

Fostering mutual respect – Promoting positive behaviours in secondary school

May 2025

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Executive summary

This report explores approaches to promoting positive behaviour in secondary schools in Wales. It highlights the challenges that secondary schools face and includes spotlights of effective practice. The report draws on information from visits to 24 secondary and all-age schools, discussions with officers from 10 local authorities and findings from national surveys for headteachers, staff and pupils.

Positive behaviour underpins effective teaching and learning and supports academic progress. However, during inspection, school leaders and staff have reported a decline in the behaviour of a few of their pupils since the time of the pandemic. In addition, there has been a national increase in fixed-term and permanent exclusions. However, as there is currently no national system to collect data on incidences of poor behaviour in schools, understanding the full extent of the problem remains difficult.

The evidence we gathered for this thematic review suggests that there are many reasons why pupils may display challenging behaviour. These include family instability, socio-economic pressures, mental health problems and additional learning needs. Common behaviour issues identified by schools involve persistent low-level disruption, acts of defiance and, to a lesser extent, physical confrontations. External factors such as the influence of social media and community-related issues such as anti-social behaviour have led to more complicated behaviours seen in schools. Responses to our national surveys across staff and pupils [pages 33 to 58] revealed concerns about low level disruption in lessons, poor behaviour in corridors, mobile phone misuse, and increased anxiety among pupils. Leaders also highlighted difficulties in securing timely specialist support.

Schools that have difficulty managing pupils’ poor behaviour generally have inconsistent approaches or lack clear policies and processes. Budget constraints and insufficient external support may also be key factors. The most successful schools have high expectations of their pupils and staff. In these schools, leadership of well-being is strong and supported by effective behaviour policies. There is normally a consistency in behaviour management practice and regular professional learning for teachers. Effective schools may also implement trauma-informed approaches to support pupils’ emotional needs and carry out regular restorative practices. Engagement with parents and strong community partnerships are also key to sustaining a positive behaviour culture. These help foster a sense of belonging for pupils.

We surveyed pupils, staff, and headteachers. Findings from these surveys reveal differing perceptions of what constitutes poor behaviour and what support is needed. While most pupils describe behaviour in a positive manner, staff and headteachers express concerns

about rising disruption and the limited support available. Pupils emphasise the need for mutual respect, calling for fair treatment and consistent approaches to discipline. Teachers highlight common issues such as defiance, verbal abuse, and corridor misbehaviour. Headteachers stress the need for clearer national policies, increased funding, and more specialist provisions. In the round, the survey responses highlight the importance of consistent policy enforcement, supportive relationships, and effective external support.

The report recommends that schools strengthen their behaviour management systems by involving all stakeholders, including feeder schools, parents and carers, governors and local authorities, in developing clear, consistent policy and processes. In addition, staff should receive specific training on managing disruptive behaviour, especially those of vulnerable learners. Local authority services should provide timely support, share relative information about pupils’ needs and experiences efficiently if pupils move within or beyond the local authority, and adopt a consistent approach to family engagement. The Welsh Government is urged to update national behaviour management guidelines and launch a national campaign on positive behaviour. Initial teacher education and induction programmes should also include a comprehensive behaviour management programme.

Introduction

This report is published in response to a request for advice from the Minister for Education and Welsh Language in his [remit letter to Estyn for 2024-2025](#). The report focuses on the strategies employed to foster positive behaviours, to support pupils’ well-being and to ensure progress in their learning. The report highlights the challenges and barriers that school leaders, staff and pupils experience because of certain pupil behaviours in secondary schools, particularly since the pandemic. It also includes spotlights and case studies of effective practice in establishing and maintaining positive behaviours. This report is written for schools, local authorities, school improvement services and Welsh Government.

To inform this report, inspectors visited a sample of 24 secondary and all-age schools across Wales. They varied in terms of size, levels of deprivation, language medium and location. We discussed with leaders, staff, support staff and pupils, including those who had challenging behaviour. We visited schools’ onsite well-being and behaviour provisions and observed behaviour during breaktime, lunchtime and in corridors between lessons. We also reviewed the evaluations from inspection activity during 2022-2024. Ten of the 22 Welsh local authorities provided feedback about their work to support schools, and we gathered the views of headteachers, teaching staff and pupils in an online national survey during the autumn term of 2024.

Background

Positive behaviour in schools is necessary for pupils to learn, teachers to teach, support staff to help learners, and parents to have confidence that their child is safe and supported to succeed in school. Over time, and particularly since the pandemic, our headteacher reference group and staff during inspection and follow-up visits have reported a general decline in pupils’ behaviour in secondary schools with a few pupils displaying challenging behaviours. These behaviours are often multifaceted and linked to the emotional, mental health, well-being and additional learning needs (ALN) of pupils. During our core inspection activity, follow-up visits, interim visits and in the schools visited during this thematic, leaders, staff and pupils have noted that the behaviour of a few pupils in school is becoming increasingly hard to manage. New behavioural challenges have also developed.

Challenging behaviour can take many forms, ranging from low level disruption to substantial disorder. Low level disruption can include:

- talking with peers during tasks or teacher instruction
- moving around the classroom without permission to do so
- being off task
- checking mobile phones
- pulling faces
- shouting out, or similar

High level disruption is behaviour that is rude and disrespectful and often designed to undermine the teacher and disrupt the learning of other pupils. Such behaviours include answering the teacher back in a disrespectful manner, being confrontational, physically threatening the teacher or a pupil and fighting in school. High level disruptive behaviour cannot be ignored and must be dealt with immediately. Both low level and high-level disruption can quickly escalate if left unchecked. All staff have the right to work in a safe environment where they are fully supported.

Possible causes of challenging behaviour –

Behaviours are often a form of communication and can be a symptom of other underlying issues a young person is facing.

- **Adverse Childhood Experiences** ([Estyn, 2020](#)) – [Public Health Wales \(Bellis et al., 2016\)](#) defines ACEs as traumatic or stressful experiences that occur during childhood that directly harm a child or affect the environment in which they live and are remembered throughout adulthood. An ACE means exposure to one or more of these factors:
 - Verbal and or mental abuse
 - Physical abuse
 - Sexual abuse
 - Hostile parental separation
 - Domestic violence
 - Parental mental illness
 - Alcohol abuse
 - Drug use
 - Neglect
 - Parental incarceration
- **Home environment** – Children learn behaviour at home and if their home environment is chaotic with lots of shouting and arguments and domestic abuse, the child may see this type of behaviour as normal so will replicate this at school.
- **Lack of basic care or potential neglect** – Parental challenges to provide basic needs and the lack of a loving home environment impacts significantly on children’s and young people’s behaviour.

- **Lack of routine** – An absence of routines and barriers such as regular mealtimes or bedtimes can have a severely negative impact on children and young people; the child may be struggling with tiredness and inability to concentrate throughout the school day.
- **Learned behaviour** – In a chaotic household, a child may have learned that confrontation and aggression is normal behaviour and will naturally react to challenging situations in this way. This learned behaviour may be hard to break.
- **Changes at home** – A child going through disruption and changes at home may manifest these significant events through their behaviour at school. Common causes include bereavement, divorce or relationship break up of parents or carers, moving home or school, or coming to a new country.
- **Behavioural issues** – Schools are normally inclusive and ensure that pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) or those with a diagnosis such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or autism are supported. These pupils may find difficulty in expressing themselves and therefore display challenging behaviour. They may be excluded by the other pupils too, which may result in them feeling isolated.
- **Boredom or apathy** – some pupils misbehave and challenge teaching staff out of boredom. They may be intelligent and feel uninspired in lessons. Alternatively, they may be struggling to understand, so just give up as this is an easier option, switching their energy to disrupting the class for attention.
- **Health** – there may be underlying health issues, for example unattended hearing or visual impairment, or they may be suffering from pain or discomfort due to an undetected problem.

Poor behaviour presents many challenges for schools. Secondary schools often find that pupils face new behavioural challenges during adolescence. The transition from primary to secondary and the change from one class teacher to a large number of teaching staff, around 10-12 in most cases, can sometimes prove difficult for a few pupils, particularly where there are inconsistencies in how teachers interpret school guidelines.

Leaders do not only deal with day-to-day behaviours but also may have to make decisions on excluding pupils, plan managed moves and consider education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) provision. The thematic report [Equity of curriculum experiences for pupils who are educated other than at school \(EOTAS\)](#) (Estyn, 2023) noted the capacity constraints in providing specialist provisions. These areas are complex and require further study that is not included in this report.

Gathering reliable and detailed information on behaviour in schools across Wales is difficult. There is no national collation of data around incidences of poor behaviour. There is national data available on fixed-term exclusions of five days or less, fixed-term exclusions of five days or more, and permanent exclusions. However, expectations regarding what constitutes a fixed-term or permanent exclusion are interpreted differently, which makes analysis difficult and there is often a substantial time lag before national data is released.

The Welsh Government recently released national data for exclusions in 2022-2023. [Permanent and fixed-term exclusions from schools: September 2022 to August 2023 \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

- All types of exclusions have increased since the last data release in 2021-2022 and all are above pre-pandemic levels 2018-2019.
- In secondary schools, fixed-term exclusions of five days or less have increased substantially. This is from 75.0 exclusions per 1,000 pupils pre-pandemic to 131.2 exclusions per 1,000 pupils in 2022-2023, **with 12,774 instances recorded in 2018-2019 and 22,945 in 2022-2023.**
- In secondary schools, the rates of fixed-term exclusions of more than five days have increased by 58% since 2018-2019 and 21% since 2021-2022, with 564 instances in 2018-2019, 758 in 2021-2022 and 912 in 2022-2023.
- In secondary schools, permanent exclusions have risen from 1.3 per 1,000 pupils in 2018-2019 to 1.8 per 1,000 pupils in 2022-2023, with 216 instances in 2018-2019 and 313 in 2022-2023.
- Secondary schools had the highest rates of exclusions in all categories. This is a change from pre-pandemic where special schools had the highest rates of exclusion.
- The rate of fixed-term exclusions is almost three and a half times higher for pupils eligible for free school meals (efsm) compared to that of non-efsm pupils in 2022-2023.
- Pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) had significantly higher rates of exclusions compared to those without ALN.
- Pupils of a Roma ethnic background had the highest rate of fixed-term exclusions of five days or less.
- Pupils of a White ethnic background had the highest rate of fixed-term exclusions of over five days.
- Pupils with a mixed ethnic background had the highest rate of permanent exclusions.
- The most common reason for exclusions was persistent disruptive behaviour, followed by verbal abuse/threatening behaviour against an adult.

These exclusion rates are a considerable concern and give us some indication of the

increasing number of pupils demonstrating extremely challenging and complex behaviour. The decision to exclude a pupil is not taken lightly by schools. However, the safety of other children and staff is paramount.

Due to the absence of national collation of data around behaviour, we do not have a complete picture of the day-to-day behaviour that pupils and teachers experience in secondary schools. This report aims to identify the main challenges facing leaders, staff and pupils in our schools and highlight effective ways that some have adopted, and which may be explored to foster positive behaviours to improve well-being and outcomes for all. The effective practice and spotlights highlighted may allow schools to reflect on their own practice and consider alternative approaches for their own context.

In April 2024, the Welsh Government published an update to the [guidance document](#) on exclusion from schools and pupil referral units. This guidance outlines the procedures for exclusion from schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) in Wales, ensuring that exclusions are fair, transparent, and compliant with legal requirements. It emphasises that exclusion should be a last resort, used only in response to serious breaches of school behaviour policies and when all other strategies have been exhausted. The document provides a structured approach for headteachers, governing bodies, independent appeal panels, and local authorities to manage exclusions and support learners’ continued education. Overall, the guidance promotes a structured and equitable approach to exclusion, balancing the need for school discipline with learners’ rights to education. It stresses the importance of clear communication, fair decision-making, and ongoing support to minimise the negative impact of exclusion on learners’ long-term outcomes.

However, there is no relevant, practical and current guidance to support schools, pupils or their families in dealing with behaviour and promoting positive behaviours. Within the past 15 years, the Welsh Government has produced the following guidance:

- [School exclusion: guidance for pupils](#) was last updated in October 2015 and appears out of date.
- [Practical approaches to behaviour management in the classroom \(a handbook for classroom teachers in secondary schools\)](#) was last updated in August 2010.
- [Guidance – inclusion and pupil support](#) provides useful guidance on behaviour support, however it was last updated in March 2016.

These guidance documents lack up to date information for supporting schools and local authorities in dealing with the recent apparent features of challenging behaviour of a few pupils.

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 Ensure that they evaluate robustly their approach to managing whole-school behaviour and involve all stakeholders in the process of evaluation and planning for any modifications
- R2 Provide regular and purposeful professional learning for staff to ensure that they develop a secure understanding of effective behaviour management of all pupils, particularly younger secondary pupils and vulnerable learners, and how to respond to their needs.
- R3 Work collaboratively with other schools to support transition and share effective practice to support positive behaviour
- R4 Evaluate the suitability of their curriculum and make considerate adaptations to ensure that all pupils have access to high quality teaching and relevant and engaging learning experiences

Local authorities and school improvement services should:

- R5 Strengthen capacity to provide more timely and practical support to schools
- R6 Adopt an authority-wide approach to promoting positive engagement between families and schools
- R7 Consider how funding can be allocated directly and more effectively to support individual schools to address behavioural challenges

The Welsh Government should:

- R8 Carry out research across primary, secondary and all-age schools to identify trends in behaviour and provide up to date guidance for schools on the most effective support to help improve behaviour
- R9 Develop a national campaign in partnership with schools to promote and explain the importance of good behaviour with parents/carers and pupils
- R10 Ensure that initial teacher education and induction programmes include a more thorough grounding in behaviour management approaches and offer a structured programme of support to newly qualified teachers to ensure that they can manage behaviour effectively in the classroom

Challenges facing secondary schools

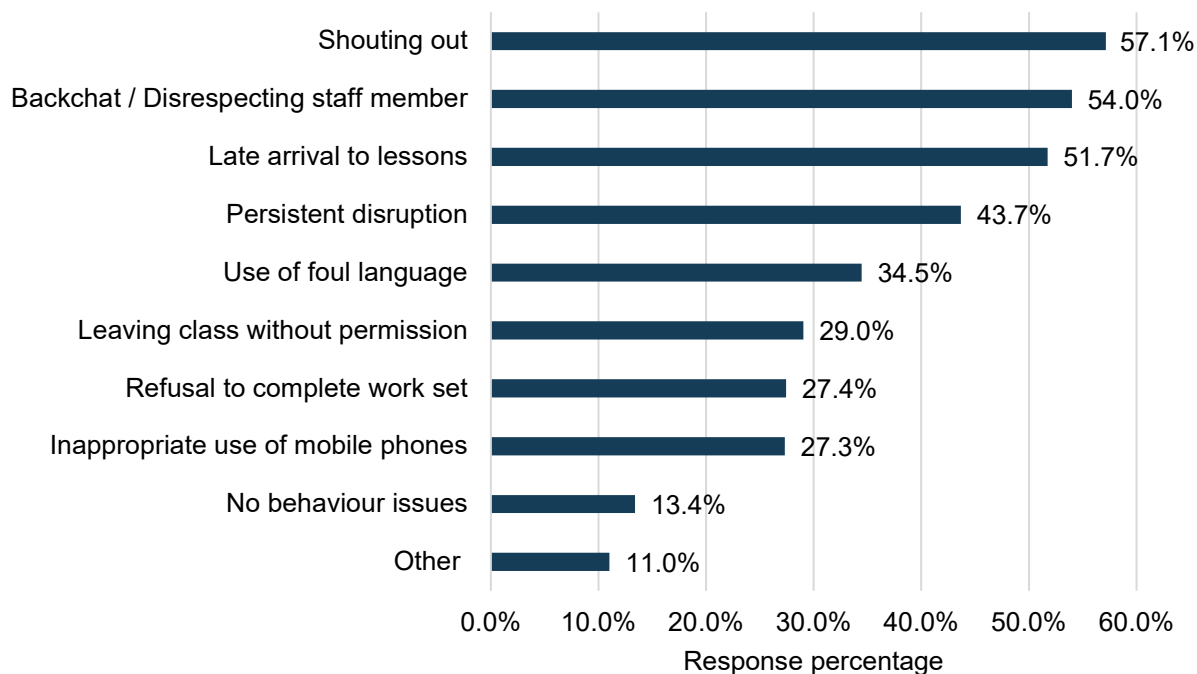
Challenges identified by leaders and all staff around behaviour

Nearly all schools we engaged with noted that many pupils behave well, and only a few pupils displayed particularly challenging behaviour. However, the challenges facing schools in dealing effectively with behaviour were complex and involved several contributing factors. These included budget constraints, recruitment and retention of specialist staff and a lack of readily available support from external agencies and local authorities. Recent and significant national changes, for example the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) 2018 Act, implementation and development of the Curriculum for Wales and uncertainties around the new ‘made for Wales’ qualifications and a lack of parental support, present considerable challenges for schools. It was also noted during the visits that the number of individual pupils within the school displaying challenging behaviours had increased. In a few cases, behaviours were becoming more complex and required additional training and support for staff.

Trends in pupil behaviours

Generally, in lessons, school staff identified the main themes in poor behaviour as answering the teacher back or disrespecting staff, refusing to complete work and internal truancy. In a very few instances, verbal abuse towards pupils and staff was noted. In the national survey, staff responses revealed significant concerns around a range of challenges. Key issues included low-level disruption, defiance and truancy. The main poor behaviours seen outside of lessons, during unsupervised times, were vaping, use of mobile phones against school policy and damage to school property, in particular toilets.

Based on your experience in your classrooms this year, can you identify the behaviours that have caused most issues in your lessons? Please select all that apply:



Percentage based on responses from 1,680 pupils

Many staff members expressed frustration with inconsistent enforcement of behaviour policies across the school and limited external support:

“Some pupils are allowed to get away with too much poor behaviour, and others are punished for the same offences.” Teacher, national survey

“Pupils seem to have less awareness of boundaries since the pandemic, they appear more reluctant to engage with learning and there is a decline in resilience.” Staff, national survey

Most schools we visited noted that a few pupils, in particular vulnerable learners and pupils with ALN, struggle with self-regulation. They find the strict routines and length of the school day difficult, and this can result in disruptive behaviour. The national survey revealed that staff felt that there was a lack of targeted support for pupils with ALN, including those with ADHD and emotional difficulties, leading to challenges in lessons.

In the majority of the schools visited, leaders and staff noted that the behaviour of a few younger pupils was more challenging than previously seen. They reported that pupils struggled with school routines and expectations. In lessons, they lacked resilience to complete tasks, struggled with concentration and with working independently. In few

schools, leaders and staff noted that older girls were displaying more challenging behaviour than previously seen, often having outbursts in behaviour as a result of a breakdown in friendship groups, fallouts from social media activity, low self-esteem and undiagnosed conditions.

Nearly all schools we visited noted an increase in the number of pupils displaying high levels of anxiety. These pupils displayed behaviours that needed extra support and provision. They include emotional based school avoidance [EBSA], inability to enter classrooms where there are a large number of pupils, refusal to sit external examinations in larger settings and difficulty in building/maintaining positive relationships with staff and pupils.

During our visits and in the national survey, teaching staff voiced concerns that managing behaviour took up significant teaching time, often affecting the quality of learning for all pupils. Nearly all schools we visited noted that a very few pupils were displaying behaviours that were unmanageable in a secondary school setting and required specialist provision. Gaining access to specialist provision that can support pupils’ underlying needs around challenging behaviour is difficult as provisions are often full.

Other challenging factors linked to behaviour

From our visits to schools, leaders and staff identified some common themes.

School staff noted that a lack of parental support was a concern. Nearly all schools noted a degree of difficulty in engaging with a few parents with regard to behavioural issues. These parents often challenged the schools’ expectations around behaviour and noted that they struggled to manage their children’s behaviour at home. In the national survey, many staff described a few parents as unsupportive, sometimes undermining staff by excusing poor behaviour. A very few parents displayed aggressive behaviour towards leaders and staff when presented with concerns about their child’s behaviour.

“Parental support is not as it was; poor behaviour at home is not being addressed by parents, and we are having to pick it up in school.” Leader, national survey

"Parents' reluctance to address challenging behaviour supports defiant attitudes." Leader, national survey

In a minority of schools, leaders noted that in-year transfers of pupils from other schools are challenging. Too often, they do not receive enough information about these pupils, particularly those displaying challenging behaviour. The volume of in-year transfers is challenging for schools, and this would warrant further study.

Most school leaders felt that the overall support from the Welsh Government, local authorities and school improvement services in dealing with challenging behaviour is inadequate. Schools were often providing their own behavioural support provisions but too often did this on a limited budget. Sourcing suitably trained staff was challenging and retaining them to ensure consistency in approach over time was difficult. In addition, creating a purposeful environment was challenging due to a lack of space within the school site. Schools stated that the options available to them after following all steps in their behaviour strategy were limited when addressing the challenging behaviour of a few pupils.

“The systems in place involving outside agencies are too slow, and nurture provision is limited.” Leader, national survey

“More needs to be done at an all-Wales level, especially around phones and social media use.” Headteacher, national survey

“The lack of provision for high-tariff students means others aren’t fully supported.” Headteacher, national survey

Schools said that the referral process for receiving local authority behaviour support services involved excessive paperwork and took too long. Pupils displaying challenging behaviours had to remain in school whilst waiting for support and this placed a strain on resources, particularly staffing. This has led to an increase in exclusions.

"Support is slow and buried under lengthy paperwork." Headteacher, national survey

Schools felt that there was a lack of suitable local authority alternative provisions available for pupils with challenging behaviour. Too often PRU provision was already full at the beginning of the academic year and could not support schools in providing short term placements to support pupil behaviour.

“There is currently one behaviour specialist shared among all schools.” Headteacher, national survey

"95% of learners are well-behaved all the time. The other 5% have needs beyond what a school setting can provide." Headteacher, national survey

“No PRUs and lack of capacity mean that schools must manage extreme behaviours alone.” Headteacher, national survey

Linked to this, external support agencies for young people, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), have long waiting lists and, too often,

schools had to provide their own support with limited knowledge or specialist training. This was particularly true for pupils displaying high levels of anxiety.

Professional learning on specific needs linked to behaviour was often superficial or presented as a one-off introductory event. Schools noted that there was a lack of comprehensive or specialist training available for staff that could be embedded effectively over time. Further training in managing challenging behaviours and supporting pupils with mental health needs would be welcomed by all staff.

Findings from our visits and the staff survey noted that the persistent behaviour issues of a few pupils often negatively impacted staff morale and well-being. Staff noted in the national survey that while most pupils behave well, the disruptive behaviour of a few has a significant impact on the overall school environment. Addressing these challenges will require co-ordinated action across schools, parents, specialist support services and policymakers.

“Pupils wandering in the corridors impacting lessons that are going on.” Staff, national survey

“Talking across the classroom and distracting friends is the biggest issue in the majority of normal lessons.” Staff, national survey

Overall, headteachers noted in the national survey that reduced funding, staff cuts, and insufficient specialist support services hindered progress in addressing behavioural challenges. A significant concern was the lack of places in specialist provisions like PRUs, with several headteachers emphasising the urgent need for better-funded external services and clearer national policies. Headteachers also identified a need for increased funding for specialist provisions, effective partnership working with parents and carers and collaboration across education, health and social services.

Challenges identified by pupils around behaviour

During our visits and in the national survey, pupil voice provided a number of comments around their view on the challenges and best support in dealing with behaviours.

“After the lockdowns – returning to school was difficult. I felt I had to find my place again with friends. My poor behaviour was in an attempt to ‘fit in’.”

“Staff have time to communicate with us, it’s a small class – it’s calmer and quieter.” Year 9 pupil, visit

“If this wasn’t in school, I would not come to school. Every school should have a well-being area that with staff to help pupils.”

“A few teachers could be more patient with pupils with troubled minds.” Pupil, national survey

“I didn’t like being naughty, I didn’t want to be naughty....it was very isolating. I found readjusting to school after lockdown difficult.” Year 12 pupil, visit

“They talk to me...they listen to me...I like the chat.” Year 10 pupil of the well-being hub, visit

“I’d rather be naughty than thick.” Year 9 pupil, visit

“Behaviour probably won’t get that much better unless the teachers respect us.” Pupil, national survey

Most pupils were clear about their school’s expectations around behaviour and recognised the need for consequences for unacceptable behaviour and rewards for good behaviour. However, pupils felt that there was a tendency for teachers to reward pupils who often misbehave if their behaviour was a little better. Pupils whose behaviour was consistently good felt that this was often overlooked and not rewarded. Similarly, in a few cases, pupils said that teachers used the behaviour system to record only negative behaviours and rarely noted positive behaviours. In addition, there was a decline from Year 7 to Year 11 in how teachers and schools celebrated positive behaviour. Many older pupils felt that they did not receive enough recognition for their positive behaviours. A very few pupils felt that they were ‘labelled’ by a few staff as being naughty based on past incidences or family history. They felt that, despite attempts to improve their behaviour, they were overlooked when staff celebrated positive behaviour.

Generally, pupils felt that there were too many inconsistencies in teachers’ behaviour management. This was particularly true when supply teachers were in lessons where pupils felt that behaviour was considerably worse and, in a few cases, led to a deterioration in behaviour in the lessons that followed on that day.

Overall, pupils who displayed challenging behaviour felt that the teacher didn’t know them very well and didn’t always understand their personal issues. In a few cases, these pupils felt the teacher had low expectations of what they could achieve, and this led to having feelings of low self-worth. Pupils recognised that home issues made focusing on school difficult from time to time and occasionally they were ‘caught in the moment’ and this led to poor behaviour. A few pupils noted that their poor behaviour in school was because of difficulties they had at home. They were occasionally worried or frustrated and found concentrating in school challenging. They often felt isolated and valued ‘time out’ from time to time and ‘having a chat’ to an adult during the school day.

A minority of pupils noted that corridors were areas where pupils ‘can get hyper’. Younger pupils said that pushing and high noise levels made them feel nervous when moving from lesson to lesson. A very few pupils noted that they preferred to be late to the lesson than walk through the corridors in a high volume of pupil traffic.

A few older pupils noted that readjusting to school life after the pandemic had been challenging, in particular establishing relationships with their peers and staff. They also noted different behaviours to those before the pandemic. Examples given were ‘kicking off’ or losing control of their emotions rather than admitting that they were struggling with the work, showing off in front of peers in order to be popular and being defiant towards adults due to being used to having their own way and their own routines for a long time.

A few younger pupils noted that the transition from Year 6 to Year 7 had been challenging. They valued the induction process but felt that the move to secondary school was a substantial change for them. They felt that dealing with a variety of new staff was challenging, especially when their expectations and behaviour management style were different.

A minority of pupils felt that the school environment influenced pupil behaviour. Negative factors included a lack of quiet and pleasant spaces to sit with friends during breaks and no proper ‘play areas’ where they could play with peers. These led to poor behaviour, particularly after lunch and on rainy days. A few pupils said that a lack of extra-curricular activities during lunchtime led to boredom and often resulted in silly behaviour. A very few pupils noted that lunchtimes were too short. This resulted in a lack of time to ‘switch off’ and relax. Consequently, behaviour after lunch was worse.

Generally, it was noted that a few pupils’ behaviour was causing disruption in lessons. In a very few instances, this was preventing other pupils from learning.

Challenges in behaviour identified by local authorities

Many local authorities shared that, despite taking several different approaches to supporting behaviour in schools, challenges remained. These included an increase in the number of exclusions and higher demand from schools for support for pupils and staff.

Overall, but not exclusively, the challenges identified by local authorities were poor family engagement with schools, verbal abuse towards school staff that included threatening behaviour, mobile phone use in school and problems arising from social media, vaping on the school site – particularly in school toilets, internal truancy, high anxiety and an increase in ALN referrals, particularly around neurodiversity.

Local authority staff noted that there has been substantial challenge around the increase in workload and a lack of capacity in terms of officers available to deal with emerging behavioural challenges. Specific teams, such as behaviour support or ALN within the local authority, often work in isolation and this can lead to a delay in addressing issues or duplication in some cases. Support from other services, for example health, is often delayed due to the increase in workload. This may lead to frustration on behalf of the school and parents.

Local authorities recognised that it was difficult to accurately track behaviour in schools and that a lack of consistency in the nature and format of the data they receive made this even more challenging.

School approaches to promoting positive behaviours

During our visits, we saw a number of approaches to promoting positive behaviour. In this section we report on what we saw in the most effective schools.

- Leaders had a clear vision for pupil well-being and established high expectations around behaviour, which had been co-constructed, shared and were well understood by staff, pupils and parents. Through robust **self-evaluation**, the values and ethos of the school were simple and clear. All members of the school community modelled good behaviour and there was mutual respect at all levels.
- **Positive working relationships led to a sense of belonging at the school.** Approaches to manage behaviour were clear and consistently applied by all members of staff including senior leaders. There was support by leaders to back up and implement the more severe sanctions for extreme poor behaviour.
- **Communication with parents** was clear and regular. Leaders placed great emphasis on parental engagement, and this gave parents clear involvement, provided a consistent message and ensured that they understood the school's policies and expectations.
- Where it was needed, **specific provisions for supporting pupils** were effective. Schools were sensitive to individuals' needs and showed empathy for vulnerable pupils and those with ALN. In such cases, staff managed them carefully through an adapted approach, explicit teaching, and effective behaviour support approaches.
- **Transition of pupils from primary to secondary, or from one school to another was well managed.** There was a clear transfer of information on pupils including their behaviour issues. The most effective approaches in managing the behaviour of individual pupils were always shared and all staff were well informed. If required, specific plans were put in place to minimise the risk of pupils displaying challenging behaviour after transition. Strategies such as individual support plans or additional transition days were successful.
- There was **thoughtful curriculum planning** – Curriculum for Wales ensured that pupils gained challenging and interesting experiences across all areas of learning. For older learners, there was a broad and balanced curriculum offer that ensured suitable pathways for all learners. There was careful consideration in optional units of work and set texts in some subjects with a focus on engaging learners fully.

- **Effective teaching** meant that staff recognised pupils’ individual needs well and planned suitably to ensure that all pupils could access the curriculum and make progress in their learning.
- There was a well-understood and **clear policy on mobile phone use** that either disallowed the use of devices in school altogether or limited their use to clearly defined times. This meant that pupils and parents were clear on expectations and all staff had a consistent approach.
- There were regular **professional learning opportunities** on aspects of behaviour management for all staff and these were a routine part of the schools’ professional learning offer. Staff regularly discussed challenges around behaviour, and this was viewed as a responsible means of seeking solutions rather than an individual’s failure. Staff were encouraged to observe each other, trial new approaches and evaluate their behaviour approaches in the classroom regularly.
- Provisions to support behaviour and well-being were carefully planned and managed. Designated **staff were well-trained** in addressing pupils’ needs. Effective intervention programmes were delivered and evaluated regularly.

Self-evaluation processes leading to an improvement in behaviour

In the most effective schools, leaders, staff and pupils evaluated the effectiveness of their well-being and behaviour policies regularly and made necessary adaptations. This was particularly apparent post pandemic where there was an appreciation of the new behavioural challenges and different approaches needed. This approach involved all staff and often pupils in identifying specific behavioural challenges and in creating and communicating their expectations around behaviour. All staff and pupils were clear about their responsibilities. However, the involvement of parents in the review and implementation of behaviour policies was rare.

A few schools have undertaken an honest and detailed evaluation of the behaviour challenges facing them using information such as behaviour data over time. They have taken a methodical and carefully thought-out approach to tackling the key issues around behaviour. As a result, they had a clear understanding of the challenges that their school faces and the changes needed.

A self-evaluation approach

Cardiff West Community High School has 1,061 pupils on roll with 67.5% eligible for free school meals. A total of 90% of pupils live in areas within the top 10% in Wales for levels of deprivation. As part of the school’s improvement journey the leadership team took a methodical and carefully thought-out approach to tackling behavioural issues, working with the whole staff community to develop suitable actions. They targeted four key areas – fights and pupil conflict, defiance (failure to follow instructions), punctuality and internal truancy to school and individual lessons and anti-social behaviours (for example swearing, poor corridor conduct and disrespectful attitudes).

<https://youtu.be/BUkPOrVKRck>

Many schools have improved the way they communicate their expectations to both teachers and pupils. They have focused on simple language, displaying expectations in classrooms and corridors, and making regular reference to expectations. In a few schools, this has been shared and explained to parents well.

‘Ready Respectful Safe’ behaviour policy

At **Pontarddulais School**, leaders introduced a behaviour policy in 2019 following consultation with an external provider. Leaders provided helpful professional learning sessions for staff to develop their skills in managing pupils, including trauma informed approaches and empathy coaching. The new behaviour policy is based on three simple rules of ‘Ready Respectful Safe’ and advocates the use of a common ‘5Cs’ approach to deal with incidences of poor behaviour: Calm, Clear, Confident, Consistent and Compassionate. Leaders have clear and high expectations of staff to remain calm and ensure fairness when de-escalating situations. Pupils we spoke to said that they appreciated the consistent and calm way that staff deal with poor behaviour and some shared how they valued the opportunity they were given to regulate their behaviour through this approach.

Through honest self-evaluation a clear vision emerged, and the values were shared clearly with staff and pupils. This was important as the policy was implemented consistently.

A few schools we visited have focused well on establishing clear routines at the start and end of the school day and supporting pupils to behave well in corridors between lessons. Staff and pupils value this consistency as it has succeeded in improving behaviour in open spaces and helped create a calm and orderly environment,

particularly at the start and end of the school day. At **Ysgol Cwm Brombil**, pupils in Years 7-10 line up when they arrive at school and then enter through a designated entrance. Year groups and form classes are then met by leaders and their form tutor each day. This allows staff to engage with pupils at the start of the school day and resolve any potential barriers to learning, such as uniform concerns or equipment needs. Pupils state that this is a helpful and positive start to their day. As Year 11 pupils are familiar with the expectations, they go immediately to their classroom and are greeted by their tutor. Vulnerable pupils and those with ALN can opt to meet staff in another part to the school. During breaks and lunch times and throughout the day, leaders are on duty around the school to support pupils, in particular younger pupils. These strategies support smooth transitions during the day.

In some cases, schools have implemented new, helpful routines at the start and end of lessons. These routines focus on reinforcing behaviour expectations and creating a more predictable environment for learning. This appears to reduce uncertainty and anxiety, and this subsequently benefits both teachers and pupils.

'ABC-BT' learning policy

Ysgol Bryn Tawe's behaviour for learning policy 'ABC-BT' has been successful in improving whole-school attitudes to learning. ABC stands for the following features:

Agwedd at Ddysgu [Attitude to Learning]

Barod i Ddysgu [Ready to Learn]

Cefnogaeth i Ddysgu [Support for Learning]

The strategy is designed to create a consistent ethos, clear expectations and a positive mindset across the school. Leaders and staff encourage all pupils to take ownership of their own behaviours in every lesson and every day. ABC-BT posters are visible in each room and form tutors refer to these three principles regularly in their morning sessions. Staff's regular reference to the principles and their use of positive language and praise is also key to reinforcing these principles, for example – "Are you ready to learn? Nice to see that everyone has their equipment..."

Leaders have noted an improvement in the attitudes to learning of a number of pupils who were of particular concern. These improvements include them bringing equipment to school and being punctual to lessons. In addition, through mentoring activities such as lesson observations and learning walks, leaders noted improved engagement in learning, reduced disruption and more consistent language used by staff across the school.

Creating positive working relationships and a culture of belonging

Schools have implemented a range of strategies to place a new focus on creating positive working relationships.

Nearly all schools we visited had focused on re-establishing effective working relationships between pupils and staff following the pandemic. Pupils and staff had been away from each other for extended periods and there was an acknowledgement that relationships had been affected, particularly between younger pupils and staff. In the most effective schools, careful consideration had been given to re-establishing these relationships. Staff had received beneficial training and well-planned activities with a focus on ‘getting to know’ pupils. For example, tutor time in the morning had a focus on building tutor-pupil relationships involving collaborating with each other through a variety of worthwhile activities. Pupils valued this time to talk and discuss with a trusted adult.

In many schools, the form tutor remained with their pupils from Year 7 to Year 11. This was valued by staff and pupils as they developed considerable understanding and empathy for each individual pupil and their families.

Crew Leaders

Cantonian school has changed the way it supports the well-being of its younger pupils and introduced a system to build and maintain positive relationships with them and their families. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 are placed in groups of about 12 with a ‘Crew Leader’ who can be a teacher or non-teaching member of staff. These staff act as emotionally available adults who offer support and guidance for their ‘crew’. The staff and pupils spoke positively about the beneficial impact that smaller form classes are having on pupils’ sense of belonging and noted how this resulted in an improvement in their attendance and also in relationships between pupils.

A few schools have focused on creating ‘a sense of belonging’ and this has helped in tackling challenging behaviour and created a safe and valued space for pupils and staff. Research suggests that staff stay at schools where they feel they belong; children attend and thrive in schools where they have been made to feel as if they belong (Tes, 2023).

[How a sense of belonging in school affects behaviour, attainment and attendance | Tes](#)

A minority of the schools we visited used different approaches to gain a better understanding of pupils’ needs during transition from primary to secondary school and from one year group to another. For example the schools used the [School Health Research Network \(SHRN\) data](#) and [Pupils’ Attitudes to Self and School \(PASS\) data](#) or their own questionnaires and data collection methods. This allowed them to identify

pupils' concerns and needs successfully and thus enabling them to set early interventions and support in place.

Ysgol Bro Preseli has established 'Cynllun Cam Ymlaen – Perthyn i Ysgol Bro Preseli'

Strategy

Led by the school's Youth Worker and in collaboration with Harvard University, the school has introduced the 'Harvard Plan' Programme that identifies pupils at risk of disengagement with education and provides targeted support. The programme engages pupils in projects with various organisations, such as the National Park, offering enrichment activities that promote teamwork, confidence, and a sense of belonging to the school community.

The school, in collaboration with Harvard University, has focused on creating a sense of 'belonging' for its new pupils before they transition in Year 7. The school acknowledges that feelings of not belonging, and exclusion can lead to disruptive behaviour and has therefore introduced a well-being questionnaire for all Year 6 pupils in their cluster to analyse pupils' sense of belonging and identify any potential anxiety. Harvard provides consistent support through training on how to analyse the data collected by the school and publish ideas on how to create effective intervention. Harvard has designated a specific contact within the Harvard institution who is always available to provide support. Leaders have then planned early interventions to prepare these pupils and build a sense of connection with the secondary school before they transfer to Year 7.

Impact

The implementation of the programme has improved pupils' sense of belonging within the school significantly. This initiative has resulted in improved behaviour, improved attendance, increased resilience, and increased motivation among participants. By building these relationships early on, the school has created a more inclusive and positive learning environment for pupils who display anxiety and behavioural problems.

Effective engagement and communication with parents

In most schools we visited, there was a renewed focus on communication and engagement with parents. In fact, in nearly all schools, re-establishing positive relationships with a few parents was an issue following the pandemic. Lengthy periods away from school during and following the pandemic meant that parents had become reluctant to engage with school. This was the case when the school wished to discuss aspects of pupils' behaviour and attendance.

Ensuring that parents feel supported and have a clear understanding of policies and procedures around behaviour can reduce the conflict between parents, pupils and school. Many schools said that they had looked at alternative ways of engaging with parents and that building positive relationships with parents had led to positive outcomes when responding to behavioural issues.

Diwrnod gyda’n gilydd (A day together)

At **Ysgol Gyfun y Strade** the ‘Diwrnod gyda’n gilydd’ (A ‘Day Together’) strategy had been set up with the aim of bringing a wide range of local services and organisations into the school in an open day for parents and carers, so that they know more about the help available to them.

Parents and pupils from cluster primary schools were invited with the aim of supporting transition and providing early support for pupils and their families. Leaders have established a common understanding with parents that they are partners in their children's education and that there is support available for the whole family.

The day was attended by various charities such as housing support, ‘Young Carers’ and organisations such as ‘CYCA’, ‘Foothold’, ‘Threshold’ and ‘Action for Children’.

‘CYCA’ – (Connecting Youth, Children & Adults) is an independent charity providing different support services to children, young people and families. The charity specialises in providing emotional health and well-being support through a range of projects and services. The service can be accessed via social prescription at the GP.

<https://cycaonline.org/>

‘Foothold’ is a social justice charity that empowers communities and individuals to achieve real change. Foothold commits to ensuring that everyone has equal access to essential services that improve their overall well-being.

<https://footholdcymru.org.uk>

‘Threshold’ is a domestic advice service committed to eradicating the violence and abuse of women, men, children and young people. The organisation provides a safe space for anyone affected by domestic violence. Support is offered to children and young people to understand their emotions, self-esteem, plan safety and maintain healthy relationships.

‘Action for Children’ provides bespoke parenting support to families in their own homes, offering behaviour management sessions for the family. Practical knowledge-

based parenting programmes are provided to support and guide parents with relationship problems to drive positive change.

In a very few schools, leaders and staff have held dedicated workshops to make parents aware of their expectations of pupils’ behaviour and the language being used in school to describe reward and sanction behaviour. This means that teachers, pupils and parents all know what is expected. As well as behaviour support, other parenting workshops help parents to better understand and support their child at home.

Wellbeing café

At **Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf**, the ‘Caffi Lles’ (‘Wellbeing Café’) provision has strengthened the relationship between parents and carers. The school invites pupils and their parents and carers to the Wellbeing Café once every half term to share information and guidance and share any well-being concerns. Staff from external support agencies come to speak with parents in the café and this has proved to be helpful and effective. For example, specialist teachers from the local authority, the educational psychologist and health professionals engage with parents in an informal and non-confrontational setting. The sessions are intended to be supportive and non-judgmental. Professionals provide information on the support available directly at school, external support available for pupils and parents, LGBTQ+ support and advice on how to deal with stress and anxiety. These sessions have enabled parents to gain a better understanding of the support available and to feel comfortable and confident when contacting the school with any concern. This in turn enables timely interventions to take place for the benefit of pupils at the school.

During our visits a notable strength was schools’ effective use of family engagement officers (FEO) to support pupils and their families. Where FEOs provide effective support:

- They build positive relationships with families. This helps identify any potential barriers to learning.
- They share information with senior leaders and staff in a timely manner so that provision can be adjusted and that strategies can be put in place to mitigate the impact of any barriers to learning.
- They work in partnership with a range of agencies to signpost families to a wider range of support beyond the school day.

For example, at Ferndale Community School, the family engagement officer works in close partnership with the ALNCo and has carefully monitored pupil attendance at

points of transition. The FEO has worked in close partnership with the local authority mental health provision to ensure that pupils and families receive bespoke support.

The Pantry

At **Ysgol Cwm Brombil** the family engagement team have strengthened the link between school and home through strategic initiatives. 'The Pantry', the in-house food bank, provides essential support including food supplies, prepared meals, hygiene products, cooking equipment, and weekly recipe cards for community members. The comprehensive support network extends beyond basic necessities. The team offer online family support services, a uniform bank, and skill-development sessions where families can enhance their basic skills and receive guidance on financial management. This approach to family support has fostered trust and openness, particularly valuable when addressing behavioural challenges.

Through successful partnership funding, there are meaningful volunteering opportunities at 'The Pantry'. This initiative has proven impactful, enabling parents to build confidence and to transition to paid employment while developing stronger connections with the school community.

The school have launched several successful community programs:

- an intergenerational gardening club that brings people together for outdoor activities and social interaction
- a cooking club teaching families to prepare nutritious meals from scratch, which has notably improved pupil attendance by making school more engaging
- a collaborative homework club where parents and children receive staff support, boosting homework completion rates and parent engagement in education
- a community book club that strengthens parent-child relationships, positively impacting behaviour both at home and school

Practical support is on offer through regular coffee mornings, drop-in sessions, and playgroups. Partnership with the Greggs Foundation, can assist families with essential household items, including furniture and appliances. These initiatives have established a community hub that supports not just pupils, but entire families.

Supporting pupils with challenging behaviour

Curricular approaches

In the most effective schools, we noted that the curriculum was carefully planned and delivered. It included interesting local, national and global learning experiences that were up-to-date and supported by worthwhile opportunities to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy, and digital competency skills.

In the best examples, teachers planned their lessons thoughtfully. They considered carefully pupils' individual needs, planned activities that engaged and developed their knowledge and understanding and adapted the lesson when needed.

Systems for gathering pupils' views, including those with behavioural issues, in order to evaluate teaching and learning experiences was a strong feature, and staff considered reasonable adaptations to their provision based on pupils' views.

At Key Stage 4, there was normally a broad range of curriculum choice. There was often a range of vocational courses included in the schools' offer. Pupils who faced challenges around their behaviour often benefited from vocational courses with a strong practical element. For example, courses such as forge work, agriculture, construction, physical education, IT qualifications and forest school provision cater well for these pupils' needs.

In a majority of schools, individualised timetables were designed for pupils with the most challenging behaviour. In the best examples, these were planned carefully and included parental input. These included a sensible balance of time in mainstream lessons (selected carefully) and time in alternative internal provision where pupils received emotional support and were helped to develop practical skills and gain qualifications.

In a few schools, suitable work experience opportunities or provision in external education providers had been carefully sought and integrated into the school week. These included structured anger management sessions at a local gym and an opportunity to volunteer in a local charity shop.

Strade in the Community programme

At **Ysgol Gyfun y Strade** the ‘Strade in the Community’ programme was introduced with the aim of broadening the learning experiences of groups of learners with low levels of engagement, challenging behaviours or poor attendance.

The school works collaboratively with over 15 local services, organisations and businesses to target specific learners with appropriate interventions. For example, a group of Year 10 girls with low motivation and negative attitudes to learning attended a local care home for an afternoon a week for a period of eight weeks. They carried out basic caring tasks with support and thus developed their confidence and communication skills well. This in turn led to an improvement in behaviour back at school.

‘Breaking Bread’ was a joint cooking project between the school and Foothold <https://footholdcymru.org.uk> in Llanelli town centre. Learners from low-income households learnt cooking skills alongside people from the community. The school reported a substantial improvement in the attendance and attitudes to learning of this group of learners.

Specific provisions for supporting pupils displaying behavioural challenges

In a minority of schools visited, leaders had identified that pupils with poor behaviour benefited from a nurture approach, particularly in Years 7 and 8. Information gathered from cluster primary schools identified the need to improve pupils’ weak basic skills, including challenges around literacy (speech and language development, low reading scores and weak writing skills), numeracy deficiencies (including dyscalculia), and well-being needs (including high levels on anxiety and EBSA). Where these needs were not addressed, there was an escalation to more challenging behaviours.

Behavioural provisions at Cardiff West Community High School

Cardiff West Community High School supports pupils well through a number of behavioural provisions.

The school uses ‘primary’ style classes in Year 7 and Year 8 for pupils with weak literacy skills. These are run part-time and focus primarily on improving pupils’ literacy skills to enable them to reintegrate fully in mainstream as soon as they are ready to, with pupils staying with mainstream for PE, art, and some other lessons.

There are classes for pupils with emotional well-being needs and sessions for pupils who struggle to behave well in mainstream lessons. There is also a behavioural, emotional, and social difficulties (BESD) unit.

The school runs its own outreach provision where FEOs visit pupils' homes. The various provisions are all run by staff who have received extensive training in nurture provision, restorative practice and anger management. This has ensured that staff can deliver suitable, structured support and pupils can learn and thrive. This has been key in supporting the overall behaviour improvement journey seen at the school.

Most schools had developed their own internal provisions for pupils with challenging behavioural needs. In the best examples, leaders evaluated their suitability regularly, made adaptations and ensured that they were well resourced. These were led effectively by trained, permanent staff members and provided considerate support, through worthwhile learning opportunities and tailored behaviour support programmes. Most school leaders and staff noted that these were essential to help address the behavioural challenges they faced.

Literacy and numeracy learning pathway

At **Cathays High School** leaders have carefully revised the school's behaviour management approaches and introduced clear processes to respond to the different levels of poor behaviour. The school identified that a range of interventions, such as full-time alternative provision classes, had little impact on modifying behaviour. Leaders identified that weak literacy and numeracy skills often led to pupils becoming disengaged with learning or misbehaving. Following consultation within the school and close planning, the school has developed a literacy and numeracy learning pathway provision at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, which provides pupils with intensive literacy and numeracy support. This provision is complemented by access to vocational courses. This bespoke approach is helping to maintain pupil engagement within their lessons and retain their sense of belonging at the school community.

'Ystafell Perthyn' and 'Yr Hafan'

Staff at **Ysgol Bryn Tawe** have set up two internal resource bases: 'Ystafell Perthyn' and 'Yr Hafan' to support pupils.

Ystafell Perthyn is a multi-use room managed by two pastoral assistants and supported by learning leaders (Heads of Year). The aim is to support learners to improve their attitudes to learning and to help them cope with school life from day-to-day. The team operates daily by:

- supporting learners with behavioural issues through mentoring sessions, well-being conversations (check ins) and acting as a 'trusted adult'
- monitoring and supporting learners' behaviour patterns including forming target groups
- supporting learners who need to regulate before returning to learning
- monitoring and supporting learners' behaviour patterns including forming target groups
- collaborating with various individuals from external agencies to support learners
- holding follow-up sessions for learners to support them with re-integration following internal exclusion

Yr Hafan includes:

- a quiet space for learners with emotional, mental health or social needs
- individual and group sessions on various themes; for example, coping with anxiety, promoting self-image and developing positive relationships
- provision of activities such as gardening sessions, construction projects and environmental tasks such as tree planting; these are intended to develop a positive mindset, improve learners' self-image, develop the sense of belonging to the school by engaging in positive activities outdoors and, in doing these, developing coping strategies
- group activities with external agencies for example CAMHS
- supporting learners by offering them a quiet place to calm down and use the 'regulating' resources available within the rooms, when necessary
- supporting vulnerable learners who are struggling to attend school while they are on a re-integration plan

Pupils who receive support from Perthyn and Hafan told us that this support helps them cope with school, improve their attitudes and gain a sense of belonging.

The school has noted an improvement in the behaviour of many pupils and a reduction in fixed-term exclusions across the school. External agencies working with the school value having a purposeful area to work with dedicated staff and pupils when they visit.

Professional learning and strategies to support staff and pupils

Many schools have provided staff with training covering different behaviour management approaches including restorative work and trauma informed practice. In the most effective schools, leaders and staff have considered a range of approaches and adapted these sensibly to suit their own context and level of need.

Restorative approaches

For example, at **Bryn Alun School** staff have a meaningful approach to restorative approaches. When a pupil has been removed from a lesson due to poor behaviour, staff ensure that these pupils take part in a restorative conversation with the relevant teacher. This is facilitated by a skilled and neutral member of staff and usually takes place after school. This normally results in the restoration of the relationship between the pupil and teacher and enables the pupil to return to their lessons.

In a few schools, leaders have established staff working groups to regularly review their approaches to behaviour management and evaluate current practice by considering their impact and how it has benefited pupils. This has led to some schools trialling new approaches to promoting positive behaviour and providing staff with feedback on their practice. An interesting feature of the work of a few working groups is ‘Teacher to Teacher Coaching’, where staff plan activities that challenge their colleagues to think about their behaviour management style and then co-create a positive behaviour toolkit for staff to trial in the classroom.

In a few schools we visited, staff have been provided with ‘scripts’ that can be used to support them when dealing with pupils with challenging behaviour. This approach helps to ensure consistency in the use of language across the school. Pupils told us that they valued this consistent approach.

Guidance booklets

For example, at **Ysgol Penyrheol**, staff are provided with a ‘routines and micro scripts’ guidance booklet.

The guidance is very practical, providing recommended scripts for teachers to use in scenarios such as when a pupil arrives late to a lesson or when a teacher overhears a pupil say something inappropriate to another pupil. The guidance covers common challenging areas such as refusal to take a coat off or comply with the uniform policy, refusal to engage in learning and how to deal with requests to leave the classroom.

The guidance supports staff across the school to use a common language that contributes to maintaining good relationships. It helps teachers use the ‘least invasive tactic possible’ to address pupils whose behaviour isn’t meeting expectations and helps them to prevent issues from escalating. As a result, staff are more confident in tackling issues and there is more consistency in the approaches adopted.

As a result, fewer pupils are removed from lessons because of poor behaviour, exclusions have reduced, and staff morale has improved.

In a few schools we visited, staff valued the opportunities they had to discuss behaviour with leaders and other key staff. They felt that this reduced anxiety around behavioural issues, gave them opportunities to reflect on their own approaches and provided new initiatives to try.

Staff well-being working group

At **Ysgol Bro Preseli**, the school recognised the impact of low-level disruption on staff well-being and worked proactively to address this. In order to foster a supportive environment, the school established a dedicated ‘staff well-being working group’ with representatives from all levels of responsibility, including senior management, subject leaders, teachers, learning support assistants and administrative staff. The group meets regularly to discuss issues affecting staff and to plan together how they will respond to the challenges.

In addition to the well-being group, the school has introduced a weekly staff meeting to provide a platform for open dialogue, where staff can voice concerns and share ideas. This initiative empowers staff and ensures that issues are addressed promptly and effectively. They discuss different ways to manage low-level disruptions and how to implement distraction techniques.

All school staff have received training on the impact of trauma on children and young people. This has provided them with a deeper understanding of the root causes of pupil behaviour and has resulted in increased empathy and informed responses to incidences. By recognising patterns of behaviour associated with trauma, staff can tackle issues more effectively and support pupils in a meaningful way.

These proactive initiatives have helped to promote a culture of inclusivity and support at Ysgol Bro Preseli where staff feel heard and valued. They feel less isolated and have an increased sense of belonging to the school. Resolving concerns in a timely manner has contributed to improved morale, stronger team cohesion, and a more positive work environment.

In a few schools, staff valued regular communication and opportunities to share information about pupils who display challenging behaviour, for example through weekly or daily bulletins and discussions with pastoral and behaviour support staff. Sharing key information has empowered staff to make reasonable adjustments where there are behavioural challenges and plan their lessons accordingly.

Case management approach

A '**Case management**' approach to managing pupils who display challenging behaviour, have poor attitudes to learning and make low academic progress.

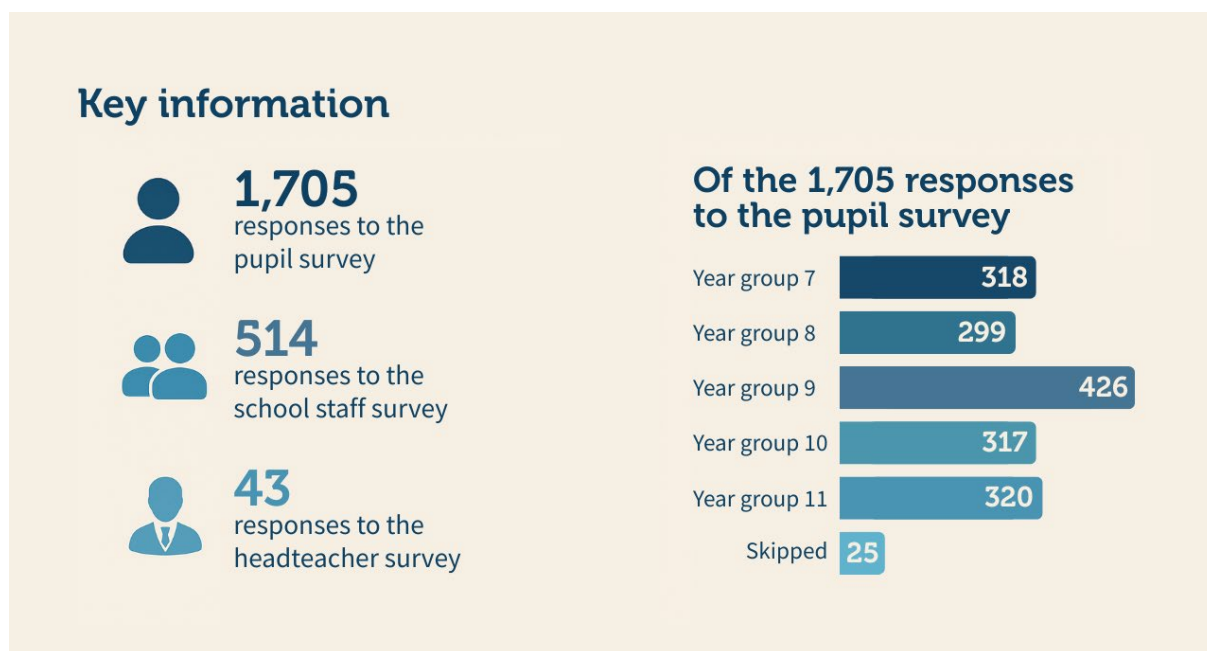
The school identified a small group of target pupils to work with, based on half termly progress analysis and behaviour data. These pupils' teachers were invited to discuss each pupil individually in a meeting. Prior to the meeting staff were provided with background information on the pupil, which included their interests, strengths, attainment data and relevant well-being information.

Staff looked at the pupils' work in their books and identified their particular needs. They then discussed short-term goals, teaching strategies and any resources needed for every pupil in the group.

This case management approach has proved successful in supporting pupils with behavioural challenges to improve their behaviours and make progress in learning. It has empowered teachers to work together to find solutions for individual pupils and over time improve their behaviour management strategies.

Survey results

Whilst evidence from the questionnaire responses has been incorporated in the sections above, this section provides full questionnaire responses and analysis of open text responses.



Summary of main themes from pupil responses

In charts 1 – 4 below we present responses pupils gave to questions about how they rate the behaviour of their peers in lessons and outside of lessons, and what behaviours they think have caused the most issues¹. We also allowed pupils to provide further comments about behaviour. Responses to the latter highlight a number of key themes. These include perceptions of mutual respect between teachers and pupils, the impact of teacher behaviour on pupil conduct, issues with discipline, and concerns about fairness and support.

Mutual respect and teacher behaviour

Many pupils emphasised that their behaviour improves when teachers show respect towards them and treat them fairly. They appreciated teachers who listen, avoid shouting, and treat pupils with understanding. As one pupil stated, “Behaviour probably won’t get that much better unless the teachers respect us.” Conversely, pupils report becoming disengaged when teachers appear dismissive or condescending. Some express frustration with perceived favouritism, as noted by a pupil: “Would be amazing

¹ You can find copies of the questionnaires used in this review on the publication page.

if a teacher could behave in a good way and set an example.”

Discipline and classroom management

A minority of pupils describe frequent disruptive behaviours in lessons, including shouting out, talking back, and vandalism. Common issues include “chewing gum,” “throwing equipment,” and “making nasty jokes.” Some pupils called for stricter discipline, while others criticised how punishments are applied inconsistently, stating, “The behaviour isn't well dealt with at all.”

Fairness and support

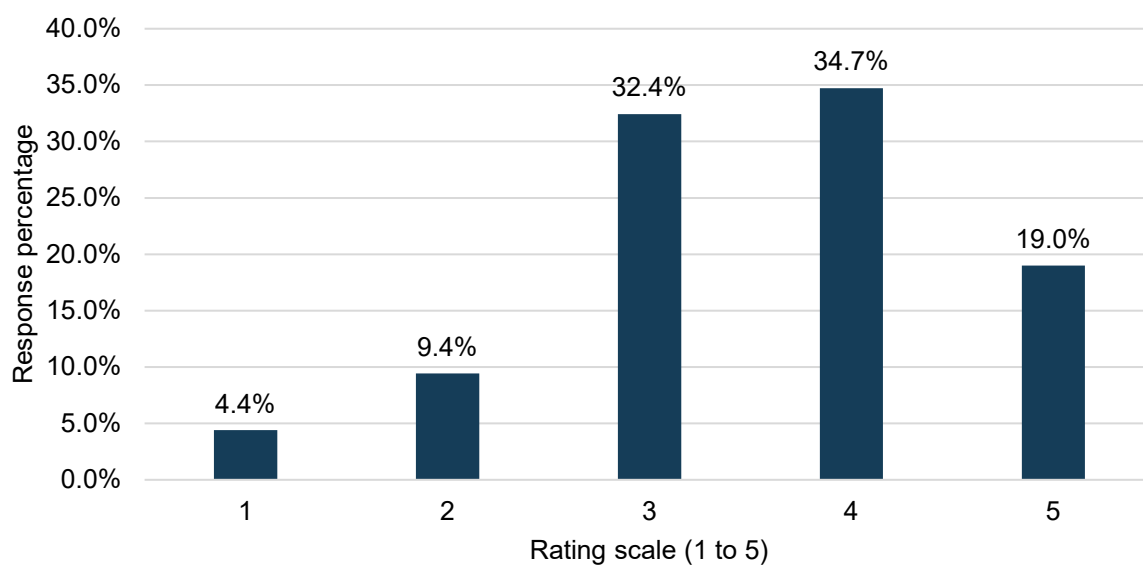
A recurring concern was that teachers sometimes fail to support pupils equitably. Some pupils felt overlooked, with one commenting, “Half of the class don't understand anything from the teachers as teachers do not care at all.” They also reported teachers focusing more on enforcing minor rules than addressing serious issues like bullying or racism: “Teachers only care about pencil cases or mobile phones.”

Peer-to-peer respect

Pupils expressed concerns about disrespectful behaviour among classmates, including bullying, rude comments, and taking others' belongings. They also noted discomfort when teachers dismiss requests for help with seating arrangements or personal issues: “Feeling uncomfortable sitting next to people that make you uncomfortable and teachers do not let you move.”

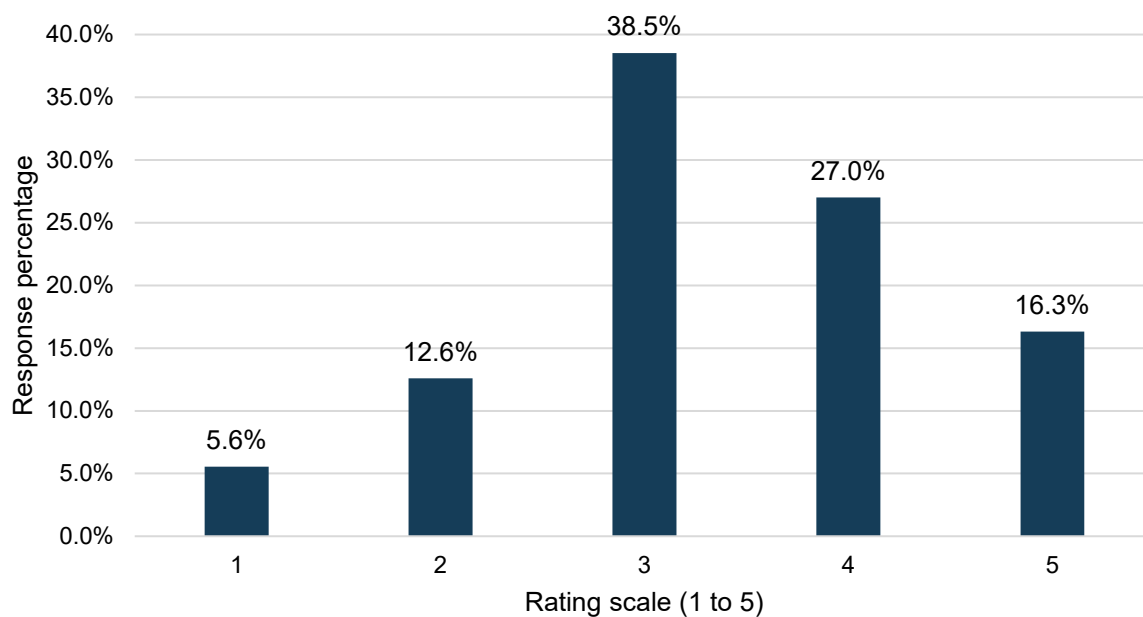
Overall, pupils viewed mutual respect as central to improving behaviour and learning experiences. They called for consistent and fair treatment from teachers, better handling of disruptive behaviours, and stronger support systems for personal and academic issues.

Chart 1: On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate behaviour in your lessons?



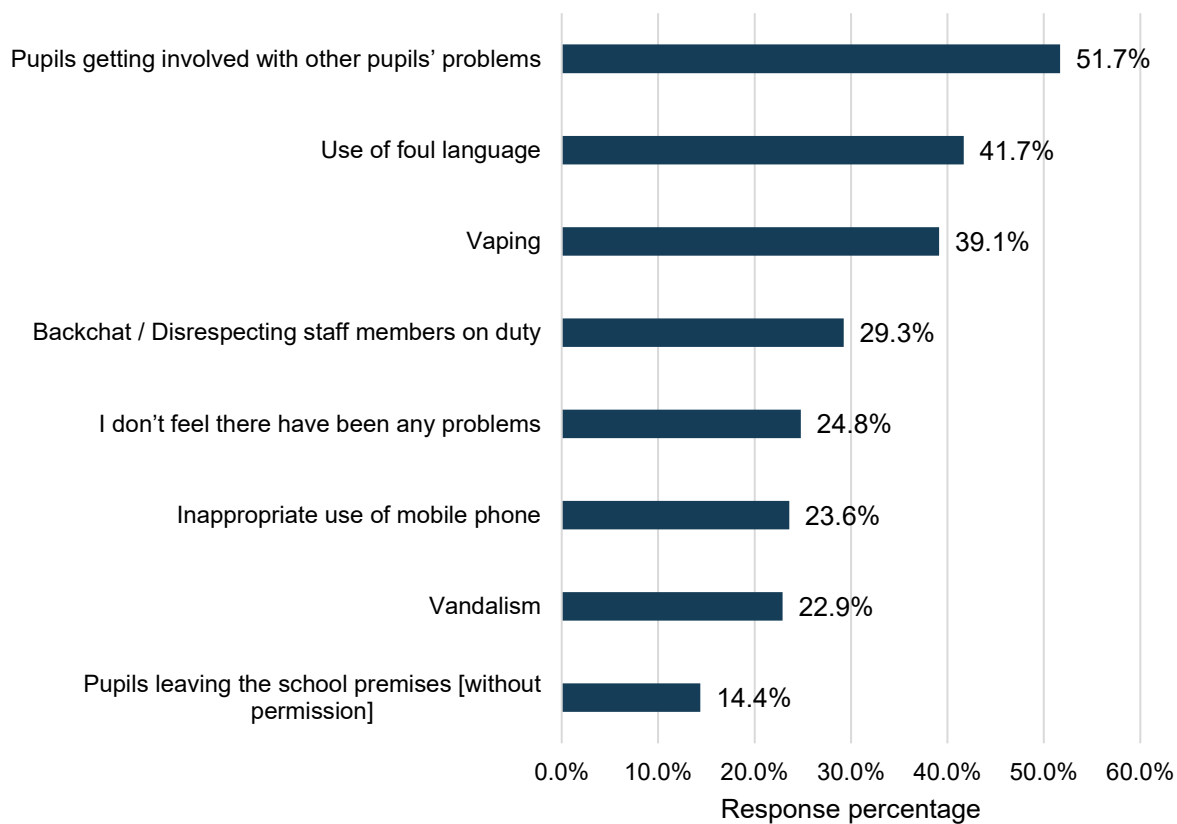
Percentage based on responses from 1,684 pupils.
Ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1= Unsatisfactory and 5=Excellent.

Chart 2: On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate behaviour around the school during break, lunch and between lessons?



Percentage based on responses from 1,692 pupils.
Ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1= Unsatisfactory and 5=Excellent.

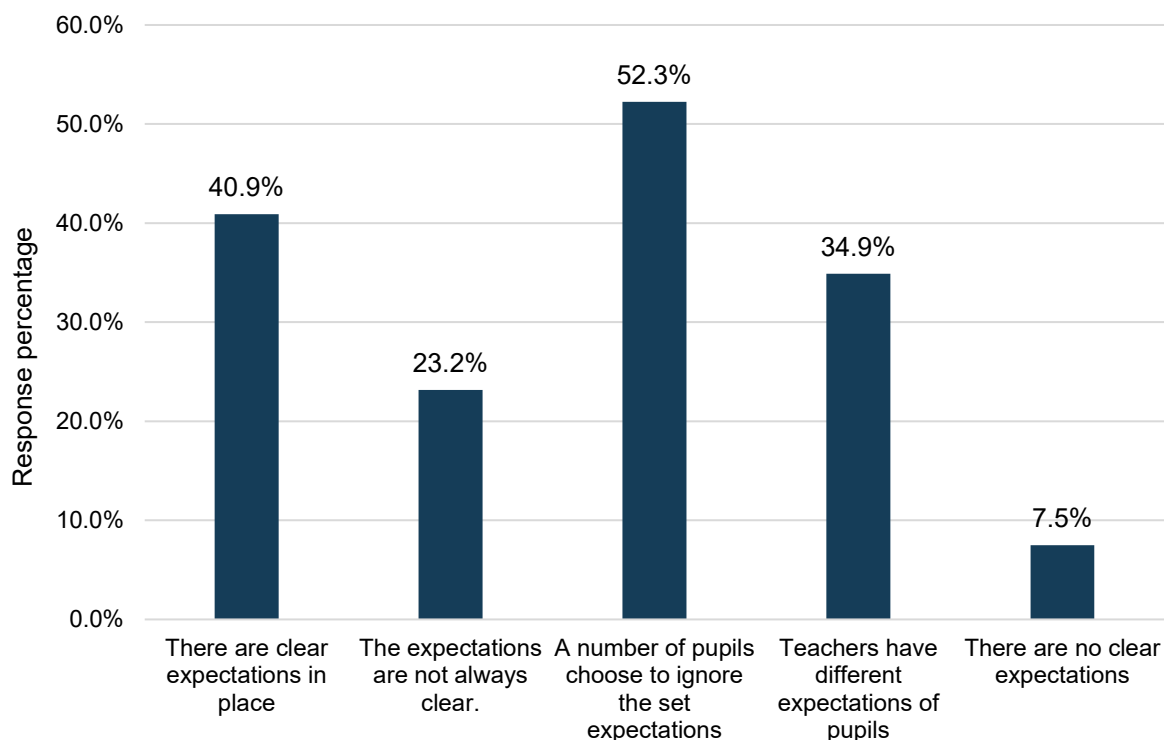
Chart 3: Based on your experience during break, lunch and between lessons this year, can you please identify the behaviours that have caused the most problems? Please select all that apply:



Percentage based on responses from 1,641 pupils.

Ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1= Unsatisfactory and 5=Excellent.

Chart 4: In your opinion which of the following statements are true about the expectations at your school?



Percentage based on responses from 1,640 pupils

Summary of main themes from headteacher surveys

The responses highlight key concerns around pupil behaviour, its management, and the support available to schools. Most respondents described behaviour as good among most pupils, though a few exhibit persistent and extreme disruptive behaviour. Many mentioned challenges they have observed since, and ascribe to, the lockdown periods imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including increased defiance, reduced resilience, and a lack of social skills. They stated that limited parental engagement and societal issues, such as social media influence and community anti-social behaviour, exacerbate problems.

Schools reported using various strategies, including consistent behaviour management, restorative practices, and trauma-informed approaches. However, they reported that reduced funding, staff cuts and insufficient specialist support services hinder progress. A significant concern arising from the headteachers' responses is the lack of places in specialist provisions like PRUs, with several respondents emphasising the urgent need for better-funded external services and clearer national policies.

Representative quotes include:

"95% of learners are well-behaved all the time. The other 5% have needs beyond what a school setting can provide."

"There are very few resources to support these children, and with reducing budgets, cutting staff, and no room in PRUs, these children are very difficult to support."

"Parents have no influence over their children's behaviour. Social media drives many problems in our school."

Overall, respondents requested stronger collaboration between schools, families and external agencies, backed by sustained financial investment and national policy changes.

Summaries by Question

Please use the space provided if you have any further comments about behaviour around the school.

Most respondents described behaviour in school as generally good, with around 90-95% of pupils following expectations. However, they stated that a few demonstrate significant challenges, including defiance, classroom disruption, and inappropriate use of mobile phones. Post-pandemic issues such as decreased social resilience, increased defiance, and reduced parental control were frequently noted.

Key Themes:

- **Persistent Issues:** "The behaviour of a much more extreme small minority has worsened since Covid."
- **Parental Support:** "Parents' reluctance to address challenging behaviour supports defiant attitudes."
- **Resource Constraints:** "The school has fewer resources to support challenging pupils due to budget cuts."

Which of the following do you feel are the most effective ways to promote positive behaviour?

Consistency, clear expectations, and parent-school collaboration were widely endorsed. Respondents stressed the need for consistent application of sanctions, clear rules, and strong relationships with pupils and families. Trauma-informed approaches and early interventions were also noted frequently.

Key Themes:

- **Consistency:** "Baseline expectations consistently applied are essential."
- **Parent Engagement:** "Build relationships with parents to gain support, though not all are willing to collaborate."
- **Targeted Support:** "Good identification of needs and bespoke support can help address behaviour issues."

How effectively does your LA/region support the school with behaviour challenges?

Most respondents expressed dissatisfaction with local authority (LA) support, describing it as insufficient due to funding and staffing shortages. Many reported long waiting times for specialist services and overburdened PRUs. School-to-school collaboration was noted as sometimes helpful but inconsistent.

Key Themes:

- **Limited Capacity:** "There is currently one behaviour specialist shared among all schools."
- **Bureaucracy:** "Support is slow and buried under lengthy paperwork."
- **Resource Shortages:** "No PRUs and lack of capacity mean that schools must manage extreme behaviours alone."

Are there examples of behaviour approaches that are working well in your school? What are the key qualities of these approaches?

Several successful approaches were noted, including consistent staff practices, trauma-informed strategies, and restorative practice. Clear classroom codes, meet-and-greet routines, and visible staff presence were frequently highlighted.

Key Themes:

- **Consistency and Expectations:** "Clear classroom codes and consistent sanctions promote a safe environment."
- **Restorative Approaches:** "Restorative practice has helped rebuild relationships after incidents."
- **Proactive Support:** "Early intervention and tailored support plans prevent problems from escalating."

Is there anything that could be done on a national level to address poor pupil behaviour?

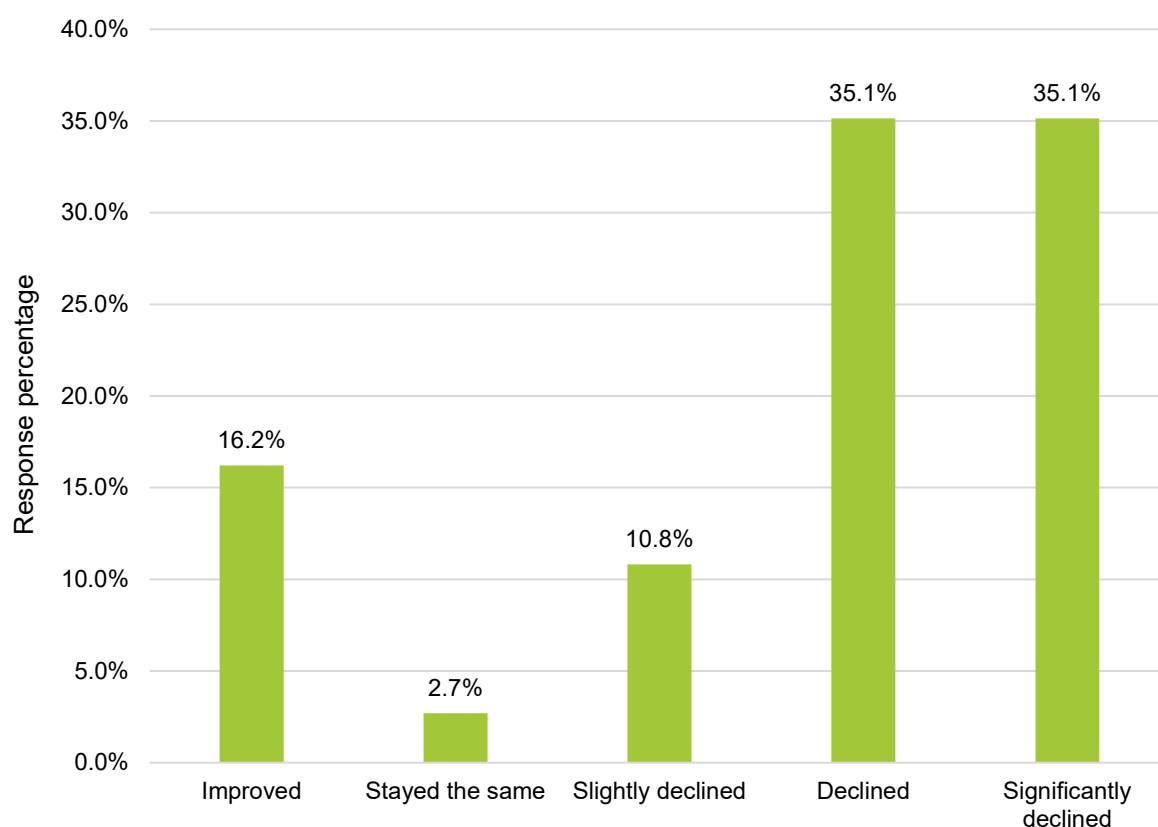
Many respondents called for a national strategy involving mobile phone bans, increased

funding for specialist provisions, and clearer accountability for parents. They advocated for better collaboration across education, health, and social services.

Key Themes:

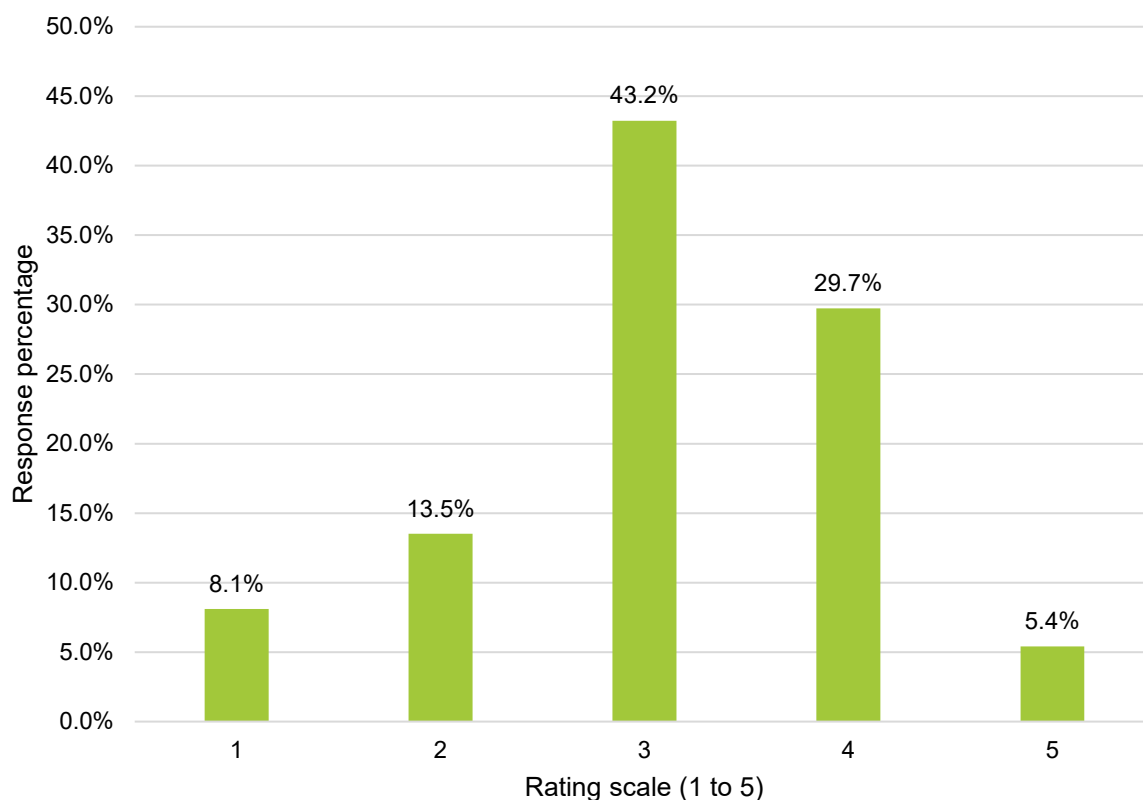
- **Funding and Resources:** "Schools need funded external support and more PRU spaces."
- **Parental Accountability:** "Sanction parents for failing to support school behaviour policies."
- **National Policy:** "A national campaign on the impact of social media and mental health is needed."

Chart 5: In the last two years would you say that generally pupil behaviour in school has:



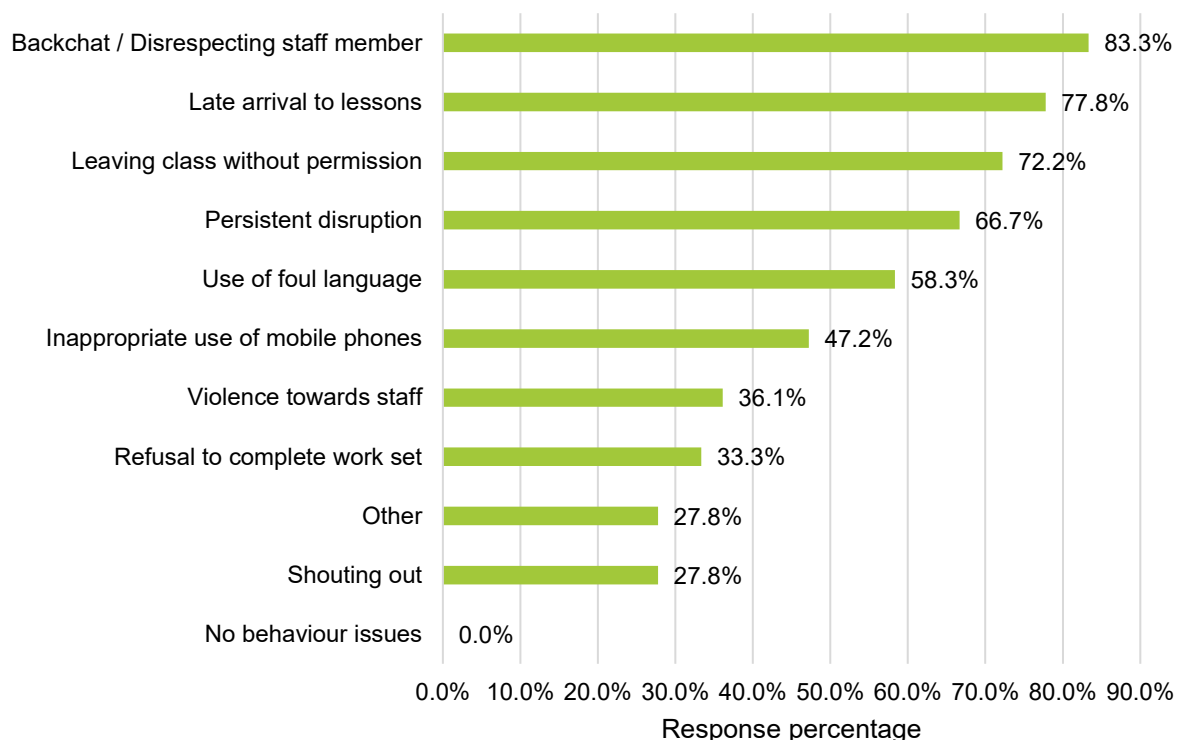
Percentage based on responses from 37 headteachers.

Chart 6: On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate behaviour in your school?



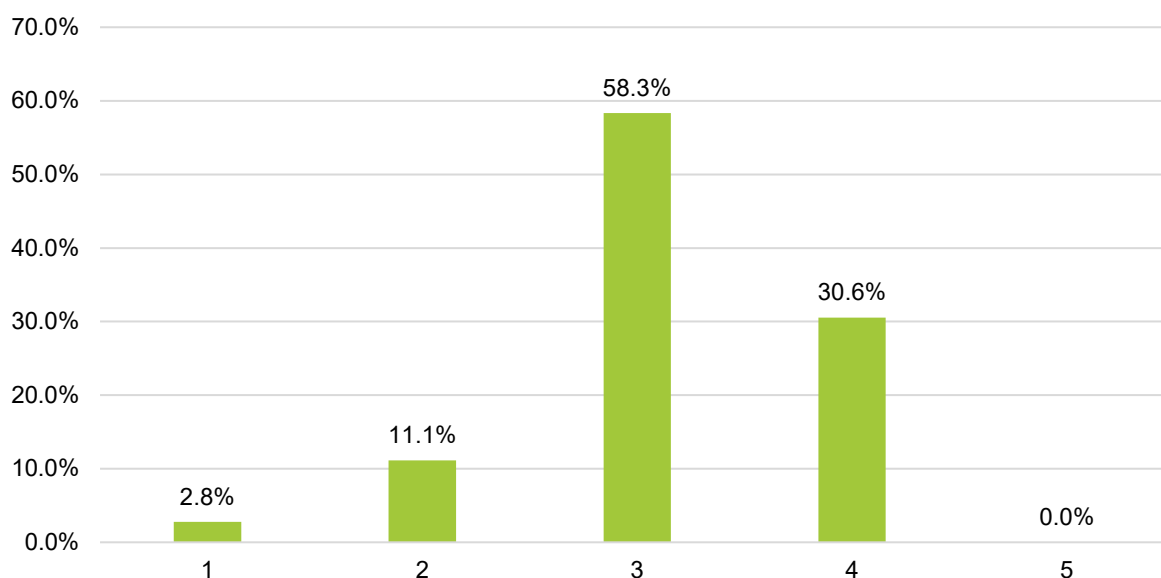
Percentage based on responses from 37 headteachers. Ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1= Unsatisfactory and 5=Excellent.

Chart 7: Based on your experience as a headteacher over the last academic year, can you identify the behaviours that have caused most issues in lessons for your staff? Please select all that apply:



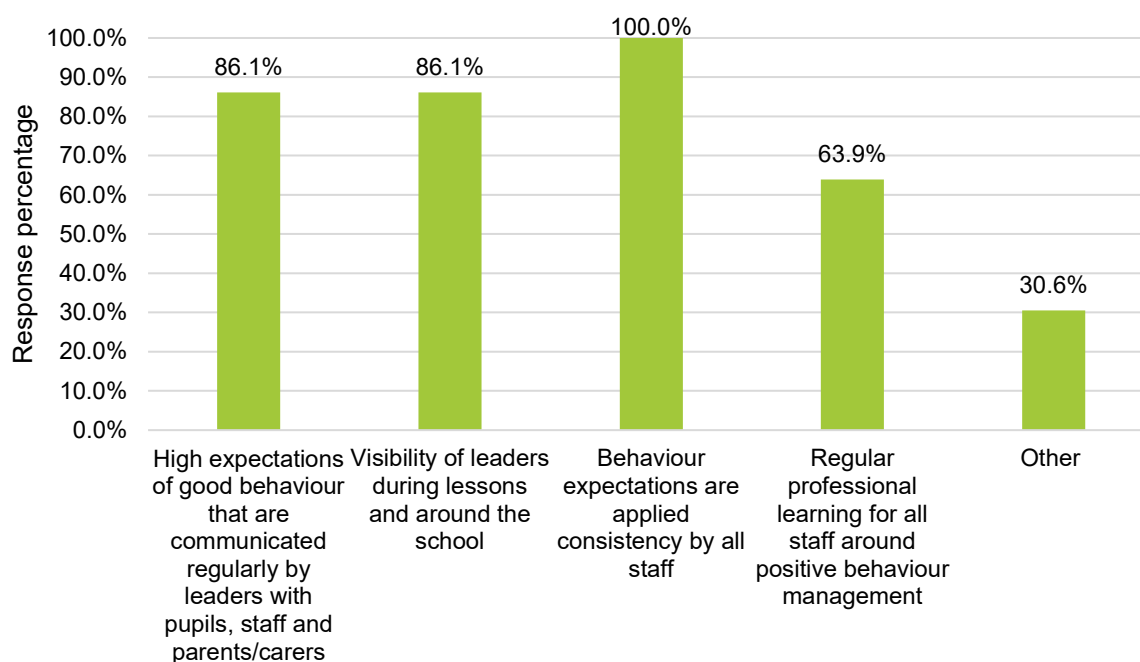
Percentage based on responses from 36 headteachers.

Chart 8: On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate behaviour around the school?



Percentage based on responses from 36 headteachers. Ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1=Unsatisfactory and 5=Excellent.

Chart 9: Which of the following do you feel are the most effective ways to promote positive behaviour? Please select all that apply:



Percentage based on responses from 36 headteachers.

Summary of main themes from staff results

The responses reveal significant concerns regarding pupil behaviour both in classrooms and around school premises. Key issues raised by staff included low-level disruption, defiance, truancy, lack of parental support, and socio-economic challenges. Many staff members expressed frustration with inconsistent enforcement of behaviour policies and limited external support. Some reported positive impacts where new policies have been introduced, although these improvements are often hampered by funding constraints and large class sizes.

Persistent low-level disruption, mobile phone misuse, and lack of respect toward staff and peers dominated the concerns. Staff stressed that a few pupils create disproportionate challenges that impact learning for the majority. Parental engagement was often described as insufficient, leaving schools to manage complex behavioural issues without adequate home support.

Key quotes include:

“Students seem to have less awareness of boundaries since COVID, more reluctant to engage with learning and a decline in resilience.”

“Truancy is our most significant issue. Verbal abuse of staff is becoming more common.”

“I can’t teach! Thirty years of experience has not prepared me for the day-to-day challenge of just trying to teach my subject.”

Detailed Summary of Responses

Based on your experience in the classroom this year, can you identify the behaviours that have caused most issues in your lessons?

Common Themes:

- Low-level Disruption: Talking during lessons, wandering around, ignoring instructions, and persistent chatting are frequently mentioned
- Defiance and Disrespect: Pupils challenging authority, answering back, and refusing to complete tasks are common concerns
- Aggression: Verbal aggression toward staff and peers, with occasional reports of physical altercations
- Truancy and Lateness: Internal truancy, skipping lessons, and corridor wandering are widely reported
- Lack of Motivation and Effort: Pupils showing minimal effort, relying on staff to complete tasks, and not having the right equipment to complete tasks

Relevant Quotes:

“A minority of pupils attach more importance to rule-breaking and getting away with stuff than learning.”

“Pupils wandering in the corridors impacting lessons that are going on.”

“Talking across the classroom and distracting friends is the biggest issue in the majority of normal lessons.”

Please use the space provided if you have any further comment about behaviour in lessons.

Key Concerns:

- Parental Support: Many respondents describe parents as unsupportive, sometimes undermining staff by excusing poor behaviour.
- Inadequate Support Systems: A lack of targeted support for pupils with ALN, including those with ADHD and emotional difficulties, is frequently noted.
- Impact on Teaching: Managing behaviour takes significant teaching time, reducing the quality of learning for well-behaved pupils.

Notable Quotes:

“The systems in place involving outside agencies are too slow, and nurture provision is limited.”

“Parental support is not as it was; poor behaviour at home is not being addressed by parents, and we are having to pick it up in school.”

“Behaviour has severely impacted teaching due to large class sizes and a lack of support for vulnerable pupils.”

Please use the space provided if you have any further comment about behaviour around the school.

Common Issues:

- Corridor Conduct: Truancy, vandalism, and frequent verbal abuse occur during unstructured times. Pupils congregate in disruptive groups, engaging in intimidating behaviour, including gang-like dynamics.
- Supervision and staffing: A shortage of staff in corridors and common areas contributes to the disorder.

Relevant Quotes:

“The corridors have no order and are completely chaotic on occasions.”

“Many pupils truant, spend the day hiding around the school, and disrupt learning in other classes.”

“Unstructured time leaves a lot to be desired. Duty staff rarely intervene, and students themselves comment on the inconsistency of enforcement.”

Please use the space provided if you would like to comment further about behaviour expectations.

Main Themes:

- Policy consistency: Behaviour policies are not consistently enforced, creating confusion among pupils and frustration among staff.
- Need for clear consequences: Many staff stress the need for well-defined and enforced consequences for rule-breaking.
- Pupil accountability: Respondents note that some pupils openly disregard expectations, often due to lack of home discipline.

Representative Quotes:

“Expectations are clear but ignored and have no ‘teeth’.”

“Behaviour expectations are clear, but a few seem to believe they are untouchable.”

“Some pupils are allowed to get away with too much poor behaviour, and others are punished for the same offences.”

Please use the space provided if you would like to comment further about any aspect of behaviour.

Highlighted Issues:

- Funding and support: Calls for more alternative provision, mental health support, and funding for behaviour management are common.
- Staff well-being: Persistent behaviour issues negatively impact staff morale and well-being.
- Training and development: Staff request further training in managing challenging behaviours and supporting pupils with mental health issues.

Key Quotes:

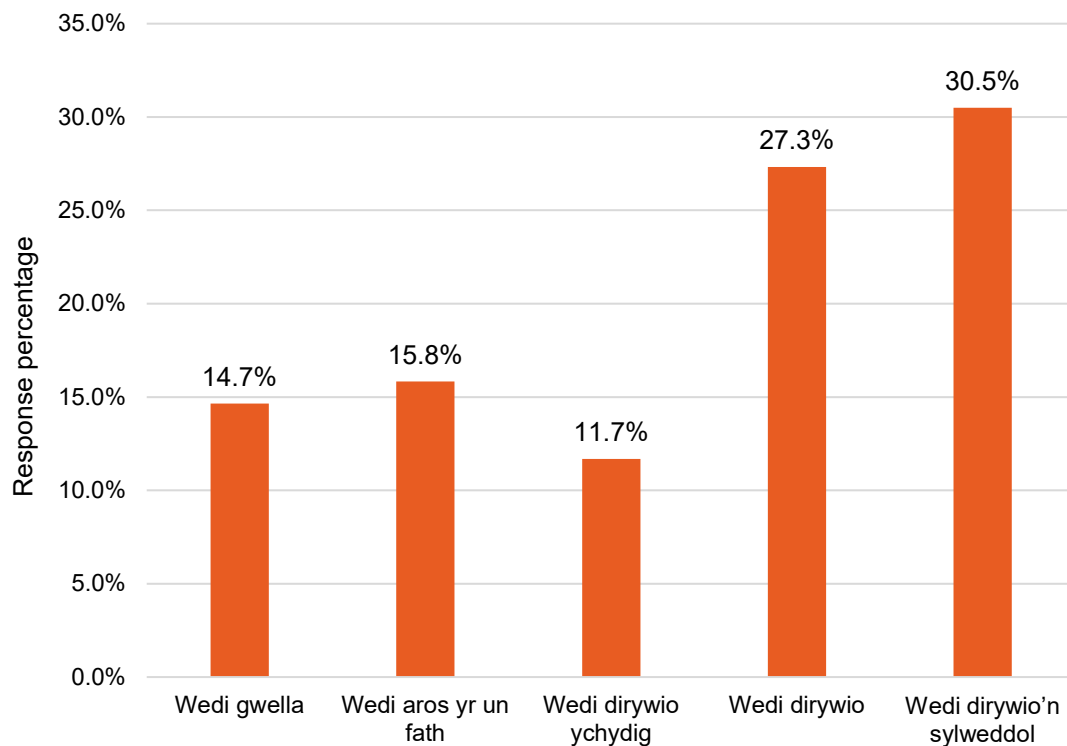
“More needs to be done at an all-Wales level, especially around phones and social media use.”

“Schools seem to be encouraged to accept poor behaviour as a feature of modern life.”

“The lack of provision for high-tariff students means others aren’t fully supported.”

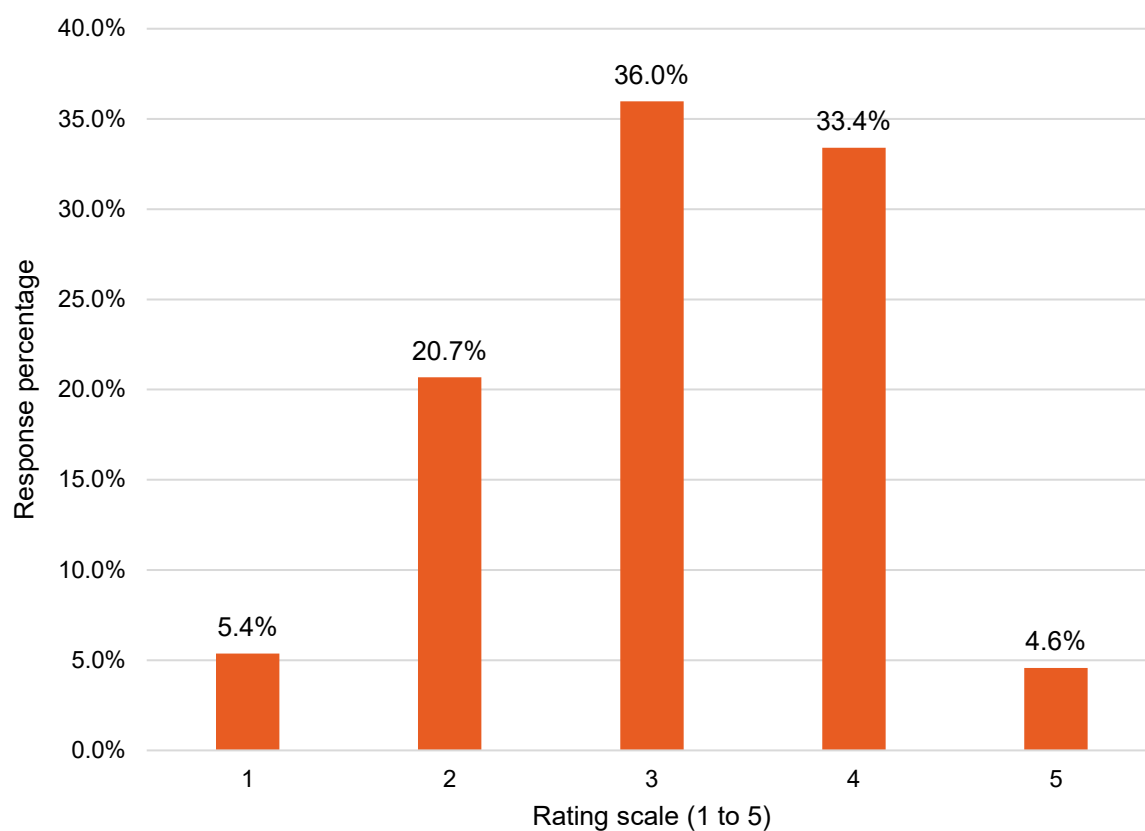
Overall, the key concerns for staff respondents were the need for consistent policy enforcement, improved parental engagement, and increased resources to address persistent behavioural challenges in schools. Respondents stressed that, while most pupils behave well, the disruptive behaviour of a few has a significant impact on the overall school environment. Addressing these challenges will require co-ordinated action across schools, parents, and policymakers.

Chart 10: In the last two years would you say that pupil behaviour in your school has:



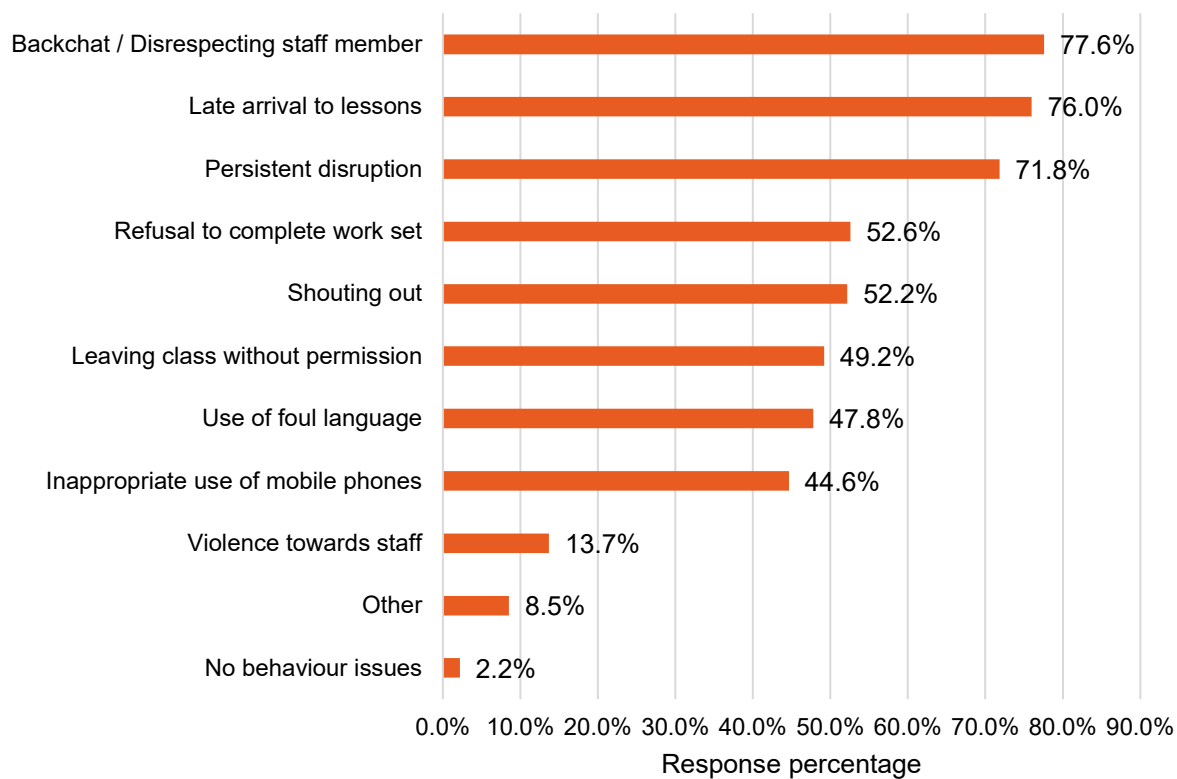
Percentage based on responses from 505 school staff.

Chart 11: On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate behaviour in your lessons



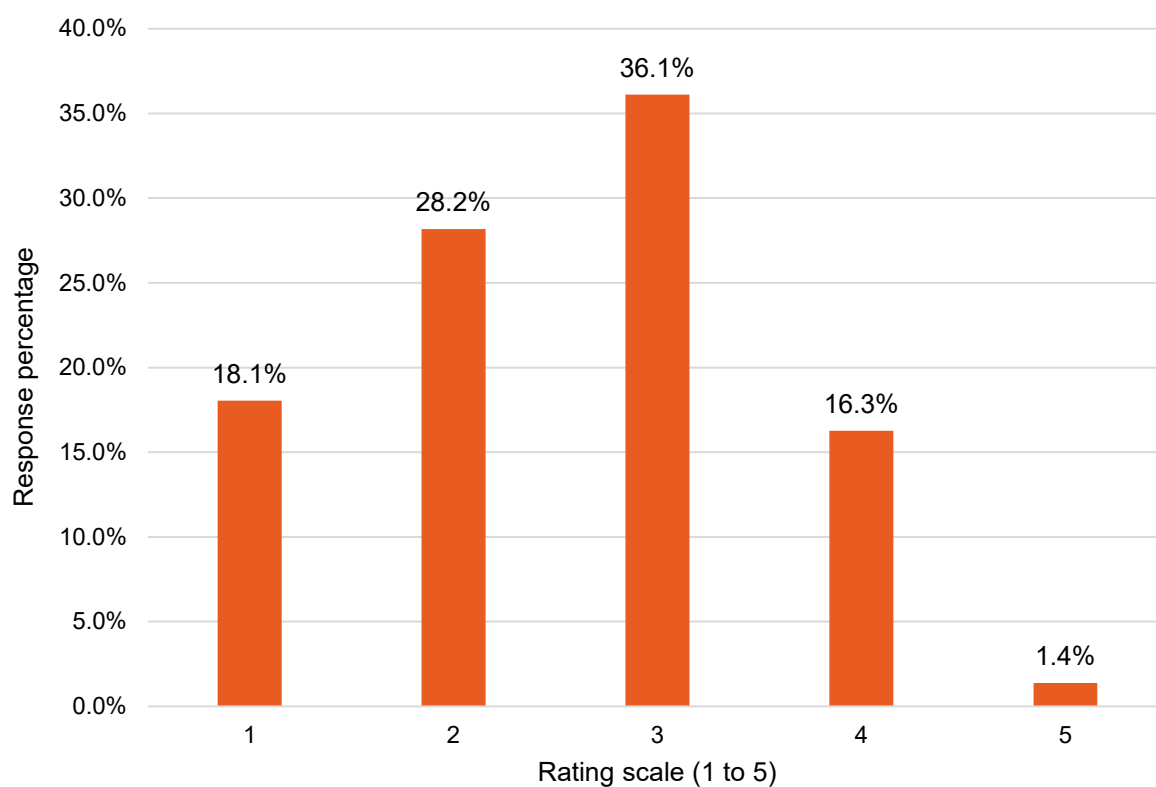
Percentage based on responses from 503 school staff.
Ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1= Unsatisfactory and 5=Excellent.

Chart 12: Based on your experience in the classroom this year, can you identify the behaviours that have caused most issues in your lessons? Please select all that apply:



Percentage based on responses from 504 school staff.

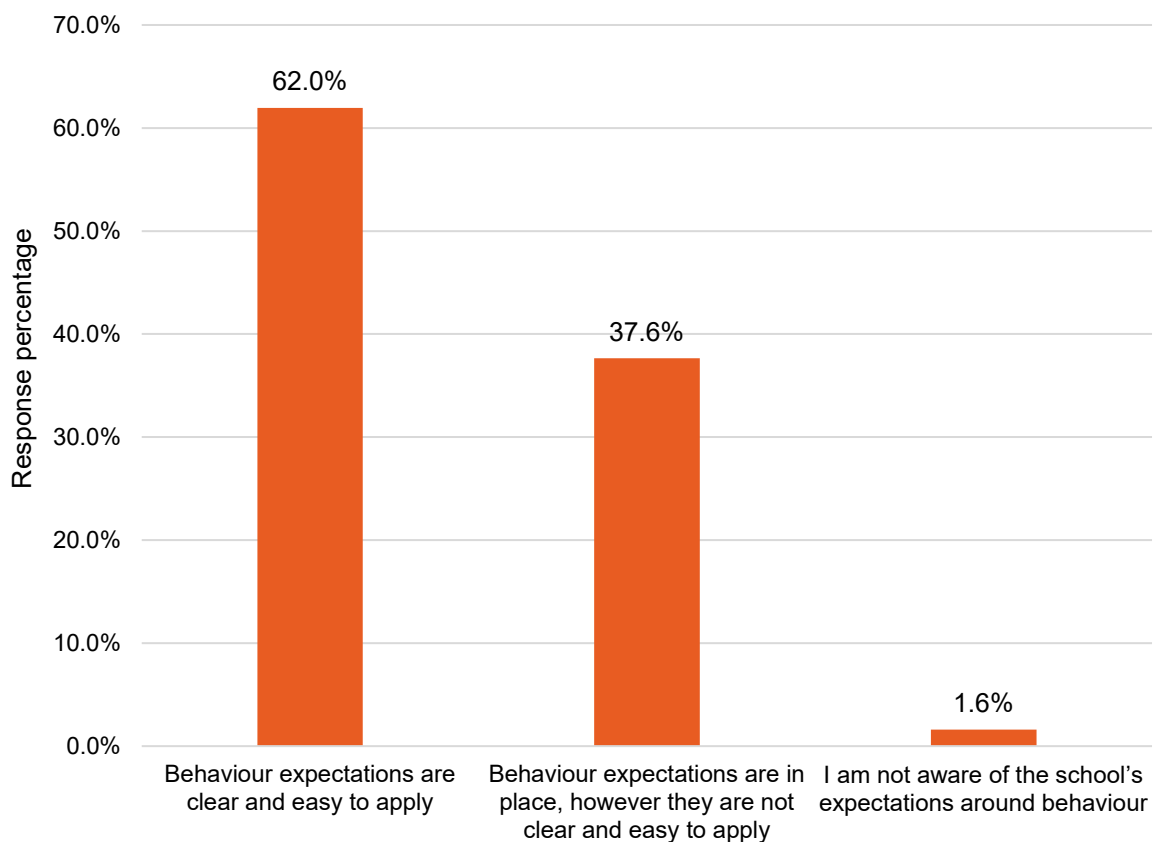
Chart 13: On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate behaviour around the school



Percentage based on responses from 504 school staff.

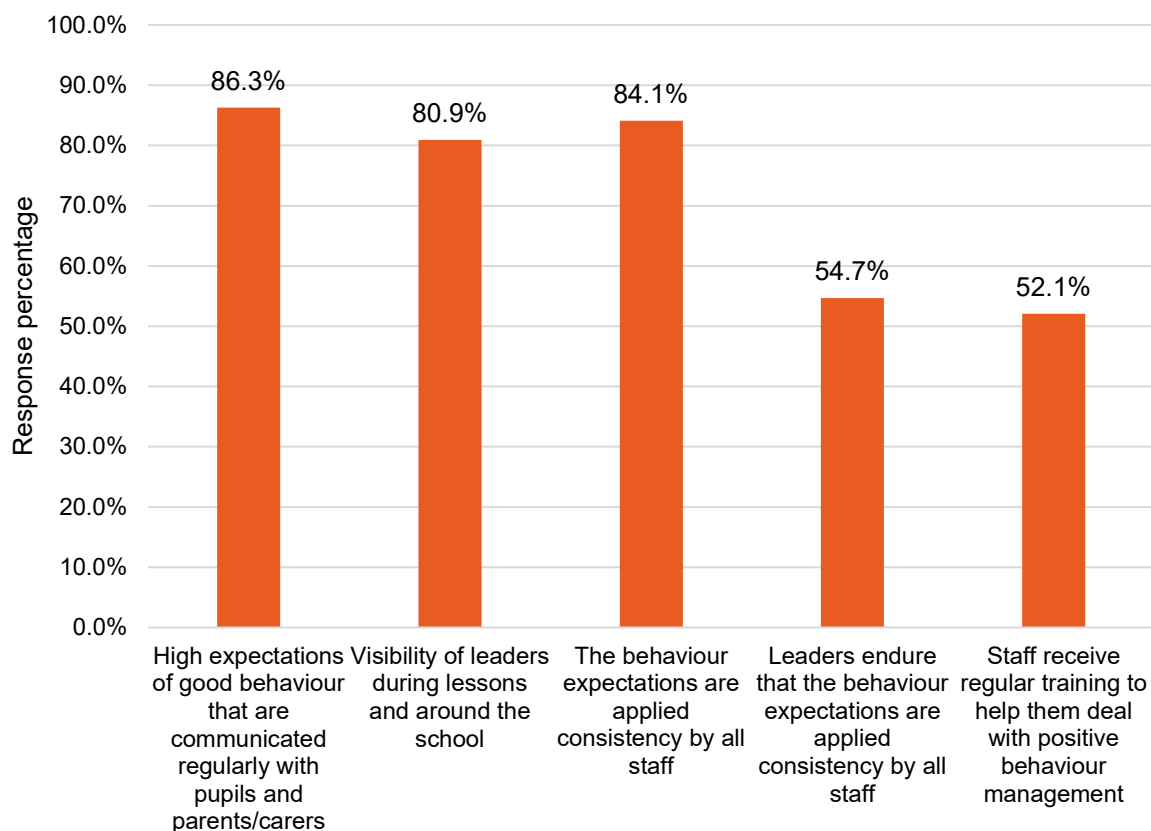
Ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1= Unsatisfactory and 5=Excellent.

Chart 14: In your opinion, which of the following statements apply to the behaviour expectations/approaches at your school? Please select all that apply



Percentage based on responses from 502 school staff.

Chart 15: What do you feel are the most important ways to promote positive behaviour in your school. Please select all that apply:



Percentage based on responses from 503 school staff

Similar questions for comparison across surveys

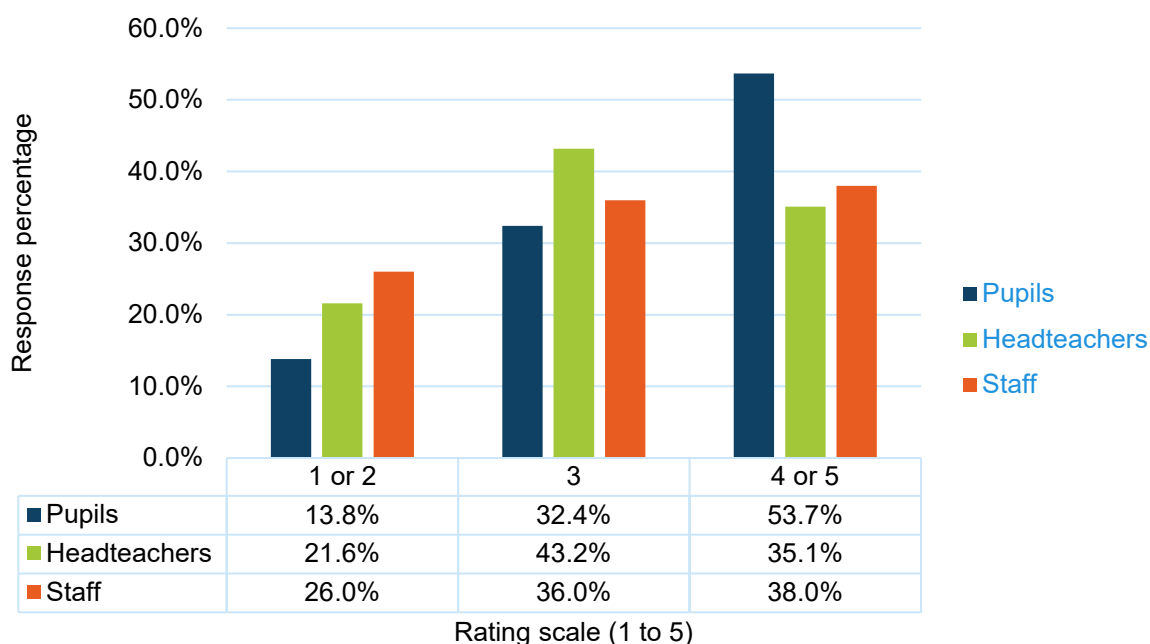
There were a number of common or similar questions across the three questionnaires, in order for us to compare responses between pupils, school staff members, and headteachers.

<u>Pupil</u>	<u>School staff</u>	<u>Headteacher</u>
Question 2 – On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate behaviour in your lessons	Question 2 – On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate behaviour in your lessons	Question 2 – On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate behaviour in your school
Question 3 - Based on your experience in your classrooms this year, can you identify the behaviours that have caused most issues in your lessons?	Question 3 - Based on your experience in the classroom this year, can you identify the behaviours that have caused most issues in your lessons? Please select all that apply	Question 3 - Based on your experience as a headteacher over the last academic year, can you identify the behaviours that have caused most issues in lessons for your staff.

<u>Pupil</u>	<u>School staff</u>	<u>Headteacher</u>
Please select all that apply		Please select all that apply
Question 5 - On a scale of 1-5 how you would rate behaviour around the school during break, lunch and between lessons	Question 5 - On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate behaviour around the school	Question 4 - On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate behaviour around the school.
	<p>Question 9 - What do you feel are the most important ways to promote positive behaviour in your school.</p> <p>Please select all that apply</p>	<p>Question 6 - Which of the following do you feel are the most effective ways to promote positive behaviour?</p> <p>Please select all that apply</p>
Question 8 - In your opinion which of the following statements are true about the expectations at your school	<p>Question 7 - In your opinion, which of the following statements apply to the behaviour expectations/approaches at your school?</p> <p>Please select all that apply</p>	

In response to question 2 'On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate behaviour in your lessons/school' where 1 = Unsatisfactory and 5 = Excellent.

Chart 16: Comparison:



Response percentage based on responses from 1,684 pupils, 37 headteachers and 503 school staff. Ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1= Unsatisfactory and 5=Excellent.

Over half of pupils rated behaviour positively, with 53.7% rating it a '4' or '5'. In comparison, 38.0% of staff and 35.1% of headteachers gave similar positive ratings.

A total of 32.4% of pupils, 36.0% of staff, and 43.2% of headteachers rated behaviour in lessons a '3'. Ratings at the lower end of the scale '1' or '2' were given by 13.8% of pupils, 26.0% of staff, and 21.6% of headteachers.

The responses indicate differences in perceptions of behaviour in lessons, among pupils, staff and headteachers. Pupils were more positive about behaviour in lessons in comparison to school staff and headteachers.

In response to question 3 'Based on your experience this year, can you identify the behaviours that have caused most issues in your lessons.'

Comparison:

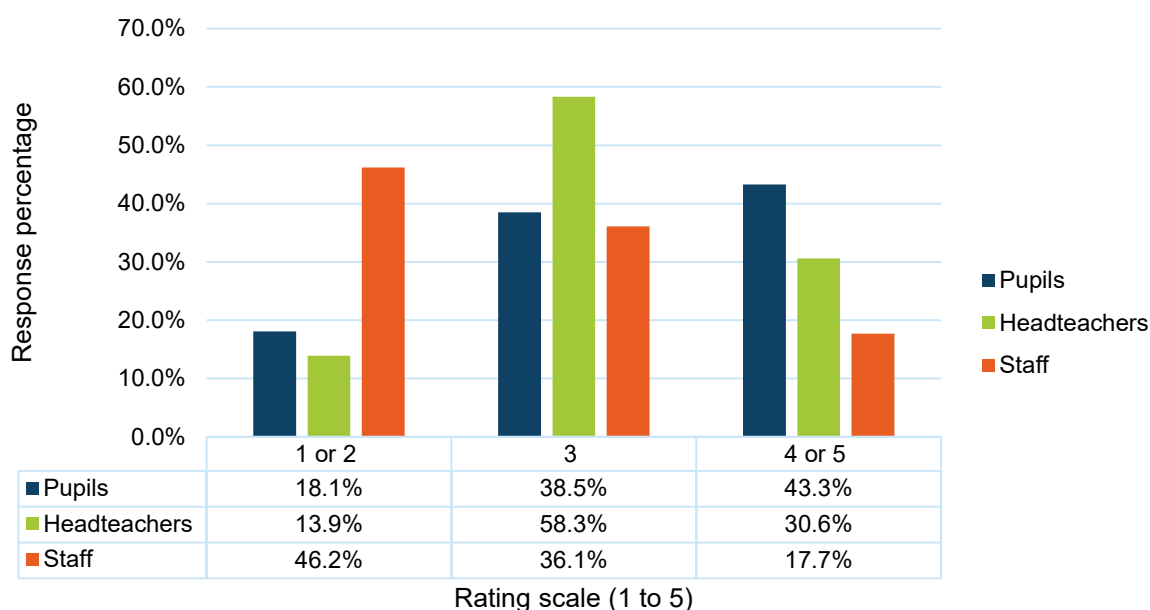
Group	Violence towards staff	Backchat/Disrespecting member of staff	Persistent disruption	Shouting out	Foul language	Late arrival to lesson	Refusal to complete work	Use of mobile phones	Leaving class without permission	No behaviour issues	Other
Pupils		54.0%	43.7%	57.1%	34.5%	51.7%	27.4%	27.3%	29.0%	13.4%	11.0%
Staff	13.7%	77.6%	71.8%	52.2%	47.8%	76.0%	52.6%	44.6%	49.2%	2.2%	8.5%
Headteachers	36.1%	83.3%	66.7%	27.8%	58.3%	77.8%	33.3%	47.2%	72.2%	0.0%	27.8%

Over half of pupils (57.1%) identified ‘shouting out’ as a behaviour that have caused most issues in lessons, closely followed by ‘Back chat/disrespecting member of staff’ (54.0%) and ‘Late arrival to lesson’ (51.7%).

Many staff (77.6%) identified ‘Backchat/Disrespecting member of staff’ as a behaviour that have caused most issues in lessons, closely followed by Persistent disruption’ (71.8%). Over half of staff identified ‘refusal to complete work’ (52.6%) and ‘shouting out’ (52.2%) as behaviours that have caused the most issues in lessons.

Headteachers were asked to identify the behaviours that have caused most issues in lessons for their staff. Similar to staff, many headteachers (83.3%) identified ‘Backchat/disrespecting member of staff’ as a behaviour that has cause the most issues. Many (77.8%) headteachers identified ‘late arrival to lessons’ and ‘leaving class without permission (72.2%) as issues.

Chart 17: In response to Question – On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate behaviour around the school? Where 1= unsatisfactory and 5=excellent



Response percentage based on responses from 1,692 pupils, 36 headteachers and 504 school staff. Ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1= Unsatisfactory and 5=Excellent.

The responses to this question show a difference of perspectives on behaviour around the school.

Among pupils, just under half of respondents (43.3%) rated behaviour around the school highly as giving it '4' or '5', while 38.5% rated it in the middle giving a score of '3' and a few (18.1%) rated it as '1' or '2'.

In contrast, nearly half of the staff (46.2%) rated behaviour around the school on the lower end of the scale at '1' or '2'. 36.1% rated it a middle score of '3' and a few rate it highly as '4' or '5'.

Headteachers responses show a different pattern again, with over half of respondents (58.3%) rating behaviour as a '3', a minority (13.9%) rating it highly as '4' or '5' and a few giving it a low rating of '1' or '2'.

In response to School Staff: Question 9 - What do you feel are the most important ways to promote positive behaviour in your school and Headteacher: Question 6 - Which of the following do you feel are the most effective ways to promote positive behaviour?

Group	High expectations of good behaviour that are communicated regularly with pupils and parents/carers	Visibility of leaders during lessons and around the school	The behaviour expectations are applied consistency by all staff	Leaders ensure that the behaviour expectations are applied consistency by all staff	Staff receive regular training to help them deal with positive behaviour management	Other
Staff	86.3%	80.9%	84.1%	54.7%	52.1%	N/A
Headteachers	86.1%	86.1%	100.0%	N/A	63.9%	30.6%

Overall, most staff and headteacher respondents stated that high expectations, leader visibility, and consistency in behaviour expectations are the most important/effective ways to promote positive behaviour. Notably, all headteachers highlighted that one of the most effective ways to promote positive behaviour is that behaviour expectations are applied consistently by all staff. Additionally, over half of respondents in both groups believed regular training for staff in positive behaviour management is important.

In Pupils: In your opinion which of the following statements are true about the expectations at your school. Staff: Question 7 - In your opinion, which of the following statements apply to the behaviour expectations/approaches at your school?

Group	There are clear expectations in place/ Behaviour expectations are clear and easy to apply	The expectations are not always clear / Behaviour expectations are in place, however they are not clear and easy to apply	There are no clear explanations / I am not aware of the school's expectations around behaviour	A number of pupils choose to ignore the set expectations	Teachers have different expectations of pupils
Pupils	40.9%	23.2%	7.5%	52.3%	34.5%
Staff	62.0%	37.6%	1.6%	N/A	

A majority (62%) of staff and 40.9% of pupils acknowledged the presence of clear behaviour expectations.

A minority of pupils (23.2%) and staff (37.6%) felt that expectations are not always clear.

Very few pupils (7.5%) and staff (1.6%) believed there are no clear expectations.

Additionally, over half of pupils reported that a number of pupils choose to ignore the set expectations, and over a third said that teachers have different expectation of pupils.

Methods and evidence base

To inform this report, during the autumn term of 2024, inspectors visited a sample of 24 secondary and all-age schools across Wales, selected on the basis of size, levels of deprivation, language medium and location. We visited five all-age schools (secondary phase only) and 19 secondary schools. 16 were English medium, five were Welsh medium and three were bilingual (one type A and 2 type B). During the visits, we had discussions with leaders in charge of behaviour and well-being, a group of staff with different roles and responsibilities, support staff that included administrative staff and school site managers and pupils, including those who had experienced challenging behaviour. We visited schools' onsite well-being and behaviour provisions and observed behaviour during breaktime, lunchtime and in corridors between lessons. We also drew on information from inspection activity during 2022-2024.

A total of 10 of the 22 Welsh local authorities provided feedback about their work to support schools. Three online national surveys gathered the views of headteachers (43 responses), school staff (514 responses) and pupils (1,705 responses) during the autumn term of 2024. The surveys were publicised across Estyn's social media channels. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, we did not ask respondents to name the colleges they work at or attend. The sample was self-selecting, which means it is not representative and may be subject to self-selection bias (i.e. more likely to be completed by those who have 'something to say' and those who have access to the technology required to complete it, such as an internet connection). Copies of the questionnaires we used for this thematic review can be found on the publication page.

Estyn would like to thank all those involved in this thematic review.

Glossary

Adverse childhood experiences	Stressful or traumatic events, including abuse or neglect. They may also include household dysfunction such as witnessing domestic violence or growing up with family members who have substance use disorders, mental illness or are incarcerated.
CAHMS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA)	<p>ELSAs are Teaching Assistants who have been trained to provide support to children who have difficulties understanding and regulating their own emotions and behaviours. They are trained and supervised by Educational Psychologists and there is a national network covering Wales and England.</p> <p>Further details, resources and additional links available at: https://www.elsanetwork.org/</p>
Education other than at school (EOTAS)	When local authorities need to arrange for pupils to access education other than at school (EOTAS). This may be because a pupil is ill, has been or is at risk of being excluded or struggles to access school due to their social and emotional or well-being needs.
Managed move	A managed move is a carefully planned voluntary move from one school to a new school and may be a suitable alternative where a pupil is at risk of a permanent exclusion, poses a risk to the welfare of others or refuses to attend school.
Nurture groups	The nurturing approach aims to identify missing early nurturing experiences and give children and young people the social and emotional skills that can help them improve peer relationships, develop resilience and increase confidence.
Maslow's Hierarchy of needs	<p>Maslow's theory suggests that our human needs can be organised into a clear hierarchy, often depicted as a triangle or pyramid. From bottom to top, the levels are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physiological needs (food, water, shelter, rest)

- Safety needs (security, stability, freedom from fear)
- Social and belonging needs (friendship, intimacy, acceptance) Esteem needs (respect, recognition, status)
- Self-actualisation needs (achieving one's full potential, creativity)

PRU

Pupil Referral Unit

Restorative practice

A school that takes a restorative approach to resolving conflict and preventing harm.

Restorative approaches enable those who have been harmed to convey the impact of the harm to those responsible, and for those responsible to acknowledge this impact and take steps to make it right.

SEBD

Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

SEBD is an umbrella term which is used to describe a range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties experienced by many children and young people in today's society. There are many various definitions for SEBD, however, there is no absolute definition (Howarth and Fisher, 2005)

Social and emotional intervention programmes

Whole-school / whole-class or individual and group programmes that promote social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance and good emotional health

Trauma-informed school

Schools who recognise and respond to the impact of toxic stress on children

Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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