

Behaviour in Schools 2025

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Executive summary

The issue of violent and abusive pupil behaviour has, for many years now, been reported as one of the most significant problems affecting the working lives of NASUWT members across the UK. In 2023, NASUWT undertook in-depth research to explore the extent of the issue.

Our casework and, in extreme circumstances, industrial action, demonstrate how – when left unchallenged – violent and abusive pupil behaviour can escalate. There reaches a point where teachers and leaders feel unsafe to attend their place of work.

To ensure the Union continued to track the concerns of our members, we repeated the research at the beginning of 2025. This report sets out the findings, including the voices of our members. Using a similar format as its predecessor (*Behaviour in Schools 2023*), it looks at the type of behaviour being exhibited in our schools, and the impact this has on pupils and teachers. The data also explores the frequency of incidents, the perceived reasons behind these behaviours and what support is, or isn't, in place to support the education workforce.

As in previous years, this report is an opportunity for us to set out our recommendations across the education system – starting with the actions we will take as a union.

We will ensure that everything we do is underpinned by our pledge to stand with our members against unacceptable pupil behaviour while they are simply trying to do their jobs.

We're also making clear the expectations we will place on schools, local authorities and governments to ensure that teachers can teach and pupils can learn in environments where disruption and violence is able to be minimised.

Background – what do we already know?

A period of 18 months has passed between our two sets of robust data on pupil behaviour and indiscipline across the UK's schools. Yet the concerns over the impact of violent and abusive pupil behaviour have shown no signs of dissipating. Furthermore, it is affecting members across the whole of the education sphere – no setting or geographical region appears immune to this issue.

As well as the research, the issue is evidenced by NASUWT casework. In the period between 1 February 2024 and 1 February 2025, there have been a number of incidents reported to, and dealt with, by the Union.

During this time, 20 cases were referred to NASUWT that have become legal matters arising from assaults by pupils. The significant proportion of these cases involve female teachers: 16 compared to four males. Additionally, 21 workplace ballots are in progress that cite pupil behaviour. This includes six that are specific 'refusal to teach' ballots.

Additionally, 529 cases have been dealt with by member support advisors or caseworkers where members have sought advice and support about pupil behaviour. Around half of these – 231 to be exact – are specifically in relation to an assault on a member. These include verbal and physical assault, being bitten, hit, pushed downstairs and sexual assaults.

Our member contact records also show that our support team is usually contacted not in relation to the initial incident, but the employer's subsequent response – or lack of – to the situation. Many of these report that their employer feels abuse is acceptable. This is especially notable for those who work in special schools or pupil referral units (PRUs).

The publication of the *Behaviour in Schools* report is part of our public commitment to identify and develop a continual, in-depth understanding of trends in pupil behaviour and behaviour management.

Continuing with the work and progress the Union has made since the publication of the 2023 report, this new robust research and data will underpin the Union's campaigning work, our response to the challenges being faced by members, and the expectations we will place on governments to address this.

Continuing to lead on behaviour issues

An ongoing commitment to the exploration of the issue, alongside wide-reaching support for teachers in the classroom in dealing with challenging behaviour, has ensured that NASUWT has always been the union at the forefront of this important aspect of a teacher's working life.

NASUWT has a wide range of resources on behaviour and behaviour management, including a guide on [developing a behaviour management policy](#). The Union has also published a [position statement on pupil behaviour](#), which clearly sets out NASUWT's stance on this aspect of a teacher's working life.

This collection of resources is regularly refreshed and updated to ensure it remains relevant and up to date.

Methodology – What did we do?

We conducted an online survey, which was completed by 5,808 members of NASUWT. The survey was distributed via electronic communication methods.

Results from this data collection have been compiled to produce the following version of NASUWT's *Behaviour in Schools* report, the second of its kind. The first *Behaviour in Schools* report was published by the Union in September 2023.

As well as quantitative data, the survey offered opportunities for respondents to share lived experiences and opinions through free-text options. These have been used throughout this report to share the voices of classroom teachers.

Behaviour in schools – What did we find out?

Types of behaviour

In the last 12 months, 40% of respondents experienced physical abuse or violence from pupils, while 85% reported verbal abuse or violence from pupils.

Backchat and rudeness are the most common behaviours, reported by 96% of respondents. Being sworn at is cited by 76% of members.

With regard to physical violence, 20% of teachers were hit or punched, 16% were kicked and 38% were shoved or barged. A further 9% were spat at, while 4% had been headbutted.

The level and types of verbal abuse are equally concerning. Thirty-nine per cent of teachers report being verbally threatened, while 13% have experienced ageism. Other discriminatory behaviour reported includes racial abuse (6%), homo/bi/transphobic abuse (5%) and ableism (2%).

Backchat/rudeness	95.68%
Being sworn at	75.55%
Being verbally threatened	38.93%
Being shoved/barged	37.92%
Damage to other property	32.36%
Being hit or punched	20.35%
Being kicked	16.28%
Ageism	13.48%
Theft	11.08%
Being spat at	8.74%
Damage to clothing	5.80%
Racial abuse	5.57%
Homo/bi/transphobic abuse	4.99%
Online abuse	3.93%
Sexual abuse	3.80%
Being headbutted	3.54%
Ableism	2.38%
Online threats	0.83%

Specific experiences included a teacher who, at the time of completing the survey, was off work after an assault that had caused two dislocated ribs, torn muscles and bruised ligaments.

Another teacher reported that over the past six months they'd been punched in the face twice and stabbed in the shin and thighs with a pencil.

There were multiple reports of teachers being subjected to pinching, having their hair pulled, and objects thrown across rooms – in many cases, deliberately targeted at them.

Threats of and assaults with a weapon

With a growing number of concerns – from NASUWT members and the general public – about the rise of weapons being brought into schools, the Union wanted to explore the extent of this issue.

In the last 12 months, more than one in 20 (7%) of respondents have endured threats of assault with a weapon by a pupil. With regard to actual assaults with a weapon by a pupil, 3% of respondents have experienced this.

When asked for further details, a troubling number of teachers report being threatened with a knife, scissors or other sharp object.

One respondent describes being threatened with a knife, and assaulted with a 3x2 length of wood. Another teacher reports a pupil stating they would “slit my throat and stab me in the neck”.

Several members shared that pupils had threatened to shoot them, with one particular incident of a pupil bringing a BB gun into school.

Age of pupils involved

The most likely age bracket to demonstrate physical or verbal abuse is 12 to 14, which was identified by 62% of respondents. The 15-16 age bracket was the second most likely, selected by over half (51%).

The most common age of pupils involved in threats of assault, or actual assault, with a weapon is also 12-14 at 37%. The second most likely is 8-11, identified by a third (33%).

Age group	Physical or verbal abuse	Threat or actual assault with a weapon
Under 4	1.30%	1.19%
4 to 7	17.91%	28.71%
8 to 11	25.97%	32.67%
12 to 14	62.51%	37.23%
15-16	51.48%	22.77%
17-18	5.52%	3.17%
Over 18	0.95%	0.59%

Frequency of physical violence

- 22% reported incidents once a year, with 26% stating they occur once a term.
- 13% say once a month, 8% once a fortnight, 9% once a week, 16% several times per week, and 6% daily.
- 81% feel the number of pupils exhibiting violent and abusive behaviours has increased.

Frequency of verbal abuse

- 4% report verbal abuse as happening once a year; 15% say once a term.
- 16% say once a month, 11% once a fortnight, 16% once a week, 25% several times a week, and 13% daily.
- 87% say the number of pupils verbally abusing staff members has increased.

Impact

When asked about the impact the verbal or physical abuse experienced in the last 12 months had on teachers, the most common result (77%) was affecting the individual's morale and enthusiasm for their job.

Sixty-two per cent experienced stress and half (50%) experienced anxiety; 18% reported suffering with depression; 8% took time off work due to the mental health issues they suffered; and 10% took time off work due to stress.

Attrition from the teaching profession is a worrying outcome. Two per cent of respondents have confirmed with their employer that they will be leaving teaching, while over half (52%) said they are seriously considering leaving the profession.

This is reflected further in the commentary associated with this question. As well as leaving the profession, numerous respondents say they have moved to a part-time contract so they don't have to be at work as often, bringing forward retirement, or stepping down from senior leadership roles to alleviate the pressure they feel under.

It affected my morale and enthusiasm for my job	77.24%
I experienced stress	62.12%
I have seriously considered leaving teaching	52.14%
I experienced anxiety	49.93%
I felt less confident in working with pupils	45.41%
I experienced depression	18.32%
I had to take time off work due to stress	10.41%
I had to take time off work due to the mental health issues I suffered	8.47%
I changed jobs	3.92%
I had to take time off work due to the physical injuries I suffered	2.32%
I have confirmed with my employer that I am leaving teaching	2.10%

Teacher voice on the impact of verbal or physical abuse:

"It affects my hope for the future of the profession."

"I suffered epileptic seizures as a result of the stress."

"I was concerned for my safety whilst pregnant."

"I don't want to go into work and my mood changes on my way to work."

"I feel I'm not doing my job properly as I barely teach due to dealing with behavioural issues, thus having an enormous impact on other children and on my performance as a teacher. I am looking constantly for other jobs outside of teaching."

A number of respondents said they were accessing counselling or therapy outside of work as a result of their experiences. Others detailed the extent of their poor physical health as a result of stress, including heart conditions. One member shared how they had suffered a heart attack and required emergency bypass surgery.

Worryingly, a small number of respondents reported feeling suicidal.

Where teachers took time off work due to the verbal or physical abuse they had experienced in the last 12 months, 41% were off for less than a week. A fifth (23%) were off for 1-6 months, while 4% took more than six months off.

Less than a week	41.38%
1-2 weeks	18.50%
More than 2 weeks but less than a month	13.63%
1-6 months	22.63%
More than 6 months	3.88%

Reporting

More than half of respondents (58%) reported all of the incidents to their manager in their school or college. A quarter (25%) reported most incidents, while 14% only reported some. A minority, 3%, did not report any of the incidents.

I reported all of the incidents	57.75%
I reported most incidents	24.95%
I reported some, incidents	13.91%
I did not report any of the incidents	3.39%

When asked about the reason for not reporting incidents, the reason cited most often was that teachers did not think anything would be done about it (66%).

Over four in ten respondents (45%) said the process for reporting behaviour incidents is too time-consuming or bureaucratic, while a third (37%) were concerned their capability would be called into question.

I did not think anything would be done about it	66.41%
I thought I would be blamed	24.39%
The process for reporting behaviour incidents is too time consuming/bureaucratic	44.52%
I was concerned my capability would be called into question	36.68%
I was concerned it would affect my pay progression	3.57%

The question also offered the opportunity for respondents to cite other reasons other than those listed. There are notable trends including:

- supply teachers being concerned they will not be asked back to a school if they raise concerns;
- it has become accepted behaviour;
- there are too many incidents to report.

"It was so frequent; I did not have the energy to record everything. Reliving the situations was significantly, negatively impacting my mental health and wellbeing."

"If you enter too many tickets [reports] for behaviour, you get a lot more 'drop in sessions' where you get observed. It's a form of intimidation rather than support, as the SLT know full well that the swearing stops when they enter."

Of those incidents that were reported, the most common outcome was some incidents being dealt with appropriately, while others were not. This was identified by 31% of respondents. Over a quarter (28%) felt some, but not sufficient, action was taken.

Just 18% said appropriate action was always taken, and the individual felt supported by their school or college.

Eight per cent said no action was taken by their school or college, while an additional 10% were not informed of the outcome of the incident(s) after reporting.

Appropriate action was always taken, and I felt supported by my school/college	18.42%
Some, but not sufficient, action was taken	27.67%
While some incidents were dealt with appropriately, others were not	31.31%
I was not informed of the outcome of the incident(s) after reporting	10.28%
No action was taken by the school/college	8.47%

More details were provided by many respondents with regard to what happened after incidents were reported. They included:

"Feeble sanctions which the children don't care about and simply resume their abuse of teachers after the meaningless sanctions. It is a joke. I keep my mouth shut most of the time because I have bills to pay."

"Because it was the day before we broke for Christmas and students got a 'fresh start' after Christmas, there was no punishment for calling me a bitch."

"My line managers avoided getting involved, my headteacher shouted at me when he thought I was calling safety at the school into question. He could not produce a playtime risk assessment and got really defensive. I was forced to choose between whistleblowing at his behaviour or leaving. I, sadly, left."

"Despite asking the head of behaviour, I was essentially not told what the sanction should be and was left to 'make up the behaviour policy myself' – essentially, management do not want to apply their own behaviour policy and would prefer staff to take the blame for doing so."

"The pupil was suspended, but abuse continued every time they returned. SLT admitted I was being targeted and promised to ensure one SLT member would be present in class when I was teaching this particular young man. They haven't stuck with the agreement. My anxiety is off the scale."

"It is just accepted behaviour and nothing is ever done about it."

"Whenever reports are raised, HOY and SLT pass responsibility back to teachers or HOD to manage departmentally, as they perceive poor behaviour is based on teaching or lesson content."

Online abuse/online threats

A specific section of the study focused on those respondents who had experienced online abuse or threats. When asked if they had reported these incidents, nearly two-thirds (61%) had not.

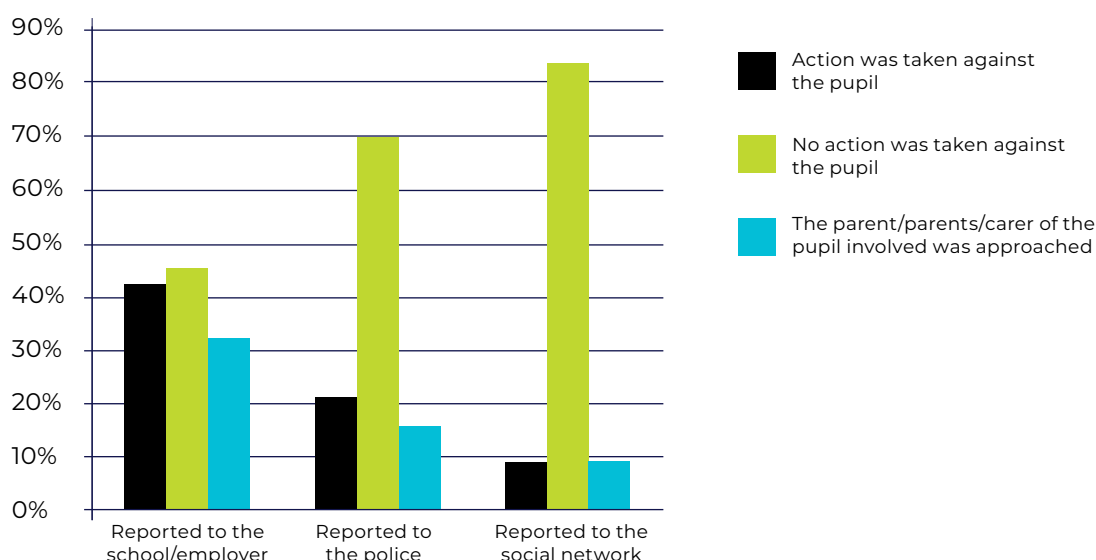
Of those who did report the incidents, 37% reported it to their school/employer, 4% to the social network, and a further 4% to the police.

Respondents who did not report the online abuse or threats were asked for the reason behind this.

I did not think anything would be done about it	47.95%
I thought I would be blamed	16.37%
The process for reporting behaviour incidents is too time time-consuming/bureaucratic	23.39%
I was concerned my capability would be called into question	21.05%
I was told it was part of my job	11.70%
I was concerned it would affect my pay progression	7.02%

Action was most likely to be taken against the pupil when the online abuse or threats were reported to the school (42%).

The least common likelihood of action being taken against the pupil was when it was reported to the social network – no action was taken in 84% of incidents.



Only a fifth of teachers (22%) felt that where action was taken against the pupil, it matched the seriousness of the incident of the online abuse/threats.

Behaviour management policies

Nearly all respondents (95%) state their school has a behaviour management policy. When asked if that policy is enforced:

- 11% said always;
- 41% said usually;
- 36% said sometimes;
- 10% said rarely;
- 1% said never.

Where schools do have a behaviour management policy, respondents were asked to identify who that policy had been communicated to and could choose multiple answers:

- 86% said staff;
- 66% said students;
- 63% said parents;
- 20% said relevant trade unions;
- 21% were unsure.

When a pupil behaviour issue is referred to managers, only 8% of teachers feel they always receive feedback about the outcome and how the pupil has been dealt with. A fifth (22%) say they usually do.

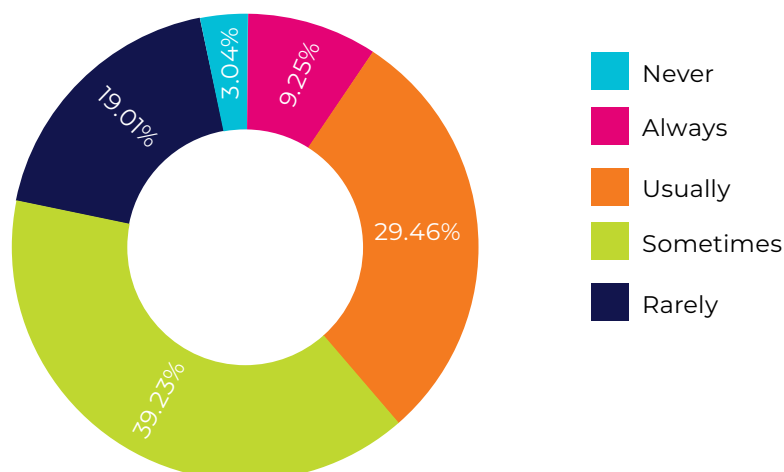
The largest proportions – 35% and 30% – say they sometimes do, or rarely do, respectively. A further 6% say they never do.

Always	7.82%
Usually	22.15%
Sometimes	34.59%
Rarely	29.51%
Never	5.93%

There is a similar picture when individuals were asked if they feel they receive support in a timely manner when they have asked for help from managers to deal with a pupil behaviour issue.

The majority of respondents (39%) say they only sometimes feel they receive support in a timely manner when they have asked for help from managers to deal with a pupil behaviour issue.

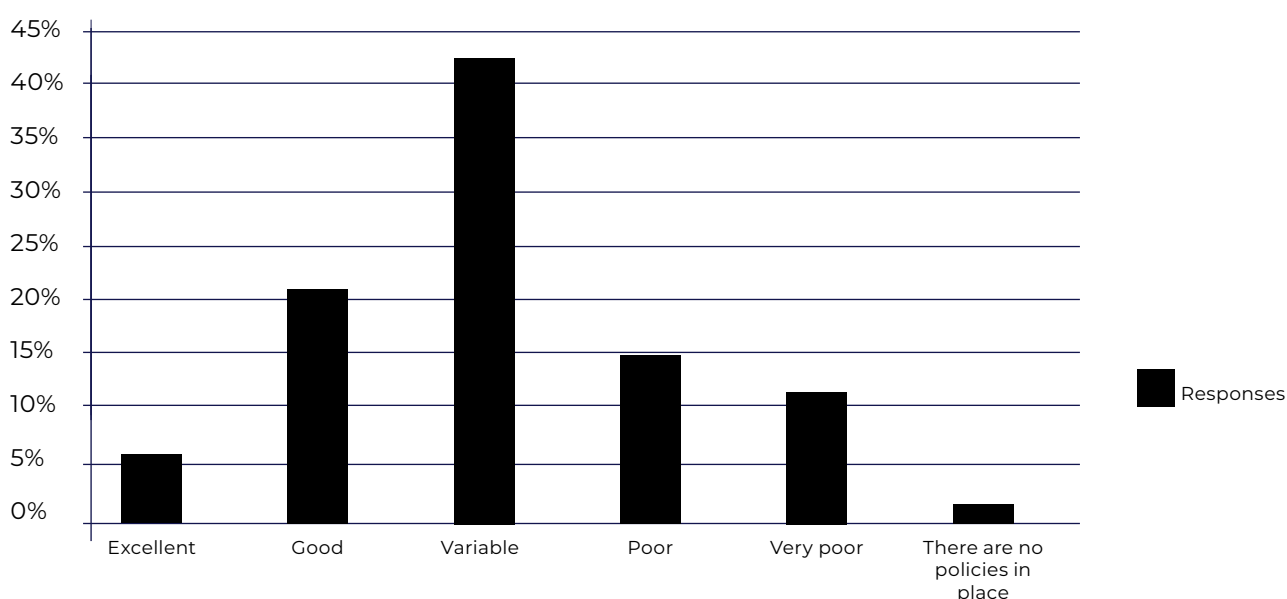
Twenty-nine per cent say usually, while a fifth (19%) say rarely. Only 9% answered that they always receive support in a timely manner, while 3% say they never do.



When asked to rate their school/college's policies and/or approaches to dealing with violence and abuse from pupils towards staff, the highest response is variable which stands at 43%. A fifth (22%) say it is good.

One in 20 (7%) rate their school or college's policies and approaches to dealing with violence and abuse from pupils toward staff as 'excellent'.

How would you rate your school/college's policies/approach to dealing with violence and abuse from pupils towards staff?



Police involvement

One in ten respondents said the police had been involved in any incidents they had experienced.

More information was asked of those who stated the police had not been involved. In 5% of cases where respondents felt that an incident was serious enough to escalate to the police, they reported that their school did not support them to do so.

Just under two-thirds (62%) of those who did involve the police were satisfied with the response they received.

Parental involvement

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of respondents said the parent/s or carer/s of the pupil or pupils involved were contacted. A further 8% said they weren't contacted, while a third (30%) were unsure.

Of those who knew the parents had been contacted, 10% said the parents were entirely supportive of the individual and the school. Sixty per cent said the parents were supportive to an extent, while the remaining third (30%) said they did not feel the parents were supportive at all.

Current experiences

Respondents were asked to assess the current experience they have in their school or college.

More than a third (42%) strongly agree or agree that they are made to feel to blame if they have an issue with poor pupil behaviour.

A further 43% said that the culture in their school/college is that poor pupil behaviour is part of the job and they should expect to receive abuse/violence from pupils.

A similar amount – 39% – do not feel supported by their school or college's approach to dealing with poor pupil behaviour.

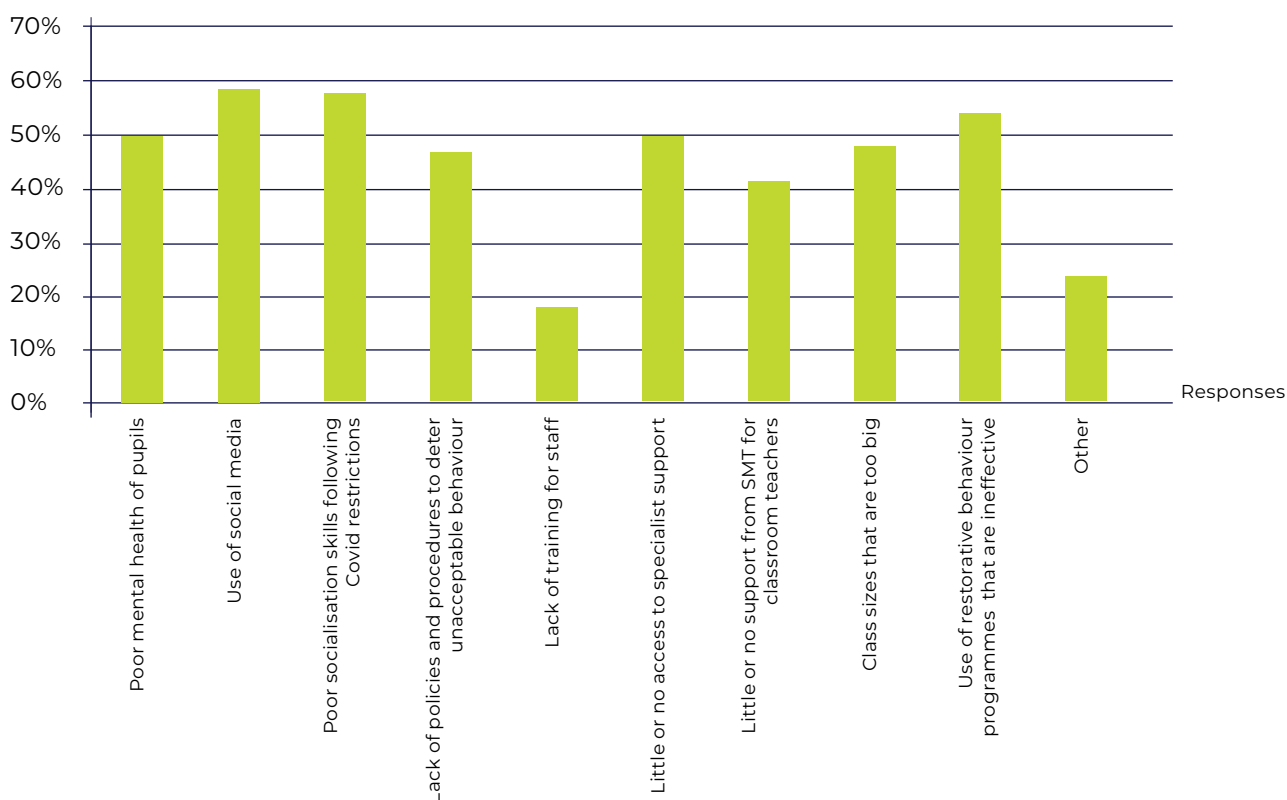
Less than a quarter (23%) of respondents feel their setting's approach to pupil behaviour management empowers them as a teacher or leader.

Almost three quarters of respondents (71%) do not feel they have the resources, support and knowledge to meet the behavioural needs of all the pupils they teach.

When asked about the number of pupils for whom respondents do not feel they receive adequate support to teach because of their behavioural needs, four in five (79%) feel this has increased in the last year.

Factors affecting pupil behaviour

If you feel pupil behaviour has deteriorated in your school, what do you believe are the driving factors behind this? (Tick all that apply)



Use of social media is the most commonly cited driving factor, identified by over half (59%) of respondents. Poor socialisation skills following Covid-19 restrictions are still seen as a significant cause, with 58% of members raising this.

Restorative behaviour programmes that are ineffective is also identified as a driver of deteriorating pupil behaviour by 54% of respondents.

Half of respondents (50%) identified poor mental health of pupils, and 46% cited lack of proper policies and procedures to deter unacceptable behaviour. Little or no access to specialist support is identified by one in two members (50%), and a similar figure cites class sizes that are too big (48%).

When the use of social media is explored in the context of different education phases, two-thirds of respondents in secondary settings report it as a factor affecting pupil behaviour. Within the primary sector, a worrying 47% cite it as causing poor behaviour. This is despite children at primary school being under the age of consent for social media sites.

Where respondents specified other reasons, the repeated themes included:

- lack of positive influences outside school;
- a breakdown of social contract between school and parents;
- increase in the number of SEND/ASN/AEN/ALN children with serious needs but without funding or support;
- a lack of respect for teachers, and the profession not being valued;
- the intensity and inflexibility of the curriculum;
- poverty and austerity;
- the 'banning' of exclusions*;
- whole school policies that do not work for individual pupil needs.

*The notion of some schools claiming that they 'ban' exclusions is problematic, given that it would prevent them from meeting their duties of care to staff and other pupils when exclusion is the only practical means of doing so in some circumstances. NASUWT will continue to explore whether this is a specific policy being committed by some settings, or a miscommunication of a policy by schools to members of staff.

Impact of social media on pupil behaviour

Teachers and leaders were asked if they felt social media is a driving factor on pupil behaviour, and what the impact was. Some of the comments from secondary school members included:

"[Social media has] poor role models, access to inappropriately aged content, and online bullying."

"It is causing tiredness and impacting on ability to focus."

"Concentration is lower due to possible impacts from TikTok and YouTube shorts."

"Pupils are keen to take part in trends. They lack empathy for others and are displaying symptoms of addiction."

"Pupils believe it is their right to access their mobile phones throughout the day, interrupting learning, causing confrontations, damaging their ability to concentrate due to their growing addiction to phone use."

"Toxic masculinity and misogynistic, sometimes abusive, behaviour, and comments towards females because of people such as Andrew Tate, and other 'alphas'."

"Access to sexist and violent content which is then mimicked in the classroom."

Commentary from primary school teachers demonstrates the effects on pupils aged 11 and under:

"As a primary teacher (year 1) we have had instances of children initiating inappropriate/poor behaviour to emulate what they have seen online. In my experience the children I teach are too young to understand the meaning/grasp the whole concept of what they are copying and mimicking."

"Pupils get instant gratification from social media and online games which cannot be matched by activities in school. This leads to a lack of motivation and resistance to work which is considered 'boring'."

"Children feel that they have to behave like the people in videos; loud, opinionated, no filter on what they say, no consequences as they think it is all one-sided."

Actions to support teachers and leaders

What actions do you feel are needed to support you in meeting the behavioural needs of all the pupils you teach? (Tick all that apply)

More in-class support from teaching assistants etc.	56.19%
More external support – i.e., from child psychologists, CAMHS etc.	61.86%
Pupils with behavioural issues being moved into specialist provision that better meets their needs	76.29%
More training	23.16%
A curriculum that better meets the needs of and engages all pupils	49.05%
More support and assistance from school/college leaders/governors	51.11%
More support and engagement from parents/carers	73.88%
Other (please specify)	9.08%

When asked what actions teachers and leaders feel are needed to support them in meeting the behavioural needs of all the pupils they teach, three-quarters (76%) said pupils with behavioural issues being moved into specialist provision that better meets their needs.

More support and engagement from parents/carers was identified as the second action, cited by 74%. More than half (56%) said more in-class support from teaching assistants is needed. More external support and more support and assistance from school/college leaders and governors were both identified by more than half (62% and 51% respectively).

A curriculum that better meets needs and engages learners was cited by 49%.

Other themes consistently identified in the commentary included:

- more funding and support for SEND/ASN/AEN/ALN;
- smaller class sizes;
- more engagement from youth services to support young people outside of school;
- clear behaviour and mobile phone policies that are communicated not only to staff but to parents and pupils, and that are implemented;
- more staff to support the children's needs in class, including TAs, alongside better pay for TAs to try and address the recruitment crisis for support staff;
- a less intense school day with reduced focus on meeting targets;
- removal of access to social media for under 16s.

Impact on other pupils as a result of behavioural issues

Members were asked to share the impact they were seeing on other pupils as a result of disruptive behaviour. A total of 4,000 members provided qualitative commentary.

Teachers' views included:

"The quality of their learning is being negatively impacted."

"Some children are distressed by witnessing poor behaviour whilst others seem to revel in the disruptive behaviour."

"It can encourage a minority of learners to copy poor behaviour."

"They are also disengaged. They are feeling uncomfortable coming to school. It is no longer a safe place for them."

"They are losing a significant amount of learning time because of behaviour issues. In one lesson I taught yesterday, it was 40 minutes into a 60-minute lesson before I was able to teach because of behaviour challenges."

"Increased anxiety, more pupils becoming more introverted, more pupils 'playing along' so as not to be targeted themselves."

Restorative conversations

Over half of respondents (55%) indicated that their school or college uses a system of structured restorative conversations involving staff and pupils to address behaviour incidents.

Of those, only 13% feel it is an effective means of addressing behaviour incidents in schools. More than a third (37%) were not sure if it is, and half – 50% – said it is not.

When asked for more detail, more than 1,200 participants provided further information as to why they feel this approach is not working. Some comments include:

“When rare discussions are held, often the student denies any wrongdoing and staff are not supported – just a paper exercise to get the student back in class.”

“Pupils see it as a way to get out of an actual consequence and their behaviour continues. They just say what a teacher wants to hear.”

“The students don’t care. They say what is required to ‘get them off the hook’ and then simply repeat the behaviour and so the cycle repeats because sanctions don’t escalate.”

“We are supposed to have restorative conversations but there is not enough time in the day to do this effectively and I’ve had no training on how to do it.”

“I am fully supportive of the restorative approach but not as a replacement to behaviour management.”

Additional practical support

When asked what additional practical support respondents felt would help to tackle the problem of behaviour that challenges, there are a number of common themes that can be identified throughout the commentary:

- Guaranteed access to behaviour-focused CPD and de-escalation training.
- Consistent application of behaviour management policies.
- A zero-tolerance approach to violence towards staff and other pupils.
- More visibility from SLT.
- Less focus on having low exclusion rates, alongside a recognition that exclusions are sometimes the only option to a school.
- Review of school timetables and greater options for flexibility to reduce pressure on students.
- Greater recognition of the impact behaviour that challenges has on teachers and other pupils.
- Dedicated behaviour support staff.
- Increased availability of alternative educational settings such as Forest School.

Vaping and behaviour

Vaping continues to be an issue blighting our schools. Over half (54%) of respondents report that vaping by pupils in school or on school premises is an issue in their setting. When this is broken down into education phases, 78% of secondary school teachers raise this as a concern, and 5% of primary teachers – meaning pupils aged 11 and under are believed to be vaping.

The links between vaping and behaviour that challenges are also explored, with 16% of members sharing that pupils vape in lessons.

More than six in ten (62%) identify that pupils leave lessons repeatedly to vape, and 39% report they have encountered pupils that are unable to concentrate because they are distracted or affected by nicotine. A third (32%) say they have seen peer pressure for non-vapers to engage in vaping.

One teacher encapsulates the issue, saying: "Vaping is a huge issue. Back in the day when it was cigarettes that were the problem, at least the smell was a giveaway. Nowadays, it's fruity flavours that smell like some body sprays. I know and can see the students who vape – they become distracted and 'twitchy' and always ask to go to the toilet. I decline, but their focus is on the next nicotine hit."

What does this show?

While there has been 18 months since the Union's previous research on the issue of pupil behaviour and indiscipline, the picture across UK schools has not improved.

The experiences shared by teachers through this research clearly show there is a continuing, and in some cases growing, issue in our schools of physical and verbal abuse towards staff. Too many teachers and leaders are being subjected to physical abuse or violence, which has no place in our schools. This is compounded by incredibly high levels of verbal abuse or violence, which some teachers are suffering on a daily basis.

An overwhelming majority of teachers and leaders feel the number of pupils exhibiting violent and abusive behaviours has increased in the last 12 months. The same is true for the number of pupils verbally abusing staff members.

Furthermore, the frequency in which teachers are victims of assaults with a weapon by a pupil is frightening.

This cannot be ignored, and will undoubtedly have ramifications on: teacher and pupil mental health and wellbeing; retention of teachers; and attractiveness of the profession. These effects are clearly shown throughout the data collected by NASUWT, both in quantitative and qualitative measures.

When eight in ten teachers say their morale and enthusiasm for their job is affected by the verbal or physical abuse they have experienced, this is an untenable situation. Stress, anxiety, depression and poor mental health should not be synonymous with being a teacher or school leader; yet for too many in the profession, it is.

Compounding the issue is the fact that a third of teachers are too worried about reporting behaviour incidents because they are concerned their capability will be called into question. Alongside two-thirds of those not reporting incidents, feeling nothing would be done, there is a clear disconnect between what teachers need and the support they are actually receiving.

Too often, teachers and leaders do not feel appropriate action is taken by their setting. This is a worrying trend, especially alongside a growing culture of normalising unacceptable behaviour when teachers are told 'it is part of the job'. In fact, 43% said that the culture in their school/college is that poor pupil behaviour is part of the job and they should expect to receive abuse/violence from pupils.

It's highly likely this underlies the feeling shared by four in ten teachers (39%) that they are not supported by their setting's approach to dealing with poor pupil behaviour. Making the situation worse, there is a strong sense that teachers are made to feel to blame if they have an issue with poor pupil behaviour, which is cited by 42% of participants in the research.

The safety and security of teachers and pupils should not be left to chance, yet it is clear from the survey findings that teachers are being left without the backup and effective deterrents needed to address poor pupil behaviour and to stop low-level disruption spiralling into more serious incidents of abuse.

No teacher should experience being hospitalised, have to take time off sick or feel forced to quit their job because of the level of abuse they have suffered.

This shows a complete lack of care and support for those educating our children.

The factors that teachers and leaders believe are driving deterioration in pupil behaviour are wide reaching. Many teachers – six in ten – feel use of social media is having a negative impact, even in primary schools where pupils are under the age of consent for social media sites.

A number of other reasons were all cited by approximately half of participants. These include poor socialisation skills following Covid-19 restrictions, use of restorative behaviour programmes that are ineffective, lack of proper policies and procedures to deter unacceptable behaviour, and little or no access to specialist support.

The Union has long been worried about the misapplication and misinterpretation of restorative behaviour programmes, which is why it is taking the step to support good practice in schools.

Class sizes that are too big are also identified as a driving factor by 48% of those involved in the study.

These driving factors align with the action that individuals feel are needed to support them in meeting the behavioural needs of all the pupils they teach.

The most identified action, by eight in ten respondents, is for pupils with behavioural issues to be moved into specialist provision that better meets their needs. There is also a clear need for more in-class support from teaching assistants, as well as better external support – for example, from education psychologists and CAMHS.

The inaccessible curriculum is also seen as problematic, negatively affecting behaviour.

The detailed picture we have been able to build through this research is that violent and abusive pupil behaviour continues to blight our education system. Too often both individual incidents and ongoing issues are unaddressed, compounded by the deprofessionalisation of teachers, driven by a blame culture.

NASUWT recognises this is a complicated issue with many root causes, and that there is no easy fix. For this reason, we are continuing to call for a holistic strategy and policy shift that goes beyond the school walls. The benefits that could be realised from a consistent focus on addressing behavioural issues are clear to see.

NASUWT will not hesitate to take action in schools where members report that poor behaviour is not being addressed effectively. But we should not have to resort to union action in order to get schools, employers and governments to take violence and abuse seriously.

What next? Recommendations and asks

Local actions – what will NASUWT do?

Raise awareness of the issue

1. Reinforce to members that they are not alone in facing this issue. NASUWT will continue to show and reassure members that we stand with them against unacceptable working conditions, including violent and abusive behaviour.
2. Use our communications channels to keep this issue in the public domain, with a view to securing widespread support for our actions.
3. Use the findings to work with governments and administrations to support those in the profession with this growing problem, through direct engagement, consultation responses, working groups and lobbying activities.

Further exploration of key issues and development of advice and guidance

4. Continue to engage with policymakers regarding ways to reduce the appeal of vapes to children and young people, as this continues to be an issue in schools that is often linked to behaviour that challenges.
5. Continue to refresh and promote the Union's suite of behaviour management resources and look at ways to communicate these to members, utilising different mediums.
6. Raise awareness of the risks associated with the concept of 'no exclusion' policies, notwithstanding the important recognition that exclusions should always be a last resort within behaviour management.

Continue our commitment to existing campaigns

7. The link between behavioural issues and mental health concerns is well documented, and the findings of this report reaffirm this. NASUWT will continue its partnership work with Citizens UK and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), championing the need for access to school-based counsellors across all UK schools.
8. Continue to make the evidence-based case for smaller class sizes.

Work with stakeholders

9. Utilise the findings of the report to inform like-minded stakeholders, encouraging them to raise awareness of the issue and join calls for schools and governments to take action.
10. Continue to look for opportunities to work with organisations that promote the safe and responsible use of technology and social media for young people, such as the Safer Internet Centre.

Representations to Inspectorates

11. Continue to press Inspectorates to take responsibility for ensuring schools understand what considerations are made during inspection with regard to suspensions and exclusion. Schools must not be penalised for making reasonable, lawful and proportionate use of disciplinary sanctions, including suspension and exclusion.
12. Elements of inspections should in no way contribute to schools artificially lowering their suspension and exclusion rates by not taking these actions, even when they are reasonable and the best course of action.

Local actions – what do we want schools, employers and local authorities to do?

13. Work with NASUWT reps to review existing behaviour management policies and ensure they are fit for purpose.
14. Ensure the consistent application of behaviour management policies, with the adoption of a whole-school approach.
15. Ensure parents are aware of their children's schools' behaviour management policy, including the role that pupils and parents play in creating a positive school environment.
16. Carry out a review of restorative behaviour approaches where they are used, their appropriateness and the impact they are having on behaviour management and staff wellbeing. To support this, NASUWT will continue to draw attention to our framework and advise on how to ensure restorative behaviour approaches are carried out effectively, should schools choose to engage this practice.

System-level actions – what do we want governments and administrations to do?

Improving the picture in schools

17. Continue to address the issues of teacher retention and recruitment. The findings of this NASUWT survey identify this as having a detrimental impact on behaviour, as skilled teachers are lost from the profession. NASUWT will hold governments and administrations to account on addressing this and ensure any proposed policies are adhered to.
18. Strengthen guidance on behaviour management to ensure 'no exclusion' policies are not legitimised across the education sector. There should be further clarification of when it is appropriate to suspend or exclude a pupil.
19. Introduce mandatory time for teachers to access training and development, with a proportion of this being focused on behaviour, through nationally agreed training.
20. Develop specific guidance on large-scale pupil disorder in schools, in partnership with NASUWT. Not only will this offer important advice on what to do in these troubling situations, it will also demonstrate that governments and administrations are supportive of the profession and the challenges they face.
21. Establish partnership approaches involving schools, police, youth justice services and other stakeholders to promote good behaviour and share expertise and resources effectively.

Tackling assaults

22. The frequency in which teachers are victims of assaults with a weapon by a pupil is shocking. UK governments and administrations must establish system-level, multi-agency working parties on school safety and security to provide practical strategies.

Wider societal commitments

23. Commit to ensure every school across the UK has access to a school-based counsellor.
24. Given the link between behaviour issues and poverty, the work of the Government's Anti-Poverty Taskforce is integral in addressing this issue. The Taskforce should ensure that it includes in its remit a focus on identifying the measures needed to tackle the link between poverty and behaviour that challenges.

About NASUWT

NASUWT – The Teachers' Union – represents teachers and headteachers across the United Kingdom. We provide unrivalled protection, benefits and support for our members, from professional advice and legal support and free training.

By 'putting teachers first', NASUWT works to enhance the status of the teaching profession to deliver real improvements to teachers' working lives, seeking to ensure they are recognised and rewarded as highly skilled professionals with working conditions that enable them to focus on their core role of teaching.

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