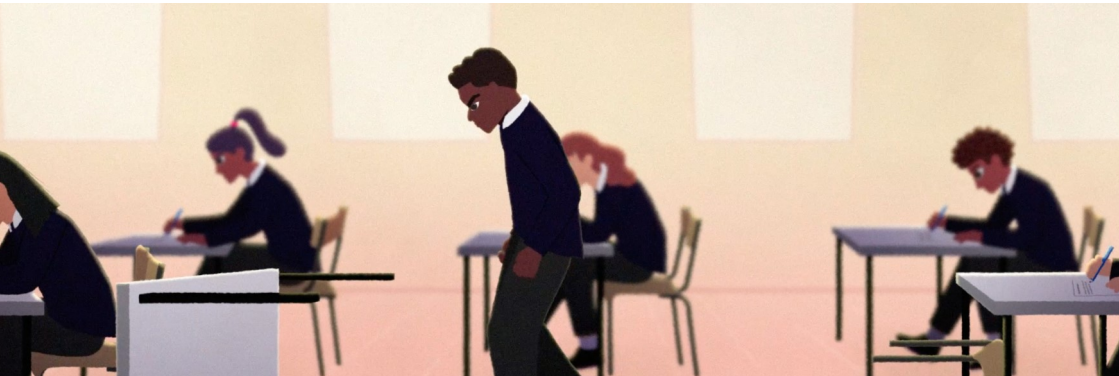




School behaviour management strategies ineffective and may impact mental health

2024



Disciplinary behaviour management strategies are common in UK secondary schools. This includes sanctions such as detention and isolation.

But there wasn't much evidence on the impact on young people's mental health and wellbeing, or whether these strategies are effective at changing behaviour.

Our Young People's Advisory Group (YPAG) raised school discipline as something we should research. Our initial workshop

with young people revealed negative experiences and impact on mental health and wellbeing.

Our **Behaviour in Schools Study (BISS)** aimed to find out more.

What did we do?

BISS is an innovative study co-produced with young people. As well as coming up with the research idea, members of our YPAG were peer researchers. They conducted interviews with 15 pupils. They also helped analyse results and write papers.



What did we learn?

From the 15 peer interviews, we found:

- Pupils viewed strategies as confusing, too harsh and inconsistent
- Ready to Learn (RTL) was frequently criticised
- Isolation was the most negatively viewed sanction
- Strategies were ineffective at changing behaviour
- Negative impact on mental health and wellbeing

What did the pupils say?

“It’s relentless, teachers coming at you left, right and centre, it’s a nightmare.”

“If you’re very energetic then it’s gonna be very hard to suppress yourself for a long period of time, for that hour you’re sat in a classroom. It was difficult not to end up in isolation, especially if you were energetic, if you have like ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) or anything like that, yes it was very difficult.”

“If you had the wrong-coloured socks on or something like that you’d get a detention. Then that would lead to you getting angry and then you’d get an isolation probably or told off a lot and just get more detentions.”

“You feel like you are going to explode in that isolation room and for them to not help you and just stick to their guns. It was so belittling and horrible.”

“They’ll stick you in the isolation room for the rest of the day and it really takes it out of you because you can’t do anything. You can’t be yourself. You just have to sit in there and be quiet. It drains you mentally really.”

Our recommendations

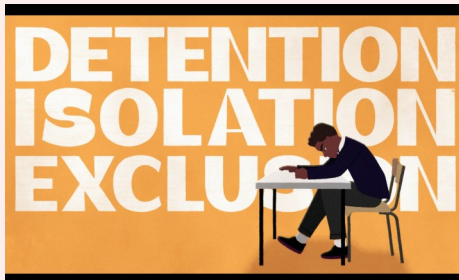
The pupils interviewed wanted schools to adopt approaches that understand the roots of poor behaviour and build relationships.

Research is needed to explore how to support schools to adopt alternative approaches.

Watch our animations

Watch our two animations about our findings: A Day in the Life and Isolation

bit.ly/school-discipline-animations



What is NIHR ARC West?

At the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) West, we conduct applied health research with our partners and others in the health and care sector, alongside patients and members of the public. Applied health research aims to address the immediate issues facing the health and social care system. We also help bring research evidence into practice and provide training for the local workforce.

Find out more about ARC West:

arc-w.nihr.ac.uk

X: @ARC_West

Email: arcwest@nihr.ac.uk