

Reducing the use of restrictive physical intervention at The Garden School

A case study showing how BILD is supporting organisations to reduce the use of restrictive practices through Positive Behaviour Support (PBS)



Introduction

The Garden is a primary and secondary special needs school in Hackney for pupils with autism and severe learning disabilities. They have a current pupil population of 129 pupils aged 4-19 years. The Garden opened in September 2013 when Downsview and Horizon schools merged. Behaviours of concern exhibited by children at The Garden typically fell into the categories of self-harm (eg head banging, biting) and harm to others (eg hitting, pushing, punching, scratching, biting, throwing). The school uses Approach as a behaviour support framework for physical intervention supported by a general low arousal approach.

The current provision at The Garden includes:

- a bespoke curriculum which addresses the core challenges of students who have autism, ie difficulty with social communication, flexible thinking and understanding and regulating emotions

- specialist pedagogical and assessment strategies which address the learning and communication needs of this group of students, eg TEACCH, PECS, SCERTS, attention autism and intensive interaction
- a tailored learning environment which includes highly structured and low arousal classroom spaces and a total communication approach

The attainment of both primary pupils and those on entry is assessed as being between P4 and P8 on the P scales. Secondary pupils include those assessed as higher ability.

Admission to the school is through the statutory assessment process whereby The Garden School is named on a child's education, health and care (EHC) plan (previously Statement of Special Educational Needs).

Context for working with BILD

Long before The Garden's inception, both Downsview and Horizon schools had a lot of experience at managing pupils with extremely challenging behaviour which would often result in the use of restrictive physical intervention in order to keep everyone safe. The Senior Leadership Team in 2011 (which oversaw both schools) sought advice from the British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD) and commissioned an audit of all behaviour-related practices and documentation. In 2012 two schools merged to create a federation and the building was redesigned to meet the needs of the changing profile of the pupils. The Garden's willingness to place a lens on challenging behaviour has continued since then. BILD completed another full audit of The Garden's practices in April 2015 which was followed up with training in Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) for the entire staff body. In 2017 a further follow up evaluation was commissioned.

The Garden said this about working with BILD:

"The significant financial cost of commissioning BILD to provide these services might be seen by some schools as a luxury that they cannot afford. The Garden views it as an investment that has had a direct impact on pupils' quality of life by reducing, over time, the need for them to display challenging behaviour in order to get their needs met."

BILD's work with The Garden

Agreeing the initial aims

The aims of the review in 2015 were agreed by Sarah Leitch, Development Manager Positive Behaviour Support for BILD and Pat Quigley, the Head. The primary aims and methods of the review were to reduce the number of incidents and restrictive interventions that were being used in response and the number of injuries (particularly bites) that were being received by staff.

Aims	Methods
Evaluate the quality of recording, reporting and monitoring of behavioural incidents	Twenty serious incidents reports were reviewed
Audit the quality of behaviour support plans and the behaviour support planning process within the school (sampling and process)	Audit of 20 randomly selected plans using the checklist in <i>Ensuring Quality Services</i> (2014) McGill. Information about staff understanding and compliance from staff interviews (13)
Evaluate the level of understanding and attributions of staff about the cause and purpose of behaviour	Two methods were used for this. The Thoughts about Challenging Behaviour Questionnaire (completed by 82 staff) and a directed face to face staff interview (completed by 13 staff)
Review of the use of the extensive sensory facilities.	Audited through direct staff interviews (13) and discussion with other staff
Develop staff knowledge and understanding of a Positive Behaviour Support approach	Planned after the review
Review of relevant policy	Desk review and questions to staff

The results

Following the initial review it was found that The Garden has a very child centred ethos and there was a general understanding that behaviours of concern are purposeful, and that for children with autism, sensory differences are an important consideration. All the staff understood that a consistent approach is a key factor in supporting the students successfully but there was inconsistency in following behaviour support plans and some confusion about the definitions in restrictive practices. There is a strong leadership and appears to be a genuine commitment to improvement in practice through PBS. The Garden leadership team emphasise the critical nature of strong leadership:

“Strong leadership has been at the heart of The Garden’s journey to minimise its use of restrictive physical intervention (RPI). We believe that the culture of any organisation has to come from the top which is why The Garden’s senior leadership team is very public in its commitment to reduce and eliminate the use of RPI.”

The school reduced its use of restrictive interventions and is using proactive strategies and de-escalation methods to minimise the impact of behaviours of concern. There was a low arousal environment and good data collecting systems in place.

However, the knowledge about PBS could have been spread more widely across the service. BILD recommended the importance that more staff understood the functions of

behaviour and how to determine this through data collection and observation, to enable them to design functionally equivalent interventions that can be designed to promote the development of new skills in children as well as minimising the likelihood of behaviours of concern. The policy needed to be reviewed to reflect the invigorated approach.

The Garden accepted the recommendations BILD made in 2015 and commissioned BILD to deliver a programme of whole school PBS training. Staff also received training in understanding basic functional assessment to allow them to concentrate their efforts on preventing behaviours of concern through proactively addressing the function the behaviour served more precisely:

“Prevention is one of the key aspects... a lot of time and energy is spent in trying to establish the function that challenging behaviours serve for the individual pupil. Without this information, interventions are going to be little more than guesswork, and could potentially do more harm than good.”

“In our context, the most pertinent example relates to pupils who bite (given that approximately 20% of our pupils have displayed this behaviour at some point during the academic year). For some of these pupils, biting is driven by a sensory need which is why many of them respond positively to having access to a ‘chewy tube’ (and which, in turn, reduces their need to have to bite people in order to experience this feeling of deep pressure in their jaw).”

Selected evidence

The effectiveness of The Garden’s work can be shown in the data collected on prevalent behaviours and the use of restrictive physical interventions. For the academic year (2016-2017) the Garden has seen the following trends in their data:

- 49% reduction in the number of bites sustained by both staff and pupils from 2014-2017 (from 118 down to 60)
- Overall there has been a 69% reduction in the use of restrictive physical interventions (97 down to 30). This represents:
 - 12 pupils (out of a pupil population of 129) being kept safe using a RPI on at least one occasion (representing 9% of pupils)
 - 117 pupils have not had to be kept safe using An RPI (representing 91% of pupils)

The reduction in the use of RPIs have lead The Garden leadership team to implement a change in strategy towards staff training:

“Over the past few years, in response to BILD auditing and our own data analysis, we have significantly reduced the number of holds and techniques taught to staff.”

Ongoing work

The Garden is committed to continue to progress and develop in their delivery of PBS. The next aims, following a further audit in 2017, is for them to continue workforce development, refreshing policies, procedures and systems for reviewing their work, these include the following activities:

Workforce development and staff competence

- Further development opportunities for the PBS lead
- Identifying PBS champions for each classroom – these champions would act as the eyes and ears of the PBS lead and can be trained to collect data and check staff competence – effectively spreading the PBS lead’s expertise across a wider area
- Utilising a staff competence model to check competence to deliver non-physical support strategies that include preventative and developmental strategies (such as teaching alternative behaviours)

Policy and procedures

- Producing a child friendly version / family version of policies
- Ensuring a consistency of the terminology in policies, eg *behaviour management* to *behaviour support*
- Testing staff knowledge of the policy in a fun and interactive way rather than just getting them to sign after they have read it

Reviews

- The Garden’s learning will be shared with families and other schools. They will work on some individual case studies that are developed to show the positive impact of PBS working in practice
- The data collected on time away (break) will be extended to include monitoring of this becoming child initiated rather than adult initiated as a measure of success for this proactive developmental strategy

Developmental work

- The school has developed a high level of understanding of triggers and preventative working and will now focus on more developmental work – teaching functionally alternative behaviours and measuring the success of this – the aim of this work is that it will help the young people as they transition into less autism friendly environments

- The Garden will be giving more thought about how to improve levels of young people's participation in their support plans

The Garden is a great example of how preventative working, a team approach and skilled and mindful staff can minimise the occurrence of incidents and maximise learning opportunities for these young people.

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