

Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research 2016

1. The Scottish Government commissioned Ipsos MORI to undertake a fourth wave of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research in 2016. It's a well-established survey with its first wave undertaken in 2006. The research explored staff, pupils' and parents' experiences of relationships and behaviour in publicly-funded mainstream schools.
2. The overall aim of the research was to inform the development of policy, guidance and support by providing a clear and robust picture of current relationships and behaviour, and of policy and practice in this area.
3. The BISSR 2016 report was published in December 2017, with full findings available online at the following address:
<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/11/5792/0>.
4. A summary of the main findings and methods is provided below, along with a discussion of related policy developments.

Summary of methods and findings

Methods

5. The research involved a quantitative survey (of headteachers, teachers and support staff) and a programme of qualitative research (with headteachers, teachers, support staff, pupils and parents).

Quantitative survey

6. For the first time, the survey was conducted online rather than on paper (although, unless the headteacher was confident that all support staff would have confidential access to a computer during their normal working day, support staff were also given the option of completing the survey on paper).
7. All 362 secondary schools and a randomly selected sample of 508 primary schools were invited to participate. At each school, the headteacher and a randomly selected sample of teachers and support staff were invited to participate.
8. Fieldwork was conducted between 9 February and 18 March 2016. In total, 4157 members of staff participated and the overall response rate was 48%.

Qualitative research

9. Between November 2016 and February 2017, a programme of qualitative research was conducted to explore and build on elements of the quantitative survey findings. This took place at 11 primary schools and 12 secondary schools (purposively selected to provide a range in terms of size, area deprivation and geographical spread across Scotland) and involved in-depth interviews with 11 headteachers and five depute headteachers, 15 focus groups with teachers, 14

focus groups with support staff, 12 focus groups with pupils and 12 focus groups with parents.

Main findings

Overall perceptions

10. Overall, the majority of staff report that they encounter positive behaviour from pupils all or most of the time. Headteachers were particularly likely to report this.
11. As in previous waves of the survey, the results from headteachers tend to be more positive than the results from teachers (e.g. headteachers report they experience more good behaviour and less low-level disruptive behaviour), and the results from teachers are more positive than the results from support staff.
12. When support staff and teachers were asked about the behaviours that had the greatest negative impact on their experience during the last week, they identified the most common low-level disruptive behaviours (rather than more serious disruptive behaviours, which are much rarer) as having the greatest impact.

Changes over time

13. The biggest change relates to low-level disruptive behaviour in the primary classroom (e.g. hindering other pupils, work avoidance and making unnecessary noise). Reports of this have increased between 2012 and 2016.
14. Primary staff were asked what they thought the reasons for this increase might be. They suggested reasons relating to societal changes (including the increased use of digital technologies), their perception of some approaches to parenting, and a reduction in the availability of ASN resources (support staff, on- and off-site provision, and expert advice).
15. Overall, there has been little change in low-level disruptive behaviour in secondary schools.
16. Overall, looking at the whole range of behaviours in this category, there has been little change in serious disruptive behaviour in either primary or secondary schools. However, primary support staff report that they have experienced higher levels of general verbal abuse, physical aggression and physical violence towards them personally, when looking back over the previous 12 months. However, there was no significant change while reporting over the previous week, so the messages about the overall environment for support staff are unclear.

Factors which predict experiences of negative behaviours

17. Analysis of a range of school and teacher variables showed that by far the strongest predictor of experiences of negative behaviours, for teachers and support staff in both sectors, was perceptions of school ethos: those who gave a poorer rating when asked to rate 'the overall ethos of your school' reported that

they experienced negative behaviours more often. This demonstrates the strong link between ethos and behaviour.

18. Among secondary teachers, after perceptions of ethos, the next best predictors were working in a school with a higher proportion of pupils from the most deprived areas and being a less experienced teacher.

Pupil engagement in learning

19. The qualitative research with staff and pupils suggests a strong interaction between engagement in learning and behaviour in the classroom. Rather than specific teaching methods being more or less effective, what matters most is how they are delivered and how well they engage pupils.
20. Staff and pupils agreed that teachers taking an interest in, and getting to know pupils as individuals, was key to developing relationships and managing behaviour.
21. The following aspects of teachers' manner and demeanour were important to pupils: being happy/smiling, being enthusiastic, using humour, being calm and not shouting.
22. Both pupils and staff agreed that using a variety of different teaching methods was one of the most important ways to engage pupils.

Approaches used in schools to support relationships and behaviour

23. As in 2012, whole-school strategies and supportive approaches, rather than the exclusion of pupils or other punishments, were identified by headteachers and teachers in the survey as the most frequently used approaches to encourage positive relationships and behaviour and manage disruptive behaviour.
24. The use of restorative approaches and solution oriented approaches increased between 2012 and 2016. Although changes to the wording of the question mean that the results for 'nurture approaches' cannot accurately be compared over time, the qualitative research suggested that the use of nurture approaches may also have increased. The use of detention and punishment exercises decreased.
25. Regardless of the specific approaches or interventions used, staff and pupils agreed it was important to: be clear about expectations; regularly reinforce these expectations; be clear about the consequences if expectations are not met; follow through on the consequences.
26. There was a consensus among staff that approaches need to be adapted on the basis of what works for individual pupils.
27. Among all groups of staff, there was a widely held view that a lack of both internal and external resources was having a negative effect on the management of behaviour.

School ethos and support for staff

28. Staff ratings of school ethos were positive and were broadly the same as in 2012. Staff, pupils and parents felt that a positive ethos was characterised by: a school feeling like a community; shared values (including, above all, respect,); strong leadership from the SMT (Senior Management Team); communication and openness among staff; and 'everyone's voice' – particularly the pupil voice – being heard.
29. Most teachers were confident of their abilities to promote positive relationships and behaviour and respond to indiscipline in their classrooms.
30. Most teachers and support staff were confident that senior members of staff would help them if they experienced difficulties with behaviour management.
31. The experiences of support staff were mixed in relation to their role and the support they receive. Primary support staff tended to be more positive than secondary support staff.

Conclusions and implications

32. The 2016 wave of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research shows that positive behaviour and relationships continue to be the norm in Scottish schools:
 - most staff report that they encounter positive behaviour from pupils all or most of the time
 - most staff give a high rating to the overall ethos of their school
 - most teachers are confident in their ability to promote positive behaviour in their classrooms and to respond to indiscipline
 - where there are problems, these are more likely to relate to low-level disruptive behaviour than serious disruptive behaviour. Serious violent incidents are rare.
33. Nonetheless, there are challenges. While the most common problems might be classed as 'low-level' (e.g. talking out of turn, hindering other pupils and work avoidance), this kind of disruption impacts on the learning of all pupils. Moreover, low-level disruptive behaviour in primary schools increased between 2012 and 2016.

The role of parents

34. A number of staff in the qualitative research identified that parents have a key role to play in supporting the development of their children's relationships and behaviour and mitigating against the potential negative impacts of societal change.

The role of support staff

35. Headteachers, teachers, support staff and pupils commented on the link between positive behaviour and having sufficient numbers of support staff in

class. Staff felt that a reduction in numbers of support staff, alongside an increased number of pupils with ASN (as a result of inclusion policies), had resulted in a lack of one-to-one support for pupils who need it and a wider negative impact on behaviour.

36. The research with support staff also indicated a need to allow them more time for discussions with class teachers about individual pupils and classroom planning, and time for involvement in whole-school discussions about approaches to behaviour and relationships. There is also scope for improvement in relation to: ensuring support staff feel valued, communication and training.

Resource issues

37. Headteachers and teachers talked about the problems of reduced external support for pupils with additional support needs. They identified a need for additional support staff as well as more specialist input and advice.
38. They also indicated that, more generally, resources within schools have been stretched – and this has had a knock-on impact on aspects which help promote positive relationships and behaviour such as SMT visibility around the school; time for class planning; and time for peer observations and sharing experiences with colleagues.

The links between behaviour and ethos, relationships and engagement

39. Both the quantitative and qualitative research confirms that behaviour in schools cannot be seen in isolation and it is inherently bound up with the ethos of a school, with relationships in the classroom and around school, and with engagement in learning. This reinforces the emphasis placed on these aspects in recent years by a range of policies and guidance.

Engagement in learning

40. In the qualitative research, both pupils and teachers identified the pupil-teacher relationship as the most important element of engagement. This includes teachers taking an interest in pupils and getting to know them as individuals.

Policy use

41. The Scottish approach to behaviour in schools has evolved over the past 10 years, and has a strong focus on promoting positive, pro-social behaviour. We have worked with a range of stakeholders to embed this approach and it is well understood and accepted in Scottish schools
42. The Scottish Advisory Group for Relationships and Behaviour in Schools (SAGRABIS) represents that group of stakeholders and provides advice to local and national government on behaviour and relationships in schools. All of the major teaching unions in Scotland are represented as well as organisations including the Association of Directors of Education (ADES), School Leaders Scotland (SLS) and the Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (ASPEP).

43. Scottish Government officials are working with colleagues in Education Scotland to produce a response, setting out priority actions, to the findings within BISSR. This will be discussed further with members of SAGRABIS to incorporate their views at their next meeting.
44. The priority actions will support local authorities, establishments, practitioners and partners to further improve the ethos and culture in Scottish schools including relationships, learning and behaviour. All establishments are expected to have robust policies and procedures in place to ensure a consistent approach to improving school ethos and culture. Children should experience positive relationships with staff and their peers, stimulating learning experiences which meet their needs and a range of approaches which promote positive behaviour. This should be underpinned by a focus on Children's Rights.
45. This is central to the successful delivery of Curriculum for Excellence, implementation of Getting it Right for Every Child and the aspirations of the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the National Improvement Framework.
46. The priority actions will be contained within a new policy guidance document which builds on and supersedes previous policy guidance on promoting positive behaviour. This was first set out in the 2001 report *Better Behaviour - Better Learning* and most recently the 2013 leaflet *Better Relationships, Better Learning, Better Behaviour*.

**Learning Directorate
March 2018**