

# Isolation in Schools

Investing in Children



By

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## Introduction

We are all members of Darlington Young People's Health Group and we decided to research policies of 'Isolation' within schools in Darlington. Our aims were to investigate what is meant by Isolation in various schools, the effectiveness of Isolation and whether or not the practice of isolating young people has an effect on their health and well being.

Our research was also concerned with how schools could use different strategies and how useful these would be, thus hopefully enabling us to make useful comparisons with the practice of Isolation.

We tried to make this a genuine piece of open research which we hope to make available to children and young people, schools in Darlington, Margaret Asquith, Head of Children's Services and all Heads of relevant services within Darlington.

We feel this research will of great benefit to everyone.

## How we did the research

After lots of planning and discussions we decided to research Isolation policies by asking schools for their official line and by holding an Agenda Day to ask children and young people for their views and opinions.

### **Asking the schools**

We sent out letters to all the primary and secondary schools in Darlington asking them to tell us: (Appendix 1 and 2)

- Their policies of Isolation
- When it is used and how it is applied
- The number of pupils who have been put in Isolation over the last year
- A brief description of how the school evaluates the effectiveness of Isolation

### **An Agenda Day**

We held an Agenda on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006. We gathered children and young people of different ages, different genders and from different schools across Darlington. This was a successful day and we gathered lots of information that we have included in this report.

During the day we asked some specific questions of the children and young people who attended.

We thought it was useful to ask:

- Does your school have an Isolation Policy?
- What does isolation mean in your school?
- Why are children and young people put in Isolation?
- Do you think putting children and young people in Isolation works?
- If your school does not have an Isolation policy, what other ways does your school deal with “bad behaviour”
- Do you think anything else, other than Isolation would work?

## **What we found out**

### **Asking the schools**

We sent out two letters to all the schools in Darlington. (See Appendix 1 and 2). No-one replied to the first letter we sent out, with only a few replying to the second letter. The replies were in the form of e-mails or telephone calls, only one school wrote a letter back.

To help us with our research, we called in ourselves at the different schools in Darlington and picked up copies of their Behaviour Policies.

## **The Agenda Day 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006**

Below are direct comments from the children and young people on our Agenda Day.

### **Does your school have an isolation policy?**

Yes

Yes, you get four warnings before you get put in isolation

Yes, first put on report, other times i.e. when fighting put straight into isolation

Isolation exists in – Longfield, Hurworth, Branksome, Skerne Park, Hummersknott, Carmel

### **Why do young people misbehave?**

They kick off because they are bored

They don't get rewards if they are good

Teachers can be rubbish and lessons are boring

They are upset at home

They do it for attention

Some teachers just have a problem with you

Some people are just naughty and misbehave

### **What does isolation mean in your school?**

When people have a bad behaviour you go in isolation

Sometimes outside the classroom

Head of Year's room

Isolation room

The base

Sit in a room on their own, don't go to lesson for up to 3 weeks, no breaktimes, meals are brought to you without a choice

### **Why are young people put in isolation?**

Talking and not listening

Cheeky, swearing

Wearing jeans

Fighting bad behaviour, not doing work

For being naughty or not completing work

Not wearing correct uniform

Leaving school premises

Refusing to do work

Own safety

### **Where are they taken for isolation?**

Branksome young people are put in the base room where you do work

Back of Head of Year's room- fighting, bad behaviour, not doing homework

Corridor, under the stage, library, cloakroom, outside the class, isolation room (base) outside Head's office

### **Do you think putting people in isolation works and why?**

No and Yes

No, people think it's clever to be put in isolation.

It doesn't work or make people behave

Good points – don't have to put up with teachers.  
Get naughty people out of the classroom  
Sometimes stops fights etc.

Bad points – Can't go out at break or dinner times  
Can't talk to mates  
People aren't bothered about being put into isolation  
Boring  
Unfair  
Bad: It is boring and you work all day

**What are the good things about isolation?**

Less distractions in class  
You don't have to do as much work  
It stops people being naughty  
Good: missing lessons  
You get to talk

**What are the bad things about isolation?**

Sent to Head  
Sitting with teacher at all times  
Excluded from the rest of your friends  
Bad things: you have to stay in  
Getting shouted at

**If your school does not have isolation, what else?**

Detentions  
Sent home  
Naughty boys sent to stand outside of class  
Sent on wall  
Exclusion  
Time out – sat outside Head teachers office

**Other punishments in your school as well as Isolation**

Suspension  
Detention  
Exclusion  
Reports  
Tracking sheets  
Teachers shout at you

**Do you think anything else, other than isolation would work?**

Not really, isolation doesn't seem to work  
Having parents brought into school  
Helping people so they don't get so angry  
Make lessons more interesting, get better teachers  
Give rewards for good behaviour, instead of just punishing bad all the time.

## Conclusion

On the Agenda Day the main thing we found out was none of the children or young people we spoke to thought isolation was a good thing. However some thought it could make them think twice about their behaviour, but in the end we all agreed that it is not good (isolation) and other things should be used

We were told there were many different reasons why young people misbehave and we feel it more important to look at the cause of bad behaviour, rather than just punishing people. All the young people said that a good teacher always listens and is always there for you. They talk to you as a friend rather than bully you.

We found putting people in Isolation affects people. All of us thought it is wrong to be kept in a small room and no fresh air. We were told that being put in isolation can get on your nerves because you get bored. And this makes your behaviour worse. As you are not allowed breaks or any exercise, people can't run off all their energy.

Also we were told on several occasions that while a person is in isolation they miss out on lessons and miss all the teaching. They end up getting lower marks. Teachers sometimes just send work that is nothing to do with the lesson; they just slap something together in five minutes. When a person goes back to their class they are behind and then get easily bored again. One young person drew a picture of a person sat on their own with a dunce's cap on, as an attempt to describe how he feels

We feel that isolation has a bad effect on young people's physical and mental health. It makes people feel inadequate; it can take away their confidence and their self esteem. As well, we feel isolation infringes on young people's rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child insists that:

- All organisations concerned with children should work towards what is best for each child.
- All children have the right to life. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop properly.
- Children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account.
- Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.
- Children have a right to an education. Discipline in schools should respect children's human dignity
- Education should develop each child's personality and talents to the full. It should encourage children to respect their parents and their own and other cultures.
- All children have the right to relax and play and to join a wide range of activities.

## **What We Think Can Help**

Isolation is a punishment that is deferred and we feel like the best deterrents are those that happen instantly. Children and young people go home and then return the next day to school, only to be put into isolation and not being allowed to start 'new.'

We feel it is more beneficial to look at the reasons why young people behave in different ways. Not everyone has the skills to say how they feel. We think a good teacher is someone who will notice a change in behaviour and try to ask what is wrong.

Instead of isolating people, there should be an effort to talk. Children and young people should be allowed to tell their side of the story.

We would like schools to promote a culture of mutual understanding and respect, and we are asking for teachers to try and remember what it is like to be a young person. We feel all children and young people should be asked what they need to develop and move on.

## **Strategies that Work**

These should be ones which help young people who can't do it themselves. Also work to help children and young people understand the effect they can have on the teacher and visa versa. This is why teachers should be given the opportunity to take time to talk to young people and really get to know them. But this boils down to the teacher's ability to build relationships.

Rather than saying to children and young people 'go away, we don't want to know you' schools should learn how to listen, people can change. But it is harder for them if they have been labelled.

## **Appendix 1**

0191 386 7485

0191 386 7492

Glenys.newby@durham.gov.uk

Glenys Newby

28<sup>th</sup> October 2005

«Head\_Teacher»

«Name\_of\_School»

«Address»

Dear Sir/Madam

We are a group of young people from Investing in Children who are looking at isolation in schools. We are writing to you to ask whether you have isolation in your school, and the following things:

- What the policy and procedures are? And can we have a copy of them?
- Have you got any statistics of the isolation in your school?
- Have young people been involved in the influence of the isolation policies and procedures you take?

If you could get back to the group asap it would be a great help.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely

**Katie Armstrong, Zoe Butcher, Kim Malcolm, Libby Finlay**  
**On behalf of Investing in Children Isolation Group**

0191 386 7485  
0191 386 7492  
Glenys.newby@durham.gov.uk  
Glenys Newby

30<sup>th</sup> January 2006

«Name»

**Appendix 2**

«School»

«Add\_1»

«Add\_2»

«Postcode»

Dear «Name»

We are members of Darlington Young People's Health Group and we are currently researching policies of 'Isolation' within schools in Darlington.

Our aims are to look at what is meant by Isolation in various schools, the effectiveness of this practice for both schools and pupils, and whether or not the practice of isolating young people has an effect on their health and wellbeing. We will also be looking at alternative strategies and their value, thus hopefully enabling us to make useful comparisons. This is a genuine piece of open research which will be made available to all schools, Margaret Asquith, Head of Children's Services and all Heads of relevant schools within Darlington.

With this in mind, would it be possible for you to give us the following information:  
A summary of your Isolation policy including when it is used and how it is applied?  
The number of pupils in the last year who have been put in Isolation? A brief description of how the school evaluates the effectiveness of this strategy?

I appreciate that you are very busy and your time is valuable, but we do hope you can help. We feel this research will be of great benefit to everyone.

We look forward to hearing from you in the very near future.

Yours sincerely

**Glenys Newby**  
**Project Worker**  
**Investing in Children**