

## **EIS Advice in relation to the 'Behaviour and Relationships in Schools Action Plan'**

### ***Introduction***

On 15 August 2024, the Scottish Government and COSLA published the '[Behaviour and Relationships in Schools Action Plan](#)'. Responding to the evidence gathered through the Behaviour in Scotland's Schools Research (2023), the EIS National Branch Survey Report on Violence and Aggression and the Relationships and Behaviour in Scottish Schools Summits, the action plan sets out twenty key actions, designed to address violence and aggression in schools. These actions will be delivered over a three-year period (2024 – 2027), with progress in implementation of the plan monitored by the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools (SAGRABIS), on which the EIS is represented.

***Whilst there are elements of the plan which are helpful, the EIS has been clear that the action plan must be backed up by sufficient resources to deliver meaningful change to ensure that Scottish schools are to be safe places to learn and to work.***

This advice highlights key aspects of the Action Plan which may assist school branches and local associations in advancing the EIS Stand Up for Quality Education key campaign aims and recommendations in relation to violence and aggression in schools.

### ***Action Plan Framework***

The Action Plan sets out a range of aims which broadly seek to apply whole-school relational approaches to improving behaviour, adopting an Empowered Schools ethos and ensuring cohesion and consistency between national and local policy.

To further these aims, the actions in the plan have been set out under the following eight themes:

- Setting clear national expectations for promoting positive relationships and behaviour in schools
- Supporting local application of national policy
- Support for children and young people
- Supporting the workforce
- Reducing violence and harm in schools
- Engaging with the whole-school community
- Tracking impact and progress
- Policy cohesion

Whilst we refer to these themes within this advice, we have not replicated the framework but rather have sought to highlight where relevant actions and outcomes will support practical implementation of EIS key campaign aims and recommendations in practice. The EIS campaign aims and recommendations to address violence and aggression in schools can be read in full [here](#).

The Action Plan also sets out a range of Outcomes that can be used to determine how effective the plan is in addressing its aims. This refers to relevant outcomes to assist school branches and local associations in gauging progress locally and in feeding into evidence gathering the EIS is undertaking nationally.

### ***EIS Key Campaign Aims and Recommendations on Violence and Aggression***

- ***Recognition that schools should be places free of and protected from violence and aggression***

Responding to the first of the EIS's national recommendations, the Action Plan provides public recognition by both the Scottish Government and COSLA that schools should be places free of and protected from violence and aggression.

The Action Plan references that *'evidence demonstrates that there is increased disruption in classrooms and increases in physical and verbal aggression'* and goes on to provide that *'no child or young person, parent or carer, or member of staff should go to school, or their place of work, and be subject to violence and abuse'*.

This clear statement acknowledges the challenges arising from violence and aggression in schools, and can be relied upon both nationally and locally to:

1. challenge any counter-narrative that violence and aggression are not on the rise in schools and/or that incidence of violence and aggression should be in any way acceptable; and
2. to advance key health and safety measures to ensure that schools are safe places to learn and to work.

*Relevant Action Plan Outcomes related to this bullet point are:*

- School staff will feel safe and supported in their place of work, confident that their employer is acting in line with their legislative duties, including health and safety legislations and the Equality Act 2010;
- Schools and school staff will work together towards a culture of collaboration and collegiality with teachers and school staff, parents, carers, children and young people, and multi-agency partners;
- School staff will be supported in their wellbeing, with links made to wider support as appropriate;
- School staff will feel confident to report, record, monitor, assess and respond to individual incidents and patterns of behaviour; and
- Schools and school staff will have procedures in place for undertaking assessment of need, risk assessments and clear expectations of local and multi-agency support.

### **Local Association Action:**

- ✓ *Local Associations are invited to engage with their Local Authority, through LNCT and other consultation structures (where and as appropriate) on the implementation of the Action Plan outcomes in relation to key health and safety measures and mitigations; in advancing health and wellbeing measures; and in promoting culture change.*

### **School Branch Action:**

- ✓ *In assessing the impact of the Action Plan, school branches are invited to determine to what extent the Action Plan outcomes are being realised at school level, in advancing key health and safety measures and mitigations; in advancing health and wellbeing measures for staff; and in promoting culture change.*
- ✓ *If change is not being implemented as outlined in the plan, then school branches should contact their Local Association Secretary for advice.*

### • **Promoting Positive Behaviour, Early Intervention and Prevention**

Theme 1 of the Action Plan sets out the importance of setting clear national expectations for promoting positive relationships and behaviour in schools.

To do this, the following actions will be taken within **phase one of the plan (August 2024 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025)**:

- 'a clear national definition of relationships and behaviour, including violence and aggression' will be integrated into national and local school policies and guidance
- Resources will be provided to schools on whole-school approaches to relationships and behaviour, 'grounded in developing strong relationships, high expectations, and effectively setting limits'
- Evidence based guidance will be published to support early intervention and prevention through a staged intervention model and will include 'improved guidance around responding to situations in which children and young people are not responsive to authoritative approaches based on strong relationships, high expectations and limit setting and where assessment would dictate that a more individualised plan would be more likely to lead to change over time'
- 'Respect for All', national anti-bullying guidance, will be updated.

**During phase 2 (1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026),** guidance on a whole-school approach to prevent and respond to racism and racist incidents, and on vaping and substance use in schools will be published.

*Relevant Action Plan Outcomes related to this are:*

- Schools will have in place school-level relationships and behaviour policies, in line with national guidance and developed in collaboration with staff, parents and children and young people, which set clear expectations of positive relationships and behaviour;
- Schools and school staff will be able to draw on national guidance and support to implement evidence-based relationships and behaviour approaches, including exemplification of relevant practice;
- Schools and school staff will be able to put in place appropriate assessment of wellbeing and plan of support, in keeping with statutory duties, and applying both GIRFEC principles and Additional Support for Learning duties, when a child's social, emotional and/or behavioural needs give rise to a wellbeing concern;
- School staff will understand within the school context how to support children who have experienced trauma and adversity; and
- Schools and school staff will be supported to adopt robust, evidence-based approaches to addressing disruption and abuse, including that caused by mobile phones.

***Agreement of a national definition for 'violence and aggression' is an important step in realising recommendation 2 of the EIS campaign aims.***

***National Action:***

- ✓ The Institute will continue to advocate nationally that this definition should align with the Health and Safety Executive's definition of 'work-related violence', i.e. '*any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work*'. This includes written forms of abuse, verbal abuse or threats as well as physical attacks.
- ✓ The Institute will continue to press for the Health and Safety Executive's definition of 'work related violence' within Part 2; Section 6.23 of the SNCT Handbook (Assault in the Course of Employment).

***Local Association Action:***

- ✓ to adopt the national definition of 'violence and aggression'; and
- ✓ have local authority produced signs and notices communicating to all who use school buildings that violence and aggression will not be tolerated.

***School Branch Action:***

- ✓ to adopt the national or local definition of 'violence and aggression'; and

- ✓ ensure that local authority produced signs are displayed in schools, saying that violence and aggression will not be tolerated.

### **Lack of Resources to Support Implementation**

The Action Plan has outlined key deliverables in relation to implementation of positive behaviour strategies, early intervention and prevention. It is, however, silent on how these strategies will be implemented and resourced.

#### ***National Action:***

- ✓ As part of the Stand Up for Quality Education campaign, the EIS will continue to campaign nationally for increased core education funding and the development of a long-term resourcing strategy to meet the additional support needs of learners.

#### ***Local Association Action:***

- ✓ to use local data to campaign for sufficient additional funding to implement the outcomes, highlighted in the Action Plan in relation to positive behaviour strategies, early intervention and prevention.

#### ***School Branch Action:***

- ✓ to engage with local campaign activities in relation to securing sufficient additional funding.

- ***Supporting local application of national policy***

To ensure consistency of approach, the Action Plan commits to the provision of practical support to local authorities and schools to support the development of local policies and approaches in line with national guidance. It provides that all publications should be 'clear, concise and realistic for real-world implication' and ensure that any new or updated guidance is accompanied by exemplar policies.

It will seek to provide this support specifically during phase 1 by creating key messages to support attendance tracking and monitoring to address concerns about pupil attendance.

There will also be an evaluation of the pilot of the suite of professional learning resources aimed at supporting positive relationships and behaviour, nurture and emotional regulation approaches.

*Relevant Action Plan Outcomes related to this are:*

- School staff will have improved access to relevant professional learning, and wellbeing support, to assist them in their roles.

#### ***Local Association Action:***

- ✓ to seek to develop or amend relevant LNCT agreements, adopting the national definition of violence and aggression and replicating the national behaviour policies produced;

- ✓ to seek to negotiate time and space for professional learning for teachers to allow them to engage with materials produced and reflect upon how national policies can be implemented consistently at a local level.
- ✓ if barriers to implementation are identified, these should be highlighted at an early stage via LNCTs.

***School Branch Action:***

- ✓ to develop school policies and procedures in line with LNCT Agreements;
- ✓ to ensure that Working Time Agreements provide sufficient time to allow teachers to engage with materials produced and reflect upon how national policies can be implemented consistently at school level.
- ✓ if barriers to implementation are identified, these should be highlighted at an early juncture with the Local Association Secretary and school management team.

• ***Empowerment in policy development and implementation***

The Action Plan advocates an Empowered Schools approach to policy development and implementation, involving the whole school community, including teachers, school staff, parents, carers and pupils. It is clear that 'children and young people's views should be embedded in the development of school policies and procedures. Parents too should be supported to support their children's social and emotional development'.

In discharging these actions, the plan acknowledges the importance of age and stage appropriate resources to support social and emotional development, and healthy relationships and behaviour, grounded in tolerance and respect. It therefore commits to updating teaching guidance on Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood education and to the ongoing review of PSE materials to 'support provision of learning resources to allow teachers to deliver relevant, engaging and stage appropriate learning' on a range of topics.

*Relevant Action Plan Outcomes related to this are:*

- Schools and school staff will be empowered to implement a culture of high expectations by implementing an understanding of behaviour, child development, classroom management skills and a spectrum of evidence-based relationships and behaviour approaches;
- Children and young people will be included, engaged and involved in their learning;
- Children and young people will be involved in the development of policies and curricula relevant to wellbeing, social and emotional learning, relationships, and social skills to promote greater understanding and use of relational approaches

- Parents and carers will develop and feel part of a shared understanding of positive relationships, partnership-working and supporting children and young people to create effective learning environments;
- Parents and carers will be an integral part of the development and implementation of policies about relationships, behaviour and support in schools.

### **Local Association Action**

- ✓ Where deemed appropriate, any issues regarding school empowerment in policy development and implementation should be raised at LNCT and appropriate action taken to remedy this and provide for effective engagement of all key stakeholders.

### **School Branch Action**

- ✓ If policy development at school level does not conform to the expectations around the Empowered approach outlined in the Action Plan, then this should be raised with the school rep or Local Association Secretary respectively.

- ***Responding appropriately to incidents of violence and aggression***

The Action Plan recognises that there will be situations in which some children and young people do not respond to the whole-school relational approaches which are highlighted above and there will be a need, in these circumstances, to ensure that clear and consistent approaches are developed to reduce violence and address significant disruptive behaviour in schools.

The definition of the supporting relational approaches set out on page 3 of the Action Plan makes it clear that they should be based on 'high warmth and high standards and expectations'. This is described as including 'emotional responsiveness and support and an ability to effectively set limits for behaviour'. In setting these limits, there is a recognition that there will be boundaries for behaviour and consequences for failure to adhere to these boundaries.

- ***Risk Assessments***

Theme 5 of the Action Plan identifies the need for support for schools and the development of clear protocols for both preventing and responding to violent incidents including those involving a weapon. This will include risk assessments, relevant to the age and stage of the child.

The Action Plan highlights that a priority for phase 1 will be in ensuring 'assessment and intervention of individual need leads to improvement over

time, including processes for risk assessment relevant to the educational context'.

*The following key deliverables are also listed for phase 1:*

- National advice and resources on risk assessment in schools will be developed;
- Guidance on physical interventions in Scottish schools will be produced, with advice on reducing distressed behaviour and minimizing the use of restraint;
- School resources on violence and weapons will be refreshed;
- Work will be undertaken with national professional associations to identify the range of approaches and services which can be offered to support relationships and behaviour at school and local authority level (e.g. Education Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy); and
- Implementation of the actions for violence prevention and harm reduction as part of the Violence Prevention Framework.

***Local Association Action:***

- ✓ to ensure that schools have effective information sharing systems in place for sharing information with teachers regarding background information and risks associated with the behaviour of specific pupils, including specific risk assessments where appropriate;
- ✓ to ensure that a system of risk assessments for classrooms and other workplace areas is implemented to identify risk and control measures for both pupils and staff; and
- ✓ to ensure that risk assessments are properly implemented, reviewed regularly and updated after each incidence of violence and aggression in accordance with national advice and resources.

***School Branch Action:***

- ✓ to ensure that a trade union rep from the school is available to support the process of writing a 'violence and aggression' incident report if requested;
- ✓ to ensure that there is specific, defined support for teachers at the school who have been subject to violence and aggression;
- ✓ to ensure that every violence and aggression report is acknowledged by school SMT and that they use their best offices to ensure that the local authority follows up on the incident report;
- ✓ to ensure that schools have effective information sharing systems in place for sharing information with teachers regarding background information and risks associated with the behaviour of specific pupils;
- ✓ to ensure that a system of risk assessments for classrooms and other workplace areas is implemented to identify risk and control measures for both pupils and staff; and



- ✓ to ensure that risk assessments are properly implemented, reviewed regularly and updated after each incidence of violence and aggression in accordance with national advice and resources.

➤ ***Consequences and Exclusions***

The Action Plan is clear that one of the misconceptions of relational approaches is that there are no consequences to behaviour. The plan, however, seeks to dispel this notion by stating on page 4 that positive outcomes of a relational style are evidenced by *'an ability to effectively set limits for behaviour, ensuring effective implementation of values, and expectations in a firm and consistent manner while using reprimands and consequences where necessary.'* This has the dual purpose of managing behaviour in the short term and developing responsibility among children and young people in the longer term.

Page 15 of the Action Plan sets out a number of priorities for phase 1, outlining specific actions in relation to the consequences of violence and aggression, up to and including exclusion.

It commits to:

- Building a collective understanding of how we create situations in which children are most likely to learn to behave well; how we intervene effectively when they do not; the purpose of consequences; how consequences can be used to support the promotion of positive relationships;
- Providing 'clarity on the range of approaches and consequences that are available, including exclusion, where there is no appropriate alternative, to empower staff to promote positive relationships and behaviour and respond to behaviour that impacts on learning and teaching or the health and safety of others';
- Providing further guidance around responding to situations in which children and young people are not responsive to authoritative approaches based on strong relationships, high expectations and limit setting, and where assessment would dictate that a more individualized plan will more likely lead to change over time.

*Relevant Action Plan Outcomes related to this are:*

- School staff will feel supported in their place of work, confident that their employer is acting in line with their legislative duties, including health and safety legislation and the Equality Act 2010;
- Schools and school staff will be able to draw on national guidance and support to implement evidence-based relationships and behavioural approaches, including exemplification of relevant practice;
- Schools and school staff will be empowered to implement a culture of high expectations by implementing an understanding of behaviour, child development, classroom management skills and a spectrum of evidence-based relationships and behaviour approaches;

- School staff will understand within the school context how to support children who have experienced trauma and adversity;
- School staff will be supported to adopt robust, evidence-based approaches to addressing disruption and abuse, including that caused by mobile phones;
- School staff will feel confident to report, record, monitor, assess and respond to individual incidents and patterns of behaviour.

***School Branch Action:***

- ✓ In assessing the impact of the Action Plan, school branches are invited to determine to what extent these outcomes are being realised at school level in ensuring that relational approaches also include the use of consequences (up to and including exclusion) to promote positive behaviour.
- ✓ The EIS is clear that exclusions should be used as a means of last resort and that where this is necessary, efforts should be made to facilitate positive re-engagement in the school community.
- ✓ If relational approaches are not being adopted as outlined in the Action Plan and staff feel disempowered to act and effect change, then this should be raised with the Local Association Secretary in the first instance.
- ✓ to ensure that as part of restorative practice, pupils understand that persistent or serious misbehaviour leads to consequences;
- ✓ that the school has a clear set of consequences for pupils who exhibit violence and aggression, up to and including exclusion from their school.

***Local Association Action:***

- ✓ to ensure that the local authority has a clear escalatory set of consequences for pupils who exhibit violence and aggression, up to and including exclusion from school.

• ***Reporting, recording and monitoring***

A key priority of the Action Plan in phase 1 is 'to provide updated guidance on reporting, recording and monitoring of bullying incidents, and commence further work to consider the simplification of approaches to recording all behaviours in school'.

One of the actions listed to advance this is the creation of a working group to review current processes and mechanisms for recording different types of incidents, including bullying, violent incidents, and incidents against staff. This will be with a view to streamlining processes and improving consistency of reporting.

*Relevant Action Plan Outcomes related to this bullet point are:*

- School staff will feel supported in their place of work, confident that their employer is acting in line with their legislative duties, including health and safety legislation and the Equality Act 2010;
- School staff will feel confident to report, record, monitor, assess and respond to individual incidents and patterns of behaviour.

Reporting, recording and monitoring are key to effective implementation of the Action Plan. However, the EIS has been clear that processes should be streamlined and not overly bureaucratic.

***Local Association Action:***

- ✓ to ensure that recording and reporting processes are streamlined, with sufficient time given to report, having due regard to the need for 'recovery time' to decompress after an incident;
- ✓ to ensure that risk assessments are conducted, mitigation measures implemented, reviewed regularly and updated after each incidence of violence and aggression.

***School Branch Action:***

- ✓ to ensure that recording and reporting processes within the school are streamlined, with sufficient time given to report, having due regard to the need for 'recovery time' to decompress after an incident;
- ✓ to ensure that risk assessments are conducted, mitigation measures implemented, reviewed regularly and updated after each incidence of violence and aggression.
- ✓ SMTs to use their best offices to ensure that the local authority follows up on the incident report.

• ***Supporting Teachers and the Education Workforce***

Theme 4 of the Action Plan specifically considers support for the Education workforce and makes it clear that all education settings must have a planned and ongoing programme to promote staff wellbeing.

In all phases of implementation, educational settings should seek to ensure that there is a 'proactive and responsive approach' to promoting and maintaining staff wellbeing and providing support following incidents.

During Phase 1, the outcomes of the Joint Scottish Government/ADES Education Workforce Health and Wellbeing Support Project will be considered, identifying next steps on improving existing wellbeing support provided by local authorities and teaching unions.

*Relevant Action Plan Outcomes related to this are:*

- School staff will feel safe and supported in their place of work, confident that their employer is acting in line with their legislative

duties including health and safety legislation and the Equality Act 2010

- School staff will be supported in their wellbeing, with links made to wider support as appropriate.

***Local Association Action:***

- ✓ Campaign and act to make the local authority 'accountable' for the level of violence and aggression in its schools and be accountable for the extent to which the local authority exercises its duty of care to its teacher employees;
- ✓ campaign to ensure that the local authority has the appropriate and sufficient employee support programmes for employees who are injured or suffer harm at work;
- ✓ promote the recruitment of Health and Safety reps.

***School Branch Action:***

- ✓ to ensure that the school provides access to the local authority's employee support programmes for employees who are injured or suffer harm at work;
- ✓ larger branches (more than 10 members) are advised to nominate a Health and Safety representative to assist with health, safety and welfare issues within the school – including members' wellbeing and mental health.

***Ongoing Review***

The EIS is represented on SAGRABIS, the group which has been charged with monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan and reviewing accordingly.

If any school branch has concerns about implementation, then these should be raised with the Local Association Secretary in the first instance and a determination will then be made as to next steps, where appropriate. If any Local Association has a concern about implementation, then this should be raised directly with the Education and Equalities Department or the Employment Relations Department, dependent on the nature of the issue.