

Education, Children and Young People Committee

19th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday 14 June 2023

Violence in schools

Committee meeting

1. The Committee agreed, as part of its work programme, to hold a one-off roundtable session on violence in schools.

2. The Committee will be hearing evidence from—
 - Anne Keenan, Assistant Secretary, EIS Scotland.
 - Mike Corbett, National Official for Scotland, NASUWT.
 - Beau Johnston, MSYP for Edinburgh Central and SYP Trustee.
 - Carrie Lindsay, Executive Director for Education & Children's Services, Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES).
 - Dr Colin Morrison, Co-Director of the Children's Parliament.
 - Nick Smiley, Chair, Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists (ASPEP).
 - Dr Joan Mowat, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of Strathclyde.
 - Cheryl Burnett, Chair, National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS).

3. A briefing from SPICe is attached at **Annexe A**.

4. The Committee has received written submissions from—
 - EIS Scotland.
 - Connect.
 - Children's Parliament.
 - NASUWT.
 - Dr Joan Mowat, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of Strathclyde and Dr Gale Macleod, Senior Lecturer in the Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh.
 - Prof Tom Bennett OBE, founder and director of researchED.

5. These can be found at **Annexe B**.

Annexe A

The logo for SPICe, featuring the text 'SPICe' in a white, sans-serif font on a dark purple background.The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Education, Children and Young People Committee

15 June 2023

Violence in Schools

Introduction

The Committee has agreed to undertake a one-off session on violence in schools. In the past year, there have been several high-profile incidents of violent behaviour in schools.

This briefing highlights some of the recent debates and developments around the issue. It also highlights some evidence of the scale of the issue and takes a fairly long view of the issue. Addressing violence in schools falls into the wider behavioural support policies, so the paper explores the approaches advocated in Scotland along with examples of other work on the topic. Lastly, the paper touches on resources in schools.

Recent questions and debates in Parliament

On [Tuesday 16 May](#), Jamie Greene MSP asked a Topical Question asking what action the Government is taking to reduce violence in schools.

The Cabinet Secretary said that she had been engaging with a number of stakeholders and would consider any response following the publication of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools research being undertaken this year (more on this below).

Parliament debated the topic of violence in schools [on 24 May 2023](#). Through an amendment to the motion of that debate, the Scottish Government announced its intention to hold a summit. The summit will aim to identify the work that is now needed to ensure that:

- the right national framework for accurately reporting instances of violence and disruption within schools is in place;

- the right guidance on exclusions laws and policies is available; and
- the right resources that are needed to support schools, parents and carers and young people themselves are available to assist them in promoting acceptable behaviour and tackling violence and disruption.

The [Scottish Government media release following the debate](#) said that summit would take place in the coming weeks. It also said that Education Scotland will work with “every local authority to identify good practice in behaviour and relationships, sharing the findings with schools across the country.”

The Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee is considering [PE1947: Address Scotland's culture of youth violence](#) which asks that the Scottish Government “address the disturbing culture of youth violence in Scotland”.

Scale of the issue

The behaviour of pupils and violence towards each other and towards staff is a long-standing concern. For example, the Scottish Executive published a report of the Discipline Task Group in 2001. This said—

“There are growing concerns regarding the level of indiscipline in our schools. These concerns range from the cumulative effect of low-level indiscipline displayed by routine inappropriate behaviour in classrooms, to the extremely disturbed behaviour exhibited by troubled young people who face major challenges in their lives. There is also concern over the increasing levels of indiscipline and anti-social behaviour witnessed outside of the classroom in corridors, playgrounds, dining areas, on school buses and also in areas immediately adjacent to schools.” (p11)

As a result of the recommendations of the Discipline Task Group, the Scottish Executive committed to supporting a range of initiatives, as well as making resources available for professional development purposes.

Three years later, a Policy Update on Behaviour in Scottish Schools concluded that progress had been made in implementing the recommendations in the 2001 report and recommended developing further approaches to prevent, and respond to, pupil-on-pupil violence or aggression. This included undertaking ‘regular major surveys of teachers’ and pupils’ experiences and perceptions of behaviour and discipline in schools’.

Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research was carried out in 2006, 2009, 2012, and 2016. The [2006 report concluded](#)—

“The majority of pupils were reported to be generally well behaved, both in the classroom and around school. Low-level negative behaviour continues to be the most prevalent form of indiscipline encountered in schools. Yet, focus group discussions would suggest that these are also the most wearing for staff. ... it may be that addressing the common pattern of low-level indiscipline needs greater attention, particularly given its reported de-motivating effect on school staff.”

The 2006 report also provided data on perceptions of violence in schools. It said—

“The problem of pupil violence was considered to be more serious by secondary school staff, particularly secondary teachers. For example, almost two-fifths (38 per cent) of secondary headteachers, nearly half (47 per cent) of secondary teachers and two-fifths of secondary additional support staff (42 per cent) reported that pupil violence was a problem in their school, compared with around a fifth of primary headteachers, teachers and additional support staff (19, 21 and 18 per cent respectively).” (p68)

These findings were broadly echoed in subsequent reports. The most [recent report relates to the 2016 survey](#). In terms of low-level disruption, the research found little change in secondary schools. However, low-level disruptive behaviour in primary schools increased between 2012 and 2016. The report said: “many of the reasons that staff identified for this increase in low-level disruption are linked to broader societal changes – the impact of digital technologies and changes in parenting”. The [report of the 2016 survey found](#)—

“There has been little change in serious disruptive behaviour in either primary or secondary schools. However, primary support staff report that they have experienced slightly higher levels of general verbal abuse, physical aggression and physical violence towards them personally.”

The next Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research was due to take place in 2020 but this was delayed by the pandemic. It is taking place this year and [minutes of a December 2022](#) meeting of the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools said that analysis of the data will take place in May-July this year with a draft report “expected in September with a final report produced late October 2023”.

Dr Mowat’s submission suggested that the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research should also undertake deeper work exploring the issues facing schools which may be outliers to support policy makers and educators to come to a deep understanding of the issues faced by schools working in more difficult circumstances.

The NASUWT’s submission quoted data from a survey of its members which indicate that Scotland has significantly more problems with pupil behaviour than other UK nations. The survey had a relatively small sample size in Scotland and the data may not be fully representative. The NASUWT also said that its members had particularly highlighted issues of LGBTQI+ and Black teachers experiencing discrimination and abuse from pupils and parents.

There are no nationally collected statistics on incidents of abuse towards teachers. Local authorities themselves may collect the data. It [was reported last year](#) that the Scottish Conservatives had put in freedom of information requests to local authorities on the number incidents of physical or verbal abuse. It revealed the total number of incidents per relevant years to be:

- 2018/19: 17,602

- 2019/20: 14,582
- 2020/21: 11,672
- 2021/22: 19,517

An [article in TES Scotland published in December 2022](#) explored the issue of the perceived increase in violence in schools. This included describing the results of a small headteacher survey. Those heads that responded said that “behaviour is worsening” and those respondents also stressed “that the issues centre on a minority of students.”

Potential factors contributing to an increase in incidents

The EIS’ submission in advance of this meeting said that the experience of its members is that violent behaviour is increasing. It argued that this was potentially due to “social deprivation, poor mental health and the experience of the Coronavirus pandemic”. It also said that its members had seen an “increase in violent incidents arising from pupils’ distressed behaviour, most notably amongst younger children in P1 and P2 who, traditionally, have been less likely to exhibit violent behaviour”.

On [Tuesday 16 May](#), the Cabinet Secretary also suggested that an increase in violent behaviour may be due to the effects of Covid. She said—

“Covid has changed the culture in schools. It is changing relationships, behaviour and things including attendance. We need to be cognisant of the broader changes that are happening in our school communities, and we need to support our school staff better in responding to such incidents when they are extreme.”

The Scottish Government’s 2021 [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) education recovery: key actions and next steps](#) included a section on work being undertaken to support health and wellbeing of pupils. It listed a number of interventions supported by Scottish Government funding such as school counsellors.

The NASUWT’s submission said—

“While there is evidence that there has been a post-pandemic rise in pupil violence and abuse in Scotland’s schools, it would be an egregious oversimplification to label the pandemic as the only cause. The Union believes the cause of changes to behaviour patterns requires in-depth examination and suggests that urgent research should be commissioned examining the impact of the pandemic on children and their schooling specifically.”

Connect’s submission highlighted the difficulties, and in some cases trauma, faced by many families through the pandemic. Its submission stated—

“These incidents should be viewed as the most extreme expression of the break down in relationships and the far-reaching social impact of the pandemic on

behaviour, distress and the ability of young people to cope. We strongly believe that family support has to be delivered through schools, to make sure children are ready and able to learn. This requires resources, extra staff, training, and a commitment to building positive relationships with families. Pilots have been run over the years of family support workers, or parent/family liaison officers, working from schools, with considerable success.”

The EIS also argued that a lack of resources generally and specialist support means that children’s needs are not being met and that this is impacting on, among other things, behaviours. Dr Mowat’s submission stated—

“Whilst a direct link has not been established between mental health issues and behaviour in schools during the recovery phase of the pandemic, an emerging literature is indicative of difficulties in emotional regulation for CYP, deriving from the impact of social distancing and the lack of a supportive framework.”

The Committee received a submission from Tom Bennett. Professor Bennett’s submission saw the root causes of violence as complex, but he argued that most are “rooted in human nature”. He said, “children, like all people, compete for attention resources, for fun, to defend their status and so on”. He then continued—

“But we can say that in institutions it occurs when it is permitted, when students feel that they can get away with it without consequences, and where the boundaries of unacceptable conduct are looser. It particularly occurs in environments where it is permitted. Scotland currently emphasises well-meant but essentially ineffective behaviour policies like Restorative Practice, which is rooted in therapeutic techniques. These techniques simply lack any evidence of large scale or scalable success. They often lead to schools massively deteriorating in their behaviour cultures, because staff don’t have the time to use them as intended, because they don’t work for most students anyway, and because students realise that nothing of any gravity will happen to them if they misbehave.”

Approaches to supporting behaviour

The [Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools](#) (SAGRABIS) provides advice to local and national government on behaviour and relationships in schools. The group is chaired jointly by the Deputy First Minister and COSLA’s Spokesman on Education, Children, and Young People.

Broadly speaking, guidance in Scotland advocates for a relational approach whereby a key aspect of supporting better behaviour is the actions of the teacher and individualised approaches to each student. [Education Scotland guidance says](#)—

“Relationships form the basis of all relational approaches. Helpful relationships are simply the positive connections between people that foster positive social interactions and establish an environment of trust and support. In a trusting and supportive environment, people can disagree and challenge each other. Relational approaches include those that are nurturing, trauma-informed, restorative, solution orientated, and encourage compassion and connection

across communities. Practitioners who are committed to relational approaches will generally:

- show unconditional positive regard to learners (accepting and supporting them exactly as they are without evaluating or judging them)
- understand and respond to behaviour in a respectful, child friendly and holistic way, considering the individual in the context of their family, community and culture
- proactively develop responses to support learners' wellbeing and learners who may be at risk of disengaging or of being excluded
- actively listen, with purpose, to children and young people
- focus on inclusion, wellbeing, and addressing barriers to learning rather than punitive processes
- help children and young people to be aware of and understand the impact of their actions and behaviours.”

The Education Scotland guidance not only promotes a relational approach, but it also argues against the use of punitive measures. It says—

“[A behaviour management approach] often focusses on what to do after unacceptable behaviour has occurred. It relies on rule setting and sanctions as a reaction to rule breaking. The idea is that the sanctions act as a deterrent to unacceptable behaviour. This model is relatively easy to establish, it does not require relationships in order to run, and it does work for the majority of compliant learners. However, it requires people to enforce negative consequences for non-compliance which often has a negative impact on relationships. Behaviour is functional, designed to meet needs. Imposing sanctions doesn't rely on any consideration of the purpose of the behaviour or the need the behaviour is communicating to us. If needs are not supported the behaviour will more than likely recur and may even escalate. Learners who repeatedly break the rules because they have no alternative strategies to have their needs met can quickly find themselves in a negative cycle of punitive measures which can lead to disengagement from learning and/or exclusions. Some of our more vulnerable learners, such as those who have experienced adversity or trauma can be disproportionately and negatively affected by these approaches. Rules-based systems also show little regard for the person who has been harmed. A sanction for the person who has caused the harm is easy to administer however it does not necessarily support or help the person harmed.”

The guidance highlights the importance of setting boundaries in this approach. It seeks to differentiate the concept of a boundary and a rule and argues that children should be partners in determining what these boundaries are.

“Boundaries are necessary to support emotional and physical safety. They provide points of reference for respectful interaction and are an expression of

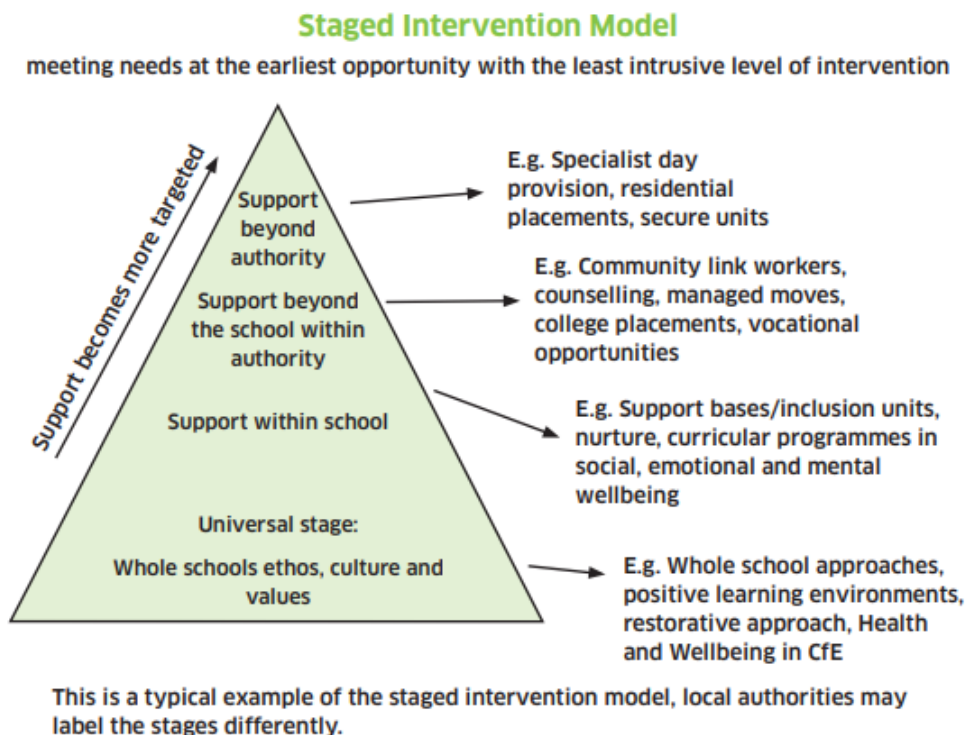
what is important to us and what we expect of ourselves and each other. Unlike rules which are directly linked to negative consequences if they are broken, boundaries can be explicitly linked to positive consequences that are a result of everyone in the learning community respecting them. Children's rights should be at the heart of agreeing boundaries, routines and shared expectations about how people treat one another. In line with Article 12 children and young people should be full partners in agreeing what the shared expectations and boundaries are."

Rather than punishments, the Education Scotland guidance suggests restorative practices to deal with transgressions. This can cover a range of strategies and can include:

- developing a restorative climate in schools with activities such as peer support;
- restorative conversations when teachers or fellow pupils intervene in a situation; and
- more formal restorative meetings and conferences involving all these affected by an incident, including families where appropriate.

The NASUWT's submission commented on the Education Scotland guidance. It said that it "fell short in terms of both its clarity and ability to support and affect real change for teachers on the ground".

National guidance also suggests a staged intervention approach. The 2016 Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research found that 97% of secondary heads reported using a staged intervention approach. Local authorities staged approaches might vary, but the broad approach is to have a process to identify the level of support required to meet the learning needs of an individual child or young person. This would normally entail universal support at the first stage up to intensive support in the final or later stages. The 2013 Scottish Government paper, [Better relationships, better learning, better behaviour](#), reflected on the 2012 behaviour survey and suggested a staged approach to interventions. The diagram below is an example of a staged intervention given in the 2013 paper:



The suite of guidance around behaviour highlights the importance of school culture and ethos. The [Scottish Government's response](#) to the 2016 Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research said—

“A culture where children and young people feel included, respected, safe and secure and where their achievements and contributions are valued and celebrated is essential to the development of good relationships. In order to create this environment for effective learning and teaching there should be a shared understanding of wellbeing underpinned by children's rights and a focus on positive relationships across the whole school community.”

A shared understanding of wellbeing is a key part of the wider Getting it Right for Every Child approach. Guidance around supporting positive behaviours is linked to GIRFEC. GIRFEC is intended to be a holistic, and where necessary multi-agency, approach to support wellbeing, as defined by the SHANARRI¹ indicators. The [Government says](#), “GIRFEC is about enhancing the wellbeing of all children and young people as well as building a flexible scaffold of support: where it is needed, for as long as it is needed.”

The TES article referenced above contrasted the views of Tom Bennett, a behaviour advisor to the Department for Education (DfE) who advocates for clear boundaries and predictable consequences, with the approach in current Scottish guidance.

In his [2017 review for the Department for Education](#), Tom Bennett, mirrored some of the Scottish guidance. For example, he stresses the importance of supporting good

¹ SHANARRI is an acronym for: Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, and Included. See <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/wellbeing-indicators-shanarri/>

behaviour as well as seeking to stop poor behaviour and putting in place additional support for those with significant behavioural challenges. A key difference is that Prof Bennett sees schools and teachers as having a directive role in setting and policing norms of behaviour, he said—

“Directing students to behave in a specific way is often mischaracterised as an act of oppression. This is both unhelpful and untrue. It is the duty of every adult to help create in students the habit of self-restraint or self-regulation. This must be mastered before students can consider themselves to be truly free. To be in control of one’s own immediate inclinations or desires and fancies, is a liberty far more valuable than the absence of restraint. Compliance is only one of several rungs on a behavioural ladder we hope all our students will climb, but it is a necessary one to achieve first. Once obtained, students can then be supported into true autonomy and independence, where they reliably and consciously make wise and civil decisions without supervision or restraint. This process closely mirrors the broader model of human maturation, in which schools have a part to play.”

Prof Bennett’s submission indicated that he considered therapeutic approaches (such as restorative practice) as suitable as part of a whole school management system which could include a range of “boundaries, sanctions, pastoral and conversational responses”.

The [Education Endowment Foundation published a guidance report](#) on improving behaviour in schools in 2021 based on research. This again focuses on good relationships and supporting good behaviour. While it does not argue that punishment or consequences should be absent from approaches altogether, the emphasis of this report is on proactive approaches. This report had six recommendations.

Under the “Proactive” theme, the recommendations were:

1. *Know and understand your pupils and their influences*

Understand what teachers can do, each pupils’ context, and ensuring that every pupil has a supportive relationship.

2. *Teach learning behaviours alongside managing misbehaviour*

“Learning behaviour” here is defined as any behaviour that supports learning such as paying attention to the teacher or persevering with a difficult task.

3. *Use classroom management strategies to support good classroom behaviour*

Training for teachers was highlighted under this recommendation, as well as ensuring that reward systems form part of classroom management strategies.

4. *Use simple approaches as part of your regular routine*

These simple approaches may be greeting pupils at the door or giving specific behaviour-related praise throughout the lesson. It also recommends working with parents to gain consistency.

Under the “Reactive” theme, the recommendation was:

5. *Use targeted approaches to meet the needs of individuals in your school*

Here the EEF says, “universal systems are unlikely to meet the needs of all students. For those pupils who need more intensive support with their behaviour, a personalised approach is recommended.”

Under the “Implementation” theme, the recommendation was:

6. *Consistency is key*

The EEF said, “consistency and coherence at a whole-school level are paramount.”

Staff, parents/carers and pupils’ say in designing policies

Involving parents/carers and young people themselves in supporting good behaviour in schools has been a longstanding expectation. Both were the subject of several recommendations in the 2001 Report of the Discipline Task Group.

NASUWT’s submission said—

“Parents and carers, too, have an essential role to play in assisting schools in maintaining high standards of behaviour. They have a duty to take responsibility for the behaviour of their child. Consistency of expectations by schools and parents/carers is essential, as is the need for effective liaison between the home and the school.”

Current [Education Scotland guidance](#) suggests that new behaviour policies should be developed in partnership with the school’s community. It said—

“Unfortunately, historically for many, Relationships and Behaviour Policies have been subjects of controversy, often viewed as being imposed with insufficient consultation, not recognising the needs of all stakeholders, and rarely seen as contextualised enough to take account of local factors. For this reason any refresh or rewriting of policies that support relationships, rights and behaviour should involve a participative process with all stakeholders and should be tailored to the specific context of each local learning community.”

The Education Scotland guidance also suggests that “all adults working with children and young people in any educational setting should receive professional learning to enable them to have a good understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of relational approaches and what they mean both in practical terms and emotionally for staff.”

Health and Safety duties

Local authorities have, as employers, a duty to do what is reasonably practical to manage risks to staff and pupils. They also have a duty to undertake formal risk assessments and to take appropriate action. The [Health and Safety Executive provides advice](#) on work-related violence and aggression and how employers can protect workers from this.

Recording, monitoring and responding to bullying incidents

A number of submissions highlighted inconsistent recording of incidents. Recent work has been undertaken looking at the recording of bullying incidents which may be a useful example to consider.

[National guidance published in 2018 sought](#) to improve the consistency of recording and monitoring of bullying incidents; such incidents should be recorded on SEEMiS. This document advised that the information recorded should include:

- the type of bullying experienced, e.g., name-calling, rumours, threats etc.;
- any underlying prejudice including details of any protected characteristic(s);
- the impact of the bullying incident, including consideration of personal or additional support needs and wellbeing concerns; and
- actions taken including resolution at an individual or organisational level.

The foreword to the 2018 guidance said that there were no plans to collate this data nationally, but that “figures gathered at a local level may be used by the Scottish Government, working in partnership with Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), teaching unions and other stakeholder bodies to support self-improvement and inform future policy and practice.”

A [2023 Education Scotland report](#) looked at the recording and monitoring of incidents of bullying as well as the responses to incidents of bullying.

This report found significant variation of how schools are using SEEMiS to record bullying incidents. It found that around “two-thirds of schools are fully implementing national guidance by recording incidents of bullying on [the Bullying and Equalities Module within SEEMiS]”. Almost all schools recorded bullying incidents, but not necessarily in line with the guidance.

Education Scotland found that senior leaders were disappointed with the functionality of the Bullying and Equalities Module within SEEMiS and found it difficult to use to identify emerging trends in their schools, and that schools can use other systems to monitor incidents of bullying. The report found—

“Schools which have systematic approaches to monitoring report a reduction in

incidents of bullying. Around two-thirds of these schools analyse data, including about protected characteristics and prejudiced-based bullying, to identify the scope and scale of bullying in their school and to drive improvement. Examples of improved policy and practice as a result of effective data analysis include adaptations to the school environment, amendments to the health and wellbeing curriculum, targeted support for individuals and professional learning for staff. There is significant scope for schools to strengthen their arrangements for using data to identify patterns and trends of incidents of bullying to help guide improvements in practice.”

In terms of responses to incidents of bullying, Education Scotland stated, “staff across schools are committed to creating a safe and secure environment where bullying is openly acknowledged, discussed and challenged as unacceptable behaviour.” It reported that a range of specific measures are adopted across schools and that more broadly there is a view that “creating an inclusive ethos and culture is the most effective way of reducing and responding to incidents of bullying”. However, Education Scotland found that a minority of learners were sceptical about the value of reporting incidents and the fairness of how these incidents are dealt with.

The [Health and Wellbeing Census asked questions](#) on pupil’s experiences of bullying. 2020/21 was the first year of the Health and Wellbeing Census and the publication does not cover all authorities across Scotland but shows aggregated results for the 16 local authorities that shared their census data. This found that 31% of the pupils who responded said that they had been bullied in the last year. The prevalence of being bullied decreased as pupils got older, and it was less for pupils from less deprived areas.

Exclusions

Local authorities have the power to exclude children and young people from school. The Schools General (Scotland) Regulations 1975 set out the grounds for excluding a pupil and the process education authorities must follow. Exclusions here mean both temporary exclusions and being permanently removed from a school roll. The 1975 regulations state—

“An education authority shall not exclude a pupil from a school under their management to which he has been admitted, except where:

- (a) they are of the opinion that the parent of the pupil refuses or fails to comply, or to allow the pupil to comply, with the rules, regulations, or disciplinary requirements of the school; or
- (b) they consider that in all the circumstances to allow the pupil to continue his attendance at the school would be likely to be seriously detrimental to order and discipline in the school or the educational well-being of the pupils there.”

An exclusion does not affect the right of the child to education and education authorities’ duties to ensure the provision of school education, albeit this might be through alternative provision.

The Scottish Government published [guidance on managing school exclusions in June 2017](#). Three of the guiding principles of this guidance are:

- Exclusion should be the last resort;
- Where exclusion is used, it should be as a proportionate response where there is no appropriate alternative, and the wellbeing of the child or young person should be the key consideration; and
- Exclusion must be for as short a period as possible with the aim of improving outcomes for the child or young person. The time during and after the exclusion period should be used constructively to resolve the situation and ensure positive and appropriate support is in place for all.

As these suggest, the guidance does not preclude education authorities from excluding pupils. The guidance [highlighted the correlation between worse outcomes and having been excluded at school](#). While the causal links between exclusion and some of the outcomes data was not clear – there could be confounding factors. The guidance also cited research which pointed toward there being negative impacts of exclusion itself on the pupil being excluded.

The Promise recommended that “formal and informal exclusion of care experienced children from school must end”. It said—

“Schools and Local Authorities must do everything required to support children to build positive relationships at school and maintain attendance, engagement, and learning in a meaningful and supportive way.

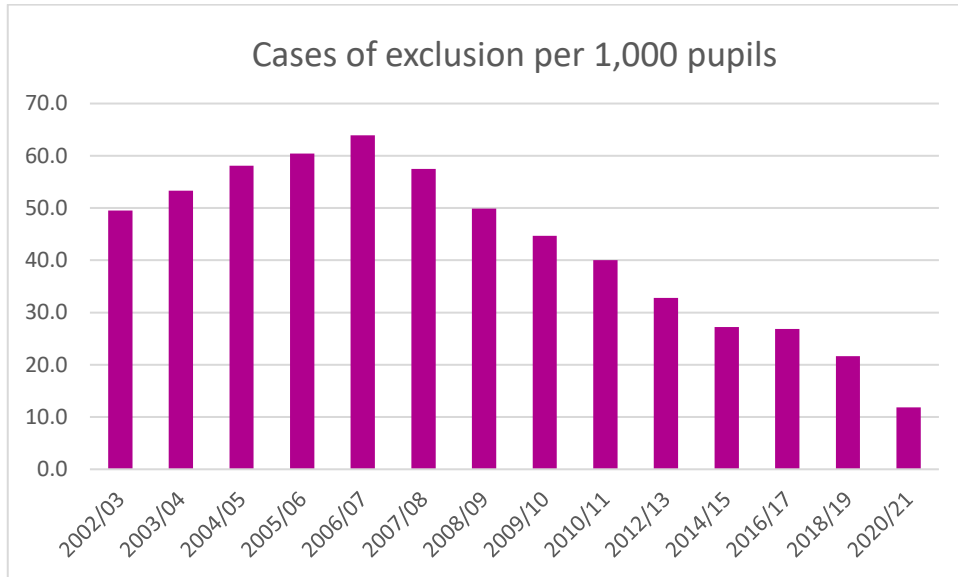
“Schools in Scotland must also not exacerbate the trauma of children by imposing consequences for challenging behaviour that are restrictive, humiliating and stigmatising. This includes seclusion or restraint and can include certain use of behaviour reward systems. Scotland must properly support and resource the workforce to step in to put theory into good practice by supporting and building relationships with children.”

SAGRABIS discussed exclusions in the context of the Promise’s recommendations in March 2021. The [minutes to this meeting](#) expressed support of SAGRABIS to supporting care-experienced young people to achieve their potential. It also said that work should be undertaken to understand better the levels exclusions of care experienced young people. The SSTA representative was reported as saying that “there are cases where exclusion is the right approach in some situations as it can help to manage behaviour and relationships with pupils and staff” and that it is “important that exclusion should not act as a barrier to learning.” The EIS representative was reported as saying that there should be a focus on ensuring that there is a managed return to school along with “a robust plan which addresses the on-going needs of the child”, and that appropriate support is provided to parents and carers.

[Data on exclusions is collected biennially](#). The latest figures refer to the 2020/21 school year. It is due to be collected for the 2022/23 school year. The dataset includes information on both who is being excluded (i.e., by SIMD, LA, etc.) and the reasons

why.

The chart below shows how levels of exclusions have changed over time.



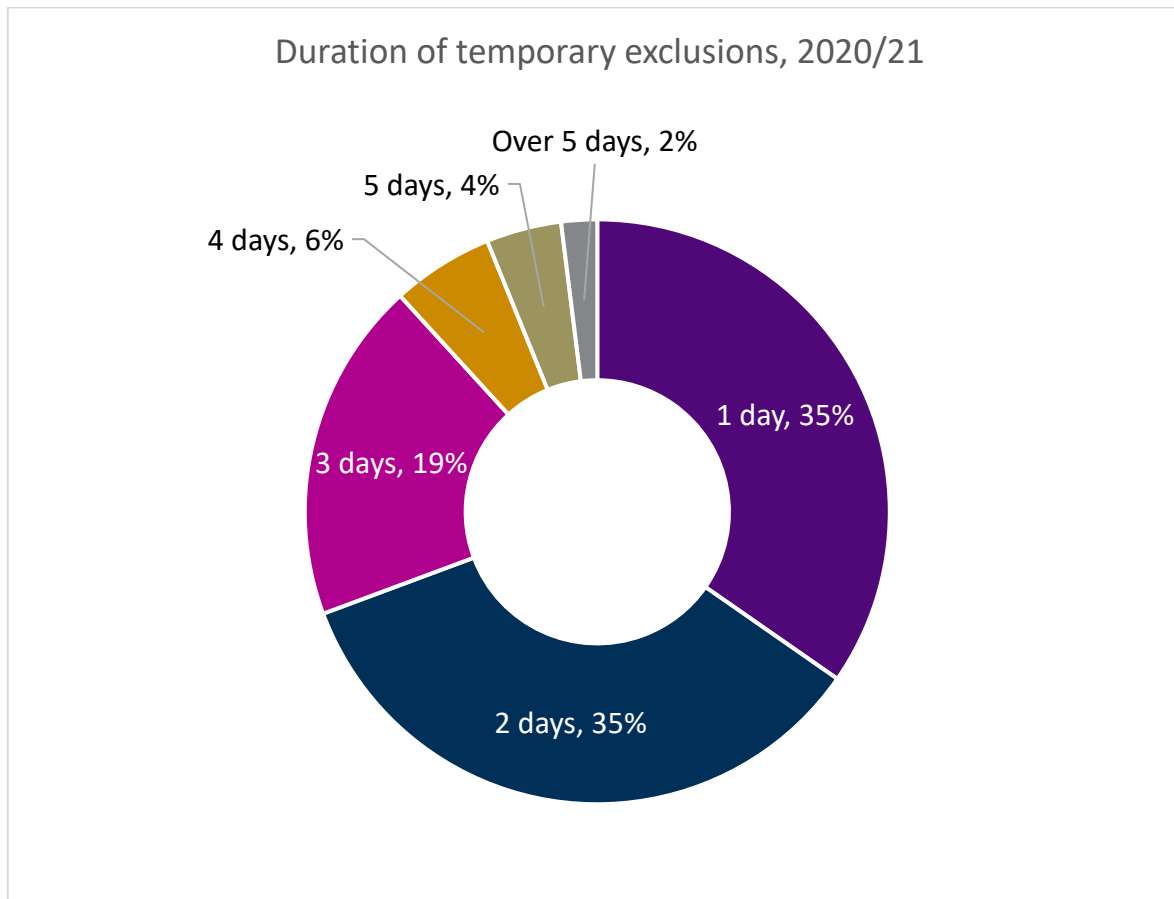
Here we can see a clear trend in the reduction of exclusions since 2006/7. In this time, permanent exclusions – the removal of a pupil from the school roll – was almost unused. In 2006/07, 248 pupils (out of 44,794 total exclusions) were removed from the school roll. In 2014/15, there were only 5 incidences of pupils being permanently excluded from a school roll (out of a total of 18,430 exclusions) and in 2020/21 one pupil was permanently excluded.

There was a total of 8,323 exclusions in 2020/21. There was a sharp decrease in exclusion between 2018/19 and 2020/21, with cases of exclusion falling by 44%. The commentary accompanying these statistics said that this decrease could be partly attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many local authorities said that the lower amount of time spent in school due to closures was a reason for a reduction in their case numbers.

Pupils can be excluded more than once in a year. In 2020/21, 6,016 pupils were excluded. 76.5% of these pupils were excluded only once, 15.0% twice, and 8.6% more than twice.²

In 86% of the exclusions, no education provision was made for the pupil while they were excluded. The duration of temporary exclusions can vary; most are one or two days. The chart below shows the reported duration of temporary exclusions in 2020/21.

² Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding.



Boys accounted for 78% of exclusions in 2020/21 and incidents of exclusion increase as pupils get older, up to S2 and S3. In S4 and beyond, the number of exclusions falls. More pupils living in areas of higher deprivation are excluded than those in areas of lower deprivation. Pupils with an identified Additional Support Need were also more likely to be excluded than those without.

Statistics also provide a breakdown of the reasons for an exclusion; more than one reason could be recorded for each exclusion. 27.7% of exclusions were due to, at least in part, “Verbal abuse of staff”. 25.0% of exclusions were due, at least in part, to “Physical assault with no weapon”. Of these, a little over a quarter included a physical assault against staff (i.e., 6.9% of exclusions) and a little over three quarters included were a physical assault against pupils (i.e., 19.5% of exclusions)³.

Dr Mowat’s submission cited research which highlighted unrecorded elements of exclusion, such as “pupils being sent home from school without the exclusion being formally recorded, the use of ‘managed moves,’ the potential abuse of part-time timetables and the increasing use of ‘inclusion’ or ‘time-out’ rooms to isolate the pupil”. Professor Bennett’s submission agreed that exclusions should be “used as last resorts in the worst scenarios”. He continued—

“Scottish education needs to move away from a system that congratulates itself on almost zero exclusions and move to one where it’s done when necessary- and only then. More supportive alternative provision destinations must be created, on the understanding that some students have needs and behaviours

³ Some exclusions would have been due to physical assaults on both pupils and staff.

that cannot be met in a mainstream environment.”

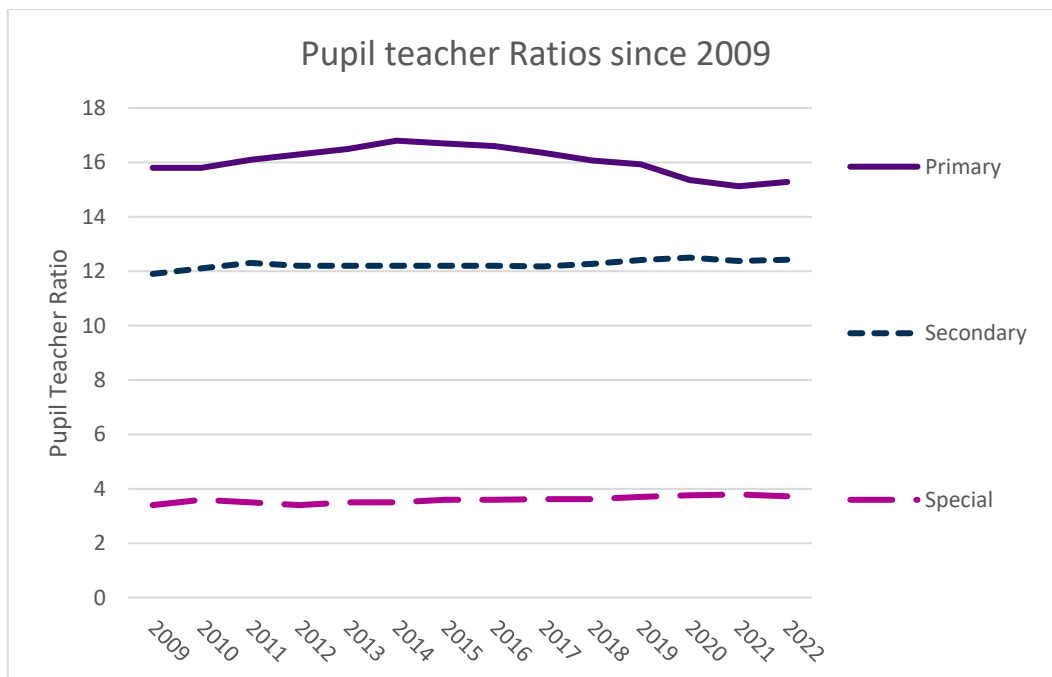
Dr Mowat’s submission took issue with Professor Bennett’s approach in relation to exclusions, saying that he “pays scant attention to the disproportionality of school exclusions amongst children and young people identified with ASN and those living in communities characterised by multiple deprivation.”

Resources

As noted above, in Scotland, guidance promotes a relational approach to supporting positive behaviour in schools. [Education Scotland guidance explains](#) that this approach requires an investment of resources—

“Relational approaches are often mis-perceived as the ‘soft’ option that allows disrespectful or irresponsible behaviour to go unchecked. If implemented properly however they involve equal measures of challenge and support and create boundaries based on shared expectations or values which are proactive, preventative and positive. ... Adopting relational approaches at a whole school level takes time - time for staff to develop a shared understanding of the underpinning principles, time to learn, practice and refine the skills and strategies to support the approach, time to become confident and consistent in their use. They are not a quick fix. Learners and parents also need time to become familiar with and trust the relational approaches being used.”

Some of the main inputs into an education system are the people who work in our schools. Pupil teacher ratios are the number of pupils per teacher – a smaller PTR indicates a greater staff resource. The chart below shows the national pupil teacher ratios in the Primary, Secondary and Special school sectors. These sectors have significantly differing staffing requirements, and the chart is intended to show changes within each sector, not a comparison between sectors.



Source: [Teacher census supplementary statistics 2022](#), table 1.1e.

We can see from the chart that since 2014, the PTR in Primary schools has been reducing albeit there was an increase between 2021 and 2022. In Secondary and Special schools, the PTR is similar over the period; both a little higher in 2022 than 2018 and before.

The collection of statistics on support staff have suffered from some comparability issues over the years and it is not possible to provide such long-run time series. The table below is from the Scottish Government’s [School support staff statistics](#).

School support staff, FTE, including centrally employed, 2018-2022

	Pupil Support Assistant	Behaviour Support	Home-school link worker	Educational Psychologist
2018	13,803	122	376	368
2019	13,909	148	373	372
2020	15,263	148	409	378
2021	16,299	187	475	383
2022	16,606	184	497	398

The table shows an increase across all categories between 2018 and 2022. While we do not have a meaningful pupil support staff ratio, these increases are all greater than the change in pupil numbers in the same period.

Supporting families can require support from a range of services. One such is social work. The [latest SSSC data](#) on the social work workforce reported that in 2021, the number of FTE social workers performing a “fieldwork service” for children was 5,820, which was down from 5,920 in 2020 but represented an increase of around 270 compared to 2012. However, in evidence to the Committee on the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill, Ben Farrugia of Social Work Scotland [said in evidence on 26 April](#) that children and families social work teams are at “60 to 70 per cent capacity”

**Ned Sharratt, Senior Researcher (Education, Culture), SPICe Research
7 June 2023**

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The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP www.parliament.scot

Annexe B

EIS written submission

Introduction

The Educational Institute of Scotland ('EIS'), Scotland's largest teacher trade union and professional association, representing more than 65,000 teachers across all sectors of Education and at all career levels, is pleased to provide written evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee on violence in schools.

Until quite recently, incidents of serious indiscipline and violence were comparatively rare in our schools, but there has been a marked increase in the number reported in the past few years. Managing challenging behaviour is a significant challenge for schools and one that is increasingly difficult to respond to as a result of insufficient resources. Whilst teachers are well accustomed to dealing with pupil indiscipline and whilst their training and experience mean that they are skilled in doing so, it is increasingly clear that the needs of children and young people are intensifying as a result of social deprivation, poor mental health and the experience of the Coronavirus pandemic. These are all potentially contributory factors in some pupils exhibiting particularly challenging behaviour.

Teachers want to deliver the best outcomes for all children and young people, but they require the support and resources to allow them to effectively meet the range and complexity of pupils' needs currently in our schools and must not be put at personal risk in doing so. Schools must be safe places to learn and to teach, safe spaces for students and staff alike, not least because health and safety legislation requires it. In instances where challenging behaviour escalates to violence or the threat of violence, this must be dealt with swiftly and appropriately and in accordance with Local Authority policies – including potential police involvement where appropriate. Supports must be in place for the teachers, staff and pupils who have been subjected to the violent behaviour as well as for those who have exhibited it.

It is, therefore, welcome that the Committee is holding a roundtable session to explore the issue of violence in schools and to seek views on ways of addressing this worrying increase in reported incidents.

We also welcome the recent Scottish Government announcement that it is to set up a summit on violent behaviour by pupils in schools. It is essential that Scotland's teachers and their unions play an active part in this summit, to ensure that an accurate picture is presented as to the scale and complexity of the problem in our schools. Real solutions, including additional resources must be forthcoming, and quickly, to produce tangible results to ensure the safety of all in our schools and improve the learning and teaching environment for students and staff alike.

The Prevalence of Violence in Schools

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines work-related violence as:

“Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work.”

This definition should cover written forms of abuse. This can include verbal abuse or threats as well as physical attacks.

Any violence or abuse in relation to a protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) may constitute illegal harassment under the Equality Act 2010.

The HSE website explains what it is doing to address the issue of work-related violence and provides access to a range of information.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/>

Unfortunately, assaults on teachers at work are a recurring problem, and one that must be dealt with appropriately by the authorities – including police involvement where a teacher has been physically assaulted or placed under severe threat. Teaching professionals have the right to expect a safe working place and to be properly supported by their employers where issues related to their safety do arise.

It is clear from the statistics produced⁴ that the levels of recorded incidents of violence are increasing in Scottish schools, with 10,852 incidents recorded in the Primary sector and 2,951 in Secondary in 2021/22. Interim figures for 2022/23 do not suggest any diminution in these numbers.

The overview presented by these statistics would also appear to be replicated in the evidence we have gathered from our members, both anecdotally, through our Networks and Committees and from the results of a recent all-member survey.

Since the pandemic, EIS members from various local authority areas have reported an increase in violent incidents arising from pupils' distressed behaviour, most notably amongst younger children in P1 and P2 who traditionally, have been less likely to exhibit violent behaviour. Whilst such incidents do not gain the same publicity as those featuring older pupils which have gone viral on social media, the impact on a predominantly female school staff and on young learners of exposure to such violence must not be underestimated.

Last session, it was reported to the EIS national Executive Committee from one Local Association that over the period of a few days, one Early Primary teacher had suffered a broken jaw and damage to the eye socket from being kicked in the face by a pupil; and another in a different school had had a tooth knocked out, having been punched in the face by a child in Primary 2. Others at the meeting concurred based on experiences in their own areas that there is acute need relative to distressed behaviour among a larger cohort of young people than previously, yet Behaviour Support provision is an area in which resources have diminished significantly over the past decade.

As recently as December 2022, the EIS supported a member who had been struck on the head by a stone deliberately thrown by a pupil. The member had suffered a head injury, causing a brain bleed, impaired vision and headaches. The member was absent for work for nine months and ultimately, had to transfer to another school.

⁴ [Violence in schools - Google Sheets](#)

These examples are not isolated incidents and whilst the EIS supports members in pursuing appropriate compensation for injuries suffered at work, our clear preference would be to see these types of injuries eliminated entirely from our schools.

The adults who have been subjected to this harm may also require additional support and yet we know that support for teachers and pupil support workers is often overlooked. Teachers are often left to manage the behaviour of the pupil who has caused the harm and to support the children in the class, who may have witnessed the incident, without intervention. Provision should be made to ensure that the teacher or member of staff who has been harmed is removed from the class and given time and appropriate support to recover. Employers owe a duty of care to keep staff safe and specific consideration should be given to risk assessment and safety planning to protect that person from further harm.

The EIS will continue to do all that it can to defend its members from all workplace risks by continuing to press local authorities and the Scottish Government to ensure that our schools are safe places to work and to learn.

Violence in the context of Additional Support Needs

In considering violence in schools, it is important to set this within the context of Additional Support for Learning ('ASL'). The approach to ASL in Scotland is expansive, it being well understood that a wide variety of circumstances can give rise to extra support for learning being required.

The key legislation relating to ASL in Scotland is the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. This legislation obliges education authorities to identify, provide and review the additional support needs of their pupils, which can arise in the short or long term as a result of the learning environment, family circumstances, health and wellbeing needs or a disability.

Essentially, additional support needs can arise from any factor which causes a barrier to learning, whether that factor relates to social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, disability or family and care circumstances. Additional support may therefore be required for a child or young person who has behavioural difficulties or is exhibiting distressed or violent behaviour.

Underlying Causes of Violent Behaviour

There may be a myriad of reasons why a pupil acts in a violent manner or displays distressed behaviour and careful consideration requires to be given to the root cause of that behaviour and early intervention strategies invoked, in accordance with GIRFEC policy, to remove barriers to engagement and reduce the risk of further incidents occurring, moving forward.

For children in the early stages of Primary, they would have missed, over the periods of lockdown, the opportunity to attend Early Learning and Childcare settings; to make friends with children of their own age; and to develop vital social skills, such as sharing and even how to play cooperatively. EIS members from various local authorities have reported an increase in the numbers of children presenting with delayed development or with minimal speech and language acquisition on arriving in Primary 1. It is perhaps

unsurprising, therefore, that there has been an increased level of distressed behaviour in this cohort of children, as they struggle to communicate an underlying need verbally and in socially acceptable ways.

Similarly, members supporting older children and young people have attested to the mental health challenges which they face and for which there is insufficient immediate or timely support.

Demand continues to outstrip capacity, not only in CAMHS but in other services designed to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. Whilst there has been investment in CAMHS and counselling services, to address the delays in accessing provision, its impact has yet to be seen, as need increases and waiting lists continue to grow. Not only does this impact negatively on the wellbeing of these children and young people, it impedes their ability to learn.

Against such a backdrop of limited specialist wellbeing support, members report a rise in general anxiety, and in issues related to sleep and eating, across the board for pupils.

In addition to this, there has been an intensification of issues seeping into schools from the community, arising, for example, from disputes on social media and resulting in conflict in the school setting. Such incidents require investigation and action and, ultimately, result in an immense draw on the time of pastoral care staff and Senior Leadership Teams.

All of these factors can impact on behaviour and unless the underlying cause is identified and addressed, then the situation is unlikely to improve. The EIS is clear that there has been a significant under-estimation of the impact of the pandemic on children and young people, but also on teachers, and this following on from a decade of austerity.

Addressing the underlying causes of distressed and violent behaviour will require resources and time; resources and time which are not currently being given to effectively meet the needs of the children and young people in our schools.

The Imperative for Additional Resources

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the EIS was campaigning strongly in relation to the chronic under-resourcing of ASN provision, which has been subject to swingeing cuts over the past decade or more, against a backdrop of increased poverty-related need, and large class sizes.

The EIS continues to raise concerns about the systemic under-investment in and rising demand for ASN provision. In 2022, 34% of the school population⁵ were identified as having an additional support need compared to only 4.8% in 2009. The presumption of mainstreaming has resulted in 95% of those pupils spending some, or all of their time in mainstream classes⁶. Critically, this rise in demand has not been reflected in resourcing. The EIS has long raised concerns over dramatically declining numbers of specialist staff and unsustainably large class sizes, leaving significant gaps in

⁵ [Schools in Scotland 2022: summary statistics - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/schools-in-scotland-2022/summary-statistics/pages/10.aspx)

⁶ [Pupils+Census+Supplementary+Statistics+2022+V2.xlsx \(live.com\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupils-census-supplementary-statistics-2022/v2/pages/10.aspx)

provision to be filled by class teachers. For example, between 2008 and 2022, the number of Primary teaching staff with a general ASN role has declined by 70%⁷, with a 78% decline for Primary teachers in a behaviour support role⁸. Large class sizes mean that teachers are less able to effectively track and monitor the well-being of their students, and such class size militates against inclusive practices, limiting the scope for early preventative intervention.

Against a backdrop of rising numbers of violent incidents reported in schools, it is clear that the current situation is unsustainable and has been for some time. Inclusive education is dependent on adequate resourcing to meet the needs of all pupils. The reality of current provision, as we emerge from the pandemic, is an erosion of resourcing with drastic cuts, rising levels and severity of need, paired with increasing and unsustainable levels of workload for teachers, arising in part from the planning documentation associated with Getting It Right For Every Child ('GIRFEC') policy.

Teachers are under significant pressure to meet the needs of *all* children in the context of mainstreaming, and are often inappropriately blamed for the failures of national and local government to provide adequate resources, support, and reduced class sizes. Teachers need to be supported now to meet the needs of those exhibiting violent behaviour but also to ensure that appropriate supports are in place to meet the needs of the other children and young people in their classes and to keep themselves and others safe.

The Impact of Under-resourcing

The current climate, of under-investment in ASL, is having an impact across the whole learning population, and is detrimental to the wellbeing of the teaching workforce; the wellbeing of young people; and the educational experience for many young people.⁹

Teachers' Wellbeing

Teachers have reported reduced morale, owing to a feeling of failing young people and their families; a feeling of their efforts being futile; feeling blamed for repetitive unacceptable pupil behaviour; feeling unsupported; and having ongoing concern for vulnerable children.

They have also reported increased stress and risk of personal injury or other health impacts, because of exposure to violent incidents, abuse or aggression, from learners who require more support but are not getting it. Overall, the current ASL climate is leading to reduced wellbeing both at and outside of work, with our members citing, for example, lack of sleep, headaches, generalised anxiety – all of which potentially contribute to more long-term absence.

Where absence management proceedings are instituted, the EIS has had to intervene to challenge the assertions that there is a capability issue and to highlight the link between ill-health and long-term exposure to violent incidents at work.

⁷ [Teacher+Census+Supplementary+Statistics+2022+V2.xlsx \(live.com\)](#)

⁸ [Teacher+Census+Supplementary+Statistics+2022+V2.xlsx \(live.com\)](#)

⁹ [ExploringTheGap.pdf \(eis.org.uk\)](#)

Unsurprisingly, the results from the EIS 2023 all-member survey highlight these concerns:

It found that:

- 72.5% of respondents were stressed all of the time or frequently (19.7% and 52.8% respectively)
- 53% of respondents from Secondary schools indicated that improved pupil behaviour in class would make the biggest impact on improving their wellbeing at work
- 71% of Secondary respondents indicated that beyond teaching, preparation and correction, managing pupil behaviour was the biggest driver of workload
- 65.2% of respondents from the Primary sector indicated that having more classroom assistants and support for inclusion and pupils with additional support needs would have the biggest impact on improving their wellbeing at work
- 70% of Primary respondents indicated that having more classroom assistants and support for inclusion would make the biggest impact on reducing workload.

Respondents also left comments by way of qualitative feedback on the factors which impact their wellbeing. We have referenced two here which capture the tenor of the concerns expressed:

- ‘Support for teachers who have pupils who are violent to staff and adults. There needs to be a plan in place which helps these pupils and also those hurt by the pupils. I want to protect my pupils but I feel I cannot, when my class has to evacuate for their protection they miss out on learning. That missed learning time is a massive concern for me, as well as how scared and tense my children are on a regular basis. I do not feel supported ... after an incident of violence and aggression. Management have had bones broken by a violent pupil, and they have continued to work as normal. This sets a precedent for other injured staff, and management themselves should be supported by the Council.’
- ‘Support for Learning Teachers being expected to cope with a bigger workload with less resourcing and support than previously. Too many children with ASN in mainstream schools without sufficient or adequate support. This is unfair on those learners, the pupils around them and the Class Teachers. Most of the SLA support in school is now directed at supporting behaviour and those with other learning needs being overlooked. This results in more pressure/workload being put on classroom teachers and support for learning teachers.’

Learners' Wellbeing

There are multiple health and wellbeing impacts reported for learners, both those learners who have additional support needs and those who don't. Learners who have additional support needs can experience reduced morale, due to receiving less

support to have their needs met than is required; being in larger class size(s) than is optimal; being less supported to take part in enrichment/after-school activities than is required; lower self-esteem; higher levels of generalised anxiety; being more likely to display challenging behaviour; being involved in more violent incidents, fights and low-level disruption to learning; and experiencing a loss of dignity e.g. when they exhibit high levels of distress.

Among the general pupil population, learners can experience higher levels of anxiety due to more stressful atmospheres developing when children do not receive the requisite support; stress caused by disrupted learning, e.g. when a classroom has to be evacuated due to a violent incident; potential distress caused by witnessing peers' violent behaviour; and overall, reduced enjoyment of school.

The current climate, of under-investment in ASL, is having an impact across the whole learning population. Our members have shared concerns about: some pupils being unable to access learning due to social/emotional issues; less access to learning support for some pupils, as this is diverted to supporting the most complex and severe needs; some pupils receiving less attention from teachers but also feeling more stress caused by constant formal assessment in senior phase classes; risk of reduced achievement, due to increasing non-attendance, opting out of school, disruption of learning or less time with teachers; differential impacts depending on socio-economic status: children from higher income families often getting more support than those from poorer backgrounds, as a result of more strident parental advocacy; and less support available at transition times.

Our members have also spoken of their frustration in striving to meet needs using a range of different strategies but having to navigate overly bureaucratic processes and systems which appear to be designed to place barriers in the way of accessing support. Only 4% of respondents (from a total of over 16,475) in the EIS all-member survey said that they have sufficient time to complete paperwork, liaise with colleagues and external agencies and attend meetings in relation to supporting pupils with Additional Support Needs.

The GIRFEC policy is based on joint working in a culture of co-operation and communication between professionals, working in partnership with children and their families. With under-resourcing across Health, Social Work and Education, the early intervention approaches espoused by GIRFEC policy often cannot be invoked.

For GIRFEC to operate effectively, for the holistic needs of learners to be met, and for there to be a reduction in the number of violent incidents in schools, class sizes and class contact time must be cut; practitioners must be given time to develop relationships; to engage in meaningful planning and reflective practice in identifying the underlying causes of violent or distressed behaviour; to assess the impact of interventions; and to be given time to engage in meaningful professional learning opportunities. Investment in the role of Lead Teachers to provide more specialist input and support in ASN for classroom teachers would also be welcome. Urgent action should also be taken to streamline the excessive bureaucracy, arising predominantly from GIRFEC processes, to reduce teacher workload.

There must also be additional investment in Health and Social Work Services if early intervention, multi-agency responses, as envisaged by GIRFEC, are to be available at the point when need is identified.

Reporting

The EIS supports a return to the collation of national statistics on violent incidents whilst also recognising that robust arrangements must be in place at local level to ensure the statistics are reliable. The collection and evaluation of statistics on the incidence of violence to employees should be overseen by the Health and Safety Committee or other appropriate bodies. Such statistics should be used to inform both procedures and the risk assessment process.

Local monitoring should be in the context of public accountability through Education and Children's Services Committees. Care needs to be taken, however, to ensure that local monitoring procedures are not used to publish local league tables of schools' violent incident figures, as this could discourage reporting out of concern about how a school might be perceived.

The EIS supports annual discussions within Health and Safety Committees to consider how risks can be reduced and within LNCTs to discuss councils' discipline procedures, including exclusion policies and alternative provision. Violent incident reporting forms should be brief, contain essential information and should not discourage reporting by being overly complex, and thereby adding to the already excessive workloads of teachers.

Schools and local authorities should be pro-active and encouraging of staff to report violent incidents and should ensure that staff are fully aware of the policies and procedures in place to support them.

Reporting must be firmly connected to action. Many teachers and Head Teachers are of the view that once the report goes to the Local Authority, no further action is taken. Collation and monitoring should not be a mere statistical exercise but a means of directing additional resource to specific areas of need. This would help to address the perception that schools are in a cycle of 'infinite risk assessments', continually updating ineffective risk assessments which will fail in the absence of additional resources being provided.

The EIS has called for all Local Authorities to make a clear statement regarding the unacceptability of any aggressive behaviour, be it verbal or physical, shown towards staff in their educational establishments and asked that this statement is clearly placed in appropriate areas throughout their schools. The response to this has also been patchy because there is a perceived reluctance in some establishments to display the posters or public statements. The reasons given are that some establishments are keen to avoid the perception that aggressive behaviour is in some way common place.

The culture around managing these incidents needs to change to ensure that there is accurate and transparent reporting, not only to ensure that staff and pupils subjected to violence receive the appropriate support but also to ensure that the extent of the problem can be appropriately tracked, to determine whether resources are sufficient and interventions impactful.

Conclusion

The factors leading to violent incidents in schools are complex. However, the solution is clear – we urgently need additional investment in Education, as well as in wider support services.

The EIS has long called for a long-term resourcing strategy – including action to reduce class sizes and significantly enhance the availability of specialist ASN support and expertise within schools – to match the scale of the promise to children and families made within the Education (Additional Support for Learning)(Scotland) Act almost two decades ago.

And yet despite the visible impact of the pandemic on children and young people, we continue to experience further cuts and witness efforts to evade discourse around the issue of resources.

Violent incidents or distressed behaviour in children and young people stem from an underlying need. We will continue to let down the adults and pupils who are witness to, and who experience the impact of this behaviour, as well as those pupils who are displaying it, unless urgent action is taken – unless additional resources are forthcoming to deliver safe and inclusive learning and teaching environments for students and staff alike.

Providing a safe working environment is not optional - failure to do so is unlawful. It's time that the statutory duties owed to teachers and school staff under Health and Safety legislation are meaningfully applied to ensure that everyone working in a school feels confident that they are safe and supported at their work.

Connect written submission

We are aware of the distress, disengagement and fractured relationships that some families and young people are experiencing with schools and school staff. We believe much of this is related to trauma and circumstances experienced by many as a result of COVID-related school closures and subsequent restrictions. We are concerned the term 'violence in schools' does not acknowledge the wider circumstances.

With this in mind, we are sharing with you some of the findings of the parent/carer surveys which we ran during the COVID pandemic. The data from these surveys show the level of stress that many families and young people were under, and the extent of their worries and serious concerns. There is a legacy of stress and anxiety from this time. We are being told that some early learning and childcare settings continue to not allow parents into the centres – some of the negative experiences during the pandemic when parents were shut out are ongoing.

You will see from the information below that parents describe the detrimental social and health and wellbeing impacts of the lockdown and subsequent restrictions on their children. We believe that the ongoing impacts of these on trust, relationships, confidence, mental health and faith in the education system cannot be underestimated. Individual families reported to us the utter despair and devastation there had been to their daily routines and lives, their young person's poor mental health, with parents saying their child would no longer get out of bed (a young man with autism) or they didn't know where their children were or what they were doing, as they had to work.

Parent responses showed that whilst communication between school and home did improve for many over time, a large percentage of families were not contacted regularly and some never heard from their centre at all throughout lockdown.

Individual families told us they felt 'abandoned' and this was particularly true of those families with a child with additional support needs (especially autism or those with complex needs).

Furthermore, from total involvement in their child's schoolwork during lockdown (for those who could manage this, and lots of families could not), many parents felt they were then kept out of the loop about their child's learning when schools went back.

Our surveys showed the great pressure that many families were under – families with one adult in the household who was trying to work, parents who had to give up work to support their child's school work, parents who had to work and could not either look after or support the school work of their children, refugee families and those in financial hardship, without access to IT or the internet, families with children who could not or would not do any school work (often young people who had additional and specialist support in school) - all of these families were, in fact, abandoned by the education system. Early on, we lobbied for local authority hubs to take in more children and young people, with the option of families self-referring but this did not happen.

Then, when schools were re-opened, specialist external support was not allowed back into schools for many, many months. Additional support for learning, diagnosis and tailored support, communication with parents, re-building the trust between families

and school/early learning and childcare centres took a long time to start to happen again, as staff were occupied with keeping schools open. We cannot begin to imagine the trauma experienced by some children, young people and families as a result of lockdown and restricted support, and the withdrawal of social services.

In addition, decisions were made about the delivery and assessment models for SQA qualifications in the last few COVID-impacted years which did not recognise or respect the stress, isolation and loss of confidence of our young people. The 'integrity' of the system was put ahead of young people's wellbeing. Connect campaigned for a more wide-ranging appeals system which would recognise trauma, stress and the disruption to learning experienced by many young people because of the impacts of COVID (pupil absence, teacher absence, ill-health at home, anxiety, lost learning, lost peer support etc). John Swinney, the former Cabinet Secretary, has subsequently expressed regret that 'a business as usual' approach was taken in relation to qualifications.

We are not surprised about serious difficulties with behaviour and relationships in some schools. You can see from our surveys that, when children went back to school, the vast majority of parents were not asked about their experiences. School staff were trying to deliver health and wellbeing learning, without having information about family contexts, which will have included grief and bereavement for many.

We hope that there will be significant efforts to research, understand and repair the detrimental impact of these COVID years on young people. We wholeheartedly agree that schools must be a safe environment for children, young people, their teachers, and other school staff. However, we do not accept any language or attempts efforts to demonise young people (or their parents/carers) as this will not solve the problem. These incidents should be viewed as the most extreme expression of the break down in relationships and the far-reaching social impact of the pandemic on behaviour, distress and the ability of young people to cope. We strongly believe that family support has to be delivered through schools, to make sure children are ready and able to learn. This requires resources, extra staff, training, and a commitment to building positive relationships with families. Pilots have been run over the years of family support workers, or parent/family liaison officers, working from schools, with considerable success. This kind of relationship- based approach is what parental and family engagement needs to look like in the coming years.

We welcome the Cabinet Secretary's announcement of a summit on behaviour and relationships in schools, which must bring together all elements of the education system from schools, local authorities, education bodies, parents' and carers' organisations and of course children and young people to work together positively to

rebuild an improved education system, with children and young people at its heart, and parents/carers by their sides.

Findings from Connect's COVID lockdown and school restrictions surveys

[How are you Doing? \(May 2020\)](#) – Connect's first survey about what support parents/carers needed in the first weeks of the pandemic.

- 1578 responses from 29 local authorities
- Ran from 1 to 30 April 2020
- 59% of parents feel they have the information and advice they need to support their children. A third say they don't yet know what they need and 10% do not feel they have sufficient information.
- 59% of parents identified at least one concern or worry about the current situation. These concerns were wide-ranging and often multiple.
- The areas of concern for parents include: children 'falling behind' in their learning; concerns about the health and wellbeing of their children; concerns about a lack of friendship and social interaction; parents unable to support learning due to their own work commitments; children not engaging with work at home; a lack of equipment; a lack of communication from the school/nursery.

[Next Steps \(July 2020\)](#) - Connect's parent/carer survey about the impact of lockdown and what might happen as schools started to re-open

- 7858 responses from all 32 local authorities.
- Ran from 27 May to 30 June 2020
- The biggest concern for parents in relation to their children is children missing their friends (76%). This is followed by concern about their child's health and wellbeing (57%) and their schoolwork (56%)
- A higher proportion of parents of older age groups are concerned about school work and lost learning/exams/lack of contact from school
- Parents of younger children (particularly pre-school) are more likely to identify concerns about their child coping (60% compared to 39% for primary and 26% for secondary)
- 49% of respondents reported that communication from their child's school/nursery was going well, 40% thought it was going okay but could be better and 9% thought it was not going well.

[Back at School \(November 2020\)](#) - Connect's parent/carer survey about how it was going for families, now that schools had re-opened

- 572 responses from 29 local authorities
- Ran from 17 September to 31 October 2020

- 70% of respondents feel school is going well for their child. However, nearly 30% did not feel as positive.
- Nearly 40% of respondents think communications from school to home could be improved or are poor.
- 79% of respondents had not been asked about their family's experience during lockdown.

[COVID-19 Lockdown \(May 2021\)](#) - Connect's parent/carer survey about how families were coping with the second lockdown

- 784 responses from parent/carers in 31 local authorities
- Ran from 7 February to 31 March 2021
- Over half (55%) reported being 'OK some of the time', 'Not OK some of the time' or 'Not OK all of the time' (6%). These two responses were given by 69% of those with children with ASN
- Most schools/nurseries were not getting in touch or checking in regularly with the family (48%).

[How's It Going \(December 2021\)](#) - Connect's parent/carer survey checked in with parents and the survey found negative impacts of COVID were ongoing

- 431 responses from 28 local authority areas
- Ran from 27 September to 29 October 2021
- Aspects of school life continue to be negatively impacted by COVID-19 for most parents/carers (76%) and young people (55% in primary school, 64% in secondary)

Children's Parliament written submission

We are disappointed about the framing of this round table. For a Parliament that unanimously passed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill on 16 March 2021 we would have hoped that all opportunities would be taken to frame our concerns for children with positivity and insight, rather than viewing them through a negative lens. We have the tools to respond with care for all, but we need to decide to use them in our language and in our standpoint. To do this we will signpost to existing knowledge, policy and practices in our schools.

The first thing we urge is to connect with what we (education sector staff as well as third sector colleagues) know from the national efforts we make across the education system to understand trauma and the power of nurture based approaches. One of the basic principles of nurture approaches is that all behaviour is communication. With this understanding we can ask, what is it children communicate to us when they cannot self-regulate, when they cannot understand and manage their behaviour or their reactions to feelings (like frustration, excitement, anger, embarrassment) and things happening around them? Then, as we work these things out, we can apply what we know about trauma. Behaviour and trauma are associated. Children who show behaviour viewed as challenging are more likely to have been exposed to trauma. In some cases, behaviour is a symptom of trauma.

A final part of this initial jigsaw puzzle of considerations must be to consider the impact of covid19. This has been a collective trauma in terms of childhood. Children have been disempowered and disconnected from learning and school, leaving many feeling helpless, without control over their lives, and less likely to succeed.

The children most impacted by these factors are perhaps those who experience other adverse childhood experiences and those who have learning disabilities, including children who are neurodivergent. Cuts to support staff should concern us all.

The work conducted by Children's Parliament through 2020 <https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/children-and-coronavirus/> captured the impacts of the pandemic. From children (8 to 14 years old) self-reporting evidenced significant decline in children's mental health and wellbeing and growing sense of disconnection from learning; this was particularly true for girls. Coming out of covid19, Children's Parliament strongly recommended that the education system focus on a recovery/wellbeing focused post pandemic curriculum, but this was not adopted. While we saw many loving and caring adults in schools work to re-establish relationships, we also saw a push on notions of lost learning and an overt focus on attainment. This was a lost opportunity; many teachers and support staff felt this too. This is exacerbated across the system at the moment where there is a lack of permanency for school staff in terms of their contracts; how can we build a recovery/wellbeing curriculum without consistency?

The language of this round table, and advance information, fails to acknowledge other tools we have in the bag. A great amount of work has been done to establish

Restorative Approaches, Solution Oriented Approaches and Mentors in Violence in schools; and the aforementioned Nurture Approaches. There are other effective approaches such as the emotional wellbeing programme Readiness for Learning (R4L). We have improved guidance on school exclusions in Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2 [Included, engaged and involved part 2: preventing and managing school exclusions - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/included-engaged-and-involved-part-2-preventing-and-managing-school-exclusions/pages/1-2.aspx)

The real opportunity here, surely shared by our adult Parliamentarians, is to use the UNCRC and rights as law to address children's wellbeing and make our schools safe for all.

Children's Parliament, with the support of the Gordon Cook Foundation, is working with children and adults to establish rights based relationships across the education system. With learning and tools reported on our Dignity in Schools Hub [Dignity In School – A home for school-based humans rights practise. \(childrensparliament.org.uk\)](https://www.dignityinschools.org.uk/) we see a shift from a focus on behaviour, to one on relationships. We have learned from our work alongside schools for many years, that when children are seen as a problem there will be no insight and no betterment of the experience of school and learning we seek.

Finally, an assertion that no child, nor adult, should fear or experience violence in their learning or work environment. All forms of violence are best tackled with prevention, and prevention is founded in rights based relationships based on kindness, empathy, trust and the core idea of human dignity. When this foundation is established then responding to violence draws on the policies and practices we already have, and described earlier. If there is anything missing here it could be an acknowledgement that if we have a problem with violence it is a societal problem, not just a problem for schools. Or perhaps we could focus on training and professional learning. Or perhaps we could address resourcing as schools lose funding for additional support staff. Considering these matters would mean adopting a curious, problem solving approach, rather than one that seeks to punish or demonise children.

NASUWT written submission

Abstract

The NASUWT's submission to the Scottish Parliament Education, Children and Young People Committee sets out the Union's views on the key issues which should be explored by the Committee in its scrutiny of violence in schools. The NASUWT's evidence is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and also by the work of its representative committees and consultative structures, made up of practising teachers and school leaders working in the education system.

Introduction

1. A key strand of the NASUWT's ongoing Better Deal for Teachers¹⁰ campaign focuses on teacher wellbeing, which is often largely impacted by pupil behaviour. This issue was referenced in a number of motions passed at NASUWT Scotland Conference in May 2023 – see Appendix 1.
2. NASUWT also regularly supports members who are dealing with challenging pupil behaviour as part of Trade Union Casework – see Appendix 2 for two anonymous 'everyday' case studies, exemplifying some of the challenges teachers face trying to navigate local behaviour management policies and referral processes.

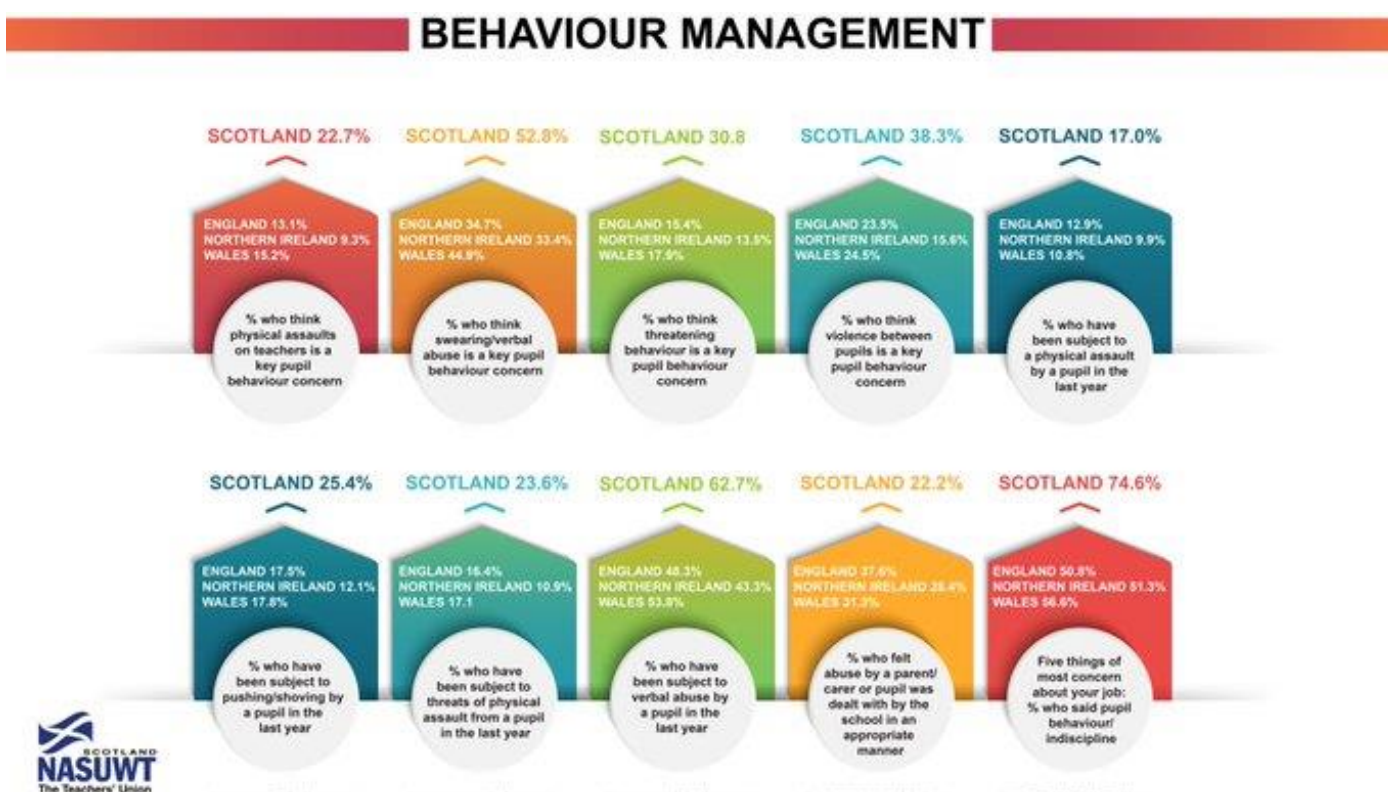
THE IMPACT OF PUPIL BEHAVIOUR

3. Teachers cannot teach and pupils cannot learn in an environment where there is disruption and violence, and where such behaviour occurs it cannot be explained away simply by attributing it to a teacher's inability to plan and deliver a lesson appropriately. The NASUWT, over many years, has been campaigning to ensure that government, employers, inspectors and parents accept this self-evident truth.
4. Constant challenges to authority, persistent refusal to obey school rules and frequent, regular verbal abuse of staff are the hallmarks of disruptive behaviour. Its effects, if unchallenged, are corrosive and when sustained over a long period can have a devastating impact on the health and welfare of teachers. Hundreds of teaching hours are being lost challenging this behaviour.
5. All staff are entitled to work in an environment free from violence and disruption and to appropriate access to training and support on behaviour matters. Pupils are entitled to a safe and orderly learning environment, together with effective teaching and support, to assist them in achieving their full potential.

¹⁰ <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/news/campaigns/better-deal-for-teachers/better-deal-for-scotlands-teachers.html>

COMPARISON DATA

6. The NASUWT's Big Question Survey is our annual survey and an **important opportunity for NASUWT members to share their experiences of teaching.**
7. The Big Question Survey **remains the only annual, national survey of teachers and headteachers and our members' responses provide a unique insight into the issues faced by the profession, including the ongoing challenges of pay, workload and wellbeing.**
8. Data from NASUWT surveys show **Scotland has significantly more problems with pupil behaviour than other UK nations¹¹ - see graphic below.**



THE PANDEMIC

9. While there is evidence that there has been a post-pandemic rise in pupil violence and abuse in Scotland's schools, it would be an egregious oversimplification to label the pandemic as the only cause. The Union believes the cause of changes to behaviour patterns requires in-depth examination and suggests that urgent research should be commissioned examining the impact of the pandemic on children and their schooling specifically.

¹¹ <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/news/campaigns/big-question-survey.html>

10. Behaviour in schools is not simply a post-pandemic concern. NASUWT has been raising concerns relating to pupil behaviour for some time. Back in May 2019, NASUWT requested violence at work be placed on the agenda for discussion at the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools (SAGRABIS). At the meeting in June 2019, NASUWT requested a zero tolerance message be clearly centrally articulated and further suggested that the working group look to review and assess the variety of models of Behaviour Management Policies across the country to gain some overview/consistency¹².
11. While the Scottish Government committed to gather all existing resources into one place, the drafted document fell short in terms of both its clarity and ability to support and affect real change for teachers on the ground¹³. NASUWT continued to engage with both Scottish Government officials and Education Scotland representatives around this document during 2021¹⁴.
12. By December 2022, NASUWT remained resolute in continuing to raise behaviour concerns via SAGRABIS; in particular around an absence of political oversight and the need for classroom behaviour to be given greater emphasis within the group:

NASUWT noted their disappointment that political representation was not available at the meeting. NASUWT also highlighted concerns around classroom behaviour and the opportunity that SAGRABIS as a group has to address some of these issues¹⁵.

EVIDENCE GATHERING

13. The NASUWT has welcomed the change in rhetoric from the new Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills but there is a need for this to be echoed by clear action - and quickly.
14. For context, the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (BISSR) has been fully supported by NASUWT since its inception and will continue to be supported. It is an important longitudinal study which facilitates tracking trends across Scotland over an extended period of time. Whilst beneficial for these reasons, it is important to also accept its inherent limitations, in that: while all secondary schools are invited to participate, not all do and this can result from issues of timing and/or miscommunication; not all primary schools are

¹² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-advisory-group-on-relationships-and-behaviour-in-schools-minutes-june-2019/>

¹³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-advisory-group-on-relationships-and-behaviour-in-schools-minutes-november-2020/>

¹⁴ <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/promoting-positive-relationships-and-behaviour-in-educational-settings/>

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-advisory-group-on-relationships-and-behaviour-in-schools-minutes-december-2022/>

included due to there being a very high number of them, with around 1 in 3 invited; only randomly selected staff in each school can take part, it is not open to all staff; school-based qualitative interviews are limited and the researchers are only able to engage with a dozen or so schools. While the evidence gained through the BISSR research will be insightful, it is not necessary to wait for it to be published before looking to take decisive national action.

REPORTING

15. Across each Local Authority, there exist different reporting models for violent incidents as well as different behaviour management policies and strategies. Indeed, this variation can also be seen between schools in the same local authority.
16. Anecdotal evidence from members highlights considerable inconsistencies in reporting systems and significant under-reporting of violent incidents in some Council areas. Where good practice exists, such as in Fife where the local authority have engaged with teacher trade unions to successfully improve their reporting mechanism, this remains localised and there are no means by which such systems can be rolled out nationally.

RESTORATIVE BEHAVIOUR

17. It is important that we recognise that an unintended consequence of restorative behaviour policies has been a climate of 'teacher-blaming'. The Pivotal Approach to Behaviour Management is advocated by consultants from Pivotal Education Ltd. The company's executive director, Paul Dix, has written a book, *When the Adults Change, Everything Changes*, which is billed as showing "*that it's far more effective to change the behaviour of the adults in a school than it is to try to change the behaviour of the children*". NASUWT is clear that in principle there is no problem with restorative-behaviour practice: like any system, it can be used well or it can be abused, but at the moment, we are hearing too many instances of misuse.
18. Members report wholesale adoption of Paul Dix/Pivotal approaches by senior leaders without a clear understanding of these. It is inappropriate to force this approach on staff without proper consultation/buy-in. In many cases, use of Paul Dix/Pivotal approaches to behaviour in schools has led to a situation where restorative conversations are seen as the only tool in the box – teachers reporting persistent or more serious behaviour problems are trapped in a loop of being forced to have numerous restorative conversations with the same pupil and given no support in administering more serious consequences for regular or serious misbehaviour. This is ironic, given that Paul Dix himself, in his book, suggests that children who misbehave need to experience 'an immediate, proportionate consequence.'
19. The approach to behaviour is further complicated by misunderstandings of the UNCRC and how it might apply when there are clashes between the rights of different children. The Union has provided members with guidance around behaviour and the UNCRC which is accessible here:

<https://www.nasuwat.org.uk/advice/in-the-classroom/children-and-young-people/united-nations-convention-rights-of-child-scotland.html>

20. The Scottish Government must also provide clear information to schools on the dangers of misunderstanding or misappropriating the UNCRC and exemplify what schools should do when the rights of different children conflict with each other.

NEXT STEPS

21. Adequate risk assessments should be undertaken of pupils who persistently display high levels of aggression and violence in school, and the details of those risk assessments should be shared with relevant staff, particularly when pupils move school. Pupils and staff are being put at risk where a school fails to undertake an appropriate risk assessment, implement suitable control measures, share adequate information with staff about violent and disruptive pupils, and use the sanctions available when necessary.
22. Schools should consider the full range of sanctions available to tackle unacceptable pupil behaviour, including dealing with low-level disruption or verbal abuse. Behaviour policies which include effective risk assessment procedures will help create conditions in which teachers can teach and pupils can learn effectively.
23. Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, employers have a legal duty 'to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of employees and others'. The Management of Health and Safety Regulations (1999) also place a legal duty on employers, through the risk assessment processes, to examine workplace hazards, identify those at risk and take measures to control those risks.
24. Schools must have a simple, fit-for-purpose reporting procedure and school leaders should take appropriate steps to ensure staff report all incidents of violence and abuse. Schools leaders should not be fearful that reporting a higher level of incidents will be judged as a failure on their part.
25. Health and Safety legislation also requires that employers consult and co-operate with Health and Safety Representatives, including on the management of health and safety risks in the workplace.
26. Effective school leadership, especially working in partnership with staff and trade unions, is essential to the establishment and maintenance of acceptable standards of behaviour in schools.
27. Early identification and intervention are also essential factors in successful behaviour management. Schools need support, and appropriate resources, to enable them to respond effectively, at an early stage.
28. Schools should be able to readily access external advice, support, and specialist provision without the requirement to negotiate burdensome,

bureaucratic procedures. They must also be given flexibility within the curriculum, and adequate resources, to develop appropriate educational programmes to meet the needs of individual pupils.

29. There are times when, despite every effort made by the school, it is necessary to implement the exclusion procedure. Headteachers must be empowered to exercise their professional judgement in the use of exclusion. Again, school leaders should be reassured that reporting a higher number of exclusions will not automatically be seen as a failure on their part.
30. Parents and carers, too, have an essential role to play in assisting schools in maintaining high standards of behaviour. They have a duty to take responsibility for the behaviour of their child. Consistency of expectations by schools and parents/carers is essential, as is the need for effective liaison between the home and the school.
31. All schools should establish behaviour policies and strategies and a range of rewards and sanctions in consultation with staff and school workforce unions to promote acceptable standards of behaviour. Schools should ensure that their behaviour management policies are non-discriminatory in their scope and operation, including on the grounds of ethnic or national origin, culture, religion, gender, disability or sexuality. Schools should collect and regularly review data on behaviour to ensure that their behaviour management policy is operating fairly and equitably.
32. Schools must also recognise that cultures of misogyny and violence also make women teachers unsafe, with many experiencing persistent verbal and sometimes physical abuse at the hands of pupils. Warm words provide cold comfort to women who live daily with the reality and the threat of sexual violence in their homes, in their workplaces, in their schools and in their communities. NASUWT supports a gender-sensitive approach to ending violence in Scottish schools.
33. Equally, a recent NASUWT poll¹⁶ found that more than half of LGBTI teachers (52%) experience discrimination and abuse from pupils and parents. The survey also highlighted the need for schools and colleges to take greater initiative in addressing homophobia, biphobia and transphobia:
 - a. just 14% of LGBTI members say their school provides training on LGBTI equalities to senior management, falling to just seven per cent for the school governing body;
 - b. only 33 % reported that their school has a zero-tolerance approach to homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.
34. Furthermore, Black teachers are more likely than the generality of the workforce to experience verbal abuse from a pupil, they are also three times more likely to experience discriminatory language/abuse by a parent or

¹⁶ <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/being-involved/events/consultation-conferences/lgbti-teachers-consultation-conference.html>

carer¹⁷. Schools and colleges must have in place procedures to address all forms of racism, to eradicate racist incidents and to deal with the perpetrators of such incidents.

35. Government and local authorities must also exercise their responsibility to support schools in maintaining good order and behaviour. Local authorities should not seek to dissuade schools from implementing sanctions or excluding pupils. Government should ensure that a properly resourced national system of high-quality off-site placements is in place to assist schools.
36. There must also be an appropriately-resourced system in place to identify and meet the educational and social needs of children who are excluded or who are at risk of exclusion.

CONCLUSION

37. Schools have a duty to act to protect both pupils and staff where incidents of indiscipline, violence and abuse occur. However, in too many cases teachers are reporting that approaches to managing indiscipline are becoming synonymous in some schools with no punishment or sanctions for unacceptable behaviour. Where employers fail to act the Union has had to take action where teachers' safety is being compromised by a failure to address poor pupil behaviour, such as the NASUWT industrial action in Bannerman High School in Glasgow, which eventually led to acknowledgement that there was a problem and saw additional resources committed to try and address it.
38. No teacher should go to work with the expectation that they will be either verbally or physically abused. All teachers are entitled to dignity at work and a safe working environment.
39. Teachers are being disempowered by the failure of government and employers to ensure that, across the country, behaviour policies are supporting teachers in maintaining high standards of discipline.
40. It's about time the Scottish Government made strong and unequivocal statements about the rights of teachers to a safe working environment, and took action to ensure that these rights are being delivered in every school
41. Too many teachers have had their careers ended prematurely and their lives ruined as a result of violent incidents at work causing significant long-term physical and psychological injuries, including stress, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and agoraphobia.
42. Disruptive or violent pupils take up a considerable amount of staff and management time, increasing stress and workload and distracting teachers from focusing on other pupils. Violent incidents can have a detrimental impact

¹⁷ <https://www.nasuwat.org.uk/static/uploaded/cf0990b8-17ba-430c-91b9caaa064d1bbf.pdf>

on the school working environment for both staff and pupils, and can cause reputational damage, leading to falling pupil numbers and staff recruitment and retention difficulties. Additional costs may also be incurred as a result of increased sickness absence, higher insurance premiums and compensation payments.

43. Simply put, pupils cannot learn and teachers cannot teach in an atmosphere of violence and disruption. No teacher should be expected to put up with violence at work. All teachers are entitled to a healthy and safe working environment.

APPENDIX 1: NASUWT SCOTLAND CONFERENCE MOTIONS 2023

Work-related Violence and Risk Assessments

Conference believes a risk assessment should:

- (i) identify hazards;
- (ii) assess the risks;
- (iii) control the risks;
- (iv) record the findings; and
- (v) review the controls.

Conference condemns:

- (a) the culture in some schools that routinely produces risk assessments, after a work-related violence incident, that do nothing to mitigate the risk of the work-related violence occurring again;
- (b) the fact that all too frequently in the education sector the risks and effects of work-related violence are underestimated and the controls put in place inadequate to stop repetition.

Conference calls upon the Scotland Executive Council to:

- 1. produce and regularly publicise guidance on risk assessments for members;
- 2. collect evidence of inadequate controls put in place from members;
- 3. lobby COSLA and the Scottish Government to take work-related violence in education seriously and act accordingly

Behaviour

Conference believes 'work-related violence' is a significant challenge and is concerned it has become normalised as part of teaching.

Conference is deeply concerned that the health of teachers in schools is being put at risk by pupil indiscipline; firstly by the stress induced, and secondly by the increased risk of more serious incidents through tolerating this indiscipline.

Conference believes that the education and wellbeing of young people in schools is also being compromised through tolerating this indiscipline and violence.

Conference confirms that it is vital that action on behaviour is taken which will benefit pupils, the school and college workforce and local communities.

Conference calls on the Scotland Executive Council to:

- i. lobby government to produce clear national behaviour guidelines which ensure minimum standards are applicable across all educational establishments and providers; and, further, ensure that nurture principles are not used as a methodology to cover up abusive behaviour or indiscipline, or to reduce publicly published exclusion figures;
- ii. continue to seek 'Refusal to Teach' ballots in cases where the school or local authority is not addressing 'workplace violence' by pupils;
- iii. support schools to take effective action to ensure staff safety and wellbeing by providing training for NASUWT Representatives on drafting behaviour policies and undertaking behaviour risk assessments;
- iv. survey members on behaviour and the impact in their schools and classrooms, capturing any disparity between policy and practice;
- v. campaign to ensure sufficient resources are given to schools to meet the needs of young people;
- vi. seek to publicly debunk the blame narrative which pervades many restorative behaviour policies; and
- vii. promote to members, representatives, government and employers the Health and Safety Executive definition of work-related violence and associated guidance and comply with the requirements of health and safety of pupils and colleagues, i.e, SCRISP, CERTS and risk assessments to ensure finance or resources is never a barrier.

Workplace Protections for Teachers

Conference notes:

- (i) with concern and great sadness the recent case of a fellow teacher in the Borders who, while suspended from school and awaiting trial for an alleged assault on a pupil, died by suicide;
- (ii) the ever present risk of allegations from pupils or groups of pupils which could result in suspension from work while under investigation and criminal charges for our members.

Conference recognises that any teacher in Scotland carrying out their everyday duties could be subjected to suspension and possible criminalisation while implementing school, local authority or national policies.

Conference mandates the Scotland Executive Council to:

- consult with members regarding the situation in schools to gather evidence of such cases;
- liaise with local authorities as employers to ascertain the frequency of cases where teachers are suspended from work due to allegations from pupils or have criminal charges raised against them;

- lobby the Scottish Government to produce guidance for employers around ensuring that our members are not put into potentially vulnerable positions in schools by employers;
- highlight these issues with the Scottish Government and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills;
- issue advice to members on the dangers of potentially damaging interactions with pupils which could lead to career-threatening incidents or criminal proceedings and how to avoid such situations in schools.

APPENDIX 2: TEACHER TESTIMONY

ANONYMOUS EXAMPLE 1

INCIDENT

Whilst outside, the teacher felt threatened by the aggressive behaviour of one pupil - witnessed by a member of staff. The incident was reported the next morning. After almost a week gone by and the class due to be taught again, the teacher had received no communication or support. No discussion took place with them as to how it was being handled. The teacher received no feedback either verbally or written and had to chase this up when they were due to teach the pupil the next day.

Having chased and sought information, it was clear that:

- A malicious and vexatious allegation had been made against the teacher by the pupil or their carer;
- The pupil clearly had taken no responsibility for their behaviour or shown any remorse or reflection.
- Despite these circumstances, and without involving the teacher in any way, the employer said they were content the matter was settled so the pupil who demonstrated aggressive behaviour in front of the whole class was simply to be returned to class.
- No concern was shown for the teacher's well-being, school procedures were not followed nor any support offered to the teacher.

Through engaging with their trade union, a request was made on behalf of the teacher that the pupil was not returned to class until a restorative meeting had taken place and the teacher was satisfied that the pupil understood the seriousness of their behaviour and that there would be no repeat. As a result, the teacher was finally invited to meet SMT and their line manager. A conclusion was eventually reached where the pupil recognised their behaviour and apologised, the frustrating thing for the teacher being that if this had been offered at the start, it would have put the incident to rest.

TEACHER COMMENT IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The pupil really squared up to me, invaded my space and came very close. The other teacher witnessed this as immediately inappropriate behaviour. Immediately the next morning, I completed a referral. Nearly a week passed and I hadn't heard anything, verbally or written. I then asked informally to my line manager what was happening? I also asked by email to my line manager and depute. I did not get a positive response other than there had a meeting and phone-call with the

parent/carer. There was an agreement that the behaviour was extremely poor and confrontational in this situation and should not be repeated. However, there was a counter claim, with a complaint that I had shouted. I had not being kept in the loop about any of this.

With the support of my union I put together a stronger email expressing my disappointment and highlighting there had been no communication in the week and no support. I requested the pupil wasn't in class until we had had a restorative meeting. Within an hour of that email, the senior management team came to see me. Just before class I did get an apology from the pupil, I said 'that is fine and we move on'. It is frustrating because the inappropriate behaviour could have been dealt with next day. It was more involved than it should have been, going through a referral, having to then chase or seek feedback and ultimately needing to send a strong email with union support.

I speak to colleagues and they are going through similar experiences. I don't know if everyone puts in referrals but very much hope so. In conversations in the school there is a consensus that behaviour has deteriorated significantly, particularly over this year. Teachers are seeking out support and teachers across different unions have reached out to talk about what is going on.

My view is there has been a bit of slackness from employers - no doubt pupils since COVID are more unsettled and there are probably a few reasons why. But, undeniably, the employer response needs to be more secure. We are experiencing behaviour issues from 1st year upwards – previously 1st year pupils would normally be well behaved as they are just in the school, but this isn't the case now. We are still awaiting transitional feedback from the primary schools for next year – we usually get that information in August. But there hasn't been any feedback from primaries that is more stark or problematic than anything previously received.

Communication needs to improve, if staff put an email in or a referral it needs to be acted on quickly. Staff need to get support. We also need high standards - back to basics on standards. We are rewarding positive behaviour – so pupils misbehaving all year end up going on trips away. Staff are then giving up their time for kids who have messed about all year. I really feel we need to get back to basics.

The government needs to be more vocal and the local authority, too. The government said the priority was education, but it has gone backwards.

Teaching and learning takes a dive when spending time dealing with behaviour.

ANONYMOUS EXAMPLE 2

INCIDENT

Whilst trying to prevent a fight, a teacher was hit two or three times by an s1 pupil – this pupil was trying to hit another pupil. The incident was clearly witnessed by 3 other teachers.

Two members of SMT attended after the event and notes were taken: the teacher was informed by text that night that the pupil would not be in the next day. The day after the incident, the teacher was informed that the pupil will not be officially excluded and will return to school the following day. The three teachers who witnessed the assault were not interviewed.

The teacher completed the appropriate Violence at Work (VAW) form but remained confused as to the school and local authority policy on assault and was concerned that a high number of VAW forms being completed in their school did not seem to raise any alarm bells centrally.

The teacher then met with SMT who, only when challenged by the teacher, said that they would get the police involved.

Subsequently the pupil in question turned up unexpectedly to the teacher's class. The teacher sent them with class materials to SMT. A member of SMT visited later while the teacher had a class and apologised for the pupil turning up to the class and asked how the teacher wanted to move this forward. Understandably the teacher wasn't in a place to respond in detail as they were still processing what had happened. The teacher said they understood the police were to be involved and that they had welcomed this.

The SMT attendee was not aware of this commitment and queried how the teacher was going to 'provide this child with an education'? The teacher offered to supply materials for the pupil but SMT put the onus on the teacher to scaffold their learning. The teacher felt under pressure and put on the spot and suggested that a further discussion was needed within the SMT team so they could arrange provision for the pupil.

The teacher was told the school and SMT priority was getting the pupil back in to class, in case they want a career in this subject. No consideration was given to the teacher's wellbeing and they are left still trying to process what had happened. The teacher requested that the investigation be complete and time given to allow them to seek advice from their union.

The situation had a deleterious impact on the teacher, who felt harassed at work following an assault.

Indeed, this was not the first time a referral on SEEMIS for this pupil had been made: the previous referral has not been responded to. The teacher feels they are being gas-lighted with messaging from SMT that the pupil had done nothing wrong since the start of the year, which is untrue.

TEACHER COMMENT IN THEIR OWN WORDS

I am happy to share my recent experience as an example of poor practice that teachers are experiencing daily. This is not the only example of violence that I have experienced: during this school year a coin was also thrown at me and I was told that this did not merit an exclusion as the coin didn't hit me.

Let me start by saying the escalation in violence towards teachers in my school is NOT a result of the COVID pandemic. Teachers being abused in my school had already gotten worse before the pandemic.

Things deteriorated when new management decided to get rid of a 'Behaviour Policy'. A 'Positive Relationship Policy' which focused on restorative practice was pushed through. Senior management within my school do not like the words 'sanctions' or 'consequences' and a culture of blaming the teachers has developed. This has had a detrimental impact on staff morale and health, school ethos and pupil's ability to function in society.

Staff in my school are very concerned that we are damaging a generation of young people due to the fact that clear and consistent boundaries are not implemented by the senior management team.

By permitting young people to be verbally and physically abusive to staff and other young people with no sanctions/consequences, we are in fact promoting this behaviour. Such abusive behaviour will continue to push staff to leave the profession early or at the least move from certain schools (referred to in my school as the conveyor belt of staff).

Some have asked why do I not leave MY school? By leaving my school I am not helping solve the problem. The problem IS NOT me or my colleagues (that is a hard thing to remember when you are continually being gaslighted and told that pupil bad behaviour is our fault).

The problem firmly lies in the government/school policies and senior management teams that are not being monitored. I will try to continue to work in the career (not job) where I once felt I was helping shape young people's future for the better. Sadly I do not see a long-term future for me in teaching unless things change quickly. This is echoed by many of my friends/colleagues.

I have questioned why the pupil that physically assaulted me was not officially excluded (even for a day). Where in the sand does my school think the exclusion line lies if not for assault? I worry that the mandate that my Headteacher said had been set from the authority not to exclude is an excuse. I again ask the question "what merits an exclusion?". I am not asking the question purely for me but for the pupils that witnessed their teacher being hit, the 3 other colleagues that witnessed the assault and to support all colleagues in the teaching profession or future young people thinking about entering the profession!

Dr Joan Mowat & Dr Gale Macleod written submission

This submission is written from the perspective of two academics with expertise in the area of behaviour in schools but who also have extensive experience of working within schools, Dr Joan Mowat, having taught for 27 years, latterly Depute Head at Vale of Leven Academy, West Dunbartonshire, situated in an area of multiple deprivation, and author of 'Building Community to Create Equitable, Inclusive and Compassionate Schools through Relational Approaches,' and Dr Gale Macleod who taught in a number of residential schools for young people identified as having Social and Emotional Behavioural Difficulties and has researched and written on the educational experiences of this group of young people. Both Dr Mowat and Dr Macleod have published recent research on parental engagement. Dr Mowat was also one of the first team of national development officers appointed to implement 'Better Behaviour – Better Learning' in Scottish schools.

The Background

Concerns about deteriorating behaviour and violent incidents in schools in the recovery period of the pandemic have been prominent in the media (The Glasgow Herald, 4th Feb, Bannerman High School and the more recent reports of a violent incident at Johnstone High School on the BBC news). This has been commented upon in the Times Educational Supplement Scotland (16th Dec, 2022 and 26th May, 2023) with reporter Emma Seith commenting on concerns expressed, and industrial action taken, by teaching unions on the basis of the issue. Drawing on the perspectives of 20 headteachers, key areas of concern to which she draws attention are the early years of secondary education and early primary [1]. However, concerns about the behaviour of children in early primary are not new – the 'Behaviour in Scottish Schools Survey 2006' [2] found that there had been a dramatic rise in the number of pupils presenting with significant behavioural problems in this demographic (2.15). The most recent survey conducted in 2016 [3] found that the biggest change since the previous survey of 2012 was in low-level disruptive behaviour within the primary school which primary teachers attributed to societal changes (such as increased use of digital technologies), perceptions of parenting approaches and a reduction in the availability of supports for children with Additional Support Needs (ASN). The survey indicated that there had been little change in violent behaviour in schools, but primary teachers reported slightly higher levels of general verbal abuse, physical aggression and physical violence towards them personally (1.14). A key finding of the report is that the strongest predictor of behaviour in Scottish schools is school ethos.

The research team found that student behaviour is inextricably bound with school ethos, relationships, and engagement in learning, with a positive school ethos being associated with a sense of 'community' or 'family' 'where all pupils, their parents and staff feel known, included, valued, safe, supported and cared for' (p.86). Shared values, strong leadership, communication and openness among staff, and account being taken of the views of others, particularly pupils, were also identified as important aspects of school ethos. ([4], p. 146)

School Exclusions

In contrast to England and Wales where there are rising rates of temporary and permanent exclusions (97.4% of permanent exclusions in the UK were accounted for by pupils in England in 2016/7) [5], exclusion rates in Scotland for both measures have fallen dramatically since their highest point recorded in 2006/7 of 44,546 temporary and 248 permanent exclusions, with temporary exclusions reducing by more than a 5th to 8,323 and

only one permanent exclusion in 2020/21. Of temporary exclusions in 2020/21, more than 2/3rds were accounted for by pupils with Additional Support Needs (ASN) and just more than a 3rd by pupils living in the bottom decile of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (in contrast to 7.8% in the highest decile) [6]. Whilst many welcome this downward trend, concerns are raised that the rate of exclusions in Scotland isn't truly representative of the reality facing class teachers on a day-to-day basis. Scottish Government guidance and legislation [7] make it clear that all exclusions (whether temporary or permanent) should be formally recorded, and the parents or young person (if over 16) notified in writing. However, McCluskey, Cole, Daniels, Thompson and Tawell [5] draw attention to concerns about pupils being sent home from school without the exclusion being formally recorded, the use of 'managed moves,' the potential abuse of part-time timetables and the increasing use of 'inclusion' or 'time-out' rooms to isolate the pupil [4].

The impact of the pandemic on the mental health & wellbeing of children & young people

There has been an extensive literature emanating from international organisations (such as the World Health Organisation, UNICEF, the OECD), academia, government, the 3rd sector and commentators (such as the Children's Commissioners in England and Scotland) which has highlighted the devastating impact of the pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people (CYP) [8-17]. There is general consensus that the pandemic has served to exacerbate existing inequalities with the most vulnerable CYP being most at risk from long-term effects. McCluskey, Fry, Hamilton, King, Laurie, McAra and Stewart [17], drawing from the perspectives of senior pupils in Scottish schools, suggest that categories of risk for CYP have expanded, raising concerns that the mental health impacts may be felt more acutely and more severely by young people already existing on the margins, and more vulnerable to risk. The Cross Party Group on Children and Young People Pandemic Impact Survey 2022 established that 86% of responding organisations (largely 3rd sector) found that the pandemic had had a negative effect on the mental health and wellbeing of CYP; 71% on their opportunity to access supportive relationships; 64% on education and learning; and 56% on levels of inequality, amongst other considerations [10]. Concerns were expressed about developmental delays and more challenging behavioural issues in pre-school children and the lack of access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for CYP of all ages.

Whilst a direct link has not been established between mental health issues and behaviour in schools during the recovery phase of the pandemic, an emerging literature is indicative of difficulties in emotional regulation for CYP, deriving from the impact of social distancing and the lack of a supportive framework. Hen, *et al.* [18] found that emotional and behavioural problems in children and peer relationship problems in adolescents were reported by them post-lockdown, with difficulty in emotional regulation predictive of mental health symptoms, particularly in girls and adolescents. However, there is a dearth of literature which focusses specifically on the impact of the pandemic on the behaviour of CYP and the implications for promoting positive relationships and behaviour in schools. The Oxford Co-Space Longitudinal study [19], conducting monthly surveys with CYP in the UK, established a correlation between periods of the highest levels of self-reported, behavioural, emotional and attentional difficulties in CYP and periods when restrictions were greatest. These did not reduce when restrictions were eased for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and those from low-income families and single parent households who continued to show elevated behavioural, emotional and attentional difficulties compared with their peers in the study, still in evidence three years beyond the initial lockdown [20].

A small-scale study [21], drawing from the perspectives of three secondary depute heads in interview as they reflected on the recovery phase post lockdown, identified key concerns as being related to the attendance, disaffection from learning (even in pupils who

previously engaged well) and behaviour of pupils, and meeting the mental health needs of the school community, particularly CYP living in disadvantaged circumstances. Concerns around pupil attendance are found UK-wide, with the UK Parliament intimating its intentions to launch an enquiry into persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils [22]. The Children's Commissioner for England, drawing on the voices of CYP themselves, suggested that the problem lay with a lack of support. In Scotland, Sosu, *et al.* [23] found that family-related, rather than school-related, variables were more significant in impacting on absence from school, which implies that the problem cannot be addressed through education policy alone [21].

Reflecting on the Above

When concerns are raised in the media about violence in schools or a perceived decline in pupil behaviour, often heralded with sensationalist headlines - *What's behind Scotland's behaviour emergency?* - there is an understandable tendency towards knee-jerk reactions, harking back to the 'good old days,' and a tendency to see the solution as resting with harsher sanctions. For example, one commentator responded to the article in the Glasgow Herald [24] by reminiscing about the days of the birch on the Isle of Man – "It had years of success." The usual commentators rush to offer their opinion – Tom Bennett, self-professed 'behaviour guru' and advisor to the UK Government, decries recent developments in Scottish education, based on nurture principles and insights gained from restorative and trauma-informed practice, identifying them as being representative of five "great myths of behaviour." For him, the answer to managing behaviour lies in "routines, norms, consequences". He argues that exclusions should not be eradicated but be considered as a last resort [1]. Whilst many would agree with this statement, he pays scant attention to the disproportionality of school exclusions amongst CYP identified with ASN and those living in communities characterised by multiple deprivation. Around 70% of temporary exclusions were accounted for by CYP identified with ASN (representing around 1/3rd of the school population): the rate per 1,000 is almost five times the rate for pupils with no identified ASN [6]. The characteristics of CYP excluded from school suggest a problem which cannot be resolved by sanctions. Consideration needs to be given to how best to support all our young people, and to understanding the complex relationship between poverty, attainment, mental health and behaviour in school [25-27]. An important aspect of this is fostering a sense of belonging [27,28] and of community within the school [4].

The role which schools play in promoting parental engagement and family learning is a key element in building community and addressing inequality [29]. Tett and Macleod [30] outline some of the barriers to effective partnerships between home and school, such as negative discourses around parents and parenting. They highlight the important role that Family Learning Practitioners play in bringing to the table the strengths and fount of knowledge that families possess, challenging such perceptions. The strengths of such family learning were highlighted by the children themselves in a small-scale study in a Scottish primary school [31].

The recently published review of the Scottish Education system following the National Discussion [37] is unequivocal that 'valuing people and positive relationships must be the essential features of Scottish education' (8.1). The review calls for a humanistic approach to education placing C&YP at the centre with their voices not only heard but exerting influence, not only the most able or dominant, but those who may be more marginalised, whilst also engaging with parents, carers, families and communities and ensuring that teachers are at the centre of informing and leading educational improvement.

It should be recognised that schools are not an island. They represent a microcosm of society – they both act on and are acted upon by society. Therefore, the solution to violence in schools and a perceived deterioration in pupil behaviour cannot rest with schools

alone. Research over the years has consistently demonstrated that relational approaches are fundamental to creating inclusive, equitable and compassionate school communities [4,32-36]. The solution rests with valuing what relational approaches can offer, building on the work undertaken in Scottish schools over the past decade, whilst addressing inequalities in society. This implies the need to build strong networks of support around communities, families and schools [25,26], investing in CYP and the professional development of teachers throughout their careers, and improving access to the support networks that CYP require. Schools need to become hubs of their communities, bringing together a range of services – social workers, community policing, school counsellors, educational psychologists, home-link workers, health professionals – led by school leaders who put children’s rights, equity and inclusion at the heart of their work. Building community, trust and relationships is the long game – young people need to feel that they are valued members of the school community with a sense of belonging to that community. It is only through investing time, effort and resources in meeting the additional support needs of pupils with complex behavioural difficulties that they will be able to achieve their potential and a climate for learning conducive for all children can be created. Whilst quick fix solutions might appeal (zero tolerance approaches, for example) they do little to create the equitable, inclusive and compassionate society that we in Scotland aspire to and the type of young people that we need to create it.

Key Considerations/Recommendations

1. Any change to policy regarding behaviour in Scottish schools should be informed by evidence.
2. The Behaviour in Scottish Schools survey draws its conclusions from examining the data set derived from the sample of Scottish schools, but it does not provide insight into the specific set of circumstances of schools which may be outliers, perhaps located in areas of multiple deprivation, where the issues faced may be much more severe. Whilst factor analysis identifies trends specific to characteristics of the school, demographic profile of pupils (e.g., SIMD status, ASN) etc., there is no in-depth analysis which would enable policy makers and educators to come to a deep understanding of the issues that might pertain within these contexts and for specific groups of pupils. Qualitative approaches lend themselves to this in-depth understanding. The survey therefore needs to have a specific focus on these populations as well as having an overview such that the conclusions reached genuinely reflect the position across Scotland.
3. ‘Better Behaviour, Better Learning’ was published in 2001, with a range of subsequent reports building on this. The *Rights, Support and Wellbeing Team* should be commended for their stellar work in raising awareness of the issues pertaining to behaviour in schools and embedding a range of approaches, such as nurture and restorative practice. However, it is time for a refresh of policy in this area and a working party, with representatives from the teaching unions, Education Scotland, COSLA, academia, the 3rd sector and any other relevant party, should be set up to make recommendations to the Scottish Government. The working party should take cognisance of the recommendations of the Morgan review pertaining to Additional Support Needs.
4. There is a need to embed relational approaches into Initial Teacher Education for all student teachers and for it to be a key aspect of career long professional learning (CLPL).

5. Greater consideration needs to be given as to how services can work collaboratively together to support schools and to the location of services, and for joined-up pre-service training of a range of professionals who have a locus in the wellbeing of CYP e.g., Social Work, Community Learning and Development and Teaching Professionals
6. Consideration should be given to extending and appropriately resourcing services which have proved to lead to more equitable home-school partnerships, which is associated with better outcomes within disadvantaged communities – in particular, Family Learning Practitioners working within Community Learning and Development teams.
7. The Scottish Government needs to have a holistic and long-term focus, extending beyond one parliamentary term, on the needs of children and young people, bringing together policy streams which impact on the lives of communities, families and children, reflected also in local government.

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Prof Tom Bennett OBE written submission

- **Hearing about how the issue is currently playing out in schools**

Behaviour in Scottish schools is a significant problem. Student conduct is vital to their collective success. All students are entitled to an environment that is safe, calm and dignified. Chaotic environments benefit no one. One major problem is that there is no way of determining at a national level exactly how good behaviour is in schools. There are no significant recording mechanisms to establish if students and staff feel that their environments reflect the ambitions described above. In this environment it becomes easy for problems to flourish. Assuming that all is well is a guarantee that things will get worse.

What we do know is that unions are consistently reporting members communicating their distress at the behaviour problems in schools, and that this bleeds into the well-publicised instances of extreme student violence, and staff taking strike action as a result.

I am currently the UK advisor on School Behaviour for the Department for Education. I have visited over 800 schools, mostly in the UK, specifically looking at their behaviour cultures. Schools are in crisis over behaviour, and until it is acknowledged as a problem, nothing can be done. Teachers consistently report to me feeling under trained, underpowered, and overwhelmed. This situation cannot be allowed to continue. Because it is almost impossible for teachers to openly criticise the school environment, there is a conspiracy of silence to say nothing. Privately, teachers openly tell me that the situation is dire.

- **Getting a sense of how significant the issue is (is it increasing or just more visible?)**

There is no way of knowing if it has gotten worse, because there is no data available. The only studies that have been done are small scale interviews. There is no nationally recorded data in this area, and no way to compare. The only guide we have are union surveys, and (for me) the repeated communication by teachers and leaders that they cannot manage behaviour, have no training in this area, or are being told to use methods that are counterproductive. My sense from talking to multiple teachers and multiple schools in Scotland is that it has become worse since COVID, but that it has always been a huge issue. It is possible to design and implement a National Behaviour Survey, as I have done in England.

- **Understanding what the root causes of violence are**

The root causes of human violence are multiple. Most of them are rooted in human nature; children, like all people, compete for attention resources, for fun, to defend their status and so on. But we can say that in institutions it occurs when it is permitted, when students feel that they can get away with it without consequences, and where the boundaries of unacceptable conduct are looser. It particularly occurs in environments where it is permitted. Scotland currently emphasises well-meant but essentially ineffective behaviour policies like Restorative Practice, which is rooted in

therapeutic techniques. These techniques simply lack any evidence of large scale or scalable success. They often lead to schools massively deteriorating in their behaviour cultures, because staff don't have the time to use them as intended, because they don't work for most students anyway, and because students realise that nothing of any gravity will happen to them if they misbehave. If therapeutic processes could solve all misbehaviour, then society would never suffer violence. But these processes are only part of a whole school management system, not the entirety of it.

- **Supporting positive behaviour in schools**

Behaviour must be taught; student must experience what I refer to as the Behaviour Curriculum; a clear, taught sense of how to succeed in a school environment. Many students lack this in their own lives, or have very different understandings and expectations of what reasonable or good conduct looks like. The job of the school is to unify and clarify those expectations in order for them to learn how to flourish. Staff training need to be much more focussed on how to teach routines, behaviour norms and social skills that help students to flourish; ITE for teachers is currently very much lacking in this area.

Schools too, need to develop clear, consistent consequences for misbehaviour, that are not solely rooted in therapeutic techniques. Boundaries, sanctions, pastoral and conversational responses- these are all useful ways to teach students about unacceptable conduct and dignified boundaries. We do not use sanctions alone, but without them, schools will degrade into chaotic and unsafe environments, as many have done.

- **How violence in schools could be addressed.**

Violence is addressed by clearly setting a culture where it is unacceptable; where students incur instant penalties for doing so; where suspensions and exclusion are used as last resorts in the worst scenarios. Anything less than this fails to keep children and staff safe, which is the fundamental responsibility of the school. Scottish education needs to move away from a system that congratulates itself on almost zero exclusions and move to one where it's done when necessary- and only then. More supportive alternative provision destinations must be created, on the understanding that some students have needs and behaviours that cannot be met in a mainstream environment.

Scotland faces a huge challenge with regard to behaviour. It will not be easily solved overnight. But it is solvable. The will, the wit, the talent exists in the Scottish education system to make it happen. I hope that we have the courage to confront this and provide a national education system that supports every student to flourish.