

Improving relationships and
behaviour in schools:
**ensuring safe and consistent
environments for all**

'[T]he standards of relationships and behaviour in our schools are not where we want them to be. While most children are well behaved most or all of the time, the evidence demonstrates that there is increased disruption in classrooms and increases in physical and verbal aggression. No child or young person, parent or carer, or member of staff should go to school, or their place of work, and be subject to violence or abuse.'

Indented:

Scottish Government, Improving relationships and behaviour in schools: ensuring safe and consistent environments for all (August 2024), p. 2.

Background

NASUWT has long been calling for unambiguous backing to be given to schools in taking appropriate sanctions for violent and abusive pupil behaviour, including expulsion where absolutely necessary.

This joint national action plan follows 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 there remains enough within it to support members and schools. Further, its publication has the potential to be the start of a culture change in how seriously the issue of pupil behaviour is taken by both ministers and employers.

This important step in the right direction only happened because NASUWT raised the issues on behalf of our members.

The National approach

The tabloid press has outlined the national approach as 'supporting relational approaches based on high warmth and high standards and expectations'. However, this is just a partial quote of a statement that extends to read:

'An approach which features high warmth and high standards and expectations includes emotional responsiveness and support, and an ability to effectively set limits for behaviour.'

This national approach is also explicitly evidence-based:

'Positive outcomes are most evidenced in a relational style characterised by high warmth and support, high standards and high expectations of socially responsible behaviour, and an ability to effectively set limits for behaviour, ensuring effective implementation of values, and expectations in a firm and consistent manner while using reprimands and consequences when necessary.'

At its heart, the action plan is 'designed to empower staff to address the spectrum of dysregulated, distressed, violent and aggressive behaviour seen in our schools'.

National Action Plan aims

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'

Outcomes for school staff

The national action plan also sets out a number of outcomes which can be used as a touchstone for individual school experiences, including that schools and school staff will:

- 'feel safe and supported in their place of work, confident that their employer is acting in line with their legislative duties including health and safety legislation and the Equality Act 2010;
- 'have in place school-level relationships and behaviour policies, in line with national guidance and developed in collaboration with staff, parents and children and young people, which set clear expectations of positive relationships and behaviour;
- 'be supported in their wellbeing, with links made to wider support as appropriate;
- 'be empowered to implement a culture of high expectations by implementing an understanding of behaviour, child development, classroom management skills and a spectrum of evidence-based relationships and behaviour approaches;
- 'have improved access to relevant professional learning, and wellbeing support, to assist them in their roles;
- 'be supported to adopt robust, evidence-based approaches to addressing disruption and abuse, including that caused by mobile phones;
- 'be confident and competent addressing behaviour rooted in inequality, including those linked to the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010;
- 'feel confident to report, record, monitor, assess and respond to individual incidents and patterns of behaviour; and
- 'have procedures in place for undertaking assessment of need, risk assessments and clear expectations of local and multi-agency support'.

Over a longer period of time staff, children and young people should therefore:

- 'experience fewer instances of dysregulated, distressed, violent or abusive behaviour;
- 'experience fewer instances of misogyny and gender-based violence; and
- 'experience fewer instances of harassment or abuse motivated by prejudice or linked to a protected characteristic.'

Relationships and behaviour approaches

Other helpful reflections within the joint action plan include:

- 'School staff were generally supportive of more nurturing and restorative approaches to managing behaviour, with the caveat that time and support were needed to integrate these fully within the school, and that there had to be meaningful consequences within this approach for more serious disruptive behaviour.'
- 'Analysis showed perceived poorer school ethos and poorer promotion of policies on behaviour were associated with frequent negative behaviour including low level disruptive behaviour, aggression towards other children and young people and social exclusion.'
- 'While schools undertake activity to try and reduce the poverty-related attainment gap and are expected to adopt trauma-informed approaches to supporting children and young people, schools cannot and should not be expected to address these broader challenges in isolation.'

National Action Plan delivery

To support the aims, the following actions have been undertaken:

- (i) 900k funding for training of support staff;
- (ii) national guidance on preventing and responding to gender-based violence in schools
- (iii) national guidance on mobile phones in schools
- (iv) HMiE to include behaviour as part of inspection reports

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

The actions include:

Action 12: Support all education settings to have a planned and ongoing programme to promote staff wellbeing.

Action 15: Identify supports for schools for situations where children and young people are not responsive to authoritative approaches and consequences.

Action 16: Support schools' development of clear protocols for both preventing and responding to violent incidents and incidents involving a weapon, including risk assessments, relevant to age and stage of child or young person.

Action 17: Develop evidence-based factors underlying violence, and develop teaching resources to support children and young people.

Clearly, further support, exemplification and advice will be required to cement this national approach. During phase 1, the following are anticipated to be negotiated and published:

- national advice and resources on risk assessment in schools;
- guidance on a relationship and rights-based approach to physical intervention in Scottish schools; and
- an updated version of *Respect for All*, the national anti-bullying guidance.

While NASUWT has been pleased to see that the Action Plan intends that schools will 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. The work will be ongoing via the SAGRABIS working group to hold the Scottish Government and others to account and to push for greater financial investment.

Action for school reps

NASUWT recommends that Workplace Representatives use the language of the national approach in their engagement with school management and local authorities.

While further briefings and updates will follow throughout this term and year, the following links and existing advice can currently be used to enable Workplace Representatives to reflect on their school's current practice:

- (i) All schools should have a behaviour and relationships policy, created in collaboration – do you have a local policy?

Please see our Developing a Behaviour Management Policy webpage for advice and support:

<https://www.nasuwat.org.uk/advice/in-the-classroom/behaviour-management-for-teachers-in-the-classroom/developing-a-behaviour-management-policy.html>

- (ii) Does your school adopt a spectrum of approaches? A range of approaches and consequences are required, given that restorative approaches to poor behaviour do not work for all pupils and cannot be the only tool available to schools when responding to incidents of abuse and violence.

For further background information on restorative approaches, please visit:

<https://www.nasuwat.org.uk/advice/in-the-classroom/behaviour-management-for-teachers-in-the-classroom/restorative-behaviour.html>

- (iii) Does your school have an existing practice surrounding the risk assessment of violent and abusive behaviour?

See NASUWT's advice here:

<https://www.nasuwat.org.uk/advice/health-safety/risk-assessment-of-violent-and-abusive-behaviour/risk-assessment-violent-abusive-behaviour-scotland.html>

- (iv) Increasing awareness and visibility of the issue in your local school can be a vehicle for facilitating change.

Have you downloaded posters to be placed on your notice board?

<https://www.nasuwat.org.uk/news/campaigns/better-deal-for-teachers/better-deal-for-scotlands-teachers.html#Sidebar>

www.nasuwat.org.uk/BetterDealForScotlandTeachers#Sidebar

Have you discussed the national action plan with your headteacher and shared some of the interesting highlights quoted above?

Have you considered a school members' meeting to discuss the action plan?

- (v) School representatives might consider building into the school calendar a semi-regular review with senior management to consider school-based approaches, staff feedback and the number of reported incidents, while utilising the aims and outcomes quoted above to reflect on local practice. Please see the Behaviour Climate Check/Check-In below.

Workplace Representatives and schools can also contact their Local Secretary, National Executive Member (NEM) or the Scotland Centre to support local engagement with the national action plan: scotland@mail.nasuwat.org.uk

Appendix 1: Behaviour climate check/check-in

1. Are all members of the school community respected and safe, and is their wellbeing protected?
2. Is there a culture of high expectations?
3. Is there 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?
4. Does the school relationships and behaviour policy set clear expectations of relationships and behaviour?
5. Is there 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?
6. Does the school adopt a spectrum of relationships and behaviour approaches?
7. Is there effective recording and monitoring of inappropriate behaviour and do staff feel confident to report, record, monitor, assess and respond to incidents and patterns of behaviour?
8. Do staff feel safe and supported in their place of work and is their wellbeing looked after?
9. Can staff access relevant professional learning and wellbeing support?
10. Are staff supported in addressing disruption and abuse, including that caused by mobile phones?
11. Are staff confident addressing behaviour rooted in inequality?
12. Are there procedures in place for undertaking assessment of need, risk assessments and clear expectations of local and multi-agency support?
13. Are there mechanisms to track over a long period of time whether staff, children and young people:
 - a. experience fewer instances of dysregulated, distressed, violent or abusive behaviour?
 - b. experience fewer instances of misogyny and gender-based violence?
 - c. experience fewer instances of harassment/abuse motivated by prejudice or linked to a protected characteristic?
14. Have time and support been allocated to integrate behaviour approaches within the school?
15. Are there meaningful consequences within the school's approach for more serious disruptive behaviour?

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