



With reports of pupil violence and chaotic classrooms making headlines, *Bella* asks...

ARE TEACHERS FAILING OUR CHILDREN?

Yes Author Katharine Birbalsingh, 38, wrote *To Miss With Love* about her experiences as the deputy head teacher of an inner-city London school



No Cherie Blair, 56, is a Queen's Counsel barrister. She recently took part in *Jamie's Dream School* on Channel 4



Walk into a classroom in any inner-city comprehensive secondary school in the UK today and you'll witness chaos. Lack of discipline is rife. Teachers have to face pupils ignoring them, chatting, and even being violent on a regular basis. And behaviour like this is standard in lots of schools.

The fact is that students today are victims of a teaching system that's become far too

'Teachers are being bullied by students'

pupil-centred. They're treated like kings. They have the upper hand and teachers are afraid to tackle bad behaviour. What sort of society are we living in where teachers are being bullied by students? If we were getting it right, all

children would be getting at least five grade Cs at GCSE. But instead less than half of 16-year-olds leave school with a basic level of education. It's shocking.

What's even worse is the way we keep hearing that these students come from deprived backgrounds. That's no excuse. If teachers were doing their job properly this wouldn't be happening.

One of the biggest mistakes being made in the classroom is a failure to teach core values. If teachers can't make their pupils understand it's important to have respect for authority, follow rules and take personal responsibility, then what sort of community are we going to end up with?

If kids push, teachers should push back - that's their role. All children want and need boundaries but at the moment teachers aren't enforcing them. And that's a serious problem.

We can't expect teachers to be miracle workers. Yes, some schools do have discipline problems but there's no one thing to blame. You've got to look at the bigger picture. If someone's home life doesn't teach them basic skills like how to live together and the need for give and take, you can't expect schools to turn that around.

Teachers have enough on their plates. I didn't fully understand how much until I became one for a couple of days when I took part in Channel 4's recent *Jamie's Dream School*. The amount of preparation, effort and concentration required to keep the kids' attention was overwhelming. And I was in that classroom for just a few hours. Teachers have to do it all day, day in, day out.

I don't believe that teachers can't control their classes and that schools are battlefields where the children reign. Students are more confident today, and that's partly because

they voice their own opinions and develop their ideas in the classroom. I think it's good that they don't just blindly accept what they're told any more. My experience of the state education system, where my children have been educated, is very good. But I think that's partly to do with trust. If a teacher has ever complained about one of my children, I've

'Teachers can't work miracles'

supported them 100 per cent. Most teachers are brilliant at feeding their pupils' appetite for knowledge and we have to believe in them. Instead of criticising, we should be grateful for the work they do and support them as much as we can.