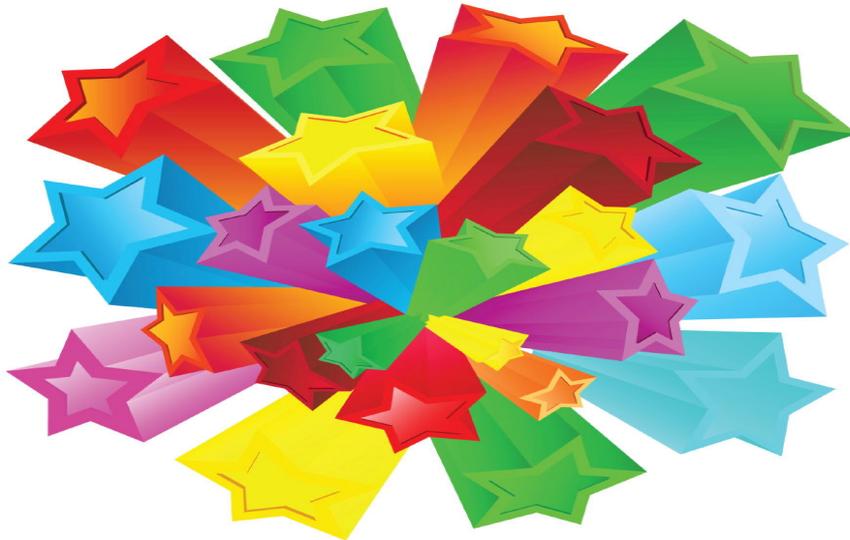# Getting off to a Flying Start

For many teachers, one of the biggest challenges relates to behaviour – will the pupils behave? What if they don't? How do I get them on-side? What about dealing with low-level disruptive behaviour – never mind more challenging, confrontational behaviours that might arise?

This guide is designed to give you practical ideas, backed with credible theory, as to how to establish a strong start - one that engages the pupils in an active partnership to create an active, safe, positive learning environment. The ideas are not intended to be followed prescriptively – try out those you want to and see which fit best for you. The most important thing is to bear in mind the principle behind the idea/strategy – if the strategy doesn't work, think about how else you could respond to the behaviour, guided by the principles outlined below.

Please note
Additional information can be found on many of the ideas outlined here in the Resource Library area of behaviourwall.com and also within the 'Teaching and Learning' area (accessed from the Homepage)

<u>Some Key Principles</u>

1. **The only behaviour you can ultimately control/change is your own**
   Perhaps a daunting truth but short of placing a gun to the heads of our pupils, we cannot force them to change their behaviour.

2. *Don't assume* - '*When I assume I make an ass out of you and me*'
   It can be easy to assume that the pupils know, or should konw, how to behave. It's critical that we are explicit with our pupils as to what behaviours we expect – which leads us onto:

3. **Model the behaviour you wish to see from the students**

   The more they see of the behaviours you want being modelled by you, the clearer idea they will have as to what exactly they need to be doing – and how to do it.

4. **Prevention is better than cure**
   A cliché – but one that is very true. As well as have a plan of how you will address inappropriate behaviours, it's critical that you also have a clear plan as to how you are going to <u>promote</u> appropriate behaviours. Focus your energy on this and implementing it and you might be surprised how it reduces time and energy being spent on dealing with 'issues'.

5. **Catch them being good**
   This is founded on good psychology. Pupils want to know how they will be noticed in the classroom – and the more recognition that is given for behaving appropriately, the more likely they will behave so.

6. **Keep interventions as least intrusive as possible**
   When you do have to intervene, do so in as least a confrontational manner as possible. Consider having a hierarchy of responses – many schools include these in their behaviour policy eg refocusing the pupil with 'the look', a reminder (perhaps given quietly)

7. **Focus on the behaviour not the individual**
   It can be very easy to personalise behaviour – to take it personally as if the pupil has something against you and/or to forget to separate out the behaviour from the pupil.

8. **Relationships, Relationships, Relationships**
   These are a key foundation stone of effective teaching and learning – getting to know your pupils and fostering good relationships with them is fundamental.

9. **Learn to forgive yourself**
   You will make mistakes - and on bad days perhaps more than you would like. It's essential that you remember that you are only human and as such aren't perfect.

10. **Ask for help**
    Teaching can be quite an isolated job – you get into your classroom, close the door and 'get on'. If you find yourself struggling with a behaviour issue, don't go it alone. Find a colleague who will listen, offer some practical ideas and also help you to identify what you are doing that is working.

Some Practical Suggestions

What follows are some practical ideas that will help you to embed these principles into your classroom practice. Tweak them as you wish, taking into consideration your own teaching style and also the age/developmental ability of the pupils you are teaching.

(Please note – further ideas on many of these suggestions can be found in the 'Resource Library' section of behaviourwall.com.)

1. Establishing expectations

What do you expect from your pupils? What do you think they expect from you?

***How can you create a classroom contract/charter that everyone buys into?***

All too 'rule-setting' often follows a pattern of the teacher asking or telling the pupils what rules are going to be followed in the classroom. The pupils will trot out the usual 'Put your hand up', 'Don't call people names' etc etc – and there can be a sense that they aren't really buying into it.

A more creative, engaging way to do this is through the use of 3-cornered contracting. Essentially this is a way in which you, the pupils and any support staff working in your classroom establish a real clarity as to what is expected from one another.

Head/Governors

Pupils   Staff
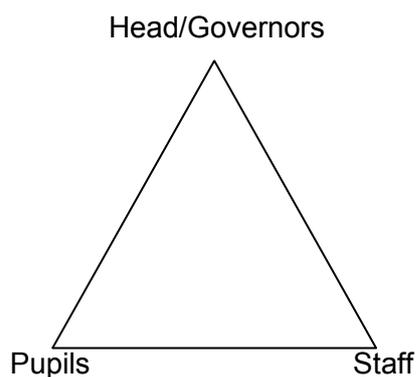
Triangle 1 is one where you can set the bigger picture, essentially helping pupils to understand that you are all working as part of the school community, and that the Headteacher and Governing Body has various expectations of you all.

Pupils can be asked what they think the Head expects from themselves and from the staff working for him/her. Discussion can focus on *why* there are these expectations.

Teacher

Pupils   Support Staff
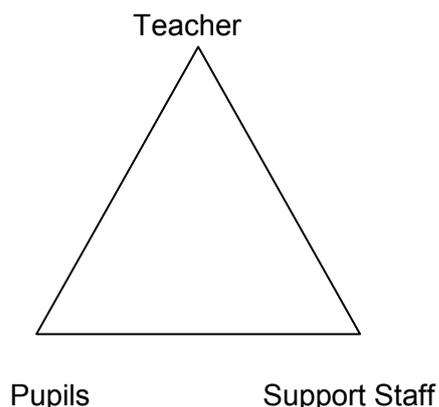
Triangle 2 is the contract you establish as a class.

Key questions can include:

What would tell you that this was the best class in the school? (See below re: Scaling)

What would you see happening? What would you hear?; How would you feel?

What do I need from you in order for this to happen?

What do you need from me?

Ask similar questions re: any support staff –and directly involve them in the discussions.

As part of the contracting, establish what are the ***negotiable and non-negotiable*** expectations.

A number of classes and schools are now basing their classroom contracts on the 5 Big 'R's:

Rights, Responsibilities, Rules, Routines and Relationships.

2.Scaling

This is one of the simplest and yet most powerful tools for helping pupils and staff alike to reflect upon how things are going. Teaching it to pupils takes very little time and, once established, provides a shared language with which you and they can review how things are going in the classroom. (You can also use it with individual pupils to help them reflect upon their behaviour and/or learning.)

1_____10

Quite simply you create a scale 1-10, where 10 is the best things could be and 1 is the complete opposite. Spend some time with the pupils teasing out what '10' would look like – get them to be as specific as possible.
(Some teachers have adapted this for younger children by having pictures instead of numbers.)

Having established this as a parameter, you can then review any lesson, day or week using it – get the pupils to scale how a lesson is going at a certain point – and ask them what they need to do to help nudge it up a point or 2.

3. Self-Esteem - Plan your strokes

We all need to be noticed – and children/young people are no exception. Every pupil in your classroom will want to find ways to get your attention – some will do so by doing 'good' work and 'behaving themselves' – and others will look for negative attention. How we provide recognition is referred to as 'strokes' – and as a teacher you will create a stroke culture within your classroom. As such, pupils will soon get a sense as to how they can get your attention –your approval, disapproval, acceptance and possibly rejection (for those particularly vulnerable youngsters)
Think about your own classroom – how will you provide strokes for the pupils?:

POSITIVE STROKES	*POSITIVE STROKES*
"I'm impressed with your handwriting"; *"You've done really well to solve those equations"*	*"How was your weekend?";* *"Like the haircut"*
Communicate APPROVAL	Communicate ACCEPTANCE
CONDITIONAL (What pupils do)	**UNCONDITIONAL** (For who the pupils are)
CONDITIONAL (What pupils do)	**UNCONDITIONAL** (For who the pupils are)
"Walk down the corridor" *"That was your worst piece of work this term"* *"You haven't given of your best have you?"*	*"Oh you're back again are you?"* *Sarcasm*
Communicate DISAPPROVAL *(NB – negative conditional strokes aren't necessarily a 'bad' thing – they provide structure for pupils, reinforcing our expectations.*	Communicate REJECTION *Poisonous and will jeopardise relationship building*
NEGATIVE STROKES	*NEGATIVE STROKES*

Aim for a stronger weighting of Positive Conditional and Unconditional strokes;

Try to balance Negative Conditionals with Positive Conditionals
Avoid Negative Unconditionals at all costs.
AND – think about how you are getting your need for recognition met – where is your positive feedback coming from? Remember – we all need recognition and

4. Routines
Routines help establish a sense of order to a classroom – and enable pupils to learn to become more independent and to take greater responsibility for their learning and their behaviour.
Which routines will you have for:
- Entering the classroom   - Equipment – getting it out, putting it away
- When pupils need help with their work   - When they've completed a piece of work
- Leaving the classroom (eg do they stand behind their chairs?)

Seating plans – where do you want the pupils to sit? Will they always sit in the same place? Is there room for negotiation with pupils? If so, what are the non-negotiable conditions?

Be prepared to spend time and energy training up the class in these routines – stick with it and you will be rewarded in the longer term because they will become far more independent and in less need of being reminded/nagged!

5. Hierarchy of interventions
As and when inappropriate behaviour arises, being clear as to the different levels at which you could intervene is extremely useful. You will need to link this in with your school's behaviour policy and consider how this can be implemented within your own classroom.

Where the behaviour isn't presenting an immediate threat to safety, think about how you can aim for what Bill Rogers refers to as the least-intrusive approaches. These include giving attention to those pupils who are on task; moving over quietly to the pupil who needs refocusing and providing a reminder as to what you expect; using 'the look'.

Imagining a continuum, moving from these least intrusive strategies through to the most intrusive approaches (eg removal from classroom) can help you to keep a more positively balanced classroom environment.