Computing classrooms present a number of unique behaviour management challenges



# BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT IN THE COMPUTING CLASSROOM

As a new academic year begins, **Neil Rickus** shares guidance on managing behaviour in computing lessons

**Pupils' behaviour is often cited as an area of concern for teachers, particularly those new to the profession, who might be working within a classroom environment for the first time. In this article we'll discuss the importance of managing behaviour, along with techniques to navigate your first lessons with a class, and look at how to address some of the unique challenges presented by the computing classroom.**

So, why should we manage behaviour? Pupils make greater progress when they are in an environment where they feel safe and able to focus on their learning, which leads to lessons being more enjoyable for both pupils and teachers. Teachers who are able to manage behaviour effectively are also likely to exhibit improved personal well-being and stay in the profession for longer. Furthermore, the UK's Department for Education outlines how good behaviour helps minimise bullying (**helloworld.cc/behaviour1**), while Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's chief inspector, recently described how good behaviour ensures parents can be confident in the support provided by a school (**helloworld.cc/behaviour2**).

## Initial lessons

During the first lesson with a class, classroom rights and rules can be agreed in conjunction with pupils. William Lau, in *Teaching Computing in Secondary Schools*, outlines how pupils have the right to learn and to be heard and respected. He discusses appropriate rules for the computing classroom, such as outlining the need to not wheel around on chairs or throw equipment around (**helloworld.cc/behaviour3**). As part of the first lesson, rewards and sanctions can be introduced, as well as a discussion of how these will be implemented during lessons. Seating plans can also be used from the first lesson, with pupils' prior attainment and learning needs used to determine their appropriate positions in the room.

The first lessons with a class are also a good time to establish the routines and procedures for the academic year ahead. While these should be in line with school policies, it is important that pupils are given ownership of how they are implemented, where feasible. Teachers should consider their context carefully, though: a small A level computer science

group, for example, is likely to have different routines and procedures to a large lower-secondary class. Regardless of the approaches chosen, consistent implementation helps to ensure all pupils are aware of the teacher's expectations.

Many teachers will have an activity for pupils to undertake as soon as they enter the classroom. In the initial lessons, these activities can be used to find out more about the learners in the class. However, tasks should be carefully chosen to set the tone for the year. While it may be convenient to spend time setting up accounts or undertaking file management tasks, having pupils complete an open-ended project that is inclusive and promotes creativity can help show what an engaging and enjoyable subject computing can be.

can form part of the class procedures and routines. Getting to the resources should be as simple as possible and follow the same steps each time, such as by using Google Classroom or Microsoft Teams. Consideration should also be given to how pupils will obtain physical items, such as printed resources and headphones, and how they will move around the classroom.

The reliability of technology means there will be occasions when a backup plan is needed. For example, offline resources might be required if the school's internet connection becomes unavailable, or paper copies of a presentation could be used if a room's display technology isn't working. A backup plan should therefore be carefully considered prior to each lesson and be readily available in the event of technology failure, which will enable it to be quickly put into place if needed.

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## Computing-specific challenges

The computing classroom presents a number of unique challenges to managing behaviour, which also need to be considered. As the class will often be seated in front of a computer, access to the device could be limited during teacher input or unplugged activities, which helps to keep pupils on the required task. Classroom management software can be installed to control machines, along with providing a range of other features to facilitate teaching (see the 'Classroom management software' box).

Pupils are likely to be accessing electronic resources regularly, so the process followed

Pupils having access to the internet in lessons can also lead to issues related to online safety. The teacher's expectations in this area can be reiterated each time pupils are using a digital device, to remind them of the appropriate behaviour.

## Excellent computing teaching

It is often considered that teaching engaging lessons, using appropriate pedagogical approaches, leads to improved behaviour in class. It is therefore important that teachers consider the methods they are using to make the subject accessible, with suitable scaffolding employed where necessary to ensure an appropriate level of cognitive load. For example, teachers might consider using shared programming activities, or allowing pupils to develop open-ended, creative projects based on their own interests (**helloworld.cc/behaviour4**).

With regards to the content taught in lessons, the requirements of all learners and their social environments also need to be carefully considered. In particular, the need to make computing culturally relevant is increasingly being recognised as important for pupils' engagement — see page 54 for more on this. The more relevant we can make our lessons, the more likely we are to see pupils engaging with the subject.

How do you manage behaviour in the computing classroom? Have you successfully implemented other approaches? Do get in touch on Twitter **@computingchamps**.


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## CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

Classroom management software enables computers in a room to be controlled by the teacher, which can help with behaviour management. Along with limiting access to a device, the software often has many other features, including:

- Displaying lesson slides on a pupil's screen
- Monitoring pupil activities on a device
- Easy distribution of web-based content to machines
- Sharing pupils' work with the class