

## Report on SEND staff working in England

A detailed survey was sent to UNISON members on the 8<sup>th</sup> September 2021 and was closed 3 weeks later on the 30<sup>th</sup>. To be included in the survey members needed to be one of the following:

- Employed at a nursery, school or college designated for learners with SEND, even if the job role was not directly working with children, or
- Employed in a mainstream nursery school or college in a job role directly supporting children with SEND

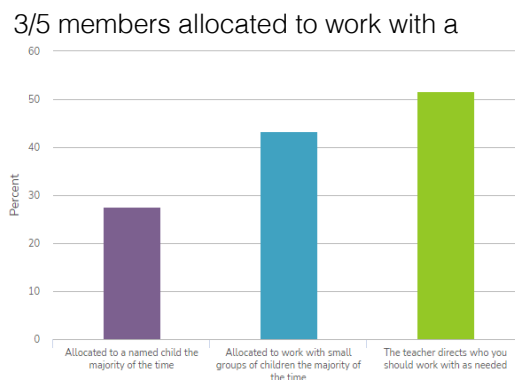
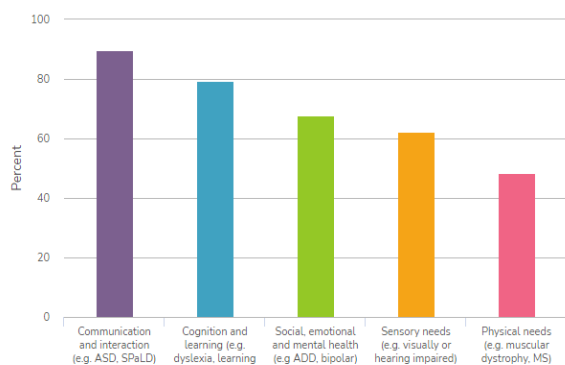
A total of 2165 staff attempted the survey with 1494 fully completing it (there was no requirement to answer all questions).

For the sake of brevity all education setting in this report will be referred to by the catch-all term 'school' since the vast majority of respondents worked with children aged 5-16.

### Findings:

The most responses were received from South East region (18.5%) and the least from Northern (4.3%)

The majority of respondents worked in special schools and a fair number of roles were not teaching assistants, although many of the job roles showed that the majority were staff who worked directly with the children.



3/5 members allocated to work with a named child were often directed to other work

### Main concerns:

Over half of respondents said that dealing with behaviour issues was their most pressing concern. This was particularly the case for those staff who worked with learners with ASD or BESD with 54/55% identifying this concern.

Staff who worked with learners with sensory or physical needs were more concerned with dealing with health needs (27/31%) and a lack of facilities(45/47%).

Staff who worked in special schools directly with learners were more concerned (than mainstream staff) about dealing with learners with health needs that they felt should be carried out by a qualified healthcare professional. Those who worked in special schools in a non-

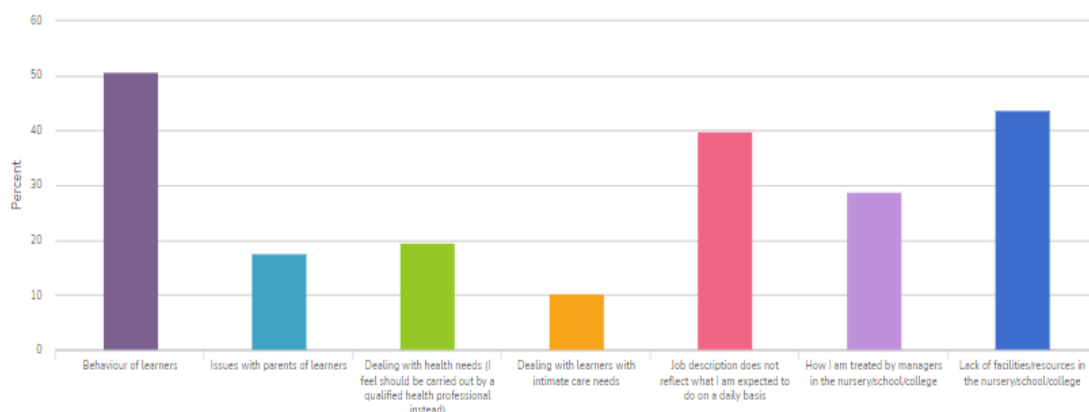
classroom based role were more concerned than others that their job descriptions did not reflect their daily jobs.

Respondents who work in mainstream settings have relatively more concerns with lack of facilities, their job descriptions not matching their actual jobs, dealing with intimate care needs and a lack of support from some parents.

2/3 of staff in special schools feel that the learners they support are best served by the setting they are in, compared with only 2/5 of those who work in mainstream.

### The nature of these concerns:

10. Please tell us the main concerns in your job from the list below (you may choose up to three)



### Behaviour concerns:

86.2% of respondents who identified behaviour as an issue told us that the behaviour of some learners made it difficult for others in the class to learn. Nearly 2/3 (63.4%) of staff in special schools reported feeling unsafe when going about their jobs. In mainstream the main concern was with the organisation's behaviour policy not being followed with 27% of respondents telling us this. Many comments were left including:

"I am physically assaulted very regularly by the students, which has resulted in several hospital visits during my time at my workplace."

"On a daily basis staff and other children may be bitten, hit, kicked, spat at, hair pulled, furniture thrown. It can be very dangerous and has caused serious harm to staff and lead to many staff being unable to work for several weeks."

"Teaching assistants including myself do receive minor injuries from the children and on occasion substantial injuries. Whilst everyone is aware it is just the nature of the job, going through it then getting paid less than £1000 a month can feel like a kick in the teeth. Often teaching assistants have to take up second jobs but it's not sustainable due to the physical and emotional demand of the SEND school job."

"Class sizes often mean that classes have to put children together who should not be in the same class eg children who have meltdowns with children who are anxious and need a calm environment"

### Concerns with parents:

Over 70% of respondents choosing this option feel there are a significant number of parents who do not work in partnership with staff in the school with 2 in 5 telling us that the demands made by parents caused them stress. Many of the comments offered focussed on parents often not respecting that staff have many children to deal with and that some seem to have

(often undiagnosed) needs themselves that makes it difficult for them to work effectively with staff at the school.

**Concerns dealing with healthcare needs:**

Respondents had a choice of issues they could opt for.  $\frac{3}{4}$  felt pay was too low, 69% were worried about the consequences if they made a mistake and 56% felt they should be treated as education workers not healthcare workers. The issues identified seem particularly acute in mainstream where a higher number than average pointed to each concern as a problem for each of the options given than the overall average. Many offered more detailed explanations in the comment section and all but one were offered by staff working in mainstream settings. There were a number of comments that related to the increasing needs to children leading to greatly increased workloads and /or changes to roles that were not reflected in job descriptions.

**Dealing with intimate care needs:**

This was a huge issue for those working in mainstream with 3 in 5 concerned about performing these tasks alone and 2 in 5 concerned. Many comments were submitted particularly around toilet training for those working with very young children.

**Job descriptions:**

A very large number of respondents (2 in 5) stated that their role had changed significantly since they started. Respondents left very detailed comments on what they are expected to do in their day-to-day jobs that they were not made aware of when they applied for the role. Over  $\frac{1}{2}$  who chose this option felt they were being asked to do a teacher's job, over a  $\frac{1}{3}$  felt they were doing jobs that other staff should do, such as cleaning or admin and the comments revealed that many support staff are being asked to complete statutory administration linked to pupils having EHC plans, e.g. completing annual review documents.

**Management:**

A very large number of staff felt that they did not always feel supported by management, particularly in special schools. The vast majority of these respondents (84%) did not feel they

were supported by management personally whereas 43% did not feel their school was well run in general, particularly in special schools.

### **Facilities/resources:**

More respondents felt that services were underfunded, particularly in special schools, than that they had what they needed. Some staff felt that resources were wasted, a situation that was more prevalent in mainstream schools.

### **Training:**

2/5 respondents felt that they had been pressured to take on tasks they were not comfortable doing. Of these:

1/10 refused to do it

1/10 received extra training

8/10 did the task anyway

The answers revealed that you were more likely to receive training in a classroom-based special school role and least likely to receive training in a non-classroom based special school role.

You were most likely to receive training if you supported learners with physical needs and least likely if you dealt with learners with communication and interaction needs.

### **Safeguarding:**

According to respondents, most of the safeguarding concerns can be traced back to not having enough staff.

Approximately half of respondents had reported safeguarding concerns, of which most related to issues outside of the classroom.

There appears to be a mismatch between what staff feel are causes of safeguarding concerns and what they report.

### **Assaults:**

Over 4/5 staff have been assaulted in some way.

- The majority were physical assaults
- By far the majority were in special schools (in classroom-based roles)

There were a variety of ways to report assaults with written reports and forms being the ones that were most often used.

Just over half of staff felt that the assaults were dealt with well and there was little difference depending on the setting.

### **Lockdown:**

90% staff were in school during lockdown with 1:2 ratio between full-time and on rota in special schools (classroom-based)

94% of mainstream staff were in school with a 4:5 ratio between full-time and on rota

88.3% of non-classroom based staff in special school were on site in lockdown.

Nearly half of staff reported that did not feel their employer considered their safety paramount during lockdown.

2/5 did not feel safe returning to school

When members were asked what they wanted from their jobs they pointed to **more funding and more pay**.

### **Conclusions:**

This survey shows us a hardworking, but under-valued workforce. We particularly saw this group of staff stepped up to the plate during the pandemic and ensured that learners were supported as much as possible.

Too many staff tell us that they do not always feel safe at work, that they are expected to undertake tasks that they shouldn't and that they do not always get the respect they deserve from their managers and/or parents. All this for relatively low pay.

Many respondents were most concerned about behaviour in their respective organisations and there is a correlation here with large numbers who do not feel supported by their managers. Additionally, the survey showed that a large number do not feel that the child is in the right place to meet their needs, particularly those in mainstream. The comments showed that this does not indicate the members are against the concept of inclusion but that there exists a lack of facilities and resources to meet these needs sufficiently. Combined with low pay, a lack of adequate training and staff not feeling backed by managers this create the perfect storm of unmet needs of children and young people.

In response we will:

- Redevelop our behaviour guidance so that it is specific to learners with SEND
- Work with health and safety team on the 'It's not part of the job' guidance material
- Work with the devolved nations to get a sense of the issues in other UK nations
- Develop work with MPs to highlight SEND issues
- Campaign for better pay and proper job evaluations
- Continue to link the work with partners at UCL