

Edinburgh Schools Facing Urgent Issues: UNISON Calls for Action Following Alarming Workplace Violence Survey

New survey data from UNISON's recent research among Edinburgh City Council workers sheds light on the challenges faced by school support staff, echoing the findings of the Scottish government's [Behaviour in Scottish schools: research report 2023](#).

UNISON Edinburgh City Branch emphasises that the impact of pupils' behavioural challenges is disproportionately falling on the shoulders of support staff, who are often the lowest paid and receive minimal training and support.

The violence at work survey, conducted among our members, saw the highest response rate from staff working in schools with 82% of respondents in that area. The Edinburgh Branch survey indicated a need for clearer reporting procedures and improved feedback mechanisms to ensure member concerns are addressed promptly and effectively.

The return aligns with the government's findings, revealing that 86% of support staff encounter low-level disruptive behaviour daily. Additionally, 66% experience verbal abuse, and 59% face physical aggression on a regular basis. This supports what UNISON members have been telling us – the lowest-paid support staff, mainly women, are the frontline responders to challenging pupil behaviour.

Pauline Henderson, UNISON Edinburgh Convenor for education, stated: "No one should face violence and abusive behaviour at work, and if they do, they need proper support. Yet, in our schools in Edinburgh, it is the lowest-paid, mostly women support staff who deal with challenging and disruptive behaviour every day."

"UNISON stresses that support staff are more likely than teachers to report the greatest negative impacts from serious disruptive behaviours," added Pauline Henderson.

Tom Connolly, UNISON City of Edinburgh Branch Secretary, emphasised UNISON's consistent advocacy on the issue: "UNISON has consistently raised violence and abuse of school support staff with employers and the government. Now that we have evidence backing up this growing problem, we need government funding and action to help schools deal with it."

"More than half of the respondents (57.6%) feel their employer does not take violence at work complaints seriously. Addressing this perception is crucial for fostering a supportive and protective workplace culture," added Tom Connolly.