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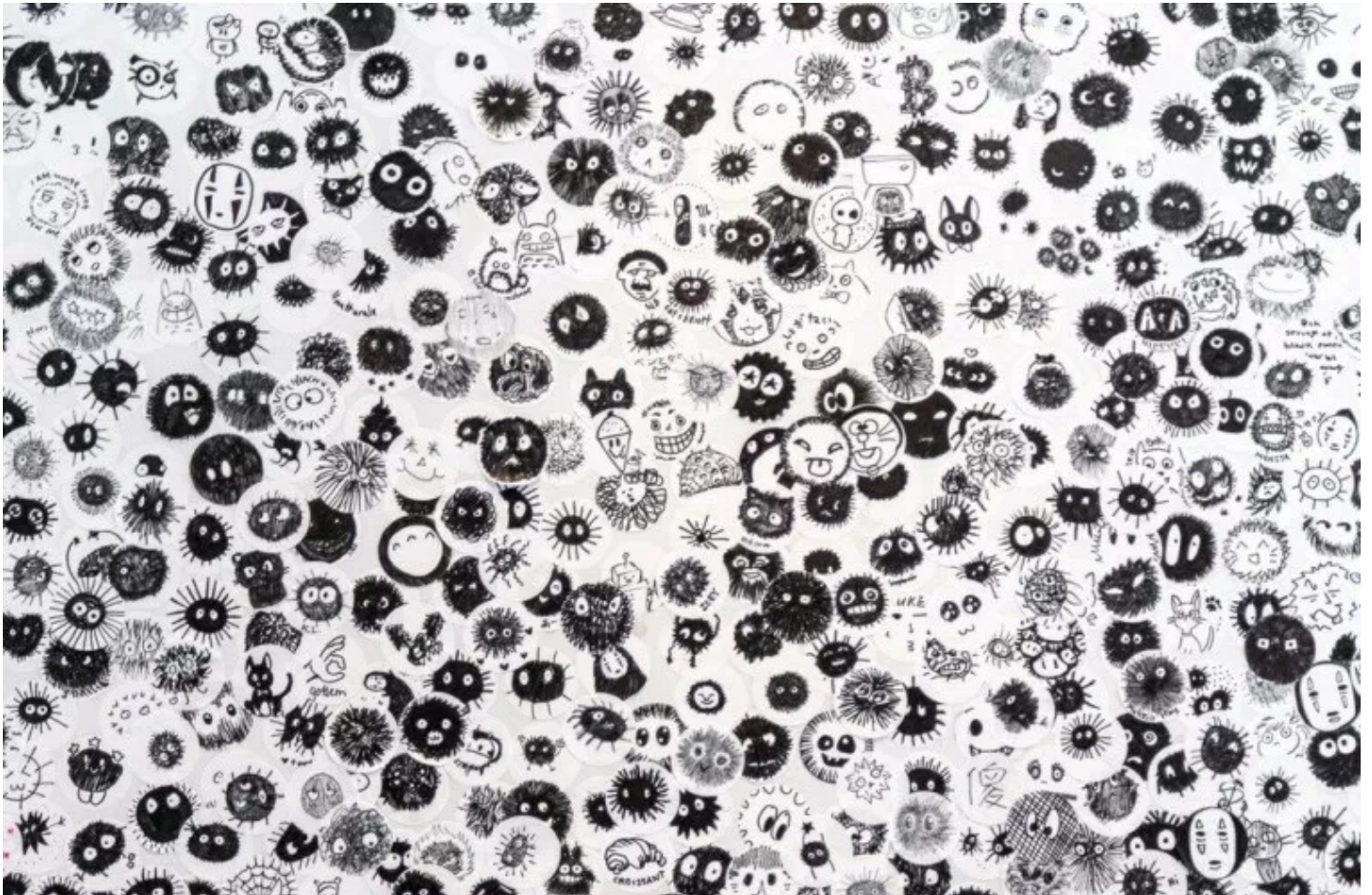
## BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT IN THE CLASSROOM

 [PAUL DIX \(HTTPS://IMPACT.CHARTERED.COLLEGE/AUTHOR/PAULDIX/\)](https://impact.chartered.college/author/pauldix/) • JUNE 2018

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This is it. Your class, without anyone sitting at the back. Your class, without having to justify every move. Your class. Utterly brilliant and utterly terrifying at the same time. There is, however, a fundamental problem with taking on a new class and being able to immediately manage their behaviour. You don't know them and, perhaps more importantly, they don't know you.

This situation is not unique to the recently qualified teacher. I vividly recall moving schools six years in and being run ragged, again. The connection you make with children that builds to positive relationships takes time. In a school with a great culture and climate for behaviour, this could be three months to turn the corner. In a school in chaos, it might take you a year to build the respect that some assume teachers are automatically given. Fortunately, you will be surrounded by some true experts who you can learn from.

Mrs Pearce walks into a class of marauding children and gently, almost imperceptibly, raises one eyebrow and instantly returns them to diligent, disciplined scholars. You hear a small gasp from the back of your group of observing teachers. This is behaviour management gold. Desperate to learn from the master, you demand that Mrs Pearce teaches you the simple eyebrow raise. 'How high does it have to go, how long should I leave it raised, what about the lowering of it?' Yet behind that simple facial cue is years of grinding out routines, holding fast to tight boundaries and cajoling with the most unruly children. Behind the raised brow is the certainty of tough love blended with daily kindness. In the subtlety of a well-established cue, there is hard work. There is no magic eyebrow. The daily drip feed of your kindness and positive recognition is essential in building relationships but it is not enough. You will need to establish and maintain relentless routines. You will need to create, shift and monitor boundaries constantly. The real work is done here and cannot be delayed. What may surprise you is that the children are unlikely to be that tricky straight away. You may experience a honeymoon period, where the newness of the new class, new teacher and perhaps new school makes it seem that your sleepless anticipation was unwarranted. Teaching behaviour routines may appear to be too restrictive, unnecessary even. You may even catch yourself thinking, 'This is easy'. Be warned. The honeymoon period will never last and if you haven't taught the routines you need – for learning, for packing away, for silence, for listening to the teacher, for leaving the room, for being ready to learn – then chaos will come creeping in. Don't let the only drill you teach in the first week be the fire drill. Teach clear routines from the outset. Work hard on this. Even experienced teachers have to. Simplify routines into three steps. Teach them, model them, recognise every child who follows them. Behaviour management has a significant impact on learning outcomes (Marzano et al., 2003).

Start creating emotional currency with pupils today, even though you won't be able to spend it for a while. Meet and greet at the door with eye contact, high expectations, maybe even a handshake. Make your feedback on work personal, thoughtful and kind. Have your lunch in the dining hall, walk the playground when you are not on duty and sign up for that trip that everyone advises you not to. Build emotional currency by making your children feel valued, important and like they belong. Use a single positive note each week to recognise children who have gone over and above for five days in a row. Resist the urge to put 'naughty names on the board' and instead use a recognition board to highlight children who are behaving 'over and above' your minimum standards. Be interested in them, be generous with your time and show them how much you love your work.

There will be times when your authority is challenged, where children behave badly towards others and, depending on where you are working, times when you will be shocked by seemingly senseless disruption. There will be children who don't want to simply hand over their trust to you, children who need more time to adjust their boundaries, children who make you question your very existence. There may be children who are carrying the invisible shrapnel of trauma or the seemingly selfdestructive effects of neglect. Everyone will tell you that it isn't personal, but it will feel personal. How you respond is utterly pivotal — and this starts with the behaviour of adults — teachers, classroom assistants and school leaders (Dix, 2017).

The challenge is to be able to respond to even the worst behaviour without showing anger, frustration or revealing the full range of your vocal power. Your ability to control your own emotion sits at the heart of excellent practice. Make a pledge not to shout, to resist the pointy finger or looming presence. Resist the screw face, the rolling eyes or permanent frown. Remove yourself and your emotions from the line of fire. The response to poor behaviour must be a rational one and not one that is emotional. Emotional responses end up with empty threats and escalating power plays: 'Do it!', 'I ain't doing it, bruf', 'DO IT!', 'Nah!', 'DO IT OR I WILL...' (\*invent ridiculously large punishment and insert here). Rational responses that do not rely on the emotional state of the adult protect everyone. Strip out every scintilla of negative emotion in your response to children from day one. Use a script, a mantra, a catchphrase to make sure that your response to the angriest situations is utterly safe and predictable.

Start every behaviour intervention with 'I've noticed', practise it and make it your default: 'I've noticed that you are late/have crawled under the table swigged a can of Monster'. There is no judgement in 'I've noticed' and children are unlikely to try to defend themselves. Start with an accusation and it is a short hop to an argument and a small step to a confrontation. Your planned response to poor behaviour makes all the difference.

As relationships grow and your skills develop, you will need consequences less and less. For now, when you need them, use the smallest sanction that you can. The consistency and certainty of 'two minutes after class' is more effective and more rational than 'you are in detention next Thursday' or even 'YOU WILL NEVER SEE ANOTHER OUTDOOR PLAYTIME, EVER'. It is not the weight of punishment that will produce the best behaviour but the certainty that there are consequences for crossing the boundaries. Certainty. Students with better relationships are more prosocial, less aggressive and less oppositional (Obsuth et al., 2017).

The more certainty you create, the faster you will be able to stop using sanctions. Eventually, you will not need any sanctions at all. You will imperceptibly raise one eyebrow and a passing student teacher will gasp in awe.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Learn names as fast as you can.** Trying to manage behaviour starting with 'Oi, red jumper!' is never going to end well.
- **Search out the expertise in your school** – the teachers and teaching assistants whom the children really listen to because they want to, not simply because they are forced to by hierarchy.
- **Simplify everything.** Focus on just three rules, three ways to positively recognise, three catchphrases you always use.

The Pivotal Podcast on [www.PivotalEducation.com](http://www.PivotalEducation.com) (<http://www.PivotalEducation.com>) offers free advice and interviews on behaviour.

**Paul Dix** is a speaker, author and Executive Director of Pivotal Education. As a former teacher, Paul has advised the Department for Education on Teacher Standards and done extensive work with the Ministry of Justice.


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**Mr Mark Bocker**

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Great advice, as ever, Paul. I hope this becomes a regular slot @CharteredColl ?

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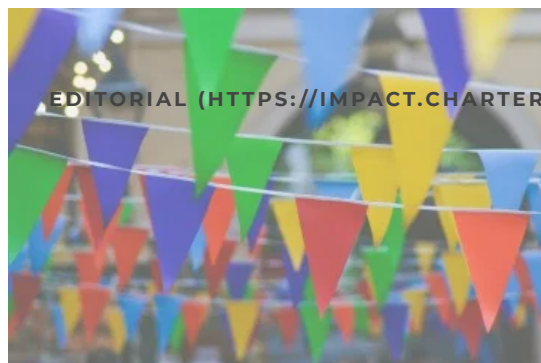
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