The NBSS promotes and supports positive Behaviour for Learning through the provision of a systematic continuum of support grounded in evidence-based practice. The NBSS offers three levels of behaviour support to post primary schools:

- **Level 1:** School-wide Support
- **Level 2:** Targeted Intervention
- **Level 3:** Intensive, Individualised Support

This model of support draws extensively from Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports – PBIS, Response to Intervention- RtI and the Comprehensive, Integrated, Three-Tiered Model of Prevention – CI3T frameworks.

The integration of these frameworks offers opportunities to address the behavioural needs as well as the social, emotional and academic needs of students effectively, with interventions at different levels of intensity and support.

All work undertaken aims to promote positive behaviour and learning throughout the school by focusing on developing:

- **Behaviour for Learning Skills**
- **Social and Emotional Literacy Skills**
- **Academic Literacy, Learning and Study Skills**
- **Positive Health and Wellbeing Skills.**
Level 1: School-wide Positive Behaviour Support

Supporting positive behaviour and improving behaviour for learning at whole school level, means addressing and focusing on key elements of school-wide positive behaviour supports for all students.

1. Setting and agreeing expectations.
2. Stating clear rules and routines
3. Developing systems for acknowledging, encouraging and reinforcing positive behaviour.
4. Developing systems that are consistently used to respond to inappropriate behaviour, “with a simple recording system that allows the school to track, systematically and consistently any student’s behaviour that is of concern.” (NEWB, 2008, p. 49).
5. Developing structures and practices to ensure that all staff explicitly teach the school expectations and promoting systems around these expectations to maintain effectiveness and consistency.

School-wide Expectations

School-wide expectations are specific, positively stated behaviours that are desired of all in the school community, can be applied across multiple settings and that everyone strives to demonstrate at all times.

School-wide expectations:
- Should be in line with the school’s mission statement.
- Should be limited in number (3-5).
- Should be applicable across multiple settings e.g. classrooms, corridors, toilets, lockers, canteen.
- Should be supported and promoted by all school staff and taught to all students.

Embedding within the school culture the explicit teaching of school expectations will help to define the skills, characteristics and attitudes expected by all in the school community.

Rules and Routines

Rules are specific to particular settings such as the classroom, the science lab, the art room, the corridors or a specific event e.g. field trip. School rules describe specific behaviours and are observable and measurable. For example:

- Be on time.
- Put rubbish in the bin.
- Follow teacher instructions.
- Keep all four legs of your chair on the ground.

The explicit teaching of specific rules and routines will help to define for students what behaviours are required of them in different school settings.

What is the NBSS?

The National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) was established by the Department of Education & Skills in 2006 and provides support and expertise to partner post-primary schools on issues related to behaviour.

The NBSS is guided by the following key principles:
- Schools can make a difference in young people's lives.
- A whole school approach, founded on respectful relationships, is essential in promoting and supporting positive behaviours throughout the school community.
- Behaviour is intrinsically linked to teaching and learning.
- Inclusion is a core educational value.
- Good practice in schools is acknowledged and disseminated.

The work of the NBSS is carried out by a multi-disciplinary team comprising of a National Coordinator, Assistant National Coordinators, Regional Development Officers, Literacy Development Officer, Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists and a Research & Development Officer.
After the development of a new mission and vision in this school, it became apparent to the Positive Behaviour Strategy Team that the Code of Behaviour no longer fully represented how positive behaviour should best be promoted in the school. The following is a snapshot of how the school community reviewed and revised their Code of Behaviour.

After consultation with staff and NBSS personnel, a staff session on expectations, rules and routines for the classroom and corridors was held. This session was facilitated by members of the school’s Positive Behaviour Strategy Team and the NBSS.

Staff identified key expectations, rules and routines they believed were essential for the promotion of positive behaviour and the development of a consistent approach across the school. These were collated and a draft document was circulated to staff for further comment. This draft document was also brought to the Student Council and the Parents’ Association. Further expectations were added and routines simplified as a result of this. The final stage in the process involved consultation with the Board of Management.

The final document identified three key school-wide expectations which were then subdivided into four classroom rules and routines and five corridor rules and routines. These school-wide expectations were then explicitly taught to each class group over a two week period by subject teachers and tutors. The expectations, rules and routines were also produced in picture and poster format for each classroom and corridor. A student competition was held to choose the most vibrant, interesting and clear pictures and posters. The Art, English and Engineering departments and the Student Council took responsibility for the competitions, and prizes were presented at school morning assemblies.

The result of the process was improved behaviour across the school. Both staff and students noted the benefits of improved clarity regarding rules and routines. Additionally, teachers recorded a big reduction both in inappropriate behaviour and pupil-teacher confrontations in classes and around the school. Students who needed additional supports were also more quickly identifiable as a result of the initiative.

The successful review and revision of school expectations, rules and routines resulted in a belief that further school improvements were possible.

School-wide Expectations

Be Responsible
Be Respectful
Be Ready

Classroom Rules

Be Responsible
- Arrive on time
- Enter quietly
- Take your assigned seat
- Follow teacher instructions

Be Respectful
- One voice at a time
- Raise your hand
- Listen

Be Ready
- Have all materials for class
- Have journal on the table
This school's Positive Behaviour Strategy Team identified the start of class as an area where significant improvement could be made; the central aim was to increase teaching time by having an effective class start. NBSS personnel facilitated a workshop where staff shared their ideas. The ideas generated provided material for the Strategy Team to develop a five-point ‘Agreed Procedure for Start of Class’. This sharing of expertise also gave ample material for a 'Useful Tips Recommended by You and your Colleagues' resource that was developed and later distributed to staff as a pocket size, laminated card. The Strategy Team also consulted with the Student Council and a group of parents to gather their views and ideas.

A further one hour staff session was organised where the two brief documents on ‘Agreed Procedure for Start of Class’ and ‘Useful Tips’ were presented and agreed. In addition, a memo that outlined clearly the rules and routines in relation to non-school jackets, school tie and the wearing of earrings was finalised; this involved a tightening of the rule in relation to non-uniform jackets and a relaxation in relation to the other two items. The memo also stated how the changes would be communicated to students and parents/guardians i.e. through assemblies, Class Teacher/Tutor registration, letters home and one to one explanations for some students.

In the final term staff were asked to briefly evaluate the initiative under the headings ‘No Change’, ‘Some Improvement’ or ‘Significant Improvement’. The respective responses were 0, 3 and 43.

The willingness by staff to engage enthusiastically with the initiative and the willingness of school management to provide the Positive Behaviour Strategy Team with the necessary time to collate material and drive the whole process was a key factor in the success of this initiative.

In the initial NBSS whole staff survey in this school, 94% of the school staff identified the inappropriate use of mobile phones by students as being a daily or frequent issue.

The school’s Positive Behaviour Strategy Team decided to address this issue. The NBSS facilitated a staff workshop that identified the exact problems caused by mobile phone usage and, more importantly, helped all staff to identify solutions that would work in their school with their students.

Four weeks later, following meetings with management and the Student Council a revised school rule was drawn up and the exact routine was agreed. Letters explaining the new rule and routine were issued to parents. Class teachers/tutors explained this rule and routine to students. In addition, the Year Heads and Deputy Principal identified parents who would benefit from a phone call explaining the new rule and routine.

A further one hour session with all staff was facilitated by NBSS and the practicalities of how the staff would implement the new rule was explored through discussion and role play. Several days later the new rule was implemented - the entire process of planning, communicating and implementing the change took just five weeks.

In order to assess long term impact, twelve months later all staff were invited to identify the impact of this initiative in terms of 'No Change’, 'Some Improvement’ or ‘Significant Improvement’. The respective responses were 0, 28, and 20.
The Positive Behaviour Liaison (PBL) Teacher Programme focuses on promoting positive behaviour and learning at NBSS Level 1: School-wide Support. The programme was initiated in 2008/2009 to explore the ways in which individual teachers, allocated 11 hours per week, can effectively implement, coordinate and develop a proactive behaviour improvement plan, with the view to creating sustainable positive teaching and learning environments within their school communities, in partnership with their colleagues. The programme is aimed at schools that are in their final year of NBSS support.

The following highlights elements of the Positive Liaison Teacher Programme in one school.

- The Code of Behaviour was reviewed with staff and aspects were highlighted as needing further development. This formed the plan for most of the work for the Positive Behaviour Liaison (PBL) teacher for the year.

- Work carried out and completed by the Positive Behaviour Strategy Team on whole school rules was displayed in each classroom.

- The system for recording inappropriate behaviour was reviewed. This revised system divided inappropriate behaviour into two areas, organisational issues and behavioural issues, which facilitated the development of separate supports for students who had repeated issues in both areas. The PBL teacher put these support structures in place.

- A ‘menu’ of strategies to reduce the number of behavioural issues being recorded in class and around the school and forwarded to Year Heads was developed.

- The system for sanctioning inappropriate behaviour, outlined in the school’s Code of Behaviour, was reviewed and rewritten. A diagram that illustrated each stage in the process was developed, with positive behaviour strategies outlined for each stage of the process. These strategies highlighted the steps that would be taken by staff to support students to improve their behaviour.

- Other work involved developing and implementing a plan which focused on the explicit teaching of specific behaviour for learning skills, with a targeted group of students. The PBL teacher also created resources for the teaching of these skills by staff into the future.

- Throughout the year the PBL teacher worked closely with the Principal to review work done and plan for the future.
NBSS Interventions, Initiatives & Projects

Adopting a Solution Focused Approach

Solution focused thinking or a solution focused approach holds that as problems do not happen all of the time, a positive way of working is to discover what is working well and then to do more of it. Rather than dwelling on deficits or the history of the problem, a solution focused approach looks to the strengths and resources a person, team or organisation possess and how these can be applied and used to construct potential solutions. From this perspective the focus naturally shifts away from problems and gravitates towards useful solutions. As an adaptable approach solution focused principles are now applied across a range of contexts, for example health, education, community and social care sectors as well as the business and corporate sectors.

Solution focused thinking in education can be applied to all aspects of school life - from promoting and reinforcing positive behaviour, addressing bullying issues, to the running of effective meetings. By focusing on the positive resources and skills inherent in all schools a solution focused approach can enhance the educational and workplace experience for all members of the school community.

Since 2008 the NBSS has provided partner schools with training in solution focused thinking and approaches. Interested school staff including Behaviour Support Classroom teachers, Behaviour for Learning Programme teachers and Year Heads have attended two-day courses where they have explored the basic principles and techniques of solution focused thinking and practice. Through lectures, group work, recorded examples and exercises the courses aim to provide teachers with sufficient knowledge and practice to try out at least some solution focused techniques in their schools. Participants are given many opportunities over the two days to practice solution focused interviewing skills such as:

- Problem free talk
- Exploring a preferred future
- Eliciting what is already working
- Using scaling questions
- Highlighting change
- Solution focused summaries

Additionally, all teachers are provided with a manual to support their practice as well as ongoing support and advice from NBSS team members, who are also trained in solution focused practices.

Solution Focused practice emerged from Solution Focused Brief Therapy. It was developed in the mid 1980s primarily by Steve de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg and the team at the Brief Family Therapy Centre in Milwaukee, USA and later in Britain by members of BRIEF. BRIEF is one of Europe’s largest providers of solution focused training and has facilitated the NBSS training of teachers from partner schools.
NBSS Interventions, Initiatives & Projects

The ALERT Programme

Since 2009 the NBSS Occupational Therapists have worked in partner schools, across all three levels of NBSS support, introducing the international evidence-based ALERT programme ‘How Does Your Engine Run’. The programme aims to help students monitor, maintain and change their level of alertness so that it is appropriate to the situation or task. The programme identifies students’ sensory needs and preferences and encourages student use of sensory motor strategies to support self regulation so that their engines are running ‘just right’. The strategies and activities taught can be incorporated into home and school routines.

Since 2012 the NBSS has offered training to partner schools in the ALERT programme and to date NBSS Occupational Therapists have trained 106 teachers in the programme. Over the course of two days training teachers are taken through the underlying theory behind the programme as well as the aims, objectives and activities of each ALERT session. The ALERT programme is implemented in NBSS partner schools with small groups of students and whole class groups.

Environmental Audits

Addressing the impact of environmental factors on students is part of the work undertaken by Occupational Therapists. The demands of a secondary school dictate that a student must negotiate a busy and often overwhelming environment on an hourly basis. An environmental audit can highlight issues and make recommendations for suitable alterations that can impact positively on student behaviour and learning.

The NBSS Occupational Therapists support partner schools to assess the physical and sensory environment. Designs and layout need to be legible through the repetition of visual, auditory and tactile signs, cues and patterns.

In addition to working on the environment with partner schools, the NBSS Occupational Therapists also facilitate interpersonal skills groups as part of NBSS Level 2 and 3 interventions.

In 2012 a study at Salford University in the UK found that the classroom environment can affect a child’s academic progress over a year by as much as 25%. The most significant design factor appeared to be how well the school allowed students to flow through the building.
NBSS Level 2 Support: Targeted Intervention

Positive behaviour supports at NBSS Level 1: School-wide support for all students looks at procedures and practices that address the entire student population in both classroom and in non-classroom settings, while NBSS Level 2 support is targeted at small groups of students as well as class or year groups.

Transition and Transfer

Targeted interventions are flexible and tailored to the needs of the group or some number of students in need of additional support. For example, to support transition from primary to post-primary, a crucial stage in a young person’s schooling career, the NBSS works with schools to develop comprehensive transition and transfer programmes for incoming first year students.

Many NBSS partner school have developed innovative approaches to transition and transfer, such as:

- Holding joint primary and post-primary staff meetings to discuss issues and develop ideas in relation to transition and transfer.
- Continuing with a subject topic in the first term of post-primary which was started in the last term of 6th class.
- Creating ‘Passports to Second-Level’ with students in 6th class and further developing these with students during the 1st year induction programme.
- Developing transition programmes that span first year and extend into second year.
- Explicitly teaching social and emotional literacy skills, behaviour for learning skills and learning and thinking skills to 1st year students.
- Building on and linking with literacy programmes taught at primary.
- Developing peer mentoring and learning mentoring support systems.

An example of the modules covered during the transition and transfer programme developed in Gorey Community School, in partnership with the NBSS.
NBSS Level 2 supports are also targeted at small groups of students who, for example, may be at risk of developing challenging behaviour or who may benefit from social and emotional skills development or who may be academically underachieving. The following highlights how one school developed a targeted intervention to support students.

At a meeting between school management and the NBSS Regional Development Officer (RDO) the challenges that teachers faced in responding to the learning and behavioural needs of a particular class group were discussed. Further meetings were then held with the school’s Positive Behaviour Strategy Team, the SEN Department, the school’s SENO (NCSE) and the NBSS RDO to plan how best to address this issue. Two 75-minute workshops with teachers in groups of four to six were agreed on.

**Workshop One**
The following objectives were presented at the start of the first workshop:

- Teachers would experience support from each other and the RDO facilitator.
- Participants would engage in an open and honest sharing of the challenges, successes and good practice in a supportive atmosphere.
- The RDO facilitator would contribute relevant research and share best practice from other schools.

**Overview:**

- Teachers were given the opportunity to identify and discuss student behaviours they found challenging.
- A solution focused approach was adopted – teachers were asked to identify strategies that were effective when working with this group of students.
- Further discussions extended this sharing of expertise i.e. teachers explained in greater detail elements of a specific approach they used with students.
- The Medical Model and Social Model of disability were explored.
- Teachers were asked to suggest a focus area for the second workshop – responses included taking a case study approach; a training session on solution focused approaches and appropriate responses to low level disruption in mainstream classes. These informed the content of the workshop.

**Workshop Two**

- The strategies suggested at all previous workshops were combined and distributed.
- An introduction to solution focused approaches was provided by the RDO and time was spent exploring how these approaches could be used in class.
- Some workshop groups explored ‘buttons we all have’ i.e. student behaviours that generate an emotional response from teachers. A case study approach was adopted. The RDO outlined two strategies 1) the use of the four questions and positive self-talk used in Therapeutic Crisis Intervention and 2) the use of a ‘coping sentence’ recommended by Cognitive Behaviour Therapist Claire Hayes (“I feel ... because...but...”).

**Evaluation and Future Developments**

Teachers were asked to evaluate the workshops under the headings ‘Very Useful’, ‘Useful’ and ‘Not Useful’. The respective responses were 14, 11 and 0.

At a later Positive Behavior Strategy Team meeting it was agreed that further workshops would be organised to explore and agree teacher responses to specific challenging behaviours.
NBSS Level 2 support is also about identifying, planning and monitoring focused interventions for groups of students in need of additional support. This can involve building mastery of specific literacy and learning skills. This overview highlights how eight 2nd year students were explicitly taught comprehension and learning strategies once a week for approximately six months, using NBSS comprehension strategy resources in order to develop their literacy and learning skills.

Once a week, for 40 minutes the eight students were explicitly taught comprehension strategies with the aim of helping them to become more purposeful, active readers, thinkers and learners.

The following key comprehension skills, that effective readers and successful learners use, were explored during the weekly lessons i.e.

- Making connections
- Questioning
- Visualising
- Inferring and predicting
- Determining importance
- Synthesising
- Monitoring and clarifying understanding

Students were explicitly taught how to use various before, during and after reading strategies that would help them construct meaning during the reading-thinking process. Using NBSS comprehension resources, students learned how:

a) Before reading strategies activate prior knowledge and set a purpose when reading.

b) During reading strategies can help them make connections, generate questions, stay focused and monitor their understanding.

c) After reading strategies enable them to summarise, question, reflect and respond to what they have read.

Prior to starting the weekly lesson the teacher involved administered the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (NARA II). This is an individually administered test that aims to measure the accuracy, comprehension and rate of reading as well as monitor reading progress and obtain diagnostic observations of reading behaviour. This test was then re-administered at the end of the intervention with six of the eight students (two students were absent at the time of retesting).

The table above presents the chronological ages, pre and post reading ages and pre and post comprehension ages for six of the students who took part in the weekly 40 minute lesson during the six month period - approximately 20-24 lessons. All six students tested improved their comprehension age by a minimum of 18 months.

NBSS academic literacy, learning and study skills resources can be accessed at: www.nbss.ie
Check and Connect

Check and Connect is an intervention designed to enhance a student’s engagement at school and with learning. NBSS team members work with partner schools on the implementation of this intervention which consists of four key elements:

1. An adult mentor who keeps education relevant for students.
2. Systematic monitoring (the “check” component).
3. Timely and individualised intervention (the “connect” component).
4. Enhancing home-school communication and home support for learning.

In NBSS partner schools teachers volunteer to become mentors. The mentors (a) work to create positive relationships with a young person, his/her family and school (b) promote regular school participation in academic, social and emotional learning (c) keep school progress a relevant issue for the student and parents.

Each mentor links with one student, checking in regularly with that student to discuss how they are doing and offering support in a number of ways. For example:

- Providing ongoing, consistent and timely monitoring of a student’s behaviour for signs of withdrawal and disengagement: lates, absences, skipped classes, failing tests, falling behind with homework, conduct sheets, detentions, suspensions, etc.
- Implementing timely interventions/supports to ensure student achievement and well being, when appropriate.
- Working with other teachers, management and other support staff to help the student be successful.
- Problem solving with the student when difficulties arise.

The adult mentors strive to build a trusting relationship while applying:

**Persistence** - there is someone who is not going to give up on the student’s ability to learn nor allow the student to be distracted from the importance of school and learning.

**Continuity** - there is someone who knows the student’s educational history, is familiar with the student’s family background and is available throughout the school year and into the next year.

**Consistency** - mentors reinforce the same message: a caring adult believes school and learning are important and the student can succeed, do the work and express frustration constructively.

Studies have shown a correlation between a young person’s involvement in a quality mentoring relationship and positive outcomes in the areas of school, mental health and behaviour.
Language is fundamental to participation in school life (academic and social). At post-primary level the language demands of the classroom increase significantly. The NBSS Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) works with targeted partner schools providing assessment, diagnosis, intervention and management of speech, language and communication needs, where appropriate.

Speech, language and communication difficulties can sometimes be hard to identify. Some students start post-primary school with a known difficulty while others will not have an obvious difficulty. A student may have difficulty with language if they find one or more of the following difficult:

- Difficulty understanding long instructions or directions.
- Difficulties understanding what they read.
- Difficulties understanding questions – what? why? when?
- Difficulties understanding verbal explanations/information.
- Difficulties explaining themselves.
- Difficulties taking turns in a conversation.
- Only using short, unfinished sentences.
- Difficulty with telling stories in the right order.
- Difficulties learning new words.
- Difficulty with eye contact.

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are linked to poor peer relationships and poor social and emotional well-being.

The NBSS Speech and Language Therapist works to develop and maximise students’ speech, language and communication needs as well as their learning and socialisation skills. The SLT works collaboratively with school staff in targeted schools to provide appropriate intervention and support to address these needs and develop these skills. For example, the focus of an intervention could be on developing a student’s vocabulary; reading and understanding of stories, instructions, questions and books; telling and writing stories and answering questions; or developing a young person’s social skills e.g. eye contact, conversation skills.

Between 50-80% of young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties have undetected speech, language or communication needs (Bryan et al., 2007; Snow & Powell, 2008). Speech and Language Therapy assessment of 40 students in five NBSS partner schools found that 95% of the students assessed presented with a speech and language difficulty. Of the 95%, 70% presented with a severe difficulty in at least one area of language (receptive or expressive language) while 60% presented with a severe difficulty in both receptive and expressive language skills. 92% presented with difficulty in at least one area of literacy (reading comprehension, phonological literacy or spelling). Vocabulary understanding and use was an area of difficulty for 88% of the students. In school these students will have difficulty expressing themselves, understanding what the teacher says and interacting appropriately with peers and adults.

Without appropriate intervention and support young people with SLCN may struggle significantly to develop adequate language skills in adolescence.
NBSS Level 3 Support: Intensive Individualised Intervention

The third level of NBSS support is distinctive in that it is tailored to the specific needs of the individual student. Characteristically, this level of support is offered to the small number of students who, notwithstanding school-wide behaviour support and targeted interventions, continue to experience difficulty.

Students who are offered NBSS Level 3 support may present with a variety of challenging behaviours, including social skills deficits; low self-esteem; difficult relationships with adults/peers and poor concentration and attention difficulties in most subjects. Many of the students are also persistently at risk of suspension and/or expulsion. The severity of their behaviour in classrooms not only hinders their own educational progress but may also impede that of their peers.

Level 3: intensive individualised support is provided to students in NBSS partner schools:

- By Behaviour for Learning Programme Teachers.
- By various school personnel in partnership with NBSS team members.

There is a structured system of referral for all NBSS Level 3 interventions.

**Behaviour for Learning Programme**

NBSS Behaviour for Learning Programme: Level 1 is focused on the development of proactive and preventive school-wide practices and strategies that promote positive behaviour for all students. The target at Level 1 is to support and promote positive behaviour and learning for all thereby ensuring that approximately 80% to 90% of students follow the school rules and demonstrate appropriate behaviour. NBSS Behaviour for Learning Programme: Level 2 and Level 3 focuses on providing supports to students who have not responded to the school-wide behaviour support practices and strategies employed by the school and so require additional targeted or intensive interventions. Taken together the NBSS Behaviour for Learning Programme: Level 1, 2 and 3 is a framework to support all students to be successful as it works at three levels of prevention and combines behavioural, academic, social, emotional and well being components into primary, secondary and tertiary interventions.

At Level 2 and 3 Behaviour for Learning teachers work with identified students, individually or in small groups on interventions that are designed to meet their social, emotional, behavioural and academic needs, so they can achieve and succeed in school. An individual Student Behaviour Plan is developed for each student in receipt of Level 3 support.
A Student Behaviour Plan (SBP) is an action plan devised to support the student in achieving positive outcomes in behaviour and learning. It includes interventions, strategies and supports that will help to improve learning and behaviour. It contains targets that have been devised and negotiated through consultation with the student.

Data is gathered from a number of sources to inform the Student Behaviour Plan. For example, all teachers of a student identified as needing Level 3 support completes a Learning Behaviour Checklist that outlines the student's strengths and challenges across a variety of areas. The student also completes a questionnaire that provides information on areas of strength and areas of challenge. This data informs elements of the SBP, such as the Behaviour for Learning Skills; Social and Emotional Literacy Skills; Academic Literacy, Learning and Study Skills or Positive Health and Wellbeing Skills that need to be developed.

A student's targets are reviewed weekly using a solution focused approach. All teachers are informed of any approaches that have been found to be of benefit by the teacher/s working with the student.
The ‘FRIENDS for Life’ programme is a school-based positive mental health programme. The World Health Organisation cites ‘FRIENDS for Life’ as the only evidence-based programme effective at all levels of intervention for anxiety in children (WHO 2004). The programme helps students to develop effective strategies to deal with worry, stress and change and teaches the skills required to reduce anxiety and promote resilience. It is beneficial for all students, irrespective of their anxiety level. Teachers can run the programme as a whole school anxiety prevention programme, as a whole class or small group intervention or with an individual student.

Anxiety can significantly interfere with a student’s ability to handle a wide variety of everyday activities, including interpersonal relationships, social competence, peer relations, school adjustment and learning. Anxiety constitutes one of the most prevalent forms of psychological distress in childhood and adolescence. Prevalence rates in Ireland estimate that 18.7% of children suffer from some form of mental health issue or psychological disorder, including anxiety, severe enough to cause impairment (Barnardos Report: Tomorrow’s Child, 2008).

Due to the increasing awareness in education of the need to understand and address the emotional and mental well-being needs of children and young people, the NBSS decided to pilot and research the ‘FRIENDS for Life’ programme in partner schools. In collaboration with the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the Social, Personal and Health Education Support Service (SPHE) fourteen NBSS partner schools participated in the research project. Of the 14 schools, two taught the programme to all 1st year students and the remaining 12 schools focused on small groups of 1st year students, some of whom had elevated anxiety levels. Forty two teachers attended a three day training session to become accredited facilitators in the ‘FRIENDS for Life’ programme. These teachers subsequently delivered the programme within their respective schools.

The word ‘FRIENDS for Life’ is an acronym that helps children and adolescents to remember the coping steps to follow; F-Feeling Worried?, R-Relax and feel good, I- I can do it!, E-Explore solutions and coping step plans, N-Now reward yourself, D-Don’t forget to practice and S-Stay cool!

There are three main components in ‘FRIENDS’ based on CBT principles; (1) Learning/ Behaviour, (2) Cognitive and (3) Physiological. The Learning/Behaviour component involves helping children and adolescents to problem solve, use coping skills, expose themselves gradually to feared situations, reward themselves for brave behaviour and identify positive role models and support networks. The Cognitive component involves helping children and adolescents to use positive self-talk (green thoughts), challenge negative self-talk (red thoughts), evaluate themselves realistically and reward themselves. The Physiological component involves teaching children and adolescents to be aware of their body clues, to use relaxation techniques and to self-regulate.

244 students were given consent to participate in the ‘FRIENDS for Life’ programme. 94 students were identified as being in the ‘elevated’ anxiety range before the programme (1 in every 5.3 students). After the programme this reduced to 51 (1 in every 9.8 students) and to 33 students after a further seven months. The results of the research project demonstrated that the ‘FRIENDS for Life’ programme is effective in reducing anxiety levels, as measured by both students and parents. The teachers who delivered the programme in their schools believe it will benefit all students. To date teachers from 79 NBSS partner schools have received training in the ‘FRIENDS’ programmes.
Developing students’ reading skills through small group or individual interventions has been a specific focus of the work of the NBSS in the last number of years. Research points to the importance of recognising the links between behaviour and academic problems and coordinating systems for prevention and intervention in both areas.

NBSS research has pointed to the association between failure with reading and behaviour difficulties. For example, an exploration of the reading ages of students (N=2187) receiving NBSS Level 3 behavioural support from the Spring Term 2009 to the Spring Term 2012 revealed that 66.3% (N=1450) of students were reading three or more years below their chronological age. Additionally, 4.3% (N=96) of the students receiving NBSS Level 3 support had reading ages of 7 years or less.

The negative effect of poor reading skills are well documented and wide ranging, for example poor academic achievement, low self-esteem, lower motivation to read, disengagement with learning and school, and behavioural problems.

Greg Brooks (2007) in his review of *What works for pupils with literacy difficulties*, noted that ‘although good classroom teaching is the bedrock of effective practice, most research suggests that children falling behind their peers need more help than the classroom normally provides. This help requires coordinated effort and training’. For some students, a tightly focused group intervention will be sufficient to allow them to develop their reading skills and build their confidence to engage more actively in the learning process, while other students need intensive and individualised interventions.

Catch Up Literacy is one of several interventions that NBSS partner schools implement to support reading and literacy skills development - other interventions include, for example, the use of Corrective Reading; Toe by Toe; Acceleread Accelewrite; The Wordsworth Programme; Rapid Plus; The Vocabulary Enrichment Programme; SNIP; Spell Write Right, among others.

Catch Up Literacy is a structured one-to-one intervention. Each student receives two 15 minute structured teaching sessions, twice per week. The intervention is targeted to the needs of individual students and addresses all aspects of the reading process: word recognition and language comprehension.

Between 2010 and 2012 over 150 teachers in 58 NBSS partner schools were trained to implement the Catch Up Literacy intervention. During this period over 333 students accessed this one-to-one intervention. The mean gain in Reading Age after 4.33 months of delivering the programme was 9.88 months, with a ratio gain of 2.28 (a ratio gain of 2 is considered ‘good impact’ – Brookes, 2007).

As part of the intervention, students were interviewed about their attitudes toward reading. In the majority of cases students indicated a dislike of reading with a strong negative feeling about reading out loud in class.

Lack of reading proficiency is known to undermine self-image and self-confidence while success with reading can reduce negative attitudes and improve self-esteem. One of the main benefits noted by the teachers who implemented the intervention was the positive impact on students’ confidence and efficacy.

The diversity of student needs, learning style, teaching style and classroom conditions that exist in any school means that no one ‘right’ strategy or programme holds the answer to addressing literacy difficulties. However, using evidence-based programmes as ONE element of targeted support can play an important role in a school’s repertoire of prevention and intervention supports for students.

Reading is a skill that gives access to learning. Students reading behind their peers need access to evidence based approaches, strategies and programmes that accelerate reading development.

*In 2011 NBSS also introduced Catch Up Numeracy to partner schools.*
Why Try?
The Why Try? programme teaches social and emotional skills using a practical multisensory approach. The Why Try? programme teaches students critical social and emotional skills required for school success and for life after school. The programme has proven to be highly effective at impacting negative student behaviour.

Important life skills taught include:
- Basic problem solving
- Anger management
- Dealing with peer pressure
- Building a support system
- Visualising future goals.

The hands on student activities are designed to teach social and emotional principles to students in ways they can understand and remember. This is achieved using a series of ten pictures (visual analogies). Each visual teaches a discrete principle, such as resisting peer pressure, obeying laws and rules and that decisions have consequences. The visual components are then reinforced by music and physical activities. The major learning styles are all addressed throughout the programme.

In 2011 the NBSS introduced the Why Try? programme to partner schools. Over two days 47 Behaviour Support Classroom and Behaviour for Learning Programme teachers were trained in the Why Try? curriculum. The feedback from teachers and students to date on the impact of the programme is extremely positive.

NBSS Movement Matters
NBSS Movement Matters is an individualised, multi-sensory physical programme.

Since 2009 the NBSS has been piloting evidence-based movement programmes to address the needs of targeted students who present with hyperactivity, poor concentration and challenging behaviour. This work began with the introduction of the SAQ Special Education Movement (SEM) training programme as well as an adaptation of the evidence-based Alert programme ‘How Does Your Engine Run’.

Through the experience of running SAQ/SEM as a NBSS Level 1 intervention and Alert as a NBSS Level 2 intervention, the NBSS concluded that a Level 3, individual, intensive movement based programme was needed and so developed the NBSS Movement Matters programme (initially as a feasibility study). The programme is designed to assist students who may exhibit one or more of the characteristics on the Inattention/Hyperactivity Spectrum such as: Constant fidgeting; Regular inattention; Hyperactivity; Excessive motor activity; Restlessness; Easily distracted behaviour; Clumsiness; Acting before thinking.

As part of the feasibility study, Behaviour for Learning (BfL) teachers from 12 NBSS partner schools were introduced to the theoretical foundations of Movement Matters and provided with detailed class plans and necessary equipment to run the intervention. During the study the BfL teachers were supported in their classrooms by NBSS Occupational Therapists (in collaboration with the Discipline of Occupational Therapy, Trinity College) and a NBSS PE and SEN teacher.

One element of the research was to capture the views of the students. Once students completed the 20 sessions of Movement Matters, they were asked to complete a survey on-line. Data from 32 students were collected. 92.6% (N=25) of students indicated that the programme had helped them with their behaviour in the classroom. The following comments are an example of some of the benefits of Movement Matters as expressed by students:

‘...not fidgeting as much in class.’ ‘Sometimes I feel good from doing it.’ ‘...didn’t get into trouble after doing it.’ ‘...I was very chilled going back to class.’ ‘...easier to behave as I was calm.’ ‘I can sit still in class more.’ ‘I don’t go on a mad one.’ ‘I was good after doing it.’ ‘Sometimes because it gives you a break from class I behave better when I go back.’ ‘...I was chillaxed and able to listen.’ ‘Getting less behaviour notes for messing in class.’ ‘Getting on well not sent to office.’ ‘I was in a better mood after doing a few exercises and I want to carry on doing it.’ ‘Got on better at home. I told them all about it.’ ‘It made me come to school even when I was really sick.’
The Parents Plus Adolescents programme is a practical and positive evidence-based parenting course designed to support and empower parents to manage and solve behaviour problems, to create satisfying and enjoyable family relationships and assist young people to grow up to reach their full potential. The programme can be delivered as a general parenting programme targeted at parents who are dealing with the normal ups and downs of bringing up teenagers, and also as an intervention targeted at parents whose children are exhibiting specific behavioural, emotional and developmental problems. Working Things Out is a sister programme to the Parents Plus Adolescents programme. The programme contains the personal stories of adolescents who overcame personal problems in their lives such as Bullying, School Pressures, Conflict with Parents as well as mental health issues such as Anxiety, Depression, ADHD, OCD, Self-harm and Suicide. The stories are illustrated by animation and graphics, narrated by young people and backed up by mental health information and handouts for facilitators/teachers. Working Things Out can be used as a preventative programme to educate adolescents about positive mental health.

The Parents Plus Adolescent programme and Working Things Out programme have been developed in partnership with Irish parents and adolescents. Both programmes follow Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) principles. The basic principle of CBT is that in any given situation a person will have thoughts and feelings about the situation and behave in a certain way. These thoughts, feelings and actions all interact and influence each other. CBT helps people to identify cognitive patterns or thoughts and emotions that are linked with behaviours and helps them to learn new behaviours and new ways of coping with events, often involving the learning of particular skills.

Since 2011 teachers from 35 NBSS partner schools have been trained in the Parent Plus and Working Things Out programmes by health professionals from the Mater Hospital. After training and with follow up support and advice from the Mater Parent Plus team and NBSS team members, teachers implement the programme with students and their parents over an eight week period. In the 2012-2013 school year the Mater Parent Plus team and the NBSS carried out research on the effectiveness of this family intervention with 47 parents and their adolescent children who were accessing Level 3 support in their schools. The research found that parent and adolescent-rated behavioural difficulties significantly improved from pre to post test, as did the parent stress and satisfaction with parenting. Parents rated their child’s social, emotional and behavioural functioning as being significantly improved post-intervention; adolescent’s ratings of their own functioning also significantly improved over the course of the intervention. These gains were largely maintained at five-month follow up for the adolescents, although parent stress somewhat returned when weekly support was no longer available. Additionally, on completion of the intervention both parents and their adolescents showed significant progress in attainment of the goals they set at the outset of the programme.

Parents Plus was founded by Dr. John Sharry (Social Worker/Psychotherapist) and Prof. Carol Fitzpatrick (Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist) in 1998, with the specific aims of developing educational and therapeutic materials for families and children and providing support and training to professionals working with children and families. Parents Plus was established as a registered charity under the auspices of the Mater Hospital, Dublin in 2001.
More Information on the NBSS Model of Support to Schools, NBSS Interventions, Initiatives & Projects and NBSS Publications and Resources can be found at www.nbss.ie
The NBSS in Schools

~ Promoting & Supporting Behaviour for Learning ~

A Brief Overview of Our Work in Schools

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