

PUPIL BEHAVIOUR

INTRODUCTION

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 the NASUWT over the years has ensured that government, employers, inspectors and many parents now accept this self-evident truth.

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. Teachers captivate and educate successfully every day youngsters who, when out on the streets in the evenings and weekends, members of the public cross the road to avoid.

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'.

Constant challenges to authority, persistent refusal to obey school rules and frequent, regular verbal abuse of staff are the hallmarks of this behaviour. Its 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.

NASUWT POSITION

Staff are entitled to work in an environment free from violence and disruption and to appropriate access to training and support on behaviour matters.

Pupils are entitled to a safe and orderly learning environment, together with effective teaching and support, to assist them in achieving their full potential.

All pupils are entitled to inclusion in the education service and to have their educational needs met. However, for a small minority of pupils, inclusion in a mainstream school is inappropriate and access to specialist, alternative provision, of the highest quality, must be made available.

Effective school leadership, working in partnership with staff and trade unions, is essential to the establishment and maintenance of acceptable standards of behaviour in schools. Governors have a responsibility to support the school in maintaining high standards of behaviour.

Early identification and intervention are essential factors in successful behaviour management. Schools need support, and appropriate resources, to enable them to respond effectively, at an early stage.

Schools should be able readily to access external advice, support, and specialist provision without the requirement to negotiate burdensome, bureaucratic procedures. They must also be given flexibility within the curriculum, and adequate resources, to develop appropriate educational programmes to meet the needs of individual pupils.

Schools should make full and appropriate use of statutory measures to minimise potential antisocial behaviour, including the appropriate use of pupil searches, provided these are conducted by appropriately trained staff. There should be no requirement or expectation that teachers should undertake pupil searches.

There are times when, despite every effort made by the school, it is necessary to implement the exclusion procedure. Headteachers must be empowered to exercise their professional judgement in the use of exclusion. In the most severe cases, headteachers must be supported in excluding the pupil permanently. A decision to exclude a pupil must balance the interests of the excluded pupil against the interests of all the other members of the school community. In England, independent review panels should not recommend the reinstatement of a pupil where the disciplinary process has been carried out without any procedural irregularities of a kind that might have affected the fairness of the procedure. National or local targets to limit or reduce the use of the exclusion sanction will not serve the interests of the school, or meet the needs of the individual pupil, and are unacceptable.

Parents and carers have an essential role to play in assisting schools in maintaining high standards of behaviour. They have a duty to take responsibility for the behaviour of their child. Consistency of expectations by schools and parents/carers is essential, as is the need for effective liaison between the home and the school.

All schools should establish behaviour policies and strategies and a range of rewards and sanctions in consultation with staff and school workforce unions to promote acceptable standards of behaviour. Schools should ensure that their behaviour management policies are non-discriminatory in their scope and operation, including on the grounds of ethnic or national origin, culture, religion, gender, disability or sexuality. Schools should collect and regularly review data on behaviour to ensure that their behaviour management policy is operating fairly and equitably.

Schools should also ensure that their behaviour management policies and procedures operate effectively within the wider context of strategies to bring downward pressure on the working hours of teachers and headteachers. This is particularly important to the operation of behaviour sanctions, and schools should avoid policies that would require teachers to supervise pupils in detentions during evenings, weekends or on non-pupil session days.

Government administrations and local authorities must exercise their responsibility to support schools in maintaining good order and behaviour.

Local authorities have a responsibility towards all permanently excluded pupils to provide suitable full-time education and to reintegrate excluded pupils as quickly as possible into a suitable mainstream school. Local authorities should not exercise their responsibility by seeking to dissuade schools from excluding pupils.

Government administrations should ensure that a properly resourced national system of high-quality off-site placements is in place to assist schools to avoid permanent exclusion and to support pupils who are permanently excluded.

There should be an appropriate system in place to identify and meet the educational and social needs of children who are excluded or who are at risk of exclusion.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information on the NASUWT position on managing behaviour, order copies of the NASUWT publications, available free. Call 03330 145550 or e-mail despatch@mail.nasuw.org.uk.