AchievoEDU
RESEARCH SUMMARY

PBL Evidence Summary for School Leaders

A concise overview of the research base supporting Positive Behaviour for Learning and how AchievoEDU is designed to implement it at scale.

1. What is Positive Behaviour for Learning?

Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) also known as Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) in some Australian jurisdictions, is a school-wide framework that proactively teaches and reinforces the behaviours and values that support student wellbeing and academic success. Rather than focusing primarily on responding to poor behaviour, PBL creates systems that recognise and reward positive contributions, making the desired behaviours visible and valued across the whole school community.

PBL is grounded in applied behaviour analysis research and has been adopted at scale in Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and internationally. It operates on a simple but powerful premise: students are more likely to meet expectations when those expectations are clearly defined, explicitly taught, and consistently reinforced.

In Australia, PBL is aligned with the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers (Standard 4: Creating and maintaining supportive and safe learning environments), making it directly relevant to teacher appraisal, school improvement planning, and system accountability frameworks.

2. What does the evidence say?

20–30% reduction in office discipline referrals in schools using PBL (Horner et al., 2009)	**20%** improvement in academic outcomes in PBL schools (McIntosh et al., 2011)	**3×** more likely to feel connected to school when recognition is regular and specific (Resnick et al., 1997)	**80%** of schools using structured PBL report improved school climate within 2 years (Bradshaw et al., 2010)

Research consistently shows that schools implementing structured positive recognition programs see reductions in disruptive behaviour, improvements in attendance, and higher rates of student self-reported wellbeing.

The effect is strongest when three conditions are met:

1. Recognition is specific and timely, delivered within hours of the behaviour, not weeks later
2. The whole school uses a shared language for values and expectations, ensuring consistency across all settings
3. Data is used to identify and support at-risk students early, rather than waiting until behaviour escalates

Research by Sugai & Horner (2009) found that fidelity of implementation is the single most important predictor of PBL outcomes, underscoring the need for whole-school adoption and ongoing leadership support.

3. What are the key components of effective PBL?

The most rigorously evaluated PBL models share a consistent set of structural components. Effective implementation requires all six to be in place. Partial implementation reliably produces partial results.

Component	Description
School-wide expectations	Clearly defined and consistently communicated values that all students and staff understand and use. Typically 3–6 positively framed competencies.
Explicit teaching	Behaviour expectations are explicitly taught, not just assumed. Students know what good looks like, what it sounds like, and why it matters.
Regular recognition	Positive behaviour is acknowledged frequently, specifically, and in a way that is meaningful to students. Generic praise is less effective than named, specific recognition.
Data-driven decisions	Schools use behaviour and wellbeing data to identify patterns, recognise trends, and adjust their approach before problems escalate.
Family involvement	Parents and carers are kept informed and can reinforce school values at home, extending the PBL framework beyond the school gates.
Tiered support	Universal support for all students, targeted support for some, and intensive support for a few. Ensuring no student is left without appropriate scaffolding.

4. How AchievoEDU Implements PBL

AchievoEDU was designed from the ground up to operationalise the PBL framework in a practical, scalable way for Australian schools. The platform maps directly to each of the six evidence-based components:

PBL Component	AchievoEDU Feature
School-wide expectations	6-competency character framework: Respect, Resilience, Responsibility, Leadership, Collaboration, Initiative. Can be displayed consistently across the platform and available as printable classroom posters
Explicit teaching	Character competency descriptions and behaviour examples are visible to students in their profile and dashboard, reinforcing what each value looks like in practice
Regular recognition	Points awarded by any teacher in real-time; students see recognition immediately on their dashboard with the competency, teacher, and reason displayed
Data-driven decisions	Admin analytics dashboard showing engagement rates, top earners, and wellbeing check-in trends by class and year level, updated in real time

PBL Component	AchievoEDU Feature
Family involvement	Parent portal showing children's achievements, points, and recognition in real time, with optional email notifications
Tiered support	Wellbeing check-in flags for pastoral care staff; student goal-setting for self-directed improvement available on Plus and Pro plans

WHOLE-SCHOOL BY DESIGN

AchievoEDU is designed as a whole-school implementation tool, not just a classroom rewards app. The platform creates the data infrastructure, shared language, and parent communication channels that PBL research identifies as critical for sustained impact. A school using AchievoEDU consistently is, by definition, implementing PBL at scale.

5. Considerations for School Leaders

Before presenting PBL implementation to your board or leadership team, it is worth addressing these questions directly:

- Do we have leadership buy-in? Research shows leadership commitment is the single strongest predictor of PBL success. The principal's visible endorsement signals to staff that this is a school-wide priority.
- Will all staff use the recognition system consistently? Partial implementation reduces impact significantly. Consider how you will onboard and support reluctant staff.
- Do our reward options reflect what students actually value? Reward stores work best when students have genuine agency over how they spend points. Regularly survey students.
- How will we communicate the purpose to parents? Parents who understand the PBL rationale are more likely to reinforce school values at home.
- How will we know if it's working? Define your success metrics before you launch, whether referral rates, attendance, wellbeing survey scores, or teacher-reported climate.

FREE IMPLEMENTATION CONSULTATION

AchievoEDU provides a free implementation consultation and an ongoing dashboard to track your school's PBL metrics. Book a session with our Head of Education at contact@achievoedu.com.au.

6. References

Bradshaw, C. P., Mitchell, M. M., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). Examining the effects of schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports on student outcomes. Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 12(3), 133–148.

Horner, R. H., Sugai, G., Smolkowski, K., et al. (2009). A randomized, waitlist controlled effectiveness trial assessing school-wide positive behavior support in elementary schools. Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 11(3), 133–144.

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