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Behaviour summit: survey of education providers and support staff

1. Background

- 1.1 Many teachers have reported a noticeable rise in challenging and disruptive behaviours within school settings. These behaviours range from low-level verbal defiance and persistent classroom disruption to more serious incidents such as physical aggression. Such conduct not only impedes the learning of other pupils but also places considerable strain on staff wellbeing, increases workload, and stretches the capacity of schools to manage behaviour effectively.
- 1.2 In response to the concerns raised, the Cabinet Secretary for Education arranged a Welsh Government Behaviour Summit bringing together a wide range of stakeholders from across the education sector. Invitees include Head teachers, school workforce, policy makers, Local Authorities and teaching unions.
- 1.3 A data gathering exercise was undertaken to help inform discussions at the Summit. This included the design and distribution of a short survey to explore the experiences and concerns of education providers and support staff regarding learner behaviour.
- 1.4 This research bulletin presents top line findings from education providers and support staff in schools or settings about:
 - noted changes in behaviours that challenge or disrupt since the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic
 - the types of behaviour that present concern to teachers and the school workforce
 - perceived support for dealing with behaviours that challenge or disrupt
 - interactions with parents

2. Methodology

- 2.1 The survey was designed and developed by policy officials in the Equity in Education Division in collaboration with analysts working in the Schools Research Branch at the Welsh Government.
- 2.2 The survey, which comprised of five questions, was designed using the platform SmartSurvey.

- 2.3 Dissemination was undertaken via the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), Hwb¹ and the Welsh Government's Dysg newsletter².
- 2.4 The survey was open for two weeks and closed on the 11th of April 2025.
- 2.5 A total of 7,744 responses were received. This included 6,694 responses (86.1%) in English and 1,080 (13.9%) responses in Welsh.

3. Limitations

- 3.1 No demographic questions were included in the survey design. This means that responses cannot be analysed by geography, age, gender, role or length of service of respondents.
- 3.2 As this was a self-selecting sample, it cannot be determined how representative it was of different sectors, or teacher characteristics, and it is possible that practitioners who didn't respond would have answered differently.
- 3.3 The survey asked about respondents' concerns within their school or setting. They were asked to indicate whether they felt different behaviours to be of major concern, minor concern, not a concern or to select 'don't know'. The wording of this question allows some room for interpretation. Respondents may be either expressing more general concerns or indicating awareness of specific incidences that have occurred or are occurring within their school. Levels of concern may also be affected by events taking place outside of their school environment e.g. incidents reported in the media. Further qualitative investigation is required to provide clarity around this issue.
- 3.4 This analysis includes comparison between those working in primary schools, secondary schools, special schools and Further Education (FE) colleges. The number of respondents working within special schools and FE colleges was much lower than those working in primary and secondary schools and, as such, their results have lower statistical confidence which should be considered when comparing the results across settings.
- 3.5 No open text boxes were included in this short survey. Given the high level of interest in this topic, further qualitative research is required to establish the reasoning behind responses.

4. Respondents

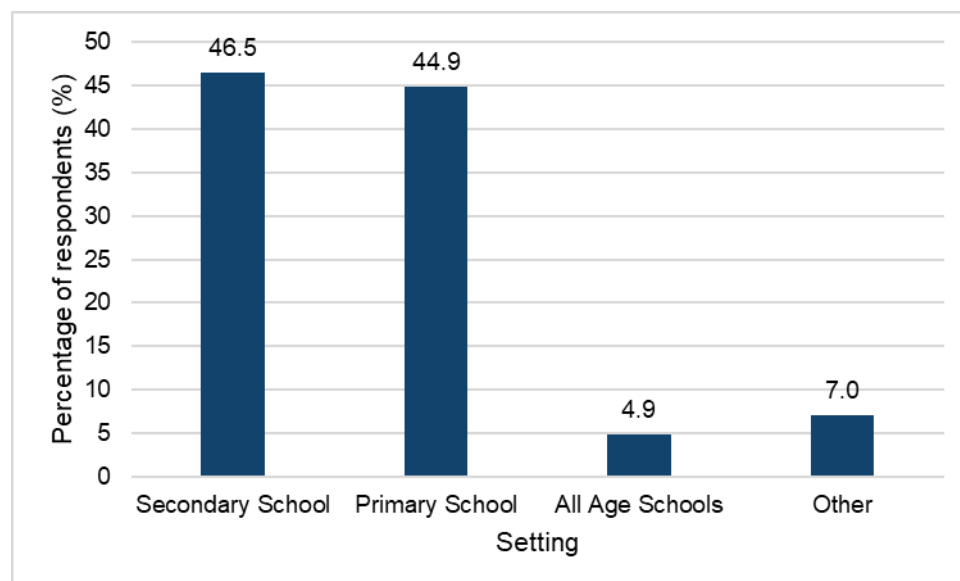
- 4.1 Figure 1 shows that most respondents work in primary and secondary schools, where there was almost an even split of respondents (primary - 46.5%, secondary - 44.9%).
- 4.2 Only 4.9% of respondents work within All Age Schools³.
- 4.3 'Other' includes but is not limited to those working in Special Schools (1.7%), PRUs (1.3%), School Sixth Forms (1.1%) and FE Colleges (1.8%).

¹ Welsh Government provides bilingual, digital services to all maintained schools through Hwb to support teaching and learning through the Curriculum for Wales.

² Dysg is the official education e-newsletter from Welsh Government. Dysg aims to provide updates and developments on education and training sectors in Wales.

³ An all-age school combines multiple stages of a child's education within one school. This would typically be from primary (Year 1 or Reception) through secondary school (Years 7-11) and sometimes beyond.

Figure 1: Which of the following describes the school/college you work in? (n=7,766)



Note: multi-choice question; percentages do not add to 100%

5. Findings

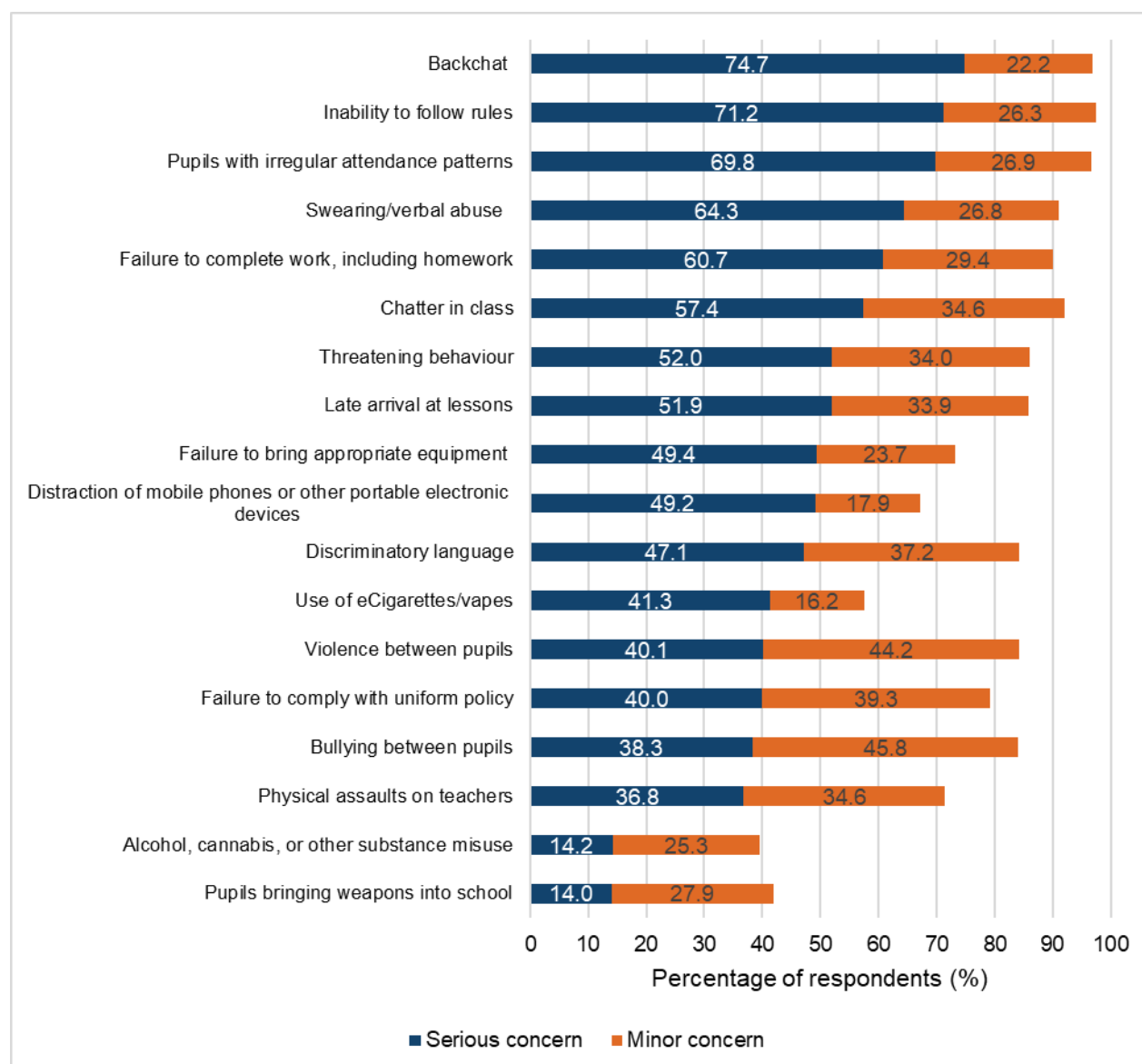
Changes in behaviours that challenge and disrupt

- 5.1 Nearly all respondents reported that the variety (94.3%), range (94.0%), magnitude (93.8%) and frequency (95.4%) of challenging or disruptive behaviours had increased since the pandemic.
- 5.2 Similar figures were reported across primary, secondary and FE settings. Less than 1% of respondents reported that there had been a decrease for each of these response options.
- 5.3 Amongst responses from special schools, these figures were slightly lower with 80% of respondents reporting an increase in the range and variety of challenging or disruptive behaviours. Around three quarters reported an increase in the magnitude of such behaviours and seven in ten respondents reported an increase in their frequency.

Behaviours of concern

- 5.4 The most prevalent concerns (combined serious and minor concerns) reported by respondents include relatively 'low level' disruption e.g. learners' inability to follow rules (97.5%), backchat (96.9%) and pupils with irregular attendance (96.7%) (see Figure 2).
- 5.5 Violence between pupils and bullying between pupils were each reported as a concern by around eighty-four percent of respondents. However, in both instances a slight majority of these respondents described their concerns as minor rather than serious. Violence between pupils and bullying between pupils were reported as a 'serious concern' by 40.1% and 38.3% of respondents respectively.
- 5.6 Comparatively respondents were even less likely to report serious concerns over substance misuse and pupils bringing weapons into schools which were reported as a serious concern by 14.2% and 14.0% of respondents respectively.

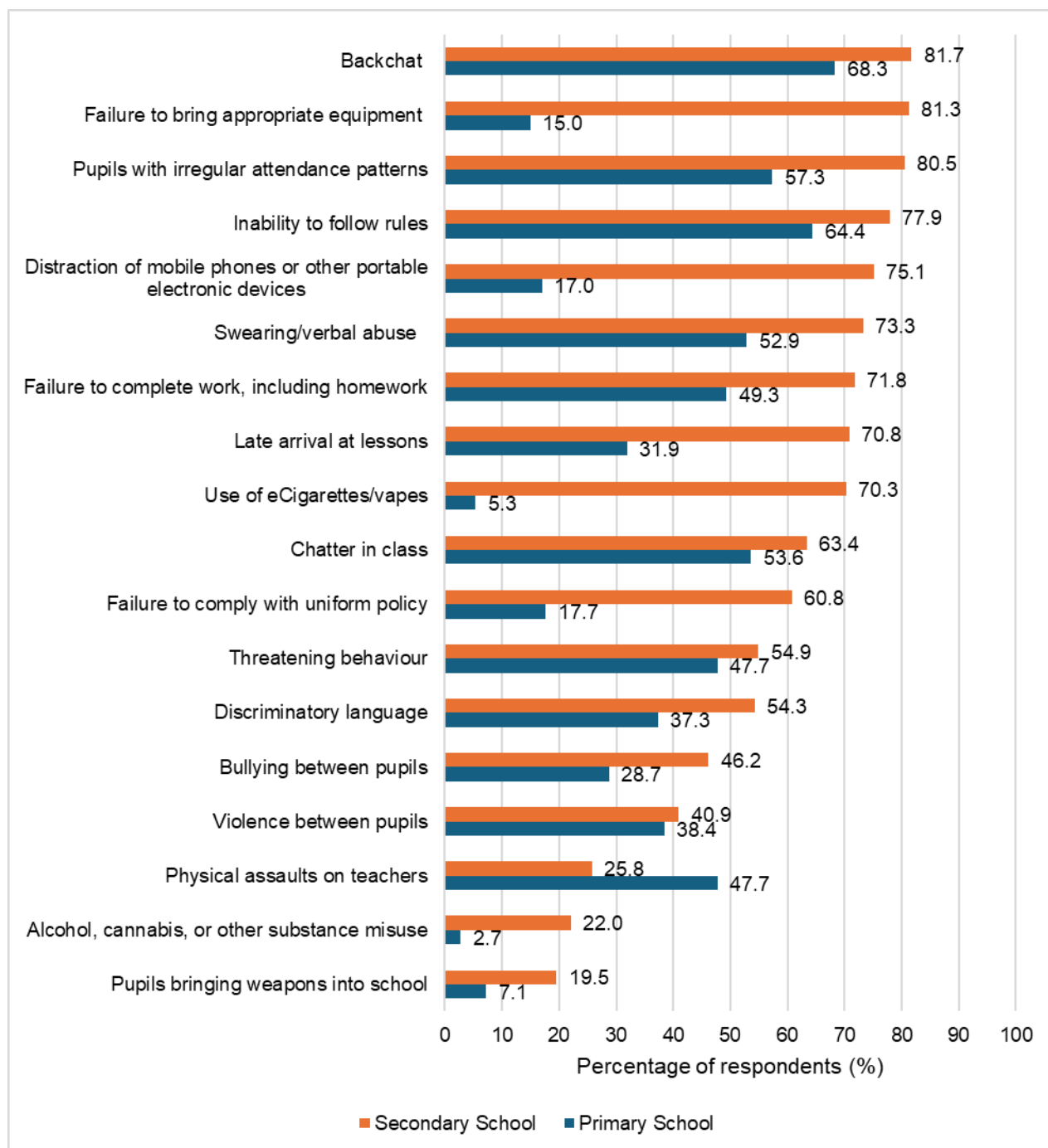
Figure 2: Would you describe the following as a serious or minor concern in your school/college? (n=7,772)



Note: the survey question was, 'How would you describe the following in your school/college?' (n=7,772) and the response options were 'a serious concern', 'a minor concern', 'not a concern', 'don't know'.

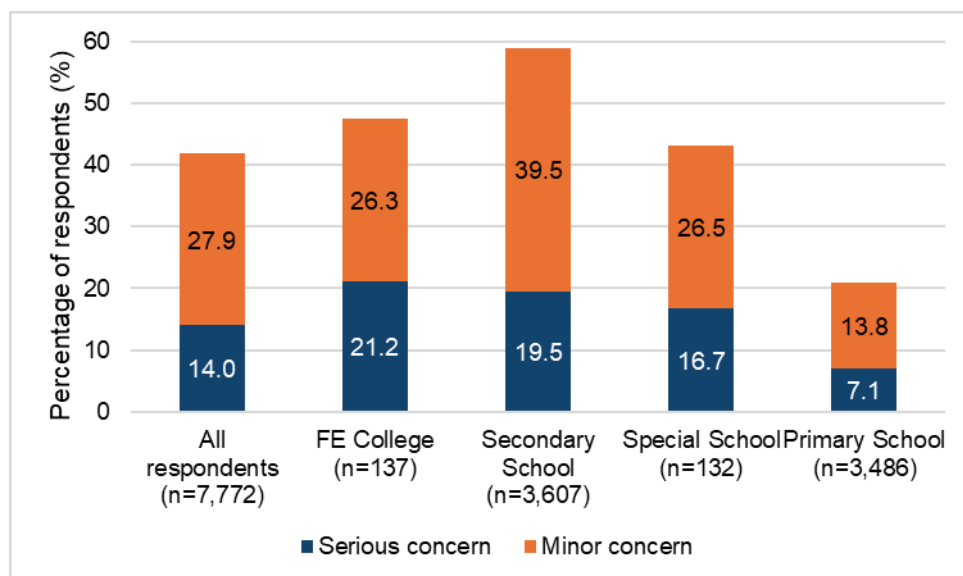
- 5.7 Figure 3 shows the proportion of respondents who reported serious concerns between primary and secondary schools. Higher proportions of respondents reported serious concerns in secondary schools across all the listed concerns apart from physical assaults on teachers, where nearly half (47.7%) of respondents working in primary schools reported this as a serious concern compared to just over a quarter of those working in secondary schools (25.8%).
- 5.8 The serious concerns with the largest percentage differences between primary and secondary schools include failure to bring appropriate equipment, the distraction of mobile phones or other portable electronic devices and the use of eCigarettes and vapes.

Figure 3: Serious concerns by school



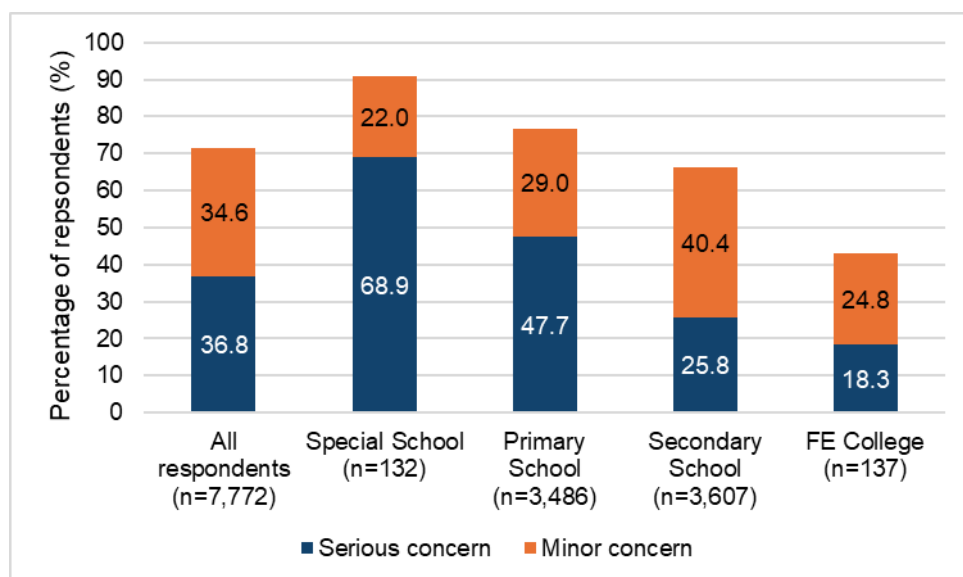
5.9 As seen in Figure 4 below, concerns over weapons being brought into school were highest amongst those working in secondary schools. Over half (59%) of these respondents reported this to be a serious or minor concern compared to one in five respondents (20.9%) working in primary schools.

Figure 4: Respondents who reported pupils bringing weapons to school as a serious or minor concern by school or setting



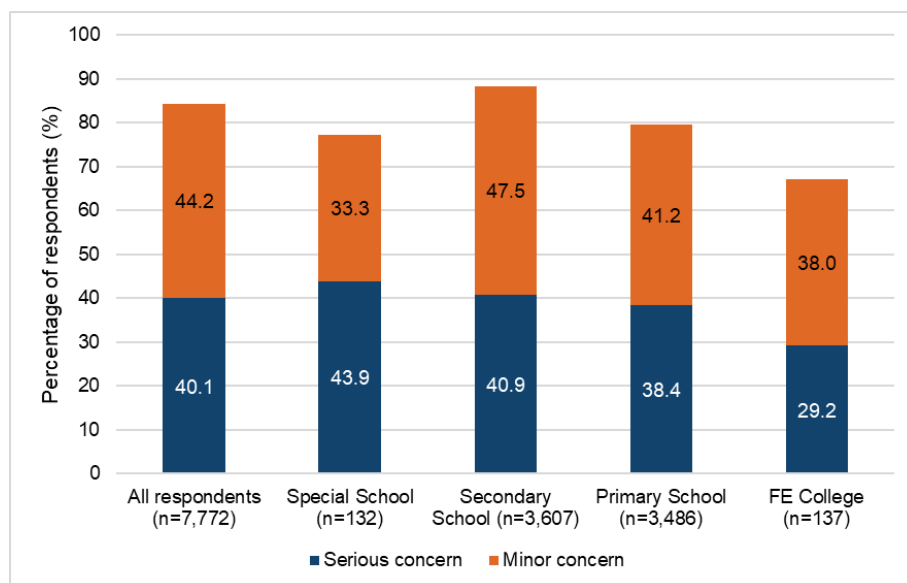
- 5.10 As seen in the Figure 5, over 70% of all respondents, reported physical assaults on teachers as either a serious or minor concern.
- 5.11 Amongst those in special schools this figure rose to 90.9% with 68.9% citing it as a 'serious concern'.
- 5.12 Physical assaults on teachers were found to be a serious concern for almost half (47.7%) of those working in primary education compared to around a quarter (25.8%) of those in secondary education.
- 5.13 Concern in relation to physical assault on teachers was lowest amongst those working in further education.

Figure 5: Respondents who reported physical assaults on teachers as a serious or minor concern by school or setting



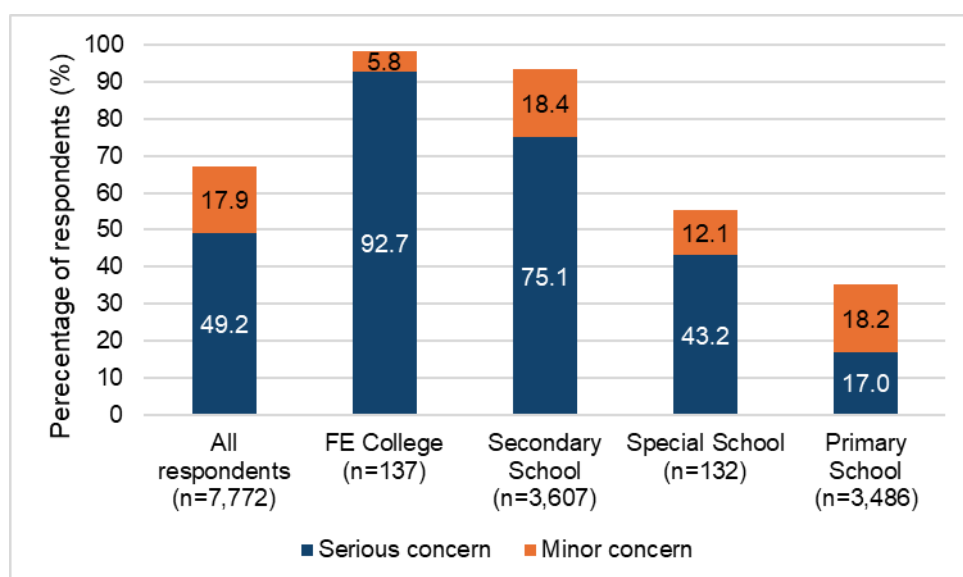
- 5.14 Figure 6 shows that almost nine in ten respondents (88.4%) working within secondary schools reported concerns relating to violence between pupils, with 40.9% rating their concerns as 'serious'.
- 5.15 Comparatively, just under two-fifths (38.4%) of respondents in primary schools also reported violence between pupils as a 'serious concern'.

Figure 6: Respondents who reported violence between pupils as a serious or minor concern by school or setting



- 5.16 The following figure shows the distraction of mobile phones or other portable electronic devices was predominantly a concern within FE colleges and secondary schools (see Figure 7).
- 5.17 Nearly all respondents working within FE colleges (98.5%) reported concerns regarding the distraction of mobile phones. More than nine in ten (92.7%) reported their concerns to be 'serious'.
- 5.18 Within secondary schools the distraction of mobile phones and devices was a serious concern to three quarters (75.1%) of respondents although in primary this figure falls to 17.0%.

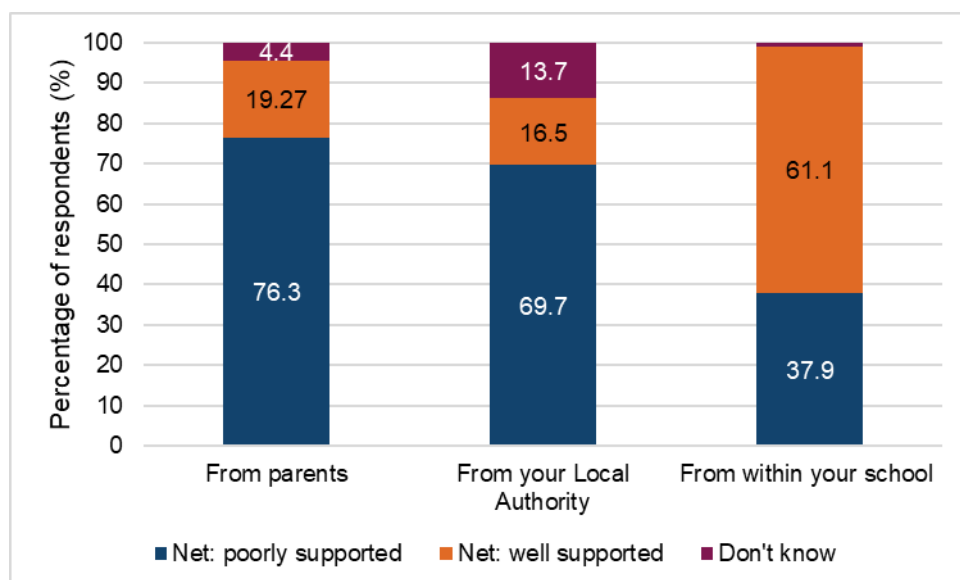
Figure 7: Respondents who reported the distraction of mobile phones or other portable electronic devices as a serious or minor concern by school or setting



Support for challenging and disruptive behaviours

- 5.19 Respondents reported feeling poorly supported in dealing with challenging and disruptive behaviour both from parents (76.3%) and from their Local Authority (69.7%).
- 5.20 Support was reported to be more common from within respondents own schools and settings with 61.1% feeling well supported within this environment.

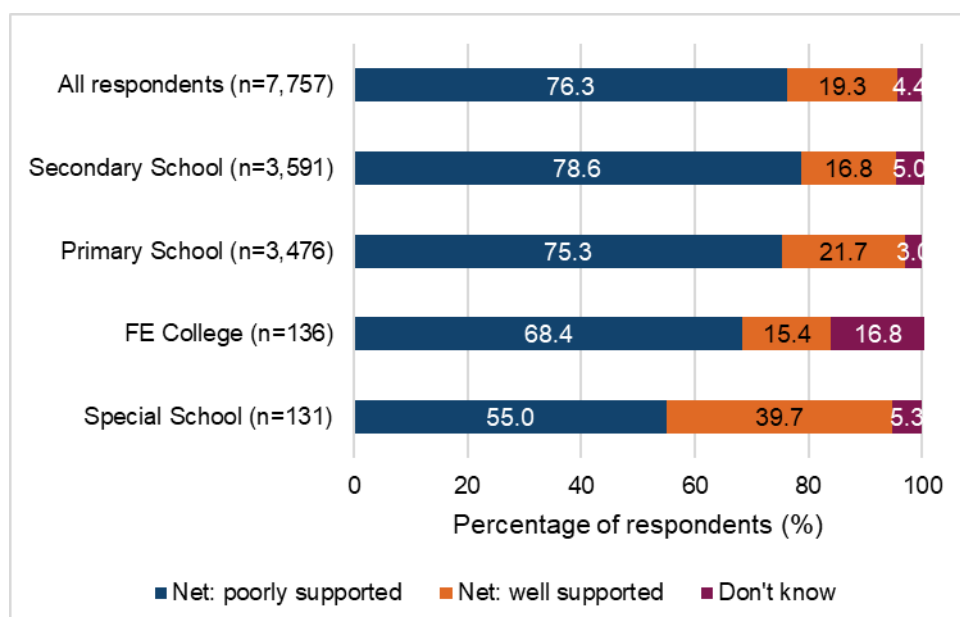
Figure 8: Support in dealing with challenging and disruptive behaviours



Note: 'Net: poorly supported' includes those who responded, 'very poorly supported' or 'slightly poorly supported'. 'Net: well supported' includes those who responded, 'slightly well supported' or 'very well supported'.

- 5.21 Over three quarters of respondents working within secondary (78.6%) and primary (75.3%) did not feel well supported by parents.
- 5.22 Respondents working within special schools felt the most supported by parents (39.7%) although, over half (55%) of respondents in these settings still reported support to be lacking.

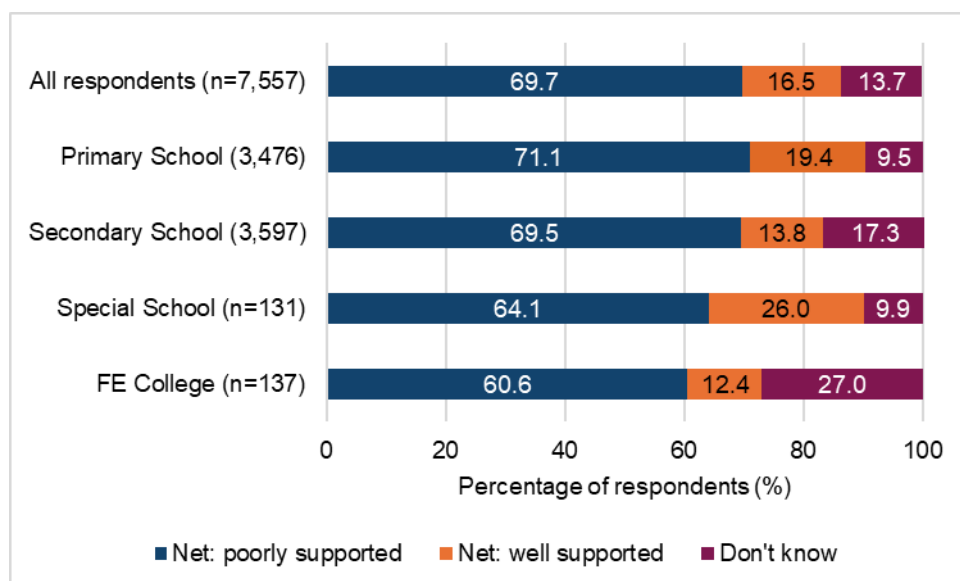
Figure 9: Support from parents by respondent's school or setting



Note: 'Net: poorly supported' includes those who responded, 'very poorly supported' or 'slightly poorly supported'. 'Net: well supported' includes those who responded, 'slightly well supported' or 'very well supported'.

- 5.23 Across all respondents, seven in ten (69.7%) felt poorly supported by their Local Authority.
- 5.24 Respondents from Special Schools were most likely to report feeling well supported by their Local Authority although this still only accounted for around a quarter (26.0%) of responses.

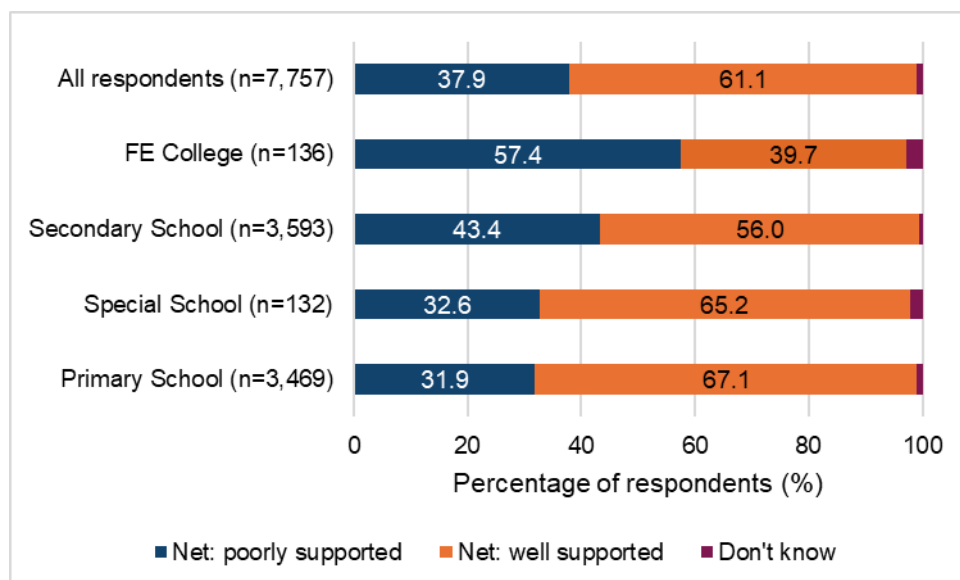
Figure 10: Support from Local Authority by respondent's school or setting



Note: 'Net: poorly supported' includes those who responded, 'very poorly supported' or 'slightly poorly supported'. 'Net: well supported' includes those who responded, 'slightly well supported' or 'very well supported'.

- 5.25 Respondents generally felt more supported within their school or setting with 61.1% overall reporting feeling 'fairly well' or 'very well supported'.
- 5.26 Those working in primary education reported higher levels of support from within their school in dealing with challenging behaviours compared to those in secondary education (67.1 and 56.0% respectively).
- 5.27 Respondents working within FE colleges felt the lowest levels of support from within their settings with just two-fifths (39.7%) reporting to feel well supported (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Support within school by respondent's setting

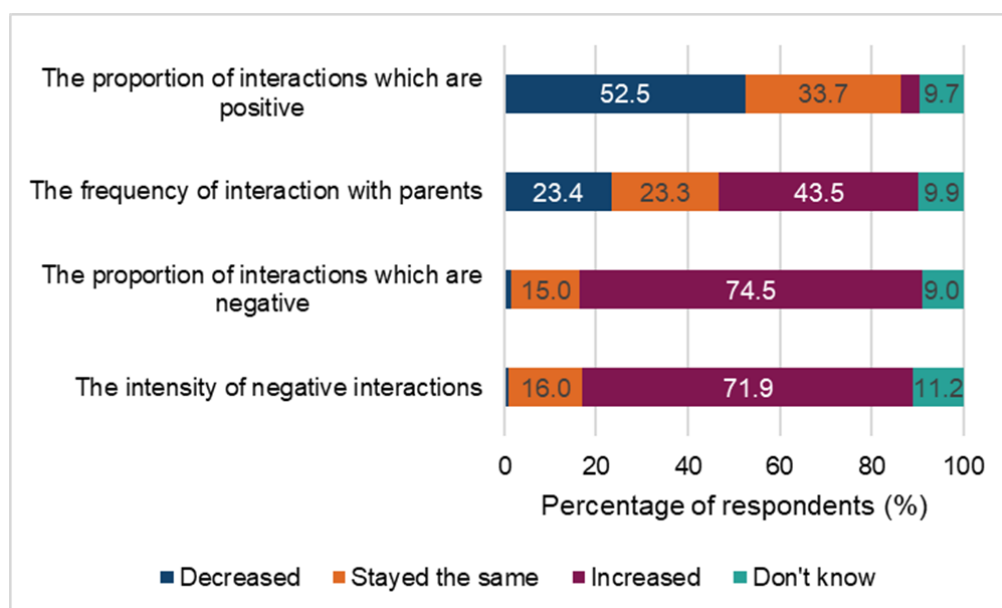


Note: 'Net: poorly supported' includes those who responded, 'very poorly supported' or 'slightly poorly supported'. 'Net: well supported' includes those who responded, 'slightly well supported' or 'very well supported'.

Interaction with parents

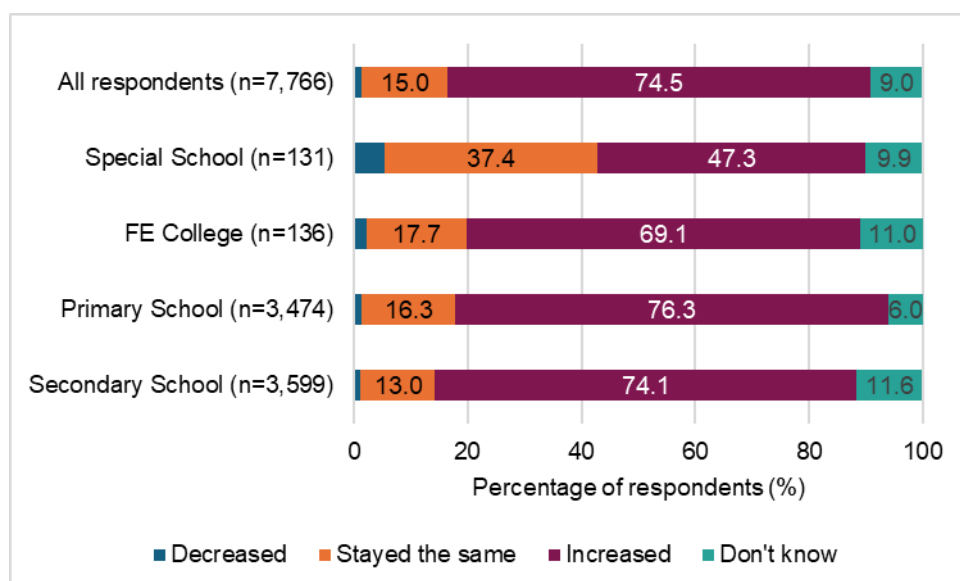
- 5.28 Over half of respondents (52.5%) reported a decrease in the proportion of positive interactions with parents (see Figure 12).
- 5.29 Three quarters of respondents (74.5%) reported an increase in the proportion of interactions with parents which are negative and 71.9% reported an increase in the intensity of negative interactions (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Have you noticed changes to the way parents interact with school or college teachers/managers/support staff since the COVID-19 pandemic? (n=7,766)



- 5.30 The proportion of respondents who reported an increase in the proportion of interactions which are negative was similar across FE colleges, primary schools and secondary schools. The highest proportion of respondents who reported an increase are working within primary schools (76.3%). The fewest respondents to report an increase in negative interactions work within special schools (47.3%) (Figure 13).

Figure 13: The proportion of interactions which are negative by school or setting



6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The high number of responses reflected an eagerness from the education workforce to participate and voice their concerns in relation to challenging and disruptive behaviours.
- 6.2 Nearly all respondents reported an increase in the variety, range, magnitude, and frequency of challenging or disruptive behaviours since the COVID-19 pandemic. This suggests that the pandemic may have impacted on learner behaviour or may have exacerbated pre-existing trends which has in turn led to more frequent and varied disruptions in school settings.
- 6.3 The most prevalent concerns among respondents included low-level disruptions such as learners' backchat, inability to follow rules, and to maintain regular attendance. These behaviours, while not as severe as physical aggression, still pose a significant challenge to maintaining a conducive learning environment and effective mitigations are required to reverse this trend.
- 6.4 Over half of respondents working in secondary schools reported concerns regarding pupils bringing weapons to school. Although just one in five (19.5%) classified these concerns as 'serious' this raises important questions regarding safety and security for both pupils and staff. This concern is also shared by those working in FE colleges where more than one in five respondents see it as a serious concern (21.5%) and more than one in four see it as a minor concern (26.3%).
- 6.5 Physical assaults on teachers were described as a serious concern for almost half (47.7%) of those working in primary schools, further highlighting the need for effective measures to protect teachers and ensure their wellbeing. Whilst startling, more research is required to improve understanding of the extent to which the concerns expressed are exacerbated by external contributing factors such as media coverage.
- 6.6 Almost nine in ten respondents (88.4%) working within secondary schools reported violence between pupils as of concern, however, for around half of those (47.5%) this was considered a minor rather than a serious concern.
- 6.7 While low-level disruptions are widespread and pose challenges to the learning environment, higher-level concerns like violence and physical assaults, though less prevalent, require targeted interventions to ensure the safety and wellbeing of both pupils and staff.
- 6.8 The distraction of mobile phones or other portable electronic devices was predominantly a concern within FE colleges and secondary schools although the figures also suggest this to be an emerging issue within primary schools. Consideration is needed as to how these technologies can be effectively managed within schools and settings.
- 6.9 Respondents reported feeling poorly supported in dealing with challenging and disruptive behaviour, particularly from parents and their Local Authority. This suggests a need for improved support systems and increased collaboration between schools, local authorities, and parents.
- 6.10 Nearly three quarters of respondents reported an increase in the proportions of negative interactions with parents and over 70% reported an increase in the intensity of these interactions. This indicates a significant deterioration in the relationship between schools and parents since the pandemic. Further research is required to improve understanding of the influencing factors around this issue and identify effective initiatives to repair and rebuild successful relationships.
- 6.11 These conclusions highlight the need for a focus on addressing the increase in challenging behaviours, improve support systems for teachers, and foster positive interactions between schools and parents.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
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