



Revised Behaviour in Schools Guidance and the Suspension and Permanent Exclusion guidance

Joint position statement

About Us

The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition brings together over 250 organisations to campaign and influence policy, with and on behalf of infants, children and young people, in relation to their mental health and wellbeing. We do not represent any one organisation, approach, or professional group, but come together to provide a strong unified voice speaking out about children and young people's mental health. We are chaired by Sir Norman Lamb.

The Schools' Wellbeing Partnership is a specialist members group, hosted by the National Children's Bureau. Our vision is that wellbeing and good mental health is a strategic priority and embedded into the culture and ethos of every school.

Our members comprise a wide range of organisations from across the children and young people's education, mental health or wellbeing sectors who work to improve children and young people's mental health and wellbeing in schools. This includes, but is not limited to schools, colleges, voluntary sector organisations and public bodies. We also host a forum for schools.

By convening the sector, the Coalition and Partnership provide an opportunity to influence policy, promote a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing, and use evidence-based practice to demonstrate the importance of good emotional wellbeing and how this connects to learning.

Introduction

We welcome this consultation from the Department for Education on the revised Behaviour in Schools guidance and the Suspension and Permanent Exclusion guidance. There are well-evidenced links between mental health, behaviour and education and our vision is for an inclusive education system that recognises these fundamental links.

Since the beginning of the academic year 2021/22, our members continue to report pupil's underlying mental health needs not being recognised in schools, the urgent need for mental health support in schools and the impact of that on behaviour, staff and pupil wellbeing. This includes reports of high levels of anxiety and behaviours that challenge, particularly for children and young people with special educational needs and other conditions.

We support the need for a calm, orderly and supportive school environment as important for both wellbeing and learning, and we believe this can be promoted in a variety of ways. In particular, this position statement sets out how whole school approaches to mental health wellbeing can be used as a basis to achieve this goal. We also highlight case studies of good practice at the end of this statement where positive behaviour strategies and whole school approaches to mental health are being used successfully to support behaviour.

Listening to the voices of children, young people and families

It is crucial that children, young people and families are given a voice in the policies that impact them most. Listening to the voices of diverse groups is vital, particularly those disproportionately impacted by behaviour policies, however, we are concerned that the consultation in its current form is not easily accessible for parent-carers and for young people to share their views. We would therefore like further clarity on how children, young people, and parent-carers will be supported to feed into the Departments' behaviour programme and implementation process going forward.

Whilst engagement with young people, parents and carers is essential within school life and is key aspect of a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing, the guidance misses a crucial opportunity to promote true partnership working between school and families in creating and communicating behaviour policies alongside other school policies. We often hear from parents-carers about their experiences of feeling alienated by school policies that advocate sanction-based approaches.

Schools need to proactively work with young people and families in order to co-produce policies and to ensure there are opportunities to feedback on the behaviour culture in schools. The guidance should promote positive in engagement and therefore should strengthen the requirement on schools to engage with young people, parents and carers.

Recommendation:

- The Department for Education should provide further clarity on how children, young people and families will be supported to feed into Departments' behaviour programme and implementation process going forward to ensure their voices are heard.
- The Department for Education should amend the 'Behaviour in Schools' guidance document to make it a requirement rather than a recommendation for schools to engage with young people, parents and carers.

Aligning Departmental agendas

Changes to guidance provide an important opportunity to align the Department's agendas around mental health and wellbeing, behaviour, exclusions and attainment. While we see the intention with this review, this guidance does not go far enough in detailing how this can be achieved. For example, there is little recognition of the role of mental health support within

the guidance, including links with the 'mental health and behaviour' guidance and the role of Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) and the senior lead for mental health.

What is more, using the language of whole school approach and wellbeing whilst still maintaining frameworks of sanctions, removal, isolation and exclusion is confusing for schools who have to implement and balance both of these directives, as well as directly adversely impacting on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. We see that the mental health offer in schools should be a universal offer in which behaviour policy and guidance should be framed within.

Recommendation

- The Department for Education should clarify how policy initiatives on behaviour, mental health and SEND are aligned and add value to effectively meet the needs of children and young people with multiple or complex needs.

Embedding whole school approaches

Behaviour, wellbeing, and attainment are intrinsically linked. However, our members have expressed concern that the consultation proposals have more emphasis on managing behaviour rather than supporting pupils with behaviour that challenge. Behaviours that challenge can often be the result of underlying conditions, unmet emotional needs, difficulties at home, at school or in the community, and exposure to trauma, for example.

Mental health support is not sufficiently considered in the guidance, despite evidence showing the effectiveness of mental health based interventions to address behaviour. For example, evidence from Place2Be shows that one-to-one counselling helps children with a range of emotional and attentional difficulties to become more settled, more able to manage their emotions and to engage in learning. After attending one-to-one counselling with Place2Be, statistics show 68% of pupils caused fewer problems in class, and 62% of pupils' difficulties had less impact on their learning. While pupils who received one-to-one counselling, 74% of pupils were also less likely to be excluded for a fixed term.¹

The guidance provides a significant amount of detail on the use of sanctions, which will achieve improved behaviour in the immediate or short term, but the longer-term impact on mental health of applying sanctions requires further consideration. The consultation also advocates a blanket approach in responding to behaviour, with little consideration of the individual needs of children and young people.

Addressing the mental health and wellbeing of pupils' is crucial in a school's response to behaviour. Behaviour should be viewed as an opportunity to intervene, whether with

¹ Statistics provided by Place2Be.

externally presenting persistent challenging behaviour, or with internally presenting emotionally based school avoidance. We believe that whole school approaches to mental health and wellbeing provides a framework in which to respond to behaviour and address unmet or additional needs. For example, a key element of a whole school approach is fostering positive relationships with pupils, teachers and families. Research reports that the most significant factor for young people – in terms of whether they experience a sense of belonging or exclusion in school – is how they perceive their relationships with their teachers.²

Recommendation

- The Department for Education should develop a national implementation programme to support every school, college and university to adopt a whole setting approach to mental health and wellbeing.

Embedding inclusive practices

Any national policy directive from the Department to schools must be inclusive in reality as well as intention. We are pleased that the guidance references the Equality Act and Children and Families Act in relation to provision for children and young people with SEND. However, the guidance needs to be much more specific and practical on how schools can respond to the individual needs of children and young people, and in particular align with different pieces of guidance and legislation. The revised behaviour guidance should ensure that schools have enough flexibility to allow for behaviours that might be the result of trauma, mental health issues, or those with undiagnosed or unmet SEND needs.

We know that some groups of children and young people are disproportionately impacted by school behaviour policies. Findings from the Timpson Review show that the rate of temporary and permanent exclusion is highest among Black Caribbean and Gypsy/Roma and Traveller pupils, those with Special Educational Needs, and those classified as in need or eligible for free school meals. The revised guidance should actively seek to reduce the disproportionate impact of sanction based approaches on children and young people facing structural inequalities. We would also like to understand whether an Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the revised guidance documents. Such an assessment is a legal requirement in ensuring that policies do not disproportionately impact on specific groups.

Recommendations

- The Department for Education should undertake and publish an Equality Impact Assessment for this call for evidence on behaviour in schools, and for their wider

² National Education Union. Creating a sense of place and belonging in schools. <https://neu.org.uk/place-belonging>

initiatives and policies focused on behaviour in education, including the assessment on the roll out of Behaviour Hubs.

- The Department for Education should require school behaviour policies to contain a commitment to record the protected characteristics of pupils (including age, sex, disability -broken down by impairment type and race) who are subject to restraint or restrictive interventions, including the isolation/use of removal rooms.

Case studies

1. Grit charity

GRIT charity has developed a programme that uses boxing as a vehicle to deliver coaching strategies to help a young person understand themselves and their emotions and empower themselves to make choices and change their lives. Dr Louise Randell, GP and founder of GRIT, has identified that schools are struggling to find effective strategies to deal with disruptive behaviour. Approximately 15-20% of young people referred have an undiagnosed condition such as ASD or ADHD.

Case study C demonstrates this – C is 15 and has been excluded from school for fighting. He was referred by his previous school as they were concerned that there was no one who could support him in his life. He reported that he was sleeping on his dad's sofa, his dad had a drug problem and he felt very despondent about his future. He also described suicidal thoughts. Without the intervention he would have been left isolated until something happened which would require further intervention.

2. Foxwood Academy

Foxwood Academy is a special needs school in Nottinghamshire. The school had been monitoring the patterns and average frequency of behavioural incidents through the day and had control data from the Autumn Term 2019 that identified a spike in behaviour incidents in the afternoons around 3 pm, among the 75 secondary students (27 female 48 male) between 11 and 18. In Autumn 2020 the school introduced a mind-body intervention using yoga-based techniques to address this with the same students. All staff were trained to offer ten minutes of yoga -based techniques daily after lunch at the same time in all secondary classes over a period of 7.5 weeks. These techniques included movement (chair yoga), breathing exercises and relaxation.

The results of the study showed a marked reduction in the spike between 3 and 4 PM, dropping from 85 incidents between September and December 2019 to 43 between September and December 2020, which represents a 49% drop. Also notable was a drop throughout the day, indicating a sustained effect. The indication of these results is that a very brief intervention of this kind can have important effects on behaviour in schools.

For more information: teenyogafoundation.com

3. St Vincent's Family Project

St Vincent's Family Project works in primary schools in Westminster, providing support to pupils through art or drama therapy. Support is also offered to school staff in supporting the needs of pupils. The service receives regular referrals of children who display with behaviours that challenge, with conduct or behavioural issues making up at least half of referrals. For some, they have been near to exclusion before being referred, and the service have built relationships with schools so that they refer pupils to the service before escalating to punitive responses such as exclusion.

The service has found that using 'play' has supported children and young people with behaviour that challenges. No exclusions have been made following therapy. The therapy also enables the school to get a better understanding of what is going on for the child and how they can be supported. Educationally, the service has often seen children develop a strong interest in arts or drama following the therapy and many continue to use it after the sessions have ended.

For example, Child V was referred for therapy due to their behaviour at school becoming increasingly challenging behaviour. Child V was unable to regulate their feelings and started to receive therapy sessions following lockdown. They enjoy the individual experience of art making and play, where rule-setting and enjoyment of each other's company seems to be helping them to better regulate their feelings and actions when at school. Teacher feedback also indicates that they have re-settled in the classroom.

4. Emotion Coaching

In Northamptonshire there has been some work to develop Emotion Coaching with Educational Psychologists and School Nurses. Emotion Coaching is based on John Gottman's work on neuroscience, relationships and psychology. The approach is based on naturally observed responsive parenting styles. When used by whole schools it is demonstrated to support improvement in wellbeing and behavioural outcomes.

Emotion Coaching is a very simple approach which requires the adult to check in with their own emotions and responses and manage those first; focus on the child's emotions and empathise with these, labelling, validating and normalising the emotion and feelings; it requires the adult to model and support the child in regulating their emotions (co-regulation); to set limits on the behaviour once the child is emotionally regulated and then facilitate the child to work out how they will resolve their problem and put right anything which has happened during their distress.

Within schools this can be taught to whole classes in relations to emotional literacy and can play out in the classroom through regulation stations. It should significantly impact the "behaviour policy" so that the approach is about regulation of emotion and behaviour and recognises the adult's role and influence in this. It is attachment orientated and teaches lifelong skills.

5. Pears Family School

The Pears Family School is an AP free school in Islington rated Outstanding by Ofsted . It has 36 places. It takes pupils aged 5-14 who have been excluded or at risk of permanent exclusion from both mainstream schools and pupil referral units. Places are commissioned by local authorities. The school opened in 2014 and was established by the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families and a number of education and healthcare professionals to provide suitable education to young people with complex needs. Its core aims are to help pupils

recover psychological and emotional well-being; build confidence and resilience; improve challenging behaviour; progress academically; and reintegrate into mainstream schools.

One particularly innovative aspect of the programme is that it requires a parent or significant adult family member to participate fully in the school day. Through this there is a strategic commitment to empower pupils and their families to improve their relationships and develop a positive outlook in order to take more control of their lives. Parents and staff work together to best understand what lies behind behaviour, producing a formulation that everyone finds useful in conceptualising Biological, Cognitive, Affective, Environmental and Behavioural factors of the problem situation. This forms the individualised Personalised Care and Learning Plan (PCLP)

The daily curriculum and the emphasis on clear and ambitious targets have a strongly positive influence on the pupil's' behaviour. This is reinforced by the arrangements for engaging parents in the opportunities to support their children and reflect on how to meet their needs in and beyond school. This encourages families to help themselves, and each other, to create the conditions needed for pupils to resolve personal challenges. Therapeutic techniques, informed by CAMHS practice, are embedded in all aspects of the teaching and learning programme. The school has developed an OCN certificate level 2 course for parents and carers in mental health. This weekly two hour session enables the parents to coach their children at home to accelerate progress and work alongside teacher staff in the classroom. Parents also join a weekly family learning session with their children. The focus on social cognition through developing key executive function skills at home and at school is part of the daily curriculum.

6. Play Therapy UK

Play Therapy is a creative therapeutic approach used with younger children where talking therapies are either too developmentally advanced for them to access; or when their thoughts and feelings are hard to articulate following trauma; and the play and art materials offer an alternative medium of expression. Within the safety and predictability of the therapeutic relationship children can learn to understand and recognise how they are feeling and why, and make sense of what has happened to them. Integral to the work is the relationship between the therapist and the child, which underpins the therapeutic work.

Unlike talking therapies, play creates a three-way process between the child, the therapist and the piece of play, music or art. The play offers the opportunity for symbolic expression and communication through metaphor, which can make all the difference to a child who finds it hard to put their thoughts and feelings into words or may be worried about doing so.

Play Therapists display best practice outside of the play therapy room by working with children's parents/carers, and their class teachers and school staff. In this way an understanding of why a child may behave as they do can be shared across families and schools; creating a larger team of adults who can respond sensitively and support the child to manage their feelings in constructive ways congruent to learning and thriving in school and living healthily.

Such understanding is also then of benefit to other children in the school, as challenging behaviour becomes better understood in terms of responses to past trauma, which although adaptive in the past are now preventing a child from settling to work or clearly communicating their concerns in the present. Such fight or flight responses when triggered in a school setting can be disruptive and difficult for teaching staff who are not trained or supported to recognise and translate such behaviours. Being able to consult a Play Therapist for help and training in such instances can make the difference between a child remaining in mainstream education, learning well or being recognised as in need of an SEN assessment.