



Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity

CREID BRIEFING 25

Evaluation of the All Wales School Liaison Core Programme: Research commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government

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Introduction

This research was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2008 to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the All Wales School Liaison Core Programme (AWSLCP). The programme involved school community police officers (SCPOs) working in schools in order to reduce crime and disorder amongst young people and promote the principles of active citizenship. The main activity of SCPOs was to deliver lessons on a range of topics such as domestic violence and substance misuse. They also tried to have a presence in school with a view to establishing positive relationships with young people. The work of SCPOs was intended to dovetail with that of staff delivering personal and social education (PSE).

The AWSLCP became fully operational in September 2004 and adopted a spiral approach, building upon the knowledge and skills of children and young people throughout their school career. Schools were encouraged to 'sign up' to the AWSLCP and in 2008/2009, 98% of schools in Wales had done so.

The lessons and supporting materials of the AWSLCP were designed by the national coordinator and five regional coordinators, all of whom were experienced educational professionals. All lessons adhered to key components of the PSE framework for 7 to 19 year olds in Wales. The SCPOs delivering the AWSLCP were serving police officers with frontline policing experience who applied for the position. All officers were expected to complete level four of the Foundation Degree in Education, and were encouraged to continue their studies through level five to obtain a foundation degree. In each school, the programme was planned jointly by the allocated SCPO and the teacher with responsibility for PSE.

Evaluation methods

This evaluation focuses on the impact of the programme with regard to reducing anti-social behaviour in schools and communities and promoting personal safety. The programme coincided with a period of economic prosperity, when crime rates in Wales and across the UK fell and expenditure on a range of social programmes was growing. It is almost impossible to disaggregate the impact of a range of initiatives which were taking place at this time, all focused on enhancing individual wellbeing and community cohesion. The evaluation therefore focussed on stakeholders' perceptions of the quality of the programme (the process evaluation) and their views of whether it achieved the goals outlined above (the outcomes evaluation).

Methods used in the evaluation included a literature review, key informant interviews, a pupil survey and case studies of programme implementation in eleven schools across Wales (four primary, five secondary and two special schools). These schools were chosen because they had a long-term positive engagement with the AWSLCP. Two researchers spent, on average, two days in each school and its local community conducting over 80 interviews with school staff, SCPOs, parents and community professionals. The researchers also observed seven AWSLCP lessons and conducted 23 pupil focus groups. A survey of pupils in years 6, 8 and 11 was administered in ten schools. Over 1,500 pupil questionnaires were completed and analysed.

The small number of schools visited means our findings cannot be generalised to all Welsh schools, though the volume, quality and consistency of data allows for some judgements to be made about the effectiveness and impact of the programme.

Process evaluation findings

The AWSLCP had been fully operational for six years when we began our evaluation, so as a first step we explored stakeholders' understandings of the role and activities of the SCPOs. The number of schools allocated to each SCPO varied in relation to the geography and population of the local area. The SCPOs we interviewed each had responsibility for between three and four secondary schools and between 12 and 36 primary schools. Each SCPO delivered lessons in two or three secondary schools each week. However, because they were working with different age groups in each school, they generally only met a class about twice during the course of a year. Despite limited contact time, school staff believed that the input of the SCPO reinforced other work in PSE, contributing to good discipline and a sense of safety amongst pupils and teachers.

Co-ordination of activities between teachers and police officers varied. In most primary schools we visited, the AWSLCP lessons were integrated into the curriculum, and, in one primary school, staff were given non-contact time to develop a school PSE programme that incorporated AWSLCP lessons with preparatory and follow-up materials.

Some dedicated PSE staff in secondary schools were allocated time for planning and development of curriculum materials. Co-ordination tended to work less well when registration class teachers had responsibility for PSE delivery. These teachers often had little or no training in this area, engaged with it reluctantly and failed to build a relationship with the SCPO. One secondary school head teacher described the importance of school structures for effective planning and coordination, with time set aside for regular meetings between the SCPO and professionals from other agencies, such as the school's designated child protection officer.

Whilst most education staff were very positive about the input of the SCPOs, some believed that teachers were better placed to deal with sensitive issues such as domestic violence and substance misuse. They worried that police officers would take a prescriptive approach, failing to explore with pupils the social conditions which led some pupils to engage in anti-social or criminal activity. An advisory panel member commented:

How can you have a police officer going in and talking about harm reduction [substance misuse] and things like that? Police officers by definition have to talk about this as illegal behaviour... (Advisory Panel Member)

The supportive policing role of the SCPO varied, but was seen as important because it enabled pupils to meet police officers in a non-confrontational setting. Supportive policing typically involved:

- intervention in incidents to avoid the criminalisation of young people;
- attendance at pupil support groups, with a recent focus on developing multi-agency working;
- involvement in summer camps and outdoor activities with disengaged pupils;
- contact with families;

- facilitation of restorative justice interventions;

An important part of supportive policing involves the formation of positive relationships with pupils. In the pupil survey half of primary and secondary pupils said they would talk to their SCPO about social issues, and pupils in focus groups were generally positive about 'their' SCPO.

Impact evaluation findings

It was generally believed that, as a result of the programme, children and young people were more aware of how to stay safe. 91% of primary pupils and over half of secondary pupils reported greater knowledge and awareness of personal safety issues. Examples of pupil comments include the following: 'I now know what to do if I come across drunk people' and 'I now know how to be sensible on websites because there are pedophiles' [original spelling].

Questionnaire data (across years 6, 8 and 11) showed that pupils were consistently acquiring new knowledge from the AWSLCP lessons, although older pupils were less positive than younger pupils. A year 11 pupil in a focus group commented: 'A lot of people have got that common sense already, but it does build on it and give you a bit more information and get you thinking about it a bit more...'

As part of the survey, pupils were asked if, as a result of the lessons, their behaviour had changed. In response to this question,

- 48% of year 6 pupils said 'yes' and 27% said 'sometimes'.
- 28% of year 8 pupils said 'yes' and 22% said 'sometimes'.
- 14% of year 11 pupils said 'yes' and 25% said 'sometimes'.

There was also strong belief from school staff and members of the community that the AWSLCP was having an impact on pupils' behaviour in terms of preventing and reducing crime. A head teacher said:

I'm sure it [AWSLCP] does save or redirect some of our youngsters and make them stop and think Do I think there's an impact? Yes I do. (Head teacher, secondary school)

Pupils' survey responses indicated that alcohol and drugs misuse posed significant problems, which had been mitigated by the programme. Just over a quarter of year 8 and 11 pupils reported drinking alcohol 'often' and about one fifth said they got drunk 'often'. Examples were given of changes in alcohol consumption:

People on Fridays always tell me to drink alcohol But now I know I shouldn't. (Yr 8 girl)

Because I don't drink that much any more; (Year 8 girl)

I don't get drunk every weekend like I used to (Year 11 girl)

I don't have alcohol every day (Year 11 girl)

About a fifth of year 8 and 11 pupils reported that they took illegal drugs 'often', with a sixth saying 'not very often'. However, the programme appeared to have a positive impact here too:

I stop thinking that drugs are cool (Year 8 boy)

I drink less alcohol and I've been off drugs for 2 and a half years (Year 11 boy)

I used to do drugs but not anymore because what I have learned in school, and outside school (Year 11 boy)

In the primary focus groups there was a strong sense that most pupils saw themselves as 'law abiding', but in the survey Year 6 pupils reported that their behaviour had improved as a result of the programme:

I behave better on the streets.

I've changed by realising that fighting doesn't solve anything.

I don't spray paint anymore.

I don't drink as often.

Pupils in Years 8 and 11 also reported changes in behaviour:

Been more careful on the streets (Year 8 girl)

I stay more quiet when out with mates (Year 11 girl)

Because I used to get into trouble, but now I don't (Year 8 boy)

I don't fight much any more (Year 8 boy);

I don't pick fights as much (Year 11 boy)

Conclusions

Evidence drawn from interviews with the SCPOs and school staff, the pupil survey and focus groups suggests there have been positive changes in attitudes and behaviour as a result of the programme, partly because of the strong relationships forged between police officers and their associated schools. Stakeholders believed that the universal coverage of the programme was one of its key strengths. It was felt that targeting the programme on schools in socially disadvantaged areas would limit its impact and stigmatise vulnerable children.

Despite the positive view of the work of the SCPOs, there were concerns that they might be relied upon to deal with socially sensitive areas, allowing school staff to abnegate their responsibilities. This highlighted a weakness in the delivery of PSE in some schools, where teaching was sometimes delegated to registration teachers rather than dedicated PSE staff.

Overall, the programme appears to have had a positive effect in tackling anti-social behaviour, contributing to crime reduction and improving pupils' sense of safety. However, the programme was implemented during a time of economic growth, which undoubtedly provided the conditions to maximise its impact. It will be important to sustain the programme in the post-recession era, when there is likely to be an increase in crime and anti-social behaviour as a result of social and economic pressures.

Further information

Further information about the project is available from Dr. Gillean McCluskey, CREID, Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ, gillean.mccluskey@ed.ac.uk. All publications and information about this project are available at <http://bit.ly/CREID-project-edu-outside-sch-setting>

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