

Behaviour management in education: Supporting learners in a post-pandemic world

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Session Intention & Success Criteria



Understand the lasting behavioural and emotional impact of the pandemic on learners.

Explore the 3Rs as a framework for behaviour management.

Gain practical, inclusive strategies to support SEMH and neurodivergent learners.

Share ideas and co-create tools for managing behaviour and re-engaging learners.

“What behaviour changes or challenges have you seen in learners over the past 5 years?”

Where are we now?



- 1.49 million persistently absent learners in England (2023/24) (DfE, 2024)
- 4.6% rise in suspensions for learners with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs (Ofsted, 2023)
- Escalation in disengagement, particularly among neurodivergent and vulnerable learners (Children's Commissioner, 2023; Ofsted, 2023)
- Widening gap in attendance between mainstream and alternative provision
- Increased reports of school refusal, anxiety, and social isolation in post-16 learners (YoungMinds, 2022; Education Policy Institute, 2023)

Key challenges emerging post-Covid

Area	Impact
Classroom dynamics	Increased low-level disruption, emotional outbursts, withdrawal, teacher burnout (DfE, 2023)
Engagement & Motivation	Learners reporting loss of purpose, rise in NEET risk (Sutton Trust, 2023)
Mental Health	Rising anxiety, depression, and masking behaviours (YoungMinds, 2022)
Equity & Inclusion	Widening attainment gaps for SEND, Pupil Premium, and neurodivergent learners (EPI, 2023)

Rising SEMH in a post-pandemic generation

Loss of social interaction

Increased anxiety and isolation

New layers of disconnection

- *Social media isolation*: false connection, performance anxiety
- *AI and digital overload*: avoidance of face-to-face interaction
- *Isolated learning*: Reduced motivation to engage with human-led support

Learners may not know how to re-enter society, regulate emotions, or relate to others—even in college or sixth form.

Behaviour management in practice: 3Rs

A behaviour culture built on consistency, connection, and calm

The 3Rs:

Routines | Relationships | Responses

Why this matters post-pandemic:

- Reduces anxiety through predictability
- Builds trust and inclusion for SEMH/neurodivergent learners
- Encourages calm, proactive responses over reactive punishment



Routines – predictability reduces pressure

Why routines matter:

- Reduce cognitive load for anxious learners
- Reinforce expectations consistently
- Help neurodivergent students feel safe and in control

Examples in practice:

- Predictable start-of-lesson tasks
- Structured seating and movement cues
- Visual timetables and task boards
- "3 Before Me" help routines

Relationships – behaviour is communication

Why relationships matter:

- Co-regulation reduces emotional escalation
- Learners are more likely to accept boundaries from adults they trust
- Relationships are protective for SEMH learners

Examples in practice:

- 1:1 check-ins or 'safe adult' systems
- Name-use and learner voice activities
- Restorative conversations after conflict
- Knowing a student's context and triggers



Responses – reacting with regulation

Why responses matter:

- Calm adults de-escalate situations
- Predictable consequences build fairness
- Emotional detachment protects both staff and learners

Examples in practice:

- Planned scripts for challenging behaviour
- Non-verbal signals to redirect
- Limited choices ("You can do X or Y")
- Post-incident reflection opportunities

Your behaviour toolkit



The 3Rs are not standalone - they're interconnected tools for creating a safe, engaging, and inclusive learning environment.

Example scenario: A learner with SEMH needs arrives late, refuses to sit down, and interrupts.

Applied 3Rs:

- **Routine:** Learner knows late arrival means quiet starter task by the door
- **Relationship:** Staff quietly acknowledges and checks in later
- **Response:** Non-verbal redirection, delayed discussion, calm tone

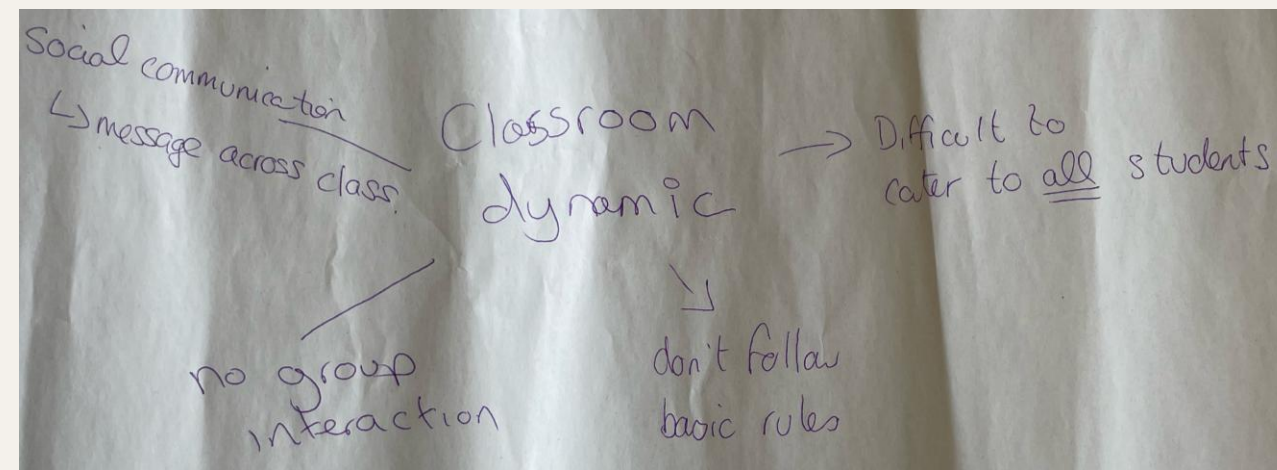
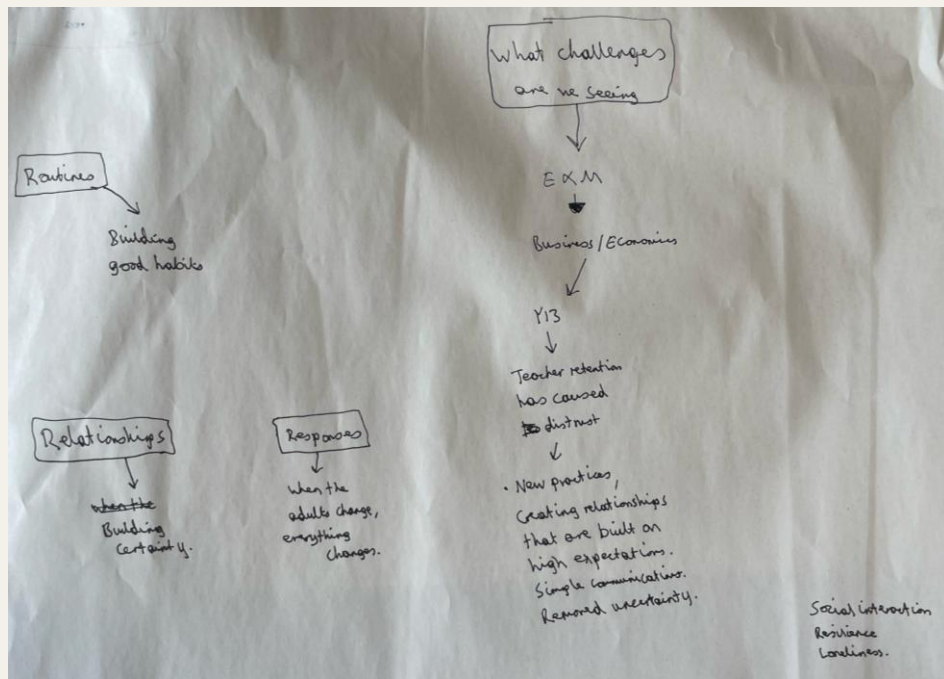
A neurodivergent student arrives late most mornings and becomes visibly distressed when expected to join group work. They sit in the corner and avoid eye contact or discussion.

A previously high-achieving student has recently disengaged. They do not hand in work, rarely participate, and often look at their phone during lessons. They appear disinterested but are not disruptive.

A learner frequently has emotional outbursts when given constructive feedback or when things don't go to plan. They often shout, swear, or leave the room suddenly.

A confident, popular learner constantly cracks jokes during teaching time, distracts peers, and frequently calls out. They are not malicious, but often derail the flow of the session.

A learner with an EHCP refuses to work with their allocated support assistant. They move seats, say "I don't need help," and ignore offers of scaffolding or adaptive teaching.



3R'S

Routines
Relationships
Responses

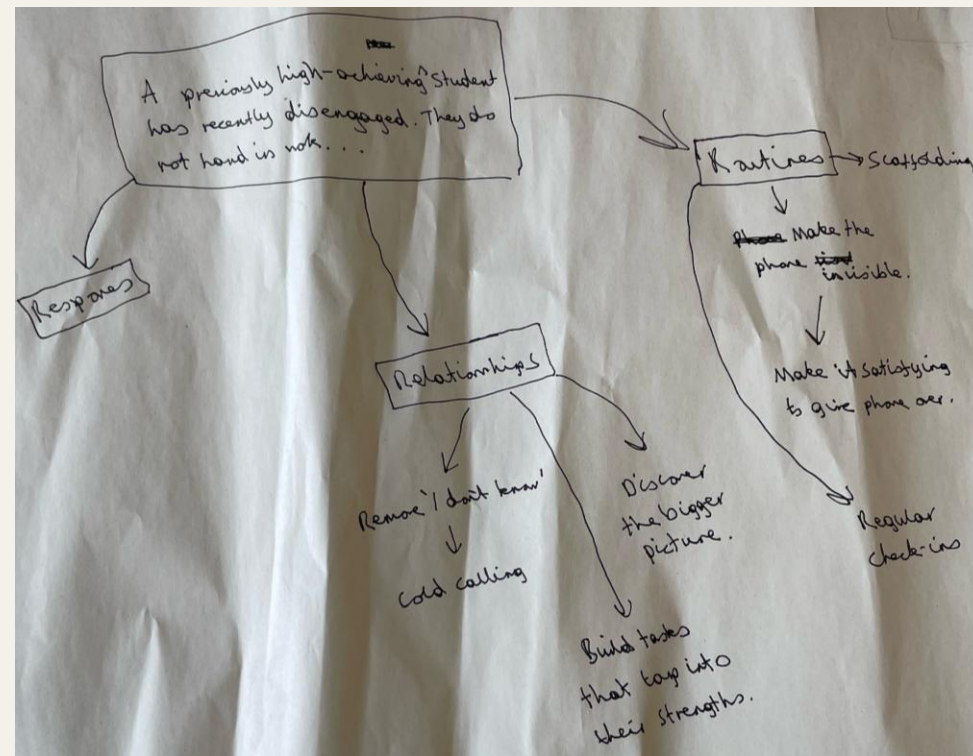
1) Routine: Not expected to work with others/breakout space

Relationship: Quiet check-ins

Response: Giving them prior warning on what to expect

Engagement + motivation

- * Can't see the bigger picture
- * Attendance
- * Lack of motivation externally (parents, family)
- * Cost of living
- * Lack of engagement - social media



Primary & Secondary - Classroom dynamics #1

FE - Engagement & Motivation

no/desire little aspirations

Learning outside of the classroom

Not taking up the opportunities offered to them.

resilience - emotional - social - no responsibility

Same Culture

background family area role models

benefits child benefits

Not my fault

lack of pride in behaviours for learning

equipment - punctuality - attendance - organisation

Check emails

planned - diary - knowing dates - deadlines

②

Classroom Dynamics

Routine →

- * Homework deadlines + expectations consistent
- * Expectation to participate - cold-call questioning

Relationships →

- * Check-ins with student before/during/after
- * Transparent/honest

Response →

- * Calm but firm/displeased response (known consequences for behaviour)

* Increased phone use

* Lack of respect for teachers when delivering (low-level chatter)

* Entitlement - can do what they want

* Withdrawal - Some students hesitant to speak/interact with others, in pairs, groups etc.

* Teacher burnout - multiple behaviour warnings

What ARE we seeing here?

Engagement + Motivation

Relationship dynamics

↓

Self-motivation

↓

NOT being independent learning skills.

4-3R'S

Routine - establish boundaries for day

Relationship - 1:1 check, knowing how they are doing

Response - redirection, constructive feedback

Engagement + Motivation - Lack of realistic aspirations

Feel like they cannot progress / anxiety

Lack of parental support + engagement.

not completing what they start /

Stuff - had to meet high work load, chaos of afters, less time for opps outside classroom.

not effective experiences etc.

②

Disengaged - outside issues - homeless/family abandonment/family substance abuse.

Relationship - offered support - check ins/referrals to appropriate support.

Allowed time out and continued support.

Eventual positive outcome - now has flat/job/passed the course.

Key takeaways

We manage behaviour through environment, not control

Routines reduce anxiety

Relationships build safety

Responses shape culture



Thank you

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