Young People At-risk of Drop-out from Education: Recognising and Responding to their Needs

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The Aim of this report is to discuss the risk factors contributing to pupils’ drop-out from education by drawing on the findings of relevant research.

Drop-out is used to refer to a range of positions on a dimension of disengagement: from the detachment of pupils in full-time education from the education offered to them, to pupils’ exclusion from school on a fixed-term basis and pupils’ permanent exclusion from school.

In 2011-12 there were 5,170 recorded permanent exclusions and 304,370 fixed-term exclusions. Disengagement from full-time education, depending on how it is defined and measured can account for up to one-third or one-fifth of the total population of 14-16 year olds.

Illegal exclusions refer to off-the-record, informal or under-the-radar exclusions. Despite the difficulties in tracking down these exclusions, recent research has provided worrying evidence of their occurrence.

Persisting patterns of inequality are also identified as a key problem in school exclusions, with certain groups being overrepresented in exclusions steadily through time.

Research analyses have mapped-out different degrees of disengagement of pupils attending full-time education. ‘Disengaged from school not education’ refers to pupils who are negative towards school, face challenges with school discipline and are likely to play truant; yet they have aspirations for continuing with education. The main risk factor is ethnicity, with Black Caribbean students being overrepresented in this group.

‘Disengaged’ are pupils who have no interest in school and education generally. Most of them find themselves in Year 12 being NEET (not in education, employment or training) or having a job with no training. Ethnicity and socio-economic background are the main risk factors, with white working class young people being overrepresented.

Factors contributing to disengagement as they have been identified by pupils themselves include: the structure of lessons in school, the low level of activity they involved, their relations with teachers and other school staff as well as their own difficulties with behaviour and anger management.

Risk factors for permanent and fixed-term exclusion predominantly relate to pupils belonging to certain social groups. Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are six times more likely to be excluded compared to their non-SEN peers, boys are three times more likely to be excluded than girls, Black Caribbean as well as Gypsy, Roma and Irish travellers are four times more likely to be excluded than their non-ethnic minority peers. In terms of age, exclusions are more frequent in Year 9.

Current policy responses for preventing and dealing with pupil drop-out from education include: the introduction of Pupil Premium, which provides extra funding to schools for each one of their vulnerable pupils; the replacement of Independent Appeal Panels with the Independent Review Panels which have no power to reinstate excluded pupils; the launch of the exclusion trials that shift responsibility and funds from local authorities to schools in order to arrange alternative provision for their pupils; encouraging the conversion of Pupils Referral Units into academies or free schools; and the Troubled Families Programme, which is based on short-term, targeted and intensive family interventions.

Examples of local responses to pupils’ disengagement and exclusion include: research and intervention projects run by Barnardo’s (Shropshire Project, Leeds Reach, Late Intervention Service) in collaboration with local authorities; Family Action’s ‘Be Bothered’ campaign, interventions to support young carers, as well as their work on achieving better outcomes on attendance and exclusion through the Troubled Families programme.

Other organisations working with pupils who are at risk of drop-out include: Chance UK, Home-School Support and Just for Kids Law.
1. The Problem and its Scope

1.1. What is Drop-out?

Drop-out from education can take different forms and may refer to: children and young people who are in full-time education but are disengaged from the education being offered, pupils who cannot or are not receiving full-time provision, or pupils who are excluded from school. This brief will draw on recent research to provide information on each of these groups. Pupils’ drop-out from education is linked to multiple, negative and long-lasting outcomes for them; while formal exclusion from school is repeatedly reported to reflect enduring patterns of inequality. In this brief we provide information about children and young people who are at risk of disengaging from education and of being excluded from school. We first give an overview of the problem, we then identify who is most likely to drop-out and finally discuss responses by government, local authorities and the voluntary sector.

1.2. How many pupils drop out?

According to the Department for Education’s annual statistical releases, a low proportion of children and young people become permanently excluded from school; but the numbers of fixed-term exclusions are considerably higher. The latest available data (DfE, 2013) show that the number of permanent exclusions slightly increased from 5,080 during 2010-11 to 5,170 during 2011-12. In other words, 7 out of 10,000 pupils were permanently excluded from school (DfE, 2013).

On the other hand, fixed term exclusions decreased, with numbers going from 324,110 in 2010-11 to 304,370 in 2011-12. This decrease happened mainly in secondary schools, as the figures for fixed-term exclusions remained stable in primary and special schools. Fixed term exclusions appear to be used as a disciplinary mechanism. A report for Barnardo’s (Evans, 2010) revealed that one in 20 secondary students experience at least one, fixed-term exclusion each year. They also found that two thirds of fixed term exclusions in secondary schools were given to pupils who had already received at least one earlier in the year.

England’s record on exclusion is different from elsewhere in Europe. Barnardo’s found that rates of permanent exclusions in the other three UK nations are less than half of those in England (Evans, 2010); According to the Office of The Children’s Commissioner using exclusion as a disciplinary action is not common among other European countries (OCC, 2012). Moreover, a range of illegal actions has been reported in relation to how schools deal with exclusions. Illegal exclusions involve ‘off the record, informal or under the radar exclusions’ (OCC, 2013b). The second year of the Children’s Commissioner inquiry into exclusions identified evidence of pupils being sent home on study leave, put into part-time timetables, or encouraged to change school under the threat of permanent exclusion, without formal procedures being followed (OCC, 2013b).

### Permanent and Fixed-Term Exclusions during 2010-11 and 2011-12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Exclusions</td>
<td>5,080</td>
<td>5,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed-term Exclusions</td>
<td>324,110</td>
<td>304,370</td>
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The numbers of disengaged pupils extends well beyond the figures shown in the table above, if we take into account young people who “haven’t withdrawn schools but are not fully taking part either because they have given up any trying or because they resist to do so” (Lumby, 2013). Steedman and Stoney examined the disengagement from education of UK 14-16 year olds and estimated that, depending on how you define and measure it, disengaged pupils represent between one fifth and one third of all 14-16 year olds (Steedman & Stoney, 2004).
1.3. Persisting Inequalities

School exclusions mainly affect particular social groups: pupils with SEN, those who come from certain ethnic minorities, boys and those from low socio-economic backgrounds. The patterns of inequality in school exclusion are persistent over time and have remained stable since the data collection started (OCC, 2013a). Additionally, when more than one of these factors intersect, pupils’ chances of becoming excluded increase remarkably. The Children's Commissioner’s Inquiry into school exclusions portrayed these disparities using the following hypothetical scenario:

Jack and Jill are in the same class at secondary school. Jack is Black Caribbean and has SEN assessed at School Action Plus. He lives in a low-income household and receives free school meals. Jill is White, British, does not have SEN and lives in a more affluent household. Jack is 168 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school before the age of 16 and 41 times more likely to be excluded on a fixed-term basis.

Source: Office of the Children's Commissioner, They Go the Extra Mile, p.13

The disproportionate rates of exclusion among some groups reflects long-standing patterns of social inequality and has been an enduring concern for schools, governments, charitable organisations, and researchers – but there is limited evidence of improvement in outcomes. For example, the Department for Education and Skills (2006) raised the question of ethnicity in school exclusions and published a report Getting it-Getting it Right; while the Department for Education (2004) published an analysis of the relationship between poverty and exclusions from school, seeking to identify the causes and mechanisms involved.

More recently the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2012) has carried out a formal inquiry into exclusions. The findings of the first year of the inquiry were published in the report They Never Give up on You, which offered an overview of the problem, identified the challenges involved in reducing school exclusions, provided elements of good practice and made policy recommendations. Two more reports were published based on the second year of the inquiry (OCC 2013a, 2013b) looking into inequalities in school exclusions and illegal activity around exclusions, respectively. The government responded to the inquiry, acknowledging these problems and expressing its commitment to put forward a set of changes and a new approach to exclusion. These will be discussed in section 3.1.
Office of the Children’s Commissioner
good practice in preventing exclusions

- The role of school leadership is key in preventing exclusions.
  * Strong leadership fosters a shared ‘ethos’, consistency in school’s behaviour. Students’
  * Become aware of the school discipline and know that behaviour issues will be managed by all teachers in the same way.
- School staff’s expertise in SEN, cognitive and emotional development and awareness of cultural differences is significant for dealing with the diverse population of the English classrooms.
  * Teachers’ expert knowledge on these issues helps them understand pupils’ diverse needs, thus reducing the likelihood of confrontations and pupils disciplinary problems.
  * The Inquiry recommends that all newly qualified teachers study child development, socio-psychological matters such as attachment theory, and that they are trained to understand cultural and other differences.

Office of the Children’s Commissioner
good practice in alternative provision

- Alternative provision is tailored to meet individual needs.
- Strong links with the mainstream school are maintained.
- Alternative provision takes place in well-equipped and attractive learning settings.
- Underlying issues are dealt with.
  * In some cases this may involve counseling provided by expert staff or the use of other restorative approaches.
- Classroom curriculum continuity of pupils who receive alternative provision; Keeping some contact with the teachers of the mainstream classroom or taking the same exams with their peers. These are elements that facilitate pupils’ re-integration in the mainstream classroom.

Office of the Children’s Commissioner
good practice in managed moves

- Formally agreed and closely monitored procedures are in place.
  * These could involve protocols of fair access and managed moves agreed among clusters of schools, the local authority and academy sponsors.

Office of the Children’s Commissioner
recommendations for schools

- A shared presumption against permanent exclusions in Reception and Key Stage 1.
- To ensure parents and pupils are fully aware of the school’s behaviour and exclusion policies and are clear about their rights. To ensure that parents and pupils are able to identify which activities are illegal.
- To this end, it is recommended that all information regarding behaviour policies and exclusions and parents and pupils rights are included on the schools websites, prospectuses, and the home-school behaviour agreements.
- Pupils with an SEN statement should not be excluded unilaterally by the school. When the school proposes to exclude a pupil with SEN statement all professionals involved in the statementing process should discuss and collectively make decisions and amend the statement accordingly.
- Schools should aim at reducing inequalities and differential in exclusions between different groups. (OCC, They Never Give Up on You, p.32)

Source: Office of the Children’s Commissioner They Never Give up on You

* To that all schools take equal responsibility of their pupils, the responsibilities of all parties are clearly outlined, so that single school is left to deal with others’ problems.
- The ‘excluding’ and ‘receiving’ schools share responsibility for the pupils who move.
- Schools collaborate rather than completing with each other.
- Head teachers had strong relationships.
- Pupils as well as their parents are involved in the decision-making process.

Source: Office of the Children’s Commissioner They Never Give up on You
The pupils discussed here are either in school but are disengaged from learning or are excluded from school either on a fixed-term or on a permanent basis. We will present an overview of the risk factors that are involved in the processes of disengagement or exclusion for each of these groups. These categories are, of course, general and do not necessarily represent the wide range of individual experiences and degrees of disengagement.

### 2.1. Risk factors for the disengagement of pupils who attend school

Research by NatCen (2009) on the disengagement of young people from education used statistical information from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England. These data allowed the researchers to follow a nationally representative sample of young people from 2004 when they were in Year 9 through to Year 11. The research identified four general types of ‘engaged/disengaged’ pupils.

- **Engaged’ young people who represented 40% in year 9**
- ‘Engaged with school not higher education’ who represented 25% in year 9
- ‘Disengaged from school not education’ who represented 23% in year 9
- ‘Disengaged’ who represented 12% in year 9

For the purposes of this review, the last two groups of disengaged pupils will be discussed in greater detail.

#### 2.1.1. ‘Disengaged from school not education’

**Profile:** The main characteristic of this group was that, although the vast majority aspired to continue with full-time education (98%), they were generally negative towards school, they faced challenges with school discipline and were likely to play truant. They were less likely to have positive relationships with their teachers and more likely to misbehave and report problems with the school rules.

**Progression through time:** They represented 23% of young people in Year 9, 26% in Year 10 and 25% in Year 11. Although 98% of them aspired to continue with education, 85% actually continued to Year 12. This may indicate that for some young people disengagement from school may contribute to further disengagement from education through time.

**Risk Factors:** The main risk factor of becoming ‘disengaged from school not education’ was related to ethnic background. Pupils in this group were more likely to be of Black Caribbean origin. Young people who were Indian, Pakistani, or Black African were the least likely to belong to this group. Young people whose father (or mother in the case of single-parent families), was in long-term unemployment or were living in step or single-parent families were more likely to be ‘disengaged from school-not education’.

#### 2.1.2. ‘Disengaged’

**Profile:** Students in this group did not aspire to continue with education, they displayed poor behaviour at school and were very likely to play truant. Their attitude towards school was particularly negative and one third reported that relationships with teachers had broken down. They were likely to have limited sense of control over their future, preferring not think about it, but rather ‘wait and see’.

**Progression through time:** ‘Disengaged’ young people represented 12% in Year 9, 19% in Year 10 and 20% in Year 11, showing increasing levels of disengagement. Their lack of engagement with education continued, in year 12 over a quarter were NEET (not in education, employment or training) and 40% in a job with no training.

**Risk Factors:** Ethnicity and social background were the most significant factors related to young people’s disengagement from school. White males, those whose fathers were in a routine or manual occupation and whose mothers’ level of education was low were most likely to become ‘disengaged’.

#### 2.1.3. School factors related to disengagement of pupils who attend school

A recent study offers insights as to how young people experience their disengagement from school. Evidence was gathered from 45 schools with interviews with 65 young people (aged 14-19), who were disengaged from school or college including pupils who attended school but had given-up trying, pupils who were in school but played truant and pupils who spent some time in alternative provision (Lumby et al., 2012).
They found that young people did acknowledge responsibility, to some degree, for their estrangement from learning and school. Some of them reported not trying enough, being ‘moody’ or having difficulties with controlling their anger. Nevertheless the majority of disengaged young people blamed school and its demands. These demands included the way lessons are structured and their relations with teachers and other adults in school. Three quarters of the students talked of being bored in the classroom and made references to the low level of physical activity involved. These disengaged young people felt they were able to learn and were aware of when they did and did not engage with learning. The conditions they identified which helped them learn included:

Conditions interrupting disengagement – identified by pupils

- Clarity of Instruction
- Active Methods
- Social Learning
- Clear Direction on Improvement

Source: Lumby (2013) - BERA Insights

2.2. Risk Factors for Permanent and Fixed-term Exclusion from School

2.1.1. Special Educational Needs

Pupils with SEN are six times more likely to be excluded from school. The Office of the Children’s Commissioner report They Go the Extra Mile (2013a), shows that the gap has narrowed slightly compared to the previous year (2009-10) when pupils with SEN were seven times more likely to be formally and legally excluded compared to their non-SEN peers. Nevertheless, the discrepancy remains substantial. They also found that 18% of pupils with SEN but without statements were nine times more likely to be permanently excluded than those with no SEN and 74% of all permanently excluded pupils have some form of identified SEN.

This is an enduring problem. A study undertaken over ten years ago found that head-teachers felt that their school did not have the capacity or appropriate resources to support these pupils and used permanent or fixed-term exclusion as a means for them to access better and more suitable provision (Osler et al., 2001). LEA officers commented at the time that this could lead to more problems as pupils were sometimes placed in special schools outside the authority and ended up being excluded from there too.

More recently a concern has arisen about illegal exclusions of pupils with an SEN statement. A survey carried out by Contact a Family (2013) found that illegal exclusions from school were a common problem for SEN children. These illegal exclusions occurred because of: lack of staff to support the child, activities which were unsuitable for disabled children, an incident had occurred and the child was sent home to ‘cool off’, the child had a ‘bad day’ or was put on a ‘part-time’ curriculum. Parents reported that children felt that they were falling behind or were left out of their friendship groups and were often upset or depressed. These exclusions also had a negative impact on parents’ lives and work obligations and were often the cause of developing bad relations with the school, and could lead to changing school.

2.2.2. Gender

Boys are more likely to be excluded than girls across all ages. They are three times more likely to be excluded than girls. Researchers have looked into the dominant cultures of masculinity and how these influence
boys’ negative attitude towards school. They have showed that very often boys adopt ‘masculine’ masculinities that equate schoolwork to a feminine, inferior activity that is inappropriate for men (Francis, 2000; Frosh et al., 2002). They have also examined a shared belief among many working-class boys, that schoolwork is anti-masculine and not for real boys (Epstein et al., 1998). Research on Black boys drop-out from education has demonstrated that when gender and ethnicity intersect, the likelihood of exclusion increases significantly. A number of studies have highlighted teachers’ low expectations and differential treatment of Black boys. These will be discussed in section 2.2.4.

Despite boys having been steadily over-represented in school exclusions, research has also flagged girls’ experiences of disengagement from education and their respective needs. Osler et al. (2002) found that the behaviour displayed by girls in difficulty is often less visible; it may not disrupt class discipline or involve physical aggression. In this sense it may be more introverted and more silently manifested although impacting negatively on girls’ learning. The researchers identified examples of such kind of behaviour which included truancy, self-harm, or withdrawal from participating in the class (Osler et al., 2002; Osler & Vincent, 2003).

### 2.2.3. Age

**Permanent Exclusions are most likely in Years 9 and 10.** The number of permanent exclusions in primary schools remains low. A slight increase has been observed in the DfE (2012) annual statistical release regarding 2010-2011 with permanent exclusion rising from 610 to 690 out of 5,170 total school exclusions, boys more likely to be excluded than girls at a younger age.

Reports from both the Office of the Children’s Commissioner and Ofsted suggested a strong correlation between the number of exclusions at infant and primary schools and the effectiveness of their behaviour management systems. According to the Office of the Children’s Commissioner, primary schools which were rated by Ofsted as ‘satisfactory’ or ‘inadequate’, permanently excluded five times as many pupils as those rated ‘outstanding’ or ‘good’ (OCC, 2012). Ofsted’s (2009) report on Exclusions of Children aged four to seven found that the primary schools with high rates of exclusions served communities with high deprivation levels. Nevertheless, it suggested that social context was not the only reason for high rates of exclusions. Schools had to deal with children with multiple needs who displayed challenging behaviour and often had limited support from other professionals outside school. The high rates of exclusion were therefore due to a combination of factors related to the schools’ ethos, capacity to meet challenges, stability in terms of leadership and staff retention and responsiveness of other agencies in the local authority.

Overall there is a wide consensus against exclusions in young ages, with many primary schools operating a ‘zero exclusions’ policy either formally by declaring it publicly in their behaviour management strategies or informally through their actual practice (OCC, 2012).

**The most common point for both boys and girls to be excluded is at ages 13 and 14 (equivalent to year groups 9 and 10).** Around 52% of all permanent exclusions were of pupils at these ages (DfE, 2013). NatCen’s (2009) research on the disengagement of young people, suggested that by Year 9 the majority of young people had already displayed clear pattern of either engagement or disengagement. Nevertheless approximately 14% of young people disengaged to some degree in Year 10 when they start to face Key Stage 4 examination demands and for all types of disengaged young people disengagement worsened over time (Ross, 2009).

### 2.2.4. Ethnicity

**Pupils’ ethnic background is strongly connected to their chances of becoming excluded.** Black Caribbean as well as Roma, Gypsy and Irish traveler pupils are four times more likely to be excluded from school (DfE, 2013; OCC, 2012). The Office of the Children’s Commissioner Inquiry looked into the likelihood of ethnic minority pupils’ exclusion across schools. They found that Black Caribbean as well as Roma, Gypsy and Irish Travelers are more likely to be excluded from schools where they are a very small minority rather than in schools with larger numbers of pupils from such ethnic backgrounds. Recent research by Gazeley et al. (2013) similarly showed that concerns over the links between ethnicity and exclusion varied across schools and depended on the demography of the local populations.

**Gypsy, Roma and Traveler pupils are four times more likely to be excluded from school because of their behavior and boys were twice as likely to be excluded.** Pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveler backgrounds are among the lowest achieving groups and this is particularly evident at secondary school (Wilkins et al., 2010). Their performance is related to a combination of factors including the accessibility of the school curricula, pupils’ disconnected and limited engagement with education, their negative experiences
of schooling, as well as certain cultural tensions between their parents’ aspirations and attitudes towards education and their teachers’ expectations. Wilkins et al. (2010) found that the period of transition between Year 6 and Year 7 is critical, as approximately one in five Gypsy, Roma and Traveler pupils leave school at this point. The Gazeley et al. study (2013) came up with similar findings and also examined the views held in schools and local authorities, revealing perceptions that these students may have limited understanding of school rules, and that ‘some might carry weapons without realizing that this was inappropriate’. The researchers also note that similar worries were raised for some refugee groups.

The ‘exclusion gap’ of Black pupils, is an enduring issue. In 2006 the Department for Education and Skills published a report on the persistent underachievement of Black pupils in response to widespread concern about the issue. In Getting it, Getting it Right (DfES, 2006) it was suggested that the persistently high rates of this group’s exclusion from secondary school was a major factor in creating what was termed the ‘exclusion gap’.

The 2006 report showed that the ‘exclusion-gap’ was related to both ‘in-school’ and ‘out-of-school’ factors, which give rise to Black pupils’ trajectories of disengagement and exclusion from school. Out-of-school factors relate to the barriers, which Black migrants historically faced in the context of racism, disadvantage and social exclusion.

**‘In-school’ Factors**

Research highlighting ‘in-school’ factors mainly refers to ‘institutional racism’. This is described as a kind of unintentional racism, which takes place in schools and is evidenced by discriminatory behaviour, low expectations and differential treatment against Black pupils -mainly Black boys.

**‘Out-of-school’ Factors**

Research focusing on ‘out-of-school’ factors highlights dominant cultural patterns outside school and their negative influence on young Black men. It is argued that the ways in which Black men are portrayed in popular culture, offers them limited positive role-models and little alternatives for adopt other than ‘anti-academic’ street-cultures and lifestyles.

Source: DfES  Getting it Getting it Right

The Office of the Children’s Commissioner report They Go the Extra Mile points out the continuing power of these barriers. According to the official government statistics, the unemployment of Black 16-24 year olds has doubled since 2008 (OCC, 2013a).

The A key finding in previous statistical analyses is that the profiles of Black pupils who are excluded from school differ considerably from those of their white excluded peers. Black excluded pupils are less likely to have SEN, to be on Free School Meals, to have a long history of disruptive behavior and truancy, to have criminal records or be looked after children – features which are frequently shared among white excluded pupils (DfES 2006; Parsons et al, 2004).

Commentators in the field have argued that black ethnic minority pupils are treated differently in some schools in ways which are likely to lead to exclusion (Gillborn, 2005; Parsons, 1999). Qualitative research has identified manifestations of these differences in schools’ ethos and policies, pedagogic approaches, and student-teacher everyday interactions. Among their findings is that some white teachers or head-teachers may misinterpret the behavior of Black pupils and may have limited awareness of their cultural differences. Some teachers also had low expectations and these influenced student achievement and contributed to lower outcomes. In several cases Black pupils felt that they were facing differential treatment from the school, and reported getting in to trouble for displaying behavior which they believed their white peers would get away with (Blair, 2001; Gillborn, 2005; Parsons, 1999).
3. Responding to the needs of pupils who are at risk of drop-out from school

3.1. Policy Responses

The disengagement and/or exclusion of children and young people from education has been a long-standing concern for governments, schools, local authorities and those working with children and young people who are at risk of dropping out. Here we provide an overview of recent government responses and policy changes in relation to pupils’ disengagement and drop-out.

3.1.1. The Pupil Premium

The Pupil Premium is a funding scheme that is targeted to support potentially vulnerable children and young people and reduce the existing attainment gap. An additional amount of money is allocated to schools for each of their pupils who has received free school meals at some point in the previous six years and for children who have been looked after by the local authority for at least six months continuously. It is up to each school to decide how it can best use the funding to support the learning of the target groups.

A number of tools have been developed to help schools manage Pupil Premium funding and support pupils effectively. Ofsted visits schools to collect evidence on how Pupil Premium funding is being used and has published a report and advice that brings together examples of using the funding effectively. The aim is to help schools analyse the information that is available to them in order to identify skills gaps among pupils from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, to specify the key stages in their career when additional support is needed, to monitor pupils’ progress and examine the effectiveness of the interventions the school provides.

A toolkit has also been created by the Sutton Trust and the Education Endowment Foundation in collaboration with academics from Durham University to help schools use their resources to reduce the attainment gap arising from economic deprivation. This toolkit is based on research evidence on 33 topics with suggested interventions aimed at supporting learning. These are then assessed under three broad headings: average impact, cost and evidence. Finally a range of resources is available from the Oxford University Press, including a report on Pupil Premium: Making it Work in your School.

3.1.2. Independent Review Panels

The process for challenging exclusions changed in September 2012 with more powers given to the head-teacher and the school’s Governing Body. The former Independent Appeal Panels were replaced by Independent Review Panels. The Independent Review Panels no longer have the right to reinstate an excluded pupil. Instead they can uphold exclusions or recommend to the school’s Governing Body that they are reconsidered. The Governing Body makes the final judgement by reviewing the decision of the head-teacher alongside the suggestions provided by the Independent Review Panel. When children or young people with Special Educational Needs are involved, an SEN expert is appointed from the local authority to provide consultation to the Independent Review Panel. Nevertheless the Children’s Commissioner has expressed concerns over the Independent Review Panels, questioning whether they safeguard sufficiently from schools excluding unreasonably. The inquiry into exclusions recommended that the role of the Independent Review Panels should be amended to offer them the right to reinstate pupils who they consider to be excluded unlawfully.

3.1.3. Exclusion Trial

The exclusion trial is currently at a pilot stage. It has been introduced in 300 secondary schools in 11 local authorities for a three-year period, starting in October 2011. An evaluation program is currently running in parallel to the implementation of the trial and the findings will inform the roll-out of the model.

The main changes introduced by the exclusion trial include:

- Transfer of responsibility from local authorities to schools: Schools are responsible for identifying, arranging and monitoring alternative provision for excluded pupils. Currently local authorities assume this responsibility from the sixth day of exclusion onwards.

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Pupil Premium: Making it Work in your School: https://global.oup.com/education/content/primary/key-issues/pupil-premium/?region=uk&acId=-C-LzJild5mOFxTLXod4EAEy
• Funding follows the pupils: Local authorities have traditionally managed the budget for alternative provision. The trial involves the devolution of this budget to schools. Local authorities, in consultation with schools, will agree and allocate a Dedicated Schools Grant to each individual school.

• Schools’ freedom to use funding as they wish: The schools will be free to choose the most appropriate provision to meet the needs of pupils who are at risk of exclusion as well as deciding on the best provision possible for excluded pupils. Provision may be offered in-school as well as buying-in expertise, contracting-out services etc.

3.1.4. Conversion of Pupil Referral Units

The conversion or replacement of Pupil Referral Units (PRU) by academies or free schools is indicated as the way forward for changing the landscape of alternative provision. The main aim of current policy changes regarding PRU is to endorse greater autonomy. Existing PRU are encouraged to change their status and convert into academies where this is possible. All new PRU will be established as academies or free schools. To facilitate these changes, from April 2013 onwards PRU will be given greater control over their budgets and staffing.

3.1.5. Raising Participation Age (RPA)

This policy involves raising the age of compulsory attendance of education from 16 to 18 and is implemented in two phases: during the academic year 2013-14 young people will be required to remain in education or training until they turn 17. From the summer of 2015 onwards, all young people will be required to continue with their education or training until they turn 18. Young people do not necessarily need to remain in school but can choose among the following pathways:

- full-time education (eg school or college)
- an apprenticeship
- full-time employment or volunteering, combined with part-time education or training

From 2013-14 onwards schools are required to offer their pupils independent careers guidance in years 8-13. Pupils can also access relevant independent advice through the National Careers Service by phone or online.

This change in the law aims at tackling the most vulnerable pupils’ non-participation in education or training. Although nowadays most of the young people continue to education or training after the age of 16, there is a small minority that does not; this group is usually disadvantaged in terms of background and is more likely to end-up being not in education, employment or training in the future (NEET). By raising the participation age it is expected that these young people are more likely to gain skills and qualifications to increase their employment opportunities and future life prospects.

Background work has been carried-out prior to the implementation of this policy. Since 2009, 66 local authorities from across the country have taken part in locally-led delivery projects, where they developed, tested and shared different approaches to increasing participation and worked on preparing the ground for the RPA.


In relation to children and young people with SEN, a range of changes has been introduced with the Green Paper Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability and the Next Steps. Below is a brief summary of these changes:

The Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

- The EHCP will replace statements of special educational needs and learning difficulties assessments.
- The EHCP will introduce a single, integrated assessment process to identify the multiple needs of children with SEN and of their families. Relevant provision will be arranged across different services to provide a combined package of support.
- Through EHCP the assessment and plans for children with SEN will extend the current provision, from the current limit of 16-19 to cover the period from birth to 25.
- The EHCP is intended to provide early and speedy assessment. The aim will be to complete assessments within a maximum of 20 weeks, while the process currently can take up to 26 weeks.

3 http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/participation/rsa


Schools

- School Action and School Action Plus are considered to be complicated and will be replaced by a single category of SEN.
- To support schools with these changes an ‘Achievement for All’ model will be offered.
- The government will seek to improve teachers’ training in relation to working with SEN pupils.

Parents

- Parents will be involved in the assessment and planning process to form their children’s EHCP.
- Parents will be allowed increased control over the budget and how it is allocated to meet their children’s educational, health and care needs. Thus they will have the right to choose providers and buy-in expert support.
- Parents will have the right to choose schools for their children; their options will include academies and Free Schools too and will not be limited to selecting maintained schools-as it is currently the case.
- Mediation for disputes will be introduced. Also a trial will be carried-out regarding children’s right to appeal if they are not happy with the support they receive.

Local Authorities

- Local authorities will be required to join-up their services to plan and commission provision for SEN children and young people.
- Local authorities will be required to put together and publish a ‘Local Offer’ including all available support for disabled children and children with SEN and their families.

3.1.7. Troubled Families Programme

This programme involves intensive, targeted and relatively short interventions. According to the government’s definition, troubled families are ‘those that have problems and cause problems to the community around them, putting high costs on the public sector’. The guidelines to practitioners indicate that a family is categorised as ‘troubled’ when 3 out of 4 of the following criteria are present:

- Family members are involved in youth crime or anti-social behaviour

• Have children who are regularly truanting or are excluded not in school
• An adult family members is on out of work benefits
• Cause high costs to the taxpayer

The aim of the programme is to turn around the lives of troubled families and therefore reduce any criminal activity, get their children back into school and help them with finding employment. Among the main features of the programme is that a worker is dedicated to a family to ensure co-ordination among different services and a hands-on approach to their multiple needs. In December 2012 a report was published, which includes evidence and examples of good practice. The report examines the most important elements of effective interventions, identifying them as follows:

1. A key worker, dedicated to a family
2. Practical ‘hands on’ support
3. A persistent, assertive and challenging approach
4. Considering the family as a whole – gathering the intelligence
5. Common purpose and agreed action

Source: Department for Communities and Local Government Working with Troubled Families: A guidance to evidence and good practice

3.2. Local Initiatives

3.2.1. Barnardo’s Report Not present and not correct and relevant programmes

Barnardo’s have highlighted the problem of school exclusions via their publications, as well as through their programmes. Their report Not Present and not Correct: Understanding and preventing school exclusions (Evans, 2010), provides an overview of the current policy context and the reasons and outcomes of exclusions for pupils’ lives. While questioning the effectiveness of exclusions, the report suggests different ways of working with disengaged children and young people based on the principle of early intervention, or by offering pupils alternative routes for re-engaging with education.

The report presents several projects by Barnardo’s aimed at interrupting children’s and young people’s pathways towards school exclusion. Although these are discussed as representing different models of work, they are all presented as effective ways of improving pupils’ behaviour and offering alternatives to exclusions. Below we provide a brief overview of three of these programs:

The Shropshire Project – Preventative Work

This project works with children and young people aged 5-19 and their families, across the local authority. It offers a range of preventative and early intervention services to take action before problems escalate. The aim is to reduce exclusions by identifying the multiple barriers, which do not allow pupils to engage with learning and which affect their behaviour negatively. The work focuses on relieving young people from the pressure of problems and crises at home, which often cause or contribute to their poor behaviour at school. The project involves young people and their parents alongside a range of other services and the school. Project workers are either based in schools or in Multi-Agency Teams. Pupils can either drop-in and refer themselves or be referred by their teachers.

Leeds Reach – Respite and reintegration

Leeds Reach is a local charity working in partnership with Barnardo’s and other local professionals to support young people who experience difficulties with remaining in school. Their main service is the ‘Re-engagement Programme’ offering a tailored, alternative curriculum lasting for over 12 weeks. Upon the completion of the programme there is follow-on mentoring to help young people re-integrate into mainstream school. The programme involves a small group of up to 12 pupils who are predominantly –although not exclusively- from African, Caribbean and dual heritage backgrounds. Other aims of the service are to provide young people with a set of theoretical and practical skills, to help them move away from drug use and criminal activities and counteract the stigma of exclusion and its effects.

The Late Intervention Service

The Late Intervention Service is a newly introduced pilot project that is located in a disadvantaged, former industrial area. It is run by project workers in collaboration with the local authority and provides targeted and intense support to young people mainly at Key Stage 4. The programme works with the most vulnerable and troubled young people whose family lives and school trajectories have been chaotic. These young people are particularly hard to reach –given the local authority’s zero exclusions policy- and project workers identify them through contact with different agencies, and through the schools’ referrals. Young people at the Late Intervention Service are often unable to attend mainstream schools and cope with their demands. The aim of the programme is to re-

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5. [http://www.leedsreach.co.uk]
introduce them into positive activities and interrupt their pathways of social exclusion and harmful experiences. Young people work with the project workers on a one-to-one basis in programmes that met their needs, such as learning to plan activities or helping them cope with college attendance. A longer term intention is to also introduce parenting groups.

3.2.2. Family Action

Be Bothered Campaign – Young Carers

Through this campaign Family Action has highlighted the difficulties young carers face in school. Their report Be Bothered - Make Education Count for Young Carers showed that the numbers of pupils with caring responsibilities in secondary schools could be as many as one in 12. Caring responsibilities often result in bad behaviour, poor attendance, lack of concentration and disengagement from school. In many cases young carers do not feel comfortable about disclosing their problem. As a result, their needs remain invisible, they do not receive support, or in some cases they even get punished because of poor attendance.

Family Action supports young carers’ engagement with education through their home-based work with families and the joined-up multi-agency provision they aim to set-up around them. Thus, they offer young carers emotional as well as practical support, in order to assist and relieve them from their pressures and responsibilities. Respite is also provided in the form of group activities with other carers, or away days. Family Action also stresses the importance of working with schools in order to identify and arrange suitable and coordinated support.

Family Action and the Troubled Families Programme: Delivering outcomes on school attendance and exclusion

One of the key areas of Family Action’s work is on improving outcomes for troubled families. In 2012 they published a report that focused on improving attendance and reducing exclusion, which is also one of the main objectives of the government’s Troubled Families initiative. The report revealed that over a quarter of the disadvantaged families they work with have children who play truant or are excluded from school. Most of these families lived in West and East Midlands, followed by
London. The report suggests that truancy and exclusion have no single explanation but involve a mix of different, complex, unmet needs in the home lives of children and young people. The presence of poor health conditions for the family, mental health problems, bereavement, bullying in school and the discrimination experienced by some ethnic minority groups are among the most common factors that give rise to complex needs. When these needs are not dealt with they interrupt children’s engagement with school. According to Family Action these problems require tailored responses and most importantly multi-agency, joint working. Normally working with all members of the family is essential, as is using tools that offer families clarity of goals, comprehensive guidance and assessment.

3.3. Other organisations working with disengaged or excluded children and young people

Other organisations working with disengaged or excluded children and young people include:

**Chance UK**
Chance UK is a charity working with children aged 5-11 years old. They provide one-to-one mentoring to pupils who are at risk of being excluded to help them improve their behavior.
www.chanceuk.com

**School Home Support**
Their work is based on the principle that pupils’ poor behavior and disengagement from education is often rooted in factors that go beyond the school. Therefore they work closely with families and involve parents in their interventions, as well as working with pupils in schools.
www.schoolhomesupport.org.uk

**Just for Kids Law**
This is a legal charity whose services combine legal representation with assistance and support tailored to meet individual children’s needs. They work with looked after children, young people who are in trouble with the law and pupils who are at risk of exclusion. In relation to the latter they mediate, advice excluded children and young people (including pupils with special needs) and ensure that suitable support is available for them. They also run a program to reintroduce them into positive activities.
www.justforkidslaw.org
References


Ofsted (2009). The Exclusion from School of Children Aged Four to Seven, London: Ofsted


Young People At-risk of Drop-out from Education: Recognising and Responding to their Needs