Violence and Indiscipline in Schools: Research Study Commissioned by NASUWT

Final Report

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CONFIDENTIAL

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In addition, the following individuals have also provided invaluable comments and contributions to the report:

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PRCI also wish to acknowledge the active involvement of teachers/head teachers, parents, young people, and agency representatives/education professionals who have all helped to make this report holistic in its approach to providing a deeper understanding of the nature and extent of violence and indiscipline within schools in the UK.

Andi Wright

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April 2003

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Executive Summary

Background

In November 2002, PRCI Ltd. were commissioned by NASUWT to undertake a scoping study to inform a national plan to develop a comprehensive research programme on violence and indiscipline in schools within the UK.

Violence is viewed by many as a contemporary crisis, which is beginning to reflect trends in the United States. One significant issue of concern is that violence and indiscipline in schools does not discriminate, essentially transcending the boundaries of gender, class and race. The impact has implications for schools; teachers have less time to deliver teaching in order to effectively 'manage' classroom disruption, as well as facing many other problems, including lack of morale and job satisfaction. In many cases, schools have seen a significant increase in staff turnover rates, which suggests that the problem of violence has now become a significant problem not only for education more generally, but also the systems which formalise educational processes.

When considering any form of violence, or indeed, indiscipline, it is paramount to take into account the wider context in which both of these events occurs. Therefore, as part of the research study, consideration has been given to external influences that impact upon young people, including the home, family, and the communities in which young people engage. The purpose of exploring these 'potential' external influences is to establish some of the 'triggers' and 'contexts', which may be considered to act as a vehicle for violence and indiscipline to occur. Furthermore, as research programmes have focused primarily upon violence in schools, indiscipline has received, in comparison, little attention, and thus becomes the main focus throughout.

This research study focuses upon both the extent and causes of violence, considering the multiplicity of 'contexts and triggers', which could be argued to exacerbate issues of indiscipline, and ultimately violence. In addition, the following questions have been raised as part of the research programme, and addressed throughout the course of this report:

- What strategies are implemented to address the issues of violence and indiscipline in schools?
- What body of knowledge exists about effective behaviour interventions, and what are the gaps in knowledge?
- What range of practical interventions are used to address issues of violence and indiscipline in schools?
- What are the gaps that currently exist surrounding measures/interventions to address indiscipline and violence, and in what ways can these be overcome?

Key Findings

Research studies conducted within the field of violence and indiscipline in schools across the UK, US, and Europe have identified a number of key issues. These are as follows

- The definitions of 'violence', 'bullying' and 'indiscipline clearly incorporate a wide range of behaviours which can alter depending on both the context within which the behaviours are enacted, and, indeed, with whom they are directed towards

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- UK research clearly identifies an inability to provide a baseline of statistical information with respect to the number of incidents of violence and indiscipline within schools, as in England and Wales there is no central register of violence statistics available from Government sources.

- UK research conducted within the field of violence and indiscipline highlights community and parental influences as having the greatest impact upon pupil behaviour within schools

- National/regional/local level initiatives in England and Wales that address pupil behaviour often fail to be appropriately evaluated in terms of their impact upon behaviour, and indeed, their impact upon the day to day issues of behaviour management within the larger framework of school systems

- Research studies conducted within the United States, Ireland, France and Spain consistently highlight similar issues of the scale and nature of violence and indiscipline within schools as those research studies conducted in the UK. Furthermore, initiatives developed to address pupil behaviour lack appropriate evaluation in terms of their impact upon improving the situation

- European research studies identify 3 risk factors that can often lead to indiscipline and violence occurring in schools. These are; external and internal issues relating to schools (i.e. demographic composition of the school, class size, staff cohesion, teaching material, class boundaries within schools), socio-demographic characteristics of pupils and staff, and psychological health of pupils and staff

PRCI's research study has identified a number of key issues arising from questionnaires, interviews and focus groups with teachers, agency representatives, parents, and young people. These are as follows:

Parents/Guardians

- Parents/guardians have a low level of awareness of 'preventative' measures used within schools to tackle incidents of indiscipline. Rather, parents only seem to have an awareness of 'reactive' measures used (i.e. report, detention, exclusion) to address indiscipline

- Communication between parents, schools, teachers, and pupils is inconsistent. Parents/guardians perceive their role as being 'external' to the school environment, with respect to addressing issues of indiscipline. Therefore, a gap currently exits between 'internal' roles and influences (i.e. teaching staff), and 'external' roles and influences (i.e. parents), and the strategic links that could be made to provide a joined up approach to addressing pupil behaviour from both parties

Teaching Staff/Agency Representatives

- The lack of clarity surrounding the defining of indiscipline perpetuates the inconsistency of response to incidents by teaching staff, and in particular, supply staff

- Policies deployed by schools surrounding pupil behaviour are felt by teaching staff to be insufficient in meeting both staff and pupil needs. This is exacerbated further by a lack of training and continuing professional development for teaching/non teaching staff on behaviour management. An effective training programme for teaching/non teaching staff is paramount to providing an appropriate practical response to policies and guidelines on behaviour management

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- Teaching staff feel they address issues of indiscipline in a reactive manner. In general, teaching staff had little, if any awareness of preventative measures used within schools to tackle pupil behaviour
- Teaching staff consider lack of parenting skills, dysfunctional families, and television/media as the three most significant factors impacting upon the decline of pupil behaviour in schools
- Agency representatives state that incidents of indiscipline and violence often occur 'external' to the class room (i.e. during lunch/break time), but are then brought into the class room environment
- According to teaching staff/agency representatives, issues perpetuating incidents of indiscipline and violence include; an inappropriate curriculum, lack of flexibility to address pupil needs, lack of appropriate support structures for young people in transition between primary and secondary school establishments. Teaching staff therefore feel they 'contain', rather than 'prevent' behaviour

Young People

- The greatest impact upon pupil behaviour, identified by young people themselves, was the amount of quality time teaching staff spend knowing and valuing pupils as individuals. Individuality is felt to be ignored, which they feel facilitates disruptive behaviour to occur
- Pupils feel that punitive measures, although often appropriate, are used inconsistently by teaching staff, hence blurring the boundaries of what individual teachers consider to be appropriate, or inappropriate behaviour. This, combined with larger class sizes, acts in a way that encourages, rather than prevents incidents of indiscipline occurring during lessons
- Pupils feel that reducing class sizes, and the adoption of an adult version of 'circle time' before lessons commence, would in turn prevent many forms of disruption from occurring in the first place

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Conclusion

The purpose of the research study is to inform a national programme of future research in the field of indiscipline and violence in schools. It is recommended, therefore, that the research strategy should adopt a 'holistic' approach focusing upon issues pertaining to parents, teaching/non teaching staff, pupils and schools. It is acknowledged that understanding indiscipline and violence in schools is a highly complex task, which should be addressed from a multitude of research perspectives to ensure that a tailored and inclusive programme of future work is implemented.

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Introduction

In November 2002, PRCI Ltd. were commissioned by NASUWT to undertake a scoping study to inform a national plan to develop a comprehensive research programme on violence and indiscipline in schools within the UK.

Violence is viewed by many as a contemporary crisis, which is beginning to reflect trends in the United States. One significant issue of concern is that violence and indiscipline in schools does not discriminate, essentially transcending the boundaries of gender, class and race. The impact has implications for schools; teachers have less time to deliver teaching in order to effectively 'manage' classroom disruption, as well as facing many other problems, including lack of morale and job satisfaction. In many cases, schools have seen a significant increase in staff turnover rates, which suggests that the problem of violence has now become a significant problem not only for education more generally, but also the systems which formalise the educational processes.

When considering any form of violence, or indeed, indiscipline, it is paramount to take into account the wider context in which both of these events occurs. Therefore, as part of the research study, consideration has been given to external influences that impact upon young people, including the home, family, and the communities in which young people engage. The purpose of exploring these 'potential' external influences is to establish some of the 'triggers' and 'contexts', which may be considered to act as a vehicle for violence and indiscipline to occur. Furthermore, as research programmes have focused primarily upon violence in schools, indiscipline has received, in comparison, little attention, and thus becomes the main focus throughout.

This research study focuses upon both the extent and causes of violence, considering the multiplicity of 'contexts and triggers', which could be argued to exacerbate issues of indiscipline, and ultimately violence. In addition, the following questions have been raised as part of the research programme, and addressed throughout the course of this report:

- What is known about the impact of poor behaviour on schools, teachers, pupils and parents?
- What Government strategies are being implemented to address the issues of violence and indiscipline?
- What body of knowledge exists about effective behaviour interventions, and what are the gaps in knowledge?
- What range of practical interventions is used to address issues of violence and indiscipline in schools?
- What are the gaps that currently exist surrounding measures/interventions to address indiscipline and violence, and in what ways can these be overcome?

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Summary of Sections

The purpose of this section is to provide a structured overview of the research study, and to outline the content and nature of each stage of the research process. In particular, attention is paid to the purpose, aims and objectives of each stage, and the methodological approaches undertaken.

Section 1: Documentation Review

The purpose of this section is to provide a review of secondary data sources, focusing upon key documents, literature, policies, strategies, and practice issues on violence and indiscipline within schools from the UK, United States, and the EU (in particular France, Ireland, and Spain). The aims of the documentation review are to:

- Provide an insight into the variety of ways in which violence and indiscipline within schools is defined in different countries
- Gain an understanding of the extent of violence and disruptive behaviour, its trends and causes
- Explore the types of interventions used to address violence and indiscipline within school settings
- Consider the strength of evidence surrounding the effectiveness of behaviour interventions, and to identify gaps in knowledge
- Highlight Government policies that are used to address violence and indiscipline in schools

Section 2: Questionnaire to Parents/Guardians

This purpose of this section is to explore the perceptions and views of parents/guardians of school age children, surrounding violence and indiscipline within schools (an area where currently little research has been conducted, both within the UK and within other countries). Parents/guardians views are obtained using a survey methodological approach (and snowball sampling), with the aim of eliciting in depth qualitative information regarding the following key issues:

- The level of knowledge surrounding violence and indiscipline incidents occurring within the schools their children attend
- The level of knowledge of measures/interventions used within schools to address violence and indiscipline
- Parental perceptions around the impact of violence and indiscipline in schools upon children, parents, and teachers/head teachers
- Parental responses to problems of violence and indiscipline within schools their children attend
- The potential role of parents in addressing violence and indiscipline

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Section 3: Teaching Staff Questionnaire

The purpose of this section is to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions and views of teaching staff from primary, middle, secondary, post 16, and special educational establishments surrounding violence and indiscipline within schools. Teaching staff views are obtained using a survey methodological approach (and opportunity sampling), with the aim of eliciting qualitative information regarding the following key issues:

- Policies employed by schools regarding violence and indiscipline, and their level of effectiveness
- The influence of external factors upon young peoples' behaviour
- Identifying measures that may help to reduce incidents of violence and indiscipline in schools
- Issues surrounding under reporting of incidents
- The level and nature of training received on behaviour management

Section 4: Consultation: Interviews/Focus Groups

The purpose of this section is to highlight in depth qualitative information using one-to-one interviews with a diverse range of agencies and professionals from various backgrounds, and focus groups with both teaching staff and young people in order to gain a better understanding of a number of important perspectives upon violence and indiscipline, from both a service provider, and service users standpoint. The range of individuals who participated include; DfES, OFSTED Inspectors, Pupil Referral Unit managers, educational psychologists, Secondary Heads Association, professionals with responsibility for re-allocating disaffected pupils, and teaching staff from nursery/infants, primary, middle, secondary, and post 16 educational establishments. The overall aim of conducting one-to-one interviews/focus groups with agency representatives/professionals is to provide detailed information regarding:

- Perception of the scale of violence and indiscipline in schools
- Triggers and contexts in which violence and indiscipline occurs
- Problems surrounding 'managing' behaviour in schools
- Knowledge and effectiveness of policies within schools regarding violence and indiscipline
- Training received for dealing with violence and indiscipline in schools
- Issues surrounding under-reporting of violent incidents
- External social factors believed to impact on the presence of violence and indiscipline in schools
- Measures/interventions that may help to reduce violence and disruptive behaviour in schools

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The aim of conducting young peoples' focus groups is to identify issues surrounding:

- Which school subjects liked/disliked and why?
- Issues facing teachers when teaching classes
- Which lessons are easiest to disrupt and why?
- Impact of indiscipline upon the ability of teachers to teach effectively
- If you were a teacher, what would you try to do to address disruption?
- Consequences of being disruptive in class and consistency of teachers responses
- What would make classes less disruptive?

Section 5: Recommendations

The purpose of this section is to collate the findings from each stage of the research study and provide a number of recommendations with respect to both practice and research issues that will help to inform a national plan to develop a comprehensive research programme on violence and indiscipline in schools within the UK.

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