Exclusions review: Call for evidence

Written evidence from The Children’s Society

About The Children’s Society
The Children’s Society is a leading charity committed to improving the lives of thousands of children and young people every year. We work across the country with the most disadvantaged children through our specialist services. Our direct work with vulnerable young people supports missing children, children with experiences of sexual exploitation, children in or leaving care, refugee, migrant and trafficked children. We can place their voices at the centre of our work.

Our well-being research
We have been researching children’s subjective well-being since 2005. We have produced annual reports reviewing children’s subjective well-being since 2012 and have analysed the impact of a range of factors affecting the way children feel about their lives. We believe that it is only by listening to children and understanding their personal experiences that we can give them the best chance of flourishing.

Introduction

We welcome this call for evidence from the Department of Education on school exclusions. Through our frontline practice and well-being work in schools, we often observe schools in which staff appear blind to the risks and vulnerabilities that children and young people experience in and out of the classroom. It is vital that school staff are able to recognise risk factors and triggers that explain behaviour schools deem unacceptable. Historically, the groups of children and young people overrepresented in school exclusion rates are some of the most vulnerable in society.

Too frequently, schools fail to understand the demands that mainstream classroom settings have on high-risk vulnerable children. Rather, they are expected to be part of school life with little offer of additional support or help. Conversely, we are also aware of schools who know those young people at risk of exclusion are the most vulnerable but do not have the resources required to put in place the support needed to keep them in education.

Through our direct work with children and young people, we understand many of those most at risk of exclusion have likely experienced abuse or neglect at home or have other experiences of trauma. It is vital that all school staff are given adequate training to enable them to recognise the
risks that children in their classrooms might be facing outside the school gates. Moreover, they should feel confident to offer them, or signpost towards, adequate help and support.

The latest Government statutory guidance for those with legal responsibilities in relation to school exclusions¹ states:

‘Schools should give particular consideration to the fair treatment of pupils from groups who are vulnerable to exclusion. […] Disruptive behaviour can be an indication of unmet needs. Where a school has concerns about a pupil’s behaviour, it should try to identify whether there are any causal factors and intervene early in order to reduce the need for a subsequent exclusion.’

The evidence presented in this response highlights how this guidance is not always adhered to and how pressures faced in schools results in a higher rate of exclusions.

Our key recommendations for change are:

- **When piloting the new Mental Health Support Teams in trailblazer areas, the Departments should have a pilot targeted at vulnerable young people. We suggest one vulnerable group to target is children with mental health problems at risk of exclusion. Alongside mental health outcomes, the number of exclusions should also be measured to establish Mental Health Support Team’s efficacy at preventing exclusions in schools.**

- **The Department for Education should review the Behaviour and Discipline in schools guidance to ensure that when a child presents with challenging behaviours, they should not immediately be faced with sanctions. This guidance should be bought in line with the SEN Code of Practice, which states there should be an assessment where there are concerns with behaviour in order to determine casual factors.**

- **Ofsted, when implementing their new inspection framework, should judge schools on their approach to mental health and well-being. This should include looking at exclusion rates, understanding and approaches to trauma, and how inclusive schools are of children from low-income families.**

1. School exclusions

In recent years, there has been an increase in the use of school exclusions across all state-funded schools. Throughout this response, we have used data relating to all state funded schools including primary, secondary and special schools. Table 1 demonstrates the increase in exclusions, both permanent and fixed period, over recent years.

*Table 1: Number of exclusions from 2013/14 to 2015/16*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2013/14</th>
<th>2014/15</th>
<th>2015/16</th>
<th>Percentage increase from 2013/14 to 2015/16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of permanent exclusions in all state funded schools</td>
<td>4950</td>
<td>5,795</td>
<td>6,685</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of fixed period exclusions in all state funded schools</td>
<td>269,475</td>
<td>302,975</td>
<td>339,360</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Young people excluded from school once are likely to be excluded again. Nationally, the average number of exclusions is two for every excluded pupil. In some areas of the country, the number of exclusions per excluded pupil is as high as five times. Students subject to exclusion are not given adequate support and intervention to tackle the cause of the problem.

The varying rates of exclusions suggest there is no consistent practice in school exclusions. As part of our longitudinal study into young people growing up in poverty, we have been able to observe the considerable variation within, and between schools, in relation to behavior management. Young people have told us how sanctioning in schools creates a system where small breaches in school rules escalate quickly to put more children at risk of exclusion. One pupil compared it to there being a series of speed cameras on a short stretch of road where it is possible to incur multiple penalties for the same offence.

As a way to explain the increase in the use of exclusions, we looked at the rate of academisation of schools and the number of exclusions. Whilst 65% of secondary schools are now academies, academisation does not appear to have affected the rate of exclusions. Exclusions are therefore part of the wider educational culture of England. This suggests there may be pressures elsewhere in the school system, such as the availability of appropriate

---

2 National Exclusion data, Department of Education, 2015/16 statistical release

3 Ibid

4 Local Authority Exclusion Data, Department of Education, 2015/16 statistical release
support or resources, which means exclusion is sometimes seen to be the only option for pupils the school is struggling to understand and respond to.

Currently, The Children’s Society is delivering a peer learning programme for the Local Government Association. We are working with eight local authorities that are each seeking to improve a specific area of their children and young people’s mental health provision. During the application stage for the programme, a number of local authorities raised the connected issues of mental health support for those with SEN, high levels of exclusions and how to deal with challenging behaviours in schools that has its causes in mental ill-health, or low well-being, but does not seem to meet the thresholds for any of the available services – whether children’s social care or CAMHS.

Exclusions are clearly something that local authorities are struggling with as they seek to meet their duties under the Children Acts, often rightly focused on the most vulnerable. They have little power to prevent exclusions and bad practice, like children being subject to ‘managed moves’ where schools will swap difficult pupils in order to mask exclusion rates. Commissioners and public health leads are struggling with this issue but there are few policy levers to effect change and little resource to commission additional services. This review should aim to simplify the system and provide clear direction and accountability. If the roles of schools and local authorities can be better defined, duties made explicit, and resource provided to meet those duties, we would likely see a significant reduction in exclusions merely as a result of the system functioning better.

We know that some groups of pupils are disproportionately represented in the school exclusion process. Research from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has found that excluded children are the most vulnerable: twice as likely to be in care, four times more likely to have grown up in poverty, seven times more likely to have a special educational need and 10 times more likely to suffer a recognised mental health condition.⁵

The IPPR research is supported by official statistics. Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are over represented in exclusion data, accounting for almost half of all permanent and fixed period exclusions in 2015/16.⁶ Of the total number of pupils in schools recorded with an SEN primary need⁷, 17% have Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) as their primary recorded need. Pupils identified with SEMH needs have the highest exclusion rate amongst children with SEN. Table 2 displays the proportion of children identified with SEMH who faced exclusions as a percentage of all children with SEN and the percentage of the total population of excluded students.

⁷ Figures excludes those with SEN support who are yet to be assessed for a type of need and those with school action provision. SEN status is as recorded at the time of exclusion.
Table 2: Percentages of children with SEMH who faced exclusion in 2015/16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of children from SEN cohort who were permanently excluded 2015/16</th>
<th>% of children from SEN cohort who were excluded for a fixed period 2015/16</th>
<th>% of all children who were permanently excluded 2015/16</th>
<th>% of all children who were excluded for a fixed period 2015/16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEN children identified with SEMH as primary need</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other children with SEN primary need (excluding SEMH)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It needs to be noted that there will be a hidden cohort of pupils who are experiencing these issues but are yet to be identified – this means that these numbers for this group could be significantly higher.

The most common reason children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs are excluded, both permanently and for a fixed period, is persistent disruptive behaviour. Research has found poor childhood mental health is associated with disruptive behaviour and poor academic attainment, both of which may increase the likelihood that a child may be excluded. As set out in the statutory guidance, disruptive behaviour can be an indication of unmet needs and early intervention is vital to ensure that an exclusion does not happen.

There is also evidence that children and young people who have experienced trauma are more likely to display disruptive behaviour than their peers who have not. Research from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network found a number of overlapping symptoms that are common to victims of trauma and those with a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD). Difficulty concentrating and learning in school, being easily distracted, not seeming to listen, being disorganised, hyperactive and restless were all behaviours associated with traumatic stress disorder and ADHD. These behaviours are synonymous with those deemed disruptive in classrooms and other school settings.

Through our direct work with children and young people, we understand that many of those most at risk of exclusion have likely experienced abuse or neglect at home or have other experiences of trauma. In particular, Looked after Children and Children in Need have often

---

9 Ibid
10 https://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/newsarchive/researchmedical/Psychological_Medicine_preprint1.pdf
12 https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//creating_supporting_sustaining_trauma_informed_schools_a_systems_framework.pdf
13 https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//is_it_adhd_or_child_traumatic_stress.pdf
experienced trauma, and both these groups are over represented in the exclusions data – Looked after Children are around twice as likely and Children in need are 3 times as likely to have a permanent exclusion, than the national average.\textsuperscript{14}

What is more, on average, poorer young people are four times more likely to be excluded than their wealthier peers.\textsuperscript{15} Children who have been on Free School Meals in past 6 years are classed as disadvantaged and receive pupil premium. In 2015/16, students who were eligible for free school schools in any of the last six years made up 64\% of all permanent exclusions and 62\% of fixed term exclusions.\textsuperscript{16}

2. Well-being in schools

School is a formative environment for children and young people. We have been studying well-being in schools for a number of years, and this work has shown us that the school environment can be far from benign. Our Good Childhood Report 2017, which measures children’s subjective well-being, found that out of a range of different aspects of life, children are least happy with the school that they go to.\textsuperscript{17} Recent analysis of data from Understanding Society has found that unhappiness with school is subsequently related to later peer relationship problems.\textsuperscript{18}

Bullying is a major factor in the happiness of children at school. We know that bullying mostly takes place in the school environment, and there are strong links between experiences of bullying and lower well-being. Children who have been bullied have significantly lower satisfaction with life, appearance and schoolwork.\textsuperscript{19}

‘Don’t feel safe at school. The kids bully and the schools don’t do anything about it. You have to fight your own battles.’

Secondary School Child

Family relationships and support are also fundamental to the well-being of children, with the quality of family relationships being the strongest predictor of overall well-being. Children who live in high conflict and low support families have substantially lower average well-being than those children who live in low conflict and high support family environments.\textsuperscript{20} What is more, we found that children in households where there was no adult in paid work and/or who were entitled to free school meals reported higher levels of family conflict.\textsuperscript{21} Where there are issues at home, this will reflect how a child acts at school.

\textsuperscript{16} National Exclusion data, Department of Education, 2015/16 statistical release
\textsuperscript{18} The Children’s Society Analysis of Understanding Society Data, April 2018
3. Exclusion of pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs

The Ofsted annual report 2016/17 identified that the exclusion of SEN pupils as being high in a third of local areas inspected, but across the majority of areas, appropriate plans were not in place to deal with this issue.\(^{22}\) What is more, research by the Institute for Public Policy Research found that half of school leaders say their teachers cannot recognise mental ill health, and three in four say they cannot refer effectively to external services.\(^{23}\)

We know that children and young people face more complex needs which impacts on their well-being. Our Good Childhood Report 2017 explored the links between children’s experiences of facing disadvantages relating to parent-child relationships, family/household circumstances, material and economic factors and neighborhood experiences and their well-being. We found that the large majority of children experience at least one or more disadvantage in their lives, and more than half experience three or more.\(^{24}\) Experiences of any kind of disadvantage is linked with lower well-being. Whilst low well-being does not necessarily mean these children will have mental ill health, wider literature suggests that increased incidence of mental health is more common.

The University of Exeter has recently conducted research into the impact of school exclusion on mental health. The research found there were high levels of psychological distress consistently detected among excluded children, and that exclusion from school was associated with the deterioration of mental health.\(^{25}\) The research emphasises the importance of support for children whose behaviour challenges school systems and advocates for timely interventions, which may prevent exclusions.\(^{26}\)

We too see timely interventions as essential in reducing the number of exclusions for this group of pupils. We believe there is great value in school-based counselling. Evidence has shown that children and pastoral care staff see school-based counselling as accessible, non-stigmatising and effective,\(^{27}\) with school management reporting improvements in attainment, attendance and behaviour of young people who have accessed services.\(^{28}\) It has also been found to reduce levels of school exclusion by around 31%.\(^{29}\)

---


\(^{25}\) [https://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/newsarchive/researchmedical/Psychological_Medicine_preprint1.pdf](https://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/newsarchive/researchmedical/Psychological_Medicine_preprint1.pdf)

\(^{26}\) *Ibid*

\(^{27}\) The Children’s Society, Response to the mental health green paper, March 2018

\(^{28}\) *Ibid*

\(^{29}\) *Ibid*
The Children’s Society has been interviewing children in school as part of a longitudinal study into children living in poverty. One participant with ADHD told us about his experiences:

Josh was 11 and in year 7 when he was first interviewed for the study. He was already subject to behaviour management within the school and often receiving sanctions and detentions. This was mostly related to behaviour in class and not listening to the instructions of teachers. By year 8 he had been moved to another school under a local arrangement between secondary schools who would exchange pupils in trouble. He had also been diagnosed with ADHD and it gave some explanation to his behaviour in class when he found it difficult to sit still for long or concentrate. Most teachers allowed him to move about the class when he became fidgety but he had one teacher who would not allow that and enforced rules and gave sanctions for Josh breaching rules about sitting still or not paying attention. Josh had accumulated all his penalty points from this one teacher and was receiving time in isolation, an experience he found very difficult to cope with and consequently was refusing to engage with. This in turn was escalating the situation and by year 9 he felt that he had a reputation within the school for being a problem and he thought he would be excluded.

It is also important that school staff receive adequate support and are trained to recognise the needs of their pupils. Staff should feel confident to offer, or signpost, towards adequate help and support. Research from the University of Essex found that where a child’s poor mental health is recognised, they are more likely to be excluded than those pupils whose poor mental health is not recognised.30

The Mental Health Green Paper provides an opportunity to provide the support that is needed in schools to help to reduce the number of exclusions. As we know, the most vulnerable children are more likely to be excluded – mental health services should therefore be primarily designed for the most vulnerable children in order to prevent poor outcomes in the future. The green paper proposes trailblazers to pilot new ways of working – one these trailblazers must have an explicit focus on vulnerable children.

Recommendations

- When piloting the new Mental Health Support Teams in trailblazer areas, the Departments should have a pilot targeted at vulnerable young people. We suggest one vulnerable group to target is children with mental health problems at risk of exclusion. Alongside mental health outcomes, the number of exclusions should also be measured to establish Mental Health Support Team’s efficacy at preventing exclusions.
- The Department for Education should review the Behaviour and Discipline in schools guidance to ensure that when a child presents with challenging behaviours, they should not immediately be faced with sanctions. This guidance should be bought in line with the

30 https://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/newsarchive/researchmedical/Psychological_Medicine_preprint1.pdf
SEN Code of Practice, which states there should be an assessment where there are concerns with behaviour in order to determine casual factors.

- The Department for Education should make a representation to the Treasury ahead of the next Comprehensive Spending Review to release funding to provide a counsellor in every secondary school and college.
- Given the high incidence of exclusions of children with mental health problems, educational psychologists should be consulted before an exclusion takes place. The new Designated Lead for Mental Health should also have a role in the exclusion process.

4. Exclusions of children living in poverty

There are approximately 4 million children living in poverty in the UK. The Children’s Society’s research also shows that there are around 2.4 million children living in families with problem debt in the UK.

Children in poverty often experience aspects of school life in ways that are more problematic because of their limited income. Conforming and complying with the rules and expectations, set out in school can be challenging, especially when these carry a financial costs. Research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has found that children from deprived backgrounds are more likely to feel anxious and unconfident about school, and feel a lack of control over their learning, which can make them more reluctant.

From our Children’s Commission into the impact of poverty on young people’s experiences of school, we found that poverty can make can make children feel excluded, stigmatised and bullied because they cannot afford the same things as their peers. In particular, costs associated with school uniforms, school meals and education materials and trips pose difficulties for poorer pupils. For example, three in ten children who took part in our research said they had fallen behind at school because their family could not afford the necessary computer or internet facilities at home.

From our work in schools, we know that the sanctions applied for not meeting school expectations were often the same as sanctions applied for poor behaviour. This means that often poorer pupils can be punished for not having the right uniform or the right equipment as much as not behaving. Young people have told us that these can make them feel unjustly treated, and in some cases caused them to resist punishments, which in turn incurred greater sanctions or a reputation for being problematic.

What is more, for many pupils there are family difficulties at home. We know that for some young people, sharing these problems is difficult even when these difficulties result in missing school or being late, which is often met with a punishment. From our longitudinal study in to

34 Ibid
child poverty, we spoke with young people who were living in unstable housing and frequently moved into temporary accommodation and at each move had to navigate complicated and extended journeys to schools. Some young people were willing to share their circumstances but others felt too ashamed to reveal that they were living in a hostel or were facing eviction.

The Children’s Society has been interviewing children in school as part of a longitudinal study into children living in poverty. One participant told us her experience:

Josie was 12 and in year 7 when she was first interviewed for the study. She was escorted to the interview by a member of staff who warned her about her behaviour and offered to sit in to ensure she did not misbehave. She was carefully monitored during her school day and at risk of being sent to isolation or receiving detentions. Josie said of herself that people tell her she has anger issues and that she was a problem in class. During the interview Josie shared that her Dad had committed suicide and that it caused her great hurt and shame that often spilled into her being angry. She didn’t feel able to share her feelings about this loss to anyone outside of her family. She also had the responsibility at home of helping to care for her baby brother as her mum had a long-term illness. Over the three years of the study Josie would reveal how she managed to care for her mum and siblings at home as debt and illness generated hardship and challenge and at the same time managed to get to school and study. There were moments when Josie was in trouble at school and came close to being excluded, often these moments were related to her emotions about the loss of her dad or a stressful crisis at home. What made the difference for Josie was a combination of her own determination to study and do well and one teacher that developed a supportive relationship with her and would advocate for her within the school system when she found herself in trouble.

Recommendations

- The Department of Education should enact its commitment to strengthen guidance on the affordability of school uniforms and make the guidance statutory.
- Schools and colleges should be inclusive for young people living in poverty. Examples of specific measures could include school uniform and school trips policies that are sensitive to the needs of families on a low income, and cashless lunch systems that allow those on free school meals to claim them without stigma.

5. Children at risk

5.1 Gypsy Roma Traveller Children and Young People

Through our direct work with children and young people from Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) families, we know they often experience racism, discrimination and isolation from their peers and school staff. Our frontline workers report that GRT children and young people they work with often tell them this contributes towards them not attending school and not feeling engaged when they do so. In our experience, repeated absenteeism and disruptive behaviour results in these children and young people being subject to fixed term and permanent exclusions.
One young person who we worked with was at risk of exclusion due to her behaviour at school. Following the death of a grandparent, the young person returned to her country of origin, which resulted in a prolonged, unauthorised absence from school. Upon her return, the young person was excluded. The young person had additional, known, vulnerabilities as she was a child in need and had been identified as being at risk of sexual exploitation. It is likely that a lack of cultural sensitivity and understanding of vulnerability on the schools part contributed towards an exclusion that, with the right support could have been avoided.

**Recommendation:**

- *Local Authority missing from education teams should be given appropriate training in working with GRT families, to help them understand the reasons behind their absences and provide support to help re-engage them back into education.*
- *When implementing a whole school approach to well-being, schools should tackle discrimination between pupils and staff. A zero tolerance approach to all discriminatory behaviour must be taken.*

**5.2 Children and young people missing from education**

We know that many of the groups of children and young people who are disproportionately more likely to be excluded are also more likely to go missing or runaway from home or care. Research by The Children’s Society³⁶ highlighted that looked after children are three times more likely to go missing than other children. Through our long history of policy and practice work relating to children and young people who go missing, we know that whilst missing, young people are at increased risk of harm. Going missing is often a sign that things are not right in a child’s life.

It is vital that school staff recognise that unauthorised absence from school may be an early warning sign of running away from home or care and take a pastoral rather than a punitive approach to addressing this issue.

Through our direct work with children and young people who runaway or go missing from home or care, we know many are not educated about the risks associated with running away such as sexual and criminal exploitation. School staff must recognise the different risk factors that children and young people may face whilst missing and signpost young people they consider to be at risk of running away to places where they can seek support.

Moreover, an inquiry by the APPG for runaway and missing children and adults³⁷ sought to establish the links between going missing and missing education. The inquiry found that some local authorities could not cross reference their missing children data with those absent from education. This means that school staff may not be aware of the additional risks that some of their students who miss education may encounter whilst missing from home. Without the full picture of trauma and vulnerability that a young person in their care might be facing, school staff will not be able to support their students in the way that they deserve.

---
Recommendations

- Local authorities should request data from schools in their area on children who are missing from education and cross-reference it with children who are reported as missing to the police to identify children who may be vulnerable and provide early support and intervention.
- Schools should review their child protection training to ensure it explores the links between child protection issues and challenging behaviours. The training should also focus on the risks associated with going missing, the emotional impact that experiences whilst missing may have on a child, and how to work with and support children who have been missing.

5.3 No further action following harmful sexual behaviour in schools

From our work in schools, we know that school staff often do not feel confident talking to children about and responding to issues relating to sexual harm, due to the lack of training they receive and a lack of awareness about these issues.

Sexual misconduct accounts for between 0.5 and 1% of school exclusions, both fixed term and permanent. However, our practitioners tell us that sexual bullying and harassment in schools can be extensive and that teachers are struggling to respond appropriately.

Whilst we are concerned with the high and disproportionate levels of school exclusion rates for vulnerable children and young people, we are worried that school staff are not given adequate support and guidance to manage situations when an incident has occurred between two pupils, has been reported, and the decision has been made to take ‘no further action’. Our practitioners reported that this could happen for a number of reasons. For example, when delays in reporting and escalating result in a lack of evidence, or the young person is not able to offer an account that can be substantiated. This can result in further distress, re-traumatisation and victimisation of young people by other pupils and in some instances staff too.

We heard an example of a young woman who disclosed that she was raped, and yet was kept in the same class as the young male perpetrator. Whilst we acknowledge that this is an extreme example, evidence of this was frequently observed through our CSE/CSA prevention programme. We heard examples from across the country of perpetrators and victims remaining in the same schools and classrooms after the decision to take no further action has been made.

Whilst we do not advocate for the exclusion of young people from school we believe that no alleged victim should have to come into contact with their alleged perpetrator in the school environment. It is vital that schools and colleges listen to the voice of the victim when making decisions about their future in the school environment following a decision of ‘no further action’. It is vital that the victim is not ‘punished’, by being excluded from certain school environments or stigmatised by school staff.

Recommendations

- Schools should have specific policies to respond to harmful sexual behaviours and accusations of sexual violence between pupils. These policies should not be victim
6. Pupil Referral Units and increased risk of exploitation

In a recent public event on disrupting exploitation of children along ‘county lines’ coordinated by the APPG on runaway and missing children and adults, speakers highlighted that young people had been excluded from school prior to involvement in county lines activity. Moreover, a representative from the National Crime Agency reported that they had seen evidence of targeting PRUs as well as reported instances of young people being coerced into recruiting other young people into county lines networks within alternative educational settings.

A parent of a young person who had been exploited to sell drugs using the county lines model stated that her son had become more vulnerable to exploitation after exclusion from secondary school and attending three PRUs.

It is vital that the Government recognises that alternative educational settings contain a high concentration of vulnerable children and young people and are therefore are a likely target for criminal networks. There are 38,000 in PRUs and they should be considered our highest risk group. Every possible action should be taken to prevent entry to PRUs.

7. Lack of access to high quality RSE and PSHE for those who face school exclusion

Through our direct work with children who have been excluded from school, we see that many of them go on to miss more education, resulting in them missing vital lessons - specifically RSE and PSHE. High quality RSE and PSHE provides the opportunity to educate pupils about healthy relationships and about making informed choices to protect them from unwanted sexual contact, abuse and exploitation. However, being excluded from school often results in children and young people who may need these lessons the most, missing out on the opportunity to be educated on the risks of being groomed for sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation, how to spot the signs and symptoms of exploitation and how to and where they can report it.

Recommendations:

- Schools and Pupil Referral Units should priorities the teaching of RSE and PSHE to vulnerable young people, prioritising those pupils on a part-time timetable.
- Pupil Referral Units should review their targeted prevention activities, ensuring they protect children from all forms of exploitation including sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and labour exploitation.

8. Conclusion and summary of recommendations

It is important that exclusions in school are not used as the only way to deal with children who are seen to be problematic. The increased rate of school exclusions can be seen as a symptom of pressures faced elsewhere in the school system, where school staff are unable to access the support that is needed for the most vulnerable pupils. It is vital that staff in school are able to establish and recognise risk factors and triggers that may contribute towards behaviour.

Early intervention and support in schools will go some way in helping to reduce the number of exclusions. There are a number of forthcoming opportunities, including this review, where positive changes could be made in this area. These opportunities include the new Designated Mental Health Leads in schools and the adoption of the whole school approach to well-being, the new Mental Health Support Teams and the support they will offer, and the changes to guidance and adapting the Ofsted framework to ensure exclusions don’t take place when they are not needed.

Summary of recommendations:

Central Government
- When piloting the new Mental Health Support Teams in trailblazer areas, the Departments should have a pilot targeted at vulnerable young people. We suggest one vulnerable group to target is children with mental health problems at risk of exclusion. Alongside mental health outcomes, the number of exclusions should also be measured to establish Mental Health Support Team’s efficacy at preventing exclusions.

The Department of Education
- The Department for Education should review the Behaviour and Discipline in schools guidance to ensure that when a child presents with challenging behaviours, they should not immediately be faced with sanctions. This guidance should be bought in line with the SEN Code of Practice, which states there should be an assessment where there concerns with behaviour in order to determine causal factors.
- The Department for Education should make a representation to the Treasury ahead of the next Comprehensive Spending Review to release funding to provide a counsellor in every secondary school and college.
- Given the high incidence of exclusions of children with mental health problems, educational psychologists should be consulted before an exclusion takes place. The new Designated Lead for Mental Health should also have a role in the exclusion process.
- The Department of Education should enact its commitment to strengthen guidance on the affordability of school uniforms and make the guidance statutory.

Ofsted
- Ofsted, when implementing their new inspection framework, should judge schools on their approach to mental health and well-being. This should include looking at exclusion rates, understanding and approaches to trauma, and how inclusive schools are of children from low-income families.

Local Government
- Local Authority missing from education teams should be given appropriate training in working with GRT families, to help them understand the reasons behind their absences and provide support to help re-engage them back into education

Schools
- Schools should review their child protection training to ensure it explores the links between child protection issues and challenging behaviours. The training should also
focus on the risks associated with going missing, the emotional impact that experiences whilst missing may have on a child, and how to work with and support children who have been missing.

- When implementing a whole school approach to well-being, schools should tackle discrimination between pupils and staff. A zero tolerance approach to all discriminatory behaviour must be taken.
- Schools and colleges should be inclusive for young people living in poverty. Examples of specific measures could include school uniform and school trips policies that are sensitive to the needs of families on a low income, and cashless lunch systems that allow those on free school meals to claim them without stigma.
- Local authorities should request data from schools in their area on children who are missing from education and cross-reference it with children who are reported as missing to the police to identify children who may be vulnerable and provide early support and intervention.
- Schools should have specific policies to respond to harmful sexual behaviours and accusations of sexual violence between pupils. These policies should not be victim blaming and should outline what adjustments and support can be provided following decisions to take ‘no further action.’
- Schools and Pupil Referral Units should prioritise the teaching of RSE and PSHE to vulnerable young people, prioritising those pupils on a part-time timetable.

Pupil Referral Units

- Pupil Referral Units should review their targeted prevention activities, ensuring they protect children from all forms of exploitation including sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and labour exploitation.

For more information, please contact Charlotte Rainer at The Children’s Society
Charlotte.Rainer@childrenssociety.org.uk