

Children relax with a drink between activities at Forest School



Preventing permanent exclusions

Michelle Haywood outlines the key principles of good practice and introduces a school where permanent exclusions are a thing of the past

It's a worrying trend. Having been in decline for the last 10 years, the latest figures from the Department for Education (2013-2014) show that exclusions are on the rise again.

Closer analysis reveals that pupils with SEND account for seven out of 10 permanent exclusions, and that pupils who qualify for free school meals are excluded four times more often than their peers. Meanwhile, a recent study conducted by the thinktank LKMco and published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation indicates that pupils from low-income backgrounds are more than twice as likely to have SEND than other children.

SEND coupled with social disadvantage – that's a lot for a child to handle. So what can we do to help?

A calm school environment

The first step is to establish whether the overall tone of the school is orderly, inclusive and conducive to learning.

A whole-school behaviour audit, based on Ofsted section 8 unannounced behaviour inspection guidance, is a good place to start. At the same time, careful scrutiny of school data will help to pick up any worrying trends, as well as pockets of poor behaviour in certain groups

and specific problems with regard to individuals.

Training in behaviour management for all staff is equally important. A consistent and positive approach from every adult in the school goes a long way towards ensuring that the majority of children are polite, cooperative and engaged, allowing you to focus on the few who are still causing concern.

“ **Children with SEND account for seven out of 10 permanent exclusions** ”

Supporting individuals

Disruptive behaviour is often an indication of unmet needs, so early assessment and intervention are vital.

Another important consideration is how you will manage the return to school of pupils whose unacceptable conduct has led to a fixed-term exclusion. Just leaving them to flounder is likely to result in a repeat performance, so you need to have a strategy in place for reintegrating them into lessons and managing their future behaviour.

These are a few key principles and guidelines. The best way to demonstrate how exclusions can be prevented is to look at the experience of a calm and happy school. So let me hand you over to Alison Dolphin, deputy headteacher and SENCO of Lakeside Primary School in Tamworth.

Setting the ground rules

We have just five golden rules, positively phrased, which apply everywhere. Simple, clear-cut and specific, they leave no room for misinterpretation by anyone, including children with autism.

Children, parents and teachers all sign up to them when we do their learning contracts at the beginning of the year. The dinner ladies wear them around their necks or on their belts and they are displayed all around the school.

Five golden rules

- We will follow directions from all adults.
- We will keep our hands, feet and unkind words to ourselves.
- We will always try our best to be good learners.
- We will look after our school.
- We will walk sensibly and quietly around school.



Collaboration and imaginative play come to the fore in Forest School

At the same time, all staff are relentlessly positive in the way they talk to the children. You never hear: 'Stop running!' or 'Turn round and face the front!' Instead it is phrased: 'I like the way you are about to walk down the corridor,' or 'I like the way you are about to sit.'

And you never hear anyone shouting. That is something we simply do not do. If we do have to discipline a child, we talk about the behaviour they are displaying, not the child as a person. The two are kept completely separate.

Engaging with parents and carers

Working closely with parents and carers is a crucial part of what we do. However, many of our parents had difficulties at school themselves and some of those who have children with SEND have special needs too. Understandably, school can seem a very daunting place to them.

Regular, positive, informal communication

The headteacher and I are out on the school path every morning and at the end of every day. I think that is one of the most powerful things we do, and one of the simplest as well. People don't feel intimidated as they might do in the head's office; they are just chatting on the school path with two fellow human beings who are not so different from them. What we pick up from these conversations is invaluable.

We also text them from the classroom, acknowledging children's achievements as

they happen. 'Thought you'd like to know that so-and-so has just read brilliantly.' It might be for a whole class or one individual. It takes staff just seconds to do and parents love them.

Twitter is another simple way of letting parents know what is going on, and we post pictures and comments on a daily basis.

Parent support groups

I recently put on a workshop for the families of children with SEND, where our



Forest School is available to all children in Reception and vulnerable children of any age

TAs came in to show them how we teach their children. At the end of the session, they took away a resource pack containing a whiteboard and pen, a number square, a phonics map, spellings made memorable... lots of simple things they could use to support their child at home.

In addition, once a month we invite the parents of children with autism to come in for a cup of coffee and a chat, and invite a member of the autism outreach team to come along too. It's a chance for people to get together, talk about the things they are struggling with at home and realise that they are not alone. Initially, these meetings were just for families affected by autism, but in response to popular demand, we have extended it to include the families of pupils with other types of SEND.

Positive behaviour logs

If parents are experiencing difficulties with their child, I identify two targets and we decide together what the reward will be – a trip to McDonald's, perhaps, or a visit to the park. The child takes the log home every evening, gets it signed by a parent and brings it back in the morning to show to me or the head, so they can clearly see that what happens at home feeds back into school.

Each booklet is personalised with a picture on the front of something that is special to the child, such as a favourite Disney character. Targets are short and sharp and last for a couple of weeks. Then it's time to move on to something else.

Phone calls home

If an issue arises in school, we call parents up to speak to them personally. It doesn't have to be something serious. Even if we are just mildly concerned, we pick up the phone to ask if there is anything happening at home that we should know about. Thanks to the positive relationships we have built with our parents, we are able to do that, which is great.

Emotional support

We do a huge amount of work on emotional support. If a child is struggling with personal problems, they are in no position to learn.

In fact, we have quite a few children who have come to us after being excluded from other schools. The most recent was a girl who had been permanently excluded for physical violence. By the end of her six-week induction, she was doing brilliantly and has now joined us full time.

Positive Play

Positive Play is a medium-term or

long-term intervention developed by Derbyshire County Council and takes place in our multisensory room. Children are referred here for lack of confidence and low self-esteem, and we complete a Boxall profile to ascertain the issue for each child. This provision is facilitated by two trained TAs. (<http://bit.ly/sc231-11>)

The Hope Project

The Hope Project is more of a quick response counselling service. If a child comes in on a Monday morning and something has gone wrong over the weekend, they don't have to wait to be referred to Positive Play; they can get support straight away. This is run by our family support worker, who also does counselling with parents. So she's there in the office every morning, ready to pick up any emotional concerns that might arise.

Children go into Hope for lots of different reasons. At the moment, she is doing a lot of work with a Year 6 pupil whose mother is an alcoholic and who is worried about the prospect of leaving us for secondary school.

Meanwhile for parents, she is their first port of call for any issues they might have, whether they need help with a personal situation or something more practical, like foodbank vouchers. She is our attendance officer too, so everything links in together. [This member of staff is employed directly by the school, as opposed to independent School-Home Support practitioners – see pages 12-15].

Forest School

When we first introduced Forest School, it was primarily for Pupil Premium children, but now we provide it to all Reception children from the start of the year and vulnerable pupils of any age. (Find out more about forest schools: *If you go down to the woods today, Special Children 225.*)

A strengths and difficulties questionnaire is completed on entry, with very specific questions, which the Forest School leader uses to tailor what she does. The same questionnaire is completed again on exit to demonstrate impact. This then feeds into all the other data we have to evidence the progress of our SEND pupils.

Behaviour management

As behaviour coordinator, I provide training, support and ensure consistency.

Behaviour environment checklists

In September, all staff fill out a classroom environment checklist to eliminate any potential problems that might affect behaviour. Is the lighting OK? Can



The ethos at Lakeside Primary School is relentlessly positive

everyone see the board? Are the five golden rules displayed? Are routines established for entering and leaving the room? The same process is applied to the playground (see page 28).

Consistency and collective responsibility

Consistent routines throughout day ensure everyone knows what to expect, and what is expected of them. When problems do arise, all staff are aware of a wide range of techniques that could help to prevent escalation. Later, when the pupil has calmed down, they will try to unpick the issue, looking beyond the presenting behaviour to uncover what might lie beneath it.

“Everyone knows what to expect, and what is expected of them”

Meanwhile, in addition to the learning contracts they sign with their teacher in September, pupils who receive small-group interventions draw up a similar document with the TA, outlining their respective responsibilities.

- Why are we working together? (To improve our spelling, for example.)
- What is expected of the teaching



Children with SEND keep their resources in a BOOM box

assistant? (To turn up on time, to prepare resources...)

- What is expected of the children? (To listen carefully, to try their best...)
- How can we spoil this? (The TA could be late, the children could talk over each other...)

Behaviour at lunchtime

Playgrounds are zoned with active areas for pupils who have energy to burn and quiet ones for those who find noisy, boisterous play overwhelming.

Lunchtime staff are trained by our lunchtime supervisor in the same principles that apply across the school. They know how to talk to children in a positive way, how to lead playground games, and how to diffuse situations before they escalate. They are also aware of individual children's medical or learning needs and kept up to date with any changes.

The lunchtime supervisor is a fantastic TA and totally child centred, so major problems are few and far between. When an incident does occur, she is happy to phone home and follow the whole thing through from beginning to end. Naturally, she keeps us informed, but she is the one who deals with it. (See also *Enjoying lunchtime breaks, Special Children 226.*)

The other people who help to keep our playgrounds safe are our peer mediators. These are Year 5 and 6 pupils who have received training in how to resolve playground disputes, listening to both sides of the story and then asking the pair to agree the next steps. They have a set script, but if it doesn't work out, the lunchtime supervisor is on hand to help.

Meanwhile, the headteacher and I will be sitting in the dining hall chatting to pupils as they eat. It's a great way of getting to know them in a relaxed environment and gives us huge insight into what they are learning in class and any issues that are affecting them.

Sharing information

TA meetings

I lead fortnightly TA meetings to ensure everyone is totally up to speed with all that is happening in school. At a recent staff meeting, for example, we reviewed our agreed practices for literacy and numeracy, and at the next TA meeting I went through it all again to make sure that everyone was clear. On another occasion, the TA who delivers our speech and language programme talked about what she does and what her role is. So we are sharing good practice and promoting consistency across the school.



The playground is zoned, with areas for boisterous games...



... and calm areas for pupils who prefer quieter pursuits



Lunchtime staff

Lunchtime staff are always briefed with regard to anything that has happened in the morning. The playground is very often the place where children come out with something that could be a safeguarding issue, and the supervisors' training includes knowing how to recognise that and how to respond.

Supply teachers

Supply teachers all receive a folder containing everything they need to know to hit the ground running.

The first page is entitled page *Who is?* and covers everyone from the headteacher to the cleaners, lunchtime supervisors and the caretaker. This is followed by *When is?* outlining the things we do every day on a regular basis.

There is also a classroom adaptations sheet detailing strategies for the whole class and named individuals under various headings, such as communication or visual support (see page 25). Our SEND children all have a box with their resources in it called a BOOM box, and that will be noted on it too.

The final documents are individual pupil passports or medical care plans. So the supply teacher knows exactly what to do for each and every child.

Pupils at risk of exclusion

Nipping things in the bud

When a child begins to wobble, we discuss it as a staff to see what we can do before it becomes an issue.

Is Positive Play needed? Would the Hope Project be more appropriate? Is it a friendship issue that needs to be addressed with the whole class? Do we need to chunk lunchtime because the child can't survive in the playground for that length of time?

In this last instance, the solution could be our nurture room, where children come 20 minutes before the bell goes to calm down, have a drink and a biscuit, talk amongst themselves and prepare for the afternoon's learning.

Following a fixed-term exclusion

When a pupil returns from a fixed-term exclusion, a plan is put in place setting out clearly and simply what will be expected of them, their parents and ourselves, and signed by all parties.

“Following a fixed-term exclusion, a support plan is put in place”

For the pupil, it might be 'to complete all learning tasks – refusal is not an option,' or 'to follow all instructions without arguing.' To help them keep on track, they might be asked to check in with myself or the headteacher every morning before going to class. For our part, we might agree to provide a TA to support them at particularly difficult times of the day, or offer them a safe place to go should they feel the need to erupt.

Positive handling plan

This is a powerful and effective document which identifies specific strategies that work with a particular individual, ensures they are used consistently, and enables staff and the pupil to develop and maintain positive relationships. If appropriate, it includes a risk assessment (see pages 26-7).

It also identifies who will be responsible for debriefing any member of staff who has had to deal with a major incident. If they don't get the chance to

unburden, they will just take all the stress home with them.

Other strategies

- **A behaviour tracker**, with antecedent, behaviour observed and consequences.
- **A reduced timetable**, or mornings only attendance. In the case of a reduced timetable, work will be sent home.
- **Offering choices**. For pupils who need to feel in control in order to feel safe and secure, the more you threaten this control, the more things are likely to escalate. So you present them with alternatives. 'The diagram and the writing both need to be done before lunch. Which would you like to do first? You choose.'
- **Non-confrontational body language** – open, relaxed and at the child's height.
- **Not making judgements about how the child is feeling**. 'I can see you are angry,' can wind the child up. Something neutral is better, like 'I can see something has happened.'
- **Keeping praise low key**. Some children actually find it hard to deal with praise.
- **Never giving consequences when a pupil is at crisis point**. An overwrought pupil is in no frame of mind to hear what you are saying. Save it for later when they are calmer.
- **Making the pupil feel a valued member of the school community**.



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