# Working TOGETHER PROJECT

# Interim Report

# Foreword

The Mission Statement of Mary Immaculate College includes a strong commitment to promoting equity in society as well as seeking "to foster in its students, a spirit of justice and compassion in the service of others".  Different aspects of the teaching and research conducted in and through the College reflect this commitment.  Activities are undertaken through the Centre for Education Disadvantage Research (CEDR), Targeting Educational Disadvantage (TED) and the Learner Support Unit (LSU).

"Working Together" is one of the initiatives which the College has undertaken as staff play their part in targeting educational disadvantage.  In 1996, the College established a network of the designated disadvantaged schools in Limerick city.  In all, seventeen disadvantaged schools have collaborated in this network which has become known as the "Partnership linking University and Schools" (PLUS).  At the outset, through an extensive survey, the PLUS network identified a number of priority areas in which research was required.  One of the most pressing needs identified was for research in the field of behaviour management which teachers perceived as an area of increasing difficulty in schools.

The title of the project, "Working Together" is indicative both of the close partnership between the Mary Immaculate College and the primary schools which participate in this network.  At another level, the title gives an indication into the nature of the work conducted through this project within primary schools, where both teachers and pupils are supported in developing the pedagogies and methodologies that promote collaboration.  Close collaboration between teachers and pupils, and between school and community is increasingly recognised as key to achievement in education.  There is also close collaboration with other bodies and agencies, both statutory and voluntary, which can contribute to improving the educational opportunities of all our pupils, particularly those in most need of support.  In the words of the Irish proverb: *"Ní neart go cur le chéile" ("There is strength in joint effort").*  This project is a powerful vehicle for ensuring that the joint effort necessary is made in a cohesive manner as we work together in the field of educational endeavour.

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# Executive Summary

The Working Together Project is a 4-year research and intervention project aimed at promoting positive behaviour amongst primary school children in designated disadvantaged urban settings. This report describes the findings of the first two years of the project. Our experience within the project in those two years can usefully be summarised in terms of findings and recommendations.

## Key Findings

- Our findings underline the importance of a **quality learning environment** in the promotion of positive behaviour. The establishment of such a learning environment is an essential pre-requisite for any initiatives around behaviour.

- Schools encounter a wide spectrum of behaviour. Most children behave in a very positive way towards their teachers and their peers. When challenging behaviour does occur, it is often minor in nature. Nonetheless, persistent minor challenging behaviour can disrupt the learning environment. There is a small number of children whose behaviour is extremely challenging. These children may have emotional and behavioural needs that require **specialist intervention** beyond that currently available in schools.

- In order for behaviour to be managed effectively in schools, behavioural expectations and consequences for positive and negative behaviour need to be clearly established through a negotiated process with key players and communicated to children, parents and teachers. **Consistency in behaviour management** is an important element in the establishment of an orderly learning environment.

- Many teachers, children and parents are of the view that children, parents and teachers should be involved in **developing behavioural expectations.** Involving children and parents in this way requires a considered discussion of what behaviour is desirable and why and how such behaviour is to be encouraged. It also requires a careful examination of the balance of power in schools and how decisions are made and of how key players can support each other to implement these decisions.

# Recommendations

Our findings imply a number of factors that are key to promoting positive behaviour

- Every child requires a quality learning environment. Provision of such an environment requires resources and on-going continuing professional development for teachers. Involvement of parents/guardians can greatly enrich this learning environment. In order to promote such involvement teachers need to be supported so that they can develop meaningful positive relationships with parents/guardians.

- Schools need to develop systematic, consistent, shared approaches to behaviour. In order for these approaches to be shared, children and parents/guardians should be involved. For such involvement to be meaningful teachers need to develop consultative skills and they also need the time and resources for consultation and relationship-building.

- Schools have a key role to play in managing challenging behaviour, regardless of its severity. The development of consistent approaches and of interpersonal skills in staff is key to behaviour management. However, coping with extremely challenging behaviour is stressful for all involved and teachers need ongoing professional development and ongoing support in this area. Support services for schools such as psychological services need to be extended. Furthermore, the assignment of a behaviour support role to a specially trained staff member, other than the principal, would provide an important resource for children, parents/guardians and teachers.

- Managing challenging behaviour is extremely complex and schools need a range of flexible responses. Looking for simple, uniform responses to challenging behaviour is likely to be unproductive.

- In considering the issue of behaviour at school, it is all too easy to become disheartened by incidences of very challenging behaviour. Schools need to recognise and affirm positive behaviour when it occurs and make such affirmation part of any policies or strategic plans for behaviour management.

# "'Fire Brigade' work is not enough, we need
# long term planning and solutions"

Teacher in a designated disadvantaged school, Limerick City.

It was comments like this one that provided the impetus for the Working Together Project. The Project seeks to promote positive behaviour amongst primary school pupils in designated disadvantaged schools in Ireland and grew out of a perceived need for innovative approaches to challenging behaviour in such schools, not only in Limerick City but also on the Western seaboard. It is a research and intervention project developed and managed by the Targeting Educational Disadvantage Project (TED) and the Centre for Educational Disadvantage Research (CEDR) at the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

As part of its work TED formed two networks of designated disadvantaged schools. The first of these networks is based in Limerick city and the second is based on the Western seaboard. In its start-up phase the city network, known as PLUS, identified the top three areas of concern for teachers in disadvantaged schools. The issues identified were early childhood education, absenteeism and challenging behaviour. With regard to the latter, teachers were specifically concerned with the rate of challenging behaviour in their schools and with their ability to respond appropriately to that behaviour. As a response to these concerns the Working Together Project was designed as a research and intervention project. The project seeks to understand the processes involved in challenging behaviour and to intervene in those processes in ways that improve the teaching-learning situation. Planning for the project began in April 2001. The intervention phase of the project is of four years' duration from September 2001 to September 2005. The current report summarises the work of the project from its initial planning phase to the end of data collection and analysis in June 2003. The lessons learned during this period and future directions are also identified. Documentation of the project's findings will continue up to December 2005.

## Project aims and rationale

At the outset, three clear objectives for the project were outlined:

- The first objective is to improve behaviour in disadvantaged schools. Specifically, to create a positive philosophy of appropriate behaviour that is shared by children, teachers and parents and in addition an improved, systematic response to challenging behaviour that is shared by children, teachers and parents.
- The second objective is to create an approach to behaviour that is sustainable.
- The third objective is to document the processes involved in problem behaviour, in formulating and implementing appropriate responses and to disseminate the findings to the broader educational community in order to improve practice.

As Working Together is concerned with human behaviour it needs to be set within a framework of understanding of behaviour. Our framework is ecological, drawing on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979). Bronfenbrenner recognises that human development is shaped not only by one-to-one relationships, but also by a complex interrelationship of relationships and context. Bronfenbrenner describes the person as embedded in a series of systems that influence his/her behaviour. These systems extend from one-to-one interactions with others, to elements of the environment that affect the people with whom an individual interacts but do not affect the individual directly, to the cultural context within which the individual lives. For example, a child is influenced by his/her interactions with parents and teachers. He/she is also influenced by interactions between parents and teachers even though he/she may not be physically present at such interactions. At a broader cultural and societal level the child is affected by a range of factors including, for example, distribution of resources within society. Bronfenbrenner's theory is attractive because it not only looks at individual development, but also provides a conceptual framework for locating that development in a broader context. Using the ecological framework to guide the Working Together Project leads us to consider not just the child's behaviour and the response to it in school, but also to consider the systems within which that behaviour occurs. The adoption of an ecological framework also affects our conceptualisation of children's behaviour and indeed, the terminology adopted. A child's behaviour can now be seen as an *individual's response to a set of circumstances.* Thus, although we began speaking of 'problem' behaviour, we now favour the term 'challenging behaviour' as this focusses on the ecological context that determines the description of the behaviour and not on the individual. Refining our definition in this way has important implications for intervention also as it focusses change not just on the individual child but also on his/her ecological context.

In the first year of the project, the aim of our research efforts was primarily to develop an understanding of the ecological framework within which the project is working and also to establish a baseline against which intervention could be measured. Our intervention efforts were primarily focussed on developing relationships between participants and coming to a shared understanding of challenging behaviour. In the second year, we concentrated on developing a shared approach to behaviour and specifically a behaviour policy. Our research then focussed on the effectiveness of such a policy.

Combining the need to describe the ecological context of the project and the objectives of the project, an understanding of the context in which challenging behaviour takes place and the responses to such behaviour as well as the impact the project had on these responses needed to be developed through data collection. Accordingly, the data collection explored:
1) Definitions, incidence, prevalence and severity of challenging behaviour.
2) Reasons for challenging behaviour.
3) Relationship between challenging behaviour and learning.
4) Existing strategies for coping with challenging behaviour and the effectiveness of such strategies.
5) The development of new approaches to cope with challenging behaviour and the effectiveness of these approaches.
6) The extent to which participation in the project leads to the development of shared understandings and is empowering for participants.

Our current understanding of these factors will be considered later in this report. The details of the methodology used in data collection and data analysis are described in Appendix 1. The next section describes a number of principles that guide the intervention aspect of the project. These principles set out, to an extent, the philosophy of the project, an important factor in understanding the decisions made and directions taken by the project team.

## Guiding principles of the Working Together Project

### Partnership

The creation of a shared understanding of children's behaviour is central to the success of this project. In order for this shared understanding to emerge, we must listen to the voices of all concerned. Frequently, in cases such as this, it is the voices of adults that are most clearly heard, and particularly those of articulate adults such as teachers. Yet Boldt (1994) has identified that teachers' perception of the nature of a problem is often sharply different to the perception of the children concerned.

Working Together seeks to redress this imbalance, firstly by listening not only to parents and teachers but also by giving children a voice in the participating schools and, secondly, through the dissemination of findings and demonstration of how children's voices can be incorporated into policy development. The importance of listening to children is noted in research into behavioural challenges (Jones and Charlton, 1996) and is a key recommendation of the National Children's Strategy (Ireland, 2000). Working Together provides an opportunity to further develop models of qualitative research with young children, which will allow their voices to be heard. By allowing children to present their perspective on behaviour problems and on possible solutions, it was envisaged that the project would be more successful and sustainable.

### Whole-School Approach

Linked to the principle of partnership is the whole-school approach adopted in the project. Research indicates that a whole-school policy is most effective in combating behavioural problems (Rogers, 2000; Smith and Sharp, 1994). The project seeks to develop such a whole-school approach. Teachers may share an ethos of children's behaviour but they will need to employ different ways of operationalising their behaviour management strategies, based on the child's developmental level and individual circumstances. For this reason, Working Together does not impose one single approach to children's behaviour, such as discipline for learning (O'Hara et al, 2000) or self-management (Traxson, 1994), but explores several in order to maximise their efficiency, thus recognising the contextual nature of behaviour problems. Although the general ethos of behaviour is similar across schools, strategies are localised to suit the needs of each school.

### Development of personal skills

The project recognises that the development of personal skills of children, teachers and parents is important in coping with behavioural challenges (O'Hara et al, 2000; Rogers, 2000). Teachers and children can become demoralised by behavioural problems (Jones and Charlton, 1996; Lane, 1996). Children's misbehaviour often stems from personal difficulties (Humphreys, 1993; Martin, 1997; O'Hara et al, 2000). The collaborative approach of Working Together provides

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emotional support for all participants, so that they are no longer facing behavioural challenges alone, but rather with the support of others who understand and share their experiences. Furthermore, the project presents an opportunity to develop analytic and interpretative skills in teachers.

### Relationships between agencies

Finally, Working Together is largely based in the school setting. However, it is clear that the school is not the only agency that addresses behavioural problems in children. Indeed, teachers clearly recognise the need for support from other agencies (PLUS survey; INTO, 2000). In the course of the project, relationships with other agencies have been developed, e.g., Barnardos, National Educational Psychological Service, Gardaí. Again, the aim here is to create a shared understanding, between agencies, of children's behaviour and of the approaches to that behaviour.

In order to maximise the transfer of learning from site to site, the project has a lagged design. During the first two years the project worked with one school. We began working with two more schools at the beginning of the third year. In this way, the work in schools two and three was informed by the lessons learned in our work with school one.

## Participants – Selection of schools

The Working Together Project is based on three case studies. Case studies are chosen from slightly different contexts which, through comparison, may tell us more about what processes are specific to a particular site or situation and what processes are found more generally. The logic is that of replication and comparison, not of randomness. Selection then is based on two concerns: identification of factors that must be kept steady across case studies and identification of factors that should be different in each case study.

As Yin (1994) notes, one problem with multiple-case case studies is that choosing cases based on certain criteria will necessitate some degree of familiarity with the case studies in advance. In this case, our close working relationship with the schools through the PLUS network enabled the choice to be made on the basis of good knowledge. Furthermore, the positive working relationship we had established with these schools through the network maximised the project's chances of success.

A number of characteristics are thought to be necessary for an intervention like Working Together to work. Such characteristics should be present in all case studies. These include: strong leadership in the school, a pre-existing identification of behaviour as an issue that the school wants to address, a critical mass of teachers interested in bringing about change and an openness to working with the project team. Furthermore, all participating schools are members of the PLUS network. Case studies should also differ in important respects that are thought to contribute to the problem or its solution. The issues identified were school size and co-educational or single-sex status. Lynch (1999) found that a higher incidence of misbehaviour is reported for boys' schools and the least incidence was reported for girls' schools.

Working Together began in a large co-educational school, with approximately 500 pupils and 30 teachers, located on the outskirts of Limerick city. Towards the end of the second year, two more schools were approached and agreed to take part in the project. One is a single-sex girls' school and the other is a single-sex boys' school. These latter schools are somewhat smaller than the first school. One is in the inner city and the other is relatively suburban. All three schools are designated disadvantaged and are located in RAPID development areas. The current report is based on our work with our first case study school.

## Getting started

### Establishing Consultative Mechanisms

Our initial step in the implementation of the project was to approach an interested school. We first approached the principal and vice-principal. We then outlined the project at a staff meeting in the school, describing our expectations and objectives. The teachers were balloted to see if they wished to proceed with the project or not. The majority of teachers agreed to do so. When we secured funding for the project, we returned to the school to revisit the project description and to discuss how to proceed. At this point, three teacher representatives were elected to serve on the project management committee. The school also invited three parents to sit on the committee. The other members of the management committee were the principal, vice-principal (who has special responsibility for resource and behavioural issues), Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) teacher and, from the Working Together Team at Mary Immaculate College, the senior researcher and the project co-ordinator. The management committee met on a monthly basis to discuss progress and targets.

An art competition to design a logo for Working Together was held amongst 6th class pupils. This logo has now become the project logo and has been incorporated into letterhead and all other project documentation. An advisory committee for the project was also formed. This committee included the Department of Education and Science local Inspector, representatives from the National Psychological Service, Health Board, Gardaí and Barnardos. The purpose of the advisory committee was to provide advice on the development of the project and to provide an opportunity to build links with other agencies. An explanatory note about the project was sent to all parents in the school.

### Exploring behaviour

Much of the first year of the project was dedicated to exploring the issue of behaviour. It is clear that teachers' understanding of challenging behaviour is central to the solution of behaviour problems, so the development of such understanding was an important first step in intervention (Cole, Visser and Daniels, 1999). The project team began by conducting a literature review of behavioural interventions. Documents to stimulate and guide teachers' thinking on behaviour management were provided to teachers. These documents looked specifically at the topics of classroom management, rewards and punishments and involving children in the development of class rules. Two training sessions were held for teachers. The first, given by Suzanne Parkinson, Developmental and Educational Psychologist at Mary Immaculate College, provided an overview of different approaches to behaviour. The second, given by Professor Frank Howe, Professor of Guidance and Counselling at Longwood University Virginia, focussed on the development of consistent expectations for behaviour and consequences for positive and negative behaviour.

Stronger links between parents and the school were also fostered through the implementation of a short course for the parents of children in junior infants. This programme explored how young children learn in school and offered practical skills to parents to support their children's learning. The programme was devised by the project co-ordinator and implemented by the junior infant teachers.

The participants' understanding of behaviour was also explored through questionnaires and interviews. Before any data could be gathered within the school, parents' consent for their children's participation was sought. A consent form was sent to all parents, asking them to contact the school if they had any objection to their child being part of the project. Care was taken to word this form in a way that would make it accessible to parents.

Questionnaires were completed by 29 teachers, and 290 children from 3rd to 6th class. As already stated, we wanted to explore the meanings around children's behaviour in school. Such exploration requires an in-depth examination of the relationships between participants. At the macro level, we wanted to explore school-wide characteristics that influence behaviour. On the micro level, we wanted to explore relationships between children, teachers and parents. In order to do so, we selected a number of children within the school to study in greater depth.

As part of the teacher survey, teachers were asked to identify the level of challenging behaviour in their classes. Classes where teachers reported that challenging behaviour significantly impacted on the class in an ongoing way were selected. Four such classes were identified, one from Senior Infants, two from fourth class and one from sixth class. As the project has a four-year span, it made more sense to concentrate on children who will be present for as much of the project as possible, rather than looking at fifth and sixth class. Therefore, the two fourth classes and the junior class were chosen for study. Another junior class was also selected so that we now had two junior classes and two fourth classes.

Once the classes were chosen, the teachers in those classes were asked to complete a behavioural checklist on each child (this checklist is described in the appendix). The results were used to select 24 children from the least challenging, average and most challenging groups. Parental permission was sought for their participation in interviews and further in-depth study. Twelve parents came to a meeting and met with the project team and school principal. The project was explained to these parents and they were asked to sign a consent form to allow the team to interview and observe their children. All of the parents who attended the meeting agreed to take part. The Home-School Community Liaison (HSCL) contacted seven more of the parents and obtained their consent, three of whom were the parents of girls who were selected because the initial selection from one of the classes was all male. A total of seventeen children were interviewed. Six senior infants were interviewed, three girls and three boys. Eleven fourth class children were interviewed, six girls and five boys. These children were also observed twice in class and once in the yard. Four class teachers were interviewed. Eight parents were interviewed, seven of whom were female.

Accessing parents for interview was more difficult than accessing teachers or children. Appointments were made for parent interviews through the HSCL teacher. If parents could not keep these appointments, the interviews were rescheduled. There was, however, a number of parents who repeatedly missed interview appointments and so were not interviewed. The fact that all communication from the project was made through the school may have influenced the rate of parents' participation in the interviews. The project team had no direct contact with parents, apart from the initial meeting and all communication with parents went through the school. Furthermore, the school was the only suitable interview venue in the neighbourhood, which meant that if parents were reluctant to go to the school, it was not possible to interview them. The questionnaires and interviews were conducted in the Spring and Summer terms of

the first school year of the project.  The findings, which were used to guide the development of strategies for managing behaviour in the second year of the project, are described in the section below.

## Definitions, Incidence and Impact of Behaviour

### Adults' and children's definitions of challenging behaviour

In their questionnaire, teachers were given a list of challenging behaviours and were asked to rate them as minor, serious or most serious.  Minor challenging behaviours involved inattentiveness.  Serious challenging behaviours involved disruption and most serious challenging behaviours involved physical and verbal aggression and refusal to co-operate with teachers' direction.  Teachers were divided on the seriousness of withdrawn or shy behaviour.  While most teachers rated these behaviours as minor, a significant minority considered them to be serious.  Information on children's definitions of challenging behaviour was gleaned from the interviews.  The 'bold' or naughty behaviours listed by children included talking out of turn, being out of one's seat, disrupting class activities and messing or playing.  Both younger and older children mentioned hitting or fighting frequently and older children mentioned 'slagging' or teasing frequently.  In contrast, children found it more difficult to define 'good' behaviour and tended to emphasise being quiet.  'Doing work' was the only description of a positive and active behaviour that emerged from the interviews.

### Incidence, prevalence and severity of challenging behaviour

Teachers described the general behaviour in the school as occasionally challenging.  Nonetheless, two serious behaviours, defiance of class/school rules and disruption of activities, were considered to happen often or most of the time by almost two thirds of teachers.  In fact, all of the challenging behaviours were said to occur often or most of the time by at least one third of teachers.  However, it was generally reported that such behaviour was displayed by only a small number of children.  The overall profile of behaviour within the school therefore was of occasionally challenging across the board with a small number of children displaying more seriously challenging behaviour.  The rate of challenging behaviour increased as children got older.  The children gave a higher estimate of the extent of general misbehaviour in the classroom than the teachers did.  This estimate was lowered when children were asked to report the extent of their own misbehaviour.

### Reasons for challenging behaviour

In the questionnaires teachers were asked to select the two most important causes of misbehaviour from a list.  The two most important causes of challenging behaviour chosen by the teachers from this list were 'lack of interest in education in the home' and 'having unmet emotional needs'.  The next most important was 'learning difficulties', followed by 'home worries', 'chronic absenteeism' and 'irrelevant curriculum'.

Children were also asked to select causes of misbehaviour from a list. Peer-related factors were the most common cause of misbehaviour according to children.  Such factors included being picked on by other children on the way to school, not getting along with peers and not liking to share with others.  Similar themes emerged in the interviews with the children.  The following extract shows how rule-breaking can form part of the child's presentation of self to peers.

Children also identified boredom as a factor in misbehaviour and suggested that some children 'like being bold'.  Teachers recognised the importance of peer factors in misbehaviour, but the children gave them more prominence in their responses to the questionnaire.

## The relationship between challenging behaviour and learning

In the teachers' answers to an open-ended question in their questionnaire about the impact of challenging behaviour, two major themes emerged.  Firstly, challenging behaviour was reported to create much personal stress for teachers, making them tired, frustrated and disillusioned. Secondly, teachers felt that challenging behaviour impacted negatively on the learning environment, preventing teachers from implementing the curriculum satisfactorily.  Teachers were also asked specifically about the impact of challenging behaviour on instructional time. The majority of teachers said that they spent some instructional time dealing with challenging behaviour.  A minority said that they spent a lot of instructional time dealing with such behaviour and only two said that they spent very little instructional time dealing with challenging behaviour.  Most teachers said that challenging behaviour impacts negatively on the individual child's learning most of the time.  Approximately 50% of teachers said that children's challenging behaviour had a negative impact on their peers' learning most of the time.  Children's reactions to challenging behaviour were harder to measure but most agreed that it disrupts learning.

## Conclusions and Directions for Intervention

In general behaviour in the school was considered to be occasionally challenging, but a minority of children were involved in seriously challenging behaviour.  Minor behaviours tended to involve inattentiveness while serious behaviours involved aggression.  Peer relationships appeared to play an important role in the development of challenging behaviour.  While children could identify challenging behaviours, they found it more difficult to define positive behaviours.  The development of a clear, agreed set of expectations around behaviour, that

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would emphasise positive behaviour therefore became a focus for the project. The research findings pointed to the need to develop strategies for responding to classroom behaviour that would minimise the disruption to the learning environment.  The impact of peer relationships on behaviour highlighted the need to consider the yard environment as a context in which peer issues were often played out.  It also demonstrated the need for the development of conflict resolution strategies.

Note: pronoun use - all teachers are referred to as "she". "He" is used for children in all extracts.

## Managing Challenging Behaviour

### Formulation of teacher strategies around challenging behaviour

The information on this theme came mainly from the questionnaire. Most teachers said they learned behaviour management strategies through trial and error, discussion with other teachers and experience. They would like the opportunity to discuss strategies with others but do not often get the opportunity to do so. Teachers had class rules and most displayed those rules. Most teachers felt that children should be involved in constructing the rules, but only half of them did so. Most children said that they should be consulted about the rules, although a significant minority (22%) were unsure. Despite this belief amongst the children, only 40% had actually been involved in constructing class rules.

### Strategies used by teachers to deal with challenging behaviour at the beginning of the project

Strategies used by teachers to manage children's behaviour could be divided then into rewards and punishments, non-verbal classroom management strategies and discussion with the child. Praise and verbal reprimand were the most frequently used strategies according to children and teachers. Other strategies used often by at least half of the teachers surveyed were signalling of awareness, rewards for effort, recording positive and negative behaviours, informing parents of misbehaviours and discussing behaviour with the child. It is worth noting that most teachers also reported informing parents of positive behaviour sometimes. The most salient management strategies for children, according to their questionnaire responses, were punishments. It should be noted here that the children rated every strategy as occurring more often than not. However, the rate of occurrence did vary from one strategy to the next indicating that the children perceived a relative difference in their effectiveness. Teachers said that they used positive strategies and low level interventions more often than children said they did. In contrast, the children's estimates of the frequency of high level interventions involving punishment were higher than the teachers' were.

The children's and teachers' interviews showed that approaches to behaviour management concentrated mainly on rewards and punishments. The rewards mentioned were tokens, such as stars, that were exchanged for treats, individual treats, class treats and being chosen for jobs. The school-wide system of a merit list was also mentioned. The teachers nominate children for a merit list and children who are placed on the list are given a small reward and a certificate by the principal at assembly. The older children could list a range of rewards. The younger children's responses concentrated on tokens like stars.

The sanctions mentioned in the interviews included time out, removal of rewards and denial of treats, removal from class and being sent to another class, verbal reprimands and warnings, being sent to the office and having your name noted in a yard notebook for misbehaviour at breaktime. Older children also discussed the system of penalty sheets; whereby children are asked to complete a worksheet, e.g., write out the words of a song. The parents' most usual response to reports from school of misbehaviour is grounding, and both children and parents reported this as effective in changing behaviour.

## Effectiveness of strategies used to deal with challenging behaviour

In the questionnaire, teachers were asked to rate the frequency and effectiveness of various strategies. Praise, rewards and the specific punishment of extra homework had similar effectiveness and frequency of use ratings. Some strategies had a higher frequency of use rating than an effectiveness rating. These included verbal reprimands, non-verbal reprimands, discussions with children and informing parents of misbehaviour. On the other hand, some strategies had higher effectiveness ratings than frequency of use ratings. These included rewarding positive behaviour and informing parents of positive behaviour, withdrawal from activities and treats and sending a child to another teacher or the principal either for positive or negative behaviour.

As with their ratings of the frequency of strategies, the children rated every strategy as more effective than not. The children's rating of the effectiveness of management strategies correlated with the frequency of those strategies, with some notable exceptions. Rewards, praise and sending a positive message home were used less frequently than their effectiveness rating warranted. The same can be said of withdrawal from activities and being sent to the principal. On the other hand, verbal reprimand and the teacher getting cross were used more frequently than their effectiveness rating would suggest.

The rank order of teachers' and children's ratings of the effectiveness of strategies was similar, except that children considered discussion and detention to be more effective and verbal reprimand to be less effective than teachers did. Even children identified as challenging were sure that rewards made them improve their behaviour, although one pointed out that waiting and "having to be good for a whole week" in order to get the treat was difficult.

Time out was a sanction frequently mentioned by children as their response of choice when asked "If you were the teacher and someone was being bold, what would you do?" Being sent to another class, particularly a "baby class", seemed to be considered a severe punishment. There was confusion amongst the children about the school-wide systems of punishment of being sent to the office and having your name put in the yard notebook.

**Extract**

Q. Do you get into trouble sometimes?

A. Mmm

Q. You do, how come?

A. Because, if we're playing a game of following in the yard and it ends up that we start pushing each other then it ends up like a very rough game and I always end up getting hurt and the other person who hurts you gets blamed. But it's really all of your faults from doing it in the first place.

Q. And what happens then, what does the teacher in the yard do?

A. She puts our name in the notebook and the Principal wants, we're supposed to get a penalty sheet or something... I don't know about the penalty sheet but the Principal has to talk to us.

While the teachers considered the system of penalty sheets effective, its effectiveness from the child's point of view was questionable.

**Extract**

Q. And you know the penalty sheets and things like that, do you think they're fair?

A. No

Q. Why not?

A. I like doing them sometimes cos they don't really bother me.

Q. So you're kinda good at doing them are you?

A. Yeah. I can go very fast through them.

Q. So they don't bother you?

A. No. I had to write a big huge song yesterday and it only took me something like five minutes.

Q. Oh you had to write out a song cos you were talking was it?

A. Yeah. Westlife, 'Seasons in the sun' I had to write that out.

Q. And you didn't mind. And will you talk the next time?

A. Yeah.

Q. What could the teacher do to make sure that you wouldn't talk in class?

A. I don't know.

Q. Nothing at all?

A. No. She knows I just keep on talking. The more she punished me I just keep on talking.

This extract shows how little impact the routine of punishment can have on children whose behaviour is frequently challenging.

## Conclusions and Directions for Intervention

Teachers had little opportunity to discuss strategies for managing behaviour with their colleagues, although most expressed a desire to do so. One function of the project was to provide a forum for such discussion. Teachers used a wide range of management strategies, although praise and verbal reprimand were the most frequently used. Positive strategies that teachers used were not as salient for the children as punishments. These findings suggested that an emphasis needed to be placed on positive strategies, such as the encouragement of positive behaviour. Furthermore, there was a need for clarity around what behaviour was

...there was a need for clarity around what behaviour was expected and what consequences followed positive or challenging behaviour.

expected and what consequences followed positive or challenging behaviour. With regard to the former, it was agreed that the children needed to be involved more in the development of class rules. With regard to the latter, more clarity was especially needed around out of class consequences.

## The Nature of School and of Home-school Links

### The nature of school

In our interviews, we explored the meaning of school for our respondents.  We asked children what they thought school was about, what they hoped to get from school and about their likes and dislikes.  We asked parents about the importance of education and we asked teachers about their attitudes to education.

Although different questions were asked in the parent and child interviews the answers clustered around the central idea that education leads to success in life as the following extracts from a child and his parent show.

**Extract Child**

Q. What's school really about?

A. I don't know.  Adults want children to go to school so that they grow up to be good lads, be good people and be able to work and get a job and stuff.
   If you don't get a job you don't have money.

**Extract Parent**

Q. So you left school yourself at twelve or thirteen, would you like that for your child?

A. No. He'll go to college.

Q. .....that's your dream for him?

A. Yeah, to do better in life.

Q  So staying in school will help him to do better.

A. Of course it will. Cos kids who stay in school get better jobs.

In their questionnaires, most children said that they liked school, although 20% said that they did not like school.  When asked about what they liked or disliked most about school, the children gave a wide range of answers.  For the younger children likes were focussed on toys, friends, the teacher and fun activities.  The older children often picked favourite subjects, usually art and physical education.  Some children indicated that 'work' was the least favourite thing about school.  According to the children, what makes school boring are things like having to sit without fidgeting, and doing things that are repetitive or not interesting.  The following extract is one child's view of the difference between good and bad activities.

**Extract**

Q. What makes you look forward to school?

A. If we have something good inside school like P.E. but sometimes even though if we have P.E. it's probably something isn't... it isn't really good inside school cos we're probably doing the same things over and over again.

Q. ...and what happens when you do the same things over and over again?

A. It gets kind of boring so you feel just like walking out of it.

Q. Do you, yeah.  And why do you think the teacher keeps going over things?

A. So we can get it in.  It's actually of good going over and over again but then you just get bored because you know it all.

Despite the high level of satisfaction with school expressed by children there were, nevertheless, some suggestions for school improvement made. The children suggested longer or more frequent breaks; some because they needed more time to eat and some because they felt a need for more playtime. Also in relation to playtime the children suggested that there should be more activities and some balls and skipping ropes should be made available. There was one suggestion from one of the older children for single gender classes and two of the older children wanted bigger chairs and desks.

## Teachers' views of school ethos

The teachers' attitudes to education and beliefs about the nature of schooling emerged in the context of discussions around the school ethos. Although teachers found it difficult to state the formal school ethos, i.e., 'to give each child the opportunity to become the best they can be', they still came very close to this perspective when asked to describe the school ethos informally.

**Extract**
Q. How would you describe the school ethos?
A. I don't even know what the school ethos is.
Q. Well not the stated one now but how would you describe it.
A. How would I../ My school ethos for this school?
Q. Yeah. Well not what you would like but...
A. What I would see the school ethos is from working here. To give every child an opportunity regardless of their circumstances and maybe to give kids a broader perspective. To achieve their full potential.

As the previous extract shows, teachers spoke of promoting all aspects of the child and helping children to achieve their full potential. Thus, it would in fact seem that there is a shared goal among the teachers, which reflects the school vision, even if teachers were not aware of the formal expression of the mission statement.

## Home-school links

The picture of home-school links and mutual understanding between teachers and parents that emerges from interviews with parents and teachers is complex. Three themes that emerge are communication between the home and school, understanding of challenging behaviour and educational aspirations.

Most teachers reported a positive relationship with parents when they met them but also identified that there were some parents with whom they had very little interaction.

Most teachers reported a positive relationship with parents when they met them but also identified that there were some parents with whom they had very little interaction. Teachers' interviews about parents often focussed on these parents. Some teachers also felt that they had a better relationship with the parents/guardians of less challenging children. Some

teachers reported that the parents of challenging children react aggressively or defensively when their child's behaviour is discussed. Similar themes emerged in the interviews. Teachers stated that they had little or no contact with many of the parents. They felt that invitations to come in to discuss a child's behaviour were ignored or were not useful as the parents took a 'them against us' stance and were not prepared to listen to the teachers' views.

**Extract**

Q. What role do you see for parents in the children's education?

A. Well they are the primary educators but I think a lot of them don't have respect for school. It's kind of an 'us and them' situation. And they always take the side of the child like, they never take the side of the teacher. If you call them in if it's in relation to behaviour, they don't want to admit that the problem lies with their child because then it reflects back badly on their own parenting skills.

Contact with the parents of younger children appeared to be more frequent than contact with the parents of older children, despite the fact that the results of the teachers' questionnaires indicated that older children were more likely to be involved in challenging behaviour. Nonetheless, it is clear that some parents are interested in contact with the school. One of the parents stated that s/he was not aware of parental involvement in the school apart from delivering and collecting children. S/he also expressed a willingness to come to the school whenever invited to do so. This same parent expressed some reservations about the level of information available when the child first entered the school saying that a meeting with the teacher would have been appreciated.

**Extract**

Q. What would encourage you to become more involved in the school?

Q. What would encourage you to come up?

A. I don't know really . I'll always come up, if it's to do with X any meeting.

Q. When your child started school... what kind of information were you given about the school or what was his life going to be like in school? Were you given any information?

A. No just a letter about the uniform and books and things like that. That was it.

Q. Is there a way that it could be any better?... Is there any information that you would need to make sure you were able to support him?

A. Are you not supposed to be introduced to the teacher beforehand? So they can get used to one another.

In contrast, another parent who was interviewed had been invited to the school to meet the teacher and had found this meeting helpful. Indeed the school reported that a meeting is held every year for parents whose children are starting school and that an information kit is provided for parents at that meeting. Some parents have accessed this meeting and others have not.

Another point that emerged from the interviews was the manner of communication between parents and school. There were four forms of communication mentioned by the parents:

· Note home about behaviour
· Formal letters of school requirements/days of closure etc.
· Verbal exchanges with teachers when collecting children.
· Entry in the child's diary

The communication methods mentioned above contributed to the parents feeling distanced from the school with no reason to become involved except for parent-teacher meetings. Often, summonses to come to the school were viewed as demands to account for a child's behaviour. There are two things that suggest themselves from interviews with parents: that parents are invited on some but not all occasions, or that some parents have not taken up opportunities to visit the school. This is a recurring difficulty, with a percentage of parents clearly not regularly involved in the school and other parents wanting and not finding opportunities to increase their involvement.

It was clear that teachers would like parents' support in encouraging certain types of behaviour at school and that they also wanted parents to follow up on certain challenging behaviours. However, in their responses to the questionnaire, teachers were divided on whether parents should be involved in constructing the rules although most felt that they should not. Parents were unable to say what exactly happened in school if children's behaviour was challenging, unless their own children were directly involved. The parents explained that their children did not usually report anything back about classroom structure unless specifically asked.

**Extract**
Q. Do you know, when children misbehave in [your child's] class, what does the teacher do?
A. No I don't.
Q. You've no idea what she does?
A. No. She gives out the sheets all right to bring home, that's all I know and she puts it in his diary.
Q. And would you like to know?
A. Oh, sure I do know if there's something wrong. (...indistinct ? I write her a letter at the end of ) the diary. If [my child] misbehaves, please let me know, so we know and ground him. I'd say the child is gettin' tormented that's all we're doing is grounding him. You can't hit him cos I don't believe in hitting a child cos we were never hit... but I dunno.

# The interviews reflected the complexity of a situation where teachers and parents need to work together to encourage certain behaviours while recognising that the home and school environments are different.

The interviews reflected the complexity of a situation where teachers and parents need to work together to encourage certain behaviours while recognising that the home and school environments are different. The recognition of that difference is clear in the following extract from a parent.

Q. Do you think with the way we expect a child to behave at home or the way we expect a child to behave at school are two different things or should we expect the child to behave the same way at school as at home?

A. No they're two different

Q. Are they? Explain it to me?

A. At school there's a lot more discipline and they're a totally different child when they're at school

Q. And the way a parent at home expects the child to behave and the way the teacher expects them to behave what's the difference?

A. I dunno... school is for learning and home is for play.. after homework like.

Q. So you think you've more freedom at home is it?

A. Yeah lots more

While accepting this difference between home and school expectations, there was some tension between the behavioural expectations at home and those at school that had the potential to cause difficulties at school. For example, although some parents reported that they had taught their children not to hit others at school, some teachers reported that other parents encouraged their children to hit back if they were hit first. A further illustration of a possible tension between expectations at home and at school is evident in the following extract.

**Extract**

Q. Would that kind of misbehaviour or opting out whether it's just occasionally or, does it create much of a problem for you and your family when it does happen?

A. Sometimes it does. Well it's not [just him]. For instance Friday morning I got up and I have to nail down all my windows cos of the [younger ones] and I have the top ones un-nailed to let air into the room. And the three of them got up Friday morning before me and thrown everything out the top window in the back. Wellies, shoes the whole lot. So I punished them. Told them they were grounded for a month. That meant no sweets no nothin' for a month and I had them in bed for the day on Friday. So I said fair enough, I gave them the benefit of the doubt on Saturday and left them down. [He] was as good as gold cos he knew. He knew he would have been put back up to bed. And everything was taken out of their room. Like [he] has television, video and playstation in his room. And the [others] have their own little toys and a telly. That was all taken away from them. It seems to be working. They will throw... 'you're stupid, I hate you' and...

Q. And what do you do when they say those kinds of things to you, that must be hard?

A. Just takes no notice of them, I'm used of it now... 'you're stupid or I hate you', sweared at.

Q. So you just ignore all of that?

A. Sometimes I'll ignore it. There goes to a point where you can't ignore it.

From the point of view of teachers in the school this reported acceptance 'up to a point' of being sworn at is an interesting difference between school and home. Tolerance for swearing in school is low, especially when directed at adults, as it is evidence of lack of respect. When the children are accustomed to different acceptance levels at home, especially the younger children, it is evident that they will need clear guidelines on what is acceptable. The home environment can also be more flexible. A parent can ignore behaviour up to a point whereas a

teacher will need to be aware of the possible impact of misbehaviour on the group.  The development of clear guidelines about behaviour has implications for the school, for home-school relationships and for the development of shared understandings about behaviour. Other parents indicated that, when it comes to behaviour at school, the teacher is the one who can sort it out.  It is interesting to note the parent's belief that the teacher has a better understanding of the child than the parent would.  Perhaps another interpretation of this would be that the parent considers that the teacher has a better understanding of the dynamic between the children because she is with all of the children together during the day.  What is clear from this parent's view is that difficulties between children need to be 'sorted out there and then'.

**Extract**

Q.  Do you know the way sometimes children would have disagreements with one another? Where would they mostly learn to sort out disagreements would you think?

A.  Well the teacher should sit them down. The teacher is with them 5 days a week and the teacher is all friendly and the teacher is at the top of the class and she should say I want you and you after school and she should sort it out there and then.
As for dealing with behaviour, most of the parents were for sitting the child down and discussing the behaviour or, if the behaviour was considered serious, the child would be 'grounded'.

**Extract**

Q.  Is there anything else, any other approaches that you use that are helpful in dealing with behaviour?

A.  Well I try to talk to him. I don't like hittin' him.  I don't like hittin' him.  Cos I know what it's like to be hit.  That's all my mother ever did, ...so I swore that I'd never hit my children. But I know that there is points there where you just have to... you can't d'you know what I mean.  I'd rather sit him down and talk to him rather than hit him, but... that has been the best one, the time out has been the best one I've ever tried.

Most of the other parents held to the view that conflict resolution skills were learned at home first and then reinforced at the school.

**Extract**

Q.  Where do children learn how to sort out disagreements most of the time?

A.  At home.

Despite some parents' advice to children to stand up for themselves it is clear that they recognise that there are factors at work in the school environment that require a different approach to resolving interpersonal difficulties.

**Extract**

A.  I taught him not to hit back in school.  I taught him if anyone hits him he's to tell teacher and that he can't hit kids in school.

The relationship between behavioural expectations at home and in school thus presents a complex picture of differences and complementarities.

The parents who were interviewed reported involvement in the education of their children. They generally liaised with the teacher and supported the child doing homework or supervised homework activities. Such supervision ranged from sitting down with the child for the homework period, to giving assistance only when asked and to watching over from a distance. Some parents were aware of a lack in their own educational background that left them searching for answers in response to their children's questions. More than one had plans to return to education when child-minding allowed.

**Extract**

Q. How do you think that you could help him get the most out of school?

A. I dunno. If he won't do the work for the teacher in his class then when I go up she'll say something to me and I'll get the work and I'll get him to do it when I get home.

It was interesting to hear the parents' comments on the academic achievements of their children. Parents were not always sure of the levels of educational attainment that should be expected of their children and some were surprised that their children could not do certain things that they considered should be easy.

**Extract**

A. Where his writing is concerned, it's not very neat. I'd be trying to correct it at home where neatness is concerned. I know he's only five but... I dunno, to me... I know I might sound stupid but I think he could do better.

Q. And how can you make sure that happens?

A. Well myself now, what I do is I have a copy at home myself and I'll write out words for him and he'll copy them .... and if he's not doing it neat, I'll do 'em in the dots for him to copy it over. So he's very good like, he knows what he's doing.

This indication of parents having high expectations of their children's academic achievement was not always recognised by teachers. The teachers' views of the eventual achievement of their pupils were not always compatible with the children's own ambitions and career goals and went against some aspirations parents had for their children to do better than they had themselves. There is a tension here between the teachers' earlier views that the purpose of the school was to help each child reach his/her potential and the recognition that many of the children may not reach that potential. This view may reflect the reality of the processes of educational disadvantage that limit children's educational achievements.

**Extract  (Teacher)**

...a lot of the kids here, education basically is just... to get by going to the shop you know and knowing their change and things like that because they'll make very little use of it anyway other than that. But we actually were talking about going to college last week and there were four people who put up their hands that said that their parents expected them to go to college. So I suppose it's very broad really what you're aiming for in the class and it's very broad as well what you're trying to... you know... we were talking about the different standards, the standard that I'd apply to people are quite broad in that respect.

In discussing the role of parents in education, teachers tended to concentrate on that minority of parents who were not supportive. Three views of this minority were prevalent: the teachers identified parental lack of interest, lack of ability and lack of pre-school preparation as elements working towards disadvantaging some of their pupils.

**Extract**

A. Family perception of the role of education (for significantly disadvantaged children) would probably not be very strong and the support that they would be getting at home would be minimal, I'm talking in terms of education. Whether the child feels that what they're doing in school is of any benefit to them, insofar as if they take work home will they get recognition for it... if they feel that it's worth it so then they might transfer that across into the school setting as well. Some children will survive despite... whatever the odds, whatever difficulties are placed in their way but a lot of children don't.

**Extract**

Q. And I wonder would it make a difference if they were to know what was expected of their children at this stage at school? Say a parent whose child is not up to the standard age level, would it be I wonder because they don't know what...?

A. Well I have another child now (who has below average reading skills) and his mother came in and she seemed concerned and she promised me the moon and stars with things and she didn't follow anything up. I mean her own reading wouldn't be... if I ever do get a note from her in relation to anything, the spelling is really poor and I don't think they're actually capable a lot of them, of doing the work of reading their books so it's difficult for them to help. But yeah, maybe, for some parents if they knew what to expect...

Parental ability to give assistance with homework may be limited in some instances due to early school leaving and lack of time available for working single parents. Parents who had older children did express concerns about not being able to answer their children's questions. Parents also recognised that some parents neglect their children's education. However, the interviews reflect the views of a number of parents who do try to assist their children and even those who consider, at the junior levels, that the school is not asking enough from the children.

## Conclusions and directions for interventions

Children, parents and teachers expressed general satisfaction with the school. Such views served as an important reminder of the positive starting point for the project. Children's description of the activities they liked and those they disliked provided an important insight into some possible causes of challenging behaviour as such behaviour can be linked to factors like boredom. The parents' and teachers' interviews highlighted some tensions around communication with parents. Although general communication between the home and school was outside of the remit of the project, the importance of clear communication about behavioural expectations was evident from the interviews.

Children and parents recognised the value of school. Both teachers and parents recognised that a minority of parents do not support their children's education. This is an issue that has high salience for teachers and tended to dominate their discussions about parents. Again, the broader issue of educational aspirations was not within the remit of Working Together but these research findings did highlight the need for the project to emphasise joint positive behavioural expectations between teachers and parents.

## Developing a Shared Approach to Managing Behaviour

Our exploration of behaviour described above indicated a number of important issues for intervention. Firstly, the positive school ethos and positive relationship between teachers and children needed to be recognised and affirmed. There was a need for clarity around the behaviour expected at school and the consequences for meeting or not meeting those expectations. Consultation with children on classroom rules needed to be formalised. For those occasions where behaviour needed to be addressed outside of the classroom, consistency across teachers needed to be established. Consistency was also needed for responses to behaviour within the classroom. Expectations around behaviour needed to be communicated to parents. While recognising that seriously challenging behaviour had a low incidence, the consequences of this behaviour were such that appropriate management strategies needed to be developed. Most importantly, positive behaviour and positive expectations needed to be emphasised.

We approached the intervention through two routes in the project's second year. Firstly, through the development of a school policy around behaviour and, secondly, the delivery of further training. The management and advisory committees continued to meet during this year to review the progress of the project.

At the beginning of the second year, a written report of the results of the children's and teachers' interviews was sent to the school staff. A report of the results of the teachers' and children's questionnaire had been sent to staff in the summer term of the first year. In the second year, a presentation of all research results was made to the staff. Having considered these results, the staff worked together to develop the school behaviour policy throughout the year. The staff were divided into three groups based on the level of classes they were teaching. These groups met for one hour a month after school to develop a school behaviour policy. A school planning day was also devoted to the completion of the policy. The policy contained the following elements:

- A statement of the school's mission
- A statement of purpose which describes the guiding principles of the behavioural policy
- The school rules
- The classroom rules (developed by the teacher and children in each class)
- A statement of what happens in class when children behave as expected (developed by the teacher and children in each class)
- A statement of what happens outside of class when children behave as expected
- A statement of what happens in class when children do not behave as expected (developed by the teacher and children in each class)
- A statement of what happens outside of class when children do not behave as expected
- A contract page, where children, teachers, parents and the principal sign to say that they will work together to help each other to keep the rules.

The management committee and teachers commented on a draft of the policy and revisions were made. The policy was then completed by teachers and children, signed by them and was sent home for a parent's signature. Parents were then invited to the school to discuss the policy and identify supports and training opportunities that would help them to support their

children in the coming year.  Two parent meetings were held, one for the parents of children up to 2nd class and the other for parents from 3rd to 6th class.  Thirty parents attended these meetings and expressed their satisfaction with the policy.  It should be noted that this is the largest attendance that the school has seen for this type of meeting.

Behaviour in the yard was identified by teachers as a key area for improvement.  Children had also identified the need to review break times.  With this in mind, a yard policy taskforce was formed to develop a policy for yard behaviour.  This taskforce consisted of the principal, three class teachers and the project support worker from the Working Together team at Mary Immaculate College.  The issue of yard behaviour was also discussed at staff meetings.  Draft policy and information documents were developed, addressing the behavioural expectations on the yard and the design of the physical environment of the yard.

Teachers also attended a number of training seminars to facilitate development of their strategies to deal with behaviour.  One of these seminars on stress management was held after school.  The other seminars were held as part of an in-service training day.  The topics covered were conflict resolution, individual behaviour plans and liaising with parents of children with difficulties.

Additional training on an individual basis was also supported by the project.  The vice-principal attended a 5-day training programme on Therapeutic Work with Children.  The principal and a class teacher attended a 2-day training programme in Solution-Focussed Brief Therapy.  A summer school entitled "Promoting Positive Behaviour Management in the Primary School" was designed and delivered by the project.  The elements of the summer school were Solution-Focussed Brief Therapy, Art Therapy, Play Therapy, Conflict Resolution, Anger Management, Child-centred Approaches and Listening Skills.

An important part of the development of a whole-school approach is the evaluation and revision of the policy.  The policy was introduced in the first week of May 2003, in the second year of the project.  It is worth noting that research by Dwyer (2003) indicates that schools wishing to have a school policy in place for September should begin working on that policy in December of the previous school year.  Thus, the time taken to develop the behaviour policy in the Working Together school (from October to May) was in line with experience in other schools.  The period from May to the end of the school year was used as an opportunity to pilot the policy in its draft format.  Teachers completed monitoring forms on a weekly basis regarding the operation of the policy.  Focus groups were also held with children and teachers at the end of year two to access their views on the behaviour policy.  Parents were invited to attend two focus groups but unfortunately only one parent attended.  The findings of these focus groups and monitoring is discussed in the section below on the impact of the policy.

## Impact of the Behaviour Policy

The focus groups with staff identified a number of important aspects to the policy. The staff recognised the role the policy played in the promotion of consistent responses to behaviour. They felt it was useful induction material for new teachers and had the potential to 'grow' with children who could be introduced to this approach from a young age. Staff viewed the policy as

> Staff viewed the policy as a useful concrete reminder of the behaviour that is expected.

a useful concrete reminder of the behaviour that is expected. They felt that the fact that staff, children and parents had developed the policy was a strength. They also felt that the policy was comprehensive, except in the case of yard behaviour. In the case of such behaviour, the need for more specific guidelines was recognised. Apart from these weaknesses and some changes to the layout of the policy, some other weaknesses were identified. In the case of seriously disruptive behaviour, the final intervention steps in a system of graded sanctions involved intervention of the principal. There were organisational difficulties in the implementation of these steps. For example, all parties could not sign the contract section of the policy during the short pilot phase. The policy also identified school-wide schemes for the recognition of positive behaviour that had not been fully implemented. Despite these difficulties, teachers recognised that the ongoing nature of the process means that development of the behavioural policy would take time.

> The children's views were also divided between strengths and weaknesses of the policy. With regard to strengths they said it had already made a difference in their classrooms.

The children's views were also divided between strengths and weaknesses of the policy. With regard to strengths they said it had already made a difference in their classrooms. They agreed that there must be consequences for misbehaviour (although there was some question as to the children's views on the need for rules of a certain type, e.g. in relation to fighting and retaliation for the younger children and in relation to uniform wearing and yard behaviour for the older children.) They also were aware of the need to work together as a team or class to obtain group rewards. One weakness lay in the fact that the Behaviour Policy was viewed by the children as 'only a book'. They did not appear to connect the physical expression of the policy with the underlying practices in the school. Also the school rules set out in the policy were seen as coming from adults and thus the children displayed little sense of ownership of that aspect of the policy.

As stated previously, teachers were also asked to return weekly monitoring forms on the effectiveness of the behaviour policy. Over the 8 weeks of information gathering there was a mixed level of reporting back. The highest number of respondents was 20 out of 21 with the

lowest, in the final week of term, being 5 respondents, giving an average number of 12 forms per week.  This is an overall response rate of more than 57%.

When the figures are examined they show that over 97% of respondents considered that 'living up to the rules' happened most or part of the time.  In the final week the 5 respondents all reported 'most of the time' in response to the level of rule abiding.  In relation to using positive consequences the comments appended show that in some weeks there was a high level of disruption to normal classroom schedule (e.g. communion/confirmation preparation, presence of student teachers, etc.) thus leaving little room for structured responses to behaviour.  In other cases serious behaviour incidents were the reason that positive consequences were not applied in the agreed sequences.  There was, however, not one week in which the positive consequences were not applied at all.  This shows that the level of promoting positive behaviour, while not completely consistent was still at a quite high level.  Reports on whether the positive consequences encouraged positive behaviour were less affirming, with a 52/46% spread between 'yes' and 'not in all cases'.  However, it should be noted that only in the first three weeks of reporting on the policy were there any responses of 'not at all'.

The use of the hierarchy of consequences for negative behaviour was also reported on.  Again there was a high report of using the sequence of consequences, with only one week where two teachers reported not using the hierarchy at all.  In the assessment of whether the consequences were successful in discouraging negative behaviour the results showed an overall 45/54% split between 'yes' and 'not in all cases'.  Interestingly, however, these overall figures hide a gradual change, over the 8-week period, from responses of mainly 'not in all cases' to mainly 'yes' by the end of term. This progression is also reflected in the figures for the question "Did you have any serious infractions of behaviour this week?"  In the last four weeks of reports the 'No' response was between 75 and 100%, suggesting that serious behaviour incidents reduced as term continued.  Without ancillary data about attendance and what the day-to-day activities were during the particular week, it is not possible to draw concrete conclusions about this being an effect of the introduction of the behaviour policy. In the question about reviewing the policy there was a progressive lessening of discussion of the policy as time went on with one teacher commenting *'Didn't because policy is working for the other 22 children'.*  Time was one of the most frequent reasons given for not reviewing the policy, in addition to the schedule disruptions mentioned earlier.  Those who did report reviewing the policy mostly talked of reminders about the rules or discussions with the children.

The Working Together project found that parents and children are generally positively disposed towards school. Positive relationships provide a sound foundation for the development of effective behaviour management strategies. The behaviour of most children is within acceptable limits. Nonetheless, when challenging behaviour does occur it creates stress for teachers and disrupts the learning environment. The strength of emotion that surrounds this issue should not be underestimated and is a key factor to consider in intervention.

The experience of the Working Together Project reinforces once again the importance of whole-school approaches to behaviour. The focus of these approaches should not be the imposition of strict uniformity across classrooms but rather the development of a shared understanding of behaviour and the establishment of clear, shared behavioural expectations at a school level. Thus, within the Working Together approach, teachers were asked to establish clear expectations for behaviour in their classrooms with the children in their care. They were then asked to establish clear consequences for that behaviour, again in consultation with the children. The nature of the expectations within the classroom and the nature of the consequences was a matter for the teachers and children within each classroom. The value of

# The value of the approach is that the basic framework of known expectations and known consequences is one to which children and teachers become accustomed, thus reducing the amount of time taken in determining responses to behaviour and creating a consistency of approach for children as they move from one class to another in the school.

the approach is that the basic framework of known expectations and known consequences is one to which children and teachers become accustomed, thus reducing the amount of time taken in determining responses to behaviour and creating a consistency of approach for children as they move from one class to another in the school.

The framework of the behaviour policy developed by the Working Together project was a system of rewards and consequences. Such approaches are not without their critics (Tauber, 1999: 81 – 83). Yet other research evidence points to their effectiveness (Miller, 2003). Furthermore, this was a basic system that was already in use in the school. Building on the known was an important first step in developing the consistency of response that was required. Having established that this kind of system was the one most likely to be consistently adopted within the school, our task was then to ensure that teachers developed their understanding of how rewards and consequences work in order to make their behavioural system more effective.

Within classrooms, it was clear that this approach worked well most of the time. Implementation was not without its difficulties however. Children were consulted about their behaviour and the result of this consultation was instrumental in the development of the school policy. Further consultation with children was built into the policy construction. At class level,

At class level, children demonstrated ownership of rules and consequences, but the school policy on behaviour was still a book to them and they displayed little ownership of it as a document.

children demonstrated ownership of rules and consequences, but the school policy on behaviour was still a book to them and they displayed little ownership of it as a document. Further difficulties emerged at whole-school level where organisational issues made it difficult to implement the later steps in a graded system of sanctions. Thus, factors like the demands on the principal's time can have a significant impact on the success of behavioural management systems. This points to the need for further research on the particular demands on the principals of large, designated disadvantaged schools. One possible way to address this issue would be to assign specific behaviour management duties to other post holders in the school.

The question of ownership also highlights another issue for us. Our project began by creating a space where teachers could consider the range of approaches and the meaning of challenging behaviour. This process was valuable in reaffirming the school ethos and establishing the underlying philosophy that would underpin the school's policy on behaviour. Furthermore, it

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identified the need for consistency between teachers and within classrooms. The process of exploring behaviour is something with which teachers can lose patience however, as their focus is on action. Yet the importance of such discussions emerges immediately once we move towards the development of shared approaches. Consultation with children, for example, is generally accepted in educational circles as desirable, yet putting it into practice raises fundamental questions about the nature of children-teacher power relations. For example, to what extent do we allow children to have real input into the development of classroom rules and what is an appropriate level of input for their developmental stage? The children's perspective on school also, at times, presents fundamental challenges to the nature of schooling itself. Some of the behaviour we require of children in school, like sitting still is difficult for them. Moreover, some of the activities we ask children to do in school are boring for them. Findings like this reinforce the fact that careful discussions around what behaviour means and about the aims of a behaviour policy at school are very important. They may appear theoretical, but it is this underlying philosophy of behaviour that guides responses to behaviour in a very real way.

Our research established that challenging behaviour often centres on interpersonal relationships between children and between children and teachers. In the case of seriously challenging behaviour, aggression is a key issue. With respect to this kind of behaviour, the project has

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clearly identified the need for specialist intervention for some children whose emotional and behavioural needs are beyond the scope of standard approaches to behavioural management. Such intervention could be implemented by the school, e.g., social skills training, but teachers will require considerable support in doing so. Some children's needs will go beyond the expertise of teachers. One of our objectives was to establish relationships between the school and other agencies in an attempt to address this issue. Our main way of doing this was through the Advisory Committee. This approach has proved effective in providing a forum where the school can meet with other agencies but the exact mechanisms whereby teachers and other professionals will work together to meet children's needs still has to be developed.

Teachers reported that their strategies for dealing with behaviour were based on their experience, on trial and error and their interaction with colleagues. Children sometimes had different views of these strategies and their effectiveness. One of the aims of the project was to develop a systematic response to behaviour that would recognise the importance of teachers' practice-based knowledge but create a space where this kind of knowledge could be combined with the existing research base and systematic consultation with children and parents. It is clear that this process involved a huge investment of time by all participants. Finding time to work with children, teachers and parents to develop policy, to provide training and to provide an opportunity for them to discuss issues with each other was a major challenge. Approaches to the Department of Education and Science for in-service time did not render positive results, beyond the allocation of one day for training. We managed this issue of time in two ways. Firstly, the school devoted one of its school planning days to the project to facilitate training. Secondly, the staff has also been very generous in attending training and meetings after school. One of the training sessions was videoed to facilitate staff who could not attend. The systemic barrier of lack of time for planning, training, consultation and policy

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development are significant impediments to the development of clear, systematic, shared approaches to challenging behaviour. Progress toward the development of shared approaches was also inhibited by staff turnover within the school.

Our original intention was to create a shared approach to behaviour between children, teachers and parents. There are a number of difficulties that emerge with regard to the creation of a shared approach between teachers and parents. Parents are not always sure of their role in behaviour at school. In fact, we could ask whether it is reasonable to expect parents to be able to contribute to the development of behaviour management approaches in schools when they are not teachers and do not have experience of working with children in a classroom situation. In this respect, the objective of the project needs clarification in that parents may not be in a position to make suggestions about how behaviour will be managed at school. Neither will parents have the same response to behaviour as teachers will, as by their very nature, home and school are different environments and the behaviours acceptable in both settings are different. Furthermore, traditionally, teachers and parents have not collaborated on matters of

## traditionally, teachers and parents have not collaborated on matters of behaviour at school except in the case of individual children. The style and substance of interaction between these key stakeholders is of pivotal importance.

behaviour at school except in the case of individual children. The style and substance of interaction between these key stakeholders is of pivotal importance.

External facilitators have limited access to this interaction and change can only take place over a period of time, even with teacher and parent good will. What we can aim for is firstly, that parents, children and teachers understand what behavioural expectations exist at school, secondly, that they agree on those expectations and thirdly, that they agree what happens when those expectations are met or not met. In terms of consistency between home and school what we can aim for is that the response from teachers and parents is consistent within their own context, although parents will always have more leeway in this matter of consistency. Furthermore, we can aim for positive messages about behaviour to be given to children in school and at home, e.g., that they can behave well, that they are cared for, that they matter and that they have choices. On a more basic level, the role of parents and school staff is to provide a secure, safe environment for children.

The development of such a relationship between home and school is, of course, a two-way process. Our project showed that parents had high expectations and aspirations for their

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children. The parents we interviewed gave very concrete examples of how they tried to develop positive behaviour in their children and help their children with their school work. Teachers may underestimate the level of interest parents have in their children's education and the expectations that parents have for their children. While teachers stated that most parents are interested in their children's education, their discussions about parents at interview tended

to focus on those parents who they feel are not interested.  The project has tried to develop a closer relationship between home and school but it is evident that the prior existence of such a relationship would be of great benefit in developing the kind of approach to behaviour that we are trying to develop.

The other way in which the project tried to create a shared approach between teachers and parents was to involve representatives of both in the management of the project.  We did this through the establishment of a management committee, but the working of this committee was not without difficulties.  Committee members reported good relationships with each other and particularly with the project team.  Parents felt that their opinions were valued.  In the first year the role of the management committee was unclear and was seen as responsive rather than proactive.  The role of the committee became much clearer when it had a definite task in the policy development.  Yet, the question of involving parents in management at this level is fraught.  Responses to behaviour are a very fundamental part of school life and responsibility ultimately lies with the principal, as clearly recognised in the Department of Education and Science guidelines.  Handing some of this power over is a difficult task to negotiate and the exact parameters of parental involvement need to be clarified.

The research exercise that was part of the Working Together project was successful.  The difficulty with an action research project like our own is that the time lag between gathering data, analysing that data and reporting back to the interested parties can seem long for professionals who are not aware of the length of time qualitative analysis takes. Yet, the

## Yet, the project demonstrates the valuable role that research can play in clearly establishing the situation through objective measurement and through exploration of meaning using qualitative methods.

project demonstrates the valuable role that research can play in clearly establishing the situation through objective measurement and through exploration of meaning using qualitative methods.   A mixed-methods approach worked best.  The research methods employed were successful in creating a mechanism whereby the views of children and parents could be relayed to teachers and could influence policy development.  They also provided an important systematic means of assessing progress.  In this way, the research recognised individual perspectives but brought a rigor to the evaluation of those perspectives which helped decisions to be made on a sound basis, rather than relying on anecdotal evidence.

The first two years of the Working Together project have increased our understanding of challenging behaviour and responses to that behaviour.  A number of important lessons have been learned, as described above.  Moving forward, the project's focus will be to review and develop the current behavioural policy and to work towards the development of responses to meet the needs of children whose behaviour is not satisfactorily managed by that policy.  We will continue our cycle of research, review, reflection and action and will take the lessons we have learned into our next two schools.

# Conclusion

Developing an approach to behaviour is a complex, emotional issue. It involves a balance between the direction and guidance we want to give children and the development of their individual autonomy. The Working Together Project has begun the process of achieving this balance and the creation of a shared, systematic approach to behaviour. This approach faces challenges in the development of a shared perspective, in building home-school relationships and in meeting the needs of individual children. Some of these challenges are based on interpersonal relationships and others relate to systemic and resource challenges within our education system. What our project has shown above all else is the value of the process of review, reflection and consultation based on sound research. The development of a shared, systematic approach to behaviour is a difficult, challenging and sometimes frustrating task. Yet it is a task at which we persist because it can make school a better place for teachers, parents and, most importantly, children.

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## Methodology

While ecological theory gives us a framework within which to place the project, it does not give us a specific methodology, although Bronfenbrenner does address the issue of ecological validity.  In order for a study to be ecologically valid, Bronfenbrenner says that the subjects' experience of their environment must have the properties the researcher assumes it has.  One of the best ways to measure the ecological system is to introduce a change in it or to observe a naturally occurring change.  Bronfenbrenner calls these changes ecological transitions.  A change in someone's behaviour can be classed as development if it has an impact across times and settings.  Working Together could be seen in this framework as an ecological experiment – changing the ecological setting of the child.  It is also developmentally valid, in Bronfenbrenner's terms, in that it seeks to measure behaviour across times and settings.

The element of change involved in Working Together, that is, that it is research for intervention, situates the project also within an action research paradigm.  Action research, essentially, aims to investigate social reality in order to change it (Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998).  It involves designing an intervention intended to bring about a change, carrying out the intervention while rigorously observing the process and nature of the actual change, reflecting on these processes and consequences, and re-planning for future changes.  The central features of Participatory Action Research (PAR) include:
- Participation by people in examining their own understandings of the social world
- A practical and collaborative focus
-  An emancipatory focus on helping people liberate themselves from unsatisfactory social structures (Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998).

The PAR approach is suitable in this case because the focus of the project is on changing something that has been identified as a problem (behaviour in school and its relationship to learning), because the project has the potential for substantial learning which could be disseminated and applied more widely and because the nature of the problem demands a collaborative and participatory response.

Thus, Working Together is an action research project set within an ecological framework. Such a framework suggests the careful examination of an ecological system, rather than sampling across systems.  For that reason, a case study methodology was adopted.  A case study is described simply by Hakim as follows:

> Case studies take as their subject one or more *selected* examples of a social entity - such as communities, social groups, organisations, events, life histories, families, work teams, roles or relationships - that are studied using a variety of data collection techniques (Hakim, 1987, p. 61).  [Italics in original]

Within the case study, both quantitative and qualitative approaches are used.  The Working Together project is concerned with children's behaviour and the understandings and reactions that develop around that behaviour.  Quantitative approaches are based on the assumption that behaviour, its causes and effects are measurable and objective.  Behaviour is seen as being driven by generalisable rules.  Theories can be formulated about these rules and tested.  In the quantitative framework, you sample human behaviour, measure it and use that data to test

theories and deduct explanations of behaviour that can be generalised to others. The focus of our project, behaviour, is directly observable and to some extent, open to objective, quantitative measurement, e.g., measuring incidences of specific behaviours. On the other hand, many of the questions raised by the Working Together project involve meaning and understanding. Qualitative approaches are based on the assumption that the causes and effects of behaviour are not objective and are socially constructed. Qualitative research seeks to understand how people define and understand their behaviour and the behaviour of others. The qualitative approach is appropriate to Working Together as the definition and reaction to challenging behaviour is contextual and constructed. The teacher for example, construes being out of one's seat as challenging in the school context and attributes some motivation to that action. His/Her reaction is influenced by his/her interpretation. The pupil, equally, interprets the teacher's reaction as, for example, legitimate or not and reacts accordingly.

Within the qualitative research framework, the analytic or theory-building method chosen is grounded theory. The term grounded theory refers to an approach to *'a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed'* (Strauss & Corbin, 1994:273). Strauss and Corbin define theory as *'plausible* relationships among *concepts* and *sets of concepts'* (Strauss & Corbin, 1994:278). Grounded theory is not tied to any particular data collection method. The main thrust of grounded theory is that theory about a topic is generated from data or grounded in data. There is no attempt to limit the number of variables that may turn out to be important. Since people will define for themselves what is important in terms of their own meaning systems, an attempt to do this would defeat the purpose of the research. This differs from approaches where hypotheses are deduced from theory and tested against the data. The testing of theory or verification, to use Strauss and Corbin's word, is part of grounded theory also. The theory is generated from the data and then verified through data analysis and further data collection. So what we have in grounded theory is a constant cycle of analysis, theory generation and verification.

Some other features of grounded theory make it suitable for our analysis. The inclusion of children's voice in Working Together means that we have to be particularly careful in the interpretation of data through the lens of existing theory. Such theories rarely incorporate the child's perspective. If we let our explanations emerge from the children's data, we have a greater chance of coming up with explanations and interpretations that take the children's perspective into account. Furthermore, Strauss and Corbin (1994) argue that listening to multiple voices is core to grounded theory – an approach that fits in well with our ecological framework. One other characteristic of grounded theory makes it particularly suitable for our purposes. Strauss and Corbin argue that because grounded theory is rooted in practice, it is particularly relevant to practitioners.

In sum, Working Together is set within an ecological understanding of human behaviour. It is action research in that it involves investigation for change. The project focusses on specific cases, using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Explanations are developed within the project using a data-driven grounded theory approach.

## Instrument design and Data Gathering

In the first year of the project, one of our main tasks was to gather baseline information about the school. In order to get a picture of children's and teachers' views about behaviour within the school two questionnaires were developed. An external consultant originally drafted the teachers' questionnaire. The project team at Mary Immaculate College then reviewed this draft and made substantial changes. At this point, it became clear to the team that research instruments were best designed by the team. This questionnaire was closely related to the research questions and contained questions on the following topics:

- Incidence, severity and range of misbehaviour;
- Possible reasons for misbehaviour;
- Frequency of management strategies and effectiveness of those strategies;
- Teacher's attitudes to education;
- Teacher's beliefs about challenging behaviour and the role of discipline;
- The impact of challenging behaviour;
- Teacher's relationship with parents;
- School improvement, working conditions and job satisfaction.

This questionnaire was piloted with a group of teachers from other designated disadvantaged schools who are part of the PLUS network in Limerick city. The questions were modified based on feedback from these teachers.

A questionnaire was also developed for children. The decision was taken to design a questionnaire in order to get an overview of the perceptions of as many children as possible. There were some concerns about accessing children's views in this way. We had to ensure that the children would be able to understand and read the questions. Maintaining children's concentration during administration was also very important. Most importantly, we needed to ensure that the children would answer the questions as truthfully as possible. Accessing children's views is also problematic as the questionnaire may have raised issues about which children had not clearly developed views.

A number of steps were taken to address these concerns. Firstly, the questionnaire was administered to 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th class children only as it was felt the task would be too difficult for children below 3rd class. Secondly, the questionnaire was carefully piloted with a 3rd class in another designated disadvantaged school in the city. Modifications were made to the questionnaire on the basis of this pilot. The final draft of the questionnaire covered six main topics as follows:

- General liking of school and extent to which the child 'got along' with their teacher;
- Extent of misbehaviour in class;
- Knowledge and opinion of the class rules;
- Reaction to others' misbehaviour;
- Possible reasons for misbehaviour;
- Frequency of management strategies and effectiveness of those strategies.

The child questionnaire was administered in two parts, to ensure that neither part was too long. Two of the project team who are experienced classroom teachers administered the

questionnaire. The children's class teacher withdrew from the class during administration but another teacher from the school was present. It was felt that the children would be more truthful if their class teacher were not present. Also, the children's names were not on the questionnaire but they were assigned an identification number. The questionnaire was read aloud by the administrators to ensure that each child understood the questions. Despite these precautions, the administration of the questionnaire was difficult. Within any one class group, the range of reading ability and interest was varied and children found it difficult to concentrate on the questionnaire. It was also difficult to keep the group in synchrony when answering with some children skipping ahead in the questions despite the administrators' best efforts. As a result, the data from the questionnaire must be interpreted cautiously. Nonetheless, they provide an insight into children's views, particularly when cross-referenced with the qualitative data.

As the project is focussed on children's behaviour, some measure of that behaviour was needed. In keeping with psychological and educational research in this area, it was decided to use a behavioural checklist. Several behavioural checklists were reviewed, including the Achenbach Child Behaviour Checklist and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. These checklists tend, however, to be clinical in nature. We were concerned that asking teachers to rate children on these checklists would unduly alarm parents. Furthermore, these items do not tap into the specifics of classroom behaviour, which is the focus of study. Educational checklists such as the Positive Behaviour Checklist were deemed to be more appropriate but were not chosen for a number of reasons. Some of the checklists did not cover all of the behaviours of interest to the project. Those that did, were considered too long, given that the class teachers would need to complete one for each child in the class. Accordingly, a behavioural checklist was designed specifically for us in the project. This checklist is called the School Behaviour Checklist (SBC).

Seventeen teachers from other designated disadvantaged schools reviewed the checklist and adjustments were made in the style and length of items before it was piloted. Teachers from the same school in which the child questionnaire was piloted were asked to pilot the checklist. Twelve teachers were asked to complete 6 checklists each, one each for two children who they considered very well-behaved, one each for two children whose behaviour they considered to be average and one each for two children whose behaviour they considered to be challenging. Checklists were returned for 60 children. The results for these children were analysed to examine the relationship between items in the checklists. It was not expected that the checklist would have the same psychometric strength as a standardised checklist. However, correlations between items thought to measure similar behaviours were carried out. On the basis of these correlations, some items were removed so that the checklist yields four broad areas that are internally consistent. The checklist can therefore be said to measure teachers' perceptions of 4 dimensions of classroom behaviour:
  · Task-based behaviour in class;
  · Interaction with peers;
  · Interaction with teachers;
  · General state, i.e., confident vs anxious/nervous.

The checklists provided us with the teachers' assessment of children's behaviour. The research team also conducted observations of selected children. These observations serve a dual

purpose in that they familiarise the research team with the children and their school habitat. Furthermore, they act as a verification of the teachers' accounts. It was decided to carry out three observations on each child, two within the classroom and one in the yard. A number of possible ways of conducting these observations was considered. Initially, an event-sampling methodology was piloted, whereby the types of behaviours identified in the school behaviour checklist that occurred within 2-minute intervals were counted. This methodology was piloted in the school playground amongst 2nd to 4th class children and was found largely to be unworkable. It was very difficult to categorise the children's behaviour. The event sampling method also focusses the observer on the frequency of one behaviour at a time. This methodology did not allow the observer to capture the context of behaviour, nor to record the range of behaviours displayed within the observation time period. A more free-flowing ethnographic type observation method was therefore adopted whereby the observers recorded everything that the child did in 2-minute intervals over a 20-minute period. The actions of others were only recorded when they came into contact with the target child. It is worth noting that, although the researchers discussed the observations with teachers and explained that the teachers themselves were not under observation, some teachers found the presence of an observer in the classroom to be unsettling while others were unconcerned. Thus, observers needed to be sensitive to teachers' reactions.

Focus groups and interviews were used extensively throughout the project. Initial focus groups concentrated on getting some insight into the main issues around behaviour in the school. The school principal was interviewed. A multidisciplinary focus group was conducted, comprising three parents, one teacher, two youth workers and one community Garda. This focus group explored the issues related to pupil behaviour with the aim of developing a behaviour policy for the school. A focus group was also conducted with eight teachers in the school. This focus group explored the teachers' interpretation of pupil behaviour, their views on education, their professional preparation, particularly for behavioural issues and their beliefs about the relationship between disadvantage and behaviour. Teachers' opinions on school improvement and the role of parents and outside agencies in children's education were also discussed. Classroom observations were also conducted to familiarise the research team with day-to-day life in the classroom.

Later in the project, individual interviews were conducted with parents, teachers and a select group of children. These interviews were all piloted with 4 children, 4 teachers and 4 parents before final interviews were conducted. Key questions were designed to facilitate comparisons across the three groups. The interviews were conducted on the school premises for all respondents. The length of interviews varied from 22 minutes to 2hours (this latter was spread across 3 sessions). The interview format was semi-structured, with key questions inserted in what appeared to be appropriate points in the discourse. The children's interviews were facilitated through the use of drawings, pictures and worksheets. At the start of each child's interview, the purpose of the interview was explained to them and they were asked whether they wanted to continue with the interview or not. The interviews with parents were initiated through a retrospective of their personal experiences and memories of school. The teacher interviews included a brief description of individual pupils who were part of the select group.

The children's interview questions are based on the following research themes:
- Role of education
- Attitudes to behaviour and discipline
- Communication skills and emotional literacy.

Photographs were used to facilitate the interview process. These photographs showed children getting along, arguing and being reprimanded by an adult. The children were asked to talk about what was happening in the photographs.

The teacher interviews looked at the teachers' views of education in general as well as their views on the individual children selected for further study in their classes. The following topics were addressed:
- The teacher's interpretation of behaviour;
- The relationship of disadvantage to patterns of behaviour at individual and class level,
- Teacher's philosophies of education, attitudes to discipline and to the social role of education;
- Teacher training and education;
- Teaching methodologies, disciplinary interventions, coping strategies;
- Views on school improvement.

Interviews were also conducted with Special Needs Assistants in the selected classes. The purpose of these interviews was:
- To explore the role of the special needs assistant (SNA) in the classroom.
- To get the SNA's views on behaviour in the classroom and in the school and of the strategies used to cope with challenging behaviour.
- To explore the special needs role in the Working Together project.
- To explore the SNA's views on the role of education.
- To explore the SNA's views on school improvement.

In the parents' interviews, the following topics were discussed:
- Relevance of school;
- Role of education;
- Their child's experience of school and learning needs;
- The level of parental involvement in the school – relationship between parent and school;
- Discipline at school and in their child's class;
- Differences in behaviour at home and at school;
- Reasons for misbehaviour;
- The role of school in learning of social skills;
- Their child's social life outside of school;
- Views on conflict resolution;
- Parents own experience of school;
- Their child's current and future experience of school;
- Relationship with class teacher;
- Strengths of the school and opportunities for improvement.

## Data Analysis

Questionnaires were analysed using SPSS v10.  All interviews were taped and transferred to computer hard disc for analysis using Anno tape™.  This programme is designed to allow the analysis of audio material without the need for transcription.  It provides an indexing and cross-referencing system to facilitate analysis and also supports the inclusion of text files and transcription.

In the first level of analysis the interviews were coded/indexed to highlight the topics that emerged in the different sections of the interview.  Some indexes were collapsed where similar ground was covered.  Some 83 indexes resulted from this process.  These indexes were then re-examined in conjunction with the interviews to identify the themes and categories emerging from the data.  A third level of analysis was carried out to collapse categories that were similar in focus.  This resulted in analytical categories in three main areas being identified.  In the initial analysis the focus was on what interviewees said in relation to behaviour, that is the main area of interest of the study.  Subsequently the data was examined further for themes and categories relating to attitudes to education and school and finally for views on links between home and school.  Within each of these areas, there were three levels of analysis. The first level of analysis involved listening to the interview/reading the interview transcript and identifying themes that emerged from the data, adding instances of the theme as the contribution of each interview was taken into consideration.  In the second level of analysis the emerging themes were given a title.  Each theme was re-examined in the third level of analysis and a comparison under the assigned titles was made to see if the categories could be collapsed further.

# Notes