

### Introduction

The Scottish government have published their latest research into [behaviour in schools](#) in Scotland. This previously regular report had not been updated for several years due to the COVID pandemic. There is nothing in the report that will surprise UNISON members working in Scottish schools. Nevertheless, it is helpful to see the detail of what our members experience at work laid out so comprehensively. The Minister announced yesterday that the government would develop a plan to deal with the issues which, while including some measures that UNISON has called for such as investment in training for staff and better reporting, still falls short of the action and funding needed to deal with the challenges staff face.

### Behaviour In Schools Report

While teachers have been the focus of media reports is the report clearly shows that the biggest impact of behavioural challenges falls on support staff. The staff with the lowest pay and least training and support. The research team undertook surveys and interviews with head teachers and teachers and focus groups with classroom-based support staff.

### Findings

- 86% of staff encountered “low level” disruptive behaviour at least once a day in the last week (before they were surveyed).
- Two thirds had experienced verbal abuse and 59% physical aggression.
- Head teachers were more likely to report higher levels of positive behaviour.
- Support staff more likely than heads or teachers to encounter almost all types of serious disruptive behaviours.
- Support staff experienced the greatest numbers of physical aggression and violence towards them in the last 12 months.

These findings support the feedback from UNISON members that they are the ones who are expected to deal with the most challenging behaviours on a day-to-day basis.

The incidence of serious disruptive behaviours has increased since 2016 (the last report). This includes sexist abuse towards staff. The only serious disruptive behaviours that remain low and largely unchanged are reported instances including racist, homophobic/biphobic/transphobic and religious abuse and abuse related to disability. Sadly, the only protected characteristic that the report gathered info on is sex so it is not really possible to explore the experience of those with the other protected characteristics properly. These types of abuse may just be unrecorded.

There has been a notable increase in primary school support staff saying they are negatively impacted by verbal abuse, physical aggression and violence towards themselves and other staff.

Support staff were more likely than teachers to report that serious disruptive behaviours have a negative impact on their work experience. Those who experience violence and aggression in the qualitative research reported a profound impact on their mental health.

Support staff agreed that they “played an important role in promoting positive relationships and behaviour in schools”. Most did not feel they have time within their paid working day to enable discussions/participate in planning with others. They also raised schools lacking funds to pay support staff to attend training or meetings outside their working hours or to provide supply cover to enable them to access support and training during their working hours.

Staff also indicated that they did not report all incidents because of lack of feedback from previous reports. Reporting systems are also time consuming and difficult. Therefore, all incidents are not being recorded.

### **Conclusion**

This is a substantial report at over 200 pages. The evidence clearly supports the feedback from members. UNISON has been raising these issues locally and nationally for many years. Nothing in this report should be a surprise to government or local authorities. Failure to act earlier has just seen the problem grow. Urgent action is needed to protect staff and pupils. The needs of all young people, including those whose behaviour is causing concern, are not being met.

Reporting incidents needs to be much easier. UNISON still encourages members to ensure that they do report incidents.

The initial response to this report from the government is inadequate. There needs to be substantial investment in our school staff and the wider support teams that children and young people need: In ELC, youth work, social work and educational psychologists. Support staff need to be provided with training, support and time to fully participate in developing strategies to support the pupils they are working with. The money so far announced is wholly inadequate for the challenges this report outlines.

### **Action for Branches**

Branches are encouraged to contact employers to ensure they are taking measures to record incidents of abuse in schools and take action in response to those reports. Please ensure that Health and Safety reps are aware of this report. While the funding outlined so far by the Scottish government is inadequate branches are encouraged to contact employers to ensure that support staff are included in their plans to use the monies announced. Finally, please send a rep to the regular Education Issues Group meetings and use the materials they provide for their violence at work campaign. For more details on the EIG contact your regional organisers or Mandy McDowall [M.Mcdowall@unison.co.uk](mailto:M.Mcdowall@unison.co.uk).

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