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Punitive behaviour management policies and practices in secondary schools: A systematic review of children and young people's perceptions and experiences

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ABSTRACT

Traditional in-school approaches focus on using consequences for managing pupil behaviour. Within published literature, concerns have been raised about the effectiveness and negative impact of punitive approaches. This systematic synthesis explores the perspectives of children and young people (CYP) in secondary schools on in-school punitive behaviour management policies and practices. Papers are evaluated using an adapted version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2019) and study findings are analysed using thematic synthesis. The findings highlight CYP's thoughts on the fairness and consistency of punitive consequences, the impact of these on academic development and emotional wellbeing, and the limited long-term effectiveness of such approaches. CYP explain their need to feel listened to, understood and supported with their behaviour and emotions. Implications of these views for school staff, educational professionals and education policy makers are outlined.

Introduction

The demands involved in nurturing prosocial behaviours and diminishing disruptive behaviours have long been a source of stress for school staff, a dilemma for school leaders, and a hotly debated subject in research (Clunies-Ross, Little, and Kienhuis 2008). Behaviourist Theory sees behaviour as a function of both antecedents (what happens before a behaviour) and consequences (what happens after). Guided by this theory, traditional approaches in schools focus mainly on external observable behaviours, particularly, using consequences to help shape desired actions (Woolfolk 2014). Using a problem-solving approach, 'Functional Behaviour Analysis' can also, then, be applied to understand a target behaviour and identify the triggers and reinforcers that lead to and maintain it (Carr 1994).

Punitive behaviour management practices in school

Behaviourist Theory is often applied in the school environment through various sanctions and consequences. Out of school exclusion is one punitive consequence for inappropriate behaviour in school. This may function as a reward for some CYP and, unhelpfully, reduces supervision and access

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to education (Barker et al. 2010). In contrast, sanctions, which work to keep CYP on the school site, increase supervision and access to educational input (Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF], 2009). Internal exclusion involves removing CYP from the classroom and placing them in a separate room for disciplinary reasons (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2009). For the purpose of this review, the term 'internal exclusion' will be used to refer to this specific approach. As well as internal exclusion, the Department for Education (DfE) proposes other in-school punitive approaches, such as verbal warnings, detentions (keeping CYP in school in break/lunch time, after school or at weekends), providing extra work, report cards and loss of privileges (Department for Education 2016).

Although internal exclusion is commonly used in schools (Mills and Thomson 2018; Staufenberg 2018), issues concerning the definition, uniformity, purpose, emotional impact and monitoring of this approach have been highlighted. With multiple terms used to describe this strategy, such as 'internal exclusion', 'seclusion', 'isolation room' and 'inclusion room', what exactly constitutes internal exclusion is unclear. Government guidance and regulation for this approach in England is also unclear and unspecific, stating simply that schools must act 'reasonably' (Department for Education 2016, 10). Inevitably, this ambiguity leads to multiple interpretations and variation. Mills and Thomson (2018) found that some schools use internal exclusion as a sanction, whilst other schools focus on using this environment to suit individual needs, providing CYP with a quieter workspace without distractions.

The effectiveness of these approaches is also unclear since schools are not obligated to record and report data on the use of detentions or internal exclusion to Ofsted or parents/carers (Department for Education 2016; Sealy, Abrams, and Cockburn 2021). With some CYP receiving over 20 detentions in one term (Sheppard 2020) and media coverage raising concerns about the amount of time spent in internal exclusion (Titheradge 2018), this raises questions about the capacity of such consequences to change some pupils' behaviour, and their potential impact on learning and emotional health. Since wider research demonstrates that CYP's mental health demands are increasing (NHS 2021), a critical review of the available evidence on punitive approaches, as well as research exploring CYP's perspectives, is warranted.

Importantly, many CYP who display challenging behaviours have likely experienced previous adverse childhood experiences (Wilton 2020). Arguably, the experience of sanctions, can result in more traumatic experiences (McInerney and McKlindon 2014) and an escalated sense of rejection (Howard 2016). Such approaches can, therefore, perpetuate the 'cycles of trauma' (McInerney and McKlindon 2014, 2). Despite ongoing controversy over these punitive approaches, harsher rules on behaviour have been advised by the government, with a focus on 'orderly' and 'disciplined' classrooms (Williamson 2021, para. 57). This approach may deserve re-examining, particularly given the difficult, and for many, traumatic experiences associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and other threats (such as the climate emergency, cost of living crisis, and the war in Ukraine).

A call for compassion

With increasing psychological knowledge of attachment theory (Bowlby 1969.), the impact of adverse childhood experiences (Felitti et al. 1998; Tsehay, Necho, and Mekonnen 2020), polyvagal theory (Porges 1995) and trauma informed practice (Bomber 2020; Geddes 2006), there has been growing exploration of relationship-focused, whole-school approaches. Such approaches involve training school staff on the impact of early childhood experiences, relationships, and the importance of showing compassion and understanding for the roots of pupil behaviour (Bomber 2020; Dutil 2020; Geddes 2006). By ensuring adults attune to, understand and respond helpfully to the diverse and evolving emotional needs of CYP, this creates feelings of safety and sets the focus on holistically supporting CYP to thrive (Cavanaugh 2016; Reynolds 2021).

In support of this, several newly developed local government teams and courses have been formed, including the Mental Health Support Teams and Senior Mental Health Leads Training

(Department for Education 2021). Creating a compassionate school environment, centred on positive relationships, can benefit the whole school community, not just CYP who have experienced trauma. Such approaches are less guided by the theory of behaviourism and, instead, move towards approaches advocated by the theory of humanism. Humanists argue that, instead of behaviour being a function of reinforcers, individuals actively respond to their environment, based on their internal thoughts and needs (Maslow 1956; Porter 2014). Currently, little research exists on how relationship-based approaches are experienced both by educational practitioners and CYP.

Children and young people's voices

Despite debate in the literature on the use of punitive in-school approaches, a scoping search revealed no systematic literature reviews of the research exploring CYP perspectives. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) proposes that CYP should be supported to share their views and feel listened to on matters concerning them. As the recipients of school behaviour policy and practice, important lessons can be learned from listening to their first-hand thoughts and lived experiences (Cargo and Mercer 2008). Indeed, involving CYP in discussions about their behaviour in school encourages acceptance of shared expectations and boundaries (Eisler and Fry 2019) and increases feelings of justice and cooperation, which in turn prevents and reduces challenging behaviour (Gouveia-Pereira, Vala, and Correia 2017; Sanches, Gouveia-Pereira, and Carugati 2012).

The current study

This review draws upon a systematic search of the literature on the views and perspectives of CYP on punitive behaviour management approaches used in secondary schools. Existing literature describing CYP's views of permanent exclusion highlights the negative impact on academic progress as well as social and emotional wellbeing (Brown 2007; Murphy 2021). Rather than explore fixed term or permanent exclusion, this review is specifically interested in CYP's views of behaviour policies and approaches which aim to keep CYP in school. Since such punitive approaches are predominantly used in secondary schools, in comparison to primary schools (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2009), the focus is on CYP completing secondary school qualifications. This review was conducted in England and draws on policies written by the Department for Education in England. It is understood that policies on punitive approaches in different parts of the UK and internationally are likely to differ in their approach and execution. However, this research continues to be relevant to any school which uses punitive approaches to manage behaviour.

The following questions guide the review:

(1) How do CYP perceive punitive in-school behaviour management policies and practice?
(2) What alternatives or adaptations to the use of punitive approaches do CYP suggest?

Methodology

Search strategy

A pre-registration protocol can be found on the Open Science Framework (see https://osf.io/75nbh). It is important to note there were some deviations from this protocol including: the addition of a second research question, adapting the inclusion and exclusion criteria to increase its specificity and re-structuring the title.

Table 1. Search terms.

Category	Search Terms
The voice of the CYP	Voice* OR View* OR opinion OR Reflect* OR Perspective* OR Experience* OR insight*) N1 (Student* OR 'young pe' OR youth OR pupil* OR learner*) OR Descriptor 'Student Attitudes'
Behaviour management	'Behaviour management' OR sanction* OR exclusion* OR 'school isolation' OR seclusion OR 'internal isolation' OR 'Behaviour policy' OR 'Behaviour practice' behaviour* OR behavior*
Policy/practices	Policy OR policies OR guidance* OR practice* OR management OR 'Policy Making'

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion	Exclusion
Studies available in English language.	Studies not available in English language.
Mainstream school settings and alternative provisions worldwide.	Special educational settings.
Secondary aged CYP (typically 11–16 years) or CYP in the secondary stage of education and completing secondary level qualifications.	Nursery School Children, Primary school CYP (4–11 years) CYP completing further or higher education qualifications
CYP's attitudes/values/beliefs on school behaviour policy.	Studies which focus on the use of corporal or physical punishment.
Journal articles published in or after the year 2004.	Journals/articles published before 2004.
Punitive behaviour policies which aim to keep CYP in school (detentions, report cards, internal isolation)	Studies focused on fixed term or permanent exclusion from school.
Qualitative studies or qualitative elements in mixed method studies	Quantitative studies

The systematic search was conducted using EBSCO and ProQuest. Three databases were searched: PsycINFO, Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. The full set of search terms can be found in Table 1.

The search was completed independently by both the first author and a voluntary research assistant to ensure reliable selection. A screening manual was developed which set out how to complete the search. This was used by both the first author and research assistant and ensured standardisation of the process. Decisions and discrepancies were discussed and either resolved or counter checked in supervision. The initial search commenced in July 2021 and was repeated in January 2022.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria are presented in Table 2. Inclusion criteria specified that studies must be focused on punitive school practices and policies but not corporal or physical punishment. Therefore, only papers published on or after the Children's Act of 2004 were included.

Data extraction and critical appraisal

Data was extracted using a table composed by the first author and focused on; participant characteristics, study design, method of data collection, school policies/practices focused on and results/themes. Studies were evaluated using an adapted version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2019) qualitative checklist. The adaptations to the checklist involved; adding an additional question which explored the research context, adding an additional hint to consider any relationship between the researcher and participant and a hint to explore the value and relevance of the study to CYP and their families and to the current SLR.

Synthesis of findings

Full papers were entered into NVIVO (QSR International; release 1.5.1). The thematic synthesis, as set out by Thomas and Harden (2008), involved line-by-line coding of all text under the headings 'results' or 'findings'. This resulted in 351 codes which were developed into eight descriptive themes and five analytical themes.

Findings

Search results

The search identified 1185 articles. After screening, 12 were included in the qualitative synthesis (see Figure 1).

Characteristics and methodology of included studies

The studies' publication dates span from 2010–2021. Seven papers were conducted in the UK and five in the USA. Eight of the papers were qualitative case studies, three used mixed method approaches (two in the format of a case study) and one study used a Interpretative
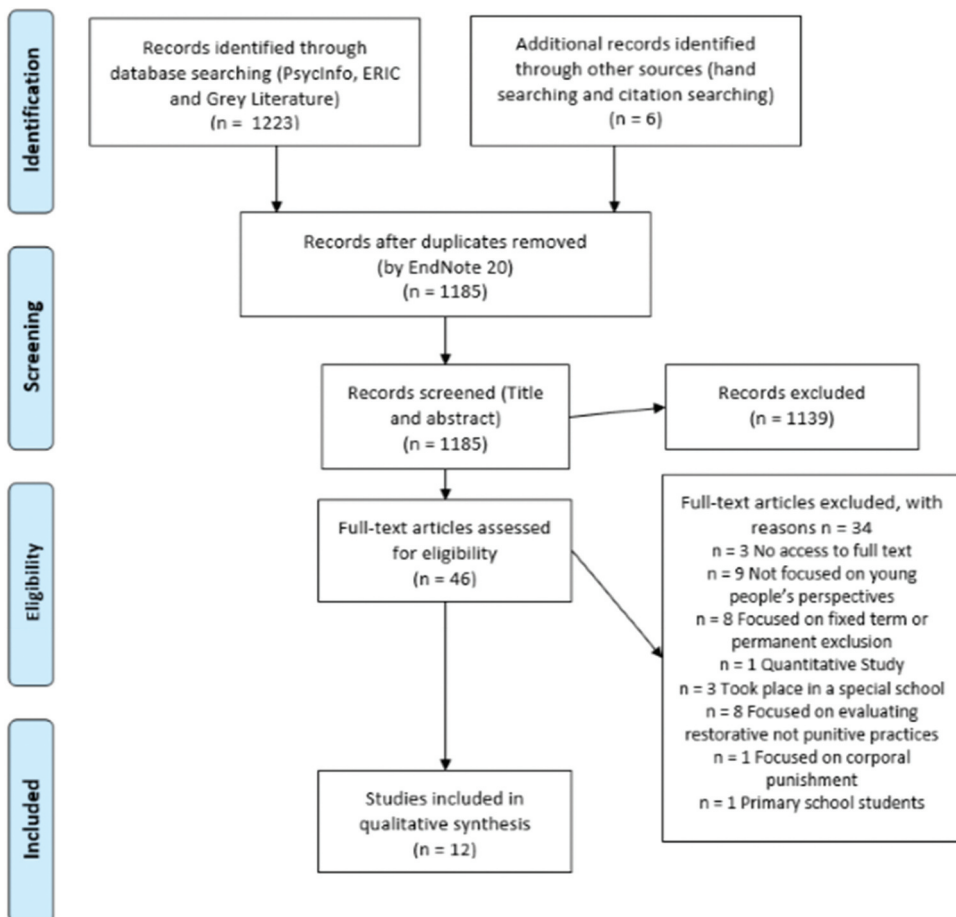

Figure 1. Preferred Reporting Items for systematic Reviews and meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart (Moher et al. 2009).
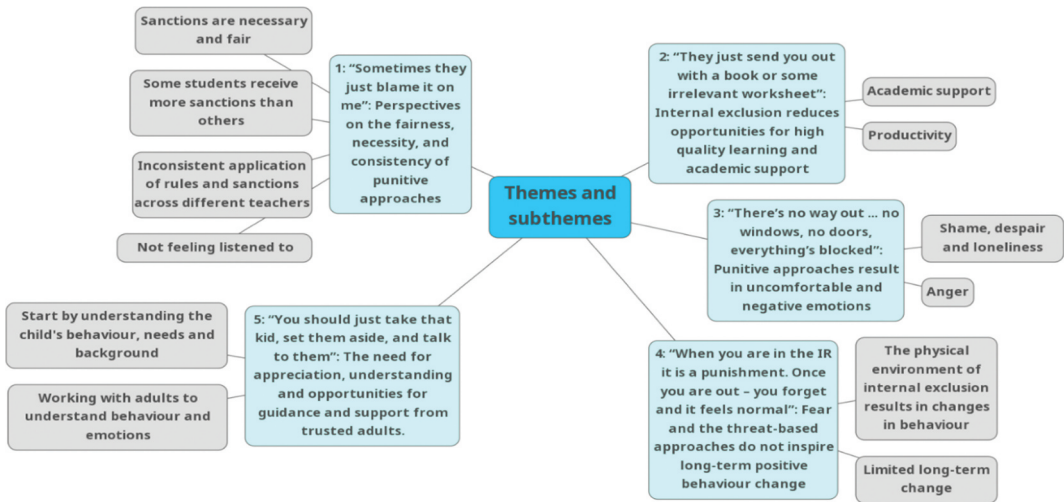
Figure 2. Themes and subthemes of CYP's perspectives and experiences of punitive in-school behaviour policies and practices, participant quotes are illustrated in quotation marks.

phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. Studies predominantly took place in mainstream secondary schools or academies; however, one study took place in three alternative learning academies. All of the studies used semi-structured/open-ended interviews to collect data, and two studies used focus groups. Approximately 243 CYP voices were captured, ranging in age from 11–19 years old. Two studies reported on any special educational needs and three detailed behaviour records. Five papers solely focused on the use of internal exclusion and seven explored punitive behaviour policies and practices more generally (such as detentions, restrictions and segregations, report cards).

Thematic synthesis findings

Five major themes were identified, themes and subthemes are presented in Figure 2.

Theme 1: 'sometimes they just blame it on me': perspectives on fairness, necessity, and consistency

Sanctions are necessary and fair. CYP described punitive approaches as fair, deserved and reasonable. Internal exclusion was seen as 'a good punishment for bad behaviour' (Barker et al. 2010), with one CYP expressing: 'I think it's a good, I don't know, it's a good thing that exists' (Reynolds 2021). Another participant expressed that punishments are necessary 'otherwise you just keep doing it' (Gilmore 2013). This suggests that some CYP view punishments as an essential consequence for misbehaviour and a necessary part of the school set up. A statement from one participant outlining 'they also have to be punished for their actions and what they did, you know' (Roach 2012) suggests punishments serve to maintain and uphold shared collective beliefs about what is right and wrong.

Some students receive more sanctions than others. CYP described punitive approaches as unfair and inconsistent, highlighting that 'Some teachers have real favourites. If are a favourite can get away with more' (Hampton and Ramoutar 2021). The favourable treatment of certain CYP was noticed: 'She be nice to some people … people she like' (Evans 2011) 'she [ISS teacher] yelled at people and wrote people up and let all her good students, like the people she likes, get on the

computer' (Evans 2011). It was suggested that teachers also formed negative expectations about CYP who have previously misbehaved resulting in unfair over-application of sanctions.

> Because they think we do one thing bad or a couple things bad then they think we going to do it all the time (Morrison 2018)

Inconsistent application of rules and sanctions across different teachers. CYP highlighted that different teachers interpret and use the approaches differently: 'you can never tell because it's different with different teachers' (Evans 2011). This makes it difficult to know what to expect as 'not all teachers follow the rules by the book' (Morrison 2018)). Consistency and coherence have been highlighted as crucial when managing behaviour (Rhodes & Long, 2019), therefore a system which is 'totally different with different teachers' (Hampton and Ramoutar 2021) can be interpreted as unfair and unpredictable. With some teachers being more likely to apply sanctions and others offering support and guidance, such inconsistencies may be due to varying beliefs regarding the origins of behaviour and how best to support it (Morrison 2018).

Not feeling listened to. 'Why ain't you letting me talk? Let me talk, let me talk, let me talk' (Reynolds 2021). CYP expressed feelings of frustration from not feeling listened to: 'it's like kind of frustrating having no say' (Sealy, Abrams, and Cockburn 2021). Discipline decisions were seen as made by the teaching staff, with little input from the CYP. Attempts to defend themselves and explain the reasons behind their behaviour were seen as 'arguing back' (Sheppard 2020), possibly resulting in more sanctions.

Theme 2: 'they just send you out with a book or some irrelevant worksheet': internal exclusion reduces opportunities for high quality learning and academic support

Academic support. Although one study highlighted some positive staff support whilst in internal exclusion (Evans 2011), the majority of studies described the limited academic support received whilst experiencing internal exclusion (Evans 2011; Gilmore 2013; Hampton and Ramoutar 2021; Reynolds 2021; Roach 2012). CYP described learning without teacher assistance as 'the teacher in there won't help you' (Evans 2011) and they 'don't have access to a familiar teacher' (Hampton and Ramoutar 2021). Moreover, school staff working in internal exclusion were unlikely to be qualified teachers: 'she didn't know the answer, she didn't know much about that subject, so she couldn't really help me' (Reynolds 2021).

Productivity. CYP described the lack of productive activity whilst in internal exclusion, explaining: 'you don't do anything, you sit there all day' (Roach 2012). CYP were either not provided with any work: 'So if the teacher doesn't give you your work, how can you do it?' (Evans 2011) or the work they were provided with was not related to the work completed in the classroom: 'In ISS we had to read this little pamphlet book and write a summary about it. It didn't have anything to do with anything we were doing inside of our classes' (Roach 2012). This resulted in them falling behind and finding it difficult to catch up.

However, this experience was not shared by all. Some saw internal exclusion as 'time to get caught up' as 'you are not distracted and can get work done' (Roach 2012). Internal exclusion was seen, by some, as a sanctuary offering a quieter environment with less distractions. This allowed them to complete more work and experience feelings of achievement: 'I've never done this before, sir' (Barker et al. 2010). Some CYP actively sought out this option 'I actually tried to be bad to get out of the classroom so I could do my work' (Evans 2011).

Theme 3: 'there's no way out . . . no windows, no doors, everything's blocked': punitive approaches result in uncomfortable, negative emotions

Shame, despair and loneliness. 'It made me feel ashamed of myself – it made me regret that decision a lot' (Pope 2019). One of the key emotions resulting from receiving a sanction was a feeling of shame. CYP explained that they experienced feeling stupid, dumb, ashamed or regretful. Shame is described as an unwanted or uncomfortable emotion as it involves negatively evaluating the self (Lewis 1971; Sheehy et al. 2019).

> There's these four walls around you [. . .] Like when you go there it just feel like you're kind of entering a box and then you can't leave until the teacher says so. (Reynolds, 2021)

As this quote illustrates, feelings of despair and hopelessness were expressed by CYP. Internal exclusion was emotively described as 'pure torture' (Evans 2011) and 'it just like makes me like, ahhhhh' (Evans 2011). These feelings seemed to be related to the experience of being trapped and not having anything to do as 'you start feeling like you're never going to achieve anything' (Sealy, Abrams, and Cockburn 2021).

Another key emotion experienced was loneliness. The physical separation from peers in the classroom, combined with the strict rules on social interaction in internal exclusion, resulted in CYP feeling isolated: 'Just feel like alone, isolated' (Sealy, Abrams, and Cockburn 2021).

Anger. Anger was sometimes seen as a result of receiving a sanction: 'If I get a planner warning . . . I get really angry' (Sheppard 2020). Using sanctions escalated interactions as 'the angers still in me, I'm gonna talk to you in the worst way because I haven't let me emotions go' (Reynolds 2021). Being in internal exclusion with little stimulation resulted in feelings of anger for some: 'you start being angry or you'll go out and you'll go out and do stupid things because you've either got too much energy or you don't care. Cos you just . . . .you feel finally free' (Sealy, Abrams, and Cockburn 2021).

Theme 4: 'when you are in the IR it is a punishment. Once you are out – you forget and it feels normal': fear and the threat-based approaches do not inspire long-term positive behaviour change

The physical environment of internal exclusion results in changes in behaviour. CYP commented on the uncomfortable environment and setup of internal exclusion. The rooms were described as 'it's like a wall and then a chair and then a wall and then a chair' (Sealy, Abrams, and Cockburn 2021), and 'In the summer it got too hot and in the winter it got too cold' (Sealy, Abrams, and Cockburn 2021). The rules on working, interacting with others, eating and drinking were outlined as stricter. This led some CYP concluding that 'it is sort of like prison' (Hampton and Ramoutar 2021). The uncomfortable and uninteresting environment of internal exclusion may act as a deterrent for some CYP as 'it makes you not want to get into trouble again . . . because it is so boring' (Priyadharshini 2011) and 'you don't want to get sent there so your behaviour improves' (Reynolds 2021).

Limited long-term change. Changes in behaviour were often short lived and temporary: 'When you are in the IR it is a punishment. Once you are out – you forget and it feels normal' (Gilmore 2013). Certain behaviour changes were limited to the internal exclusion environment as 'you'll just behave so you can get out and move on, get back to your friends' (Reynolds 2021). CYP highlighted that 'I had a hundred and eight detentions last year' and 'I was in isolation most of the time, I was only in school for like 20 days' (Sheppard 2020). Often, if CYP misbehaved whilst in detention or internal exclusion, the punishment was another detention or increased time in exclusion, highlighting the ineffectiveness of using sanctions to create positive progress for some CYP.

Therefore, despite being subjected to numerous detentions or internal exclusions, this does not result in behaviour change for all CYP. CYP commented on the limited support to help understand their behaviour and emotions and avoid repetition and highlighted that 'Isolation doesn't teach you'

(Hampton and Ramoutar 2021) and 'I don't necessarily reflect, I just erm I just suck it up' (Reynolds 2021).

Theme 5: 'you should just take that kid, set them aside, and talk to them': the need for appreciation, understanding and opportunities for guidance and support from trusted adults

Start by understanding the child's behaviour, needs and background. When making decisions about behaviour, being mindful of the individual's circumstances and background was portrayed as important. Approaching behaviour on a 'case-by-case basis' (Kruse 2012) was suggested by CYP as 'people don't know what's going on at home and stuff' (Hampton and Ramoutar 2021). Considering the background and circumstances of CYP was suggested to help school staff understand possible motivations and decide on the most appropriate response. CYP expressed their appreciation for teachers who understood their individual needs and made allowances to avoid sanctions (e.g. listen to music).

Working with adults to understand behaviour and emotions. Talking through their actions with an adult, exploring possible reasons for their behaviour and discussing future alternatives was described as helpful. The usefulness of communication between adults and CYP was apparent, with many CYP making comments such as 'I mean talking about what you did and why you're not gonna do it again' (Kruse 2012) and 'teachers and students should get in a room and talk and settle things' (Priyadharshini 2011). It was recognised that 'It might take you a long time because you have a lot of students' (Kruse 2012) but being able to 'get to know their side, get to know their story, get to know why they're doing that and what their motive is' (Kruse 2012) was by far the best help someone could receive.

Discussion

This review explored the views and experiences of CYP in secondary education with regards to punitive in-school approaches. Qualitative synthesis of 12 studies brought to the fore a diverse set of perspectives. These perspectives are organised into five themes and discussed below in the context of existing theory and research.

Fairness, necessity, and consistency

In the current review, CYP in both UK and US studies viewed sanctions as a means to restore order and collective rules and norms, whilst other CYP saw sanctions as unfair and inconsistently applied. Previous literature outlines how punishments reaffirm the common beliefs and values in society, creating a 'collective conscience' (Durkheim 1893) and joining individuals together. However, other research highlights how teachers form expectations of CYP (Rubie-Davies, Hattie, and Hamilton 2006) and act in ways which align or fit with these expectations (Wang, Rubie-Davies, and Meissel 2018). Such explanations may account for the over-application of sanctions to certain CYP, thus justifying feelings of unfairness. In this current review, the difference in CYP opinion may therefore depend on whether they are the receiver of the sanction or the on-looker.

Opportunities for high quality learning and academic support

The amount of academic support received whilst in internal exclusion was highlighted as a concern. As all children have a right to education (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989), this potentially raises considerable ethical issues. CYP were often sent out with work which was unrelated to the current focus in class or no work at all and often did not have a qualified teacher available to support them. This means they are not only

missing out on input from the teacher, but also being excluded from valuable class activities and quality teacher support to understand their work. These issues were also raised by staff who commented on the detrimental impact time spent out of class had on academic development (Roach 2012).

Uncomfortable, negative emotions

CYP spoke about the emotional impact of sanctions and described feelings of shame, despair, loneliness and anger. Feelings of shame, created by punitive dominating approaches, have been recognised to trigger the sympathetic part of the body's autonomic nervous system, putting individuals into a state of alert and disabling reasoning and consciousness (Eisler and Fry 2019). Therefore, such sanctions are likely to increase 'survival' type responses (e.g. answering back, leaving the room), rather than supporting CYP's emotional wellbeing and readiness for learning.

Long-term positive behaviour change

Across the studies identified in this review, CYP recognised some immediate and short-term changes in behaviour seen during internal exclusions but also described how any positive changes were unlikely to be sustained long-term. This fits with previous research on motivation conducted by Ryan and Deci (2017) who argue that three needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, are essential and fundamental to human growth and development. Indeed, it has been recognised that if an individual's environment is supportive of these needs, then they are more likely to become intrinsically motivated (Flannery 2017). This may explain why punitive approaches, which highlight the negatives, remove autonomy and self-control and damage relationships reduces some CYP's intrinsic drive for long-term positive behaviour change.

The need for appreciation, understanding and opportunities for guidance and support from trusted adults

CYP expressed a strong desire to be understood by adults, in terms of their needs and background, and better supported to explore their emotions, actions and possible alternatives. This theme was mentioned more by CYP in the UK compared to the US, perhaps suggesting the shift in approaches is more apparent in the UK and therefore has shown the CYP the alternatives and possibilities. Relational, compassionate and nurturing approaches aim to build relationships with CYP and support them with understanding their emotions and behaviour (Bomber 2020; Gilbert, Rose, and McGuire-Sniekus 2014). Based on trust, respect and mutual understanding, teacher-student relationships are instrumental in this approach (Baker and Simpson 2020; Platz 2021; Siegel 2020). Compassionate and relationship-focused approaches have shown to be effective in improving behaviour, reducing the need for sanctions, increasing emotional self-awareness and self-regulation and fostering positive relationships (Rose, McGuire-Snieckus, and Gilbert 2015). Additionally, neuroscience research highlights a crucial period during childhood and adolescence whereby the development of key brain areas involved in decision making and managing emotions takes place (Giedd 2015). This makes supporting CYP with their emotions and decision making even more important and helps explain why the support of adults is necessary and desired by CYP.

Embedding the findings in current educational policy and practice

The call for more compassionate approaches to school behaviour management is in line with growing interest in embracing attachment-aware (Rose et al. 2019) and trauma-informed schools

(Bomber 2020). Plans outlined in the Government's Green Paper (Young Mental Health 2017) highlights the impact of trauma and the need for more mental health support.

The return to education, after the COVID-19 pandemic, saw the Government, in association with the Anna Freud Centre, offering free training to all schools and colleges in England on wellbeing and recovery (Ford 2020). At the same time, revisions were being made to the Behaviour in Schools Guidance (Department for Education 2022) and the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) System in schools (SEND Review 2022).

Although the revised Behaviour in Schools Guidance (Department for Education 2022) highlights a need to understand the reasons behind behaviour and possible support required, this guidance is predominantly related to pupils with special educational needs and is discussed with reference to the Equality Act (2010), instead of more widely for the whole-school population. The clear and consistent application of sanctions is mentioned throughout the guidance. The SEND and AP guidance contrasts this by advocating for an inclusive system, whereby every CYP can access and receive the support they need (Department for Education & Department of Health and Social Care, 2022). Overall, the suggestions in these revised governmental documents go some way to accommodating the needs and experiences of diverse CYP, yet it remains unclear if potential harms associated with punitive practices have been sufficiently considered, or alternatives sufficiently explored.

Practice implications

The findings from this review have important implications for those who work closest with CYP (parents/carers, school staff), educational practitioners supporting schools, and educational theorists and policy makers more broadly. Table 3 outlines the potential implications of this research across these multiple audiences.

It is crucial that the themes in this review are not used to shame and blame school staff and educational policy in the form of a 'moral outrage' (Done and Knowler 2020, 3). Compassionate approaches to behaviour change are seen as equally applying to the position of school staff who are working hard to raise academic standards, ensure inclusivity, manage the demands of cultural challenges, and work with decreasing budgets and funding (Pressley 2021). If more humanistic approaches to behaviour and emotions are required and advocated for, it is important to extend this to the whole school. Therefore, consultation and collaboration with school staff, themselves, would help to make further sense of these reported themes and translate them into future practices to improve school experiences for all.

Strengths, limitations and future research

This paper is the first to provide a qualitative synthesis of the views and experiences of CYP on the use of punitive in-school behaviour management policies and practices. This is particularly important considering that the CYP in this review often did not feel listened to regarding this topic. Conducting a qualitative synthesis of in-school exclusions resulted in a deeper insight into under-reported in-school behaviour practices and the untold stories of CYP. Further research could focus on the views of school staff. This would allow for the exploration into the possible functions existing behavioural approaches serve and reasons for their predominance. Furthermore, teacher attitudes and approaches could be compared to the views and perspectives of parents/carers. This would help uncover the types of practices used at home and if these are in contrast with the school setting.

Although the inclusion and exclusion criteria placed no limits on the geography of studies, the papers were conducted in Western countries (UK and USA), meaning conclusions are limited to these cultures. In addition, a number of the papers used potentially biased

Table 3. Implications for multiple audiences.

Relevant persons	Implications
Academic teaching staff	• This review suggests the need for a planned provision of a quieter, distraction-limited time, within lessons, when CYP can complete their work but still receive support from a qualified teacher. • According to the views of CYP, many teachers could be more mindfully aware of the way in which their biases, expectations and previous judgements of CYP shape their behavioural management decisions. This could be achieved through peer reflection with colleagues and a willingness to explore alternative, compassionate perspectives.
Pastoral support staff	• This review has highlighted that CYP can be supported through listening, understanding their needs and background, working with them to resolve behavioural and emotional conflicts, and problem-solving possible future choices. In light of this, useful training for pastoral staff to help them support CYP may include mediation, conflict resolution, conciliation skills and restorative justice.
School leaders and academy CEOs	• After considering the potentially detrimental impact of using punitive approaches and suggestions for change made by CYP, school leaders may wish to explore alternative approaches to fostering prosocial behaviour. • School leaders and academy CEOs would benefit from reviewing the consistency and congruency of the approaches used in their school across staff in participation and consultation with CYP themselves. • It would be beneficial if school leaders and academy CEOs regularly monitored and critically reviewed the impact of sanction based approaches on positive change, over time. This would involve gathering data on the frequency of sanctions used and correlating this with a range of academic, social, emotional and behavioural outcomes.
Parents and carers	• Research has highlighted the importance of congruence and consistency of behaviour approaches between home and school settings and has outlined the positive impact this can have on academic and behavioural outcomes, as well as attitudes towards school (Henderson and Mapp 2002). Using similar approaches at home and school will allow for the development of similar expectations and reduce any conflicting messages. Provide parents and carers with relevant information on complementary approaches.
Educational practitioners (EPs) e.g. educational psychologists	• EPs are qualified and skilled at using consultation and training to support schools at the individual, group and whole-school level. This makes EPs well placed to sensitively challenge perceptions, explore behaviour policies and practices and support school staff and leaders to optimise and update their approaches, as appropriate. • EPs have a role in enabling all education staff in their local authority to compassionately explore the function of behaviour and encourage the development of person-centred plans (LaVigna et al. 2022). They may also be involved in ensuring that school staff are sufficiently attachment-aware and trauma-informed.
Education theorists and wider UK policy makers	• The heavy reliance and ongoing emphasis on punitive practices in the UK school system is something which would merit further analysis. • The diversity of views and responses of CYP to the same in-school punitive approaches suggest a need to widen the scope of possible behavioural support approaches outlined in the guidance provided to schools. Supporting teachers to understand which approaches work for which CYP and why would be beneficial.

selection methods involving a senior member of school staff selecting participants. Details on participant characteristics (ethnicity, additional needs) were either brief, unclear or not collected. This makes it difficult to determine which populations of CYP are most affected by the approaches and whether the sample selected in the studies was representative. Studies which adopt a stratified sample and explore the unheard and missing voices of participants who do not often take part in research, for example, CYP with English as an additional language or limited language skills, would be valuable additions to the literature.

Conclusion

This qualitative synthesis explored CYP's perspectives of punitive in-school behaviour management policies and practices. Although a range of practices were mentioned in the studies, internal exclusion was the most frequently discussed strategy. Punitive practices were experienced as ineffective by many CYP and, in some cases, detrimental to their school experience and developmental outcomes. CYP were diverse in the ways they perceived punitive in-school practices. However, the risks and possible harm caused by these practices, particularly for already marginalised groups of CYP, merits further critical debate and research. When given the opportunity, participants in this review expressed clear ideas on what helps promote prosocial behaviour: adults who listen, understand and collaborate with them. The innate ability to understand, cooperate and connect with others is, arguably, what makes us unique and successful as a species (Harari 2014). Maximising our relational capacities, and our sense of humanity, will likely make for more inclusive, balanced and compassionate school cultures. It is, after all, schools who are tasked with creating conducive enough environments so that the next generations of CYP might all have a chance to grow and flourish.

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