

Aberdeen EIS Local Association

Violent and Aggressive Behaviour Report 2021



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Background

The EIS is the largest teacher trade union in Aberdeen City, representing over 80% of all teachers and associated professionals across nursery, primary and secondary education. With such a broad and expansive membership, the EIS Aberdeen City Local Association is committed to seeking and representing the views of its members through direct engagement as well as through the use of member surveys.

Introduction

Aberdeen City EIS Local Association conducted a follow up survey about members experiences of violent and abusive behaviour in schools. A survey of members in all educational sectors was carried out on 18th November 2021. This was done to monitor and compare the results of a survey carried out in May 2019. The original survey highlighted the experiences of members in the city particularly those that were experiencing violent and verbal abuse in their schools. The follow up survey is intended to find out the extent of any improvements in the areas that were of concern to members, as well as to ascertain the nature of teacher's experiences, strategies in place, support available, the use of reporting mechanisms and the impact on teachers Health and Wellbeing. 600 members replied which is nearly a third of Aberdeen City EIS membership.

NB This report has the figures from the 2019 survey in red for comparison.

The report has drawn on comments from the survey respondents. At the end of these comments, we have indicated the post held by the respondent. Below is a table of abbreviations to clarify the post held.

HT - Head Teacher

SLT – Senior Learning Team

DHT – Deputy Head Teacher

FH – Faculty Head

PT – Principal Teacher

CT – Class Teacher

SfLT – Support for Learning Teacher

ASNT – Additional Support Needs Teacher

GT -Guidance Teacher

Levels of Physical Assaults,

Almost a third 28.54 % (28.14%) of teaching staff stated that they had been physically assaulted by a pupil in the 2021/2022 academic session. The two main forms of assault were being punched by a pupil 36.29% (41.18%) or kicked by a pupil 40.32%

(47.06%). Other forms of assault included, spitting, being struck with an object and biting.

Strategies for supporting a member of staff

Over a quarter of members 26.86% (32.66%) felt there was not a clear strategy in place to support a member of staff after an assault with 16.55% (16.53%) strongly disagreeing that this was the case.

Strategies in place to prevent or address violence

Restorative practice, punitive measures (detention, exclusion etc), PSA support and SLT support came across as the main response strategies. As with the last survey, Restorative Practice came top of the strategies that were used in schools to prevent or address violence. However, it is again clear from this year's survey and respondent's comments, that this strategy is not being used to its full potential. This is evidenced from respondent's experiences which evidences that restorative practice is present as a strategy but is not being implemented correctly.

- *"Barely any support. SLT rarely come when needed. Child if removed comes back to class within minutes with no apology to teacher or pupil and parents are not notified." (SfLT)*
- *"No restorative training undermines this. Even if restorative goes poorly pupil is still allowed back in classes." (CT)*
- *"Occasionally some strategies are used such as punitive measures but often it is ignored, there is certainly no restorative practices." (CT)*
- *"Strategies are used from time to time. However, there is limited PSA support. Management is often unavailable to support". (CT)*
- *"Restorative practice is claimed to have been used for such incidents but doesn't happen." (CT)*
- *"SLT suggest what staff could do to avoid pupil's violent behaviour next time. Nothing to support staff." (CT)*
- *"Occasionally some of the above strategies are used such as punitive measures but often it is ignored, there are certainly no restorative practices." (CT)*
- *"These are used from time to time. However, there is limited PSA support. Management and PSAs are also subject to the violent behaviour." (CT)*

Additional strategies/measures needed to address violence and abusive behaviour.

The comments strongly recognised the need for support in mainstream classes for teachers. Comments also highlight escalating behaviour issues that new initiatives are failing to address.

- *"I think each incident needs to be recorded appropriately to show the extent of this behaviour in schools. I also feel that more support from outside agencies and proper funding needs to be put in place." (CT)*
- *"Clear consequences for violent behaviour & providing education for different ways to deal with issues, rather than resorting to violence." (CT)*

- *“Parental contact, pupil centred planning, nurture and targeted support for repeat offenders to deal with emotions causing behaviours, time away space.” (CT)*
- *“More support from ‘higher up’. e.g. someone to respond to the growing number of incident reports which have been completed by members of staff. Other extra adult support from SLT/PSAs, we feel we have very few options for protecting staff and other children from violent pupils.” (DHT)*
- *Better understanding of de-escalation techniques for all staff.*
- *Incidents are very low, and I can't think of any measure. I would in general like to see more community education, youth work, police, and social work in schools to help and support a minority to make better choices not because of threatening behaviour but because many could do so much more if we could support them and reduce barriers. (DHT)*
- *Parental contact, pupil centred planning, nurture, and targeted support for repeat offenders to deal with emotions causing behaviours, time away space. (CT)*
- *Somewhere/somebody to be able to be referred to and another setting where the child must go to as an alternative to mainstream school, for a period of time to address these behaviours with people more specialised in this area! Would like to see action being taken to address the huge numbers of violent incident reports being recorded on YourHR. It would also be nice if there was an acknowledgment of these incidents and that someone in the council (our employers) would check in to see if the employees require anything else. Even the school to see if we need support and guidance on what to do next. When incidents happen, how to address other children's parents who hear about the incident and want to know how their child will be safe at school- this job is gone ridiculous, and it needs the EIS collective to kick back and say no we are not standing for it and that nationally there needs to be a strategy! (DHT)*
- *“I would like a clear and consistent approach to be taken. Violence should not be tolerated, and exclusion followed by rigorous restorative follow up between pupil, parents and SMT with guarantees that the behaviour is not repeated.” (DHT)*
- *“I think each incident needs to be recorded appropriately to show the extent of this behaviour in schools. I also feel that more support from outside agencies and proper funding needs to be put in place.” (CT)*

Support from the authority

85.91% (88.59%) indicated that they experienced no support from the authority with 14.09% (11.41%) indicating that they have after reporting an incident.

What sort of assistance should be available to support schools?

In the 2019 survey, it was clear from the comments that the respondents considered there should be a greater level of support from the authority. While more respondents in the 2021 survey have indicated that that they have received support after an incident, appropriate provision and support is still a concern. Comments indicate that there should be more effective intervention for young learners struggling within the mainstream environment. However, the comments reflect that there is a deep concern around how aggression towards colleagues is addressed.

- *“It is a tricky one as the behaviour is often very clearly connected to specific reasons. For me there needs to be more practical multi-agency support for schools with pupils who are violent.” (HT)*
- *“More specialist provision for pupils who mainstream is not the correct provision” (SLT)*
- *“Trained staff, more staff, specialist provision for our most damaged children. Inclusion has gone too far. Classrooms must prioritise the most damaged/violent children to survive the day. What are the rest of the children learning? Absolutely shocking. I've thought about leaving teaching many times as it's not working for anyone. I stay because I care, I care about the children even though the politics that surrounds them is appalling.” (SLT)*

- *"A range of alternative provisions for those pupils who threaten or assault staff." (CT)*
- *"More staff so we can support more appropriately for those children who have experienced trauma or those with additional support needs/disabilities." (DHT)*
- *"Clearer sanctions and more help when incidents do arise, more support for after an incident occurs." (CT)*
- *"Better more targeted training opportunities for staff. More support for pupils with difficulties." (CT)*
- *"Clear guidelines to remove a violent pupil from a classroom situation and keep them in a separate learning space until they are able to be in a shared space safely. Violent outburst put strain and stress on the other pupils in the class, as well as any support staff present, and creates an environment of fear and alarm." (CT)*
- *"Abandonment of these positive behaviour policies with 0 consequence. Stop pressuring HTs for 0 exclusions as the harm is then to staff and other pupils. There should be an ability to record violent incidents without needing the HT to sign off on them. Informed yes but not having to run it by HT as teachers are too afraid to disturb SLT or SLT discourage these being reported so their school is not "labelled" (SfLT)*
- *"A revisit of current policies towards violence and aggression. Supporting their staff when violence situations occur, not just brushing it off as part of the job. Standing by staff and providing support to them." (CT)*
- *"More understanding of the lack capacity in schools to support when there are a number of children displaying distressed behaviours from previous trauma. Something different to offer when these children are struggling with engagement in the curriculum and inclusion in the classroom. Knowing how to write a PCRA is one thing, but it does not give you the extra resources that are required when a child is struggling to self-regulate and is becoming aggressive." (SLT)*
- *"My experience has been lack of support to teachers dealing with aggression from leadership; structures in place that support teachers to violate the rights of children when dealing with violence and aggression and class sizes that too big with many children requiring specialist support and vulnerable teachers who accept the status quo and don't ask for support I've personally suggested a well and appropriately trained staff group to house a nurture space in school and this has been dismissed by previous leadership." (CT)*

Reporting of violent incidents

There were three questions asked around this subject.

When asked "when a violent incident is reported, is it satisfactorily resolved? Nearly a third, 29.25% (31.70%) disagreed with 20.75% (12.75%) strongly disagreeing. 15.75% (15.67%) agreed that a violent incident had been resolved satisfactorily with 3.75% (2.27%) strongly agreeing. 30.50% (37.53%) neither agreed nor disagree

There was evidence to suggest that teachers did not have confidence in Authority Incident Forms triggering any response to address violent and abusive behaviour.

When asked if they were aware of how to report an incident using the Aberdeen City Incident forms, 26.94% (26.14%) said no with 20.63% (20.69%) uncertain.

This question highlighted that nearly 50%, 47.57% (46.83%) of members surveyed were either unaware of how to report an incident using an Aberdeen City Incident form or were uncertain.

When asked if there was a protocol at their school for submitting an Aberdeen City Incident Form 47.30% (50.10%) didn't know and 9.07% (10.39%) replied no.

The process about how an incident form is processed seems to vary considerably from one educational establishment to another. In some academies there was an incorrect emphasis on School Support Manager (SSM) being involved or administering the process.

- *"SSSM manages the investigation and completion of near miss and incident reporting" (HT)*
- *"Complete form and submit to Business Manager." (CT)*
- *"Ask administrator for copy of form. Complete the form. Return to administrator to pass onto ACC." (CT)*
- *"Hand the form in to the administrative assistant." (CT)*

In some schools there were examples of submitting an incident as a paper copy that was then completed online. This is not satisfactory as it leads to a two-tier system. The clear procedure is that the incident is reported to the line manager and input online through YourHR.

- *"We submit incident form to head teacher to input. We are never told the outcome after form is handed over." (CT)*
- *"We fill out the form and senior management deal with them as they are so frequent at the moment." (GT)*
- *"Form completed and passed to office. Beyond that I don't know." (CT)*

Several members commented that barriers are placed in their way when they tried to report an incident.

- *"No and it's never been raised at any Inservice or after school meeting. It is avoided." (SfLT)*
- *"Yes, but I feel it needs to be made more aware to all staff across the authority. It should also be made a comforting experience, and not seen as you have failed to stop the incident. Sometimes feels like victim shaming." (CT)*
- *"Line managers have to complete forms. The system seems to be designed to deter people from filling them in. Staff should be able to fill in their own forms." (FH)*
- *"Meet with HT to discuss, where she tells staff where they went wrong and how to avoid being hit by pupil next time." (CT)*
- *We are not allowed to submit incident forms or near misses. The incidents are considered part of our day-to-day job. We are expected to get on with it and "be positive." (CT)*

There were concerns as to how technically robust the system is and it's suitability for recording incidents in education.

- *"Yes, but it doesn't work! We have over 30 outstanding forms just in our faculty. The system doesn't let us to submit forms." (CT)*
- *"The council near miss form...this form is not fit for use/practice in an educational setting and is merely generic across all sectors." (CT)*
- *"It is filled in and submitted by our line managers. The form however is absolutely unfitted for usage in the education sector. Actions that are taken as a result of these forms are rarely communicated back to the staff member involved." (CT)*
- *"But it doesn't work, and half the staff aren't on the system. It shouldn't have to go through SLT to fill the forms in. We as teachers should be allowed to type in our own forms. If we didn't get on with our line manager, we could be put under pressure to change the form. We currently have 6 forms in the past 2 weeks that can't be processed because of the system. In total as a faculty, we have over 30 SERIOUS forms from August." (CT)*

In others, the correct process of the incident being managed by the appropriate line manager was observed. Members provided some positive examples of how an incident was reported by SMT.

- *"A member of SLT submits after consultation with the staff who has experienced abuse."* (SLT)
- *"Contact HT and complete the forms together."* (HT)
- *"Completed with line manager."* (CT)
- *"Through SLT as quickly as possible."* (SLT)

Verbal Abuse in schools

In the session 2021/22 54.14% (53.75%) responding to the survey experienced verbal abuse.

By far the largest category of verbal abuse was swearing with 92.06% (92.10%) members reporting this. The other categories included racist 8.82% (7.90%), sexual orientation 7.06% (5.93%), sex or gender specific 12.06% (10.62), disability 1.76 (2.72%), religion and belief 1.18% (2.72%) and age-related remarks 6.47% (10.62%) being made to teachers.

Around protected characteristics that are included in the 2010 Equalities Act there were 172 (159) members who indicated that they had been the subject of this type of verbal abuse.

While swearing is the highest category there is a worrying increase in verbal abuse involving characteristics protected under the 2010 Equalities Act.

- *"I Have been called a bitch and a slut."*
- *"Called a c***, posh bitch/f***** attention seeker/f***** bitch/I just be a horrible parent to my children/I'm f***** stupid."*
- *"I've been called a 'paedo' on one occasion presumably because I'm a male primary teacher."*
- *"I have been called a porn star for the last two years and was told to go back to where I came from. Nothing was done- referrals were ignored by SLT and then closed. I am getting verbally abused every week many times: "C***! Bitch! F*** off! etc."*
- *"For being a female teacher, overtly sexualised language."*
- *"Pupil frequently using highly inappropriate sexual language. Verbally abusing and threatening other pupils in class."*
- *"Xenophobia."*
- *"Threatening 'I'll stab you'".*

Health and Wellbeing

When asked if physical violence and verbal abuse has impacted on their Health and Wellbeing a third 33.50% (37.23%) of members surveyed agreed with. With 29.41% (21.65%) strongly agreeing.

Frequency of violent behaviour

Just over 29.92% (18%) of surveyed members indicated that violent behaviour took place in their schools once a day while others reported 18.46% (19.96%) once a week and 13.85% (17.38%) stating once a month.

Leaving teaching profession

Just over a quarter 26.65% (29.40%) agreed that they have considered leaving the profession because of disruptive, challenging or violent pupils with 20.81% (15.88%) strongly agreeing.

Obstacles in the implementation of strategies for preventing violence in school

37.53% (44.59%) agreed that there were obstacles in implementing strategies for preventing violence in schools with 25.19% (18.90%) strongly agreeing.

The 2019 survey highlighted frustration with teacher's ability to fully implement inclusion without the correct resources and structures in place. There is still a concern over ASN pupils being placed in mainstream classes without the correct resources to meet their needs. However, several comments highlighted those members feel unsupported in dealing with violent learners. It was particularly relevant to SLT, many of which commented on overwhelming workload issues in supporting young learners and colleagues.

- *"Mainly ASN who struggle in mainstream environment. Lack of understanding by parents as to the effect on class teachers who are already struggling with a wide range of needs in their class. One pupil can result in working many extra hours - planning and preparation of resources, liaising with PSA and other support staff. Completing paperwork including IEPs, pastoral notes, communication with parents. Outreach services suggest daily communication with home including providing daily timetables, revisiting PCRA's etc, etc (and then deliver a curriculum for the rest of the class)" (DT)*
- *"Lack of specialist staff, lack of appropriate deterrents for individuals, moving away from behaviour management policies in favour of positive relationships too quickly leaving a void for certain pupils who need the structure." (FH)*
- *"Lack of staffing and time. Several incidents can be occurring if j any one day. A huge amount of SLT time is taken up dealing with this, on a daily basis." (DT)*
- *"The closing of so many ASN provisions children are no longer getting the right education at the right level. Support teacher and PSA budget cuts. Educational psychology no longer frequently visiting schools to observe students." (GT)*
- *"Current minimising exclusion policy presumption of mainstream where schools are not provided with appropriate resources and the current staffing formula for each school has had a negative impact on the roles and responsibilities of staff." (HT)*
- *"Staff are powerless and frightened to confront due to repercussions of parental complaints, Legislation and no sanction approach does not support a safe environment. Restorative approaches work for some. Not all pupils engage or are able to engage and not all parents want to support pupils in school." (DT)*
- *"Victim shaming - making me question what I did wrong to cause the incident to happen. Not clear steps as to what I can do. I feel it has to get to its worst before I can actually report anything because it happens so often it just feels like the norm." (CT)*

Risk assessments

All staff likely to be impacted by the behaviour of a pupil contribute to the construction of a Pupil Centred Risk Assessment to mitigate risk to staff.

Over a quarter 26.92% (28.93%) of members surveyed disagreed and 12.56% (12.31%) strongly disagreed. It is a source of concern for the EIS that staff who may have the greatest experience of pupil behaviour are not being included in the construction of a robust risk assessment.

Police reporting

In response to the question “I am aware if I am involved in a violent incident, I have the option of reporting this to the police” a third of members 27.59% (33.55%) responded no.

Final comments

- *“Others have wanted to report violence to police and are discouraged from doing so.” (CT)*
- *“Abusive language, name calling, disruptive behaviour has caused me many issues this school year. I don't know how much more I can take. The school is trying to support, but short of suspending he pupil there isn't a lot that can be done.” (CT)*
- *“As a member of the school community, a staff member doesn't feel comfortable reporting it to the police, but I can guarantee that if it happens again to me, I will and I will set a precedent for the rest of the staff at my school!” (DHT)*
- *“We have a very robust reporting process in our school, and all staff are trained in BSS (Behavioural Support Strategies). This is a proactive model and may be useful training in other schools where students display violent behaviour.” (ASNT)*
- *“I think with the implementation of rights of the child it makes us hard to enforce sanctions. Rights of the child are not just for those from adverse conditions but rights of all children to feel safe etc.” (CT)*
- *“A lack of consequence for violent physical or verbal acts is not adequately preparing young people for the real outside world. Also, a zero-tolerance policy is enforced in other public services to protect staff, so why not in teaching”. (CT)*
- *“My school does an amazing job to support us all. We have all felt let down by the authority and outside agencies who have not responded quick enough to our pleas for help. 7 months of escalating behaviour which has been reported repeatedly is only being taken seriously now. However, the impact that is having on staff is taking its toll, with increased absences, feelings of anxiety, members of staff often crying and angry about the situation. More needs to be done to protect staff from the escalating behaviour and abuse we have to endure.” (GT)*
- *“There is rarely a day in which a staff member is not assaulted or verbally abused. On most days there are multiple instances of both.” (CT)*
- *“Totally unacceptable that school staff are allowed to be subjected to violent/abusive behaviour. This just shows a complete lack of respect for and disregard for school staff. No wonder there is a huge problem with recruiting and retaining teachers!” (CT)*
- *“We are losing a lot of good teachers and putting others off joining the profession because of this. I love my job and I enjoy working in my school most of the time. I work with lovely staff and have a very good relationship with SMT. I feel it is time the Council supported SMT to be able to work proactively to protect all staff and pupils and work to support the pupils who are violent to help meet their needs.” (CT)*
- *“Tik-tok craze and videoing is encouraging pupils to violent acts”.*
- *“Violence in school has become the normal and it is fully expected that teachers just put up with it. And this is made clear by the options made available to schools, lack of true support out there and the push of inclusion without proper mitigations to ensure its resourced and supported fully by the Council. A lot of children are being set up to fail in the current climate and classes, staff and the pupils themselves are put at risk and learning and teaching is several impacted because of the crisis in staffing in schools as well as outside agencies e.g. SALT, Ed.Physyc, EAL. Resources are stretched too thin to be able to provide adequate support. There is a growing need with reduced capacity which allows children to slip between the gaps resulting in increased outbursts/frustrations/disruptions and violence”.*
- *“Behaviour and violence are often a means of communication for children who cannot express their frustrations productively. There should be regular training for all staff about basic prevention and de-escalation strategies and emotions coaching strategies to help build*

emotional resilience. There should also be more specialist support available for more extreme cases. "(CT)

- "The country is going to lose wonderful teachers in the next five years if not sooner because we are underfunded and under supported. Staff and teachers are not the priority to the authority. "(CT)
- "After teaching in the same school now for 24 years, I have never witnessed or experienced the level of behaviour and abuse which we now suffer on a day-to-day basis! Our staff are regularly sworn at, physically assaulted, and totally disrespected. Classrooms regularly get trashed by certain children, resulting in the whole class having to be evacuated for their safety. These children cause serious damage to the rooms including smashing laptops etc and absolutely nothing happens! There are simply no consequences anymore and these children know it! GIRFEC is an absolute joke! We are failing everyone! We are not meeting the needs of the children who come to school to learn and behave themselves." (CT)
- "No confirmation ever received about ACC getting the incident form. It's very difficult to actually get the form - it's almost as if they don't want the incident reported." (CT)
- "I reported violent incidents dozens of times to the council, and I have never received any acknowledgment of the incidents, or any follow up. It feels utterly pointless filling them in, and that the council don't care about its staff or the children in question who struggle so much with life in school. "(CT)
- "A lot of the issues stem from the impact of non-educational issues at home or in the community. Unrealistic expectations of parents as to what can ACTUALLY be provided for their child with additional support needs. Misaligned expectations of GPs, CAMHS, health of what a school can do. Lack of support for mental health – cannot easily access support for primary aged children. "(HT)
- "I decided to leave the teaching profession due to the terrible/ unsupported experience which I was put through whilst pregnant in an Aberdeen City school. "(CT)
- "As an educator the last thing we want to do is report a pupil to the Police. We aim to have positive relationships with all pupils. If the local authority is unable to meet the young person's needs therefore leaving staff subject to violence and abuse this may be something that I do consider in the future. "(PT)

"Children become violent for a reason. They have additional support needs and it's not personal. I believe on supporting the root cause and that can be hard with limited resources available. "(HT)

The EIS recognises the collaboration and co-operation with Aberdeen City Council after the results of the 2019 Violent and Abusive Behaviour Survey highlighted member concerns. This positive relationship created a Sub Committee that fed a monthly report to the Supporting Learners Group. In addition, the EIS recognises the valuable co-operation in producing a protocol for submitting an authority incident form.

However, this fell short of the original EIS recommendation that a joint workgroup be established to investigate the findings of the 2019 survey. It is clear from the data and comments in the 2021 survey that violent and abusive behaviour in schools remains a considerable concern to our members.

Recommendations

- That the authority sets up a joint work group using the findings of the EIS Violent and Abusive Behaviour survey to produce strategies to support members who are victims of Violent and Abusive Behaviour. This work group would also monitor and help to implement the following recommendations. *put this recommendation first*
- That there is mandatory session on the first inset day highlighting the procedure for submitting an authority incident report as laid out in the ACC advice document which was agreed with the teaching unions.

- That the authority creates recommendations on how to support staff who are victims of violent and abusive behaviour and shares this first with trade unions and then with schools
- That the authority considers how to minimise all verbal abuse but particularly abuse against members who are affected by the 2010 Equalities Act.
- That the reporting system is altered to show incidents that are reported in schools exclusively.
- That a policy on the prevention of Violent and Disruptive Behaviour in schools be created in conjunction with the teaching unions.

Aberdeen City EIS Local Association
10 February 2022