

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The great majority of children and young people enjoy learning, work hard and behave well. Among the schools inspected in 2003/04, behaviour was good or better in 90% of primary schools, 68% of secondary schools and 80% of special schools and Pupil Referral Units [PRUs]. However, Ofsted's annual reports have highlighted the fact that the behaviour of some pupils, usually boys, remains a serious concern for many schools and other settings. Their behaviour troubles others, affects the climate of the learning community and disrupts their own and others' progress.

As the successful practice described in the full report illustrates, schools and other settings can be expected to solve most behaviour problems themselves but they cannot solve them all. They need specialist support from other services. Some schools need to make special provision to cope with poor behaviour and to deploy additional resources to assist whole-school change.

## **2. RESEARCH EVIDENCE**

Lack of agreed definitions of what constitutes challenging behaviour in schools makes it difficult to gauge the full extent of it. Some instances of violent behaviour in schools attract considerable media and public attention, but research indicates that such instances are rare. Research suggests that up to 5% of pupils may display challenging behaviour at some time in their schooling, though by no means all this behaviour involves violent conduct.

When behaviour is discussed in schools there is little agreement as to the meaning or use of terms to describe challenging behaviour. Perception of challenging behaviour is relative and conditioned both by the context in which the behaviour occurs and by the observer's expectations. There is, however, widespread agreement that two types of behaviour are challenging whatever the particular circumstances. The first is overtly aggressive behaviour: physical acts such as biting and pinching, throwing furniture and assaulting people. The second is aggression that is mainly verbal, for example, streams of abuse, temper tantrums, and invasion of personal space intended to be threatening. The second type includes behaviour which defies teachers' authority in refusing to follow instructions.

## **3. INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS**

Sound international comparisons on the extent and nature of poor behaviour in schools are difficult to come by. Figures for the United States and Canada appear similar to United Kingdom figures. In the United States, incidents involving firearms and other weapons capture attention, but acts of extreme behaviour are by no means commonplace. Challenging behaviour is mostly associated with boys aged 8 to 9 and 12 to 15, and most often with boys with SEN and those from low-income families. Research in Germany shows a low incidence of challenging behaviour in schools, mainly involving boys aged 11 to 15, usually from low-income families among whose adult members anti-social behaviour is common; many of the pupils concerned have repeated a year of schooling. Figures for the proportion of pupils in Scandinavian schools with challenging behaviour are substantially higher, at 11%. This higher level is hard to explain; differences in perceptions of what constitutes challenging behaviour may well account for it.

## **4. MAIN FINDINGS**

- The behaviour of the very large majority of pupils and students remains satisfactory or better. Most schools and other settings are successful at managing behaviour and creating an environment in which learners feel valued, cared for and safe.
- The most common form of poor behaviour is persistent, low-level disruption of lessons that wears down staff and interrupts learning. Extreme acts of violence remain very rare and are carried out by a very small proportion of pupils.

- A significant proportion of pupils with difficult behaviour have SEN and face disadvantage and disturbance in their family lives. Many have poor language skills. Problems with reading and writing often begin early and continue into secondary school, limiting achievement in a range of subjects.
- Behaviour is significantly better in settings which have a strong sense of community and work closely with parents. In these settings learners feel safe and are confident that issues such as bullying are dealt with swiftly and fairly.
- A strong lead by senior managers who set high standards and provide close support to staff contributes significantly to the effective management of behaviour.
- Most schools and other settings recognise that an appropriate curriculum and effective teaching engage learners and encourage good behaviour, but about 1/4 of those visited in this survey have difficulty in ensuring that their provision meets the standards needed in these respects.
- Staff in some settings require more training in managing and improving the behaviour of more difficult pupils.
- The quality of accommodation has a significant impact on behaviour. Accommodation that is welcoming, stimulating and well maintained tends to foster good behaviour.
- The extent of LEA support for schools in managing more challenging behaviour varies. A common weakness is the lack of detailed evaluation of the benefits of the support given by LEAs.
- LEAs and schools recognise the importance of working with other agencies but less than 1/2 have established strong partnerships with health and social services.
- Schools, PRUs and colleges are generally weak at monitoring and evaluating their own strategies and the impact of support from other agencies on the attitudes and behaviour of more difficult pupils.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

**Schools, colleges and PRUs** should:

- focus on improving the quality of teaching and the provision of an appropriate curriculum that engages the more difficult pupils;
- do more to improve the literacy and other communication skills of pupils with difficult behaviour;
- improve systems for tracking academic and social development, and make better use of this information to help pupils improve and manage their behaviour;
- provide more systematic training for senior managers, teachers and assistants in behaviour management and in child and adolescent development;
- review the way they link with parents; and
- underline the need for consistency among staff in the way expectations of behaviour are set and maintained.

**LEAs** should:

- monitor and evaluate schools' responses to pupils with more challenging behaviour in order to target support more effectively;
- build on initial teacher training in order to provide longterm programmes of professional development in child and adolescent development and on the application of behaviour management strategies; and
- encourage effective partnerships with other services and create more opportunities for joint training.

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