

## Title

Use of a Support and Development Group approach to aid schools in implementing Restorative Approaches

## What did we ask? (Research Questions)

- Does the Support & Development Group structure enhance the ability of schools to implement Restorative Approaches?
- Does the Support & Development Group structure provide additional benefit beyond simply linking schools in a network around Restorative Approaches?

## What is the evidence base?

The definition of the Poverty-Related Attainment Gap used within this research is that pupils from the most deprived communities (SIMD Levels 1&2 particularly) perform significantly worse at all levels of the education system than those from the least deprived communities. Furthermore, underpinning this is the assertion that a significant focus on supporting pupils' health and wellbeing will aid progress towards reducing this gap (Sosu & Ellis, 2014).

Glasgow Psychological Service (GPS) supports the reduction of the poverty-related attainment gap by promoting the use of Restorative Approaches (RA), particularly at a whole-school level. The Behaviour in Scottish Schools Report (Black, Chamberlain, & Murray, 2012) advocates for whole-school approaches, noting that positive pupil wellbeing is best advanced by promoting a positive ethos with inclusive values at whole-school level. Positive school relationships enhance pupil engagement with learning (Sabor & Pianta, 2012) and positive relationships are considered essential in effective learning and teaching (Scottish Government, 2013)

RA was selected as it is a whole-community ethos to promote and maintain positive relationships by providing a foundation for repairing conflict or 'emotional harm' between two or more individuals. RA allows all parties involved in conflict to be listened to, reflect on all views expressed and arrive at a collective and agreed solution to resolve emotional harm. Also, the language of RA helps to define how we think about and manage our own and pupil behaviour and move forward.

The evidence around RA is that it improves relationships within schools (Kane, et al., 2007; Macready, 2009). RA improves pupils' affiliation to school (Pavelka, 2013), resilience (McCluskey et al, 2008), problem-solving skills (Macready, 2009), emotional literacy (Hopkins, 2002), and internal regulation (Hopkins, 2002). RA is also shown to enhance time in class and reduce exclusions (McCluskey et al, 2008; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013), and to positively impact children and young people's mental health (Wachtel, 1999). Along with the above, RA has been shown as

an effective approach to support children and young people who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Wilcox & Hoyle, 2002).

In order to promote RA within the city, GPS has previously facilitated an RA City Network, bringing together schools who had completed initial RA training from GPS. In order to develop this, a Support & Development Group method was adopted. This was selected as it would offer a needs-led approach, with opportunities for personal goals and skills development built in. This approach offers a focus on impact on practice and participants are asked to complete tasks between sessions and provide feedback/share experiences at the following session.

### What did we do?

A Support & Development Group approach was adopted, offered to representatives from any schools who received initial RA training from GPS. 17 participants attended the group, representing 11 different schools across the city.

Over 75% of the schools who attended the Support & Development Group have over 50% of their population living in the 15% most deprived areas (SIMD 1&2).

This Support & Development Group took place over five sessions, with initial group and individual needs analyses being conducted in the first session which informed the content of the remaining sessions.

A mixed methods approach was adopted, with participants completing questionnaires pre- and post-programme. These questionnaires gave quantitative measures of confidence in implementing RA within establishments, to allow for comparison. Further qualitative information was gathered also from the post-programme questionnaires.

Interviews were conducted also with the Educational Psychologists (EPs) who facilitated the group, to gather additional perspective on the effectiveness of a Support & Development Group approach.

### What have we found?

In terms of addressing the first research question; comparison of pre- and post- data demonstrated that attendance at the Support & Development Group led to an increase in attendee ratings of confidence in implementing RA within their establishment.

Thematic analysis was conducted on the completed post-attendance questionnaires completed by attendees also, with primary themes emerging indicating that strengths of attending the group were that it permitted sharing of resources/strategies around RA, that it allowed for sharing of experiences with colleagues, and that it led to a better understanding of implementation.

Specific examples of actions that attendees had taken due to attending the group were:

- Delivered training for extended leadership team;
- Developed an RA implementation plan;
- Implemented peer mediation;
- Implemented visual approaches to support RA with young people who require additional support with expressive and receptive language
- Linked with other schools in their learning community around RA;
- Modelled approaches for parents at in-school session.

Regarding the second research question; both teaching staff who attended (through questionnaire) and EPs (through interview) noted advantages of the Support & Development Group model over simply linking schools in a network.

Teacher attendees felt that the Support & Development Group approach meant they *“gained more examples and ideas to try in my school.”* Also that due to this approach there had *“been a greater sharing of resources between establishments”*. Being led by the expressed needs of attendees also meant that *“It was more specific and relevant for Secondary”*

EPs felt the approach also meant that their involvement was *“more active and purposeful”*, and that this method had more structure, allowed for greater follow-ups, and that its built-in evaluation process meant impact was measured.

## What do we plan to do next?

Evidence suggests that RA would be an effective way of tackling the poverty-related attainment Gap, and this current evidence suggests that the Support & Development Group approach is an effective way to ensure promotion and implementation of RA at a whole school level. As such, this approach will continue to be used going forward, continually evaluated to ensure that it is optimised for those attending, for maximum impact.

Beyond current evidence, it will be beneficial also to gather and analyse establishment-level data around achievement on longitudinal basis, for schools who attended, and with comparators to ascertain if the enhanced implementation of RA is having the intended impact on lessening the gap.

## References

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### For further information contact:

Graeme McLeary Graeme.mcleary@glasgow.gov.uk