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SEAL of A.P.proval

Dudley Children's Services have commissioned a number of external organisations to provide alternative education for its excluded young people since the year 2000. These Alternative Providers (APs) are also the setting for pupils whose return to school may be difficult, for example new children to the Borough who have been without a school place for sometime.

Two key aims of this provision is to ensure continuity of learning and a pastoral climate that is supportive to a group of young people who can be some of the most troubled and troublesome. The Emotional Health and Wellbeing (EHWB) of youngsters has always been seen as key and central to both these aims

The decision to introduce aspects of the National Strategy Behaviour and Attendance programme - Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) to the settings was based on the following:

- There has been a strategic CPD programme for staff to develop their own understanding and skills in the area of Emotional Literacy (one of the key disciplines underpinning SEAL). This is also consistent with some of the key issues for Local Authorities as identified in 'The Back on Track' white paper.

- Since 2002, the APs have taken part in surveying the views, perceptions and behaviours of their young people using a specially adapted version of the Health Related Behaviour

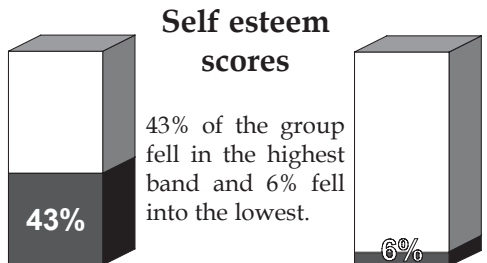
Questionnaire as part of the biennial Dudley Schools Lifestyle Survey, of which EHWB is a key theme

- The success of SEAL in many schools in supporting the learning environment, positive relationships and behaviour change was also a key factor.

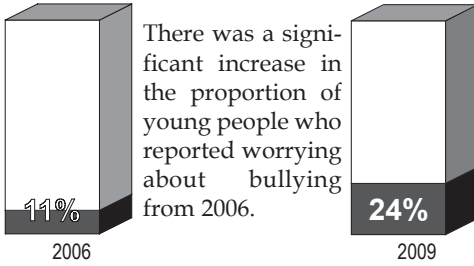
Identifying and responding to need

A training programme was arranged consisting of three full day workshops with follow-up support offered 'back at the ranch' which aimed to build upon the previous training, responding to some of the EHWB issues identified from the 2009 Lifestyle survey data, and to needs and issues identified by staff.

Some of the EHWB data from the 2009 Lifestyle Survey warranted further discussion. Specifically, the results of questions asked on worries about bullying and relationships, the reasons for 'falling behind at school' and the number of pupils who reported being victims of violence and aggression were of interest and relevant to the proposed SEAL workshops.



Bullying

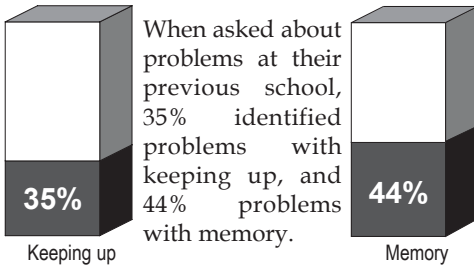


There was a significant increase in the proportion of young people who reported worrying about bullying from 2006.

Amongst the problems that the young people were most likely to worry about at least 'quite a lot' were:

- The way they looked
- Family Problems
- Relationships

Problems at school



When asked about problems at their previous school, 35% identified problems with keeping up, and 44% problems with memory.

Exploratory discussions with staff and anecdotal evidence on the above gave some further food for thought and the following suggestions were made.

Surprise was expressed at the self esteem scores. They were thought to be unusually high for the type of young person and the nature of their problems and the way they generally responded to feedback, specifically criticism, which in many cases they appeared to take personally.

The suggestion was made that the responses may have been due in some cases to bravado, and may be more indicative of 'brave face' rather than a true estimation of their self worth.

The increase in the worries about bullying might be due to the fact that there were now more girls in Alternative Provision than in 2006 and this reflects the general findings that girls tend to report worrying more about this than boys.

Staff also expressed concern that the use and perception of bullying was itself misunderstood, and often the young people would describe any falling out as bullying.

Aggressive behaviour was generally cited as an example of how some of the young people responded to breakdowns in relationships, with many feeling that they had 'little else in their tool box' to deal with conflict.

Finally, discussion around the cited example of 'memory' being one of the problems encountered at their previous school prompted suggestions about stress levels and the impact on their ability to concentrate, process and take in their learning.

The data provided a focus for discussions and threw up some useful questions for further exploration in the training.

The workshop programme

Workshop one

'What is SEAL and how can it support learning and behaviour?'

The key purpose of the first workshop was to build links between participants' previous knowledge and understanding of Emotional Literacy and the SEAL programme and to develop an understanding of the five domains:

- Self awareness
- Managing Feelings
- Motivation
- Empathy
- Social Skills

and their associated skills or competancies.

Workshop two

'Social and Emotional Development (SED) and the importance of the teenage years'

The aim of this workshop was twofold: to look at the importance of SED milestones and the part a positive environment plays in their development, and to transfer that understanding into an appraisal of their own setting's 'climate' for repairing, building and maintaining self esteem within the learning environment. This included a section on looking positive language and positive thinking strategies.

Workshop three

'Tools and strategies for staff and young people for supporting behaviour change'

This workshop built upon the previous two and looked at the learning and practice of self management strategies for dealing with stress, anger and conflict.

Outcomes

This, and the ongoing CPD opportunities in the area of Emotional Health and Well being and its link to learning and behaviour, is key in developing:

- A network of providers that have a shared understanding of the Social and Emotional development needs of the young people they engage
- Common language, practice and strategies for behaviour and learning
- A skilled workforce that are able to support young people in behaviour change
- An opportunity to share concerns and explore solutions together
- A time to discuss relevant data and information

What next?

Measurable outcomes to be evaluated in future will be:

- Attendance rates
- Attainment
- Number of pupils not in education, employment or further training
- Number of learning interruptions (eg days lost from removal due to unacceptable behaviour)

And of course, looking forward to the next input from young people in the 2011 Dudley Lifestyle Survey!