A School Without Sanctions

A School Without Sanctions

A new approach to behaviour management

Steven Baker and Mick Simpson

Foreword by Dr Alice Jones Bartoli

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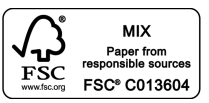
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Contents

Foreword by Dr Alice Jones Bartoli ix
Preface xi

Introduction 1

1 Operating without sanctions 5

2 The threat response 23

3 Non-confrontational behaviour management 49

4 Understanding and meeting basic human needs 73

5 Emotional intelligence 89

6 Learning and behaviour 105

7 Trauma 123

8 Wellbeing 139

Conclusion: Goodbye Mr Woo Woo 161

References 165
Index 173

Foreword

I first met Steve Baker on the terrace at the House of Lords bar. Neither of us usually leads such a glamorous-sounding life. Since then, I have had the good fortune to spend time in three different schools across the Wirral, being a small part of Steve, Mick and their colleagues' drive to put positive, evidence-based practice at the heart of their education – for the good of students and staff. This book is written by people I consider to be experts, and from whom I have learned a lot – about everyday teaching and pastoral care, about the reality of running schools and about the possibilities for translational research. Their will to improve the school experience for students who are faced with some of the greatest challenges is inspirational, but their methods and results are the things that educators in all contexts can learn something from.

The use of sanctions in schools is always up for debate. For most of us, punishment, or more likely the threat of punishment, doesn't normally drive our behaviour. A motivation to be law-abiding isn't driven by a fear of prison, but rather because we are aware of the consequences of not sticking to social and legal rules. In most school settings, sanctions are exclusionary in nature – sometimes necessarily so – but these are often associated with poorer student outcomes: poorer academic attainment, lessened sense of school belonging, and early departure from mainstream education (Chu and Ready, 2018; Huang and Anyon, 2020). The use of sanctions also disproportionately impacts children who are boys, Black, from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, of Gypsy or Irish Traveller heritage, and those with special educational needs (Parkes, 2012). Accounts of how and why this disproportionality manifests are written by educators such as Dr Anna Carlile, whose 2018 chapter in *The Palgrave International Handbook of School Discipline, Surveillance, and Social Control* is worth your time. Teachers too need consistent and clear approaches to student behaviour and engagement, but are working in contexts with increasing workloads, stress and high-stakes accountability. Teachers' tolerance for academic and behavioural challenges in those contexts is stretched (Aloe et al., 2014). Here, school leadership that is positive and supports the professional development of staff has the capacity to engender a sense of efficacy about inclusive practices.

There are several important lessons that can be drawn from this book. The first is that relationships matter. They are not always easy to cultivate, especially for those children who have good reason to mistrust and be sceptical of adults'

motives. Relationships between teachers and students matter, but so do relationships between school staff themselves and between staff and parents – and they should be no less of a priority. A school where adults are genuinely, and obviously, friendly with each other models positive relationships, but also engenders an ethos of calm and kindness. I love going into a school where I am met with warmth, and also know that I'm going to get some excellent lunch after an early start and a long journey – the same is true for the children.

The second lesson we should take from this book is that we should never leave a child with nowhere to go, educationally or behaviourally. During my work with Steve and Mick, I've had two children. Becoming a parent who works in child behaviour is an interesting challenge… One of the most useful day-to-day things I've taken up is always to offer a way out of a potential stand-off. This is helpful for life with toddlers, but crucial for young people who are desperate to assert themselves, and can't lose face. Sometimes, it's useful to have another adult come by and defuse the situation by changing the adult involved. Learning to leave your ego at the door, and put the need to calm a situation down first, is vital.

The third point is the importance of you and your own staff and colleagues. Whether you read this as a senior leader, or as someone embarking on initial teacher education (ITE), being able to put your own and your colleagues' wellbeing and development first should be a priority. The relationship between student behaviour and teacher burnout is dynamic – exhausted, overwhelmed teachers don't have the capacity left for positive student–teacher relationships. There are occasions when we ask ourselves and others to go beyond the usual – none more so than while I write this in the summer of 2020. It is easy for us to get lost. It is vital for all school staff to feel capable in their work, and that there is scope for their own development.

Finally, the one thing that I hope will stay with you after reading this book is that a school that runs without relying on sanction (but not without consequences, of course) is possible. I have worked with several schools that have chosen to make this change, and that continue to thrive years later. Each school has an outstanding inspection report, each has managed to include and retain students for whom they admit doing either would have been a struggle in the past. The difference in the everyday experience of the school, to me as an outsider, and for staff and students, is heartening and encouraging for others who want to do something similar. This book is not a 'how-to', rather a series of lessons to reflect on and to consider how they fit into your own practice and the ethos of your school.

Dr Alice Jones Bartoli
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Preface

Some conversations can have a profound effect on the direction your life takes and we had one such moment almost a decade ago at the start of our professional relationship. Discussing our careers to date and how they might progress, we began to examine the things that were of fundamental importance to us and a simple core truth emerged. We both wanted to make the world a little better, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people – the type of people we had worked with since the very first days that we became educators. We spoke about the best way to achieve this and, having recently become headteacher and deputy of a small special school for boys with additional social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, the way forward seemed blindingly obvious. We would build upon strong existing foundations and ensure that our school delivered an outstanding level of provision in every respect for our students, their families and the wider community, with a compassionate, caring, non-confrontational ethos at the heart of all we did. Having achieved this, we would seek opportunities to export this ethos to anybody who would listen.

We called our approach 'Meeting the Challenge'. Our mission was to use psychology and neuroscience to convince organisations that dealt with challenging behaviour that the relentless application of aversive, punitive approaches ignored many avenues of research, did not promote learning or wellbeing, and was often ineffective. Instead, we would promote organisational change, with the aim of understanding the drivers of challenging behaviour and decreasing confrontation whilst increasing empathy and compassion. We would champion behavioural modification and management strategies that we had shown could deliver outcomes of the very highest standard.

Since then we have trained thousands of professionals in education, social care and the emergency services in face-to-face sessions and have reached over 10,000 people in 165 countries via our online course hosted by the FutureLearn platform. Approached initially by a single prison, we have since established relationships with the Ministry of Justice and leadership teams of adult and youth establishments nationally as they seek to develop a culture of rehabilitation.

This book represents our latest effort to reach the widest possible audience in our endeavour to 'Meet the Challenge'. We tried to recreate the dialogue (we hesitate to use the word 'banter') of our face-to-face sessions but just found it impossible to achieve. We've instead planned together and then taken responsibility to write

individual chapters. You will find our names in the overviews on the first page of each chapter to make it clear who is speaking. We hope that you enjoy the result and choose to implement from the many suggestions we propose those that you and the people for whom you care can benefit from the most.

Steve and Mick

Introduction

Our school is special. Of course all schools think this, but for us it is true by definition. We are a special school for boys aged 11 to 16; it's a tiny setting with a student admission number of 55. Each of our young people arrives with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), a statutory document produced after a joint assessment of the child's needs involving them, their family and any agency with a stake in their nurture and future. The main area of need identified for all of our students is social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). The young person's plan identifies outcomes for their educational, social and health development and it is our job to ensure that they are achieved. SEMH covers a huge spectrum of additional need, but all of our students have one thing in common: they find it very difficult to regulate their emotions and this can readily manifest as very challenging behaviour.

Our working lives are therefore dominated by behaviour and its effects. As a whole staff team, we gather twice a day, planning from an individual student to a whole-school perspective for a myriad of potential eventualities. We identify the things we can do to avoid these eventualities and the things we will do to ameliorate the effects of those that actually materialise. A whole panoply of tools and strategies have emerged from these discussions, guided by best practice around the globe, which represent the combined wisdom and experience of our team – a team whose professional lives focus on managing and modifying challenging behaviour in order that everyone can learn and that we can all flourish. We have devised a simple system to modify behavioural choices that works for our students and that we think can work for any organisation.

During the course of the book, we will discuss many facets of behaviour management and modification, examining underlying causes of certain behaviours and the strategies that we find most effective. These strategies all work, they are all relatively easy to adopt and they are all easily transferable to any setting, whether that be the classroom, staff room or your living room.

But before we get into all that, we'd like to contextualise what follows by telling you a little bit more about us, what makes us tick and how we see our place in society.

Welcome to our school without sanctions

If our school were a book and you were to judge it by its cover, then you'd probably never even pick it up. Built in 1955, it is austere from the outside with little in the way of green space. Squat, redbrick and surrounded by decaying tarmac, it sits between housing, dockland and semi-derelict industrial sites. Inside, the layout is of one single narrow corridor, which, despite all we try to do, can appear enclosing, almost claustrophobic. Even slight noises echo so that the sound of a closing door might give a visitor the impression of elevated behaviour taking place. Some carers who come to look around cannot get past this first impression; they say that the school looks like 'a prison'. The building started life as an infant school and the classrooms are in the proportions you might expect for an environment designed for low numbers of seven-year-old children. There isn't much in the way of space when these rooms are occupied by a group of ten 14-year-old boys and the adults necessary to support their academic and social progress. Autistic students, especially, can occasionally find the sensory challenge to be overwhelming. The proximity, rustling of cloth, breathing, swallowing, talking, shouting out, not to mention the smell… all this can heighten arousal and lead to elevated behaviours. There are no quiet rooms or breakout spaces in our building. If students need to leave the classroom, we have a converted reprographics room (the Learning Hub) in which to accommodate them, or a small store cupboard from which we have removed the door (the Reflection Room). We don't have changing rooms or even a dining room. There are no medical rooms, therapy rooms or sensory rooms and nor does our funding allow us to employ the therapists, counsellors or psychologists to occupy them. Office and storage space is severely limited. It would be fair to say that our physical environment isn't exactly inspirational. In fact, it isn't fit for the purpose it's meant to fulfil.

Despite the deficiencies of bricks and mortar, one of our great pleasures in life is to show visitors around our school. Unimpressed by the exterior, no doubt, the guest might have their view reinforced by a reception area that isn't big enough to fit a chair into. What makes our school special, however, has nothing to do with design and infrastructure. It is the people who inhabit the building, who learn with each other and are, each and every one, bound together by a compassionate approach that permeates our every interaction. The first of the five core values that guide our approach is that 'relationships come first'. This will be apparent to our guest from the first contact they have with any member of our team, whoever that may be. Beginning with a warm greeting, enquiries about

their needs and the offer of refreshment, our guest should quickly begin to feel welcome, comfortable and valued.

The next thing our guest will notice is that the most senior member of the team who is on site has made time for them. We think it is worth investing in relationships and other things may need to wait. If they haven't noticed the awards on the walls, then we'll unashamedly point them out for the same reasons that we put ourselves forward for consideration in the first place – to raise expectations. Few of our students see themselves as successful learners and one way to help change that is to show them they are part of a successful, well-regarded organisation. Staff, too, benefit from proudly feeling themselves an integral part of a nationally recognised, outstanding team. Grossly unfair though it may be, we still have to contend with an outdated reputation in our community as a 'naughty school', and the sooner that visitors are disabused of this particular notion the better for our students. For this reason, we will talk about our Pearson Awards (in one year our tiny school won an unprecedented three out of around 60 Silver Awards from over 20,000 nominations across the UK), the TES nominations, and the NASEN Awards and Ofsted certificates. We will show them posters of inspirational quotations and messages of goodwill to our students that we have solicited from figures ranging from Dame Jane Goodall to Danny Dyer and Whoopi Goldberg. They are far more than decorative; they show us all that we are not alone in our struggle to reach our potential.

Moving onto the corridor and into classrooms, our guest is most likely to see a calm, productive working environment. They will see students engaged in their learning and feel the genuine warmth in their interactions with the adults who are supporting them. On some occasions, our guest may see challenging, even extreme, behaviours and we will not attempt to hide them. There may be shouting, banging, aggression, destruction or even violence. What they will invariably remember is our staff dealing with the event in a calm, compassionate way, focusing on positives and on the feelings and needs of the young person. They will not hear a raised voice or a negative comment from an adult. They are very likely to see the young person in question responding calmly to our intervention within minutes.

As we tour the building, we will point out the attention we pay to the little things. There may have just been a major event but there will not be a scrap of paper on the floor to betray the fact. Somebody may have just trashed a classroom but there will be no evident trace of it; all that will be apparent are the displays of student work that show how proud we are of what they achieve. What will really stand out, of course, is the young people themselves. Our guest will be introduced to every student, be they working diligently in a classroom or

displaying crisis behaviours on the corridor. In this way the whole community has the responsibility to act as a collective host, everybody practises a social skill, and everybody has some ownership and stake in the event. The greetings they receive are sometimes circumspect, very occasionally fruity, but overwhelmingly warm, open and cordial. Visitors may arrive with preconceptions and pre-prepared labels for our students, and these labels could possibly fit – here is a young man with comorbid autistic spectrum condition, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD); over 75 per cent of our students have comorbid conditions. He comes from a chaotic family background, blighted by drugs and alcohol, and experienced trauma in his early years. He has had several foster carers in the last two months, is in danger of criminal exploitation and is suspected of being involved in knife crime (at any one time up to 80 per cent of our students are known to social care or the police).

If visitors do arrive with labels, we can almost certainly find somebody they can pin them on. By the time they leave, however, the label has turned into a person – a vulnerable, sometimes very challenging, young man, deserving of the best care that our society can offer. Full of affection, curiosity and hope, his destiny is not predetermined. The victim of social, economic, cultural, nutritional and aspirational deprivation that spans generations, there is a positive future ahead of him. All we have to do is help him find his way to it and we are all totally committed to doing so.

By the time they leave, almost without exception, our visitors are acknowledging that they have witnessed something magical. They have seen wonderful people achieving remarkable things in the face of almost insurmountable adversity. None of us who work here are particularly gifted, intelligent or knowledgeable. What makes our school special is that we are utterly united in believing that our ethos is the right one and that in applying our approach we are doing good for our students, their families, the community and ourselves. As they climb into their car, our guest should feel like they have been introduced to a loving, caring extended family, because that, in fact, is what has just happened. Be they carer, student, supply teacher or visiting professional, they will usually be effusive about what they have just been part of and they will always be smiling. In the chapters that follow we'll attempt to tell you how we do it.

1 Operating without sanctions

Chapter overview

In this chapter, **Mick** will:

- tell the story of how our school moved to a sanction-free approach
- explain why punishment doesn't work for everyone
- offer an alternative solution: rewards.

Sometimes, I feel, we accept things too readily. We often accept what we're told, what we read, or what we encounter on social media without really examining the matter in hand. We will go along with conventions, established habits or customs without giving them a second thought. In accepting facts or received wisdom, we may then let our behaviour be affected without consciously questioning what the drivers of this behaviour are. Let me give you a personal example. When I was a student, my friend was chatting to me as I made a snack. She watched as I opened a tin of sardines and then carefully washed all traces of the tomato sauce from the fish.

'I thought you liked tomato sauce. You like tomato soup,' she said.

'I do,' I replied.

'Then why are you washing it off?'

'Because it's poisonous.'

'What? Are you joking?'

'No, it's poisonous.'

'Why would they put a poisonous sauce on the sardines? It wouldn't be allowed. That's just ridiculous.'

I started to think as I rinsed the toxic red gloop from my sardines. Of course it was ridiculous. Why on Earth would anybody buy a food product with 'poison' on the list of ingredients? I'm not completely stupid (I had, after all, managed to scrape into university), so where did this belief come from? The answer was simple: from my mum. When I was a young child, she'd once seen me licking the sauce from the edges of an empty tin of sardines. Averse to the inconvenience of a child with a sliced tongue, she simply said, 'Don't do that. It's poisonous.' I, of

course, believed what my mum said without question. It became a self-evident truth for me and I never stopped to question it again until the bizarre nature of my behaviour was pointed out to me.

My tinned sardine behaviour might have been particularly daft but lots of us continue to act in accordance with entrenched beliefs without really questioning the evidence upon which they are based. We are capable of merrily ignoring information or even our own direct observations if they contravene our firmly held convictions. The reliance of society and of schools on punishment as a way to manage the behaviour of people is an example of this.

The truth about punishment and behaviour

I spent years of my life making young people sit in silence, giving detentions and making people endlessly write: 'I will not [insert misdemeanour here] in Mr Simpson's lessons.' Latterly, in my mainstream career, I set up and ran an internal isolation unit. I didn't question any of it at the time because I 'knew' that people who do the wrong things get punished for it. Had I taken a pause to reflect, though, I might have noticed that often the same people appeared time after time in my detentions. They frequently attended for exactly the same reasons on each occasion. I might also have asked myself why the same names appeared again and again on the register of the internal isolation unit and why, when they re-joined the main school population, they continued to display exactly the same behaviours as before. Perhaps, had I thought about it rather than just accepted it, I'd have come to the conclusion that the punishments we were applying were not having an effect on the behaviour of the students I was sanctioning on such a regular basis.

That isn't to say that punishment doesn't have an impact. It does act as an effective deterrent for some people, probably the majority, and I count myself as one of them. During my time as a schoolchild, I've been given detentions, lines and other repetitive impositions; I've been told off, screamed at, humiliated in front of my peers, slapped, beaten with a running shoe and caned. I found all of them unpleasant and none of them were things I'd put on my bucket list. The threat of them made me think twice about certain behaviours, or at least be very careful to cover my tracks in order to avoid retribution being visited upon me. This wasn't true of all my friends. Some of them didn't care one way or another and would never have considered, even for a microsecond, adapting their choices to avoid a punishment. If they were caught, they brazened it out, and if they were given a

detention, they would avoid it and be damned to the consequences until refusal became impossible. They would remain unaffected by corporal punishment and contemptuously indifferent to those who inflicted it. One of these kids had the nickname 'Rocky' and it is the name that most perfectly described its owner that I've ever come across. I fought him once, in primary school before we were friends, and it was like trying to fight a piece of granite that moved with the fluidity of quicksilver and the speed of a striking cobra. He battered me with elegant ferocity. Rocky did not see teachers as 'the enemy' and didn't go out of his way to make life hard for them. He liked a few of them and saw the rest as minor irritations when they interfered with his plans. Rocky fought, swore, vandalised, truanted, smoked and disrupted his way through school without caring a fig about what they may do to him as a result. He displayed the same attitude when he came to the attention of the police and, eventually, of magistrates and judges. Rocky, unlike me, never once let the possibility of punishment or retribution stop him from doing anything. He would have been one of the students who attended my detentions and the internal isolation unit time after time without it affecting their attitudes or behaviour in the slightest. Although he was the most obvious example of this disregard for punishment in my peer group, Rocky was not, by any means, alone. I would guess that quite a large minority of my contemporaries shared this characteristic with him.

When I first moved to the special school where Steve and I now work together, I combined the role of senior leader with that of science teacher and I finally started to think more deeply about the role of punishment. We had a system of detention called 'catch-up'. It was very simple – if there were behaviours that were unacceptable in your lesson, then you awarded the student concerned anything from one minute to 25 minutes (equivalent to half the lesson) of catch-up. The catch-up would be completed in the 'catch-up room' during the last timetabled session of the day, when the rest of the school population were able to select a 'social' activity. I initially began to try to avoid giving catch-up for the wrong reason; it was just because it was an absolute pain! I'd have to prepare potential catch-up work for each lesson I taught and, if I awarded any, get it to the right staff member before the end of the day. I also had to keep a record of who had done which piece of work so that there was no chance of a student 'kicking off' because they'd already done it on an earlier occasion. This was quite tough because the same students, of course, kept on getting catch-up. The next reason was because I could see that on busy days the job of administering the catch-up session could be horrendous. It was a nightmare to collate the work, the kids had to be levered into the room and they were often in a foul mood once they

arrived. Nobody was having a remotely positive experience on these days. Better for everybody concerned, I thought, if I could avoid adding extra ingredients to the mix.

Another reason to avoid giving catch-up was the potential for secondary behaviours to happen as a result. These behaviours could range from disruption and abuse, which were both common, to aggression. The aggression might not be directed at anything in particular or might be directed against me. It might also be directed against other students in the class. The size of the sanction didn't seem to matter. The imposition of one minute of catch-up could trigger emotions that led to either flight or fight responses. The latter could be fairly explosive. The effects of awarding catch-up didn't necessarily end when the students left the lesson either. Tracking the behaviour of students throughout the day, it was obvious that some who had earned catch-up during my lesson in the morning could be affected by it in other lessons throughout the day. When I spoke to them about it, the answer was usually along the lines of 'I've already got catch-up so what's the point of being good or doing any work?' It seemed that the act of awarding a sanction to a student could start a chain reaction that would eventually impact upon most people in the building at some point. I could see this 'ripple effect' and trace it back to one particular incident in a classroom, which was the equivalent of throwing a large stone into a pond.

It seemed that my emerging views were shared by our students. I conducted a whole-school survey in which 63 per cent of our students said they were regularly awarded catch-up. None of them felt that catch-up helped them to make more positive choices about their behaviour and all of them said that catch-up could cause them to make worse behavioural choices. Of the 20 per cent of our students who did feel catch-up could help them make more positive choices, none identified themselves as regularly receiving it. Those who were regularly subject to our punishments were telling us that it wasn't working.

As I reduced the amount of catch-up that I was awarding, I noticed something that I didn't expect. Far from descending into anarchy, my lessons began to improve. Behaviour and engagement were better and we all seemed to be having a better time. I couldn't put my finger on the reasons for this but I think I was just working harder at building relationships and intervening earlier, often identifying issues before the students had even noticed. I was forced, I suspect, to work harder because the 'go to' script of using the threat of catch-up wasn't available to me and I had to become more proactive. Without the default punitive mechanisms to fall back on, the only real way to reduce the likelihood of unwanted behaviours was to keep the students engaged. I paid even more attention to the activities I was asking them to do, getting

more creative and making sure that there was something for everybody. It was this need to 'up my game' that led to me to winning the Pearson Award for Science Teacher of the Year in 2015. The formula that worked best for me will be unsurprising to you.

I'd try to give something at the start that would engage the class, usually with an element of choice or something personalised according to interest. For example, those who hated watching a starter video or doing a whole-class activity had an ongoing puzzle or piece of work for display in their folder. Some just wanted to 'get on with the work' and this was OK. My support staff or I would make sure they understood the main learning points separately during the lesson. We always made it clear in advance that this intervention had to happen. We would build a little flexibility into the transition between the starting activity and the activities related to the learning outcome. We gave plenty of notice when this would happen by 'counting down' or referring to the clock and saying, 'When the big hand gets to…' If somebody was engrossed in the starting activity, we negotiated the point at which it 'would be fair' to switch.

I'd be especially clear about what I'd need to see for the learning outcome to be achieved and what 'level' I'd be able to assess it as having met. If there was a chance that the criteria wouldn't be met, then I'd catch it early. It meant springing around the room like a jackrabbit and was particularly important for students who had become accustomed to academic failure. I'd also give a choice of how the learning outcome could be achieved. This might be by letting students choose the order of the tasks or select from a range of options, giving personalised tasks or making reasonable adjustments to my expectations. If somebody really finds it difficult to form letters or to read, then why would I expect them to spend a lesson doing it? 'You do a bit then I'll do a bit' worked well. If a student could verbalise or answer a string of leading questions, then I could note the key points and they could turn it into sentences. With videos, oral answers, cartoons, stop gap animations, models, spider diagrams, double bubbles, bullet points, ordered lists, highlighting texts, text to table, spot the mistakes, challenge the teacher, peer-to-peer support and talk for writing, we could usually find something for most students.

Constant feedback and interaction were always necessary, whether that be about behaviour or the learning activity. Nothing worked better than meaningful praise or tangible success. Celebrating success, especially taking note of 'small wins', was an absolute banker. Stickers, stamps, thumbs up, mimed or actual rounds of applause, fist pumps, acknowledgement to the whole group, phone calls or writing postcards home with the student present all worked well. I've known really tough 16-year-olds who would sell their grandmother for a sticker

on their coursework progress chart. 'Wow! Just go and show this to Ms Jones on duty' brought smiles all around. Using success to initiate some peer-to-peer support was usually a winner if we were careful about the students we used it with.

Planning collaboratively with my support staff allowed us to be clear about the important learning points and to decide about intervention: with whom, who would do it, how they would do it, and when. This was absolutely invaluable, and if we couldn't plan collaboratively, then we'd have a quick chat in the morning or the evening before the lesson. At one point, my support assistant was taking the same Level 2 qualification as my Key Stage 4 groups. Being so completely immersed in the material meant that they not only understood the main learning points but also had a much better understanding of the barriers facing the students as they built upon their skills and knowledge.

When it came to behaviour management, modifying and clarifying my scripts so that they were more supportive and relied less on the potential for punitive action certainly helped. For example, the response to swearing changed from 'If you swear in the room it means five minutes of catch-up' to 'I need you to help me avoid giving any catch-up in this lesson.' It didn't take long, once the penny dropped, to realise that my approach to punishment had nothing to do with improving behaviour. Students' behaviour wasn't changing because of catch-up. Nobody in the catch-up room, student or adult, was learning anything about better choices, the advantages they bring and how to make them. Nobody was learning about emotions or how to recognise them and better regulate them. Nobody was improving their prosocial skills, improving their sense of self, feeling valued or experiencing success. Nobody was learning to recognise the characteristics of a healthy relationship, let alone the things that might help them to build one. Nobody was improving their wellbeing. I recognised all of this but was still awarding catch-up, albeit at a reduced level. I was doing so partly because I needed to adhere to the school's policies and partly because I was at a loss as to what I could do as an alternative. I recognised that I couldn't just stop using punishment on my own; if I was going to be able to change then the whole school would have to change with me. It also began to dawn on me that there was another, very powerful, force at play and its origin was in the subconscious operating systems of my brain. It took time for me to recognise it and would take even longer for me to conquer it. It was my need for retribution. This ancient urge is born from the threat response and has driven our systems of justice across cultures since pre-history. I was punishing students because I wanted vengeance for the perceived affronts to my authority and dignity I had

suffered at their hands. If change was going to happen, I was going to need to overcome my innate desire for retribution and so was everybody else in the building.

Steve and I initiated conversations with some key stakeholders and we all agreed wholly. There were, however, some fairly hefty problems that we couldn't find a way around. We had plenty of anecdotal evidence to say that punishments weren't working but that was all. We hadn't been able to find examples of other educational organisations operating without punishment and weren't sure where to start looking for information or advice. Even if we abolished punishment, we didn't have a clear plan of what we would do instead. We were in this impasse when serendipity brought Steve into contact with somebody who had what we needed. Dr Alice Jones Bartoli was the Director of the Unit for School and Family Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London. She arrived at our school with the science that validated our views and gave substance to the arguments that we would need to persuade the rest of our staff to venture upon a new path with us. She also had the knowledge that helped us design a system that was to replace punishment. Alice's message was backed by research (see, for example, Lykken, 1957) and its essence could not have been simpler:

- There are significant numbers of people for whom the effect of punishment on behavioural choices is low.
- Reward, or the anticipation of reward, is an effective way of influencing behavioural choices for everyone.

Why punishment doesn't work for us all

Punishment relies upon aversive conditioning in order to have a deterrent effect. For this to work, young children have to associate inappropriate behaviours with punishment or the threat of punishment. It relies upon consistent reinforcement as a child so that punishment cues are recognised. Children who have not had a consistent message about punishment in their early years are unlikely to have been conditioned effectively. Early Years settings and primary schools may need to work hard to establish it. Aversive conditioning also relies upon fear of the punishment. There are some groups of people for whom these conditions are not satisfied. Studies have shown that children and adolescents who displayed 'behaviour problems' and were also diagnosed with ADHD showed low skin

conductance responses to aversive stimuli as well as to (positive and negative) emotional stimuli and to neutral pictures, compared to children and adolescents with ADHD only and to 'healthy' controls (Herpertz et al., 2005). Basically, these young people didn't scare very easily when compared to other sections of the population. If they aren't scared of the punishment, how can we expect them to respond to aversive conditioning? This group of people can account for anywhere between 50 and 100 per cent of students in any year group in our school, and will likely be present in most educational settings.

I am sure that my friend Rocky fell into the above category. He reacted really well to competition and reward and we'll come to this shortly. He also responded really well to strong relationships and would behave very differently for teachers who were able to find a way to forge bonds with him and whom he liked. Our deputy headteacher in primary school, Mr Kerr, was the best example. He made Rocky feel special and valued, always had time to joke with him and always singled him out for praise. The rest of us were scared of him but Rocky just loved him. After a particularly bad lunchtime one day (it involved a child from a nearby school being tied to the adjacent railway line), Rocky had to stand in the corridor as the rest of the school was lined up to return to class. He looked defiant and pugnacious, just as we knew he would. As our class trooped by, Mr Kerr approached and stopped next to us. Looking grave and sorrowful, he said, 'Rocky, I hope you're every bit as ashamed of yourself as I am of you.' Rocky, unbelievably, began to cry. He sagged, his face crumpled and tears ran down his cheeks. It didn't seem possible. If punishments are going to work, then their magnitude isn't important. Most children are driven to seek social connectedness with adults and peers and to gain approval from them. They want social acceptance and positive feedback. Rocky's kryptonite was the disapprobation of the adult in the world whom he most wanted to impress.

Another group of people for whom punishment may be counterproductive are those with callous unemotional (CU) traits. Unlike Rocky, those who have strong CU traits do not seek social connectedness, approval or acceptance. What is important to them is social dominance. They feel a need to be in control of those around them and see themselves as superior. Studies show that children with strong CU traits tend to have intact cognitive empathy skills but a deficit in affective empathy. In other words, they have a good understanding of how others are feeling but simply don't particularly care about it. Punishment is often ineffective for these students because of the sense of superiority they may have over the adult who applies the sanction. 'Who are you, to think you can punish me?' they may think. Sanction is often met with anger, a desire for vengeance and the associated secondary behaviours. These secondary behaviours are also

likely to be directed at the victim of the original misdemeanor. I've spoken to a student with strong CU traits about bullying behaviour towards another student. He was absolutely incandescent and could not see that he had done anything wrong. 'Nah, the only reason I'm in your office is because he cries like a little pussy every time I say something to him. Just watch what happens now.'

People with CU traits are more selfish than average. Of course they are – they see themselves as superior, don't care too much about others and don't see the need for social connections or approval. This isn't their fault and there's no point blaming them. They are like this because of the way their brains are wired, not because they are bad. Building good relationships with these students is very helpful, and if you show them that you have noticed the things that they are good at, then you're onto a winner. Just don't expect the relationship to produce the result that I described with Rocky – it just isn't going to happen. The best way to influence the behaviour of someone who has strong CU traits is to show them why, in any given situation, they gain something from acting appropriately. We will get a better response if the benefits of behaving in a socially acceptable way are clear and tangible to them. Showing people with CU traits how their behaviour might influence other people to act in their best interests can work well. Directly rewarding behaviours that you want to see often works too – if we get the reward right.

Aversive conditioning is dependent on avoiding an unpleasant experience and the social disapprobation of an adult is one of these experiences. Young people will read the social landscape of the classroom and pick up clues that tell them they might be overstepping the mark. These punishment cues will guide them down a more acceptable path. But what of children who misread social situations, miss punishment cues and can be confused by the signals that the adult in question is giving out? Students with additional social communication needs or who are on the autistic spectrum are disadvantaged in this respect. Having missed or misinterpreted the cues, they may well be surprised, confused and upset when the punishment arrives unexpectedly. Students with attachment disorder may have a similar experience of punishment, blindsided by the actions of adults that their chaotic or neglect-blighted early childhood has ill prepared them for.

I have described three groups of people for whom punishment is less likely to affect behaviour than the majority of the population. These people are likely to be a sizeable minority in average mainstream schools and, in a typical cohort, comprise 100 per cent of the students in schools like our own. So, is there a system that will work for all students both inside and outside of these groups? Yes. They all respond well to reward.

From punishment to reward

It was always going to be difficult to change such an entrenched part of what was not just our school culture, but the culture of the society we had all been raised in. I didn't realise just how tough we'd find it. The key to success was to get everyone involved, convince them, inspire them and give them ownership. Every member of the team would need to contribute their ideas if we were to design a system that had any chance of success. We started planning in December 2014 and were to implement the results in late June 2015. In this way, we reasoned, if it was a disaster then we could adapt or abandon the scheme over the summer holiday and it would all be just a bad memory by September.

Our first training day featured a big input from Alice to convince staff and governors that we weren't setting out on a fool's errand. People found the science to be compelling but were justifiably worried. We spent time identifying everybody's concerns, fears and questions. We discussed them, recorded them, collated them and promised that by the time we were ready to go, each would have been addressed in our plans. Because of this, people could engage in the process wholeheartedly and with fewer reservations. The next step was to identify the behaviours we wanted to see, and hence what we would reward. We didn't waste a second thinking about the behaviours that we didn't want to see – the days of focusing on negatives were behind us. This was followed by a whole-team session and a follow-on research task to identify ways, big and small, that we could reward these behaviours.

The next session was a competition. We had identified how we could reward our students and we were clear about what behaviours we wanted to reward them for. The staff split into teams to devise a system of administration that would work for us, giving clarity to the students and allowing us to be consistent in our application. By January, I had distilled all of the ideas into a scheme that I presented to everybody. It was the result of about 500 total staff working hours and I hoped that it was close to the finished article. This was not the case, or even remotely close to it.

As a staff, we spent our weekly development meeting picking holes in the plan and troubleshooting the problems, of which there seemed to be an endless list. We welcomed every comment, especially the negative ones, which often highlighted small but significant issues. Questions commonly began with 'What do I do if…'. Answers were typically 'I don't know. Let's use the collective wisdom of the group to decide.' By Easter we were using our daily debriefings and were troubleshooting every day. We considered it from the perspective

of groups, subjects, office staff, individual subjects and specific students. We had produced a table in which all the potential problems were typed in red. As we solved them, the text was changed to black. It was displayed in the staff room and we worked on it constantly. In March, it was a seven-page document full of red text. By May, most of the boxes were black and we were ready to go – or so we thought! The next few years taught us that some parts of our plan were too complex and some too simple. If we hadn't found a problem, then our students eventually did. The system continued to evolve and now has significant differences to the one that launched in 2015. Its core features have stayed the same, however:

- Punitive actions or language do not have a place at our school.
- We are non-confrontational and compassionate in our approach.
- We ignore negatives wherever possible and only respond to positive events.
- Positives are always rewarded.

Our reward system

The basis of our reward system is a simple document called the Pupil Achievement Sheet or PAS. Every student is awarded a mark from 0 to 5 in every session for two categories. These are 'Effort to Learn' and 'Behaviour Choices'. A mark of 3 means 'good'. Everyone knows this and all of our students know that they have to be good to earn rewards. The PAS is a simple table upon which these scores are recorded. The criteria are simple:

5	Perfect choices	Perfect means just this. If a child isn't engaged for the entire lesson, then they can't earn this score for effort. Swearing once is not perfect behaviour.
4	Excellent choices	Not quite perfect.
3	Good choices	Most of the student's contributions are positive.
2	Some good choices	There are enough positive things to focus on.
1	A few good choices	Most of the interactions have not been positive and there is minimum engagement.

During the last academic session of the day, the PASs are collected and the average score for each category is calculated for every student. Each day, everyone must aim for an average score of three in both categories because less than good is not good enough. Everything we do stems from the PAS.

One common fault with reward systems is that the monitoring period between behaviour and reward is too long. If a child does something positive on Monday morning, then Friday's assembly can seem a lifetime away. The PAS does away with this. The first level of reward is the constant, specific commentary that adults employ. 'Thanks for coming in quietly and getting your book. That's a perfect choice.' The second level is the mark that is awarded at the end of the lesson and it comes as no surprise. The teacher's commentary should allow the student to accurately predict their score. There are a couple of things worth mentioning here. The students do not start with a score of 5 and have marks deducted – that would be a punishment. Nor do they 'earn a point' for a specific action. The score they receive is a numerical summary of the whole lesson. Consistency is absolutely essential and we work hard to get it right. We discuss and role-play examples where different marks should be awarded. Our support staff are always involved in awarding the mark and we will discuss examples in our daily debrief. We also have to work hard to avoid focusing on the negatives. If a student asks, 'Why did I only get a 3?', then the temptation is to describe the negative choices that stopped them from earning a 5. Instead, we would say, 'Because your overall behaviour was good' and proceed to describe the good behaviours that we saw. We might ask, 'What could you do to turn it into a 5 next time?' If we've done our job properly, then they'll be able to tell us. If not, we can give them ideas and targets.

This way of working gives us a real advantage with students who may have had a rotten morning. In the past they would have had catch-up. Now they can work towards an average of three by making improvements. We can use help scripts to enable them to overcome negative feelings and identify how they can move on. We can discuss potential issues in the day ahead that they'll have to really focus on getting right (perhaps they don't like PE and it's timetabled for lesson three). We can help them put a strategy together.

The next level of reward is 'socials' time. The formal academic timetable is modified every day at least an hour before our students leave for home. Students either go to socials (if they have earned an average mark of three for the day) or to their timetabled lesson (if they have not). There is no punishment here, just the absence of reward if their behaviour or effort choices have not been good. Socials time is a choice of activities that motivate the students and that they look forward to. They range from cooking, games consoles and computers to sports and crafts. In