



The Primary Teacher's Role in Child Protection

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ABSTRACT *The Children Act (1989), Department for Education and Employment Circular 10/95, Protecting Children from Abuse: the role of the education service and government guidance place increasing responsibilities upon schools to be proactive in child protection. This article examines policy and practice in relation to child protection in primary schools and reports the perspectives of child protection coordinators. It draws on the findings of the Social Work in Primary Schools (SWIPS) project based on qualitative research in 15 primary schools and a national questionnaire survey. The findings are analysed in relation both to Nias's discussion of the 'culture of care' in primary schools and to the tensions between the Government's inclusive education rhetoric and its Standards agenda.*

Introduction

According to the Department of Health (Steele, 1998), there were 31,600 children and young people on child protection registers in England in March 1998. Four categories of abuse are recognised for the purposes of child protection—neglect, physical injury, sexual abuse and emotional abuse. The Department of Health (DoH) statistics (Steele, 1998) show that for 1998, 37% of the children on the register were registered under the category of neglect, 28% physical injury, 19% sexual abuse, 15% emotional abuse and 1% other forms. However, as Kay (1999) points out, children may be subject to more than one form of abuse but are only registered under one category. The overall number has decreased since the early 1990s but within this, while the numbers at risk from physical or sexual abuse continue to fall, the numbers at risk from neglect and emotional abuse are steadily rising. How far changes in the figures reflect changes in the pattern and frequency of child abuse and how far they represent differences in the interpretation and reporting of that abuse is open to debate. However, it is the case that there is an ever-increasing concern to prevent child abuse and a range of agencies, including charitable organisations, supported by government legislation, are working together to keep children safe. To assist in this work the term 'child protection' has largely replaced

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that of child abuse prevention because, as Moon (1992) argues, this is non-threatening and has positive and proactive connotations which are much more readily accepted by parents and carers.

Sections 27 and 47 of the Children Act 1989 place duties on a number of agencies, including local education authorities (LEAs) and their schools, to assist social services departments acting on behalf of children in need or investigating child abuse. Government guidance (DoH, 1991) and Circular 10/95 (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 1995) instruct the education service on its role in helping to protect children from abuse. However, in the literature both on child protection and on teachers' work, the role of teachers in child protection appears understated and largely unacknowledged. Also, with a few exceptions, such as Milner & Blyth (1988), there appears to be minimal guidance written specifically for schools in England. Braun & Schonveld (1994), Hawtin & Wyse (1998) and Whitney (1993) consider teachers to be uniquely placed to detect cases of abuse. Whitney (1993) claims that 'studies have indicated that more children disclose the existence of abuse to school staff than to anyone else', which he considers 'entirely to be expected bearing in mind the amount of time which children spend at school and the extremely valuable nature of the relationships with teachers and others which are formed there' (p. 39). In recognition of teachers' increasing ability to undertake assessment procedures and the need in the multiprofessional field of child protection to make most effective use of the skills of those involved, David (1994) considers that with appropriate training teachers might carry out observational and interview work in schools. Braun & Schonveld (1994) argue that teachers' knowledge of child development and the norms of child behaviour and the concern of schools to educate the 'whole child' by meeting their social, emotional and psychological needs as well as developing them academically means that 'the value base in most schools is very supportive to child protection work' (p. 92).

There is a widely held view that primary school teaching is a 'culture of care' (Nias, 1999, p. 66), which appears to support the recommendation that primary schools should play a more central role in child protection work. School culture created by the values, attitudes, customs, habits, routines and behaviours of staff has been variously interpreted in educational research (for an overview, see Prosser, 1999) and typologies of 'idealised' types of school cultures have been provided, especially in relation to school improvement (see, for example, Hargreaves, 1995; Stoll & Fink, 1996). However, Schein (1985) considers the essence of school culture to be 'the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic "taken-for-granted" fashion an organisation's view of itself and its environment' (p. 6). Nias (1999) examines the caring behaviours of primary school teachers and the assumptions and tacit beliefs accompanying these. Her earlier research (Nias *et al.*, 1989) establishes the importance of primary teachers' affective involvement with children, and drawing on the proposition of relational feminists that affectivity is the basis of an ethic of care, she argues that 'it is easy to construe primary teaching as a "culture of care" whose underlying values emphasise the importance of making children feel secure, happy and cared for' (Nias, 1999, p. 68). She also shows how through a combination of different kinds of influences on primary education—such as the work of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel, with its emphasis on the development of the 'whole child'—and recent government expectations—for example, in relation to planning and assessing the progress of every child across the subject areas of the National Curriculum—primary teachers view themselves as having a moral responsibility for both the learning and the welfare of each pupil in their class. In addition, and

in contrast to 'caring' as an ethical concept resulting from love and concern for children, Nias (1999) shows how 'caring' among primary teachers has strong historical roots derived from the quasi-maternalism of the profession and a deeply engrained social conditioning into deference towards, and dependence upon, authority which can be traced back to the origins of English public education.

Arguments for extending the primary teacher's role in child protection raise at least two fundamental questions. The first is about teachers' preparedness for, and perceptions of, that role. The second is whether it is possible or even appropriate in the current context of primary education for primary schools to sustain, let alone develop further, a 'culture of care'. However, to date there appears to be little research which addresses these questions. The findings from the Social Work in Primary Schools (SWIPS) project reported here begin to redress this by portraying the responsibilities of child protection coordinators, their contacts with other agencies and the impact of involvement in child protection for themselves and home-school relationships. As a result, it is argued that, while schools are valuable sites for child protection and related provision, primary teachers should not be expected to do this work alongside their teaching and curriculum responsibilities unless they are given adequate training, non-contact time and specialist support. Before presenting and discussing these findings, an account is provided of the origins and research strategy of the SWIPS project.

Methodology

The SWIPS project aims to gain a detailed understanding of the extent and nature of the social work dimension of primary teaching. The impetus for the project was threefold. First, earlier research, funded by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), that we conducted into the impact of the Education Reform Act (1988) on primary schools revealed that an extremely time-consuming aspect of the role of many of our sample of 50 headteachers was interaction with parents. Some of this interaction involved the provision of counselling and social work (Webb & Vulliamy, 1996a). Second, when carrying out a brief review of the literature in response to these findings (Webb & Vulliamy, 1996b), we were surprised at the neglect of a consideration of the primary headteacher as social worker in both recent research and in books on parental involvement. Third, we are currently in the final phase of an evaluation commissioned by the Home Office of a 3-year project which it funded to place a social work trained home-school support worker in each of seven comprehensive schools (Vulliamy & Webb, 1999). Data from this project are providing considerable insights into the social work dimension of the secondary teacher's role and pose questions as to how far and in what ways this might be mirrored in the work of their primary colleagues.

SWIPS data were collected during 1998-99 through document analysis, interviews and observation in 15 schools in the primary phase across five LEAs in the north-east of England. The sample consisted of three infant schools, one junior school and 11 primary schools, of which one had less than 100 pupils, three had between 101 and 200 pupils on roll, three had between 201 and 300 and eight had over 300 pupils. The schools were chosen in an opportunistic fashion but with an attempt to ensure diversity in terms of size and the age range for which they catered but with a bias towards those situated in areas likely to generate social work demands for teachers. Consequently, while the locations of the sample schools varied, including a former mining village, seaside resort, industrial town and cathedral city, nine of the schools were in areas of economic and social deprivation, including seven that were situated on large estates of predominantly

council-owned homes. Five of the schools had less than five children on the child protection register, the majority had around 10 and two schools had 24 and 38 pupils registered.

The interviews with the headteachers of each school and 30 classteachers across the sample schools were carried out by us and a research assistant. They were semi-structured, tape-recorded and transcribed, and varied in length from about 45 minutes to 2 hours. Interview questions in relation to child protection sought to find out 'what do child protection coordinators actually do', and asked for descriptions of experiences, successes and difficulties encountered, perspectives on factors constraining and facilitating the role and resources required for the role to be undertaken more effectively. Analysis of the interview and other data was based on a process of category generation and saturation influenced by Glaser & Strauss (1967), which we have described in detail in relation to our own work elsewhere (Vulliamy & Webb, 1992). Four predominant overlapping categories of social work emerged from initial analysis of the interview data in the early stages of the project, which contributed to progressive focusing to clarify the scope of the research. These were: helping parents with personal problems; supporting pupils with emotional and behavioural problems; child protection; and working with agencies in relation to these and other issues. This article is based on data in the latter two categories. While the school findings reported here are derived predominantly from the analysis of school documents and interviews, where field notes of observations made are relevant to child protection issues—for example, those on school assemblies and an LEA child protection course—these are drawn upon.

A questionnaire of 18 items based on an initial analysis of the early qualitative data and covering the four overlapping categories of social work mentioned earlier was compiled to gain the views of a wider sample of primary teachers. The responses drawn on in this article are to questions asking for information on the respondent's responsibilities within the school; the provider, duration, adequacy and content of child protection training received; and ascertaining the level of agreement with certain statements of relevance to child protection issues—these statements are provided in the sections of this article where the findings relating to them are given. The penultimate question, which invited comments on any issue(s) raised by the questionnaire, also provided additional relevant opinions. The questionnaire was circulated in the Spring 1999 Newsletter of the Association for the Study of Primary Education (ASPE), which draws members from schools, LEAs and institutions of higher education, and to local schools in a conference mailing from our Department of Educational Studies. The sample, which consisted of 303 returns (69% from headteachers and 31% from other teachers), was therefore a self-selected one. Primary schools constituted 61% of the sample, nursery, infant and first schools made up 27% and the remaining 13% were junior schools. Small schools of less than 100 pupils accounted for 19% of the returns, with 53% coming from schools of between 101 and 300 pupils and 28% from schools with over 301 on roll. A wide range of different LEAs was represented, which can be broadly categorised as 52% from counties, 34% from metropolitan authorities, 14% from unitary authorities and 1% from London.

Child Protection Training

To support the instruction in Circular 10/95 (DfEE, 1995), Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) funding was available to support child protection training for 1995–96, after which training requirements had to be met from mainstream funding. In

the sample schools 11 of the child protection coordinators had been on training for half a day or a day provided by their LEA, which concentrated on giving basic information on the referral system, case conferences, the child protection register, identifying signs and symptoms of child abuse and keeping records. However, headteachers attributed their knowledge and skills predominantly to accumulated experience. As the headteacher of school A put it, 'You use a lot of common sense and you look for patterns of events and it's like a jigsaw puzzle, it all falls into place'. Class teachers in the schools with few children on the child protection register considered themselves aware of the signs of abuse and related issues through school-based training and/or staff meetings and the school policy, but lacking in knowledge of procedures in practice and the work of other agencies because they had had little or no involvement in child protection cases. However, they were aware of, and felt supported by, the school's child protection coordinator. In the nine schools in areas of social deprivation, the culture of the schools was such that class teachers generally viewed the safety and welfare of children as an ongoing concern:

I think child protection is part and parcel of the job now really, so yes, you are prepared, especially the older ones. I am not so sure about the newly qualified staff. We are a fairly settled staff here and you do try and prepare the NQTs and give them support—because of the ethos, the support is there. It may not be a whole hour on child protection or any of the issues but there is generally a mention of it every other staff meeting. So it is kept alive and you are aware of what things are going on most of the time. (Year 5 class teacher, Junior School B)

The DfEE Circular 10/97 introduced the requirement for specific coverage of child protection in initial teacher training. However, prior to this, as demonstrated by Goodyear (1993), tutors on some Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and BA (QTS [Qualified Teacher Status]) programmes were concerned to find ways to address child protection either through introducing sessions specifically on the topic or attaching it to a number of existing course areas such as special educational needs, personal and social education or work with families. Baginsky & Hodgkinson (1999) carried out a questionnaire survey of child protection training offered to students on secondary and primary initial teacher training in England and Wales at a point where the requirement had been published but not implemented. They found that to varying degrees training was provided on most courses but teacher trainers were concerned that the demands of the National Curriculum for primary initial teacher training would increasingly lead to reduced and more superficial coverage of the issues. They conclude that in addition to coverage within initial training, child protection could usefully be included in a school's induction programme and/or identified as an area for development in a beginning teacher's career entry profile (Teacher Training Agency [TTA], 1997).

A postal survey in 1991 which was circulated to practitioners ($N = 339$) in six professions including teachers (Birchall & Hallett, 1995) revealed that four-fifths of the class teachers had had no training in child protection and less than two-thirds of the senior and headteachers had had any. Our questionnaire indicated a considerable improvement in this situation as only 19% of respondents had received no training in child protection issues during the last 5 years and 94% of those who were child protection coordinators had received training. Of the 82% of respondents who had received training, for most of them (69%) this had been provided by the LEA. Just under half of them received less than a day's training, with 43% receiving 1–3 days' and 10%

over 3 days' training. Generally, teachers appeared satisfied with their training as it was considered to be completely adequate by 29% and fairly adequate by 63%. However, around 40% suggested that they felt that they needed more training in each of the following: recognition of signs of types of abuse children have suffered; what to do and say if a child discloses; the role of Social Services and other agencies and personal safety programmes for children.

Generally, in the sample schools information on child protection was conveyed to the whole staff by the child protection coordinator at one or more staff meetings during which LEA policies on the issue were considered and adopted or used as the basis for schools to draw up their own policy. Meetings tended to concentrate on the school's responsibilities and the procedures and information requirements needed to fulfil these. As Blyth & Cooper (1999) point out, 'a one-hour slot at the end of the school day can do no more than start to raise awareness and give some basic information' (p. 117). Consequently, teachers identified important gaps in their knowledge, such as how to respond appropriately to children attempting to disclose:

teachers need training not on how to get information out of people but what to do with the information if a child says something, not to overreact. I remember the first time that I ever dealt with it, the initial horror that somebody could do that and I thought, 'no you can't show the child that you are upset and worked up about this, you have got to be calm', but I just wanted to go and hit somebody. So it's more training on how to deal with it and knowing that we have got somewhere to go and let off steam because it is upsetting. (Deputy headteacher, Infant School C)

Braun & Schonveld (1994) consider it insufficient simply to provide information on how to recognise signs of abuse and the procedures to follow. They stress the need for training of sufficient depth to provide staff with the opportunity 'to explore their own feelings, attitudes and values about abuse' (p 92) and so recognise how these could inhibit them from taking action, to develop skills to respond to a child who is attempting to disclose abuse and to relate to parents after a referral and to develop knowledge about community agencies and resources to support children. Also, as David & Burns (1993) point out, it should be recognised that there is the possibility of staff being involved who themselves have been abused and who may have never disclosed the abuse. However, in the sample schools, constraints on time within staff meetings for whole-school sharing and professional development caused by the number of curriculum and other issues on which schools needed to formulate policies meant that teachers did not have time to critically reflect on their own attitudes or pursue areas where they felt particularly insecure. Thus, the increasing managerialism of primary schools (Webb & Vulliamy, 1996a), with its emphasis on policy production and administration, could be seen to be in tension with a culture of 'caring' by encouraging teacher self-neglect (Nias, 1999) and reducing training opportunities in relation to pupil welfare.

Schools' Child Protection Policies and Procedures

Government guidance (DoH, 1991), and Circular 10/95 specify that there should be a designated member of staff in every school who is responsible for child protection issues and LEAs are required to keep a list of such named persons. Designated teachers need to know:

- how to identify the signs and symptoms of abuse and when to make a referral;

- the local ACPC (Area Child Protection Committee)/LEA child protection procedures and the designated teacher's role within them;
- the role and responsibilities of the investigating agencies and how to liaise with them;
- the requirements of record-keeping; and
- the conduct of a child protection conference and how the designated teacher or another member of staff can make an appropriate contribution to it (Circular 10/95, para. 18, p. 7).

In two of the sample schools, the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) was the child protection coordinator, in one school, a reception teacher fulfilled the role and in another school, it was the responsibility of the deputy head although she shared the work with the headteacher. In the remaining 11 schools, the headteacher was the child protection coordinator, although in one, where the head was also the SENCO, the work was shared with a teacher in the special educational needs support base. As one SENCO/child protection coordinator—who did not have responsibility for a class and could therefore devote her time exclusively to these roles—explained, the situations and experiences that rendered children 'at risk' were likely to induce learning difficulties and/or behaviour problems and so the two roles intertwined as she found that she was often already supporting children for whom a referral was made. The main reasons headteachers gave for assuming the role themselves were: the serious and sometimes contentious nature of the issues posed by child protection; the external liaison involved; the intimidating nature of some case conferences and court hearings; and the need on occasion to defend a different stance to that adopted by social services. Also, generally only headteachers had the flexibility of timetable to accommodate meetings and case conferences. Class teachers who had experience of working as a child protection coordinator found it a very difficult role to combine with their full-time teaching commitments. Difficulties arose when they had to attend a case conference for a child whom they had not taught and with whom they were unfamiliar; taking telephone calls from, and making them to, other agencies; and the time-consuming nature of keeping a log of issues relating to children 'at risk'. Also, as Blyth & Milner (1997) point out, lack of privacy and timetable commitments mean that schools 'do not provide the optimum environment for teachers to listen to children who want to talk about their abusive experiences' (p. 113).

The questionnaire returns allow the patterns of responsibility in the sample schools to be compared with those of a wider national sample. Interestingly, only 10% of the child protection coordinators ($n = 69$) were class teachers (who were neither heads nor SENCOs), perhaps acknowledging the difficulties created by lack of an overview of a school's pupils and little or no non-teaching time. A further 6% of child protection coordinators were class teachers who were SENCOs. Headteachers who were SENCOs accounted for 41%, which may indicate, as expressed by the SENCO referred to earlier, that the roles are seen to some extent as interdependent, and 43% were heads who were not SENCOs. Clearly, in most schools where the head is the coordinator, he or she will bring status, authority and in many cases experience to the role, which is likely to be particularly helpful in negotiations with parents and agencies. However, especially since the Education Reform Act (1988), as we have demonstrated elsewhere, in response to government requirements the responsibilities of headteachers have escalated, exponentially reducing the amount of time they feel able to devote to social work (Webb & Vulliamy, 1996a).

Keeping a record of the comments, behaviour and incidents involving children on the

Child Protection Register or regarded as potentially 'at risk' by the school was a major part of the coordinator's role. LEA advice on what should be recorded detailed a wide range of potentially useful information, including relationships with peers and adults; behaviour; classroom functioning; comments, writing, 'news' and drawings; responses to physical education and sport; general demeanour and appearance; injuries and marks both past and present; changes in mood; parental interest and comments; medicals; and attendance patterns. Consequently, it was difficult for coordinators to decide precisely which information to record and in what degree of detail. In schools where a large number (up to a third of pupils in a few schools) were being monitored, the record-keeping was very demanding:

It's a big job. It's like having another curriculum area to be responsible for. Virtually every day I have to drag out the files and make an entry of something somewhere—virtually every day ... I mean I've got about 60 files in the cupboard. I've got teachers coming to me all the time saying, you know, 'I'm a bit concerned about this', 'Oh by the way this has happened' and mums, if I go out in the playground [recounts how that morning in the playground a distraught mum was telling her how her son had come back from a difficult weekend with his father and thrown a brick through her neighbour's window] and all these things which are on the periphery of child protection if you just jot them down form a picture—if something really unpleasant goes on you can see how it's led up to it. (SENCO/Child protection coordinator, Primary School E)

Lack of training, possibly combined with the extreme 'conscientiousness' identified by Campbell & Neill (1994) as characterising primary school culture, may make such record-keeping more onerous than it needs to be. However, it seems increasingly impossible for primary teachers to do successfully all that is expected and legally required of them in addition to class teaching.

In addition to schools' statutory duty to assist social services departments, Circular 10/95 goes further, pointing out that in order to fulfil their pastoral responsibility towards their pupils, 'Every school and college should, therefore, develop a child protection policy which reflects its statutory duties and pastoral responsibilities and refers to the procedures to be followed, drawing on the guidance in this circular' (para. 4). The office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) (1999) comments favourably on primary schools' child protection policies and claims that 'these are known to all staff, and responsibilities and lines of communication are usually clear' (p. 65). However, prior to inspections, most schools ensure that they have produced all the policies inspectors will expect to see. Also, staff awareness of procedures does not mean that they will necessarily be implemented. Typically, policies in the sample schools stated: the location of the handbook of guidance (staffroom or headteacher's office); provided definitions of abuse, with additional material on signs and symptoms located in an appendix; gave procedures for class teachers to follow if abuse was suspected or disclosed, including allegations against staff; specified the need for accurate records and their location (headteacher's office) and arrangements if a child on the register transferred schools; and emphasised the need to strive to retain a positive working relationship with families involved. A minority included references to the ways in which opportunities to develop an awareness of sources of danger might be introduced into the curriculum—for example, through health education—and emphasised the importance of introducing children to key notions

such as feelings, touch, secrets, self-esteem, trust and assertiveness. One school stated that such concepts would be included in the school's assembly programme.

Although Blyth & Cooper (1999) stress the fact that schools themselves can become sites for abuse and institutionalised oppression, only a few schools referred to processes adopted to render the school environment safe, such as monitoring visitors, scrutinising helpers, vetting staff, overseeing the collection of children, anti-bullying strategies and positive forms of behaviour management. Little or no mention was made of staff training, communicating information during holiday times or the role of governors. Circular 10/95 states that 'Parents should be made aware of the school's child protection policy and the fact that this may require cases to be referred to the investigative agencies in the interests of the child' (para. 33, p. 9). A few schools published a statement to this effect in their school brochure and a few others included it in a letter home that addressed a related topic. However, most preferred to explain this to individuals when it became clear from the way in which a conversation was going that it was necessary.

In the sample schools, the health and well-being of pupils was promoted through aspects of topic work, health and personal and social education programmes and specific weeks which focused on issues such as healthy eating, sex education and the dangers of alcohol, drug or substance misuse. Although not necessarily preplanned or mentioned in the child protection policies, schools used children's concerns, local incidents and media reports to discuss children's safety with individuals and groups as appropriate. Moon (1992) recommends programmes, such as *Skills for the Primary School Child (TACADE, 1990)*, which can increase children's awareness of potentially harmful situations and help them to develop skills and strategies for keeping safe and knowledge of when, where and how to obtain help. (For a description of such a programme see Buchanan [1989] and for an evaluation of the effectiveness of New Zealand's national school-based child protection programme see Briggs & Hawkins [1994]). However, Moon (1992) stresses that such programmes should not convey a false sense of security and power to children and that they should be set within personal and social education and form part of a whole-school approach within a wider partnership in prevention between the home, school and community. Circular 10/95 endorses teaching children about the risks of different kinds of child abuse and assisting them to develop skills to help them to remain safe. However, lack of training for teachers and awareness of appropriate resources in combination with an overcrowded curriculum, which makes it difficult to accommodate additional material, means that abuse, protection and risk seem unlikely to be addressed comprehensively within lesson time.

Interagency Cooperation

The Government requires agencies to work together (for example, DfEE, 1997 and DfEE, 1998) in order to plan and implement 'joined-up solutions' to social problems. However, inter-agency cooperation is recognised as problematic, with clashes between professional cultures, competition between departments for local government funding, reductions in overall budgets and low morale being commonly cited as the main contributory factors (Adler & Gardner, 1994; David, 1994; Hallett & Birchall 1992; Vernon & Sinclair, 1998). It is suggested (Barker, 1996) that in relation to child protection, the situation will deteriorate further because of the tension between the principles underpinning government child protection legislation and advice and the market philosophy which increasingly determines how public services are organised and funded. An orientation towards managerialism and financial cost effectiveness means

agencies are likely to value efficiency in terms of performance indicators, achieving short-term targets and fulfilling Service Level Agreements, rather than trying to meet the longer term needs of individuals and developing the quality of service provision over time. Also, the increasing fragmentation of services into smaller and smaller quasi-independent units and the possibilities of buying in a range of packages of child protection services makes coordination between agencies more difficult. Hallet & Birchall (1992) found that, with the exception of the police, agencies deemed the role of teachers in child protection to be important but generally perceived them as difficult to cooperate with and isolated from local agency networks. As marketisation increasingly puts pressure on schools to improve their performance in national tests and OFSTED inspections, teachers are likely to have less time and energy to spend on promoting pupils' welfare. They will need to focus more exclusively on achieving academic goals to the detriment or even exclusion of activities such as integrating with agencies.

Lupton & Khan (1998) view collaboration as existing on three levels: the interpersonal, involving the interaction of individuals; the interprofessional, determined by the training, knowledge and skills of each agency; and the interorganisational, concerning the internal structures, finances, time-scales and priorities of agencies. Most of the sample schools provided examples of informal non-statutory cooperation at an interpersonal level with practitioners in the health services, social services and police to tackle parents' personal problems in relation to a range of issues such as housing, finance, health and domestic violence. These served to demonstrate in a low key way the benefits of 'joined up' solutions to social problems. However, while teachers viewed themselves and agency members as ideologically in support of cooperative working in relation to child protection, their experience was that at interprofessional and interorganisational levels differing values in relation to supporting children and families, poor communication and lack of contact and inadequate resources acted as severe constraints on joint practice.

Schools became involved in various ways in cases of child abuse and in monitoring children at risk. Frequently, social workers contacted schools to express their concerns about particular children and to ask for the headteacher's or class teacher's opinion. As a result of this or because a class teacher or another member of staff noticed some of the signs and symptoms of abuse, the emotions and behaviour of children were monitored and recorded over time. Sometimes physical injuries which seemed unlikely to have occurred accidentally led to an immediate referral. Occasionally, pupils disclosed abuse to their teachers or to auxiliaries. Most frequently, abuse was identified through parents or grandparents confiding information which immediately led to a referral to Social Services.

The ACPC, which is made up of members drawn from the key agencies involved in child protection, provides a forum for developing and reviewing local child protection policies and promoting inter-agency cooperation. In accordance with Circular 10/95, every LEA should have a senior officer with responsibility for coordinating child protection policy and action across the authority's schools and providing them with advice. Normally this officer will also be the LEA's representative on the ACPC. As a result, liaison with Social Services in relation to deciding on whether to make a referral was viewed as having improved immensely in two authorities:

We can go direct to Social Services but my procedure would always be to go via the Education Child Protection Officer because he is very experienced and very objective and there are occasions when you don't go ahead with a referral

as a result of talking to him. We still monitor it but I think it's really important to have someone in between us and the referral process because once that happens, then, kind of all hell lets loose basically. (Headteacher, Primary School F)

Metaphors such as 'all hell lets loose' and 'turning everybody's life upside down' were used to describe the immediate aftermath of a referral and to emphasise the importance of feeling confident that the decision to make a referral was the correct one.

Once abuse has been reported, a multidisciplinary case conference is usually convened in order to share information on the child, agree a child protection plan containing members' recommendations, and make arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the child's welfare. Although beneficial outcomes from case conferences for both families and children were cited by teachers in the sample schools, perspectives were generally negative. As one SENCO/Child Protection Coordinator put it, at case conferences 'an awful lot of professionals sat around a table for an awful long time and not always with a lot of things decided'. Headteachers expressed frustration at lack of communication about case conferences, which resulted in the school not being represented, and/or time being spent drawing up child protection plans which needed parental cooperation when the parents were not present. The data suggest that while schools contribute information to inform assessments of the child's situation and may play an important role in subsequent monitoring, they have little influence on child protection plans. When teachers were asked in the interviews to reflect on the outcomes of case conferences in which they had participated, overwhelmingly they expressed disagreement with the outcomes that were arrived at:

I went to one of the case meetings where there were 20 people involved. Everybody went to great lengths to help the mother. I could not say at the end of the day what was done to help the child because they felt that by helping the mother that they would be helping the child. That child was not given any counselling or help for herself. I did not agree with it. That child could not learn because all she wanted to do was hide her head in her coat or wet herself. The case meeting was about her and her future and yet it didn't touch on her. (Year 6 class teacher, Junior School B)

In part, the high level of dissatisfaction with case conferences conveyed by teachers could be attributed to the fact that those which they found frustrating or upsetting were likely to be most readily recalled. However, Blyth & Milner (1997) consider that the group processes in case conferences mean that participants 'tend to lose sight of the possible losses to the child in their efforts to keep a family together and teachers find that they are pressurised into accepting group reassurances about the child's safety which they do not share; that their information is disregarded when it does not fit with the group's preferences; and sometimes they are not invited to subsequent meetings' (p. 123). Decisions relating to sexual abuse were particularly contentious but as Whitney (1993) argues, 'it is important to recognise that the Children Act has dramatically changed the social work climate and there is no question nowadays of the child being "whisked away" on the merest suspicion' (p. 40). He acknowledges that one consequence of steering 'a middle way between being over-zealous and too laissez-faire' is that 'teachers often feel some frustration at the apparent lack of urgency which may be displayed by child protection specialists' (p. 40).

Blyth & Milner (1997) explain that, although practice varies considerably across LEAs, Education Social Workers (ESWs) are involved in a wide range of welfare

activities including child protection but there is a general consensus that dealing with school attendance is a central responsibility. With the exception of one primary school in our sample in which an ESW played a vital part in working with children and families, ESWs were generally perceived by teachers as a service which was becoming increasingly overstretched and needing to concentrate on the more serious truancy and school refusal existing in secondary schools rather than assisting primary schools with home-school liaison and child welfare. Members of agencies such as health and social services were viewed as too overworked to visit or initiate contact with schools. Partly because of this lack of time and partly in order to maintain confidentiality, teachers found it difficult to obtain information from agencies, especially the health services, about the assistance that they were providing for families. This was particularly frustrating when the school had been instrumental in establishing the links between parents and agencies:

Health services tend to be very careful about confidentiality and I feel they don't actually ask the parents enough whether or not they agree to us working together, that's my sort of feeling, because I think, 'well, I set all this up [for example, family counselling] and now what, what are they doing with them?' If I know who the person is who is dealing with them, I will ring him or her up. (SENCO, Junior School B)

It was extremely helpful if headteachers had worked in an area for some years and were accustomed to working informally with agencies and had therefore built up a network of agency contacts, because individual agency members were more prepared to release information of assistance to the school with teachers whom they had come to trust.

A small minority of schools were scathing about the lack of monitoring of, and support for, families after the initial visit prompted by a report of abuse, the perceived mismanagement of case conferences, failure to implement child protection plans and 'stagnant caseloads' where social workers were on sick leave and no cover was provided. In the most deprived areas, concerns were also expressed that a shortage of social workers might be seriously hindering children's safety:

when we have an initial child protection case conference a key worker is not appointed for anything up to 6 weeks or more. It's a big worry because you wonder what use the registration is. Also in this area there seems to be a big turnover of social workers and they seem to finish one contract and go on to something else ... you just wonder how well covered the child is really—there doesn't seem to be any continuity. (SENCO/child protection coordinator, Primary School D)

Teachers attributed what they regarded as inadequate action to constraints on time and resources at local level. They considered social services to be underfunded and undervalued and saw social workers as incurring even more media derision and subject to worse working conditions than themselves:

I mean the state of the building that they work in, you know, for professionals! I have never worked with social workers who have a nice office. You know the toilets are a disgrace, the building smells fusty and damp and there are all these social workers in one room, there is no privacy, the telephones are ringing and everything. I mean it was the same in my previous authority. We are not valued, I don't think—the teaching profession—but social workers definitely aren't. (Headteacher, Primary School G)

Hayden's (1997) research into primary school exclusions found teachers critical of the

apparent lack of urgency on behalf of social services in relation to children that they perceived as in need, and angry at the lack of proper consultation and follow-up in cases where the school had raised child protection concerns. In their research into truancy Carlen *et al.* (1992) also found headteachers critical of social services for seeming lack of action and continuity. In fact interagency liaison generally was characterised by 'circles of blame' whereby agencies held other agencies to be responsible for problems encountered. Normington & Kyriacou (1994), whose study focused on the work of outside agencies in relation to exclusions, found that 'there was a general lack of understanding by each agency of the aims and roles of the other agencies' and that 'the records maintained by schools and agencies differ markedly, and none reflects the full picture of the child's problems nor gives a clear picture of the multi-disciplinary work occurring' (p. 14).

The Impact of Child Abuse on Teachers

The sample schools either provided or hosted a wide range of initiatives to help children and families, such as parent and toddler groups, parenting classes, homework clubs, child and adult literacy initiatives, Saturday outings, pupil discos and other social events often financed by funds from GEST, City Challenge, New Deals Money, Standards Fund Money and the Single Regeneration Budget. Headteachers, especially, in the schools in difficult areas viewed themselves as committed to the community, an important aspect of which was to be accessible to parents, and through supporting them, to help to take care of, and to develop, the whole child. Parents came to school to seek advice from headteachers on a range of issues concerning their children, especially emotional and behavioural problems, difficulties in relationships with other children and learning difficulties. They also came to confide personal problems—such as a breakdown in relationships, bereavement, physical abuse in the home, drug problems and issues to do with rehousing when husbands or partners left home—in order to receive counselling, practical help and additional understanding for their children whose behaviour was likely to be adversely affected by these problems. To some degree all the sample schools experienced parents coming into school for help with social problems but this was a great deal more frequent in the nine schools in areas of social deprivation and included not only very serious matters but also many minor queries about aspects of daily living. Listening to parents and providing assistance, and/or contacting other agencies which could help them, was regarded as vital for building positive relationships with parents which could be used to secure improved progress for their children.

A source of considerable stress for teachers was exposure to the traumatic situations which children in their care had experienced and which, 'because of the confidentiality, you know, you didn't really feel that there was anybody you could sort of sound off to'. Skinner (1999), who interviewed 14 teachers who had dealt with victims of sexual abuse, found that 'personal impacts'—such as anxiety, nightmares, inability to sleep and feelings of powerlessness—formed a large part of the teachers' stories and 'every member of the sample mentioned increased stress as a result of having to deal with this issue' (p. 333). Headteachers generally viewed themselves as trying to protect their staff through handling such cases themselves and advised teachers against becoming emotionally involved. However, as one headteacher herself admitted, sometimes she was unable to follow her own advice. She gave the example of the case of a small boy who had been taken into local authority care as a baby, who had been adopted and then returned to care by his adoptive parents, and from then on had been placed with various foster parents

until finally he was settled and getting on quite well with his current foster parents. His class teacher had gone to her in tears when she had learned that his foster parents were moving out of the area and he was to experience further rejection and to go back into residential care. The head had also been very upset and found herself trying to persuade her husband that the child should come to live with them. He had had to calm her down, explain why this was not really feasible and divert her onto other things. Generally, social workers and ESWs have a senior worker or colleague with whom they can discuss cases and 'offload' their own reactions and distress at what they have heard and/or witnessed. There is no provision within the English educational system for child protection coordinators to offload to a trained person. Class teachers can confide and seek advice from their headteachers but for the majority of headteachers who are child protection coordinators there is no one designated within the profession to whom they can turn and so they have to cope on their own or, as a few headteachers in our study confided that they had done, seek assistance from a doctor or external counsellor.

In those contexts where violence in the school neighbourhood was commonplace and school security a major concern, threats towards teachers who made referrals could be a considerable source of anxiety. For example, the father of one girl, who was taken into care as a result of a referral, retaliated by stabbing the head of social services, for which he was imprisoned. Not surprisingly, the threatening letters he sent to the headteacher were a source of stress. However, as another head explained, more usually such threats had a different function and meaning within the culture of the community to the way in which they were interpreted by teachers:

We have two different codes. There's the code that the teachers have which is 'We're all extremely reasonable people—or try to be—and we explain things and we back off and express ourselves very carefully with words that hang together—"We're disappointed that this has happened"'. Whereas when you get a community that can't necessarily express itself easily or fluently they resort to a threat which is intimidating. And although they intend it to be intimidating, it's over and done with in most instances fairly immediately. While the effect on we middle-class professionals is it lingers longer, as a fear, because we're not used to it. (Headteacher, Primary School H)

A common experience was that of attacks on personal integrity (see also, ATL, 1995) when child protection reports and statements at child protection conferences were challenged:

I had an abusive phone call from the parent and I also had a letter from a solicitor which I gave to the borough legal department because it was claiming that I had acted unprofessionally—that I had made allegations. I think that the solicitor was way out of order because all I had done was follow procedures that were in place. The letter caused me a great deal of stress. They wanted a formal apology and they were going to hand it to the local paper. Nothing came of it. (Headteacher, Primary School H)

The Secondary Heads Association and the charity Kidscape both reported taking phone calls most weeks from teachers who were concerned about their court appearance, or calls from defence lawyers trying to discredit the child's evidence or finding themselves threatened by friends and family of the accused (Rafferty, 1998). Consequently, Michele Elliott, director of Kidscape argues that 'Teachers need training to act as witnesses in such cases, and need support afterwards' (Rafferty, 1998, p. 1).

Generally, schools felt that child protection issues had not resulted in a long-term

deterioration of their relationships with parents. This was especially the case in relation to neglect, which was the most common category of abuse and viewed by teachers as frequently the result of poverty. One in four people in the UK is classified as poor (defined as those with a household income which is less than half the national average earnings—currently £19,500) and includes the families of a third of all children (Hook, 1999). Although parents may have been upset or angry initially, ultimately they were often grateful for the help, as is reflected in the following account:

It has taken me a long time to build up a relationship with that mother because I think that she thought that I was against her but now she will come and talk about everything. I mean yesterday she was talking about taking her washing to the family centre which school set up for her. She hasn't got a washing machine and she couldn't afford to go to the launderette. She is just so over the moon that we did that for her and that we don't treat her any differently—'You know it is the best thing you ever did making me talk to you'. Actually it makes it all worthwhile with somebody like that because I must admit for the first couple of weeks when I went out she used to scare the living daylights out of me. I used to think, 'Don't worry there is the whole school behind you'—she frightened me. (Deputy head, Infant School C)

This teacher felt intimidated by a mother that she had referred, reflecting the dissonance in teachers' culture and that of the community in which they were working. However, the referral had become a vehicle for building a relationship of mutual trust.

Future Directions

In the questionnaire returns, 99% of the respondents agreed with the statement that 'primary teachers are concerned with the well-being of the whole child'. The statement that 'because of their day-to-day contact with individual children, primary teachers are well placed to identify child abuse' received the agreement of 91% of respondents, and 79% agreed with the view that 'primary schools are ideal sites from which to operate support systems for parents and carers'. This supports Braun & Schonveld's (1994) argument referred to in the introduction that teachers' values make schools appropriate places for child protection work. However, our research suggests that, if it is the teachers themselves who are to carry out the child protection work, in order for them to be fully effective, more training is required in those areas where they feel insecure. Also, a great deal more opportunity is needed for contact with agencies so that both schools and agencies can understand each other's working cultures, values and priorities. Joint child protection training and guidance which examines both the interrelatedness and the distinctiveness of agencies is one way forward to promote increased understanding. Also, if schools were to build up a compendium of local agencies, which included services offered, personnel and contact numbers, this could be very helpful for new child protection coordinators and headteachers as often such information is lost if key people leave the school.

Parsons (1996) has argued that teachers can increase their professional stature by taking on a broader social role. Tackling social exclusion is a major policy goal of the Labour Government which makes considerable demands of teachers (for example, DfEE Circulars 10/95 and 10/99). However, as we have argued elsewhere (Vulliamy & Webb, 2000), the Government's inclusive education rhetoric is in danger of being submerged by the policy and practice of its Standards agenda. Given the exponential growth in

primary teachers' roles and responsibilities (Webb & Vulliamy, 1996a), Campbell (1996) argues that 'the most urgent priority for primary schools is to *reduce*, not increase, the scope of expectations on class teachers so that they can gain a sense of real achievement from teaching well instead of the current sense of doing nearly everything inadequately' (p. 18). The need to concentrate on 'teaching well' has been accentuated by the outcomes of school inspections which pass judgements on teachers (Jeffrey & Woods, 1998) and seek to combat 'cultures of low expectation' (OFSTED, 1993) combined with the Labour Government's strategies to continuously raise pupil attainment. This has led to a fundamental shift in the culture of primary schools (Woods *et al.*, 1997) whereby a strong emphasis is put on the academic side of the school at the expense of the pastoral side. Consequently, several of the sample schools had ended initiatives involving parents, such as parenting classes, in order to focus on improving numeracy and literacy targets. However, all the schools felt under pressure to move from what Hargreaves (1995) terms a 'welfarist' school culture with its focus on 'individual student development within a nurturing environment' (p. 27) and child-centered educational philosophy towards a 'formal' culture emphasising the achievement of 'learning goals', including homework, curriculum targets and test performance (pp. 26–27).

Teachers have only so much time and energy, which in the current context and foreseeable future needs to be channelled predominantly into their pedagogical responsibilities. As Nias (1997) bluntly states, 'No-one's interests are served when the path to school improvement is paved with the ashes of burnt out teachers' (p. 21). She finds '“care” construed as altruism and self-sacrifice, as a convenient way of exploiting teachers, especially those who are women; and also of conning them into taking on, unpaid, work which would be better done by other trained professionals such as counsellors and social workers' (p. 21). It is therefore extremely important that in order to maintain and/or extend schools' social work responsibilities, including making a more substantial contribution to child protection, they are resourced accordingly. Teachers in the sample schools were asked, given the necessary resources, what additional provision they would choose to assist with the social dimension of their work. A person without a class who could give time to individual children and work with families was the most frequently mentioned. This was reflected in the questionnaire data where respondents had to prioritise from five types of provision suggested by teachers in the sample schools. 'A full-time SENCO with no class responsibilities to provide support for the full range of special needs for parents and families' was the highest priority since it was a first priority with 48% (with 21% putting it second); second highest came 'a social work trained home-school support worker on the school staff to provide case work involving home visits and interagency liaison for those pupils with the most challenging behaviours', viewed as first priority by 27% (with 30% prioritising it second).

In a study of the links between schools, families and communities conducted between July and December 1997, Ball (no date) describes a number of initiatives based on primary schools, including the coordination of multi-agency services by the National Pyramid Trust, a voluntary organisation, and a pilot project of a 'full service' approach by Manchester City Council whereby three primary schools each has its own multi-agency support group and a local community action group to encourage the take-up of the available services. However, as illustrated by these initiatives, a major endemic problem in the development of school-family-community links identified by Dyson & Robson (1999) is their fragmented and localised nature. They view the field as 'characterised by a multiplicity of locally-led and locally-developed projects, replicating each other's discoveries and difficulties, but not systematised in any useful way', which

they view as influenced by 'the multiplicity of often short-term funding sources' (p. 48). This description characterised most of the family-oriented initiatives in which the sample schools were participating, which stopped and started in line with available funds. In their evaluation of a home-school support project to improve the behaviour of primary children in danger of exclusion, Lupton & Sheppard (1999) consider that the brief operation of the project 'did as much harm as good' as its withdrawal left the community less empowered than before it began. They conclude that 'secure and adequate sources of funding must be identified from the outset' otherwise 'the energies and enthusiasm of all involved—professionals, parents and their children—will yet again have been carelessly wasted and any potential lessons to be learned needlessly lost' (p. 29). The problems of investing time and energy into such short-lived projects also received criticisms in the section for additional comments at the end of our questionnaire. It is therefore vital that, if schools are provided with a full-time SENCO, a home-school support worker or become the site for 'full-service' provision to address issues of child protection and to support 'children in need', then this must be funded in a way that can be maintained, evaluated and developed over time.

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