

Developing a positive whole-school ethos and culture – Relationships, Learning and Behaviour



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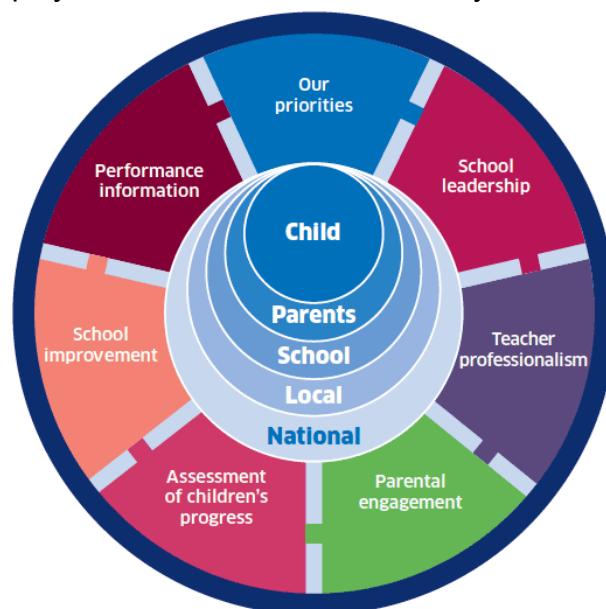
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Developing a positive whole-school ethos and culture – Relationships, Learning and Behaviour

Purpose

This document outlines new policy guidance in response to the *Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research* conducted in 2016 and published in December 2017. The Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools (SAGRABIS) have identified the next steps, outcomes and priority actions to support local authorities, establishments, practitioners and partners to further improve the ethos and culture, and relationships and behaviour in Scottish schools. This is central to the successful delivery of Curriculum for Excellence, implementation of Getting it Right for Every Child and the aspirations of the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the National Improvement Framework.

The **National Improvement Framework** sets out clear priorities to deliver excellence and equity and outlines a number of key drivers for improvement.



A positive ethos and culture which promotes positive relationships and behaviour cannot be delivered without strong school leadership which is authoritative and distributive in nature ([Dinham, 2007](#)). The Teacher professionalism driver is also key to supporting staff to be flexible, reflective and confident to deliver approaches that will support the individual needs of children and young people in their school. SAGRABIS recognises that parents and carers are key partners in their children's learning. Schools should engage directly with parents and carers and foster a positive and inclusive environment where parents and carers are encouraged to work in partnership with the school to develop consistent messages.

Children's wellbeing is at the heart of Getting it Right for Every Child. This means focusing on the wellbeing of every child to ensure they are safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included (the wellbeing indicators). It is essential when implementing the key priorities in this guidance that links are made with the priorities and drivers within other current legislation and guidance and

they are not viewed as separate aspects of improvement. The priority actions outlined below are designed to support schools in achieving better outcomes for children and young people in health and wellbeing which should contribute to improvements in literacy and numeracy.

This new policy guidance builds on and supersedes the 2013 publication *Better Relationships, Better Learning, Better Behaviour*. It highlights the need for a continued focus on the promotion and development of positive relationships and behaviour in order to improve a school's ethos and culture. Approaches to develop this learning environment should also be underpinned by children's rights.

What did the research find?

The full report and executive summary can be found on the [Scottish Government website](#).

Overview

- The majority of staff in schools report pupils as being generally well behaved. This is a pattern consistent with previous rounds of this research (2006, 2009, 2012)
- There has been little change in low-level disruptive behaviour in secondary schools
- Overall, there has been little change in serious disruptive behaviour in either primary or secondary schools. Serious violent incidents remain rare
- Staff ratings of school ethos were positive and broadly the same as the previous research. Most staff gave their own school ethos a high rating
- Analysis of a range of school and teacher variables showed that by far the strongest predictor of experiences of negative behaviours, for teachers and support staff in both sectors, was perceptions of school ethos
- The use of restorative approaches and solution oriented approaches increased between 2012 and 2016.
- Most teachers were confident of their abilities to promote positive relationships and behaviour and to respond to indiscipline in their classrooms

Findings for further consideration

- Low level disruptive behaviour in primary schools (e.g. hindering other pupils, work avoidance and making unnecessary noise) has slightly increased. Between 60-80% staff reported they had to deal with this at least once a day or more
- Primary support staff reported that they have experienced slightly higher levels of general abuse, physical aggression and physical violence towards them personally
- Support staff and teachers identified the most common low-level disruptive behaviours (talking out of turn, work avoidance, using mobile phones, making unnecessary noise) as having the greatest negative impact in the classroom
- There is a widely held view that a lack of both internal and external resources was having a negative impact on the management of behaviour

- Primary staff also cited societal changes (including the increased use of digital technologies), their perceptions of some parenting approaches and a reduction in the availability of Additional Support Needs resources to support children and young people with additional support needs

Ethos and Culture

A positive school ethos and culture (sometimes described in research as ‘climate’) is essential to developing good relationships and positive behaviour in the classroom, playground and wider community.

Following analysis of a range of school and teacher variables BISSR 2016 showed that by far the strongest predictor of experiences of negative behaviours, for teachers and support staff in both sectors, was perceptions of school ethos: those who gave a poorer rating when asked to rate ‘the overall ethos of your school’ reported that they experienced negative behaviours more often. This demonstrates the strong link between perceptions of ethos and behaviour.

A culture where children and young people feel included, respected, safe and secure and where their achievements and contributions are valued and celebrated is essential to the development of good relationships. In order to create this environment for effective learning and teaching there should be a shared understanding of wellbeing underpinned by children’s rights and a focus on positive relationships across the whole school community.

‘Climate’ and ethos are key determinants in promoting social and emotional wellbeing and mental health for all in schools. This is described as ‘core values, attitudes, beliefs and culture of the school and classroom’ and includes school ‘connectedness’ and a feeling of being accepted, respected and bonded to the school environment. School climate can also be seen as incorporating three essential aspects - engagement, safety and environment. These aspects are seen as essential to maintaining positive relationships and social and emotional wellbeing.

Scottish-based research also indicates that schools, where attainment is higher than expected for their catchment area, demonstrate positive relationships throughout the school community and that children and young people are involved meaningfully in decisions which affect them at all levels of the school. Research into authoritative school ‘climate’ indicates that it is one in which there is a balance between a high expectations and structure on one hand and warmth and support on the other. This authoritative ‘climate’ has been cited as reducing student dropout rates, improving attainment and led to less bullying and victimisation in schools.

Within Curriculum for Excellence and General Teaching Council for Scotland standards all staff are expected to be proactive in promoting positive relationships and behaviour in the classroom, playground and the wider school community. There are specific experiences and outcomes in Health and Wellbeing which are the responsibility of all practitioners, who have a role in:

- establishing open, positive, supporting relationships across the community, where children and young people will feel that they're listened to, and where they feel secure in their ability to discuss sensitive aspects of their lives
- promoting a climate in which children and young people feel safe and secure
- modelling behaviour which promotes health and wellbeing and encouraging it in others
- using learning and teaching methodologies which promote effective learning
- being sensitive and responsive to the wellbeing of each child and young person

Additionally, practitioners may find some of the 'Challenge questions' in 2.1, 2.4, 2.6 and 3.1 in How Good Is Our School (4th Edition) useful.

Teachers who are providing supply cover should be provided within a school's relationships and behaviour policy when they arrive in a school and be given the opportunity to seek clarification on any aspect.

Next Steps

Although BISSR 2016 shows that positive relationships and behaviour continues to be the norm, it also reports that there are areas that need to be addressed. Low-level disruption has increased between 2012 and 2016 and there is a need to better equip support staff with the skills and resources to enhance their key role in a classroom and the wider school community.

The Scottish Government and SAGRABIS have agreed to support schools to overcome the issues identified in the BISSR report through the following steps:

- Scottish Government/Education Scotland in partnership with VOICE and UNISON will establish a national steering group to develop a programme of professional learning for support staff to develop their knowledge and skills and enable them to continue to feel part of the school's team around the child
- The Scottish Government will continue to fund a development officer to develop and deliver a resource to support staff and children and young people to understand the impact of trauma, stress, bereavement and loss
- The Scottish Government will consider and act on the findings of the review of Personal and Social Education
- Education Scotland will continue to provide support to develop policies and strategies to implement this guidance and will continue to provide professional learning in approaches to develop positive relationships and behaviour

BISSR – our response

Priority Actions	SG/SAGRABIS /ES	LA	Heads of Estab	All staff	Partners
Outcome: All local authorities and schools have a relationships and behaviour policy					
In consultation with partners, review, develop, plan and implement policy frameworks which focus on creating a positive ethos and culture, underpinned by positive relationships and behaviour across the school community		<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>
Children’s rights and participation should be a key part of the life of the school and be integral to the policy. All staff should be able to understand how rights based approaches support relationships and behaviour and create a positive ethos and culture			<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>
Outcome: All local authorities and schools have a strategy or programme for providing professional learning to support the implementation of the policy					
Continue to use a wide range of universal and targeted approaches that promote a respectful and inclusive whole school ethos and promote positive relationships and behaviour, e.g. nurturing, restorative and solution oriented approaches			<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>
Staff should have access to leadership opportunities that will promote a positive culture of staff support and collaboration within schools	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>		
Develop professional learning materials for staff and linked curricular materials for children and young people to support their understanding of the impact of adverse early experiences and support the impact of skills such as self-regulation	<u>x</u>				
Develop professional learning on creating a positive ethos and culture at class and school level for Initial Teacher Education and newly qualified teachers	<u>x</u>				
Develop clear strategies to help enhance positive relationships and behaviour within schools, e.g. making use of attunement principles to enhance relationships, setting social goals in the classroom	<u>x</u>				

A programme of professional learning and support is developed for support staff in schools					
Through the steering group, collate information on the different roles/deployment models of support staff and present findings to SAGRABIS	<u>x</u>				<u>x</u>
Develop online professional learning materials for support staff	<u>x</u>				
Organise national/regional events to allow for enhanced professional learning and networking	<u>x</u>				<u>x</u>
Outcome: Parents and carers are actively engaged in the development and implementation of policies and approaches to develop relationships and behaviour within a positive ethos and culture					
Local authorities and schools should engage parents and carers as partners in the development of their policies		<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>
Parents and carers should be given opportunities to become familiar with and understand the approach that schools are taking to develop a positive ethos and culture and promote positive relationships and behaviour and model this approach at home		<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>
Outcome: Children and young people will be given opportunities to participate actively in policy making and approaches to develop relationships and behaviour within a positive ethos and culture					
Children and young people are given the opportunity to participate in the formulation of policy which supports positive relationships and behaviour and outline what approaches they feel contribute to this			<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>



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