

ANGUS COUNCIL  
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

11 JUNE 2002

“THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM - RESPONDING TO PUPILS”, A RESEARCH REPORT BY THE ANGUS  
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this report is to bring to the attention of the Education Committee a Research Report prepared by the Angus Educational Psychology Service.

**1 RECOMMENDATIONS**

1.1 It is recommended that the Education Committee:

- (a) notes the terms of this report
- (b) notes the encouraging findings about teacher-pupil interaction provided in the research report (a copy of which is available for perusal in the Members' Lounge)
- (c) notes the arrangements being made to disseminate the research findings to all Angus primary schools
- (d) notes that arrangements are now being made to conduct a similar research study in Angus secondary schools

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 For some years the Angus Council Educational Psychology Service has sought to promote and provide training opportunities for classroom teachers in relation to positive approaches to managing pupil behaviour.
- 2.2 The promotion of positive behaviour is essential to a teacher's efforts to establish within her/his classroom the necessary conditions for effective learning and teaching.
- 2.3 The training provided by the Educational Psychology Service has been designed to assist teachers to reduce incidences of poor discipline and to develop strategies likely to enhance pupil co-operation and motivation. This training in relation to Positive Assertive Management (PAM) reflects earlier research findings and basic assumptions about pupil behaviour, whether academic or social, and about teacher responses to that behaviour.

**3 AIMS AND CONDUCT OF THE RESEARCH EXERCISE**

3.1 The principal aims of the research exercise were to:

- examine, through class observation in Angus primary schools, teacher approval and disapproval responses to pupil behaviour
- identify and describe good practice
- make known to teachers and Head Teachers and the Senior Management of the Education Service the outcomes of the research study
- identify teachers' professional development needs and,
- make recommendations on how best these might be met

3.2 A sample of Head Teachers and classroom teachers were asked to participate in this local action research exercise. The finalised sample consisted of 29 classroom teachers (7% of Angus primary teachers) and 16 primary schools (26% of Angus primary schools).

3.3 The action research exercise involved detailed classroom observation carried out with the agreement of each participating teacher. Teachers were observed for three half hour periods and their

responding behaviour was recorded. Teachers were also asked to carry out self-assessments and to identify personal and professional development needs relating to the positive management of pupil behaviour.

- 3.4** Following observation sessions participating teachers received specific feedback from the Educational Psychologist about their classroom practice. Participating teachers all reported their satisfaction with the manner in which observation and feedback activities were managed by the psychologists.

## **4 KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY**

- 4.1** The following are the main findings of the classroom observations undertaken in the 16 participating Angus primary schools:

- Angus teachers demonstrate a higher frequency of positive responding and less negative responding than teachers who were observed in an original national study undertaken by Merrett and Wheldall in 1987
- Angus teachers demonstrate an (appropriate) balance between academic and social responding
- positive responding to pupils' academic behaviour decreases as pupils move up the school
- the greatest frequency of negative responding to social behaviour is found among the least experienced teachers
- teachers with 10-20 years experience are the most positive and the most responsive
- teachers with the greatest amount of experience tend to demonstrate the most negative responses to academic behaviour
- more positive responding to academic behaviour takes place during work on basic rather than on non-basic skills
- teachers tend to have a consistent responding style across time and across curricular areas
- positive behaviour management training is associated with more overall responding by teachers

- 4.2** The above findings will be of considerable interest to colleagues in the Educational Psychology Service and the Educational Development Service in considering future training priorities for primary teachers.

- 4.3** The high levels of positive responding demonstrated in Angus classrooms would lead to an expectation of enhanced levels of "on task" behaviour and, therefore, of improved pupil attainment.

- 4.4** Primary classes observed during the research study were characterised by a positive ethos, and teachers demonstrated a wide range of pupil-centred management strategies. Teacher participants reflected on their professional development needs and how these could be met, thus providing valuable insights about possible future approaches by the Authority to the provision of CPD in relation to effective classroom management.

## **5 CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1** Considerable efforts have been made over recent sessions to provide professional development activities which will enable Angus teachers to become more reflective practitioners. In addition to supporting teacher self-evaluation practices with reference to national quality indicators, specific steps have been taken to set up effective learning and teaching and reflective practitioner networks.

- 5.2** Teachers who have volunteered to participate in such networks have themselves undertaken small pieces of mini action research with a view to assessing and, where appropriate, improving their own classroom practice.

- 5.3** Teachers who volunteered to participate in this educational psychology action research project contributed in essence to a key practitioner network and are to be commended for the open, honest and positive manner in which they engaged with the exercise and with the psychologists who observed their classroom practice and who thereafter provided professional feedback.

- 5.4** The positive outcomes of the research exercise are fortuitous in that they complement a significant level of current activity in Angus in relation to (a) the promotion of direct interactive teaching methodologies which necessarily focus on improving teacher-pupil interaction and on improving teachers' ability to offer their pupils effective "feedback" and (b) the national "Better Behaviour-Better Learning" initiative whose focus is very much on preventing pupil disaffection or demotivation as well as on finding effective ways of addressing incidences of disaffection and demotivation.

- 5.5** In order to ensure that the implications of and messages from this research project are addressed appropriately within the Angus Education Service, the following commitments have been agreed:

- provide detailed formal feedback to the participating schools [**this has already occurred**]
- taking account of the research study, develop a range of CPD opportunities with a view to assisting teachers to improve classroom management skills
- develop and produce a resource booklet for primary teachers in order to enhance their awareness of positive behaviour management strategies which **have been** observed to be successful in Angus primary classrooms
- undertake a similar research project in Angus secondary classrooms [**it should be noted that initial arrangements for this exercise have already been made**]

## **6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

## **7 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

There are no human rights implications arising directly from this report.

## **8 CONSULTATION**

The Chief Executive, the Director of Law and Administration and the Director of Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

JIM ANDERSON  
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

NL/AR