

# Youth Voice on School Exclusions

'I had changed as a person, the system didn't change.'



Young Person's Summary

# Introduction

The Children's Society has a long history of listening to what children and young people have to say about their lives. We believe that by hearing directly from young people like you, we can begin to understand life from a young person's perspective and can work out how best to support young people who might be struggling.

There is a lot of research<sup>1</sup> out there which shows there could be a link between young people being excluded from school and exploitation.

The Children's Society have a number of projects across the country which support young people who have been or are at risk of being exploited. We have noticed that a lot of these young people have been excluded from school.

## Exploitation means being 'used'

When a person or a group of people uses a young person (or an adult) in a way that is wrong or bad to get something for themselves. It isn't always obvious to the young person what's happening because it is often done by someone they know or trust. Sometimes a young person can be threatened and/or feel frightened to say anything to anyone or ask for help, even from their parents or carers.

We know from the young people we work with that they have a lot to say about school and exclusions and want to see change. To make sure any changes that adults make are the right ones, they need to listen to young people and understand their point of view.

## Listening to young people

In 2019 we spoke with 11 young people<sup>2</sup> between the ages of 10-19 young from across England to hear what they had to say about exclusions. Young people chose what they wanted to talk about and how much they wanted to share. In this report there are anonymous quotes from young people. This means that we haven't used anyone's name, age or location with their words, so it's not possible to know who said what.

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1. You can read more about this on page 2 in the full report.

2. Details about the young people who took part is on page 3 of the full report. You can find the full report at - <https://spark.adobe.com/page/rZld427q3MAQv/>

## What young people said



Young people told us that exclusions impact on different areas of their lives.

### Emotional health and well-being

Young people told us that being excluded from school had a negative effect on their emotional health and well-being. They described how it can damage confidence, self esteem as well as their hopes for the future.

Young people told us they are often dealing with other problems outside of school, which can make it hard to concentrate when they're at school. Being excluded can make coping with these problems even more difficult.

*'I felt demoralised and I felt like I couldn't really do anything.'*

*'...Cause it did affect me mentally, it did affect me like academically as well and I missed out on so much content...'*

*'I left my family home, and this was not my choice and decisions were made above my head. Now looking at all this and thinking... this has affected my engagement with educational institutions.'*

### Relationships

Young people spoke a lot about relationships. They spoke about supportive friends, but also how friends have let them down or played a part in them being in trouble. They value teachers they can identify with, who give support and listen. But some also described feeling powerless and not always heard by teachers. Young people gave examples of how being excluded from school has put a strain on the relationship between school and adults at home.

*'I feel like friends have tried to get me to like, work harder, stop being rebellious....'*

*'That one teacher you can trust, sit down with them and build through a plan how you can actually improve in school and at home.'*

*'Mum was angry with me sometimes, well not angry annoyed if I did something bad. Then she was annoyed with school if they excluded me for silly things.'*

# What young people said

## School approach

Young people described the different approaches schools take to teaching, learning and pastoral support. Some young people shared examples of when their school has taken the time to support them and the positive difference that's made. However, young people also told us the way some schools deal with behaviour is too strict, which doesn't help and instead can make things worse. Some young people shared examples of school feeling unequal and having very little control over what happens. They also told us that moving between schools can be challenging.

*'They're just giving you a day off. They think it's a punishment, I don't.'*

*'We had a family meeting... and my dad met Mr \*\*\*\* [teacher] and my dad got along with him and I'm starting to see my dad a lot more.'*

*'I did not understand the letter and it was English so mum did not understand it either.'*

*'Something needs to change about [mainstream] school, they're a bit too strict...they need to be more calm, like my new school innit.[AP]'*

## Risk of exploitation

Some young people told us they see a link between being excluded from school and being at risk of exploitation. These young people talked about an increased risk of exploitation because of

- Spending lots of time outside of education because of a permanent exclusions or part-time timetable.
- Living in a deprived community
- Being in Alternative Provision e.g. going to a Pupil Referral Unit rather than a mainstream school

*'.. I was out of school for about 8 months and that's when I started rolling on road cuz my mum used to go to work and that so I used to go out on road and like get in trouble with police...'*

*'Where I live I am surrounded by gangs and stabbings – what do they expect from us if we live in a place like that? Anything that is positive like youth clubs gets shut down.'*

*'... talking slang, smoking weed, talking about stuff they do and that, robbin' and that... it's where all the naughty kids go. When you get excluded from school you go to AP.'*

## Young People's ideas for change



Young people talked about their experiences of school exclusion and how it affects young people's lives. All of them gave examples of how being at school can be really difficult at times. Some described a feeling that they didn't 'fit' well into the school system. One young person said,

*'I changed as a person, the system didn't change.'*

There are some important messages in what young people have said about how the school system can change for the better, so that everyone feels like they fit. These include:

- Being better at listening to young people and the adults at home
- Being more flexible with the rules because every young person is different.
- Helping build and support important relationships like friendships between young people, between teachers and students and between school and the adults at home.
- Understanding that sometimes young people feel powerless at school.

As well as this young person's summary, there is a report for adults which gives them the opportunity to understand school exclusions from the point of view of young people. Every young person has the right to feel heard about the things which matter to them in their lives. If adults make decisions without including young people they will miss a big part of the picture. The report challenges adults to work alongside young people to change the education system for the better.

# Who can help?

If you are struggling with school it is important to ask for help. This could be from an adult you trust or from a service. Below you can find information about useful service.

## 1. Childline.

You can call Childline for free or visit their website where you can find information about school exclusions. They also have counsellors you can speak to online.

[childline.org.uk](https://www.childline.org.uk)

0800 1111

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/school-college-and-work/school-college/excluded-from-school/>

<https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat/>

## 2. Just For Kids Law

JFKL provide legal advice and representation to children and young people up to the age of 25 facing a wide range of issues including education. The JFKL exclusions hub has lots of useful information and resources. You can also refer a young person or make a self-referral to Just for Kids Law by filling in the referral form.

020 3174 2279

[info@justforkidslaw.org](mailto:info@justforkidslaw.org)

<https://justforkidslaw.org/school-exclusions-hub>

## 3. BLAM

If you are a Black British student and have been excluded from school, BLAM (Black Learning Achievement and Mental Health) could help. They provide advice and representation at school exclusion panels. BLAM's education advocacy service is free.

<https://blamuk.org/school-exclusion-appeal-services/>

[info@blamuk.org](mailto:info@blamuk.org)