
Advisory Centre for Education

Briefing on exclusions

ACE runs dedicated exclusion helplines and, from parents and carers' experiences and its own research, knows that there is a side to the arguments over exclusions that the media seldom reports – that of parents and children.

Parents often tell us of exclusions for trivial reasons, or where the pupil has real difficulties such as bereavement or family break-up causing them to go off the rails. It's not unusual for schools to depart from government guidance and exclude for the wrong reasons.

ACE is especially concerned that the majority of permanently excluded children have special educational needs when government guidance says that exclusion of these children should be avoided if at all possible. Are moves to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at risk of exclusion being swamped by populist punitive impulses? For many already disadvantaged young people, exclusion is the blow that ends their education.

In this briefing we list the key facts that emerge from official statistics and research.

Exclusions are high

- 9880 permanent exclusions in 2003/4; at 0.13% of the school population, this proportion has risen steeply by 6% after staying at 0.12% for three years¹.
- Fixed period exclusions are much higher: in 2003/4, there were 344,510 fixed period exclusions reported.

These numbers, however, are not reliable: 'official figures are widely regarded by researchers as considerable underestimates of the actual numbers of pupils excluded from school, either temporarily or permanently'².

Exclusions penalise already disadvantaged groups³

Children are more likely to be excluded if they:

- are **poor** (as indicated by take up of free school meals);
- are **in care** of social services;

- have **special educational needs (SEN)**: in 2003/4 pupils with SEN formed about two-thirds of all permanently excluded pupils. Pupils with statements of SEN were 4 times more likely to be permanently excluded⁴. ACE's own figures show that SEN was reported as an issue in three-quarters of our exclusion helpline calls in .
- are members of certain **minority ethnic groups** (especially Irish Travellers and Black Caribbean)⁵, in spite of the general duty in law to promote racial equality.
- are already having a bad time, e.g. **as young carers or suffering bereavement**. In the ACE/Children's Society research on exclusion, 63% of parents of excluded children mentioned upset, difficulty or change at home just before an exclusion. This included separation of parents or death of a close relative.⁶ More recent research by the NSPCC⁷ has drawn attention to the fact that children who are maltreated at home are more likely to develop behavioural difficulties and to be excluded.

¹ DfES (2004) *Statistics of Education: Schools in England 2004 Edition*, V05/2004, Table 54a; DfES (2005) *Statistical First Release: permanent and fixed period exclusions from schools and exclusion appeals in England 2003/2004*, SFR 23/2005, Table 1.

² Webb, R. and Vulliamy, G. (2004) *A Multi-Agency Approach to Reducing Disaffection and Exclusions from School*, DfES and Home Office, p. 9.

³ DfES Circular 10/99. Chapter 3 listed groups at particular risk: those with special educational needs; children in the care of local authorities; minority ethnic children; Travellers; young carers; those from families under stress; pregnant schoolgirls and teenage mothers.

⁴ DfES (2005) *Statistical First Release: permanent and fixed period exclusions from schools and exclusion appeals in England 2003/2004*, SFR 23/2005, Table 10.

⁵ DfES (2003) *Statistics for Schools in England*

⁶ Hayden, C. and Dunne, S. (2001) *Outside, Looking In: children's and families' experiences of exclusion from school*, ACE/The Children's Society.

⁷ Mills, C. (2004) *Problems at Home, Problems at School*, National Society for the prevention of Cruelty to Children.

Parents and children suffer from exclusion

Exclusion is often a profoundly negative and damaging experience, conveying feelings of ‘trauma, stigma and isolation’⁸. Children are also often left angry by what they perceive as the unfairness of the school’s action⁹.

The long-term effects can be even more damaging, as children grow up with no or few qualifications, feeling isolated and rejected, and resenting authority

Cost to society

Excluded children commit crime¹⁰ and other anti-social behaviour, become disaffected, and are more likely to become offenders as adults. It’s expensive to educate children who are out of school because they have been excluded.

Pritchard and Fox (1998) followed a complete cohort (1990–95) of 227 ‘excluded from school adolescents’ and found that 63 per cent had a criminal conviction as young adults (16–23 years). ‘A cautious estimate of the total cost to the public purse of these 143 offenders over a six-year period was over £4 million, averaging nearly £30000 a head’.¹¹

Uneven and inequitable effects

‘As many as ten per cent of all permanent exclusions are from just 100 secondary schools. By contrast, 41 per cent of all secondary schools recorded no exclusions in the last reporting year.’¹²

Academies tend to be high excluders (in Middlesbrough King’s Academy excluded 27 pupils and Unity City Academy excluded 14 pupils in 2003/04, compared to 10 from the town’s five secondary schools¹³) and the costs of these exclusions fall on the LEA.

Cost of alternative education

Although alternative education is frequently inadequate, its cost is high. The DfES estimates that the cost is ‘around £6,500 [per pupil] more than educating pupils in schools’¹⁴.

⁸ Hayden and Dunne (2001), p. 64.

⁹ Hayden and Dunne (2001), p. 71.

¹⁰ Webb, R. and Vulliamy, G. (2004) *A Multi-Agency Approach to Reducing Disaffection and Exclusions from School*, DfES and Home Office, quotes research in London: ‘Gilbertson (1998) reports that in the Metropolitan Police District in 1997 “over one third of juvenile offences are committed during school periods by those who have been truanting, excluded from school, or who are unplaced”’, p. 2.

¹¹ Webb and Vulliamy, p. 3.

¹² Ofsted (2001) *Improving Attendance and Behaviour in Secondary Schools*, para. 14

¹³ *Evening Gazette*, Teesside, 24 July 2004.

¹⁴ DfES (2004) ‘New ways for schools and LEAs to work together to manage excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion’, consultation paper.

