DISAFFECTION TALKS

A report for the Merseyside Learning Partnership Inter Agency Development Programme

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nfer

IADP

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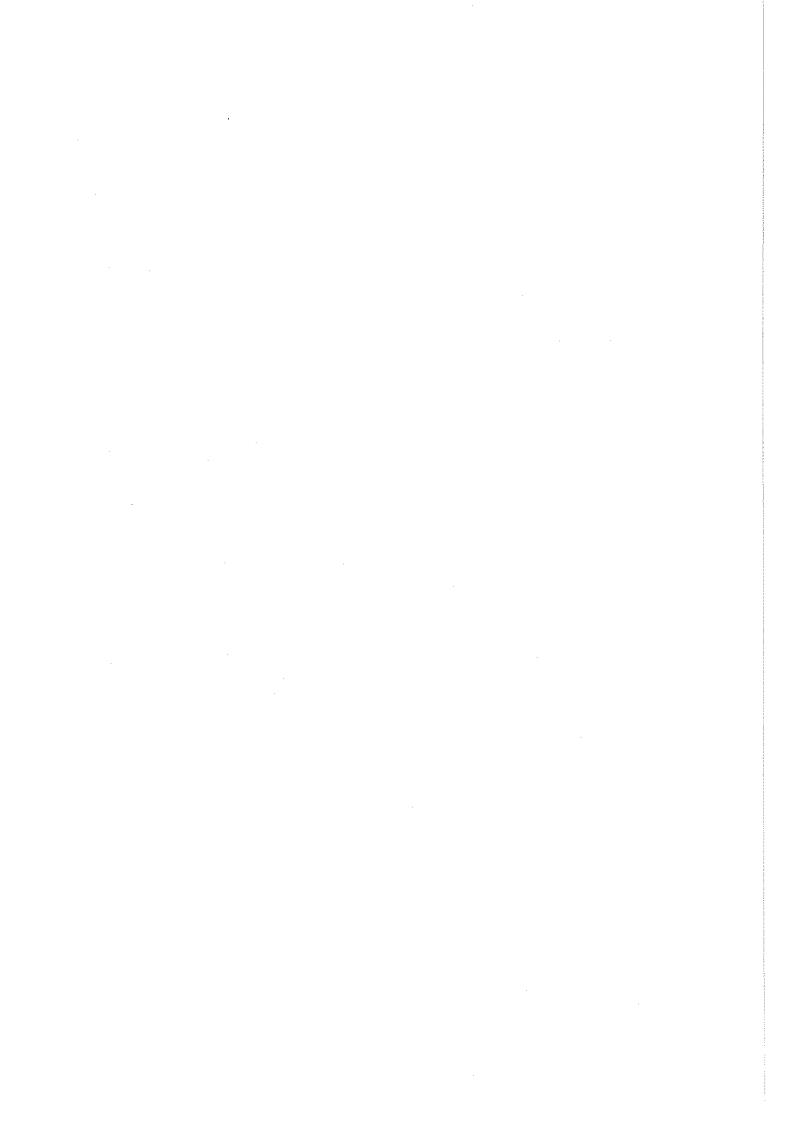Kay Kinder
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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

NFER was asked by the Merseyside Learning Partnership through its Inter Agency Development Programme (IADP) to carry out a study examining the perceived factors influencing pupil disaffection within the three Partnership authorities and how that disaffection was experienced by the youngsters and their families.

The Merseyside Learning Partnership was founded in 1996 and it involves the three local authorities of Knowsley, Liverpool and Sefton and Merseyside TEC. It aims to 'enhance the employment prospects, education and skills of local disadvantaged young people' and it seeks to address these issues through a coherent package of strategies and programmes targeted at two key groups:

> Young people aged 11–14 at risk of disaffection and underachievement.
> Young people aged 14–16 identified as long-term non-attenders or who are permanently excluded from school.

The Inter Agency Development Programme, which began in June 1997, places emphasis on establishing working relationships across the three authorities and aims to support schools and other organisations by providing opportunities for the professional development of all those who work with disaffected young people in the target groups. The three local authorities, working in partnership, therefore aim to develop programmes of staff development, training and support for a range of individuals and organisations including, for example, education, social services, health and parents.

This report addresses the following specified aims of the project:

- to investigate the 'pupil careers' of a sample of young people from the Partnership authorities (including home and community influences) who have demonstrated some degree of disengagement and dislocation from their mainstream schooling opportunities;
- to identify any key factors and commonalities among the sample which were associated with disaffection;
- to adumbrate the range of experiences, attitudes and feelings that accompany the disaffected behaviours of the sample;
- to investigate the perceived efficacy of any alternative provision or support programmes experienced by the sample; and
- to identify key features which achieve some reduction in disaffected attitudes and/or behaviour.

The study used qualitative methods, undertaking in-depth interviews with young people who had displayed a range of disaffected behaviour. A series of contextualising interviews was also carried out with a sub-sample of youngsters'

1

parents/carers and the educational professionals (teachers and support service staff) who worked with them. Quantitative data such as records of attendance and behaviour were also collected where possible.

ACCESSING THE PUPIL SAMPLE

Young people and their families were contacted via educational professionals both within and outside mainstream provision. Four high schools within the three authorities (one in each of the two smaller authorities, and two in the larger authority) were approached and agreed to participate in the study. Each school was asked to identify some six students who had displayed a range of disaffected behaviour, including:

- those successfully reintegrated back into mainstream after a permanent exclusion;
- those 'at risk' of permanent exclusion;
- those who had experienced fixed-term exclusions;
- those with emerging attendance problems; and
- those with significant attendance problems.

Heads of various LEA support services within the three authorities were also contacted and, through these, pupils attending off-site provision or at home were accessed. They included:

- permanent excludees;
- school refusers; and
- pregnant school girls.

In addition, two pupils who had been reintegrated from pupil referral units (PRUs) were interviewed, one of which involved contacting a fifth high school.

INTERVIEWING THE PUPIL SAMPLE

The initial contacts were made and pilot interviews were carried out in May 1998. The interviews and other data were gathered between June and July 1998.

In total, 50 pupils were interviewed; 24 were in school and 26 were out of school. All the interviews were conducted in privacy and strong assurances were given regarding their confidentiality and anonymity. These assurances were extremely important due to the sensitive nature of the questions asked. Young people were asked to divulge information about their behaviour which may have been anti-authority or even illegal; thus, it was paramount that the confidential nature of the interview was stressed. In addition, the value attached to the pupils' views and opinions was emphasised. Each pupil was interviewed individually for about 50 minutes. The questions covered:

2

- general views on the causes of truancy and disruptive behaviour in school;
- personal experiences and involvement in truancy and/or disruptive behaviour;
- attitudes to and experiences of exclusion;
- school career and health profile;
- relationships with teachers;
- impact of curriculum and individual learning styles and preferences;
- involvement with alternative curriculum programmes; and
- influence of friends, family and neighbourhood on disaffection.

Educational professionals (e.g. mainstream teachers, Education Welfare Officers (EWOs), PRU staff, care workers) were interviewed in order to contextualise each pupil interview and obtain background information on the young people.

In addition, a total of 13 parents/carers were also interviewed either at their home, or in school, or in off-site provision.

Both educational professionals and parents were asked about the factors which they felt had influenced the young person's disaffection and these covered:

- neighbourhood, family and friends;
- factors in the young person's school career, including relationships with teachers and other pupils;
- health histories;
- attendance and behaviour at primary and secondary school; and
- involvement with alternative curriculum programmes.

THE SAMPLE

The final sample obtained showed the following characteristics:

Age: five children were in Year 7, seven in Year 8, nine in Year 9 and 29 in Year 10.

Gender: 31 boys and 19 girls were interviewed.

Location: 25 children were currently within the remit of the Liverpool authority, 14 in Sefton and 11 in Knowsley.

The sample included five children from ethnic backgrounds (three boys and two girls); four children (two girls and two boys) were cared for by their local authority. Two pregnant schoolgirls were also interviewed.

THE ANALYSIS

For the purposes of interview analysis, the sample was divided into various categories of disaffection, with the accompanying definitions:

NON-ATTENDANCE CONTINUUM

Attendance problems | Described as poor attendance, currently less than 70 per cent but more than 30 per cent.

Serial non-attenders | Children with an ongoing history of non-attendance, typically less than 30 per cent.

School refusers | Nil attendance.

DISRUPTION/ EXCLUSION CONTINUUM

At risk of exclusion | Classified by school as being at risk of exclusion/ exhibiting lower level disruption.

Fixed-term exclusions | Pupils with a recent history of fixed-term exclusion.

At risk of permanent exclusion | Classified by the school as currently in danger of permanent exclusion.

Permanent exclusion | Pupils currently permanently excluded from school.

Reintegrated | Pupils reintegrated back into mainstream education after a permanent exclusion.

Pregnant | Girls who were pregnant or had recently had their baby.

In some cases, it was obvious which category a child should be allocated to, e.g. permanently excluded, reintegrated and school refusers. Other individuals, however, exhibited disaffection which cut across the categories, e.g. they had engaged in disruptive behaviour as well as having poor attendance. In these cases, classification was based on the perceptions of educational professionals as to their predominant view of a child's disaffected behaviour. If an opinion was not available or unclear in any way, categorisation proceeded on the basis of the most *dominant* aspect of disaffection – e.g. attendance problems were of higher magnitude than disruption.

4

The allocation process generated the following category compositions:

Table 1

	TOTAL	Male	Female
Attendance problems	10	3	7
Serial non-attenders	4	2	2
School refusers	3	1	2
At risk of fixed-term exclusion	3	1	2
Fixed-term exclusion	5	5	0
At risk of permanent exclusion	8	6	2
Permanent exclusions	13	11	2
Reintegrated after permanent exclusion	2	2	0
Pregnant	2	0	2
TOTALS	50	31	19

It should be noted that children from ethnic backgrounds fell into the categories of attendance problems, serial non-attender, school refuser and a permanent excludee, while three of the 'looked after' children had experienced permanent exclusions and had also experienced attendance problems. The remaining 'looked after' pupil had been a recipient of fixed-term exclusions and had attendance problems.

ABOUT THE REPORT

The following report is in four sections. As part of the first aim of the project regarding pupils' careers, a general overview of the pupil sample is offered initially with some of the possible policy implications generated by this quantification.

Chapter 1 addresses the key factors and commonalities in the sample (Aim 2 of the project); Chapter 2 covers the experiences and emotions associated with disaffection (Aim 3); and Chapter 3 reports on issues relating to alternative provision (Aims 4 and 5). Summaries are provided and the conclusion offers an overall review of policy implications. The appendix presents the stories (or 'cameos') of five individuals who were part of the sample, in order to further illustrate different types of disaffection.

OVERVIEW

The interviews with 50 pupils (and those with associated educational professionals and parents/carers) were first trawled for any trends or commonalities. This involved quantifying overall responses to possible background factors in disaffection such as primary school experiences, health histories and perceptions of neighbourhood influences, as well as collating data on more direct features associated with school disengagement such as learning 'styles' and curriculum preferences. The opinions of all interviewees about what they saw as the main causes of disaffection were directly elicited and these too were counted and ranked. From that overview, a number of issues emerged.

In all, 44 acknowledged engaging in acts of truancy and 43 in disruptive behaviour in school. A total of 37 stated they had experienced some form of official exclusion. In sum, the sample demonstrates the considerable overlap in disaffected behaviours: many of these youngsters both selectively avoided attending school as well as demonstrating problem behaviour when present.

Accounts of *biographical factors* showed that:

- Over half (29) of the 50 pupil interviewees recounted they had attended more than one primary school, though only eight young people viewed their primary school experiences as negative.
- Eighteen indicated recognised learning difficulties or general low academic ability.
- More than a quarter (15) reported health problems which they felt had affected the continuity of their school life.
- Eighteen recorded experiences of being bullied at school.
- Half came from family units where there was employment.
- Nineteen of the 50 youngsters lived with both their natural parents.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The correlation between non-continuous primary school careers and later disaffection is particularly striking within this sample. In a few instances, exclusion was the reason underpinning such movement, but in many other cases, pupil reports suggested relocation was due to family circumstances or sometimes a decision taken by parents because of their child's difficulties with peer relations. The need to consider early school movement as possibly contiguous with later disaffection may be a useful finding for policy and practice.

Equally noteworthy are the positive accounts of primary schooling provided by most of the sample. Outrightly disengaged attitudes were reported by pupils (and sometimes their parents) to have emerged at later stages of their school career, suggesting that key stage 3 and beyond is a common 'incubation period' for disaffection. Hence, while increasing services' preventative activity in the early and primary years is a well recognised and much promoted policy option, it may be that other manifestations of disaffection, which equally require resources and provision, only emerge during secondary schooling. Notwithstanding this, it was apparent that those with low academic ability (as opposed to those with specific learning needs) were more likely to indicate behaviour difficulties in primary. Overall, given the warm regard with which many of the pupils recounted their primary school experiences, it might be valuable to look at the kinds of learning culture and affective support systems endemic in the primary sector – and how these might be significant for disaffected youngsters.

Other noteworthy results from quantifying the biographical data are the equal numbers of disaffected youngsters in the sample who lived within a traditional nuclear family and/or one where there was employment. Any direct simple association between disaffected behaviours, single-parent families or those where employment is absent does not stand out.

Pupil perceptions of *local community influences* revealed:

- A clear majority, when asked directly, did not see 'neighbourhood' as a factor affecting their attitude to school: only seven of the 50 youngsters responded in the affirmative to this question.
- About a quarter (13) described their neighbourhood in negative terms, referring variously to drugs, fighting, gangs, thefts, 'bad' types and so on.
- Half reported no leisure facilities in their local area.
- Twenty-seven youngsters held the view that there were job opportunities in the area.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The sample as a whole rejected the notion of neighbourhood and local community as a relevant factor in disaffection, although it should be noted that a lack of leisure and job opportunities was reported by about half of the young people. This response of not linking social factors with disaffection may of course signal an inappropriately worded question, or it may indicate these youngsters' unfamiliarity with the concept of any wider social milieu affecting attitudes and behaviour. Does this suggest a curriculum omission: these young people's misrecognition is because they have not been offered sufficient sociological insight or the firsthand experience of other communities to make such inferences? Equally, it may imply that many of the young people ascribe disaffection directly to their personal school experiences or their association with peers who are outside or challenge the school regime.

On issues more directly related to *learning experiences and preferences*:

- Half the sample volunteered 'teachers' as the aspect of school they most disliked, while one in four nominated 'teachers' as a positive feature of school.
- 'Friends' was the second highest ranking response (by 15 youngsters) to the question asked about what they liked about school.
- PE ranked as the most favoured aspect of the school curriculum, freely nominated by 19 youngsters to the above general question; it was also suggested most (by 20 interviewees) in response to a question asking about their 'best lesson'.
- English was the second most popular lesson, and 14 pupils volunteered this subject as a general aspect of school they liked.
- Maths, French, science and humanities (geography and history) rated as least liked lessons. Maths was also the top-ranking response (by 11 youngsters) as to their 'most difficult' subject.
- Three-quarters (36) stated they preferred working in a group to individual work, while 37 of the sample suggested they preferred writing a made-up story rather than recounting personal experiences ('writing about something that has happened to you').
- The sample was evenly divided about whether they preferred 'listening to a teacher talking' (25 pupils) or 'doing a task where the teacher watches you work' (23).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The high-ranking response of 'teachers' as the most disliked aspect of school, whilst highly predictable, perhaps starkly intimates the breakdown of relations with adults in authority which almost invariably accompanies school disengagement, and adds weight to those who see the re-establishment of positive relations with an adult as a *sine qua non* in constructing effective strategies to combat disaffection.

The inevitable popularity of school activity which is physical, collaborative and creative also comes through. Given the notable finding that young people's expression of disaffection was so often voiced in terms of physical constraint and physiological discomfort, it may be that policy makers, practitioners and researchers have failed to appreciate the affective experience of school for a highly physically active and sociable young person. However, the sample was not unanimous on any preferences for particular pedagogical styles, with some groups, notably school refusers and those with learning difficulties, preferring working alone to collaboration. The fact that two core subjects (maths and science) rate highly as 'disliked' subjects is also noteworthy.

On being asked directly what was the **main reason** for the individual's problems in school and accompanying disaffected behaviour:

- The highest-ranking responses from pupils were 'teachers' and peer influence (including bullying).
- Parents most often selected bullying or some aspect of the school which had 'failed' their child (e.g. not picking up on learning difficulties or insufficient support at transition to secondary).
- Educational professionals most often nominated family factors, neighbourhood influences and peers as the key factors underpinning disaffected behaviours.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Particularly striking is this comparison between the different parents, teachers and youngsters as to the main causes of the sample's disaffection. Again predictably, we see most often pupils cite teachers as the key factor, parents indicating the school system's lack of facilities for supporting their individual child and professionals giving most emphasis to home and community influences. While these views remain polarised, perhaps successful solutions will always be less easy to achieve. Equally noteworthy, however, is the common view across all the three groups that peers are influential in disaffected behaviour. Does this again suggest the need for disaffection strategies to better address the issue of peer culture, and its physical and psychological strength in affecting behaviour and attitudes?

When the pupil sample was asked generally **what motivated** pupils to truant or misbehave in class:

- 'Teachers' was ranked highest (by 32 of the sample) as a cause of non-attendance, while 16 pupils referred to them as a factor in disruptive behaviour.
- Bullying was the second most mentioned factor in truancy (25 youngsters), followed by schoolwork itself (being boring, irrelevant, etc), which was elected by 19 pupils.
- Peer influence (35 pupils) and lack of engagement with schoolwork (29 pupils) were most often nominated as factors in disruptive behaviour.
- Family problems were noted by 15 youngsters as an issue in truancy, whereas only six referred to this as a factor in disruptive behaviour.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The sample's view suggests that relations with teachers and peers (particularly a sense of harassment and bullying) accounted most for inducing non-attendance, while non-engagement with learning tasks and peer encouragement accounted more for disruptive actions. This corroborates the view (see Kinder *et al.*, 1996) that a breakdown in the learning relationship usually stimulates militant rather than evasive action. The higher number of pupils suggesting that family problems were linked to non-attendance may also be of note: how far can mainstream pastoral systems detect and ensure support for pupils with difficult domestic circumstances?

CHAPTER ONE

THE FACTORS UNDERPINNING DISAFFECTION

In this section of the report, a number of background experiences relating to disaffection are examined, including the health histories of the pupils in the sample, reported information about their primary school careers and their family circumstances. The finding that disaffected youngsters do not successfully engage in one or more of the three central relationships within secondary school, namely teachers, other pupils or the curriculum on offer, is well rehearsed, and this sample certainly replicated the discourse and attitudes which are associated with such breakdown. As reported elsewhere (see Kinder *et al.*, 1996) and, as Chapter 2 also reveals, the sample's overriding viewpoint was that teachers personified a range of attitudes which essentially reflected a lack of equivalence between adult and child (not showing respect, unfairness, rudeness, victimisation and humiliation, etc); that pupil culture could stimulate disaffected behaviours (by a powerful psychological continuum encompassing real or imagined enticement, coercion, harassment or exclusion), and that the curriculum failed to engage (because it was unmatched to the young person's interests, aptitudes or academic capabilities). Yet on one level, these 'factors' reveal only that disaffected young people have difficulties in accessing the essential purposes and components of secondary school life which other pupils apparently do not. Reintroducing or re-educating youngsters into positive relationships with adults, peers and learning are, as Chapter 3 reveals, the essential elements of alternative provision. However, this chapter reports on the efforts by the research to look for patterns and trends in the less directly secondary school-oriented features of disaffected youngsters' lives, in the hope that this might be a significant addition to our understanding of the genealogy of disaffection.

1.   PRIMARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

The range of experiences reported by the sample (and in some instances parents) varied from recollections of primary school being a very positive and enjoyable period in their school career to acknowledgement of behavioural problems leading to exclusion, encounters with peer bullying and the beginnings of disaffection (as one put it, '*going off a bit at the end of primary*'):

> *I didn't work or nothing, because we weren't get taught nothing. Most of the teachers could spell just about as good as I could ... they were dunces* (Male, permanent excludee).

> *I was a bad kid in* [primary] *school as well. I would get sent to the headmaster's office and a couple of times a week I would get letters home, I got stopped from staying in at dinner time, I had to go home for dinner* (Male, permanent excludee).

Equally, some had clear learning difficulties (specific learning difficulties, low attainment in literacy and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) were mentioned) and these were sometimes felt not always to be fully addressed.

Most significantly, over half of the sample reported some form of non-continuous primary schooling. Reasons for moving, apart from exclusion, included being the recipients of bullying, family relocation, parents electing to move their child to non-state education and general, unspecified dislike of a particular school resulting in transfer.

As well as the 'looked after' children, it was notable that the two female school refusers were particularly prone to school movement instigated by parental decisions, suggesting learned patterns of avoidance as a coping strategy. Those with exclusion experience at primary had invariably been excluded or were at risk of exclusion again during their secondary school career, implying little in their pathologies had been resolved by the act of removal.

Notwithstanding this, even where there were learning or behavioural difficulties, positive memories could be recounted and these variously included the teachers being 'nice', having friends, appreciating opportunities for parental involvement, and recollecting the work being easy and interesting with opportunities for activity and practical tasks:

> *I would love to go back to juniors ... the work there was easy ... and the teachers were boss* (Female, at risk of exclusion).

> *I was good then, the class was smaller the work was better because we weren't moving around all the time to different lessons and getting late for lessons and different teachers all the time, it was just one teacher* (Male, permanent excludee).

> *I had loads of friends and there were no nasty teachers ... and there was a parents' group and my mum could go there and do art and stuff and when you were playing in the yard you would get to see your mum, it was just a really good school* (Female, school refuser).

> *Primary school was boss; you used to do loads of activities and go out you weren't stuck in school all day. I used to like it* (Male, school refuser).

> *I enjoyed primary a lot more than secondary 'cos the lessons were more interesting and the teachers were nicer and the whole school was me friend, I was a lot happier going there* (Female, school refuser).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the issue of transfer to secondary and the culture shock of the new school regime resounded through a number of stories, particularly among some of the excludees, as well as those with predominantly attendance difficulties.

These stories may give some indication of the importance of the transition stage, both in terms of monitoring earlier symptoms of dislocation and in reproducing some of the securities and support which primary school culture clearly supplied. Equally, the language used to depict primary school (sometimes likened to a lost golden age) may intimate the kinds of learning contexts which some disaffected young people still require or thrive in.

2.   HEALTH MATTERS

Within the stories of 22 youngsters in the sample, there was some expression of concern over health (whether past or present, physical or mental) as a corollary of their school problems, although not all of these were reported by the pupils themselves but by parents, carers or educational professionals. Of course, this reticence in some instances may be entirely due to data collecting techniques (i.e. by interview with a total stranger), but it may equally signal an issue around helping youngsters themselves to recognise, understand and resolve certain background factors underpinning their school-related problems. In two instances, a lack of congruity between parent and school over the severity of the illness as a valid reason for absence emerged. In others, some degree of malingering (feigning illness) was apparently being condoned by the parent and there were two cases where parents had not taken up referrals to Child and Family Services. A further factor was the strong sense some children conveyed of feeling their return to school after illness had been unsupported, and they felt particularly vulnerable in relation to both teachers and peers: *'being picked on'* at this juncture was reported in a number of instances. As one non-attender put it: *'When I've been off sick, I just don't want to come back in.'* In all, the evidence does suggest that some disaffected youngsters, at certain points in their careers at least, are prevented from successfully engaging with the three pivotal relations in school (i.e. teachers, curriculum and pupils), in part because of their physical and/or mental health.

When the data were examined, each sub-group contained examples of ill health: the list of problems and debilitation included (and sometimes multiple cases of):

* a period of hospitalisation;
* asthma;
* depression/suicide attempt;
* drug abuse;
* sexual abuse;
* Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; and
* broken limbs.

> *I got used to not going in because I was sick all the time* [with my asthma]. *I would get used to staying in the house and I got used to not going to school* (Female, school refuser).

> *He's hyperactive, always has been, but it's only recently that he's been diagnosed with a hyperactive disorder* [ADHD]. *We were always getting called in about him. They kept saying he wouldn't do as he was told, everything was always his fault. He was always getting into trouble for not listening, not paying attention, but he can't concentrate because of the ADHD* (Parent of permanent excludee).

It was only those on the continuum of attendance problems (and one pregnant schoolgirl) who reported a period in hospital, suggesting a possible contributory precedence in any dislocation and distancing from school culture, relationships and curriculum. Those who were mentioned as being in receipt of educational psychology support were all within the exclusion continuum.

A number of the young people (particularly school refusers and excludees) were clearly operating within daily routines which encompassed late nights, poor diet and so on. In these instances, the potential for successful engagement with school is no doubt impaired.

3.   FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES

The stories of about half the sample's home backgrounds suggested a number of factors that contributed to disaffected behaviours. Some of these might be seen in terms of **family values** (e.g. condoning or corroborating absence, different behavioural expectations) as opposed to **family problems** (where features within the family unit suggested dysfunctionality in relationships, lifestyle or health), **family events** (such as bereavement, new partners) or **family choices** (e.g. relocating children to new schools). Clearly there may be considerable overlap in these categories: e.g. parents who choose to keep youngsters at home to act as carers or support for family problems are implicitly making statements about how they value education, or this type of absence may be connected to family dysfunctionality in terms of an exaggerated parent/child interdependence.

Obviously, 'looked after' children represented examples of the most extreme forms of family dysfunctionality. In one instance, the young person's mother had been sectioned for drug abuse and in another, 'being rejected' by parents and foster parents was referred to. Equally, the experience of relocation and subsequently attending multiple schools was a further significant discontinuity in their educational careers.

Examples of **family values** which condoned non-attendance were evident in all categories of disaffection, though in some instances this varied between parents corroborating a youngster's indifference to school – '*I told my dad it was too far to go to school, and he said it's not worth sagging. You may as well stay at home if you're not going in*' – and other parents who in effect colluded with their child's perceived incapacity to attend: in these instances, condoning their child's absence because of school anxiety or illness became a reasoned decision. Also parents were concerned regarding their legal obligation to send their children to school, leading to complicity in their children's truancy:

> *I knew I would get away with it because my mum would just lie for me because she wouldn't want to get in trouble herself* (Pregnant schoolgirl).

In a number of instances, patterns of non-attendance had also been evident in elder siblings. Different values regarding behaviour expectations emerged – '*At school there are rules against what you do at home, and it's not that bad ... but school won't let you*' – as well as cases where parental problems in control of behaviour were cited. Parents' aggressive or unhelpful attitudes to school were also mentioned as contributing to disaffected behaviours. The significance of elder siblings who were successful at school, and whose careers therefore contrasted sharply with those of disaffected youngsters, also emerged as an issue, as did families proffering more attention on other siblings (with medical problems and so on). This suggests how

families may unwittingly contribute to the problems of low self-esteem and attention-seeking which can underpin school rejection.

Family problems, some of them severe and distressing, also surfaced within each category of disaffection. There were examples of children's backgrounds involving sexual abuse, violence, alcoholism, neglect, as well as difficulties in interpersonal relations with siblings and step-parents:

> *When I lived with me mum I was just left to do what I wanted* (Male, reintegrated after permanent exclusion).

> *If you've got problems at home you can't be bothered with problems in school as well* (Pregnant schoolgirl).

> *I have never been close to my family ...* [my mum] *knows because I don't get on with him* [stepfather] *and she won't stick up for me with him that I will just rebel against her* (Pregnant schoolgirl).

> *I was off last week 'cos I had a big argument with me family and I was on the edge* (Male, reintegrated after permanent exclusion).

Most, but not all, of the permanent excludees had evidence of these kinds of histories and there were certainly notably higher numbers of family dysfunctionality among these youngsters compared with other types and degrees of disaffection.

Family events appeared to be of a different order of influence: in the case of three of those with only attendance problems, bereavement was mentioned as a factor. Coping with new family circumstances (new partners, stepsiblings, family breakups), however, was cited in disruptive behaviour.

Put together, it does suggest that home factors need careful consideration. Pastoral support systems within mainstream may simply not be adequate to meet the complex needs of many of their students' personal lives. Notwithstanding this, the school is clearly an important evidence gatherer in any changes in pupils' attitudes and behaviour which are domestically influenced and greater investment in inter-agency discourse may be a particular benefit.

4.   PEER INFLUENCE

The accounts of peers influencing and contributing to disaffected behaviours were many and varied. The sample ranged from pupils with experiences of painful isolation due to bullying and harassment, through to pupils who operated successfully within strong peer group networks which exercised powerful stimuli to anti-social behaviour, both within and out of school. Given the inevitable finding that 'friends' ranked as the second highest response to the open question on what was liked about school, the issue of pupil interrelationships within and around school may then be a key component in the stories of disaffection. Within the sample, four main types of peer engagement surfaced.

One type was the **outsiders**: those pupils who depicted themselves or were described as essentially victims and/or loners. Essentially, they had been unable to engage in positive ongoing relations with other pupils – '*I haven't got any mates*' – and they might experience bullying, or just describe this outsider status as bullying. School refusers were in this category, and there were also examples among those with attendance problems. Youngsters who were of different ethnic origin or geographical locale were evident within this type, as were those who did not conform to, for example, the usual gender expectations evident within the school and local community. Abuse in early childhood featured in two of these stories, giving some indication of the ramifications of severe family problems for healthy social relationships.

A further category was youngsters who were essentially *émigrés*, in that their friends and social contacts were largely beyond the world of school or expected peer group: 'older' friends surfaced among pregnant schoolgirls, excludees, and again the 'looked after' children, as well as indications that their social milieu was around other youngsters exhibiting disaffected behaviour:

> *I think it's because I go out with people that don't go to school. Both the people I have been out with left school at an early age, so I think if they can do it so can I* (Pregnant schoolgirl).

> *I've got other mates who don't go to school, just go out and get into trouble* (Male, school refuser).

In one instance, friends who were 'younger' were cited as a factor in attendance problems. Beyond that, the sample had examples of what might be termed **colluders and disputants**, those youngsters who were sometimes referred to as having '*poor ongoing relations*' or being '*easily led*'. This group nevertheless seemed focused on engaging with their school peer group even though this was not always successfully achieved or sustained. Educational professionals sometimes described them as '*not knowing the boundaries*' in peer relations. This type was evident in all categories of disaffection:

> *He doesn't know whether to go with the goodies or the baddies* (Educational professional talking about a fixed-term excludee).

> *They're messing about and you're on your own and everyone's laughing at them – you feel left out so you go and do what they do* (Fixed-term excludee).

> *My mates bunk so I bunk* (Fixed-term excludee).

Finally, the sample had examples of youngsters whose discourse suggested a claim to '**alpha male/female status**' (i.e. dominance) within their peer group, their dominance demonstrated by undertaking or orchestrating disaffected behaviour:

> *If someone asks me out I just won't bottle out ... I'll just keep on fighting till I win* (Male, fixed-term excludee).

> *He will incite other pupils into fighting and then withdraws so the other kids get into trouble and he doesn't* (Educational professional talking about male, fixed-term excludee).

Accounts of youngsters who were 'bullies', 'ringleaders' and 'cock of the year' were given. Those with only attendance problems were not in this category:

> *She behaves like cock of the year, she is older in experience than most of her mainstream teachers as well as her peers* (Educational professional talking about female, 'looked after' pupil and permanent excludee).

> *They're always bunking off school with me, so they're following in my footsteps but they've not been expelled and I have 'cos I was the leader. They knew I was persuading the others to bunk so they got rid of me so the others wouldn't* (Male, permanent excludee and 'looked after').

> *It suited his image better to be out on the streets with his mates* (Educational professional talking about male, permanent excludee).

Overall, the educational professionals seemed acutely aware of the precise social placings/peer type of the sample. Perhaps then the most striking feature underpinning their accounts, and those of the pupils themselves, is the issue of what are the most appropriate strategies to counter the different kinds of debilitating disaffection-related pupil relationships. Do mainstream schools have sufficient time and opportunity – let alone actual solutions – to moderate the powerful influences of peer relations in disaffection?

5. NEIGHBOURHOOD FACTORS

Where these were cited, the reference was usually to the disaffected youngster engaging with youth culture which confirmed or encouraged disaffected behaviour:

> *When I was living at X I used to go to school all the time but since I moved up there and I got to know everyone round here, they just made me sag more* (Female, serial non-attender).

> *All the gangs say school's crap and you start thinking about it then* (Male, attendance problems).

> *All the kids have just got the worst attitude towards school so you pick that up* (Pregnant schoolgirl).

> [He] *liked the notoriety of being a villain, he liked being a bad boy. He took notice of the big voices in the neighbourhood* (Educational professional talking about male, permanent excludee).

> *He's very much a product of the street. He resides in a rough and tough area where you have to act hard* (Educational professional talking about male, fixed-term excludee).

Alternatively, the dislocation and distance between the school attended and the youngster's neighbourhood did get mentioned, suggesting one reason why school transfer is rarely a solution to disaffection:

> *I hated going to school because it was too far for me to get there* (Pregnant schoolgirl).

19

6. FACTORS IN LEARNING: STYLES AND PREFERENCES

Learning styles and preferences of pupils are increasingly being noted as a crucial component of learning outcomes within the classroom context. It was hoped that by asking students about their learning styles and preferences, a little insight would be gained into any possible relationship between these factors and pupils' disaffection. Students were asked, for example, whether they would prefer to work alone or in a group, or whether they would prefer a practical task such as taking something apart, or designing something.

A number of trends were highlighted in students' responses. Firstly, those pupils who expressed a preference for working alone were non-attenders, had learning difficulties, and/or had poor peer relationships. Of two such pupils, their teachers commented:

> *On a one-to-one you would probably get loads out of him but in a classroom situation he's extremely embarrassed about his low ability* (Educational professional talking about a pupil with attendance problems).

> [He] *does demand attention ... he basically lacks confidence and is probably known in school as more of an annoyance than anything else ... he does get into fights because other kids would be jealous of him, they will see him demanding attention and getting it and they don't get it* (Educational professional talking about a permanent excludee).

Another factor highlighted was that the learning preferences of those female pupils with severe attendance problems (school refusers and serial non-attenders) were creative rather than practical; they said they preferred artistic rather than prescribed tasks. In contrast, those pupils at the harder end of the behavioural continuum (permanent excludees including those reintegrated back into mainstream) said they preferred *'taking something apart'*. These pupils can be seen as technical processors: they do not like writing and prefer hands-on experience. Eleven of the 13 males who had experienced permanent exclusion responded in this way.

Other gender differences in learning preferences were seen. Boys, especially those with behavioural problems, expressed a stronger preference for computers, whereas, girls marginally had a stronger preference for writing.

Finally, pupils with learning problems and school refusers again highlighted their need for support and individual attention within the classroom context, when they said that they would prefer to be involved in a task where the teacher came round and assisted them in their work. In contrast, some pupils who had exhibited behavioural problems expressed a preference for teachers 'teaching' at the front of the class:

> *They'd keep asking if I was OK and it'd wind me up. I don't like people watching me. I'd a member of staff who used to stand over me when I was working. I couldn't do the work — it puts me off* (Permanent excludee).

The above data begin to suggest that disaffected students are likely to exhibit a range of pedagogical preferences. Thus, lack of compatibility in learning and teaching styles may unknowingly contribute to pupils' experiences of disaffection and/or stress within the classroom environment.

Regardless of such differences, common responses of disaffected youngsters reverberated around the 'boredom' of school learning. Accounts invariably focused on the repetitive nature of their learning experiences and the lack of variety in their learning tasks. For many of these youngsters, the notion of learning as having coherent progression and purpose was entirely lacking:

Well people think ... it's not what you know to get a job, it's who you know; if you have got an uncle that owns a business you can get a job with them, so why bother going to school. In school you just get learnt basically the same that you did in first year but a bit harder work on it (Female, attendance problems).

Each week is just the same thing: every time you come to school it's the same old thing, so if you changed it, it might give you more team work, instead of 'Work by yourself', 'Be quiet', 'Do this'. Give you more team work or more reasons to come to school, instead of just getting your head down, then more people would come in (Female, attendance problems).

Making it more exciting, because you can learn things in an exciting way, instead of just sitting down and writing about it ... Take time on it and investigate it more proper, like they do in the science book. In English they just write it on the board, ask you a question and you have got to like write the answer, so that's not exciting (Female, attendance problems).

I don't think there's any point in coming to school. I think I have learnt all I need to learn (Female, attendance problems).

It used to be boring work, they used to give us real boring work and we had all done it before in the year before, and we had to do it again, so it's just like the same and it was just boring (Male, permanent excludee).

It was boring. They teach you the same things every year but in a harder dose (Pregnant schoolgirl).

The discourse suggested that at the heart of many disaffected youngsters' school experience was a lack of engagement and it was one which was construed as proffering only monotony and isolation. For this reason, perhaps the strongest message sent out by the youngsters was their dislike and ultimate rejection of the very purpose of school. Above all, the vehemence of some responses was outstanding:

I knew at the end of the day I would get into trouble for it, but I just didn't care, I didn't like school (Female, school refuser).

I just don't like them, they are horrible and strict. I didn't want to go in. I just hated it — the teachers, the lessons and the kids and all that (Female, school refuser).

I hated school, it was boring (Male, permanent excludee).

I just won't come to school, I don't see the point (Female, attendance problems).

[What do you like about school?] *Nothing I hated it. They said I can go back if I want after having the baby, but there's no way I am going back there. I just wanted to get out of that school because I hated it. I didn't find it hard or nothing, but I just couldn't be bothered with it. I have always hated it, I have never liked school at all. Even in primary school I used to come home for lunch because I hated it that much. I was good at primary school but I still hated it* (Pregnant schoolgirl).

The final and probably most predictable component in the learning factors underpinning disaffection was the sample's relationship with teachers. Pupils

typically cited teachers as a major source of their discomfort. One resounding grievance was the 'lack of respect' which teachers showed to youngsters. Such attitudes included:

I'd show the kids respect if I was a teacher. It's easy to show respect to someone but they won't 'cos they're dead stubborn. They're very posh all coming from that place, this place to teach us (Pregnant schoolgirl).

I would rather be my own person. I don't like people telling me what to do. Teachers, they think that they are royalty or something when they are at school, that you should stand by them. That they are top of the class. I know, you should respect them, but they think that they are more than what they are (Female, permanent excludee).

Such comments were extremely common in many of the conversations with the young people as evident in other studies. Kinder *et al.* (1996) suggested that this type of discourse was particularly associated with extreme disaffection and alienation from school and that as long as these views were evident, any reintegration and rehabilitation to education and learning opportunities were unlikely. Adumbrating the skills, attitudes and approaches of professionals who do relate to disaffected young people may thus be an issue for professional development. The issue and possibility of a pupil–teacher relationship that could convey respect and equivalence, in the context of mainstream school culture, was one the youngsters seemed acutely aware of:

The teachers I liked respected the kids. Most of the teachers wanted respect but they weren't giving respect to us (Pregnant schoolgirl).

They should be told to give people a chance – if they're good with me, I'm good with them (Male, permanent excludee).

22

SUMMARY

The factors covered in this analysis testify to the considerable complexity of disaffection. The discourse of 'systemic breakdown' between pupils and the curriculum on offer, as well as the teacher–pupil relationships which mediate that curriculum, is as evident in this sample as it has been in other research into disaffected youngsters' attitudes. The accuracy of such discourse is not the issue, but the need to change youngsters' attitudes towards these two central components of education remains a major challenge in resolving disaffection.

The research has also discussed, in some detail, the significance of home factors and how different types of domestic situations – family problems, values, events and choices – might influence disengaged school behaviours. Health too has emerged as an issue, in particular the dislocation from school learning and relationships which it can exacerbate. Equally, the research has begun to open up the issue of peer relations and how different capabilities and preferences in the ways that individual pupils socialise can affect – or at least indicate – the degree and kind of school rejection they exhibit. Both of these findings have implications for schools' pastoral and extra-curricular opportunities, and equally signal the vital role of an array of agencies which may support pupils' informal curriculum as well as those services that can address particular problems.

The sample's strongly favourable memories of the primary school culture and the significance of any transition phase between primary and secondary may also be worthy of note. Equally, the issue of discontinuity in education experiences and disaffection seems to have some correlation in a number of instances.

CHAPTER TWO

DISAFFECTION: EXPERIENCES, EMOTIONS AND ATTITUDES

INTRODUCTION

This chapter of the report endeavours to meet the third aim of the project and *'adumbrate the range of experiences, feelings and attitudes associated with disaffection'*. It directs the spotlight to the words of youngsters who fall into the category of disaffection, giving them the opportunity to verbalise and communicate their own individual experiences.

The interview schedule contained questions pertaining to truancy, disruptive behaviour and exclusions. For each, the youngsters were asked to recount their experiences under the prompt: *'Have you ever truanted, why, when, what did you do, who with?'* and later, *'Have you ever misbehaved, etc.?'* The children were also encouraged to talk about how they felt, both prior, during and after these incidents. At the same time, wherever possible, comparisons were drawn between disaffection types in an effort to uncover any distinctive features of particular groups, as well as commonalities which arise through the shared experience of disaffection.

Through their discourse, the children shed light on every dimension of school life: references were made to teacher–pupil relations, school rules, peer influences, bullying, learning difficulties and the family, amongst other things. Their conversations thus point to factors implicated in the aetiology of disaffection and for this reason their words take centre stage in this section of the report.

The chapter has three major sections and looks at:

* experiences of disaffection;
* emotions associated with disruption, truancy and exclusion; and
* pupils' perceptions of preventative work regarding truancy and disruption.

1.   THE EXPERIENCES OF DISAFFECTION

This section briefly addresses the kinds of events and activities which happen to youngsters as they become involved in various disaffected behaviours. It suggests that peers are often central to those experiences and that there is usually a certain amount of selectivity in any occurrence or act of disaffection. However, for the more extreme examples of disaffected behaviour, a sense of being not entirely in control emerged from the sample's discourse.

1.1 THE EXPERIENCES OF TRUANCY

The 50 interviews served to illuminate the motivations and activities associated with non-attendance, and the following factors emerged.

Peers were heavily implicated in the act of truancy, and truancy often emerged as a socially influenced activity. In both sub-samples of non-attendance and disruption/exclusion, half the children recalled truanting with friends:

> *I came to this school in September and it was about January. My mates were always going off, so I said to them 'Are you going off today?', and they said 'Yeah', so I said to them 'I'll come with you'. I didn't want to be the odd one out. I didn't want to be in school on my own, so I started doing what my mates were doing* (Female, attendance problems).

> *Whenever my friends were going I went with them* (Male, fixed-term excludee).

However, there were equally examples of children who undertook truancy as a solitary endeavour: the loners, those who felt the need to escape because of bullying or victimisation by teachers and who operated individually out of school. Other solitary non-attenders simply stayed at home, often with the permission of their carers.

> *I just tidy up and that for my mum. Nothing else and then just sit down and watch telly* (Female, school refuser).

Proportionally more children in the non-attenders' sub-sample reported lone truanting than those in the exclusions continuum.

In each of the categories of non-attendance and amongst the two pregnant schoolgirls, evidence of parentally condoned truancy came to light. By contrast, none of the children in the exclusions sub-sample spoke of this phenomenon. This may indicate the role that parental knowledge and acceptance has to play in promoting the tendency to truant — or that children who challenge authority in school feel no need to gain the support of an adult when they elect not to attend:

> *I got caught by my mum, but I never got caught by my school because my mum lied for me* (Pregnant schoolgirl).

Truancy was often selective, triggered on the basis of lesson type, teacher preference or ease of escape and non-detection. The fact that many children could name specific lessons they avoided, indicates a truancy–curriculum link. They had not outrightly rejected school, just particular aspects of it. This confirms the findings of the O'Keefe and Stoll truancy study (1995), which revealed strong evidence of subject-specific truancy. Approximately one-third of the sample described lesson-specific truanting:

> *Sometimes used to do just lessons, like if it was a Monday and I had good lessons to begin with I would do them, good lessons, but then if I didn't like the other lessons I didn't do them* (Male, permanent excludee).

> *I was going in for all the subjects that I liked; all the others I didn't go* (Male, permanent excludee).

Certain lessons, because I would have certain teachers so I would just stay off school (Female, school refuser).

Amongst those children whose attendance was very poor, there were similar recollections of their initial truanting, which tended to be socially generated and lesson-specific prior to their more prolonged school avoidance. This indicates that it was sometimes a gradual process, whereby youngsters descended into the cycle of non-attendance. By not going to school, pupils recognised that they had missed out on lessons, fallen behind, and dissociated themselves from their peers. It therefore became increasingly difficult for them to reintegrate back into school life, at all levels – social and educational. Equally, the perceived reaction of teachers once the youngster returned to school was instrumental in furthering non-attendance. One Year 10 pupil with no behavioural problems and good academic ability repeatedly stated that the reason he could not come to school was because of the 'skitting' he got from teachers when he returned from a period of absence. Whether real or imagined, this perception forms an insurmountable barrier for those with attendance problems:

When you go to the lessons, they are always 'Oh, you are in today, are you?' and then they start hassling you because you have missed all your coursework and you just get more hassles and more hassles staying off, so then you just think 'I am not going back' (Female, attendance problems).

I was always getting detentions for being late so that's why I didn't want to go in (Male, serial non-attender).

I got used to not going in because I was sick all the time. I would get used to staying in the house and that, and I just got used to not going to school, and then when I had to go back it was a bit of a drag. Well it started off like one day, but then I started every day, I just didn't like school at all (Female, school refuser).

The teachers used to put me in the corner every day and that led on to the sagging because of the maths. I used to sag just that lesson and when I'd come in they'd get at me and then I didn't used to come in at all (Male, permanent excludee).

Some interviewees on the lower fringes of non-attendance referred to the addictive nature of truancy. Once tried and tested, it was no longer taboo and, in the absence of detection, it became a tempting indulgence and before long the 'addict' was locked into a pattern of non-attendance:

I think bunking is addictive – you do it once and you think that's boss that and you do it again and you won't get caught and again and again. You get caught and they hardly do anything to you. I think I'll do it again (Male, at risk of fixed-term exclusion).

I can remember the exact day. It was in second year, it was in the summer and me and Vicki were walking up to school, we got to the ... leisure centre and, like, I wasn't going to go in and she said to me 'I can't be bothered going to school' and I said 'Neither can I' and that's the first time we ever done, we just never went, and then it just carried on from there. If you do it once, just make sure that's the once, because you get that into it that you just get the habit of not going at all ... I just got into the habit of not going to school (Female, attendance problems).

Having removed themselves from school, children undertook a range of alternative pastimes, although none of them particularly exciting! This most likely stems from the limitations placed upon truants – the need to avoid detection, lack of finances,

27

having to return for later lessons, etc. Some children would stay within the school boundary, hiding out in the toilets; others would go to the park, to the shops, to town, take a bus ride or go home.

> *... then I started getting into trouble, I don't know. Just walking round the school at dinner time and I would go and sit in the park and then get the bus home. I knew at the end of the day I would get into trouble for it, but I just didn't care, I didn't like school* (Female, school refuser).

> *I didn't really want to sag. Sometimes when I had lots of money, I'd go and buy loads of cakes and sweets and I'd have a laugh on me own. But sometimes I'd just go on the bus, on me own and go right round for 50p* (Male, permanent excludee).

In some cases, the act of truancy demonstrated ingenuity and careful pre-planning on the part of the young person involved. Those engaging in post-registration throughout the day were particularly adept at cheating the system, in order to avoid detection:

> *Bunk out, come in for break so that the teachers could see me and then bunk back out, have my dinner, get my mark and then bunk out last two and then go home* (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

> *When we were sagging we had it all planned out. We used to go in at nine o'clock, get our mark, used to go the café and knock a few bottles of juice off, then go and play football all day, go back for dinner and come back* (Male, permanent excludee).

> *We'd sag for the whole day and after bring a note in for our form teacher. You get someone who can write good to do you a note and then you can get away with it* (Male, reintegrated after permanent exclusion).

1.2 THE EXPERIENCES OF DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Like truancy, disruptive behaviour was often felt by the youngsters to be linked to peer influences. Some of the sample described acting up ostensibly for the entertainment of their peers, seeking status through confrontations with teachers and messing around to avoid the attention of classroom bullies. Thus, disruptive behaviour tended to be socially generated and experienced:

> *When someone else is doing it, you start joining in, people egging you on* (Male, fixed-term excludee).

> *I mess about, talk to my mates and shout at teachers. [Why?] Because of my mates, just showing off, they laugh and then I carry on and they laugh more. It makes me feel good, it is not a good thing, but it's not a bad thing either* (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

The influence of peers was greater for those in the exclusions sample, especially those at risk of permanent exclusion, with examples of disruption as a means of achieving kudos amongst the peer group.

> *Everyone says I'm a clown in lessons. I make everyone laugh – I'd write something on the board, make a funny comment* (Male, at risk of exclusion).

28

Occasionally, disruption was limited to particular lessons with poor discipline and where the subject matter was found to be boring or too difficult:

> *In lessons I liked I would just do my work and then have a joke. In the lessons I didn't like I used to run on the tables* (Male, permanent excludee).

Within the exclusions sample, disruption was described as more blanket, with fewer youngsters mentioning lesson-specific disruption. Non-attenders, by comparison, tended to describe and recall disruption in specific lessons:

> [Have you ever misbehaved?] *Yes, in all me lessons, with me mates* (Male, permanent excludee).

Typically, the range of behaviours reported by the children included: swearing at teachers, shouting, pea shooter fights, harassing other pupils, refusal to work and physically challenged behaviour. Any more extreme forms of bad behaviour may have gone unmentioned during interviews or at least was not relayed in great detail. It was sometimes very difficult to judge the frequency or severity of disruption, based on the testament of a youngster. Parent and staff interviews served to uncover different reports of bad behaviour and when compared with pupil interviews, incongruity was found to exist between some accounts.

However, for the purpose of this section, it is the experiences, as voiced by the young people themselves, that are under discussion. The following two extracts provide typical examples of the disruptive behaviours acknowledged by the sample:

> *I'd throw stuff at the rest of the class, kick other people ... like for a joke, just show ... kicked out, or like bang on the windows to people, run round the class and do all stuff like that* (Male, permanent excludee).

> *Probably throw pencils at someone else to try and get their attention and then start pulling faces and stupid things like that, childish things. One time I used to sit there and put my make up on in lessons because it was so boring* (Pregnant schoolgirl).

Some individuals were able to recall the details of specific disruptions. One significant feature of these accounts, was the tendency for seemingly innocuous comments or incidents to produce an extreme reaction in some children, such that the situations escalated into full-blown confrontations. This was often the case where children had presented more extensive forms of disaffection: the permanently excluded, the school refusers and pregnant schoolgirls:

> *I didn't like the cookery teacher, I nearly punched her in the face one time. I was sitting on this bench and she told us to get down but I didn't hear her the first time 'cos I was talking. She goes 'X, get down 'cos that can't hold your weight'. I went 'Who are you talking to?' And she went 'You' and I started swearing and I'd big tears in me eyes and I walked out* (Pregnant schoolgirl).

> *I was in art one day and I was sitting with all my mates ... and I asked to lend a pencil because I had forgotten my H2 one and like she went 'Oh God, there's always one in the class' and just started, so I just ignored it and then I said to my mate 'Pass us my ruler over there' so she went 'Right, you move over there' and put me on my own, and I used to suffer from panic attacks as well, so like when she moved me she wound me up that much I couldn't breathe and my head was like it felt if it was throbbing and I just got these pencils and started snapping*

*them all, and she grabbed me really hard by my arm and I said to her 'What are you doing?'
and she went 'Get down to Miss X', and I said 'I haven't done nothing, you are the one who
moved me, I wasn't even doing it, I was being harmless' and then she gripped me even more
and I even had the bruise to prove where she was holding me, so I just smacked her off me and
I went 'Don't you ever' ... And really started shouting, but I couldn't control that, I can't
control my temper, that's why I have been to see doctors and all that* (Female, attendance
problems).

These youngsters consistently referred to the need for respect from teachers and
challenged 'traditional' notions of authority, authoritarian control and pupil
submission. However, given the way minor incidents erupted into major
confrontation, anger management for these particular children and their teachers, is
clearly an issue.

1.3   THE EXPERIENCES OF EXCLUSION

Excludable offences mentioned during the interviews with pupils included smoking,
fighting, bullying, refusal to wear the correct school uniform, truancy, hair cut too
short, non-completion of homework and an unacceptable number of referrals to
isolation rooms.

Excluded ten times – for fighting, smoking, smashing a window (Male, attendance problems).

*I got tripped up in PE and I call the lad who tripped me up a dickhead. I was sent to Mr
Stewart and I was suspended for a week. I've been suspended before because I threw a chair
at someone* (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

*I have been suspended from school 18 times ... most of it was for fighting, and the other one
was for just messing about. The last time was for getting referred twice a day and arguing
with a teacher, 'cos the teacher kept me in. I had finished my lines and he was telling me to
do two more lines, and I said that I was going. He came to the canteen and said 'X, come back
to the referral room' and I was arguing with him* (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

*Excluded from school for messing about in class, putting the others off their work – got
suspended ten times from same school. Excluded from last high school for head butting.
Came back and before even got into school X started calling me so I butted him again. He
went back and grassed so I got expelled. It wasn't just that, it – they'd got a big book in the
school full of all the things I'd done wrong. Been expelled from every school I've been to since*
(Male, permanent excludee).

*It's because people easily lead me; I'd say no, then I'd get in a fight. I had a fight one day and
I cut his eye open and that was the end of school forever* (Male, permanent excludee).

Once disconnected from school life, the excludees experienced a range of alternative
activities. In this particular sample as found elsewhere (Kinder *et al.*, 1997), life
during an exclusion seemed often to be determined by parental response. For fixed-
term excludees, a large number were 'grounded' and prevented from going out.
Consequently their days were filled with staying in, watching TV or lying in bed.
Other children were granted more freedom and recalled visits to friends and helping
with the shopping. Rather worryingly, only four reported doing any school work
whilst they were excluded.

Life for the permanently excluded child appeared even less structured. If there was an extended period out of education provision, the youngsters noted how they drifted away from the protection of the family home. If parents were working during the day, direct supervision was reduced and in some cases the excludees were free to dabble in delinquent pastimes. The two excerpts presented below indicate how, without structure or supervision, a young person can easily descend into criminal activity:

> *I got into trouble outside. I started robbing cars and then I got caught and then ... to all kinds of trouble ... they would start getting me to do little things that were bad and I started going on to bigger things and then round the wrong people* (Male, permanent excludee).

> *There's nothing to do and I've got other mates who don't go to school — just go out and get in trouble. That happened to me when I got kicked out, then I started mixing with the wrong crowd and I got into trouble. I was stealing cars and getting into trouble with the police. When they expel you and you've got the bad crowds up by your area and they're all car robbing they just drag you into it. When you get booted out of school, you get bored and your parents aren't in and you've got lads by your area who don't go to school, you get in with them and get into trouble* (Male, serial non-attender).

Other excludees appeared to use their time more 'constructively' and secured employment, e.g. at a nursery, in a pub, in a restaurant. The interviewee below points out that while he was kept busy and in receipt of an income, he was not receiving an education which would have enhanced his job prospects at a later stage:

> *I had little jobs, paper boy, upholstery. That give me a bit of money but I wanted to be in school for two reasons: to get an education, to get a job and to save money* (Male, permanent excludee).

2. THE EMOTIONS UNDERPINNING DISAFFECTION

A range of emotions, sensations and feelings 'emanated' from the interviews. A tally of all those expressions around both truancy and disruption produced the following common themes (in rank order): *victimisation; boredom; frustration.* Other emotions underpinning disaffection behaviours which surfaced regularly included: fear; regret; anger; bravado; oppression; fun; guilt; relief and curiosity. On further analysis, it became apparent that certain emotions were linked to particular forms of disaffection.

2.1 THE EMOTIONS UNDERPINNING TRUANCY

The act of truancy appeared to operate largely as an evasion strategy, employed by youngsters who experienced some degree of emotional discomfort precipitated by features in their school environment. By removing themselves from the source of discomfort, they achieved temporary relief. Of course in many cases the discomfort could be described as relatively minor, e.g. dislike of particular teachers, a disinclination for French, etc. The corresponding response was similarly low-level, e.g. avoidance of a specific lesson. However, within the sample, there were examples of emotional distress of a much greater magnitude, children whose discourse conveyed feelings of being stifled and completely overwhelmed by the demands of school life. These were children who manifested the more extreme forms of disaffection and who could simply not tolerate being at school.

The top-ranking emotion preceding the decision to truant was that of victimisation. Many of the youngsters complained of being unjustly labelled and persecuted by teachers and/or other pupils. To avoid further confrontation, they distanced themselves from the perpetrators, resorting to non-attendance to alleviate their emotional discomfort:

> [Have you ever truanted?] *I went in, tried to cope with it, but if they started fighting ...* [What was the main reason?] *Lads bullying* (Male, attendance problems).

> *If I get into trouble, I just can't face it – big green fence there – climb over that* (Male, at risk of fixed-term exclusion).

> *When you go in, the teachers are shouting all the time, call me into the office, having conversations with me and all that, about stuff I haven't done. They moan at me all the time. Everytime I go in it's 'X, come here, X that, X this', shouting at me all the time* (Male, permanent excludee).

Amongst the non-attenders' sub-sample, victimisation was the principal emotion preceding truancy and, overall, half of this group spoke of feeling victimised at some stage during the interviews.

Those youngsters experiencing feelings of oppression as underpinning their act of non-attendance very often described their discomfort in vibrant physical terms and complained of feeling overwhelmed, trapped, hot and stifled. Expressions like this were more likely to be voiced by children recounting the emotions preceding truancy experiences than by those referring to actual incidences of disruption. From this observation, it is apparent that oppression elicits avoidance reactions, rather than rebellion. Relief is through extrication from the confines of the school regime, serving to immediately reduce the emotional pressures. Interestingly, this sense of oppression was expressed at all levels of the non-attenders' continuum. Truancy for some could be seen as a response to overbearing emotional discomfort, where the children concerned cannot physically and psychologically tolerate the school environment, and thus experience an all-consuming need to remove themselves from the source of their discomfort:

> *When teachers are getting on your back and you are trying your best and they don't realise that. It depresses you – I hate it, you have to bunk off. You just feel trapped. It is like a prison* (Male, fixed-term excludee).

> *On hot days you need to get out but you're stuck in the classroom writing all day – it drives you up the wall. The hours were too long, they don't give you enough breaks and the heat and that. You can't get a drink or nothing* (Male, serial non-attender).

> *I didn't like being locked in, the railings, big people, teenagers being locked in. We can't go out at dinner time unless we've got a note – it's stupid. We'd to get permission to go out and we could hardly ever get it. Things like going to the toilet, you have to ask to go to the toilet and get a letter and a key and a limited time period in case you have a ciggy. You come back and they smell your breath – I didn't like all that. They treated us like five-year-olds and we can't do nothing* (Pregnant schoolgirl).

> [Fourth year] *was a lot different. It was a lot bigger, it was a lot scarier and there was different teachers up there. There was a few teachers that I didn't really get on with and it's a*

32

big place and I get nervous when I am in big places with a lot of people in (Female, school refuser).

Both pregnant schoolgirls gave examples of feeling oppression prior to truancy. One girl had consistently hated school, right from the primary years – '*I just wanted to get out of school because I hated it*' – while the other spoke of the physical manifestations of oppression: '*I done it for lessons, 'cos it's too hot in school or I just didn't like going in*'.

A further common emotion underpinning non-attendance derived from the inability to cope with school work on a daily basis, leading to frustration. One might expect the immediate retaliatory response to be one of disruption and this was certainly true for many individuals in the sample. However, in some cases a more reasoned option was to remove themselves from those lessons that generated frustration:

> *I didn't want to sag, I wanted to be in school with all me mates having a laugh. I couldn't get on, I thought in the end I was going to snap* (Male, permanent excludee).

> *You started getting worked up and start shouting and you start bunking off that lesson* (Male, fixed-term excludee).

Less extreme emotions associated with non-attendance included curiosity which provided the impetus for truancy, normally in the early stages. This is in complete contrast to the youngsters quoted previously, who experienced a desperate need to escape from the pressures of school life. In situations where curiosity operated, the decision to truant appeared as spontaneous, and spur-of-the-moment, where conditions were right and the opportunity arose. There was little or no emotional discomfort preceding the act:

> *I just thought I would try and see what it was like* (Male, attendance problems).

> *I did it because all my mates were doing it and I wanted to see what it was like* (Female, at risk of permanent exclusion).

A second set of emotional responses arose during the act of truancy and these were very often dependent on an individual's particular brand of disaffection. When describing their feelings during truancy experiences, low-level non-attenders, stated that they were scared and nervous, fearing possible detection and retribution, which in some instances might prohibit a decline into incessant truanting. Overall, fear was the second most frequently voiced emotion in relation to truancy behaviour:

> *It was good, it didn't feel good. I was scared in case I got caught* (Female, attendance problems).

> *I was a bit scared – but I thought it was better than being at school* (Female, at risk of permanent exclusion).

> *I was a bit nervous because I thought the school might find out* (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

For the more sustained acts of non-attendance (serial non-attenders and refusers), fear was not apparent, which corresponds with their normalisation of truancy:

Sometimes I get myself up and sometimes I don't. Sometimes I just can't be bothered (Female, school refuser).

I knew at the end of the day, I would get into trouble for it, but I just didn't care. I didn't like school (Female, school refuser).

Those with very poor attendance generally distanced themselves from the act of truancy. For instance, when one interviewee was asked if she had ever truanted, she replied *'Yes, in the first year, but after that I didn't bother'*. *'Didn't bother'* actually meant she didn't come in at all. She was 'stopping off' – this decision was not perceived as truancy. The inability to go to school was seen in a legitimate context, a considered choice on her part, which served to distance her from the label of truant:

[What do you call it when someone decides not to come to school?] *Staying off, sagging. But I am not sagging* (Female, school refuser).

I have been off for a couple of weeks. People say I have been sagging but I haven't (Female, attendance problems).

These children are sometimes therefore of the opinion that long-term non-attendance does not constitute truancy, but is instead a legitimate, reasoned action. Hence, the absence of fear from their discourse. For these individuals, not going to school becomes part of everyday life and consequently the use of punishments to improve attendance would appear to be counter-productive, instead serving to alienate the child further. This observation is corroborated by looking at attitudes towards reducing truancy levels. Those who truanted did not recommend the use of punishments, instead opting for positive strategies, such as improving the quality of lessons and using rewards.

Truancy was not always cloaked in negative emotions. There were some truants who enjoyed time out of school, viewed it positively and attached the emotion of 'fun' to the experience. Notably, both the quotes below originate from those with more minor attendance problems:

Just look around, and have a laugh. Just forget about school (Female, attendance problems).

I used to love bunking off school, I always had a laugh (Female, attendance problems).

Amongst the youngsters with very poor attendance, some voiced complete relief that they were no longer in school, having distanced themselves from the source of much psychological and physical discomfort.

I feel better than coming in, I'd rather be off than in. I just don't like school. Sometimes I miss friends, but I see them outside school playing football (Male, serial non-attender).

While truancy may be fun or beneficial for some pupils, others regretted their actions, especially if parents become involved:

Every time I got into trouble it made my mum feel bad and I was putting my mum through something (Male, at risk of fixed-term exclusion).

In retrospect, a few individuals admitted that truancy can actually be quite boring, with nothing to do except walking around, avoiding detection, waiting for the next lesson or hometime.

> *It was boring. You'd got nothing to do you just had to sit there and talk* (Male, reintegrated after permanent exclusion).

Three individuals referred to boredom when talking about their truancy experiences, and two of these mentioned boredom during the act itself, rather than as a precursory feeling. Boredom, therefore, in this sample, did not directly motivate truancy. The relationship between boredom and disruption, however, is much more significant, as will be outlined in the following section.

> *Silly really, 'cos you're staying off school and all you're doing is walking the streets and getting bored* (Female, serial non-attender).

2.2   THE EMOTIONS UNDERPINNING DISRUPTION

The most common emotions voiced specifically with reference to disruption were victimisation, boredom, frustration and bravado. These were followed by (in rank order) regret, anger and fear.

By far the strongest feeling resonating through the interviews was again that of victimisation. When allowed to expand on the issue, youngsters' discourse became animated, conveying feelings of bitterness and annoyance with regard to their treatment in the school system. As one progressed up the scale of disaffection, the sense of persecution increased. Children felt unfairly criticised and reprimanded by teachers, who simply 'had it in for them'. Teacher–pupil conflict served to fuel their aggression and pushed them towards defiant and antagonistic reactions:

> *When a teacher is getting on your back you think 'Well I am not taking that, I have got to answer back'* (Female, attendance problems).

> *The teachers would make you feel little in front of the other kids and the other kids would laugh and it makes you angry so you would mess about more* (Female, school refuser).

> *The teachers shout at you till they are blue in the face. It just works you up and makes you worse* (Male, fixed-term excludee).

> *I wouldn't have a go at teachers, if they stopped having a go at me. They single me out.* (Male, fixed-term excludee).

> *I'm regularly in trouble – but half the time it's not my fault. I think a teacher in the school has a big grudge against me. She always liked to plant the blame on me 'cos I don't think she wants me in the school. I don't think she likes me* (Female, at risk of permanent exclusion).

> *All the teachers know me. If there was going to be a fight, my name would get mentioned, even if I was off* (Male, permanent excludee).

> *The teacher just put my name up for nothing and started ticking it for nothing, and someone else was shouting and I am not doing nothing, just sitting there trying to do my work and my name is getting on the board and all that and I haven't done nothing. That's what it's like.*

35

They blame everyone, whoever they see, that's not doing what they should be, just get their name on the board (Male, permanent excludee).

You can't do nothing about it [being picked on by teachers], *you can't, you argue with them, they just don't listen to you. Then you get into trouble, end up arguing back and you can't get the better of them, they always get the better of you* (Male, permanent excludee).

I used to get in trouble all the time 'cos he used to say 'You're going to get into trouble today' and he'd make sure I got into trouble, he'd watch everything I did. He got me in trouble once for putting me feet on the pipes; he started flipping on me 'cos I put me foot on the pipes. I was just sitting there. He started moaning at me 'cos the pipes were dusty and I got   all   dust on me legs, I thought that was stupid. He picked on me 'cos he didn't like me, he used to pick on loads of people (Male, reintegrated after permanent exclusion).

Boredom appeared the second most common 'emotion' expressed by the sample regarding the disruptive incidents. Boredom was also expressed by those youngsters who were academically able, as well as those who were less able.

I just get bored and find myself fidgeting and messing around with me mates (Male, fixed-term excludee).

The things they do nowadays is dead boring so you end up talking and having a laugh ... If it's not interesting, I can't do it. I'll do it for a bit but after about five minutes I get bored and start messing about (Pregnant schoolgirl).

... like I used to play hangman in my English lesson because it was that boring. She used to just sit there and read to you, which is just not good at all, sitting there, not even giving you a book, just expecting you to sit there and listen to her, for an hour and ten minutes. It's easily going to distract your concentration (Pregnant schoolgirl).

I finish it dead quick [work] *or I can't be bothered to do it 'cos you know you'll do it dead quick and then you mess about* (Male, fixed-term excludee).

While there were those individuals who expressed themselves as bored by lessons, there were others who communicated frustration. They found it hard to cope, sometimes because of a specific learning difficulty like dyslexia or simply because they could not keep up. One interviewee said he found it hard to '*jump from one topic to another*' and he struggled with the overall speed of lessons. Eventually, the pattern was that frustration boiled over and pupils reacted negatively, disillusioned with the learning experience:

Sometimes, 'cos I'm dyslexic, I can't do the work and I think 'No point in bothering' (Male, at risk of fixed-term exclusion).

In French, because it is annoying and some of the words, when you get mixed up, it is confusing. I just don't concentrate (Female, at risk of fixed-term exclusion).

I feel upset that I can't do me work, but in the end I just leave it (Female, at risk of permanent exclusion).

At the far end of the emotional spectrum was the feeling of anger, an emotion which was linked to disruption, rather than truancy. Anger was vocalised as preceding disruption, arising from a variety of classroom stimuli – peers, teachers and work. Many of the interviewees complained of being 'wound up', a feeling which fostered antagonistic reactions:

I have got a dead bad temper. People just had to look at me and I would start fighting with them (Pregnant schoolgirl).

I just didn't like it. I get stuck on the slightest easiest word and the teacher would go 'Oh you are thick. You can't even read that'. It just really winds you up. The only reason my behaviour wasn't good is because I was easily wound up, very easy. I mean, I still am now. I mean, people could say the slightest thing and I would start fighting or arguing with them (Female, attendance problems).

When I was in a mood, they used to have a big punch- bag. It was full of sand – dead heavy as well. I used to just kick and punch it. [Did that help?] Yes, it got all the anger out .... I couldn't help it and they were winding me up in the class, I used to just ... sometimes I would just go home. If there was no one in, I would just go upstairs and knock f*** out of the punch-bag (Male, permanent excludee).

I was mad because people were always picking on me (Male, permanent excludee).

Anger was particularly salient at the extreme end of the exclusions sub-sample. It is perhaps the most explosive and threatening emotion, which explains why it was more frequently expressed by the permanently excluded, whose behaviour had presumably been deemed unmanageable or unacceptable by their schools.

Anger could also originate from sources beyond the classroom. During conversations, youngsters spoke of difficult family circumstances, such as long-term unemployment and illness. Features within the immediate neighbourhood, e.g. crime, drug use, or gang culture, could also impact detrimentally, thus influencing their overall state of mind. It is not surprising then that some youngsters clearly walked through the school gates with muted enthusiasm and an undercurrent of simmering frustration, precipitated by aspects of their immediate environment:

You've got to learn to stand up for yourself, then you fight in school and get suspended (Male, fixed-term excludee).

When I've been arguing with me mum and she says 'Best be good in school' and I say 'I will' but she keeps going on and when I come into school I'm worse 'cos I'm already in a bad mood; it makes me feel worse (Male, reintegrated after permanent exclusion).

When I used to have all the lads after me I used to come into school dead tensed up and the teachers used to shout at me and I just used to kick off, 'cos I used to be dead worried about going home (Male, fixed-term excludee).

In some cases, disruption was viewed as emanating from a desire to impress. The ability and inclination to truant did not generally increase a child's status in the eyes of peers, although low-level non-attendance and first-time experiences often took place under the duress or in the presence of a peer group. Disruptive behaviour by comparison, is usually located in the classroom setting, in the presence of 30 peers. Hence the motivations and repercussions of rebellion are quite different to those of truancy. The youngsters' conversations produced expressions of bravado during their stories of disruption, whereby status and image were established through confrontations with teachers, in the presence of peers:

I like making people laugh, putting all the others off doing their work (Male, permanent excludee).

I started in the first year and you have this thing in first year — 'Who's the hardest?' And I was fed up with being at the bottom, so I started working my way to the top by fighting and fighting and fighting. I did it to gain respect (Male, reintegrated after permanent exclusion).

Expressions of bravado were restricted to those children either at risk of permanent exclusion or the permanently excluded.

While some viewed the outcomes of disruption as largely beneficial, others regretted their behaviour, particularly if it was brought to the attention of their parents. Teacher–pupil relationships were characteristically poor throughout the sample and some of the disaffected youngsters appeared to pay greater heed to the opinion of their parents. Parental sanctions were seen as more effective, and several children were sensitive to their parents' feelings, i.e. not wanting to disappoint them, let them down, etc.

I want to change me behaviour. I've told me mum I'm going to get me head down. I've got to. Otherwise I'll end up getting kicked out (Male, fixed-term excludee).

At the time, I don't think. But afterwards I think why did I do that and I shouldn't have done it (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

I feel that I've got to start to be good in school (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

They [family] *stop me from being naughty like and I am being good now and getting my head down and pulling up my socks and doing my work* (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

When me gran says 'You've let me down', you feel ashamed (Male, reintegrated after permanent exclusion).

2.3   THE EMOTIONS UNDERPINNING EXCLUSION

The affective responses to exclusion differed enormously. During the interviews, some youngsters stated they welcomed the experience with open arms, relieved that they had finally propelled themselves from the stresses of school; others indicated they resented the decision, adamant that their behaviour did not justify removal from school. Once again, the emotional reactions could be matched with the level of disaffection. The permanently excluded were particularly vocal in this section of the interview.

The affective responses to exclusion mirrored those uncovered in Kinder *et al.* (1997), a national survey which found that children either accepted or resisted exclusion as a reprisal. These attitudes were then accompanied by antagonism, distress, regret or fun. Longer-term, 'unwishing' emotions also emerged.

Overall, the emotions expressed by the youngsters in this study could be ranked as follows: regret, injustice, relief, anger, boredom and acceptance.

An extended time out of school, sometimes without any immediate alternative provision, encouraged reflection amongst the permanently excluded children. They

were no longer part of the traditional school system and, consequently, several voiced regret, as depicted in the statements below:

> *Bad, because I would rather be sitting in school doing history or something than be sitting here* (Female, permanent excludee).

> *I would prefer to go back* (Male, permanent excludee).

> *At the time I didn't want to be there. I wanted to be expelled but looking back on it now I was stupid missing me exams and all. That's why I want to get back to school* (Male, permanent excludee).

> *I would be sleeping in late, just wake up early and lying there with nothing to do, wishing I was still in school* (Male, permanent excludee).

This remorse, however, was not unique to the permanently excluded. Other youngsters with experiences of fixed-term exclusion also regretted their actions:

> *I wished I hadn't done it. I'm going to be good now* (Female, attendance problems).

> *I feel bad now. I feel bad that I wasn't in school – the amount of days I was suspended for. I have only got five more times and I'm permanently excluded* (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

> *I shouldn't have done it in the first place. I feel bored when I'm off. I would rather be at school, 'cos my mates are here* (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

While some children accepted their exclusions as a reasonable and fair reprisal, a significant number disagreed with the punishment, complaining that it was unfair and inconsistently applied because others involved in the exclusion incident had escaped retribution. This inconsistency of a disciplinary measure, in the eyes of young people, served to amplify feelings of persecution and increase their disillusionment with the education process.

> [Was it fair?] *Sometimes fair, I shouldn't have done it* (Male, attendance problems).

> *It was dead easy to get excluded. I thought it was stupid. There were other people there who were worse then me* (Male, reintegrated).

> *The first fight when they suspended me – this girl approached me and said she wanted a fight. So I said OK and I fought her and I did beat her up and I got suspended for provoking her and she didn't. I made an issue of it. I asked why I'd got suspended and she didn't* (Female, serial non-attender).

Other children reacted aggressively to the exclusion, angry at what they perceived to be an unjust decision on the part of the school. Interestingly, it was the permanently excluded who again expressed intense feelings. The individual below vented his frustration by attacking his punch-bag with a knife:

> *Ripped it up, stabbing it with a knife, I* [destroyed the punch-bag] *in anger. That was the day I got put in here, just went off my head, because I had been expelled* (Male, permanent excludee).

> *I was mad at them because it was outside school* [the exclusion incident]. *It had nothing to do with them* (Male, permanent excludee).

Again, while such emotions were in evidence, reintegration would seem unlikely to be successful.

With movements restricted by parents during fixed-term exclusions and a delay in alternative educational provision for permanent excludees, feelings of boredom were mentioned, once the structure of daily learning had been removed:

> *It was boring because there was nothing to do, only like clean up and do the back garden*
> (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

For some individuals, boredom was a preferable option when compared with facing the trauma of school. Considering the potent emotions which can encapsulate disaffection (oppression, victimisation, frustration, etc.), it was clear that some young people saw exclusion as a way out, a release from the pressures of school. A proportion of those interviewed spoke of relief when reviewing their exclusion experiences, especially those who were permanently excluded:

> *I felt better when they excluded me and I came here* [PRU] *and I got my head together*
> (Male, permanent excludee).

> *I just ... every day wanted them to expel me so I didn't have to go there* (Male, permanent excludee).

> *Now I look back and think it was stupid, but then sometimes I'm made up because I'm in here now* (Male, permanent excludee).

For those manifesting their disaffection through non-attendance, exclusion seemed curiously counter-productive – it was exactly what the children wanted! The excuse to miss school legitimately was sometimes greeted enthusiastically by this sub-sample. Time out of school simply disassociated them even more from school culture. Indeed there were examples of children deliberately breaching school rules in order to achieve exclusion status, as exemplified in the first two quotes:

> *I loved it. I loved being off school. I hate coming in. If you are naughty, they shouldn't suspend you because that's what you want to do, you want to be off school, so that's why you are messing about, getting suspended* (Female, attendance problems).

> *At the time I didn't want to be there, I wanted to be expelled. So I signed a form to say that if I did another runner I'd be expelled and I did one the next day, to get expelled* (Male, permanent excludee).

> *I'd rather be excluded than at school* (Male, attendance problems).

> *I thought I was stupid for doing it, but in another way I thought it was good, because I weren't going into school the next day* (Female, serial non-attender).

It is noteworthy that very few children mentioned the remedial effects of exclusion. One individual understood that time was limited – he only had five more chances before a permanent exclusion came into operation – and another pupil modified her behaviour to remain just below the requirements for exclusion. However, none of the children acknowledged that the exclusion *per se* had diverted them away from further misbehaviour. Thus the deterrent value of exclusion is uncertain.

3.   STRATEGIES TO PREVENT TRUANCY AND DISRUPTION: PUPIL PERCEPTIONS

The research probed the opinions of the disaffected youngsters to ascertain what they themselves thought would help combat non-attendance and disruptive behaviour.

For both truancy and disruption the highest-ranking suggestions were:

*   make lessons more enjoyable;
*   change the teachers' characteristics and;
*   use rewards.

The high ranking of a curriculum that would engage pupils is particularly noteworthy and corresponds with the findings of other research.

3.1   PREVENTING TRUANCY

During the interviews, the following question was posed: *'What sort of things might get young people not to truant?'* In response to this issue of non-attendance, the highest-ranking suggestion was to make lessons more enjoyable, confirming the lack of engagement which prevailed throughout the sample.

The majority of youngsters had nominated teachers when asked to suggest the main cause of difficulties in school and hence, perhaps not surprisingly, 'changing the teachers' was perceived by some to be the primary mechanism for addressing non-attendance. Specific suggestions for 'improving' teachers included being less strict, being friendlier, shouting less, having a sense of humour, giving people a chance and being fair. The third most popular suggestion in relation to improving attendance was the use of rewards. Other solutions mentioned included involving parents, shorter lessons, punishments, ability to choose lessons, putting an end to bullying, stricter teachers, more freedom in school and smaller classes.

Further analysis of the data revealed differences of opinions between disaffection types, when asked about encouragement to attend. Within the non-attenders sub-sample, youngsters called for shorter lessons and smaller classes, perhaps further evidence that these children find school physically stressful, overwhelming and demanding.

> *Change the times — start later, not working all the time, doing different things* (Female, attendance problems).

> *Maybe if they had shorter hours* (Female, serial non-attender).

> *Make school better, like in here you do snooker and that. I'm not going to sag off here 'cos it's better than normal school. Here we have about three breaks and you can play snooker or table tennis or listen to music. Then when you go back to work you're not stressed; you can get down to work then* (Male, serial non-attender).

Put nicer teachers in the school; put more teachers in school because you like need littler classes with less students in so they can have more time with the teachers and stuff, to learn more things (Female, school refuser).

As non-attenders themselves, they did not recommend the use of sanctions to prevent truancy, possibly because, based on their own experiences, these have little impact. Instead, non-attenders advocated more constructive alternatives, such as using rewards to encourage attendance.

If you stay in school for two weeks, you get a day off or something (Male, attendance problems).

In some cases, non-attendance existed as a coping strategy for bullying. Consequently, three individuals exhibiting attendance difficulties suggested tackling the bullying problem within school:

I think it's mainly bullying. Something could be done about the bullying (Female, attendance problems).

Punishments for the kids who bully (Male, serial non-attender).

If the teacher's going to be fair with you, and the pupils are not going to pick on you, you could go to school (Male, attendance problems).

The most common suggestion made by non-attenders was to improve or change the behaviour of teachers in some way:

Not shout at you and not send you out all the time (Female, attendance problems).

Make lessons more interesting and teachers a bit more happier, have less of an attitude (Female, serial non-attender).

Amongst the exclusions sub-sample, a number felt parents could be involved in some way.

Your family could try to talk to you — the importance of attendance (Female, at risk of permanent exclusion).

If parents ground them, that might work. If they say you're not getting anything unless you go to school (Female, at risk of permanent exclusion).

Of all those in the exclusions sub-sample, the fixed-term excludees felt most strongly that lessons could be improved, indicating their dissatisfaction with the current curriculum:

Make lessons more interesting. Make the school better, more lively, change the teachers (Male, fixed-term excludee).

The ability to choose a tailor-made curriculum was often suggested by the permanently excluded. This may reflect their experiences following exclusion, with opportunities to follow a modified programme of study, hence one which is more manageable and specifically adapted to their individual needs.

Should be able to choose your lessons and make your own timetable and be able to leave after dinner if they want (Male, permanent excludee).

If they could choose what lessons to go to during the day (Female, permanent excludee).

Again, those in the exclusions sub-sample offered suggestions for enhancing the teacher-pupil relationship:

Make sure the teachers are always in a good mood (Male, fixed-term excludee).

Teachers could be friendlier, encourage you more (Female, at risk of permanent exclusion).

Get better teachers – someone who listens and can have a joke with you (Male, permanent excludee).

I'd have a friendlier atmosphere in the classroom and in school. I'd come across as a friend to get them to like me. I wouldn't be as strict (Male, reintegrated after permanent exclusion).

From their suggestions, it would appear that those in the exclusions sample, like the non-attenders, also found school overly demanding and restrictive. Thus, calls for more freedom, shorter lessons and smaller classes were reiterated by this sample:

Giving us a bit more space to go, the court areas (Male, fixed-term excludee).

Make lessons shorter; they drag. Make teachers not shout. Do interesting things and make teachers learn properly to you (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

Make classes smaller; let them talk a bit, as long as they are getting on with work. Make them understand what they are doing in work, like pay more attention to them; don't just sit in front of them and say do it (Male, permanent excludee).

3.2   PREVENTING DISRUPTION

The youngsters were then asked to propose ways of reducing the tendency to misbehave: *'What sort of things do you think might encourage young people not to misbehave?'*

Interestingly, the ranking of recommendations matched exactly that given in response to the previous question on non-attendance. Again, the most frequent solutions were to make lessons more interesting, followed by changing the teacher-pupil relationship and the use of rewards. Other suggestions included involving parents, use of punishments, the opportunity to choose lessons and separating you from your friends.

With reference to improving the quality of lessons, the youngsters made requests for varied, exciting, relevant and practical topics:

More exciting activities, brighter classrooms, more stuff to use because we haven't got that much (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

Make them smaller, definitely, pay more attention to the kids there, tell them what to do properly at the start of the lesson, go through everything, not just like the basic things, go through that and give them easier work if they find it too hard (Female, permanent excludee).

More things to do in school, more variety (Female, attendance problems).

43

Make them interested. Try and find out what they enjoy and do things what kids enjoy, like in English, do play (Female, serial non-attender).

I think if they made it more interesting, instead of just putting you down and trying to teach you something. If they did more experiments and things, then it would be a lot more good (Pregnant schoolgirl).

Lessons could be further improved by offering some flexibility and choice with regard to the curriculum followed. Clearly, some pupils were studying subjects which they found too difficult, irrelevant and unstimulating: hence, the propensity to misbehave.

If you get to do what you want in the lessons. Then that will be good (Female, at risk of exclusion).

If you could choose what lessons to go to during the day (Female, permanent excludee).

Kids could pick which subjects they want to do (Male, serial non-attender).

Teaching style was again targeted, and a number of modifications were suggested in order to reduce disruption in the classroom. It is worth emphasising that some children recognised the need for stricter teachers, demonstrating an awareness that poor classroom control engenders disruption. In contrast, other youngsters expressed a preference for teachers with a friendly disposition and 'down-to-earth' approach.

I would want teachers to talk to them and ask what is going on (Male, fixed-term excludee).

Teachers could be more strict (Male, permanent excludee).

Make teachers stricter (Male, permanent excludee).

If teachers came across like friends and you could have a laugh with them but only to a certain extent (Male, reintegrated after permanent exclusion).

They could calm themselves down. Like teachers here, they are just excellent, they talk to you as if like you are a human being (Female, attendance problems).

Among the disaffection sub-samples, slight variations emerged in the proposals made for combating disruption. As a group, the non-attenders manifested less disruptive behaviour and consequently some advocated the use of punishments for managing challenging behaviour in the classroom. Interestingly, this is different from their recommendations with regard to managing truancy:

They could punish you, your family could keep you in (Female, attendance problems).

Let them do what they do here, let them go and play snooker. If they don't behave, take it away from them. It'd work 'cos your mates'd say 'I want to do that; stop messing around' (Male, serial non-attender).

By comparison, only one person from the exclusions sample suggested a punishment response in the event of disruption. Their preferred option was for good behaviour to be rewarded. Again, parental involvement was recommended, supporting the notion that parents carry greater authority than teachers, at least in the eyes of their children. Both reintegrated pupils recommended parents imparting rewards for good behaviour.

44

Family could help you along with a prize or rewards (Male, reintegrated after permanent exclusion).

I'm on report and when I get good on me report me mum's made up and she gives me money when I'm good, so I keep being good. That's how she gets me to be good (Male, reintegrated after permanent exclusion)

Looking at these solutions and views, and the youngsters' focus on positive reinforcement, serves as a useful comparison with, and precursor to, the whole issue of alternative provision. It is to this aspect that the report now turns.

SUMMARY

Based on the testaments of the youngsters interviewed, disaffection emerges not as a unitary phenomenon, but as a complex web of experiences, emotions and attitudes, unique to the individual and setting.

Descriptions of truancy portrayed an act which was typically socially orientated – undertaken in the company, and often under the duress, of others. Those with more serious attendance difficulties, having disassociated themselves from the peer group, were more likely to truant as a solitary endeavour. This group also gave examples of parentally condoned truancy which served to protect them from discovery, remove the fear of truancy and, ultimately, normalise the experience. Long-term non-attendance at school, in some instances, deschooled the pupil to such an extent that reintegration would be very difficult on all levels – social and educational. Selectivity operated in many accounts of truancy: decisions to truant could be based on teacher preference, lesson type or ease of non-detection.

Disruption in the classroom displayed a similar set of features, namely selective and peer-generated. The interviews with disaffected youngsters in this study showed that, for them, incidents of disruption were more likely to 'escalate' out of control. While the majority of pupils are able to comply with teacher discipline, a minority react against it, unable to control their emotions.

In terms of emotional responses to disaffection, the youngsters articulated a plethora of feelings, associated with their type of disaffection and the specific incident they were recalling. A gradation of emotions existed from low-level frustration and boredom through to anger and oppression. Generally, the emotions were negative, but there were exceptions. For example, some youngsters referred to relief and fun during their time out of school.

Collating the emotions expressed throughout the interviews brought out pupils' strong sense of victimisation, boredom, oppression and frustration. Youngsters, particularly those manifesting more extreme forms of disaffection, spoke of feeling psychologically and, in many cases, physically, stifled by the school regime.

Although the emotions, experiences and attitudes expressed during the interviews were frequently negative, there were few individuals who outrightly rejected every aspect of their educational experience. Often, they lodged specific grievances – particular lessons, teachers, pupils, etc. but, at the same time, could name lessons they enjoyed and teachers or other educational professionals they related to.

Re-engagement clearly requires a careful calibration of teaching and learning relationships with appropriate curriculum opportunities. In addition, this part of the research has shown that young people's affective response to a school system or regime may also be something that needs to be given greater consideration and discussion.

CHAPTER THREE

ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

INTRODUCTION

The full range of provision and additional support offered across the sample included attendance at a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), in-class support for learning needs, support for additional educational needs or withdrawal, provision of an alternative curriculum of some form, behaviour support, counselling, mentoring and the involvement of external agencies such as the Education Welfare Service, Educational Psychology and Social Services.

Different types of provision or support offered can be viewed as proffering some aspect of one or more of the following:

- **an alternative curriculum:**
  college, work placement, training and basic skills – related to future needs of pupils
  leisure activities, e.g. football, snooker
  practical activities, e.g. woodwork, computers

- **support for learning needs:**
  individual help with work
  improved learning context, e.g. smaller classes

- **support for emotional and behavioural needs:**
  a key relationship
  ambience, e.g. a relaxed atmosphere, understanding, a flexible response to behaviour and pupils given responsibility
  behaviour modification, e.g. use of rewards, sanctions, targets and individual education plans (IEPs).

The overlap of some of these aspects of alternative provision and support is apparent in the table overleaf:

Table 2   Elements of the main forms of provision and support that were perceived as effective

Provision	Alternative curriculum	Learning needs	Emotional and behavioural needs
PRU	• college, work placement, training and basic skills • leisure activities • practical activities • improved learning context • focus on relationships • relaxed atmosphere • understanding and flexible response to behaviour • behaviour modification		
In-class support		• individual help with work • a key relationship	
EWO involvement	Access to: • college, work placement, training and basic skills • leisure activities		• a key relationship • understanding and flexible response to behaviour
Alternative curricula offered by mainstream schools	• college, work placement, training and basic skills • leisure activities • Practical activities		
SEN support		• individual help with work • improved learning context • a key relationship • relaxed atmosphere	
Behaviour support			• behaviour modification including the use of rewards and sanctions, target setting and the development of IEPs
Counselling			• a key relationship • understanding and flexible response to behaviour
Mentoring			• a key relationship
Home tutoring	• access to college, work placement, training and basic skills • individual help with work		
Adolescent unit			• key relationships • understanding and flexible response to behaviour
Therapy group			• understanding and flexible response to behaviour

1.   AN ALTERNATIVE CURRICULUM

Throughout the range of disaffection, pupils and teachers saw provision of an alternative curriculum as a significant factor in motivating and effectively re-engaging

pupils in the educational process. Pupils and teachers referred to the provision of college and work-related activities, practical activities and leisure pursuits. Pupils, in particular, emphasised the importance of the curriculum being relevant to their future needs as well as the need for it to be varied and enjoyable and involve an element of choice. The fact that this sort of learning matched interests, aptitudes and capabilities was extremely evident, as well as the incentive to re-engage in educational opportunity.

> *They have already started changing it ... education officer, she takes you to college once a week and to a centre once a week and to school for the other three days, and if you don't go to school for the three days then they won't take you, so that gets people going to school. Yes, because its better like, because when you leave school and you have done a bit of work and college, you know what college is going to be like so you are ready. Like he won't take Year 7 or Year 8s and 9s to college; it will just be 10s and up, trying to get you to come to school more. If you are on a scheme, say the college one, if you are naughty they should just take you off that* (Male, attendance problems).

> *[The pupil] is very practical and very interested, in fact, in the army. That probably is his ultimate aim. He went on work experience with the army while he was here with us. He has been doing a construction course which we organised ... and he has done so well at that he has been offered a place to start in January* (Head of the PRU; male, permanent excludee).

> *I come down here and see what he's doing. It's had a big impact... [the PRU] has brought him on leaps and bounds. It's brought him out of his shell. Very useful, got him interested again. At the moment he's doing a construction course one day a week and hopefully he'll keep that up when he leaves here. He's also doing plastering and doing his NVQ1 so if he sticks at it he'll hopefully get somewhere* (Parent; male, permanent excludee).

However, less than one in five pupils in the sample as a whole had experienced alternative curricula of any kind within mainstream provision. In contrast, pupils who were attending a PRU (i.e. the majority of pupils at the extreme end of the disaffection continuum) had access to some form of planned alternative curriculum. The majority of pupils referred to the range of activities available at the PRU, including leisure activities, practical activities and work and college placements:

> *Make the school better. Like in here you do snooker and that. I'm not going to sag off here 'cos its better than normal school. On hot days they should let you do a bit of swimming 'cos the sun just gets to you. Like here, you can just go to the shops but in normal schools you can't. I think they should do what they do in here. Here we have about three breaks and you can play snooker or table tennis or listen to music. Then when you go back to work you're not stressed, you can get down to work then. Here we get longer and more breaks than at school. These [PRUs] put you on schemes when you finish here, like football and recreation* (Male, serial non-attender).

> *At the PRU I go to a [name of club]. In the boy's club we do gardening and clearing up. If you do very good you go on occasional days out – we're going away this Friday. The '408' is the best way to get people in 'cos they say 'If you go in, we'll take you out'. '408' is a young advice bureau. If you don't go in school and they end up being taken to court, you end up at 408 and they persuade you to go to school. If you get good attendance there, they take them out every Friday or Monday afternoon* (Male, permanent excludee).

> *Yes, because I used to do like the Duke of Edinburgh, and I used to go climbing and fishing and all that, and I do trampolining now and all stuff like that, and like with the Unit [PRU] I can do activities. I go on a Tuesday sailing and canoeing all day, from nine o'clock of a morning, and then Wednesday's its climbing* (Male, permanent excludee).

Yes. Because I know what I am doing there, because if you used to go to school, English I would just go 'Naa, I don't do like English and maths and that'. I like all the physical; I like art and things like that, activities. So that's better for me (Male, permanent excludee).

Teachers and parents of those pupils with extreme disaffection supported the view that the range of activities on offer at the PRU and their relevance helped to engage pupils in education. Teachers felt that because they were able to be flexible with the intensity of the timetabling as well as with the substance of the curriculum, pupils felt a greater sense of achievement, in contrast to mainstream school, where they continued with GCSEs and ended up in a cycle which reinforced their sense of failure year after year. One teacher in a PRU described the lack of flexibility and constraints placed on pupils in mainstream schools as the *'schools' straitjacket'*.

He was very poor on the basic skills so although again he was very good on IT, very practically minded. So he coped better with us, because we perhaps didn't have to force him to do GCSEs because there was no hope of him achieving GCSEs. We have the leeway to be able to do that. I can understand, although things are changing in the school that he was in, everybody does those courses to whatever level (that level or the lowest level) and, of course, the frustration for the ones that are stuck in the low groups perpetuates over the year's work and by the time that they get to Year 9/10, some of these lads just say they have had enough (Head of PRU; male, permanent excludee).

Mostly he enjoys what we are doing, but I think if we forced him back into full-time he would fail and would end up with nothing. And I think we would find him the right sort of training for next year. I think he will go for something practical, possibly mechanics. If he can get four GCSEs, we can start him on a modern apprenticeship (Head of PRU; male, permanent excludee).

There appeared to be little planned provision of this kind available to the sample in mainstream education and only one teacher within a mainstream setting referred to capitalising on the pupils' interests in this way. This suggests that, in mainstream education, the provision of alternative curricula is a largely untapped resource in terms of remotivating disaffected pupils and this may need to be taken into account in the future planning of mainstream school curricula.

In fact, in a range of cases of disaffection, pupils, teachers and, in some cases, parents noted that these pupils were often denied access to such activities. They were seen as unreliable because of their attendance and behavioural difficulties. It may be, therefore, that in this way, disaffected pupils are denied access to the very thing which could be effective in turning their disaffection around.

No way he would get work experience if he was at school. They felt that he would let them down (Teacher at PRU; male, serial non-attender).

Most of [the activities] *I couldn't go to, because of the teachers. They'd say — you're not coming* (Male, permanent excludee).

I was getting in the footie team, but they kicked me out because of all the things that happened (Male, serial non-attender).

I'd like to do fishing, but the teachers won't take me. They go, but they won't take me because I'm not good at school (Male, fixed term excludee).

He loves sport but he never gets a look in. He's been alienated by the sports teacher and he's been dropped from the football team. He's stopped bringing his football kit into school because of the bad relationship with the teacher. Before, when he was interested and he was in the team, he would have never forgotten his kit. Mum came in and had a chat with the teacher about it which seemed to work for a while. He was getting on better with Ant but then it went off again. [The pupil] used to like to go out and play footie at home but now won't go. He wasn't good at football when he came to [school] but he started playing and really took to it. He got in the team but then he was dropped and he never got back in because he had too much to say for himself. At the end of the year everyone who'd been in the team got certificates but he didn't — that really upset him (Parent; male, fixed-term excludee).

For [the pupil] and for us, in a way, it is the icing on the cake, because it is a way of reward and they perhaps feel important. They get included in things. If they had been in mainstream school, they wouldn't have even got a chance. They would have been the kids at the back of the queue. Their names wouldn't have even gone in the hat. But we try here to build up trust so whatever they do, they do what they have to here and they get the extras (Head of PRU; male, permanent excludee).

Three pupils out of the ten with minor attendance problems had experienced some form of alternative curriculum which either consisted of a combination of work experience, college placement and school attendance or involvement in specific practical or leisure activities. Whilst other pupils with minor attendance and behavioural problems had no experience of alternative curriculum provision, many referred to the need for a greater variety of activities within the school curriculum rather than '*writing all day*'. They referred to activities which were practical and more relevant in terms of their future needs and the need to take part in activities outside of the immediate school environment in order to motivate pupils to attend school and not engage in disruption. They expressed some involvement or interest in future jobs, college placement, extra-curricular activities and a variety of leisure pursuits. Two pupils specifically stated that the opportunity to take part in leisure activities would be an incentive for pupils to attend school.

In contrast, over a third of pupils within the behavioural continuum had experienced some form of alternative curriculum and pupils, teachers and parents again agreed that capitalising on pupils' interest in leisure, practical and work-related activities could be an incentive to pupils to behave better and could be successful in changing behaviour. It was also noted by one pupil that leisure activities could shape friendship groups, which may have a beneficial influence on behaviour.

Very little reference was made to alternative curricula in the categories of school refusers and pregnant schoolgirls and this may reflect the lack of appropriate provision generally for these pupils. Whilst one of the pupils in each of these categories was attending a PRU, neither referred to the alternative curriculum available. The school refuser focused on the improved learning context, in the form of smaller classes, as the beneficial aspect of the PRU and the pregnant schoolgirl did not comment. However, access to an alternative curriculum was noted by the home tutor of the pregnant schoolgirl. She highlighted that, if the young mother decided to remain at home after having the baby, her access to education, including alternative curricula, would be seriously limited, despite the fact that many pregnant schoolgirls, given the opportunity, perform well educationally.

*While she is in the earlier stages of pregnancy, she has been going into the Unit. First of all she was monitored, so she would be doing maths, English, she is doing child development, she will be doing science. At the moment I think she is still on line for GSCEs so she should be doing at least four GCSEs, possibly the computer, which will be RSA ... that sort of thing and then life skills – she will have vocational education and normal careers services as well, so we will keep her going as much as we possibly can If by any chance after she has had the baby she feels that she does not wish to come into the Unit, then she will be taught at home and we will carry on with as many subjects as we can so that she comes out with qualifications at the end. Hopefully she will get involved with Youth Enterprise, but that **would be** if she decided to come back after the birth. It's a link in with colleges and they also do one particular project where they actually run their own company and they compete with other schools in the area. And hopefully she will do work experience if she comes back. It's a little more difficult if she decides to stay at home* (Home tutor; pregnant schoolgirl).

This raises the issue of providing access to alternative curriculum provision for pupils in these minority groups.

2.   SUPPORT FOR LEARNING NEEDS

Within each of the categories of disaffection there was evidence that some pupils had learning difficulties, where pupils either stated that they had difficulty with the work or were receiving some form of support for recognised learning needs. Learning difficulties were particularly evident, however, in pupils at the lower end of the continuum for both behaviour and attendance, where about two-thirds of pupils had attendant learning needs. The majority of these pupils received in-class support, albeit limited to a few subjects, and a small proportion were withdrawn from ordinary classes for extra help with basic subjects within the special needs department. All spoke positively of the support which they received and, for these pupils, in which problems of attendance and behaviour were beginning to emerge, support for learning difficulties was highly valued, although this did not always appear to be recognised by teaching staff. For one pupil, the extra support itself provided an incentive to work.

Yes. Two support teachers come into some lessons. They help you do geography and that. They help me 'cos when we were doing a grid reference I got stuck so [the teacher] came over and helped me (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

Say in the English class we have this like ... there's the teacher there, but we have a woman that comes in and sits with the ones that won't work, and she goes 'Oh, come on; you can do it' and she listens to what the teachers say and then will put it out in another way for us – that's in English. And she will sit there and she will push you to do it, like the teacher will push you too much, whereas she will just say 'If you don't do it, it's just you that's wasting your time', but the teacher will go 'You have got to do it'. She just says 'Well take your time on the work' (Male, attendance problems).

Just say in maths and ... that [the teacher], she's all right, she helps me. [She's called a] supporter, child supporter, something like that, I don't know, special needs teacher (Female, attendance problems).

In-class support in certain lessons, language, which is helpful when you are stuck and you can remember what you learnt easier (Female, at risk of exclusion).

Pupils also emphasised the air of mutual respect which they felt existed in the special needs block, in contrast to the rest of the school. They emphasised how they enjoyed

the relaxed atmosphere and the relationship which they had built with the teachers there, as compared with others in the school. It was these teachers whom they would go to for help with other problems and, in this way, this form of provision may also have given pupils access to a means of addressing their emotional needs.

> *I like the facilities: it is for people that need help, and the teachers help you. They talk to you and they understand you and they take your point of view first. You can't talk to the other teachers. There is something about them that you can, when you talk to them, it is not as if they are teachers, they are more like youth workers* (Male, fixed-term excludee).

> *They don't put much pressure on you like all the other teachers. It's a special needs block, so when you are in there they ask you to do things they don't tell you ... so getting told what to do. They are nice to you; they don't always get off on you like all the teachers do – 'Do this or do that' ... stuff like that; they just ask you to do it and are pleasant. 'Do what you can do' and not force you to do things you can't do* (Female, attendance problems).

> *Dyslexic help – we have special lessons with* [the teacher]. *When I go to classes, half the teachers don't know I'm dyslexic, but* [the teacher] *does loads of things for me. If I get into trouble they sort it all out for me* (Male, at risk of exclusion).

Teaching staff also commented on the progress made, albeit sometimes small, when pupils were supported within the special needs department. In one case, pupils, teachers and parents agreed that learning support was helpful, particularly having work-related targets.

> *Very much focused on him because he gets a lot of the help off the extra adult in the room or two adults in the room sometimes. All pupils have* [support] *to a basic level, but the likes of* [the pupil], *because there is at least one extra adult in the room, certain members of the class are focused and he is a mega focus because ... there's one other little girl who isn't a problem disaffection-wise, but has major learning difficulties, similar to his. We have used the special needs department – he is on Stage 3 and he has had the help that Stage 3 brings. He is on an individual education plan, as are up to 60 children in the school out of a population of 250, and he has been monitored by the SEN department as to his targets and his success in those targets and along with all the Year 7/8 and 9 children he has been tested and retested in his basic skills, and he has had a learning enrichment programme, which is ongoing, and is greatly assisted. In* [the pupil's] *case, he is one of only two children in Year 7 where not a great deal of improvement has been seen in his reading age; for example, he has gone up slightly, but in other children there has been a 50 per cent improvement, for example, and his has only improved five per cent or so* (Head of Year 7 and KS3 coordinator; male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

Some pupils and teachers highlighted the benefit of an improved learning context in the form of smaller classes:

> *One of the teachers I liked, she is in* [the PRU]. *She was good, she helped me out and all that with my work, because there was only three people in that class as well. She just paid loads of attention to you; she just came over, and what you were stuck on she would help you with, like, say, 'Read this bit of the book'. In the school you just had to read and read and read until you found it, and you couldn't do it all in one lesson. If there's only a few people, she moves around helping each person, but in a class they can't go round helping all the people* (Male, permanent excludee).

> [The pupil] *needs closer attention and would benefit from smaller groups where more attention could be given* (Head of PRU; female, minor attendance problems).

[Referring to the PRU] *It's smaller and they pay more attention to you* (Male, permanent excludee).

Although valued highly by pupils, apart from the teacher of the pupil with specific learning difficulties, teachers commented surprisingly little about the nature or effect of any learning support for pupils with minor disaffection problems. It should, perhaps, be noted that the parent of the pupil with specific learning difficulties blamed the primary school for his present behavioural difficulties as his learning needs had not been identified and addressed earlier. The head of the PRU which he was now attending agreed with this and held the belief that it was the pressure from the parents which had enabled this pupil to receive the support for learning needs which he needed.

Other pupils, whose learning needs appeared not to have been fully recognised, implied that there were times when they struggled with the work and that extra support would be helpful. One pupil specifically stated that if they had extra help with learning, this would encourage them to attend school. The parent of a pregnant schoolgirl commented that she needed more help with basic subjects.

> *Could maybe have done with a little extra help in English* (Male, permanent excludee).

> *Support in class would be useful, a bit* (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

> *Subjects — could get extra help* (Male, attendance problems).

> *If you can't do it and they don't help you, you just flip. Would have liked help with maths and geography* (Female, minor attendance problems).

> *She needed more help with her reading and spelling* (Parent; pregnant schoolgirl).

It was interesting to note that only a few pupils referred to the possible stigma attached to receiving extra help and these tended to be pupils with either long-term attendance problems or behavioural difficulties:

> *If you wanted help you'd to walk over to the desk and you feel stupid so you've just got to sit there and get the answer off your mate* (Male, serial non-attender).

> *When I need help I ask the support teacher, when no one is listening. She explains how to do it* (Male, fixed-term excludee).

> *Feels easy and good* [getting help], *but, there again, it makes me feel like I am dumb and thick, but it is not because I am dumb or thick, it's my behaviour, my attitude* (Male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

However, one teacher commented that in-class support may be more effective than withdrawal for pupils with behavioural difficulties, as it is less intense and more low-key support:

If it's in the classroom like that, he tends to be more receptive. When he is being withdrawn, sometimes he causes a problem. He would tend to reject that focus. If he is in a classroom scene – I have a helper in with me, for example, in my history lesson, somebody who helps in learning enrichment as well, and he will be more receptive to the help, even though the lady is aware that he can be funny about it, but he will accept the support there, whereas if it's in a withdrawal sense he sometimes doesn't (Head of Year 7 and KS3 coordinator; male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

For one pupil with minor behaviour problems, rather than being too difficult, it appeared that the work provided was not challenging enough and this was also recognised by the teacher involved:

We need to motivate him and if we do that, he will achieve his potential. The problem is he does ten different subjects and has ten different teachers. So it's difficult to get consistency. We are trying several strategies with him. He's been interviewed by the head and senior managers and he's agreed to a sort of contract for good behaviour and will shortly be returning to class. We need to look at ways of looking at getting stronger staff and the work to stretch him (Head of Lower School; male, fixed-term excludee).

Don't need help in class. The work's too easy. I know what to do (Male, fixed-term excludee).

As noted already, a number of pupils, with varying degrees of disaffection, had previously had a significant amount of time out of school (four weeks or more) for various reasons, including illness and bereavement, although this was particularly the case for pupils with minor attendance problems. All of these pupils expressed how hard it had been for them on return to school and they emphasised their concern about being behind and difficulty coping with their work. Pupils who received help on their return said that this had been useful, although two felt they could have had more help:

[Have you had time off school?] *No apart from when broke my leg last year – off school four months, was a bad break. Missed loads of work; I was made up I didn't have to do it. When I went back I was slower with the work than everyone else* (Male, reintegrated after permanent exclusion).

[When off for health reasons:] *No help given. I was behind for ages* (Male, fixed-term excludee).

I didn't do the work. They tried to help me, but I could have had more help (Female, attendance problems).

Broke me ankle I was in hospital for eight weeks and I come home and played football on it so I'd to go back to hospital. Was off school for ten weeks at beginning of Year 7. Mum used to come to school and get work for me to do in hospital. Funny coming back 'cos you didn't even know what day it was (Male, permanent excludee).

For pupils at the extreme end of the behavioural continuum, learning needs were mentioned very little by pupils or teachers. Emphasis appears to be placed on addressing their behavioural needs, although pupils implied that they valued the help that they were receiving with their work, one-to-one tuition and the sense of achievement with the work which they undertook in the PRU. Teachers referred to the frustration that many pupils had previously felt because of a lack of achievement and continual failure within mainstream, due to a lack of flexibility with the

curriculum. School refusers, specifically highlighted the improved learning context as the main aspect which they valued in contrast to other types of disaffected pupils, but this was not always identified by staff, for whom attendance appeared to remain the main issue.

However, for pupils reintegrated after a permanent exclusion, the focus appeared to shift back on to their learning needs, and both pupils in this group were receiving in-class support for their learning needs and found this valuable:

> *I have a teacher from* [the PRU] *helping me 'cos I'd missed so much school, I asked her to come in and help me. It's made a difference; we've just had our test results back in geography and I came third highest in the class. She explains things and helps me with my reading and spelling. If I don't understand anything, she'll write it out and I'll copy* (Male, reintegrated after permanent exclusion).

> *Special needs teacher support in maths makes it easier but still hard* (Male, reintegrated after permanent exclusion).

3. SUPPORT FOR EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL NEEDS

Throughout the range of alternative provision for disaffection, a variety of forms of direct support for emotional and behavioural problems were highlighted. These included the relationships developed and the ambience created in the educational environment, use of rewards and sanctions, the development of individual education plans for behaviour and support through external agencies. The factors which were deemed important for addressing emotional and behavioural needs within these forms of support, however, could be divided into three aspects:

- key relationships;
- ambience; and
- behaviour modification.

3.1 RELATIONSHIPS

For pupils across the whole range of disaffection, key relationships with adults in the educational environment were highlighted as an important aspect in helping them with their problems. Teachers, parents and pupils highlighted, for example, the value of the relationship which the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) developed with the pupil and their family. About a fifth of the sample had received some input from the Education Welfare Service – mainly pupils with attendance problems and the pregnant schoolgirls. Teachers felt that the EWO played a vital role in providing a link between school and home, especially in cases where difficulties at home affected the child's functioning at school:

> *The EWO visited his home. Involved from May '95. We've obviously got to have ongoing Educational Welfare involvement and I think there's more of a relationship between the Service and* [the pupil's] *mum. We can only keep up that pressure* (Head of Year 10; male, attendance problems).

School worked through the EWO as much as possible (letters home, phone calls, etc) and she has a really good relationship with her (Head of Year 7; female, attendance problems).

And we are trying to address [her attendance] *through the EWO, who has had contact with the family about her coming in on time. There has been lots of cooperation from home with the welfare people* (KS3 coordinator; female, at risk of exclusion).

Even at the lower end of the attendance continuum, however, the EWO could be under pressure to prosecute the parents for their children's failure to attend school, and this could damage the relationship which they had developed with the family. One EWO expressed this dilemma quite clearly:

Pressure from County Hall to fine, but I believe that that will serve no purpose as X's mum is hard up and may even make matters worse. I have had to have a strong word with [mum] *about what will happen if the children do not attend school, about the fact that she will be fined. In fact, my boss is writing to mum to ask her to come into County Hall to be warned about it. I believe that fining* [mum] *will serve no purpose at all, she is so hard up, and might even make matters worse. However, this is the avenue down which the EWS is being forced to move by bureaucracy. I think officialdom and schools are all into accountability but this is not always the right approach* (EWO; male, attendance problems).

In contrast to the apparent relationship which the EWO appeared to have with pupils with minor attendance problems, the relationship with families of long-term non-attenders and school refusers appeared to be less positive, and pupils in these groups often referred to threats made by the EWO:

Well the Education Welfare man ... that if I didn't start going into school that my mum would get a fine and my mum said she would take me out of school, but I didn't want to go to another school, because I had friends in there and that ... like my friends and that. Well after that, the education [man] *said if I didn't start going to school every day I would have to go to a unit, and my mum just took me out of the school and then I came here. Yes I went back for about a week and then I started sagging again* (Female, school refuser).

We tried hard to get him in. Contacted his parents, working with the EWO. She's made several visits to the family home. We've tried to encourage, offered praise. I believe the EWO has started proceedings to prosecute the family if he doesn't attend school. We've exhausted most avenues with him. Very difficult just getting in touch with them, getting their support. It's something that's run through the family and nobody's quite cracked how to solve the problem (Teacher; male, serial non-attender).

Pupils attending a PRU, mainly those at the extreme end of both the attendance and behavioural continuum, highlighted the good relationships with teachers at the PRU as an important aspect in helping them address their difficulties and, at times, they contrasted this with their experience in mainstream education.

Like teachers here, they are just excellent, they talk to you as if like you are a human being, you know what I mean. I came in this morning, I had a problem, I told one of the teachers and she just sat there and she was listening and she took it in and she helped me like, but I think that's what they need in normal schools. Instead of just like concentrating on one person, everyone needs TLC don't they? People are just getting left out. People need time don't they? (Female, attendance problems).

This view was supported by the staff at the PRUs and at the adolescent unit and one teacher emphasised the fact that '*you have to invest heavily on a personal level*':

The unit provides [the pupil] *with some consistency and with a chance to get close to staff and other kids, and build relationships* (Residential social worker at the adolescent unit; female, permanent excludee).

It's a technique that you tend to learn either as a counsellor or working with children who are abused and traumatised in some way and unfortunately there isn't really a text book for it; you have the old sit-openly-and-do-all-the-right-things, sit in the right way, look in the right way, empathise, not sympathise. You can do all the right things at the right time, but some kids actually want sympathy. Other kids, if you give them it, will blow up in your face and you have to know which one to do and you can't know without testing the water... with [the pupil] *I want to be in a position where I don't step over that mark because I think that mark for him is more dangerous than it is for* [another pupil]. *Funnily enough, she will explode and tell you to f*** off and that's it, that's fine; where he won't,* **he** *will draw into himself and you won't know what's going on inside that head, so it's a tricky one but I will find out and once I have got that, that can be a tool to aim for or target to avoid, whatever. I am looking forward to that* (Head of PRU; male, permanent excludee).

Counselling, the primary aim of which is to provide a key relationship for clients, was viewed as helpful for pupils with minor behavioural problems by teachers and parents, although one teacher questioned the transferability of progress made in counselling to the classroom situation. Teaching staff, in particular, felt that counselling could be more readily available to pupils, but lack of resources and finance inhibited this:

He doesn't speak about it in school openly, we have a counsellor here who has been used with [the pupil] *and he had addressed the problem with her, but he doesn't use this in school with other members of staff, but that has been the major cause of his problems* (KS3 co-ordinator and Head of Year 7; male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

Has been talk of a counsellor to help him work through things, but that's a matter of money (Head of Year 8; male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

When he is in school he has long periods where he is fine, but I would like him to undertake some counselling about his violence, his level of violence and his desire to put fear into others, but he has to admit that that's there (Assistant Head of Pastoral Care; male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

3.2 AMBIENCE

Pupils across the disaffection continuum, but particularly those at the extreme ends, commented on factors such as a relaxed atmosphere and understanding of their problems helping them address their difficulties. They referred to, for example, the environment in the special educational needs department in mainstream schools and in the PRU, where these conditions were evident, and often compared this to the oppressiveness which they had felt in mainstream education:

They said I was too mature for them because I didn't like their rules 'cos they were very immature rules. They said 'If you can't abide by our rules you might as well leave', which I wanted to do anyway. At the PRU — it's a lot more laid back, they haven't got petty rules, they're not strict. You can have laugh with the teachers and if you have a problem you can go to either of them. You don't have to wear a uniform which is much better. We're working in groups 'cos there's only a few of us. Lessons are more interesting because the teachers are more laid back and they'll have a laugh with you. Even if I hate the lesson, the teachers'll make it a bit more exciting (Female, serial non-attender).

At the PRU, we have a laugh with them; you can joke around with them and all that and they don't take it serious and give you detentions and all that (Male, permanent excludee).

Teaching staff within the PRU supported this: comments indicated the heavy emphasis placed on building relationships with pupils and demonstrated a deep understanding of pupil behaviour. They also highlighted the ability of staff within the PRU to respond flexibly and to give pupils more responsibility:

If they have got a history of confrontation with staff, and our first objective is to neutralise that by avoiding conflict where possible with them until they get to know us and until they settle in. That's usually for about a period of three weeks to a month and then once they discover that they have escaped from that conflict situation, we can then start putting a bit more pressure on them as regards their work and attainment and so on (Head of PRU).

[The pupil] – when I have tried to work with him when he has been upset, he is quite unresponsive and goes into a sulk. If you get him when he is upset, and if you are trying to deal with it in a therapeutic way and you are just bringing him out of lesson to talk about things and he is quite happy, then yes, he will respond. But if an actual incident has occurred, you are wasting your time talking to him, you have to come back to it later. He becomes very, very withdrawn and just cries and won't speak to anybody, so you would have to let him calm down, which probably in a mainstream classroom you couldn't let that happen, whereas here we just let him go in a corner and calm down. He has only done it once with us, but if he really does go, then he won't discuss it and becomes very sullen. On a one-to-one he is fantastic and he is very bright and needs lots and lots of pushing, but when he gets upset, he really does (Head of PRU; male, permanent excludee).

That's the strength of it for me ... it's mainly pupil-led and that leading encompasses to a large degree the responsibility of ownership of their own lives and that's what they can't do when they arrive ... you are letting a child see their own strengths ... and they get loads of individual support to start with and then once in a while you leave the room. I just leave them on their own and they will learn on their own. I used the printer as an excuse to go away; you come back and, wow, what have you got? Who taught you that? How did you do that? And your involvement there, I thought, was great. She has done something; she has involved someone else in her learning, whereas a year ago she wouldn't sit at the desk and attempt to learn. But today she sat there and drew someone else into her learning experience, which is wonderful, bodes very well for the future. It basically means that support is always there – that's all that really is important for these kids. If they think there is a hand there just waiting to be held, they will step out on their own and, once they have done it, you are not needed any more and quite rightly the college will want to take them on full-time, so fingers crossed (Head of PRU; female, permanent excludee).

Pupils, parents and teachers noted changes in behaviour and attitude when pupils attended the PRU, even after only a short time. The environment created, therefore, did appear to change the attitudes and the behaviour of pupils with extreme disaffection. This was evident in the following extracts:

Staff are wonderful at the PRU and he really likes the teachers and he's really trying with his work. He looks forward to coming (Parent; male, permanent excludee).

So, I think, at the end of the day we are very lucky to have him still here, because he is still very highly motivated. It has taken a hell of a lot of work to keep him that way (Head of PRU; male, permanent excludee).

3.3   BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION

Behaviour modification, the use of reward and praise, was little mentioned by pupils at all. However, for pupils with minor attendance problems, teaching staff highlighted the fact that the use of rewards and praise linked to targets led to improvement in attendant behavioural problems:

> *And we have got an individual action behaviour plan now with her, which has stated targets, In her case, it is five incidences – she has to beat five between last week and the end of this term; she has got three weeks to beat that target. It's five referrals. So far she has done very well; as far as I'm aware she has got none. She has had so many opportunities to improve and I think we have become more successful now that the targets are tighter. And I think perhaps we haven't been hard enough on her* (KS3 coordinator; female, attendance problems).

Teachers' comments indicated that rewards were more effective than sanctions and these contrasting approaches to behaviour were raised by teachers. It was noted that where teachers talked about the use of sanctions, they were usually pessimistic about the outcome for the pupil – even when some success was noted; and where they talked about the use of rewards, they were more optimistic about the outcome for the pupil:

> *We've tried detentions, being placed on report, having parents up. Improved for a little while on report. Needs counselling, but not available in school. I can't see us being able to deal with him* (Head of Year; male, fixed-term excludee).

> *Referral to ICE, school detention, referral to head of year, daily report card. Increasingly out of lessons so referred to the head of school* (Head of Year 8; male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

Teachers highlighted the use of the Behaviour Support Service to increase teachers' understanding of behaviour and how they respond to it, and pupil involvement in this process.

> *But we have referred him to the Behaviour Support Service and the big thing for him, as I mentioned earlier, someone is going to come in especially to see him and to sit and talk to him each week and talk to his teachers on his behalf and with him. The way forward with him is going to be the mentor in school, the Behaviour Support Service and talking to his teachers about strategies of coping with him. My opinion is that with kids like [the pupil], if we have someone to come in and there is room for someone to come in and talk to him and be his special person and all of that. But if we train staff to help [the pupil] to help himself to cope with the surroundings, to cope with the situation, to interact in a more appropriate way and we don't over criticise him* (SENCO; male, at risk of permanent exclusion).

For pupils at the extreme end of the behavioural continuum and their teachers in the PRU, behaviour modification techniques seemed to be of less importance than relationships and creating the right atmosphere for pupils to grow emotionally. Emphasis, therefore, appeared to be placed on addressing underlying causes of behaviour and emotions involved, rather than the outward behaviour.

ALTERNATIVE PROVISION: A SUMMARY OF ISSUES RAISED

Attendance problems

- At the lower end of the continuum for attendance, when problems are beginning to emerge, support for learning difficulties was highly valued by pupils, but was not often raised by school staff.

- A number of pupils stated that they had difficulty catching up with work after time out of school for various reasons, but this was particularly so for those with attendance problems.

- Teachers and pupils saw provision of an alternative curriculum as a significant motivational factor and effective in re-engaging pupils in education.

- Teachers, parents and pupils highlighted the value of the relationship which the EWO developed with the pupil and their family.

- Even at the lower end of the continuum, an EWO could be under pressure to prosecute and this could damage the relationship with the family.

- Staff highlighted that the use of rewards and praise linked to targets led to improvement in attendant behavioural problems.

Serial non-attenders

- Lack of alternative provision was evident.

- Pupils and staff identified changes in attendance, attitude and behaviour as a result of attendance at the PRU. Parents of this group were not interviewed.

- At the PRU, pupils highlighted the relaxed atmosphere, relationships with staff and the range of activities as key factors. Staff highlighted relationships, understanding, a flexible response to behaviour and the curriculum, and the balance of responsibility with support as the key aspects.

- Teachers in the PRU stated that these pupils would be the last to be chosen for alternative curriculum activities in mainstream school because they were seen as unreliable.

- In contrast to the previous group, the relationship between the EWO and the family was less supportive, and the former were often in the process of taking court proceedings.

School refusers

- Lack of alternative provision again was evident.

- Attendance at the PRU was valued by pupils and they highlighted the improved learning context as the main aspect, but this was not raised by staff.

- Staff comments indicated that they had exhausted all strategies with this group.

Pregnant schoolgirls

- Lack of appropriate provision for this group was again mentioned.

- Attendance at the PRU was viewed as beneficial by the home tutor, but was not raised by pupils.

- If pregnant schoolgirls decided to stay at home after they had had their baby rather than attending the PRU, their access to education and an alternative curriculum was limited, despite the fact that most could do well educationally.

- Staff highlighted the importance of the PRU as a means of social contact with their peer group for pregnant schoolgirls, but this was not raised by pupils.

- Pupils were concerned about leaving their peer group in mainstream school and their reputation of having been excluded.

- The importance of relationships with teachers for such pupils was evident in one instance.

Lower end of the behavioural continuum

This group includes pupils at risk of exclusion, those who have had a fixed-term exclusion and those at risk of permanent exclusion.

- Support for learning difficulties was highly valued by pupils, with only one raising the issue of the stigma attached, but this was not often raised by staff.

- In one case, pupils, teachers and parents agreed that learning support was helpful — particularly having work-related targets.

- Teachers believed that in-class support may be more effective than withdrawal for this group as it is more low-key, although only one pupil referred to the stigma attached.

- In some instances, work may not be challenging enough.

- Pupils, teachers and parents agreed that access to an alternative curriculum in which pupils were given a choice of activities gave some success and was an incentive to pupils to behave better.

- Teachers and pupils identified the need for the curriculum to be related to pupils' future needs so that they see it as relevant.

- Capitalising on pupils' interest in leisure, practical and work-related activities was shown to be successful in engaging pupils.

- Pupils and teachers highlighted the fact that often it is these types of activities which pupils are denied because of their poor behaviour.

- Leisure activities can shape beneficial friendship groups which may influence behaviour.

- It was teachers' view that EWO contact with home can be beneficial in helping to address home problems, but this was not raised by pupils.

- Staff felt that 'counselling' should be available to pupils but was not greatly in evidence due to a lack of resources. It was often viewed as helpful by teachers and parents, although the benefits did not necessarily transfer to the classroom situation and it was not identified by the pupils themselves.

- It was teachers' view that a behaviour modification programme which incorporates some form of self-assessment can give practical help with behaviour and emotional support for the pupil, although this was not raised by pupils.

- Where teachers talked about the use of sanctions, they were usually pessimistic about the outcome for pupils, even when some success was noted; and where they talked about the use of rewards, they were usually more optimistic about the outcome for pupils. However, teachers' comments indicated that use of rewards was more effective than sanctions.

- Teachers and pupils highlighted the use of the Behaviour Support Service to increase teachers' understanding of behaviour.

- Teachers believed that behaviour support did have some effect, although often this was short-term and limited, but this was not often raised by pupils.

- Involvement of some external agencies was not seen as effective by some pupils and parents, because of the delay in receiving provision, although this was not commented on by teachers.

Extreme end of behavioural continuum

This group contains those pupils who have been permanently excluded.

- Pupils, teachers and parents concurred that attendance at the PRU was effective and led to a change of attitude and behaviour.

- Pupils, parents and teachers supported the view that the range of activities on offer at the PRU, and their relevance, helped to engage pupils in their education.

- Teachers went on to say that because they were able to be flexible in addressing learning needs, pupils felt a greater sense of achievement in contrast to mainstream school where they continue with GCSEs, reinforcing their sense of failure year after year.

- Some pupils, parents and teachers stated that pupils were denied access to such activities in mainstream school because of their behaviour.

- Some pupils felt that part-time attendance at the PRU was beneficial as it was important for them to have some time of their own, although one parent highlighted this as a definite disadvantage of the PRU. Other teachers did not comment, though teachers did raise the issue of the positive achievement inherent in some of these youngsters accessing part-time provision.

- Other key elements identified by pupils as effective were the ambience and the improved relationships with teachers. Teachers supported this, saying that there was a heavy emphasis on relationship building, but, in addition, they emphasised the importance of staff having an understanding of behaviour and the ability to respond flexibly.

- Exclusion itself was seen as beneficial by one parent because it resulted in access to alternative provision.

- For some pupils, it was important to be with their peer group in mainstream school rather than segregated in separate provision.

SUMMARY

Attendance at a PRU appeared to be effective in changing attendance, behaviour and attitudes in pupils with long-term attendance problems and extreme behavioural difficulties. PRUs were able to provide a combination of an alternative curriculum, support for emotional and behavioural needs and support for learning needs. It is, therefore, perhaps, this combination which is most effective in terms of turning around pupils' disaffection.

Provision of an alternative curriculum could be a significant motivational factor for a range of pupils with attendance and behavioural difficulties and could be effective in re-engaging pupils in the educational process. However, pupils with long-term attendance problems and those with lower-level behavioural difficulties were often unable to access such activities in mainstream schools.

There appeared to be a lack of provision for pupils with long-term attendance problems, school refusers and pregnant schoolgirls in comparison with those with behavioural difficulties. This may suggest that **causing** rather than **having** problems is a particular criterion for selection for alternative provision. The difficulty of engaging effectively with these more challenging pupils suggests that specialist provision with highly trained staff may be appropriate.
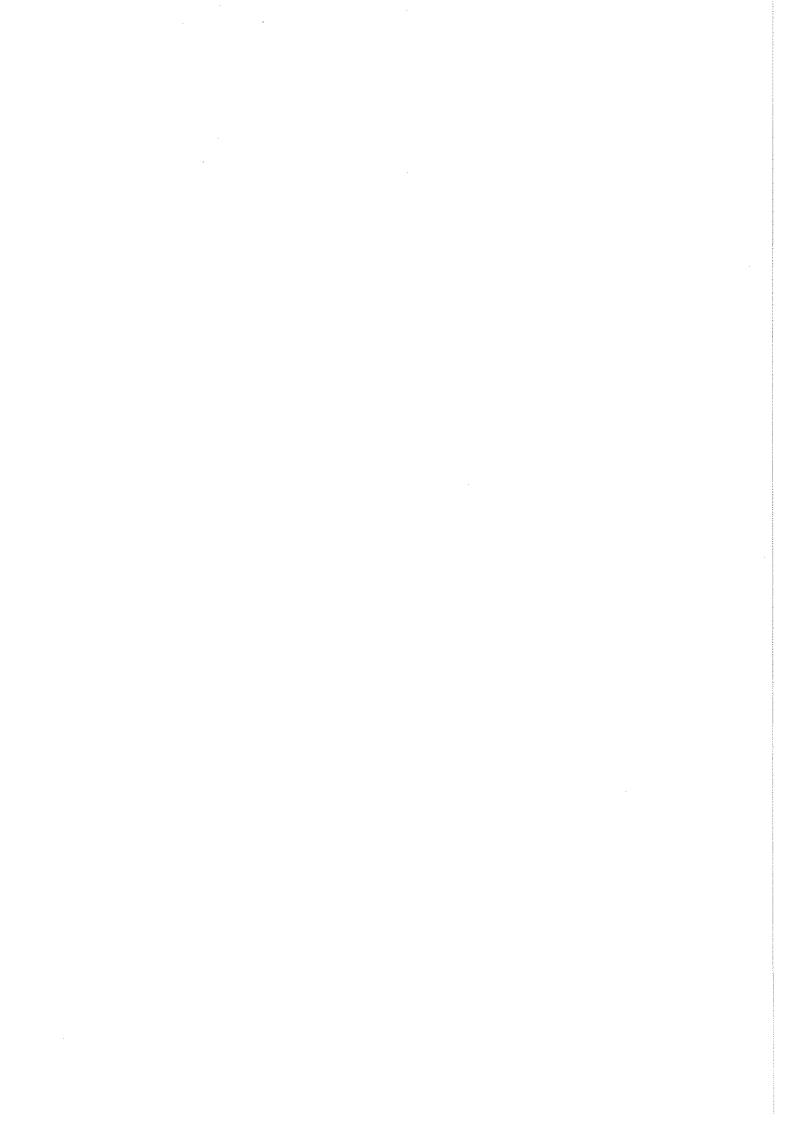
CONCLUSION

This research has provided the opportunity to recognise yet again the complexity underpinning disaffected young people's lives, and how their personal histories, including domestic and social relationships, affect demonstrations of educational dislocation. Many factors combine to suggest that a commonality is their failure to acquire the self-esteem, inter-personal skill or self-control to automatically engage successfully with the demands of secondary school life. Equally, some of the stories suggest that particular attributes and aptitudes (such as physical, technical and practical skills or interests) may be constrained within current curriculum opportunities. Beyond that, the accounts of the young people testify to the considerable physiological and affective discomfort of their school experiences, and this may have been given insufficient recognition. Youngsters' discourse, suggesting fundamental issues like 'choice' and 'respect' are crucial to their commitment to education, may indicate something about the current flexibility of school systems as much as their personal difficulties in conforming to a particular educational culture.

Learning to relate successfully with educational professionals (and peers) as well as to recognise meaningful achievement and purpose in educational opportunity appear to be the essential components of re-engagement. The research again suggests that alternative provision which comprises some aspects of different curriculum opportunities; specialised support for learning and pastoral needs; and more informal learning contexts can effect positive change. Such success in reintegration into educational opportunity nevertheless is clearly highly intensive in terms of resources, staffing skills and expertise. Perhaps, therefore, a major message from the project is simply 'inclusion costs'.

A further question must be how does and can mainstream education access or replicate the facilities and approaches underpinning successful alternative provision, and how effectively can it diagnose and then 'broker' or facilitate young people's appropriate access to the specialised support which is so clearly present in the range of services, agencies and providers within local authorities? Young people's school careers can provide many clues to the kinds of support needed, and the research suggests that any significant loss of time in school and an uncomfortable experience of transfer are important pointers to vulnerability. Finally, it may be a concern that those youngsters who clearly have difficulties in successfully accessing their educational opportunity – but do not cause problems while so doing – may receive less attention and support than their more challenging peers.

APPENDIX: CAMEOS

LIAM: ATTENDANCE PROBLEMS

Liam is 15 years old and currently in Year 10. He is of mixed race origin.

Disaffection record

Attendance:

Liam's attendance in the last year was recorded as 37 per cent. Liam became an attendance concern during 1995 and in Year 8 he refused to come to school. Bullying, with racist undertones, was given as the initial reason for non-attendance, although, both mum and the EWO stated that this was no longer a factor.

Behaviour:

He was described as a 'quiet and generally cooperative pupil'. Liam's behaviour was always awarded an A grade. At home the picture was quite different. Both mum and the EWO reported poor behaviour, with mood swings, bad language and non-compliance. Liam himself noted that detention and isolation 'learned you not do it again', suggesting a conformist attitude to school rules and norms.

Learning: achievement and preferences

The teacher interviewed described Liam as 'inclined towards special needs', although he was taking GCSE's. Liam nominated PE as the subject he liked in school. His 'best' lessons were English and French 'cos the work was quite easy'. He was receiving support from a classroom assistant, which he spoke of positively.

Primary school experience

Health:

No problems were identified.

School:

Liam attended two primary schools, with a transfer at age 7-8. According to Liam, he sometimes messed around in class, adding 'I had mates there'. This colluder tendency and memory of friends may be significant, given his diminished social circle in secondary school. Liam felt he enjoyed his time there 'because the work was easy'. This was corroborated by his mum, who had attended a parents' evening and was told Liam was both clever, and able to manage his school work.

Transition

Liam's mum reported a difficult transition to secondary school, largely because of the work, moving from class to class and the subsequent bullying which occurred.

Secondary school experience

Health:

Liam described his health as 'average' and his mum described it as 'very good'. Liam's health was sometimes given as an explanation for non-attendance in letters to the school.

School:

Because of the attendance difficulties, a trial period at a new secondary school was arranged from June of Year 9. However, after the summer holidays, Liam's attendance deteriorated yet again, such that, in October of Year 10, he returned to his original school. From this, the EWO involved concluded that bullying was not the only reason for non-attendance. However, Liam noted he had missed loads of school and was given no work to do at that time.

The teacher interviewed perceived Liam to be a cooperative pupil, although mum said that Liam thought the teachers didn't like him. Liam's discourse portrayed a slight sense of victimisation when recalling an incident with one teacher: 'because, when I am off and I have missed loads of work, she always has a go at me when I get in, like you have been off all the time'.

His teacher felt that multiple periods of non-attendance had prevented Liam from establishing close relationships and he, therefore, presented as a loner: 'He gets on alright. He's not alienated by people. He's not shunned by pupils. He just hasn't developed relationships. He tends to be on his own'. Liam corroborated this observation and stated that he now only has a few friends in school. Somewhat poignantly, when asked to suggest ways of encouraging attendance, Liam proposed 'getting loads of mates and that'.

Some bullying took place in the past, most notably during Year 9, for three weeks. Mum stated that Liam was no longer a victim of bullying and non-attendance occurred because 'he just doesn't like school'.

Home:

Liam's older brother also had severe attendance problems and was completely absent during Year 11. Non-attendance in this case, was given as medically related (asthma). Liam's younger sister was also beginning to school refuse. She had experienced bullying and, according to mum, blamed Liam for the hassle she gets. School, therefore, believed that Liam's non-attendance was largely family influenced. Liam's mother went through two very difficult pregnancies, after which, her current partner left the family home and she went through a 'very difficult period'. He returned, but, according to the EWO, mum struggled to cope with five children.

Community:

Outside of school, Liam had a more extensive social network. Mum reported that he mixed with younger boys. She noted that he 'still likes building dens'. His mum believed these younger boys were a bad influence and led Liam into trouble.

Parent/educational perspectives

School reported no behavioural problems, instead, described Liam as quiet and cooperative. This very much differed from behaviour at home, where Liam was very difficult to manage: 'We can't tell him off'. Mum displayed a lack of awareness with regards to Liam's academic abilities. She continued to say she believed him to be quite clever, although she had never seen him bring any work home. The school, however, placed Liam at the lower end of the academic spectrum, commenting on his poor turn-out of homework. Notably, mum had never attended any parents' evening at secondary school. Even so, parental influence was not completely lacking — mum had used rewards to promote attendance and Liam believed his family had encouraged him to go to school.

Issues raised

Liam's initial non-attendance appeared to have served to dislocate him from his peers and reduce his investment in the school culture. Meanwhile, mum was unable to enforce attendance, due to poor health and having to cope with a large family. His bad behaviour in the family home, as opposed to his good behaviour at school, signifies the lack of control and effective discipline strategies available to mum. The issue of the effects and effectiveness of prosecution for parenting of this ilk is immediately raised, as is the viability of transfer to another school as a solution to problem attendance.

LINDA: SCHOOL REFUSER

Linda is 14 and she has been receiving little in the way of educational provision for over a year.

Disaffection record

Attendance:
Linda was a long term non-attender, with only 12 per cent of possible attendance since September 1997. Her attendances were erratic and some days she was late for school. In some incidences, her non-attendance was related to genuine illness, but in others it appeared to be related to not wanting to go to school and going to bed late.

Behaviour:
Linda ran home from school in response to bullying and she threatened to commit suicide if she had to go to school. No incidence of disruptive behaviour was noted by teachers, but Linda noted '*I just sit on the desk and all that, start writing on the desks and get shouted at*'.

Learning: achievement and preferences

Linda had no apparent learning difficulties, but had not been at school to be assessed recently. She tended to prefer more creative writing and her 'worst' lessons included maths and geography, although no rationale was offered for these.

Primary school experience

Health:
Linda missed four months of school through serious illness.

School:
Linda attended five primary schools and moved school every year or two. She said she took part in lots of extra curricular activities at primary school. She had some friends, although she was also bullied by some peers. She stated that the teachers at primary were '*alright*'.

Home:
Linda was sexually abused by her father at the age of four years.

Transition

Linda's pattern of non-attendance appeared to start after transition from primary to secondary school. Initially this was due to illness. In Year 8, however, she truanted in response to being bullied. She became increasingly isolated from the social environment of the school and this was demonstrated by her lack of involvement in activities, her lack of friends and her unwillingness to relate to teachers.

Secondary school experience

Health:
Linda suffered from colds and periods of depression and the EWO highlighted late nights and a poor diet as factors in her poor health. In Year 7 she missed one two-week period of school and another two-month period due to an operation on her ears. Mum stated that she had been to the GP for counselling in connection with the abuse, but the EWO said that the GP informed them that she had not. Mum also had health problems.

School:
Linda had great difficulty forming relationships with her peers and with teachers. Her mum described her as '*always being a bit of a loner*', and said that '*she doesn't trust many people*'. She appeared to have an intense dislike of teachers and had no friends. She described people in the school as '*just horrible*'. The family's view of Linda's harassment by pupils was that the school did nothing and that the Education Welfare Service's response was to threaten court action. The family were hoping for a change of school.

Home:
There was a lack of stability in Linda's home life and the EWO related her non-attendance to mum's problems with her partner. At times, mum was supportive of school, insisted that she go to school and helped her with her work. However, when Linda was not at school, she tended to do things for mum. The EWO believed that Linda would rather be at home with mum than go to school. She was often allowed to stay up late so that she was too tired to go to school the next day. Her older brother was excluded from two schools for violence.

Community:
No relevant factors were identified.

Parent/educational perspectives

The school recognised that Linda had low self-esteem and relationship problems, but felt that responsibility for this was mum's, for wanting her at home. On the other hand, mum recognised that a lot of her daughter's difficulties were caused by the abuse by her father, but blamed teachers for their lack of response, being unapproachable and not having the resources to help her daughter. The EWO's view was that Linda wanted to be at home, but mum's view was that she was unable to cope with the pressures of school. Mum highlighted many ways in which Linda expressed her disaffection, whereas school appeared to have concentrated only on her attendance. The EWO believed that a mainstream school was unable to address her difficulties and that she needed a smaller environment. Mum believed that a move to a new school would solve the problem.

Issues raised

Linda's early experiences appeared to lead to a lack of trust in individuals outside of the family and this seemed to be a key issue affecting all her social relationships at school. However, no one seemed to be fully addressed this issue. The constant movement of the family may have made it harder for problems to be successfully tackled at an earlier stage and mum's ambivalence provided Linda with mixed messages about the value of education. At the point of transition from primary to secondary school, Linda appeared to begin to dislocate herself from the school environment and, from this point, a negative cycle of increasing social isolation appeared to be created which was then very difficult to change. This may reflect the impersonal nature of the secondary school environment as compared to that of the primary school. Equally, the mix of school and home versions of agency involvement (e.g. doctor/GP) highlights the level of opacity agencies deal with in some instances.

NIKI: THE LOOKED-AFTER YOUNGSTER

Niki is 14, living in a residential home and currently attending an adjacent Adolescent Unit.

Disaffection record
Attendance:
Niki remembered not attending her first high school: *'the reasons I never went was because I was getting bullied'*. Some suggestion of parental prosecution for this non-attendance was given, but Niki stated *'me mum just said to them 'she has got her own mind. It has nothin' to do with me whether she goes to school''*.
Behaviour:
Niki reported *'messing up'* her last mainstream school *'within four days'* and referred to an incident where *'I took a picture off the wall. My mate told me to ... and they just said to me they didn't want me in the school. I never done anything but take a picture off the wall'*. However, the care staff acknowledged that *'she is probably quite difficult to teach if she is like she is here ... very determined, cock of the year'*. Niki suggested she *'just goes to sleep'* or *'sagged'* if she was bored in lessons, rather than engaging in acting-out behaviour.

Learning achievement and preferences
Niki stated that *'the only things I like are art and maths; apart from that, it's boring'*. Her care workers saw her as preferring to attend college: *'she needs vocational and practical opportunities'*, and also felt she would benefit from a learning situation where she could be *'treated more like an adult'*.

Primary age experience
Care workers noted *'Niki's files don't go back that far'*, and stressed this showed the poor links between school and home.
Health:
No health factors were mentioned by Niki, though clearly, being put into care indicated some extreme difficulties in her personal life.
School:
Niki recollected being excluded from one of her primary schools *'for four days ...for robbing the petty cash thing'*, and, with moves due to care, she remembered attending three different primary schools. Her accounts of this phase of her school career were full of the discourse of rejecting — and being rejected by — teachers and authority: *'there was this teacher and she used to grab me by the arm and poke me with a pen. I hated her'*. Of her second primary school, she noted: *'the headmaster used to shout at me all the time and make me cry'*. Niki did recall one teacher in her primary career positively: *'the fact she was always bringing me sweets didn't matter, I liked her. All the teachers used to hate me, but she was dead nice to me'*. She stated that the actual work was *'easy'*.

Transition
Niki described her first day in high school as *'the hardest ever'*, but did not elaborate why. She also referred to the high school *'as always bringing up my bad reputation from primary'*.

Secondary school experience
Health:
Care workers referred to Niki as having suffered from ovarian cysts and said that she complained of headaches and stomach pains.

School:
Niki's memories of secondary school again were couched in a discourse signifying stress and a complete breakdown in relationships. *'Hating'* and being *'hated by teachers'* recurred in her account. Her difficulty in accepting authority also surfaced: *'the teachers telling me what to do made me go mad'*. Equally, Niki implied problems with her mainstream peers: *'all the kids were dead snotty'*. She described how, within mainstream school, sometimes she had *'tried to get my head down and think I'll make a go of this ... and then my head just goes all mad, and I'd lose all my mates'*.
Alternative provision:
The care workers saw the benefits of the unit as providing *'consistency'*, and the small numbers offering *'a chance to get close to staff and other kids'*. Niki herself suggested that the fact *'they don't pile work on you all at once'*, as well as having few people in the class, were aspects of the unit she valued.
Home:
Niki reported having younger siblings and half-siblings (now adopted and in another part of the country). She had contact with her mum (who had a history of drug abuse and had once been sectioned), liked to see her sister, but also described returning home as *'doing my head in'*, because of confrontations with her brother. Her current location in care was described as *'the top one I've been in'*, due to the staff being *'sound ... nice'*. Significantly, she gave one other reason for this positive view: *'this home has got more rules and regulations'*.
Community:
Niki described leisure opportunities as *'apart from smoke pot, that's it ... or we just go out on the bus'*. Her friends were also in the care accommodation, and care workers noted this meant further lack of investment in any school life, as her social world was elsewhere. Her friends were all older than her. Both Niki and her carers indicated her familiarity with the culture of drugs, clubbing etc. Hence, a classic 'émigré' situation in peer relations.

Carer perspectives
Her carers described Niki as *'a girl who had to grow up too quickly'*, and that despite the aggressive and confrontational behaviour, a real need for self-esteem, positivity and praise was in evidence, given her past cycle of abuse and neglect. Niki's constant experience of transition, rejection and failure at home and school had left her *'presenting confrontational behaviour to dare adults to reject her, because that is what she is used to. It's the one thing familiar to her. She doesn't trust ... her experience tells her 'why invest in any relationship because they will always move on?''*

Issues raised
The distressing and dislocated life of this youngster is very apparent. The value of a stable mentor figure from an early age is perhaps highlighted and equally, the array of specialist skills required to support such a troubled youngster. How interventions and agencies can provide a continuity and stability which is meaningful to the child is a further issue for consideration

ANDY: FIXED-TERM EXCLUDEE

Andy is 14 and is attending a mainstream school.

Disaffection record
Attendance:
Andy has not had any attendance problems at secondary school. His last recorded attendance was 92.5 per cent.

Behaviour:
Andy was described by his teachers as 'loud, aggressive and disruptive in class'. The school felt that he was unable to take responsibility for his actions and would frequently blame others for his misdemeanours. Poor relationships with teachers and some of his peers were also evident. He had been given fixed-term exclusions for trying to break a door and misbehaving whilst on report.

Learning: achievement and preferences
Andy was reported by staff to have 'no problem areas', but that he 'did not excel at anything in particular, (although) he can be very good at art'. His parents noted that he had been put down a set in maths 'for his 'mouth''. Andy himself noted a link between the teachers he liked and his enjoyment of their subjects: 'I like the geography and history teachers and I like the subjects'. He also expressed a preference for practical activities, such as PE, especially football, but he had been thrown out of the football team 'because I had too much to say for myself'. It was a practical subject, technology, that he described as his 'worst' subject because 'I haven't got a clue with it ... it doesn't interest me'.

Primary school experience
Health:
No relevant factors identified.

School:
Some behaviour problems were acknowledged: 'I was always fighting in the yard', and Andy remembered not being allowed on a residential because he had been 'dead naughty'. Movement between schools was a significant factor. He had three moves between the state and independent sector and he had problems coping with the consequent dislocation: 'I don't know why she [his mother] took me out. I had mates there. I didn't want to leave'. Andy had further problems being accepted by peers after this transfer, including incidences of bullying, which resulted in hospitalisation. He felt the headteacher did not like him: '[she] kept saying that she was going to suspend me.'

Home:
No problems were identified, although he said that his mother also had a problematic relationship with one of his headteachers: 'they kept falling out'.

Transition
His parents felt that Andy's problems were exacerbated by the transition. He attended a school some distance from his home. He did not know anyone and had problems making friends. They said it took three months before Andy mixed with his peers.

Secondary school experience
Health:
No relevant factors identified.

School:
Bullying was again cited as a significant factor by parents. They said Andy developed 'a twitch and would come home clenching his fists. He was so tense'. Andy said he would 'come into school tense' and 'kick off at teachers. Andy felt that he was easily led by other pupils . He thus appears as a strong example of a colluder and disputant: 'I end up getting into trouble 'cos I pick the wrong lads to work with' and his parents said he 'runs with the pack'. Andy also felt pressure to conform to male role models in school: 'I feel a bit of a girl running to me mum'. Perhaps this was exacerbated by his previous experiences of being bullied. He had a few close friends. Some were in trouble and some were not. Other pupils tended to stay away from him because they saw him as someone who misbehaved. Poor personal relationships, especially with teachers, were again in evidence. He said he 'answers back to show I'm not soft' and admitted 'I do shout me mouth off...tell them to shut up and then they flip on me and the more they flip on me the more I lose my temper'. He was described by his parents as being unaware of the boundaries: 'He doesn't know when to shut up and that gets him into trouble'. Andy expressed an acute sense of victimisation in his relationship with teachers: 'They single me out', 'Mr X picks me out because I've been in trouble with him before. He hates me', but he was also aware of his need to modify his behaviour, if he was not to be excluded.

Home:
Family values seemed significant. Andy's parents were concerned about his education and progress (e.g. they employed a maths tutor). Mother frequently came into school, talked to teachers, and sat in class with Andy.

Community
Andy lived in a 'nice' area, distant from school which is in a 'rougher' area and, again, the possibility that he felt he had to cultivate a 'bad boy' image was evident.

Parent/educational perspectives
Andy's parents felt their decision to move schools at primary had a detrimental impact on their son's behaviour. Andy and his parents felt that he was picked on by other pupils and was easily led, whereas the school felt that he was often the 'ringleader'. His parents felt that school had not done enough to address his behaviour problems and that it was only when they expressed concern that something was done. However, his parents still felt that he was picked on by some members of staff because he had a reputation as a trouble maker. They noted that, where teachers had modified their behaviour with Andy, his behaviour had also improved. In contrast, the school said that Andy might benefit from counselling, but their resources were limited, and they felt that they may be unable to deal with his behaviour in the future: 'I can see him continuing to disrupt the education of others. I can't see us being able to deal with him'.

Issues raised
Andy's dislocation, his movement at primary and the resultant bullying appears to have had a significant impact on his behaviour throughout his school career. His experiences perhaps highlight the value of support mechanisms, to be implemented around the issue of bullying and peer relations from primary level onwards. His problematic relationships with both peers and adults, perhaps, also highlight a need for mentoring and counselling regarding the development of personal relationships, as well as learning to accept responsibility for his own actions. The need for additional pastoral support and resources, highlighted by the school, and their inability to address concerns about Andy's behaviour must be a significant factor when addressing disaffection. Andy's experience of rejection within school, for example, being 'kicked out' of the football team, also highlights how pupils' feelings of dislocation and disengagement from the school environment may be accentuated by current sanction systems. Andy's story also raises the issue of parental support in keeping him in school. In this case, it appears to be a necessary, but not sufficient, component in the efforts to maintain Andy in mainstream.

BOB: THE PERMANENT EXCLUDEE

Bob is 16 and for the last two years has been attending a PRU. He is currently taking NVQ Level 1 in Plastering and Decorating.

Disaffection record

Attendance:

Bob's last attendance record in mainstream school was 35 per cent (prior to exclusion). He had frequently truanted with friends, who were also out of school. He identified an 11-week period where he was 'at home with mates drinking and smoking' while his parents were away.

Behaviour:

Bad language, silly behaviour and suspicions of theft were identified. Described as 'attention seeking', Bob was suspended, initially, for little things. At 14 years of age he was excluded for constant disruption in the lessons. In Bob's terms, the behaviour was ''cos I couldn't be bothered doing nothing'. He experienced some difficulty coping with the exclusion. He destroyed his own art work and his dad said he went in on himself.

Learning: achievement and preferences

Bob was reported to have 'poor basic skills' and a reading age of eight when he arrived at the PRU, aged 14. Bob noted a strong preference for physical and practical activity (football, art, design and construction). He referred to 'working with his hands' as his strength. His 'worst' lessons included history and geography and he indicated the importance of the learning relationship with his teacher: 'I'm good at maths when I've got the right teacher. We used to have a teacher here who used to take us for PE as well. I was good at maths with him'.

Primary school experience

Health:

No relevant factors were identified.

School:

Bob attended one primary school. According to one of his parents, he 'acted daft' at primary school, but 'got good reports'. 'He got on well with teachers, but friends led him astray. He loved school work'. However, Bob had a very different recollection, with the discourse of victimisation: 'I got shouted at badly and even when I didn't do something and I would come through the door and it weren't even me, I'd get shouted at', and curriculum dislocation: 'I wouldn't do any work or nothin' I used to pretend I was on strike'. The PRU recognised these early signs of dislocation, attributing them to poor reading ability. Equally evident is Bob's investment in peer activity at this stage of his career (he boasted of being a 'firebug with my mates') and his investment in a learning relationship with a young male teacher who 'liked doing what I liked doing, like playing sports. He was younger — all the other teachers were old and grumpy and he was on the same sort of wavelength'.

Home:

According to his dad, Social Services were involved at one point due to a [false] suspicion of child abuse. This had set up an attitudinal barrier, on the part of the parents, to further involvement in Bob's later educational career.

Transition

Bob's parents viewed this as uneventful: problems started after transition to high school.

Secondary school experience

Health:

Bob broke his arm in the second year and was out of school for a year. After that, he said he couldn't be bothered with school.

School:

There were examples of a strong peer investment, but apparently in 'émigrés' and in 'alpha male activity'. He was reported to be 'easily led' by older pupils and had 'a reputation with his peers to keep up'. He was described as the 'class clown' but he got on well with his peer group. His main friends, however, were equally dislocated from mainstream school: 'most of my mates who I hang round with, none have been to school since second year senior'. He did not readily accept authority, but, his parents said he got on with teachers until his attitude changed. Bob was one of the oldest in the year, but one of worst at reading, therefore, he was used to constant failure and was reported to get frustrated and embarrassed (i.e. the physiological symptoms of disaffection were strongly present). The PRU indicated he used disruptive behaviour to mask his learning difficulties. His parents' view was that he was given no help with work after being off for a year, so he gave up and his attitude changed.

PRU/alternative provision

Bob has been at the PRU for two years and has responded to their flexible approach. He will conform at the PRU, up to a point. His parents feel this has had a big impact on his behaviour and renewed his interest in education. He has a wide circle of friends, and is liked by peers.

Home:

There may be much significance underpinning the reported period, when Bob's parents holidayed for two months, while Bob was in Year 8, leaving him and his elder sister with their uncle. This relative was reported to let the youngsters run wild and broke Bob's arm. Since then, the parents reported mood swings: 'sometimes quiet and sometimes loud at home'. A volatile and violent relationship with his elder sister was also reported. Bob's parents were considered supportive of school, but they felt that school was always sending him home or asking them to go in and could have handled it differently.

Community:

Bob lived on the fringes of a rough estate. His main friends were out of school. His parents and PRU staff reported peer pressure in the neighbourhood that encouraged being hard, going out all the time and not doing homework. Phrases like 'in the wrong crowd' and 'always on the edge of things' were used.

Parent/educational perspectives

Some incongruity emerged about interpretations of how Bob's behaviour should be handled, because school was always sending him home and asking parents to go in. His parents believed that this treatment affected his attitude to school. They highlighted the period spent with his uncle as a significant factor, whilst school placed the emphasis on learning difficulties and peer pressure.

Issues raised

One interpretation of Bob's career would be that his unaddressed reading difficulties led to embarrassment and frustration, which eventually resulted in lack of interest/investment in school and concomitant behavioural difficulties, as a way of covering them up. Equally, however, his predilection for practical and technical aspects of learning might suggest how inappropriate much of the curriculum would feel to him, especially given his current interest in designing houses and taking a painting and decorating qualification. Does even the primary curriculum provide sufficient sustenance for this type of 'technical processor'? The strong investment in young male role models as teaching and authority figures is apparent throughout his career. It could be argued that, in the absence of such models within school, Bob makes considerable investment in other circles: notably the peer 'émigrés'.
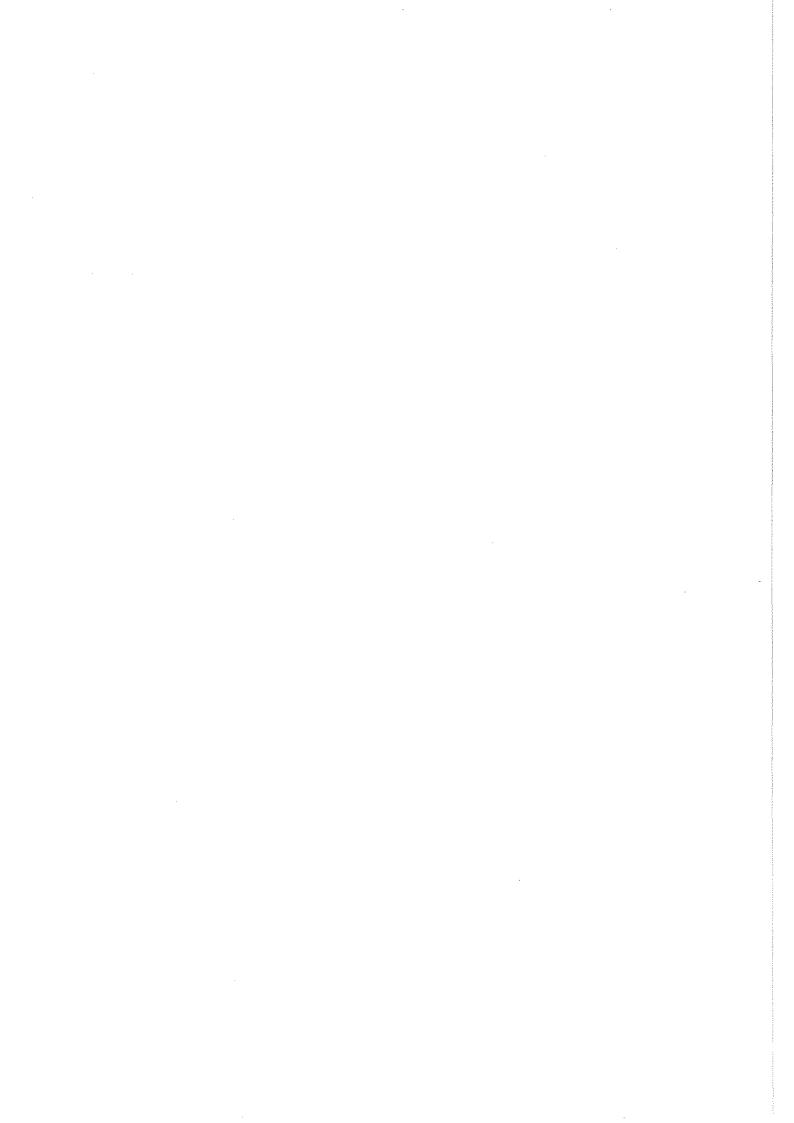
Equally, Bob's story contains elements of violent domestic circumstances and an opacity about the emotional health of his family. A long period out of school, perhaps, also exacerbated learning difficulties and contributed to a change of attitude to school.

The PRU, with its access to vocational opportunities, seemed able to inhibit the cycle of rejection and behaviour which had become established.

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Disaffection talks

This report presents the findings of an NFER project commissioned by the Merseyside Learning Partnership through the Inter Agency Development Programme.

It examines the perceived factors underpinning disaffection, through the viewpoints of young people, parents, teachers and other educational professionals. The report conveys some of the experiences, emotions and attitudes which can accompany disengagement, and analyses a range of alternative provision available to those young people manifesting disaffected behaviours.

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