

# Rewards and Punishments in Intermediate Schools 2010

## Beliefs About Effectiveness

M. Debney  
Principal, South Wellington Intermediate School

*Three classes of students in each of four intermediate schools were presented with lists of rewards and punishments. The students ranked each list in terms of effectiveness. The teachers in the same schools ranked the same lists in terms of their belief of effectiveness with students.*

*While there was some correlation between the students and teachers results, some significant anomalies indicate that teachers should review their practices.*

### **Introduction**

This study sets out to explore and compare the views of students and teachers on effectiveness of rewards and punishments in the classroom.

Care must be taken in interpreting results because the issue is complex and what a student indicates as effective as a reward or punishment, may not be effective classroom practice. Some teachers commented that a reward or punishment varied depending on each individual circumstance and it was difficult to generalise about effectiveness.

Also, some schools may not have structures such as Houses where points may be awarded as a reward.

### **Method**

A sample of the questionnaire was discussed with a group of students and teachers to develop two standard lists. The following items were decided upon and the order decided randomly;

#### *Rewards*

Private praise  
Parents informed of student's good behaviour  
Praised in front of other pupils  
Good written comments on student's work  
Praised by other pupils  
Good marks on work  
House/Merit points given by teacher  
Mentioned at assembly  
Having work on display  
Whole class praised

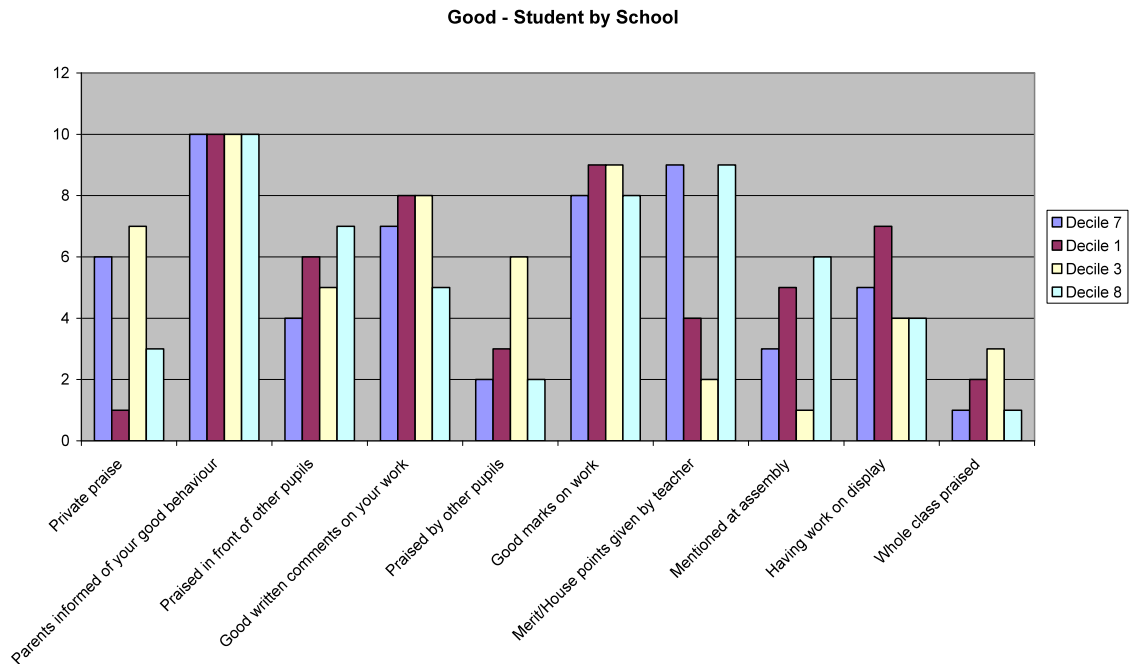
#### *Punishments*

Teacher explaining what is wrong with student's behaviour in front of class  
Teacher explaining what is wrong with a student's behaviour in private  
Parents informed of student's naughty behaviour  
Being moved to another seat in the class  
Being stopped from going on a school trip  
Taking unfinished work home  
Being told off in front of class  
Being sent to see the principal  
Being told off in private  
Kept in at playtime

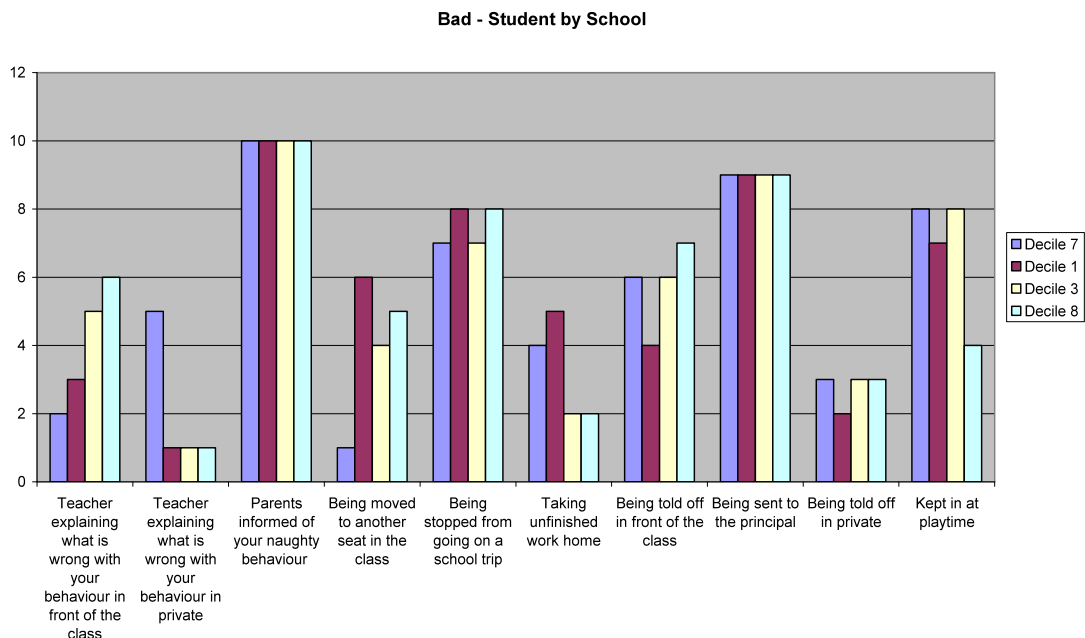
The four intermediates chosen were a range of deciles: 1, 3, 7 and 8. Three classes of students from each school were samples plus all teaching staff. The participants were all asked for gender and ethnicity

## Findings Students

### 1. Between schools



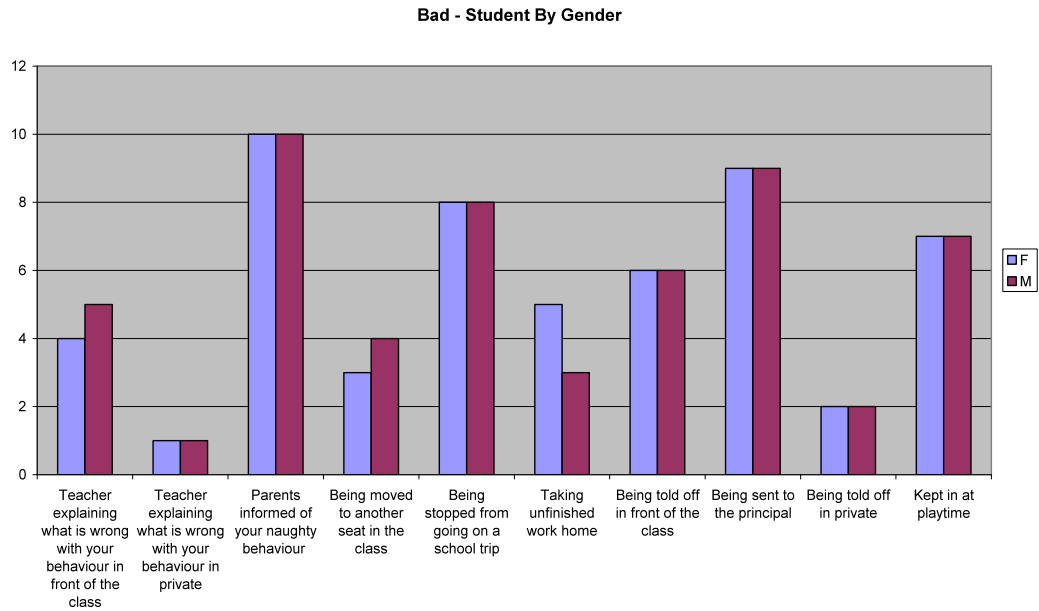
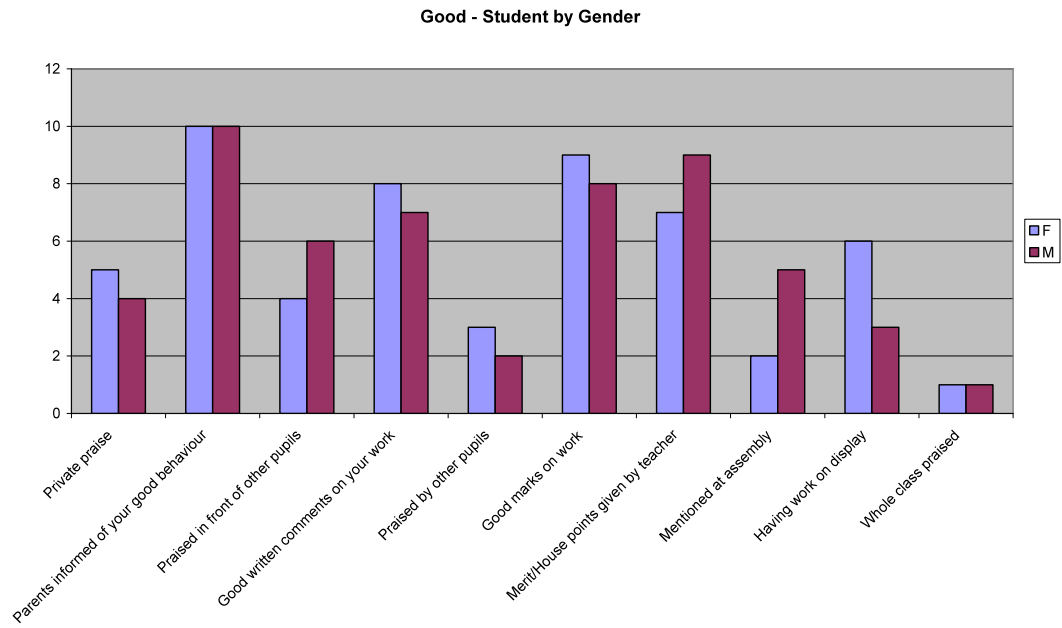
All students ranked 'Parents informed of your good behaviour' as the most effective form of reinforcing that behaviour. 'Good marks on work' and 'Good written comments on work' also figured strongly. The students of two schools ranked 'Merit/House points given by teacher' as the second most effective reward. It is possible the other two schools may not have this reward structure in place.



The students of all schools ranked 'Parents informed of your naughty behaviour' as most effective followed by 'Being sent to the principal'.

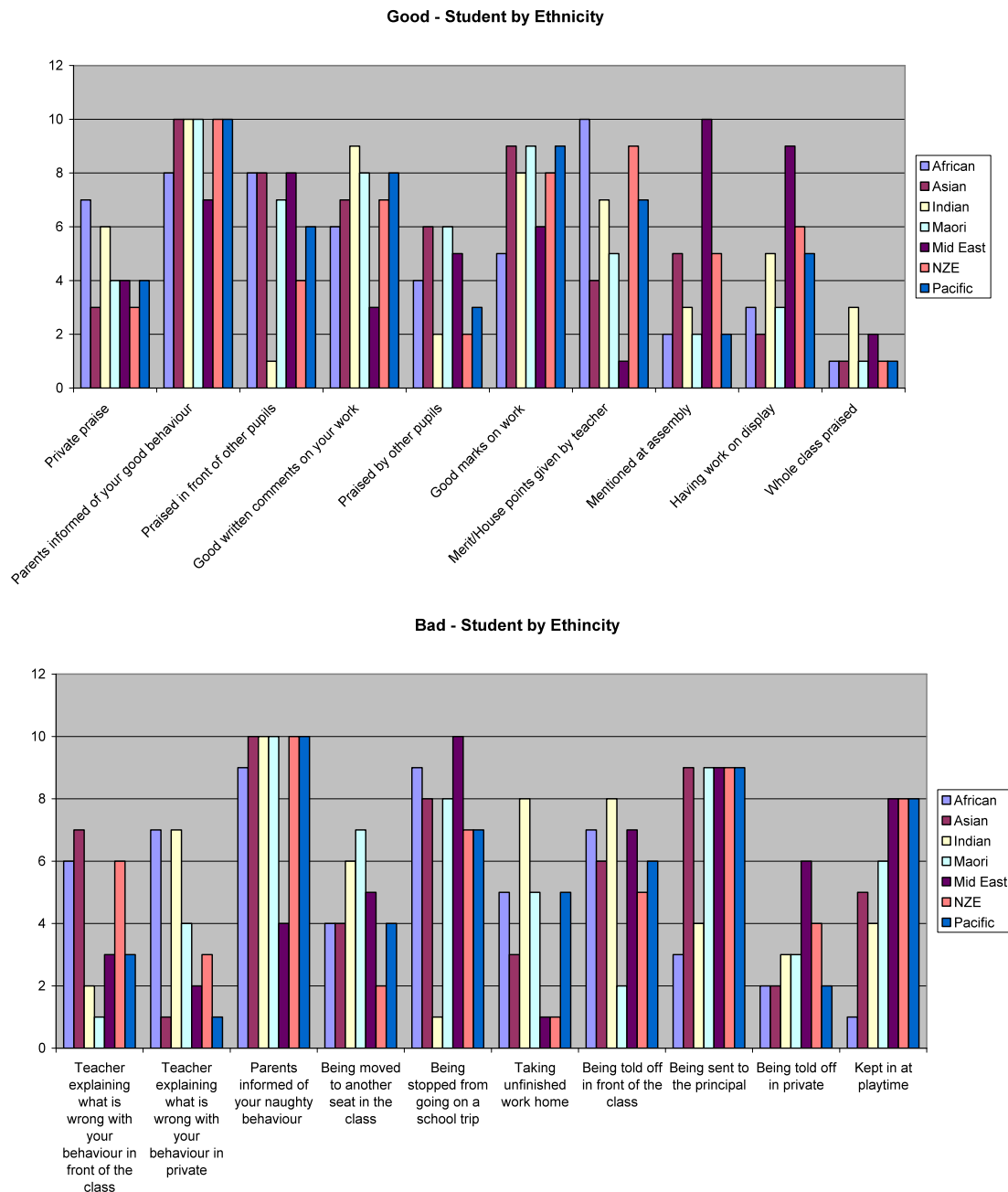
It is significant for both rewards and punishments, contacting the parents is considered most effective.

## 2. Between genders



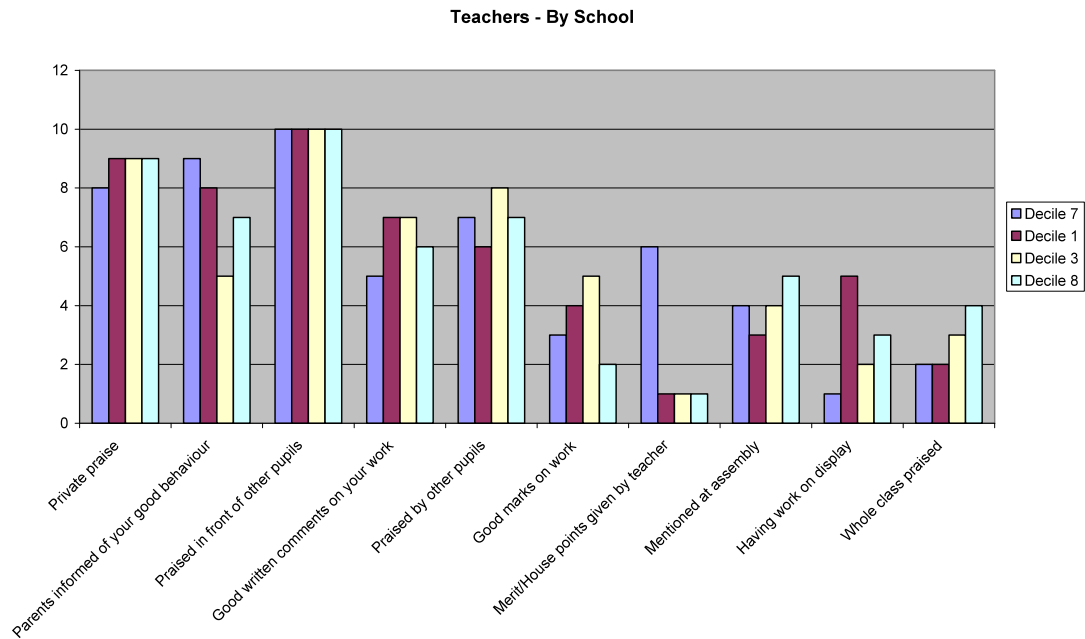
These is a strong correlation of results between genders for both rewards and punishments.

### 3. Between ethnicities

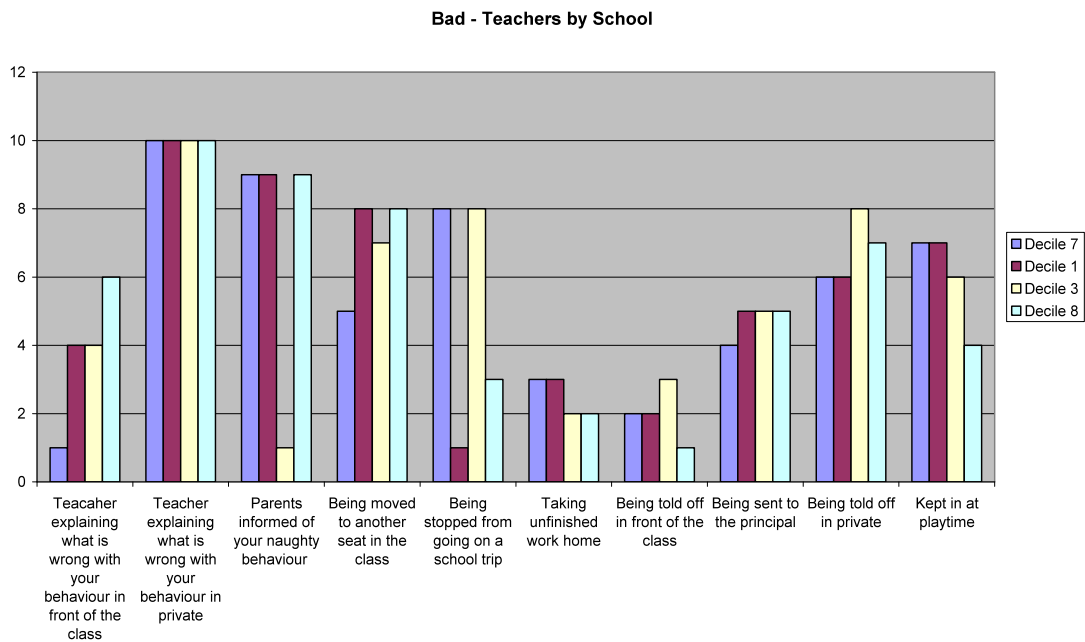


Of greatest significance with both the rewards and punishments data is that it shows contacting parents is not ranked as most effective for African and Middle Eastern students where all other groups stated very strongly that this was most effective. The reasons for this are not clear from this study but may relate to the fact that most students in these groups are of refugee families. As a result there is often a language barrier in contacting parents and the families themselves are often disrupted by not having the full family together because of strife in their original homeland.

## Teachers Between schools

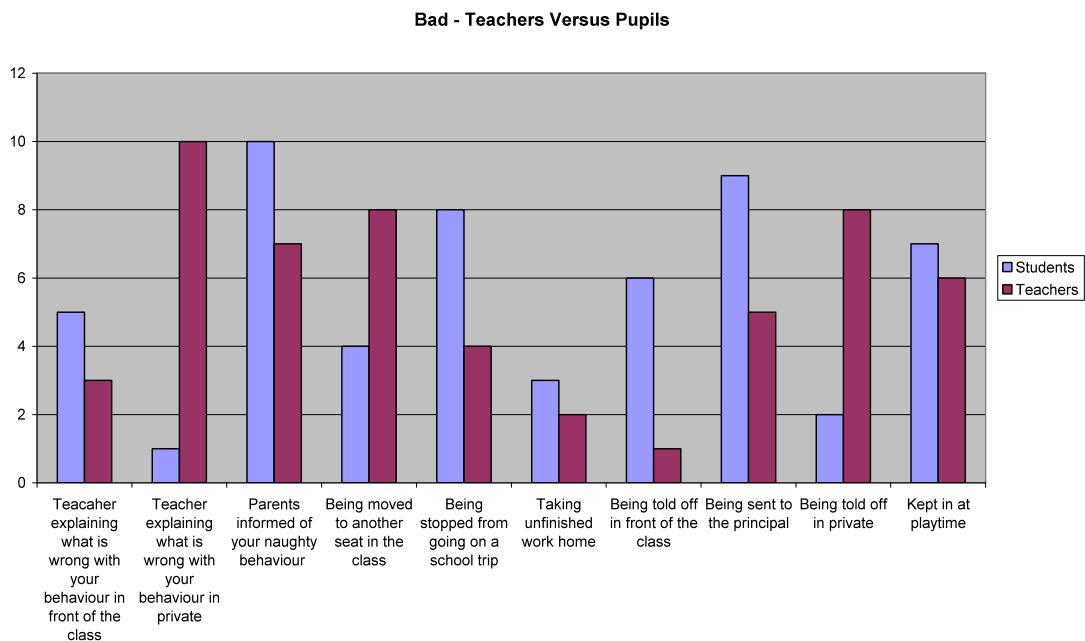
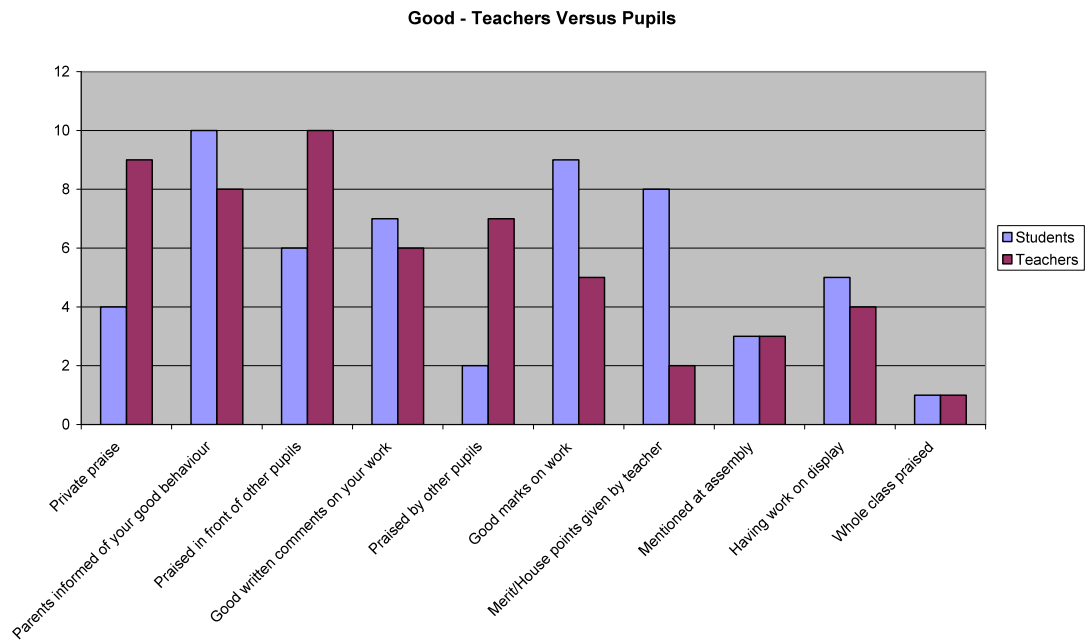


Teachers in all school considered 'Praised in front of other pupils' as the most effective reward for good behaviour followed by 'Private praise'. Overall there was unanimity of beliefs about effective rewards.



All teachers considered 'Teacher explaining what is wrong with a student's behaviour in private' as being most effective. Teachers in three of the four schools considered 'Parents informed of a students naughty behaviour' as the second most effective but teachers in one school ranked this as the least effective.

## Comparison between students and teachers



There are significant differences in what students and teachers consider effective rewards for good behaviour. Most notable are 'Private praise', 'Praised in front of other pupils', 'Good marks on work' and 'Merit/House points given by teacher'.

The differences between the views of students and teachers is amplified when considering effectiveness of punishments. Teachers rank 'Teacher explaining what is wrong with behaviour in private' as the most effective and students place this as the least effective. Other significant anomalies are 'Parents informed of naughty behaviour', 'Being moved to another seat in the class', 'Being stopped from going on a school trip' 'Being sent to the principal' and 'Being told off in private'.

## Discussion

The correlations between the students on rewards and punishments were, overall, quite high. It is worth noting that correlations between genders is very high and between ethnicities, quite high. There are more differences between schools than within schools.

By comparison, correlations between students and teachers were extremely low. This is worth exploring in more detail.

The largest discrepancies in rewards for good behaviour were the rankings for 'Merit/House points given by the teacher' (students: third most effective/ teachers: eighth most effective), 'Praised by other pupils' (students: fifth most effective/ teachers: most effective), and 'Private praise' (students: seventh most effective/ teachers: second most effective).

The largest discrepancy in punishments for bad behaviour were the rankings for 'Teacher explaining what is wrong with your behaviour in private' (students: least effective/ teachers: most effective). This is understandable on teachers' part as they may feel the technique is less damaging to a student's development than other more severe strategies and a belief that positive behaviours will dominate where there is a positive teacher/student relationship. To discuss behaviour in private can assist in building these positive relationships. From a student's point of view on effectiveness, there is a strong indication that this strategy should not be used in isolation but linked with another strategy such as contacting parents. Students rated 'being sent to the principal' as the second most effective while teachers rated it seventh. In the eyes of students, the principal has an important role in modifying behaviour. Students consider 'Being told off in front of the class' much more effective than teachers. No doubt these are dangers in this strategy which can damage positive student/teacher relationships if not handled with sensitivity.

## Recommendations

The study suggests the following in relation to reinforcing good behaviour:

- Schools consider instituting a process of House/Merit points if they do not already exist.
- Contacting parents about good behaviour is considered by students to be the most effective reward. A school-wide process should be considered to enable teachers to do this easily.
- Approval from adults is more important to intermediate students than approval from other students. This varies from the importance of peers socially for students. Teachers need to be aware of their status and use it to reinforce positive behaviour.
- School with refugee students should consider strategies to develop extra strong home/school links, enabling easier communication.
- Rewards are most effective when specific to the student and are actions rather than just words.

In terms of deterring bad behaviour this study suggests the following:

- Discussing bad behaviour in private is not effective in changing behaviour (although it undoubtedly has benefits in relationship building) and should be used in conjunction with other strategies.
- Contacting parents about bad behaviour is clearly the most effective strategy in behaviour modification. A school-wide process should be considered to enable teachers to do this easily.
- School with refugee students should consider strategies to develop extra strong home/school links, enabling easier communication.
- The principal plays a key role in behaviour modification in the eyes of students. Perhaps this is because of the strategies the principal has time to implement whereas the teacher must cope with the rest of the class. The principal must have an active role in the discipline process.

## References

- Caffyn, R.E. (1987) 'Rewards and Punishments in Schools', *School Psychology International*, 8, 85-94
- Harrop, A and Williams, T. (1992) 'Rewards and Punishments in the Primary School: Pupils' perceptions and Teachers' Usage', *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 7, 4, 211-215
- Rutter, M., Maughan, B., Mortimore, P. and Ouston, J. (1979) *Fifteen Thousand Hours*. London: Open Books