



Creating Consistency: Developing a shared understanding of behaviour in international schools

Foreword



As human beings, we are all built for connection. It gives us a sense of belonging; the feeling of being part of something that is greater than ourselves. Strong connections help us feel understood, supported and able to thrive. And at the foundation of all connections is communication.

As educators, connection and communication go hand in hand. Communication with ourselves, our colleagues, our students and their families is what enables us to build strong communities, to provide connection and that sense of belonging for everyone.

Building an effective and supportive community is undoubtedly no mean feat, but schools all over the world are seeing the benefits of effective communication, sharing thoughts, feelings and ideas and listening to what their different community members have to say. They're able to establish a shared set of principles and achieve their goals together as a whole school connected community.

When it comes to behaviour, many international schools are leading the way in building positive behaviour cultures with the support of their wider community. Cultures that foster a shared set of principles and approaches and put students at the heart of everything they do.

We know the behaviours we're seeing in our schools are changing, and meeting the needs of our students and their families while also supporting our staff teams is not easy by any means, but with the support of a whole school community, we have the best chance of providing the right provisions to help our students reach their potential and be happy.

– Jonathan Newport, Chief Learning Officer, Team Teach

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19 Connection and community at the heart of behaviour support

Wherever you look in the world, international schools face a plethora of challenges, day in day out, especially since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, and one issue that has recently been catapulted to the top of the agenda is the behaviour of children and young people.

Although there are undoubtedly similarities across all educational settings worldwide, school leaders in every country, on every continent, are dealing with their own unique set of circumstances which can have a considerable impact on behaviour – and international schools are no exception.

Behaviour survey insights

Before we consider the global picture, it's interesting to look at some insights from a recent behaviour survey carried out in the UK.

In June this year, the UK Government published an extensive, in-depth report, based on the National Behaviour Survey[1], that explored four key areas of behaviour in English schools: school behaviour culture and policy; school environment and experience; frequency and impact of 'misbehaviour'; and responding to behaviour.



One of the most illuminating findings was that there were variations, sometimes significant ones, around how student behaviour was perceived by different members of the school community, such as leaders, teachers and pupils.

For example, the results showed that in June 2022, 90% of school leaders said behaviour was either 'very good' or 'good' in the past week, versus 64% of teachers. For pupils, 47% said that behaviour had been 'very good' or 'good'. Generally, school leaders tended to give more positive responses than teachers, who, in turn, were more likely to give more positive responses than pupils.

The global picture

The National Behaviour survey gives us valuable insight into perceptions of behaviour in English schools, but what about international schools, the bigger picture, and the global reality when it comes to student behaviour? What is behaviour like in international schools at this moment in time? Do perceptions vary, and if they do, to what extent?

The answer, it seems, depends largely on an individual school's context, although there are commonalities across all settings, no matter where they are in the world.

Through carrying out extensive training in international schools all over the world, and interviewing international school educators across a large number of settings, we found that there were variations in perceptions of behaviour, although these were not as marked as those uncovered in the UK's National Behaviour Survey report.

Nevertheless, principals, head teachers and pastoral leads at the international schools we engaged with were clear that, in their settings, they thought perceptions did vary, and there were a number of possible explanations for this.

In this piece, we consider why perceptions of behaviour in international schools vary between senior leaders, teaching staff and students, and offer 6 key focus areas to help school leaders and educators further develop a coherent, joined-up approach to behaviour support.

The unique characteristics of international schools

When we're trying to understand perceptions of behaviour in international schools, we need to consider their unique qualities. International schools embody a number of characteristics that set them apart from other schools and, in many cases, from each other.

Some predominantly serve families from overseas, as well as students from the local community and the staff and student body can be relatively transient, home to pupils, teachers and leaders from a diverse range of backgrounds and cultures. Many international schools are representative of an increasingly common educational marketisation model, where competition is rife, your brand and reputation are vital, and parents are powerful consumers.

Thanks to these specific attributes, children and young people who attend international schools can expect to receive an incredible and unique education and be part of a wonderfully diverse community, where they are encouraged to view themselves as true global citizens and have fantastic opportunities to engage with and learn from other cultures, traditions and heritages.

However, such variegated features can make it more challenging for leaders to establish a coherent, consistent behaviour identity; one that is embedded in every aspect of school life but is also understood and accepted across their wider community. This, in turn, can affect different individuals' perceptions of and attitudes towards behaviour, depending on the role they play in relation to the organisation.





Diversity can be a challenge when creating consistency

Diversity is, of course, a strength, however, when it comes to behavioural expectations, this degree of diversity can present a number of challenges.

Contextual factors vary from school to school, but it could be the case, for example, that a member of staff is working in a setting where their view of behaviour is widely different from the community they serve; it may even be vastly different to that of other staff within the four walls of the school. The potential for misunderstanding and confusion can therefore increase, leading to an inconsistent approach and, ultimately, misunderstandings, or even conflict, between and among staff members, students and parents.

No matter what their location, international schools have their own unique culture – one that recognises and represents the diverse nature of its staff and student body and addresses this in its policies and practices. Therefore, establishing and implementing clear guidelines around a school's bespoke behaviour identity, and ensuring that all stakeholders – including parents – understand the importance of a unified, consistent approach, is vital to effective behaviour support.

> **Developing a positive school culture around behaviour that is long-lasting and evolves over time can be challenging for any setting. It takes training, commitment and above all an informed, cohesive and consistent approach from all staff team members. So many of the international schools we support are leading the way when it comes to re-framing behaviour in their contexts and benefiting from a healthy approach to supporting their students.**
>
> Nancy Hooper, Principal Team Teach Trainer and behaviour consultant.





Senior leader perspectives

The lens of leadership

Definitions of terms like 'calm, orderly environment' and 'good behaviour' are not fixed; they are highly subjective and may vary widely depending on an individual's position in school.

And even where there is a shared understanding of what these terms mean, when it comes to senior leaders, there is no guarantee that what they observe is a true representation of what is actually going on. After all, there can be a tendency for pupils to behave in a certain way when those in positions of leadership are present.

Furthermore, in settings where there is an emphasis on sanctions and strict discipline, calm and orderly environments can sometimes reflect compliance to manage behaviour, rather than connection and commitment to *understand* it.

Proximity to pupil behaviour

While many school leaders are highly visible within their settings and have an in-depth understanding of the needs of their pupils, leadership, by its very nature, often requires an 'at arm's length' approach to day-to-day behaviour support and pupil interactions, particularly in larger settings.

Often, senior leaders' attention has to be trained on steering the ship and implementing strategy, responsibilities that may require them to be physically removed from the immediate learning environment. This doesn't mean senior leaders are shutting themselves away; rather, they are often somewhat removed from young people and their daily experiences, simply by virtue of their role.

Internal and external pressures

What's more, due to the fact they are ultimately accountable to parents, and a range of external moderation bodies, senior leaders' focus might be predominantly on collecting and analysing data surrounding behaviour, such as the number of exclusions or detentions; in other words, the consequences, rather than the causes and functions of behaviour.

They may not always be privy to the work going on behind the scenes, by teachers and support staff, to intervene early, and defuse situations with students before they escalate.

Leaders might also find themselves under enormous pressure to present a calm and orderly school environment, where behaviour is perceived as 'good', not only because this may be a key area of external moderation and inspection, but also because it is in their interests to uphold a positive reputation in the local area and beyond.

In international schools, where parents are powerful, well-informed consumers, have high expectations, and are reactive to an ever-changing educational market, leaders often have the additional responsibility of protecting and growing their school's brand. Not only does this sometimes take them even further away from daily interactions with students, but the pressure to attract parents and families, and positively differentiate themselves from other institutions, can heavily influence how they perceive and present behaviour in their setting.



Teaching staff perspectives

Classroom impact

While senior leaders are often one step removed from the classroom, due to leadership and management responsibilities, we need to consider the factors that shape teachers' perceptions of behaviour, and how this impacts classroom life.

Because teachers are "on the frontline" and spend a comparatively large amount of time with their students, they arguably have a more informed view on the behaviour of their students.

They also have a good understanding of individuals' contexts and as a result, they are often adept at 'nipping things in the bud', using their knowledge of a child or young person's background, identifying possible triggers, and anticipating and averting potentially challenging situations.

That said, due to the unique nature of international schools, there can sometimes be obstacles along the way. For example, some teachers may have very different expectations around and views on pupil behaviour, either due to a developing understanding of the local context and students' varying needs, or because of their own values, attitudes and beliefs that they bring to the job.

And there is no doubt that disruption caused by behaviour can hamper pupils' ability to focus on their studies.

> **"Since COVID pandemic associated school closures, schools are now reporting that behaviour patterns are often more challenging with younger students frequently unused to following instructions and focusing on tasks (skills that are traditionally taught in early years settings which enable 5 and 6 year olds to better learn in and benefit from a classroom environment) and arriving with fewer independent skills (such as making friends, resolving playground conflict etc.) than they would have historically had in previous years."**
>
> **Luke Walduck, Schools Development Manager, ISC Research**

Where teaching and learning is repeatedly interrupted, teachers can find themselves distracted by dealing with the consequences and may have to adapt their planning and lesson content as a result. Over time, their capacity to deliver high-quality learning opportunities might be curtailed, and outcomes can be affected along with their perceptions of behaviour overall.

It's also important to consider that in some international settings, it's teachers that can experience difficulties with demand avoidance, a perceived lack of respect towards the profession, and even indifference towards and lack of engagement with educational expectations, from families and students themselves – all of which can lead to an increased likelihood of misunderstanding and conflict and make a consistent home-school approach to support behaviour very difficult to achieve. Apathetic behaviours, which often only affect the individual student rather than others around them, may be less likely to be shared with senior leaders as they are less disruptive to the overall learning of the entire class.

Conversely, in other settings, and indeed, often, within the same setting, there are families who are very supportive and who go above and beyond to be involved in their child's education and build a strong relationship with the school and the teaching staff.

All of these factors can influence teachers' overall perceptions of behaviour in their setting and account for differences between how they see behaviour compared to those outside the classroom.

Prioritising staff wellbeing

While pupils' ability to focus, learn, and progress academically can be adversely affected by others' behaviour, we also need to consider the impact on teachers' wellbeing.

When staff encounter behaviour that challenges them, day in, day out, it can gradually erode their love for the job, and lead to feelings of despondency, disengagement, and frustration. This can be exacerbated in situations where support from leaders or parents is not forthcoming.

If international schools are to keep dedicated, enthusiastic, and talented practitioners in the classroom, working in an environment that is conducive to effective teaching and learning, it is essential that all staff are integrated into and educated about their local context, while also being aware of their own perspectives on behaviour, and how these might shape their approach in the classroom. By combining knowledge of the wider community with a clearly-defined school behaviour identity, teachers are empowered to carry out their roles to the best of their ability.

The importance of support staff views

Support staff, or classroom assistants, are invaluable members of teaching teams, and are often the 'eyes and ears on the ground'.

They tend to be trusted individuals who, due to the nature of their role, are able to forge strong bonds with key pupils, and because they do not carry the main teaching responsibility, have more time to talk and listen to pupils and provide emotional support when needed. They also tend to be adept at pre-emptively spotting problems, and defusing situations before they escalate.

Gleaning the views of classroom assistants and learning support staff can help schools understand more about pupil behaviour, and more easily identify the underlying reasons for it. One way of doing this is by setting up focus groups or forums, which is exactly what **Steve Gallego, Deputy Head of School (Professional Development, Inclusive Support, Engagement) at Nexus International School, Singapore, did:**

> **"We have various mechanisms for support staff to give feedback about what is going on at classroom level. At Nexus, we have recently introduced a Classroom Assistant Focus Group, which is open to all CAs on an optional basis and provides them with a fortnightly opportunity to meet and share their views. As Deputy Head of School, I attend these meetings, and endeavour to support them with their ideas, opinions and concerns."**

When we consider all the factors potentially influencing teachers' and classroom assistants' perceptions of behaviour, we can begin to understand why their views may differ to those of senior leaders. But what about the students themselves, and their experiences and perceptions of behaviour?





Student perspectives

Expectation vs. reality for pupils

Pupils are on the frontline of behaviour, so to speak, and as a result, may be most likely to be adversely affected, both within the classroom walls, but also across other areas of school, such as toilets, cafeterias and playgrounds.

They have a much higher chance, therefore, of encountering behaviour that staff are unlikely to see or hear, something that undoubtedly colours their perception.

Unlike leaders, teachers and support staff, pupils might not have insight into other children's backgrounds and contexts, and therefore may be unable to fully comprehend the underlying reasons for behaviour. This may be particularly pertinent in international schools, where pupils from a diverse range of nationalities and cultures are potentially subject to different expectations at home, often depending on cultural, societal and religious factors.

For example, as **Hannah Pearson, EY PE Coordinator and Lower School PE Specialist at Harrow, Beijing,** explains,

> **"In China, physical fighting is seen as a sign of strength and almost condoned by some parents, so it's not unusual for students to try to resolve conflict or arguments this way. This can make it challenging for us to establish a coherent behaviour identity that works for everyone in school and at home."**

Behaviour expectations can vary enormously, depending on a number of contextual factors, such as religious beliefs and cultural norms, for example, some households favour a strict, disciplinarian approach to behaviour, while others prefer a more liberal, flexible perspective.

This can sometimes cause confusion for children and young people who attend international schools. As a result of receiving unintentional mixed messages between home and school, some students may struggle to adapt to their establishment's behavioural expectations and unique behaviour identity.

It can also make family engagement more challenging, as different families' perspectives may be out of alignment with a school's approach, thus making buy-in and support harder for leaders to secure.



Many of the schools we support find engaging with families about behaviour an on-going challenge. Having a clear behaviour policy outlining expectations, that's shared with all new families when their child joins the school and made easily accessible thereafter, can go a long way to helping get everyone on the same page.

Stephanie Pendlebury, Business Development Director, Family Engagement, Team Teach.

The impact of 'affluent neglect'

Many international school students come from financially stable, even affluent, families, where parents work full time, so may not have the opportunity to be as involved in their child's day-to-day life as other parents.

In some cases, students are often in the care of paid carers such as nannies for considerable periods of their childhood years.

While this arrangement causes no issues in many cases, and can be part and parcel of the decision to send a child to an international school in the first place, children who are raised in households where parents are either physically or emotionally absent can be at an increased risk of a phenomenon known as 'affluent neglect', the ramifications of which can be far-reaching.

Affluent neglect differs from 'traditional' neglect, in that a person's material needs, such as food, warmth and shelter, are met, but their emotional needs are not. This can result in children and young people who struggle to co-operate, can display demand avoidant behaviours, and find it difficult to regulate their emotions – all of which make it potentially challenging for them to meet a school's behavioural expectations, and can impact their perception of behaviour.

Perceived injustice

Due to individual students' varying needs, and different support strategies being employed by staff, children and young people may witness situations being handled in a certain way that, from their perspective, appears unfair.

For example, if a child who is dysregulated is allowed to leave the classroom to spend some time in a nurture room or quiet space, this can seem unjust to other pupils, as they are not privy to the information that specifies which type of behaviour support is most appropriate.

This perceived injustice can colour students' perceptions of behaviour: while teachers and senior leaders may discount distressed and dysregulated behaviour when considering 'misbehaviour' in schools, fellow students may be impacted more severely by it, as they prioritise equality of experience, while leaders' and teachers' focus is on equity – a concept that can be hard for children and young people to grasp.

Without the contextual understanding that teachers and support staff have about individual students, and without education and training about dysregulation, is it any wonder that some students may perceive situations differently?

A solution-focused approach

There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.

Desmond Tutu

At the heart of remedying some of the challenges faced by international schools and bringing everyone in the community together on the same page, is a shared understanding that all behaviour is communication.

By fostering a proactive, inclusive and positive approach, where we look at what we can 'add in' rather than 'take away' from our educational environments, we can create conditions in which all members of a school community – leaders, teachers, pupils, parents and beyond – can thrive.



6 focus areas for a consistent behaviour approach

So now we've considered why perceptions may vary significantly between the members of our school communities, what can we do to help bring everyone into alignment?

We suggest the following 6 key focus areas to build a consistent and coherent approach to behaviour support.

1: Supporting, not 'fixing' behaviour

A common, and perhaps understandable, response to behaviour is to immediately remove a young person from the classroom, or to 'parachute in' pastoral staff to manage that behaviour. While this might appear to yield short-term results and 'fix' the immediate issue, it does little to effect change in the longer term.

> **"In my experience, sometimes the behaviour expectations aren't always clear enough in schools so staff are just not sure what they're supposed to do or how to handle particular situations and sometimes this can lead to teachers being disempowered to deal with things themselves because they're concerned about whether they are going to deal with things in the 'right' way."**
>
> **Lynne Thompson, former international school teacher, SENCO and safeguarding trainer (UK and Middle East).**

By adopting a compassionate, relational approach where all pupils and staff understand individuals' needs, and where support is easily accessible and available, we can move away from managing behaviour, and move towards equipping young people with the tools they need to be successful in the classroom and in the wider community.

For leaders, in particular, who may be somewhat removed from daily interactions with children, welcoming students into school at the start of the day, regular drop-ins into classrooms, or factoring in learning walks, can support the building of strong relationships, and understanding of individual students' needs.

Central to this strategy is a sustained commitment to developing a joined-up, coherent approach to behaviour that all members of a school community buy into, and are fully trained in.

Communication and transparency are also key, so that there is a 360° view of individuals' needs and contexts. Fortunately, this does not necessarily require a root and branch overhaul; simply by reviewing existing policies and procedures, we can make sure these are fit-for-purpose, and that all members of our school communities understand them and embed them in their daily practice.

To be successful, we also need to prioritise the recruitment and retention of high-quality, dedicated staff who not only feel valued, but who also have access to ongoing training and development. This is particularly important in an international school setting, which is often characterised by a comparatively transient staff and student body. Through ensuring that all staff are quickly assimilated with a school's approach, ethos and values, we can equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to lead the way in positive behaviour support and share preferred practice with others.

Does this require financial investment? Yes. Does it give us the best chance of understanding and supporting behaviour in class? Undoubtedly.

2: Reframing behaviour as a skill to be learned

All children deserve to succeed, both academically and emotionally, and behaviour support can be treated in exactly the same way as any other support provided in a school.

Some young people need extra help to improve their reading, for example, while others need a helping hand to get better at recognising their emotions and developing ways to self-regulate.

This has never been more true when we consider the learners who, in the past, would have attended specialist or alternative provisions. Embracing neurodiversity, and encouraging inclusive education, requires us to challenge our perceptions of behaviour (in particular, of what 'good' behaviour looks like) and foster an understanding that behaviour is a bit like learning to read: it can take children and young people different amounts of time and different levels of support to learn it.

To ensure we offer the broadest and most appropriate support, we need to review our current systems, consider the local context and the specific needs of our students, and identify where tweaks can be made to our approach. For example, who is the best member of staff for this child to turn to if they feel dysregulated? What resources, spaces and systems are in place if they are in crisis? How do we systematically teach emotional regulation strategies that equip them to cope with day-to-day life?

By answering questions such as these, we can ensure we meet children and young people's needs across every facet of school life. As with most things, early intervention is key to mitigating escalating behaviour, and it is incumbent on us, as leaders, teachers and support staff, to empower children and young people with the skills they need. **As Hanadi Rustam, Elementary School Counselor at Riffa Views International School in Bahrain, explains,**

> **"Starting early is so important, as it allows us, and our students, to solve smaller problems before they escalate. Here at Riffa Views, we explicitly teach conflict resolution from a young age, and help children to understand and express their feelings in a positive way. This approach has been central to our behaviour support strategy."**





3: Involving parents, carers and families

While it might be unrealistic to expect everyone to be on exactly the same page when it comes to perceptions of behaviour, especially given the diverse backgrounds and contexts of the families involved in international school communities, we can certainly facilitate conversations to address this, both within and beyond the school gates.

International school communities tend to be tight knit, with parents keeping in close contact with one another, and sharing their views on both actual and perceived issues in school. This makes it all the more important to be unified and clear with any communication around a school's behaviour identity and approach to behaviour support.

All schools, no matter where they are in the world, rely heavily on positive parental engagement to cement messaging around behaviour, so when there is a disconnect between school and home, it makes it virtually impossible to pull in the same direction. Similarly, where there is a lack of communication between pupils and staff, children can feel shut out and 'done to' which, ultimately, leads to misunderstanding and disengagement.

We need to be transparent and explicit about our 'why' when it comes to behaviour support and develop a shared language and understanding that parents and carers can also adopt. This can be done through a wide variety of initiatives like family workshops, coffee mornings, SLT 'meet and greets', and informal drop-ins, where we explain things like our academic and personal development curriculum frameworks, what different sensory needs look like, characteristics of neurodivergence, and the importance of equity and inclusion. We can also introduce our behaviour support strategies and outline the importance of building relationships and nurturing strong home/school links.

Adam Johnson, a former international school educator based in the Middle East, is a staunch advocate of proactively reaching out to parents, often with a simple phone call, as a way to motivate students and recognise their achievements, as well as create a shared understanding of, and joined-up approach to behaviour support with their family at home.

> **"One of the things that I find works really well, is calling parents at the end of the day, with positive messages about their child's behaviour. Parents often expect bad news from school, so it's really powerful, for both families and their children, to have these conversations. The ripple effect is that the students who might struggle with behaviour and self-regulation want us to recognise and acknowledge their efforts and share their successes with their parents. It's a positive, upwards spiral, and has made a huge difference to improving behaviour."**

Whether through informal or formal channels, parental knowledge is power, and by adopting a proactive approach, one that takes cultural and contextual sensitivities into account, we can forge deep connections with members of our communities, helping them to gain a better understanding of behaviour.

As **Elena Sentevska, Leader for Student Support Services and Learning Support Teacher at the International School of Belgrade says,**

> **"We want our families to view us as the hub that brings them all together. Our message is simple: we see you, we hear you, and we value you. For us, it's about fostering a sense of belonging; a feeling of being part of a shared community.**
>
> **We always endeavour to communicate the message that we are here to support you and help you. For some families, it's a quick process; for others, it takes a little longer. It's also vital that we demonstrate a genuine desire to understand each other's cultures and backgrounds, so we can formulate the right kind of support for all of our students."**

> **"The prioritisation of school and community culture is becoming much more prevalent in international schools' strategic plans and actions around the world as schools recognise the importance of a sense of belonging to the entire community and how it can impact the behaviour of all stakeholders, not just students.**
>
> **Luke Walduck, Schools Development Manager, ISC Research**

4: Using intentional language

Shining a light on behaviour and talking about it in a positive way can be hugely empowering for staff, children and families alike.

We can model the type of language we use, by avoiding terms like 'naughty', 'disruptive' and 'troubled', and instead open up discussions around dysregulation and emotional needs and support. When people better understand the underlying causes of behaviour, and talk about it using positive, constructive terminology, it enables them to view behaviour as the communication of an unmet need and allows them to bring more compassion to situations.

Intentional language and vocabulary has the power to transform perceptions of behaviour, within and beyond the school gates.

"Changing how we talk about behaviour, both with the students, but also with their parents, has made an enormous difference in our school. For example, we refer to detentions as reflections, which minimises the punitive aspect, and instead supports our ethos of children and young people taking responsibility for their actions."

Denise Kenny, Counselor Pastoral, Jumeira Baccalaureate School, Dubai

In international school communities, where any number of languages may be spoken by staff, students and parents, it's even more important to consider the nuances of the spoken word, to ensure messages are not lost in translation, or open to being misconstrued.

Moreover, we also need to pay heed to differing interpretations of body language and non-verbal interactions, taking cultural differences into account. For example, a gesture or stance that might be typical for individuals from one particular background, may be construed as confrontational and aggressive by another.



5: Develop a systematic approach to pupil voice

Whether it is through the establishing of a 'worry box', a friendship bench, or student council, schools are always striving to find ways to tune into the opinions and feelings of their pupils.

While these initiatives are, of course, well-intentioned, and can be successful to a point, they sometimes lack a systematic, consistent approach. Ultimately, they can end up being too simplistic and disjointed in terms of what they reveal to us about children's attitudes to and concerns about behaviour.

The most effective way to garner pupils' opinions is to provide regular opportunities for them to talk, and for us to listen. By actively listening, and collaboratively deciding on appropriate follow-up actions, children can feel confident that we are taking their views and suggestions on board.

At **Nexus International School in Singapore, Deputy Head of School (Professional Development, Inclusive Support, Engagement) Steve Gallego,** has established a structured leadership model, to give pupils a voice:

"This model has existed in secondary for years but has just been introduced in primary. Lead Learners, as we call them, regularly convene to discuss pertinent issues, and they receive support to develop their leadership skills. We are passionate about giving our students a sense of autonomy and agency over what happens in school and reassuring them that their thoughts and opinions matter."

And at The International School of Belgrade, their model of student voice aligns seamlessly with the core principles of their International Baccalaureate, or IB, framework, as **Elena Sentevska, Leader for Student Support Services and Learning Support Teacher** explains:

"Our curriculum is very action driven. We are an IB school and a NEASC accredited school, and our learning principles are based around concepts like autonomy, engagement and empowerment. In that sense, our programmes align philosophically with those accrediting agencies that we have behind us.

And we have a student council, or Dragon Leaders, as we call them, at primary and secondary level. They plan and run assemblies and have their own times to meet and suggest different issues in school. We're also hoping to start after-school clubs led by students, as well as a student tutoring programme in the future. Pupil voice sits at the very heart of our decision making and school improvement strategy."

Using systems such as these, we can marry together both qualitative and quantitative data, and build a much more accurate picture of what behaviour in school looks like, from the perspective of both individuals, and groups of pupils. As a result, we can ensure their viewpoints are subsequently incorporated into our policies and practices.

According to **ISC Research's Listening to Student Voices Report**[2] a significant percentage of students they engaged with said they're not part of a student voice group, but they would like to be.

"We asked students and alumni if they speak out within a student voice group or movement within or beyond their school. 21% of respondents said they actively contribute with comments and opinions in a student voice group. 14% said they follow the group and its content on social media but don't actively contribute. 40% said they do not engage with a group but would like to, suggesting that student voice groups are in demand and those that are active might want to make themselves more visible or accessible. Some schools have introduced student voice officers, student-led podcasts, community forums, school apps, student-led assemblies and student-led newsletters to enable their students to raise their voices."

ISC Research survey to students, November 2022



6: Personalise our behaviour support

Everyone is different and what works for one individual, may not work for another. Where we adopt a generic, one-size-fits-all approach to behaviour support, we run the risk of some children falling through the gaps, and only coming to our attention once they have become dysregulated.

Often in schools, we end up dedicating the majority of our time to the children whose behaviour causes interruptions to learning or who are in crisis; in other words, we firefight to contain behaviour and reduce the impact on others.

A more effective approach is to focus our interventions on the earliest point of need; to look for opportunities to support pupils before their behaviour becomes habituated and reinforced by repetition. And the best way to achieve this is to take a personalised approach to behaviour support. Using our knowledge and understanding of an individual reduces the likelihood of unhelpful behaviour and enables us to equip them with the most effective tools to self-regulate, no matter what is going on around them.

It is imperative that this personalised approach is reflected in all of our behaviour support documentation. Positive cultures and supportive approaches are underpinned by meaningful, inclusive and trauma-informed policies and practices that recognise the bespoke nature of support and highlight the need for the earliest possible intervention.

"It's so important for everybody to be involved and everybody to be clear about what the expectations are within the school, what that shared language is, who is responsible, who is accountable for the children and their behaviour. Policies and procedures are really important, but you also have to look at every individual pupil, as what is expected "good" behaviour for one child may be very different for another, especially for students with additional needs. Making sure that all the key members of staff are informed is crucial, it all comes down to communication."

Lynne Thompson, former international school teacher, SENCO and safeguarding trainer (UK and Middle East).

Elena Sentevska, Leader for Student Support Services and Learning Support Teacher from the International School of Belgrade, underscores the importance of taking a personalised, bespoke approach:

"We emphasise that we, as a school, are a support system, and that there's no name, blame or shame here. We want parents to see that we really know their child well and will always provide the specific care and support they need. Every child is different, and we strive to reflect that in every strategy we implement around behaviour."





Connection and community at the heart of behaviour support

International schools, just like all schools, are more than just places of learning; they are places of security, belonging and connection. And it is in that connection that we have the best chance of fostering strong, positive relationships between every member of a school community.

Due to the enormous variety of cultural, societal and geographical factors, perceptions of behaviour across international settings may differ quite considerably from school to school, and person to person, depending on their role. However, as human beings, what we all have in common is a desire to connect with each other, to feel like we belong, and to be truly understood.

"Our school culture is built on a foundation of connections. Our school leaders, staff, students and families are all part of a supportive community, and bringing parents close to their child's education journey with the school is really important for behaviour, mental well-being and academic outcomes."

Hanadi Rustam, Elementary School Counselor at Riffa Views International School in Bahrain.

International schools have a golden opportunity to embrace diversity and use it as a vehicle for building and embedding acceptance, understanding, and inclusion.

And by looking outwards, as well as inwards, these establishments can create their own bespoke behaviour identity that prioritises a relational approach to behaviour and reflects their values, to ensure that each and every child can grow, flourish and thrive, in order to become global citizens – no matter what their culture, nationality or background.

"The international school staff teams that we support with behaviour come from all kinds of settings, all over the world, and while contexts can vary hugely, and each member of staff is a product of their own personal experience and background, with a unique perspective, one thing that's always the same, is that student well-being is at the heart of each school's culture and ethos. Above all, we're all human with the same fundamental intrinsic needs that need to be met for us to be happy and thrive."

Nancy Hooper, Principal Team Teach Trainer and behaviour consultant.

Sources:

(1) The National Behaviour Survey Report

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-behaviour-survey-reports

(2) ISC Research – Listening to Student Voices Report

https://iscresearch.com/reports/international-student-voices/

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- Mr Elhussein Elsharif, Pastoral Assistant, Principal MHS, ACS International School, Doha

Who are Team Teach?

TeamTeach

If you're looking for support with behaviour in your school or setting, we can help. We are a leading accredited provider of Positive Behaviour Support Training, supporting over 13,000 settings worldwide with training and an ethical, holistic approach to de-escalation, behaviour support and physical intervention methodology that you can trust.

Our team have over 20 years of experience helping staff teams to feel more confident, empowered and supported when it comes to behaviour and we're renowned for our reasoned, researched and respectful approach.

Please contact us any time to discuss your particular requirements and see how we can help you, your staff and your students.

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"What I really love is the fact that the Team Teach course is about a school-wide ethos of student concern and how our actions can lead to a better environment for our students and in turn ourselves. It is a course about creating a cultural shift in our community rather than just classroom strategies."

Mr Elhussein Elsharif, Pastoral Assistant, Principal MHS,
ACS International School, Doha



