

**NASUWT**  
The Teachers' Union

# Behaviour in Schools

Key messages



# Introduction

This short briefing summarises the key findings from the NASUWT's *Behaviour in Schools* report. The report was developed in response to data gathered from the Union's Big Question survey, alongside statistics taken from casework records, which show growing concern over violent and abusive pupil behaviour in schools.

The report 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.

The full report can be found at [www.nasuwt.org.uk/BetterDealOnBehaviour](http://www.nasuwt.org.uk/BetterDealOnBehaviour).

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## Our approach

We conducted an online survey, which was completed by 6,586 members of the NASUWT. The survey was distributed via electronic communication methods.

Results from this data collection have been compiled to produce the *Behaviour in Schools* report.

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 - key findings

### What types of behaviour are being exhibited?

In the last 12 months:

**37%** of respondents experienced physical abuse or violence from pupils;

**90%** experienced verbal abuse or violence from pupils;

**97%** reported backchat and rudeness from pupils;

**81%** reported being sworn at by pupils.



With regard to physical violence, 14% of teachers were hit or punched, 11% were kicked and 39% were shoved or barged. A further 6% were spat at, while 2% had been head-butted.

Specific experiences included a teacher who was hit in the abdomen by a window pole. There are also multiple reports of furniture, including chairs, being thrown at teachers, including one incident where the member of staff was seven months' pregnant.

### 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 72% of respondents.
- The 15-16 age bracket was the second most likely, selected by over half (60%).

## How often is this happening?

### Physical abuse:

- 31% reported incidents once a year, with 27% stating they occur once a term.
- 12% say once a month, 7% once a fortnight, 7% once a week, 11% several times per week, and 4% daily.

**89% feel the number of pupils exhibiting violent and abusive behaviours has increased.**

### Verbal abuse:

- 3% report verbal abuse as happening once a year, 15% once a term.
- 16% say once a month, 12% once a fortnight, 17% once a week, 26% several times a week, and 11% daily.

**93% say the number of pupils verbally abusing staff members has increased.**

## What is the impact of this verbal or physical abuse?

**82%** report that it has affected their morale and enthusiasm for their job.

**63%** experienced stress and nearly half (49%) experienced anxiety.

**17%** reported suffering with depression.

**7%** took time off work due to the mental health issues they suffered, with 9% taking time off work due to stress.



Nearly one in two (49%) said they felt less confident in working with pupils.

Attrition from the teaching profession is a worrying outcome. One in twenty (5%) of respondents have confirmed with their employer that they will be leaving teaching, while 53% said they are seriously considering leaving the profession.

## Do teachers report the incidents?

- More than half of respondents (55%) reported all of the incidents to their manager in their school or college.
- Over a quarter (27%) reported most incidents, while 15% 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 it (73%).

Four in ten respondents (44%) said the process for reporting behaviour incidents is too time consuming or bureaucratic, while a third (36%) were concerned their capability would be called into question.

## What was the outcome?

Of those incidents that were reported:

- 34% said some incidents were dealt with appropriately, while others were not. This was identified by 34% of respondents;
- three in ten felt some, but not sufficient, action was taken;
- just 15% said appropriate action was always taken, and the individual felt supported by their school or college;
- 7% said no action was taken by their school or college, while an additional 11% were not informed of the outcome of the incident(s) after reporting.

“The school is scared of too many suspensions and exclusions, so won’t act how it should.”

## 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:

- 8% said always;
- 40% said usually;
- 40% said sometimes;
- 11% said rarely;
- 1% said never.

When a pupil behaviour issue is referred to managers, only 5% of teachers feel they always receive feedback about the outcome and how the pupil has been dealt with. A fifth (20%) say they usually do.

The largest proportions – 36% and 32% – say they sometimes do, or rarely do, respectively. A further 6% say they never do.

The majority of respondents (43%) 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-seven per cent say usually, while a fifth (20%) say rarely. Only 7% 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?

Nearly half (45%) strongly agree or agree that they are made to feel to blame if they have an issue with poor pupil behaviour.

Another 45% 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 (44%) do not feel supported by their school or college’s approach to dealing with poor pupil behaviour.

Less than a fifth (18%) of respondents feel their setting’s approach to pupil behaviour management empowers them as a teacher or leader.

Almost three-quarters of respondents 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, more than four in five (84%) feel this has increased in the last year.

## What are the factors affecting pupil behaviour?

**73%** say poor socialisation skills following COVID-19 restrictions.

**60%** cite the use of restorative behaviour programmes that are ineffective.

Around half of respondents identified lack of proper policies and procedures to deter unacceptable behaviour (53%), and poor mental health of pupils (51%).



Where respondents specified other reasons, the repeated themes included:

- a lack of understanding by pupils of their responsibilities, not just their rights;
- distraction and poor behaviour driven by vaping, including leaving lessons repeatedly and being affected by nicotine;
- the loss of experienced teachers as a result of the retention crisis across the profession;
- the introduction of 'no exclusion' policies;
- being distracted by mobile phones and social media, and copying unacceptable behaviour seen on social media;
- little or no teaching assistant (TA) or special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) support in the class.

## What actions do teachers and leaders feel are needed to support them in meeting the behavioural needs of all the pupils they teach?

- Nearly eight in ten (78%) 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 external support and more support and assistance from school/college leaders and governors were both identified by more than half (60% and 55% respectively).

Other themes consistently identified in the commentary included:

- smaller class sizes;
- consistency in use of sanctions, and a whole-school approach to behaviour management;
- better pastoral care or mental health support for pupils;
- better education/awareness for pupils on the risks of social media and its influence.

# Recommendations and asks

## Local actions - what will the NASUWT do?

### Raise awareness of the issue

1. Ensure members know that they are not alone in facing this issue. The NASUWT will reinforce to 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 put pressure on 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. In response to the significant levels of concern over ineffective restorative behaviour approaches, the NASUWT will develop dedicated advice on this. We will set out a framework to support good practice in schools.
5. The issue of vaping is growing in schools and is often linked to behaviour that challenges. The NASUWT will research this issue further and subsequently explore the support that members need to address this.
6. 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.
7. Explore the concept of 'no exclusion' policies to build a picture of where and how these are being introduced.

### Continue our commitment to existing campaigns

8. The link between behavioural issues and mental health concerns is well documented, and the findings of this report reaffirm this. The 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.
9. Continue to make the evidence-based case for smaller class sizes.

### Work with stakeholders

10. Utilise the findings of the report to inform likeminded stakeholders, encouraging them to raise awareness of the issue and join calls for schools and governments to take action.
11. 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 Ofsted

12. Continue to press Ofsted to take responsibility for ensuring schools understand what considerations are made during inspection with regard to suspensions and exclusion. Elements of the Ofsted inspection 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.

## Regional actions - what do we want schools 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 the 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, their appropriateness and the impact they are having on behaviour management and staff wellbeing.

## National actions - what do we want governments to do?

### Improving the picture in schools

17. Continue to address the issues of retention and recruitment. The findings of this NASUWT survey identify this as having a detrimental impact on pupil behaviour, as skilled teachers are lost from the profession. The NASUWT will hold governments 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 continuing professional development (CPD) with a proportion of this being focused on behaviour, through nationally agreed training.
20. Development of specific guidance on large-scale pupil disorder in schools, in partnership with the 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. Build on the current behaviour hubs initiative with the principles of the dismantled Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships. Under these partnerships every school has a responsibility to work with others to promote good behaviour across all schools in a local area and to recognise that the behaviour of all pupils in these areas is a shared responsibility of all schools. These partnerships work with other services for children, including the police and youth justice services, allowing expertise and experience to be shared across settings and resources pooled.

### Wider societal commitments

22. Commit to ensure every school across the UK has access to a school-based counsellor.
23. Given the link between behavioural issues and poverty, the Government should provide free school meals in England to all children from families receiving Universal Credit.
24. For the same reason, there is a need to reverse the decision to remove the £20 per week uplift to Universal Credit and tax credits.

## About the NASUWT

The 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', the 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 [www.nasuwt.org.uk](http://www.nasuwt.org.uk).



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