

# An Acceptable Level of Violence?



## **EMBARGO 00:01 THURSDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2019**

*This survey was carried out by the 10 trade unions on the Education Trade Union Group of the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in October 2018 in response to concerns raised by members of individual unions in relation to levels of violence in schools.*

*1427 members of ICTU affiliated unions in Northern Ireland responded to the survey. 1133 were members of teaching unions and 294 members of support staff unions.*

### **1/ Is there a problem?**

1a/ Quantity (how often and to whom and by whom)

- *1 in 3 education workers experience PHYSICAL abuse annually*
- *1 on 5 receive physical abuse ONCE a WEEK*
- *83% have been VERBALLY abused in the classroom*
- *45% of verbal abusers are PARENTS*

1b/ Some education workers receive far more abuse than others.

- *88% of Special Education teachers have received verbal or physical abuse*
- *95% of support staff, such as classroom assistants, have been assaulted.*

### **2/ Who is responsible and how? – EA, DE, schools, unions, parents, ‘society’?**

2a/ **What can be done** to fix each stage of problem and by whom?

- It is a reasonable expectation that schools should be safe places with robust mechanisms to protect all students and those working with them – teachers and support staff.

### **3/ Are there broader lessons about:**

- Schools as workplaces?
- What training is available to manage violence and abuse?
- Austerity/ budgets – what has been the impact of cuts, especially to classroom assistants?
- Social media – what are the legal issues?
- Parenting – how much can be achieved at school if the real problem lies elsewhere?

## How much violence and abuse is really happening in our schools?

**We asked:** *Have you ever been verbally abused at your school or college?*

Yes	1,186	83.1%
No	241	16.9%

*How Often?*

At least once a week	27.9%
At least once a month	19.8%
At least once a term	21.2%
At least once a year	15.5%
Rarer than once a year	15.5%

*By Whom?*

Pupils	84.6%
Parents	45%
Colleagues	16.3%
Other	2.2%

**We asked:** *Have you ever experienced violence/physical abuse?*

Yes	665	46.6%
No	762	53.4%

*How often?*

At least once a week	21.6%
At least once a month	14.6%
At least once a term	13.1%
At least once a year	16.1%
Rarer than once a year	34.7%

*By Whom?*

Pupils	94.3%
Parents	3.8%
Colleagues	1.5%
Other	0.4%

## How did your school respond? How did you react?

**We asked:** *Did the school or college take any action to support you?*

Yes	327	49.8%
No	330	50.2%

*And did the school or college take any action against the perpetrator?*

Yes	261	39.2%
No	349	52.5%
Don't Know	55	8.3%

**We asked:** *Have you ever suffered an injury as a result of abuse at your school or college?*

Yes	304	21.3%
No	1123	78.7%

*And if you answered yes, were you absent from school or college due to the injury?*

Yes, for 3 days or less	13.9%
Yes, for more than 3 days	7.9%
No	78.2%

*Has your experience of work related violence physical abuse and / or verbal abuse negatively affected your working life?*

Yes	73.8%
No	26.2%

## What are the procedures? And are they being observed?

**We asked:** *Are all incidents of verbal abuse recorded?*

Yes	27.9%
No	44.8%
Don't Know	27.3 %

*Are all incidents of violence/physical abuse recorded?*

Yes	681	47.7%
No	492	34.5%
Don't Know	254	17.8 %

*How you ever been briefed by the principal/line manager on how and why to report a violent incident?*

Yes	495	34.7%
No	836	58.6%
Don't Know	96	6.7 %

**We also asked:** *Did your Principal/line manager report it to the employing authority (question only for Controlled and CCMS schools)*

Yes	13.8%
No	44%
Don't Know	42.1%

*If you were absent for more than 3 days did your Principal/line manager report it to the Health and Safety Executive ?*

Yes	3.1%
No	46.7%
Don't Know	50.1 %

*Do you know if your school or college has a Risk Assessment Policy relating to Violence against staff?*

Yes	318	22.3%
No	307	21.5%
Don't Know	802	56.2 %

*Does your school or college have risk control measures and/or procedures relating to violent behaviour in place?*

Yes	462	32.2%
No	259	18.1%
Don't Know	706	49.5 %

*Have you seen a risk assessment or behaviour plan for any of the students that you primarily work with?*

Yes	779	54.6%
No	648	45.4%

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## All Education workers are vulnerable to becoming victims of abuse,

- But some are more likely to be affected than others
    - (and they tend to be female...)
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We asked **Teachers**: Have you ever been **verbally** abused at your school or college?

	Primary	Secondary	Nursery	Special	All
Yes	87.3%	89.5%	76.5%	89.7%	88.2%
No	12.7%	10.5%	23.5%	10.3%	11.8%

We also asked **support staff**, including Classroom Assistants:

	Primary	Secondary	Nursery	Special	All
Yes	64.7%	76.8%	42.1%	91.5%	73.2%
No	35.3%	23.2%	57.9%	8.5%	26.8%

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### How often does it occur?

	Teacher	Support Staff
At least once a week	25.7%	39.6%
At least once a month	19.9%	20.8%
At least once a term	22.6%	15.6%
At least once a year	16.5%	11.8%
Rarer than once a year	15.2%	12.3%

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**We asked:** *Who have you experienced verbal abuse from? (Participants could select more than one)*

	Teacher	Support Staff
Pupils	84.6%	83.6%
Parents	50.8%	17.8%
Colleagues	15.5%	13.1%
Other	1.4%	0.9%

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## We asked about experiences of *violence/physical abuse*

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### Teachers

	Primary	Secondary	Nursery	Special	All
Yes	54.8%	29.0%	76.5%	88.7%	45.6%
No	45.2%	71.0%	23.5%	11.3%	54.4%

### Support staff

	Primary	Secondary	Nursery	Special	All
Yes	46.2%	20.7%	47.4%	95.8%	51.2%
No	53.8%	79.3%	52.6%	4.2%	48.8%

### *If yes, how often does it occur?*

	Teacher	Support Staff
At least once a week	15.8%	43.0%
At least once a month	15.0%	13.4%
At least once a term	13.1%	14.1%
At least once a year	18.3%	9.4%
Rarer than once a year	37.8%	20.1%

### *If yes, have you experienced verbal abuse from?*

	Teacher	Support Staff
Pupils	93.4%	96.0%
Parents	4.6%	1.3%
Colleagues	1.0%	2.0%
Other	0.2%	0.0%

## We asked about consequences:

*Did the school or college take any action to support you?*

### Teachers

	Primary	Secondary	Nursery	Special	All
Yes	56.1%	49.0%	53.8%	59.3%	54.1%
No	43.9%	51.0%	46.2%	40.7%	45.9%

### Support Staff

	Primary	Secondary	Nursery	Special	All
Yes	40.0%	47.1%	11.1%	30.3%	34.7%
No	60.0%	52.9%	88.9%	69.7%	65.3%

*Did the school or college take any action against the perpetrator?*

### Teachers

	Primary	Secondary	Nursery	Special	All
Yes	41.5%	53.5%	30.8%	37.2%	43.8%
No	53.5%	35.0%	61.5%	53.5%	48.4%
Don't Know	5.0%	11.5%	7.7%	9.3%	7.8%

### Support Staff

	Primary	Secondary	Nursery	Special	All
Yes	36.4%	35.3%	11.1%	10.3%	22.8%
No	56.4%	41.2%	88.9%	79.4%	67.1%
	7.3%	23.5%	0.0%	10.3%	10.1%

***Have you ever suffered an injury as a result of abuse at your school or college?***

**Teachers**

	Primary	Secondary	Nursery	Special	All
Yes	19.8%	9.4%	34.8%	66.0%	18.9%
No	80.2%	90.6%	65.2%	34.0%	81.1%

**Support Staff**

	Primary	Secondary	Nursery	Special	All
Yes	19.3%	11.0%	22.2%	80.3%	32.1%
No	80.7%	89.0%	77.8%	19.7%	67.9%

***If yes, were you absent from school or college due to the injury?***

	Teacher	Support Staff
Yes, for 3 days or less	12.3%	10.8%
Yes, for more than 3 days	17.9%	24.7%
No	69.8%	64.5%

***Did your Principal/line manager report it to the employing authority (question only for Controlled and CCMS schools)***

	Teacher	Support Staff
Yes	21.5%	13.3%
No	48.8%	30.0%
Don't Know	29.8%	56.7%

***If absent for more than 3 days did your Principal/line manager report it to The Health & Safety Executive?***

	Teacher	Support Staff
Yes	8.1%	8.7%
No	51.4%	30.4%
Don't Know	40.5%	60.9%

***Those who have experienced work related violence physical abuse/ and /or verbal abuse feel that this has negatively affected their working life***

	Teacher	Support Staff
Yes	82.0%	84.9%
No	18.0%	15.1%



## **Appendix: A Selection of comments from the Survey carried out by the Education Trade Union Group of Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions**

NOTE: The ICTU-affiliated unions whose members participated in this survey were: NIPSA; NASUWT; Unison; INTO; GMB; UTU; Unite; Prospect; NAHT.

- 1. I have been personally threatened by these pupils but have been told that they aren't a credible threat as they are teenagers with a 5-year old mentality.*
- 2. Support from senior management is minimal and if we suggest that more help is required we are told that there are no more funds available, class sizes have also increased dramatically to the detriment of staff and pupils alike.*
- 3. Teachers need more focused training in regards to mental health issues, ASD and substance addiction etc, in relation to how these impact on the behaviour of young people. The more we understand about where the behaviour comes from the better we can support and care for our colleagues and the young people.*
- 4. Class sizes are getting too big and we are losing our helpful teaching assistants etc. Staff need better guidance and ongoing training.*
- 5. One 7-year old told me he was going to stab my pregnant belly because he didn't want to do literacy... things are getting worse and nothing is being done about it.*
- 6. The children in my class are being schooled in an environment where they feel threatened and insecure due to a number of highly volatile peers, who at a moment's notice could lash out throw things, damage their property, be abusive or just generally unruly and unmanageable.*
- 7. As a senior teacher of 30 years, last week I was pinned to a wall by a P7 boy because I got in his way, the wall had coat hooks attached.*
- 8. SEN concerns seem to be stopping action taking place against pupils who repeatedly abuse staff, particularly in a verbal context. Sanctions enacted in the case of physical assault need to be stronger.*
- 9. Children with an education plan seem to be able to do what they want in schools as management seem to be afraid of dealing with incidents appropriately for fear of litigation.*
- 10. Violence between pupils is an issue and staff have not been briefed about procedure.*
- 11. Education authority referrals take too long. Students have progressed through majority of the year before initial meetings even take place.*
- 12. I feel powerless. We are expected to take it as part of our jobs!*
- 13. Schools can't afford enough classroom assistants to support these pupils.*
- 14. Schools have no one to turn to but their unions. There needs to be a support or advice hub for principals.*
- 15. During the past year, while I was pregnant I had 2 children in the class who were both verbally and physically abusive. When I requested assistance with these children I was told there was no funding and that I would just have to hold the boys' hands at all times to ensure they were behaving. This was in a class of 30 P2children - 10 of which have an IEP. A tough year to be pregnant.*
- 16. Repeated patterns of violent behaviour not being sanctioned adequately and therefore escalation of behaviours seen in school.*
- 17. Many staff are reluctant to report verbal abuse, as it may be perceived as being own fault; school doesn't want to acknowledge there is a problem as could affect future intake; SLT brush problem under the carpet and hope it will go away*
- 18. We need the EA to take a no tolerance policy! We require signage at every school entrance to say that it is unacceptable and that the school will call the police.*
- 19. Incidents of spitting, kicking, punching and throwing items by younger pupils are not expected to be reported by staff to senior management and are largely ignored by them. Only when older students ie 16-19-year olds display this behaviour is it taken seriously. The*

- vice principal witnessed me getting punched in the face by a 10 year-old pupil and said "oh were you not expecting that!" and walked away offering no help or support!*
- 20. Teacher are very vulnerable within schools and there are very little boundaries in place for parents/carers. There is a huge increase in behavioural, social and academic issues and needs of children within the main stream education and very little to no support in place from outside and internal educational agencies due to huge volume of children presenting with these needs. There are also very frustrated parents who often verbally vent and demonstrate highly aggressive behaviours and harassment of teachers and principals, when often the school is doing all it can following applicable procedures and crying out for help and sending letters and e mails for support and intervention, and before intervention is put in place it often takes up to a year at best! In the mean-time the class teacher is trying to put in place reasonable adjustments and do her best under so much stress, a single teacher no classroom assistant and class sizes for 25-30 children. It is simply not good enough!!!*
  - 21. Things get brushed under the carpet in schools so that they appear to be the beacon of light and hope for all however on the ground things are very different. Seldom do cases get reported or dealt with properly.*
  - 22. Employers need to provide policies to staff regarding their rights in terms of violence in the workplace as staff are wholly unaware of these rights. Employees need to be informed of the legal duty of care that an employer has towards staff as this is not the case. Clear strategies regarding how management will deal with abuse against staff need to be made available to staff with no grey areas, in order to protect staff, and these strategies need to be implemented in schools in the same way they are implemented in all other workplaces.*
  - 23. More spaces in special school to accommodate younger children with severe behavioural problems, even if they are not diagnosed with ASD. We have been told a child's IQ is too high for certain schools, they are too young for others and they don't have ASD diagnosis so can't go to other schools. For the sake of staff mental health and children in mainstream classrooms whose education is greatly affected by having to be evacuated from their classroom twice a day!*
  - 24. My neck was bleeding i was given cup of tea and five minutes later was back in classroom.*
  - 25. I am responding as a Principal. I try to be as supportive to staff as I possibly can. However, the level of assault faced by staff is unprecedented. In my own school we are averaging over 100 incidences per week in this academic year. Whilst staff absolutely need time to recover, debrief and reflect so that they can hopefully reduce future risks, the flexibility to do so simply does not exist, particularly when incidences happen with the frequency with which these do. I often feel like I am failing in my duty of care to staff but do not have the resources to respond adequately given the scale of the issue. Whilst your questions are welcomed, they do not begin to uncover the scale of what is happening. There is an acute need for financial support. The EA also needs to account for how they are responding to the risks that are being raised by school principals. The information that I am hearing from other schools would suggest that there is a significant corporate risk and that requires a co-ordinated response from the authority.*
  - 26. Staff should be treated with dignity and respect. So often you get no recognition of the trauma, or you get told to take 5 minutes. The adrenalin and cortisol is pumping through your veins and you feel light headed and sick but you have to pull yourself together and get back in class. I have known colleagues who were badly injured and the first aider wanted to call 999 but was over-ruled by principal (or sometimes even the office secretary) and told to phone their husband or wife to come and pick them up. I have felt very unvalued and low when after an assault, and knowing that there has been no consequence for the child, I have had to go back into class and support the child while they have laughed, jeered and boasted about what they had done.*