

Executive Summary

An Evaluation of Checkpoints for Schools

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March 2004

Abstract

This research project arose from the concern that schools are increasingly being asked to address issues of violence. The focus of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of *Towards a Non-Violent Society: Checkpoints For Schools* (Varnava, 2000) as an intervention strategy in supporting young people and schools in promoting non-violence. The longitudinal study (1 year) built on the UK-001 CONNECT project funded by the European Union in which *Checkpoints* was selected for evaluation as part of ongoing work relating to violence in schools (see www.gold.ac.uk/connect). The work also builds on a range of small scale pilot studies across the country where *Checkpoints* had been used as an intervention. The research design focused on a test/retest design involving baseline measures utilizing the *My Life in Schools Checklist* (Arora, 1987); the *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* (Goodman, 1999) and qualitative case study data, including semi-structured interviews, diaries, observations, and documentary evidence. Schools were selected through previous involvement with work on anti-bullying. The quantitative results suggest that *Checkpoints For Schools* (Varnava, 2000) is successfully addressing overt behaviours such as hitting, tripping or shouting, but is less successful in influencing emotions and internal processes such as feeling unhappy. The qualitative data also suggests that *Checkpoints for Schools* (Varnava, 2000) acts as a springboard for action on practical issues such as self-auditing, raising and increasing self-awareness. Analysis of the case study data suggests three models that illustrate the process of a school's *readiness* to implement an intervention: the Circular Model, the Corkscrew Model and the String Model. Further systematic evaluation of the intervention is necessary to consider its effectiveness in the long term.

Key Objectives

This study aimed to support the development of a safe environment for learning and teaching in a group of schools and to evaluate the effectiveness of *Checkpoints* in supporting children, young people and schools in promoting non-violence. More specifically, the key aims were:

- to evaluate *Checkpoints* as an intervention strategy - to create new momentum to carry schools further forward in their own practice on the reduction of violence;
- to integrate *Checkpoints* into current initiatives such as the development of Citizenship and PSHE, healthy school and teaching and learning policies;
- to introduce *Checkpoints* as a whole school initiative in a cluster of schools;
- to describe how *Checkpoints* is successful in effecting change.

Definition

For the purposes of this study, the following definition was used:

“...*behaviour which causes physical or psychological harm*” (Varnava, 2000, pi).

Research Design

The research design comprised of quantitative and qualitative elements.

Quantitative: Two group pre-test, post-test design. Study schools received the intervention *Checkpoints For Schools* (Varnava, 2000) and *Checkpoints For Young People* (Varnava, 2002); control schools received the intervention after post-test measures had been administered.

Qualitative: Study schools were invited to implement and use *Checkpoints* in an unspecified way in accordance with their current view of bullying and violence in their school and the process was documented using documentary evidence, interviews, diaries, observations and questionnaires.

Sample: Twelve Birmingham schools; seven primary, four secondary and one special school.

Participants: Year 6 and Year 7 children and young people in seven study schools (N = 560) and 5 control schools (N = 674).

Quantitative Measures: Pre- and post-test baseline measures were selected on the basis of considering the impact of the intervention on tangible aggressive behaviour and internal emotional well-being. The *My Life in School Checklist* (Arora, 1987), a 40-item self-completion questionnaire, was employed in secondary schools and a primary version consisting of 39-items was employed in primary schools to measure elements of behaviour such as bullying and overtly aggressive behaviour. The questionnaire consists of a mix of positive items, such as, “*Another pupil was very nice to me*” and negative items, such as, “*Another pupil tried to make me give them money*” describing bullying behaviour, friendly behaviour and aggressive behaviour. Participants were asked to indicate whether they had experienced the behaviour in the last week either “*not at all*”, “*only once*” or “*more than once*”. The checklist enables a Bullying Index to be calculated for each school on the basis of the following six items: “*Tried to kick me*”, “*Threatened to hurt me*”, “*Demanded money from me*”, “*Tried to hurt me*”, “*Tried to hit me*” and “*Tried to break something that belonged to me*” to gauge the extent of bullying and aggressive behaviour in the school at a particular point in time.

The *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* (Goodman, 1999), a 25-item self-completion questionnaire, was employed to measure children and young people’s behaviours, emotions and relationships. The 25 items can be sub-divided into 5 scales of 5 items each as shown below:

Hyperactivity Scale: “*I am restless. I cannot stay still for long*”, “*I am constantly squirming*”, “*I am easily distracted; I find it extremely difficult to concentrate*”, “*I think before I do things*” and “*I finish the work I am doing. My attention is good*”.

Emotional Symptoms Scale: “*I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness*”, “*I worry a lot*”, “*I am often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful*”, “*I am nervous in new situations. I easily lose confidence*” and “*I have many fears; I am easily scared*”.

Conduct Problems Scale: “*I get very angry and often lose my temper*”, “*I usually do as I am told*”, “*I fight a lot. I can make other people do what I want*”, “*I am often accused of lying or cheating*” and “*I take things that are not mine from home, school or elsewhere*”.

Peer problems scale: “*I am usually on my own. I generally play alone or keep to myself*”, “*I have one good friend or more*”, “*Other people my age generally like me*”,

“Other children or young people pick on me or bully me” and “I get on better with adults than with people my own age”.

Prosocial scale: “I try to be nice to other people. I care about their feelings”, “I usually share with others (food, games, pens, etc)”, “I am helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill”, “I am kind to younger children” and “I often volunteer to help others (parents, teachers, children)”.

Participants were asked to indicate “Not True”, “Somewhat True” or “Certainly True” for each behaviour for the last six months.

Qualitative Measures

In-depth case study data was collected from the seven study schools including documentary evidence, semi-structured interviews, diaries, observations and questionnaires with headteachers, middle managers, children and young people.

Key Findings

Quantitative data was unavailable for two of the study schools and is therefore not reported. Of the remaining five study schools, analysis of the *My Life in School Checklist* (Arora, 1987) data revealed that two primary and two secondary schools experienced a significant reduction in levels of bullying and aggressive behaviour, and one primary school experienced an insignificant increase. Of the five control schools, one primary experienced a significant increase in bullying and aggressive behaviours and one primary experienced a significant reduction. For the remaining three control schools, one primary and one secondary experienced an insignificant increase in bullying and aggressive behaviours and one primary experienced no change. Analysis of the *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* (Goodman, 1999) data suggests that in one study secondary school there was a significant decrease in negative behaviours, emotions and relationships overall. In all other schools, study and control, results were insignificant. Analysis of the sub-scales, hypersensitivity, emotional symptoms, conduct problems and peer problems, revealed that of the study primary schools there was a significant increase in the experience of difficult behaviours on the hypersensitivity subscale for one school, a significant decrease on the conduct problems subscale for another school and a significant decrease on the peer problems subscale for a third school. Of the study secondary schools, there was a significant decrease in the experience of difficult behaviours on the hypersensitivity, emotional symptoms and peer problems sub-scales for one school and on the peer problems subscale for a second school. Of the control schools, there was a significant decrease on the hypersensitivity subscale for one primary school only.

Of the seven study schools, two schools chose not to implement the intervention. Of the remaining five schools, a variety of approaches were adopted:

- Two schools introduced *Checkpoints For Schools* as an additional initiative and used *Checkpoints For Young People* over a series of lessons addressing one *Checkpoint* at a time;
- One school introduced *Checkpoints For Schools* as an extension of the School Development Plan and did not use *Checkpoints For Young People*;
- One school introduced *Checkpoints for Schools* as an additional initiative and used *Checkpoints For Young People* in one lesson addressing all the *Checkpoints* together;

- One school did not introduce *Checkpoints For Schools* and used *Checkpoints For Young People* in one/two lessons addressing all the *Checkpoints* together.

Evaluation of *Checkpoints for Schools* as an Intervention Strategy

In consideration of the quantitative results the researchers would like to highlight a number of limitations of the study:

- conducting the study within a relatively short cycle;
- the suitability of the baseline measures to measure the effectiveness of the intervention;
- the different approaches of each school to the implementation of the intervention;
- other interventions and initiatives that schools were involved in that could have had an impact on bullying and violent behaviour.

That said, the analysis of the results from the *My Life in School Checklist* (Arora, 1987) suggests that *Checkpoints For Schools* (Varnava, 2000) had a positive impact on bullying and aggressive behaviours in the study schools; with the exception of one study school, all Bullying Indices have reduced at post-test. Whilst this may be due to the impact of *Checkpoints For Schools* (Varnava, 2000), it should be noted that, according to Arora and Thompson (1987), there are seasonal variations in levels of bullying, with rates often higher in the Autumn term (pre-test) and lower in the Summer Term (post-test). Whilst it might have been preferable to administer the measures at the same time in the academic year, this would have presented problems with the Year 6 cohort who would have made the transition from primary school to secondary school by the time of the administration of the post-intervention measure. Future research might consider recruiting Year 5 and Year 7 pupils for the study with the post-intervention measures being carried out in Year 6 and Year 8 respectively.

Despite one school introducing *Checkpoints For Schools* (Varnava, 2000) as an extension of their School Development Plan and using *Checkpoints For Young People* (Varnava, 2002) with Year 6 over a series of lessons, taking one *Checkpoint* at a time, the rates of bullying and aggressive behaviours increased between pre- and post-test. Whilst this rise is statistically insignificant, it is nevertheless interesting as the data does not present any obvious reason for this rise in incidence. Given that this school implemented *Checkpoints* as an intervention these results highlight the need for further investigation. One possible explanation for these results is that during the period between the administration of the pre- and post-intervention measures, the Iraqi War broke out. Indeed, one Headteacher reported observing an increase in physical war play in the playground.

With regard to the control schools, levels of bullying and aggressive behaviours have significantly increased for one school and significantly decreased for another. This decrease could be explained in terms of seasonal variations outlined above; alternatively, it could be that this control school was involved in activities or initiatives other than *Checkpoints For Schools* (Varnava, 2000) that had an impact on the levels of bullying and aggressive behaviours. The design of the present study did not include interviews with control schools. On reflection, it would have been helpful to conduct follow up interviews with the control schools at the end of the study to

ascertain what activities and initiatives they had been engaged in during the academic year in order to explain the findings.

On the other hand, the results are less clear for the *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* (Goodman, 1999) suggesting that *Checkpoints For Schools* (Varnava, 2000) has had little impact on young people's behaviours, emotions and relationships. Only one study school experienced a significant decrease in negative behaviours, emotions and relationships overall. One possible explanation for this is that in this school, emphasis is placed on the training of young people in terms of life and peer counselling, and this provides an opportunity for both peer supporters in terms of increased self-confidence, a sense of responsibility and a belief that they are contributing positively to the school community, and users of the service in terms of feeling that the school is a 'caring school' (Cowie and Wallace, 2000). When each behaviour is taken separately (that is, Hypersensitivity, Emotional Symptoms, Conduct Problems and Peer Problems), of the study primary schools there is a significant increase on the Hypersensitivity subscale for one school, a significant decrease on the Conduct Problems subscale for another school and a significant decrease on the Peer Problems subscale for a third school. Of the study secondary schools, there is a significant decrease on the Hypersensitivity, Emotional Symptoms and Peer Problems sub-scales for one school and on the Peer Problems subscale for a second school. Of the control schools, there is a significant decrease on the Hypersensitivity subscale for one school only. In general, one possible explanation for these results is that whilst *Checkpoints For Schools* (Varnava, 2000) may have helped reduce externally experienced negative bullying and aggressive behaviours as measured by the *My Life In Schools Checklist* (Arora, 1987), it may not be addressing the more subtle, internally experienced behaviours as measured by the *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* (Goodman, 1999). Bearing in mind the four limitations outlined above, in particular the suitability of the baseline measures to measure the effectiveness of an intervention and the different approaches of each school to the implementation of the intervention, this suggests to the authors that *Checkpoints For Schools* (Varnava, 2000) is successfully addressing overt behaviours, such as, hitting, tripping or shouting, but is less successful in influencing emotions and internal processes such as feeling unhappy or distracted or having fears. Further longitudinal work, therefore, needs to be conducted to consider the impact of *Checkpoints* on emotions and internal processes. This would need to involve the design and development of a specific evaluation tool for measuring the efficacy of *Checkpoints*.

Furthermore, analysis of the qualitative data suggests that *Checkpoints For Schools* (Varnava, 2000) acts as a springboard for action on practical issues such as self-auditing and raising and increasing self-awareness:

"It provided the focus for the work on non-violence. It was also useful to refer back to the documentation for self-evaluation throughout the year"
(Headteacher)

However, whilst the qualitative data suggests that *Checkpoints* achieves two out of three of its main functions, that is, raising awareness and facilitating institutional self-audit, it failed to achieve the third in terms of offering guidance:

“We moved to doing our own development of behaviour as we felt there was no back up once the audit was done” (Headteacher)

Evaluation of the process of implementing Checkpoints For Schools

In considering the case study data in terms of cultural, managerial and organisational factors that either impede or facilitate implementation, the varied approaches to the introduction and, in some cases, the integration of *Checkpoints* offer a unique insight into the process of change in terms of *readiness*. Qualitative analysis of the case study data generated three models that help to further our understanding of the process of *readiness* to implement an intervention: the Circular Model, the Corkscrew Model and the String Model (see Figure 1).

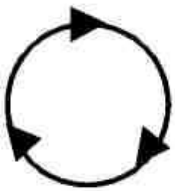
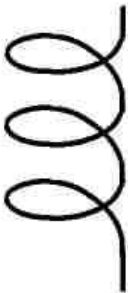

The Circular Model reflects an organisation that is self-aware and responsive and operates from a clearly focused rationale. The school is able to prioritise its course of action and is aware of the need for constant review and evaluation of practice. The culture in the school could be characterized as democratic with a focus on children’s participation in decision making. The school recognizes the negative consequences of not addressing the issues of bullying and violence and is committed to the process of change. The school has an internal locus of control. A school operating from this model of *readiness* is likely to implement both *Checkpoints For Schools* (Varnava, 2000) and *Checkpoints For Young People* (Varnava, 2002) as an extension of the School Development Plan.

The Corkscrew Model reflects an organisational culture that fluctuates. The school is sometimes able to identify action through self-reflection but the action is not always clearly focused. The culture in the school could be characterized as pragmatic with some emphasis on children’s participation. Whilst the school acknowledges the existence of bullying and violence, takes ownership of the problem, and identifies some of the negative aspects of its presence, it is ambivalent about committing to the process of change. The school has a locus of control that fluctuates between external and internal input. A school operating from this model of *readiness* is likely to either feel complacent about the issue of violence or to feel ambivalent about implementing *Checkpoints*.

The String Model reflects a fragile organisational culture. The school has limited self-evaluation and experiences difficulty in identifying a clear course of action. The culture in the school could be characterized as strategic with little emphasis on the children’s participation. The school is not yet sensitive to the bullying and violence experienced by their children and young people; however, others may be aware of a problem, for example, parents or the wider community. The school has an external locus of control. A school operating from this model of *readiness* is unlikely to have much success with implementing *Checkpoints*.

In considering the road to readiness (see Figure 2) the models highlight a spectrum where a learning network and support either provides protection or produces pressure. Notwithstanding the different kinds of schools, the balance between external and internal locus of control varies according to the conditions pertinent to each individual school. A school’s readiness to change, therefore, will be dependent upon the extent to which the key elements defined in the three models will support the introduction of an intervention and whether children, young people and staff are empowered to

Figure 1: *Readiness models*

Models	Key Characteristics
	<p>Circular Model The school clearly articulates its educational vision The school ethos is explicit through all areas of school life Emphasis is placed on children's participation and empowerment Emphasis on the wider curriculum and emotional literacy Places value in children's social time outside the classroom to enhance learning across the school day A responsive and reflexive leadership and management style The school displays good knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses and can prioritise targets Strives for consistency between behaviour policy and practice An emphasis on communication and dynamic relationships with children, staff, parents, governors and the wider community Training and development is linked to the school review process The school rationalises and selects from initiatives at both national and local level</p>
	<p>Corkscrew Model The school shares its educational vision The school ethos not always made explicit Emphasis is placed on children's participation Emphasis on the wider curriculum and emotional literacy An absence of supportive strategies that value children's time outside the classroom A pragmatic "Quick fix" style of management The behaviour policy facilitates the review of practice An emphasis on communication with some evidence of parental support and community links Training as a mechanism for change and self-reflection The school selects from initiatives at both national and local level</p>
	<p>String Model The school has difficulty in articulating its educational vision The school ethos is not explicit Emphasis is placed on academic achievement and the formal curriculum Little emphasis is placed on the supportive strategies that value children's time outside the classroom A strategic or autocratic style of management Inconsistencies between behaviour policy and practice Limited evidence of systems and policies for the management of pupils and staff Ineffective communication between staff and professional isolation Limited evidence of home/school/community links The school has difficulty selecting from initiatives at national and local level and tends to become overloaded</p>

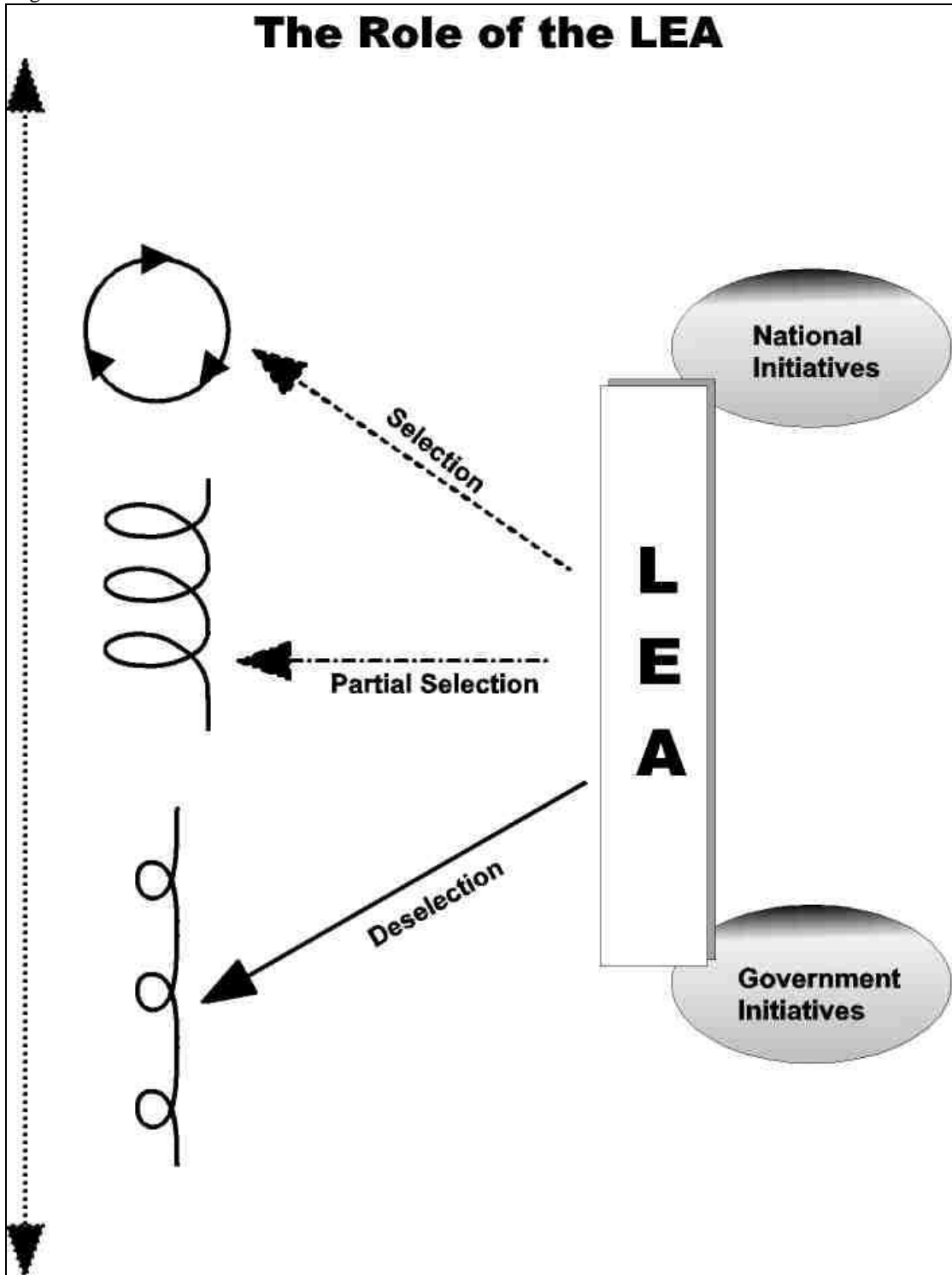
participate meaningfully in its development. This concurs with the work of Roffey (2000), Dusenbury, et al. (1997) and Sammons, et al. (1995) for example.

To summarise therefore, drawing on the models outlined above, some general conclusions about the core principles that should underpin the successful integration of an intervention are identified, such as the importance of understanding the problem of violence and aggressive behaviour and ownership of the process of implementation of an intervention. Clearly schools operating from within the Circular Model experience an internal locus of control that requires less external input. On the other hand, schools operating from within the String Model experience more external locus of control and require greater external input to enable effective needs analysis and evaluation. Sadly, schools that operate within the String Model are most in need of radical change with the least means at their disposal to achieve this.

In an educational culture where schools are bombarded with initiatives, *readiness* and the ability to cope with change are crucial for success. Further analysis of cultural and organisational factors that promote greater understanding and determine *readiness* are crucial in order to move beyond a reactive model of change on the part of the organisation towards a model of change that is meaningful, organic and reflects the needs of the children and young people.

The case study analyses highlight the strengths and limitations of implementing the intervention *Checkpoints For Schools* (Varnava, 2000) and its impact on behaviour in school. In describing the process of implementing the intervention it has been possible to suggest a model of *readiness* and emphasize the key factors that enhance or impede success. Further systematic evaluation of *Checkpoints For Schools* (Varnava, 2000) and *Checkpoints For Young People* (Varnava, 2002) is necessary to consider its effectiveness in the long term.

Figure 2: The role of the LEA



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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those children and young people, staff and schools who took part in this research and who gave generously of their time. We would also like to say that everything that you told us has been treated in confidence. All quotations are authentic, but any identifying features have been removed to protect the identity of participants. We would also like to thank Chrissie Garrett, Peter Wild, John Smail, Sonia Sharp and Nadeen Justice at Birmingham LEA and Professor Helen Cowie from the UK Observatory for the Promotion of Non-Violence. And lastly, George Varnava author of *Checkpoints For Schools*, whose commitment to research and practice has made the evaluation possible. The research project could not have run without help from Penny Scuffill, Judith Stevens and Martin Evans at University of Surrey Roehampton, and Anna Barker and Flora Jennifer-Burchell. We would also like to acknowledge Alison Kelly who was involved in reading the final text.

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