

ict



Bob Whitthorne

'those integrated within school are less likely to commit criminal acts'

38 www.IE-today.co.uk

WHAT MAKES THEM TICK

Imagine for a moment being able to "peel back" the first couple of "layers" which go to make up the innermost thoughts of every school pupil.

How fascinating to be able to have so much access to such a wealth of information and see what makes them tick.

Access to such data would provide essential information about a youngster's attitude to education individually, as well as helping identifying the "golden thread" which tends to run through groups of primary and secondary age pupils.

Ten years ago all this would have been unlikely. However, greater availability of personal computers and continued advances in their processing power mean that more and more schools are recognising that ICT could be the ideal conduit through which to assess pupils' attitudes to learning. Ironically, these "hard edged" mathematically-based systems actually offer the simplest pathway into those crucial "soft outcome" areas represented by the exemplar themes of Every Child Matters and the heavy pupil voice element of school inspection.

Those same past ten years have seen a parallel growth in the use of ICT in helping develop approaches to learning, teaching and to change management.

This may be no coincidence? Indeed, there is an argument to say that it is not possible to truly peel away the "layers" of the pupils to assess their attitude to education without the use of ICT.

Dr Glen Williams is a former educational psychologist and chairman of W3 Insights, a company which utilises internet technologies for high-volume psychometric assessment in order to provide schools with the means to access pupils' feelings and thoughts about school and their studies.

Dr Williams said: "The role that ICT plays in any such process is crucial and allows practitioners to identify the likely causes of persistent problems such as low attendance, poor self-esteem and under-achievement.

Schoolchildren seem to enjoy interacting with our systems, telling the computer how they

feel and for the most part doing this in a remarkably honest and open way".

"The school then gains a truer picture of what steps need to be taken in order to address problems on an individual and, indeed, group or organisational basis."

Bob Whitthorne, managing director of W3 Insights, added feedback from schools demonstrated that only through technological means could they obtain such important information and go on to share that with parents.

"Independent research demonstrates that children who feel integrated within school are much less likely to commit criminal acts, take drugs or gamble as adults so there is the longer-term potential for positive impact on the community outside school too," Said Mr Whitthorne.

Dr Williams's company spent a number of years developing a system called Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS), which asks pupils a range of questions across a number of factors. Schools are then provided with detailed reports which enable teachers to intervene in cases of groups or individuals deemed to be "at risk".

"With Government's increasing emphasis on integrating existing datasets within schools we've also seen attitudinal data used by our clients in combination with other key performance indicators such as attendance and attainment to identify and support hitherto "invisible" vulnerable groups such as "fragile" learners," he said.

"When schools can measure robustly the emotional domain they develop more enabling approaches to teaching and support of their youngsters which builds learning, confidence and co-operation between the schools, the pupils and communities."