



All-Party Parliamentary Group on
Knife Crime

BACK TO SCHOOL?

Breaking the link between school exclusions and knife crime



October 2019

Redthread

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FOREWORD

School exclusions have been increasing at an alarming rate. Huge proportions of excluded children have special educational needs and other, often unaddressed, vulnerabilities. In many cases there is literally nowhere for them to go.

All children must have access to the high-quality full-time education that gives them the best chances in life, to stay away from harm and go on to achieve their potential. It's a travesty that so many children are being locked out of education and the opportunities that come with it.

Schools have a vital role to play in the effort to prevent and tackle serious youth violence. Excluding a child must be a last resort. But too often we are hearing of schools struggling to find resources to support children and manage their behaviour, or being too hasty to exclude a child for minor misbehaviour.

Too many children are being socially excluded and marked as failures, with tragic consequences. All too often the moment of

school exclusion is the tipping point that leads to young people picking up knives. It's increasingly clear children outside of mainstream schools are at serious risk of grooming and exploitation by criminal gangs. Professionals talk of the 'pupil referral units (PRU) to prison pipeline'. We must act now to stop the flow.

This document summarises our findings from meetings and independent research, and makes a number of recommendations. Our aim is not only to help schools reduce the numbers of exclusions, but to improve the quality and availability of alternative provision, and break the link between exclusion and crime once and for all. We are incredibly grateful to all the young people, parents, education providers and policy experts who took part, and to the councils who took the time to respond to our research request.

Knife crime tragically continues to take children's lives. We can cure this epidemic of violence if we start from the principle that no child is left behind.



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INTRODUCTION

There has been a surge in serious violence in England and Wales in recent years. Figures from the office of national statistics show that there were 47,513 offences involving a knife or sharp instrument in the year ending June 2019. This is around a 44 percent increase since March 2011. Particularly concerning is the rise in the number of young people who are carrying knives.¹ More than 17,500 boys aged 14 carry a knife or weapon in England and Wales; a third of those arming themselves have had weapons used against them.²

Also, following a general downward trend between 2006/07 and 2012/13 the number of children and young people excluded from school has risen substantially.

The most recent statistics were released in July 2019 relating to school exclusions in the year 2017/18.³ These showed:

- In England there were 7,900 permanent exclusions – a 70 percent increase in the number of permanent school exclusions since 2012/13; and
- there was a 54 percent increase in fixed term exclusions since 2012/13.

In recent months a number of experts including the Children’s Commissioner for England⁴ and the Local Government Association⁵ have suggested that those who are excluded from school are at increased risk of involvement in serious youth violence. The issue has also been looked at by the Education Select Committee⁶ and as part of Edward Timpson’s review of school exclusions.⁷ In May 2019 seven Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) along with London Mayor, Sadiq Khan, wrote to the Prime Minister linking the “broken” school exclusions system to rising knife crime.⁸

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) set out to establish the role school exclusions may be playing in exacerbating the increase in knife crime; and what could be done to support vulnerable young people both before and after exclusion to help ensure we could keep them safe.

Our inquiry involved:

- A public meeting involving young people who had been excluded, their parents, educational professionals, academics and other interested stakeholders;
- A roundtable with policy experts and providers of mainstream and alternative provision; and
- A Freedom of Information (FOI) request to all local authorities to establish capacity in alternative provision in their area.



1 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingjune2019> figure a showing increase exclude data from greater Manchester police due to comparable data not being available.

2 Home Office, July 2019. An analysis of indicators of serious violence. Available online.

3 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/820773/Permanent_and_fixed_period_exclusions_2017_to_2018_-_main_text.pdf

4 <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/CCO-Gangs.pdf>

5 <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/County%20Lines%20National%20Summary%20-%20Simon%20Ford%20WEB.pdf>

6 One off evidence session held on 27 March 2019 see <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/knife-crime-inquiry-17-19/>

7 Timpson review of school exclusions May 2019 see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807862/Timpson_review.pdf

8 <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.bbc.co.uk/news/amp/education-47470502>

Our aim was to answer four main questions:

1 What is driving the current rise in school exclusions?

2 Is there a link between rising school exclusions and rising levels of knife crime?

3 What can be done to prevent exclusion from mainstream education, particularly of young people who may be at risk of involvement in serious violence?

4 What happens to young people when they are excluded from school? How do we effectively safeguard them and ensure they access effective education?

This paper provides a summary of our findings. It also provides a range of practical recommendations which the Government should implement to help combat the problem and keep vulnerable children and young people safe.

ABOUT THE ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON KNIFE CRIME

The APPG on Knife Crime is a group of over 50 MPs and Peers, set up in response to the alarming rise in knife crime across the country. The group aims to develop cross-party consensus from parliamentarians around new approaches to tackling knife crime, with particular focus on prevention and early intervention. The APPG has held a number of evidence sessions in Parliament on a range of issues including county lines, a public health approach, youth services, the role of health, social media and exclusions.

The APPG will set out its findings in a series of policy papers. Each one will look at a specific issue that the group believes to be a significant underlying factor in why knife crime is rising.

The secretariat to the APPG on Knife Crime is jointly provided by Barnardo's and Redthread.



ABOUT BARNARDO'S

As the UK's oldest and largest national children's charity, last year we supported around 300,000 children, young people, parents and carers through more than 1,000 services. Our goal is to achieve better outcomes for more children. To achieve this we work with partners to build stronger families, safer childhoods and positive futures.

ABOUT REDTHREAD

Redthread is a youth work charity whose vision is a society in which all young people lead healthy, safe, and happy lives. Redthread's mission is to empower young people to thrive as they navigate the challenging transition to adulthood by integrating trauma-informed youth work into the health sector. Redthread supports the holistic wellbeing of young people by delivering innovative interventions, personal support, and bridging of services – through their Youth Violence Intervention Programme in A&E departments, Well Centre, and education programmes across London and the Midlands. The aim is to help young people to meet their full potential to live healthy, safe, and happy lives, and move away from cycles of violence and (re-)offending.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What young people told us

Young people told us that some schools were not very good at supporting young people on the cusp of trouble. Some commented on how the growth in zero tolerance behaviour policies meant that it seemed that schools increasingly relied on both fixed term or even permanent exclusions to respond to what seemed to be relatively minor behaviour:

“I would get excluded more often and sent home more often, for unnecessary reasons, like not wearing a blazer, my socks not coming up to my knees. Just silly things like that. It is encouraging kids to go out and do what they want because you are not giving them an education.”

Young people commented that they would like to see more resources put into helping pupils who were struggling with issues such as mental health or problems at home. They felt it was

important that teachers and other members of staff realised there were often reasons behind poor behaviour:

“I think a lot more schools should take that into consideration that you are not bad because you are labelled as bad but because you have problems going on at home – just because your family is perfect it don’t make mine perfect.”

Young people also said that far from helping improve behavior, school exclusions could often serve as a catalyst for young people who were already at risk of getting into trouble drifting further into crime. If you gave them more time to themselves they would have increasing opportunities to get into trouble.

“Since they kicked me out I’ve got time on my hands to do more crime, commit more crime... in Croydon with my friends who have also been kicked out who are also doing wrong things, who are also selling drugs who are also carrying knives.”





What should be done?

A range of policy changes are needed to improve the support for vulnerable young people excluded from education. Together these should help break the link between school exclusions and knife crime.

1 School rankings and results must take account of all pupils, including those they exclude

Accountability measures used to assess schools – such as progress 8 – should take into account every pupil who had spent time at a school, with a proportion of pupils' final results included in every secondary school that had responsibility for educating them since year 7. Schools should not be able to lose accountability for pupils' results as a result of exclusion.

2 All excluded children must have access to the full time education they are legally entitled to – too many do not currently get this

The Government should conduct a full review of the use of part-time provision for those who are excluded from school. All pupils are entitled to full time education from the sixth day following exclusion and the Government must seek to ensure that local authorities have sufficient capacity to enable them to deliver on this legal obligation. Children spending too much time without sufficient adult supervision is a safeguarding risk.

3 All education providers must have the funding and backing they need to support vulnerable children

Alternative provision providers should be equipped to support young people at particular risk of involvement in violent crime. The Government should act on recommendation 30 in the Timpson review to allow education providers including alternative provision to access funds from the Youth Endowment Fund to provide financial support for this work.

4 Schools must be recognised for the central role they play in a multi-agency response to keeping children safe, with funding to support this work

Education should be seen as a key partner in helping to keep children and young people safe from violent crime or exploitation, and schools should be supported to be part of multi-agency working. To aid this clear protocols on working with schools should be established to ensure good and consistent information sharing in the area of serious youth violence.

5 Everyone working in the education sector must be trained to understand vulnerability and trauma. Best practice should be identified and spread

Work should be done to build mainstream schools' understanding of vulnerability. All professionals working with vulnerable children should be trained in trauma responsive practice and there should be better coordination and sharing of what works in supporting vulnerable young people between mainstream and alternative provision.

6 Schools should be supported to focus on prevention and early intervention

The Government should commit to establishing a Practice Improvement Fund as set out in the Timpson review. This would be used to provide schools and alternative provision with additional resources to help tackle school exclusion, particularly by enabling them to focus on delivering good quality early intervention.

7 Every council should have a leader responsible for children excluded from school

All local authorities should be required to appoint a leader – similar to the virtual school head for looked after children – to oversee the education of children being educated in alternative provision. This leader would have responsibility for the monitoring of placements and advising on the commissioning of appropriate alternative provision.

WHAT IS DRIVING THE CURRENT RISE IN SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS?

There has been a significant rise in both permanent and fixed-period exclusions for English schools over the last five years. In 2017/18 in England there were 7,900 permanent exclusions – a 70 percent increase since 2012/13. School exclusion is more likely to affect certain groups of young people than others. Young people who receive free school meals are about four times more likely to be permanently excluded from school; and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are over five times more likely to be excluded permanently. In fact children with SEND make up an alarmingly high percentage of all children who are excluded – 44.9 percent of permanent exclusions and 43.4 percent of fixed-period exclusions in 2017/18.⁹

Exclusion rates are also higher in areas of high social deprivation. Amongst pupils going to school in the 10 percent most deprived areas,

the permanent exclusion rate is 0.12 percent compared with 0.07 percent for those going to school in the 10 percent least deprived areas.

In addition to the official statistics on fixed and permanent exclusions, there remains a concern that the figures are likely to represent only part of the problem. Our investigation suggested that many believe there are still a number of ‘unofficial’ exclusions where pupils have been ‘off rolled’ – meaning a child is removed from school without using a permanent exclusion. This problem is difficult to quantify since much remains hidden. The Education Policy Institute, however, published research in April 2019 analyzing exits from secondary schools. This found that for the cohort who took their GCSEs in 2017, 55,309 pupils had been removed from the school roll at least once between year 7 and year 11. This suggests that in that year around 8.1 percent of pupils in the cohort were removed from a school roll at some point for “unexplained” reasons.¹⁰

Another concern identified through the work of the APPG were the stories of young people who were not officially excluded but have been placed in isolation with very little educational input. One young man told us about his experience of being sat outside an Assistant Headteacher’s office watching films on his phone – at the time he was attending only one lesson a week. Officially we do not know how many children and young people are being impacted by these types of arrangements. The Timpson review of school exclusion found examples of both good and poor practice in the use of in-school exclusion units including particularly poor examples of schools where pupils were given work without any supervision or even not given any work to do while subject to “in school” exclusion. Edward Timpson recommended that that Department for Education should review and strengthen guidance on the use of in-school units so they are always used constructively and are supported by good governance. Given evidence received as part of the APPG’s investigation we would support such a review.



9 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/820773/Permanent_and_fixed_period_exclusions_2017_to_2018_-_main_text.pdf

10 https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/EPL_Unexplained-pupil-exits_2019.pdf



When asked why school exclusions were rising a large number of contributors highlighted the perverse incentives created by the current accountability and inspection regime. Teachers spoke of a “cliff edge” whereby Headteachers needed to do whatever it took to avoid an inspection result which was anything less than good. A lower inspection result could impact on the ability of schools to recruit teachers and reduce the number of parents who would actively choose the school for their child, impacting on the school’s future funding. This could create a downward spiral impacting on the long term ability of the school to deliver the best educational outcomes for its students.

Headteachers reported that Ofsted can appear to give little recognition to work aimed at helping more vulnerable students. They described experiences of Ofsted inspections where work done to improve attendance or help pupils at risk of exclusion had been given only a passing mention in the final report compared to the focus on academic outcomes.

“We were Ofsteded and despite phenomenal improvement on attendance and exclusions it got less than one line in the report, and the only thing they were interested in was the Maths, Science and English.”

This finding is supported by similar studies looking at the focus of Ofsted inspections. For example, analysis by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) highlighted only one in three Ofsted inspection reports (32 percent) included an explicit reference to pupils’ mental health and wellbeing.¹¹

This experience means that some Headteachers inevitably may see both fixed term and permanent exclusion as an easy solution when faced with a difficult student in their school. This can particularly happen if they are concerned that the pupil will not make the necessary academic progress and could impact on the academic data the school is required to publish.

“If you see children hitting adults, children frustrated, emotionally immature so that they behave in ways and you think ‘what do we do now?’ The easy thing is to exclude them.”

Pupils who spoke about exclusion also talked about experiences where schools seemed overly keen to jump to using exclusion rather than other behavioral interventions. This was particularly so in schools with “zero tolerance” behavioral policies. Recent press reports relating to leaked policy reports from the Department for Education suggest that new Government policy is likely to include an increased focus on school exclusions and “supporting [schools] to create a safe and disciplined school environment”.¹² It was not within the remit of the APPG to specifically investigate the effectiveness of current school behaviour policies however if we see more schools adopting stricter approaches to school discipline, we are likely to see greater use of exclusions.

“I would get excluded more often and sent home more often, for unnecessary reasons, like not wearing a blazer, my socks not coming up to my knees. Just silly things like that. It is encouraging kids to go out and do what they want because you are not giving them an education, most of them you are not giving them a chance to explain themselves.”

Ofsted has recently revised its inspection framework, which came into force from September 2019. This revised framework separates out the requirement to inspect a school in relation to what it does to help “behavior and attitudes” and “personal development” from academic achievement.¹³ This should hopefully send a clear message that inspections should have a greater focus on supporting the wellbeing and development of learners. Additionally, the removal of a specific Ofsted judgment on “outcomes” and combining that into a single judgment on “teaching, learning and assessment” is also a positive development. This should mean inspections now focus more on what a school does – schools should not get a “good” or “outstanding” rating if they achieve good outcomes but at the expense of supporting more vulnerable pupils.

11 Sample of 50 Ofsted inspection reports that took place after September 2015 https://www.ippr.org/files/publications/pdf/education-education-mental-health_May2016.pdf

12 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/aug/27/leaked-documents-reveal-tories-dramatic-plans-for-schools>

13 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/801429/Education_inspection_framework.pdf

The extent to which the new framework is successful in challenging perverse incentives to exclude will need to be monitored closely. Implementation of the new framework will need a significant cultural shift by inspectors and there will need to be effective training to achieve this. It also remains that the most outstanding schools may never be inspected under the new framework, given that they are currently exempt from routine inspections due to their outstanding status.

Schools who are not due an inspection under the new framework will primarily be held to account using their published academic outcomes, most notably their progress 8 scores. This measures the academic improvement of pupils during their time at the school. This means schools continue to have an incentive to seek early exclusion of pupils who are under-performing – an incentive which disproportionately impacts on more vulnerable pupils including those entitled to free school

meals and those with SEND. The APPG believes that it is important that the Government reviews how academic data is calculated. Schools should continue to keep some accountability for the outcomes of pupils they exclude.

RECOMMENDATION 1

School rankings and results must take account of all pupils, including those they exclude

Accountability measures used to assess schools – such as progress 8 – should take into account every pupil who had spent time at a school, with a proportion of pupils' final results included in every secondary school that had responsibility for educating them since year 7. Schools should not be able to lose accountability for pupils' results as a result of exclusion.



IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN SCHOOL EXCLUSION AND SERIOUS YOUTH VIOLENCE?

There are a number of indicators which suggest there is a link between being excluded from school and involvement in violent crime. For example self-reporting studies – such as that undertaken by the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) – show pupils in alternative provision are more likely to know someone in a gang or who carries a knife than those in mainstream settings.¹⁴

Equally a number of professionals who attended our events commented they had seen a link between knife crime and school exclusions in their own work. For example one charity commented on their experience of running county lines intervention projects in three different parts of the country. Despite geographical differences they commented that:

“So far every referral has been school excluded, not necessarily in PRU but they are not in mainstream. There is really a disturbing correlation – it’s about creating vulnerability and supporting that vulnerability, the vulnerability may have been there before being excluded from secondary school but it is compounded by excluding...increasing the risk hugely.”

Many professionals at the meeting highlighted that a strong correlation did not mean that exclusion was directly causing young people to carry knives. In reality, pupils who are permanently excluded often have a range of other vulnerabilities including difficulties in their home life and strained relationships with trusted adults. They may already be involved in violent crime and behaviour linked to this may have contributed to the decision to exclude. As one contributor commented:

“There is a common thread of experiences in children who are excluded. Exposure to violence, abuse, loss or neglect that cause long term physiological and psychological damage to the brain. In adolescence this presents as seriously confrontational and withdrawn behaviour and may lead to exclusion. It is these vulnerabilities that hugely increase the risk that they will e.g. be drawn into a gang associated with county lines or become a victim or perpetrator of knife crime.”

The suggestion that there is a strong cross over between pupils who are at risk of exclusion and those who are at risk of criminal exploitation is mirrored by the experience of providers of Barnardo’s Schools. Barnardo’s runs two schools which teach young people who have social and behavioural needs, many of whom have been excluded from mainstream school. One Headteacher reported that the nature of the behavioral issues of some of their pupils does in his opinion increase their vulnerability to grooming by criminal gangs. He gave the example of Thomas.

THOMAS WHO ATTENDS A BARNARDO’S SCHOOL FOR PUPILS WITH SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL NEEDS

Thomas is 16 and has autism which makes him particularly vulnerable to manipulation by others. Concerns were raised about Thomas’ welfare when a young person who was lodging with his family was stabbed over the weekend in front of Thomas. Further investigation revealed that the house has been ‘cuckooed’ – it was being used by an organised criminal gang to help supply drugs to the area. The Headteacher made a referral for Thomas to be supported by police and social services.

*Name has been changed

Many contributors did however state that in their opinion school exclusions could risk making already vulnerable young people more vulnerable. Being excluded from school frequently results in a reduction in the number of hours that a young person has in a supervised environment.

A number of professionals commented that they believed criminal gangs were aware of how school exclusion could increase vulnerability and were seeking to exploit this fact. They reported cases where they believed gangs had deliberately set out to engineer the exclusion of pupils – for example by giving them a knife to carry in school. The gangs knew that school exclusion would increase a young person’s vulnerability and make it easier for them to be

14 https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/youth_voice_survey_report_2018_final.pdf

Given the risk that part-time education has to young people already at risk of exploitation the APPG believes that the Government should conduct an investigation into capacity within alternative provision – including the use of a part time provision – as a matter of urgency. It is essential that there are enough resources put into alternative provision to ensure that all pupils who are excluded get the full time provision they are legally entitled to.

RECOMMENDATION 2

All excluded children must have access to the full time education they are legally entitled to – too many do not currently get this.

The Government should conduct a full review of the use of part-time provision for those who are excluded from school. All pupils are entitled to full time education from the sixth day following exclusion and the Government must seek to ensure that local authorities have sufficient capacity to enable them to deliver on this legal obligation. Children spending too much time without sufficient adult supervision is a safeguarding risk.

Being excluded can also mean that young people are cut off from positive role models in their previous school environment. This means that even when young people are able to access alternative provision they may still be at increased risk of involvement in exploitation. As one contributor explained:

“It’s not to say that everyone [in a PRU] becomes a gang member, but if you start putting everyone who is struggling with school in mainstream in one place then those anger points into the mainstream start to be diluted. I was at a really good PRU... not that long ago, they said that 50 percent of the children were gang members, they said 30 percent were runners in gangs.”

Alternative provision can mean grouping together a number of very vulnerable pupils and the risk that disagreements between pupils can escalate into serious conflict is high. Some alternative providers commented catchment areas for alternative providers can also often cross street gang boundaries – grouping young people together from areas where conflict is more likely.

Therefore, while it is clear that alternative providers are not responsible for young people becoming involved in violent crime they need to be equipped to deal with the heightened risk factors that their pupils face. Many of those who worked in alternative provision commented that they were doing what they could to manage the risk but felt that there needed to be more support.

Edward Timpson specifically highlighted the need for those working in alternative education to be better supported in managing the risks associated with violent crime. He recommended that education providers should be permitted to access money from the Youth Endowment Fund to enable them to develop work with pupils involved in serious violence. The APPG supports this recommendation.

There has been an increased recognition in recent years of a need for a “public health approach” to tackling serious violence. Better joined up working is needed from everyone involved in helping young people who are at risk of involvement in serious violence. The recent Home Office Select Committee report on serious youth violence recommended that by April 2020 all schools in areas with an above-average risk of serious youth violence should





have a dedicated school police officer.¹⁸ The Government has also recently committed to introducing a “new legal duty” which will require a number of statutory bodies to collaborate on the issue of how to tackle serious youth violence.¹⁹ The APPG supports work to ensure schools are seen as full partners in helping to tackle serious youth violence. However to be a success we need to be clear that all new responsibilities for schools and other agencies to protect children from serious violence must be properly funded by central Government.

For schools to be seen as effective partners in helping to tackle youth violence they need to form effective partnerships with a range of different agencies. For example, we need to ensure that schools are able to work with social services, family support workers and others with a welfare focus. Understanding the background as to why a young person is susceptible to involvement in serious youth violence will be a key part of any effective response. Ensuring better joint working between schools and the police is a particular issue. Our investigation found that police practice of working with schools to tackle serious youth violence is often inconsistent. This echoes the findings of the recent Ofsted report looking at best practice in safeguarding young people in education from knife crime.²⁰ The report found that while some schools – particularly those with an embedded school safety officer – had good practices in information sharing with the police, this was not consistently the case. Ofsted recommended the introduction of clearer protocols to aid information sharing and ensure that schools

are seen as full partners in safeguarding young people involved in violent crime. The APPG supports this approach.

RECOMMENDATION 3

All education providers must have the funding and backing they need to support vulnerable children

Alternative provision providers should be equipped to support young people at particular risk of involvement in violent crime. The Government should act on recommendation 30 in the Timpson review to allow education providers including alternative provision to access funds from the Youth Endowment Fund to provide financial support for this work.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Schools must be recognised for the central role they play in a multi-agency response to keeping children safe, with funding to support this work

Education should be seen as a key partner in helping to keep children and young people safe from violent crime or exploitation, and schools should be supported to be part of multi-agency working. To aid this clear protocols on working with schools should be established to ensure good and consistent information sharing in the area of serious youth violence.

18 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmhaff/1016/1016.pdf>

19 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-public-health-duty-to-tackle-serious-violence>

20 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/785055/Knife_crime_safeguarding_children_and_young_people_110319.pdf

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO STOP CHILDREN BEING EXCLUDED FROM SCHOOL?

Young people are excluded from school for a range of reasons. The most common is “persistent disruptive behavior” – accounting for around a third of both permanent and fixed term exclusions.²¹ For behavior to be “persistent” there will usually have been warning signs for schools that problems are developing which could escalate to the point of exclusion. It is important that schools are well equipped to act on these warning signs and introduce effective interventions before poor behavior becomes entrenched. This will be key if we are to effectively bring down exclusion and keep vulnerable children – including those at risk of involvement in violent crime – in mainstream education.

Some examples of effective working with pupils before it became necessary to exclude them were described to the APPG. Practitioners who had experience of working with young people at risk of exclusion described how they had invested in whole family approaches seeking to tackle the underlying causes of poor behavior.

“[I work in] a pretty tough area and we have about 10 families with very tough backgrounds...we have a team around every single one of those kids, we have a fall back,...pastorally we will see what the issue is, the debt that the dad has got or we send the mum to the food bank, we get a debt advisor...the kid gets breakfast at school.”

However, overall there was significant concern that in too many schools staff lacked an understanding of what could be the underlying causes of poor behaviour. Young people and practitioners reported many schools frequently wanted to simply punish behavior without considering what else may be going on in a young person’s life.

“I think a lot more schools should take that into consideration that you are not bad because you are labelled as bad but because you have problems going on at home – just because your family is perfect it don’t make mine perfect.”

Some practitioners – often those who had worked in alternative provision – explained that they had developed an understanding that poor behavior often had underlying causes. Difficulties a pupil has experienced elsewhere in their life, such as abuse, witnessing domestic abuse, or living with a parent with drug or alcohol misuse issues can impact on behavior in the classroom. Having an understanding of the impact of trauma enabled the practitioner to work effectively with the child often by including outside agencies such as family support workers or community policing teams.

Mainstream teacher training currently does not include ensuring that teachers have this in-depth understanding of the impact past trauma can have on behavior and effective strategies to tackle it. Trainee teachers are also not currently required to undertake any teaching practice in a non mainstream settings. However this expertise often does exist in good quality alternative provision settings. As one contributor explained:

“There is a real need in the workforce to improve training for teachers. Some of the expertise we lack in mainstream exists in the alternative sector, what we need to do is create more crossover from those two sectors rather than reinvent in the mainstream. Mainstream practitioners do not have much access to alternative provision practitioners as teachers and we need to share that.”



21 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england-2017-to-2018>

The APPG supports the idea that we could do more to share practice between mainstream and alternative provision. In particular there is a need to build understanding in teachers within mainstream on how to effectively support pupils who have experienced past trauma.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Everyone working in the education sector must be trained to understand vulnerability and trauma. Best practice should be identified and spread

Work should be done to build mainstream schools' understanding of vulnerability. All professionals working with vulnerable children should be trained in trauma responsive practice and there should be better coordination and sharing of what works in supporting vulnerable young people between mainstream and alternative provision.

Encouraging investment in effective pastoral support for children at risk of exclusion is important – yet can currently be difficult for many mainstream schools. The type of early interventions that may be effective such as 1 to 1 support, counselling or mentoring can be seen as a luxury in a tight fiscal environment. Educational leaders who spoke to the APPG explained it was particularly difficult to justify this type of spending since it was not aimed at directly improving the academic outcomes on which schools are primarily judged.

“The things that are most vulnerable [to cuts] are the things that cannot be related to academic outcomes, so counsellors, withdrawal mentors, a whole range of things you might offer in school, they are the first things to go when the budget really needs to be pared back.”

The problem has been exacerbated by cuts to community services schools could otherwise refer pupils too. A number of practitioners spoke of cuts to speech and language therapy or mental health support:

“There is less [money] for in school support, in school counselling, speech and language, particularly in the early years. We are desperately trying to piece together the local level funding for speech and language and low level mental health basically after 15 months every area does it differently and nobody knows what they are doing. Those are the services that should be prioritized.”

The Government has committed to improving mental health provision for children and young people with a particular focus on schools. The approach is set out in the Government's Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Green Paper and its subsequent response.²² This may help in providing more support to young people at risk of exclusion. The Government plans include introducing a designated senior lead for mental health in schools; creating mental health support teams jointly managed by schools and the NHS; and reducing waiting times for specialist services in “trailblazer” areas. However, there are questions whether this will be sufficient to provide schools with access to the support services they need. The Government's goal is to roll out the new approach to at least a fifth to a quarter of the



22 <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-provision-a-green-paper>



country by the end of 2022/23. That means children and young people in three quarters of England will not see any improvement in four years' time. Additionally, funding is not guaranteed to support this beyond 2020/21.

The recent Timpson review highlighted the importance of effective early intervention and the need for funds to be made available to support schools in developing effective approaches.²³ The review found a number of examples of good practice aimed at helping children at risk of school exclusion. These included a school who had employed a school-based social worker and another which developed an in-school unit staffed by a full time teacher who used therapeutic interventions. The review also highlighted that effective approaches usually involved partnership working. Despite this evidence of some best practice, the Timpson review commented that more needed to be done:

“For every child to benefit from these approaches, DfE must invest in developing, testing, sharing and growing practice.”

Timpson recommended the development of a Practice Improvement Fund with “*sufficient value, longevity and reach*”. The fund would support all types of schools to establish and test systems aimed at both improving the early identification of pupils at risk and providing effective interventions to support them. The review suggested a number of areas where the fund could particularly be used to develop best practice – these included nature groups and the proactive use of alternative provision practitioners in mainstream schools.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Schools should be supported to focus on prevention and early intervention

The Government should commit to establishing a Practice Improvement Fund as set out in the Timpson review. This would be used to provide schools and alternative provision with additional resources to help tackle school exclusion, particularly by enabling them to focus on delivering good quality early intervention.

23 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807862/Timpson_review.pdf

WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUNG PEOPLE WHEN THEY ARE EXCLUDED FROM SCHOOL, AND HOW DO WE KEEP THEM SAFE AND LEARNING?

Evidence to the group clearly suggested that when a young person was excluded from school they were usually very vulnerable. For a number of young people this includes a risk they could become involved in violent crime. It is essential that what happens next should involve clear planning with a focus on how to effectively help the pupil achieve going forward. The aim should be to find an appropriate educational option that can meet all of their educational, behavioral and emotional needs. Placing a young person into alternative provision should not be seen as a “punishment” for previous misbehavior but as a genuine aim to help the young person going forward.

Our investigation, however, revealed that effective planning to find the “right” place for excluded pupils often does not happen. The rise in permanent school exclusions has created significant pressure on the

alternative provision sector. Many local authorities are therefore forced to look for any available place for a pupil rather than having any choice in available placements.

In addition to concerns regarding the number of places, there are also concerns regarding the quality of education that is available about alternative provision in certain areas of the country. Previous research revealed that while some areas benefit from a number of high quality providers provision is patchy. Work by IPPR in 2017²⁴ looking at the Ofsted rating of PRUs across England found that while 91 percent of excluded pupils in London were attending provision that was deemed good or better, in some local authorities – notably Dudley, Gateshead, Newcastle and Thurrock all of their alternative provision was rated as inadequate.



24 <https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-10/making-the-difference-report-october-2017.pdf>



The APPG believes that ideally there should be a range of alternative provision available in every area to meet the diverse needs of young people who have been excluded. In the course of the inquiry we heard from a number of alternative providers who had developed innovative options for working with disengaged young people. Providers told us of how they developed strong vocational options seeking to re-inspire young people with the opportunity to learn a trade when they had been turned off academic learning in a classroom. Providers also told us about the importance of developing individual and bespoke 1 to 1 approaches looking for possible passions in the young person such as sport or music which can be helpful to re-engage them in education. In addition, high quality providers of alternative provision commented that they aimed to provide good pastoral care programs and therapeutic interventions.

As well as finding the right alternative provision for a pupil providers also talked about the need to manage the move back to mainstream. Young people can thrive in the right alternative provision with good pastoral support but find that support can instantly disappear when they transfer back to mainstream. Failure to manage the transition back to mainstream can thus set young people up to fail and result in further disruption to their education.

Ensuring local authorities have sufficient oversight of what is happening with pupils in alternative provision should be a priority particularly given their vulnerability to

involvement in knife crime. The APPG therefore believes that we could learn from how local authorities monitor the education of looked after children. Here there is a requirement for local authorities to appoint a virtual school head. This role has responsibility for promoting the educational achievements of all children looked after by the local authority. We believe there would be merit in requiring local authorities to develop a similar role in relation to permanently excluded children. This role would be responsible for maintaining oversight of what alternative provision there was available in their local authority, whether placements were meeting the needs of children and whether improvements needed to be made. They would also be responsible for managing any transition by a child previously educated in alternative provision back to mainstream education.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Every council should have a leader responsible for children excluded from school

All local authorities should be required to appoint a leader – similar to the virtual school head for looked after children – to oversee the education of children being educated in alternative provision. This leader would have responsibility for the monitoring of placements and advising on the commissioning of appropriate alternative provision.



All-Party Parliamentary Group on
Knife Crime

The Officers of the APPG on Knife Crime are:

Sarah Jones MP – Chair

Lord Paddick – Vice Chair

Kate Osamor MP – Vice Chair

Ross Thomson MP – Vice Chair

The Secretariat to the APPG
on Knife Crime is jointly provided
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The All Party Parliamentary Group for Knife Crime thanks
the young people and professionals who told us about their experiences

Website: www.preventknifecrime.co.uk