

Behaviour

Management

Children and Students
with Disabilities

A
Whole-School
Approach

December
2003

Ministerial Advisory Committee:
Students with Disabilities





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F Foreword

Managing the challenging behaviours of some students with disabilities is a recurring issue for parents, carers and educators. Seeking effective behaviour management strategies to best support these students and minimise the disruption that can occur in preschools and schools, is an ongoing topic for review and discussion by numerous educators. The purpose of this project was to investigate the key factors necessary for whole-school implementation of behaviour management programs that result in positive outcomes for children and students with disabilities.

In 2003, the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities formed a Task Group to identify:

- a number of preschools and schools across Australia that have implemented whole-school behaviour management programs, that have resulted in positive outcomes for children and students with disabilities
- the key factors determining an effective whole-school implementation, and
- the associated costs of implementing these programs.

The Task Group included representatives from the government and non-government education sectors, as well as parents and specialist service providers. I would like to extend my thanks to all members of the Task Group for their participation in this project. Their commitment and diversity of expertise has proved invaluable for the completion of the task.

Five schools and one preschool participated in the project. These schools were diverse in type of setting, size and student population. They included mainstream and special settings, an age range of students from 4 to 20 years and children and students with varying types of disabilities. School leaders, specialist staff, teachers, teacher assistants and parents generously contributed their time to this study and readily discussed their experiences of behaviour management programs that had been implemented with a whole-school approach.

In closing, I would like to thank the staff of the Ministerial Advisory Committee's Secretariat: Margaret McColl (Executive Officer), Jo Shearer, Luisa Pirone (Project Officers) and Lyn Kohl (Executive Secretary), who collaborated by conducting interviews, analysing data and producing the final report.

Adrian Murray

Chairperson

Behaviour Management Task Group

Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities

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E

xecutive Summary

and Recommendations

Managing challenging behaviour, in relation to the education of children and students with disabilities, is one of the most complex issues faced by parents and educators. Two recent developments in the field of behaviour management have contributed to an improvement in professional practice and outcomes for students¹ with behaviour related difficulties. These developments represent a paradigm shift to the provision of positive support for students, as well as whole-school implementation of behaviour management programs.

This report includes an analysis of study data that illustrates how the whole-school approach to behaviour management is beneficial for students with disabilities, their parents² and education personnel. Although not the focus of the study, the move by schools to positive behaviour management practice was acknowledged as an important factor in the implementation of successful programs. All schools in this study had adopted a proactive supportive approach where the students were seen as learners, and challenging behaviour was acknowledged as a method of communication.

Data were collected through interviews with preschool and school leaders, specialist staff, teachers, teacher assistants³ and parents. One preschool and five schools from four states in Australia were selected to participate in the project. These six schools⁴ were implementing behaviour management programs using a whole-school approach. It is recognised that there may be more sites that would have matched the study criteria, but the Committee was limited by the chosen method for selection (Section 2.2).

The range of participating sites included mainstream and specialist settings, preschool to secondary age students (ages 4 to 20 years), as well as students with varying types of disabilities. All were government schools. It should be noted that neither of the mainstream schools included large numbers of students with disabilities in their populations. It is not possible, therefore, to report on the difficulties that may be associated with the added complexities of this type of setting. In addition, while specific behaviour management programs were discussed during interviews, the principles of whole-school implementation were the focus of the investigation, not the various types of programs available. (Section 3.1, Appendix 4)

From this study, several factors were identified as essential for the successful implementation of whole-school behaviour management programs. These included: committed leadership as well as a level of consensus among teaching staff; a partnership approach with regular communication between staff and with parents; and the adoption of a behaviour management program that had a clear structure, overall consistency with some flexibility for individual student needs and ongoing professional development, particularly for new staff.

¹ In this report, the term 'students' includes both children and students attending preschools and schools.

² The term 'parents' includes caregivers and legal guardians.

³ The term 'teacher assistants' refers to comparable positions across the three education sectors in each State of Australia.

⁴ The term 'schools' includes preschools.

Student welfare was identified as an area of priority by the participating schools. This reflected an underlying belief that behaviour disruption was minimised and learning maximised by assisting a student to develop improved social skills and relationships with others, as well as providing an individualised curriculum that was valued by the student. All schools assumed that behaviour was learned and could be taught and, in order to engage a student in learning, it was necessary to support their identity and self-worth. Fostering respectful, collaborative and supportive relationships with parents represented a critical dimension to the schools' ethos. (Section 3.3)

A partnership approach, where parents were seen as co-workers and supportive of the philosophy of whole-school implementation, was important in this study. Consistent application of behavioural strategies was then ensured, not only at school but at home and in the community. Parents emphasised the positive support received from their child's school. They expressed appreciation for what they had learned about behaviour and a willingness to continue working with staff to develop effective skills for managing their child's challenging behaviour. (Sections 3.4, 3.8)

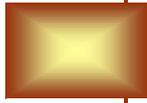
A structured behaviour management program was considered essential. In all project schools, programs were chosen with a focus on positive, not negative, reinforcement. Clearly articulating and communicating the basic tenets of the program to all stakeholders was a key factor for whole-school implementation. This included documenting beliefs, behaviour expectations and consequences for behaviour infringement. Documentation of the school's approach to behaviour management included policies and procedures, information booklets, the school Website, staff induction material, posters placed in the physical environment and newsletters. This transparency allowed new families, staff and students to become familiar with the behaviour management program and support its consistent application across the whole school. (Sections 3.3, 3.5, 3.7)

A common understanding between staff was another key factor to successful whole-school implementation. This could be acquired through all staff undertaking the same professional development activities, coupled with opportunities for frequent sharing of information, particularly in relation to individual students. Staff information sessions were conducted on a regular (often daily) basis and various measures were undertaken to keep parents informed as well. It was important, for the success of the program, for school leaders to accept that professional development in the area of behaviour management was ongoing and required regular revision, particularly as staff changes and developments in behaviour management practice evolved. Some schools advocated the involvement of parents in formal training opportunities. Parents valued being kept informed of the school's behavioural approach and how it affected their children. (Sections 3.6, 3.8)

In addition, evaluation, review and modification were significant procedures for effective behaviour management programs. Developing a system for documenting behavioural incidents assisted in this process. Through analysis of data, whole-school trends or specific individual issues that required attention were highlighted. Communicating these findings to school staff was an important aspect of collaborative whole-school program development. (Sections 3.3, 3.5, 3.7)

It was clear from this project that leadership drives the adoption of a whole-school approach to behaviour management. However, it would not be possible without a team approach and the commitment of a core group of staff. Leaders recognised that a shift to the whole-school approach can be challenging and requires sensitive management skills. Arriving at a level of consensus was the key to success but not always easily achieved, especially when there were large numbers of temporary or transient staff, or permanent staff were reluctant to change. (Section 3.4)

In summary, in this study the benefits of a whole-school approach to behaviour management were highlighted. The whole-school approach provided a clear and consistent structure for all members of the school community. Teachers, support staff and parents were provided with regular opportunities to share difficulties, help one another find solutions and celebrate achievements. This increased collegial support appeared to reduce stress, as teachers were able to focus on the core business of student learning. (Section 3.4)



Recommendations

It is recommended that the Minister for Education and Children's Services approve the forwarding of this report to the:

- Chief Executive of the Department of Education and Children's Services
- Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of SA
- Director of Catholic Education SA.

It is recommended that the Minister approve:

- a project to be undertaken by the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities in 2004. This project should include a trial implementation of positively focused behaviour management programs using the whole-school approach in a number of preschools and schools in South Australia.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Each year the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities undertakes research projects related to the education of students with disabilities in order to provide policy advice to the Minister for Education and Children's Services. In 2003, the Minister approved a project that focused on the implementation of a whole-school approach toward behaviour management, and the complementary training that would enable staff to appropriately support children and students with challenging behaviours. This project builds upon previous reports of the Ministerial Advisory Committee that have highlighted difficulties confronted by preschools and schools in relation to this topic (eg Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities, 1998, 2003).

A task group was formed to oversee the project (see Appendix 1 for membership), with the aim of collecting information on whole-school behaviour management programs that have resulted in positive outcomes for children and students with disabilities at preschools and schools in Australia. This was achieved through consultation with preschool and school communities that were known to have demonstrated best practice in the area of whole-school behavioural support.

1.2 Literature Review

In 1998, The Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities reported to the then Minister for Education, Children's Services and Training on behaviour management issues related to the education of students with disabilities. At that time, the number of students with disabilities who were suspended and excluded from school sites was an area of particular concern. All three education sectors (the Department of Education, Training and Employment, Catholic Education SA and the Association of Independent Schools of SA) were working to develop effective policies and practices to maximise students' learning opportunities and manage challenging behaviours.

In this context, recommendations from the Committee's report included: further collaboration between all school staff (ie teachers and teacher assistants), increasing the amount of training and development for teachers (particularly in non-aversive behaviour management strategies), improving access to expert consultative advice, and suggestions for providing students with challenging behaviours with alternative options to participate in a curriculum that was appropriate for the individual (Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities, 1998).

Frequent disruption to the learning environment, caused by challenging behaviours, continues to concern teachers (Kerr, 2001). Since the Ministerial Advisory Committee's 1998 report, two notable developments in theory and practice have influenced the current approach to managing challenging behaviours in preschools and schools. Firstly, there has been a paradigm shift to embrace the principles of positive behaviour support. This has evolved out of the field of applied behaviour analysis (Cook, 1998; Turnbull et al, 2002; Eber et al, 2002). Assessing the function of behaviour, determining environmental influences on behaviour and acknowledging behaviour as a method of communication represent three dimensions to consider when providing positive behaviour support for students (Department of Education and Children's Services, 2002; Hetzroni, 2003).

Cook and Tarr (2001) emphasise the importance of conducting assessments that are related to behaviour and the subsequent development of behaviour plans, in situ, or where the behaviours occur (eg at the school site). Approaches that focus on proactive positive support strengthen relationships between students and teachers because the teacher is seen to be part of the solution to the student's problems (Cook, 1998). It is now recognised that punitive responses to managing challenging behaviour, which have been recent common practice, can lead to stressful and destructive relationship cycles between teachers and students (Richmond, 2003a). A positive behaviour support program uses educational methods to expand an individual's behaviour repertoire, as well as systems change methods to redesign an individual's environment (Carr et al, 2002).

The second area of significant development has been an emerging trend to a whole-school, team directed approach toward behaviour management. Rogers (1995) believes that "the quality of behaviour management can be significantly improved and the social and learning environment of a school is enhanced, if a whole-school approach is developed" (p 13). He suggests the benefits of a whole-school approach include: reduced teacher stress (due to a sharing of concerns and solutions), an increase in effective strategies as teachers share good practice, consistency, collaboration, enhanced relationships with parents and a greater appreciation of school as an environment for learning. Cook (1998) also notes that leadership is critical to the success of the whole-school process.

When the whole school becomes engaged and committed to a plan through the actions of the principal and senior staff, the likelihood of fitting strategies to the classroom context, making adaptive changes to activities and the environment and creating effective support for teachers are greatly increased (p 5).

Hence, in Australia, a number of programs have been specifically designed to engage the whole school in professional development related to managing challenging behaviours and positively supporting students. Some of these have been implemented in settings where students with disabilities are enrolled. Such programs include theoretical information, references, advice and guidelines for implementation (eg Cook, 1998; Liaupsin et al, 2000; Bernard, 2001; DECS 2002). However, it is important to note that the type of behaviour program adopted by a preschool or school must relate to their specific education community, necessarily taking into consideration the dynamics of the student population (ie their developmental stage, type of disability and individual needs).

With these current developments in mind, the purpose of this study was to investigate whole-school implementation of this type of behaviour program in a number of preschools/schools in Australia.

2 Project Design

2.1 Aim

The aim of this project was to investigate the effect of a whole-school approach to behaviour management in preschools/schools, where this had been implemented over a period of time. While study participants at schools discussed specific behaviour management programs, the principles of whole-school implementation represented the core focus for investigation, not the various types of behaviour management programs available (see Terms of Reference, Appendix 2).

2.2 Methodology

Schools were selected according to predetermined criteria to ensure the whole-school approach had been utilised, that students with disabilities were enrolled and to include a range of settings. As mentioned, the project did not aim to evaluate the content of specific behaviour management programs.

Schools were identified through consultation with education and disability professionals known to Task Group members. A small number of schools were selected from four states across Australia (Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia). It is recognised that there may be many more preschools and schools that would have successfully matched the criteria, however, the Task Group was limited by this consultative approach to selection.

In order to investigate the whole-school approach to behaviour management a qualitative methodology was employed. This included interviews with directors and principals, specialist staff, teachers, teacher assistants and parents (see Appendix 3 for interview questions).

Data were analysed to identify key factors that contributed to the successful implementation of behaviour management programs across these education settings. The ultimate aim of the project was to identify the underlying principles associated with the whole-school approach that might be undertaken by preschools and schools in South Australia.

3 Project Results

3.1 Participating Schools

A brief summary of each of the six schools participating in the study and their approach to behaviour management is included in Appendix 4. While the particular behaviour management program varied between the schools (eg Applied Behaviour Analysis, Responsible Thinking and Program Achieve), all six schools were implementing a whole-school approach.

The range of schools included three mainstream settings (a preschool, primary and secondary school) and three specialist schools (one for students with psychiatric and behaviour disorders, a special school for students with mild to moderate intellectual disability and another for students with moderate to severe intellectual disability). All enrolled students with disabilities, however, it should be noted that the numbers of students with disabilities in mainstream school settings was relatively low compared to the total population of students in these schools (ie 15 students at one and 14 at the other). Whilst the project team endeavoured to involve a range of schools and student populations, it was not possible to visit a mainstream school with a large percentage of students with disabilities (that also implemented a whole-school approach to behaviour management). It is therefore not possible to report directly on the potential difficulties for large and extremely complex populations.

In total, seventy-six participants were interviewed. This included one preschool director, five principals, eight assistant principals, seven specialist support staff, nineteen teachers, thirteen teacher assistants and twenty-three parents.

3.2 Analysis of Data

Several key factors were identified from the data, which contributed to the successful implementation of behaviour management programs in all six settings. These factors, which appear to be essential components of the whole-school approach, include:

- A priority focus on the welfare of students.
- A school-wide behaviour management policy and a program that has structure and clearly enunciated expectations.
- A proactive positive approach to behaviour management where students are seen as learners and challenging behaviour is acknowledged as a method of communication.

- Creating a partnership that involves all persons who interact with the student, including leaders, teachers, teacher assistants, ancillary staff, allied professionals and parents.
- Professional development activities that include all staff, and in some instances parents, so there is a common understanding of the behaviour management program and consistency in its application.
- Regular communication about students' behaviour and opportunities for sharing behaviour management strategies with all stakeholders.
- Flexibility based on familiarity with the needs of an individual student.
- A curriculum that engages students in learning activities that have value for them and supports their individual needs.

The following sections elaborate on these key factors and describe the environment, relationships, beliefs, attitudes and approaches of the participating school communities.

3.3 School Ethos

Student Welfare

Student welfare was identified as an area of priority with the belief that, in order to engage a student in learning, it is necessary to support their identity and self-worth. This ethos was reflected in the participating schools' policy, planning and management documents.

In this study, overseeing student welfare was the responsibility of school leaders, as was behaviour management. Student behaviour was philosophically aligned with student welfare and behaviour management programs had been developed as a proactive approach to supporting students. As one parent commented:

What you'd normally think were punishments are presented as learning experiences: how they focus in on what happened, how it could be fixed and what to do next time.

Understanding each student's needs and their family circumstances was integral to this approach. Staff nurtured supportive relationships with parents, appreciating the critical link between home and school as it relates to student welfare.

We're really strong on trying to build really good relationships between home and school. That's really really important.

Flexibility was also considered important to support student welfare.

Within the overall behavioural management system, you need flexibility because we're there to help the student, not so much fit the student into a particular mould. That's where behaviour management is dynamic. Consistency and flexibility is the key but therein lies the skill, the real skill of special educators in this role.

This factor is also emphasised in the discussion of behaviour management programs (see Section 3.5).

Behaviour Management Policy

In addition to departmental policies relating to student behaviour (which are unique to each State and Territory of Australia), the schools involved in this study had developed and documented their own behaviour management policies and accompanying procedures. These policies clearly outlined the school's philosophical beliefs, the aim of the behaviour management program and an explanation of the purpose for responding to challenging behaviours in a specific way. This transparency assisted new families, staff and other members of the school community to be informed of the preschool/school's behaviour management program and feel assured of its consistent application across the whole school. Documenting the school's policy in detail also provided a point of reference for evaluation and review.

Evaluating the behaviour management program, and reviewing specific outcomes for students, was discussed as an important factor in relation to whole-school implementation. It was emphasised as an ongoing process:

You don't do it once, you need to be reviewing. In our management plan we set time, once a term to very closely review our processes, and they have changed and developed, and grown according to the needs of the school community.

Each of the schools involved in this study had a system of documenting behavioural incidents to assist with this review process. Some had developed sophisticated databases to record and store information. It was then possible to analyse and interpret these data: to monitor the success of a behavioural strategy, to note conflict in relationships, to determine patterns relating to an individual student, or to analyse whole-school trends in relation to behavioural issues.

3.4 Benefits of a Whole-School Approach

A whole-school approach to behaviour management provides a clear and consistent structure for all members of the school community: teaching staff, students and their parents. Responses from those interviewed at participating schools clearly indicated the benefits of the whole-school approach.

Most teachers now are a lot more relaxed. They know that they can use the process, they know the students know how it works, so it's stopped all that stress. The students themselves are more relaxed. To me it's been very positive.

As a casual teacher I found it very supportive coming in to a new environment. There is consistency right throughout. You can see the benefits coming through. For example, when on playground duty you are still following the same behaviour management program and the students know that, they know that it's consistent.

We found a big bonus was having very black and white consequences. If you do this, this will happen. Every teacher in the school knows, and therefore it will happen.
(Parent)

In addition to consistency, teachers can share difficulties, help one another find solutions and celebrate achievements. This increased collegial support reduces stress, enables staff to share successes and to focus on the core business of education.

I've noticed that not one person is responsible for any individual child, that everybody shares the good times and the not-so-good times and by sharing, you don't go home at the end of the day exhausted thinking, "I've been carrying this one child on my shoulders all day"! It's a really good approach.

It was clear from the study data that the director/principal drives the adoption of a whole-school approach to behaviour management. However, this would not be possible without a team approach and the commitment of a core group of staff. One teacher described her view of how to effectively implement a whole-school approach to behaviour management:

You first need to make sure all the teachers understand the program, otherwise it's not going to work. Once the teachers understand it, can see the system and how it might work, then you need to teach it to the kids.

Challenges to Implementation

Achieving the consensus and commitment of staff was important but not always easy. It appeared to be more difficult when large numbers of staff were transient or reluctant to change. A teacher from one school described their recent experience of change:

I wouldn't say that it's been easy to implement because we have a lot of part time people, not everyone who works here has special education training, and you have people who want children to be in trouble when they do things they shouldn't. But the general approach, the overall feeling, is one of support for the program.

Another principal shared his perspective based on several years of experience:

I don't want to make out that it's all been easy going. Some staff have resisted and there have been difficulties with that. Some have withdrawn, some have caused all sorts of problems. I've been through all of that and I know they are the realities.

School leaders recognised that the whole-school approach, particularly with a behaviour management program that focuses on positive reinforcement, can sometimes confront individual values and beliefs. Evidence from this study suggested that unless a majority of staff are committed to this approach, implementation may not be successful.

3.5

Selecting a Behaviour Management Program

Various theoretical frameworks may be used to guide behaviour management practice and this study was not designed to evaluate the specific programs chosen by the schools. However, the type of program is an integral component of the whole-school approach to behaviour management.

Porter (1996) provides a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of different behaviour management theories, from authoritative approaches that focus on the individual, to more democratic ecological models where social systems are considered. In an educational context, any program for managing challenging behaviour will relate to theoretical beliefs and, for many schools in this study, the chosen programs appeared to be somewhat eclectic. However, all reflected the philosophical views of the leadership and staff at the time of implementation. As one principal explained:

If we wanted to hold up a banner for our school, we'd say that this school is about learning. So you'll find that the things we do, for example behaviour management, are about maximising the learning in the classroom that is our whole school philosophy.

As previously mentioned, the schools involved in this project had chosen a variety of behaviour management programs. Some had similar theoretical frameworks and others differed. One important consideration was that the program implemented necessarily related to the age and ability of the students attending the particular school. (See Appendix 4 for references to the types of programs chosen and descriptions of each school site.)

Positive Behaviour Support

As mentioned in Section 1.2, a paradigm shift has occurred in much of the recent literature to embrace a positive approach to behaviour support. Students are seen as learners and challenging behaviours are acknowledged as methods of communication, largely influenced by environmental conditions. This perspective was clearly reflected in the responses of the leaders interviewed for this project. Although specific behaviour programs differed, there was a common concern for the welfare of the students and support for positive programming that encouraged learning and engagement in the curriculum.

An appreciation of the individual student's need to learn about appropriate and responsible behaviour in the context of the broader curriculum was paramount. Systems were structured to maximise success for each student, subsequently increasing their self-esteem and reducing frustration. When required, the curriculum was specifically tailored to the individual student and often included an individual behaviour plan as an adjunct to their education plan. The concept of 'proactively programming' was adopted to avoid unnecessary behaviour issues caused by trying to engage a student in inappropriate curriculum activities. Concurrently, teaching social and relationship skills as part of the formal and informal curriculum was an integral part of the positively focused behaviour management programs.

Structure

Providing a structured environment was also identified as a key factor for supporting students with challenging behaviours. Behaviour management programs with a graduated process for managing behaviour infringement and a method of prioritising the severity of disruptive behaviour were effective. Clearly defining processes and applying them consistently created this structure and had positive benefits for students, teachers, support staff and parents. One principal described a student with severe language and communication disorder who was highly explosive, and outlined the benefits of a structured program:

The more secure and consistent that we made his environment, the more he began to respond, and we were able then to use strategies for him to lessen his frustration. If you haven't got the steps in place, then sometimes your management just becomes crisis management and you can be pretty sure that if you go straight to crisis management, you're going to have a crisis.

The type of structure needs to be tailored to the population of students. In this study, for those who worked with students with a mild (or no) intellectual disability, whose cognitive ability enabled them to comprehend their contribution to and responsibility for managing appropriate behavioural transactions, a cognitive based partnership approach was proving successful. Counselling, mediation, constructive communication and written agreements were some of the strategies used to support healthy teacher/student as well as family/student relationships. As one principal explained:

A cognitive behavioural approach is actually about teaching, teaching kids to make other sorts of choices. It's very much a part of their whole educative process.

In instances where students had severe intellectual disabilities, observing and documenting behavioural actions was an important part of the behaviour program. This allowed staff to understand the function of a student's behaviour and provided insight for the development of behaviour modification strategies. This process was particularly useful when the student was not able to clearly articulate their problems and used challenging behaviours to draw attention to their frustration. The time needed to observe and understand students' actions will vary depending on familiarity with the student and the complexity of their behaviours. As one teacher explained:

Even though it's a whole-school approach, it's also individual. We actually look at the individual student's behaviour with the main focus on looking at the function of the behaviour. Staff have been trained to use a range of assessment approaches but one of the main approaches is to observe the behaviours over a period of time. Some are more complex and the student displays a range of behaviours for a range of reasons, so they may need observation over a period of a week.

When a student persistently created difficulties through challenging behaviours, an individual behaviour plan was required. This individualised approach was used by all schools involved in this study. Again, a whole-school approach was applied; staff were engaged to support a student's development based on their individual behaviour plan. A student's behaviour plan would be shared with all those involved in their schooling, including the teacher, teacher assistants, parents, the administration staff and, at required times, the bus driver, psychiatrist or counsellor.

In all cases, the processes for managing an individual student's challenging behaviours were supportive and oriented toward enhancing self-image and personal development.

Language

Teaching the 'language' of behavioural expectation or communication was another strategy used to support the consistent application of a whole-school program, as highlighted by the following teacher:

I think that the language of behaviour management is terribly important, that people have common language that they use. It may be with an individual kid or it might be with the entire program.

Certain words were used to describe elements of a specific behaviour program and indicated the expectations of the students. For example, the terms 'time out', 'reflection' or 'level 1 behaviour' would have semantic association for staff, parents and the students at a particular school. Scripted questions were also used to ensure consistency across the whole school, such as: "What are you doing?", "What should you be doing?" and "What will happen if you disrupt again?".

Using commonly understood language to acknowledge appropriate behaviour and correct inappropriate behaviour was an important component of the whole-school process (see also Richmond, 2003b). Language was often idiosyncratic and related to both the particular behavioural program chosen by the school and the age and ability of the students involved. In addition, by sharing this language and its meaning it was easily transferred to another setting, for example, to the home or in a community context.

Affirmation

Incorporated into any program for managing challenging behaviours must be a mechanism for rewarding or affirming desired behaviour. Certificates, food, movie vouchers and money were some examples of rewards that were selected appropriately, depending on the student and the circumstances. One school ensured parents were included in the success of their child by telephoning to report on any achievements, which could then be celebrated at home. For many parents, this was a refreshing change to only being called when their child had caused disruption.

Familiarity and Flexibility

As one school leader suggested:

There has to be some degree of flexibility with the behaviour management system so that we don't get people just following through the rule—a routine approach.

Familiarity with the student was regarded as critical when determining how best to respond to an individual's challenging behaviour. Considering their age, emotional and mental well-being and cognitive ability was important. For example, a child who had just begun preschool would not be expected to understand rules and responsibilities in the same way as an older child who was ready for the school system. It was acknowledged that "behaviour needs to be taught" and affirmed.

Ensuring that a student with challenging behaviours is assessed thoroughly and that there is always someone available who understands the student and can be consulted by other staff, were critical factors in the provision of whole-school support. One teacher explained the importance of having effective assessment and consistency in relation to flexibility.

If you're dealing with a kid who's really into power struggles, then you do need to be confronting and rigid, but if you're dealing with a kid who's quiet and anxious, they're likely to escalate when you start to confront them, you know when to pull back on those things—that's flexibility.

The concept of flexibility with consistency needs to be made clear to staff because, if consistency is confused with rigidity, it will cause other problems and everyone will get into huge power struggles.

Receiving feedback from parents and between staff about the effect of a behaviour management program was an integral part of the process. This was facilitated through regular meetings (staff meetings at some sites consisted of a daily/weekly debriefing), communication books, telephone calls and behaviour questionnaires. Aside from regular communication between staff and parents, periodic review of the overall behaviour management program was also considered important (see Section 3.3).

3.6 Professional Development

Staff from the participating schools (including teacher assistants and ancillary staff), had participated in training that specifically focused on behaviour, the principles of behaviour management and the way to respond to a student according to the behaviour management program. As consistency was a key factor to whole-school implementation, this was ensured by all staff participating in the professional development.

For some schools this involved devoting a whole day or two to learning about behaviour and the specific behaviour management program that was being implemented. For other settings, members of the leadership team and/or specialist staff had undertaken training and then provided professional development at the school site for all staff. This training was ongoing at many sites and became part of regular staff meetings. A specific amount of time would be devoted to discussing behaviour management at each or alternate meetings. This was an opportunity for sharing information and strategies, for updating staff knowledge and increasing skills. However, in common with many schools, ancillary and teacher assistant staff were often not involved in general staff meetings, which represented a deficit for the whole-school approach.

A definitive understanding and knowledge of specific disabilities (eg Autism Spectrum Disorder, speech and language disorder or obsessive compulsive disorder) was regarded as critical for managing the challenging behaviours of this group of students. According to one school leader: To know whether anxiety, frustration or intimidation drives challenging behaviour and to understand behaviour as a method of communication were other important aspects for school staff. This level of understanding provided insight to effectively manage student behaviour and develop strategies for behaviour modification:

When you understand something about the diagnosis, you'll understand something about the management and you're less likely to mismanage.

Aside from initial training sessions, ongoing exposure to and support for professional development in this area was another key factor for the successful implementation of a whole-school approach. As one school leader explained:

Super-saturation would be the way I describe it—at every staff meeting; showing how the statistics are going, what's happening, “thanks so much for the way you are handling it”, “these are some of the key issues that we're not getting right at the moment”. In every staff notice, every day for the first month, I had little tips. It wasn't just a two day in-service.

You need to be revisiting, reviewing, looking at people's certain philosophical approaches to behaviour. Another very important aspect is supervision and support, to make sure that staff are able to talk things through on all their different levels. They have to have a supervisor to go to, who organises their professional development.

It was also evident from this study that, more often than not, new staff required professional development relating to the school's behaviour management program. Incorporating this into the school induction program for new staff was critical to maintain whole-school consistency.

3.7 Communication

In all instances, the schools participating in this project adopted a team approach where all members of the school community were informed of specific issues, regularly updated, and provided with opportunities to discuss concerns and progress. Strategies included: outlining the behaviour program in the school information booklet and on the website, posting signs at the school site, and sharing information in newsletters to parents. Sharing information also ensured that specific strategies for individual students were applied consistently across the school. According to one school leader:

You need to avoid small groups of individual teachers. You need to have everyone together so that they can bounce off each other and communicate as a whole school, otherwise it just doesn't work.

This approach achieved not only a common understanding of the behaviour program but also the individual needs of students and their families. As one teacher explained, "Everyone knows what's going on in all aspects of the program". Setting aside time for communication was a key element of success. Two of the schools purposefully timetabled staff communication sessions each day, either at the beginning or at the end of the day, to discuss daily issues including student behaviour. Staff obviously valued this time, as one teacher stated:

One of the things that impressed me about this school was the meeting every day, which meant you were informed. In the past, they tried to drop off that meeting because, at times it goes on too long, but I think we've always come back to that because it is so valuable. Minutes are taken and the office staff are able to read the minutes afterwards, or an emergency teacher, or an aide who comes in later—at least they know what's happening.

As highlighted earlier, sharing responsibility for managing student behaviour was a mechanism for decreasing staff anxiety. Staff were able to share their skills and ideas and felt supported by other members of the team.

In addition to a daily communication (or debriefing) session, another opportunity for staff to communicate was at the staff meeting. The regularity of staff meetings varied in this study, from weekly to monthly. However, these meetings were also scheduled with time allocated to discuss behaviour management. In some instances, staff met regularly in subgroups (eg junior or senior school staff) or in leadership teams. Discussions would include the behaviour of individual students and their 'plan', or the effectiveness of the overall behaviour program.

In relation to large school sites, it becomes more difficult to share information with the entire staff. One suggestion to overcome this difficulty was for the staff member, responsible for behaviour plans, to email relevant behaviour management information to all staff. This ensured they were kept informed about particular students and their needs. By providing opportunities for regular communication, the success or failure of a strategy could be discussed collectively and the responses for a particular student modified, as a whole-school approach.

Communication about behaviour and behaviour strategies could also extend to a community setting, when it was considered important for the care and development of the student (eg to the leader of a weekend recreational group). While this sharing of information must have parental consent, one mother spoke of the usefulness of conveying strategies to staff at her son's childcare centre:

I've passed on the instructions they've given me here to the people who look after him there, so it can be consolidated throughout the day, and I've also tried it at home and it's really starting to work.

Communication systems assist in monitoring a student's behaviour across settings, as well as facilitating the sharing of important information. Data from this study suggest that by working cooperatively, a consistent approach can be applied in each domain of the student's life that will lead to improved development and modification of behavioural interactions.

3.8 Parent/Carer Involvement

Creating a partnership between home and school (where parents are seen as co-workers), was advocated by many of the staff interviewed for this project. Building a trusting relationship between school and home was critical. Involving parents in the reality of their child's needs at preschool or school and enlisting their support to work as part of the team, was another key element of the whole-school approach to managing challenging behaviours. Spending time explaining the school's behaviour management program was valued by the parents interviewed:

We've found the same sort of compatibility with what was used at the school and being able to apply it at home. We certainly learned the terms very quickly and there's the psychology that you learn dealing with it at home that you can take as a tool. I think that's really important.

Providing parents with knowledge is one aspect of the relationship. Preparing parents for those exasperating moments when challenging behaviours recur, and supporting them through those times, is equally important. As one principal highlighted, in a partnership the school has a role, not only to assist parents to acquire effective skills in behavioural support but also to recognise their child's progress:

Their child may not make the right choice or the best choice, but if it's better than the choice before, you've had a behavioural movement and the kid's thought about it.

3.9 Funding

Each of the participating schools discussed the expense of whole-school training and development in behaviour management. For example, training in a specific program for a large school population (approximately 120 staff participants) for two school closure days, with a consultant for one of those days, cost one school site approximately \$7,000 in total. In this example, the amount represented approximately 25 percent of the school's professional development budget for that year and equated to approximately \$3.50 per pupil.

In this study, none of the schools had accessed additional funds to implement a behaviour management program across the whole school. An effective whole-school approach to managing challenging behaviours was considered an integral dimension of the learning program and, as such, had become a priority. As one school leader stated:

We had to use the global budget. It actually became part of our management plan, the one that you work on over 3 to 5 years. Social skills were an important area, so we budgeted about \$4,000 towards that each year. (Note the behaviour program was integral to the social skills program at this school.)

In all cases, funds for professional development and implementing the program were allocated from the global budget (professional development was an allocated budget line). In some instances, small grants were accessed for specific purposes but these were regarded as negligible in the greater scheme of a commitment to implementing the whole-school approach.

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Appendix 1

Task Group Membership

Mr Adrian Murray— Chairperson	Department of Education and Children’s Services
Ms Cynthia Betterman	Parent Advocacy
Ms Christel Butcher	Children’s Services Department of Education and Children’s Services
Mr Greg Cox	Policy Advisor: Student Behaviour Management Department of Education and Children’s Services
Mr Richard Dalefield	Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities
Ms Chris Drynan	Special Schools Principals’ Association
Ms Judy Gray	Autism Association of South Australia
Mr Phil Lewis	Behaviour Education Team Catholic Education SA
Ms Nicole McDowell	Association of Independent Schools of South Australia
Ms Sheena Ruedas	Association of Non-Government Education Employees

Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities

Ms Margaret McColl	Executive Officer
Ms Jo Shearer	Project Officer

Appendix 2

Terms of Reference

To formulate policy advice for the South Australian Minister for Education and Children's Services on whole-school behaviour management programs for children and students with disabilities in a range of school settings across the three education sectors in this State.

To investigate effective training and development programs for preschool/school communities that have translated into successful outcomes for children and students with disabilities by:

- undertaking a literature search for programs of best practice
- identifying preschool/school sites across Australia that have implemented whole-school behaviour management programs resulting in positive outcomes for children and students with disabilities
- selecting a small number of preschools/schools to consult in order to identify successful elements of their behaviour management programs and determine their possible application in preschools/schools across the three education sectors in South Australia.

To report on the relative success of selected whole-school behaviour management programs and make recommendations about:

- a trial of programs in a number of preschools and schools in South Australia in 2004
- the associated costs of implementing these programs.

Appendix 3

Interview Questions

Principals

- 1 Please briefly describe your school.
- 2 Please describe your school's whole-school approach to behaviour management.
- 3 How have you implemented a whole-school behaviour management program?
- 4 Please describe any funding that you have accessed to develop a whole-school behaviour management program?
- 5 What professional development has been undertaken by your staff in order to implement a whole-school behaviour management program?
- 6 What effect has the whole-school behaviour management program had on:
 - teachers and teacher assistants
 - students with disabilities
 - students without disabilities
 - parents and carers of students with disabilities?
- 7 How are you evaluating the effect of your school's approach to managing challenging behaviour?
- 8 How are parents/carers involved in the whole-school behaviour management program?
- 9 What changes to the program have been made since implementation?
- 10 What challenges/barriers have you faced when implementing a whole-school behaviour management program?
- 11 Please describe any useful strategies that could be adopted by other schools implementing a whole-school behaviour management program.
- 12 Please describe any strategies to avoid when implementing a whole-school behaviour management program.
- 13 Any other comments?



Teachers and Teacher Assistants

- 1** Please explain your school's approach to whole-school behaviour management.
- 2** Who is it important to involve in this approach, if it is to be successful?
- 3** What professional development activities have you undertaken to implement this whole-school approach to behaviour management?
- 4** Are there other professional development programs that you would like to undertake?
- 5** How do you implement the whole-school approach to managing challenging behaviour in the:
 - a)** classroom
 - b)** school yard
 - c)** other settings?
- 6** What has been the effect of this approach for:
 - a)** you as teachers and teacher assistants
 - b)** the students with disabilities
 - c)** the parents and carers of students with disabilities
 - d)** students without disabilities?
- 7** What challenges or barriers have you faced when implementing the behaviour management program?
- 8** Please describe any useful strategies that could be adopted by other schools when implementing a whole-school behaviour management program.
- 9** Please describe any strategies to avoid when implementing a whole-school behaviour management program.
- 10** What additional strategies or resources would you like to see included as part of the whole-school approach to behaviour management?
- 11** Any other comments?



Parents and Carers

- 1 Firstly, we would like you to explain your understanding of how this school approaches behaviour management for its students.
- 2 How have you, as parents, been informed of the school's approach to managing the challenging behaviours of students?
- 3 What other information have you been provided with, in relation to managing your child's behaviours?
- 4 Please describe how the behaviour of your child(ren) has changed since they have either, attended this school or, since the behaviour management program has been introduced?
- 5 Have you experienced any problems in relation to the school's approach to behaviour management?
- 6 What do you see as the advantages of the school's approach to behaviour management?
- 7 Any other comments?

Appendix 4

School Profiles

Rivendell School for Specific Purposes

Type of setting and location

Rivendell School is a joint New South Wales Department of Health and Department of Education and Training (DET) facility that focuses on the psychological health of young people and their families. It is located on the site of Rivendell teaching hospital at Concord (an inner west suburb of Sydney) and is a Statewide facility. Rivendell provides support from both education and health professionals for students with emotional and psychiatric disorders, who are of secondary school age (ie year levels 7 to 12, ages 12 to 18 years).

Student population and education programs

At the time of the study, Rivendell had a population of approximately 54 students and offered 4 different programs relating to their needs. Specific student needs are classified into the following categories: anxiety/mood disorders, students with psychotic symptoms, students with behaviour disorders, and students who (for emotional and social reasons) are not attending school despite various interventions. The four programs are structured according to these diagnostic categories. Programs for students are implemented on an individual basis and focus on their return to mainstream schools after treatment, or transition into other appropriate educational settings. Rivendell provides outpatient services, inpatient care, community outreach programs, and in addition to student education, staff also provide consultancy and educational programs for professional groups, including teachers from other schools.

Behaviour management

Rivendell utilises a systematic, stepped process for managing student behaviour, based on a modified Glasser approach. Teaching staff analyse data from the behaviour management system records and use this information to develop initiatives to target specific areas of need. One of the main aims of the behaviour management and social skills development programs is to help students learn to accept responsibility for their own behaviour. This increased responsibility enables students to make informed choices and to move into the community with a set of values that will enhance their personal and working lives. It also encourages them to be contributing members of society.

- **Professional Development:** Professional Assault Response Training
Modified Glasser approach (Judy Hatswell & Associates)
- **Whole-school approach:** 14 years (1989)
- **Interviewees:** Principal, thirteen staff and five parents.

Type of setting and location

Kurrabee School is located at the foot of the Blue Mountains in the outer western metropolitan area of Sydney. The school is a purpose-built special school that caters for students with moderate to severe intellectual disability from preschool to year 12 (ages 4 to 20 years).

Student population and education programs

At the time of the study, 86 students were enrolled at Kurrabee. All students have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) developed in collaboration with parents, support staff and therapists, as appropriate. The IEP goals may reflect a mix of skills development and activities across a range of curriculum areas, in accordance with the needs of the individual student.

Behaviour management

In addition to individualised education planning, the staff at Kurrabee consider their ability to manage students with challenging behaviours as a strength of the school. They have defined challenging behaviour as “entrenched excessive behaviours that may place the life of the individual and others around them at risk and/or significantly interfere with the opportunities and lifestyle experienced by a person”. The types of challenging behaviours demonstrated by students range from social isolation to aggression towards self and others.

Staff believe in their responsibility to change these behaviours using a range of strategies that include focus on positive relationships, firm boundaries, proactive responses, an appropriate curriculum, effective communication, and functional assessment and analysis of behaviour (which includes the collection of direct observation data to inform the development and implementation of a student’s individual behaviour support plan). Staff record and share strategies to manage and change behaviours with the aim of reducing the incidence and effect of challenging behaviours and enhancing the student’s quality of life experience.

- **Professional Development:** Functional Assessment and Analysis of Behaviour
Modified Glasser approach (Judy Hatswell & Associates)
- **Whole-school approach:** 5 years (1998)
- **Interviewees:** Principal and assistant principal, six staff and four parents.



Type of setting and location

Valley View Kindergarten is located in the north eastern metropolitan area of Adelaide. It is a mainstream preschool catering for children from 3 to 5 years of age, with a high number of children who have significant additional needs. The preschool has a speech and language program to provide specific support for children who have speech and/or language disorder. This program is the only one available of this type in the north eastern region of Adelaide and is one of eight programs Statewide.

Student population and education programs

At the time of this study, 77 children attended the preschool and approximately 35 percent of these children were identified with additional needs, including children with Autism. Entry into the speech and language program required a separate application and entry process. The program is limited to 7 children with 2 staff, a speech pathologist and a special education teacher. The children enrolled in the speech and language program are fully included in the mainstream preschool program.

Behaviour management

The preschool's policy statement on Behaviour Management clearly demonstrates an understanding of a child's frustration, which can be caused by learning difficulties/delay, and may result in challenging/inappropriate behaviour. A consistent approach to each individual child is taken, recognising that there are different levels of understanding and experience across the group of children. There is also a recognition amongst the preschool staff that behaviour changes more quickly when approached in a positive way.

Explicit expectations about behaviour within the centre are clearly communicated to the children. Parents and preschool staff work collaboratively to support the children and there is an expectation that adults will model appropriate behaviours to the children, including the use of 'positive language'. Behaviours that are considered acceptable and those that are unacceptable are documented in the preschool policy statement on behaviour management, along with a statement of belief that children need to learn responsible behaviours to be happy, confident and co-operative members of a group, and ultimately our society.

- **Professional Development:** Maximising Positive Behaviours and Minimising Challenging Behaviours (DECS, South Australia)
- **Whole-school approach:** 4 years (1999)
- **Interviewees:** Director, four staff and four parents.



Baringa Special School

Type of setting and location

Baringa Special School is located at Moe, a large regional town in the La Trobe Valley of Victoria, 134 kilometres from Melbourne. Baringa school caters for students with mild intellectual disability from reception to year 12 (ages 5 to 18 years). At the time of the study, Baringa school had a campus at Leongatha, however, this is due to become a stand-alone school in 2004.

Student population and education programs

At the time of the study, 102 students attended the Moe campus of Baringa school and another 53 students were located at the Leongatha campus. Sixty percent of these students were in their middle years of schooling (years 5 to 9). Some students lived in nearby towns and travelled up to an hour each way to attend a specialist setting.

Each student was seen as an individual within the context of the family and their local community and links between school and home were cultivated. Baringa had initiated proactive steps toward a more appropriate flexible curriculum based on individual ability and need, coupled with the establishment of caring, understanding relationships between students, staff and families.

Behaviour management

During 2001, the school undertook a shift in their approach to managing challenging behaviour to a more positive proactive approach. A professional development program was developed and presented to staff to facilitate this change, to increase staff understanding of the origins of behaviour, and to develop practical strategies for the prevention of challenging behaviours as well as strategies for intervention when required. Student welfare and management had been a priority focus within the school for some time. Changing the approach toward behaviour management was a part of the school's ongoing review and development process, with the aim of providing a safe supportive learning environment where each individual was valued and treated with respect and dignity.

- **Professional Development:** Promoting Positive Student Behaviour (AP Consultants—Robert Cook and Associates)
- **Whole-school approach:** 2½ years (2001)
- **Interviewees:** Principal, eight staff and six parents.

Type of setting and location

Robina State High School is located at Robina, a suburb of the Gold Coast, Queensland. Robina is a mainstream high school enrolling students from years 8 to 12 (ages 13 to 18 years). The school is coded as a 'physical impairment' (PI) school and is intended to have a 'PI unit', where all students with a physical impairment from this region are eligible to attend. However, the practice of the school is that all students with disabilities enrolled in the school are included as mainstream students and a separate 'PI unit' does not exist.

Student population and education programs

Robina State High School had over 1,800 students enrolled at the time of the study. Two-fifths of these students (approximately 720) were junior students in years 8 and 9. There were 15 students with a disability enrolled in the school, six with physical impairment, another six with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and two with a hearing impairment. One of the students with a physical impairment also had an intellectual disability, acquired through a brain injury in childhood. These students received additional support from teacher assistants and had negotiated education plans.

Behaviour management

Prior to 2002, the school operated an internal suspension system, where students were withdrawn from timetabled classes for up to three days for behavioural infringements. School leaders were concerned with the educational disadvantages of this system and recognised a need for change. From August 2001, leaders within the school began researching alternative programs for managing student behaviour and chose to implement the Responsible Thinking Program (RTP) in 2002.

In order to effectively implement this program, expectations, rules and responsibilities were clearly described and openly discussed amongst students, staff and parents. Students were required to take responsibility for their behavioural choices. Disruptive behaviour, non-compliance and unfulfilled expectations were dealt with by key staff, rather than the subject teacher, and behavioural issues were discussed. Where a student had been removed from a class, they were expected to negotiate inclusion back into the classroom with the aim of maintaining a safe supportive learning environment for themselves and their peers. Students with disabilities received support with this process. The Responsible Thinking Program resulted in a shift in attitude for staff, parents and students—learning and student welfare were reaffirmed as the core business of the school.

- **Professional Development:** Responsible Thinking Program (based on Perceptual Control Theory by Ed Ford)
- **Whole-school approach:** 18 months (2002)
- **Interviewees:** Five school leaders, four staff and one parent.



Ranfurly Primary School

Type of setting and location

Ranfurly Primary School is a mainstream primary school located in the regional city of Mildura, in the Mallee district of Victoria, 550 kilometres north-west of Melbourne and 400 kilometres north-east of Adelaide. The school was founded in 1993 and built to accommodate 250 students from reception to year 6 (ages 5 to 12 years). The school is located in a relatively new residential setting, adjacent to two new housing development areas.

Student population and education programs

At the time of the study, enrolments were 515 with a prediction of 600 to 650 students in the next ten to fifteen years. Many students came from low socio-economic backgrounds, many from single parent and Koori (Aboriginal) families. The school experienced a transient population of almost 33 percent each year.

There were 14 students with disabilities enrolled in the school. The nature of the disabilities included Down syndrome, Spina Bifida, visual impairment, severe language disorder, intellectual disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder. These students received additional support from integration aides (teacher assistants) and were included fully in mainstream classes. Two specific programs related to problem solving and behaviour were taught to all students in the school, including students with disabilities. These were Program Achieve, which originates from Rational Emotive therapy, and the Stop, Think and Do program.

Behaviour management

The school began with a charter priority of student welfare. The inaugural principal initiated this focus and it has remained the priority. Respect, Pride and Safety constitute the school motto and the basis for all aspects of student conduct. Some students are supported with an individual behaviour plan. Students are taught to be increasingly responsible for their own behaviour with a stepped sequence of consequences for unacceptable behaviour. A range of positive rewards is used to highlight positive behaviour, with a belief that students learn and behave well when they experience success in the school environment.

- **Professional Development:** Program Achieve (Michael Bernard)
Stop, Think and Do (Lindy Peterson)
- **Whole-school approach:** 10 years (1993)
- **Interviewees:** Acting principal, seven staff and three parents.