

Five things you need to know about exclusions

1. Exclusions are rising rapidly - in both primary and secondary schools

- a) Permanent exclusions rose 60% between 2013/14 and 2017/18 (from 4,949 to 7,905). In 2017/18, 41 children were permanently excluded every day.
- b) Primary schools experienced largest percentage increase – 39% from 2013/14 to 2017/18. During term time an entire class's worth of children (31) are permanently excluded from school every week (2017/18)¹.

2. The children being excluded are highly vulnerable

- Children with identified mental health problems are 10 times more likely than average to be excluded
- 45% of all permanently excluded children have special educational needs (4 out of 5 in primary schools)
- Black children are 34% more likely to be excluded.

3. Only a small minority of schools are excluding children

- Nationally, the 10% of schools with the highest number of permanent exclusions in 2017/18 accounted for 88% of the total number of permanent exclusions. For comparison they only account for 23% of the total school population.
- 1% of primary schools in England were responsible for a third (29%) of the permanent exclusions took place in 2017/18
- .

In short, your chance of exclusion is a product of your characteristics and the school you go to. You can be a very vulnerable child but if you go to one of the vast majority of schools which support such children then your chances of being excluded are very low.

4. Exclusions cost a lot of money

- The average cost of providing a place at a PRU is £21,051. This is more than three times the average cost of a secondary school place (£5,771) and over four times the cost of a primary school place (£4,864)².

¹ DfE Permanent and fixed period exclusions in England 2017 to 2018.

² Expenditure by Local Authorities and Schools on Education, Children and Young People's Services in England, 2018-19 (Table 4)

- As the number of children in PRUs rises, it puts huge strain on the capital budget (reducing funding for other new schools and school improvement) and, more importantly, the high needs budget. This reduces the funds available to support mental health and special educational needs in all schools.

5. Exclusions don't work for the children involved because (2017/18 figures):

a) Excluded children miss a lot of school, falling further behind and making re-integration more difficult

- Children face a big gap in their education while waiting for another place – 76 days on average, and 109 days on average for children with a SEN statement or EHC plan.

b) Most excluded children won't return to mainstream school

- 59% of under-14s excluded from mainstream school in 2014/15 did not return to mainstream education within 3 years. This rises to 69% for those who went into alternative provision following their exclusion.¹

b) Children who attend alternative provision/PRUs have very poor prospects

- 71% of children in PRUs are persistently absent²
- 4.5% pass GCSE English and Maths³
- 40% become NEET when they leave at 16.⁴

c) Excluded children are at much higher risk of offending

- 4 in 5 boys in Young Offender Institutes have been permanently excluded.
- Self-reported gang members aged 10-15 are 5.5 times more likely to have been excluded or suspended in the last year (compared to those who aren't)
- Children aged 10-15 who carry knives are 7 times more likely to have been excluded/suspended in the last year (compared to those who don't)⁵

Why the current system fails both children and schools

At the moment a very small number of schools account for the overwhelming majority of exclusions. This small minority of schools places a huge burden on the rest of the system because:

- 1) They are expecting other schools to take the difficult pupils from their own schools, as well as those already at the second school
- 2) The money spent on providing PRU places for children from a few schools means less money available for all schools to support SEND and mental health – key drivers of exclusions.

Case study: local authority x. This is an area trying to introduce a 'hub and spoke' model of PRUs, whereby they would abolish the PRU as a separate institution and provide the support within mainstream schools (either the child's first school or another mainstream school). This is much cheaper to administer and means more children can be reached. There is a long waiting list for the 'in-school package', but this is being undermined by a small number of schools who continue to

¹ OCC internal analysis.

² DfE Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2018 (underlying data).

³ Department for Education, Key stage 4 performance 2019 (revised)

⁴ Department for Education, Destinations of KS4 and 16-18 (KS5) students: 2018

⁵ CCO Keeping Kids Safe Report

exclude in high numbers and effectively 'jump the queue'. These schools also prevent the majority of other schools from being able to accommodate all excluded pupils, forcing the PRU to remain open and restricting their in-school support. There are currently no repercussions for these schools who put undue pressure across the rest of the education system.

The problem is bigger than formal exclusions

Formal exclusions are only part of the problem. There are many more children falling out of mainstream education and being prevented from accessing education. This includes:

- **Children being taken out of school to be home educated** because their needs are not being met in school. Some parents make a positive, philosophical decision to home educate which is entirely their right. But the Children's Commissioner has heard of too many children forced to leave school because they are not receiving the support they need to succeed – see our report *Skipping School* (2019).
- **Children repeatedly being placed in isolation.** Isolation is a widely used punishment for poor behaviour which involves children missing lessons and going to a separate room for a fixed period. The Commissioner is concerned that many children are not given any work to do, are supervised by staff with no teaching qualifications, and where no effort is made to identify the causes of their behaviour problems (e.g. undiagnosed special educational needs or mental health problems). We will publish an investigation into isolation later this year.
- **Children who are persistently absent from school while remaining on the roll.** In 2018, 11%⁶ of children were classed as persistent absentees. The Commissioner is concerned that some of these children have special educational needs, and are unable to access alternative education provision outside of the school.

When tackling rising rates of formal exclusion, it is important to ensure that there are not unintended consequences where more children begin to fall out of education via these other routes instead.

What the Children's Commissioner wants to see:

1. **Action against the schools who exclude high numbers of pupils to the detriment of both these children and the wider schools system, especially those with persistently high exclusions year-on-year.**
2. **A ban on primary school exclusions. Young children with high needs should be supported not penalised.**
3. **More funds for schools to support children with mental health or special educational needs, including a comprehensive NHS-DfE response to the systemic failings identified in recent Ofsted-CQC inspections. Early support should focus on those children most at risk of exclusion. A new model of alternative provision which focuses on keeping children within mainstream schools and providing greater support.**
4. **A limit on the amount of time a child can spend without any school place of one week, and a limit on the amount of time they can remain out of mainstream school under age 14 of 1 year.**

⁶ DfE Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2018.

- 5. Schools should retain financial responsibility for children they exclude**
- 6. The Department for Education should use a data driven approach to provide pre-emptive support for children who are at risk of exclusion.**
- 7. The reform of Alternative provision should explore a "Hub and Spoke" model where more support is offered in school to children at risk of exclusion to prevent an exclusion in the first place.**