

Getting the simple things right:

Charlie Taylor's behaviour checklists

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Why is it that some schools continue to struggle with managing and improving behaviour?

At a recent event at King Solomon Academy in Paddington I gathered together a group of headteachers of outstanding schools who succeed with some of the most deprived pupils in England. I asked them to outline what they felt were the key principles that they had followed for improving behaviour in their schools. What soon became clear was how much similarity there was between the approaches that the headteachers had followed. Many of them emphasised the simplicity of their approach, but they agreed that most important of all is consistency.

Where there is inconsistency in schools, children are more likely to push the boundaries. If a pupil thinks there is a chance that the school will forget about the detention he has been given, then he is unlikely to bother to turn up. If he gets away with it, the threat of detention will be no deterrent in the future.

Often it is doing the simple things that can make a difference with behaviour. For example, the teacher who takes the time to meet and greet pupils at the door will find they come in happier and ready to learn.

I recently read the '[Checklist Manifesto](#)' by Atul Gawande, a surgeon who was concerned that so many patients seemed to suffer serious complications in the days after their operation. He realised that many of these problems were caused by operating staff failing to follow basic procedures. For example, a surgeon failing to wash his hands could cause an infection, or failing to account for all the swabs used in the process could lead to one being left in the patient's body.

Gawande developed a checklist to be read out before each operation to ensure that all of the simple, but essential procedures were followed. The outcome was a marked decrease in the number of patients becoming seriously ill or dying after surgery.

I took the idea of a checklist and adapted it to help schools to improve behaviour. My list is a menu of ideas from which schools can develop their own checklist. The list is not exhaustive and some parts would apply just to secondary or to primary schools. School staff or headteachers decide what their priorities are for improving behaviour and then create a bespoke checklist of between five and 10 essential actions to promote good behaviour. The teachers run through the checklist first thing in the morning and again after lunch to ensure the correct preparations are in place. It serves as a reminder of what needs to be done and ensures consistency across the school.

I have asked some schools to look at areas of behaviour they want to improve and devise their own checklist. Examples have included:

- making sure all adults in the room know how to respond to sensitive pupils with special needs;
- ensuring that children actually receive rewards every time they have earned them and receive a sanction every time they behave badly;
- carefully following each stage of the behaviour policy rather than overreacting to poor behaviour; or
- simply remembering to stay calm.

Teachers who follow these guidelines find there is more consistency of approach to managing behaviour, both in the classroom and around the school. When children know that teachers will stick to the behaviour policy and class routines, they feel safer and happy, and behaviour improves.

The checklist may seem too simple, but managing a school or a class is a complex operation and because of this complexity it is easy to fail to get the simple, but essential, things right. After all, who could have believed patients die in hospitals because staff fail to wash their hands properly?

In the special school where I am headteacher, we have considerable expertise with the most challenging behaviour. Yet a few years ago, one of my teaching assistants pointed out that we had become very good at ensuring children got the sanctions they had earned, but they were not getting their rewards with the same consistency. The message we were inadvertently sending to our pupils was that your good behaviour is less important to us than the things you are doing wrong. A checklist would have stopped us getting into this situation.

Like Gawande's checklists for surgeons, mine are not written in tablets of stone and purporting to be perfect. They have been tested in a few schools who have gone on to develop and refine them to suit their own particular context, just as surgeons are now doing in hospitals. This is the start of a grassroots project led by heads and teachers – not a Government initiative in which schools are told what to do.

I thought the idea of the checklist was exciting and I hope more people will try it out in their schools or classrooms. I would be interested to hear the views of colleagues on the checklist and I would be keen to visit schools who decide to use it.

CHARLIE TAYLOR

Government's Expert Adviser on behaviour in schools

Key principles for headteachers to help improve school behaviour

Policy

- Ensure absolute clarity about the expected standard of pupils' behaviour.
- Ensure that behaviour policy is clearly understood by all staff, parents and pupils.
- Display school rules clearly in classes and around the building. Staff and pupils should know what they are.
- Display the tariff of sanctions and rewards in each class.
- Have a system in place for ensuring that children never miss out on sanctions or rewards.

Leadership

- Model the behaviour you want to see from your staff.

Building

- Visit the lunch hall and playground, and be around at the beginning and the end of the school day.
- Ensure that other Senior Leadership Team members are a visible presence around the school.
- Check that pupils come in from the playground and move around the school in an orderly manner.
- Check up on behaviour outside the school.
- Check the building is clean and well-maintained.

Staff

- Know the names of all staff.
- Praise the good performance of staff.
- Take action to deal with poor teaching or staff who fail to follow the behaviour policy.

Children

- Praise good behaviour.
- Celebrate successes.

Teaching

- Monitor the amount of praise, rewards and punishments given by individual staff.
- Ensure that staff praise good behaviour and work.
- Ensure that staff understand special needs of pupils.

Individual pupils

- Have clear plans for pupils likely to misbehave and ensure staff are aware of them.
- Put in place suitable support for pupils with behavioural difficulties.

Parents

- Build positive relationships with the parents of pupils with behaviour difficulties.

Behaviour checklist for teachers

Classroom

- Know the names and roles of any adults in class.
- Meet and greet pupils when they come into the classroom.
- Display rules in the class - and ensure that the pupils and staff know what they are.
- Display the tariff of sanctions in class.
- Have a system in place to follow through with all sanctions.
- Display the tariff of rewards in class.
- Have a system in place to follow through with all rewards.
- Have a visual timetable on the wall.
- Follow the school behaviour policy.

Pupils

- Know the names of children.
- Have a plan for children who are likely to misbehave.
- Ensure other adults in the class know the plan.
- Understand pupils' special needs.

Teaching

- Ensure that all resources are prepared in advance.
- Praise the behaviour you want to see more of.
- Praise children doing the right thing more than criticising those who are doing the wrong thing (parallel praise).
- Differentiate.
- Stay calm.
- Have clear routines for transitions and for stopping the class.
- Teach children the class routines.

Parents

- Give feedback to parents about their child's behaviour - let them know about the good days as well as the bad ones.

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