

Rebooting behaviour after lockdown

**Tom
Bennett**



Delivering effective instruction – or even just making the classroom run smoothly – is difficult when educators are struggling with behaviour issues. These 10 tips may help to get things back on track.

Better behaviour is the beginning of everything

Good behaviour is the core mission for every school, whatever age or stage. Get behaviour right and everything else is possible. And now, with this year's disruptions to school attendance, behaviour matters more than ever.

- Students may have partially or entirely lost the habits that enable them to flourish as learners and as member of the school community. This will matter more for some than others.
- Staff may also be a little rusty, and uncertain. This is perfectly natural. They will have been coping with a variety of new anxieties.
- Students will have to observe far higher standards of respiratory and tactile hygiene than ever before.
- Many students – especially young children – will already have hygiene habits that we would probably describe as less than ideal, that become dangerous in the current climate.
- Staff too will have to observe not only this type of virological etiquette but also be expected to train and maintain these behaviours in others.

Rather than ask every school to reinvent this wheel simultaneously, here is my list of 10 ideas about how schools manage it.

- 1 **Define what you mean by good behaviour.** There is an opportunity here for schools to re-evaluate what they actually want their behaviour to look like. Students have very different ideas and habits of how to behave. Staff do too. Teachers should define what behaviour they think is ideal in their classrooms; leaders, in their schools. Be concrete.
- 2 **Good behaviour must be taught, not told.** The best teachers and schools actively teach the behaviour they want to see as if it were a curriculum.
- 3 **Routines, habits and norms.** All staff dealing with students must consider these questions:
 - a) What behaviour do I want them to think is normal?
 - b) What habits do I want them to develop?
 - c) What routines do they need to learn in order to succeed as learners and human beings? This is crucial. In order for it to be as easy as possible to behave, students should be taught the specific sequences of behaviour they are expected to demonstrate.



- 4 **Don't wait for pupils to misbehave – be proactive.** This is particularly important for students who would be more at risk of sanction or exclusion due to insecure behavioural habits.
- 5 **Make boundaries meaningful.** Students need to know that deliberately misbehaving will result in consequences; the school must develop immediate/fast responses. When behaviour is poor, or fails to meet the standard, it must be challenged. Most consequence systems fail because they are inconsistently applied by individual teachers or across a school community.
- 6 **Rewrite your behaviour policy and consequences to reflect the current circumstances.** Unhygienic behaviour has to be reclassified from a misdemeanour to something much more serious. And malicious, deliberate acts of transmission (e.g., spitting, coughing) must be treated with the greatest seriousness.
- 7 **Train staff first.** Teach – don't

tell – the behaviour staff need too. Leaders need to spend time with staff before students, and front load their professional development so that they both understand and know how to implement the new routines and are able to teach it to children.

- 8 **Insist on implementation.** New norms and standards can be taught, but unless someone monitors and maintains these standards, they quickly wither.
- 9 **Reboot your expectations constantly.** Behaviour needs to be a state of constant re-creation. This means a) continually, on a day-to-day basis; and b) formally, in a targeted way.
- 10 **High expectations means high support.** Everyone, from staff to students, have been through difficult times. The higher the expectations – and they must be higher now – the higher the support required to achieve them. Staff training, calm student induction, checking for understanding, consistent repetition

of norms, demonstrated and corrected where necessary: these are the foundations of good behaviour.

Final thought

Be aware that students with the most challenging behaviour may need a more targeted approach, pastoral support, therapeutic strategies, and so on. We should not assume that students are returning to school traumatised, and equally nor should we assume they are fine. Students need to see adults being positive, hopeful and in control of themselves – whether we feel it or not.

Tom Bennett is the founder of researchED, a grassroots organisation that raises research literacy in education. Since 2013, researchED has visited three continents and six countries, attracting thousands of followers. In 2015 he became the UK government's school 'Behaviour Czar', advising on behaviour policy. He has written four books about teacher training, and in 2015 he was long-listed as one of the world's top teachers in the GEMS Global Teacher Prize.