Good Practice Guide

Guide for <u>Leaders:</u> Behaviour in our Classrooms

EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE
Te Tari Arotake Mātauranga
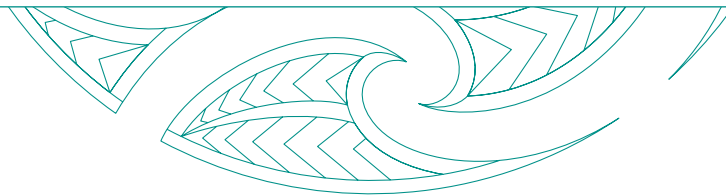
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What is this guide about?

A positive learning environment sets up all students to focus and achieve at school. However, we know that positive classroom behaviour isn't just about in-school practices – it requires shared responsibility and deliberate, joint actions and supports.

This guide gives a brief overview of what ERO found out about behaviour across schools in Aotearoa New Zealand, and then uses robust evidence to clarify 'what good looks like' for managing challenging behaviour within schools. These evidence-based strategies are a combination of 'proactive' (preventing challenging behaviour) and 'reactive' (responding to challenging behaviour) approaches. It also sets out ideas for ways that leaders can implement these practices in their own schools.

ERO looked at classroom behaviour

We wanted to know about the behaviour happening in Aotearoa New Zealand schools, what needs to shift in order to make improvements to the support that schools receive, and the strategies that teachers and leaders can use to manage challenging behaviour within their own schools and classrooms.

We undertook a robust, mixed-methods approach to build our understanding through:

→ surveys of 1557 teachers

→ surveys of 547 principals

→ focus groups with: 47 school staff, 37 students, 21 whānau participants, 14 Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs)

→ site visits and online sessions with 10 schools

→ an in-depth review of literature, including Education Endowment Foundation research.[a]

Good classroom behaviour makes a big difference for learning

Maintaining positive behaviour in school classrooms is crucial for creating a positive and engaging learning environment where students can learn and achieve. When this happens, teachers are able to better use their time teaching, and less time reacting to and managing behaviours. As a result, students' progress and enjoy their learning more.

For teachers, positive classroom behaviour climates place far less strain on their own health and enjoyment of the job, allowing them to teach at their best.

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a   UK-based charity dedicated to improving teaching and learning through better use of evidence

But teachers can't do it alone – shared responsibility and joint actions are needed across school teams and leaders, the wider community, and through system supports like national guidance and programmes, initial teacher education, and access to experts.

For more information about the actions ERO is recommending around higher-level supports, see our report summary: www.evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/time-to-focus-behaviour-in-our-classrooms-summary

We wrote an evaluation report, a good practice report, and three practical guides

Our *evaluation report* and *good practice report* go into a lot more detail about the research evidence that we refer to in this guide. This *guide for school leaders* is designed to be a practical resource. There is also a *guide for teachers* and a short *insights for school boards* document. These resources can all be downloaded from ERO's evidence and insights website, www.evidence.ero.govt.nz.

This guide is for school leaders

This guide provides practical support for leaders to reflect on and build their practice. Each practice area is unpacked into key practices, real-life strategies, and examples. This guide includes strategies that are the relevant for both primary and secondary school leaders. You can find an extended list of strategies for each practice area in our good practice report.

What ERO found out about behaviour in our classrooms

This guide is part of a suite of resources about classroom behaviour. Our evaluation report *Time to Focus: Behaviour in our Classrooms*, describes the type, frequency, and severity of classroom behaviour, how this has changed over time, and the impacts on students, school staff, and parents and whānau. Below is a brief overview of our key findings from that report.

Behaviour is a major problem in Aotearoa New Zealand schools, and it is worse than other countries.

→ Half of teachers have to deal with students calling out and distracting others in every lesson.

→ A quarter of principals see students physically harming others and damaging or taking property every day.

→ PISA results over the last 20 years show that Aotearoa New Zealand's classrooms have consistently had worse behaviour compared to most other OECD countries. For example, Aotearoa New Zealand is lowest among OECD for behaviour in maths classes and in the bottom quarter of PISA countries for behaviour in English classes.

Student behaviour has become worse in the last two years.

→ Over half of teachers report all types of behaviour have become worse. In particular, they report a greater number of students displaying challenging behaviour.

Behaviour is significantly damaging student learning and achievement.

→ Almost half (47 percent) of teachers spend 40-50 mins a day or more responding to challenging behaviour. This limits the time available to teach.

→ Three-quarters of teachers believe student behaviour is impacting on students' progress.

→ International evidence (PISA) links behaviour and achievement, finding students in the most well-behaved maths classes scored significantly higher than all other students, and students in the worst-behaved classes scored the lowest.

Behaviour is significantly impacting student enjoyment of school and therefore attendance.

→ Two-thirds of teachers (68 percent) and principals (63 percent) find that challenging behaviour in the classroom has a large impact on student enjoyment. Enjoyment of school is a key driver of attendance.[b]

Behaviour is a key driver of teachers leaving teaching.

→ Behaviour impacts on teacher wellbeing through mental health, physical health, and stress.

→ Half of teachers (50 percent) say this has a large impact on their intention to stay in the profession.

Behaviour is associated with negative life outcomes.

→ Student behaviour is sometimes managed through being stood-down (not allowed to attend school). These students have worse life outcomes.

→ Students with three or more stand-downs are less than a third as likely to leave school with NCEA Level 2 (22 percent) than those with no stand-downs (73 percent).

→ Experiencing stand-downs is linked to other longer-term outcomes such as unemployment, offending, and poor health.

→ The younger a student's first stand-down, suspension, or exclusion, the more likely they are to receive a benefit, have lower income, have a greater number of admissions to emergency departments, offend, or receive a custodial sentence.

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b   Attendance: Getting Back to School | Education Review Office (ero.govt.nz)

Behaviour issues are particularly severe in large schools and schools in low socioeconomic communities.

→ Teachers at larger schools see challenging behaviour more often, such as refusal to follow instructions (75 percent of teachers at large schools see this every day, compared with 65 percent of teachers at small schools).

→ Teachers from schools in low socioeconomic communities also see challenging behaviour more often, such as damaging or taking property (40 percent see this at least every day, compared to 23 percent from schools in high socioeconomic communities), reflecting the additional challenges in these communities.

Teachers are not all well prepared to manage behaviour.

→ Less than half (45 percent) of new teachers report being capable of managing behaviours in the classroom in their first term.

→ Older new teachers (aged 36 and above) are more prepared to manage behaviour in their first term teaching than teachers aged 35 or younger.

Many teachers and principals struggle to access the expert support they need, particularly in secondary schools and schools in low socioeconomic communities.

→ Half of teachers (54 percent) and three-quarters of principals (72 percent) find timely advice from experts to be an important support, yet four in 10 (39 percent) teachers and half of principals (49 percent) find it difficult to access.

→ Teachers at secondary school feel the least supported, and that their behavioural policies and procedures are the least effective and applied the least consistently.

Teachers struggle to find the time to respond to behaviour.

→ Over half of teachers (53 percent) and principals (60 percent) find it difficult to access the time they need to tackle behaviour issues.

There are inconsistencies in behaviour management within schools and between schools.

→ One in four teachers (25 percent) report that their school's behaviour policies and procedures are not applied consistently at their school. But just 2 percent of principals think they are not applied consistently.

ERO's findings show that there are significant behaviour challenges facing teachers and schools. Deliberate actions and shared responsibility are needed at a high level, like improving national systems and supports. However, the evidence base also shows that there are school and classroom-level actions that can make a positive difference to student behaviour. These evidence-based practices and strategies are outlined in the next section of this guide.

Good practice for managing challenging behaviour

This guide has practical strategies for managing challenging behaviour

This guide offers practical guidance for school leaders and is divided into six practice areas – covering a range of 'proactive' and 'reactive' strategies. Each section of this guide unpacks one practice area, outlines what we know works, and sets out key practices that make the most difference.

The six practice areas are:

Practice area 1	Know and understand students and what influences their behaviour (proactive)
Practice area 2	Use a consistent approach across the school to prevent and manage challenging behaviour (proactive)
Practice area 3	Use strategies in the classroom to support expected behaviour (proactive)
Practice area 4	Teach learning behaviours alongside managing challenging behaviour (proactive and reactive)
Practice area 5	Respond effectively to challenging behaviour (reactive)
Practice area 6	Use targeted approaches to meet the individual needs of students (reactive)

To support leaders and their teaching team, these good practices are illustrated by real-life strategies, insights, and ideas from real Aotearoa New Zealand classrooms. ERO spoke to a range of schools about how they put these evidence-based practices into action. We wanted to know about the practical strategies they use, that might be helpful for other schools.

This guide is focused on classroom behaviour.

These six practices are sharply focused on practical actions that are specific to behaviour management aspects in schools. In addition, it is important to do the basics of teaching and leading well, including content knowledge and delivery, pacing lessons well, using culturally responsive practices, reflecting on teaching effectiveness, and ensuring that learning tasks are at the right level of challenge for all students. These foundational aspects of effective teaching and leading are very important but are not the focus of this report.

Effective behaviour management uses a combination of 'proactive' and 'reactive' strategies.

Proactive strategies are about encouraging positive behaviour. They involve working to create a positive and ordered learning environment, responding positively to students who show good behaviour, and encouraging more positive behaviour over time.

Reactive strategies are about discouraging negative behaviour. They involve responding to students who are behaving poorly to discourage challenging behaviour and providing targeted support for improved behaviour over time.

Practice area 1: Know and understand students and what influences their behaviour (proactive)

This practice area is about teachers and leaders drawing on good knowledge about the students in their class and school. Students' behaviour has multiple influences, and teachers and principals can build their knowledge about these through purposeful relationships with students and through information from other staff and parents and whānau.

When this is going well, teachers and leaders understand the range of influences that are impacting their students' classroom behaviour. They are also proactive in seeking and sharing information with other staff.

1) What do we know about what works?

Behaviour in the classroom is influenced by a range of factors, many of which are external to what happens in class.

Teachers and leaders are better equipped to prevent, predict, and respond to challenging behaviours if they are well informed about the wider context for that behaviour. This includes things like past behaviour, incidents of bullying, attendance and achievement information, individual needs, out-of-school interests, parents and whānau, or community contexts. Being informed allows teachers to tailor their strategies to the potential underlying causes of that behaviour, which is more effective than relying on a default or one-size-fits-all approach.

Taking steps to get to know students well also helps with building learning-focused relationships with students and bolstering students' sense of belonging at the school. These are both strongly reflected in the research evidence base as positive influences on both student achievement and behaviour at school.

2) How can school leaders know and understand what is influencing their students' behaviour?

a) Find out about what might be influencing or triggering students' behaviour

In-school information like attendance and achievement data, behaviour and incident records, and whether students are keeping up with their schoolwork and homework, helps to paint a picture of what is happening for each student that might impact their classroom behaviour. It is useful for teachers and principals to have access to this information to respond in an appropriate way for each student.

The students' parents and whānau and home contexts, as well as in-class peer and group dynamics, also have significant impacts. Strong connections between home and school allows issues to be raised early and helps ensure continuity between home and school. The sharing of approaches that work well at home or in one classroom also helps ensure continuity between different contexts. Good knowledge informs teachers and leaders about the best strategies to address students' challenging behaviour in the classroom, supporting them and their peers to focus on learning.

b) Make sure that every student has a positive relationship with at least one member of staff – ideally their teacher

Behaviour and learning improve when students feel that they are cared about at their school. It is important that all students have a positive relationship with at least one member of school staff. This practice also ensures that there is staff oversight of all students across the school, which helps with monitoring behaviour.

3) Real-life examples: How have other leaders done this?

ERO spoke to schools that have a focus on knowing and understanding what influences their students' behaviour. We wanted to know about the practical strategies that they've found useful.

We heard from teachers and school leaders that it works well to...

→ **Have regular informal 'meet the teacher' nights.** These are a chance for parents and whānau to get to know their children's teachers. Some parents and whānau feel more confident coming along to an informal meet and greet (e.g., a social BBQ), rather than a more formalised event. Teachers then draw on these relationships to support student behaviour.

→ **Ensure new entrant students can visit the school to help them get used to the place and their teacher before they start.** We heard that at least four visits before they start is highly effective in getting new entrants familiar with their teachers and peers, and comfortable in their new environment.

→ **Schedule regular hui/fono/meetings with Māori and Pacific parents and whānau.** At one school this was particularly effective when they asked parents and whānau to provide feedback on what they wanted from these meetings, what was working well, and what could be improved to make these events more productive for everyone involved.

→ **Have specific times when leaders and teachers are available to parents and whānau for 'drop in' chats.** One school ensures that teachers are in the classroom from 8:30am each morning, meaning that parents and whānau know when and how to easily reach the teacher.

→ **Invite parents and whānau to attend school assemblies and other school activities.** We heard that the more opportunities parents and whānau have to connect with the school, the better it is for building the trust and relationship between schools and parents and whānau.

→ **Take a whole-school approach to carefully matching students with teachers.** We heard that this makes it more likely that students can develop a strong and trusting relationship with their teacher, which greatly improves their behaviour.

→ **Arrange classes to support ongoing teacher–student relationships over multiple years.** One school found it worked particularly well to shift to composite classes, where students have the same teacher for two or more years.

→ **Have one teacher or leader responsible for tracking students and looking at their data closely.** We heard that it is useful for all other teachers to know where to go to find this information on students. Having this task assigned to one person means that it is prioritised and doesn't get forgotten.

4) Good practice example

This primary school takes a team approach to managing behaviour by making sure that there's a 'key teacher' for every student. Key teachers have developed a good relationship with their students, and other teachers call on them for support.

> "At morning tea today, one student was not necessarily following instructions… So I just talked to my colleague who works next door with me and I know that she's got a bit of a relationship with this child…"
>
> **TEACHER**

Teachers make an effort to build positive relationships with students, by learning about their interests. Having connections in the community can also support these relationships.

> "[Students] know we know their family and their cousins and their aunties. And… we know they're going to be at netball on Saturday."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

5) Reflective questions for leaders

→ Is information about students shared among school staff? Are we proactive in doing this or do we wait until asked or if there is a problem?

→ What are my relationships like with students' parents and whānau? What could I do to strengthen information-sharing with them?

→ How well do students get on with school staff? Is there someone they really connect with? What could I learn from this relationship?

> "We have our 'Meet the Teacher' evening where parents are invited to come in, see the classrooms, be in the classrooms, meet the teams, meet their teachers, child's teacher, ask all the questions they want, see the space, which makes a huge difference because they're welcomed in and they feel a part of the school."
>
> **LEARNING SUPPORT COORDINATOR**

> "Having that [shared] language… being able to ring home and have those open discussions – and parents understand exactly what you're talking about and the students can discuss that with staff or home. … Students are now almost able to identify [and] self-refer if they need to as well, which is really good. Where in the past they probably would have actually labelled themselves negatively."
>
> **LEADER**

Practice area 2: Use a consistent approach across the school to prevent and manage challenging behaviour (proactive)

This practice area is about being clear on what behaviour management looks like, across the whole school. Consistent approaches help students to know what to expect, reflect on and monitor their own behaviour, and focus on learning. When this is going well, all teachers and leaders are on the same page about how to manage behaviour, and all students know the standard of behaviour expected of them.

This practice area is particularly relevant to school leaders as they support teachers.

1) What do we know about what works?

Behaviour management approaches are more likely to have a positive impact on student achievement outcomes if they are well understood and implemented consistently across the whole school.

A 'whole-school' approach makes expectations and norms around behaviour clearer for everyone. Clarity and consistency help students to know what is expected of them, and to reflect on and monitor their own behaviour. This creates a predictable experience for all students, overlapping with and reinforcing classroom-level strategies.

Implementing school-wide approaches can be more challenging than implementing approaches at the classroom level.

It helps when all staff use consistent language, definitions of behaviour, and consequences. Staff turn-over and time pressures can be barriers to successful implementation.

2) How can leaders use a consistent approach across the school to prevent and manage challenging behaviour?

a) Establish a clear school-wide behaviour approach and apply it consistently

Leaders set the scene for behaviour approaches across the school, through setting the school's behaviour expectations, creating the school's related policies and procedures and making sure these are consistently applied throughout the school. Leaders can encourage teachers to get to know their school's behaviour expectations, including behaviour-related policies and procedures, and plan how they will make sure that their practice lines up with that approach.

b) Use data to track school behaviour

Effectively implementing a school-wide approach to behaviour management requires careful monitoring, through systematically gathering and analysing behaviour data. All school staff should contribute to schoolwide monitoring and decision-making through keeping good records of behaviour-related data like how often behaviour incidents occur.

c) Make sure that teachers are skilled in and supported to use evidence-based behaviour strategies

School leaders must clearly articulate a whole-school behaviour management approach and take deliberate steps to build shared understanding and consistent practice across all staff and all classrooms. This might include providing professional learning opportunities.

3) Real-life examples: How have other leaders done this?

ERO spoke to schools that have a focus on using consistent approaches across the school to prevent and manage challenging behaviour. We wanted to know about the practical strategies that they've found useful.

We heard from teachers and school leaders that it works well to...

→ **Be clear about behaviour 'non-negotiables' at the school.** One intermediate school we visited puts extra effort into communicating these 'non-negotiables' in the first six weeks of school.

→ **Use a structured behaviour management plan that is published.** One school leader told us how their school behaviour management plan has multiple levels including 'reflective steps'.

→ **Encourage students, and parents and whānau to read and give feedback on school policies.** This also provides an opportunity for parents and whānau to share ideas to improve school policies.

Practice Area 2

→ **Have a folder for teachers that outlines behaviour management practices and lists different consequences.** Teachers told us that it helps when they have something they can easily look to for guidance.

→ **Track all behaviours on a Student Management System (SMS).** We heard this is an effective way monitoring patterns of behaviour on and identifying any escalations.

→ **Show behaviour data to parents and whānau during meetings.** Schools shared that data gives a good starting point for conversations, providing clear evidence of a child's behaviour.

→ **Have behaviour as a standing agenda item during staff meetings.** This way it never gets overlooked because there is always a place for it during meetings.

→ **Have a 'go-to' staff member who has specific responsibility for supporting behaviour.** For example, a Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) coach or a specialist class teacher who supports other teachers who are having difficulty with behaviour management.

4) Good practice example

This primary school has put effort into embedding a consistent approach to behavioural management across the school. Teachers refer to documented behaviour management procedures for guidance. This document uses consistent language and includes suggested consequences and praise for certain behaviours.

> "This is quite concise... a really good document to follow... It's the consistency. If they're in my room... [or] another teacher's room. They know if they've been working really well and they've really pushed themselves, they're most likely going to get a token for that. So I think it's really good. It's consistent no matter what teacher is going to be dealing with it."
>
> **TEACHER**

This school makes use of data recorded by teachers to track behaviour trends. Leaders note which weeks tend to have the most behaviour incidents, what types of incidents these are, which students are involved, and how frequently these students behave poorly. The data is presented in graph form. Teachers take time to analyse the data during meetings and discuss potential solutions as a group, ensuring a shared plan of action. The school also compares this data to past years to see if a negative trend is developing.

> "From that we can establish hotspots and whether we need an extra duty teacher or a place to watch out for, or a [particular] child."
>
> **TEACHER**

5) Reflective questions for leaders

→ Does my school have a set of current behaviour expectations, policies, and procedures in place? Do I know whether these are reflected in classroom practice?

→ Do I have my 'finger on the pulse' and know what the behaviour situation is like across the school? How often do I look at behaviour data to identify trends/patterns and what I need to do to address them?

→ How well supported are staff in dealing with behaviour issues? Do they know what to do? How consistent is their practice?

→ What opportunities are staff given to talk about and reflect on behaviour in their classrooms? What about opportunities for students?

> "If students were to be verbally abusive to one of my teachers, then there's not a lot of talking that goes on then. I think that's really important to note. That's part of our culture. Our teachers know that. Our parents know that. Our kids know that if you were to swear at a teacher and be aggressive towards a teacher, you're going straight to me."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

> "A lot of that data informs us as well … if a student who hasn't previously been flagged up to us all of a sudden is now struggling, gets to level one and is being removed from class quite regularly, then we realise that actually there might be something deeper there as well. And we can start to dig into that."
>
> **LEADER**

> "I think having the ability to enter the data into eTAP and we've talked about that as a staff and the expectations then allows the PB4L team to then gather that data. And actually that's shared….. once a term [we have] a staff meeting where we sit and we … as a school there might be some flashpoints, so it might be at morning tea or the transition back in after lunch and then we can put things into place as a staff around that."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

Practice Area 2

Practice area 3: Use strategies in the classroom to support expected behaviour (proactive)

This practice area is about teachers, with the support of leaders, setting up their classroom for positive behaviour. Effective classroom management reduces challenging behaviour and student disengagement, which is linked to improved attendance and higher student achievement.

When this is going well, teachers and leaders set up clear behavioural expectations and refer to them often. They also carefully design physical classroom environments and routines to support learning.

1) What do we know about what works?

Effective classroom strategies reduce challenging behaviour, leading to improved achievement, better attendance, and a more purposeful learning climate.

Classroom strategies do this through supporting positive learning and social behaviours that align with the core values of the school and wider school community.

Simple strategies, like greeting each student at the door or altering the classroom layout, can have a powerful impact on behaviour and achievement.

Having solid routines in place for actions, like borrowing materials and working with others, promotes a calm, well-ordered classroom environment. It is important that students are explicitly taught how these routines look, through teachers describing, modelling, and providing helpful feedback for students.

Teachers offering specific praise or rewards to students for positive behaviour increases the chances of students showing them.

Offering specific praise or rewards to students for positive behaviour is particularly important and effective for students who often get corrective feedback, or who experience punishment outside of school.

2) How can leaders use strategies in the classroom to support expected behaviour?

a) Support teachers to develop and implement a set of class behavioural expectations and consequences with students

Expectations around behaviour and consequences are most effective when students have been involved in the process of developing them and *agreeing* to them. Good quality classroom expectations focus on supporting positive learning and social behaviours, and are worded in ways that everyone can understand and remember. They should also align with the core values of the school and wider school community, usually documented in the school charter.

b) Ensure all classes have clear and consistent routines that are taught and reinforced from day one

Having routines in place for actions like borrowing materials, transitioning between activities or spaces, and collaborating with others creates a calm, well-ordered learning environment. These expectations and routines have the greatest impact when they are explicitly taught in the first few classes, and then regularly revisited.

c) Support teachers to organise the layout of the classroom to support positive behaviour

The layout of the classroom can help promote learning and prosocial behaviour by providing clarity about which spaces are for independent work, collaboration, or accessing learning devices. It can also be useful to have quieter spaces in the classroom for students to go to self-regulate or calm down.

d) Give specific praise and incentives for positive behaviour

Good classroom behaviour expectations aren't just about what *not* to do. Good quality expectations set out what positive behaviours are expected in the classroom. This way, leaders, teachers, and students have a clear shared understanding of 'good' behaviours. Praise focuses on what a student has done or attempted to do, and incentives are more 'future focused' – communicating the belief that students can get better.

e) Support teachers to display visual aids about expected behaviours around the classroom

Clearly displaying expectations in the classroom allows the teacher to easily refer to them, and supports students to develop self-management skills through referring to them independently.

Practice Area 3

3) Real-life examples: How have other leaders done this?

ERO spoke to schools that have a focus on using strategies in the classroom to support expected behaviour. We wanted to know about the practical strategies that they've found useful.

We heard from teachers and school leaders that it works well to…

→ **Explicitly teach the behaviour expectations and go through them with students.** One school we visited had a goal of students being able to recite their expectations off by heart.

→ **Set aside time at a teacher-only day at the start of the year for teachers to set up their classrooms.** This dedicated time supports teachers to focus on a *deliberate* classroom set-up.

→ **Provide 'calming spaces' for when students are feeling overwhelmed.** One primary school we visited had weighted toys and teddy bears in these spaces. Teachers set clear expectations around how this space is to be used.

→ **Use a house system with house points, house leaders, and other leadership opportunities.** Students earn house points by showing good behaviour.

4) Good practice example

This school's expectations around uniform, devices, and behaviour are clearly written in the front of students' school diaries. All teachers go through these with their students at the start of the year. The student support director described the diary as the 'golden rule.

Teachers carefully plan how they group students together in class. They note that one issue with having students pick their own groups is that some students end up being left out or isolated. A well-constructed seating plan mitigates this.

> "Teachers can make sure that that groups that work well together are put together and that students that don't work well together are not. So that is something that we do across the board."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

Homeroom teachers have the flexibility to develop their own classroom rules – as long as they are linked to the school's overarching expectations. Five or six times a term on a Thursday, homeroom teachers spend an hour with their students focusing on teaching students' positive behaviours (for example, 'not being a bystander' if you see something wrong happening).

> "We found [it] has been invaluable… to try and get the students to make decisions about their behaviour."
>
> **DEAN/TEACHER**

> "Students a few times a year get awarded, either an award for their effort and seeing progress throughout the year. So it's not just for those students that are top scholars, but seeing the hard work and what the mahi can actually achieve."
>
> **DEAN/TEACHER**

> "We also have our [school awards], which is a school wide system, and that's around acknowledging positive behavior and that's linked to our house system."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

5) Reflective questions for leaders

→ How do I ensure that each class has a set of behaviour expectations and consequences, and that students know about these and understand them?

→ How do I reinforce behaviour expectations with students and staff?

→ Do I provide teachers with guidance on what routines should look like in the classroom? Are they regular and well-structured and predictable? How purposeful is the layout of our classrooms?

Practice Area 3

Practice area 4: Teach learning behaviours alongside managing challenging behaviour (proactive and reactive)

This practice area is about explicitly teaching and reinforcing behaviours which help students to focus on their work. These behaviours might include paying attention to the teacher, getting along with classmates, and being focused during class.

Teachers and leaders can help students to develop learning behaviours by ensuring that all students can access the curriculum and engage with lesson content, and that rules and routines are well-established.

1) What do we know about what works?

Teaching and reinforcing learning behaviours reduces the need to manage challenging behaviour.

The more engaged and motivated students are, the less likely they are to behave poorly and the less time teachers need to spend managing behaviour. This is key to improving academic achievement across all students in the class.

Students may display disruptive or challenging behaviour because the work is too difficult, or they don't have the appropriate scaffolding or support.

It's useful to keep in mind that being well-behaved does not necessarily mean students are actually engaging with the content of the lesson (also known as being 'passively disengaged'). Teachers may need to use a targeted approach for individual students.

2) How can leaders teach learning behaviours alongside managing challenging behaviour?

a) Promote classroom teaching practices that encourage focused learning

Leaders can support teachers to ensure that classes are well-paced and motivating and that classwork is not too difficult or too easy for students. This reduces the likelihood that students will become disengaged and behave poorly. It is helpful when students have a stake in, and feel in control of, their learning. During lessons, teachers can check in on whether they are successfully promoting focused learning by, for example, asking 'check-

for-understanding questions', or looking out for signs of passive disengagement like tapping fingers on the table, off-topic discussions, or playing with a pen.

b) Encourage teachers to provide opportunities to practice positive social behaviours

Classes which encourage cooperation between students have a positive impact on learning. In a cooperative classroom environment, students teach and learn from each other, and are confident to bring their own knowledge and experiences to a task. The teacher is deliberate in assigning peers or groups based on the needs and dynamics of their students.

Some students find it hard to work well with others, and some activities trigger disruptive behaviour. In some cases, these students require more targeted action – see practice area 6 of this guide for more about this.

c) Support students to regulate their own behaviour

Students who can self-regulate have learnt resilience, self-control, and how to manage their emotional responses to stressful situations, such as another student's disruptive behaviour. They are aware of their own behaviour and potential consequences for challenging behaviour. Self-regulation helps students to focus on their own learning, rather than distracting, or being distracted by, others in the class.

3) Real-life examples: How have other leaders done this?

ERO spoke to schools that have a focus on teaching learning behaviours alongside managing challenging behaviour. We wanted to know about the practical strategies that they've found useful.

We heard from teachers and school leaders that it works well to...

→ **Organise for senior students to lead school events and mentor younger students.** Strategies include peer support programmes, or a 'tuakana-teina' approach with younger students having a senior 'buddy' or mentor. We heard that this develops senior students' leadership skills and benefits younger students through a positive example.

→ **Have a check-in with students later on after an incident.** This helps to give students time to process what happened in an incident before talking about it. In one school, staff use a written 'check-in sheet' which is then made available to all teachers and senior staff.

→ **Include a reflection activity during detention/punishment, such as writing apology letters.** This encourages students to reflect on their challenging behaviour with a clear head.

→ **Hold 'restorative practice' conversations to restore relationships between students.** These conversations support students to understand the impact their actions can have on others, and encourages them to improve their behaviour.

Practice Area 4

4) Good practice example

Teachers in this primary school provide classroom environments that purposefully encourage on-task behaviour. During class time, there are multiple workstations with a range of different activities. Students self-manage their workload using 'graphic organisers' on the classroom walls which show which activities to go to next. This practice prevents students becoming disengaged and prone to challenging behaviour.

> "Working all around at different stations, [students] are all engaged, they're all moving because they've all got work that's targeted at their level. They talk about success criteria. They talk about 'what does good work look like?'"
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

This school facilitates positive social connections between students by having buddies, peer tutors, and several student leadership groups. Buddies are selected by staff. Staff have found that older students who behaved poorly in the past can benefit from the responsibility of being a 'buddy' for younger students.

> "We set up an older student who was really struggling with behaviour but related really well to the little dudes. So he became... [their] big buddy."
>
> **PRINCIPAL**

5) Reflective questions for leaders

→ Do teachers at my school regularly check on all students during class time (e.g. asking how they are going with a particular task)?

→ How are students' social skills and self-regulation skills? How can I support them to develop these skills to better focus when learning alongside their classmates?

→ Do I give students the opportunity to calm down and then reflect on behaviour incidents? Do I make time to have a debrief or check in with them?

> "The same class can be beautifully behaved in maths class, beautifully behaved in art, and then their behaviour is appalling in English or P.E.... So some of the challenge is about teaching and pedagogy."
>
> **EXPERT**

Practice area 5: Respond effectively to challenging behaviour (reactive)

This practice area is about teachers and leaders responding to challenging behaviour when it occurs, with evidence-based practices. This involves having a range of strategies and the confidence to make good decisions about what response is needed.

When this is going well, teachers and leaders have clear planned responses for incidents of challenging behaviour ranging from corrective feedback to larger-scale logical consequences.

1) What do we know about what works?

Occasional challenging behaviour will occur in even in the most well-organised classroom environments.

Alongside embedding good-quality behaviour expectations and preventative practices, teachers and leaders need to be prepared to respond to challenging behaviour. Without appropriate responses from teachers and leaders, behaviour can quickly escalate and present risks to students and school staff.

There is a range of responses that teachers and leaders can use, ranging from low-level (e.g. corrective feedback) to high-level (e.g. logical consequences).

For less serious behaviours, students benefit from structured feedback intended to help them develop better self-management skills.

In the same way that teachers may provide feedback for students' classwork, feedback around behaviour has the best effect when it:

→ is given as soon after the behaviour incident as possible

→ is given as calmly and privately as possible

→ is linked to the school's behaviour expectations

→ starts with what the student does well, and what they should do differently to avoid a future incident.

For more serious or recurring behaviours, teachers and leaders must respond with logical consequences.

Logical consequences reinforce agreed rules and expectations, are proportionate to the student's behaviour, and support all students to know what behaviour is expected at school.

After some incidents, students may need to be given time to 'cool off' and reflect. When reflecting, it is important that students focus on the impacts of their behaviour, and what might have triggered them. This allows students to better understand their triggers and strategies they can use to better self-manage their behaviour in the future.

2) How can leaders respond effectively to challenging behaviour?

a) Work with teachers to plan responses to common and frequent behaviours in advance

While some behaviours can't be predicted, often teachers will notice patterns emerging in the behaviours that occur in their classroom. Where there are predictable types of challenging behaviour, teachers can draw on their experiences to plan out an effective approach going forward. Identifying the best strategies to use ahead of time is more likely to lead to behavioural change in students.

b) Alongside teachers, respond appropriately using relevant strategies:

→ Corrective feedback

→ Reminders ('warning' at secondary school level)

→ Redirections

→ Logical consequences

Strategies can range from low-level responses (for example, reminding a student of the behaviour expectations), to higher level responses (such as meeting with parents and whānau to develop individualised plans). Where there are repeat incidents of challenging behaviour, teachers and leaders should work together to implement higher level systems for responding that link in with agreed schoolwide practices.

3) Real-life examples: How have other leaders done this?

ERO spoke to schools that have a focus on responding effectively to challenging behaviour. We wanted to know about the practical strategies that they've found useful.

We heard from teachers and school leaders that it works well to…

→ **Develop a school-wide book that lists the consequences for different behaviours.** Teachers add in new behaviours as they occur and the consequences that are used. One school also uses this book to document behaviour incidents.

→ **Respond to challenging behaviour in class as a senior leader.** Teachers told us that one of the most effective responses to a serious incident or highly challenging students is to involve someone from the senior leadership team.

→ **Use a warning system with three strikes.** One secondary school uses coloured cards to deliver these warnings so students are clear about each escalation. This school's three strikes are a verbal warning, a quiet chat with teacher, and a dean's referral.

→ **Develop a flow chart of how to respond to behaviours that sets out when to escalate to a higher level.** This is something teachers look to regularly for guidance to support them to respond to challenging behaviour more efficiently and consistently.

→ **Debrief with colleagues after a behaviour event, and brainstorm responses as a group.** Teachers we talked to spend time reflecting on how they have responded to incidents in the past. This helps them to feel more prepared for future events.

→ **Design consequences for students around giving back to school and making up for any harm.** For example, one school we visited gave students the opportunity to choose from a small range of agreed consequences.

→ **Debrief with students after an incident.** We heard that this is an effective way to draw a line under the incident.

4) Good practice example

All teachers in this large urban primary school use a flow chart to guide them on how to respond to behaviours and when to escalate to a higher level. The flow chart is on the wall in every classroom and sets out the procedures for dealing with behaviour – assessing how serious it is, and then moving through a restorative process. It is designed to align with the PB4L program they have at the school. The principal told us that the flow chart ensures "that [each] student is getting some consistent management."

Leaders and teachers monitor students after a behaviour incident. If the students involved are still upset about what happened the next day, then the principal will invite them to come and debrief. The principal noted that talking through what happened is an effective way to resolve any remaining issues.

"[If students] feel like it's an injustice, then I'll always invite them to come back at morning tea and sit. We sit together and we can talk about what actually happened, then… some will even take the opportunity and come back again at lunchtime just to clear it from their head… They take home a clear mind [rather] than… one that's loaded."

PRINCIPAL

5) Reflective questions for leaders

→ How do I support teachers to respond to more challenging behaviours when we have used up all proactive strategies? Are our responses effective?

→ Do teachers at my school know who to go to on the staff if a student's behaviour is becoming really challenging?

→ Do teachers know what to do if a student's behaviour escalates or starts to get out of hand? Are they prepared and confident with a plan in place?

→ Am I flexible in how I respond to different behaviours, or do all students get the same response regardless of their actions? How could I implement a wider range of logical strategies and consequences?

Practice area 6: Use targeted approaches to meet the individual needs of students (reactive)

This practice area is about responding to behaviour by using targeted, individualised approaches to respond to challenging behaviour when it occurs.

When this is going well, teachers and leaders are able to adapt their practices to more effectively manage students with more severe challenging behaviour. They also develop useful plans for managing the behaviour of these students in collaboration with their parents and whānau, other school staff, and outside experts if required.

1) What do we know about what works?

A school's usual approach to behaviour management may be insufficient to meet the needs of the most challenging students.

In these cases, a school's clear expectations and norms around behaviour should form the backbone of a more targeted approach to behaviour management for these individual students. Teachers and leaders should work together to ensure that targeted approaches are not perceived by others to give differential treatment to, or lower behaviour expectations for, any one student. This is important for reinforcing schoolwide expectations.

Behaviour management plans benefit from a team approach.

When designing targeted approaches, schools need to consider influences in students' lives from outside of school. For this reason, it is effective to include parents and whānau, the student themselves and relevant health/psychological professionals in the development of the plan. This allows teachers to match their response with any underlying causes of that student's behaviour (see practice area 1 for more information about this). In cases of extremely challenging behaviour, a targeted approach implemented by experts or specially trained teachers may be required.

2) How can leaders use targeted approaches to meet the individual needs of students?

a) Work with teachers to adapt approaches to the individual needs of students

There is strong evidence that having the flexibility to adapt behaviour management strategies to students' individual needs has more of an impact than a one-size-fits-all approach. When designing targeted approaches, schools need to consider the needs of the individual students, and the context in which their behaviour is most likely to occur (for example, during a particular class).

b) Plan responses with school staff, the student, their parents and whānau, and others

Students with a history of extreme or persistent challenging behaviour benefit from an explicit documented, in-depth behaviour management plan to help teachers to address and respond to incidents. This plan should guide strategies to prevent behaviour incidents from occurring (proactive), as well as strategies for managing an incident if it does occur (reactive). Good quality plans are collaborative, including collaboration with the student, and draw on data and a range of voices rather than 'intuition' or assumptions.

c) Get expert help when required

Students, their contexts, and their behaviours are diverse. Teachers may not have the specific expertise or capability to respond to all types of behaviour that they encounter in the classroom. Teachers can draw on expertise from RTLB, Social Workers in Schools (SWIS), counsellors, and through funding programmes such as the interim response fund and Te Kahu Tōi: Intensive Wraparound Service, and other supports.

3) Real-life examples: How have other leaders done this?

ERO spoke to schools that have a focus on using targeted approaches to meet the individual needs of students. We wanted to know about the practical strategies that they've found useful.

We heard from teachers and school leaders that it works well to…

→ **Use safety plans for high-risk students which lay out clear protocols.** This works well when each staff member is aware of and has access to the plan. We heard that it's helpful if each plan includes a photo of the student so that they can be easily identified by all staff.

→ **Create 'transition sheets' which provide information about students when they change classes or schools.** This informs school staff about students' behavioural needs and helps schools adapt their behavioural approaches when they need to.

→ **Include students in the development of their behaviour management plan.** We heard that inviting students to join planning meetings can make them feel more involved and more likely to follow the plan.

Practice Area 6

→ **Seek mentor support for extreme challenging behaviour.** In one school, a mentor for a Māori student takes part in cultural activities with them, which supports their relationship-building outside of a 'teacher-student' dynamic.

→ **Develop a home-school behaviour book.** These are used to keep up regular communication between parents and whānau and the school. One school's book for more challenging students go between home and school each day, with details of the students' behaviour, and any important messages.

→ **Have clear systems and structures in place for staff to know where to get support.** This might have multiple tiers of support starting with seeking advice from a team leader, up to working with the deputy principal or the principal.

→ **Leverage positive relationships between students and their counsellors.** We heard that it can be important for students to have someone they can talk to who is *not* a teacher. Counsellors can help students to contribute to their behaviour management plans.

→ **Access a psychologist to assess and diagnose students.** This might be through arranging visits, or one secondary school we visited employs an in-school psychologist.

4) Good practice example

This large urban intermediate school develops tailored behaviour management plans for challenging students, with clear steps for teachers to follow, 'levels' of escalation, and documentation requirements.

"If this was a first offense… the teacher would be managing their situation with possibly some guidance from their team leader… That would be logged into our behaviour plan. If it was a recurring behaviour… [then] there would definitely be contact to the parents at level two. The parents would be notified… through an email. But at level three I would be… having a phone conversation with them, and we would be putting some things in place to support that child."

PRINCIPAL

This school shared that for some students, involving them in the process of creating their own behaviour management plans is highly effective for reducing behaviour incidents.

"For example, we have one child that's on [level] one at the moment. Theirs is very much tailored to what they're working on, and it's framed in a really positive way. So it's not, 'You will not do this, you will not do that.' It's all about what I [the student] am going to do, what I am going to see. And that is shared with myself, the teacher and the parent… That usually has a really positive response."

PRINCIPAL

5) Reflective questions for leaders

→ Have I made sure that the school is keeping good documentation and a record of everything that is being done to support students with more challenging behaviour? How well informed are parents and whānau?

→ What supports have been put in place to meet the needs of all students? Am I proactive in keeping informed about how well these are working?

→ Do I know how to access the range of external supports and resourcing in the local area when students' behaviour has really escalated? What barriers are there to this and how can I overcome them?

→ How well do teachers at my school know the Government legislation and Ministry of Education policies/procedures relating to behaviour? Should I check that our understandings are up-to-date?

→ Supporting student behaviour can be challenging for teachers – do I check in often with my staff? Do all teachers have capacity and good support?

> "You've got to look at what's underneath the behaviour and what's causing it ... [the behaviour is] just one part of the puzzle. It's not going to change the behaviour if we haven't figured out that the behaviour is actually like."
>
> **PSYCHIATRIST**

> "[We] have a Year 9 boy that's had some challenging behaviour this year. What has worked has been getting his teachers together and sharing with them all the student's aspirations and their... aspirations for his future. And teachers have been able to see the person rather than the problem. And that's... been quite transformative in their relationships with him and... his behaviour in class."
>
> **RTLB PROVIDER**

> "We've put together a positive learning support plan and behaviour support plan for him. And he signed it off. The parents signed it off. We were all on the same page and it was really clear expectations of this is what you do, this is the consequence."
>
> **LEARNING SUPPORT COORDINATOR**

Conclusion

Positive classroom behaviour is critical for creating learning environments in which students can learn and achieve, and teachers can be most effective.

This good practice guide describes six areas of practice that evidence shows make a real difference to classroom behaviour. This is intended to be a practical resource for school leaders.

Behaviour in schools impacts on learning

Classroom behaviour impacts the learning of all students. Maintaining good behaviour in school classrooms is crucial for creating an environment where students can learn and achieve. In classrooms with good behaviour, teachers are able to better use their time teaching, and less time reacting to and managing behaviours. This places far less strain on their health and enjoyment of the job, allowing them to teach at their best. For students, better behaviour in classrooms means less disruptions, allowing them to focus on learning.

ERO identified six key areas of practice for managing classroom behaviour

ERO looked at national and international research and what is happening in schools across Aotearoa New Zealand to set out 'what good looks like' for managing challenging behaviours. These six evidence-based areas of practice are a combination of 'proactive' (preventing challenging behaviour) and 'reactive' (responding to challenging behaviour) approaches.

Proactive	Practice area 1	Know and understand students and what influences their behaviour
	Practice area 2	Use a consistent approach across the school to prevent and manage challenging behaviour
	Practice area 3	Use strategies in the classroom to support expected behaviour
Reactive	Practice area 4	Teach learning behaviours alongside managing challenging behaviour
	Practice area 5	Respond effectively to challenging behaviour
	Practice area 6	Use targeted approaches to meet the individual needs of students

Leaders' and teachers' practice makes a difference

ERO's evaluation report, *Time to Focus: Behaviour in our Classrooms* www.evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/time-to-focus-behaviour-in-our-classrooms shows that there are significant behaviour challenges facing teachers, and that deliberate actions and shared responsibility are needed at a national level. However, the evidence base also shows that there are school and classroom-level actions that can make a real difference to student behaviour.

We visited schools across the country to see how teachers and leaders are making these six key practices happen in real life. Their strategies and ideas are shared throughout this guide to inspire and support teachers with their own classroom practice. It is intended to help inform positive shifts to teachers' and leaders' practices – setting students up for better achievement and engagement in the future.

Useful resources

This guide is part of a suite of resources around classroom behaviour.

ERO's research report and guides are designed to support teachers and leaders to better manage challenging behaviour. These resources can be downloaded for free from ERO's evidence and insights website, www.evidence.ero.govt.nz.

Link	What's it about?	Who is it for?
Time to Focus: Behaviour in our Classrooms	The **evaluation report** shares what ERO found out about the behaviours happening in our classrooms.	Teachers, leaders, parents and whānau, learning support staff, specialists, and the wider education sector
Summary – Time to Focus: Behaviour in our Classrooms	The **summary** is a brief overview of the evaluation report	Teachers, leaders, parents and whānau, learning support staff, specialists, and the wider education sector
Good Practice: Behaviour in our Classrooms	The **good practice report** sets out how schools can manage classroom behaviour.	Teachers, leaders, parents and whānau, learning support staff, specialists, and the wider education sector
Guide for Teachers: Behaviour in our Classrooms	This guide sets out practical actions for **teachers.**	Primary and secondary school teachers
Guide for School Leaders: Behaviour in our Classrooms	This guide sets out practical actions for **school leaders.**	Principals, and other school leaders at primary and secondary schools
Insights for School Boards: Behaviour in our Classrooms	This brief insights for **school board members** explains how they can help their school focus on behaviour	Board members at primary and secondary schools

In addition to ERO's reports, guides, and insights, there are a range of resources available for teachers and leaders wanting to get better at managing challenging behaviour. Links and information about some of these resources are set out below. Leaders and teachers can also seek support and resources from their regional Ministry of Education office.

What is it?	Link
The Education Endowment Foundation's 2021 resources on Improving Behaviour in Schools	Improving Behaviour in Schools | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)
ERO's 2022 report on the experiences of disabled learners in schools	Thriving at school? Education for disabled learners in schools (ero.govt.nz)
ERO's 2022 and 2023 attendance reports	Missing Out: Why Aren't Our Children Going to School? (ero.govt.nz) Attendance: Getting Back to School (ero.govt.nz)
The Ministry of Education's information page about behaviour resources	Learning and behaviour supports for schools and kaiako – Education in New Zealand (www.education.govt.nz)
The Ministry of Education's severe behaviour service resource page	Behaviour Support – Information for teachers and schools – Education in New Zealand (www.education.govt.nz)
The 'Educultural Wheel' framework, developed by Angus MacFarlane for use in Aotearoa New Zealand schools	NZC – Resource (education.govt.nz)
ERO's 2019 evaluation on bullying in our schools	Bullying Prevention and Response in New Zealand Schools.pdf (ero.govt.nz) Bullying Prevention and Response: Student Voice | Education Review Office (ero.govt.nz)

We appreciate the work of all those who supported this research, particularly the teachers, school leaders, students, parents and whānau, and experts who shared with us. Their experiences and insights are at the heart of what we have learnt.

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