

# Improving Behaviour in Schools: Evidence Review

## Introduction and background

Behaviour has always been a key area of interest in education. Research has shown that difficulties with classroom management can lead to a range of issues including low pupil attainment, bullying and teacher stress and burnout. Poor pupil behaviour is not always extreme; a 2014 report by Ofsted highlighted the fact that there is a need to tackle the frequent low-level disruption which can be detrimental to learning.

The new Ofsted inspection framework has introduced a separate key judgement for behaviour and attitudes. Interestingly, perceptions of pupil behaviour vary according to staff role. A recent Teacher Voice survey showed that whereas 86 per cent of senior leaders rated behaviour in their schools as good or very good, the figure for classroom teachers was just 59 per cent.

In the light of ongoing interest in this issue, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) have published a comprehensive evidence review on behaviour, comprising 3 separate reviews. Review 1 looked at evidence about why pupils may misbehave in schools. Review 2 explored which types of classroom management approaches are the most effective in improving attainment, behaviour and learning. Review 3 focussed on the effectiveness of whole school policies and interventions. The full report lists all of the studies which were consulted and the interventions on which they were based.

Throughout the report, there is frequent reference to effect sizes, using Cohen's  $d$ . An effect size quantifies the difference between 2 groups – in the case of these studies, one group which had an intervention and another group which did not. Cohen suggested that  $d=0.2$  be considered a 'small' effect size, 0.5 represents a 'medium' effect size and 0.8 a 'large' effect size.

## Key findings

### Review 1

- The most extensive systematic review of theories of behaviour in education was conducted by Powell and Tod (2004). They consulted a large number of studies on the influence of family, community, policy and relationship with learning. Based on their findings, they constructed a model showing links between behaviour and influences.
- For example, if a pupil in Year 8 experiences the death of a close and influential relative, the bereavement can have a negative effect over time; changes in behaviour will then lead to negative effects on pupil wellbeing and academic development.
- By paying attention to Powell and Tod's model, teachers can be more attuned to events which exert and influence over the pupils in their care. Being in an informed position where one is aware of variables which are affecting a pupil's life situation is key to being effective in behaviour management. Furthermore, if teachers can become aware of events before they have extreme consequences, there is more chance of keeping pupils in a 'positive zone' and intervening before a more chronic pattern of negative behaviour emerges.
- One of the key advantages which teachers have in working with pupils is a knowledge of their situation. Research has shown that when teachers know their students well, this can have a highly positive effect on classroom management (Sammons et al, 2016, Sizer, 1992).
- Returning to the above-mentioned Year 8 pupil, their level of resilience will, in part, determine the extent to which their

behaviour deteriorates following the bereavement. Resilience is dependent on a range of factors including a strong social network and access to counselling.

- A negative self-image arising from events in the early life cycle will often exacerbate negative behaviour in response to adversity. This means that events outside schools can either impact children's behaviour directly or indirectly by affecting self-perception and resilience.
- Influences on behaviour can be divided into 3 categories. A table listing all elements within these categories can be found in the full report. Firstly, there are those which teaching staff can influence directly such as a particular behaviour management approach or engagement with the curriculum. In the second category are influences where the teacher can influence or advise, such as parental involvement in homework or choice of peers. The third category contains influences of which teachers should be aware, but which may be outside the remit of teaching staff. Examples include parental view of education, parental mental health and family functioning.

### Review 2

- Review 2 identified 61 studies which assessed the benefits of interventions targeting school behaviour in classrooms. A majority of these were 'universal', i.e. applied to all students. Most of the interventions focussed on positive responses to the challenge of misbehaviour and on training

- teachers to positively encourage learning behaviour. For example, 2 studies (Gregory, 2014) and Okonfua (2016) show the effectiveness of training teachers to develop more empathetic and respectful approaches. They show that incorporating these approaches in a sustained way leads to a decrease in rates of exclusionary discipline.
- There were 7 studies based on trials of the Incredible Years teacher classroom management intervention. This programme aims to improve teacher competence in supporting children in the classroom and developing social, emotional and problem-solving skills. The studies showed a low overall effect size of  $d=0.13$  for this programme.
  - The KODEK classroom management training programme for in-service teachers which was trialled by Piwowar (2013) was found to be effective, with a median effect size of  $d=3.37$ .
  - The Good Behaviour Game is a team-based classroom management strategy. Two trials of this intervention showed little beneficial effect. However, another group-based intervention, the Class-Wide Function-related Intervention, reported by Kamp (2015) showed a large effect size of  $d=2.0$ .
  - There were 8 studies which focussed exclusively on reward systems. All 8 demonstrated positive outcomes. However, a study by Spilt et al (2013) found no positive effects for students with combinations of behavioural and social risks and those from dysfunctional families.
  - A study by Bartholomew et al (2018) examined the impact of pupils' participation in a short session of games or activities as part of their usual academic lesson. A positive effect was found between this classroom physical activity (CPA) and time on task.

### Review 3

- This part of the review identified a number of whole school policies and interventions which appeared to have a significant positive impact on behaviour. A selection of these are described below.
- Waschbush (2005) reports on an intervention called the Behaviour Education Support and Treatment Plan which combined universal school rules and a reward system. These were accompanied by targeted interventions for children who did not respond or who failed to meet the weekly reward goal. This programme had an effect size of  $d=0.57$ .
- The PALS programme is an adapted version of the School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support model which aims at the prevention of behaviour models and the promotion of social competence. A trial by Sorlie (2007) reports that it had an effect size of 0.29.
- Sorlie (2015) reported on a 4 day whole staff training programme called Preventing Problem Behaviour in School. It trained staff in a range of evidence-based practices. The intervention was found to reduce problematic behaviour throughout the school, although it was more effective outside the classroom.
- Another effective training programme with significant positive effects was the Safe and Civil Schools Programme which was trialled by Ward (2013). This US-based training helps teachers to create positive behaviour management strategies schoolwide, in the classroom and with individual students.
- The School-Wide Positive Interventions and Supports programme evaluated by Bradshaw (2012) provides strong evidence of reductions in levels of disruptive behaviour and concentration problems and increases in pro social behaviours. The programme has 3 tiers: primary prevention involving school-wide systems for everyone; secondary prevention involving specialised interventions

for groups of students exhibiting at-risk behaviours; and tertiary prevention involving personalised systems for individual students with very high risk behaviours.

### Qualitative Comparative Analysis

- The authors of the report undertook what is known as qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). This looked across all of the reviews in order to explore whether certain components of interventions might better predict beneficial effects on behaviour. The research question guiding this part of the analysis was: What components of the universal behaviour interventions reviewed are effective for behaviour outcomes?
- In order to answer this question, the analysis looked at 21 studies that included universal samples (i.e. child participants were representative of whole school). It became apparent that 2 different combinations appear to predict effectiveness for behaviour outcomes. Firstly, tailoring to individual intervention recipients, a focus on improving relationships and over 20 hours of teacher training. Secondly, analysis indicates that an alternative way of improving behaviour can be to focus on academic issues, teaching coping and resilience skills, but not to focus on improving relationships.

**The full document can be downloaded from:**

<https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10871/40181>