

Behaviour in Schools

A Pulse Check (2026)

Introduction

Pupil behaviour remains one of the most serious challenges facing schools, with significant consequences for teachers' safety, wellbeing and ability to teach effectively. Evidence from NASUWT's previous *Behaviour in Schools* reports has already demonstrated the scale and persistence of these issues. However, the experiences of teachers since the last full survey make clear that these concerns have not diminished and, in some cases, may be intensifying.

This interim report has been produced as a pulse check, in response to the need for timely evidence. While NASUWT's major *Behaviour in Schools* studies provide comprehensive national analysis, their scale means they cannot be undertaken annually. In the intervening period, it is critical that emerging patterns and ongoing concerns are not overlooked.

The findings in this report provide a clear and immediate account of current conditions in schools. They highlight the continued prevalence of disruptive and abusive behaviour, and point to areas where action is urgently required. The evidence presented reinforces the need for sustained and co-ordinated efforts to ensure that teachers are protected and that pupils can learn in safe, orderly environments.

This report sends a clear message: the issues identified in previous studies have not been resolved. Without decisive action, they risk becoming further embedded in the daily reality of schools.

Methodology – what did we do?

The main findings of this report have been drawn together from the findings of the Big Question survey. This is NASUWT's annual state of the profession, which is distributed and responded to via electronic communication methods. At the time of compiling the *Behaviour Pulse Check* report, a total of 10,226 NASUWT members had responded to the survey.

This report also draws on Department for Education (DfE) data to identify commonalities between NASUWT findings and those from the Government's own research. As with the major *Behaviour in Schools* report, teachers' experiences and opinions shared via free-text opportunities have been used to express the voice of classroom teachers.

Behaviour in Schools: A Pulse Check – what did we find out?

Types of behaviour

In the last 12 months, 20% of respondents have experienced or seen physical assaults by pupils on teachers. Violence between pupils is also an issue, with over a quarter (28%) reporting this.

A small proportion at 4% – but still above anything schools should be seeing – report that pupils have brought weapons into school. Discriminatory language has been experienced by nearly a third of members (29%). Inability to follow rules was the most commonly reported behaviour (79%). Second and third were chatter in class (70%) and backchat (65%). Distraction from mobile phones was cited by over a quarter (28%), and distraction from other portable electronic devices was reported by 10%.

Swearing/verbal abuse	45%
Chatter in class	70%
Discriminatory language	29%
Sexualised behaviour between pupils/towards staff	13%
Inability to follow rules	79%
Physical assaults on teachers	20%
Violence between pupils	28%
Backchat	65%
Late arrival at lessons	59%
Threatening behaviour	20%
Failure to bring appropriate equipment	51%
Distraction of mobile phones (e.g. texting, cameras)	28%
Distraction of other portable electronic devices (e.g. iPad)	10%
Pupils with irregular attendance patterns	64%
Bullying between pupils	24%
Failure to complete work (including homework)	61%
Failure to comply with uniform policy	42%
Pupils bringing weapons into school	4%
Vaping in class/leaving class to vape	14%

When asked about whether they had been subjected to any specific behaviours in the last year, the picture deteriorates further. Over half of respondents (59%) have been verbally abused by a pupil, and nearly one in five (17%) have been physically assaulted by a pupil.

Misogyny is a worrying finding, with 21% of respondents stating they have been subjected to misogyny by a pupil. Additionally, 2% report being sexually harassed by a pupil. Threats of assault with a weapon is reported by 3%, while 1% told us they have been assaulted with a weapon by a pupil.

When sharing their experiences, members reported that they had been kicked or slapped, or had their hair pulled. Another described an incident of “serious biting by a pupil, requiring a week’s course of antibiotics.”

One member told us: “Multiple times I have been hit and had a chair thrown at me by a child.”

Verbal abuse by a pupil	59%
Verbal abuse by a parent or carer	29%
Discriminatory language/abuse by a pupil	23%
Discriminatory language/abuse by a parent or carer	6%
Threats of physical assault from a pupil	19%
Threats of physical assault from a parent or carer	2%
Physical assault by a pupil	17%
Physical assault by a parent or carer	0.28%
Pushing/shoving by a pupil	23%
Misogyny by a pupil	21%
Misogyny by a parent or carer	5%
Sexual harassment by a pupil	2%
Sexual harassment by a parent or carer	0.16%
Abuse/allegations on social networking sites by a pupil	3%
Abuse/allegations on social networking sites by a parent or carer	3%
Criticism from parents/carers (including parent 'bombing')	24%
Threats of assault with a weapon by a pupil	3%
Assault with a weapon by a pupil	1%
None of these	23%
Other (please specify)	4%

Support from school, governors and MATs

For those who had experienced any form of abuse by a pupil or a parent/carer, we asked if they felt their school/governors/multi-academy trust (MAT) dealt with the issue in a satisfactory manner. The majority (41%) said no. A third (33%) replied yes, and 26% said they are not sure.

We asked respondents if risk assessments for violent or potentially violent pupils are completed in their schools. Nearly half (47%) were not sure. A quarter (27%) said yes and that they are shared with staff, while 16% said they are completed but not shared with staff. A total of 11% reported that risk assessments are not completed in their setting.

Teacher voice

To capture the voices and experiences of teachers, we asked them to share their experiences of any form of abuse or violent behaviour and how it had affected them. A small selection of comments include:

- “I was barricaded into a classroom with a class and subjected to verbal abuse. I was worried the student would bring a knife into school or would attack me when I was lone working.”
- “As a SEND hub teacher, I have been bitten twice by two different pupils in KS1 – both times drawing blood. I have had my hair pulled, been scratched, been punched, headbutted and kicked. I now work within a KS2 SEND hub and have experienced similar behaviours. This has occurred whilst ensuring the safety of other pupils and my colleagues.”
- “I have been hit, smacked etc. and pushed by pupils. SLT did not impose sanctions on the child. This made me fearful to work with these children as they will not face consequences.”
- “Name calling, chairs thrown at me, equipment thrown at me, child urinated into a plastic wallet and threw it at me, chased with a rounders bat and a dinner knife, scissors used as a weapon, hit, punched and kicked.”
- “Frequent outbursts of verbal/physical abuse are increasing. Staff spend their days feeling anxious and on edge, fearing when the next incident will occur and what the severity of the outburst will be. We know that if we follow the school behaviour policy with certain children, we will trigger an outburst. The decision is ‘let the child get away with lower level disruption, or address it and face physical/verbal aggression and having to evacuate the classroom’. These children are mainstream pupils without additional adult support.”
- “I have scars from children who have bitten me, thrown objects at me, kicked me – I’ve attended hospital for antibiotics and injections following being bitten. In no other profession is this deemed acceptable, so why are teachers expected to just put up with it?”
- “I have been verbally insulted and called names. I have been physically assaulted with chairs, tables, small white boards, pens, pencils and so on. I have been told that I was going to get killed the day after. This is from a six-year-old boy and it happened more than once. I left the school and I am now on supply.”

Current experiences

Respondents were asked to assess their current experience of pupil behaviour in their school or college. More than four in ten (42%) agree or strongly agree that they are made to feel to blame if they have an issue with poor pupil behaviour.

A further 36% 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 (34%) do not feel supported by their school or college's approach to dealing with poor pupil behaviour.

Less than half (44%) of respondents feel their setting's approach to pupil behaviour management empowers them as a teacher or leader.

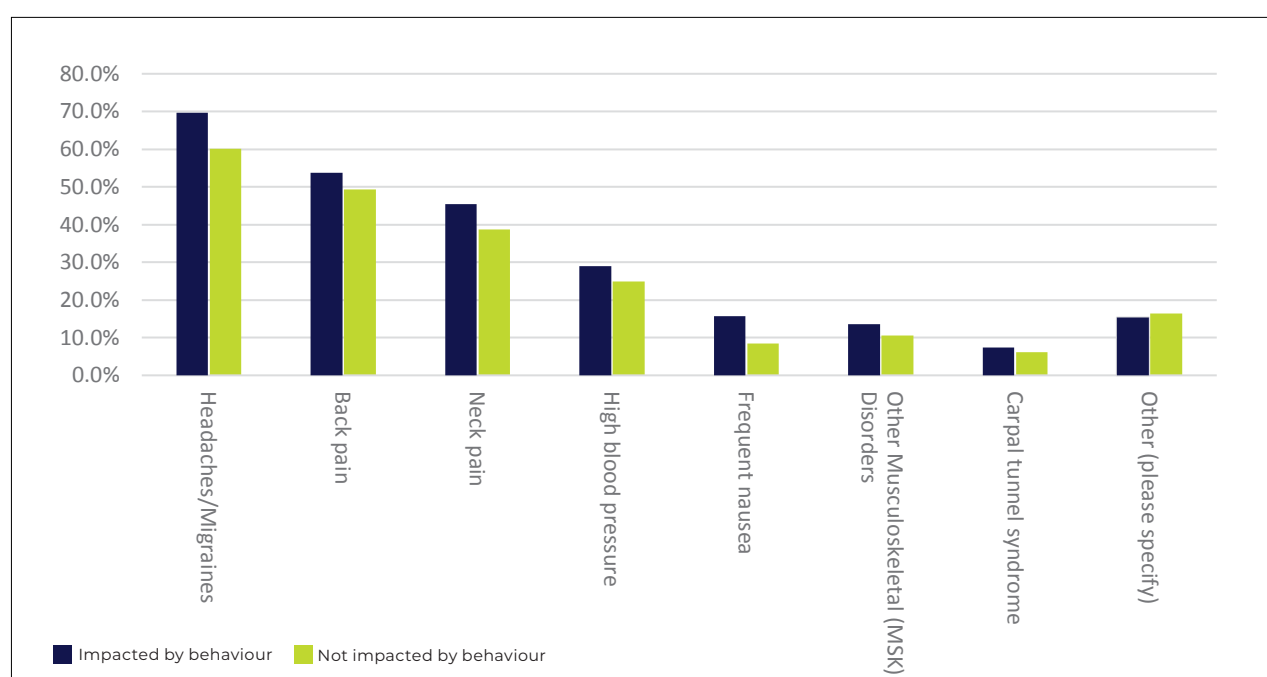
Half of respondents (49%) do not feel they have the resources, support and knowledge to meet the behavioural needs of all the pupils they teach. Nearly half (48%) do not feel their school's behaviour policy is effective and fit for purpose. When asked what factors professionally disempower them as a teacher, 39% cited offensive behaviour from pupils/parents or colleagues not being tackled by management.

In the last 12 months, 80% of respondents feel their job has adversely affected their mental health. When asked what factors had influenced this, a third (34%) ranked behaviour as the top issue. This ranked only behind workload, which was cited as the top issue by 47% of respondents.

Impact of poor pupil behaviour on teacher health

To understand the impact of poor pupil behaviour on teacher health, we looked specifically at the work-related health issues reported by those who experienced severe behaviour incidents.¹

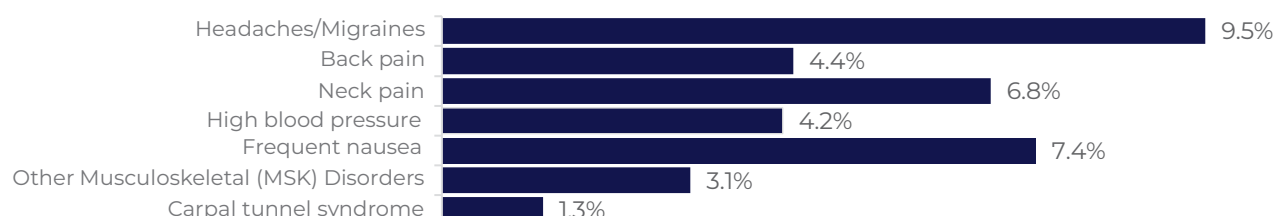
Teachers who experienced severe behavioural incidents² report higher rates of almost every work-related health issue compared to those unaffected by behaviour.



¹ Severe behaviour incidents by pupils include: verbal abuse, discriminatory language, threats of physical assault, physical assault, pushing/shoving, misogyny, sexual assault, abuse/allegations, criticism, threats of assault, assault with a weapon.

² This analysis focuses purely on the impacts of pupil behaviour. Q34 of the Big Question also measures teachers' experiences with poor parent/carer behaviour, which are left absent here, though there is already broad overlap between these two groups.

Percentage Point Increase when Impacted by Behaviour



- Headaches and migraines are by far the most common condition in both groups, but the gap between them is striking: almost 70% of teachers impacted by behaviour report headaches or migraines, compared to 61% of those unaffected.
- Frequent nausea shows the most significant relative increase: it nearly doubles, from 8.3% among those unaffected to 15.7% among those impacted by behaviour.
- Neck pain is the third most affected condition, rising 6.8 percentage points (from 38.7% to 45.5%). It is closely followed by similar issues like back pain (from 49.3% to 53.7%) and other musculoskeletal disorders (+3.1pp).
- High blood pressure rises from 24.8% to 29.1%.

Severity of behaviour matters too. There is a clear gradient within the impacted group, where teachers who experienced the most extreme forms of behaviour report the worst health outcomes. Those who dealt with assault with a weapon report headaches at 83.3%, high blood pressure at 41.7%, back pain at 63.3%, and neck pain at 61.7%, all substantially above even the impacted group average. Similarly, sexual harassment by a pupil is associated with an especially high rate of frequent nausea (33.9%), more than double the impacted group average.

The overall picture is one of clear, consistent harm. Across every health category except 'other', teachers who report dealing with severe behavioural issues report notably higher rates of ill health. There is also a clear gradient between health outcomes and the severity of behaviour incidents in question.

Concerns about behaviour compared to other work-related issues

When asked to identify the top five concerns that members have about their jobs, behaviour is ranked by two-thirds (68%) of respondents. It is ranked after workload, which is cited by 77% of those taking the survey. School budget cuts are third at 49%, while 45% cite pay as their biggest concern.

Workload	77%
Behaviour	68%
School budget cuts	49%
Pay	45%
Inspection	34%
Working conditions	28%
Curriculum reform	25%
Pension	23%
Job security	21%
Accountability	19%

Comparison with government data

The most recent DfE's [National behaviour survey report](#) is from the 2024/25 academic year. This set of data shows that the biggest issue remains persistent low-level disruption, rather than extreme incidents. At the same time, the report makes clear that this ongoing disruption continues to have a substantial effect on teacher wellbeing.

Types of behaviour reported

The survey distinguishes between:

- low-level disruption (talking, calling out, off-task behaviour, phone use, refusal to follow instructions); and
- more serious behaviours (verbal abuse, aggression, bullying, discriminatory behaviour, physical incidents).

Teachers most frequently reported:

- talking when pupils should be working quietly;
- calling out without permission;
- chatting during teacher instructions;
- slow compliance with instructions;
- mobile phone misuse in secondary schools; and
- pupils not engaging with work.

The report repeatedly emphasises that the dominant issue is frequent low-level disruption, not rare severe incidents.

The scale of disruption

Key figures include:

- Teachers said seven minutes of every 30-minute lesson were lost to misbehaviour – unchanged from the previous year (May 2024).
- 62% of pupils in Years 7-13 said misbehaviour had interrupted their learning in at least some lessons during the previous week. This was an improvement from 73% the year before, but still very high.
- Around two-thirds of teachers said pupil behaviour was 'good' or 'very good', but pupils themselves were notably less positive than staff.

The proportion of teachers reporting that pupil misbehaviour had negatively impacted their health and wellbeing in the past week (73% in May 2025) has decreased from 78% in May 2024.

Impact on teacher wellbeing

The section of the report looking at the impact of behavioural challenges on teacher wellbeing is the most aligned with the findings of NASUWT's member research.

- 73% of teachers said pupil misbehaviour had negatively affected their health and wellbeing to some extent (to a great extent, to some extent, or to a small extent) in the previous week.
- In the previous survey year, this figure was 78%, so there was some improvement – but the level remains high.
- When broken down into phases, primary school teachers are reporting greater impact at 74% (compared to 72% of secondary teachers).
- Primary teachers were more likely to say the impact was 'to a great extent':
 - 17% primary
 - 7% secondary

This data points to a situation where the overall prevalence of wellbeing impact is similar across primary and secondary, but primary teachers more often describe the impact as especially severe.

The report links wellbeing effects primarily to:

- constant vigilance around low-level disruption;
- cumulative stress from repeated interruptions;
- loss of teaching time; and
- emotional exhaustion from behaviour management.

A notable theme across the survey and wider teacher commentary is that it is the relentlessness of minor disruption, rather than isolated major incidents, that wears staff down over time. So although the data points to modest improvements, the wellbeing data shows that managing behaviour is still a major source of stress for teachers.

Conclusion

The findings of this pulse check present a clear and troubling picture of the current state of pupil behaviour in schools. Low-level disruption remains widespread and continues to erode teaching time and contribute to teacher stress and exhaustion. Less common, but worrying in the fact they are happening at all, are the incidents of a more serious nature, including verbal abuse, physical assault, discriminatory behaviour and misogyny directed towards teachers.

The experiences shared by teachers throughout this report demonstrate that poor pupil behaviour is not an abstract or isolated issue. For many, it is a daily reality that affects their sense of safety, professional confidence, health and wellbeing. The evidence also suggests that too many teachers feel unsupported when incidents occur, with significant numbers reporting that behaviour policies are ineffective, that abusive conduct is not adequately addressed, and that a culture exists in some settings where violence and abuse are seen as part of the job.

The findings relating to teacher health are particularly stark. Teachers who experience severe behavioural incidents consistently report worse physical and mental health outcomes, with the severity of incidents closely linked to the severity of impact. This reinforces the urgent need to recognise poor pupil behaviour not only as a barrier to learning, but also as a serious workforce and occupational wellbeing issue.

Importantly, these are consistent with government thematic data on behaviour. While there are some indications of modest improvement in certain areas, both NASUWT and DfE evidence point to the same underlying conclusion: disruptive behaviour remains prevalent and continues to have a substantial impact on teachers and pupils alike.

This report therefore underlines the need for sustained and co-ordinated action at every level of the education system. Teachers must be confident that poor behaviour, abuse and violence will be addressed consistently and effectively, and that they will be properly supported when incidents occur. Schools and colleges must be equipped with the resources, staffing, training and specialist support needed to meet pupils' behavioural needs safely and appropriately.

Without meaningful intervention, there is a risk that the behaviours identified in this report will become further normalised within schools, with serious consequences for teacher retention, staff wellbeing and pupils' education. Safe, orderly and respectful learning environments are essential for both teachers and pupils, and must remain a priority across the education system.

What next? Recommendations and asks

Local actions – what will NASUWT do?

Raise awareness of the issue

1. We will 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. We will use our communications channels to keep this issue in the public domain, with a view to securing widespread support for our actions.
3. We will use the findings to work with governments and administrations to support those in the profession who face 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. We will 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. We will 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. We will 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. We will continue to make the evidence-based case for smaller class sizes.

Work with stakeholders

9. We will 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. We will 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 UK Safer Internet Centre. We will also continue to push for social media restrictions for under-16s, which we have concluded is a necessary step – given the harm these platforms are causing to children and young people.

Representations to Inspectorates

11. We will 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 advice 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 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 (and when it is not) 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, but 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.
22. Restrict mobile phone use in schools through the introduction of, and funding for, lockable pouches or similar storage to reduce disruption, improve focus, and support positive behaviour.

Tackling assaults

23. No teacher should go to work feeling unsure of their safety, and they should never be in a situation where they are victims of assaults with a weapon by a pupil. UK governments and administrations must establish system-level, multi-agency working parties on school safety and security to provide practical strategies.

Wider societal commitments

24. Commit to ensure every school across the UK has access to a school-based counsellor.
25. 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.
26. Commit to restrictions on social media access for under 16s to help protect young people's wellbeing and reduce harmful online influences.

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 to 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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