7. Manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe learning environment

- have clear rules and routines for behaviour in classrooms, and take responsibility for promoting good and courteous behaviour both in classrooms and around the school, in accordance with the school's behaviour policy
- have high expectations of behaviour, and establish a framework for discipline with a range of strategies, using praise, sanctions and rewards consistently and fairly
- manage classes effectively, using approaches which are appropriate to pupils' needs in order to involve and motivate them
- maintain good relationships with pupils, exercise appropriate authority, and act decisively when necessary.

Introduction

Creating a positive classroom environment in which pupils are safe, secure and able to learn will underpin everything that you do as a teacher. In 2014, Ofsted reported that 'deeply worrying' persistent low-level disruption in classrooms frequently prevented learning, had a detrimental impact on the life chances of some pupils, and was a contributor to good teachers leaving the profession (Ofsted, 2014). Never has the behaviour of pupils received so much attention in the media and been so high on the agenda of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education. It is critical therefore not only that school leadership teams apply a robust behaviour management system, but also that teachers are well equipped to deal with all levels of pupil behaviour. Wherever you are on the 'continuum' that Rogers (2011) describes, you will need to develop a range of effective management skills for all situations. Rogers states that:

There are a number of well-established theoretical positions addressing behaviour management and discipline in schools ... ranging from 'explicit teacher control' (for example, particular forms of assertive discipline) to non-directive approaches (for example, teacher effectiveness-training). These 'positions' on a continuum, are in part philosophic, in part pedagogic and in part psychological – all have implications for one's values and practices as a teacher. (2011: 6)

Effective management of pupil behaviour is one of the most fundamental skills to develop as a teacher. From how you organise your classroom, through to the way in which you interact with pupils, outstanding teachers have both the confidence and the
CHAPTER 10

BEHAVIOUR STRATEGIES IN CHALLENGING CLASSROOMS

Ed Southall

Standards linked to this chapter include...

1. Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils
   - establish a safe and stimulating environment for pupils, rooted in mutual respect
   - set goals that stretch and challenge pupils of all backgrounds, abilities and dispositions
   - demonstrate consistently the positive attitudes, values and behaviour which are expected of pupils.
skill set to deal with the multitude of situations that require behaviour management. As a beginning teacher, this is something you will need to master early on. Identifying and defusing minor behavioural situations before they escalate will become one of the most valuable skills you possess as your experience and confidence grow. These skills, despite being used primarily to describe dealing with poor behaviour, also encompass the handling of positive behaviour, managing participation, and encouraging collaboration within the classroom. Often, how you deal with a well-behaved pupil can impact on how others in your lesson act and react in your learning environment.

Applying these skills in school situations that for a variety of reasons may be more challenging is equally important. Many of the issues that impact on behaviour are common to almost all classrooms. However, in a number of classrooms you will also face issues that are less common – children with particular needs, or who behave (or misbehave) in particular ways. This chapter first considers how you can plan for good behaviour, and then looks at how you can recognise and cope with challenging behaviour, along with gaining an understanding of some of its causes.

**Managing behaviour through active learning**

A key contributor to poor pupil behaviour is boredom. If pupils aren't encountering a range of learning experiences throughout a school day, they are increasingly likely to become distracted. This applies not only to children but adults as well. Ask yourself when you last sat through a lecture or meeting or even watched a film without wanting to check your phone. We live in a world full of easily accessible distractions. We need breaks, a cup of tea, a change of scenery, some music perhaps, just to give a little variety to a situation. Lessons are no different. Pupils are more likely to stay engaged if they are exposed to a variety of stimuli – film, teacher demonstrations, pictures, discussion, movement and ICT are just a few examples of how you can enhance pupil engagement and reduce the risk of their straying off task. There will never be a perfect combination of activities that works for every group. Some pupils will work best from a textbook or worksheet for part of a lesson whereas others may respond better to a role-play activity. Some may prefer a range of activities in your afternoon lesson, but respond better to a quieter more teacher-led environment in the morning. The key is to know your classes, and that takes time. You must also be clear about the purpose of each task you direct for pupils to complete and the outcome that will show them that they have completed it successfully. If the task is simply there to fill time, or to make things more active at the cost of deeper learning, then reconsider its fitness for purpose. Furthermore, consider the balance between your choice of active learning activities and your ability to control the class. If you are letting them move around the room for example, how confident are you that you will be able to get them back to their seats and listening later on?  

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Managing expectations

Before any task, it is vital you communicate your expectations to pupils. What does success look like? How will they know if they are doing well? Sometimes showing pupils 'what a good one looks like' (often abbreviated to WAGOLL) can avoid confusion (which often leads to distraction) and allow pupils to focus more on the expected outcomes rather than interpreting the task. How will the task end? What are you expecting pupils to do and how are they expected to conduct themselves? How much time do they have? An effective technique to refocus the class after an activity is the use of a visible timer (there are many versions available online). When the time runs out (with or without an audible alarm), pupils have a clear ending and new beginning to a part of the lesson. Don't be afraid to cut a task short. If pupils are losing interest, or have begun to complete the task before its expected end, adapting your lesson around this is essential. Allowing a task to dwindle can open the door to poor behaviour.

Managing accessibility: differentiation and challenge

Another considerable contributer to straying off task in lessons is a pupil who simply gives up. As soon as a pupil is off task, the likelihood of poor behaviour increases greatly. Pupils who are on task generally demonstrate predictable behaviours. However pupils who are off task are far less predictable. The reasons for straying off task can vary. As well as the dangers of repetitive tasks in lessons, pupils can also become bored through a lack of challenge. It is incumbent on you to deliver explanations of tasks concisely and with clarity, and develop differentiation strategies that will enable pupils of all abilities within a class to access the work and make appropriate progress (see Chapter 14).

But how is that achieved? There are a number of effective strategies available to you, many of which start at the planning stage of your lesson. Asking yourself simple questions such as 'what if they don't understand this?' and 'what if they grasp this very quickly?' will help you begin to create more scaffolding around a topic for weaker pupils, or a greater challenge for the more able. Consider the needs of your pupils when you are planning lessons. How well do you know each individual? For example, will your pupil with poor literacy be able to access the main activity? Once again we are pulled towards the fundamental expectation that you must know your pupils. You will have to know their needs, what they will respond to and how they will respond to it. You won't always get this right, but the more familiar you are with a class, the more you can reduce the risk of poor behaviour developing through inappropriate tasks.
Application to secondary teaching

It is easy to focus differentiation entirely on supporting weaker pupils in lessons. However, it is just as important to give an appropriate challenge. This does not necessarily mean creating many different resources for the same activity. Be creative. You could have a range of questions that span from simple to extraordinarily difficult within one activity, or you could develop questions that allow for a range of answer depths – through the use of technical vocabulary, or the application of a concept to real life, or the projection of an idea arising from a pupil's own questions around a topic. It is important to allow all pupils access to more difficult questions and challenges. Never assume that a lower ability pupil will not want to attempt harder tasks. It is unfair to deny them that opportunity. On a similar note, don't underestimate how much challenge you will need to provide for some pupils. There will be those who will not have to struggle with anything you ask them if you stay within the boundaries of your provided curriculum. Don't be afraid of giving them access to material that will truly test their understanding beyond the needs of the curriculum. If they are not finding anything challenging, you run the risk of losing your most able pupils.

Managing reflection (and contrition)

When dealing with poor behaviour, there is a need not only for pupils to be punished in accordance with your school's behaviour policy, but also for them to accept that their behaviour was inappropriate. Often a pupil can be punished without reflecting upon their actions, and so the process itself is ineffective. For example, consider a girl who has sworn at another pupil during a lesson. She is given a detention for half an hour after school the next day. During the detention she sits in silence until the time is up, then goes home. At no point during this procedure has she reflected upon her behaviour, or taken any responsibility for her actions. She may have sat for thirty minutes thinking about what she is going to do that evening, or worse, grown increasingly frustrated at you for the injustice of the punishment as she believes she did nothing wrong. Is it reasonable to expect her to come to you after the lesson and talk through what she did without support and guidance from you? Be conscious of the need to restore broken relationships and to talk through serious behavioural incidents with any of the pupils involved. Again, it should be stressed that you are the adult. If you don't address and resolve the issue, there is every chance that the pupil involved will be coming into your next lesson bearing a grudge, or worse, over time may stop attending your lessons. Well-structured questioning goes a long way in helping pupils to reflect on their actions. Why did you do that? will most likely be met with 'I don't know', 'You know that was inappropriate behaviour, don't you?' will also prompt an answer that does not require...
the pupil to think. Furthermore, demanding an apology will often result in a reactive, disingenuous response. Try instead to discuss who is affected by the pupil's actions. Delve deeper until they have realised that not only did the event affect the teacher and pupils involved, it also affected their parents, the rest of the class, the Teaching Assistant, the learning, and so on. Once you feel they have realised the true extent of the issue, any apology will at least be sincere, and the slate can be wiped clean for the next lesson. Following such discussions, mutually agreed targets are far more likely to be effective.

**GROUP EXERCISE**

Think back to your own time at school and think of the ways in which you or your friends were punished for bad behaviour. How constructive was this? Did it deter you? Would it deter everyone? Share these experiences in your group and discuss what you would define as a 'constructive' punishment. Make a list of punishments that do little to deal with the cause of the behaviour.

**Acknowledging positive behaviour**

All too often the focus on negative behaviour can be at the expense of those pupils who are modelling good behaviour, effort and attitude. Pupils who never cause a problem, and who can always be relied upon, do not deserve to be ignored. Be mindful of how much attention you give to good behaviour. Praise can be an excellent tool to encourage pupils to adopt the behaviours of others. Be aware that some pupils may not like being publicly praised – often it can cause embarrassment or anxiety about how other pupils will react to them. However there are other ways to recognise behaviours that meet or exceed your expectations. Letters, postcards or texts home, school-based rewards, written praise in books, a quiet word when others are on task – the key here is that in whatever way is most appropriate to the pupil, good behaviour is acknowledged and not taken for granted.

**INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION**

Make addressing positive behaviour a focus for your observations. Talk to teachers about how they have reinforced positive expectations as a way to prevent poor behaviour. Develop some routines that you can use in your own teaching for different age ranges. For example, you could develop a positive behaviour reward scheme, some good behaviour stickers, a weekly phone call home to a different pupil, or email a picture of the 'best looking' classwork to that particular pupil's parent.
Involving other stakeholders

When dealing with poor behaviour, it can be easy to lose focus on the wider options available to you. You do not have to tackle behaviour on your own. You have line managers, Heads of Department, form tutors, Heads of Year, Assistant Head Teachers in charge of behaviour and learning, and often the most effective stakeholders - parents. If a pupil is persistently disruptive, parental involvement can often prove very effective, and almost certainly necessary. Wouldn't you want to know if your child was getting into trouble at school? Of course some parents are more supportive than others, but you should never ignore the option by pre-empting the parental response. A note in their pupil planner or a phone call home will let the pupil know that their behaviour in school is not separate from their behaviour at home. The same approach should be taken for good behaviour too. Often a good phone call home for a pupil who has often been a problem, but in a particular lesson was exceptional, can really motivate that pupil to change their attitude towards your lessons. There will almost certainly be a wealth of behavioural strategies available to you through your school's behaviour policy and procedures as well. Subject reports, whole school reports, time-out cards for pupils displaying aggressive behaviour, and removal rooms are all likely to feature at your school.

Consistency

Being consistent is a key skill for teachers. From a pupil's perspective, consistency equates to fairness and fairness commands respect. If some pupils are seen to be 'getting away' with things, whilst others are punished for relatively little, this can create tension in the classroom and lead to confrontational behaviours. However consistency is not something that will come easily, and in truth, it is often more sensible to be unfair. Confused? Consider the pupil who is particularly rowdy or problematic when arriving at your door. Once in your lesson, they chat noisily to their neighbour - but you don't want them to. You speak to them about their behaviour, but a few minutes later they are doing it again, and despite further warnings they follow a similar pattern. If you strictly follow your behaviour system, that pupil will probably have a detention at this point. But you are only three minutes into the lesson. You now have no ammunition left, and that pupil is possibly going to be with you for the next fifty-seven minutes. Furthermore, they will most likely have become frustrated with you now too, as in their mind they haven't had a chance to settle and already find themselves in a detention. So now they might be thinking 'I can behave how I want, because I've already got a detention', and become confrontational. This may seem like an extreme example, and hopefully in your school it is. You may well have a system whereby pupils displaying this kind of behaviour are removed from your room, but be aware that there are pupils who will frequently display this kind of behaviour. They cannot be removed from your room three minutes after the start of every lesson. As a teacher therefore there will always have to be an element of
common sense and flexibility when punishing a pupil. It may be that some pupils need a few more verbal warnings before you start to drill through the consequence system. You will know when enough is enough, and when lines have been crossed despite an appropriate warning – and that line may well sit slightly differently for each pupil. The enormous difficulty therefore is to be as consistent as you can, without appearing to tolerate misbehaviour in some pupils more than others.

**A thought**

Think back to when you were at school. Was there a child who had a bad reputation? A child who for some reason seemed to get away with more than the other pupils? What behaviour did he or she display? How did the teacher deal with it? Was it effective? What are your thoughts about how that child behaved now? Perhaps with hindsight you can see a clearer pattern to the behaviour, or the reasoning behind it, or you can think of strategies that the teacher used or should have used.

**Always follow through**

Whilst consistency in behaviour management may need to be constantly re-evaluated, often within a single lesson, one thing that must never be compromised is following through on both punishments and rewards. If you say you are going to send a letter home for good behaviour, then you must do so. If you say a pupil will be in detention, then there is no room for leniency. As soon as your sanctions and rewards are perceived as empty threats and promises, then you have lost one of your most valuable tools, as well as some of your credibility. Pupils will no longer strive to please you or meet your expectations if your promises of letters and phone calls home lead only to disappointment.

**What if the behaviour becomes more challenging?**

Regardless of your school, your experience and your consequence system, there will always be more challenging behavioural situations that occur. These will become less frequent as you become more experienced, and develop the ability to spot the signs that a situation is about to escalate, but it would be naïve to assume they will go away forever. How you deal with those situations will very much depend on what caused them and who they involved. However here are some general guidelines that are applicable to most scenarios.
Stay calm

Behaviour spreads behaviour. If the most authoritative person in the room begins to panic, then pupils will inevitably reassess the situation and begin to panic themselves. Just like when a toddler grazes a knee and looks to the parent’s expression before deciding how to react, children will look to you to gauge the severity of a situation. Your reaction to the pupil(s) who have caused the incident is also important. If they are causing disruption for example, and you panic, then the control you have, or even their perception of your control, will disappear. That control may have been the one thing preventing an escalation of the problem. Your judgment in these situations will be crucial. If you are panicking, or angry, or stressed, then you may not be of the right frame of mind to make the best decisions to diffuse a situation.

Avoid confrontation

Some pupils will want confrontation. As a professional you will need to remove as many opportunities for them to confront you as possible. Staying calm is of course a key factor. But consider how you will respond to a pupil in these situations. Shouting at them is likely to frustrate them further, or embarrass and humiliate them, to which they will of course respond negatively. Something as simple as engaging with them may be enough for them to confront you. Often the best strategy is to calmly tell a pupil their behaviour is inappropriate, and then immediately move on with the lesson – focusing your attention on other pupils who are promoting more positive behaviours. This essentially removes the pupil’s audience and gives them no-one to focus on. Some pupils will try to draw you into an argument. Don’t let them. Even if it means they have the ‘last word’ and you move on, this is better than running the risk of a full-blown argument with a child who in such circumstances will have no desire to negotiate or acknowledge what you have to say. You can always remand them in private after the lesson. This does not have to be on show to everyone.

A thought

When addressing poor behaviour, the tone with which you address pupils is something you will need to carefully consider. A good tip here is to imagine the parents of the pupil you are speaking to standing next to them. Would you berate the child in front of them in the same way as in front of the class? What is the most likely response from a child if you react to their behaviour by shouting at them and humiliating them in front of their peers? Of course they need to be punished with an appropriate (and proportionate) response, but consider when, where and how
Often by shouting at a pupil, you are risking them shouting back at you. What would you do then? Shout louder? Where does it end? Use a more rational approach. You are the adult. Be firm, but do not risk losing control of the situation by getting (or acting) angry. Speak to the pupil privately or one-to-one whilst the rest of the class continue working.

**Ignore selectively**

Sometimes selective hearing can be the best approach. If a pupil has been difficult, and as you move on from their behavioural incident you hear them mutter under their breath something that you at best can only assume is insulting, remember that you do not have to be drawn straight back into the incident you were just moving away from. You can deal with it after the lesson, or when the rest of the pupils are on task. The pupil involved is most likely muttering under their breath for more attention – be it from the friend sat next to them, or in hopes that you will be drawn straight back into the incident all over again. Imagine how this would play out if you did confront them again:

- 'What did you say?'
- 'Nothing.'
- 'Yes you did, I heard you.'
- 'No you didn't.'

You’re getting nowhere. And the lesson has stopped again. Remove the audience, reduce the problem.

**Application to primary and early years teaching**

It is less likely that you will become embroiled in a war of words with a much younger pupil, or find yourself being whispered about by them. However it is important to acknowledge that similar problems do occur.

- **Removing the audience** – in primary school and early years, the audience is more likely to be the pupils themselves rather than attempts to provoke the
De-escalation of confrontational behaviour

Sometimes a trigger may induce even more challenging behaviour or a lost temper. Learn to spot the signals that behaviour might be about to deteriorate – raised voices, a higher register of voice, unusual behaviour such as a refusal to participate from a normally compliant child. Learn to read body language as well – children will posture before a confrontation so look out for signs like shoulders back, directed stares and making fists.

Control your reactions to avoid escalation. Faced with a ‘threat’ your body will want to take you into a confrontation. Your adrenalin levels will rise, your emotional barriers will fall. You must, therefore, stay calm and in control. Model the behaviour that you expect from your pupils. Lowering your voice, for example, can often be much more effective than raising it. This in itself may be enough to defuse a situation. You will want to use the tools that work 90% of the time, so may resort to reasoned argument and an appeal to the pupil’s sense of responsibility and community. So you could try saying ‘you are stopping other children from learning’ or make an appeal to their self-image, ‘you’re just making yourself look silly’. Consider that you are facing a young person who, for whatever reason, has lost his or her temper and read the above – will these really work?

There are three major families of techniques that are proven to defuse challenging situations. Each of these has variations and adaptations that you can develop for your own situation.

Model behaviour. Be excessively polite and make sure that you (and other pupils) are not in anyone’s personal space. Remain calm and collected. Acknowledge the source of anger or frustration and empathise: ‘I understand why you feel that way, but...’ is a powerful opening.
Use the language of choice. Try not to close the door on a situation and allow children room to make their own choice. So, for example, saying either move away from Sean, Eddie or get you to eat lunch with me is more effective than an instruction with no options. Also allow for exit strategies – some of these may be built into a system, such as time-out cards or ‘cooling-off’ areas.

Distract. This is especially effective if you spot the signs of a situation developing. ‘Sean, that’s a really excellent piece of work’ or Fiona, I’d like you to explain how you did that’ can have the effect of engaging the brain and disengaging the misbehaviour. This can also be linked to giving responsibility: ‘Sean, could you start collecting the materials in, thank-you’ effectively moves him away from Eddie and a burgeoning situation.

The behaviour iceberg

As a final thought on behaviour in the classroom, consider the behaviour iceberg. The behaviour you see from a pupil will rarely be based entirely on your lesson. Pupils are unpredictable, as we all are sometimes. Often as teachers we neglect to acknowledge that we are only seeing a snapshot of each child on each day. We don’t know what happened the lesson before, at lunchtime, at home, or the night before on Facebook. All of these factors contribute towards pupils’ behaviour in your lesson. You have very little, if any, control over that. Similarly, those pupils who perhaps display poor behaviour on a regular basis may in fact be displaying comparatively excellent behaviour considering their circumstances. It is a sad fact that some pupils do not have a good support network at home or with friends. In extreme cases, pupils may not be living with either parent, or may be victims of domestic abuse or worse. Some children may have suffered such circumstances that they will be considered to be ‘children in crisis’ – namely those pupils whose circumstances or experiences will place them outside normal parameters and thus will make your classroom even more challenging. Often the behaviour of such children may be difficult to deal with, ranging from extreme passivity (an unwillingness or inability to contribute) to attention-seeking episodes such as temper tantrums. Triggers for such behaviours could be illnesses, specialised medical conditions, or periods of crisis in a child’s life. At an individual level these can range from family issues such as divorce, bereavement, sibling rivalry, and family illness (that could mean a child has carer responsibilities), to social issues such as domestic violence/abuse, peer or group pressure to commit crime, bullying, and alcohol- or drug-related issues, as well as sexual and biological issues such as developing sexuality and pregnancy. Issues could be as simple as children seeking attention because they are not loved to complex medical conditions that will require professional intervention. Children may have borne witness to events that have affected them, or be in communities whose standards may be at odds with those of their school. There are, for example, large groups such as refugees or asylum seekers who may carry horrific experiences with them. There may be children who do not share the usual mores of a classroom,
often due to lack of experience (e.g. Roma children who have no background of education). If these conditions are the basis on which a pupil has learnt 'acceptable' behaviours, it is perhaps not surprising that their actions and reactions towards others are considered appropriate by them and inappropriate by us.

**Conclusion**

Unusual or trying circumstances don't make poor behaviour excusable, but may go some way to make it understandable. In such cases, the best advice is still 'know your class': it is important to be aware of children's circumstances so that you can show appropriate support and empathy. Remember, emotional support is one of the key pillars of the effective classroom (Pianta and Hamre, 2009). Jennings (2014: 6) also emphasises the key role of emotional support:

> Teachers who are skilled at providing emotional support respond to their students with warmth and sensitivity, and they recognize, understand and are responsive to their students' individual needs and perspectives.

Again, the school's own systems are likely to provide the best way to deal with such issues in an expert and professional manner.

**Summary**

- The prerequisite of positive learning behaviour is effective teaching that actively engages pupils in their learning.
- Negative behaviour can be minimised if you develop a positive classroom climate, with effective classroom routines, where the pupils feel safe and secure.
- Praise is the most powerful tool for building pupils' self-esteem in the classroom.
- One of your priorities, as a teacher new to the profession, must be to develop a range of strategies for dealing with low-level disruption and also for maintaining a professional approach to more challenging behaviour.

**Key reading**


**References and bibliography**


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**Useful websites**


Visit https://study.sagepub.com/denby3e for extra resources related to this chapter.