

## Khulisa's response to the Children & Young People's Mental Health Coalition's Behaviour and mental health in schools inquiry

**4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements. If the statements are not related to your profession, then please choose not relevant.**

	1 - Strongly disagree	2- Disagree	3- Neither agree or disagree	4 Agree	5 - Strongly agree	Not relevant
Schools are responsive to young people's mental health needs when dealing with behavioural issues	x					
Schools are responsive to young people's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) needs when dealing with behavioural issues	x					
National behaviour guidance and policy is effective in improving pupils' behaviour	x					
Behaviour management techniques used by schools are effective in improving behaviour		x				
Behaviour management techniques used by schools are fair when dealing with behavioural issues	x					

**5. In your experience, what do you think are the underlying drivers of pupil behaviour? Please provide any supporting evidence.**

Research suggests a close relationship between a number of underlying drivers of pupil behaviour and, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). ACEs hamper growth and development and can lead to a series of social and emotional difficulties that can have an overwhelming impact on a child's ability to engage, learn and succeed in school. These include:

- 1) Poor mental health - Childhood trauma presents a doubled risk of developing mental ill-health<sup>1</sup> which in turn is closely associated with exclusion from school.<sup>2</sup>
- 2) Poor emotional regulation - Trauma exposure leads to poor regulation of the stress response system. This has a close relationship with impulsivity and poor emotional control which is exhibited in disruptive behaviour.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chandan, J., et al.,(2019) "The burden of mental ill health associated with childhood maltreatment in the UK, using The Health Improvement Network database: a population-based retrospective cohort study" *Lancet Psychiatry*

<sup>2</sup> Ford, T., et al., "The relationship between exclusion from school and mental health: a secondary analysis of the British Child and Adolescent Mental Health Surveys 2004 and 2007" Vol.48 (4) (2018) *Psychological Medicine*

<sup>3</sup> Bright, MA., Thompson, LA., "Association of Adverse Childhood Experiences with Co-occurring Health Conditions in Early Childhood" Vol.38 (1) (2018) *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*

- 3) Learning difficulties - A child with four or more ACEs is thirty-two times more likely to be labelled with a learning or behaviour problem than a child with no ACEs.<sup>4</sup>

Research has also taught us that all children need the space to test and develop adaptive coping skills (such as the ability to confront problems directly, and how to recognise and change unhealthy emotional reactions). For many children, that safe space is their school. As humans, we develop our social and emotional skills (such as emotional regulation and coping skills) in early childhood, learning these skills through our relationship with primary caregivers. Children who do not have these responsive caregivers miss out on this and rely on other relationships to develop this capacity to learn new and appropriate relational skills.<sup>5</sup> Often, these secondary caregivers are their teachers. Unfortunately, time, resources, and capacity constraints coupled with an education culture which places attainment targets above wellbeing means that schools struggle to find the time to help young people develop these skills.<sup>6</sup> This means that for the most vulnerable children, the social and emotional skills deficit is widened by the lack of social and emotional support in schools. Without this support, as the evidence above shows, young people are more vulnerable to being labelled 'disruptive', being excluded and becoming further entrenched in their situation.

Given the importance of the teacher-pupil relationship (as described above), poor teacher wellbeing is another factor with the potential to negatively impact student behaviour. In the last year, 91% of teachers, surveyed by NASUWT The Teachers' Union, reported that their job had affected their mental health. They reported an average wellbeing score of 38.7, with a score below 41 indicating the risk of probable clinical depression.<sup>7</sup> This matters as poor wellbeing has been proven to reduce our ability to provide sensitive, responsive care which can, in turn, intensify the distress and aggression shown by young people who interpret the detachment of staff as rejection or abandonment. This in turn furthers the spiral of mental strain and compassion fatigue in staff and toxic stress and disruptive behaviour in the children under their care.<sup>8</sup>

Poverty is another factor with a close relationship with ACEs and 'disruptive' behaviour. Children from poorer backgrounds are more likely to sustain ACEs<sup>9</sup> and require support to develop their social and emotional skills (children with at least 1 indicator of disadvantage make up 81% of the young people we work with). They are also some of the most likely cohorts of young people to be excluded from school.<sup>10</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated many of these issues. 69% of teachers have reported a deterioration in behaviour as a result of the pandemic<sup>11</sup> and research by the Association of School and College Leaders found that children with the highest social and emotional mental health needs found the weeks leading up to the end of the summer term more difficult than usual, resulting in displays of

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<sup>4</sup> Plumb, J., Bush, K.A., and Kersevich, S.E., "Trauma-Sensitive Schools: An Evidence-Based Approach" Vol.40 (2) (2016) *School Social Work Journal* pp37-60

<sup>5</sup> Skuse, T., Matthew, J., (2015) "The Trauma Recovery Model: Sequencing youth justice interventions for young people with complex needs" *Prison Service Journal*, 220, 2015, pp.16-24.

<sup>6</sup> Donnelly, M., Brown, C., Costas Batlle, I., Sandoval-Hernández, A., "Developing Social and Emotional Skills Education policy and practice in the UK home nations" (2020) *Nesta and University of Bath*

<sup>7</sup> NASUWT The Teachers Union, (2022) Teacher Wellbeing Survey  
<https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/news/campaigns/teacher-wellbeing-survey.html>

<sup>8</sup> Winstanley, S, and Hales, L., (2014) "A Preliminary Study of Burnout in Residential Social Workers Experiencing Workplace Aggression: Might It Be Cyclical?" *British Journal of Social Work* 45(1):24-33

<sup>9</sup> Walsh D, McCartney G, Smith M, et al/Relationship between childhood socioeconomic position and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): a systematic review *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2019;73:1087-1093.

<sup>10</sup> National Statistics, "Academic Year 2019/20: Permanent exclusions and suspensions in England" (2021)  
<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england>

<sup>11</sup> TES, (2020) "Exclusive: 69% of teachers see Covid behaviour slump"  
<https://www.tes.com/magazine/archive/exclusive-69-teachers-see-covid-behaviour-slump>

aggressive or frustrated behaviour(s). They cited fatigue, longterm anxiety, or changes to routines at the end of the term having a bigger than usual impact as some of the causes of this behaviour.<sup>12</sup>

## 6. In your experience, what impact do you think the Covid-19 pandemic has had on schools' expectations of pupil behaviour?

There have been some positive impacts on schools' expectations of pupil behaviour during the pandemic. The Association of School & College Leaders, for example, found that schools, recognising the strain COVID-19 placed on pupil wellbeing and behaviour, placed a stronger focus on building relationships with pupils and their families.<sup>13</sup> Some schools have even begun reconsidering their behaviour policies, seeking to move beyond "hard" behaviour management strategies, toward approaches that are led by the knowledge that not every student shows disruptive behaviour for the same reason.<sup>14</sup>

However, the sustainability of these supportive intentions is threatened by cuts to funding and an accountability system that prioritises academic attainment over inclusive approaches. One only needs to look at the government's flagship catch-up policies which have focused funding on tutoring and closing the attainment gap over supporting the wellbeing of students. At a time when the social and emotional disruption caused by the pandemic has led to a 60% rise in mental health problems, the Education Select Committee found that schools have been left to navigate "a 'spaghetti junction' of bureaucracy" in order to support their students.<sup>15</sup> We will be watching out for the Department for Education's exclusion figures for the 20/21 academic year to see whether these challenges have led to unrealistic expectations of student behaviour. If exclusion statistics from the last school year before the pandemic are anything to go by, we expect this to be the case.

While figures released by the DfE for the 19-20 academic year show an overall decrease in suspensions and permanent exclusions, the data for the first term of that school year, before schools were closed, showed a rise in both permanent exclusions (a 4% increase) and suspensions (up 14%).<sup>16</sup> This was before the post-pandemic increases in mental ill-health and poor behaviour reported by schools that now have a much tougher job balancing children's reduced social and emotional wellbeing with unrealistic attainment targets - all while having to make cuts to their budgets just to balance the books.<sup>17</sup> Something has to give and often it's the poorest and most vulnerable children who suffer. Recent research suggests as much; 78% of children surveyed by Mind last year said that school along with attainment targets and deadlines made their mental health worse with the "overwhelming message from many young people [being] that academic achievement is prioritised at the expense of wellbeing."<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere, 48% said that they had been disciplined at school for behaviour that was due to

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<sup>12</sup> ASCL, (2021) "Government call for evidence on behaviour management strategies, in-school units, and managed moves" <https://www.ascl.org.uk/ASCL/media/ASCL/Our%20view/Consultation%20responses/2021/Call-for-evidence-on-behaviour-management-strategies-in-school-units-and-managed-moves.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Sharp, C., et al., (2020) "The challenges facing schools and pupils in September 2020" NFER and Nuffield Foundation [https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4119/schools\\_responses\\_to\\_covid\\_19\\_the\\_challenges\\_facing\\_schools\\_and\\_pupils\\_in\\_september\\_2020.pdf](https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4119/schools_responses_to_covid_19_the_challenges_facing_schools_and_pupils_in_september_2020.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, "Is the Catch-up Programme fit for purpose?" (2022) <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5802/cmselect/cmeduc/940/report.html>

<sup>16</sup> Department for Education, (2021) "Academic Year 2019/20 Permanent exclusions and suspensions in England" <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england>

<sup>17</sup> BBC News, "Covid-19 costs put pressure on school budgets" (2021) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-stoke-staffordshire-58973959>

<sup>18</sup> Mind, (2021) "Not making the grade: why our approach to mental health at secondary school is failing young people" <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/8852/not-making-the-grade.pdf>

their (often attainment-related) poor mental health, while 1 in 4 said they were put in isolation as a result.<sup>19</sup> That they were, in the first instance, met with punitive measures instead of support shows some of the pressures schools are under. Such a punitive approach is made even easier to resort to by government policy which promotes “heavier threats of exclusion and detention” as behaviour management strategies for schools post-pandemic.<sup>20</sup>

## 7. To what extent do you believe the below behaviour management techniques impact on young people's mental health?

	1 - very harmful	2 - harmful	3 - neither beneficial nor harmful	4 - beneficial	5 - very beneficial
Verbal reprimand		x			
Loss of privileges, such as missing out on break		x			
Whole classroom punishment such as the whole class being kept behind	x				
School-based community service, such as tidying classrooms		x			
Phone call home	x				
Being put on report		x			
Detention		x			
Isolation/removal rooms	x				
Fines/penalties for non-attendance or lateness	x				
Use of in-school behaviour units		x			
Suspension	x				
Permanent exclusion	x				

**Please use this text box to provide any explanation to your response to question 7 if you wish to.**

We would like to preface our response by saying that the extent to which these approaches are harmful differs on a case by case basis.

As a whole, the techniques listed above are all ‘behaviourist approaches’ which rely heavily on sanctions to manage behaviour. Behaviourist approaches take a surface level response to challenging behaviour, and encourage passivity, control and obedience in children rather than empowerment, autonomy and self-regulation.<sup>21</sup> In treating all children equally they also fail to account for different

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Willow, C., (2021) “After a year of Covid, a behaviour crackdown is an insult to England’s children” (*The Guardian*) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/apr/09/covid-behaviour-england-children-schools>

<sup>21</sup> Parker, R., Rose, J., and Gilbert, L., “Attachment Aware Schools: An Alternative to Behaviourism in Supporting Children’s Behaviour?” (2016)

needs and circumstances which means that behaviourist approaches disproportionately target children with special educational needs.<sup>22</sup> They also place the fault and the responsibility to change on the child regardless of environmental factors.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, while they are easy to implement for schools and the government, they can leave permanent scars on young people as they are by nature designed not to understand the root causes of distress (as a relationships-based approach would) but to shame the child, and to disconnect them from their learning environment. In short, rather than teach a child how to recognise and control their emotions, these approaches shame a child for not knowing how to do so.

Disruptive or challenging behaviour is often a manifestation of a child's distress when their needs are not understood or supported at school. Sanctions made without engaging with young people to understand why they are acting the way they are, only exclude and can further trigger a young person in distress furthering the cycle of disruptive behaviour. Comparatively, taking a relational approach that: a) co-regulates a child in distress, b) helps them label their emotions, c) provides structure and boundaries and d) engages in joint-problem solving with the child<sup>24</sup> is proven to reduce both school exclusions and incidents of students being sent out of class.<sup>25</sup> Such a relational model works because it reduces the need for rewards and sanctions in supporting behaviour by empowering students and improving relationships between young people and the adults around them.

The use of fines as a behaviour management strategy only exacerbates existing socioeconomic inequalities and risks penalising the poorest young people, including many who will have experienced trauma both during and prior to the pandemic, the most.

Furthermore, the use of removal rooms, suspensions and exclusions, in removing children from a supportive environment, can cause further distress and exacerbate vulnerability. Children with insecure attachment are more likely to perceive the world as unpredictable, and thus show more maladaptive coping. Rather than help correct behaviour, these approaches have a greater potential to further traumatise children who already feel as if they have no positive relationships in their lives. In fact, evidence shows a bi-directional association between psychological distress and exclusion with those who were excluded from school more likely to experience poor mental health and those with poor mental health more likely to be excluded from school.<sup>26</sup> This research suggests that efforts to identify and support children who struggle in school might prevent both future exclusion and future psychiatric disorders, while suspensions exacerbate both. Suspension and exclusion can also further harm children by forcing them to spend more time in the home where they sustained ACEs.<sup>27</sup> And this is without mentioning the dismal outcomes associated with the school to prison pipeline: 6 in 10 children who are excluded from school are cautioned or sentenced for an offence.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Webster, R., and Blatchford, P., (2017) "The Special Educational Needs in Secondary Education (SENSE) study"  
<https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/SENSE%20FINAL%20REPORT.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Harold, V., and Timothy, C., "Discourses on behaviour: a role for restorative justice" Vol.10 (2) *The international journal on school disaffection* (2013) pp45-61

<sup>24</sup> See: Babcock IDP, (2020) "Guidance for Developing Relational Practice and Policy"  
[https://www.babcockldp.co.uk/babcock\\_idp/Core-Downloads/Covid/Back-to-School/vlog5/Guidance-for-Developing-Relational-Practice-and-Policy.pdf](https://www.babcockldp.co.uk/babcock_idp/Core-Downloads/Covid/Back-to-School/vlog5/Guidance-for-Developing-Relational-Practice-and-Policy.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Rose, J., McGuire-Snieckus, R., and Gilbert, L., (2015) "Emotion Coaching - A Strategy for Promoting Behavioural Self-Regulation in Children/Young People In Schools: A Pilot Study" *EjSBS - Issue 2* pp130-157

<sup>26</sup> Ford, T., et al., "The relationship between exclusion from school and mental health: a secondary analysis of the British Child and Adolescent Mental Health Surveys 2004 and 2007" Vol.48 (4) (2018) *Psychological Medicine*

<sup>27</sup> Centre for Mental Health, "Trauma, challenging behaviour and restrictive interventions in schools" (2020)  
[https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-01/Briefing\\_54\\_traumainformed%20schools\\_0.pdf](https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-01/Briefing_54_traumainformed%20schools_0.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Department for Education and Ministry of Justice, "Education, children's social care and offending: Descriptive statistics" (March 2022)

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1059556/Education\\_children\\_s\\_social\\_care\\_and\\_offending\\_descriptive\\_stats\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1059556/Education_children_s_social_care_and_offending_descriptive_stats_FINAL.pdf)

While we do not support the use of removal rooms in principle, we do recognise that some students might have a need for a quiet space where they can be supported to self-regulate for short periods of time. These have been shown to be effective in helping young people to re-engage with their school work.<sup>29</sup>

### 8. To what extent do you think the following impact on how a teacher/school staff respond to pupil's behaviour?

	1 - not at all	2 - to a little extent	3 - to some extent	4 - to a large extent	5 - to a very large extent
Staff capacity					X
Staff wellbeing					X

### 9. To what extent is current government guidance on behaviour in schools promoting the mental health and wellbeing of pupils?

1 - not at all	2	3	4	5 - To a very large extent
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### 10 What impact has the introduction of the Department for Education's Behaviour programme since 2019 (this includes behaviour hubs, national behaviour survey, changes to guidance etc.) had on schools expectations of pupil behaviour?

We recognise that there have been some promising efforts made by the government to help schools adopt more nurturing approaches to behaviour management. This in itself is indicative of a change in direction in government thinking. The government's 2016 statutory Behaviour and Discipline in Schools guidance,<sup>30</sup> for example, made no mention of mental health needs, whereas subsequent guidance like the 'Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools guidance' in 2018<sup>31</sup> and the latest Behaviour in Schools guidance<sup>32</sup> acknowledge the link between behaviour, mental health and adverse childhood experiences and they both promote whole-school approaches and training for staff on how to support pupils under their care.

However, despite this change in language, on the whole, the tone of the Department for Education's (DfE) behaviour programme has placed more emphasis on controlling children's behaviour rather than on identifying and meeting the needs of individual pupils. We believe that doing so has, for the most part, promoted unhelpful, short-sighted and exclusionary expectations of pupils' behaviour.

One only needs to look at the government's behaviour in schools agenda over the last year. The

<sup>29</sup> ASCL, (2021) "Government call for evidence on behaviour management strategies, in-school units, and managed moves" <https://www.ascl.org.uk/ASCL/media/ASCL/Our%20view/Consultation%20responses/2021/Call-for-evidence-on-behaviour-management-strategies-in-school-units-and-managed-moves.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Department for Education (2016) "Behaviour and discipline in schools Advice for headteachers and school staff" [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/488034/Behaviour\\_and\\_Discipline\\_in\\_Schools\\_-\\_A\\_guide\\_for\\_headteachers\\_and\\_School\\_Staff.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/488034/Behaviour_and_Discipline_in_Schools_-_A_guide_for_headteachers_and_School_Staff.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> Department for Education (2018) "Mental health and behaviour in schools" [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1069687/Mental\\_health\\_and\\_behaviour\\_in\\_schools.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1069687/Mental_health_and_behaviour_in_schools.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Department for Education, (2022) "Behaviour in schools Advice for headteachers and school staff" [https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-absence-and-exclusions-team/revise-school-behaviour-and-exclusion-guidance/supporing\\_documents/Behaviour%20in%20schools%20advice%20for%20headteachers%20and%20school%20staff.pdf](https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-absence-and-exclusions-team/revise-school-behaviour-and-exclusion-guidance/supporing_documents/Behaviour%20in%20schools%20advice%20for%20headteachers%20and%20school%20staff.pdf)

roll-out of behaviour hubs - criticised for the opacity surrounding their operation<sup>33</sup> - the revisions to guidance on exclusions and the launch of the National Behaviour Survey have all been accompanied by disciplinary rhetoric<sup>34</sup> that focuses on sanctions, rather than on promoting supportive relationships, as a means of behaviour management.

Other examples of such policy include the Department for Education's (DfE) revised behaviour guidance for schools published earlier this year.<sup>35</sup> Through it, the government has proposed "a new national minimum expectation of behaviour." While the guidance also recognises that some misbehaviour is "more likely" to arise from SEND pupils and advises schools to "anticipate likely triggers" and put in place measures to support these pupils, this guidance (like many of the policies in the government's behaviour programme) fail to account for individual pupils' needs and how this might impact their behaviour. As per our response to question 7 of this call for evidence, and as evidenced in the Timpson Review,<sup>36</sup> blanket behaviour policies that treat every child in the same way set up the most vulnerable children up to fail.

In placing responsibility for conduct on pupils, government policy in this area, like many behaviourist approaches, has also perpetuated unrealistic expectations of pupil behaviour that fail to account for environmental factors. Children in schools today are having to manage attainment-related pressures and the impact that has on their mental health, all while coming to terms with the impact of a global pandemic on their lives with minimal support from their already struggling schools. As the joint leader of the National Education Union points out, "With all the challenges currently facing schools, playing to the gallery by talking tough on behaviour is the least useful approach the education secretary can take."<sup>37</sup>

As we said above, we are encouraged by signs of progress in this area. The DfE's recognition of the importance of wellbeing and the positive impact whole-school approaches can have on wellbeing and behavioural outcomes are all steps in the right direction. We'd like to see that progress in thinking reflected in policy and in funding for schools.

## 11. Are there any changes you think are needed in relation to government policy on behaviour in schools?

To start with we'd like to see a move away from the promotion of punitive behaviour management measures to more relational models of support for young people. The combination of overwhelming stress over a prolonged period of time combined with the lack of access to adult caregivers who can help them manage this stress during the pandemic exacerbated the potential for trauma and toxic stress in children. This is evidenced in the reports of increased mental ill-health in young people: they are 3 times more likely to develop depression due to loneliness as a result of the pandemic with

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<sup>33</sup> See: Gibbons, A., and Roberts, J., (2021) "What is the point of DfE behaviour advisers? ask heads" [What is the point of DfE behaviour advisers? ask heads | Tes Magazine](#)

<sup>34</sup> Adams, R., (2021) "Experts reject claim Covid has worsened behaviour in English schools" <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/apr/07/experts-reject-claim-covid-has-worsened-behaviour-in-english-schools>

<sup>35</sup> Department for Education, (2022) "Behaviour in schools Advice for headteachers and school staff" [https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-absence-and-exclusions-team/revised-school-behaviour-and-exclusion-guidance/supporing\\_documents/Behaviour%20in%20schools%20%20advice%20for%20headteachers%20and%20school%20staff.pdf](https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-absence-and-exclusions-team/revised-school-behaviour-and-exclusion-guidance/supporing_documents/Behaviour%20in%20schools%20%20advice%20for%20headteachers%20and%20school%20staff.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Timpson, E., "Timpson Review of School Exclusion" (2019) [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/799979/Timpson\\_review\\_of\\_school\\_exclusion.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/799979/Timpson_review_of_school_exclusion.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Adams, R., (2021) "Experts reject claim Covid has worsened behaviour in English schools" <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/apr/07/experts-reject-claim-covid-has-worsened-behaviour-in-english-schools>

effects estimated to last up to nine years.<sup>38</sup> As mentioned in our responses to questions 5, 6 and 7, taking a punitive approach (through the use of removal rooms, exclusion, fines etc) to manage children's behaviour only exacerbates their poor mental health and runs the risk of re-traumatising them.

We would like to see the DfE working alongside schools to minimise and end the use of these punitive methods of behaviour management. Instead, we'd like to see the promotion of a more relational model that prioritises de-escalation and lets children know they are valued members of their school and not problems that need to be 'removed.' Positive relationships with adults, also known, as Benevolent Childhood Experiences,<sup>39</sup> are the strongest buffer against the effects of early-life mental ill-health. Taking a relational approach to behaviour management is not only a more effective means of de-escalation (see our response to question 7), it has the potential to mitigate much of the harm children sustained during the pandemic.

To support this approach, we'd like to see the government's support for whole-school approaches reflected in policy. The reasons are simple. Many of the behavioural issues we see are a product of systemic issues and we need to take a systemic approach to fix them. By focusing solely on developing a young person's skills or punishing their behaviour, we lay blame and responsibility with the young person to fix the problem. The solution is to work with young people and address the systemic issues around them that cause and exacerbate their struggles, i.e. school culture, their relationships with adults/caregivers at home, at school and amongst friends. Ways of doing this include:

- Making a whole system investment that promotes wellbeing as on par with attainment. Many schools, despite their awareness of the positive impact a whole school approach to wellbeing can make, feel unable to implement it due to time, resource and capacity constraints in a system that places attainment targets above wellbeing.<sup>40</sup>
- Promoting social and emotional learning as part of the curriculum. Our own evidence, as well as international research, shows that social and emotional learning can have a positive impact on student wellbeing, behaviour and attainment.<sup>41</sup> They are also particularly effective for disadvantaged and/or low-attaining pupils.<sup>42</sup>
- Providing schools with the right tools and resources to support children with SEND and those who are struggling with their mental health. In this respect, the government's investment in Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) along with the roll-out of funding for the training of Designated Senior Leads for Mental Health are welcome. However, neither is enough on its own. Not only would we like to see both schemes expedited (35% of schools having MHST by next year, while great, means that two-thirds of schools will still be without support), we'd like to see more mental health and trauma-informed training for all school staff. Children with SEND, and those who are struggling with their mental health, are the most likely cohorts of young people to be dealt with punitively in school. Often, this is because teachers feel ill-equipped to recognise and support their needs.

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<sup>38</sup> Loades ME, Chatburn E, Higson-Sweeney N, Reynolds S, Shafran R, Brigden A, Linney C, McManus MN, Borwick C, Crawley E. Rapid Systematic Review: The Impact of Social Isolation and Loneliness on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in the Context of COVID-19. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*. 2020 Nov;59(11):1218-1239.e3. doi: 10.1016/j.jaac.2020.05.009. Epub 2020 Jun 3. PMID: 32504808; PMCID: PMC7267797.

<sup>39</sup> Crandall, A., Miller, J.R., Cheung, A., Novilla, L.K., Magnusson, B.M., Leavit, B.L., Barnes, M.D., Hanson, C.L., (2019) "ACEs and counter-ACEs: How positive and negative childhood experiences influence adult health" Vol.96 *Child Abuse & Neglect*

<sup>40</sup> Donnelly, M., Brown, C., Costas Batlle, I., Sandoval-Hernández, A., "Developing Social and Emotional Skills Education policy and practice in the UK home nations" (2020) *Nesta and University of Bath*

<sup>41</sup> Taylor, R.D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J.A. and Weissberg, R.P. (2017) Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child development*, 88(4), pp.1156-1171

<sup>42</sup> EEF, Social and emotional learning Teaching and Learning Toolkit, Nov 2018.

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/social-and-emotional-learning/#closeSignup>



- Increased funding for, and improved access to, Child and Mental Health Services (CAHMS) and other local services. Many of these services are underfunded and oversubscribed resulting in many children falling through support gaps.

## 12. Are there any changes you think are needed in relation to school-based practice on behaviour?

Inclusive approaches to behaviour are already something many schools are implementing. As the Commission on Young Lives found in their enquiry earlier this year, “just 10% of schools are responsible for 88% of exclusions.” Unfortunately, however, many schools “feel that the way the system works, and a lack of resource and support, leaves them with limited options to be more inclusive.”<sup>43</sup> Given the systemic nature of many of the problems schools are dealing with, we would like to reiterate that schools must receive practical and financial support from the government in order to implement the most effective changes.

Having said that, there are factors which schools can control as they think about culture, expectations and inclusion as they recover from the effects of the pandemic.

The first is a review of behaviour management policies and practices to make them more trauma-informed, relational and focused on understanding behaviour through the lens of a child’s experiences and on creating a safe environment in which all children can thrive. Our own experience, and a robust international evidence base, have taught us that in order to be successful at school all children need to develop secure relationships which enable them to feel safe, secure and positive about who they are. These are factors proven to have a positive impact on student attainment, wellbeing and behaviour.<sup>44</sup> We advise the schools we work with as part of our whole-school approach to:

1. **Focus on developing relationships.** This means relationships, empathy and helping young people feel safe should take precedence over other means of discipline. A child’s behaviour is often a form of communication and in order to be successful in communicating these needs well, they need to develop secure relationships that enable them to feel safe, secure and positive about who they are. The response to any misbehaviour then should be inclusive and focused on setting and maintaining boundaries with empathy. The first step of the emotion coaching process should be to co-regulate a child in distress. Unless they feel safe they will be unable to relate to others or engage in higher levels of cognitive ability, key to reasoning and consequential thinking.<sup>45</sup> They will also need repeated experiences of being co-regulated in order to regulate themselves. Next, teachers should focus on helping the pupil label their emotions. A child in distress may not be able to distinguish between physical sensations and emotions and may need an adult’s help to do this. While it is normal for children to be playful and challenge authority and test boundaries, research shows that relational skills can help

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<sup>43</sup> Commission on Young Lives, (2022) “All Together Now Inclusion not exclusion: supporting all young people to succeed in school”  
[https://thecommissiononyounglives.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/COYL-Education-report-FINAL-APR-29-2022.pdf?utm\\_source=The+Difference+Bulletin&utm\\_campaign=ad7bf69998-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2019\\_08\\_23\\_02\\_28\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_29e74ae5ec-ad7bf69998-43963927](https://thecommissiononyounglives.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/COYL-Education-report-FINAL-APR-29-2022.pdf?utm_source=The+Difference+Bulletin&utm_campaign=ad7bf69998-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_08_23_02_28_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_29e74ae5ec-ad7bf69998-43963927)

<sup>44</sup> See: Bodin, M. C., South, S. H. and Ingemarson, M. (2016) A Quasi-Randomized Trial of a SchoolWide Universal Prevention Program: Results and Lessons Learned. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 60 (4), pp. 449–476; Dyson, A. H. (2018) A Sense of Belonging: Writing (Righting) Inclusion and Equity in a Child’s Transition to School. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 52, 236-261; Keyes, T. S. (2019) A Qualitative Inquiry: Factors That Promote Classroom Belonging and Engagement Among High School Students. *School Community Journal*, 29, 171-200.

<sup>45</sup> Perry, B.D. and Dobson, C.L., “The Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics” in *Treating Complex Traumatic Stress Disorders in Children and Adolescents*. Edited by Julian D. Ford and Christine A. Courtois. Copyright 2013 by The Guilford Press

resolve low-level disruption without escalation through structure and support such as including the young person in the resolution of the situation.

2. **View discipline as representing an opportunity to teach and nurture not sanction.** When a child oversteps a boundary, practice-based evidence suggests that if they are approached with cold or cross tones we run the risk of pushing them into higher levels of stress which will trigger their defence response. A trauma-informed response, on the other hand, takes a nurturing approach to understand the reason behind behaviour rather than using rewards and consequences to promote or discourage certain behaviours.
3. **Separate a young person from their behaviour.** Ways of doing this include externalising language around behaviour that challenges (e.g. saying ‘we need to’) and internalising language around positive behaviour (this is language that celebrates a young person when they do something well e.g. ‘you did well when you...’).
4. **Provide different levels of support to children depending on need.** Whilst consistency of approach is important for children and young people to feel safe and secure, it is also important to differentiate expectations and approach according to a child or young person’s abilities, needs and experiences. Some children will need further support than others to help them develop the ability to understand & process emotions as well as clear plans shared and understood by all members of staff regarding regulating their behaviour and keeping them safe. Behaviour policies should outline the different levels of support available dependent on the child or young person’s level of need.
5. **Provide training for staff on how to look after their own wellbeing.** In addition to training on how to support pupils, we help schools by training their staff in how to recognise issues with their well-being and on how to manage their self-care in this challenging environment. Studies show a close link between the wellbeing of young people and their adults in their lives,<sup>46</sup> a fact that some professionals like teachers already recognise: 77% of teachers feel that poor teacher mental health has a detrimental effect on pupils’ progress.<sup>47</sup>

Such an approach as shown in our answers to questions 7 and 13 is proven to reduce both school exclusions and incidents of students being sent out of class.<sup>48</sup> These changes, however, depend heavily on schools having the resources and capacity to test and implement new and more inclusive behaviour management strategies.

### **13. What role do you think a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing has to play in behaviour management and support?**

Since 2010, Khulisa has worked with schools to deliver therapeutic wellbeing programmes for young people at risk of (re)exclusion. However, we know from our own evidence and from a growing body of international evidence, that improving a young person’s social and emotional skills will only go so far in improving their life outcomes. To create lasting change, we learned that we needed to ensure all young people are cared for by adults who are trauma-informed, and systems that are responsive to their social and emotional needs.

Following the evidence, we made a decision in 2018 to pilot a whole school approach to improving the social and emotional wellbeing of young people. This meant continuing to work directly with young people, while simultaneously creating school-wide changes which improved the relationships between staff and children to create a more nurturing school environment. We provide:

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<sup>46</sup> Bloom, A., (2018) “Teacher stress ‘spreads to pupils like a contagion’ *TES*

<https://www.tes.com/magazine/archived/teacher-stress-spreads-pupils-contagion>

<sup>47</sup> National Education Union, “Tackling Stress” <https://neu.org.uk/advice/tackling-stress>

<sup>48</sup> Rose, J., McGuire-Snieckus, R., and Gilbert, L., (2015) “Emotion Coaching - A Strategy for Promoting Behavioural Self-Regulation in Children/Young People In Schools: A Pilot Study” *EjSBS - Issue 2* pp130-157

- Intensive and therapeutic wellbeing programmes for vulnerable young people
- School-wide social and emotional skills development support for all young people
- Training for staff on trauma and how it affects children's social and emotional development
- Resilience training supporting them to improve their wellbeing and their capacity to respond appropriately to challenging behaviour
- Guidance for senior leadership teams on implementing cultural and policy changes to support the wellbeing of children and the good development of social and emotional skills (this includes everything from support on changing behaviour policies to advice on practical changes that can be made to classrooms and the broader school environment like not using the bell, developing peace/wellbeing corners and using inclusive signage).

In delivering this work, we also invested in a range of evaluations which seek to evidence the positive benefits of working in this way. The first of these evaluations looked at the change our universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programme, delivered as part of the curriculum, made to young people and the professionals who support them. Over 24 weeks and across two school terms we delivered our SEL programme to 501 pupils across two-year groups in Manchester. We trained the 15 teachers who co-facilitated these sessions on Khulisa's relational style of facilitation and coached them on how to recognise and respond to students who appear in distress or appear vulnerable during discussions (these pupils could then be referred to Khulisa for further support). We also provided group reflective practice sessions for the 14 teachers involved to review their learning and discuss any changes they have seen as a result of the new curriculum. This pilot showed evidence that the programme helped to:

- **Improve young people's resilience.** We observed the most significant increase in children with SEND (67% of whom reported increases in resilience).
- **Improve teachers' understanding of the needs and behaviours of their students.** In focus groups teachers consistently told us that receiving training on how to identify and identify pupils' needs has enhanced their confidence and their ability to better support pupils. In one teachers' words: "Since implementing the SEL curriculum project, the most significant change for me has been having discussions with students about their needs and behaviours that I haven't had before. I, therefore, have a better understanding of emotions and behaviours. This change was brought about just by me teaching the SEL lessons. Before the SEL curriculum project, I didn't have a good understanding of SEL topics and I had less empathy. Greater knowledge means I can impact students more."
- **Build trust and improve relationships between young people, their peers and teachers:** During focus groups, both teachers and pupils spoke about how the programme helped young people improve their emotional regulation and helped them better communicate their emotions. Teachers and senior leaders reported that in addition to leading to fewer behaviour-related incidents, these developments also helped improve trust and communication in the classroom. Students also spoke of how much they highly valued the opportunity to explore sensitive topics in a safe space with teacher support. Both groups felt that as a result of these conversations their relationships had deepened and that, and that habitually discussing emotions with pupils had increased trust.

As part of another pilot of our whole school approach, this time in London, in addition to providing targeted support for the most vulnerable and behaviourally challenging children at the school, we delivered a 21-day programme of training, coaching and supervision for school staff while also supporting the Senior Leadership Team with the development of school-wide policies and strategic reviews.

- Nearly 9 in 10 teachers (88%) reported that Khulisa's trauma training programme **improved**

**their understanding of trauma-informed care and the importance of self-regulation strategies.**

- Pupils reported **improved levels of resilience, wellbeing, and emotional regulation**
- On average, wellbeing levels for pupils participating **rose from below national average levels to above national average.**
- 81% of pupils reported using coping skills learnt on the programme (compared to a programme average of 71%).
- There was a **62% decrease in negative behaviour incidents** between 18/19 and 20/21.
- The number of **exclusions nearly halved** between 18/19 (170) and 20/21 (81).

While this is our experience, global<sup>49</sup> and national<sup>50</sup> evidence on whole-school approaches also shows a similar link between improved wellbeing (for both staff and students), stronger relationships with trusted adults and improvements in behavioural outcomes.

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<sup>49</sup> Giboney Wall, C.R., (2019) "Relationship over reproach: Fostering resilience by embracing a trauma-informed approach to elementary education" Vol30 (1), *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, Vol.30 (1) pp118-137

<sup>50</sup> Riley, K., Coates, M., and Allen, T., (2021) "Place and Belonging at School: Why It Matters Today" National Education Union <https://neu.org.uk/media/13026/view>