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## Children and Young People in School

A growing amount of evidence highlights the rise in the incidence of childhood disorders:

it is estimated that at least 10% of the school population in England is, at any one time, affected with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties ..., it is important to note that the overwhelming majority are to be found in mainstream schools. (Cooper, 2005)

There is an increase in 'acting out' disorders (behaviour/conduct disorders), as well as the 'acting in' emotional, mental health disorders (eating disorders, anxiety, depression, self-injury). Haggerty et al. (1996) spoke of 'many troubled families who share a multitude of risk factors', including genetic, biological and psychosocial factors, and that children suffer from these cumulative effects.

Whatever the explanation for these increases, there is hardly a teacher or support staff who does not recognise that they are faced with supporting an ever-increasing number of children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Schools make a significant difference for children with SEBD, and this book will give examples of how this can be achieved.

The first phase is essentially to have in place those factors that create the right school ethos. The second phase follows this through by setting up a school-wide behaviour team. The third phase is having in place an effective classroom behaviour plan. The fourth phase of the system is how to help learners who, despite the ethos, the school team and effective classroom management, have SEBD issues, and this phase will be the focus of the Toolbox.

The first three phases help the majority of learners engage successfully with the curriculum offered. Below is a brief account of what each of these phases might look like in an effective school.

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### Phase One – School Ethos

Some of the school factors that help create the right ethos are (Marzano, 2003):

- Professionalism – there is strong and purposeful leadership with shared values that supports cooperation between staff.
- Curriculum – ensuring that all learners have the opportunity to learn through a viable curriculum.
- Goals and feedback – having challenging academic goals for all learners with agreed teaching methods and good monitoring helps build a whole-school approach.

Home and community links – essentially there are three ingredients for the positive involvement of home and community:

- good communication systems
- opportunities for positive participation in activities
- a degree of influence in decision making.

### A Model Example

To establish the correct ethos, which is a fundamental aim of Phase One, the following steps could be undertaken by any school. If a secondary school has serious concerns regarding student behaviour, then the following steps could be a systematic plan to be undertaken over a three-year period.

The initial phase would test the current situation – ‘What are the attitudes of staff towards behaviour?’ A questionnaire would be used to determine staff views on such key aspects as:

- Does the staff believe that problem behaviour is caused by individuals, who have to be caught and punished? Or do they believe that staff should be proactive and plan strategies to prevent problem behaviour?
- Are the staff individualistic, believing that each member of staff has to depend on their own resources, or are they collaborative – believing in whole-school approaches?

A specific aim with regard to behaviour, would be to promote a belief in the staff that making mistakes and having to deal with the consequences is a common feature of managing behaviour. There are no simplistic solutions. Based on this initial data obtained, a whole-school development day would be planned to explore and establish core values.

### Phase Two – School-wide Behaviour Team

The second phase is for the school to set up a school-wide behaviour team that manages behavioural issues. The most successful schools see inclusion as a real challenge and the

inclusion of children with SEBD as the greatest challenge – but they appreciate the need for proactive techniques to enhance positive behaviour in all children. The stronger the positive influence – that is, staff energy mainly focused on increasing desirable behaviours, rather than trying to extinguish unwanted behaviours – the easier it is for all, and the few staff who need extra support are more readily identified.

The following headings could be guidelines towards creating an inclusive and proactive approach:

**Step 1** Assemble a positive school-wide behaviour team

Over time, such a team would develop the expertise to support colleagues in analysing behaviour difficulties and implementing interventions.

**Step 2** Assess school needs

Behavioural audits could be undertaken to indicate any ‘hot spots’ – curriculum areas or actual locations (corridors, etc.) – for poor behaviour that exist, as well as identifying those staff who make the most discipline referrals.

**Step 3** Set goals

Based on hard data whole-school behavioural goals could be clearly defined.

**Step 4** Select/design interventions

Using the team as a resource, a specific plan of action could now be proposed.

**Step 5** Establish support

A clearly stated support network set up to cover whole-school, whole-class, staff and individual student issues. Those who are most directly affected by any specific problem behaviour could be included in the proposed action.

**Step 6** Engage and train staff

The more staff that generally agree with the analysis of behaviour and the resulting way forward should make proposals easier to implement. Sharing the same core beliefs about behavioural matters is an important step.

**Step 7** Implement, monitor and maintain

This will involve the established team and other key staff in setting up an agreed framework for introducing, monitoring and maintaining behavioural standards.

**Step 8** Assess effectiveness

Alongside the monitoring of the plan, the effectiveness must also be evaluated and reviewed on a regular basis.

## Phase Three – Classroom Behaviour Plan

It is the classroom teacher who controls the pacing, sequencing and general experiences that influence learners. Effective teachers create their desired learning

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environment through designing a variety of ways to deliver the curriculum. It follows that the more methods a teacher has to employ, the more effective their teaching will become.

For children to be included in any classroom there needs to be a definite plan of action on the part of the class teacher and support staff. This approach could ensure that protective factors are maximised for those learners who face SEBD, Kaiser and Rasminsky (2003) identified such factors as being:

- respect for self and others
- social interaction skills
- problem-solving skills.

To successfully include children who face SEBD, schools need to look at ways of creating an environment that enables them to be successful, despite their difficulties. It is not a question of 'fixing' them, it is a matter of asking how a school can promote their successful inclusion. However, what works well for learners with SEBD usually works well with all learners. Bloomquist and Schnell (2005) suggest the following key stages in a classroom behaviour plan.

Step 1 – Develop class guidelines.

Step 2 – Teach appropriate behaviours, for example, social and conflict resolution skills.

Step 3 – Effective use of rewards and consequences.



### Case Study 1.1

A class teacher having established her classroom procedures and routines, turned her attention to the effective use of rewards. She asked learners to complete a survey rating their preference for different rewards. These included:

- extra playtime
- a good note home
- classroom games
- free time
- watching a video
- listening to tapes
- computer time
- group games in gym.

Based on her findings she was able to develop a much more effective rewards system.

Schools that adopt this phased approach can systematically increase the likelihood of positive behaviour in learners. This should then reduce the number of problem behaviours that any school experiences.

The next phase is then the Toolbox, which enables practitioners to design intervention programmes for the many different types of SEBD that school staff will inevitably meet. However, in every school there will be a small but significant group that will need specialist support. This group of children display SEBD, but the main cause for their difficulties is usually medical in nature. The next chapter will look at some of the most frequent behavioural disorders that school staff are likely to meet with some suggestions as to how they can be supported in the classroom. The focus will then lead exclusively on to Phase Four, the multifaceted Toolbox.

### Further Reading

Marzano, R. (2003) *Classroom Management that Works: Research Based Strategies for Every Teacher*. Alexandria USA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Marzano, R. (2003) *What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action*. Alexandria, USA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.