

# MENTOR HANDBOOK

## B4 | BEHAVIOUR: DIRECTING ATTENTION

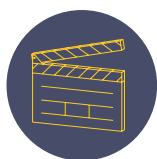
### STUDY

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR THIS MODULE

Your teacher can direct pupil attention and increase learning by understanding that:

- > Self-regulation and pupil motivation can affect how pupils direct their attention, which naturally wanders over time.
- > Proactively monitoring, modelling and reinforcing helps direct pupil attention and keep them on task.
- > When reinforcement is positively framed it makes pupils feel safe and creates a more productive learning Environment.
- > Teachers can redirect attention in the least intrusive ways. But if action taken by the teacher is sometimes clearly visible, pupils can feel that their teacher is more effective and experience a stronger sense of shared classroom values.

Get yourself into a strong position to mentor your teacher by working through the following:



**CLICK TO WATCH  
MODULE VIDEO**

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**READ THE EVIDENCE  
SUMMARY BELOW:**

#### TEACHING CHALLENGE

Ms Silva knows what she wants her pupils to do and communicates it clearly. However, during her expositions or when pupils are working independently, she finds that some pupils simply drift off and stop paying attention to her or the task. What could she do to keep her pupils focused for more of the lesson?

#### KEY IDEA

Attention naturally drifts and so teachers need to continuously monitor and actively direct pupil attention to maintain a classroom where all pupils succeed.

## ATTENTION WANDERS

Ms Silva has high expectations of her pupils. She regularly communicates these and keeps her instructions clear and concise to help pupils meet these expectations (Gathercole et al., 2016). However, even this does not guarantee that her pupils will continue to pay attention throughout the lesson.

It is natural for the mind to wander after a time, particularly in busy environments such as the classroom (Sweller et al., 1998). Attention is also influenced by pupil motivation. For example, where pupils believe they may be unsuccessful, they can end up avoiding a task, while prior experiences of success make them more likely to persist at similar tasks (Gutman & Schoon, 2013).

Whatever the reason, Ms Silva needs to recognise that pupil attention wanders, so this is something she needs to take responsibility for and direct as needed to keep her pupils learning.

## DIRECTING PUPIL ATTENTION

A variety of strategies can be used to direct pupil attention. These include:

- > **Modelling:** Showing pupils exactly what paying attention looks like.
- > **Reinforcing:** Acknowledging or praising pupils who are demonstrating good levels of focus, being specific about what they are doing to earn this recognition.
- > **Positively framing:** Saying what you want to see from pupils rather than what you don't want to see.

One useful distinction here is to appreciate the difference between praise and acknowledgement. Praise entails rewarding a behaviour that exceeds expectations, whereas acknowledgement entails showing that you have noticed a behaviour that meets expectations. Over-praising pupils who are merely following standard rules can inadvertently convey low expectations and hamper learning (Coe et al., 2014).

Pupil capacity to self-regulate their emotions and behaviour influences how well they can direct their attention towards specific tasks. No-one is able to completely self-regulate their attention at all times, and this ability varies between individuals. But self-regulation can be developed, improving pupils' abilities to learn effectively (EEF, 2017). In addition, our behaviour is influenced by that of our peers. The more pupils that are paying attention, the more others will be encouraged to do so (IES, 2008). Effective teachers take account of these factors to help their pupils focus by using, for example:

- > **Brief reminders:** Issuing a quick reminder of what is expected, using consistent language and non-verbal signals. "We're just waiting for one more person to face the front in silence, thank you."
- > **Private reminders:** Having subtle conversations with individuals when it is only a few who need support to stay focused. "Hi Jenny, let me know if there is anything you need to help you get started."
- > **Benefit of the doubt:** Communicating a belief that off-task behaviour is a result of enthusiasm for learning rather than purposeful disruption. "I know you are really keen to discuss this task with your partner but, to do a good job of it, first you need to put your pens down and face me."

## PUPIL PERCEPTIONS MATTER

Pupils tend to have a more positive classroom experience when they feel that their teacher is effective at managing the attention and behaviour of the class. This is important because pupils who have positive classroom experiences are more likely to feel wider life satisfaction and get better results. Pupils see effective teachers as those who (Rathmann et al., 2018):

- > Are aware of everything in class, instantly noticing when pupils aren't paying attention.
- > Manage to quickly re-involve pupils if they don't pay attention for a moment.
- > Have the class under control.

## CHANGE TAKES TIME

Explaining a classroom routine just once or delivering a set of instructions without follow up is rarely enough to create lasting classroom change. For high expectations to become embedded, teachers need to continually remind and reinforce (IES, 2008).

Reinforcement is more effective when it acknowledges positive behaviour more often than highlighting negative behaviour. Over time, this approach has been shown to increase academic engagement and focus (IES, 2008).

## NUANCES AND CAVEATS

Acknowledgement, praise and reminders are powerful teaching tools for directing attention. However, there are also times when teachers simply need to issue a sanction or escalate the issue in line with the school behaviour policy. For example, when pupils are being defiant, inhibiting learning or risking the safety of others (IES, 2008).

# SELECT

Before you observe, first select a **DEVELOPMENT AREA** to focus on. Next, familiarise yourself with the **FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREAS**, as you will zoom in on one of these during your observation. Finally, craft a **PRECISE TARGET** when you observe your teacher (examples are provided below).

DEVELOPMENT AREA	FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREA	EXAMPLE PRECISE TARGETS
Getting everyone on task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Teacher gets the whole class' attention before delivering instructions.</li> <li>&gt; Teacher ensures their instructions are clear by making them manageable and sequential.</li> <li>&gt; Teacher ensures pupils know they are accountable for following instructions by standing where they are visible to the class and checking they are following instructions.</li> <li>&gt; Teacher reminds pupils who are off-task what they need to do in order to get back on task.</li> <li>&gt; Teacher deals with off-task behaviour least intrusively starting with a non-verbal corrective gesture, e.g. putting their finger to their lips to remind the pupil they should be silent at this point in the lesson.</li> </ul>	
Positioning and checking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Teacher ensures they are able to see all pupils and explicitly scans the whole class.</b></li> <li>&gt; Teacher checks for and reinforces the behaviour they want from pupils and non-verbally corrects behaviours they do not.</li> <li>&gt; Teacher, with the support of a colleague, identifies when it is most useful to check all pupils' behaviour and which behaviours they are looking for.</li> </ul>	<p><b>If your teacher is...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Not doing it at all:</b> When you need to see all pupils and be seen, e.g. when checking their behaviour or delivering instructions, stand in a spot where you can view all pupils and they can all see you.</li> <li>&gt; <b>Doing it but needs some improvement:</b> Standing on a spot where you can view all pupils and they can all see you, check all pupils' behaviour by scanning across the whole class.</li> <li>&gt; <b>Doing it well, but needs some stretch:</b> Standing on a spot where you can view all pupils and they can all see you, make it obvious to pupils that you are checking all pupils' behaviour by exaggerating your body language, e.g. stand on tip-toes, widen your eyes and/or move your arm across the room to match your gaze.</li> </ul>
Positive narration and social norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Teacher, with the support of a colleague, identifies and names the positive behaviours they expect from pupils at each stage of the lesson.</li> <li>&gt; Teacher ensures that pupils know exactly what the behaviour expectations are so they can meet them.</li> <li>&gt; Teachers use specific, positive narration to normalise the behaviours they expect to see from pupils.</li> </ul>	

**RECORD YOUR THINKING HERE**

DEVELOPMENT AREA	FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREA	EXAMPLE PRECISE TARGETS
(select before observing)	(select whilst observing)	(select/write whilst observing)

# OBSERVE

Consider the following questions based on a short (approximately 15 minute) observation of your teacher.

What was your teacher's **previous** target? Are they meeting it? How do you know?

For the **DEVELOPMENT AREA** you are focussing on for this observation, what is your teacher already doing well?

Next, go to the previous page and select a **FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREA** to further zoom in on. Then select (from the examples) or write one **PRECISE TARGET** (bite-sized action) to coach your teacher on. You can choose to stick with the previous target if your teacher have not made enough progress yet.

How will you model the target to your teacher to show them what good looks like? What questions will you ask to check your teacher understands the model? For example, 'How it is different from your current practice?', 'What impact might it have on your practice and pupils?', 'What links can you see between the model and the module principles (below)?'

**Reminder: Your model should help your teacher develop their ability in some of the following:**

- > Getting pupils on task by giving them manageable, specific and sequential instructions.
- > Supporting behaviour expectations through positively narrating the behaviours they want to see and therefore highlighting positive social norms.
- > Positioning themselves so they can check pupils are following instructions and support pupils to remain on task by using least-intrusive reminders.

Next, meet with your teacher to work through the 'Feedback' stage of instructional coaching. See the guidance on the feedback stage in the appendices of the Mentor Handbook for support.

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## REFERENCES

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