WILSTHORPE WORKSHOP REPORT

March 11th 2009

Agenda

Introduction
- Signing-in; participants; group photograph
- Motivation and commitment of participants

Background
- Introduction to the 'School Inclusion' project
- Partners involved
- National Reports
- Training Package
- Project portal
- Testing of access to 'Teacher's Forum'
- Data Protection especially 'Teacher Experiences' examples

Evaluation of Module 1
- Group discussion on best way to achieve objectives
- Comments on module
- Comments & recommendation for forum

Preparation for next workshop

Any other business

- What to do if teachers are not able to attend the workshop

Evaluation of the workshop

Preparation for the next module

Date, time and venue of next meeting

List of participants

Jane Cowie
Bethan Daley
Prue Drinkwater
Amanda Driver
Mick Flower
Chris Greenall
Alec Lancaster
Keith Lonsdale
Colin Tucker
Roger Murfin
Apologies received from Adelle Cavanagh & Phil Ormerod

Material Distributed

Before the meeting all participants received written copies of:

- UK National Report
- Module 1
- Example comments on the module from the Teachers forum
- Blank Teacher's experiences form

Group Photograph taken in a computer room at Wilsthorpe B & E College

Workshop Minutes

Wilsthorpe project co-ordinator, Roger Murfin (RM), went through the 'Introduction' and 'Background' agenda items. All participants 'signed in' and a group photograph was taken.

RM provided background to the project, information about the position in the UK (including reference to the National Reports) and made comparison with the position in the other partner countries.

Prior to the meeting RM had advise the group what commitment was required from each teacher and these were discussed again, so that everyone was clear.

RM mentioned in particular the need to each submit at least one example of the teacher's 'Experience in Dealing with Early School Leaving Issues' and then submit comments on other teacher's experiences.

The group then moved on to access the actual portal using the computers in the venue. RM provided guidance on how to use the web site and where to locate the 'Teacher's Forum'

The group then moved on to a detailed discussion of Module 1. The following comments were made / agreements reached.

The group discussed how best to submit module comments e.g. either as individuals or a group submission. It was agreed that a group submission would be best with RM collating and submitting responses on behalf of the group. However individual submissions will be submitted by teachers not able to attend the workshops.

All participating teachers had had the opportunity to read through the module before the meeting and this was felt essential to facilitate discussion at future workshops.

The group felt 'Module 1' was good, well written, easy to read and provided a comprehensive overview of the factors influencing school 'drop outs' and a sound platform for future modules.

Teachers also like the 'short sharp' approach which highlights the major factors.

A detailed discussion took place on each chapter.

Chapter 1 – Educational Factors

The quality of the teaching is felt to be extremely important and teachers should be encouraged to 'think creatively outside the box', but in the UK the ability to diversify is limited by 'whole school' targets and the need to encourage as many students as possible to achieve 5 x A-C passes at GCSE level. It was felt that this can sometimes lead to disadvantaging students with lower ability levels.

Higher quality educational leadership is also felt to be essential to motivate staff and students alike. A clear vision and a clear disciplinary system are also essential, but sometimes, students at risk fall foul of a disciplinary system which is too rigid.

An additional barrier to moving on into sixth form education after the age of 16 was felt to be the perception that education after the age of 16 is only for students who are more academic, when in fact the number of 'post 16' vocational opportunities is expanding and no such barrier exists.

Learning styles must be identified and utilised so that students don't just enjoy their practical work.

The University of the First Age was felt to be a useful link for inclusion:

http://www.ufa.org.uk/

On the subject of assessment and target setting it was felt that these can sometimes be demoralising for students who make only slow progress. Making the school more welcoming and non-threatening was also felt to be relevant here.

Inter-school transfers were felt to be a time of high risk of 'drop-out'. It was felt to be too easy for a family to move to a new area and not register at the local school. Families living in 'social housing' were felt to be particularly vulnerable and one good strategy is if Head teachers contact each other so that the new Head can make contact with the family as soon as possible.

The early transmission of background information about the student to a new school was also felt to be essential. Without the right information it is too easy for a student to be put in the wrong group or class and this can lead to major problems. It is also important to know and pass on behaviour indicators and strategies which have worked or not worked in the past.

An early intervention 'bridging' strategy for use in case of need was also felt to be very useful.

Communication - one strategy which has been tried and works well is a system of weekly contact with parents or carers. Although this is heavy on staff time, it can pay dividends with the most vulnerable students as both the student and parents/carers know the contact will be made and students tend to try harder to receive a good progress / updating report.

Turning to distance of travel, students who have been excluded from one school often have an increased distance of travel to the next school and this makes them particularly vulnerable.

The group all agreed that inadequate basic skills and especially poor levels of literacy are a barrier to everything.

Although students want to be treated as adults, sometimes they have an inadequate understanding of how an adult should be treated.

One example quoted in the module is that of a student in a case study who felt that courses on offer were not relevant for a career in the army. The general feeling was that this young person was wrong, but it is up to the teacher to show the relevance of courses and subjects and make clear the link to long term career prospects.

Finally in this section it was felt that one area for further research would be the number of students who have dropped out of 'Pupil Referral Units' without completing their compulsory education.

Chapter 2 – Personal Factors

A query was raised as to what is the significance of 63 days in the context of 'Persistent Absentees' – RM advised:

'A Persistent Absentee (PA) is defined as having more than 63 sessions of absence (authorised and unauthorised) during the year (typically more than 20 per cent absence)'.

Sometimes an unsettled home life is a reason for problems in school, however the group felt that sometimes the reverse can be true and the student enjoys coming to school because of the stability which school offers.

Having said that it was agreed that students who miss a lot of education for 'personal reasons' often find it difficult or impossible to catch up.

It was suggested that in the context of bullying the module should include references to UK Institutions such as 'Childline' or 'Kidscapes'.

One possible solution to students who may leave after completing a significant part of their course is to 'front-load' the course and make it even harder to leave.

Chapter 3 – Family Influences

On the subject of 'Elective Home Education', teachers pointed out that not all parents who take this route are doing so to avoid punitive action by their Local Authority for not sending their children to school. Some parents are able to teach their children at home to a perfectly acceptable or even high standard.

If location factors and distance of travel are a significant factor, then one strategy would be to offer subsidised travel.

In the context of Paragraph 3 – Family Needs / Circumstances examples previously seen by teachers included a parent who was a heroin addict; a parent who was a prostitute; a student who could not sleep at night because of an alcoholic, abusive father.

Spending time between parents who have split up can also allow a student to 'drop off the radar and it can also be a reason why the student is not in school.

Family culture can also play a part – an example suggested was that of Asian girls who go to India 'on holiday' and come back married.

Family circumstances can also play a part e.g. if a family is particularly well off, this can be a dis-incentive to work hard and stay in school. On the other hand, family influences can sometimes lead to girls choosing a career in say 'beauty therapy' rather then staying in school to do A-levels' and go onto university.

Chapter 4 – Community and Social Factors

In paragraph 3 - 'Work culture' the module refers to young people preferring to leave school to take up 'low paid, dead-end jobs' which was felt to happen in practise, however the group did have concerns about how long such jobs will be available and perhaps the current 'credit crunch' and high level of unemployment will mean more students choose to stay on in school.

Concern was also raised about the loss of 'traditional' jobs such as in the mining, banking or car industries, following the decline of these industries. This could lead to some students dropping out because they feel that no matter what they do they will never be able to get a job.

If the local community has a culture of students taking jobs either before or after school this can lead to young people being too tired to concentrate on their studies.

Chapter 5 – After Identification

Teachers had looked at previous comments on the module on the teacher's forum. One of those comments suggested that we should perhaps look for an alternative to 'Ten Top Tips'. Although this was felt to be perfectly acceptable, as an alternative 'Strategies tried and found to be effective' was suggested.

Another useful strategy suggested was 'make the school more welcoming'. Not all parents have good memories of school and this can be a barrier to them coming into school and talking to teachers and supporting their children.

Learning Mentors – it was suggested this reference should be expanded to include 'peer / student mentors'.

'Alternative Schooling' – 'Prostart' is a good model to explore: http://www.prostartuk.co.uk/

An excellent reference book was suggested for inclusion in the database 'How children Fail' by John Holt

http://www.educationreformbooks.net/failure.htm

Date & Time of next meeting

Then next meeting will be on Wednesday 1st April commencing at 3.15pm

The main agenda item will be the next module 'Communication' and all teachers were asked to ensure they read the module before the meeting.