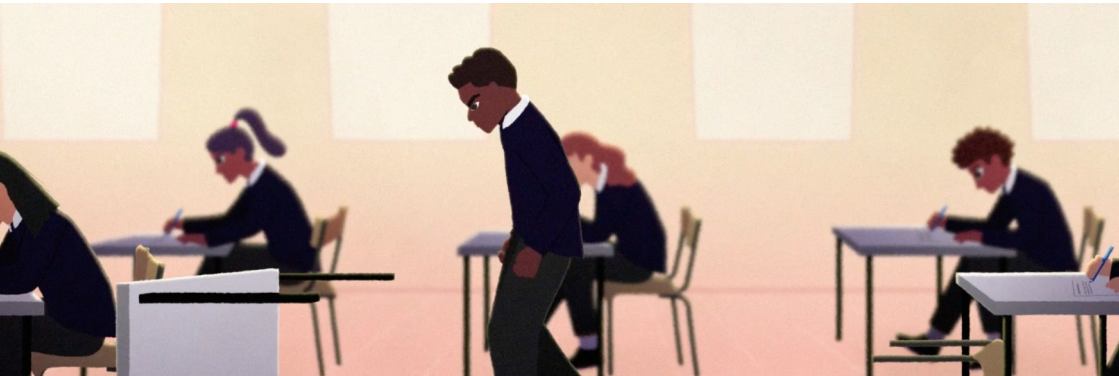




School behaviour management strategies ineffective and may impact mental health

2024



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

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.

We also systematically reviewed all the research on the link between behaviour management in schools and pupil mental health and wellbeing.



What did we learn?

The **systematic review** included 14 studies, ten studies assessing suspension, and two each assessing verbal reprimand and a combination of strategies. There were no studies on isolation.

Fives studies found these strategies were linked to depression. Three studies found they were linked to poor behaviour. The effect on exam results wasn't clear.

Most studies were at high risk of bias, meaning we can't fully trust their findings.

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

Our recommendations

Our review of the evidence suggests disciplinary behaviour strategies have a negative impact on mental wellbeing and behaviour.

The pupils interviewed want schools to adopt approaches that understand the reasons for poor behaviour and build relationships.

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

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."

"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..."

"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."



Find out more

Watch our two animations about our findings: A Day in the Life and Isolation
bit.ly/school-discipline-animations

Read the systematic review
bit.ly/school-discipline-systematic-review

Read our plain language summary
arc-w.nihr.ac.uk/behaviour-in-schools/