



# 'School let me down'

Overcoming barriers to  
educational achievement



the children's charity

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# Why educational attainment matters to NCH

NCH is one of the UK's leading children's charities. We work with more than 100,000 children, young people and their families every year to improve their quality of life. All our professional experience tells us that enabling children and young people to succeed at school is key to helping them achieve their full potential; indeed, doing well at school is more likely than anything else to transform their lives.

Among our 500-plus projects are more than 200 that work specifically with young people who are vulnerable or socially excluded. This may be because they are leaving care, are homeless, are in trouble with the law, are disabled, or are young carers. Many young people in these groups are known to underachieve educationally. For example:

- In the year ending September 2002 in England only 8 per cent of looked-after young people in Year 11 gained five or more GCSEs at A\*-C (or equivalent), compared to a national figure of over 50 per cent. At the end of Year 11, 56 per cent of looked-after school leavers remained in full-time education compared with 72 per cent of all school leavers. Just under a quarter of looked-after young people were unemployed in the September after leaving school, compared with 8 per cent of all school leavers.<sup>1</sup>
- A recent survey of young carers found that 25 per cent left school with no GCSEs.<sup>2</sup>
- Eighty per cent of 15- to 17-year-old prisoners have no qualifications.<sup>3</sup>

Given that the majority of employers ask for five GCSEs at grades A\*-C, the adverse impact of educational underachievement on such young people's lives and on their ability to reach their potential can be dramatic.

Disengagement from learning and resultant poor qualifications put young people at very serious risk of ending up in low-paid, intermittent employment. In addition to the link between poor qualifications and offending behaviour, studies have found that low educational attainment is strongly linked with teenage

pregnancy.<sup>4</sup> Thus, educational underachievement is strongly implicated as a cause as well as a consequence of social exclusion. Poor education is also the key vehicle through which the cycle of poverty is passed on from one generation to the next: for example, government research published in 2000 found that 74 per cent of children whose parents were in the highest socio-economic group achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C, compared with only 29 per cent of children whose parents were in the lowest group.<sup>5</sup>

If we are to enable young people to break out of this cycle of disadvantage it is vital that we do all that we can to improve the way in which the education system meets their needs.

Although NCH is primarily known as a provider of social care services to children, young people and their families, we are also a major provider of education and health services. Our projects include schools for children with disabilities, Learning Gateways, mentoring schemes and alternatives to school for children who have been excluded or who are school refusers. Many of these projects work with young people who are completely disaffected with formal education, yet one of our project managers reports arriving at work at 9am to find a group of young people waiting on the doorstep for the project to open. Our professional experience therefore convinces us that the young people with whom we work can succeed in education if they are taught in the right environment and in the right way. Some of them have already proved this to be true and we want to do everything we can to ensure that others can succeed too.

This is why NCH decided to carry out a simple survey of our young service users' views of education during the spring of 2003. We wanted to understand more about their experience of the education system and to give them the chance to suggest ways to make learning more attractive for them and for others in a similar position.

The results of the survey and the conclusions and policy recommendations we have drawn from it are outlined later in this report.



# The policy context

*'Our message on education is simple. Excellence for the many, not just the few.'*

David Blunkett MP, Education Secretary, July 1999<sup>6</sup>

'Education, education, education' has been a real priority for this government. Labour's election to office in 1997 was followed by an avalanche of education Acts, initiatives, regulations and guidance, all with the aim of improving the educational achievements of our children and young people. There were a number of reasons for this approach, not the least of which was the government's recognition that globalisation and technological change mean that our economy will require the workforce to be progressively more skilled as time goes on. This helps to explain the drive to encourage more young people to stay on into further and higher education; 'starter jobs' for 16 year olds are already becoming increasingly rare.

Nor does this huge effort to improve our education system show any signs of slowing down. Education spending is set to rise by 35 per cent between 2000 and 2005 (although some of this will be swallowed up by the rise in National Insurance contributions). There has been a major expansion of pre-school education, with all four year olds and by 2004 all three year olds guaranteed a free early education place (currently 88 per cent of three year olds are benefiting from free early education). Class sizes are falling, and standards have been rising. The numbers of young people going into further education are growing.

These are significant achievements, but a closer examination shows that the picture is still very mixed.

For example England – and the UK generally – still lags behind comparable nations in terms of the numbers of young people staying in education post-16.

Furthermore, education policy is currently the focus of several heated political debates. There are disputes over the development of specialist schools (with concerns that these will produce a 'two-tier system'), the role of selection and the financing of higher education. The government has used national targets and testing as key levers for driving up standards. It has also retained school league tables, although it has reformed them to better reflect the added value that schools bring. There is therefore a market for education within state provision as well as across the private sector, one that the government has actively encouraged as a mechanism for driving up standards.

Not everyone supports this approach, however, and questions arise as to whether it best serves the interests of poor and socially excluded children. Certainly, the government has paid considerable attention to their needs and is funding a wide range of activity to support them, including extended schools, mentors, Saturday schools, teaching assistants and homework clubs. A new SEN Action Programme and Early Support Pilot Programme are to be launched to further promote the education of children with special needs. Education spending is also increasingly progressive, with more disadvantaged areas enjoying bigger funding increases than affluent ones through initiatives such as Excellence in Cities, and there is evidence that these programmes are starting to reduce the differential between areas.<sup>7</sup>



However, there are serious doubts as to whether these measures can compensate for the fact that the overall market approach to education tends to benefit more able and more advantaged children. There has long been a strong correlation between class and attainment in the UK, and a key test of the government's approach from NCH's perspective will be to see if this weakens over time.

Some recent policy developments suggest the government recognises that more reforms are required to enhance the capacity of less academic and disadvantaged pupils to reach their potential. For example, the Department for Education and Skills consultation paper 'Opportunity and Excellence', which focuses on the curriculum for 14 to 19 year olds, sets out some very positive ideas that would give students more choice of both academic and vocational studies in their GCSE courses, with the aim of giving both equal status. Similarly, Education Maintenance Allowances are to be rolled out nationwide following a successful pilot exercise: these have proved helpful in encouraging young people from low-income families to stay on in education, rather than leaving at the earliest opportunity.

We can only hope that the government will give priority to the other issues raised by disadvantaged young people in this report as education policy continues to develop. In NCH's experience there are too many young people, with so much to offer, who remain trapped in disadvantage because they do not fit what often appears to them to be a 'one size fits all' education system.



# NCH's survey of young people's views

In spring 2003 we asked young NCH project users about the issues that affected them in school and what they thought could be done to reduce the barriers to educational attainment. We followed up analysis of the 623 returned questionnaires with three focus groups (involving 21 young people); these allowed us to explore some of the issues emerging from the questionnaire in more depth.

## What was the single biggest issue for you at school?

The first open question asked young people what the single biggest issue at school had been for them. A quarter (24.4%) of those who responded to this question indicated that bullying had been the biggest issue. The other most frequent responses concerned teacher–pupil relationships and difficulties with particular subjects.

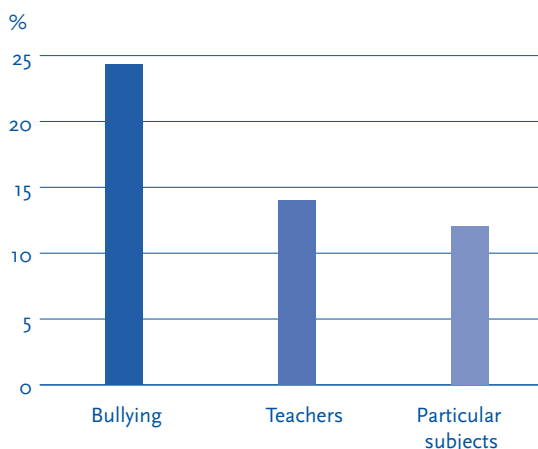
In terms of teacher–pupil relationships, many young people complained about the way in which teachers talked to them. There was also a feeling that if you didn't get on with a particular teacher then you were unlikely to get any help from them in that particular subject.

## What would have helped you to do better at school?

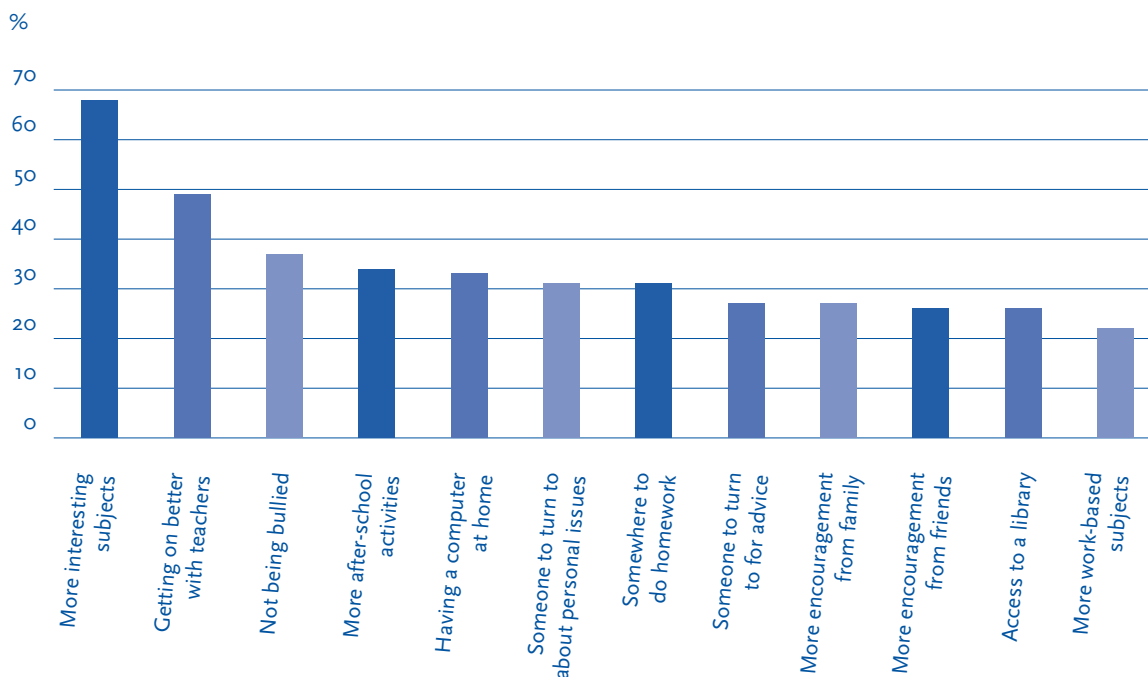
While bullying was the single biggest concern of our project users, when asked what would have enabled them to achieve more at school and improve their educational attainment, the need for more interesting subjects came top, with almost 70 per cent selecting this option. Table 2 presents the full results for this question.

Respondents could select as many options as they wished. It can be seen from the table that 'more interesting subjects' and 'getting on better with teachers' were seen by NCH's service users as the biggest hurdles to their success at school. Many of them felt that they had been forced to study subjects in which they had no interest and to which they could see no point.

**Table 1: The three biggest issues at school**



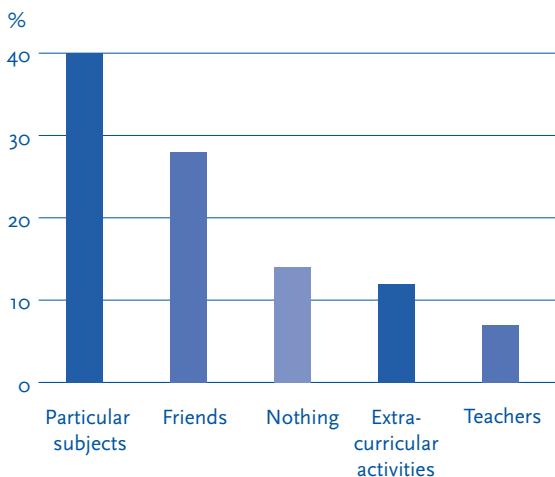
**Table 2: Hurdles to success**



### What did you like best and hate most about school?

Young people were also asked what they had liked best and hated most about school. Again these were open questions. 'Particular subjects' came a strong first in what the service users liked best about school.

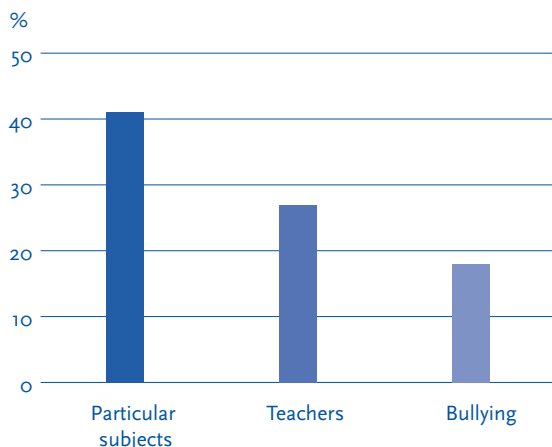
**Table 3: Liked best about school**



It is encouraging that the most popular thing about school for many young people was one or more of the subjects they were studying. The issue of 'extra-curricular activities' is interesting in that the focus group discussions suggested that some young people who are not very successful in terms of their academic achievement can succeed in other ways and gain a great deal from school, if the opportunities are there for them to do so. One young man, for example, admitted to often being in trouble at school, but had gone on to win a youth award for his work with young people with learning disabilities – a tribute to the imagination of the school in offering him this opportunity, as well as to the young man himself for having taken advantage of it.

'Particular subjects' also featured most often in response to the question what they most hated about school.

**Table 4: Hated most about school**



There was a strong sense of injustice in some of the comments the young people made about teachers, such as: 'Teachers accusing you of doing things that you haven't done.' While many of the young people with whom NCH works admitted that they were not model pupils, they often felt that once they were labelled as troublesome or difficult, they were routinely blamed for any misbehaviour in class, whether it was their fault or not.

For those who were bullied it is unsurprising if this was the thing they hated most about school.

# Further exploration of some of the key issues the young people raised

## Bullying

It is clear that bullying has a devastating impact on some children's lives; tragically, a small number of children have even committed suicide in recent years as a result of their extreme distress. NCH's experience – reflected in this survey – is that many more children and young people simply give up on school because they can no longer face being victimised on a regular basis. Yet current government policy for tackling chronic truancy has paid little heed to bullying as a frequent underlying cause of school non-attendance. This is a serious misunderstanding of what is really going on in many children's and families' lives, in NCH's view.

Research is demonstrating what many children and parents already know: that bullying is widespread in some schools and communities, spans life both within school and beyond it, and can take many forms, including bullying by email and text message, the prevalence of which NCH drew to public notice in 2002.

In a recent survey carried out by the Thomas Coram Research Unit, over half of pupils at both primary and secondary school thought that bullying was a 'big problem' or 'quite a problem' in their school. Just over half (51%) of pupils in Year 5, and a quarter (28%) in Year 8 reported that they had been bullied. There is no gender bias, but as pupils get older higher proportions of black and Asian pupils report bullying incidences (33%) than white pupils (26%).

We have also learned how very difficult it is for 'the adult world' to counteract bullying effectively. Bullying is often kept secret by children, who fear – sometimes with justification – that if they tell, things will get even worse for them. But practice has also shown that schools can employ strategies that make it harder for bullying to flourish and easier for children to seek help. These include practical measures to 'shut down' opportunities for bullying, such as ensuring that breaks are effectively supervised, utilising peer mentoring approaches so that children support each other in challenging bullying cultures, and tackling bullying as part of a whole-school approach to creating a respectful, positive learning environment. The evidence is that schools with a co-operative and participative ethos tend to have lower levels of bullying.<sup>8</sup>

The government has now recognised how damaging bullying can be and has launched an £80 million package to tackle bullying through the provision of curriculum materials, training for teachers and expert behaviour and attendance consultants. There will also be an information film and an anti-bullying charter and Ofsted will be inspecting for evidence of effective anti-bullying policies. Hopefully the campaign and associated measures will

go a long way towards eradicating the scarring and negative experience of being bullied.

All but seven of the 122 young people in our survey who said that bullying was the biggest issue for them at school indicated that they had been bullied. There were a further 45 young people who indicated in other responses (under 'hated most') that they had been bullied, so at least 25 per cent of our sample had been bullied. There may well have been other respondents who had been bullied but for whom it had not been the biggest issue at school or had not been the thing that they hated most.

A number of respondents felt that bullying had been ignored by teachers or found that when they complained about being bullied, nothing was done:

*'When I was in secondary school I was bullied, and when I turned to tell the teachers, nothing was solved, which of course made matters worse.'*

Questionnaire respondent

*'I was bullied and the teachers did nothing about it.'*

Questionnaire respondent

This corresponds with the findings from other UK research on bullying, which indicates that young people get a very mixed response from teachers when they report bullying. Of the children and young people who phoned Childline's Bullying Line, 97 per cent had told teachers about it, yet the bullying was still going on. For 53 per cent of them their complaints had led to no action but even where action had been taken it was often ineffective.

Young people in our focus groups were very sceptical about the value of bullying initiatives:

*'It might work in front of the teacher, but you know once they get out it's like "I'm going to get you".'*

Kylie, from a south east town (focus group)

They basically felt that the only way to stop bullying was to fight back:

*'I got bullied by a group of people that were my friends before, it was horrible, but I managed. I didn't bother going to school. I didn't go to school for weeks, and then my mum come home one time and she said "Right, I've had enough of this" and she dragged me down to the school, and she got my teacher out and she went absolutely mental at him and said "If you don't \*\*\*\*ing do something about those girls", you know, and that didn't help at all, but then when my dad come home he said to me "No, don't back down. If they want to beat you up, they'll beat you up, what's the worst that can happen, you get beaten up, but don't back down,*

*and more than likely they will", so that's what I did and they did. So after all that, that was the only thing that worked.'*

Imogen, from a south east town (focus group)

Unfortunately for some young people who responded to the questionnaire, the strategy of fighting back had landed them in trouble:

*'I got really angry because this girl was jeering at me, so I pushed her and she knocked her tooth on the desk and I got into serious trouble.'*

Questionnaire respondent

The impact of bullying on its victims can be devastating not only in terms of the negative impact on their self-esteem,<sup>9</sup> but also on their educational attainment:

*'I left school with no qualifications, I got bullied so I just left. I left in Year 9. My mum went up to the school to talk to the teachers but they didn't want to know, their attitude was if I couldn't be bothered to come to school then they can't be bothered to try and help. Now they're bringing in that policy where they prosecute your parents!'*

Jackie, from a south east town (focus group)

In assessing the survey results with respect to bullying it is important to remember how extremely vulnerable many of NCH's service users actually are. We know from research and professional experience that children and young people are often bullied because they are in some way 'different'. The vulnerability and social exclusion of some of our service users may indeed differentiate them from many of their peers: for example, a young carer may appear 'different' because she can't readily go out in the evenings because of her responsibilities at home. This may put her at risk of being teased or even bullied. Children and young people like these need understanding, protection and support: NCH believes we must do better at ensuring they receive it at school and in the community.

### More interesting subjects

A lack of interesting subjects was highlighted as a major barrier to educational attainment for the majority (68%) of respondents to our questionnaire. A further 22 per cent indicated that more vocational options would also have helped them to be more enthusiastic about learning. This is a serious indictment of the ability of the current school curriculum to effectively engage the interest of many of the young people with whom NCH works.

It is even more worrying that our research suggests that for some, disaffection is so great that they play truant or, in the worst cases, leave school altogether:

*'School was boring so I didn't attend most of my lessons.'*

Questionnaire respondent

However, it was clear that the vast majority of respondents could engage with learning, given the right subjects and teaching methods, even if they were bored by much that was on offer:

*'I found school mostly boring, most of the lessons except for maths, drama and electronics.'*

Questionnaire respondent

This is highlighted by the fact that when asked what they liked most about school, 40 per cent of respondents mentioned one or more taught subjects. The most popular lessons were physical education (39%), art (26%), maths (16%), IT (11%) and English (9%).

It was not necessarily the subject itself but the way in which it was taught that caused disaffection. Many respondents indicated that while they were interested in particular subjects, they would have preferred a greater practical element to both the teaching and assessment:

*'There was too much English involved in all other lessons. It was a real bummer because drama and art relied on 60 per cent or whatever it is, of the work that you write, and I'm not that good at English.'*

David, from an eastern town (focus group)

*'I've been told that I've got a talent for drawing, but I can't do all the writing, so my drawing goes out the window and that's not right. Just cos you're not good at English, doesn't mean that you're not good at something else.'*

Martin, from a north west town (focus group)

*'The majority of marks should go on drawing and paintings, rather than sitting down writing about the history of art.'*

Questionnaire respondent

Dissatisfaction with teaching methods was not restricted to the emphasis on writing: some teachers clearly succeeded better than others in making lessons interesting and fun:

*'The subjects, some were interesting, but it was the teachers that made them boring, and the fact that they didn't try to make things relevant. They just gave us work out of books and things and that was boring. It was all words and whether you think you're a hardcore person, then you would want to study it, but most people dropped it because it was boring.'*

Emma, from an eastern town (focus group)

Research into the underachievement of boys suggests that their enjoyment of lessons is affected by opportunities for active involvement such as role-play, practical work and the use of ICT and audio-visual aids.<sup>10</sup> This survey suggests that this may be a wider issue for children who struggle with school:

*'I know now that I can't just sit in a classroom, I find it boring, I'd rather be out doing physical things. My mind just wanders like and I start looking out the window. I lacked concentration.'*

Lucy, from a south east town (focus group)

Some respondents also found the pressure of school tests difficult to cope with. They commented on the anxieties generated for them by having to sit SATs, for example, as being a major negative factor about school.

The survey suggests a number of reasons why some of our project users found school uninteresting: the narrowness and compulsory aspects of the national curriculum; the lack of 'hands-on assessment' in more practical subjects; and the way in which subjects are taught. Overall, it is clear that our project users would benefit from a more flexible curriculum, more imaginatively taught, with more vocational opportunities. This is something the government may well have to address if the 10,000 Key Stage 4 pupils who currently disappear from the education system every year are to be encouraged to remain."

### **Teacher–pupil relationship**

Reference has already been made to the fact that the home backgrounds of NCH project users often mark them out from their peers. For example, young people who are looked after or who have left care may be seriously behind with their school work because of having had a number of different placements that have disrupted their education. Children and young people who have been abused or who are living with domestic violence may struggle to concentrate at school or college because they are preoccupied with dealing with these or other damaging experiences. A common theme from the survey returns and the focus group discussions was a lack of understanding from teachers about the difficulties they might be facing at home and the impact that these might have on them in school.

*'Not getting along with most teachers. Feeling like I was being singled out – made an example of because I was in care and they knew no one would defend me.'*

Questionnaire respondent

*'Teachers not understanding what was going on at home.'*

Questionnaire respondent

*'I had a lot of problems at home which made it awkward when I went to school.'*

Questionnaire respondent

In this survey, teacher–pupil relations emerge as a major obstacle to some of NCH's service users achieving their educational potential. Nearly 50 per cent of respondents were of the opinion that if they had had better relationships with their teachers, they would have done better at school. This issue was more of concern for

project users of secondary school age than for younger survey participants.

The focus group discussions generated one or two examples of extreme insensitivity on the part of teachers:

*'There was this one teacher, cos of stuff that's happened to me my bladder control wasn't very strong, they knew the situation and yet they still wouldn't let me go toilet. I used to hate that. One day I couldn't help it but go. That teacher knew the situation but she wouldn't let me go to the toilet.'*

Kelly, from a south east town (focus group)

One of our project users who is a young carer and looks after his disabled mother has, as a result, sometimes had difficulties getting to school on time. He said:

*'I used to get up in the morning and help my mum. As a result, one time, I was five minutes late for lessons so I was sent to the head teacher's office. I was there for most of the day and missed most of my lessons for being five minutes late.'*

To some extent, disliking one or more of your teachers and learning to deal with these feelings is part of almost everyone's experience of growing up. But again, it must be remembered that many of NCH's service users are unusually vulnerable for a number of reasons that are not of their making. Many of them also lack good support structures at home to help them cope with problems in their lives and have low self-esteem. It is not surprising if they need more encouragement and reassurance than more advantaged pupils in order to feel positive about school. Unfortunately, many of the children and young people in this survey felt that they didn't receive it. This survey and other research NCH has carried out show how incredibly valuable positive feedback of all kinds, including at school, can be for young people dealing with profound difficulties in their lives.

The focus group discussions suggested that, unfortunately, some NCH service users' experiences of school tend to confirm their own feelings of inadequacy, rather than helping them to feel more positive about themselves and optimistic for the future. Such feelings could be serious barriers to these young people re-entering learning later on, should the opportunity present itself for them to do so, and could also impact on their capacity to support their own children in getting the most out of school.

*'Sometimes the way teachers talked to you was like they thought you were stupid.'*

Darren, from a north east town (focus group)

Those respondents who felt they had struggled at school often questioned the commitment of teachers to those who needed the most help:

*'People who are bright get help, but people who are not so brainy don't.'*

Questionnaire respondent

*'They don't do enough for us what's daft. In our form they used to focus more on them that were going to get As than us that were daft.'*

Darren, from a north east town (focus group)

Of course, most teachers may well try very hard indeed to promote the learning of every child, but this was not the impression that some of NCH's service users had gained. Research has shown the importance of high teacher expectations in motivating children to succeed: NCH's service users need to be stretched and challenged too, albeit in a way that is appropriate for them. Some commentators have also argued that the present system of school league tables may inadvertently cause teachers to neglect the needs of the least academically able children.<sup>12, 13</sup>



# Removing the barriers to achievement

Although this survey was relatively small in scale and unrepresentative in any national sense, its findings are sufficiently clear and reinforced by other studies to suggest that the education system is in need of significant reform if the government's aim of providing opportunities for all children and young people to realise their potential – an aim NCH enthusiastically endorses – is to be achieved. A wide-ranging and sustainable package of policies and initiatives is required to address the educational needs of those currently being left behind.

These are our proposals for change, based on our survey findings and from our professional experience working with disadvantaged children and young people.

## 1 Keeping on top of bullying

Having launched a major programme to tackle bullying, the government needs to keep track of its progress. Regular research needs to be conducted to assess the extent and scale of bullying and make sure that it is reducing.

## 2 Moving towards a more flexible curriculum

We support the government's proposals to make the pre-16 curriculum more flexible, incorporating more vocational elements as well as enabling pupils to study for academic GCSEs. The government should ensure that all vocational qualifications are tied to a specific profession or discipline. We would also suggest that those teaching these subjects would benefit from actual experience of working in them.<sup>14</sup>

## 3 Making optimum use of mentors

NCH's professional experience, reinforced by research, is that mentors can be extremely effective in helping less able and less advantaged children and young people to succeed in school. We commend their use and call on the government to encourage and support a sustainable expansion in mentoring schemes across the country. The forthcoming Spending Review 2004 provides an opportunity to do this.

We particularly support schemes in which the mentors themselves are or have been underachievers and are given the chance to 'reinvent' themselves as helpers and teachers.<sup>15</sup>

## 4 Equipping schools to meet the needs of less advantaged and less able pupils more effectively

The Green Paper on children includes proposals for attaching more child and family support services to schools. This is very welcome since, as this study suggests, it will do much to help schools to 'hang on' to children who currently refuse school and drift away from the education system.

NCH already runs a small number of highly successful projects attached to schools; our experience is that many schools will need guidance and support in taking up any such new opportunities. In particular, they will need help in drawing effectively on the contribution of voluntary organisations because, at present, most schools do not have strong local relationships with them.

NCH also believes that if schools are to meet the needs of less advantaged and less able pupils more effectively, the education system must be strategically reviewed. The aim of such a review should be to ensure that schools are appropriately incentivised to promote the achievement of all their children and young people, and provided with the resources (for example, extra support staff) to enable them to do so. Some steps have been taken in this direction but many more are needed.

Teachers should also receive initial and in-service training in how to recognise the needs of vulnerable children and young people, and in what they can do to help meet them. The experience of organisations such as NCH should be drawn on to assist with this.

## 5 Doing more to engage all pupils in the life of the school

NCH views the 'teachers versus pupils' culture that exists in some schools as highly detrimental. We strongly support the involvement of young people in making school decisions. While many schools have a history of pupil involvement through the use of school councils, such activities should be more extensive. The introduction of PHSE (personal health and social education) lessons to the national curriculum provides a good opportunity for such discussions to take place. Pupils should be consulted on a wide range of issues, from after-school activities to the design of school uniforms.

Such measures would help promote a positive learning environment. If young people are to feel included in the life of the school they – alongside their parents – must be seen increasingly as partners in a shared endeavour, not as subjects. The Welsh assembly government has recently proposed that every Welsh school should have a school council and we recommend this initiative to the government at Westminster too.

## 6 Providing more learning opportunities for children and young people outside school

There are two elements to this proposal. Firstly, NCH is an enthusiastic supporter of and participant in schemes such as Saturday schools and homework clubs; in our experience they are very helpful in combating the '9am to 3.30pm' school mentality and in offering children and young people valuable opportunities for catching up if they have fallen behind in their lessons. We would like to see all schools

taking part in such schemes and we hope the forthcoming Spending Review 2004 will provide an opportunity for this to happen.

Secondly, we believe much more can and should be done to attach creative learning opportunities to other services that support vulnerable and excluded children and young people, especially to projects run by voluntary organisations such as NCH.

Our experience is that a small number of children and young people are so alienated by the formal school environment that they are unlikely ever to realise their potential within it, yet they may well be prepared to learn in a more informal setting, or perhaps through the use of ICT. We have evidence of success in both regards and we would like more opportunities to play our part in helping disadvantaged children and young people to re-engage with learning in these ways, and to enjoy doing so.



# Conclusion

The barriers facing the children and young people who use NCH projects in achieving their potential can sometimes seem insurmountable. Yet NCH's experience is that many of them are highly resourceful and resilient in meeting and overcoming difficulties at a young age that, fortunately, most of us will never have to face. So despite some of the difficult issues that this report raises, we are ultimately optimistic that the education system can be reformed in a way that will allow many more of the children with whom we work to do justice to their skills and talents in the future.

We hope and trust that the government shares our ambition and will want to work with us, and with children and young people themselves, alongside their parents and carers, to create the changes that we believe are required to make this happen.

## Endnotes

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