

## Warrington Horizons School – The impact of Team Teach

Edward Dewhurst is responsible for a KS4 PRU, and comments on the impact of Team Teach in a learning environment.

Warrington Horizons is a Pupil Referral Unit and therefore caters for vulnerable and challenging young people. In September 2008, Ofsted reported that :

*"Students' enjoyment of their education is outstanding as a result of the great gains in motivation and the very positive attitudes to learning which are established as soon as they join the unit".*

*"The pastoral care of students is very good. The strong commitment of all staff secures their enjoyment and promotes health and safety effectively. This supportive environment helps students to grow in confidence and motivation"*

The school's adoption of Team Teach strategies has been a major contribution to the above observations. Our focus from the start was not on the "physical handling" of pupils, but instead on the de-escalation strategies that Team Teach has as its underlying philosophy.

The first 2 day course in 2005/6 opened the psychological door in terms of how to truly support a child when they are in distress. This led to the complete overhaul of the school's disciplinary systems by putting in structures which were designed to "catch the pupils being good" and let them see how this positivity leads them to a much more rational approach to their own behaviours. Positive points systems and rewards were the priority, with sanctions being firmly in place when needed. Consistency and fairness were the cornerstones of the change in approach. The school developed successful intervention strategies which further reduced the "crisis management" of pupil behaviours.

In November 2008, the school invited Team Teach to return for a "refresher" course. We were able to re-visit previous decisions, changes, alternative strategies etc. with a view to ensuring that positive handling strategies were consistent and appropriate. In the 2 year gap between visits the need for handling reduced to 1 case only ! Staff and pupils had arrived at a similar point – that unless there is a major unforeseen crisis, handling pupils was

unnecessary – pupils were aware however that staff were trained and able to apply the handling strategies if required.

Warrington Horizons calls our adaptation of Team Teach, “positive handling”. This is a broad term which encompasses our practices of de-escalation strategies, positive points gaining, consistency and fairness. Pupils are aware that we deal with pupils as individuals, but that they must aim to embrace this positivity in their actions and attitudes towards school.

This is supported by the use of Positive Handling Plans. These are a plan for each pupil showing their “trigger” behaviours, and suggest tactics for de-escalation. The plan is brief, just 1 side of A4 which shows everything that is needed to identify potential areas of difficulty and how to resolve them **before** they become significant and cause a pupil to go off task. They are working documents available in the group folder for each lesson. Staff regularly update them offering new strategies as appropriate. All staff are therefore up to date for every pupil which eliminates opportunities for inconsistencies to creep in. Daily de-brief meetings ensure the integrity of the system.

Pupils appreciate the system and often contribute themselves, seeing it as a method of encouraging self control whilst having safeguarding measures built in. Parents have commented that they have seen a significant change take place in their children and the Local Authority and Ofsted have observed a significant improvement in pupil attainment and attendance with a dramatic reduction in exclusions. Ofsted reflected that :

*"Staff work well together as a confident team so that when students arrive at the unit, their attendance improves, they settle quickly and show a clear determination to succeed. For many, given their past histories, this is a considerable achievement. The students' enjoyment of their education is outstanding. This is due partly to the climate of mutual trust, very good pastoral care and the interesting lessons and activities".*

I have no reservation in recommending Team Teach to any and all Education practitioners and Local Authorities. It is a major contribution to improving the expectations and motivations of young people.

If it succeeds in the problematic pupils of SEN, PRU's and the like, why not in mainstream ?

