

Case Studies

HELP FILE

School Behaviour Policy Vs. Teacher Skill

"Hi! I have a new class of year 9 boys. They were fine for the first couple of weeks but have just started acting up. The major problem seems to be talking and just messing about. We have a system of structured warnings, then a consequences plan, but once I've moved one of them, then another starts. Is there something I can do?"

Jenny replied

There seem to be only one or two issues but a starting point is not easy as this type of behaviour is typical of year 9 and 10 classes.

Firstly though I need to comment on the difference between correcting behaviour by applying the school's behaviour policies in a structured manner Vs. using your own behaviour management skills in interaction with individuals and with the class as a whole.

Applying school policies, even good ones like you have, removes you the teacher from the equation. In a sense the school's behaviour management system may be undermining your own authority in the classroom. The system makes consequences automatic, this is good and helps make the students responsible for their own actions. But it is not *you* who is managing the class. The students will understand that you have little personal authority in the classroom. If you establish your own authority and use it to build working relationships with individuals and the class as a whole, you will enable them to curtail their own acting out. This will not displace the school's behaviour management system from its current role.

I think what I will do is just list a few thoughts for you to take and apply as you feel may work with your particular class - you are welcome to come back to me when you've tried these.

This is fairly common behaviour for boys of this age and reflects part of their adolescent task - asserting themselves and relating to their peers.

1. At the beginning of term it is important to state your expectations for behaviour and work - keep it brief and simple .. maybe as a couple of ground rules in your class ... don't have more than three - nobody will remember them and they lose impact - decide what is most important to get right in their behaviour and go with those ... you can change them next term as they learn how to behave in your class ... this is all proactive management.
2. Catch them doing it right" from the first moment you set eyes on them ... don't keep catching them doing it wrong ... it sets a negative precedence. Catching them when they do it right is the quickest way to turn behaviour around - but it has to be both an honest and a genuine observation - always describe what they have done or

said ... they are then able to acknowledge this to themselves ... increases self worth too.

3. Don't get hooked into these behaviours ... if students know you get irritated .. you're fair game. Short brief e.g. "No throwing thank you," is enough.
4. With boys humour is the key ... enjoying together but never laughing at anyone ... there is a section in my book that looks at this.
5. Acknowledgement and choice are good options for any teacher .. e.g. "Wow that's a great paper plane but you know the rules, away or I'll have to look after it for you." I had a colleague who said, "Hey you need a lesson in paper plane flying, see you after class," and he showed a student both how to make and fly a really good paper plane ... never happened in class again.
6. When you come in punitively - with warnings and consequences you are almost playing into their hands ... and if the behaviour doesn't stop ... is this working? Best to be proactive and plan for their behaviour and how you will manage it so as to prevent it escalating or repeating. For example if they talk a lot ... stop the class and give them say 2 minutes to talk ... then back to work ... takes away their need to talk and you are controlling the time they talk ... then it is quite fair to expect them to settle down and work ... they're generally okay with that. But remember, managing a year 9 class takes many different skills ... have you read "Coat of Many Pockets - managing classroom interactions"? In this I give lots of strategies for these kinds of behaviours.
7. Best practice is to be proactive ... plan for behaviour ... have lots of skills, strategies ready to use, but don't forget it's natural for them to knock against the boundaries - just be firm, fair and deal with behaviour with least intrusion into the learning.

All best wishes

Jenny Mackay