KEY MESSAGES

Behaviour in Schools 2025

Introduction

This briefing summarises the key findings of the latest NASUWT Behaviour in Schools research. The data has been gathered to provide an up-to-date picture of pupil behaviour and indiscipline across the UK's schools – 18 months after the Union's first in-depth look at this issue.

This briefing explores:
- the evidence gathered through our research;
- the voices of teachers and their lived experiences;
- a set of recommendations across the education system, including actions for us as a union, and the expectations we will place on schools, local authorities and governments.

Our approach

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 will be used to produce a new version of the NASUWT *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.

Key findings

What types of behaviour are being exhibited?

In the last 12 months:
- 40% of respondents experienced physical abuse or violence from pupils;
- 85% experienced verbal abuse or violence from pupils;
- 96% reported backchat and rudeness; and
- 76% reported being sworn at by pupils.

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.

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 having objects thrown across rooms and, in many cases, deliberately targeted at them.

The level and types of verbal abuse are equally concerning: 39% 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%).

Threats of assault and actual 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 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 described being threatened with a knife and assaulted with a 3x2 length of wood. Another teacher reported a pupil stating they would "slit my throat and stab me in the neck."

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

How old are the pupils involved?
- The most likely age bracket to demonstrate physical or verbal abuse is 12 to 14, which was identified by 63% 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%).

How often is this happening?

Physical abuse:
- 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.

Verbal abuse:
- 4% reported verbal abuse as happening once a year, 15% 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.

What is the impact of this verbal or physical abuse?
- 77% reported that it has affected their morale and enthusiasm for their job.
- 62% 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, with one in ten (10%) taking time off work due to stress.

Nearly one in two (45%) said they felt less confident in working with pupils.

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 half (52%) said they are seriously considering leaving the profession.

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."

Do teachers report the incidents?
- More than half (58%) of respondents 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.

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 them (66%).

Four in ten (44%) respondents said the process for reporting behaviour incidents is too time-consuming or bureaucratic, while a third (37%) were concerned that their capability would be called into question.

Other reasons cited included:
- 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."

What was the outcome?
Of those incidents that were reported:
- 31% said some incidents were dealt with appropriately, while others were not;
- 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;
- 8% 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.

How are behaviour management policies being used?
Nearly all respondents (95%) stated that their school has a behaviour management policy. When asked if that policy is enforced:
- 11% said always;
- 41% said usually;
- 37% said sometimes;
- 10% said rarely;
- 1% said never.

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.

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.

What else do we know about teachers' current experiences?

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.

Another 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 that 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.

What are the factors affecting pupil behaviour?
- Over half (59%) see the use of social media as a driving factor.
- 58% say poor socialisation skills following Covid-19 restrictions.
- 54% say use of restorative behaviour programmes that are ineffective.
- Half (50%) identified poor mental health of pupils, and 46% cite lack of proper policies and procedures to deter unacceptable behaviour.
- 50% say little or no access to specialist support, with a similar figure (48%) saying class sizes are too big.

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 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.

Impact of social media on pupil behaviour

Teachers and leaders were asked what impact they thought social media was having on pupil behaviour. 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."

What actions do 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%.
- 56% said more in-class support from teaching assistants.
- 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 the needs and engages learners was cited by 49%.

Other themes consistently identified in the commentary included:

- more funding and support for SEND/ASN/AEN;
- 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."*

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 challenging behaviour are also explored, with 16% of members stating that pupils vape in lessons.

More than six in ten (62%) report 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 observed 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."*

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 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. 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 UK 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 advice on how to ensure restorative behaviour approaches are carried out effectively, should schools choose to adopt 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, 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 of 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 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.

For more information, visit **nasuwt.org.uk**

facebook.com/nasuwt   **instagram.com/nasuwt**   **tiktok.com/@nasuwt**