

Association of Teachers and Lecturers

Press Release



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A third of education staff have dealt with physical violence from pupils in this school year, with parents failing to back schools – ATL

A third of school and college staff have dealt with physical violence from a student during this academic year, according to a survey by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL).

Of those staff who had to deal with violent students, one in four said it had been violence directed at them and the same percentage said it was directed at a teacher. The main forms of physical violence experienced included pushing and shoving, punching, hitting and kicking. These were the key findings of an ATL survey of 814 teachers, lecturers, support staff and school leaders in state and independent schools and colleges across the UK.

A support staff member at a state secondary school in Wales said: "I had a female student threaten to kick the smile off my face, in front of a whole class." A teacher at a state secondary school in England said: "Six boys were refusing to work, throwing glue, pens, fighting and throwing books." A management team member at a state primary school in England said: "A Year 4 pupil threw a Year 1 child on the school field."

Staff believe the behaviour of pupils has become worse over the last two years, with just under half saying it had got worse, while 57% believed it has worsened over the last five years.

However, across all schools and colleges, members reported that the vast majority of bad behaviour was low-level disruption such as talking and not paying attention (87%), disrespect (85%), including the use of mobile phones in class and ignoring teachers' requests, and verbal attacks (63%).

Tony Osborne, a further education lecturer from England, said: "Low-level disruption, name-calling, using mobile phones in class and homophobic language is an everyday occurrence with foundation level learners in FE."

A primary teacher in Surrey said: "I experience low-level disruption every day from a core group of six pupils. Constantly disrupting, talking, shouting, fighting, rolling around on the carpet, poking each other with pencils, rocking on chairs, whistling or humming, with absolutely no respect for others or school property. I feel I am child-minding throughout the school day - just trying to keep the rest of the class safe."

The lack of positive role models at home (73%), relational breakdowns within families (63%) and seeking attention from other pupils (73%) were highlighted by staff as being major factors contributing to problem behaviour in schools.

A special educational needs staff member at a secondary school in England said: "Pupils are often confused, lack stable families, lack discipline or discipline is inconsistently applied."

For the vast majority of staff, poor student behaviour disrupts their classes (80%), but for nearly half of staff (49%) dealing with challenging behaviour has led to stress and more than a third (37%) have suffered from anxiety.

A support staff member at a state primary school in England said: "A pupil once hit me in the back totally unexpectedly, because I had asked her to put a book away. I was so winded and hurt that I couldn't carry on that day."

On a positive note, over half of staff felt their school or college provides adequate support in dealing with reported incidents. Nearly 90% of staff said their school has a clear behaviour policy with 57% of staff satisfied with this policy, although three in ten were not satisfied. Two-thirds (67%) of staff believe that having a whole-school behaviour policy is the most effective way of managing pupil behaviour. Whole-school bullying policies (53%) and receiving support from the management team (47%) are also considered important.

The most common forms of discipline used by schools and colleges include calling or summoning children's parents (82%), removal from lessons (82%), and warnings (80%). However, independent schools tended to favour using detentions (77%), suspensions (76%), as well as warnings (75%) and summoning parents (74%). Of all those surveyed, a third (33%) of staff said pupils had been excluded from their school during the current academic year, a figure which rose to 51% among academy staff in England.

Victoria Malcolm, a primary school teacher from a state school in England, said: "Pupils know that there is little school staff can do to enforce discipline. They are not 'afraid' for want of a different word. Behaviour folders, traffic light charts, even talking to parents does nothing to encourage certain children to improve their behaviour."

Respondents also raised concerns over the support they had received from the parents or guardians of children who behaved poorly. Gail Reardon, a secondary teacher from a state school in England, said: "Most parents are supportive, however, a minority refuse to acknowledge or deal with their child's behaviour."

A management team member at a state primary school in England said: "A change in pupils' behaviour is not helped by the lack of respect that parents show towards staff in school – there is no wonder that some pupils are rude when this is what they see as a role model."

ATL general secretary, Dr Mary Bousted, said: "It is shocking that a third of teaching staff have experienced violence and that it is getting worse. ATL firmly believes that no member of staff should be subjected to violent behaviour by pupils."

"A minority of children are very aware of their rights, have a total disregard of school rules and are rather less aware of their responsibility for their own learning and how to show respect to staff and other students. This can apply as much to over-indulged middle class children as those from challenging families."

"It is not surprising to see that poor behaviour is often attributed to problems at home. Teachers need to work with parents to encourage good behaviour and parents should be acting as good role models by supporting staff and helping them create a more positive learning environment for their children."

ENDS

ATL surveyed 814 teachers, lecturers, support staff and school leaders working in primary and secondary state and independent schools in the UK in March 2012.

Key survey results:

Have respondents had to deal with a violent pupil/student in their school/college in this academic year? Total respondents: 721	
Yes	33.1%
No	66.9%

If respondents have dealt with a violent pupil/student in this academic year, to whom was the violence directed? Total respondents: 237	
You	28.3% (67)
A member of the teaching staff	28.7% (68)
A member of support staff	21.9% (52)
A member of the management team	12.2% (29)
Another pupil	80.6% (191)

Would respondents say that the violent pupil/student behaviour they experienced in this academic year falls into any of the following categories? Total respondents: 238	
Pushing/shoving	88.7%
Scratching	16.4%
Biting	16.4%
Spitting	18.5%
Fists (punching/hitting)	74.8%
Legs (kicking)	56.7%
Knives (stabbing/attempting to stab)	4.2%

Have respondents had to deal with challenging or disruptive behaviour (other than violent) from a pupil in this current academic year? Total respondents: 721	
Yes	86.0%
No	14.0%

How do respondents think pupil/student behaviour has changed over the...? Total respondents: 721	Better	The Same	Worse	Don't know
past two years	7.0%	44.2%	47.3%	1.4%
past five years	7.6%	29.4%	56.8%	6.2%
past ten years	5.8%	17.5%	58.2%	18.6%

If respondents have had to deal with challenging behaviour from a pupil/student in this academic year, what form has it taken? Total respondents: 621	
Low level disruption (talking, not paying attention,	87.1%
Intimidation (threats, shouting, being sworn at)	43.0%

horsing around)			
Disrespect (use of mobile phone in class, ignoring teacher's requests, refusing to comply with school rules)	84.7%	Physical aggression (pushing, spitting, scratching, kicking, punching, hitting, stabbing)	32.4%
Verbal (insults, threats, derogatory comments)	63.1%	Bullying (isolating another pupil/student from a friendship group, spreading rumours, snide looks across the classroom, snide comments)	45.2%
Other	3.9%		

What do respondents think are the reasons, if any, for challenging behaviour by pupils/students at their school/college?			
Total respondents: 624			
Relational breakdown between friends	45.2%	Rebelling against gender stereotypes	3.2%
Relational breakdown within family	62.7%	Being bullied	20.4%
Poor emotional health	52.1%	Peer pressure	42.3%
Puberty	31.6%	Neglect at home	42.5%
Effects of poverty	20.2%	Exam pressure	13.0%
Bravado	48.7%	Not interested in lessons	52.2%
Seeking attention from other pupils (ie. seeking attention for popularity, sexualised attention seeking)	72.8%	Struggling to understand lessons	33.2%
Poor role models in the media	30.1%	Do not see the value of education	59.9%
Lack of positive role models at home	72.9%	Special educational needs/Additional support needs	40.5%
A medical condition	21.3%		

Has dealing with disruptive, challenging or violent pupils/students in this academic year caused respondents any of the following?			
Total respondents: 721			
Disruption of work or class	79.5%	Detrimental effect on your relationships with other staff at	11.5%

		school	
Loss of confidence at school/college	24.5%	Consideration of a change of school	20.4%
Refusing to teach a pupil	9.2%	Consideration of a change of profession	32.2%
Stress	49.1%	Physical harm (bodily harm)	3.1%
Anxiety	37.3%	Taking leave from work	4.4%
Depression	8.9%	Visit to the doctor	7.4%
Mental health problems	2.5%	None of the above	14.6%
Detrimental effect on your relationships at home	12.8%	Other (please specify)	4.7%
Detrimental effect on your relationships with parents/carers	5.1%		

Do respondents feel their school/college provides adequate support when staff report incidences of poor behaviour by pupils/students? Total respondents: 680	
Yes	52.1%
No	38.5%
Don't know	9.4%

Do respondents school/colleges have a clear behaviour policy? Total respondents: 680	
Yes	89.3%
No	7.9%
Don't know	2.8%

If respondents answered 'yes' to the previous question, which of these statements is true? Total respondents: 595	
I am satisfied with the behaviour policy	56.6%
I am not satisfied with the behaviour policy	29.9%
No views either way	13.4%

What is effective about the way the respondents school manages pupil/student behaviour? Total respondents: 657			
Whole school behaviour policy	67.3%	Nurture groups	18.3%
Whole school bullying policy	53.4%	Working with parents/carers/the community	33.2%
Risk assessment	25.9%	Behaviour partnerships with other schools	5.0%
Support from management group/leadership	46.7%	Pupil/student mentors	26.2%

Support from multi-agency professionals (non-educational professionals e.g. educational psychologists, social workers, police, etc)	32.6%	My school doesn't manage pupil/student behaviour well	22.2%
Better Continuous Professional Development (CPD)/Initial Teacher Education (ITE)	11.0%	Other (please specify)	6.4%

What are the forms of discipline respondents schools' currently utilise? Total respondents: 680			
Exclusion	59.4%	Warnings	80.1%
Suspension	65.1%	Writing lines	11.3%
Detention	68.2%	Stepped behaviour system eg. Behaviour tree	36%
Removal from lesson	81.5%	Externally sourced behaviour system	7.6%
Summoned to the head/senior teacher	55.6%	Other	7.1%
Log of good behaviour	46.3%	None of the above	0.6%
Parents called or summoned	81.6%		

What are the forms of discipline independent schools' currently utilise? Total respondents: 91			
Exclusion	52.7%	Warnings	74.7%
Suspension	75.8%	Writing lines	14.3%
Detention	76.9%	Stepped behaviour system eg. Behaviour tree	9.9%
Removal from lesson	50.5%	Externally sourced behaviour system	2.2%
Summoned to the head/senior teacher	60.4%	Other	9.9%
Log of good behaviour	39.6%	None of the above	1.1%
Parents called or summoned	73.6%		

Have any pupils/students in the respondents' school/college been permanently excluded for poor behaviour in the current academic year? Total respondents: 721	
Yes	33.4%
No	53.1%
I don't know	13.5%

Have any pupils/students in academy schools been permanently excluded for poor behaviour in the current academic year? Total respondents: 143	
Yes	51.0%
No	35.0%
I don't know	14.0%

Note to editors:

1. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers' Annual Conference is taking place at Manchester Central Convention Centre, from 2-4 April 2012.
2. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 160,000 teachers, headteachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent nurseries, schools, sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges in the United Kingdom.
3. ATL exists to help members, as their careers develop, through first rate research, advice, information and legal advice.
4. ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.