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### A comparison of staff perceptions of behaviour in Scottish schools in 2009 and 2006

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## **A COMPARISON OF STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF BEHAVIOUR IN SCOTTISH SCHOOLS IN 2009 AND 2006**

**Pamela Munn, Stephen Sharp, Gwynedd Lloyd, Gale Macleod, Gillean Mcluskey, Jane Brown, Lorna Hamilton**

### **Introduction**

Behaviour in schools is an enduring public policy concern not only within the UK but internationally (Brown and Munn 2008; Brown and Winterton 2010; Hue 2010). Current concern should come as no surprise as behaviour is intimately connected with policy priorities for schools, namely raising standards of attainment and promoting social cohesion. Clearly, standards are threatened where disruptive behaviour takes place and teacher time is spent on maintaining an orderly classroom rather than on the formal curriculum. Brown and Munn (2008 p. 217) suggest that: 'Fears about the decline in shared values, the rise in multicultural societies and immigration, together with concerns about national security have made social cohesion a hot topic for policy makers.' Education in general and schools in particular as a universal provision in advanced post-industrial countries are regarded as an important vehicle for promoting social cohesion (Heynemen 2000). Indeed the development of education for citizenship has often been portrayed as a response to fears about threats to social cohesion (e.g. Cremin 2007; Wyness 2006). Promoting positive behaviour in schools can thus be seen as both a means to an end – effective learning, and an end in itself – social cohesion.

Media interest in behaviour in schools is understandable given that the subject carries such cultural and political significance. Shocking incidents such as murder or serious assault in or around schools naturally feature in headlines (Osler and Starkey 2005) but reporting of these rare events is seldom accompanied by more comprehensive consideration of behaviour. One way in which governments have tended to respond to this intense media interest is to collect information about the nature and extent of violent incidents (Debarbieux 2003; Danmer and Commodity 2001; Herda-Rapp 2003) so that they have a fuller picture of behaviour in schools. International comparisons, however, are difficult since Governments use different definitions of violent incidents and there are different procedures for recording them, even within the UK (see Brown and Winterton 2010 for an overview).

In Scotland there are three main sources of national information about behaviour in schools. The first two are the annual national statistical collections on i) exclusion from school and ii) attendance and absence. Both of these collections provide fairly detailed information. For example, the exclusion statistics distinguish the number of exclusions and the number of excluded pupils, give details of the age, ethnicity, and gender for excluded pupils, whether excluded pupils had additional support needs and the length of time of exclusion. Both sets of national statistics also provide information at local authority level so that comparisons among authorities can be made. The third source of national information and the one that is reported here is a three-year regular study of perceptions of behaviour held by teachers, headteachers, support staff and pupils. The intention is 'to provide a clear and robust picture of positive and negative behaviour in publicly funded schools and of current policy and practice in relation to managing behaviour' (Scottish Government 2008). A distinctive feature of the three-year study is to provide trend information on key questions about occurrence of positive and negative behaviour. The commitment to regular studies

could thus be seen as a desire to broaden the sources of evidence available to both local and national policy makers about behaviour and to inform policy development. Moreover the study is conceived as a joint enterprise, involving national government, local authorities and professional associations of teachers. Before describing the study it is necessary to put it in context by describing key features of the Scottish policy context which need to be taken into account both in understanding the responses below and the account taken of them by policy makers.

### **Key Features of the Scottish Policy Context**

There are five main features of policy context which are worth highlighting as an aid to understanding the results reported below.

First a Discipline Task Group was set up in December 2000 by the then Education Minister in the newly established Scottish Executive, the executive arm of the devolved Parliament which met for the first time in 1999. Education was a key policy priority for the devolved government of Scotland, a Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition. The Task Group was set up as response to concerns about behaviour raised by teachers' professional associations in negotiations about teachers' pay and working conditions (Scottish Executive 2001). The Task Group's report, *Better Behaviour – Better Learning* (Scottish Executive 2001) made 36 recommendations one of which was that the Executive should develop an action plan in order to take these forward. The recommendations distinguished the areas in which action needed to be taken by the Executive, local government and schools and encompassed areas such as curriculum flexibility, learning and teaching approaches, and meaningful pupil and parent participation in school decision-making. In addition the report recommended the development and extensions of more specialist approaches involving early intervention when negative behaviour occurred regularly and staged intervention whereby specialist help and support became progressively more available to individual pupils and their schools. Among the recommendations about teacher development was that a national professional development programme on behaviour management for teaching staff at all levels should be put in place. The report thus stressed the importance of schools promoting positive behaviour as well as identifying strategies for dealing with negative behaviour. The report and subsequent action plan had high political currency, with the Education Minister's direct personal involvement, (himself a former teacher of mathematics) and his subsequent role as First Minister. It remains the foundation of current policy even though the current Scottish Government (2007-2011) is a minority Scottish National Party one. The Executive invested substantially in a number of pilot projects related to school behaviour across Scottish Authorities, funding development and training in: Restorative Practice, Nurture Groups, Staged Intervention in Support, Motivated Schools and solution focussed approaches. Training for this work continues to be offered by the national Positive Behaviour Team discussed below. These interventions built on previous developments designed to help schools develop a positive ethos and the production of a range of support materials on anti-bullying. In short since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 there have been several developments to promote positive behaviour and deal with negative behaviour.

Secondly, the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Acts 2004, and 2009 replaced the category of special need based on individual child deficits, with that of additional support needs. This was an important change. Riddell (2007) suggests that the change in terminology gave prominence to social problems requiring inter-agency responses rather than individual child deficits, as the main cause of learning and behavioural difficulties. Successive Scottish Governments have expressed commitments to educational inclusion, with almost all children being educated in mainstream schools (see e.g. Scottish Executive 2001; Scottish Government 2009).

About 1% of children including those with behavioural difficulties are educated in special schools and units but there are no pupil referral units in Scotland. Indeed the main form of mainstream education is the comprehensive school, with none of the encouragement of alternative forms of mainstream provision found in England. The political emphasis in Scotland across all major political parties is on improving comprehensive schools from the inside, as it were, rather than promoting different kinds of schools and encouraging a quasi market in provision. Around 4.3% of young people attend private schools although this percentage is not evenly distributed throughout Scotland. In Edinburgh, for example, about 10,00 primary and secondary pupils attend private schools, by far the largest number in the country (Independent School Census 2009.) Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of young people attend their local co-educational comprehensive school.

Thirdly a major reform of the curriculum 3-18 is underway, implementation beginning in the autumn term 2010. Curriculum for Excellence is the generic term for a series of reforms of curriculum and assessment, designed to improve standards through greater personalisation and choice of what they learn for young people and greater autonomy for teachers in how they teach. There is a national framework of learning experiences and outcomes. These are intended to be less detailed and prescriptive than previous versions. There are also major changes to the system of qualifications, with the first changes, the abolition of Standard Grade and Intermediate qualifications and the introduction of qualifications levels 4 and 5, broadly equivalent of GCSE, being introduced in 2013/14. Level 4 qualifications will be entirely internally assessed and moderated, while level 5 and above will have a significant amount of external assessment.

The Curriculum for Excellence website sums up the purposes of the new curriculum as follows:

*The curriculum aims to ensure that all children and young people in Scotland develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they will need if they are to flourish in life, learning and work, now and in the future.*

It further highlights the importance of a positive ethos to promote effective learning, echoing the sentiments of *Better Behaviour – Better Learning* mentioned above.

*The starting point for learning is a positive ethos and climate of respect and trust based upon shared values across the school community.*

(<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/understandingthecurriculum>)

Moreover, a new distinctive area of the formal curriculum has been denoted, health and wellbeing. This encompasses young people's physical and mental health and sets out a series of learning experiences and outcomes for all children at a very general

level. These include a series of statements about what young people should expect from their learning environment. For example,

I can expect my learning environment to support me to:

- *develop my self-awareness, self-worth and respect for others*
- *meet challenges, manage change and build relationships*
- *experience personal achievement and build my resilience and confidence*

There is also a description of the ways in which various aspects of health and wellbeing will be developed. For example,

***Social wellbeing – HWB 0-12a, etc***

*This will be developed by raising the young person's awareness, understanding and experience of participation in consultation, citizenship and volunteering activities within the formal and informal curriculum* (<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/learningteachingandassessment/curriculumareas/healthandwellbeing/eandos/index.asp>).

Fourthly, in common with Every Child Matters agenda in England, Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) provides the framework for more co-ordinated planning and support across agencies for children and young people. This includes troubled children who may be experiencing behavioural problems in school.

Fifthly, current policy is supported by the national Positive Behaviour Team (PBT), which in turn is advised by the Scottish Advisory Group in Behaviour in Schools (SAGBIS). SAGBIS is co-chaired by the Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning and the Spokesperson for Education, Children and Young People of the Convention of Local Authorities' (COSLA). These party political members as co-chairs are supplemented by representatives of teachers' associations, the association of directors of education in Scotland, the General Teaching Council for Scotland and Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education. It 'provides advice to national and local government on behaviour in schools, or wherever learning takes place' (Scottish Government 2010). SAGBIS is intended to embody partnership working to promote positive behaviour. It has supported and taken forward pilot projects on positive behaviour management, staged intervention, restorative practice, motivated school and nurture groups.

The PBT, which is accountable to SAGBIS, consists of a group of nine experienced and expert practitioners in developing and promoting positive behaviour. Each member of the team has responsibility for a group of local authorities and offers help and advice to them and their school clusters. Each member also has responsibility for taking forward professional development in a particular substantive area. For example one member leads on nurture groups, another on solution-focussed strategies and another on emotional health and well-being.

To sum up there are a number of key features which are important to bear in mind when considering the results below. The first is the consistency of the message about behaviour, first embedded in *Better Behaviour – Better Learning* in 2001. This might be summed up as a need for a multi-pronged

approach to promote positive behaviour and deal with negative behaviour. This multi-pronged approach can perhaps best be described as combining whole school strategies, including the formal, informal and hidden curriculum, designed to encourage an orderly and purposeful environment for all pupils, together with a number of targeted interventions to support particular pupils displaying troubled behaviour. This approach is supported at various levels, national, local and school through staffing structures, professional development opportunities and accountability frameworks. Secondly there is a commitment to inclusive schooling and to comprehensive education under successive Scottish governments regardless of the political parties in power. Local authorities continue to play a prominent and important role in education policy development and management. Thirdly the development and implementation of policy has been a continuous process with feedback from a range of organisations and individuals feeding into new strategies to promote positive behaviour and deal with negative behaviour. The PBT, for example and HMIE can feedback to SAGBIS their perceptions of life in schools and classrooms as can professional associations. Fourthly, evidence from research and from national statistical collections is used as important information to help determine priorities and obtain an overview of the system.

### **Conceptual Framework for the Research**

There is an extensive literature on behaviour in schools contributed by a range of disciplines including psychology, sociology, criminology and various branches of medicine. Within these disciplines there are debates about the causes and consequences of negative behaviour and corresponding debates about interventions and their efficacy. There are significant bodies of work which focus on medical or psychological explanations for negative behaviour which necessarily focus on the individual's physiological, neural or personality characteristics and offer targeted interventions of various kinds to inhibit or minimise negative behaviour. There are also significant bodies of work which point to social and economic inequalities underlying negative behaviour and associated with learning difficulties of one kind or another (e.g. Case and Haines 2003). Studies of schools as social institutions point to the influence which the assumptive worlds of teachers and pupils can have on behaviour (e.g. Harber 2002). For example teacher expectations about the kind of pupils who attend the school, the relationships with parents and fundamentally how the key purposes of schooling are conceived can influence behaviour (Lawrence et al 1989; Watkins and Wagner 2000; Munn et al 2000; McLuskey et al 2008; Brown and Winterton 2010). Moreover studies have shown that whether behaviour is conceived of as negative or troublesome is highly context specific, with the teacher's mood, the time of day or year, the subject matter of the lesson and the previous history of relationships with particular classes or pupils all having an influence (e.g. Johnstone and Munn 1992). A similarly wide range of studies of peer relations among pupils in general and of bullying in particular produces a complex array of findings on definitions, 'causes' and 'cures' (Brown and Winterton 2010).

The research did not seek to arbitrate among competing explanations of positive and negative behaviour in schools. Rather in designing the study it took care to ask about the occurrence of specific positive and negative behaviours in the classroom and around the school, to explore whole school approaches to promoting positive behaviour and dealing with negative behaviour which were part of a school's ethos and also to explore targeted interventions aimed at particular pupils such as nurture groups, or solution oriented approaches. The research also explored the training and professional development opportunities available to teaching and support staff (classroom or learning assistants) as well as asking about the deployment of specialist behaviour support staff and home-school link officers working with families. Perceptions of behaviour can be associated with one's role and status in the school and so the research sought to obtain information from primary and secondary school teachers, headteachers, support staff and pupils

### **Research Aims, Design and Methods**

The research built upon the previous survey in 2006 and had four main aims to:

- Provide clear and robust information on the nature and extent of positive and negative behaviour in Scottish publicly funded schools in 2009;
- Provide trend information on key questions about positive and negative behaviour compared to 2006;
- Describe the range of behaviour management approaches in use and to report on staff's perceptions of their effectiveness;
- Describe the training and support provided to staff and their confidence in managing behaviour.

The research was commissioned by the Scottish Government and won after a process of competitive tender. It took place 2008-2009 and had several strands.

#### ***Strand 1: Survey***

The data reported in this article are drawn from this strand and thus most information is given about it. It involved a large-scale survey of teachers, headteachers and support staff in a representative sample of publicly funded primary and secondary schools across Scotland.<sup>1</sup> The survey had its origins in the instrument designed by Gray and Sime for the Elton Committee (DES 1989) modified to include positive as well as negative behaviour and updated to include examples of new technology such as mobile phone use and cyber bullying. It asked questions about the occurrence of specific behaviour in classrooms and around the school, the strategies used to promote positive behaviour and deal with negative behaviour, staff confidence in behaviour management and participations in training and in school discussions on behaviour management policy. It was dispatched as a postal survey to headteachers who were given instructions about distributing the forms to their staff, the number being based on school size and individual teaching staff being selected on a pseudo-random basis using surname initials. Individual responses were returned confidentially to the researchers.

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<sup>1</sup> The surveys and details of sample construction are available in an online technical annex. See <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/welfare/Behaviour>

Table 1 summarises information on response rates.

Table 1 about here.

The 2009 survey offers improved precision compared to the 2006 survey due to the larger sample size in 2009. Even though the response rate was lower for all groups the number of survey forms returned was higher. For example, the response rate from secondary teachers was 43% in 2009 compared to 55% in 2006. However there were 1468 responses from this group in 2009 compared to 550 in 2006.

The standard errors are dependent on the achieved samples (i.e. the number of forms returned rather than the number distributed) and, despite the lower response rates, achieved samples were still larger than in 2006 for all six groups. In the case of the Primary Teachers, the increase was very small and the standard error fell by only three per cent. The largest increase was for the Secondary Teachers where the standard error was reduced by over a third. As an example of the effect of this in practice, if 33% of Secondary Teachers in the sample expressed a given opinion, the standard error for the estimate of this proportion in the population would be 1.2 in 2009, down from 2.0 in 2006.

Testing for the effects of non-response from schools revealed that there is no evidence that the achieved level introduced a significant degree of bias into the results of the 2009 survey<sup>2</sup>. Due to the anonymous nature of the survey, we are unable to test for the effects of non-response from individuals in schools (i.e. whether those who do not respond hold the same views as those who do). Nevertheless, we are confident that the 2009 survey results provide a statistically robust picture of the perceptions of the six groups of respondents in terms of positive and negative behaviour in schools.

A final point to bear in mind is that the surveys provide information about the kind of behaviour experienced and the frequency of dealing with it. They do not tell us about the number of pupils behaving in particular ways or about the number of individual incidents.

### ***Strands 2 and 3: school visits***

*A second strand* of the research consisted of visits to 7 typical primary and 8 typical secondary schools. The purpose of the visits was to contextualise the survey findings and to explore issues that did not lend themselves to investigation via the surveys. These included for example, the details of the approaches to behaviour management adopted in the schools. The school visits involved data collection from a range of staff and a survey and series of other data collection activities from pupils. The data collection from pupils comprised *strand three*.

### ***Strand 4: local authority interviews***

*The fourth strand* of the research involved telephone interviews with local authority representatives, selected by Directors of Education or equivalent to be well placed to discuss the local authority's approach to behaviour management. The representatives received a copy of the interview schedule in advance to enable them to prepare for the

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<sup>2</sup> See the online technical appendix for further detail on non-response.



interview and collect appropriate documentation. All interviews were tape-recorded and the researchers also took extensive notes.

## **Findings**

Descriptions of the findings from all strands of the study are reported in Munn et al ((2009). Our intention here is to offer some possible explanations for one part of these, the generally positive changes in perceived occurrences of positive and negative behaviour in 2009 and 2006. We also provide a critical analysis of the findings by drawing on exclusions data and on Scotland's performance in PISA in 2009. In order to contextualise the comparisons a brief summary of the 2009 findings on the perceptions of the frequencies of behaviour is required. In general:

- The vast majority of staff said that all or most of their pupils were generally well behaved. For example 91% of primary teachers observed pupils keenly engaging with their tasks and over 8 in 10 secondary teachers saw pupils following instructions and listening to the teacher in all or most lessons.
- The most frequently encountered low level negative behaviour encountered by both primary and secondary teachers in classrooms was talking out of turn. Only 4% of primary and 1% of secondary teachers said that they had *not* encountered this in the previous week.
- Using mobile phones/texting is the least frequently encountered low-level negative behaviour in classrooms with 98% of primary and 39% of secondary teachers saying that this had not been encountered at all in the last week. The difference between primary and secondary teachers' perceptions is notable for this behaviour both around the school and in the classroom.
- Both primary and secondary teachers and headteachers reported very low, although still of course concerning, numbers of serious incidents of physical violence and aggression towards them both in relation to the last full teaching week and over the previous twelve months. For example one secondary teacher (who worked in a special unit in a mainstream school) reported experiencing physical violence several times daily, three reported experiencing physical violence once a week and 1,455 had not experienced physical violence towards them in their classroom at all in the previous week.
- In both primary and secondary schools, general verbal abuse was the serious indiscipline/violence most frequently experienced by staff at least once over the previous twelve months. When asked about the most recent incident, respondents reported that these were most commonly reported to senior colleagues and/or the headteacher. 26 out of 92 primary and 17 out of 524 secondary teachers who reported a most recent incident said that it was physical violence. Out of these incidents, 2 in primary and 4 in secondary schools were referred to the police and this was the kind of incident most likely to be referred to them.
- All respondents highlighted negative relations amongst pupils in classrooms and around the school. For example, around 2 in 3 secondary school support staff identified pupil-to-pupil general verbal abuse as the most frequently encountered serious indiscipline in classrooms. For primary support staff physical aggression between pupils was the most frequently encountered serious indiscipline in classrooms, with 56% identifying this.
- In general primary and secondary headteachers were more positive than their staffs in observing behaviour, primary teachers tended to be more positive

than secondary teachers and secondary support staff were the least positive group.

### **Comparisons between 2009 and 2006**

There were 276 questions on specific behaviours on which direct comparison between 2009 and 2006 were possible. In Munn et al (2009) these are reported in terms of six staff groups, (teacher, headteacher and support staff in secondary and primary schools). For ease of reporting, the comparisons between 2009 and 2006 are summarised in terms of five question categories, positive behaviour in the classroom, C+ negative behaviour in the classroom C-, negative behaviour around the school S-, serious negative behaviour in the classroom C—and serious negative behaviour around the school S--. Table 2 shows the number of comparisons that was possible.<sup>3</sup>

Table 2 about here

Tables 3 and 4 show two examples of the results of single comparisons. This is taken from “Positive behaviour in the classroom”, where the same response scale was used in both years and the second from “Low-level indiscipline in the classroom”, where different scales were used. In both cases, the entries in the body of the table give the percentages of teachers in each year who selected each point on the response scale. These percentages sum to 100 plus or minus rounding error. The last two columns give the sample sizes on which the percentages are based and the direction and significance of the difference between the years. The data were treated as being ordinal in nature (i.e. the points on the scale are in a sequence of increasing or decreasing levels of frequency of occurrence of behaviour) and the test used was Mann-Whitney *U*. This was applied to each of the 276 comparisons individually to assess the direction of the change, “positive” denoting a move towards better levels of discipline and “negative” towards worse levels. It also calculates the probability that a change as large as, or larger than, that observed could have occurred as a result of sampling variation (i.e. could have occurred even if there had been no real underlying change in levels of perceived indiscipline in the population of teachers as a whole). If this number is less than 0.05, the difference is said to be significant at the 5% level. If it is less than 0.01 and 0.001, the difference is said to be significant at the 1% and 0.1% levels respectively. If the number is greater than 0.05, the result is said to be not statistically significant. In the examples given in tables 3 and 4 therefore, the frequency of pupils arriving with the correct equipment has improved and to an extent which cannot be ascribed to sampling variation. The frequency of talking out of turn however has deteriorated, but to an extent which is well within the range of sampling variation (i.e. not significant). A change as large as this would occur on average on two occasions out of every three even if no change in the views of all teachers had in fact occurred.

Table 3 about here

Table 4 about here

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<sup>3</sup> It was not possible to compare positive behaviour around the school since the scales used in 2009 and 2006 were so different as to make comparison impossible. The symbol – indicates that data were not available.

Detailed comparisons for each group and question category are available in Munn et al (2009) but a summary table showing changes between 2009 and 2006 is presented below to give an overall picture.

Table 5 about here

The table shows how many comparisons were significantly positive at the 5% level or above. The entry in each cell of the table is in the format P/X/N giving the number of significantly positive, non-significant and significantly negative comparisons respectively. The largest proportion of positive changes came from the secondary teachers with 51 out of a total of 58 items, no change in 6 and a negative change in 1. Secondary teachers were followed by the primary teachers and the secondary headteachers in terms of changes in a positive direction. The primary headteachers and secondary support staff were less positive though still returning more positive than negative changes. All eleven of the negative changes recorded for the head teachers in both sectors came from comparisons where there was a change in wording of the question which asked about serious negative behaviour to 'you or your staff' in 2009 but in 2006 had asked only about serious negative behaviour 'to you.'

As regards question categories, that containing the largest proportion of positive changes was "Low level indiscipline around the school" with 29 positive and seven non-significant changes out of 36 comparisons. The next most positive was "Serious indiscipline around the school" with twice as many positive as non-significant changes followed by "Positive behaviour in the classroom" and "Serious indiscipline in the classroom", both of which had approximately equal numbers of positive and non-significant changes and few negative ones. All eleven of the negative changes for the "Serious indiscipline in the classroom" and "Serious indiscipline around the school" came from the previously mentioned comparisons in the head teacher columns. The least positive category was "Low level indiscipline in the classroom" where positive and negative changes were equally balanced and fewer in number than the non-significant ones. All of the negative changes in this category came from a question about pupils withdrawing from interaction from you/others and from support staff. All of the 22 negative changes in the survey as a whole came from the "pupil withdrawal" question, from support staff or from the comparisons for the head teachers which asked about behaviours to you or your staff.

### **Possible Explanations**

Taking the data at face value, how can we explain the generally positive trend in perceptions of positive and negative behaviour shown above? The surveys did not set out to test particular hypotheses and the nature of the qualitative work in schools enabled more detail to be collected on whole school policies and practices rather than test particular explanations for or develop hypotheses about the survey results. There were also timetabling constraints on the research which meant that the survey results were not available at the time of the school visits. Explanations for the trends must necessarily be speculative therefore although we draw on data from the survey to guide these speculations.

Secondary teachers showed the most positive trend with only one negative behaviour being seen as more prevalent in 2009 than in 2006, that of pupils withdrawing from interaction with you/others. We can speculate that the reason for this particular behaviour being more observable could be related to the increase among young people in depression and other mental health issues reported by charities e.g. Young Minds or to greater awareness of these matters amongst education professionals. Possible explanations for the positive trend may also lie in the sources of support and help available to teachers. For example, 68% of secondary teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'I am confident that senior staff will help me if I experience behaviour management difficulties.' They were also very appreciative of staff in pupil support bases, behaviour co-ordinators and home-school link workers as well as being confident or very confident in their abilities to promote positive behaviour in their classrooms (87%) and in responding to negative behaviour (85%). It may be then, that policies emphasising whole school approaches such as developing a positive ethos based on shared values of mutual respect, reported by almost all teachers, together with clear procedures such as referral to senior staff when there are difficulties and the availability of targeted support for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties are having positive effects on teachers' perceptions. We recognise that the particular strategies employed in these areas will vary from school to school, as was clear from the school visit strand of the research. Nevertheless it may be that the general principles underpinning the approaches help to explain the positive perceptions of secondary teachers shown in Table 5.

Primary teachers were also positive although less so than their secondary colleagues. There were 58 items on which direct comparison was possible and Table 5 shows that there were positive changes on 29, a negative change on one and no change on 28. As with secondary teachers, the negative change concerned that of pupils withdrawing from interaction with you/others. The positive changes related to all categories of behaviour, positive, low level indiscipline and serious indiscipline in the classroom and around the school. Like their secondary colleagues, primary teachers were confident or very confident in their abilities to promote positive behaviour in their classrooms (93%) and to respond to indiscipline (89%). However, they were more positive than secondary teachers about training, with almost 2 in 3 agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had had effective training in behaviour management approaches used in their schools. For secondary teachers the equivalent figure was 45%. Local authorities were the main provider of training for both primary and secondary staff with the PBT accounting for between 10% and 12%.

The prominence of local authorities in promoting and developing behaviour management strategies is evident in data from primary and secondary headteachers, with around 2 in 3 saying they had received support from their local authority in the last three years to try new initiatives for promoting positive behaviour. The support took various forms including funding, additional staff, specific training advice and consultancy. The local authority also provided policy or strategic development support.

This general picture of confidence in behaviour management and participation in training given by teachers tended not to be shared by support staff. Secondary support staff were less positive than secondary teachers in 2009, there being no significant change in 21 out of the 35 questions for which comparison with 2006 was possible.

Where there were positive changes it is worth drawing attention to the fact that these were related to serious negative behaviour in the classroom which included items such as physical destructiveness, sexist and racist abuse towards other pupils and physical aggression towards other pupils. The fact that support staff tend to be used specifically in classes where there are pupils with learning or behaviour difficulties, may mean that they have a partial view of classroom behaviour in contrast to secondary teachers who are likely to teach a wider range of classes.

Primary support staff were the least positive of all groups. Out of a total of 35 comparisons they reported no change in 26, a negative change in 6 and positive change in 3. The negative changes related to positive behaviour in the classroom, for example they saw fewer instances of pupils following instructions than in 2006, and in low-level indiscipline in classrooms. Here they observed fewer pupils being punctual than in 2006 and more pupils talking out of turn. Interestingly, however, the three positive changes all related to serious indiscipline in classrooms. These concerned truancy, general verbal abuse towards other pupils and sexist abuse towards you, all which had declined since 2006. Primary support staff may see a wider range of pupils than primary teachers in some cases. The latter usually have responsibility for one class in most schools. In contrast support staff may be deployed across a number of classes to help pupils with particular activities and this may explain their more negative perceptions.

Further explanations may lie in the training available to both, primary and secondary support staff and their perceptions of involvement in behaviour policy development. Support staff in both sectors were less satisfied than teachers with training. Only 35% of primary and 21% of secondary support staff agreed that there was adequate training available and a notable 60% of secondary support staff disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. When it came to policy matters, only 27% of secondary support staff and 59% of primary support staff agreed or strongly agreed that they had been regularly involved in discussions about improving behaviour. While it may be easier to involve primary support staff in such discussions given the smaller size of many primary schools, it is noteworthy that the majority of those directly involved with supporting children who have challenging behaviour perceive a lack of adequate training and a majority in secondary schools are not involved in policy development.

Both primary and secondary headteachers tended to be more positive on behaviour around the school and in classrooms in 2009 than teachers or support staff. Again this might be explained by their role affording them a more general overview of behaviour than that available to other members of staff. Part of the explanation for the negative trends on the items in Table 5 was the slight change in wording in 2009 in respect of serious indiscipline towards you or your staff. In 2006 the question related only to serious indiscipline towards you. A further explanation for the generally more positive picture painted by headteachers could be that they were anxious to portray their schools in the best possible light.

## **Discussion**

In this section we critically appraise the trustworthiness of the data before going on to consider what it may tell us about behaviour in Scottish schools.

Coe (2009 p.366) reminds us that data reporting perceptions of participants involved in innovations while important are to be treated with caution. This is because, ‘... people who believe they have freely invested effort in a particular course of action are more likely to see it as successful than those who have not invested such effort.’ He goes on to argue that where people have been persuaded or encouraged or inspired to invest in making a change, positive perceptions may tell us more about the people who inspired the innovation than its ‘real effect.’ He calls for perceptions data to be part of a wider range of evidence brought to bear in evaluating the impact of any innovation and highlights the importance of pupil attainment data in any claims about school improvement. As indicated above, a number of interventions in behaviour management have been developed in Scotland and supported both by local authorities and the PBT. It may be then that staff could be seeing behaviour in a more positive light, because they have been involved in developing and implementing new strategies. We would argue however, that the data concerns perceptions of specific behaviours in classrooms and around the school rather than evaluating the impact of particular innovations. While we recognise that the meaning of some behaviours could vary among respondents, they were responding to the same descriptions of behaviours used in 2006 and 2009. Moreover, the items on which comparisons were made concerned the occurrence or otherwise of specific behaviours within a specific time frame, the previous week, rather than more general perceptions of behaviour. Not all the data collected was as robust, however. Where we explored perceptions of strategies to promote positive behaviour and deal with negative behaviour, the data need to be treated more cautiously. This is because these strategies, such as promoting a positive ethos, or using playground supervisors, for example, can be enacted in different ways. (Data not shown). We are thus careful to avoid correlations between the use of particular strategies and more positive perceptions of behaviour and confine ourselves to reporting perceptions of frequency of occurrence of behaviours.

The trend to more positive perceptions of behaviour on the part of teachers and headteachers, between 2006 and 2009 is echoed by national statistics on rates of exclusion from school.<sup>4</sup> We recognise that such statistics cannot be totally accurate, because of the tendency for schools to use informal exclusion and thus to underreport the extent of formal exclusion. However, trend information suggests that numbers of exclusions and of excluded pupils fell in 2009-10 compared to 2008-09. (Our research data were collected in academic year 2009-10). There were 30,211 cases of exclusion from local authority schools in Scotland in 2009-10 compared to 33,917 in the previous year, a decrease of 11 per cent (Statistical Bulletin 2010). Over 99 per cent of exclusions were temporary and 67 pupils were removed from the school register (permanently excluded). This was a decrease of 23 per cent from 2008-09. The rate of exclusion per 1,000 pupils in 2009/10 is 44.7 (down from 49.9 in 2008/09). These statistics allow for the differing school rolls in respective years and measure the number of cases of exclusions per 1,000 pupils. The recent trend is towards excluding fewer pupils from the peak seen in 2006/7(Statistical Publication Notice 2010).

While survey and exclusions data present a more positive general picture of behaviour in 2009 than in 2006 there are some stubborn patterns in exclusions statistics which raise concerns about the claims of the Scottish school system to be inclusive. For example, boys continue to be about four times as likely to be excluded as girls, and

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<sup>4</sup> Attendance and absence statistics have remained constant over this period

deprivation continues to play an important factor in the likelihood of exclusion. Rates of exclusions per 1,000 pupils are 7 times greater for pupils living in the 20% most deprived areas compared with pupils living in the 20% least deprived as defined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. Furthermore Pupils with an Additional Support Need (ASN) in mainstream schools have a higher rate of exclusion than those in mainstream schools without ASN. Pupils in special schools have a higher rate of exclusion than those with an ASN in primary schools but a lower rate than those with an ASN in secondary schools (Statistical Publication Notice 2010).

These statistics lead us to ask whether the survey data can tell us anything about teachers', headteachers' and support staff's assumptions about behaviour management. In a recent paper, Bickmore (2011 p.1) reminds us that 'peace and conflict theory distinguish three overlapping goals for managing conflict, ranging from ... post incident intervention to comprehensive and proactive.' In brief, she describes *peace keeping* as intervening after an incident (negative peace); *peace making* 'which includes both intervention and problem solving dialogue to resolve disputes after they surface as in restorative justice approaches, and *peace building* a more fundamental process of redressing injustice, democratization and nurturing healthy social relationships (positive peace) Bickmore (2011 p.1). In other words one can have well behaved schools and classrooms by imposing negative peace through the use of sanctions and making it clear that adults in the school are in control and 'call the shots' in terms of behaviour management. Or teachers may guide 'thoughtful, respectful dialogue for self-governing conflict resolution' Bickmore (2011 p.2) for example through peer mediation or similar strategies. Or schools may adopt a more pro-active approach emphasising mutual understanding, shared values and promoting a sense of community. As mentioned above, the research did not set out to arbitrate among competing explanations of negative behaviour, but it asked respondents to indicate whether particular approaches were used (a list of 29 was provided) and to identify the three which in their opinion were most helpful.

In Bickmore's (2011) terms both peace keeping and peace building strategies emerged in the top three. Promoting a positive ethos based on shared values was identified by both primary and secondary teachers and headteachers as helpful. We do not know, of course, what this means in detail, but the Scottish Schools Ethos Network existed for about fifteen years and was designed to enable schools to share experiences and ideas about how to promote a positive ethos. It also used tools such as ethos indicators to encourage school staff to reflect critically on their ethos and to collect information on ethos from pupils through surveys, research projects, discussion groups and pupil participation activities of various kinds. Indeed pupil participation in school decision-making is an important feature of Curriculum for Excellence, as indicated above. One might read into the data therefore that teachers saw schools and classrooms as becoming more democratic, involving pupils more in how the school operated. (It is also possible, of course, that staff were responding in a politically correct way.) This more democratic reading, however is not supported by other strategies identified as helpful. These were referral to the headteacher in the case of secondary teachers and break time supervision in the case of primary teachers. These strategies imply peace keeping and peace building – negative peace, rather than the positive peace implied by references to a positive ethos. This picture of negative peace is echoed when inspecting secondary teachers' perceptions of serious indiscipline around the school. Some 38% of secondary teachers reported meeting

pupil-to-pupil verbal aggression between one and four times a week and a further 7% encountered this behaviour once a day or more frequently. For physical violence between pupils the corresponding figures were 18% and 2% respectively. We do not know from the data how many pupils were involved in verbal aggression or physical violence but the data suggests that peer relations among pupils are a cause for concern. Positive behaviour, and the absence of negative behaviour among pupils, tend to be more in evidence where adults in authority are present. While one might expect this state of affairs for younger children in primary school, pupil-to pupil aggression reported to the above extent by secondary teachers leaves no room for complacency. It suggests that positive peace, pupils internalising pro-social behaviour has some way to go. It also suggests that staff continue to use a range of strategies in respect of pupils' behaviour and that negative and positive peace are not mutually exclusive states of affairs.

It might be inferred that more peaceful classrooms and schools promotes better learning. Do the statistics on attainment support the positive trend in perceptions of behaviour? Scotland, like all OECD countries and the many other countries which take part, pay close attention to international comparisons of pupil attainment. The 2009 PISA survey gave pause for serious thought in terms of Scotland's performance. The positive changes in teachers' perceptions of behaviour in the classroom and around the school were not reflected in pupils' performance which one would expect to be improving. While Scotland remained above the OECD average in science and reading its performance was weakest in mathematics where its international ranking may be falling slightly. The PISA report highlights the need to address the link between socio-economic factors and performance. Worryingly in Scotland the size of the performance gap for a difference in socio-economic factors is above average and this is highlighted as a cause for concern in the government's response ([www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/12/responsesPISA09](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/12/responsesPISA09)). As we saw above, the exclusion statistics revealed that economic disadvantage was correlated with the chances of being excluded. Thus the more positive picture of behaviour reported by teachers perhaps masks the characteristics of the small minority of pupils who display negative behaviour, predominantly boys from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with additional support needs.

## **Conclusion**

The generally positive picture revealed by the survey while welcome should not encourage complacency on the part of government, local authorities and schools. In particular data about pupil-to-pupil relations are concerning as is the generally less positive trend in perception of support staff. SAGBIS reported in June 2010 what its priority actions would be based on the Behaviour 2009 report (Munn et al 2009).

Building on those sustained and concerted improvements in approaches to improving relationships and promoting positive behaviour, a new policy framework will be developed to support local authorities, schools, early years learning centres and other learning environments to review, improve and plan relationship and behaviour policies. This will involve working in partnership with stakeholders including local authority education, children's and social services, health and allied health professionals, further and higher education, police and justice, and the voluntary/independent sector. The



Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA will facilitate this process through consultation with key partners.

The following priority actions have also been identified and agreed by the Scottish Advisory Group on Behaviour in Schools:

- we will further develop learning environment checklists to support the creation of peaceful learning environments and manage low level negative behaviour

we will promote further:

- restorative practices and solution oriented approaches as whole school approaches and as approaches to address more serious negative behaviour between peers in schools
- nurture groups and approaches in early years, primary and secondary schools
- anti-bullying policies and practice to address both serious negative behaviour and contribute to social and emotional wellbeing
- we will develop and promote social and emotional wellbeing programmes for staff and parents in order to support the implementation of those programmes for children and young people
- we will consider other evidence on emotional health and wellbeing and consider strategies for supporting staff, children and young people with this issue.

The Positive Behaviour Team will support the implementation of these priority actions reporting regularly to SAGBIS. (Scottish Government 2010)

This list is interesting because it explicitly acknowledges the contribution of the research to policy development. For example it acknowledges the need to tackle ‘negative behaviour among peers’ through a variety of approaches. Yet it also sees the need to develop a new policy framework which was not contained in the research data – rather the reverse. Local authority data suggested that policy was bedding down both in promoting positive behaviour and dealing with negative behaviour. There was a clear commitment to multi-agency working underpinned by GIRFEC. It may be that the commitment to a new policy framework is one which brings in new partners from health and social care to SAGBIS. Alternatively, it may be an attempt by the Scottish National Party to stamp a distinctive approach to the issue in advance of Scottish parliamentary elections in May 2011. One part of the policy framework, Curriculum for Excellence, with its emphasis on personalisation and choice in learning should be a very important contribution to behaviour management, as it gives greater flexibility to both primary and secondary schools to what they teach and how they teach it. The challenge is to ensure that this flexibility does not entrench disadvantage by offering a less demanding curriculum to those pupils whose behaviour is most negative. Finally, there seems to be no priority attached to the training and development needs of support staff, although this was clearly highlighted by the research.

As suggested at the beginning, one of the characteristics of behaviour policy in Scotland has been its consistency and continuity between governments of different political hues but this may be changing. Another has been a strong partnership between central government and local authorities and increasingly between headteachers and local authorities. This may also be under threat.

The imperatives for national and local government and the teacher associations to work together to develop and implement behaviour policies is now under strain due to cuts in public expenditure. The current settlement between local and national government involves a commitment on the part of local government not to raise council tax, in return for reductions in local government grants from the centre of around 2.5% while Councils which did not accept a freeze would be subject to budget reductions of 6.4%. All 32 Councils accepted the freeze. Councils also had to accept key education, social care and police numbers commitments (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2011/02/10165301>). Although Councils have committed to maintain teacher-pupil ratios in Primary 1-3 and to reduce teacher unemployment as part of the agreement, there is less ring fencing of budgets which means that education as one of the major items of local government expenditure is having to find substantial savings. Some Councils have announced large-scale redundancies of classroom assistants, for instance. These staff were highly valued by teachers and headteachers as contributing to positive behaviour in the classroom. At the same time, teacher associations are refusing to accept a pay freeze and there is currently a review of Teachers for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the settlement reached in 2001 which underpins teachers' working conditions.

This period of turbulence coincides with the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence which may well become a battleground in teachers' pay negotiations. Whether the Scottish Government will remain committed to three yearly surveys of staff perceptions of behaviour could be doubtful, particularly as publication of national data on exclusions is likely to cease. Local authorities will continue to collect data but no national overview will be provided. So it seems that trend information on perceptions of behaviour together with the national statistical collection of information on exclusion are at risk due to financial constraints. It seems a false economy to reduce the evidence base for policy making after a series of developments spanning ten years, designed to promote positive behaviour in schools and classrooms and reduce negative behaviour. Whether new data collection will be developed as part of Curriculum for Excellence remains to be seen. What is certain is that rhetoric about the comprehensiveness of Scotland's schools need to be underpinned by independently collected data and perceptions of behaviour are an important strand of this evidence.

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