‘They think that swearing is okay’: first lessons in behaviour management

Jim McNally, John I’Anson, Claire Whewell & Gary Wilson

Behaviour management is generally acknowledged as one of the major tasks facing new teachers. It was recently reported (TES January 2004) that pupils in the UK are ‘probably the worst behaved in the world’ and that many teachers are not able to impose authority in the classroom. It is the case that media interest, for example the recent ‘5 live’ phone-in (BBC 13 April 2004) on new teachers and classroom indiscipline, is part of an ongoing if intermittent trend in highlighting this particular facet of life in our schools. Accepting that much of this interest may well be based in headlines and hype, the behaviour of pupils in school and how teachers should deal with it constitute a legitimate area of concern for policy makers. In Scotland, the management of pupil behaviour has resurfaced as a major policy priority, amidst claims of links with escalating anti-social behaviour by young people and a national policy of unqualified social inclusion (TES June 2004). The Scottish Executive has funded the appointment of ‘behaviour co-ordinators’ in schools as well as a national ‘tsar’ (TES January 2004), and the Registrar of the GTC Scotland has acknowledged as top priority the importance of preparing new teachers for this aspect of their role (National Conference, 10 May 2004).