

Guidelines for Supporting Pupils with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties



An information guide for Primary Schools

This information guide had been developed to assist schools in responding to the needs of pupils presenting with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. It draws on principles and practices outlined in the documents and sources highlighted below. Schools are advised to consult these for additional information and guidance.



Special Educational Needs - A Continuum of Support
www.education.ie

Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) - A Continuum of Support
www.education.ie



Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools
www.newb.ie

Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process
www.ncse.ie



Special Education Circular SP ED 02/05

Along with other resources available from:

Special Education Support Service www.sess.ie

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment www.ncca.ie

The following general principles can enhance the effectiveness of interventions to support pupils presenting with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties:

1. Educational research highlights the need to take a whole school approach in addressing the behavioural, emotional and social difficulties experienced by children. This includes:

- Creating a safe and caring school climate which is accepting and inclusive of all children.
- Adopting a positive approach to behaviour management which is implemented consistently by all staff.
- Promoting partnership between staff, pupils and parents.
- Developing good staff communication and support systems.
- Ensuring pupils' access to appropriate support and a broad curriculum (see *Developing a Code of Behaviour*, NEWB; *BESD – A Continuum of Support*, NEPS).

Whole school approaches are most effective when all members of the school community are actively involved in the process.

2. The classroom learning environment has an impact on pupils' behaviour and social and emotional functioning. The following strategies can help school staff promote positive behaviour in the classroom:

- Fostering a positive relationship with all pupils.
- Taking a holistic view of the child by responding to broader needs (i.e. physiological, belonging, esteem needs etc).
- Developing effective classroom rules and routines.
- Helping pupils to understand and manage their own behaviour by employing a clear system of rewards and sanctions, including a consistent, structured approach in responding to challenging behaviour (*BESD - A Continuum of Support*, NEPS).
- Adapting the school curriculum (e.g. by using differentiation) to cater for different levels of ability and learning styles (www.ncca.ie; www.sess.ie).

3. Early identification of behavioural, emotional and social concerns helps prevent difficulties developing into more serious problems. This is supported through:

- Systematic information gathering and assessment, as necessary, covering such areas as pupils' physical, sensory and medical needs; cognitive, academic and communication skills; and level of social and emotional competence.
- Ongoing liaison with parents, relevant teachers, including Home School Community Liaison Teacher (HSCL), School Completion Personnel and Support Teacher Service, where available.
- Listening to the pupil's perspective on their difficulties.

4. The careful recording of behavioural concerns including frequency, persistence, context, and intensity of behaviours will help achieve a shared perspective on the nature of the behavioural, emotional and social concerns. It will also lead to an understanding of potential causes and triggers of the behaviour, in addition to providing baseline data to measure future progress following intervention.

5. A planned, systematic response to the needs of individual pupils is enhanced through the use of:

- Teacher encouragement, positive attention, rewards, tactical ignoring of unwanted behaviours, time out systems, warnings and use of consequences.
- Explicit teaching of social skills through the SPHE curriculum (and evidence-based behavioural and social skills programmes) to provide the child with more adaptive ways of getting his/her needs met.
- A teamwork approach involving principal, parents, class teacher, support teacher(s), and relevant professionals, as appropriate.
- The development of support plans at each level of intervention, including monitoring and reviewing the process by adopting a problem-solving approach. (*Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process*, NCSE; *BESD - A Continuum of Support*, NEPS).

6. Attending to the training needs of teachers in the area of behaviour management (including approaches for promoting emotional well-being) maximises the capacity of schools to cater for the needs of pupils presenting with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Planning a response to the needs of pupils presenting with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties

Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties occur on a continuum from mild, transient difficulties to difficulties which are significant and persistent. The responses detailed below are incremental, moving from classroom-based interventions to more intensive and individualised interventions. The timing and pace of implementation may vary depending on the level of need, and the nature of the presenting problems. Thus the following framework should be used flexibly, with interventions tailored to the individual needs of pupils.

Level 1: Classroom Support

When a teacher becomes aware that a pupil is showing significant behavioural, emotional and social difficulties the following is recommended:

- Establish and maintain good communication with pupil and his/her parents.
- Review whole class structures and learning environment, including classroom and playground rules and routines.
- Review strategies to promote key social skills (i.e. through SPHE curriculum), including use of rewards, and incentives.
- Consult with relevant support teachers, with the SESS (in relation to staff training needs), and/or with NEPS, on an informal basis as required, for advice on supporting pupils in the classroom.
- Draw up a classroom support plan, implement, and review as necessary.

Level 2: School Support

This level involves more systematic gathering of information relating to the pupil's behaviour and the development and monitoring of a support plan (in collaboration with the learning support/resource teacher, principal, etc).

- Carry out a school based assessment of key behaviours using observation schedules, interviews and checklists.
- Use this information to develop strategies for managing the behaviours, including whole-class, group and individual reward systems and teaching of key social/communication skills in order to promote more adaptive behaviours.
- Review responses to misbehaviours, including tactical ignoring, redirecting and use of consequences for negative behaviours.
- Involve the pupil in the process through an exploration of his/her individual strengths and interests, and in setting specific goals to build self-esteem and a sense of achievement.
- Consult with parents to develop a shared understanding of his/her child's behaviour and involve them in the intervention process.
- Liaise, as required, with NEPS and other professionals on an advisory/consultative basis.
- Draw up the pupil's school support plan, implement and set regular review dates.

Level 3: School Support Plus

This involves a more intensive, individualised response for those with more severe and/or persistent needs and will often include liaison with outside agencies and professionals.

- Consult with the pupil, parents, principal, support teachers, NEPS and/or other professionals, as required, when planning and implementing the pupil's education/behaviour plan.
- Use interview and observation along with relevant records and checklists to explore causes and triggers of the pupil's behaviour and to obtain baseline data (e.g. in relation to the frequency and intensity of the behaviour). Involving the pupil in this process helps increase understanding and awareness around his/her own behaviour.
- Agree realistic, achievable targets with the criteria and timeframe for their achievement clearly stated, along with identifying the necessary resources and supports.
- Agree strategies for teaching appropriate behaviours and social and emotional skills.
- Agree approaches to promote pro-social behaviours, including use of rewards and incentives; and strategies for responding to misbehaviours that are clearly articulated and managed by all relevant adults in the school.
- Draw up, implement and review an individual education plan, with an agreed understanding of how interim progress will be recorded and assessed.