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Behaviour in Scottish Schools

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

University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom

Background

Behaviour in schools is an emotive topic and one of enduring political interest and sensitivity. This is partly explained by the fact that establishing standards of good behaviour in schools has two linked purposes. It is a means to an end – the successful learning of young people. Clearly, young people are less likely to learn in classrooms where disruptive behaviour takes place and teacher time is spent on maintaining discipline rather than on the formal curriculum. Good behaviour is also an end in itself, however – a key purpose of schooling being to socialise young people into accepted norms of behaviour. Reports of declining standards of behaviour in schools, violence and bullying in playgrounds and on school premises generally, can thus contribute to more general concerns about crime, public safety and sense of well-being. As might be expected, concern about standards of behaviour in schools is not new and is an international one (Brown and Munn 2008).

The Scottish Government is committed to conducting regular 3 yearly national studies of behaviour in schools 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. The 2009 research built on previous research in 2006. The paper reports the main findings of the 2009 study with a particular emphasis on 2006 comparisons.

Research Questions

The research 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 and assess the range of behaviour management approaches in use and to report on staff's perceptions of their effectiveness;
- Describe and assess the training and support provided to staff and their confidence in managing behaviour.

Methods

There were four main strands to the mixed methods study. This paper focuses on the major strand, a questionnaire survey to a representative sample of primary and secondary school headteachers, teachers and support staff about their perceptions of the nature and extent of positive and negative behaviour in the classroom and around the school.

Table 1.1 gives, for each respondent group, the numbers of survey forms sent out and received back in 2006 and 2009 along with the return rates. The last column gives the 2009 standard error as a percentage of the 2006 standard error.

Respondent group Table 1.1: respondent groups and return rates

These are given in the appendix.

Frame

The analysis took as its starting point that schools can influence the behaviour of pupils through many different kinds of interventions, ranging from those that are explicitly directed at individuals in need, such as cognitive behavioural therapy or anger management to those aimed at the whole school population such as interventions seeking to develop a whole school positive ethos based on shared values. The analysis of perceptions of positive and negative behaviour was accompanied by an analysis of the presence or absence of a range of school policies.

Research findings

The main findings are that most groups surveyed are more positive in their perceptions of behaviour in 2009 than in 2006. Of the groups, this positive shift is most marked for secondary teachers. The paper reports these findings in terms of positive behaviour in the classroom, low-level negative behaviour in the classroom and around the school and serious negative behaviour in the classroom and around the school. A range of explanations for the more positive picture are put forward for discussion.

Reference

Brown, J. and Munn, P., (2008) 'School violence' as a social problem: charting the rise of the problem and emerging specialist field *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, Vol. 18(3-4), pp. 217-228.