

Classroom management explainer

High expectations for student behaviour

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Effective classroom management creates safe and supportive learning environments for all students. This explainer is part of a suite of foundational resources for beginning teachers, teachers working in new environments, or experienced teachers who want to refine or refresh specific elements of their classroom management practice. They can be used to individually reflect on and refine one's own practice, or as shared resources to support mentoring and other collaborative and whole-school approaches to improving classroom management.

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)'s guidance is based on a [synthesis](#) of the most rigorous and relevant research evidence and guidance on classroom management from a wide range of research experts and expert practitioners across Australia and internationally.

This explainer focuses on high expectations for student behaviour, describing how maintaining high expectations for all students can positively impact their behaviour and readiness to learn. Related explainers focus on [positive teacher–student relationships](#), [teaching routines](#) and [establishing and maintaining rules](#).

High expectations for behaviour are standards of conduct that promote positive student behaviour, expressed in daily [routines](#), [rules](#) and behaviours in the classroom. Examples include: expecting that students be on time, line up quietly outside before [entering the classroom](#), [raise their hands when they have a question](#), quietly put away equipment and follow the teacher's instructions when transitioning between activities. High expectations for behaviour should be consistently demonstrated by all teachers in all classrooms as part of a whole-school approach.

High expectations for student behaviour are best supported by [positive teacher–student relationships](#) built on understanding and mutual respect (Stronger Smarter, 2017). These relationships help teachers enact and have high expectations *for* students, rather than *of* them, supporting students to meet the high expectations (Stronger Smarter, 2020). Students will need varying levels of support to meet high expectations, and some may require different point-in-time expectations as they develop their skills.

To establish and maintain high expectations for behaviour:

1. Observe effective teachers to gauge and align your own expectations with those around you.
2. Clearly articulate your own expectations for behaviour and how you want students to demonstrate them, ensuring they align with the school's behaviour expectations.
3. Model and explicitly teach these expectations (for example, routines and rules) to students.
4. Address behaviours that do not meet the high expectations set for the class (for example, routines and rules), providing support to students when needed. It can be challenging, but ignoring or overlooking these behaviours can lead to a decline in expectations over time.
5. Regularly reflect on your own behaviour to ensure you are consistently modelling high expectations yourself.

Adapted from Bennett (2020)

The importance of high expectations for student behaviour

Behaviour expectations are important because they provide students with clear guidelines for how to behave in the classroom and create a positive and productive learning environment. When expectations are clear, students feel more secure because they know where they stand (DeNobile, 2021). Having high expectations for students' behaviour offers them hope of success, shows they are cared for, and supports achievement for all (Bennett, 2020; McDonald, 2019).

When teachers hold high expectations for students, it can lead to increased effort from the students (Goss et al., 2017). If a student isn't completing a learning task because they say it's too hard, instead of demanding its completion and outlining the consequences for non-compliance, teachers can discuss these concerns and provide the support needed so the student can complete it successfully (Sarra et al., 2018).

Setting high expectations for students increases the likelihood that students will meet or exceed those expectations as they encourage students to learn, take responsibility for their actions and understand the consequences of their behaviour (Australian Government Department of Education, 2023; Wong & Wong, 2018). High expectations are also associated with positive outcomes, such as improvements in behaviour, self-esteem, motivation, attendance and academic achievement (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation [CESE], 2020).

Establishing and maintaining high expectations for behaviour

To establish and maintain high expectations for behaviour and ensure students know what's expected of them, it's important to provide students with predictability, structure and support. Students may be unsure about teacher expectations at the beginning of the school year. Establishing expectations for behaviour early is vital, as it supports students to be cooperative and comfortable as quickly as possible (De Nobile, 2021).

Setting high expectations with students requires similar planning to teaching classroom rules and routines (McDonald, 2019). It's important to teach and reinforce high expectations every day, not only

by telling students to do something, but showing them how to do it and allowing them opportunities to practise (Bennett, 2020). 'I believe you can do it' must be used in conjunction with 'And here's how you can do it' (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Bennett, 2020).

Students are quickly able to distinguish between intended boundaries and actual boundaries in the classroom (Bennett, 2020). When monitoring and reinforcing high expectations for behaviour, it's important to recognise student effort, [acknowledge and praise specific behaviours](#), and view mistakes as learning opportunities to teach students how to meet expectations in the future (McDonald, 2019).

Scenario

This scenario provides a practical example of the evidence summarised in this explainer. It provides insight into one teacher's approach to maintaining high expectations for all students to create a predictable, safe and supportive learning environment.

Ms A. notices that her students' behaviour varies from day to day. Some days, students are meeting expectations, while on others, they're less consistent and more prone to disruptive behaviour. She knows her students and their families quite well and isn't aware of anything outside school, or at school, that could be influencing their behaviour this way.

Ms A. decides to ask an experienced colleague to observe a lesson and provide feedback. After the lesson observation, her colleague congratulates Ms A. on establishing clear classroom routines and rules. Her colleague also suggests that what's missing is consistency in the way she maintains the classroom routines and rules.

While initially taken aback, Ms A. asks her colleague to elaborate. Her colleague highlights a few instances where Ms A. was not maintaining high behaviour expectations for all her students, such as when she corrected the behaviour of students near the front of the room, but not those at the back, and when she addressed off-task behaviour the first time it occurred, but not subsequent times. Ms A.'s colleague observes that students seem to perceive it as a matter of chance as to whether they're reminded about specific behaviour expectations in any given lesson.

Her colleague asked about when Ms A. felt her students' behaviour was more likely to 'slide'. On reflection, Ms A. realised it was when she was tired in the afternoons, sometimes near the end of the week, and when she was busy with other tasks. Knowing there would always be times she felt tired or had competing priorities, Ms A. realised she needed to consistently maintain high expectations for her students' behaviour so they were aware of clear boundaries. This was going to be hard work and probably take some time to turn around, but she could see the outcome would make the effort worthwhile.

For more practical guidance

AERO has developed a suite of resources to support teachers and school leaders to refine or refresh their foundational practices in creating safe and supportive learning environments through effective classroom management. You can read the [Classroom Management Resources: User Guide](#) for an overview of these resources and suggestions for their use.

Further reading

Refer to the following publications to support your implementation of high expectations for behaviour:

Bennett, T. (2020). *Running the room: The teacher's guide to behaviour*. John Catt Educational. (pp. 205–211)

De Nobile, J., Lyons, G., & Arthur-Kelly, M. (2021). *Positive learning environments: Creating and maintaining productive classrooms*. Cengage. (pp. 89–93)

Lemov, D. (2021). *Teach like a champion 3.0*. Josey-Bass. (pp. 419–424)

McDonald, T. (2019). *Classroom management: Engaging students in learning*. Oxford University Press. (pp. 118–122)

Wong, H. K., & Wong, R. T. (2018). *The first days of school: How to be an effective teacher* (5th ed.). Harry K. Wong Publications. (pp. 49–57)

References

Archer, A. L., & Hughes, C. A. (2011). *Explicit instruction: Effective and efficient teaching*. Guildford Press.

Australian Government Department of Education. (2023). *Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper*. <https://www.education.gov.au/quality-initial-teacher-education-review/resources/teacher-education-expert-panel-discussion-paper>

Bennett, T. (2020). *Running the room: The teacher's guide to behaviour*. John Catt Educational.

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE). (2020). *Classroom management: Creating and maintaining positive learning environments*. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/education-data-and-research/cese/publications/literature-reviews/classroom-management>

De Nobile, J., Lyons, G., & Arthur-Kelly, M. (2021). *Positive learning environments: Creating and maintaining productive classrooms*. Cengage.

Goss, P., Sonnemann, J., and Griffiths, K. (2017). *Engaging students: Creating classrooms that improve learning*. <https://grattan.edu.au/report/engaging-students-creating-classrooms-that-improve-learning/>

Lemov, D. (2021). *Teach like a champion 3.0*. Josey-Bass.

McDonald, T. (2019). *Classroom management: Engaging students in learning*. Oxford University Press.

Sarra, C., Spillman, D., Jackson, C., Davis, J., & Bray, J. (2018). High-expectations relationships: A foundation for enacting high expectations in all Australian schools. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 49(1), 32–45. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jie.2018.10>

Wong, H. K., & Wong, R. T. (2018). *The first days of school: How to be an effective teacher* (5th ed.). Harry K. Wong Publications.