

Government plans on pupil behaviour welcomed by NUT

Commenting on Education Secretary Charles Clarke's announcements today (18 November 2004) Steve Sinnott, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said:

"The Education Secretary is to be congratulated. The Government now realises the damaging effects a few young people with unacceptable behaviour can have on the morale of teachers and the learning of pupils. The decision to ensure that all schools, including grammar schools and academies, take a fair share of excluded pupils is a logical step.

"But there is a need to require local authorities to live up to their responsibility to provide appropriate special schools and units for children with emotional and behavioural problems. For many young people with such difficulties this provision can turn round their behaviour and enable them to return to main stream education. No child should be written off. But it is not enough for schools to be left to carry the whole burden without this type of support.

"The bringing of weapons into school is a growing menace though it is impossible to quantify at present. Giving the power of forcible search to head teachers will help protect other pupils and staff from the dangers weapons pose. Sadly, the growing prevalence of guns and knives on our streets will be reflected in our schools unless determined efforts are made to prevent this happening. Schools are not immune from the changes taking place in the wider society.

"However that power must not put the head teacher or other teachers carrying out the search in jeopardy. It may be that specific legislation is needed to protect teaching staff carrying out searches from allegations of assault.

"I am very pleased that the Government is to look at ways of speeding up the handling of allegations made by pupils against teachers. Too often innocent teachers are left in limbo for month after month while an investigation into spurious allegations is carried out. It is disappointing that the Education Secretary did not accept the need for such allegations to be treated confidentially but speeding up the process will help.

"I look forward to discussing these important issues with the Education Secretary."

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For further information contact: Olive Forsythe tel: 020 7380 4706 (office) 020 8313 1692 (weekday evenings) or if all else fails 07879 480061.