

# Creating a culture: How school leaders can optimise behaviour

## Introduction and background

**Schools in which good behaviour is the norm are schools in which pupils achieve better outcomes and in which staff well-being, retention and working conditions are optimised.**

**In 2015, the then Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, commissioned the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Behaviour Review Group. The group's remit was to advise the Department for Education on ways to improve the core provision for trainee teachers with regard to behaviour management. The group was led by Tom Bennett who is the author of this report. It concluded that there were substantive opportunities for improvement in the content and pedagogy of how new teachers are trained to run classrooms and direct pupils' behaviour. This new report builds on the findings of the Review Group. It examines evidence about the situation in schools and makes a series of strategy recommendations for school leaders. The full report provides a number of useful case studies exemplifying the strategies which are outlined.**

## Key findings

### Behaviour in schools: A review of the evidence

- The evidence regarding behaviour in schools in England paints a mixed picture. In 2011, a report by the House of Commons Education Committee found that it was, in fact, impossible to measure the extent of the problem because it varied so much.
- Some studies, such as the 2009 Steer report, paint a positive picture. Using data mainly taken from Ofsted reports, it concluded that most schools were good or better with regard to behaviour.
- The latest teacher Voice Omnibus also paints a generally positive picture. When asked to describe behaviour at their school, 75 per cent of respondents described it as good or very good. Most others (17%) described it as acceptable. Interestingly, a much higher proportion of teachers in primary schools than in secondary schools judged behaviour to be very good (41% in primary schools vs 24% in secondary schools). The survey also revealed a divergence of opinion between senior leaders and classroom teachers. Forty-eight per cent of senior leaders reported that behaviour was very good, compared to 21 per cent of classroom teachers.
- In A 2009 survey of over 1,000 teachers by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) is less positive. Sixty per cent of respondents stated that they had disruptive pupils in their classes. In a 2014 survey, also carried out by the ATL, it was revealed that dealing with pupils' aggression had caused 60 per cent of staff who had experienced it to feel a loss of confidence in their work, 34 per cent to have mental health issues and 33 per cent to refuse to teach the pupil concerned. The same survey also found that 40 per cent of respondents had considered leaving the profession because of pupil behaviour.
- In a 2010 survey of 400 headteachers 35 per cent of respondents reported that pupil behaviour had deteriorated in the last 12 years.

### Commonly found features of successful schools

- The research for this report found that successful strategies observed or described in interviews were remarkably consistent across a range of different schools and contexts.
- No matter how skilled, teachers alone cannot have as much impact on pupils' behaviour as a school leader. Committed headteachers, with high levels of focus, ambition, mission, altruism and tenacity are therefore key. These qualities were frequently mentioned by school leaders themselves, their staff and the students. Sometimes leaders themselves were unable to express what qualities they possessed which made a difference. Some of them expressed the belief that they 'had' to make changes in the school and that they would not be persuaded otherwise. Many viewed challenges and obstacles in a pragmatic manner and all expressed a deep commitment to the success of the school and of every individual in it. Many spoke of this as a very personal belief.
- Successful schools were characterised by strong management teams with a good balance of skills. Although slavish compliance to the headteacher was not seen as necessary, a sharing of the school leader's vision was key.
- In the best schools visited, all students knew in detail what the school vision was, and exactly how it was being achieved. They were aware of what the school rules and values were, and who the senior team were. All staff interviewed expressed positive regard for the school behavioural policies, felt supported in their ability to carry them out, and crucially also felt confident in communicating them to the students.
- In successful schools there was consistency between all staff and students about cultural and academic norms. Many teachers spoken to highlighted their appreciation that school values and rules were consistent throughout the school, and that expectations were therefore simplified and more easily realised.

- In the most successful schools few things were left to chance and every aspect of the school life, from break duties to library passes to counting in the basketballs, was considered thoughtfully, and made to comply with the values and processes of the school behaviour policy. The policy was clearly spelled out in sufficient detail and constantly referred to.
- In successful schools there were repeatedly demonstrated routines, both in classrooms and in the whole school. Pupils benefitted from consistent expectations of habitual conduct. In some schools, for example, there was an expectation to walk on one side of the corridor only, wear uniform in a certain way, attend assembly in silence, or row by row. There was a shared understanding of this behaviour, embedded in the collective consciousness.
- Successful schools demonstrated a commitment to staff development along with the expectation that staff reciprocate by contributing their best efforts. Continuing professional development and performance management raised the staff's overall skill base in this area. All staff were expected to be accountable for their decisions, their adherence to the school routines, and their demonstration of school values.
- Highly visible leadership was a normal part of the life of the school. Classes were unsurprised to see the headteacher turn up without announcement, and disruption was minimised as a result. Leaders were present on lunch queues, at breakfast clubs, at the school gates, and in every area of the school community
- Successful schools did not wait for behaviour to become a problem. It was a permanent agenda item at meetings of the governing body, the leadership team, the school council, and school faculties.
- Successful schools demonstrated genuine care for every student and every student was seen as an opportunity for success rather than the vehicle for failure. When students failed to behave, it was seen as a problem to be solved rather than merely a nuisance. It was, however, recognised that challenging and sanctioning students when they misbehave, is in fact consistent with having high regard for their potential, as well as the dignity of their peers.
- In successful schools, communication with parents was fast and efficient. Multiple platforms (texting, Facebook, email) were used. Parents were contacted about positive and negative behaviour. Contact was also used to keep parents updated about school life.
- Successful schools had strong links in the community. In some cases, local shops knew the names of senior staff and some even had hotlines to the headteacher in case of issues arising. Pupils were explicitly taught how to conduct themselves when representing the school in any capacity.
- A focus by senior staff on supporting the most challenging students appropriately was often evident in successful schools. Pupils with the greatest behavioural needs, need to be proactively supported rather than waiting for their difficulties to manifest themselves. At Robert Clack School in Dagenham, the principal Sir Paul Grant took a close interest in the students who had the biggest difficulties meeting the school behaviour standards. He developed a warm but professional relationship with them based on positive, high expectations, and knowledge of their progress. As a result the students respected him and regarded him highly. He knew how they were progressing, and the students expressed high levels of respect and regard for him as a result.

## Recommendations for school leaders

- A school culture will exist whether effort is invested in it or not. Therefore, it is sensible to ensure that the prevailing culture is supportive of good conduct rather than one that impedes it.
- Good school leaders are the conscious architects of their school cultures. They should have a clear idea of the behaviour they want to achieve, and the methods they will use to achieve them.
- A formal school behaviour management policy is just a starting point. A leader's vision for behaviour should be demonstrated and referred to constantly.
- Discussions on school behaviour should be proactive rather than reactive. School behaviour needs to be an important topic at every strategic planning meeting and at every level. The creation of a culture of excellent behaviour should be one of the school's fundamental goals.
- Any aspect of school behaviour which can be standardised should be, for example walking on the left or right of a corridor or entering assembly quietly. Once these routines become automatic, mental energy can be directed to more useful areas.
- School leaders must make it absolutely clear what the vision for behaviour looks like in practice. For example 'high expectations' may mean different things to different members of staff. For one, it may mean that homework is submitted by most pupils a week after being set, whereas to another it may mean that all homework is submitted on time by all pupils to a high standard.
- School leaders must ensure that their senior leadership team is loyal and that they possess the skill sets for their designated roles. Achieving this may involve retraining, recruitment or moving unsuitable staff into different positions. School leaders need to be constantly aware of the need to identify those who are potential leaders and also those who are not engaging with the ethos of the school, or actively trying to destroy what the school wants to achieve.

## Building a school culture

- Leaders whose schools are transitioning to an improved state need to offer staff support in understanding new expectations and systems. They must be prepared for their ideas to be rejected by a minority of staff. Once all avenues have been exhausted it may be necessary to move staff or ask them to consider other options.
- Staff must be inducted into the behaviour culture of the school, preferably before joining. To understand what constitutes good, core teacher training, school leaders could look at the findings of the ITT Behaviour Review Panel (2015) where a skeleton set of training standards can be found. All new staff must be assessed, observed and trained up to the school standard as soon as practical, as a matter of urgency.
- All schools should have a clear system of sanctions and rewards. Sanctions need not be severe but they need to be certain. Rewards do not always need to be material, but should involve sincere proportionate recognition of the pupils' achievements.
- There are several ways in which a school's culture can be conveyed. These include: reinforcement in assemblies, wall displays celebrating achievement; high expectations of attendance and punctuality; and clear considered rules about the use of mobile technology in lessons.

The full document can be downloaded from:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/behaviour-in-schools>