**Case Study 2: Fixing leaks**



Jasmine is a senior leader with responsibility for pupils’ welfare and behaviour in a large secondary school. Since starting the role three years ago, she has been successful in improving the general conduct of pupils around the school during breaks and in lessons. However, she remains dissatisfied with the transition of pupils from one lesson to the next.

The first aspect of conduct which Jasmine would like to improve is punctuality. Teachers report that the starts of their lessons are often interrupted by pupils arriving late. To solve this problem, Jasmine had recommended that teachers use ‘silent starters’ – tasks which students could start doing as soon as they sat down in the lesson. Teachers reported that this seemed to help for a while, but once pupils expected them, they seemed to take their time getting to the lesson as they knew it wouldn’t ‘start’ until a few minutes in.

The school also has a ‘late mark’ system which had been in place long before Jasmine arrived at the school. The headteacher insists that this remains. If pupils received three late marks, they are set a lunchtime detention. The recent increase in lateness means that these detentions are getting increasingly difficult to manage.

The second aspect of conduct Jasmine would like to improve is how pupils move between lessons. Her observation is that pupils can be quite rowdy, particularly in small corridors. Younger pupils report getting shoved and one of her pregnant colleagues says that she avoids moving around the school at transition times due to the ‘raucous behaviour’ of some of the older boys.

To address this problem, Jasmine asked that teachers step outside their classrooms during the transition period to supervise. This helped to settle things down, but not all teachers agreed to do this, and the ones that did reported that they found it difficult to supervise the ‘silent starter’ for those who arrived early as they were getting involved in incidents outside the classroom.

Whatever she tries, Jasmine’s proposed solutions seem to cause unexpected problems elsewhere. It is like fixing a leak in an old pipe, only for the increased water pressure to cause a rupture somewhere else.

Her colleague suggests that perhaps she should address the underlying causes of the problem rather than trying to fix every leak. But is the underlying cause pupils’ general attitude, how engaging lessons are, the behaviour of a small group of persistent offenders, the inadequate facilities, lack of supervision, or something else?

**Questions**

Consider how Jasmine might come to better understand the problem. These questions may help structure your thinking:

1. What assumptions appear to underpin Jasmine’s attempts to solve the problems of lateness and disorderly transition between lessons?
2. Who might Jasmine speak with to challenge her assumptions?
3. Are the problems of lateness and disorderly transition separate problems, connected problems, or manifestations of the same problem?

Consider why Jasmine’s task is so difficult. These questions may help structure your thinking:

1. Why does each attempt to solve the problem cause new problems elsewhere?
2. Are the problems Jasmine describes linked to other common problems faced by schools?
3. Is Jasmine likely to identify a single underlying cause which can be fixed?