

Running the Room- a teacher's guide to behaviour

By Tom Bennett



Better behaviour is the foundation of every single goal we have for education and schools. Too often we reduce 'behaviour' to simple models of punishments and rewards, as if that was all there was to it. We know this isn't true. 'Behaviour' simply means everything we do and say in schools. It means the habits and skills we have (and need) to flourish, as learners and as human beings.

It isn't a simplistic model of 'what we aren't allowed to do.' Behaviour is what we *can* do. And that means adults as much as children.

Children do not invent themselves. The behaviour they exhibit has been learned somewhere, good or bad. Their homes and lives have taught them the habits they show every day in our classrooms. And that applies to staff

too- leading a classroom well is a complex set of skills and habits, learned by experience.

Behaviour is a curriculum, and it's our job to teach it when we find children who don't *know* what to do, *how* to do it, or they don't value *why* they should behave the way they need to. This is the part that many schools struggle with, and who can blame them? It's almost never taught in teacher prep or leadership training. School leaders' main task is to *Create a Culture*. And that means focussing on something they are normally already good at: teaching- not telling - behaviour.

- If you want student mental health to improve- focus on behaviour.
- If you want to improve staff retention: focus on behaviour.
- If you want grades to improve – focus on behaviour.
- If you want to see fewer suspensions and expulsions – focus on behaviour.
- If you want to see happier children- focus on behaviour.
- If you want classrooms, corridors and halls to be calm safe spaces where everyone is treated with dignity- focus on behaviour.

Every school leader wants the Holy Grail of education: inclusive, comprehensive schools where the behaviour culture is fantastic. This is possible, but it can't be done by an endless cycle of waiting for students to misbehave and only reacting to it. When leaders start to focus on the *proactive* part of the culture, schools start to turn around because good behaviour has been made easier to do, not harder.

*These topics- and much more, are explored in Tom Bennett's new book, **Running the Room**, available now from John Catt Educational Ltd.*

Tom Bennett is the UK government's behaviour advisor for schools.

