



Two more of your queries around special educational needs, addressed by our resident voice of experience, **Carol Frankl...**

Q

For the first time since I qualified as a teacher three years ago, I've been confronted with a class that seems to be impossible to control. I know they're good kids, but their behaviour is collectively a nightmare. How can I get us all back on track?

A I have been confronted with the 'class from hell' and it wasn't fun! It is almost impossible to 'teach' in these circumstances and what works for me in this situation is to concentrate on establishing positive learning behaviours in the first few lessons. This could be at the expense of delivering the lesson content in the beginning, but it reaps rewards in the long term.

It is really important to try to find out the causes of poor behaviour before launching into a response. One thing that you can be sure of is that students know how to push our buttons, so avoiding immediate retaliation is always a good strategy. One way to do this is to anticipate possible difficulties that may arise from particular students and think through your response before you get in to the classroom so that when you are confronted with undesirable behaviour you respond in a planned way (although of course you will sometimes have to respond spontaneously). The key here is to minimise the risk of poor behaviours emerging by focusing on behaviour for learning at all times.

I find that most children misbehave because they find lessons difficult, irrelevant or boring so it is important to show students that you respect their points of view but that learning isn't optional. Establish a seating plan, explain the rewards and sanctions and most importantly, stick to them. Use language that reminds students that they are responsible for choosing the way that they behave and that making the wrong choice has consequences both immediate and long term.

I have had the experience of doing all of these things with little improvement in behaviour and when I reflect on the reasons, it is invariably because I have 'gone through the motions' of these positive behaviour management steps, but not given sufficient time to ensure that students believe that I mean what I say. Keeping cool in a crisis and reminding students of their rights and responsibilities should ensure the establishment of a safe and enjoyable learning environment, for everyone.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CAROL FRANKL HAS OVER 30 YEARS EXPERIENCE IN THE FIELD OF SEN. IN ADDITION TO BEING A PASSIONATE EDUCATOR, SHE IS A REGULAR SPEAKER, A PROVIDER OF SEN TRAINING AND CONSULTANCY, AND FOUNDER AND MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE SOUTHOVER PARTNERSHIP, ONE OF THE UK'S LEADING INDEPENDENT AND MANAGED SEN ORGANISATIONS, WHICH PROVIDES A MULTI-FACETED APPROACH TO SEN, INCLUDING A SPECIAL SCHOOL (THE SOUTHOVER PARTNERSHIP SCHOOL), AND EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES COMPRISING A SUPPORT-IN-SCHOOL SERVICE, A SPECIALIST SUPPORT TEAM OF EXPERTS AND STAFF TRAINING AND CONSULTANCY. FIND OUT MORE AT SOUTHOVERPARTNERSHIP.COM.

Q One of my students is perpetually day dreaming in my lessons. I have tried repositioning him and pairing him up with another attentive student but nothing seems to make a difference. What can I do?

A

Undiagnosed speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) is a common cause of perceived daydreaming; the strategies you describe will not work if a child has such difficulties. I remember working with a Year 2 class. When the

children were on the carpet listening to a story, one child always fidgeted and seemed to pay no attention. He was constantly looking out of the window or trying to distract the child next to him. The final straw came one day when I asked the class at the end of the story to collect their lunch boxes from the trolley, coats from their pegs and come and sit back on the carpet. The child in question didn't move, but just looked around him in his usual way. I was so frustrated!

A colleague suggested I look into possible reasons for his behaviour, watching him at other times of the day in different activities. It soon became clear that when he was working 1:1 or in very small groups he was more on task. It turned out that he had receptive language delay, which meant that he could not process language very easily. So he was only able to attend to the final instruction of a list given, for example. I had labelled this child as 'naughty' when in fact, with the right interventions (including altering our language patterns to give him only one instruction at a time so that he could process them correctly) we were able to help him achieve success.

Other children may have additional expressive language difficulty. This means that they find it challenging to find the right words to communicate their meaning. This can lead to frustration and disillusionment for learners, although it is easier to spot for teachers. Again, a programme devised often with the help of a speech and language therapist can produce dramatic improvements in learning.

So don't despair. Explore possibilities to explain poor concentration and enlist the help of experienced colleagues and your SENCO.