



# Attention needed: What is happening with behaviour in inspection reports?

By Dr Keven Bartle, SSAT

This morning, I asked an AI tool ‘what are the recent trends in pupil behaviour in English schools?’. The response that came back said this:

*“Recent trends in pupil behaviour in English schools indicate a concerning increase in behavioural issues. Here are some key points:*

- ▶ **Increase in Behavioural Issues:** A significant rise in behaviour problems has been reported, with both staff and pupils affected. In the 2022/23 academic year, 1 in 5 staff members experienced emotional or physical violence from pupils.
- ▶ **Impact of the Pandemic:** The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures have exacerbated these issues. Increased screen time, social isolation, and mental health challenges have contributed to worsening behaviour.
- ▶ **Disruptions to Learning:** Despite 92% of pupils believing they behave well, 42% reported frequent disruptions to their learning due to others’ behaviour.
- ▶ **Staff Challenges:** Many staff members are considering resignation, with pupil behaviour being a significant factor. About 43% of staff have contemplated leaving their positions.

- ▶ **Need for Support:** There is a notable difficulty in obtaining support for managing pupil behaviour, with 25% of school staff reporting challenges in this area.

These trends highlight the need for increased attention and resources to address behavioural challenges in schools.”

Not a bad summary, I think, and one that would resonate with many working in schools. It is the final section that I think is interesting; that there is a need for “increased attention” about the issue alongside additional resources to tackle the issues raised by such increased attention.

With this in mind, I thought that I would use this blogpost to take a deeper dive into SSAT’s Inspection Tracker data around behaviour to see whether the inspection service is indeed giving behaviour their “increased attention”. The answer was a fairly resounding “no”.

In case you haven’t read any of our previous posts about the Inspection Tracker, it is a tool we use to capture the ‘need to improve’ comments made in every inspection report for every school setting conducted since September 2023. At this moment, the tracker includes 19,000 such improvement needs for primaries, secondaries, through schools, special schools, PRUs, sixth form settings and non-associate independent schools.

	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1	Mean
<b>Behaviour and Attitudes – All</b>	<b>9.3%</b>	<b>10.8%</b>	<b>11.8%</b>	<b>9.9%</b>	<b>10.9%</b>	<b>11.3%</b>	<b>10.6%</b>
Application of behaviour policy is inconsistent	2.0%	2.3%	2.1%	1.7%	1.9%	1.9%	2.0%
Pupil behaviour and conduct is problematic	1.7%	1.5%	0.9%	1.1%	0.9%	0.6%	1.2%
Attitude to learning and engagement are problematic	0.6%	0.4%	0.7%	0.9%	0.7%	0.8%	0.6%
Behaviour policy and sanctions are not working	0.7%	0.4%	0.7%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%
High level misbehaviour not effectively addressed	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%
Recording and reporting of behaviour problematic	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%	0.1%
<b>All behaviour comments</b>	<b>5.3%</b>	<b>4.9%</b>	<b>4.8%</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	<b>4.4%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>4.6%</b>

The table above shows the proportion of all improvement needs that are related to behaviour over each quarter of inspection activity since October 2023.

Some insights that emerge from this data include:

- ▶ From Q4 of 2023 to Q2 of 2024, behaviour accounted for around 5% of all 'need to improve' comments. Since then, the figure has been around 4.2% of all needs.
- ▶ In recent quarters there has been less focus by inspection reports on:
  - ▷ the application of behaviour policies by school staff
  - ▷ problematic student behaviour
  - ▷ the effectiveness of policies and practices
  - ▷ the failure of schools to tackle high level misbehaviour well.
- ▶ At the same time there has been a marginally increased focus on:
  - ▷ in-class engagement and attitude to learning
  - ▷ school effectiveness around recording and reporting of behaviour incidents.

Although there has been a notable increase in focus on the behaviour and attitudes element of the inspection framework since the start of 2024, much of the attention has gone to attendance which, in the current quarter of inspection activity, accounts for almost 7% of need to improve comments (compared to 4% for behaviour needs).

Our analysis (see table below) also looks at the riskiness of each need, correlating the instance of the need with the inspection outcomes for the setting with the need. By this measure we have identified the following levels of risk around specific behaviour needs.

Some insights that emerge from this dataset include:

- ▶ Whenever a behaviour need is mentioned in an inspection report, there is a greater risk of negative outcomes (requires improvement or inadequate judgments) or declining outcomes since the previous inspection.
- ▶ The riskiest of behaviour needs are those that are least frequently mentioned in inspection reports. Issues around policies not working, high level misbehaviour not being tackled and recording/reporting being problematic feature in only 0.8% of reports.
- ▶ Even with these most risky of behaviour needs identified on inspection reports, schools that receive them retain a four-in-ten chance of receiving good or outstanding outcomes and an almost six-in-ten chance of maintaining or improving their outcomes.

	Risk of negative outcomes	Risk of declining outcome
<b>All identified needs</b>	<b>24.7%</b>	<b>22.5%</b>
Application of behaviour policy is inconsistent	47.8%	36.7%
Pupil behaviour and conduct is problematic	34.4%	28.3%
Attitude to learning and engagement are problematic	33.1%	29.8%
Behaviour policy and sanctions are not working	48.9%	42.9%
High level misbehaviour not effectively addressed	61.9%	55.3%
Recording and reporting of behaviour problematic	56.3%	40.0%

And finally, our Inspection Tracker enables us to drill down into needs by regions (even counties) to explore where certain needs might be more prevalent across the country. In terms of behaviour needs identified on inspection reports since September 2023, some key outliers include:

- ▶ 6.9% of improvement needs for schools in the East of England are about behaviour, compared to 4.6% of schools in all regions.
- ▶ The only other regions with above average mention of behaviour in their school's inspection reports are the East Midlands (5.1%) and the South West (4.7%).
- ▶ Problems with the application of the school behaviour policy by staff (the most frequent of behaviour need nationally at 2.0%) are much more likely to be mentioned in reports for schools in the East of England (3.4%) and London (2.7%).
- ▶ Schools in the East Midlands and North East are much more likely (0.5%) to be identified as not responding effectively to high levels of misbehaviour (0.2% nationally). As outlined earlier, this is the riskiest of all behaviour needs for low or declining outcomes.

## Conclusions

As my AI companion mentioned at the start of this post, there is a “need for increased attention and resources to address behavioural challenges in schools” in England at this time.

This brief analysis of data from every inspection report over the last 18 months suggests that on the first of these requirements, there has not been an increase of attention by our inspectorate on the behaviour challenges being faced by schools.

Our look at our Inspection Tracker data suggests that, if anything, there has been a decreased level of attention paid to this area of school's work and that that decrease in attention has been relatively consistent quarter by quarter of inspection activity since Q4 of 2023.

The risks of behaviour needs featuring on inspection reports may be greater than for all identified needs, but even where the riskiest comments are made, schools still have a good chance of avoiding negative or declining outcomes.

Broadly speaking, the identification of behaviour needs is consistent across most of the country. There may be need for additional work to support behaviour management for schools in the East Midlands and South West, but those responsible for supporting schools in tackling behaviour issues in the East of England face the greatest challenge of all the English regions.

Ofsted's ongoing consultation includes a draft of a proposed report card that includes the judgment 'attention needed'. It is hard not to conclude from this analysis that greater levels of attention are needed from the inspectorate in responding to the behavioural challenges faced by schools.

More positively, the consultation proposals to separate attendance from behaviour in the new framework might – just might, with additional resourcing – help us to better identify the issues better so that we can, together, address them better.

For school leaders, the relative decrease in frequency of behaviour improvement needs in inspection reports should not obscure that relative increase in impact of such judgments. Even the least risky behaviour needs are 50% more likely to lead to negative outcomes than other types of needs. The riskiest behaviour improvement needs more than double the chance of such unwanted outcomes. In this respect, behaviour needs have an iceberg-like quality for schools in the inspection window: much lies beneath the visible surface and it is best not to run into them whilst navigating a course through the high seas.

To see is to know and to be able to do. Continuing the nautical imagery, taking the Nelsonian “I see no ships” approach – not seeing and therefore not knowing – around something as crucial as behaviour, is worrying for the future of our schools and all who sail in them.

## Hard Cases: Exploring complex behaviour challenges through case studies

### *Are you a school leader responsible for behaviour?*

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Keven Bartle Senior Education  
Lead

