

Exclusions of Pupils from Schools in England: Extent, causes and consequences

Research Project Brief

1. Introduction

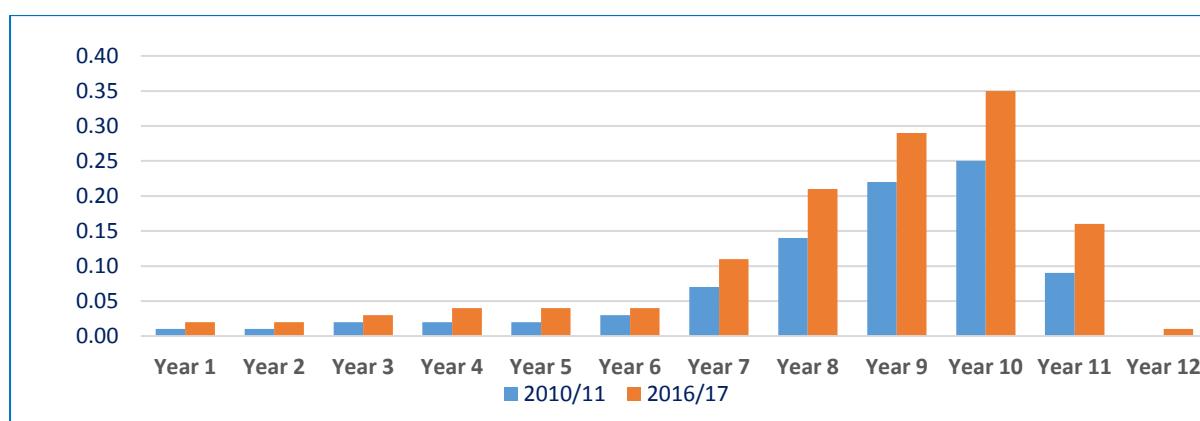
In recent years, there has been considerable concern among education policy makers, teachers, school leaders, parents and communities about the growing numbers of exclusions and off-rolling in schools in England. National figures from the Department for Education show that 6,685 pupils were permanently excluded from schools in England and Black Caribbean and SEN pupils are over-represented in both permanent and fixed term exclusions (DfE, 2018). The empirical data also indicates that Black Caribbean pupils were more than three and a half times as likely to be permanently excluded as pupils overall and were twice as likely to receive a fixed period exclusion (DfE 2018).

The review of previous research also suggests that Black and SEN pupils represent the most excluded groups of pupils in British schools (Gillborn and Youdell 2000, EHRC 2015; Parsons 1999, 2009; DfE 2016; IPPR 2017). In addition to Black Caribbean students, there are also concerns of overrepresentation issues in the exclusions statistics in the UK about Gypsy/Roma and Traveller pupils and Mixed White and Black Caribbean pupils. The government research identified Gypsy/Roma and Traveller pupils as being strongly affected by many factors influencing their education including racism and discrimination, myths, and stereotyping (see DfE 2018).

Recent national debate also suggests that exclusions in English schools has been a ‘hot topic’ in the UK with some media highlighting the sharp rise in pupil exclusions from English state schools with the following headlines:

- “Sharp rise in pupil exclusions from English state schools” Guardian 2018
- “Education Secretary orders DfE review into rising numbers of school exclusions” TES March 2018
- “Thousands of pupils missing from English school rolls- Informal exclusions cited as possible reason” Guardian, 21 Jun 2018
- “The schools regulator Ofsted has identified 300 schools with high levels of so-called off-rolling, where pupils disappear from the school register just before GCSEs” Guardian, June 2018

Figure 1: Rate of Permanent Exclusions by National Curriculum Year in England



Research has also highlighted off-rolling in English schools as one of the reasons for unofficial exclusions (House of Commons, 2018; Ofsted 2018). This is supported by national data that shows Year 10 has the largest increase in the rate of permanent exclusions (Figure 1). The empirical evidence also shows that increasing numbers of children in England are being 'off-rolled' - being excluded or otherwise leaving school for other reasons, for example to 'game' the school performance system, or to relieve financial pressure on schools.

Off-rolling is also raised as a concern by Ofsted's most recent annual report with its implications in exclusions practice in schools. The report stated that in the latest school census around 19,000 pupils did not progress from Year 10 to Year 11 in the same state-funded secondary school, around 4% of the total (Ofsted, 2018). Of those 19,000 pupils:

- *'the destination of 9,700 pupils (51%) is unclear, because they do not reappear in another state-funded school*
- *25% of pupils move to other secondary schools and 20% move to alternative provision in the state-funded sector'* Ofsted, 2018:50).

Overall the data and research review suggests a sharp rise in exclusion and that Black Caribbean and Gypsy/Roma represent the most excluded group of pupils in British schools (Gillborn and Youdell 2000, EHRC 2015). There is also a widespread consensus in the research literature that young people who are excluded from school are at far greater risk of a variety of negative outcomes, including poor educational attainment, prolonged periods out of employment; poor mental and physical health; involvement in crime; and homelessness (Parsons 2009; Gazeley 2010; IPPR 2017; DfE 2016; Demie and Mclean 2017).

2. Research aims

The aim of this research project is to explore the experience of ethnic minority pupils and SEN pupils in school exclusions in England and to investigate the reasons for overrepresentation in exclusion statistics. Four overarching questions will guide this research:

- What does the national data tell us about school exclusions and off rolling?
- What are the reasons for exclusions from schools?
- What are the reasons for ethnic minority and SEN pupils' overrepresentation in exclusions?
- What are the good practices to tackle exclusions from schools?

Research methods

The methodological approach to be used is mixed methods research that combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research for the purpose of increasing the breadth and depth of understanding of exclusions issues in schools. The research has three main strands, each contributing a particular set of complementary data to answer the research questions.

Firstly, a quantitative analysis of 6.5 million pupils' annual school census data will be done to examine exclusions trends and off rolling in schools. Data will be analysed by gender, socio-economic factors, ethnic background, types of schools and LAs and regions in England to determine the current extent of ethnic and SEN disproportionality.

Secondly, **focus groups** will be used to gather the views of school staff, governors, parents, pupils, teachers, education psychologists, special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) and learning

mentors on the causes and reasons for over-representation of Black and SEN pupils in exclusion statistics.

Thirdly, **case studies** of schools and pupil referral units will be carried out, using semi structured questionnaires to interview headteachers and teachers to gain more qualitative insights on the reasons for exclusions and on what needs to be done to tackle exclusions issues.

The Research Team



Feyisa Demie is Head of Research and Adviser for School Self-evaluation at Lambeth LA. Prior to this, he was a university lecturer. Feyisa has worked extensively for the last 25 years with Local Authorities, government departments, schools and governors on the use of data and sharing good practice to raise achievement. He was responsible for pioneering work on developing school profiles, contextual and value added analyses that are widely used for monitoring, challenging and supporting schools. He is a passionate champion of school self-evaluation and an advocate of using data and research as a tool for supporting school improvement. He runs bespoke school focussed training programmes on the use of data to raise

achievement and an annual national school improvement conference at UCL Institute of Education (IOE) for headteachers, teachers, governors and policy makers to share good practice in schools. With longstanding research interests on what works in raising achievement in schools and equity issues in education, he has written a number of research reports and articles on school improvement, EAL, ethnicity and tackling educational disadvantage in schools.



Christabel McLean is a former Headteacher and Education Consultant and has worked with HMI/Ofsted at national level. She has also worked extensively on the inspection, improvement and management of educational establishments. Christabel started her teaching career in Camden and Westminster in inner London and went on to become headteacher of Sacred Heart School in Hammersmith. Christabel's unshakeable belief that all children can achieve their best no matter what their background, language or circumstance, also led to a successful period as a full time Ofsted inspector. From this she was specifically recruited as a key member of a school improvement team of Advisers by a

new Director of Education, to deal with a large number of schools in special measures in Lambeth. Then as an Education Adviser in Lambeth she took part in an extensive range of school improvement activities linked to schools facing very challenging circumstances and led a number of very successful school improvement projects. More recently she has been involved in a number of research projects and contributed to books advising parents on education.

Project Advisory Group

This research is supported by Lambeth School Partnership (LSP) and project advisory group. The project advisory groups cover a range of expertise and include:

1. Michelle Bennett, Headteacher of Fenstanton Primary School and LSP representative
2. Jennie Sines, Senior Educational Psychologist (Inclusion and Vulnerable Groups)
3. Stuart Boffin, Head of Inclusion, Lambeth LA
4. Professor Carl Parsons - Academic expert in the area of exclusions, University of Greenwich
5. Dr Feyisa Demie, Head of Research and adviser for school self-evaluation (Project leader)
6. Christabel Mclean, Former Headteacher and Education Consultant

7. Dr Joan O' Mahony, The Elmgreen Secondary School governor
8. Linda Collins, Chair of Governors, La Retraite Secondary School
9. Wilf Thomas Smith, Chair of Governors, Walnut Tree Walk Primary School

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