Classroom Management and Disaffection

Barbara Zamorski and Terry Haydn, School of Education and Professional Development, University of East Anglia

Abstract
This paper reports on aspects of the Norwich Area Schools Consortium (NASC) cross-school Classroom Management and Disaffection research project undertaken as part of the NASC programme. It documents the dual interwoven ‘stories’ of teacher engagement in research as a learning experience and the substantive research undertaken. The project took place in two stages, the focus of the second stage emerging out of the analysis of the first stage. Research into both pupil and teacher perceptions concerning disaffection and classroom management were investigated in the first stage. The second stage attempted to unravel the complex relationships between disaffection, curriculum, pedagogy and context from pupil perspectives, with insights on the relationship between a good lesson and a good teacher being of particular interest.

Introduction
This project had its roots in the NASC Workshop held at the University in the summer of 1999. The aim of the Workshop was to produce research designs and action plans for the four cross-school research projects which were to become the second phase of the three-year NASC programme on pupil disaffection. The starting point for this particular project was to research ‘effective in-school strategies to deal with disaffection and reduce exclusion’.

As a result of this event, the Classroom Management and Disaffection Research Group came into being. The eight members of the group comprised six teachers from five NASC schools and two members of the University staff (a UEA research co-ordinator and mentor). The group met at the University on a regular basis to work on the planning and conduct of the research. The research was carried in two stages, the focus of the second stage emerging out of the analysis of the first stage. This paper describes the work of this group during these stages, and reports on some of the research undertaken.

Stage One
Stage One of this project, which took place in the autumn term of 1999, began with an interest in the following questions, which arose from a consensus amongst the group that there were generally differences in the extent to which pupils were engaged in learning not only between schools, but within schools.

- What factors enable some teachers to develop greater effectiveness in terms of class management and the engagement of pupils in learning than others?
- Is it possible to draw on the experience of teachers and pupils to elucidate which are the characteristic and most influential skills and attributes that make teachers good classroom managers?
• In addition to teacher characteristics, is it possible to discern departmental, subject, or school ‘effects’ which influence pupil engagement in learning?

The group began by reviewing and reflecting on what had already been learned about classroom management and disaffection from NASC research projects carried out in the first phase. Specific reports considered were: Response of underachieving pupils to lesson activity and teaching style (Bulmer 1999); The Effectiveness of Teaching Styles and Classroom Management in Engaging Disaffected Pupils (Binney and Lewell 1999); The use of differentiated tasks and minimum performance targets to encourage ‘self-directed’ learning (Hine and Pine 1999) and Identifying Disaffection (Gutteridge 1999). In addition, relevant documentation from NASC schools was examined. For example, one of the teachers introduced a copy of his school’s pilot pro-forma on ‘Monitoring of Teaching’.

Relevant research literature was also discussed by the group. Key texts examined were: Kinder, K and Wilken, A (1998) With all respect: Reviewing Disaffection Strategies NFER Abstract; Kinder, K, Harland, J, Wilken, A and Wakefield, A (1993) Three to Remember: Strategies for Disaffected Pupils NFER Abstract; and Kinder, K, Wakefield, A and Wilken A (1996) Talking back: Pupil Views on Disaffection NFER Abstract. Findings from further studies, such as Munn and Johnstone, (1990), Kershner (1999), and results of surveys from agencies such as the Hay McBer Group (2000) were provided by the UEA mentor.

Two factors were taken into consideration when planning the first stage. It was suggested that, judging from the Hay McBer experience (2000), it might be difficult to get beyond general descriptions of salient characteristics of good classroom managers, so a variety of approaches in this initial stage would be worth attempting in order to do so. Further, the group determined it was crucial to heed staff sensitivities in view of the plethora of initiatives and demands they were currently engaged in, and to work on a modest scale in the first instance. It was decided to pilot two data collection activities at this stage: a) pupil perceptions of effective class managers, and b) teacher perceptions of effective class managers, and factors involved in class management.

a) Pupil perceptions of effective class managers:

Data was collected from year10 mixed ability classes in four of the NASC schools. In three schools, two open-ended questions were asked of pupils: ‘What makes a good lesson?’, ‘What makes a good teacher?’ In the fourth school, the pupils were asked to respond to a short survey, which included the above key questions and the added questions What makes a bad lesson? and What makes a bad teacher?

In all, a sample of 123 pupil responses was collected. As most pupils had written either three or four statements in response to each question, and in some cases, also a short paragraph, this generated much data. Within each school, the teachers carried out first stage analysis on this raw data by coding the responses and then developing conceptual categories (Strauss and Corbin 1990).
b) Teacher perceptions of effective class managers, and factors involved in class management:

The teachers planned to carry out five taped semi-structured interviews, based on the subject of what makes a good teacher, in each of the five schools in the group - one with a member of the Senior Management Team (SMT), one with a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) and with three other teachers chosen at random. Only three of the schools were able to do this in the time period available, so fifteen people were interviewed. The teachers who conducted these interviews also carried out some initial analysis. In two cases, the teachers coded, clustered and represented each participant’s responses in diagrammatical form and then checked out the results with the teacher concerned for accuracy. In the third case, the teacher also produced a composite, overall map, analysing data from all five members of staff interviewed.

All data and initial analysis was brought to the group meetings for discussion, following which the UEA research co-ordinator analysed the information as two cross-school data sets.

a) Pupil responses:
Pupil responses were full and, in the main, appeared serious and considered. They were presented mainly as lists of statements. For example:

A good teacher should:
• be enthusiastic about their subject
• project a relaxed atmosphere
• be in control of the class
• be friendly
• have time for the pupils, inside and outside lessons
• not dictate at the class
• allow pupils participation
• be unique in their class ideas

(year 10 pupil)

Some pupils had also been asked to write a short paragraph as well as a list. For example:

A good lesson. ‘I think a good lesson involves some teaching, some writing, and maybe an activity involving group work. If a whole lesson is the same thing then it can just get monotonous. The main things, however, are a relaxed environment and a good teacher. Sometimes teachers just sit behind a desk and tell us to get on with it but this way we learn nothing. It is important to feel comfortable with the teacher and not feel intimidated.’

A good teacher. ‘A good teacher gets involved with the class and really cares about their grades and work. I don’t like it when teachers pounce on you to answer questions, but it is important to get the class speaking. I think teachers should come round and help individuals and not just, as I said earlier, sit behind the desk and leave the class alone. It is important to feel entirely comfortable and confident with a teacher and to feel relaxed enough to talk to them. I think teachers should try to be a friend to the pupils and to help them when they’re in trouble. (a year 10 pupil)
Less articulate and developed responses were also presented, but it was clear that the research had been taken seriously by nearly all pupils, and no response was ignored. Also, it is important to note that, as illustrated in the example many of the responses to the first question of ‘What makes a good lesson?’ usually included comments concerning the qualities and behaviour of the teacher.

Each pupil’s response was coded, and each instance of that code counted, with examples given in every instance. These codes were then clustered into sixteen categories for the first question and twenty two categories for the second question. Two summary tables were then produced (not reproduced here) from which six main categories were distilled following group reflection and discussion (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The teacher</th>
<th>The teacher is approachable, open-minded, enthusiastic and a good communicator. The teacher has a sense of humour, good relationships with pupils, and a respect for pupils, The teacher has a good command of the subject. The teacher is not stressed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Teaching methods are interesting and appropriate Pupils are managed well Everyone is involved Lessons are well-organised Lessons proceed at a good pace A variety of learning activities are offered Learning activities are stimulating Quiet talking between friends should be allowed Homework should be relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils’ learning needs</td>
<td>The curriculum content is relevant Appropriate expectations are held Work is matched to pupils’ abilities There are good learning gains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils’ emotional needs</td>
<td>Learning takes place in a comfortable, safe and secure atmosphere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards and sanctions</td>
<td>Appropriate use of rewards and praise Fair rules Fair discipline and control are exercised, without teacher stress, shouting or bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>A suitable physical environment is required Good use of resources, such as computers or videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other pupils</td>
<td>Pupils are motivated and co-operative (this was up to the teacher to achieve)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – analysis of pupil responses
Analysis of the data from one school on what constituted a bad teacher or a bad lesson yielded similar findings. For example, an answer to ‘What makes a bad teacher?’ was ‘They should help you a lot, but some don’t and that makes a bad teacher’. Another example, short but to the point, offered to the question ‘What makes a bad lesson?’ was ‘Having a bad teacher’. In whatever fashion one posed the question, teacher characteristics emerged as the most prevalent influence in pupil responses.

b) Teacher responses:
As noted earlier, each teacher’s and school’s data was coded separately, and then aggregated, by the teacher researchers concerned. Table 2 contains an overview of the descriptors offered by the teacher researchers and their research respondents. They have also been clustered into six categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships with pupils</th>
<th>Is consistent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creates a safe atmosphere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows pupils and understands class dynamics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is fair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is approachable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fosters respect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a sense of humour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a rapport with the pupils</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees pupils as individuals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involves pupils e.g. Suggests plans, offers feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has high but realistic expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has an awareness of special needs of each pupil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands and respects boundaries between public and private pupil lives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching skills and techniques</td>
<td>Good communicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses a variety of techniques</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applies differentiation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considers timing and pace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has routines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can get the attention of the class easily and quickly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has time to evaluate the lesson with the pupils</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is well-organised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the ability to prioritise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can be adaptable and flexible when necessary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert subject knowledge</td>
<td>Has good knowledge of subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always ahead of the pupils in knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can inspire pupils on own subject</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes a wider interest in own subject – not just related to school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has access to support</td>
<td>Has and uses effective school management processes e.g. Behaviour support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has timetabling ‘specialists’ in the school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has access and use of appropriate resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Has proper ‘rooming’ and physical space
Has access to, and is willing to, engage in in-service training and development

Relationships with other members of staff
Has ability to work/interact with other staff
Willing to share ideas and to collaborate with others
Is constructive and helpful to colleagues
Is sufficiently confident to challenge others in school if feels strongly about something

Personal qualities and attributes
Is enthusiastic
Is self-reliant
Is hard working
Has sense of humour
Is fair
Is able to trust pupils and other staff
Is confident of own beliefs, and with pupils and staff
Has energy
Has physical and mental strength
Can cope with pressure
Is a good communicator and listener, with pupils and staff
Can share emotions
Is socially aware
Has a sense of vocation

Table 2 – teacher responses to What makes a good teacher?

Unsurprisingly, there was overlap between the final categories chosen. For example, there are overlapping descriptors in the category ‘Relationships with pupils’ and in ‘Personal qualities and attributes’. But value lay in the attempts to unravel the inter-related threads of teacher attitude, personality and skill, because of the discussions and insights generated by such attempts.

**Overall analysis**
Finally, all the data was coded as one data set in order to create a comprehensive list of skills, attributes, behaviour and qualities of a good teacher. These were then clustered and presented under the three headings of:

- Relationships with pupils
- Teaching skills/techniques/knowledge
- Support required by teachers

By engaging in this second act of analysis, the group hoped to identify any useful patterns of ordering that might emerge, but in the event, the sample was too small for such analysis to be meaningful. It did, though, provide a useful map to check the above tables of descriptors against. It was found that only one item had been left out, that is, one person had included the assistance of his or her family as being important as a support mechanism for being a good teacher.
Moving towards the next stage of research

Members of the group found the analysis and findings of the first stage to be of much interest and value, especially when examining data from across the different schools. In particular, the significance of teacher/pupil relationships was noted. However, moving towards the next stage of research did not prove to be a simple or ‘technical’ process. First of all, questions had emerged about the complexity of the nature of disaffection in the schools, and the particularity of the inter-relationships of different factors that were required to be taken into account when investigating reasons for disaffection. The teachers pointed out that the interaction between these factors needed to be considered on a case by case basis for each school, and even each classroom, to produce findings that were ‘actionable’ in the sense of enabling teachers to re-engage pupils disaffected from learning. Clearly, this view did not negate findings and insights derived from others’ research, but their own research on classroom management and disaffection, in their own contexts, was proving to be particularly useful, as neither phenomenon existed in a vacuum.

Secondly, by using what was broadly a ‘grounded theory’ approach (Strauss and Corbin 1990) analysis of the data collected so far indicated that the research boundaries of the project could all too easily be widened. Analysis and discussion of the first stage research data had splintered the primary focus. A new set of secondary and inter-related issues (potentially new research foci) were identified, some of which were beginning to overlap with the other cross-school projects, such as the Rewards and Sanctions Project for example. McNiff (1988:45) describes this process as ‘generative action research’ and her example of a teacher researcher working with this ‘three-dimensional spiral of spirals’ partially echoed the approach that the NASC teachers now decided to pursue.

Challenged by a wide range of issues of relevance and interest for further investigation, with limited resources and time, decisions on research questions and boundaries at this second stage were crucial. The group recognised the artificiality of ‘bounding’ the research activity to limited foci, but also realised that distinct directions and purposes had to be followed in order to make the research manageable, and eventually useful to the schools and classroom teachers. Not all the newly identified leads on classroom management and disaffection could be followed at once, but as McNiff suggests ‘Other problems may be explored as and when they arise without the researcher losing sight of the main focus of enquiry’ (ibid.).

For the second stage, a number of related strands were explored. As Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993) write, action research by teachers is ‘undertaken to improve practice’ (1993:155), and in order to do so ‘The most important source is our new understanding gained from analysis of the situation. Understanding an issue, by uncovering the network of interrelationships, not only leads to a new awareness of the situation, but also usually offers a wealth of ideas about possible action’ (1993:160). This aim proved to be ambitious and problematic in execution, but in retrospect, still a worthy and valuable exercise.

It was clear that the relationship between pupils and teachers was a key factor in respondents’ perception of what constituted both a good teacher and a good lesson. The extent to which the relationship contributed to effective classroom management that worked for both pupils and teachers was thus an area for further investigation. Members of the group were anxious not to
conceive of classroom management as merely a range of strategies that worked primarily as behaviour control mechanisms. Evidence of such effectiveness was related by some teachers. But it was noted that the result of these classroom strategies often did a disservice to pupils, especially disaffected pupils, who felt the effects of the mechanisms sufficiently to either become pupils ‘really here in name only’ (‘RHINOS’ Oakley 1999) or allow their frustrations or hostility to erupt in less controlling places in a school. Teachers would prefer that such pupils felt motivated, and perhaps even inspired, to participate in lessons rather than being a minority to be restrained or ‘closed down’ for the greater interest of the classroom majority.

In the light of wishing to better understand and hopefully better motivate disaffected pupils, it was decided to now concentrate on pupil rather than teacher perceptions of these areas. Implicit in these aspirations was the intention to move from a strategy of developing classroom control mechanisms which repressed certain pupils' behaviours, as discussed earlier, towards changing teachers’ understanding of pupil disaffection, and consequently, their classroom strategies and behaviour.

Also, if the issue of pupil/teacher relationships was such a significant factor, the group considered that the nexus between individual teacher attitude, competency and personality, and the context, culture and environment of the school would probably play a part in configuring that relationship. So as a further strand of investigation, the question ‘Why do pupils who are disaffected from learning come to school?’ was also seen as key. This was felt to be an issue worth exploring as it may throw light on the problem of pupils presenting ‘disaffected’ behaviours which defeated even experienced teachers’ expertise of managing pupils and classrooms. In order for teachers to be able to manage classrooms more effectively, they thought they needed to better understand the motivations, opinions and feelings their pupils brought to bear on the school and classroom environment. The group felt that areas of disjunction between pupils’ perspective and teachers’ perspective of the purpose of school attendance could be where the heart of the matter lay. Data from pupils so far suggested that for many, attending school was as much a social as an academic pursuit. An early indication presented the group with the hypothesis that for disaffected pupils, the social dimensions of attending school took precedence over the possible rewards of academic outcomes, and an exploration of this hypothesis was viewed as an integral part of this endeavour. With these aims in mind, the group planned to:

a) Design and administer a pupil questionnaire to a balanced sample of pupils from across the NASC schools.
b) Conduct complementary qualitative research in parallel, concentrating on pupils identified as disaffected.

Stage Two

Two of the teacher researchers and the UEA research mentor designed a short draft questionnaire, containing both qualitative and qualitative questions. After piloting the draft with pupils in a mixed ability year10 class in each school, a format for a questionnaire on factors influencing pupils’ attitude to learning was agreed and issued across a balanced sample of pupils in the five schools involved, from year 7 to year 10. The focus was on the subject dimensions of classroom engagement and disaffection, and teacher characteristics thought by pupils to engender engagement in learning. The first question listed 38 ‘things to do with the teacher’ and
asked respondents to rate them as ‘very important’ to ‘doesn’t matter’. Some of the factors related primarily to pedagogy (‘knows their subject well’, ‘explains things well’, ‘can stop pupils spoiling the lesson’), others to the personal attributes of the teacher (‘has a sense of humour’, ‘is friendly’, ‘talks to you normally’), and others to the general professionalism of the teacher (‘is nearly always on time for lessons’, ‘marks and returns your work promptly’, ‘sets homework regularly’). The intention was partly to see which group of factors seemed to be most influential from the pupils’ perspective, and partly to see which factors within each group of factors seemed most important to pupils.

The pupils were also asked in which subject they made most and least effort to learn, and the reasons for these choices. Other questions asked pupils to try and identify one lesson that they thought had been particularly good, and explain the reasons for their choice. They were also asked to identify 3 things that put them off learning a subject, and 3 things that made them feel positive about studying a subject. The final question asked them if they had any other comments that they wished to make about ‘teachers, lessons, and how you are taught in school in general.’

The questionnaire was administered to 25% of pupils in year groups 7 to 10 (11-15 year olds), at times when they were working in mixed ability classes, in each of the five schools. Pupils were anonymised, and coded according to school, gender, year group and setting in English and Maths. Schools, although identifiable to the group, would be anonymous in terms of research reporting. In all 704 questionnaires were administered and returned.

The group understood that analysing such a large sample of qualitative, semi-structured and open-ended questions would prove time-intensive but were anxious to give pupils an opportunity to articulate their views in an open-ended rather than a pre-scripted manner.

In parallel to this method of collecting data, interviews with pupils identified as disaffected were carried out. This was in order to investigate more deeply what such pupils considered to be effective classroom management, good lessons, and successful and beneficial teacher/pupil relationships. The interviews also aimed to address the more tangential question of why disaffected pupils come to school by investigating what they most liked or disliked about being in school.

In two schools with contrasting socio-economic catchment areas, the UEA co-ordinator interviewed pupils, drawn from across the ability range from four year groups (years 7 to 10). Twenty eight pupils were interviewed in twelve, small, single gender year groups or pairs. The interviews were all audio-taped.

The teachers considered that an ‘outside’ researcher, in the form of a UEA person, would be a better research instrument than a teacher because: a) pupils would not recognise such a person as a teacher and would possibly be more open and frank in their views, b) the interviewer would have no background information about the individual pupils which might prejudice the interviewer/respondent relationship or the data analysis, and c) he or she would be in a position to process the pupil data, which might be sensitive in nature, in an anonymous fashion, thus offering pupils confidentiality.
**Analysing the data**

Although the remainder of this paper is devoted primarily to the analysis of the data, some space has been given here to the process of doing so by the group, as it was clear that this process helped develop practical understanding of research, and its role and relationship to theory and knowledge. Significantly, it also gave teachers access to pupils’ voices and views in a very different way from ‘normal’ school processes (school forums, informal feedback to form teachers etc), and subsequently generated new thinking on classroom management and teacher/pupil relationships.

**a) analysing the questionnaire**

Analysis of data began during the Summer Term 2000. SSPS software was used to analyse the first question of the questionnaire, and part of the second and third questions. The first stage in the analysis of the remaining data was done by open coding, categorisation, and eventually, clustering of the categories. The group met and worked together on three occasions in order to do so. Each question (or section) was tackled separately on a cross-school basis, members of the group working in pairs on their respective sections. Data from each school was also analysed separately as there was an interest in comparisons, and school effect.

The benefit of working together as a group for reasonable periods of time was that people working on the data from the different questions, sections and schools were able to discuss and compare the emergent findings as they progressed. A further benefit was a kind of ‘moderating’ influence, in that people were able to generate a shared discourse and common understanding as they developed the codes and categories.

These periods of analysis proved to have an unexpected appeal to the teachers as findings began to emerge. Reading authentic pupil ‘voices’ in the data was fascinating for all the group members, and people were gratified by the seriousness of the majority of the pupil responses. The teachers were intrigued by the fine detail of pupil revelations as to a) why they (the pupils) indicated they behaved or reacted in certain ways, and b) what they identified or defined as good, bad or important in a lesson or a teacher. Additionally, they enjoyed the occasional biting wit and humour in some responses, and were moved by expressions of appreciation, disaffection or desperation displayed by others. Significantly, it was noted that distinct personalities could shine through pupils’ words in a way that they did not always do so in their relationships with their teachers, begging questions of how much self-censorship regarding their personalities pupils practised in classrooms and in schools, and why they might do so.

**b) analysing the interviews**

Initial analysis of the pupil interviews was necessarily undertaken by the UEA co-ordinator as the pupil participants had been promised anonymity by her. The aggregated ‘data’ in the form of notes and pages of quotes (loosely clustered) was then passed onto the group for individual school feedback purposes and for further analysis by members of the group in relationship to the overall research focus. As in the case of the questionnaires, the ‘voices’ of the pupils, as quotes, could be disconcerting. Unexpected and previously unthought of factors concerning disaffection and classroom management
had been identified by the pupils, creating a fundamental shift in the thinking of one teacher in particular.

Analysing all of the data collected was a large task and was not completed by the end of the time available. Some of the teachers took sections of the questionnaires home with them to continue the analysis, but it was still incomplete by the close of the term. The UEA mentor undertook to complete this task. Work by various members of the group continued after this point, but the group meetings had now finished. In some senses, this was a disappointing end. Notwithstanding that much had been learnt, and even enjoyed, there was insufficient sense of completion, or ‘closure’ for the group as a whole as a result.

Nevertheless the shared acts of analysis, at whatever level, behaved as a catalyst for discussions and change, on, for example, the nature of pedagogy, pupil/teacher relationships and classroom management. The importance of articulating and sharing professional experience and knowledge about distinguishing between and working with the many different types of disaffection was highlighted. But sadly, barriers to such sharing in the current teaching climate were also identified, with little hope of change expected in that direction. (see Burns and Haydn, 2002 in this volume)

**Questionnaire Analysis**

Of the 704 responses, there appeared to be a definite ‘subject dimension’ to disaffection, with English emerging as the subject which pupils most engaged with (17.9%), followed by Maths, PE and Science. Religious Education (RE) was by some way the least popular subject, (22.7%) followed by Modern Foreign Languages, Business Studies, Economics and Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE). CDT and Science tended to polarise opinions, whilst Humanities subjects tended to be neither most disliked nor most popular overall.

There was however, a marked ‘school effect’ in several subjects, with some subjects viewed in a markedly more positive way in some schools. In one of the five schools (a Catholic School), RE evinced very positive responses, and in almost every subject, there was some evidence of a ‘school effect’ in terms of the popularity of curriculum subjects. The format of data collection did not provide for ‘within school’ effects, in the sense of delineation between different teachers within a school department. Considering the responses overall, it was difficult not to feel a degree of sympathy with those teachers charged with the responsibility of teaching ‘low-status’ subjects such as RE, but in all such subjects, clusters of popularity and the transcendence of subject disadvantage could be discerned. For example, a pupil in the Catholic school liked RE best because ‘I like the teacher and I love learning about other religions’.

In terms of teacher characteristics likely to reduce disaffection and engagement, pedagogical and ‘reasonable human being’ qualities tended to score higher frequencies than professional ones, although there was some overlap. The four top frequencies overall were good subject knowledge, the ability to explain things well, ‘being friendly’ and ‘talks normally’. Within the professional cluster of factors, ‘dresses smartly’, ‘sets regular homework’ and ‘makes you work hard’ had the lowest frequencies, ‘prompt marking and returning of work’, ‘punctuality to lessons’, and ‘not being absent’, the highest. In the ‘pedagogy’ cluster, ‘variety’ and ‘ability to use computers’ scored lowest, ‘ability to explain’ and good subject knowledge’ the highest. In
the ‘personal characteristics’ of the teacher cluster, ‘being strict’ and ‘acknowledging pupils in the corridor’ gave the lowest frequencies, with ‘friendly’, ‘talks normally’, ‘sense of humour’, and ‘polite’ scoring highest. Pupils preferred teachers who were friendly rather than formal, relaxed rather than strict, but ability to control the class was viewed as most important overall.

Although there were ‘school effects’ and ‘subject effects’, analysis of the responses to the questionnaire as a whole indicated that ‘teacher effect’ was by far the strongest influence on pupils’ attitudes to learning. When asked to identify factors which inclined them to make an effort to learn in the classroom, teacher characteristics were most common across all five schools involved in the survey, and were far more prevalent than, for instance, references to the employment or career path utility of particular school subjects.

The teacher’s ability to ‘explain things well’ emerged as the factor that was most commonly cited as ‘very important’ in a teacher, and an inability to explain things clearly was a major cause of disengagement and negative attitudes to subjects. When asked to explain why they did not feel inclined to make an effort in their least favoured school subjects, it was common to find responses where pupils claimed not to have any idea or understanding of what was going on in the lesson. Being consistently bored by the subject, and not seeing the point of the subject were other common responses, particularly in RE, Modern Foreign Languages and Art. Responses included, for example: ‘Art - because you learn not very much. You only learn about paint’ and ‘RE- because unless I want to be a nun, I do not see how RE is going to get me a good job in later life therefore I’m wasting my time’.

The most common factors which ‘put pupils off’ being in the classroom or learning a subject were (in order of frequency), other pupils disrupting the lesson (over 200 responses), too much written work, teachers talking too much, and not being able to sit where they wanted to in a lesson. All these factors elicited well over 100 responses. Being bored, not being able to see the purpose of learning and ‘not understanding what is going on’ were also reiterated. There was again a strong school effect in terms of the relative weighting of these factors.

‘Environmental’ factors emerged as negative influence on attitudes to learning. Pupils appeared to accept that school environments were not created with comfort or style in mind, but indicated that unkempt classrooms did not facilitate attitudes of excellence. Responses such as: ‘Tired, dull classrooms, uncomfortable chairs’ and ‘We would like less grubby classrooms and computers that work’ were not uncommon.

In response to the question which asked them to identify factors that made them feel positive about being in a classroom, teacher characteristics, as with other questions, transpired as most influential, with (perhaps unsurprisingly) a composite image emerging of a friendly, polite and approachable teacher, with good skills of exposition, and the ability to control classes. Many pupils mentioned being able to sit next to friends and being allowed to talk during the lesson as being important to them. ‘Doing things’ and being able to ‘discuss issues in class’ were also cited as positive aspects of classroom life.

Although not all pupils identified a lesson which they thought was particularly good or enjoyable, and some pupils stated, without apparent rancour, that they could ‘not remember any
lesson like that’, those who did respond to this question often gave interesting and illuminating responses. ‘Special occasion’ lessons figured prominently, as for example: ‘English, when a poet came in’. So also did lessons where pupils had learned to do something that they had previously regarded as beyond their capabilities, for example: ‘Maths, where I found out that algebra isn’t as hard as it looks’.

The last question asked the pupils if there was any other comment that they would like to make about teachers, lessons, and ‘how you are taught in school in general’. Again, not all pupils responded to this question, and a few responded at the level of invective, but the majority that did respond were often unreservedly enthusiastic about their school experience, writing comments such as: ‘It’s brilliant’ and ‘The school is good, the teachers are nice’.

Finally, there were many comments that expressed concern about the quality of life, personal welfare and state of mind of their teachers, for example: ‘Teachers are sad’, ‘Teachers should relax more’, ‘Teachers should loosen up a bit’ and ‘Teachers shouldn’t get so stressed.’

The interviews
The framework for the analysis of the interviews was grounded in the data that emerged in response to the questions rather than from the questions themselves. This was in line with the rationale of the questionnaires in that there was a desire for an open-ended investigation that had the potential to look beyond an adult, and maybe misleading, agenda of issues. In an attempt to keep the agenda open and to avoid a pre-scripted and simplistic polarity between ‘good’ and ‘bad’, the interviews were semi-structured and began with open questions such as Why do you come to school? and What do you like about school? before moving on to specific questions of classroom management. The pupils though quickly introduced the language of polarity and passion themselves, so words like ‘bad’ and ‘good’, and ‘hate’ and ‘like’ were used liberally in their first responses.

Analysing this data was problematic, not least because pupils moved easily and seamlessly between contradictory responses, between expressions of passion and indifference, and between what appeared to be both naive and sophisticated expressions of motivation and opinion. Such responses appeared to be reflecting their own confusion, dilemmas, and ambiguity regarding their feelings about being in school, and about the relationships that they constructed, or were prey to, in this environment. For example, it seemed that on the one hand, school offered good facilities for learning and education and gave unparalleled space and opportunity for social and emotional expression and development. But, on the other hand, it was also a place that insisted on compliance of attendance, actions and behaviours at a time in their lives when many felt strong imperatives of independence or rebellion. Moreover, areas of personal development which lay outside of a school remit increasingly interfered in their school lives in a negative manner.

Further examples of such dilemmas and contradictions included the following:

- All interviewees had been identified as disaffected by their schools, but when asked if they had a free choice as to whether attend school or not, all except two said they would prefer to
do so. Taking this ‘choice’ question further, i.e. given a free choice as to whether they attended lessons or not, again, most of them said that they probably would do so.

- Most of the pupils reported that learning and ‘getting educated’ was important and could be enjoyable; what they disliked was either ‘having’ to do so, or the context in which education took place.
- Most pupils initially reported that most of all in school, they ‘hated’ the teachers, but then said that outside of the classroom, they liked some of the teachers, often enjoying their company and appreciating their help.
- Many reported that being told what to do or having strong authoritative people and structures in the school or classroom was very difficult for them, but that they valued school rules and firm discipline enormously as these factors could make their lives in school safer and less stressed, and their lessons enjoyable and productive.
- All pupils complained about having to wear school uniform, but most said that they would prefer to keep some form of uniform, and gave various reasons for doing so.
- All the pupils complained about others’ behaviour and attitudes (staff and pupils) but indicated that they were unable or unwilling to moderate their own self-reported anti-social and disaffected behaviour.

It seemed that at the heart of these contradictions lay issues of authority; the tussles of rebellion, risk and control that many pupils were engaged in, not only within themselves, but also in relationship to the structures of their schools and classrooms, and the adults who constructed their professional personas in particular ways within these structures.

Teachers, required to work within strict educational frameworks (and constraints) of legality, economy and purpose, said that they struggled to provide a safe and motivating learning environment for all pupils, regardless of the range of abilities, personalities and motivations pupils bring to the school. Faced by what they considered to be, especially with regard to disaffected pupils, weak formal mechanisms of force or motivation, they engaged in micro-politics of power, authority and leadership in the classroom in order to achieve this aspiration. Although the pupils did not use this kind of language, much of their data also revolved around these issues. Metaphors of battle were not uncommon, and some pupils clearly understood, and reacted to, these micro-politics of power at a sophisticated level, even though they may have lacked the sophistication of language to match their understanding and behaviour.

However, in spite of the complicated messages that pupils offered, a number of common threads and patterns emerged. Moreover, a common or shared pupil discourse about schooling appeared to be prevalent. The concurrence of the views and the language used across the two schools, which are in very different in catchment areas, and have a very different culture and ethos, was striking. ‘School effect’ issues, therefore, tended to revolve around questions of degree rather than difference.

The main issues
None of the pupils were aware of why they, in particular, had been asked to participate in the research, but all those interviewed took the task seriously, and were willing to explain the reasoning behind their thinking. Analysis of the data generated the following issues.
(i) What is important to pupils in schools?

- The desire to be with friends: Pupils said, straightaway, they came to school to meet their friends, or their mates, and to socialise. Secondary to this purpose was ‘to get educated’ and ‘to do PE and sport’. Two girls could not immediately think of anything worth coming into school for. Eventually, they agreed that ‘seeing mates and friends’ was probably the main reason. But when invited to speculate about school becoming just a large social club, with no lessons, they thought that it would become ‘a bit boring after a while’.

- Being with friends during both ‘work’ and ‘play’: Pupils said they preferred to be with their friends most of the time, at break times and during lesson times. The majority of the pupils thought their social lives in their schools were good. As one pupil said ‘it happens in both breaks and in lessons. In some lessons you can sit with your friends, you can choose where to sit in lots of classes’. They are aware that ‘this sometimes interferes with your work … and some teachers complain’ but being with their friends was more important. Some said that silence makes them ‘nervous’ so they have to talk to friends as this helps them work better, or that working with friends made tasks more enjoyable.

- Having access to spaces for meeting friends: For some pupils, school is the only place where they see their friends; they cannot meet outside school because they live too far away. This was not true for all, but school was a place that routinely brought together a large group of peers, with much potential for friendship, association and social interaction. As one boy explained: ‘School is a good place to meet friends and socialise … it’s difficult to meet them out of school sometimes’. They particularly liked having spaces in which to meet with their friends where there were no teachers ‘on our backs’ as one pupil put it. Not having to go outside at breaktimes was appreciated, as ‘talking and chatting with friends is better inside than out, except in summer, when it is warm’. A number suggested that a wider range of social spaces for these purposes would be welcome.

- Having access to spaces ‘to be by yourself’: A surprising number of pupils reported that they valued having safe and quiet spaces to be alone in and to ‘think about things’. ‘I like having breaktimes and dinnertimes, so that I can go around for a little walk for a bit of fresh air, but the places to walk around aren’t very brilliant,’ was a similar comment.

- Getting educated: Having a good education was important for the majority of the pupils interviewed. They did not necessarily see themselves as disaffected from learning or from education, but often blamed the teachers for their own and their fellow pupils’ hostile views, negative behaviour or lack of achievement. A girl described as highly disaffected and disruptive by both herself and her school, said in an interview that she came to school: ‘To see friends and have meetings, thinking about the future and careers … I like learning and hope to get good grades for a good career. Others ‘quite liked some of the lessons’ and insisted that education was ‘important to earn decent money’.

- Opportunities and facilities for sport: Nearly 40% of the pupils, of both sexes, reported that they came to school for sports, PE and football. This could be in the form of formal lessons, extra-curricular activities, such as clubs, or in the games they played in their break times.
Being in an environment they felt at ease in: A few comments were made about ‘tatty, old and dark buildings’, insufficient facilities and dirty or locked toilets, but it was explained that this is what schools looked like anyway. In terms of feeling at ease, a more important distinction for the pupils was the level of control that was exercised in the different locations and spaces they occupied during the day. For example, even in the short spaces between lessons some pupils loosen their school uniforms as soon as they leave a classroom and then tidy them up again as they enter the next classroom. Classrooms were considered to be the spaces in which most adult control was exercised.

Feeling safe: Feeling safe was very important. Pupils talked about ‘zero tolerance’ regimes, which many thought a good idea, so that if they were bullied or victimised they had someone to tell and action would be taken. In both schools, pupils reported some fighting, bullying and verbal abuse but said that generally ‘it was not too bad’ and thought their schools measured up very well against other (named) schools which friends attended and whom they discussed this with. They liked the fact that ‘you have grown up with each other and all know each other ... like a kind of very large family’. The analogy of a family was used by pupils in both schools. This was all about feeling at ease as well as safe. Pupils said that when they knew people in school well, and their personalities, they were in a better position to predict their behaviour. This helped them engage more safely in the politics of power with peers and adults that many felt they confronted on a daily basis.

Teachers: In the eyes of the pupils interviewed, most ills in school emanated from the teachers. When asked what they disliked most in school, all cited ‘teachers’ either immediately or very soon into the interviews. Most pupils eventually modified ‘teachers’ to ‘some teachers’ when questioned further, as, some were ‘all right’, ‘good’ or ‘okay’. Some pupils used the word ‘hate’ but others thought ‘dislike’ was more accurate.

Uniform: Uniform was the second major negative factor identified by pupils. They thought that some teachers took it too seriously, finding teachers who bothered about ‘top buttons being done up’ and ‘shirts tucked in’ a genuine problem. Much time was spent talking about the details of uniform, which seemed to have great significance for pupils.

(ii) Different agendas

Apart from differentiation and special needs provision, school curricula tend to operate on the ‘one size fits all’ principle. Teachers are required to deliver a certain curriculum within relatively fixed infrastructures. Implicit in such delivery is the assumption that all are working to a similar agenda and wish for similar outcomes. It was clear in the data that this was not so in reality. Pupils’ agendas were not all the same, and teacher and pupil agendas did not always match, albeit they could overlap.

Those pupils whose agendas were most distant or detached from teachers’ or schools’ agendas were almost invariably the ones whom teachers identified as disaffected. For example, some pupils already had their adult lives and future work mapped out and were now impatient with classroom, lessons and schooling processes. They said that it was time they moved on and were
wasting time coming to school. So they ‘opted out’, or ‘disengaged’, either quietly and privately in some cases or more loudly in other cases. This appeared to depend on personality, patience, and the extent to which school or teachers interfered with the ‘waiting’ process. This did not mean that they gained no pleasure or enjoyment on a day to day basis, or could not be surprised (or even gratified) by some form of learning that occurred during this period, but the curriculum on offer was of little value in their eyes.

Just as pupils who came to school with a different agenda from that decreed by the school, pupils who attended school with least sense of life purpose or intent in general were also likely to be identified as disaffected. Having, for various reasons, little sense of direction or purpose, they thus ‘reacted’ to what happened in schools or classrooms rather than follow a goal, educational or otherwise. Their locus of control appeared to lie in others’ hands, be they teachers or peers, rather than in their own. This process of ‘reacting’, sometimes in an unnecessarily extreme manner, could be construed as form of filling space that others employed in working towards longer-term intentions or goals. Those with just as much energy and time as the pupils who engaged in the lesson because of intrinsic stimulus used this time and energy to react to extrinsic stimuli. ‘Teacher effect’ in such cases, appeared to be a key factor in classroom management. Disaffected pupils would decide whether to engage or disengage (loudly or quietly) with a lesson in the classroom and help or hinder a teacher in classroom management depending whether they liked, admired or respected the individual teacher concerned. As one highly disaffected girl reported ‘Teachers don't like classes getting out of hand, so they try and keep control, but it only works for some teachers because pupils like them. If they don't like the teacher, then they won't help and thing get worse’. Pupils who had clearer agendas did not appear to allow ‘teacher effect’ to play such a large part in their classroom lives or their learning intentions.

(iii) The impact of ‘home’ lives

‘Disaffection’ is currently used as a global term describing a phenomenon that has its roots and causes in many scenarios, only some of them based in school issues. Those originating in the personal and private lives of pupils are not easily susceptible to changes or interventions that a school or a teacher may wish to put in place. Many of the pupils interviewed talked spontaneously about difficulties in their home lives and how these inevitably impacted on their attitudes to learning, and teachers and friends in school.

For example, one pupil spelled out in some detail the problems she and her family faced in their daily lives. She understood that her inability to compartmentalise her life between home and school generated problems for both herself and others in the school, and struggled with issues and dilemmas of public and private knowledge in the school context. She was grateful to teachers who took the trouble to find out what was wrong and who were prepared ask her how things were, to listen to her and to make allowances if necessary. But at the same time she was also angry that these people knew about her private family life, had access to this information and were ‘nosy’. This was not their business. Both attitudes were displayed, alternately, and with some passion, within five minutes of discussion. A further paradox for this pupil was that she had career ambitions, but felt that there was little chance of ever achieving them because her relationship with the schooling process and with the teachers in the school was so poor. She was aware of her reputation and could see simultaneously how teachers were trying to help her
privately on an individual basis but were also hindering her by their attitude to her in the classroom.

(iv) Teachers and lessons

‘Some lessons can be all right. You go in in a happy mood, and sometimes the teacher is in a bad mood, or there is a lot of mucking about, and you don't get much done and you didn't enjoy the lesson, and you come out in a bad mood. And then you go to the next lesson in a bad mood.’ (year 10 pupil)

It was difficult to separate lessons and teachers. These were the areas where the most passion and emotion was displayed, and the hate/dislike words used most often.

Pupils clearly appreciated teachers who were strict and kept good control in their classrooms and lessons. This maintained the classroom as a stress-free and relaxed environment, a safe place to be in, and a reasonably easy place to work and learn in if you wanted to do so. How the teacher kept such control was crucial though. Pupils reported a number of strategies that teachers used to control a class that they considered bad management:

- teachers who 'bullied' or ‘victimised’ them
- teachers swore or shouted at them
- teachers who were sarcastic in a ‘nasty rather than a jokey way’.
- what they called unfairness. The main example of unfairness given was when a small group were disruptive and just one was picked out (arbitrarily in their eyes) as ‘an example’ to be sent out or punished in some way.
- inconsistent behaviour on the part of the teacher. Two forms of inconsistency were identified: a) inconsistency between intention and execution, b) teachers who were unpredictable in their relationship to pupils, for example, relaxed and joking one day but very strict on another day. It was not the strictness they minded, rather, pupils felt they could not trust (feel safe with) teachers who were unpredictable in behaviour and attention to them.

‘Respect’ was a word that came up often. Pupils said that a teacher should be able to control them and still show respect to them. What they disliked was control and authority being exercised without any respect for the pupil. In particular, being told off or told what to do in public was considered as very bad from pupils’ point of view. It was embarrassing (see the next point) and could develop, according to pupils, in a number of ways:

- the pupil retaliates verbally and publicly. This usually had a bad end as the pupil is often excluded from the classroom and what may have began as a temporary glitch grows into something bigger,
- it works (fair or not) in terms of behaviour and classroom control and the pupil will try to avoid such behaviour again because he or she cares about or responds to this kind of control mechanism, or
- the pupil retaliates privately, as a form of ‘revenge’ in order try to get back his or her personal dignity or self-esteem, by not working well, or at all, in the lesson.
Some pupils were aware that these options could be counter-productive, but said such reactions were either instinctive, or happened too quickly. Pupils tried to explain that they often behaved in ways that they felt they had little control over, how something small could escalate out of control and once an incident had occurred, a pre-set course of behaviour (for pupil and teacher) was set off. The skill of a good classroom teacher could help a pupil break this cycle of behaviour in a non-embarrassing manner, and some of the pupils recognised and liked teachers who did this.

They made a distinction between those teachers who were just trying to control the class, however well or badly (unfairly) for the sake of effective classroom management and those who they felt were on ‘power trips’. Teachers whom pupils thought were on ‘power trips’ were disliked by most, but admired and enjoyed as a challenge by a minority. As a group of boys explained, with some of these teachers ‘you can’t retaliate – they are just too powerful’ - but with others ‘it was worth having a go at’.

When asked what advice they would give to a new teacher, all strongly advised against a) giving direct orders, b) direct confrontation, and c) embarrassing pupils in front of their peers. There was recognition that they and other pupils could be, and often were, highly disruptive and often lost their tempers. Many said that they ‘just would never do teaching’ as the ‘teenagers of today are so bad’. One very disaffected pupil said ‘I wouldn’t teach people of our age – I couldn’t cope with things – I would end up hitting them’ and another that ‘it was a pity that corporal punishment has been stopped, although’ as she added, ‘you couldn’t bring it back now. It’s too late, the kids would just kill you if you tried to hit them these days’. But in spite of these problems, they still thought that a good teacher still had to exercise strong control, generate a relaxed environment, and remain a paragon of fairness, because ‘That’s their job’.

A final issue identified was the significance given to teachers’ control over the physical space in the lesson. A teacher could decide to what extent pupils had liberty to sit where they wished in the classroom, the choices they could make over who they sat next or near to and the amount and kind of movement allowed in a lesson. Being able to sit or work near friends was very important to most of the pupils, and was, in the view of some of the pupils, a mark of a teacher they liked. A few pupils said that some teachers come too close to them, some of whom did not smell nice, but they did not have any choice about personal territory or the physical distance between themselves and a teacher. That was the teacher’s choice and within their control.

(v) Being embarrassed

Pupils reported that they felt embarrassed easily, and used any number of mechanisms to try and restore their sense of self-esteem. By doing so, many them ended up cutting off their noses to spite their faces, so to speak. In the urge to feel at ease with themselves again, and not having the skills, language or confidence to do otherwise, they retaliated overtly and unthinkingly in ways which consequently interfered with their intentions and gave their teachers and fellow pupils misleading messages about their underlying feelings and attitudes. So signs of disaffection with schooling, teachers and lessons did not always reflect disaffection with learning and ambition.
Pupils gave many examples of what made them feel embarrassed and stopped them taking better advantage of what many recognised to be on offer. For example:

- Being told off in public (deserved or not).
- Not being able to do the work set or understand the questions asked. Some pupils described how, once they had asked for help at least once, it was too embarrassing to ask again, or, the teacher could become angry and blame the pupil if he or she still failed to understand. One pupil for instance talked about ‘Teachers who explain the work properly and you’re not frightened to ask if you don’t understand even after extra help. A brilliant teacher is one who explains things really well and who you don’t feel embarrassed about asking again ... like teachers who listen to you, teachers who aren’t miserable’. And another described a teacher she really liked because this teacher told her class that if they did not understand something properly, it was her (the teacher’s) fault and they must ask her again.
- Some pupils described how they were at the lower end of mixed ability classes, and often felt left behind but were too embarrassed to ask for extra help when others could do the work without help. But, the same pupils also disliked being ‘streamed’ because it could be embarrassing to be seen as ‘slow’.

Embarrassment and fear were often allied, albeit in opposition. Pupils recounted examples of incidents where the sense of potential embarrassment in a classroom generated an imperative to retaliate, but fear of teacher authority or of disrupting routine classroom conventions in particular classes could confuse rather than diminish this imperative. So the root cause of disaffection could remain in a pupil and be carried over to other classrooms and lessons. Depending on the competence of the teacher, and the classroom environment he or she created, this feeling of disaffection could dissipate, or linger on, or find opportunity to express itself. This meant that teachers needed to be able to ‘read’ individual pupils, and react to them, skilfully. Pupils reported that they were not always sure about correctly interpreting comments and moods of teachers and peers, but there was an expectation on their part that teachers could interpret the intentions and feelings that lay behind some of their overtly misleading behaviour.

(vi) A good lesson? A good teacher

In the main, lessons were described as either ‘boring’ or ‘interesting’, ‘boring’ being the more common adjective used. ‘Boring’ could describe either lesson pedagogy or content, but it was primarily used as a catch-all term for something negative about a teacher or teacher/pupil relationship in a lesson.

A small minority of the pupils could not see any good in a teacher. For them, being a teacher was the defining characteristic of that person, and as that pupil ‘hated’ teachers, he or she was unable or unwilling to see behind or beyond that professional persona of the teacher. Such pupils could be defined as being seriously disaffected, in that their views on school, lessons and teachers appeared to be fixed and possibly now immutable. Their approach to a classroom or a teacher was almost inevitably foreshadowed by suspicion, fear or hostility.
However, the majority of the pupils interviewed were not so fixed in their views. Many, whose initial response to the questions of what they disliked most about school or a lesson was ‘teachers’ usually modified this response to either ‘some’ or ‘not all’ teachers later on in the interviews, and identified and praised certain teachers. For example, a female pupil who had earlier expressed a range of hostility to teachers and lessons, subsequently talked about the ‘good teachers’ in her school, describing them thus:

[someone who has] ‘a good sense of humour, lets you sit where you want, someone who helps you do your work, helps you pass your exams, teachers who are on the same wavelength as you, people who you can talk to normal things about’.

It was clear, and not surprising of course, that the relationship between a good teacher and a good lesson is very strong. The relationships that teachers engendered between themselves and pupils were key, but a good relationship in itself was not sufficient in the eyes of the pupils. In order to be successful in terms of conducting good lessons other characteristics came into play. Detailed examples of good lessons were given, described (in different words) as being well-differentiated, well-paced, well-controlled and having definite targets and outcomes against which pupils could measure and judge their progress. Praise from a teacher was important, as was a sense of achievement on the pupils’ part. Teachers who appeared to display these characteristics were described as ‘brilliant’ and were identified by a number of the pupils. Teacher skills and teacher attitudes did not exist separately in pupil views. It was how they interacted that made the difference between an ordinary lesson or teacher and a brilliant one.

(vii) Teachers being ‘grumpy’

In a similar manner that the word ‘boring’ acted as a catch-all for disaffection with teachers and lessons in general, the word ‘grumpy’ was used very frequently as a catch-all for describing teacher attitudes to pupils and lessons.

‘Grumpy’ was essentially about teacher mood. Pupils spoke a lot about gauging the mood of a teacher, the first thing that they do when they walk into a classroom. ‘Grumpy’ could mean bad-tempered, cross, teachers who shouted at the class as soon as they walked in, or teacher who complained a lot. According to the pupils, many teachers are ‘grumpy’ a lot of the time. When asked why, they explained that teachers were very stressed, ‘they spend a lot of time having to work over the weekend, doing tons of paperwork and doing all that marking for you’. How did they know this? ‘Because the teachers are always telling us’. Pupils said they ‘just wouldn’t do that job’.

Pupils said they could tell which teachers were properly organised and ‘on top of their work’. Those who were ‘disorganised’ subsequently ‘get cross, panicky and grumpy’. If the lessons or courses are not well-organised, pupils have to ‘rush their course work, have lessons which don’t work very well … are just told to get on with something, things aren’t explained very well, work doesn’t get marked for ages, and the teacher is grumpy’.
’Happy’ teachers stood out as being good. Pupils like being with happy teachers, or ones that were ‘relaxed’ or ‘laid back’. As one pupil remarked: ‘It’s good to walk into a classroom where the teacher is happy, enthusiastic about the subject’ and ‘pleased to see us’.

Some pupils reported that teachers complained to them about things in their personal lives, or criticised other adults in their personal lives. They did not like this; it made them feel uneasy. They wanted a friendly and safe relationship with teachers, but not for them to bring their personal problems and ‘whinges’ into school and tell the pupils about them. In order for the classroom to feel safe it seems that the pupils need to believe, at a tacit level, that teachers are not as prey to the problems of life that the pupils feel they are, and nor do they indulge in similar behaviours. For pupils to give the authority to the teachers to control them in the classroom, they needed to trust their teachers; to feel that teachers are in control of their own lives, that they make their judgements from a consistent and fair standpoint, and that they like their work.

Summary comments
Challenged by increasing signs of disaffection and dis-engagement in their pupils, schools and teachers are eager to investigate and improve policy and practice in their individual schools and classrooms, to the extent that they can within the external constraints and contexts in which schools currently operate. This year-long project, albeit less even and coherent in execution than originally aspired to, nevertheless, proved to be of worth to all parties concerned, both in terms of useful and ‘actionable’ research findings, and of research being a valuable dimension of school and professional development.

Working through the stages and process of the research gave group members a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between disaffection, curriculum, pedagogy and context from pupil perspectives, insights on the relationship between a good lesson and a good teacher being of particular interest. Moreover, the research suggests that pupils who lack clear learning and life agendas as they approach adult life, have been unable to use their schooling and curricular experiences to construct or prepare for a personal vision of their future lives. Pupil disaffection with schooling can be grounded in any number of factors, but the disjunction between school agendas and pupil agendas in high schools appears to be one that is growing rather than diminishing.

For those who are interested, a fuller report on the NASC Classroom Management and Disaffection research is available as one of the NASC project reports, available from the authors at UEA.

Acknowledgements
The authors would like to acknowledge and thank the teachers in the project group who were involved in the research: Dominic Boddington, Bob Burns, Wynne Feather, Lesley Howell, Dave Jones and Debbie Rolfe.
References

Bulmer, M (1999) Response of underachieving pupils to lesson activity and teaching style NASC UEA Mimeo
Oakley J (1999) Really Here in Name Only (RHINOS) NASC UEA Mimeo