

## School Based Member Survey Briefing 1

### Comments on pupil behaviour – November 2020

Within the EIS November survey, thousands of comments from teachers were collected on issues such as behaviour in the classroom, their health, and wider safety concerns about working in schools. This is the first in a series of briefings, that the EIS will issue to the Scottish Government outlining the experiences of EIS members. Some comments have been redacted to ensure they do not identify individual schools or members.

#### Key Issues

- 85 comments mentioned behaviour in their response (not all are included in this briefing)
- Teachers feeling unsupported when they challenge pupils who are not following the Guidance
- ASN teachers feeling that they cannot follow the Guidance and keep themselves safe
- Lack of PPE, with some teachers having to supply their own
- Guidance impossible to follow for many due to large class sizes, or managing pupil behaviour
- High levels of anxiety amongst staff and pupils

“On the surface, the school seems to be implementing procedures but nothing is enforced if pupils do not comply. It is impossible, due to pupil behaviour, to stay 2m away at all times as circulating room is necessary for any teaching and learning to take place in some classes. Pupils have no regard for staying 2m away and often refuse to wear masks. Getting them to sanitise hands etc is a chore in itself. Losing battle as government are saying that we can't do anything if they don't wear masks. Feel like safety of teachers and other school staff is of no importance to govt, no PPE provided and expected to mix with 150+ pupils a day. Is it going to take deaths before we are taken seriously?”

“On the whole, morale is exceptionally low amongst teaching staff. Schools are simply not safe. Pupil behaviour (especially amongst the BGE) is deteriorating rapidly and the number of cases is clearly rising due to schools being left open 'at all costs'. There is a general feeling that teachers are being largely ignored by the government and media - told to be quiet and get on with our jobs. We have not been provided the appropriate protection or conditions to do so. There was 4 members of our team self- isolating this week and numerous staff testing positive across the school. Teachers and support staff are scared quite frankly and do not feel valued in the slightest. This has to change.”

“Please look into additional mitigations for carers of vulnerable people. I live with my 89-year-old mother who is physically vulnerable and has dementia. I feel that there is a one size fits all approach to Covid related H&S. As I work with SEBN pupils I am subject to worrying behaviours such as no physical distancing, spitting and

deliberate coughing in the face. This is just seen as part and parcel of the job. I wear a face mask where possible and I have been told that this is protective, but this does not protect me but is for the benefit of my colleagues and the pupils.”

“Procedures in place at our school are not followed through. We are told to maintain a 2m distance from pupils but this is impossible with classes of 33. It is not possible to "teach from the front" due to behaviour management.”

“Pupil behaviour is in decline, staff spending lots of time referring pupils. Extra-curricular projects continue near to normal. Staff being asked to participate in more digital learning, lost time at breaks and lunch, staff exhausted as they try to maintain a positive hygienic working environment.”

“Rooms are unable to be ventilated- windows and doors open since August. Despite this, we are being told to shut windows now due to cold. Huge workload pressure due to additional assessments and support. Pupils refusing to abide by guidelines and coughing on you if you need to redirect behaviour. Oversubscribed classes- 34 pupils in a room. It is not safe.”

“School is not following advice fully. It is impossible to stay away from children. The behaviour in our school is terrible. Children are wandering around the corridors, running away from class, behaving aggressively and we are expected to teach the curriculum. It is very difficult to teach with the added fear of covid and the obvious stress of the children. I have spent two weeks in isolation due to a positive case, we had been in a training as a staff and I sat in the child’s chair, it had not been cleaned. We should be able to leave schools soon as possible after the children.”

“Staff are anxious, scared and losing patience all over the place, behaviour is beginning to deteriorate, and parental expectations and communications is increasing ten-fold.”

“Because windows have to remain open and changing facilities are not yet available, pupils are having to keep jackets on in class or are coming to school in non-uniform, this is having a detrimental impact on the behaviour of pupils and causing further stress to staff.”

“Teachers are being described as front-line workers but without the protection of the NHS have. I have family and friends who work for the NHS who state if they were being spat at to the level I and my staff are, then that patient would be removed. But yet [local authority name removed] feel it is acceptable for a 21-week pregnant teacher to accept this behaviour and treatment because the pupil in question has ASN. Let me be very clear, I have 35 years’ experience personally in the ASN sector and almost 11 years professionally, I have had three broken bones whilst working within [school name removed] and I have been physically assaulted during my first pregnancy where they found blood from an abdominal blow (several a day to be honest) from one pupil. I am not inexperienced with behaviour; I understand in my sector it comes with the job. However, during a

global pandemic with an airborne virus, spitting of this magnitude is NOT acceptable. We as teachers should not be treated as collateral damage for the economy.”

“Measures in schools are poor, we are not able to distance from pupils and pupils are getting away with poor behaviour and running a mock in my school! Management don’t deal with poor behaviour and they blame staff for this poor behaviour! I work in a school with a high percentage of kids living in SIMD 1 and 2! It’s a difficult place to work with so many pupils with additional support needs, social emotional issues and living in poverty! We don’t get any support with these pupils in class and we are continually pushed to offer more and more to improve exam results! Since returning in August we are having to clean more, I am a home economics teacher and I am doing around 5 washings per day with no support from the school, we have to order food in batches and divide food as we can’t have other kids touching food items! We get zero support from elsewhere! Support staff are not helping in class as they need to stay away from kids but we the teachers need to do it! I am feeling very stressed! I also have a disability and struggle wearing a mask!

“Actions speak louder than words. Mitigations such as pupils wearing masks should have been a starting point for returning to schools not months down the line, it's also become a behavioural issue that some pupils refuse to wear masks despite no exemptions. Guidance and action should have been in place for returning to schools, we have been operating in the dark with the headteacher and senior management doing their best but it's become a joke that you find out more information from Nicola Sturgeon's announcements than local authority.”

“All levels of staff in school are on their knees, the children are broken and behavioural issues are at and all time high as children cannot mix with other bubbles, are confined to restricted areas of the playground, and teachers are unable to use normal strategies to cope with challenging behaviours.”

“As a drama teacher, there is a genuine struggle to allow pupils to access the curriculum whilst keeping pupils motivated. Seniors are worried about their practical assessments with the need for face masks and juniors are creating low level behaviour issues as a result of the uncertain times and new rules that seem to be ever changing.”

“As a home economics teacher there is not nearly enough cleaning done or as often as it should be in light of Covid and I clean as much as I can but it is impossible to keep up with the workload and cleaning between classes. It is also not possible to wash aprons between every lesson and buying disposable ones is not possible either, or rubber ones as they are not safe as students would easily burn them. I feel anxiety levels are rising amongst some students while other students could not care less. It is a battle to get students to wipe their surfaces and maintaining social distancing between them in a kitchen is also unrealistic. I keep windows open but that means everyone now is freezing and behavioural problems are increasing. Stress amongst students and staff is clear and it has been really hard being a probationer on the flexible route like this because I am a mature student with my own children and need to get full registration and fulfil all my responsibilities. I am on a full timetable and I am doing the best I can (as is everyone else) but I do wonder if schools remaining open is actually the best approach when tensions are so high. I have students wearing masks and shields over them and disposable gloves because they live with grandparents. I can't understand what they say when they speak

and they sit in class uncomfortable all day. I know being isolated from friends and from seeing other people and at home can create other problems but at the moment anxiety incidents, panic attacks and just difficulty coping with school in covid times are on the rise everyday. I get email after email about students who are finding it difficult and need to leave class early to avoid busy corridors as a lot of students do not wear their face masks as they should. One-way systems are not respected. I can understand why students feel anxious like this and I follow procedures to remind students of the rules but it's a constant battle and a daily lack of following rules which is concerning.”

“As a school we are trying to have a Covid safe environment but this is extremely challenging in our school setting, we have some very challenging behaviours in the school and this leads to often distancing not being managed.”

“At present in our school we have had a grievance against the council which has not progressed all year due to the dangerous behaviour of children in our school, this is my biggest concern especially through Covid we constantly ask for updates and nothing has progressed.”

“Bad behaviour from pupils who put other pupils and teachers at risk is not dealt with seriously enough by SLT. Their hands are tied by WDC.”

“Concerns purely come from the lack of support from pupils. Management have been supportive and have implemented measures which should make school safer however too many pupils don't follow due to ASN, behaviour needs or not remembering. Examples of measures not being followed include social distancing, sharing equipment, keeping distance from other classes and hand washing.”

“Difficult to get pupils to keep masks on in common areas causes some poor behaviour and increased friction between staff and pupils.”

“I am categorically unsafe at work. The behaviour is so poor and SLT don't seem to be able to do much. None of the S1-3 are wearing masks because it isn't mandatory and we are in a tier 3. I will speak to my union rep about other school specific concerns.”

“I am concerned that I am in a lab with 20 pupils and no social distancing. Paper towels and disinfectant are supplied but not topped up without a personal request. This can lead to children arriving during the day and sanitation products running out. Many children are still not wearing masks when in communal areas. Other pupils with behavioural issues are roaming the corridors again without protective masks. The school have had three false fire alarms in the last couple of weeks as well as two flooded toilets. Fire assemblies, although outside, have large numbers of pupils with no protection in close proximity to each other. We are preparing for prelim exams and S4 have to attend school during this period while S5 and S6 are given exam leave. As the prelims for S4 will have a major contribution to pupils' final grades surely it would make sense to give S4 exam

leave? This would also reduce numbers in the school for two weeks. It seems pointless asking teachers to teach while pupils will be out of classes to sit prelims in small groups. There are also all sorts of problems with tracking on a system that continually crashes. I have now had to enter my S3 tracking three times, due to data being lost as a result of the system crashing. This adds to my workload at a time when the job is already extremely stressful.”

“I am currently covering an ASN class who are unable to social distance. The children regularly demonstrate high risk behaviour (e.g. blowing raspberries, spitting, etc.). Whilst this does particularly not worry me right now, it may become more of a concern if one of the children test positive for Covid 19, as it I believe it would put staff and other children in a vulnerable position. It is for this reason that I opted for “can’t decide” for questions 3 and 4. I believe that these risky behaviours would be carried out by the children whether they attended full time or part time.”

“Behaviour has deteriorated drastically and is not addressed at all. The fact that the government think it is ok to put the country into tier 4 but yet schools would continue as normal is utterly ridiculous, these people making decisions about our welfare with no thought for the teachers whatsoever, while sitting and working from the comfort of their own homes, absolutely criminal!”

“I think our school does an amazing job at working in a Covid safe way. This is not the issue. Working with pupils with severe learning difficulties means that there is an increased level of risk. The majority of our pupils can’t /don’t wear masks in the classroom. Most of our pupils are non verbal, so unable to express if they feel unwell. Many of our pupils require personal care. All of my pupils require one to one support and this necessitates close contact. Pupils can have socially unacceptable behaviours with an increased Covid risk (e.g. playing with spit). Pupils rarely manage to cover their mouths if they cough/sneeze. I love my job but worry about effects of catching Covid both for myself, my vulnerable pupils and my amazing team.”

“Inappropriate behaviour from pupils is an ongoing concern and this has become even more apparent since COVID. Lack of support staff (classroom assistants / nurture staff) is also a concern especially in the current climate.”