

Behaviour in Scottish Schools 2023

November 2023

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Contents

| | |
|---|------------|
| Chapter 1 – Executive Summary | 4 |
| Chapter 2 – Introduction | 17 |
| Chapter 3 – Methodology | 23 |
| Chapter 4 – Overall perceptions of behaviour | 35 |
| Chapter 5 – Changes over time | 70 |
| Chapter 6 – Impact of COVID-19 | 102 |
| Chapter 7 – Factors which predict experiences of behaviour | 112 |
| Chapter 8 – Impact of behaviour | 120 |
| Chapter 9 – Approaches used in schools | 136 |
| Chapter 10 – Support for managing behaviour | 168 |
| Chapter 11 – Discussion and conclusions | 194 |

Chapter 1 – Executive Summary

Background and aims

The Scottish Government commissioned the Scottish Centre for Social Research to conduct a fifth wave of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (BISSR) which was first undertaken in 2006. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the 2020 wave of BISSR was postponed, with the result that there was a seven year gap between the fourth wave of BISSR, conducted in 2016, and this iteration of the study. The research in 2023 explored the headteachers', teachers' and support staff members' views of relationships and behaviour in publicly-funded mainstream schools, as well as the views of key local authority representatives across Scotland.

The overall aim of this study was to provide a robust and clear picture of relationships and behaviour in publicly-funded mainstream schools and of current policy and approaches for supporting relationships and behaviour.

Methods

The research involved a quantitative survey (of headteachers, teachers and support staff) and in-depth qualitative research (with headteachers, teachers, support staff and local authority representatives).

Quantitative survey

A stratified random sample of 508 primary schools and all 330 eligible secondary schools were invited to participate. At each school, the headteacher and a randomly selected sample of teachers and support staff were invited to participate.

As was the case in 2016, the survey was conducted online, though support staff members were also given the option of completing paper questionnaires. Survey fieldwork was carried out between 27 February 2023 and 12 April 2023. The overall school staff response rate was 43%. The achieved sample was 3754.

Qualitative research

A programme of qualitative research was conducted between February and July 2023 to add context and detail to the survey findings and explore new and emerging issues in depth. The qualitative research comprised interviews with headteachers and teachers, and focus groups with classroom-based support staff, involving a total of 109 staff at 14 schools (6 primary schools, 8 secondary schools), and interviews with 30 local authority education representatives.

Main findings

Overall perceptions of behaviour

Staff were asked about their experience of a wide range of positive behaviours and disruptive behaviours across 3 categories (low level disruptive, disengagement, serious disruptive). For low level and disengagement behaviours, the proportion of staff that have experienced each of these at least once a day in the last teaching week is reported. Among the serious disruptive behaviours staff were first asked how frequently they had experienced each of these behaviours between pupils in the last teaching week. They were then asked how frequently they had experienced these serious disruptive behaviours being directed at themselves or other staff¹.

Both primary and secondary school staff reported generally good behaviour among most or all pupils in the classroom (65%) and around the school (85%). The most commonly reported positive behaviours within the classroom were pupils following instructions and pupils seeking support from staff or peers when needed. However, low level disruptive behaviour, disengagement and particular serious disruptive behaviours were also frequently experienced by staff. One of the most common low level disruptive behaviour was pupils talking out of turn, with 86% of staff having encountered this at least once a day in the last week. One of the most common disengagement behaviours was pupils withdrawing from interaction with staff/others, with 43% having encountered this on a daily basis.

School staff reported that the most common forms of serious disruptive behaviours between pupils were physical and verbal abuse, particularly physical aggression, general verbal abuse and physical violence². Two-thirds (67%) had encountered general verbal abuse, 59% physical aggression and 43% physical violence between pupils in the classroom in the last week. The proportion of staff witnessing abuse between pupils related to protected characteristics was lower, but some types of this abuse were reported by around 1 in 5 staff in the last week. For example, 24% of staff experienced abuse towards pupils who had additional support needs in the last week.

There were differences in the types of behaviour experienced by staff in different roles. Headteachers were more likely to report higher levels of positive behaviour and lower levels of disruptive behaviour than teachers or support staff. Support staff were more likely than headteachers or teachers to encounter almost all types of serious disruptive behaviours between pupils. In addition, a higher proportion of support staff reported having experienced the greatest number (21 or more) instances of physical aggression and violence towards them in the last 12 months compared with other staff. There was a general trend of positive behaviours

¹ Most of these questions ask how often staff have experienced each of these behaviours within the last teaching week, with the exception of a question that asks how many incidents of each type of behaviour they have personally experienced directed at them in the last 12 months.

² For serious disruptive behaviours the proportion of staff that have experienced each of these at least once during the last teaching week is reported on, rather than at least once a day as these occur less frequently than low-level and disengagement behaviours.

decreasing and negative behaviours increasing as pupils' ages increase, with most of the low level and negative behaviours more commonly reported in secondary schools than primary schools. The exception was physical aggression and violence, both directed at other pupils and towards staff, which were more often experienced in primary schools compared with secondary schools. Primary 1 -3 teachers were also more likely to encounter these behaviours towards themselves or other staff in the classroom compared with P4-7 teachers and in P4-7 compared with in secondary school.

The abusive use of mobile phones and digital technologies was one of the most frequently experienced serious disruptive behaviours among secondary staff, as were general verbal abuse between pupils and towards staff, physical aggression/violence between pupils and pupils being under the influence of drugs/alcohol. Primary 4-7 teachers reported higher frequencies of all low-level disruptive behaviours in the classroom than P1-3 teachers. In terms of disengagement, pupils deliberately socially excluding others was more commonly experienced by primary staff but pupils leaving the classroom without permission or truanting were significantly more likely to be reported in secondary school.

Whilst over a third of staff had experienced general verbal abuse³ and 16% had experienced physical aggression and 11% physical violence towards themselves or other staff in the classroom in the last week, it was relatively unusual for staff to report that they routinely experienced abuse directed towards themselves or other staff related to race, sex and sexuality, religion, or disability. A small proportion (6% or less⁴) of all staff had personally experienced abuse due to each of the protected characteristics in the last 12 months. However, as staff demographics relating to protected characteristics other than gender were not captured by the survey, it is not possible to ascertain whether the study accurately reflects the experiences of these demographic groups.

Changes over time

Whilst the majority of staff in 2023 still perceived that all or most pupils are generally well-behaved around the school and in the classroom, perceptions of this among teachers and support staff have declined since 2016 and since the time series began in 2006. By contrast, headteachers' perceptions of good behaviour have remained high across the time series. Staff continue to find that pupils engage in the majority of the positive behaviours in the classroom in all or most lessons.

However, there has been a perceived decline in pupil behaviour since 2016, with primary and secondary staff reporting decreases in most positive behaviours and increases in most of the low level disruptive, serious disruptive and other negative behaviours around the school. While headteachers' experiences generally remained more positive, particularly in primary schools, teachers and support staff

³ 38% had experienced this in the classroom and 32% around the school in the last week

⁴ This varies for each of the protected characteristics asked about, ranging from 0% for some to 6% for others.

experiences of pupil behaviour in primary and secondary schools were more negative across a wide range of behaviours.

Staff reported increases in most of the classroom disengagement behaviours and low level disruptive behaviours in the classroom and around the school since 2016, particularly pupils persistently infringing rules, making cheeky or impertinent remarks, engaging in general rowdiness, mucking about and deliberately excluding others. Staff experiences of the most commonly experienced low level disruptive behaviours have also increased since 2006. Reports of pupils being under the influence of drugs or alcohol and using digital technology/mobile phones abusively have also risen since 2016.

Likewise, reported incidence of serious disruptive behaviours has increased since 2016, including sexist abuse towards staff, general verbal abuse, physical aggression and violence towards staff and pupils in the classroom and around the school⁵. The proportion of staff that have experienced at least one incident of general verbal abuse towards them personally in the last 12 months increased among all staff types in primary and secondary schools since 2009, with the greatest rise occurring since 2016. The only serious disruptive behaviours that have remained low and largely unchanged since 2016 in primary and secondary schools are reported instances of abuse towards staff including racist, homophobic/biphobic/ transphobic and religious abuse and abuse related to disability. However, it is not possible to ascertain whether the study accurately reflects the experiences of these demographic groups due to the survey not gathering this demographic information.

Across primary and secondary schools, abuse between pupils and physical destructiveness have also all increased. Whilst the overall proportion of staff who report having experienced use of a weapon towards other pupils and staff in the last teaching week was much lower (2-6%)⁶ than the proportion reporting general verbal, physical and a number of other types of abuse this has increased since 2016. There has been a rise from 3% in 2016 to 11% in 2023 of primary support staff and from <1% to 6% of primary and secondary teachers having encountered use of a weapon towards other pupils in the classroom in the last teaching week. Since the time series began in 2006, reported encounters of pupil violence and aggression in the classroom towards other pupils has risen. For example, 10% of primary teachers had dealt with physical aggression towards other pupils at least once a day in 2006, rising to 20% in 2023. The increases have been more marked among primary teachers and primary and secondary support staff.

⁵ For example, the proportion of primary support staff having experienced violence between pupils in the classroom in the last week has increased from 42% in 2016 to 58% in 2023 and among secondary support staff from 17% to 44%. Experiences of this among both primary and secondary school teachers has risen as well as among secondary headteachers.

⁶ 3% of staff experienced use of a weapon toward themselves or other staff in the classroom and 2% around the school. 6% experienced use of a weapon towards other pupils in the classroom and 5% around the school.

The qualitative research identified new and emerging patterns of disruptive behaviour including vaping and in-school truancy, a rise in misogynistic views expressed by male pupils, and problematic use of mobile phones and social media.

School staff and LA representatives identified underlying reasons for these changes in behaviour, including a perceived lack of consequences for pupils who engage in serious disruptive behaviour, a lack of support for pupils with additional support needs, particularly Autism Spectrum Disorders and ADHD, disengagement from school and learning and wider societal changes such as a general lack of respect in society, the ubiquity of social media and changing approaches to parenting.

The impact of COVID-19

Most school staff perceived that pupil behaviour was worse in 2023 than before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began in March 2020, both in the classroom (77%) and around the school (80%).

School staff involved in the qualitative research perceived COVID-19 to have had a negative impact on behaviour, particularly for those pupils whose transition - either between early years and primary or primary and secondary - was disrupted. School staff viewed these pupils as showing signs of immaturity, leading to low level disruption. The pandemic was seen to have resulted in delays to pupils' social and communication skills, leading to distressed and disruptive behaviour related to sharing, playing together and communicating their feelings in primaries, and interpersonal relationships and group work in secondaries. Opinion differed among participants as to whether the COVID-19 pandemic was the cause of these changes in behaviour or had exacerbated and accelerated existing trends.

Additional perceived impacts of COVID-19 included disengagement with school and schoolwork, reduction in attendance for some pupils, anxiety and poorer mental wellbeing and greater reliance on mobile phones and social media. The most negative impacts of COVID-19 were considered to be felt by the most vulnerable pupils; those affected by poverty, deprivation and trauma.

Factors which predict experiences of negative behaviours

While a number of in-school factors which predict behaviour were identified in the quantitative analysis, participants in the interviews and focus groups focused on societal factors such as poverty and deprivation, and challenges associated with home and family life such as trauma and adverse childhood experiences and parenting, as the root causes of disruptive behaviour.

Interview participants also identified school-based factors as supporting positive behaviour in schools, such as a whole-school approach to recognising and celebrating positive behaviour and strong relationships between teachers, pupils and their families.

This highlights the challenge for schools in balancing in-school approaches to promoting positive behaviour alongside an external societal context outside their direct sphere of influence.

Multivariable regression analysis was used to identify the factors most strongly and independently associated with experiences of different types of negative or disruptive behaviour. Perceptions of behaviour getting worse since the pandemic was the strongest predictor of experiences of frequent negative behaviour, irrespective of the type of behaviour and the type of school or role of the staff member. This is not surprising, though it is not possible to infer from this that the impact of COVID was causing negative behaviour.

Other findings from the survey included that:

- 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 pupils and social exclusion.
- Disruptive or negative behaviour was more frequently reported in urban schools than rural schools, particularly at primary level.
- Limited confidence in one's own abilities 'to respond to indiscipline in the classroom' or to 'promote positive behaviour' was also associated with more frequent experiences of negative behaviour.

Impact of behaviour

Staff were asked to rate the level of impact⁷ each of the three categories of pupil behaviour (serious disruptive behaviour; disengagement and low level disruptive behaviour) had on the overall ethos and atmosphere of the school. Low level disruptive behaviour was identified by school staff as having the greatest negative impact, with almost all (94%) staff in the survey reporting that this behaviour had an impact on school ethos and atmosphere⁸. Slightly lower proportions, though still the vast majority, said that disengagement behaviours and serious disruptive behaviour have a negative impact.

Teachers and support staff were also asked which three of the wider set of behaviours (that they reported having experienced within the last teaching week⁹) had the greatest negative impact on their teaching experience or their experience as a support staff member. The three behaviours that staff identified as having the greatest overall negative impact were all low-level disruptive behaviours: talking out of turn; hindering other pupils; and using/looking at mobile phones/tablets inappropriately.

In primary schools, the behaviour most frequently identified as having the greatest negative impact on experience, reported by 57% of primary school staff, was pupils talking out of turn. In secondary schools, the behaviour most commonly reported as having the greatest negative impact was pupils using/looking at mobile phones or tablets when they should not. More than half of secondary school staff (52%) said this was one of the three behaviours that had the greatest negative impact, a

⁷ On a scale of one to five (one being 'not at all,' five being 'a great deal')

⁸ Having given this a rating of two-five on the aforementioned scale

⁹ See the Overall Perceptions of Behaviour Chapter for the findings on staff experiences of each type of behaviour in the last teaching week or day

notable increase since 2016. Perceptions of the specific impact of low level disruptive behaviour varied across qualitative participants. There were participants that felt disengagement and class disruption were manageable, whilst others described how they exacerbated stress and burnout among staff.

In line with the reported increase in low-level and serious disruptive behaviour, the level of perceived impact of negative behaviour also increased since 2016 across all behaviour types (low level disruptive, disengagement and serious disruptive behaviour), and staff groups, particularly for secondary teachers.

There has also been a notable increase since 2016 in primary school support staff reporting being negatively impacted by verbal abuse, physical aggression, and physical violence towards themselves and other staff. Support staff were more likely than teachers to report that serious disruptive behaviours (i.e. verbally or physically aggressive or abusive behaviour) have the greatest negative impact on staff experience. For those experiencing violent and aggressive pupil behaviour, participants in the qualitative research reported a profound impact on their mental health. Particular concern was raised regarding the wellbeing of teaching and support staff, who frequently manage disruptive behaviour in classrooms.

Interviewees highlighted the negative impact of incidents of pupil violence and aggression on the mental health of other pupils. Teaching and support staff shared instances where other pupils displayed fear and avoidance in response to aggressive behaviour. Persistent low level disruption was also said to have led to greater acceptance, and imitation of, inappropriate behaviours among pupils. On the other hand, positive pupil behaviour, as well as staff and pupil buy-in regarding school values, was thought to create a welcoming and nurturing environment in schools.

Approaches used in schools to support relationships and behaviour

Within schools, there was evidence of a culture shift towards a focus on relationships, restorative practice and nurture approaches and away from punitive approaches. Nurturing approaches, the promotion of positive behaviour through whole-school ethos and values, and restorative approaches were commonly used across primaries and secondaries to both encourage positive relationships and behaviour and manage serious and low level disruption.

School staff interviewed highlighted the positive impact of particular programmes and broader approaches, particularly in terms of the adoption of whole-school values, and emotional programmes in primary schools. Staff also described changes which had been made to the physical environment and the structure of the school day to promote positive behaviour and relationships (e.g., the use of sensory rooms, break out areas, alternative learning zones, nurture bases, a tailored curriculum etc). These adaptations were viewed as particularly important for those pupils with mental health issues, or those who were anxious about returning to school following school building closures due to COVID-19.

However, the extent to which positive approaches had been embedded across case study schools varied, with some teachers and support staff remaining sceptical as to the effectiveness of positive approaches. Staff noted the challenges

associated with nurture and restorative approaches in terms of the time and resources needed to implement these successfully. In the survey, staff reported spending longer on behaviour-related issues and tasks than in 2016.

The survey found the frequency of use of punitive approaches such as detention, punishment exercises and exclusions have decreased since 2016. Overall, the majority of school staff surveyed at both primary and secondary level were positive about their school's ethos and culture. However, perceptions were much poorer in secondary schools and ratings of school ethos and culture have declined in all staff groups since 2016.

When asked to rate how their school promotes policies on positive relationships and behaviour, most (72%) of both primary school teachers and support staff rated their school as good or very good. Again, perceptions were lower in secondary schools, with 46% of teachers and 51% of support staff rating this as good or very good and ratings have decreased since 2016 (from 52% among teachers and 57% among support staff).

Teachers' confidence in their ability to 'promote positive behaviour' and 'respond to indiscipline' in the classroom, both in primary and secondary schools remains high¹⁰, although confidence in their ability to 'respond to indiscipline' has decreased since 2016.

Staff described improvements to the way that behaviour is described and understood, particularly the understanding of the impact of trauma and neurodiversity on pupil behaviour and the use of trauma-informed language and approaches. However, primary and secondary school staff interviewed criticised the perceived lack of consequences in current positive approaches to relationships and behaviour and called for this to be addressed in the future. School staff highlighted a perceived mismatch between the positive approaches espoused at both a national and LA level and the realities of dealing with violent and aggressive incidents in schools and highlighted the need for greater consistency in approaches to behaviour, both among teachers and schools. In addition, staff expressed concern at the perceived lack of alternative options and resources for pupils for whom mainstream education may not be appropriate.

Support for managing behaviour

School staff were positive about the level of support they receive from other staff within their school, particularly the formal and informal support they receive from their colleagues working in the same role. Almost all staff surveyed agreed that they could talk to other staff openly about any behaviour-related challenges they experience.

¹⁰ In relation to promoting positive behaviour, 94% of primary teachers and 91% of secondary teachers gave a rating of 4 or 5 (with 1 being 'not confident at all' and 5 being 'very confident.' In relation to responding to indiscipline 82% of primary teachers and 81% of secondary teachers gave this a rating of either 4 or 5.

However, while primary staff perceptions of how well staff work together were high and have remained so since 2016, secondary staff perceptions were much less positive and have decreased since 2016; around half of teachers and less than half of secondary school support staff rated staff collegiality as 'good' or 'very good'.

Primary teachers and support staff reported high levels of confidence that senior staff would help them if they experienced behaviour management difficulties, but confidence was much lower among secondary teachers and support staff and has fallen since 2016 in both groups and across school types. This was reflected in the qualitative findings, where secondary school staff tended to feel less supported by the senior leadership team than those in primary schools and school staff interviewees reported feeling less well supported by their managers than by their peers. Support staff also said that they did not always feel well supported by teachers.

While support staff in primary and secondary schools agreed that they played an important role in promoting positive relationships and behaviour in their schools, the qualitative research found that most support staff did not feel they have time within their contracted hours to enable discussions around classroom planning or discussions with colleagues/SMT/class teachers. Issues around contracted hours, schools lacking the funds to pay support staff to attend training or meetings outside of their working hours, and supply cover were also highlighted as barriers to support staff accessing appropriate support and training.

Among qualitative participants, there was a mismatch between the support LA representatives identified as being available to schools, and the support reported by schools. Headteachers, teachers and support staff, particularly those based in schools with more challenging levels of serious and disruptive behaviour, perceived that they were not always fully supported by their local authority.

The quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that serious disruptive incidents might be under-reported within schools and to the local authority. Primary and secondary staff in all roles were less likely to report an issue to anyone in 2023 than they were in 2016. The interviews found that staff did not report all incidents, both through in-school reporting systems and local authority reporting systems because of the lack of information provided to teachers and support staff following previous incidents to update them of the outcome and the perceived lack of support from local authorities. This reluctance was exacerbated by the view among some teachers that reporting appeared to be futile when there were 'no consequences' for disruptive pupils.

In addition, teachers complained of the amount of time they spent reporting behaviour incidents. The systems were considered difficult to navigate and overly time-consuming, particularly for staff working in schools with frequent and persistent disruptive behaviour.

Discussion and conclusions

In conclusion, in 2023 staff perceived that the majority of pupils were behaving well around the school and within the classroom, causing teaching staff few difficulties, and often accepting and mindful of their peers. However, the consensus of headteachers, class teachers and support staff was that there has been a general deterioration in the behaviour of pupils in primary and secondary schools in Scotland since 2016. Although the COVID-19 pandemic was thought to have been partly responsible for this observed deterioration, it was argued that the trend in more negative behaviour among pupils pre-dated the pandemic.

All school staff groups reported an increase in low level to more serious disruptive behaviours among pupils. Serious disruptive behaviours had a negative impact as a result of their very nature, but low level behaviours, such as pupils talking out of turn, were more prevalent, were difficult to deal with and caused frustration and fatigue among staff members. Notably, though, there was a reported increase in other serious disruptive behaviours, such as verbal abuse, physical aggression and violence, which were also occurring frequently, with verbal abuse being experienced by 67% of staff in the last week in the classroom. Since 2016, respondents also reported a greatly increased prevalence of pupils using phones/technology when they were not supposed to or in an abusive manner, as well as pupils being under the influence of alcohol and drugs in secondary schools.

School staff reported a positive view of the overall ethos of their schools, and teaching staff stated that they were mostly confident in their ability to 'promote positive behaviour' in their classrooms and to 'respond to indiscipline'. Serious cases of disruptive behaviour, though perceived to have increased, were still infrequent. Headteachers and local authority representatives also tended to have a more positive view of pupil behaviour and experiences within school as a whole.

In addition, school staff were generally supportive of more nurturing and restorative approaches to managing discipline, 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.

The majority of school-based respondents reported a positive school ethos and culture which, allied with the fact that most pupils were still perceived to be behaving well within the classroom and the school, suggests that there is a solid bedrock which can be built on if the more frequent low level disruption and the rarer but more serious cases of dysregulated behaviour can be addressed in the future.

Suggested changes called for by respondents to approaches and support

The qualitative research participants made a number of suggestions as to how relationships and behaviour in schools might be improved in the future, including:

Approaches

- A greater consistency in relation to approaches to relationships and behaviour: more clarity at a national level, in the form of national guidance or policy, as to which behaviours are and are not acceptable and how they might be managed consistently across schools in different areas.
- The perceived lack of consequences for pupils engaging in more disruptive behaviours: the management of the behaviour of a small core group of young people with whom all other approaches and strategies had been exhausted was thought to necessitate more robust measures. However, apart from suggestions such as removing pupils from the class temporarily, providing additional options for alternative provision or in more extreme cases the school, teachers were not always able to articulate what might be helpful.

Additional resources

- The respondents emphasised the importance of providing adequate resources to fund nurture and support for pupils with additional support needs in mainstream schools under the presumption of mainstream policy. The reported increase in pupils with additional support needs (e.g., ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder) and young people with undiagnosed conditions suggest that much higher levels of funding and support are required if these pupils' needs are to continue to be met in mainstream schools.

Enhanced support provision

- A lack of provision for social, emotional and behavioural needs (SEBN) within enhanced support provision: more places to be made available in enhanced provision to help support highly dysregulated pupils, more opportunities to be provided for support through third sector organisations and breadth of curriculum and learning options to be explored. Again, funding would be required to pay for these additional resources.

More support from national and local government bodies

- More support to be provided at national and local governmental level: this often related to resources, both in terms of staffing and funding, to allow schools to have the capacity to deal with disciplinary and behavioural issues, and to support pupils with additional support needs. It was proposed that the Scottish Government might issue a statement of support making clear that violence is unacceptable for school staff experiencing violence in their workplace.
- More communication from local authority staff about how specific school incidents had been addressed.

- A more visible presence from LA staff, such as visiting schools and experiencing the school environment.

Greater resources needed at LA level

- The benefits of additional funding for schools in deprived areas through the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) and the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC), for example, in establishing Inclusion Hubs, were outlined. However, school staff also highlighted instances where their funding from PEF and SAC had been reduced or come to an end, with implications for the funding of inclusion hubs and support staff levels.
- School staff perceived that cuts to statutory services (e.g., social work, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), alternative learning provision from third sector organisations, enhanced support provision, and numbers of support staff impacted on the resources available to schools to help some of their most dysregulated children and young people.

Need for additional staffing at school level

- At a school level, school staff called for funding to increase staff capacity to support pupils with distressed behaviour. Staff pointed to reductions in numbers of support staff, and the ways this has impacted on schools' ability to provide one-to-one support and facilitate nurture and well-being groups. Staff also called for smaller class sizes, particularly in the primary sector, to help staff build relationships with their pupils.

Need for more training/collaboration

- Class teachers called for more classroom observation from their peers to help them reflect and discuss strategies used, and access additional peer support from their colleagues, to help them promote positive relationships and behaviour. They also wanted more time after attending professional learning to be able to reflect on the sessions and consider how they could apply the strategies to improve behaviour.
- Support staff should be paid to undertake learning and development, including formal training, outside of school or their contracted hours. Support staff themselves requested appropriate induction training to support them in their roles with pupils.

Parental and pupil engagement

- Greater engagement with parents: as not all parents were perceived as being supportive of schools' efforts to address behaviour, and it was stressed that schools and teachers were being held accountable for wider social issues. Earlier intervention to help support struggling families was proposed, though the issue of providing this in the context of local authority budget cuts was recognised.

- It was suggested that campaigns to engage with pupils themselves to discuss their rights and responsibilities within school, and how to address low and more serious disruptive behaviours, might be beneficial.

Chapter 2 – Introduction

On behalf of the Learning Directorate Support and Wellbeing Unit, the Scottish Government Education Analytical Services Division commissioned the Scottish Centre for Social Research (ScotCen) to undertake a fifth wave of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (BISSR). Previous waves took place in 2006, 2009, 2012, and 2016. The fifth wave was scheduled to take place in 2020 and then again in 2021 but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The research explores staff perceptions and experiences of relationships and behaviour in Scottish schools with the aim of providing evidence to inform the development of relevant policy and practice.

The 2023 wave of the study continued the existing time series to examine changes in pupil relationships and behaviour in the school seven years after the previous wave. It is important to note that the data for this wave were collected following the period in which the COVID-19 pandemic led to severe restrictions impacting the delivery of school education in Scotland and the related experiences of pupils and staff. Furthermore, this wave also took place in the context of a cost-of-living crisis and some of the most significant industrial action over teacher and school staff pay for many decades, with school staff strikes taking place at the beginning of the survey fieldwork period in spring 2023. These issues may all have a bearing on the findings from this study.

Policy context

Supporting the development of and promoting positive relationships and behaviours in schools is a key aim of Scottish education policies. Specifically, this is demonstrated in policy guidance documents such as *Better Behaviour – Better Learning* (2001), *Building Curriculum for Excellence through positive relationships and behaviour* (2009), *Better Relationships, Better Learning, Better Behaviour* (2013) and, most recently, *Developing a Positive Whole-school Ethos and Culture – Relationships, Learning and Behaviour* (2018).

Other policy developments since the last wave of BISSR include *Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1: promoting and managing school attendance* (2019) and *Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2: A Positive Approach to Preventing and Managing School Exclusions* (2017). This guidance was developed to fulfil the Scottish Government's goals of improving attainment and employability by improving attendance, and to support schools in reducing the number of exclusions by improving school ethos and developing positive relationships and behaviour.

More widely, policies on relationships and behaviour in schools are embedded within and central to the delivery and implementation of policies such as the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) – both of which stress the importance of health and wellbeing for children's learning. *GIRFEC* is a specifically Scottish approach which promotes a holistic view of child

development and wellbeing¹¹. With values and principles based on children's rights, it is at the heart of Scottish Government's aim to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. The principles of GIRFEC have been enshrined in legislation through the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. GIRFEC highlights the importance of ensuring that children's wellbeing is at the heart of service provision and planning, and it promotes and supports effective partnership working across sectors – including, but not limited to, education, social services, and health. It does so through the provision of a shared language and a structured framework which identifies key aspects of children's wellbeing – namely the need for all children to be safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included (the 'SHANARRI' indicators).

CfE sets out the aim for Scottish education policy to support all children and young people to be successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens^{12,13}. A key feature of CfE is the emphasis on health and wellbeing as crucial preconditions for effective learning and the recognition that positive relationships and behaviour within the school environment play a crucial role in this. Related to CfE is the *National Improvement Framework* which sets out key priorities in the Scottish education system – one of which is the improvement of children and young people's health and wellbeing¹⁴.

Drawing on the principles of GIRFEC and CfE, *Developing a positive whole-school ethos and culture – Relationships, Learning and Behaviour*¹⁵ was developed in response to the 2016 Behaviour in Scottish Schools research¹⁶ and builds on earlier documents. The guidance sets out next steps, outcomes and priority actions identified by the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools (SAGRABIS).

Specifically, Scottish Government and Education Scotland committed to:

- establish a national steering group to develop a programme of professional learning for support staff;
- continue to fund development of a resource to support staff and children and young people to understand the impact of trauma, stress, bereavement and loss (Scottish Government);

¹¹ Scottish Government (2022) [Scottish Government - Getting it right for every child](#)

¹² Scottish Government (2008) *Curriculum for Excellence: Building the curriculum 3. A framework for learning and teaching*. Available at: [Building the Curriculum 3: A Framework for Learning and Teaching \(education.gov.scot\)](#)

¹³ [Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence](#)

¹⁴ Scottish Government (2019) [Scottish Government - 2019 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan: Achieving excellence and equity](#)

¹⁵ Scottish Government (2018) [Scottish Government - Developing a positive whole school ethos and culture: relationships, learning and behaviour](#)

¹⁶ Scottish Government (2017) [Scottish Government - Behaviour in Scottish schools: 2016 research](#)

- consider and act on the findings of a recent review of Personal and Social Education¹⁷ (Scottish Government);
- continue to provide support to develop policies and strategies to implement the guidance (Education Scotland); and
- continue to provide professional learning in approaches to develop positive relationships and behaviour (Education Scotland).

At the heart of the guidance is a recognition, as set out in CfE, that a positive and supportive learning environment is crucial for ensuring that all children and young people reach their full potential – and a prerequisite for achieving the aspirations of the *Scottish Attainment Challenge*, which aims to improve the attainment of children and young people in deprived areas and, ultimately, to close the poverty-related attainment gap¹⁸. More specifically, the guidance highlights the importance of developing a school ethos of mutual respect and trust between pupils and staff and notes the benefits associated with an ‘authoritative’ school ethos (or ‘climate’) where high expectations and structure exist alongside support and warmth (p.3).

Central to the Scottish Government’s commitment to an inclusive approach to education is the presumption of mainstream policy. The Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act 2000 placed a legislative duty on local authorities to provide education for all children and young people in a mainstream school or early learning and childcare setting unless specific exemptions apply. Guidance on the presumption to provide education in a mainstream setting was updated in 2019¹⁹. In the same year, the Scottish Government commissioned Angela Morgan to Chair an independent review of the implementation of additional support for learning (ASL) legislation²⁰ to see how ASL works in practice. The review found that implementation has been fragmented and inconsistent, and has been hampered by increases in the number of young people identified as having complex additional support needs while public sector resources have reduced at a time of austerity.

In developing a positive and supportive learning environment, schools in Scotland draw on a range of strategies to improve relationships and behaviours. These include restorative²¹ and nurture²² approaches. In addition to national policies and guidance, local authorities, supported by Education Scotland, may also produce their own guidance documents. For example, drawing on the principles set out in national policies and frameworks, Glasgow City Council and Education Scotland

¹⁷ Scottish Government (2019) [Review of Personal and Social Education: preparing Scotland's children and young people for learning, work and life](#)

¹⁸ Education Scotland (2017) [Education Scotland - Scottish Attainment Challenge](#)

¹⁹ Scottish Government (2019) [Scottish Government - Presumption to provide education in a mainstream setting: Guidance](#)

²⁰ Scottish Government (2020) [Scottish Government - Review of additional support for learning implementation: report](#)

²¹ Education Scotland (2021) [Education Scotland - Restorative approaches to support positive relationships and behaviour](#)

²² Education Scotland (2021) [Education Scotland - Nurture and trauma-informed approaches: A summary of supports and resources](#)

have produced a framework for incorporating nurturing approaches in schools and early learning and childcare establishments²³.

Pupils, teachers and schools faced unprecedented challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. School closures, remote learning, phased returns, differentiated timetables and the widespread rollout of public health measures in schools caused significant disruption to school education. A range of research has already demonstrated short- and medium-term impacts of this disruption on pupils. Much of this research has focused on the negative impact on pupil learning attainment, with pupils generally observed to be doing worse and disadvantaged pupils more so, thus widening the attainment gap²⁴. There is also a range of evidence demonstrating the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the wellbeing and mental health of children and young people in Scotland^{25,26}. The Equity Audit²⁷ examined a range of measures put in place by schools, local authorities and other partners to mitigate the impacts of school closures in 2020 due to COVID, with a focus on health and wellbeing and intensifying support. This helped to share understanding of the impact that COVID-19 and school building closures had on children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and set clear areas of focus for accelerating recovery, including the refresh of the Scottish Attainment Challenge programme.

As such, the COVID-19 pandemic required a policy response. In the *Education Recovery Key Actions and Next Steps: The contribution of education to Scotland's COVID recovery* (2021), the Scottish Government outlined additional funding commitments for the recruitment of extra staff to ensure resilience and to provide additional support for learning and teaching. In addition, the document reinforces the key priorities of Scottish education, namely:

- Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy;
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people;
- Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing; and
- Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people.

²³ Glasgow City Council (2017) [Glasgow City Council - Applying Nurture as a Whole School Approach: A Framework to support the Self-evaluation of Nurturing Approaches in Schools and Early Learning and Childcare \(ELC\) Settings](#)

²⁴ Education Endowment Foundation (2022) [Education Endowment Foundation - The Impact of COVID-19 on Learning: A review of the evidence](#)

²⁵ Public Health Scotland (2021). [Public Health Scotland - The impact of COVID-19 on children and young people in Scotland: 10 to 17-years-olds](#). Edinburgh. Public Health Scotland.

²⁶ Inchley et al (2023). [University of Glasgow - Findings from the HBSC 2022 Survey in Scotland. Health behaviour in school-aged children: World Health Organization collaborative cross-national study \(HBSC\)](#)

²⁷ The Scottish Government and Education Scotland (2021). Equity Audit. [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): impact of school building closures - equity audit - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

Mental health and wellbeing: whole school approach: framework (2021) recognised the already increasing trend in prevalence of poor mental health and wellbeing among pupils in Scotland and notes the potential further damaging impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this issue. Drawing on the restorative and nurture approaches already in place in schools throughout Scotland, the document provides a plan for how schools may work together with parents, carers, families and a range of partners in schools and the wider community to address these issues, many of which are related to pupil behaviour. The rollout of counselling through schools and professional learning on supporting children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing²⁸ will also assist in addressing these challenges.

As demonstrated above, an emphasis on supporting positive relationships and behaviour in schools and developing a positive school climate, is apparent across a range of Scottish education policies and frameworks. This includes key priorities for Scottish Government such as addressing the attainment gap and the impact of COVID-19. A supportive learning environment is central to ensuring that all children and young people – not least those who, for whatever reason, may not receive high levels of support at home – achieve the very best they can.

The Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research series represents a commitment to produce valid, reliable and robust data that can help put the policies into practice and, where needed, inform further policy development. These data will help provide a national picture of perceptions of positive and negative behaviour in Scottish schools, as well as information about the strategies being used by schools to promote positive behaviour, and their effectiveness.

Aims and objectives

The aim of this study was to provide a robust and clear picture of relationships and behaviour in publicly-funded mainstream schools and of current policy and approaches for supporting relationships and behaviour.

The 2023 wave of the study built on previous waves by providing an analysis of:

- the nature and extent of positive and negative behaviours in schools, examining trends over time and, in particular, changes that have occurred in the seven years since 2016 in the context of the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- the experiences of staff, examining similarities and differences in primary and secondary schools and between experiences of support staff, teachers and headteachers
- the factors linked to positive/negative behaviours including the perceived impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on pupil behaviour, school factors (such as size, urban/rural classification); the demographic profile of the pupils (such as

²⁸ Online professional learning on supporting children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing, [Children and Young People’s Mental Health - A Professional Learning Resource For All School Staff](#)

levels of deprivation and the proportion of pupils with Additional Support Needs); and the profile of teachers (such as length of service) and, in primary schools, the stage of pupils they are teaching (P1-P7)

- the impact of pupil behaviour on staff, other pupils and the overall ethos of the school
- the range of different approaches used in schools to support relationships and behaviour and staff perceptions of which are most effective in different circumstances. This includes: staff perceptions of school ethos and culture with regard to the promotion of positive relationships and behaviour; staff views on the effectiveness of support they receive to encourage positive relationships and manage negative behaviour; the confidence of staff in their ability to manage negative behaviour and the ways in which incidents of serious disruptive behaviour are followed up
- staff feelings about the level of support they receive from colleagues and more senior staff within the school and within the Local Authority

Report structure

The next chapter provides details of the research methodology and the following chapters discuss the findings in relation to the different themes and topics discussed above. Chapter four provides a comprehensive overview of perceptions of behaviour and chapter five considers how behaviour in 2023 compares to that reported in previous waves of the research. The specific impact of COVID-19 is considered in chapter six. Chapter seven explores which factors are associated with the likelihood of experiencing different types of behaviour whilst chapter eight discusses the perceived impact of behaviour on pupils and staff. Chapters nine and ten summarise findings on the approaches used by schools to manage behaviour and the support drawn on to do so. The report ends with conclusions and implications for policy and practice.

A key strength of the BISSR is its ability to provide robust data allowing the comparison of trends in behaviour over time. To achieve this, it is crucial that the language used in the survey questions is kept consistent across each wave. As the survey has now been running for almost two decades, some of this language may now seem a little out of date and some of the recent emerging trends may not be fully captured in the survey. Potential amendments for future waves are considered in the limitations of methodology and discussion of this report.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The research comprised a quantitative survey with headteachers, teachers and support staff and a programme of qualitative research with school staff and local authority representatives. The survey provided data on the frequency of different behaviours in schools and allows changes over time to be tracked. The qualitative research explored staff experiences in depth to add context and aid understanding of the survey findings. The qualitative research was also able to explore areas of relationships and behaviour in schools, and the impact of these, which were not captured by the survey.

Quantitative survey of headteachers, teachers and support staff

Questionnaire development

The questionnaire was largely based on the version used in the previous survey in 2016, with key measures of behaviour having remained since 2006 and retaining questions introduced in 2016. Two new questions were added to assess staff perceptions of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on pupil behaviour within the classroom and around the school. A small number of other questions and response categories were updated.

Pilot

A pilot was undertaken to test new and amended questions and assess the ease of the process. Schools were required to randomly select and invite staff to participate and assess the accessibility of the survey to staff. The pilot took place between 10 and 20 January 2023. Support staff, teachers and headteachers from two primary schools and one secondary school took part. Feedback and questionnaire data suggested that the new questions were well-received and were capturing what they aimed to measure. Adaptions were made to the survey layout on the web to improve accessibility and some of the questions, such as the list of school subjects that staff teach, were updated in response to feedback. Survey information letters were also updated to advise that the survey could be completed on a smartphone but would take longer to complete. The final version of the online script and paper version of the support staff questionnaire are provided in Annex A and B.

Some changes were also made to the process of administering the survey in response to feedback. This included enabling the Key Contact in each school (the staff member in charge of inviting staff to take part) to email invitation letters to staff rather than having to hand them out. Feedback suggested that making this change would greatly increase response, especially in larger schools where it would be time consuming to hand these out to all the selected staff in person. This change required some adaptation to associated processes related to how staff accessed the survey.

Survey mode

As in 2016, the survey was conducted online with respondents having the option to complete the questionnaire on a device (PC, laptop, tablet or smartphone²⁹) at school, at home or elsewhere. Sampled staff were provided with a web link to access the survey. Once the survey had been started, participants were given an access code that could be used to re-enter their questionnaire should they get interrupted.

Based on previous waves of the survey and feedback from the pilot, it was considered necessary to provide a paper version of the questionnaire as an option for support staff where they didn't have easy and confidential access to a school computer within their normal working day. Given the clear advantages of web completion, including ease/speed, higher quality data³⁰, the cost saving and environmental benefits, online participation in the survey was encouraged for support staff where possible (and where privacy could be maintained). However, it was considered important, for maximizing response, to allow support staff the option to complete the survey online or on paper, depending on what was most convenient.

To further encourage response, especially at a time of industrial action among schoolteachers and staff, efforts were made to publicise the study and encourage participation through members of SAGRABIS (Scottish Advisory Group on Behaviour in Scotland), including COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities), ADES (The Association of Directors of Education in Scotland) and the main teaching unions.

Sampling and recruitment

All publicly funded, mainstream schools in Scotland were included in the sampling frame³¹. To achieve the required number of secondary school staff participating, all eligible secondary schools were sampled and invited to participate, resulting in an issued sample of 330 schools.

508 primary schools (out of a total of 2000) were sampled and invited to participate. To ensure that the selected schools were representative, a stratified random sampling approach was used. Stratification was by size of school, urban/rural category and the proportion of the school roll living in the 20% most deprived areas of Scotland³².

²⁹ It was noted to participants that whilst it was possible to complete the survey on a smartphone, it would take longer to complete the survey in this way

³⁰ Due to the greater control over routing and automatic checks where respondents miss out a response or enter an impossible/implausible response

³¹ Special schools were not included, and schools listed as both primary and secondary were treated as primary only. A further 4 newly opened schools that were not in the 2021 Scottish Government school-level summary statistics therefore were not included as data required for sample stratification was not yet available.

³² Sample distribution by Local Authority was checked and was a close match to the population.

The headteacher was invited to participate in all sampled schools. Teachers and support staff were sampled in proportion to the number of teachers in the school³³.

Headteachers were sent an advance letter informing them about the survey and encouraging them to take part. They were asked to complete a brief online form to confirm if they were willing to participate and to provide contact details of the member of staff in their school they wished to nominate as a key contact for the study. Any that did not complete the form were contacted by ScotCen telephone interviewers to confirm whether they were willing to participate and to obtain details of their key contact. A relatively small number of schools (n=11) opted out of participating in the survey at this stage. The key contact was then sent full instructions on how to randomly select the appropriate number of teachers and support staff, together with electronic versions of survey invitation letters and (where required) paper versions of the questionnaires for support staff. A copy of the key contact instructions is provided in Annex C and an example of an invitation letter (the version for teachers) in Annex D.

Survey fieldwork was carried out between 27 February 2023 and the 6 April 2023, with paper questionnaires accepted up until 12 April 2023.

Reminder calls and emails were made to survey key contacts in schools during the fieldwork period and support offered by ScotCen for any schools needing guidance on the steps required to take part. The first reminder call was to ascertain if key contacts had received the survey pack and to remind them of the key tasks involved and the fieldwork period. The second call was made a few weeks into fieldwork to contact schools where less than 10% had completed the survey by this time.

Many of the questions ask about staff experiences over the last full teaching week, though a sub-set of questions asked about the number of incidents of serious disruptive behaviour against them in the last 12 months. The experiences of individuals will, to some extent, vary from week to week (e.g. in some weeks they may experience more positive behaviours than in others). However, the large sample size means that these variations should offset one another – those who experienced more positive behaviours than they usually do in the last teaching week are balanced by those who experienced fewer positive behaviours than they usually do. So, while the reports from some respondents will be ‘atypical’ for them as individuals, the overall picture of behaviour in schools across Scotland will be accurate. There may be some seasonal fluctuation in behaviours (e.g. relating to the weather, if it is towards the beginning or end of a term or the timing of exams). Fieldwork for this wave started slightly later than in previous waves³⁴ and closer to pre-exam time and the Easter break. It should be noted that the fieldwork period coincided with a period of industrial action by school staff including several days of

³³ The number of teachers invited per school was proportionate to the total number of teachers that worked in each school. As limited data was available about the number of support staff per school, the number of support staff invited per school was also allocated proportionately to the total number of teachers that worked in each school.

³⁴ Fieldwork in 2016 ran from 9th February to 18th March which was very similar to previous waves

national and regional teacher strikes resulting in school closures. This may have had some impact on the reported experiences of some staff. The fieldwork period was extended to help account for disruption as a result of industrial action by school staff at the time and the change to the fieldwork period might have also had some impact on reported experiences of pupil behaviour.

Response rates

The response rates are shown in Table 3.1 below. The overall response rate in 2023 was 43%. This is down from 48% in 2016. It had been anticipated the recent COVID-19 pandemic and industrial action among school staff would impact on response. However, this trend does also reflect a wider decline in response rates on almost all major social surveys in the UK and internationally over the last 10-15 years³⁵. The response rate in 2016 had also seen a fall since 2012 which may have been partly due to the switch to online, competing demands among school staff and reduced capacity (including the loss of some posts) at the LA level³⁶. Response rates had notably risen between 2009 and 2012 which may have been due to improved pre-survey publicity; the efforts of local contacts to encourage schools in their area to take part (particularly from Positive Behaviour Team link officers); the introduction of telephone calls to headteachers at the recruitment stage and the introduction of key contacts in schools.

Differences in response rates between teachers and support staff have remained fairly consistent with the proportions achieved in 2016, taking into account the 5 percentage point reduction in overall response. The response rate among headteachers has fallen more substantially below the rate in 2016. This may be, at least in part, due to the fieldwork having taken place closer to pre-exam time and the Easter break and due to the impact of industrial action among school staff immediately before and during the beginning of fieldwork.

³⁵ Bolling, K. and Swales, K. (2017) *Response Rates on UK Random Probability Face-to-face Surveys*, paper presented at the MRS Roundtable on Research Design, Data Collection and Innovation

³⁶ These reasons were given by schools in 2016 for not having the time to participate for both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the research

Table 3.1: Response among primary and secondary school staff in 2023 and previous waves

| Staff category | 2023 selected sample | 2023 achieved sample ³⁷ | 2023 response rate | 2016 response rate | 2012 response rate | 2009 response rate |
|-------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Primary headteachers | 508 | 223 | 44% | 58% | 73% | 57% |
| Primary teachers | 1514 | 669 | 44% | 47% | 69% | 43% |
| Primary support staff | 1029 | 452 | 44% | 47% | 69% | 45% |
| Secondary headteachers | 330 | 134 | 41% | 53% | 70% | 65% |
| Secondary teachers | 3906 | 1689 | 43% | 46% | 61% | 43% |
| Secondary support staff | 1442 | 587 | 41% | 47% | 60% | 52% |
| Total | 8729 | 3754 | 43% | 48% | 64% | 47% |

Overall, 525 schools took part in the survey out of the 838 schools invited.

All teacher and headteacher completions were carried out online. More support staff than expected completed the survey on paper, with around half (51%) of total support staff completions being carried out this way (Table 3.2). The paper completion rate is considerably higher than in 2016³⁸. Whilst support staff were encouraged to participate in the 2023 survey online where possible, it was considered important to give them the option to complete the survey on paper should they prefer this for convenience, privacy or other reasons. There were some differences in the wording of the support staff materials (the paper questionnaire is provided in Annex B).

Table 3.2 Number of support staff completions by questionnaire mode

| Support staff survey completion mode | No. | % of total completions |
|--------------------------------------|------|------------------------|
| Web | 510 | 49% |
| Paper | 529 | 51% |
| Total | 1039 | 100% |

³⁷ Prior to weighting the response data was checked for identifiable errors, where respondents may have selected an incorrect school from the drop-down list at the start of the survey. As a result of standard web and paper survey completion checks 11 duplicate responses were excluded from the overall response.

³⁸ 10% of support staff completed the survey on paper in 2016

Weighting

The survey data was weighted to control for the effects of sampling and to ensure the achieved sample more closely matched the population of schools and staff. The weighting method consisted of two stages: development of a pseudo-selection weight and calibration of the weight to population estimates of:

- Staff role (head teacher, teacher, or support staff)
- School type (primary or secondary)
- Sex (male or female, head teachers and teachers only)
- Working status (full-time or part-time, teachers only)
- Contract status (temporary or permanent, teachers only)

The survey weighting has brought the weighted data close to population estimates, thus the survey data presented in this report is representative at a national level. Further detail of the weighting is provided in Annex G.

Analysis

Where differences between 2016 and 2023 and between sub-groups are reported, they are statistically significant at the 5% level. Any tables or figures showing sub-group differences only present variables where the difference was statistically significant. Statistically significant changes are referred to throughout the report as being 'higher' or 'lower' or an 'increase', 'decrease' or 'decline'. The exception is Chapter 7 which uses the term 'significant' or 'statistically significant' in relation to predictors of pupil behaviour as it is presenting the findings of a regression analysis, which differs to other chapters.

Weighted datasets for previous waves were unavailable to the research team. As such, similar to 2016, a guide was developed to help determine whether changes in survey estimates between 2016 and 2023 were statistically significant (see 'Notes to tables' in the supplementary tables for Chapter 4 and 5). Calculations of statistical significance included an estimated design factor associated with data from 2016. In reality, this design factor is likely to be an over-estimate for some variables and an underestimate for others. Reported statistical significance since the 2016 survey should therefore be treated only as an indication of such. Differences between 2016 and 2023 that are close to statistical significance are also noted throughout the report. In the absence of weighted datasets for each previous wave of the survey, the longer-term trends since 2006 has focused on patterns of change over time rather than on statistically significant changes. Figures on the longer-term trends were taken, where available, from previous published

reports^{39,40,41,42}. Due to some of the 2006 figures not being available some were taken from the 2016 longer term trends charts and may therefore be 1-2 percentage points different from the original figures. Given the gap between the 2016 and 2023 wave of the survey, which has been twice the length of the gap between most previous waves, there is a gap shown in the x-axis of the charts in the longer-term trends section of this report.

Figures presented within the report on responses to individual questions, or within sub-groups, may sometimes add up to 99% or 101% due to rounding. The 2023 figures including decimal places are presented in the supplementary tables. The 2016 figures in the supplementary tables do not present decimal places as these are taken directly from the 2016 tables which were rounded to 0 decimal places.

For some of the changes since 2016 discussed in the Impact of Behaviour and Approaches used in schools chapters 'Don't know' responses were included for both 2016 and 2023 to allow comparison. This was due to these being included in the 2016 tables. As 'Don't know' would typically be excluded from these types of survey questions, the 2023 findings presented at the beginning of these chapters do not include this so some of these percentages may therefore slightly differ to the 2023 figures presented in the changes over time sub-section that follows. The Supplementary tables for these two chapters (Chapter 8 and 9) show both the figures excluding the 'Don't know' category (just for 2023) and the figures including it (comparing 2016 and 2023).

Qualitative research with headteachers, teachers, support staff and local authority representatives

A programme of qualitative research was conducted between February and July 2023 to add context and detail to the survey findings and explore new and emerging issues in depth. The qualitative research comprised interviews with headteachers and teachers and focus groups with classroom-based support staff at 14 schools (6 primary schools, 8 secondary schools), and interviews with 30 local authority education representatives. Qualitative research with parents and pupils was not conducted as part of this study.

³⁹ Behaviour in Scottish Schools (2006). Wilkin, A., Moor, H., Murfield, J., Kinder, K., Johnson, J. National Foundation for Educational Research. Scottish Executive Social Research. [Behaviour in Scottish Schools \(core.ac.uk\)](http://core.ac.uk)

⁴⁰ Behaviour in Scottish Schools (2009). Munn, P., Sharp, S., Lloyd, G., MacLeod, G. et al. Moray House School of Education and Sport, Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity. [Behaviour in Scottish Schools 2009: Final Report — University of Edinburgh Research Explorer](http://www.ed.ac.uk/research-explorer)

⁴¹ Behaviour in Scottish Schools (2012). Black, C., Chamberlain, V., Murray, L. et al. Ipsos MORI Scotland. Scottish Government. [Behaviour in Scottish schools 2012: final report | The Learning Exchange \(iriss.org.uk\)](http://www.iriss.org.uk)

⁴² Behaviour in Scottish Schools (2016). Black, C., Eunson, J., Murray, L et al. Ipsos MORI Scotland. Scottish Government. [Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research 2016 \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

Interviews with local authority representatives

Interviews were conducted with representatives of 30 out of the 32 local authorities in Scotland between February and July 2023. The Director of Education for each local authority identified the most appropriate senior member of staff who had both strategic responsibility for, and a good overview of, policy and practice on behaviour in schools, meaning that LA representatives working in a number of different roles were interviewed. These included those working in and leading inclusion services, quality improvement services and educational psychology. These individuals were invited to take part in an interview. All interviews took place online and were conducted by a member of the ScotCen team.

Interviews lasted around one hour and were structured around a topic guide (Annex E). Interviews were audio-recorded, with the participants' consent, and transcribed.

Fieldwork in schools

ScotCen staff undertook visits to 14 schools (8 secondary and 6 primary schools) during the summer term (April – June) of 2023. Visits to 13 schools were conducted in person by members of the research team and one was conducted online.

Schools were sampled from those that had taken part in the quantitative survey and where headteachers had given their consent to be contacted about further research. Sampling was conducted to ensure the inclusion of a range of schools varying on a number of factors including school size, deprivation (based on SIMD quintiles of catchment area), frequency of types of behaviour as reported in the survey, rurality, local authority, proportion of pupils with additional support needs, proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language and proportion of pupils from a Black and minority ethnic background.

Selected schools were recruited by email and phone call. The timing of the fieldwork in the run up to the summer holidays meant that staff were very busy and recruitment was challenging. Headteachers in participating schools were asked to circulate details of the research to their staff, arrange a quiet, private space for the fieldwork to take place and schedule time slots for those staff to meet with a member of the ScotCen research team. In each school, the research team conducted an interview with the headteacher, interviews with 3-4 teachers and a focus group with classroom-based support staff (range 2-6 support staff; mean 3.75 per group). Verbal consent was collected from all participants at the time of the interview or focus group. The number of participants in the school fieldwork is shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Number of participants in the qualitative school fieldwork

| Staff type | Primary | Secondary |
|---------------------|------------|-----------|
| Headteachers | 6 | 8 |
| Depute headteachers | - | 1 |
| Teachers | 15 | 31 |
| Support staff | 19 | 29 |
| Total | 109 | |

A flexible approach was offered to support schools to participate in the research. Some schools experienced challenges in releasing staff within the school day in the structure set out above. Therefore, the following exceptions were made:

- In one school, individual interviews were conducted with support staff
- In one school, a focus group was conducted with teachers
- In one school, the headteacher and depute headteacher were interviewed together
- One school was unable to release staff to take part and only the headteacher was interviewed.

The majority of fieldwork was conducted in-person on the school premises. Online interviewing was used on a small number of occasions to allow staff with other commitments on the day of the school visit to take part, for example, in instances of staff absence.

Interviews and focus groups were timed to fit around school periods and were between 45 minutes and an hour in length, and were structured around topic guides (Annex E). All interviews were audio-recorded, with the participants' consent, and transcribed.

All participating schools were offered a £100 donation to school funds as a thank you for participating in the research.

Analysis and interpretation

To systematically manage the qualitative data collected, NatCen's Framework approach⁴³ was used in NVivo 12 and Microsoft Excel. A coding frame was developed to code the data to a number of categories. Within each category, a matrix was created, where each row represented a participant and each column a key theme. All available qualitative data was then summarised within the matrix.

⁴³ Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., McNaughton Nicholls, C., and Ormston, R. [eds.] (2013). *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. London: Sage

Once the raw data for each strand has been coded, it was analysed using a mixed deductive/inductive approach to thematic analysis.

Limitations of methodology

As noted earlier in this chapter, it is possible that the timings of the survey fieldwork for this wave (starting slightly later than in previous waves and closer to the pre-exam time and Easter break) might have had some impact on reported experiences of pupil relationships and behaviour. The coincidence of the survey fieldwork with a period of industrial action by school staff (including several days of national and regional teacher strikes resulting in school closures) may also have had some impact on the reported experiences of some staff.

There were limitations in relation to the contact strategy with schools immediately prior to and during the fieldwork period that could potentially be improved upon in future waves. For a number of schools, it was not possible to reach the nominated key contact via the contact details provided. Therefore, the survey materials were sent to the headteacher directly and email reminders to the general school administrative team. Some schools reported later in fieldwork that the key contact did not receive the pack on time which had some impact on response rates. For future waves there should be consideration of additional approaches for communicating with schools in which headteachers had opted to take part but had subsequently not responded to contact.

In this wave of the survey, as one measure to maximise overall response, key contacts in the schools could either hand out paper copies of the survey invitation or email it to the selected staff. The email invitations did not contain an individual-level access code for the survey due to privacy issues and the need to simplify the process. Instead, a question was included in the survey to record which school each respondent worked in and their staff type in order to compare this with the number of expected survey completions from each school to inform weighting. In taking this approach there is a small risk that some respondents chose the incorrect school from the drop-down list in the survey and a possibility of some over-sampling if an individual responded more than once or more staff were invited to undertake the survey than was stated in the survey instructions for that school. The level of potential impact this might have had on survey response has been reviewed and assessed as minimal.

There are limitations with regards to the survey findings on staff experiences of abuse from pupils directed towards them and other staff due to protected characteristics. As staff demographics relating to protected characteristics other than gender⁴⁴ were not captured by the survey it is not possible to ascertain whether the study accurately reflects the experiences of these demographic groups. Whilst we would expect proportionate representation of these demographic

⁴⁴ The following protected characteristics were not captured in the survey: age, race, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnerships and pregnancy and maternity

groups within the sample given the approach taken to sampling⁴⁵, it is not possible to check overall representation of each demographic group against the staff population within schools in Scotland. It is possible, though unlikely, that particular demographic groups might have been less likely to participate in the study for various reasons. It should also be noted that the prevalence of experiences reported by staff in the survey may be lower than the actual prevalence of experiences of such behaviour. Reporting of experiences may be influenced by a range of factors, for example desensitisation if certain types of behaviours are being experienced often enough to be normalised or sometimes forgotten. Further research with school staff from different demographic groups including those with protected characteristics would be beneficial to explore the experiences of these staff.

As noted within Analysis, data from 2016 and previous waves were taken, where available, from previous published reports, due to previous weighted datasets not being available. This has limited the level of analysis of the longer-term trends to reporting on the overall pattern rather than on statistical significance and there are some caveats (as noted in Analysis) of the approach for interpreting significance of differences observed since 2016. There are several longer-term trends charts in Chapter 5 for which it has not been possible to find exact figures for earlier waves directly from published reports; these have had to be taken from the 2016 figures which do not contain data labels and therefore some figures may be 1-2 percentage points different to the data. This will likely have minimal impact upon the patterns reported across the time series.

As noted in the introduction, a key strength of the BISS survey is the continuity of the time series since 2006. However, maintaining the time series through using the same questions, some of which were developed prior to 2006 or 2009, means that the terminology used in some questions is now out of date. Whilst this was noted by some staff in the survey pilot and in the qualitative research, this is unlikely to have impacted on the quality of the survey data. It could be beneficial to review whether any adaptations can be made for future waves whilst maintaining the key time series data. This is considered further in Recommendations for future iterations of the BISSR study in Chapter 11 Discussions and Conclusions.

It is possible that schools who engaged with the qualitative research were more likely to be those which were not experiencing staff shortages or time challenges, or which were coping well despite these challenges. However, it is important to note that many of the participants in the qualitative research described similar on-going challenges within their schools.

As befits a case study approach, the views of those in the 14 schools that took part in the qualitative phase are not representative of all schools across Scotland. However, they were purposively sampled from the 153 schools that took part in the

⁴⁵ Further detail is provided in Annex G on the technical details of the survey sampling and the instructions for schools on how to select the sample of staff to invite to take part is provided in Annex D

survey element and where headteachers gave their consent to be contacted about the qualitative research.

Due to the project budget, there was no scope to include the views of pupils and parents in this iteration of the BISS study. This should be considered for future waves as considered in the recommendations within the Discussion of this report.

Chapter 4 – Overall perceptions of behaviour

Summary of findings

Staff were asked about their experience of a wide range of positive behaviours and disruptive behaviours across 3 categories (low level disruptive, disengagement, serious disruptive). For low level and disengagement behaviours the proportion of staff that have experienced each of these at least once a day in the last teaching week is reported on. Among the serious disruptive behaviours staff were first asked how frequently they had experienced each of these behaviours between pupils in the last teaching week. They were then asked how frequently they had experienced these serious disruptive behaviours being directed at themselves or other staff⁴⁶.

Both primary and secondary school staff reported generally good behaviour among most or all pupils in the classroom (65%) and around the school (85%). However, low level disruptive behaviour, disengagement and particular serious disruptive behaviours were also frequently experienced by staff. One of the most common low-level disruptive behaviour was pupils talking out of turn, with 86% of staff having encountered this at least once a day in the last week. One of the most common disengagement behaviours was pupils withdrawing from interaction with staff/others, with 43% having encountered this on a daily basis.

The most common forms of serious disruptive behaviours between pupils were physical and verbal abuse which were encountered by a considerable proportion of staff on a routine basis, particularly physical aggression, general verbal abuse and physical violence⁴⁷. Two-thirds (67%) had encountered general verbal abuse, 59% physical aggression and 43% physical violence between pupils in the classroom in the last week. The proportion of staff witnessing abuse between pupils related to protected characteristics was less common, but for some types of abuse this was still reported by around 1 in 5 staff in the last week. For example, 24% of staff encountered abuse towards pupils who have additional support needs in the last week, 18% encountered sexist abuse or harassment and homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards other pupils and 17% encountered racist abuse towards other pupils in the classroom in the last week.

There were differences in the types of behaviour experienced by staff in different roles. Headteachers were more likely to report higher levels of positive behaviour and lower levels of disruptive behaviour than teachers or support staff. However, a higher proportion of headteachers reported having experienced at least one instance of physical violence and aggression and verbal abuse towards them personally in the last 12 months compared with other staff. Support staff were more

⁴⁶ Most of these questions ask how often staff have experienced each of these behaviours within the last teaching week, with the exception of a question that asks how many incidents of each type of behaviour they have personally experienced directed at them in the last 12 months.

⁴⁷ For serious disruptive behaviours the proportion of staff that have experienced each of these at least once during the last teaching week is reported on, rather than at least once a day as these occur less frequently than low-level and disengagement behaviours.

likely than headteachers or teachers to encounter almost all types of serious disruptive behaviours between pupils. In addition, a higher proportion of support staff report having experienced the greatest number (21 or more) instances of physical aggression and violence towards them in the last 12 months compared with other staff. Teachers were more likely to report at least one personal experience of racist and sexist abuse or harassment in the last 12 months compared with other staff.

Positive behaviours were encountered more often in primary schools than in secondary schools. Most of the low level and negative behaviours were more common in secondary schools than primary schools. There was general trend of positive behaviours decreasing and negative behaviours increasing with increased pupil age. The exception was physical aggression and violence, both directed at other pupils and towards staff, which were more often experienced in primary schools compared with secondary schools. Primary 1 -3 teachers were also more likely to encounter these behaviours towards themselves or other staff in the classroom compared with P4-7 teachers and in P4-7 compared with in secondary school.

The use of mobile phones and digital technologies abusively was also one of the most frequently experienced serious disruptive behaviours among secondary staff. Among the other most frequently experienced serious disruptive behaviours in secondary schools were general verbal abuse between pupils and towards staff, physical aggression/violence between pupils and pupils under the influence of drugs/alcohol. P4-7 teachers report higher frequencies of all low level disruptive behaviours in the classroom than P1-3 teachers. In terms of disengagement, pupils deliberately socially excluding others was more commonly experienced by primary staff but pupils leaving the classroom without permission or truanting are more likely to be reported in secondary school.

Whilst over a third of staff had experienced general verbal abuse⁴⁸ and 16% had experienced physical aggression and 11% physical violence towards themselves or other staff in the last week, it was relatively unusual for staff to report that they routinely experienced abuse directed towards themselves or other staff related to race, sex and sexuality, religion, or disability. A small proportion (6% or less⁴⁹) of all staff had personally experienced abuse due to each of the protected characteristics in the last 12 months. However, as staff demographics relating to protected characteristics other than gender are not captured by the survey, it is not possible to ascertain whether the study accurately reflects the experiences of these demographic groups. A higher proportion of secondary school staff report experiencing sexist abuse or harassment, racist, religious and homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse compared with primary school staff.

⁴⁸ 38% had experienced this in the classroom and 32% around the school in the last week

⁴⁹ This varies for each of the protected characteristics asked about, ranging from 0% for some to 6% for others.

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of survey findings relating to staff perceptions of pupil behaviour in the classroom and around the school. It discusses different types of behaviour including positive, low level disruptive and serious disruptive.

Differences in perceptions between staff in different roles are considered along with differences between staff in primary and secondary schools and those working with pupils in primaries 1-3 and in primaries 4-7.

Headteachers and teachers were asked about behaviours around the school and in the classroom whilst support staff were asked only about behaviours in the classroom.

General behaviour

To measure general behaviour around the school, staff were asked how many pupils they found to be generally well behaved. Responses were given on a five-point scale ranging from 'all/almost all' to 'none/almost none'. For the purposes of summarising the findings, results for the two highest categories 'all/almost all' and 'most' have been combined.

The majority (85%) of staff report that most/all pupils are well behaved around the school. There are differences here by staff type with headteachers being more likely to report all or most children being generally well behaved (99%) than teachers (85%) or support staff (84%). Primary school staff are also more likely than secondary school staff to report that all or most pupils are well behaved around the school (89% compared with 81%, Table 4.1).

To capture perceptions of general behaviour in the classroom, headteachers were asked how many pupils they believed were generally well behaved in lessons whilst teachers and support staff were asked in how many lessons they find pupils generally well behaved. Although most staff (65%) report that all or most pupils are generally well behaved in the classroom (or that in all or most lessons pupils are generally well behaved), it is clear that perceptions of behaviour in the classroom are less positive than perceptions of behaviour around the school.

Similar to behaviour around school, headteachers are more likely to report good behaviour than teachers or support staff. Almost all (98%) headteachers believed that most/all pupils are well behaved in lessons compared with 69% of teachers and 50% of support staff. Perceptions also vary by school type with primary school staff more likely to report positive behaviour in the classroom than secondary school staff (71% compared with 58%, see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Proportion of staff reporting that all or most pupils are generally well-behaved by staff and school type

| | | In the classroom (%) | Around the school (%) | Unweighted bases |
|-------------|---------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Staff type | Headteacher | 98 | 99 | 357 |
| | Teachers | 69 | 85 | 2354 |
| | Support staff | 50 | 84 | 1026 |
| School type | Primary | 71 | 89 | 1340 |
| | Secondary | 58 | 81 | 2397 |
| All | | 65 | 85 | 3737 |

Where headteachers and teachers said that at least some pupils were generally well behaved around the school, they were then asked a series of follow-up questions asking about general behaviour in specific parts of the school including corridors, toilets, the dining hall, playground/social areas and other areas of the school grounds. Support staff were not asked these questions as they were only asked questions relating to pupil behaviour in the classroom.

The patterns in perceptions of behaviour around the school generally by school and staff type are largely repeated in views about behaviour in different areas of the school. Headteachers are more likely than teachers to consider all or most pupils well-behaved in all areas of the school, including in particular corridors (97% compared with 71%) and toilets (86% compared with 53%). Similarly, primary school staff are more likely to report more positive behaviour than secondary school staff (Table 4.2). For example, 81% of primary school staff believe all or most pupils are well behaved in corridor areas compared with 63% of secondary school staff. Toilets are the area where staff are least likely to report positive behaviour. This is particularly the case for secondary school staff only 40% of whom believe all or most pupils are generally well behaved in the school toilets.

Table 4.2 Proportion of staff reporting that all or most pupils are generally well-behaved in certain areas of school by staff type and school type

| | | Corridor (%) | Toilets (%) | Dining hall (%) | Playground/social areas (%) | Other areas of school grounds (%) |
|------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Staff type | Headteacher | 97 | 86 | 99 | 94 | 97 |
| | Teachers | 71 | 53 | 76 | 69 | 73 |
| School type | Primary | 81 | 66 | 82 | 73 | 81 |
| | Secondary | 63 | 40 | 74 | 66 | 66 |
| Unweighted bases | Headteacher | 348 | 349 | 347 | 348 | 335 |
| | Teachers | 2264 | 2022 | 2028 | 2132 | 2063 |
| | Primary | 864 | 849 | 848 | 859 | 827 |
| | Secondary | 1748 | 1522 | 1527 | 1621 | 1571 |

Positive behaviour

In the classroom

To explore positive behaviour in more detail, headteachers, teachers, and support staff were asked how often they had experienced specific positive pupil behaviours in class over the last full teaching week. Behaviours included, for example, pupils following instructions and contributing to class discussions. Responses were on a five-point scale from 'all lessons' to 'no lessons'. In presenting the findings, results for the two highest categories 'all' and 'most' have been combined.

The most commonly reported positive behaviours are pupils following instructions and pupils seeking support from staff or peers when needed. For each, 69% of staff had observed this in all or most lessons in the past week. The least common positive behaviours are pupils listening to others and contributing actively during group work and pupils working independently without adult support when appropriate. Forty-nine percent of staff had experienced the former behaviours and 44% the latter behaviours in all or most lessons over the last week.

Experience varies by staff type (Table 4.3). Headteachers report the highest frequency of positive behaviours followed by teachers and support staff. For example, 91% of headteachers say that pupils listened to staff respectfully in all or most lessons compared with 63% of teachers and 45% of support staff.

Table 4.3 Proportion of staff reporting individual positive behaviours in all or most lessons in the last week by staff type

| | All (%) | Headteacher (%) | Teacher (%) | Support staff (%) |
|--|---------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Pupils following instructions | 69 | 97 | 74 | 53 |
| Pupils settling down quickly | 55 | 92 | 58 | 42 |
| Pupils contributing to class discussions | 68 | 91 | 69 | 61 |
| Pupils listening to others' views respectfully | 51 | 83 | 53 | 42 |
| Pupils listening to staff respectfully | 59 | 91 | 63 | 45 |
| Pupils keenly engaging with their tasks | 58 | 85 | 62 | 43 |
| Pupils seeking support from staff or peers when needed | 69 | 87 | 68 | 68 |
| Attentive, interested pupils | 59 | 90 | 62 | 45 |
| Pupils arriving promptly for classes | 64 | 87 | 64 | 60 |
| Pupils interacting supportively with each other | 54 | 81 | 54 | 49 |
| Pupils enthusiastically participating in classroom activities | 58 | 83 | 61 | 50 |
| Pupils listening to others and contributing actively during group work | 49 | 77 | 49 | 44 |
| Pupils working independently without adult support when appropriate | 44 | 77 | 46 | 35 |
| Unweighted bases | 3732 | 351 | 2352 | 1035 |

There are also differences by school type with primary school staff experiencing all positive behaviours more frequently than secondary school staff (Table 4.4). The difference between primary and secondary staff experiences was particularly stark in relation to pupils arriving promptly for class (78% of primary staff reported this for all or most lessons compared with 48% of secondary staff), which may be expected given the different arrangements in the two school types⁵⁰. However, notable differences are also seen in relation to pupils contributing to class discussions,

⁵⁰ In secondary schools, pupils are required to move between different classes over the course of a school day increasing the opportunity for arriving late, whereas in primary school pupils will be in a single class throughout the day with late arrivals only likely at school opening and following lunch and break times.

pupils seeking support from staff or peers when needed, pupils enthusiastically participating in classroom activities and pupils listening to others and contributing actively during group work.

Table 4.4 Proportion of staff reporting of individual positive behaviours in all or most lessons in the last week by school type

| | Primary (%) | Secondary (%) |
|--|-------------|---------------|
| Pupils following instructions | 73 | 64 |
| Pupils settling down quickly | 61 | 49 |
| Pupils contributing to class discussions | 81 | 53 |
| Pupils listening to others' views respectfully | 60 | 41 |
| Pupils listening to staff respectfully | 67 | 51 |
| Pupils keenly engaging with their tasks | 70 | 44 |
| Pupils seeking support from staff or peers when needed | 82 | 54 |
| Attentive, interested pupils | 70 | 46 |
| Pupils arriving promptly for classes | 78 | 48 |
| Pupils interacting supportively with each other | 65 | 41 |
| Pupils enthusiastically participating in classroom activities | 72 | 44 |
| Pupils listening to others and contributing actively during group work | 62 | 34 |
| Pupils working independently without adult support when appropriate | 51 | 37 |
| Unweighted bases | 1340 | 2398 |

For some behaviours, different experiences are also reported by primary teachers responsible for different year groups (Table 4.5). For all questions, P4-7 teachers report less frequent positive behaviours in the classroom than P1-3 teachers. For example, 77% of P1-3 teachers experienced pupils enthusiastically participating in classroom activities in most or all lessons in the past week compared with 68% of P4-7 teachers.

Table 4.5 Proportion of teachers reporting individual positive behaviours in all or most lessons in the last week by primary stage taught

| | Primary 1-3 (%) | Primary 4-7 (%) |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| Pupils contributing to class discussions | 86 | 80 |
| Pupils listening to others' views respectfully | 64 | 59 |
| Pupils keenly engaging with their tasks | 76 | 71 |
| Attentive, interested pupils | 76 | 68 |
| Pupils interacting supportively with each other | 66 | 61 |
| Pupils enthusiastically participating in classroom activities | 77 | 68 |
| Unweighted bases | 296 | 387 |

Around the school

In addition to questions on positive behaviour in class, headteachers and teachers were also asked how often they had experienced certain positive pupil behaviours around the school over the last full teaching week. The behaviours covered this time included taking turns, making positive use of school facilities during breaks and using litter bins. Staff indicated whether they had experienced each behaviour always, on most occasions, sometimes, seldom or never. Findings are generally reported in relation to a category combining the proportion of staff selecting 'always' or 'on most occasions'

Staff are most likely to frequently encounter pupils greeting them pleasantly – 69% saying this happened always or on most occasions – and least likely to encounter pupils challenging others' negative behaviour – only 14% said this happened always or on most occasions⁵¹.

Similar to patterns seen in relation to individual positive behaviours in the classroom, experiences of positive behaviour around the school varied by staff and school type. Headteachers are more likely than teachers to more frequently encounter positive behaviour around the school (Table 4.6). For example, 96% of headteachers encountered pupils greeting staff pleasantly always or on most occasions compared with 68% of teachers.

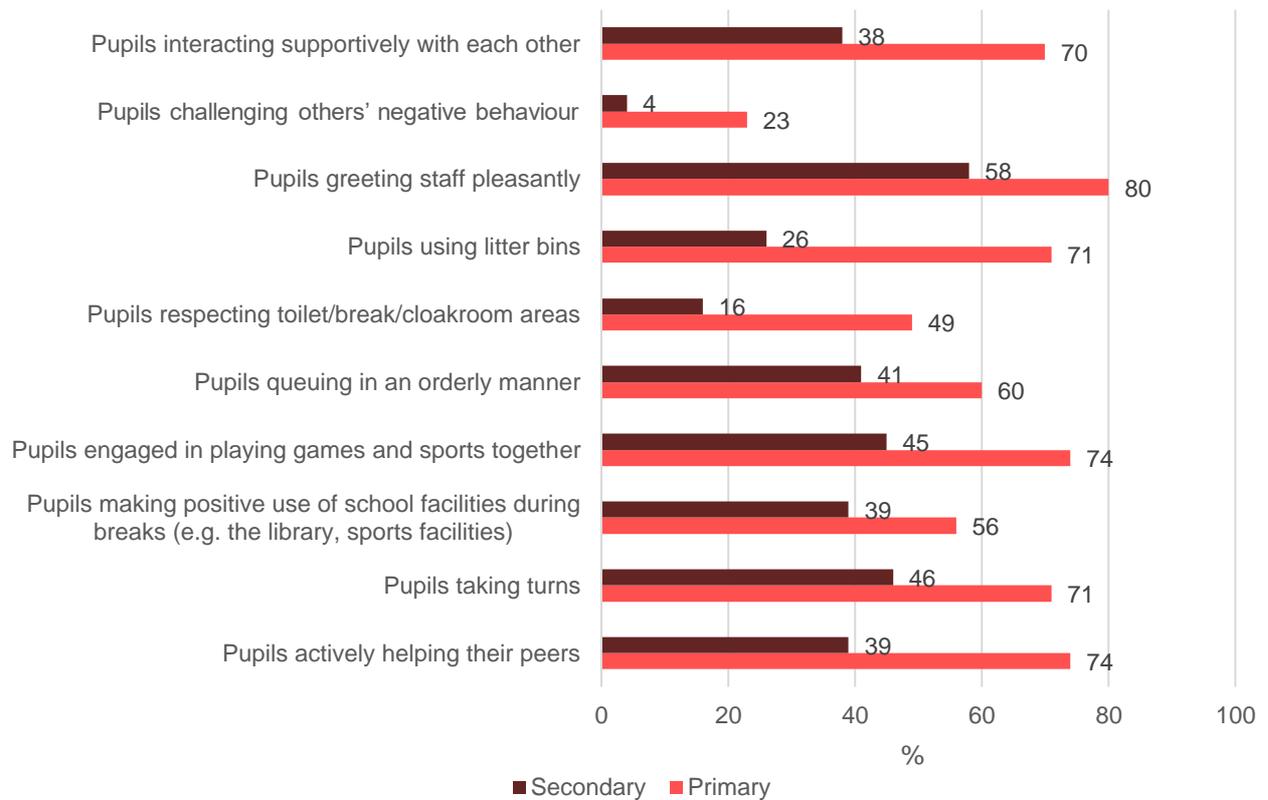
⁵¹ Though this will also reflect the frequency at which staff witnessed an opportunity for pupils to challenge others' negative behaviour

Table 4.6 Proportion of staff reporting individual positive behaviours around the school always/on most occasions in last week by staff type

| | All (%) | Headteacher (%) | Teacher (%) |
|--|---------|-----------------|-------------|
| Pupils actively helping their peers | 57 | 87 | 56 |
| Pupils taking turns | 59 | 89 | 58 |
| Pupils making positive use of school facilities during breaks (e.g., the library, sports facilities) | 48 | 75 | 47 |
| Pupils engaged in playing games and sports together | 60 | 85 | 59 |
| Pupils queuing in an orderly manner | 51 | 86 | 49 |
| Pupils respecting toilet/break/cloakroom areas | 33 | 69 | 32 |
| Pupils using litter bins | 49 | 82 | 48 |
| Pupils greeting staff pleasantly | 69 | 96 | 68 |
| Pupils challenging others' negative behaviour | 14 | 22 | 14 |
| Pupils interacting supportively with each other | 54 | 83 | 53 |
| Unweighted bases | 2648 | 351 | 2279 |

Primary school staff more frequently report encountering all positive behaviours around school than secondary school staff (Figure 4.1). The difference in experience is largest in relation to pupils using litter bins - 71% of primary staff encountered this always or on most occasions compared with just 26% of secondary staff.

Figure 4.1 Proportion of staff reporting individual positive behaviours around the school always/on most occasions this week by school type



Some limited differences in experience are reported between primary teachers with lower and upper school classes. P4-7 teachers are less likely than P1-3 teachers to frequently encounter pupils queuing in an orderly manner (54% always or on most occasions compared with 61%) and pupils interacting supportively with each other (64% compared with 72%), although upper primary school teachers are more likely than secondary teachers to frequently encounter all behaviours. These figures are shown in supplementary tables 4.22-4.31.

Low level disruptive behaviour

In the classroom

A series of questions were asked to capture how often staff had to deal with specific types of low level disruptive behaviour over the last full teaching week. Eleven types of behaviour were covered including talking out of turn, hindering other pupils, not being punctual and work avoidance. Headteachers were asked how often each behaviour had been **referred on to them** and how often they **think teachers within the school would have to deal with** low level disruptive behaviour in the last teaching week. Teachers and support staff were asked how often they had to deal with the particular behaviour in class over the last week. In both cases, staff responded using a seven point range from several times a day to not at all.

The most frequent disruptive behaviour experienced is talking out of turn - 86% of staff had dealt with this at least once a day. The least common behaviour was pupils going on to websites they shouldn't (e.g. to play games or use social media) when digital technologies were being used in teaching and learning. Forty percent of staff experienced this at least once a day.

The overall figures mask some variation across staff groups (Table 4.7). The findings show that low level disruption in the classroom is not often referred on to headteachers but it is frequently experienced by a large majority of teachers and support staff. The experience of teachers and support staff is similar in relation to most behaviours, but support staff are more likely to report experiencing some behaviours more often. For example, 68% of support staff experience cheeky or impertinent remarks at least once a day compared with 57% of teachers. Support staff also experience children getting out of their seat without permission and general rowdiness more frequently than teachers.

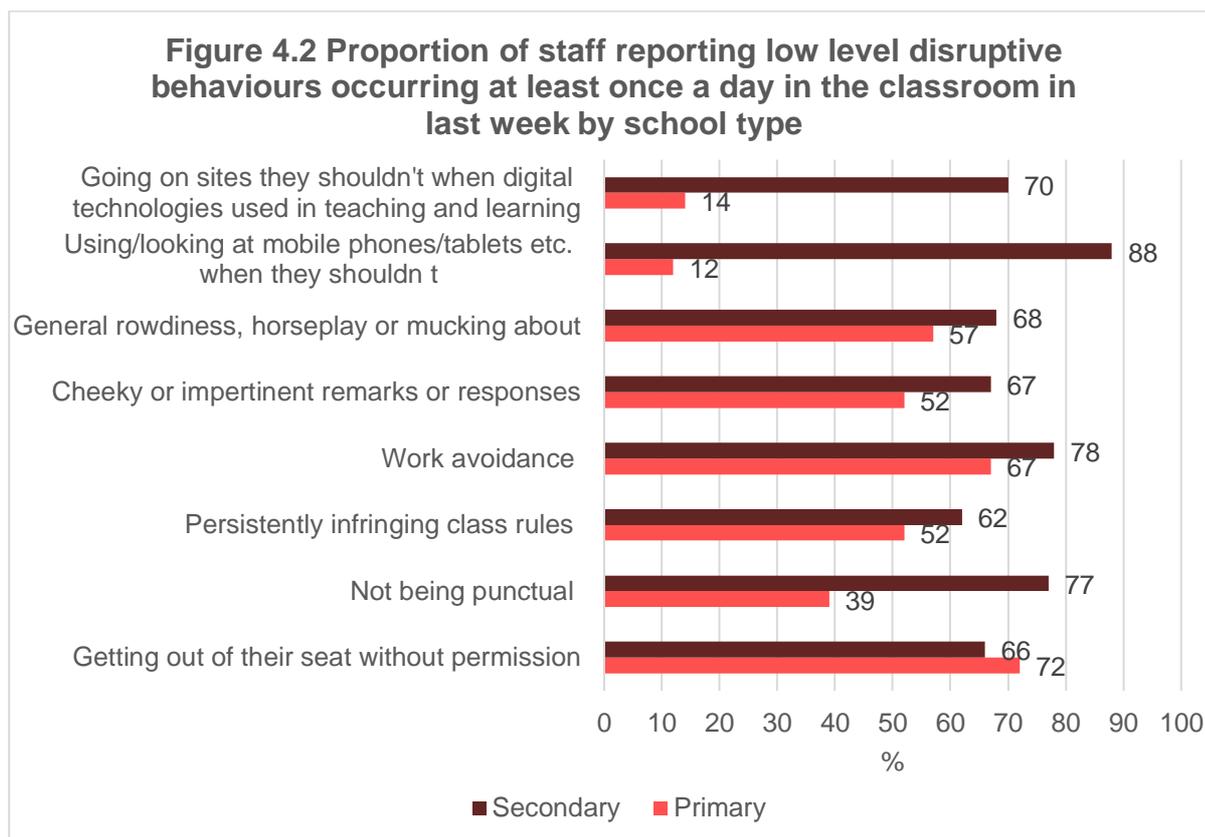
Table 4.7 Proportion of staff reporting low level disruptive behaviours occurring at least once a day in the classroom in last week by staff type

| | All (%) | Headteacher (%) | Teacher (%) | Support staff (%) |
|---|---------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Talking out of turn (e.g., by making remarks, calling out, distracting others by chattering) | 86 | 27 | 88 | 86 |
| Making unnecessary (non-verbal) noise (e.g., by scraping chairs, banging objects) | 74 | 19 | 75 | 78 |
| Hindering other pupils (e.g., by distracting them from work, interfering with materials) | 76 | 23 | 77 | 77 |
| Getting out of their seat without permission | 69 | 22 | 68 | 76 |
| Not being punctual (e.g., being late to lessons) | 58 | 16 | 60 | 56 |
| Persistently infringing class rules (e.g., pupil behaviour, safety) | 57 | 22 | 56 | 63 |
| Work avoidance (e.g., delaying start to work set) | 72 | 22 | 74 | 74 |
| Cheeky or impertinent remarks or responses | 59 | 21 | 57 | 68 |
| General rowdiness, horseplay or mucking about | 62 | 19 | 61 | 70 |
| Using/looking at mobile phones/tablets etc. when they shouldn't (e.g., messaging, playing games, listening to music) | 48 | 9 | 51 | 47 |
| Going on sites they shouldn't (e.g., to play games, use social media) when digital technologies used in teaching and learning | 40 | 7 | 42 | 41 |
| Unweighted bases | 3687 | 355 | 2344 | 1028 |

Headteachers seem to appreciate how commonly teachers are having to deal with low level disruptive behaviours in the classroom, even though these behaviours are not often referred onto them. The majority (80%) of headteachers reported that they think that teachers within their school would have to deal with low level disruptive behaviour in the classroom at least once a day. This varied by school type with secondary headteachers more likely to report this (92%) compared with primary headteachers (77%).

The experience of low level disruptive behaviour in class differs between staff in primary and secondary schools (Figure 4.2). For example, secondary staff are more likely than primary staff to report more frequent occurrence of lack of punctuality (77% of secondary staff experienced this at least once a day compared with 39% of primary staff) and work avoidance (78% compared with 67%). In contrast, primary staff experienced children getting out of their seat without permission more often than secondary staff (72% at least once a day compared with 66%). A number of

further differences between the experiences of primary and secondary staff reflect, in a way similar to the difference on punctuality, the different teaching and learning contexts in which they operate. For example, there is a notable difference between primary and secondary school staff in terms of their experience of disruptive behaviour involving technology, which is more common for secondary staff. Eighty-eight percent of secondary staff experience pupils using or looking at mobile phones/tablets when they shouldn't at least once a day and 70% experience pupils going on sites they shouldn't when digital technologies are being used at least once a day compared with 12% and 14% of primary staff respectively.



Experience of low level disruptive behaviour in the classroom also differs by primary stage (Table 4.8). P4-7 teachers report higher frequencies of all of these behaviours than P1-3 teachers. In particular, compared with P1-3 teachers, those teaching P4-7 report more frequent experience of pupils getting out of their seat without permission (80% experience at least once a day compared with 70%), cheeky or impertinent remarks (60% compared with 49%) and pupils going on sites they shouldn't when digital technologies are used (22% compared with 11%).

Table 4.8 Proportion of staff reporting low level disruptive behaviours occurring at least once a day in the classroom in last week by primary stage taught

| | P1-3 (%) | P4-7 (%) |
|---|----------|----------|
| Talking out of turn (e.g., by making remarks, calling out, distracting others by chattering) | 92 | 93 |
| Making unnecessary (non-verbal) noise (e.g., by scraping chairs, banging objects) | 76 | 81 |
| Hindering other pupils (e.g., by distracting them from work, interfering with materials) | 78 | 82 |
| Getting out of their seat without permission | 70 | 80 |
| Not being punctual (e.g., being late to lessons) | 42 | 45 |
| Persistently infringing class rules (e.g., pupil behaviour, safety) | 55 | 56 |
| Work avoidance (e.g., delaying start to work set) | 66 | 75 |
| Cheeky or impertinent remarks or responses | 49 | 60 |
| General rowdiness, horseplay or mucking about | 60 | 62 |
| Using/looking at mobile phones/tablets etc. when they shouldn't (e.g., messaging, playing games, listening to music) | 9 | 16 |
| Going on sites they shouldn't (e.g., to play games, use social media) when digital technologies used in teaching and learning | 11 | 22 |
| Unweighted bases | 295 | 385 |

Around the school

To further explore lower level disruptive behaviour, headteachers and teachers were asked how often they had encountered a range of other types of negative behaviour **around the school** over the last full teaching week. Behaviours this time ranged from running in the corridor to leaving the school premises without permission. Again, staff responded on a seven point scale ranging from several times a day to not at all.

Running in the corridor is the behaviour headteachers and teachers most frequently experience – 68% do so at least once a day. In contrast, using digital technology (e.g. computers, tablets, mobile phones) against school policy was the least common behaviour experienced, though still encountered by 39% of staff at least once a day.

Again, following trends reported already, headteachers encounter all behaviours less frequently than teachers (Table 4.9). For example, 58% of teachers

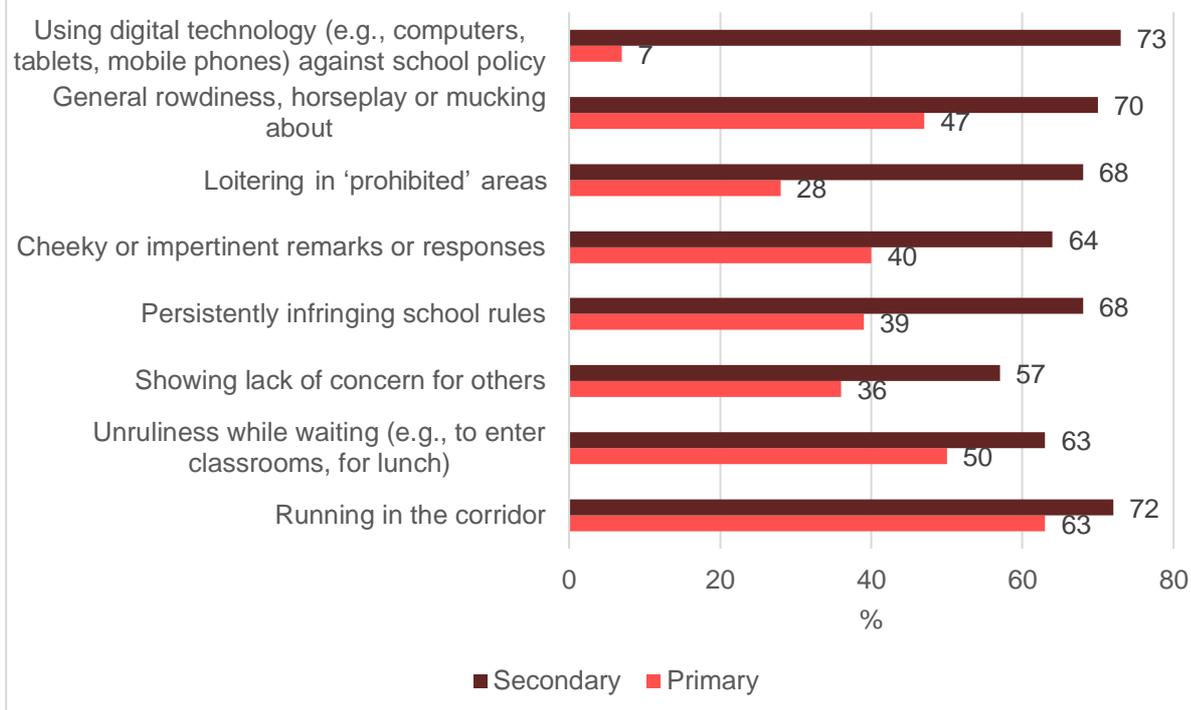
experience unruliness of pupils whilst they are waiting to enter classrooms or for lunch compared with 19% of headteachers.

Table 4.9 Proportion of staff encountering negative behaviours at least once a day around the school in last week by staff type

| | All (%) | Headteacher (%) | Teacher (%) |
|--|---------|-----------------|-------------|
| Running in the corridor | 68 | 36 | 69 |
| Unruliness while waiting (e.g., to enter classrooms, for lunch) | 56 | 19 | 58 |
| Showing lack of concern for others | 46 | 15 | 48 |
| Persistently infringing school rules | 53 | 20 | 55 |
| Cheeky or impertinent remarks or responses | 52 | 22 | 53 |
| Loitering in 'prohibited' areas | 48 | 18 | 49 |
| General rowdiness, horseplay or mucking about | 58 | 22 | 59 |
| Using digital technology (e.g., computers, tablets, mobile phones) against school policy | 39 | 8 | 41 |
| Unweighted bases | 2590 | 353 | 2300 |

Secondary school staff are more likely than primary school staff to report experiencing a higher frequency of all these behaviours (Figure 4.3). There are particularly stark and perhaps unsurprising differences between primary and secondary staff in their experience of pupils using digital technology against school policy (73% of secondary staff encountering at least once a day compared with 7% of primary staff) and loitering in prohibited areas (68% of secondary staff encountering at least once a day compared with 28% of primary staff). Experiences between school types are more similar in relation to running in the corridor and unruliness while waiting.

Figure 4.3 Proportion of staff encountering negative behaviours at least once a day around the school in last week by school type



The experience of lower and upper primary school teachers is broadly similar in relation to these behaviours. There are only two behaviours experienced notably more often by P4-7 teachers: cheeky or impertinent remarks or responses (45% experience at least once a day compared with 40% of P1-3 teachers) and using digital technology against school policy (10% compared with 4%). These figures are shown in supplementary tables 4.45-4.53.

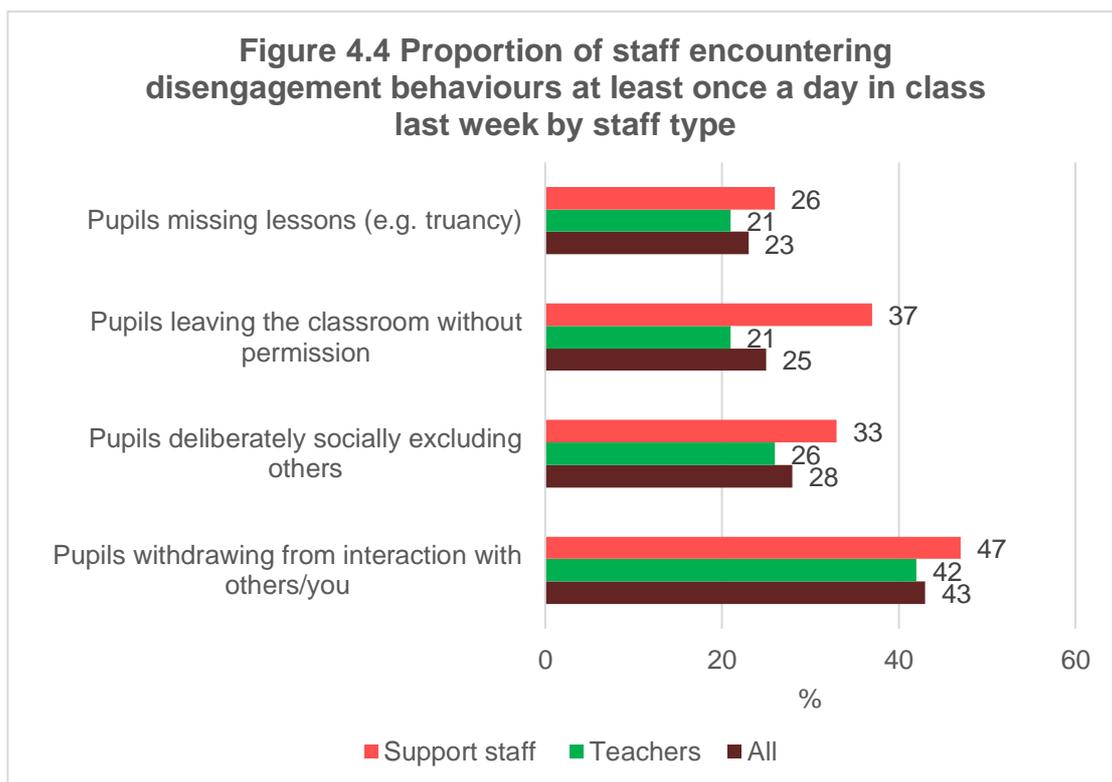
Disengagement

In the classroom

Teachers and support staff were also asked how often they had encountered a range of pupil disengagement behaviours in class in the last full teaching week. These behaviours included pupils: withdrawing from interaction with staff/others; deliberately socially excluding others; leaving the classroom without permission and missing lessons (e.g. truancy).

Staff are most likely to experience pupils withdrawing from interaction and least likely to experience pupils missing lessons. Forty-three percent of teachers and support staff encountered pupils withdrawing from interaction at least once a day and 23% encountered pupils missing lessons at least once a day.

Support staff report higher levels of disengagement behaviours than teachers, particularly in relation to pupils leaving the classroom (Figure 4.4). In the last week, 37% of support staff had experienced this at least once a day compared with 21% of teachers. This is perhaps expected given that support staff are often working closely with pupils who exhibit more disruptive behaviour.



Some classroom disengagement behaviours varied by school type. Pupils deliberately socially excluding others was more commonly experienced by primary staff (42% experience this at least once a day compared with 34% of secondary staff) but pupils leaving the classroom without permission or truanting are more likely to happen in secondary school. Forty-one percent of secondary school staff encounter this at least once a day compared with just 5% of primary staff. There are no differences in withdrawing from interaction by school type and experiences of P1-3 and P4-7 staff are also broadly similar.

Around the school

Headteachers and teachers were asked how often they had encountered the same set of behaviours **around the school** in the last full teaching week.

The frequency of these behaviours encountered by staff around the school is broadly similar with each experienced at least once a day by between 20% and 26% of staff. Pupils socially excluding others was the least common behaviour encountered and pupils truanting was the most common. A similar proportion of staff encountered pupils missing lessons, as presented above, and truanting (23% and 26%).

Following the trends seen for other behaviours, headteachers are less likely than teachers to have encountered all behaviours (Table 4.10).

Differences by school type mirror those seen in relation to classroom disengagement. The experience of primary and secondary school staff is more similar in relation to pupils withdrawing from interaction and socially excluding others but quite different in terms of pupils leaving the classroom without permission and truanting. For example, whilst 50% of secondary staff experience truanting at least once a day, the same is true of only 4% of primary staff.

Table 4.10 Proportion of staff encountering disengagement behaviours at least once a day around the school in the last week by staff type

| | All (%) | Headteacher (%) | Teacher (%) |
|---|---------|-----------------|-------------|
| Pupils withdrawing from interaction with you/others | 22 | 9 | 23 |
| Pupils deliberately socially excluding others | 20 | 7 | 20 |
| Pupils leaving school premises without permission | 21 | 7 | 21 |
| Pupils truanting | 26 | 11 | 27 |
| Unweighted bases | 2552 | 353 | 2119 |

Serious disruptive behaviour

Serious disruptive behaviour by pupils includes different types of verbal abuse towards staff and other pupils - such as sexist or racist abuse – and physical abuse and aggression, including violence towards staff and other pupils and damage of school property. This section reports on the proportion of staff having experienced each of these at least once during the last teaching week, rather than at least once a day as these occur less frequently than low-level and disengagement behaviours. Staff were first asked how frequently they had experienced each of these behaviours between pupils in the last teaching week. They were then asked how frequently they had experienced these behaviours being directed at themselves or other staff⁵².

In the classroom

Physical and verbal abuse towards pupils

Headteachers, teachers and support staff were asked how often they experienced different types of physical and verbal abuse between pupils during lessons over the last teaching week.

As may be expected, many of these more serious behaviours are less common than the low level disruptive behaviours and disengagement that have already been discussed. Therefore, for these behaviours the proportion of staff that have encountered these at least once in the last teaching week have been reported. Nevertheless, some types of physical and verbal abuse between pupils are seen by a considerable proportion of staff on a routine basis.

General verbal abuse (including offensive, insulting, or threatening remarks) and physical aggression between pupils, such as pushing or squaring up, are the behaviours most likely to have been encountered by staff. Over two-thirds (67%) encountered the former and 55% the latter at least once a week. In contrast, only 5% of staff experience religious abuse towards other pupils at least once a week making it the least common behaviour encountered.

Overall, the majority (76-95%) of staff have not encountered abuse towards other pupils due to each of the protected characteristics at all in the classroom in the last teaching week. This does not include general verbal abuse and physical aggression/violence which were all encountered towards other pupils more frequently. See supplementary tables 4.62-4.71 for the full breakdown of how frequently staff have encountered each of these serious disruptive behaviours in the classroom towards other pupils.

Reports of serious disruptive behaviour directed towards other pupils in the classroom differs by staff type. On almost all of the behaviours measured here, support staff are more likely than headteachers or teachers to encounter it (Table 4.11). Notable differences can be seen in relation to abuse towards pupils with a

⁵² Most of these questions ask how often staff have experienced each of these behaviours within the last teaching week, with the exception of a question that asks how many incidents of each type of behaviour they have personally experienced directed at them in the last 12 months.

disability or additional support needs. For example, 30% of support staff encounter abuse towards pupils who have additional support needs at least once a week compared with 23% of teachers and 13% of headteachers. The experience of different staff is more similar in relation to physical abuse, though support staff are still more likely than headteachers and teachers to encounter physical destructiveness and aggression. All staff types are similarly likely to encounter physical violence between pupils with 43% doing so at least once a week.

Table 4.11 Proportion of staff encountering different types of serious disruptive behaviour and abuse towards pupils in the classroom at least once in the last week by staff type

| | All (%) | Headteacher (%) | Teacher (%) | Support staff (%) |
|---|---------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Racist abuse towards other pupils | 17 | 19 | 16 | 22 |
| Sexist abuse or harassment of other pupils | 18 | 12 | 17 | 22 |
| Abuse towards other pupils who have a disability | 12 | 5 | 10 | 19 |
| Abuse towards other pupils who have additional support needs | 24 | 13 | 23 | 30 |
| Religious abuse towards other pupils | 5 | 1 | 5 | 7 |
| Homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards other pupils | 18 | 10 | 19 | 17 |
| General verbal abuse towards other pupils (e.g., offensive, insulting, or threatening remarks) | 67 | 57 | 67 | 69 |
| Physical destructiveness (e.g., breaking objects, damaging furniture and fabric) | 47 | 39 | 46 | 50 |
| Physical aggression towards other pupils (e.g., by pushing, squaring up) | 59 | 59 | 56 | 70 |
| Physical violence towards other pupils (e.g., punching, kicking, head butting, use of a weapon, throwing objects) | 43 | 48 | 40 | 52 |
| Unweighted bases | 3718 | 356 | 2346 | 1025 |

Reports of physical and verbal abuse amongst pupils also varies by school type (Table 4.12). Primary school staff are more likely than secondary staff to encounter a higher frequency of physical aggression and violence between pupils. For example, 52% of primary staff encounter physical violence between pupils at least once a week compared with 33% of secondary staff. In contrast, secondary staff report higher frequencies of most other kinds of abuse. The difference is particularly stark in relation to homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards other pupils which 30% of secondary staff encounter at least once a week compared with 8% of primary staff. But notable differences are also evident in experience of sexist abuse or harassment and general verbal abuse.

Table 4.12 Proportion of staff encountering different types of abuse towards pupils in the classroom at least once in the last week by school type

| | Primary (%) | Secondary (%) |
|---|-------------|---------------|
| Racist abuse towards other pupils | 13 | 22 |
| Sexist abuse or harassment of other pupils | 10 | 27 |
| Abuse towards other pupils who have a disability | 7 | 17 |
| Abuse towards other pupils who have additional support needs | 18 | 31 |
| Religious abuse towards other pupils | 3 | 7 |
| Homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards other pupils | 8 | 30 |
| General verbal abuse towards other pupils (e.g., offensive, insulting, or threatening remarks) | 59 | 76 |
| Physical aggression towards other pupils (e.g., by pushing, squaring up) | 63 | 55 |
| Physical violence towards other pupils (e.g., punching, kicking, head butting, use of a weapon, throwing objects) | 52 | 33 |
| Unweighted bases | 1335 | 2392 |

Staff in upper and lower primary school also report differences in their experience of verbal abuse towards pupils in the classroom. Staff working with pupils in P4-7 report higher frequencies of most behaviours than those working with pupils in P1-3⁵³. For example, 16% of P4-7 staff encounter racist abuse towards other pupils at least once a week compared with 7% of P1-3 staff. Although the frequency of experiencing different behaviours varies, the margin of difference between upper

⁵³ The only exception was for physical violence for which a similar proportion reported having experienced this in the classroom amongst pupils in the last week (52% among P1-3 teachers and 51% among P4-7 teachers).

and lower primary staff in the proportion who encounter the behaviour at least once a week is similar for each behaviour at around 5-9 percentage points.

Table 4.13 Proportion of teachers encountering different types of abuse towards pupils in the classroom at least once in the last week by primary stage taught

| | P1-3 (%) | P4-7 (%) |
|---|----------|----------|
| Racist abuse towards other pupils | 7 | 16 |
| Sexist abuse or harassment of other pupils | 6 | 12 |
| Abuse towards other pupils who have a disability | 4 | 9 |
| Abuse towards other pupils who have additional support needs | 16 | 23 |
| Homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards other pupils | 5 | 12 |
| General verbal abuse towards other pupils (e.g., offensive, insulting or threatening remarks) | 56 | 64 |
| Unweighted bases | 295 | 385 |

Use of a weapon towards pupils

Staff who reported any experience of violent behaviour towards other pupils in the classroom (43%) were asked how frequently these incidences involved the use of weapon. Of this group, 14% of staff reported that they had to deal with the use of a weapon specifically at least once in the last week. This equates to around 6% of all staff. Experiences of physical violence towards other pupils involving a weapon did not vary by staff type or school type. See supplementary table 4.71 for a full breakdown of these figures.

Physical and verbal abuse towards staff

Along with questions on abuse towards pupils experienced in class, headteachers, teachers and support staff were also asked how often they experienced the same behaviours towards staff in class. This includes behaviours and abuse witnessed in class towards another staff member as well as those that were directed at the staff member themselves.

Some behaviours were very rare, as shown in Table 4.14. There is no routine experience of abuse of staff related to a disability or related to religion and relatively low proportions of all staff encounter racist abuse (1%), sexist abuse or harassment (5%) or homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse (1%) at least once a week⁵⁴. Physical aggression and physical violence are more common though only frequently experienced by a minority of staff. For example, 11% of staff

⁵⁴ Note that this refers to the proportion of all staff that report each of these types of abuse directed at themselves or other staff and does not reflect the proportion of staff with each of these protected characteristics that have experienced these in this time frame. See Limitations to methodology in Chapter 3.

encountered physical violence towards themselves or other staff at least once in the last week. Staff are most likely to encounter general verbal abuse on a frequent basis – 38% did so at least once in the last week including 10% who did so once a day.

Table 4.14 Proportion of staff encountering different types of abuse towards themselves or other staff in the classroom not at all and at least once in the last week

| | Not at all (%) | At least once (%) |
|---|----------------|-------------------|
| Racist abuse towards you/staff | 99 | 1 |
| Sexist abuse or harassment towards you/staff | 95 | 5 |
| Abuse towards themselves/staff who have a disability | 100 | 0 |
| Abuse towards themselves/staff who have additional support needs | 100 | 0 |
| Religious abuse towards you/staff | 99 | 1 |
| Homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards staff/you | 99 | 1 |
| General verbal abuse towards staff/you (e.g., offensive, insulting or threatening remarks) | 62 | 38 |
| Physical aggression towards you/staff (e.g. by pushing, squaring up) | 84 | 16 |
| Physical violence towards you/staff (e.g. punching, kicking, head butting, use of a weapon, throwing objects) | 89 | 11 |
| Unweighted bases | 3,725 | 3,725 |

Abuse towards staff varies by staff type (Table 4.15). In this instance, headteachers are more likely than teachers and support staff to encounter these behaviours. Around one in two (49%) headteachers experienced general verbal abuse towards themselves or other staff in the last week compared with two in five teachers (38%) and support staff (39%).

Table 4.15 Proportion of staff encountering abuse towards staff in the classroom at least once in the last week by staff type

| | All (%) | Headteacher (%) | Teacher (%) | Support staff (%) |
|--|---------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|
| General verbal abuse towards you/staff (e.g. offensive, insulting or threatening remarks) | 38 | 49 | 38 | 39 |
| Physical aggression towards you/staff (e.g., by pushing, squaring up) | 16 | 30 | 12 | 23 |
| Physical violence towards you/staff (e.g., punching, kicking, head butting, use of a weapon, throwing objects) | 11 | 25 | 8 | 19 |
| Unweighted bases | 3725 | 357 | 2346 | 1024 |

There are also differences by school type (Table 4.16). Similar to the patterns in abuse towards pupils in the classroom, primary school staff report higher frequencies of physical violence and aggression towards staff than secondary staff. For example, 19% of primary staff encountered physical aggression in class in the last week compared with 11% of secondary staff. On the other hand, secondary school staff report higher levels of all other types of abuse towards staff. As may be expected, secondary staff are particularly more likely than primary staff to encounter pupils under the influence of drugs (18% of secondary school staff experienced at least once in the last week compared with no primary school staff) and using digital technology abusively (27% compared with 6%).

Table 4.16 Proportion of staff encountering abuse towards staff in the classroom at least once in the last week by school type

| | Primary (%) | Secondary (%) |
|--|-------------|---------------|
| Racist abuse towards you/staff | <1 | 2 |
| Sexist abuse or harassment towards you/staff | 2 | 7 |
| Religious abuse towards you/staff | <1 | 1 |
| Homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards you/staff | <1 | 2 |
| General verbal abuse towards you/staff (e.g. offensive, insulting or threatening remarks) | 30 | 47 |
| Physical aggression towards you/staff (e.g. by pushing, squaring up) | 19 | 11 |
| Physical violence towards you/staff (e.g. punching, kicking, head butting, use of a weapon, throwing objects) | 17 | 4 |
| Pupils under the influence of drugs/alcohol | <1 | 18 |
| Using digital technology (e.g. computers, tablets, mobile phones) abusively (e.g. malicious posting of comments, photos, videos) | 6 | 27 |
| Unweighted bases | 1338 | 2389 |

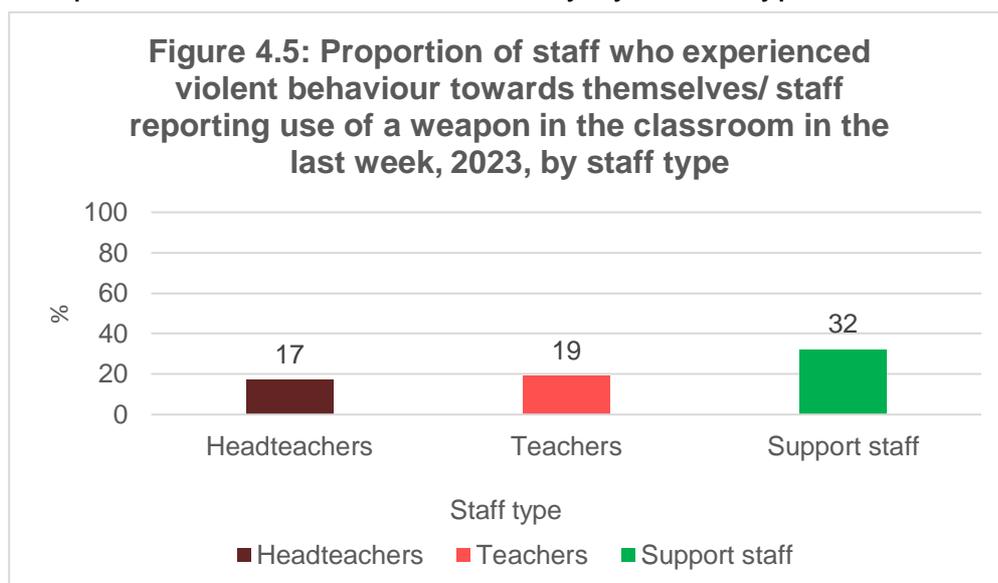
In primary schools, there are also some differences in the experiences of P1-3 staff compared with P4-7 staff (Table 4.17). Staff working with P4-7 pupils are more likely than those working with P1-3 to encounter general verbal abuse (32% at least once in the last week compared with 25%) and using digital technology abusively (8% at least once in the last week compared with 3%). In contrast, P1-3 teachers experience higher levels of physical aggression and physical violence towards themselves or other staff than do P4-7 teachers. For example, 15% of P1-3 staff experienced physical violence towards themselves or other staff in the last week compared with 9% of P4-7 staff.

Table 4.17 Proportion of primary teachers encountering serious disruptive behaviour in the classroom at least once in the last week by primary stage taught

| | P1-3 (%) | P4-7(%) |
|--|----------|---------|
| Sexist abuse or harassment towards you/staff | 1 | 2 |
| General verbal abuse towards you/staff (e.g. offensive, insulting or threatening remarks) | 25 | 32 |
| Physical aggression towards you/staff (e.g. by pushing, squaring up) | 17 | 11 |
| Physical violence towards you/staff (e.g. punching, kicking, head butting, use of a weapon, throwing objects) | 15 | 9 |
| Using digital technology (e.g. computers, tablets, mobile phones) abusively (e.g. malicious posting of comments, photos, videos) | 3 | 8 |
| Unweighted bases | 295 | 386 |

Use of a weapon towards staff

Of those who had experienced violent behaviour towards themselves or other staff in class in the last week (11% of all staff), 24% reported also having to deal with the use of weapon towards themselves or other staff at least once in the last week. This equates to around 3% of all staff. Support staff were more likely to encounter use of a weapon towards themselves or other staff than headteachers or teachers. Among those who had experienced violent behaviour towards themselves or other staff in class in the last week, 32% of support staff dealt with use of a weapon compared with 17% of headteachers and 19% of teachers. The breakdown by staff type is shown below in Figure 4.5. Experiences of violent behaviour involving a weapon in the classroom did not vary by school type.



The figure presents the proportion of the 11% of all staff who reported violent behaviour towards themselves/other staff in the classroom who reported use of weapon towards themselves/staff. The percentages shown are therefore not the overall proportion of all staff who reported use of a weapon.

Around the school

Physical and verbal abuse towards pupils

Alongside their experience in the classroom, headteachers and teachers⁵⁵ were also asked how often they experienced the same types of serious abuse towards pupils around the school.

The most and least common serious behaviours encountered by staff around the school are similar to those experienced in class. General verbal abuse amongst pupils is the behaviour staff are most likely to have encountered. Sixty-one percent did so at least once in the last week. Religious abuse towards other pupils is the behaviour least likely to be experienced with 4% of staff encountering this at least once in the last week.

Teachers were more likely than headteachers to frequently encounter almost all serious disruptive behaviours between pupils (Table 4.18). For example, 16% of teachers encountered homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards other pupils at least once in the last week compared with 8% of headteachers. However, headteachers were more likely than teachers to experience physical violence between pupils around school – 49% did so at least once in the last week compared with 41% of teachers.

Table 4.18 Proportion of staff encountering abuse towards pupils around the school at least once in the last week by staff type

| | All (%) | Headteacher (%) | Teacher (%) |
|---|---------|-----------------|-------------|
| Sexist abuse or harassment of other pupils | 12 | 8 | 12 |
| Abuse towards other pupils who have a disability | 8 | 3 | 8 |
| Abuse towards other pupils who have additional support needs | 16 | 10 | 17 |
| Religious abuse towards other pupils | 4 | 1 | 4 |
| Homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards other pupils | 16 | 8 | 16 |
| General verbal abuse towards other pupils (e.g., offensive, insulting, or threatening remarks) | 61 | 54 | 62 |
| Physical destructiveness (e.g., breaking objects, damaging furniture and fabric) | 55 | 46 | 55 |
| Physical aggression towards other pupils (e.g., by pushing, squaring up) | 57 | 56 | 57 |
| Physical violence towards other pupils (e.g., punching, kicking, head butting, use of a weapon, throwing objects) | 41 | 49 | 41 |
| Unweighted bases | 2576 | 352 | 2247 |

⁵⁵ The questions relating to behaviour around the school were not asked of support staff

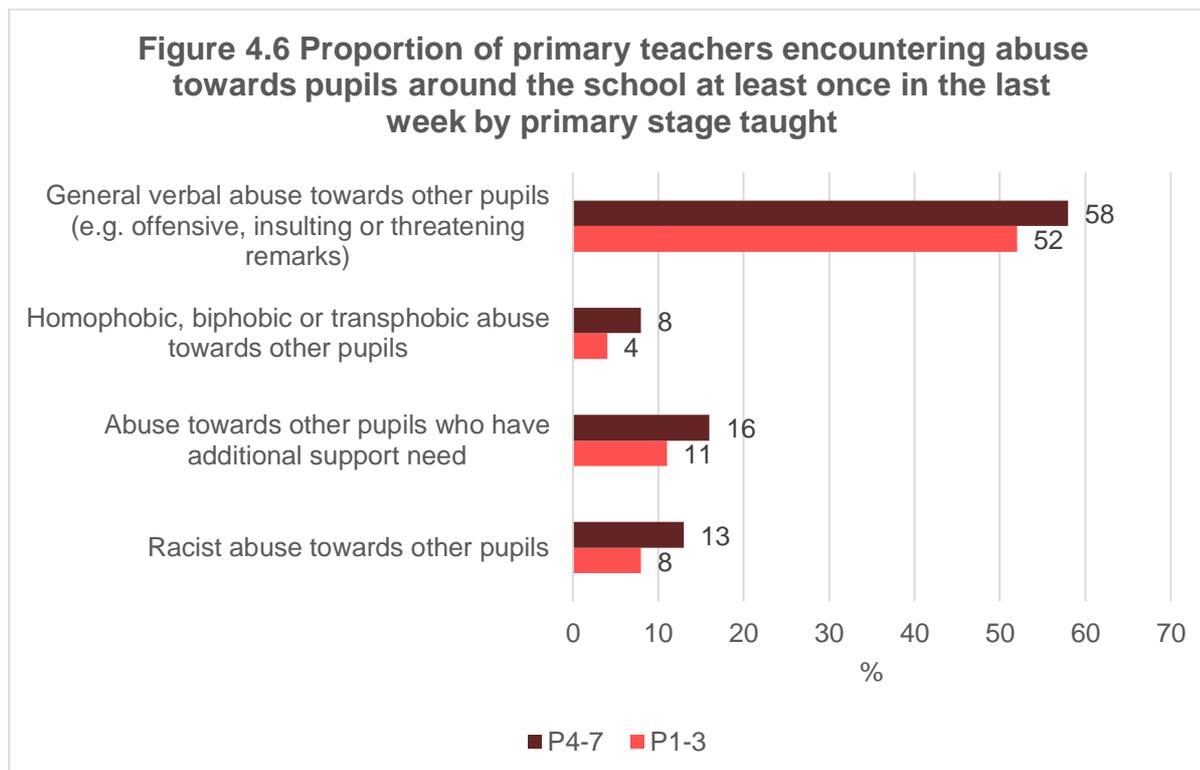
The full breakdown of the frequencies of staff reporting of each of these types of abuse towards other pupils around the school is shown in supplementary tables 4.85-4.93.

Differences by school type in experience of serious disruptive behaviours around school mirror, to some extent, those seen in relation to experience of the same behaviours in class (Table 4.19). Compared with secondary staff, primary school staff report higher frequencies of physical violence towards other pupils - 46% of primary staff had encountered this at least once in the last week compared with 36% of secondary staff. Staff in both types of school similarly experienced physical aggression around the school – around 56-57% doing so at least once in the last week. Otherwise, secondary staff were more likely than primary staff to encounter all other types of serious disruptive behaviour around the school. Differences are particularly notable in relation to homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards other pupils - where secondary staff were around four times more likely than primary staff to have experienced this at least once in the last week (26% compared with 7%) – and sexist abuse – where secondary staff were three times more likely than primary staff to have encountered this at least once in the last week.

Table 4.19 Proportion of staff encountering abuse towards pupils around the school at least once in the last week by school type

| | Primary (%) | Secondary (%) |
|---|-------------|---------------|
| Racist abuse towards other pupils | 11 | 17 |
| Sexist abuse or harassment of other pupils | 6 | 18 |
| Abuse towards other pupils who have a disability | 5 | 11 |
| Abuse towards other pupils who have additional support needs | 13 | 20 |
| Religious abuse towards other pupils | 2 | 6 |
| Homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards other pupils | 7 | 26 |
| General verbal abuse towards other pupils (e.g., offensive, insulting, or threatening remarks) | 54 | 69 |
| Physical destructiveness (e.g., breaking objects, damaging furniture and fabric) | 52 | 58 |
| Physical aggression towards other pupils (e.g., by pushing, squaring up) | 57 | 56 |
| Physical violence towards other pupils (e.g., punching, kicking, head butting, use of a weapon, throwing objects) | 46 | 36 |
| Unweighted bases | 871 | 1728 |

Experience of some forms of abuse between pupils around the school varies between primary staff working with P1-3 and P4-7 pupils (Figure 4.6). Compared with P1-3 staff, those working with P4-7 reported higher levels of racist abuse towards other pupils (13% experiencing at least once in the last week compared with 8%) and general verbal abuse (58% experiencing at least once in the last week compared with 52%). It is notable that despite experiencing less frequently than secondary and P4-7 staff, a little more than half of P1-3 teachers (52%) encounter general verbal abuse between pupils at least once a week.



Use of a weapon towards pupils

Amongst headteachers and teachers who reported experience of physical violence between pupils around the school in the last week (41%), 11% also reported having to deal specifically with use of a weapon. This equates to around 5% of all headteachers and teachers. This experience did not vary by staff or school type. Supplementary table 4.106 shows the full breakdown of these figures.

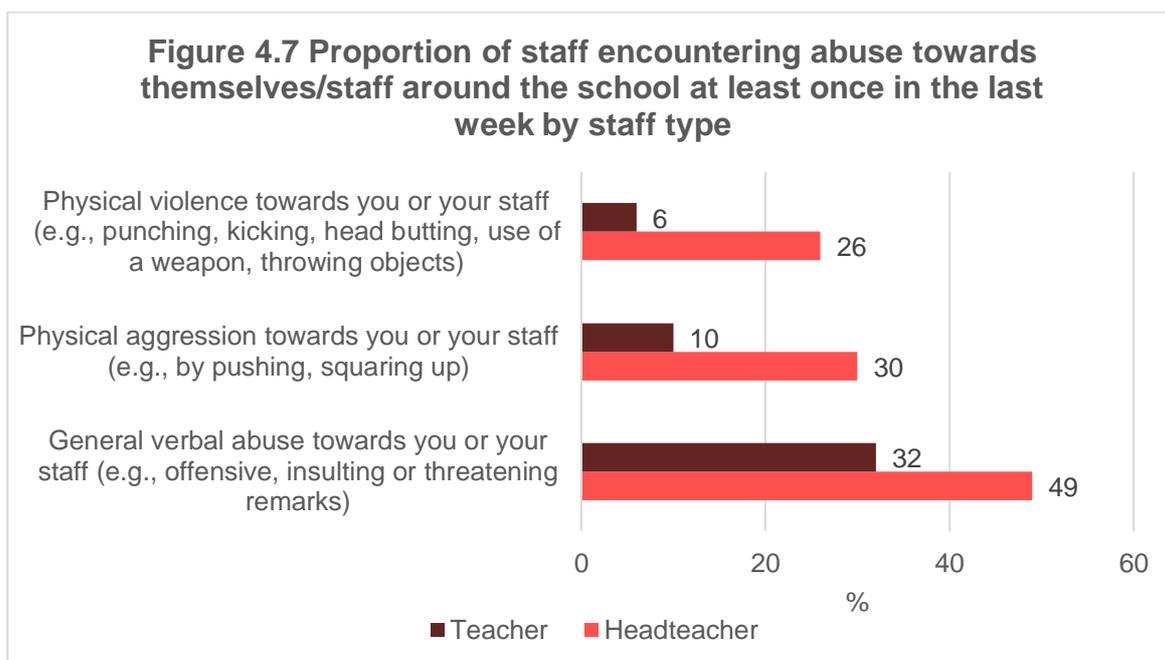
Physical and verbal abuse towards staff

Headteachers and teachers were asked how often they experience the same types of abuse towards themselves or other staff around the school. This includes behaviours and abuse witnessed around the school towards another staff member as well as those that were directed at the staff member themselves.

As seen with abuse towards staff in the classroom, many types of this sort of behaviour were rare – more so than in the classroom - including racist abuse, sexist abuse, religious abuse, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse and abuse as a result of a disability. General verbal abuse was relatively common with around one in three staff experiencing this at least once in the last week. Physical aggression and violence and encountering pupils under the influence of alcohol or drugs were

less common – between 7% and 11% of staff had experienced these at least once in the last week.

Amongst those behaviours which were more common, headteachers experienced them more frequently than teachers (Figure 4.7). For example, headteachers were over four times more likely than teachers to encounter physical violence towards themselves or other staff at least once in the last week (26% compared with 6%) and three times more likely to encounter physical aggression (30% experiencing at least once in the last week compared with 10%).



Similar to serious disruptive behaviours towards staff in class, primary staff were more likely than secondary staff to encounter physical aggression and physical violence towards them or other staff around school. The difference was particularly notable for physical violence where primary staff were more than five times more likely than secondary staff to have experienced physical violence towards them or other staff at least once in the last week (11% compared with 2%). In contrast, and again following trends seen earlier, secondary staff were more likely than primary staff to have encountered sexist abuse, general verbal abuse, pupils under the influence of alcohol and drugs and pupils using digital technology abusively towards staff.

Table 4.20 Proportion of staff encountering abuse towards themselves/staff around the school at least once in the last week by school type

| | Primary (%) | Secondary (%) |
|--|-------------|---------------|
| Racist abuse towards you or your staff | 0 | 2 |
| Sexist abuse or harassment towards you or your staff | 1 | 5 |
| Homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards you or your staff | 0 | 1 |
| General verbal abuse towards you or your staff (e.g., offensive, insulting or threatening remarks) | 23 | 42 |
| Physical aggression towards you or your staff (e.g., by pushing, squaring up) | 13 | 9 |
| Physical violence towards you or your staff (e.g., punching, kicking, head butting, use of a weapon, throwing objects) | 11 | 2 |
| Pupils under the influence of drugs/alcohol | 0 | 16 |
| Using digital technology (e.g., computers, tablets, mobile phones) abusively (e.g., malicious posting of comments, photos, videos) | 5 | 27 |
| Unweighted bases | 869 | 1749 |

P4-7 teachers report higher levels of general verbal abuse (25%) compared with 19% of P1-3 teachers. P4-7 teachers also report higher levels of using digital technology (e.g., computers, tablets, mobile phones) abusively (e.g., malicious posting of comments, photos, videos) (7%) compared with 3% of P1-3 teachers.

Use of a weapon

Amongst staff who experienced any physical violence towards themselves or other staff around the school in the last week (7%), 23% reported having to deal with the use of a weapon. This equates to around 2% of all headteachers and teachers. This did not vary by staff or school type. Supplementary table 4.105 shows the full breakdown of these figures.

Personal experiences of abuse towards staff

In addition to the questions presented above on how frequently staff experience each form of abuse towards themselves or other staff in the classroom and around the school, staff were also asked in the **last 12 months** how many times they have personally experienced each of the following types of serious disruptive behaviour/violence towards them in their role as a head teacher, teacher or as a member of support staff. Table 4.21 shows the different types of serious disruptive behaviour/violence staff were asked about and the proportion of staff in primary and secondary schools that reported having experienced each of these at least once during the *last 12 months*. Reported experiences of most forms of serious disruptive behaviour/violence at least once in the last 12 months are more common among secondary staff compared with primary staff, for example sexist abuse or harassment towards them (10% in secondaries and 2% in primaries) and general verbal abuse towards them (49% in secondaries and 36% in primaries). Reported experience of physical aggression or violence towards staff personally was more common in primary schools compared with secondary schools, for example 30% of primary staff compared with 11% of secondary staff have experienced physical violence towards them (e.g. punching, kicking, head butting, use of a weapon, throwing objects).

Table 4.21 Proportion of staff experiencing at least one incident of each type of serious disruptive behaviour/violence towards them in the **last 12 months**

| | All (%) | Primary (%) | Secondary (%) |
|--|---------|-------------|---------------|
| Racist abuse towards you | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Sexist abuse or harassment towards you | 6 | 2 | 10 |
| Abuse towards you due to a disability* | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Abuse towards you due to an additional support need* | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Religious abuse towards you | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards you | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| General verbal abuse towards you (e.g., offensive, insulting or threatening remarks) | 42 | 36 | 49 |
| Physical aggression towards you (e.g., by pushing, squaring up) | 27 | 31 | 22 |
| Physical violence towards you (e.g., punching, kicking, head butting, use of a weapon, throwing objects) | 21 | 30 | 11 |
| Unweighted bases | 3,582 | 1,292 | 2,291 |

*Differences in experiences of these between staff in primary and secondary schools do not reach statistical significance

Personal experiences of some of the above forms of serious disruptive behaviour and violence varied according to staff type, as shown in Table 4.22. Table 4.23 shows the frequency that staff reported having experienced each of these in the last 12 months. Teachers are more likely to report at least one personal experience of racist and sexist abuse or harassment in the last 12 months compared with support staff and headteachers. This is particularly the case among secondary teachers (11% having experienced sexist abuse or harassment compared with 6-8% among other staff) as shown in supplementary table 4.108).

A higher proportion of headteachers reported having experienced at least one instance of physical violence and aggression towards them and verbal abuse towards them personally at least once in the last 12 months compared with teachers and support staff. Whereas, as shown in Table 4.23, a higher proportion of support staff report experiencing the greatest number (21 or more) instances of physical aggression and violence in the last 12 months. This was particularly apparent in primary schools (as shown in supplementary table 4.114) where physical aggression and violence towards staff and pupils is more common.

Table 4.22 Proportion of staff experiencing at least one incident of serious disruptive behaviours/violence towards them in the last 12 months by staff type

| | Headteachers (%) | Teachers (%) | Support staff (%) |
|--|------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Racist abuse towards you | - | 2 | 1 |
| Sexist abuse or harassment towards you | 3 | 6 | 4 |
| Physical aggression towards you (e.g., by pushing, squaring up) | 35 | 26 | 29 |
| Physical violence towards you (e.g., punching, kicking, head butting, use of a weapon, throwing objects) | 31 | 19 | 27 |
| Unweighted bases | 347 | 2,258 | 978 |

Table 4.23 Proportion of staff experiencing different numbers of incidents of racist, sexist abuse and physical aggression and violence towards them in the last 12 months by staff type

| | | None (%) | 1 (%) | 2 to 5 (%) | 6 to 10 (%) | 11-20 (%) | 21+ (%) |
|--|---------------|----------|-------|------------|-------------|-----------|---------|
| Racist abuse towards you | Headteachers | 100 | - | - | - | - | - |
| | Teachers | 98 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | - |
| | Support staff | 99 | 1 | 1 | - | 0 | 0 |
| Sexist abuse or harassment towards you | Headteachers | 97 | 2 | 1 | - | 0 | - |
| | Teachers | 94 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Support staff | 96 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Physical aggression towards you (e.g., by pushing, squaring up) | Headteachers | 65 | 8 | 13 | 7 | 3 | 4 |
| | Teachers | 74 | 9 | 10 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| | Support staff | 71 | 6 | 9 | 5 | 2 | 6 |
| Physical violence towards you (e.g., punching, kicking, head butting, use of a weapon, throwing objects) | Headteachers | 69 | 3 | 17 | 7 | 2 | 2 |
| | Teachers | 81 | 6 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| | Support staff | 73 | 5 | 10 | 3 | 2 | 6 |

Unweighted bases: racist abuse, sexist abuse, physical aggression (headteachers - 347, teachers – 2,258, support staff - 978), physical violence (headteachers - 347, teachers – 2,257, support staff - 978)

As shown in Table 4.24 between 0 and 2% of all staff reported having personally experienced each of these types of abuse towards them due to protected characteristics in the **last 12 months**⁵⁶. A higher proportion of all staff experienced general verbal abuse towards them in the **last 12 months**, with 9% having experienced this 21 times or more, 5-7% 6-20 times, 16% 2-5 times and 5% once during this time. There were no variations in experiences of each of these behaviours among different staff types.

⁵⁶ As noted in Chapter 3 Methodology it is not possible to ascertain whether the study accurately reflects the experiences of staff with protected characteristics due to the survey not gathering this demographic information (other than for gender).

Table 4.24 Proportion of staff experiencing different numbers of incidents of abuse due to protected characteristics and general verbal abuse in the last 12 months

| | None (%) | 1 (%) | 2 to 5 (%) | 6 to 10 (%) | 11-20 (%) | 21+ (%) |
|---|----------|-------|------------|-------------|-----------|---------|
| Abuse towards you due to a disability | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Abuse towards you due to an additional support need | 99 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Religious abuse towards you | 99 | 1 | 0 | 0 | - | 0 |
| Homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards you | 98 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| General verbal abuse towards you (i.e. threatening remarks) | 58 | 5 | 16 | 7 | 5 | 9 |

Unweighted bases: 3,583. Except for homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse: 3,582.

Experience of abuse, aggression and violence towards staff was also considered according to the gender of the staff member. Only a small number of gender differences emerged, as shown in Table 4.25. Notably, female staff were more likely than male staff to have encountered at least one incident of physical violence towards themselves in the last 12 months. In contrast, male staff were more likely than female staff to have experienced homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse or verbal abuse.

Table 4.25 Proportion of staff encountering at least one incident of abuse towards themselves in the last 12 months by staff gender

| | Male (%) | Female (%) |
|--|----------|------------|
| Racist abuse | 3 | 2 |
| Religious abuse | 2 | 1 |
| Homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse | 5 | 1 |
| General verbal abuse (e.g., offensive, insulting or threatening remarks) | 51 | 40 |
| Physical violence towards you or your staff (e.g., punching, kicking, head butting, use of a weapon, throwing objects) | 14 | 23 |

The full breakdown of the number of instances of each of the above types of serious disruptive behaviour/violence experienced personally by staff in the last 12 months is shown in supplementary tables 4.107-4.115.

Chapter 5 – Changes over time

Summary of findings

Whilst the majority of staff in 2023 still perceive that all or most pupils are generally well-behaved around the school and in the classroom, perceptions of this among teachers and support staff have declined since 2016 and since the time series began in 2006. Headteachers' perceptions of good behaviour have remained high across the time series. Staff continue to find that pupils engage in the majority of the positive behaviours in the classroom in all or most lessons.

However, there has been a general worsening of pupil behaviour since 2016 with primary and secondary staff having experienced decreases in most positive behaviours and increases in most of the low level disruptive, disengagement and serious disruptive behaviours around the school. While headteachers' experiences have generally remained more positive, particularly in primary schools, teachers and support staff experiences of pupil behaviour in primary and secondary schools have been more negative across a wide range of behaviours.

Staff have seen increases in most of the classroom disengagement behaviours and low level disruptive behaviours in the classroom and around the school since 2016, particularly pupils persistently infringing rules, making cheeky or impertinent remarks, engaging in general rowdiness, mucking about and deliberately excluding others. Staff experiences of the most commonly experienced low level disruptive behaviours have also increased since 2006. For most part these behaviours have been rising since 2006, whereas for some such as pupil work avoidance teachers' experience of this declined between 2006 and 2012 and then has increased at each survey wave since then. Reports of pupils being under the influence of drugs or alcohol has risen since 2016 as has use of digital technology/mobile phones abusively.

Reported incidence of serious disruptive behaviours has risen since 2016. This includes sexist abuse towards staff, general verbal abuse, physical aggression and violence towards staff and pupils in the classroom and around the school. The proportion of staff that have experienced at least one incident of general verbal abuse towards them personally in the last 12 months has risen among all staff types in primary and secondary schools since 2009, with the greatest rise occurring since 2016. The only serious disruptive behaviours that have remained low and largely unchanged since 2016 in primary and secondary schools are reported instances of abuse towards staff including racist, homophobic/biphobic/transphobic and religious abuse and abuse related to disability.

Across primary and secondary schools, abuse between pupils and physical destructiveness have also all increased. Whilst the overall proportion of staff who report having experienced use of a weapon towards other pupils and staff in the

last teaching week was much lower (2-6%)⁵⁷ than the proportion reporting general verbal, physical and a number of other types of abuse this has increased since 2016. There has been a rise from 3% in 2016 to 11% in 2023 of primary support staff and from <1% to 6% of primary and secondary teachers having encountered use of a weapon towards other pupils in the classroom in the last teaching week. Since the time series began in 2006, reported encounters of pupil violence and aggression in the classroom towards other pupils has risen⁵⁸. For example, 10% of primary teachers had dealt with physical aggression towards other pupils at least once a day in 2006, rising to 20% in 2023. The increases have been more marked among primary teachers and primary and secondary support staff. For some behaviours, such as physical aggression, this has not been a straightforward increase at each survey wave since 2006; rather reporting of this declined between 2006 and 2012 and has increased again after this. Therefore, among some staff types⁵⁹ reported physical aggression among pupils is broadly similar in 2023 as it was in 2006.

The qualitative research with school staff and local authority representatives also identified new and emerging patterns of challenging behaviour including vaping and in-school truancy, a rise in misogynistic views expressed by male pupils, and problematic use of mobile phones and social media. School staff and LA representatives identified underlying reasons for these changes in behaviour. These included:

- A perceived lack of consequences for pupils who engage in serious disruptive behaviour, particularly in the context of restorative approaches to relationships and behaviour
- A lack of support for pupils with additional support needs, particularly Autism Spectrum Disorders and ADHD
- Changes in society and parenting such as a general lack of respect, increased use of mobile phones and social media and parents' attitudes to school and behaviour
- Disengagement from school and learning
- Poor mental health and lack of resilience among pupils.

⁵⁷ 3% of staff experienced use of a weapon toward themselves or other staff in the classroom and 2% around the school. 6% experienced use of a weapon towards other pupils in the classroom and 5% around the school. A much higher proportion have encountered verbal abuse towards other pupils (67%) and physical aggression (59%) in the classroom in the last week.

⁵⁸ This was reported by all primary and secondary staff types in relation to physical violence and by primary and secondary teachers and secondary support staff in relation to physical aggression.

⁵⁹ Head teachers and secondary support staff.

Introduction

This chapter examines changes over time in primary and secondary schools between 2016 and 2023 in relation to a wide range of specific positive behaviours, low level disruptive behaviours and serious disruptive behaviours. It then presents changes over time for some key measures of pupil behaviour since the first wave of the survey in 2006.

Changes in behaviours between 2016 and 2023

Overall perceptions

Headteachers' perceptions of general good behaviour have remained very similar to 2016 in both primary and secondary schools. The vast majority perceived all or most pupils to be well-behaved around the school and in the classroom. For example, 99% of primary headteachers reported all or most pupils being well-behaved around the school in 2023 compared with 100% in 2016. This was also supported by the qualitative findings that schools staff found the majority of pupils to be well behaved.

Whilst the majority of teachers and support staff still perceive that all or most pupils are well-behaved around the school (85% and 84% respectively) and most teachers perceive this to be the case in the classroom (69%)⁶⁰, there has been a decline in this since 2016. For example, in 2016, 87% of primary teachers and 79% of primary support staff reported that all or most pupils were generally well-behaved in the classroom compared with 74% and 62% respectively in 2023 (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Proportion of primary and secondary school teachers and support staff reporting that all/almost all or most pupils are generally well-behaved in the classroom/ in the school, 2016/2023

| | | In the classroom | | In the school | |
|-----------|---------------|------------------|------|---------------|------|
| | | 2016 | 2023 | 2016 | 2023 |
| Primary | Teachers | 87% | 74% | 96% | 88% |
| | Support staff | 79% | 62% | 96% | 90% |
| Secondary | Teachers | 86% | 65% | 93% | 83% |
| | Support staff | 54% | 36% | 89% | 75% |

Unweighted bases for 2023 – for teachers in the classroom (primary 668, secondary 1686) and around the school (primary 663, secondary 1659), support staff (primary 452, 580). For 2016 – for teachers in the classroom (primary 707, secondary 1795) and around the school (primary 704, secondary 1776) and for support staff in the classroom (primary 472, secondary 658) and around the school (primary 476, secondary 665).

⁶⁰ 50% of support staff report that all or most pupils are generally well-behaved in the classroom as described in Chapter 4.

Positive behaviour

The majority of staff continue to find pupils to be well-behaved in most of the specific locations around the school and on school trips⁶¹, as shown in Chapter 4.

There has been a decline in reporting of positive behaviour in each of these locations among teachers in both primary and secondary schools. Teachers report that a lower proportion of pupils are well-behaved all or most of the time compared with 2016 in most of the locations they were asked about in the last week, including in corridors, toilets, playgrounds/social areas, other areas of the school grounds and on school trips. Among headteachers there was no notable change since 2016 in relation to experiences of pupil behaviour in most of these locations, with the exception of behaviour in the school toilets in secondary schools where headteachers reported a decline in the proportion of pupils who are well-behaved all or most of the time (from 96% in 2016 to 65% in 2023). Figures are shown in Supplementary Tables 4.3-4.8.

For primary schools, headteachers' reporting of most types of positive pupil behaviour around the school has remained similar to in 2016. Headteachers have reported increased levels of some of these positive behaviours such as 'pupils taking turns' 'always' or 'on most occasions' from 82% in 2016 to 94% in 2023.

There has been a decline in most positive pupil behaviours around the school reported by secondary headteachers and teachers in both primary and secondary schools since 2016. These include pupils taking turns, making positive use of school facilities during breaks (e.g. the library, sports facilities), queuing in an orderly manner, challenging others' negative behaviour and interacting supportively with one another. For example, in 2016, 71% of primary teachers reported that pupils queued in an orderly manner always or on most occasions compared with 58% in 2023. The most notable change was reported in relation to pupils respecting toilet/break/cloakroom areas always or on most occasions which fell from 50% to 15% among secondary teachers and 87% to 40% among secondary headteachers. Some aspects of behaviour were reported to have worsened among secondary teachers and not among secondary headteachers, such as pupils actively helping their peers and greeting staff pleasantly.

Similarly, across most of the positive behaviours asked about in the classroom, all staff, other than primary headteachers, report that a lower proportion of pupils are well-behaved in all or most lessons in the last teaching week compared with 2016. This is consistent across 11 of the 13 behaviours covered. For example, in 2023, 69% of primary teachers report pupils 'listening to staff respectfully' in all or most lessons compared with 85% in 2016, and 57% of primary support staff report this in 2023 compared with 69% in 2016.

Among primary school headteachers, perceptions of these positive behaviours in the classroom have not notably changed since 2016.

⁶¹ Overall, 54%-78% of staff in 2023 report that pupils are generally well-behaved in each of the locations staff were asked about, such as in the dining hall (78%), corridors (72%), toilets (54%).

Low level disruptive behaviour

In the classroom

There has been an increase since 2016 in the reported level of pupils being referred to secondary headteachers for low level disruptive behaviour issues: 17% reported having a pupil referred at least once a day in 2016 compared with 38% in 2023. There has been no equivalent change among primary headteachers. A similar pattern is seen in the proportion of headteachers reporting that they think that teachers within their school have had to deal with low level disruptive behaviour in the classroom at least once a day. Eighty-two percent of secondary headteachers reported that they think teachers in their school have to deal with low level disruptive behaviour at least once a day in 2016 which increased to 92% in 2023. There was no change in primary headteachers' perceptions of this.

Most low level disruptive pupil behaviours in the classroom reported by teachers and support staff have increased since 2016. For example, in 2016, 37% of secondary teachers and 29% of primary teachers reported dealing with cheeky or impertinent remarks or responses at least once a day. This rose to 63% among secondary teachers and 52% among primary teachers in 2023. Among primary school staff, some experiences of low-level disruptive behaviour have increased among teachers but not among support staff or headteachers, including: making unnecessary (non-verbal) noise (e.g. by scraping chairs, banging objects; getting out of their seat without permission; persistently infringing class rules and work avoidance. Similarly, among secondary school staff the following low level disruptive behaviour had only increased since 2016 for secondary teachers: making unnecessary (non-verbal) noise (e.g. by scraping chairs, banging objects); and hindering other pupils.

Around the school

There has been a rise in primary and secondary teachers' experiences of all low level disruptive pupil behaviours around the school since 2016. The proportion of secondary headteachers reporting such behaviours has increased for most low-level disruptive pupil behaviours around the school, but there has been no equivalent increase among primary headteachers. Reports of each of these types of behaviours is greater among teachers than headteachers and greater in secondary schools than primary schools (Figures 5.1 and 5.2). For example, there has been a 15 percentage point increase since 2016 in the proportion of primary teachers having encountered pupils loitering in prohibited areas at least once a day (from 14% to 29%) and a 28 percentage point increase in the proportion of secondary teachers encountering this (from 40% to 68%).

Figure 5.1: Proportion of primary school teachers experiencing low-level disruptive behaviours around the school at least once a day (in the last teaching week) between 2016 and 2023

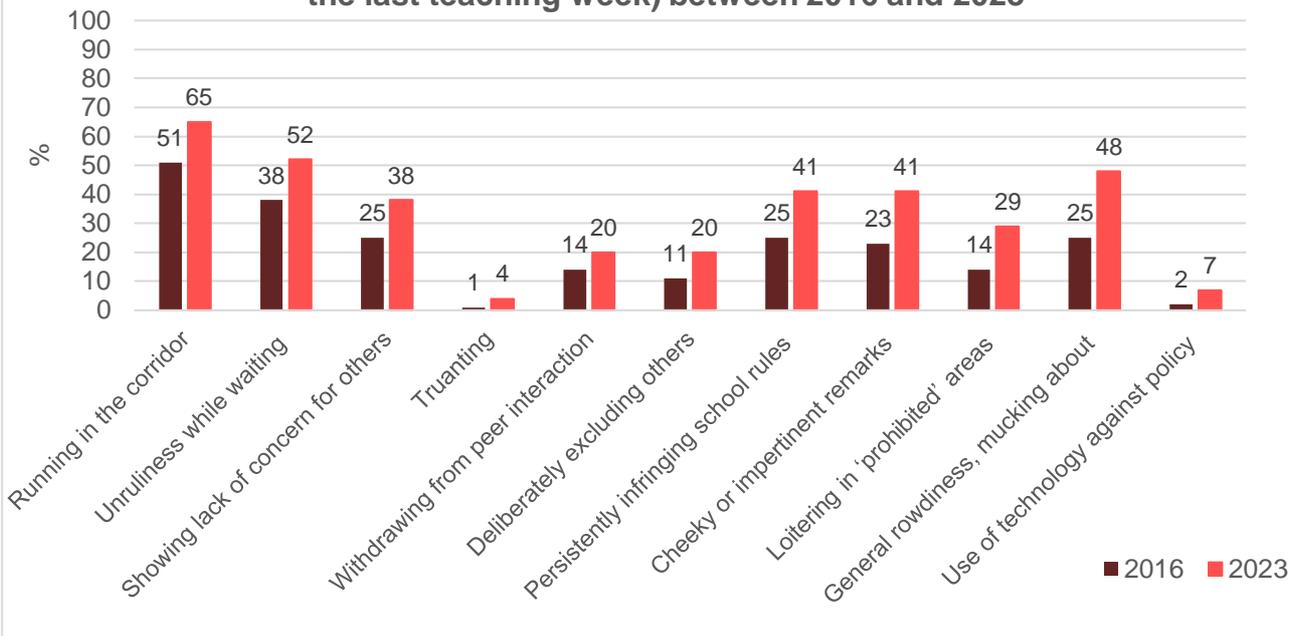
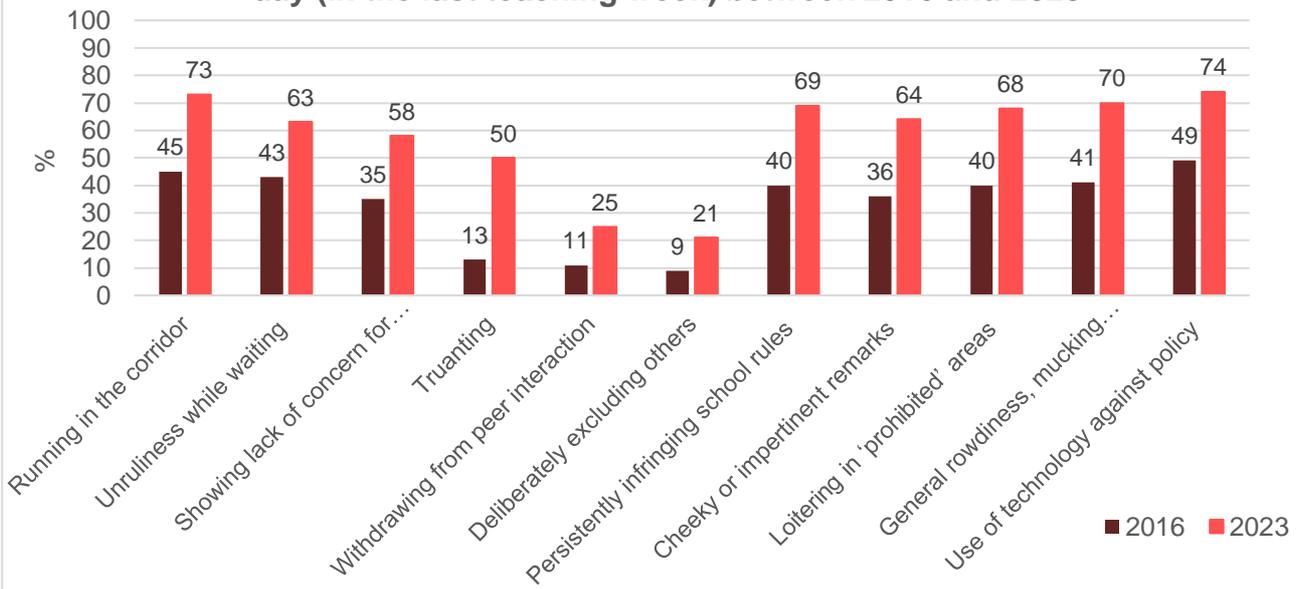


Figure 5.2: Proportion of secondary school teachers experiencing low-level disruptive behaviours around the school at least once a day (in the last teaching week) between 2016 and 2023



Disengagement

Experience of all four types of classroom disengagement behaviours that teachers and support staff were asked about has increased since 2016⁶². For example, pupils deliberately socially excluding others at least once in the last week has risen in primary schools from 55% to 69% (among teachers) and from 61% to 71% (among support staff). In secondary schools this has risen from 50% to 61% (among teachers) and from 61% to 73% (among support staff). In secondary schools there has been a particularly notable increase since 2016 in reports of pupils leaving the classroom without permission in the last teaching week. This has risen from 29% to 62% among teachers and 46% to 77% among support staff.

Report of pupils leaving school without permission, which can also be classified as a form of disengagement⁶³, has also risen among experiences of primary and secondary teachers. Among primary teachers this has risen from 10% in 2016 to 19% in 2023 and among secondary teachers from 44% to 70% in the last teaching week. This has also increased among secondary headteachers' experiences from 62% in 2016 to 78% in 2023.

Serious disruptive behaviour

Physical and verbal abuse towards pupils

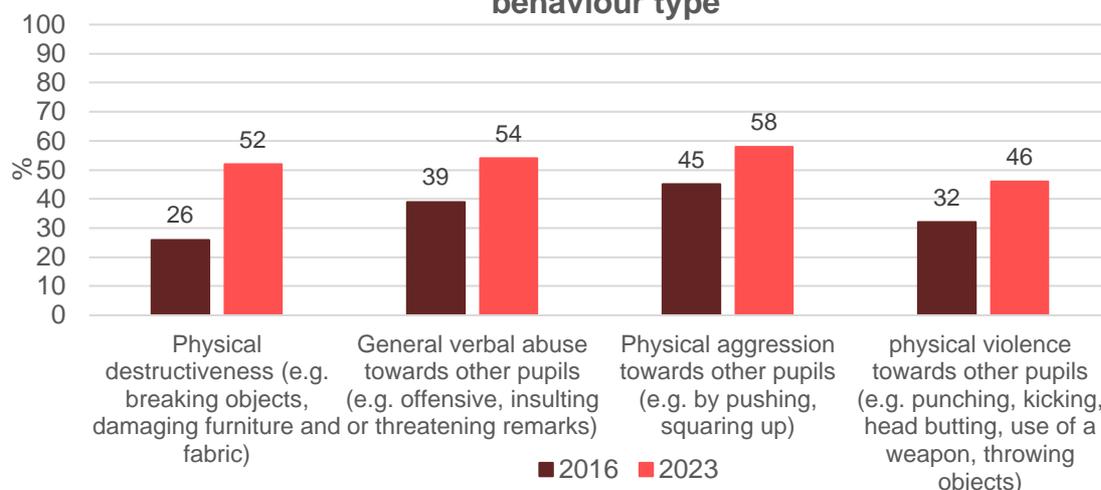
Primary school

There have been changes since 2016 in reported levels of physical and verbal aggression and abuse towards pupils in the classroom and around the school. The proportion of primary school staff that have dealt with physical destructiveness and serious disruptive behaviours in the classroom towards other pupils at least once a week has increased for teachers (in the classroom and around the school) and for support staff (in the classroom). For example, as shown in Figure 5.3, the proportion of primary teachers who reported encountering physical destructiveness at least once a week around the school has doubled since 2016, increasing from 26% to 52%. General verbal abuse towards other pupils around the school was also encountered by around half (54%) of primary teachers in 2023, which has increased from 39% in 2016. Physical aggression towards other pupils and physical violence towards other pupils have both increased since 2016 (from 45% to 58% and 32% to 46%, respectively).

⁶² This is across the following four behaviours: Pupils withdrawing from interaction with others/you, deliberately socially excluding others, leaving the classroom without permission, missing lessons (e.g. truancy).

⁶³ This behaviour was asked only of headteachers and teachers in relation to negative behaviours 'around the school'

Figure 5.3: Proportion of primary school teachers experiencing serious disruptive behaviours around the school at least once a week (in the last teaching week) between 2016 and 2023 by behaviour type



There has also been a small rise in experiences of most forms of abuse towards other pupils around the school such as racist abuse, sexist abuse, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse and abuse towards pupils with additional support needs. For example, in 2016, 7% of primary teachers said they had encountered abuse towards pupils with additional support needs at least once a week compared with 13% who said the same in 2023. Reports of pupils using digital technology abusively in the classroom (e.g. malicious posting of comments, photos, videos) have also increased from 2% to 6% among teachers and 1% to 6% among support staff).

Use of a weapon towards other pupils in primary school

Similar to the trend with other behaviours, there has also been an increase in teachers experiencing use of a weapon towards other pupils **in the classroom** and **around the school** since 2016.

Staff who reported any experience of violent behaviour towards other pupils around the school were asked how frequently these incidents involved the use of weapon. For primary teachers (46% of whom had encountered violence between pupils around the school in the last week in 2023 and 32% in 2016), the proportion dealing with use of a weapon increased from 1% in 2016 to 11% in 2023. This equates to an increase from <1% to 5% of all primary teachers between 2016 and 2023.

Among the 49% of primary teachers who reported any experience of violent behaviour towards other pupils in the classroom in the last week in 2023 and 31% in 2016, the proportion dealing with use of a weapon increased from 2% in 2016 to 13% in 2023. This equates to a rise from <1% to 6% of all primary teachers. Among support staff⁶⁴ there has been an increase from 7% in 2016 to 19% in 2023 having

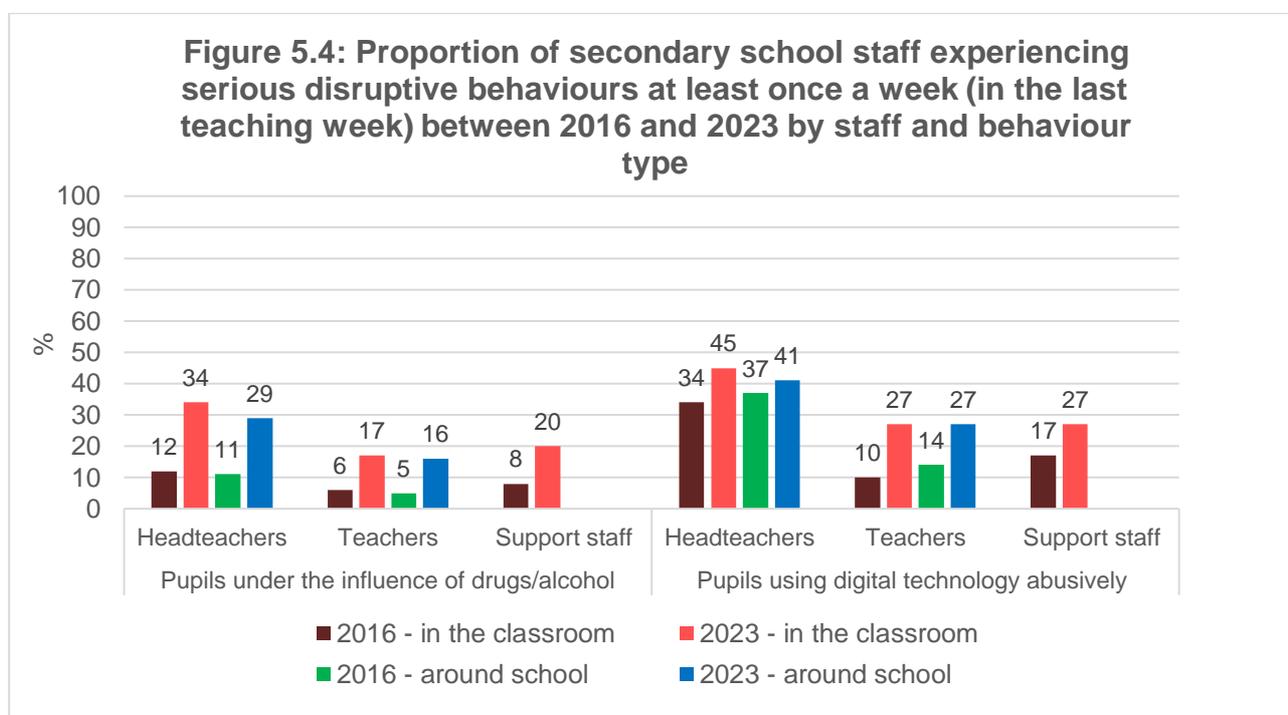
⁶⁴ 58% of primary support staff who were asked this follow-up question in 2023 as they had encountered physical violence towards other pupils in the classroom in the last week and 42% in 2016

dealt with the use of a weapon in the last week which equates to a rise from 3% to 11% of all support staff.

Secondary school

Similar to the trend for primary schools, there have been increases in many serious disruptive behaviours in secondary schools in the classroom and around the school since 2016. However, some behaviours do not show any change.

Reports of encountering pupils under the influence of drugs/alcohol around the school at least once in the last week has risen among teachers (5% to 16%) and head teachers (11% to 29%) and in the classroom among support staff (8% to 20%), teachers (6% to 17%) and head teachers (12% to 34%). Reports of pupils using digital technology abusively around the school has also risen among teachers (14% to 27%) and in the classroom among support staff (17% to 27%), teachers (10% to 27%) and head teachers (34% to 45%). This is shown in Figure 5.4 below.



The rise among in the proportion of headteachers having experienced pupils using digital technology abusively around the school is shown in the figure however is not statistically significant. All other changes shown in the figure are significant.

The proportion of secondary school staff dealing with physical destructiveness and serious disruptive behaviour towards other pupils in the classroom at least once a week has increased for teachers, support staff and, for some behaviours, also among headteachers. This includes a rise in experiences of racist, sexist, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards other pupils and abuse due to disabilities and additional support needs.

The greatest increases were reported in the level of racist, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards other pupils. In 2016, 11% of secondary school teachers experienced homophobic abuse towards other pupils in the classroom at

least once a week compared with 30% in 2023. There was a similar increase in homophobic abuse towards other pupils from 15% (in 2016) to 32% (in 2023) in the last week among secondary support. For secondary support staff, the greatest increase was in the level of racist abuse towards other pupils they experienced. In 2016, 13% of support staff reported experiencing racist abuse towards other pupils at least once a week, compared with 32% in 2023. Levels of sexist abuse rose more for support staff than among headteachers and teachers. Overall, the increase in abuse towards those with disabilities or additional support needs was lower than the rise in other types of verbal abuse. However increases in experiences of these were higher among support staff with a 14 percentage point rise in experiences of abuse towards other pupils due to a disability (14% in 2016 to 28% in 2023) and a 12 percentage point rise in experiences of abuse towards pupils with additional support needs (31% in 2016 to 43% in 2023) in the classroom⁶⁵. Further, general verbal abuse, physical aggression and physical violence towards other pupils have all similarly increased. Most notably among secondary school teachers, who have reported levels of verbal abuse towards other pupils in the classroom in the last week increasing from 51% in 2016 to 75% in 2023, and physical aggression increasing from 30% in 2016 to 52% in 2023.

Use of a weapon towards other pupils in secondary school

Staff who reported any experience of violent behaviour towards other pupils **around the school or in the classroom** were asked how frequently these incidents involved the use of weapon.

Among the 36% of secondary teachers who reported experiencing this behaviour around the school in the last teaching week in 2023 and the 15% in 2016, there has been an increase from 4% in 2016 to 11% in 2023 having dealt with the use of a weapon. This equates to an increase from <1% to 4% of all secondary teachers between 2016 and 2023.

For the 44% of secondary support staff who encountered this behaviour in the classroom in the last week in 2023 and 17% in 2016, there has been an increase from 8% to 14% dealing with use of a weapon which equates to a rise from 1% to 6% of all secondary support staff between 2016 and 2023.

Abuse towards staff

Primary school

In line with changes in reported levels of physical and verbal aggression and abuse between primary pupils since 2016, many types of abuse and aggression towards staff have also increased whilst some have remained the same. Types of abuse towards staff that have increased since 2016 are shown in Table 5.2.

⁶⁵ See Supplementary tables 4.62-4.70 for abuse towards other pupils in the classroom and 4.85-4.93 for abuse towards other pupils around the school

Table 5.2 Proportion of primary headteachers, teachers, and support staff reporting incidents of abusive behaviours towards them/staff at least once per week in the classroom/ in the school, 2016/2023

| | 2016 | | | 2023 | | |
|--|--------------|----------|---------------|--------------|----------|---------------|
| | Headteachers | Teachers | Support staff | Headteachers | Teachers | Support staff |
| General verbal abuse in the classroom | 31% | 8% | 19% | 46% | 28% | 34% |
| General verbal abuse around the school | 27% | 8% | - | 45% | 22% | - |
| Physical aggression in the classroom | 18% | 6% | 14% | 31% | 14% | 32% |
| Physical aggression around the school | 17% | 4% | - | 31% | 12% | - |
| Physical violence in the classroom | 15% | 3% | 13% | 30% | 12% | 28% |
| Physical violence around the school | 16% | 5% | - | 30% | 10% | - |

Unweighted bases for the above for 2023 – for headteachers (in the classroom 223, around the school 220), teachers (in the classroom 667 for all but physical aggression 668, around the school 649 for all but physical violence 647), support staff (in the classroom 448). For 2016 – for headteachers (in the classroom and around the school 291), teachers (in the classroom 705, around the school 701), support staff (in the classroom 473 for all but physical aggression 472).

Experiences of general verbal abuse towards staff in the classroom at least once in the last teaching week have increased from 19% in 2016 to 34% in 2023 among support staff, from 8% to 28% among teachers, and from 31% to 46% among headteachers. Reports of this type of verbal abuse around the school have also increased among teachers - from 8% to 22% - and headteachers - from 27% to 45%.

There has also been an increase among all staff groups in reported levels of physical aggression towards themselves or other staff. In the classroom the proportion of support staff who reported experiencing physical aggression at least once in the last week increased from 14% in 2016 to 32% in 2023. Among teachers there was an increase from 6% to 14% and among headteachers from 18% to 31%. Headteachers and teachers also reported increased levels of physical aggression around the school, from 17% to 31% among headteachers and from 4% to 12% among teachers.

The proportion of staff who reported experiencing physical violence towards themselves or other staff in the classroom in the last full teaching week has more than doubled for support staff and headteachers since 2016, rising from 13% to 28% and from 15% to 30% respectively. Among teachers, the levels of physical violence reported were lower than for both support staff and headteachers in both

2016 and 2023. There was, however, a fourfold increase in the level of physical violence experienced by teachers from 3% encountering this at least once in the last week in 2016 to 12% in 2023. The level of physical violence experienced around the school has also doubled or nearly doubled since 2016, from 5% to 10% for teachers and 16% to 30% for headteachers.

Personal experience of abuse in the last 12 months

Staff were also asked how many times they have experienced each of the forms of abuse⁶⁶ directed at them personally in the last 12 months. Reported abuse towards the staff member themselves due to protected characteristics remains very low in 2023. Between 0% and 2% of staff reported experiencing any incidents of racist, sexist or religious abuse, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse, or abuse in relation to a disability. The proportion of staff having experienced general verbal abuse and physical aggression/violence directed at them in the last 12 months was much higher⁶⁷ and has increased since 2016 among all staff types. For example, among teachers experiences of at least one incident of general verbal abuse directed towards them has increased from 17% (in 2016) to 34% (in 2023). These increases are in line with the increase in the proportion of staff having experienced these forms of abuse towards themselves or other staff as shown above in Table 5.2.

Use of a weapon towards staff in primary schools

Staff who reported any experience of violent behaviour towards them **around the school or in the classroom** were asked how frequently these incidents involved the use of weapon.

Among the 10% of primary teachers who reported experiencing this behaviour around the school in 2023 and the 4% in 2016, there has been an increase from 13% in 2016 to 26% in 2023 having dealt with the use of a weapon in the last teaching week. This equates to an increase from <1% to 3% of all primary teachers between 2016 and 2023.

Among the 28% of primary support staff who reported experiencing this behaviour in the classroom in the last week in 2023 and the 13% in 2016, there has been an increase from 9% in 2016 to 32% in 2023 having dealt with use of a weapon in the last week which equates to a rise from 1% to 9% of all primary support staff. Among the 12% of primary school teachers who reported experiencing this behaviour in the classroom in the last week in 2023 and the 3% in 2016, the increase has been from 7% in 2016 to 19% in 2023 having dealt with the use of weapon in the last week. This equates to only a rise of <1% to 2% of all primary school teachers, which is not a statistically significant change.

⁶⁶ This includes general verbal, physical aggression or violence and abuse relating to each of the protected characteristics

⁶⁷ As shown in Chapter 4, 42% of all staff experienced at least one incident of general verbal abuse and 21-27% experienced at least one incident of physical aggression or violence directed towards them personally in the last 12 months

Secondary schools

There have been changes since 2016 in the level of reported physical and verbal aggression and abuse towards secondary staff in the classroom and around the school. Reported experiences of abuse towards secondary school staff in the last teaching week remained low in 2023 (ranging from 0-5%) for racist abuse, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse and abuse relating to religion, disability or additional support needs. However, there has been an increase in reported experiences of sexist abuse or harassment towards staff around the school and in the classroom among support staff, teachers and headteachers. For example, among headteachers, the proportion experiencing sexist abuse and harassment at least once in the last week increased from 3% to 12% around the school and from 3% to 14% in the classroom. Types of abuse towards staff that have increased since 2016 are shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Proportion of secondary headteachers, teachers, and support staff reporting incidences of abusive behaviours towards them/staff at least once per week in the classroom/ in the school, 2016/2023

| | 2016 | | | 2023 | | |
|--|---------------|----------|---------------|---------------|----------|---------------|
| | Head-teachers | Teachers | Support staff | Head-teachers | Teachers | Support staff |
| General verbal abuse in the classroom | 54% | 23% | 25% | 61% | 48% | 45% |
| General verbal abuse around the school | 45% | 18% | - | 65% | 41% | - |
| Sexist abuse or harassment in the classroom | 3% | 1% | 3% | 14% | 7% | 7% |
| Sexist abuse or harassment around the school | 3% | 1% | - | 12% | 5% | - |
| Physical aggression in the classroom | 16% | 3% | 4% | 27% | 11% | 13% |
| Physical aggression around the school | 14% | 2% | - | 26% | 8% | - |
| Physical violence in the classroom | 2% | 0% | 1% | 11% | 3% | 7% |
| Physical violence around the school | 3% | 0% | - | 12% | 2% | - |

Unweighted bases for the above for 2023 – Unweighted bases for 2023 - for headteachers (in the classroom 134, around the school 130), teachers (in the classroom 1675-1681, around the school for general verbal abuse 1616-1620), support staff (in the classroom 576-579, for physical violence 577). For 2016 – for headteachers (in the classroom 190 and around the school 186), teachers (in the classroom 1775-1778, around the school 1757-1758), support staff (in the classroom 655-658).

There has been an increase since 2016 in reports of verbal abuse and physical abuse/aggression from pupils towards secondary school staff in the last teaching week. Experience of general verbal abuse directed towards staff in the classroom at least once in the last teaching week have increased from 25% to 45% among support staff and from 23% to 48% among teachers. Reports of general verbal abuse towards staff around the school in the last week have also more than doubled from 18% to 41% experiencing at least once among teachers and from 45% to 65% among headteachers.

Reported levels of physical aggression from pupils towards staff in the classroom at least once in the last week have increased among support staff (from 4% in 2016 to 13% in 2023), teachers (3% to 11%) and headteachers (16% to 27%). Physical aggression around the school at least once in the last week has also increased for both headteachers (from 14% to 26%) and teachers (from 2% to 8%).

The proportion of staff having experienced physical violence towards themselves or other staff in the classroom at least once in the last full teaching week has increased among support staff from 1% to 7% and among headteachers from 2% to 11%. The level of physical violence experienced around the school has also increased four-fold from 3% to 12% for headteachers.

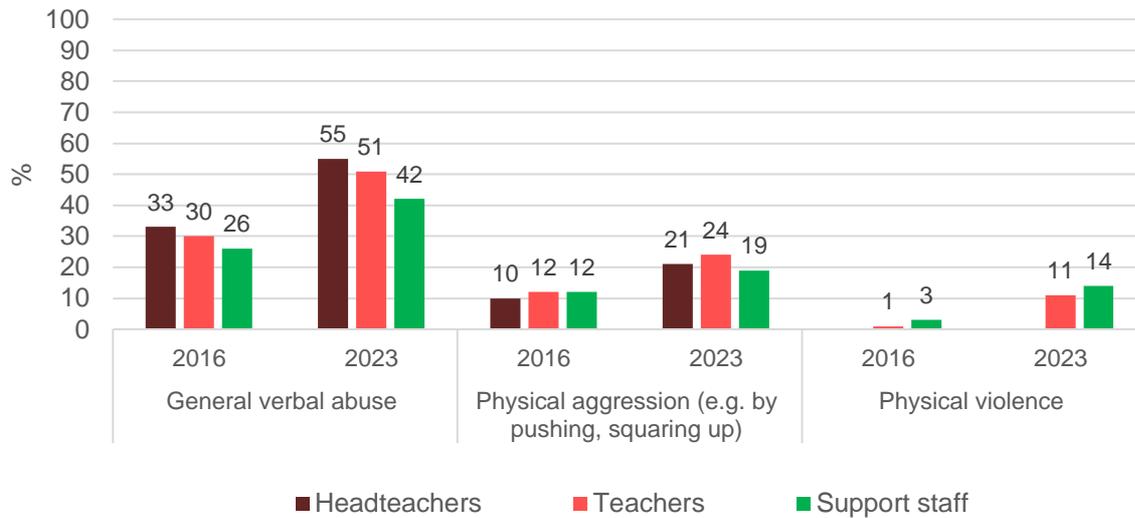
Personal experience of abuse in the last 12 months

Staff were also asked how many times they have experienced each of the forms of abuse⁶⁸ directed at them personally in the last 12 months. Reported abuse towards the staff member themselves due to protected characteristics remains very low in 2023. The proportion of staff having reported incidents of racist, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic, or religious abuse, or abuse in relation to a disability or additional support needs has remained between 0-3%. However, the proportion experiencing sexist abuse towards themselves in the last 12 months has risen from 2% to 7% among support staff, 3% to 11% among teachers and 1% to 8% among headteachers.

As in primary schools, reports of any incidents of general verbal abuse in the last 12 months directed at the staff member have increased among support staff (26% to 42%), teachers (30% to 51%) and headteachers (33% to 55%). The same is true for incidents of physical aggression directed towards support staff (12% to 19%); teachers (12% to 24%); and headteachers (10% to 21%) and physical violence towards support staff (3% to 14%) and teachers (1% to 11%). This is shown in Figure 5.5.

⁶⁸ This includes general verbal, physical aggression or violence and abuse relating to each of the protected characteristics

Figure 5.5: Proportion of secondary school staff experiencing incidents of serious disruptive behaviours towards themselves at least once in the last 12 months between 2016 and 2023



Use of a weapon towards staff in secondary schools

Staff who reported any experience of violent behaviour towards themselves or other staff **around the school** or **in the classroom** (2-4% of secondary staff) were asked how frequently these incidents involved the use of weapon.

Among the 12% of headteachers who encountered violence around the school in the last teaching week in 2023 and 3% in 2016, there has been an increase from 0% in 2016 to 15% in 2023 having dealt with the use of a weapon. This equates to a small overall increase from 0% to 2% of all primary headteachers between 2016 and 2023 which is not statistically significant.

Among the 7% of secondary support staff who encountered violence in the classroom in the last week in 2023 and 1% in 2016, there has been an increase from 0% in 2016 to 28% in 2023 having dealt with use of a weapon which equates to a small, and statistically insignificant, rise from 0% to 2% of all secondary support staff.

Longer term trends over time

This section describes trends for some key measures since the first Behaviour in Scottish Schools survey in 2006. These include measures of positive behaviour, low level disruptive behaviour and some types of serious disruptive behaviour toward other pupils. Personal experience of serious disruptive behaviour over the past 12 months was first asked about in the 2009 survey so changes over time in this section start from then.

Longer term trends in positive behaviour

Since 2006, there has been a decline in the proportion of primary and secondary support staff and teachers who think that all or most pupils are generally well-behaved in class (Figure 5.6). There has also been a smaller decline since 2006 in the proportion of primary school support staff (94% in 2006, 90% in 2023) and teachers (96% in 2006, 88% in 2023) who think that pupils are generally well-behaved around the school. Primary and secondary headteachers' perceptions of overall behaviour both during lessons and around the school have remained positive since 2006.

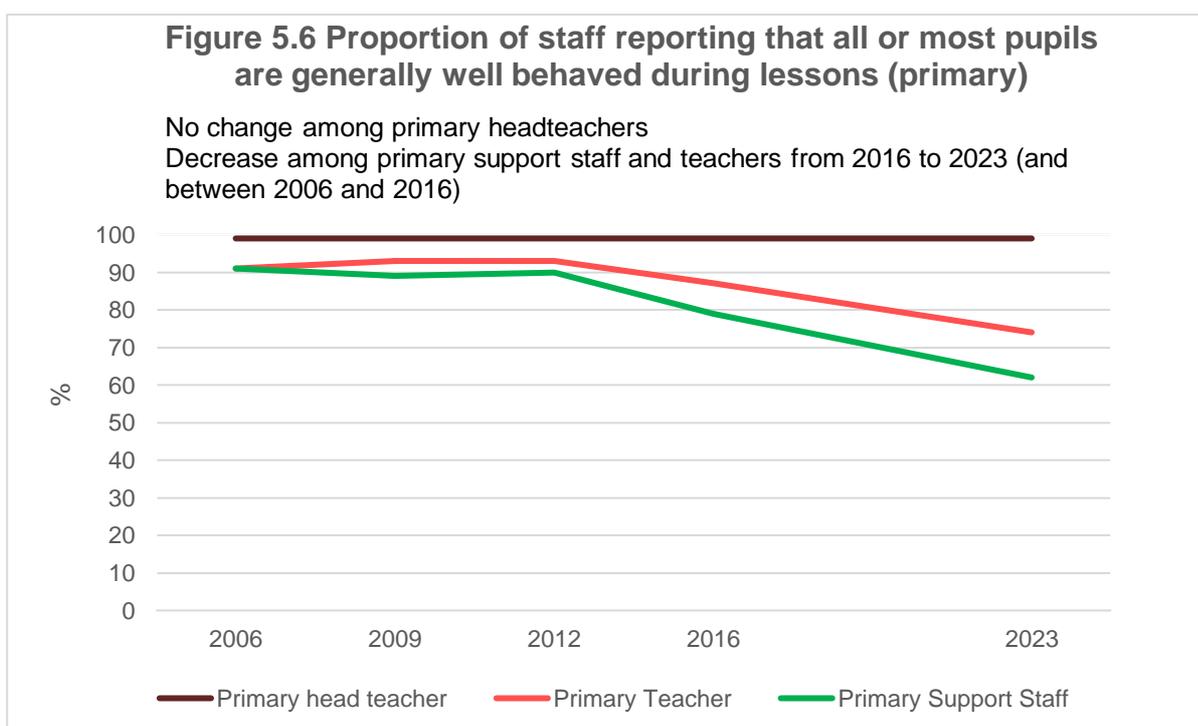
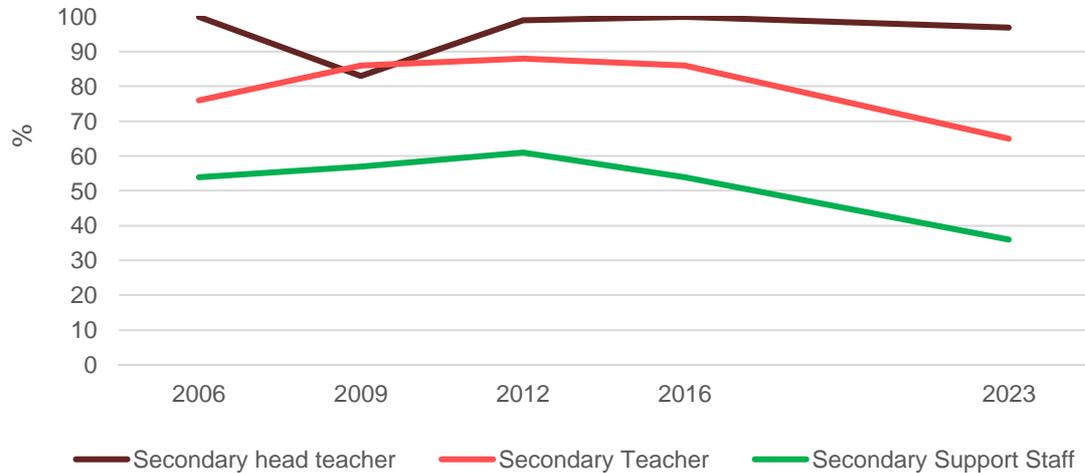


Figure 5.7 Proportion of staff reporting that all or most pupils are generally well behaved during lessons (secondary)

No change among secondary headteachers between 2006 and 2023
Decrease among secondary teachers from 2016 to 2023 (and since 2006)
Decrease among secondary support staff from 2016 to 2023 and from 2012 to 2016 (and since 2006)



Similar decreases can be seen amongst secondary support staff and teachers (Figure 5.7). In 2006, around half (54%) of secondary support staff reported that all or most pupils were generally well-behaved in the classroom, this remained relatively stable from 2009 to 2016 before a decline to around a third (36%) in 2023.

Across the same time period, views of secondary support staff about behaviour around the school has followed a different pattern (Figure 5.9). In 2006, 79% of secondary support staff reported that all or most pupils were generally well-behaved around the school. This increased in 2012 and 2016 to 84% and 89% respectively, before declining in 2023 to a similar level to 2006 (75%). A similar pattern was seen with secondary teachers, although the reported levels were generally higher (ranging from a high of 94% in 2012 to a low of 83% in 2023).

Figure 5.8 Proportion of staff reporting that all or most pupils are generally well behaved around the school (primary)

No change among primary headteachers
 Decrease among primary teachers and support staff from 2016 to 2023 (no change in any previous years)

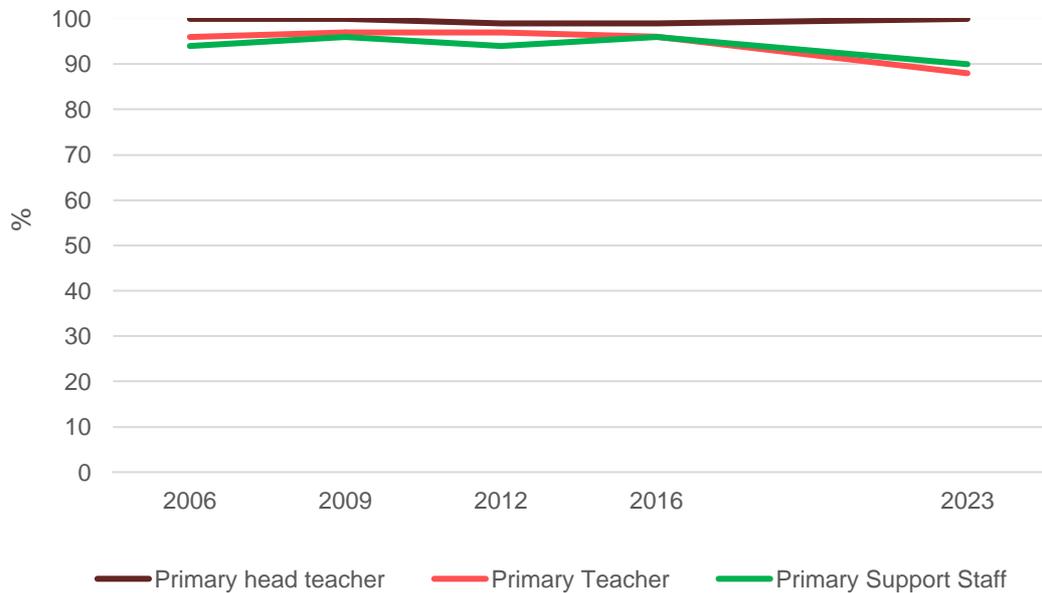
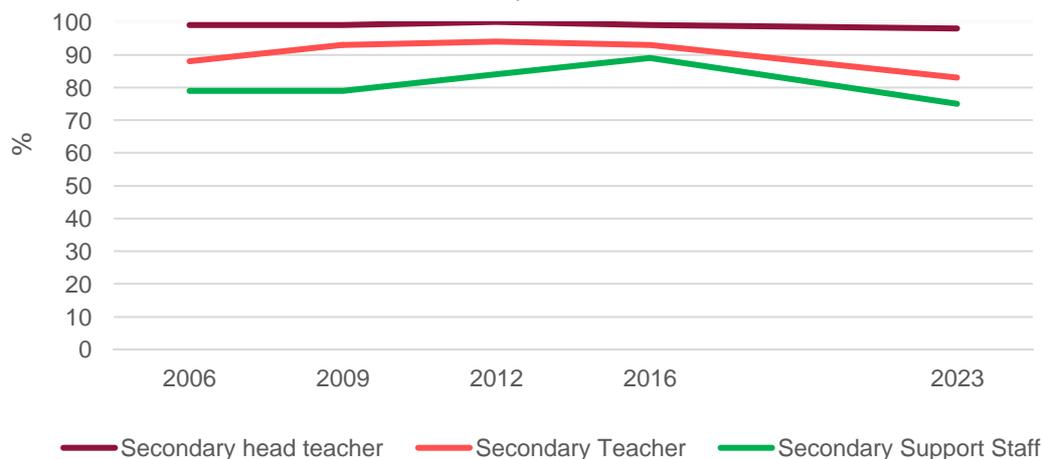


Figure 5.9 Proportion of staff reporting that all or most pupils are generally well behaved around the school (secondary)

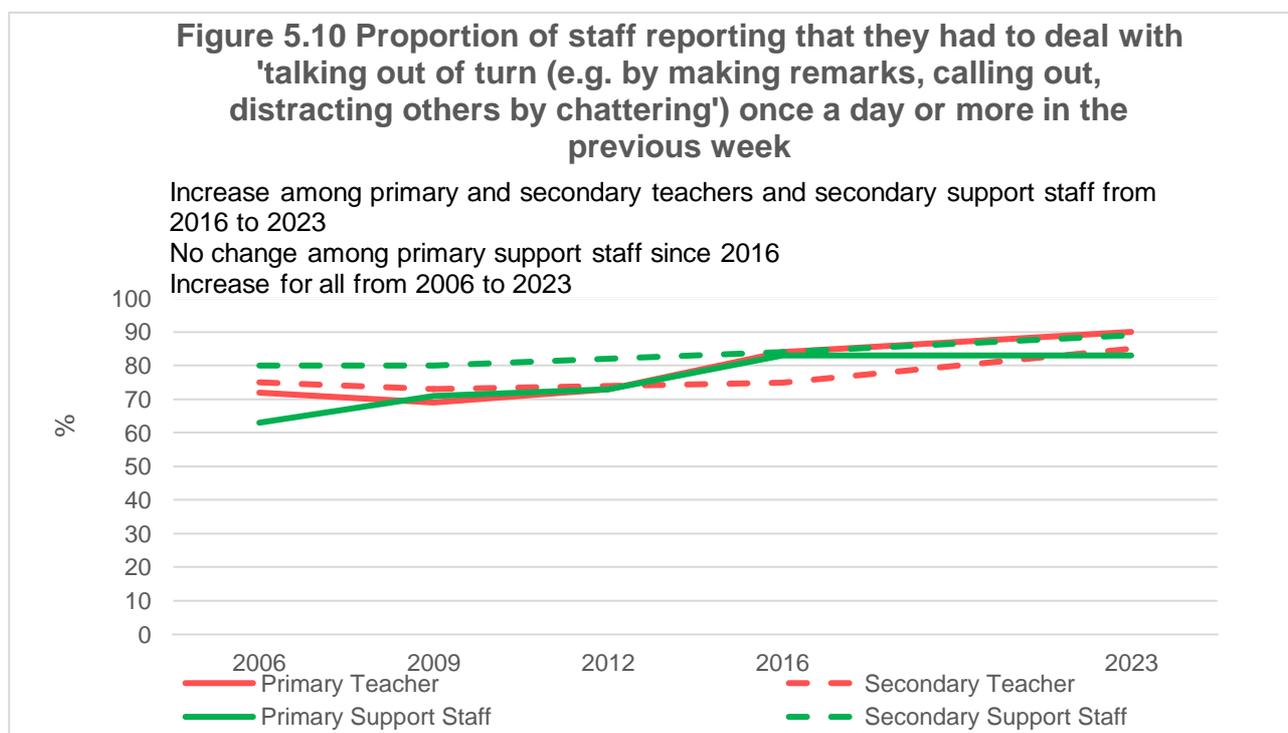
No change among secondary headteachers.
 Decrease among secondary teachers from 2016 to 2023 (with an increase between 2006 and 2016)
 Decrease among secondary support staff from 2016 to 2023 (with an increase between 2006 and 2016)



Longer term trends in low level disruptive behaviour

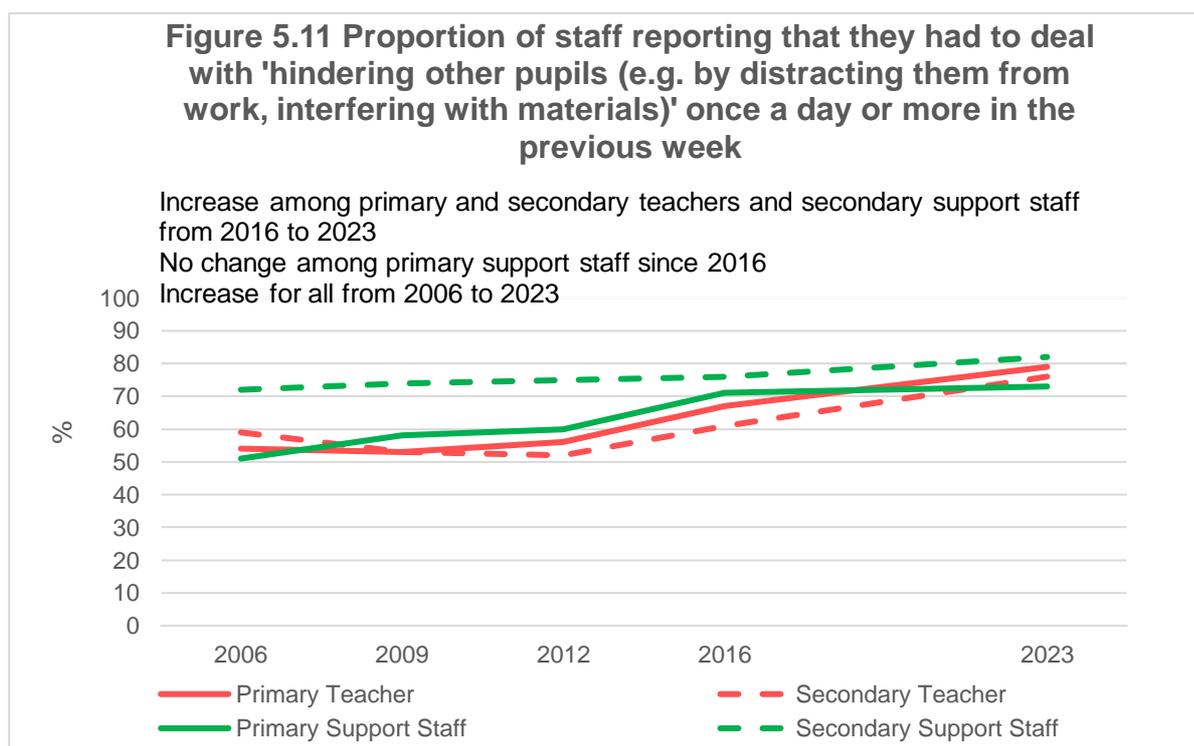
Between 2006 and 2023, the three low level disruptive behaviours which were most commonly reported by both support staff and teachers have remained consistent. They were: talking out of turn, hindering other pupils and work avoidance. However, in 2023, all three of these behaviours are being experienced more often by primary and secondary support staff and teachers than they were in 2006.

The reported level of pupils talking out of turn in the classroom at least once a day increased from 63% in 2006 to 83% in 2016 among primary support staff (Figure 5.10). Among primary teachers, the increase in reported levels can be seen from 2012, rising from 73% to 90% in 2023. Among secondary teachers, the proportion who reported pupils talking out of turn in the classroom at least once a day remained relatively stable between 2006 and 2016, before increasing between 2016 and 2023 from 75% to 85%. Views of secondary support staff have changed less over time. This group were more likely than others to report experiencing talking out of turn at least once a day in the last week in 2006 with 80% saying so, rising to 89% in 2023.



Reported levels of staff experiencing pupils hindering other pupils in the classroom have increased since 2006 among all teachers and support staff (Figure 5.11). The overall increase has been less pronounced among secondary support staff – rising from 72% in 2006 to 82% in 2023 - than primary support staff – increasing from 51% to 73%. Reported levels among primary teachers increased at a level similar to support staff - from 54% in 2006 to 79% in 2023. Secondary teachers also reported a notable increase in experiencing this behaviour, from 59% to 76%. The reported levels of experiencing pupils hindering other pupils in the classroom rose most sharply between 2016 and 2023 for all staff groups except primary support

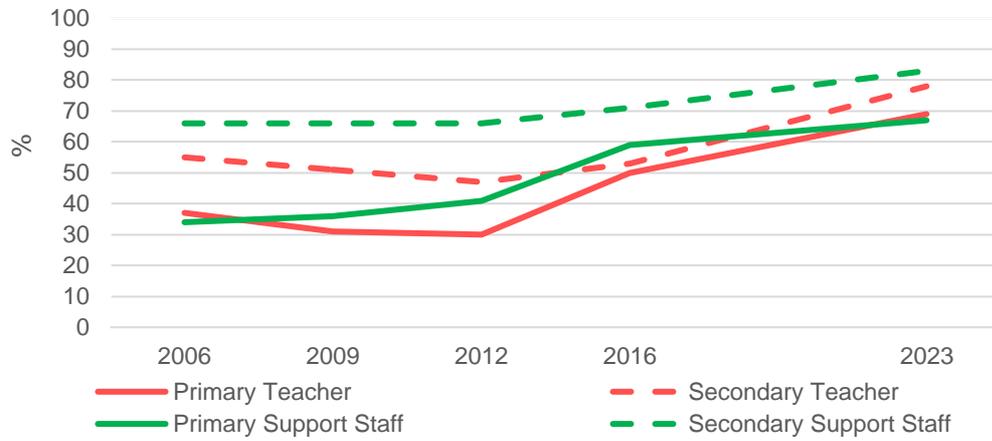
staff, where the greatest increase occurred between 2012 and 2016 (from 60% to 71%).



Following these trends, there has been a similar increase in the levels of pupil work avoidance in the classroom reported by all teachers and support staff between 2006 and 2023 (Figure 5.12). The increase is greater (between 32-33 percentage point increase) among primary staff than secondary staff (between 19-23 percentage point increase). For primary and secondary teachers, reported levels declined up until 2012 before rising between 2012 and 2023. For example, in 2012, only 3 in 10 (30%) primary teachers reported having to deal with work avoidance at least once a day, rising to 5 in 10 (50%) in 2016 and nearly 7 in 10 (69%) in 2023. Primary and secondary support staff are almost twice as likely to have experienced work avoidance at least once a day in 2023 compared with 2006. For example, 34% of primary support staff experienced this at least once a day in 2006 compared with 67% in 2023.

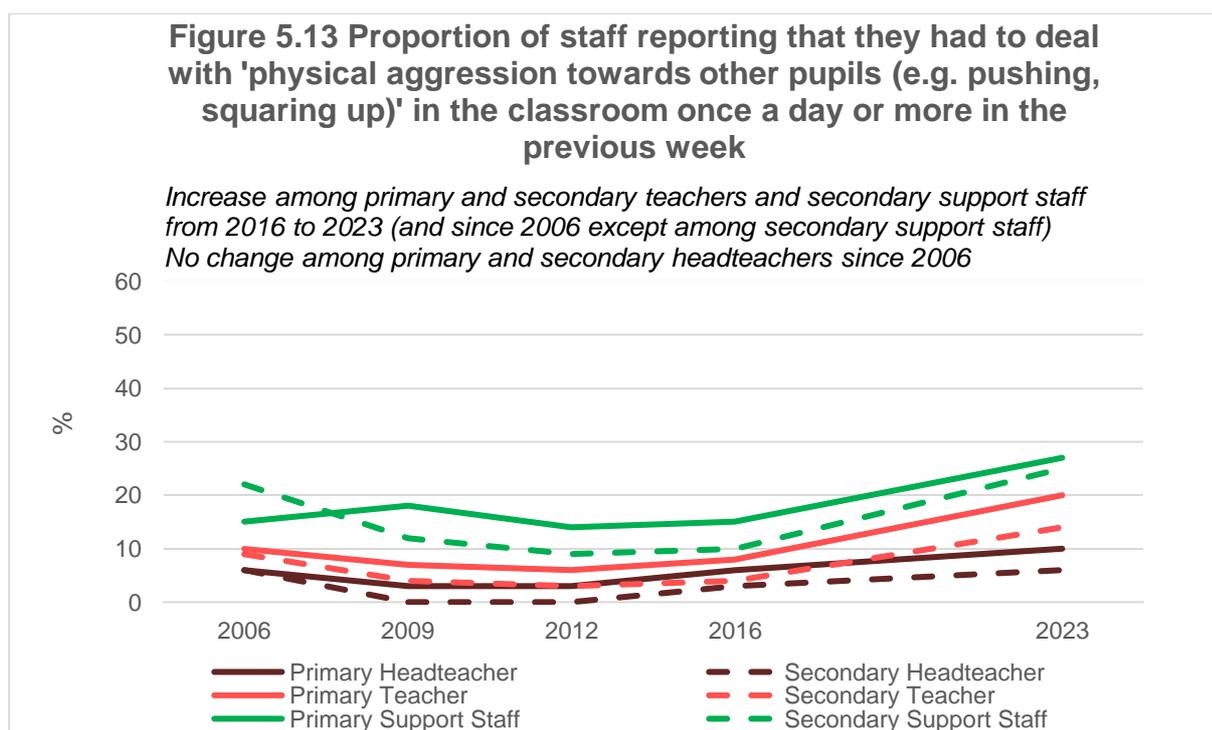
Chart 5.12 Proportion of staff reporting that they had to deal with 'work avoidance (e.g. by delaying start to work set)' once a day or more in the previous week

Increase among primary and secondary teachers and support staff from 2016 to 2023 (all increased since 2006)



Longer terms trends in serious disruptive behaviour

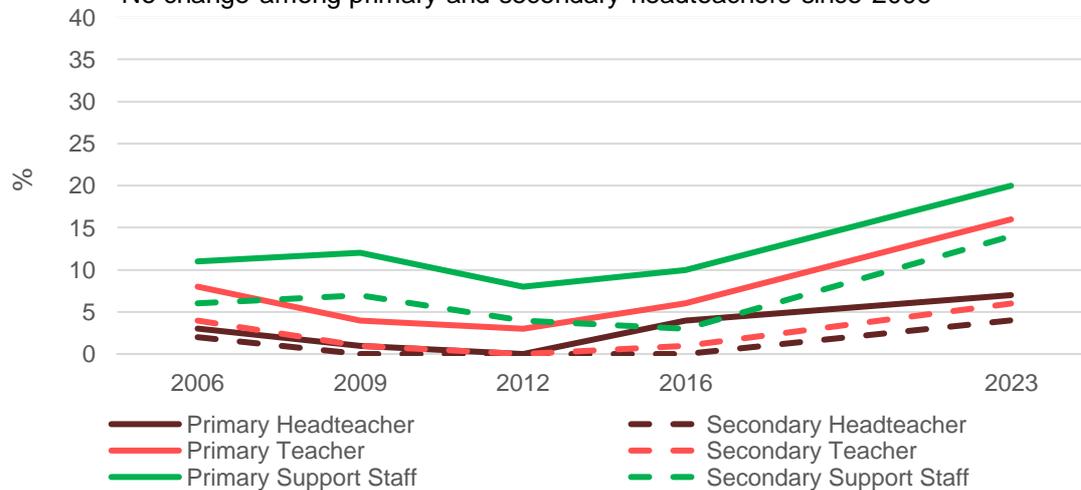
After initially declining between 2006 and 2012, staff experience of pupil aggression towards other pupils in the classroom (at least once a day in the last week) has been consistently increasing (Figure 5.13). For headteachers and secondary support staff, this means that experiences in 2023 are broadly similar to those in 2006. For example, 8% of primary headteachers reported experiencing pupil aggression towards other pupils in class at least once a day in 2006 compared with 10% in 2023. In contrast, reported levels among primary teachers and support staff and secondary teachers have risen since 2006. For example, 10% of primary teachers had encountered physical aggression towards other pupils in 2006, rising to 20% in 2023.



Patterns in experiences of pupil violence towards other pupils in the classroom at least once a week since 2006 are similar to those seen in relation to pupil aggression (Figure 5.14). For all staff groups, there is a decrease in the proportion encountering this behaviour between 2006 and 2012 followed by a steady rise between then and 2023. Amongst headteachers and secondary support staff, again this means levels in 2023 are similar to those reported in 2006 (though the differences between these groups are wide). For teachers and primary support staff however, the proportion experiencing this behaviour in 2023 is notably higher than in 2006, with a particularly stark increase since 2016. For example, 8% of primary teachers reported encountering physical violence towards other pupils at least once a week in 2006, this decreased to 6% in 2012 before rising to 16% in 2023. A similar rise from 2006 is reported by secondary support staff (from 6% to 14% in 2023).

Figure 5.14 Proportion of staff reporting that they had to deal with 'physical violence towards other pupils (e.g. punching, kicking, head butting, use of weapon)' in the classroom once a day or more in the previous week

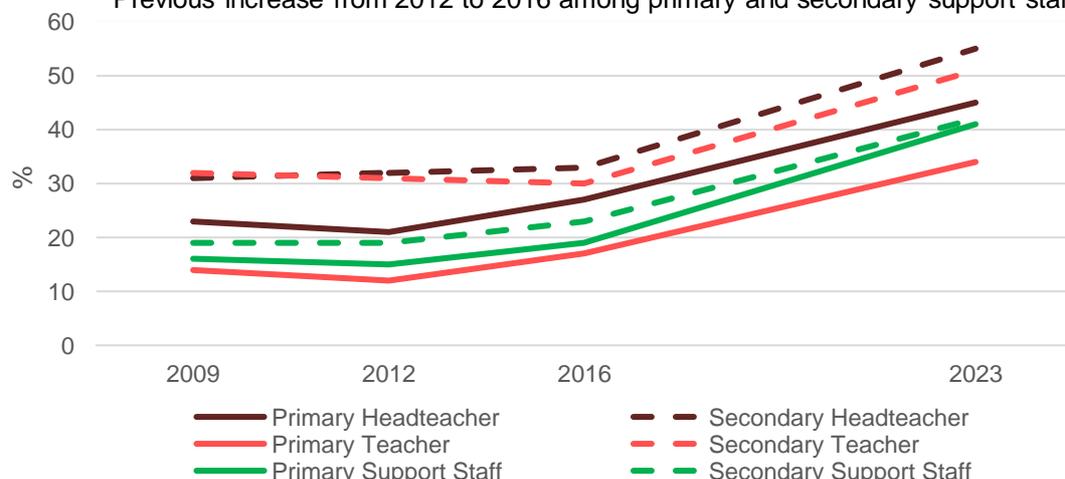
Increase among primary and secondary teachers and secondary support staff from 2016 to 2023 (and since 2006 except among secondary teachers)
 No change among primary and secondary headteachers since 2006



The proportion of staff that have experienced at least one incident of general verbal abuse towards them personally in the last 12 months has risen among all staff types since 2009 (Figure 5.15). The greatest increase occurred between 2016 and 2023, ranging from a 17 to a 22 percentage point rise. Around 3 in 10 (31%) secondary headteachers reported at least one incident of verbal abuse towards them personally in 2009, rising to over 5 in 10 (55%) in 2023. Between 2006 and 2016 increases were low, ranging from 3 to 4 percentage points.

Figure 5.15 Proportion of staff reporting that they personally experienced at least one incidence of 'general verbal abuse towards you (e.g. threatening remarks)' in the previous 12 months

Increase among all primary and secondary staff types from 2016 to 2023 (and between 2006 to 2023)
 Previous increase from 2012 to 2016 among primary and secondary support staff



The proportion of staff having experienced at least once incident of physical aggression and physical violence towards them in the last 12 months has also increased since 2009 for all staff types (Figures 5.16 and 5.17). As with verbal abuse, the greatest increase in personal experiences of physical aggression and violence has occurred since 2016, except among primary support staff where this increased the most between 2012 and 2016. Since 2009, experiences of physical aggression have increased more among primary staff (increasing by between 21 and 25 percentage points) than secondary staff (increasing by between 9 and 11 percentage points). The pattern is similar for experiences of physical violence with increases of between 20 and 28 percentage points among primary staff and between 6 and 10 percentage points among secondary staff. Increases in personal experience of aggression and violence have been just as pronounced among headteachers as among teachers and support staff.

Figure 5.16 Proportion of staff reporting that they personally experienced at least one incidence of 'physical aggression towards you (e.g. pushing, squaring up)' in the previous 12 months

Increase among all primary and secondary staff types from 2016 to 2023 (and between 2006 to 2023)
 Previous increase from 2012 to 2016 among primary teachers and support staff

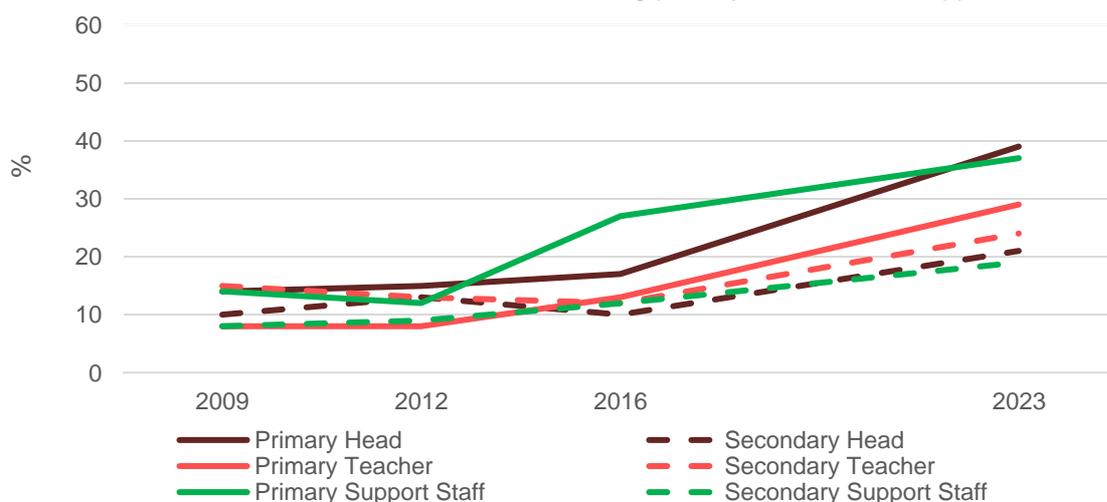
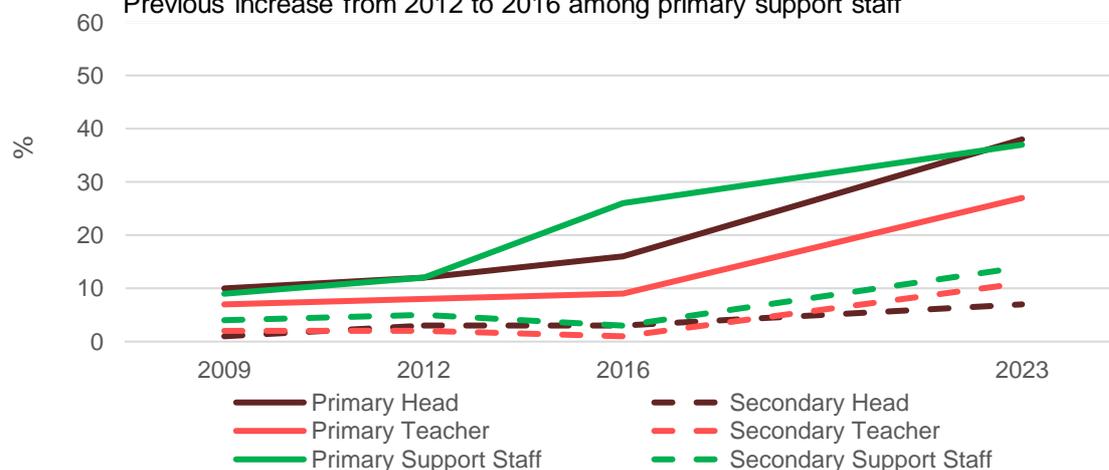


Figure 5.17 Proportion of staff reporting that they personally experienced at least one incidence of 'physical violence towards you (e.g. punching, kicking, head butting or use of a weapon)' in the previous 12 months

Increase among all primary and secondary staff types from 2016 to 2023 (except for secondary headteachers). Increased for all primary and secondary staff types between 2006 to 2023.

Previous increase from 2012 to 2016 among primary support staff



Experiences of changing behaviour

When speaking about the changes they had seen in behaviour in recent years, school staff and LA representatives generally reported changes which are similar to those identified in the quantitative findings. In addition, a number of emerging behaviours were identified which are not captured by the survey.

Positive behaviour

Despite the survey results indicating that positive behaviour in schools has decreased since 2016, the majority of school staff, interviewed as part of the qualitative research, described the behaviour in their schools as being generally good with only a small number of pupils displaying behaviour which was disruptive or challenging. Staff reported that most pupils behaved well, giving examples of positive behaviour such as pupils being polite and kind to one another, following instructions and engaging with their work. However, the number of children within a school who exhibit disruptive behaviour was perceived to have increased.

“The pupils within the school, I would say about 90% of them give us absolutely or next to no bother at all when it comes to behaviour. They might need the odd reminder, they're a bit noisy, they're a bit boisterous, but generally, other than that, they are great.” (Primary headteacher)

Where schools gave examples of positive improvements to behaviour in recent years, these included young people being kinder and more tolerant of difference and having a greater interest in social justice.

“Other students are comfortable being friends with any student from any walk of life, or any race, or sexual orientation, or any of that sort of stuff. It seems to be a positive thing, this behaviour has changed.” (Secondary teacher)

Negative changes in behaviour

One of the most marked changes in behaviour since 2016 identified in the survey was the increase in verbal abuse, physical aggression and physical violence in both primary and secondary school. This was echoed in the qualitative research by school staff and LA representatives who reported an increase in the frequency of young people biting, spitting, kicking, slapping, punching, pulling hair, scratching, throwing chairs and tables and damaging classrooms. While school staff acknowledged that it was only a small minority of pupils exhibiting these behaviours, it could have a serious impact on teaching staff including, in some cases, injury, hospitalisation and sickness absence. This was particularly observed among pupils with the greatest support needs, including those with ADHD and ASD diagnoses. LA representatives, while more often using the terms “distressed and dysregulated behaviour”, noted increasing numbers of incidents involving violence and aggression being reported through their local authority-wide health and safety reporting systems.

“Physical violence for me is the one thing that's really escalated. What can you do when a child's attacking you, besides keep moving away? Then if they follow you, where do you go? You've got nowhere to go.” (Primary support staff)

“I wouldn't say it's just secondary schools, and I would say its primary schools and what I would say is that we've noticed a real increase in that distressed and dysregulated behaviour with our younger children.” (Local authority representative)

The use of swearing and bad language within school was also noted to have increased, both in the way that pupils speak to one another and also directed towards school staff. It was suggested that this change may reflect a more relaxed attitude towards swearing in society in general and that pupils may have had more exposure to such language in the home during lockdown. When speaking about both the increased exposure to violence and physical aggression, and verbal abuse and swearing, school staff noted the lack of parity with other professions which have a zero-tolerance approach towards swearing, physical violence and aggression.

There is the swearing, there's a lot more swearing at staff, and staff don't like that. Nobody comes into their work to be swore at. It's as if you have to accept it. It's alright for you to get sworn at. I don't agree with that because I don't feel like if you're in another workplace that it would be okay for somebody to come in and swear at you. (Secondary teacher)

A final theme which emerged from the interviews regarding changes in behaviour was a general reduction in levels of respect and a change in attitude among pupils. School staff spoke about pupils lacking respect both in their behaviour towards one

another and towards school staff, with examples given of pupils being unkind and thoughtless towards one another, repeated vandalism within the school and using inappropriate and offensive language. This was discussed alongside a perceived change in attitude among pupils to one of defiance and a sense of entitlement, citing increased incidences of pupils arguing back to teaching staff, refusing to follow instructions and walking out of class, contributing to low level disruption within schools.

“In general, I would say there's been a decline in, for want of a better word, respect, and not respect for authority, just respect for somebody that's being respectful to you. There doesn't seem to be the respect back. It seems to be lacking now.” (Secondary teacher)

Emerging patterns of behaviour

In addition to the changes in behaviour over time identified in the survey data, school staff and LA representatives spoke about emerging trends in behaviour which may not be captured in the survey. In-school truanting was described as an issue across a number of the secondary schools visited as part of the qualitative research, whereby pupils attend school but do not attend all their classes. School staff spoke about groups of pupils roaming the corridors, toilets and social areas, walking out of class and causing disruption by shouting into classrooms and vandalising school property. Behaviour in toilets was identified as an area of concern by staff who described destructive behaviour and vandalism in toilets and raised concerns about the difficulties of managing behaviour in toilets, particularly during class time.

“What they do is they lap, we call them lappers. They just do laps of the corridors. They just go around the corridors or around the building.” (Secondary headteacher)

Related to this is the issue of pupils vaping in schools. This was also highlighted by a number of school staff in secondary schools and LA representatives who reported that pupils are frequently asking to be let out of class to go to the toilet, in order that they can vape. Participants raised concerns about the ease of access that pupils seem to have to age-restricted products and their use of these during the school day.

“In a school of 1400, I would have easily said that there was maybe between 400 and 500 of them vaping. It's the ease of access to vape in shops. You go into some shops and it's like Disneyland. The cigarettes are behind closed doors, but the vapes are neon, in your face, and kids really don't think there's anything wrong.” (Local authority representative)

Another common theme in emerging issues in behaviour was that of sexist, misogynistic and explicitly sexualised language among male pupils, particularly related to the popularity of influencers. While only mentioned in a small number of secondary schools, school staff expressed great concern about this growing trend and its impact on girls, young women and female school staff members.

Participants gave examples of male pupils directing abusive and sexist language and more disruptive behaviour towards female teachers in a way that they did not towards male teachers.

“[influencer] is like a god to these lads. It's really frightening how much he has reached out and infiltrated their world and he's all over social media and it's like a radicalisation of a lot of the young men in the school.” (Secondary teacher)

“But when it comes to influencers and young boys, that can really have an overt impact on how they display misogyny. I would say that's definitely one of the biggest issues and it's one that's on the rise.” (Secondary teacher)

While the increasing use of mobile phones and social media was identified as an area of concern in the 2016 research, this type of behaviour seems to have increased substantially in the intervening years and was mentioned commonly among by school staff and LA representatives. Primary schools reported fewer issues and concerns around mobile phone and social media use, partly due to the ages of the pupils, though primary school staff did on occasion speak about mobile phone use among upper primary pupils. In secondary schools, mobile phone use was described as a significant challenge across almost all schools visited. Pupils' use of mobile phones in class was described “a bane” and a source of considerable disruption, with teachers asking pupils to put their phones away potentially leading to conflict from which more serious disruptive behaviour could escalate.

I've spoken to other members of staff within my department who have had a real struggle and spend most of their day arguing with a pupil to get their mobile phone off them, and it becomes a big argument because, 'That's my phone and you're not getting that. This is my rights,' and all of that kind of stuff. It can take up a lot of learning and teaching time. (Secondary teacher)

Where schools had mobile phone policies, these were often applied inconsistently, with some staff allowing pupils to use their phones for research or to listen to music during quiet study time. This, in turn, was perceived as making it more difficult for other teachers to enforce no-phone policies. However, staff also spoke about the challenges in navigating mobile phone use policies in an increasingly digital world, describing them as “part of life”, which made attempts to control their use in schools more problematical.

Social media was also highlighted as a negative influence on pupil behaviour. LA representatives and school staff described instances of pupils videoing fights and incidents among pupils, taking pictures of staff members during classes and pupils under toilet cubicle doors, before sharing them on social media. The use of social media in bullying incidents was also outlined, with school staff describing the way in which social media was inescapable as young people had their phones with them at all times and were accessing social media late into the night.

“So, setting up fights, enticing fights, sharing videos of fights, making false accounts, sending pictures of staff, pictures of other pupils, putting them to abusive songs and insulting social media platforms. That side has all increased.” (Local authority representative)

Finally, a number of local authority representatives expressed concerns around behaviour facilitated by free bus travel for those aged under 22 years. The ability of young people to travel for free on buses had, in some cases, led to young people traveling to other areas of the city to take part in fights or meeting up on buses and engaging in anti-social behaviour. LA representatives also raised safeguarding concerns that young people may be travelling far from their homes to meet with people without their parents’ knowledge.

“I don’t know if other local authorities have verbalised their concerns about the free bus travel but certainly what we’re seeing in [local authority] is that some of our adolescents are planning groupings, congregations, gangs, using the free bus pass and heading...one gang heading from one community to another and yeah...the implications of that. So I think socially we’re seeing real issues in our communities and that is drip feeding into our schools as well.” (Local authority representative)

Reasons for changes in behaviour

School staff and LA representatives spoke about issues they believed to be at the root of changes in behaviour in recent years. There was no clear single reason identified by school staff and LA representatives for the perceived changes in behaviour observed since the 2016 report. However, many participants referred to COVID-19, the resulting lockdown and the specific impacts of the pandemic (see Chapter 6).

In addition, many of the reasons given for worsening behaviour in schools were similar to those identified in the previous wave of Behaviour in Scottish Schools in 2016. These similarities are highlighted in the text. This suggests that the changes in behaviour since 2016 may not be solely due to COVID-19 and more recent changes in society, and that policies and approaches put in place following the 2016 research may not have been effective in addressing the factors which contribute to negative changes in behaviour.

Perceived lack of consequences

In the education sector in Scotland, there has been a shift in culture within schools in recent years towards a nurturing and restorative approach with a focus on relationships. The benefits and challenges of this approach are outlined in Chapter 9. For some teaching staff and LA representatives, there was a feeling that the adoption of this approach meant that there was a lack of meaningful consequences for young people who displayed disruptive behaviour, and this was contributing to its increase. Participants described a gradual normalising of disruptive behaviour which is leading to widespread deteriorating behaviour, and reported that pupils

were observing their peers displaying disruptive behaviour with few or no consequences, leading them to act in this way themselves.

“There is a more general belief that young people believe that there are no consequences, there are no repercussions. They're very well aware of their rights, and they're very well aware of the system that sits around everything, and they can understand how far to push that.” (Local authority representative)

School staff also frequently mentioned that children are increasingly aware of their human rights as a result of Rights Respecting Schools accreditation and a focus on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, for some, there was a feeling that children were being taught their rights without any consideration being given to also teaching children what their responsibilities may be or an understanding of the rights of others. Others described young people using language related to rights in arguments as to why their disruptive behaviour should not be challenged, for example, that their phone should not be removed from them or that they should be allowed to leave the classroom or school premises with no adverse consequences.

Dysregulation, ASN and resources

When speaking about incidents of verbally abusive or physically aggressive or violent behaviour, school staff frequently spoke about this as intersecting with additional support needs, ADHD and ASD diagnoses and emotional dysregulation. School staff, particularly support staff, described pupils with ASN with more extreme behaviours and complex needs who require one-to-one support in the classroom and who frequently experience extreme emotional dysregulation which can manifest itself in violent and destructive behaviour leading to classes being evacuated and injury to staff and other pupils.

School staff linked this increase in incidents among young people with ASD to the presumption of mainstream (the legislative duty on local authorities to provide education to all children and young people in a mainstream school or early learning and childcare setting unless specific exemptions apply) and a perceived reduction in the availability of resources for pupils with ASN including numbers of support staff, as well as on and off-site provision. There was a sense that schools, particularly primary schools, were not adequately resourced to support pupils with ASN, that the funding available for that support was not adequate to provide the additional support required and that there were some pupils attending mainstream schools for whom mainstream was not appropriate but that there was no alternative, specialist provision available. The under-resourcing of ASN provision and lack of specialist facilities and services were also observed in the 2016 report.

“If you can manage mainstream, great, but there's not enough facilities for young people who really do need the right support and the right environment for them to be able to reach their potential. The council has shut down so many of these establishments.” (Secondary support staff)

Changes in society and parenting

Qualitative participants also pointed to changes in wider society, in approaches to parenting and family structures as potentially contributing to elements of disruptive and distressed behaviour. These changes in society included the ubiquity of social media, perceived normalisation of the use of swear words in everyday conversation, and a reduction in the level of respect that is shown among people across society as well as a perceived increasing individualisation and a lack of awareness of the impact of their behaviour on others.

School staff spoke about young people having less well-developed social skills than in previous years and pointed to parents' approach to their own use, and their children's use, of digital technology as contributing to this. School staff identified parents not setting boundaries around mobile phone and social media use as contributing to challenging interpersonal situations among pupils which impacted on their behaviour in school. They also gave examples of parents allowing children to have their own social media profiles at a young age, setting no restrictions around using their phones late into the night and allowing young people to continue to use their phones after being involved in incidents of online bullying and sending hurtful messages.

As in 2016, parental attitudes towards schools and behaviour were identified as a key factor in observed changes in the behaviour of pupils in schools. School staff frequently emphasised the difference in the parental response if they raised concerns about their children's behaviour. Staff described scenarios in which parents would only accept their child's account of the situation, and assume that the school was at fault rather than their child. Some staff argued that this reflected parents struggling to instil discipline at home or wanting to be friends with their children rather than setting boundaries. Others perceived that this demonstrated a lack of respect for teaching as a profession among some parents.

“We have a number of children whose behaviour can be very much linked to the parents' expectations of school and whether or not the parent fully buys into the education system or supports us in decision-making.” (Primary headteacher)

Engagement with school and learning

Disengagement from lessons was frequently identified as contributing to low level disruption within classrooms. As discussed in Chapter 6, disengagement with learning was highlighted as an impact of COVID-19 as a result of time out of the school routine and gaps in knowledge. However, disengagement was also identified as a contributor to disruptive behaviour in 2016, with common causes cited in 2016 and 2023 including lower levels of concentration, shorter attention spans and pupils getting less sleep. Use of social media, mobile phones and digital technology was discussed as contributing to both decreased attention spans and disengagement, and school staff described changes that they had made to lessons to increase engagement including more engaging teaching methods, shorter tasks, switching tasks more often and incorporating digital technology into lessons.

Mental health and resilience

Lower levels of resilience were identified as contributing to low level disruption in 2016 in terms of pupils not developing problem solving skills and increased reliance on school staff for assistance. While these themes were also present in 2023, resilience was more commonly talked about alongside mental health and wellbeing, which was felt to have declined in recent years. School staff described their concern at the increased incidence of mental health problems, particularly anxiety, among pupils and a decreased ability to cope with the pressures and stresses of secondary school workload and exams. While not always directly resulting in low level or serious disruptive behaviour, poor mental health and wellbeing were seen as being related to issues such as disengagement from classes, reduced social interaction, in-school truancy and emotional dysregulation.

“We see quite a rise in older maybe S4 to S6 young people, in particular girls, where mental health and well-being and the challenges that they face there, whether it's anxiety, depression, self-harm, equally impact on their ability to regulate in school and their relationships with staff and others.” (Local authority representative)

Chapter 6 – Impact of COVID-19

Summary of findings

In line with perceptions of worsening behaviour described in Chapter 5, most staff perceive that behaviour is worse than before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began in March 2020, both in the classroom (77%) and around the school (80%).

School staff involved in the qualitative research perceived COVID-19 to have had a negative impact on behaviour, particularly for those pupils whose transition - either between early years and primary or primary and secondary - was disrupted. School staff viewed these pupils as showing immaturity, leading to low level disruption.

COVID-19 was seen to have resulted in delays to pupils' social and communication skills, leading to disruptive behaviour related to sharing, playing together and communicating their feelings in primaries, and interpersonal relationships and group work in secondaries.

Additional impacts of COVID-19 included disengagement with school and schoolwork, reduction in attendance for some pupils, anxiety and poorer mental wellbeing and greater reliance on mobile phones and social media. The most negative impacts of COVID-19 were considered to be felt by the most vulnerable pupils; those affected by poverty, deprivation and trauma.

The impact of the pressures placed upon school staff by COVID-19 and the impact on their wellbeing and resilience should also be noted.

Introduction

This chapter explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on behaviour in the classroom and around the school. These questions were introduced to the 2023 BISS survey to capture the extent to which school staff perceive COVID has impacted on pupil behaviour, which may help to interpret changes in pupil behaviour since 2016. The issue was also explored in the qualitative research with headteachers, teachers, and support staff as well as Local Authority representatives. This chapter will explore the differences in perceptions of behaviour since COVID of headteachers, teachers, and support staff, as well as amongst different stages of pupils taught. The qualitative research then explores this in more depth and the potential reasons for the perceived impact of COVID-19.

Perceived changes in pupil behaviour since COVID-19

In the survey, staff were asked to think about the pupil behaviour they encounter in the classroom and around the school now, compared with before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began in March 2020, and to indicate if behaviour was much better, a little better, a little worse, much worse, or about the same as before the COVID-19 pandemic began⁶⁹.

All staff (head teachers, teachers and support staff) were asked about pupil behaviour in the classroom. In addition head teachers and teachers were asked about pupil behaviour around the school:

For the purposes of this analysis, answers of 'much better' and 'a little better' were combined into a single 'better' category, and answers of 'much worse' and 'a little worse' were combined into a single 'worse' category. Tables in this chapter show the net percentages of staff who perceived behaviour to be 'better' or 'worse'.

Overall perceptions across primary and secondary

Overall, the majority of staff in both primary and secondary schools perceive that behaviour has become worse since before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began in March 2020, both in the classroom (77%) and around the school (80%) (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Perceived pupil behaviour in the classroom and around the school compared with before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began

| Would you say that behaviour now is... | In the classroom (%) | Around the school (%) |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Worse | 77 | 80 |
| Better | 3 | 3 |
| About the same as before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began | 19 | 17 |
| Unweighted base | 2,943 | 2,165 |

Overall perceptions vary by staff type. As shown in Figure 6.1, teachers are more likely than headteachers to say that behaviour has worsened around the school since COVID-19 (80% compared with 68%). Similarly, a higher percentage of teachers (79%) than headteachers (71%) and support staff (72%) perceive pupil behaviour in the classroom to have worsened since before the pandemic (Figure 6.2).

⁶⁹ Staff were given the option to select 'Not applicable (e.g. not in post here before March 2020).' Figures and base sizes presented in this chapter have excluded staff to whom these questions were not applicable.

Figure 6.1: Staff perceptions of pupil behaviour around the school compared with before COVID-19 by staff type

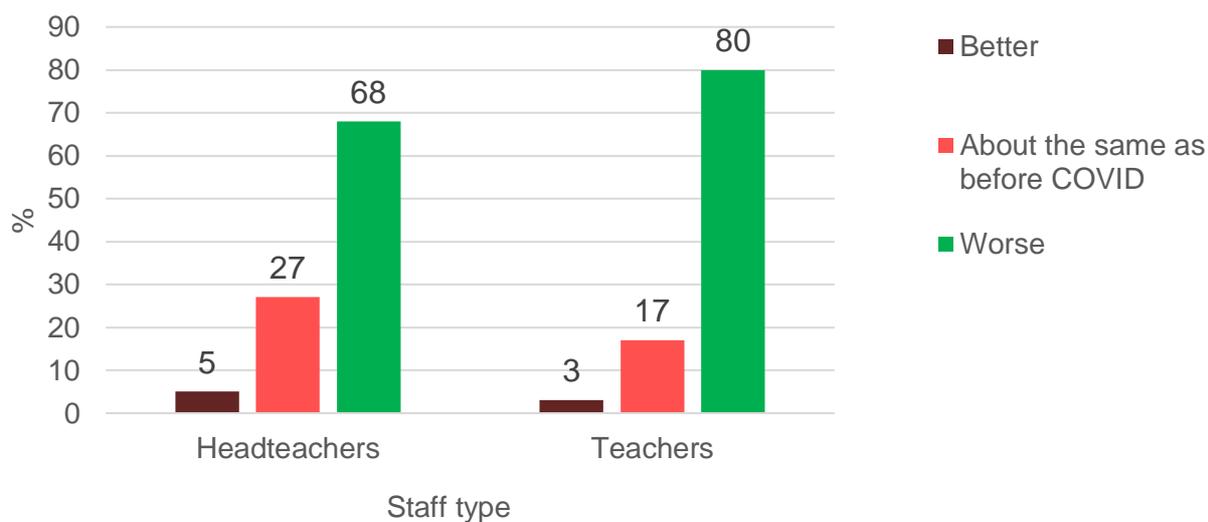
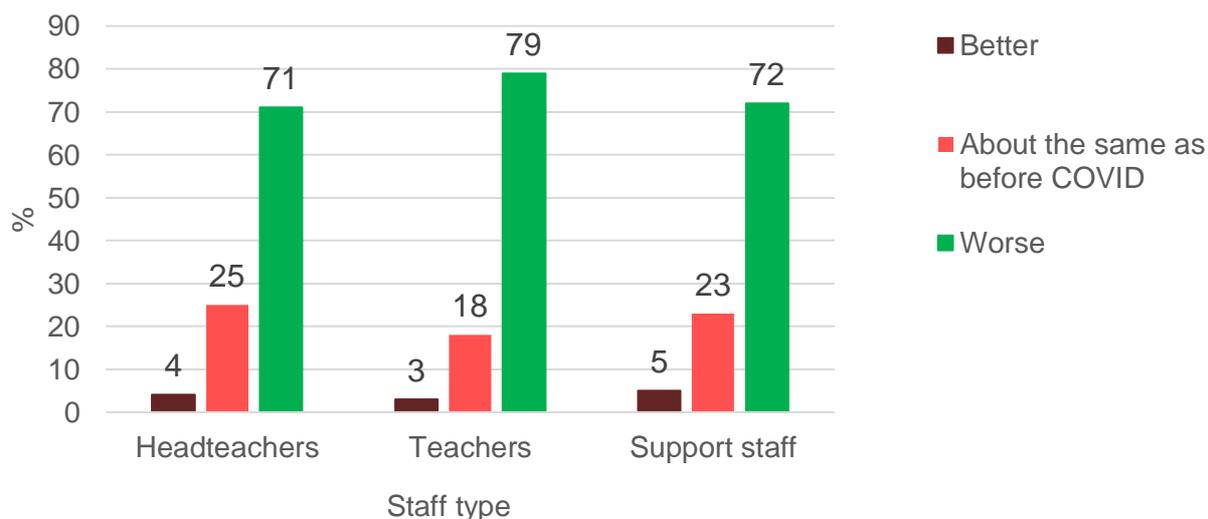


Figure 6.2: Staff perceptions of pupil behaviour in the classroom compared with before COVID-19 by staff type



Differences by staff type are mainly driven by those in primary schools where a higher percentage of teachers than headteachers perceive behaviour to have worsened since the pandemic, both around the school and in the classroom. Just over 7 in 10 (71%) of teachers compared with 64-65% of headteachers and support staff thought that behaviour had worsened in the classroom and 72% of teachers compared with 63% of headteachers thought the same around the school. In primary schools, support staff were also less likely than teachers to perceive behaviour to have worsened in the classroom (64% compared with 71% respectively).

In contrast, there were no notable differences in perceptions of behaviour since the pandemic between secondary staff. A high percentage of headteachers, teachers, and support staff all perceive behaviour to have worsened since COVID-19

(ranging from 84-89% in the classroom and around the school). The full breakdown of responses to these questions can be seen in Supplementary tables 6.1-6.2.

Variations by school type

Overall differences between primary and secondary school staff are also evident. Compared with primary school staff, secondary school staff are more likely to perceive worsening behaviour around the school (89% compared with 71%) and in the classroom (87% compared with 69%) since COVID-19. In line with this, primary school staff are more likely than secondary staff to report no change in behaviour since the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, 27% of primary staff believe behaviour in the classroom is about the same as before the pandemic compared with 11% of secondary school staff.

Wider impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown and the resulting time out of school, move to online learning and the restrictions which were still in place when pupils returned to school after each of the lockdowns were seen by participants to have had a profound effect on the development, and therefore the behaviour, of pupils. While there was general agreement across participants that COVID-19 has had an impact on behaviour in schools, there was some disagreement as to both the nature and the scale of the impact. For some, the impacts of COVID-19 were clear and could be evidenced by school and LA-level survey data. However, others argued that while COVID-19 may have exacerbated behaviour issues or impacted specific groups, these patterns of behaviour pre-dated the pandemic.

“I think these issues, these societal, poverty, social economic issues were always here but they may have been worsened by COVID” (Primary teacher)

“Although COVID has impacted a lot of things, the behaviour was already an issue prior to COVID, definitely.” (Secondary support staff)

A number of these issues have also been identified in the changes to behaviour chapter (Chapter 5). In this chapter, we discuss how participants have explicitly linked these changes in behaviour to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact on social development and communication skills

The most commonly identified impact of COVID-19 by both school staff and LA representatives was a delay in development among pupils, particularly evident in pupils' social and communication skills as well as a general immaturity. In terms of age and stage, the groups for whom COVID-19 seems to have had the greatest negative impact were those who experienced disruption to important transitional periods in their education. Local authority representatives and school staff identified those pupils who had missed out on early years education and the transition from nursery to school or from primary to secondary school as the groups most negatively affected by COVID-19. These transitions were seen as important for pupils to settle into school, build relationships with school staff and observe appropriate behaviour modelled by older pupils.

Immaturity among pupils as a result of COVID-19 was identified by those working in both primary and secondary schools. In primary schools, this lack of maturity was evident through incoming Primary 1s lacking the skills that staff would have expected from them, such as the ability to put on their own shoes and jacket and to take responsibility for their own belongings. Participants suggested that being at home with parents and missing out on time spent in nursery and the early years setting, as well as bypassing the transition from nursery to primary school, resulted in pupils in the earliest years of primary lacking basic skills in independence. Primary teaching staff spoke about adaptations they had made to their school day and teaching approach to support their youngest pupils in developing these skills while they settle in at school.

“I know they've had to adapt the approaches that they use within the infants' [school] over the last number of years, having soft starts, having less desk time, more play-based learning.” (Primary teacher)

In secondary schools, immaturity was apparent in pupils through a number of behaviours such as rough play and interactions in the playground, not taking responsibility for their work and materials and needing more attention and supervision in class. Those pupils who experienced disruption to their transition from primary to secondary school and the early years of secondary school (S3 and S4 at the time of the research) were most commonly identified as the group for whom COVID-19 had the greatest negative impact on behaviour. This group were described as showing immature and disruptive behaviour and disengagement with learning.

“They've missed huge inputs of transition, and I do beg the question, and I know a lot of people do, as to whether a lot of their behaviours are to do with the isolation of COVID, them not getting those transition events, them not developing those skills at such an essential and crucial point of their childhood.” (Secondary teacher)

“I think they've missed that end of primary, beginning of secondary, this is transition, this is how we do things. I think they've missed a bit of that. Maybe a wee bit of settling. They're quite immature.” (Secondary teacher)

Delays in the development of social and communication skills were identified by both primary and secondary school staff as contributing to the overall immaturity of pupils. Among primary pupils, staff described an increase in children struggling to share, take turns and play with one another in unstructured ways such as in the playground and coming to teaching staff with interpersonal issues which, in the past, pupils would have solved amongst themselves.

Staff and LA representatives also highlighted a lack of language and communication skills among pupils in the early years of primary meaning that pupils were coming to school without the skills to communicate their feelings and felt that the closure of playgroups, toddler groups and playparks over lockdown had contributed to this. Those in early and mid-primary school (P1 to P5) who experienced disruption to their nursery and early years' experience, the transition

from nursery and their first years of primary school were described as missing key language and social skills, with negative impacts on both their educational development and behaviour.

Teachers described the COVID-19 safety measures which were in place on return to schools, such as the wearing of masks and social distancing, as contributing to these negative effects as wearing masks made it difficult for primary teachers to model sounds and mouth movements to pupils to help with their language development. In a small number of schools, school staff spoke about an increase in violent outbursts and dysregulated behaviour among pupils in the early years of primary school which they described as being linked to the inability to communicate and frustration among pupils.

“Biting, kicking, punching, throwing, things that because they can’t communicate properly and they don’t have the skills to communicate even if their voice works, they bite you, they throw things at you, they pull your hair, they run away, they wreck, they hit other kids and that communication breakdown that’s happened in development seems to be showing itself in P1, 2 and 3.” (Local authority representative)

Even when pupils were able to return to primary school, restrictions meant that they were not able to resume normal activities seen as important in helping young people to develop social skills and responsibility such as mixing with other age groups of pupils, going on trips and taking on jobs within the school such as helping in the school office or acting as buddies to younger pupils.

Secondary school staff also identified a lack of social and communication skills among secondary pupils, although to a lesser extent than primary school staff, describing pupils as more likely to struggle with social interactions and group work as a direct result of the lack of opportunities for socialising during lockdown.

“For me, what we're seeing as a result of COVID, that lack of socialisation, their social skills if nothing else, being able to socially interact with friends and other adults that they missed out on.” (Secondary teacher)

Disengagement with learning and low level disruption

Among both primary and secondary school staff, lack of focus and engagement with learning was identified as contributing to low level disruption within the classroom. For both primary and secondary pupils, staff described a reduced attention span, and an increase in pupils struggling to sit in class, shouting out, arguing with teaching staff, coming late to class and getting out of their seats to walk around the classroom or go to the toilet. Staff linked this to the lack of structure experienced during lockdown, online learning and two years spent outside of the classroom environment.

“They had two years of not having to meet the demands of a school day so I think now when we're expecting them to sit down, engage in lessons, to listen, they find it hard.” (Primary headteacher)

Participants in the qualitative research also linked this disengagement and disruption with gaps in literacy, numeracy and general knowledge, study skills, the poverty-related attainment gap and pupils' lack of confidence in their academic ability. School staff described these issues as having been exacerbated by the disruption to learning and move to online learning during lockdown.

“So I've noticed in the maths, things like the first and second years, even the third years, that same core knowledge that was there, there's a load of gaps now.”
(Secondary teacher)

In senior secondary school pupils, school staff observed a lack of motivation since the pandemic. Teachers compared this with previous years where they described pupils as “more self-motivated”, particularly with respect to exam preparation. Staff members from one school spoke about having introduced additional supported study to support pupils around exam preparation.

“I just feel like they're just a little bit lackadaisical. It's almost like there's a bit of a hangover from COVID, where they just don't have that same drive that other year groups have had coming through.” (Secondary teacher)

Attendance, school avoidance and anxiety

Attendance and school avoidance was identified as a significant issue post-COVID-19 by school staff and local authority representatives. Across local authority areas, representatives spoke about a small but persistent cohort of students who had experienced difficulties in returning to school post-COVID-19 and were continuing to learn online and in the community. One local authority representative described a pilot scheme in their area which aimed to support pupils to re-engage with school in partnership with the school, the Nurture team and educational psychologists.

“Looking at individualised timetables, looking at individual teacher support, looking at small group support to try and get them to re-engage with school in a small way and then build that up to get them back into more regular attendance.
(Local authority representative)”

Concerns about reduced attendance following COVID-19 were echoed by school staff. Secondary school staff also highlighted a growing issue within schools where pupils will attend school but struggle to be in the classroom. This type of school avoidance was described as challenging to manage for schools as pupils are leaving classes between or during lessons to hide in the toilets or leave the school premises. Some pupils are being accommodated in spaces such as Nurture bases as an alternative to attending class.

“The first thing is to get them here. The second thing is when they are here, to get them into classes. Some of them will just not go into classes, some of them will not engage with the support spaces that we've got.” (Secondary headteacher)

School staff gave a variety of reasons for this type of non-attendance. Some staff felt that the disruption to learning had made pupils feel that school was optional and that in-person attendance was not important. Others related low attendance and in-school class avoidance to mental health issues related to the pandemic.

An increase in mental health problems and anxiety was also identified as a standalone impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. School staff described increased levels of anxiety and a general decline in resilience amongst young people, with pupils expressing anxiety around illness, infections and death. Local authority representatives described an increased demand for support from school counsellors which has led some local authorities to introduce additional provision.

“I think COVID has caused a significant increase in anxiety. For those children that were already a wee bit anxious, it's just escalated it and made it much bigger than it was previously.” (Primary headteacher)

Social media and mobile phone use

While an increase in mobile phones and social media use has already been described in previous chapters, interview participants explicitly linked this increase to young people's experiences in lockdown. School staff described an increased reliance on mobile phones among pupils resulting from pupils using their mobile phones as their main form of communication and entertainment during lockdown.

“I think a huge part of it is phones. I think during lockdown they had their phones 24/7. That was their source of entertainment, their source of communication. I think they've not lost that. I think in social areas and things, you see the kids interacting at breaks and lunches and it's all based around technology. They've kind of lost the ability of communication.” (Secondary support staff)

School staff described negative impacts of this reliance on mobile phones on young people's social and communication skills and on their attention spans, relating reduced attention spans to the short forms of content on social media platforms.

Impact of COVID-19 on different groups of pupils

There was general agreement among participants in the qualitative research that COVID-19 has had a more extreme impact on some pupils than others. As described above, in terms of age and stage, those pupils who experienced disruptions to their early years' experience, transitions into primary and into secondary were identified as those whose behaviour has been most affected by COVID-19.

In addition, young people who were perceived to have had the most difficult experiences of lockdown, particularly those from areas of greatest deprivation, those affected by poverty and trauma, those already struggling with mental health and anxiety, and care-experienced young people were also identified as being more negatively affected by COVID-19 than their peers. Local authority representatives and school staff described these specific cohorts of young people as experiencing particular challenges in reintegrating into education.

“I think the significant differences within our primary-age pupils coming through - I would say there's a difference there. Yes, I would say that those who have had the most difficult period of time have been those who had the poorest experiences in lockdown. Generally, those correlate to people who have trauma, attachment, nurture and a level of high SIMD, areas of multiple deprivation. So there's a correlation.” (Local authority representative)

For pupils with additional support needs, particularly autistic and neurodiverse pupils, there was a difference of opinion as to whether these young people had been more negatively affected by lockdown than their peers. Local authority representative and school staff found that some young people with additional support needs struggled over multiple lockdowns without the structure and routine that school provided, but acknowledged that, for other young people, learning online in a quiet and familiar environment had been beneficial and that returning to school and reintegrating into the busy school environment had presented a greater challenge.

The closure of statutory and third sector support services during lockdown, some of which have remained closed or under-resourced, were reported as exacerbating the negative impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable groups. Interview participants spoke about long waiting lists for Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and speech and language therapists, and funding cuts to third sector projects as a barrier to accessing adequate support for those young people who had experienced the most negative impacts of COVID-19. In addition, it was perceived to be a source of increased pressure for schools as they were being called on to provide this support from their own resources.

“What I would say generally is we are picking up more things than ever before that other agencies previously would have picked up. Through cuts, those services or agencies or supports don't exist anymore.” (Secondary headteacher)

Impact on staff and relationship with parents

In addition to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people, participants spoke about the effect of the pandemic on school staff and their relationship with parents. Participants described higher levels of absence, lower wellbeing and resilience among staff as a result of the pressures for school staff of transitioning to teaching online, learning to deliver classes in front of a camera and maintaining online learning resources and teaching in childcare hubs.

“Staffing, I think we see high rates of absence in staff, and I think maybe where staff might have been more resilient in the past, maybe that resilience isn't there at the moment.” (Local authority representative)

COVID-19 was also perceived to have had an impact on the way in which parents engage with schools. For some schools, lockdown had opened up new opportunities for staff to reach families through weekly phone calls and this had contributed to stronger relationships between the school and parents. However, others reported that the move to online learning and direct contact between parents

and class teachers via email or online platforms has created an expectation that school staff should be available to parents outside of working hours and should be responding immediately to parental queries and requests. Teachers reported receiving emails and messages from parents and pupils late at night with the expectation of an instant reply, putting pressure on teaching staff and contributing to stress.

“It's kind of removed that barrier between going through the right procedures versus, 'I can just access you whenever'. That idea of, 'You will be available any time I'm available,' rather than actually I still have a working day.” (Secondary teacher)

Chapter 7 – Factors which predict experiences of behaviour

Summary of findings

While a number of in-school factors which predict behaviour were identified in the quantitative analysis, participants in the interviews and focus groups focused on societal factors such as poverty and deprivation and challenges associated with home and family life such as trauma and adverse childhood experiences and parenting as the root causes of disruptive behaviour.

Interview participants also identified school-based factors as supporting positive behaviour in schools such as a whole-school approach to recognising and celebrating positive behaviour and strong relationships between teachers, pupils and their families.

This highlights the challenge for schools in balancing in-school approaches to promoting positive behaviour alongside an external societal context outside their influence.

From the survey, perceptions of behaviour getting worse since the pandemic was the strongest predictor of experiences of frequent negative behaviour, irrespective of the type of behaviour and the type of school or role of the staff member. This is hardly surprising, and it is not possible to infer from this that the impact of COVID is causing negative behaviour.

A number of other factors were also notable:

- Poorer school ethos was associated with frequent negative behaviour, as was poorer promotion of policies on behaviour which was associated with more frequent low level disruptive behaviour, aggression towards other pupils and social exclusion. The direction of the association with poorer school ethos is likely to be circular, with behaviour affecting ethos, as well as the other way around.
- Disruptive or negative behaviour was more frequent in urban schools than rural schools, particularly at primary level.
- Teachers of P6 and P7 were more likely than teachers of younger children to experience frequent negative behaviours.
- Having a high proportion of children with English as an additional language was associated with more frequent experiences of negative behaviour in primary schools. This association is likely to be complicated and mediated by other variables including wider societal factors that are not captured in the survey. Further research is needed to explore why this association is observed in primary schools and not at secondary level.
- At secondary level, having a high proportion of children living in the most deprived areas tended to be much more commonly associated with frequent

negative behaviour than at primary level. This is also likely to be linked to wider societal factors, though further research is needed to explore why this association is observed at secondary level and not at primary level.

- Teachers' confidence in their own abilities to respond to disruptive behaviour or to promote positive behaviour also emerged as an issue in relation to some types of behaviour.

Predictors of experienced behaviour were more similar within each staff type / school type group, rather than for each of the different types of negative behaviour identified. This suggests that staff who experienced one type of negative behaviour were also more likely to experience other types of negative behaviour. Thus, where mildly disruptive behaviour is prevalent, discriminatory or violent behaviour is also more likely to be common.

School staff and local authority representatives identified a number of external factors which impact behaviour in schools including:

- Societal factors such as poverty and deprivation.
- Challenges associated with home and family life such as trauma and adverse childhood experiences and parenting.
- Additional support needs, particularly where sufficient support is not in place for pupils.

Introduction

This chapter draws on both survey and qualitative findings to explore the key factors associated with experiences of negative pupil behaviour among headteachers, teachers and support staff.

Multivariable regression analysis was used to identify the factors most strongly and independently associated with experiences of nine different types of negative or disruptive behaviour⁷⁰. The variables used and the statistical analysis conducted are described in Annex F.

The different types of negative behaviours examined are as follows⁷¹:

- low level disruptive behaviour in the classroom
- low level disruptive behaviour around the school
- disengagement

⁷⁰ In the multivariable regression analysis, a selection of variables capturing school, staff and pupil factors were added at the same time to an analytical model examining the association between the particular factors and each negative behaviour whilst controlling for all other variables in the model. Such analysis allows identification of independent relationships between different factors and the negative behaviour. A model was created for each behaviour listed and run separately for whether teachers, headteachers and support staff in primary and secondary schools reported experiencing the behaviour.

⁷¹ The construction of scales used to measure each of these is described in Annex F

- aggression, violence, destructiveness and general verbal abuse towards other pupils
- discriminatory verbal abuse towards other pupils
- pupils under the influence of drugs / alcohol and abusive use of technology
- social exclusion
- aggression, violence and verbal abuse towards staff
- discriminatory verbal abuse towards staff

The list of variables considered for inclusion in each of the models to predict staff experiences is also shown in the Annex F. It is worth noting that the list is limited to questions asked in the surveys and administrative data recorded about the school. However, behaviour is not solely a product of the school one attends, and poor behaviour in school is also likely to be associated with other factors which have not been measured here. Therefore, school staff and local authority representatives were asked to reflect on the root causes of disruptive behaviour and factors which promote behaviour in schools in the qualitative interviews.

In this chapter, we are able to identify a number of key predictors of staff experiences of poor pupil behaviour and the wider societal issues which contribute to both positive and negative behaviour.

Overall findings

The variables that were generally found to predict an increased likelihood of staff experiencing negative behaviour were:

- Perception of behaviour in the classroom or around the school to be much worse than before COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began in March 2020
- Perception of a poorer overall ethos of the school
- The school having a high proportion of children living in the most deprived areas – this as a predictor amongst all primary and secondary staff types with the exception of primary headteachers

In addition to the above, amongst teachers and support staff a wider range of variables are found to predict experiences of negative pupil behaviour, including poor promotion of policies on behaviour within the school and poorer perception of staff working together. For primary and secondary teachers, low confidence in one's own abilities to respond to disruptive behaviour or to promote positive behaviour is a predictor as well as a school size, with larger schools associated with negative pupil behaviour, in particular, with low level disruption and disengagement.

Poor promotion of policies on behaviour was more associated with low level disruption and disengagement whereas, lower confidence in one's own abilities to

respond to disruptive behaviour was associated with aggression and discriminatory abuse towards pupils and social exclusion⁷².

In primary schools, being in a school with a higher proportion of pupils with English as an additional language was associated with more frequent experiences of negative behaviour. This finding is most evident from the reported experiences of teachers in primary schools where more than around 5% of pupils with English as an additional language predicted more frequent experiences of five types of negative behaviour including low level disruption and aggression and discriminatory abuse towards pupils. The association between this and increased negative behaviour is likely to be complicated and mediated by other variables including wider societal factors that are not captured in the survey.

The stage of pupils being taught by primary teachers was also a predictor, with P6 and P7 teachers more likely to report more frequent negative behaviour in four of the models, particularly in relation to low level disruption.

Urban-Rural classification of the school with schools in urban areas, and to a lesser extent in accessible rural areas or small towns, reporting a more frequent negative behaviour. This is a predictor amongst primary headteachers and support staff and secondary teachers; for the latter this specifically predicts physically aggressive behaviour towards other pupils.

Primary headteachers

Up to three variables were found to significantly and independently predict an increased likelihood of experiencing the negative behaviour amongst primary headteachers⁷³. Perceiving behaviour in the classroom or around the school to be much worse than before COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began in March 2020 was very strongly and consistently associated with experiencing poor behaviour.

The overall ethos of the school was also a highly significant predictor of behaviour. Headteachers who reported the ethos as being poorer were more likely to report higher frequencies of negative behaviours. However, the direction of this association is likely to be circular, with behaviour affecting ethos, as well as the other way around. What individual staff members interpreted as “ethos” is also unclear, but to some extent this can be identified by removing this variable from the models to discover what would otherwise be associated with experiencing negative behaviour. When this is done, the main variable which replaces it is the one recording perceptions of how well staff work together, suggesting that this is at least in part what staff mean by “ethos”.

The third variable that is statistically significant in most of the models is the urban-rural classification of the school. Headteachers of schools in urban areas, and to a

⁷² Social exclusion included ‘Pupils deliberately socially excluding others’ (in the classroom and around the school) and ‘Pupils withdrawing from interaction with peers’ (around the school). See Annex F for more details.

⁷³ See Table F3 in Annex F

lesser extent in accessible rural areas or small towns, reported more frequent negative behaviour. The only other variable that was significantly associated with perceptions of behaviour in any of the models was the proportion of children with English as an additional language. The findings suggest higher proportions (those with between 2% and 12.5%) were associated with primary headteachers being more likely to report higher levels of aggression, violence and verbal abuse towards staff. However, the relationship did not hold for schools with the highest proportions (>12.5%) of children with English as an additional language.

Primary teachers

The range of variables included in the models of primary school teachers' experiences of pupil behaviour was much greater than for headteachers. To some extent this is due to the larger sample size, but it is interesting that the findings are not dominated to the same extent by perceptions of behaviour being worse since the pandemic and the school ethos, though these factors nevertheless remain important.

In four of the seven models summarised in Table F4 in Annex F, poor promotion of policies on behaviour was associated with more frequent negative behaviour including both low level disruptive behaviour, aggression towards other pupils and social exclusion. Limited confidence in one's own abilities 'to respond to indiscipline in the classroom' or to promote positive behaviour was also associated with more frequent experiences of negative behaviour in a number of the models. However, the former was primarily associated with low level disruption and disengagement whereas the latter was associated with aggression and discriminatory abuse towards pupils and social exclusion.

P6 and P7 teachers were more likely to report more frequent negative behaviour in four of the models, particularly in relation to low level disruption. Being in a school with a higher proportion of pupils with English as an additional language (more than around 5%) was significantly associated with more frequent experiences of five types of negative behaviour including low level disruption and aggression and discriminatory abuse towards pupils⁷⁴.

Poorer perceptions of working together, the size and location of the school, and the proportion of children living in deprived areas all showed significant, independent associations with experiences of at least one type of negative behaviour.

Primary support staff

The variables most associated with support staff's experiences of negative behaviour were again dominated by school ethos and perceptions of worse behaviour since the pandemic.

⁷⁴ This includes racist, sexist, religious, homophobic, biphobic and transphobic abuse towards other pupils as well as abuse towards pupils with a disability and additional support need. See Annex F for more detail.

Other variables showing significant associations with more frequent experiences of negative behaviour, in at least two of the models, were poorer promotion of policies on behaviour, poorer perception of working together, being in an urban or accessible area, and having a high proportion of pupils living in deprived areas. Table F5 in Annex F shows which variables were significantly associated with which types of behaviour.

Secondary headteachers

Two main factors emerged as being associated with experiencing higher levels of negative behaviour for secondary headteachers⁷⁵: a perception of much worse behaviour since the pandemic and having a high proportion of children living in the most deprived areas. Finding that a perception of worse behaviour since the pandemic is associated with secondary headteachers' experiences is perhaps unexpected given it has featured as a key predictor for the other staff groups discussed thus far, but the proportion of children living in the most deprived areas was not found to be a particularly important predictor for primary school staff. Larger schools were identified as a predictor in one of the models, being associated with low level disruptive behaviour around the school, but no other factors featured. The limited extent of these models is mainly due to the smaller sample size compared with that for teachers and support staff.

Secondary teachers

For secondary teachers, school ethos and perceptions of worse behaviour since the pandemic were again significant predictors of experiences of all types of negative behaviour⁷⁶. The same was true for having a high proportion of pupils living in the most deprived areas, supporting the earlier finding for secondary headteachers.

A number of the other variables discussed in relation to other groups also showed significant associations with experiences of some of the types of behaviour. For example, poorer promotion of policies on behaviour, confidence in one's own ability to respond to indiscipline in the classroom and being in a larger school were associated with low level disruption and disengagement. In contrast, being in a school in an urban or accessible rural area was associated with aggression towards pupils and towards staff. Having high proportions of children with ASN was associated with higher experiences of low level disruption in the classroom and disengagement.

The length of service as a teacher was associated with almost all experiences of behaviour, with those who had been teaching for less time more likely to report frequent poor behaviour.

The subject taught was associated with experiences in three of the models, although the pattern was not clear. Teachers of practical subjects, such as art and

⁷⁵ See Table F6 in Annex F

⁷⁶ See Table F7 in Annex F

design or physical education, were the most likely to experience frequent low level disruption in the classroom, while teachers of science were less likely to experience disengagement or social exclusion. ASN or learning support teachers were less likely to experience disengagement but more likely to experience social exclusion.

Secondary support staff

Perceiving that behaviour was worse since the pandemic was significantly associated with more frequent experiences of all types of negative behaviour for secondary support staff⁷⁷. Poorer school ethos was associated with four types of behaviour, specifically those which were not low level disruption or disengagement. Notably however, poorer promotion of policies on behaviour was associated with five types of behaviour, including low level disruption and disengagement. School size, school location and the proportion of children living in the most deprived areas were also significant, but in relation to different types of behaviour.

Perceptions of root causes of disruptive behaviour

School staff and local authority representatives identified a range of root causes of disruptive behaviour among children and young people. Most commonly, participants spoke about the impact of wider societal factors which are outwith the direct influence of schools including poverty and deprivation and the cost-of-living crisis. While schools can promote positive behaviour in school, the extent to which school can influence or mitigate these external factors is limited.

School staff discussed the impact of hunger and inadequate nutrition on pupils' ability to engage with school and described the introduction of initiatives such as free breakfast for all pupils and breakfast clubs to counter this.

“The impact on the young person in terms of uniforms, food, etc., that's the challenges they're facing. With the cost of the school day/cost of living crisis for all of us, I think we're seeing a little bit more of that coming through.” (Local authority representative)

Participants also identified other societal issues such as the increased use of mobile phones and social media, violence and aggression in communities and the societal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. The impact of COVID-19 on behaviour is explored in detail in Chapter 6.

School staff and local authority representatives also reported the impact that home and family life outside of school can have on pupils' behaviour in school, giving examples of traumatic events and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as witnessing and experiencing domestic violence, children and young people being looked-after and accommodated, parental substance misuse and poor parental mental health as external factors which can profoundly impact the way in which pupils behave in school. Participants also cited the impact of parenting on young people, in particular how lack of family boundaries and routines leading to pupils

⁷⁷ See Table B8 of Annex B

having poor sleep can affect behaviour during the school day. Participants described pupils replicating in school the reactive and verbally aggressive behaviour they see modelled at home.

“Children are just the sort of output of their homelife and if the parents are struggling, or if the parents aren’t coping, or they have social emotional needs then their children are bound to have these needs and we can’t plug the gaps, we can’t raise attainment without actually looking at the problems in society that have caused it.” (Primary teacher)

Mirroring findings from the survey for secondary teachers, school staff and local authority representatives also highlighted that additional support needs including Autism Spectrum Disorders, ADHD and pupil mental health and anxiety can be a root cause of some behaviours, particularly among those young people awaiting a diagnosis and where appropriate support is not in place. Qualitative participants spoke about the presumption of mainstream education, reductions in alternative provision for pupils with additional support needs and long waiting lists for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services as exacerbating the difficult behaviours.

Factors promoting positive behaviour

School staff and local authority representatives were more likely to speak about in-school activities and approaches than societal or parental factors when discussing factors which promote positive behaviour. School staff placed importance in a whole-school approach in recognising and praising positive behaviour, with examples such as sharing achievements on social media, posting positive behaviour on display screens around the school, emails sent to parents to praise their child’s positive behaviour and rewarding positive behaviour with trips and rewards.

Building positive relationships between school staff, pupils and their families was also highlighted as an important factor in promoting positive behaviour. Both routine informal parental engagement activities such as school staff being visible and available at the end of the school day and specific events such as prize-giving ceremonies and assemblies were seen as key in building relationships between parents and schools. This relationship between schools and parents was seen to promote a shared understanding of the standard of behaviour which is expected in school and more consistency between the home and school environments.

“It’s relationships we have with the pupils, the pupils have with themselves, that people have with staff members, the relationship that we have with families, teachers have with families.” (Primary headteacher)

Local authority representatives in particular also identified the importance of the pupils’ voice and mechanisms for pupils to feed into school decision-making processes in supporting positive behaviour.

Chapter 8 – Impact of behaviour

Summary of findings

Staff were asked to rate the level of impact⁷⁸ each of the three categories of pupil behaviour (serious disruptive behaviour; disengagement and low level disruptive behaviour) had on the overall ethos and atmosphere of the school. Low level disruptive behaviour was identified by school staff as having the greatest negative impact, with almost all (94%) staff in the survey reporting that this behaviour had an impact on school ethos and atmosphere⁷⁹. Slightly lower proportions, though still the vast majority, said that disengagement behaviours and serious disruptive behaviour have a negative impact.

Teachers and support staff were also asked which three of the wider set of behaviours (that they reported having experienced within the last teaching week⁸⁰) had the greatest negative impact on their teaching experience or their experience as a support staff member. The three behaviours that staff identified as having the greatest overall negative impact were all low-level disruptive behaviours; talking out of turn, hindering other pupils and using/looking at mobile phones/tablets inappropriately.

In primary schools, the behaviour most frequently selected as having the greatest negative impact on experience is talking out of turn, with more than half of primary school staff (57%) selecting this behaviour. In secondary schools, the behaviour most commonly reported as having the greatest negative impact is pupils using/looking at mobile phones or tablets when they shouldn't be, again with more than half of secondary school staff selecting this behaviour (52%) said this was one of the three behaviours that had the greatest negative impact, a notable increase since 2016. Perceptions of the specific impact of low level disruptive behaviour varied across qualitative participants. There were participants that felt disengagement and class disruption was manageable, whilst others described how it had exacerbated stress and burnout among staff.

In line with the reported increase in low-level and serious disruptive behaviour, the level of perceived impact of negative behaviour has also increased since 2016 across all behaviour types (low level disruptive, disengagement and serious disruptive behaviour), and staff groups, particularly for secondary teachers. There has also been a notable increase since 2016 in primary school support staff reporting being negatively impacted by verbal abuse, physical aggression, and physical violence towards themselves and other staff. Support staff are more likely than teachers to report that serious disruptive behaviours (i.e. verbally or physically aggressive or abusive behaviour) have the greatest negative impact on staff experience. This is in line with the findings presented in Chapter 4, that a higher

⁷⁸ On a scale of one to five (one being 'not at all,' five being 'a great deal')

⁷⁹ Having given this a rating of two-five on the aforementioned scale

⁸⁰ See the Overall Perceptions of Behaviour Chapter for the findings on staff experiences of each type of behaviour in the last teaching week or day

proportion of support staff report encountering such behaviours compared with other staff.

For those experiencing violent and aggressive pupil behaviour, qualitative participants reported a profound impact on their mental health as well as their role. Particular concern was raised regarding the wellbeing of teaching and support staff, who frequently manage disruptive behaviour in classrooms. Violent and aggressive behaviour was also seen to have an impact on school ethos and atmosphere, and had led to greater stress and anxiety across participants and a tense atmosphere within schools.

Interviewees perceived incidents of pupil violence and aggression having a negative impact on the mental health of pupils. Teaching and support staff shared instances where other pupils displayed fear and avoidance in response to aggressive behaviour. Persistent low level disruption was also said to have led to greater acceptance, and imitation of, inappropriate behaviours among pupils. However, positive pupil behaviour, as well as staff and pupil buy-in regarding school values, created a welcoming and nurturing environment in schools.

Introduction

This chapter draws on both survey and qualitative findings to explore the perceived impact of pupil behaviour. In the survey, headteachers, teachers and support staff were asked about the impact of three different types of behaviour – serious disruptive behaviour, disengagement and low level disruptive behaviour - on school ethos/atmosphere. They were also asked which behaviours they felt had the greatest negative impact.

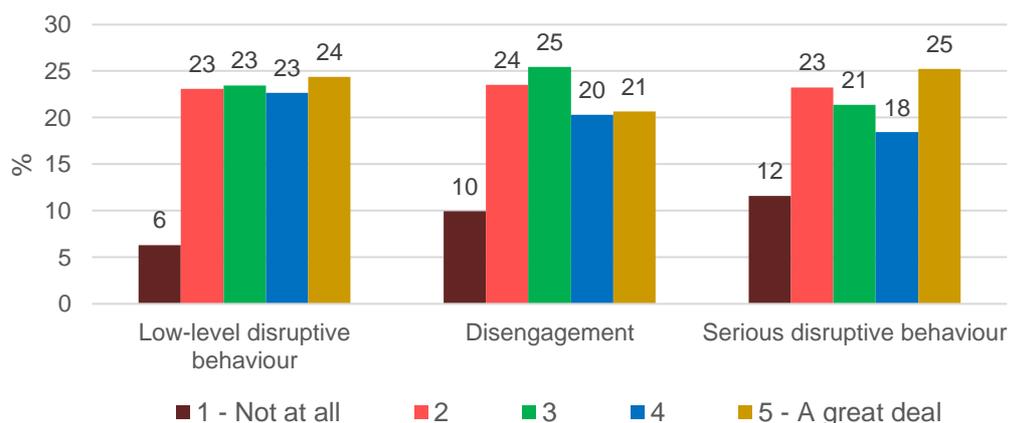
In the qualitative interviews and focus groups, headteachers, teachers and support staff discussed the perceived impact on themselves and other staff, pupils and the school ethos/atmosphere.

Impact of behaviour on overall ethos/atmosphere of the school

All staff were asked to rate the level of impact, on a scale of one to five (one being 'not at all,' five being 'a great deal'), each of the following types of pupil behaviour - both in class and around the school - had on the overall ethos/atmosphere of the school: serious disruptive behaviour; disengagement and low level disruptive behaviour.

For each behaviour, a significant majority of staff reported some sort of impact (i.e. a rating greater than one). Almost all (94%) staff reported an impact from low level disruptive behaviour, 90% reported an impact from disengagement, and 88% reported an impact from serious disruptive behaviour. The level of perceived impact of each behaviour is shown in Figure 8.1. As the graph shows, the highest perceived impact was from low level disruptive behaviour with 47% of staff rating the impact at four or five compared with 41% doing so for disengagement and 43% for serious disruptive behaviour.

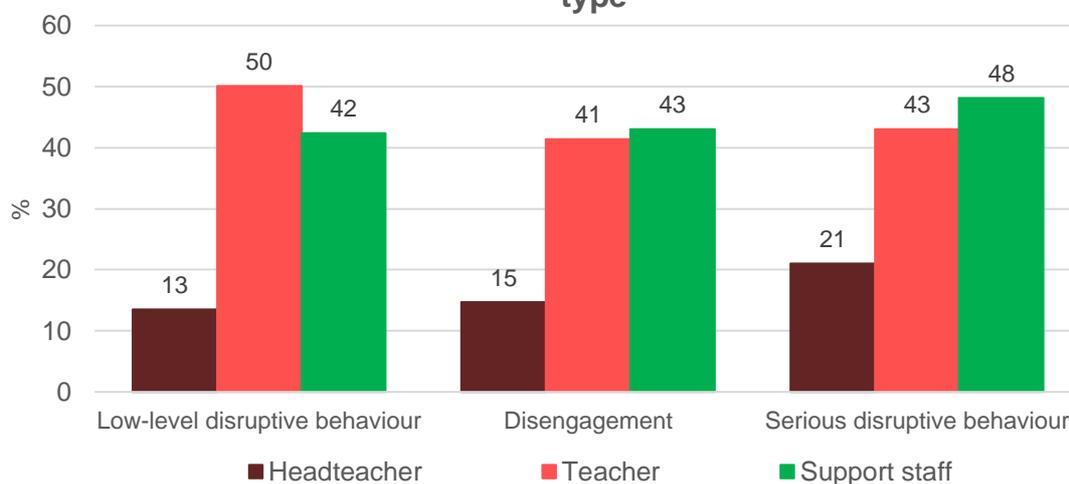
Figure 8.1: Staff perceptions of the effect of behaviour on school ethos/atmosphere



Differences between staff groups

Headteachers were less likely than teachers or support staff to perceive any behaviour as having a high impact (a score of four or five) on school atmosphere/ethos. For example, as shown in Figure 8.2, whilst only 13% of headteachers believed low level disruption had a high impact, the same was true for 50% of teachers and 42% of support staff.

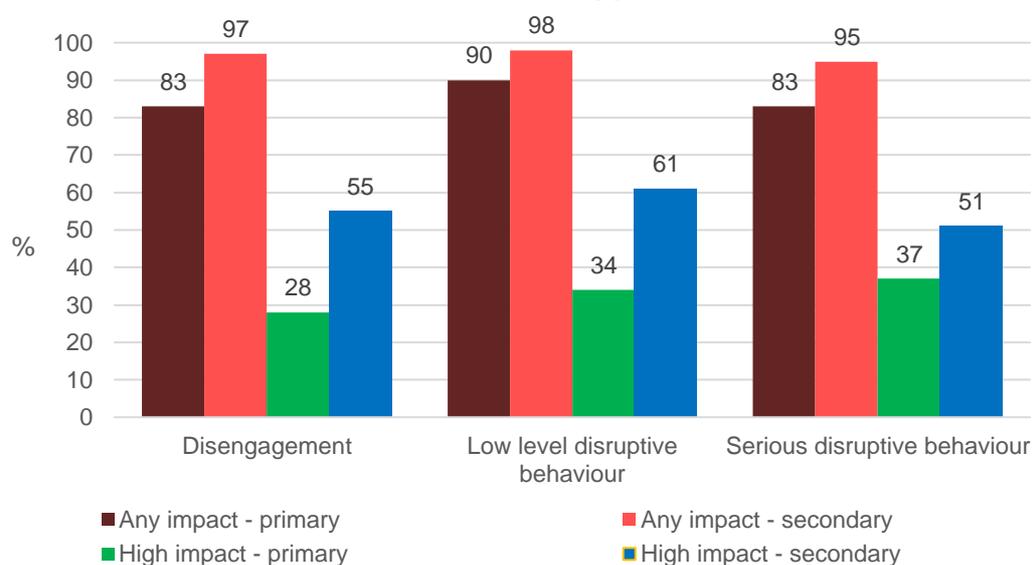
Figure 8.2: Proportion of staff rating each behaviour as having a high impact (score of 4 or 5) by staff and behaviour type



Differences between school type

Disengagement and disruptive behaviours were more likely to be reported as having any sort of impact and a greater level of impact in secondary schools than primary schools (Figure 8.3). Ninety-seven percent of secondary school staff believed disengagement had some impact on school atmosphere/ethos compared with 83% of primary school staff; 55% of secondary school staff perceived a high level of impact from this behaviour compared with 28% of primary school staff.

Figure 8.3 Proportion of staff rating each behaviour as having any or high impact (score of 4 or 5) by school and behaviour type

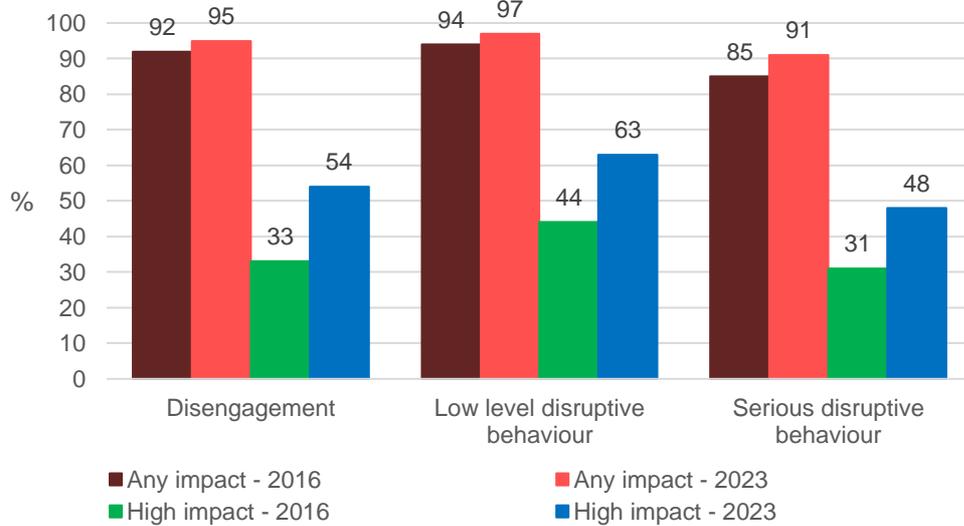


Differences over time⁸¹

The perceived impact by school staff of negative behaviour on school ethos/atmosphere increased between 2016 and 2023. This increase is evident across all behaviour types and staff groups but is particularly clear amongst secondary school teachers and support staff. For example, as shown in Figure 8.4 and 8.5, whereas in 2016 33% of teachers and 24% of support staff in secondary schools believed disengagement was having a high impact on school ethos/atmosphere, in 2023 this had increased to 54% and 53% respectively. It is notable that the least amount of change between 2016 and 2023 was reported by primary headteachers. The perceived impact of low level disruption, disengagement and serious disruptive behaviour for this group remained broadly similar over time.

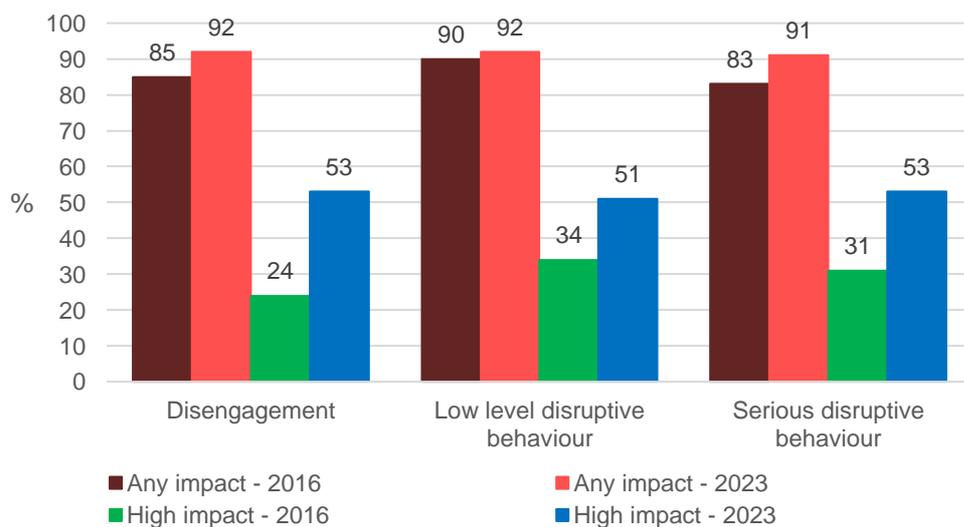
⁸¹ Don't know responses were included in the 2016 tables for each of these three behaviours and were therefore included in the 2023 figures presented in this Differences over time sub-section only to allow comparison over time. As 'Don't know' would typically be excluded the 2023 findings presented above this sub-section do not include this so are not exactly the same as those presented here. See Methodology for further detail.

Figure 8.4 Proportion of secondary school teachers rating each behaviour as having any or high impact (score of 4 or 5) by year



For the above figure 3% of secondary teachers said they 'Don't know' how much disengagement by pupils (both in class and around the school) affects the overall ethos/atmosphere of your school, 2% said the same for low level disruptive behaviour and 4% for serious disruptive behaviour.

Figure 8.5 Proportion of secondary school support staff rating each behaviour as having any or high impact (score of 4 or 5) by year



For the above figure 10% of secondary support staff said they 'Don't know' how much disengagement by pupils (both in class and around the school) affects the overall ethos/atmosphere of your school, 6% said the same for low level disruptive behaviour and 9% for serious disruptive behaviour.

Wider impact of behaviour within schools

In interviews and focus groups with headteachers, teachers and support staff, participants discussed the impact of different types of pupil behaviour on the ethos and atmosphere in both primary and secondary schools.

Perceptions of impact on ethos and atmosphere within schools

When discussing the impact of pupil behaviour on the ethos and atmosphere within schools, headteachers, teachers and support staff reported both positive and negative impacts. In schools where pupil disruption and incidents of physical violence were more prevalent, this led to greater tension and anxiety throughout the schools and a perceived lack of safety for both pupils and staff. Additionally, pupil disruption and disengagement led to frustration among staff and lowered morale and motivation. It was common for participants to discuss the behaviour of a minority of pupils that had a negative impact across different classrooms and its influence on the atmosphere within their schools. Where disruptive behaviours were more localised within classrooms, participants felt that it did not impact the overall school ethos but might still impact on staff and pupils during lessons.

School staff perceived that positive pupil behaviour, however, contributed to a more positive ethos and atmosphere within school. Participants shared instances where pupils had been polite and welcoming towards staff and other pupils, emphasising positive supportive behaviour displayed towards pupils with additional support needs. These types of behaviour were perceived as creating a welcoming environment within schools.

“We give them responsibilities on parents' night for meeting and greeting the parents. Yes, I think it just creates a very positive ethos and people can really see the relationships between everybody in the building.” (Primary headteacher)

Where schools had found nurturing and restorative approaches to be successful, participants felt this created a positive atmosphere and sense of community within and beyond the classroom.

“I think it allows you to actually do your job, to actually teach. I think you can then see the learning, you can see the progress and that spirals in positively. The more children are learning, the more engaged they are, the more positive the ethos of the whole school. I think that's good for everybody [chuckles], yes.” (Primary teacher)

Buy-in from both staff and pupils regarding school values was reported as greatly contributing to the overall ethos of the school. Pupils that were perceived as eager to learn and polite were celebrated and made role models in order to support more vulnerable pupils.

Perceptions of impact on ability to cover the curriculum

When discussing the impact of pupil behaviour, teachers had varying experiences and views on their ability to cover the curriculum. There were teachers that felt confident in their ability to cover the curriculum, attributing this to their experience and ability to communicate with the pupils that display disruptive behaviour. This was discussed as being accomplished despite challenges occurring within the classroom.

“You're having to deal with behaviour in the room and you're being taken away from delivering the curriculum. As an experienced member of staff, you do ensure that you teach to a high standard. You teach what you need to teach, regardless of having to deal with the behaviour. In a classroom where everything was perfect, you would have no behaviour issues, you would be able to teach the course excellently. In the real world, that doesn't happen very often.” (Secondary teacher)

Both low level and serious disruptive behaviour was perceived by teaching and support staff as negatively impacting their ability to cover the curriculum. Teachers found the time taken away from lessons to manage behaviour to be particularly frustrating. Severe disruptions, such as those leading to classroom evacuations, have led to teachers taking additional time away from their planned lesson to ensure pupils are feeling safe and ready to learn after the incident. Additionally, waiting for support from senior school management to help manage disruption had also taken learning time and support away from other pupils.

Disruptive pupil behaviour had also impacted the quality of teaching. The limited time available as a result of behaviour management was felt to have affected teachers' ability to teach lessons in-depth. With persistent low level disruption, school staff discussed challenges with delivering high-quality lessons. Additionally, pupils that displayed dysregulated behaviour and missed class time as a result through removal from the classroom were also missing opportunities to learn.

“...because if you've got severe disruption you have to call for back-up from senior colleagues to you and that's minutes lost calling them, waiting for them to arrive and we're starting to see that more and more as well. Obviously, therefore some students are getting a much less high-quality education than perhaps some years ago where this was much less.” (Secondary teacher)

When pupils were perceived as showing a lack of interest in participating and learning, teachers discussed adapting lesson plans to maintain or increase engagement. However, there were also teachers that reported difficulties in addressing disengagement and persistent disruption within the classroom. In these cases, time was often taken away from learning to ensure pupils remained on task, impacting the pace of learning and teachers' ability to build on the foundations of lessons.

Participants also emphasised the importance of building strong relationships between staff and pupils to promote positive behaviour within classrooms.

However, this was perceived as not always being possible due to consistent disruption and decreased willingness of pupils to participate in lessons. Persistent low level disruption was also viewed as affecting other pupils, particularly those who required learning support in the classroom, as teachers and support staff were more focussed on resolving the issue. This, in combination with pressures to improve attainment, had led to increased frustration among teaching staff.

Violent and aggressive behaviour from a minority of pupils within the classroom was perceived as impacting on teachers' ability to cover the curriculum in terms of class engagement. For example, when specific pupils that tended to display serious disruptive behaviour were not present in a lesson, teachers had reported seeing a clear difference in other pupils' willingness to participate in lessons and activities. Classroom staff reported observing pupils engaging less in lessons when certain pupils who had shown aggressive behaviour were present in the classroom and perceived this as a response to avoid unwanted attention from these pupils.

Behaviours that have the greatest negative impact on experience

Teachers and support staff were also asked which three of the wider set of behaviours (that they reported having experienced within the last teaching week⁸²) had the greatest negative impact on their teaching experience or their experience as a support staff member.

The behaviours frequently reported to have the greatest negative impact on staff's experience were within the 'low level disruptive' category. The most commonly mentioned negative behaviour was talking out of turn, which was selected by 52% of respondents. This was followed by hindering other pupils, which was selected by 30% and using/looking at mobile phones/tablets etc. when they shouldn't (26%). The fourth and fifth most commonly selected were work avoidance (24%) and general rowdiness, horseplay or mucking about (17%). Smaller proportions of staff selected serious disruptive behaviours towards other pupils and staff as having the greatest impact, ranging from 0% selecting racist, sexist, religious, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse towards other pupils and staff or abuse due to a disability to 5-7% selecting general verbal abuse or physical violence towards other pupils or staff. These figures are shown in Supplementary table 8.4.

Differences between staff groups

Whilst talking out of turn was the most frequently mentioned negative behaviour for both staff groups, the proportion reporting it was much higher for teachers than for support staff. More than twice the proportion of teachers to support staff considered talking out of turn the most negative behaviour (61% compared with 26%).

Tables 8.1 and 8.2 show the most frequently mentioned negative behaviours for each staff type. Among teachers these were: talking out of turn, hindering other pupils and using/looking at mobile phones/tablets when they shouldn't. Around twice the proportion of teachers selected each of these compared with support

⁸² See the Overall Perceptions of Behaviour Chapter for the findings on staff experiences of each type of behaviour in the last teaching week or day

staff. Among support staff these were: Talking out of turn, general verbal abuse towards either themselves or other staff and cheeky or impertinent remarks or responses. Among the most commonly selected after these were also using/looking at mobile phones/tablets etc. when they shouldn't (16%) and physical aggression and violence towards themselves or other staff (11%). Support staff selected a wider range of behaviours as having the most impact than teachers (as shown in supplementary table 8.4).

Table 8.1: The three negative behaviours teachers selected as having the greatest negative impact on their teaching experience (and the proportion of support staff that selected each for comparison)

| Negative behaviour | Teachers (%) | Support staff (%) |
|---|--------------|-------------------|
| Talking out of turn | 61 | 26 |
| Hindering other pupils | 35 | 16 |
| Using/looking at mobile phones/tablets etc. when they shouldn't | 30 | 16 |
| Unweighted base | 2,305 | 1,021 |

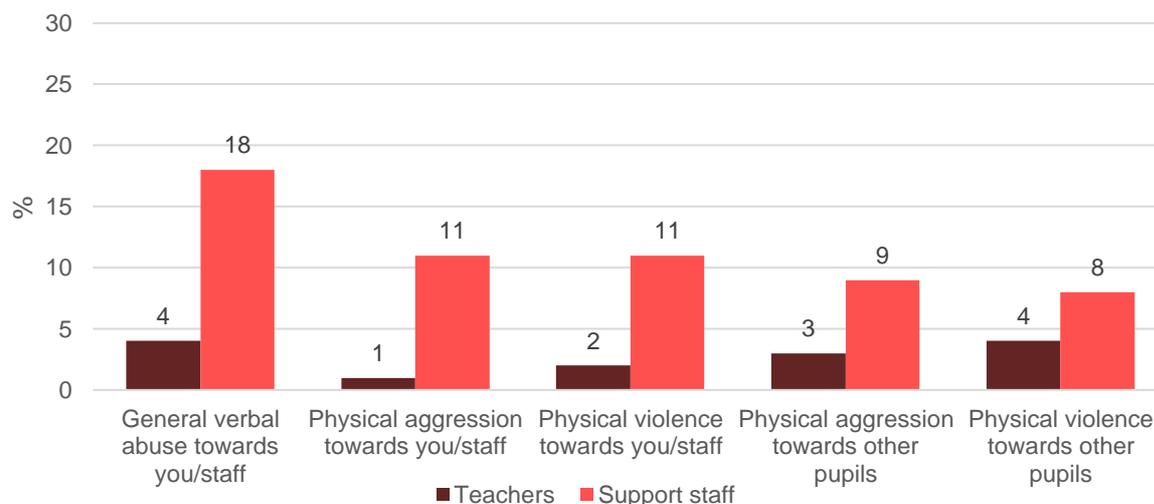
Table 8.2: The three negative behaviours support staff selected as having the greatest negative impact on their teaching experience (and the proportion of teachers that selected each for comparison)*

| Negative behaviour | Support staff (%) | Teachers (%) |
|--|-------------------|--------------|
| Talking out of turn | 26 | 61 |
| General verbal abuse towards you/staff | 18 | 4 |
| Cheeky or impertinent remarks or responses | 17 | 14 |
| Unweighted base | 2,305 | 1,021 |

* It should also be noted that 19% of support staff select 'Prefer not to say' for this question, much higher than the proportion of teachers who select this (0%).

Support staff were more likely than teachers to consider certain serious disruptive behaviours - specifically verbally or physically aggressive behaviour and verbal or physically abusive behaviour - as the most impactful negative behaviours (see Figure 8.6).

Figure 8.6: Proportion of staff reporting particular behaviours as having greatest negative impact on experience



Differences between school type

In primary schools, talking out of turn was the most referenced negative behaviour with 57% of staff selecting it. Other behaviours frequently mentioned as having the greatest negative impact included hindering other pupils (36%) and work avoidance (22%).

In secondary schools, the most commonly mentioned negative behaviour was pupils using/looking at mobile phones/tablets when they shouldn't – this behaviour was mentioned by 52% of staff.⁸³ The next most frequently mentioned behaviours were talking out of turn (46%) and work avoidance (26%).

Differences over time

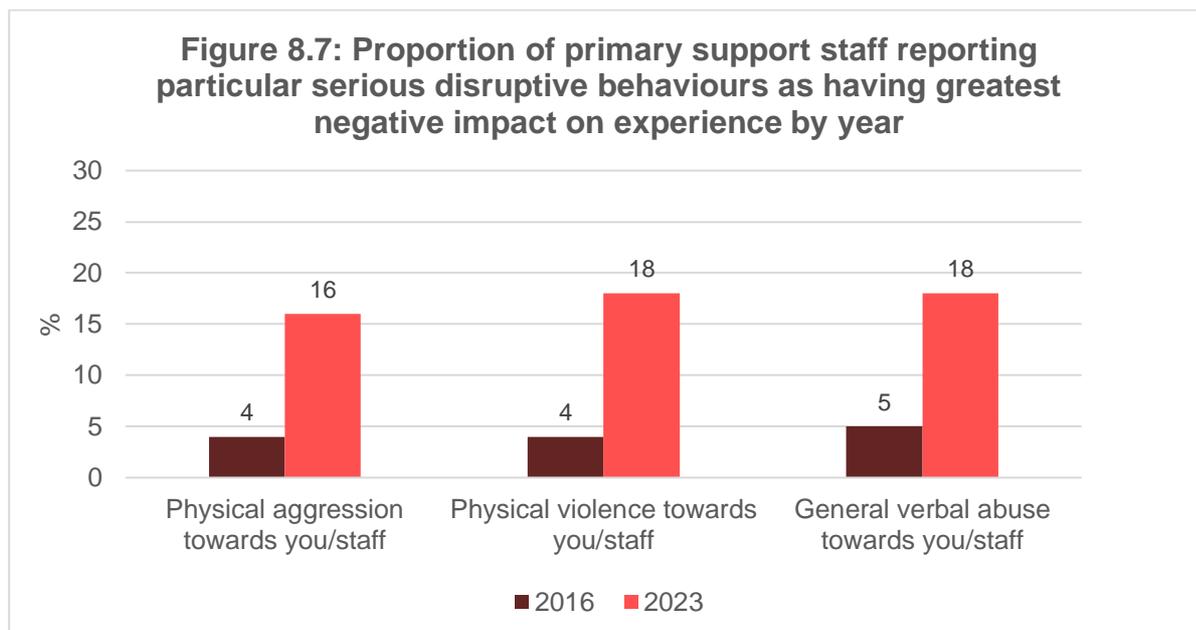
For primary teachers, there was very little change in the behaviours perceived to have had the greatest negative impact on their experience between 2016 and 2023. Whilst the proportions selecting them varied a little, the top five behaviours selected were identical in both years for this group. These were: talking out of turn, hindering other pupils, work avoidance, making unnecessary (non-verbal) noise and general rowdiness, horseplay or mucking about.

Among secondary school teachers, the principal change was a significant rise in the proportion identifying students using/looking at phones/tablets when they shouldn't as the behaviour with the greatest negative impact on their experience. In

⁸³ Using/looking at mobile phones/tablets was only mentioned by 1% of primary school staff, likely due to household and school rules around primary school aged children's access to technology. This absence at the primary school level reduces the total impact recorded in primary and secondary schools combined to 26%. This is despite unsanctioned technology use being the most commonly highlighted issue at the secondary school level.

2016, 33% of secondary school teachers selected this behaviour, compared to 57% in 2023.

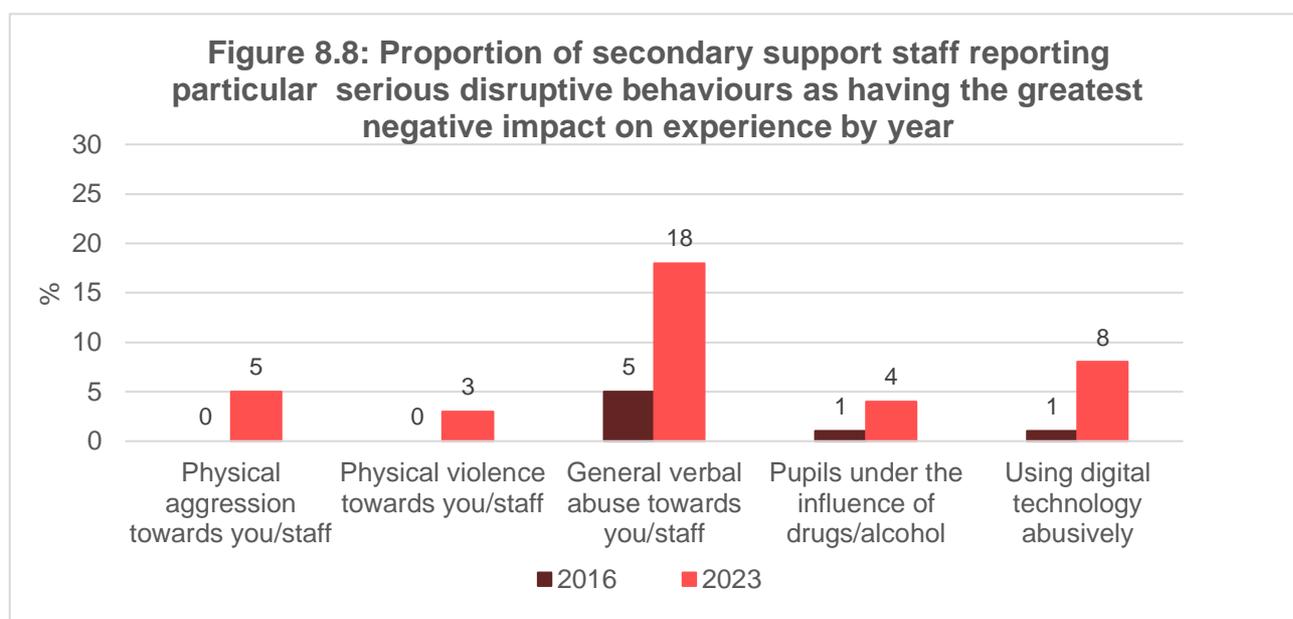
Amongst support staff there was a notable rise since 2016 in the proportion reporting certain serious disruptive behaviours having the greatest negative impact on their experience. For example, in 2023 18% of primary school support staff reported being negatively impacted by general verbal abuse towards them/other staff compared with just 5% who reported this in 2016. Figure 8.7 demonstrates similar rises in the reported impact of physical aggression and physical violence abuse on primary school support staff's experience.



There was also an increase in the proportion of secondary school support staff who reported general verbal abuse towards them/other staff as having the greatest negative impact on their experience. This rose from 5% in 2016 to 18% in 2023.

Although a smaller proportion of staff cited these types of behaviours as having the greatest negative impact⁸⁴, it is worth noting that the proportion of secondary support staff reporting negative impact of a range of serious disruptive behaviours has increased (see Figure 8.8). For example, compared with 2016, secondary school support staff in 2023 were more likely to report negative impact from physical aggression and physical violence, pupils being under the influence of drugs/alcohol and pupils using digital technology abusively.

⁸⁴ The only one of these behaviours in the three most selected by secondary support staff was general verbal abuse towards you/staff as well using/looking at mobile phones/tablets etc. when they shouldn't and as talking out of turn.



Impact of behaviour on staff and pupils

In interviews and focus groups with school staff, participants reported the impact of different types of behaviour and their severity on themselves and other staff within the school. Headteachers, teachers and support staff discussed the particular impact on their own as well as other staff members' health and roles.

Impact on staff

Negative impact on staff wellbeing and morale was perceived to be an impact of both serious and low level disruptive behaviour. Frustration as a result of managing consistent low level disruptive behaviour had a particular impact on staff morale and mental health. The stress of managing constant low level behaviour was thought to have led to greater burnout and persistent stress which continued outside of school. The time taken and effort required from teachers and support staff to ensure pupils engage and focus in the classroom was described as being tiring and mentally draining. Pupils displaying a lack of respect towards school staff and disengagement in the classroom had exacerbated these feelings of frustration and exhaustion.

“I think it's just more draining but low level behaviour I find is more challenging than the odd chair getting thrown across a classroom, because it's all the time. I think teachers get frustrated that they're working really hard to engage the children and they're just kind of sitting back and they want education done to them rather than them having an active part, an active role in their learning. I think, yes, they just find it frustrating and quite draining.” (Primary headteacher)

Violent and aggressive behaviour towards staff and pupils had reportedly led to poorer staff mental and physical health. In terms of mental health, both teaching and support staff reported high levels of stress and anxiety, particularly for schools with a higher prevalence of violent incidents. This had led to a perceived increase in teaching and support staff being signed-off work due to work-related stress.

“I think that we are getting increasingly anxious as teachers. I think there's not enough discussion on the mental health of teachers, but you are starting to see burnout, which is increasing more, anxiety which is increasing more”. (Secondary teacher)

Participants also described difficulties with sleep, experiences of dread at the thought of encountering more violent behaviour and questioning their role and ability to teach and support pupils. Anticipation of further outbursts of aggression and violence led to a perceived increase in levels of anxiety in both teaching and support staff. Participants highlighted feelings of guilt at not being able to keep other pupils safe from a minority of young people who display violent and aggressive behaviour or to prevent them from witnessing verbal and physical abuse directed at other staff members. Teachers expressed particular concern for the wellbeing of support staff, who are in regular contact with pupils demonstrating aggressive behaviour.

“They're paid a pittance and they are on the frontline of a lot of it... My [support staff] are at the door taking hit after hit after hit, and I'm sitting there going, 'I can't do anything,' so I don't know how the management team must feel. I know that in my classroom, I am in charge. My [support staff] are my responsibility; the children are my responsibility. I can't keep my [support staff] safe.” (Primary teacher)

There were participants who stated that pupil behaviour did not have an impact on their mental or physical health. One reason for this was that these teachers reported having few to no experiences of violent behaviour directed towards them or exhibited in the classroom. Others described feeling confident in addressing challenging pupil behaviour or thought there were sufficient approaches and strategies in place to de-escalate incidents. There were participants who discussed how the impact of behaviour is likely to vary across school staff, in terms of different teaching styles and attitudes. Not taking pupil behaviour personally and understanding the underlying reasons for behaviour were some ways in which teaching and support staff said they were coping with behaviour challenges.

Additionally, there were participants who highlighted how support from other staff and senior management alleviated the impact on their own mental health. However, those that perceived there was a lack of support within or outwith the school found it particularly difficult to manage their mental stress. For participants who felt there were strong relationships between staff and pupils and where approaches to managing behaviour were successful, experiences of disruptive behaviour had less of an impact.

Positive pupil behaviour was also reported to have a positive impact on the mental health and morale of school staff. Although a majority of pupils were described as polite, kind and helpful, there was a perception that this can often be overshadowed by the minority of pupils displaying challenging and aggressive behaviour. Teachers and support staff discussed “taking the small wins”, supporting each other and sharing instances where approaches to promoting positive behaviour have been successful in terms of its impact on pupils and their learning.

In interviews and focus groups, headteachers, teachers and support staff also discussed the range of ways pupil behaviour had impacted on their roles. Participants described their roles in school as changing because of the increased need for behaviour management in classrooms. Staff discussed taking on what they perceived as babysitting and parenting roles to manage constant low level disruption in classrooms.

“It's become more what I would imagine social work or parenting. You feel like you're good cop/bad cop, instilling parenting skills where maybe they're lacking at home. Dealing with things that are happening outwith school, dealing with things that are happening in school before you can even look at teaching.”
(Secondary teacher)

“Me, I think it's draining. You don't feel like you're teaching, you feel like you're babysitting. It's the constant wee things, just making sure they're working, turn around, they're not working, so you're back over there.” (Secondary teacher)

The perceived change in the role of support staff was also raised by participants, emphasising the increased need for behaviour management in schools and the importance of the role of support staff within classrooms. Their role was originally considered as closing the attainment gap and supporting learning, but participants perceived this as now more focused on behaviour management.

“It's a different type of work they're doing. Some of them are acting as mothers - we've got some guys here as well; mothers, brothers, fathers, role models. Some of them are acting as kind of social work assistants, bridges between the family and the school. I think the role they carry out is completely different now. They're completely underpaid and they're a scarce resource and they're always one that the council cuts first, because the government never report on [number of] support staff members.” (Secondary headteacher)

Serious disruptive behaviour had led to school staff adapting and creating more contingency plans, with the result that more focus was being lost from the lessons. Experiences of violent and aggressive behaviour, as well as pupil disengagement, led to some teachers questioning their roles and expressing feelings of failure.

“When you've got quite extreme behaviours and then you've got a lot of low level behaviours you can't do it all. So yes, I felt just like I was failing all of them. The thing with teaching is even although it is just a job, it's not just a job, because you give your all to it and not really feeling super supported.” (Primary teacher)

There were also participants that discussed resilience with regards to their own ability to successfully manage pupil behaviour. Strong relationships with pupils, as well as experience in the role, contributed to this. Positive pupil behaviour had also impacted on participants' roles. Teachers shared feeling more positive and motivated when behaviour management approaches had been successful and when pupils have created a welcoming environment within the school and classroom. Seeing the progress of pupils and having a positive work environment was reported as making the job worthwhile and rewarding.

Impact on pupils

School staff, in both primary and secondary schools, also discussed how they believed violent and aggressive behaviour and persistent low level behaviour had impacted on other pupils within their school in relation to mental health, class engagement and attendance.

Despite pupils who display serious disruptive behaviour being in the minority, participants discussed the profound impact violent and aggressive behaviour has had on other pupils within classrooms and the school in terms of pupil mental health. Exposure to violent and aggressive behaviour was seen by support staff as worsening the mental health of other pupils. Teachers and support staff shared instances of other pupils expressing dread and fear at the thought of being targeted by pupils who displayed particularly distressed behaviour, and anxiety after witnessing verbal and physical abuse targeted towards teaching and support staff.

“We have pupils who are afraid to come to school. We have pupils who when they, the teacher asks them to come and sit down on the carpet, who will seek out a wall and sit with their back against a wall because they've been punched or kicked in the back so many times when they've been sat on the carpet. We have pupils in the school who see the members of staff who are there to work with them, to teach them, to protect them, being assaulted and shouted at and sworn out and punched and kicked. Children whose classrooms are evacuated, whose resources are broken and smashed, who can't go to certain parts of the school because other children are there.” (Primary headteacher)

Despite this exposure to violent and aggressive behaviour, there were teachers that highlighted the resilience of their pupils. Despite disruption, other pupils were viewed as being able to cope with the behaviour and continue participating in the lesson. This ability to cope, however, was not applicable to all pupils and participants also shared instances where the opposite was the case.

Participants also discussed the impact of pupil behaviour on class engagement and attendance. Avoidant pupil behaviours, such as the desire to not attend classes and disengaging in learning activities, were reported by both teaching and support staff. Decreases in class attendance were perceived to be associated with experiences of bullying and intimidation from particular pupils. Experiences of serious disruptive behaviour had also led to school responses, such as classroom evacuations which had come to be viewed as the norm among pupils with a negative impact on the classroom environment and pace of learning.

Teachers and support staff also reported how a lack of long-term consequences for pupils demonstrating disruptive behaviour had also resulted in a “domino effect”, skewing pupil perceptions on what is considered acceptable behaviour in the classroom and resulting in other pupils mimicking this behaviour. Additionally, teachers and support staff discussed how pupils have become increasingly frustrated by persistent disruption in the classroom, particularly for those that were viewed as eager to learn and were not able to or confident enough to ignore it.

Participants also described instances where pupils had been tolerant of challenging and disruptive behaviour, particularly when displayed by pupils with additional support needs.

“A lot of the time they're incredibly compliant and tolerant of behaviour that has gone on and I think it's testament to them I suppose as human beings, because they recognise that not everybody functions in the same way as them. It's also I think testament to how schools have tried to move forward in terms of how we manage these situations as well.” (Secondary teacher)

Headteachers, teachers and support staff also spoke of the range of ways the majority of pupils in both secondary and primary schools demonstrated positive behaviour, such as showing kindness and being respectful to other pupils and staff. However, participants also discussed how positive pupil behaviour can be overlooked when teachers and support staff are consistently preoccupied with managing disruptive behaviour. Support staff discussed how this lack of praise or recognition, particularly from senior management, could demotivate pupils who consistently display positive behaviour.

“The bad behaviour outshines everything else. It's actually a sin. It's an absolute shame because there (are) really nice, really good kids.” (Secondary support staff)

Chapter 9 – Approaches used in schools

Summary of findings

Across the survey and qualitative research, there was evidence of a culture shift towards a focus on relationships, restorative practice and Nurture approaches and away from punitive approaches. Nurturing approaches, the promotion of positive behaviour through whole-school ethos and values, and restorative approaches were commonly used across primaries and secondaries to both encourage positive relationships and behaviour and manage serious and low level disruption.

School staff interviewed as part of the qualitative research highlighted the positive impact of particular programmes and broader approaches, particularly in terms of the adoption of whole-school values, and emotional programmes in primary schools. Staff also described changes which had been made to the physical environment and the structure of the school day to promote positive behaviour and relationships (e.g., the use of sensory rooms, break out areas, alternative learning zones, Nurture bases, a tailored curriculum etc). These adaptations were viewed as particularly important for those pupils with mental health issues, or those who were anxious about returning to school after COVID-19.

However, the extent to which positive approaches had been embedded across schools participating in the qualitative research varied, with some teachers and support staff remaining sceptical as to the effectiveness of positive approaches. Staff noted the challenges associated with Nurture and restorative approaches in terms of the time and resources needed to implement these successfully. In the survey, staff reported spending longer on behaviour-related issues and tasks than in 2016.

The survey found the frequency of use of punitive approaches such as detention, punishment exercises and exclusions have decreased since 2016. Overall, the majority of school staff surveyed at both primary and secondary level were positive about their school's ethos and culture. However, perceptions were much lower in secondary schools and ratings of school ethos and culture have declined in all staff groups since 2016.

When asked to rate how their school promotes policies on positive relationships and behaviour, most (72%) of both primary school teachers and support staff rated their school as good or very good. Again, perceptions were lower in secondary schools, with 46% of teachers and 51% of support staff rating this as good or very good and ratings have decreased since 2016 (from 52% among teachers and 57% among support staff).

Teachers' confidence in their ability to 'promote positive behaviour' and 'respond to indiscipline' in the classroom, both in primary and secondary schools remains

high⁸⁵, although confidence in their ability to ‘respond to indiscipline’ has decreased since 2016.

Staff described improvements to the way that behaviour is described and understood, particularly the understanding of the impact of trauma and neurodiversity on pupil behaviour and the use of trauma-informed language and approaches. The qualitative research found that there is still progress required in terms of how relationships and behaviour, and the approaches used to promote and manage these, are communicated to, and understood by, teachers and support staff. Primary and secondary school staff interviewed at all levels criticised the perceived lack of consequences in current positive approaches to relationships and behaviour and called for this to be addressed in the future. School staff highlighted a perceived mismatch between the positive approaches espoused at both a national and LA level and the realities of dealing with violent and aggressive incidents in schools and highlighted the need for greater consistency in approaches to behaviour, both among teachers and schools. In addition, staff expressed concern at the perceived lack of alternative options and resources for pupils for whom mainstream education may not be appropriate.

Introduction

This chapter explores the range of approaches⁸⁶ schools use to encourage positive relationships and behaviour and to respond to disruptive behaviour, how these have changed over time and the perceptions of staff on how these approaches work in practice. Next, the ways in which policies on promoting positive behaviour are developed and communicated and which members of the school community are most frequently involved in actively developing behaviour and relationship strategies are addressed. Perceptions of the overall ethos of the school are also explored. Finally, this chapter considers the effectiveness of these approaches and the changes staff would like to see at a national and local level to assist them with relationships and behaviour.

Approaches used in schools

The survey asked headteachers and teachers to indicate how often, if at all, each of 32 different approaches were used in their school. The answer options were: ‘frequently’, ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’, and ‘never’.

Approaches used in primary schools

Primary headteachers and primary teachers both report that the most frequently used approaches in their schools are promotion of positive behaviour through whole-school ethos and values (100% of headteachers and 98% of teachers said this approach was used ‘frequently’ or ‘sometimes’ in their schools); sharing

⁸⁵ In relation to promoting positive behaviour, 94% of primary teachers and 91% of secondary teachers gave a rating of 4 or 5 (with 1 being ‘not confident at all’ and 5 being ‘very confident.’ In relation to responding to indiscipline 82% of primary teachers and 81% of secondary teachers gave this a rating of either 4 or 5.

⁸⁶ For brevity, the term ‘approach’ is used throughout this chapter but it is used in its broadest sense and includes both specific techniques and wider strategies.

appropriate strategies and approaches within school/staff (99% headteachers, 95% teachers); Nurture approaches (96% headteachers, 96% teachers); curriculum programmes in social and emotional skills and wellbeing (98% headteachers, 94% teachers); and restorative approaches (97% headteachers, 95% teachers). Table 9.1 shows the 10 most commonly reported approaches used in primary schools.

There are several differences in the reported level of use of approaches between primary headteachers and primary teachers. Teachers are more likely than headteachers to report home-school link officers/work with families being used ‘frequently’ or ‘sometimes’ in their school (69% teachers, 57% headteachers) and pupil/behaviour support base in school/campus (44% teachers, 30% headteachers) being used in their schools. Headteachers are more likely than teachers to report targeted small group work, such as anger management, (82% headteachers, 72% teachers) and time with a key adult (e.g. a counsellor) (80% headteachers, 66% teachers) being used frequently in their schools.

Of the 32 approaches used in primary schools, only circle time is used in different proportions in P1-3 and P4-7 (87% of P1-3 teachers and 79% of P4-7 teachers report using circle time).

Table 9.1: Proportion of primary school staff reporting using each of the top 10 approaches⁸⁷ ‘frequently’ or ‘sometimes’ to encourage positive relationships and behaviour and to respond to disruptive behaviour, 2023

| Approach used in school | Primary schools | |
|---|-----------------|-------------|
| | Headteacher (%) | Teacher (%) |
| Promotion of positive behaviour through whole school ethos and values | 100 | 98 |
| Sharing appropriate strategies and approaches within school/staff | 99 | 95 |
| Curriculum programmes in social and emotional skills and wellbeing | 98 | 94 |
| Restorative approaches | 97 | 95 |
| Nurture approaches | 96 | 96 |
| Solution oriented approaches | 96 | 92 |
| Motivational approaches | 95 | 90 |
| Pupils actively involved in developing ideas and activities in the school | 95 | 89 |
| Reward systems for pupils | 94 | 89 |
| Break-time supervision | 92 | 92 |
| Unweighted base | 215 | 629 |

⁸⁷ This table shows the top (mostly commonly reported) approaches. See Supplementary tables 9.1-9.32 for the percentages reporting each of the 32 approaches about which staff were asked.

Approaches used in secondary schools

Similar to their primary colleagues, secondary headteachers and teachers both report frequent use in their schools of Nurture approaches (100% headteachers, 90% teachers); promotion of positive behaviour through whole-school ethos and values (100% of headteachers, 88% of teachers); and restorative approaches (100% headteachers, 86% teachers). However, secondary staff also report their school frequently using break-time supervision (98% headteachers, 88% teachers) and broad curriculum options, vocational opportunities and personal and social development programmes (98% headteachers, 92% teachers) to encourage positive behaviour and respond to disruptive behaviour in their schools.

There are differences in reports of frequency of approaches being used in their school between secondary headteachers and secondary teachers. The largest differences, where headteachers are more likely to report frequent use compared with teachers, are in anti-bullying policy & programmes (78% headteachers, 69% teachers report 'frequently' or 'sometimes' using this approach in their schools); motivational approaches (92% headteachers, 72% teachers); and targeted small group work (94% headteachers, 74% teachers). Teachers are more likely than headteachers to report the frequent use of local authority off site provision with 33% of teachers reporting this used 'frequently' or 'sometimes' compared with 13% of headteachers. Table 9.2 shows the 10 most commonly reported approaches used in secondary schools.

Table 9.2: Proportion of secondary school staff reporting using each of the top 10 approaches⁸⁸ ‘frequently’ or ‘sometimes’ to encourage positive relationships and behaviour and to respond to disruptive behaviour, 2023

| Approach used in school | Secondary schools | |
|---|-------------------|-------------|
| | Headteacher (%) | Teacher (%) |
| Nurture approaches | 100 | 90 |
| Promotion of positive behaviour through whole school ethos and values | 100 | 88 |
| Restorative approaches | 100 | 86 |
| Break-time supervision | 98 | 88 |
| Broad curriculum options: vocational opportunities; personal and social development programmes | 98 | 92 |
| Solution oriented approaches | 98 | 78 |
| Sharing appropriate strategies and approaches within school/staff | 97 | 79 |
| Staged assessment and intervention model (e.g. school and multi-agency joint assessment and planning teams) | 97 | 87 |
| Time with a key adult (e.g. a counsellor) | 97 | 80 |
| Referral to SMT/HT | 96 | 88 |
| Unweighted base | 127 | 1558 |

Approaches used in schools and local authorities participating in the qualitative research

The qualitative interviews and focus groups with school staff and local authority representatives explored the range of approaches used within schools to encourage positive relationships and behaviour and to respond to disruptive behaviour. Participants outlined using the majority of the 32 different approaches about which staff were asked in the survey.

The promotion of positive behaviour through whole-school values was identified as a key approach in both primaries and secondaries. Headteachers highlighted the importance of updating or adopting their school values and shaping their whole school approaches around these. Often, these related to some permutation of ‘ready, respectful, safe’. The work of expert practitioners on, and training in, relational practice was viewed as having been critical to encouraging schools to rethink their approaches to relationships and behaviour. The focus on values was

⁸⁸ This table shows only the top (mostly commonly reported) approaches. See Supplementary tables 9.1-9.32 for the percentages reporting each of the 32 approaches about which staff were asked.

perceived to have helped foster new school cultures and ethos based around positive relationships and behaviour. A focus on school values was complemented by the adoption (to varying degrees) of restorative practice in both primary and secondary schools along with Nurture principles.

“We recently have done a lot as a school staff over the past few years. We started off by consulting parents, consulting kids on our values, what our agreed big three golden rules would be. All our assemblies are health-and-wellbeing-based apart from class performances. So everything is constantly reinforced as a whole school every single week. It's visible in the classroom, around the school. We did a whole year's study around [book on relational approaches]. So we took a lot of our influences from that, looked at what we were already doing as a school. Then myself and another member of staff trained all the staff on restorative approaches.” (Primary teacher)

The wider policy context of Rights Respecting Schools, GIRFEC and a Framework for Inclusion were influential on the adoption of these positive approaches to relationships and behaviour.

Primary schools participating in the qualitative research used a range of curriculum programmes in social and emotional skills and wellbeing which were designed to help children learn to understand and regulate their emotions. In the secondary schools, frameworks to identify classroom strategies to support learning with additional support needs were popular. Some secondary schools had adopted peer mentoring programmes to address gender-based violence or classroom-based approaches which sought to help staff learn more about brain development and the impact of trauma. Programmes designed to address LGBT inclusivity were also seen as being influential in schools' approach to positive relationships.

Across the schools visited as part of the qualitative research, staff described changes which had been made to the physical environment of the school and the structure of the school day to promote positive behaviour and relationships. This was viewed as particularly important for those pupils with mental health issues, or those who were anxious about returning to school after COVID-19, for example. These adaptations included:

- Sensory rooms and break out rooms/areas in primary schools
- Alternative Learning Zones, pupil support and Nurture bases in secondary schools
- Reductions in the number of classes in the playground at one time
- ‘Soft starts’ in primary schools and extended period lengths in secondary schools
- Varied and tailored curriculum offers in secondary schools including vocational opportunities, personal and social development programmes and partnerships with local colleges.

Breakfast clubs were a feature in both primary and secondary schools, with staff commenting on importance of ensuring students were fed in order to support good behaviour and how hungry children found it harder to concentrate.

“If things were more focused on the wellbeing and the mental health and getting that in a good place for the children, I feel like then the academic stuff kind of flows off the back of that for me. I think it's really important to have the kids in a happy and safe space before we can sit there and force them to pick up a pencil and do work. They're coming in tired, they're coming in hungry, there's loads of things affecting them in their life. They've got situations at home where nobody really cares, and then we're at them every minute of the day - sit down, go here, do this. It's very regimented.” (Primary support staff)

Changes in approaches over time⁸⁹

In this section, the approaches used in schools in 2023 are compared with those reported in 2016 to explore how the approaches used have changed over time.

In the interviews and focus groups with school staff and LA representatives, participants were asked for their views as to how approaches for promoting positive relationships and managing more serious behaviour had changed since 2016. Broadly, their responses point to a culture shift in terms of how pupil behaviour is understood, with a move away from more punitive measures towards more positive approaches.

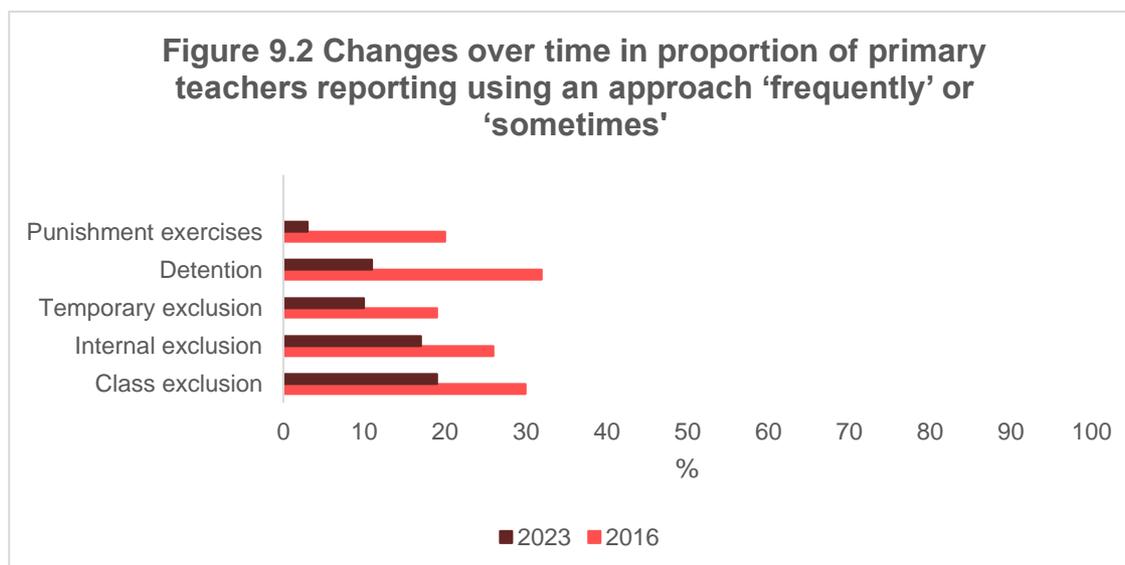
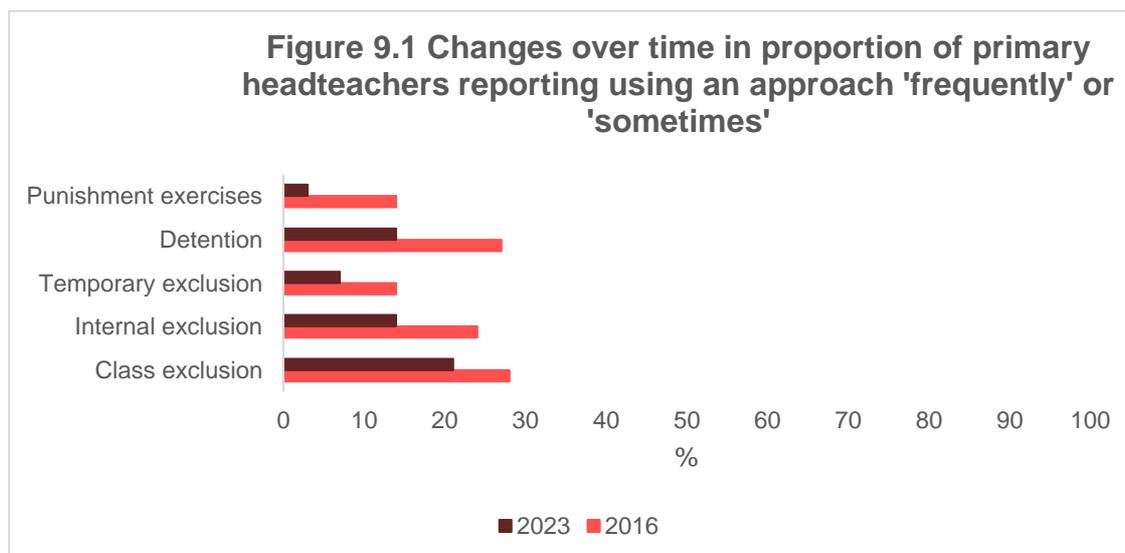
Changes over time in approaches used in primary schools

Between 2016 and 2023, there have been changes in the proportion of headteachers and teacher reporting that a number of the approaches are being used ‘frequently’ or ‘sometimes’ in primary schools among the 32 categories included in the survey.

For all but one of the 32 approaches there has either been a decrease, or no change, since 2016 in the proportion of headteachers and teachers using the approaches ‘frequently’ or ‘sometimes’. The most notable reductions between 2016 and 2023 were in punitive approaches and the use of exclusions. Reductions were reported in the frequency of use of two punitive approaches among both primary headteachers and primary teachers: detention (27% of primary headteachers and 32% of primary teachers reported using ‘frequently’ or ‘sometimes’ in 2016 compared with 12% of primary headteachers and 11% of primary teachers in 2023) and punishment exercises (14% of primary headteachers and 20% of primary teachers reported using ‘frequently’ or ‘sometimes’ in 2016, compared with 3% of both primary headteachers and primary teachers in 2023). There were

⁸⁹ Don't know responses were included in the 2016 tables for each of these 32 approaches and were therefore included in the 2023 figures presented in this Changes in approaches over time sub-section only to allow comparison over time. As ‘Don't know’ would typically be excluded the 2023 findings presented above this sub-section do not include this so are not exactly the same as those presented here. Supplementary tables for Chapter 9 show both the proportion excluding Don't know and including Don't know (for comparison to 2016). See Methodology for further detail.

reductions in the frequency of use, among primary headteachers and teachers, of class, internal and temporary exclusions (see Figures 9.1 and 9.2).



There were no notable increases in the proportion of both primary headteachers and teachers reporting the use of any of the 32 approaches.

Changes over time in approaches used in secondary schools

Between 2016 and 2023, there have been changes in the proportion of secondary staff reporting the use of approaches 'frequently' or 'sometimes' for around two-thirds of the 32 approaches included in the survey (Figures 9.3 and 9.4).

For around a third of these approaches, there were reductions between 2016 and 2023 in the proportion of both secondary headteachers and secondary teachers reporting their frequent use. The most notable reductions were in the use of punishment exercises, detention, temporary exclusions from school and buddying/peer mentoring. For a further third of the approaches, reductions were only seen among secondary teachers. The most notable reductions in the frequency of use among secondary teachers were recorded in anti-bullying policies

and programmes, broad curriculum options (such as vocational opportunities and personal and social development programmes), pupils actively being involved in developing ideas and activities in the school (e.g. pupil council), sharing appropriate strategies and approaches within school/staff and referral to SMT/HT.

In contrast, there was only one approach where reported use had increased. Both headteachers and teachers reported an increase in the use of nurture approaches (85% of secondary headteachers and 69% of secondary teachers 2016, compared with 95% of secondary headteachers and 77% of secondary teachers in 2023).

Figure 9.3 Changes over time in proportion of secondary headteachers reporting using an approach ‘frequently’ or ‘sometimes’

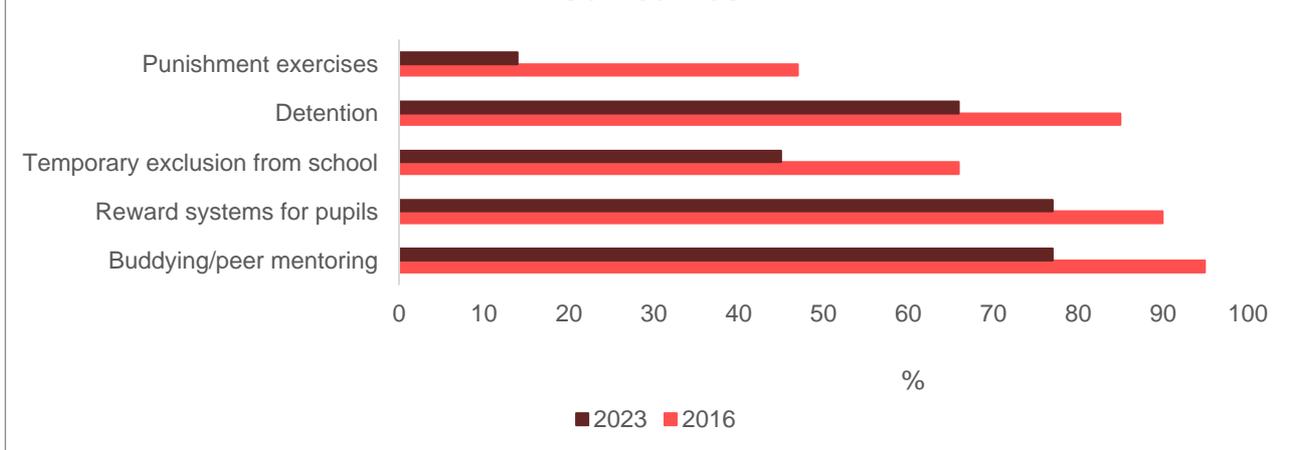
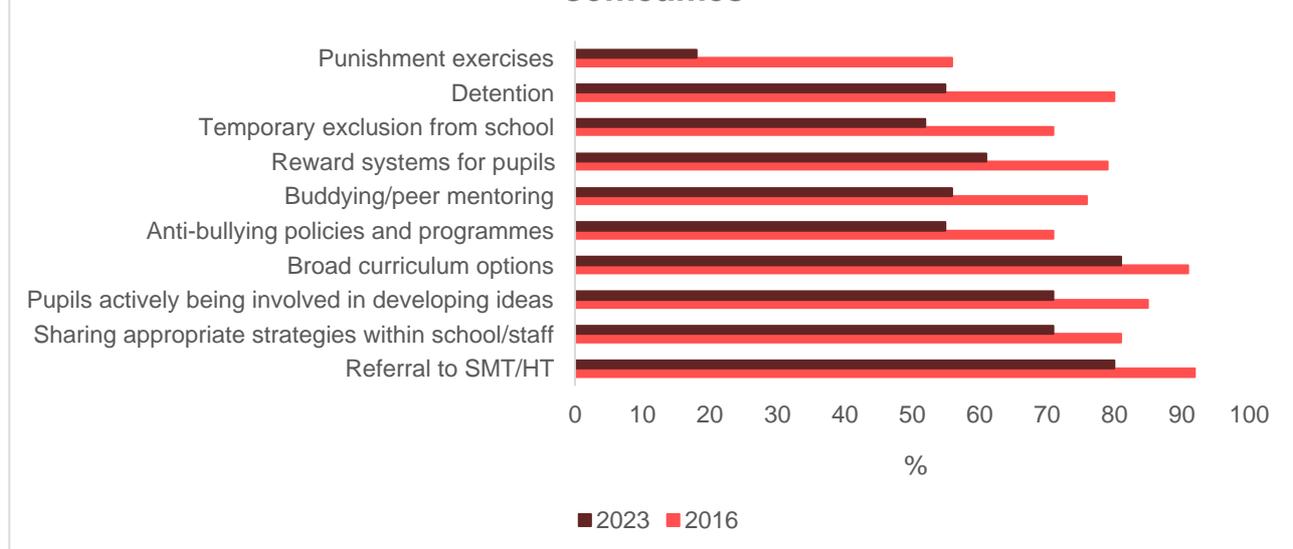


Figure 9.4 Changes over time in proportion of secondary teachers reporting using an approach ‘frequently’ or ‘sometimes’



A culture shift in how behaviour is understood and managed

Qualitative participants spoke of a 'culture shift' since 2016 in how behaviour is understood, with approaches to behaviour moving away from what they described as 'discipline' and 'punitive measures' towards increased use of Nurture principles and restorative practice. For example, headteachers spoke of never or rarely excluding pupils; whereas, in the past, rates of exclusion would have been much higher. Instead, relationships were viewed as being central to the way headteachers approached behaviour in their schools.

"I don't want any punitive punishments, we don't have that [...] in my old school when I was a PT, if a child had misbehaved, they would be on the seats outside the office sitting in shame. It's not like that anymore so I think that's an improvement. It's about conversations, it's about developing awareness in the children, and I suppose having parents on board. I prefer to do - I don't call it discipline because it's not about discipline - but it's about the relationships. I like to do it in partnership with them so it's probably my own capacity that's improved over the years to be able to do all these things." (Primary headteacher)

School staff expressed the view that gaining respect was a two-way process, with staff earning pupils' respect through forging strong relationships with them.

"It's very much about gaining respect in different ways, and making sure that that's because you're very respectful in the relationships that you lead with pupils. It's much less punitive, it's much less authoritarian than it was, hugely." (Secondary teacher)

While Chapter 5 demonstrates worsening levels of disruptive behaviour since 2016, LA representatives and headteachers reported improvements in terms of schools understanding the effect of trauma on pupil behaviour and how staff approach relationships. There was also a view that language at LA and headteacher level is now more trauma informed, and displays an increased understanding of neurodiversity and pupils with additional support needs.

Several factors were identified as contributing to this culture shift:

- National policy such as GIRFEC and Scottish Government relationships and behaviour guidelines (Included, Engaged and Involved II) were mentioned by both primary and secondary staff, particularly in terms of the national push to reduce exclusion rates.
- Staff training on Nurture principles, de-escalation and relational practice was reported to have helped to provide staff with an understanding of child brain development, the impact of trauma on pupils and their behaviour.
- Staff noted that concerns for pupils' wellbeing had increased as a result of COVID-19 and that this had impacted on the approaches taken to behaviour.
- Staff also noted an increasing understanding that punitive measures were not working and that different approaches were needed.

- In some schools, the shift away from punitive behaviour approaches was driven by new headteachers.
- Changes in teacher staffing in some schools were said to have made a difference with new teachers keen to try different approaches.
- Perceived changes to the relationships between teachers and pupils, not just in terms of respect but more widely in terms of a willingness among teachers to build relationships, and an awareness of the importance of this in terms of promoting positive behaviour.

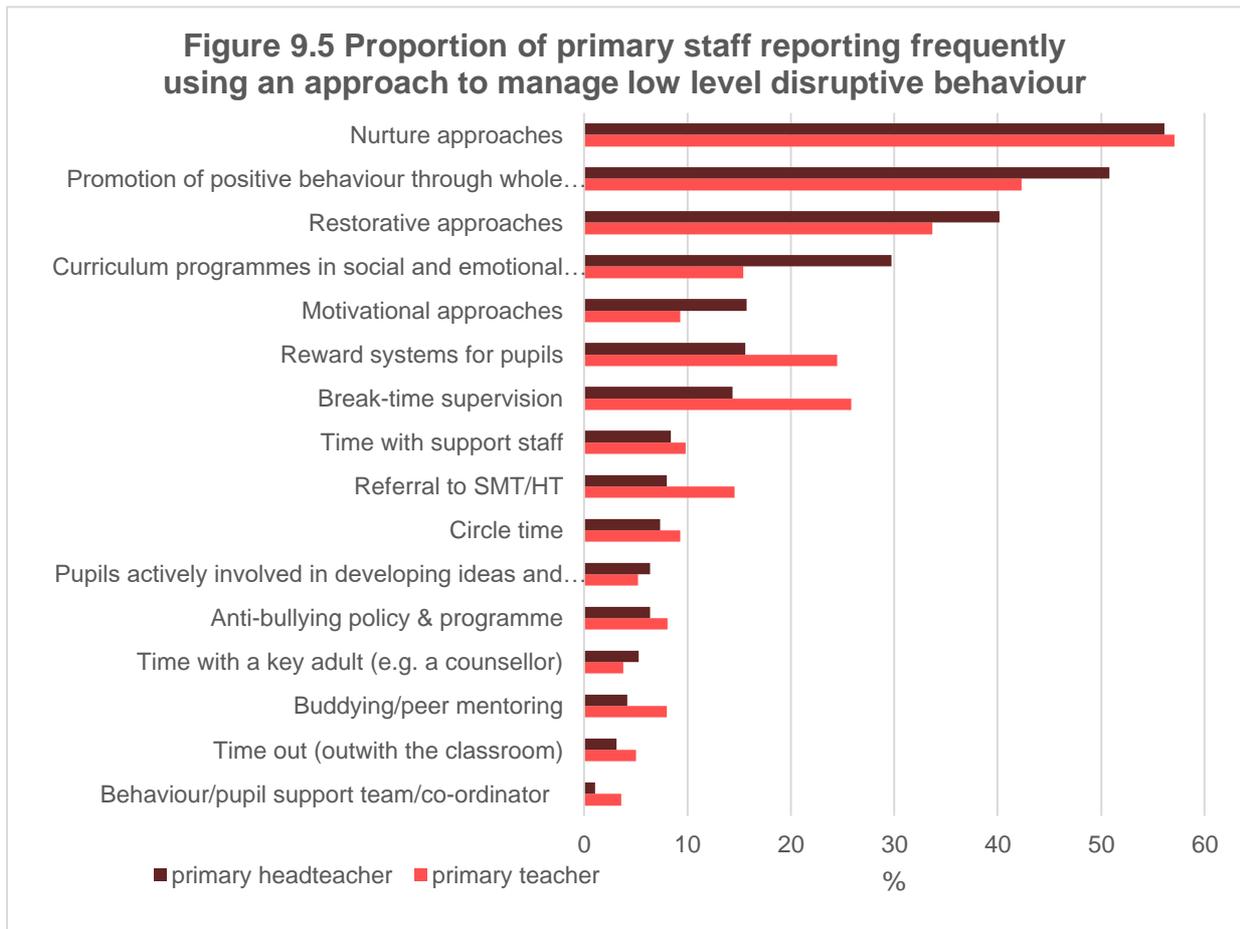
This shift in culture was most evident at LA and headteacher level. LA representatives and, less frequently, headteachers tended to conceptualise approaches to behaviour as focusing on relationships and restorative practice. However, the extent to which these approaches had been embedded across the school varied, with some teachers and support staff remaining sceptical as to the effectiveness of positive approaches. This is further explored later in this chapter.

Managing low level disruptive behaviours

Headteachers and teachers were asked to select up to three of the 32 approaches to behaviour management and relationship building that are frequently used in their school to deal with low level disruptive behaviours.

Approaches frequently used in primary schools to manage low level disruptive behaviour

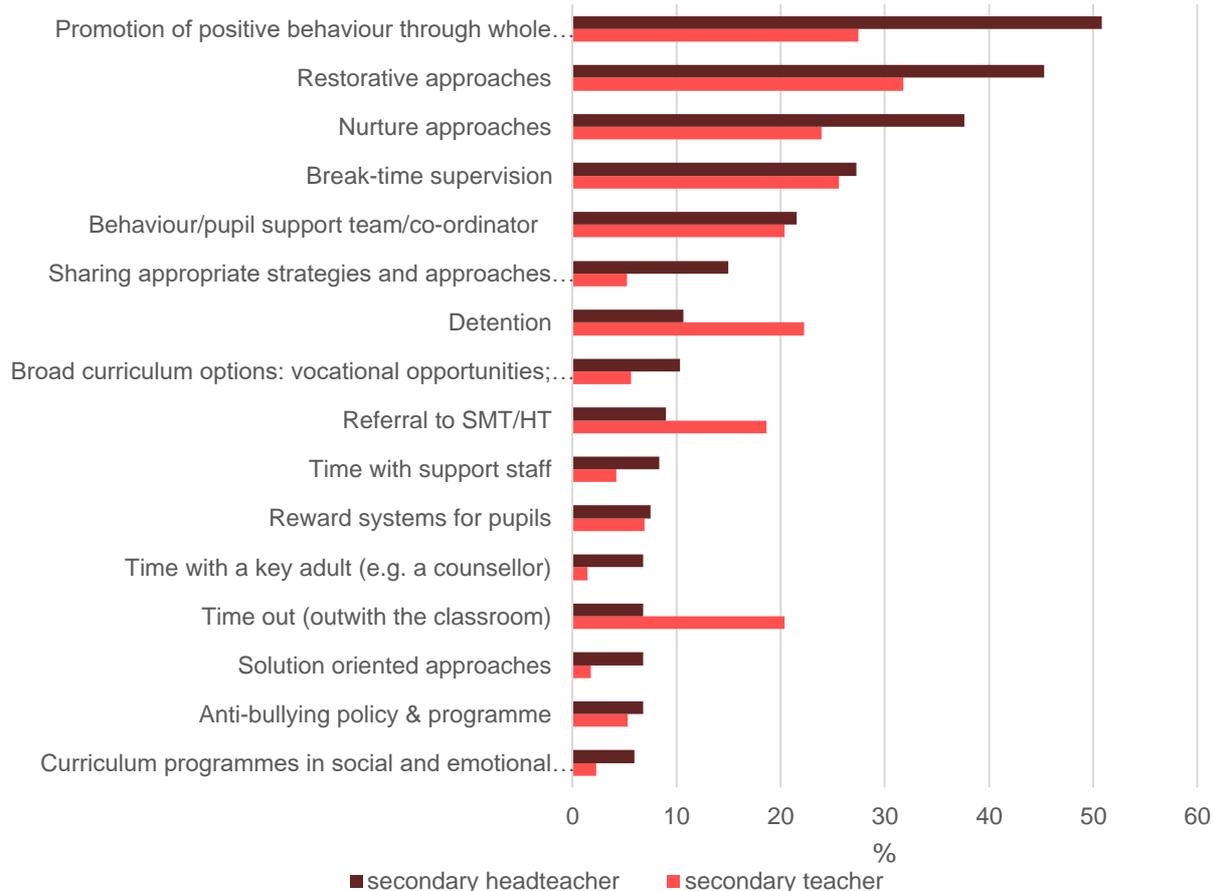
The three mostly commonly selected approaches among primary headteachers and primary teachers (Figure 9.5) to deal with low level disruptive behaviour in their schools are: Nurture approaches (56% headteachers, 57% teachers); promotion of positive behaviour through whole-school ethos and values (51% headteachers, 42% teachers) and restorative approaches (40% headteachers, 34% teachers). These are the same three approaches that were selected as being frequently used to deal with serious disruptive behaviour. Primary headteachers are less likely than primary teachers to select using break-time supervision (headteachers 14%, teachers 26%) and reward systems for pupils (headteachers 16%, teachers 24%) as one of the three frequently used approaches in their school. In contrast, headteachers are more likely than teachers to select using promotion of positive behaviour through whole-school ethos and values (51% headteachers, 42% teachers) and curriculum programmes in social and emotional skills and wellbeing (headteachers 30%, teachers 15%).



Approaches frequently used in secondary schools to manage low level disruptive behaviour

Secondary headteachers and secondary teachers (Figure 9.6) both selected promotion of positive behaviour through whole-school ethos and values and restorative approaches as one of the three most frequently used approaches in their schools. Headteachers were more likely than teachers to select both the whole-school ethos approach (51% headteachers, 27% teachers) and restorative approaches (45% headteachers, 32% teachers). The third most commonly selected approach by teachers was break-time supervision (26% teachers, 27% headteachers) and for headteachers was Nurture approaches (38% headteachers, 24% teachers).

Figure 9.6 Proportion of secondary staff reporting frequently using an approach to manage low level disruptive behaviour



Addressing low level disruptive behaviours in practice

In both primary and secondary schools visited as part of the qualitative research, teachers emphasised the importance of spending time ‘going back to basics’ in promoting behaviour by reinforcing class rules and class charters, introducing rewards systems and focusing on relationships. Teaching and learning techniques were revisited to explore how these could help support relationships and promote positive behaviour. Teachers spoke of using non-verbal cues, having a subtle, quiet word with a pupil rather than calling them out in front of their peers, and reinforcing classroom routines to help reduce disruption, before escalating behaviour to middle managers. Teachers also mentioned using seating plans and adopting ‘three warnings’ systems before considering next steps.

The importance of building strong relationships with pupils was highlighted by school staff irrespective of their role. Knowing pupils and their families, and understanding their backgrounds was seen as critical to being able to manage low level disruption. Headteachers, and their staff, noted the importance of having a ‘visible’ head who is present in school corridors and during breaks/lunchtimes.

“I would say the most visible person in this school is [the headteacher]... Actually, he spends his time getting to know the kids and talking to staff and seeing what's going on, on the ground. I think that's so valuable.” (Secondary teacher)

Curriculum structures were perceived to make it harder to address low level disruption in some cases. Teachers in some smaller secondary schools noted issues around teaching classes with multiple qualification levels (National 3, 4, 5 and Higher) and the ways that this combined approach could make it harder to support all pupils and make disruption more likely.

To a greater degree than among teaching staff, support staff described forging relationships with pupils as being at the heart of their approach to behaviour. Often noting how pupils viewed them as being different to teachers, support staff spoke of how they were able to build upon this difference to build strong relationships based on trust with the pupils they supported. They spent time getting to know them, were aware of what might ‘trigger’ individual pupils and could identify quickly how a pupil was feeling when they arrived at school. Some support staff members spoke of the need to ‘show love’ to pupils, aware that they may have very difficult home lives.

“They just need to hear that [they are loved], a lot of the kids. [The pupils we work with], they’ve not got that family network, not got somebody to come home to at night and the dinner's ready and they can watch a movie or whatever, and someone goes, 'Right, love you, good night'. They then come into school and all those emotions come out in anger and aggression, so they can't get Nurture because they're too angry and too aggressive.” (Secondary support staff)

However, support staff also discussed some of the challenges they faced in terms of being perceived differently to, and respected less than, teaching staff by pupils who used this as a reason not to listen to them. Other support staff, particularly those in secondary schools, said they were sometimes expected to manage behaviour as a result of teachers being reluctant to step in. This led some support staff to say they felt ‘taken for granted’ by teachers and senior management.

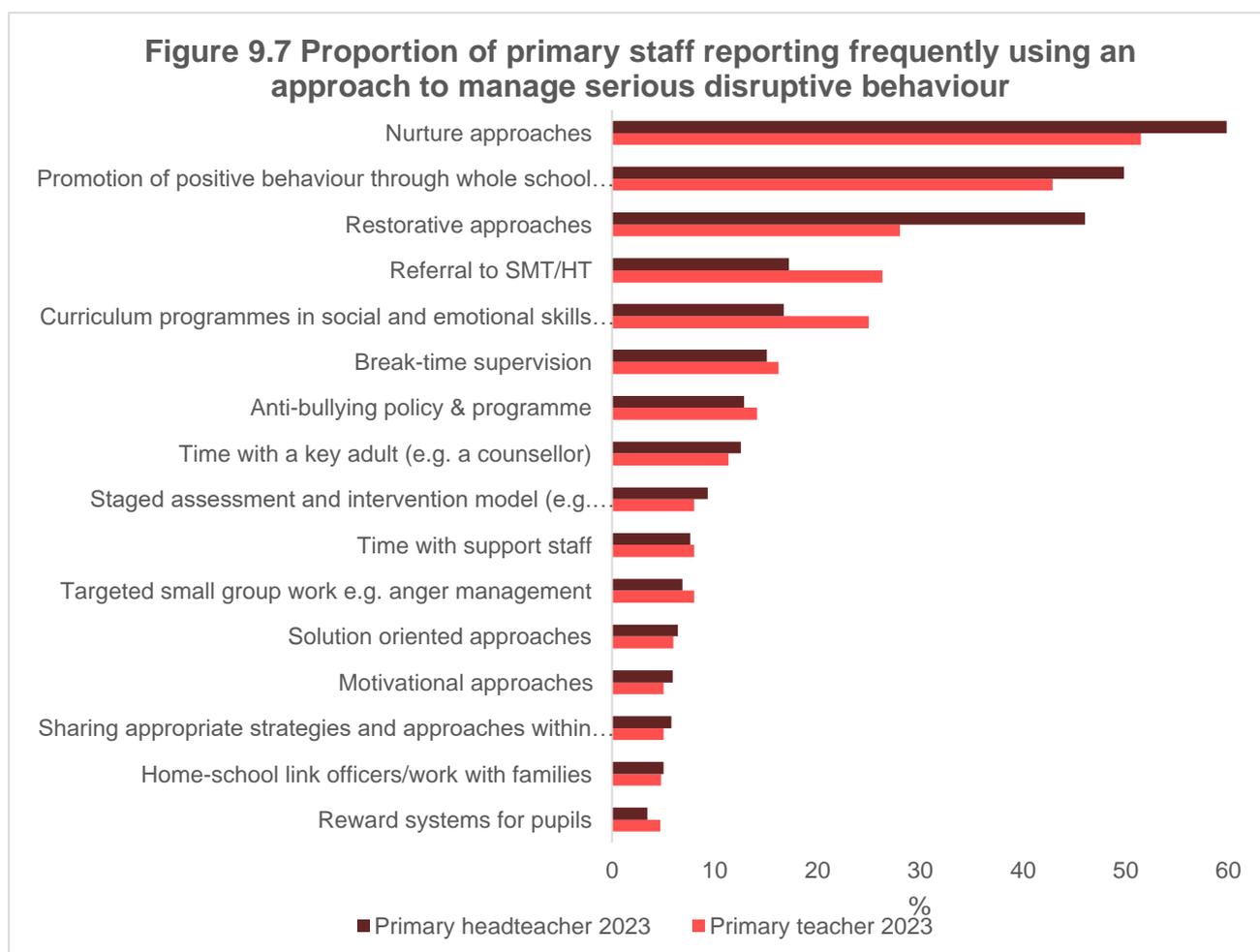
Among headteachers, teachers and support staff, being able to draw upon, model and reinforce school values was seen as particularly helpful due to the consistent message it helped staff to convey. Despite this, the lack of consistency in the strategies used by different teachers across the school was mentioned by headteachers, teachers and support staff. It was felt the inconsistent approaches to managing behaviour experienced by secondary pupils moving between classes could be confusing and impact detrimentally on behaviour. This was particularly noted in relation to teachers’ strategies for dealing with pupils using their phone in class.

Managing serious disruptive behaviours

Headteachers and teachers were asked to select up to three types of approaches that their school frequently uses to deal with serious disruptive behaviour from the 32 approaches already presented to them.

Approaches frequently used in primary schools to manage serious disruptive behaviour

The three most commonly selected approaches among primary headteachers and teachers (see Figure 9.7) are: Nurture approaches (60% headteachers, 52% teachers); promotion of positive behaviour through whole-school ethos and values (50% headteachers, 43% teachers); and restorative approaches (46% headteachers, 28% teachers). Around a quarter of primary teachers also selected referral to SMT/HT (26%) and break-time supervision (25%) as one of the three types of approaches that their school frequently uses.

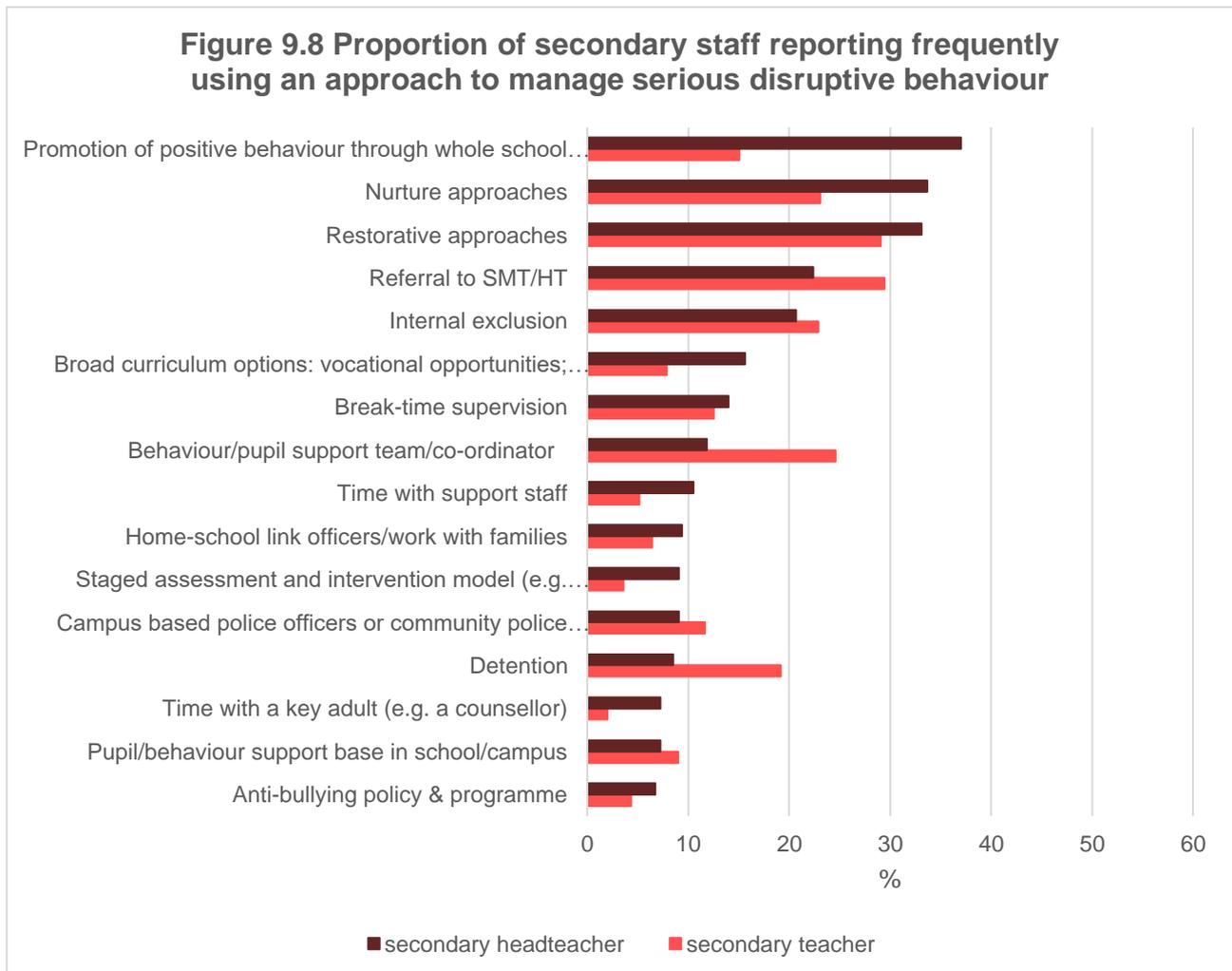


Primary headteachers are more likely than primary teachers to select the use of restorative approaches and time with a key adult (e.g. counsellor) (13% headteachers, 3% teachers). Primary headteachers are less likely than primary teachers to select using referral to SMT/HT (17% headteachers, 26% teachers); break-time supervision (15% headteachers, 25% teachers); and reward systems for pupils (3% headteachers, 16% teachers).

Approaches frequently used in secondary schools to manage serious disruptive behaviour

Secondary headteachers and teachers both select Nurture approaches (34% headteachers, 23% teachers) and restorative approaches (33% headteachers, 29% teachers) as one of the three frequently used approaches to deal with serious disruptive behaviour. In addition, secondary teachers select using referral to the SMT/HT (22% headteachers, 29% teachers) whereas secondary headteachers select promotion of positive behaviour through whole school ethos and values (37%) as one of the three frequently used approaches in their schools.

Figure 9.8 Proportion of secondary staff reporting frequently using an approach to manage serious disruptive behaviour



Managing serious disruption in practice

In the primary schools which participated in the qualitative research, there was a focus on Nurture and restorative practice to help manage serious disruption and support those displaying dysregulated behaviour. Some pupils had been offered additional support from members of support staff, but this was not always available due to staffing pressures. Some primary schools had introduced sensory rooms with lights, sounds and soft furnishing designed as spaces for pupils to go to calm down. However, the physical layout of some open plan primary schools meant it was not always easy to provide pupils with a time-out space, or a space they could go to calm down.

"I think schools struggle a wee bit even in terms of space because even if they're doing [whole-school Nurture], one of the challenges is the physical environment sometimes. There's just not space if children are dysregulated for them to get time where they can calm down." (Local authority representative)

In the secondary schools visited, school staff at all levels spoke of Nurture and using restorative approaches in managing serious disruption and supporting those displaying distressed behaviour. However, it was felt that restorative conversations sometimes only had minimal impact on behaviour (see Effectiveness of approaches section below for a detailed discussion of this), and staff instead noted the use of various other strategies.

Both primary and secondary schools mentioned adopting 'reduced' timetables for some pupils. This could include different start times for pupils to avoid them coming into contact with other pupils or specific members of staff. Elsewhere, they were adopted as a means of a phased return for pupils who had been excluded or had been anxious about coming to school. The use of 'bespoke' or 'personalised' timetables was also adopted in both primary and secondary schools to help tailor timetables towards pupils' interests or abilities as a further means of helping them to remain in school in the face of more serious and disruptive behaviour.

Despite the previously discussed culture change in schools, staff in some schools continued to use what they described as more "punitive" measures to assist with managing more serious incidents of challenging pupil behaviour. Detentions were still in use in both primary and secondary schools, albeit as a time for reflection in some schools, as were phone calls home to parents.

Internal exclusion – being removed from the classroom to study in a different classroom or in a support base – was relatively commonly cited by secondary school staff in particular. This was variously referred to as 'classroom extraction', 'seclusion' or 'internal exclusion'. Teachers and support staff had mixed views of this. While some staff appreciated the respite this offered both staff and pupils, others highlighted pupils who were familiar with the ways in which behaviour incidents were escalated and purposefully sought to cause disruption so as to be removed from a lesson they did not wish to attend.

As a last resort, some schools (mainly secondaries, but also some primaries) used exclusion. A secondary headteacher expressed concern at how their school's

exclusion rate might be perceived by the LA, but stressed the importance of balancing the rights of a dysregulated child with the health and safety of other pupils.

“Verbal abuse of staff is usually an exclusion or an alternative to exclusion where they're not excluded but they're not in class for a couple of days, and the restorative conversations with a year head or a teacher or other pupils, things like that. The alternative to exclusion, I would say, a nurturing but educational approach where pupils sign a contract where they reflect on what happened, what will happen next time, who was impacted, that kind of thing.” (Secondary teacher)

School staff also outlined some of the systems schools had introduced to help staff call for additional support in the classroom when needed. These included:

- A ‘red card’ system so that pupils could take a red card to a member of the school leadership team if a class teacher required support.
- Walky-talkies and phones in classrooms to allow teaching and support staff to communicate with one another and the school leadership team, and often used by staff monitoring corridors.
- A “duty head” system with staff allocated to be on call and available if needed.
- A door-fob system for external school doors in primary schools.

Development and promotion of policies and strategies on positive relationships and behaviour

The survey asked primary and secondary headteachers to identify school community members actively involved, over the last 12-months, in discussing and developing strategies for dealing with disruptive behaviour and the promotion of positive behaviour and relationships in their schools.

Primary and secondary headteachers report teachers (96% primary headteachers, 97% secondary headteachers); learning assistants/support staff (88% primary, 74% secondary); pupils (80% primary, 87% secondary); parents (74% primary, 67% secondary); and educational psychologists (71% primary, 69% secondary) as being actively involved in developing disruptive behaviour strategies in their schools.

Around half (56%) of primary headteachers also identify lunchtime/playground assistants as being actively involved in strategy development in their schools. While a similar proportion of secondary headteachers identify campus police or community officers (53%) as being actively involved in strategy development.

Changes in school community members involved in developing strategies on disruptive behaviour over time

The reported level of active involvement in developing primary school strategies fell between 2016 and 2023 amongst lunchtime/playground assistants (68% of primary headteachers in 2016, compared with 56% in 2023), pupils (89% in 2016,

compared with 80% in 2023) and school caretakers/janitors (26% in 2016, compared with 19% 2023).

The reported involvement of social workers in secondary school behaviour and relationship strategy development has also decreased over time. For example, 40% of secondary headteachers reported their active involvement in 2016, compared with 28% in 2023.

How changing approaches to promoting positive behaviour are reflected in school and LA policies

The majority of schools which took part in the qualitative research (primaries and secondaries) had policies in place or were in the process of developing new policies, most of which were framed around positive relationships rather than behaviour management. At the heart of many of the policies was a focus on school values. Several schools mentioned having established Behaviour Groups to revamp school policies. However, in other schools, the nature of relationships and behaviour policy was unclear. Some secondary schools had developed policies specifically around the use of mobile phones in school (for example, pupils handing in their phones to the teacher at the start of the lesson), though it should be noted these were thought to have had varying degrees of success.

Among LA representatives, the shift towards the promotion of positive relationships was frequently raised. As well as the drivers to the updating of behaviour policies mentioned by schools, the influence of the UN Rights of the Child was also highlighted, as was that of pupil voice and children's rights, Angela Morgan's review for the Scottish Government of additional support for learning and approaches which recognise the impact of trauma on brain development. Some LA representatives said their authority had updated its guidance around exclusions policy while others said there was no current guidance in place around exclusion. While many LA representatives said their LA had a positive relationships policy in place across the authority, others said they did not have a central policy around relationship-based practice and that it was instead up to schools to develop their own policies on relationships and Rights Respecting Schools.

Promotion of policies on positive relationships and behaviour

In the survey, teachers and support staff were asked on a scale from 1 being 'poor' to 5 being 'very good' to rate 'How your school promotes policies on positive relationships and behaviour.'

Among primary school staff, 72% of both teachers and support staff rated their school as either 4 or 5 (Table 9.3). Ratings among both staff types have decreased since 2016 when 81% of teachers and 82% support staff rated their school as 4 or 5. Secondary school staff are less likely to score their school highly with 46% and 51% of support staff and teachers respectively rating either 4 or 5. Among teachers, the proportion giving this rating had decreased from 52% in 2016. Among support staff this has remained similar to 2016.

Table 9.3: Teachers' perceptions of how their school promotes policies on positive relationships and behaviour

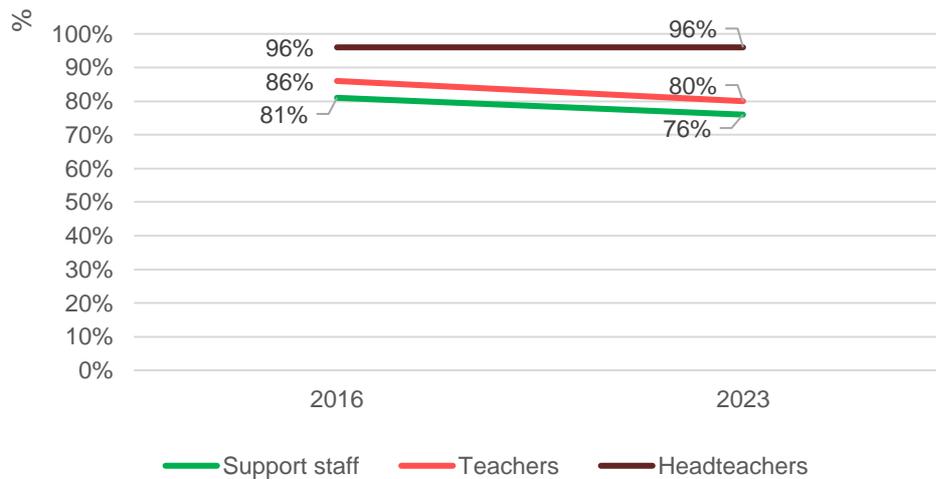
| | Primary (%) | Secondary (%) |
|-----------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1 – Poor | 2 | 7 |
| 2 | 4 | 15 |
| 3 | 21 | 31 |
| 4 | 37 | 29 |
| 5 – Very good | 35 | 18 |
| Unweighted base | 617 | 1536 |

Headteachers were similarly asked on a scale from 1 being 'poor' to 5 being 'very good' to rate 'How the education authority works in partnership with your school to promote positive relationships and behaviour.' Nearly half of primary school headteachers (49%) and 44% of secondary school headteachers rate this as 4 or 5. Around a third (32%) of primary headteachers rated this as a 3, indicating neutral, with a similar proportion (37%) of secondary headteachers giving the same rating. A smaller proportion of primary headteachers (14%) rated gave this a rating of 1 or 2 compared with secondary headteachers (24%).

Perceptions of school ethos

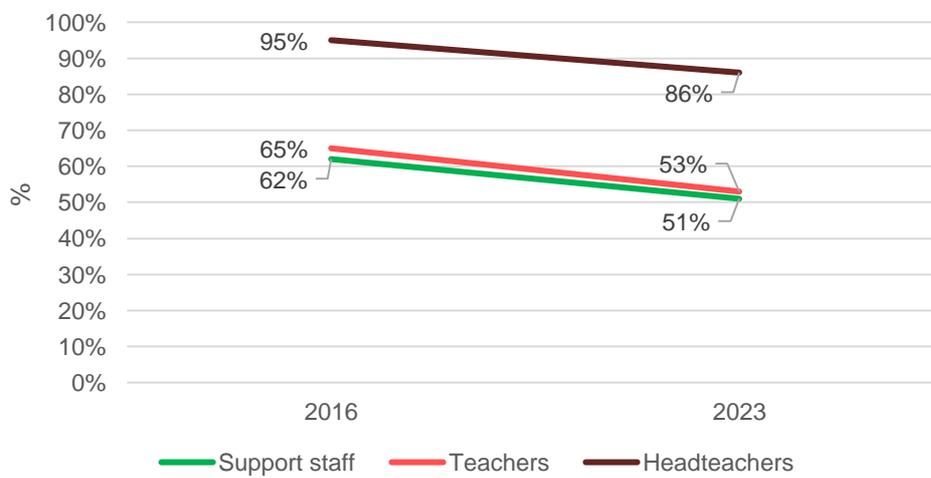
All staff were asked on a scale from 1 being 'poor' to 5 being 'very good' to rate 'the overall ethos of your school.' As in previous years, primary headteachers, teachers and support staff are generally positive about their school ethos: 95% headteachers, 80% of teachers and 76% of support staff gave this a rating of 4 or 5. This has dropped among teachers from 86% in 2016 but remained the majority at 80% (Figure 9.9).

Figure 9.9 Primary staff ratings of school ethos as high (4 or 5) 2016 to 2023



Secondary headteachers are also positive about their school ethos with 86% giving a rating of either 4 or 5, however this has decreased since 2016 (95%). Teachers and support staff are less likely to rate their school ethos highly with 53% of teachers and 51% of support staff giving a rating of 4 or 5. These ratings have also decreased since 2016 (65% teachers, support staff 62%) (Figure 9.10).

Figure 9.10 Secondary staff ratings of school ethos as high (4 or 5) 2016 to 2023



Similar to previous years, primary school staff were more positive than secondary school staff about their school ethos, with 79% giving a rating of 4 or 5, compared with 53%. The most marked between primary and secondary staff was among teachers with 80% of primary school teachers giving a rating of 4 or 5 compared with 53% of secondary school teachers (as shown in Table 9.4 below).

Table 9.4 Teachers' perceptions of school ethos

| | Primary (%) | Secondary (%) |
|-----------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1 – Poor | 2 | 6 |
| 2 | 2 | 13 |
| 3 | 16 | 28 |
| 4 | 38 | 33 |
| 5 – Very Good | 42 | 20 |
| Unweighted base | 619 | 1536 |

Effectiveness of approaches promoting positive relationships and behaviour

This section explores staff's views of the effectiveness of approaches used to support positive relationships and manage disruptive behaviour. It includes findings from both the survey and interviews and focus groups with school staff and LA representatives.

School culture regarding developing positive relationships and behaviour

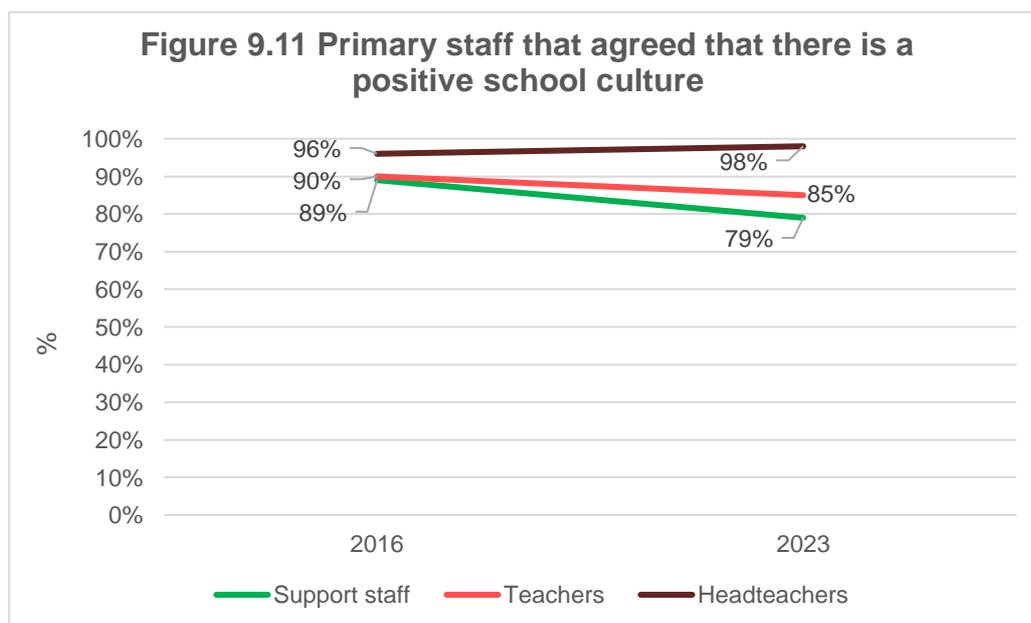
The survey asked all staff about the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that 'Our school has a culture of developing positive relationships and behaviour for the health and wellbeing of all.'

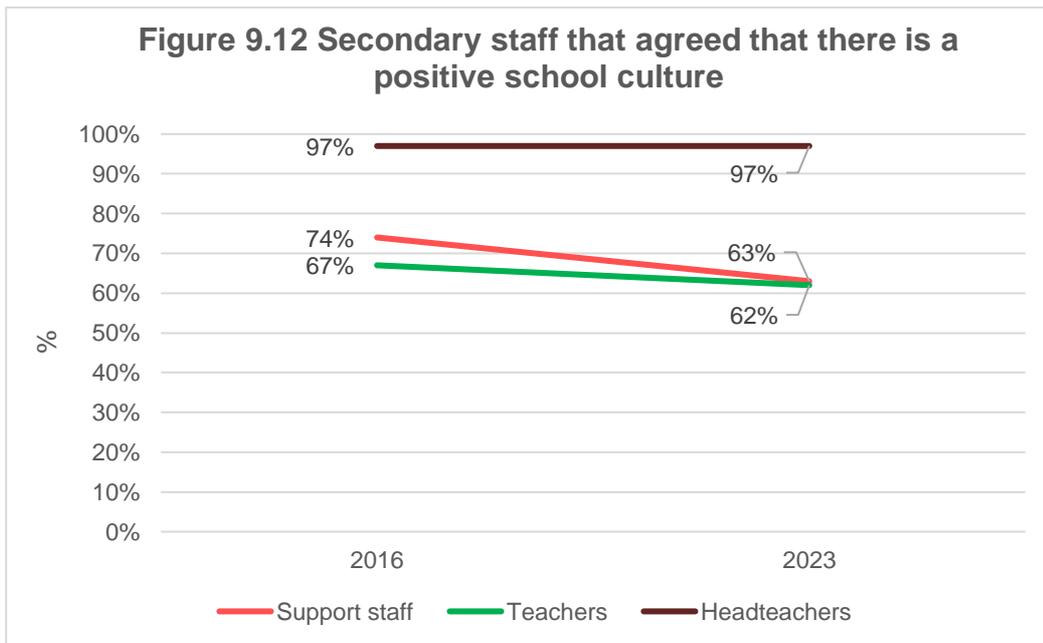
Most staff agree with this statement though agreement was higher in primary (84%) than secondary (62%) schools. Headteachers were the group most likely to agree (98% in primary and 97% in secondary schools). In primary schools, teachers were more likely to agree (85%) than support staff (79%) whereas in secondary schools, views of teachers and support staff were similar (62% and 63% agreeing, Table 9.5). Primary school teachers of P4-7 were slightly more likely to agree with this statement than were teachers of P1-3 of (86% and 82% respectively).

Table 9.5 Staff views on whether their school has a culture of developing positive relationships and behaviour for the health and wellbeing of all

| Those that agree (either agree strongly or agree) | Headteachers (%) | Teachers (%) | Support staff (%) |
|---|------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Primary | 98 | 85 | 79 |
| Secondary | 97 | 62 | 63 |
| Unweighted base (Primary) | 218 | 641 | 450 |
| Unweighted base (Secondary) | 129 | 1,602 | 577 |

There has been a fall since 2016 in the proportion of teachers and support staff agreeing that their school has a culture of developing positive relationships and behaviour for the health and wellbeing of all. As shown in Figures 9.11 and 9.12, this has decreased among teachers (from 90% to 85% in primaries and 67% to 62% in secondaries) and among support staff (from 89% to 79% in primaries and 74% to 63% in secondaries).





Perceptions of whole school approach to promoting positive relationships and behaviour

Headteachers and teachers responding to the survey were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree that ‘My school has a clear and comprehensive whole school approach to promoting positive relationships and behaviour.’ Primary and secondary headteachers are equally as likely to agree with this statement (92%). However, teachers have a less positive view; 73% percent of primary teachers and 53% of secondary teachers agree on this point. As shown in Table 9.6, there is a particularly large difference in the views of headteachers and teachers in secondary schools (92% compared with 53% agreeing with this).

Table 9.6: Staff views on whether their school has a clear and comprehensive whole school approach to promoting positive relationships and behaviour

| Those that agree (either agree strongly or agree) | Headteachers (%) | Teachers (%) |
|---|------------------|--------------|
| Primary | 92 | 73 |
| Secondary | 92 | 53 |
| Unweighted base (Primary) | 218 | 636 |
| Unweighted base (Secondary) | 129 | 1,598 |

Teachers’ confidence in promoting positive behaviour in the classroom

Teachers were asked to rate their confidence in their ability to ‘promote positive behaviour in your classroom’ and ‘respond to indiscipline in your classroom’ on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=‘not confident at all’ and 5=‘very confident’). Confidence levels were high. In relation to promoting positive behaviour, 94% of primary teachers and 159

91% of secondary teachers gave a rating of 4 or 5. This remains the same as in 2016. In relation to responding to indiscipline, 82% of primary teachers and 81% of secondary teachers gave a rating of either 4 or 5. This has decreased since 2016, from 89% among primary and 86% among secondary teachers.

Time spent on supporting relationships and behaviour

In the survey, headteachers and teachers were asked to estimate the time they spent in the last full teaching week on eight different types of activity related to supporting relationships and behaviour. They could indicate either 'no time spent', 'under one hour', '1-3 hours' or 'over 3 hours'. The figures are shown in Supplementary tables 9.39-9.46.

Both primary and secondary headteachers spend more time than primary and secondary teachers on all eight types of activity.

Primary headteachers spend most time each week on activities related to supporting relationships and behaviour on reactive actions: dealing with disruptive behaviour referrals from staff (24% spend 'over 3 hours' a week, 38% '1-3 hours'); dealing with the same pupils who present challenging behaviour (24%, 'over 3 hours', 37% '1-3 hours'), and planning or providing behaviour support to individual pupils (22%, 'over 3 hours', 44% '1-3 hours').

Primary teachers spend most time each week dealing with the same pupils who present challenging behaviour (12%, 'over 3 hours', 38% '1-3 hours').

Secondary headteachers spend most time referring or liaising with other staff about particular pupils (36% spend 'over 3 hours a week', 53% spend '1-3 hours'); dealing with disruptive behaviour referrals from staff (29% spend 'over 3 hours' a week, 39% '1-3 hours'); and dealing with the same pupils who present challenging behaviour (22%, 'over 3 hours', 59% '1-3 hours').

Secondary teachers spend most time dealing with the same pupils who present challenging behaviour (12%, 'over 3 hours', 48% '1-3 hours').

Changes over time in time spent on supporting relationships and behaviour

Between 2016 and 2023 there have been increases in the proportion of both primary and secondary headteachers who report spending 3 or more hours per week dealing with disruptive behaviour referrals from staff (12% of primary and 14% of secondary headteachers in 2016 compared with 24% and 29% respectively in 2023) and dealing with the same pupils who present challenging behaviour (13% of primary and 7% of secondary headteachers in 2016 compared with 24% and 22% respectively in 2023).

There has been an increase in the proportion of primary headteachers spending '3 or more hours' per week planning or providing behaviour support to individual pupils (10% in 2016, 22% in 2023). The proportion of secondary headteachers who reported spending 3 or more hours per week referring or liaising with other staff about particular pupils has also doubled from 17% in 2016 to 36% in 2023.

Views on the effectiveness of approaches

This section outlines school staff and LA representatives' views of the effectiveness of different approaches used (at national, local authority and school level), outlining their views of what was said to be working well and what was seen as more challenging.

Positive impacts of particular programmes and broader approaches

Qualitative research participants highlighted the impact of positive approaches such as Nurture principles, restorative practice and trauma-informed approaches. In particular, the focus on school values was viewed as a helpful approach at both primary and secondary level, and as contributing towards a positive school ethos. Adopting new, or revising old, school values was said to bring consistency across the school and help staff to set high expectations of behaviour standards, particularly in primary schools.

“We have three [values] in this school, so that's being kind, being safe and being respectful and that language is embedded in everything that we do. That's something that we speak to parents about and try and get that consistency from home to school as well.” (Primary teacher)

Similarly, celebrating the success of pupils – either through positive phone calls home, use of rewards systems or praise postcards – was perceived as helping pupils to feel safe and valued. While school staff noted that schools were focusing more on positive behaviour than they might have in the past, staff in some schools called for more of a focus on this.

Staff in primary schools spoke of the benefits of using curriculum programmes in social and emotional skills and wellbeing, noting that they had helped children to better understand and regulate their emotions and to communicate to staff how they were feeling. It was felt these had enabled schools to develop a consistent approach among staff through the use of shared language. While staff felt these helped the majority of children, it was noted they did not always work for the most dysregulated children.

At secondary level, staff highlighted the considerable impact of training on relational practice on both whole-school and individual teachers' approaches to relationships and behaviour. Schools which had adopted peer mentoring programmes in addressing gender-based violence also found it helpful. Staff in a secondary school noted how useful this had been in dealing with a rise in misogyny among some pupils they linked to social media influencers. In those secondary schools which had introduced policies on mobile phones, and, importantly, where they had been adopted consistently, these were said to have made a difference in terms of reducing disruption associated with phones.

Nurture approaches in practice

Local authority representatives and school staff, particularly headteachers and those responsible for pastoral support, highlighted the benefits of adopting Nurture and restorative approaches in terms of contributing to improved understandings of trauma and its impact on pupil behaviour. In those schools which had allocated physical spaces and, in some cases, dedicated staff, for Nurture, this was seen to have been particularly helpful, particularly in secondary schools where this had been developed alongside alternative learning provision and new approaches to the curriculum.

Whilst many school staff members reported receiving training in Nurture principles or that their school had implemented these principles, understanding of what it meant to be nurturing varied somewhat. In some schools which had adopted nurturing approaches, these existed alongside more punitive measures. A minority of teachers stated that sometimes direct consequences or punitive measures were appropriate. This conflict in approach was highlighted by an LA representative.

"I think that's a huge learning curve, because some people are going to schools and they go, 'Yes, we're a nurturing school' and then next minute I hear a child being absolutely bawled at by a member of staff and I'm like, 'that's not very nurturing'." (Local authority representative)

There also appeared to be some confusion as a result of the duality of Nurture – in that in some schools it could be both a physical space ('the Nurture base') and an overarching approach. In schools which had a space for Nurture, this was targeted at specific pupils identified by the school. Some teachers said they did not always understand the criteria for selecting pupils for Nurture support, and in some schools there was a lack of communication around the aims of the Nurture bases and which pupils they were aimed at. One critique of Nurture was that staff perceived that some pupils who would benefit most from Nurture were said by the school to be 'ineligible' for support through this route. This tended to be some of the most challenging and dysregulated pupils whose behaviour was considered too aggressive for Nurture groups.

Challenges associated with restorative approaches

While LA representatives and school headteachers interviewed as part of the qualitative research were generally positive about the use of restorative approaches, teachers and support staff expressed more mixed views. Some staff found restorative approaches to have little impact, particularly among those pupils whose behaviour was the most dysregulated. Teaching staff reported that the use of restorative conversations after a disruptive incident which led to a pupil being removed from the classroom could feel 'tokenistic'. Teachers and support staff also questioned the sincerity of pupils 'who know what to say' during these conversations. School staff from all levels pointed to the difficulty of managing disruption caused by pupils who appeared not to care about the impact of their behaviour or about any sanctions they were handed as a result.

"I don't think it's a good thing in the long term. I think it will keep getting worse behaviour – Nurture, if properly implemented could work, but just now I feel it's a bit like you just get away with what you're doing. If you then go and have a chat, then they say they're sorry, and then they're back in, but they know what to say."
(Secondary teacher)

The time needed from both staff and pupils to be able to implement restorative practice properly and to allow time for people to fully reflect on their actions was cited as a factor which may limit the effectiveness of restorative approaches.

Perceived lack of consequences associated with current approaches to behaviour

Both primary and secondary staff frequently expressed the view that the current focus on positive relationships and behaviour means that pupils have little understanding of the consequences of their actions. This was more strongly seen among teachers (including experienced teachers and those who were newer to the profession) and support staff than among headteachers. In some schools visited as part of the qualitative research, conflicting views were expressed between headteachers and senior leaders and those of class teachers and support staff. For example, support staff in a school which the head said was centred around nurturing and restorative approaches questioned the lack of perceived consequences of disruptive behaviour for pupils.

"Quite often they're taken out of the classroom, spoken to and then put right back and it seems to have little effect. You were talking about this particular child on the bus that was squirting juice and being disrespectful and goading another pupil. Yes, they get a talking to, but it doesn't have any effect on these particular pupils. It's like water off a duck's back. You could stand that child in the corner and tell him how disrespectful that is. 'What do you think you're doing? How do you think that makes other people feel?' They're like, 'I don't know'." (Secondary support staff)

There was a view among some school staff (mainly teachers and support staff) that current approaches do not adequately prepare young people for the realities of the workplace or for their place in society more widely.

"I think it's added to the increase in the low level disruptions, etc. There's no clear rules, sanctions, consequences, boundaries. Everything's become very muddled. Like I say, that's how society works. We have rules that we all agree on in the best interests of everybody, and there are consequences if you break those rules, whereas we seem to have become - with children in Scotland – no, there are no rules, there are no consequences." (Secondary teacher)

"I got no apology from the student in question and that's hard. That is hard, because I firmly believe if this child acted like this in a workplace they wouldn't have a job now. So we are actually in a way – when I say 'we', the school – are failing these kids in the respect that if they go into a workplace which we're trying to set them up for, no workplace, no employer is going to take what I took."
(Secondary support staff)

Part of the reason that some staff gave for their resistance to these approaches related to their views on equity, and how other pupils might perceive it to be 'unfair' that a child who misbehaved might then have time out with staff or be allocated Nurture time. This view was present among both primary and secondary class teachers and support staff. While most were sympathetic to the challenges some pupils faced in their home lives and the ways in which this might be reflected in their school behaviour, it was felt that it could foster resentment among pupils.

"Sometimes as I've said I've seen instances with children being offered tea and biscuits to talk about their behaviour. Now you've got students who are behaving really well in the class. They do not get that. They don't get that chance to sit outside the class and talk about their expectations. They don't get free food offerings or drink offerings. So it's started to cause resentment amongst general students and of course other students are getting away with quite poor behaviour. They're seeing how their behaviour is also being allowed."
(Secondary teacher)

This view was also shared by some LA representatives. Other LA representatives interviewed acknowledged the desire among teachers for the return to more punitive approaches. Teachers also highlighted the difficulty of knowing what to do with pupils where all other approaches or strategies had been exhausted and their disruptive behaviours continued.

Mismatch between national/LA policy and individual school's approaches

School staff highlighted a perceived mismatch between the positive approaches espoused at both a national and LA level and the realities of dealing with violent and aggressive incidents in schools.

While noting the need for a trauma-informed approach to dysregulated pupils, school staff at all levels expressed concern that the health and safety of other pupils was in danger of being neglected. In particular, staff in secondary schools which had high levels of serious disruption highlighted the pressure they were under from the LA and national guidance to reduce pupil exclusions.

"The first principle of Nurture is that school is a safe space. As soon as school is not a safe space, we have a big problem, but to make school a safe space, we have to use some of those harder-edged tools that are at our disposal, including exclusion, to ensure that safety is maintained for all. That is not politically palatable, and it is not accepted within the current policy narrative." (Secondary headteacher)

Both teachers and support staff noted how current school policies discourage, and in some cases, forbid staff from physically intervening in the event of a serious behaviour incident. Staff spoke of the difficulty of having to 'stand by' while pupils, for example, 'destroyed' a classroom. Some staff interviewed said these more violent situations were the most difficult to manage, given the levels of threat and intimidation experienced during these incidents and their desire to keep other pupils in the vicinity safe. As some support staff noted, it was not always considered practical or safe to avoid intervention when considering the potential impact on other pupils. In such situations, staff spoke of their 'instincts' kicking in to help manage challenging situations. This led some support staff to contravene school policies to ensure the safety of pupils.

"I know we have a hands-off policy, but in that situation it's not really a choice thing. I'm a parent and I would hate to hear that an adult presence was there while somebody punched seven shades out of my son." (Secondary support staff)

Changes staff would like to see in relation to approaches

The qualitative interviews asked school staff and local authority representatives what future changes they would like to see introduced at a local and national level which could help them promote relationships and manage serious disruption in schools.

Need for consistency in approaches to behaviour

School staff identified a need for greater consistency in relation to approaches to behaviour. They spoke of how these vary among teachers, and between schools. Staff called for greater clarity at a national level, perhaps in the form of national guidance or policy, as to which behaviours are and are not acceptable and how they might be managed consistently across schools in different areas.

"I think a very sensible thing would be an agreed-upon classroom management approach, and if you had that in every classroom, in every secondary school in a local authority, and it was like, 'this is [name of] Council's classroom behaviour policy. This is what the teacher will do, and this is what you have to do or this will happen', and it just makes it simple for everybody." (Secondary teacher)

Desire for greater consequences in how behaviour is managed

Headteachers, teachers and support staff called for greater consequences to be added to the suite of approaches available. Headteachers and teachers spoke of the need for 'empowerment' and 'the authority' for teaching staff to have rules and consequences in place. The perceived lack of consequences was said to make it difficult for school staff to implement positive approaches.

“I would say a more firm approach to behaviour management. I don't know exactly what that would look like, but I think we need maybe a wider script to follow with understanding of these children. The approaches we have work for the majority of the children, but children with really challenging backgrounds or additional needs, we need obviously different approaches for them. I think that sometimes we're trying to (have) just one approach for all of the children in the class and that doesn't work.” (Primary teacher)

In particular, there was a view that school staff were running out of options as to how to manage the behaviour of a small core group of young people with whom all other approaches and strategies had been exhausted. Without the option of exclusion and with few options for alternative provision, staff questioned what other options were available to them.

“I talked about the professional impotency. I think that is a little bit of an issue. You sometimes get to the point where you think well, we've tried all the strategies that are open to us and nothing has changed.” (Secondary teacher)

Need for additional resources around inclusion

Headteachers, teachers and local authority representatives related concerns about funding Nurture and the presumption of mainstream policy. Within the context of increasing levels of need, school staff emphasised the importance of providing adequately resourced support. There was a perception that rising proportions of children with ASN (e.g., ADHD, ASD) and young people without formal diagnoses needed higher levels of support to remain in mainstream schools. As a member of support staff noted:

“We don't have enough staff to be able to deal with the number of children that need constant support.” (Primary support staff)

While the inclusive aims of the presumption of mainstream policy were welcomed, some school staff interviewees expressed concern that to implement these approaches properly required higher levels of resource. This view was also shared by some local authority representatives.

“The presumption of inclusion - which I completely agree with if it's resourced appropriately - has the detrimental impact on some of the learners, if not all learners. Yes, inclusion works if it's sourced and resourced. Inclusion is negative to everybody including the child, who's meant to be being included, if it's not resourced effectively.” (Primary headteacher)

“I think Scottish Government need to think carefully about their policies, like presumption of mainstream. I am absolutely in agreement with children being in mainstream, but you absolutely need the resource to back that up. If mainstream have to support children who, due to current economic, financial, social climate, are expected to manage schools the way schools are set up at this point, we need an awful lot more flexibility in our system to be able to do that.” (Local authority representative)

Desire for alternatives to mainstream for pupils with high levels of need

In some schools, staff interviewed as part of the qualitative research reported trying to support highly distressed and dysregulated young people for whom it was felt mainstream education may not be appropriate. However, staff said the lack of enhanced support provision left schools with little alternative. Across the local authority representatives and school interviews, a lack of provision for enhanced support provision was reported, with the majority of social, emotional and behaviour needs support provided by schools themselves. This was particularly evident in staff in primary schools, among whom there was a clear demand for additional LA support to help support highly dysregulated pupils. Suggestions included more places in enhanced support provision, more opportunities for support through third sector organisations and alternative curriculum options.

“Probably more things like behaviour units and things like that, because people get to the stage where there's nothing more we can do with this pupil, but we've still got to keep them, and then they continue to still disrupt everyone else. I just feel like there needs to be somewhere. You're letting that pupil down because you're not helping them, so it has to move on to somebody else after that. There's only so much a teacher can do.” (Secondary teacher)

“I felt sorry for [the young person] as well, because I'll be honest, this isn't the right environment for that young person to that extent. [The young person is] not coping in here. If you can manage mainstream, great, but there's not enough facilities for young people who really do need the right support and the right environment for them to be able to reach their potential. The council has shut down so many of these establishments. (Secondary support staff)

More widely, some interviewees (both school staff and LA representatives) expressed the view that current traditional teaching structures do not work for some pupils, and called for greater provision of alternative learning options for these pupils.

“This idea that all pupils of age 14 should be at this stage and all pupils by the time they're 16 should be able to do this, I think over time we're waking up to the fact that that's not realistic. So, actually if someone in S3 isn't engaging and isn't buying in to school, why would we continue to try and ask them to attend 32 periods of classes a week? To me it doesn't make any sense. If they had six months out or even a whole session out just doing other stuff to get themselves in a better place where they might then be open to learning, then that's what we should be looking at and then they re-join the system as appropriate.” (Secondary teacher)

Chapter 10 – Support for managing behaviour

Summary of findings

In general, school staff in primaries and secondaries were positive about the level of support they receive from other staff within their school, particularly the formal and informal support they receive from their colleagues working in the same role. Almost all staff surveyed in primary schools and secondaries agree that they can talk to other staff openly about any behaviour-related challenges they experience.

However, while primary staff perceptions of how well staff work together were high and had remained so since 2016, secondary staff perceptions are much less positive and have fallen since 2016, with around half of teachers and less than half of secondary school support staff now rating staff collegiality as good or very good. Likewise, while primary teachers and support staff reported high levels of confidence that senior staff will help them if they experience behaviour management difficulties, confidence is much lower among secondary teachers and support staff and has fallen since 2016 in both groups and across school types. This is reflected in the qualitative findings, where secondary school staff tended to feel less supported by the senior leadership team than those in primary schools and school staff interviewees reported feeling less well supported by their managers than by their peers, and support staff reported that they do not always feel well supported by teachers.

While support staff in primary and secondary schools agree or strongly agree that they play an important role in promoting positive relationships and behaviour in their schools, the qualitative research found that most support staff do not feel they have time within their contracted hours to enable discussions around classroom planning or discussions with colleagues/SMT/class teachers. Issues around contracted hours, schools lacking the funds to pay support staff to attend training or meetings outside of their working hours, and supply cover were also highlighted as barriers to support staff accessing appropriate support and training.

Among qualitative participants, there was a mismatch between the support LA representatives identified as being available to schools, and the support received by schools. Headteachers, teachers and support staff, particularly those based in schools with more challenging levels of serious and disruptive behaviour, perceived that they were not fully supported by their local authority.

The quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that serious disruptive incidents might be formally under-reported within schools. Primary and secondary staff in all roles are less likely to report an issue to anyone in 2023 than they were in 2016.

The qualitative interviews found that teachers felt deterred from reporting all incidents because of the lack of communication with teachers and support staff following these incidents to update them of the outcome. This reluctance was exacerbated by the view among some teachers that reporting appeared to be futile when there were 'no consequences' for disruptive pupils. Additionally, teachers complained of the amount of time they spent reporting behaviour incidents. The

systems were considered difficult to navigate and overly time-consuming, particularly for staff working in schools with frequent and consistent disruptive behaviour.

School staff and local authority representatives identified a range of suggested improvements in relation to support. These included the need for more accountability at a national and local government level to help support those working in schools; greater resources for local authorities; additional school level staffing and training; and parental and pupil engagement on the impact of disruption in the classroom.

Introduction

This chapter explores the extent to which staff feel supported in their work. This covers whether they can encourage positive pupil relationships and behaviour and manage negative behaviour. First, staff perceptions of the types and levels of support they receive in their role, within the school and more widely, is explored as well as their views of the monitoring and reporting of behaviour incidents, in terms of notifying and following up incidents and the adequacy of their training/professional learning.

School staff responding to the survey and participating in the qualitative interviews and focus groups were asked about their perceptions of support from different groups. The chapter begins by exploring support within the school, including support from colleagues, from more senior staff and the sharing of best practice. The chapter then moves on to examine wider support, including support from the Local Authority, from parents and carers of school pupils and external counselling and support available to school staff.

Perceptions of support within the school

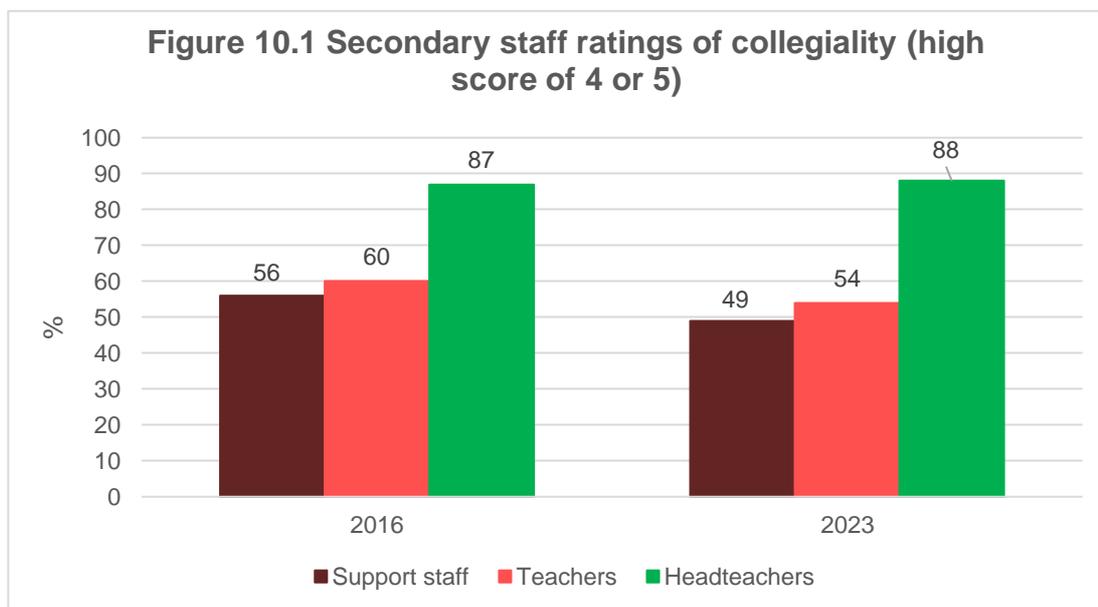
Support amongst colleagues

In the survey, staff were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a set of statements about the support available to them with regards to pupil behaviour and relationships. As indicated in each of the sub-sections below, some statements were asked of all staff, some only of support staff or support staff and teachers and some only of headteachers.

The survey explored staff perceptions of collegiality. All staff were asked on a scale from 1 being 'poor' to 5 being 'very good' to rate 'how staff work together in your school'. The majority of primary headteachers rated the collegiality amongst staff as either 4 or 5 (91%), compared with 81% of teachers and 73% of support staff, which has remained similar to 2016. Teacher ratings did not vary between those teaching different primary stages.

Secondary staff ratings were generally lower than among primary staff with 88% of headteachers, 54% of teachers and 49% of support staff rating either 4 or 5. As with ratings of school ethos, (see Chapter 9) the most marked difference between primary and secondary school staff is between teachers. These ratings also

represent a decrease in perceptions of collegiality since 2016 amongst secondary staff teachers (60% in 2016) and support staff (56% in 2016) (Figure 10.1).

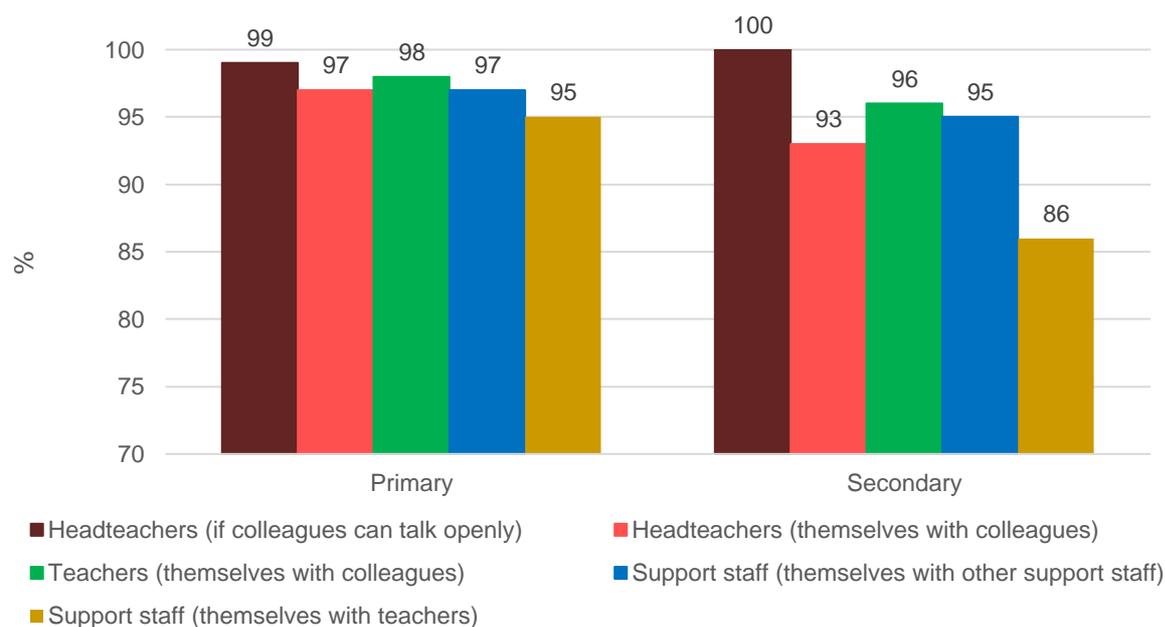


The survey also asked staff about the extent to which they could talk openly to others about any behaviour-related challenges experienced.

Headteachers and teachers were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement 'I can talk to colleagues openly about any behaviour-related challenges I experience.' Headteachers were also asked to what extent they agree or disagree that 'My colleagues can talk openly about any behaviour-related challenges they experience.' Results are shown in Figure 10.2.

Similar to when this question was last asked in 2016, almost all teachers (98% in primaries and 96% in secondaries) agree with this (either strongly agreed or agreed). The majority of headteachers also agree that their colleagues can talk openly and that they themselves can talk openly about any behaviour-related challenges, both of which have remained high since 2016.

Figure 10.2 Staff ratings of ability to talk about behaviour-related challenges (those in agreement)



Support staff were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘I can talk to other support staff openly about any behaviour-related challenges I experience’. They were also asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement ‘I can talk to teachers openly about any behaviour-related challenges I experience’.

As with teachers and headteachers, almost all (99% in primaries and 100% in secondaries) feel that they can talk openly about such challenges with other support staff. A lower proportion, though still the majority, feel they can talk openly with teachers about this. This was less so in secondaries (86%) than primaries (95%).

Perceptions among support staff have all remained similar to 2016.

Findings from the qualitative research indicate that staff were highly positive about the support they received from their immediate colleagues. This was particularly the case among support staff who spoke often of the benefits of the informal support they received from their peers including checking in on each other after challenging incidents and sharing information on what works well to support specific pupils.

Teachers also spoke about the valuable support and assistance they received from support staff, particularly around sharing information on incidents happening at break and lunchtime and pupils’ relationships with their peers. However, support staff reported mixed experiences in terms of how well supported they felt by their teaching colleagues. In some schools, support staff said they felt very well supported by teaching staff and highlighted the close and supportive relationships in place across the school. Elsewhere, however, support staff cited teachers not checking in on them after challenging incidents with pupils, not knowing support staff member’s names and referring to them, in one case, as ‘the other adult that’s

in the room' as an indication of a lack of support and respect from teaching colleagues.

“Well after that incident, nobody checked in on me the next day and I heard through the grapevine that I was to be every day with the child. Nobody actually asked how I felt about that or actually just checked in to see how I was feeling.”
(Primary support staff)

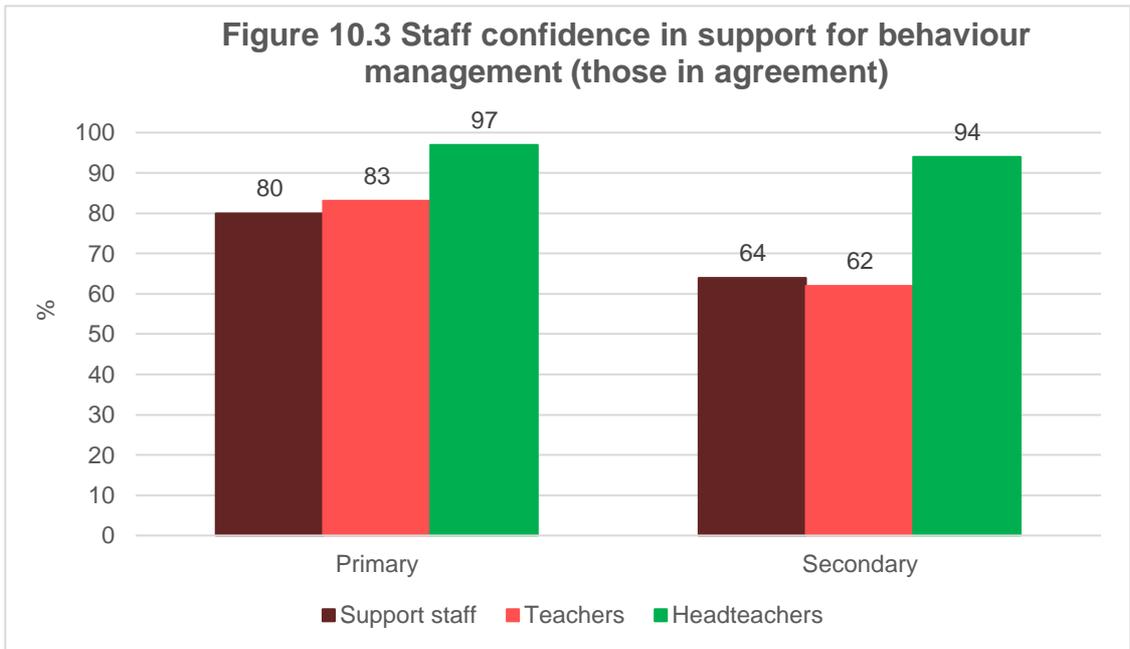
Teachers praised the support of teaching colleagues within their teams or department. They highlighted the benefits of being able to 'vent' about a particular issue or pupil with their colleagues, ask them for support (e.g., to take their class while they dealt with a pupil, or deal with a pupil causing a disturbance), and share strategies for promoting relationships and managing behaviour. In some secondary schools, departmental teams acted as an informal support network.

“I think my department are very good but I would say that that's not necessarily sent from above; that's something that's been internally established through a culture that we have. We all get on with each other, we all respect each other as colleagues. That hasn't been something that has been as an official guideline; that's just something that we deal with as a faculty, knowing our different needs...” (Secondary teacher)

Support from senior management

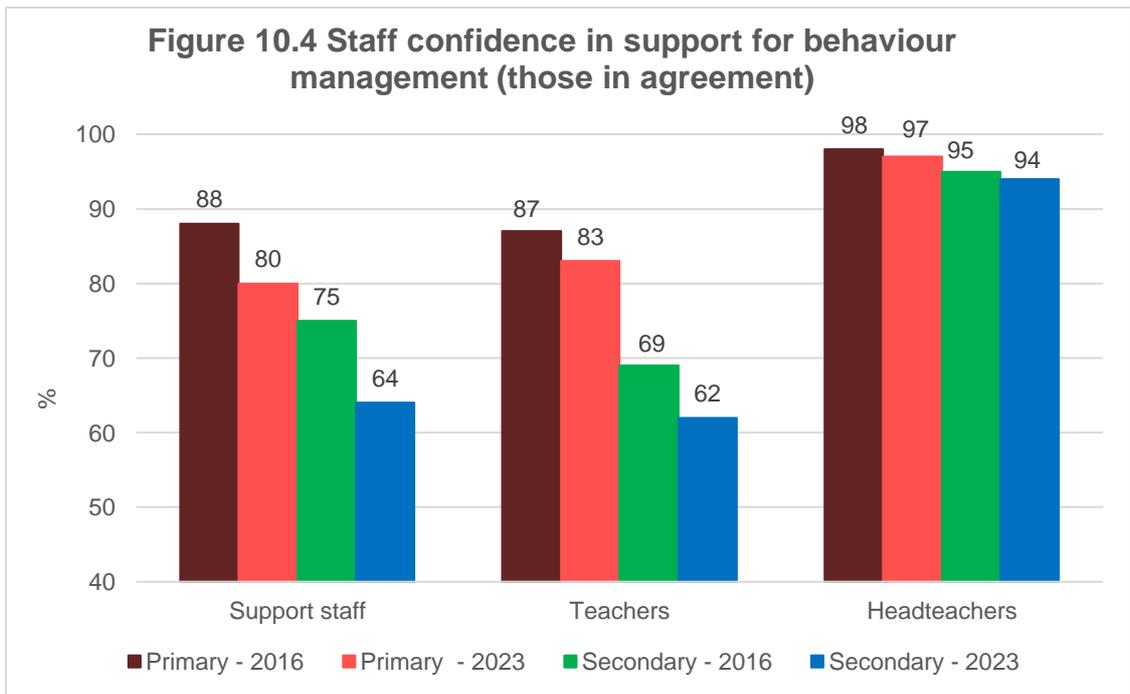
In the survey, all staff were asked about their confidence in the help they or their colleagues receive from senior staff in dealing with behaviour management difficulties. The different staff groups were asked slightly different questions. Support staff and teachers were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement 'I am confident that senior staff will help me if I experience behaviour management difficulties'. Headteachers were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'My colleagues are confident that senior staff will help them if they experience behaviour management difficulties.'

The majority of primary school staff (97% of headteachers, 83% of teachers and 80% of support staff) agree (either strongly agree or agree) with the respective statement. For teachers and support staff, confidence is lower in secondary schools than primary schools (as shown in Figure 10.3). For example, 62% of secondary teachers agreed with the statement compared with 83% of primary teachers.



Among primary teachers, level of confidence in the help they get from senior staff varied slightly according to the year group they teach. Those teaching P1-3 groups were a little more likely to feel confident (84% agreeing with the statement) than those teaching P4-7 (80%).

In both primary and secondary schools there has been a fall in the proportion of teachers and support staff agreeing that they feel more senior staff will help them with behaviour management difficulties (Figure 10.4). This has decreased from 69% to 62% among secondary teachers and from 75% to 64% among support staff since 2016. This has not notably changed among headteachers.



All staff were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement ‘I feel supported in dealing with relationship and behaviour difficulties’. Headteachers were also asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘My colleagues feel supported in dealing with relationship and behaviour difficulties.’

Most primary school staff feel that they are supported in dealing with relationship and behaviour difficulties (70% for support staff and 76% for teachers). However, as shown in Table 10.1, headteachers are more likely to report that their colleagues feel supported than teachers and support staff are to report that they themselves feel supported.

Secondary school staff are less likely to report feeling supported than primary school staff. In secondary schools, 57% of teachers and 53% of support staff agreed with the statement. Similar to primary schools, secondary headteachers are more likely to agree that their colleagues feel supported than teachers and support staff themselves agree. Indeed, the proportion of headteachers agreeing with the statement is similar across the school types.

Table 10.1: Staff views on whether they (or for headteachers their colleagues) feel supported in dealing with relationship and behaviour difficulties

| | Whether colleagues feel supported | Whether they feel supported | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| | Headteachers (%) | Headteachers (%) | Teachers (%) | Support staff (%) |
| Those that agree (either agree strongly or agree) | | | | |
| Primary | 94 | 74 | 76 | 70 |
| Secondary | 89 | 78 | 57 | 53 |
| Unweighted base (Primary) | 218 | 217 | 636 | 448 |
| Unweighted base (Secondary) | 129 | 129 | 1,604 | 576 |

There has been a decrease in perceived level of support since 2016 among primary and secondary school staff. In primary schools, the proportion agreeing with the statement has fallen from 84% to 76% among teachers and from 77% to 70% among support staff. In secondary schools, agreement among teachers has fallen from 66% to 57% and among support staff from 62% to 53%. There has been no notable change over time in the perceptions of headteachers on this measure.

The differences in perceptions of support between different groups in the survey were echoed among the school staff interviewed as part of the qualitative research. There was a marked difference between staff’s perceptions of the support they received from their immediate colleagues and that provided by the senior leadership team (SLT). Among both primary and secondary staff, teachers and support staff interviewees tended to view the support received from the SLT in more negative terms than support provided by their immediate colleagues. As in the

survey data, this was more pronounced among secondary school staff than those in primary schools.

Teachers differentiated between the support of their immediate colleagues/team, and the support offered by the SLT. Some teachers highlighted the considerable support they received from their headteacher (particularly those in primary schools), Principal Teacher or Departmental Head. In contrast, others expressed little confidence in, and were critical of, the support they received from the SLT. Staff cited examples of members of SLT not being available to assist with incidents of serious disruptive behaviour, and senior managers placing responsibility for managing behaviour on the teaching staff.

A lack of confidence in support from the SLT, from both support staff and teachers' perspectives, was partly related to teachers' perceptions of the efficacy of positive relations approaches and the perceived lack of consequences in how serious disruption was managed (see Chapter 9). Where it was felt behaviour incident reports were not being adequately addressed in their school, or where staff felt the senior leadership team was relatively powerless in the face of current approaches to behaviour, staff tended to report feeling less confident.

“I feel confident myself in dealing with behaviour. I feel confident in my principal teacher of dealing with behaviour. I feel less so confident in the support or the ability of the management team to deal with the behaviour in the school just now.” (Secondary teacher)

Support staff interviewees also expressed mixed experiences of help and support to deal with relationship and behaviour management difficulties. However, other support staff had more negative experiences. A particular issue was the sharing of information on pupils due to a lack of access to this information or time to engage with pupils' case notes. Support staff suggested that this could be addressed through more formalised, regular support meetings to help address this, and for support staff to be included in multiagency meetings regarding individual pupils.

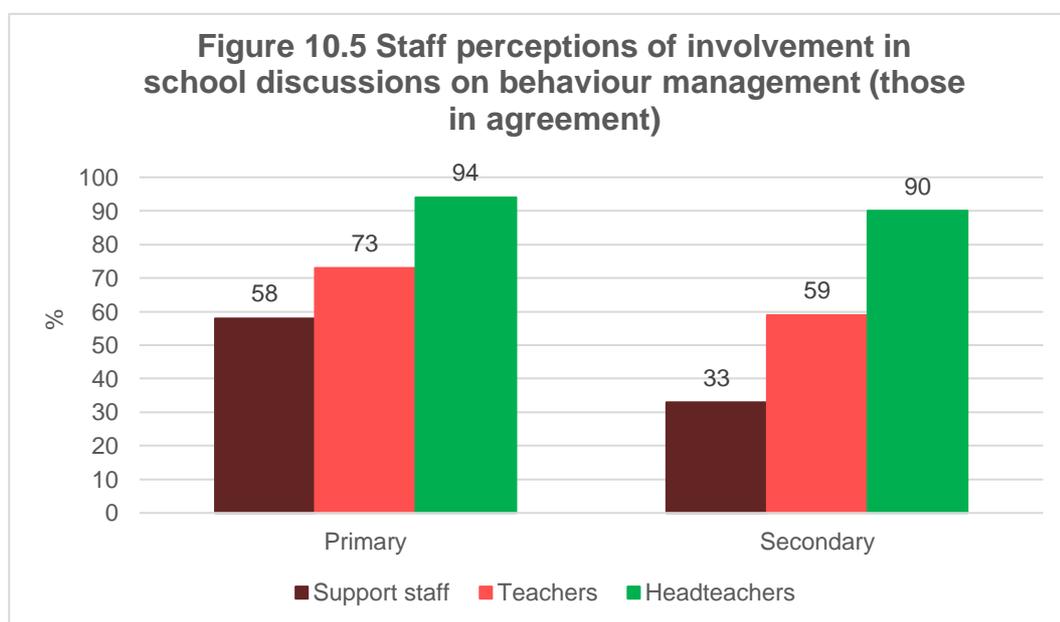
“I would say ‘very supported’. I can think of one incident where I was completely torn to shreds by a pupil. I was really upset and I went and I said... ‘I would like it to be facilitated for us to sit and discuss what happened’.... The pupil didn't want to engage but that's another story. I went and I was listened to and believed, which is a big thing.” (Secondary support staff)

Sharing best practice

The survey asked all staff a question to gauge how involved they felt in discussions about improving pupil relationships and behaviour in the whole school. Teachers and support staff were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement ‘I am regularly involved in discussions about improving relationships and behaviour in the whole school’ and headteachers were asked the same of the statement ‘My colleagues are regularly involved in discussions about improving relationships and behaviour in the whole school.’

On the whole, staff in primaries were more positive about this than those in secondaries with 69% and 53% agreeing with the statement respectively.

In both primary and secondary schools, headteacher perceptions of the extent of their colleagues' involvement in discussions about improving relationships and behaviour in the whole school were higher than those reported by teachers and support staff (Figure 10.5). Almost all (94%) primary headteachers agreed or strongly agreed that 'My colleagues are regularly involved in discussions about improving relationships and behaviour in the whole school', compared with 73% of primary teachers and 58% of support staff who agreed/strongly agreed that 'I am regularly involved in discussions about improving relationships and behaviour in the whole school'. The same pattern was seen among secondary school staff with 90% of headteachers agreeing with the statement compared with 59% of teachers and 33% of support staff.



Since 2016, there has been a decrease in primary school teachers who agree with the statement (from 78% to 73%) and an increase in secondary headteachers who agree with the statement (from 76% to 90%). There are no other notable changes since 2016.

Teachers and headteachers were asked a similar question to gauge the extent to which they feel they or their colleagues contribute ideas and provide support to one another regarding pupil relationships and behaviour. Teachers were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement 'I contribute ideas and provide support to my colleagues regarding pupil relationships and behaviour' and headteachers were asked the same of the statement 'My colleagues contribute ideas and provide support to each other regarding pupil relationships and behaviour.'

In primary schools, headteacher and teacher perceptions on this are similar with 96% of headteachers and 93% of teachers agreeing that they or their colleagues contribute ideas and provide support to one another regarding pupil relationships and behaviour. In secondary schools, 91% of headteachers and 86% of teachers

agree/strongly agree with this statement, lower than in primary schools. Views on this measure have not notably changed since 2016.

In the qualitative research with school staff and LA representatives, the sharing of best practice on relationships and behaviour was perceived to be critical in helping school staff understand and implement more positive and appropriate approaches. School staff identified formal approaches for doing this, such as regular staff meetings, training opportunities during in-service days, sessions and events where external organisations visited schools to discuss behaviour management approaches with staff. Informal opportunities included conversations with teachers and support staff to discuss challenges and potential solutions regarding behaviour management.

School staff also identified challenges and barriers in terms of limited opportunities for information sharing across whole-school staff. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was said to have limited collaborative working and reduced the sharing of best practice. This was perceived to have contributed to inconsistencies in approaches across classrooms, with participants expressing a desire for more consistent school-wide approaches to behaviour. In addition, support staff contracted hours were said to leave little time for support staff to engage in formal training opportunities for the sharing of best practice, meaning more informal support approaches were used.

Opportunities for sharing best practice between schools within the local authority included groups where staff can share best practice with teachers from other schools, school clusters, networks, conferences and headteacher meetings. This enabled schools to share successful cases and discuss approaches to managing behaviour in group settings. A range of networks with different focuses, such as Additional Support Needs, Inclusion and Child Protection, enabled practitioners to have discussions around how best to support pupils within their schools. However, not all headteachers were aware of such opportunities, constituting a barrier to sharing best practice. This view was also raised by local authority representatives. Means of sharing information were perceived as too unsystematic and participants expressed a desire to improve networks between schools that are more solution focused.

Perceptions of wider support

Support from the local authority and other external groups

In the interviews, local authority representatives outlined a range of ways in which local authorities support schools with regard to relationships and behaviour. These included:

- Networks, regular meetings and consultations to promote the sharing of good practice (monthly meetings with HTs; termly school cluster meetings; consultations with teachers and parents; behaviour working groups)
- Developing, updating and disseminating guidance and policies through curriculum networks, working groups

- Providing training, specific support and engagement for individuals or a whole school in response to school's specific needs
- Building staff capacity and confidence
- Monitoring data on reported incidents and using this to tailor their support and training offers to schools
- Signposting to support; advice on debriefing after incidents; provision of confidential support lines for staff, counselling etc
- Staged models of interventions
- Provision of alternative learning support, enhanced support provision – specialist and targeted intervention
- Risk assessments, health and safety assessments, environmental audits.

LA representative interviewees spoke of the open, responsive and consultative relationships between local authorities and schools to support them with behaviour issues, highlighting the 'bespoke' support local authorities provided. However, this was not the view of school staff interviewees (including heads, teachers and support staff), many of whom said they felt unsupported by their local authority. This was particularly the case among staff based in schools with more challenging levels of serious and disruptive behaviour.

There was a perception among participating heads and teachers that, when they requested more support for behaviour from their local authority, the responsibility to address it was often placed on the school; for example, in terms of offering staff training on different strategies or approaches.

"It would be really difficult if there wasn't a supportive staff in school, I have to say, because that's where you get your support from. To be honest, I do feel like we get nothing from the Local Authority. Everything is batted back to school"
(Secondary headteacher)

Staff in schools facing particularly high levels of dysregulated behaviour spoke of the difficulties faced when they had exhausted all options in terms of approaches to behaviour and tried to access additional support through the council. They reported a lack of additional support being received despite their requests for alternative provision, additional resources in terms of specialist staffing, or enhanced support provision. Staff in participating schools spoke of frequently submitting violence and aggression forms (used by the local authorities to monitor behaviour issues) but of receiving little support in response (see Monitoring and reporting of incidents section below).

While staff in participating schools tended to welcome local authorities' drives to reduce exclusions, others cited the pressure to do so as a factor which contributed to them not feeling supported by their council. The tension this generated between schools and their local authority was also raised by LA representatives, who highlighted the role of resources in determining the support that can be offered by an LA.

“Now the school wants the child to be excluded and the local authority are saying, 'Well, do you know, not really.' I think at those points there can be a real tension in the system between a school, and sometimes it's between individual members of staff and senior management and school. Sometimes there's a rub there; the individual members of staff not feeling supported. The reality as well in terms of resource is that there's not a lot of resource in the system to be able to put something significant in.” (Local authority representative)

More widely, school staff were asked how supported they felt by the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and the teaching unions. Teaching staff perceived their unions to be largely supportive of them on the occasions when they needed to contact them about a behaviour issue.

Participating staff expressed mixed views of the support provided nationally. Some highlighted what they viewed as the helpful nature of Scottish Government guidance. Others called for the need at a national level of a statement of support for school staff experiencing violence in their workplace.

“There is a fear around feeling that you're not succeeding, and I think we can protect our staff to know that if they come to us with those concerns, it's not judged whereas I think beyond that level, outwith the school it is deemed that you're not doing a good-enough job. I think if I'm being brutally honest about it, I think this needs to come not from the local authority but from Scottish Government to say, 'It is absolutely unacceptable that members of staff are hurt at work and if such' - if that does happen, there should be a response that parents will be informed to remove their children.” (Primary headteacher)

Support from parents and carers of pupils

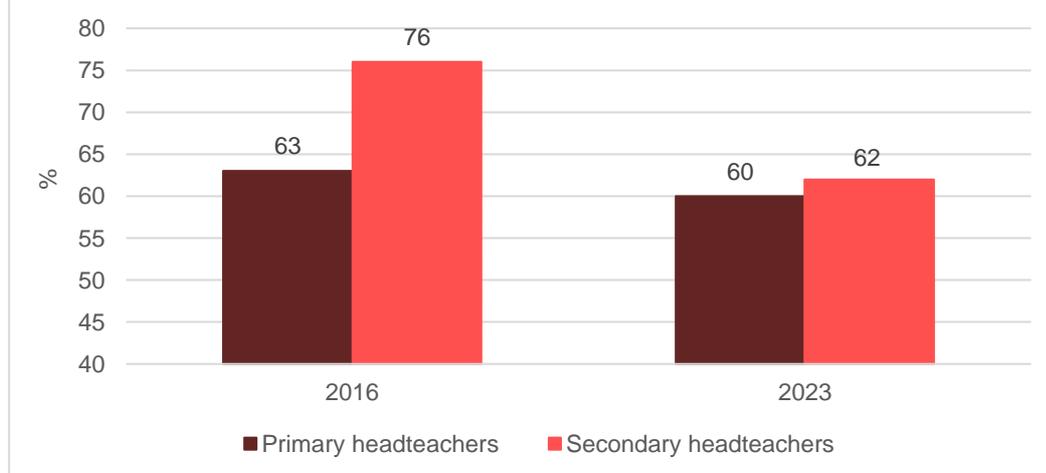
Headteachers were asked, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being 'Not supportive at all' and 5 being 'Very supportive') how they would rate the following:

- The parents/carers of pupils at your school in terms of their general supportiveness
- The parents/carers of pupils at your school in terms of their supportiveness in tackling behaviour and discipline issues

Most headteachers rate parents/carers' general supportiveness at either 4 or 5. This has remained similar to their view in 2016.

Furthermore, headteachers were also asked to rate parents/carers of pupils in terms of their supportiveness in tackling behaviour and discipline issues. A similar proportion of primary and secondary headteachers rate parents/carers' supportiveness in tackling behaviour and discipline issues highly - as 4 or 5 (60% in primaries and 62% in secondaries). The proportion of secondary headteachers rating parent/carer support highly has declined since 2016 from 76% to 62% (Figure 10.6).

Figure 10.6 Staff perceptions of parental supportiveness in tackling behaviour (high score of 4 or 5)



In the interviews, school staff in all roles highlighted the challenges associated with the view that parents are not always supportive of schools' attempts to promote positive relationships and managing more disruptive behaviour (see Chapter 5).

Confidential support and counselling

The survey asked all staff a question to gauge level of awareness about confidential support and counselling for staff who need to access it. Headteachers, teachers and support staff were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement 'I know there is confidential support and counselling for staff if I need it.' Headteachers were also asked the extent to which they agree or disagree that 'My colleagues know there is confidential support and counselling for staff if they need it.'

Views on the availability of confidential support and counselling varied by staff type. A higher proportion of headteachers both in primary (88%) and secondary schools (87%) agree that their colleagues know that this is available for staff who need it than the teachers and support staff agree that they know this is available should they need it, as shown in Table 10.2. Teachers in primary schools are more likely to agree that confidential support and counselling is available for staff if they need it than teachers in secondary schools (65% and 57% respectively) whereas the views of support staff in primary schools are similar to those of support staff in secondary schools. The majority of headteachers agree that they know there is confidential support and counselling if they need it (85% of primary headteachers and 91% of secondary headteachers).

Table 10.2: Staff views on availability of confidential support and counselling

| Those that agree (either agree strongly or agree) | My colleagues know there is this support | I know there is this support | | |
|---|--|------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| | Headteachers (%) | Headteachers (%) | Teachers (%) | Support staff (%) |
| Primary | 88 | 85 | 65 | 65 |
| Secondary | 87 | 91 | 57 | 64 |
| Unweighted base (Primary) | 218 | 218 | 636 | 445 |
| Unweighted base (Secondary) | 129 | 128 | 1,598 | 576 |

In primary schools there has been a decline since 2016 in the proportion of support staff agreeing that confidential support and counselling is available for staff if they need it (from 74% to 65%), with no notable change among teachers and headteachers. In secondary schools, there has been no notable change among teachers and support staff but headteachers' views have changed. The proportion of headteachers agreeing that colleagues know about this type of support has risen since 2016 from 77% to 87% as has the proportion of headteachers who agree that they know about this type of support being available to them (from 84% to 91%).

Access to confidential support and counselling was not raised by staff participating in the qualitative research.

Monitoring and reporting of incidents

The survey and interviews with school staff and LA representatives explored staff's views of the monitoring and reporting of behaviour incidents, in terms of notifying and following up incidents.

Notifying incidents

The survey asked headteachers, teachers and support staff who said they had experienced an incident of serious disruptive behaviour/violence against them in their role in the last 12 months⁹⁰ (48% of primary staff and 55% of secondary staff), to indicate which members of the school community were notified about the most recent incident of this nature. Respondents could select more than one category (Table 10.3).

Among those primary and secondary head teachers who had experienced an incident of serious disruptive behaviour/ violence against them in the last 12

⁹⁰ This includes at least one of the following types of incidents: racist abuse, sexist abuse, abuse towards you due to a disability, abuse towards you due to an additional support need, religious abuse, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse, general verbal abuse, physical aggression or physical violence (see Annex A for questions asked in full).

months⁹¹, parents are most commonly notified of an incident (primary headteachers 77%, secondary headteachers 72%). Primary teachers most commonly notify the headteacher (77%), while secondary teachers most frequently notify a senior colleague other than the headteacher (70%). Primary support staff most commonly notify a teacher (66%), while secondary support staff notify a senior colleague (47%).

Table 10.3: Member of school community notified about an incident of serious disruptive behaviour or violence

| % reporting to the... | Primary | | | Secondary | | |
|------------------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| | Headteachers (%) | Teachers (%) | Support staff (%) | Headteachers (%) | Teachers (%) | Support staff (%) |
| The teacher | - | - | 66 | - | - | 42 |
| The headteacher | - | 77 | 62 | - | 28 | 18 |
| The Local Authority | 45 | 17 | 12 | 49 | 9 | 6 |
| Health and safety executive | 12 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| A senior colleague | 17 | 21 | 29 | 31 | 70 | 47 |
| The police | 3 | 1 | 1 | 28 | 3 | 3 |
| Parents | 77 | 47 | 30 | 72 | 24 | 16 |
| No one / issued not reported | 14 | 8 | 3 | 12 | 7 | 11 |
| Other | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 6 |
| Unweighted base | 118 | 278 | 228 | 76 | 921 | 269 |

There have been several changes over time in the notifying of incidents. On the whole, primary and secondary staff in all roles are less likely to report an issue to anyone in 2023 than they were in 2016. In addition, primary headteachers are less likely to report an incident to the local authority now than they were in 2016 (67% 2016, 45% 2023). Secondary teachers (37% 2016, 28% 2023) and support staff (30% 2016, 18% 2023) are both now less likely to notify the headteacher of an incident. Secondary support staff are also less likely in 2023 to inform a teacher of an incident (57% 2016, 42% 2023). Primary teachers and support staff are both

⁹¹ This is of 54% primary and 59% of secondary head teachers, 43% primary and 57% secondary teachers, 53% primary and 49% secondary support staff who had experienced at least one incident of serious disruptive behaviour or violence against them in the last 12 months.

less likely to report an incident to the headteacher and more likely to notify a senior colleague than in 2016.

The qualitative interviews with school staff help explain some of the reasons for the underreporting of incidents highlighted in the survey. While some school staff interviewees said behavioural incidents are generally accurately reported, particularly serious violent incidents and those that resulted in exclusion or physical intervention, there was a common concern expressed about the underreporting of other, less serious, incidents.

Certain types of behaviour were considered more underreported than others. This included verbal abuse towards staff in both primary and secondary schools, incidents involving a child with additional support needs, allegations of bullying and pupil-on-pupil violence.

The lack of communication provided to teachers as to the outcomes of a reported behaviour incident deterred teachers from reporting all behaviour incidents they experienced. This reluctance was exacerbated by the view among some teachers that reporting appeared to be futile when there were 'no consequences' for disruptive pupils (see Chapter 9). Additionally, teachers complained of the amount of time they spent reporting behaviour incidents. The systems were considered difficult to navigate and overly time-consuming, particularly for staff working in schools frequently experiencing high levels of disruption.

This led staff to prioritise the reporting of certain incidents over others due to capacity. Teachers also suggested that some staff (especially those newer to teaching) may be reluctant to report incidents out of a concern it could reflect poorly on their ability to teach. Lastly, school staff highlighted a lack of consistency around how different type of incidents should be classified and subjective understanding of what incidents might be considered 'severe' and 'low level'.

"I think in most - certainly primary schools I suspect all of the physical aggression will be reported, or the majority of it, but the verbal and pupil-on-pupil I think is vastly underreported." (Primary teacher)

Following up incidents

The survey asked staff to indicate the ways in which incidents of serious disruptive behaviour and violence are followed up within their schools.

Primary and secondary headteachers, teachers and support staff all agree that the three most frequently used methods of incident follow up are completion of a violence incident form; feedback on how the incident/pupils have been dealt with; and restorative meetings/discussions with pupils/staff.

Table 10.4: Following up incidents of serious disruptive behaviour and violence, 2023

| % reporting that each of the following occurred... | Primary | | | Secondary | | |
|--|------------------|--------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| | Headteachers (%) | Teachers (%) | Support staff (%) | Headteachers (%) | Teachers (%) | Support staff (%) |
| A violence incident form completed | 48 | 31 | 35 | 30 | 18 | 14 |
| Feedback on how incident/pupils have been dealt with | 29 | 35 | 33 | 28 | 40 | 27 |
| Restorative meeting/discussion with pupil(s) involved and yourself | 70 | 40 | 28 | 48 | 31 | 15 |
| Informal meeting/contact with colleagues | 24 | 23 | 19 | 6 | 20 | 13 |
| Formal meeting within school | 21 | 6 | 5 | 43 | 6 | 2 |
| Protected time to recover/speak immediately/debrief | 6 | 5 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Meeting offered with local authority personnel (e.g. Head of Service, QIO, educational psychologist) | 4 | 1 | 1 | 14 | 1 | 0 |
| Counselling support/confidential helpline | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | - |
| In another way (not mentioned above) | 9 | 6 | 9 | 15 | 7 | 11 |
| Not at all | 7 | 14 | 13 | 11 | 17 | 25 |
| Unweighted base | 118 | 278 | 228 | 76 | 921 | 269 |

As shown in the Table 10.4 there are a number of differences in reporting of events that occurred following an incident of serious disruptive behaviour or violence according to school type. Overall, in primary schools a higher proportion of staff reported that the following occurred: a violence incident form completed (33% compared with 17%) and a restorative meeting/ discussion with pupil(s) involved and yourself (38% compared with 28%). In secondary schools a higher proportion of staff said that no action was taken at all (19%) compared with in primary schools (13%). The full breakdown of responses is provided in Supplementary table 10.21.

Among staff based in schools participating in the qualitative research, interviewees outlined the use of both external and internal recording systems. External recording systems, including SEEMiS as well as locally specific systems, were used by school staff to record incidents regarding health and safety, violence and aggression, and bullying. There were schools that also monitored data internally from these external systems. However, knowledge and access to these systems varied across teaching and support staff. There were also participants that reported only using the external electronic system on occasion, relying on internal approaches/verbal reporting instead. This was the case for staff who felt incidents could be handled internally and that escalation was not needed. In schools, internal recording processes, such as verbal reporting to senior management, pastoral notes and chronologies, and referral systems within schools for both positive and disruptive behaviour, were utilised.

LA representatives reported monitoring a range of data from these reporting systems, such as incidents of violence towards staff, bullying and incidents related to protected characteristics, exclusions and attendance, to determine emerging patterns and identify gaps in support.

“Because we're collecting information on the numbers and types of incidents that are happening in our schools, we're able to do that and respond to that very quickly now. We pull off information monthly, and if there seems to be a challenge in a school, then we'll ask the professionals to go out and have that discussion about ‘what else can we do?’” (Local authority representative)

However, headteachers and teachers interviewed in both primary and secondary schools highlighted the perceived lack of follow-up both from the local council and senior management within schools. Headteachers described periods when their school submitted multiple violence and aggression forms but received no follow-up response from the local authority. Within schools, staff described submitting forms and receiving no further communication from senior management regarding the incident until the pupil returned to their class. This contributed to a reluctance to report all incidents.

“By the school, nobody could've done more. Above school level, zero support. When you're filling in violence and aggression forms on a daily basis and nothing happens with them, it's really frustrating. It's a waste of time and all they do is go back to a headteacher and say, 'Is the person okay?' Quite often [the headteacher] will say, 'No, but I don't know what else to do.' (Primary teacher)

Skills and training

In the survey, headteachers were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree that ‘My colleagues have the skills to promote positive relationships and behaviour.’ The majority (89%) of head agree/strongly agree with this statement, with a higher proportion of primary headteachers agreeing compared with secondary headteachers (91% and 84%). Agreement with this has remained consistent since 2016.

All staff were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree that ‘I have received adequate training⁹² on how to deal with relationship and behaviour difficulties. Headteachers were also asked the extent to which they agree or disagree that ‘My colleagues have received adequate training/sufficient learning on how to deal with relationship and behaviour difficulties.’

In both primary and secondary schools there were different perceptions among staff types with support staff least likely to agree they receive adequate training (57% in primaries and 40% in secondaries) compared with teachers (80% in primaries and 71% in secondaries). In primary schools a higher proportion of headteachers feel they receive adequate training compared with teachers (76% and 80%), whereas in secondaries these proportions were closer (73% and 71%). Headteachers in secondaries are less likely to agree that colleagues are adequately trained compared with those in primaries (69% and 74%). This is shown in Table 10.5.

Table 10.5: Staff views on adequacy of training on how to deal with relationship and behaviour difficulties

| | Colleagues have received adequate training | I have received adequate training | | |
|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| | Headteachers (%) | Headteachers (%) | Teachers (%) | Support staff (%) |
| Primary | 74 | 76 | 80 | 57 |
| Secondary | 69 | 73 | 71 | 40 |
| Unweighted base (Primary) | 218 | 218 | 642 | 446 |
| Unweighted base (Secondary) | 129 | 129 | 1,600 | 577 |

There has been no notable change since 2016 in the proportion of staff agreeing with this statement.

Staff views on professional learning around behaviour and relationship management were explored further in the qualitative research. There was considerable variety in terms of the types of training provided and the modes in which training was said to be delivered across the schools and local authorities which participated in the qualitative research.

The qualitative research found that some training programmes were being more commonly delivered across the whole school than others. For example, Nurture principles, relational practice and training on trauma-informed approaches had

⁹² The wording was slightly different for teachers and support staff: Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement: I/My colleagues have received adequate training/sufficient learning on how to deal with relationship and behaviour difficulties.

been delivered to all staff (including janitors and support staff) in some schools and in some local authorities. As outlined in Chapter 9, such training was viewed as having impacted on staff's increased understanding of behaviour as communication, the role of trauma in young people's behaviour and the extent to which school staff engaged with the shift towards more positive approaches. Whole school training was viewed as critical to providing a consistent response to the promotion of positive relations and behaviour across staff.

Teaching staff in some schools had also read, and undertaken reading groups on, books on relational and trauma-informed approaches. Teachers spoke of the benefits of reading, discussing and reflecting on these with their colleagues.

While training was very much welcomed by school staff who received it, some expressed the view that it could be tokenistic, with little time to reflect and integrate training into teaching practice. While much of the training discussed by staff was provided directly through the council, in some schools a smaller number of staff were trained and then expected to cascade the learning to their colleagues, though this approach was not always viewed as being as successful.

Staff expressed mixed experiences with regard to training on physical restraint. Some local authorities appeared to only allow staff from specialised settings to access restraint training due to the view that restraint should not be used in the mainstream. However, there were examples of staff having no option but to physically intervene and a desire among staff for training to be provided so that this could be done safely. In some cases, pupils were supported by staff from external agencies who were trained in restraint.

Teaching staff expressed mixed views about the extent to which initial teacher education (ITE) prepared them for dealing with school relationships and behaviour. On the one hand, teaching staff perceived that it had not prepared them sufficiently and suggested that more time should be spent on behaviour as part of ITE training. Other members of teaching staff said that it prepared them as much as it could, noting that they had learned far more through their experiences on their teaching placements and as a probationer than through the course.

“Universities can prepare you for the learning side of it, the academic side of it, but not the behavioural and not the additional support needs side of it, not at all.”
(Primary teacher)

Some headteachers and teachers expressed the view that more experienced teachers may be less likely to engage with positive approaches. This view was also shared by a number of LA representatives. On the other hand, there was also a perception among some school staff that less experienced teachers may be more likely to be overwhelmed by poor behaviour and less able to seek assistance to deal with it.

"Particularly there's generations within teaching, isn't there, and there's been a generation that's coming towards the end of their careers that are [...] very clear about their expectations, which is, 'I'm the adult in the room, you do as you're told'. Young people that have had very much a rights-based approach to life and education, which is actually that doesn't work anymore, so there's that tension."
(Local authority representative)

The role and capacity of support staff

Support staff were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following three statements:

- 'Support staff in my school play an important role in promoting positive relationships and behaviour'
- 'I have time within my contracted hours to enable discussions around classroom planning to take place.'
- 'I have time within my contracted hours to enable feedback discussions with colleagues/SMT/class teacher to take place.'

In primary and secondary schools, the majority of support staff agree that they play an important role in their schools in promoting positive relationships and behaviour. This was higher among primary support staff (93%) than among secondary support staff (87%). This is very similar to the proportion that agreed with this in 2016.

However, most support staff do not feel they have time within their contracted hours to enable discussions around classroom planning. In primary schools only 29% of support staff agree that they have time to engage in this within their contracted hours, 45% disagree or strongly disagree and 26% neither agree nor disagree. A lower proportion of support staff in secondary schools (21%) agree with this, while 62% disagree or strongly disagree and 18% neither agree nor disagree. These figures are shown in Table 10.6.

Table 10.6: Support staff views on whether they have time within their contracted hours to enable discussions around classroom planning to take place

| | Primary (%) | Secondary (%) |
|------------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Agree / Strongly agree | 29 | 21 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 26 | 18 |
| Disagree / Strongly disagree | 45 | 62 |
| Unweighted base | 442 | 575 |

The number agreeing with has remained similar to 2016.

Similarly, the majority of support staff do not feel they have time within contracted hours to enable feedback discussions with colleagues/SMT/class teacher to take

place. Only 39% of primary support staff agree/strongly agree that they have time to do so, while 38% disagree/strongly disagree and 23% neither agree nor disagree. Compared with primary support staff a lower proportion of secondary support staff agree (25%) and a higher proportion disagree (58%) that they have time within their contracted hours for this purpose. This is shown in Table 10.7.

Table 10.7: Support staff views on whether they have time within their contacted hours to enable feedback discussions with colleagues/SMT/class teachers to take place

| | Primary (%) | Secondary (%) |
|------------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Agree / Strongly agree | 39 | 25 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 23 | 17 |
| Disagree / Strongly disagree | 38 | 58 |
| Unweighted base | 446 | 576 |

The proportion of support staff agreeing that they have time within their contracted hours to enable feedback discussions with colleagues/SMT/class teacher has decreased since 2016 among those in secondary schools.

Qualitative focus groups with support staff, and interviews with headteachers and local authority representatives reflected the findings of the survey. Participants highlighted the lack of training for support staff, noting that support staff were often those who were most likely to be faced with the most disruptive behaviour and violence, and should be able to access training to support their role.

School staff and LA representatives commonly spoke of the gaps in training provided to support staff. Among support staff themselves, a key issue raised was in relation to induction processes where support staff explained there was often little, if any, induction or initial training provided when they first joined their school. Instead, support staff spoke of having to ‘sink or swim’, relying on the informal support of other members of support staff to help them learn about the pupils they were to support.

“Basically you're in at the deep end. It's a bit of a shock, to be honest, the first couple of weeks until you find your way around and who's who, once you get to know the children a wee bit and how to approach them.” (Secondary support staff)

School staff interviewees highlighted the barriers support staff faced in accessing training more widely. These related to the challenge of finding time for training in support staff's contracted hours, the hours they work (with many having childcare responsibilities after school) and in some cases the lack of access to a computer. Headteachers noted that training is often provided after school at times when

support staff should not be working. Elsewhere staff noted that schools do not have the budget to pay support staff to attend in-service training. It was also noted that training for support staff has to be done during the school day which takes them away from pupils they support, when it may be difficult for schools to arrange cover. Many of the barriers relating to support staff being able to access training were thought to be related to pay.

“I think, again, if we want our staff that are often with the most challenging young people on a period-by-period, day-by-day basis, some thought has to be given over to investing in their training that's paid, not just done through good will.”
(Secondary headteacher)

In response, a local authority had increased the training provided to support staff.

"So we've recognised the importance - these are the people who are the least qualified, worst paid people in the school, yet we gave them the most challenging situations to deal with. So recognising their value and trying to upskill them through doing a lot of training in those approaches that I've already spoken about. So the support-for-learning assistants have been trained in all of those aspects.” (Local authority representative)

This, however, appeared to be relatively unusual. Some local authorities had sought to address these issues by allocating support staff collaborative time at the end of the day by reducing their in-service commitment, and by giving support staff an extra contracted hour a week which could then be built up for professional learning or mandatory training.

Suggested improvements to support

In the interviews, school staff and LA representatives were asked about the changes that they would like to see at a local and national level to help them promote relationships and manage disruptive behaviour in their school or LA role. Many of their responses related to the need for additional support.

More support from national and local government bodies

School staff interviewees expressed a desire for more support ‘from the top’. There was a view that too much responsibility is currently placed on teachers, and that more accountability is needed at a national and local level to help support those working in schools.

“I think there are areas where the Scottish Government does need to listen to teacher voices about which way the job is going because like I said right at the start, there seems to be more going into what we need to do but there’s never anything taken away.” (Primary teacher)

At a local level, and allied to the views expressed above in terms of how school staff did not always feel fully supported by their local council, interviewees called for better support from the LA in terms of both resources and in understanding the challenges that school staff face in relation to disruption in school. Headteachers,

teachers and support staff expressed a desire for greater transparency from their LA and a recognition of the extent and scope of behavioural issues in schools. They called for a more visible presence from LA staff, for example, sitting in on lessons or visiting schools to experience the reality of the teaching environment. It was suggested that greater communication about school incidents and how they have been addressed from the LAs would help repair some of the trust between school staff and their councils.

Greater resources needed at LA level

Many of the responses around how things could be improved in the future related to funding and resources to help staff feel better supported.

Staff in some schools in areas of higher deprivation outlined the benefits of additional funding they had received through the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) and the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC). Headteachers said this funding had allowed schools to set up and fund Nurture bases and staff, establish Inclusion Hubs and bases, provide targeted Nurture support, and buy in additional support resources from the LA. However, school staff also highlighted instances where their funding from PEF and SAC had been reduced. Some headteachers noted their SAC funding had come to an end. Others complained that their PEF funding was going to the LA rather than directly to the school and that this reduced the funds available to them, which had implications for the funding of inclusion hubs, nurture bases and support staff levels.

School staff also noted how LA cuts to statutory services (e.g., social work, mental health), third sector organisations (including those offering alternative provision), enhanced support provision and numbers of support staff impacted on the resources available to schools to help some of their most dysregulated children and young people. Long waiting lists were said to make it harder for schools to support young people adequately. Both primary and secondary headteachers reported that there was a lack of joined up approaches between schools, the third sector and statutory services. This was perceived to be partly related to local authority cuts.

“Some of these children, I would say it’s been obvious for probably 7 or 8 years that they’ve needed help. But as everything has been cut back and there are fewer external agencies to rely on yeah, it’s been really difficult. Not having a primary mental health worker has been a nightmare.” (Secondary school headteacher)

Need for additional staffing at school level

At a school level, school staff (heads, teachers and support staff) expressed a desire for additional funding for both teachers and classroom-based support staff, to help increase staff capacity to address behaviour issues. Staff pointed to reductions in numbers of support staff, a perceived critical resource, and the ways that this has impacted on schools’ ability to provide one-to-one support and facilitate nurture and wellbeing groups.

“It's support. Staffing is a massive thing. The more staff we have, the better things we can do... We can run more groups. We can support more children.”
(Primary teacher)

Staff also called for smaller class sizes in the primary sector to help support staff to build relationships with their pupils.

The low pay of support staff was frequently discussed, with interviewees pointing out the challenges of living on their wages, particularly during the school holidays, with the result that some were working multiple jobs to cope financially.

Need for more training

School staff called for more training, particularly for support staff who can face multiple barriers to accessing training. Among LA representatives there were signs of attempts to bridge the gap in support staff's training. However, this was not evident in the schools visited as part of the qualitative research. School staff highlighted the need for support staff to be paid to undertake training outside of school. Support staff highlighted the need for induction training and requested this to help support them in their roles with children.

In terms of their own training needs, teachers expressed a desire for more classroom observation from their peers to help them reflect and discuss strategies used, and access peer support from their colleagues. They also called for more time after accessing professional learning to be able to reflect on the training and consider how the strategies could be applied to their own classroom.

Parental and pupil engagement

The desire for more support for schools and staff also extended to parents, whom some staff perceived to be unsupportive of school attempts to manage behaviour. School staff suggested greater engagement with parents would help address this, for example, by conveying to parents the impact that low level disruption can have in the classroom, especially on those who are behaving well.

There was a perception among school staff that schools and teachers were being held accountable for social issues which require wider engagement. Staff expressed a desire for earlier intervention to help support struggling families. However, both school staff and local authority representatives recognised the challenge of providing additional support to families within the context of LA budget cuts.

“I feel that if the Government want to make things better in schools, they need to try and help people before children come to school, and that's where their money and the people should be. Then I think if we're talking about behaviour, I think behaviour would be different when it came - if parents are helped to parent, then I think behaviour will be better in schools because everybody will be singing from the same hymn sheet.” (Primary teacher)

It was also suggested that a campaign to engage with pupils themselves in terms of what their responsibilities are around school behaviour could be beneficial.

Chapter 11 – Discussion and conclusions

Overall summary

The consensus of headteachers, class teachers and support staff was that there has been a general deterioration in the behaviour of pupils in primary and secondary schools in Scotland since 2016. Of course, it is important to note that the perceived deterioration in behaviour in the 2023 research is reported in the wider context in which the majority of pupils are still said to behave well and cause teaching staff few difficulties. The majority of staff reported pupils to be generally well behaved around the school (85%) and in the classroom (65%), and it was perceived that overall they tend to follow instruction and that they are often accepting and mindful of their peers.

However, in 2023 all school staff groups reported that there was an increase in nearly every measure, from the low level to more serious disruptive behaviours. Serious disruptive behaviours, such as physical violence and aggression, had an immediate negative impact as a result of their very nature, but low level behaviours, such as pupils talking out of turn, were also thought to have an insidious effect as they were more prevalent, were difficult to deal with and caused frustration and fatigue among staff members trying to deal with them. Indeed, 52% of all staff reported that pupils talking out of turn had the greatest negative impact on overall staff experience within school. Notably, though, there was a reported increase in other serious disruptive behaviours such as verbal abuse, physical aggression and violence, which were also occurring frequently, with verbal abuse being experienced by 67% of staff in the last week in the classroom.

School staff reported a positive view of the overall ethos of their schools, and teaching staff stated that they were mostly confident in their ability to promote positive behaviour in their classrooms and ‘to respond to indiscipline in the classroom’. Serious cases of disruptive behaviour, though perceived to have increased, were still infrequent. Headteachers and local authority representatives also tended to have a more positive view of pupil behaviour and experiences within school as a whole.

In addition, school staff were generally supportive of more nurturing and restorative approaches to managing discipline, 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. It was stated that schools that adopted and embraced the nurturing approach across all staff, and not as a top-down approach imposed by the headteacher, were more likely to use it successfully. Also, staff viewed the support they received within school from senior school staff and their peers positively. The majority of school-based respondents reported a positive school ethos and culture which, allied with the fact that most pupils were still perceived to be behaving well within the classroom and the school, suggests that there is still a solid bedrock which can be built on if the more frequent low level disruption and the rarer but more serious cases of dysregulated behaviour are addressed.

Impact of COVID

Respondents of all types thought that the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in an increase in dysregulated behaviour among pupils in primary and secondary schools due to, for example, the perceived negative impacts on mental wellbeing and socialisation as a result of lockdowns. The prevailing view was that it had resulted in an increase in immaturity in pupils of all ages, had created particular problems at times of transition within schools, had led to disengagement, problems with concentration and attendance issues. It was also thought to have had the greatest negative impact on the most vulnerable pupils. There was a perception that parents now expected school staff to be available at all times to discuss issues, and were not as understanding of what schools and teachers were trying to achieve.

Although there was agreement that COVID-19 and associated lockdowns had been responsible for these negative impacts on pupils, their mental wellbeing and their behaviour, it was also argued that these behavioural issues, and indeed the reported deterioration in behaviour in schools, pre-dated the pandemic. As a consequence, it was argued that COVID-19 and its aftermath accentuated a negative trend that was already being experienced within schools. It was also added that governmental policies, and more nurturing and restorative approaches, after 2016 had not been successful in addressing this overall deterioration in behaviour within schools, though it is noteworthy that the number of exclusions has decreased over this time period.

Emerging issues reported in 2023

School staff respondents also reported the emergence of new issues and challenges in 2023 which had not been present or as problematical in 2016, adding to the perceived decline in behaviour. These included:

- Mobile phone and social media use: pupils tended to think they were entitled to use these devices as and when they wanted, causing distraction and loss of concentration in class. Incidents were described of pupils using the phones in abusive ways, conducting inappropriate filming, etc.
- Vaping: the rise in prevalence of use of vapes among secondary pupils was outlined as resulting in reduced attendance within classes as young people gathered to vape in toilets throughout the school day.
- In-school truanting: pupils were said to be avoiding or leaving classes more regularly, and were described as 'wanderers' or 'lappers' as they walked around the school buildings.
- A perceived increase in levels of misogyny and gender-based abuse among male pupils, potentially related to use of social media and the impact of influencers.

Specialist support services

School and local authority respondents also stated in the qualitative interviews that there were more pupils requiring specialist support, those with additional support needs and also those with neurodiverse conditions such as ADHD. The underlying presumption of mainstream policy was criticised as it was thought that the support for these pupils was not adequately resourced within schools, there were too few support staff who were also not being adequately remunerated and indeed many of these pupils were viewed as requiring more specialist support than a mainstream school could provide. It was also said that specialist support units had closed, it was difficult to refer to CAMHS and to receive other appropriate specialist support. This was all thought to contribute to the reported increase in violent incidents within schools, as staff did not have the capacity, resources or specialist knowledge to deal with young people with these conditions.

As well as staff supporting dysregulated pupils with additional support needs, it was also thought that overall pupils' mental health and resilience had declined since 2016. Again, the impact of the pandemic was cited as being a major factor in this decrease in mental wellbeing, with pupils struggling to adapt to lockdown and its aftermath. Respondents argued that this increased the burden on school staff, who had to educate and support a more fragile group of young people less equipped for socialisation and learning.

Impact of disruptive behaviour

The dysregulated behaviour of pupils was thought to have a negative impact on pupils and teaching staff. Violent and aggressive acts impacted on the mental health of other pupils, who were described as displaying fearful and avoidance behaviours in response. In addition, less serious and lower-level distressed behaviour was also perceived as leading to a more widespread tolerance and acceptance, and indeed imitation, of such behaviours among other pupils. This emphasises the importance of addressing these lower-level behaviours at source, as it is possible that more serious behaviours may develop if less serious cases are either ignored or tolerated.

Dealing with behaviour in schools

The consensus among teaching and support staff in particular was that the reliance on nurturing and restorative approaches had the effect that they lacked the means to address the most distressed behaviour of pupils within the school. The most prevalent view was that there was a perceived lack of consequences for the more dysregulated behaviour of pupils, with examples given of teachers and support staff trying to address incidents of pupil behaviour, for example, verbal abuse directed at staff members, but unable to resolve the issue as the pupils were aware of the limited action that might be taken, and also of their own rights and entitlements. There were still schools that did seem to take more severe measures such as excluding pupils from school, but this did not seem to be the norm given the amount of incidents schools reported experiencing. The majority of school staff perceived that there was little action they could take if pupils engaged in more disruptive behaviour and were also unwilling to resolve the issue or stop behaving in this way

or of their own accord. It should be noted that school staff respondents argued that they lacked the resources and support to deal with the more dysregulated behaviour.

In addition, staff who had reported instances of behaviour within schools which had been escalated to a more senior level within the school, and to local authority level, expressed disappointment that they had not been any informed of the outcome. The findings suggest that serious disruptive incidents might be under-reported within schools, with primary and secondary staff stating that they were less likely to report an issue to anyone in 2023 than they were in 2016. It was also argued that it would be beneficial if local authority staff contacted the affected member of staff after the incident to ascertain how they were faring and to discuss concerns with them directly.

Considerable frustration was also expressed that schools were expected to deal with the consequences of wider societal issues arguably outwith their control. All participant groups that took part in the research reported that social factors such as deprivation, poverty, the cost of living crisis and indeed the COVID-19 pandemic had fundamental impacts on society, communities, families and pupils, and the presumption was that school staff would be able to accommodate concomitant changes in behaviour among affected pupils. It was also emphasised that many of these underlying societal factors were more evident in 2023 than they had been in 2016, and schools lacked the resources and influence to address these issues successfully.

Suggested changes called for by respondents

Suggested changes to available approaches

School staff identified a need for greater consistency in relation to approaches to behaviour. Staff wanted greater clarity at a national level, in the form of national guidance or policy, as to which behaviours are and are not acceptable and how they might be managed consistently across schools in different areas.

School staff argued that the suite of approaches currently available to them currently lacked sufficient authority and potency. The perceived lack of consequences for pupils engaging in more disruptive behaviours made more restorative approaches ineffective. The management of the behaviour of a small core group of young people with whom all other approaches and strategies had been exhausted was thought to necessitate more robust measures, though apart from suggestions such as removing pupils from the class temporarily, or in more extreme cases the school, teachers were not always able to articulate what might be helpful.

Need for additional resources

The respondents emphasised the importance of providing adequate resources to fund nurture and the presumption of mainstream policy. The reported increase in pupils with ASN (e.g., ADHD, ASD) and young people with undiagnosed conditions suggest that much higher levels of funding and support are required to support the

inclusion policy. It should be noted that the inclusive aims of the presumption of mainstream policy were welcomed, but only if appropriately resourced.

Alternatives to mainstream for pupils

Across the local authority representatives and the school interviews, a lack of provision for enhanced support provision was reported. Indeed, the majority of social, emotional and behaviour needs support was provided by schools themselves. It was proposed that additional LA support was required to help manage highly dysregulated pupils. Suggestions included more places to be made available in behaviour units, more opportunities to be provided for support through third sector organisations and alternative curriculum and learning options to be explored. Again, funding would be required for this additional and resource and support.

Suggested modifications: Support and training

More support from national and local government bodies

School staff interviewees expressed a desire for more support to be provided at a national and local governmental level. This often related to more resources, both in terms of staffing and funding, to allow schools to have the capacity to deal with disciplinary and behavioural issues, and to support those with additional support needs. School staff also called for greater understanding and acknowledgement of the extent and impact of dysregulated behaviours within schools. It was proposed that the Scottish Government might issue a statement of support, in line with a zero tolerance of violence statement, for school staff experiencing violence in their workplace.

At a local level, it was also suggested that there should be:

- More communication from local authority staff about how specific school incidents had been dealt with
- a more visible presence from LA staff, such as visiting schools and experiencing the school environment.

Greater resources needed at LA level

Staff in schools in more deprived environments described the benefits of additional funding they had received through the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) and the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC), for example, in establishing Inclusion Hubs. However, school staff also highlighted instances where their funding from PEF and SAC had been reduced or come to an end, with implications for the funding of inclusion hubs and support staff levels.

School staff perceived that cuts to statutory services (e.g., social work, CAMHS), alternative learning provision from third sector organisations, enhanced support provision and numbers of support staff impacted on the resources available to schools to help some of their most dysregulated children and young people. It was also thought that long waiting lists for specialist support services needed to be addressed if schools were to support young people adequately.

Need for additional staffing at school level

At a school level, school staff called for funding to increase staff capacity to address distressed behaviour. Staff pointed to reductions in numbers of support staff, a critical resource though thought to be underpaid, and the ways this has impacted on schools' ability to provide one-to-one support and facilitate nurture and well-being groups. Staff also called for smaller class sizes, particularly in the primary sector, to help staff build relationships with their pupils.

Need for more training/collaboration

Class teachers expressed a desire for more classroom observation from their peers to help them reflect and discuss strategies used, and additional peer support from their colleagues, in order to address poor discipline. They also wanted more time after attending professional learning to be able to reflect on the sessions and consider how the strategies could be applied to their own classroom to improve behaviour.

School staff perceived that support staff faced a number of barriers to attending training, and these needed to be addressed in order to aid their development. It was added that support staff should be paid to do training outside of school or their contracted hours. Support staff themselves requested appropriate induction training in order to support them in their roles with children.

Parental and pupil engagement

It was commonly expressed that parents could be more supportive of teaching staff's efforts within schools to manage behaviour. It was suggested that greater engagement with parents may help to address this, though it was stressed that schools and teachers were being held accountable for wider social issues. Staff called for earlier intervention to help support struggling families, though the problem of providing this in the context of local authority budget cuts was recognised.

It was also suggested that a campaign to engage with pupils themselves to discuss what their rights and responsibilities are within school, and how to address low and more serious disruptive behaviours, might be beneficial.

Recommendations for the next iteration of the BISSR study

The Scottish Centre for Social Research conducted the BISSR 2023 study. One of the main changes in the conduct of the 2023 study was the much closer integration of the quantitative and qualitative fieldwork, analysis and reporting phases. The benefits of this approach would appear to outweigh any disadvantages, and the recommendation would be for this more integrated approach to continue. Other issues which should be considered when the next wave of BISSR is commissioned include:

- A recommendation that fieldwork for future survey waves is aligned with previous surveys (2016 and prior) to begin in early February and end in mid-late March so as not to come too close to the pre-exam time and the Easter

break. Fieldwork for 2023 started slightly later than in previous waves⁹³ and closer to pre-exam time and the Easter break. This change to the fieldwork period was largely due to the impact of industrial action by school staff at the time and might have some impact on reported experiences of pupil behaviour.

- Consider additional survey promotion and contact approaches with schools prior to and during survey fieldwork in order to help ensure that the survey details are being filtered through to the staff that implement the survey.
- Include demographic questions in the survey to cover school staff members' protected characteristics.
- Identify potential changes to survey questions in which the language used is out of date in the current context; reviewing whether such changes could be made to some question whilst retaining comparability on key data across the time series.
- Consider adding questions to the survey to better capture emerging issues such as vaping (in addition to smoking), in-school truancy and mobile phones/digital technology and the impact these have on pupils' learning and behaviour.
- Consider asking the survey questions in relation to pupil behaviour around the school of support staff as well as of headteachers and teachers, given the prevalence of support staff experiences of negative behaviour in the classroom
- Involving pupils and parents/carers in the research. Clearly there will be budgetary implications, but it would seem advisable to elicit the views of pupils and parents/carers, most likely as part of the qualitative research phase
- Reduce the number of qualitative interviews with local authority representatives. Although it may be advantageous to seek the perspective of representatives from as many local authorities as possible, arguably data saturation is reached and it may be better to focus the local authority interviews in case study areas only.

⁹³ Fieldwork in 2016 ran from 9th February to 18th March which was very similar to previous waves



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