PERSPECTIVE

Beyond punishment: reframing behaviour in schools

Paul Howard

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Paul Howard has over thirty five years' experience in education, having been a youth worker, teacher, lecturer and headteacher of a behaviour support service, before establishing his current training and consultancy practice in 1999. Paul's long-standing commitment to inclusive education has led him to explore alternatives to traditional constructs of educational failure, learning difficulties and pupil behaviour. In this context, much of his work has focused on preferred learning styles, the creative curriculum and the relational aspects of behaviour, especially restorative practice in schools and communities. Paul has delivered training on restorative practice in schools and multi-agency partnerships throughout the UK and acted as the external consultant to the CfBT project in East Sussex.

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Acknowledgements

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Executive summary

> *Restorative practice in schools is derived from the principles that underpin restorative justice, the central tenets of which are to repair harm to individuals, relationships and communities…*

This report is associated with CfBT's report *Restorative practice in schools*. The current document explores the broader context within which such initiatives are located and is intended to stimulate consideration of the most appropriate models of disciplinary practice in schools.

Restorative practice in schools is derived from the principles that underpin restorative justice, the central tenets of which are to repair harm to individuals, relationships and communities, instead of apportioning blame, handing down judgements and prescribing sanctions. Restorative practice is not merely a set of techniques for responding to conflict, but also a cultural perspective that is underpinned by values of fairness, empowerment, inclusion and responsibility. It is further informed by an acceptance of conflict as natural and by understandings of social relationships. Whether incorporated within the ways in which members of the school community communicate and interact on a daily basis, or within formal mediation settings, restorative practice integrates the skills of problem-solving, open-ended questioning, active listening, facilitation and emotional literacy.

This document is arranged in seven sections:

Section 1 provides a historical overview both of the adult world's view of the behaviour of young people and of restorative practice. Whereas, in many respects, current general attitudes towards youth may not have changed in millennia, mass public education provides an additional, specific arena in which these attitudes are formulated and acted upon. With its roots in traditional, community-based restorative justice, restorative practice in schools offers a progressive alternative to the demonisation of children and young people.

The second section offers a brief comparison of punitive and restorative responses to conflict and behaviour in schools, including the underlying assumptions and processes of the restorative approach.

The third section explores the concept of zero tolerance in school contexts and questions its effectiveness. 'Zero tolerance' has been used variously by politicians and educators to communicate a determination to tackle unacceptable behaviour in schools. While it is open to a range of interpretation, 'zero tolerance' has a ready, tough, populist appeal that enables it easily to be planted into the public consciousness. In the UK, 2005 marked something of a watershed in the use of the term by government ministers and continues to influence policy and practice. Even though its usage in public pronouncements appears to have declined, zero tolerance remains an influential rationale for discipline in schools.

Section 4 includes an examination of the use and effects of exclusion from school. Although widely used, exclusion is not used consistently by all schools; on the contrary, there is huge variation between schools. That some schools manage to promote and sustain positive behaviour, without recourse to exclusion, raises questions about the effectiveness and appropriateness of the sanction in education settings. Further, the disproportionate representation for certain groups in the exclusions statistics also prompt doubts about its fairness.

The fifth section explores the recommendations of the Steer Committee, which is the predominant contemporary source of guidance and policy development in respect of discipline in schools. It is not insignificant that the committee was formed at a time when ministers were espousing the virtues *(sic)* of zero tolerance and, not surprisingly, some of Steer's recommendations reflect those origins. Of at least as great a concern is the relative lack of grounding of the recommendations in a learning culture. Smith's (1998) critique of the official theory of learning ('Learning Behaviour') is presented as the basis for this questioning of Steer.

Given the breadth of Steer's remit, it is notable that 'Learning Behaviour' made very little reference to restorative practice as a vehicle for behaviour change and learning. The evidence of the proven effectiveness of restorative practice in a variety of school

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> *It suggests the need for a radical re-think of how we view childhood and adolescence…*

systems is examined in section six and questions raised about the implications for schools, communities and children's services.

The final section, *Key messages* summarises the issues explored earlier in the document and distils these into a number of challenges to various stakeholders in the education system. It suggests the need for a radical re-think of how we view childhood and adolescence and a shift away from the demonisation and criminalisation of our young people. While this requires action on the broader, societal level, schools and caring services should not wait for and react to policy developments from the top down, much of which appears likely to inflame rather than solve the problem.

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1. Historical overview: adult perceptions of children and young people and the evolution of restorative practice

> *The world is passing through troubling times. The young people of today think of nothing but themselves.*

Often, when the words 'behaviour' and 'school' are used in the same sentence, the speaker has in mind the unacceptable behaviours of a small minority of pupils a small proportion of the time. This tendency for the adult world to focus on the negative aspects of the behaviour of children and young people may give rise to a partial and distorted world view, in which the state of behaviour in schools is deplored in generalised terms even though the vast majority of pupils behave appropriately the vast majority of the time.

Of course, there is nothing new in sweeping negative depictions of young people, as illustrated by the following observations.

'I would there was no age between sixteen and three and twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing in between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing and fighting.'

Shakespearean scholars will recognise this as a quote from The Winter's Tale which was written in the first decade of the seventeenth century.

'The world is passing through troubling times. The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint. They talk as if they knew everything, and what passes for wisdom with us is foolishness with them. As for the girls, they are forward, immodest and unladylike in speech, behaviour and dress.'

Attributed to Peter the Hermit, this comment on youth was written in the late thirteenth century.

'What is happening to our young people? They disrespect their elders, they disobey their parents. They ignore the law. They riot in the streets, inflamed with wild notions.

Their morals are decaying. What is to become of them?'

Plato's critique of the young was written in the 4th century BC.

'We live in a decaying age. Young people no longer respect their parents. They are rude and impatient. They frequently inhabit taverns and have no self-control.'

Our time travel ends a few thousand years from our starting point with this inscription on an Ancient Egyptian tomb.

While, therefore, any contemporary tendencies to demonise young people may be regarded as simply continuing a time-honoured tradition among the older generation, we need to take account of contextual changes that distinguish the current landscape from its predecessors. Unquestionably, one of the most important differences is mass public education. Modern commentaries on the unruliness of youth are no longer confined to vague, general social contexts but also include specific reference to the manifestations of that unruliness in schools. Putting to one side the questionable veracity of the generalisations, the intensity and vicariousness of political, media and public interest in behaviour in schools brings with it a heightened expectation that schools must be responsible for correcting 'bad' behaviour. Moreover, this expectation is often not limited to the school's immediate sphere of influence but extends beyond the school gate, the school day and the academic year.

Although we might dismiss some of these expectations as unreasonable – a central theme in this Perspective will be the locus of responsibility – the fact that schools have a key role in preparing young people to be the citizens of the future is inescapable. The conflation of universal anxieties about youth, of concerned perceptions about behaviour

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> *Where restitution is wholly grounded in material recompense to the immediate sufferer, restoration embraces non-material harm…*

in schools and of the accountability of schools inevitably prompts the search for the most effective approaches to discipline and behaviour in our education system. Clearly, the term 'most effective' needs qualifying, for it can be coined from a number of different perspectives e.g.

- a drive to uphold the status quo

- concern about public image

- emphasis on correction

- reinforcement of positive behaviours

- child and adolescent development

- promotion of personal responsibility

- behaviour as a medium for extending learning.

While the various viewpoints on school discipline are not all mutually exclusive, the central tenet of this 'Perspective' is that responses to pupil behaviour in schools principally should be driven by schools' primary role to educate. This necessitates the adoption of approaches in which pupils' behaviour is viewed as a resource for learning. Such approaches require the active involvement of pupils, as in other facets of their learning. Arguably, some of the dominant contemporary approaches to discipline in schools fail to connect to the school's role in facilitating the learning and development of children and young people.

Although the use of restorative practice in schools is a recent development, it has deep historical roots. In many ancient societies, including the Sumerian and Babylonian, restitution was the cornerstone of the justice system. The tradition of making restitution for offences through material compensation continued over many centuries and formed the centrepiece of the Brethon Laws in Ireland and, in the same era, featured significantly in the laws of King Ethelbert of Kent (circa 560–616). While restitution is not synonymous with restoration, the two approaches have in common the principle of the wrongdoer being directly responsible to the victim for righting wrongs. As such, both approaches focus in the main on the victim and the harm done to him or her. On the contrary, retributive forms of justice are offender-centred, with an emphasis on the law that has been broken rather than the harm to the victim and community.

In England the introduction of retributive justice is often attributed to the Norman Conquest and certainly the centralisation of law enforcement developed apace post-1066. However, the antecedents of a justice system, in which judgement and punishment are determined by third parties on behalf of the state and most compensation (in the form of fines) paid to the state, were present during the Anglo-Saxon period. For, alongside the widespread use of restitution, there were also draconian measures, including banishment and death. Moreover, restitution itself evolved from a system of direct compensation to the victim to include fines payable to the king. The notion of violation of the king's peace, which originally related only to offences within the royal household, became applied more broadly, resulting in the Crown becoming increasingly active in levying fines.

Where restitution is wholly grounded in material recompense to the immediate sufferer, restoration embraces non-material harm (e.g. feelings of being unsafe, the loss of trust) and considers the effect of the harm on others (e.g. the families of the victim and offender, or other members of the community). This broader and deeper focus on the needs of the victim also has a long history in certain traditional societies, e.g. the Maori of New Zealand. A strong sense of community underpins this response, in which the offender is exposed to the thoughts and feelings of those affected, directly and indirectly, by their actions. This process may take place in a large meeting space and a collective view of what the offender needs to do to restore his/her relationship with the community is constructed. In the process, the responsibilities of both the individual and the community are refreshed.

The application of these longstanding principles of restorative justice has been embraced by police forces in North America, Australasia and the UK, where the Thames Valley force has been at the forefront of this development. Restorative justice has been applied to a wide range of situations by the police, from fairly immediate responses on the beat to complex reparation of harm in the wake of very serious offences.

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In recent years restorative practice has not been confined to two-sided offending, but also been applied in the most complex political and community contexts.

According to the Thames Valley force, the benefits of 'RJ' are that it:

- gives victims a greater voice in the Criminal Justice system

- finds positive solutions to crime

- allows victims to receive an explanation and more meaningful reparation from offenders

- makes offenders accountable for their actions

- shows the community that offenders are facing up to their actions

- can reduce post-traumatic stress disorder in victims; it can, in some cases, motivate offenders to stop their criminal behaviour (Thames Valley Police website, 2009).

In recent years restorative practice has not been confined to two-sided offending, but also been applied in the most complex political and community contexts. As recounted by Howley (2002) restorative justice was the basis for the peacemaking process that ended the civil war of the 1990s in the Bougainville region of Papua New Guinea. At around the same time in South Africa, Desmond Tutu's Truth & Reconciliation Commission, which sought to repair the rifts in South African society at the end of the Apartheid era, was informed and largely driven by restorative principles. Also in the mid-1990s, following the official ceasefire in Northern Ireland, there was growing interest in developing non-violent, restorative community justice, as an alternative to the continuing use of punishment beatings and other acts of retribution.

Despite the complexity and chronic nature of the conflicts, these large-scale attempts to effect restorative resolution had significant impact. In his study of the work of Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJI) and Northern Ireland Alternatives (NIA), Mika (2006) traced the sharp reduction in beatings and shootings in those areas in which the two bodies were operating. Mika also found that the two organisations contributed to increased tolerance and had 'increasingly become a venue of first resort where members of the community – families of offending youth, aggrieved victims, and other citizens and community organisations – approach the projects, and not paramilitary organisations as they might have in the past, for conflict intervention and resolution assistance'.

Not withstanding their impact, restorative justice projects have not been immune from criticism and suspicion. In both Northern Ireland and South African, perhaps inevitably, there are victims of 'The Troubles' and Apartheid respectively who perceived the restorative process as denying them justice. While these perceptions cannot be lightly dismissed, nor can the fact that community-based restorative approaches in major conflict arenas have had considerable success. Indeed, it is the viability of such approaches in respect of some of the most enduring political problems of the modern age that has been recognised by an increasing number of education practitioners as offering a template for the resolution of conflict within school contexts. The following section examines how the principles of restorative justice have been translated within schools and explores some of the evidence of the impact of this translation.

2. An introduction to restorative practice in schools

> *However, in schools, as in society, the predominant approaches to conflict tend to be punitive, with a third party acting as judge, jury and executioner.*

In any context, restorative practice is based on an understanding and acceptance that conflict is a part of life and that where conflict occurs, either or both parties and their relationship are harmed and it is this harm that needs to be addressed. However, in schools, as in society, the predominant approaches to conflict tend to be punitive, with a third party acting as judge, jury and executioner. While punitive systems may appear plausible in terms of both maintaining order and being seen to do something about issues, they tend to be flawed in the following ways:

- *The conflict is stolen.*
  Ownership of the conflict is taken away from those directly involved and now belongs to the adult who has intervened.

- *Responsibility is reduced.*
  The third party use of punishments tends to become a substitute for the 'offender' taking direct responsibility for what he/she has done. Once punished, he/she has no need to address the harm he/she has done. As far as the 'victim' is concerned, he/she is denied the opportunity to express thoughts, feelings and needs arising for the situation. The negative effect of third party solutions on responsibility also applies where there is no clear offender/victim relationship and the harm appears to be mutual.

- *A sticking plaster is applied to the problem.*
  Where third parties deal with conflict, the outcomes are invariably superficial and underlying issues remain unaddressed. Just as a sticking plaster on a dirty wound will seal in infection, punitive responses to conflict seal in the harm within the relationship and this may keep festering away within subsequent behaviour.

- *The focus is almost exclusively on broken rules and judgements of wrongdoing.*
  While rules are unquestionably important, their breach may not be the main issue when there are conflicts. If we punish X because he/she has hurt Y, our main concern has been that a rule has been broken. If that's all we do, it is unlikely that the relationship between X and Y will be restored, let alone enhanced. Moreover, the principal lesson learned may be that age brings with it the power to punish others.

The restorative alternative allows those involved in conflict to retain ownership of and responsibility for their actions, thought, feelings and needs. Harm is recognised, wrongdoing acknowledged and addressed and the damage to relationships repaired. Some of the outcomes may be similar to those arrived at through third party intervention, for instance, a decision to stay away from each other, an apology or payment for material damage; however, the *process* is fundamentally different. As the outcome does not depend on a third party making a judgement, the persons in conflict experience being listened to in a way that frees them up to accept responsibility for what is theirs and to make decisions about next steps. Whether in mediation or informal contexts, the facilitator of the process may see other actions that the participants could take to put things right, but he/she keeps her counsel on these, as the process is not about his/her solutions but those of the parties directly involved. By entrusting the process to the people in conflict, restorative practice consistently produces meaningful and enduring outcomes for them.

While restorative approaches in schools have their origins in community models of restorative justice, the author favours 'restorative practice' rather than 'restorative justice' to describe the range of activity in schools. This preference reflects the view that schools are not extensions of the criminal justice system – although it can be argued that the encouragement of zero tolerance (section 3) can produce such an extension by stealth – and responses to conflict and behaviour in schools need to be grounded in understandings of learning and development, not perceptions of offending.

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3. The 'zero tolerance' approach

> *Any poor behaviour is too much and should not be tolerated. We need to re-draw the line on what is acceptable.*

Although strict adherence to set rules and punishments may have had a long history within our education system, the year 2005 marked a watershed in the use of the term 'zero tolerance' to describe and prescribe approaches to behaviour in schools in the UK. While the term had been adopted sporadically since the 1970s, its high profile in the public consciousness has its roots in local, then national, policing of drugs trafficking in the United States during the mid- to late-1980s. There is no doubt that 'zero tolerance' had and still has a significant, populist appeal, as Skiba and Noam (2001) observe:

> *'The language of zero tolerance seemed to fire the public imagination; within months, the term and strategy began to be applied to a broad range of issues, from environmental pollution and trespassing to skateboarding, homelessness and boom boxes.'*

The central proposition of this brand of policing is the application of penalties and punishments to even minor infractions of a code or law in order to reinforce its importance. In the process, there is a tendency to extend powers and/or widen the net to catch an increasing range and decreasing severity of misdemeanour. Skiba and Noam (2001) note that between 1989 and 1993 the initial use in of zero tolerance by some school districts in respect of drugs, weapons and gang-related activity had broadened to embrace all states and an increasing number of issues including smoking and disruptive behaviour. They cite further evidence of the expanding reach of zero tolerance policies in the extension of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 to weapons other than fire-arms, a growing list of misdemeanours which are covered by other school-based, zero-tolerance policies and the application of these policies to incidents that occur outside school.

According to Webb (2006), 'Feeding on moral panic and popular fear, zero tolerance policies not only turn schools into an adjunct of the criminal justice system, they also further rationalize misplaced legislative priorities.' By criminalising students, zero tolerance policies have fuelled increases in the exclusion and arrest of young people, frequently for highly debatable reasons (Skiba & Knesting 2001; Webb 2006).

We can take no comfort from the apparent occurrence in the United States of the most worrying illustrations of the excesses of zero tolerance. Given its raw popular appeal, 'zero tolerance' has duly been imported by many politicians on this side of the Atlantic as an attractive standard around which to rally support. In the UK, the transformation of 'zero tolerance' from a crime-control initiative to a school-based approach to discipline, has to some extent mirrored its evolution in the States. In 2002, the then Home Secretary, David Blunkett, and Prime Minister, Tony Blair, launched the street crime initiative and an expansion in youth custody provision against a backdrop of 'zero tolerance' rhetoric and, three years later, the rhetoric was refocused on schools, albeit not for the first time. (In a speech at Ruskin College in 1996, Blair had used the phrase 'zero tolerance' in respect of 'failing' schools.)

2005 marked a watershed in the pursuit of 'zero tolerance' behaviour policies in UK schools. In February of that year, the then Secretary of State, Ruth Kelly, nailed her colours to the mast of zero tolerance in a speech to a headteachers' conference:

> *'Any poor behaviour is too much and should not be tolerated. We need to re-draw the line on what is acceptable.'*

Kelly also added that she was suspending her predecessor's commitment to requiring schools to admit pupils excluded from elsewhere. In one fell swoop, the Secretary of State copied the American experience of both encouraging the application of zero tolerance to relatively low level behaviours and risking the compounding of problems by not attending to the need for excluded pupils to access continuing education.

In May 2005, Kelly returned to the theme, pronouncing:

> *'We must now have zero tolerance of bad behaviour in the classroom and create a culture of respect, of good behaviour and*

> *Critics argue that the concept of zero tolerance in the classroom is singularly unhelpful.*

firm discipline, and this must be the norm in all schools in every classroom all of the time. But how do we make that happen? Personally I think we have a good set of policies in place but clearly we do not have those policies implemented in every classroom by every teacher all the time.'

In the interests of fair reporting, it should be noted that Kelly's solution to this problem was to bring together *'a group of heads with real expertise and a track record of creating a good ethos and a good culture in their schools coming together to tell us what we need to do in every classroom in all of the country.'*

Although the setting up of the Steer Committee was evidently well intentioned and, as we shall see in section 4, many of its recommendations well received, Kelly's initiative may be viewed as flawed in key respects. Firstly, it provided an endorsement to an approach to school discipline which was by then largely unsupported by emerging evidence in the USA (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Secondly, it promoted the notion of a single approach being applicable in all contexts, a promotion that was challenged by at least one of her own back-benchers:

> *'In areas like mine with extreme problems, we need tailor made solutions devised by and road-tested with, local practitioners, not one size fits all policies handed down by the great and the good and filtered by Whitehall.'*[1]

Thirdly, by simultaneously endorsing 'zero tolerance' and setting up a body which might generate less draconian solutions, Kelly may have contributed to confusion over the most appropriate and most effective response, as suggested by another back-bench contribution:

> *'Can we really apply zero tolerance to low-level misbehaviour? Critics argue that the concept of zero tolerance in the classroom is singularly unhelpful. It suggests punishments for minor infringements of behaviour that are far too severe. It implies a draconian approach to classroom discipline. It smacks of a clampdown. It treats all offences equally*

severely, and it does not recognise different levels of indiscipline. Importantly, it does not recognise that solutions should be tailored to the individual needs of the child. Yet I strongly believe that the concept and language of zero tolerance have a significant role to play – and it does not have to be to the exclusion of other complementary approaches.'

Saying that all types of classroom misbehaviour, no matter how severe or minor, are not to be tolerated and will be dealt with is not incompatible with saying that the response to different types of misbehaviour will differ in scale and complexity.

Solutions to misbehaviour should involve flexible discipline plans, formulated with the help of teachers, parents and pupils. They should involve excellent in-school, on-site support, to avoid the possibility of exclusion.[2]

Arguably, in an attempt to reconcile a liberal stance with the proposed policy, Irranca-Davies understated the extent to which zero tolerance represented a radical departure from existing practice. There is no evidence to suggest that the architects of zero tolerance policies intend them to accommodate flexibility. On the contrary, the blanket application of zero tolerance may be viewed as *'an effort to treat all offenders equally in the spirit of fairness and intolerance of rule-breaking'* (Skiba & Peterson 1999 in Webb, 2006).

From a semantic point of view it may be possible to accommodate apparently conflicting philosophies. We may say that we will not tolerate certain behaviours in school, without resorting to a punitive reaction when they are presented, for using non-punitive approaches to misbehaviour does not equate with inaction. Thus, even restorative practice can be reconciled with zero tolerance; however, as it has evolved during the last twenty years, the paradigm of 'zero tolerance' is not semantic, but firmly grounded in aggressive punishment regimes.

As far as zero tolerance in schools is concerned, exclusion, both fixed term and permanent,

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[1] Graham Allen, MP for Nottingham North, House of Commons debate, February 2005
[2] Huw Irranca-Davies, MP for Ogmore, House of Commons debate, 9 February 2005

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> *These penalties are not there simply to punish pupils but to help them learn to behave better.*

is often a cornerstone of the approach and it is significant that, in their responses to the Secretary of State's announcement in May 2005, some of the main interest groups raised exclusion issues:

> *'Secondary schools have been working hard for many years to improve pupils' behaviour while the Government has not helped by changing the rules on school exclusions several times.'*
>
> Jean Gemmell, General Secretary, PAT

> *'Schools already have wide-ranging powers to tackle pupil indiscipline but unfortunately there are still far too many incidents of serious disruption which are not dealt with effectively because some schools still believe that they will be perceived as failing if they exclude even on a temporary basis.'*
>
> Chris Keates, General Secretary, NASUWT

Although the rhetoric of 'zero tolerance' may have subsided in recent years, the principles continue to influence policy and practice, most recently in the launch of 'The Behaviour Challenge' and the revised inspection framework for schools in England (Ofsted, 2009a). The principal document setting out the Challenge is rich in the vocabulary of zero tolerance with an emphasis on '*strong* discipline' and the use of the simple, eye-catching but limited term 'bad behaviour' (DCSF 2009a) [*my italics*]. It is interesting that in the explanatory leaflet to parents, 'strong discipline' and 'bad behaviour' are replaced by the toned down 'effective discipline' and 'unacceptable behaviour', but otherwise the emphasis on punishment is undiluted:

> *'Schools help pupils learn how to behave. They have legal powers to apply a wide range of penalties to pupils who break school rules, fail to follow instructions or who behave in a way that is unacceptable. Penalties include:*
>
> • *Withdrawing the pupil from a lesson or peer group*
>
> • *Withdrawing participation in a school trip or sports event*
>
> • *Taking away break or lunchtime privileges*
>
> • *Detention – including at weekends*

> • *Confiscation of property*
>
> • *Exclusion from school – either for a fixed period ('suspension') or permanently*

> *'These penalties are not there simply to punish pupils but to help them learn to behave better.'*
>
> (DCSF 2009b)

The vocabulary of behaviour management and discipline in schools appears to have been transformed, with the repeated use of 'penalties' to describe what was formerly the punitive half of 'rewards and sanctions'. Moreover, the re-appearance of a redundant word, 'suspension', to help explain the well-established category of fixed-period exclusion might further indicate the nature of the transformation as a reconnection with a harsher disciplinarian past.

The assumption that the preceding list of penalties help pupils learn to behave better will be examined in the context of theories of learning later in section 5 of this Perspective.

The revised inspection framework includes a particularly intolerant approach to grading schools on pupils' behaviour, as indicated by the following grade descriptor:

> *'Pupils behave so that learning proceeds appropriately and time is not wasted. They understand what is expected when asked to work on their own or in small groups and only gentle prompting is needed to maintain discipline. Around the school, pupils' behaviour is orderly so that public spaces are safe and calm. Pupils are polite and generally respond appropriately to sanctions. Incidents of poor behaviour are uncommon.'*
>
> (Ofsted 2009b).

For readers who are unfamiliar with the inspectorate's gradings this descriptor relates to 'Satisfactory', a grade which is officially viewed as not good enough and a trigger for additional intervention. It may be a source of confusion for every pupil and parent, to whom the Government White Paper 'Building a 21st century schools system' has given a guarantee of 'good behaviour, strong discipline, order and safety' that when their schools fulfil

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this guarantee they will be judged merely 'satisfactory'.

Rather worryingly for the organisation that oversees the quality of the education system, Ofsted's new criteria seem bereft of any understanding of behaviour in the context of child and adolescent development and the grade descriptor for 'outstanding' behaviour reads like a juvenile version of *The Stepford Wives*. There appears to be a significant risk that by encouraging schools to adopt a zero tolerance approach in order to achieve a high inspection grade, Ofsted may contribute to increasing use of exclusions, in contradiction of its own encouragement to schools to reduce the number of exclusions, especially in the primary sector (Ofsted, 2009c).

While not the only significant feature of a 'zero tolerance' approach, exclusion from school is often the logical conclusion of that approach and the place of exclusion in contemporary views of behaviour and discipline in schools is considered in the next section.

4. The use and effects of exclusion from school

"Given the scale of the use of exclusion, it is perhaps easy to understand popular perceptions that behaviour in schools is out of control."

Before considering issues relating to exclusion from school, it is appropriate to take stock of the scale of its use. In the process, I hope that any doubts about the significance of exclusion as a response to unacceptable behaviour will be dispelled.

In 2007/08 in England, there were 8,130 permanent exclusions from state funded primary, secondary and all special schools, which represents 0.11% of the number of pupils in schools (11 pupils in every 10,000). This represented a significant reduction on the level of permanent exclusion ten years earlier (in 1997/8 the number of exclusions represented 0.16% of the school population); however, the rate of exclusion remained more or less unchanged between 2000 and 2008.

Additionally, there were 324,180 fixed period exclusions from state funded secondary schools, 43,290 fixed period exclusions from primary schools and 16,350 fixed period exclusions from special schools, the total number of fixed term exclusions representing 5.14% of the school population. This represented an arrest of what had been a recent upward trend. In 2003/04 the number of fixed term exclusions represented 4.49% of all pupils, in 2004/05 it was 5.12% in 2004/05 and in 2006/07 5.66%.

Given the scale of the use of exclusion, it is perhaps easy to understand popular perceptions that behaviour in schools is out of control. Certainly, the statistics on exclusion help fuel media (mis)representations of youth. However, the translation of the overall figures into a general view of behaviour in schools is flawed in that the aggregated data conceals the enormous complexity and variety of the issue.

In broad terms, about a quarter of schools do not permanently exclude pupils, and about a half make little use of the sanction, with the remaining quarter excluding more frequently. Wide variation can also be found in schools' use of fixed term exclusions. For example, it is not unusual for the highest excluding school in a local authority to exclude at a rate hundreds of times greater than the least excluding school. Moreover, these variations do not neatly reflect

differences in catchment area or intake. On the contrary, some of the strongest contrasts in responses to exclusion relate to schools which, on most other variables, are very similar.

This suggests that the principal determinant of patterns of exclusion is not the pupils' presented behaviour, however unacceptable, but the institutional response to that behaviour. As with other aspects of school policy and practice, the lead given by the headteacher appears to be the single most important element in that response, as illustrated by the following scenarios:

Scenario 1
On her appointment, the headteacher expresses a determination not to tolerate unacceptable behaviour. In order to make her mark and establish order and discipline, she significantly increases the school's use of exclusion. Two years later, the school remains one of the highest excluding schools in the local authority.

Scenario 2
In eleven years in the school, the headteacher has not once used the sanction of exclusion. He holds that if a pupil's behaviour is seen as a problem by the school community, then it is for the school community to find ways of working with the pupil to overcome the problem.

Scenario 3
The headteacher sees exclusion as a last resort that is unavoidable given the causal factors outside school, for example, the student's family life and the peer group he/she belongs to. Because of these external influences, he sees himself as having no option than to exclude when a pupil engages in significant acts of indiscipline.

Scenario 4
When he was appointed, the headteacher soon realised that the high level of exclusion was making no difference to behaviour as a whole, some aspects of which were not good. Staff seemed to have become dependent on sanctions and he set about replacing this dependency by re-focusing the school on the promotion and recognition of positive behaviour. Exclusions fell to fewer than five per year over the next two years.

> *Around 5 per cent of children in England's most deprived areas are excluded and 4 per cent in the least deprived.*

The headteachers in scenarios 1 and 3 respectively viewed exclusion as an appropriate measure to bring behaviour under control and as the inevitable outcome of pupils' experiences outside school. By contrast, those in scenarios 2 and 4 accepted neither the appropriateness nor the effectiveness of exclusion. While recognising that these examples may not be representative of headteachers as a whole, they give a clear indication of the diversity of view and rationale adopted by school leaders in relation to exclusion.

As indicated above, heads' views about the effectiveness of exclusion are likely to be shaped at least as much by ethos as by evidence. On both sides of the argument, core principles seem to be a principal driver of policy and practice. Without discounting the importance of the subjective, the objective evidence needs to be considered. Despite its prevalence, the bulk of research data suggests that exclusion is of very limited value in terms of either effecting behavioural change among pupils who 'offend' or discouraging others from behaving in the same way as 'offenders'.

The failure of exclusion to alter subsequent behaviour is reflected in the high proportion of pupils who are excluded more than once. In 2006/07, of the fixed term exclusions from state sector schools in England, around 20% involved pupils with two exclusions and a further 20% with three or more exclusions. This level of repeat prescription brings into question the effectiveness of exclusion in terms of changing behaviour and is hard to reconcile with an ambition that children and young people should learn from the consequences of their behaviour.

As far as the impact of exclusion on other pupils' behaviour is concerned, there is widespread anecdotal evidence of some schools maintaining high levels of exclusion over protracted periods of time. The school mentioned in Scenario 1 (above) falls into this category. Here the headteacher's determination in the early months of her incumbency to use exclusion to help stabilise behaviour appears to have become a cultural norm with exclusion rates remaining high two years after she took up her post. Were exclusion an effective deterrent, a reduction in its use would be expected over time.

Concerns over the use of exclusion go beyond the issue of its efficacy and include questions of fairness and equality. As previously indicated, there is huge variation between schools in their delivery of exclusion, which alone is sufficient to stimulate a debate about the need for it and its appropriateness. Further stimulus for such reflection can be derived from the perspective of those on the receiving end of exclusion. Nationally and locally, certain groups of pupils are consistently over-represented in exclusion statistics to an extent which appears to indicate structural inequalities.

As far as deprivation is concerned, there tends to be significant variation in the exclusion experience of pupils in more and less deprived areas. The following table, which draws on the Department for Children, Schools and Families' Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), illustrates the extent of the variation between schools in England over a two-year period.

Although the correlation between the level of deprivation and the rate of exclusion is not precise, it is evident; however, the evidence is open to different interpretation. Under the headline 'Rich-kid school exclusions on a par with those in poorer areas' on 7 August 2009 the *Times Educational Supplement* ran a piece on the 2007/08 data, in which the *similarities* within the statistics were highlighted: *'Around 5 per cent of children in England's most deprived areas are excluded and 4 per cent in the least deprived'.* Presented thus, the variation certainly seems slight but the same data reveal that in 2007/08 pupils in the most deprived areas were 29% more likely to be excluded than their counterparts in the least deprived areas (38% more likely in 2006/07).

Patterns of exclusion in relation to ethnicity have been extensively studied and are well documented. In his analysis of permanent exclusions, Parsons (1999) highlighted the fact that Black Caribbean pupils, who represented 1.5% of the school population in 1995/96, accounted for 7.1% of exclusions. In other words they were excluded nearly five times more often than expected on the basis of the population as a whole, Black African and Black Other groups respectively being excluded 1.8 and 2.9 times more often. In the wake of the Race Relations

The numbers of pupils excluded in the three 'Black' groups were small.

TABLE 1: Department for Children, Schools and Families' Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)

Level deprivation of schools (most to least deprived)	2006–2007			2007–2008		
	No. of schools	Fixed term exclusions	% of school population	No. of schools	Fixed term exclusions	% of school population
0–10%	2,045	43,720	6.19	2,000	38,060	5.24
10–20%	1,956	44,661	6.20	1,899	39,870	5.83
20–30%	2,112	45,283	6.05	2,046	47,800	6.20
30–40%	2,107	50,373	6.51	2,096	40,380	5.44
40–50%	2,166	47,662	6.04	2,260	46,060	5.69
50–60%	2,361	47,375	5.85	2,279	35,170	4.84
60–70%	2,376	39,191	5.32	2,441	40,490	5.18
70–80%	2,387	36,925	5.08	2,369	36,010	4.75
80–90%	2,324	36,466	4.88	2,304	30,960	4.14
90–100%	2,029	33,945	4.47	1,944	29,040	4.04

(*Amendment) Act of 2000, Parsons *et al* (2004) provided an updated picture of the experience of exclusions by pupils from ethnic minorities. Their analysis of the permanent exclusions data for 2002/3 concluded:

'The numbers of pupils excluded in the three 'Black' groups were small. In 2002/03, 360 permanently excluded pupils were recorded as Black Caribbean. If Black Caribbean pupils were excluded at the same rate as White pupils then the Black Caribbean permanent exclusions in 2002/03 would have been 120.'

Data on the exclusion of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) provide further stark examples of the inequalities associated with that form of sanction. The following table refers to exclusions from schools in England during 2007/08:

TABLE 2: Exclusions of pupils from schools in England during 2007/08

Permanent exclusions				
	Percentage of school population	No. of exclusions	Percentage of total no. of exclusions	Extent of over-representation
Pupils with statements of SEN	2.8%	700	8.6%	x3.1
Pupils with SEN without statements	17.2%	5,080	62.5%	x3.6
Fixed term exclusions				
Pupils with statements of SEN	2.8%	42,600	11.1%	x4.0
Pupils with SEN without statements	17.2%	199,100	51.9%	x3.0

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In the context of (a) high levels of funding for special educational needs provision, (b) the rationale behind the SEN Code of Practice and (c) political commitment to equality and inclusion, the above illustrated over-representation, which has worsened in recent years, may be regarded as a national disgrace. At the very least, policy makers and practitioners need to reflect on the continuing paradox of identifying and assessing pupils with special educational needs and subsequently excluding a sizeable proportion of those pupils for behaviours that are often directly linked to those needs.

If the premise is sound, that exclusions per se do not bring about improved behaviour and learning, what approaches will do so? The next section considers some of the alternatives with specific reference to the findings and recommendations of the Steer Committee.

5. Discipline in schools – the predominant culture

> *The fact that the Steer enterprise has operated under the banner 'Learning Behaviour' might suggest that how children and young people learn about behaviour and how to behave has been the committee's principal driver.*

During the last few years, the work of Sir Alan Steer's committee on discipline and behaviour in schools has been the single most important source of influence in this field, as the Committee's recommendations increasingly inform government guidance and policy, some of which was examined in section 3. The fact that the Steer enterprise has operated under the banner 'Learning Behaviour' might suggest that how children and young people learn about behaviour and how to behave has been the committee's principal driver. While Steer (2006, 2009) makes some significant references to 'learning', e.g. the call for all schools to have a learning and teaching policy and the examination of the relationship between learning and behaviour, there is less attention given to the learning aspects of behaviour or the behavioural aspects of learning.

If the findings of the Steer Committee are weak in terms of the process of learning behaviour, the committee's origins go some considerable way to explaining that weakness. As indicated in an earlier section, the Steer Committee was assembled against a backdrop of ministerial animation over the concept of 'zero tolerance' and, four years on, the concept remains a thread within the committee's report *Learning Behaviour, lessons learned (*2009). Within

the executive summary, Steer declares 'The starting point of my report is that poor behaviour in schools cannot be tolerated…', while in the recommendations, we find an extension of powers to search pupils and a reminder of schools' power to discipline pupils for behaviour off school premises. This emphasis on the legal powers and duties of schools mirrors a similar development in the States in the 1990s, when the zero tolerance approach was growing in strength there.

While the Steer Committee may owe its existence to a particularly punitive construct of behaviour in schools, it would be unfair to dismiss its reports in their entirety; to do so would be to ignore the range and diversity of comment and guidance to emerge from the committee's proceedings, as reflected in the abstracts below.

Notwithstanding the different viewpoints that are suggested by the illustrations above, a behaviourist perspective seems to predominate in Steer's outputs, with a heavier emphasis on staff managing the behaviour of pupils than on pupils developing the insight and experience to manage their own behaviour. Moreover, despite the strapline of the committee's work, 'Learning Behaviour',

Some key messages from the Steer Committee (2006)
• The effectiveness of any practice will be determined by the values and expectations that are agreed by all.
• Good teaching engages pupils in their learning and this reduces instances of poor behaviour.
• In-service training should include opportunities to discuss and learn about behaviour.
• Effective leadership is central when creating a climate of security and good order.
• Schools should offer pupils the opportunity to take responsibility for aspects of their learning.
• Schools should use Assessment for Learning techniques to increase pupils' involvement in their learning and promote good behaviour.
• Schools should provide a range of rewards and a practical set of sanctions that deal appropriately with poor behaviour.

Some key messages from the Steer Committee (2009)
• Schools should be required to produce a written policy identifying key learning and teaching aims, strategies and practices.
• Effective behaviour management requires that agreed policies are followed consistently by all staff.
• The engagement of pupils in the life of the school and the development of their decision-making skills should be priorities.
• Schools should ensure all pupils have someone who knows them well and who is able to support them with their learning and development.
• The DCSF should not set targets on exclusion to local authorities, which would undermine heads' right to exclude where that is necessary.

Steer appears to lack an overt, coherent theory of learning.

The rhetoric of learning to behave is evident in the committee's documents. For instance, the 2006 report, *Principles and Practice: What Works in Schools*, stresses that 'It is also vital to teach pupils how to behave well – good behaviour has to be learned – so schools must adopt procedures and practices that help pupils learn how to behave.' However, while Steer provides several examples of interventions and techniques which may impact on pupil behaviour, he does not appear to offer a general view that might clarify the 'how' of the process of learning to behave. It is arguable that, without a general view of learning, Steer's recommendations lack a degree of relevance to a learning community, which prompts the question, 'What view of learning is relevant to pupil behaviour?'

Smith (1998) offers two contrasting visions of learning, which he terms the 'classic view of learning and forgetting' and the 'official theory of learning and forgetting', the key features of which can be summarised in Table 3 below:

TABLE 3: Key features	
The classic view says that learning is:	**The official theory says that learning is:**
Continual	Occasional
Effortless	Hard work
Inconspicuous	Obvious
Boundless	Limited
Unpremeditated	Intentional
Independent of rewards and punishment	Dependent on rewards and punishment
Based on self-image	Based on effort
Vicarious	Individualistic
Never forgotten	Easily forgotten
Inhibited by testing	Assured by testing
A social activity	An intellectual activity
Growth	Memorisation

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> *…terms like 'thinking', 'hoping', 'expecting', 'believing' are all derided as 'mentalistic' fictions.*

According to Smith, the official theory 'is a theory that learning is work and that anything can be learned provided sufficient effort is expended and sufficient control is enforced. This theory has gained supreme power in educational systems from kindergarten to university.' With their emphasis on external factors – the management by staff of pupils' behaviour and the use of positive and negative reinforcement – the reports of the Steer Committee can be said to embrace some of the attributes of the official theory of learning. In his critique of that theory, Smith sees as problematic the lack of an active role for the learner and his observation seems as applicable to behaviour as to other forms of learning:

> *'None of this involves any thinking on the part of the learner. In fact, terms like 'thinking', 'hoping', 'expecting', 'believing' are all derided as 'mentalistic' fictions. Behaviourism is a philosophy of total external control.'*

Although situations in which pupils' behaviour is externally managed and manipulated may appear ordered, the quality of pupils' behaviour learning in these situations is invariably impaired. Of course, if one subscribes to the classic view of learning, one must acknowledge that learning will take place; however, what is learned may bear little or no relation to the intended learning. For instance, a teacher shouting at a pupil while issuing a detention may assume that through this the pupil will have learned his lesson in one way ('He'll know not to do that again', 'He'll show me more respect in future'), while the lesson learned by the pupil may be very different ('Authority is communicated through aggression and humiliation', or 'When I am bigger, I'll be able to boss smaller people around').

If one shares Smith's view that most education policy has been driven by the official theory of learning, it is perhaps inevitable that external management has evolved as schools' predominant response to pupil behaviour. However, as indicated in this Perspective, the relevance and appropriateness of that response to a learning community is open to doubt and there is a case for using the classic view of learning to inform an alternative approach in which the actors retain ownership of and responsibility for their actions. Restorative practice fulfils those requirements and its effectiveness is examined in the next section.

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6. Restorative practice in schools and communities – evidence of impact

> *Despite encouraging experience RJ (Restorative Justice) rates hardly a mention in the report of Alan Steer into school discipline commissioned by the Prime Minister.*

As Allen (2006) notes, *'Despite encouraging experience RJ (Restorative Justice) rates hardly a mention in the report of Alan Steer into school discipline commissioned by the Prime Minister'*. In this section, the 'encouraging' credentials of restorative practice in schools are reviewed and a case made for placing that practice at the heart of schools' approaches to behaviour and discipline. The principal basis for that case is, from around the globe, a growing body of evidence of impact of restorative approaches. Moreover, restorative practice seems especially suited to learning contexts in general as well as to recent, specific education policy developments.

Quantitative data on the outcomes of restorative interventions provide a consistent picture of effectiveness from diverse contexts, as indicated by the excerpts from Porter's (2008) review of research for the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIPP).

From 1998 through 2001, the Minnesota Department of Education conducted an evaluation of restorative practices in primary and secondary schools in four districts. The study showed a 30 to 50 per cent reduction in suspensions. One elementary school reduced its behaviour referrals for inappropriate physical contact from seven per day to a little more than one per day.

The Waterloo Region District School Board in Ontario, Canada, implemented restorative conferencing in 2005 to manage violence, particularly bullying. The district's elementary suspensions dropped 80 per cent in under three years; its secondary school suspensions decreased by 65 per cent; and secondary and elementary expulsions dropped by a third.

In the UK, the Sefton Centre for Restorative Practice partnered with the Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP). In the twenty project schools, permanent exclusions were reduced by 70 per cent between 2003 and 2006. Recidivism was reduced as well. Of 59 conferences run in one term, there was no reported recidivism for misbehaviour ranging from bullying and assaults to swearing at teachers.

These illustrations, which are representative of the overall body of evidence, quantify as sizeable the impact of restorative practice in both reducing the use of the most severe sanctions and promoting behaviour improvement. On a note of caution, the improvements may have been attributable to a *range* of factors of which restorative practice is just one. However, the clear tendency for there to be no recurrence of conflicts and instances of unacceptable behaviour, following restorative interventions, provides a powerful indication of the effectiveness of those interventions, irrespective of whether they are delivered singly or in concert with other measures.

A second cautionary note concerns the process by which levels of exclusion can be reduced, for the relationship between restorative practice and reduced exclusion is best not assumed to be one of osmosis. Although restorative approaches do not sit easily with punishment regimes, they are not mutually exclusive. For instance, the use of mediation to resolve significant conflicts does not automatically lower the number of exclusions. In fact, some schools use mediation as a way of repairing relationships *after* the pupil(s) involved have been excluded. In the final analysis, the reduced use of exclusions and other sanctions is usually the result of a conscious decision to reduce their use, rather than of the chosen procedures or methods. However, restorative practice clearly represents a logical choice for a school that is seeking to move away from a punishment-

based ethos. In some of the schools in the Sefton project, cited earlier in this section, a restorative conference was held where there was a chance of exclusion and in a one-year period, the number of fixed term exclusions fell by 38% and the number of days lost through exclusion by 57% (Allen, 2006).

Qualitative data on the effectiveness of restorative practice is similarly compelling. The Youth Justice Board's (2004) evaluation of the use of restorative conferences in twenty-six pilot schools in England found that 92 per cent of conferences resulted in successful agreements between the parties involved, and that student participants reported a high degree of satisfaction (89 per cent) with the conferences. Moreover, 93 per cent said the process was fair and that justice has been done and three months later, only 4 per cent of agreements had been broken.

Similarly, in respect of the Scottish Executive-funded pilot in three local authorities, Lloyd *et al* (2007) found 'evidence of substantial change in the schools studied in the period of the evaluation; in half of the schools there was strong evidence of improved relationships within the school community'.

The findings of CfBT's own project in East Sussex, 'Restorative Practice in Schools', mirrored both the quantitative and qualitative evidence cited above. For example:

- in the secondary school in the project, agreements were reached in 95.3 per cent (41 of the 43) of the mediations

- in all 41 cases, the agreement was sustained over time and there was no recurrence of the conflict

- the primary school reported fewer issues from lunch-times carrying over into classrooms and, therefore, less lost teacher time

- in both schools, staff and pupils commented on improvements in relationships.

Notwithstanding the specific impacts (the resolution of conflicts, reductions in rates of recidivism and markedly fewer exclusions), enhancement of the general quality of relationships may be viewed as the most important outcome of restorative practice in

schools, in that it goes to the core issue of the value base of our schools and education system. Understandably, practitioners in schools search enthusiastically for what might be the best methods of addressing unacceptable or 'bad' behaviour; however, the appropriateness of the chosen methods in terms of either school ethos or the primary focus of schools also needs to be considered. Otherwise, a school with high levels of exclusion may have a mission statement which espouses inclusion, while one which seeks to develop its pupils as responsible citizens may continually deny pupils a voice or a role in resolving issues. With this type of contradiction in mind, the adoption of restorative practice in schools needs to be viewed, not merely as a technical development, but as Hopkins (2004) has observed, also as a cultural one.

At one level, schools may be regarded as communities in their own right; however, they also reside within the broader communities that they serve and by which they are supported. Consequently, consideration needs to be given to the relationship between the cultural values of the school and those of their communities, a relationship that might be articulated in degrees of congruence or conflict. Where a school seeks to develop its culture on the basis of restorative principles, it may encounter opposition both within and without, especially in the early stages of that development. For some individuals, revenge may be a significant emotional driver which is undermined by what might be perceived as a 'soft option'. At a social or community level, punishment as a central requirement of the response to unacceptable behaviour and conflict may be reinforced from a variety of sources including the media, politicians, government departments and inherited beliefs and prejudices. The reconciliation of conflict between school and community cultures is likely to be a slow, complex process in any circumstances and the complexity may be most pronounced when the school's ethos is driven by restorative principles, as these are the polar opposite of what drives adherence to so-called 'traditional values'.

At a general level, cultural reconciliation may hinge on how the school is perceived and presents itself in relation to the community.

"What sense does it make to try and reform schools while the communities around them stagnate and collapse?"

Whereas for some institutions, this relationship has been enshrined in the titles 'community school' or 'community college', of interest here is the way in which *all* schools have a community dimension. In research that it commissioned, CfBT coined a new term to capture the universal significance of the school/community relationship. By grounding this research in the notion of 'schools as community based organisations', CfBT (2006) shifted the focus from the nature of provision in schools to the quality of the relationship between schools and their wider context. Moreover, while 'full-service school provision' and 'extended school provision' are often associated with top-down policy, the term 'schools as community based organisations' appeared to be relatively free from connotations of mandated outcomes and emphasised the development of a dynamic relationship between the school and its community.

The obstacles to this development cannot be dismissed lightly and Warren (2005) indicates that some of these are structural:

> *'What sense does it make to try and reform schools while the communities around them stagnate and collapse? Conversely, can community building and development efforts succeed in revitalising inner-city neighbourhoods if the public schools within them continue to fail their students? The fates of urban schools and communities are linked and yet schools reformers and community builders act as if they are not.'*

In response, West-Burnham, Farrar & Otero (2007) give a clear indication of what needs to change:

> *'For the public services this means:*
> * *a focus on collaborative effort and locality improvement, rather than the professional and the organization;*
> * *a focus on prediction and prevention, rather than finding and fixing;*
> * *a focus on the whole child (learning, well-being and social justice) rather than a narrow focus on the experience within the classroom.'*

With its roots in traditional community responses, restorative practice has the potential to reconnect schools and communities by cementing common understandings, language and approaches. As demonstrated most ambitiously in Hull's Riverside Project and on a smaller scale in a number of other settings, restorative practice offers a sound basis for integrating children's services and other forms of inter-agency working. Summarising the rationale and evolution of the Hull initiative, Finnis (2009) notes:

> *'The challenge… at the beginning was trying to find a group of like minded professionals across all services who believed in Restorative Practices and who could make key decisions. Another challenge at first was to encourage colleagues to see that we wanted to implement the use of Restorative Practices and not just Restorative Justice. We wanted to emphasise the proactive, community and relationship building side of Restorative Practices and not just focus on the reactive side of things. This is when we made a conscious decision to make building, maintaining and repairing relationships at the heart of everything we do.'*

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7. Key messages

> *Throughout history, the young have been a soft target for adult criticism, so any politician endorsing traditional, negative views is more or less guaranteed populist support.*

Despite the complexity of human behaviour and of schools as organisations, the key messages from this Perspective are simple. These can be expressed as a series of challenges to the various consituencies with an interest in the behaviour of children and young people.

Key messages for politicians

Throughout history, the young have been a soft target for adult criticism, so any politician endorsing traditional, negative views is more or less guaranteed populist support. Therefore, the principal challenge for politicians is to resist the temptation to make political capital from the demonisation of children and young people. This would entail the abandonment of the rhetoric of zero tolerance, for which the evidence of failure is increasingly compelling.

Restorative practice in schools is a proven vehicle for demonstrating the skills and potential of young people, including those whose behaviour may be viewed as problematic. This suggests that politicians have an opportunity to focus on the social capital of the young, rather than on those aspects of their behaviour that are seen as anti-social.

In order to achieve this shift in perception (and policy), it is arguable that politicians need greater openness to understanding about child development, behaviour and learning. In this context, it is a matter of concern that Government and Opposition leaders have been swift to dismiss the observation from the Cambridge Primary Review (2009) that children need a play-based educational experience for longer than is currently the case.

Key messages for the DCSF and Ofsted

The challenges facing senior civil servants in the Department and Ofsted concern the extent to which they can put a brake on the translation of political rhetoric into official policy and guidance. As indicated earlier in this Perspective, the contemporary arena for this issue includes the findings of the Steer Committee, which in some respects are narrow, the recently published 'Behaviour Challenge' and those elements of the revised inspection framework that relate to pupils' behaviour. All three seem influenced by the philosophy of 'zero tolerance' and it is arguable that informed, professional public servants have a responsibility to confront the failings of that philosophy.

While policy and practice are guided by intolerance and punishment, there is little prospect of exclusion from school, which is as ineffective as it is widespread, being robustly challenged.

Key messages for local authorities

Given (a) the lack of correlation between exclusion and behaviour and (b) the evidence base supporting the effectiveness of restorative practice, local authorities might reasonably be expected to discourage the former and encourage the latter, regardless of whether there was a strong national steer in that direction.

The Riverside Project in Hull and the author's own experience in other areas highlight the fact that the development of a restorative culture is not only relevant to schools but also to whole communities and multi-agency partnerships. Where restorative practices are adopted as the common currency of services and agencies, the rhetoric of joined-up practice is likely to be replaced by the reality of increased social capital.

At a time when community cohesion is viewed as a key concern, the development of a systematic, restorative approach might be at a premium for local authorities that wish to strengthen local, social capital.

Key messages for school leaders and governors

For school leaders and school governors, the key issue may be the development of approaches to behaviour that are most appropriate for a learning community. As part of this development process, schools should feel encouraged and challenged to explore

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the vision or theory of learning on which that community is based. This may entail re-engagement with what has been described in the Perspective as the classic view of learning.

Being grounded in a belief that relationships lie at the centre not only of conflict resolution but also learning and development, restorative practice is both practically and philosophically at one with the core purpose of schools.

In order to minimise the risk that restorative practice might merely be an addition to what the school offers, leaders and governors should review the school's value base as part of the process of developing restorative approaches. The adoption of restorative approaches might fit within the broader development both of the school's culture and of relational schooling.

Recognising that schools which develop a restorative culture may find themselves in conflict with the cultural values of the communities in which they are located, there is a need for reflection on the nature of the relationship between school and community and a search for a meaningful construct for this relationship. The concept of schools as 'community based organisations', which was adopted by CfBT Education Trust for one of its research projects, is suggested as a sound starting point.

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