

# NASUWT calls for schools to improve mental health support for teachers

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Children & Young People Now  
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Schools must do more to help teachers with mental health problems, the general secretary of the teaching union NASUWT has warned.

Speaking after Nottinghamshire teacher Peter Harvey was cleared of attempting to murder a student with a dumbbell, Chris Keates called on government to improve the quality of support that teachers receive.

She warned that school behaviour policies must also be reviewed, since pupils with a history of disruptive behaviour were trying to aggravate Harvey and film his reaction with a mobile phone immediately before the attack occurred.

"The incident arose out of an explosive combination of events, a teacher who was in a fragile state of health and a group of pupils who recognised this and decided to exploit it," Keates explained.

"Any teacher who has had to deal with challenging and disruptive pupils will recognise that given the combination of factors that applied in this case how such a situation can easily spiral out of control."

She added that rules on mobile phones in schools should be tightened.

"Once again, inappropriate use of mobile technology in the hands of pupils raises its head and was a catalyst for a large part of the behaviour," she said. "Pupils were clearly playing to the camera. NASUWT has welcomed guidance already issued on the use of mobile technology but it is clear all of this needs to be revisited in the light of this and other similar cases."

Harvey admitted causing the pupil grievous bodily harm, but a jury at Nottingham Crown Court cleared him of attempted murder. The judge presiding over the case said "common sense had prevailed". Harvey will not face a custodial sentence.

Julian Stanley, chief executive of the Teacher Support Network, described the Harvey case as "extreme", but warned that low-level stress is a major problem for many teachers. Teachers must not be demonised for taking time off because of stress or other common mental health problems, he added.

"School leaders must take responsibility for developing a supportive culture in which teachers feel comfortable in discussing their problems," Stanley explained.

"All too often teachers keep difficulties such as anxiety to themselves for fear of being seen as a failure. This can lead to prolonged periods of absence when an early, supportive intervention may have prevented the need for time off."