

Behaviour in Northern Ireland's Schools – Key Messages

Introduction

This short briefing summarises the key findings across Northern Ireland 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 Northern Ireland's 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.

Our approach

We conducted an online survey, which was completed by 297 members of the NASUWT in Northern Ireland. 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.

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;
- backchat and rudeness were the most common behaviours, reported by 94% of respondents;
- 79% reported being sworn at by pupils.

With regard to physical violence, 14% of teachers were hit or punched, 13% were kicked and 33% were shoved or barged. A further 9% were spat at, while 6% had been head-butted.

Specific experiences included teachers being bitten and having their hair pulled, as well as multiple accounts of teachers being scratched.

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 69% of respondents.
- The 15-16 age bracket was the second most likely, selected by over half (58%).

How often is this happening?

Physical abuse:

In the last 12 months:

- 26% reported incidents once a year, with 25% stating they occur once a term.
- 10% say once a month, 6% once a fortnight, 8% once a week, 16% several times per week, 8% daily.

87% feel the number of pupils exhibiting violent and abusive behaviours has increased.

Verbal abuse:

- 3% report verbal abuse as happening once a year, 17% say once a term.
- 14% say once a month, 12% once a fortnight, 20% once a week, 24% several times a week, and 11% daily.

95% say the number of pupils verbally abusing staff members has increased.

What is the impact of this verbal or physical abuse?

- 83% reported that it had affected their morale and enthusiasm for their job.
- 73% experienced stress and more than half (60%) experienced anxiety.
- 16% reported suffering with depression.
- 6% took time off work due to the mental health issues they suffered, with 12% taking time off work due to stress.

More than one in two (52%) said they felt less confident in working with pupils.

Attrition from the teaching profession is a worrying outcome. 2% of respondents have confirmed with their employer they will be leaving teaching, while 56% said they are seriously considering leaving the profession.

Do teachers report the incidents?

- Half of respondents (50%) reported all of the incidents to their manager in their school or college.
- A quarter (26%) reported most incidents, while 20% only reported some.
- A minority, 4%, 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 (74%).

Almost half of respondents (47%) said the process for reporting behaviour incidents is too time consuming or bureaucratic, while 43% were concerned their capability would be called into question.

What was the outcome?

Of those incidents that were reported:

- 35% said some incidents were dealt with appropriately, while others were not.
- Over a quarter (27%) 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.
- 11% said no action was taken by their school or college, while an additional one in 20 (5%) were not informed of the outcome of the incident(s) after reporting.

“Some reports were completely ignored and I was told to basically get on with it.”

“Some were dealt with, but then I was questioned on how I was dealing with incidents.”

“The issue became my fault and I was the problem.”

How are behaviour management policies being used?

Nearly all respondents (93%) stated their school has a behaviour management policy. When asked if that policy is enforced:

- 7% said always;
- 29% said usually;
- 44% said sometimes;
- 17% said rarely;
- 2% said never.

When a pupil behaviour issue is referred to managers, only 3% of teachers feel they always receive feedback about the outcome and how the pupil has been dealt with. Less than a fifth (19%) say they usually do.

The largest proportions, 41% and 34%, say they sometimes do, or rarely do, respectively. 3% say they never do.

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.

28% say usually, while a fifth (21%) say rarely. Only 5% answered that they always receive support in a timely manner, while 4% say they never do.

What else do we know about teachers' current experiences?

Nearly half (48%) strongly agree or agree that they are made to feel to blame if they have an issue with poor pupil behaviour.

62% also 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.

47% do not feel supported by their school or college's approach to dealing with poor pupil behaviour.

Less than one in five (15%) of respondents feel their setting's approach to pupil behaviour management empowers them as a teacher or leader.

Three-quarters (74%) 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 for whom respondents do not feel they receive adequate support to teach because of their behavioural needs, more than four in five (86%) feel this has increased in the last year.

What are the factors affecting pupil behaviour?

- Poor socialisation skills following COVID-19 restrictions is cited by most respondents, with 62% of members raising this.
- Use of restorative behaviour programmes that are ineffective is cited by 55% of respondents.
- More than half of respondents identified lack of proper policies and procedures to deter unacceptable behaviour (54%), while 50% cited lack of support from SMT for classroom teachers.

Where respondents specified other reasons, the repeated themes were:

- a lack of respect for the teaching profession;
- inconsistent behaviour management between home and school;
- being distracted by mobile phones and social media, and copying unacceptable behaviour seen on social media;
- vaping affecting concentration.

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

- More than three-quarters (76%) 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 75%.
- More external support was identified by more than half (60%) and more support and assistance from school/college leaders and governors was cited by 59%.
- More external support was identified by more than half (60%), and more support and assistance from school leaders was cited by the same number (60%).

Other themes consistently identified in the commentary included:

- clear behaviour management policies that are consistently applied;
- smaller class sizes;
- more flexibility in primary schools to match teaching assistants to the right child or children;
- better respect for teachers' mental health.

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.

Continue our commitment to existing campaigns

7. 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.
8. Continue to make the evidence-based case for smaller class sizes.
9. Call for teachers aged 55 and over working in special schools, where there is an expectation that violence against teachers is more likely, to be offered better financial remuneration allowing them to retire when they are no longer able to deal with severe behaviours.
10. Campaign for proper funding of the education system, in particular the services that support and greatly impact pupils most in need.

Work with stakeholders

11. 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
12. 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.

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.

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 to 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.



www.facebook.com/NASUWTNorthernIreland.



twitter.com/NASUWT_NI.



NASUWT

The Teachers' Union

NORTHERN IRELAND

advice@mail.nasuwt.org.uk

www.nasuwt.org.uk