SCOTLAND

NASUWT THE TEACHERS' UNION

EVIDENCE

PE2215: Introduce a Statutory National Anti-Bullying Policy and Strengthen Consequences for Bullying in Scottish Schools

20 November 2026

NASUWT evidence to the Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee

NASUWT's submission to the Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee sets out the Union's views on the key issues which should be explored by the Committee in its scrutiny of 'PE2215: Introduce a Statutory National Anti-Bullying Policy and Strengthen Consequences for Bullying in Scottish Schools'.

NASUWT's evidence is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and also by the work of its representative committees and consultative structures, made up of practising teachers and school leaders working in the education system.

For further information, parliamentarians may contact:

Matt Wrack
General Secretary
nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk
www.nasuwt.org.uk

NASUWT
The Teachers' Union

INTRODUCTION

1. NASUWT notes the petition is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to create and enforce a national anti-bullying policy that all schools and local authorities must follow, with mandatory reporting procedures and stronger consequences to ensure the safety and protection of children affected by bullying.

2. NASUWT is committed to work to eradicate bullying in all its forms in schools and colleges in the UK.

SCHOOL CONTEXT

3. NASUWT believes that all children and young people and staff in schools have a right to learn and work in a safe and secure environment, free from intimidation, harassment, abuse and fear, and where they feel valued and respected.

4. There needs to be a whole-school approach to tackling bullying: tackling the bullying of staff by other staff is as important as tackling pupil-on-pupil bullying and the bullying of staff by pupils.

5. Pupils are entitled to a safe and orderly learning environment, together with effective teaching and support, to assist them in achieving their full potential. Teachers cannot teach and pupils cannot learn in an environment where there is disruption and violence, and where such behaviour occurs it cannot be explained away simply by attributing it to a teacher's inability to plan and deliver a lesson appropriately. The work done by NASUWT over the years has ensured that government, employers, inspectors and many parents now accept this self-evident truth.

6. Thanks to the hard work of teachers, headteachers and support staff, the vast majority of schools are relative havens of peace, security and good order. Whilst maintaining high standards of behaviour is increasingly

difficult, it is important not to misrepresent the nature of the problem. There is, for example, a growing weapon-carrying culture among young people that is causing concern, but incidents in schools are still rare. Serious, widespread violence and disruption are a further concern, but such behaviour remains confined to a minority of pupils in a small number of schools. The main concern for staff in all schools, in all areas, is the growing pressure from what is now the most common form of poor behaviour, so-called 'low-level disruption'.

7. Constant challenges to authority, persistent refusal to obey school rules and frequent, regular verbal abuse of staff are the hallmarks of this behaviour. Their effects, if unchallenged, are corrosive and when sustained over a long period can have a devastating impact on the health and welfare of teachers. Hundreds of teaching hours are being lost challenging this behaviour.

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

8. The Scottish Government joint National Action Plan on Relationships and Behaviour was instituted following sustained pressure by the Union for action to address a rise in incidents of violence and abuse in schools, including advocacy to the Cabinet Secretary, via the National Summits on Relationships and Behaviour and the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools (SAGRABIS). While the National Action Plan is policy heavy, we believe it has the potential to support members and schools and be the start of a culture change in how seriously the issue of pupil behaviour is taken by both ministers and employers.

9. Policy coherence and cohesion is referenced throughout the national plan, so all schools and authorities should dovetail their activity with the explicit aims that it outlines, which include:

    • *'[s]upport schools to reinforce a positive ethos and culture, where all members of the school community are respected and safe, their wellbeing*

is protected, and children and young people are included, engaged and involved in their learning and in the life of the school';

- *'a whole-school approach to improving relationships and behaviour, where all members of the school community – school staff, parents and carers, children and young people – recognise their role in developing community values by creating, modelling and supporting positive relationships and behaviour';*
- *'ensure schools can embed relationships and behaviour policies, based on the needs of their children and young people, in line with national guidance and developed in collaboration with staff, parents and children and young people, which set clear expectations of relationships and behaviour';*
- *'[s]upport schools to implement a spectrum of relationships and behaviour approaches, appropriate to the specific context, taking account of issues such as the Public Sector Equality Duty, and intersectionality';*
- *'some of the behaviours and challenges in schools is a society-wide concern that will require a multi-agency approach';*
- *'though approaches require to be tailored through self-evaluation to individual school context and staff and children's needs, these should be based on the common foundation of a clear and consistent setting-wide relationships and behaviour policy over which all members of the school community have a sense of ownership and participation'; and*
- *'effective recording and monitoring of inappropriate behaviour'.*

10. The joint action plan sets out 20 key actions to be delivered between 2024 and 2027. These actions are designed to support schools in their practice and approaches, by responding to the concerns and challenges identified within the evidence on relationships and behaviour in schools. The actions are set out under overall themes of:
    1. Setting clear national expectations for promoting positive relationships and behaviour in schools
    2. Supporting local application of national policy
    3. Support for children and young people
    4. Supporting the workforce

5. Reducing violence and harm in schools
6. Engaging with the whole-school community
7. Tracking impact and progress
8. Policy cohesion

11. During phase 1 of the National Action Plan, the agreement and publication of an updated version of *Respect for All*, the national anti-bullying guidance, was prioritised. NASUWT was a member of the Anti-bullying: Respect for All Working Group, which was active between March 2023 and November 2024. This working group led on the review, and updated guidance was published in late 2024. The Scottish Government has committed to reviewing the guidance every five years.

BISSR

12. The Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (BISSR) 2023 was the fifth wave of time-series research that was first undertaken in 2006, and the first wave to be completed since the Covid-19 pandemic. The BISSR provides a national snapshot of the experiences of school support and teaching staff, headteachers and school leaders, and education authority staff on relationships and behaviour in schools. The BISSR 2026 is anticipated shortly and will be the foundation upon which the actions taken under the National Action Plan can be reviewed and revisited to assess impact. NASUWT would suggest that this data will be key to reviewing the actions undertaken in the last three years, including the implementation of *Respect for All*.

RECORDING AND MONITORING

13. From August 2019, schools and local authorities have been expected to use the Bullying and Equalities Module (BEM) within SEEMiS. This module allows schools to record and track bullying. Following a review of SEEMiS, a national programme has been instituted to identify and procure a replacement MIS for Scotland's local authorities and education services. The programme is progressing through a number of workstreams covering

procurement, specification development, transition arrangements and programme governance. NASUWT understands that there has been significant progress during 2026 and we are now in the formal procurement phase. We have been assured that work is being undertaken to consider transition and legacy arrangements for SEEMiS, exploring how best to ensure a safe and effective transition.

14. Having an effective system in place to record and track bullying and thereby monitor and review impact is key. It is clear from the Education Scotland National Thematic Review that there was not consistent practice across Scotland in terms of recording and monitoring. HM Inspectors published findings of the national review for recording and monitoring instances of bullying behaviour in February 2023. The review identified a need to improve arrangements for the recording and monitoring of bullying. HM Inspectors set out several recommendations as part of the review. These included:

- *'Scottish Government should work with partners to review the functionality of the BEM within the SEEMiS system to make it more practical for schools to record and monitor incidents of bullying.*
- *'Schools should work in partnership with parents, learners and staff to agree a shared definition of bullying within their school community. This will help to strengthen approaches to recording and support monitoring of alleged incidents of bullying.*
- *'Schools should ensure that they have suitable arrangements in place to encourage children and young people to report, with confidence, all incidents of alleged bullying.*
- *'Schools must record bullying incidents accurately and monitor this information systematically. This will allow them to identify more readily the scope and scale of bullying incidents and make improvements in policy and practice to support learners' wellbeing.'*[1]

[1] https://educationinspectorate.gov.scot/inspection-reports/national-thematic-inspections/responding-to-bullying/

15. The HM Inspectors thematic review focused heavily on ineffective reporting and monitoring systems noting:

'School leaders recognise the value of recording incidents of bullying, and the majority are using the nationally agreed process through the BEM within SEEMis. However, they describe finding the BEM module challenging to use and some schools are not fully implementing national guidance. This is leading to inconsistency in both the use of the BEM module and the recording of bullying incidents. There is now a need for partners to review the functionality of the BEM to make it more practical for schools to record and monitor incidents of bullying.

'Schools that have systematic approaches in place to monitor bullying report a reduction in bullying incidents. However, the monitoring of incidents of bullying is not yet consistent across schools. School leaders often develop and use alternative approaches to support the monitoring of bullying trends and patterns. Around a third of schools do not monitor incidents of bullying at whole school level.

'HM Inspectors acknowledge that staff use a range of supportive approaches when dealing with children and young people in response to incidents of bullying. However, there is now a need to improve arrangements for the recording and monitoring of bullying and ensure robust and consistent analysis of bullying incidents. This will help schools to identify trends or themes in bullying and support planning for improvements to both prevention and intervention in tackling bullying.'[2]

16. SEEMiS has been universally agreed as challenging to use and HMiE agreed in the thematic inspection that it was a barrier to improving outcomes for bullying. It is hoped that any new system would have improved functionality, though as NASUWT is not part of the procurement

[2] https://educationinspectorate.gov.scot/media/10chie4b/approaches-to-recording-and-monitoring-bullying.pdf

process we are not able to share a detailed account of the options currently being explored: this responsibility sits with local authority employers.

CONSEQUENCES/RISK ASSESSMENTS GUIDANCE

17. NASUWT participated in the SAGRABIS Consequences subgroup, which resulted in the publication in June 2025 of new guidance setting out a range of approaches for schools to consider when responding to behaviour. The guidance sets out that various approaches are available to schools, ranging from classroom management approaches to support strategies and the use of exclusion as a last resort. In Appendix 1 of the *Schools - fostering a positive, inclusive and safe environment: guidance*, illustrative examples of consequences are set out.[3] As it explains:

'This guidance cannot prescribe specific consequences schools should use to respond to particular behaviours. The table below is for illustrative purposes only, highlighting a range of behaviours, some possible underlying reasons, and examples of potentially appropriate responses. It aims to demonstrate that there can be a number of underlying reasons behind behaviour and that children and young people may act in similar ways for very different reasons and therefore the appropriate response will differ depending on the particular context and needs of the child. Responses should be considered in line with local authority policies, procedures and approaches as not all responses illustrated here may be appropriate or available in all areas.'

18. Another recent national publication is *Schools - violent, aggressive and dangerous behaviour: risk assessment guidance,*[4] which provides clarity to local authorities and schools on using risk assessment processes appropriately to mitigate or minimise violent, aggressive and dangerous

[3] https://www.gov.scot/publications/fostering-positive-inclusive-safe-school-environment-guidance/pages/8/
[4] https://www.gov.scot/publications/risk-assessment-guidance-violent-aggressive-dangerous-behaviour-local-authorities-educational-settings/

behaviours exhibited by children and young people at school. NASUWT would commend both these publications as strengthening the advice and guidance previously available to schools and local authorities.

IMPACT

19. While at its inception, NASUWT was pleased to see that the Action Plan specified that schools would be offered support to adopt the recommendations within it, including suggested approaches and exemplars, it is disappointing that the Scottish Government has not as yet committed any additional funding, time or resources to schools to support this work. NASUWT will continue, via the SAGRABIS working group, to hold the Scottish Government and others to account and push for greater financial investment.

20. As MSPs returned to Holyrood for the new parliamentary term this year, NASUWT, in particular, called for urgent and concerted action to address the continuing failure to tackle violence and abuse in Scotland's schools effectively, as well as excessive teacher workload and the crisis in Additional Support Needs (ASN) provision.

21. Figures from NASUWT's annual Big Question Survey of teachers in Scotland, shared with Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic Màiri McAllan, show that nearly three-quarters (74%) have been verbally abused by a pupil in the past year and nearly a quarter (23%) have been physically assaulted. These figures are up slightly on the previous year where 73% had experienced verbal abuse and 20% physical assault.

22. Just 22% of those who had experienced abuse said they felt their school dealt with it in a satisfactory manner, compared to 21% in 2025. The lack of progress in both bringing down levels of abuse and violence against teachers and in schools responding effectively when incidents do occur must be a priority for this parliament.

23. The Union has called on the Scottish Government to make the implementation of the National Action Plan on Relationships and Behaviour mandatory across all schools and local authorities, and for a requirement to be introduced to publish robust data setting out which local authorities and schools have updated their behaviour policies and School Improvement Plans (SIPs) in line with the guidance.

24. If we look to approaches in England as a comparison, the requirement to address bullying in schools is set out in law. Maintained schools must have measures in place to prevent all forms of bullying under section 89 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. There is a different regime for academies, as they have to implement measures to address bullying as far as is reasonably practical under the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. In England, most state-funded schools are now covered by the latter requirements. The Department for Education (DfE) publishes non-statutory guidance on tackling bullying, but schools are not obliged to follow it. The legal requirement is enforced by Ofsted and schools where bullying regarded by inspectors as unacceptable can be subject to direct intervention by the DfE. Yet a statutory foundation has been insufficient on its own to tackle bullying, referencing data from the DfE and the Anti-Bullying Alliance on prevalence in England.[5]

25. At NASUWT Scotland Conference 2026, a motion was passed noting the importance of reviewing the variety of approaches adopted across 32 local authorities, not specifically to bullying:

'Conference calls on the Scotland Executive Council to lobby Scottish Government, local authorities and COSLA to ensure:
(i) greater standardisation of systems between local authorities, including recording and reporting mechanisms;
(ii) greater standardisation in the mechanisms for sharing relevant ASN information on pupils and risk assessments with supply staff;

[5] https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/prevalence-and-impact-bullying/prevalence-bullying

(iii) a review of the national risk assessment guidance is undertaken to assess effectiveness and implementation;
(iv) a cost-benefit analysis is undertaken for running 32 different local authority reporting and recording systems and
(v) employers are aware of the protections for part-time workers in law.

Conference believes such actions will better support child protection and meet the needs of all children at school.

Conference further calls on the Scotland Executive Council to support members in securing compensation where their workplace has been unsafe.'

26. We have inconsistent approaches to bullying and indeed to embedding the National Action Plan on Relationships and Behaviour more broadly across Scotland's local authorities and schools. Lifting anti-bullying approaches out of the holistic relationships and behaviour package of approaches set out in the National Action Plan and treating it differently from other interlinked guidance would seem unwise, given there are multiple interconnecting exigencies. Embedding national guidance, such as that on appropriate consequences, and securing a fit-for-purpose reporting system are two examples of key factors needed to create the appropriate foundation for any anti-bullying policies or approaches.

27. In terms of immediate next steps, assessing the latest imminently published BISSR data will be an important tool to hold the Scottish Government to account for the commitments and actions set out and undertaken in the National Action Plan. NASUWT is also keen to receive more information on whatever will replace SEEMiS. We need local authorities and schools to publish robust data in line with the guidance.

28. NASUWT remains committed to campaign for the implementation of the National Action Plan on Relationships and Behaviour in its entirety to be mandatory across all schools and local authorities.