

What Works Best 2025

Practical guide

Classroom management

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

How to use this guide

This resource is part of the **practical guide series** for What Works Best 2025. It provides teachers and school leaders with practical ideas for implementing effective classroom management practices in their school. It is not intended to capture all aspects of classroom management, and it is important to consider how strategies and practices should be responsive to the learning and wellbeing needs and goals of students.

Before engaging with these ideas, it may be useful to first consider your current practice, and how it influences teaching, learning and student wellbeing. What is working well, and which areas could be strengthened? The following ideas may support you when planning next steps.



What is classroom management?

Classroom management is a broad term that encompasses a range of practices to create a safe, inclusive and stimulating environment to support students' academic and socio-emotional learning (Evertson and Weinstein 2006; CESE 2020a). Effective classroom management is more than behaviour management. It involves creating a positive classroom climate through actions such as proactively building positive teacher–student relationships, holding high expectations for students, engaging students with high-quality instruction and explicitly teaching and modelling expected classroom rules and routines (Richardson et al. 2023; CESE 2024a; Peddie et al. 2024). A positive classroom climate maximises effective learning time and encourages on-task, positive learning behaviours, where disengagement and disruptions are addressed in a timely, fair and respectful manner. Ultimately, the focus of creating positive classroom environments should be directed to student learning.

Like all What Works Best practices, classroom management is interconnected with the other 7 practices. In particular, it has strong connections with wellbeing, high expectations, explicit teaching and effective feedback.¹

Why does classroom management matter?

When used effectively, classroom management practices have the potential to positively influence students and their ability to engage in learning. Effective classroom management has been shown to have moderate positive effects on student behaviour (Oliver et al. 2011), as well as student engagement and achievement (Marzano et al. 2003). It has also been shown to support student wellbeing (Korpershoek et al. 2016) and promote a positive sense of belonging, and is a predictor of students' everyday resilience and levels of academic agency (Bostwick et al. 2022; CESE 2020b, 2022a, 2024a, 2024b). In addition, effective classroom management helps to establish a positive attendance culture (CESE 2022b). Importantly, classroom management includes maintaining the physical and emotional safety of students and teachers, as well as creating environments that support cultural responsiveness.

¹ For more on each of these practices, refer to [All What Works Best resources by theme](#).

The relationship between classroom management and explicit teaching

Explicitly teaching behaviour by explaining, modelling and reinforcing expected classroom behaviours helps establish an environment where students have a sense of belonging, feel safe and are ready to learn. Explicit teaching of academic skills and knowledge also supports classroom management. Explicit teaching strategies create a high level of on-task behaviour, reduce opportunities for distraction or off-task behaviour and give students immediate positive and corrective feedback on both the content being taught and their behaviour.

NSW Department of Education Student behaviour policy and Student code of conduct

The department's [Student behaviour policy](#) and the [Student code of conduct](#) give direction and guidance on supporting and managing safe, responsible and respectful student behaviour in NSW public schools.

The Student behaviour policy makes it clear that in NSW public schools, all students and staff have the right to be treated fairly and with dignity – both online and offline – in an environment free from intimidation, violence, harassment, victimisation and discrimination, including that based on sex, race, religion, disability or sexual orientation. Effectively and proactively managing and responding to disengaged and disruptive behaviours can play an important role in supporting this right. The Student code of conduct clearly outlines the expectations for inclusive and safe behaviour. It states the rights and responsibilities of students and unpacks the principles of respect, safety and engagement that underpin expected behaviour. It acknowledges the role of department staff in implementing teaching and learning approaches across a range of settings that support the development of skills needed by students to meet our high standards for respectful, safe and engaged behaviour.

The department endorses the explicit teaching of behaviour through the [Positive Behaviour for Learning \(PBL\) framework](#), [trauma-informed practices](#) and the principles of inclusive practice to support positive student behaviour. These set the foundations for success for whole-school and classroom behaviour management systems within schools and are essential in the reduction of unwanted behaviours in the classroom, including bullying and cyberbullying behaviours.

Create a positive learning environment

- Invest time in getting to know students and building positive teacher–student relationships.** This includes learning about their interests, strengths, language and cultural backgrounds, attitude towards learning and aspirations. For example, at the beginning of the school year, each student could be asked to write down or verbally share something about themselves, their interests and what they would like to achieve in the year. This can form the basis of a one-to-one discussion. Teachers can also build positive teacher–student relationships by framing communication positively, stating what students need to do rather than what they should avoid, and using words like ‘no’ and ‘don’t’ sparingly. This models respectful and polite interactions for students and contributes to a positive and supportive learning environment (Peddie et al. 2024). When students feel understood, respected and valued by their teacher, they are more likely to engage cooperatively in the learning environment. This contributes to building trust and rapport (CESE 2020b).
- Practice reflexivity by critically examining personal attitudes, values and biases with a view to engage with students in a culturally responsive manner** (AERO 2023a). Establishing positive teacher–student relationships is an important part of teachers’ and leaders’ cultural responsiveness and their capacity to foster a culturally inclusive environment.² Through reflexive practice, teachers, educators and school leaders can appraise and evaluate how their behaviours and ideas influence their teaching and learning (AERO 2023a). This can address misunderstandings between teachers and the students and families of diverse backgrounds with whom they work. Positive relationships can increase the likelihood of students and their families seeking help when it is required, and engaging with education and school (AERO 2023a).³
- Support students to understand what they will be learning and what is required of them by clearly communicating the learning intentions and success criteria at the start of each lesson.** This involves clearly explaining what students will be learning, why it is important and where and when the knowledge and skills can be used. Using clear and concise language from the syllabus will help to ensure that students understand the learning intention. When defining or describing key terms, use student-friendly language and provide vocabulary supports such as glossaries.⁴ Clearly explaining learning intentions and success criteria at the beginning of each lesson minimises disruptions because it breaks down complex tasks into manageable steps, helping students understand what is expected of them and minimising the potential for frustration. When students have a clear understanding of what they need to do, they are more likely to stay engaged and on task (CESE 2020a).

2 The department’s [Cultural inclusion](#) webpage provides pointers and ideas on what culturally inclusive practice, schools and learning environments look like. [Strong strides together – meeting the educational goals for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students](#) (CESE 2022) summarises the evidence on, and provides practical examples of, supporting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to achieve their goals.

3 For the purposes of this and other What Works Best practical guides and illustrations of practice, ‘families’ includes biological parents, adoptive parents, step-parents, legal guardians, kin carers, out-of-home (foster) carers, extended family members and other significant adults with caring responsibilities.

4 Refer to the [What Works Best 2025 practical guide – Explicit teaching](#) for more information on the effective use of learning intentions and success criteria.

- **Create inclusive learning experiences so that all students can engage with lesson content and experience success.** In addition to sharing the learning intentions and success criteria, teachers can also engage in the following actions when planning for, and delivering lessons:
 - checking that all students have the key prerequisite knowledge and skills before beginning new or more complex learning
 - using clear and concise language
 - supporting students to connect learning by linking prior learning experiences with new knowledge or skills
 - modelling new or complex lesson content, before progressing to guided practice and then independent practice
 - frequently checking for understanding
 - providing differentiated levels of scaffolding to ensure an appropriate level of challenge for each student, as well as to build confidence and support success
 - allowing multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know and can do.

Applying these elements of explicit teaching promotes the communication of high expectations and supports all students to participate, practice relevant skills in a safe environment, retrieve and apply knowledge, build mastery and feel successful (Martin et al. 2022).⁵

Where students need extending in their learning, teachers may consider using the department's Differentiation adjustment tool, which has been designed to support teachers to meet the specific learning needs of high potential and gifted students. The tool includes strategies and practical examples on adjusting for complexity, challenge, choice, abstraction, creative and critical thinking, higher order thinking, pace, authenticity and learning environment.

- **Celebrate diversity, incorporating a wide range of perspectives and materials into the curriculum that reflect the backgrounds and experiences of all students.**

When students are proud of their identities and can see themselves reflected in their learning, they are more confident, motivated and engaged (D'warte 2017 as cited in CESE 2021). One example of this might be to select and study texts written by authors from diverse cultural backgrounds, or texts translated into English from other languages. Another example could be facilitating discussions around different cultures and understanding associated ways of being, knowing and doing. For example, consider engaging with the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) for advice on ways to connect learning to place and share knowledge in relationship.

⁵ Refer to the [What Works Best 2025 practical guide – Explicit teaching](#) for more information on supporting all students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills and engage in effective teaching and learning.

- **Where appropriate, encourage student voice and agency and ensure that students feel heard, as this can have a positive impact on the learning environment and student engagement** (van der Kleij et al. 2023).⁶ This could include working with students to establish shared class values and routines and involve gathering feedback via surveys or focus groups. This process should be as inclusive as possible so that all students can participate. For example, students with language or literacy support needs can be provided with visuals or response cards, such as images of thumbs up/down to indicate yes/no. Incorporating student voice into routines makes them more effective by giving students influence and ownership over decisions affecting them. Clearly demonstrating what adjustments have been made to lessons, processes or the classroom environment based on student input is important to show students that their opinions have been considered and are valued. The department has a range of teacher resources designed to help teachers identify current and future student voice initiatives in their classrooms. They include units of work, teaching and learning programs, student and teacher surveys and checklists. Teachers can take time to reflect on ways that student perspectives are already incorporated into learning and opportunities to strengthen their use.
- **Recognise and celebrate success.** This could include reaching out to family to share positive feedback about their child or publicly commending a student for demonstrating positive behaviour, such as resilience, leadership or kindness. Some students may not feel comfortable with public recognition. These students can be recognised personally by their teacher or the principal sharing a quiet word with them to reiterate the student's success with a goal.

Provide structure and predictability for student participation within the classroom

- **Take time at the start of the school year to explicitly teach rules and routines in a way that is specific and easy to understand** (CESE 2020a; AERO 2023c; Peddie et al. 2024). For routines to be effective, they need to be explicitly taught, practised and reinforced consistently over time (Epstein et al. 2008; Wong and Wong 2018; Lemov 2021). New routines are best introduced gradually over several weeks to avoid overwhelming students (Archer and Hughes 2011). School and classroom expectations or rules should be introduced on the first day of school and taught in small sections over the following days and weeks. This proactive approach helps students understand and develop expected behaviours, moving beyond simply enforcing compliance. To teach the expectations effectively, start by clearly introducing each one, explaining what it is and why it matters. Afterwards, check that students understand what the expectations look and sound like through discussions, modelling and practice. When students follow expectations, it is important to acknowledge the behaviour itself, rather than the student, to encourage them to repeat it (AERO 2024).

⁶ Student voice' refers to students actively participating in decision-making at school on things that shape their educational experiences. Student voice is more than just students 'having a say' and 'being heard'. To be successful, schools must value the perspectives and opinions of students and act on them in a way that genuinely shapes learning and decision-making at the school.

Yarning is a culturally inclusive method of soliciting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander student voices. For more information, refer to NSW Department of Education's (2023) Student Voice Through Yarning resource.

Consider engaging students in the development of a classroom agreement or expectations. Expectations should clearly communicate the desired behaviour and be positively framed to create clarity and a supportive learning environment, which can reduce resistance. For instance, saying “Listen to your teacher and classmates” is more effective than “Don’t talk while others are talking.” (Archer and Hughes 2011; Hepburn et al. 2021; AERO 2024). Some shared expectations could include:

- “In this class, we will allow everyone to have a say.”
 - “We will stick to the point when speaking.”
 - “We will listen to different ideas without interrupting, or using ‘put downs’ when we disagree.”
 - “We will be responsible for our own behaviour.”
- **Use visual cues such as posters, checklists and signs to reinforce expectations for classroom behaviour and refer to these visual cues when needed.** Keeping the number and complexity of rules and routines to a minimum makes them easier for students to remember.
 - **Explicitly teach and model appropriate behaviour, breaking down complex social and emotional skills into more achievable component parts and sequencing their introduction.** It is important that students have opportunities to practice the behaviour being taught, and to receive and apply feedback to guide their learning (McDonald 2023). Effective feedback about behaviour clearly and consistently shows students which aspects of their behaviour meet the defined standard, as well as which aspects need improvement and how to improve. Importantly, explicitly teaching behaviour includes creating structured, repeated opportunities for students to understand and apply the feedback.⁷

For example:

Teaching younger students how to speak politely

- **Define and explicitly teach and model the behaviour**
 - begin by explaining what it means to ‘speak politely’ – that is, using kind words, a calm tone and respectful language when talking to teachers, classmates, family and others
 - define specific contexts where polite speech is important, such as during class discussions, asking for help or resolving conflicts
 - model polite speech in different situations, such as respectfully asking a question, calmly responding to a disagreement or politely expressing a request (for example, “Could I please have some help with this?”)
 - show examples of both polite and impolite speech to clarify expectations.

⁷ For further information about the explicit teaching of social skills, refer to the department’s [Positive Behaviour Support – explicit teaching of social skills](#) (staff only). Also refer to the department’s [Socio-emotional learning lessons for K–2](#) (PDF 312.7 KB) resource – in particular, Kindergarten Lesson 6 and Year 2 Lesson 6.

- **Break down the skill into achievable parts and sequence their introduction**

1. Use kind and respectful words (for example, please, thank you and excuse me).
2. Use a calm and friendly tone of voice.
3. Listen carefully and wait your turn to speak.
4. Show you are listening with friendly body language, where appropriate.
5. Respond appropriately, even if you disagree.

- **Provide opportunities to practice, monitor, reinforce, and give feedback**

- engage students in role-plays where they practice asking for something politely or resolving a disagreement using polite language
- monitor students during class interactions and group work to identify use of polite speech
- reinforce polite speaking with praise and encouragement (for example, “Thank you for using polite words when you asked for help!”)
- provide specific, clear feedback on areas for improvement (for example, “Your words were polite, but remember to use a calm tone too.”).

- **Create structured, repeated opportunities for application and reteaching**

- incorporate regular ‘politeness moments’ where students acknowledge their peers’ politeness
- use visual reminders or posters about polite language in the classroom
- where students struggle, reteach the skill by revisiting the steps, modelling again and providing extra practice
- regularly role-play or discuss polite speech scenarios to reinforce learning and help students confidently apply the skill in various situations, including times when they disagree.

- **Ensure that rules are applied consistently and that outcomes are predictable.**

Teachers can follow a series of predictable, proportionate steps that students know and expect when upholding rules. For example, if a student is not following classroom expectations, a teacher could implement a graduated response:

1. move close to the student’s desk while practicing intentional circulation⁸
2. use a non-verbal cue (such as engaging the student through eye contact) and reinforce the expectation with a gesture, such as putting a finger to mouth to show students should be working silently
3. provide a whole-of-class verbal cue or reminder of the expected behaviour

8 Intentional circulation refers to deliberately moving around the classroom and standing in identified spots to observe and actively engage with students. Refer to AERO’s (2023) [Circulation: classroom management skill](#) for more information about the practice. Teachers can also use AERO’s (2025) [Classroom management observation tool – circulation](#) to engage in peer-observation of the skill and identify strengths and areas for development.

4. give a verbal correction to the student, directly and discreetly
5. move the student to another location in the class
6. monitor the student's behaviour in class to ensure that it improves
7. if the student is still not meeting the expectations, arrange to interview the student and place them on a monitoring card
8. if the student's behaviour still does not improve, speak with your head teacher (if relevant) and the student's parents regarding the issue
9. if the student's behaviour escalates to pose a significant work health and safety risk to other students, staff or property, follow the department's Incident notification and response policy (🔒 staff only).

It is important that teachers follow the same hierarchy in the graduated response consistently and fairly, and that all students know and understand why and when the rules are being applied.

Consistent rules and predictable outcomes can help address disengaged, disruptive and discriminatory behaviour. When outcomes are predictable, students are more likely to take responsibility for their learning (CESE 2020a; Richardson et al. 2023). Consistent, predictable consequences can support students who have experienced trauma by creating a sense of safety (McDonald 2023).

- **Provide students with additional learning and support needs with greater levels of structure and more intensive support to develop self-regulation skills** (Meyer et al. 2021). This could include explicitly teaching, modelling and implementing a range of emotional wellbeing strategies, such as mindfulness, self-calming techniques and problem-solving using tools such as the problem solving guide (🔒 staff only) located on the department's Universal Resources Hub.

Reminding students of the strategies and, where appropriate, modelling and using the strategies with them, can be an effective way to support students as they learn self-regulation skills. This might look like sitting or standing near a student in a non-confrontational way and saying something like, "I can see you're feeling frustrated. How about we take some deep breaths together?" AERO's (2025) Emotional regulation: supporting students' diverse needs provides practical examples of ways to support students with additional learning and support needs to recognise, understand and express emotions safely and respectfully. The What Works Best practical guide – Wellbeing also has a range of examples and ideas for teaching and supporting healthy coping practices, resilience and self-regulation.

- **Consider implementing a start-of-day or start-of-lesson routine.** In a primary classroom, this might look like reminding students to enter the room quietly and sit on the carpet for a morning message, where the teacher starts with a positive goal for the day and invites a few students to share something they are looking forward to that day. The teacher could then remind students of the classroom norms or rules, pointing to visual cues or posters displayed around the room and saying, “Today we are going to be safe and respectful learners by following our routines for moving around the room and asking questions.” If there is a specific rule or norm that needs revisiting, the teacher could try role-playing the expected behaviour. The teacher could then give an overview of the learning intentions and success criteria and activities, using familiar and consistent visuals associated with common tasks so students know what to expect. The teacher could then conclude the start-of-day routine with a short, engaging activity related to the day’s learning or social-emotional skill, such as a mindfulness exercise, fun fact or brainteaser.

Routines serve as the everyday habits that help both students and teachers to uphold agreed expectations. Well-established routines allow students to follow them independently with minimal teacher input, leading to fewer interruptions and more time for learning (Archer and Hughes 2011). Routines also reduce cognitive load, freeing students’ attention for the task at hand (Epstein et al. 2008; Peddie et al. 2024). They not only support learning but also contribute to positive learning environments that foster a sense of belonging, which in turn motivates students to attend school and engage meaningfully (Bennett 2020; Peddie et al. 2024).

The consistency of routines can be especially important for students who experience challenges with executive functioning or self-regulation (Peddie et al. 2024). Routines facilitate predictable and calm environments that can help reduce anxiety, build independence and support self-regulation.

- **Facilitate a smooth transition between lesson activities.** This can be done by providing clear guidance and using pre-arranged signals, such as a bell, countdown timer or a short, pre-recorded piece of music to indicate when a transition is about to occur. When transitions are well-planned and managed efficiently, students are less likely to become disengaged or distracted, which in turn reduces opportunities for off-task behaviour (AERO 2023c).
- **Ensure that all students are aware of school safety procedures, particularly in classes where practical components involve added risks (such as science or design and technology).** For example, at the start of each year, the food technology teacher can demonstrate and discuss safety procedures to follow when using the kitchen teaching and learning space. Students can then be reminded of the procedures and expectations throughout the year, as relevant to the demonstration or practical lesson being delivered. For example, when delivering a lesson involving hotplates, the teacher can remind students of correct procedures to follow during the demonstration. The teacher can then again remind students at the beginning of the practical lesson and monitor safety throughout the lesson.

Acknowledge positive behaviour, and respond to and manage disengagement and disruptive behaviours to support students to reengage in learning

- **Provide behaviour-specific, timely positive feedback to students who are following the classroom or playground rules.** For example:
 - “Ezra, I love how you just used your inside voice and manners to ask Aliyanah to share the pencils. Great job remembering our classroom rules!”
 - “Jack, I can see you’ve taken the initiative to clean up our reading corner and make sure all the books are packed away neatly without being asked. This is such a great example of being a team player and caring for our space. Well done!”

Positive reinforcement of behaviour in the playground might look like acknowledging a group of students who are playing inclusively and collaboratively.

Praise and acknowledgement that precisely identifies the relevant behaviour – in context and as close as possible to its occurrence – helps students understand exactly what behaviour is expected and encourages its repetition. Doing this publicly can reinforce student behaviour while reminding other students around them of what is expected (Wheldall et al. 2020). However, not all praise needs to be given publicly, and some students may prefer for praise to be given to them quietly or privately. For example, in a secondary school context, praise could be given to a student who deescalates an interaction with a peer by quietly saying to them, “I saw what happened there. You handled that situation with a lot of respect and self-control. Nice work.” Praise that is timely, genuine, informative and specific supports positive student behaviours, helps establish a positive and encouraging learning environment, and can strengthen teacher–student relationships (AERO 2023b).⁹

- **Use non-verbal communication to address low-level behavioural issues.** For example, redirect student behaviour by positioning yourself near a student who is not following classroom rules (where appropriate), strategically using classroom circulation, pausing to draw attention or using ‘the look’ paired with gestures like shaking your head or nodding when the behaviour in question improves (AERO 2023c). Simple gestures, such as putting a finger to your lips for ‘quiet’ or miming writing, can communicate the expected behaviour without speaking (AERO 2023c).

Non-verbal corrections are important, as they subtly address misbehaviour while minimising distractions for others. AERO’s [Non-verbal behaviour corrections: classroom management skill](#) video provides a range of examples of non-verbal corrections, what they can look like in both primary and secondary settings and how to use them effectively to proactively manage disengagement and maximise learning.

⁹ For more information on the importance of reinforcing expected behaviour and further examples of effective ways to do this, refer to the department’s [Positive behaviour support–reinforcement](#) (staff only) resource.

- **Use verbal corrections to address students who are disengaged or engaging in disruptive behaviour by calmly reminding them of expectations.** This gives students a clear opportunity to refocus (AERO 2023c). If possible, it is best to address verbal corrections to students privately rather than in front of the class. Using an encouraging tone and supportive, constructive language can help students re-engage (Leach and Helf 2016). Examples of non-confrontational, non-judgemental-statements could include:
 - “We’re all going to read now.”
 - “It’s time to start writing.”
 - “I can see you’re excited! Let’s focus on the task together.”
 - “Thanks for settling down. Let’s get back to our work.”
 - “I notice you’re finding this tricky. Let’s take a deep breath and try again.”
 - “Remember, it’s okay to ask for help when it’s hard to stay on task.”
 - “This is the part of the lesson where everyone gets to have a turn practicing what we’ve just been discussing. Let’s remember to let everyone be able to focus on their learning.”
 - “In our class, we listen and show respect when someone is speaking. This means we sit still and put down our pencils to show them they have our attention.”
 - “It is not safe to swing on chairs, and it is my job to make sure everyone is safe and ready to learn. Please return your chair legs to the floor.”

Make sure that students understand that when teachers manage classroom behaviour, they are doing this in the service of learning. A caring, consistent and firm approach when responding to and managing disengagement or disruptive behaviour is best. In culturally diverse classrooms, this approach supports teachers to build authentic relationships, value their students’ cultures and backgrounds and maintain high expectations. All students are at school to learn, and teachers guide, direct and manage the rules, norms and expectations for behaviour to make sure this can happen (McDonald 2023).

- **Explain the consequences to a student when they are being disruptive or unsafe.** For example:
 - “Sasha, it’s important to respect everyone’s right to learn, including yours. Right now, the class is working quietly on their writing task. If you continue to be disruptive, I’ll need to ask you to move to a quieter spot at the front so you can focus better and avoid further distractions. I want to support you in showing you can meet these expectations – can you work with me on this?”

Framing consequences as opportunities for learning and restoration – rather than purely punishment – fosters a sense of fairness in students and helps rebuild relationships when expectations are breached.

It is important that consequences are fair and proportionate when behaviour doesn't meet expectations, and that consequences are consistent with the whole-school approach. If the student reengages with learning, acknowledge the decision they have made and reaffirm the appropriate behaviour. If the student still refuses to follow directions, follow the school's behaviour procedure to seek additional support. This is important because consequences are only effective if consistently applied across the whole school (AERO 2023c).

- **Where appropriate, engage in timely and respectful conversations with students who are disengaged or being disruptive to seek to understand any underlying causes.** Such conversations should take place out of earshot of the student's peers – for example, in a quiet area of the classroom or at the end of class. Using open body language, a calm tone and open-ended, empathetic questions can support a non-threatening interaction, help foster trust and open dialogue aimed at providing support to the student.

Understanding students and their behaviours is central to providing tailored supports that complement existing practices without lowering expectations for any student (Meyer et al. 2021). It is important to identify why a student may be disengaged or disruptive because the reason for their behaviour can vary greatly and will shape what action is needed (CESE 2020b). Having strong, respectful relationships with students is the foundation for understanding them and their behaviours. In some cases, initiating early communication with families can also provide valuable insight into circumstances that may be influencing the student's behaviour (AERO 2023b).

While teachers and leaders are not expected to determine the underlying causes of all behaviours, the department's [Understanding behaviour](#) webpages provide information about factors that influence behaviour. This information can help teachers to identify risk factors, enhance student resilience and support pro-social behaviour, while recognising that some situations may require additional expertise or support beyond what a teacher or school can manage alone.

School leaders are key to creating and sustaining safe and orderly learning environments across the school

School leaders play a crucial role in implementing effective classroom management strategies that foster safe, orderly, positive and inclusive learning environments across the school and create a stable and predictable environment for everyone. By aligning policies and practices, school leaders can create consistent and supportive conditions for classroom management that benefit both students and staff (CESE 2020a; Richardson et al. 2023).

In NSW, the Student code of conduct provides the framework for establishing a whole-school approach for classroom management. The Student code of conduct sets out expectations for all NSW public school students and emphasises high standards of respect, responsibility and safety. It also outlines behaviours that do not meet these expectations. Consistent whole-school messaging helps students to understand expectations in different situations and supports consistent and fair implementation of rules and consequences. This will be reflected in the School behaviour support and management plan (SBSMP) and published on the school website. Department resources such as PBL can assist school leaders with materials and practices to support the explicit teaching of social, emotional, behavioural skills and expectations.¹⁰

As part of the care continuum, whole-school proactive and prevention approaches focus on creating and maintaining safe and respectful learning environments for all students (NSW Department of Education 2025a).¹¹ These approaches involve explicitly teaching expected behaviours, and should be applied consistently across stages and key learning areas. This may involve making sure that all teachers delivering creative and performing arts lessons implement the same consequences for students disrespecting or damaging instruments, tools or props. School leaders can consider what systems to put in place to ensure classroom management procedures apply consistently across each subject area (for example, food technology, textiles, timber, metal).

For students requiring early intervention, it is recommended that schools have different ways to respond to students who show early signs of low-level behaviour issues. These responses can include teaching students what behaviours are expected, using preventive strategies, applying logical consequences and seeking advice or support when needed. Students with highly complex and challenging behaviours, including students with disability, may need comprehensive systems of support that require regular reviews in consultation with families, school staff and other professionals (NSW Department of Education 2025a). School staff are not expected to manage highly complex and challenging behaviours alone. Schools can access additional services through their local Team Around a School (🔒 staff only).

Sustained improvement in behaviour management is more likely when teachers and school leaders work together, and when leaders create a school culture where all teachers feel comfortable and encouraged to seek support whenever needed. School leaders play a crucial role in enabling this (Bennett 2017; AITSL 2021; Winn et al. 2021).

10 Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) is an evidence-based framework that brings together the whole school community to contribute to developing a positive, safe and supportive learning culture. The framework assists schools to improve social, emotional, behavioural and academic outcomes for children and young people. When PBL is implemented with consistency, teachers and students have more time to focus on relationships and classroom instruction.

11 The care continuum facilitates the implementation of a whole-school, prevention-focused and positive approach to behaviour support to meet the needs of all students. Students may require different types of intervention delivered in different ways along a continuum of care.

One of the ways in which school leaders can facilitate opportunities for staff to work together is by ensuring that time is made available for developing and establishing procedures, processes and systems. Although time is often limited, facilitating even brief, dedicated periods for staff to work together can be beneficial. Leaders can create opportunities for sharing experiences, discussing challenges and developing collective strategies for managing student behaviour. This can include dedicated sessions during staff development days or short ‘bite-sized’ professional learning in weekly briefings. Structured time to share experiences and co-design routines leads to a more consistent and predictable approach across the school.

To aid the effective implementation of effective classroom management strategies, schools can invest in professional learning for teachers in all aspects of classroom management (Hirsch et al. 2021). This can be done by providing tailored mentoring programs, offering professional development workshops on behaviour management and culturally responsive teaching, and creating opportunities for peer observation and feedback. The department’s [Behaviour professional learning](#) webpage provides modules about classroom and behaviour management. The department’s [Aboriginal Education and Communities](#) webpages can assist with professional learning to support and improve cultural responsiveness. Providing professional learning opportunities for beginning teachers is especially important, to support them in developing the necessary skills to create effective, inclusive, safe and well-managed classrooms. The department’s [Classroom management – supporting colleagues with refining their classroom management practice](#) (🔒 staff only) resource provides experienced teachers and school leaders with tools for supporting a colleague with refining their classroom management practices. Professional learning is most effective when it focuses on practical strategies that can be applied immediately, enacted by modelling, rehearsal and feedback (Peddie et al. 2024). For example, teachers could practice giving clear directions or using non-verbal cues in a low-stakes setting before applying them in the classroom.

When considering professional learning opportunities, it is important for school leaders to take into account the school context and needs. For example, teachers in regional, rural and remote locations may have added barriers to access professional learning in person due to challenges with class coverage, resourcing and geographical distance. School leaders may consider tailoring professional learning to teachers in these geographical locations, especially for early career teachers who may need additional support. For example, professional learning content might focus on skills for teaching composite classes or connecting curriculum to the local community and context (NSW Department of Education 2025b).

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) has an extensive suite of classroom management resources

AERO has produced a suite of classroom management explainers, practice guides and skill resources based on a synthesis of relevant research evidence and guidance from researchers and practitioners. AERO's [Classroom management resources: user guide](#) describes these 3 types of resources and how they can support teachers to develop, refine, or refresh their practice:

- **Classroom management explainers** provide summaries of the evidence for classroom management, explain the key principles and describe how they are enacted in practice.
- **Classroom management practice guides** provide step-by-step guidance for effectively implementing and refining evidence-based practices, as well as checklists for effective practice.
- **Classroom management skill resources** support teachers in refining necessary classroom management skills. They include definitions for the elements for success for each skill.

School leaders can use these resources when reviewing and refining whole-school approaches to classroom management. They can also use them to support teachers to reflect on and refine their practice and skills, and to support conversations, mentoring or other collaborative approaches aimed at improving classroom management.

The department has curated a list of these resources on the [Classroom management – Australian Education Research Organisation \(AERO\) resources \(🔒 staff only\)](#) webpage. This includes a [Classroom management – professional learning facilitation guide](#) to help school leaders provide professional learning to staff to support a whole-school approach to classroom management.

Other What Works Best 2025 resources on collaboration

- [Evidence guide – Chapter 6: Classroom management](#)
- [Illustration of practice – Classroom management at Plumpton High School](#)

Additional resources

- Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) (2026) [What Works Best – Key practices for positive student behaviour](#)
- CESE (2022) [Strong strides together – meeting the educational goals for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students](#)
- NSW Department of Education (n.d.) [Classroom behaviour management resources on the Universal Resources Hub \(🔒 staff only\)](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2025) [Behaviour professional learning](#)

- NSW Department of Education (2025) [Classroom management – practice guides for supporting students with diverse needs](#) (🔒 staff only)
- NSW Department of Education (2024) [Behaviour support toolkit](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2024) [Student Voice Through Yarning](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2023) [Amplifying voice and agency in students with disability](#) (PDF 280 KB)
- NSW Department of Education (2023) [Classroom practice](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2023) [Cultural inclusion](#)
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (2022) [Advice for beginning teachers working in remote settings](#)
- AITSL (2022) [Building a culturally responsive Australian teacher workforce](#)
- AITSL (2022) [Indigenous cultural responsiveness self-reflection tool](#)
- AITSL (2017) [Positive learning environments](#) [video]
- AITSL (2017) [Classroom management techniques](#) [video]
- AITSL (2017) [Modern Australian Dinner](#) [video] – a teacher reflects on, and demonstrates the core elements of what she sees as the essential components of effective classroom management

Reflection questions

Teachers

- How do I develop and maintain positive relationships with students, their families and communities?
- How do I develop and maintain a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students, particularly in practical subjects?
- How do I explicitly teach rules, routines and expectations? How do I know if students understand them, and how can I best support them to do so?
- How do I incorporate student voice in the development of classroom rules and routines?
- Do I create inclusive learning experiences so that all students can engage with lesson content and experience success? How does my lesson planning support the implementation of individual students' [planning and pathway documentation](#) (🔒 staff only)?
- How well-structured are my lessons? How might I plan for challenges – both anticipated and unforeseen – in the classroom?
- What strategies do I use to prevent, identify and respond to student disengagement and disruptive behaviour?
- How often do I provide students with positive feedback?

- How could I better manage unsafe behaviours in my class? Who could I collaborate with to make plans for managing unsafe behaviours?
- What factors, within my control, support or impact my students' classroom engagement within and beyond the class (that is, in the broader community)? How could I build on these for positive engagement?

School leaders

- What strategies are in place to provide consistent structures and predictability for learning across classrooms in our school? How do they account for factors within and beyond the school's control that could support or impact classroom engagement?
- What consistent rules and expectations are in place to prevent and respond to disengaged and disruptive behaviour at our school? How can I make sure these are communicated effectively and consistently across the whole school? Are these reflected accurately in our School behaviour support and management plan (SBSMP)?
- What opportunities are provided in our school to strengthen teachers' classroom management skills and strategies?
- How do I support and promote the development of social and emotional intelligence among my staff?¹²
- How do I create an environment in my school that honours and supports the visibility, inclusion and active participation of all members of the school community? What opportunities might there be to collaborate with students, families and our community to do this?
- How do I support teachers in our school to ensure that students with additional learning and support needs are provided with more structure and guidance in their learning?
- How am I supporting and promoting physical, psychological and emotional safety for students and staff?
- How can I better support beginning teachers to effectively manage classrooms (for example, through mentoring relationships, or communities of practice with other beginning teachers)?

¹² The School Leadership Institute's [social and emotional intelligence self-reflection tool](#) (staff only) for middle leaders can be used to identify strengths and areas for development.

References

- Archer AL and Hughes CA (2011) *Explicit instruction: effective and efficient teaching*, Guilford Publications.
- AERO (Australian Education Research Organisation) (2023a) *Classroom management explainer: positive teacher–student relationships*, AERO, AERO website, accessed 1 May 2024.
- AERO (2023b) *Classroom management practice guide: building positive connections with all students*, AERO, AERO website, accessed 1 May 2024.
- AERO (2023c) *Effectively managing classrooms to create safe and supportive learning environments*, AERO, AERO website, accessed 1 May 2024.
- AERO (2024) *Supporting self-regulated learning*, AERO, AERO website, accessed 25 June 2025.
- AITSL (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership) (2021) *Classroom management: standards-aligned evidence-based approaches*, AITSL, accessed 9 September 2025.
- Bennett T (2017) *Creating a culture: how school leaders can optimise behaviour*, UK Department of Education, accessed 14 October 2025.
- Bostwick KCP, Martin AJ, Collie RJ, Burns EC, Hare N, Cox S, Flesken A and McCarthy I (2022) 'Academic buoyancy in high school: a cross-lagged multilevel modeling approach exploring reciprocal effects with perceived school support, motivation and engagement', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 114(8):1931–1949, doi:10.1037/edu0000753.
- CESE (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation) (2020a) *Classroom management – creating and maintaining positive learning environments*, NSW Department of Education, accessed 11 June 2024.
- CESE (2020b) *Supporting students' sense of belonging – every student is known, valued and cared for in our schools*, NSW Department of Education, accessed 11 June 2024.
- CESE (2021) *English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) effective school practices*, NSW Department of Education, accessed 25 June 2025.
- CESE (2022a) *Everyday resilience – What Works Best in practice*, NSW Department of Education, accessed 11 June 2024.
- CESE (2022b) *Understanding attendance – a review of the drivers of school attendance and best practice approaches*, NSW Department of Education, accessed 11 June 2024.
- CESE (2024a) *Supporting students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to flourish – What Works Best in practice*, NSW Department of Education, accessed 1 May 2024.
- CESE (2024b) *Making sense of belonging*, NSW Department of Education website, accessed 6 February 2025.
- Evertson C and Weinstein C (2006) 'Classroom management as a field of inquiry', in Everston C and Weinstein C (eds) *Handbook of classroom management*, Routledge, New York.
- Hepburn L, Beamish W and Alston-Knox CL (2021) 'Classroom management practices commonly used by secondary school teachers: results from a Queensland survey', *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 48(3):485–505, doi:10.1007/s13384-020-00402-y.
- Hirsch SE, Randall K, Bradshaw C and Lloyd JW (2021) 'Professional learning and development in classroom management for novice teachers: a systematic review', *Education and Treatment of Children*, 44(4):291–307, doi:10.1007/s43494-021-00042-6.
- Korpershoek H, Harms T, de Boer H, van Kuijk M and Doolaard S (2016) 'A meta-analysis of the effects of classroom management strategies and classroom management programs on students' academic, behavioral, emotional and motivational outcomes', *Review of Educational Research*, 86(3):643–680, doi:10.3102/0034654315626799.
- Leach D and Helf S (2016) 'Using a hierarchy of supportive consequences to address problem behaviors in the classroom', *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 52(1):29–33, doi:10.1177/1053451216630288.
- Lemov D (2021) *Teach like a champion 3.0: 63 techniques that put students on the path to college*, 3rd edn, Jossey-Bass, New Jersey.
- Martin A, Burns E, Collie E, Bostwick K, Flesken A and McCarthy I (2022) 'Growth goal setting in high school: a large-scale study of perceived instructional support, personal background attributes and engagement outcomes', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 114(4):752–771, doi:10.1037/edu0000682.

- Marzano R, Marzano J and Pickering D (2003) *Classroom management that works: research-based strategies for every teacher*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria.
- McDonald T (2023) *Teaching behaviour: how classroom conduct can unlock better learning* [PDF 1,287 KB], Centre for Independent Studies, accessed 30 May 2025.
- Meyer K, Sears S, Putnam R, Phelan C, Burnett A, Warden S and Simonsen B (2021) 'Supporting students with disabilities with positive behavioral interventions and supports in the classroom: lessons learned from research and practice', *Beyond Behavior*, 30(3):169–178, doi:10.1177/10742956211021801.
- NSW Department of Education (2023) *Student voice through yarning*, NSW Department of Education, accessed 24 November 2025.
- NSW Department of Education (2025a) *The care continuum*, NSW Department of Education website, accessed 30 May 2025.
- NSW Department of Education (2025b) *Education in regional, rural and remote NSW: a scan of the evidence* [staff only], NSW Department of Education, accessed 20 October 2025.
- Oliver R, Wehby J and Reschly D (2011) 'Teacher classroom management practices: effects on disruptive or aggressive student behavior', *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 4:1–51, doi:10.4073/csr.2011.4.
- Peddie B, Kelly M, Greengard T, Whiting C and Richardson S (2024) *Foundational classroom management resources handbook*, AERO, accessed 30 October 2024.
- Richardson S, Kelly M, Whiting C, Peddie B (2023) *Effectively managing classrooms to create safe and supportive learning environments: discussion paper*, AERO, accessed 11 June 2024.
- van der Kleij F, Taylor-Guy P and Rogers C (2023) *School improvement tool: literature review*, Australian Council for Educational Research, doi:10.37517/978-1-74286-613-0.
- Wheldall K, Wheldall R and Merrett F (2020) *Positive teaching for Australian primary classrooms: Effective classroom behaviour management*, MultiLit Pty Ltd.
- Winn CS, Cothorn TL, Lastrapes R and Orange A (2021) 'Teacher self-efficacy and principal leadership behaviors', *Education Leadership Review*, 22(1):17–35.
- Wong HK and Wong RT (2018) *The first days of school: how to be an effective teacher*, 5th edn, Harry K. Wong Publications.

High expectations

Explicit teaching

Effective feedback

Using data to inform practice

Assessment

Classroom management

Wellbeing

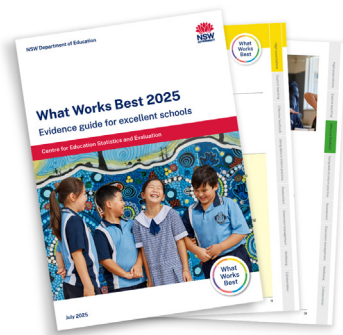
Collaboration

Access the full suite of What Works Best resources

What Works Best 2025 is a suite of resources for teachers and school leaders that outlines 8 effective practices that are known to improve student learning and wellbeing:

- high expectations
- explicit teaching
- effective feedback
- using data to inform practice
- assessment
- classroom management
- wellbeing
- collaboration.

The resources can be used individually or in conjunction with one another to implement evidence-based, quality teaching and learning practices and inform school excellence planning.



The What Works Best 2025 – Evidence guide for excellent schools provides an overview of the evidence that underpins each of the 8 themes.



The What Works Best practical guides translate evidence into practice by providing teachers and school leaders with practical ideas for implementing each of the themes in their classrooms and schools. The guides unpack not only ‘what’ should be done to successfully implement a theme, but also the ‘how’ and ‘why’.



The What Works Best illustrations of practice provide teachers and school leaders with examples of how some of our great schools from across NSW have implemented the themes.

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

GPO Box 33, Sydney NSW 2001, Australia

✉ info.cese@det.nsw.edu.au

🌐 education.nsw.gov.au/cese

🌐 yammer.com/det.nsw.edu.au

Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

