human rights, would read this...

Glenys Fox, HMI, wrote:

'Ian Mikardo high school is a day special school for secondary age boys with severe and complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). It is located in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, which is rated as having the fourth highest level of deprivation in the country. All the boys have statements of special educational need and all had significant difficulties settling to learn in their previous schools. Many were excluded. A high proportion experience extremely challenging circumstances outside school and remain vulnerable....

This is an outstanding school. The school motto is, 'Come with a past, leave with a future'. The school works very effectively to address the negative experiences many pupils have had in their previous schools and sets them on the road to much brighter futures. It improves the life chances of many vulnerable pupils by restoring their self-esteem and helping them to see themselves as learners with potential for achievement both in school and beyond. One parent said with pride, 'What's happened in the past is forgotten. It is a fresh start. Before he came, he never mentioned the future. Now he talks about going to college. It gives them skills for the future'.

....The main indicator of its success is that the boys all want to be there, and, once at the school, the majority make tremendous progress. Many are completely transformed by their school experience. The school has a much higher attendance rate than similar schools and this is a testimony to its success. Despite having taken exams and completed courses, all the Year 11 boys were present in school and enjoying work experiences provided by the school. Although they are all moving on to gainful post-16 courses, they are sorry to leave. One said with feeling, 'This school feels like a home. I am safe the way everything is. I don't want to leave'.

The headteacher demonstrates outstanding leadership and creative strategic thinking. The staff, parents, governors and students speak very highly of her. One parent said, 'I would back Claire 100 per cent for what she has done here. She teaches the boys how to respect themselves'. Another said 'Claire is very caring. She has a lot of compassion and looks for other staff with the same compassion'. A Year 10 boy said 'Since Claire came, everything changed. I like the school a lot'. The head herself says, 'We are constantly learning and revising our practice. We don't sit still and we are not complacent. We know our outcomes are fantastic but there is a whole load of development still to be done'. There are exciting community links developing with Bromley-by-Bow Community Centre. The school has ambitious plans for the future and has applied for specialist school status to support these plans.

The headteacher is well supported by a committed senior team and a team of staff with a wide range of relevant skills. The deputy head explained 'This school is needs led. We look at what the boys need, we look at the sort of staff we need and then ask, 'What do staff need to support them?'' One Year 11 boy said with appreciation, 'They are amazing teachers. You learn a lot from them'. A parent wrote 'I am truly grateful to all the staff. My son was a confused and depressed little boy, who had no confidence in himself or others. He is now growing into a confident young man which I believe is due to the help and support he has received'.

The personal development of the pupils is outstanding. Once they join the school they quickly become attuned to its culture and many start to enjoy their school life for the first time. One parent reported, 'My child was out of school for two years. It was really hard for him to go into school. Here he has been able to go into class and start work. He never had that chance before'. Another said, 'It was a fresh start here. The difference is phenomenal'. A third parent said about his son 'The staff build up

personal relationships, along with that comes trust and then he will take on what they say. He has learned not just to respect but to trust others'. The students say how much they value their school experience.... 'the best thing is, the teachers are always there to support you'.... 'You have got to grow up otherwise you never get anywhere. We get a good education here'. The happy faces around the school demonstrate the fact that students feel very much a part of the school. In observing the school council at work it is clear that students are fully included in all decisions about their school. There is a good range of additional activities and experiences provided for the students. There have been many educational, social and cultural outings which students talk about enthusiastically, pointing out the displays of photographs around the school. These have included trips to Butlins at Bognor, and to France and Spain.

Another major key to the school's success is the high quality of care, guidance and support which is provided to each pupil. Every boy is valued and is offered a level of care which is exemplary. From providing transport to school to support for medical appointments, from advice about life outside school to conflict resolution, the staff work tirelessly to improve the coping skills of the boys. The boys can see what the staff do for them in 'going the extra mile' and this engenders a spirit of mutual respect. Any problems are swiftly addressed and resolved to the benefit of the pupils. Each student has an individual education plan which is framed under the five outcome areas from the 'Every Child Matters' guidance: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well being. The school makes good use of these plans to personalise the learning of each student, and each student writes their own plan. In the last section of the plan, students have to complete the sentence, 'One thing I would really love to do in the next six months is...' On one plan, picked at random, the student had written...'learn more'.

The school works effectively with a wide range of external services in order to make provision for the full range of needs. The psychotherapist works with staff in regular seminars to provide support to them and this is valued highly. One member of staff said, 'We acknowledge that working with such raw emotion all day can be very wearing. The psychotherapist reframes stuff and gives us reassurance'. There is a robust programme of staff development led by the School Improvement and Development Teacher.'

Success in PRUs

My study also allowed me to look at a sample of PRU inspections reports:

- Congratulations to SEBDA members, Nikki Shaw and team at the Oldham PRU (inspected March 2006): ' a good unit with some outstanding features...consistently good teaching, pupils who attend regularly, and sometimes very good progress. Excellent links with other professionals ...outstanding leadership of the headteacher ...[PRU] held in high regard by mainstream schools, particularly the preventative work...'
- Also Annette Moxon and First Base (SEBDA members for some years!), Suffolk: 'First Base provides an outstanding quality of education for children in the Foundation Stage...teaching is very good...At the heart of its success is the most effective work done by a multi-agency group that co-ordinates support for pupils and their families...outstanding leadership. Self-evaluation is accurate and outstanding. This is a PRU that is reflective and committed to continuous improvement. ..The unit's outreach work and that of its behaviour support service is highly valued by staff in schools...outstanding value for money.'

- And Liz Robson (SEBDA member) and colleagues in Camden: ' a highly effective establishment providing good value for money...The welcoming and supportive atmosphere, the very well-considered policies and practice, and the highly effective staff team help the pupils re-engage with learning. They achieve exceptionally well educationally, and make up for lost time...Around half of the pupils...return successfully to their mainstream schools...Teaching is outstanding.' (p2)
- And in brief, the good Mendip Tuition Centre, Glastonbury and the Brent KS4 PRU 'an excellent provision'.

Well done all!