

TEACHERS OF SPECIAL & ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS AND BEHAVIOUR INCIDENTS

SURVEY REPORT 2025

Introduction

NASUWT conducted parallel surveys of members about their experiences of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in England, Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Northern Ireland, Additional Learning Needs (ALN) in Wales, Additional Support Needs (ASN) in Scotland, and inclusion. The surveys ran through February and March 2025. We received more than 3,300 responses to the surveys.

We have produced four reports that draw together the findings from those surveys. This report focuses on teachers working in special schools, specialist units, alternative provision (AP) and education other than at school (EOTAS) settings, and their experiences of behaviour incidents and how their school or setting deals with incidents, including how they are supported. We received 525 responses to these questions.

The other three reports focus on:

- Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCOs) and Principal Teachers (ASN/Support for Learning (SfL)): Co-ordinating special and additional learning needs;
- Class teachers: special and additional learning needs and inclusion; and
- Schools: Support for SEN, ALN, ASN and inclusion.

The reports:

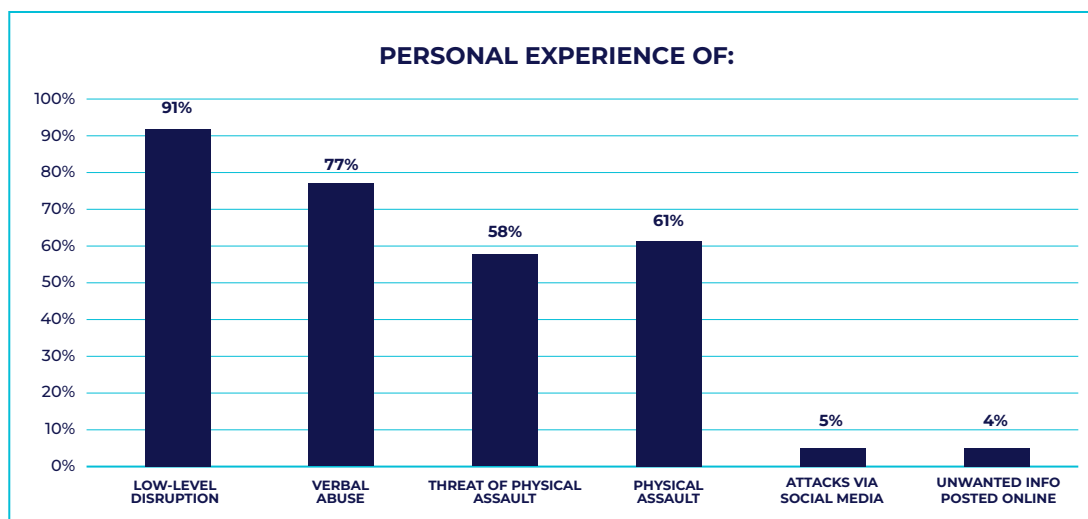
- summarise the main findings from the surveys;
- outline the voices and lived experiences of teachers; and
- highlight key issues and challenges facing schools.

The reports will inform our work with schools and settings, employers and education authorities and governments to secure changes to SEN, ALN and ASN systems and practices that both meet the needs of learners and protect the rights of teachers and leaders.

A separate *Issues and Actions* document outlines key issues raised in the survey reports and outlines some of the actions NASUWT will take to respond to the issues and challenges that teachers, leaders and schools are facing.

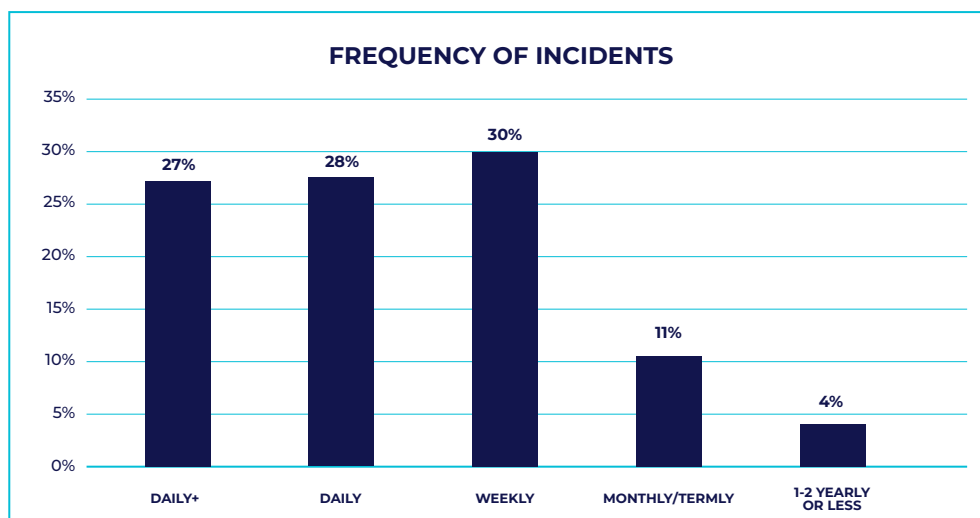
The majority of SEN/ALN/ASN teachers experience incidents of disruption, abuse and assault with more than half reporting that incidents occur on a daily basis...

The overwhelming majority of SEN teachers and teachers in specialist settings experience low-level disruption (91%) and verbal abuse (77%). Almost two-thirds (61%) have experienced physical assault in the last year, and over half (58%) have been threatened with physical assault. Five per cent of respondents said that they had experienced attacks via social media in the last year, and 4% said that unwanted information about them had been posted online.



Responses to question: Have you had personal experience of any of the following in the last year:

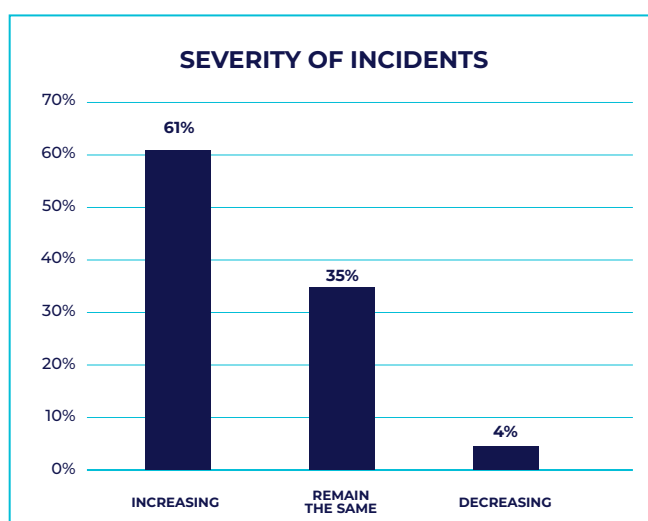
Eighty five percent of respondents experience incidents weekly or more, and more than half (55%) report that incidents are happening either daily or more than once a day.



Responses to the question: How frequently do you experience these incidents?

Violent behaviour is becoming more challenging across schools and settings...

Almost two-thirds of teachers (61%) report that incidents are increasing in severity, 35% report that the severity of incidents remains the same, and just 4% report that the severity of incidents is decreasing.



Responses to the question: Are the incidents you are experiencing: increasing in severity, decreasing in severity or remaining the same?

'Physical assaults on staff [are] now a daily occurrence and this is mainly from SEND pupils in the mainstream school.' (Teacher, England)

'The level of challenging behaviours is increasing – with staff sustaining significant injuries.' (Teacher, Northern Ireland)

'Pupil behaviour in special schools is becoming increasingly complex. Aggression and challenging behaviour is just seen as part of the job. Increasingly, more focus is being placed on simply managing that behaviour and keeping pupils calm [rather] than teaching them.' (Teacher, Northern Ireland)

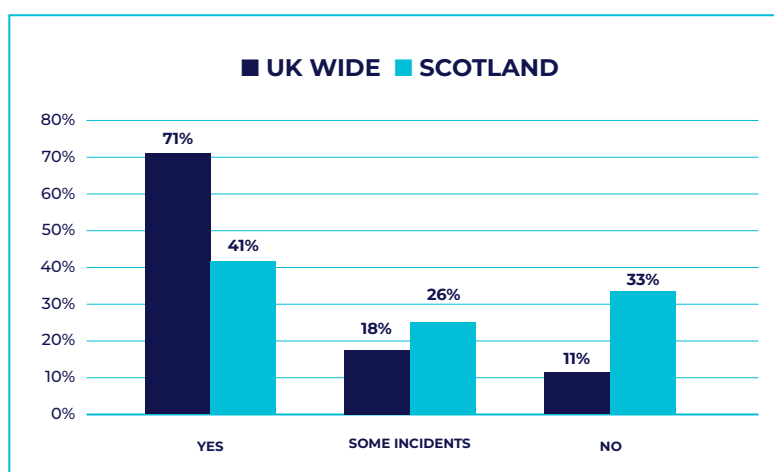
'The pupil behaviour [in special schools] is getting out of control as we are getting the most severe cases [while other pupils go to mainstream or satellite provision].' (Teacher, Northern Ireland)

'Pupil behaviour has become more severe over the past two or three years, resulting in staff being taken to hospital. SLT do deal with the situations [but the] behaviour does impact on the rest of the children in the school.' (Teacher, Wales)

A significant number of schools do not encourage teachers to report incidents and are not recording incidents that are reported...

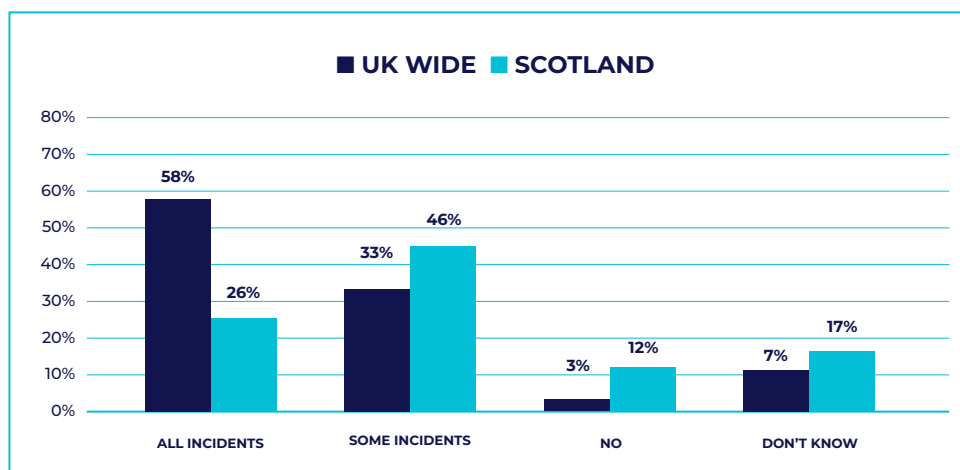
Just over two-thirds of teachers (71%) say that their school encourages them to report incidents, but 11% say that their school does not encourage them to report incidents, and 18% say that they are only encouraged to report some incidents.

Teachers in Scotland were more likely to report that their school does not encourage them to report incidents (33% compared to 11% across the UK). Further, under half of respondents from Scotland (41%) reported that their school encouraged them to report all incidents when compared to the UK average of 71%.



Responses to the question: Does the school encourage you to report incidents?

While over half of respondents (58%) say that their school records all incidents, a third (33%) report that the school only records some incidents, and 3% state that the school does not record incidents. Again, respondents from Scotland are much less likely to report that their school records incidents – just 26% said that their school records all incidents compared to the UK average of 58%. Also, 12% of respondents from Scotland reported that their school did not record incidents when compared to 3% of respondents across the UK.

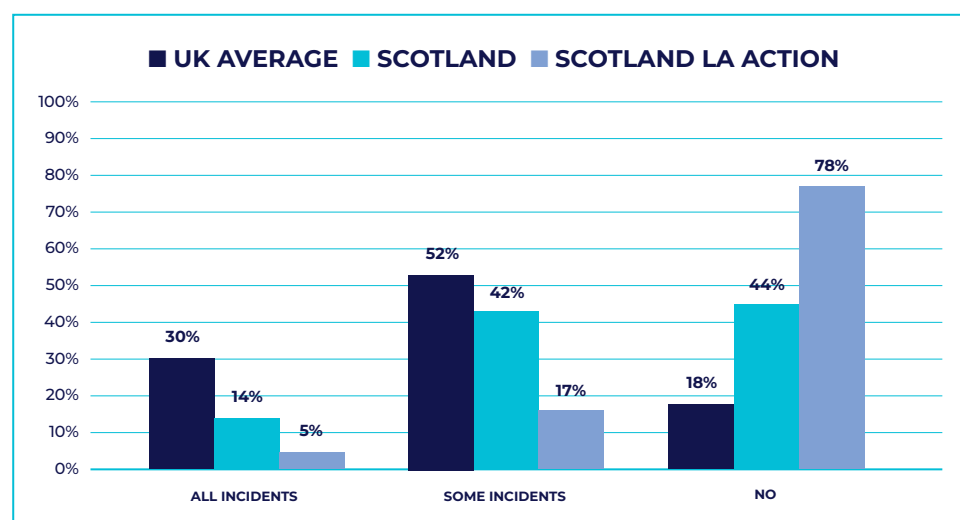


Responses to question: Does your school record incidents?

Over half of teachers report that their school does not take appropriate action to address incidents that they have reported...

Less than a third of respondents (30%) say that their school takes appropriate action to address all incidents that they report, with just over half (52%) saying that they do this for some incidents, and 18% reporting that the school does not take appropriate action to address incidents that they have reported. Respondents from Scotland were much less likely to report that their school took appropriate action to address incidents they report – only 14% said that their school took appropriate action to address all incidents, with 42% reporting that their school took appropriate action to address some incidents, and 44% reporting that their school did not take appropriate action to deal with incidents they reported.

Scottish teachers were also asked whether their local authority took appropriate action to address incidents that they had reported. An overwhelming 78% of respondents reported that their local authority does not take appropriate action to address incidents that they have reported, with just 5% reporting that their local authority took appropriate action to address all incidents that they had reported.



Responses to the questions:

- Does the school take appropriate action to address incidents you have reported?
- Does your local authority take appropriate action to address incidents that you have reported? (Scotland only)

Teachers are often made to feel responsible for incidents...

'You are made to feel like an inconvenience when reporting things. I was locked in a room by a student and pushed when I was pregnant and a member of SLT implied that it was my fault that the incident had occurred.' (Teacher, England)

'I was invited to write a letter of apology to a pupil (on a neurodivergent pathway) to whom I raised my voice when he was being appallingly rude and disrespectful to my colleague. His mother went on social media to complain about the overly punitive approach (which her son had lied about) and I feel that I ended up being disciplined for my behaviour while he was apologised to and empowered.' (Teacher, Scotland)

'Sometimes the questioning that takes place after an incident can make it feel like you're to blame for the behaviour escalation.' (Teacher, Wales)

Some schools treat incidents involving a school leader more seriously than incidents a teacher or member of support staff...

'If SLT have been threatened/abused, it is always dealt with severely. However, if classroom teachers are abused in the exact same manner, lesser consequences are put in place. Justification is that there is "nowhere to go" after SLT. When I am told I will be knocked out or stabbed, why does it result in a detention when the same threat to SLT means external exclusion?' (Teacher, England)

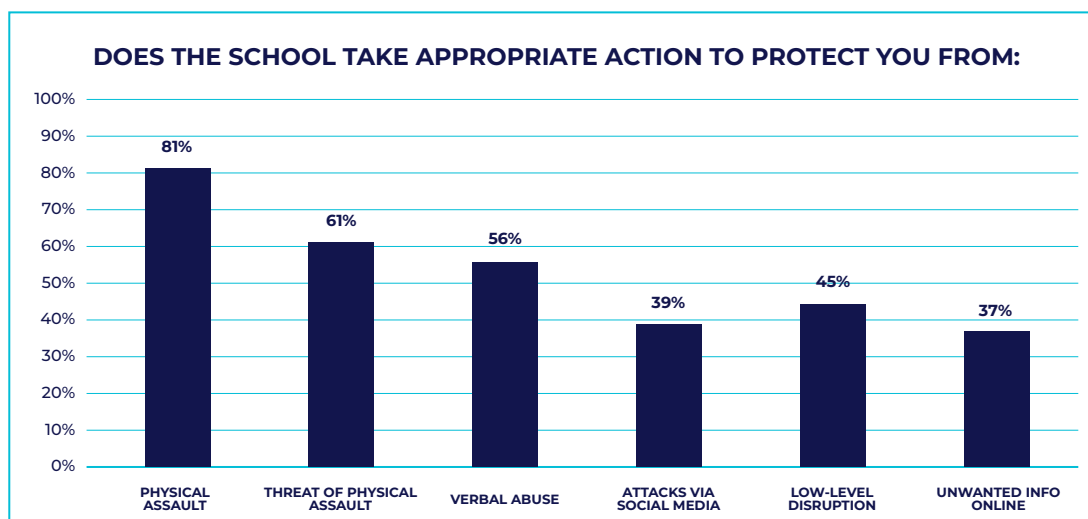
'The school response depends on who is targeted; for example, teaching staff and TAs are expected to shut up and put up, but when the same incident is directed at SLT, then there is a bigger response.' (Teacher, England)

'A pupil may verbally abuse staff and it [just] gets logged [but if] the same pupil verbally abuses SLT [they are] suspended.' (Teacher, England)

'Inconsistency – depends on your position in the school as to what the outcomes are – the higher up you are, the more serious the incident is considered [to be]. We have a panel which has made things a bit better, but the process is still flawed and [applied inconsistently by] senior staff. Some are too worried about what parents think.' (Teacher, England)

Many schools are failing to protect teachers from abuse online and via social media...

While the proportions of respondents who said that they had experienced attacks via social media (5%) or had unwanted information about them posted online (4%) are small, many schools do not have appropriate procedures in place to deal with incidents that do occur. Just 37% reported that their school took appropriate action to protect them from unwanted postings about them online, and just 39% reported that their school took appropriate action to protect them from attacks via social media.



...and teachers are not being protected from other forms of assault and abuse...

Well under half reported that their school took appropriate action to protect them from low-level disruption (45%), and just over half (56%) reported that appropriate action was taken to protect them from verbal abuse or threats of physical assault (61%).

While 81% said that their school takes appropriate action to protect them from physical assaults, this suggests that almost one in five teachers do not believe that their school takes appropriate action to protect them from physical assaults. Notably, only 67% of respondents from Scotland said that their school takes appropriate action to protect them from physical assault.

Respondents' comments illustrate the nature of their experiences and their impact:

'I am currently off work. Assaulted [four months previously]. I am still being treated for the injuries and the trauma/stress I have. When I was being assaulted, SLT were called and [they] refused to come.' (Teacher, Wales)

'There is a disconnect between SLT and teachers. There is also an emphasis on parents over teachers, e.g. a student of mine was excluded for assaulting me [but] his mum dropped him off at school because she had work and the Deputy Head allowed him to return to school.' (Teacher, England)

'Recently, one class [in my school] has had several days of continuous physical behaviours resulting in staff injuries and absenteeism. Staff have been taken from other classes, disrupting class teams and causing [behaviour problems] in those other classes. Staff are being kicked, punched, nipped, grabbed, scrubbed, called different names and cursed at.' (Teacher, Northern Ireland)

'We report all incidents (which are multiple) daily to our education board, but sadly we receive no feedback/support from them.' (Teacher, Northern Ireland)

'Actively discouraged and told not to report. Incidents reported at council level [are] force closed. No actions taken.' (Teacher, Scotland)

'In the last term, I have submitted at least 30 violent incident forms. I have never had any follow-up or been spoken to by a member of management or been offered support after being attacked and left with black eyes and bruises, scratches, bite marks or my hair ripped out. The children involved have never had a consequence. Not once have strategies been put in place to support the pupil or member of staff. I have been told that I work in ASN so I should expect to be abused and attacked.' (Teacher, Scotland)

'I often find that when a pupil is making threats against me, they have already done so to another member of staff earlier in the day. I have had to ask multiple times over the course of weeks for a violent incident form [for me] to fill in. Management often make out that I am the only member of staff having these problems, but our internal referral system shows that it's [an issue for] every member of staff. All staff in my establishment are now blocked from seeing referrals [and it seems] this is an attempt to play down behaviour across the school.' (Teacher, Scotland)

'It is part of the job' – school policies, practices and culture...

Some of the comments above make reference to failings in school, policies, practices and culture. Many respondents gave examples of their school's failure to take appropriate action to protect them and a culture that sees violence and abuse as part of the job:

'It is seen as part of the job when we are the victims of verbal and physical assaults.' (Teacher, Northern Ireland)

'A lot of what happens, happens so often and frequently that it is viewed as the norm and to be expected.' (Teacher, Scotland)

'Staff are penalised [for] speaking up against violence – I personally have been told twice to get a new job if I'm not willing to accept violence.' (Teacher, Scotland)

'Violence is [increasing and is regarded as] acceptable when you are teaching in an SRP. School wants [all incidents] reported which I do, but then [the school] does not take action or even come and check on me.' (Teacher, England)

'There is a level of expectation that all of these "happen" and are part of the complex needs of pupils.' (Teacher, England)

'Management are dismissive and encourage non-reporting. There is very much a culture of "this is your job and you just have to deal with it".' (Teacher, Scotland)

'Abuse and violence are seen as part of the job and if you have a problem with it you are seen as weak.' (Teacher, England)

'There is a culture that if you work in a special school then these behaviours come with the job. However, as much as behaviour is communication, teachers and TAs etc. should not be subjected to or have to put up with the behaviour we experience.' (Teacher, England)

'Violent incident forms are completed by teaching staff/ASNAs, but [there is] no follow-up from management. This makes staff feel isolated and often in the wrong.' (Teacher, Scotland)

'We have an online reporting system but no behaviour policy. Staff are confused as to what to do with incidents. There are different AHTs who all run their departments differently, which confuses staff when they teach or support across departments.' (Teacher, Wales)

'It is expected that staff take low-level physical abuse such as bites, or hit/kicks that leave significant bruising. This is part of the school culture. Twenty years ago, this may have [involved] one child in the whole school, now it is two to three pupils in each class.' (Teacher, Northern Ireland)

Many teachers report that their school or authority does not care about their wellbeing...

'Since the start of the academic year, I have logged around 120 sexualised behaviours/ comments at our upper school and I have not had anyone check on me and how this is impacting me.' (Teacher, England)

'I am currently injured, having had my knee kicked backwards by a student who was dysregulated. I am currently facing five weeks off work and attending physiotherapy, which I am having to pay for myself.' (Teacher, England)

'A pupil intentionally physically assaulted a member of staff. The staff member had concussion and was treated in hospital. The local authority are not supporting the school in excluding the pupil. Staff do not feel safe knowing the local authority does not support them.' (Teacher, England)

'SMT are reluctant to exclude. [Their] focus is usually [on] the pupil with frequent reference to their "problems" and their "wellbeing". Staff concerns over threats are brushed aside.' (Teacher, Wales)

'The morale of staff is greatly affected by lack of support from SLT.' (Teacher, Wales)

...or that of learners

'I have been kicked, punched, headbutted, spat at, threatened with a metal spike and almost pushed downstairs in the last few weeks. At no point has there been a consequence for the student. Students in my class have been scared seeing such behaviour and I'm told to "work on their resilience", implying that they overreact – which is how I'm also made to feel. I struggle now to be part of the RPI out team, following injuries from assaults, and am undergoing physio following the fall on the stairs. Our LT (all non-teaching x 5) have not asked after my welfare or [provided] support.' (Teacher, England)

Lack of investment and support from national and area authorities are contributing to behaviour difficulties and problems that teachers face...

'Substitute staff are unqualified, inexperienced and not trained or familiar enough to manage challenging behaviour, but the EA doesn't see the need for additional staff, additional contracts, additional accommodation and appropriate spaces. Our school isn't failing teachers, [the] EI and DE are failing schools.' (Teacher, Northern Ireland)

'Schools are underfunded, understaffed and overcrowded, with too many complex needs. Primary schools are powerless; we have very few sanctions that actually work.' (Teacher, Northern Ireland)

'Our school is used to dealing with the most intense behaviour difficulties, though the [number] of pupils is increasing and funding/governmental support is not [and this] makes it difficult for us to get the help required, be it staff or equipment.' (Teacher, Northern Ireland).

'The staff and SLT do report all instances via SHEs and pastoral notes. Representatives from [the council] visited our school a few weeks ago as part of an ASN review, but they basically told us that there is no money to improve the situation. Our numbers are set to increase again next session, putting further pressure on staff and negatively impacting the short- and long-term outcome for our vulnerable pupils.' (Teacher, Scotland)

'We do not have the resources to cope with the needs we experience in the school.'
(Teacher, Scotland)

'In the special school where I teach, the number of pupils with extreme challenging behaviour has increased dramatically over the past few years to the point that it is impossible to deliver teaching and learning effectively in the majority of classes. We experience physical and verbal aggression as well as property destruction on many occasions throughout every day. Although advice and guidance is provided, it is all ineffective as the class sizes are simply too big.' (Teacher, Northern Ireland)

The bureaucracy involved in dealing with incidents is a significant concern...

'We report incidents [and] incidents are then dealt with by the Behaviour Management Lead [but] we seldom see action being taken to support student victims and or perpetrators (unless severe violence is involved). I have three students in my class of nine SEND students [who] have varying behaviour needs and I can spend two hours a day completing lesson-by-lesson incident reports on [the school form], writing messages to parents/carers informing them of incidents and then copying and pasting updates of messages and/or details of phone calls home to the management team.' (Teacher, England)

'The EA report form needs to change. We report physical abuse as an accident when it is not an accident.' (Teacher, Northern Ireland)