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Positive behaviour management is high on the education agenda. This paper will describe the relationship between organisational culture and positive behaviour management. As an example of good practice the authors highlight a secondary Pupil Referral Unit which has undergone a significant change over the last three years leading to an enhanced ability to support, re-direct and sustain the education of disaffected pupils. Many of the principles discussed are also considered to be of relevance to mainstream education.

Introduction

This paper examines the need for education institutions to develop a culture for positive behaviour. The focus of the study is a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in a large middle England local education authority.

Pupils displaying inappropriate behaviour are not going to reduce in number, they are going to be a permanent part of formal educational culture in the UK. Conditions which contribute to pupils' disruptive and challenging behaviour are not reducing (Castle and Parsons, 1997). The realisation that bad behaviour is not a temporary phenomenon is an important redefinition. Projects and short term interventions are inadequate. The problem of pupils with challenging behaviour needs to be seen as part of normal provision rather than exceptional.

It is established that the culture of each school is dependent on the attitudes of staff and their professional ideologies (Handy and Aitkin, 1986). A crucial issue with regard to disaffection is how pupil misbehaviour is perceived, schools are often quick to apply sanctions but not so forthcoming with imaginative and positive action. This is an ingrained cultural factor and much work needs to be done in schools to encourage a more collaborative and consistent approach to behaviour management.

Often what a school decides to focus on in terms of improvement will relate to the impetus of external reform, government circulars and papers e.g. Excellence for all Children (DfEE, 1997), Supporting the Target Setting Process (DfEE, 1998). Whatever the scenario, the decision to enter into school improvement strategies should be based on an aspiration to create cultures which pursue what is best for all pupils concerned. As Hopkins and Harris put it:

"When this occurs we not only begin to meet the real challenge of school improvement but we also create more effective classrooms and effective schools where all children are able to learn" (Hopkins and Harris, 1997, p.147).

This study encompasses a PRU in central England. The PRU has seen a commitment to a shared vision for improvement over the past three years. It caters for secondary aged pupils providing support for those who have been permanently excluded and those with an identified need, but not carrying a statement of special educational need e.g. disaffected pupils. Pupils with a statement of special educational need are placed at the Unit if they cannot be placed elsewhere. The Unit is part of a wider service consisting of preventative outreach support to mainstream schools, delivery of INSET to local educational institutions and a tuition service for permanently excluded, sick or phobic pupils. Additionally the Unit is soon to take on responsibility for the Home Tuition Service. Numbers supported at the PRU have doubled over the last three years and are set to rise as responsibilities increase. At present approximately eighty pupils are supported either in the core groups at the Unit, individual tuition at the Unit or in mainstream outreach work.

Development priorities over the last three years have included additional staffing to meet increased referrals and outreach support; the development of educational 'packages' for permanently excluded pupils (involving work at the Unit towards accredited examinations, college placements on vocational courses and work experience placements), the establishment of a comprehensive ICT programme and the broadening of the curriculum to include additional accreditation and certification. This improvement has focused on processes, has had a qualitative orientation and has highlighted the quality of pupils' learning within the PRU:

"This is a very successful referral unit which gives pupils a positive experience of education and makes an excellent contribution to their personal development" (OfSTED, 1997).

The nature of organisational culture

It is difficult to think of a better example where a quality culture is vital than the environment of a school:

"In few organisations is the influence of ethos or culture on the product greater than in a school, or its consequences for society more profound" (Everard and Morris, 1996, p.52).

Culture pervades the decision making and problem solving strategies. It influences thought processes, goals, priorities and action. It is a source of motivation and de-motivation and underlies the majority of human activity in all institutions. "It is arguably one of the least tangible but most important aspects in creating a quality environment" (West - Burnham, 1993, p.84). A quality institution should reflect on its work, be responsive to change and have a belief in a capacity for constantly striving to improve. It is logical that when schools are successful in moving forward teachers' self esteem is increased and motivation will be high. It is then that the school takes on some of the features of what Senge (1990, p.14) calls a "learning organisation - an organisation that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future."

Effective leadership for improvement

Learning organisations need educative leaders (Ainscow and Southworth, 1996). Hopkins et al. [1996] suggest that vision building, relevant expertise, relationships and the quality of communication and participation are all factors in effective leadership, transforming the school culture to one where leadership is spread amongst the staff group and all members are capable of contributing.

Ainscow and Southworth (1996) maintain that effective leaders recognise that school improvement hinges on the capacity of their colleagues to develop. Additionally they understand that professional development is differentiated since it is to do with each individual increasing their confidence and competence, in addition to staff developing as a team. A trait of an educative leader is one with a concept of 'hope' (Fullan, 1998). Havel (1993, as cited in Fullan (1998) states that hope is not the same as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out. Fullan (1998) considers that leaders with hope are much less likely to succumb to the daily stresses of the job and especially important, they set the tone for others.

The PRU is fortunate in having a style of leadership that communicates this sense of hope. Problems are seen as issues to be solved rather than weaknesses. As a result staff feel motivated and are able to create and maintain an effective team. There is a constant readiness to make changes, a willingness to learn and enthusiasm for staff training and development. Staff are given sincere, specific and regular praise for their efforts. Problems are confronted directly and not treated as personal disputes. Creativity is encouraged. The result is a culture open to ideas, which encourages innovation and initiative:

"The Teacher-in-Charge provides a thoughtful, visionary style of leadership, keen to identify desirable developments and initiate any necessary changes. Staff continually engage in informal evaluation of their practice and seek to improve provision wherever possible" (OfSTED, 1997).

The change process

One of the most common responses to school improvement is to increase the capacity to mobilise change within an institution. However, it is not only important to create a culture for change, enabling the acquisition of internal effectiveness, but also to instigate improvement strategies to increase the outcomes of pupils in terms of academic effort, achievement and acceptable social behaviour.

Change, according to Moss Kanter (1984) is the process of analysing the past to elicit the present actions required for the future. Understandably staff can feel threatened, under stress and often de-skilled at the prospect of change and it is vital to have a culture that provides support and encouragement. At the PRU the process started with an awareness of the need for change. A diagnosis was made of the distinctive characteristics of the institution and how improvement could be made. A development plan indicated the direction in which action needed to be taken. All staff were in agreement that the profile of the Unit needed to be lifted alongside creating relevant and flexible learning 'packages' for all the pupils. It was important at this stage to foster a culture which responded positively to change. It was enormously helpful to have a culture already in place that provided a supportive environment for both pupils and staff: "The teachers are extremely committed and work together as a coherent team with shared objectives" (OfSTED, 1997). Unfortunately it would appear, from discussions with staff in a variety of mainstream schools, that some learning organisations see the pastoral care of staff as a low priority. Teachers

can so easily feel undervalued. Staff morale is essential for good relationships and strengthens the capacity for managing change.

Collaborative cultures

Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) strongly support the notion of collaborative cultures being an essential building block for school improvement. They consider that a collaborative culture facilitates development through mutual support, joint work and a broad agreement on educational values. A system of collaborative management has developed at the PRU by the sharing of duties across the staff. The team spends much time discussing management issues. There is a shared sense of purpose and drive. All staff have responsibility for teaching and learning. The Unit works on success through the curriculum to effect improvement in behaviour, increase self esteem and enhance confidence:

"Staff have created a very positive ethos within which pupils' self- confidence and self-esteem are raised by valuing and respecting the contribution each has to make" (OfSTED, 1997).

A culture that promotes the need for learning, good citizenship and consideration for others helps pupils to focus clearly on their individual strengths and talents and provides them with hope for future success. The focus is on the future without the problem rather than the past with the problem.

Ainscow (1991) considers that pupils benefit academically when their teachers share ideas, co-operate in activities and assist one another's intellectual growth. In more effective schools the emphasis is on teachers as learners as well as the pupils. As a result staff exhibit cohesiveness, identify problems, take action and have a shared approach to planning. A pertinent example of this in the PRU is the collaborative planning, preparation and delivery of INSET on behaviour management to a variety of educational institutions. This has proved to be a rich learning experience for the staff involved as it has taken teacher development beyond personal reflection to a point where all staff learn from each other and share expertise. Arguably this is the pinnacle of professional responsibility and development.

Staff development at the PRU is not viewed as being solely concerned with meeting individual needs, rather it is viewed as having a whole - Unit focus and a collaborative purpose. It is conceptualised by a genuine commitment to the raising of achievement and the Unit's improvement and development: "There are good opportunities for further training and staff development. Teachers are undertaking higher degrees and attend appropriate inservice training" (OfSTED, 1997).

Staff at the Unit often observe each other's teaching sessions and discuss classroom teaching strategies and skills on a regular basis. Much emphasis is put on the belief that if the lesson content is dull then the 'performance' by the teacher needs to compensate. This increases motivation and channels energy towards pupil achievement. The Unit takes pride in creating a learning environment for pupils and staff and it is considered that a culture of collaboration positively affects learning outcomes and pupil attitudes.

Culture of achievement

School improvement is a process that focuses on enhancing the quality of pupils' learning. "Teaching and learning have to be interactive. Teachers need to know about their pupils' progress and in particular their difficulties with learning so that they can adapt their work to meet the needs which are often unpredictable and which vary from one pupil to another" (Black and William, 1998, p.2). Hopkins and Harris (1997) argue that a major goal for school improvement is to help teachers become professionally flexible so that they can select from a repertoire of possibilities the teaching approach most suitable for their content area and the age, interests and aptitudes of their pupils.

The pivotal nature of the PRU's work is based on improving the quality of teaching and learning through supporting individuals and mainstream partners: "The Unit has a distinctly positive ethos, pupils' pastoral and academic needs are paramount and expectations are high" (OfSTED, 1997). This enables pupils with high expectations but little motivation to overcome their difficulties in accessing the curriculum. Interventions aimed at improving attitude, repetition of the purpose of each piece of work, unequivocal statements of belief in pupils' ability, separating the pupil from negative behaviours and verbal and written praise for successful outcomes are daily activities:

"Pupils display positive attitudes and are very well motivated. Their concentration is good, they are attentive and remain on task consistently throughout the day. They are aware and appreciative of what the Unit is helping them to achieve. They feel secure in the Unit and say that the time spent there has helped them to focus on plans and objectives for the future" (OfSTED, 1997).

Recent research by Martin and Hayes (1998) indicates that opportunities for praise are not always seized and in general they are used in response to academic behaviour and rarely for appropriate conduct. A culture must ensue in all learning institutions where desirable behaviours are recognised, reinforced and appropriately rewarded:

"All forms of reward, praise or appreciation have a positive impact on students. Effective schools have multiple opportunities for recognition" (Ainscow, 1991, p.78).

In schools where there is a culture of achievement pupils begin to see themselves as more able and ·responsible: "High expectation is a potent force in human experience and endeavour. Low expectation has equal force" (Davie, 1996, p.54). At the PRU a belief in the capabilities of pupils is constantly conveyed as a means of concentrating on the positive as a mechanism for altering the negative:

"A climate of care and respect has been established in which everyone's efforts and experiences are valued. This gives pupils the opportunity to transcend everyday reality and find a belief in themselves and others" (OfSTED, 1997).

Discussion

School improvement is not easy or straightforward. It may involve a great deal of negotiation and coalition building as well as a sensitivity to colleagues' professional opinions and feelings. Ainscow and Southworth (1996) consider that the improvement process is about changing the culture of an organisation through colleagues' attitudes and actions, their beliefs and their behaviours. The time involved for this process is contingent upon many factors because the interpersonal dynamics are context specific and unpredictable. Leaders need to be able to examine the circumstances they face in each school and respond to the personal and political dramas that are part of every institution.

Effective change should have the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning at its heart: "It is this link - between powerful learning and powerful teaching - that is at the heart of school improvement." Put simply, powerful teachers believe that *all* children can learn and that they can teach all children. More pertinently "they convey this message to their students" (Hopkins, 1997, p.163). Those at the most disaffected end of the emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) spectrum need quality teaching in particular as they have no

resources or desires to 'fill in the gaps' of a poor teacher - learner relationship. All schools should consider the teaching process of paramount importance in institutional improvement. Structures should be put in place which create opportunities for collegiality and collaboration ultimately leading to the empowerment of individuals and groups.

Sadly it is an all too common view that discarding some pupils from mainstream schools will lead to institutional improvement. Gray and Noakes (1998) consider that difficult behaviour in pupils provides a strong challenge to an adult's sense of personal effectiveness. A culture often exists which is characterised by defensiveness and blame and works against the development of effective collaboration. This type of culture also expects instant solutions and often leads to poorly thought out ad hoc strategies which may have short term benefit but do little to secure longer term improvement and consistency. The government's Green Paper (DfEE, 1997) states clearly that pupils with EBD have special educational needs and suggests that 'standards' for mainstream schools should include an ability to maintain such pupils successfully in that environment or create 'packages' within that environment. This requires multi-agency support (Blandford, 1998). Disapplication of the National Curriculum at key stage 4 for a wider focus on work related learning (QCA, 1998) is a welcome strategy for those needing a broader range of opportunities to sustain their education. There is a sound argument that supports the fact that pupils who are already disadvantaged should not be further marginalised.

'Inclusive' education has major implications for the existing cultures of mainstream schools. A keynote therefore in school improvement will be the ability to support, re-direct and maintain the full time education of disaffected pupils. Such a culture will be required to sustain professional commitments to a school, which excludes rarely and as a last resort rather than a matter of course. Redefinition of the problems so that they become part of the normal rather than exceptional provision is needed. Learning institutions need to be more analytical about the contexts of challenging behaviour. They need to be creative in designing and implementing interventions; these interventions should be based on a fundamental philosophical commitment to the principle that all pupils are educable.

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