



Consistency is key what does the evidence say?

Sam's school have a policy which states that mobile phones should not be used during the school day, and that they will be confiscated if seen by a member of staff. When the policy was first introduced, it was implemented very consistently by all members of staff and, as a result, mobile phones were rarely seen either in lessons or during social times. But more recently, **inconsistency** has crept in. Some teachers and support staff still confiscate phones, but others ignore or give a warning when they see them being used. As a result, mobile phones are becoming a common sight on the corridors, and an increasing number of teachers are joining those who turn a blind eye. Sam and his friends are aware of this, and use their phones frequently for sending messages and photos while in school, fully aware of which teachers they can do this in view of, and which they cannot.

The consistency conundrum

Evidence suggests that consistency and coherence at a whole-school level are paramount. Consistency matters: to pupils, to their families, and to all school staff. Only a quarter of secondary and half of primary teachers agree that the behaviour policy in their school is applied consistently (EEF, 2019).

However, when working in a dynamic human environment, making constant decisions about applying strategies in specific circumstances, and making reasonable adjustments for specific pupils, some inconsistency is inevitable. We might call this 'the consistency conundrum', and balancing behavioural consistency with necessary personalisation is one of the many skills of effective teaching and school leadership.

Why does consistency matter?

Ofsted data shows that consistency is the area that schools most commonly need to address to improve behaviour (Ofsted, 2014). It matters **which** strategies teachers and school leaders adopt, but it matters just as much that they all use the **same** strategies, in the **same way**.

Schools should adopt a consistent, coherent school-wide approach to promoting positive behaviour and establishing a safe, inclusive environment where all young people can thrive (Carroll et al, 2017). Evidence shows that effective school-wide approaches can improve pupil behaviour (Coe et al, 2022), meaning more time spent on learning and higher academic achievement (Bennett, 2017). Better behaviour also leads to higher attendance and higher well-being among pupils and staff alike (EEF, 2019).

Whole school approaches to behaviour consistency

Whole-school changes usually take longer to embed than individually tailored or single-classroom approaches. It may sometimes seem quicker and simpler for individual teachers, phases or departments to implement their own approaches, but behaviour strategies are more likely to have an impact on pupil attainment if they are implemented across the whole school (EEF, 2019). Ultimately leadership is the key to improving behaviour; school leaders have a key role in championing new approaches and supporting staff to embed them (Bennett, 2017).

Implementing school-wide behaviour systems or strategies can be a complex, time-consuming process (Chapman et al, 2013). Successful implementation requires sustained coordination and ongoing planning and monitoring – even for changes that may seem minor or simple (EEF, 2019).

However it is worth the investment of time and effort; the power of a behaviour programme derives, in great part, from its consistent application at a whole school level (Ofsted 2014; Bennett, 2017).

Coe et al (2022) make the point that whilst individual classroom teachers can have some *influence* on the classroom supports that enable effective learning to take place, they cannot exercise *control* over them. They explain that only the collective actions of all staff can result in change, and therefore it is beholden on school leaders to lead effective whole school implementation.

Consistency is key: what does the evidence mean for you?

Applying 'flex'

We are used to providing different supports for pupils in order to increase their access to education. Indeed, education providers have a legal and moral duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure students are not discriminated against. Similarly with expectations around behavioural consistency, we might provide reasonable adjustments and support to enable all pupils to be successful when they might otherwise not be.

For example, moving calmly and quietly in corridors might be the expectation for all, but might be made easier when adjustments are in place for some pupils (the 'flex'):

- staggered exits from class
- additional supervision at certain times in the day
- the explicit teaching of expected corridor behaviours

Similarly, focusing on teacher instruction in class is expected, but we can set more pupils up for success if we understand what motivates and supports them to succeed:

- showing a pupil the progress they are making
- through an intelligent seating plan
- through teacher instruction that uses pause, pace, repetition and questioning appropriately

Leaders in school should consider how they support staff to navigate situations with an adaptive flexibility while remaining true to the school's culture core principles. This is likely to include communicating and bringing staff together around the 'why' of a strategy, so that all stakeholders understand the rationale behind a school's approach to behaviour and the core components that make it effective.

This can help in supporting how a strategy is interpreted, adapted and implemented every day.



EXPLORE



PREPARE



DELIVER



SUSTAIN

Leaders should consider how changes will be implemented: the EEF's implementation guidance can help. Implementation should include careful exploration of the issues which leaders hope to solve, and careful preparation. This is likely to involve extensive consultation with all involved: teachers, support staff, parents, and pupils.

Reflection questions

When introducing whole school approaches to behaviour, consider the following questions):

- Are all staff who interact with children trained (e.g. teachers, leaders, teaching assistants, receptionists, lunchtime staff)?
- Is there a sense of shared responsibility or does this new policy feel 'done to' the school community by leadership?
- Are those in the wider school community (beyond the SLT and teachers) involved?
- What impact will you see in school if this strategy is successful? How can that be measured?

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"It is reasonably straightforward to identify what a good culture might look like, but like a diet, the difficulty lies in embedding and maintaining it. This includes staff training, effective use of consequences, data monitoring, staff and student surveys and maintaining standards."

Tom Bennett

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