Government call for evidence on behaviour management strategies, in-school units, and managed moves

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

A. Introduction

1. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 21,500 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million young people in more than 90 per cent of the secondary and tertiary phases, and in an increasing proportion of the primary phase. This places the association in a strong position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of schools and colleges of all types.

2. This call for evidence will help inform revisions to the non-statutory guidance on behaviour and discipline in schools and the statutory guidance on suspensions and permanent exclusions.

B. General points

3. ASCL welcomes any opportunity to highlight examples of effective behaviour management. Schools have shown incredible leadership and skill in adapting this year to the needs of their pupils and their diverse experiences of the pandemic. ASCL believes school leaders are best placed to make decisions about policy and practice in their schools. We welcome all opportunities to share good practice and learning in support of children who may struggle to regulate their behaviour without the support of expert teachers in each school.

4. However, the timing of this consultation is extremely problematic. It was launched on 29 June and closes on 10 August. The consultation period comes at the end of a particularly difficult school year for teachers and leaders, coincides with a very busy end of term, and runs into much-needed holiday time.

5. The timeframe available for comment is insufficient and the timing inappropriate for seeking the valuable and extensive evidence required to inform such an important opportunity for the revision and improvement of guidance.

6. We have consulted as much as possible, given these restrictions, with ASCL members in order to inform our response. Had the consultation been open for longer and more appropriately timed we would have been in a position to collect a wider range of experiences.

7. This poor timing mirrors that of a number of other important consultations, including the initial teacher training market review. We would strongly encourage the government to resist what is starting to feel like a habit of inappropriately timed consultations, if they genuinely wish to seek the views of stakeholders on such crucial issues.

C. Responses to specific questions

Part 1: Behaviour management strategies

Question 7: What new or refreshed whole school behaviour practices did you develop during the COVID pandemic? What was particularly effective and what will you continue to implement after restrictions are lifted?

8. ASCL believes that behaviour management should be relational and aim to understand conduct through the lens of a child's prior experiences. Structure, routines and consistency are key to providing a safe and secure school environment within which all children and young people can thrive.

9. Many schools were able to adopt new practices and improve existing approaches to behaviour(s) during the course of the pandemic and particularly on return to school in March 2021. A number of adaptations were made, most notably in relation to
   a) pastoral systems
   b) the structure of the school day
   c) relationships with pupils
   d) relationships with parents and families
   e) classroom organisation
   f) the use of school space

   Examples of developments in each of these areas are shared below.

a) *Restructure and reinforcement of pastoral systems*

10. Pastoral leaders in several of the schools which contributed to this consultation response took on more specific, purposeful roles on returning to school in March 2021. Pastoral leaders became more important for proactively supporting positive behaviour – rather than responding reactively, as was more common pre-pandemic.

11. Schools reported using middle leaders more effectively as part of their pastoral system. Middle leaders were called upon to monitor new systems and to support and challenge tutors.

12. Keeping bubbles together allowed year groups to form more of a community and helped the school focus in on their needs more, meaning management became easier.

b) *Restructure of the school day*

13. Staggering the end of the school day led to calmer and more orderly ends to the day (particularly in city schools), and to fewer complaints of anti-social behaviour. Several schools reported that they plan to maintain this arrangement post-pandemic.

14. One-way systems worked well and will be maintained in some schools, although some schools felt strongly there is a danger that systems such as these become more 'rules'

to be followed and require maintenance through monitoring and sanction, with little difference being made to outcomes.

15. Systems that had obvious benefits to virus reduction are likely to be more effective in the long term in changing behaviours and reducing risk. Many schools with narrow corridors had already instigated a one-way protocol pre-pandemic; this a good example of children being able to see the reason for a rule.

c) Relationship building with pupils

16. Lockdown schooling on-site, for the most vulnerable, enabled positive relationships to be formed with children and adults who the child may not have spent time with before.

17. School staff had more time (and generally fewer children in a class) so that it was easier for the positives of regulated behaviour(s) to be noticed and recognised (e.g. 'I like the way you are sitting', 'Thank you for letting me know you were upset before you came to school today. We'll take some time out to share a game with Freddie, to help you feel calm and then you can start your task.'). This type of reinforcement of normal expectations is enormously helpful for children who don't always know what it is they are *not* doing.

18. Schools which reported good behaviour systems during the last 18 months also recognised the importance of supporting staff wellbeing, through clear communication of risk assessments and the open communication of reasons for the mitigating measures. The value of supervision in supporting staff develop positive behaviours in children was also highlighted.

19. Where school staff were effective in self-regulating their own anxiety in relation to Covid, this was seen to have a positive impact on the children.

d) Relationship building with families

20. More frequent updates for parents and families to cite positive achievements helped to strengthen relationships with families.

21. Encouraging parents to take an interest by inviting them into the Google classroom when appropriate has had a very positive impact on the behaviour(s) of some pupils.

22. Some schools found benefits in identifying roles for older pupils as wellbeing champions, buddies and mentors to support younger pupils or peers (bubble systems permitting).

23. Setting up administrative support to ensure much greater capacity for home school communications about attendance, self-isolation, etc. has strengthened relationships with parents in some schools.

24. Recognising parental frustrations and difficulties in maintaining home schooling was also important. Where schools had systems to support those parents, or the capacity to provide in-school support where the difficulties made the children vulnerable, trust was built and maintained.

25. Liaison with early help, food banks and local charities also impacted on relationships between families and schools. Where parent trust and support for the school is high, this is likely to impact on the behaviour of children within the family.

e) *Classroom organisation*

26. Fewer children and fewer moves suited many children whose behaviour(s) is/are a result of their own anxiety.

27. Fewer changes of clothes (e.g. for PE) reduced opportunities for tension between peers.

f) *Use of school space*

28. Children and young people spent more time outdoors in many schools. Several schools reported setting up new covered areas in the playground which allowed pupils to be outside even when it was wet. Schools said they would like to invest further is creating all-weather spaces.

29. Similar benefits were noted from the use of forest school and outdoor provision in early years settings.

Question 8: What adjustments did you make to the implementation of your school's behaviour policy to respond to any adverse effects of COVID 19 pandemic on pupils? Please explain what was effective and not effective?

30. Most schools reported little change to their behaviour policy. Where changes were made, these were minor amendments to accommodate adherence to Covid regulations.

31. Schools that involved children and parents in redrafting aspects of the policy relating to Covid report that they had good success in implementing changes.

32. Several schools reported that children with the highest SEMH needs found the weeks leading up to the end of the summer term more difficult than usual, resulting in displays of aggressive or frustrated behaviour(s). This may have been as a result of fatigue, long-term anxiety, or changes to routines at the end of term having a bigger than usual impact. Limited transition arrangements for incoming Year 7s may also have had an impact.

33. Staff acknowledging their own fatigue and taking steps to overcome this, such as supervision, talking to colleagues, focused PPA time, etc. all worked well.

34. Schools stated that expectations may be outlined in the policy but the practice on the ground is developed through clear, consistent communication and robust school systems: "staff agency and ownership helps to deliver consistency and a pro-active approach to behaviour".

Question 9. Prior to COVID 19 pandemic, what pupil level practices or interventions did you find most effective in supporting pupils to address persistently disruptive behaviour?

35. Schools reported their reliance on clear expectations, shared values and a shared language for behaviour(s). Several schools referred to the importance of using language and actions to de-escalate behaviour(s) and how helpful this had been.

36. Several schools had implemented training led by their inclusion teams (involving pastoral leads, DSLs and SENCOs). Training included:
   - de-escalation strategies
   - communication and language

- meeting ASC needs
- trauma-informed practice
- parental engagement (Parents and carers of children who frequently disrupt or show aggression often feel ostracised, marginalised, blamed or blame themselves. Clear systems for regular non-judgemental contact makes a difference.)
- behaviour tracking which allowed monitoring of hot spots of behaviours and provided better understanding of triggers

37. One MAT leader reflected: "We have consistently monitored behaviour and exclusions and have found our most vulnerable are most likely to be excluded – those with SEND and particularly SEMH, and also those identified as SEMH who are actually SLCN. Covid has allowed us to pause and reflect, consider the appropriateness of behavioural approaches and take account of the increased stress and anxiety a global pandemic has on pupils."

Question 10: Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, what practices or interventions did you find were most effective for addressing low level disruptive behaviour?

38. Examples from ASCL members of the most effective pre-pandemic interventions included:
- restorative practices, including restoring relationships and making apologies
- thrive interventions, particularly in primary schools (one trust reported a dramatic reduction in sanctions and in exclusions after implementing this approach)
- shared expectations and language used by staff and recognised by pupils
- same-day detentions
- therapeutic interventions such as ELSA, Drawing and Talking, Place2Be

39. Schools noted that it was important not just to respond with support for children who display 'loud' behaviours, but to be aware of quieter changes in behaviours in order to identify those who may also need support: "Respond to the 'whispers of behaviour' before they become the 'shouts'."

Question 11: Prior to the COVID 19 pandemic, what pupil level practices or interventions have been effective for pupils with particular vulnerabilities? Which of these approaches helped to better understand triggers?

40. Training that has helped teachers the most has been where they were helped to understand the cause of poor behaviour, rather than simply deal with the symptoms. Most cited were the use of thrive interventions and trauma-informed practice.

41. Examples of 'what worked' also included:
- PEAP (Pre-Exclusion Assessment Process) using structured conversations between inclusion specialists and headteachers to understand the factors contributing to exclusions or those at risk (this has led to a 50% reduction in exclusions in one school)
- pupil engagement in evaluating their own achievement towards work, language and safety points for each session and debriefing where these were not earned
- the use of 'silent soaps' – watching clips from soaps such as Coronation Street or EastEnders with the sound muted to recognise signs of aggression in body language, particularly for those children whose body language often gives different messages from their verbal communication
- box of feelings

- Anna Freud Centre resources aimed at young people and children, e.g. the animation 'We all have mental health'

42. Feedback from members strongly suggests that good preparation for teaching pre-pandemic was the result of effective ongoing whole school professional development. Particularly helpful was training that focused on positive relationship building and understanding anti-social behaviour, and how to respond rather than react.

Question 12: What challenges would or do you face in banning mobile phones from the school day and do you have any concerns about banning phones from the school day?

43. ASCL believes strongly that the use of mobile phones during the school day should be determined by school leaders, who are best placed to decide on the impact of these decisions on their pupils' learning and wellbeing.

44. All the schools which fed into this consultation response had a robust and well-established policy on mobile phone use. These policies ranged from schools where phones remained in a pupil's bag all day to schools where certain subjects had clearly defined opportunities for using phones to aid learning or retention.

45. For example, one leader told us that "We have a strict policy that phones are kept in bags and switched off. It is well established and respected by pupils. Pupils with SEND often use their phones as a support tool in class, e.g. they take photos of work/instructions on the board that they haven't managed to get into their books quickly enough. Sometimes they use their phones to manage timekeeping. This works well and is agreed by the SENCo."

46. All the schools we consulted in bringing together this response placed clear limits on the use of mobile phones during the school day. They also recognised that this is an important form of communication for young people and safe use, which needs to be taught as a positive and essential part of the RSE curriculum.

47. School leaders unanimously agreed that different strategies were appropriate for different school contexts. For example, a school where the use of mobile phones was being used to communicate with gangs was utterly different from a school where leaders felt inclusivity was being enhanced through the use of digital platforms.

48. Many schools also reported different approaches for children and young people of different ages. All the schools we consulted allowed appropriate use of phones by sixth formers.

49. School leaders were also clear that oracy and good communication is hugely important, and that pupils were encouraged to communicate with each other during lunch and break times, rather than being on their phones.

50. Some schools described how their approach to the regulation of smart phones had changed over time: "There was a total ban initially but now we have clear expectations [around the use of phones]. Pupils can get phones out of their bags if the teacher wants to make use of the technology during a lesson."

51. Concerns expressed by ASCL members over a blanket ban on mobile phones included the following feedback:

- Year 7 should be educated about the safe use of phones. Where they are banned, it becomes even more important that they are encouraged as part of PSHE and RSE to consider the safe use of social media and are able to recognise and report online harms.
- A mobile phone can act as a safety measure. This is especially pertinent for children in the care system, either where they are separated from family members or in a transitional placement.
- Young carers can require a mobile phone to provide essential support to parents.
- A removal or banning policy can trigger poor behaviour fuelled by anxiety.

Part 2: Removal rooms and spaces

Question 13: Is a removal room used in your school?

52. ASCL believes that the term 'removal room' is unhelpful and stigmatising, and should be avoided.

53. However, many members identified the need for a space in which pupils can be supported to re-engage constructively and quickly with their class. Quiet rooms with low stimulus, where a child can be supported to use strategies to self-regulate their mood, can work effectively.

54. Keeping children safe from harm, including from harming themselves, is important and more research is needed on the purpose, practice and impact of internal exclusion.

55. In response to Question 15 below we have listed ways in which our members have described the beneficial use of additional school spaces to support re-engagement of pupils with the curriculum and with their peers.

Question 14: If your school has a removal room, how is it used? Please explain the place of removal rooms in your school's behaviour policy.

56. All the schools that we consulted which have any form of alternative space for pupils described the importance of including a rationale for this in their behaviour policy, and informing parents and governors about the usage and impact of these spaces over time.

Question 15: What factors are most integral to the success of removal rooms in managing pupil behaviour and what are the barriers to success? Please explain how this is used to improve future behaviour when a pupil returns to the classroom including any evidence you have of their effectiveness or otherwise.

57. Schools have told us the following strategies have led to constructive use of additional rooms/spaces:
- timebound – the time spent here shouldn't be fixed, pupils stay until they are ready to return to class and this timely return to the classroom is the ambition for every child
- children and young people feel safe here yet don't view it as a reward
- trained and qualified staff – there must be qualified teachers who are able to support pupils to continue working through the curriculum, as well as staff who are knowledgeable about the pupils and trained to support them to re-regulate their behaviours
- learning – opportunities to learn must remain a priority.

- physical intervention – where this is necessary for a limited period to protect a child or others from harm, then the wellbeing of the child, appropriate training and legal considerations must be paramount. Parents or carers should be informed of *any* restrictive physical intervention
- debriefing – children and staff benefit from the opportunity to separately debrief on what could have worked more effectively, once they are out of the full cycle of heightened behaviour and are able to reflect

58. One member commented: "We had an isolation room but it didn't work very well. We reviewed our policy and practice, deciding to trial more of a restorative approach where pupils came for relatively short periods and were encouraged to quickly return to class. We plan to review this again next year as we are concerned that some teachers become reliant on this as a sanction."

Question 16: How do you support vulnerable pupils, especially those with SEND, when placing them in removal rooms? Please comment on challenges, if any, you have faced in these circumstances.

59. The use of 'removal', isolation or seclusion rooms can be particularly inappropriate for children with SEND. However, there is a place for spaces that can respond to the need for a short respite from the classroom. The constructive use of any such spaces should form part of a school's behaviour policy.

60. As set out in our answer to Question 13 above, we believe the terminology of 'removal rooms', or the use of a room to isolate young people, is counterproductive. Separation from their peers fails to address the negative behaviour being exhibited by a pupil and can instead further alienate the pupil from their peers. This can result in pupils seeking to then 'live up to' their reputation for poor behaviour.

61. Children with special educational needs should not be placed in a 'removal room', or indeed in any room, that fails to support rapid re-engagement into the classroom

62. As we explain in our response to Question 13, it is important that schools use all means possible to re-engage pupils into their classrooms as early as possible alongside their peers. Research by Rob Webster and colleagues (SENSE Study 2017) tells us that SEND pupils are regularly separated and segregated from their peers rather than included. The use of any room to separate and segregate pupils rather than include should be avoided.

63. Where young people with special needs require a quiet or safe space for the purposes of de-escalation, additional support or restorative behaviour support, the following considerations must be borne in mind:
- Children and young people, particularly those with additional needs, need to be familiar with the space, to recognise how it is being used and why.
- Full access to the curriculum must be available so further behavioural repercussions are avoided and learning remains the priority.
- Staff should be supported through training and modelling to use these spaces in order to be responsive, rather than reactive, to the behaviour of young people.
- Shared expectations for rapid re-integration should be demonstrated by all staff.
- Adaptations should be made to help prevent the same issues recurring (e.g. allowing a highly anxious child to sit near an exit, rather than in the middle of a crowded classroom).

Question 17: List any individuals who are engaged with the strategic monitoring of removal rooms for example governors or trustees.

64. Governors and trustees should be aware of the use of rooms beyond the classroom. The SENCO, DSL, pastoral lead and directors of inclusion should all be involved in monitoring pupil movement and any approaches which separate pupils from curriculum learning and from peers.

Part 4: In-school behaviour units

Questions 18 to 24

65. These questions are targeted at individual schools and we are therefore unable to respond.

Part 5: Managed moves

Question 25. In what circumstances is it appropriate for a pupil to have a managed move with the aim of permanently resettling in a new school rather than a short term intervention to receive support in an alternative setting? Please identify your school type within your answer.

66. If done well, a managed move can offer a fresh start for pupils. But there is a danger that managed moves become permanent exclusions by default – exclusion by another name. Managed moves should not be viewed as a 'last chance' or a 'stepping stone' to permanent exclusion.

67. ASCL would like to see the piloting of short-term intervention strategies which seek to address the underlying triggers of negative behaviour(s) whilst supporting the growth of the individual as citizen.

68. We are aware of some trusts which are looking to trial a member of the 'home school' accompanying a pupil to alternative provision. This would allow the pupil to see their move as temporary and for the member of staff to learn from the expertise in AP.

69. Prevention strategies such as this are costly in the short term, but would prevent the costs incurred in supporting permanent exclusions and build capacity across school networks, allowing positive transitions back to the home school.

Question 26: Over the last five years, which type of school have you most often manage moved pupils into? Please select one below.

70. N/A

Question 27: What does effective engagement with pupils, parents, carers and other agencies look like throughout the managed move process? Please refer to any practice you may be aware of outside your own school, trust or local authority.

71. School culture is key. Where schools have existing and robust home-school communication structures, the baseline of trust can make these difficult decisions much easier and, where possible, a shared endeavour.

72. Pupils and parents should be given as much of a voice as possible, and also an opportunity for choices wherever this is possible. Where a managed move is imposed

there is heightened risk of an adversarial relationship developing between the family and the school.

Questions 28 to 31

73. These questions are targeted at individual schools and we are therefore unable to respond.

D. Conclusion

74. We hope that this response is of value to the consultation process. ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

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