

# **Extreme, Challenging Behaviour in New Zealand and English Special Schools and how it is dealt with.**

Author, John McKeown, Sunnydene School in Auckland, Term 2 2013.

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## **Method:**

I visited several schools in Auckland and also several schools in the UK to look at the ways those schools deal with the highly challenging behaviours of their “full-grown” students of 15 years + with Autism, severe intellectual disability and challenging and violent behaviour.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to tackle the problem that many Special Schools have with students with severe and challenging behaviours. These are students, some of whom have spent some of their education included in mainstream schools and others who have come right through Special Schools for all of their education. The common feature is that they have extreme behaviours

**Introduction:**

There is a small but significant group of students in Special Schools both here and overseas who have extremely challenging behaviours. Many of them are on the Autism Spectrum. Some of the most extreme of these behaviours are violence towards fellow students, violence towards family members and towards staff and caregivers. By the term violence I mean instances of hitting, pushing, kicking, spitting, grabbing or pulling hair, biting, scratching and self-injury. Other antisocial behaviours that commonly occur are damage to property, banging and sometimes even breaking, walls, doors, windows and furniture, making regular loud noises, screams, screeches or moans, sometimes lasting for long periods, sometimes even hours. All of these behaviours make it very difficult for the student to be included, either in regular schools or in community activities. Almost exclusively these students are in Special Schools due to the fact that their behaviours are too difficult for the other students and staff in mainstream schools to deal with. It sometimes happens that they spend their early years of education in the mainstream, but as they get larger and stronger they become harder to deal with. In cases that I have seen, they are still in the mainstream but excluded from classrooms and from interacting with the rest of the students. In New Zealand terms they are usually, but not always, Very High Needs ORS-funded students. Usually the learning of these students is severely disrupted by their demanding, controlling and even bullying behaviours. Mental Health issues are also prevalent within this group. Sometimes, because of the danger they can pose to other students and staff members, they can be suspended or expelled. In all they have great difficulty accessing the curriculum.

It is a particularly difficult thing for schools to deal with because staff and other students can be attacked and Boards of Trustees can ultimately face court action. Yet at the same time Special Schools, in my experience, are reluctant to put restrictions on the activities these students can do.

Most Special Schools have very good appreciation of challenging behaviours and are well-versed in how to deal with them. These are the extraordinarily challenging behaviours and I believe that most if not all schools find it difficult to deal with students with this magnitude of challenge. My wish is to come up with a range of the best practical and effective strategies that people are using. Or alternatively, if it is the case, find out which challenging behaviours they are not dealing with and why. I also think it will be useful to find out what relevant literature schools recommend and how they access, where necessary, mental health services. However, I do believe that it is teachers and schools who are dealing with these problems regularly who will find the most effective solutions.

I believe that the overseas experience will be helpful and enlightening. The English system does have more resources that we have in New Zealand and it could be that extra resources will hold the key to successfully rising to the challenges presented.

### **Programme Outline**

2 weeks: visit 5 different special schools in Auckland and write up the Principal's and sometimes the senior staff members' responses to the questions.

Over a period of two weeks visit Special Schools around the UK, ask similar questions. See the facilities and talk about the responses, particularly to the following questions:

#### **1. Extremes of behaviour.**

What are the most challenging behaviours you have to deal with in your school?

#### **2. Prevalence**

What is the prevalence of extreme behaviour within your school?

#### **3. Functionality**

What are the functions of those behaviours?

#### **4. To what extent is the environment a factor in the students' behaviour?**

To what extent can you change or have you changed the environment

#### **5. What have you done to change practice within the school?**

#### **6. Strategies**

What strategies do you use?

#### **7. Barriers**

What are some of the brick walls you have come up against?

What is missing in the system that will improve what you have got or make it work better?

#### **8. Literature**

Do you have a behavioural guru? Can you recommend any good relevant literature?

#### **9. Medication / Mental Health**

**Do any of your most challenging students need medication?**

What are the characteristics of the students who need medication? Do you have a working relationship with mental health services

### **10.Support**

Who do you involve in the process of finding interventions?

### **11. Staff**

In what ways are your staff affected? What do you do to support them?

## **Executive Summary**

### **Definitions**

There is agreement that we are looking at aggression towards staff and other students, damage to property and self-harm. Aggression was considered to include, hitting, kicking, biting and scratching, pinching and pushing, spitting, and verbal abuse. Stripping clothes and smearing faeces were also considered to be extreme behaviours.

The students involved in extreme behaviours were most often described as being deeply or severely autistic. Others included in this were emotionally damaged, intellectually disabled, and anxious. ADHD and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome students were also mentioned, as was the fact that these students are often non-verbal and generally full-grown (adult-sized).

### **Prevalence**

The difference in answers to this question from English and New Zealand schools clearly tells a story of resourcing differences and for me states plainly that more staffing resources would make a decisive difference in New Zealand Special Schools. English schools have many more and better-trained support staff. Because of this it is likely that some incidents would be prevented before they happened. Another English school said, “the students need to go to therapeutic placement if they are hurting other students.” In New Zealand there is no “therapeutic placement” for most students to go to.

### **Functionality**

Both New Zealand and English schools gave similar answers and covered similar ground when talking about the function of the behaviours. One way in which New Zealand schools do better in my opinion than many of their English counterparts is that they have therapists employed at their schools. Most English schools report great

difficulty getting therapists (who are usually employed by Health) to work with their students with any regularity.

One of the Principals said, “*behaviours reduce when communication problems are sorted.*” Commonly, the purpose of the extreme behaviours were seen as:

- A ticket out of schoolwork
- Escape from sensory overload
- A need for exercise
- BESD (Behavioural, Emotional, Social Difficulties)
- Wrong methods of teaching for example, auditory rather than visual teaching (i.e. an escape from an intolerable classroom situation.)
- Learned bullying is where a student has learned that he or she can get away with bullying other students and in the process can gain lots of attention for himself or herself.
- Sometimes it is a complex mixture of behaviours and
- Mental health issues are common usually displaying as a mix of anxiety and unrest.

### **Environmental**

In talking about the environmental factors involved in extreme behaviour there was a distinctly different tone between the English and New Zealand responses. This reflects the huge gap between the money spent on the environment in Special Schools in England and that spent in New Zealand. Interesting however was the fact that English schools talked about using the environment they already had and NZ schools were often talking about what they would like to have.

### **Philosophy**

The philosophy needs to be good. It has to be spelled out. It is important to have consistency within the school about what is and is not acceptable. It is essential that all people dealing with the students share that same philosophy. One school said that they had targeted negative responses from staff members and had, in a non-judgmental way started to “call them”, to speak to the staff members involved to discuss with them what they could have done differently and how raised voices and angry responses are philosophically unsound as well as not effective in dealing with such behaviours. It is important to teach staff to have positive attitudes and particularly to give specific positive support training to Teacher-aides.

## **Staffing**

A lot depends on the quality of staffing. With the paltry pay that New Zealand teacher-aides receive it is very difficult to ensure that we have fully committed staff members throughout and it is a real challenge to work out how to get the TAs to attend full staff training. A lot of responsibility must, of course go on the teachers to ensure that their classroom teams are well up to speed with all aspects of behaviour training and the school's philosophy on the issue.

## **The Team approach**

Behaviour is a school-wide issue and needs a team approach. Many schools seem to have a BAIT team (Behaviour Action Intervention Team).

## **Some useful Programmes**

NVCI / SAFE / MAPA. These are important behavioural interventions. It was pointed out that in each case the most important thing is the de-escalation techniques. The physical holds taught as part of these programmes should only be used in extreme circumstances and when the student's or other peoples' safety is at risk.

Communication, visuals, now and next cards, self-regulation (traffic light system), knowing the individual students, knowledge of etiologies and the direct teaching of emotions are all parts of the effective teacher's armoury of techniques. Each of them has a part to play in make the extreme behaviours less likely to occur.

**On the whole** English and New Zealand schools seem to use the same programmes and the same techniques and have the same problems. Considering the vast difference in funding levels between rich England and poor cousin New Zealand I believe it is a compliment to New Zealand schools that they manage to "keep up" and be usually just as effective as their English counterparts. It does come at a cost though and I believe that cost is borne mostly by school staff who regularly suffer assault at the hands of some of the students. The addition of residential sections to most English Special Schools is an extra which I can see could be valuable here too.

## **Barriers to dealing with extreme behaviours**

### **New Zealand Barriers:**

#### **Extra resourcing needed for:**

- Properly escorted taxis.
- To employ more 1:1 or even 2:1 staffing.

- To do more coaching and training of front line staff and sometimes of students' families.
- To develop our outside spaces. Our very challenging students seem to need to spend a lot of time outside the classroom, outside the school buildings.

### **How are staff affected by challenging behaviour and what do you do to support them?**

It is frustrating and sometimes demoralizing for classroom staff because it disrupts teaching and learning and they can feel that they are trying but not succeeding. It can escalate their own anxieties and they can be hurt both physically and emotionally.

### **Medication / Mental Health**

#### **New Zealand:**

We have begun to forge relationships with Mental Health through the Dual Diagnosis Team. We have long had a good relationship with others within the health sector, Pediatricians and Public Health workers in particular. Our involvement with Mental Health is so far small but growing.

## **Discussion**

### **Definitions**

Definitions are extremely important in order to ensure that we are comparing the same things. There are no distinct well-defined labels for certain behaviours that many of us working in Special Education and in particular Special Schools are very familiar with. Often within the general education sector and even the general special education sector, extreme behaviours are described which are very different and the perpetrators of extreme behaviours are spoken about in ways that make it clear they are not the students that we in special schools have especial concerns about. Special schools are very aware of their own extreme students and tend to agree about who they are and what their behaviours are. The question I asked, under the heading, "Extremes of Behaviour," was: "What are the most challenging behaviours you have to deal with in your school?" In my discussions I sought information about who was using those behaviours.

There is a large degree of similarity between the perceptions of English and New Zealand schools. Where there are differences it is perhaps that the English definitions are broader. This possibly reflects the fact that the most extreme students in English schools are more likely to go to national residential behavioural schools than they are in New Zealand.

Otherwise there is agreement that we are looking at aggression towards staff and other students, damage to property and self-harm. Aggression was considered to include, hitting, kicking, biting and scratching, pinching and pushing, spitting, and verbal abuse. Stripping off their clothes and smearing faeces were also considered to be extreme behaviours.

The students involved in extreme behaviours were most often described as being autistic, or deeply or severely autistic. Others sometimes mentioned were emotionally damaged, intellectually disabled and anxious. ADHD and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome students were also mentioned, as was the fact that these students are often non-verbal and generally full-grown (adult-sized). It was also expressed that personal emotional upheaval or confusion at the onset of puberty sometimes seemed to correlate with the startup of the most extreme behaviours. There are also dual diagnosis students with psychiatric problems in addition to their intellectual disability or autism or other diagnosed condition. These students do sometimes require drug treatments.

## **Prevalence**

What is the prevalence of extreme behaviour within your school?

The difference in answers to this question from English and New Zealand schools clearly tells a story of resourcing differences and for me states plainly that more staffing resources would make a decisive difference in New Zealand Special Schools.

The New Zealand schools were much more precise about this, giving information from incident reports and answers like, approximately one incident per fortnight. One English school said, tellingly, "Very low because it is not a school for extreme behaviours." English schools have many more and better-trained support staff. Because of this it is likely that some incidents would be prevented before they happened. Another English school said, "the students need to go to therapeutic placement if they are hurting other students." In New Zealand there is no "therapeutic placement" for most students to go to. Perhaps the New Zealand inclusive alternative is the Ministry's new (funded by the partial closure of residential schools) wrap-around service. A comment from an English school expressing the need for good paperwork, was: "When there are a lot of incidents the LEA will supply more staff."



One English school stated simply that prevalence was, “quite low because everything is in place.” True enough I found that that particular school was very well organised with regard to its behaviour and they stated also that they were renowned for their sound behaviour planning and programmes and tended to have behavioural students sent there for that very reason. But it was also telling that all the schools I visited in England including that one, had residential units of their own and as it was explained to me they were not for respite care, but for training and instruction.

New Zealand Schools too were well-organised paperwork wise. One school told me that there were 5 students in Satellites and 4 at base school who could at one time or another display this type of injurious behaviour.

### **Functionality:**

Both New Zealand and English schools gave similar answers and covered similar ground when talking about the function of the behaviours. One way in which New Zealand schools do better in my opinion than many of their English counterparts is that they have therapists employed at their schools. Most English schools report great difficulty getting therapists (who are usually employed by Health) to work with their students with any regularity.

Communication was top of everybody’s list of functions of extreme behaviour therefore schools in New Zealand, see Speech/Language Therapists as being essential members of the behavioural teams. One English school that I visited, an academy, did employ its own SLT. In England, academy schools are state-funded schools that are directly funded by central government (specifically, the Department for Education) and independent of direct control by local government. Academies also have more discretion about how they spend their money.

None of the other English Special Schools employed their own therapists.

One of the Principals said, “behaviours reduce when communication problems are sorted.” Commonly, the purpose of the extreme behaviours were seen as:

- A ticket out of schoolwork
- Escape from sensory overload
- A need for exercise
- BESD (Behavioural, Emotional, Social Difficulties)
- Wrong methods of teaching for example, auditory rather than visual teaching (i.e. an escape from an intolerable classroom situation.)

- Learned bullying is where a student has learned that he or she can get away with bullying other students and in the process can gain lots of attention for him or herself.
- Sometimes it is a complex mixture of behaviours
- Mental health issues are common usually displaying as a mix of anxiety and unrest.

## Environmental

In talking about the environmental factors involved in extreme behaviour there was a distinctly different tone between the English and New Zealand responses. This reflects the huge gap between the money spent on the environment in Special Schools in England and that spent in New Zealand. Interesting however was the fact that English schools talked about using the environment they already had and NZ schools were often talking about what they would like to have.

All agreed that environmental issues were important factors in extreme behaviour.

English schools talked about their residential facilities and how they used them:-

“It is not a respite care facility. They tend to stay during the week and go home at weekends. It can be at parents’ request though it can also be suggested by the school.”

They also talked about “chill out areas” and a pastoral support centre which is staffed by a grade 3 teacher assistant. Schools also talked about how they had great input both from staff and students about the design of their school. *“You can prevent so much of the challenging behaviour by altering the environment.”*

They also talked about students being given the opportunity to manage their own behaviour by self-selecting when they use the chill out spaces.

Also it can be an area where a student and a staff member can go to talk one on one. Only as a last resort and if it is really necessary will staff elect for a student to go to the chill out area and it is accepted that they may require escorting there

New Zealand schools spoke about the inadequacy of funding meaning that they are unable to do or have some of the environmental solutions they would like. “We can make accommodations, but it does generally require manpower.” The implication being that extra manpower is difficult to come by with the tight funding regime that New Zealand Special Schools operate under.

New Zealand schools talked about chill out spaces too and possibly a forest space. One school mentioned having computers in the chill out spaces. I think that is a good idea, but know that in some circumstances those computers would be deliberately and very quickly destroyed by extreme students. However, in other circumstances it would be an effective way of calming a student down. The teacher needs to be careful in that situation that the solo computer access is not seen as a reward for difficult behaviour.

One school said, *“what we’d like to have is: Big space, big grounds with secure fencing, retreat spaces within classrooms and taxi escorts.”* The English schools have those things anyway.

Finally one of the NZ Principals pointed out that “Many of these students have been in the mainstream and the mainstream has failed them. Maybe when the mainstream changes enough it could work there too.

My observations showed up the huge discrepancy in the levels of funding between us and the English Special Schools, both in terms of personnel and facilities.

### **Strategies for dealing with extreme behaviour in Special Schools both in England and New Zealand. (Includes changing school practice.)**

#### **Philosophy:**

The philosophy needs to be good. It has to be spelled out. It is important to have consistency within the school about what is and is not acceptable. It is essential that all people dealing with the students share that same philosophy. One school, in New Zealand, of course, pointed out that getting the school’s Maori programmes right has made a huge difference and that many problems have diminished since they did that. One school said that they had targeted negative responses from staff members and had, in a non-judgmental way started to “call them”, to speak to the staff members involved to discuss with them what they could have done differently and how raised voices and angry responses are philosophically unsound as well as ineffective in dealing with such behaviours. It is important to teach staff to have positive attitudes and particularly to give specific positive support training to Teacher-aides.

One school pointed out that staff body-language must be non-threatening, “there is no place for macho staff who feel that they need to dominate.” Another Principal pointed out that reaction to behaviour can make it worse and that, *“angry people are no good in these situations.”*

Another helpful comment that was made was that exerting control is only for extreme situations where there is danger of another staff member or child being hurt.

PBS, Positive Behaviour Support was mentioned by a number of schools and certainly it is a way to establish the positive and nurturing philosophy that is ultimately so important when dealing with behavioural situations. It is also for many schools the means by which they budget for behavioural training and ensure that this reaches every staff member in the school. Most schools pointed to full staff training happening at least twice a year.

### **Staffing:**

A lot depends on the quality of staffing. With the paltry pay that New Zealand teacher-aides receive it is very difficult to ensure that we have fully committed staff members throughout and it is a real challenge to work out how to get the TAs to attend full staff training. In New Zealand a lot of responsibility goes on the teachers to ensure that their classroom teams are well up to speed with all aspects of behaviour training and the school's philosophy on the issue.

Teachers need to be continually reflective about their practice. AFL training ensures that staff reflect upon their practice. Where behaviour is concerned this is essential in order to maintain progress in improving student behaviour by improving our response to it. One Principal discussed the very practical idea of the classroom staff as a team reflecting together.

One school (English) talked about their rigorous staff selection process which takes two days and includes observing job applicants working and socializing with students. They did point out that it was difficult because their Teacher Assistants only received £18,000 pay per year, which was not nearly enough. (As it happens most teacher-aides in New Zealand receive about half of that amount.)

Schools in England used to have 2:1 staffing for very difficult students but most schools believe now that that policy did not work. The most often quoted reason for its failure is that once they hear about it most parents want it for their child too.

## **The Team approach**

Behaviour is a school-wide issue and needs a team approach. Many schools seem to have a BAIT team (Behaviour Action Intervention Team) these teams go by many different names. The approach, however, is consistent, that the relevant professionals join together to guide the teachers in dealing with behavioural issues within their classes. Typically the make-up of these teams include a lead teacher from the school, a psychologist where the school employs or can easily access one, SLTs and OTs, parents sometimes, depending on the situation. Sometimes it is important that the team meets first without a parent in order to work out what it is doing before calling on parents/family members to join them. The family needs to be involved both for their invaluable input and also because the more comprehensive the behavioural programme (i.e. if it can be implemented both at home and at school) the more likely it is to effectively control extreme problem behaviours. The classroom teacher with whose student the team has been concerned has to be involved and often teacher-aides/assistants who are directly involved with the student need to be there too. The transdisciplinary approach is also a winner, especially where the problems include a mental health element. Such a team may include clinical psychologists, pediatricians, psychiatrists, mental health nurses and social workers. One comment I received was that one school did not like behavioural support teams because it would encourage staff to give the problems away and not accept ownership. I feel that that was missing the whole point and is another good reason why it is essential that the class teacher and most probably other classroom staff need to be involved in the BAIT team.

One of the functions of a Behaviour Team is to produce a behaviour plan for the class to follow. In one case it was pointed out that the BAIT team would appoint a key worker, usually the psychologist, from within the team who would work with the classroom team to implement the plan. Another school holds behaviour clinics in staff meetings in order to bring to bear the expertise of all teachers and therapists. This acknowledges the “whole school” nature of extreme behaviours and also helps each staff member to increase his or her expertise.

## **Some useful Programmes**

- SPELL is all about organizing the classroom space and ensuring that individual needs are being met.
- Teacch is a method of controlling wavering attention and ensuring that learning takes place.
- Engagement Profile concentrates on choosing methods and topics to engage students who are otherwise difficult to engage.

- Intensive interaction. This does not deal directly with behaviours, but works at a deep level to promote communication and interactions between students and school staff.
- ABA, promotes learning techniques.

While the above programmes do not specifically deal with the behavioural issues, they do promote the learning environment, knowledge of the students and relationships between students and classroom staff. As one of the Principals asserted:

*“The curriculum has to be right. A boring, unsuitable programme will cause more behaviour programmes. There needs to be just the right amount of challenge in a programme, not too much not too little.”*

- Team Teach. This is a behavioural approach very well-regarded in England and also used in some New Zealand schools.
- NVC / SAFE / MAPA. These are important behavioural interventions. It was pointed out that in each case the most important thing is the de-escalation techniques. The physical holds taught as part of these programmes should only be used in extreme circumstances and when the student’s or other peoples’ safety is at risk.

Communication, visuals, now and next cards, self-regulation (traffic light system), knowing the individual students, knowledge of etiologies and the direct teaching of emotions are all parts of the effective teacher’s armoury of techniques. Each of them has a part to play in make the extreme behaviours less likely to occur.

## **Paperwork**

Everyone agreed that good paperwork is essential. Data of incidents has to be collected and has to be analyzed by senior school management. *While analyzing the data, as well as analyzing student behaviour it is also important to analyze the adult behaviour.* In most schools the incident forms were signed off by a senior staff member. One school used a system called “Slueth” a computerized data collection system which seems like a good way to ensure comprehensive and relevant data is collected.

**On the whole** English and New Zealand schools seem to use the same programmes and the same techniques and have the same problems. Considering the vast difference in funding levels between rich England and poor cousin New Zealand I believe it is a compliment to New Zealand schools that they manage to “keep up” and be usually just

as effective as their English counterparts. It does come at a cost though and I believe that cost is borne mostly by school staff who regularly suffer assault at the hands of some of the students. The addition of residential sections to most English Special Schools is an extra which I can see could be valuable here too.

## **Barriers to dealing with extreme behaviours**

### **New Zealand Barriers:**

1. The complexity of some of the behaviour problems, especially when they include mental health issues. For these students behaviour intervention, which most of our schools are very skillful at, will not completely work. Anxiety is often the first manifestation of mental health issues and though we can (and do) try to make the environment calm and give the option for instance of a chill-out space, still there are times when those strategies do not work, or are not given a chance to work (by the students involved.).
2. We need easier access to psychiatrists *with an understanding of intellectual disability*.
3. The need for consistency between home and school. This requires us to work as hard as we can alongside families to engage with them and to try to achieve some consistency. Still it is not always possible to do with consistent effectiveness.
4. Inconsistent giving of medication on the part of some families sometimes is a barrier to success.
5. Reactive behaviour on the part of staff. They always need to be well-versed in PBS. In the final analysis in NZ there is a greater burden on the teachers in running their classroom teams often without well-educated and well-trained paraprofessionals.
6. It is difficult for our schools to reach the heights of English schools because of the disparity in pay and training between New Zealand Teacher-aides and English Teacher-Assistants. Most Special School Principals in New Zealand are well-aware of this problem. We need a complete paraprofessional team who are well enough paid and well enough trained to do the job.
7. We need systemic changes covering categorisation and funding. In the end ORS funding is not enough for a group of behaviour challenged students. Perhaps NZ needs VHNCB, Very High Needs Challenging Behaviour with an extra funding for the students who sometimes need two adults to look after them and prevent them from harming themselves, other students, staff or property.

### **Extra resourcing needed:**

8. For properly escorted taxis.
9. To employ more 1:1 or even 2:1 staffing.
10. To do more coaching and training of front line staff and sometimes of students' families.
11. To develop our outside spaces. Our very challenging students seem to need to spend a lot of time outside the classroom, outside the school buildings.

### **English Barriers**

1. Replacing staff who are sick with staff good enough to continue the complex classroom programmes can be problematic.
2. Multi-agency lack of compatibility.
  - a. Mental Health services are not prepared to work with students who have real challenges.
  - b. The police unfortunately will not work in a flexible manner, when called upon, they simply criminalize behaviours.
  - c. Social Care and Mental Health do not work for special needs students. Something needs to change at Social Care level.
3. Constantly having to remind staff to engage with students. That is their job.
4. Problems with (getting) some therapies. The authorities have decided that SLTs are under Health and this does not seem to work for schools.

### **Conclusion**

Nowhere is the difference between English and New Zealand Special Schools so marked as in the discussion regarding barriers to dealing effectively with extreme behaviour. The New Zealand schools that I spoke to point to some serious resourcing problems, which expose staff and students to serious danger and expose buildings to regular damage.

The English schools are not only better-resourced, but also they have residential units and when all else fails there are the National Residential Schools which deal with the extreme challenging behaviour students with Intellectual Disability.

Interestingly the problem of dealing with and getting access to Mental Health Services is common to both countries. English Special Schools point to a lack of flexibility in the attitude of police and social care. Under-resourcing is a problem in these areas in New Zealand.

### **Who helps to find the right interventions?**

#### **New Zealand**



Usually it is the teacher, the psychologist, parents, therapists and the BAIT team, in fact anyone who is involved with the child can be asked for their input. If external help is needed, possibly the Mental Health team can be approached and these days they will offer their support. Other agencies can be involved too, like CYFS through their Strengthening Families meetings. Additionally we can recommend to Taikura Trust that a family needs some in-home behavioural support.

### **England:**

Initially the decision is made by the class team, i.e. the teacher and teacher assistant. In England there is CAMS, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, when there is reason for the support of a Mental Health team.

In the words of one of the English Principals, do the simple things first and if that works you don't need to go any further. First of all call in the parents and after that Educational Psychologists.

Mention was made of SLTs and ABA consultants.

### **How are staff affected by challenging behaviour and what do you do to support them?**

It is frustrating and sometimes demoralizing for classroom staff because it disrupts teaching and learning and they can feel that they are trying but not succeeding. It can escalate their own anxieties and they can be hurt both physically and emotionally.

For serious incidents the Senior Management Team debriefs the staff. The debriefing needs to be effective and non-judgmental. It needs to deal with the idea of how it could have been done differently. The debriefing needs to be minuted and any points raised in it need to be dealt with and any promises made need to be kept. If it is considered necessary they can receive counselling with the school footing the bill for it. If the staff member does not want to work with that student any more they are offered a placement elsewhere. It may be pertinent to give a day off, a box of chocolates or some flowers, all part of the process of making someone realise that they are valued.

The behaviour plans are regularly reviewed and plenty of relevant training is given and above all they are part of a collaborative environment where they can feel supported and where they can offload, share and reflect. The person who has been hurt could be invited to the subsequent intervention meetings.

Most of the suggestions from the English schools were the same as those from New Zealand, though a few extra points were made. One school suggested having a well-

being team to work on issues brought up in behavioural reviews. There is also an organisation called Worklife, set up to support staff members in difficult situations.

This is another situation where paperwork has an important part to play. In England the paperwork can be very important in applying for extra funding.

Apparently the council of one of the English cities I visited has a stress management team which school staff can make use of.

One English school mentioned Hepatitis B injections for staff who have been or are liable to be bitten. Schools in New Zealand do this too.

“Sometimes female staff can work better with challenging behaviours because the students see them as less threatening.” Or as one of the New Zealand principals put it,

*“Males have bigger egos when it comes to aggressive things. This can escalate the situation.”*

## **Medication / Mental Health**

### **New Zealand**

We have begun to forge relationships with Mental Health through the Dual Diagnosis Team. We have long had a good relationship with others within the health sector, Pediatricians and Public Health workers particularly. Our involvement with Mental Health is small but growing.

There is now much more medication than there used to be, too much, according to one principal, who also acknowledged that it was sometimes necessary but should only be tried after everything else. Most principals acknowledged that there was an increase in Mental Health Issues. Perhaps this has been brought about by the general rise in the number of young people with Autism.

“Some students are on medication, mostly Risperidone or Concerta (Ritalin). Risperidone addresses ADD, helps the brain to slow down and reduces reactivity. Concerta takes the edge off emotional ups and downs [sic].\* Medication is also necessary for Fetal Alcohol /Syndrome and ADHD.”

*\*(In fact Ritalin is the better-known drug for ADHD, whereas Risperidone is an Atypical anti-psychotic”)*

Later teenage Autistic students can develop Mental Health issues.

We work closely with Whirinaki, (the Mental Health group for South Auckland) but unfortunately they are not experienced or skilled in the area of Intellectual Disability. The paediatricians are much more effective.

### **England:**

Medication is sometimes required and this is often parent-led. Sometimes school does recommend medication especially to take the edge off a student's anxiety. It is sometimes difficult to get help from Mental Health medical staff. They seem to change jobs frequently.

One school said that the medication mostly used is Ritalin. One school did have a regular Pediatric clinic which seemed to work well. Another school talked about Abilify (in the Risperidone family) to take the edge off the students' anxiety.

All in all there was less about medication from the English schools, but once again this could be due to the fact that the most extreme students are often away from home in residential schools.

### **Touchstones**

#### **The following people were mentioned by the Principals I spoke to as being influential for them:**

Len Nel in New Zealand, who is an Educational Psychologist working in Auckland Special Schools.

Barry Carpenter has been highly influential both in New Zealand and England. Barry is a fellow of Oxford University, well known in Special Schools in England, Australia and New Zealand, he is Special Education Speaker and the author of many Special Education texts.

Paul Pagliano is an Associate professor at James Cook University in Townsville Queensland and a regular speaker at special education conferences in Australia.

Barry Coughlan an Irish Psychiatrist, who has visited New Zealand in the past to lecture on Mental Health issues among intellectually disabled students

Dr. Bill Rogers, an Australian behavioural specialist, the author of many journal articles in Australia and the UK, who advocates for a skills-based approach to discipline and behavioural management.

Leigh Cantor from the United States.

Louise Bomber and George Matthews who are Team Teach Instructors from the South of England and who are both known as behaviour specialists and authors on the subject.

The difference in answers to questions about the prevalence of extreme behaviours from English and New Zealand schools clearly tells a story of resourcing differences and for me states unequivocally that more staffing resources would make an important difference in New Zealand Special Schools' ability to safely deal with the extreme behaviours.

In talking about the environmental factors involved in extreme behaviour there was a distinctly different tone between the English and New Zealand responses. This again reflects the gap between the money spent on the environment in Special Schools in England and that spent in New Zealand. The fact that English schools talked about using the environment they already had and NZ schools were often talking about what they would like to have was interesting. The addition of residential sections to most English Special Schools for instance is an extra which we could expect to see making a decisive difference here.

- New Zealand schools spoke about the inadequacy of funding meaning that they are unable to do or have some of the environmental solutions they would like. "We can make accommodations, but it does generally require manpower, which is difficult"
- We need a complete paraprofessional team who are well enough paid and well-enough trained to do the job.
- We need properly escorted taxis.
- We need the resources to employ more 1:1 or even 2:1 staffing.
- We need the resources to do more coaching and training of front line staff and sometimes of students' families.
- We also need resourcing to develop our outside spaces. Our very challenging students seem to need to spend a lot of time outside the classroom, outside the school buildings.

Considering the vast difference in funding levels between rich England and poor cousin New Zealand I believe it is a compliment to New Zealand schools that they manage to "keep up" and be usually just as effective as their English counterparts. It does come at a cost though and I believe that cost is borne mostly by some school staff who regularly suffer assault at the hands of some of the students.

There is one way in which New Zealand schools do better in my opinion than many of their English counterparts in that they have therapists employed at their schools. Most

English schools report great difficulty getting therapists (who are usually employed by Health) to work with their students with any regularity.

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## Significant Quotes:

*“behaviours reduce when communication problems are sorted.”*

*“You can prevent so much of the challenging behaviour by altering the environment.”*

*“what we’d like to have is: Big space, big grounds with secure fencing, retreat spaces within classrooms and taxi escorts.”*

*“angry people are no good in these situations.”*

*“Males have bigger egos when it comes to aggressive things. This can escalate the situation.”*

*“The curriculum has to be right. A boring, unsuitable programme will cause more behaviour programmes. There needs to be just the right amount of challenge in a programme, not too much not too little.”*

*“While analyzing the data, as well as analyzing student behaviour it is also important to analyze the adult behaviour.”*

*“It does come at a cost though and I believe that cost is borne mostly by school staff who regularly suffer assault at the hands of some of the students.”*

*“We need a complete paraprofessional team who are well enough paid and well-enough trained to do the job.”*

**John McKeown**

