

**The Children and Young People Committee  
Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour  
28 January 2013**

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Children and Young People Committee Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour.
2. The NASUWT is **the largest teachers' union** in Wales and the UK representing teachers and school leaders.

GENERAL COMMENTS

3. The NASUWT has considerable experience in dealing with behaviour and attendance issues in schools through casework and collective disputes and has produced high-quality guidance and resources on this subject.
4. This material can be accessed through the NASUWT's website at [www.nasuwt.org.uk](http://www.nasuwt.org.uk). Among the literature and studies that may be germane to this inquiry are: NASUWT Position Statement on Pupil Behaviour; Behaviour Advice; Risk Assessment of Violent and Abusive Behaviour; Gangs and Schools Report; The Big Question Survey 2012; Sink or Swim? Learning Lessons from Newly Qualified and Recently Qualified Teachers; Reflections, Renewal and Reality: Teachers' Experience of Special educational Needs and Inclusion; and NASUWT principles for the curriculum.
5. Through the work that has been undertaken in this field, the Union has identified several key factors that contribute to poor pupil behaviour and

poor attendance. These include a lack of parental support, low aspirations of pupils and families, lack of readiness to learn, lack of enforcement of school rules, and a lack of engagement with the curriculum.

6. The NASUWT notes that this inquiry focuses on the effectiveness of the Welsh Government's strategies for tackling many of these issues and will offer, where possible, views on the specific points of inquiry later in this response.
7. There are, however, some important factors that the Union maintains the Committee should be mindful of when considering attendance and behaviour. These include:
  - the effectiveness and clarity of school behaviour management policies;
  - the degree to which school behaviour management policies are applied fairly and consistently;
  - the effect that a failure to tackle the incidence of low-level disruption by a minority of pupils in a school can have on well-being and engagement with learning of the majority of pupils;
  - the effects that external influences, over which a school has very limited control, have on the behaviour of pupils within school and on their attendance at school;
  - the effects of the pressure placed on pupils through the high-stakes accountability culture that has been introduced into the education system due to the misuse of international benchmarking data, the School Effectiveness Framework, the Banding system and other target driven initiatives;

- the effect that the narrowing of the curriculum and the forensic scrutiny of pupils' work that could result through the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework may have on pupil engagement;
- the effect that the continuing underinvestment in education has on the ability of local authorities to provide the support services and alternative education provision needed to assist in addressing poor pupil behaviour and poor attendance;
- the effect that underinvestment in education has on the ability of local authorities and schools to provide teachers and other practitioners with access to the high-quality training and development needed to assist in addressing poor pupil behaviour and poor attendance.

### **SPECIFIC COMMENTS**

8. The NASUWT offers the observations that follow in relation to the points of inquiry on which the Committee has sought assistance.
9. Strategies in place to address behaviour and attendance, for example:

#### *Teacher training and development*

The NASUWT has maintained for some considerable time that the training student teachers receive does not equip them adequately for dealing with the behavioural problems they may encounter.

Given the shortfalls in this area of initial teacher training, the Union decided to develop and offer a course in behaviour management, and ensured that a condensed version of the training was offered to Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) at the seminars that the Union runs each summer.

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It may be of interest to the Committee to note that over the last two years it has become evident at these seminars that the training that student teachers are now receiving in the management of pupil behaviour has shown a marked improvement.

It is, however, clear from the attendees at the one day behaviour management courses, the NASUWT runs in Wales, that access to high-quality training and professional development is extremely limited.

*Provision to pupils who are Educated Otherwise than in School (EOATS) including in pupil referral units*

The NASUWT recognised the efforts made by the Welsh Government to reduce the number of children and young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) through the implementation of the Youth and Employment Action Plan 2011.

The NASUWT support the view that pupils are entitled to inclusion in the education service and to have their educational needs met. However, for a small minority of pupils, inclusion in the mainstream is inappropriate and access to specialist, alternative provision, of the highest quality, must be made available. Regrettably, access to such provision has declined in Wales.

The NASUWT maintains that placement in specialist provision, such as pupil referral units, should be viewed as providing a valuable passport to learning and a pathway to work for those pupils who, for whatever reason, have become disaffected with main stream education.

*Use of exclusions (including permanent/fixed term/illegal exclusions)*

There are times when, despite every effort made by a school, it is necessary to implement the exclusion procedure. Consequently, the

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NASUWT maintains that headteachers must be empowered to exercise their professional judgement in the use of exclusion and, in the most severe cases, head teachers must be supported in excluding a pupil permanently.

Such decisions must balance the interests of the excluded pupil against the interests of all the other members of the school community.

The responsibility towards all permanently excluded pupils rests with local authorities to provide suitable full-time education and to reintegrate excluded pupils as quickly as possible into a suitable mainstream school.

The NASUWT is of the firm view that:

- the use of targets to limit or reduce the use of the exclusion sanction is unacceptable;
- Independent Appeals Panels should not direct the reinstatement of pupils where the disciplinary process has been carried correctly;
- the Welsh Government should ensure that a properly resourced national system of high-quality off-site placements is in place to assist schools to avoid permanent exclusion and to support pupils who are permanently excluded.

The NASUWT seeks clarification over the reference to 'illegal' exclusions.

#### *Education Welfare*

The NASUWT recognises the valuable contribution that Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) play in attempting to combat truancy but is concerned that the combination of economic restraint and the reorganisation of the education support services may have resulted in a reduction in the workforce that deals with education welfare.

*Other general issues such as:*

*parental engagement* - as stated previously, a lack of parental support was cited by just over half the teachers surveyed as the most significant factor for the cause of poor pupil behaviour<sup>1\*</sup>;

*behaviour support services* – the NASUWT maintains that this is an area that has suffered, because of the requirement to increase delegation rates to schools and the restructuring of education support services, with specialist centrally employed staff who could be deployed to areas of need being made redundant;

*the link between food consumption during the school day and behaviour* – the NASUWT is aware that some foods can have affect the behaviour of some children but recognised the difficulties presented to school in attempting to control the dietary habits of pupils.

10. Support to pupils with Additional Learning Needs in respect of behaviour and attendance

As stated previously, the NASUWT support the view that pupils are entitled to inclusion in the education service and to have their educational needs met. However, for a small minority of pupils, inclusion in the mainstream is inappropriate and access to specialist, alternative provision, of the highest quality, must be made available.

The Union maintains that the decline in access to such provision can not only have a negative affect on the behaviour and attendance of those pupils who are deemed to be in need of such provision, but also on the mainstream pupils who and subjected to the indiscipline and disorder caused when such provision is unavailable.

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<sup>1</sup> NASUWT Big Question Survey 2012

## 11. Collaborative working arrangements

*Joint working between relevant agencies including, for example, education, social services, health, young offending teams, police, third sector organisations*

The NASUWT recognises that collaboration between various agencies is essential to the development and provision of an appropriate system that identifies and meets the educational and social needs of children who become disruptive, disaffected or distanced from mainstream education.

*Links to other relevant initiatives such as Families First, the School Effectiveness Framework, third sector initiatives*

The NASUWT acknowledges fully the contribution that such initiatives can make in tackling poor attendance and poor behaviour and welcomes the integrated, early-intervention approach provided by the Families First programme, but warns against initiatives that are based on expectations and targets, rather than on need.

## 12. The NASUWT trusts that these views will assist the Committee in this Inquiry.



Rex Phillips

**Wales Organiser**

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