



No silver bullet: An update on issues relating to behaviour and engagement in secondary schools

1 Introduction

In spite of the pressure from PPTA and a growing public concern that secondary schools are not as safe as they should be, progress on the proposals in the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) action plan has been slow.

2 Background to the Positive Behaviour for Learning action plan

The sector group originally convened by the Ministry of Education to oversee the development of the 2009 Taumata Whanonga (Behaviour Summit) has now morphed into the PB4L (Positive Behaviour for Learning) reference group. The PB4L work is finally starting to roll out to secondary schools, although the bulk of the Ministry's current focus is on early years interventions, such as the Incredible Years programmes for parents and ECE/primary school teachers.¹ PPTA continues to attend meetings, lobby the Ministry, and liaise with members whose schools are involved with aspects of the PB4L plan. Thanks to sustained effort by PPTA, the Alternative Education Association now has representation. However, in this time, despite PPTA's best efforts, the Phoenix Centre has closed in Dunedin and other threatened closures remain.

3 What's in the PB4L?

Other PB4L measures include a doubling of the Interim Response Fund – although sources suggest that the 2010 allocation is already exhausted, which illustrates its insufficiency. A Behaviour Crisis Response pilot programme is under way. There is also an 'intensive wraparound service' pilot for students from the (now closed) Waimokoia School, as they are resettled at home and placed in local schools. This pilot is trialling a case-management approach, which PPTA endorsed in the 2009 conference paper. One positive sign is that this approach takes account of each student's home circumstances as well as issues at school.

Through the PB4L project Ministry continues to explore the role and function of RTLB – particularly in the secondary context – and now seems more open to questions and concerns about the role. For example, why does RTLB involvement end at Year 10? Might RTLB function more effectively if allowed to specialise in secondary? How can RTLB be more productively managed and deployed?

4 Secondary schools – the poor cousins

What does this mean for secondary schools? At present, the answer continues to be: not much. While PPTA endorses evidence-based approaches and the Ministry's desire to evaluate programmes to monitor effectiveness, they do actually need to initiate such programmes and implement, resource, and support them. Meanwhile, schools continue to be frustrated in their efforts to find support and interventions that lessen the negative impact of students with conduct problems. All advice from the experts at the Taumata Whanonga was that interventions need to be 'early in life' or

¹ <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/EducationInitiatives/PositiveBehaviourForLearning.aspx>



early in the life of the problem. It seems we have the former (which is commendable) but not the latter, leaving secondary schools stranded when it comes to providing support for students whose psychological, social, and sometimes psychiatric needs exceed what schools can provide.

5 School-wide behaviour for learning programme

The major plank of the PB4L for secondary schools is the introduction, over the next four years, of 'school-wide behaviour for learning' professional learning and development in schools clustered around the country. As of June 2010, appointments for facilitation and training roles had not been finalised, although the Ministry plan to begin these programmes in term three. (Programme introduction information and a list of participating schools are attached to this paper as appendices A and B.)

However, this programme is not designed to cope with the most difficult students. Students with serious conduct problems need expensive, individualised, specialist support and interventions across a range of contexts. Given the failure in dealing with this 5 per cent of students, the PB4L school-wide programme will, at best, make little difference and, at worst, be fatally compromised.

6 Attendance and engagement

Along with the PB4L initiative, the Ministry has started a project to address related issues concerning attendance and engagement in more coherent ways. This work includes a focus on monitoring and responsiveness of schools (especially using electronic registers and early notifications via text and email), the District Truancy Service (DTS) and Non-Enrolment Truancy Service (NETS); the possibility of developing coherent inter-agency responses to children and families with attendance problems; and, finally, the role of alternative education. Although this work does not sit within the Ministry's definition of 'behaviour', they acknowledge that there are links and are making some effort to ensure this work is co-ordinated with PB4L.

However, the attendance and engagement work has a ridiculously small budget allocation, with no guarantee for more funding; while the PB4L work has \$15 million over the next two years, but no guarantees after 2012. Presumably the Ministry will need to show evidence that the various interventions are working in order to secure ongoing funding. The problem with this caveat is that, for example, the school-wide behaviour programmes take at least three to five years to establish and embed. This means that there is little likelihood of there being much useful evaluation data in time for the next funding round in 2012.

The Ministry is now prepared to agree with the sector that alternative education (AE) providers have a role to play in supporting improved outcomes for students, but there is no commitment from government to increase the funding for this essential service. This means that any changes to provisions are currently tagged with a requirement to be fiscally neutral. Given that recent reviews acknowledge the AE system is already underfunded and has been for some years, this is not encouraging.

7 No commitment to staffing support

Delegates at last year's PPTA conference called for development of staffing formulas to improve schools' ability to cope with negative student behaviour and conduct problems. PPTA endorses the model developed by the Staffing Review Group (SRG)



in 2000, which allocated guidance staffing on a roll and decile weighted basis.² This model has not yet been adopted, but PPTA continues to advocate it be used to support schools' work in the areas of behaviour and engagement, along with further tagged liaison staffing to schools, to support their work with relevant agencies.³

Similarly, the government is so determined to carve funding out of the public sector that essential resourcing needed to implement measures to address the crisis situation faced by many schools and teachers is absent. While PPTA was pleased that the Minister did not proceed with the Budget 2009 decision to cut \$50 million in staffing, 2010 Treasury papers suggest that the attack on staffing has not been removed but is waiting in the wings.

Meanwhile, there are simply insufficient trained and qualified specialists available to work with schools, students, and their families around issues of behaviour and engagement; these include social workers, behaviour therapists, and educational psychologists. This specialist shortage afflicts health, justice, and social development, as well as education. PPTA calls on the government to address this shortage, as well as for support for training and the development of tagged positions, such as the Social Workers in Schools model.

Advice to the government, including evidence from the Ministry of Social Development's Advisory Group on Conduct Problems (AGCP) and the Office of the Prime Minister's science advisory committee, is that young people with conduct problems require more support than any one school can give; it reiterates that suitable interventions for adolescents and their families are hugely important, but also complex and expensive.⁴

8 When will the government step up?

There are some signs that cross-sector systems can be developed to provide more coherent responses to complex problems. However, without system-level intervention and support from government, through central agencies, schools will remain relatively isolated and unsupported while they continue to engage with young people whose conduct problems sit well beyond the remedies of school-wide programmes and good teaching practice.⁵

PPTA accepts that there is no silver bullet, and that long-term change requires ongoing investment in staffing, training, programme implementation, and evaluation. The question is whether the government is prepared to accept its responsibility to ensure that schools are safe places for all and that the needs of a vulnerable group of students are addressed.

² See Staffing Review Group report and recommendations: http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/Schools/SchoolOperations/Resourcing/SchoolStaffing/ReportOfTheSchoolStaffingReviewGroup/7_Developing_the_Adequacy_of_the_Staffing_Resource.aspx

³ See recommendation from 2009 conference: That PPTA call for tagged staffing for schools for liaison with support agencies of 0.5 FRRE base staffing plus a roll and decile-linked component.

⁴ See <http://www.pmcsa.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Adolescence-transition-interim-report-release-1Jul10.pdf> and <http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/conduct-problems-best-practice/index.html>

⁵ See for example Right Service Right Time in Christchurch: <http://www.rightservice.org.nz/index.html>



Recommendations

1. That the report be received.
2. That PPTA remind government of its obligation to provide safe teaching and learning environments in secondary schools; and call for the development of comprehensive indicators and measures of the impact of conduct problems so that resourcing and support can be matched to the problem.



Appendix A

Information on PB4L school-wide programme



ABOUT POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR FOR LEARNING – SCHOOL-WIDE

POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR FOR LEARNING – SCHOOL-WIDE is about improving academic and behaviour outcomes for all students. It's about making positive behaviour in your school the norm. It is a framework that is consistently applied across both classroom and non-classroom settings (such as the playground, corridors, buses and toilets), where appropriate behaviours are clearly defined and taught by all of your staff. The focus is on:

- preventing problem behaviour
- developing students' social skills
- reinforcing desired behaviour
- consistently addressing and reducing inappropriate behaviours
- using data-based assessment and problem-solving to address concerns.

HOW THE SCHOOL-WIDE APPROACH WORKS

Major components of the school-wide programme include:

- a consistent approach to disciplining students in your school, based on establishing respectful relationships through collaborative consultation with the whole school community
- positively stated expectations for all students and staff in your school (clear, positive definitions that all staff, students, and parents can understand and remember)
- procedures for teaching these expectations (explain, model, practise, acknowledge consistently)
- a reinforcement system for encouraging your students to demonstrate and maintain these expectations
- a continuum of logical consequences for your students to discourage problem behaviour.

The school-wide approach includes setting up a system to record behavioural events in your school over time (the School-Wide Information System, SWIS). This allows you to determine where the problems lie, who is generating them, when they are occurring and how often. The system allows you to make decisions that are well grounded in evidence and will also allow you to track your school's progress over time.

The programme includes initiatives that are universal across the school, and also which target students who need specialised and individual support with their behaviour.

TIME COMMITMENT

The school-wide programme extends over three to five years and includes training for your school's leadership and setting up school team coaches. There is ongoing support. At the end of the period teachers in your school will be able to:

- define specific inappropriate behaviours in your students
- analyse their behaviour
- specify and support replacement behaviour.

BECOMING INVOLVED IN THE PROGRAMME

This is our first year rolling out this programme. For this reason we are approaching schools to take part rather than schools registering interest with us.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR UNDERTAKING THE PROGRAMME

The Ministry of Education will contribute \$10,000 per year, per school for the first three years your school participates in the programme.

THE BENEFITS FOR YOUR SCHOOL INCLUDE:

- your school environment will become less reactive, aversive and exclusionary and more engaging, responsive and productive
- relationships between staff, students and whānau will improve
- teachers will spend more time teaching and less time being reactive to problems
- teachers have greater confidence
- your students will spend more time learning and this will result in an increase in their academic achievement and social skills.

HOW WE KNOW THE SCHOOL-WIDE APPROACH WORKS

The Positive Behaviour for Learning – School-Wide programme in New Zealand is based on an American programme, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) which has been established by the US Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. This has been running in the United States, Oregon for 16 years and has an extensive programme of evidence that supports it. It is also being implemented successfully in Australia, Norway, Canada and Iceland.

The studies of this approach have shown a sustained drop in disciplinary referrals and suspensions, increased instructional time, a positive increase in the learning climate, and corresponding improvements in literacy and numeracy.

WHAT IMPLEMENTING SCHOOL-WIDE INVOLVES

Information sessions for principals

Your school principal and the people who will be responsible for implementing the school-wide approach will attend a *Positive Behaviour for Learning: School-Wide: Essentials for Leaders* course. This will introduce how the approach works and identify what your school needs to put in place to support the approach.

Setting up school teams and coaches

You will be supported to set up a school leadership team for the programme, of up to 10 people. One person in the team will be trained to coach the others in your school to implement the school-wide practices. Your school coach will also be asked to coach another school.

Training programme

The training for your leadership team is delivered in three sequential modules (your team will need two consecutive days out of regular duties to complete each module):

1. Universal Prevention Training
2. Secondary Prevention Training
3. Tertiary Prevention Training.

Between each module you will have 12 months or more in which to implement the approach in your school. When your school has achieved agreed specific and measurable outcomes, you can then move onto the next training module. You will have access to a coach from another school and a trainer in your area who can provide you with support as you implement each module.

Before each training module you will have to complete 'readiness tasks', such as setting up regional coordinators or collecting baseline academic and behavioural data (eg office discipline referrals, detentions, withdrawals, suspensions and exclusions) from the previous school year.



Positive Behaviour for Learning is a series of programmes and initiatives being delivered across New Zealand to address behaviour problems in schools. Positive Behaviour for Learning is a collaboration between the Ministry of Education and other education sector organisations.

Appendix B

PB4L school-wide training: participating secondary schools

Aurora College
Bay of Islands College (tbc)
Fairfield College
Greymouth High School
Horowhenua College
Linwood College
Logan Park High School (tbc)
Marlborough Boys' College
Melville High School
Motueka High School
Ngata Memorial College
Papatoetoe High School
Porirua College
Taieri College (tbc)
Taita College
Tauranga Boys' College
Tauranga Girls' College
Te Aute College
Te Puke High School
Thames High School
Tuakau College
Waihi College
Waitara High School

The information here is based on a list provided to PPTA by the Ministry in July 2010. Along with these 23 secondary schools, the school-wide training has also been confirmed in 41 primary and 27 intermediate schools. This is of some concern, given that the Ministry claimed the school-wide programme would target secondary schools.