

PREVENTION OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING  
REPORT ON THE NATIONAL SITUATION

Case Studies in England

**Roger Murfin**

Wilsthorpe Business & Enterprise College  
Derby Road  
Long Eaton  
Nottingham  
United Kingdom  
NG10 4WT

[murfin@wilsthorpe.derbyshire.sch.uk](mailto:murfin@wilsthorpe.derbyshire.sch.uk)



## Case Study Interviews

### CASE STUDY: One

#### NAME, AGE, PLACE

Male, aged 15, Nottingham, UK

#### CASE DESCRIPTION

Attended secondary school as normal and attendance record was acceptable. Comes from a good socio-economic background, parents very supportive of son and tried hard to keep him out of trouble and in education. Student has a good relationship with parents and on a 'one to one' basis' with college staff can be a pleasant and articulate young man, but could be influenced by peer group pressure and often misbehaved to attract peer group attention. Found it difficult to accept criticism and found the college disciplinary policy inflexible. Disruptive behaviour affected teaching of others in his class, especially when he refused to follow the teacher's instructions. Behaviour deteriorated significantly over a 24 month period before being permanently excluded by the college. Did not feel securing qualifications was important for his chosen career – intends to join the army as soon as he is old enough, and did not like doing school work outside of college.

#### ANALYZE THE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE CASE

##### CAUSES

Unable to conform to college disciplinary policy which he felt was 'very strict' and meant he was 'punished for everything'. Also felt that certain teachers singled him out for punishment. Could be easily led into misbehaviour by peer group and regularly associated with young people with similar attitudes. Not motivated to achieve qualifications to improve long term career prospects.

##### APPROACH / SOLUTIONS

The college tried a number of approaches including 'one to one' mentoring; meetings with 'Behaviour Support'; numerous meetings with parents; parental withdrawal of 'privileges' as an incentive towards good behaviour; college detentions; a 'managed move' to another school (temporary move to another school on a trial basis).

##### RESULTS

College approaches / solutions were not successful. Student was eventually permanently excluded and placed by the Local Authority in a specialist unit with an emphasis on practical / vocational rather than academic work. This placement has proved to be more successful and student is happy in this environment but does acknowledge it is only filling in time until he can join the army.

#### GOOD PRACTICES ADOPTED

##### METHODOLOGIES APPLIED

Application of college disciplinary policy; internal 'exclusion'; 'One to one coaching'; Meetings with external 'Behaviour Support' counsellor; meetings with parents; managed move; rewards for good behaviour; regular 'case' meetings between senior staff;

##### SUBJECTS INVOLVED AND THEIR COMPETENCES

N/A

##### RELATED TRAINING ACTIVITIES

N/A

## **CASE STUDY: Two**

### **NAME, AGE, PLACE**

Female, aged 16, Nottingham, UK

### **CASE DESCRIPTION**

Comes from a poor socio-economic background, in which her older brothers do not work. Had a poor attendance record from the age of 12 onwards and the 'Education Welfare Officer was involved at an early stage to try to help with this problem. Student unable to accept college discipline, which she felt was too strict. Parents, despite describing their daughter as being 'very stubborn', believe they have a good relationship with her and were not supportive of the college, eventually withdrawing her to give 'Elective Home Education' (EHE). Student was not motivated by a need to obtain qualifications as she believes these are not essential to achieve her long term goal, which is to work in 'Hair and Beauty'.

### **ANALYZE THE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE CASE**

#### **CAUSES**

Unable to accept college discipline and refused to serve detentions. Poor attendance record – often refused to get up in the morning. Felt she was being 'treated like a child' in college by the teachers. Claims to have been the subject of bullying, but no evidence of this from the teacher. Also, some problems in Mathematics where she felt the work was 'too difficult'. Not motivated to achieve qualifications to improve long term career prospects.

#### **APPROACH / SOLUTIONS**

Applied college 'Attendance' policy and Education Welfare Officer worked to try to improve attendance. Student received several short term exclusions but always re-admitted into college. After exclusion always invited parents to attend a 're-integration meeting' but parents failed to attend on numerous occasions despite letters being sent home. Timetable amended to one which did not make 'too many demands'.

#### **RESULTS**

Attendance not brought up to satisfactory level – parents being prosecuted. No improvement in student behaviour and student continued to refuse to accept college discipline until withdrawn from college by parents to give 'Elective Home Education'. Timetable amendment did not provide a solution.

### **GOOD PRACTICES ADOPTED**

#### **METHODOLOGIES APPLIED**

Application of college disciplinary policy; internal 'exclusion'; Support from Education Welfare Officer to try to improve attendance; Support from 'Connexions'; Individual, 'Less Demanding' timetable offered.

#### **SUBJECTS INVOLVED AND THEIR COMPETENCES**

N/A

#### **RELATED TRAINING ACTIVITIES**

N/A

#### **MOST SIGNIFICANT ACTIONS**

None of the actions taken by the college proved to be successful.

Lack of parental support and lack of student motivation are felt by the teachers to have been the most significant factors in this case.

#### **OTHER**

## **CASE STUDY: Three**

### **NAME, AGE, PLACE**

Male, aged 16, Nottingham, UK

### **CASE DESCRIPTION**

Comes from a poor socio-economic background and has a very poor attendance record which started when aged 13/14 – finds it difficult to get up in a morning. Parents, who now have a good relationship with their son, put this down to 'lack of enthusiasm' and 'long term illness' – although nothing specific was found during medical tests. Student is bored with lessons, especially 'English', but thought practical lessons were 'ok'. Teachers believe student has good ability, particularly in Mathematics and Science and tests suggest that if willing to try, he could be very successful in GCSE examinations. Parents and students believe the strict disciplinary system applied in college is 'generally a good idea'. Student not motivated to achieve academic qualifications and has changed long term career plans regularly but at the time of the interview had long term plans to be a hairdresser and expected to receive training and possibly an apprenticeship, to achieve this goal.

### **ANALYZE THE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE CASE**

#### **CAUSES**

Has a very poor attendance record, only in college for 53% of the time – often refused to get up in the morning because of 'lack of enthusiasm', especially after returning following long term illness. Parents believe they have not been put under any pressure to make him attend although this is not the view taken by the college where records show regular chasing telephone calls to his parents. Student says he is 'bored with lessons 90%' of the time, especially 'English' – both parents and student felt this was because they were 'panicked' into making 'option subject choices' for the last two years in college and chose the wrong subjects. Parents and student feel the college could have been more flexible once it was recognized the wrong subjects had been chosen. Student feels he is 'picked on' by some teachers.

#### **APPROACH / SOLUTIONS**

Applied college 'Attendance' policy and Education Welfare Officer has worked to try to improve attendance. Deputy Head has had regular meetings with mother and student. Student allowed to change one of 'Option Subjects' and moved from 'Sports Studies' to Art.

#### **RESULTS**

Still on college roll although attendance is still well below a satisfactory level. Student will be taking only a limited number of examinations and teachers believe he will significantly under achieve against his ability level.

### **GOOD PRACTICES ADOPTED**

#### **METHODOLOGIES APPLIED**

Application of college 'Attendance' policy; Support from Education Welfare Officer to try to improve attendance; Support from 'Connexions'; Student allowed to change courses during final two years of compulsory education; Parents applied a 'lot of grounding and withdrawal of privileges' to try to improve attendance;

#### **SUBJECTS INVOLVED AND THEIR COMPETENCES**

N/A

#### **RELATED TRAINING ACTIVITIES**

N/A

## **OTHER**

- Student feels the college should offer more interesting course such as photography and feels not enough courses are offered which link to career choices
- Student would like to go to college but is discouraged by distance of travel, cost and traveling time
- Parents feel the college could have given more support and help to catch up when student returned after long term illness, perhaps by offering a part-time timetable
- Teachers believe the college could have offered more 'work related learning'

## **CASE STUDY: Four**

### **NAME, AGE, PLACE**

Female, aged 16, Nottingham, UK

### **CASE DESCRIPTION**

Comes from a reasonable socio-economic background but when aged 15/16 had a poor attendance record. Parents, split up about 8 years ago and student has been living with her father, with whom she has a very good, close, relationship, ever since. She does not see her mother on a regular basis. Has no real difficulty with any particular academic subject but did have some difficulties with her form tutor with whom she was unable to form any rapport. Student believes this led to 'unjustified detentions' and eventually she was withdrawn from college for 'Elective Home Education' (EHE). Unfortunately this was not successful in enabling any examination success and student has now returned into the college sixth form, to try to achieve qualifications which will help in her long term career which is to work with children or 'Social Work'.

### **ANALYZE THE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE CASE**

#### **CAUSES**

Had a poor attendance record when aged 15/16 partly caused by in college bullying and partly because of 'difficulties' with her form tutor and one or two other teachers. Also, student suffered a 'traumatic personal incident' outside college which affected her self confidence and her attitude when arriving at lessons, often arriving 'up tight, upset and needing to talk to someone'.

#### **APPROACH / SOLUTIONS**

Applied college 'Attendance' policy and father and daughter had several meetings with the Deputy Head and one meeting with college Governors. Withdrawal for 'Elective Home Education' was tried and the services of an external counsellor were used to help with the 'traumatic personal incident'.

#### **RESULTS**

Elective Home Education was unsuccessful and student did not achieve any examination success at the end of her compulsory schooling (aged 16). The counsellor used to give support following 'traumatic personal incident' was much more successful and helped to restore student's self confidence, so much so that she has now returned into the college sixth form, although she could have undertaken 'post - 16' courses elsewhere, and she is now highly regarded for her college work.

### **GOOD PRACTICES ADOPTED**

#### **METHODOLOGIES APPLIED**

Application of college 'Attendance' policy; Meetings with Deputy Head and other college staff; Support from 'Connexions'; Support from 'external counsellor';

#### **SUBJECTS INVOLVED AND THEIR COMPETENCES**

N/A

#### **RELATED TRAINING ACTIVITIES**

N/A

### **MOST SIGNIFICANT ACTIONS**

- Excellent support from external counsellor
- Strong support from father.

### **OTHER**

- Teacher believes the lack of qualifications at 16 could affect her long term career prospects.
- The need to keep confidential the 'traumatic personal incident' had a restricting effect on the type and level of support and understanding which individual teachers, who had no information about the incident, could offer.

## **CASE STUDY: Five**

### **NAME, AGE, PLACE**

Female, aged 17, Nottingham, UK

### **CASE DESCRIPTION**

Comes from a satisfactory socio-economic background and had a good school attendance record, apart from ill health absences. Parents split up and student has been living with her biological father since the age of 12. However she still retains regular contact with her mother and their relationship has improved following a low point after the marriage split. Lacks social skills and often gets herself into situations which the majority of students would avoid and this lead to a number of disciplinary problems. Has low self esteem and very conscious of her weight and appearance. Undertook 'Alternative Curriculum' course but only limited success. Left school to start college post-16 course, but dropped off the course before completion.

### **ANALYZE THE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE CASE**

#### **CAUSES**

Poor disciplinary school record and difficult to keep on task in a classroom situation. Lacks social skills and often involved herself in other people's conversations and arguments. Suffered some bullying at school and this continued at college. Bullying was one of the reasons she dropped off the college course but she also fell behind with the work and couldn't catch up. Additionally the college was slow in paying her 'EMA' (Education Maintenance Allowance) and this caused much frustration and financial difficulty. Mismatch between her aspirations and her ability.

#### **APPROACH / SOLUTIONS**

Part of a small school group offered an 'Alternative Curriculum', more suited to her abilities interests and designed to develop social and life skills. Lots of individual counseling and regular, almost daily, meetings with both mother (who was employed at her school) and father, to discuss behaviour. Also supported by 'Behaviour Support' service and 'Connexions' service.

#### **RESULTS**

Student managed to stay on school roll until age 16 and then moved on to college. This was her way of dropping out of the school community, as she could have done the same course in the school 6th form. Unfortunately she experienced similar problems on the college course to those experienced in school and she quickly dropped out of the course. However she then moved straight onto an 'E to E' (Education to Employment) course where she is happy because 'they only have small groups of students' and 'bullying is not tolerated'.