

GL Education Group: Response to Children and Young People Committee's Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour, January 2013

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The GL Education Group

The GL Education Group is a leading independent provider of educational resources and training for schools, including literacy and numeracy assessments, SEN diagnostic tools, stakeholder surveys and professional development services. These resources and services provide teachers with the tools they require to help raise standards in education. We work with over 70% of primary and secondary schools in Wales.

The company works through two divisions: GL Assessment and GL Performance.

GL Assessment specialises in literacy, numeracy, reasoning, SEN and attitudinal assessments, and has relationships with over 85% of UK primary and secondary schools. Tests are nationally standardised, giving measures such as National Curriculum levels and standard age scores, and include parental reporting where appropriate. In-depth interpretation services help to identify appropriate intervention strategies. Assessments include the Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT) and Progress in Maths (PiM).

One popular assessment is the Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) attitudinal survey. PASS provides a robust measurement of a pupil's attitudes towards themselves as learners, and their attitudes towards school and staff, and is suitable for pupils aged 4 to 18+. The survey can help schools to identify the root causes of behavioural difficulties and absences and subsequently introduce targeted interventions to address them before they become entrenched. It is already widely used in Wales.

GL Performance provides management tools, stakeholder surveys, professional development and interpretation services for schools. Its portfolio includes:

-- National College training programmes such as Leading from the Middle, Local Leaders in Education and Developing Senior Leadership Teams;

-- Schoolcentre, an online tool that brings together self-evaluation, school improvement and performance management;

- Kirkland Rowell Surveys, provider of contextualised and weighted parent, staff and pupil surveys;
- GO 4 Schools, an online tracking tool that supports whole-school improvement through the efficient capture and analysis of school data;
- Data Interpretation and Analysis Services, enabling schools to exploit fully the data they gather through assessment and self-evaluation.

Inquiry Response

The GL Education Group has extensive experience in helping schools to tackle attendance and behavioural problems. Poor behaviour and attendance can have a significant impact on a child's attainment and it is therefore vital that schools have the information they need to tackle difficulties. The company helps schools to identify the root causes of these problems as well as highlighting those pupils who may be at risk of difficulties in the future so that appropriate intervention programmes can be introduced before they become entrenched.

In order to tackle absenteeism and other behavioural problems schools need to understand the root causes of such behaviours. Similar poor behaviour from different pupils can be a manifestation of different causes and it can be hard for schools to understand these without undertaking proper pupil assessment. The company has found that disengagement is often a cause of absenteeism but the source and focus of this disengagement can often be difficult for schools to identify. One way of addressing this is for schools to use attitudinal surveys to identify the causes of disengagement and subsequent absenteeism.

For example, the Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) attitudinal survey is used by 38% of secondary schools in Wales, as well as over 2500 schools and over 100 local authorities across the UK, to address behavioural problems such as persistent absences. The survey is comprised of short psychometric statements that feed into nine attitudinal factors linked to key educational goals. These include how well children are responding to the curriculum, how prepared they are to learn and their attitude towards attendance. A low score in any factor can accurately pinpoint negative attitudes that may not otherwise be apparent. In the case of attendance, a low score can highlight a potential problem before a child starts missing school, giving teachers a chance to intervene at an early stage and reduce the likelihood of truancy. Using PASS also allows schools to compare their pupils to those in other, similar schools to identify any behaviour trends, such as persistent absences, that may need to be addressed.

Our research shows that a pupil's attitude to attending school can change at least a year before they start to truant. In fact, PASS demonstrates a high correlation between students who have a low score in attitude to attendance and actual attendance a year later. Results indicated a very high ($p < 0.0001$) correlation for the whole of the rating scale and the relationship between attitude to attendance and actual attendance was 0.91.¹ In light of this it is important for schools to identify a low attitude early in order to give them an opportunity for intervention before actual truancy takes place. In Wales, there is a significant use of PASS at transition between Primary and Secondary, so that schools can identify the pupils who have a poor attitude to attendance before they start their Secondary education.

¹ Details about the research are published in: "Attitude Measurement to Bridge the Post-16 Gap" by Glen Williams, Bob Whittome & Phil Watts in - Hillier, Y. & Thompson, A. (Eds.) (2005) Readings in Post-Compulsory Education. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

PASS can also be helpful in understanding the root causes of other poor behaviours, providing teachers with the information they need to improve them. For example, one school found that two students who exhibited similar conduct had very different causes. PASS revealed that one had no self-esteem but a good attitude to school and was well-motivated to learn. The other had high self-regard but a terrible attitude to school. This knowledge enabled teachers to tailor support appropriately, building the confidence of the first student and ultimately improving their attainment while helping the other student to focus on their goals beyond school and put in the work needed to achieve them. Similarly, Ysgol Brynhyfryd², a bilingual comprehensive school in Denbighshire, has successfully used PASS as a tool to help the school improve attainment. The school cites that the survey has had a positive impact in reducing the potential number of NEETS from the school by identifying those at risk of truancy and disengagement and allowing teachers to intervene and provide pupils with the support they need to succeed.

Absences and poor behaviour are known to have a serious impact on pupil attainment and, in light of this, schools should also be considering using attitudinal assessments like PASS alongside other formative assessments of pupil abilities. For example, in Rhondda Cynon Taf, PASS has been used in conjunction with the Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT) to provide insights into pupil motivations and areas where interventions are needed to improve attainment. CAT cannot be prepared for as it measures underlying reasoning abilities and therefore provides schools with a comprehensive profile of a pupil's developed abilities. CAT provides schools with a solid basis for introducing targeted interventions to improve pupil attainment in key areas such as literacy and numeracy. By using PASS, schools can identify if a pupil is disengaged because of difficulties coping with work and as a result is, or is at risk of becoming, persistently absent or disengaged. Schools can then subsequently assess these pupils with CAT to identify where interventions are needed to help the pupil improve.

In addition, an updated version of CAT, CAT4, has recently been published which can further support schools as they work to tackle the causes of disengagement and absences as it additionally assesses spatial reasoning abilities. Pupils with high spatial abilities often have an aptitude for STEM subjects but the way these and other subjects are taught makes it difficult for these pupils to learn during their school careers. This is because teaching, even in STEM subjects, has a strong verbal bias which prevents pupils from playing to their strengths even in subjects where spatial ability is required. This can be a source of frustration and disengagement for many pupils, potentially leading to future absences, poor behaviour and ultimately poor attainment. It is important that schools consider different learning styles and that they are able to identify these pupils and cater for their learning needs. This will help to reduce the disengagement they may otherwise feel. Using these types of assessments alongside attitudinal surveys like PASS will ultimately help to reduce disengagement. Most significantly this will also help schools to improve attainment and reduce the number of pupils who become NEETs upon leaving school.

Another way schools can develop an understanding of the causes of poor behaviour is through using perception surveys. Kirkland Rowell Surveys help schools obtain information about how important particular areas, such as 'how well the school controls bullying', are to pupils and how satisfied they are with the school's management of these criteria. Dissatisfaction with the management of a key area, like bullying or happiness, could lead to absences and poor behaviour if left unaddressed. Kirkland Rowell Surveys can help schools initially identify these potential problem areas and by following it up with PASS, they can ascertain the root cause of any pupil disengagement and intervene to prevent absences and poor behaviour occurring.

² Please see appendices 1 and 2 for further information on how PASS is used in the Welsh schools referenced in the response.

As well as understanding pupils and the root causes of poor behaviour and absences it is important that schools also engage with parents and develop a positive relationship with them. Parents can have a significant influence over their children in terms of attendance and behaviour. Using stakeholder perception surveys can identify any areas where parents are dissatisfied and those who may, as a result, not be providing appropriate support for their children, impacting on their attendance and behaviour. By understanding parent perceptions schools can work to make improvements and also identify those pupils who may need additional support from the school to encourage attendance and better behaviour to mitigate any lack of support at home.

It is important that schools consistently assess pupils and engage with parents in order to highlight the root causes of behavioural problems but also to identify those at risk of demonstrating future poor behaviour and absenteeism. Regular assessment will mean that problems can be identified early and be properly addressed before they seriously impact on attainment. Teachers will need to be properly trained in order to understand how best to use the information obtained from such assessments to ensure that the best results are achieved in the longer term. The Welsh Government should encourage senior management teams to introduce consistent assessment programmes and support teachers as they implement them. This will ensure that the most useful information can be obtained and the most successful interventions introduced to reduce behaviour problems and ultimately improve attainment.

Appendix 1

Case Study – PASS

Boosting Attendance and Attainment at Ysgol Brynhyfryd:

how one school used attitudinal surveying to raise educational standards

“We’ve had good results in terms of improving achievement and attendance. Without the insight of attitudinal surveys, some students would probably not have achieved so much. *PASS* provides us with a good indicator which enables us to put into place preventative measures to support and guide our students,” says Linda Cooledge, the assistant head teacher at Ysgol Brynhyfryd in Denbighshire.

Ysgol Brynhyfryd is a bilingual co-educational comprehensive school for pupils between 11 and 18 years of age, maintained by Denbighshire Education Authority. At present it has 1221 on role, including 206 in the sixth form. The school’s bilingual ethos reflects the community it serves. With around 18 feeder primaries, and a big mix of agricultural and town children, there is no such thing as a ‘typical’ child so teachers welcome all opportunities to broaden their understanding of what motivates their students, how they perceive their own capabilities and what their attitude is like towards school.

Linda, a member of a strong team that provides student support at her school says, “I first heard about attitudinal surveying via my work with Denbighshire 14-19 Network. Then, in 2006, Denbighshire 14 – 19 Network introduced the *PASS* attitudinal survey to schools in the area as part of a county-wide initiative to improve the education provision in Wales. I was interested to see what kind of results they would yield.”

Initially designed as an educational early identification tool, the survey offers insights into how well students are prepared and motivated to learn, and the results can aid early identification of pupils at risk. Sometimes this can be in advance of attitudes becoming behavioural outcomes, such as non-attendance at school, so preventative measures can be taken.

Linda strongly believes using the survey has had a positive impact in reducing the potential number of NEETS (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training). “Each year, we identify nine groups of students who have scored poorly in the nine different learner factors, including feelings about school, attitudes to attendance and response to curriculum demands. This has helped us identify those at risk of truanting or dropping out of school and it provides the basis for frank conversations with those who are at risk of becoming disengaged.”

By talking to the students in time through its Learning Coach System the school can offer viable and practical alternatives which then can have considerable impact on achievement. It has also assisted in helping pinpoint children who might otherwise just fly under the radar.

Now in their fourth year of using *PASS*, the teachers at Ysgol Brynhyfryd have realised that there are even more advantages than they first thought. “For the first two years, we surveyed the students but we didn’t do as much as we could have with the results. Then we began to see the potential and we realised the data could help us to identify those students at risk within our school, which in turn helps us to focus on how best to raise standards and achievements. As a school with an inclusive, caring ethos, student well-being is very important to us. The fact we can also use the information to fulfil the new Estyn framework on student well-being was an unexpected bonus.”

The questionnaire is available for completion in Welsh and in English, with students choosing which language to respond in as part of the completion process. Initially, the school surveyed pupils in the Spring term. "But we soon realised that this meant we were unable to act on issues such as low motivation as it was too close to exams. Now we survey Years 7 to 11 in a two week period in October, making Years 10 and 11 a priority."

Every child at Ysgol Brynhyfryd has access to a learning coach, whose role is to motivate students and make sure they have the skills to learn, providing a lifelong learning pathway. "Although we had learning coaches in place before *PASS* was introduced, we weren't fully using them. Now they are able to focus their efforts. We want to ensure students possess the learning tools they need before they sit exams, so the learning coaches offer a rolling programme of workshops during school time, including time management skills, study skills and self-esteem. These workshops have come about as a direct result of using attitudinal surveying."

More intensive help is given to those groups of students who score poorly on the survey, starting with a one-on-one session. "We undertake an interview with every student who scores red or amber and then decide the most appropriate course of action. We have lots of strategies in place; it could be a session with one of our support team members, referral to school-based counselling, a specific workshop or even an appointment with an educational psychologist or child mental health specialist. We also use outside agencies such as Careers Wales, an organisation of career advisors. They work with our students in small groups or on a one-to-one basis, looking at career paths."

"We've always aimed to meet the individual needs of our pupils, keeping them, engaged and motivated in order to achieve their very best at all times. Attitudinal surveys add an extra dimension to how we realise this," says Linda.

She concludes, "Now we've seen the benefits of using *PASS*, it's time to explore the possibilities of further use so that we are using it to its full potential."

Appendix 2

Case Study: Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC

Building a Brighter Future with the Cognitive Abilities Test and PASS

A three year project, Building the Future Together, is currently underway in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) to improve the life chances and career opportunities for the thousands of young people who live in the borough. With limited resources and the need for tangible results, a combination of GL Assessment's Cognitive Abilities Test and the PASS attitudinal survey is helping to pinpoint where interventions will have the most impact.

“Ensuring adequate basic skills and raising aspirations are both fundamental to increasing the long-term job prospects for our young people. Testing cognitive abilities together with student attitudes gives us the information we need to stimulate more positive attitudes to education across the local authority and to identify any areas that require appropriate interventions,” says Martyn Silezin, schools data officer at Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC (RCT).

Funded by the Welsh European Funding Office, *Building the Future Together* seeks to tackle the disengagement of 11-19 year olds across all 19 secondary schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf - an area of significant socio-economic disadvantage. The aim is to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) and improve future employability.

Martyn, a psychology graduate with 20 years teaching experience, was recruited to the project to look at how data could be used to spot where literacy and numeracy interventions were needed, and then to measure the impact of putting these interventions in place.

He explains: “The first part of the project was to conduct a student review to identify those at risk of leaving school without the qualifications or confidence to move into further education or work. With around 24,000 young people to screen, it was clear I needed reliable tools that would provide robust information.”

“From my time as a deputy headmaster I was already familiar with the *Cognitive Abilities Test* and knew the information it would yield was exactly what was required for this project. After extensive research, I discovered that using these scores in conjunction with the *Pupil Attitudes to Self and School* attitudinal survey would provide extremely useful insights into pupil motivations and build a more detailed picture.”

Measuring ability

The *Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT)* is the UK's most widely used test of reasoning abilities, measuring numerical, non-verbal and verbal reasoning as well as an element of spatial ability. The data can be used to identify pupils' strengths, needs and learning preferences, as well as provide indicators of academic potential at key stages, including GCSEs and A-levels.

Martyn says: “We started by testing with CAT in Years 7 and 9. Interestingly, we discovered that some schools thought they had better cohorts than they did. We also uncovered various pupils who were masking poor numeracy skills by being linguistically very able. It's so important we ascertain this in the early stages – the further they fall behind, the harder it is to catch up.”

Attitudes and motivations

Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) is a survey that gauges pupils' attitudes to themselves as learners and to their schools. It assesses nine core factors, including task persistence, preparedness for learning and attendance attitudes, proven to be closely aligned with academic outcome. It also allows early identification of 'at risk' pupils, sometimes in advance of these attitudes translating into behaviour outcomes.

Martyn comments: "PASS provides an insight into pupils' mindsets that would otherwise be difficult to glean. The nine factors fit exactly with the data we are interested in and help us drill down into any specific barriers to learning. Attendance is always the hardest thing to crack, but we know it's crucial to prevent disengagement or involvement in anti-social activities. Our area is about 2% below the average in Wales, so the fact that PASS results can predict those at risk of playing truant in advance of it actually happening is excellent."

"Once we surveyed the children, it turned out that many who scored poorly were already known to us. The biggest surprise was that the most disaffected and disruptive pupils have a strong belief in their own ability to learn but lack of belief in the system to help them. Knowing this immediately focuses our efforts in the right direction."

Plan for improvement

Part of Martyn's remit for *Building the Future Together* is to monitor progress and prove the distance travelled, so he approves of the digital versions of *CAT* and *PASS*. "Both assessments can be completed online, an attractive aspect for us as we can collect the information electronically – which will form a baseline for future testing – and benefit from real-time returns."

"We're developing a database on what the major issues are and which interventions work most effectively. At the start of the project, there were 241 different interventions in place but nothing to cohesively match the right pupil to the right intervention. Now, the insights we are getting concentrate our attentions. For example, we're finding out where to invest in one-to-one support or when to use our extensive after-school provision of activities designed to engage young people's interest."

With so many young people involved in the project, RCT has implemented a system of youth coaches and key workers to co-ordinate work taking place in each of the 19 secondary schools. "Our key workers aren't trained teachers, so the data from *CAT* and *PASS* gives them an easily readable list to work from. For simplicity, we compile spreadsheets with colour-coded results, and this aids with prioritising who will benefit most from support."

Martyn continues, "The data we are collecting brings to light any obstacles preventing children from fulfilling potential. If they are not displaying overtly disruptive behaviour, they can sometimes stay hidden. For example, there was one boy who seemed happy and cheerful in class and who scored highly with *CAT*, but the *PASS* results revealed he was actually very unhappy in terms of self-confidence and contentment with the curriculum. Finding this type of thing out kick-starts an action plan to get young people back on track before the problems become insurmountable."

Benefits:

- RCT can more easily identify young people who are at risk of underachieving or becoming disengaged with education

- Data is benchmarked to reveal trends that need addressing by area and by school
- Helps focus more clearly on which pupils should be prioritised for support
- Enables better matching of the right intervention to the right individual
- Allows the borough to measure the impact of interventions