

# Disruptive anti-social behaviour in secondary schools

*A paper to the PPTA Annual Conference from the Hutt Valley Region*

## **1. Introduction and background**

The Hutt Valley region presents this paper to National Conference 2008 to draw attention to the increasing incidence (see appendix) of disruptive, anti-social behaviour in New Zealand secondary schools and the need to address this trend through a changed staffing formula.

The campaign for a maximum class size of 25 includes the goal of the implementation of all remaining Staffing Review Group (SRG) recommendations. These include significant extra staffing for pastoral and guidance support, weighted towards lower-decile schools. The question is, would maximum class sizes of 25 and targeted guidance staffing address all of the needs of high-risk students?

If maximum class sizes of 25 were gained tomorrow, secondary teachers would still be confronted with the problem of dealing with the behaviour of a significant number of disaffected, unmotivated, disruptive and high-risk students. It is not clear if traditional guidance support would address the needs of these students and their teachers.

To this end, in July of this year, the Hutt Valley and Wellington regions jointly funded a survey among all teaching staff in their regions, to be administered by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, on the incidence of anti-social behaviour in their state and integrated secondary schools. Through this survey, the two regions hoped to provide more than anecdotal evidence to back their contention that the current staffing formula must change in order to recognise the changing times in which teachers work. The report on the general findings will be available at National Conference.

The impetus for this survey came from the 2006 PPTA National Conference, where the topic of violence in our schools was vigorously debated, and a similar survey initiated in 2007 by the Hawke's Bay primary and intermediate principals. That survey concluded that one in five primary school pupils in that region exhibited severe anti-social behaviour in the classroom. It noted that ORRS funding for high and very high need special needs services covered 1 per cent of the school-aged population (though there is also other funding, for example for 'moderate' ORRS and SEG, RTLB, etc, which covers other students). The 2007 survey results revealed 7 per cent of primary children needed such funding, and this is the level at which special needs students in places like Finland are resourced.

It is worth recalling that Executive presented a paper to the 1999 National Conference on 'Special Issues For Decile 1 Students'. Among its recommendations, which would inform PPTA advice to the government and the Ministry of Education, was the recognition that:

current staffing formulae fail to address the extensive and complex learning and social needs of students from low decile backgrounds, and that extra staffing provisions be sought in schools where low-decile students are congregated.

Nearly a decade later, that recognition is still relevant. From the 1999 conference paper came the SRG proposal for decile-weighted guidance and support staffing on top of the base guidance staffing component. The Association's policy is for the full implementation of the SRG recommendations. However, successive Labour-led governments since 2000 have consistently failed to make further progress on its implementation – or to engage in honest discussion with the profession over the real staffing needs of secondary schools.

While it is true that the Ministry of Education has made available several schemes to alleviate the situation in secondary schools, often these schemes are short-term emergency relief, or depend on contestable funding, which requires schools to compete with one another for the severity of their needs. It should be noted that all of the education sector groups involved in the recent operations grant review supported PPTA's position on the abolition of contestable funding models. In failing to address this problem, the government effectively chose to ignore the whole sector.

The Hutt Valley region is recommending, among other suggestions, that a new remedial, at-risk index be developed for possible inclusion in the staffing formula, to cater for the number of high-risk students that currently exist, and that Executive investigate such an index and present its findings to the 2009 National Conference.

## **2. Target Students**

'High-risk students' is the term used in this paper to refer to those whose prior experience renders them incapable of successfully and cooperatively accessing learning in the classroom. They are also referred to in some of the literature as *damaged* or *highly disruptive*. Their prior experience may fall into one or other of two categories.

First, there are those students whose degree of remedial learning needs is so great that special programmes or extra remedial tuition have to be provided on an ongoing basis. These are students, for example, whose literacy and numeracy levels may be at the extreme lower end of the competency spectrum and yet who are of normal or above normal intellectual ability. Often their lack of learning is the result of truancy, transience or invisibility in previous screening attempts. The history of these students now makes them unwilling to learn and cooperate with others in the secondary classroom. These students are not passive learners. They are uncooperative, disruptive and often fractious, because of the gaps in their prior learning. They

need to be taught one-on-one, or in small groups, or in special programmes, to bring them up to par with their peers.

Secondly, there are those students whose social conditioning has made them adopt oppositional, antagonistic and sometimes violent behaviour in the classroom. Often they are peer-led; sometimes they are leaders of their peers. They may display 'gangsta' style behaviour; they may abuse substances; they may be involved in bullying, intimidation and violence towards others; they may come from abusive situations or have suffered from social neglect in their own lives. Such is their 'wiring' that they disrupt the learning of others, challenge legitimate authority in the classroom, recognise few boundaries and social obligations, and usurp much of the teacher's time and attention. These students need to be socialised in order for them to learn. At the extreme end of the scale they may require a process of 'rewiring' before they are reintegrated into the mainstream; as a rule, they require alternative programmes and extra support staff to keep them at school.

These two categories of high-risk students are not necessarily exclusive. Often, a deprivation in prior learning overlaps with a deprivation in socialisation, resulting in a volatile mix for the classroom and a potential 'time-bomb' for society.

### **3. Results of survey**

(These will be made available at conference)

### **4. The impact of disruptive students on learning**

The disruptive behaviour of high-risk students has an impact in the classroom. Their behaviour can demand a disproportionate amount of time from the teacher – this means other students are disadvantaged.

Their behaviour distracts other students from learning. The disruptive students themselves do not learn anything and become disengaged – they are further disadvantaged.

The learning needs of high-risk students are different and require programmes that are not necessarily curriculum-based or are based at a different level of the curriculum to that of a majority of students. The style of learning of high-risk students is often different (for example, kinaesthetic) and is not always catered for in our present system.

High-risk students are more likely to truant, and miss out on their own learning.

The behaviour of these students can lead to their being excluded. This can have a detrimental effect on them, as they struggle to find another school, or drop out. These young people are more likely to be further disadvantaged and become a cost to society through unemployment and participation in crime.

We need to create a system that is responsive to the needs of high-risk students. This system will require special projects, programmes and planning that will require adequate resourcing over and above current levels.

## 5. Possible solutions

This section will look at the programmes already running that may have a benefit for high-risk students. It is clear that a number of programmes already running have a beneficial effect, but are often not available to all students. This is an equity issue and one we would like to see addressed.

The first subsection below deals with national programmes that should be made more widely available, works through programmes that have run or are running, and suggests the establishment of a non-contestable fund to help tailor local solutions to the problem.

The second subsection looks at local school-based initiatives.

The third subsection looks at the possible next steps in improving teaching and learning for high-risk students.

### 5.1 *Current national programmes and initiatives*

**Te Kotahitanga:** A programme focused on Maori potential that provides extra resources to assist schools with Maori students. It statistically has a beneficial impact on Maori, and indeed on all students, and may also have particular benefits for high-risk students.

**AimHi:** A resourced programme, focused on South Auckland schools, which has a beneficial impact on student achievement.

**Literacy:** LPDP and the literacy project have given improved access to language codes, which has had a beneficial impact on high-risk students.

**Numeracy:** The numeracy project gives students the tools to break numbers down and sets them up for life after school.

**New Curriculum:** This has an inclusion agenda, which should provide a better, more flexible learning environment to improve learning for high-risk students. Unfortunately, this flexibility is limited by under-resourcing and under-staffing.

**New suspension and stand-down rulings:** These rulings, which stress a school's responsibility in educating all students, including those that are high risk, emphasise the need for schools to work positively with students exhibiting anti-social behaviours. Engaging high-risk students has a positive impact on the student and society. Unfortunately, these initiatives are currently not resourced.

**Schools Plus:** The drive to keep all students at school till the age of 18 is entirely compatible with improved resourcing for high-risk students – if properly resourced and implemented.

### 5.2 *Examples of successful local school-based programmes*

Where high-risk students are removed from stressful classroom environments and nurtured through relationship-based initiatives, success can be achieved. These initiatives are often focused on local student need and are based on routine, principles and positive social values. Naenae College ran a programme 'Wero' with high-risk students, where education outside the classroom, combined with good relationship management, helped establish a nurturing environment for their students. However, it had to be discontinued due to lack of funding and timetable inflexibility. Such programmes, if they are to be sustainable and extended nationally, will require changes to the staffing formula and additional resourcing.

Small project-based technology classes: Wainuiomata High School has run a multi-lined programme with students, some of who had been high-risk students in the junior school. This initiative provides a project-based approach to learning which can accommodate multiple curriculum areas. However, classes need to be small (and should be around 15 students), which creates class size pressures elsewhere under current funding regimes. Where a positive impact for disruptive students can be proved, extra funding for staffing should be available and so, again, there would need to be staffing formula changes to allow it to flourish and be extended.

Taita College, Bishop Viard and St Bernard's run special Year 11 classes with low numbers focused on achieving basic literacy and numeracy credits. They may have the same teacher for Maths, Science and Physical Education. This home room approach is resource intensive and currently partially funded via a ministry fund. This sort of funding should be non-contestable and based on a school's ability to meet established and transparent criteria. To extend it would require staffing formula changes and new funding based upon an objective measure of need across all schools.

Class size limits: Where schools are choosing to maintain small classes in the junior school, the needs of high-risk students can be more fully met and the students can be engaged more fully in a safe environment. To meet its potential, though, either the remaining recommendations of the SRG report would need to be fully implemented or additional targeted staffing built into the staffing formula.

### 5.3 *The next step*

Where pro-social programmes have a beneficial impact on high-risk student behaviour, the benefits for the school, the student and society are immense. It is essential that these programmes be supported now. The 'Special Issues for Decile 1 Students' paper presented to this conference in 1999 raised many of these questions. The ministry's response of contestable funds, bureaucratically loaded schooling improvement initiatives and effective, but restricted programmes

has been completely inadequate. Change is long overdue. Below are some suggestions for moving us ahead.

Funding should be established that provides for schools to run special programmes that meet the needs of high-risk students within a school setting. The funding available should be linked to an index that picks up accurately the distribution of high-risk students in all schools. We believe that there are high-decile schools with large numbers of high-risk students, as well as lower decile schools.

This resourcing needs to be in addition to the current decile-weighted operations grant components, which serve to address educational disadvantage among low income social groups rather than specifically addressing the needs of high-risk students who may be from any socioeconomic group.

However, since there is a clear correlation between socioeconomic status and proportions of high-risk students, the funding should be weighted to schools with a high proportion of Maori and/or Pasifika, schools of lower decile rating, schools with a high immigrant population, schools with high student turnover, and schools that have taken significant numbers of suspended or excluded students from elsewhere.

It is noted that one mechanism may be ORRS-type assessments of individual students, which generate resourcing for those students. If this is a possibility, then it needs to be developed without simply transferring the ORRS model into this area, since that model in itself has very significant drawbacks.

Funding for high-risk students should be tagged to programmes for those students, and schools should be expected to report on the programmes they are using and the success of those programmes.

There should be additional support and guidance applied to help schools that are not achieving measurable improvements with their high-risk students over time.

The Alternative Education system may need to be reviewed and additional resources applied to ensure that high-risk students who need time away from the 'normal' school setting have available to them a safe and educationally productive environment, staffed by specialist teachers with skills in working with these students.

Secondary schools should all have access to non-teaching professionals who can support the work of teachers with these high-risk students. This would include social workers and health professionals with appropriate training, qualifications and skills. This will help both the teachers and high-risk students directly, but will also allow the wider context of the students' environment (such as home and community) to be more adequately integrated into re-normalising the student's behaviour and engagement in education. These no-teaching professionals may also be able to

work with primary schools to limit the development of high-risk behaviours at the earlier ages that secondary schools currently have to cope with.

## **6. Conclusion**

If our students with disruptive and anti-social behaviours are going to be given a fair chance in the system, then the union needs to put concentrated effort into establishing an alternative way of resourcing high-risk students. In a flexible age of futures thinking and large-scale policy development, it is time education came up with some tangible support for teachers in schools. This will help turn the tide of teacher resentment and set an environment for learning in schools that is more conducive to success now.

This paper argues that to improve the behaviour of our most high risk students it is necessary to have a combination of national projects that provide teachers with the time and the professional learning support to make a difference for these students, as well as locally tailored solutions that nurture this group and give them a chance for success in the future. Money spent now will mean money saved in the future, as these individuals develop more constructive relationships with society.

## **Recommendations**

1. That the report be received.
2. That PPTA demand that the government extends both the funding and the criteria for students eligible for GSE-funded interventions in schools.
3. That PPTA assert that the practice of providing short-term, limited, contestable funds for programmes that have proven to have had a beneficial impact on students' learning and achievement is destructive for those programmes, and insist that the government desists from using this funding mechanism.
4. That PPTA insist that the government fund programmes proven to have a beneficial impact on students' learning and achievement on an equitable basis across New Zealand.
5. That PPTA insist that the government increase significantly the resourcing available to schools through targeted funding to reduce the need for stand-downs and suspensions in schools with high-risk students.
6. That PPTA insist that the full recommendations of the Staffing Review Group 2000 (SRG) be implemented to provide the staffing resourcing required to create appropriate guidance, support and learning environments to maximise the engagement of high-risk students.
7. That a new index with which to target staffing to students who are at high risk of disengagement and dangerous and disruptive behaviour be investigated.

8. That PPTA prepare a report on successful programmes and people's experiences in them.
9. That, in the next round of claims development for the STCA, PPTA consult with members about the development of greater salary incentives or allowances for teachers in hard-to-staff schools.
10. That Executive report back to next year's conference on their progress in meeting these recommendations.

## Appendix

A sample of recent newspaper articles from Wellington's *Dominion Post* suggests an increasing incidence:

### **NZ 'failing kids who struggle to learn'** [*Dom-Post* 11/1/08]

This article reports a British education expert's criticism that New Zealand is failing learning impaired children due to lack of resources and programmes to address their special needs. The article specifically identifies, among other problems, the lack of screening to pick up attention-deficit disorder.

### **Bully Girls** [*Dom-Post* 24/5/08]

*'Queen Bee' mentality sparking violence and aggression in schools.*

This article refers to Ministry of Education figures that show a 41 per cent increase in girls being stood down, suspended or kicked out of school for assaults between 2002 and 2006.

### **Schools told violence will rise** [*Dom-Post* 29/6/08]

This article refers to a visiting British researcher's warning that New Zealand schools need to brace themselves for an increase in violence, truancy and expulsions, and that they should consider stepping up school security.

### **Beating the school bullies** [*Dom-Post* 3/7/08]

This article reports that an escalation of physical violence and emotional bullying has sparked a major investigation by the children's commissioner.

### **Safe family project in disarray** [*Dom-Post* 3/7/08]

This article reports that the \$15 million government family violence project is in disarray and refers to researchers who state the Hutt Team was particularly struggling and that this area had especially high levels of family violence and a lack of services.

### **Alert for school gun threats** [*Dom-Post* 18/7/08]

This article reports emergency planning guidelines are under way by police and educational officials, to deal with 'mass casualties' at a school due to an armed rampage.

### **Violence and abuse rampant in schools** [*Dom-Post* 22/7/08]

This article states that violent, disruptive or misbehaving pupils were suspended, stood down or kicked out of school more than 27,000 times last year, with 14-year-olds being the worst culprits. More than 1600 pupils were removed from school for serious misconduct, most under the legal leaving age of 16. It acknowledges that suspension rates overall hit an eight year low, but reports that principals reject suggestions that behaviour has improved and says they attribute the decline to schools being under pressure to cut suspension rates, even though staff often face violence and abuse.