

Introduction

During the last decade there have been a number of headline stories about the extreme behaviour of some secondary school students. If we look closer at the stories, there are often underlying learning and/or emotional and social difficulties. Proactive learning support can be vital in preventing learning problems becoming behavioural difficulties.

This pack is designed to provide the opportunity to discuss documented systems of support and theories of learning and behavioural development. Its purpose is to enable schools to design their own learning and behaviour policy, which can be matched to their own individual situation. Ideally, students and parents, as well as all professional, academic and auxiliary staff will play a part in forming this policy.

The pack is presented via the following sections:

- 1 **Where are we now?** – Looking at current situations, concerns and documentation.
- 2 **Stakeholders** – Roles and responsibilities and communication within and around the school.
- 3 **Making 'SALAD' work** – Dealing with 'Systems, Access, Limits, Acceptance and Direction'.
- 4 **Off-the-shelf solutions** – Can they work? Discussion and case studies.
- 5 **When the student has a label** – Examining illnesses such as dyslexia, AD/HD, Asperger's syndrome, etc.
- 6 **Student self-esteem** – Looking at the links between students' self-esteem and behaviour.
- 7 **Moving behaviour and learning forward** – Strategies involving emotional literacy and affective learning.
- 8 **A behaviour and learning policy for all** – Policy and positive alternatives to exclusion from school.

Each section could be used to deliver an INSET session and is designed to last approximately two hours; however, if the school is large, an extra half hour might be needed in order to give all staff the opportunity to feed back their responses. The first section should be covered first but after that sessions could be covered in any order.

The member of staff who is delivering the INSET in a school may use a complete section, or, for a shorter session, part of a section. Activities are designed to be undertaken in small groups, and there should be an opportunity to share the outcome of those discussions in the large group. The pack could also be used for INSET sessions shared by staff of a group of smaller schools.

Suggestions for further reading are provided below and at the end of appropriate sections. A bibliography of references can be found on pages 71 and 72.

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Suggested background reading

Cooper P et al, *Positive Alternatives to Exclusion*, RoutledgeFalmer, 2000

Lovey J, *Supporting Special Educational Needs in Secondary School Classrooms*,
David Fulton Publishers, 2002

Olsen J and Cooper P, *Dealing with Disruptive Students in the Classroom*, Kogan Page, 2001

2 Stakeholders

This section is about the responsibilities taken by stakeholders within a school for the learning and behaviour policy and how they communicate with each other. Stakeholders include the headteacher, deputy teachers, teachers, governors, the pastoral team, midday staff, students and parents/carers.

Parents

Parents and carers are particularly important stakeholders in the new *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice* (DfES, 2001):

Parents hold key information and have a critical part to play in their children's education. They have unique strengths, knowledge and experience to contribute to a shared view of a child's needs and the best way of supporting them. It is therefore important that all professionals (schools, LEAs and other agencies) actively seek to work with parents and value the contribution they make.

The code stresses the importance of this in the case of children with special educational needs, and it is important that there is home–school liaison between all parents and the school. It is unfortunate that, except for parents' presence at school for statutory special needs reviews, their presence is more likely to be a result of an invitation to discuss a learning difficulty, or a summons to discuss a behavioural matter. This is particularly unfortunate if the parents themselves had problems at school. Some parents, because of their own school history, find it difficult to approach the school except when they have a grievance. The fact that they are nervous about their relationship with the school means that they will sometimes seem more aggressive than they actually are.

If we look back at the Ogden Nash High School policy (**Handout 1**, pages 8 to 11), it appears at first that parents are there for consultation in times of trouble. However, many staff have established a habit of regularly sending home good commendations when a student has shown very positive behaviour, effort or achievement. It would be a good idea if this was written more clearly into the policy.

Initially, some schools had misgivings about having parents on the board of governors, but they are now established as valued members of the governing body. Schools benefit greatly from having supportive parents. In the last section we discussed how students' ideas on a behavioural policy should be sought. We now look at the role of parents.

Consultation with parents

Schools in England and Wales have a statutory responsibility to establish home–school agreements (DfEE, 1999); therefore, it is fitting that a consultation document which includes a questionnaire regarding discipline should be sent to parents.

The purpose of this consultation exercise is to:

- raise parental awareness of the school's mission statement, statement of purpose and reward system
- secure majority parental support for these
- ensure that a sense of responsibility for discipline issues is shared between the school community and the wider community of parents and carers.

Mild/moderate learning difficulties (MLD)

These students will have always had difficulty with learning, and will have fallen further behind their peers as they have progressed within the school system. Unlike those students with specific learning difficulties, their difficulties will span the academic curriculum, although they may excel in repetitive practical work.

Some students with MLD are accomplished at copying and colouring in and take a tremendous pride in their work. Their main problems are:

- not being able to grasp more difficult concepts
- having difficulty in synthesising what they have learnt
- being vulnerable to bullying
- having fragile self-esteem
- being depressed at not being able to catch up academically with peers
- maintaining motivation in academic subjects.

They often respond extremely well to a vocational curriculum, backed up with basic skills, in Key Stage 4.

Developmental disorders

The following disorders are often referred to as developmental disorders:

- attention deficit disorder (AD/HD)
- autism
- Asperger's syndrome
- pragmatic semantic disorder
- Tourette's syndrome.

They are characterised by:

- an underlying biological cause
- evidence that, for the most part, there are genetic factors involved in the transmission (Comings, 1990)
- the frontal lobes of their brains (which regulate attention and behaviour) functioning differently to those of the general population.

Attention deficit disorder

This disorder exists with and without hyperactivity. Students with the hyperactive sub-type are more likely to be diagnosed because of their high profile in the classroom. Students with the non hyperactive sub-type have severe difficulties with learning.

Students with AD/HD have severe difficulties with:

- concentrating on one thing at a time
- curbing their impulses and waiting for their turn
- memory
- sitting still
- focusing on what is important
- having friendships with their peers
- self-esteem.

When we communicate with each other, our ego state is that of adult or child or parents. Within those main ego states there are:

- **The adapted child** – The child who wants to please adults.
- **The free child** – The child who expresses wants and needs regardless of the limits of society.
- **The nurturing parent** – The parent who is helpful, caring and nurturing.
- **The controlling parent** – The parent who criticises and controls.

The adult's behaviour, thoughts and feelings relate to what is happening at the moment. Communication (transaction) between people can depend on the ego state of both parties, regardless of chronological age. Examples of different transactions are shown below:

1a Adult to adult:

Have you seen my training report? I think it's in the top drawer.

1b Adult to critical parent:

Have you seen my training report? Why can't you ever remember where you put things?
Have you tried looking in the drawer?

2a Critical parent:

How many times do I have to tell this group to listen?

2b Nurturing, caring parent:

Now, do you need me to help you? Did you understand the instructions?

3a Free child to free child:

I'm fed up with this marking! Let's leave it and go down to the pub.

3b Adult to adult:

This marking seems to be taking an age. Yes. Shall we go to the pub when we've finished?

4 Sometimes, an appeal is made to the nurturing parent but transactions are crossed and the response is as adult to adult:

I've had a rotten day today. The man came to fix the boiler.

5 Sometimes, an appeal made to the nurturing parent is responded to by a child also needing caring:

I've had a terrible day. You're not the only one. You can't imagine what the traffic was like.

Often, it is appropriate to be the caring, nurturing parent to students. However, when a student needs correction, communication is often more effective when conducted on an adult-to-adult level rather than a critical parent level.

Praise and recognition

This is a way of developing the self-esteem of another person, as long as it is sincerely and realistically given:

- **A positive stroke** – This is sincere praise which makes the person receiving it feel good. It must relate to something that the recipient knows has been done well and with effort.
- **Plastic strokes** and **marshmallow strokes** – Examples are when a student answers a simple question and the teacher says, 'Brilliant' or when any slight effort receives a similar response. The recipient feels patronised.

Steady workers

Thankfully, there are many students in our schools who simply plod along, doing their best, sometimes cruising, sometimes struggling, and often almost unnoticed and unappreciated. Many students are extremely happy not to attract the teacher's attention as they do not like to be praised or corrected in front of others.

Doing their best

Fortunately for this majority, there is a national system of assessment which ensures that every student's academic progress in core subjects is monitored, graded and evaluated throughout their school career. Since this is a statutory requirement, it should be in place in all schools. It is important that any change in achievement and motivation is picked up on quickly.

Steady workers often see not only those ahead of them being praised, but also those who cause concern and disturbance in the classroom. The latter group often receive praise disproportionate to achievement because of the extra effort, or slightly more positive attitude they are bringing to the task. Clearly, these students should have small steps recognised and celebrated; however, it is also important to recognise the efforts of those who carry on regardless, doing their work as well as they can.

The presence of league tables means that average students who are forecast to be capable of a 'D' grade at GCSE will sometimes have extra resources directed to them in the hope of turning it into a 'C' and hauling the school up in the league tables. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you acknowledge that for some students a 'D' grade is an achievement?
- Do you celebrate the D to Fs that are achieved by some of the quiet plodders?
- To what extent do your students feel that less than university entrance is an indication of failure?
- Are those going into vocational courses encouraged and affirmed?

The personal advisors from the new Connexions service (see page 69) will have an important role in helping the students who cannot and do not want to go to university.

Affective teaching and learning

Much has been written about effective education. However, many students respond better when the emphasis is on **affective** education, education that recognises the humanity in all stakeholders. The interaction between the teacher and those who are taught is of paramount importance. There has to be a willingness on both sides to listen to each other and to value what the other has to say.

In a culture where examinations dominate the curriculum, teachers have to be particularly skilful if they are to nurture a real enthusiasm for learning, even among those who find it difficult. All students need to be able to see the progress they have made, to understand the extent to which their prior learning helped them to access further learning and to value new areas, or building blocks, of their learning.

For some students, this happens very slowly and teachers have to be explicit in valuing small steps. Unless the group is small, it is difficult to achieve this quality of nurturing interaction. However, there are situations where groups are small because of the challenging nature of the students in them. In such groups there should be an emphasis on listening to each other and discussing how current learning fits in with prior learning.