

Learning aid to help pupils pass

Previously the preserve of sweaty job interviews, psychometric tests are now being used on schoolchildren to assess their attitude to learning.

They can also provide parents with a valuable insight into their child's mind, as Education Correspondent **Shahid Naqvi** finds out



How many parents really know what their children are like at school? They might get a bit of an idea from a brief chat with the class teacher on parents evening. Or from comments in a school report.

Asking their children is no use - invariably they're dealt a monosyllabic "OK", designed to stop further questioning.

For the most part, parents are in the dark, until the exam results come out - by which time it may be too late.

However, that may change with the help of a diagnostic tool, already being used by some schools, that provides detailed information about youngsters' attitudes to learning.

Essentially, it is a psychometric test developed by two Wolverhampton-based child psychologists that puts a score out of 100 to various aspects of pupils' school life.

It can tell, for example, that Sally scores 22.8 out of 100 for her feelings about school; Michael notches up 31.4 for his attitude to teachers and James 59.4 for the way he responds to the curriculum.

The system called PASS - Pupil Attitudes to Self and School - is the brainchild of Bob Whittome and Glen Williams and is attracting

interest from local authorities throughout the region.

"It is a quantitative measure rather than a qualitative measure," said Mr Whittome. "There are nine elements of assessment, which we call factors, which provide you with patterns and trends for a whole school or even an LEA, but equally you can focus it right down to an individual pupil.

"You can then use the profile to generate work programmes for an individual child."

In addition to the categories already mentioned, the other areas for assessment include "self-regard", the child's "perceived learning capability", "general work ethic", "learner confidence" and "attendance attitude".

Pupils are assessed online by choosing one of four responses - ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree - to 50 statements such as "I feel safe in school" or "I like doing homework".

The score ends up as a percentage that says how they have done benchmarked against 150,000 pupils who have completed the test in each of the nine categories. A score of 60 for work ethic, for example, means they are above 59 per cent within their year group nationally.

Schools adopting PASS get a breakdown of pupil attitudes in individual classes, with a traffic light system to flag up any pupil who appears to have a problem.

It also provides an analysis of the "learner environment", by comparing pupils, for example, by ethnicity or gender.

If done over a period of time - typically schools sign up for an annual assessment over three years - it can show if measures put in place have improved attitudes.

"We send back a report in two parts," said Mr Whittome. "One strategic report which looks at patterns and trends at school level, then gender, year group and ethnicity. The other is a profile on every single youngster that has completed it. It goes from macro to micro."

A secondary school will typically pay about £2,400 for a three-year annual assessment. At primary level it will be between £1,500 and £1,800, depending on size.

Mr Whittome and Mr William's company, W3 Insights, based at the Wolverhampton Science Park, will be showcasing its system to educationalists at the three-day Education Show which starts at the National Exhibition Centre on Thursday.

The company believes the tool can also give parents invaluable insight into their child's school life.

"We consistently get feedback from schools that have shared the pupil profile with parents - they feel engaged because it is about a child," said Mr Whittome. "They can see as a result of that dialogue things that are going on in that youngsters' world which they wouldn't have got through other routes. It provides a facility for building a collaborative partnership with parents."