

UNACCEPTABLE PUPIL BEHAVIOUR

A survey analysed for the National Union of
Teachers by



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Summary - 'I don't want to be the enemy any more'

Both the quantitative data and written-in comments described a situation where continuous low-level harassment, in a climate where senior staff, outside authorities and parents were frequently unsupportive or hostile, sapped teachers' morale, distracted them from teaching and in some cases was driving them to leave the profession.

The major influence on low-level 'frequent disruption' was the effectiveness of support to classroom teachers; written-in comments indicated senior staff often gave poor support because of their preoccupation with bureaucracy and the need to maintain numbers on roll in the school; pressure from local authorities to avoid exclusions was a contributory factor.

More serious incidents such as violence from pupils and threats from parents, were less frequent but highly disturbing to teachers, who felt they were being blamed in a climate where parents were unprepared to take responsibility for their children. In many cases these problems were reported as being due to a minority of children who absorbed a disproportionate amount of staff time and effort; policies of inclusion for such children were widely criticised for creating a climate where no effective sanctions were available to deal with such problems.

While measures introduced by the Government during this survey may, if successful reduce the incidence of high-level disruptive behaviour, the effect of continued and frequently continuous lower-level disruption appears as great in promoting teacher wastage and had been contributed to by many years' criticism of the teaching profession.

Introduction

Questionnaires were sent to teachers resident in 13 LEAs selected to give a geographical and social spread; Bournemouth, Bristol, Cardiff, East Sussex, Islington, Leeds, Leicester, Middlesbrough, Norfolk, Northumberland, Nottinghamshire, Pembrokeshire and Thameside. A total of 2575 questionnaires were returned. This distribution of respondents reflects the composition of the teaching force in general.

There is a roughly inverse relation between the seriousness of behaviour problems and their frequency. However it is clear from the written-in comments that many respondents feel that the common behaviour problems, while individually often relatively trivial, interfere with their ability to deliver the curriculum and render the classroom as a working environment which is unacceptable. A minority of respondents felt personally threatened and some had left their job, or teaching altogether; but most were concerned by their ability to teach effectively in a climate where it was difficult to control a minority of children unresponsive to any sanctions available to teachers.

Discipline problems witnessed by respondents

Possession of offensive weapon [Offensive weapon]

One-third of respondents had witnessed offensive weapons in their schools, though few (total 3%) encountered them on a weekly or monthly basis. They occurred annually in a fifth (20.2%) of schools and termly in a tenth (9.2%). Though in many cases these weapons are likely to have been intended for intimidation or coercion rather than use, their presence in school is inevitably disturbing.

Threats to pupils of physical violence directly by pupils [Pupil-pupil violence]

This was by far the most frequent of the serious problems witnessed by respondents, with five-sixths (83.2%) of respondents reporting it and approaching half (43.4%) experiencing it on a weekly basis, with a further fifth (19.3%) experiencing it monthly. A climate of threatened pupil-pupil violence is therefore part of the routine working environment for the majority of teachers.

Threats to pupils of physical violence indirectly by third parties [Third-party violence]

Threats from third parties (from written-in comments, usually parents, less often former pupils) were much less frequent than threats of pupil-pupil violence, being experienced by rather more than half the respondents (52.7%), but, like threatened pupil-pupil violence, where it did occur it appeared relatively frequently, with approaching a third of respondents experiencing these threats weekly (16.1%) or monthly (14.5%); it was less frequent for these threats to be an occasional (termly or annual) occurrence. Though threats from third parties to pupils occur less frequently than direct threats by other pupils, this is balanced by their greater seriousness in creating a general climate of violence.

Discipline problems personally experienced by respondents

Offensive language

Approaching two-thirds of respondents (60.3%) reported offensive language at least weekly; a seventh (13.8%) reported it monthly, with a similar proportion not reporting it. Only a tenth of respondents (10.7% total) reported it infrequently (termly or annually). Again this behaviour has to be seen as part of the customary experience of most teachers.

Personal comments of an abusive or insulting nature / manner [Abuse / insult]

Over a quarter of respondents (27.5%) received abusive or insulting comments weekly with another fifth (18.6%) receiving them monthly; thus for nearly half the respondents abuse and insults were a regular feature of working life. A third of respondents (31.2%) did not report them and for the remaining fifth they were relatively infrequent (termly or annual).

Damage to property

The figures for damage to property, including, for example, teachers' cars, were very similar to those for abuse and insults, with over a quarter of respondents (26.8%) encountering damage weekly, another fifth (19.7%) monthly, a fifth more infrequently and nearly a third (30.1%) not reporting damage. Again, for almost half the respondents, damage to property was a routine occurrence in their working lives.

Persistent and malicious disruptive behaviour, including open defiance [Defiance]

Nearly half the respondents (46.8%) encountered persistent disruption and defiance weekly; with the addition of those who reported it monthly, disruption and defiance were a regular feature of working life for nearly two-thirds (65.3%) of teachers. Only a fifth (20.2%) did not report disruption and defiance, with relatively small proportions experiencing them on a termly or annual basis.

Bullying and harassment [Bullying]

A third of respondents (32.2%) encountered bullying and harassment by one pupil to another weekly and a fifth monthly, so that over half the respondents (52.6%) were encountering bullying as a regular occurrence, though a third (33.1%) did not report it. A tenth of respondents encountered bullying only termly, and a twentieth annually.

Threats to you of physical violence directly by pupil [Threats by pupil]

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65.5%) did not report this serious problem, and it was a weekly or monthly occurrence for 5% of respondents respectively. However a quarter of respondents (25% total) encountered threats infrequently (termly or annually); and a situation where violent threats are a regular experience for a tenth of teachers should give rise to concern.

Threats to you of physical violence indirectly by third parties e.g. parents [Threats by parents]

Violent threats from parents are even more serious than those from pupils, and nearly a tenth (7.9%) of respondents reported experiencing them termly, or for some, monthly or weekly. However three-quarters of respondents (75.8%) did not report encountering threats of physical violence.

Pushing, touching or other unwanted physical contact to you [pushing/touching]

Approaching two-thirds of respondents (63.1%) had not encountered problems with unwanted physical contact; about a tenth respectively encountered this problem weekly (8.9%) monthly (8.9%) termly (8.2%) and annually (10.9%). Though this might be expected to be a problem experienced especially by younger, secondary and female teachers, the analysis indicated no significant difference between the sexes, but confirmed that younger and less experienced teachers were more at risk, and that the problem, like most other unacceptable behaviours, was greater in secondary schools.

Disruptive behaviour in your lesson [Disruption to lesson]

Over two-thirds of respondents (68.9%) reported disruptive behaviour weekly or more frequently; together with those who reported it monthly, this meant that over four-fifths of teachers (81.4%) experience disruption to their teaching regularly. Only a tenth (10.3%) did not report it, and termly or annual occurrence was rare.

Written-in comments

A number of respondents felt that the questionnaire categories did not allow for their continuous experience of disruption, and the comments that unacceptable behaviour was now common even in country and 'leafy suburb' areas were confirmed by the quantitative comparison between LEAs.

- Most of those above ticked as 'weekly' in fact occur DAILY! (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- You need a box which says 'every lesson'. (Secondary, female, 40-9)
- I have the right to work without being abused - in industry it wouldn't be accepted yet day after day it's now just "part of the job!" How sad!! (Primary, female, 29-39)

- Since relocation to Norfolk from London (1 year ago) I have been appalled again & again by pupil behaviour here in rural Norfolk. (Primary, female, 40-9)
- Persistent daily low-level disturbance by too many pupils is much more evident and equally disturbing. (Secondary, female, 50-9)
- I find that working in so called "good schools" even those with a positive OFSTED report does not guarantee freedom from abusive and disruptive behaviour. (Secondary, female, 50-9)
- Less experienced staff suffer greater problems than I do and of a more serious nature. (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- Though my school is in a lovely, rural area the behaviour, particularly of some boys in year 7 grows worse by the year. Rudeness, verbal abuse and a lack of interest and any effort at all are increasingly the norm. (Primary, female, 40-9)
- Malicious verbal threats and intimidation from past pupils, out on the streets, e.g. stole my car and taunted me with "What are you going to f***** do about it?" (Primary, male, 40-9)
- Small rural school – more problems with children thinking the rules do not apply to them – calling out, disruptive, at a young age not too much of a problem but wearing/irritating. (Primary, female 50-9)
- Children are under 5. On a weekly basis staff experience the need to restrain one child to prevent another child being injured. On a similar timescale members of staff experience being hit, kicked or pushed by angry or distressed children. (Under-5s, female, 40-9)
- I was head butted by a 5 year old child and had my lip split open. (Primary, female, 29-39)
- Made-up blackmail attempt! (Secondary male, 29-39)
- I'm quite big, so I'm not assaulted - I only get anonymous text messages on my mobile. (Secondary, male, 50-9)

A concern, here and elsewhere was the presence of children who could not cope with ordinary classroom life, sometimes due to inclusion policies. Even small numbers of such children could have a disproportionate effect;

- It only takes one disruptive individual to ruin lessons so much of this survey is not useful. (Secondary, male, 50-9)
- All the above incidents are from one pupil only who is a totally disruptive influence both emotionally and academically to the other children in my class...On one occasion both the parent and child were emotionally disruptive in the class and the Head told me to go into the library with my class. This child seems inappropriately placed in a mainstream school. (Primary, female, 40-9)
- I have been kicked, punched, and bitten on a regular weekly basis by a pupil in my class who has severe emotional and behavioural problems. (Primary, female, 29-39)
- One occasion, a child stabbed another with a pencil, producing a 1 inch gash (through a jumper + shirt). Child responsible was sent to Headteacher to be sent back 5 mins later. I refused to teach class until child was removed for the rest o the day. No further action was taken. Unfortunately [SMT] receive no support from county hall or governors. One of their performance management targets (suggested by County Hall) was no exclusions! (Primary, female, 28-39, East Sussex)
- Obviously, on supply, one does experience a variety of situations. My feeling generally is of a rising tide of difficult behaviour and attitude, despite some good policies in schools. (Under-5 / primary, female, 50-9)
- I taught at this school for 10 years as curriculum co-ordinator. I have been asked back as supply because the behaviour is so awful that supply teachers will not enter the school. (Secondary, female, 50-9)

Responses on training and support

Have you received behaviour management training or professional development in pupil behaviour during the last twelve months [Behaviour training]

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63.3%) had received training within the last year, though some wrote in commenting that they had received training longer ago, or that it was planned. However, the written-in comments indicated that more were dissatisfied with inadequate training than those who were angry to have received nothing.

Written-in comments

Many respondents felt the training, even if adequate in quantity did not answer the problems they were encountering, though some nominated training they had found particularly supportive.

- There has been a change of Head so our Assertive Discipline has been changed and altered. We have very low morale in the school and LEA have been critical of us! (Primary, female, 50-9)
- Training budget has been slashed. (Secondary, female, 29-39)
- This is educationally based and has little use practically when 'Sam' says "F--- off"! (Secondary, female, 40-9)
- It's very time consuming and rewards bad behaviour. (Primary, female, 40-9)
- "Behaviour Management" system is on a sheet of paper, circulated on Sept. 4th and NEVER AGAIN DISCUSSED. (Secondary, male, 29-39)
- It is the pupils who have severe behavioural problems that cause most problems and in big groups no amount of behaviour management can help long term. (Secondary, female, 40-9)
- I am considered to be a strong teacher and yet I find myself increasingly running out of strategies with a small number of students. (Secondary, female, 29-39)
- It was excellent. Staff felt it was worthwhile; addressed an issue that was relevant to the way we work on a daily basis. (Primary, female, 40-9)

Answer this question if you are not the headteacher. In the formulation of the school's discipline policy were your views (a) fully taken into account (b) partly taken into account (c) not at all taken into account [Views taken]

Nearly half the respondents (45.6%) felt that their views had been partly taken into account; a quarter (25.0%) felt their views had been fully accommodated and rather more (29.5%) that no account had been taken of their views.

What support is available from senior management to staff who experience difficulties with pupil behaviour? [Support from management]

A third of respondents (33.9%) felt they had a lot of support from management; over half (59.9%) felt they received some. Few felt they received none, but, as the comments below indicate, 'some' support left many respondents feeling dissatisfied.

Written-in comments

In some cases support from senior staff was reported as excellent, but many respondents had found it inconsistent, inadequate, or felt that asking for help was seen as an admission of failure;

- This [a lot of support] is only recently the case with the arrival of a new, very supportive, headteacher. (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- We only get the occasional problem and a lot of support from the head. (Primary, female, 50-9)
- An increasing amount of my time as Head Teacher is spent supporting staff with [dealing with] behaviour problems. We are very skilled as a staff in dealing with problems but they are on the increase. (Primary, female, 40-9)
- In a small school there is much pressure on the Head who has to leave his own class to deal with seriously disruptive behaviour. (Primary, female, 40-9)
- Some senior management staff are extremely supportive. Others tell you it's your fault - nothing to do with the children. (Primary, female, 29-39)
- Not consistent. Colleagues are frequently blamed / made to feel that problems arise due to their own inadequacies! (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- You are seen as failing or not coping if you ask for help. (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- I don't like to ask senior management for help as it is a reflection of my inability to cope. (Secondary, female, 40-9)
- Teachers who experience difficulties are seen as weak. Internal figures of 'on call' incidents are published thus encouraging a 'blame' culture. (Secondary, female, 29-39)

Some respondents reported extremely efficient systems, but middle management felt they carried the burden of supporting junior colleagues, but were then expected to cope themselves;

- The Leadership Team (2 each day) provides staff support Mon-Fri and are contacted at reception through 'walkie talkies'. (Secondary, female, 29-39)
- We have telephone connections in all classrooms for immediate response. Every class has a LSA for 1/2 day minimum. All incidents are followed up and pupils excluded → parents involved → apologise. (Primary, male, 40-9)
- We have an alarm button on Bromcom (electronic register) and a senior manager will hopefully appear! (Secondary, female, 21-8)
- As Head of Dept. I step in and help my staff with problem situations but who steps in and helps me on a lesson / lesson basis? (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- As Head of Faculty, much of this is to do with being in the 'front line' protecting my team. In my school middle management seem to do much more of that than SMT. (Secondary, female, 40-9)

Many respondents thought that heads and other senior management were distracted from giving proper support by too much orientation to the demands of children or parents, or by administration and bureaucracy;

- Although action is taken quickly, the subsequent action never matches the seriousness of the incident. (Secondary, male, 50-9)
- Headteacher refuses to be judgmental. Seen as a soft touch by students. (Secondary, female, 50-9)
- Basically the HT shouts at the culprit and then gives them a hug or some special job like "Eat those crisps for me because I need this token on the packet". (Primary, female, 40-9)
- Willing to supervise children removed from classroom & to contact parents. Unwilling to exclude. Children returned to classroom after violent incidents. (Primary, female, 29-39)
- Behaviour was highlighted as a cause of concern when the staff initiated working groups to address the issue a few years ago. The policies formulated have been undermined /

ignored and a poorer pastoral system introduced much to the frustration of the staff. (Secondary, male, 40-9)

- School has grown from 500 to 1200 in 2-3 years in a difficult area. Management has been overwhelmed. Teacher shortages have exacerbated the problem. (Secondary, female, 40-9)
- S.M.Team (teachers) supportive personally, but have their own heavy workload so cannot do more. (Primary, female, 40-9)
- Theoretically our head is an experienced practitioner in EBD - realistically the head is an expert in the paper war. (Centrally employed teacher, male, 50-9)

If you were a victim of an assault did you feel the support the school gave you was excellent / reasonable / poor / non-existent? [Support after assault]

Over a quarter of respondents (27.4%) answered this question; written-in comments indicated that some respondents who had not suffered assaults felt lucky not to have, or that while they personally had not, colleagues in their school had. A fifth (20.3%) of the respondents who did answer felt they had received excellent support, with over a third (38.3%) feeling it was reasonable. However nearly a third (29.4%) felt support had been poor and a sixth (12.1%) that it had been non-existent. Comments about colleagues' experience suggested similar proportions, but could not be quantified exactly.

Written-in comments

In many cases respondents thought there had been little effective support or sympathy, again often because of maintaining enrolment or as a result of outside pressure, though there were reports of excellent support:

- It took 3 years to get the child who injured me statemented and a further year to get him into a special unit.
- I was scratched by a seven-year-old girl who drew blood - I contacted the Union who contacted the headteacher. Her reply was 'What am I supposed to do about it?' (Primary, female, 50-9)
- I was kicked repeatedly while restraining a pupil from attacking another pupil. I was given no advice. (Secondary, female, 50-9)
- I have been pushed by a boy my size as I stood between him and a smaller boy he was trying to attack; and kicked in the face by a 7 year old, as I assisted the Head in bringing him to her office. (Primary, female, 29-39)
- I have had to separate a fight (boy kicking another's head) while pregnant, had student who refused request of 5 staff to leave room, students who defecate in corridors, had a laser point shone in my eye by an 11 year old boy. School makes it very awkward for staff to get hold of incident form because they then have to report it to the LEA. (Secondary, female, 29-39)
- Reports are made to SMT but nothing is done re the risk that child is causing, even when a pregnant teacher was hit in the stomach. (Primary, female, 29-39)
- Have received serious injury through the violent behaviour of a student. Needed surgery and have been absent from post for 6 months. (Secondary, female, 21-8)
- Pupil threw a hard sweet at the back of my head. Investigated - suspended. Pupil brought in with mother. Met me to apologise. (Secondary, female, 29-39)
- The accusation was verbal and suggested physical violence on the part of the teacher. Witnesses willingly provided evidence to refute the accusation. Senior management acted quickly and effectively and offered support to the pupil too. (Secondary, female, 50-9)

- Went to court. Assailant had to pay £2000 costs. Did my self-esteem no end of good. (Secondary, female, 40-9)
- Serious assault by yr 11 pupil & ex pupil on another yr 11 student - I intervened & was myself assaulted. Short prison sentence followed. (Secondary, female, 40-9)

In some cases the assault had been the last straw:

- As a result of an incident with a student last November when I was physically and verbally abused and then was unsupported by management I, with Union help, took severance from the school in April. (Secondary, female, 40-9)
- Next time I will contact the police myself as I don't feel we are able to do anything in Education. (Secondary, female, 40-9)
- I carry permanent scars from scratches, bites & kicks including a broken nose. I have never received any kind of compensation but I understand that Soc. Services workers do. (Secondary, female, 50-9)

Do you feel the in-school support available for pupils with behavioural problems is excellent / reasonable / poor / non-existent? [Support for pupils]

Nearly half the respondents (48.2%) felt support was reasonable, but only a ninth (11.1%) felt it was excellent; as the written-in comments below indicate, this reflected a feeling that the scale of the problem exceeds the resources available. Over a third of respondents (36.7%) felt support was poor, but very few reported that none was available.

Written-in comments

- The problem is that we spend so much time and effort on our pupils with behavioural problems that ordinary children receive less attention. (Primary, female, 50-9)
- Very definitely the rights of the disruptive child seem to take priority over the rights of all others, the victims, pupils & staff in school - 5% of the students take up 90% of staff time due to their disruptive and violent behaviour depriving the majority of their right to an education. (Special, male, 40-9)
- More and more is being done to support our students - but we are taking on too many students with known problems. They should be in a school designed to suit them. (Secondary, male, 29-39)
- Inconsistency is a major factor - the feeling that it's someone else's job is another. (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- Outside agencies do not know what to suggest with children who are too young to reason with, draw up agreements with etc. We are trying to compensate for poor parenting skills. (Under-5s, female, 40-9)
- Growing "Gangsta" culture among Afro-Caribbean boys not being addressed. Social Inclusion Unit operates like a revolving door - same kids in for short spells, then out again with unmodified behaviour. (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- The Head is constantly busy with budgets etc. The SMT and class teachers tend to take the brunt of pupil problems. The SENCO is so swamped by paper-work / admin / liaison, that her time is stretched too thin to be able to cope with the many issues of behaviour. (Primary, female, 40-9)
- The SENCO is often teaching due to staff shortage. These children love the 1:1 attention & revert when back in class. Actual behaviour modification programmes would be good but too expensive. Much cheaper to replace tired teachers! (Primary, female, 50-9)

Has the LEA been supportive in helping the school address pupil behaviour? LEA support]

Very few respondents (2.1%) felt that LEAs had been very supportive; an eighth (13.1%) felt they had been fairly supportive. A third of respondents were undecided, and over half (50.3%) felt that they had not been very or not at all supportive. The written-in comments indicate the ways in which teachers felt LEAs had failed to help or had actually created problems.

Written-in comments

Most respondents commented that LEA support had been slow or inadequate, and that the authority tended to support disruptive children rather than staff or co-operative children;

- When the Governors have supported staff in removing aggressive, abusive students from school, the LEA has, on occasions, overruled the decision! (Secondary, female, 50-9)
- On the few occasions the school management were convinced that outside help was required it was slow in coming and involved a great deal of "paper" shuffling. (Secondary, male, 40-9, Norfolk)
- Children First does not take into account the rights of the children who come second - those who want to work. (Secondary, male, 40-9, Nottinghamshire)
- Nottinghamshire's 'Children First' policy is a licence to disrupt. (Secondary, male, 29-39)
- Although Notts C.C. has a policy of total inclusion more & more pupils are finding their way into special schools who are extremely violent and potentially dangerous. There is an amazing growth in violent pupils labelled "Autistic", "Aspergers" or "ADHD"; most are completely out of control of themselves. (Special, male, 50-9)
- We had many exclusions 2 years ago. None at present. The 'Haven' is used by very disruptive pupils, supervised by non-teaching staff with no special training as such. They are at times with the children on their own. This I find unacceptable. Two adults are on sick leave. Parents object that 'good' children do not use the special facilities in the 'Haven'. I agree. (Primary, female, 50-9, East Sussex.)
- L.E.A. needs permanently to break the "merry-go-round" system where some very defiant students are moving from one school to another. There is limited value in continuous "fresh starts" and temporary referrals to P.R.U.s (L.E.A. centrally employed teacher, female, 40-9)
- We seem to be having more pupils under 'inclusion' - to our unit - with EBD not learning problems. Also inclusion into mainstream esp. into Yr6. (Primary, female, 40-9, Cardiff)
- At a meeting of 20+ primary feeder schools an LEA rep. was asked what to do if a table was lifted and thrown across the room (actual incident). The LEA rep. said to put an arm gently around the offender and to lead them out of the room.... (Primary, female, 40-9, Cardiff)
- I've taught in Southwark and Norfolk. The support in Southwark was excellent. Here it is non-existent yet the problems very similar. (Primary, male, 40-9)
- Nottinghamshire's 'inclusion' policy has had a devastating effect on school discipline. There is no ultimate sanction & pupils know it. (Secondary, female, 29-39)
- The LEA, given present structures / lack of specialist schools cannot cope with massive social breakdown, which, in turn, destroys success in schools. (Secondary, male, 40-9, Leeds)
- I do not feel Islington provide enough support for teachers in class or places for disruptive pupils. (Secondary, female, 29-39)
- Notts LEA has virtually withdrawn its support of its teaching staff. It expects them to maintain discipline without the back-up resources most professionals would expect in such a sensitive situation. (Secondary, male, 50-9)
- The service from Behavioural Support (LEA) is virtually useless. It takes longer to fill in the forms etc. than the time eventually offered. (Secondary, male, 40-9, Norfolk)

- As our students have severe learning difficulties & all are statemented the LEA does not record violent incidents on staff. (Special, female, 21-8, Norfolk)
- Still trying to access this, but we will have to pay £450 a day for it. Norfolk has no special-school provision for EBD until Year 4, even though we are an infant school - what a dreadful scenario. (Primary, female, 50-9)
- Support in school from LEA is terrible - feels like what they don't see won't hurt them (or cause them work!) (Primary, male, 21-8, Norfolk)
- There seem to be no placements available in Nottinghamshire for pupils with behaviour problems. (Primary, female, 40-9)
- As a Church school, the Catholic education authorities are deficient too. (Secondary, female, 40-9, Cardiff)
- Until recently the LEA have had OFSTED problems and so have seemed to sweep such issues under the carpet. (Secondary, female, 50-9, Leicester)
- Need a co-ordinated approach! Teachers' professional opinions i.e. necessity for exclusions need to be respected - & there need to be referral units up, running & effective NOW!! LEA needs to take responsibility for excluded pupils. (Secondary, female, 40-9, Leicester)
- When it comes to addressing the behavioural needs of ethnic minority pupils the council is at best blind or institutionally racist. (Secondary, male, 50-9, Bristol)

Some respondents were more positive towards their local authority;

- Recent input of funding via standards fund helpful. (Secondary, female, 40-9, Norfolk)
- Publications are available and behaviour support in Notts is patchy in terms of area and named person you receive help from. Improving, though! (Primary, female, 29-39)
- My school has mature, thoughtful staff, committed to inclusion & highly skilled. We discuss & support each other regularly. No-one feels undervalued & the Head is hands on & deals with major incidents personally. The County EPS system supports us with visits, reviews & money for extra staff when necessary. We have had our failures when pupils have been excluded tho'. (Primary, female, 50-9, Nottinghamshire)
- The switch from County to City Council has enabled a huge change. The City value Health and Safety and are working hard to change the culture. However they are on a steep learning curve. Will Central Government allow them time or destroy their efforts? Let's hope and pray for constructive co-operation. (Secondary, male, 50-9, City of Leicester)
- Bristol LEA has a good support service dedicated to prevention - however some schools fail to access this other than a 'lip service' act to provide 'evidence' for (e.g.) pupil exclusion. (Centrally employed teacher, male, 40-9)

Changes in pupil behaviour

Do you feel that pupil behaviour has worsened since you started teaching? [Behaviour worse]

Approaching two-thirds of respondents (59.5%) felt that behaviour had become very much worse; together with those who felt there had been a fairly marked deterioration, this meant that over four-fifths of respondents (80.3%) felt there had been a deterioration. A tenth (9.5%), often young teachers who felt unable to comment owing to their limited experience, were undecided; a similar proportion felt that there had been little or no deterioration (10.2% total).

Written-in comments

Some respondents felt the situation was remediable, and respondents dealing with special needs felt that the tenor of the survey stigmatised their pupils and encouraged mainstream teachers :

- There was a bad patch about 5-10 years ago (maybe longer) but on the whole today's children work hard and seem to want to learn. Progress is held back by disruptive children now in the classroom but who were in special units in the past. (Primary, male, 50-9)
- I feel the behaviour in my school has improved considerably since the introduction of an 'assertive discipline' policy. (Primary, female, 29-39)
- Our ability to manage pupils with behaviour difficulties is (mostly) improving: Assertive Discipline has been a great help. I would like a supervised "cool down" place (e.g. room with balls or padding) where children could bash things safely. Smaller classes would help plus higher pay for trained Teaching Assistants. (Primary, female, 40-9)
- I do not believe children's behaviour is getting worse - it varies year on year - some years are good and some awful & it can be because of one child only (last year was terrible). (Under-5s, female, 50-9)
- Pupil behaviour is probably worse from a minority. Most of our children are pretty well behaved and really fond of their teachers. (Primary, female, 50-9)
- Believe it or not I love teaching! (Secondary, female, 50-9)
- My school has mature, thoughtful staff, committed to inclusion & highly skilled. We discuss & support each other regularly. No one feels undervalued & the Head is hands on & deals with major incidents personally. (Primary, female, 50-9)
- A class of 15-20 means you can be positive, move students around, keep everyone monitored. My last school was a hard inner city school but small class sizes and assertive discipline made it a good experience. (Secondary, male, 21-8)
- Fewer really serious incidents (e.g.) assault, but much more widespread "low level" defiance / answering back. Isn't putting me off though - too many staff do nothing but moan and apportion blame. It isn't as bad as some claim!! (Secondary, male, 29-39)

Many found parental attitudes a major part of the problem, raising issues about the sanctions available to teachers and teachers' own security;

- Please help - we do have a very good behavioural policy but how do we cope with abusive and violent parents - ?!*!* There are too many entrances to our school, adults, youths & parents come & go as they please! We need direction from the L.E.A. (Primary middle management, male, 40-9)
- Fights parent / parent - termly. (Primary, female, 50-9)
- The attitude of parents is usually to say they can't cope and pass the problem on to teachers and the school. It's a problem for society as a whole, not just schools. (Primary, male, 60+)
- I have had verbal abuse from parents but, thankfully, personally, not physical - 3 colleagues have. (Primary, female, 50-9)
- Help needed with parents / pupils who are persistently misbehaving. Schools need to feel empowered. PARENTS NEED TO BE IDENTIFIED BY SCHOOL AND THEN LEA HELP GIVEN. (Primary, female, 40-9, threats of violence from parents marked as 'major problem area')
- A lot of poor pupil behaviour in our school is condoned by parents and also is a direct result of instructions parents give their children e.g. if they get into trouble in class they must walk out of the lesson and phone home! (Secondary, female, 40-9)
- Experienced mumbled threats of suing from parents and I had one unfounded accusation of shaking a child violently. This was not pursued. (Primary, female, 40-9)

- As HT of an inner city primary school I feel that pupil behaviour, parental refusal to accept responsibility, LEA avoidance of school difficulties and a government policy of blame the schools / teacher is leading to a situation where teaching and learning in 'tough' schools will be almost impossible in the near future. (Primary, male, 50-9)
- I am very concerned about the vulnerability of staff regarding allegations by pupils & parents. I feel the whole system works on the principle of guilty until proved innocent and a legacy of suspicion. (Primary, female, 40-9)
- Not pupils - but parental expectations i.e. not taking any responsibility, just accusations - no trust - too much compensation culture. Some parents need attention more than kids: we are a handy scapegoat for them to "shout" at. (Primary, female, 29-39)
- Parents are more argumentative and unsupportive, and more and more I am hearing children telling me and other staff how their parents feel school / teachers / education is crap - so why should the kids do what we want? (Primary, female, 29-39)
- Parents are encouraged to point the finger of blame at schools if their children do not behave well or do well at school. The status of teaching is low because the Government and the Media are always saying we are underachieving. (Primary, male, 50-9)

Some respondents reported that policy initiatives such as inclusion and the inflexibility of the National Curriculum contributed to behavioural problems and the frustration of lower achievers;

- HMI report demanded reduction of exclusions - but did not say how this was to be achieved without further disruptions in class or damage to the school. Senior management is under unfair pressure to keep students who seriously damage the fabric and morale of the school. (Secondary, male, 50-9)
- There seems to be a reluctance to exclude pupils permanently because of the impact on finances, despite the continual disruption those pupils cause. (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- Sanctions are very difficult in a climate of "inclusion"; where pupils are on "reduced" timetables they are none the less still able to roam the building - SECURITY IS AN ISSUE. (Secondary, female, 40-9)
- Problems have got worse since the tightening up of the curriculum. Small children who can't sit long have to. They learn to dislike school and are bored and so create more problems than they would if teaching could be more flexible in its approach. Under-5s, female, 40-9)
- The prime contributor to unacceptable behaviour is, I believe, that the curriculum is inappropriate for many of our students - I teach Welsh + French to students who have very limited skills in English. "Practical subjects" now demand academic skills resulting in failure, frustration and confrontational situations for many students who are very clever given a practical task. (Secondary, female, 40-9)
- Social inclusion policy is making teaching a nightmare. What about the 95% of kids who do want to learn. (Primary, female, 29-39)
- I constantly avoid teaching styles / methods which I know will inflame any incidents and I avoid subject matter which is too hard & likely to cause an incident. Consequently other pupils in the class are not being taught properly. (Primary, female, 29-39)
- I feel sorry for the other children who do their best but we fail them because of the constant disruptions and bullying which they face. (Primary, female, 29-39)
- Disruptive behaviour is infectious since those pupils with real problems demand disproportionate amounts of time relative to well-behaved pupils which can leave well-behaved pupils disaffected etc. (Secondary, male, 29-39)

Staffing, time and other resources were often unavailable or over-stretched, and the fact that some respondents were leaving can only exacerbate this. The problems were especially

severe in schools which were having recruitment difficulties and were therefore unable to reject pupils. On the other hand some schools were able to pass on their problem pupils:

- I work in a school with a fair amount of problems. What I have been surprised by since taking up the post of Senco is that money is not the problem. We have the money for all sorts of imaginable initiatives etc. but cannot find the staff.... (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- I am leaving the profession. I love teaching and I'm good at it..... but it's getting too dangerous. The stress of constant battles with pupils is far too much. I don't want to be the enemy any more! (Secondary, female, 29-39)
- I am considering leaving teaching after 2 years despite offers of promotion and excellent prospects. The general lack of respect around school & low level disruption means that I can't do the job I want to do. (Secondary, female, 21-8)
- Staff are "fair game" to be shoved and hit when in crowded corridors - so much that I dare not venture out just after the bell has gone - I dare not wear my glasses around the school. (Secondary, female, 40-9)
- I would be classed as a "strong" teacher but: a) I feel unsafe regularly; b) I have never been sworn at so much as in the last 12 months compared to the last 11 YRS; c) pupils regularly:- walk out of classrooms; walk away from staff; wander around school unchallenged. (Secondary- resigned at Easter, female, 29-39)
- I feel disillusioned and mentally exhausted hence my decision to hand in my notice. (Primary, female, 29-39)
- When looking for other jobs I feel stigmatised because I teach at a "difficult" school. We've had 100 windows broken in 3 weeks by children on the estate. Exclusion? And results? It's a farce. What can we do??!!! (Primary, female, 50-9)
- I am at present on long term sickness and looking for early retirement due to ill health. This is largely because of the poor behaviour in the school, and the way SM Team treat offender (pupil) and offended (staff) the same, instead of backing the teacher concerned. (Primary, male, 50-9)
- Ultimately, as a Vol. Aided R.C. school, parents are advised to find another school - we then have a place available which sometimes goes straight to a 'nice' pupil from the school that received our rogue. (Secondary, female, 50-9)
- School with falling rolls accepts any pupil from authority and before long most of pupils in school are disruptive → leads to poor results → more spare places → more difficult children directed in from other school that won't accept them....etc. (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- I am changing schools in Sept. after seeing my present school deteriorate drastically particularly over the last 3 years of my 13 years at the school. Against my principles in many ways, I've taken a job at a Catholic school that still has some sanctions left. Had I not got this job I would have gone abroad to teach. (Secondary, female, 29-39)
- As a supply teacher, I am 'open season' & 'fair game' to disruptive children. I don't return to schools where I'm given a hard time and no support. (Primary, female, 50-9)
- The very high 'turnover' of staff in the city school where I do most supply has made the discipline problems much worse. When I taught there permanently in the 80s discipline was much better. (Secondary, female, 50-9)
- I have left school teaching as of 23/4/01. I have become convinced that the majority of pupils (who try their best and work) suffer because of the ineffective procedures (sometimes) used to "help" disruptive pupils. Teachers' rights to be treated as human beings are being ignored. (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- I am leaving my first job after one year because the head has been wholly unsupportive with the 4 EBD children in my class. (Primary, female, 21-8)
- The management are frightened to death of having to discipline any pupil severely (i.e. expel or suspend or involve parents very much). The consequence is constant

inappropriate behaviour, even here. I decided to leave this school as of July 2001. (Independent secondary school, male, 40-9)

- Only teaching for 2 years and probably not for much longer. (Secondary, male, 21-8)
- Largely as a result of the deterioration of pupil behaviour, and the removal of effective sanctions, I am leaving the teaching profession after 23 years of service. I cannot recommend teaching as a profession. (Secondary, female, 40-9)
- It is hardly surprising that there is a crisis in teaching recruitment. I would not go into teaching now if I were young. The behaviour of the children, bureaucracy, lousy pay and general stress - who needs it! What a great pity - this was a great job. At 44 I'm the oldest teacher in my school - people can't get out quickly enough! (Primary, male)
- The whole system is an insult to society. I have borrowed £6000 to fulfil my ambition to become a teacher. I am now leaving the profession with that debt. I feel very bitter and abused. Now trainees get paid! Insulting to us. (Secondary, female, 29-39)

While younger teachers felt they did not have enough experience to comment on whether behaviour had deteriorated, most experienced teachers felt that there had been deterioration, especially in the last few years, due to general social changes and, especially, a lack of respect for teachers;

- NQT, so hard to answer. However it does seem that present school has more of a behaviour problem than teaching practice schools, but it was still present in there too. Why do we put ourselves through it? (Secondary, female, 21-8)
- Well, I have only been in the profession a year now but there have been many occasions where I've been absolutely horrified with what is supposed to be 'acceptable' behaviour when it should not be accepted! (Primary, female, 21-8)
- Being a young teacher makes it harder I think. It makes me a good 10 mins. To settle classes down & then more time is wasted by calling out etc. Out of a 1 hour lesson I probably "teach" for 40 minutes - the rest is behaviour management. (Secondary, female, 21-8)
- It bears no comparison to 1975, and I worked at a school in a Yorkshire pit village. (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- It feels as if children have more say than us! (Primary, female, 40-9)
- I teach reception children & feel that my whole approach in the last 8 years has had to change completely because of the behavior experienced from children on arrival in school now. Total defiance, refusal to co-operate or conform are some examples. (Primary, female, 50-9)
- When I began teaching in 1973 teachers still had some token automatic respect by virtue of their job and the lip-service paid to the value of education. Real respect, of course, had to be earned by building good relationships with children as always. Now all respect has to be earned from scratch by each individual teacher.....There is less ability to listen, communicate and negotiate among children AND parents and these skills have to be taught at school. (Secondary, female, 50-9)
- Much of the behaviour arises from the low status conferred on the teaching profession by low pay and damaging remarks from OFSTED, Woodhead, etc. Putnam's prizes do nothing to restore public confidence in teachers' professionalism.. If the profession was respected, young people would aspire to join it. (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- The number of pupils who are negative, have little or no respect for staff and are frequently rude and abusive has increased dramatically & this is an all-girls school! Teaching used to be pleasant! (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- It is getting worse every year. Next year's intake are already causing us concern. (Special, female, 50-9)
- Underneath all the disruptive behaviour I feel there is pupil unease - they themselves would be happier and achieve more in a much stricter, less permissive / "understanding"

environment, with real sanctions / consequences, not token exclusions / reports. (Secondary, female, 40-9)

- Children have very poor responses to failure and are not being trained to accept some failure as part of life. It is acceptable only to reward positive behaviour and emphasis is placed by heads to find something to reward badly behaved children - therefore other children see badly behaved children constantly rewarded for very small improvement. (Primary, female, 60+)
- It is not so much the fact of pupils doing the wrong thing as the refusal of some pupils to accept appropriate low-level punishment, so that far too many low-level incidents escalate into major ones. (Secondary, male, 40-9)
- Pupil behaviour reflects a meaner, nastier, more selfish society...Either go for the free market and don't expect schools to have to cater for parents who choose not to raise their children properly or start reminding parents they too have responsibilities. [I've worked in the Sudan so I am NOT blaming poverty!] (Secondary male, 40-9)

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