

Restorative Practice in Swansea schools: A small-scale evaluation



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Summary

Restorative Practice has been a priority for the City and County of Swansea for the past three years, following the successful use of Restorative Justice locally. Restorative Practice is seen as a way to equip organisations working with children with prevention and early intervention tools, with a view to reducing the number of referrals.

This report presents findings from a small-scale evaluation of practitioners and pupils which sought to gain their perceptions of the Restorative Practice processes being used in their settings.

The report was commissioned by Swansea Council's Prevention and Early Intervention Team and undertaken by researchers at Swansea Metropolitan University of Wales Trinity St David.

The research looked at five key areas: training; experience and understanding; benefits and challenges; processes used before Restorative Practice; and any changes they felt were needed to the Restorative Practice processes used in their settings.

Adopting a qualitative approach the research methods consisted of six focus groups and eight semi-structured interviews. Thirty-five participants (twenty-one pupils and fourteen practitioners) were involved in either a focus group or semi-structured interview and a total of nine hours of audio material was collected. Thematic analysis of transcriptions was focused around the five key areas and the findings were presented under these headings.

The majority of key findings from practitioners were positive and included:

- an overwhelmingly positive response to the Restorative Practice training;
- a request for Top-up or on-going training;
- recognition of the sense of calm Restorative Practice had developed within the children and within the school environment;
- acknowledgement of pupil voice within the Restorative Practice process;
- identification of a reduction in the number of incidents in school;
- recognition of the fairness Restorative Practice brought to resolving conflict.

The majority of the key findings for pupils were positive and included:

- a request for specific Restorative Practice training to include materials to share with family members;
- acknowledgement of the time Restorative Practice gave them to talk, be listened to, get to know their peers and be treated fairly;
- recognition of the opportunity to 'off load' any worries they may have; to share how they felt; and to gain understanding from their peers;

The biggest challenge highlighted by practitioners and pupils addressed similar concerns. The majority of practitioners questioned how to engage pupils who don't feel remorseful or who are cynical about the Restorative Practice process. Similarly pupils discussed their frustration at other pupils who would not engage with or who would laugh at the process.

The Prevention and Early Intervention team is already addressing a number of the key findings identified in this report. To enable these findings to be considered alongside the areas currently being addressed by the team, they have attached their action plan to this report.

1. Introduction

1.1 Restorative Practice

Restorative Practices have developed from the concept of Restorative Justice; a growing social movement that takes an approach to justice that is concerned with more than the violation of the law. Rather than considering 'only legally relevant issues ... to protect both parties' rights [Restorative Justice seeks to expand] the issues beyond those that are legally relevant, especially into underlying relationships' (Braithwaite, 2002:249).

This broader view of the breakdown of relationships between all stakeholders allows the focus to be placed on repairing the harm caused by the crime to the individuals, communities and relationships affected by it (Payne et al, 2010). It offers all stakeholders the opportunity to come together and collectively repair and resolve the conflict (Zehr & Mika, 1998) and in doing so, transfers some of the decision-making responsibility from the legal system to victims, offenders, their families and community members (Kurki, 2003).

Similarly, Restorative Practice within a school setting views misconduct as an attack, not on the school as an institution, but on the people within it and the relationships between them (Cameron & Thorsborne 2001). It seeks to develop dialogue around the incident, the specific context and circumstance (McCluskey et al, 2008), and places emphasis on restoring relationships by encouraging discussion between all stakeholders. The processes are designed to restore, resolve and repair (Cameron & Thorsborne 2001).

Research into the impact of Restorative Practice has had mixed results. In their critique of current theoretical models, McCluskey et al (2008:200) highlight the widespread support that has been documented for Restorative Justice in schools, "'We've got the best morale we've ever had ... people feel good about themselves, and the children seem to be happier. They feel more enfranchised, and that people care about them' (Porter, 2005, p. 2). 'The staff have seen some amazing culture shaping at the school ... the number of disciplinary interventions has dropped' (Chmelynski, 2005, p. 2) ... 'There are hardly any conflicts any more' (Henskens-Reijman and Van Pagee, 2003, p. 94)''.

In a large, independent evaluation of Restorative Justice in schools, Bitel (2005:13) concluded that when implemented correctly, Restorative Practices could 'improve the school environment, enhance learning and encourage young people to become more responsible and empathetic'. Blood and Thorsborne (2005) note that schools using Restorative Practice processes solely as a reactive response have limited impact and it is those schools that employ a wider remit for Restorative Practice which have the most

success.

Wong et al (2011:846) found that schools implementing a restorative whole school approach (RWsA) 'exhibited a significant reduction of bullying, higher empathic attitudes, and higher self-esteem'.

However, it has also been noted by Bitel (2005) and Chmelynski (2005) that Restorative Practice processes had little impact on outcomes such as exclusions and pupil attitudes. More recently, Standing et al (2012) similarly found Restorative Practices had little impact on improving behaviour.

Another pertinent consideration addressed by Blood and Thorsborne (2005:6) is time. They suggest schools introducing Restorative Practices will require '3-5 years if change is to be sustained'. McCluskey et al (2008), state that the head teachers they worked with recognized that Restorative Practice processes could take 5-10 years to become embedded.

1.2 Restorative Practice in Swansea

In 2009, an Intervention Board was put in place for Swansea Council's Child and Family Services following a number of serious case reviews. The focus of the Board was to investigate the high number of referrals into the Service, which had become unmanageable. This was due, in part, to a severe shortage of Principal Officers coupled with a high level of looked after children (LAC). It was also considered that a significant percentage of the referrals could have been dealt with at an earlier stage and the focus was to equip establishments, particularly schools, with prevention and early intervention tools.

One of the interventions put forward by the board was Restorative Practice. It was seen as a way of supporting an early intervention approach and to reduce referrals.

Restorative Practice has been a Council priority over the last three years, following the successful use of Restorative Justice locally. It has been rolled-out across schools and organisations working with children and young people.

The first phase of the roll-out focussed on training those schools which had the highest level of deprivation. By April 2013, nearly 4,000 people had attended the Introduction to Restorative Practice course. The Prevention and Early Intervention team provide the training. This training utilises a whole school or whole team approach and ensures that members of staff are trained together. Whole school training has been offered to all schools. At the time of writing, 47 out of 80 primary schools and 7 out of 14 secondary

schools have received the training, as well as one special school and a Pupil Referral Unit. Training has also been rolled-out across thirty other agencies and teams working with children and young people in Swansea.

1.3 Report rationale

Initial anecdotal evidence gathered by Swansea Council's Prevention and Early Intervention team from practitioners implementing restorative practices suggest they are:

- making a difference to pupil behaviour in classrooms;
- creating strong working relationships between pupils and staff developing calm classroom environments;
- improving relationships between staff, pupils and parents;
- reducing the number of issues;
- allowing children to deal with issues which are distracting them from learning – making them happier coming to school;
- improving attendance and behaviour;
- encouraging children and adults to take responsibility for their actions and
- creating an environment in which students feel safe and secure.

2. Research

2.1 Research Aims

To gain pupil and practitioner perceptions of the Restorative Practice processes being used in their settings.

The research looked at five key areas:

- training;
- experience and understanding;
- benefits and challenges;
- processes used before Restorative Practice; and
- any changes needed to Restorative Practice in their settings.

2.2 Methods

This research adopted qualitative methods consisting of focus groups and semi-structured interviews in participating schools.

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with practitioners; a focus group was also used with practitioners who, as a team, had joint responsibility for the Restorative Practice roll-out in their setting. All participating pupils took part in focus groups.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted on-site in a quiet room provided by the settings. Interviews and focus groups were audio recorded to enable transcription. The 8 interviews lasted between 30 – 50 minutes and the 6 focus groups with practitioners and pupils lasted between 15-50 minutes. A total of 9 hours of audio material was collected.

The focus groups and interviews were organised around the five key areas and these were explored through a series of seven central questions (with further questioning depending on the answers given – see appendix). There are set out below:

1. What RP training have you had?
2. How have you disseminated the information on to Children? Families?
3. What are the most important aspects of RP for this school? Your class?
4. What experiences have you had with the RP initiative?
5. What are the benefits and challenges surrounding RP in your setting?
6. How are Restorative Practice processes different from what you used to do?
7. What, if anything, would you change about the RP initiative/ process in your school?

2.3 Participants

Data were gathered across both primary and secondary schools. Swansea Council's Prevention and Early Intervention Project Manager selected the two participating schools on the basis that they have been implementing restorative practices for a year or more.

There were 35 participants involved in the study; 21 pupils (aged 4 to 18) and 14 practitioners teaching across the age range of their school.

2.4 Ethics

The research upheld the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011).

2.5 Data analysis

Interviews and focus groups with practitioners and pupils were transcribed and a thematic analysis of the transcriptions was focused around the five key areas of training, experience and understanding, benefits and challenges, processes used before Restorative Practice and any changes needed to the Restorative Practice implementation. The findings have been presented under these five headings and quotations have been used, where appropriate, to demonstrate the particular patterns in the findings.

3. Results

3.1 Training

3.1.1 Training summary

The majority of practitioners were overwhelmingly positive when asked to discuss the Restorative Practice training they had received. They frequently highlighted the benefits of the training, particularly the practical nature that included the opportunity to be involved in role-plays and circle scenarios. This aspect was seen by the majority of teachers as the most successful. Others felt it had also been well structured, had worked well, created a comfortable environment and had given a clear picture of Restorative Practice principles as well as providing them with lots of good ideas.

A few practitioners felt it wasn't always targeted at situations they deal with or the age group they work with and one practitioner, working in the nursery, felt that it didn't consider the youngest children in the school.

When discussing how they had disseminated information to pupils and families, the most frequent response was via assemblies. Two teachers explained how pupils were involved in Restorative Practice processes but might not be aware that it was a Restorative Practice process.

Disseminating information to parents was dealt with very differently in the two settings. One setting had not yet engaged with the parents and the other had trained a number of parents who went on to write a letter to the rest of the parent body explaining Restorative Practice. That school also offered Restorative Practice training to the local community.

When asked about how they found out about Restorative Practice, the responses from pupils were more mixed and varied than those of the practitioners. Some students remember being told about Restorative Practice in assembly, others stated that they were told by their class teacher and a small number felt they only found out about Restorative Practice when they went to talk to someone because they were “being bullied”.

When asked what they would change about Restorative Practice within their setting, the most popular response from pupils in the secondary school focused on the need for more information because it was felt that Restorative Practice was not publicised enough throughout the school. Practical sessions including role-play scenarios were mentioned by a number of pupils as an effective way to present this information. A number of pupils discussed the benefit of sending information home so pupils could share this with their families.

Pupils who received mentor training all felt it had been worthwhile. They discussed how it had provided them with new skills and an understanding of Restorative Practice. Two students referred to the video they had been shown, with one highlighting how it could be shown to younger pupils too. Another stated how they found the question cards useful when working with younger pupils.

These pupils also felt there were a number of changes that needed to be made to the mentor training. Conducting the training over a number of days was discussed by some pupils to allow for a greater breadth of information and also to give pupils time to apply the Restorative Practice processes they were being taught. Having the ability to reflect on their experiences as part of on-going training was considered as a possible benefit.

Another specific concern was the timing of the training. A number of pupils felt that holding the training during the summer holidays meant that some pupils missed out because of family trips. Others felt that by the time they returned to school to apply it was difficult to put what they had learned into practice.

3.1.2 Pupil results

When asked how they found out about Restorative Practice the responses were mixed. Some of the students were told in an assembly, while others were told by their classroom teacher.

'We had a talk in assembly, I think, I can't really remember' (Child T).

'I think we had an assembly, with [the head teacher]. She was teaching it to us so we could understand what our teachers are doing with us (Child S)

'Our teacher told us. We just walked into class one day and the teacher said, 'right, you've got to get into a check out circle' and we were like, 'What's a check out circle?' and then the teacher explained it was about restorative practice' (Child V).

'Our teacher told us and we just do it now' (Child U).

A number of students reported they only found out about RP when they went to talk to someone because they were being bullied.

'I went to see the head of the bullying department and he said he needs to sort it out immediately ... He basically said that he was going to get a group of people, the people who had been picking on me and some eye witnesses and we are just going to go into a circle and sort things out ... As I'd never heard of it before, I was willing to give it a shot. He gave me a little bit of information and said we were going into a circle and we'd talk about each other's views. ' (Child H).

'In my last primary school I was bullied a lot, like really badly and I was on my own for three years with no friends. I wasn't in school a lot because I didn't want to go and my mum went to the school but then they called me a snitch and it got worse... Then, this lady came to my house and she gave us some information about RP' (Child I).

A number of pupils were given specific training to become mentors for younger pupils. They felt this was worthwhile and gave them new skills and an understanding of Restorative Practice.

'The training day was quite interesting because we learnt something new like how to deal with arguments with younger children' (Child M).

'We got taught how to ask the questions in a tidy way, to make the children feel comfortable. So, we just learnt the questions on that day really (Child O).

'We learnt a lot on the training. We were given information and given practical role-plays to try the questions out. It really helped understand what RP is about' (Child P)

Two students commented on the video they had been shown during the training, with one highlighting how this could be used for younger pupils too.

'They showed us a video at the start just to show how it worked in another school ... so we kind of knew what the purpose of it was and why we were doing it. Then, we kind of got split up into smaller groups to go through role plays. It worked.' (Child H).

'I think the video we saw on our training day, that was really useful, and I think that would be good to show the younger years ... It would show them how it is working in other schools, then they could see why we are doing it and why they need to be educated on it' (Child N).

Another stated how useful the cards were.

'We took the cards away with us, which have definitely been useful. If anything has arisen ... obviously we also learnt a lot during the session. The guy that came in was really good at what he did ... I think it was quite good that it was quite informal, and a smaller group worked better because you got more attention and they made sure you were doing it right' (Child P).

When asked if they would change anything about the ways in which they had received information about RP, the most popular response focused on the need for more information. It was generally felt that RP was not publicised enough throughout the school.

'I think it would be good to have a presentation because it tells other people in the school that might not have the courage to tell someone. You can then tell them what they can do and how they can tell someone and stuff like that' (Child H).

'In our school we have specific days called RBF days, where we learn about subjects outside of the curriculum. RP could definitely be incorporated into one of those days because everyone has those days' (Child P).

Practical sessions, including role-play scenarios, were mentioned by a number of students as an effective way to present the information.

'You could have a RP day. Where people go to different sessions about different things. They could even have the questions themselves so they can get used to answering the questions and if there is any occasion then where they have to answer them, they can then' (Child O).

'More role-plays, so we can get used to being in the situation of asking questions and being in the situation of the other people' (Child N).

'I would change the way it was taught to us, especially for the little ones, because they get really bored sitting in assembly. So, I would have the teacher tell them quickly and then they could have a check in to start it off and have a practice' (Child S).

One pupil felt it was only those people who had sought help for a problem, who would have information on the process.

'The only people that know about RP are the people that have gone to tell the teachers because I think the RP is like the last resort' (Child H).

Those students who had received mentor training suggested additional sessions to allow for a reflection of RP in practice.

'It could have been spread over two days so we could have learnt more about it, more about RP' (Child O).

'Maybe the initial session you are introduced to everything and you get everything then but then a couple of months later you have a reminder session ... I think when you put something into practice you see the pros and cons of the actual process. So, if we did have a follow up day we could discuss what we had come across and what we would like to question them about' (Child P).

The timing of the training was also raised with some of the pupils feeling that holding it during the summer holidays* meant some pupils missed out. Others pointed out that by the time they had an opportunity to put what they had learnt into practice, some of it had been forgotten.

*(It should be noted that mentor training was provided in the summer term but some students may have already finished school because of their exam timetables).

'It shouldn't be in the summer holidays, because I feel like I've missed out, and even though I'm there to help, I can't offer ... if there was an incident in front of me I wouldn't really know what to do because I haven't got the cards or anything. So, I think it was just an inconvenient time because I wasn't going to cancel my holiday. So, if it could be done in half term or during term time (Child L).

'Because it was in the summer holidays by the time we got back in September a lot of it, we obviously hadn't been thinking about it over the holidays, so we had forgotten quite a bit. So, it would be more useful to have it in term time' (Child M).

3.1.3 Practitioner results

When asked about the RP training they had received, many of the practitioners discussed the success of the practical, interactive nature of the training.

'It was done in a good way. Interactive. We were given examples. It was good, much better than having just a paper chain in front of you or someone just talking' (Teacher A).

We had some theory in the morning, which was nice and helped us understand what it was because it was completely new to me. So, it was nice to have the theory and we then put it in to practice with some role plays and things in the afternoon. In the role plays we changed who we were so we could see it from different perspectives and that was really handy too' (Teacher C).

I think a lot of the initial training day was spent focusing on the questions...an we would normally be asking and looking at the negative response we were always having. Questions like, 'why did you do that?' and obviously they don't know why, they haven't got the answer and then that creates a problem in itself. A lot of that day was looking at the questions we should be asking and the different responses you have with those particular questions. You could see quite quickly, by using the questions in a role-play, how the responses and the approach to a situation was very different just by changing the questions you were asking the pupils' (Teacher E).

'Having been given a short introduction to the principles of Restorative Practice we then split into various teams and did some role play. We then took part in a circle and saw how it could be implemented and how to use it in a school scenario.... It worked really well, the role-play. A lot of it was looking at how to avoid that confrontational language' (Teacher F).

'The training day gave you a clear picture of what RP was, what the four principles are, and lots of different strategies that we could use to embed RP in the school ... It was a very interactive day ... It wasn't a case of this is a strategy, it was actually trying it out. We did check ins, and we prepared for restorative circles. Lots of good ideas came through on that day' (Teacher G).

A number of practitioners highlighted the overall success of the training.

'No, I wouldn't change anything about the training. Definitely not, not about the training day. It was good' (Teacher G).

'The training followed a very well structured programme, the training day and the three days. It was a really comfortable environment, great' (Teacher R).

'The training was excellent' (Teacher V).

When discussing the video, a few practitioners felt that it did not give much information and wasn't always targeted at situations they deal with and the age groups they were involved with.

'Part of the training involved the justice system. You saw video clips of youngsters in America but the bits I preferred were more related to our age group. Just looking at the questioning and the problem circles, and how to address conflict in that way' (Teacher A).

'The DVD didn't give much information. There was some but it didn't give the detail. There was enough there to give you a flavour of the impact that RP could have' (Teacher G).

'We watched a clip of four boys from America and they had destroyed a historical bridge in a town, I thought it was a bit over the top ... it was to highlight the restorative process and the fairness, but it is not the sort of situation we are dealing with in school' (Teacher X).

'As my children are very young...I had to take from the training how I could fit that for the children that I work with, and you can. It is not something that needs to be done a specific way. With restorative practice, what we have done is take the principles and use them effectively with the age that we are working with. We don't use the question cards because our children are too young. Instead of asking "why?, if there is an incident or problem, we will ask "what happened?" and will bring the two children together. Sometimes their language is not great but you can model the language for them' (Teacher W).

One practitioner highlighted the success of training school staff as a whole.

'We are very lucky that all staff are on-board and that goes back to the whole staff training. Everybody getting trained together. If we'd have trained ten members of staff and they'd have cascaded that information back we'd never have had as good a 'buy-in' as by doing it as a whole staff' (Teacher G).

3.1.4 Dissemination

When discussing how they had disseminated information to pupils the most frequent response was through whole school assemblies.

'There have been talks in assembly from different members of staff' (Teacher B).

'They've had an assembly' (Teacher C).

'With the children, I have shared our vision, the terminology in whole school assemblies' (Teacher G).

'They've heard about it in assembly and within some of their classes' (Teacher R).

Two practitioners explained how pupils might not be aware that they were involved in an RP process.

'We do lots of RP things with the kids but I'm not sure how much we use the term RP. I'm not sure how aware they are of the term but they're aware of check-ins and circles and the questions. They're aware of the processes but probably not aware of the term RP.' (Teacher B).

'The children wouldn't know it is restorative practice but they would know it's a check-in, and they know we talk about happy and sad in the check-in (Teacher W).

When discussing how they had disseminated information to families the settings had taken different approaches; with one setting taking a more proactive approach while the other took a more reactive one.

We haven't sent any letters or anything to parents but if something has arisen then we do get in touch and explain the process to the parents because a lot of them don't know what RP is. I think a letter for parents would be beneficial' (Teacher R).

'We have the PTA and they are the funding arm, and then the parent guardian council are our sort of message arm. So, they come together and work on different topics like head lice, or smoke-free environments. We did a restorative practice session with them and they've designed a leaflet to parents, from parents to explain what restorative practice is ... It works really well. It's not another letter coming from the school, it's from the parents and they can all talk about it at the school gates' (Teacher W).

'We have opened up and offered RP training to anyone in the community who wants it. There has been a big uptake' (Teacher X).

3.2 Experience and understanding

3.2.1 Experience and understanding summary

When asked to comment on any Restorative Practice experiences or any changes it had brought to the school, the most frequent response highlighted by practitioners was the sense of calmness. Practitioners discussed the sense of calm the children were demonstrating and the sense of calm Restorative Practice had on the school environment as a whole.

Providing children with the time and space to discuss their feelings, giving them a voice and equipping them with the skills to be able to discuss their feelings were seen as some of the positive experiences provided by Restorative Practice.

A reduction in the number of incidents was highlighted by a number of staff and not having to revisit issues, as they were not reoccurring after circles had been held was seen as an important aspect of the Restorative Practice roll out in their settings.

The relationships that were now developing between staff and pupils and pupils and their peers were highlighted as was how the involvement of pupils in the process made it more likely that they would accept the issue and the consequences given.

When discussing check-ins, two teachers highlighted that although the circle may not be able to solve the problems the pupils discuss, they felt that the relationships and community that they were building through the Restorative Practice processes provided them with good support structures.

The majority of pupils, when discussing their Restorative Practice experience felt they had been positive and successful. They generally felt that the use of circles gave everyone the ability to hear both sides of the story; to talk through their issues; to help people understand what they had done wrong (which one pupil felt led to a much more compassionate interaction); and to try and resolve their problems. When considering check-ins they discussed the opportunities these gave them to discuss any worries they may have and share how they felt as well as to gain understanding from their peers.

There was a similarly positive response when pupils considered how these processes made them feel; happy or happier was the most common response because it was seen as time for them to talk, be listened to, get to know their peers and be treated fairly. Developing confidence was also an outcome cited by one pupil.

3.2.2 Pupil results

Many of the pupils expressed support for the use of circles, believing that they had a positive impact on situations by allowing them to hear both sides to a story, to sort out problems, to help people understand the effect they had on others and by contributing to a much more compassionate interaction between the parties.

'If there is a problem, it will get dealt with. Say someone hit someone and they hit them back, they would both have to tell their side of the story and work out what is going to happen next' (Child S).

'Problem circles work because you get to hear from both people. You get to hear both sides of it' (Child T).

'Problem circles are useful because it helps the child understand what they have done and how it has made people feel' (Child M).

'Check-in means that when there is a problem, your teacher can sort it out' (Child Y).

'When it's used it works really effectively, I think. I've been on one of the panels when it's been used and it made the bully realise how he might have made the victim feel and there was much more compassion between the two then' (Child P).

'Problem circles are good if anyone gets into a fight and they are really sad about it. If they are just a little bit sad, then we don't do problem circles but if they are really, really, really sad about it then we do a problem circle. They are a circle like check-outs but we don't do 'Syt wyt ti?' [a welsh phrase

meaning How are you?] We ask them what happened and they tell us how they'll sort it out' (Child S).

When discussing check-ins a number of pupils acknowledged how they allowed them to share their feelings to express any worries they may have.

'In the check-in, we go around and see how everyone is feeling. It's good! We sit in a circle and ask how everyone is feeling. There is a board on the door with; happy, sad, excited, angry and then you stick your name on whatever you're feeling and then you can tell in check-in why you are feeling that' (Child T).

'In check-ins and check out you see how you are feeling. So, if you are sad everyone will listen to that and try not to upset them anymore. Like yesterday I was sad and I didn't want to say why so everyone just left me but checked that I was alright' (Child T).

'In check-in we get into a circle, and then we say "bore da" and then we say "how we're feeling?". We do check-outs but we don't say "bore da" or "goodbye" we just say "Syt wyt ti?" and if you've had worries in the day you can tell everyone then (Child S).

'You can give out all of your worries, without people laughing at you' (Child S).

'We need check-ins to see if we're happy or sad. If you scrape your knee on the way to school, you can tell Miss and put a plaster on' (Child 1).

Some pupils highlighted that check-ins may not always be successful and could be superficial as pupils may not always engage with the process in a truthful or meaningful manner.

'You've got children who are a 'one' but will say "four" just to fit in and say they are happy when they are not' (Child I).

'Sometimes circles are annoying because everyone just says "happy", "happy", "happy" to get it over with' (Child 3).

One child stated that if you missed check in you were unable to share your feelings for the rest of the day.

'If you miss check in, you can't do it for the rest of the day. You can't tell how you are' (Child 1).

When asked how the RP process made them feel all pupil responses were positive. They felt the circles made them happy [or happier] because they could talk, be listened to and treated fairly.

'They make you feel happy because you have been treated fairly' (Child T).

'The problem circle made me feel much happier because everyone wasn't butting in and you were sitting in a circle and then one person could talk and then the next and the next' (Child S).

'Happy because I know someone is trying to help me rather than teachers in my old school who would say, "You're just being silly, just all be friends" and they wouldn't really talk about it. Now I'm happy that someone is there to help you talk about it' (Child I)

'Happy, because it's good' (Child Y).

One pupil commented that the processes developed pupils' confidence as they were encouraged to share their feelings in public.

'I would say the circles and the check-ins have made people feel more confident in themselves because they're able to say how they feel in front of people and it just allows them to be more confident' (Child H).

It was also noted by one pupil that RP could also allow time for children to get to know other members of their registration class.

'I think a good thing about circles in registration in the morning is that it gets everyone, especially in the younger years when they don't know each other as well, it gets them to know each other and gets them more relaxed at the start of the day' (Child N).

3.2.3 Practitioner results

When asked to discuss the most important aspects of Restorative Practice, the relationships that are developing between staff and pupils and pupils and their peers was highlighted as an important aspect.

'I think the relationship of staff to pupils, that's a big thing coming from the effective statements, coming from the questions, from the check-ins. Pupils are recognising that staff have got an interest in their lives and it's not just about teaching them. You know, we're interested if they've got a problem. The whole staff-pupil relationship has improved' (Teacher D).

'We had a ESTYN inspection recently and they recognised RP as 'sector leading practice' and we will be asked by ESTYN to write a paper on this... The inspectors were constantly talking about how noticeable it was that pupils looked after each other... and that again is a consequence of restorative practice. Well, that is restorative practice, that is restorative practices being used They recognised it as a good part of the school ethos' (Teacher G).

Lower levels of reoccurrence was another important aspect of RP in schools.

'For year seven, I understand my pupils are younger, the circles have been really effective. I was looking at, when we've done a circle we record it on the system, and I was looking through it the

other day and I haven't had to revisit many circles at all whereas before you would find you were dealing with the same issues over and over again. There has been less of that, I feel" (Teacher D).

Giving pupils the skills to discuss their feelings in relation to conflict was also seen as an important aspect of Restorative Practice.

'I think it's giving the pupils the confidence to talk about their feelings and what has happened. It is also about giving them the skills to discuss what has happened and how to resolve it and either deciding to be friends again or deciding that they clash and they are just going to leave each other alone. I think it's giving them the skills and the maturity to do it' (Teacher R).

When asked to comment on any changes to the school experience for themselves or the children since introducing the RP initiative, the most frequent response highlighted the sense of calmness they felt it had brought to the school;

'There is now a sense of calm around the school. It's had a calming effect, that's the best way to describe it' (Teacher F).

'We have tried to eradicate 'why?', 'Why did you do that?' It immediately causes a negative response, obviously, 'what happened?', that just calms everything down and gives everyone an opportunity to talk' (Teacher G).

'I often feel the school is a lot calmer. You often feel that it is a lot quieter, there is just more of a calmness and I think it is because of the way staff respond' (Teacher D).

'It was a totally different school before; it has changed the whole atmosphere of the school. It used to be quite a spiky place to work, because you never knew what was going to kick off and how bad it was going to be. Now the whole school is a lot more calm' (Teacher V).

'The school is a lot calmer, there is no doubt about that, difficult to measure I know. We've got statistics that say there are less incidents but sometimes you will get to half term October/ November where the incidents start to creep up again but it's just that time of year and then they start to drop off after Christmas again but with eight hundred pupils you will always have some conflict but it's just a calmer feel' (Teacher G).

In circles, it's that first question, 'What happened?' you're not saying, 'Why did you do this?' and accusing the child straight away. It's that element, that opportunity to say what happened and we're going to listen to their side of the story. I think that's a key question at the very beginning, it seems to just calm everything down' (Teacher C).

'I'm calm, yes, calm. I rarely get stressed with the children about behaviour, we just don't have those sort of issues now' (Teacher X).

'It stops me. It calms. We're not snapping at each other. We're not on a treadmill ... It's not about the teaching it's our social relationship' (Teacher V).

'Having six lessons in a day sometimes you might say things in a certain way which is not effective. [RP is] just trying to be a lot calmer about things in your own approach and not be so ready to get your heckles raised' (Teacher F).

'My approach has been a lot calmer. I don't get stressed, I don't shout. Well I try not to' (Teacher X).

'If you say "what has happened?" there is instant calm, so even if they are in the wrong and they have done something terrible they know they are going to be heard. It gives you an opportunity to be calm as well. I was teaching here years ago and I was really stressed and now I'm only stressed about the academics and I don't have to stress about behaviour' (Teacher X).

Providing children with the time and space to discuss their feelings, and giving them a voice, was also an aspect which was discussed by a number of teachers.

'There is a misconception that RP is for schools that have discipline issues, big exclusion rates. It's not. It certainly isn't for us. It's about building relationships. So, I think there are a lot more positive relationships between staff and pupils ... Pupils know they have the opportunity to talk and to be listened to. Pupils show a great deal of respect towards each other... It has strengthened the ethos in the school. It hasn't changed the ethos, but it has helped to strengthen it and will continue to strengthen it' (Teacher G).

'Before, you just found you were punishing reoccurring behaviour all of the time. I think it is just a frustrating approach. It is an approach used in schools because of the sheer number of pupils here ...but I think RP has given everyone the insight to be able to discuss their feelings' (Teacher R).

'I think it has changed the ethos of the school. Now it's ok to come and discuss your feelings in front of your peers' (Teacher E).

'[The question] 'what do you think should happen next?' you know, before I didn't used to care what they thought, I would tell them what was going to happen next. RP gives them the opportunity to talk and to have input' (Teacher D).

'We used to ask 'Why?' and it wouldn't encourage a conversation. They'd just shrug their shoulders and that would be it. The questions are different now. They encourage talk rather than discourage it' (Teacher F).

'Everyone is treated fairly because the process through the school is the same. Children from nursery to year six know that if there is a problem, and that their behaviour has impacted on someone else, that it would be dealt with in this way. There are consequences for what they have done but there are also opportunities for them to make it right. They are not vilified for being the 'naughty' one ... In terms of behaviour management, it's consistent and everyone knows what to do, including staff, children and parents ... and it is giving everybody a chance to discuss their feelings, their opinions and it is giving everybody a voice' (Teacher W).

'Don't ask "why?". Don't ask a child "why?" because you are not going to get anywhere. [Restorative Practice] gives them the window of opportunity to voice their feelings' (Teacher V).

A number of staff mentioned a reduction in the number of incidents following the introduction of RP.

'It is very difficult to measure whether it is successful or not, but when you talk to [teachers in the school] you will see that the number of incidences that we have had with regards to behaviour, as the year went on, reduces and I think that has to be an effect of using Restorative Practices There could be lots of reasons for why it drops off but it is far too much of a coincidence for it just to be a total coincidence ... It is to do with staff working restoratively' (Teacher G).

'If you look at our data for exclusions from two or three years ago, the half day exclusions, full day, three day It has totally turned it around and I can't remember the last time it happened' (Teacher V).

'I think without RP we would have had far more exclusions. Like I said, the incidents of exclusions and reduced timetables are much less now than four years ago. We just haven't got the incidents' (Teacher X).

'Resolving conflict between staff and pupils using a circle means you have less incidences following that. If we never held that circle the incidences are very likely to continue' (Teacher D).

It was also highlighted that, although the circle may not be able to solve some of the difficulties faced by the children, the check-ins helped them to deal with their problems more easily by building relationships and communities with others.

'In one I observed on Wednesday morning, there was one girl who shared that she was a one [on a scale of 1-4] because her nephew was in hospital that week. Immediately the girl next to her put her hand on her shoulder and that is lovely because there is a relationship building between the group and the rest are now aware that today that girl is fragile. They might not be able to fix it but they can support and that would never have happened if check-ins didn't take place' (Teacher D).

'When we do our check-ins because of the area we are in, often their problems are not going to go away but because they are being listened to and being given ways of handling it and dealing with it, that relationship and the community feel helps them deal with it that little bit better' (Teacher V).

One teacher noted how, in the check-in, pupils might not want to share the reasons they are feeling sad with the whole group but as the teacher she was able to follow things up privately.

'We check-in during the morning on a mood board, because it is an older class they are growing up so they might not share why they are sad but I will monitor it, if a child says they are sad regularly and then they lift during the day it is then obviously not something school related and I would monitor that and follow it up privately' (Teacher X).

Four practitioners noted that where issues were discussed in a problem circle they were less likely to reoccur.

'The majority of mine have been successful, there have been a few that haven't worked out but the majority have turned out well and I haven't had to revisit them' (Teacher A).

'In my experience if you can get the wider circle of friends involved it works a little bit better because they are all there and they are all hearing it. So, although they are not involved directly, they are all aware of the problem and they can keep an eye on it. So you don't get students back stabbing or trying to be sly because everyone knows what is going on and what has been agreed. It normally deals with the problem and stops it reoccurring because everyone is aware of the outcome' (Teacher B).

Problem circles work well. If it's a problem regarding a few children, we'll have a problem circle and they are all used to those. It's what's the problem, ways of solving the problem and ways forward. If it is something that has happened on the playground and it is a persistent problem, we would do a private conference where we would go through the questions, and usually we don't have the same issues arising afterwards' (Teacher X).

'The circles I have felt have gone really well are when you have had conflict between staff and pupils, but it is essential to have staff 'buy-in' ... Naturally, if a pupil is constantly disrupting a lesson and there is a breakdown in that relationship that lesson will always be disrupted unless there is a change ... and as soon as staff are happy to share how they feel about the situation it is amazing the impact that has on pupils... the disruptions then normally stop' (Teacher G).

Two teachers noted that sometimes more complex issues arise that which can then be passed on to a specialist for support (e.g. child protection officer).

For some children restorative practices are very difficult. They're not able to engage with the process. So, I don't think you'll hit every child. We have a welfare officer in school so if the restorative practices in the class are not working for a child there are other things in place, like councillors coming in' (Teacher X).

'We've had disclosures as well. We write notes, it has taught us to be very focused and whatever children disclose or are worried about, 99% of the time we can act upon it there and then. Other times then, we have a note of it and we'll action it. If we need to speak to the parents at the end of the day or we need to pass it to the child protection officer then that is dealt with from the office' (Teacher V).

Another teacher noted that RP allows them to engage with difficult, emotional issues.

'We deal with things that are quite difficult and emotional and RP allows us to be emotional about them. We don't have to be smiley, happy people all of the time' (Teacher W).

One practitioner highlighted that involving pupils in the process made it more likely that they would accept the issue and the consequence.

'The majority of my circles have been successful. I'll be honest, I have had one terrible one, where another teacher had to come in and help me out. But on the whole, as I keep coming back to, as long as they are part of the process and they understand that even if there is a consequence at the end, as long as they are part of it they are more likely to accept it' (Teacher C).

3.3 Benefits and challenges

3.3.1 Benefits and challenges summary

When asked to consider any benefits or challenges fairness was considered to be the overwhelming beneficial aspect from the majority of practitioners. One practitioner also cited improved attendance as a benefit.

A number of practitioners took the opportunity to express their concerns and referred to a number of challenges. The most frequently discussed challenge was the need for staff and pupil 'buy-in'. Practitioners highlighted the difficulty of engaging pupils who were cynical about the process or didn't feel remorseful for their actions against others. Having the emotional maturity to engage with Restorative Practice was also highlighted as a barrier to the process, especially when dealing with pupils with special educational needs.

Time to hold circles was another aspect that was highlighted a number of times although it was also acknowledged that the initial outlay of time would lead to more time saved in the longer term because incidents were less likely to reoccur.

Having to react restoratively when dealing with really challenging behaviour or when a pupil had been rude to a colleague was also brought up as a challenge by a number of practitioners.

Two practitioners noted that sometimes issues arise in a circle that need to be passed onto others within the school, like a child protection officer or school councillor.

One practitioner noted how, during check-in, pupils might not want to share with the whole group the reasons they are feeling sad. In those circumstances, the practitioner was still able to follow things up privately afterwards.

Pupils, despite their predominant support for Restorative Practice processes and its ability to resolve conflict, also took the opportunity to express their concerns. The need for pupils to 'buy-in' to Restorative Practice was equally apparent when pupils discussed

their frustration at circles in which other pupils would not engage with, or would laugh at, the process. It was recognized by pupils that this hindered the overall process. Two pupils highlighted how they might end up arguing more after a circle because someone might say something offensive or pupils might not tell the truth, which could make the situation between the pupils worse.

One student suggested that leaving time between the incident and the circle could allow the problem to escalate and one student voiced concern that the process may be perceived as 'soft', particularly when dealing with more serious incidents.

When discussing check-ins, a number of pupils noted how they could, at times, superficial, with one commenting that,

'Sometimes circles are annoying because everyone just says "happy", "happy", "happy" to get it over with' (Child 3).

Others stated that pupils would say they were feeling 4 (the best score they could give meaning they were happy) even when they weren't, because they wouldn't want to share publically with the group due to a fear of being laughed at or because they didn't want to share personal information in front of the group. However, it was also recognised by one pupil that if they said they were feeling sad but didn't want to explain the why, the teacher would often talk to them individually after the circle.

3.3.2 Pupil results

When asked about the benefits of Restorative Practice the most frequent response was related to check-ins and check-outs and the opportunities they give pupils to share and express how they are feeling.

'In check-in, everyone knows how you feel. So, if you are sad people won't bully you anymore' (Child T).

'A good point about check-in is you get to tell people how you are feeling and you get to tell people what is going on and stuff like that. It gives children of all ages a voice' (Child S).

'If someone is upset we can talk about how to make it better. Like this morning, I said I was upset because my brother fell and hurt his leg, but no one could do anything about it because he'd already done it but they made me feel better by talking to me and once we started doing work I felt better then' (Child U).

'If someone kicked you and you didn't know who did it, someone else would tell Miss' (Child Y).

Two pupils noted that if you said you were feeling a 'one' in the circle the teacher would talk to them after the circle.

'Some of the circles I have been in the teachers will say "How are you feeling out of one to five?" Five is the best and one is the worst, and you just give a number and if you said one the teacher would have a word with you after the class to talk about it' (Child I).

'If you don't want to talk about it in the circle you can say you're a one but you don't want to say why and the teacher will come and see you at the end of the circle to see if you're ok or if she could help' (Child S).

When discussing the negatives of the RP circle process, pupils' not 'buying into' the process was a frequent response. It was recognised that this hindered the process.

'Sometimes they are annoying because they just laugh and don't care if they have done something wrong' (Child W).

'Sometimes people say, 'I'm not saying sorry' or 'I don't care' and that gets me annoyed' (Child S).

'Sometimes if you're in a circle, they will not tell the truth and then you can't solve the problem' (Child U).

'Problem circles sort fights out. If someone has been bullying you, you ask them for their side of the story and you tell your story until they get the full story and then they sort it out but sometimes they start being nasty in the circle, then they just get a time out' (Child S).

Two pupils discussed how circles could exacerbate issues, particularly where pupils behave offensively or fail to tell the truth about a situation.

'A lot of the time people argue more after having RP because some of the things you say in the circle can offend someone even more and then you have an even bigger argument... So maybe instead of getting everyone to just say anything they want to out loud, make sure that no one offends someone else because then it makes it worse and make sure that everyone gets a fair chance to say what they want to say and no one says anything that makes the whole thing pointless' (Child J).

'In problem circles you can get things sorted out and feel much better when its sorted, but things I don't like is people deny about it and don't do it properly and that gets me really mad and we'll fight again' (Child W).

One student suggested that leaving time between the incidence and the circle could allow the problem to escalate.

'I think they could do circles more often. Rather than just sitting in a room and talking about it. I'd rather do a circle straight away, just tell the teacher and have a circle to sort it out straight because before I had to wait two days to have my circle and things just went twice as worse by the time I had my circle. So I think they should do them as a first resort rather than a last resort' (Child I).

One student voiced concern that the process may be perceived as 'soft' for more serious incidents.

'I think the only weakness it might have, which might not even be true, is that it comes across quite soft sometimes. If it is used in serious incidents it can be quite soft' (Child P).

When discussing check-ins or check-outs a number of pupils discussed not being able to say how they really felt in front of the group.

'[The circles] kind of have impact because everyone can say how they feel but then you've got people in the class that would make fun of that and then you don't really want to tell everyone ... You might say you're unhappy but you won't say why because everyone will just make fun of you but if it is obvious that something has happened a teacher will come and have a word with me privately' (Child J).

'Sometimes you might be feeling one, but you don't want to say in front of everybody because they might laugh' (Child I).

'In check-in sometimes it is hard to pick what you are feeling, because you don't know. I always just say happy' (Child U).

3.3.3 Practitioner results

When asked about the benefits of Restorative Practice, the most popular response highlighted the sense of fairness it brought to the school setting.

'[The students] like it because it's a fair process. One of the main things behind it is they get their say' (Teacher B).

'We have the restorative question cards and every child knows that if there is a problem, or a breakdown in something that these are the questions that are used. It's seen as fair. So, it's not "why?", it's "what happened?". So, everything is very factual' (Teacher V).

'I think it makes everything fair' (Teacher W).

'Fairness, so the children have a voice and equally we have a voice as teachers. It has also made the children realise that their behaviour affects others, that's from the key questions really. So they have an idea now that it's not just, 'it's all about me' (Teacher X).

Pupils improved attendance was highlighted by one practitioner,

'Our attendance has improved; children are coming in for the check-in. Those children who were perpetually late comers they want to come in' (Teacher V).

When asked to discuss any challenges they had regarding the RP process, the ability to 'buy in' to the process was a factor for a number of practitioners who highlighted a

combination of cynical students, pupils who do not feel remorseful and practitioners who don't have a passion for RP.

'Staff did feel that the younger pupils were far easier to come on board, than the older students, who were a bit more cynical. But I think we're naive if we didn't expect that to happen ... I'll give you an example, there was a circle where a year 11 boy was in a group of boys that were falling out continuously with a cover supervisor, so we held a circle. His form tutor then asked him 'how did the circle go?' he goes back in and says, 'yeah it was great, we sat around, we held hands, we said nice things about each other and we walked out'. So obviously he was very cynical but the only thing I would say is that there was never another negative incident between that cover supervisor and that group of pupils' (Teacher G).

'If the child doesn't feel remorseful then we do have a problem, and that needs to be worked on' (Teacher V).

'You have to have that element of shame and consciousness for it to work because I have got some students who are just like "huh! That's it" and won't engage meaningfully with the process' (Teacher C).

'You have got to have the passion for it. I don't know if it would have worked as well if we had had someone other than our head teacher leading RP throughout the school. She has that personality, and is passionate about RP' (Teacher V).

Having the emotional maturity was also highlighted, especially when working with pupils with special educational needs.

'I run circles from year seven to year eleven and it can be quite hard if they haven't got that emotional maturity, it is really hard. Pupils with special educational needs, it is more challenging running a circle with them because often they don't really understand the process and they might not understand the social aspect or social context so it is more challenging' (Teacher R).

Educating parents as to the ethos of Restorative Practice was cited as challenge

'The downside, at that time, was that I did hear one parent, tell their child as they walked in through the door, 'make sure you put your name on the happy board'. That worried me then because I thought we'd relayed to the parents the whole meaning of the check-ins was for the children to voice their feelings and to make it a better working day for them ... so we got the mums and dads back in' (Teacher V).

Time was viewed as a challenge by one practitioner.

'We have been doing this for just over a year, and I think it will take a secondary school at least five years to become fully restorative because you are bringing every year group through. (Teacher G).

Time to hold circles was also another aspect that was highlighted a number of times, although it was also noted that an initial outlay of time to hold a circle would lead to more time saved in the long run because incidents were less likely to reoccur.

'Time is the big thing. Before, you would go in, give them a quick row, tell them what was happening next, and that would be the end of it. Two minutes. Whereas now, you have a circle and it takes half an hour or more' (Teacher B).

'It's time, but when you invest that time we haven't got to revisit so I think now I'm more patient in that process because I think it's going to be easier on me in the long run if I invest that time and get to the bottom of it properly' (Teacher D).

'Time to hold circles, especially in a comprehensive' (Teacher E).

'RP can take a little more time to resolve issues because of the circle. It takes time, but you are investing time there to gain a load of time in the future by resolving the conflict and never having to go back to it. It is certainly an investment in that way (Teacher R)'

Acting restoratively when dealing with challenging behaviour was also brought up by a couple of practitioners.

'In all honesty, sometimes I forget to be effective and I've shouted at somebody and I've thought 'I should have dealt with that differently' and that is going to happen because we are not perfect. But, it happens a lot less now because we are in that mode of thinking and it starts to become part and parcel of day to day' (Teacher D).

'Sometimes it's still hard to be restorative, when you know a student has really been rude to a member of staff and you do want to lay down the law but it's that restraint and the ability to give that student the opportunity' (Teacher C).

3.4 Processes used before Restorative Practice

3.4.1 Processes used before Restorative Practice summary

When asked to discuss how Restorative Practice has changed the way conflicts are resolved in their settings, the majority of practitioners discussed the move away from the punitive ethos of punishment, sanctions and exclusions. The move away from these measures was seen as the greatest change. Restorative Practice was, almost universally, seen to bring fairness to the way conflicts are resolved within the school setting.

Some practitioners felt that Restorative Practice wasn't too far removed from their previous practice and it just gave their practice structure, clearly naming processes that were, in part, happening already.

When discussing how Restorative Practice had changed school practices for them, pupils gave a number of reasons. The most frequent response highlighted how, through the use of circles, Restorative Practice allowed them to be treated fairly and equally. They felt they were now given the opportunity to talk and be listened to, with one student highlighting the difference hearing someone else's perspective can make to a situation. Having the ability and opportunity to discuss their problems and trying to find ways to solve them rather than just receiving a punishment or being shouted at for their actions was another aspect that was highlighted by a number of students. The most frequent response when discussing check-ins and check-outs was the opportunities they now provided for pupils to share and express how they were feeling.

3.4.2 Pupil results

The notion of fairness and being treated equally was the most frequent answer when asked to discuss how RP was different from previous ways of resolving conflict.

'I think it is fair. Obviously before you'd say, "so and so is bullying me!" and the teacher would go, "you're bullying him" and tell them off. Whereas now they give them a chance to speak and to explain themselves ...It is creating conflict if you just go up to someone and start shouting at them without giving them a chance to speak and it makes them feel like it is unfair where as they cannot complain that RP is unfair because it is completely fair and gives everyone a chance to speak' (Child N).

"First come, first served". That's what my primary school teachers used to say. I remember I had a really big rivalry with a boy and at one point he had punched me in the face and he went to the teacher and said that I punched him. I had a big red mark on my face but the teacher didn't believe me because I wasn't the first to come to tell. So, it was an unfair way of doing it. This way we all get a say and that is fair' (Child H).

'The old head master would have them both in his office and usually if you walked past you would hear him shouting and I think he would favour one person more than the other but now everyone gets treated the same' (Child S).

'You get treated fairly now because you get to hear both sides of it and we have all the groups and they're all treated fairly' (Child T).

'For me, I haven't really seen a lot of incidents, since it has gone into force. I remember when we were in year ten and eleven there would always be fights in the yard But I think everything has just calmed down and I think its because the meaner children are thinking that they shouldn't do it because with the RP thing there is nowhere to hide. Everything is just out in the open. There is no finger pointing and everything is dealt with in that fair calm environment' (Child Q).

'Everyone gets treated the same, and no-one is the favourite' (Child U).

The ability of the process to facilitate talking and listening to was another frequent answer, with one student highlighting the difference that hearing someone else's perspective can make to a situation.

'I think RP means you get treated in a better way, you all get listened to' (Child O).

'Usually it would just be a telling off from the teacher and isolation. Now people get the chance to talk about it' (Child P).

'I think RP is a good practice to do because it gets everyone's thoughts on the matter and on the situation. So, in that sense it is good' (Child O).

'It's listening to others. It just gives everyone involved a different perspective on what has gone on and that can sometimes make all the difference because people then realise and think 'I definitely shouldn't have done that!', and that will stop it happening again.' (Child P).

Some pupils were aware of how RP processes helped to solve problems rather than just focusing on punishment.

'To me it has changed a lot. This school is the best school I've been to and I've been to three different schools. It's because of the RP and the help you get solving your problems' (Child I).

'Before, you would have one boy coming in and going to talk to the head of year and then he'd walk out and then the victim would go in and talk to the head of year. To me it didn't really feel like anything was really being done. They were just having a talking to but the problem was still there. I think that since this has come into force, they get to the bottom of the problem and everything gets solved' (Child L).

3.4.3 Practitioner results

When asked about how RP is different from what was previously used in the schools, the move away from punishment, sanctions, exclusions and punitive measures was noted by a number of practitioners as being the greatest change.

'Before RP it was punitive measures. It was sanctions and it just wasn't working. You could hear staff almost pleading, 'what do I do now? Where do I go? How can I put this right?' We had children being violent, being aggressive, using horrendous language in the classroom and not coping with any form of learning. The whole set up, the whole school has got a different feel to it' (Teacher V).

'Discipline was two strikes and you're out' (Teacher X).

'With the last head the teaching methods were very much individual books, no group work and that's how the children were managed... with a very strict regime. "Sit down and do

your work!" but now it's different. It's the talking, the bonding, the fairness; a lot of our children won't have this outside of school' (Teacher X).

'Our other approach was very behaviourist, so if they misbehaved then they would be punished. We have an isolation room so if they misbehaved, they would go there and do their punishment...If it was a day, a few hours, a lesson, a lunchtime and that was it really. There were discussions but nothing like RP or circles. It was just punish the behaviour, punish the behaviour' (Teacher R).

Giving their current practice structure and clearly naming processes that were, in part, happening already was also discussed by the practitioners.

'It wasn't formalised [before RP]. We have got a structure now. We use these questions. We would sit down with the pupils and talk through it before, of course you would, but now there's a structure that they know and are expecting and it's consistent' (Teacher C).

'It's a mature way to respond to a situation and I think it has been around for years and years. Since I began teaching we've dealt with situations in this way without the label of RP' (Teacher A).

'You think about it a lot more now. Before you would just do things and when RP came in you think 'oh yes, I do that' whereas you're thinking now 'right, lets be restorative. Let's do it this way, this is the way to do it'. Rather than just doing it (Teacher B).

'RP is strategies that have been constantly used in schools, by different staff, not all staff, but lots of staff have worked restoratively since they started teaching ...but for us it was the ability to call it something, give it a name' (Teacher G).

'Some of the processes are very similar. I'd held circles, not using the circles script, but I'd held circles with members of staff and we'd break it down and that was successful, so a lot of the strategies were similar, but now it is labelled and packaged and they are clearer because of that' (Teacher G).

3.5 Any changes needed

3.5.1 Any changes needed summary

When practitioners were asked to discuss any changes they would make to the Restorative Practice process in their school, top up training was the most frequent response. More training for other members of staff and training for staff in other schools, to develop continuity for pupils, was also highlighted.

Developing the way Restorative Practice is represented and promoted within the school and within the wider school community were also given as changes practitioners would like to make.

One practitioner mentioned the need for resources that were targeted specifically at the early years within a primary school.

Pupils when asked if they would change anything about the processes in their school offered a number of concrete suggestions. The most popular response highlighted the need for an increase in the training and information pupils received about Restorative Practice with a number of pupils suggesting information days that could be practical, interactive and use role-plays and scenarios to help pupils understand Restorative Practice. Information for pupils to share with their families was also another suggestion given by a few pupils.

One pupil felt it was important to make sure everything was ok after the circle and suggested a check-up system.

One student also felt that information about bullying should be disseminated to pupils.

3.5.2 Pupil results

When asked to discuss what they would change about RP in their school, the most popular response highlighted the need for more information to be shared with pupils.

'So far, there haven't been any presentations about it. They just say "If you get picked on come to the teachers and they will sort it". So, you don't know anything about it until they have told you in private' (Child H).

'I don't think there has really been a lot of advertisement for it. Nobody really knows what it is. In assembly, the lady who does the drop in, she is talking about 'if you want a chat come and see me'. Especially the younger students, they haven't really got much of a clue what it is. So, if they don't know what it is, they are not going to be 'oh, I'll just pop in randomly' because they don't really feel comfortable. They just haven't got a clear idea of how it could help them. So it needs to be fed through the school, not just in assembly, there needs to be a much more clear and much more detailed idea of what it is and then they could give that to the students and then it really would take off because it is a really good idea' (Child L).

'I would promote it a bit more... just get teachers to know more about it and make more presentations about it so then everyone can understand what it is' (Child M).

'More presentations for the younger children, so they can understand it and know that it is there for them. Do they even know there is a drop in and what it is for?' (Child O).

'I would have more information for children. So they can all know what it is about' (Child I).

'I think possibly the weakness in our school is that it hasn't quite picked up as much as it could have, I think that is because of a lack of information filtering through to the children, especially the younger ones' (Child N).

Another suggestion for improvement was for information to be sent home with children for them to share with their families.

'I would get the teachers to give out more information so we could have it to take home, so we could read it with our parents' (Child J).

'We could have a pack or a letter to show our parents too, to let them know what is happening' (Child I).

A follow-up of the circles was also suggested for some children.

'We could keep checking up to make sure everything is ok after the circle, because if it's not you don't have another one' (Child H).

One student also felt that information about bullying should be disseminated to pupils.

'I think people should show other children what it is actually like to get bullied and try and show them the other side rather than the positive side, if you get what I mean. Like, just try and explain that it might not be a great time for other people if they've got problems at home and it can be really frustrating. Show them a clip of people getting bullied' (Child I).

3.5.3 Practitioner results

When asked to discuss any changes they would make to the RP process in their school, top up training was the most frequent response. More training for other members of staff and training for staff in other schools was also highlighted.

'You have got to keep having training regularly to keep on top of it otherwise things can be forgotten' (Teacher B).

'Over time I think it is important to come back to it and recap because of staff changes and so many different priorities. So, it is important to come back and use inset training to refresh it' (Teacher A).

'I think for staff, top-up training days could be very good' (Teacher R).

'You need that constant refreshing, or training, whatever you want to call it. It's not something you can just do and leave it. You have to do it regularly, every term or a couple of times a year, to keep refreshing staff' (Teacher B).

'Training for more people. The courses I have been on have been excellent and you get the in-depth training, like the circles training, and I learnt a lot on that it was excellent. We need more people trained up really' (Teacher B).

'Some top up training would be helpful but we've adjusted things ourselves as we've gone along. We've got posters in our rooms so we know what questions to ask during check-in' (Teacher E).

'Top-up training and full training for other staff. You do need that' (Teacher F).

'I wouldn't change anything in the primary school. The only thing I would change is that it would run through to all secondary schools too' (Teacher X).

Developing the way RP is represented and promoted within the school and within the wider school community were also given as changes practitioners would like to make.

'I think promoting it. I know there is a competition running with a mascot, I think once you have got a mascot you can get posters up. When you see Mr Urdd everyone knows it's the Urdd. When you see a mascot it can cement it then and it is good for promoting everything. I think the main way to move it forward is just to promote it more with students and perhaps a letter to parents as well' (Teacher R).

One practitioner mentioned the need for resources that were targeted specifically at the early years within a primary school.

'I think specific work with Foundation Phase, I think that would be useful. I do think that the question cards are difficult, when you are working with nursery and reception. I still think they are difficult questions. Could there be an early years resource pack?... To make it relevant for these children ... More early years friendly' (Teacher W).

5. Key Findings

5.1 Training

Practitioners

- The majority of practitioners were overwhelmingly positive about the Restorative Practice training they had received.
- The practical aspect included in the training was highlighted as particularly effective by a number of practitioners.
- Practitioners felt it was well structured and gave them a clear picture of Restorative Practice processes.

- Practitioners felt additional focus could be given to specific school related scenarios and to working with very young children.
- Top-up or on-going training was seen as an important aspect of the overall success of Restorative Practice.

Pupils

- Specific training was suggested by a number of pupils. They felt training that included role-play scenarios would be beneficial.
- Restorative Practice materials to take home and share with family were requested by some students.
- Some pupils who received mentor training asked for it not to be held in the summer break as not all pupils were able to attend and it was a while before they were able to apply the skills they had been taught.

5.2 Experience and understanding

Practitioners

- Restorative Practice was seen by a number of practitioners to have developed a sense of calm within the children and within the school environment.
- Restorative Practice was understood to have given pupils experience of having a voice, discussing their feelings and developing skills to be able to express themselves.
- A reduction in the number of incidents practitioners dealt with was highlighted by a number of staff.
- Practitioners also experienced a reduction in the number of incidents they had to revisit. Issues were not often seen to recur once a circle had been held.
- One practitioner highlighted the relationships developing between staff and pupils and pupils and their peers.

Pupils

- The majority of pupils felt their experiences had been positive.
- Experience of Restorative Practice processes made a large number of pupils feel happy because they were given time to talk; time to be listened to; opportunities to get to know their peers and the chance to be treated fairly.
- Pupils felt they had experienced opportunities to hear both sides of the story; to talk through their issues; to help people understand what they had done wrong and to try and resolve their problems.
- Pupils discussed the opportunities they had to 'off load' any worries they may have; to share how they felt; and to gain understanding from their peers.

5.3 Benefits and challenges

Practitioners

- The most frequently discussed benefit was the fairness practitioners felt Restorative Practice brought to the school.
- The majority of practitioners questioned how to engage pupils who don't feel remorseful or who were cynical about the Restorative Practice process.
- How Restorative Practice could engage pupils with little emotional maturity or pupils with SEN was also a concern raised by number of practitioners.
- Finding time to hold circles was highlighted as a challenge by a number of practitioners.
- Having to react restoratively when dealing with highly challenging behaviour was a challenge for some practitioners.

Pupils

- A number of pupils viewed the opportunities they were given to resolve conflict and discuss feelings as the most prominent benefits of the Restorative Practice process.

- Pupil 'buy-in' was highlighted as a challenge for a number of pupils. They discussed their frustration at pupils who would not engage with, or who would laugh at, the process.
- Two pupils highlighted how they might end up arguing more after a circle because of something that was said within it.
- A number of pupils highlighted that check-ins could often be superficial with students not always engaging with the process in an honest manner.
- Some students cited that they did not enjoy sharing personal information publically as they feared being laughed at.

5.4 Processes used before Restorative Practice

- Restorative Practice was almost universally seen to bring fairness to the way conflicts are resolved within the school setting.
- Restorative Practice was seen as a move away from the punitive ethos of punishment, sanctions and exclusions.
- Some practitioners felt that Restorative Practice wasn't too far removed from their previous practice.

Pupils

- Being treated fairly and equally was the most frequent change for the majority of pupils.
- Having the opportunity to talk and be listened to, to discuss their problems and to try and find ways to solve them, rather than just receiving a punishment or being shouted at, was another change highlighted by a number of students.
- The opportunity to share and express how they are feeling was a frequent response.

5.5 Any changes needed

Practitioners

- Top-up training, training for other members of staff and training for staff in other non-Restorative Practice schools was cited as the change that was most needed.
- A number of practitioners felt a change in the way Restorative Practice is represented and promoted within the school and the wider community was needed.

Pupils

- Improved training and information was the most popular response from pupils.
- Practical, interactive information days were suggested by a number of pupils.
- Information to share with their families was also something pupils would encourage.
- A 'check-up' system was suggested to make sure issues remained resolved after a circle had taken place.

6. Recommendations for future research

Recommendations for future research:

1. To include participants, both practitioners and pupils, who do not 'buy into' the Restorative Practice processes to ensure a broad and balanced view of Restorative Practice across each setting;
2. To consider attendance and exclusion data held at school and county level;
3. To involve a larger cohort of schools to gain a deeper understanding of Restorative Practices across the county;
4. To incorporate the views of families and the wider community;
5. To consider the views of supporting agencies.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Data collection materials

Focus group topic guide

1. Training

1.1 How did you find out about RP? Who told you about circles, check-ins and check-outs?

1.2 Would you change anything about how this happened? How the information was delivered?

1.3 Would you change anything about what (content) information you were given?

2 Experience and understanding

- 2.1 What RP experience have you had?
- 2.2 circles/ check-ins? / check-outs?
- 2.3 What are the most important aspects of RP for you?

3. Benefits and challenges

- 3.1 What are the benefits and challenges (good or bad points) of RP in your setting?
- 3.2 How have they made you feel?

4. Processes used before Restorative Practice

- 4.1 How are RP processes different from what you used to do?
- 4.2 What did you used to do to resolve conflict?
- 4.3 How did that process make you feel?

5. Any changes needed?

- 4.6 What would you change about the RP initiative/process in your school?

Interview questions

1. Training

- 1.1 What RP training have you had?
- 1.2 What did you think about the training?
- 1.3 Would you change anything about how the information was delivered?
- 1.4 Would you change anything about what (content) information you were given?
- 1.5 How have you disseminated the information to Children? Families?

2 Experience and understanding

- 2.1 What experiences have you had with the RP initiative?
- 2.2 What are the most important aspects of RP for this school? Your class?

3. Benefits and challenges

3.1 What are the benefits and challenges surrounding RP in your setting?

3.2 How have they made you feel?

3.4 How does the process impact on you? The children?

4. Processes used before Restorative Practice

4.1 How are Restorative Practice processes different from what you used to do?

4.2 What did you used to do to resolve conflict?

4.3 How did that process make you feel?

5. Any changes needed?

5.1 What would you change about the RP initiative/process in your school?

9. Action Plan (Project Manager: Hilary Davies)

In conjunction with this research being carried out, project planning had already identified and re-scoped a number of areas highlighted in the report and are outlined below. A lessons learned exercise is undertaken every term to ensure the project evaluates progress and makes adjustments where required. Recommendations from those interviewed will also be included in future planning.

9.1 Training

- Pupil training will not be delivered during the last half of the Summer term. [The report gives reference to training being already delivered during summer holidays; however this was in relation to training in late June/early July 2012 at which time 6th formers had already finished following early exams.]. This has already been addressed at the start of this year.
- No schools or organisations' with 6 weeks off during the Summer will be trained during the last half of the summer term.
- Refresher/follow-up sessions for pupils will be introduced.
- Top-up training has been available for staff over the last two years. This includes either a one day Circle training course that includes a 'refresher' of the Introduction to RP in the morning and the afternoon involves learning problem-solving techniques. There is also an advanced 3 day course for those intending to run more formal conferences. This includes an open book exam on the last day. All course dates are circulated to those trained and are on the RP website.
- Open training sessions are available throughout the year that new staff can attend. All course dates are circulated to those trained and are on the RP website. [The website is currently being re-vamped as there are issues with it's design.]

9.2 Communication

- A pupil conference has been arranged for 15th October 2013 for those trained as pupil mentors. The event will provide opportunities for pupils to feedback on training and contribute to future delivery.
- A pupil leaflet has been produced and will be circulated to all pupils prior to the training day.
- Prior to pupil training discussion takes place with the Headteacher/RP lead as to how the RP mentors will use the skills in the school.
- All schools are advised to communicate the approach to pupils, parents and the community and include in their well-being policy. Evidence of this is required in our follow-up visits.

- Following comments received from pupils, appropriate age-related videos will be included in future training for pupils.
- Comments' relating to publicity regarding RP around schools is being addressed. We are currently producing 'levels' that the schools can work towards and evidence on RP across areas will be included in this.
- As part of raising awareness an RP week has been held each April. Future events will encourage pupils to be part of this including opportunities to visit other schools. There will also be greater focus on parents, governors and the community being involved.

9.3 Resources

- Following comments included in this report more resources will be provided for early years settings.
- A competition has been organised to design a mascot. This is being judged over the summer holidays and will be used on display materials' and distributed to schools. The winner will be presented at the Pupil Conference event on 15th October.