

Troublesome pupils are tomorrow's entrepreneurs says study

# Truants one day tycoons the next

CHILDREN who skive from school have the same attributes as successful entrepreneurs, a study revealed today.

Research carried out by an Edinburgh-based company suggests troublesome pupils who under-perform in exams are tomorrow's tycoons in the making.

The same firm has put the theory to the test by working with disenchanted teenagers from Edinburgh's Wester Hailes Education Centre on entrepreneurial skills, a pilot project which they say has transformed some of the youngsters' behaviour.

Gavin Devereux, managing director of Leith firm TTI Mindscreen, launched the research today which he hopes will be used to help cut truancy across Scotland.

And he said the reason he had got involved in the issue was because he had been a truanting, "remedial" adolescent himself, who went on to launch two companies.

For the study, 52 business founders from the Entrepreneurial Exchange Foundation completed personality profile surveys which map people's traits through detailed questioning.

More than 80 per cent of the participants shared similar characteristics. These included drive coupled with enthusiasm and optimism, being highly active and flexible while not wanting to conform to other people's plans or procedures and having an unconventional approach while wanting to get a high return on any time and energy invested.

A year group of 100 13-year-olds from the Wester Hailes Education

By HELEN PUTTICK  
Education Reporter

Centre were asked to complete the same forms and ten per cent shared similar traits to the entrepreneurs.

Mr Devereux said: "This ten per cent were described as challenging and non-compliant by the school."

In addition, 39 per cent of the successful adults said they wanted to "leave school early and learn from experience" rather than gain qualifications, when asked to reflect on their own education.

Mr Devereux said: "Based on the style of characteristics that the entrepreneur exhibits, entrepreneurial teenagers are more likely to wish to be non-conforming and more likely to make their own decisions and therefore decide 'I do not want to go to school today' regardless of the background they come from."

He accepts children from deprived areas are more likely to truant, but suggests this may be because they are not encouraged to value their education and therefore make their own decision to pursue independent and apparently more worthwhile interests.

He continued: "The entrepreneur view of the world is: 'If I do this how big or great will the return be, and is the investment required, when it is balanced up against the return that I expect, worth doing or not?'"

As a teenager Mr Devereux left school with four Standard Grades, but has since launched his own property investment company, Guardian Properties Ltd, and TTI Mindscreen, which is taking forward a programme to bring out business acumen in underachiev-



SEAT OF LEARNING: Gavin Devereux in the high chair he uses to help him think

ing adolescents. A group of 11 students from the WHEC took part in a 12 month pilot scheme which involved visits to hotel conference venues, discovering how to register a company, learning how to make a presentation and giving a speech to a panel of judges.

Running a stall at Ingliston Market was also part of the out-of-school course, which involved marketing and meeting customers, pricing and making profit.

They were also allowed to sit in a special elevated chair which Mr Devereux uses to help him think.

**Positive**

He said at the end of the course he examined the school records on attendance, exclusion rates and classroom behaviour. Although some pupils had dropped out of the programme, those who continued responded well.

One student who had been suspended 31 times during S2 was only excluded twice while taking part in the scheme during S3. Another who had skipped 35 days of school before the course began, stopped truanting altogether.

Edinburgh's education department has confirmed the course was a "positive" experience for the pupils involved.

Ben Williams, a chartered corporate psychologist, said both groups were challenging if not resistant to authority. "They prefer to make their own decisions, they are very results orientated, they want to be rewarded."

PHOTOGRAPH BY [unreadable]