

**PINS What is...? Series:** Answering key questions about policy, guidance and other key issues in working with vulnerable, disaffected or excluded pupils.

## WHAT IS RESTORATIVE PRACTICE?

Restorative practice in an educational context is about restoring good relationships when there has been conflict or harm. It is also concerned with developing school ethos, policies and procedures to reduce the possibility of such conflict and harm arising.

The underpinning principles of restorative practice emphasise the importance of:

- Fostering positive social relationships in a school community
- 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 our actions;
- Fairness and a commitment to equitable process;
- Active involvement of everyone in school with decisions about their own lives;
- Issues of conflict and harm being addressed by the participants, rather than the behaviour pathologised
- A willingness to create opportunities for reflective change in pupils and staff.

To deliver its aim of restoring good relationships when there has been conflict and harm and to promote a strong positive ethos in schools, restorative practice employs a variety of strategies or approaches. These include:

A curriculum focus on relationships/conflict prevention;

- Restorative ethos building
- Restorative enquiry, language and scripts
- Restorative conversations
- Mediation, shuttle mediation and peer mediation
- Circles - checking in and problem-solving circles
- Restorative meetings, classroom conferences and mini-conferences
- Formal conferences.

Such developments take time – typically a 3-6 year programme. The Scottish Executive supported an evaluation of pilot approaches between 2004 and 2006 which showed evidence of substantial change in many of 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. 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 involved in the evaluation was their willingness to reflect on practice and engage with change.

When introduced in schools with at least a number of receptive staff and when restorative practice initiatives are supported by commitment, enthusiasm, leadership and significant staff development, evaluation shows a clear, positive impact on relationships in schools - evident in a measurable reduction in playground incidents, discipline referrals, exclusions and use of external behaviour support.

For more on how practitioners use restorative approaches see the PINS Practice Profile on Restorative Practice by Richard Hendry. Richard is Sacro's National Coordinator: Work with Schools

Richard is also author of: **Building and Restoring Respectful Relationships in Schools: A Guide to Restorative Practice** (2009). Published by Routledge, London ISBN-10: 0415544270

For more on the evaluation of restorative approaches see: **Restorative practices in three Scottish councils: Evaluation of pilot projects 2004-2006 Executive Summary** at:

[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/08/23161140/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/08/23161140/0)

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Nov 2009