

Praise for *Sorting Out Behaviour*

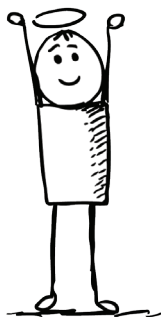
I strongly recommend this extremely useful and practical guide, which demonstrates that effective behaviour management is about clarity, transparency, consistency and a set of manageable policies and procedures which are kept under constant review. Drawing on the author's vast, first-hand experience, it is a source of common sense and practical pointers which would enable all school staff from trainees to experienced school leaders to review their behaviour policies, practices and procedures.

**Brian Lightman, General Secretary,
Association of School and College Leaders**

Thank you to Jeremy Rowe for providing a plain English, common sense, easy to read guide about behaviour. Perhaps more importantly, he reminds us that children aren't criminals and that most schools are calm, productive, orderly places that are far removed from the image so often portrayed in the media. We need to hear that message more often.

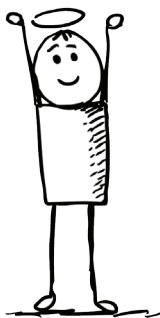
Fiona Millar, Guardian Columnist

SORTING OUT BEHAVIOUR



SORTING OUT BEHAVIOUR

A head teacher's guide



Jeremy Rowe

 Independent Thinking Press

First published by
Independent Thinking Press
Crown Buildings, Bancyfelin, Carmarthen, Wales, SA33 5ND, UK
www.independentthinkingpress.com

Independent Thinking Press is an imprint of Crown House Publishing Ltd.

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Illustrations © Les Evans 2013

Image cover, title page and page 90 © adore, Fotolia.com

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First published 2013.

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue entry for this book is available
from the British Library.

Print ISBN 978-1-78135-011-9

Mobi ISBN 978-1-78135-033-1

ePub ISBN 978-1-78135-034-8

Printed and bound in the UK by
Gomer Press, Llandysul, Ceredigion

This book is dedicated to the hundreds of thousands of children who, despite leading difficult lives, come to our schools every day in a spirit of generosity and hope. It is an honour and a privilege to have the chance to build schools in which these fantastic children can soar, become great and leave their trace across the sky.

And to Harriet, of course, with love.

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Introduction

Like most of us, I've worked in schools that have got their approach to behaviour right and in some that have got it wrong. Right is better. I've been lucky to have had the opportunity to work with magnificent teams at Pool Academy in Cornwall and Sir John Leman High School in Suffolk, both of which are packed with colleagues who know it is possible to improve and have been prepared to do what is needed to make that improvement happen.

By working together consistently and strategically, both schools were able to see genuine improvements. This can only be achieved by teams unswervingly operating value-based systems. Without that, staff are out on a limb and the minority of students who can be difficult will have a field day.

Like you, I am doing the job day-in and day-out and, like you, I get it wrong sometimes. In fact, the minute you think you've sussed it, a child will literally take your legs from under you! Remembering that is quite helpful, I think.

My basic view is that behaviour is about choice. That doesn't mean that situations are equally easy for all of us to handle, but I believe that if we factor choice out of a situation we

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could be robbing an individual of their entitlements and their independence. If we were all predestined to behave in certain ways, all responses would be predictable. People choose how they behave. All of us.

Below is a short quiz:

Can bad behaviour be eradicated in our schools?

Can it be improved?

Should we try to improve it?*

For me, everything became clear as a result of one early conversation I had in which I was told there was no soap in the students' toilets because 'they messed around with it'. What this meant was that a couple of students did. What it really meant, though, was both profound and frightening. It did not simply mean that one or two students were running the school. They had in fact, been given the power to do something much more important. They were being allowed to *define* the school. No child could wash their hands because one or two students didn't want them to. From that point onwards, I made a virtue out of taking risks with what students could 'cope with' – and never looked back.

I hope that this book provides a straightforward description of what we do, and why we feel these approaches work. None of the ideas are patented; all of them are taken wholesale or adapted from other schools. You will know the idiosyncrasies of your own school and what would be successful.

* Answers: No, Yes, Yes.

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I'm not using a Marxist or feminist perspective – mainly because I don't understand them. I haven't done a lot of research either, because I was too busy actually improving our school – so there aren't twenty pages of references at the back. Sorry.

Incidentally, it is important to remember that children are not criminals and that the negative behavioural choices a minority occasionally make are not crimes. Our job isn't about retribution; it is about ensuring young people learn from their mistakes, so they can take their place in society and succeed.

My intention is to set out a simple, occasionally slightly difficult, approach to student behaviour that actually works. My school isn't perfect, but it is better as a result. And that's important.

Key points

- All schools can be made even better
- The outcome is worth it
- The students are worth it

Sorting out mistakes

It is currently very popular to talk about how great mistakes are – as in, you can only learn by making mistakes. While I've no doubt there is a lot of truth in this, I still think that mistakes are overrated. What's wrong with learning by getting it right first time?

Tackling behavioural issues requires a lot of thinking, planning and consistent delivery. Errors will make you look ridiculous, will make people question the rigour of your planning and will undermine your efforts, confidence and credibility. They are probably best avoided.

I've read that one supermarket chain is so successful because they 'keep it very simple, and they execute brilliantly'. Sounds good to me (unless they are doing actual executions, which a good approach to behavioural management should try to avoid).

Sorting out fixed-term exclusions

Fixed-term exclusions can be an absolute disaster for schools. In fact, as the almost ultimate sanction they are a curious one, because the school is seeking to deprive the student of the one thing that could make a difference in their lives. Thoughts about the wisdom of fixed-term exclusions go to the heart of the philosophy of school behaviour management. I have found the subject to be a very emotive one, with many colleagues sounding like Charlton Heston on gun ownership: 'I have only five words for you: from my cold, dead hands.'

If our aim is to improve the behaviour of individual students, then we have to ask ourselves whether or not fixed-term exclusions actually work. If the same students from your school are regularly sent home, the answer might well be no. Fixed-term exclusions send the student back to where the problem often originated and away from where the answer ought to lie. They alienate parents. They create a highly visible platform for a student who has done something wrong – in fact, something seriously wrong. (Also, have you ever noticed how many excluded students there are at the school gate throughout the day as well as at the end of the day?) These guys are there to be seen – it is critical for their self-esteem. Often they are closer to their school than they might have been on a normal day! And then there is the work they ought to have been doing – how often is that done properly and returned? And what do you do if it isn't – exclude them again?

Sorting out home visits

There are three responses to the problem of parents who don't answer the phone if the school number appears on the display:

- Give up (this isn't recommended)
- Use a different phone – parents will often suddenly be in
- Visit in person

Home visits can be hugely powerful – in over ten years of doing them, I have never had to visit the same household more than once. I initially thought the school would be on the back foot in a parent's home but the exact opposite is true. By bothering to turn up you have confounded their expectations and visibly – and powerfully – reinforced the view that actually the values of your school are important; so important in fact, that you will do what you feel is necessary to uphold them. Reluctant parents hate the idea of members of school staff appearing at their front door, and it is worth the effort just to see the horrified look on Amy's face as she comes downstairs to see the two of you sitting on the sofa.

Ultimately, it comes down to how much you believe in what you are doing. My experience is that being prepared to go the extra mile in this way reaps enormous dividends.

Important note: Never do a home visit without letting your school know where you are going, never go on your own and

Sorting out the fire drill

Working hard to plan and deliver a silent fire drill was undoubtedly the best possible start we could have had in our campaign to improve student behaviour across the school.

The fire drill is normally the only time the whole school is together in one place. Something to dread? No, a golden opportunity. Fire drills are going to happen anyway so, like all aspects of school life, you should use them to get across your message and values. A slick, efficient fire drill, with students lining up in silence, is an incredible opportunity; if you don't use it to show who is in charge, you can rest assured that a minority of students will. The moral high ground for doing it properly could not be clearer either – children will be safer as they exit the school more quickly and calmly.

When I joined my school and announced we would do the fire drill in silence I could see, and have heard anecdotally since, that the majority view was that I had gone mad! However, I knew we could do it and I knew that doing it would speak volumes about our intentions, as well as put a rocket under our expectations of the school.

So how did we do it? If we had not felt confident we could achieve a whole-school silent fire drill, we would have held one separately for older students (if they were the problem) somewhere else. We then would have sorted out the younger ones, and aimed to bring them both together after a term,

Sorting out platforms

Platforms are anything positive which enables young people to have their say and to positively define their school. There is an army of fabulous young people just waiting for the chance to define your school. All they need is the signal from you and for the 'platforms' to define the school from to be built. Without these platforms, the tiny minority of difficult students will define your school. This is probably not a good thing for the rest of the school or for them.

The constant sound that must ring out is of the positives in your school. At our school we start our weekly senior team meetings with a 'good news' standing item. Unfortunately, however, the default for all of us is to focus on the negative. I have observed many lessons where ten minutes is lost directing the whole class to bask in the glow of Connor, who didn't bother to do his homework, while a dozen other Connors sit unrecognised, the gleaming homework in front of them barely noticed. Or Abbie, who gets more attention for not taking her coat off when asked than Jake, who has produced an immaculate piece of work. (A great tip here is for the teacher to thank everyone who has taken their coat off, possibly combined with a sideways glance at Abbie.) How much of your interaction with students is negative? Are they the students whose names you know?

Sorting out my ten favourite approaches

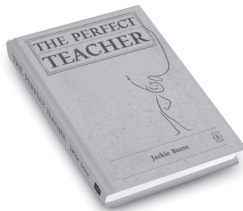
None of these approaches will work for long without a systematic process and they will all only improve issues, not eradicate them. The order in which you implement them will depend on how well you know your own school. In our school, weighing up impact against the time each improvement took, I would say the order of effectiveness for us was probably:

1. Inclusion room
2. Study focus
3. Lateness in the mornings
4. Whole-school detentions
5. Tracking behaviour
6. Changing the on-call system
7. Silent fire drill
8. Improvements to the decor and facilities around the school
9. Ensuring we had a behavioural timeline
10. Giving parents guaranteed access to the head teacher

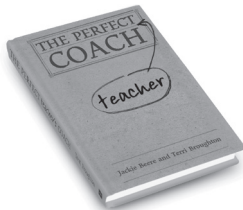
Two of our biggest successes – phasing out fixed-term exclusions and paying for alternative education for students we couldn't contain – were consequences of these combined approaches, rather than being strategic aims in themselves.

We might have been able to achieve these both on day one, but without the rigorous values and robust consequences I would not have recommended it!

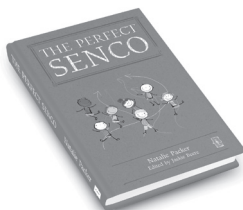




978-178135100-0



978-178135003-4



978-178135104-8

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is the view from the head teacher's chair when it comes to getting behaviour right across the whole school.

If you want to get the public, the papers and politicians hot under the collar you only need mention 'classroom behaviour'. It's a subject everyone has an opinion on – and it's rarely positive. For every media-fuelled horror story of disruptive behaviour there is a knee-jerk, sack the teachers, blame the parents, get the troops in response which often makes things worse when it comes to actually engaging children in learning. This book is not only about effective behaviour strategies that genuinely work but it is also special as it has been written by a practising head teacher, drawing on that unique perspective of whole school behaviour. Full of helpful, practical, do-able tips and ideas it is relevant for any teacher, manager or leader in all sorts of schools.

"I strongly recommend this extremely useful and practical guide, which demonstrates that effective behaviour management is about clarity, transparency, consistency and a set of manageable policies and procedures which are kept under constant review. Drawing on the author's vast, first-hand experience, it is a source of common sense and practical pointers which would enable all school staff from trainees to experienced school leaders to review their behaviour policies, practices and procedures."

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Jeremy Rowe combines his twenty plus years of teaching experience with traditional values and a realistic perspective to produce the effective method of management that has led him to become a successful head teacher and public speaker.



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ISBN 978-178135011-9

US \$16.95



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781781350119

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