

VOICE FOCUS

PRU & AP SURVEY REVEALS ISSUES OF CONCERN

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During Autumn 2019, Voice surveyed its members about pupil referral units (PRUs) and alternative provision (AP) in the UK.

We wanted to know more about:

- > how staff working with and within these sectors felt about their roles;

- > how well they felt supported, both by their own employer and the schools around them; and
- > how this impacted upon the pupils.

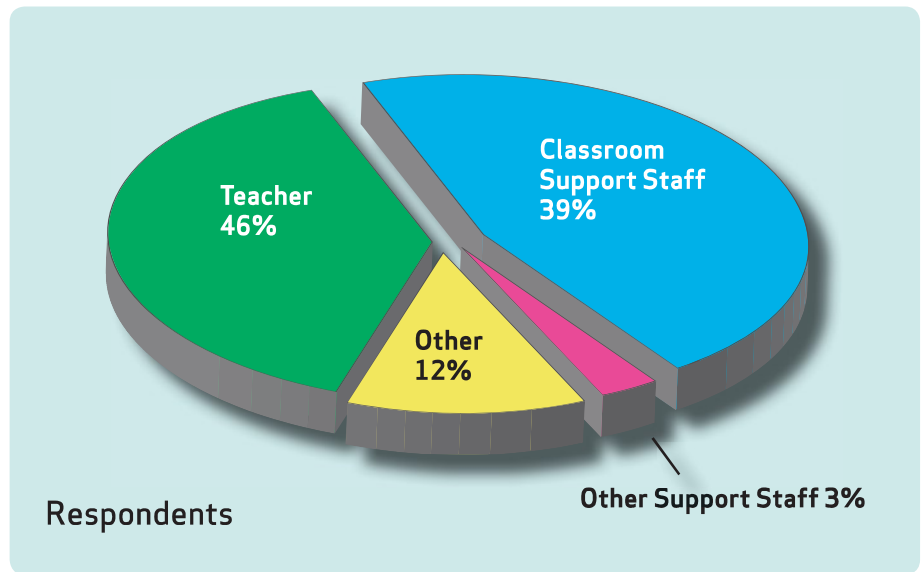
We did make the survey open to parents and pupils, as well as employees, but did not receive any response from pupils and only one parent commented.

Respondents

The vast majority of respondents worked in mainstream schools, with around 20% working in alternative settings including PRUs and other specialist provision, and these were evenly split between local authority (maintained) provision and academies.

We also had a small number of responses (7 respondents) working in the independent and fee-paying sectors.

It was very clear from the detailed answers given that the needs of the learners are paramount and that, in order to best meet their needs, the types of setting need to be almost as diverse as the types of learner.

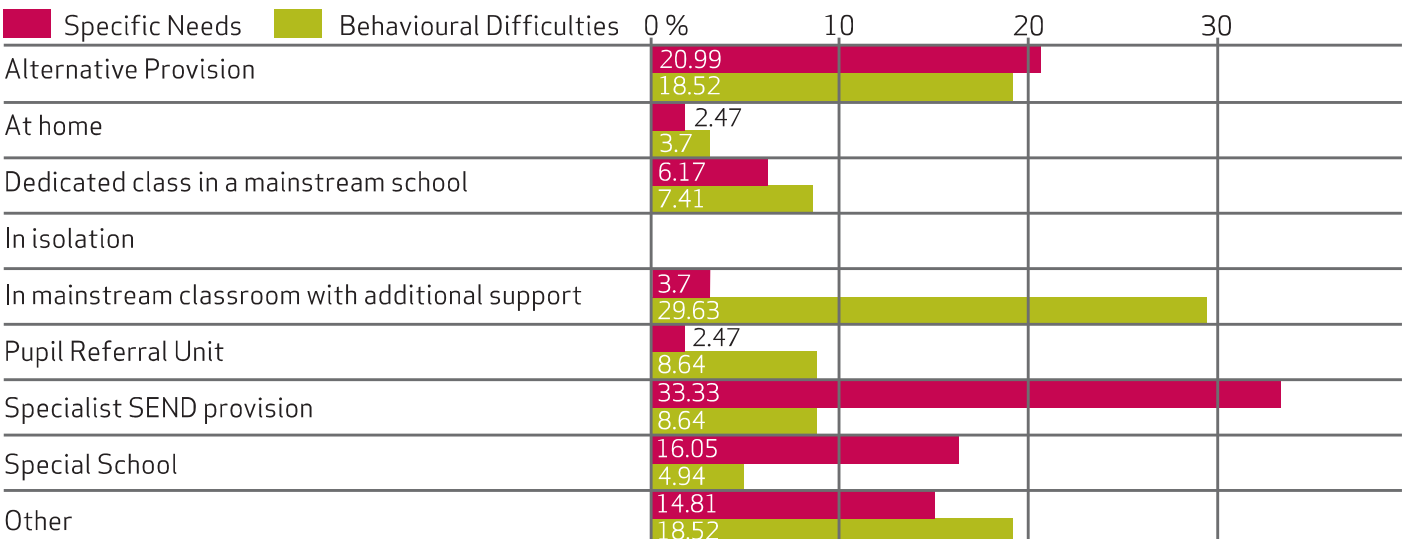


Behavioural difficulties

When considering behavioural difficulties, almost 40% of respondents felt these should be catered for within mainstream settings as long as there was specific and sometimes separate provision to support them.

Conversely, looking at those with significant learning difficulties, almost half of all respondents felt pupils would be best educated in specialist SEND provision, with less than 10% suggesting that they might be best supported in mainstream education.

In your opinion where should pupils with Behavioural Difficulties / Specific Needs be educated?



Training

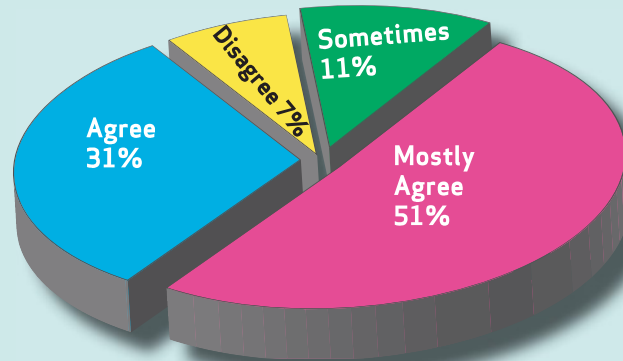
Given that staff in pupil referral units and alternative provision often work with vulnerable children, it is important that their training is thorough. Voice recommends that this includes topics such as lone working, managing difficult situations and restraint training, where appropriate.

Voice Member

'Training needs to be given to mainstream staff about behavioural needs and [to understand] [that] the [students'] social, emotional needs affect their day to day behaviour and school isn't always the main priority in their lives. Having staff who are trained and understand where they are coming from, who spend time building positive relationships, moral compass and [a] good rapport is paramount.'



My Workplace is Safe



It was good to note that two thirds of respondents felt they had been trained to deal with most difficult situations and although only 20% of respondents worked in PRUs and AP, almost half of all respondents had received formal restraint training.

Safety

We asked all respondents to comment on how safe they felt in the workplace.

82% of respondents stated that they felt safe, despite the fact that they also reported that some pupils have violent outbursts.

Just 28 respondents had never personally experienced physical violence from pupils, with 10% reporting more than 10 incidents in the past 12 months, which is extremely worrying.

It was not surprising to note that almost 94% of respondents felt there was need for specially trained staff to support and manage behaviour.

Equally worrying are the instances of physical violence experienced from parents (11%) and other site visitors (2.5%). Whilst these may be isolated incidents, they highlight how vulnerable staff working in schools can be.

Bullying and harassment

Bullying and harassment were also noted as issues. Almost 68% of respondents noted at least one incident of bullying, harassment or abuse from pupils, with more than a quarter reporting more than 10 incidents in the last 12 months.

This is clearly unacceptable and when 42% of respondents reported at least one incident of bullying, harassment or abuse from parents and almost 30% experienced it from their colleagues, it underlines just how much of an issue this is for schools.

Ongoing campaign

As part of our ongoing PRU/AP campaign (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/blog/seced-ap) we will be investigating these findings in much greater detail in the coming weeks and hope to report again on this issue in the near future.

If you have any experiences or comments, please join the conversation and contact us.