



Confederation  
of School Trusts

Parents  
Teachers  
FOR EXCELLENCE

# The Question of Behaviour

putting values into practice

The **Confederation of School Trusts (CST)** is the national organisation and sector body for academy and multi-academy trusts, advocating for, connecting and supporting executive and governance leaders.

CST is completely apolitical. We represent our members to advance education in the public interest.

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**Parents and Teachers for Excellence (PTE)** is a movement to spread good practice to help to ensure educational excellence for every child

Supported by some of the most respected people in education, we believe that schools should use their freedom to ensure every child benefits from effective behaviour practices, a knowledge-rich curriculum, ambitious exams and qualifications, and cultural enrichment. These are characteristics of some of the top performing schools in the country.

Our website is regularly updated with content designed to help parents and teachers promote effective practice in the schools they engage with. Please visit **[www.parentsandteachers.org.uk](http://www.parentsandteachers.org.uk)** for more information.

(Please note: The views and opinions expressed in articles throughout this publication are those of the authors alone and are not necessarily shared by CST and PTE.)

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## Foreword – Leora Cruddas

### *Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts*

Every parent wants their child to go to a school that is safe, where learning can occur in an orderly environment.

Parents should not have to worry that their children are bullied, that learning is routinely disrupted or that their child is at risk of harm. Happily, most schools and classrooms are orderly places, safe for both children and adults, where purposeful learning takes place – 86% of schools were judged good or outstanding at their most recent inspection.

It is important that school leaders are trusted to develop and implement behaviour policies that enable positive learning environments. This is a complex task and requires a balance to be maintained between the rights of the individual child and the rights of all children. Leaders take this responsibility very seriously. The ultimate sanction of permanent exclusion is only used in the most serious instances.

As a society, we need to be clear about what we want from schools and school leaders. If we want children to know and accept the rules of society – that one cannot with impunity be violent to others – then we need to trust school leaders to use the ultimate sanction wisely. Powers to exclude should not be curtailed.

Schools are places where children and young people learn about the rules and norms of a safe society and the common good. School leaders work for the good of all children. They seek to enable all young people to lead useful, happy and fulfilling lives. Sometimes they are confronted with really difficult decisions – the decision to use the ultimate sanction of exclusion is never easy.

Behaviour policies are usually part of an overall educational philosophy and set of beliefs about the common good. They are not bolt-on or mechanistic procedures. Ultimately what does any parent want from the school to which they send their child? That their child is safe and happy and able to learn and flourish. Isn't this also what we want from the good society?

## Foreword – Mark Lehain

### *Director, Parents & Teachers for Excellence*

Although I'd had senior leadership experience, I'd never been fully in charge of a school before I became Principal of Bedford Free School (BFS) in 2012.

To help guide me where I was unsure of things I came up with "The Sophie Test" – I would ask what I would want to happen if it was my eldest daughter Sophie in whichever situation was at hand. "If it's not good enough for my own child, it's not good enough for anyone else's" was a mantra used for many, many decisions. It was also at the centre of the culture that we designed at BFS.

Every Head wants their school to be a safe and happy place to work and learn. However, simply having high ambitions isn't enough – one has to carefully design the rituals, routines, and practices to embed and reinforce them, and then find ways to get everyone to consistently stick to them.

Hence this collection of essays.

PTE exists to help parents and teachers spread the very best ideas and approaches in schools today. In this pamphlet we have been fortunate enough to gather together reflections and insights from excellent leaders in a range and variety of schools.

Each essay takes us through the process by which thought they have defined their values and then the ways that they have embedded them for their school community. The moral purpose and sense of learning along the way really comes off the pages.

Each of these case studies contain lessons useful for the broader education sector – ideas or processes that schools can be inspired by, and adopt or adapt where appropriate.

It is by learning from others that we will ensure that we create a system that ensures educational excellence for every child.

## Foreword by Tom Bennett

*Independent Behaviour Advisor, Department for Education, Member of PTE Advisory Council*

The behaviour culture of the school is one of the most important things school leadership should focus on. Everything else flows from it: safety, well-being, learning, personal development, and every other goal we can conceive of for what happens in schools.

This is what we learned when we looked closely at successful schools for 2017's Creating a Culture report: good schools with challenging intakes thought hard about the behaviour they wanted to see, and then built mechanisms to ensure that behaviour emerged, imbedded, and was maintained over time.

It's easy to see why schools frequently don't do this - or think that they do, but don't. Teacher training in behaviour management is patchy and often weak; leadership training in this respect is practically non-existent.

But great practice abounds. Good behaviour doesn't happen by itself. Hundreds of relative strangers cooperating with one another, helping, sharing, listening and supporting one another is not the natural state of many children - or adults. It must be created, and continually created, for as long as we want it to happen. Staff need to be trained and supported to understand what behaviour is required of them; students need this too, especially – often - the most disadvantaged or vulnerable.

If we assume children will behave automatically, without clear adult leadership, we set our children up to fail, especially the most vulnerable. But when we do lead like this, the results are transformational.

And when students flourish, staff flourish, and we all flourish. And we never give up.

# Jenny Thompson

## Principal, Dixons Trinity Academy

**Dixons Trinity** is a non-selective secondary school in the city centre of Bradford, which opened in 2012 in the second wave of free schools. The area in which we are located is placed in the highest deprivation quintile. Last summer, we placed third nationally for progress, 71% achieved grades 5+ in English and mathematics combined and 54% achieved 5+ in the EBacc.

Such outcomes are reflective of the exceptional hard work of our students, their families and our staff. The data that really teaches us about our school, however, is collated through our annual surveys of every child and every family, and which tells us that 100% of our students are proud to attend Trinity and 100% of our parents would recommend the school. Even though we invariably have tough times in our relationships, we are all oriented toward our shared mission and we pull as a team.

As a team, accepting the complexity of behaviour management is an important place to start. Perhaps too often in education, strategy is shaped by opinion derived from personal experience. At Trinity, we try to avoid complacency around evidence: we consistently ground our thinking in research.

Behaviour expectations and support opportunities need to be taught, interleaved and reviewed as explicitly as knowledge. We understand the need to learn not just what the expectations are, but also how to meet them. This is why we explicitly teach and practise our learning habits using the same methods as are used for learning academic content.

At Trinity, we generate daily opportunities to share how to meet our expectations: we narrate the positive in every lesson, every day. As staff, we do not grow tired of saying the same things in our shared language. Our culture is grounded in the knowledge that it is up to the principal and SLT to ensure children behave and that staff must have abundant opportunities to develop behaviour management confidence.

Three times each week, all staff use role-play to explicitly practise how to support the learning habits in our school. As often as possible, we make our mistakes away from the children! We plan and practise our approaches together – just as we do our curriculum. All staff participate in one-to-one coaching every week; as such, professional development can be completely bespoke. At Trinity, we all have agency: teachers can teach and students can learn.

As with our curriculum, we start from the needs of our most vulnerable: our high expectations shape our learning habits and, crucially, our pastoral offer. We do not lower our expectations for students, but we will absolutely enhance the support they receive to be successful. Doing this in collaboration with families is critical. We have a dual expectation, that support will be put in place preventatively for students who need it but also that, if difficulties arise, sanctions are accompanied by helpful action. Any student may need support at any point. Sometimes, this can be as small as a conversation. What we have learnt, at Trinity, is that it is the little things that matter. Our SENCO writes an exceptionally thoughtful blog which shares more detail on some of our approaches, and which can be found at: <https://inco14.wordpress.com/>

In our school, we are unafraid to talk about the love we share as a community and that shapes our communication with children: the method is the message. We know that learning to follow our learning habits is a journey as high in expectations as our curriculum and we do not make limiting presumptions based on our students' data-based characteristics. Instead, we focus on developing our students' intrinsic motivation: wanting to develop the learning habits so you can work really hard and make lots of progress needs to be a deeply held desire because it asks so much. We over-rationalise so the students always know why: we tell the students that we can't do it for them but we will do it with them.

For example, at Trinity, a student will receive a 30-minute, centrally held, same-day, after-school sanction if they do not have the correct equipment. That is a pretty high expectation.

As such, we have to make sure it is purposeful and supported. This means our equipment list is comprised only of items students will definitely need every day and that, without which, their learning would be hampered. It is all purposeful. We communicate the list with families when we first meet them and every time after that. Alongside this, every morning, before the day starts, when we meet together in our daily morning meetings, every student makes a little pile of their equipment on their desk (exactly what this pile is comprised of is displayed on the screen every day even though the students and staff know it inside out). The student's advisor checks the pile while completing the register and replaces any missing equipment. This is a daily commitment that takes just moments longer than the completion of a register; it has been practised over and over again in staff role-play. Every day, the students will also have had the opportunity to go to our pastoral support and independently replace any missing items before this process even begins. This means the student is facilitated to have a successful day.

If the student has not independently replaced anything missing, yes, the student will receive a 30-minute, centrally held, same-day correction, during which their advisor would meet with them to identify both the issue and a supportive intervention. Often, this meeting doesn't take the full 30 minutes and it can be completed at another time during the day by the advisor if that is more convenient (if this is the case, the after-school time is spent working on a reflection document and doing supported revision). As all educators know, serious underlying needs can often be identified from the most innocuous of starting points when time is committed to listening. At Trinity, knowing our students as individuals is so important – relationships come first.

For more serious or repeated behaviours we have red lines. These can be bespoke to the circumstance or the student. Typically, however, this will mean the student not attending lessons for a day. Instead, the student spends the day in my office or in the office of another leader. We don't have an isolation room – instead we operate the same

thinking that shapes our staffing model: our most vulnerable students need to be with the most experienced members of staff. The student has a lot of work to get through on the day and a lot of opportunity to talk and be listened to.

Every red line is also accompanied by a meeting with family before the student returns to lessons. Sometimes, this can be tricky as some families are hard to reach but we are tenacious and thoughtful in equal measure. If we need to go to them, we will. If we need to hold a baby sister in our arms to provide the space to speak, we will. If we need to meet before school, after school or during the day, we will. Again, our families know this is an expectation. In this meeting, alongside ensuring we all share the same hopes, we are seeking to understand the behaviour and to find support to prevent it reoccurring.

We talk to families and students about this at every opportunity – we tell our families explicitly that they may not always agree with our perspective and, if that occurs, to share that with us. As adults, we can find resolution by listening to one another. Our relationships with our families and our incredible community have been the base of any success we have had as a school. We treat those relationships as precious and when we make mistakes, which we do, we are honest about them. This builds reciprocity and respect.

Our systems are not perfect and we are always learning – together, grounded in evidence and shaped by a shared mission. Therefore, when we have the pleasure of welcoming visitors to our school, the students, who guide the tours (given without training or staff supervision), are always in pairs. One student is simply the next student on the roll (all students have the opportunity) and the other is a student who has perhaps had a red line or is struggling with the learning habits. The tour is part of their re-induction – both a way to let them know that they are part of our community, that we will continue to love and support them, and a way to allow them the opportunity to articulate what is so special about our school.

Managing behaviour is complex: the method is the message.

# Simon Knight

## Joint Headteacher, Frank Wise School

**Frank Wise School** is a local-authority-maintained special school serving a population of approximately 120 children and young adults with either severe or profound and multiple learning disabilities.

It has a strong commitment to inclusion and as such groups its pupils by age, regardless of ability, to avoid further stigmatising those already segregated from the mainstream. Additionally, every pupil up to the age of sixteen spends half a day a week in mainstream, as part of a long-standing whole-class inclusion programme with local primary and secondary schools. After the age of sixteen the curriculum is delivered through high levels of community-based education, helping ensure that our population is both visible in, and valued by, the community that we serve.

Our pedagogical approach has been shaped over more than thirty years, resulting in a carefully sequenced and developmentally determined curriculum structure, accompanied by a range of bespoke assessments. Our focus is on the educational requirements of the individual and as such, we ensure that decisions are made on the basis of the evidence of what has been learned and what needs to be learned next. We have the luxury of not being tied to chronological 'norms' and aim to maximise the positive impact of this freedom on the pupils we teach.

For us, the key to developing positive behaviours and ensuring that those behaviours are transferable to contexts beyond the school, comes from seeing behaviour as being a subject to be taught rather than solely a set of conditions to impose. Securing improvements in pupil behaviour comes with its own developmental pattern, requiring a highly individualised approach, shaped by the requirements of

each pupil and allowing the appropriate amount of time to enable pupils to develop successfully.

One of our key aims is to nurture in our pupils a sense of self-confidence combined with sensitivity and respect towards others, through a familiarity with, and understanding of, their rights and responsibilities. We recognise that this is not something that we can do alone, nor should do alone, but requires us to build trusting partnerships with the pupils, their families, other professionals and the wider community.

Supporting pupils to improve their behaviour is key to the culture of the school and the broader educational achievement of those who come here. We believe that all children feel more secure and learn more successfully if clear boundaries, based on high expectations, have been secured. The value of consistency and clear unambiguous messages, delivered in a developmentally appropriate manner, cannot be underestimated and these are fundamental to our approach.

For us the emphasis is on creating a culture where we celebrate success and achievements in order to recognise the importance of shared values, and this includes how we respond to the sometimes complex behaviour we experience within our school community.

We expect all of our staff to show respect for the achievements of our pupils and have high expectations of behaviour, raising these expectations as behaviour improves. By being positive, consistent, and focussing on good behaviour, we create an environment in which there is an incentive for behaving well. It is our belief that rewards are preferable to and more effective than sanctions when working with pupils with more complex behaviour, but equally we accept that sanctions may be sometimes necessary. It is always about having a deep understanding of the child and making decisions in the best



interest of both them and the wider community.

However, it is important to acknowledge that enabling our pupils to manage their own behaviour successfully isn't just about consistent whole-school approaches and practice – it's also about establishing a consistency of mood. We aspire to create a 'haven of consistency' for our pupils, a place of security where children are valued for both who they are and what they achieve, and where adults are predictable in their responses and the way in which they conduct themselves.

It is about recognising the relationship between the 'what' of supporting the improvement in behaviour and 'how' we interact with those we teach. Considering carefully the paralinguistics of tone of voice, facial expression and body language, is key to ensuring that we give our pupils the best chances of success. In doing this we adopt, as a general principle, a proactive approach as opposed to a reactive approach, with a focus on:

- Not taking the behaviour personally;
- Remaining calm and avoiding overreaction;
- Stating clear and reasonable expectations matched to the pupil's developmental level;
- Knowing what to say and what to do next in order to promote de-escalation;
- Using praise effectively.

As well as establishing a climate of success and focussing on what the pupils are able to do, rather than that which they have yet to achieve, the establishment of routines and rules is key. The pupils are at the heart of this process and work collaboratively to develop their understanding of the characteristics of a calm and orderly classroom, and indeed school, and celebrate one another and the contribution that they each make to this culture.

In addition to the general approaches of: high expectations; clearly articulated rules and routines; consistency; and pupil-centred, developmentally matched responses, we also have some pupils who require more individualised approaches.

These Individual Management Plans (IMPs) are not exclusively for supporting complex behaviours, but are also used for other individual areas of support, such as medical requirements, physical development or complex communication. These are part of a whole-school methodology for ensuring the consistent application of individual responses to specific pupils' requirements.

An IMP will always be constructed in partnership with the young person and/or their family, before being distributed to all staff throughout the school. It is essential that all staff who regularly interact with the pupil are well versed in the responses required to the behaviour specified in the IMP, which may include specific words or phrases. For those who interact less regularly, we would expect familiarity with the IMP and if this is not the case, they should default to the school's general principles if they encounter the pupil demonstrating complex behaviour.

In considering who would benefit from an IMP we give careful thought to the age and developmental stage that the child is at, to ensure that the expectation, and the implementation of that expectation, are matched to the individual. As a 2–19 school we need to recognise that what is expected in the nursery may be different to what is expected in key stage 5.

The process of developing an IMP is built around observation and paying close attention to what preceded the behaviour and how it was responded to by the adult, or indeed other pupils in the classroom. Following a period of sustained observation, often lasting many weeks and where required, supported by other professionals, a strategy will be drawn up to ensure that if the

behaviour reoccurs then the response will be both consistent and appropriately matched to the educational, social and emotional requirements of the pupil. This will then be monitored, evaluated and revised as required.

It is also worth noting that sometimes when an IMP is introduced there is not an immediate improvement; in fact sometimes the behaviour can become more complex before improvement is seen. However, staff are well versed in the developmental patterns associated with improvements in complex behaviour and are measured and considered in their responses.

IMPs provide a structure through which we can support staff to:

- Respond calmly;
- Analyse what is happening;
- Anticipate what might happen next;
- Consider the short- and long-term implications of how we respond;
- Communicate clearly with others involved in the response;
- Consider what we as adults have learned.

Frank Wise is a school that has built its practice over many years and this is equally the case with regards to its approach to supporting pupils who present with complex behaviours. We take an iterative and methodical approach to improvement, avoiding fads, bandwagons and knee-jerk reactions to situations that we may encounter.

In everything we do, we aspire to be objective and considered. As such we rarely introduce specific behaviour interventions, preferring instead to collectively embody a culture of aspiration and high expectations for all. In the main, this creates an environment in which children both see and experience success, academically, emotionally and socially. It's an environment in which the vast majority of pupils are enabled to develop improvements

in their behaviour without the need for distinct interventions or additional curricular opportunities.

This can be seen in the fact that whilst our population is approximately 120 of the education system's most complex and vulnerable pupils, only about 10% of them have an IMP and by the time they reach key stage 3 this number falls to about 2%. The time we invest with children at the younger age range, sets the foundation on which later success is built and we see this in the significant reduction in the requirement for personalised approaches to managing complex behaviour. This is the impact of a carefully considered, consistently applied philosophy and values-based system.

To achieve this, we devote a lot of time to working with children to support their behaviour in the knowledge that over time we will progressively reduce the need for this support, until we reach the point where support is no longer routinely required. Our aim is not control or coercion, but enablement, working in partnership to highlight the value and impact of better behaviour.

As such, ours is a calm and purposeful school, where low-level disruption is rare and where learning is the focus of what teachers do, rather than having to explicitly devote energy to 'running the room'. It is a school where there is a critical mass of collective responsibility that ensures a consistency of approach, irrespective of who the pupil encounters and irrespective of the complexity of the behaviour.

And all of this is delivered with compassion and care by staff who inherently see the good in the children they have chosen to work with.

However, one area where we feel that we do need to develop things further is the way in which we support children to explore their behaviour after the event. Many of our pupils have very complex communicative requirements and this, coupled with their

level of cognitive development, can sometimes make exploring behaviour conversationally challenging for us as teachers.

And yet, the value of enabling our pupils to better understand how their own behaviour makes them, and those around them, feel is something that is likely to have significant emotional value.

As ever, making changes to our practice will be done slowly and through reaching considered consensus to ensure that change is embedded successfully and sustained over time. Our approach is to build areas like behaviour improvement into our work on curriculum development. This enables us to explore the interrelationship between the 'what', 'how' and 'why' we teach things with the 'what', 'how' and 'why' associated with understanding our pupils' behaviour.

What we see now is the culmination of years of work and honest reflection upon our collective capability. The key to securing the kind of culture and consistency of expectation that we have at Frank Wise, is a clarity of purpose and a singular belief in the collective good that can be achieved by working together for a common aim. For us that aim is better lives for the pupils we teach, an aspiration that, despite being a high performing school, we are yet to fulfil.

Due to our whole-school approach, however, we are better equipped to secure those lifelong outcomes, as a result of having a school that is calm, purposeful and which prioritises a deep understanding of the requirements of the individual.

# Helena Brothwell

## Principal, Queen Elizabeth's Academy

**Queen Elizabeth Academy** is a school on a rapid improvement journey after being in deep special measures for over 15 years. Currently a fresh-start academy rebrokered to the Diverse Academies Learning Partnership in September 2016, this secondary comprehensive serves an area of significant deprivation and had a falling roll prior to rebrokerage.

### Expectations

We have upscaled our expectations of behaviour in stages since taking on the school in September 2016. This has been an important part of our school improvement strategy; we didn't walk in with a very strict behaviour policy, we did it in stages to ensure that the line was held consistently by all. Then, on a termly basis we would raise the line up to meet our new standards, and this has been a relentless drive, done carefully so as to not create shock waves, but getting the results we wanted all the same.

We have worked hard to raise the profile and status of our teachers in the classroom. Most teachers choose to have their qualifications on their classroom door - this reinforces to students that there is one person in the room whom they need to be listening to. It is hugely important that students recognise that the teacher is the expert in the room.

### Responsibilities for Behaviour

We are very clear that behaviour is the job of SLT and teaching is the job of the teachers. We are also very explicit about the role of pupils in the classroom - only to learn and be respectful. We say showing one another and the teacher respect is not enough; it must be ultimate respect.

We deal with poor uniform by having an accessible uniform: only blazers and ties are purchased from suppliers and are free on entry, everything else can be supermarket bought. We also keep a room full of new uniform (we spend approximately £400 a

term on this) for any student who arrives at school with broken shoes or leggings because their trousers are too small. Those students go into the room, which has cubicles at the back, and come out fully dressed. This removes the burden from parents and students, but also means that we can demand high standards of uniform with integrity.

### The QEA Philosophy

We would class our philosophy as warm-strict. Anyone who has worked in schools serving areas of disadvantage understands well the need for warmth, consistency, routine and boundaries but above all else, the highest expectations to counter-balance any low aspirations they may be absorbing from seeing daily the lack of opportunities within their local community. We are extremely warm. This is what people comment on most when they visit. But we are also very demanding of our students, and they know that we want great things for them.

The impact is that pupils feel safe and teachers can teach without low-level disruption tainting their classes. Behaviour around the site is calm and orderly. Students have clear routines and feel safe and secure that they understand these expectations well.

### Systems and routines

Our systems and routines support our most vulnerable students the most; places are calm and there isn't jostling and lots of noise. All classrooms have one consistent entry and exit protocol to ensure that our vulnerable students or those with SEN are not overloading their working memory remembering what the entry routine is for Mr X, then a different entry routine the next lesson for Mrs Y. All classrooms have seating plans and a clear expectation of desk layout to be followed. Crucially, all classrooms follow the same behaviour pathway.

To ensure consistency of approach, we wrote a handbook for staff that explicitly outlines exactly how their interactions with pupils should look. For example, when challenged a

student should simply reply, “sorry miss/sorry sir” rather than arguing. This redraws the line and allows everyone to move on. We were heavily influenced by Paul Dix's book, *When the adults change, everything changes* and the paragraph about saying sorry is a direct steal from that book. He says that students must know “with certainty” what is expected of them, and this is something we have worked hard on. Nobody can let the line drop.

I am moving on in September to join the David Ross Education Trust, and based on what we have achieved at QEA I will take some core principles with me:

- Behaviour management is the role of SLT - we must make our expectations clear, constantly reinforce them and have systems in place which support. Teachers should not be expected to be great behaviour managers, they should be great teachers. It is for SLT to create the climate for learning that means this is possible.
- Warm and strict have to be in equal measure to work well, and students must be clear with certainty what our expectations are. A school cannot operate a warm-strict approach without great relationships, strong practice to support vulnerable pupils, and effective pastoral systems. A key to this is to find that staff member who knows the families well, and make use of their knowledge, for example.
- Leaders must also focus in equal measure on developing teaching staff to ensure that teaching is of excellent quality. With low-paced, poorly planned lessons, even the most motivated students in the most warm and supportive climate may misbehave. We invested a significant amount into the professional development of our teachers, developing their subject knowledge and using evidence-informed practice about how pupils best learn, to drive a consistent pedagogical approach.

And as for Queen Elizabeth Academy, the sky's the limit!

# Chris Humphries

## Director of Performance, ACE Schools Multi Academy Trust

**The ACE Schools Multi Academy Trust** was formed in 2016 as a provider of alternative education. Originally based in Plymouth, it has expanded its reach to 14 different locations across Devon and Cornwall, delivering high-quality education and support services for pupils not in mainstream education.

Our trust currently runs two schools – Courtlands Special School and ACE Schools Plymouth, both of which are rated Good by Ofsted. ACE Schools Plymouth caters for pupils aged 4 to 18, whilst Courtlands caters for primary-age pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH), moderate learning difficulties and other complex needs. We have also been approved to open a special needs free school, ACE Tiverton, in September 2019.

### Our ethos and philosophy

Our ethos as a trust, and the central tenet of everything we do, is to create positive futures for our pupils by championing a supportive and proactive environment where we work with vulnerable and often hugely challenging children and young people who need our help the most. In the AP academy and special school that we oversee, we never give up on a child. That includes having never permanently excluded a child. This isn't because sometimes behaviour hasn't warranted it. But we are aware that if we exclude, what comes next for that child?

That doesn't mean we are "soft", excuse bad behaviour or keep giving final warnings. One of the most important aspects of ensuring that we honour our ethos is constructing a behaviour policy that sets incredibly clear expectations. It serves to help our young people grow and flourish, whilst also allowing them to understand appropriate boundaries and learn how to behave in a way that will serve them well through school and into the world beyond.

The philosophy of our behaviour policy is based on empathy, an understanding of the impact of environment on emotional and educational flourishing, and a combination of taking into account the individual needs of each pupil without ever lowering our high expectations.

### Taking needs into account

Although we aren't mainstream provision, we're also not a youth club. We don't allow our young people to use first names to refer to teachers or the leadership team and we make it very clear that although we will always be supportive and willing to listen, we are there to educate, not to be their friends. Swearing is prohibited – we are big believers in giving young people the tools to describe their feelings and frustrations without resorting to profanity.

Saying that, we also know that a lot of the young people that pass through our doors are young people who have previously not been able to live up to the behavioural standards that mainstream school has set for them. This can be due to many different factors – some young people have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and some come from highly traumatic backgrounds which have influenced the way that they experience and then react to certain circumstances. Our policies are based on the accurate identification of risk and stimulus – what external factors our young people respond to, how, and why.

Different sites across our provision focus on pupils with different needs and we make sure our pupils, on joining us, are triaged to the site that will best meet and understand their needs. We strongly believe that the environment in which young people learn has a distinct impact on their behaviour – and if the environment is not conducive to their learning, it is highly possible that there will be instances of disruption.

Eighty per cent of our secondary cohort have a reading age below nine years old. It goes without saying that when you aren't able to access the task at hand this can cause

frustration, and a lot of our young people end up externalising this frustration in the form of disruptive behaviour.

When there are instances of disruptive behaviour that careful consideration of a young person's environment and needs haven't resolved, we operate on a basis that could be described as non-confrontational but no-nonsense. Confrontational responses are often counterproductive in terms of the young people we teach, and from experience we know that many young people, not just the ones in our provision, often respond negatively to confrontation.

Instead of acting on the problem once it has occurred, we instead remove potential problems from the equation. For example, we pre-emptively remove distractions and instigators by removing phones and money when they arrive each day, so they aren't able to use them throughout the day. School uniforms are also checked on the way in, and if any uniform doesn't meet our high standards, there are always items available for pupils to change into. We know that for many of the young people at our sites, dishevelled clothing can often be indicative of a wider problem at home – whether this is a lack of money with which to replace uniform, or other elements of a turbulent home life. We have to take that into account, while still insisting they are properly dressed.

Behaviour on our sites is good and we are proud of that. However, working with such challenging children, it's perhaps not possible to eradicate all instances of unacceptable behaviour. The experience and circumstances that many of our pupils have experienced often lend themselves to the externalisation of negative emotions and reactions. When these instances do occur, it's important that we respond to them in a way that is best for the pupil involved, the other pupils in our care, and of course all of our dedicated and professional members of staff.

### **What works best for our pupils**

For some of our pupils, a zero-tolerance behaviour policy, and its clear parameters and

structure, is incredibly helpful in allowing them to understand what behaviour is acceptable within the school environment. However, for others, a zero-tolerance policy does not work. You can't be prescriptive when dealing with an immense number of unique circumstances, SEND and SEMH conditions, and assorted barriers to learning and socialising. A blanket approach would in many instances be both confusing and complex for our pupils.

So, while not operating a blanket zero-tolerance policy, we do practise consistency and clarity, the two most important aspects of our behaviour policy. Young people across our sites know exactly what the consequences of their actions will be: the principles of how we operate each day never differ and the rules are clear, consistent, and visible throughout our whole school community.

When incidents occur that require a strong response, we do implement fixed-term exclusions – however, only when we feel this is imperative for the overall safety and wellbeing of the school community – for instance, if there is an incident of violence against another young person or staff member. It's for the benefit of all involved to have a cooling-down period, but it's important that consistency remains to the greatest possible extent. Consequently, we endeavour to place pupils on fixed-term exclusion in another one of our sites wherever possible, so that they benefit from the continuity and teaching practices that are positive influences in the day-to-day experience of their education within our trust.

In essence, our behavioural policy is linked to our moral compass as a trust and as individuals. It's evolved alongside us and has, without doubt, been tested along the way. From these tests, we've learnt the importance of having a policy that is flexible enough to work with, not against, our young people, whilst still being rigorous enough to uphold our high expectations.

What we hope to achieve through our behaviour policy is an understanding in our pupils that there are consequences to every choice, positive or negative, that will impact them in some way – it's the basics of cause and

effect. However, we also instil the principle that nothing is ever too bad or too big to come back from. In my eyes it's crucial to allow our young people to be aware that they are empowered to make choices for themselves and to give them autonomy as much as possible.

Through our behaviour policy, and our methodology more generally, we enable young people to make better choices. We build up their resilience, so that they can flourish after they leave our academies and so that they can self-manage and self-regulate their own behaviour in other environments that they may encounter. This is inspired by the work of behaviour management specialist and author Bill Rogers, who has long advocated for rewarding good choices and acknowledging when young people make the right decisions.

### **The impact of our policy**

Our behaviour policy works for our young people as it implements clear boundaries and expectations. Different levels of structure work well for different individuals, but our baseline remains unchanged. Being able to be confident that they know what we expect from them and what actions their choices will result in means that they are able to make informed choices for themselves.

As well as working for our pupils, our policy also works for our staff. It's simple to apply, implements a framework of choice and consequence and is, importantly, founded on our ethos of never giving up on our young people. All the staff within our trust are passionate about working towards the best possible outcomes for the young people in our care, and as long as the staff we take on have the same motivation we do, the application of our behaviour policy occurs naturally.

The impact of our behaviour policy can't be understated, and the changes that we see in our young people, from the time they begin with us to the time they embark on new adventures, are transformative and incredibly positive. The results speak for themselves – our aim is to get the behaviour of our young people to such a high baseline that having to

implement any kind of punishment is a rare occurrence.

The parents and carers of our young people are incredibly supportive of our behaviour policies and the way that we help them work towards understanding and regulating their own behaviour. After all, actively thinking about your choices and your behaviour is a skill that will see you well throughout school, work, and the rest of your life. We have repeatedly heard from parents and carers that the positive change in behaviour and outlook has also transformed how our young people behave at home and in out-of-school environments and has subsequently had positive impacts on family life.

We also receive incredibly positive feedback from our young people, who often tell us that we have helped them recognise negative behaviours and reactions, and understand how to react in a positive and resilient way. Our SEND pupils have also provided feedback about the benefits of implementing policies that work for them by taking into account their specific needs, difficulties, and contexts, noting that this is often the first time they feel listened to in a school environment.

One of the most successful elements of our behavioural policy is the use of Theraplay, which is an element of the trauma-informed approach we are adopting throughout all of our sites. It uses play to recreate secure attachments with adults in a safe environment, and has proven to be particularly effective in decreasing pupils' levels of stress.

We have also ensured the provision of emotionally available adults for our pupils as part of this approach and have introduced pastoral managers, who enter at postgraduate level to manage our multi-agency work. This allows our teaching staff to be supported, and for our young people to have access to a pastoral team with real expertise and understanding.

### **What the future holds**

Looking towards the future, we are examining how we expand our influence to both regional and national levels. We are the experts'



experts – we know what we do inside out – and we know that we do it well. We want to look to effect positive change across the whole alternative provision sector, as well as furthering understanding of how good behavioural practice within mainstream schools should manifest.

Our results speak for themselves – children who have come to us having used violence to express themselves, or having experienced severe trauma, leave us as experts in their own behaviour management with a full repertoire of coping techniques and with the ability to take on the world. It's this resilience and perseverance that we hope to bring to the table on a wider scale, in order to do what means the most to us – helping our young people to aspire and achieve.

For any other organisation, whether a mainstream school or MAT, or alternative provision, who would like to instil a behaviour policy within the same vein as ours, I would argue that empathy and understanding are two of the most important underpinning principles. However, it also requires the recognition that this approach is not about lenience. The world is full of rules and expectations, and can be a hard environment to navigate, and we fully expect our young people to be able to conduct themselves in accordance with this.

The environment in which young people learn can make or break their ability to thrive and flourish. An environment in which they are consistently reminded of their ability to make good choices provides the combination of positivity, reassurance, and autonomy that has proven to be invaluable for the young people in our care. Most of all, it's vital to maintain a mutual understanding with the young people in your classroom – that as their support network, we will never give in, and never give up.

# Tim Blake

## Principal, Bedford Free School

**Bedford Free School (BFS)**, one of the very first free schools approved in England, opened in September 2012. Set up by a group of local teachers and parents, we were the first brand-new secondary school in the town for many years and we aimed to be distinctive in our offer to give local families greater choice in their children's education.

BFS is part of Advantage Schools, a multi-academy trust founded in 2017. It specialises in an academic education that offers excellent outcomes, a great learning environment with routines and structures that ensure excellent behaviour, and phenomenal extra-curricular opportunities.

We are smaller than average in size, with only 100 pupils per year, and we have a longer school day to allow time for pupils to study subjects in greater depth and to experience our extensive 'electives' enrichment programme. Inspired by other schools, we also teach all pupils to play a musical instrument, which can be guitar, violin or (with support from the local Salvation Army) brass.

We pride ourselves on being a genuinely comprehensive school that provides a knowledge-based education for pupils of all backgrounds. We teach an unashamedly academic curriculum consisting of the best that has been thought and said. We have a powerful culture that is warm but strict, based on clear routines, systems and structures. As a result our teachers enjoy impeccable behaviour in lessons and hardworking, highly motivated pupils. Our approach combined with our exam success means that BFS is now heavily oversubscribed.

### The BFS approach to behaviour

Our mission statement - "We believe that, given the right circumstances, all children are capable of extraordinary things" - is inscribed on the walls of our reception for pupils, parents, staff and visitors to see whenever

they arrive. When parents are making that difficult decision about which secondary school to send their child to, we tell them that those 'right circumstances' are: the education provided for pupils by BFS; and families working closely together for the shared goal of success for their child. All of our teachers and pupils are able to quote our mission statement, the motto, 'Go the extra mile', and our values; 'Respect, Honesty and High Expectations'. We talk about the fact we are a values-driven school and frequently refer to all of these aspects in the drive to nurture, develop and further embed the school ethos.

One of the key elements of those 'right circumstances' is, of course, ensuring impeccable behaviour and establishing baseline behaviours for learning.

At BFS we frame and reference behaviour within the wider context of effective teaching and pupil learning. This is visually represented in something we call 'climbing the mountain to success'.

We hold high aspirations for our pupils and want them all to succeed, including having the option to attend the best universities. We emphasise and narrate the positives and the importance of working hard and having the correct attitude, motivation, aspiration and reliance.

Our behaviour policy has been developed over a number of years, which means it's been carefully thought out, tested and refined. It's also been informed by literature and research such as Tom Bennett's 'Creating a Culture: How school leaders can optimise behaviour' and visits to other great schools such as Dixons Trinity, King Solomon Academy and Mossbourne Community Academy.

We run BFS around tight structure and routines. We openly tell families we 'sweat the small stuff'. We are honest and say that some may call this 'strict' but it is all about creating an environment where all pupils feel safe and can learn effectively.

We've systemised key elements of the school day and some interactions within the classroom so that they become habitual

routines. These include the entry to and exit from classrooms, purposeful and silent transitions between lessons, as well as morning and break-time line-ups. These are micro-scripted in the staff handbook to ensure consistency and to over-communicate. We find that as a result pupils know what is expected of them; they like the structure because it gives them clear boundaries, and as a result their behaviour is impeccable.

### **Induction**

We spend a lot of time and energy during induction for new staff explaining the rationale behind our approach, how it works in practice, and modelling it out in real-life scenarios. Likewise, we use our year 6 transition meetings to outline the terms of our home-school agreement and clearly set out the roles pupils, parents and the school have to play in ensuring a child's success. The home-school agreement is central to our standards. We spend a significant amount of time with every family going through it and securing a commitment to do their best. We also place a high demand on parents; attendance at parents' evenings and other events is compulsory. This ensures a very high level of parental engagement from the beginning.

### **Leadership**

At BFS the accountability for ensuring impeccable behaviour rests with SLT. We're very mindful of behavioural drift and constantly monitoring the general feel of the school. This is important, as whilst teachers are expected to be responsible for managing behaviour in line with school policy, their main focus must and always should be teaching great lessons. That's why it is SLT's responsibility to ensure behaviour is always great. Any poor behaviour is never seen as a reflection upon staff, nor do we make excuses for any of our pupils. We impress upon pupils that they are responsible for their own behaviour.

We back our staff and ensure they feel empowered by our systems and routines. We're highly visible throughout school; every

lesson a member of the leadership team will carry out a wander, walking into every class to be there to provide any support. Usually this support is to fetch a coffee or some photocopying, but by asking the phrase "is everything to your satisfaction?" we also communicate and reinforce the consistency of high expectations and the team element in enforcing them.

### **Purpose not Power**

We have a staff mantra: 'purpose not power', and we tell the pupils that everything they are instructed to do is done for a reason. For example, at the end of each lesson they are told to get out their books and equipment for the next lesson and carry them in their arms, "so that you waste no time starting your next lesson and 100% of the time is focussed on learning". At the start of the day, they are told to line up in alphabetical order, in silence and raise their arm straight up in the air ready for morning address, "so that we know the whole school has their planner, achievement cards, and is ready for the day and we don't waste time doing this repeatedly".

We over-communicate our expectations so it becomes the default state. Staff hear our vision repeatedly within the daily briefing, pupils hear it in the morning address (a message delivered by a member of the SLT), daily pupil news and weekly assemblies. Every fortnight we have a designated theme, which might be the school's mission statement, motto or values, or other desirable character skills such as resilience.

Pupils know there is consistency between different lessons and teachers and all colleagues will hold pupils to the same high level of expectations. Visitors are blown away by the calm, purposeful atmosphere around the school, including transition times where movement from one class to another is expected to be in silence.

### **Code of Conduct**

Every pupil has a copy of the Code of Conduct in their school diary; it's also displayed in

every classroom and referenced in any parental meeting involving behaviour. It's a clear set of rules and expectations that ensures every pupil is living up to our values and 'going the extra mile'. Naturally, we spend quite a lot of time with our new Year 7s explaining this in September but it's always reviewed by every year group at the beginning of each academic year and is very much part of our normal dialogue with pupils.

### **Achievement Cards**

Each pupil carries upon their person an 'Achievement Card'. This is central to our behaviour system and extremely effective at removing any low-level disruption. It works on the basis that during each period of the day pupils can 'earn' a credit by consistently meeting our high expectations.

The default expectation is that 100% of pupils can and will meet our expectations and therefore earn their credit. If a pupil's behaviour or conduct falls below this standard then they 'lose a credit'. Credits can also be removed for missing equipment, poor uniform, being late and other minor infractions in and outside the classroom, including during lesson transitions and break times. All achievement cards are checked once a week by form tutors, and parents have to sign the back to confirm they have seen the card and are aware of their child's conduct.

### **Sanctions**

At BFS we hold extremely high expectations for pupils' conduct in lessons and around school. For example low-level disruption simply is not tolerated and will immediately be sanctioned by a teacher. We operate a simple hierarchy of sanctions: initially this will take the form of a verbal reminder, and then a loss of lesson credit but can be escalated to a 'correction' (see below) and eventually isolation.

We never allow pupils to 'take time out' or stand outside of the classroom. If a pupil's behaviour has a detrimental impact on the learning of others or it's a serious incident then they will be removed from the lesson and placed in isolation. This is relatively

infrequent at BFS but it does happen and we believe it is necessary to ensure we maintain an effective learning environment.

Once in isolation, pupils will remain out of circulation for the remainder of the day. We also insist upon a parental meeting that evening or first thing the next day to address the issue and ensure it is resolved before the pupil returns to normal lessons. These conversations are held by the relevant Head of Department or Pastoral Leader and usually with a member of SLT.

We use a centralised detentions system. Pupils can be issued with a same-day 45 minute 'correction' for missed homework or repetitive off-task behaviour and we inform parents via a courtesy text message. All corrections are run by a single teacher with support of a member of SLT to register the pupils upon arrival.

The centralised corrections system was a huge and significant change for us. It reduced staff workload dramatically, increased consistency and therefore improved behaviour as a result.

### **Golden Time**

On Fridays we have something called 'Golden Time', which runs from 15:15-16:00. All pupils who met our high expectations consistently throughout the week and have earned their credits leave at 15:15. Those that lost more than one per day remain in school. During this time, supported by a member of staff, pupils will undertake a reflection upon their behaviour and how to avoid repeating these actions. The combination of the achievement card and Golden Time have significantly improved behaviour and formed a foundation for a positive culture based on high expectations.

### **Staff duty**

We have staff on duty before school, after school and at break and lunch times.

At the beginning of the day during our morning line-up, tutors and a senior leader will check all pupils for uniform, including makeup and hair. We want our pupils to look

and feel professional. Any issues will be dealt with straight away before learning has even started. This prevents minor issues developing into bigger problems later in the day. It also means teachers can concentrate on teaching rather than behaviour.

The same expectations and sanctions apply outside of lessons as they do in the classroom. Our behaviour and exclusions policies make clear that pupils represent the school at all times and we have a right to challenge and discipline any inappropriate behaviours even outside of the school gates.

### **Mobile phones**

Ever since we opened in 2012 we've taken a tough stance on the use of mobile phones and electronic devices. We simply don't tolerate their use in school. All pupils know that they must be switched off and kept out-of-sight in their bags until they leave the school gates at the end of the day.

If a mobile phone is seen or heard it will be confiscated. This is rigorously enforced. Initially it will be confiscated for a day and then up to a week or until it is collected by a parent. We don't have an outright ban on mobile phones, not because we're ideologically against having one, but rather we don't have an issue with phones that would currently warrant it.

In my mind, phones and electronic devices have no place in the classroom and can only serve as an unwarranted distraction for pupils. We also run assemblies to discourage their use at home when studying or revising.

### **Red lines**

At BFS we have very clear and simple red lines. Fixed-term exclusions are issued for swearing at any member of staff, refusing to comply with a member of SLT, or persistent breaches of the Code of Conduct. Following any exclusion, the readmission meeting focuses on the Code of Conduct and how pupils can prevent the situation from occurring again. We feel that fixed-term exclusions are a useful tool in our wider behaviour toolkit. If things do go wrong, we

work with families to resolve them, and always take action so that we can guarantee to pupils that they are able to learn productively at BFS. Fundamentally parents choose our school because they know we are strict and don't tolerate poor behaviour.

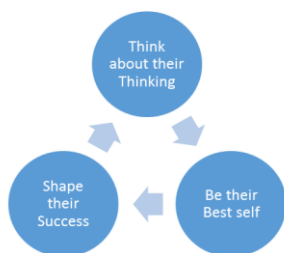
Our pupils thrive in the calm and purposeful environment created by the strong culture established at BFS. Clear systems and routines ensure consistency. Staff morale is high because teachers can teach and don't get bogged down in having to manage poor behaviour. As a result pupils achieve great outcomes. It's fair to say it's taken a number of years to get to this point but we'll continue to refine our policy to ensure we drive standards even higher and build upon the success we've already had.

# Stuart Gardner

## CEO, Thinking Schools Academy Trust

The Thinking Schools Academy Trust is made up of 17 schools in Kent, Medway and Portsmouth. We are consistently amongst the highest performing trusts for key stage 4 and key stage 5 progress, and 87% of our schools are rated as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted; we have recently sponsored five schools that are now rated as Good. Our trust serves a variety of communities with almost two-thirds of our schools having cohorts with higher than national levels of deprivation.

Our mission is to transform life chances. Every young person in our community deserves to have the best opportunities at life regardless of their individual circumstances. Education is the key to this, and we support and develop every member of our community to:



What makes our trust unique is our consistency in the embedded use of metacognitive tools - every school in the trust is working towards accreditation by Exeter University as a Thinking or an Advanced Thinking School.

As part of this accreditation, every school will choose the most appropriate metacognitive tools and approaches to support their students in their context, which may include approaches such as:

- Thinking Maps – developed by Dr David Hyerle
- Thinking Hats – by Edward De Bono
- Thinkers Keys – by Tony Ryan
- Habits of Mind – by Bena Kallick and Arthur Costa

These become the building blocks for all aspects of the school.

By creating schools that enable our students to think about their thinking, we are not only providing them with the cognitive tools to structure and analyse their thinking, but also building effective habits that will support them for the rest of their lives. In turn, these tools will enable students to visualise their best selves and give them tools to adapt their behaviour in order to achieve this. Ultimately, this enables students to have the power to shape their own success and break free from whatever chains may have held them back from achieving their true life potential.

This paper discusses approaches used by our trust as a whole, with focused examples from the work of The Victory Academy and The Portsmouth Academy.

### Intent

While schools in the trust create their own Behaviour for Learning policies to meet their individual needs and circumstances, there are some core elements that are common to all.

One of those is clear and consistent routines, such as lining up at the classroom door and putting all equipment onto desks. Younger students line up at the beginning of each day for uniform checks and for heads of year to reinforce expectations around classroom conduct.

It is important that all staff understand our “why”<sup>1</sup>. We believe that every young person in our community deserves to have the best opportunities at life regardless of their individual circumstances. A collective belief in this “why” is essential to a restorative pastoral system and emphasis on consistent use of metacognitive frameworks and language. Gaining staff buy-in is essential to bringing about success.

The practice that underpins our behaviour policy is restoration.<sup>2</sup>

We recognise that our students will sometimes make poor decisions and we take a restorative approach to low-level disruption and minor infractions. The onus is on the member of staff addressing the behaviour to set a restoration meeting during break or lunch. If the student

refuses this opportunity, they are referred to a one-hour detention after school (which is centrally held) where they reflect on their behaviour using 'thinking tools' that they have been taught. If the student is unwilling to take responsibility, their parent is invited to meet with a more senior member of staff after school and the detention is reset.

Some of the metacognitive tools of the Thinking School approach that we use overlap into the behaviour system, which helps to create a common language of learning and pastoral support. For example, some of our schools use the following Thinking Tool to assist students to reflect on a particular incident:



It is critical for students to reflect on the sequence of events and their part in the outcome. This approach allows us to support students to consider their own habitual responses<sup>3</sup> and the difficulties these may be causing them. Only by consciously prolonging the thinking time after the event to take control of their response, are students able to reach a better outcome in the future.

However, it is also acknowledged that this restorative approach is not appropriate in all circumstances, nor is it a silver bullet to reduce exclusions.<sup>4</sup>

Isolation and exclusion are used for more serious incidents to ensure that all students and staff are safe at school and able to engage in effective teaching and learning. As a trust, we are clear that students and staff should not expect to come to school and face physical harm or verbal abuse.

Internal isolation is used as a means to avoid external exclusion and keep students in school where curriculum work can be completed under the supervision of staff. In many of our schools students engage in community service activities and reflection as part of their time in isolation in addition to the curriculum work

they are expected to complete. In this way students are able to keep up with their learning and develop the skills and understanding to enable them to move away from disruptive, violent and inappropriate behaviours that prevent them from positively engaging with the school community.

Fixed-term exclusions support the safety and welfare of staff and students in the academy, and are supported by full reintegration meetings where further interventions are agreed with the parents to support the young person in school. This might be, for example, working through the 'My Chimp' book<sup>5</sup> with their child in order to support them to improve their self-regulation. Students who are excluded have access to online learning materials and receive welfare checks from the academy.

Permanent exclusions are used as a last resort, where having the student remain on site could seriously harm the safety and welfare of either staff or students or where there are no further interventions available in a mainstream setting that would effect change in a young person's behaviour. In these instances we will work closely with other schools to try to achieve an alternative and more positive outcome than a permanent exclusion, to allow students fresh starts within alternative academic settings.

### Implementation

The school rules, and the sanctions associated with each of them, are published in the form of a behaviour tariff system on the website, so that expectations are crystal clear. Exhibiting one of the 'habits of excellence' we highlight as a trust earns points for students. In some schools parents are encouraged to download the 'My Ed' app so that if their child either gains a positive habit point, or loses one for breaking a school rule, they receive this information instantly.

Research into the teenage brain has been drawn upon in terms of the design and implementation of the policy, and staff and students are trained to understand that the teenage brain is going through the greatest period of rewiring since toddlerhood. Students

are given models of how the brain works and learn to recognise different ways in which the brain might respond to situations (for example, a 'red hat'<sup>6</sup> or a 'chimp brain'<sup>7</sup> response). They use thinking maps to deconstruct what happened in order to help them to develop the habit of empathy, which is a cognitive skill associated with older people.

Our schools use a variety of approaches to log behaviours. For example, at The Portsmouth Academy every week, every child is given their habit point score. They start the year with 10 points in credit, and if they drop below 0 it will trigger pastoral interventions designed to get them back on track.

Points mean access to special opportunities such as visiting a theme park in the summer term, and they also contribute to house competitions, with the winning house getting an extra-curricular opportunity such as ice-skating. The Victory Academy uses a school shop where students can trade their behaviour points for rewards that are chosen through our school council and student voice systems.

Responding to its own particular needs, the Executive Principal of the Victory Academy, Mandy Gage, created a bespoke habit of mind called 'bounceability', which rewards students for learning from their mistakes and not being defined by them.

When we sponsored the Victory Academy following a re-brokerage the school was in a very challenging position. The previous school/s on the site had not achieved a 'Good' Ofsted rating in living memory, behaviour was poor, student progress and outcomes were in the bottom 10% of schools nationally, staff turnover was high and, despite a new building, the previous sponsor had not been able to turn the school around. The school served a highly deprived local community in a selective area; it was both in the top 10% of schools for levels of deprivation and in the bottom 10% for prior attainment.

Bounceability was identified as an essential quality if we were to transform the school and positively impact on the life chances of the students. The school built a whole programme

of assemblies, rewards and events within the school to highlight the importance of 'bounceability' and to celebrate it whenever it was identified. The words 'bounce back' and 'bounceability' have become part of the language of the school and have enabled many students to improve and move on from their previous mistakes rather than becoming trapped in downward spiral of negative behaviour and increasingly punitive sanctions.

In our secondary schools we have created a single area for all student services, which ensures students can clearly delineate support services from the rest of the school. This has been very effective in ensuring students are able to access the support they need and that all staff supporting students can easily share information and work collaboratively with students. The impact of this approach has been recognised by Ofsted, who reported: "Sensible reorganisation by leaders brought together a range of provision into the 'Student Services' area. This provides a calm and reassuring environment."

There are also some 'red lines' in some of our schools which students know they must not cross, such as bringing drugs or weapons into school. There is very little tolerance in these areas because school must operate as a safe space, protected from the influence of the behaviour cultures students may find beyond the school gates.

We have also spent significant sums of money on CCTV systems in some of our schools to ensure that parents and students can see the behaviours for which they are being sanctioned. This helps students to overcome the denial of their behaviours, as only by owning their behaviour is there a chance of improvement over time.

### **Impact**

The Portsmouth Academy has been used as an example of excellent practice and the Victory Academy is often held as an example of strong inclusive practice to other schools. Both have been commended by the local authority for their approach.



Many of our school leaders work collaboratively with local schools and the local authority. For example, the executive headteacher of the Victory Academy sits on the alternative provision steering group and works in collaboration with other schools to secure shared practice that is appropriate for all learners. The Victory Academy is also working with another local secondary school on an effective transition project, funded by the Arts Council and the local authority, with a clear focus on using the arts to engage students in their learning, reduce exclusions and improve attendance.

We are there to help students become their best self and that we recognise that this is a journey, supporting them to earn their way back into credit and rewarding them for their efforts. This makes them value their school: for example, attendance at The Portsmouth Academy is now at the national average, which is a great achievement considering that the school is in the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for its deprivation indicator. The school also has the second lowest exclusion rate in Portsmouth and very few students receiving their education off-site, or indeed having alternative provision on-site.

The impact of our approach to behaviour can be seen in schools previously in Special Measures that could be unsafe for students and staff, which have been transformed into schools where positive behaviour is valued and strived for.

Take this excerpt from the 2016 Ofsted report for The Portsmouth Academy, which was sponsored by Thinking schools in 2013 after going into Special Measures:

“The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils’ conduct, in lessons and around the school, at break and lunchtimes, is excellent. Behaviour has improved since the last inspection and school processes ensure that any incidents are dealt with quickly and efficiently. Pupils are clear about the consequences and sanctions associated with specific actions. There are very few incidents of bullying and when it does occur it is dealt with appropriately by staff. The systematic approach to behavioural issues is

reducing the number of incidents of poor behaviour. Pupils are choosing to focus on receiving a positive school reward, ‘habits of excellence’ rather than a negative ‘demerit’. This is increasing the number of pupils celebrating success at the end of every term.”

### **The Future**

As a trust we continue to reflect on the work that remains to be done to get our behaviour systems as strong as we would like it them to be; one of the main challenges we face is lack of support from some parents around the ‘small’ things like uniform, equipment and punctuality. We recognise that we need a better parental engagement strategy to build stronger relationships. We would also like to invest in technology to enable parents to access their children’s creative ‘outputs’, so they can praise their children for their efforts and be more involved with the school curriculum - no matter their prior attainment or barriers in terms of attendance and/or behaviour.

The main challenge we continue to face is a lack of societal, media and political support for schools to be trusted to maintain appropriate expectations of behaviour and apply sanctions when this is not acceptable. The ongoing public debate around exclusions has not been broadly supportive of this.

Unfortunately, many schools seem to be inaccurately presented as excluding students on a whim and at far higher rates than previously, while little or no recognition is given to the enormous amount of work schools do to keep students in mainstream education. This means that students and parents are further emboldened to challenge schools when they apply sanctions and consequences for student behaviours.

The public debate does not recognise that exclusions as a proportion of the student population have changed little over the last decade. While the proportion of students permanently excluded from schools hit a low between 2012 and 2014 at six students per 10,000, in 2006/7 this figure was 12 per 10,000

and in 2016/17 (the latest available figures) it was 10 students per 10,000.

It is a similar story for fixed-term exclusions. In 2006/07 the proportion of students receiving a fixed-term exclusion was 5.66% while in 2016/17 it was 4.76%.

It is essential that all stakeholders understand that permanent exclusions are rare and have been relatively stable over the longer term. We must avoid knee-jerk reactions to misleading headlines and the damaging unintended consequences that could arise from changing exclusion policies.

In conclusion, our advice to other school leaders would be:

Be clear with students and staff about the behaviour you will not accept. Staff and students need to feel supported and safe.

Be consistent and stick to your policy once it is in place; any system needs time to bed in and changing the behaviour of some students is a long-term project with few quick wins. However, perpetually changing your system is guaranteed to fail to make the changes you hope for.

Focus on celebrating and nurturing the positive behaviours rather than reducing the negative behaviours. The aim is to create a holistic culture where students want to engage positively with their learning and behave well. While this can be very challenging, it is also a very rewarding culture to work within.

Footnotes:

1. *The Golden Circle*, Simon Sinek
2. There has been much research to support this approach including: *The Use and Effectiveness of AntiBullying Strategies in Schools*. Fran Thompson and Peter K. Smith, Goldsmiths, University of London (2010); *An evaluation of Bristol RAiS*. Layla Skinns, Natasha Du Rose and Mike Hough, ICPR, King's College London (2009); *The Restorative Classroom: Using Restorative Approaches to Foster Effective Learning*. Belinda Hopkins

(2011); *Building and Restoring Respectful Relationships in Schools: A Guide to Restorative Practice*. Richard Hendry (2009); *Mediation and Restoration in Circle Time*. Teresa Bliss (2008). *Restorative Solutions: Making it Work*. Colin Newton and Helen Mahaffey (2008); *Just Schools: A Whole School Approach To Restorative Justice*. (2004) Belinda Hopkins.

3. *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg
4. Catherine H. Augustine, John Engberg, Geoffrey E. Grimm, Emma Lee, Elaine Lin Wang, Karen Christianson, Andrea A. Joseph.
5. *My Chimp* is a student-friendly version of *The Chimp Paradox*, by Professor Steve Peters
6. *Six Thinking Hats*, Edward de Bono
7. *The Chimp Paradox*, Professor Steve Peters

# Cassie Young

## Head of School, Brenzett C of E Primary School

**Brenzett** is a small, rural Church of England primary school, for up to 140 children aged 4 to 11, serving the Romney Marsh area south of Ashford.

As of 01 October 2016 we became an academy under the Diocese of Canterbury's Academy Trust, Aquila. Our acts of worship reflect Anglican beliefs, practices and values and we strive to maintain a distinctive Christian ethos and feel to our school.

The teaching staff currently comprises four teachers in addition to the executive headteacher and Head of School/SENCo. An experienced team of teaching assistants, including some trained to higher level, works alongside the teachers.

The school, which has capacity for 140 pupils, currently has 75 pupils on roll, which represents a 40% increase over the past 18 months. Eleven per cent of pupils are from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

The school is due its first Ofsted as a new school in the Autumn term of 2019.

Our behaviour policy reflects our Christian values of friendship, trust, compassion, forgiveness, community and respect. We have worked incredibly hard to ensure that expectations are explicit and modelled at all levels of leadership and by the whole school community.

When the new senior leadership team started in April 2017, it was very clear that there were huge inconsistencies and misunderstandings of the fundamental expectations set out in the policy. It was therefore re-written and step-by-step guidance was set out in staff meetings, to diminish any ambiguity.

The policy was then sent out to parents along with a home-school agreement, with a request that it be shared with their children and a consent form signed, to support any decisions the school would make in regard to behaviour management. This clarified the school's standpoint and ensured that all parties were

clear on the steps we would take to maintain the school as a calm, purposeful and nice place to learn, for staff and pupils alike.

We currently use a very simple 'traffic light' system of red, amber and green, alongside hand signals as non-verbal cues to support our SEN pupils. Our expectations in behaviour are the same for all pupils, and those that need support are given the tools, resources or strategies to support this.

We introduced a system called 'FUEL' in response to low-level disruption across classrooms and a lack of engagement and responses from children when asked questions. This stands for:

- Face the speaker
- Understand
- Engage and respond
- Listen carefully

Our FUEL poster is visible across the school, in classrooms, hallways and meeting rooms. At the beginning of each of the six terms per year, the behaviour policy and the FUEL system are revisited to ensure that we are explicit in our expectations at all times. Additionally, staff carry the policy with them at all times, reminding children if needed.

Higher level incidents are dealt with swiftly and in the same way every time. Parents are called in immediately for a meeting with a member of SLT, the family liaison officer and the class teacher. The pupils are placed in isolation with appropriate work to ensure that their learning is not affected.

This process has reduced the number of serious incidents hugely, in a relatively short space of time. Year-on-year comparisons show that high-level incidents have decreased by 90% according to our safeguarding and behaviour reporting system.

Exclusions of any type are probably the hardest part of running a school. I'm yet to meet a leader who finds this decision easy to make. But working in a dual role of Head of School and SENCo, I have to make decisions based both on the individual pupil level and the effect on the school community as a whole.

Fixed-term exclusions are a last resort and we follow a really robust reintegration process, supported by the local authority's Attendance and Inclusion Officer. Fortunately, over two years, we have had to fixed-term exclude only two pupils for a combined period of 12 days in total. These children are now in full-time attendance at school and closing the academic gap with their peers.

Our main driver for school improvement with regard to behaviour is positivity and positive reinforcement. However, there was a tendency initially for staff to reward children every time they did what was expected.

Short term, this had a good impact, but now the children are seeing the benefit of expected behaviour, it has become an intrinsic reward. The children know that there are long- and short-term benefits to good behaviour and we use lots of role modelling to reinforce this throughout the school.

Children need to be 'consistently green' in the traffic light system in order to join an end-of-term celebration with their classmates and we use weekly assembly to celebrate those short-term achievements with a certificate. This ensures that everyone has an opportunity to achieve success and this has been a catalyst for change.

Using a weekly meeting between the SLT and 'always green' children, has also been an opportunity to empower those children that are role models for attitude and behaviour. The children are invited to share a drink, their work and what they think is working well or could be improved across the school.

The overarching goals for the school are that we can go about our day in a calm, purposeful and positive way. Everyone benefits and everyone can now see the school is a very different place compared to two years ago. Feedback from our recent staff wellbeing survey suggests that they are more confident that they can teach free from disruption, and pupil feedback suggests that the children feel safe and secure to learn.

We are very firm with our expectations but our pastoral team work incredibly hard to ensure that this is done in a warm, nurturing and

inclusive way. Our wrap-around care for families has been vital in ensuring that the children come into school ready to learn. The family liaison officer works tirelessly with our harder-to-reach families and we will provide any support necessary to make school a safe and supportive place to come to.

The new behaviour system has had a hugely positive impact on the majority of pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and with SEN.

As SENCO, I've had to really think about how we ensure our SEN pupils are supported in both strategies and interventions to reach their full potential. Previously, SEN students were taught outside of the classroom by unqualified staff, with little-to-no interaction with their own class teacher. Not only was this upsetting, but also denied children access to quality-first teaching and went against the code of conduct for SEN pupils.

The decision was made (pretty rapidly!) that no interventions would take place during core subjects and no children would be taught outside the classroom. The expectation on all our pupils is the same, regardless of need. All staff attend our pupil progress meetings and devise strategies and support to ensure that, while making reasonable adjustments, all pupils are free from distraction and capable of being taught in an inclusive environment.

The parents are now fully informed of the purpose behind our behaviour policy, the consistent strategies and consequences we use. They previously would not engage with the school staff or approach staff to talk through any enquiries or provide feedback, whether positive or negative.

When realigning our expectations we asked for parent feedback, making it clear that we were not asking for their voice as a box-ticking exercise, but genuinely wanted their views and feed this into our changing ethos. This was achieved by informal discussions, forming a Parents and Friends Association, and changing the way parents' evenings were conducted. They now use the format of 'collaborative conversations', in which the parents are asked three questions:

- What are your child's strengths?
- What are your child's weaknesses?
- What would you like your child to achieve?

This gives us a really clear indication of parental aspirations and builds stronger relationships between the teacher and the family, which empowers us to have more robust conversations about behaviour, if needed, in the future.

When we updated the Positive Behaviour Policy we attached the home-school agreement to a letter that we sent out to all families. It had a consent form where they needed to confirm that they had read, understood and shared the policy with their children. We got them to resign the home-school agreement in order that we had a really clear understanding of expectations of everyone across the school community. We ensured that everyone signed up – taking the time to chase up families who hadn't got around to returning slips.

By having a really clear behaviour policy it also makes it easy for staff to see when they are following it and when they are not – and as a result we now have less confusion and clearer accountability too.

As a result of the growing reputation of the school, we are in the happy position whereby children are now joining us all year around. This presents a challenge, as it is one thing starting the school year with assemblies, etc. to remind everyone of how we do things, but now we have new pupils regularly, and they need to be inducted into how we do things.

We've done two main things to address this. All classes get an in-depth reminder of everything at the start of every half term – which is never a bad thing anyway – but also, the families of all new starters in-between receive and are talked through the key documents so that parents and their children can start on day one knowing how we operate.

Onboarding our pupils so they can make a smooth transition into the school is so important for both them and their classmates and teachers. It really is making a difference – and not just for the new pupils. The children in

the class they're joining benefit as it makes for less disruption. For example, a child recently joined us from an alternative provision, and as a result of the work we did with them and their family, they made a transformational start to their time with us.

I knew that in order to make a success of the higher expectations of everyone I needed to be able to take families with me. And the timing of the change was key. I had to have built good enough relationships with the community, and given everyone enough time to absorb what we were going to do, that when we made the change they would support it. Remember, the whole school was so fragile when I took over, and people had already seen too much instability, that we had to make it work and keep kids in the school so they'd see the benefits.

# Richard Tutt & Mark Adams

## Principal & Vice Principal, Magna Academy

**Magna Academy** is an 11-18 sponsored academy, which opened on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2013. The predecessor school had been in special measures. It is a non-selective school in a highly selective coastal area, with two grammar schools within walking distance. Our intake is made up of predominantly white, working-class students with significantly below national average key stage 2 attainment on entry. The local area has a history of low aspirations.

Since it opened, Magna Academy has achieved two consecutive Ofsted Outstanding judgments (in 2015 and 2018), accreditation as a National Teaching School and National Support School, and a Progress 8 score of +1.15 in 2018, placing it 24<sup>th</sup> nationally.

Despite being a secondary modern in a selective borough, the mindset at Magna Academy is one of being a “grammar school for all”. Staff are unapologetically ambitious for every child, no matter what their background, prior attainment or needs. Every decision and action is taken with a view to supporting every student to climb their personal mountain - whether to university or an equally aspirational alternative - and ultimately, so that they might thrive in a fulfilling job and have a great life.

Magna’s 2018 Ofsted report stated: “The principal and his senior team are very ambitious for pupils. They are passionate about improving the achievement of everyone. They are absolutely committed to ensuring that pupils leave with the qualifications and personal qualities that will allow them to be successful in their future lives.”

We believe that schools must teach powerful knowledge, defined as the best that has been thought and said. In the words of the academic

Michael Young, we believe in an “entitlement curriculum” for all, with an underpinning philosophy that “education for all should confer the benefits associated with education for the rich”.<sup>1</sup> We believe that educational success is the passport to prosperity and long life, so nothing must be allowed to subvert it.

Underpinning everything at Magna is the creation of a scholarly culture that is warm and strict, disciplined and joyful, where there is purpose not power, ensuring impeccable behaviour where teachers can focus on teaching and pupils, on learning. We passionately believe in a culture of no excuses. And that is because we believe that the alternative to a no-excuses school is a “some excuses” school, where we accept different standards for different pupils. “No excuses discipline works for pupils. It means all pupils can go beyond the circumstances of their birth to be whatever they want to be.”<sup>2</sup>

The intent behind our behaviour policy and systems is to ensure that all learning is disruption-free, so that no learning time is stolen by those who may choose to disrupt. This allows teachers to impart their knowledge to the pupils, efficiently and effectively, without the fear of interruption to the flow of the lesson.

Ofsted recognised this in their most recent inspection, stating: “The Principal ensures that there is complete clarity about the school’s aims and ways of working. No one, from leaders and teachers through to pupils joining the school, is under any doubt as to expectations of them. This ensures that school systems are consistent and firmly embedded.”

Our overarching mantra at Magna is “Climbing the Mountain to University”; we expect all of our pupils to be able to attend university or follow an equally aspirational path. Without disruption-free learning, this becomes increasingly difficult, especially for our more vulnerable pupils or those with special

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<sup>1</sup> Young, M. and D. Lambert with C. Roberts (2014) *Knowledge and the Future School: Curriculum and Social Justice*. London: Bloomsbury, p.150

<sup>2</sup> Porter, J. (2016) *No Excuses Discipline Works*. Available at <https://mcsbrent.co.uk/humanities-24-04-2016-no-excuses-discipline-works/>

educational needs. Each year group arrives significantly below the national average for key stage 2 attainment. If we are to achieve our mission, pupils need to make exceptional progress from their starting points, and this will not be achieved without an embedded scholarly culture of excellence.

Another of our mantras is “Treat Staff like Platinum”, which is over-communicated to pupils and fosters an extremely respectful environment that supports staff wellbeing. We adapted this mantra from Amistad Academy in the US.

### Changing the school

The predecessor school to Magna Academy was in special measures with a dysfunctional culture, where it was most certainly not “cool” to be seen to be working hard. As part of our journey from opening in September 2013, replacing the predecessor school, the systems we have developed have been much influenced by research, reading and visits to other schools. We have outlined some examples of our reading below.

Reading *Headstrong* by Dame Sally Coates back in 2015 was very inspirational for us. Dame Sally Coates cites Doug Lemov: “...a dysfunctional school being like a bucket of crabs, where the crabs at the bottom pull down the one or two crabs which have the audacity to seek a better life beyond the bucket. A good school is a bucket of crabs in reverse.”<sup>3</sup>

The following quotes from Dame Sally also had a profound impact on us: “...you don’t have to work in challenging schools for long to realise the poignancy of the old maxim that order liberates; that structure allows freedom,”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Coates, Dame S. with S. Adcock and M. Ribton (2015) *Headstrong*. Melton: John Catt Educational Ltd, p.162

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p.231

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p.241

<sup>6</sup> Didau, D. (2019) *Making Kids Cleverer: A manifesto for closing the advantage gap*. Carmarthen, Wales: Crown House Publishing Limited, p.53

and: “The difference between the culture required in a challenging school with that of a more affluent school is the difference between the intensive care ward and physiotherapy ward of a hospital.”<sup>5</sup>

David Didau, entertainingly, outlines the importance of strong behaviour systems alongside a knowledge-rich curriculum: ‘As information diverges from its folk knowledge base, it becomes increasingly harder for us to wrap our heads around it. We easily fall prey to naïve misconceptions and get frustrated at the tedious practice needed to master secondary knowledge. This is why schools need rules and well-administered behaviour systems; without these things, children – especially teenagers – are likely to drift off into those activities which come naturally and induce more pleasure, such as chatting, twanging rulers, looking at cat memes on the internet and trying to get off with each other’.<sup>6</sup>

Whitman in *Sweating the Small Stuff*<sup>7</sup> and Thernstrom in *No Excuses*<sup>8</sup>, both outline the approach of very successful US Charter schools, which have also provided us with much inspiration. Thernstrom states that the best schools work hard to instil “desire, discipline and dedication”. Disciplined behaviour and disciplined work go hand in hand. They outline that students were taught from an early age that every minute spent on learning was a minute bought towards achieving their college dream.

Schools that have a strong aspirational culture ensure that students receive a continual message that nothing is as important as learning. Every minute of every day is spent on building good habits. Such cultures are created by continually “sweating the small stuff”. If we

<sup>7</sup> Whitman, D. (2008) *Sweating the Small Stuff: Inner-City Schools and the New Paternalism*. Washington: Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

<sup>8</sup> Thernstrom, A. and Thernstorm, S. (2003) *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

concentrate on getting the tiniest of details right, the harder challenges become easier.

### **Implementing the behaviour system**

Zero tolerance, as it is applied at Magna, means zero tolerance for poor behaviour in lessons after reasonable adjustments have been made; it does not mean we do not support students with underlying issues or problems. If you adopt any other than a zero-tolerance approach in this sense, then you are by definition permitting some disruption to learning. What right have we got to deny any pupil a full, knowledge-rich, uninterrupted education?

We operate a simple cumulative behaviour points system backed up with a sanction threshold ladder, including head-of-year detentions, SLT detentions, Saturday detentions and academy-based exclusions.

The points system applies to all behaviour infractions in and out of the classroom, is understood by all pupils, and is applied consistently by all teachers and support staff. Uniform is strictly adhered to, mobile phones have to be kept switched off and in bags.

Alongside this, we have a comprehensive rewards system, which was developed in partnership with our Student Leadership Team. This includes the highly coveted Zero Hero badges, which are awarded to pupils who manage to go one term (Bronze Award), two terms (Silver Award) and the whole academic year (Gold Award) without receiving any demerits.

Pupils who disrupt the learning in the classroom in any way are removed immediately by patrol and escorted to our Behaviour Correction Centre (BCC) where they will self-quiz in what we call the “natural state” (silence) for the rest of that lesson, followed by a same-day detention. Failing to complete homework also results in a same-day detention.

Incidents that are more serious may result in at least one day in the BCC, where pastoral support is always available for those pupils

who need it. This is not isolation; it is removal and support when necessary.

To ensure there is support where and when it is needed we employ highly specialist support, including a social worker, a professional counsellor, an ex-police community support officer and a highly experienced pastoral manager, alongside heads of year. Ofsted has noted that “school leaders work hard to match the school’s high levels of challenge with high levels of support”.

We currently have a problem with gangs and accompanying anti-social behaviour within our local community and have to make sure that not even a semblance of this culture enters or is fostered within the academy. The street must stop at the gate. Our strict, zero-tolerance approach, backed up by the consistent application of our behaviour policy ensures this.

Fixed-term exclusion is part of a school's toolkit to deal with, and act as a deterrent to, poor behaviour. We use it when it is deemed necessary. Permanent exclusion is only used as a last resort.

All staff are provided with support from SLT at all times; we never apportion blame on a teacher for poor behaviour within a lesson. Our teachers feel fully supported and we make their well-being a priority in all aspects of academy life. We see this as a form of servant leadership.

Overall, our approach is warm-strict, in that we do not tolerate any form of poor behaviour or disrespect but go above and beyond to support pupils should they need it, alongside building warm relationships. This was recognised fully during the most recent Ofsted inspection, where inspectors noted that “leaders provide a very high level of support for vulnerable students”.

### **The Results**

The impact of our behaviour policy and systems has resulted in a calm, scholarly and purposeful environment where teaching is uninterrupted and the vast majority of our



pupils are able to perform at their best lesson after lesson.

Ofsted noted, "School leaders have made their expectations of the highest standards of discipline clear. [...] Since the principal adopted this approach, standards have risen and number of pupils on role has substantially increased". Also that "pupils' conduct is very good. They treat each other with warmth. They are respectful towards adults. Disruption in lessons is very rare."

Pupils with special educational needs thrive in the calm, scholarly atmosphere. Progress 8 for SEN students in 2017-18 was +1.16, slightly higher than their non-SEN peers. Disadvantaged students achieved +1.05, approximately 1.5 grades higher across all subjects than pupils with the same prior attainment nationally.

The vast majority of parents have been very supportive and have seen the dramatic impact it has had on their child. This can be illustrated by some parent quotes:

"My child was bullied very badly at junior school. This has completely changed at Magna. Things are much safer with silent transition, line-ups and the well-being room. My child is very happy here and making great progress." (Parent of a Year 8).

"The attention to detail at Magna, both in and out of lessons helps my child so much. His reading and handwriting is unrecognisable since he started in Year 7. His progress over two years has been amazing, we are very pleased." (Parent of a Year 9).

The community have also seen the difference as well:

"The change in behaviour in the community has been remarkable. The students seem to be completely different now." (Local shopkeeper, October 2014).

"As a local resident of Canford Heath for 27 years, I would just like to say a big thank you for the changes you have made to the school... it's a pleasure to see the pupils from your school, looking tidy, respectful and generally

bringing credit to where they have been going to. You really have made the whole place outstanding. So well done to you and your staff." (Local resident, February 2015).

"Your students gave up their seat for my little girl and another helped us get off safely as I had a lot to carry and a buggy. I would just like today how lovely it was that the children were so well mannered and are a credit to your school." (Local resident, March 2016).

The reputation of the academy in the community has dramatically improved, and it has been oversubscribed for the last four years. The school opened with 542 students, now has over 840 students and is projected to grow to 1100.

Staff are happy and feel supported; there is very little staff absence and minimal staff turnover. Teaching is consistently of a very high quality, enabling our pupils to learn and successfully retain and apply information over time. This has resulted in very high outcomes with an overall progress 8 score in 2017-18 of +1.15, placing Magna 24<sup>th</sup> in England for this measure.

We only apply systems and structures when they will have the biggest impact in terms of pupil outcomes and well-being. Silent transition between lessons and line-ups are prime examples of this.

### **Dealing with criticism**

A very small minority of parents have previously claimed that our systems are too inflexible. We maintain that you simply cannot have flexibility when you have a relatively short time-window in which to secure pupils' life chances. Certain external commentators have criticised our high expectations and standards of discipline. They are, of course, free to express their views but we consider these views to be based on a misplaced conception of pupil agency.

### **How the system has evolved**

We are constantly reviewing how we can improve through visiting schools all over the country, attending ResearchED conferences

and learning through Twitter. Operations of the academy are also systematically reviewed every six weeks, which help inform the next six weekly cycle of CPD.

The behaviour policy in its current form has evolved significantly over the past five years. For example, it is has moved from a “behaviour for learning” to a “behaviour for character” policy.

We have added de-merit points to help address lack of effort, poor presentation of work and lack of attention (e.g. not tracking the person who is speaking with your eyes), and in this system we have staff rehearse and practice the use of reasonable adjustments for pupils with SEN or specific vulnerabilities.

Another recent example has been the introduction of Doug Lemov’s *Teach Like A Champion* technique “Brighten Lines”, to help further tighten up instructions and transitions in lessons.

The search for absolute consistency in application is always our aim, and deliberate practice is central to achieving this. We hold weekly ‘Deliberate Practice’ sessions (influenced by Lemov) where staff, including support staff, can practice application through role-play, supported by microscripts and ‘What To Do’ sheets providing detailed narratives for staff. This particular form of professional development is well received.

The behaviour philosophy and policy has been successfully adapted by our sister school, Atlantic Academy, in Portland, an all-through 3-16 academy previously in special measures, which has become one of the top 10 most improved schools in the country.

### **What’s next?**

A key focus of our current work is on significantly improving reading ages and vocabulary development, which we believe is crucial to further improving behaviour in the future.

As a secondary modern school, many of our pupils arrive with readings ages significantly below their chronological age, some as low as five. To help address this, we have invested heavily in implementing Engelmann’s Direct Instruction programme, together with techniques from Lemov’s *Reading Reconsidered* and Murphy’s *Thinking Reading*<sup>9</sup> programme. These programmes, together with a knowledge-rich curriculum, are helping to rapidly improve reading ages and help prevent future serious behavioural issues.

We are also looking at further developing our rewards system, as part of our “disciplined and joyful” culture. We have been inspired by the values and rewards systems from Ark King Solomon Academy, US KIPP Schools and the US Charter School Amistad Academy. We are therefore considering use of whole-class half termly rewards, and ways in which pupils can qualify for an extensive programme of residential trips. We are also reflecting on the development of a set of values to underpin these rewards, inspired by the five “REACH Values” from Amistad Academy in the US: Respect, Enthusiasm, Achievement, Citizenship and Hard Work.

### **Advice to other school leaders**

We would advise any other school or trust wanting to implement a similar behaviour approach to consider which aspects to implement first and when. The Magna system was introduced initially to deal with the legacy disruptive behaviour from the predecessor school. It can evolve over time as behaviour improves and can be refined to deal with certain behaviours or culture shifts where necessary.

Ofsted praised us for taking such an adaptive approach, saying: “Leaders are quick to review and revise their systems and structures when they feel they are not delivering what they need. For example, last year they reorganised how they provide pastoral support. They introduced year heads, to make sure pupils

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<sup>9</sup> Murphy, J. and Murphy, D. (2018) *Thinking Reading: What Every Secondary Teacher*

*Needs to Know About Reading*. Melton: John Catt Educational Ltd, p 89

were given the support they needed. This has improved the quality of support that pupils receive.”

We have also found that it is very useful to pilot significant changes in July, ahead of a full roll-out in September. We did this with such changes as silent transitions and line-ups.

It is vital that the impact of any changes on outcomes is monitored carefully. Staff and student buy-in is also crucial: without complete staff buy-in the necessary consistency of application will not materialise or be sustainable; without pupil buy-in they will lose faith in the system which, after all, is implemented for their benefit.

We have also learned that it is advantageous to continually ‘over-narrate’ to all stakeholders why changes are being made and their purpose. For every change, we have found that it is beneficial to explain four or five reasons for the changes.

We have learned from leading free schools about the importance of ‘Purpose not power.’ Therefore, we will never ask children to do things to show we are in control or in a position of authority. For example: we don't walk in silence down the corridor because it makes the teacher feel powerful, we do so because walking in a straight, silent line is the most efficient way of getting from one place to another, so it helps to maximise every minute of learning. We also believe that it supports our most vulnerable children and helps keep them safe.

‘Leaders insist pupils walk silently between lessons so that they arrive on time and ready to learn at their next lesson. Pupils generally follow this rule diligently. Some pupils, for example some who have special educational needs, feel reassured by the calm atmosphere generated by this approach’ (OFSTED, 2018).

We believe that in a turnaround situation, implementation of strong behaviour policies from the outset are crucial, but will invariably attract negative publicity in the press and on

social media. We believe it is important to be prepared for this, but also to be brave and do what you consider to be in the best interests of your school community and to ‘hold the line.’ This is critical.

As Dame Sally Coates said, “The headteacher in a failing school has to be the bravest of the brave, visibly leading the charge, flying the flag for your SLT and your teachers to follow. Failing schools can’t be cajoled back into life, they have to be pummelled into shape. Throughout the transformative process the leader is exposed, open to criticism, ridicule and blame. You have to be completely professional.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Coates, S. et al, 2015, p.36

# Character education: what is it and what can we do?

A reflection by Ian Bauckham CBE, CEO of Tenax Trust, and Chair of DfE Character Advisory Group

## Is academic excellence enough?

Securing well-regarded, demanding and rigorous academic qualifications is a central and essential function of effective schools, and young people who have qualifications demonstrating mastery of foundational knowledge are more likely to be successful in future study, the workplace and life than those who do not. Those from the least advantaged backgrounds are least likely to achieve these qualifications, and so attention has quite rightly been focussed on how to close that opportunity gap.

However, there are behavioural and character traits which, taken together with academic progress and knowledge mastery, are also predictive of future success and thriving in the fullest sense. Identifying what these traits are, and working out how best systematically to impart them to all young people, is the task of the Secretary of State's 'Character Advisory Group', which I am currently chairing. In this short piece I offer some as yet non-conclusive thoughts on this topic, and in particular on how character and resilience development links with the wider school climate that we who work in or lead schools set out to foster, including that pertaining to behaviour expectations.

## What does character actually mean? Some tentative definitions

Part of the challenge of this work is one of language and definitions. 'Character' is a notoriously nebulous word that has almost as many different meanings as it does users, and 'resilience' is easy to use but sometimes harder to define. If as a school system we are going to work systematically to improve the work we do in this area, we need to talk a common language. So here goes.

Resilience is a collection of personal character attributes which make someone more likely to be able to remain motivated by a distant goal and its associated rewards, and less likely to change course, lower aspirations or give up when an obstacle or setback is encountered. It is associated with a set of beliefs about one's ability to reach a distant or demanding goal which are often referred to as 'self-efficacy' beliefs. Together resilience and self-efficacy are a central aspect of character. Sometimes the term 'grit' is used as a shorthand for this, notably for example by Angela Duckworth in her work on this subject.

Character also encompasses a set of personal qualities which are predictive not only of future success but also of future human thriving or flourishing, happiness in its fullest sense. This ideal state is sometimes known as 'eudaemonia' (Greek for 'good-spiritness') by those working in the Aristotelian tradition, and the personal characteristics themselves as 'virtues'. These virtues can include things like integrity, courage, honesty, humility, generosity and so on. These traits or 'virtues' tend to help us integrate into society, contribute to the common life, be more likeable and easier to work with, and ultimately make us, in the deepest sense, more fulfilled.

While self-efficacy is related to confidence, another kind of self-confidence is also an important aspect of character. This is the kind of self-confidence which enables us to relate with others, move in a range of social settings with ease and poise, be persuasive and communicate effectively both with individuals and in front of audiences, and build networks and relationships with others which are helpful both to our security and sense of connectedness and also to our prospects. This might be called 'rhetoric' by some.

And that feeds into a final aspect of character which I want to highlight, an extension of our ability to form relationships, and that is the human need for commitment. Sustained and serious

commitments frame and stabilise lives. As David Brooks has noted in his book 'The Road to Character', happy and successful lives are framed by commitments to family, partner, vocation or career, community, faith or philosophy, and so on. The absence of a range of serious commitments in our life, or a failure to sustain such commitments and recognise their value, can lead to a sense of rootlessness, drift, lack of purpose, all of which can easily turn into an antisocial attitude and all the consequences that brings.

### **The academic curriculum and character**

If schools are truly to prepare young people for lives which are both successful and happy they must ensure that all young people have opportunities to see modelled, learn about, experience and practise all these aspects of character.

It is important to establish a firm link between the core activity of a school, the academic programme, and character. An academic programme that is based on teaching of a carefully planned and sequenced knowledge-based curriculum which focusses on teaching, practising and embedding foundational knowledge in order to give a sense of mastery and to equip students for the next stages of their learning, accompanied by an appropriately challenging and valid examination regime, itself is one of the most powerful tools for building resilience. That is simply because this kind of curriculum and its examination gives each student the confidence that they are as likely as the next person to be able to tackle each stage in the learning because they have been equipped with the knowledge and concepts they need for that next stage. They are less likely to give up if something is hard and more likely to be able to develop and hold to the idea that they can achieve excellence.

Conversely, a curriculum that has not identified the components of knowledge needed at each stage and which does not teach them in a logically sequenced way, or where 'learning' is the unthinking rehearsal of expert performance without systematically mastering the building-blocks of that performance, or which rewards pupils for poor performance through an insufficiently rigorous and demanding examinations regime, will tend, in the long term, to erode rather than build resilience. Pupils will be less well equipped to deal with the next stages of learning because they will not have mastered the foundational knowledge needed, so will be more likely to think of themselves as lacking ability and not able to achieve an aspirational or long term goal, leading to them giving up more readily.

Linked to the curriculum of course is pedagogy. Where a well-designed, segmented and sequenced curriculum is taught using effective pedagogy, in particular one which recognises the benefits of clear teacher up-front explanation and modelling, the need for the cognitive load to be properly managed to take account of the working and long term memory, the role of deliberate practice for automatising, then the well-designed curriculum can reach its full potential.

So resilience is built in part through an effective curriculum taught using evidence based pedagogy. The first thing a school should do if it wants to ensure that its pupils gain in resilience is to ensure that its approach to the curriculum is robust.

### **The importance of a strong whole-school behaviour ethos**

As we are particularly interested here in behaviour, it might be useful to reflect specifically on the relationship between behaviour expectations and character education. The first point to make is that the research in this area tells us the impact on behaviour is far greater when all aspects of school life are aligned in approach. Individual initiatives have their place but unless they are contributing to a consistent whole school approach they will be the weaker for it and probably unsustainable.

Learning to be 'of good character' is in many senses about a process of habituation. An expectation or a rule starts as something imposed from the outside and backed up with both explanation and

sanctions (why we expect this of you and what the consequences will be if you do not do it), but over time and with consistency and practice the expectation becomes part of the way the individual behaves; it becomes internalised. That is why establishing clear high standards of considerate and respectful behaviour in schools, embodying as many as possible of the range of aspects of character we considered above, is so important. If these expectations are consistently demanded and enforced, eventually they will become part of the individual's own character, and the need for constant enforcement will diminish (though rarely disappear altogether).

Behaviour understood in this way certainly starts with an establishment of the basics needed to live and work together in school: listening to teachers, refraining from disrupting the education of others, moving safely and respectfully around the school site, refraining from violence or theft, and so on. There can be no compromise, obviously, on this kind of expectation, and consistently enforced, these expectations become habituated and part of the young person's character.

Once these basics are established, however, there are good reasons for being more ambitious. We must always remember that our behaviour expectations in school are not just about making school 'survivable', they are about habituating behaviours which become part of character and serve us life-long. Thinking about virtues, for example, a consistent emphasis on the value of honesty, expecting and prizing it at all times, helps the young person to gain a sense of the value of that virtue. Likewise with humility: a consistent expectation that we acknowledge the role that others have played in our supposed achievements, or that we always practise the habit of constructive self-critique, however well we seem to be doing, and however much praise we attract, helps young people to habituate the virtue of humility and for it to become part of their character.

### **Beyond the taught curriculum**

Character is developed by everything a school does, and ensuring that all members of the school community to some extent at least have understand the wider aims of the school, beyond academic success, and know how they play a part. We must never overlook the importance of good teaching and good behaviour expectations in character formation.

Alongside these, beyond the normal programme of taught subjects, there are other aspects of school provision which can play a significant role. A key to their effectiveness is that the adults who lead these other aspects of provision, what I will call the 'co-curriculum', have a good level of understanding not only of the surface aims of what they are doing, but also the underlying purpose. If I am running a football team, for example, I am on the surface obviously teaching and practising football skills. But, more deeply, I am expecting, modelling and practising humility, courage, mutual dependence, courtesy, sustained commitment even when 'I don't feel like it', and so on. All co-curricular activities are the more powerful when those leading them know and can articulate these underlying aims as well.

Taking part in the arts, for example drama, at school also teaches, practises and habituates a range of aspects of character. Being part of a school play can build confidence in mixing with others, practise public speaking and persuasiveness, help us see the world from someone else's perspective and so encourage respect, help us practise overcoming obstacles as we move to a longer term goal, and practise humility.

The co-curriculum is an important place also for us to habituate what I will call a 'service orientation'. By this I mean a disposition which tends to focus attention on the needs of others, and to notice the change in myself when I focus on being of service to those who need my support. The individualism which dominates our culture of course has positives, as it allows me to make many choices which can shape my life. However, it also has negative consequences, and an unhealthy obsession with 'me', what I own and how others see me is conducive neither to good mental health nor to a sense of fulfilment. As places where character is developed, schools can create expectations for all young people to develop and practise service orientation. There are many ways

to do this. Some schools create an expectation that all pupils follow a Duke of Edinburgh programme, for example, which includes a requirement to offer service to an individual or an organisation over a sustained period. Offering service over a period of time is essential if the benefits are to be habituated – one-off activities are not likely to have the same effect. All the time we must remember that the purpose of service-giving is for the practice to move from the external and observable to the internal and character-altering.

At every stage, we must recognise of course that those who have the least prior access to all these opportunities are likely to need schools to ensure that they access them. That is not of course to say that the tough lives which some disadvantaged children cope with are not 'character-forming'. In many ways they are. But it is important that all young people are given access to the life-enhancing benefits of character education across all dimensions we have considered if character is going to serve as a driver of greater social equity.

### **Conclusion**

I conclude somewhat tentatively with what may seem like an exaggerated claim, but I offer it nonetheless. At a time when we are concerned as a country about what appears to be a rise in knife crime in some areas (though the picture on violent crime may not actually be quite what it might seem at first sight, once we look at the statistics), it may just be that re-focussing on character and behaviour as a way to habituate good behaviour and associated 'pro-social' attitudes, and as a way to re-engage a sense of purpose in service to others and commitment to something greater than myself offers a helpful way forward for society as well as helping individuals to lead more successful and fulfilled lives.



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