



Department for Education call for evidence on behaviour management strategies, in-school units and managed moves

Place2Be consultation response

About Place2Be

Place2Be is a children's mental health charity with over 26 years' experience working with pupils, families and staff in UK schools.

We provide mental health support in schools through one-to-one and group counselling using effective methods backed by scientific evidence¹. We also offer expert training and professional qualifications.

For more information about the work we do, please see our [website](#).

Why we are responding

There are strong links between children's socio-emotional mental health and their behaviour in school. By supporting children, parents and school staff, as part of our whole school approach to mental health, schools may see improvements in children's behaviour and their ability to engage with learning. Schools may also see a reduction in the rates of fixed term exclusion.

We welcome this consultation, and we would like to share our perspective and experience with the Department for Education. As we are not a school, the consultation questions in the form are not appropriate for us to address, so we have provided responses to the wider themes the Department is keen to explore.

Counselling - snapshot of relevant statistics and impact

Place2Be's one-to-one counselling helps children with a range of emotional and attentional difficulties to become more settled, more able to manage their emotions and to engage in learning. After one-to-one counselling with Place2Be, teachers tell us that:

- 68% of pupils caused fewer problems in class, and
- 62% of pupils' difficulties had less impact on their learning.

While pupils received one-to-one counselling, 74% of pupils were less likely to be excluded for a fixed term.

For children with emotional and attentional issues, one-to-one school-based counselling can be an effective intervention.

For children with conduct difficulties (persistent disruptive or antisocial behaviour), the evidence shows that counselling can have some, but not a great deal of impact. Therefore, Place2Be has introduced evidence-based parenting and teacher interventions which are discussed in this response.

To find out more, please see our most recent [Impact Report](#).

¹ Finning, K., White, J., Toth, K., Golden, S., Melendez-Torres, G. J., & Ford, T. (2021). Longer-term effects of school-based counselling in UK primary schools. *European child & adolescent psychiatry*, 1-9.

What children tell Place2Be

Feelings of fear or sadness in children can manifest in their behaviour at school - children might come across as “angry” or “frustrated”. Thus, it is important to look beyond the ‘anger’ at the underlying feelings. Unless education professionals are trained to recognise this, they can perceive children as “acting out” or “naughty”. The quotes from children below are about these feelings, and how talking to a skilled mental health professional (based within the school) about their feelings and difficulties helped them to regulate their emotions. All these children have been supported by Place2Be in school.

"I was angry and annoyed coming back to school; these sessions have helped me to be less angry and annoyed". (9-year-old boy, Leeds)

"This is the only place that I can be angry, and nobody gets upset with me". (Child in the north of England)

"Place2Be helped me a lot, I don't feel angry as much and when I do, I close my eyes and talk to my body and take deep breaths." (Child in the north of England)

"At the start of my sessions I felt really angry all the time and I was losing my temper a lot both at home and at school. Now I am a lot calmer and happier." (7-year-old boy)

"When I get angry now, I try and move so that I don't feel as angry in my head... I haven't been in trouble now for two and a half weeks, so my head feels quiet." (10-year-old boy)

Involvement of parents

In terms of managing challenging behaviour arising from conduct difficulties, research shows that the involvement of parents and carers in interventions can be highly effective^{2,3} For children with conduct difficulties, the best intervention is represented by training programmes aimed at parents⁴. Alongside this, counselling may be used as an intervention if the child also has emotional difficulties, but child counselling alone is not considered as an effective approach for addressing conduct difficulties.

As part of our whole school approach service, Place2Be provides universal and targeted support for parents and carers in terms of supporting their child's mental health and behaviour.

We recently launched a new website resource called *Parenting Smart* to our partner schools. We hope to make this available to the public in the new academic year. The site contains practical advice to help parents and carers to support primary school age children and manage behaviour.

Our targeted intervention with parents is called *Personalised Individual Parenting Training (PIPT)*. This is a face-to-face programme for individual parents and their children, working with parent and child together to improve relational warmth and behavioural management.

We are also developing an online parenting course which will launch in January 2022.

² <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg158/resources/antisocial-behaviour-and-conduct-disorders-in-children-and-young-people-recognition-and-management-pdf-35109638019781>

³ O'Farrelly, C., Watt, H., Babalis, D., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., Barker, B., Byford, S., ... & Ramchandani, P. G. (2021). A brief home-based parenting intervention to reduce behavior problems in young children: a pragmatic randomized clinical trial. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 175(6), 567-576.

⁴ Scott, S. (2008). An update on interventions for conduct disorder. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, 14(1), 61 - 70. <https://doi.org/10.1192/apt.bp.106.002626>

The importance of supporting parents and carers cannot be underestimated when considering how to support a child's behaviour particularly in relation to conduct difficulties.

Behaviour management policies - as part of a whole school approach to mental health

For Place2Be to be able to support pupils in an effective way, and for schools to get the best value from Place2Be, ***we need to think about behaviour systemically***. We work with schools to examine what pupil behaviour is communicating and to explore how the existing systems around the child can be activated to support them to thrive.

Guidance from Public Health England recommends schools aim to develop a 'whole school approach' to mental health. This approach is widely accepted as contributing towards helping protect and promote pupil emotional health and wellbeing. All school policies should consider pupil's mental health. Thus, as part of a whole school approach to mental health, there needs to be enough flexibility in the behaviour policy to allow for behaviours that might be the result of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), trauma, attachment issues, or social emotional and mental health needs. ***If challenging behaviours are addressed in a punitive way, for example using isolation and exclusion, this can serve to further exacerbate the distress that is causing the behaviours***⁵.

It is important for schools to have a behaviour policy that is supported by sufficient investment in pastoral and SEND support. The best behaviour policies recognise that the most troubled pupils will often require an assessment of their social, emotional and mental health needs, and receive interventions, such as counselling, that help to support and include them.

Pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs (a recognised category of SEND) should be protected from policies and practices that may further disadvantage them. This is in alignment with the SEND Code of Practice and the Equality Act.

Changes to behaviour management strategies and policies due to impact of Covid

It is important for staff in education settings to understand that some pupils will find it difficult to adjust to being back in school after spending so much time in their home environment during the lockdowns.

Some children's existing mental health needs will have been exacerbated during lockdown, and for others new mental health needs will have emerged. Some children will have felt unsafe whilst spending more time at home.

All staff should be supported and trained to understand pupil behaviour as a form of communication. There needs to be a differentiated response to the implementation of a school's behaviour policy to allow for behaviours that might be the result of ACEs, trauma, mental health issues or emotional difficulties.

Place2Be provided our partner schools with a suite of [Return to School](#) resources to help support schools with community recovery and reintegrating pupils after the periods of lockdown.

Punitive approaches

Isolating or excluding a pupil whose behaviours are underpinned by unmet social, emotional and mental health needs can further exacerbate their difficulties. We must be very careful not to discriminate against children with social, emotional and mental health needs by using blanket behaviour policies.

⁵ Tejerina-Arreal, M., Parker, C., Paget, A., Henley, W., Logan, S., Emond, A., & Ford, T. (2020). Child and adolescent mental health trajectories in relation to exclusion from school from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 25(4), 217-223.

Instead of employing punitive approaches such as isolation and exclusion, all other reasonable adjustments should be explored, in line with the Equality Act. An example of this would be exploring whether the child may benefit from one-to-one counselling, groupwork or a parenting intervention. This approach is more likely to meet the child's social, emotional, and mental health needs and thus, more likely to help them with their behaviours.

Exclusion

Schools may see a significant impact on rates of fixed term exclusion when Place2Be supports children with social, emotional and mental health needs. When analysing our one-to-one counselling service, we found that 74% of pupils were less likely to be excluded for a fixed term while they had counselling.

In terms of exclusions, it is important to be aware that the current approach can discriminate against the most disadvantaged children and young people. According to the Timpson Review of School Exclusions⁶ – children are more likely to be excluded if they:

- Have a SEND,
- Are from a Black Caribbean background, Mixed White and Black Caribbean background, or are from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities,
- Are eligible for free school meals.

Place2Be works with highly disadvantaged children with multiple and severe mental health needs. Over a third have a SEND, almost half are eligible for free school meals and almost half have severe mental health needs. In terms of race and ethnicity, we are working with a much more diverse population in comparison to the wider population in England and Wales (2011 Census).

Considering the impact exclusion is having on disadvantaged pupils, we **must** ensure that needs are identified and met, rather than excluded. Any form of exclusion should be an absolute last resort.

Training for class teachers and education professionals

In terms of supporting pupils' behaviour effectively, it is important for class teachers and other education staff to understand what factors may underlie a child's behaviour. This can be done through high quality training. This helps professionals to understand that behaviour is almost always an expression, communication or presentation of an emotional challenge that the child is experiencing.

One colleague in a partner school told us that "something that makes a significant difference is the confidence and competence of staff to deal with challenging behaviour in the classroom. When this happens, children are better able to stay in the room, join in with the lesson and teachers feel more confident and motivated and grow as professionals. Where this is not the case, they will quickly reach for the sanctions available to them to control and punish which, feeds the cycle of challenging behaviour and the young person's narrative of being bad/angry/unlikeable."

It's also important for education staff to understand how crucial their *own* behaviour is when responding/reacting to situations. Again, this can be supported through training and ongoing supervision.

Place2Be provides training for class teachers which includes an introduction to mental health, attachment theory, and the neuroscience of managing classroom behaviour. This programme is called [Mental Health Champions](#) and was usually provided to staff in Place2Be partner schools as part of our whole school service. However, during the pandemic, we secured funding to deliver the

⁶https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807862/Timpson_review.pdf

programme for free online to 50,000 education professionals. With this, we reached education staff from more than 13,800 schools in every county of the UK. 97% of participants said they would recommend the programme to a colleague. Over 90% of participants feel that the course has increased their capacity to lead a positive approach to mental health and wellbeing, and 73% learned something in the course that resulted in a change in their actions, behaviour or attitude in their workplace.

There are many other programmes available, such as the Department's own Wellbeing for Education Return / Recovery programme that seeks to do similar things. This strand of work should be built upon. All teachers, but especially trainee teachers need this topic to be a core, explicit, part of their training. The approach also needs to include ongoing good quality supervision, coaching and support. This would help to deal with most low-level behaviour concerns, which would not then escalate.

Funding challenges

Place2Be partner schools report challenges with securing sufficient extra funding to support pupils with challenging behaviour arising from social, emotional and mental health needs.

A colleague in a partner school told us that at present the only way for them to secure reliable funding to meet some children's mental health needs is to apply for an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The process to secure an EHCP can take many months and requires additional professional input, which can require expenditure. This deters some schools from beginning the EHCP process, making it more likely that a school could move to exclude or transfer a pupil if they feel it's too challenging and costly to support and include them.

Many more children also require additional, but temporary support, for which an EHCP is not appropriate. Schools usually provide this support using their own budgets however not all schools feel financially able to do this.

Key recommendations

- For children with conduct difficulties - good quality, evidence-based parent and teacher training programmes should be explored as an effective intervention.
- For children with emotional and attentional issues, one-to-one school-based counselling should be explored as an effective intervention.
- For schools to have a behaviour policy that is supported by sufficient investment in pastoral and SEND support. The best behaviour policies recognise that the most troubled pupils will often require an assessment of their social, emotional and mental health needs, and receive interventions, such as counselling, that help to support and include them.
- Pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs (a recognised category of SEND) should be protected from policies and practices that may further disadvantage them such as isolation and exclusion. All other reasonable adjustments should be explored, in line with the Equality Act.
- High quality training for education staff to help their understanding of behaviour as almost always an expression, communication or presentation of an emotional challenge that the child is experiencing. All teachers, but especially trainee teachers, need this topic to be a core, explicit, part of their training. The approach also needs to include ongoing good quality supervision, coaching and support.

Contact for more information

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We consent for you to contact us about our submission.

Confidentiality

Place2Be's response does not need to be kept confidential. Our response can be published.