



RJC Schools Briefing December 2011

Restorative Justice in Schools

The use of Restorative Justice (RJ) in Schools has shown that when used as part of a school's discipline system, it enables pupils to be accountable and promotes responsible citizenship.

The Government's introduction of the Big Society Agenda has made clear its commitment to empowering communities. The Coalition has already expanded the use of Restorative Justice in the criminal justice system. Restorative Justice is being used at a grassroots level in many schools, academies and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). The Department for Education (DfE) could take the opportunity to promote Restorative Justice to support discipline in schools across the country.

The Restorative Justice Council (RJC) is the independent third sector membership body for the promotion of Restorative Justice. We are the national voice across the public, private and voluntary sectors. We provide evidence of effective practice and support for a wide range of members. A growing number of our members work in the field of children and young people across a wide range of settings to prevent and respond to discipline and bullying issues. The RJC would like to further develop the use of Restorative Justice in partnership with the DfE.

Restorative Justice in schools:

In the criminal justice system, Restorative Justice is used in response to crime to empower victims and make offenders aware of the impact of their crime. In schools, Restorative Justice is used by Headteachers proactively to build relationships, promote discipline and prevent harm and conflict occurring. Restorative Justice builds on existing practice, including the use of circles, mediation skills and peer mediation training for the children. It goes on to develop both informal and formal procedures such as one-to-one support in order to decide the best approach to meet the needs of the school and pupils. It is also used as a response by schools to enforce discipline whilst emphasising the value of positive relationships and active citizenship.

Headteachers recognise the need for strong leadership and a shared vision where staff are able to use Restorative Justice to meet a range of discipline issues including poor class behaviour, all forms of bullying and a break down in teacher/pupil relationships.

Ofsted inspections have recognised the value of adopting this approach in schools:

"Pupils value the restorative practices that help them understand right and wrong, and encourage them to take responsibility for their actions." Ofsted report Upton Primary School, Bexley (2010)

Headteachers are most effectively supported when agencies outside the school are also committed to Restorative Justice, to ensure that pupils receive consistent discipline both in and out of schools. Areas across the country such as Croydon, Hull, Kent, Lancashire and Norfolk are leading this multi-agency approach to Restorative Justice. Key partners in the multi-agency partnership are police officers who are working closely with schools to address incidents that spill over from school into the wider community. At present, the RJC is working with the Metropolitan Police on how to implement Restorative Justice across the police service to complement other agencies working with children and young people.

Evidence of impact:

The RJC supports the development of evidence-based practice to help practitioners and Headteachers in education to draw on lessons learned from evaluating the growing body of research from around the country. Key findings from recent evaluations include:

- The 2002 - 2005 national evaluation of Restorative Justice in Schools enabled Headteachers to adopt the approach based on strong qualitative and quantitative research. Since this evaluation numerous Headteachers have chosen to implement its use in their schools.¹
- In Barnet, 16 primary schools were trained in Restorative Justice. A 2008 evaluation by the local authority compared these schools with non practising schools and found a reduction in exclusions of 51% in RJ trained schools; compared to a 65% increase in exclusions in the 32 Barnet schools that have received no RJ training. They also found increased confidence among school staff to deal with bullying and conflicts in the school.²
- An independent evaluation of Restorative Justice in Bristol schools found that Restorative Justice improved school attendance and reduced exclusion rates. For example, the Orchard School in Bristol used to have around 300 permanent exclusions every year. Since introducing restorative justice a few years ago this has fallen year on year – to this year being just one permanent exclusion.³
- In Hull, a two-year Restorative Justice pilot involved all professionals in Children's Services in the Riverside area. Over 3,500 staff from the Children's Workforce were trained, including staff from twelve primary and two secondary schools. Evaluation of the schools revealed 73% fewer classroom exclusions, 81% fewer fixed term exclusion days, a reduction in verbal abuse between pupils and verbal abuse towards staff of over 70%.⁴

Benefits of Restorative Justice in schools:

Restorative Justice in schools has grown from the grassroots lead by Headteachers. Therefore, the evidence of success in England and Wales comes directly from schools themselves. Headteachers who implement Restorative Justice see key benefits as:

- Building a culture of respect and discipline in the school community

¹ National Evaluation of the Restorative Justice in Schools Programme (2005) YJB
<http://www.yjb.gov.uk/Publications/Scripts/prodView.asp?idproduct=207>

² Restorative Approaches in Primary Schools (2008) Barnet Youth Offending Service
[www.transformingconflict.org/Barnet%20007098_RA%20Evaluation%20A4%20Booklet%20final%20version%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.transformingconflict.org/Barnet%20007098_RA%20Evaluation%20A4%20Booklet%20final%20version%20(2).pdf)

³ An Evaluation of Bristol Restorative Approaches in Schools (2009) ICPR, Kings College London. Key findings -
http://www.restorativeresolutions.org.uk/images/RAiS_KeyFindings_Updated

⁴ City of Hull Riverside Project (2008) Hull Centre for Restorative Practices and International Institute for Restorative Practices. Summary - <http://www.restorativejustice.org.uk/Resources/Research/Schools/Hull%20Impact%20of%20RP.pdf>

- Increased staff confidence to deal with a wide variety of discipline issues including classroom management, bullying and low-level disruptive behaviour.
- Empowering pupils to take ownership of their behaviour to encourage self-discipline and responsibility to other learners and staff in the school community

Recommendations for further development:

Scotland has taken a lead in this area; following a 30 month pilot project in Scottish Schools⁵ in 2008. The Executive has supported the roll-out of Restorative Justice across the country. Key lessons from evaluations of schools in England, Wales and from the Scottish Executive emphasise the need for:

- Strong leadership from Headteachers to implement and sustain change within their school setting
- Training to enable staff to be confident in tackling both discipline and bullying issues
- Restorative Justice is promoted as part of school policies and procedures to ensure quality of delivery and clear expectations across the school community
- Multi-agency collaboration to create a standardised model for professionals to adopt when addressing wider issues including dealing with parental conflict, gang culture and anti-social behaviour.

The previous school guidance was vague in helping schools develop a systematic approach to implementing Restorative Justice. The RJC would like to work in collaboration with the DfE in order to provide a strategic approach to implementation in schools, academies and free schools.

Next steps:

The RJC is committed to the development of Restorative Justice in educational settings. The evidence clearly shows the benefits to the school community. We would like to work with the DfE to promote this as part of a wider strategy in improving discipline in schools.

We would like to set up a forum for you to meet and hear from Headteachers who have implemented Restorative Justice in their schools together with leading experts in the field. We are able to arrange visits for you and your colleagues to schools, academies and PRUs using Restorative Justice. This would allow you to hear directly from children and young people about their experiences.

We look forward to working with you in the near future.

Restorative Justice Council, December 2011
www.restorativejustice.org.uk

⁵ Restorative Practices in Three Scottish Councils: Final Report of the Evaluation of the First Two Years of the Pilot Projects 2004-2006 (2008) <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/08/24093135/0>