

News Release

Association of Teachers and Lecturers

Annual Conference • 21 - 24 March 2005 • Torquay



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For education correspondents /newsdesks

Teachers will leave profession due to poor pupil behaviour, ATL survey finds

An Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) survey has revealed that a shocking 72 per cent of secondary school teachers are considering leaving teaching because they are worn out with dealing with the persistent disruptive behaviour of some of their pupils. At its Conference today ATL will demand better protection for the rights and dignity of teachers.

ATL surveyed 300 secondary school teachers and found that as many as 46 per cent claim to have suffered from mental health problems as a result of disruptive pupil behaviour and 14 per cent had been subjected to actual bodily harm.

A teacher in the south east gave examples of disruptive pupil behaviour in her school, which included: making threats, swearing, locking teachers out of classrooms, vandalising school property, letting down car tyres, stealing keys, throwing eggs at staff, spitting at staff and physically assaulting them. She added:

“Teachers would be suspended if the situation was reversed and they committed any of these acts. Heads in our school refused meetings with teachers and did not report a single incident over a three-month period when more than 40 occurred.”

A teacher who has been in the profession for 18 years told of the mental health problems and physical bodily harm inflicted on him by disruptive pupils:

“I have been struck by pupils on at least 10 different occasions and have had two breakdowns and been on antidepressants for more than three years as a result.”

Another teacher, from Luton, explaining her decision to leave full-time teaching after 10 years, said:

“I left full-time teaching because I was no longer prepared to be verbally abused on a daily basis. I now do supply teaching because they cannot retain English teachers as behaviour continues to decline.”

A teacher who has been in the profession for 19 years described the helplessness felt by teachers:

“Hassle, persistent stress and aggression from pupils becomes directed at you. You’re a lovely docile target because you have ‘no rights’ and can do nothing to defend yourself.”

At their Conference next week ATL members will call for explicit standards of acceptable pupil behaviour and for behaviour policies, enforceable by LEAs and school governing bodies, which protect vulnerable teachers.

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 employers have an obligation to minimise risk and not expose staff to an environment that leads to stress, illness or harm. Yet the ATL survey found that 88 per cent of teachers are not aware of any risk assessments being conducted by their schools. Delegates at Conference will stress the need for risk assessments to be required for any student with a history of aggression.

A male teacher who has been in the profession for 14 years said:

“Risk assessments are needed. An increasing number of students have complex needs that are not met within mainstream education and manifest themselves in violent behaviour.”

Support that ATL believes should be offered to staff includes:

- Identifying levels of risk of violence faced by members of staff
- Providing adequate training for all staff likely to be exposed to violence under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- A structured response from management in the event of an assault
- Considering exclusion in the case of pupil/student assailants
- Reference to the police and use of statutory powers
- Relief from duty following assault
- Providing access to medical advice, legal advice and counselling
- Co-operating with the professional associations of assaulted members

Ends

For further information please contact the ATL Conference press office on 01803 299 910.

Notes to Editors

1. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers surveyed a randomly selected sample of 300 secondary school teachers in mainstream education in March 2005. Key findings of the survey are:
 - 39% of teachers are not satisfied with their school's behaviour policy
 - 72% of teachers have considered leaving the profession due to poor pupil behaviour
 - 74% of teachers know of colleagues who have left the profession due to poor pupil behaviour
 - 46% of teachers say that poor pupil behaviour has caused them mental health problems such as stress
 - 14% of teachers say that disruptive pupil behaviour has resulted in physical and bodily harm
 - 17% of teachers have experienced other types of suffering as a result of poor pupil behaviour
 - 88% of teachers are not aware of any risk assessments being conducted by their schools on students with a history of aggression
 - 19% of teachers feel their school's risk assessments are not effective
 - 61% of teachers feel their school should conduct risk assessments
 - 85% of teachers believe that the narrow and restrictive national curriculum, which disengages young people from education, contributes to poor pupil behaviour
2. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers' Annual Conference is taking place at the Riviera International Conference Centre, in Torquay, from Monday 21 March to Thursday 24 March 2005.
3. The ATL Annual Conference will be broadcast live on the internet at: www.atl.org.uk
4. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 160,000 teachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent schools, sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges in the United Kingdom.
5. ATL exists to protect and improve the status of teachers, lecturers and other professionals involved in delivering education and to further their legitimate professional interests.
6. ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC). It is unaffiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.

7. ATL members receive a regular magazine *Report* reflecting ATL policy and other issues affecting the education sector. If you would like to receive a copy please call 020 7782 1589.
8. Further information and all press releases are available on ATL's website: www.atl.org.uk