

Managing behaviour using the least specific response

This model (see *Figure 1*) uses a hierarchical approach to behaviour management. Its purpose is to eliminate as many difficulties as possible with the least amount of direct intervention. Put another way, if the whole school policy is well thought out, understood and generally accepted by all, then the structures generated for use with all pupils will eliminate most potential behaviour problems ‘automatically’. However, it is recognised that the school behaviour policy will need to be supported by classroom management techniques and intervention with individual pupils to change their behaviour. The principles of the behaviour policy must inform all three levels of intervention to enable consistent application of what the school community has agreed are expected levels of behaviour. So, while teachers will all differ (thankfully) in how they conduct their classrooms, the behaviour policy must be *seen* to influence classroom management techniques and promote a sense of community and social identity.

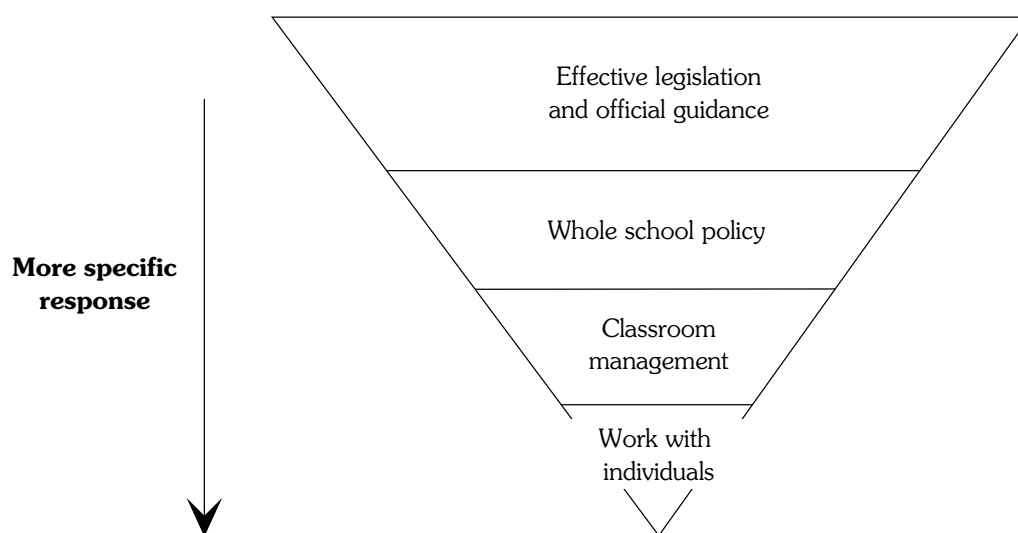


Figure 1: A model for managing behaviour using the least specific response

To be effective, the principles of a school behaviour policy must be seen as fundamental to the care and control of all pupils and not some superordinate structure or merely compiled for administrative purposes.

Similarly, the application of specific techniques to those young people who, despite their peers conforming to school and classroom rules, persist in disrupting learning and social situations, must also be grounded in the school behaviour policy.

A school behaviour policy must be fundamental to all levels of behaviour management whether working with the whole school, classes of pupils or with individuals.



Case study 1

Steve (46) was appointed head of Facultown School, following the 'retirement' of the previous head through ill health. Steve had previously worked as a deputy in another local authority. Prior to taking up his post he visited the school on a number of occasions to familiarise himself with the staff and hear what they had to say. Excepting differences between departments, there appeared to be some consensus about what was required. The staff said they had been unhappy with the leadership offered by the previous head who "spent most of his time in his office doing the paperwork". Steve was not that sort of person. He believed in 'people management': getting out there and spending time in classrooms. The staff also realised, from the OFSTED inspection they had 'suffered', that changes were needed to teaching and pastoral approaches in the school.

The staff said that they looked forward to a new managerial style with a head who would make his presence felt. They also wanted to revitalise the teaching, which many agreed needed updating. Several said they had prepared papers outlining their various departmental thinking on these issues.

Soon after taking up the post as head, Steve set up working parties to look at the curriculum and behaviour in school, and spent time making his presence felt around the school. Initially staff appeared very enthusiastic, auditing the curriculum and teaching styles and producing new operational manuals.

Within two terms of taking up the post, however, the situation had changed substantially. Staff commented that Steve spent too much time sticking his nose into their business ("He's never out of my classroom") and not getting on with managing the school ("That's what he's paid for!"). Pupil behaviour was considered to have deteriorated ("They don't respect him. He walks around school like an ordinary member of staff"). In addition, the changes which were initially so eagerly anticipated were now seen as not recognising any of the good work which they were "doing before he came".

Steve tried to regain the ground by calling meetings to address concerns but most energy was spent talking about administrative issues. The situation became worse with Steve trying to 'revitalise' the staff with new appointments, initially to senior and then to junior staff. Eventually, he relocated his office some distance from the teaching areas and spent longer periods of time on administration – his rationale for moving office being to provide more teaching space in school. Staff, in the meantime, became more nostalgic about the previous head, who "at least left you alone to get on with your teaching", and "who was a figurehead [who] at least did provide support when children were playing up".

Perceived causes of misbehaviour

There are a great number of explanations offered as to why children misbehave. These explanations usually seek to find someone to whom we can attribute blame. Some of these attributions are internal (we blame ourselves), while others are external (we blame others). We engage in the process of attributing blame for a number of reasons, but mainly to provide causal explanations for our own and other peoples' behaviour. It also helps us to cope. Social psychologists have shown that we make these causal attributions at a personal and social level in order to make sense of our world. We attempt to find common-sense explanations which help to make our world predictable. There is evidence to show that people who continually externalise responsibility – ie blame other people or things outside their control for their difficulties – are less psychologically healthy than those who tend to look for solutions within their control. However, either extreme is unhealthy: to continually blame oneself can lead to feelings of helplessness and worthlessness.

It is therefore important to analyse the bases for one's inferences. In a study carried out by Lawrence and Steed (1986), 78% of teachers were found to predominantly blame issues outside their control for children's misbehaviour. In addition, 48% felt that schools could exacerbate misbehaviour. Below are some common explanations for the causes of children's misbehaviour: compare them with your own list.

Beyond school issues

- Within-child factors – the child is sick or maladjusted or wilful
- Dysfunctional families – the child comes from a family who practice ineffective child-rearing techniques; uncaring or overprotective parents
- Dysfunctional local communities – the child comes from a community which is deprived; high levels of criminality
- Wider society-based issues

School-based issues

- Ineffective teaching earlier in the child's career
- Inappropriate curriculum
- Poorly resourced school
- Poorly managed school
- Poor quality teaching in present school
- Ineffective pastoral system

Communication difficulties between teachers and pupils

There are a number of other features of listener behaviour which may affect communication in a negative way and inhibit the social interaction process. This can occur despite teachers being aware of the recognised characteristics of effective listening. These features are often conveyed in obvious ways (eg via the type and amount of eye contact, physical distancing and emphasis of speech), and can happen unintentionally or unwittingly. However, these behaviours are indicative of more fundamental issues. The following highlights some of these:

- Lack of trust and respect for each other – often teachers/pupils have to engage in discussion with a pupil/teacher with whom they have had difficulties in the past. This may affect the application of more subtle aspects of their social skills, such as mismatching what is being said to the body messages being transmitted.
- Low expectations of the pupil(s) or outcome(s) – a teacher may believe that an interaction is likely to be a waste of time because they ‘know what the pupil is like’ or ‘nothing will change as a result’.
- Those involved feeling low, depressed or under stress because of factors within or beyond school, or both, not necessarily connected with the topic in question.
- Conflicting agenda – pupil has one expectation while the teacher has another.
- Lack of clarity or confusion in defining the purpose of the interaction at the beginning and then not staying on task.
- Distractions because of poor choice of location, eg corridor or alien territory.
- Using the interaction to resolve something else – throwing in criticism or referring to another incident.

Assertiveness

Assertiveness refers to behaviour used in social interaction which allows people to get what they want from others while respecting the rights of and not hurting others. Put another way, on a continuum in which aggressive behaviour is at one extreme and submissive behaviour at the other, assertive behaviour would be somewhere in the middle. Being assertive in social situations tends to lead to feelings of positive self-worth (feeling good about yourself) whereas being non-assertive can lead to feelings of discomfort, tension and negative self-worth.

Many people will have experienced situations in which they have wanted to complain about the way they were treated and either have not done so or have become very angry with the person concerned. Both responses have negative results for the person who felt offended. In the first case, their feelings might include injustice; being taken advantage of; not being respected as a person; not being cared about; a situation unresolved. In the second case, becoming angry with someone can leave you feeling resentful that you had to ‘lose control’ to get what was rightfully yours. These episodes can occur in any number of situations, eg when having bought something with which you are unhappy and attempt to return, or when dissatisfied with a meal or the service you received.