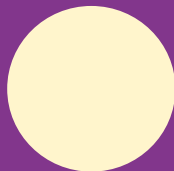


Behaviour and mental health in schools

Authors: Charlotte Rainer, Huong Le and Kadra Abdinasir



Children & Young People's
Mental Health Coalition

Acknowledgements

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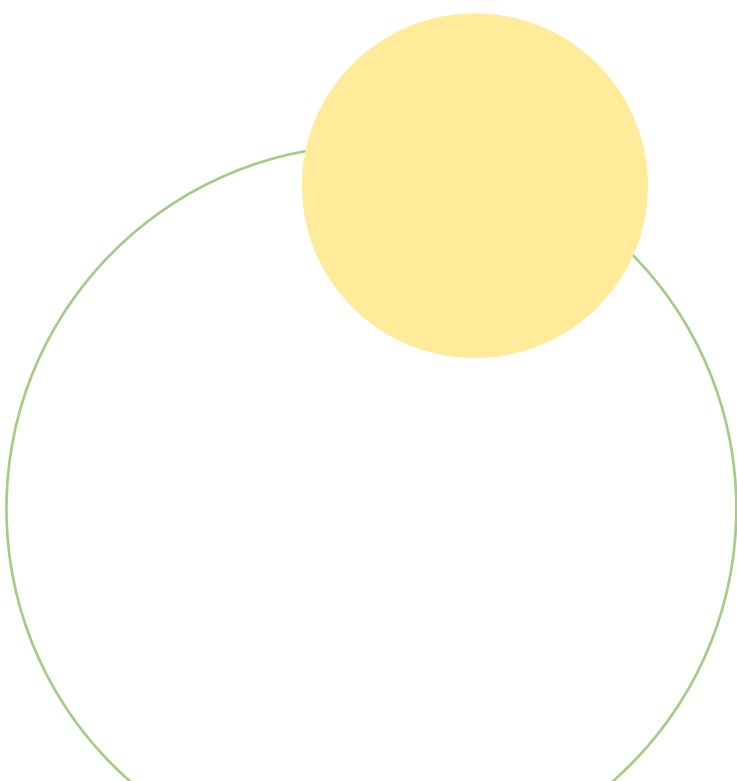
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Finally, thank you to the Aim Foundation whose generous contribution and support made this inquiry possible.



Glossary

Behaviours of concern: Throughout the report, we will use 'behaviours of concern' when talking about challenging behaviour within schools. This is because we believe behaviour must signify to adults that the onus is on them to be curious and concerned enough to provide support. We have avoided the use of 'challenging behaviours' as our feedback has highlighted that this has sometimes been used as an unhelpful label. We understand that many people who have contributed to this report may use a variety of terms when referring to behaviours of concern.

Behaviour management techniques: We use this term to refer to approaches used by schools to prevent and respond to misbehaviour.

Removal rooms: These are rooms or separate spaces from the classroom, where pupils are sent following disruptive behaviour, that are used as a behaviour management technique. We understand that different settings use differing terms to refer to this, for example, isolation rooms, inclusive rooms or nurture rooms. For the purposes of this report, we will use the phrase 'removal rooms' to reflect the latest government guidance.

Punitive approaches: This term is used throughout the report to describe sanctions-based responses and punishments in response to behaviour in schools.

School Behaviour Policy: Schools are expected to have a policy in place setting out their vision and approach to behaviour, including details on how staff will support pupils to meet behavioural expectations.

SEN and disabilities: The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice defines special educational needs (SEN) as having a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made. The Equality Act defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term impact on a person's ability to do normal daily activities. This includes learning difficulties, mental health conditions and hidden impairments such as autism, and speech, language and communications impairments. Whilst definitions of disability and SEN are covered by different legislation, there is significant overlap. We have chosen to use the term SEN and disabilities in the report to ensure they have equal recognition. We recognise some quotes and research included in the report use the term 'SEND' to refer to special educational needs and disabilities.

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Foreword

As former Chair of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition, I am proud to introduce the findings from our year-long inquiry into behaviour and mental health in schools.

Education is a key pillar in children and young people's lives as they grow and develop and plays an important role in their mental health and wellbeing. Alongside our members, I share the vision of an inclusive education system where every child, no matter their needs or life experiences, is valued and thrives. I believe that changing the approach to behaviour in schools from one that is focused on the use of punitive approaches, to one that is understanding of and responsive to children's needs, will be our first step in the journey to achieving this vision.

In reality, however, many schools are facing rising mental health needs and widening inequalities. Reduced school budgets, worsening teacher wellbeing and a lack of access to specialist expertise means that schools are often having to support those with the highest needs with very few resources.

Our evidence suggests that punitive approaches remain commonplace in too many schools in responding to children and young people's behaviour. We heard how the use of these approaches in schools exacerbates children's needs and in turn worsens their behaviour. Such approaches can also have harmful and lasting impacts on children and young people's mental health. This means that schools - and teachers - can be left trapped in a cycle of unmet need and worsening behaviour, adding to the mounting pressures they are already facing.

What our findings tell us is that a culture shift is needed in how we view and respond to behaviour in schools. We heard consistently that behaviour in school is often driven by children's unmet needs. Whilst we recognise that this may not be the case in all incidents of misbehaviour in the classroom, where these issues are persistent, we need to be much more curious about what is driving this behaviour. By being curious, we are in a significantly better place to identify needs early and respond in a much more sophisticated and compassionate way.

But schools cannot do this alone. In our recommendations, we set out the actions that the national government, local systems, and schools can take to create the change that is needed to build effective systems of support around children, young people and their families.

Finally, I would like to thank all the young people, parents and carers, Coalition members and stakeholders who have shared their views with us so honestly throughout the course of the inquiry.



Sir Norman Lamb, Former Chair

Executive summary

The Behaviour and Mental Health in Schools Inquiry was launched in 2022, with support from the AIM Foundation. The inquiry aimed to explore the links between behaviour and mental health, how school behaviour policies and practices impact the mental health of children and their families, and to understand what can be done to help schools to better support behaviour, mental health, and wellbeing.

In this report, we summarise our findings from the inquiry and set out recommendations for change. To inform the report, we draw on the evidence gathered throughout the inquiry from children and young people, parents and carers, academics, Coalition members and wider stakeholders.

The links between behaviour and mental health

Whilst there is no single definition of behaviour, when talking about behaviour within an educational context, this can relate to any action that pupils take. Within a school setting, our evidence suggests that this predominantly focuses on the negative behaviours, rather than the positive behaviours that schools want to see.

Our evidence consistently highlighted that behaviour is often driven by unmet need. Young people, parents, carers and professionals overwhelmingly told us that behaviour is linked to both mental health needs and to special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities. We heard evidence of how unmet and undiagnosed needs can often contribute to behavioural problems within schools.

Whilst it is important to note that not all misbehaviour in the classroom is a result of an unmet need, when behavioural issues are persistent, we should be curious about their underlying causes and the potential presence of unmet needs (Meredith, 2021).

Approaches to behaviour in school

The Government has taken significant steps in recent years to improve behaviour within schools, with new programmes such as behaviour hubs being established and guidance on behaviour in schools being refreshed. However, it was reported that this programme of work has added further pressure on schools at a time when they are already struggling to respond to the growing needs of pupils, and that sufficient resources or support have not been provided to support policy implementation.

There is wide variability in the behaviour management systems used across schools in England. Government guidance stipulates that it is the responsibility of individual schools to develop their own best practice in managing behaviour. This leads to inconsistency and makes it challenging to ascertain a comprehensive overview of what is happening in schools in relation to behaviour. Our evidence suggests, however, that many schools do focus mainly on punitive approaches to behaviour.

Whilst government guidance does recognise that behaviour could be a manifestation of mental health problems or special educational needs, young people's experiences of school responses to their behaviour do not match up to this. Many of the young people who took part in our call for evidence reported that they do not feel their needs are supported when their school is responding to behavioural issues and that they do not feel listened to.

The impact of behaviour management techniques on mental health

Older young people in secondary school were more likely to report that they had experienced behaviour management techniques compared to younger age groups in primary school. Parents and carers who identified that their child receives SEN support or an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) were also more likely to state that their child had experienced behaviour management techniques.

Young people, parents and carers regarded removal rooms to be the most harmful behaviour management technique deployed by schools, whilst professionals rated permanent exclusion as most harmful. The use of fines or penalties for non-attendance and lateness, suspension and whole-class punishment were also seen to be harmful to mental health, as reported by the young people, parents, carers and professionals who responded to the call for evidence.

Our evidence highlights the impact of behaviour management techniques on children and young people's mental health. We were told how experiences of these techniques can evoke negative feelings in young people, can lead them to dislike school, and can increase feelings of anxiety, particularly in relation to school attendance. In some cases, we heard about experiences of self-harm and suicidal thoughts.

The use of these techniques disproportionately falls on certain groups of children and young people, such as those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, young people from racialised communities - particularly Black and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people - and young people from low-income backgrounds.

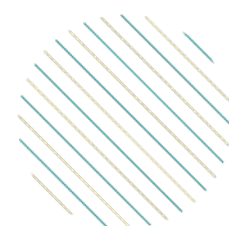
Whilst it was recognised that behaviour management techniques do have some short-term benefits, it was noted that in the long term, punitive measures are not effective in changing behaviour. This is because they respond to the presenting behaviour and not the child's underlying needs, meaning the root causes of the behaviour are never actually addressed.

What needs to change?

It is important for schools to have clear expectations and boundaries in relation to pupil behaviour, and we heard about the importance of teaching pupils positive behaviours to help them to thrive in the school environment. This should be coupled with a supportive, nurturing and inclusive school environment, where every child is valued. Many schools have taken steps to prioritise and embed relational and restorative approaches in order to improve both behaviour and mental health.

What became clear during our inquiry is that a culture shift is needed in how behaviour is viewed in schools. We need to move beyond a place where behaviour is seen as problematic and something that needs to be managed, to a much more concerned and curious place about what the behaviour could be telling us. By changing the way behaviour is viewed, needs can be identified at a much earlier stage.

Schools cannot make these changes alone and action should be taken at national and local levels to build effective systems of support around schools and families.



Recommendations

Recommendations for national government

A coordinated approach to school policy

- The Department for Education should expand the Behaviour Hub programme to include a focus on mental health and wellbeing provision.
- The Department for Education should establish a group to oversee the delivery of mental health and behaviour programmes to ensure alignment. This group should review and utilise the data collected by schools to inform planning and delivery, and to tackle inequalities.
- The Department for Education should review attendance codes for schools to ensure there is a more nuanced approach, recognising both mental health problems and SEN and disabilities can be recorded as authorised absences.
- The Department for Education should take an anti-racist approach to policy making.

Staff development and wellbeing

- The Department for Education should expand the National Professional Qualification in Behaviour and Culture to include training on identifying and addressing the underlying drivers of behaviour.
- The Department for Education should mandate that teachers are given time for continuous professional development in the areas of behaviour, mental health and SEN and disabilities.
- The Department for Education should update initial teacher training to ensure that content on mental health and SEN and disabilities is included.
- The Department for Education should ensure that the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter is properly resourced, and annual figures are published on how many schools have signed up to this.
- The Department for Education, as a first step, should provide support to schools to implement their own staff reflective spaces. In the long term, the Department should explore supervision opportunities for Senior Leaders, using external qualified practitioners.

Improving the SEN and disability system of support

- The Department for Education should ensure that all education staff are supported in their initial training and throughout their career in identifying and addressing needs that underlie SEN and disabilities, and in understanding statutory responsibilities to children and young people with SEN and disabilities.
- The Department for Education should explore what the range of indicators of progress might look like for children and young people with SEN and disabilities that do not predominantly focus on academic progress.
- The Government should use the SEND improvement plan to strengthen the availability of specialist support services and to address gaps in the specialist workforce.

Embedding whole education approaches to mental health and wellbeing

- The Department for Education should develop a national implementation programme to support every school, college and university to adopt a whole education approach to mental health and wellbeing.
- The Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care should commit to and fund the full national roll-out of Mental Health Support Teams across all schools and colleges in England.

The role of Ofsted

- Ofsted should consult with key stakeholders to understand and define harmful behavioural practices in schools to further inform the 'Behaviour and Attitudes' judgement area in inspections.
- Ofsted should look beyond just academic attainment and overall performance and also assess schools on their efforts to promote pupils' overall wellbeing, development and creative skills, including implementation of whole school approaches to mental health and wellbeing.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Integrated Care Systems

Building systems of support around families and integrating services

- Plans and strategies developed by Integrated Care Boards and Integrated Care Partnerships should set out how they will improve access to, and capacity in, specialist services, alongside how they will map local offers of support.
- Integrated Care Boards should ensure that school representatives contribute to strategic planning and the commissioning of children and young people's mental health support.

Recommendations

Recommendations for schools

Putting relationships at the centre of the school culture

- School leaders should commission staff training around relational and restorative approaches to help make the necessary changes and build more inclusive and nurturing environments for all pupils.

Moving from a one size fits all approach

- Staff in school should shift away from the adoption of a one size fits all approach to behaviour and consider more flexible and tailored approaches to support that recognise pupils' individual needs and diversity.
- All schools should ensure they take a whole school approach to anti-racism, equality and diversity and comply with the latest guidance and legislation in this area. This should include ensuring all staff working with pupils receive training in these areas.
- School leaders and governing boards should collect and monitor data relating to the experiences of pupils with protected characteristics and those facing inequalities to plan effective provision and address any disparities. This should include qualitative data from pupils and families to build richer insights into their experiences.

The role of school governors and academy trustees

- Members of school governing boards and academy trustee boards should be involved in the development and approval of school behaviour policies and should work alongside school leaders to routinely review implementation of the policy and track progress.

Improved mental health knowledge and awareness in schools

- Schools should explore how to integrate mental health and wellbeing within the school curriculum and take steps to embed a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing, so that it forms a central part of the school culture.
- Schools should develop a specific mental health and wellbeing policy, setting out how they will meet *all* 8 principles of a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing. Audits should be carried out regularly by school leaders to assess how well they are meeting the aims of this policy.

Listening to children and young people

- Schools should review their co-production practices to ensure they are regularly listening to the voices of children and young people.

Working with families

- School staff should proactively build relationships with parents and carers at the earliest opportunity to support pupils' learning journeys.
- Teachers and school leaders must ensure they communicate school expectations around behaviour, including what is set out in key school policies and approaches taken.
- Schools should create opportunities for parents and carers to voice their views and have a say in decision-making.
- School leaders should seek to address and eliminate the culture of parent-carer blame where it exists.

Introduction: Setting the scene

Over recent years, there has been a continuous decline in children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, with one in six children and young people aged 7 to 16 experiencing a mental health problem in 2022, compared to one in nine in 2017 (NHS Digital, 2022). Findings consistently show that there are specific groups of children and young people who are at greater risk of developing mental health problems, including children with special educational needs and disabilities, children living in lower income households and children from racialised communities.

There has also been an increase in the number of children and young people with special educational needs. Statistics from the Department for Education (DfE) show that the number of pupils with special educational needs increased to 1.49 million pupils in 2022, an increase of 77,000 from 2021 (Department for Education, 2022a). This represents 16.5% of all pupils, with 4% having an education, health and care plan and 12.6% being provided with SEN support (Department for Education, 2022a). Boys, pupils on free school meals, travellers of Irish heritage and Black Caribbean pupils have been identified as experiencing higher rates of SEN and disabilities compared to their peers (Department for Education, 2022b).

Children and young people's experiences in school can have both a positive and negative influence on their mental health. Our *Making the Grade* report highlighted some of the known risk factors for poor mental health, such as bullying and exam pressures (Abdinasir, 2019). *The Good Childhood Report 2022* also highlighted a link between wellbeing and experiences of school, with almost one in eights (12%) of 10 to 15 year

olds stating they are unhappy with school (The Children's Society, 2022). On average, children were most happy with how safe they feel in school and least happy with how much they are listened to.

The 2022 *State of the Nation* report on children's wellbeing produced by the Department for Education further highlights how many children and young people's experiences, thoughts and feelings about school reflect their current mental health and wellbeing; those who feel safe in school, enjoy going to school and who feel like they belong in school were less likely to have a mental health problem and more likely to report greater subjective wellbeing (Department for Education, 2023).

A national problem with behaviour?

A 2017 review of behaviour management in schools suggested that there was sufficient evidence to propose that there is a 'national problem with behaviour' in schools across the country (Bennett, 2017). Evidence on the standard of behaviour in schools predominantly comes from surveys of teachers and other school staff. A 2018 investigation by Policy Exchange into pupil behaviour in school found that 75% of the teachers polled think low-level disruption and disorder occurs frequently or very frequently in their schools (Williams, 2018). The Big Question survey 2019, carried out by NASUWT, also found that of the 5500 teachers surveyed, 82% said that they think there is a widespread behaviour problem in schools today, and over half (56%) stated that they believe there is a behaviour problem in their particular school (NASUWT, 2019).

The Covid-19 pandemic has since exacerbated concerns about behaviour in the classroom. A survey of 10,000 heads, teachers and other school staff completed by Tes in 2020 found that the majority of school staff in England say pupils' behaviour had worsened since the Covid lockdown (Tes, 2020). More than two-thirds (69%) of teachers, school leaders and classroom assistants in the survey said that pupils' behaviour has dipped since the coronavirus lockdown closed schools to the majority of pupils. Ofsted's annual report 2022 noted that issues with behaviour were most common when pupils returned to school in autumn 2021 and by the summer term it was found that most pupils' behaviour had returned to how it was pre-pandemic (Ofsted, 2022).

What is the current context for schools?

Reduced school budgets over recent years have meant that schools have long been facing financial pressure and are now among the worst hit by the current cost of living crisis, with already stretched budgets being stretched further to accommodate rising costs. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that school spending per pupil remains at 3% below 2010 levels in real terms (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2021).

A survey conducted by NAHT of 11,000 school leaders explored the impact of rising costs on schools and the action school leaders will need to take to balance budgets, many of which will negatively impact staff and pupils (NAHT, 2022). Almost half of school leaders (44%) who took part in the survey said they will reduce spending on targeted intervention or pupils requiring additional support, and four in ten (40%) will reduce non-educational support and services for children.

In the longer term, around two-thirds (66%) of respondents said they will have to reduce the number of teaching assistants and half of respondents also said that they will have to reduce the number of teachers or teaching hours, meaning less support for pupils who need it most. NAHT notes that staffing cuts are disproportionately likely to affect pupils with SEN and disabilities, disadvantaged pupils, pupils with low prior attainment and pupils with mental health and wellbeing needs (NAHT, 2022).

Systems of support around schools, such as NHS Children and Young People's Mental Health Services, specialist services and social care, are also not of consistent quality, meaning that many schools are having to respond to rising needs with limited support. The strain on specialist services means that they can be challenging to access and waiting times for support can be extremely long. Consequently, schools are having to hold increasingly complex cases whilst children and families endure long waits for assessments and diagnoses. A recent report by Ofsted, for example, found that a lack of specialist help is resulting in increasing numbers of primary school children with SEN and disabilities being referred to alternative provision (Ofsted 2022). A recruitment and retention crisis in the specialist workforce is adding to this pressure.

Our ambition

There has been a longstanding debate regarding the way children and young people's behaviour is approached within schools in England and the impact that serious sanctions, such as exclusions, have on their mental health. This has been a concern reflected by Coalition members and such concerns formed a prominent feature of our CYPMHC Members' Reports in 2020 and 2021.

There is an emerging body of evidence that highlights the link between behaviour and mental health problems amongst children and young people. We believe there is a need to better understand the underlying drivers of behaviour and their links with mental health, and how groups of young people with existing needs are disproportionately impacted by punitive behaviour management processes.

In its inquiry, the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition wanted to respond to the concerns of our members, and the children and families they work with, by bringing together the evidence base that explores the links between behaviour and mental health. The inquiry also sought to explore the impact of school behavioural policies on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Through this, we wanted to gain an understanding of the change that is needed for improving behaviour, mental health and wellbeing, by highlighting examples of best practice.

Our approach

This report is based on research conducted between March 2022 and January 2023 and reflects the latest evidence available during this period. We gathered first-hand insights from our members, children and young people, parents-carers, academics and professionals through online surveys and virtual evidence sessions. To support this, we also completed a rapid review of relevant literature.

Data collected

We conducted an open call for evidence via three surveys with young people, parents and carers, professionals and practitioners to gather their views on school behavioural policies, their impact on mental health and their perspective on the change that is needed. The surveys were live between May and June 2022 and were hosted via Google forms. We promoted the surveys via the Coalition newsletter, on social media and through targeted emails to organisations. In total we received **840** responses across all three surveys:

- 111 responses to the young person's survey
- 495 responses to the parent-carer survey
- 234 responses to the professionals and practitioners survey

All respondents to the surveys lived in England and made comments relating to the education system in England.

We also held four evidence sessions to gather further insight and evidence. These evidence sessions were held during September 2023. We held one session with school leaders, one session with academics, and two separate sessions with sector representatives. We also held individual stakeholder conversations with Professor Tamsin Ford, Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Cambridge, Tom Bennett, Lead Behaviour Advisor to the Department for Education, and Senior Officials in the Department for Education.

Demographics of those who responded to the call for evidence

Young people

In total, 111 young people responded to the survey. Respondents were spread out across England, with the majority (44%) based in the Midlands, followed by an even split between the South East, London and the North West. We received the least number of responses (4.5%) from those in the North East.

Nearly half (49.5%) of respondents identified as English, Welsh, Scottish or Northern Irish. The other half of respondents identified across a number of groups, including Pakistani, Indian, Chinese, any other mixed or multiple ethnic group, white and Asian, white and Black Caribbean, other white background, Irish, Bangladeshi, any other Asian background, African, Caribbean, other Black, African or Caribbean background, and any other background.

Finally, we found that older age groups were more likely to respond to the survey than younger groups. 53.2% of young people who responded were aged between 11 and 15 years old and 26.1% were aged between 16 and 18. Just 5.4% of those who responded were aged 5-10.

Parents and carers

Overall, we received 495 responses to the parent-carer survey. There was a wider geographical spread in response to this survey. We received the greatest number of responses from the South East and the least number of responses from London.

The majority of respondents (87.2%) identified as English, Welsh, Scottish or Northern Irish. We also received a small number of responses from parents and carers who identified as Irish, white and Asian, white and Black Caribbean, Chinese, Caribbean and other Black, African or Caribbean backgrounds.

When we asked parents-carers about the ages of their child/ren, over half (54.9%) of respondents identified their child as being in the 11-15 age group. This was followed by 26.7% reporting that their child was aged between 5 and 10, and 12.9% with a child aged 16-18. We received the fewest number of responses from those with a child aged 0-5.

We also asked parents-carers if their child receives Special Educational Needs (SEN) support or has an Education Care Plan. 64.6% of those who responded said their child receives SEN support or has an Education Care Plan, and 33.5% responded 'no' to this question.

Professionals

In total, we received 234 responses to the professional survey.

Education professionals made up the largest group responding to the survey, and there was a range of roles reported including teacher, headteacher and senior leader. Other roles such as pastoral lead, Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA), Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and learning mentor were also reported. We also received a large number of responses from mental health practitioners such as counsellors, practitioners working within Mental Health Support Teams, NHS Children and Young People's Mental Health Services professionals, wellbeing leads and psychologists. Other sectors represented in responses include the charity sector, local authorities and health professionals.

Limitations/caveats

We recognise that we need to do more in future research to increase the representation of young people and parents and carers from diverse groups. Because sample sizes are small, we have been unable to complete further analysis by breakdown of ethnic group.

The majority of respondents to the call for evidence fell into the 11-15 age group. This means that evidence from both young people and parents might be more focused on experiences of secondary school than primary school. Whilst indirect experiences and views of younger children were shared by some parents and carers who took part in the call for evidence, further thought is needed on how to make the survey more accessible to younger age groups.

Finally, we note that the young people and parents and carers who responded to the call for evidence self-selected. Therefore, the statistics and views presented are not a cross-section of views of these groups generally.

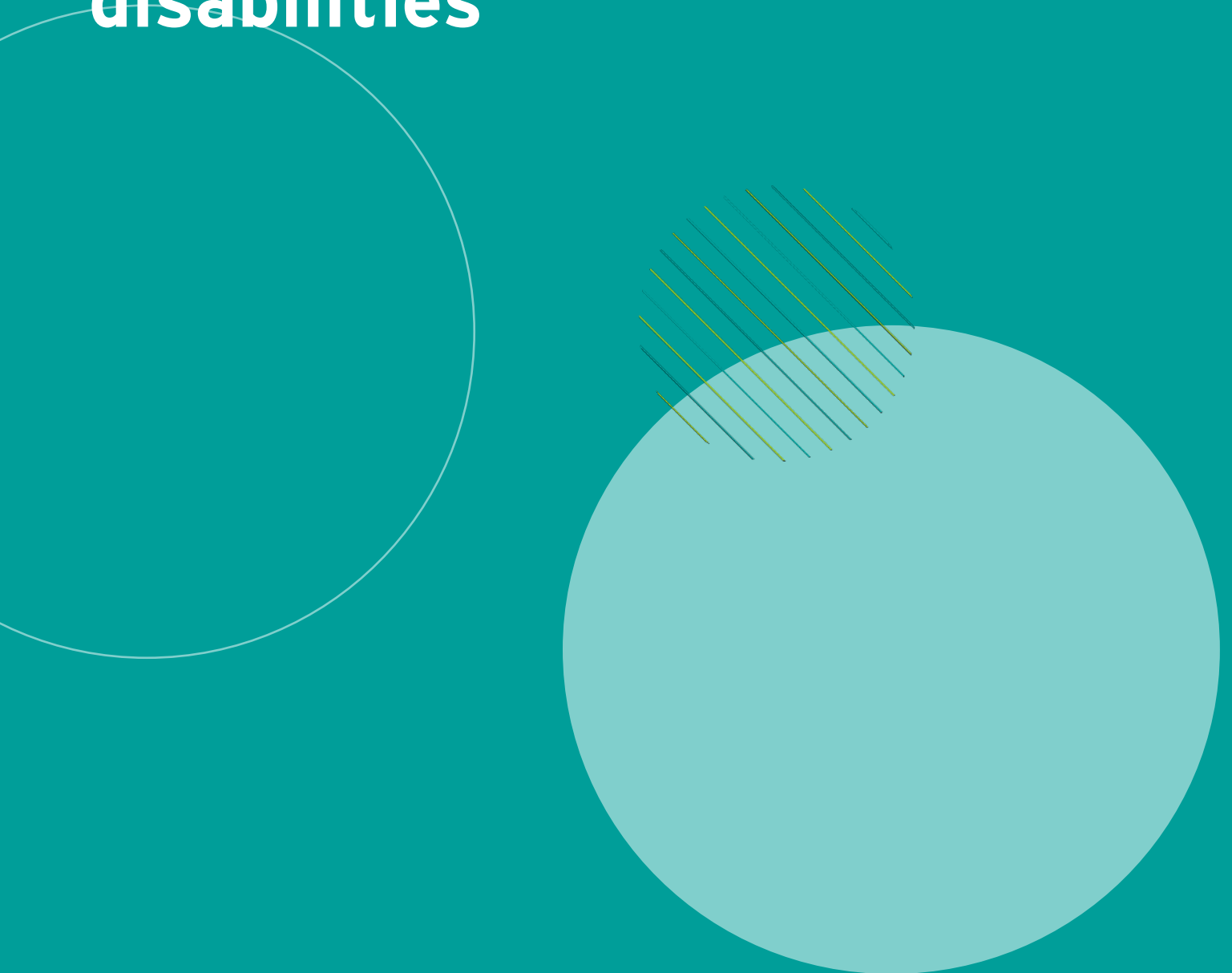
Advisory groups

We established a parent-carer advisory group and a youth advisory group to support us with the project. We went through an open application process to onboard young people and parents and carers to these groups. We recruited ten young people to sit on our youth advisory group, and nine parents and carers on our parent-carer advisory group. All members of the advisory groups represented a range of experiences, including experience of mental health difficulties, special educational needs and disabilities, were from diverse backgrounds and came from different regions across England.

We held a total of four meetings with both advisory groups throughout the course of the project to gain their views and experiences. Advisory group members were paid a total of £25 per hour for their time.

Chapter 1

The links between behaviour, mental health and special educational needs and disabilities



The roots of challenging behaviour have long been debated by experts and this debate can sometimes become deeply polarised. At one end are those who see challenging behaviour as either a choice or the inevitable consequences of a lack of boundaries, and at the other are those who perceive it as the communication of unmet needs (Timpson, 2019).

In the inquiry, we were keen to explore this debate further and understand from the views of young people, parents, carers, and professionals on whether poor mental health, special educational needs and disabilities, and other unmet needs can drive perceived challenging behaviour. This chapter will explore what is meant by behaviour within education settings, and the links between behaviour, mental health and SEN and disabilities.

How is behaviour defined in educational settings?

Behaviour has been simply defined as the way in which we act or conduct ourselves, especially towards others. Therefore, at its broadest, behaviour in school can relate to any action that schoolchildren take.

Others have also attempted to define what is meant by behaviour in schools. For example, the Education Endowment Foundation's definition of behaviour includes both negative and positive actions that are open to subjective interpretations, even to the extent that a specific behaviour may be of concern to one teacher but not to another, or of concern in the classroom but not in the playground (Moore *et al.*, 2019).

When it comes to defining poor behaviour, it has been noted that this is not straightforward and there are many definitions. Research conducted by the Department for Education in 2012 finds that definitions of 'bad' behaviour and evidence on what constitutes the problem present a spectrum of types of conduct which are perceived to interrupt learning in schools (Department for Education 2012). This spectrum can be seen as ranging from 'low-level' chatter and inattention in the classroom, to more serious actions such as physical violence, which disrupt learning. Literature suggests that it is 'low-level' frequent disruption that is the most common form of pupil misbehaviour (Department for Education, 2012).

Whilst no clear definition of behaviour exists, professionals who took part in our evidence sessions suggested that definitions of behaviour within education are predominantly focused on behaviour that schools do not want, as opposed to behaviours they do want.

'When we talk about behaviour many people assume unwanted behaviours when talking about the context of schools.'

[Tristan Middleton, Academics evidence session]

'Behaviour in the way I think about it is the external manifestation of emotions, temperament, social situations and somebody's psychological makeup and everything we do could be classified as behaviour in the educational context.'

Professor Tamsin Ford

‘We’ve got to define behaviour and what we tend to mean... when we talk about behaviour, it’s behaviour that we don’t want. But there’s a whole spectrum, isn’t there? We’ve got to be as concentrated on behaviours that we do want and... to work to build a culture that celebrates that and allows us to have a high expectation that everybody can meet.’
[Colin Lofthouse, School Leaders evidence session]

It has been noted that a wide range of factors can influence school behaviour including family, community, policy, and relationship with learning (Moore *et al.*, 2019). What is more, there is no single cause for behavioural difficulties, and the risk factors are often complex and interrelated; they can be individual, within the family environment and outside the home (Impact on Urban Health, 2022).

‘I think behavioural problems rise in their own context and I think they need an analysis of what is driving that behaviour and so sometimes it’s temperament, sometimes it’s a developmental issue, sometimes it’s a learning problem, sometimes it’s something about the school environment that’s triggering that child and I think there are levels on which you want to deal with it.’
[Professor Tamsin Ford]

‘Behaviour is about collaboration, about us living together and doing things together jointly, which is our motive force as human beings. But to enable that to happen, you have to join minds. And to join minds, you have to develop relationships, and it’s ultimately relationships that make behaviour.’
[Professor Peter Fonagy, Academics evidence session]

What we heard consistently throughout the course of the inquiry was that behaviour must be seen as a form of communication and signs of poor behaviour may be an indication that a child has an unmet or undiagnosed need or is struggling to communicate or regulate themselves.

‘All ‘behaviour’ is communication. It is an external signal of an internal sensation, emotion or thought. This could be a momentary thing for a child that has not learned to regulate or understand themselves or it could be a daily struggle.’
[Professional survey respondent]

‘What’s coming through very clearly in our research is that idea of behaviour being seen as a form of communication and children just are communicating. They don’t have the agency that adults have. They may not have the communication and skills, abilities that adults or their peers perhaps have, and I think it is only natural that does come through as behaviour, and it is just an expression that something isn’t quite right for that child either in that specific environment in that moment or it could be something broader and therefore it is really up to schools and the adults around a child to try and help understand that and unpick it.’
[Georgia Hyde Dryden, Academics evidence session]

The links between behaviour and mental health

Over recent years, there has been a growing body of evidence that highlights a relationship between behaviour and children and young people's mental health. For example, one report on behavioural difficulties in children and young people recognises that during childhood and early adolescence, mental health problems can present through behavioural difficulties (Impact on Urban Health, 2022). The report notes that whilst all children's behaviour can be challenging at times, some children experience persistent and more extreme behavioural difficulties that can have a significant impact on their lives.


Analysis by Centre for Mental Health has also shown that behaviours of concern and trauma are linked - children and young people who display behaviours of concern are more likely to have experienced trauma, and in some cases, their behaviour is a symptom of trauma (Centre for Mental Health, 2020). Research conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research further noted that senior leaders within schools recognise that behaviour that challenges is often a sign of underlying issues such as pupils experiencing trauma and being unable to self-regulate or communicate their feelings in more appropriate ways (Sharp *et al.*, 2021).

We wanted to explore this link further in our evidence gathering processes. Within our call for evidence, we asked young people, parents and professionals if they believe a young person's behaviour is linked to their mental health.

There was an overwhelming agreement from young people and parents and carers that a young person's behaviour is often linked to their mental health.

47% of young people strongly agreed and **32% agreed** that a young person's behaviour is linked to their mental health. Almost 10% of young people disagreed with this statement.

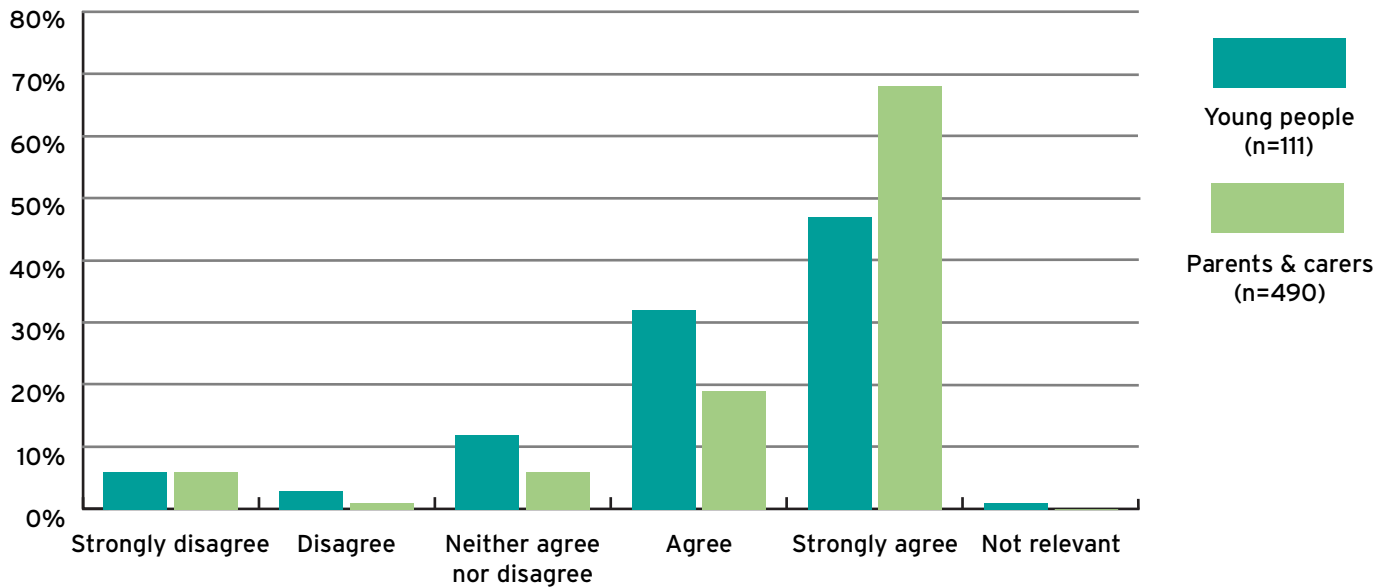
68% of parent and carers also strongly agreed and **19% agreed** that a young person's behaviour is linked to their mental health.



'Children's behaviour is a manifestation of their internal world and we're seeing it in ever increasing numbers.'

Ellie Costello, Sector evidence session

A young person's behaviour is linked to their mental health



Professionals responding to the call for evidence shared their views on what they believe to be the underlying drivers of behaviour, based on their experiences. One of the most cited factors highlighted by professionals was the impact of trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on pupil behaviour. This includes experiences such as abuse, neglect, violence, parental separation, bereavement or having caring responsibilities (Bush *et al.*, 2018). What is considered to be an ACE is continually evolving, as is our understanding of the impact of such experiences on children's development and mental health. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic is regarded as a collective trauma, which has had an uneven impact on communities across the country with some faring worse than others.

What is trauma?

Trauma is a response to a stressful, frightening or distressing event, a series of events, or set of circumstances. Traumatic events can happen at any age and can have lasting adverse effects on an individual's functioning and mental, physical, social and emotional wellbeing. Trauma isn't a mental health condition in itself, but experiencing trauma can result in a child or young person struggling with their mental health. It has been found that approximately one third of young people in England and Wales have been exposed to traumatic experiences by the time they are eighteen years old (Centre for Mental Health, 2020).

When the negative effects of childhood trauma are left unaddressed, many professionals noted that this fuels a vicious cycle between trauma, behaviours of concern and the use of punitive measures.

'Trauma (including early developmental trauma) is often not considered in schools, and so behaviours that challenge are treated as non-compliance/defiance, with all the blame and shame located in the individual, with no consideration of why the young person might not be able to do what is being asked of them.'
[Professional survey respondent]

'As Centre for Mental Health has noted, young people who have been exposed to trauma are more likely to have psychological and behavioural problems, which can then be exacerbated by increased risk of exposure to punitive behaviour policies. Research on adversity by YoungMinds has shown that a 'young person may adopt risky or challenging behaviours, which are frequently misinterpreted or criminalised by those who do not identify their full need'.
[Professional survey respondent]

'I worked in permanence support in social work, supporting children and families affected by adoption and special guardianship. The children that I supported had all experienced early relational trauma, often experienced mental health challenges and some (but definitely not all) struggled in school. For these children the underlying drivers of challenging behaviour were in relation to their previous traumatic experiences - relationships had caused them significant harm and so their underlying worldview was one of not feeling safe and extremely low self-esteem.'
[Professional survey respondent]

A member of a Mental Health Support Team (MHST) who responded to our survey expressed concerns about some schools' failure to make the connection between a pupil's behaviour and the trauma-related issues they might be experiencing at home. They shared an example of a case involving a pupil below.

A recent example my team had of this, was a school asking us to help with a 10-year-old male pupil, who was displaying aggression within the school environment and emotional dysregulation. The team practitioner had already become aware of significant issues between parents, including an episode where the pupil had been subjected to a terrifying ordeal, when the father had tried to run his mother's car off the road. Although the school had some understanding that things were difficult at home, they had not checked with the young person when he arrived at school each morning how he was and if he needed some time to be listened to. We were able to explain to the school that a more trauma informed approach would be more helpful to this young person, alongside ensuring safeguarding concerns were followed up.
[Professional survey respondent]

Professionals also stressed the impact of a range of wider unmet needs that they felt drive pupil behaviour in schools, such as mental health problems and special educational needs and disabilities.

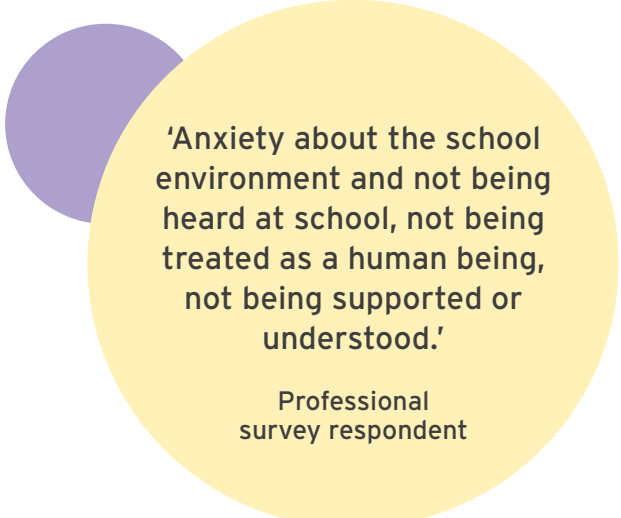
'YoungMinds' Parents Helpline often receives calls from parents and carers of young people who have experienced punitive responses to their behaviour at school. Parents and carers have relayed that on some occasions, schools appear not to recognise and support the underlying needs and difficulties that are causing young people to display challenging behaviour, and resort to mechanisms such as placing young people on reduced timetables in lieu of providing dedicated support. For some young people, and notably young people with special educational needs, this lack of support can sometimes lead to the implementation of measures such as fixed-term and permanent exclusions.'

[Professional survey respondent]

'Recent research by Mind has shown that 48% of young people surveyed said that they had been disciplined at school for behaviour that was due to their mental health, with one in four being subject to isolation. However, with many young people also reporting that their behaviour stemmed from experiencing problems with their mental health, both from the COVID-19 pandemic and prior to this, it is worrying that in the first instance they were met with punitive measures. In both this research and research undertaken by YoungMinds, young people responded that they were often not able to access support during the pandemic that they would usually have access to and felt that previously available coping mechanisms were no longer viable.'

[Professional survey respondent]

Some professionals raised specific concerns about the growing levels of anxiety, in particular, facing pupils and how this impacts their behaviour.



'Anxiety about the school environment and not being heard at school, not being treated as a human being, not being supported or understood.'

Professional
survey respondent

I am a child and educational psychologist and EMDR [Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing] therapist. In the past two years I have worked with generalised anxiety far more than usual. The drivers of behaviour are varied, but always come from a place of anxiety and all the way through to fear. Behavioural responses are stress and survival, as opposed to feeling safe, and with it an ability to be more open to social connections...

[Professional survey respondent]

Further exploration is needed in schools of what is driving children and young people's behaviour in order to know how to best respond.

The links between behaviour and SEN and disabilities

Special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities can affect a child or young person's ability to access the curriculum and, if they are not receiving the right support, can affect their opportunities to socialise and their behaviour as a result of unmet need. Children with SEN and disabilities can display behaviours of concern for a range of reasons - they may not be accessing their education, have speech, language and communication needs, unmet mental health needs, or there may be issues outside of school. In some cases, behaviours of concern can arise directly as a consequence of a disability, or a lack of reasonable adjustments made to accommodate this (Children's Commissioner, 2022).

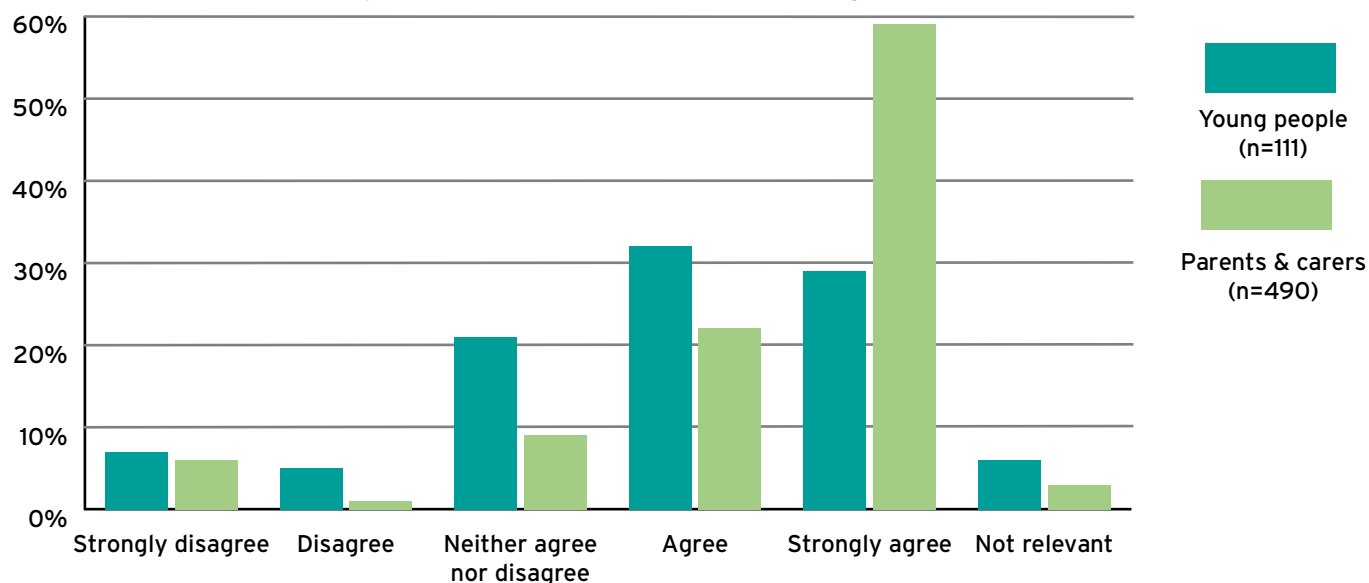
Children with SEN and disabilities are also more likely to have unmet educational needs, which can increase their risk of being caught up in disciplinary processes. An exploration of the educational experiences of children with SEND conducted by the Office for National Statistics found that unmet educational needs can result in a range of reactions from young people, including feeling angry or frustrated, which sometimes is treated as 'naughty' behaviour and met with punishment, such as isolation and exclusion (Office for National Statistics, 2022).

What is more, undiagnosed SEN and disabilities are also likely to contribute to a child's or young person's behaviour, with investigations by the Office of the Children's Commissioner highlighting issues with undiagnosed SEN and disabilities being incorrectly identified as a student with behavioural issues due to a lack of support and training for school staff on SEN and disabilities (Children's Commissioner, 2022). It was also noted that it was common for a child to develop behaviours of concern due to a late diagnosis.

Within our call for evidence, we also asked young people, parents, carers and professionals if they believe a young person's behaviour is linked to their SEN and disabilities. **29%** of young people strongly agreed and **32%** agreed that a young person's behaviour is linked to their special educational need and disability, whilst **12%** of young people disagreed with this statement.

The proportion of parents and carers who strongly agreed with this statement was even higher, with **59%** of parents and carers strongly agreeing that a young person's behaviour is linked to their SEN and disabilities and **22%** agreeing.

A young person's behaviour is linked to their special educational need and disability



In relation to special educational needs and disabilities and neurodiversity more generally, many professionals we spoke to described behaviour as a manifestation of both unmet need and a lack of support and identified the lack of timely assessments and support as driving the rise in behaviour problems in schools.

'Reasons can be many and varied, some of the more frequent include unidentified SEND (Special Educational Needs/ Disability) or an unidentified underlying condition such as ASC [Autism Spectrum Condition] or ADHD [Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder]. School staff also need to have an awareness of family problems and other problems in order to support CYP effectively in schools.'

[Professional survey respondent]

'Undiagnosed learning or neurodevelopmental conditions can mean some pupils find the school environment increasingly challenging. This is more prevalent as they move from primary to secondary, the former often compensating for any difficulties by providing adjustments, often without a formal EHCP plan. This does mean that some pupils leave primary with no information relating to their needs and then struggle to manage once transition takes place.'

[Professional survey respondent]

'Actually, the massive issue is that special needs are not being met adequately. Schools can recognise them and refer, but that referral time is far too long and that's leading to a lot of additional behaviour issues in school.'

Judy Ellerby, School Leaders evidence session

Evidence submitted to us by Chance UK, a London-based charity working with children impacted by trauma, also reinforced the links between undiagnosed SEN and disabilities and behaviours of concern.

Chance UK strongly believes that behaviour is a communication of unmet need and does not occur in isolation. In our direct work with primary school aged children, we find that often children have unidentified and undiagnosed needs and as a result, they are not receiving the correct support in school that responds to their needs. Many of the children we work with have [an] undiagnosed special educational need or disability (SEND), social, emotional or mental health need, previously unidentified trauma or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). These unmet additional needs are often exhibited through behaviour, which we have seen put children at risk of suspension or permanent exclusion. [Professional survey respondent]

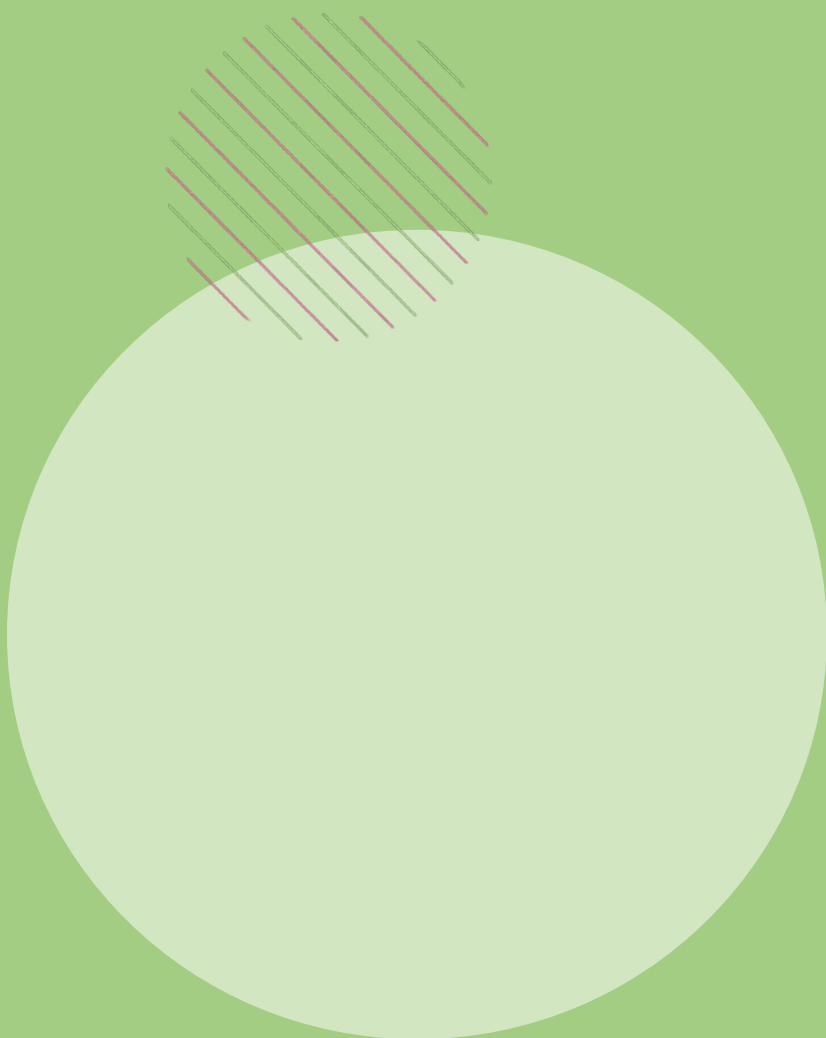
It is important to note the interconnectedness between mental health and SEN and disabilities. If a child or young person's mental health difficulties become a barrier to learning then they may need special educational support, and alternatively children and young people with SEN and disabilities can be at higher risk of developing mental health problems.

'Mental health is included as one of the four areas of need in the definition of SEND. But what research tells us is that when you are diagnosed with a particular need, you are more likely to have mental health issues, potentially because of the environment and the way you're treated, potentially because of stigma.'
[Tristan Middleton, Academics evidence session]

'I think the relationship with special educational needs is even more complex still, because sometimes for some children, their mental health condition will be their special educational need, and a prime example is the neurodevelopmental conditions which make the highly social, highly structured place of school very difficult to cope with. For other primary special educational needs, like a child with a severe physical health problem like a traumatic brain injury or cancer, requiring long, long periods out of school being treated, the condition itself is a risk factor for deteriorating mental health. And then actually aspects in the school environment or struggling at school because you have a global or specific learning difficulty also can precipitate a mental health condition.'
[Professor Tamsin Ford]

Chapter 2

Steps to address behaviour in schools



Over recent years, there has been an increased focus from the Government on behaviour in schools. Successive Secretaries of State for Education have expressed concerns about behaviour in school and the importance of having ‘high expectations’ for all. As a result, there has been increased guidance and regulations regarding the approach and actions schools can and must take to manage behaviours (Moore *et al.*, 2019). The Covid-19 pandemic and the return to education has further exacerbated these concerns. We were keen to understand what impact the Government’s programme of work is having on schools and their approach to behaviour. Whilst government guidance supports the links between behaviour, mental health, SEN and disabilities, we were also keen to explore if young people and parents-carers believe school behavioural policies take children’s needs into account.

The Government’s behaviour programme of work

In 2016, independent behaviour advisor to the Department for Education, Tom Bennett, undertook a review to explore how to tackle bad behaviour in classrooms (Bennett, 2016). The review focused on the approaches school leaders can take to develop a culture in their schools to promote ‘excellent behaviour’ and stressed the importance of a school leader creating a culture that is understood and subscribed to by the whole school community. The review made a series of recommendations on how to design, build and maintain such a culture in schools. At the time of publication, the Department for Education stated that the findings from the review will be used to help and support schools with this issue (Department for Education, 2017).

The review has since provided a framework for the Government’s response to behaviour in schools and has been the foundation on which behaviour policy has been developed. This has been recently demonstrated by the Behaviour Hub programme which has been founded on the principles outlined in the review. The Behaviour Hubs programme is a three-year programme funded by DfE to improve pupil behaviour in schools (Department for Education, 2020). The programme pairs schools and Multi-Academy Trusts with ‘exemplary behaviour practices’ with partner schools or Trusts that want and need to improve behaviour. The initiative has been backed by £10 million from the Department for Education and is aiming to reach 500 schools over the next three years.

Government guidance on behaviour in schools

The behaviour in schools guidance provides advice to schools on behaviour, including on how to support pupils to behave well and the powers of staff when responding to misbehaviour (Department for Education, 2022). The guidance emphasises the importance of creating a culture in schools which promotes high expectations of behaviour and establishes ‘calm, safe and supporting environments conducive to learning.’ The guidance sets out that the school’s behaviour policy should provide details on how staff will support pupils to meet expectations, including the support provided to pupils with additional needs which might affect behaviour. The guidance also provides advice for schools on developing and communicating the behaviour policy, implementing a whole school approach to behaviour, responding to misbehaviour, and how to prevent incidents of misbehaviour.

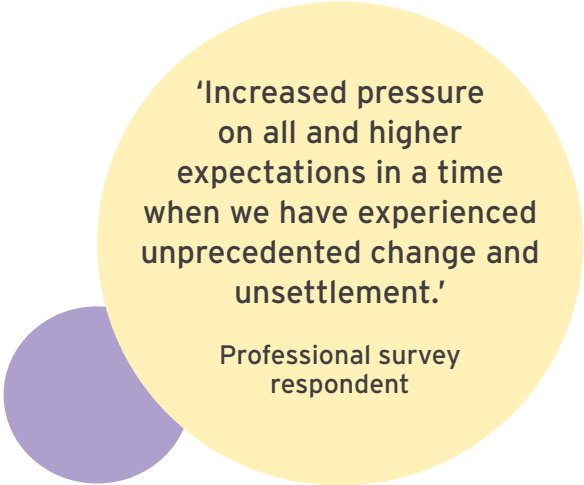
The Department for Education's mental health and behaviour in schools guidance further sets out advice to help schools support pupils whose mental health problems manifest themselves in behaviour. The guidance states that a school's approach to mental health and wellbeing should be part of a consistent whole school approach, which should be paired with an individualised and graduated response when behavioural issues might be a result of educational, mental health or other needs and vulnerabilities. The guidance emphasises the importance of taking action to address underlying causes of behaviour and putting the required support in place.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government has had a particular focus on school attendance. Updated guidance has been issued to help schools maintain high levels of attendance. The Government has pledged to make this statutory by September 2023. The guidance sets out how schools should work with partners to maintain high standards of attendance, monitor attendance data, remove barriers to attendance when identified, put the required support in place, and, in the last resort, take enforcement action.

How does government guidance translate into reality?

In our survey for professionals, we asked their views on the implementation and effectiveness of current government guidance on behaviour. Overall, professionals shared a mixed view of whether guidance introduced since the launch of the Department for Education's behaviour programme in 2019 has contributed to an improvement in pupil behaviour.

Some professionals suggested that recent changes have had a negative impact on schools, as new requirements have added to pressures at a time when schools are already struggling to respond to the growing needs of pupils. This includes pressures brought on by diminishing budgets and resources, as well as the disruption and changes associated with the pandemic.



'Increased pressure on all and higher expectations in a time when we have experienced unprecedented change and unsettlement.'

Professional survey respondent


'[It has placed] more pressure on the schools - provide the support without the high pressure to provide results - these things take time, and every setting will be different - asking them all to deliver to the same standard is unrealistic.'
[Professional survey respondent]

'It has added unrealistic pressure on an already overburdened educational system.'
[Professional survey respondent]

Changes in guidance have specifically had a negative impact on mental health according to some survey respondents.

'These policies have put emphasis on dealing with behaviour, which is a symptom of poor mental health, rather than understanding what young people are communicating about their experiences. These high expectations can result in the neglect of trauma and attachment issues which can often underlie challenging behaviour.'

[Professional survey respondent]



'It is hard to see how this is beneficial when thinking about wellbeing. We improve behaviour by supporting wellbeing and resilience, having a society where every child is in a happy home, financially stable and with equal opportunities and we need staff who are well supported in the role and their own wellbeing.'

Professional survey respondent

Professionals also noted that it was hard to see the positive impact of new guidance as schools have not been provided with sufficient resources to support implementation.

'Very little, they still routinely don't provide special educational provision appropriately.'

[Professional survey respondent]

'A willingness to implement everything but not the resources or support to help.'

[Professional survey respondent]

Other respondents noted that there is variability between schools in how guidance has been interpreted and adopted making it difficult to comment on progress or generalise results.

'Schools all act differently. Some schools feel scared to follow through their behaviour policy with SEN children. Some schools make absolutely no allowance for needs.'

[Professional survey respondent]

'This varies widely across schools. There is a move towards understanding needs and using restorative approaches. Some staff and parents don't see a strong punishment so think nothing is done; leading to feelings of children doing what they want. To implement the policy effectively takes time, something that school staff have very little of due to funding/staffing cutbacks.'

[Professional survey respondent]

Approaches to behaviour management in school

It is for individual schools to develop their own best practice for managing behaviour, and whilst the Department for Education can advise schools on what should be included in their behaviour policies, it is down to school leaders to develop policies that reflect what they feel their schools need and their local context. As a result, it can be challenging to try and identify a single behavioural system, as schools across the country take many different approaches to behaviour management.

'Behaviour management can be lots of things; lots of schools do loads of pastoral work and therapeutic work, and lots of them do reactive work, and most schools tend to have some kind of sanction and reward system, and most schools do a little bit of induction in terms of this is how we expect you to behave, and this is how we want to be... and the majority of schools do loads of targeted interventions for children with additional needs.'

Tom Bennett

However, whilst there is this mixed picture of behaviour management responses, behaviour advisor to the Department for Education, Tom Bennett, noted that through his own investigations he found that schools over-prioritise 'reactive models' of behaviour management rather than proactive approaches, whereby schools respond reactively to behaviour when it occurs instead of teaching children the behaviours they need to thrive within settings and identifying and responding to their needs.

One of the things I found through my own investigations was that teachers and schools over prioritize what I call a reactive model of behaviour management, which is to say they wait for things to go wrong and then they try to fix them... But what a lot of schools weren't doing particularly well or what they weren't focusing on was the proactive mechanism, which is teaching children behaviours they need in order to cope, thrive, flourish and more than just survive in an institution.

[Tom Bennett]

In other evidence provided to the inquiry, there appeared to be an overriding sense that emphasis is placed on approaches to behaviour management that centre on the use of sanctions.

'The disciplinary framework that is currently in place has punishment at its core.'

[Zahra Bei, Sector evidence session]

'What I hear is lots of quite punitive approaches to very minor infractions of rules that frankly don't matter and there is no evidence base to back that up.'

[Professor Tamsin Ford]

'Punishment is the primary tool that we use to control behaviour.'

[Professor Peter Fonagy, Academics evidence session]

It was also noted that behaviour policies can take a one size fits all approach, meaning that the individual circumstances and needs of young people are not considered when responding to their behaviour. As a result, this means that behaviour policies can disproportionately impact some groups of children and young people.

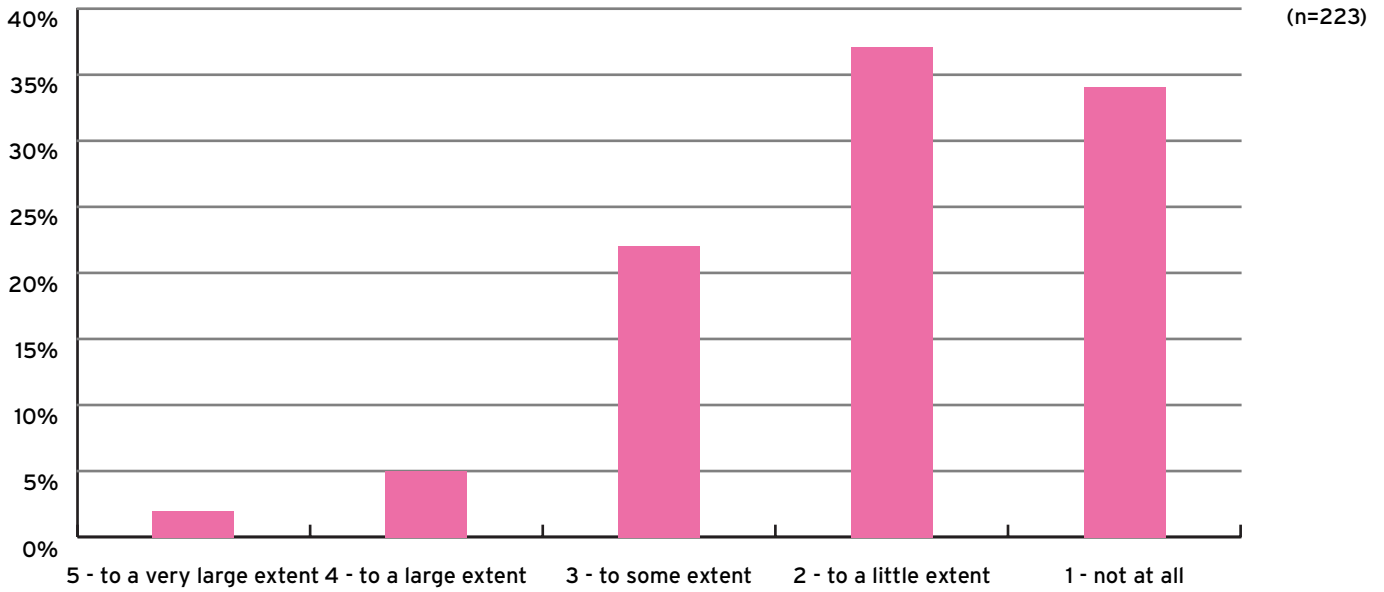
“ We see very much that schools want to strive for a one size fits all approach to behaviour policy, when actually, that fails to see children as individuals, and particularly for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities like mine, children are very individual culturally. Children from Black, Asian, minority ethnic groups are very different, and they need to be understood and we see that those children aren’t being understood and these policies aren’t taking account of them and that’s really problematic.
[The Traveller Movement, Sector evidence session]

School behaviour policies’ responsiveness to mental health, SEN and disabilities

The Behaviour in schools guidance states that staff should ‘take account of contributing factors that are identified after a behavioural incident has occurred such as mental health needs or SEND needs.’ The guidance does also reference the important role of mental health professionals such as Educational Psychologists and Mental Health Support Teams in informing and developing behaviour policies, and in making links to whole school approaches.

However, when asked if current government guidance on behaviour is promoting the mental health of pupils, over half (59%) of professionals responding to our survey felt that current guidance was promoting pupil mental health to some or little extent, while just over a third (34%) felt that it wasn’t having a positive influence at all.

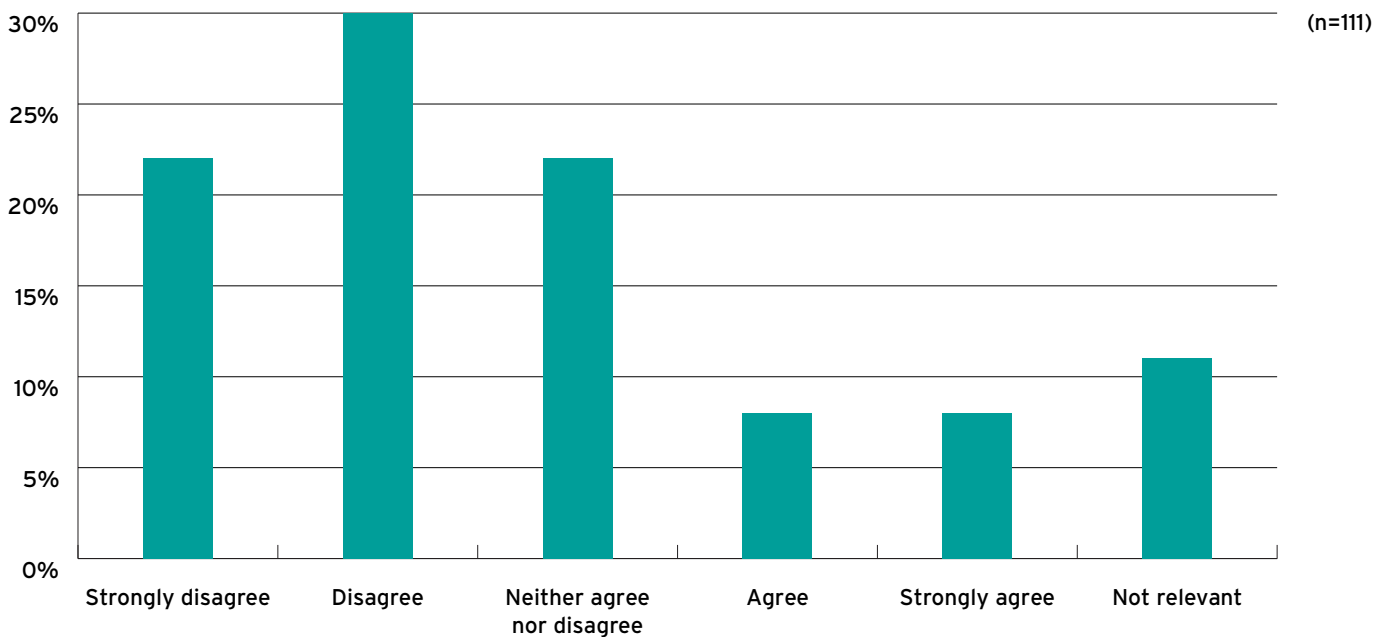
To what extent is current government guidance on behaviour in schools promoting the mental health and wellbeing of pupils?



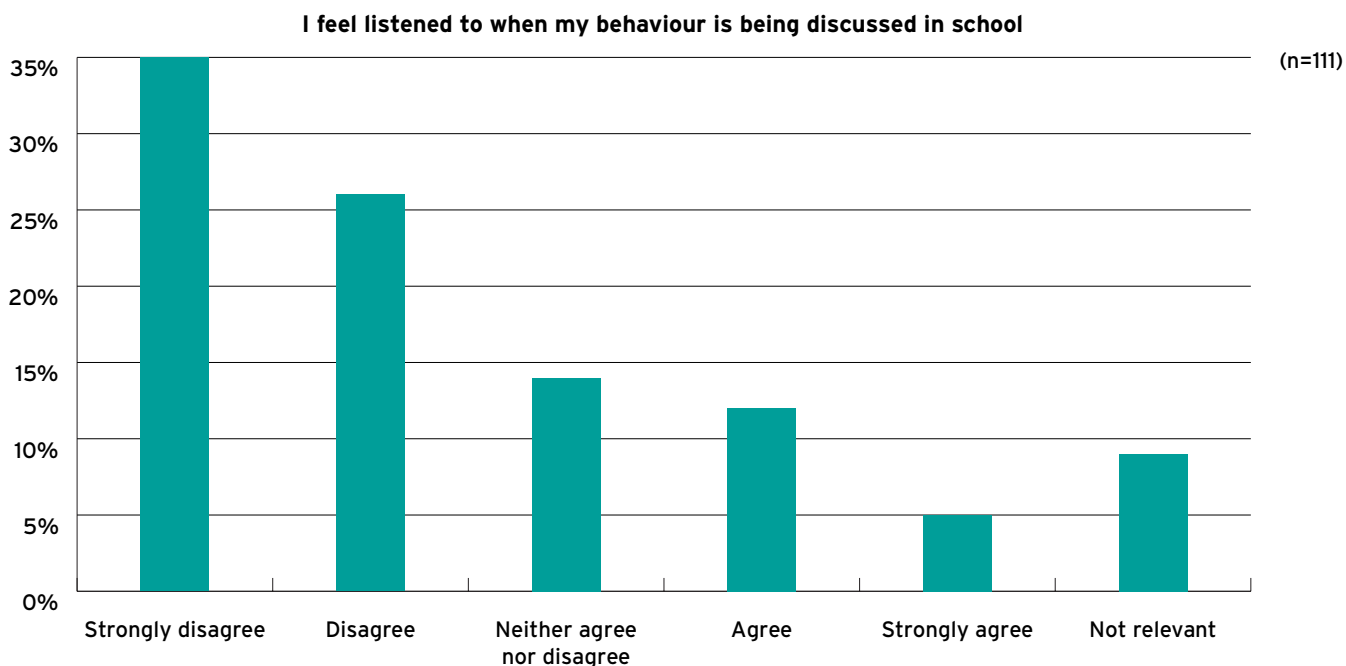
Further to this, we asked young people, parents and carers if they felt schools are responsive to children and young people’s mental health needs, SEN and disabilities when dealing with behavioural issues. Whilst government guidance on behaviour sets out that schools should consider underlying factors in behaviour and that appropriate support should be put in place if needs are identified, this was not reflected within our conversations with young people, parents and carers.

Over half of young people (52%) strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that their school is responsive to their needs when dealing with behavioural issues and that the required support is put in place to help them.

My school is responsive to my needs when dealing with behavioural issues and put the required support in place



A higher proportion of young people reported that they do not feel listened to when their behaviour is being discussed at school, with **61%** (strongly disagree and disagree combined) of those who responded to the call for evidence stating this.

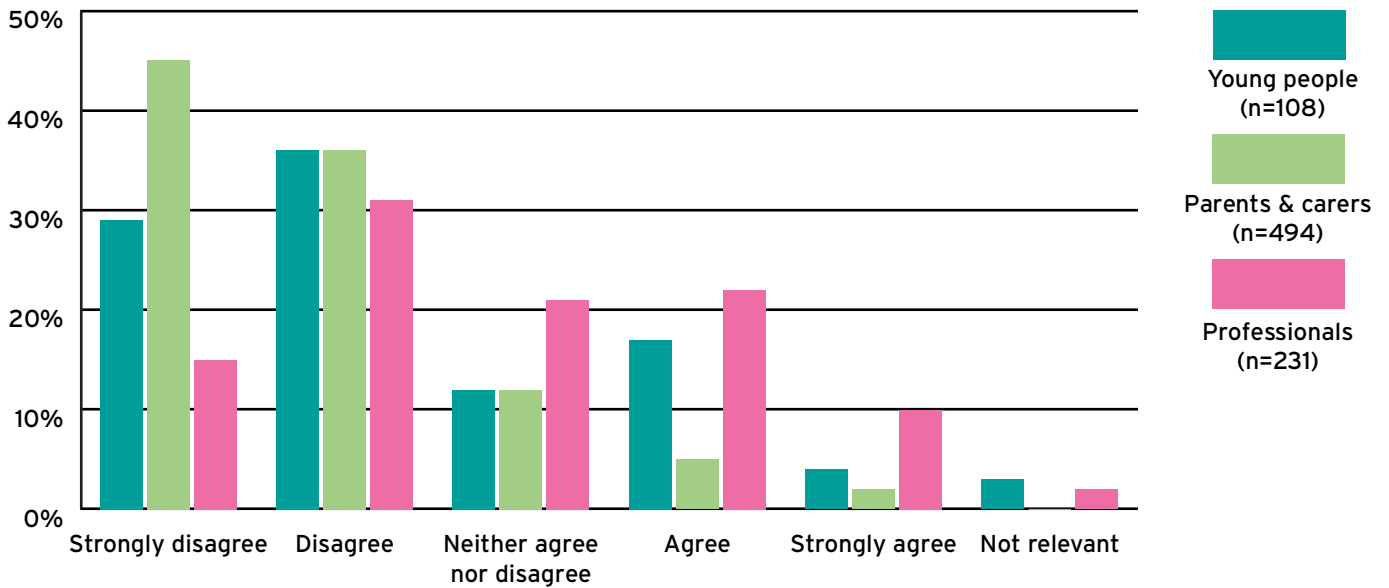


In relation to responsiveness to mental health needs, **29%** of young people strongly disagreed and **36%** disagreed that schools are responsive to mental health needs when dealing with behavioural issues.

There was a similar response from parents and carers who took part in the call for evidence, with **45%** strongly disagreeing and **36%** disagreeing that schools are responsive to mental health needs when dealing with behavioural issues.

There was a more mixed response from professionals. Whilst **15%** strongly disagreed and **31%** disagreed, **over 30%** (combining strongly agree and agree) stated that schools are responsive to mental health needs when dealing with behavioural issues.

Schools are responsive to mental health needs when dealing with behavioural issues

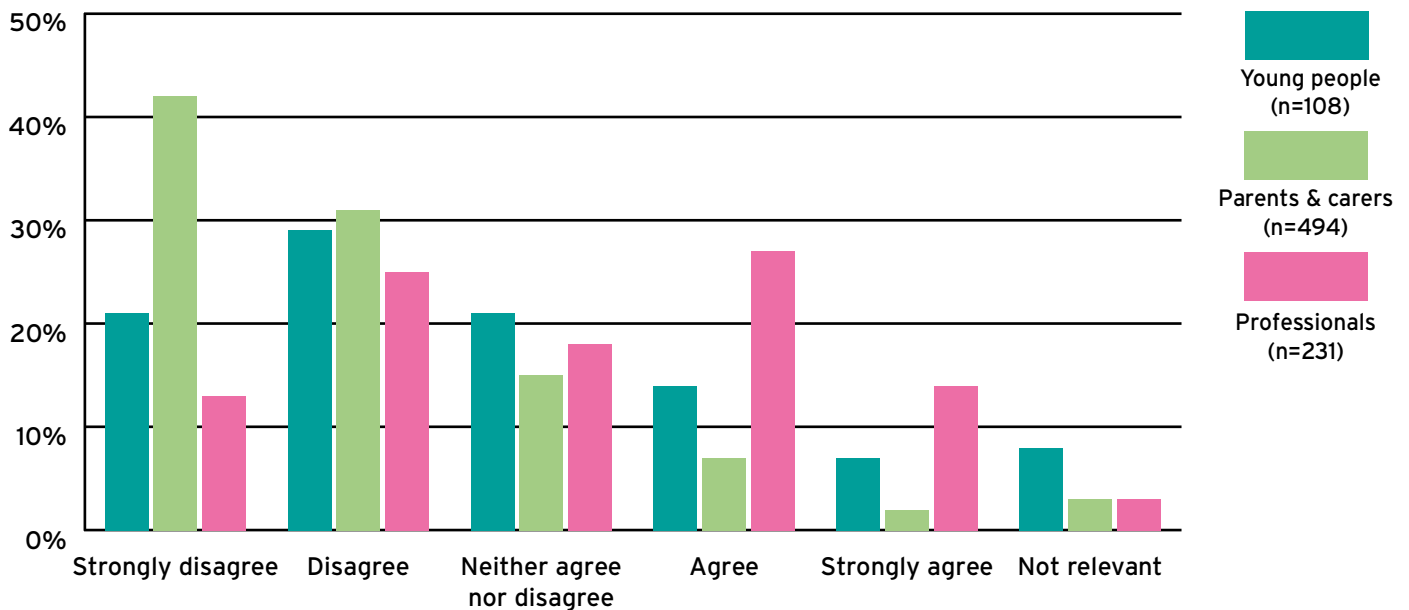


Young people reported similar findings when asked if schools are responsive to SEN and disabilities when dealing with behavioural issues. **21%** of young people strongly disagreed and **29%** disagreed that schools are responsive to SEN and disabilities within this context.

For parents and carers, a higher proportion disagreed, with **42%** strongly disagreeing and **31%** disagreeing that schools are responsive to SEN and disabilities when dealing with behavioural issues.

Professionals were more likely to respond by agreeing that schools are responsive to SEN and disabilities when dealing with behavioural issues, with **41%** strongly agreeing or agreeing, whilst **38%** said they disagreed.

Schools are responsive to SEN and disabilities when dealing with behavioural issues



The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on behaviour policies

The Covid-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruption to children and young people's education. Schools were closed to the majority of children and young people, with remote learning becoming the norm for many. It has been noted that the closure of schools deprived children of access not only to education but to the many other things that schools provide, from emotional support and life skills to regular meals (Gurdasani *et al.*, 2022).

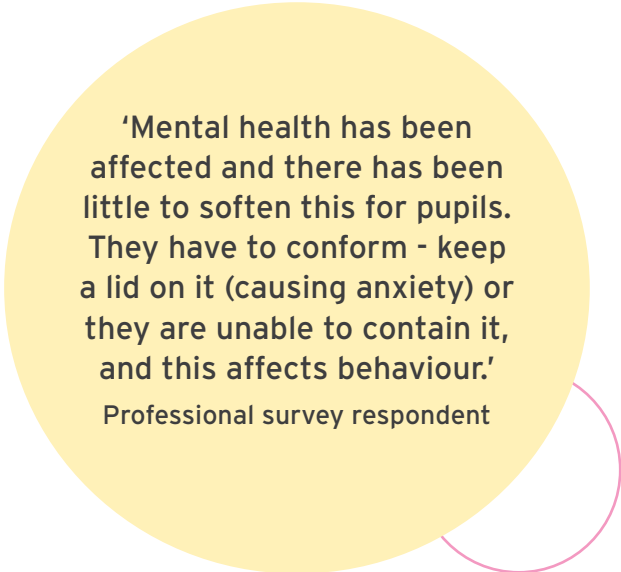
Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic did cause mass disruption to children, it is important to recognise that, for some, the move to remote education was better suited to their needs. A study conducted by researchers at the universities of Cambridge and Oxford found that one in three young people reported that their mental wellbeing had improved during the first lockdown (Soneson, 2022). Students who felt they had better wellbeing during lockdown were more likely than their peers to report positive lockdown experiences of school, home, relationships and lifestyle. In relation to school-related factors, the study noted that the increased opportunities for flexible and tailored teaching, smaller class sizes and more teacher attention, as well as more freedom during the school day may have contributed to increased feelings of wellbeing (Soneson, 2022).

The social and emotional disruption caused by the pandemic and subsequent school closures is highly likely to have increased or exacerbated student anxiety and other mental health issues, and in particular had a disproportionate impact on children and young people with SEN and disabilities (Daniels *et al.*, 2020; Ofsted, 2022).

Ofsted's 2022 annual report further indicates that Covid-19 continues to have an impact, with pupils' learning, attendance, mental health, physical health and personal

development persisting as areas of concern (Ofsted, 2022).

'Enormous impact on mental health of individuals and families, new coping behaviours observed, including bullying, self-harm, acting out frustration, food issues... Social skills lost during lockdown are making many situations much more complex and explosive or harmful.'
[Professional survey respondent]



'Mental health has been affected and there has been little to soften this for pupils. They have to conform - keep a lid on it (causing anxiety) or they are unable to contain it, and this affects behaviour.'
Professional survey respondent

'It's been a lonely few years, missing out on socialising and increased fears of not feeling safe.'
[Parent-carer survey respondent]

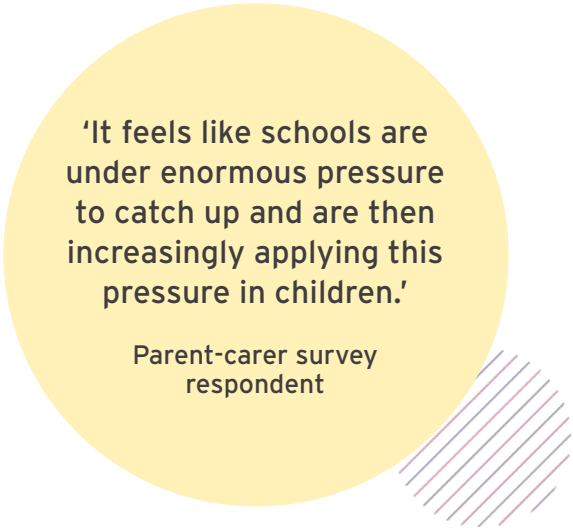
As we recover from the pandemic, the Government has placed emphasis on educational recovery to help pupils 'catch up' on lost learning. Overall funding for education 'catch-up' in England has totalled £3.1 billion since the beginning of the pandemic. Several respondents to our call for evidence raised concerns about the overemphasis on academic catch-up in national conversations during the return to school. At the time, there was widespread consensus amongst our members that the narrative expressed by politicians and within government messaging was unhelpful and intensified the pressures facing pupils and school staff.

'Schools feel under pressure from the government on catch up and have therefore cracked down on student behaviour. What students needed was time to re-engage with their friends and school again. So many young people have suffered trauma during the pandemic and for many their mental health is not ready for pressured learning.'

[Professional survey respondent]

'I think the additional pressure on schools made them less sympathetic to children's difficulties, and more rigid in their approach...'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]



'It feels like schools are under enormous pressure to catch up and are then increasingly applying this pressure in children.'

Parent-carer survey respondent

In relation to behaviour, research from Ofsted reported that school leaders said the pandemic had resulted in poorer behaviour among some pupils, which was commonly characterised by poorer social skills, such as not taking turns or sharing, not engaging with learning, and inappropriate behaviours such as bullying and fighting (Ofsted,2022). These issues were most common when pupils returned to school in autumn 2021, and by the summer term it was found that most pupils' behaviour had returned to how it was pre-pandemic. Ofsted's annual report noted that in some schools, pupils' levels of engagement and ability to stay on task have remained worse than before the pandemic.

There appeared to be a firm stance on behaviour, with former Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, stating that schools should take 'firm action' when faced with consistent 'bad behaviour', including by issuing detentions, suspensions and expulsions as children returned to school following lockdown in 2021. In our call for evidence, we asked young people, parents, carers and professionals to share their experiences of behaviour management in schools following the pandemic.

We found that experiences of behaviour management at this time varied across the responses we received to the call for evidence. Some highlighted that expectations around behaviour had increased, resulting in schools becoming stricter in their responses.

Before Covid-19, our school had two isolation rooms. One for minor issues like incorrect uniform, swearing, etcetera. And another one for what they deemed as more major issues like defiance, disrespecting a teacher. After the pandemic, they got rid of the less severe isolation room and put us all in the most important one, so you'd be immediately generalised to be this 'bad' student and if you'd done something wrong you'd be immediately sent to this isolation room, without them waiting to hear what you have to say, waiting for your opinion or your side of the story. They just didn't really seem to care to have the time to waste speaking to us.

[Young person survey respondent]

'After returning from the second lockdown which involved school closures, the school made tougher policies around their behaviour expectations. Their reasoning being this was to support pupils to remain disciplined and focused and to be able to catch up on lost learning.'

Parent-carer survey respondent

'Expectations on children are higher than prior to the pandemic. There is more of a general assumption that children will follow every rule, because in general they followed Covid-19 rules so well. Therefore if/when a child does not follow a rule, perhaps because it doesn't make sense to them, teachers are making more of an issue out of that than they would previously.'

[Professional survey respondent]

An area where schools were felt to be particularly strict following the pandemic was around attendance, with some pushing a 100% attendance policy.

'The Department of Education's guidance on school attendance also raises concerns about the detrimental impact of punishing pupils regarding school absences. As young people are prone to experiencing lengthy delays before accessing mental health support, government requirements on providing medical evidence can pose a significant challenge, which in addition is often not in the control of young. Without provision of evidence, young people are either recorded to have unauthorised absences which can make parents more vulnerable to fines and prosecutions.'

[Professional survey respondent]

Others shared that schools' expectations in relation to behaviour remained the same as pre-pandemic and no adjustments were made. Many felt that little consideration was taken of the impact of the pandemic on young people and that this could have unintended and negative consequences for pupil wellbeing.

'Schools have expected students to maintain high levels of behaviour, but this has often been at the expense of many students' ability to socialise with their peers/despite a significant deterioration in their mental health. This is not sustainable...'

[Young person survey respondent]

'The school's expectations haven't changed and I think this is bad. Lockdown has had a huge impact on everyone's mental health whether that be a big or small one. My school hasn't taken into account that people may behave differently to how they used to before and they haven't made any changes to their expectations.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'The school expects children to behave the way they would pre pandemic. Not enough is being done to help children catch up socially and emotionally.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

'The 100% attendance policy is awful. The new behaviour policy has not been produced in a supportive manner to students.'

Parent-carer survey respondent

School's expectations seem to be much the same as pre-pandemic when in fact, due to the pandemic, many pupils have regressed in their ability (or desire) to follow basic rules and conform to behaviour expectations.

[Professional survey respondent]

In particular, young people highlighted the difficulties in having to adjust back to school expectations and routines following a sustained period of being out of school.

'I think that due to Covid children are trying to have fun as we have been cooped up in our houses for a long time but when we come to school all the rules are quite strangling and can be overwhelming so when we do one thing on accident we get punishments that are way over board'

[Young person survey respondent]

'People have not had to live by school rules, had the same pressures or interact with others for so long that their behaviour has been affected negatively because of it. There is a lot more "messaging about" in lessons, which I think has a lot to do with the fact that students have a smaller attention span than before the lock down with not having lessons so full on.'

[Young person survey respondent]

Positively, we did hear reports of how some schools were more supportive following the pandemic, reviewing their policies and approaches to ensure that the needs of children and young people were supported.

'Her school is fairly relaxed compared to other schools. I like this. They allowed time for the children to settle back into routines and arrive in the morning. The return was stressful, and I feel the school recognised this and made allowances.'

Parent-carer survey respondent

'The school is aware of the impact covid has made on children's ability to manage interpersonal relationships, peer conflict and use of social media. The school has reviewed its behaviour policy and has implemented a range of welfare related interventions such as an emphasis on rewarding kindness.'

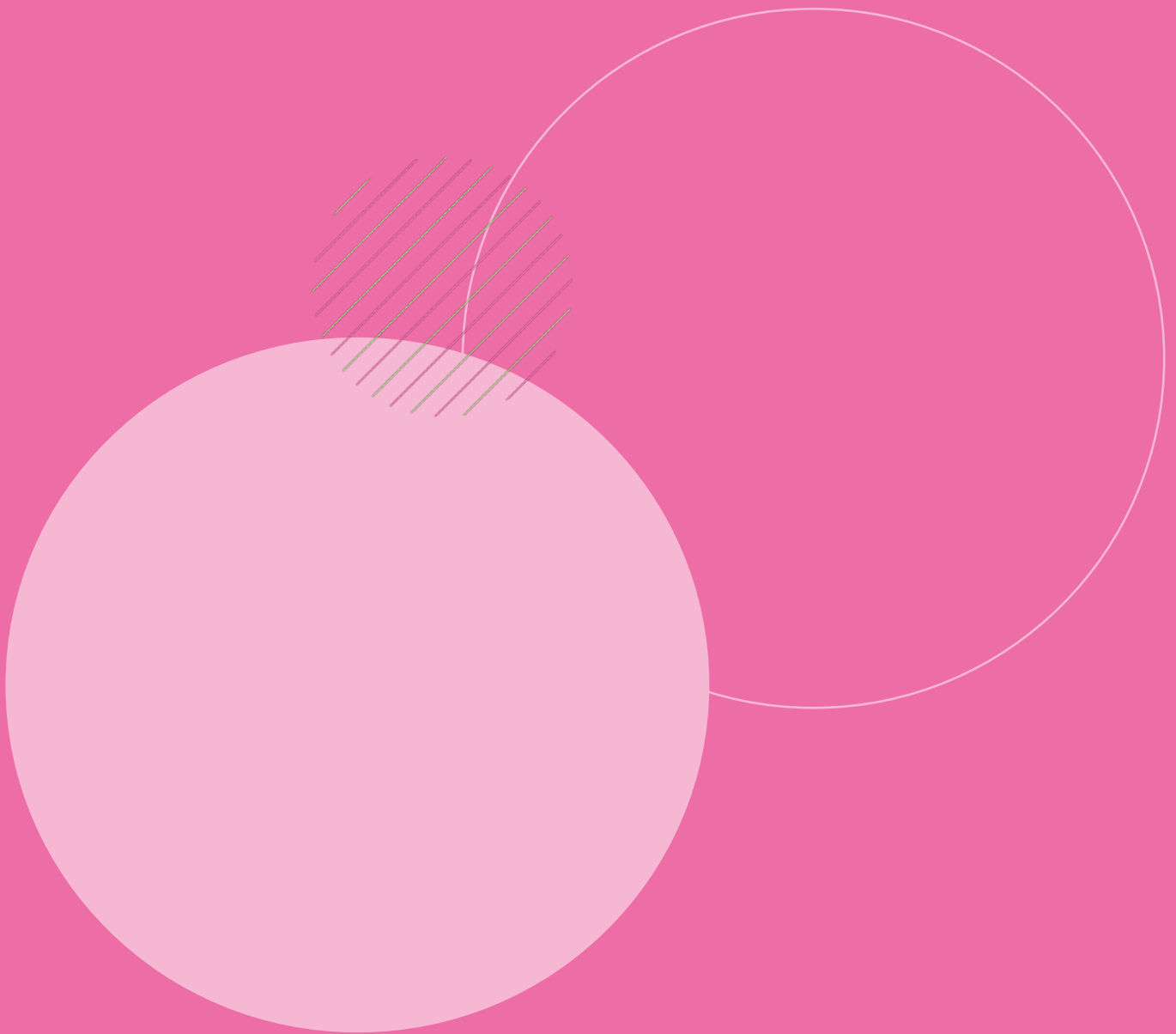
[Parent-carer survey respondent]

'Initially, I feel that we lowered our expectations about behaviour as a result of wanting to address possible mental health and wellbeing issues caused by the pandemic. We are now being able to establish a more rigorous approach, whilst maintaining a focus on restorative justice and taking account of Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs.'

[Professional survey respondent]

Chapter 3

The impact and effectiveness of behaviour management techniques



There have been longstanding concerns about the impact of behaviour management techniques used in schools on children and young people's mental health. Research by Centre for Mental Health shows how the use of restrictive practices towards behaviour, such as exclusion and isolation, can reinforce trauma and fuel a cycle between trauma, behaviours of concern, and further restrictive interventions (Centre for Mental Health, 2020).

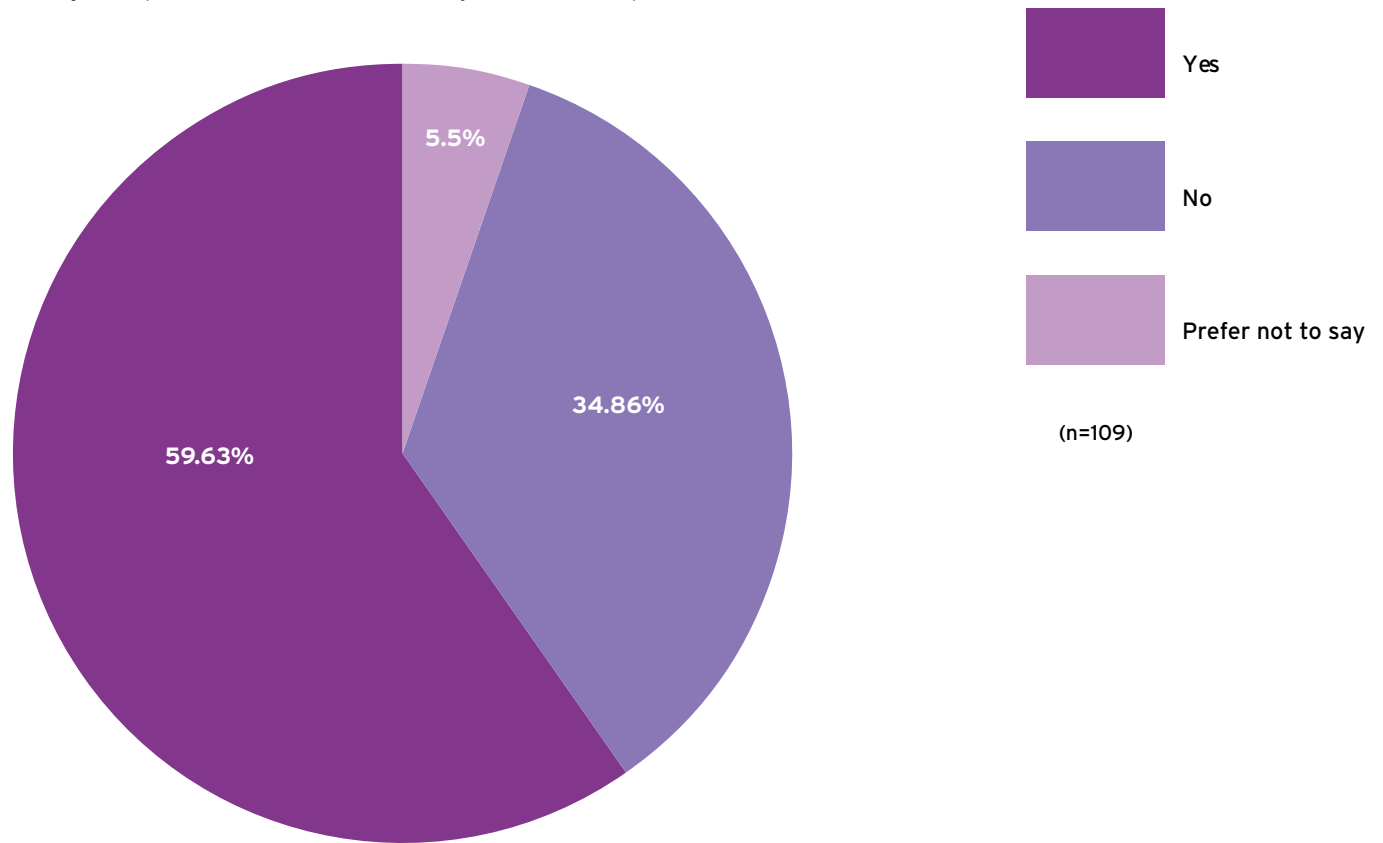
Evidence also highlights the particularly harmful impacts of permanent exclusion on mental health. For example, research by the University of Exeter has found that exclusion from school predicts the onset of new mental health problems such as depression and anxiety as well as behavioural disturbance (Ford *et al.*, 2017). Other studies also suggest that emotions such as shame, resentment, frustration, and powerlessness are experienced by students who are excluded from their school community (Partington, 2001). Whilst evidence demonstrates the consequences of permanent exclusions on mental health, we were keen to explore the range of behavioural sanctions deployed by schools and how harmful these are seen to be by those who experience them. Within this chapter, we look at children and young people's experiences of behaviour management techniques, the impact of these on mental health, and the effectiveness of such techniques in improving behaviour.

Experiences of behaviour management techniques

Government guidance sets out that teachers can sanction pupils whose conduct falls below the standard which could be expected of them. This means that if a pupil misbehaves, breaks a rule or fails to follow reasonable instruction, the teacher can apply a sanction on that pupil (Department for Education, 2022). For the purpose of the report, we are referring to these sanctions/approaches as behaviour management techniques. We wanted to understand how the many young people who responded to our call for evidence had experienced behaviour management techniques at school.

60% of young people who responded to the call for evidence said they had experienced behaviour management techniques at school.

Have you experienced behaviour management techniques at school?



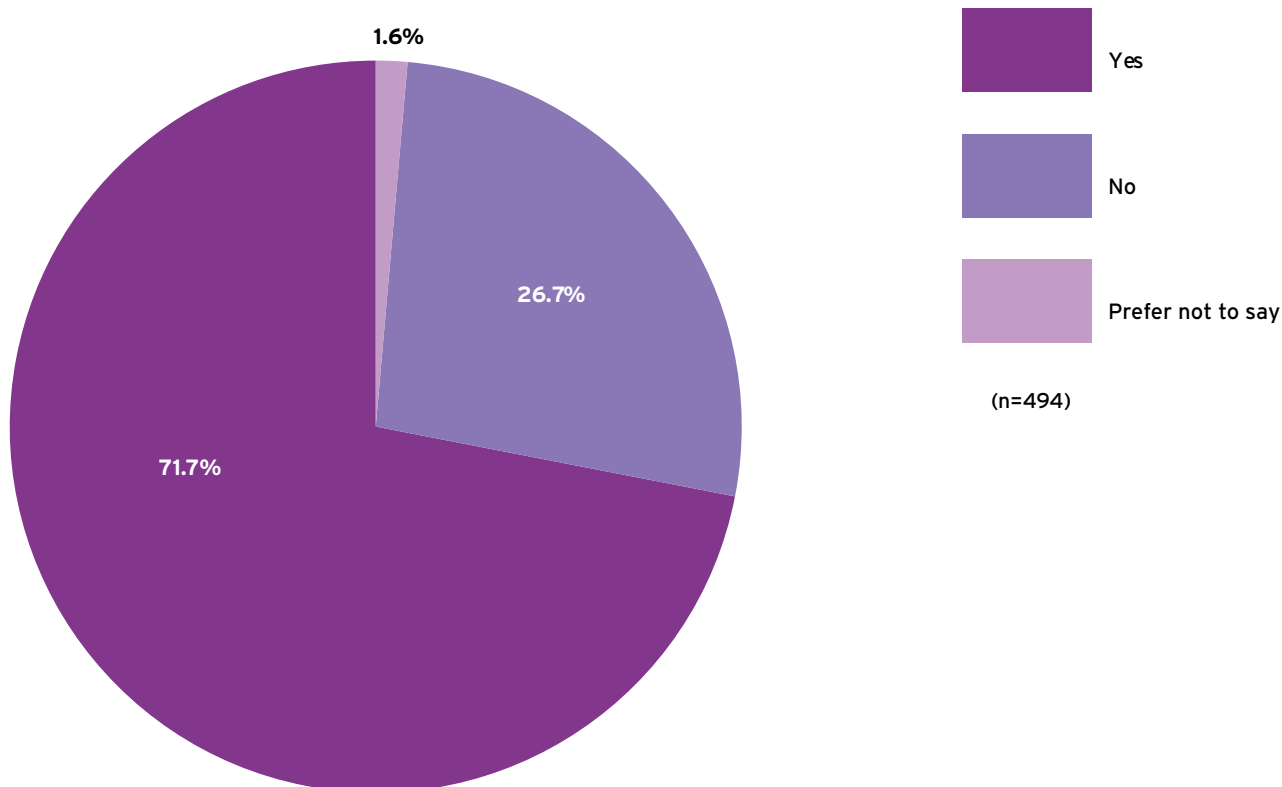
We completed further analysis to explore the age range of young people who had experienced these techniques. Our analysis found that older young people in secondary school were more likely to experience behaviour management techniques compared to younger age groups in primary school, which could reflect the higher proportion of 11-15 year olds who responded to the survey. This is demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The breakdown of children and young people who have experienced behaviour management techniques at school, by age (in percentage)

Have you experienced behaviour management techniques at school?			
Age group	Yes	No	Prefer not to say
5-10	33.3%	66.7%	
11-15	57.6%	35.6%	6.8%
16-18	62.1%	34.5%	
18+	70.6%	17.6%	11.8%

We also asked parents and carers if their child had experienced behaviour management techniques at school, with 72% of those responding saying they had.

Has your child experienced behaviour management techniques at school?



Further analysis highlighted that of those parents who identified that their child receives SEN support or has an EHCP, a high proportion also said that their child had experienced behaviour management techniques at school. **74.7%** of parents whose child receives SEN support or has an EHCP plan said their child had experienced behaviour management techniques.

The impact of behaviour techniques on mental health

Whilst existing evidence predominantly focuses on the harmful impact of permanent exclusion on children and young people's mental health, we were keen to explore the range of behavioural sanctions used by schools. These approaches were chosen based on what is set out as recommended sanctions in the Department's behaviour guidance, and in consultation with our Youth Advisory Group and Parent-Carer Advisory groups.

We asked young people, parents and carers the extent to which they believe the behaviour management techniques outlined impact young people's mental health on a scale from very harmful to very beneficial, based on previous experiences they have had before.

Overall, young people reported that the use of removal rooms was the most harmful to their mental health, with **90%** of young people who responded to the question stating this (combining responses of harmful and most harmful). This was followed by whole class punishment, fines/penalties for lateness or non-attendance and permanent exclusion.

The use of school-based community service and in-school behaviour units were considered by young people to be the behaviour management techniques that are least harmful to mental health. Figure 2 presents a breakdown of responses from most harmful to least harmful.

Figure 2: Young people's views on the impact of behaviour management techniques based on their previous experience (in percentage)

	Very harmful	Harmful	Neither beneficial nor harmful	Beneficial	Very Beneficial	Sample size (N)
Isolation rooms/ removal rooms	59%	31%	5%	5%	0	61
Whole class punishment	46%	39%	15%	0	0	65
Fine penalties for non-attendance/ lateness	56%	26%	16%	2%	0	55
Permanent exclusion	67%	15%	16%	2%	2%	55
Suspension	61%	19%	15%	4%	2%	54
Loss of privileges	30%	43%	20%	7%	0	60
Detention	32%	41%	25%	2%	0	63
Being put on report	28%	40%	23%	7%	2%	57
Phone call home	39%	28%	23%	10%	0	60
Verbal reprimand	30%	31%	31%	8%	0	61
Use of school in behaviour units	44%	15%	29%	10%	2%	52
School based community service	13%	8%	57%	22%	0	60

Parents and carers also highlighted the use of removal rooms as the technique most harmful to children and young people's mental health, with **96%** of those responding to the question stating their use is either very harmful or harmful. This was followed by fines/ penalties for non-attendance, permanent exclusion and suspension.

School-based community service and phone calls home were seen as the techniques least harmful to mental health. Figure 3 provides a breakdown of these responses from most harmful to least harmful.

Figure 3: Parent-carer views on the impact of behaviour management techniques based on their previous experience (in percentage)

	Very harmful	Harmful	Neither beneficial nor harmful	Beneficial	Very Beneficial	Sample size (N)
Isolation rooms/ removal rooms	80%	16%	3%	2%	0	247
Fine penalties for non-attendance/ lateness	77%	18%	4%	1%	1%	212
Permanent exclusion	85%	9%	5%	5%	0	188
Suspension	76%	19%	5%	1%	1%	213
Detention	54%	33%	11%	1%	0	243
Whole classroom punishment	61%	25%	12%	2%	0	254
Loss of privileges	53%	33%	11%	3%	0	276
Use of school in behaviour units	60%	19%	13%	8%	1%	200
Being put on report	42%	37%	16%	5%	1%	222
Verbal reprimand	27%	43%	21%	9%	0	289
School based community service	20%	21%	39%	19%	1%	213
Phone call home	11%	22%	34%	29%	5%	262

We also asked professionals the extent to which they believe the outlined behaviour management techniques impact young people’s mental health on a scale from very harmful to very beneficial, based on their views and expertise.

Professionals and practitioners who responded to the question identified permanent exclusion as the most harmful to mental health, followed by whole class punishment, suspension and fines/penalties for non-attendance or lateness. Phone calls home, school-based community service and verbal reprimand were seen as least harmful. Figure 4 provides a breakdown of these responses from most harmful to least harmful.

Figure 4: Professional and practitioner views on the impact of behaviour management techniques based on their previous experience (in percentage)

	Very harmful	Harmful	Neither beneficial nor harmful	Beneficial	Very Beneficial	Sample size (N)
Permanent exclusion	72%	19%	6%	2%	1%	223
Whole classroom punishment	49%	36%	13%	2%	0	224
Suspension	44%	38%	15%	3%	0	223
Fine penalties for non-attendance/lateness	44%	31%	19%	5%	1%	221
Isolation rooms/removal rooms	48%	28%	18%	6%	1%	221
Loss of privileges	18%	42%	25%	15%	1%	219
Detention	17%	36%	41%	7%	1%	217
Use of in school behaviour units	25%	27%	26%	19%	3%	215
Being out on report	15%	29%	35%	21%	1%	220
Verbal reprimand	11%	32%	40%	16%	1%	223
Phone call home	7%	15%	35%	39%	3%	221
School based community service	9%	12%	39%	37%	4%	222

The use of removal rooms

Guidance from the Department for Education states that removal from the classroom should be considered a 'serious sanction' and should only be used when necessary and once other behavioural strategies in the classroom have been attempted. However, we are concerned that removal rooms are not being used in this way. We consistently heard that removal is being used in response to minimal breaches of the behaviour policy or as a proactive sanction.

'In some schools I see a really proliferating use of isolation, for example as an approach to managing behaviour.'

[Hester Riviere, Sector evidence session]

'The impact seems to be quite huge on the young people we support... children being in isolation rooms for not days, not a day, not hours but weeks and months for things sometimes that are nothing to do with their behaviour, like their haircut and then the behaviour issue is the fact that they haven't changed it.'

[Mital Raithatha, Sector evidence session]

'Being in a room by yourself five hours a day is absolutely horrendous.'

End Child Poverty Youth Ambassador, Sector evidence session

There is limited research on the efficacy of isolation punishment and no statistical information on the prevalence of isolation as a form of school discipline exists (Sealy *et al.*, 2020). An investigation carried out by the BBC in 2018 found that more than 200 schools in England use isolation booths. The investigation also found that more than 200 pupils spent at least five straight days in isolation booths, and more than 5,000 children with special educational needs attended isolation rooms at some stage (BBC, 2018).

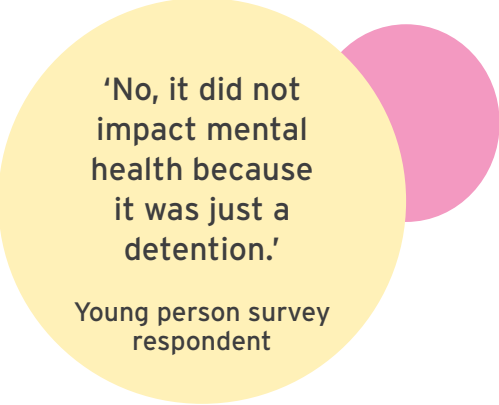
While the behaviour in schools guidance suggests that schools collect data on the use of removal rooms, there is no requirement for this to be fed into the Department for Education, meaning that the Government does not have a clear picture on the use of this as a sanction across schools.

Despite an apparent rise in the use of isolation, research carried out by the University of Sunderland found no evidence that the use of isolation booths improves behaviour, with findings suggesting it makes behaviour worse and compounds mental health and physical health issues (Martin-Denham, 2020). It has been further noted that when children are placed in isolation for prolonged periods, deprived of social interaction and in a state of continual impoverished trust, their emotional systems remain on high alert, impacting their sense of identity, hope and capacity to relate to others (Sealy *et al.*, 2020).

The impact of behaviour management techniques on mental health

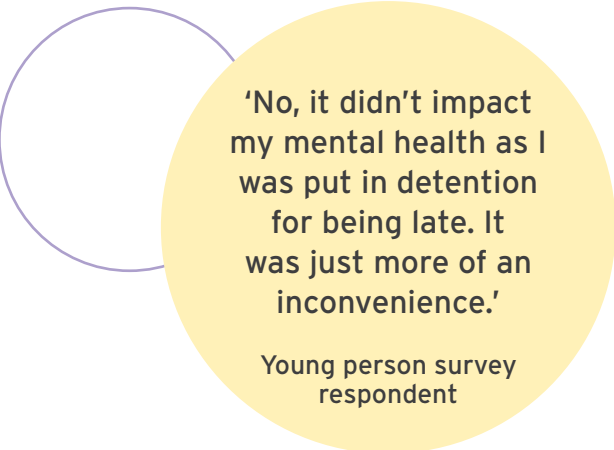
We wanted to further understand the impact that behaviour management techniques have on children and young people's mental health. In our call for evidence, we asked both the young people and the parents and carers who reported that they had experienced such techniques if they felt these had impacted their or their child's mental health and, if so, how. Most respondents did not specify the behaviour management technique they had experienced; therefore, the following evidence provides an overview of these techniques as a whole.

It is important to note that there were young people who responded to the question who reported that experiencing behaviour management techniques had no impact on their mental health. This mainly related to experiences of detention.



'No, it did not impact mental health because it was just a detention.'

Young person survey respondent



'No, it didn't impact my mental health as I was put in detention for being late. It was just more of an inconvenience.'

Young person survey respondent

I did not experience many: the extent was a couple of detentions and being 'gated' which refers to not being able to leave school grounds for a period of time (and having to sign in every hour to prove this). As there were not many instances it did not impact me greatly. But I did witness the effects of isolation impacting the mental health of my peers.

[Young person survey respondent]

However, there was an overriding sense from the majority of young people who responded to the question that experiences of behaviour management techniques had some impact on their mental health. Some young people described how experiencing such techniques evoked negative feelings and emotions about themselves. In particular, feeling worthless, invisible and disappointed with themselves came up as key themes.

'I felt invisible and misunderstood. It made me not want to go to college as I was worried I would get shouted at.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'It made me feel a little displeased with myself and uncomfortable. I felt as though the fun/happiness in my brain was slightly fading into one that was harsher and stricter.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'It affects my mental health by putting the idea in my head that no-one sees my worth and I deserve to be in pain.'

[Young person survey respondent]

Further to this, other young people described feeling isolated and alone as a result of experiencing behaviour management techniques.

'It definitely impacted me negatively, I think there was a sense of isolation and loneliness that came with it and nobody cared to ask why I was doing what I was doing and how to deal with it, it was more a case of authority trying to make you feel worse than you already did.'

Parent-carer survey respondent

'Being locked into a room doesn't help with your behaviour, it makes you feel alone.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'It was horrible, I felt alone and isolated and didn't know what to do because I didn't mean to do anything wrong.'

[Young person survey respondent]

Parents and carers further reported that, where their child had existing mental health problems and needs, they felt that experiencing behaviour management techniques made these difficulties worse.

A huge number of detentions led to a breakdown, him withdrawing from school and eventually admission to a mental health unit. School only ever treated him as being naughty.

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

'My child has been made to sit alone for hours at a time as she couldn't cope in a classroom setting. Eventually she ended up with no friends as she was 'forgotten' and the effect on her mental health was so detrimental that it added to her illnesses, and she no longer attended school.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

'Isolation gives time for thoughts and feelings to escalate and has a negative impact. My daughter self-harms and time away from others isolated creates unhelpful thoughts and feelings that then become overwhelming without the opportunity to discuss this with others due to the nature of isolation and detentions rather than finding the root of the behaviour it escalates these behaviours and can create crisis for my daughter.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

In some cases, parents-carers spoke about how the experience of behaviour management techniques led their child to self-harm and to experiencing suicidal thoughts.

'Horrific. Currently receiving CAMHS support and this made him feel unwanted and contributed more towards his suicidal thoughts.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

'They became so frequent that each exclusion led to severe breakdowns for my son, including him repeatedly saying he didn't want to live.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

'Destroyed it he was suicidal.'

Parent-carer survey respondent

My child was put in isolation for 1/2 years, this had massive impact on his mental health as he could not cope with being in a small booth, to the extent he wanted to kill himself.

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

'Child didn't want to go to school and was anxious about getting into trouble.'
[Parent-carer survey respondent]

Impact on feelings about school

Both young people and parents and carers highlighted that experiences of behaviour management techniques had consequences for their feelings about school. Some young people noted how this negatively impacted their relationships with teachers. In particular, some described not feeling listened to by their teachers, not feeling supported and that no action was taken to understand why the behaviour was happening.

'I felt very isolated and bullied by teachers and those who were meant to protect me and have my best interests at heart. It felt like they actually had their own interests because it's easier for them to shove the disruptive student away instead of providing them with support. I felt misunderstood and not given my own agency either.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'Yes it did, I stopped caring about how teachers viewed me as a general student and I gave up trying so hard to impress teachers when they don't even care about you. When I got a detention I told the teacher the truth about what actually happened, but she did not believe me, so I gave up trying to tell them.'

[Young person survey respondent]

Parents and carers also highlighted how the threat of behaviour management techniques made their child feel scared and pressured within school, causing increases in feelings of anxiety.

'Punitive measures for not completing tasks in time has caused my child's anxiety to spike re: going to school and any pressure to complete tasks within a set time. Fear of failure in those situations is very high'

Parent-carer survey respondent

Impact on school attendance

We heard from both young people and parents and carers how these experiences resulted in non-attendance at school. Young people told us how these experiences made them feel scared of school and resulted in them no longer wanting to attend, particularly if a young person was experiencing mental health problems.

'Being shouted at scared me, I was scared of my teacher, they made me miss my break, saying I wasn't listening when I didn't understand. Told me off for being slower. It made me too scared to go to school.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'Made me feel unwelcome in school and I felt less inclined to attend as a lot of blame was placed on me for things I could not control and I began to believe it, which enhanced the mental health problems I was facing.'

[Young person survey respondent]

As it was my first behaviour point I felt extremely upset to the point that I didn't want to come into school again, my mental health was already quite low as my illness was causing me some mental and physical problems and this just made me feel even worse.
[Young person survey respondent]

Parents and carers further reported that the use of such techniques led their child to feel demoralised about school and in some cases these experiences led to non-attendance.

'He didn't care about going to school. He felt they did not care about him.'
[Parent-carer survey respondent]

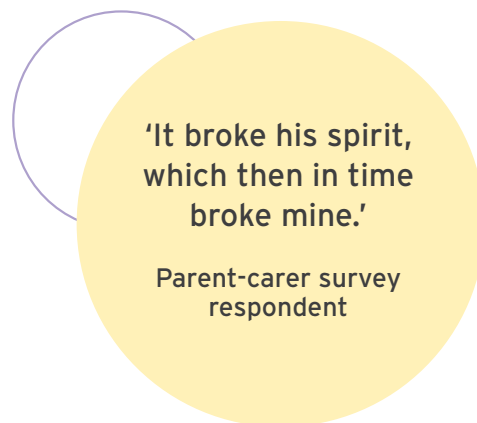
'It has created resistance to going to school and a poor attitude towards it, she no longer wants to learn or believes she can.'
[Parent-carer survey respondent]

'My son stopped going into certain lessons for fear of getting in trouble, this led to him refusing to go into school at all. Behaviour management sanctions (on report, detentions, inclusion and exclusion) were often used rather than understanding of his developmental trauma or proper implementation of his EHCP.'
[Parent-carer survey respondent]

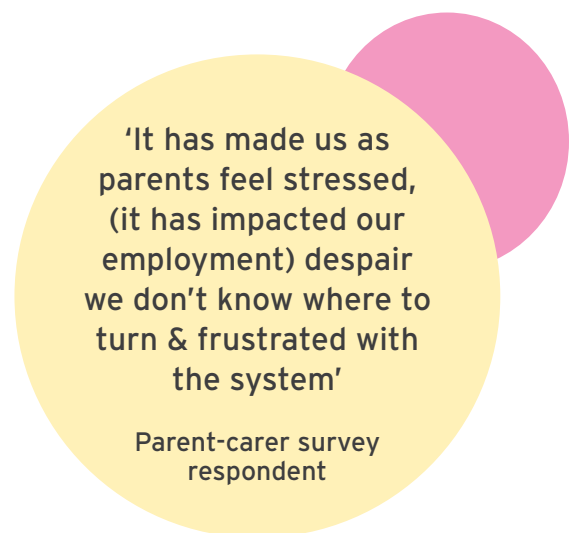
Impact on wider family

The impact of behaviour management techniques is not just limited to the child. Parents-carers told us about the wider impact of these techniques on family life, including parental mental health and on working life and employment.

'This has triggered more trauma and periods of emotionally based school avoidance for our daughter. There is limited understanding and intervention that is needs or trauma led. We have felt bullied, disbelieved and blamed by school for our child's struggles. Our whole family has had to change and reduce working hours to accommodate our increasingly disconnected daughter from herself, us and the world.'
[Parent-carer survey respondent]



'It broke his spirit, which then in time broke mine.'
Parent-carer survey respondent



'It has made us as parents feel stressed, (it has impacted our employment) despair we don't know where to turn & frustrated with the system'
Parent-carer survey respondent

Many also highlighted how they felt judged and blamed for their child's behaviour by the school.

'My child was made to feel like a bad child, and I was made to feel like a bad mother.'
[Parent-carer survey respondent]

School blamed our parenting which had a huge impact on me. My child lost all confidence and became extremely anxious and wanted to be dead rather than go to school.

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

'He internalised that adults at school do not listen and felt invalidated. My partner felt that if we did not accept the school's views we were ineffective parents while I felt that I wanted to advocate for my child. He himself did not want the attention it would draw so I felt I was letting him down.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

Little understanding of needs

Overall, it was felt that there was a lack of understanding from schools of the consequences that behaviour management techniques could have on young people with mental health problems or with special educational needs and disabilities. Young people expressed that behaviour can sometimes be outside of their control as a result of their needs and this was not understood by the school.

'I only get into trouble for being forgetful or not concentrating, but I'm diagnosed with those difficulties along with others. It terrifies me and makes me not want to go to school. I spend more time worrying about not getting told off and I can't then focus on my work.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'I'd say this negatively impacted my mental health. Due to my depression, I am often unable to get out of bed, to get ready, to leave for school on time so I'm constantly quite late. I also frequently am unable to be in class whether this is because of my sensory issues or depression it is never quite understood. Instead of ever listening to my reasoning

or being asked why I'm constantly late, one of my teachers want to put me on report 'to check that I'm going to all my classes' and I'm in detention more times than I'm in class. Upon trying to explain myself I'm told that everybody has excuses and that I'm no different from everybody else. Further ignoring my mental health and making me feel like it's pointless to try and talk if no one will take it on board.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'It did [impact my mental health] as I felt I was being punished for something out of my control. My behaviour is a result of my mental health and special needs so I can't control the fact that I act a certain way from time to time.'

[Young person survey respondent]

Parents and carers echoed these concerns and further highlighted that, in some cases, their child felt worried about being labelled a 'bad person' or 'naughty' because of their needs.

'Felt he was being blamed for something outside of his control.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

'They enjoyed the quiet environment of isolation but hated the idea that they had been naughty when their behaviour was caused by their needs.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

The impact of behaviour techniques on specific groups of young people

Throughout this inquiry, we heard evidence that some groups of children and young people are disproportionately impacted by school behavioural policies, and often these policies fail to take into consideration individual needs and challenges of different young people. These groups of young people include, but are not limited to, those with special educational needs and disabilities, young people from racialised communities including Black and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, and young people from low-income backgrounds.

A report by the Children's Commissioner in 2012 noted that a lack of understanding on how to manage children who have differing abilities and cultural and relationship expectations can lead to confrontations between teachers and children, increasing the likelihood of specific groups of children having disciplinary problems, exceeding boundaries and thresholds, and ultimately being excluded (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2012).

Data on the use of school exclusions is the main data available to us on the use of behaviour policies in school. There are concerns that permanent exclusion might be applied disproportionately to certain groups of students (Department for Education, 2019). Literature consistently notes that certain vulnerabilities, individually or combined, increased a child's risk of exclusion, including SEN and disabilities, social and emotional health (SEMH) needs, poverty, low attainment, being from racialised groups, being bullied, poor relationships with teachers, life trauma, and challenges in their home life (Department for Education, 2019).

Data from the Department for Education on the use of school exclusions highlights this disproportionality in their use (Department for Education, 2022).

- Boys have higher permanent exclusion and suspension rates than girls.
- Rates of exclusions are around four times higher for pupils eligible for free school meals compared for those who are not eligible. The suspension rate is also higher for this group.
- Exclusion and suspension rates are higher among pupils with special education needs.
- Gypsy and Roma pupils continue to have the highest rates of permanent exclusions and suspensions, followed by pupils of mixed white and Black Caribbean ethnicity.

Analysis conducted by the Avon Longitudinal Study further demonstrates that exclusion is more likely among children of lower socioeconomic status, boys, and those with language difficulties, lower educational attainment or special educational needs (Paget *et al.*, 2018).

Children's identities and circumstances are multi-faceted, which means many children will experience multiple layers of vulnerability (Just for Kids Law *et al.*, 2020). For example, children on free school meals are twice as likely to have SEN and disabilities, and Black children face a higher chance of living in poverty. It has been identified that schools reflect wider society; these social factors intersect, creating overlapping disadvantage and marginalisation (Just for Kids Law *et al.*, 2020). As we heard in our evidence sessions, this can also be seen as multiplication of marginalisation.

What does the Equality Act 2010 say?

Under the Equality Act 2010, schools cannot unlawfully discriminate against pupils because of their sex, race, disability, religion or belief, or sexual orientation (Department for Education, 2014). Schools must not discriminate against a pupil, or a child or young person who might become a pupil at the school, in relation to admissions, the provision of education, access to any benefit, facility or service, or exclusion or other forms of detriment, that is other forms of disadvantage.

The duties under the Act cover not just teaching and learning in classrooms, but lunchtimes and playtimes, school clubs, activities and trips; in effect, the whole life of the school (Stobbs, 2022). Under the Act, schools are required to make 'reasonable adjustments' so that disabled pupils can participate in school life and in order to avoid any disadvantage that might otherwise occur (Stobbs, 2022).

Guidance to schools on their duties under the Equality Act 2010 also sets out that schools need to make sure that pupils of all races are not singled out for different or less favourable treatment from that given to other pupils (Department for Education, 2014).

Importantly, a school's duties under the Equality Act 2010 should take precedence over behaviour policies and practices.

'When you look at it intersectionally... I think looking at protected characteristics and the intersections and not in a compounded way, not in a cumulative way is really important, we're not adding things together. We're talking about the multiplication of marginalization.'
[Zahra Bei, Sector evidence session]

The impact on those with existing mental health problems

Experiences of mental health problems can impact children and young people's participation in school life. An inquiry conducted by Mind on mental health and education noted how low mood, fatigue, depression and difficulty concentrating meant that young people had little energy or motivation to complete school (Mind, 2021).

Further to this, Mind's inquiry found that almost half (48%) of young people who took part in the research said they had been disciplined at school for behaviour that was due to their mental health.

'We can also see how they [behaviour policies] disproportionately affect young people with social, emotional, mental health difficulties.'

Hester Riviere, Sector evidence session

‘ A child with depression may lack motivation to engage in school, may be irritable and challenging in a way that they haven’t been before. And again, I have in my clinical practice seen children who have experienced fixed term or even permanent exclusions as a result of a severe depressive episode, but the school didn’t see where their behaviour was coming from and likewise a child who is anxious may become very angry and tantrum even depending on their age if they are pushed to do something that increases their anxiety... what the teacher sees is behaviour, but it’s coming from an emotional difficulty. ’
[Professor Tamsin Ford]

Studies have also shown how experiencing mental health problems is linked to school exclusion and difficulties with attendance. Analysis has found that children with recognised difficulties were more likely to be excluded, but children with unrecognised difficulties or recognised subclinical difficulties were also more likely to be excluded than children with no difficulties (Parker *et al.*, 2019). Further research from the University of Exeter highlighted how children with psychological distress and mental health problems are more likely to be excluded, but exclusion predicted increased levels of psychological distress (Ford, 2017).

‘I guess the other thing to say is my work has clearly demonstrated in more than one data set that there is a bidirectional relationship between poor mental health and exclusion from school. We are excluding, as you know, other vulnerable characteristics. More children with those characteristics are excluded rather than their mental health supported and their access to schools supported and likewise of those who were doing OK, those who are excluded have worse mental health. So, it’s a pretty disastrous thing to do.’
[Professor Tamsin Ford]

In relation to school attendance, one study exploring the association of neurodevelopmental and mental health disorders and recorded self-harm by age 24 years with school attendance and exclusion found that children and young people with a record of a neurodevelopmental or mental disorder or self-harm were more likely to miss school than those without a record (John *et al.*, 2022). The Children’s Commissioner for England has noted that children have reported facing barriers to attendance, such as a lack of support around mental health, emotional and care needs, and problems around feeling safe and supported in school (Children’s Commissioner, 2022a).

The impact of racial stereotypes

Research suggests that behavioural policies that fail to take into consideration the behavioural and cultural norms of different ethnic groups can lead to some in those groups being labelled as disruptive and aggressive (The Traveller Movement, 2020).

Current research indicates that racism is present in school structures within the UK (Lamrhari *et al.*, 2022). A YMCA poll conducted in 2020 found that 95% of Black children had heard racist language at school and 49% considered racism as the main barrier to academic achievement (YMCA, 2020). What is more, half of those children cited teachers’ perception of them as one of the biggest barriers to their achievement in school, such as being seen as ‘too aggressive’ (YMCA, 2020).

Research published in 2014 by Anglia Ruskin University also found that nearly 9 out of every 10 children and young people from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller background had suffered racial abuse and nearly two-thirds had been bullied or physically attacked (The Traveller Movement, 2016). Further research by the Traveller Movement found that 40% of young Gypsies and Travellers in London had experienced bullying and, of these,

67% reported experiencing bullying from teachers that they felt was directly linked to their ethnicity (The Traveller Movement, 2020).

'One quick example is the number of teachers and even headteachers that I've spoken to who don't recognize Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups as ethnic groups or races or ethnically protected. And so, when the use of the words ***** or Gypsy or ***** are used, they see that as banter... What we're saying is no, this goes a lot further. This needs to be treated the same way as we see other groups with similar dreadful words being used.'

[The Traveller Movement, Sector evidence session]

Numerous studies have found that racism particularly affects Black pupils and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children within education settings, in the form of differential treatment, linked to (unintentional) low educational expectations, a variance in reactions to behavioural transgressions, and a lack of awareness of diversity (Department for Education, 2019). We heard evidence of how this differential treatment stems from the persistent stereotyping of these groups.

'The persistence of stereotypes means that often people don't see the child in front of them... it's that persistence of stereotypes that we still have failed to challenge that gives opportunity for the behaviour and policies that we have in place to act discriminately and disproportionately at the moment.'

[Jabeer Butt, Sector evidence session]

Young people are also aware of the impact of stereotypes held by school settings and how this impacts their experiences of school behaviour policies. For example, The Children's Society spoke to young people who had experienced school exclusions and reported that school

policies disproportionately impact young people from racialised communities, with consequences for poor behaviour escalating much more quickly for these groups, particularly for young Black boys (Lamrhari *et al.*, 2022). Young people highlighted the stereotypes some teachers hold against Black students and described teachers lacking understanding because of intergenerational differences. Research highlights how these stereotypes can manifest in the treatment of children and young people (Commission on Young Lives, 2022).

For example, a YoungMinds focus group with young Black men in 2021 highlighted that for the participants involved, this was a key issue. Respondents reported that they felt that teachers often treated young people unfairly because of their race and that they felt teachers 'held grudges' with Black pupils longer than they would with peers who are not Black. When discussing racial stereotypes in school, respondents stated that if they felt listened to by school staff, it would have a positive impact on both their education and wellbeing. This would involve teachers and school staff looking at the reasons that a young person may be acting a certain way, rather than capitulating straight to a sanctions-based approach.

[Professionals survey respondent]

What is more, racial stereotyping means that sometimes Black children can be viewed as both older and less innocent than their white peers, and also falsely perceived as angry in the classroom (Commission on Young Lives, 2022). This is also known as adultification, whereby Black children are viewed as older than they are and consequently are not treated with the care and treatment that is needed for children. As a result, these children may be subject to receiving more punitive sanctions, such as being excluded from school. Adultification can also lead to

a lack of safeguarding and protection being afforded to these children (Commission on Young Lives, 2022). We have seen this play out in the recent case of Child Q, where a 15-year-old Black girl was strip searched by police at school.

You have to ask yourself the question: why is it that we spend more time discussing how black boys cut their hair than we do about what we have or haven't achieved in improving their educational attainment? And in that context, we have to see what happened to Child Q as a behaviour management activity, that's what they were doing. When they failed to identify any drugs on her, they called in the police. This was not only a message for her, but this was also a message for all the other black girls in that school.

[Jabeer Butt, Sector evidence session]

Experiences of racist stereotypes and discrimination can not only affect children's self-esteem, aspiration, mental health and attainment, it can impact their behaviour as a result of feeling undervalued and disrespected (Just for Kids Law *et al.*, 2020). As a result, this can contribute to children not wanting to attend school and not feeling engaged in their education.

Children from low-income backgrounds

Children living in poverty often find aspects of school life problematic because of their limited income, and conforming and complying with the rules and expectations set out in school can be challenging, especially when these carry a financial cost, such as uniform and equipment (Department for Education, 2019). Research from the Child Poverty Action Group's Cost of the School Day project found that 40% of low-income families were missing at least one essential resource to support their children's learning (Child Poverty Action Group, 2020).

Sanctions for not meeting school expectations are often the same as those applied for poor behaviour, meaning pupils from low-income backgrounds can often be punished for not having the correct uniform or equipment.

'We see that within our communities [Gypsy, Roma and Traveller] as well and we often see teachers not willing to compromise. Teachers are not willing to understand why there may be difficulties in doing homework, such as poor access to the Internet and digital exclusion and those sorts of things.'

[The Traveller Movement, Sector evidence session]

'In terms of discipline it seems to be the case still that children are disciplined for not having the right uniform, for not being able to do homework because they don't have a computer at home and can't do it online - the homework is set that a child can't possibly do so they're set up to fail... it gives the classic double bind, that we're going to be told off for something you have absolutely no control over and it's no wonder therefore low income kids... they are up against both sort of behaviour management systems, but also just basically being able to participate normally like other kids.'

[Alison Garnham, Sector Evidence Session]

This in turn can lead to young people feeling unjustly treated, in some cases causing them to resist punishment, which in turn escalates to more serious sanctions and a reputation for being 'problematic' (Just for Kids Law *et al.*, 2020). This was reflected in our evidence sessions:

'I think ultimately experiencing poverty in school is incredibly isolating, they feel different, it makes you feel undervalued... if you're not accepted by the leaders, schoolteachers, young people from middle class incomes, you go on to make your own groups and you sort of move away from following the narrative... ultimately, you'll never have that, so you push [yourself] away from those narratives because you can't achieve them. So, this obviously translates to young people isolating themselves away from school rules, they create their own rules... and obviously just completely undermining the school system.'

[End Child Poverty Youth Ambassador, Sector evidence session]

These difficulties are likely to be compounded by the current cost of living crisis. *Buttle UK's State of Child Poverty Report 2022* reported that 51% of children are falling behind at school because of the cost of living crisis (Buttle UK, 2022).

Children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities

Under the Equality Act 2010, schools have a duty to ensure that disabled children and young people are not discriminated against by making reasonable adjustments (many children with SEN are covered under this disability duty). The reasonable adjustment duty is anticipatory, meaning the school has a duty to ensure policies, systems, processes, the environment, information, and the curriculum do not currently and will not put disabled pupils at a disadvantage compared to their non-disabled peers (Stobbs, 2022).

The behaviour in schools guidance also states that, when responding to the behaviour of children and young people with SEN and/or disabilities, the school should consider whether any reasonable

adjustments need to be made, and seek to understand the underlying drivers of behaviour and whether additional support is needed. Further to this, the 2018 Upper Tribunal judgement set a precedent under the Equality Act to ensure that behaviours related to disability are not treated in the same way as those without a disability, as this may be discriminatory.

However, approaches to behaviour are particularly prone to the application of rigid rules and policies and the absence of reasonable adjustments (Special Education Consortium, 2022). Sometimes educational settings may state that in the interest of fairness, school rules and procedures on behaviour management should be applied consistently to all pupils, regardless of disability.

‘We keep seeing schools that strive for equality and they say that education is a universal right, and it absolutely is and that what we're seeing is that one child shouldn't get in the way of. We're seeing that as a reason, we're seeing fairness as a reason for a one size fits all, and what we say is actually, fairness can be achieved when you look at children individually, so that's simply not an excuse.’

[The Traveller Movement, Sector Evidence Session]

In general, the Equality Act makes positive discrimination unlawful, however, there are some specific expectations. For example, the Act allows for the more favourable treatment of disabled people, including disabled pupils in schools, and favourable treatment does not amount to discrimination against those who are not disabled (Stobbs, 2022).

Moreover, Ofsted has identified a lack of understanding of disability duties in the Equality Act 2010 in this context and made clear that inspectors had seen examples of schools 'giving parents an ultimatum - permanent exclusion or leave - or pursuing

finer when a reasonable adjustment for a disability would have been more appropriate (SEC green paper response, 2022). In evidence to our inquiry, we heard how often school behaviour policies do not reference the need to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and provide reasonable adjustments. As a result, there have been concerns that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities are disproportionately impacted by school behaviour policies, and these were concerns echoed throughout our inquiry.

“We will see young people with SEND, either identified on it, not necessarily, or just additional needs... The response to the additional need not being understood and then the response being something punitive and that is a real problem. I can give an example of a young person we supported just after the pandemic who was diagnosed with autism and now I think is being also tested for ADHD, but was excluded because her behaviour didn't match the norm and so she was deemed to be acting out and the school said that they had provided little support she needed but this, when we calculated it, she'd only been in school for a month physically, because she was constantly being reprimanded by being sent to alternative provision or the pandemic, meaning that she was studying from home. All of these things have an impact.” [Mital Raithatha, Sector Evidence Session]

Research undertaken by the Office for National Statistics on the educational experiences of young people aged 11-16 with special educational needs and disabilities has also found that young people, parents and carers believe that often teachers and educational staff misunderstand young people with SEN and disabilities and held unjust and inaccurate preconceptions of them (Office for National Statistics, 2022). They described some staff labelling pupils with SEN and disabilities as 'bad' or

‘That argument that for fairness, everything needs to be the same and everybody needs to be treated the same, I would say that that in itself goes against the whole concept of equality, and it technically could be in breach of the Equality Act.’

Mital Raithatha,
Sector evidence session

‘naughty’ rather than understanding the underlying problem, with young people stating that they felt like the onus was on them to change their behaviour rather than on schools to identify and address individual needs.

The impact of behaviour in the classroom on others

It has been recognised that misbehaviour by some pupils may negatively impact the classroom environment and consequently lead to a loss of teaching time. Through the inquiry, we wanted to understand the impact of misbehaviour on others in the classroom. Our evidence sessions highlighted key themes in relation to this, in that misbehaviour can obstruct learning, make children feel less safe in the classroom and impact relationships within the classroom.

‘Schools try to aim to develop a welcoming, safe and consistent environment for children and young people when they come in and the problem with poor behaviour or perceived poor behaviour, it can sometimes bring a sense of school is it's less than safe for others sometimes or [they] no longer feel it's quite so welcoming and [this] affect[s] how people, pupils particularly feel about coming into school and that

kind of anxiety that it creates doesn't breed a positive culture... It also [affects] relationships, peer to peer relationships can be affected, particularly if there's some kind of resentment towards the disruption it's causing.'

[Rob Williams, School Leaders evidence session]

'If there is a difficult behaviour in a class, be that extreme behaviour or be that low level disruptive behaviour, the product of that is that it can utterly stop learning in its tracks.'

[Colin Lofthouse, School Leaders evidence session']

Witnessing someone being punished in the classroom can impact classmates. For example, evidence from No More Exclusions highlights how witnessing segregation and expulsion can damage others' sense of trust, safety and self-esteem. Within our call for evidence, we asked young people to describe the impact of seeing others punished in the classroom. Young people described feelings of unfairness, embarrassment, and annoyance and stated that seeing others being punished sometimes makes them feel uncomfortable.

'It makes me feel really uncomfortable. Of course, you can giggle at the awkwardness of the situation but when it settles sometimes the way in which students can be shamed and punished is shocking and feels like an abuse of power.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'It felt unfair and I felt sorry for the people as sometimes they were being punished for something that was taken way out of proportion.'

[Young person survey respondent]

However, some young people did note that receiving sanctions for behaviour was situation-specific, and that it depended on what the young person had done.

'It kind of ruins my day and makes me feel sorry for that person if they got in trouble for a simple thing but if it was genuinely their fault and was a big deal then I don't feel too bad.'


[Young Person survey respondent]

'I think it depends on what the punishment is, like for example if someone is sent out of the classroom then I may feel bad for that student but if the teacher just tells them about what they've done wrong then I won't feel as bad.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'Neutral as sometimes yes, they deserved it but sometimes very defensive as the teacher either a) jumped to conclusions b) took it very extreme e.g. skipping a warning, behaviour point and going straight to detention c) shouted at them in an unnecessary manner.'

[Young person survey respondent]



'It makes me angry when they don't deserve it.'

Young person survey respondent

Our evidence gathering processes revealed that responding to behaviour within the classroom can be viewed as a 'zero-sum game' in which any attention given to 'disruptive' students will be at the expense of the education and future success of 'good' pupils in the room. It was continually highlighted within our evidence gathering processes that all children in the classroom matter and that each child has the right to high-quality education. Witnesses in our evidence sessions stressed the importance of creating a school environment where all children feel safe and included. The importance of setting up behavioural expectations in a way that recognises diversity and individual needs was also noted.

Either you say we're going to invest in our staff to train them to a really high degree, to understand that behaviour is communication, that you've got to look at why the behaviour is acting out and have a way of dealing with it that is intelligent, or you have a really punitive system which says, 'right, you're acting up, you're out.' And of course, the product of that is that though for those individuals and they're probably the most needy individuals... unfortunately, learning stops for them. It might allow learning to happen for the majority, but for those pupils they're going to fall out of education, they're going to fall out of opportunity, and I think we need to build systems which care for all of the pupils.

[Colin Lofthouse, School Leaders evidence session]

'From our research we're finding that that whole school approach to being relational, trying to just be more nurturing and having [a] much calmer environment then had a knock on effect potentially from what staff were saying to us, so children who may perhaps have had behaviour problems and there may have been that disruption, for instance, within the

classroom, if that is being deescalated then obviously there is a knock on for other pupils within the classroom.'

[Georgia Hyde-Dryden, Academics evidence session]

'The impact on the other children in the class depends on how we set up our expectations and if we set up expectations in our learning environment where we come to expect and acknowledge and work with and value diversity so we don't look for conformist behaviour, but we understand that some people are going to need to be picking up something and rattling it, some people are going to need to walk around every 10 minutes... so if we set up that, it becomes less difficult for other children to work with and we perhaps learn or help the children to learn how to focus. I think if we manage that in a way that we don't expect conformity, then I'd think it's less of a challenge than if we're expecting a very strong conformist approach to behaviour.'

[Tristan Middleton, Academics evidence session]

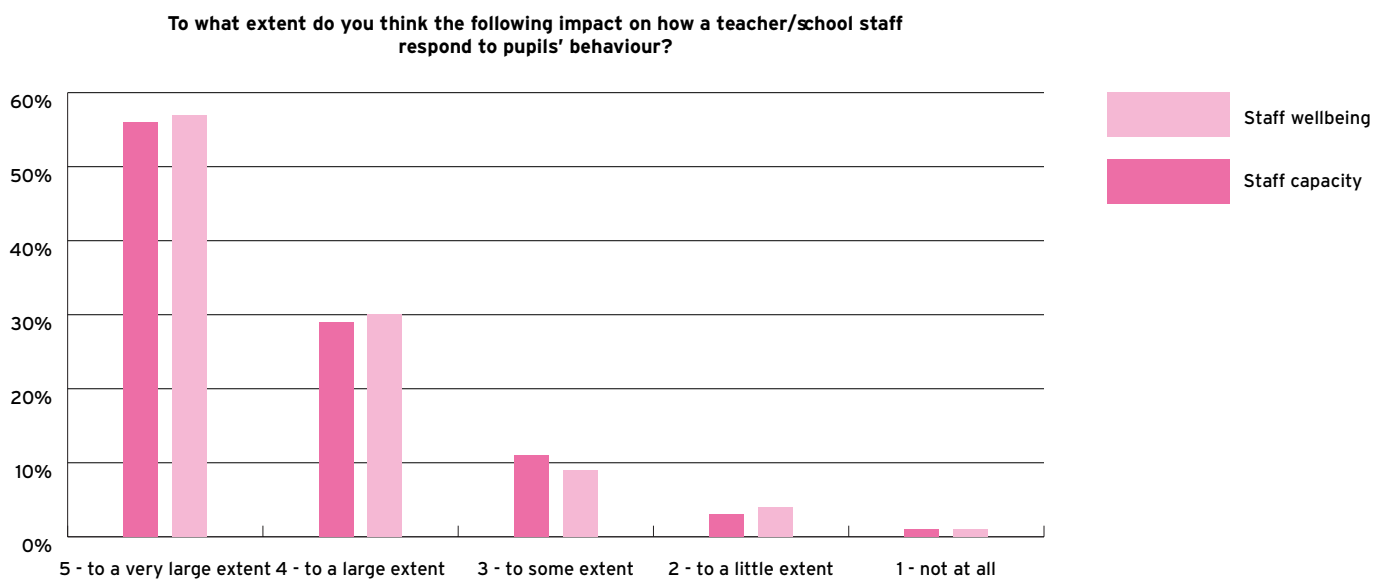
The impact of behaviour on teachers

Pupils' behaviour is often a negative influence on teachers' wellbeing at work and many teachers do not feel supported by senior leaders in responding to and managing this (Ofsted, 2019). In recent years, there has been a general decline in the wellbeing of teaching staff, with teachers suffering from high workloads, a perceived lack of resources, and, in some cases, a perceived lack of support from senior managers, especially in managing pupils' behaviour (Ofsted, 2019).

A study by the Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University explored the impact of teacher wellbeing and mental health on pupil progress in primary schools (Glazzard *et al.*, 2019). Most teachers who

took part in the research agreed that their wellbeing affects their performance as an education professional. The study also spoke to children and found that children were attuned to their teacher's mood and could usually pick up when they were feeling stressed. Teachers were seen as stressed by children when they were unusually short-tempered, they shouted at the class more than normal, classroom behaviour deteriorated, and less work was completed than normal.

In our call for evidence, we asked professionals about the extent to which wellbeing and capacity impact how school staff respond to pupils' behaviour. Over half of respondents agreed that both staff capacity (56%) and staff wellbeing (57%) have a large impact on how a teacher responds to pupil behaviour.



It was further noted within our evidence sessions that managing behaviour can be a particularly challenging role for teachers, with poor behaviour in the classroom contributing to low morale and dissatisfaction with teaching.

It's your thoughts, feelings, etc. that control your behaviour. On a good day, on a bad day, you just react, which is much more difficult to deal with as the context matters... It's a difficult situation and that's why a teacher's job is probably the most difficult job there is to actually control the behaviour of, you know, 30-40 brains, all of which are going off at a different rate.

[Professor Peter Fonagy, Academics evidence session]

'I guess teachers come to the profession because they want to make a difference to the young people and when they have a sense that might not happen because of anything like challenging behaviour that can knock confidence, make them feel that somehow, they were failing and then you have the issues with disaffection with the profession and so forth if it's not being dealt with.'

[Rob Williams, School evidence session]

'I think having behaviours that challenge can be really, really destructive to a teacher's morale.'

[Dr Susan Tranter, School Leaders evidence session]

It is vital that teachers are given the support and resources they need to be able to do their job effectively. A concern we heard echoed throughout the inquiry was that learning support assistants and teaching assistants, who typically support those with more complex needs, are leaving education to join other professions due to low pay and increasing pressures on their role, consequently leaving schools without the additional capacity to support children with additional needs.

'I just want to reiterate that we share the concerns about falling numbers of support staff and teaching assistants. Because I think that the whole-school approach to this is the kind of support the teachers need, and [together with the] ability to be able to deal with children who are struggling for whatever reason without disrupting the rest of the class and allowing teaching staff and others to continue teaching and making [the] most of that. It can be a real problem if it's not addressed... And schools can try as hard as they might. It's going to be really, really difficult unless they're given tools to deliver the job really.'

[Rob Williams, School Leaders evidence session]

'I think it comes back to funding again and needing a good whole class support team operating which includes a teacher, but also well qualified and experienced teaching assistants. Unfortunately a lot of the experienced teaching assistants who manage pupil behaviour very well are leaving because of pay.'

[Judy Ellerby, School Leaders evidence session]

The loss of learning support assistants and teaching assistants is a particular risk for children with special educational needs. In a recent poll of 922 special educational needs and disabilities coordinators in primary and secondary schools across England, more than half (57%) said they were trying to recruit teaching assistants, but either no one was applying, or candidates were all unsuitable (Fazackerley, 2022). As a result, this will leave schools unable to provide the support required for pupils with SEN and disabilities.

Effectiveness of behaviour management policies

Within our call for evidence, we asked young people, parents, carers and professionals whether they thought behaviour management techniques used by schools are effective in improving behaviour. We included this question in the call for evidence as not much evidence exists about the usefulness of such approaches.

We understand that schools need to have a range of behavioural management techniques in place as part of their behaviour policy, and the professionals we spoke to told us how these are necessary within the school environment.

'Punishments such as isolation rooms may allow time for a child to calm down and regulate themselves in order to talk with someone, but [their] repeated use is pointless.'

Professional survey respondent

'Mental health might be negatively affected in the short term, however it is right that there are consequences for poor behaviour, as long as these are not applied indiscriminately and are within a framework which also serves to improve the behaviour next time. Exclusion can never be right for the individual; however, it is often right for the child's peers and school who have a right to a safe education. A managed move and fresh start would be far preferable and, in my experience, is far more successful.'
 [Professional survey respondent]

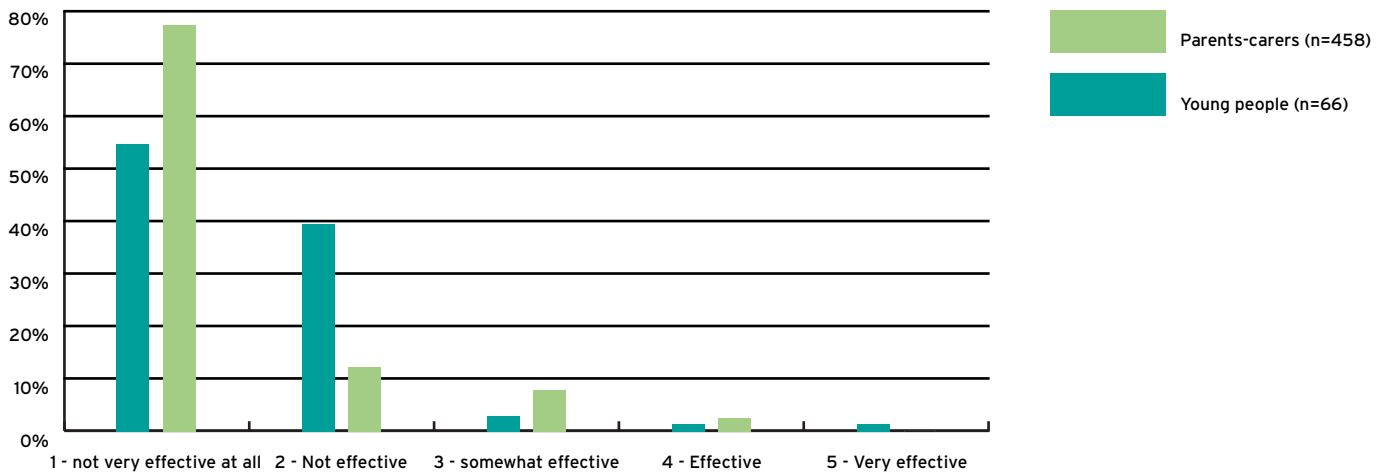
'We have had to suspend pupils because they are hurting staff and themselves. Hard to access services to get emergency help - even had to call 999 for a child harming themselves.'
 [Professional survey respondent]

The following section is based on the direct experiences of children, young people and the parents of those who have experienced behaviour management techniques. The young people, parents and carers we spoke to who had experience of these techniques expressed concerns about their effectiveness in improving behaviour in the long term.

Of the young people who said they experienced behaviour management techniques, **over half (55%)** said they were not very effective at all in improving their behaviour, and a **further 40%** said they were not effective.

Parents and carers also reported similar findings. Of the parents who said their child had experienced behaviour management techniques, **77%** said they were not effective at all in improving behaviour.

Of the behaviour management techniques you have experienced, how effective do you think they were in improving your/your child's behaviour?



Both young people and parents-carers told us that the use of these techniques can ignore the root causes of behaviour such as SEN and disabilities, mental health problems or issues at home, meaning that circumstances behind the behaviour are never actually addressed. It was felt that emphasis was placed on managing behaviour rather than supporting young people's needs.

'I have received many threats to be put on report or expelled and told that 'I'm not working in this school', teachers have brought tears to my eyes but they have never once tried to understand my behaviour, asked me what's going on at home, acknowledged that my mental health is deteriorating rapidly when I have hinted towards it and explicitly said it as well, but nobody has taken it into consideration or even questioned the link between my mental health and behaviour and how the way I feel is impacting the way I act.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'Punishing me for what I get into trouble for won't improve things because I have working and short-term memory difficulties and dyslexia so telling me off for it won't fix it. I'm not ever purposefully naughty, if I was I'd expect to be told off. Why do they punish me for something I can't fix? I try my best..'

[Young person survey respondent]

'The techniques used in school actually made my behaviour worse and lead to me feeling so unwanted at school that my attendance got bad y9 onwards (currently 28.5% in y11).'

Young person
survey respondent

'My child's school uses a 'cloud chart' system to reward and reprimand, because our child has special needs and experienced early childhood trauma her behaviour may appear 'naughty' and she is put on the poor behaviour side of the chart. It has got to a point where other children inside and outside school recognise her as a 'naughty child', this is hugely detrimental to her wellbeing and means she is quite often excluded from her peers and isolated.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

'Their behaviour was linked to their support needs being unfulfilled e.g., not allowing short breaks during sensory overload.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

Instead of improving behaviour, some respondents noted how the use of behaviour management techniques can sometimes have the reverse effect, such as making young people dislike school and can adversely impact mental health and exacerbate existing needs. In some cases, this made behaviour worse rather than better.

'As a sixth form our common room was taken away for not behaving. This created a lot of anger and resentment and mistrust that ultimately caused worse behaviour and less respect for our office and resources.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'Sanctions only had a negative impact on my child's behaviour - 'if they are going to treat me like a criminal, I may as well behave like one.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

'Her needs related to attachment and developmental trauma so applying a standard policy up to exclusion was completely counterproductive and increased her challenging behaviours and anxiety.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

Where these techniques were seen to be effective was in providing some short-term benefit of preventing pupils from repeating the action and encouraging them to conform to behaviour policies because of the consequences of misbehaving. However, there was consensus that because these techniques do not address individual needs, they are not effective in changing behaviour in the long term.

'Well, I kept getting detentions with 1 behaviour point instead of the usual 2 because of how late I always was and [this] encouraged me not to be late. I was more aware of it, but it didn't stop the reason, nor did/do I care if I was late, I just didn't want another detention.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'The vast majority of techniques are significantly harmful as they do not take into account the external factors they could be influencing. Also, it creates a completely negative culture of punishments and expecting good behaviour to happen just to avoid punishment rather than developing an understanding of why certain behaviours are preferred and the benefits as well as rewards for behaviour which would work much better.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'I think these techniques are more short term, they don't explain anything or teach or help a student.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'The class uses a rainbow behavioural chart. Moving down the rainbow is used to shame children and is on display for all children to view. Avoiding shame is the motivation to behave better at school.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

'They were effective in that he was scared into towing the line. They were effective in that we supported the school because we didn't want to be seen as troublesome parents.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

There is also very little evidence in place to suggest that the use of punitive behaviour management techniques are effective in improving behaviour. For example, the Education Endowment Foundation found that there are very few robust studies that have assessed the impact of school behaviour policies that aim to create a strict and clear whole school approach to behaviour on pupil outcomes (Education Endowment Fund, 2019).

Instead, evidence suggests that a shift of focus from managing a child's behaviour towards teaching a child learning behaviours may be more effective in improving behaviour than a focus on punitive approaches. A review of evidence conducted by the Education Endowment Fund noted that whilst teachers will need to manage behaviour at times, promoting learning behaviours has a positive impact on the child, their peers and the whole class. The review focused on positive responses to the challenge of misbehaviour and heard little about the role of punitive approaches.

This is also an approach that was consistently advocated for within our evidence gathering processes. We were told about the importance of communicating behavioural expectations and teaching the behaviours that schools want to see, with it being noted that a big part of behaviour management is proactively teaching children habits, behaviours and the knowledge of how to thrive within school, while providing nurturing and supportive environments.

'It's all about being very explicit and co-producing the key rules with the children, it's about lavishing lots of attention on children who are doing what you want them to do... I think at the moment what we tend to have has been the complete opposite, where sometimes there's so much kind of picking on the minor disruption that means teaching doesn't get done.'

[Professor Tamsin Ford]

'You make it easy for children to behave by saying welcome to our school, we look forward to teaching you, we care about you, we care about your success as well as you and part of our main job here is to help you be brilliant and succeed and learn things and be better at things, that's a big part of our job here. So, here's how we are going to enter the classroom, leave the classroom, hand in a piece of homework, what to do if you're stuck, what to do if you finished the work and nobody else has... things like that are not obvious to children.'

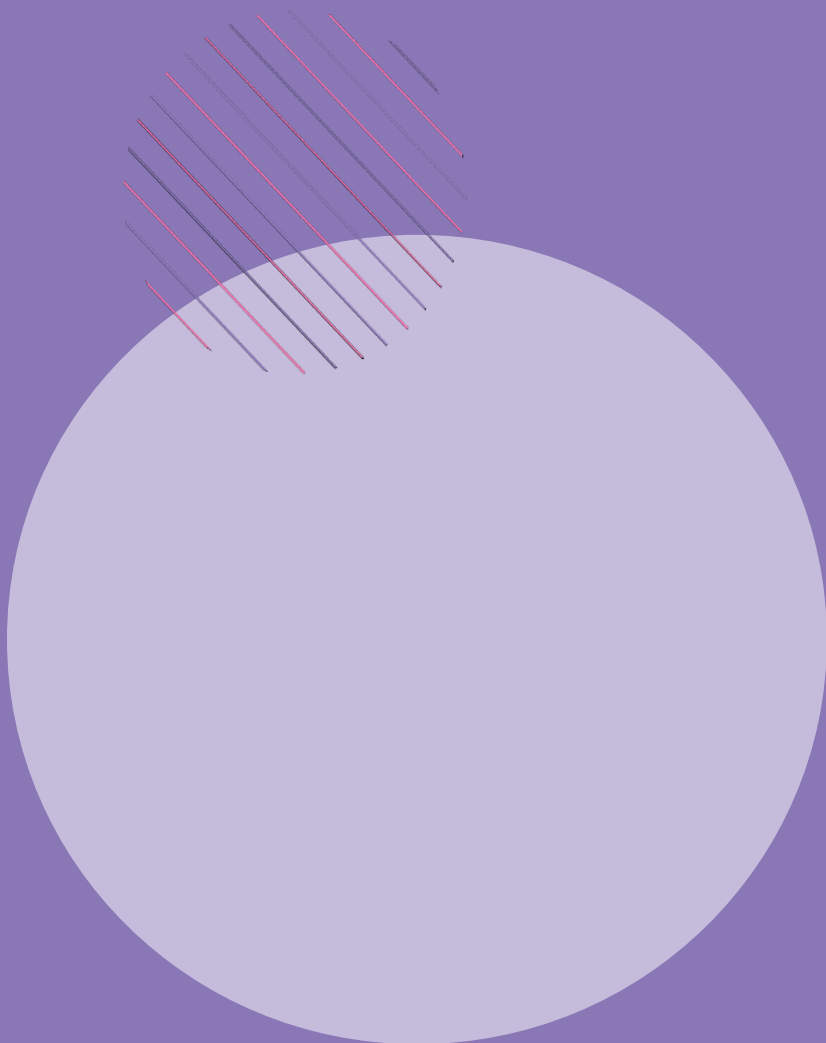
[Tom Bennett]

'I believe that we can teach good behaviour and the behaviours that we want and actually if we're getting the behaviours that we don't want, then it's a consequence of the actions which adults are taking and the culture which has [been] sustained and is being developed in the school.'

Dr Susan Tranter, School leaders' evidence session

Chapter 4

What can be done differently?



Throughout the inquiry, we heard a range of recommendations on what needs to change to better support children, young people and school staff within educational settings. Much of what we heard centred on ensuring that children and young people's individual needs are effectively met at an early stage, that a one-size fits all approach is abandoned, and that supportive and nurturing school environments are created where every child is valued and feels like they belong.

What has become clear, however, is that a culture shift is needed in how behaviour is viewed. We believe that much more emphasis is needed on proactively identifying and responding to children and young people's needs and putting in place strategies to de-escalate behaviour at an earlier stage. Changing attitudes, beliefs and the cultures that shape how behaviour is viewed is therefore crucial in making a difference to how behaviour is responded to across all schools. We know that many schools have already shifted their culture in this way, and it is important that we listen and learn from local practice.

'I think what needs to change is really our approach. The culture, law, policy, all of those things are important, but ultimately, unless we get to a cultural shift, we're going to continue to be talking about the same patterns again, hopefully not in another 50 years.'

[Zahra Bei, Sector evidence session]

'I've got schools really trying hard to shift to relationship and behaviour policies, who are putting relationships absolutely at the forefront, who are trying to do things differently, who are going on some really brave journeys and they're asking psychologists and other people to support them in those journeys... but I also see the struggles that they're having, partly because some of the time what they're doing feels quite counterculture.'

[Hester Riviere, Sector evidence session]

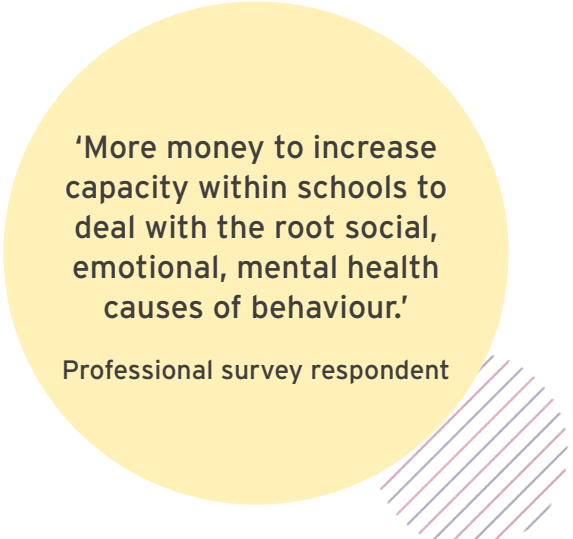
We also understand that where misbehaviour does occur, schools need to set out consequences and give children the opportunity to learn from their actions. However, sanctions should not be the central component of the school behaviour policy and should not be used in a way that is harmful to children and young people. In particular, if a child is struggling with their mental health, or SEN and disabilities, then sanction-based approaches will only exacerbate these needs.

Where we see behaviour falling short of our expectations, we've always got to see that as a child trying to tell us something and that could be an indication that there is an issue with the environment or with the relationships that their child is experiencing either at home or at school.... that can lead to behaviour that maybe runs contrary to our expectation and that has to be dealt with. It's still behaviour. We don't make an excuse for that, but we ought to see that in a different way.

[Colin Lofthouse, School Leaders evidence session]

What can be done nationally?

We know that schools cannot make change alone, and much more support is needed from the Government in terms of the resources and investment that is available to schools. Whilst we recognise that efforts have been made to improve the availability of support to schools through reforms such as the Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision green paper reforms, we consistently heard about the challenges schools are facing in meeting the growing scale of need, and how much more resource and capacity is needed throughout the whole system to ensure that schools can effectively meet the needs of all pupils.



'More money to increase capacity within schools to deal with the root social, emotional, mental health causes of behaviour.'

Professional survey respondent

'Governments need to provide funding to enable schools to support children pastorally as well as academically. Parents and children need additional support following Covid-19. Schools need access to specialists that can advise on SEN and assessments need to be made more available.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

'A redirection of funding is a really important thing to mention as well, because one of the things that we hear again and again is there's no money, there's no funding.'

[Zahra Bei, Sector evidence session]

Whilst focus has been placed on issuing and updating guidance for schools, professionals consistently told us that not much resource has been allocated to help schools put this in place effectively. Underpinning all of our recommendations therefore is the recognition that change cannot be brought about, and effectively sustained, unless there is significant investment in increasing the resources available to schools and capacity within the whole system.

A coordinated approach to school policy

Over recent years, the Government has introduced separate programmes of work to improve both the behaviour and the mental health of children and young people in schools. Concerns have been expressed regarding the alignment between the behaviour programme of work and the mental health and wellbeing programme of work within the Department for Education, and how efforts to improve both behaviour and mental health can work against one another.

There should be specific guidance on how policy on behaviour management interacts with consideration of and provision for pupils' mental health and their experiences (both within school and outside school). There is currently emphasis on behaviour itself without adequately considering the reasons for the behaviours or ways in which pupils can be helped to emotionally self-regulate so that they are better able to manage their own behaviour.

[Professional survey respondent]

'Behaviour policies need to be more wellbeing centred, there is always a reason for a child displaying difficult behaviour, there is no such thing as 'naughty' a lot of the time, I don't believe that policies allow these things to be supported nor do schools have the capacity to explore them.'

[Professional survey respondent]

We believe that the behaviour and mental health programmes of work need to be better aligned to ensure they are supporting one another in the work that they are doing, and that the links between behaviour, mental health, SEN and disability are recognised throughout all streams of work. We have seen some progress in this area with the departmental prioritisation of whole school and college approaches to mental health and wellbeing, and the plans to incorporate questions on wellbeing in the next version of the National Behaviour Survey. However, further work is needed.

There are other existing programmes of work that can be expanded further to ensure better alignment between behaviour and mental health approaches. For example, Mental Health Support Teams and senior mental health leads should be trained and supported to work with behaviours of concern and their underlying causes. We heard an example from one professional working within a Mental Health Support Team about how their expertise was employed by the school to ensure that a trauma-informed approach was taken in managing a pupil's behaviour and re-engaging them in the school environment following a behavioural incident.

'I recently advised a school who rightly needed to respond to a pupil known to our service, who had assaulted another peer following some name calling and threats. The pupil who had carried out the assault was suffering with low mood and anxiety, due to a significant assault on him last year and therefore perceived school as a threatening environment and [was] often hypervigilant. He refused the consequence of needing to spend the next few weeks in isolation, as he saw this space as anxiety provoking and triggering his anxiety. School accepted after a few weeks, as the pupil refused to come back into school, to no longer offer that consequence but to allow him time to reflect on his behaviour, through his

work with our service and then offer him a chance to come back to school each afternoon and attend lessons. This was important in helping the pupil appreciate the school was supportive of his needs at the same time as him needing to work on more helpful ways of managing his anxieties. To add, the pupil made amends with the boy he had assaulted, and they are now friends.'

[Professional survey respondent]

In order to better support schools with behaviour, more expertise, such as a specialist that understands behaviours of concern could be added to Mental Health Support Teams - an existing initiative where funding has already been allocated.


What is more, as it stands the Department for Education's Behaviour Hub programme predominantly focuses on improving behaviour management systems, with little consideration of what the school is doing to support pupils' mental health and wellbeing. We believe that this programme could be expanded to include a focus on mental health and wellbeing so that schools are paired to share best practice in both behaviour management systems and mental health and wellbeing provision within the school, in order to ensure that both sets of provision are aligned.

Links between school attendance, mental health problems, and SEN and disabilities also need to be recognised within school policy. Research from Mind shows that mental health absence is not commonly authorised by schools, with the requirement to provide medical evidence particularly challenging for young people who face lengthy delays to access mental health support (Mind, 2021). This becomes a significant barrier to providing evidence of mental health problems and leads to absences being recorded as unauthorised, risking parents being faced with fines and prosecutions.

Finally, guidance encourages schools to have strong systems to capture, monitor and evaluate data on behaviour including all components of the behaviour culture. The guidance further suggests that data is analysed by protected characteristics to ensure the school meets its duties under the Equality Act 2010. While it is recommended that schools collect data of this kind, the Department for Education does not have sight of it. We believe the data collected by schools could be better utilised in order to understand what is happening in schools and to better align programmes of work. Further to this, data collected on protected characteristics can be used to understand inequalities within the school environment.

Recommendations

- The Department for Education should expand the Behaviour Hub programme to include a focus on mental health and wellbeing provision.
- The Department for Education should establish an oversight group to supervise the delivery of mental health and behaviour programmes of work to ensure alignment between the two and should better utilise the data collected by schools to inform planning and delivery and to tackle inequalities.
- The Department for Education should review attendance codes for schools to ensure there is a more nuanced approach, making it clear that mental health problems and SEN and disabilities can be recorded as authorised absences.
- The Department for Education should take an anti-racist approach to policy making.



'Mental Health training for staff to understand differences in displays of behaviour from young people dealing with mental health problems.'

Young person
survey respondent

Staff development and wellbeing

A change in the way that teachers are trained consistently came up in our conversation as an area of improvement, particularly in relation to behaviour, mental health, special educational needs and disabilities. Many noted that a lack of training in these areas is leaving school staff without the skills they need to appropriately respond.

'Our Early Career Teacher (ECT) focus groups highlighted that they definitely wanted more training and support on behaviour. That was one of the things they were finding most difficult in their first years in school.'
[Judy Ellerby, School Leaders evidence session]

'In the same way that we talk about every teacher being a teacher of SEN, we also need to talk about every teacher being a teacher who is well versed in the issues about pupil mental health.'
[Dr Susan Tranter, School Leaders evidence session]

The Department for Education has taken steps to improve the standard and quality of training on behaviour management. The Schools White Paper committed to giving teachers and leaders access to a fully funded scholarship to undertake a National Professional Qualification in Behaviour and Culture. In relation to mental health, as part of the proposals set out in the Green Paper, a grant of £1,200 is available to schools and colleges to train a senior mental health lead, who will support implementation of the whole school and college approach to mental health and wellbeing. However, this is as a one-off training opportunity, meaning if the trained staff member leaves the school then this funding cannot be accessed again.

Evidence suggests that training teachers around skills in social and emotional development is effective in supporting both mental health and behaviour (Ford *et al.*, 2018). For example, the Alex Timpson Attachment and Trauma Awareness Programme provides strong evidence about the use of attachment and trauma awareness training as part of a whole school approach. An evaluation of the programme suggests that the training is perceived to have had a positive impact on pupil wellbeing, their enjoyment of school and their relationships with school staff. Staff across a range of roles felt there had been a reduction in behaviour incidents and the use of sanctions, which they linked to using an attachment and trauma aware approach and, in particular, a combination of de-escalation techniques and not reacting immediately to behaviour.

Further to this, there is an overall lack of training for teachers on racism or microaggressions. A recent survey of over 200 school staff carried out by Centre for Mental Health (in conjunction with social action group Not so Micro) highlighted that while less than a third of teachers have ever received training on racism or microaggressions, nine out of ten (94%) believe it should be given to all school staff (Centre for Mental Health, 2023).

Alongside opportunities for development, support also needs to be put in place for staff wellbeing. We recognise the competing pressures that teachers face with rising workloads and being at the forefront of supporting many of the most vulnerable pupils in school. Many school leaders carry enormous workloads and pressures particularly in relation to safeguarding, but do not receive supervision in the same way as other professionals, such as clinicians or social workers. We also acknowledge that disruptive behaviour in the classroom can impact on the wellbeing of staff, and we heard evidence of how this can be demoralising to those in the teaching profession.

'I think in terms of the whole school approach, it needs to include staff as well. There's no point saying we're a school which cares about mental health if you don't actually have a policy on staff mental health as well, that's really important.'

[Dr Susan Tranter, School leaders evidence session]

Whilst the Government has taken steps to prioritise wellbeing through their education staff wellbeing charter, it is unclear how many schools have signed up to this. Further action is needed to ensure that staff wellbeing is protected and promoted as part of a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing. Research has shown that promoting teacher wellbeing enhances the capacity of schools to meet the needs of diverse populations, which is likely to reduce the numbers of students needing intensive support - especially for social and behavioural difficulties, but also for learning needs (Roffey, 2012). In order to better support the wellbeing of school staff, there have been growing calls for supervision to be introduced within education settings.

'Teaching is the only profession that is without supervision... if we could deliver that, then that alone would really be a massive support to boosting capacity and resilience to staff that they had something, somewhere safe that was reflective and where they could also tool up.'

Ellie Costello,
sector evidence session

Evidence is starting to emerge on the benefits of supervision for educators, including that it provides a framework for discussing challenging situations, gives time to consider and discuss the multitudes of possible avenues available for complex problems, and represents an opportunity to build relationships between colleagues (Carroll, *et al.*, 2020).

What is more, Place2Be has worked with the Universities of Stirling and Edinburgh to embed their Place2Think programme as part of their initial teacher education provision. The programme provides one-to-one reflective sessions in a confidential space to allow discussion around emotional reactions, responses, beliefs and attitudes, as trainee teachers progress with their placements (Forbes, 2019). An evaluation of the programme found a positive impact on the knowledge, understanding, practice and personal development of the trainee teachers surveyed.

Recommendations

- The Department for Education should expand the National Professional Qualification in Behaviour and Culture to include training on identifying and addressing the underlying drivers of behaviour. This should include what behaviour may look like in different contexts, what it may be communicating, what happens if this is not understood or responded to, and how behaviour and/or mental health needs may be a result of undiagnosed SEN and disabilities.
- The Department for Education should mandate that teachers are given time for continuous professional development in the areas of behaviour, mental health, SEN and disabilities.
- The Department for Education should update initial teacher training to ensure that content on mental health, SEN and disabilities is included.
- Initial teacher training should include information on how to look after your own mental health and wellbeing, with particular support for Early Career Teachers to be put in place.
- Initial teacher training should also include anti-racism training, with how to identify and deal with racial microaggressions being a part of this.
- The Department for Education should ensure that the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter is properly resourced and annual figures are published on how many schools have signed up to this.
- The Department for Education, as a first step, should provide support to schools to implement their own staff reflective spaces. In the long term, the Department should explore supervision opportunities for senior leaders, using external qualified practitioners.

The importance of the early years

Early childhood education can help support children to build emotional and social skills; in particular, self-regulation skills in order to enable them to adjust to new situations, reflect on and adapt their behaviours, focus their attention, remember instructions and plan how to approach tasks successfully (Early Intervention Foundation, 2022). Research on developing self-regulation in primary schools found that free-flow activities and small group work were more effective in encouraging self-regulation than whole class instruction (Parker, 2022).

Further evidence suggests providing tailored support to families in the 0-3 year period can alleviate difficulties with children's behaviour before they worsen by intervening early. For example, the Healthy Start, Happy Start programme is a home-based parenting programme delivered by health visiting teams to families who reported difficulties with their children's behaviour. The programme focuses on supporting caregivers to notice their child's behavioural cues and signals, and to provide sensitive and responsive parenting (Barker *et al.*, 2021). A study found that children's behaviour problems improved immediately after families finished the programme but there was also a sustained improvement two years after the programme was delivered (Barker *et al.*, 2021).

Improving the SEN and disability system of support

We consistently heard evidence of how the current system of support is not working for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and how needs are often identified too late and left unmet, with children struggling to cope within the school environment.

Improving the SEND system of support for young people has been an area of focus for the Government over recent years. In 2019, the Department for Education commissioned a review into the SEND system to understand why it was struggling to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people following the SEND reforms in 2014 (Council for Disabled Children, 2022). This included proposals to introduce new national

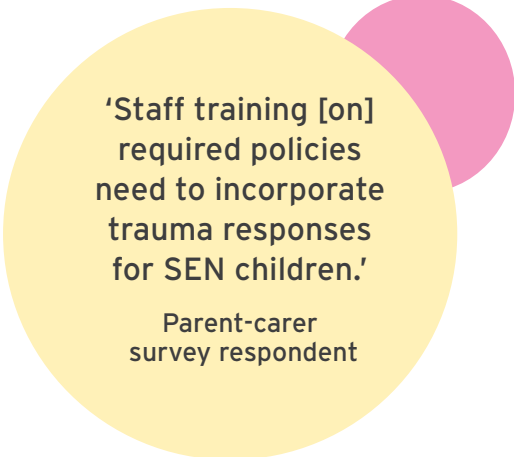
standards for how needs are identified, simplifying Education, Health and Care Plans, a new legal requirement for councils to introduce local inclusion plans, and a commitment to making culture and practice in mainstream education more inclusive. The Government has since published their SEND Improvement Plan, which sets out how these proposals will be implemented in practice.

We believe that a shift is required to identify needs at an early stage so that timely support can be put in place for children and their families. This could be achieved by improving the quality of early years provision and improving the capacity of early years practitioners to identify and meet needs early. Identification within the early years would ensure that support can be put in place to prevent gaps in progress and development becoming too wide.

'Where I would put my money is prompt identification and treatment of children with special educational needs, whatever they are.'

[Professor Tamsin Ford]

We have previously noted the importance of staff development, but we wanted to highlight the importance of education staff receiving specialist training in SEN and disabilities. School staff need to be equipped with the resources to be able to address and identify the learning and behaviour needs of the children and young people they teach.



'Staff training [on] required policies need to incorporate trauma responses for SEN children.'

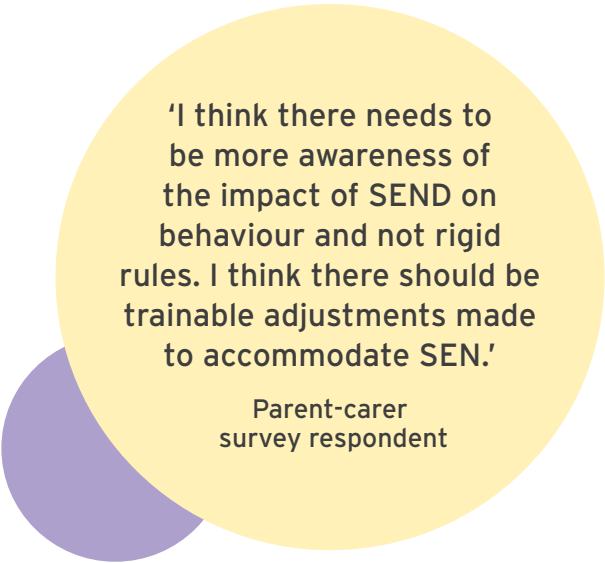
Parent-carer
survey respondent

The SEND Code of Practice states that every teacher is a teacher of SEN and disabilities and sets out that this should form a core part of a school's approach to professional development for all teaching and support staff. However, workforce development in relation to SEN has been consistently highlighted as an area of concern, with the high demands on teachers' time making it difficult to undertake SEN-related CPD (NASUWT, 2016). A recruitment and retention crisis in the specialist workforce is further adding to pressures, with children with SEN and disabilities often unable to access support until they have reached crisis point. A campaign led by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists is calling on the Government to address gaps in the specialist workforce and ensure there will be sufficient specialist professionals to help children (Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, 2022).

Finally, training for the workforce should also include a focus on the Equality Act 2010 and the SEND Code of Practice in order to strengthen schools' understanding of their duties relating to SEN and disabilities. This would help to improve consistency in how the law is applied and in developing more inclusive provision.

Recommendations

- The Department for Education should ensure that all education staff are supported in their initial training and throughout their career in identifying and addressing needs that underlie SEN and disabilities, and in understanding statutory responsibilities to children and young people with SEN and disabilities.
- The Department for Education should explore what a range of indicators of progress might look like for children and young people with SEN and disabilities which does not predominantly focus on academic progress.
- The Government should use the SEND improvement plan to strengthen the availability of specialist support services and to address gaps in the specialist workforce.



'I think there needs to be more awareness of the impact of SEND on behaviour and not rigid rules. I think there should be trainable adjustments made to accommodate SEN.'

Parent-carer
survey respondent

Embedding whole education approaches to mental health and wellbeing

Whole education approaches to mental health and wellbeing have been recognised by the Government as an integral factor in protecting and promoting the mental health and wellbeing of pupils in education. The *Transforming children and young people's mental health provision: a green paper* set out the Government's vision for a whole school approach, which included proposals to improve the availability of early intervention and preventative support in education settings through the roll out of Mental Health Support Teams (MHST), training for a new senior mental health lead in every school and trialing a four-week waiting time for specialist mental health services.

While there has been welcome prioritisation of whole school approaches, we heard about the significant challenges that education settings face in relation to implementation. This included challenges with resources and capacity to roll out these approaches in the face of shrinking budgets and increasing academic pressures.

'They need proper resources both in time and funding. While it's pleasing that the focus has been put on implementing whole school approaches and, for example, with the funding for training for senior mental health leads, putting that as one additional role on one person misses the need for it to be owned by a lot more people across the school or trust, and that often what's needed is more capacity. I know for many, trusts particularly and for different settings, people are on different stages of that journey and might have already established a team responsible for wellbeing. But what we see is people saying that that's a real difficulty because already staff are under pressure to do all of these things.'

[Elizabeth Collins, School Leaders evidence session]

'The WSA has the potential to encourage schools to be more wellbeing centred by considering the pupil's voice, but schools need to prioritise this for it to be effective and to engage with agencies who can support the implementation of this. Unfortunately, due to the academic pressure schools have to put on pupils currently, I don't believe they have the capacity to do this.'

[Professional survey respondent]

Evidence highlights the effective role that whole school approaches have to play in supporting mental health, wellbeing and behaviour. For example, an evidence review conducted by the Early Intervention Foundation highlights that whole-school interventions implemented as part of whole school approaches to mental health, which embrace change across the school environment as well the curriculum, have been identified as among the most effective means to prevent and respond to behavioural problems, and have been shown to be more likely to result in enduring positive outcomes (Early Intervention Foundation, 2021).

The Coalition has long been calling for whole school approaches to be fully implemented across all education settings in England. We believe this would foster school cultures that prioritise mental health and wellbeing by responding to pupils' needs, within a framework of inclusive and supportive behaviour management strategies. This was echoed in responses to our call for evidence.

'Encourage a holistic approach where it is a whole school effort and not just teaching staff, but all staff. Potentially encourage small ways other pupils/ students can support their peers with managing their behaviour i.e. peer to peer models (buddy programs in schools so older students can help young students with improving the behaviour).'

[Young person survey respondent]

‘Schools should be encouraged to link their behaviour policies to a whole school approach to wellbeing. The government should be encouraging schools to use programmes which support students to develop social and emotional learning skills which include a teacher training element.’

[Professional survey respondent]

‘We’d like to see the government’s support for whole-school approaches reflected in policy. The reasons are simple. Many of the behavioural issues we see are a product of systemic issues and we need to take a systemic approach to fix them. By focusing solely on developing a young person’s skills or punishing their behaviour, we lay blame and responsibility with the young person to fix the problem. The solution is to work with young people and address the systemic issues around them that cause and exacerbate their struggles, i.e., school culture, their relationships with adults/caregivers at home, at school and amongst friends.’

[Professional survey respondent]

We also heard evidence of where successful implementation of a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing had resulted in positive changes to behaviour management practices within the school through having a consistent and clear approach in responding to the needs of children and young people.

‘Very positive, we have seen our exclusion rates drop significantly. As a mainstream school we would desperately appreciate support though with children who have more extreme SEMH needs which impact on their learning. Due to issues with funding we find the approaches we’d love to adopt (increased therapy, ELSA, additional 1:1 support) stretched beyond capacity in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic. We don’t want to exclude or change provisions (not that there are many options there), we do want to support in mainstream, but it is becoming harder and harder.’

[Professional survey respondent]

‘A huge role and at our school we discuss this regularly. We can’t manage behaviour without examining and supporting the root cause which is often emotional needs not being met.’

[Professional survey respondent]

‘It’s the only role. Small interventions as ‘add ons’ to support mental health and wellbeing can only work when the whole school model is aligned. There is no point teaching about mental health, only to have a teacher shouting in your face and to be made to walk in silence down a corridor.’

Professional survey respondent

Targeted mental health support

A central component of a whole school approach is ensuring the relevant support is in place. The Green Paper introduced Mental Health Support Teams to work in schools and colleges to provide support for mild to moderate need. However, the Green Paper stated that these proposals would only be rolled out to at least a fifth to a quarter of the country by the end of 2022/23, and that precise roll out would be determined by future funding.

Some welcome progress has been made in implementing the Green Paper proposals. Recent data published by NHS England shows that more than 2.4 million children and young people now have access to a MHST in schools and colleges, with more than 500 teams to be confirmed ahead of the 2023 ambition (NHS England 2022). However, significant concerns remain about implementation and the speed at which all areas of the country will have access to this additional support.

Findings from Barnardo's suggest that the current timetable for the roll out of MHSTs leaves around 6.5 million children without access in the medium term, further exacerbating inequality in access to support (Barnardo's, 2023). Young people, parents, carers and professionals we spoke to consistently highlighted the importance of more targeted mental health support being in place in schools.

'Professional mental health workers instead of untrained teachers given the role to "support" children when going through mental health crisis.'
[Young person survey respondent]

'Making sure children can access mental health support in their school.'
[Professional survey respondent]

Recommendations

- The Department for Education should develop a national implementation programme to support every school, college and university to adopt a whole education approach to mental health and wellbeing.
- The Department for Education should commit to, and fund, full national roll out of Mental Health Support Teams across all schools and colleges in England.

The role of Ofsted

We know that many schools do their best to positively support pupil behaviour, however, we have heard examples of a minority of schools misusing behaviour management approaches. Ofsted have started to take steps in highlighting harmful behavioural practices, for example, with their latest annual report identifying how part-time timetables are being used as a way to manage pupil behaviour (Ofsted, 2022). We believe work to identify harmful behavioural practices needs to be built on by Ofsted as part of the judgement area on behaviour and attitudes. As a first step, Ofsted should work with stakeholders, including the Equality and Human Rights Commission, to understand what this means in practice and to define harmful behavioural practices in order to inform future work in this area.

We also believe it is crucial that Ofsted looks at achievement in schools through a much more holistic lens. Education inspectorates across the nations have begun paying closer attention to young people's outcomes in education, beyond the academic. For example, Estyn, the Welsh schools inspectorate, has recently been using objective data as a measure of wellbeing (such as attendance rates in a school compared to those in similar schools) and increased the opportunities to listen to pupils prior to and during the inspection process.

While the Government has advocated for the implementation of whole school approaches to mental health and wellbeing, there is currently no reference to this within the Ofsted inspection framework. We believe that Ofsted should recognise the efforts of schools to embed approaches to support mental health and wellbeing for the whole school community as part of their inspection framework.

Recommendations

- Ofsted should consult with key stakeholders to understand and define harmful behavioural practices in schools to further inform the 'Behaviour and Attitudes' judgement area in inspections.
- Ofsted should look beyond just academic attainment and overall performance and instead assess schools on their efforts to promote pupils' overall wellbeing, development and creative sides, including implementation of whole school approaches to mental health and wellbeing.

What can Integrated Care Systems do?

Building systems of support around schools and families

Schools cannot respond to pupils' needs alone and are therefore reliant on the wider service provision that is available in the local area. However, we consistently hear about the challenges schools experience with engaging and securing sustained involvement with mental health and wellbeing support within their local area. Links between schools and NHS Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS) are not consistently good across all areas, and where NHS CYPMHS experience long waiting lists and demand, there is subsequently an increased demand on schools to hold more complex cases for mental health support while children and families wait.

'Wider and more prompt access to individuals and organisations with specialist counselling and pastoral support skills as well as a working SEND system which provides specialist settings or supports schools to create specialist units.'

[Professional survey respondent]

'One of the key elements of the whole school approach is having access to referrals and although I think the whole school approach is a brilliant way to focus on prevention, early intervention and promoting positive well-being, the current waiting times for referral for additional support, after schools have exhausted all of their own resources with children or young people, really puts enormous pressure on schools and trusts.'

[Judy Ellerby, School Leaders evidence session]

'I believe that schools need so much more mental health support for children. Quicker access to assessments and outside supporting services. Often a child with behaviour problems gets bounced around the system for so long that it goes beyond the point of being able to deal with the behaviour. Huge waiting lists for assessments and counselling is unacceptable and extremely frustrating for the child, parents and school.'
[Parent-carer survey respondent]

It is vital that schools have timely access to specialist support services where they can receive advice and make referrals for further support. While provisions such as Mental Health Support Teams have been put in place to improve the link between the NHS and schools and colleges, the early evaluation of the Trailblazer programme found a mismatch between education settings' expectations or perceived support needs and what MHSTs could actually offer (Ellins *et al.*, 2023). In particular, the evaluation highlighted concerns about children and young people falling through the gaps in MHSTs' 'mild to moderate' remit and the criteria for specialist services (Ibid).

Local systems should work to remove these blockages in the system as a priority and actions to address this should be set out in local strategies and plans. There should also be a clear, concise and representative offer of the support provided locally, ensuring that local areas are mapping their offer, resources and existing organisations and provision in a joined-up way for schools. This includes joining up with good-quality digital provision where available. It is crucial that schools are plugged into local offers of support, and that teams of support are built around schools.

What is more, throughout the inquiry we heard how families do not feel like their voices are being heard, particularly in relation to special educational needs and disabilities. Local areas need to ensure

there are effective advocacy services in place for children and families to turn to and that schools are plugged into these. Voluntary and community sector organisations often provide this advocacy and independent support, and many of these organisations also deliver tailored support to schools and pupils which can form part of the mental health offer. As part of this, advocacy services should be supported by local systems and commissioners to upskill and empower parents to be able to advocate for their children and respond to changes in the education system.

Integrating services

Integrated Care Systems provide the opportunity for local areas to bring partners together in delivering improved care and integrating services to meet people's needs more effectively and efficiently. The Health and Care Act places a specific requirement on Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) to set out the steps they will take to address the needs of children and young people under the age of 25 in their five-year forward plans, and for each ICB to nominate an executive children's lead.

While it is still early days in the development of the new health and care system, it is currently unclear how children and young people's mental health provision will be prioritised across ICS footprints and what this means for the commissioning and delivery of mental health services. We have also heard about existing challenges within local areas about key partners working together, particularly in relation to health and education. The latest CQC report on the state of health and care services further highlighted that children and young people's mental health services continue to work in silos.

Education and health need to start seeing themselves not in silos but as working together on this. What we have at the moment is commissioning groups, they're responsible for SEND and CAMHS and those professionals that are supposed to be supporting schools are neither given enough resources or importance, and they don't talk to each other enough and are not using the same language half of the time. So we get competition and often duplication... both trying to do things but working in two different directions. Without structural change the resource won't go far enough unless we create opportunities for cross department or professionals to work together towards the same goal rather than meeting their own masters demands.

[Colin Lofthouse, School Leaders evidence session]

'My school in particular doesn't collaborate with the mental health resources (myself) to plan and strategise what support could be offered to students who are struggling with their mental health. Students themselves don't know what help is available to them. Communication is not very good. A mental health officer should be available to students in crisis or to plan interventions.'

[Professional survey respondent]

It is crucial that key agencies working to support children and young people, including education partners, are part of these new local structures. Education leaders hold valuable insights about the need they are seeing in children and young people, which would enable ICBs to plan and commission services in response. Where decisions are delegated to a 'Place' level, mechanisms must still be in place to ensure voices in education are heard. ICBs and Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs) should appoint a representative from the education sector to facilitate this process. Creating accountability in local systems for children and young people's mental health will be critical in ensuring effective, integrated mental health support is delivered. This should involve the development of shared standards and the review and reporting of progress and outcomes achieved across the children and young people's mental health system, including within education.

Case Study: Southwark Council

Southwark Council has an ambition to ensure that 100% of children and young people in Southwark have access to the emotional wellbeing and mental health support they need. The council has invested £2m in mental health in schools through Southwark's Improving Mental Health and Resilience in Schools Programme (IMHARS) - a whole school and inclusive approach. IMHARS is a preventative programme which aims to build capacity and resilience so that children and young people can cope with the challenges of life. In addition, the council aims to deliver a sustainable, universal infrastructure across all schools in Southwark. To date, 100% of schools in the borough have accessed the programme and wider offer.

Southwark Council also ensures young people can access mental health support in the community through The Nest, an open-access service for young people, based in Peckham and delivered by Groundwork London on behalf of the council. The Nest provides support at the point of need, without requiring a professional referral, and offers early intervention for emotional issues and low-level mental health needs such as worries, anxieties and stress. The council has provided funding so that The Nest can deliver services directly to schools, with over half of schools in the borough now using Nest services.

Recommendations

- Plans and strategies developed by Integrated Care Boards and Integrated Care Partnerships should set out how they will improve access to, and capacity in, specialist services, alongside how they will map local offers of support.
- Integrated Care Boards should ensure that school representatives can contribute to strategic planning and the commissioning of children and young people's mental health support.



What can schools do?

Schools can implement a series of small changes that help make a big difference to pupil behaviour and mental health. Throughout our inquiry, we spoke to school leaders and staff about what they think works in practice. Pupils, parents and carers also told us what they felt needed to change to address their concerns and improve outcomes. There was widespread agreement that school staff need to be supported in identifying and addressing the drivers of poor behaviour. In this section, we outline steps schools can take to work towards this.

Putting relationships at the centre of the school culture

Creating a culture and ethos that promotes a calm, orderly and supportive school environment is crucial, and much of the evidence we heard reflected this. Throughout the inquiry, we heard countless examples and evidence around the importance of relational approaches within education which place relationships front and centre. Relational approaches help promote positive and trusting relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves. Evidence also shows that positive relationships between pupils and teachers act as protective factors for mental health and wellbeing (Abdinasir, 2019).

Taking a relational approach also enables pupils to feel valued, heard and a sense of belonging within the school community. For example, a study on belonging undertaken by UCL, Institute of Education and the National Education Union highlights practical examples that promote belonging and mental health and help minimise the use of punitive approaches (Riley *et al.*, 2020). Schools that took part in the study faced significant issues around behaviour in the past and recalibrated their school culture to a place where exclusions are now rare. Within these schools, the study found little about sanction-based approaches to behaviour,

and much about learning and relational approaches centred on valuing individuals. There is also robust evidence of the impact of a sense of safety, belonging and wellbeing on student performance and engagement (Riley *et al.*, 2020).

It is important that schools take a more nurture based, restorative, eco-systemic and relational approach to behaviour management. This should seek to address environmental problems (e.g., poverty or parental stress), support children to feel safe and secure in the school setting and focus on the development of positive, collaborative and communitarian relationships between staff and pupils. [Professional survey respondent]

'Safety, calm and the third thing is dignity... When students are treated like human beings with dignity, and everyone else is too, including the teacher... if you make somebody feel valued or valuable and you can encourage them to engage with work which they feel is meaningful... those are three factors that school leaders and teachers can be very good at providing.' [Tom Bennett]

'We've got a lot of evidence around the need for positive relationships and positive atmosphere and feelings within the education context to enhance learning.' [Tristan Middleton, Academics evidence session]

Case studies

Carr Manor Community School in Leeds places relationships at the centre of their approach to inclusion. Restorative and relational practices are used across the school to build a culture that promotes a sense of belonging and connectedness. Key to this is the school's coaching programme, which it believes is fundamental in developing strong relationships across the whole school community. All adults - teaching staff and non-teaching staff - lead timetabled "Coaching Circles" three times a week: Monday check-in, Wednesday check-up and Friday check-out. Each circle has approximately eight to ten pupils gathered from all year groups. These check-ins provide the opportunity to get to know one another, and share targets, worries and achievements, while mid-week sessions explore topics such as careers and financial education, health and wellbeing, and citizenship, while building resilience and independence. The coaching programme has had a profound impact in building strong relationships across year groups, staff, pupils and families. It has enabled better identification of wellbeing or safeguarding concerns and laid strong foundations to positively support challenging behaviour and restorative practices.

Trafalgar School in Portsmouth uses relational approaches to build strong relationships across the whole school community. This means all school policies, including the behaviour policy, are built on the foundation of strong relationships. The school believes it is these relationships which create a sense of belonging in the school and enable pupils to feel safe in the school community. Community circles take place in every tutor group on a Monday and Friday, which are key in building relationships. Community circles are not only a space to have informal conversations, but also to address any issues and to focus on personal development. They enable tutors to check in on pupils and to address any challenges they might be experiencing. Every adult in the school, regardless of their role, is a Form Tutor, which places the pastoral system at the centre of everything.

The New School in South-East London focuses on developing positive and supportive relationships through relational practices. This is achieved through small class sizes and the use of democratic and restorative practices. Each day starts with the class coming together to check in, have breakfast with one another, and set out what they are going to do in the day and to address any issues as a class. The school also uses restorative practice approaches to manage conflict in the school. This allows all voices to be heard and holds people to account for their actions in order to reach an appropriate resolution. The model the school takes has been evaluated by the University of Nottingham, which found improvements in children's confidence, wellbeing and their sense of belonging in the school. The evaluation also noted that the restorative justice approach taken by the school led to improvements in discipline and to the development of trusting relationships.

Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) has developed guidance for schools on developing an [Attachment Aware Behaviour Regulation Policy](#). This guidance encouraged BHCC schools to follow a relational approach to behaviour, exploring the links at a whole school level between training, policy and practice. Many schools across the whole range of ages and SEN and disabilities in the city have since been following this guidance and are at different stages of their journeys in following an attachment aware or trauma informed approach.

Embedding restorative approaches

Restorative approaches within schools attempt to promote accountability, resolve conflict and work with pupils to address the harm caused by their behaviour (Restorative Justice Council, n.d). It gives pupils responsibility for decision-making on issues that affect their lives, their learning and their experience of school, including their behaviour (Hendry *et al.*, n.d). Schools that utilise restorative approaches embed this within their wider school culture and ethos, and it forms part of relational practice.

'Schools should work on relational skills and restorative approaches. Proactive rather than reactive would be a good change.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

'As education providers, surely restorative thinking helps in assessing consequences and behaviour approaches and abilities.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]

Research has demonstrated that restorative approaches in schools have led to improvements in behaviour. For example, a 2009 study examining restorative approaches in Bristol schools found that they helped improve attendance and reduce rates of exclusions (Skinns, *et al.*, 2009). Many professionals and families who shared evidence with us highlighted their preference for more restorative approaches, as they place less emphasis on sanctioning and therefore minimise the harms associated with them.

Schools should work towards embedding more relational and restorative approaches to help minimise the use of punitive and sanction-based measures in response to behaviour. These approaches are most successful when there is investment and buy-in across all teaching levels, especially at senior leadership.

Case studies

Trafalgar School in Portsmouth uses restorative approaches to deal with conflict when it does arise in the school. While all pupils understand they are responsible for their behaviour and that there are consequences for misbehaviour, they are given the opportunity to learn from their actions and make changes to their behaviour through restorative conversations. The school believes that because pupils feel safe in the school, they are able to put things back together and have these conversations when conflict does occur.

Saxon Way Primary School has replaced their behaviour policy with a relationships policy. This policy has created a positive approach to supporting pupils, particularly through incidents of conflict, and sets out clear expectations of the school community. Expectations within the school focus on the 'three B's: Be Safe, Be Ready, Be Respectful. To support this, the school has an Expectations Matrix, which identifies how children are expected to behave in different areas of the school and focuses on positive behaviours. These expectations are communicated to all children who are taught the positive behaviours set out in the matrix. A restorative approach is taken to manage conflict within the school and allow children to have the opportunity to have their say and be heard. The school timetable has been amended to allow these conversations to happen, with a 15-minute quiet reading session being put in place after break and lunch to allow teachers to address any issues that happened during this time and have restorative conversations.

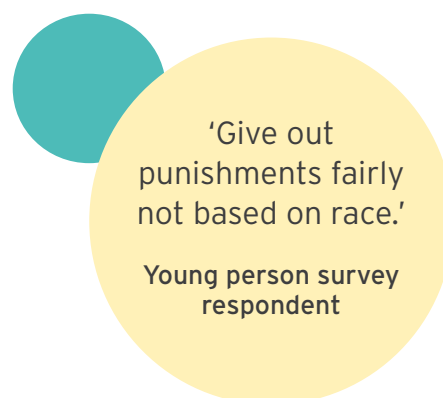
Since 2016, Gloucestershire County Council has been on a journey to implement restorative practice across children's services. In 2016/17, Gloucestershire was the 4th highest excluding county in the UK, with 141 permanent exclusions. Restorative practice was the chosen approach due to the strong evidence base that it supports the reduction of exclusions, improves attendance, and supports wellbeing and staff retention. This was reflected in initial pilots the council implemented across Children's Services, including two schools. The outcomes from the pilots included reduced exclusions, increased attendance and better relationships between staff and pupils. Following the success of the pilots, the Director of Education in the council began a five-year investment plan to roll out restorative practice across more schools. Almost five years later, the council is working with 6 secondary schools, 4 specialist and alternative settings and 43 primary schools to embed a whole school restorative practice approach. Gloucestershire County Council also offers a whole school approach to restorative practice. The programme is an immersive one and begins with a two-year leadership programme.

Recommendations

- Schools should work towards embedding relational and restorative approaches to their behaviour policies and practices. To support this, school leaders should commission staff training around these approaches to help make the necessary changes and build more inclusive and nurturing environments for all pupils.

Moving from a one size fits all approach

During this inquiry, we heard repeatedly that blanket approaches to behaviour management are unhelpful and that those pupils facing the greatest levels of educational disadvantage and inequality are more likely to experience punitive measures. This includes pupils with SEN and disabilities, Black and Traveller young people and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. While there is a need for a whole school approach to behaviour, wellbeing and mental health, we must recognise that some groups may face additional barriers or challenges that impact on their learning and behaviour. A one size fits all approach can overlook their needs and unfairly punish pupils who have not been properly supported around their behaviour, learning and wellbeing.



'Moving away from the one-size-fits-all approach and looking at children as individuals... I've seen a lack of understanding of what true equality is and making equality of opportunity doesn't mean treating everyone the same, it means levelling up and being proportionate to the background, [or] to the situation. That might look like giving a group or an individual a leg up, but actually, that leg up is needed.'
[The Traveller Movement, Sector evidence session]

There are some very simple solutions that schools can put into place. It's not all about money. It's not all about having to buy people in, there are some very simple things like not changing a seating plan without talking to a SEND young person. If a child has said they need to sit at the end of a row in the corner at the back, let them sit there and make sure they sit there in every class because then they're more likely to demonstrate appropriate behaviour rather than behaviour which challenges. So it doesn't always come down to money, it comes down to the culture of the school, having the chance to be flexible within current guidelines and respecting the individuality of students. Using one-size-fits-all approaches doesn't work, schools need to think about individual needs, and they need a system that allows them to work in this way. [Judy Ellerby, School Leaders evidence session]

'Schools need to stop trying to implement 'one size fits all' behavioural policies. Adjustments should be made according to pupils' needs.'
[Parent-carer survey respondent]

In particular, we heard that pupils with SEN and disabilities awaiting assessments struggle without appropriate support and are unfairly sanctioned when they display behaviours that don't conform. While school policies should be underpinned by relevant legislation, we heard concerns that many of these do not reference the relevant legislation or how reasonable adjustments will be made.

Additionally, racism and discrimination expose pupils from racialised backgrounds to many of the known risk factors for poor mental health and behavioural problems, such as poverty. Their experiences can be further compounded by the effects of teacher racial bias and stereotyping when it comes to behaviour as highlighted earlier.

Racial inequalities in school exclusions also remain an issue; for example, exclusions data from the Department for Education shows that Gypsy and Roma pupils have the highest rates of permanent exclusions, followed by pupils of mixed White and Black Caribbean ethnicity.

Behaviour policies that fail to recognise and accommodate pupils' individual differences risk being discriminatory. While we know that many schools work hard to tackle discrimination our inquiry has found that more can be done in relation to behaviour management. There is a raft of legislation and guidance around equality and inclusion in schools that can support them to assess their approaches and prevent and eliminate disproportionality. Schools have a duty to consider how their policies or approaches impact on pupils who have protected characteristics, including in relation to behaviour. For example, the Equality and Human Rights Commission have issued guidance and advice for schools on the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which sets out how schools can meet the duty in areas such as decision-making, policy development, participation and the use of data (EHRC, 2022). The Council for Disabled Children has also produced guidance for schools on their duties under the Equality Act in relation to disabled pupils.

All staff working in schools should be actively promoting equal opportunities for all pupils and should take an anti-ableist and anti-racist approach. This will allow us to move towards a more equitable education system where no pupil is unfairly penalised or held back because they belong to a marginalised group.

Case studies

The Brighton and Hove Inclusion Support Service at Brighton City Council has also led on developing an [SEND Guide for schools](#) and for [early years settings](#), as well as the [ATTEND Framework](#) to support Emotionally Based School Attendance (EBSA), which has helped a shift towards a more systemic understanding of presenting behaviour and mental health needs, which often coexist alongside other SEND needs, rather than viewing these only through a social, emotional and mental health lens.

In 2020, **Southwark Council** agreed a clear objective for 100% inclusion in education for its students. Southwark's goal is to ensure that children are always included in education and that provision is available for a wide range of complex educational needs, alongside superb mainstream provision. This was agreed following a steep increase in permanent exclusions in the borough in 2017/18. Through working with headteachers and partners on the local safeguarding board, [the Inclusion Charter](#) was taken to Southwark's Cabinet and launched in July 2022, cementing the goal for 100% inclusion in education in the borough. Southwark is planning an event for agencies in the borough to come together to sign the Charter. Southwark is the first local authority to have launched an education inclusion charter of this kind.

Recommendations

- Staff in school should shift away from the adoption of a one size fits all approach to behaviour and consider more flexible and tailored approaches to support that recognise pupils' individual needs and diversity.
- All schools should ensure they take a whole school approach to anti-racism, equality and diversity and comply with the latest guidance and legislation in this area.

- All staff working with pupils should receive training around anti-racism, equality and diversity to ensure they routinely promote these values and challenge biases and stereotyping that may influence their decisions.
- School leaders and governing boards should collect and monitor data relating to the experiences of pupils with protected characteristics and those facing inequalities to plan effective provision and address any disparities. This should include qualitative data from pupils and families to build richer insights into their experiences.

Role of school governors and academy trustees

School governors and academy trustees have a crucial role to play in the development and oversight of school behaviour policies. While it is the role of school leaders to draft the policy, governing boards can set the tone by deciding the principles on which the policy will be based. Statutory guidance for governing bodies on behaviour and discipline in school sets out the role of governors in setting these principles and in providing advice and guidance to school leaders in the development of the behaviour policy. While this guidance only applies to maintained schools, it has been recommended that all schools take account of it (National Governance Association, n.d).

Beyond setting the principles for the policy, school leaders should also seek to involve governors and trustees in the development of the behaviour policy. There is currently no requirement on governing boards to approve the policy, only for it to be reviewed on an annual basis. We believe that the behaviour policy should go to governing boards for approval in order to strengthen oversight of the policy and better hold schools to account in its implementation.

Governors have a key role to play in monitoring the implementation of the behaviour policy. It is therefore vital that they are equipped with the knowledge they need to interrogate these policies and the impact they are having on children and young people. For example, as part of monitoring activities, we would expect governors to explore how these policies are being deployed in the school, if and where reasonable adjustments are being made, impacts on pupil mental health and wellbeing, and to investigate behavioural incident data by protected characteristics to see if these policies are disproportionately impacting on certain groups of young people. Governing boards and academy trustees are also ultimately responsible for ensuring that the school upholds their responsibilities in relation to the relevant legislation, such as the SEND Code of Practice and the Equality Act 2010, and we would expect these bodies to interrogate policies within the context of their statutory duties.

“ School governing bodies and SLT MUST be trained and held accountable for breaches of the SEND Code of Practice and failure to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010. They should all be made to demonstrate that the implementation of their behaviour policies does not contravene law and guidance on mental health or SEND.”
[Parent-carer survey respondent]

Further to this, training opportunities available to school governors and academy trustees should help them in understanding the underlying drivers of behaviour, such as mental health, SEN and disabilities, in order to strengthen the skills set of governing boards in their reviewing and monitoring roles. The National Governance Association has created a guide for governing bodies on effective practice in reviewing, communicating and monitoring behaviour policies.

Recommendations

- Members of school governing boards and academy trustee boards should be involved in the development and approval of school behaviour policies and should set the principles on which the policies are based. They should work alongside school leaders to routinely review implementation of the policy and track progress. They should also be offered training on school policy areas relating to mental health, SEN and disabilities.

Improved mental health knowledge and awareness in school

It has been noted that the education system weighs heavily on the side of academic performance, which makes it difficult to find the time to meet the mental health and behavioural needs of pupils. Schools need to be supported in giving equal priority to mental health and academic achievement – recognising that good mental health facilitates learning. The Government has taken welcome steps to increase teaching on mental health through the introduction of a dedicated Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) curriculum. However, it was identified that much more emphasis is needed on mental health in school policies and practices that goes beyond certain RSHE lessons. Young people told us this could be achieved, for example, through dedicated lessons, assemblies and having more support in place in the school environment.

‘We could have more assemblies on mental health and how it is important to be healthy mentally and physically.’
[Young person survey respondent]

‘More talks and explanations about mental health so we understand more and feel more comfortable talking about it.’
[Young person survey respondent]

'There could be adults coming into the school [to] talk about how to deal with your mental health and offer support to those who struggle with mental health.'
[Young person survey respondent]

Alongside this, we heard about the importance of young people having access to lessons and extracurricular activities that boost wellbeing. There have been concerns that growing academic pressures have reduced children and young people's opportunities to take part in subjects such as art, drama, music and sport. Numerous studies have shown that taking part in these subjects boosts wellbeing. For example, studies have shown how learning through arts and culture can improve attainment in maths and English, and can enable the development of skills and behaviours that support children and young people in school (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2017).

'The school curriculum should revolve around wellbeing and mental health, having a happy pupil, the pupil will succeed and be able to learn. But a pupil that is struggling will have barriers to their learning.'

Professional survey respondent

Case studies

Over the last few years, **Charles Dickens Primary School** in Southwark has been on a journey to improve mental health and wellbeing within the school. A whole school approach is taken, where emphasis is placed on universal strategies to skill up pupils and build resilience. The school believes that such an approach helps to support pupils in being emotionally regulated. At the heart of this approach is a wellbeing curriculum which is taught throughout the school, from nursery to year 6. All pupils are provided with a 'Wellbeing Booklet' to complete, and animations are available to accompany this so that pupils can share learnings at home and so parents and carers can be involved. Pupils are also taught a 'character curriculum' where they learn not only about what the school expects of them, but also wider learnings such as what to do if there is a disagreement and how to say sorry. For example, recently lessons have been held for Year 6s on dealing with transition, to support them as they make the move into secondary school. This helps to ensure that they feel as prepared as possible for the move.

Red Balloon is an educational charity providing tailored therapeutic, educational and social re-engagement programmes to children and young people unable to attend mainstream school due to mental ill health, bullying or trauma. The purpose of the charity is to support pupils to re-engage with education and build the skills and confidence they need to re-integrate with their peers. Red Balloon uses a process of negotiated teaching where students are able to develop their strengths and interests in order to support re-engagement with learning. Each student has an individualised timetable of online and in-person sessions which are delivered one to one, in pairs or in a small group. Students are also given the opportunity to access a negotiated range of different activities such as cooking or forest school, and termly trips are organised for those who are able to attend.

The New School uses a process of democratic education to enable young people the choice of what they study, and how, at certain points of the day. This translates to a mixture of core subjects and optional subjects, resulting in a more individualised curriculum and self-directed time. The school also holds weekly workshops run by both teachers and pupils on a range of different subjects as decided by young people. Examples of workshops being run in the school include knitting, extended maths and origami, but these change on a half-termly basis.

Recommendations

- Schools should take steps to embed a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing, so it forms a central part of the school culture.
- Schools should develop a specific mental health and wellbeing policy, setting out how they will meet *all 8* principles of a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing. Audits should be carried out regularly by school leaders to assess how well they are meeting the aims of this policy.

Listening to children and young people

A message we consistently heard from children and young people throughout the course of the inquiry was the need for schools to listen to them more. Young people told us how they don't feel like their views or needs are taken into account, and how a much more compassionate and understanding approach needs to be taken by schools.

'I'd like to see a more understanding approach rather than a 'how do we fix this student' view. It's important to remember that all of us are hormonal teenagers who are going to be annoying, but also are very stressed and sad and all over the place. Punishments should not increase that stress, such as a detention, but punishments that help the misbehaving students do good, such as clean a desk they drew on, or a discussion with a teacher about why what they did was wrong in private, would be more beneficial.'

[Young person survey respondent]

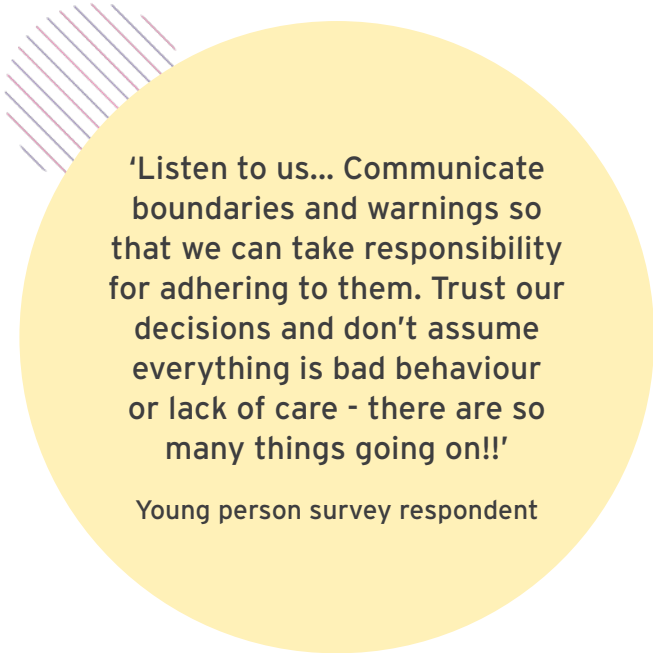
'I want them to listen to the students and what they need (support wise). I struggle a lot with concentration and hyperactivity. The lessons I enjoy are taught by teachers who help me by engaging me in the subject if they see me lose focus and support/encourage me if I'm listening and answering questions. They need to change their attitude on poor behaviour. children aren't naughty for fun (most of the time).'

[Young person survey respondent]

The young people we spoke to highlighted practical solutions that schools could put in place to ensure they are listening to the pupils and effectively responding to their needs. These solutions included making the Senior Leadership Team in schools more visible and approachable so that young people know who they can talk to, introducing pastoral support and mentor initiatives, and effectively communicating the boundaries that are in place.

'Weekly meetings with the Safeguarding Team or whoever usually helps with the mentality of the pupils, and with certain pupils who have a voice and can communicate to and from other pupils and teachers as many do shy away from speaking or asking for help. Ask the pupils what they need as well, individually if need be.'

[Young person survey respondent]



'Listen to us... Communicate boundaries and warnings so that we can take responsibility for adhering to them. Trust our decisions and don't assume everything is bad behaviour or lack of care - there are so many things going on!!'

Young person survey respondent

'Pastoral support and mentorship [initiatives]. There is no problem in teachers being strict and giving out punishments for bad behaviour. But you must have a relationship with the child you are disciplining. Teachers tend not to have good relationships with children who are labelled as badly behaved and that is the problem.'

[Young person survey respondent]

Young people also identified the importance of having regular 'check-ins', with pupils having a safe space to go in the school if needed.

Some sort of check-up so at least one pastoral or head of year should check up on each pupil fortnightly.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'I am aware that most schools offer school counsellors, however I think schools should encourage students to speak to people they trust more. This doesn't have to be a counsellor because this can seem daunting. Teachers and staff should approach students more to check up on how they have been feeling recently.'

[Young person survey respondent]

'Definitely, I think there needs to be more 1:1 support, different resolutions and resources. There needs to be a consistency with checking up on a young person and just having a safe place for young people to go if [they] need.'

[Young person survey respondent]

Recommendations

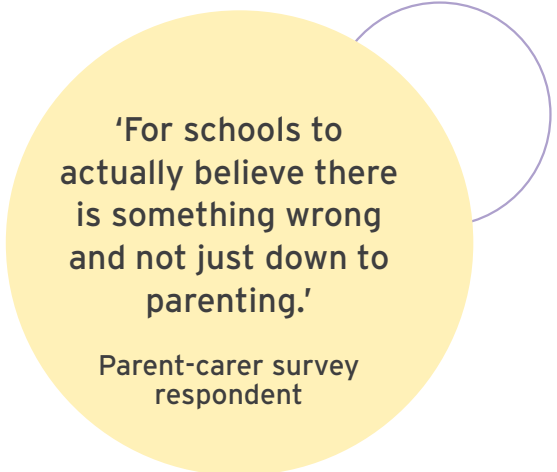
- Schools should review their co-production practices to ensure they are regularly listening to the voices of children and young people.

Working with families

It is crucial that as part of any school culture, families feel involved and consulted in their child's education and the school community. This has been recognised within the eight principles of a whole school approach, and most recently the behaviour in schools' guidance notes the important role parents and carers have to play in developing and maintaining good behaviour in schools. However, we heard consistently from parents and carers who took part in the inquiry that they feel blamed by schools for their child's difficulties and that strict behaviour policies can alienate them further. Parents and carers told us they wanted to see an end to the culture around parent blaming and the appropriate support to be put in place for their child.

'It should be the policy to not have a 'blame culture' for parents. Having a child with a hidden disability is hard enough without being made to feel guilty for their behaviour by school.'

[Parent-carer survey respondent]



'For schools to actually believe there is something wrong and not just down to parenting.'

Parent-carer survey respondent

An area of school life where parent blame is felt most acutely is around persistent absence, where non-attendance can often be regarded as parenting issues. Evidence collected by Coalition member SquarePeg notes that the traditional narrative around attendance dictates that the only explanation for absence is physical illness, truancy, or (in the most severe cases) a parent who deliberately prevents their child from attending, and that there is zero recognition of the role played by mental health in non-attendance (Square Peg *et al.*, 2021).

Professionals echoed the importance of schools being given the space to build relationships with parents and carers but recognised that there isn't always time, space or a will for this to happen. The importance of building collaborative approaches with families right from the very beginning was highlighted throughout our evidence, and this should be an intrinsic part of any school culture.

'Every time people mention parents and carers, the word listen just comes to mind... so I think it's really important that schools are able to have the time to really listen and engage with parents and carers and the students of course. SENCOs and Senior Mental Health Leads need the time to work with parents to understand the

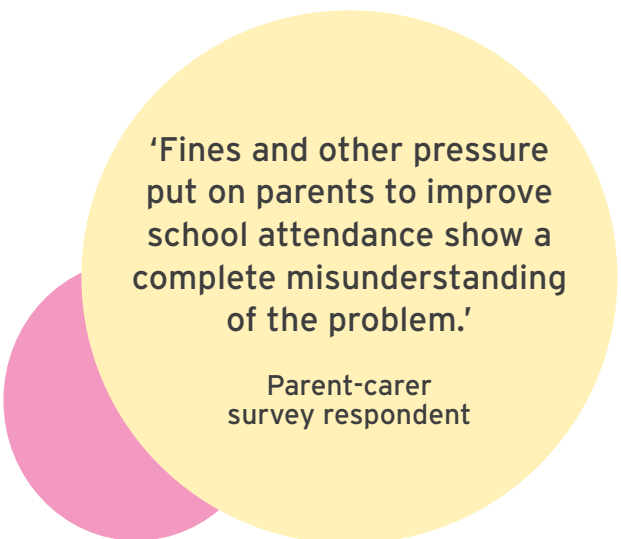
young person fully, from both the home and school perspectives. As they will be doing a number of other jobs as well as these roles the pressures on their time are very great, so having the time to really engage with parents is very difficult.'
[Judy Ellerby, School Leaders evidence session]

'Don't start the relationship with parents when there is a problem to address or even just only on behaviour. Schools that do it really well have parental engagement and relationships well established across all aspects of school life. It's a lot harder to think how we are going to get parents engaged on this one thing, particularly as that can come across quite negatively if you're seeking only to specifically discuss their child's behaviour. So, I think instilling a culture and ethos that promotes parental engagement as well as engaging with other stakeholders - pupils' and staff - is crucial. As a school or trust that means that those relationships are established before talking about behaviour, that those expectations and those foundations for a good working relationship are already set.'

[Elizabeth Collin, School Leaders evidence session]

'I think including parents in the work of a school, it's critical... Often teachers are reluctant to include parents in their learning efforts, their teaching efforts, as much as they should be. To me, there should be a much deeper partnership between parents and schools.'

[Professor Peter Fonagy, Academics evidence session]



'Fines and other pressure put on parents to improve school attendance show a complete misunderstanding of the problem.'

Parent-carer
survey respondent

Case studies

Charles Dickens School in Southwark provides a wider network of support for families. An Early Help Manager is employed whose main role is to engage with and support families, and regular coffee mornings are held for parents where experts are invited to provide advice and guidance to parents on key topics. The school has also recently introduced a 0-2 provision for members of the local community.

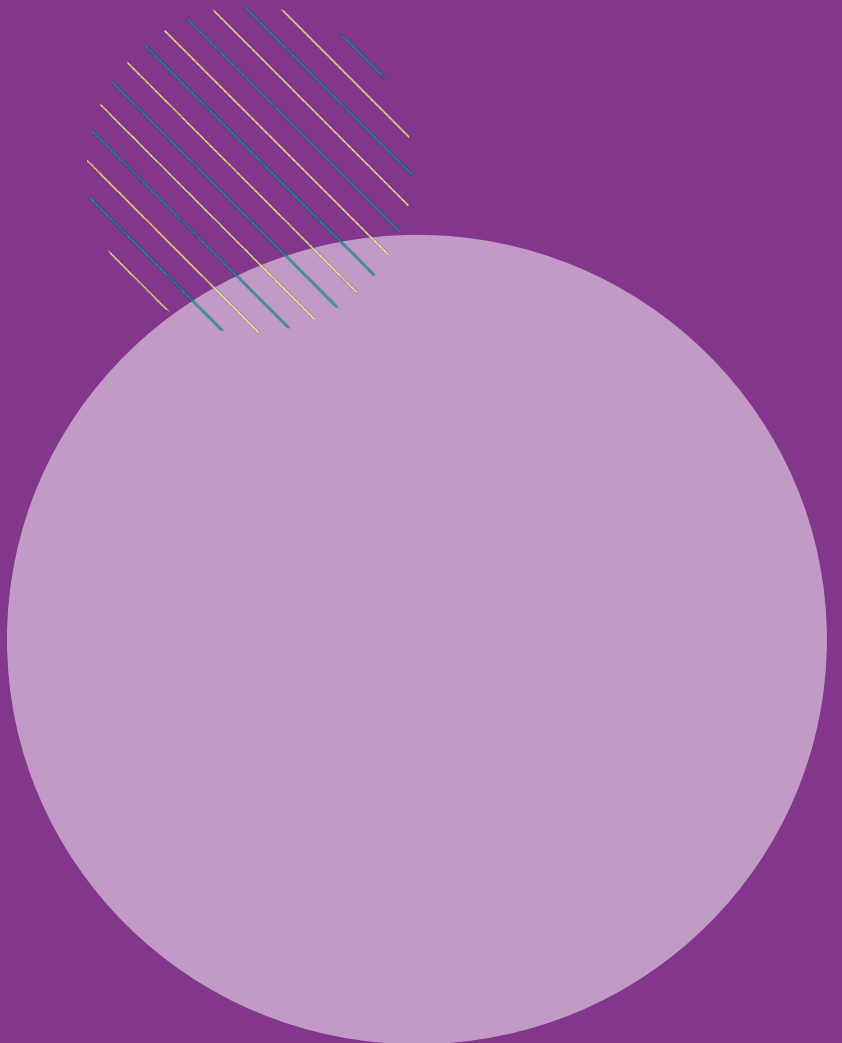
Saxon Way Primary School in Medway has also taken steps to ensure support is in place for parents and carers. Each morning, teachers are expected to stand at their classroom door to greet each child and members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and support staff stand at the school gates to welcome children. The school has found that this approach has enabled contact with parents and has been crucial in helping to build relationships. Further to this, there is a Wellbeing Centre on the school site which not only provides a community space for parents and carers to come together, but also an opportunity for them to access support. Both the school's Senior Mental Health Lead and Wellbeing Coordinator have received training to provide support for parents and carers, and the local authority will be providing support services such as parenting programmes.

Red Balloon education provision in the South-East of England takes a whole family approach by ensuring parents and carers also receive the support they need. Red Balloon provides family support sessions and individual parent support sessions, and there are monthly parent support groups.

Recommendations

- School staff should proactively build relationships with parents-carers at the earliest opportunity to support pupils' learning. This should also include creating opportunities for parents to connect with one another.
- Schools should create opportunities for parents-carers to voice their views and have a say in decision-making, for example, through creating parent and carer forums. Schools should also be linked in with local advocacy services that represent parent voices.
- School leaders should seek to address and eliminate the culture of parent-carer blame where it exists.

Conclusion



In recent years, behaviour in schools has become a widely debated and, at times, polarising topic. Many of these narratives have been informed and led by experts and politicians, but what has been absent from the conversation are the voices of children, young people and families themselves who are directly impacted by school behaviour policies. Our inquiry aimed to understand the underlying drivers of behaviour and how approaches to behaviour impact children and young people's mental health from a broad range of perspectives. We also wanted to explore the changes needed to positively support both behaviour and mental health in schools.

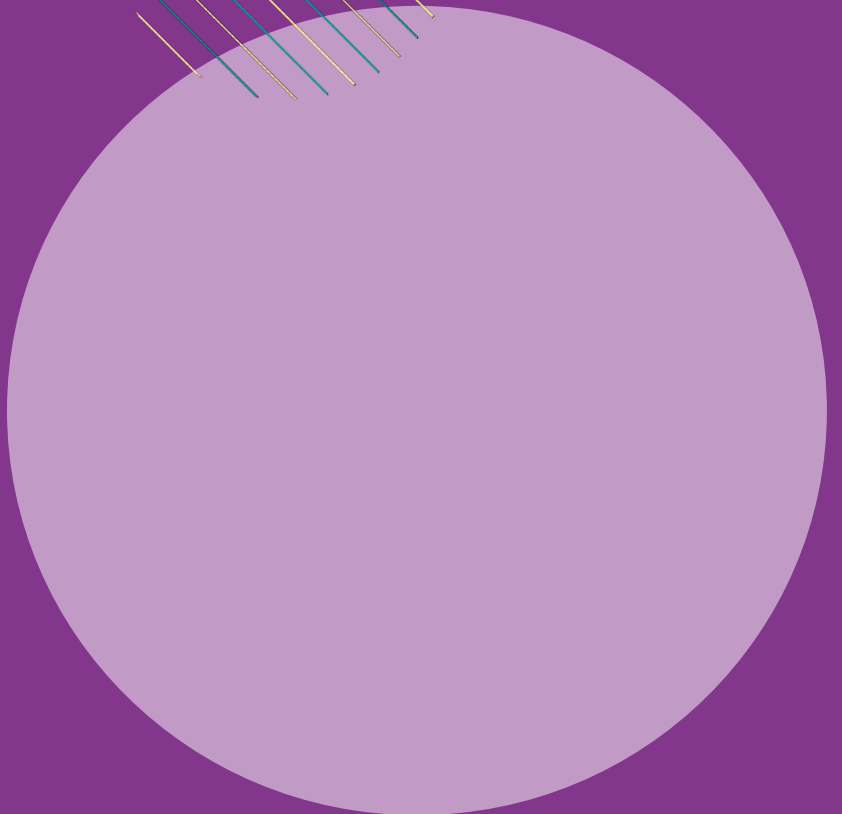
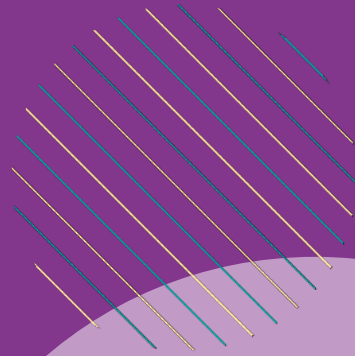
The findings suggest that the underlying drivers of children and young people's behaviour can be multi-faceted and linked to both mental health needs and special educational needs and disabilities. Often, behaviour is a form of communication of unmet or undiagnosed needs, or indication that a child or young person is struggling to communicate or regulate themselves.

Many different approaches are taken by schools to respond to children and young people's behaviour, with government policy stating that it is the responsibility of individual schools to develop their own best practice for managing behaviour that aligns with national guidance. As a result, it is particularly challenging to get a clear picture of how schools are responding to children and young people's behaviour. What we did hear, however, is that many schools use approaches that centre on the use of punitive behaviour management techniques. We heard how the use of some of these punitive behaviour management techniques can be particularly harmful to children and young people's mental health, can exacerbate existing needs and can actually be counter-productive in improving the presenting behaviour.

What our findings show is that a much more compassionate approach is needed to address the root causes of behaviour. Central to this is a culture shift in how behaviour is viewed in schools. We heard evidence of how many schools are starting to prioritise the use of approaches that not only set clear expectations for behaviour, but also respond to young people's needs. Alongside this must be a properly resourced system of services that sit around schools, and offer timely advice and support to children, young people and their families.

We believe that changing the approach to behaviour in school is the first step in building a more inclusive education system.

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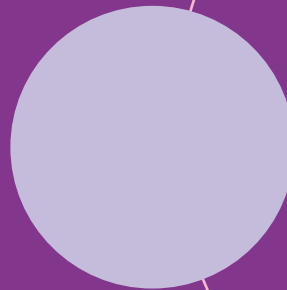
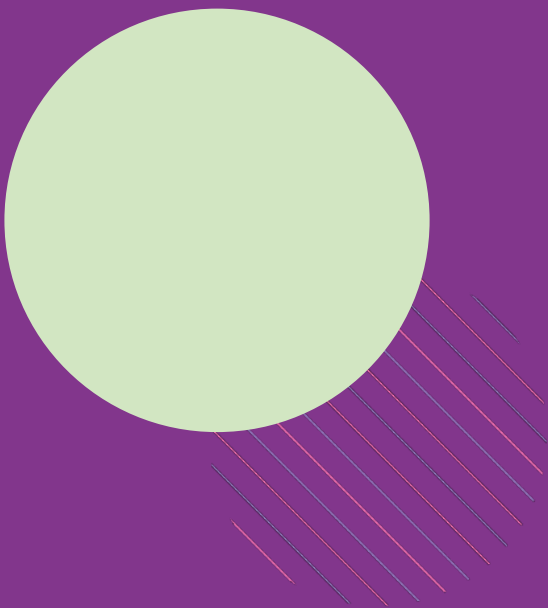
About The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition

Our vision: For all babies, children and young people to grow up in a society that prioritises, invests, listens and attends to their mental health and wellbeing. We listen to, and learn from members, supporters, children and young people and families, using this knowledge to influence and shape policy, systems and practice.

For more information, check out our website: www.cypmhc.org.uk

Follow us on Twitter: [@CYPMentalHealth](https://twitter.com/CYPMentalHealth)

Contact us: info@cypmhc.org.uk



**Children & Young People's
Mental Health Coalition**

Designed by [Krishna Lad](#)