Report for the Management Committee at Number 18 Project on

The use of Isolation Rooms and School Rules

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Submitted to Mr J. B. Cosgrove (Chairman)

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Chairman's Note:

The new direction adopted by the Trustee Directors in 2014 added a significant recognition that the rights of young people would be a key consideration and focus for the Project in the future.

This would embrace current work of provision of leisure, information, support and allied services here. It also would create new areas and challenges. based very much on concerns raised through our contact with our young people.

Dot's work has been predicated on this focus and this report arises from repeated reporting by young people of situations and concerns around Isolation within their Schools, that is, deliberate actions by the schools to secure the isolation of students for rule infractions.

That there may be concerns about breaches of rights and about inappropriate sanctions is one conclusion of Dot's report for which I thank her. It is my view that this is a serious matter, and that one issue arises concerning accountability by school governance to parents, the community and also to their students who appear never or rarely to be consulted on these issues, raising questions about compliance with duties under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Consultation, Article 12) and about the efficacy and seriousness of school council regimes in that regard.

NB: Since this Report was published first, a local situation re School Rules has arisen at a local secondary school ad reported here in The Chichester Observer:

http://www.chichester.co.uk/news/education/bishop-luffa-students-protest-against-no-shorts-rule-1-6832456

<u>Introduction</u>

This report will be looking at school rules and the use and misuse of isolation rooms. Examining how rules in schools are used and what is classed as unruly behaviour. Whether or not these rules are being misused and the increasing number of cases being report in the news for improper wearing of uniforms

Exploring the use of isolation rooms and whether or not schools are abusing their powers to deal with misbehaving pupils. The length of time students are being placed within these units and the effects it has on their behaviour.

Also looking at the behaviour patterns of young students and whether on not young people today within the school systems are suffering more behavioural issues. How exclusions are not the answering the questions on how to deal with the complex issues surrounding youths of today.

Including a brief outline around one of the young adults attending the Number 18 project and the complex issues they have. Whether there is a solution in helping this young person with her educational needs and any way forward in addressing their complex needs.

Concluding with whether or not there is a further need to research and examining school rules and isolation room. Also if the use of both of these issue are having an adverse effect on students with real behavioural problems.

Following up with recommendations and actions to be looked at more closely.

NB: School students using the Project include those from The Regis School, Felpham Community College, St Philip Howard School, Chichester High School for Girls, etc

Main:

School rules

The head teacher of a school must decide the standard of behaviour expected of pupils. They also determine the school rules and disciplinary penalties for breaking the rules. Every school must publicise their school behaviour policy. Behaviour that is unacceptable and the discipline of pupils must adhere to the Education and Inspectors Act 2006, "whether the imposition of the penalty constitutes a proportionate punishment in the circumstances of the case" (91 a).

A fixed term exclusion from school is a disciplinary measure which head teachers can use to deal with incidents of serious misbehaviour. In order that excluded students receive education and adequate supervision a growing number of schools in the UK have develop school based internal exclusion, also known as seclusion units or isolation rooms (DCFS, 2008).

Seclusion/Isolation units have arisen from political pressure to raise educational standards and attainment to reduce levels of exclusion from school and to remove the threat of 'undesirable' young people using public space during school hours.

The UK government has no overall strategy or requirement for schools to develop seclusion/isolation units(no central figures are available). Official guidance highlights that seclusion/isolation units commonly aim to punish disruptive behaviour, mediate between the school and parents and offer clear and organised support for students learning. Also to manage re-integration to mainstream classes and to secure improvements in students behaviour (DCSF, 2008).

It could be said that these new types of school spaces have been controversial, in that it is suggested that their highly punitive nature could violate children's rights. There is little research which considers the effectiveness of Seclusion/Isolation units or which explore young peoples views of these spaces (McKeon, 2001 Hallam & Castle 2001). One in twenty secondary students will experience at least one fixed term exclusion.

It could be argued that exclusions could give young people the message that problems can be solved by giving up or walking away, when the opposite is true. A Barnados report (Evans 2010) highlights some disquieting statistics, like the fact that secondary school pupils on free school meals were three time more likely to be excluded than their better of classmates and a third of permanent exclusions are for persistent disruptive behaviour.

Expulsions rate remain too high and disproportionately affect certain groups of children. When the government ratified the UN convention on the rights of the child in 1991 it agreed to 'ensure that schools discipline is administrated in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity [with the CRC]" (Article 28 (2)).

Isolation Rooms:

Schools can adopt a policy which allows disruptive pupils to be placed in isolation away from other pupils. Schools must act lawfully, reasonably and proportionately in all cases. Any use of isolation that prevents a child from leaving of their own free will should be considered in exceptional circumstances. Individual schools decide how long a pupil should be kept in isolation, "disruptive students can be placed in isolation for a limited period and schools should ensure that pupils are kept in Seclusion/ Isolation no longer than necessary (Government Guidance, 2014).

Isolation rooms are where children are sent for unruly behave or misconduct, most of these rooms are set out in cubicles where students cannot speak or see any one-else. Breaks are also spent in isolation and lunch is brought into the cubicle. They are allowed out for a specific number of toilet breaks and student material are supposed to be provided by the teachers. Although, after talking with a number of young people who attend the Number 18 project and them filling out questionnaire's this does not always seem to be the case.

If a school uses isolation rooms as disciplinary penalties this should be made clear within their behaviour policy. Individual schools should also include how long a pupil should be kept in isolation. This should be no longer that necessary and constructive. There is an increasing number of reports and articles that suggest that this is being abused. What seems to be happening in a lot of UK schools is pupils being put into isolation for wearing the wrong uniform, and ,disruptive behaviour some students are left there for up to eight hours a day (Lognonne, 2014). However, as well as influencing behaviour, there is a consensus amongst students and staff that students worked harder and achieved more in seclusion/isolation than in class (Baker et al, 2010).

This does not seem to be the case either, students who have been in isolation for a period of hours or days can revert back to their usual behaviour and attitudes to learning once they return to everyday classrooms. Isolation rooms are not a sufficient way to enable long term behavioural changes amongst many secluded students, nor address or resolve the complex behavioural issues or specific learning needs. It could be argued that these students are made to feel like victims or become cosy and secure within these rooms. The offence gets pushed or forgotten once isolation is over, the underlying cause is not dealt with which can lead to more unacceptable behaviour.

This is not just happening in secondary schools but also a number of cases are popping up in the news about the misuse in primary schools. In one particular case a nine year was placed in isolation in a 2.5ft x9ft room for a whole week (bbc,co.uk, 2014).

It could be suggested that punishing children in this age group could have long term affects making them untrusting of any adults and causing a great deal of anxiety. In comparison the maximum amount of time in a cell in youth offending units is three hours a day, within schools students can be placed in isolation rooms for eight hours a day for weeks and there is this bizarre notion that isolation produces a positive change in pupils behaviour but there is a lack of evidence that backs this up.

Children who are continually placed into isolation are perhaps the ones with the most complex need, the most damaged, vulnerable and suffering from emotional trauma.

Behaviour:

For a child to learn and understand how to manage their emotions and any behaviour which might seem as challenging by others they are likely to need support, guidance and explanation. Arguably it is easier to manage the child and the behaviour by putting them in a room rather than try to figure out what is making them behave this way, which would be a more proactive and positive response.

For many young adults bad behaviour in schools is a result of real difficulties outside of school, children at risk of exclusion need more adult supervision not less. A high percentage of young adults using the Number 18 project could be said to have a number of behavioural issues ranging from; anger, anxiety, authority challenging, low self esteem and problems within their home life.

The number of repeat exclusions show that this is an ineffective way to improve behaviour. looking at behaviour patterns, studies in neuroplasticity (the brains adaptability) have proved that repeated experiences actually change the physical structure of the brain.

Since discipline, related interactions between children and caregivers comprise of a large amount of childhood experiences, it becomes vital to consider how they respond when kids misbehave. "Discipline is about teaching not about punishment and finding ways to teach children appropriate behaviour is essential for healthy development" (Siegel & Bryson, 2014).

When children are overtaxed emotionally they sometimes misbehave, this expression of a need or a big feeling therefore results, in aggressive disrespectful or uncooperative behaviour, which is simply proof that children haven't built certain self regulations skills yet. Misbehaviour is often a cry for help (see Subject X).

Isolation can make children angrier and more deregulated, leaving them even less able to control themselves or think about what they have done. Negative cycles can occur where pupils simply opt out of learning anything and their behaviour deteriorates as a result because the root cause of their disruption was never being addressed.

It could be said that this deprives children of their liberty and giving nothing else validates it by labelling them. Historical data show that there is a long standing tendency to emphasise the extent and level of bad behaviour in schools (The Elton Report; chp2, pf12).

This negative reporting can create a self fulfilling prophecy, whereby teachers come to expect bad behaviour from certain pupils and treat them in subtly different ways that then encourage the display of the expected bad behaviour.

The term antisocial behaviour can be unhelpful because it implies a punitive approach and does not take into account the range of complexity of causes. The Children's Rights Alliance for England has pointed out, by not expecting anything of them the schools is depriving them of the right to an education and contravening the UN convention of the rights of the child. Effective systems need to be put in place to support and reinforce positive behaviour.

Exclusion is very ineffective as a means of improving behaviour and attainment, not least because it disenfranchises pupils from their right to be educated. Children who have experienced risk, abuse and absence of sufficient care can become controlling and very untrusting, challenge the authority of the teacher and behaviour boundaries .

Subject X

Subject X is a young adult who regularly uses the project on a weekly basis. After having many informal conversations with X, it became clear that s/he was suffering from a number of complex behavioural issues.

X had been permanently excluded from both of the local schools plus a further one just outside the Bognor Regis area. S/he is currently attending school in Chichester, but due to their behaviour has spent weeks if not months in permanent isolation. Although X has problems at school, it is of great concern to this project that the school do not seem to have recognised that they are deeply troubled.

It is known to this project as well, that X has drug and alcohol problems and sees a counsellor as well as a social worker. S/he's unable to attend lessons or take any of their exams apart from the core curriculum.

It seems that most of the misbehaviour tends to happening outside the classroom as it seems s/he has good marks. X's parent is aware of the situation and has been attending meeting's but however, the school is now looking to manage move them to a pupil referral unit, they are attending a reintegration meeting this week to find out.

Schools use these meeting as a forum for warning the child that they misbehave again they will be permanently excluded. There is often no mention of how school, parents and children can work together positively to support the child's reintegration and prevent further incidents (A.C.E, 2006).

Pupil referral units (Pru) provide education for children who have been excluded, sick or who otherwise unable to attend mainstream schools. Most of the young adults attending Pru's have emotional and behavioural difficulties and unsettled domestic situations.They do not have to follow the national curriculum. places in Pru costs four times as much as secondary school places.

It could be argued that such pupils are more likely to leave school; with no qualification, become unemployed, end up in prisons and experience homelessness. This is deeply concerning, while most young adults who act out at school have some behavioural issues, this can be put done to hormonal teenagers. However, it is the young adults like X, who have disturbing and difficult childhoods that lead to complex issues in latter life, who fall through the cracks and need the most help (a separate report is to written about subject X).

Conclusions:

In conclusion it could be suggested that a lot more information needs to be gathered to investigate fully individual school rules and the use and misuse of isolation rooms. There seems to be a lack of research and data around these subjects, apart from what is reported in the news. More academic literature and statistics need to be developed to get a fuller and more rounded discussion.

Young people who have been excluded even for a few days are often left to their own devices. The problems are still there when they return to school. The implications of sending young people away to a chaotic home or risky neighbourhood include a greater likelihood of being involved in crime, as well as poor qualifications and reduced prospects of gaining employment. It could be argued as well that it can have negative impact on the individual.

The abuse of isolation rooms may not be legitimate and cannot be free from scrutiny in relation to the UK's adherence to the UN convention on the right of the child (1989).These so called acceptable forms of punishment can be abused if used inappropriately or with the wrong students. Punishment can have undesirable side effects and can often mask the genuine reasons for the students behaviour, which deprives them of the help they require.

It is also concerning the amount of young adults today who seem to have a range of complex behaviour. It could be suggested that facilities like the Number 18 Project are just what young adults like these need, some where they are accepted by the peers and adults without being judge or told what to do. Young adults need places they feel safe to come and talk about there issues.

<u>Recommendations:</u>

- There needs to be a more humane and effective way of dealing with behaviour problems and should be made readily available.

- Look into children's rights as the legality and appropriateness of detaining young people in isolation rooms

- Students at risk from exclusion from school should get substantive and ongoing support/intervention to help keep them in school and promote academic achievement.

- There should be a case for early interventions and alternative provision for young people at risk of exclusion.

- Look at whether or not schools have permission to use isolation as part of their behavioural management strategy.

- Recommend requesting local schools F.O.I for there behavioural management Strategy.

- Recommend requesting F.O.I for use of Isolation Rooms.

- More resources needed to tackle children with behavioural issues.

- Recommend appointing advocate's to work along side schools, parents and children under the threat of exclusion, to look also behind a child's misbehaviour and to liaise with all parties.

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