

## Behaviour in the Classroom



# Behaviour in the Classroom

*The Practical Guide*

*Olivia Dear & Sarah Dear*

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To Michaela teachers who lead the way and for all the other teachers  
fighting the good fight, even and *especially* when it's difficult!



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# Foreword

There are very few books for new teachers worth reading. Most of them are written as philosophical treatises, academic indulgences, or written hopelessly above the level of the classroom practitioner. It is hard for the veteran teacher or author to remember what it is like when one is starting out, or taking over a challenging classroom for the first time. Much of what good teachers do is instinctual, or intuitive. But beginners (or those wise enough to know they can improve) do not need abstract rumination on cryptic points of political ideology. They need advice; they need guidance; they need direction. And they do not need it from armchair philosophers, or those so removed from the classroom they can barely remember it. They need advice from people who have demonstrated expertise, and who have a strong sense of what it is you, the reader, needs to hear. They need something short enough to be readable, but long enough to be clear. They need straightforward, evidence-informed, practical advice on how to manage the behaviour of groups of children, in order that they may flourish.

And that is the book you are holding in your hand. Read it all at once, in one gulp. Then put it down. Then read it again a few days later, and refer back to it as you work, prepare, and plan your day with the inheritors of the future, our students. They may never thank you that you did, but they will owe you a debt.

**Professor Tom Bennett**

Academica University of Applied Sciences

School Behaviour Advisor to the Department of Education, UK



## Note to readers

This practical guide on classroom management, behaviour management, and school and classroom climate is based on the professional experience of the authors and the work of other well-known education practitioners and thinkers such as Tom Bennett, Doug Lemov, and Greg Ashman. The authors, Olivia Dear and Sarah Dear, have been Core Lecturers at *Academica* for a few years. Both of them worked as teachers at the successful *Michaela Community School* in London for many years.

The core business of *Academica* revolves around educational development, educational consultancy, teacher professionalisation, and teacher training informed by knowledge, especially knowledge generated and tested in scientific research. The knowledge on which this guide is based is primarily professional: what we advise here works in practical school settings, as confirmed by experience. While we are already publishing this guide, we are still in the process of mapping relevant scientific knowledge and conducting research ourselves, along with teachers, to assess existing scientific knowledge in our own practices.

Various traditions of research and theory formation are relevant in this context. They differ in the sense that there are more than one or two; significantly more. They are also diverse in the sense that they have different backgrounds and motivations, different principles and assumptions, different methodologies, and, to some extent, different conclusions. In our own research, we explore, compare, evaluate, and check:

- the interpersonal theory/interaction styles theory (including Wubbels and Brekelmans);
- the parenting styles theory by Baumrind applied to communication between teachers and students (including Wentzel);
- the attachment theory extended to the teacher-student relationship (including Pianta, Spilt, Koomen, Verschueren, Roorda);
- theories of motivation, such as agency theories (e.g., Self-Determination Theory by Deci and Ryan, Vansteenkiste), self-competence theories (by Pintrich and Schunk), self-efficacy theory (e.g., Bandura), interest theories (e.g., Alexander), and goal theories (e.g., Blumenfeld, Dweck);
- theories of school effectiveness (including Creemers, Kyriakides, Bosker, Muijs);

- theories of class and school climate (including Bryk);
- theories of classroom management (including Weinstein, Brophy, Doyle).

Over time, we will publish the results, comparing the practical knowledge that guides this manual with what is known from scientific research and what is debated among researchers.

**Dr Piet van der Ploeg**

Professor of Pedagogy and Ethical Issues

Former Dean of the School of Education & Society at Academica University of Applied Sciences

# Introduction

Effective behaviour. It is crucial for teacher satisfaction and motivation. It is crucial for pupils' learning and safety. PISA<sup>1</sup> showed that, in all countries and economies, pupils who reported a better disciplinary climate—"the way we feel around here"<sup>2</sup>—performed significantly better in reading. The outcome remained true irrespective of gender, socio-economic status, background of the children, type of school, and extent of misbehaviour. Even occasional misbehaviour in lessons (e.g., "the teacher has to wait a long time for students to quiet down" in *some* lessons) has a negative impact on performance. The more frequent and the more significant the behaviour—"students don't listen to what the teacher says", "noise and disorder", "students cannot work well"—the greater the impact.<sup>3</sup>

And that's only inside the classroom. Outside of the classroom, the way our pupils behave will impact so many other aspects of their lives including social mobility, vocational opportunity, interpersonal skills, well-being, and mental health. By definition, the behaviour of our pupils will determine the future of our society, because our pupils are the next generation. Their behaviour—what they do and how they do it—will shape the world.

Presumably, you have picked up this book because you already think that better behaviour in the classroom will increase your pupils' success and you hope you might be able to achieve that. You are right. The first (and very important) step is to really believe that you can make this positive difference. Extensive literature reviews and meta-analyses show us that the teacher is the most important influencer of pupil achievement<sup>4</sup> (at least, the most important influencer that we have control over), with classroom management specifically being identified as the most crucial factor.<sup>5</sup> Research into effective teachers who have high expectations of their pupils finds that those teachers first have high expectations of themselves. Teachers who set the bar high and believe that all children can achieve academically and can behave effectively (sometimes referred to as high expectation teachers) are also teachers who believe that they themselves can make a difference to their pupils' development. These teachers have been found to persist more than others in their behaviour expectations and their teaching—even when it's difficult for their pupils—achieving ever-increasing improvements for their pupils.<sup>6</sup>

So, as you work through this book, keep reminding yourself why you picked it up in the first place. It doesn't matter where you work: which country, which type of school, which kinds of kids. It doesn't matter what your current experiences are with behaviour: whether you are fighting daily fires or dealing with a few unmotivated pupils. Perhaps you have just started in the classroom; perhaps you have been in the job for 30 years. You might be a teaching assistant or a headteacher. It doesn't matter. What matters is that you have the power to improve the behaviour culture in your classroom or school. And in doing that, you will change lives. This book is written to help you do just that.

### **Who are the authors?**

We, Olivia and Sarah, are both teachers. For the last two years, we have worked at Academica University of Applied Sciences in Amsterdam as Core Lecturers in School Behaviour and Culture. In this job we read academic literature about behaviour in schools, combine it with our hands-on experience as teachers, and condense both into practical guidance, which we share with schools of all types across the country. We are in schools every week doing observations and delivering training about school culture and behaviour.

Prior to this, and as inspiration for the work we do with Academica and in this book, we taught for a combined total of 15 years at Michaela Community School in Wembley, northwest London. Olivia was a founding member of the school in 2014. She initially held the position of Head of Science and later joined the Senior Leadership Team as Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo). Sarah joined the school in 2015, was a Head of Year and later Deputy Head of the Sixth Form.

When Michaela Community School opened in 2014, opinions varied widely, much like they do about Marmite! Some hailed it 'pioneering', praising its unwavering focus on discipline, academic rigour, and traditional teaching methods. Others were sceptical, expressing concerns that its strict behaviour policies and traditional approach would breed robotic conformity, stifling creativity. Over time, it has become, we think, increasingly clear that Michaela's behavioural culture and the classroom management techniques used by Michaela teachers work wonders for the development of its pupils. As well as being amongst the friendliest and happiest children we have



ever met, the pupils at Michaela Community School have achieved greater progress than pupils in any other school in England for the last two years (at the time of writing).<sup>7</sup> Since the first set of results were achieved in 2019, the results have been unwaveringly high.

Having said that, it is important to make clear that this book is not about Michaela, though a lot of what we have written has been inspired by our time there. It is a truly inspiring place. If you want to know more about the school, look it up!<sup>8</sup> There is plenty of information out there; Michaela's latest book, edited by the Headmistress Katharine Birbalsingh, is probably a good place to start.<sup>9</sup> For now, back to this book.

### **What is this book about?**

This book is exactly what it says on the cover: a practical guide to effective behaviour in the classroom. The aim of this book is to teach practical classroom management skills to any teacher who wants to learn them.

Olivia figured out how to manage behaviour in the classroom as a trainee teacher at a school in urban London. She had to pick up tips and tricks along the way, and a great deal of her experience before Michaela involved learning from mistakes. Sarah, on the other hand, learned to teach as a complete novice at Michaela Community School. The training programme at Michaela—especially when it came to behaviour—was comprehensive, supportive, and meticulously crafted. Within a few days, she felt confident standing in front of the class and being in control of the classroom behaviour. There was a clear and strong behaviour culture supporting both pupils and teachers. The combination of our experiences as new teachers, experienced teachers, and teacher trainers means we have a very particular insight into teacher education:

- 1 Olivia has lived experience of how classroom management skills are most often learned by most teachers (ineffectively)
- 2 Sarah has lived experience of how classroom management skills *can* be learned: with practical guidance and concrete examples (incredibly effectively)
- 3 We both know what behavioural challenges teachers are currently facing in *all* types of schools, and what strategies work to help teachers to improve the behaviour in their classrooms.

With this knowledge, we break down the seemingly intuitive skills that effective teachers possess into manageable steps that any teacher can learn. We translate the complexities of behaviour research into practical examples. It is not a thesis, nor is it a ready-made school-wide programme that promises to solve everything in one fell swoop.

This book is written for teachers who want to make their classroom environment a better one for children to learn in: a classroom where every child can achieve.

We try to provide the kind of classroom management training that Sarah got when she was learning to teach: a very practical but evidence-informed set of tools that work. Some of the practical tips we give come from books and research articles, others come from lived, hands-on experience. For us, being evidence-informed means basing our advice not only on what we have read, but also on what we have seen working in both our own classrooms and in the many other classrooms and schools we have visited.

During her teaching training in 2012, Olivia was regularly told that her role as a teacher was to facilitate pupils in discovering the world around them and was made to feel guilty about telling children new information in place of letting them discover it for themselves. When she joined Michaela, saw her colleagues in action, and read more research about pedagogical approaches, she realised what she had always suspected deep down: that as novices, children learn best through instructional guidance from experts<sup>10</sup> and should not be left to discover or construct essential information for themselves.<sup>11</sup> We want to mention here that our choice of the term ‘pupil’ is a deliberate one, based on this teacher-centred pedagogical philosophy, often referred to as direct instruction (di). A pupil is taught<sup>12</sup>, whereas a student studies<sup>13</sup>. We associate the term ‘student’ with those studying at higher education with a knowledge base large enough to benefit from independently studying examples and engaging in problem-solving. Because we believe that teachers play a crucial role in *teaching*—scaffolding learning in a way that optimises cognitive load<sup>14</sup> and facilitating the acquisition of new knowledge<sup>15</sup>—we use the term ‘pupil’. It is very possible that you agree with the research about what high-quality teaching looks like and nonetheless use the word ‘student’, consciously or otherwise, but we want to highlight our careful choice of words early on. Words are important; they contribute to building a culture based on your values and beliefs.

As with everything that we learn, knowledge precedes skills.<sup>16</sup> We recommend that you begin by introducing specific systems and by using particular phrases. But just because we provide you with practical examples, this doesn't mean that your skills will remain inflexible. As you become more familiar with the knowledge in these pages, and as you put these tips into practice in your classroom, you will begin to see what works and gain an intuitive understanding of the complexities underneath. What starts off in this book as simple, concrete, and practical is what eventually ends being the subtle art of classroom management.

Some of what we say is clearly and widely supported in other books and research, to which we provide references. Some of what we suggest may go against what you currently do or what you learned as a trainee teacher (but remember: if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got). Some statements may seem to challenge current research understanding, which we hope will spark interesting discussions; many other aspects are simply insufficiently researched at this stage. But this does not make the things we say untrue or unscientific. We write down what we know about the practical side of behaviour in the classroom as an invitation to build up our collective knowledge: let's start with what we know actually works. We hope that anything in this book that appears to be at odds with current approaches or seems to have an insufficient basis in scientific research will simply provide us with the momentum and incentive to keep researching, especially when it comes to applying scientific ideas in real classrooms.

We have structured our advice as six broad tips. All of these tips are preventative: they enable the teacher to manage the classroom in such a way that truly difficult behaviour incidents are unlikely to occur. They aren't all quick fixes or one-size-fits-all rules but practical ways of managing your classroom, preventing undesirable behaviour before it happens, and increasing the amount of positive and effective behaviour in your classroom. Unsurprisingly, many themes and strategies come back repeatedly in different tips. By the time you have finished this book, we hope you possess more than just the 'know-that' of six practical tips; rather, our goal is to empower you with the 'know-how.' When faced with a real-life classroom scenario that hasn't been explicitly covered, we want you to feel empowered to reflect on the principles we've discussed and apply your knowledge. The goal is for you to be able to navigate unforeseen interactions with confidence, using the insights gained here to deduce effective approaches to new situations.

In essence, this book seeks to equip you with the tools to bridge the gap between theory and real-world application, fostering your ability to respond adeptly to the dynamic nature of classroom behaviour. The aim is that an effective behaviour culture will run through your teaching practice and your classroom like a red thread.

The six tips are split into two general sections. The first is about planning; so much of the behaviour that will happen in your classroom will be determined before you even meet your pupils. The second is about teaching, in the moment: the small ways that you can interact with your pupils when you are with them, to keep them 'with' you.

## Endnotes

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