

Nutritionist to tackle unruly classrooms

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A controversial nutritionist with a track record of "curing" disruptive pupils has been enlisted in the Government's fight against growing indiscipline in the classroom.

Patrick Holford has been asked by Ruth Kelly, the Secretary of State for Education, to advise on whether poor-quality food – including cut-price school lunches – could be responsible for the decline in behaviour which is seen as the main problem facing the education system.

Delegates to the National Association of Head Teachers' conference in Telford, Shropshire, yesterday complained that schools must deal with ever-increasing numbers of uncontrollable and occasionally violent teenagers.

Some heads demanded that parents be sent to weekly classes that will help them to teach their children the difference between right and wrong. In the past three months parents were also responsible for more than 50 cases of assault or abuse against teachers.

Last week, TV viewers watched Mr Holford transform the behaviour of three disruptive 14-year-olds, who had been thrown out of school because of behavioural problems. He achieved the transformation in only a month by cutting out sugar and stimulants such as caffeine, and adding vitamin supplements.

Children's eating habits are already the focus of ministers' attention, with the Chief Medical Officer having warned that the epidemic of childhood obesity constitutes a "time bomb" for the health service.

Last month the Prime Minister promised an extra £280m to improve school dinners after the outcry created by Jamie Oliver's campaign against junk food and his Channel 4 programme Jamie's School Dinners. It emerged that the average primary school lunch costs 45p a child.

The Government has set up a task force to prepare advice on minimum nutrition

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standards for school meals. But, as revealed in The Independent on Sunday, the Department for Education and Skills does not employ a nutritionist.

Now the department has written to Mr Holford, a private consultant, asking for his help.

Mr Holford believes that mental health disorders are related to a person's biochemical requirements. Instead of drugs, he prescribes dietary changes plus vitamin and mineral supplements. "The sad truth is that scientists have been carrying out this research for over a decade," he said.

"But it takes a television programme to bring it to everyone's attention. Poor nutrition is definitely a contributory factor towards crime and mental health problems in later years."

He wants policymakers to raise the importance of nutrition. "If it doesn't happen governments will be bankrupt," he says.

"They will be crippled by the rising costs of Alzheimer's, obesity and soaring crime rates, which will force them to look at the true contributory causes."

Mr Holford is already helping the Government's Food Standards Agency draw up plans to publish health warnings on all foods that have a sugar content of more than 10 per cent. He also hopes that the Government will introduce a tax on sugar.

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