



This week our Spotlight is written by Alex Morgan. A huge thank you to him for this excellent contribution to our Behaviour for Learning. He writes: One of the simplest but most effective ways to set a positive tone in a lesson is through a technique I call “pre-notifying.” At its core, pre-notifying means explicitly telling students, at the start of a lesson, what positive learning behaviour you will be focusing on and praising. It’s about establishing clear behavioural expectations before any issues arise — being proactive rather than reactive.

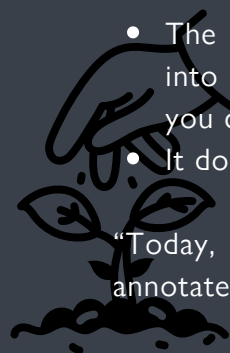
### Why Pre-notify?

When students know exactly what kind of behaviour you’re looking for, they’re much more likely to demonstrate it. Pre-notifying helps to:



- Clarify expectations from the outset. Students understand not only what they are learning but how they are expected to learn.
- Reduce low-level disruption by giving students a clear behavioural anchor at the start.
- Create a shared focus that can unify the group — particularly helpful after transitions or with classes prone to distraction.
- Support precise praise later in the lesson. Because you’ve made expectations explicit, your praise can be specific and credible (“I really like how Ella is showing collaborative problem-solving by listening carefully to her partner before responding”).

### When to Pre-notify



- The best moment to do this is after your silent start and Do Now feedback, just before moving into the main learning activity. This means the class is settled, focused, and ready to listen — and you can communicate your expectations calmly and purposefully.
- It doesn’t need to take more than 30 seconds. A simple statement like:

“Today, I’ll be looking out for careful reading — particularly noticing those of you who take time to annotate and think before you answer.”

- That small intervention plants a seed that subtly shapes behaviour throughout the lesson.

### What to Pre-notify

The behaviours you highlight should connect directly to the nature of the lesson. Examples include:

- Independent work and quiet reflection – for extended writing or creative tasks.
- Collaborative problem-solving – for group projects or inquiry work.
- Careful reading – for text-heavy or information-rich lessons.
- Close peer marking – when reviewing work or giving feedback.
- Investigation – for practical or inquiry-based learning.
- Critical thinking / argument construction – for discussions, debates, or analytical tasks.



By varying the focus, students begin to see that different lessons demand different kinds of learning behaviour — and they start to internalise what good learning looks like in each context.

### The Link to Praise with Precision

Pre-notifying and “praising with precision” work hand in hand. Because you’ve been explicit about the behaviour you want to see, your praise later in the lesson becomes more meaningful and targeted.

“Well done to this table for engaging in real collaborative problem-solving — you’ve each listened carefully and built on one another’s ideas.”

This kind of praise reinforces exactly the learning behaviours you want to cultivate, rather than generic comments like “good work” or “nice effort.” Over time, this builds a classroom culture where students understand that how they learn is just as important as what they learn.

