

Early warning system on pupil attitudes

Pupil attitudes in North Ayrshire are to come under scrutiny to see how they impact on behaviour following the introduction of an evaluation programme developed in England.

The Garnock cluster is to become the first Scottish school group to use PASS (Pupil Attitudes to Self and School), which can trim a 50-item questionnaire down to nine factors. These can then identify existing or potential problems, such as low achievement, poor attendance and fragile self-esteem.

"We wanted some way to measure the unmeasurable, as it were," Bob Neilly, the authority's quality improvement manager, told psychologists. "This system came highly recommended by

Ofsted, and we thought it could help us develop some preventive measures for pupils."

The system has taken founders Glen Williams, an artificial intelligence expert who retrained as an educational psychologist, and Bob Whittome, an educational psychologist for 18 years, eight years to develop. It is now used by many authorities in England.

"The system robustly assesses student attitudes, motivations and self-concept," Mr Whittome, managing director of W3 Insights, said. "It can also suggest solutions and prompt new ways of dealing with problems. The 50 questions feed down into the different factors, and can highlight problems early on."

Schools can download PASS on to a network or it can be delivered

online. The questionnaire, which has a readability aimed at age seven, takes about 15 minutes to complete. The findings can be used for both pupil profiling and whole-school measurements.

One school discovered that girls

were becoming disaffected, Mr Whittome said. "This could have been due to the national emphasis that has been put on bringing boys' achievements more in line with girls'. But there was definitely something going wrong. The school decided, controversially, to split the classes gender-wise and within a term the girls' attitudes had improved dramatically."

PASS then showed that boys' attitudes took a nose dive, and the school had to respond rapidly. "We can't tell schools what to do," Mr Whittome said. "But we can suggest responses such as increasing positive reinforcement."

The results from the questionnaires will provide schools with a detailed report by year group, gender and ethnicity, and many

schools have found it can provide insights into trends for school groups or individual pupils. It will also take into account fluctuations, such as secondary school transfer and transition across key stages.

"We are hoping to use it to improve school liaison during transition between primary and secondary, identifying problems before the pupil's attitudes become ingrained." Mr Neilly said. "We are also using it to identify trends within year groups, to see if we can find out why some year groups have better attitudes."

Presenting teachers with comprehensive data on individuals can allow them to develop appropriate intervention strategies, such as study support.

MORE NEXT WEEK

PASS factors

- Feelings about school
- Perceived learning capability
- Self-regard
- Preparedness for learning
- Attitude to teachers
- General work ethic
- Confidence in learning
- Attitude to attendance
- Response to curriculum demands