

Why schools need effective behaviour policies

- Good school discipline is essential: disruption in class stops students learning.
- We know how to ensure good school discipline – hundreds of Academies have turned around schools with poor behaviour and made them great learning environments. There are simple steps all schools can follow to do the same.
- There are no excuses for bad behaviour. While it is hard to consistently stick to the steps that lead to good behaviour, every school is capable of it

Perhaps the biggest concern for parents when their child moves to secondary school is behaviour. At the worst, there is a fear that children will be bullied or unsafe.¹ It is terrifying for parents to imagine their child being exposed to violence and abuse.

While most schools are safe, many still have low-level behaviour problems causing disruption in class. This prevents children learning and affects their future, through no fault of their own. And if there is bad behaviour among their classmates, it can lead children into bad habits.

The good news is that poor behaviour can be addressed. When high quality Academy sponsors take over poorly performing schools with behaviour problems, they quickly improve. Even though some of the students have chaotic home lives with poor discipline, the school can still make a huge difference, for them and the other students in the class.

The bad news is that there are still too many schools with poor behaviour:

- Almost half a million pupils are being taught in secondary schools with bad behaviour ratings from Ofsted. English schools saw a rise in the number of permanent exclusions (expulsions) in 2013/14, with 4,950 pupils being excluded compared to 4,630 the year before. Out of those, 870 were Primary School children; of that 870, 240 of them were forced to leave due to physically harming adults (Gov.uk).²³ “Persistent disruptive behaviour” was the most commonly cited cause of expulsion (33%), followed by “other” (16%), “physical assault against a pupil” (15%) and “physical assault against an adult” (11%).
- Those schools are concentrated in particular parts of the country. Three quarters of the secondary schools in England that Ofsted rates inadequate for behaviour and safety are in the North and Midlands.
- Poor behaviour affects student performance as well as safety. The achievement of five GCSEs grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, at these schools is 21 percentage points below those with good or outstanding behaviour. At GCSE, the performance gap

¹ http://www.ucl.ac.uk/stars/information-leaflets/Feedback_for_parents;

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/oct/20/bullying-parents-secondary-school-children-alcohol-survey>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england-2013-to-2014>

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/jul/30/english-schools-see-first-rise-in-exclusions-in-eight-years>

between a school with outstanding behaviour and one with satisfactory or inadequate behaviour was worth more than a whole extra subject grade per pupil. Imagine what that means for a child's future – it could be the difference between them getting to university, or being offered a good apprenticeship, and being turned down.

There are no excuses for bad behaviour in school. Disruption in class, bullying and violence can be stopped. The government's behaviour Tsar, Tom Bennett, who has spent his career helping schools improve their behaviour, has produced simple guidelines that we have reproduced below. All schools should follow these principles. We know that children, whether 3 or 13, operate best in a world with consistent rules and boundaries. Parents have a responsibility to create those at home, and teachers and head teachers have a responsibility to create them at school.

Tom Bennett: What good schools do on behaviour

All schools can manage behaviour efficiently; there are no schools where good behaviour shouldn't be the norm. The secret to having good behaviour as the norm not an exception, rests on schools following strategies that are relatively simple to formulate, but take determination to carry out in practice. Different schools will have different interpretations of these strategies, but they should follow these guidelines:

1. A programme of behaviour training where every employee knows in detail what the school behaviour policy is, and how to carry it out.
2. Communicate this regularly with every pupil, and all parents before children start school. Signed school agreements should be an essential part of enrolment. The school rules and values should be demonstrated in everything the school does.
3. Every class teacher needs to set boundaries. Class rules should be so simple that they can be remembered by students or staff, even under pressure.
4. Sanctions and rewards should help support these boundaries.
5. The difficult part: maintaining these boundaries. When a student crosses the line, sanctions should follow immediately; that day if possible. Staff should be trained in the fair and consistent application of these consequences. Schools must budget for adequate support staff to administer this process.
6. Repeated misbehaviour should result in an escalation of both the extent of the sanction, and the chain of staff dealing with it AND, where applicable, involve attempts to deal with the causes of the misbehaviour.
7. Parents should be informed and involved as early as possible.
8. Sanctions should be used to deter; as such they are a positive part of reinforcing high expectations of conduct and achievement. They are not an exhaustive technique, and schools should lean on a repertoire of strategies to create a calm environment. But it is a false ambition to aim for a community that eschews them. Rewards- and rules, reinforce relationships, justice and achievement.
9. Pupils whose behaviour makes learning impossible for the class must be taken away from the lesson. Challenging pupils are often impossible to help, reach or amend in a mainstream environment. Whether

they are simply choosing to misbehave, or victims of circumstance, they need to be removed from the classroom so that a) their behaviour can no longer disturb others b) they can receive support.

10. Exclusions are a necessary event at times; it shows the school community that there are limits to what can be tolerated, which in turn underpins every other rule and value. However, exclusion should never mean abandonment. Schools should aim at both reforming and teaching children in these circumstances: the emphasis must be on rehabilitation back into socially acceptable behaviour. It's also an excellent opportunity for other support agencies to work with these pupils.
11. Senior staff should be visible throughout the school. They should be free to walk into any classroom without warning, and children should expect this.
12. Senior staff must insist that all staff follow the school policies. There should be an expectation that poorly-behaviour will be responded to; that it should be reported and solved. No staff member should feel that to do so is a failure on their part, but rather an integral part of their job.
13. Sincere and proportionate praise should be a common part of normal social intercourse. Children should see civility, effort and manners rewarded at every opportunity.
14. Staff should be publicly supported by senior staff. Any doubts should be expressed and challenged privately.
15. All sanctions and rewards should happen as soon as humanly possible. Tomorrow is too late for many.
16. The school needs to accept that behaviour management is a constant process of creation, and plan accordingly in every aspect of their provision. Good conduct costs resources, but this is money spent well. With time, costs reduce, as the dividend of order accrues.
17. Members of staff with pastoral responsibilities need time and resources. Teachers need time to follow up on misbehaviour. Overloading either party with inappropriate workloads and bureaucracy is an act of theft from the pupils well-being.
18. Support and teaching staff need to have time to meet and discuss strategies for children that require support with their behaviour.
19. In extreme circumstances situations students have to leave school, permanently. By itself this is not a failure, but an acknowledgement that sometimes a student's needs or behaviours cannot be met by the resources available to the school. It also sends a powerful message to the rest of the school.
20. Staff demonstrate the values and behaviours they want to see in others. And this flows from senior staff; and their conduct is demonstrated by the head teacher.

These are simple techniques to understand, but hard to execute. They take courage, consistency, and ambition, and a complete agreement amongst staff that they are essential. But time after time I have seen them work in the most difficult of circumstances. And children- and staff, and parents- deserve no less.

What about the parents?

Some teachers and schools are quick to blame the parents if something goes wrong. Of course, there are a few parents who are problematic. But good schools do not blame parents, they work with them. They recognise that the vast, vast majority want a good education for their children, in a safe environment, and will support teachers who are trying to achieve.

According to a YouGov poll for the TES⁴, parents also support good discipline in schools, including sending children out of class (89%), after-school detention (88%), suspension and expulsion (84%), and writing lines (77%). Policy Exchange found in March 2015 that “introducing stricter discipline in schools” was the most popular potential education policy for a future government to deliver.

Good schools will not only have good behaviour policies; they will implement them. If a few parents are refusing to co-operate, the head teacher should feel able to stand up to them. And parents should be able to see that the policy on the website matches what is happening in the classroom.

⁴ http://cdn.yougov.com/today_uk_import/yg-archives-tls-vancomms-parentschildrenschoo-200911.pdf