The implementation of a school wide positive behaviour support (SWPBS) model at an independent special needs school in Southwest London.

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ABSTRACT: The following case study focuses on a school and the partnership working between the school and behaviour analysts from BeyondAutism. Adding a behaviour analyst to the teachers, educational psychologist, and later clinical psychologist as part of the interdisciplinary team (IDT) of the school increased the scope of the support that could be provided to the learners. The processes involved in establishing the school wide PBS model will be detailed as well as the evidence base for school wide PBS. It will then focus on the roles and responsibilities of the different members of the IDT, what was done, how it was done and most importantly, why it was done.

Introduction

Dysart School is a special needs school in southwest London, there are approximately 150 learners with Autism/severe learning difficulties (SLD). The school is part of Orchard Hill College Academy Trust and has in house speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and a nursing team. Dysart received an outstanding Ofsted inspection in 2018.

The school was looking to enhance its mental health and wellbeing team and their understanding of behaviours that challenge. Following knockbacks from CAMHS, and with no access to an SEN psychologist, the school recognised that they needed to take action themselves to ensure that the learners needs were met. An interdisciplinary team was set up at the school and met on a monthly basis as the mental health and wellbeing plus team (MHWB+). The team consisted of the head teacher, assistant head teacher and wellbeing lead, an educational psychologist from the local authority and a behaviour analyst from BeyondAutism.

In addition to the monthly meetings of the MHWB+ team, the educational psychologist had regular visits and conducted class and learner observations with the head or assistant head. To implement the SWPBS model across the school, weekly visits were conducted by the author, a certified behaviour analyst (UKBA (cert)). The visits focused on class/learner observations, feedback with class teams, staff training in situ and feedback/planning with the in-house PBS team. The feedback/planning with the PBS team involved regular contact and discussion around the systems and culture that the school were trying to establish and shift across to a school wide PBS model.

The focus of this case study is to detail all the processes involved in establishing a school wide PBS model in a special needs school, establishing a timeline of the implementation to date as well as looking forward to what is still needed. As will be explained in the literature review, SWPBS is an established model, but not that widely used in the UK. Considerations will be made for what a SWPBS model could look like for other schools in the UK, (SEND schools and mainstream schools).

Literature Review

School-wide positive behaviour support is a well-established model for improving the teaching and learning environments of schools. This is done through a systems framework to establish a social culture and implement behavioural supports (Sugai, 2014). This model is based on the science of behaviour analysis, and the focus of the analysis in this case is not an individual learner, but the school as a whole. The ultimate aim is increased academic engagement and achievement, and this is reached by increasing the school's capacity to prevent behaviours that challenge, to actively teach desired or 'socially significant' behaviours and to respond quickly to patterns of behaviours that challenge (Sugai, 2014).

George Sugai is a behaviour analyst based in America, and the main focus of his work has been the development of PBiS which is another name for School Wide PBS. PBiS is described as '"tiered framework for supporting learners' behavioural, academic, social, emotional, and mental health'" (2023). The key features of this approach are a combination of systems, data and practices, with an over-arching focus on culture and equity. The ultimate goal is to improve outcomes. Learner support is organised into tiers, with tier 1 being the universal support for all learners in the school, tier 2 being targeted support for some learners in the school and tier 3 being intensive and individualised support for a few of the learners who require it. Over the last 20 years, this approach has been introduced to over 25,000 schools in the US.

School wide PBS approaches are used outside of the US, for example Park et al (2019) discuss the implementation of school wide positive behaviour support in six special schools in South Korea. They found that there were positive outcomes in terms of behaviour of learners and perceptions of the efficacy of the approach and classroom management skills for teachers. In the UK there is evidence of PBS and applied behaviour analysis (ABA) approaches being used successfully in special education settings,

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but there is not a clear use of the model of school wide PBS in schools.

Beqiraj et al (2022) conducted a systematic review of positive behavioural supports for children and young people with developmental disabilities in special educational settings. Overall, they found that of the 30 studies included, 28 demonstrated significant decreases in behaviours that challenge and increases in alternative behaviours, if that was part of the intervention. They focused on the components of positive behaviour support as one of the measures of the studies included in the systematic review.

The components are split into 3 areas: values, systems, and science and technologies. For values, the primary characteristic is a proactive constructional approach; for systems the primary characteristic is 'supportive contexts and environment' and for science and technologies, the primary characteristic is 'understanding the functions of behaviour'. These components guide the approach of school wide positive behaviour support and should be visible in all interventions.

The component of systems (supportive contexts and environment) is demonstrated clearly in the work of McGill et al (2020) and the focus on 'capable environments'. McGill et al (2020) address the significant issue of behaviours that challenge and the subsequent breakdown in placements, use of restrictive practices and removal of individuals to costly out of borough placements. As Carr (2007, p. 4) stated, "the central independent variable in PBS is systems change". By making more 'capable environments, behaviours that challenge are reduced, and quality of life is improved.

The twelve characteristics of capable environments are as follows: positive social interactions; support for communication; support for participation in meaningful activity; provision of consistent and predictable environments which honour personalised routines and activities; support to establish and/or maintain relationships with family and friends; provision of opportunities for choice; encouragement of more independent functioning; personal care and health support; provision of acceptable physical environment; mindful, skilled carers; effective management and support and finally, effective organisational context (McGill et al, 2020). These

characteristics can be used in the form of a checklist when assessing settings for the implementation of a school wide PBS approach.

As mentioned by Beqiraj at al (2022) above, there are a number of settings in the UK where positive behaviour supports are being implemented, but not necessarily under the banner of school wide PBS. The only study included in the systematic review by Beqiraj et al (2022) that was a group study (pre and post intervention within groups design) was that of Pitts, Gent and Hoeger (2019). The study evaluated the effectiveness of an ABA intervention for a group of autistic children (with additional learning difficulties) in a UK SEND school (similar to the school that is the focus of this case study). They found that learners of all ages acquired essential skills which reduced their barriers to learning and enabled them to learn more effectively.

What has been done to date?

BeyondAutism have had input and worked with Dysart School since 2020. To begin with this input was limited in scope by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns and limits on additional staff visits in schools. Over the last 3 years the input has increased in scope and frequency of visits. The following section details the key things that were implemented, how they were implemented and what impact they have had.

PHASE 1

Mental Health and Wellbeing plus meetings (MHWB+)

The mental health and wellbeing plus team meetings were rolled out in September 2020, following work done to set the team up in the previous academic year. This was done by the school to meet the needs of the learners who had additional behaviours that challenge and/or mental health needs that did not meet CAMHS thresholds or due to the lack of CAMHS capacity to support. A member of CAMHS was part of the meetings initially (before leaving the Borough), alongside the head teacher, assistant head teacher (mental health lead), senior educational psychologist for the Borough and the behaviour analyst from BeyondAutism.

Minimum classroom standards

The first step that was required for the MHWB+ meetings, and the whole school wide positive behaviour support approach to work was for the school to establish minimum classroom standards. This worked to help establish a solution focused approach across the school, with the aim of preventing all concerns being brought to the MHWB+ meetings/referred to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) of the school, which would be unmanageable in a school of over 150 learners.

The standards cover things such as use of daily schedules, supporting learners communication and use of Zones of Regulation for supporting emotional regulation. See the appendix for a full list of the minimum classroom standards. The initial aim was for all class teachers to establish this culture within classrooms, with support from senior leaders via observations, feedback and additional training sessions where required. This first step meant that the majority of the learners were having their needs met within the resources of the classroom, but those that were not would be

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flagged and extra support could be sought from the PBS team via the MHWB+ meetings.

Early years red flag behaviours

Another important first step in the process was to identify 'red flag' behaviours in the early years classrooms. By identifying these behaviours, the learners could be supported with early intervention proactively. The alternative would have been reactively supporting when they were older, behaviours that challenge had been reinforced and become well established and their increased size and strength may have led to placement breakdown. The following 'red flag' behaviours were identified and monitored:

• No progress in establishing communication mode/ rejection of existing communication systems.

• Behaviours that challenge related to demands in the environment (academics/following the schedule or school routines).

• New self-injurious behaviour occurring.

• Avoidance of social interaction with adults and/or peers.

• Staff notice that transition are regularly physically supported or visual supports are elaborate and hard to update and maintain.

PHASE 2

In early 2022 the level of input provided by BeyondAutism was increased. A new behaviour analyst took over the input and began to attend the monthly mental health and wellbeing plus meetings. They also conducted bi-weekly observations in school, focused on 2 or 3 classes and a few learners from those classes. This work consisted of observations, in situ training with staff, class meetings and discussion with the class teacher. Planning was also done over the summer term with the assistant head (mental health lead) to plan ahead for the academic year 2022/23 and the implementation of a tiered system of support across the school.

PHASE 3

Tiered system of support

As detailed in the literature review above, a tiered system of support is a key feature of a school wide PBS model. At the end of the

summer term (July 2022), the school had categorised the learners in the school into 3 tiers of support. Those identified as requiring tier 1 support would receive it in the form of their essentials toolkit (the document that details the needs of the learner, see appendix for an example) and would not require additional support outside of what is available in the classroom. Those learners who required more than this (tier 2 support), would have additional input provided by the in-house school PBS team (the head teacher and 3 assistant heads, the emotional wellbeing practitioner and emotional regulation practitioner). This input would consist of the essential's toolkit and a simplified behaviour support plan. The learners that were identified as requiring tier 3 support would receive a full functional behaviour assessment. This could only be conducted by the behaviour analyst and consisted of a functional assessment interview (FAI) with the class team and caregivers, direct and indirect observation and data recording and analysis. The behaviour analyst would then create a full behaviour support plan for each of the learners, across the next academic year.

Data recording

Another key feature of the school wide PBS model and essential practice for all behavioural interventions is effective recording of data. For the tier 3 behaviour support plans, ABC data (Antecedent Behaviour Consequence data) was analysed and additional data recorded as required. Once the behaviour support plans were in place, the data switched to partial interval recording of the identified behaviours that challenge. This gives a picture of the daily occurrence of the behaviours and informs decisions that are made about the behaviour plans, e.g. if the behaviours that challenge are reducing over time or remain low, then the plan is working and no changes are required. If behaviours that challenge increase, then changes to the plan are required. This fundamental scientific approach is the foundation of a robust behavioural intervention, whether that is an individual intervention or a large scale, school wide intervention.

For the learners receiving tier 2 support, or learners at tier 1 that are identified as potentially needing more support, a process was established for recording ABC data. The class team would record 2 weeks of ABC data which would then be analysed by the in-house PBS team, with support from the behaviour analyst. They would then make recommendations which would be implemented, and an adapted ABC form would be provided to record another 2 weeks of data. At the end of this process, it would be clear if the recommendations had worked or if additional support was required from the behaviour analyst.

Conclusion

Prior to the input from BeyondAutism, many learners with behaviours that challenge had been supported. Adaptations were made to the learning environment, including the creation of a self-contained classroom/supported living area to support two learners with high levels of behaviours that challenge which led to them no longer being able to access the classroom. However, for one of the learners, the difficult decision was made to exclude them, as their behaviours that challenge were no longer at a level that could be supported in the current environment of the school.

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The senior leader of the school sought additional support to prevent further exclusions and to proactively support learners before they got to the point of unmanageable behaviours that challenge. One of BeyondAutism's key strategic objectives is to reduce school placement breakdown, and through the work done at Dysart School and the implementation of a school wide PBS model of support, the statistics on exclusions show that there have not been any further exclusions made by the school since the one mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Throughout this progress there is a lot that has be learnt, for example we could have gone straight to implementing the tiered system and behaviour support plans, not the ad hoc or less focused input across the 2 terms when the author first took over the support. There are also current processes that are still being established and adjusted as we go. For example, the methods of data collection and measures of fidelity that are still to be implemented.

Interventions of this scale are not quick and easy, shifting cultures within a school can take time and hard work from a lot of dedicated staff at all levels. From the external members of the IDT, the schools SLT and in-house PBS team as well as the teachers and LSA's supporting the learners on a daily basis. The statistics show the impact of what we have done, reducing placement breakdown and behaviours that challenge, all of which create barriers to the learners accessing learning and thriving which is our vision: to ensure autistic children and young adults access an education which empowers a life full of choice, independence and opportunity.

Appendices

Dysart school minimum classroom standards:

- Learners understand where they should be and what is happening next through the use of personalised daily schedules.

- Learners have communication modes established and are consistently used.

- The classroom environment supports the learner's communication.

- The learners have access to learning supports in the form of sensory supports, visuals and choices of support strategies such as movement breaks, weighted vest, OT programme, chewy tube etc.

- Are adults in tune with the learners to understand when supports are required for emotional regulation?

- The learners emotional regulation Support Plan are accurate, reviewed and followed consistently by all staff members.

- The learners pen portraits are accurate and reviewed regularly.

- Behaviours that challenge have been recorded and tracked through CPOMS and basic data collected.

- Zones of Regulation is embedded within the classroom relative to the age and stage of the learners.

- The learner's learning outcomes are assessed, prioritised and appropriate to their age and stage of development.

- CPD: Staff Mental Health and Well Being training has been attended.

- Do the class team understand what engages the learners?

- Are engagement needs being met – during sessions? During downtime?

- A planning and rota system is in place to enable all staff to be aware of their roles for each part of the day.

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My Environment
My Social Environment (Relationships)

My Dysart trusted adults:

Approach I would like you to use....
When I'm anxious....
When I'm calm....

My Physical Environment

My transactional supports for....
Making my day/activities/sessions predictable?
Transitions:
Learning:

My Sensory Environment

Movement Break...
When do I need it?
How do I request it?
My sensory sensitivities
Any adaptions/supports that I need due to my sensory sensitivities?
Sensory diet
Seating type/arrangement:

My home environment

Who do I live with?
What do I like to do at home?
Do I access any other settings?
Do I access home/school transport? If so what transactional supports do I need?

Uploaded by:
Date:
Please note: Any updates to Tiers 2 + 3 pupils members' models need to be agreed by the PBS team.

My Communication

My Communication stage: Social Partner.
How I communicate:
My communication system:

What is my symbolic understanding?

My Engagement

My values

What is important to me?

My Strengths

My Interests

What motivates me?

What and how do I like to play?

XXXX Essentials Toolkit

My Daily living skills

My Mobility info:

Specialised equipment:
My Continence skills/needs/support:
Any adaptions/supports that I need due to my medical conditions?
My Dressing skills:

My Eating and Drinking info:

My sleep habits:

My Wellbeing

Emotional regulation

How do I Self Regulate?
How do I stim?
When am I likely to need to stim?
How can you help me lessen stress?
Where do I always have access to for me to calm down and regulate?
Any adaptions/supports that I need if I'm having a bad day?
Emotional Literacy

How do I show my emotions?
Which emotions do I understand?
How can you help me develop my emotional literacy?
Do I use ZOR
Do I attend the Nest?

Please place the red star under any section where I need to know. Information can be shared by the Safeguarding team.

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