# restorative practices in three scottish councils

Evaluation of pilot projects 2004-2006
Executive Summary

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## Foreword

The Scottish Executive has sought to support development of innovative approaches as part of its commitment to promoting positive behaviour in Scottish schools. Restorative Practices is one of a range of approaches which has been developed through pilot projects in three Scottish local authorities funded by the Scottish Executive. Throughout the life of these pilots an ongoing and collaborative evaluation has been carried out by the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. This document sets out the main findings of the research carried out in these pilots. The full research report is entitled '*Restorative Practices in Three Scottish Councils - Final Report of the Evaluation of the first two years of the Pilot Projects 2004-2006*' and is available from www.scotland.gsi.gov.uk.

The views expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Scottish Executive or any other organisations by whom the authors is or are employed.

## 1. Introduction

In 2004 The Scottish Executive established a 30-month pilot project in Restorative Practices (RP) in three Local Authorities (LA's), each of which was funded for about £45,000 annually. The pilot project was later extended until 2008. This executive summary outlines the findings of the collaborative evaluation of the implementation over the first two years of RP in 18 of the pilot schools: one special, seven primary and ten secondary schools. It describes the wide variety of experiences and approaches associated with RP and discusses the impact of the development of RP across the 18 schools. It highlights general factors which may inhibit or facilitate the development and sustainability of RP in schools.

The evaluation indicates that RP, as they are developing in the pilot LAs and schools, can offer a powerful and effective approach to promoting harmonious relationships in school and to the successful resolution of conflict and harm.

## 2. What are Restorative Practices?

RP in an educational context are defined as restoring good relationships when there has been conflict or harm and developing school ethos, policies and procedures to reduce the possibility of such conflict and harm arising. It is an approach that acknowledges that school education is complex with increasingly wider demands being placed on schools in a diverse and changing world and where the work of teachers and support staff is challenging and stressful.

The underpinning principles of RP emphasise the importance of:

> - fostering positive social relationships in a school community of mutual engagement;
> - taking responsibility and accountability for one's own actions and their impact on others;
> - respecting other people, their views and feelings;
> - empathy with the feelings of others affected by own actions;
> - fairness;
> - commitment to equitable process;
> - active involvement of everyone in school with decisions about their own lives;
> - issues of conflict and difficulty being retained by the participants, rather than the behaviour pathologised; and
> - a willingness to create opportunities for reflective change in pupils and staff.

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To deliver its aim of restoring good relationships when there has been conflict and harm and to promote a strong positive ethos in schools, RP employ a variety of strategies or practices[1]. These include:

> restorative ethos building;
> curriculum focus on relationships/conflict prevention;
> restorative language and scripts;
> restorative enquiry;
> restorative conversations;
> mediation, shuttle mediation and peer mediation;
> circles - checking in and problem-solving circles;
> restorative meetings, informal conferences, classroom conferences and mini-conferences; and
> formal conferences.

## 3. About the evaluation

The overall aim of the pilot projects was to learn more about RP in school settings and to establish whether a restorative approach could support schools to manage conflict in relationships within establishments and thereafter impact on class climate and school ethos. The specific objectives were:

> to identify the training and support which staff feel is required to enable them to implement the initiatives effectively;
> to explore the different situations, contexts and areas of the curriculum where the new approaches are employed;
> to analyse the ways in which different participants (school staff, pupils and parents) respond to the innovative approaches and the conditions which appear to produce beneficial outcomes;
> to identify the characteristics of schools, staff or others which contribute to positive or negative outcomes; and
> to identify the support required from local authorities to promote and support school-level implementation.

The design of this evaluation forged new ground in a number of ways. It involved working with staff in the three LAs to clarify the nature and goals of the pilot initiatives and develop a methodology for the collaborative evaluation, in which participants, as well as researchers,

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1 Further information on these strategies/practices can be found within the full evaluation report which is available from www.scotland.gov.uk

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played a critical part. Data collection involved:

> Interviews with a range of LA and school staff
> Interviews, individual and group, with pupils
> School staff survey
> Pupil survey
> Observation of a range of meetings, activities and lessons
> Documentary analysis of school and LA policies
> Participation in a range of Scottish Executive, LA and school based meetings
> Analysis of national and school statistical data
> Focus group meetings with school and LA staff

Key staff members in each school were interviewed on a number of occasions over the period of the pilot. In summary, across the 18 schools, we interviewed Headteachers (17); members of School Management Team/Principal Teachers (43); class/subject teachers (48); non-teaching support staff (30), other inter-agency staff (12), and educational psychologists (12). About 400 individual interviews took place with staff in schools. We also met directly with 138 primary pupils and 93 secondary pupils, either in groups or in individual interview. We met with 12 parents of primary pupils and 19 parents of secondary pupils. Each school was visited at least 5 times and findings at each stage of the research were fed back and discussed with key staff.

Evidence from the range of data was considered on a school by school basis, in order to build up a broad picture of progress in each school. Schools began from very different starting points, and had quite varied aims and strategies. Conclusions about each school therefore relate to what they had achieved, in terms of their own context, concerns and priorities.

Although the three authorities in the pilot took different approaches to implementation, there were common ideas and some shared training. It is important to emphasise again that there was a variety of practices, with different levels of formality, and that many of the above terms for practice (cf. Section 2 above) are used flexibly in different contexts, as practitioners made the practices real and labeled them in their own context and settings.

In terms of the evaluation exercise the two major themes addressed were:

1. How did RP develop in the pilot schools?
2. Were RP perceived by participants as supportive and positive?

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To reflect the distinct differences in the approaches adopted by the educational sectors in the pilot, this evaluation will report separately on the development and impact on primary/special establishments and the secondary schools involved.

## 4. How did Restorative Practices develop in the pilot schools?

### Primary/special

The research indicated that the primary schools and the special school had

› a strong focus on ethos and relationships in and out of classrooms and a generally broad view of RP underpinning specific practices;

› strong leadership and positive modelling by head teachers and key staff;

› a major contribution to the developments by class teachers and support staff;

› a focus on promoting restorative language in school interactions, using posters and cards with scripts;

› playground projects involving promoting positive relationships through games and activities supported by trained problem solvers and peer mediators;

› developed restorative conversations and classroom conferences; and

› social skills and cognitive reasoning programmes aimed at developing skills to prevent and resolve conflict.

### Commentary

RP were often seen to be building on developments already started and to be compatible with other current initiatives. Indeed, successful primary schools developed a blended approach to their initiatives and the values and ideas associated with RP provided a 'glue' which was helpful in integrating these into an overall approach. There was strong evidence of cultural change within the primary and special schools - while there still existed a minority of resistant staff. There was strong evidence of restorative language and ethos. The atmosphere in most of the schools became identifiably calmer and pupils generally more positive about their whole school experience; they thought staff were fair and listened to 'both sides of the story'. Most staff were comfortable with the language of RP and identified improvements in staff morale. A small number of schools had raised attainment and in several there was a decrease in exclusions, in-school discipline referrals and out of school referrals, although of course not all of these can be attributed solely to the introduction of RPs. There was clear evidence of children developing conflict resolution skills.

Challenges faced by primary and special schools included:

> continuity of staffing;
> recruiting staff amenable to RP, together with the need to keep the momentum for change going;
> working to bring parents on board and to convince some of the value of the approach;
> developing support structures for the involvement of support staff;
> communication with pupils, staff and parents when a restorative solution has been reached to ensure that the resolution is understood and owned by everyone;
> reassuring all partners that RP are intended to be fair and just for all concerned; and
> developing RP into the area of staff relationships.

As with other school initiatives, key staff were aware that they would need to work at sustaining RP beyond the pilot project. There was also awareness that there could be challenges in sustaining/embedding RP principles to prevent reaction or rejection during episodic 'down' points in the school calendar. Some staff still felt that punishment was a necessary part of their task as teachers. This may indicate that there are different understandings and views about whether RP is seen as the over-arching ethos or merely 'another tool in the tool box'. Senior staff acknowledged that they needed to maintain and develop further training opportunities which allow staff to reflect on the 'big ideas' in RP, as well as practising the skills.

## Secondary
The research found that

> in several schools staff identified and valued the commitment and modelling of RP by key members of staff, especially managers and those within pupil support teams;
> some staff and some departments were using restorative language and conversations;
> some staff identified significant changes in classroom climate and some subject departments were developing restorative strategies;
> interest in RP was generated by trained staff working with colleagues, especially with subject departments;
> in most secondary schools there was development and use of restorative meetings to address conflict between pupils and between staff and pupils;
> several schools were increasing the involvement of pupils as restorative practitioners through buddying and anti-bullying initiatives; and
> some schools also developed restorative conferencing processes, where key staff met with a pupil and their family to explore a problem or harm, using a script and formal structure, to allow all concerned to express their views and feelings and to generate a restorative solution.

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## Commentary

The research indicated that secondary schools had more diverse approaches to the development of RP with most beginning with one part of the school or with pupils with more challenging behaviour. The degree of readiness influenced the approaches initially adopted by schools. Schools, where significant numbers of staff might need further convincing, tended to opt for small-scale 'local' innovation perhaps involving guidance/behaviour support or particular departments. In other secondary schools, where ethos was regarded as already very positive, aims for RP were broader and intended to underpin and complement existing practices.

Challenges faced by secondary schools included:

> reviewing and revising their disciplinary policies and procedures to facilitate restorative approaches;

> offering staff the opportunity to reflect on values and ethos across the school as well as to learn specific practices and skills;

> key staff having to revise expectations to allow more time for change to become embedded in school;

> senior and key staff remaining committed to RP when change was slow;

> the need for all staff to learn more about, and share more about, their experience of RP;

> the provision of structured opportunities for trained staff to develop the confidence to train others in school;

> the need to continue to promote restorative conversations and the use of restorative language across the school; and

> the need to communicate with staff, pupils and parents about outcomes of restorative interventions and to ensure that RP is seen as equitable and just by all those concerned.

The evaluation pointed to the importance of effective data systems for monitoring and evaluation of RP and other approaches to discipline and pastoral care in all sectors. Equally schools could continue to develop and use their monitoring of discipline referrals in identifying areas of difficulty in the school. There was an awareness of the need to explore with colleagues the role and use of punishment and sanctions. In secondary schools the initial development of RP was more strongly linked to 'dealing with' discipline issues, and therefore challenges deeply held beliefs around notions of discipline and authority. Responding to this has proved no easy matter, and the key personnel in the pilot schools were impressive in their commitment and enthusiasm.

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## 5. Were Restorative Practices perceived by participants as supportive and positive?

RP was one of a range of multiple, simultaneous innovations/developments in the 18 schools. This means that it was difficult to attribute direct effect to a particular strategy/intervention. However, it seemed important that RP was compatible with other developments and indeed in some cases that the willingness to embrace RP was an indication of an openness to change. Primary schools in particular were able to develop a 'blended', integrated approach to their various developments that improved overall effectiveness but made it more problematic for the research to isolate the impact of RP.

The table offers an indication of the relative progress of the 18 schools participating in the evaluation. The table was compiled from a cumulative picture of each school, drawn on the basis of all data gathered and on the schools' own views of progress. The indicators of achievement were developed by the research team, based on analysis of interviews with key local authority and school staff.

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## Achievements of schools by summer 2006

| Schools | Primary and Special | Secondary |
|---|---|---|
| Significant achievement across school | 7 | 2 |
| Significant achievement in places | 1 | 4 |
| Early stages but evidence of progress | 0 | 3 |
| Other priorities dominate | 0 | 1 |

**Indicators:**

**Significant achievement across school**
Clear evidence from research of school change
Staff mainly positive views and understandings about RP
Most staff and pupils familiar with key ideas if not the term
Evidence of permeation of practice and of positive outcomes
Evidence of improved relationships within the school
Pupils indicated that they were listened to
Integrated, or working towards integrated, policy framework
Broad focus on values as well as strategies and practices
Staff reflect on practice
Clear impact on discipline and school climate

**Significant achievement in places**
Clear evidence of Restorative practices and developments
Enthusiasm and understanding by key school staff and in some classrooms and subjects
Challenge to still widen across all classrooms or subjects
Key staff and some class/subject staff familiar with key ideas and reflect on practice
Some visible impact on discipline and school climate

**Early stages but evidence of progress**
Evidence of commitment and enthusiasm by key school staff
Some staff trained
Some practices developed in particular settings or by particular staff, eg Behaviour support teacher, or subject teacher in own classroom
Plans in place for further development
Beginning impact on discipline and school climate

**Other priorities dominate**
Other pressures/developments mean that RP not high priority
Some staff wish to promote this but lack of overall clear plans

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## 6. Key points from the evaluation:

> Flexibility to do what fits with individual school needs was seen as a strength, as was the balance of support and accountability.

> Effective development of RP could happen using different approaches - both whole-school and more focused strategies. There is no one model of effective implementation.

> Primary schools emphasised whole school, preventative approaches focusing on ethos, language and values in addition to curricular developments and particular practices such as mediation, problem-solving and restorative meetings.

> Secondary schools were more likely to begin with one part of the school or with more challenging pupils and to develop restorative meetings and mediation. However, some were developing wider approaches, spreading to subject departments and classrooms and revising their disciplinary and pastoral care processes along restorative lines.

> Restorative ethos building became increasingly central to schools implementation; there is a developing focus on the wellbeing of all pupils through RP, rather than only on challenging behaviour and disengagement.

> A continuum of RP was evident in most schools.

> Restorative meetings, informal conferences and mini-conferences were common.

> Mediation, shuttle mediation and peer mediation were widely developed.

> Formal conferencing was not widely used.

> Training/staff development was central - opportunities for internal and external training were both equally important.

> The cost of time for training was seen as a particular issue in rural areas with long travelling times and distances. The costs and availability of cover were particular issues noted.

> Visible support and modelling of a restorative approach by senior managers and key pupil support staff was very important; in the small number of schools where this was less apparent progress was less visible.

> Involvement of parents was still quite limited in many schools.

> Most energy has gone into developing pupil-focused restorative approaches.

> Emphasis on RP for conflict resolution among staff is generally at a very early stage.

> A response or strategy seen by staff as restorative may not always be seen as such by others involved, e.g. a pupil.

> Funding through the pilot project was seen as important by the schools to support their developments; however, there was also evidence of no-cost practice.

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> There was a clear reduction in the use of disciplinary exclusion in primary schools.
> Some secondary schools reduced their use of exclusion.
> RP were implemented successfully in schools with widely differing catchments, including those with high FME rates.

## 7. Conclusions

Such developments as RP take time and this has been recognised by the Scottish Executive who have extended the period of the pilot projects. Nevertheless, the evaluation shows 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. Clearly, as indicated earlier, this progress has to be seen in the context of the whole range of initiatives, practices and developments in these schools during the evaluation period. Indeed one feature of the successful schools is their willingness to reflect on practice and engage with change.

When introduced in schools with at least a number of receptive staff and when the initiative was supported by commitment, enthusiasm, leadership and significant staff development, there was a clear positive impact on relationships in school. This was identifiable through the views and actions of staff and pupils, as well as evident in measurable reduction in playground incidents, discipline referrals, exclusion and use of external behaviour support.

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## List of abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| CSW | Children's Services Worker |
| DHT | Depute Head Teacher |
| FGC | Family Group Conference |
| FGDM | Family Group Decision Making |
| FSM(E) | Free School Meals (Entitlement) |
| HT | Head Teacher |
| IIRP | International Institute for Restorative Practices |
| PS(H)E | Personal and Social (and Health) Education |
| PT | Principal Teacher |
| RA | Restorative Approaches |
| RP | Restorative Practices |
| PATHS | Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies |
| PCP | Person Centred Planning |
| SACRO | Safeguarding Communities, Reducing Offending |
| SLG | School Liaison Group |
| SMT | Senior Management Team |
| VOM | Victim Offender Mediation |
| VORP | Victim Offender Reconciliation Programme |
| WFGC | Welfare Family Group Conference |

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