Youth Voice on School Exclusions

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

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Introduction

To change systems around child exploitation it is vital to listen to young people who have experienced it as their valuable insights highlight why, where and how systems can be changed. This is why, since its launch in 2018, a key focus of the Disrupting Exploitation National Programme (DEx) has been to listen to the voices of the young people it supports to influence change.

Disrupting Exploitation is a unique model, combining systems change work with direct support to young people. It is a pioneering approach to embed systems change in the frontline of practice and being led by youth voice. It is a pioneering strategic partnership between the funder – the National Lottery Community Fund – and The Children's Society.

Exclusions

External research[1] suggests there is a link between young people being excluded from school and exploitation. A re-occurring theme amongst the young people supported by the DEx programme is being excluded from school with a large proportion of those referred having experienced school exclusion. Consequently, a systems change priority of the DEx programme is tackling school exclusions.

Listening to young people

In 2019 the DEx team, working in partnership with The Youth Engagement Team, began engaging young people to hear their voices on the topic of exclusions. A key aim was to

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[1]https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807862/Timpson _review.pdf
https://justforkidslaw.org/sites/default/files/fields/download/JfKL%20school%20exclusion%20and%20CCE_2.pdf

give young people an opportunity to express their thoughts about a process which often doesn't allow them a voice. It was also to help adults understand school exclusions from a young person's perspective and therefore how to best influence the system.

This project engaged with 11 young people from across England who were either receiving a direct service from The Children's Society, part of an external youth club, at an Alternative Provision or part of a Youth Voice Webinar. The young people shared some interesting experiences of schools exclusions and their lives, and what might help to improve this, but – given the limited scope of the exercise – it is important to be aware of this when interpreting the findings presented here.

- They were invited to share their experiences of school and exclusions in a variety of ways, and could choose how much they wanted to tell us. Young people engaged in individual conversations alongside their support workers, a one-off consultation activity, or a series of engagement activities in 2019 and early 2020.
- What their voice would contribute to and that it would be anonymous and unidentifiable was explained and discussed.
- Those who chose to participate ranged in age from 10 to 19, some had experience of exploitation, and others were at risk of being exploited. We spoke to both males and females, we are unaware of other gender identities within this group/cohort. We did not ask young people to describe their ethnicity during this project, however we know that there was a mixture of ethnic identities within the groups and individuals who took part. In addition, some of these young people identified that they had additional needs, and others identified experience of the care system. All of these experiences are reflected in what young people told us, and they had control over what they were happy to share with us and in turn what we are sharing here.
- It is important to note that the disruption caused by Covid-19 and the subsequent social distancing delayed and altered the intentions and outcomes of this piece of work. However, in producing this report we have kept true to the consent and understanding of the young people involved.

What young people told us

This report amplifies the collective voice of the young people who took part in the project. The quotes are not attributed to individual young people or ages or genders in order to protect the identity of those who took part.

Throughout the report the term 'school exclusions' encompasses all processes and interventions linked to school exclusions such as behaviour sanctions, internal exclusions (i.e. being removed from mainstream teaching experiences, such as being put into

isolation) temporary and permanent exclusions, managed moves, alternative provision (AP's) and Pupil Referral Units (PRU's).

The report is arranged according to three key themes which have emerged through analysing what young people told us - (1) Wellbeing. (2) Relationships. (3) The school system. The connections young people made between exclusions and exploitation make up the fourth section.

A theme of power imbalance also emerged. References to this run throughout the report rather than as a stand-alone section, this is because the theme of power imbalance cuts across all the other themes.

Young people made reference to both positive and negative experiences of exclusions and shared solutions and ideas about how to improve the system. Their thoughts on this are the focus of the final section of the report: How might Young People's Voices Influence the System of School Exclusion?

We are sharing these findings because we want the insight from young people to lead to action and for young people to see that we have acted on what they have said.

What young people said about Exclusions and Emotional Health & Well-being.

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

Throughout our conversations, young people talked to us about the impact that school exclusions had on their well-being. Young people spoke about the impact on their confidence and self-esteem, their sense of feeling valued and cared for, the impact on relationships with those around them and the amount of choice and autonomy they feel they have in school and in the exclusions process itself. Overall, young people told us that they struggled to cope with the challenges of school exclusions.

'I didn't even have my say. They asked me nothing, no questions.'

Isolation and moving school were highlighted as particularly challenging. Moving school caused some to feel isolated because it felt like landing in a new place with no support. Their self-esteem and confidence were reduced and they didn't feel cared for or valued. They told us about the use of isolation within schools impacting on them and how it makes them feel trapped.

'It was proper isolation. With walls on each side so you can't see anyone else. I would be put in for half a day or a whole day.'

'I would come in the morning and then be put in isolation all day for something I did the day before.'

Through extensive research, The Children's Society[2] knows that trusted relationships are vital for good well-being. Those relationships might be with adults or friends, but it's important that they're supportive and nurturing. A whole section of this report is dedicated to

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[2] https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood

exploring what young people told us about their relationships and school exclusions. In terms of well-being, young people told us about relationships which impact them both positively and negatively.

Young people spoke about exclusions impacting on their hopes and aspirations about the future and whether they feel able to fulfil their further and higher education plans. We found that the disruption to education as a result of an exclusion can be significant and lead to young people feeling 'written off' and demoralised.

'When young people attend school, they may feel it is boring and that they may not like it very much, but however boring it is school is the most important key to your future.'

'Cause it did affect me mentally, it did affect me like academically as well and I missed out on so much content… that I kinda put me behind.'

'I don't feel like my future is gonna be any good.'

For many of the young people the school exclusion was just one of the challenges in their life. Young people told us they are also facing challenges in their home lives such as:

■ complex home lives including being moved into care and coping with that change
■ living in challenging communities where knife crime and exploitation was occurring
■ navigating racism in all its forms
■ having unmet learning needs
■ not coping with the rigid rules and expectations of school
■ feeling ignored and not being listened to properly
■ and experiencing bullying and friendship difficulties

Young people explained that their circumstances in and out of school impact on each other. What they experience outside of school can impact on their ability to engage with school life to the extent that it can lead to them being excluded. Also that being excluded from school exacerbates the challenges they are already struggling with outside of school.

'If I have a problem they should do something about it, not just listen and forget about it the next day'

'I was feeling really alone. I had been feeling rubbish and being on a managed move did not help.'

'Young people may begin to get overwhelmed with upsetting emotions as moving into a care home isn't what they initially might have asked for but the hardest part about moving is getting used to it.'

'The root causes of the challenges that I have faced that have contributed to my exclusions are those that I don't …have control over. For example, I left my family home, and this as not my choice and decisions were made above my head. Now looking at all this and thinking about this has affected my engagement with educational institutions.'

The impact of school exclusions has a profound effect on young people's sense of identity, both in the present and their hopes for the future and its reach goes beyond what happens in school itself and into the wider contexts of their lives.

What young people said about Exclusions and Relationships

'Friends don't want you to get in trouble or excluded'

In sharing their experiences and views on school exclusions young people spoke a lot about their relationships with teachers, adults at home, friends and peers and the complexities of how all of these relationships interlink with their education.

Friendships and Peers

Through The Children's Society's subjective well-being research we know that feeling a sense of belonging is a significant aspect of well-being for young people.[2] The young people described making choices at school motivated by a need to be with friends or to fit in or maintain their friendships. Sometimes 'friends' can be disloyal and let each other down with significant consequences.

'I started being really naughty, wagging lessons and just being cheeky. I did this because they moved me out of lessons with people that I knew. I didn't know anyone so I didn't want to go, so I started wagging, I got used to it and then it became a new hobby.'

'I didn't touch it, he just put it in my bag. He was my best friend at the time- he wouldn't even admit that it was his knife.'

Young people described having to deal with stereotyping and rumours amongst their peer group at school. For some a reputation is positive and something to cultivate, whereas others felt it led to negative consequences.

'Can't really keep it private because people probably put it on their social media, 'oh, I've been kicked out' or something like that and then everyone will find out cuz they'll look at the stories innit. So, everyone will know that you're not in school.'

'People at school were saying that I always carried knives with me- just because I wouldn't let people have my bag.'

Young people also describe friends being supportive and important positive influences preventing them from getting in trouble at school. A key challenge highlighted when transitioning to a new school is having to find new friends.

'I had my friends that really supported me…if I was getting disruptive my friend would nudge me.'

'Friends helped calm me down.'

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

Teachers and adults at school

Young people tended to refer to all adult staff in school as teachers rather than referring to specific roles such as pastoral.

Young people identified the importance of consistent support in schools where they have teachers they can relate to and trust, who listen, seeing past the behaviour to understand the cause and supporting them to resolve things and move forward. Young people explained that finding just one teacher who you trust and who believes in you can make a huge difference in mind-set, especially if you can relate to their identity.

'Having that black female teacher for me is like I saw where she was coming from…I could relate to her so much…she opened so many opportunities for me.'

'Think schools should work with young people to resolve the situation and make it better…if a young person brings a knife to school they get permanently excluded. The young person might be scared, being bullied, schools just don't try and find out.'

'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.'

'They listen and try to understand.'

Young people frequently spoke about feeling powerless at school. They spoke about teachers being inconsistent, treating some pupils differently to others. They feel this is unfair and as a result some have lost respect for their teachers. As well as feeling stereotyped by their peers, some pupils feel they are stereotyped by teachers. This contributes further to a sense of powerlessness and inevitability of being in trouble.

'I was naughty in lessons, the teachers would treat you like [I'm stupid] so I would treat them the same way. If you don't be nice to me, I won't be nice back."

"Me and Mum were angry- why didn't he get in any trouble? He would never get into trouble, he was a teacher's pet. All teachers hated me though because I was naughty in lessons."

"At the end of the day they've got more power than you but yous are equal. At the end of the day yous are both the same. But they're going to abuse the power they have more, so just listen to them. Listen to what they've got to say and then they'll listen to what you've got to say."

"When I first came to the school, I felt like I was equal to all the teachers, as I got older I realised no like- I've got no- the teachers were just really abusing all the power they had."

Relationships at Home

Being subject to school exclusion can impact negatively on relationships at home. Young people explained that parents and carers can feel under pressure having to attend various meetings and engage with school throughout the process. This can damage relationships between home and school and can also strain the young person's relationship with those who care for them at home. Some comments from young people highlight a lack of inclusivity making it challenging for adults to access the exclusions process.

'If a young person is excluded from their education they may feel they have no way to escape the system because they are constantly on (in) the home with staff members, this will impact them negatively because if you feel you can't get away then you must feel trapped.'

'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.'

'I had a meeting every time I was excluded and I felt tight on my Mum because she had to come every time and walk up with the baby.'

'They knew if they had a translator and if mum could have explained my side that I wouldn't have been kicked out- but there was no meeting. With any meeting there was no a translator.'

Some accounts from young people highlighted the positives of how schools communicate home, which is covered in the following section.

We know from our well-being research that the quality of the relationships in young people's lives has a significant impact on how they feel about their own well-being. Therefore, it is no surprise when young people spoke about school a lot of what they said related to their peers, friends, family, carers and teachers. Young people described how the interactions they have at school are complex and range in quality. They also highlighted the varying degrees of power and influence different people have within the school system. It is clear that people are a big part of school and relationships play a significant role in the process of school exclusion.

What young people said about Exclusions and The School Environment and System

'Rigid rules and reputation over understanding.'

The young people involved in this project often spoke about 'school' as an entity in itself - how 'school' makes them feel, the decisions 'school' makes, whether 'school is fair or not. Our understanding of what they are referring to when they say 'school' is both the school environment and the school system and relates to any educational setting from mainstream to alternative provision. 'School' plays a significant role in young people's lives, helping them shape their understanding of themselves and how they relate to others, simultaneously being both a protective and a challenging place to be.

Young people told us that the learning environment and the academic and pastoral support they can access at school makes a big difference. Large class environments can be challenging, particularly for young people who have additional and/or unmet needs. Young people talked about the difficulty and pace of the work, limited choice of subjects and their concerns about part time timetables.

'Want to be back in lessons – need support.'

'We should have more choice in what we learn.'

'When you get back from an exclusion you can get put on a reduced timetable and in isolation. You don't always need to do that and it doesn't help just going home early.'

'We have them teachers who are just like, they're being nice to us and have jokes…we do our work [in AP]... but then in mainstream we just work, work, work and that's why we get bored…if we have a nice teacher we respect him for that.'

Transitions between schools, including from smaller more nurturing primary schools to larger more dynamic secondary environments as well as experiencing managed moves

between schools, were highlighted by young people as a significant challenge. They described the difficulty and fear of moving to new or unfamiliar settings without meaningful support to help them feel safe and navigate the new environment.

'I had support in Year 6, but when I actually went into Year 7 it didn't feel like I had any support, didn't feel like anyone was really helping me.'

'I went on a managed move to another school and it was rubbish. I don't think the school did not care about me. They threw me in and I didn't know where I was going. They put me in lessons that I was struggling with…the teachers didn't understand me or want to understand me.'

Young people talked about behaviour policies and approaches. They described rigid rules and the cycle of detention/isolation/exclusion that can quickly escalate and feels hard to break once established. Young people see the systems in place as inflexible, arbitrary and ultimately ineffective in achieving real change.

'I think school exclusions are stupid, we go to school to be taught. Don't send kids home, it's just common sense for us to be in school.'

'I was on report at the highest level in Year 7 every day and had to see my headteacher every day, nothing changed.'

'Is being excluded a punishment? I dunno. I feel like it's just a normal day. I got lucky this time. They're just giving you a day off. They think it's a punishment, I don't.'

Young people described the different approaches they had experienced between mainstream and Alternative Provision (AP), including how schools and teachers relate to young people, the space given to understanding the cause of problems and the level of support. One young person felt that the physical environment can impact on behaviour.

'PRU's are built like prisons so you act like you're in prison.'

'School [mainstream] did nothing to actually help, they just excluded me. If they wanted me to behave and 'be normal' then they should have told me how to. They should have got me back into lessons and actually supported me.'

'You get more one to one [in AP] with more help and I also have an Outreach Worker to help you. Someone to talk to.'

'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]'

A theme running throughout much of what young people said relates to having a lack of power and autonomy. Young people talked about this in relation to communication with teachers as well as between school and home. They shared examples in both mainstream school and alternative provision but it is clear that what matters is the approach taken rather than the type of educational setting. Young people feel empowered when they and their family/carers are listened to and are able to effectively engage in and influence decisions that affect their lives.

'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.'

'They put you in a room and they talk to you [AP]…what's happened and they sort it. And they say well done and they call your mum saying you handled it. They call her or text her saying stuff innit, saying you've handled everything and it's all good.'

However, young people spoke more frequently about feeling disempowered at school, with power imbalances for some becoming more noticeable as they get older. The interventions designed to prevent problems escalating can actually have the opposite effect if young people don't feel they have the opportunity to have their voices heard. Young people referred to difficulties with short notice or brief meetings and late letters and the impact that had. A specific example related a lack of inclusivity in terms of communication in relation to English being a second language for a family.

'When I first came [Year 7] I felt I was equal to the teachers, but as I got older I realised like no, the teachers were just abusing all the power. If we've said anything they've just overruled it by giving a detention or going higher up to SLT'.

'No time for me to say what I had done…they used their own words… the meetings were 10 minutes long and not long enough for me to say what happened.'

'In the meetings when I had been excluded they were a waste of time.'

'I did not understand the letter and it was English so mum did not understand it either. They sent another letter… but by the time we got the letter the date had passed…I didn't even have my say…they just thought it was my knife… they knew if they had a translator and if mum could have explained my side that I wouldn't have been kicked out.'

Young people shared both positive and negative experiences of the school environment and school systems - times when 'school' has felt supportive but also when their individual needs and circumstances have not been taken into account. Their experiences highlight a power imbalance, where, due to the school systems and/or culture in place, they often feel powerless and unheard.

The context of exploitation

'…not falling into the temptation of making that quick money'

The young people involved in this project made clear links between school exclusions and exploitation.

A consequence of being excluded from school is often spending long periods of time out of the education system. Young people described being bored and unsupervised at home while waiting for alternative education provision to be sourced for them. They felt that this made them vulnerable to exploitation, a vulnerability which increased for young people living in deprived communities.

'You meet people on the streets, so I think there is a link between home schooling and crime and exploitation.'

'When you live in a deprived area then there's nothing else you can do apart from going into crime because you're bored at home.'

'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.'

Compared to mainstream school, some young people felt more exposed to drugs, violence and criminal behaviour in Alternative Provision (AP's.)

"… there's more like gang kids in thingy as well, alternative provisions…The way they act and that - 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."

"It depends how they are, if they can look after themselves or not. Like being able to like fight or sommit…. Probably get influenced or sommit." [Young person was referring to how new young people entering an AP would cope being in contact with young people who are linked with serious youth violence]

Referring back to the introduction: to change systems around exploitation it is vital to listen to young people who have experienced it as their valuable insights highlight why, where and how systems can be changed. From listening to the young people involved in this project, it is clear that to effectively protect young people from exploitation we must consider how the school exclusions process can increase their vulnerability and the risk of harm to them.

How might Young People's Voices Influence the System of School Exclusion?

"Cuz I was out of school, when I got permo-ed [permanently excluded] 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 and that. And that's how I ended up in care… a massive impact. Yeah, that's when I started smoking weed and all that."

Young people have told us that being excluded from school has a huge impact on their lives. Their learning is disrupted, their emotional health and well-being is damaged, so too are their relationships with friends and family and their relationship to learning and achieving. Their confidence and self – esteem declines and they lose hope for the future. Young people told us they think there is a link between being excluded and being at risk of serious harm through exploitation.

However, some young people shared positive changes and experiences which have happened when their needs have been recognised, such as schools coordinating and supporting family meetings and finding a school setting which suits their learning needs better.

Both the positive and negative experiences represent important points in young people's lives. The schools approach to challenging behaviour is key and can mean a young person accessing the support they need and receiving help. However, an approach resulting in an exclusion from school could put a young person at risk of serious harm for example being at risk of exploitation.
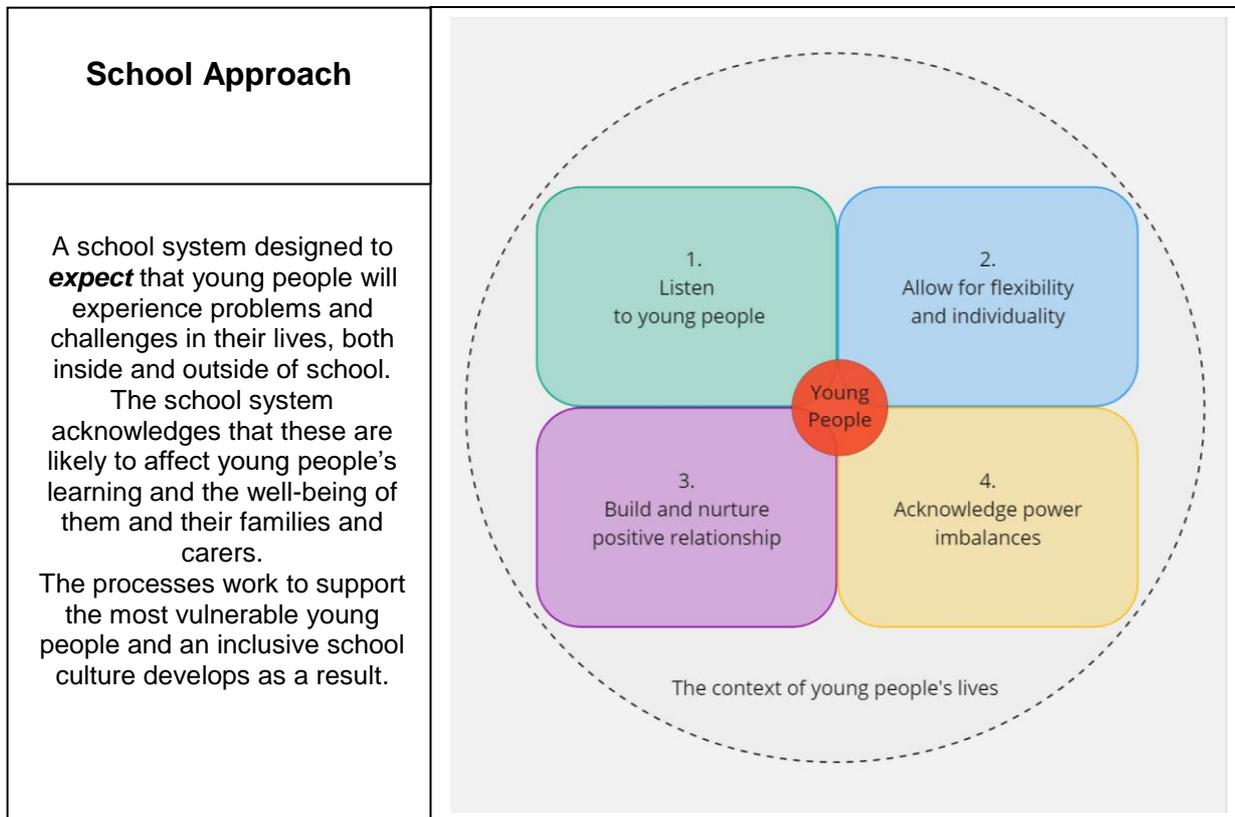
If you hadn't been excluded do you think it would have been different for you? 'Yeah. I think I would've done well in my exams and that, I would've been in a proper school and I wouldn't have been hanging around with gangs and I wouldn't be sat in here, I would be sat in [my home town] right now.'

The School Approach

We know from research and the direct work supporting young people that some are more likely to experience exclusion than others. The young people involved in this project have shared a sense of frustration at being encouraged to fit into an education system which they feel is unfair, prejudice and not designed to meet their needs. So, rather than seeing vulnerable young people as the outliers who do not 'fit' the system lets consider how to change the system to put them at the heart of it.

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

Emerging from the positive and negative experiences young people have shared are some key principles to underpin a school system which has vulnerable young people at its heart, taking into account the context of their lives. Rather than making adjustments and concessions when problems occur, it is designed to anticipate the issues they are likely to face and supports them and their families in their current circumstances. For example, letters being available in additional languages, and planning for that in advance. In addition, rather than a complex, expensive school uniform which young people get in to trouble for not having, implement a simple, low cost uniform which everyone can afford. Schools often link uniform breaches with misbehaviour which contributes to the pathways to exclusions. Taking an inclusive and universal approach will not only benefit vulnerable young people, but all young people at school.

School Approach	
A school system designed to **expect** that young people will experience problems and challenges in their lives, both inside and outside of school. The school system acknowledges that these are likely to affect young people's learning and the well-being of them and their families and carers. The processes work to support the most vulnerable young people and an inclusive school culture develops as a result.	

① Key principle: Listen to young people

Whether they feel listened to and understood is a theme young people have spoken about in relation to a range of school experiences. The increasing use of *'zero tolerance'* behaviour approaches in many secondary schools, where there is no flexibility given for any student who deviates from the school rules, leads to a significant power imbalance. Young people describe feeling disempowered and unable to influence key decisions that affect their lives, particularly in relation to exclusions.

'More time listening to young people would make a difference.'

'…talk instead of expecting things.'

'I think really understanding the problems that cause the disruption or that can lead to exclusion.'

Schools are dynamic environments that have to balance the needs of a wide range of diverse individuals. Considering different ways that young people's voice can be supported and heard within schools would make a real difference to all pupils. But for those most likely to be affected by the exclusions process, it could create the opportunity needed to break the cycle they find themselves in.

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2 Key Principle: Allow for flexibility and individuality

Many young people described struggling to conform and follow the rules at school. As a result, they found that situations quickly escalated and they became part of a cycle of behaviour which they found hard to break. Systems, processes, communications, the curriculum and teaching approaches can all have unintended consequences for the most vulnerable young people and increase the likelihood of exclusions.

'Should put them into smaller groups of 6-10 people in a classroom, take it down and see how they are and gradually put them back in.'

Some of the positive examples young people describe relate to their experiences of PRU's. Here class sizes are smaller and a more flexible approach is taken. This allows for more time and space for situations to calm down, opportunities for teachers to listen and respond and young people to feel heard and understood.

'I haven't had a detention at all at that school, [in mainstream] I was getting them probably every day.'

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3 Key Principle: Build and nurture positive relationships

Young people told us that making a genuine connection with teachers and adults at school can make a significant difference. They value teachers they can identify with, who they can trust, who listen to them and take the time to unpack and understand.

'…for teachers, trying to connect with your students a bit more and showing that you are going an extra mile and it's not just a job.'

'I think that another thing schools can do to kind of prevent exclusions is kind of support is actually supporting the young people, building that relationship with them to guide them through education.'

Whether young people described their peers as supportive or challenging, it was clear that fitting in and friendship is important to them. Therefore, school policies and those implementing them must acknowledge that young people search for a sense of belonging with peers. Actively nurturing young people's friendships has the potential to improve behaviour, reduce the risk of exclusion and improve overall well-being as well as helping them identify and address negative peer-to-peer behaviour.

'Teachers should stop bullying happening'

'I wouldn't listen, I only took notice of my friends.'

'School' taking time and care over their communications home is something that young people value and makes a real difference in terms of empowering and engaging both young people and their families and carers in outcomes. School policies and processes should not undermine pupils home lives, put unnecessary strain on carers or lack inclusivity. Adults at school and adults at home must be enabled to work in partnership to support the young person.

'Some ethnic parents or some parents may not understand what their child is doing in school and feel like they (schools) play upon it…it doesn't allow the parent to say 'well my child was naughty but what can we do going forward to support my child?'

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4 Key Principle: Acknowledge power imbalances

Young people involved in this project highlighted a power imbalance between them and 'school'. Sometimes young people identified specific decisions makers or teachers, but overall there is a sense that 'school' holds the power over both them and their carers. Young people also spoke about feeling stereotyped and a sense of being treated differently to other pupils. As such young people feel a sense of inevitability when it comes to school exclusion. They feel that what is right for the 'school' will prevail and that their needs are less significant in comparison.

'There are kids getting excluded and permanently excluded all over the UK, but I don't think that it's the schools that are having to deal with the side effects.'

This is a complex theme to unpick and understand, but it comes out strongly in the voices of the young people that they see the current system privileges some, puts others at a disadvantage and protects the school over the pupils.

'I think schools should work with young people to resolves the situations and make it better. Excluding them doesn't help and it's lazy.'

Overcoming this involves acknowledging that this is the way that some young people feel about school. Though others may perceive school differently, young people's perception is powerful and influences how they behave. Establishing a youth voice ethos that allows young people to speak honestly and openly, ask for support when they need it, challenge when they feel they have been misunderstood and to have choice in the decisions which affect their education and their lives would enable schools to work *alongside* young people in an inclusive way.

Consider the context

Young people have told us that being excluded from school does not happen in isolation. The context of the young person's life, such the challenges they face in and out of school, their emotional health and well-being, the school environment and the relationships around them can all contribute towards an exclusion. However, young people tell us that the education system does not always take this into account when considering sanctions.

Young people have shared positive experiences of when the context of their lives have been carefully considered by schools, resulting in better understanding and support. They really value the approach taken and refer to it as a key solution in improving school experiences for young people.

'… Like I've done some madness. Like I beat a kid up in a lesson because he was like givin' it large on the internet and then when I seen him he got a bit scared and that. But then I beat him up in the lesson and then I got kicked out and then they wasn't gonna bring me back but then they thought 'it's [young

person's own name] so I'm taking him back.' Like I was on the borderline of being kicked out forever but they took me back again… I think that fight was in the lesson when I first went into care. They let me back as well because I think they understood because like, he got cheeky to me on the internet and then when I got into school I got a bit angry. But then they probably thought 'oh his heads a bit messed up' or summit so let's give him another chance. And then they got me and this kid in a room together and then we sorted it all out and that and then it was all calm… yeah cuz when I first came into care my head wasn't all there and that but now like I've settled down and that I'm alright.'

Considering context is not only about how a young person's behaviour in school is affected, it is also about protecting them from significant harm. Young people have made clear links between being excluded from school and being exploited. Therefore, it is vitally important to consider what a young person's life would be like after an exclusion and to ask questions about the risks they might face if they are not in education for a period of time.

When it comes to school exclusion, considering the whole context of a young person's life means that support and interventions can be targeted where it is needed most in order to best support the young person.

In Conclusion

At the start of this project we set out to amplify young people's voice about school exclusions through the perspective of those who were at risk of or who had been exploited. Young people spoke about the wide-ranging impact of school exclusion on their lives and for some, they saw a clear link between being excluded from school and risk of serious harm.

This document captures 11 young people's unique experiences which it is important adults listen to. It is recognised that the scope of this report is small, but it is a starting point and contributes to wider national debate around the impact of school exclusions.

Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously[3]. In acting alone, without the participation of young people, adults will miss a vital piece of the jigsaw. What is set out

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[3] Article 12, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989)

here, highlights adult's duty of care to listen, take note and act in partnership with young people to change the education system for the better.