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Improving behaviour

Lessons learned from HMI monitoring of secondary schools where behaviour had been judged unsatisfactory

**Better
education
and care**

This report is based on the progress made in 2005 and 2006 by secondary schools which had been judged to have unsatisfactory behaviour following routine institutional inspections. Her Majesty's Inspectors' monitoring visits to these schools tell a good story. Schools can reduce low-level disruptive behaviour in a reasonably short time using simple strategies, if everyone uses them.

Of particular interest to:
secondary schools, local authorities, parents and guardians, the
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Contents

Executive summary	2
Key findings	3
Recommendations	3
How the most successful schools changed	4
They tackled behaviour as part of a wider school improvement strategy	4
They promoted honesty, ownership and teamwork	5
They identified behaviours that were most challenging and planned responses	6
They used external support effectively	7
Barriers to improvement	8
Notes	10

Executive summary

This report is based on the progress made in 2005 and 2006 by secondary schools which had been judged to have unsatisfactory behaviour following routine institutional inspections. Her Majesty's Inspectors' monitoring visits to these schools tell a good story. Schools can reduce low-level disruptive behaviour in a reasonably short time using simple strategies, if **everyone** uses them.¹

The most successful schools did not deal with behaviour in isolation but tackled it as part of a wider school improvement strategy. They set out to motivate students and raise achievement by improving teaching, making learning more enjoyable and giving wider choices in the curriculum. They ensured that their policy for managing behaviour made sense to all. The schools monitored incidents of unacceptable behaviour carefully and established additional support strategies for those behaviours the staff found most challenging. Staff understood that they were not alone when dealing with difficulties and followed the behaviour policy guidelines more consistently.

These coherent strategies shifted the balance of students' attitudes and low-level disruption in lessons fell substantially. The students took a more responsible approach to learning and showed greater respect for their peers and teachers. The calmer climate exposed deep-seated behavioural issues that had been masked previously. In turn, this helped schools to identify any individuals with acute needs, liaise with external agencies and plan support programmes.

Thirty-five of the schools inspected had a range of weaknesses and had been placed in special measures. These schools were monitored termly by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI). Thirteen schools had serious weaknesses. Each of these schools had one monitoring visit by HMI and Additional Inspectors about six to eight months after their inspection. Twenty-three schools had unsatisfactory behaviour identified as an isolated weakness and were not placed in a category of concern. At the request of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), these schools were monitored by HMI.

Twenty-one special measures schools, 11 schools with serious weaknesses and 15 schools where behaviour was identified as an isolated weakness were turning behaviour around by the first monitoring visit. Behaviour had improved by the second monitoring visit in all but four of the special measures schools and all but one of the schools with behaviour identified as an isolated weakness. At the heart of the improvements was a shared purpose linked to a gritty determination to succeed.

¹ 'The most common forms of misbehaviour are incessant chatter, calling out, inattention and other forms of nuisance that irritate staff and interrupt learning.' *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2003/04* (ISBN 0102931771), Ofsted, 2005.

Key findings

- ❑ The schools that made the best progress tackled the improvement of behaviour as part of a whole-school improvement programme. They improved teaching and learning through focused training and coaching, and planned ways to make the curriculum more motivating.
- ❑ They sought students' views about each stage of the improvement process, involved students in the improvement strategies and actively celebrated students behaving well.
- ❑ They spelt out clearly to everyone what behaviour would be considered as unacceptable and its consequences, and ensured that staff knew what to do when faced with unacceptable behaviour.
- ❑ They rigorously monitored and evaluated how staff implemented the agreed behaviour policies and procedures, and maintained high-profile monitoring of behaviour throughout the school day. They analysed incidents of unacceptable behaviour to establish where, when and why they were happening.
- ❑ They identified vulnerable students, including those at risk of permanent exclusion, and provided one-to-one mentoring to discuss issues and work on solutions. In-house support units and external placements were used as part of a thought-through strategy for individuals.
- ❑ They used external support effectively to improve teaching and learning, alongside developing the staff's skills in managing behaviour. They worked productively with external support agencies to evaluate progress, identify crucial next steps and programme training or support.
- ❑ The main barriers that slowed progress for some schools were high staff turnover and reliance on short-term temporary staff. In some schools, senior managers had become absorbed by other priorities, or staff felt overwhelmed by the widespread and deep-rooted weaknesses that had to be turned around.

Recommendations

Schools where behaviour has been judged unsatisfactory should ensure that:

- strategies for improving behaviour form part of a whole-school improvement programme that boosts the quality of teaching and learning, and makes the curriculum more motivating
- strategies for managing low-level disruption are understood and implemented consistently by everyone
- strategies for dealing with challenging behaviour are based on a thorough analysis of issues; focus on ways forward for each individual; and blend the range of available expertise into a coherent, phased programme of support.

How the most successful schools changed

They tackled behaviour as part of a wider school improvement strategy

1. The most successful schools recognised that they would not resolve their behaviour issues just by updating their discipline policy. The schools subject to special measures had widespread weaknesses that had contributed to students' negative attitudes and low-level disruption. These schools, and those with serious weaknesses, were publicly accountable for making a range of improvements.
2. The schools where behaviour was identified as an isolated weakness also realised that making improvements on a wider front was essential. In most cases, the behaviour issues in these schools stemmed from students' frustration with unsatisfactory teaching in a few classrooms and a curriculum that did not motivate a vocal minority, as well as some staff not consistently implementing the school's guidance on managing behaviour.
3. The most successful schools set out to improve teaching and learning as part of their plan to reduce low-level disruption and improve attitudes to learning. Teachers were expected to plan lessons that were more varied and interesting, and to develop the students' ability to work independently and collaborate productively. Whole-school training sessions, sharing good practice and individual coaching kept this message at the top of the agenda.
4. This sustained focus led to improvements in teaching and learning, and improved students' attitudes. The calmer climate exposed deep-seated behavioural issues that had been masked previously. In turn, this helped schools to identify any individuals with acute needs, liaise with external agencies and plan support programmes.
5. Alongside improving teaching and learning, most schools improved their monitoring of students' achievements. Progress within the year was tracked more robustly. Senior managers used this information to pinpoint underachievement and plan additional strategies to support the students' learning. Teachers were expected to use data to set work at an appropriate level of challenge. More regular assessment helped students know what they needed to do to improve and gave teachers more opportunities to celebrate success and raise the students' self-esteem.
6. Some schools made changes in their management structure, bringing academic and pastoral responsibilities together. Revamped tutorial systems led to more effective teamwork among the staff and provided more productive contact with students: discussion about academic

achievement was informed by greater knowledge of the students' personal development and particular circumstances.

7. Arrangements for recording and analysing attendance and punctuality were strengthened. Procedures for following up concerns were streamlined and speeded up. Wider choices of courses were provided for students in Key Stage 4, including vocational and work-based learning. Flexible individual programmes were introduced for the students whose behaviour was most challenging, including one-to-one sessions with learning mentors and anger-management sessions in small groups. Improvements to the quality of the environment encouraged students to treat the school buildings with more respect and to take pride in their surroundings.

They promoted honesty, ownership and teamwork

8. The most successful schools did not blame members of staff or particular student groups for their problems. Instead they said 'we're all in this together'. The schools recognised that students, as well as staff, were frustrated by disruptions caused by incidents of challenging behaviour and the negative attitudes of a minority. They reviewed their behaviour management strategies, seeking views from staff, students, parents, and, in some instances, local community groups. Expectations of how everyone should behave were discussed. Members of staff recognised that they should be good role models for the behaviours valued by the school. Codes of conduct were agreed and their rationale understood.
9. The staff knew that they should set clear boundaries for behaviour and hold to them. They recognised that everyone should implement agreed procedures for responding to unacceptable behaviour consistently. Senior leaders ensured that staff had prompt back-up when appropriate. They actively patrolled classrooms and the school site. They monitored the need for sanctions regularly, and identified hotspots. Issues with particular groups or particular classrooms were discussed openly. Staff experiencing difficulties with particular groups were supported rather than left to flounder alone.
10. In consultation with their local authorities, the schools held their nerve when exclusion rates rose as firmer and more consistent disciplinary arrangements became established. Some used internal exclusion rooms rather than excluding students from the school site. Many parents liked this, but not all of the students did! Internal exclusion meant that the students' work was supervised and less time was lost from learning. It also meant that students missed seeing their friends, especially at break and lunchtime.
11. Students were consulted about the rewards they would value. Some reward systems involved the added excitement of receiving tickets for a

lottery in school, with the chance, albeit small, of more substantial prizes. Rightly, many staff also found time for the personal touch; for example, postcards home celebrating a student's good commitment.

12. Many students responded well to positive recognition, valuing quiet words of approval and an interested enquiry about their achievements. Seeing that those behaving well were appreciated, and that it was not just those behaving badly getting all the attention, was crucial. Better learning stemming from improvements in teaching, better motivation stemming from improvements in the curriculum and better relationships shifted the balance of students' attitudes and low-level disruption in lessons fell substantially.
13. Encouragingly, schools provided training for students to help others who needed advice or just someone to talk to unofficially. Such initiatives led to younger students feeling safer and cared for by their older schoolmates. It also proved to be a great experience for the older students taking part in programmes that increased their awareness and understanding of positive citizenship.
14. The schools making sustained progress sought feedback from the students about how well the new strategies were working. They ensured that the school council was strengthened and that the students knew that their voices would be heard.

They identified behaviours that were most challenging and planned responses

15. Improvements in learning, the curriculum and relationships were not always enough. The schools' firmer management, and better monitoring, of behaviour pinpointed the behaviours that staff found most challenging. It also provided information about which students had the greatest difficulty in conforming to the expectations of the school's code of conduct, and when they struggled most.
16. This analysis of serious incidents enabled conflict to be pre-empted. For example, targeted support was provided for particular lessons, or students spent some lessons supervised by senior staff in a different classroom or 'time-out' facility. The most successful schools recognised that these strategies were not long-term solutions but a first step to focusing on ways forward, rather than using precious time dealing with the fallout from behavioural issues after the event.
17. Ongoing discussions between the students and the school's learning mentors, mentors from the local community, heads of year and group tutors helped to clarify issues for staff and students. Staff review meetings proposed support strategies and monitored their success over time. Improving links with parents was particularly important and led to more

realistic support by, for example, pinpointing young carers' needs more clearly.

18. The most successful schools blended the range of available expertise into a coherent and phased programme of support. Close working with educational welfare officers, social workers, the police and other outside agencies informed the pastoral support programmes and gave them a better chance of succeeding. Dialogue with feeder schools was more purposeful, identifying students in need of behavioural support before they came to the school.
19. The schools improved their liaison with colleges and work-based training. Staff worked hard to find practical courses or training that matched the students' interests. They actively kept in touch with students involved in these flexible learning programmes so that they did not feel that everyone was pleased to see them go. Students liked these external placements and improvements in their attitudes to learning were evident in school.
20. Learning support units played a key role in the support provided by the most successful schools. They were calm, encouraging environments for students to re-engage with learning. Over time, the unit staff equipped the students with strategies to handle their own behaviour better. Planned, phased support helped students to spend more time successfully in mainstream classrooms.
21. Many units provided a safe haven for vulnerable students at break and lunchtime or for those occasions when students found everything too much to handle. Temporary, part-time timetables encouraged some students to attend who could not conform for a whole day or who were very reluctant attenders. Managed transfers to other schools were used when other carefully planned and consistently tried strategies had failed, and a fresh start was the best option for the student.

They used external support effectively

22. The most successful schools took full advantage of the support offered by local authorities, when it was clearly focused on the most pressing improvements needed. The impact of this support was greatest where schools and local authorities worked to a clear, agreed support plan and adopted a coordinated approach to checking progress and planning next steps. Many schools and local authorities had termly or half-termly strategy meetings, which included all parties working in the school, senior leaders and chairs of governors.
23. The local authorities provided consultants with expertise in behaviour management. These consultants are part of the behaviour and attendance strategy strand of the national strategies for school improvement and give priority to secondary schools where behaviour has been judged

unsatisfactory. They helped the schools to audit the strengths and weaknesses in their behaviour management strategies. They also worked alongside teachers, teaching assistants and non-teaching staff assessing strengths and weaknesses in classroom organisation and supervision around the site. They modelled more effective techniques and put schools in touch with sources of good practice and useful guidance.

24. Curricular expertise and subject guidance were also used well where weaknesses in teaching were a root cause of the low-level disruption. Consultants helped to audit teaching and learning, working alongside senior leaders to moderate judgements, identify improvements required and plan support. Advanced skills teachers and skilled practitioners within the school were deployed to help colleagues develop particular skills.
25. Experienced interim headteachers were brought into some of the schools subject to special measures. They quickly saw issues and knew that particular strategies would help to turn things around. The most impressive new arrivals quickly, and actively, built up the students' trust in them: the belief that the long hoped-for improvements in behaviour would be achieved became more widespread among both staff and students.
26. The negative impact of weaknesses in subject leadership, or the long-term absence of subject leaders, was reduced by local authorities arranging additional help in planning and assessment for inexperienced staff within these departments. Where the governing body was struggling to implement all its responsibilities, there were useful appointments of additional governors or well thought-out plans to train governors.

Barriers to improvement

27. Some schools faced severe challenges: gaps in staffing, massive changes to be managed, and widespread and substantial improvements needed.
28. Recruiting and retaining staff was problematic for a minority of schools. Where a high number of vacant posts went in tandem with a high rate of staff absence, the effect on students' attitudes to learning was striking. Students were fed up with changes in teachers and with temporary teachers who did not know them or how the school worked. Indeed, in one school, staff reported that students enquired whether particular teachers were in school that day before deciding to walk through the school gates. These problems were mitigated when senior leaders monitored staff absence, and improved support for temporary staff, visiting their classrooms regularly. Temporary staff were involved in training and development programmes but this investment did not always pay off when they moved on.

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29. A small minority of senior leaders were unable to improve behaviour effectively enough because their time was absorbed by other priorities. Headteachers, for instance, were engaged in developing bids for specialist status and planning new buildings to be erected under Private Finance Initiative schemes. These were indeed crucial developments for the school. However, the disappointment in one student's voice when saying, 'the headteacher has never spoken to me about anything' shows that the headteacher is a key person for the students. The headteacher communicates the tone, ethos and priorities for everyone. The problem of distracted senior leaders was mitigated when monitoring visits and local authority review sessions helped to refocus their priorities, concentrating their attention on what to do today to make tomorrow better.
30. Some schools were overwhelmed by the task before them. Joint planning with local authorities and HMI monitoring visits helped to reassure schools that getting underway on a few things well was better than a lot of activity that could be dissipated. The most effective approaches were those adopted by schools that identified the prevalent issues that wasted the greatest time in lessons and in disciplining students. For instance, one school identified inappropriate language and swearing as the biggest issue and tackled this in an extremely focused way and with a high profile launch. Assigned staff were on site well before the start of the school day, were on-call during lesson times and monitored the corridors at all times. There was a rapid reduction of referrals for swearing and younger students reported less harassment from older students.
31. The most effective external support helped schools to overcome barriers to improvement. Brokering support from other schools and bringing in missing expertise helped the schools to move forward. However, sheer determination from committed staff, who knew that their students deserved a better deal, was equally important.

Notes

Figure 1. Secondary schools in special measures with unsatisfactory behaviour.

HMI judgements about schools' progress in improving behaviour	1 st visit	2 nd visit	3 rd visit	4 th visit	5 th Visit
Number of monitoring visits	35	27	19	11	4
Good progress	4	5	3	1	1
At least satisfactory progress	21	23	17	11	4
Unsatisfactory progress	14	4	2	0	0

The table is based on monitoring visits to 35 schools in special measures with unsatisfactory behaviour. The schools had been inspected and placed in special measures in 2004/05 or the autumn and spring term 2005/06. The table is not a complete record of the schools' journey through special measures. For example, some schools had only received their first monitoring visit when this report was compiled. Six schools had special measures removed: one on the second monitoring visit; two on the third visit; three on the fifth visit.

Figure 2. Secondary schools with serious weaknesses and unsatisfactory behaviour.

HMI judgements about schools' progress in improving behaviour	1 st visit
Number of monitoring visits	13
Good progress	8
At least satisfactory progress	11
Unsatisfactory progress	2

The table is based on monitoring visits to 13 schools with serious weaknesses and unsatisfactory behaviour. The schools were inspected in 2004/05 and had one follow-up monitoring visit. The schools will be reinspected in 2006/07. In September 2005, the inspection framework and the criteria for identifying category of concern were updated.

Figure 3. Secondary schools with behaviour as an isolated weakness.

HMI judgements about schools' progress in improving behaviour	1 st visit	2 nd visit
Number of monitoring visits	23	8
Good progress	7	4
At least satisfactory progress	15	7
Unsatisfactory progress	8	1

In May 2005, at the request of the DfES, HMI began monitoring the progress of schools that had unsatisfactory behaviour identified at an Ofsted inspection but had not been placed in a category of concern. The schools had been inspected in 2003/04, 2004/05 or the autumn and spring term 2005/06. The table is based on monitoring letters written by July 2006.

Figure 4. Secondary schools with unsatisfactory behaviour in inspections 2004/05.

HMI judgements about schools' progress in improving behaviour	1 st visit	2 nd visit	3 rd visit	4 th visit	5 th Visit
Number of monitoring visits	46	24	19	11	4
Good progress	17	4	3	1	1
At least satisfactory progress	30	20	17	11	4
Unsatisfactory progress	16	4	2	0	0

The table is based on monitoring visits to secondary schools identified as having unsatisfactory behaviour in inspections in 2004/05. There were 22 schools in special measures, 13 schools with serious weaknesses and 11 schools with behaviour as an isolated weakness. The table is based on monitoring letters written by July 2006.