

## IS INDISCIPLINE GETTING WORSE? SCOTTISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INDISCIPLINE IN 1990 AND 1996

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### SYNOPSIS

This paper compares secondary school teachers' perceptions of indiscipline in 1990 and 1996. It also presents information on primary teachers' perceptions of indiscipline. Perceptions were derived from three surveys, sample sizes being 883 secondary teachers in 1990 and 561 secondary teachers and 825 primary teachers in 1996. Misbehaviours which were most common in secondary schools in 1990 remained the most common in 1996. These were typically low level, such as talking out of turn or eating in class. Violence against teachers was rare both in 1990 and 1996. There was a statistically significant finding about verbal abuse which teachers encountered towards them around the school. If this reflects a genuine change, it represents a rather more serious trend towards challenging behaviour around the school. The findings are placed in the context of research on indiscipline and in the policy context of social exclusion and target setting.

### INTRODUCTION

Discipline in schools, or more accurately, the levels of indiscipline in schools, is an emotive topic. This is so, because good discipline is seen as fulfilling two separate but related functions. First it is a means to an end, effective learning. Good discipline does not in itself guarantee effective learning but it is an important influence. An orderly, purposeful classroom with pupils actively engaged in learning at least provides positive conditions for learning to take place. Thus reports of disruption in the classroom, fights among pupils for instance, naturally create concern about the lack of opportunity for learning, and thus for attainment, and thus for life chances. Good discipline, however, is also an end in itself, an outcome of schooling. We expect schools to promote values such as courtesy, kindness and respect for others in their pupils. So reports of indiscipline make us wonder about the kind of society we are becoming and about whether the younger generation will subscribe to the same broad values as ourselves. This is not a new phenomenon. As long ago as five hundred years BC Socrates is quoted as saying:

The young people of today love luxury. They have bad manners, they scoff at authority and lack respect for their elders. Children nowadays are real tyrants, they no longer stand up when their elders come into the room where they are sitting, they contradict their parents, chat together in the presence of adults, eat gluttonously and tyrannise their teachers.

Discipline is also associated with academic subjects and with their standards of evidence and proof. The inter-relatedness of the concepts is neatly conveyed by Bertrand Russell in his observation:

... that valuable intellectual discipline of close research into a limited topic  
... needs the discipline of hard work and early rising.

(Websters 1986)

Standards of discipline are notoriously difficult to measure because of the context dependent nature of the interpretation of behaviour. What counts as indiscipline in one school or classroom may not be seen that way elsewhere. Even the same teacher may vary in his or her standard of discipline depending on circumstances such as the age or stage of the class, the history or reputation of a particular pupil, the time of day or year and the teacher's own mood. The 1977 Pack Report (SED 1977) on truancy and indiscipline was unable to report on the extent and nature of indiscipline in schools for this reason and confined itself to the itemising of contexts likely to create problems for teachers.

#### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDIES

Concern about indiscipline is long-standing. For example in 1675 the Synod of Aberdeen asked its presbyteries only to demand three questions of the school master: whether he makes the bairns learn the catechism, whether he teaches them prayers for morning and evening ... and whether he 'chastises them for cursing, swearing, lying, speaking profanities: for disobedience to parents and what vices they appear in them' (quoted in Smout 1987: 83-84). In more recent times concern continued to be voiced by teacher unions, the press and others after the Pack Report and in 1987 the Scottish Office commissioned research on understanding effective discipline in schools. Part of the work involved a survey of teachers' perceptions of the nature and extent of indiscipline in secondary schools. The questionnaire used was taken from that developed by Gray and Sime for the work of the Elton Committee (DES 1989), set up to investigate indiscipline in schools in England and Wales. It attempted to minimise the context dependence of teachers' perceptions by asking about the frequency and difficulty of dealing with particular behaviours encountered in the classroom and around the school during a specific week. The teachers were selected at random from a structured sample of one in four Scottish secondary schools; the sample structure reflected the overall picture of secondary schools in terms of size, percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals and denominational/non-denominational background. Full details of sample composition and the findings are reported in Johnstone and Munn (1992).

In the years since the survey, attention on school discipline has been sustained. Concern about bullying (Mellor 1993; 1995) about the rising level of permanent exclusions in England and Wales (Lawrence and Hayden 1997; Parsons 1996) and high profile cases of the breakdown of discipline such as the Ridings School in Yorkshire have kept attention focused on the issue.

There has also been a range of support measures for schools and teachers. These include packages on anti-bullying strategies, packages on assertive discipline and the development of specific techniques and therapies (Lloyd and Munn, forthcoming). Furthermore, it has been recognised that teachers themselves have a wealth of experience and expertise in promoting good discipline but that more needs to be done to share experience. Thus two networks, the Scottish Schools Ethos Network and Promoting Positive Discipline, have been established which enable schools to share information through writing about their experiences and talking about it face to face in seminars and conferences. The government has encouraged local councils to consider innovative and imaginative in-school alternatives to exclusion by providing a £3,000,000 grant. Thus indiscipline in schools continues to be a pertinent issue.

The Educational Institute of Scotland, Scotland's largest teacher union, believed that the time was right for further research on teachers' views. It therefore commissioned a follow-up to the 1990 survey, using essentially the same questionnaire. There were two important additions to the 1990 survey. For the first time, primary as well as secondary teachers' perceptions were gathered; and new questions on the issue of exclusion were added. These changes reflected concern

that indiscipline was an increasing problem in primary schools and that exclusion was becoming an issue.

In any questionnaire, responses are shaped by the questions which are asked. The chief topic of the questionnaires was in each case pupil indiscipline. The implication of this is the replies focused on problems and on negative aspects of school life. Furthermore, the surveys report teacher perceptions and necessarily take as unproblematic the social relations of schools, the cultural assumptions about these and the essentially contested nature of discipline in any school. Some commentators may dismiss such surveys as no more than teacher 'moans', encouraging unreflective responses and a search for solutions to discipline problems outside the schools. Nevertheless, the surveys provide important information on teachers' perceptions, a valuable prerequisite for policy development and provide evidence about the nature and extent of indiscipline in a systematic way. This is important given the emotive nature of the topic.

Our understanding of the causes of and hence the 'cures' for troublesome and troubled behaviour has grown over the years. In the past most explanations were rooted in the individual child who was seen as either mad or bad. Thus in the Advisory Council report 1950-1952 dealing with the education of handicapped children, four residential child guidance clinics were suggested as meeting the needs of 'pupils who are maladjusted because of social handicap' (Petrie 1978). The treatment provided by these clinics was in terms of psychiatric or psychological approaches. A different emphasis was that of the neo-biological causes of disruption, 'of children who showed an abnormal incapacity for sustained attention ... restlessness [and] fidgetiness' (Ferguson *et al.* 1997). There is much debate about the meaning, cause and treatment of this condition which is currently called attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder. A contentious treatment is the use of drugs to aid concentration and attention span. More recently, however, sociological explanations of pupil disaffection have drawn attention to the role schools and teachers play in promoting positive behaviour in pupils. Areas such as curriculum organisation in terms of setting or streaming, curriculum provision, teaching approaches, systems of praise and rewards for positive behaviour and pupil involvement in decision making about schools and classroom rules, rewards and punishments have all been highlighted as ways in which schools and teachers influence discipline. These sociological explanations, then, focus attention on things which schools can do to promote positive behaviour and provide a counterbalance to medical and psychological explanations which see the causes of bad behaviour as located firmly in individual children.

Surveys of teachers' perceptions are an important piece of the jigsaw of research contributing to our continuing understanding of discipline in schools. They provide glimpses into the daily experience of aspects of being a teacher. These glimpses are valuable in their own right and can be helpful in the further development of policy.

#### SAMPLES

In 1990, 112 secondary schools were contacted by the Scottish Office and asked to pass on to designated but randomly selected teachers the sealed envelope with the questionnaire. A total of 1,011 teachers was contacted and some 883 replied, a response rate of 87%. The teacher names were later erased to preserve anonymity. Thus the 1996 sample of teachers was a new randomly selected group.

The 1996 secondary school sample focused on the same schools, although the attrition of closure and amalgamation reduced the overall number of schools contacted to 101. A further two schools dropped out once contacted: the headteacher in each case felt that the staff would be unwilling to participate. We contacted 909 teachers; 561 replied giving a response rate of 62%, substantially lower than 1990.

Of these 561 only 7% were sure that they had been part of the 1990 survey; 21% were unsure and 72% were sure they had not participated earlier.

The primary schools sampled were those sending substantial numbers of pupils to the secondary schools involved in the survey. This allowed for a broad similarity in catchment and in pupil intake. The total number of schools approached was 426, of which 323 schools participated. The target sample of teachers from the 426 schools was 1,560 teachers, as we hoped to elicit replies from four staff members from the majority of schools (teachers of P1, P3, P5 and P7). In the event 825 teachers responded, a return rate of 53%.

It is interesting that the response rate was markedly lower in 1996 than in 1990. This is despite the fact that the 1996 survey was despatched at a time when media attention had coincidentally been focused on high profile cases of pupil indiscipline in England. We speculated that the response rate might have been boosted by this, but this does not appear to have been the case.

Our interpretation of the high response rate in 1990 was that the survey was tapping into a real concern of teachers, especially as many respondents took time to add lengthy comments at the end of the questionnaire. We might speculate that subsequent government attention on the issue of indiscipline has made participation in a survey less urgent. Alternatively teachers may be suffering from 'survey fatigue' or have too many other demands on their time. It is noteworthy that in the primary sample only 15 of the 426 schools refused to take part and yet no response was received from 88 schools. This might mean that in some instances questionnaires were not distributed to staff and so the response rate could be higher than we calculate. Regrettably, however, those choosing not to reply seldom explain why. We are, nevertheless, left with large sample sizes which give us a picture of teachers' perceptions of indiscipline in 1990 and 1996.

#### TEACHER REPORTS OF CLASSROOM INDISCIPLINE

Tables 1 and 2 below offer a general picture of the reported incidence of the listed behaviours, in 1996 and 1990. It would be inappropriate to interpret each and every behaviour as giving cause for concern, although the 'drip, drip' effect of continually encountering seemingly trivial behaviours such as talking out of turn, or calculated idleness was reported by teachers in 1990 and 1996. It would also be inappropriate to compare primary and secondary teachers' responses given the different ages and other circumstances of their pupils. The higher number of primary than secondary teachers reporting 'making unnecessary noise' and 'getting out of seat without permission' may be explained simply by the ages of the pupils taught.

The most important points arising from the comparison across the years were as follows:

- Pupil behaviours can be ranked in almost the same order; that is behaviours which were most common in 1990 remained the most common in 1996.
- For the weekly incidence of 15 pupil behaviours (table 1), the frequency increased in six cases, remained constant in seven and fell in two. Only one behaviour showed a statistically significant<sup>1</sup> difference between the two years. This was "general verbal abuse towards you" where the increase in incidence was significant at the 1% level, though it should be remembered that, with comparisons being made on each of 15 behaviours, one of them could produce a significant result by chance.
- For the daily incidence of 15 pupil behaviours (table 2), the frequency increased in thirteen cases and remained constant in two<sup>2</sup>. Four of the increases were statistically significant: they were "hindering other pupils",

“eating/chewing in class” and “cheeky or impertinent remarks or responses”, which were all significant at the 2.5% level, and “persistently infringing class rules”, which was significant at 1%.

*Table 1: Percentages of teachers reporting different pupil behaviours as occurring at least once during a week of classroom teaching*

<b>Type of pupil behaviour</b>	<b>% 1990 secondary school teachers (N=883)</b>	<b>% 1996 secondary school teachers (N=561)</b>	<b>% 1996 primary school teachers (N=825)</b>
talking out of turn	98	99	98
hindering other pupils	90	90	91
calculated idleness or work avoidance	90	92	70
eating/chewing in class	85	85	26
not being punctual	83	85	56
making unnecessary (non verbal) noise	80	80	84
persistently infringing class rules	72	72	65
cheeky or impertinent remarks or responses	71	72	44
getting out of seat without permission	71	71	79
general rowdiness, horseplay or mucking about	67	65	57
general abuse towards other pupils	66	69	64
physical aggression towards other pupils	50	50	69
general verbal abuse towards you	21	27	8
physical destructiveness	18	18	15
* sexist abuse or harassment of other pupils	-	17	7
* racist abuse towards other pupils	-	6	4
* sexist abuse or harassment towards you	-	3	0.2
physical aggression towards you	2	1	1
* racist abuse towards you	-	0.5	0.1

*Each percentage is based on the total response given for that behaviour.*

*\* Those behaviours marked with an asterisk were additions to the original 1990 list of behaviours.*

Taken together these findings suggest that the profile of indiscipline is not changing much and that there is more evidence of increases in daily indiscipline than of weekly indiscipline. It is noteworthy that very few teachers reported meeting physical aggression towards themselves at least once a week while the figures relating to daily encounters are almost negligible. Equally noteworthy, however, are the percentages of staff reporting physical and verbal aggression among pupils. We do not know the exact numbers of pupils involved, nor the contexts in which physical

*Table 2: Percentages of teachers reporting different pupil behaviours as occurring at least daily in a week of classroom teaching.*

Type of pupil behaviour	% 1990 secondary school teachers (N=883)	% 1996 secondary school teachers (N=561)	% 1996 primary school teachers (N=825)
talking out of turn	63	65	66
calculated idleness or work avoidance	40	43	20
hindering other pupils	37	44	41
eating/chewing in class	36	42	3
making unnecessary (non-verbal) noise	31	36	39
not being punctual	24	25	12
persistently infringing class rules	20	26	20
getting out of seat without permission	20	24	31
cheeky or impertinent remarks or responses	17	22	9
general rowdiness, horseplay or mucking about	14	18	11
general verbal abuse towards other pupils	14	17	11
physical aggression towards other pupils	7	8	13
general verbal abuse towards you	2	3	1
physical destructiveness	2	2	1
* sexist abuse or harassment of other pupils	-	1	1
* sexist abuse or harassment towards you	-	nil	0.1
physical aggression towards you	-	nil	0.1
* racist abuse towards other pupils	-	nil	nil
* racist abuse towards you	-	nil	nil

*Each percentage is based on the total response given for that behaviour.*

*\* Those behaviours marked with an asterisk were additions to the original 1990 list of behaviours.*

and verbal aggression occurred, nor indeed whether pupils were intimidated, upset or took such behaviours in their stride. For some pupils, no doubt, coping with such an environment is part of growing up and poses few real problems. For others, however, such an environment can be ultimately destructive as research in bullying shows (Tattum and Tattum 1992; Cowie *et al.* 1992).

The presence of specific pupil behaviours does not necessarily mean that teachers found these behaviours difficult to deal with. The data on which table 3 below is based show that in 1990 just over 5 in 10 reported a particularly difficult behaviour while for the 1996 sample the proportions were smaller with about 4 in 10 secondary teachers and under 3 in 10 primary finding some behaviour difficult to deal with. Most behaviour tended to be difficult to deal with because of specific pupils and situations as much as the behaviour itself. When specific behaviours were examined the percentages of teachers reporting difficulties were quite small. Table 3 shows a sample of behaviours found difficult by the 1996 secondary teachers.

*Table 3: Particularly difficult behaviours as reported by secondary school teachers in 1996*

<b>Behaviour in the classroom</b> <b>(total N of teachers = 561)</b>	<b>number of teachers reporting this</b>	<b>teachers finding this difficult</b>	
		<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
talking out of turn	553	68	12
calculated idleness or work avoidance	514	51	10
cheek	403	15	4
verbal abuse towards other pupils	386	17	4
physical aggression towards other pupils	279	2	1
verbal abuse towards the teacher	162	15	9
physical aggression towards the teacher	6	1	17

*Each percentage is based on the total response given for that behaviour.*

The following comments from a secondary school and a primary teacher sum up the situation of the majority:

It's the repeated dealing with these silly things (talking out of turn, stopping others from working, etc) which is so wearisome and soul-destroying.

Secondary school teacher

The daily repetition of sit still, listen, put that pencil down, keep your hands/feet to yourself, don't push, don't kick, why did you hit her? - it's all exhausting and wears the teacher down.

Primary school teacher

TEACHER REPORTS OF INDISCIPLINE AROUND THE SCHOOL

As with classroom behaviours, teachers were given a list of pupil behaviours to be met around the school. Again the findings are striking for their similarity between 1990 and 1996.

*Table 4: Percentages of teachers reporting difficult pupil behaviours as occurring at least once during a week around the school.*

Type of pupil behaviour	% 1990 secondary school teachers (N=883)	% 1996 secondary school teachers (N=561)	% 1996 primary school teachers (N=825)
showing lack of concern for others	90	93	88
running in the corridors	87	91	86
persistently infringing rules	84	90	63
unruliness while waiting	84	88	83
general rowdiness, horseplay or mucking about	84	88	75
loitering in 'prohibited' areas	75	75	50
general verbal abuse towards other pupils	75	77	65
cheeky impertinent remarks or responses	70	74	52
physical aggression towards other pupils	67	69	77
leaving school premises without permission	44	40	10
physical destructiveness	32	29	16
general verbal abuse towards you	15	24	7
* sexist abuse or harassment of other pupils	-	17	5
* racist abuse towards other pupils	-	6	5
physical aggression towards you	1.5	2	0.6
* sexist abuse or harassment towards you	-	1	0.6
* racist abuse towards you	-	0.4	0.8

*Respondents who missed out particular behaviours averaged around 0.5%.*

*\* Those behaviours marked with an asterisk were additions to the original 1990 list of behaviours.*

Again the profile of indiscipline seems to have changed little between 1990 and 1996 with the order of frequency being much the same. Of the 13 behaviours for which comparison is possible, there were increases in 10 cases and decreases in two while one remained constant. Five of the 13 increases were significant: “running in the corridors” was significant at the 5% level, “unruliness while waiting” and “general rowdiness, horseplay or mucking about” at the 2.5% level, “persistently infringing rules” at the 0.5% level and “general verbal abuse towards you” at the 0.1% level. With the exception of the last of these, these increases are confined to indiscipline of a relatively minor nature but the increase of verbal abuse towards the teacher from 15% to 24% would, if it reflects a genuine change, represent a rather more serious trend towards challenging behaviour around the school.

It is difficult to paint an accurate picture of school life as we do not know the number of pupils exhibiting these behaviours. Nevertheless the high percentages of teachers reporting overall rule breaking and unruliness gives an impression of a somewhat turbulent general climate in schools. In an attempt to gauge this, teachers were asked in 1996 what proportions of pupils were difficult. About one third of secondary teachers and 15% of primary teachers reported having “several” difficult pupils in their classes. Teachers tended to characterise difficult pupils as male and of middling or below average ability. Interestingly enough, however, the behaviours exhibited by these pupils were no different from those of their peers, implying that the difference lay in the frequency with which the behaviours were encountered rather than their seriousness. This echoes recent research on exclusion from school where reasons for exclusion tended to be breaking school rules or insolence or fighting and reasons such as carrying an offensive weapon or supplying drugs were rarely given (SOEID 1997).

#### HOW SERIOUS A PROBLEM IS INDISCIPLINE?

It is a common view that standards of discipline are declining and that teachers are having to encounter more troublesome behaviour than in the past. We asked teachers both in 1990 and in 1996 how serious a problem indiscipline was. This question, also asked by Gray and Sime (1989) was intended to give a general picture of teachers’ perceptions. As Table 5 shows there has been little change for secondary teachers. Just about two thirds of the sample in 1996 as in 1990 thought that the problem was not very serious, minor or no problem at all, and the difference between the response profiles for 1990 and 1996 is not statistically significant.

*Table 5: Teachers’ views on the seriousness of the indiscipline problem*

	1990 Secondary school teachers		1996 Secondary school teachers		1996 Primary school teachers	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
no problem at all	20	2	4	1	73	10
minor	140	16	83	15	284	35
not very serious	402	46	279	51	312	39
serious	275	31	163	30	121	15
very serious	42	5	20	4	14	2

Table 6 reflects an attempt to dig a little deeper into teacher perceptions by asking about time being spent on indiscipline and the general quality of school life in terms of violence.

*Table 6: Teachers' further comments on indiscipline as a problem (1996)*

	Primary school teachers		Secondary school teachers	
	n	%	n	%
(a) time spent on discipline...				
has increased	361	45	286	51
stayed the same	318	39	190	34
decreased	131	16	81	15
(b) pupil violence in the school...				
is a problem	166	20	161	29
is not a problem	648	80	398	71
(c) pupil violence is ...				
verbal aggression between pupils	163	98*	155	96*
physical aggression between pupils	164	99	140	87
verbal aggression to teachers	71	43	111	69
physical aggression to teachers	16	10	23	14

\* Note that for section (c) of the table, percentages apply to the total of 166 primary school teachers and 161 secondary school teachers who saw pupil violence as a problem in their schools.

It is interesting that about half the secondary teachers perceived more time being spent on discipline, perhaps a reflection of the drip, drip effect or of paper based referral systems adding to the workload. The 1 in 5 primary teachers and 3 in 10 secondary teachers who see pupil violence as a problem is worrying. At best this could lead to uncertainty and unease with teachers and non-aggressive pupils feeling under threat.

#### DEALING WITH INDISCIPLINE

It is one thing to describe teachers' views on indiscipline; quite another to offer solutions to dealing with it. Although much is now known about strategies at school, classroom and individual level to promote positive behaviour, standards of proof are certainly not equivalent to those of medical studies. Recent research suggests that 'some things do work, sometimes!' (Lane 1994) and a good deal of innovative and imaginative work is taking place in schools. More needs to be done both to disseminate the work and to evaluate its effectiveness.

There are whole school developments such as promoting a positive ethos (SOED 1992a; 1992b) including aspects such as developing praise and reward systems (eg Hay 1997; Marshall 1998); and involving pupils in decision making through school councils and other means. Classroom strategies such as circle time (Mosely 1995) and co-operative learning (Johnson and Johnson 1984) derive from theoretical perspectives emphasising self-concept and aiming to enhance self-esteem. Other approaches assume that teachers could be more effective in preventing and responding to indiscipline in the classroom (Wheldall 1987; McLean 1992). Others again restate the right of the teacher to be in charge of the classroom (Moss and Rumbold 1992). A range of strategies is available to help an individual child or young person exhibiting troubled or troublesome behaviour. Many factors influence the selection and use of a particular strategy. Key among them are perceptions of the reasons for the behaviour, the age and stage of the child, the competence and confidence of the teacher, resource availability and the theoretical interests of any external professionals involved, such as educational psychologists or doctors (Lane 1994). Responses may also be influenced by whether the troubled behaviour is seen as 'curable' or enduring (Allan, Brown and Munn 1991). Thus approaches include counselling, anger control, learning or behaviour targets, the prescription of drugs such as Ritalin, brief therapy and the like (Lloyd and Munn, forthcoming).

Teachers were asked about the kinds of whole school and classroom strategies which they used and found most effective in dealing with indiscipline. We asked teachers to identify the priority action at whole school level for dealing with indiscipline. Table 7 shows the priorities identified by 60% or more of secondary teachers.

A striking feature is 85% of teachers seeing the removal of troubled children to special units as a priority. We know from Ofsted inspections of Pupil Referral Units in England (Ofsted 1995) that these are generally seen as ineffective both in providing a broad and balanced curriculum and in terms of reintegration into mainstream schools. The response from teachers can perhaps be explained in terms of the responsibilities of teachers for the general welfare of their classes as well as the welfare of individual pupils. A persistently troubled and troublesome pupil poses an acute dilemma for teachers. How much time, effort and other resources should be devoted to an individual pupil at the expense of other pupils to whom a teacher also has responsibilities? The priority of specialist off-site provision can also be seen as resistance to Warnock's definition of teacher professionalism in terms of skills of management of learning for all pupils (Armstrong and Galloway 1994). Armstrong and Galloway (1994) argue that the policy context of attainment targets and 'league tables' of school performance legitimates a perception of teachers' work as educating more able pupils. Accountability for pupil attainment linked to parental choice of school means that schools can be reluctant to admit pupils who risk damaging the school's league table position. More broadly perhaps it might be argued that as a society we have moved away from a reliance on community values and a sense of the social towards relationships based on contracts and the delivery of services. In schools this is played out as teachers providing expert services to pupils. If they fail to deliver or if pupils fail to respond, the contract can be terminated. Thus teachers' reluctance to teach troublesome pupils can be explained in broader sociological terms as well as in the common sense language of the wearisome effects of coping with disruptive behaviour on a daily basis.

Turning to other actions listed in Table 7 the three different categories of reply indicated that for every two secondary school teachers looking for support from colleagues, one sees this as in place already. Conversely, for every two secondary teachers seeking support from the local authority, one saw this as an ineffective option.

Looking in detail at the priorities identified by teachers, it became clear that there was no consensus around the single most important thing that schools could do.

Table 7: Secondary school teachers' choice of priority actions to improve school discipline (1996)

Yes, this is needed %	No, it is in place already %	No, it is ineffective %	
• offering more places in special units outside the school for pupils with behaviour difficulties	85	6	8
• establishing smaller classes	80	17	2
• establishing special units in the school for children displaying behavioural difficulties	68	22	10
• more guidance and support from colleagues for teachers facing problems of indiscipline	65	30	5
• more in-service training focusing on discipline problems and strategies	63	23	15
• more guidance or support from the local authority for teachers facing problems with discipline	61	8	31
• more counselling for pupils whose behaviour is often difficult	60	32	8

This no doubt reflects the different circumstances in which schools find themselves. Thus although 85% of secondary teachers thought that more places in special units were needed, only 14% chose this as the most important action to take (Johnstone and Munn 1997).

In primary schools the response was similar but not identical. Table 8 shows the high priority given to establishing smaller classes and special units. However when looking at the single most important thing to be done, for the largest proportion of staff, 29% identified smaller classes – far outweighing special units in school (9%).

Both Tables 7 and 8 deal with teacher responses to pre-specified categories. It is worth reporting that in the open response section of the questionnaire 65% of secondary teachers and 48% of primary teachers took the opportunity to write at greater length about a variety of matters relating to school indiscipline. A theme which had not been present in the 1990 open response was 'school action to promote good discipline'. This included descriptions of rewards systems, new policies or programmes of support from management (reported by 11% of secondary teachers and 15% of primary teachers).

At classroom level, as might be expected, a wide range of actions was reported by teachers with no single action being seen as universally effective. Most teachers used a mixture of verbal rebukes, humour and reasoning to deal with indiscipline.

This is a reminder of the context dependent nature of what counts as indiscipline and thus the wide variety of approaches which are available to teachers depending on the context.

*Table 8: Primary school teachers' choice of priority actions to improve school discipline*

<b>Yes, this is needed</b>	<b>No, it is in place already</b>	<b>No, it is ineffective</b>	
%	%	%	
• establishing smaller classes	73	21	6
• offering more places in special units outside the school for pupils with behaviour difficulties	72	6	22
• establishing special units in the school for children displaying behavioural difficulties	66	6	28
• more counselling for pupils whose behaviour is often difficult	63	26	10
• more in-service training focusing on discipline problems and strategies	61	24	14
• more guidance or support from the local authority for teachers facing problems with discipline	60	17	23

#### CONCLUSION

The consistent picture from the surveys is that it is the 'drip, drip' effect of seemingly trivial behaviours such as talking out of turn, work avoidance and hindering other pupils which seem to be most wearisome to teachers. Physical aggression towards teachers is rare and research on school exclusion in Scotland paints a similar picture (Cullen *et al.* 1996). Of the 4,733 pupils excluded formally or informally from school in an eight month period, 26 had been excluded for physical assault on staff; 19 for the possession of an offensive weapon; and 45 for the use or sale of drugs. This is not to minimise the draining effect of dealing with minor misbehaviours on a daily basis. It is to remind ourselves that popular notions of schools out of control, so beloved by the media, are mistaken.

Nor, however, are all schools havens of peace and tranquillity. About one in three secondary teachers saw indiscipline as a serious or very serious problem. Furthermore, teacher reports of pupil-to-pupil verbal and physical aggression are worrying, both in terms of the time being spent on this and so not on other things, and in terms of the distressing environment such events present for some pupils. It is reasonable to infer from such data that some of this aggression amongst pupils involved bullying including name calling as well as physical aggression.

A further paradox in the data is the divergent range of policy level solutions to the issue of indiscipline. On the one hand there is a recognition that there are things which schools can do to promote good discipline (smaller classes, teacher in-service training, promoting a positive ethos) but on the other hand there is the wish to be rid of troublesome pupils via special units. A sense of frustration about some parents' lack of interest in or responsibility towards their children was evident in some of the open comment about discipline. Teachers resented the fact that they were having to pick up the consequences of poor parenting for a 'substantial minority of pupils'.

It would be a pity if such a view prevailed. Occupied as they are with the day to day realities of schooling, it is easy for teachers to forget the important and beneficial effects they are having in Scottish society. Comprehensive education is popular in Scotland (Paterson 1997) and parents have a large degree of trust in teachers' professional expertise (Munn 1992). As importantly, comprehensive education is successful. Paterson (1998; 1-2) summarises the success as follows:

- examination pass rates S4-S6 as a proportion of the age group have risen, while standards of examination have not fallen;
- staying on rates into post-16 education and post-school education have grown;
- social class differences in access to schooling, in access to the curriculum, in examination pass rates, in staying on rates and in entry rates to higher education have all fallen.

This bigger picture of the successes of comprehensive education can be obscured from teachers by the nature of their work and by the lack of pre- and in-service training on education and social policy concerns. A more fragmented system which would be the result of the provision of more special off-site units would be more socially divisive, both in terms of gender - more boys than girls would go there - and in terms of social class. These units are unlikely to be filled by pupils from the 'leafy suburbs'. In their heart of hearts teachers know this, and they know that being a teacher has to encompass a direct and immediate concern for the social welfare of their pupils as social welfare is inextricably linked with educational welfare.

This is not say that teachers have also to be social workers or that they necessarily have the skills to tackle all disruptive and disturbing behaviour. It is to say that teaching is partly, some would argue wholly, about relationships and about socialising pupils into normative behaviour. Fullan (1991) says: 'Scratch a good teacher and you will find a moral purpose. The moral purpose is to make a difference to the lives of students.'

A concern only for the well-motivated, well-behaved and conforming pupil is to diminish the notion of teacher professionalism which would ultimately diminish all of us.

Government, however, has a responsibility to ensure that its worthy ambitions to raise attainment do not encourage greater conservatism among teachers by unsophisticated setting and reporting of the meeting of pre-specified targets. Teachers who are publicly accountable for attainment targets are inevitably going to be tempted to focus on the well motivated and well behaved, and be less tolerant of pupils whose behaviour risks targets being missed. It would be ironic indeed if a government devoted to combating social exclusion encouraged mainstream teachers to reject pupils who present disruptive and disturbing behaviour.

## NOTES

1. Statistical significance is measured here by the chi-square test for contingency. Strictly speaking this test should only be used when the samples being compared are independent. This was not so in this case as a minority of teachers features in both the 1990 and 1996 samples. It is unlikely however that the violation of this assumption was sufficient to invalidate the results of the test.
2. Although one of these was “physical aggression towards you” of which only one daily case was recorded (in 1990).

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