

FREE REPORT

How to Succeed With The Noisy Class



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Hello everyone

I've put together this little report to help you succeed with your most challenging groups of students.

Succeeding with a difficult group of students isn't a pipe dream. I believe any teacher can do this if they employ certain **key strategies** both in and out of lessons. Teachers I have taught the 'Needs Focused Classroom Management' and 'Take Control of the Noisy Class' systems have reported *dramatic* transformations in the way challenging students respond to them and I'm 100% confident I can help you achieve similar results. This short report is a slimmed-down version of the full [Take Control of the Noisy Class](#) resource pack.

*"Thanks you so much, by following what you have already proved to work, I am now asked on a regular basis to cover the teacher in year 6, who earned themselves the title **"The Class From Hell"** especially when they have someone other than their regular teacher. You will be pleased to know that nick name is a thing of the past thanks to your inspiration."*

Hazel Loughran, Distance Learning Customer

How do I know I can teach you these things? Because I've been exactly where you are now and know how it feels to be walked on in the classroom.

Like you, I left teacher training fresh, keen and eager to teach. I was totally convinced I would make a difference in the hearts and minds of the young people I was about to teach and I was proud to be part of this most noble and rewarding profession. Captain, my captain? Tell me about it!

But those dizzy dreams were cruelly followed by despair, frustration and stress... as I began to experience the reality of students who simply **didn't want** to be taught. I was working in a referral unit for students who had been thrown out of mainstream school and it was hard. *Very hard.*

When I arrived there I was shocked to see students literally running wild through the corridors, slamming doors, ripping books, screaming and shouting abuse, running into the car park and throwing stones at the building. (Remember that film Gremlins? Well, my first thought was that somebody had fed these kids after midnight!) And all of this was happening **during lesson time**. The staff had *no* control whatsoever; the head teacher was in despair - and worst of all in my widening eyes, I had just signed a permanent contract!

I used to go home in the evenings in a rage, so angry that these students could get away with the things they did, furious that there seemed to be no way of dealing with them. They didn't respond to staff who were *pleasant* to them and they laughed in the faces of staff who tried to discipline them. *Nothing* seemed to work.

I couldn't sleep. I became bad tempered at home and all my conversations with friends centred around the horrors I was facing at work on a daily basis. I became a bore and for several months I was actually *broken* - resigned to the fact that I *didn't* have what it took to work in tough schools with tough kids. My dream was over.

Fast forward a few years and my life had become very different. I became the teacher I had always wanted to be. My students loved me and they loved my lessons. My reputation as a skilled classroom manager was spreading and I was enjoying *tremendous* success with some of the most damaged, vulnerable and challenging students in today's schools. I *loved* my job. How did this change come about?

The school I had been working in all those years before had been placed in 'Special Measures' before I took the post, and when this happens money is literally *thrown* at the school for training and development in order to raise standards. This meant I enjoyed several years of the most thorough and in-depth professional training any teacher could hope for in the field of behaviour management.

It was a tough few years but I consider myself so fortunate for that experience. I believe I learned more in five years than I would have done in thirty-five years had I stayed in mainstream education.

Since those early years I have worked in many educational settings and finished full time teaching three years ago as the deputy head of a small special school for students with severe behaviour problems. I now run a business providing behaviour management training solutions to teachers, lecturers and parents all over the world through online resources and live workshops.

In this short report I want to give you a small taste of the kind of solutions we provide by giving you some strategies for one of the most common difficulties faced by teachers in today's tough classrooms... **how to settle and succeed with noisy, challenging groups of students.**

*"We were delighted to be able to get Rob Plevin in to work with our **Teach First** participants. He has an excellent reputation within the sector and he certainly didn't disappoint!"*

From the start his dynamic approach captivated the group and they were enthralled throughout. It wasn't only the lively

engaging style that won over the participants though. Rob was dealing with crucial issues relating to behaviour management that were high on their list of concerns about entering teaching in some of the most challenging schools in the country

He covered these issues thoroughly without pulling any punches and still worked wonders in increasing the participants' confidence. We will be inviting Rob back on every possible occasion to work with all of our participants and trainees. I cannot recommend him highly enough.

If you want to watch someone in complete control of his topic area and audience then get him in. He makes a real difference."

**Terry Hudson, Regional Director 'Teach First'
Sheffield Hallam University**

Let's begin...

1. Take Control at the door

One of the first things I notice when I'm coaching teachers who struggle with a challenging class is that they fail to establish control *before* the lesson actually starts. This is a *big* mistake because if a group of noisy, out-of-control young people are allowed to fall into the classroom, pushing, shoving, shouting and messing around, they are going to enter the room feeling as if *they* are in control.

From a psychological point of view they are going to be entering the teacher's space on *their* terms - flouting the teacher's rules for acceptable behaviour. Once this imbalance of power has been established it is *very* difficult for the teacher to regain control and get the group to settle down.

So, the first step in succeeding with a tough group is to take control at the door, and the *manner* in which this is done is crucial.

You can't get control by just barking orders at this group and then expect them to sit up and listen like well trained dogs. Yelling at them will only give them extra ammunition and excuses to answer back. Standing with stern expression will just create hostility.

A difficult group needs to be calmed down *gradually*. Once they're in a more relaxed state in which they are ready to listen, you can tell them what to do with a better chance of them actually *doing* it.

Here are two ways to get students to settle down at the door:

i) Make general, non-confrontational statements as to the behaviour you want to see rather than confrontational rants about things you don't want to see.

Confrontational: "STOP TALKING AND STAND AGAINST THE WALL, NOW!"

Non-Confrontational: "There are still some people shouting and messing about. We can all go in as soon as everyone is standing still without talking. Thank you Simon for standing quietly, and you Carly, thank you. Thank you Steven for settling down. Thank you John. This group is nice and quiet - thank you girls. Let's settle down now over here. Thank you Nathan, nice to see you ready to go in to the lesson. We're just waiting for a few others now, we'll go in as soon as everyone is quiet."

Statements like this should be repeated a few times, calmly and easily settling the group down.

ii) Chat with individuals and small groups of students.

Spending a few minutes mixing with students, walking in between groups and chatting informally with individuals, can work wonders in settling them down. It also gets them used to hearing your voice and seeing you in control and comfortable in their presence.

Teachers who are comfortable chatting about last night's television, the latest blockbuster, football scores and current fashions tend to find students respond to them in the classroom much more than those who try to maintain an air of superiority and don't bother interacting.

2. Get them in the room

Now that the students are starting to settle down, get them into the classroom.

In the full resource pack, I explain the process in detail for taking control of *extremely* difficult groups of students at the door and getting them in your classroom with minimum fuss and disruption. But in this short report let's assume you are working with a *moderately* difficult group – one in which at least *some* of the students do actually follow *some* of your instructions.

The process for getting *these* students into the classroom could go something like this:

i) Give the instruction to line up.

"You all need to line up behind (insert student's name) now please."

You could also add a time limit and/or make the instructions more explicit:

"By the time I reach zero you need to be standing in a line facing the door, with your left shoulder touching the wall in total silence. Five... four... three... two... one... zero."

ii) Direct your next instructions only at those students who have done as you asked.

It's far easier dealing with a small group than a large group so in this next step we separate them:

"Ok, you people come to the front please. You've done as I asked, thank you, so I need to speak to you separately."

And then give them very clear instructions as to what you want them to do:

"You're going to go in the room and sit in your allocated seat." (Have a seating plan in place.) "There is some starter work on the board which you need to get on with in silence. You people have shown that you can follow instructions so I'm relying on you to be sensible enough to be in the room on your own. If anyone starts talking or messing around I'll bring you straight back out OK?"

Right, away you go quietly in, and thank you all of you for being so mature."

Have work ready for them to complete. The work should be relatively simple – ie, it shouldn't require any input from you, they should be able to just get on with it quietly.

TIP: Have the work/instructions written up on the board so that they know EXACTLY what to do and add the following sentence to give the activity importance. (If you don't so this, some students will view this work as nothing more than a 'filler' or a waste of time and will end up off-task):

"You have ten minutes to complete the task. If it isn't completed in this time you will have to finish it at break/after school."

iii) Let them in the room in single file but...

...be prepared to bring back anyone who runs to their chair, pushes someone, starts talking etc.

After going through this process you will be left with the students who either *didn't hear* you the first time, or *chose* not to. Repeat the instruction to these students and you'll find that a few more will now be ready to line up and enter

the room because they have seen the first group of students go in. Repeat steps ii) and iii) and then admit these students.

You will then be left with a handful (if you're lucky) of students who obviously aren't ready to settle yet without further input from you - you have very effectively filtered out most of the trouble-makers. Were you to allow all these students to drift into the room without this filtering process you would have great difficulty starting the lesson.

The students you're left with now obviously need a little more attention. Some may need reassurances (those who often find the work too difficult or those who feel uneasy in the presence of other members of the group for example); some may need cajoling; and others need to be calmly reminded of the rules and consequences.

Again, in the full resource pack we cover a wide range of responses to students who are presenting most, if not all of the behaviour problems you're going to encounter with a challenging group – including *'what to do when they won't follow your instructions'* and *'how to deal with students who won't settle at the door'*. For now let's pretend you've got them all in the room. The next step is to get the lesson started.

3. Have a good lesson start

Here are two ways to start a lesson:

i) Fun Starter

Fun starters can be curriculum-related but non-academic starters are also useful to gain the attention of a particularly difficult group with entrenched negativity towards lessons. They can also be used as fill-ins for times you just want to inject some light-hearted fun into the lesson and keep emotions positive.

Here's an example of a non-academic fun starter:

Fun Starter: 'Film Quotes'

Number of people: Unlimited.

Materials: None, but take care with Eddie Murphy films.

Time: 5-10 minutes.

Purpose: To re-focus a group who have lost interest with an activity. To provide some light relief following intense working period or to inject humour into the lesson.

Directions:

1. Write on the board or say "Which film is this from?"
2. Write or say a quote from a famous film and invite students to guess the film. Here are a few to start you off:

"I'll be back."

(The Terminator)

"My Mama always said, 'Life was like a box of chocolates; you never know what you're gonna get.'"

(Forrest Gump)

"Adrian!!"

(Rocky)

"A census taker once tried to test me. I ate his liver with some fava beans and a nice chianti."

(The Silence of the Lambs)

"My preciousssss"

(The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers)

"I'm (the) king of the world!"

(Titanic)

"Braaaaiins"

(any zombie film)

Adaptations:

Get pupils to spend a few minutes writing down quotations from films on separate pieces of paper. Put the slips of paper in a hat so that you have a supply of quotes to choose from.

Here's an example of a curriculum-related Fun Starter:

Fun Starter 'What's in the Bag?'

Number of people: Unlimited.

Materials: Prop related to the lesson content together with a suitable bag or container.

Time: 10 minutes.

Overview: A subject-related prop is hidden in a bag or container. Students have to guess what's inside. Younger pupils may enjoy this as a regular routine ("What's in the bag today?") but older pupils also enjoy it as an occasional warm up. It relies on intrigue and falls flat if the prop doesn't live up to the hype which the game naturally generates.

Directions:

1. Write on the board 'You have 20 chances to guess what's in the bag'.
2. Explain to pupils that they can volunteer to ask a question to try and determine what's in the bag. Questions can only be those which have a 'yes' or 'no' answer, ie they can ask "is it blue?" but not "what colour is it?"
3. Write their questions down on the board one at a time to keep track of the total number asked and to avoid repeated questions. Answer them "Yes" or "no" and put a tick or a cross next to the question. (I always like to have two noise effects for right and wrong answers to add to the humorous atmosphere - a kazoo or duck call for wrong answers and a bugle horn or quiz master's bell for right answers. Be sure to carry an even-tempered duck if you choose this route.)
4. Tension mounts once their questions are into double figures as they realise they might not succeed - particularly when you tell them they will get extra homework if they don't get the right answer!

NB: These activity examples are taken from our HUGE lesson resource pack [Needs Focused lessons](#).

ii) Settled Starter

This is the type of activity to have ready for your students if you are sending them into the room a group at a time as described above – they need an activity which requires minimal explanation, something they can just get on with.

On each desk you could have a quick topic-related puzzle, a review quiz of last lesson's work, a cloze exercise or some text copying work. Nothing too difficult – you don't want to confuse them because they'll spend ten minutes asking questions instead of settling down. Choose something simple (and preferably light-hearted or fun) that requires no explanation or fuss.

4. Maintain Lesson Flow

Ok, let's quickly recap. We've settled the students OUTSIDE the room so that they are more likely to follow our instructions. We've got them in the room under control and we've made a start to the lesson. If we leave it at that the lesson will soon drop off the boil. To prevent this happening, a difficult group needs to be occupied at all times – we have to maintain the flow of the lesson.

Here are a few tips for keeping students engaged throughout the lesson:

- Have a lesson outline on display and tick off tasks as they are completed:
 - ✓ Starter – 5 mins
 - ✓ Video – 10 mins
 - ✓ Teacher demo – 5 mins
 - Pair work – 20 mins
 - Game – 10 mins
 - Plenary – 10 mins

- Have frequent structured breaks – brain breaks, stretches, energisers, ‘serotonin’ breaks (jokes, YouTube funny videos) etc.
- Have a stock of alternative, ‘emergency’ activities on hand and be ready to change tasks if students start to become bored or frustrated.
- Use the room – move around the whole floor space, spending time with all students.
- Brief support assistants prior to the lesson on their specific role with individual students.
- Break down work into manageable chunks and give them short term individual work targets – ‘In the next ten minutes you need to complete the first three questions.’
- Include pair work and cooperative learning tasks – students enjoy working with peers.
- Include hands-on, kinaesthetic tasks.
- Avoid verbal/oral overload and teacher-talk by writing down instructions/criticisms or putting them on a presentation.

5. Re-establish control during the lesson

Up until now, in steps 1-4, we’ve dealt largely with *prevention*. Each of those steps was concerned mainly with *avoiding* problems by maintaining control and encouraging appropriate behaviour. But this is a ‘difficult’ class and we can’t expect to be able to prevent *all* problems from occurring. Sooner or later students will test us so we need to be ready with strategies to re-establish control when this happens.

This is an area I cover in great detail in the full version of ‘Take Control of the Noisy Class’, giving *specific*, targeted strategies for *specific* problems. It is beyond the scope of this smaller report to give detailed responses for the many behaviour problems presented by a difficult group of students. Instead I’m going to give you some generic responses for dealing with problems as they arise. Before I do that though there are two important things to remember when dealing with ALL incidents of misbehaviour in the classroom...

i) What you allow, you encourage



Sometimes there is so much going on in the classroom that we might miss a note being passed around, we might miss an incidence of low level bullying and we might miss items being stolen or broken. Our eyes can't be everywhere at once and it is understandable that some incidents go unnoticed. The thing we have to remember is that every time a student gets away with not bringing a pen to class, every time they arrive late and we don't say anything, every time they interrupt us... we are effectively encouraging them to do the same again.

And it doesn't stop there because it's not just the perpetrator who will repeat the action. Other students who witness these behaviours going unchallenged will feel they can do the same, so a lack of vigilance can create an environment where 'anything goes'.

Once the problems start to take root, they escalate and get harder to stamp out. It is much easier dealing with problems when they are small and before they become established.

The way to stop this is obviously to be vigilant and to jump on any problem as soon as possible. If you see two students starting to bicker give them a warning or get them separated - quickly. If a student is starting to get wound up offer him some support - quickly. Challenge rule breakers *every time* (even those students who are prone to retaliate fiercely) and make sure you are present in every area of the room. Be constantly on the move, teach from each corner, walk round the tables and speak to *all* your students. Let them know this is *your* room, that you really *do* have eyes in the back of your head, and you are aware of *everything* that is going on.

ii) Keep a record of repeat offenders

It is imperative that you keep an accurate record of individual students who are causing problems in your lessons. In even the worst of classes, there are seldom more than 5 or 6 main culprits who are responsible for the bulk of the trouble so this needn't be as much work as it seems and the benefits far outweigh the extra work involved.

All you need is an A4 page in your teaching file for each student and in every lesson you record exactly what they say and do to disrupt the class. You then have a vital document which can be used for evidence should you need to speak to parents or senior staff about this child.

Being able to quote specific examples such as:

*"On 17th March, lesson 2, Steven called Mark a 'fat ****' without provocation and threatened to stab him with a pencil."*

... is far more helpful and professional than a vague complaint such as:

"Steven annoyed Mark".

Here are five generic strategies for dealing with behaviour problems...

i) Assess the reasons behind the behaviour

Effective responses towards behaviour problems should focus on the reasons *behind* the resulting behaviour, not the behaviour itself. Ranting and raving at a student who isn't working when the *reason* he's not working is because *he don't understand* the work is not going to make him concentrate.

When confronted by disruption or misbehaviour in the classroom a good place to start looking for possible reasons is with the work you've given.

Is the task too simple? Too difficult? Too dull? Too text-heavy?

Change pace, seating or adjust the activity if necessary.

ii) Give them a responsibility

Consider giving responsibilities to some of the ring-leaders – eg, ask them to quieten their group/area down for you:

"Paul, the group respond very positively to you, they look up to you. I need to use that strength you have, so would you mind helping me by quietening your table down for me?"

It's surprising how responsive very challenging students can be when requests are phrased in this way.

iii) Offer support

Often students are badly behaved because they are afraid of failure and simply don't want to look stupid in front of others. I'm not saying this is always the case – they may be acting out of revenge, for fun, or because it gives them a sense of power - but in any circumstance offering support is a positive first response. An offer of help is totally non-confrontational and is therefore one of the best ways to deal with a student who is attempting to escalate a situation. It also strengthens the staff/student relationship.

'I can see you've made a start but do you need me to explain that bit again for you? Would it help if I let you start on one of the other questions first?'

'Do you need to get a drink or some fresh air?'

'I can see you're getting angry about this, why don't you go and sit over there quietly for a few minutes and then let me know when you need some help?'

'Is there anything I can do that will make this easier for you?'

Sometimes the behaviour of our most difficult students is a cry for help and showing sensitivity to their needs, rather than assuming they are being belligerent, pays dividends.

iii) Be quick to find something to praise

We are often too quick to look for (and find) faults but the quickest way to make lasting positive changes to their behaviour is *always* with positive comments. When was the last time you did something to please someone who was constantly nagging you? If they make a slight improvement be quick to jump on it and 'catch them being good'.

iv) Consistently follow school behaviour plan and stepped consequences, eg:

- Move them to an isolated seat
- Take time off them at break/after school
- Notify them of a letter/phone call home
- 'Park' them in another class
- Send them to senior staff

NOTE: When moving up through a hierarchy of consequences it's best to give a clear, fair warning and remind students of the consequences of their actions should they continue. Also try to give 'take up time' to follow your instructions rather than standing over them expecting immediate compliance. With audience pressure, that's a tall order.

"John if you don't make a start now you'll be... (insert consequence of choice). Is that really what you want? I'm going to go and help Sasha but I'll be back over in 2 minutes and I'll expect to see that you've completed that first one. OK?"

v) Try addressing individuals rather than the whole class.

It's easier to get control of a small challenging group than a large one. We need to 'divide and conquer'.

Work on small groups and individuals. Walk round table groups and desks and speak to individuals, calming them down, solving minor problems such as lost equipment, jackets left on etc and explaining that you need them to be settling down.

And finally...

Before I leave you allow me to tell give you what I consider to be **the most important tool for gaining respect from your students**, regardless of how difficult they may seem right now. Putting your efforts into this one area will help you succeed more than any other strategy I know of.

A few years ago I was talking with a colleague after delivering training at his school. He (let's call him John) told me a story about one of the teachers at the school, (she can be called Janet for the purpose of this story and for the benefit of any Terry Wogan fans), who was struggling badly with one particular group of students; she just couldn't get them quiet.

John was Janet's head of department and he often had to pass through her room when she was teaching in order to get resources from the main store cupboard. He told me that on one particular day he happened to be passing through when Janet was teaching her most challenging group.

The students were literally out of control – screaming, shouting and totally ignoring Janet's cries to settle down. John didn't normally intervene unless asked to do so but he felt this situation was only going to get worse so he walked round the room speaking quietly to some of the students for a few minutes. Without the need to raise his voice, a hush gradually descended on the room and the students returned to their seats facing Janet; happy faces, ready to work.

John quietly left the room and went about the rest of his day without giving the incident a second thought.

At the end of the school day, when the students had left the premises, Janet caught John in the staffroom...

"John, how do you do that? How the hell do you manage to get that group so quiet so easily?"

I'm sure she didn't expect the reply he gave her. She wanted a magic bullet, a sure-fire strategy, a new way of speaking, a secret hand signal or a never-fail script to follow. But I hope she understood the power of what he said and I hope you do too, it's priceless. It is the single, most important tool *any* teacher can develop and it leads to an enviable level of respect from your most challenging students. This is where the real rewards in teaching lie.

"I'll tell you exactly how I do it, there's no magic to it....

I *know* these kids. I've spent time with them. I go to support them playing football for the school at weekends, I chat with them in the corridor, I regularly speak to their parents on the telephone, I visit their homes, I've taken them on trips, I sit with them at lunch time. The door to my room is always open to them, they know they can come and chat when something's wrong and I make a point of catching up with them whenever I can."

Building positive relationships with your students won't solve *all* behaviour problems but it will certainly reduce incidents and will make dealing with problems much, much easier. Students are, after all, far more likely to listen and respond to a teacher they trust and respect.

I hope you have found this little report useful and wish you success with your most challenging students. If you want to access the full version it's available here:

<http://www.needsfocused.com/noisyclass/noisyclass.html>

Rob



Rob Plevin is a behaviour management specialist and big-brained, relentless optimist. He runs the website www.behaviourneeds.com and presents training courses internationally on working successfully with challenging young people for teachers, lecturers, care workers, prison officers and parents.

His live courses and INSET sessions are frequently described as '**unforgettable**' and he has been rated as an '**outstanding**' teacher by the UK's Office for Standards in Education.

"I found Rob Plevin's workshop just in time to save me from giving up. It should be compulsory - everybody in teaching should attend a Needs-Focused workshop and meet the man with such a big heart who will make you see the important part you can play in the lives of your most difficult pupils."

Heather Beames, Teacher, London course attendee

To book **INSET** or to enquire about **live training** please visit the help desk at

<http://www.behaviourneeds.com/helpdesk>

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