

bett

● A Hyve Event

Student
Behaviour
Report
2024



Foreword

The state of children's behaviour in UK schools is a topic that should concern us all – parents as well as teachers and policymakers. The results of our survey of teachers outlined on these pages do not make for comfortable reading.

Three-quarters of teachers report a surge in challenges to their authority. Over a third expect student behaviour to worsen this academic year. Most alarmingly, over a quarter of teachers are considering leaving the profession because of poor behaviour.

These challenges aren't confined to secondary schools. Primary teachers are also grappling with disruptive behaviour, albeit to a lesser extent. The impact on learning is clear: 86% of teachers say managing classroom behaviour impedes their ability to teach effectively.

Yet, amid these difficulties, there's room for optimism. Teachers are open to innovative solutions, including educational technology that engages students and improves communication with parents. They're also calling for consistent application of behaviour policies and increased support for students facing challenges.

At Bett, we're committed to addressing these issues head-on. As the world's largest education show, we bring together educators and innovators from across the spectrum – primary, secondary, further and higher education. Our event offers a unique opportunity to discover both technological and non-technological solutions to today's classroom challenges.

But our support extends beyond the annual show. We provide year-round resources to help educators with their immediate challenges and to help them plan for the future. From webinars to white papers, we offer practical help and knowledge to support teachers in their vital work.

This year, we're particularly excited about our expanded offering of accredited CPD sessions. Our Tech User Labs,

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Duncan Verry, Portfolio Director - Bett

which happen on site at the show, are always popular and so we launched them for free online.

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Duncan Verry
Portfolio Director - Bett



Introduction

Last year, Ofsted reported that behaviour in schools in England had deteriorated markedly since the pandemic¹. The inspectorate said that classroom disruption, student non-compliance and verbal abuse were all on the rise in schools.

Earlier this year, the Department for Education's National Behaviour Survey (NBS) found that significant lesson time was lost because of misconduct and that teachers and school leaders thought that behaviour, while generally good, had worsened since the NBS was last conducted in May 2023.

To discover how far teachers agreed with those official findings and what their expectations were for the coming academic year, Bett commissioned pollsters YouGov to survey teachers in both primary and secondary schools across the UK for their views.

We wanted to know if behaviour in their classes had continued to deteriorate, if so, what type of disruptive incidents they were dealing with, and if they hoped for an improvement in the autumn. We also wanted to discover what measures teachers thought could improve matters, or if behaviour was so bad that it was inducing them to consider quitting the profession altogether. The results were alarming:

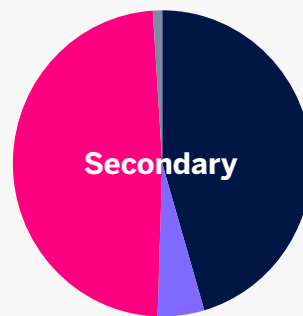
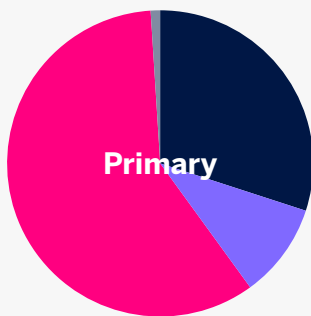
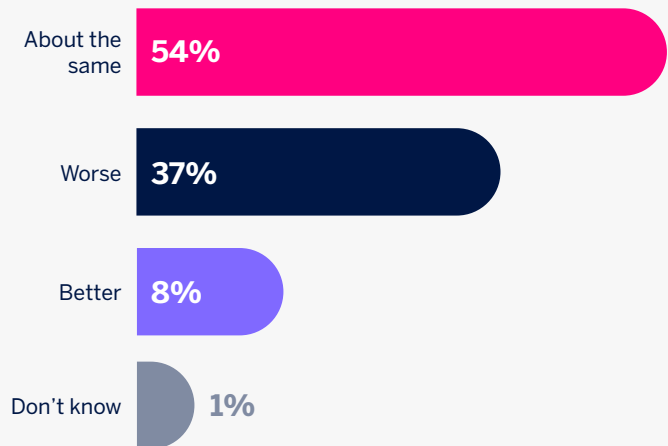
- Over a third of teachers – and almost half of secondary school teachers – expect behaviour to be worse this year than last
- Three-quarters say challenges to teacher authority have rocketed
- Over a quarter say they are likely to quit teaching as a result
- Three-fifths say parental complaints about their school's behaviour policies have increased
- 3 in 10 say they have to deal with a disruptive incident every 10 minutes or less
- 8 in 10 say classroom misconduct impedes their ability to teach
- And almost all teachers say social media and a lack of boundaries at home is fuelling inattention and poor behaviour in school

On page 13, behaviour expert Tom Bennett outlines his thoughts on the situation and what schools and teachers can do about it.



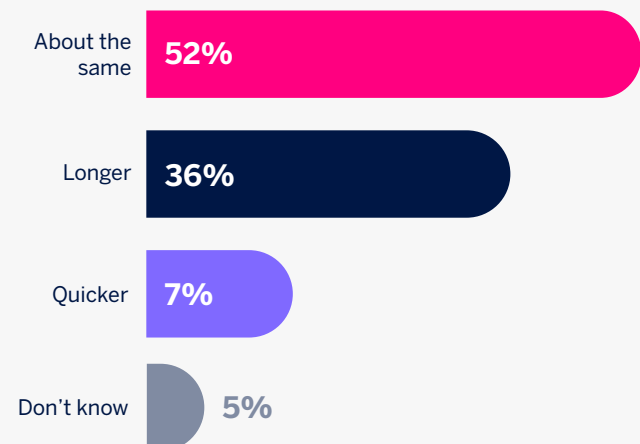
Teacher Expectations

Not only do teachers think student behaviour won't improve this year, but they also think it is likely to get worse. When asked if they expect it to get better or worse compared to the last academic year only 8% say better, compared to 37% who expect it to be worse. Over half (54%) think it will be about the same.



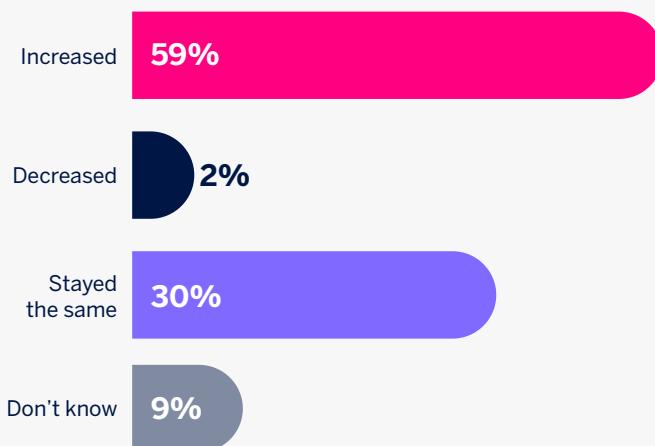
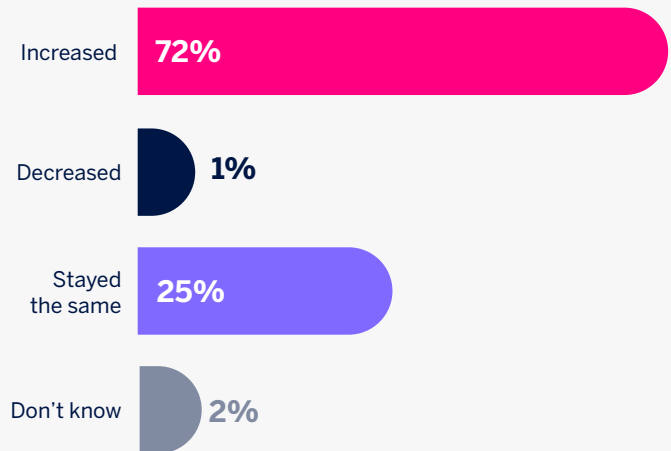
Secondary school teachers are especially pessimistic – 45% of them, compared to 30% of primary school teachers – think behaviour will deteriorate.

Teachers also expect classroom management to be a challenge. When asked how long they thought it would take for behaviour to settle down to manageable levels compared to last year, 36% say it will take longer compared to 7% who believe it will be quicker, while 52% think it will be about the same.



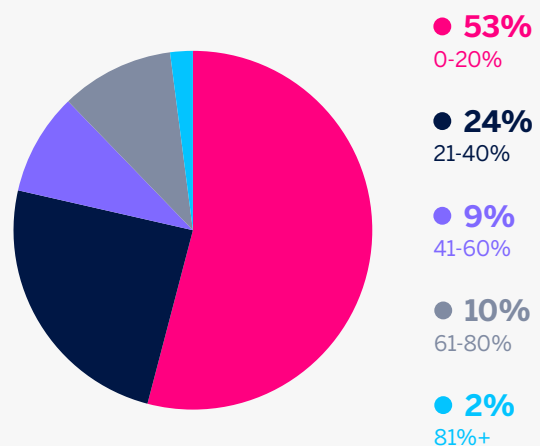
Challenges on the rise

Almost three-quarters of teachers (72%) say instances of students challenging their authority have increased this year compared to last – hardly any (1%) say they have decreased.



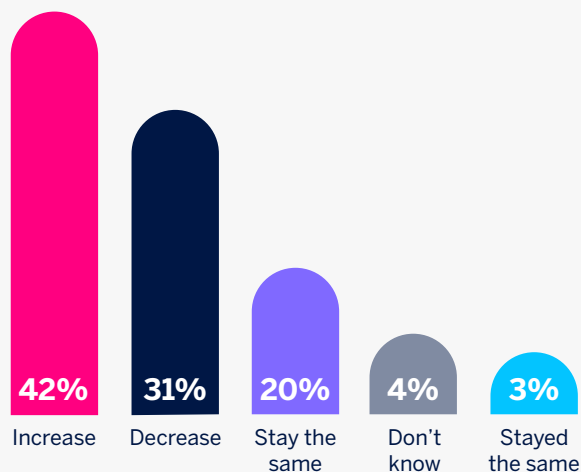
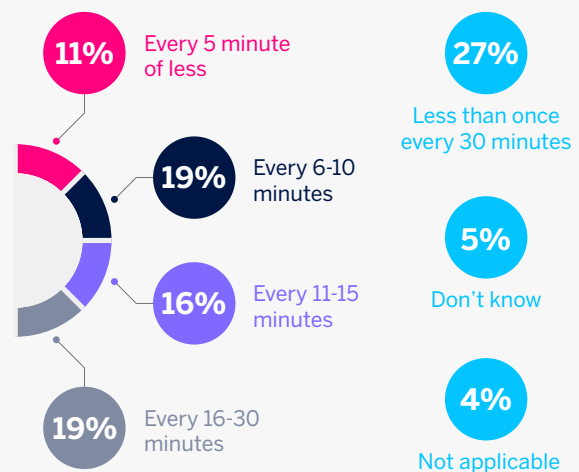
Most (59%) have also witnessed a steep rise in the number of complaints from parents about their school's behaviour policies.

Over half of teachers (53%) say in their experience, up to a fifth of students disregard school rules. But more than 1 in 10 (12%) say that number is much higher, and that over three-fifths do.



Disruption in the classroom

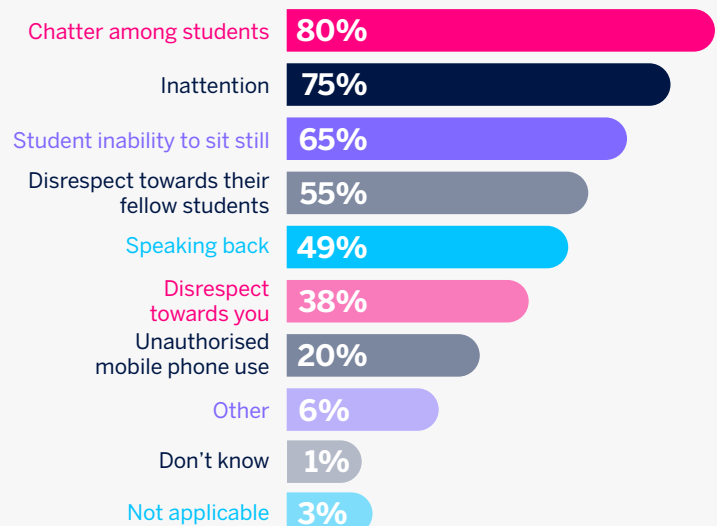
Disruption occurs frequently, according to respondents. Three in ten (30%) say they deal with a disruptive incident in their class every 10 minutes or so, with 11% saying it is every five minutes or less.



There is less consensus over whether the number of disruptive incidents is likely to increase at the start of the academic year. Two-fifths of teachers (42%) think they are, but almost a third (31%) think they are not.

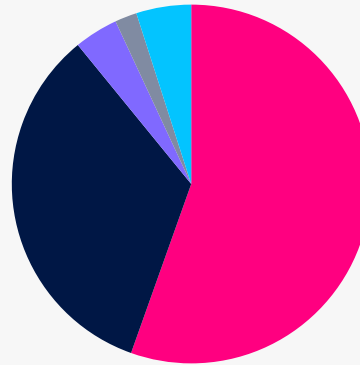
But there is more agreement about the most frequent types of disruptive behaviours. Chatter among students, inattention and inability to sit still were cited by 80%, 75% and 65% of respondents respectively.

While disrespect towards other students (55%), speaking back (49%), disrespect towards the teacher (38%) and unauthorised mobile phone use (20%) are the next most frequent forms of misconduct.



Contributing factors

Why do teachers think behaviour has deteriorated? Social media has had a negative effect on students' attention spans, according to 9 in 10 teachers (90%).



- 56%
A great extent
- 34%
To some extent
- 4%
Not much
- 2%
Not at all
- 5%
Don't know

Very consistent

21%

Somewhat consistent

44%

Somewhat inconsistent

20%

Very inconsistent

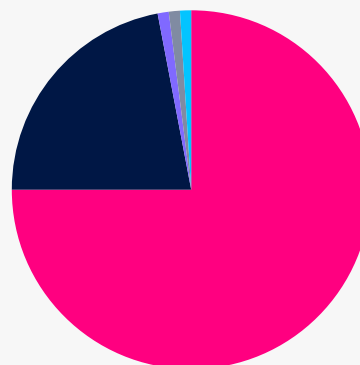
14%

Don't know

30%

While a third (34% – rising to 41% of secondary school teachers) say their school's senior leadership don't apply school behaviour policy consistently. However, only 1% of heads and 12% of deputy and assistant heads agree.

Almost all teachers (22% to some extent and 75% to a great extent) believe that inconsistent boundaries at home cause poor behaviour at school.

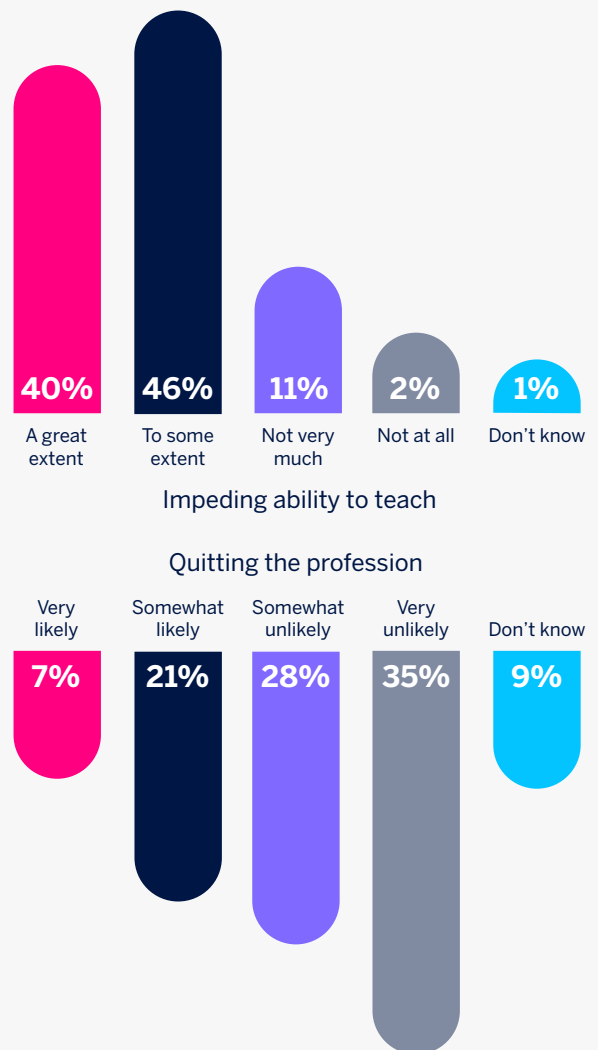


- 75%
A great extent
- 22%
To some extent
- 1%
Not much
- 1%
Not at all
- 1%
Don't know

Consequences of poor behaviour

Misconduct isn't only affecting classroom teaching – a significant minority of teachers are so demotivated it is spurring them to reconsider teaching as a career.

An overwhelming majority of teachers (86%) say the need to manage classroom behaviour is getting in the way of their ability to teach, while over a quarter (28%), say it is so bad they are thinking of quitting the profession.



● 8%
Less than 5 minutes

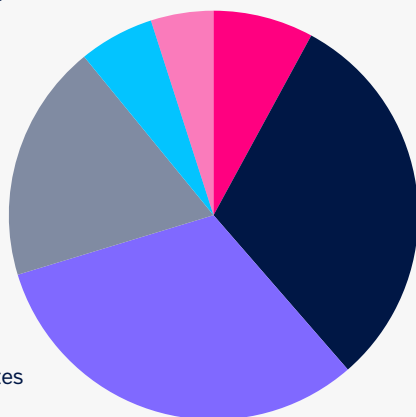
● 31%
5-10 minutes

● 32%
11-15 minutes

● 19%
16-20 minutes

● 6%
More than 20 minutes

● 5%
Don't know

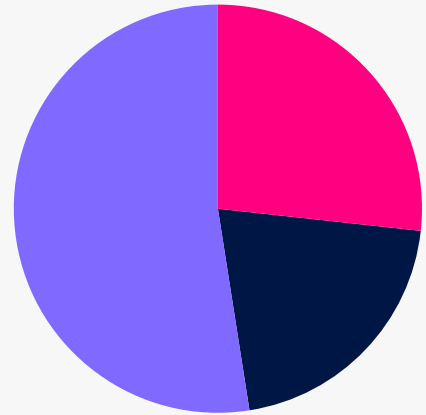


Two-fifths of teachers (39%) say students are so easily distracted that they need to change a classroom activity every 10 minutes or less to maintain their attention.

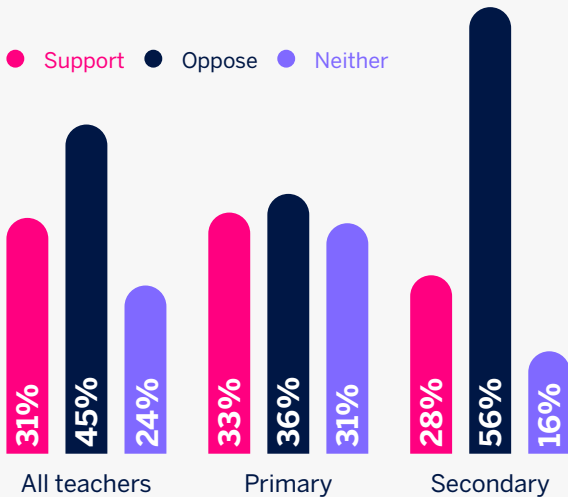
What can be done?

Teachers are open to the idea that edtech that gamifies classroom learning and homework could engage students – 27% think it could be effective, 21% don't – though most remain unsure (53%).

- 27% Effective
- 21% Ineffective
- 53% Don't know

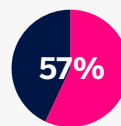


- Support
- Oppose
- Neither

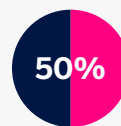


And they tend to oppose the removal of isolation booths and removal rooms from schools – 45% oppose vs 31% support the measure. However, while opinion in primary schools is evenly divided (36% oppose vs 33% support removal), it is far more clearcut in secondary schools (56% oppose vs 28% support removal).

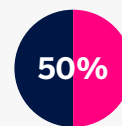
Teachers believe behaviour would improve if class sizes were reduced (57%), behaviour policies were consistently applied by all staff (50%), support for students with challenges was increased (50%), SLT applied behaviour policies consistently (31%), communications with parents were improved (23%), there was a school-wide mobile ban (18%), and a parent-signed school behaviour charter was implemented (15%).



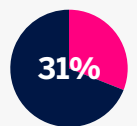
Reducing class sizes



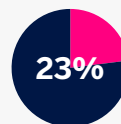
Consistent application of the school's behaviour policy by all members of staff



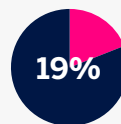
Increased support for students with behavioural challenges



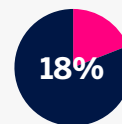
Consistent application of the school's behaviour policy by SLT



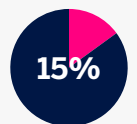
Improved communication between school and parents over behaviour expectations



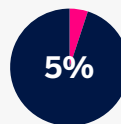
Incorporating more structured physical activity into the school day



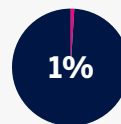
A school-wide ban on mobile phone usage



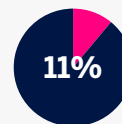
Implementing a parent-signed school behaviour charter



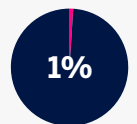
Implementing silent corridors between classes



None of these



Other



Don't know

Conclusion

Teachers are largely pessimistic about the prospects for an improvement in school behaviour – at least in the short term, with challenges to teacher and school authority seemingly on the rise.

Almost all respondents to our survey believe poor behaviour is impeding teachers' ability to teach to some extent – and a significant minority, sadly, are so disenchanted that they are contemplating leaving the profession entirely.

Given teachers' concerns, it isn't surprising that a plurality, rising to a significant majority in secondaries, oppose the removal of measures such as isolation booths. But many do think that smaller class sizes, consistently applied behaviour policies and more support for students with challenges would improve the situation.

And many are open to the idea that technology could play a part in reducing the load on teachers – particularly when it comes to classroom aids that help with student engagement and improve communications with parents.



The new wave of misbehaviour

It's always about behaviour. Whatever you want to achieve in school, whether it be academic outcomes, safety, critical thinking, mental health, wellbeing or a hundred other desirables, the behaviour of students is key to obtaining it. No child flourishes in chaos; no child is safe, or learns as well as they could, or reaches their potential, when the environment is unruly, unpredictable and unmanaged. And the children most affected by this are the already disadvantaged, the child from the neglectful, abusive, or deprived home environment. The children who have the least, need a well-behaved classroom the most.

The findings of the report sadly, do not demonstrate that this has been universally achieved. Far too many schools still struggle with the demands of the behaviour of their students, and everyone suffers, including staff members, who frequently cite the school behaviour climate as one of the principal reasons to exit the profession. We can't afford that in the middle of a recruitment and retention crisis.

The reasons why children misbehave are often overlooked, but they are not hard to find: children learn their habits from their environments, and many children grow up in circumstances - through no fault of their own - that do not provide them with a rich and nurturing context in which to develop healthy social skills, and positive ways to behave in institutional settings.

But what are the reasons why teachers perceive behaviour to be worse now than before? To some extent, teachers have always felt this to be the case. When I started to teach in 2003, teachers would tell me how behaviour used to be better, that children were worse today than before. It is possible that at least some of this sentiment is a ubiquitous generational sentiment. But I don't think it's all that. I've visited around 1100 schools in the last ten years, solely looking at their behaviour climates, and there is definitely a very strong sense that since COVID, behaviour has become worse; I hear this in almost every school I have visited since the lockdowns.

Why? Because when children spend a year or more out of the school culture, they can often lose the habit of how to conduct themselves in those environments and learn new habits instead. Because many students become used to being at home, and not in the high expectation environment of a school. Because parents can lose a sense of urgency to send children in on time, regularly, an expectation that has been built up as a cultural norm since the early 20th century. Lockdowns have hit the school attendance and behaviour cultures like a meteor, and we are all still feeling the aftershock.

And of course we cannot ignore the ubiquitous presence of smartphones, and their undoubtedly negative impact on



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motivation, focus, attention spans and the development of social skills. When we are logged in online, we are not where we are, and teaching is very much the business of getting students to think hard, for extended periods of time; but phones are designed for grazing, superficial thinking, novelty, and rapid changes of attention. When we allow students to habituate to their omnipresence, we take away from them the sacred spaces where they can think, ponder, wonder and learn to focus, and replace it with novelty and entertainment. To paraphrase Neil Postman, we are amusing them to death,

The solutions? Most of it we already know. Schools need to double down in their commitment to teach students the Behaviour Curriculum, the sum total of expectations and standards of conduct that enables them to navigate and flourish in schools. Almost all children can learn this. They need clear boundaries, and consistent consequences. They need pastoral support for the children who need more than this rich environment, and they need to know that they will be kept safe from harm, harassment and disruption. Safe schools are places where everyone flourishes. And lastly, they need to be protected from the agent of mass distraction vibrating away in their pockets. Not all tech is benevolent, and schools need to enforce their policies of restriction in this area with gusto.

None of this is easy; but it will never be easy. But it's important, and that makes all the difference. Students need us to be the adults in the room, because we care about them.

Tom Bennett

DfE Behaviour advisor and consultant



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