BEHAVING TO LEARN

Best practice lessons for the behavioural turn in English schools policy

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FOREWORD

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This ResPublica report sets out to better understand how effective behaviour policies in state schools, notably non-faith, non-selective state schools, can lead to better learning outcomes for their pupils. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the subject matter of behaviour and progress of students is a focus in every school.

I am delighted to write this foreword as Headteacher of Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School, Barnet, one of the top 10 ranked non-selective state schools in the 2019 DfE Performance Tables – the last published data pre-Covid – and again part of the top-performing cohort of schools in the 2022 DfE Performance Tables – the first post-Covid data – whose policies and learning outcomes were included in the research of this report.

The report finds there is plenty of research to show that high behaviour standards are a key component in helping pupils achieve better learning outcomes. However, behaviour has been a missing ingredient in the last several decades of school policy legislation.

When such reports are open to hearing the voice of stakeholders in both discrete and contrasting contexts, their recommendations and suggested action points gain validity, particularly for those working at ground level. This validity is all the more necessary and significant in this specific context, at this time, when schools face increasing challenges from student behaviours that are more complex in nature, even simply from the socio-economic fall-out of the pandemic.

This report raises important questions for Government and for school leaders. It aligns its key recommendations with the Levelling Up White Paper and the Schools White Paper to suggest outcomes that will be familiar to leaders of schools where behaviour is a constant focus because those leaders understand its impact on everyone's learning and school experience. Since Covid, the other consistent priority for schools has been mental health as a response to the associated increasing anxieties identified in adolescents.

The report also highlights the recent "behavioural turn" of the schools reform agenda, with a strong focus on positive rewards alongside negative sanctions. In addition, it started to link behaviour policy explicitly to mental health provisions, and support for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils. It is a welcome development that behaviour is increasingly treated as a central part of what schools can "do for" their pupils.

Furthermore, it identifies the potential impact of including behaviour qualifications as part of teacher training, and the need to always be attuned to a school's socio-economic context in terms of data collection and judgement. This latter point perhaps serves to indicate why the report argues that "some of the best schools in the country under Progress 8 measures are non-selective state schools". The best comprehensive schools attend to the diverse needs of their students in terms of the curriculum, including teaching behaviour for learning, and at classroom level in terms of quality-first teaching that meets the needs of every student. This results in them addressing the factors that influence data on pupil potential, such as disadvantage and other identified characteristics, so that those contributing factors become negligible.

The report makes the point that without blurring boundaries between schools' various responsibilities, statutory policies must be crafted in a way that reinforces simple, clear standards for how pupils should demonstrate good behaviour. Course development, pastoral care, disciplinary management, and SEND support all overlap and interact asserting good behaviour standards, which includes the idea of introducing behaviour teaching as a vital part of the taught curriculum.

The current national challenge regarding teacher recruitment and numbers entering teacher training not meeting Government targets, by a large margin, can partly be understood as a linear relationship with poor behaviour in schools. Poor behaviour management, including neglecting teaching behaviour, not only impacts pupil outcomes but also the wellbeing of the professional workforce; the balance between an acceptable salary, vocational notions of the teaching profession and the need to adhere to a variety of statutory policies, can become compromised.

As a Headteacher leading a school during this academic year that has seen teacher strikes for the first time in 15 years, I note with a keen eye that the report's summary of its section on "Learning outcomes in context" concludes that "the profile of the best performing non-faith, non-selective schools was one of low absence and low persistent absence, better SEND provision, a more diverse but not necessarily better- or worse-off pupil body, and a strong core made up predominantly of better-paid full-time teachers".

The report recognises that while course development, pastoral care, disciplinary management, and SEND support all overlap, they each have their own separate purpose too. Integrating them should not mean putting too onerous an expectation on all members of school staff to address all of these policy areas

at the same time when they go about doing their jobs. Instead, it raises the importance for schools of recruiting specialist, well-trained support staff who can help turn schools into positive socialising environments for pupils.

Impressively, the report acknowledges the importance of engendering a sense of belonging to a school community. Belonging supports the expression of identity, of feeling valued by others in the community so that everyone can make personal contributions. This is particularly important in the classroom where exchanges of thoughts, ideas, and knowledge all encourage risk-taking, respect, and develop confidence in pupils. These all contribute to overall success and their impact is greatest when behaviour does not disrupt learning.

Of note is that the report states schools policymaking has a lot to learn from the schools that have done well in the Government's new Progress 8 measures, especially the ones that do not select for academic performance. What we need is a granular engagement with the different "bottom-up" models of "best practice" that have been developed in the best-performing schools, to learn from what works well and roll it out at the national level.

This report will resonate with all leaders of schools in the English comprehensive school system. All will find validity either in their intentional work or in the work they strive to achieve, impeded by various constraints imposed by their particular context.

The proposal for "a scalar measure so that schools' disciplinary performance can be graded in a more granular way" by creating "Behaviour 5 […] modelled on the way Progress 8 criteria are calculated" will no doubt be a source of great debate; particularly at this time, when inspection evaluation of schools is a current hot topic. Having to meet additional standards may seem burdensome. However, the report appears sympathetic to this, suggesting that Government should remove the binary cut-off nature of school behaviour, where "intervention […] is only triggered when pupils' standards fall to a level that is 'unacceptably low'".

A final key point drawn out in the report is a strong message to Government and at the same time, a positive message to schools. Government cannot afford to be shy in taking on the challenge of boosting behavioural standards in schools, and helping pupils make the most of their opportunities for learning. The radical ideas that the English schools system needs are out there – now is the time to use them to convert the "behavioural turn" into a "behavioural revolution".

The report's call to behavioural revolution is in the spirit of a change for the better, and it is undeniably a blueprint for pupil progress.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this report, ResPublica evaluates the range of approaches to behaviour management across the English comprehensive school system, to generate an up-to-date awareness of the 'best practice' across the sector.

It explores how effective behaviour policies in state schools can lead to better learning outcomes, and develops a series of recommendations for reforms to schools policy in the UK, in particular for the behaviour guidelines to be implemented via national frameworks across the state school sector.

This report examines the behavioural policies, learning outcomes, and contextual institutional characteristics of 150 UK non-faith, non-selective state schools. These represent the top 50, median 50, and bottom 50 of the 2,491 comprehensive schools captured by the 2022 Progress 8 rankings, supplemented with data from the 2019 rankings (the last year that full information is available for all schools).

It closely analyses the behaviour management approaches in operation at the top-performing 20 non-selective schools to establish some parameters of 'best practice'. It compares their behavioural policies and procedures to evaluate how differently they treat positive and negative behaviour, as well as other statutory policies that have a close bearing on how their behavioural policy operates, including codes of conduct and Special Educational Needs and Disability provision.

It accompanies this with an analysis of the available Government data collected as part of the Progress 8 score rankings, including various breakdowns of academic attainment scores, and statistics related to pupil management and school staff structures.

This report uses these findings to inform ten strategic recommendations for future national and regional legislation around school behaviour, and ten tactical action points for school leadership teams to prioritise in their behaviour policy implementation.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this report, ResPublica examines how effective behaviour policies in state secondary schools can lead to better learning outcomes for their pupils, and develops a series of recommendations for reforms to UK schools policy. The analysis here summarises the results of ResPublica's longer investigation, *Behavioural Standards and Learning Outcomes in the English Comprehensive School System*, which offers a granular, contextualised assessment of behavioural approaches and academic results at the non-faith, non-selective state schools who performed best in the most recent Progress 8 measures.

The debate over the relationship between behavioural standards and learning outcomes is set against the background of several long-standing education policy concerns. These concern the UK's mixed record in global rankings of learning outcomes, and the long-running gap between education research on the link from pupil behaviour to learning outcomes and the degree of importance that has been attributed to behavioural issues in UK education policy up to this point. This report overviews the context for the recent 'behavioural turn' in schools policy, which comes in the wake of successive items of schools legislation that focused primarily on other areas of school performance, especially pupils' academic success.

The Government's rankings data covers all UK state schools, faith and non-faith, selective and non-selective. Its main data points are the schools' Ofsted grades and their overall Progress 8 scores, along with a raft of more granular academic and other contextualising information. For the purposes of this report, the Progress 8 data and other contributory data such as Attainment 8 and EBacc scores are the primary way of assessing pupils' learning outcomes at the top 50, median 50, and bottom 50 non-faith, non-selective secondary

schools in our sample. The remaining data breaks down fairly neatly into three categories: further learning outcome statistics; pupil characteristics; and staff characteristics. This report compares the results for these 150 schools in our sample, drawing out useful insights and conclusions for future policy directions.

UK schools are statutorily required to publish online a large number of policy and procedure documents. From the perspective of pupil behaviour management, by far the most relevant of these documents are evidently the school's dedicated behaviour policy, which some schools may either combine with or separate out from their codes of conduct, their attendance policy, their absence policy, their exclusion policy, and their rewards and recognition policy. Other policies that also bear on behaviour questions are their Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND) policy, their charging and remissions policy, and their looked after children policy. The report surveys all the relevant documents for the best-performing state schools, focusing especially on those schools that emerged as repeated outliers in the contextualised analysis of learning outcomes.

Our longer study offers an extensive list of recommendations for reforms to UK schools policy. These are targeted at 'best practice' changes to behaviour policies that can positively impact pupils' educational outcomes, and raise the profile of pupil behaviour management as a vital component of the UK's mainstream education system. Included in this are specific structures, guidelines, and assessment approaches for behaviour management that can be implemented via national frameworks across the state school sector.

This report distils these far-reaching recommendations into two lists of clear, innovative policy proposals. These are intended to inform the future trajectory of schools legislation on the question of behaviour policies in the medium to longer term, but they also outline concrete, radical changes that school leadership teams can undertake in the shorter term to improve their behaviour management.

2. POLICY CONTEXT

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One of the UK's most successful exports, and a jewel in the crown of its global reputation, is the quality of its education system. Yet over the last two decades, the performance of the UK's school system has left a lot to be desired by international standards. British pupils' scores for reading and maths in successive PISA rankings are historically average and stagnant, with only a small recent uptick. In science, meanwhile, where their scores have previously been above the OECD average, they have started to slip consistently with every new PISA study.

The UK has enjoyed only marginal success in addressing socioeconomic gaps in performance measures. Socioeconomically advantaged pupils still significantly outperform disadvantaged pupils in their learning outcomes, and more than twice as many pupils at disadvantaged schools (30%) face limited or inadequate access to learning resources compared to pupils at advantaged schools (13%). British pupils are less satisfied with their lives than their OECD peers, and more at risk of bullying. Even though the UK is among the better global performers on school attendance, schools still face troubling rates of absence (19% of pupils at least once within a two-week period) and lateness (39% at least once in a two-week period). And the UK remains decidedly average on school behaviour, with fully 25% of pupils reporting regular or even constant problems with classroom disruption.

There is a sizeable body of research to show that high behavioural standards have a positive effect on pupils' learning outcomes. Reducing classroom disruption unsurprisingly helps pupils concentrate, with favourable effects on their performance in reading assessments and other achievement measures. This is especially true for socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils, which raises the prospect of using school behaviour policies to support strategies of social mobility and Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. Targeting disruption 'at source' to help pupils see their classrooms as positive learning spaces also reduces the risk that they will exhibit poor attendance, or engage in poor behaviour that leads to them being suspended or excluded—all of which have clear negative impacts on their examination results and later life prospects.

Yet over the last three decades, reforms to UK education policy have only marginally treated questions of school behaviour. Despite the passage of several landmark pieces of school policy legislation in 1998, 2002, 2006, 2011, and 2015, these mainly addressed questions of choice, selection, organisation, and oversight. Where legislation has tackled behaviour, it has focused overwhelmingly on negative behavioural issues, such as pupil exclusion, attendance targets, teachers' rights to restrain and discipline misbehaving pupils, and a statutory requirement for clear rules and sanctions around pupil behaviour. By comparison, there has been very limited engagement with the requirements for positive behaviour.

Although the debate around school behaviour policy has raised the possibility that discipline be made a key factor in evaluating school performance, legislation has taken a *laissez-faire* approach so far. The current cut-off point for intervention is that there has been a "breakdown of discipline" so severe that school governance becomes unviable, or pupil and staff safety is threatened. Rather than a scalar measure of school behaviour, stepping in is a binary decision, triggered only once the behavioural profile of a school falls below an "unacceptably low" level.

Where new granular criteria for evaluating school performance have been introduced, these have only targeted *academic* performance. The Progress 8 measures introduced in 2015 to compare the educational 'value added' pupils gain from attending a particular school only take into consideration their academic results at GCSE level, weighted towards maths and English, as well as a moderately restricted roster of other subjects on the English Baccalaureate list. So far, there is no equivalent assessment of pupils' behavioural 'growth', measured through their improvement in (e.g.) rates of behavioural compliance, absence/attendance, or exclusion.

This situation has begun to shift with the launch of the Levelling Up and Schools White Papers in 2022. The 'levelling up' agenda includes proposals for new Education Investment Areas designed to boost the local areas with the worst educational attainment in the UK. It also plans for a network of Behaviour Hubs and new pilot programmes to help boost attendance rates, and to share curriculum resources and extracurricular expertise among and beyond schools and academy trusts. The White Paper signalled revisions to existing school funding arrangements, though without clear indications as to where these funds are intended to be targeted (staffing, infrastructure, or operational provisions). Finally, it outlined a range of ambitious targets to improve reading, writing, and maths results by 2030, especially in the areas of the UK with the worst educational performance.

The ongoing schools reform agenda has added more detail explicitly on behaviour policy, tied for the first time explicitly to mental health provisions, and to support targeted at the most socioeconomically disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils. Above all, it has introduced a new focus on positive communication and explanation of behavioural expectations, in particular an orientation towards rewards over sanctions as the way to incentivise good pupil behaviour. Part of this is a further layer of statutory requirements for schools to publish their attendance policies, and a reframing of behaviour as a skill to be treated as an explicit curriculum subject.

The White Paper also aims to build a consensus around better teacher training and support on behaviour management, and bring external expertise into the education policymaking process at a national and local level. Lastly, it sets out a raft of new data-collection strategies to help boost school attendance, including a National Behaviour Survey designed to canvass the views of pupils, parents/carers, and school staff. Overall, these recent developments point to a welcome 'behavioural turn' in schools policy, although this has yet to translate through into future legislation.

3. LEARNING OUTCOMES IN CONTEXT

In the 2022 Progress 8 measures, the best-performing non-selective, non-faith state schools more than held their own against their selective rivals. Of the top 50 state schools in England, 11 were selective schools (10 girls-only, 1 boys-only), and the remaining 39 were non-selective (12 girls-only, 27 mixed). The 20 highest-performing schools were all non-selective, and at the upper end, they scored considerably higher than the top-placed selective schools.

FIG. 1: TOP 20 NON-SELECTIVE AND SELECTIVE STATE SCHOOLS *(SOURCE: DFE)*

| TOP 20 NON-SELECTIVE SCHOOLS	PROGRESS 8 SCORE	TOP 20 SELECTIVE SCHOOLS	PROGRESS 8 SCORE
Michaela Community School	2.27	Altrincham Grammar School for Girls	1.06
The Steiner Academy Hereford	2.15	Newstead Wood School	1.05
Bentley Wood High School	1.34	Dr Challoner's High School	1.02
Ealing Fields High School	1.32	Dartford Grammar School for Girls	1.01
The Hurlingham Academy	1.3	Wirral Grammar School for Girls	0.99
Glenmoor Academy	1.27	Woodford County High School	0.99
Ark King Solomon Academy	1.24	The Henrietta Barnett School	0.98
Manor High School	1.18	Beaconsfield High School	0.97

TOP 20 NON-SELECTIVE SCHOOLS *continued*	PROGRESS 8 SCORE	TOP 20 SELECTIVE SCHOOLS *continued*	PROGRESS 8 SCORE
Avonbourne Girls Academy	1.16	Highworth Grammar School	0.95
Levenshulme High School	1.16	Queen Elizabeth's School, Barnet	0.94
Whitmore High School	1.15	Stratford Girls' Grammar School	0.93
Ark Greenwich Free School	1.14	The Tiffin Girls' School	0.92
Ashcroft Technology Academy	1.14	Kendrick School	0.92
Villiers High School	1.14	Dartford Grammar School	0.92
Featherstone High School	1.12	Ripon Grammar School	0.91
Forest Gate Community School	1.11	Colchester County High School for Girls	0.91
Parkside Community College	1.11	Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School	0.91
Ark Isaac Newton Academy	1.1	Nonsuch High School for Girls	0.9
Rosebery School	1.1	Wallington High School for Girls	0.9
Beaumont School	1.06	Langley Grammar School	0.9

Selective schools still hold a sizeable advantage over non-selective schools in pupils' absolute attainment, both in terms of their Attainment 8 and EBacc scores. At the top end of the non-selective sector, a few outstanding performers are within touching distance of the selective sector, with a small amount of 'overlap' between the strongest non-selective schools and their more middling selective counterparts.

However, non-selective schools' performance may be underestimated by weighting the EBacc, Attainment 8, and Progress 8 measures so heavily towards English and maths results. The calculation formula is designed to give 40% weight to English and maths, 30% to EBacc subjects (sciences, languages, history, geography), and only 30% open to all subjects (including EBacc and non-EBacc). This means that the bulk of the ranking measures favour the EBacc over GCSE teaching in other areas, including more technical/vocational rather than 'academic' subjects. This helps explain the low rates of EBacc entry among the worst-performing non-selective schools, a large proportion of which are university technical colleges or specialist schools. This speaks to the need for more, more granular, better-disaggregated data in future rankings to better gauge schools' success at boosting pupils' learning outcomes.

FIG. 2: 2022 ATTAINMENT 8 SCORES, EBACC SCORES, PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS ACHIEVING GRADE 5+ IN ENGLISH AND MATHS, AND EBACC ENTRY IN NON-SELECTIVE AND SELECTIVE STATE SCHOOLS *(SOURCE: DFE)*
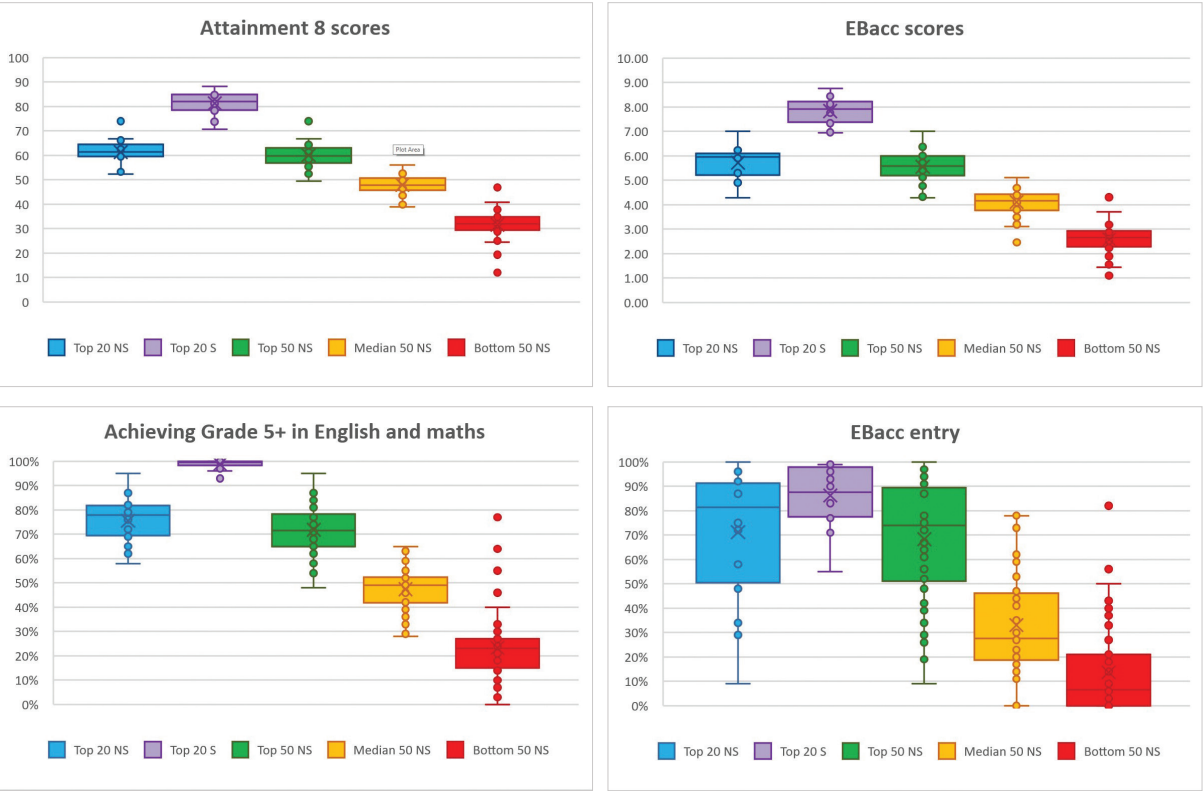
School size had no discernable impact on pupils' learning outcomes, with even a slight positive relationship between schools' place in the Progress 8 rankings and their total pupil numbers. Intriguingly, the idea that smaller, more specialised institutions fare better at learning outcomes than larger, generalised ones is simply not borne out by the available evidence. It also raises the prospect of introducing more ways to integrate learning provision, through either place-based or trust-based multi-school 'franchising' to pool teaching provision, staff, and teaching materials to give more pupils access to rare and resource-intensive subjects.

On school attendance, the better-performing schools straightforwardly boasted lower absence and persistent absence levels than their lower-ranked equivalents. This is in line with intuitive expectations, and corroborates the consensus in the education studies literature that lowering absence, and especially lowering persistent absence, is a key ingredient to boosting learning outcomes, both for individual pupils and for the school environment as a whole. One key suggestion that flows from this is that there are concrete target figures that schools and trusts can set themselves to prevent absence from inhibiting learning outcomes, which should be supported by targeted investment and intervention from DfE.
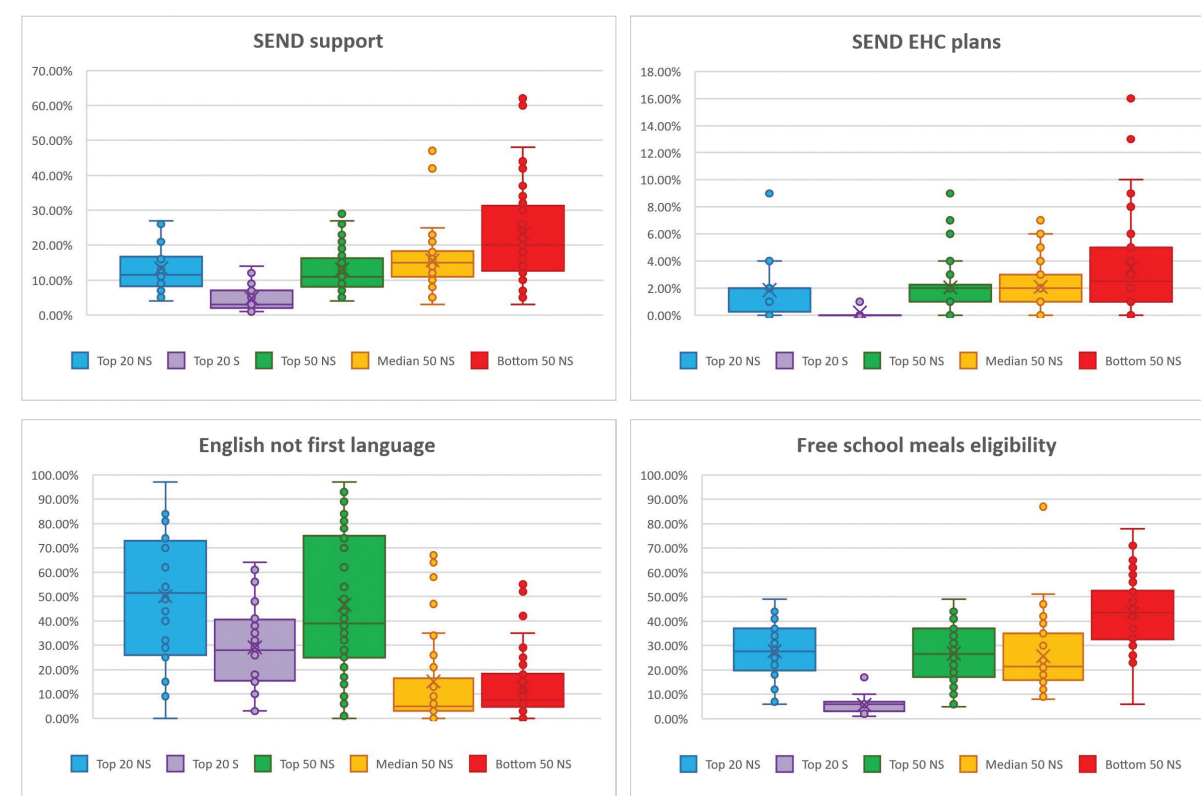
At the same time, the data offers a mixed picture of the relationship between socioeconomic status and learning outcomes. Certainly, the proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is noticeably higher at the bottom end of the 2022 rankings, but the proportions are both lower and comparably similar at both the top and the median points in the Progress 8 table. This should not be taken to mean that the effect of socioeconomic disadvantage on learning outcomes can straightforwardly be 'undone' by heroic school efforts on curriculum formation, behaviour, or SEND provision. Instead, it leaves the question of how deprivation affects learning outcomes at least partly inconclusive, which lends some credence to OECD findings that 'disadvantage is not destiny' but also suggests a need for further supplementary analysis using additional data, such as Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index datasets.

Expanding SEND provision may help improve learning outcomes, although many of the best-performing schools on other context measures are outliers on SEND provision in both directions. Some have found ways of achieving high educational attainment/progress without SEND, while others have made SEND a core part of their offering. What is clear, however, is that the current structure of Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plans does not appear to be having a major positive impact. These plans inadequately address the educational, health, and social needs of the pupils they are designed for. In particular, they do not fully overcome the deficits in learning outcomes at the level of individual pupils or their schools as a whole.

Pupils whose first language is not English, meanwhile, are unusually highly represented in high-performing selective and non-selective schools. On the face of it, this suggests that school selection may have a positive role to play in wider policies of ethnic, national, and cultural integration; at the very least, it implies that exclusion from selection does not stand in the way of non-native English speakers' educational success. This may be the result of external factors such as the 'outcomes bonus' of local English as an Additional Language provision, the positive pedagogical 'externalities' of multilingualism and exposure to other education systems, as well as favourable cultural norms around educational success and behavioural standards among communities with a generational migration background or non-British cultural ties.

Finally, the non-selective schools who performed best in the 2022 Progress 8 rankings typically boast a larger core of full-time teachers as a proportion of their total staff, along with slightly more support, administrative, and auxiliary staff, generally in exchange for a smaller number of teaching assistants. This suggests that staff composition matters, and that schools who invest in a larger, more diverse core of well-resourced, well-trained, experienced teachers with the autonomy and responsibility to lead teaching delivery are likely to reap the rewards of better pupil learning outcomes. Such investment should include

infrastructural capacity and targeted training to 'upskill' and 'upgrade' teaching assistants into full-time teaching staff. It should be paired with a close examination of the roles of school support staff to determine if future recruitment should best focus on SEND support, mental and physical health, financial and resources, behavioural, or logistical activities.

One of the most interesting results is that there is no unambiguous relationship between pupil-to-staff ratios and learning outcomes—specifically, that the totemic goal of smaller class sizes is a misplaced aspiration in education policy. Instead, a more valuable approach would be to lower this ratio in other ways: broadening and diversifying the school curriculum, 'setting' within subjects based on aptitude, and altering timetables to give pupils regular contact with a larger share of overall teaching staff. At the same time, there is a clear positive relationship between average salary levels and learning outcomes, with teachers at the top-placed non-selective schools earning around £1,500–2,500 p.a. more than at other non-selective and even many selective schools, and average salaries in the £45,000–£52,000 p.a. bracket. Unsurprisingly, this implies that boosting teacher pay helps schools attract the best staff—those with higher qualifications or better subject knowledge, who have the skills training, experience, and motivation needed to communicate effectively with their pupils.

FIG. 5: 2022 FTE TEACHERS, FTE TEACHING ASSISTANTS, PUPILS PER FTE TEACHER, AND AVERAGE TEACHER SALARY IN NON-SELECTIVE AND SELECTIVE STATE SCHOOLS *(SOURCE: DFE)*
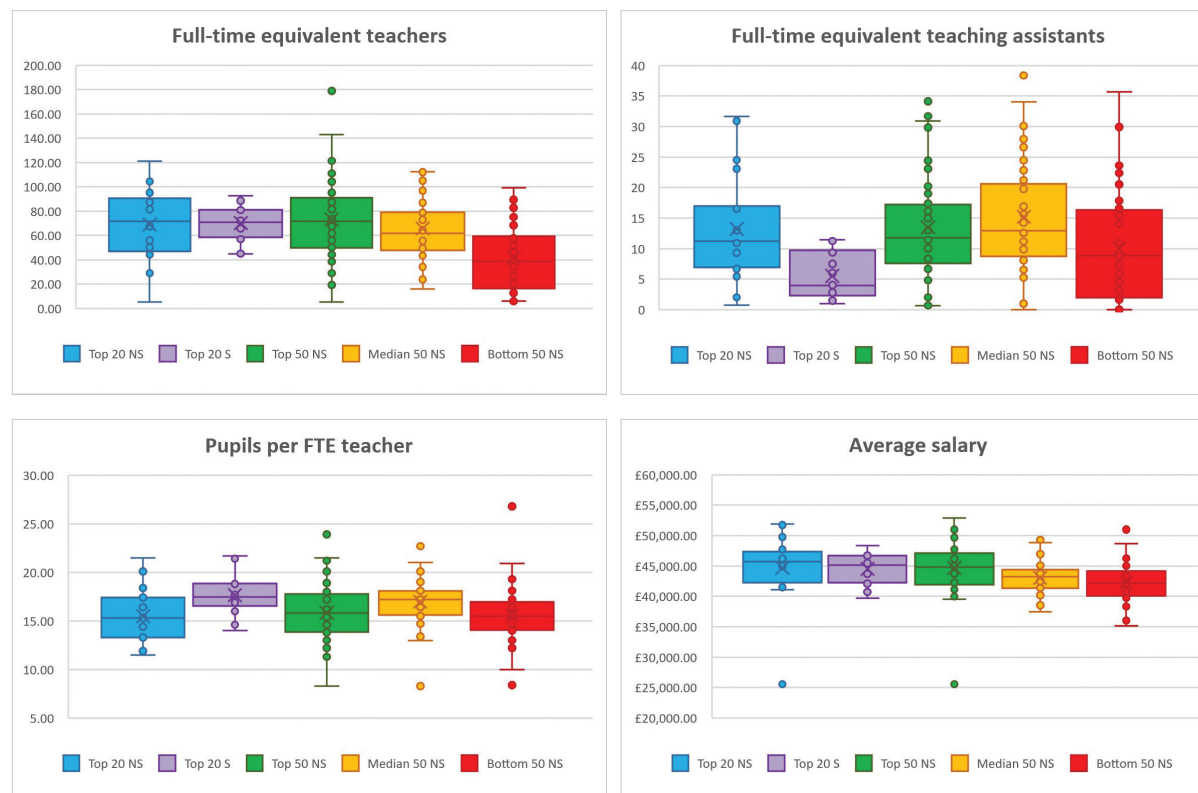
4. BEHAVIOURAL POLICIES

Examining the behavioural policies of the schools who performed best on the most recent Progress 8 measures reveals several consistent patterns. Fundamentally, the best disciplinary policies and procedures are consistent, well-defined, and clear to staff, pupils, parents/carers. They are detailed enough to offer adequate guidance for a range of behaviour situations: minor and major, for pupils at different ages, incurring low-stakes and high-stakes disciplinary responses. To be effective, they must remove the conditions for negative behaviour, steer pupils towards positive behaviour, and provide a decisive outcome. They tread a careful line between giving staff autonomy in tailoring their decisions to the situations they face and holding them rigorously accountable for their disciplinary choices.

Beyond these general rules, some of the best-performing schools' behavioural policies clearly emphasise the distinction between pupils' *behaviour* (acceptable or unacceptable) and pupils *as persons* themselves. This helps pupils to 'take ownership' of their behaviour, and empowers them to see it as something they can change, helping them process and redress situations of misbehaviour.

Positive socialisation is key to helping pupils understand the reasoning behind the disciplinary rules they face, through private or public praise targeted at actions that reflect pupils' efforts to be thoughtful, caring, polite, or embody values that help make their school community a well-functioning, positive space. The same is true of positive reflection, which allows pupils to better process and understand not just *that* certain behaviours are expected of them, but also *why*. While the first line of accountability for behaviour situations is ultimately between pupils and staff, pupil–pupil 'peer support' is a useful auxiliary tool to help staff resolve behavioural situations. 'Monitor' or 'prefect' systems create a network of pupil–pupil 'first responders' to report or sanction negative behaviour. In the same vein, pupil–pupil 'buddy' systems can act as 'ports of call' for positive behavioural advice, reassurance, or support.

Schools prefer to rely on offering pupils rewards and privileges for positive behaviour over imposing duties and sanctions for negative behaviour. The aim of this is to accustom pupils to *seeking success* rather than *avoiding failure*, in their overall attitudes, attendance, learning and behavioural attainment, effort, and progress, and their wider impact on school life within and outside lessons. The most frequent rewards are personal commendations, achievement points, stickers and stamps, certificates, and badges; the most common sanctions are verbal reprimands, notes and phone calls to parents/carers, detentions, isolation, suspension, and exclusion, as well as withholding or removing rewards. While these are mostly *individually* awarded, they can have group effects, such as through class points or restorative community action within the school environment. These encourage pupils to be good 'team players' and grasp the 'multiplier effect' their actions have on the wider school.

The best-performing schools put in place clear, stringent boundaries that encourage pupils to see the school as an environment 'set apart' for learning, and to give themselves the space to make the most of their learning opportunities. All schools operate bans on addictive and illegal substances, pornography, weapons, and other potential causes of injury or damage. But these go a step further, and also prevent pupils from bringing in items that will distract unnecessarily from their learning, or at least heavily control their use on school premises—including mobile phones and smart devices, and excessive modification or accessorising of uniform dress codes.

Several of the best-performing schools also set careful limits on how pupils move around when they are on school premises. These limits are designed to instil a sense of efficient, sensible purpose in pupils' use of school space, through 'one-way systems' in corridors, 'out of bounds' areas, and prohibitions that aim to minimise the time pupils spend outside the classroom. A number of schools reinforce this by insisting on 'hands off' policies that create 'professional distance' around pupils and their personal space, appropriate to their age, maturity, and stage of learning and development. The aim of all these measures is to ensure that pupils give their tasks their maximum focus, and grasp the distinction between their institutional role and their 'outside life'.

Financial rewards and sanctions also have a role to play at the extreme ends of the behaviour policy spectrum. It is fairly common for schools to award tangible prizes to pupils who exhibit positive behaviour, including book tokens, vouchers, or new school equipment. Some schools go a step further, and reward positive behaviour through either individual and collective trips or participation in 'enrichment' activities. However, it is less common for schools to use fines to punish negative behaviour beyond the existing system of Local Authority 'penalty notices', except to help cover the cost of defaced or damaged school property. Instead, schools chiefly rely on more or less detailed rules around temporary or permanent confiscations, intended to remove items that distract pupils from their learning or otherwise disrupt school life.

The most important values that school ethos statements project include **integrity, self-esteem and respect, individuality, diversity, achievement**, and **responsibility**. Some schools link them to the requirement to foster British values, including offering pupils clear choices, encouraging them to express and discuss their own ideas, and to hear and consider those of other pupils. These sit alongside pupil codes of conduct as the key messaging that helps inculcate positive behaviours, above all organisation and self-discipline, punctuality, being well-prepared, focus and concentration, courtesy, taking instructions, and being considerate to their environment. Beyond these 'good manners' requirements, some of the best-performing schools also require pupils to carry school ID cards on and off school premises, and ask pupils and parents/carers to sign mandatory school behaviour contracts to hold pupils accountable for their actions.

At a small number of the best-performing schools, staff do not just instruct their pupils but clearly explain the rationale behind behaviour expectations. This includes 'proper character' conversations between staff and pupils as part of the daily/weekly school schedule, as well as 'restorative meetings' and staff–pupil–parent/carer 'summits' to explain school decisions. This shifts pupils' behaviour understanding from *what* to *why* and *how*, which treats them as not just pupils fulfilling their roles at school, but also nascent adults who must be prepared to face behaviour expectations in their future social roles.

Staff also rely extensively on behavioural signalling to steer pupils towards positive behaviour and away from negative behaviour. Much of this is non-verbal and non-interventionist, such as pauses, claps, raised hands, eye contact, proximity, or other postural or gestural behaviour 'prompts' that precede the lowest end of disciplinary scales. This often works best when it is formalised into a system of pre-sanction or pre-reward 'green/yellow/red cards', 'flags', or 'strikes', which let pupils know their behaviour has been noted. Schools also use behaviour celebrations such as 'achievement weeks', termly 'celebration assemblies', or annual 'summit parties' to accustom pupils to the idea of regular 'check-ins' or progress reports. Some schools also invite parents/carers to these events, to ensure that their behavioural approaches are well-integrated with those pupils are familiar with from their 'home life'.

Staff benefit from rigorous training to help them manage their pupils' behaviour, especially to help them provide pupils with clear, carefully-calibrated physical and verbal communications of their behavioural expectations. But schools cannot expect teaching and administrative staff to take on all the additional responsibilities for managing pupils' behaviour. Some of the best-performing schools have introduced full-time 'key workers' to act as liaisons between schools and families on behavioural questions. Others have created formal spaces for collaboration, and exchange between staff, pupils, and parents/carers on the content and implementation of behaviour policies.

It is well-established practice for schools to use individualised behaviour plans to give pupils targets for behavioural achievement tailored to their own needs and records, based on close observation and discussion involving staff and parents/carers. However, at the moment, these are poorly integrated with

existing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, and SEND provision. This means that behaviour policies, which to some extent necessarily have to be universal across the pupil body *as a whole*, may not have the leeway to adequately capture *individual* pupils' capabilities and needs.

All schools keep some purely internal, confidential behavioural records, especially of incidents where pupils have demonstrated inappropriate, disruptive, or dangerous behaviour requiring staff intervention. But some schools have begun to move beyond maintaining an 'institutional memory' of pupil behaviour, introducing a system of regular updates, 'payslips', and scores for (e.g.) classwork and homework effort, punctuality, and attendance that are accessible to pupils and parents/carers. This offers a promising foundation to quantify or 'grade' *behaviour* outcomes and behaviour development over the course of a pupil's time at a particular school along the same lines as the *academic* outcome and 'value added' comparisons that inform the Progress 8 calculations.

Finally, the language in the Schools White Paper around treating behaviour as a curriculum subject reflects the tentative rise in explicit behavioural training within a classroom context in some of the best-performing schools. These are still largely informal and situation-specific, but at the early-years level in particular, semi-formal guidance on emotional management to help pupils develop non-aggressive strategies to self-express, to talk about their own feelings and empathise with others, and to self- and co-regulate are an increasingly common part of substantive teaching. To help craft this 'in-house' training, many schools harness the expertise of external agencies to support pupils' behavioural needs. These include welfare, health, and social care services and the police, but also means engaging with the latest 'best practice' in pupil behaviour management provided by educational psychologists and consultants.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has conducted a detailed analysis of the behavioural approaches of the top 20 non-selective state schools in the most recent available Progress 8 rankings, supported by a close comparison of learning outcomes and contextual factors in the top 50, median 50, and bottom 50 non-selective state schools.

Overall, the behavioural approach of the best-performing state schools exhibits a number of standout features, which deserve to be given greater recognition in light of the behavioural turn in schools policy within the UK. The general tenor of these features is to make sure that the school as a community and a physical environment becomes a distinct space where pupils are taken seriously as learners, and where they are able to realise the learning opportunities they are presented with to their best ability. Many of them are designed in a way that subtly prepares pupils for the expectations, routines, and evaluations they will face in their careers once they leave, both in tertiary education and the world of work.

There is much for the state school sector as a whole to draw on in the behaviour policies of its outstanding performers, and there is ample 'best practice' available that can inform proposals to sharpen the new focus on pupil behaviour in schools policy. To push the behavioural turn even further, there are several key behavioural approaches that should be expanded beyond their current patchwork implementation, in consultation with schools' local stakeholders and their pupils' parents/carers. These lead to a number of specific insights and proposals in the areas this report has evaluated.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEGISLATORS

1. **Behaviour accounts.** School rewards and sanctions systems should be joined up into a live 'behaviour account' that pupils can 'pay into' through good behaviour, and from which the school makes 'withdrawals' when they exhibit poor behaviour. Behaviour guidance should provide an indicative national 'points conversion' framework for different types of reward and sanction (such as reprimands, detentions, or suspensions for negative behaviour, as well as stickers, certificates, or commendations for positive behaviour).

2. **Behaviour records and behaviour scores.** The 'running tally' of the points surplus/deficit that pupils have on their behaviour account should be converted into a termly 'behaviour score'. This should be made a formal component of each pupil's yearly school results, made available to pupils themselves and their parents/carers alongside their examination performance, to evidence either behavioural consistency, growth, or decline. This 'behaviour score' can then be provided as supplementary information for their later UCAS and job applications.

3. **Behaviour 5 ranking.** The Ofsted ratings system should be supplemented by a behavioural equivalent of the Attainment 8 and Progress 8 measures for academic outcomes. Like these, the DfE should introduce a standardised points conversion system for a basket that includes: (1) schools' 'behaviour score' (as an average of its pupils' scores); (2) compliance rates; (3) rates of absence and persistent absence; (4) rates of lateness; and (5) number of temporary or permanent exclusions. Comparison of schools' Behaviour 5 scores at KS2 and KS4 would allow for a similar 'value added' assessment as Progress 8 offers for academic results.

4. **'Fair play' prizes and 'foul play' penalties.** Financial rewards and sanctions should be given a greater role in school behaviour management. Schools should be further empowered to issue prizes/bonuses or penalties/fines to pupils and their parents/carers if they show instances of outstanding positive and negative behaviour. These prizes and penalties should be calibrated to pupils' individual behaviour plans and targets. National behaviour guidance should offer clear advice on what a fair, sustainable maximum level for any financial rewards and sanctions should be.

5. **School ID cards.** The DfE should roll out a national mandate for school ID cards, to allow school and non-school authorities to hold pupils to account for their behaviour on school premises and beyond. These cards should be scannable, linked to a smart device app, that allows school staff, parents/carers, and pupils to easily access (and in the case of staff, amend) each pupil's behaviour record and behaviour account.

6. **Behaviour contracts.** The DfE should implement a national mandate for school behaviour contracts, to be signed by pupils and their parents/carers at all schools and academy trusts. These will help hold pupils accountable for their actions at school, integrate the mentorship roles of staff and parents/carers, and make the behavioural expectations pupils face at home and at school more consistent and predictable.

7. **Behaviour teaching.** The DfE should set a mandatory minimum weekly quantity of behaviour-focused teaching, where staff and pupils systematically consider key questions of 'good' and 'bad' behaviour in theory and practice. This can be conducted as separate 'behaviour classes', or integrated into existing curriculum provision, either within National Curriculum subjects or alongside Critical Thinking and Citizenship classes. Behaviour guidance should offer indicative teaching and testing materials to provide a minimum expectation for this learning objective.

8. **Bans and interdictions.** Clearer policies are needed around the items schools are empowered to exclude as inessential to learning, such as smartphones or other electronic devices. Existing policies on staff intervention should be expanded to include clear national guidelines around pupils' use of school space, and to better protect pupils' personal boundaries and circumscribe the limits of physical interaction between them while on school premises.

9. **Behaviour policy councils.** The DfE should mandate all schools and academy trusts to create forums for systematic dialogue between staff, pupils, and parents/carers on the content and implementation of school behaviour policies. These are vital to providing clarity and continuity for pupils about the behavioural expectations they face at home and at school.

10. **School Behaviour Unit.** Government should create a dedicated consultancy and intervention unit with a policy scrutiny function that draws on the expertise of welfare, health, social care, police, and education consultancy services. This Unit should oversee, integrate, and structure the resources for the existing system of Behaviour Hubs. Accountable to Ofsted, it should play the role of a 'think and do tank' empowered to help schools and trusts revise and update their behaviour policies and develop strategies to improve their behaviour performance.

TACTICAL ACTION POINTS FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAMS

1. **Positive socialisation.** School staff should be encouraged to give pupils clear, proportionate praise when they exhibit positive behaviour. This praise can be public or private, formal or informal, and handed out to pupils individually or in groups. It should always draw a precise link between pupils' character and effort and the value their behaviour is embodying.

2. **Positive reflection.** School leadership teams should ensure that dedicated time is set aside in schedules and lesson plans for explanatory behaviour discussions led by the staff. Whenever pupils receive a reward or sanction that is entered on their behaviour record, staff should find structured opportunities to hold explanatory conversations with pupils and parents/carers to help reinforce expectations about positive as well as negative behaviour.

3. **Behaviour celebrations.** Schools should introduce half-termly, termly, and annual 'summary events' to mark pupils' behaviour over the preceding period. The aim is to acknowledge pupils' individual and collective efforts to reflect the attitudes and values the school expects of them in their actions, with praise and other rewards for 'best behaved' and 'most improved' pupils and class groups.

4. **'Behaviour buddy' system.** Schools should expand the 'first responder' model of 'monitor' or 'prefect' systems beyond just reporting or issuing low-level sanctions for negative behaviour. Senior pupils should also act as sources of peer support and accountability, acting as 'ports of call' for pupils who are having trouble with behaviour expectations, or as a 'support person' who can accompany pupils to some disciplinary meetings to ensure greater transparency.

5. **Reconciling behaviour and SEND policy.** Schools' personal behaviour plans should explicitly take into account contextual factors that might impact pupils' behaviour, recognising that the experiences they have outside the classroom (on or off school premises) can strongly impact their performance within it. Schools must clarify areas of separation and overlap between EHC and personal behaviour plans, add an explicit behavioural component to SEND provision, and make behavioural policies more sensitive to pupils' SEND requirements.

6. **Behavioural signalling.** School leaderships should develop clear systems of pre-disciplinary, pre-intervention signalling, in the form of 'yellow cards' and 'red cards' to signal that negative behaviour has been noted, and 'green cards' to signal that pupils are making exceptional effort towards positive behaviour. Awards of 'cards' should be included as part of pupils' behavioural records, and integrated into pupils' 'behaviour account' via a clear 'exchange rate' between 'cards' and 'points'.

7. **'Conditional confiscation' as a behavioural sanction.** Schools should institute policies where items that are not essential to the school curriculum can be confiscated as a form of 'collateral' against pupils' behaviour. Pupils who exhibit negative behaviour must demonstrate that they meet the attitudes and values the school expects of them to 'earn back' access to these items on school premises.

8. **Enrichment trips as a behavioural reward.** Schools should provide systematic opportunities for place-based visits and outings for pupils who exhibit either consistently positive or greatly improved behaviour. These should be supplementary to the school curriculum, and schools, academy trusts, and LEAs should partner with local businesses, Further and Higher Education institutions, cultural bodies and sites, public service provides, and local authorities. This would help schools make best use of local facilities, and cultivate 'pride in place' in their pupils.

9. **Behaviour support staff.** School leaderships cannot expect teaching and administrative staff to take on all current and future responsibilities for mentorship and behaviour management. Instead, they should introduce designated full-time behaviour support staff with a dedicated career path within the school and wider sector. These staff can liaise between the school and pupils' families on positive and negative behaviour questions, taking the pressure off existing teachers and administrators.

10. **Expand teacher training.** Schools should provide staff with the opportunity for on-the-job or part-time continuing professional development. As well as the latest 'best practice' in course delivery, curriculum development, and behaviour management, training programmes should be supplemented with insights from media, rhetorical, and communications training. This will help staff minimise ambiguity in their communication with pupils, and play a stronger, more proactive part as positive role models.

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This report explores how effective approaches to behaviour management can lead to better learning outcomes for pupils in the English comprehensive school system. It examines the behavioural policies, learning outcomes, and contextual institutional characteristics of 150 UK non-faith, non-selective state schools, representing the best-, median-, and worst-performing comprehensive schools in the 2022 Progress 8 rankings.

The report closely analyses and compares these schools' behaviour management approaches to evaluate how differently they treat positive and negative behaviour, as well as other statutory policies that have a close bearing on how their behavioural policies operate, including codes of conduct and Special Educational Needs and Disability provision. It accompanies this with an analysis of the available Government data collected as part of the Progress 8 score rankings, including various breakdowns of academic attainment scores, and statistics related to pupil management and school staff structures.

Using these findings, the report develops a series of recommendations for reforms to schools policy in the UK, in particular for the behaviour guidelines to be implemented at the national level. Drawing on the latest best practice across the state school sector, it proposes ten strategic recommendations for future national and regional legislation around school behaviour, and ten tactical action points for school leadership teams to prioritise in their behaviour policy implementation.