MAXIMISING ACCESS TO EDUCATION: WHO’S AT RISK OF EXCLUSION?

AN ANALYSIS IN CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER
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In west Cheshire we are deeply committed to inclusion in all its forms. We feel especially strongly that all children and young people should be educationally included regardless of their need, background or vulnerability. We know how damaging exclusion can be for children and young people, their families and carers, and how this can have long term impact for individuals, families and communities. We are a forward-looking borough and in Social Finance we found a partner that shares the same ambition to do this innovative work. We are immensely proud of this cutting-edge piece of analysis.

When comparing our data to the national picture we do not have a high number of exclusions. However, what we saw was an emerging increase in exclusion in some areas. We were also conscious that the data doesn’t tell the whole story and doesn’t capture exclusion in all of its forms. We have always enjoyed strong partnership working in the borough between the Local Authority, schools and other partners. All key stakeholders shared the collective vision and dedication to address the issue of exclusion. We wanted to better understand what we could do differently in order to identify pupils at risk of exclusion earlier and to put effective interventions in place. In order to do this, we wanted an analysis of the factors leading to exclusion to be rigorous and robust so any changes to ‘the way we do things’ is evidence-led. We also know that we must look at the use of funding that is targeted for excluded children, ideally refocusing that on earlier intervention and prevention to maximise impact.

In west Cheshire we felt that we already had a good understanding of school exclusions. While some of the findings were not a surprise, we have been struck by how clear a picture they present. The key messages are striking in their intuitiveness such as being able to recognise the warning signs. We also are challenged by the fact that a significant proportion of children are being excluded when they are already in receipt of an intervention and/or additional funding. Through this work we were able to look beyond the more formal definition of school exclusion.

This data analysis work is only the starting point. The main task is still ahead of us. The findings will shape what we do next and will be instrumental in re-modelling pathways, systems and support around school exclusion in west Cheshire. Once again, we will be working with Social Finance as we embark on this ambitious next phase.

From the start of this programme we wanted to ensure that the work not only had a positive impact for the children, young people and families in west Cheshire but, wherever possible, we wanted to look outwards. We want to share our work and the learnings widely to encourage others to rethink their understanding of school exclusion so we can all learn from each other. Only by doing so can we really begin to address exclusions across the country.

Mark Parkinson
Director of Education and Inclusion, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Executive summary

Cheshire West and Chester Council has exclusion rates below the national average. However, they experienced an increase locally in 2017/18 and noticed a change in the nature of exclusions in the area. Realising that efficient use of resources relies on understanding exactly who is at risk of exclusion locally, they began a partnership with Social Finance to develop a data-informed understanding of the issue.

Through qualitative and quantitative research conducted in 2019, this report brings forward insights from interviews with schools, pupil referral units and a range of local authority services. The analysis combines datasets from across schools, children's social care, SEN, and indices of multiple deprivation. Based on our findings we make a number of recommendations to key agents of change including foundations, local authorities and national government.

With Thanks

Our work with Cheshire West and Chester Council presented in this report is part of a wider Maximising Access to Education programme at Social Finance. We recognise the complexities of this issue and we are committed to working with a range of partners to support systemic change for vulnerable pupils at risk of exclusion. We are grateful to Cheshire West and Chester Council for their proactive partnership and their willingness to share learnings to further a collective understanding of this national issue.

1: Defining exclusions

   USING A COMPREHENSIVE DEFINITION OF EXCLUSIONS UNCOVERED ‘INVISIBLE’ LOCAL TRENDS IN THE DATA, WITH GENDERED IMPLICATIONS

- The extent of exclusions is greater than headline statistics suggest. Analysis uncovered a higher rate of informal exclusions than expected, including persistent absence and managed moves.
- We found that girls are more at risk of some types of informal exclusions than boys. While rates of permanent and fixed term exclusions are higher for boys, we found that rates of school moves and early exits were higher for girls. These forms of exclusion can lack the accountability mechanisms built into the formal exclusion process.

1 They include representatives from Children’s Services, Early Help, Special Educational Needs, Education Access Team, Education Welfare Service, Virtual School, Insight & Intelligence and Educational Psychology Service.

2 An early exit occurs when a pupil leaves a mainstream secondary school prior to the final census return in year 11 and does not move to a special school or PRU.

RECOMMENDATIONS (1)

Foundations: Invest in data analysis as it is key to understanding the nuances and complexities of an issue.

Local Government: Use a comprehensive definition of exclusions to better record and understand the issue locally, and to avoid gender bias.

National Government: Review the collection, analysis and use of data to inform decision making on a national level, to ensure a comprehensive definition of exclusion is applied. To address the risk of gender bias, these trends cannot remain “invisible”.
2: Understanding the issue
EXCLUSION IS A COMPLEX SYSTEMIC ISSUE THAT GOES BEYOND EDUCATION AND DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTS A SMALL COHORT OF VULNERABLE PUPILS

- Pupils living in high levels of deprivation at an area and household level have a greater risk of all types of exclusion, serving as an important data point for identification of pupils who could benefit from additional support.

- We identified a small cohort who represent 15% of pupils but account for 58% of multiple fixed term exclusions. This cohort all have experience of social care or Social Emotional Mental Health needs.

3: Targeting support to schools under pressure
CERTAIN SCHOOLS IN DEPRIVED AREAS ARE UNDER DISPROPORTIONATE PRESSURE DUE TO THE LEVEL OF NEED IN THEIR SCHOOL, LEADING TO HIGHER EXCLUSIONS IN THESE SCHOOLS

- There are a small number of high excluding schools which are often in deprived areas with high proportions of pupils who need additional support.

- This variation of exclusion rates between schools can be largely explained by the level of additional needs. Data on this shows that level of need accounts for over 50% of interschool variation.

RECOMMENDATIONS (2)
Foundations: Provide long term funding for multiple projects in the same issue, supporting the creation of well evidenced local marketplaces to tackle complex systemic issues.

Local Government: Build capacity for multi-agency working to enable earlier identification of pupils in need of additional support. This means prioritising contextual decision making based on the multiple factors and flags such as those outlined in this report.

National Government: Invest in and incentivise early intervention based on contextual decision making across agencies, to reduce exclusions and their associated social and financial costs.

RECOMMENDATIONS (3)
Foundations: Use funding to strengthen local support to parts of the system under pressure. Where possible, seek to work in partnership with the statutory sector to align support and foster a more effective approach to tackling local inequalities.

Local Government: Proactively target support to schools in deprived areas with higher proportions of pupils with additional needs. Where possible, seek to work in partnership with the non-statutory sector locally.

National Government: Go beyond comparative academic standing when assessing schools, to take into consideration deprivation levels and the proportion of pupils with additional support needs.

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3 Multiple fixed term exclusions here refers to two or more.
4: Recognising warning signs and adapting support

**DATA FLAGS CAN SIGNAL RISK OF IMMINENT EXCLUSIONS SUCH AS DETERIORATING ABSENCE, WHICH TENDS TO WORSEN BEFORE AN EXCLUSION EVENT AND DOESN’T RECOVER AFTERWARDS**

- We found the following data points warn of heightened risk of imminent exclusion: **new and specific forms of contact with social care, persistent absenteeism, and a build up of multiple fixed term exclusions**.

- This analysis indicates that **exclusions do not work to improve attendance or behaviour for this cohort**: on average, absenteeism remains an issue after exclusion and multiple fixed term exclusions more often lead to permanent exclusion rather than preventing it (the latter often linking to behaviour policies).

5: Funding

**THE LACK OF SUPPORT FOR MULTIPLE LOWER LEVEL NEEDS IS PUTTING PRESSURE ON SCHOOL BUDGETS, CREATING AN INCENTIVE TO EXCLUDE PUPILS WHO CAN’T ACCESS SUPPORT. SUPPORTING PUPILS AFTER EXCLUSION, RATHER THAN SUPPORTING THEM EARLIER, IS COSTING THE LOCAL AUTHORITY AND SCHOOLS MORE.**

- We found that high thresholds mean pupils with multiple needs who do not meet a singular threshold are not eligible for support, often costing schools more than the budget allocated to educate them. Further, notional SEN budgets are frequently unavailable as they are often committed to cover gaps in the school budget, making it difficult for schools to access additional support.

- Financially there is a perverse incentive to exclude pupils with additional needs, particularly if they do not meet high thresholds for support, as the Local Authority takes over responsibility for supporting the pupil in these cases, thereby stopping school overspend on their allocated budget for that pupil.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS (4)**

**Foundations:** Apply common outcomes across grant making to multiple organisations, to better understand what works for vulnerable pupils holistically.

**Local Government:** Work with schools to use data, alongside their experiences, to understand what works to support emerging needs and to subsequently reduce exclusions.

**National Government:** Gather evidence on what works for this cohort in different contexts to provide robust guidance for schools and local authorities.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS (5)**

**Foundations:** Match or leverage local authority commitments to early support approaches, this will help reduce incentives to exclude and ease financial pressures on schools and local authorities.

**Local Government:** Target support to help schools address multiple additional needs at lower levels, where these do not meet thresholds, to better support pupils and save money in the longer term.

**National Government:** Review the funding formula to compensate for the financial pressures faced by disadvantaged schools to support pupils with additional needs.
Maximising Access to Education: Who’s at risk of exclusion?

1 Context

National picture

Rising exclusions

Across England, as each pupil finishes their school day, a group the size of a classroom of 35 pupils has been told to permanently leave mainstream education. This rate of exclusion is 60% higher than it was five years ago and represents 7,900 pupils removed from mainstream education in 2017/18.4,5 Pupils who are excluded from school are much more likely than their peers, to have poorer outcomes later in life.6

Although exclusions happen in school, the drivers and impacts of exclusions are much broader than an ‘education issue’. Pupils are children and young people in an education setting, which means their needs can be complex and go beyond education, even when they’re at school.7 Exclusion is often not the problem in and of itself, but rather a symptom of a highly fragmented and underfunded system unable to address a pupil’s holistic needs.

The Government found that 78% of excluded pupils have up to three key vulnerabilities: a special educational need, experience of the care system or eligibility for free school meals.8 These factors increase a pupil’s risk of exclusion and contribute to poorer outcomes in later life.

These often multiple and complex needs can present as behaviours in a school setting, including being disruptive, disengaging from learning and self-excluding absenteeism. We’ve been told by schools that challenging behaviour and increasing absenteeism are a common precursor to significant safeguarding needs.9 Currently however, there is a lack of capacity and consistency in the system to focus on early intervention, as identified within the Timpson Review.10 Our qualitative research suggests this is compounded by insufficient understanding of how to effectively address the deeper issues driving these behaviours.

Schools face increasing difficulties, aggravated by reductions in funding, in addressing the deteriorating behaviours of pupils with such needs, which can result in exclusion of the pupil from school. This starts to erode one of the few

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6 They are overrepresented in terms of low attainment of GCSEs, being not in education, employment or training (NEET), being vulnerable to exploitation through county lines gangs and going to prison. These poor outcomes also have significant costs to the state – estimated at £370,000 per pupil who is permanently excluded.
7 We have chosen to use the language of ‘pupil’ rather than ‘child’ in this report for this reason. When talking about ‘children in care’ we tend to understand the complexities of their needs, but when in school those same children become ‘pupils’ and they do not always have the support they need in that environment – there is therefore a need to understand ‘pupils’ with needs as we do ‘children’ with needs.
9 Schools have a safeguarding duty, under section 175 Education Act 2002, to investigate any unexplained absences.
remaining protective factors in that child's life – education.\textsuperscript{11,12}

**National agenda**

There has been growing political recognition that rising exclusions are a critical issue. In March 2018, Edward Timpson, former Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families, was commissioned to review school exclusions by (then) Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds. In response to rising school exclusion rates nationally, the review aimed to explore the underlying issues driving this trend and why certain groups are disproportionately likely to be excluded.\textsuperscript{13}

Alongside others in the sector, we welcome the review’s recommendations on increasing collaboration between mainstream education settings, Alternative Provision (AP) schools, and local authorities, and increasing accountability for the safeguarding and outcomes of excluded pupils.\textsuperscript{14}

Through this report and other work within Social Finance’s Maximising Access to Education programme, we hope to add to the national conversation by providing data rich insights and local context to this issue.

**Fragmented system, fragmented sector**

There are a number of committed actors working to address rising exclusions and the need for systemic change. This work ranges from research into the drivers of exclusion, to working to improve AP, or improving personalised support to at risk pupils.\textsuperscript{15}

There is, however, a lack of infrastructure (nationally and often locally) to ensure interventions are aligned and work to reinforce each other.

Without such infrastructure, we often see levels of duplication and non-alignment that undermine the potential effectiveness of different interventions. Building infrastructure to support cohesion and coordination across the sector will be key to success, on a local and national scale.

**Local picture**

**Cheshire West and Chester**

The rates of permanent exclusion in west Cheshire are below the national average (see Figure 1). Across the county there are almost 50,000 pupils across 150 mainstream schools and 12 other settings, the latter consisting of ten special schools and two Pupil Referral Units.\textsuperscript{16} Pupils are largely white British, with 3\% part of a minority ethnic group. Over half of pupils live in the top 50\% of affluence in the country, however 9\% are in the most deprived decile of the national population.\textsuperscript{17} 10\% of students have received support from children’s social care services such as being a Child in Need (CiN), a Looked After Child.

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\textsuperscript{13} Such groups include pupils with experience of social care, SEN needs, eligible for free school meals, and from particular ethnic groups, especially black Caribbean boys and gypsy Roma traveller children.

\textsuperscript{14} For example, RSA response to the *Timpson Review of School Exclusion*, (10 May 2019). Available at: https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/rsa-blogs/2019/05/timpson

\textsuperscript{15} Examples of research work includes the University of Sunderland research into the nature of exclusions, Education Policy Institute work on early exits, Oxford Department of Education ‘Excluded Lives’ series which looks at ‘exclusion from school and its consequences’. Examples of organisations focusing on Alternative Provision include Centre for Social Justice and The Difference. Examples of organisations focused on improving support include School Home Support and Right to Success.

\textsuperscript{16} School Census Data, 2018/19, Cheshire West and Chester.

\textsuperscript{17} School Census (school exclusion data), 2012-2018, Cheshire West and Chester. Note: for pupil entering year 7 in 2012, 2013 and 2014.
Maximising Access to Education: Who’s at risk of exclusion?

Despite their relatively low exclusion rates, Cheshire West and Chester Council saw a significant increase in the number of exclusions: reaching 54 in the academic year 2018/19, up from 38 in the previous year.\(^{19}\) The council also observed a change in the nature of the trend, with a marked increase of exclusions shortly after the transition to secondary school, and in the lead up to pupils sitting their GCSEs. The council’s decision to dig deeper on this issue came from a realisation of a lack of evidence around who was at risk of exclusion locally, limiting the effectiveness with which they could target interventions.

To lead on a proactive approach to this issue, the Director of Education and Inclusion set up an *Averting Exclusions Task and Finish Group* in June 2018. This group was set up as a multi-agency forum, as the council recognised the potential benefit of tackling exclusions as more than ‘an education issue’. The group included representation from schools and a range of local authority services, including the ‘New Ways of Working – Trauma Informed Practice’ team.\(^{20,21}\)

Within a few months, the local authority began working with Social Finance. Working in partnership, we undertook an initial phase of in-depth data analysis, coordinated through a Data Sub-Group of the *Averting Exclusions Task and Finish Group*.

The findings of this initial data analysis phase are presented within this report. The analysis allowed us to identify which pupils are most at risk of exclusion locally, with a view to improving the local infrastructure to respond to their needs earlier and more effectively. We continue to work in partnership on this issue – more details in the ‘conclusion and next steps’ section of this report.

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\(^{19}\) *School Census Data, 2017-2019*, Cheshire West and Chester.

\(^{20}\) The New Ways of Working programme aims to develop a common and consistent approach to working with families across Cheshire West and Chester. It is being driven forward by the Children’s Trust and is funded through the Department for Education as part of the Partners in Practice programme. The approach focuses on working in a trauma informed way, using motivational interviewing and drawing on shared language with the objective of preventing children and young people becoming vulnerable and needs escalating, ensuring lasting solutions within families to improve resilience, emotional health and wellbeing and improving overall outcomes for children and families.

\(^{21}\) This includes Education Access Team, Education Welfare Service, Education Psychology Service, Special Educational Needs, Early Help, Police, Social Care, Alternative Provision, Virtual Schools, Insight & Intelligence, Schools Finance and the New Ways of Working - Trauma Informed Practice team.
Maximising access to education programme

The work with Cheshire West and Chester Council sits in Social Finance’s wider ‘Maximising Access to Education’ programme which is part of the Impact Incubator. The Impact Incubator is a collaboration between charitable foundations and Social Finance, that works with partners to tackle entrenched issues and create lasting, systems-level change by developing and implementing responses.

In the context of this programme, Social Finance is working with two local authorities, Cheshire West and Chester Council and Gloucestershire County Council, to develop a response to the rising number of school exclusions rooted in local context. This work is rooted in understanding who is being excluded in specific areas and by co-producing the necessary local infrastructure and evidence based interventions in response. Simultaneously, Social Finance is working to capture and disseminate cross-cutting learnings with a view to scaling nationally in the longer term.

This report and the data analysis conducted in Cheshire West and Chester is central to understanding ‘who is being excluded’ – one of the three key pillars of our high level theory of change (see Figure 2). Without a deep understanding of who this cohort is, high quality interventions and strong local systems are unable to effectively target support to the pupils who need it. Developing data and insights around this cohort is therefore key to exploring what interventions and quality assurance need to be in place to better support them and how local systems need to work to support this process. At the same time, without a clear understanding of ‘what good looks like’, local infrastructure cannot effectively support best practice and embed accountable outcomes for the most at risk pupils.

Equally, without developing a clear picture of how local systems work, high quality support cannot be embedded in a way that reaches the most at risk pupils. Working across these three interdependent pillars is therefore key to ensuring the local system supports high quality interventions for the pupils who need it most.

**Figure 2. Maximising Access to Education high-level theory of change**

- **HOW?** Develop local infrastructure
- **WHAT?** Quality assurance for interventions
- **WHO?** Develop data and insights around cohorts

This report and the data analysis conducted in Cheshire West and Chester is central to understanding ‘who is being excluded’ – one of the three key pillars of our high level theory of change (see Figure 2). Without a deep understanding of who this cohort is, high quality interventions and strong local systems are unable to effectively target support to the pupils who need it. Developing data and insights around this cohort is therefore key to exploring what interventions and quality assurance need to be in place to better support them and how local systems need to work to support this process. At the same time, without a clear understanding of ‘what good looks like’, local infrastructure cannot effectively support best practice and embed accountable outcomes for the most at risk pupils.

Equally, without developing a clear picture of how local systems work, high quality support cannot be embedded in a way that reaches the most at risk pupils. Working across these three interdependent pillars is therefore key to ensuring the local system supports high quality interventions for the pupils who need it most.
2 Our Research Approach

What we did

We combined qualitative and quantitative insights to build a longitudinal picture of pupils’ journey through secondary school in the west Cheshire area (see Figure 3). We conducted an initial literature review to build on existing research at a national and local level.

We also conducted primary qualitative research with schools, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), social care and SEN teams. These interviews informed statistical analyses, which linked datasets across schools, pupils’ social care, SEN, and indices of multiple deprivation.

Combining research methods and datasets in this way widened our scope to understand which pupils are at risk of exclusion and how we can better support them. For reflections on the limitations of our approach see Appendix 1.

Our research methods

Our qualitative analysis comprised interviews with:

- Seven Secondary Schools
- One Virtual School head
- Two Primary Schools
- Children’s Services and Early Help
- One PRU and three AP providers
- SEN team
- Education Access Team
- Education Welfare Service
- Educational Psychology Service
- Insight and intelligence team

Our quantitative data analysis joined together 700 individual files covering:

- Schools;
- Children’s Social Care (CSC);
- SEN;
- Education access (exclusions);
- Deprivation

This allowed us to build a longitudinal picture of child journeys, as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: A pupil’s journey

Child from low-income area starts secondary with SEN

Yr 7

Yr 8

Yr 9

Yr 10

Yr 11

Experiences first fixed term exclusion

Gets Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

Attendance deteriorates

Put on CIN plan

Permanent exclusion
How we did it:
(i) Qualitative methodology

We undertook a comparative literature review of national and local research on contributing factors to school exclusions. We analysed the core features of key data exclusion reports over the last five years, focusing on those which analysed a similar cohort to that examined in this report. We also drew on the Timpson Review (2019) throughout our research. This national literature review supported the wider review of school exclusions commissioned by the Department for Education, which focused on work (from 2009 to 2018) related to disproportionate exclusion rates for certain groups of children and effectiveness of preventative approaches. This review determined that most of the current reports are small scale and based on qualitative investigations rather than analysis of pupil level data. Showing, for example, there is still limited evidence regarding the gender disparity in permanent exclusion rates.

We also undertook primary qualitative research, which shaped and informed our quantitative analyses. As outlined above, we conducted interviews and workshops with 13 local education settings from across mainstream primary and secondary schools and alternative provision. These engaged practitioners across local authority services, Early Help, the education and access team and the SEN team. The interviews explored the impact of a school and its processes on exclusions, the impact of a child’s background and ongoing life experiences on exclusions, and different approaches to reducing exclusion (whether successful or not). We undertook pre-data analysis on an initial tranche of interviews to draft child and school personas. We also conducted data analysis of follow up interviews which tested and validated themes from the first round of interviews, allowing us to refine the personas and themes based on feedback. Synthesis of these findings informed our qualitative methodology: through thematic analysis of our interview data, we pulled out a number of scenarios that often lead to exclusion.

By combining these with established drivers of exclusions in existing literature, we developed a list of hypothesised risk factors for exclusion. Based on these, we identified corresponding flags in the data to test these risk factors quantitatively (see Figure 4).

How we did it:
(ii) Quantitative methodology

For our quantitative analysis we brought together data from children’s services and education to build a more holistic picture of pupils’ experiences related to exclusions. Combining datasets in this way enabled us to gain a better understanding of the interplay between pupils’ experiences inside and outside of schools, than has often been possible in the quantitative literature on school exclusions in England.

Our final dataset included 10,087 pupils for whom we have the full secondary school history. This means we focused on three cohorts of children – those who started year 7 in 2012, 2013 and 2014 (see Figure 5).

Our sample sizes were therefore reasonable but restricted, meaning we focused on trends with high significance levels to draw findings. Many of the effects shown in this report were very significant (for example we consistently found p-values of <0.001%). However, lack of statistically significant data on ethnicity was a key limitation alongside others detailed in the Limitations section in Appendix 1.

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23 Our source data was from: School Census, SSDA903 return, and the CIN Census.

24 We limited our dataset in this way for a number of reasons – see Limitations section in Appendix 1 for details.
Maximising Access to Education: Who’s at risk of exclusion?

**Figure 4:** Hypothesised Risk Factors and corresponding Risk Flags

**RISK FACTORS AND FLAGS**

- Children's Services Contact
- Experience of Trauma
- Deprivation
- EHC Plan / Statement
- Gender
- Special Educational Needs
- School Year
- Ethnicity

**Figure 5:** Cohorts included in data analysis: three cohorts of children, those who started year 7 in 2012, 2013 and 2014

![Diagram showing cohorts included in data analysis](image-url)
Findings & Recommendations

I. Defining exclusions

Our analysis uncovered a higher rate of exclusions than headline statistics suggest due to informal forms of exclusion such as persistent absence and managed moves not being captured in the national data being presented. In particular, girls are more at risk of some types of informal exclusions than boys, namely school moves and early exits. This implies that focussing solely on formal fixed and permanent exclusions risks gender bias.

A comprehensive approach

In this research we adopted a comprehensive definition of exclusion to include other ways that pupils may be removed from mainstream education. Our definition goes beyond formal permanent and fixed term exclusions, which currently dominate policy and media narratives on school exclusions. We identified six different forms of exclusions:

1. **Permanent exclusion (PEx):** A pupil is permanently removed from the school and the local authority is responsible for finding alternative full-time education.

2. **Multiple fixed term exclusions (FTEx):** A pupil is temporarily removed from school two or more times within their secondary school career. This can be for a maximum of five consecutive school days, 15 cumulative school days a term and 45 cumulative school days in an academic year. We focused on multiple fixed term exclusions to identify those pupils for whom a fixed term exclusion was more than a one-off event.

3. **Persistent absence:** A pupil misses more than 10% of school sessions through cumulative authorised and unauthorised absences.

4. **Managed move:** A voluntary agreement to transfer a pupil, at risk of exclusion and as an alternative to exclusion, between mainstream secondary schools. Managed moves do not have a distinct flag on the school census as they are not statutorily regulated. To identify managed moves in the data, we created proxy measures through dual registrations and enrolment status. Although this is a conservative definition, not exhaustive, we can be certain that these events are all managed moves.

5. **School move:** A pupil is moved between schools between school censuses. We only included school moves to another secondary mainstream school, excluding school changes to a specialist or alternative provision school.

6. **‘Early exit’:** A pupil left a mainstream secondary school prior to the final census return in year 11 and did not move to a special school or PRU. This could be for many reasons including moving out of county, attending an educational institution out of county, being home educated, or off-rolled.

We found there was strong overlap between the different forms of exclusion, as shown in Figure 6. This indicates certain pupils experience exclusion in multiple ways during their school life. It also shows that persistent absence in particular, is commonly an issue in cases of both fixed term exclusions and school moves.
Gender analysis

Applying a comprehensive understanding of exclusion, as above, revealed that girls tend to experience different forms of exclusion to boys.

Formal exclusions

Three-quarters of the formal exclusions (FTE and PEx) in our dataset were experienced by boys. This supports an existing robust body of research that shows boys are far more likely to be formally excluded than girls.25 This was not found to be reflective of gender differences in either SEN diagnoses or social care contact, nor in differences in incidences of violent behaviour. The data showed boys received more formal exclusions for every reason, not just violent behaviour. This dispels a common myth that boys receive a disproportionate number of formal exclusions due to gendered differences in incidents of such behaviour.

Our findings held when SEN status and contact with children’s social care were controlled for. This means even though boys are more commonly diagnosed with SEN, this does not explain why they receive disproportionate numbers of fixed term and permanent exclusions.26

Informal exclusions

Whilst formal exclusions are more likely to be experienced by boys, informal exclusions show a different trend. Rates of persistent absence and managed moves were similar for both boys and girls, whereas rates of school moves and early exits were higher for girls than boys (see Figure 7).

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Discussion

By using a more comprehensive definition of exclusion, we found that unofficial forms of exclusions are more likely to be experienced by girls. These do not necessarily result in the same formalised ‘permanent mark’ against a pupil’s name, however these forms of exclusion may lack the accountability mechanisms built into the formal exclusion process. Formal permanent exclusion triggers, for example, the opportunity to appeal to an Independent Review Panel.27 By contrast, unofficial forms of exclusion lack such checks and balances and do not result in the same rights to request a review of the decision. Also, school moves and early exits are not consistently nor routinely captured and reported on through existing school level data, rendering these pupils largely ‘invisible’.

This not only implies that girls are experiencing exclusion from education in distinct ways from boys, but also they are more likely to experience exclusions that lack formal accountability measures. This accountability is lacking both in a procedural sense, through the absence of appropriate appeal processes, and in the sense of transparency, scrutiny and visibility, through consistent and responsible data collection and processing. Designing a response to exclusions based on traditional formal exclusions data alone, therefore risks gender bias.

This data analysis allowed us to identify some ‘invisible’ trends and nuances within exclusions. There is great value in using data to support our understanding of an issue, both locally and nationally. Investing in the infrastructure to support this kind of work can therefore increase our capabilities in responding to a complex issue such as school exclusions, effectively.

**RECOMMENDATIONS (1)**

**Foundations:** Invest in data analysis as it is key to understanding the nuances and complexities of an issue.

**Local Government:** Use a comprehensive definition of exclusions to better record and understand the issue locally, and to avoid gender bias.

**National Government:** Review the collection, analysis and use of data to inform decision making on a national level, to ensure a comprehensive definition of exclusion is applied. To address the risk of gender bias, these trends cannot remain “invisible”.

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27 For more information on Independent Review Panels see Appendix 2 for Glossary.
Maximising Access to Education: Who’s at risk of exclusion?

II. Understanding the issue
Analysis showed that pupils living in high levels of deprivation at an area and household level have a greater risk of all types of exclusion. We also identified a small cohort with Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) needs or experience of social care support, who represent 15% of pupils, but account for 58% of multiple fixed term exclusions. These factors should be embedded in early identification processes for targeting support.

Pupils living in deprivation
We looked at deprivation using Indices of Multiple Deprivation, based on pupils’ postcodes. This approach provides a multi-dimensional view of poverty, acting as a more holistic measure than the pupil premium. We found that pupils from the top 20% deprived areas are more than twice as likely to receive multiple FTEx. Persistent absences and school moves are also more frequent amongst pupils from the most deprived areas, showing they are at greater risk of all types of exclusion.

At risk priority cohort
Pupils with specific additional needs are more at risk of exclusion than their peers. We identified contact with social care and SEN, particularly SEMH needs, as distinct risk factors for all measures of exclusion.

Contact with social care
Pupils with experience of social care contact are far more at risk of all types of exclusion than their peers, and are persistently absent four to five times more than their peers (see Figure 8). Although Looked After Children are protected from PEx by statutory regulation, they are at higher risk of all other exclusions and are most likely to receive FTEx (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Exclusion rate by contact with children’s social care

Note: 977 pupils have had some form of contact with Children’s Social Care (CSC) in CW&C. The three CSC thresholds are across a pupil’s whole educational career: both primary and secondary school. CIN are defined as those with experience of CIN status, with no future CPP nor LAC flag. CPP are defined as those with experience of CPP status with no LAC flag, but may have received CIN status previously. LAC are defined as having experience of LAC flag and also may have received CIN or CPP status. These three categories do overlap and have different cohort sizes dependant on the three flags.

Figure 9: Exclusion rate by SEN support status

Those with experience of SEN Plans do not have significantly lower risk of permanent or fixed term exclusion, but do have lower risk of a school move.

Pupils with SEN are > 8x more likely to receive a permanent exclusion.

Note: We separated SEN from SEND as secondary and user research highlighted that statutory guidance protects some pupils against exclusion/ school moves. Thus, including both children with SEN and Disabilities might, in averaging out, mask the significantly higher exclusion rates of those with SEN. 661 pupils have had some form of SEN support or SEN plan. “SEN Support” is a pupil cohort who have received some form of SEN support during their secondary school career. “SEN plan” are pupils who have been given a SEN plan during their educational career. SEN here only includes SEMH, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Speech Language and Communication Needs (SpLCN), Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD), and Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD).

Figure 10: Exclusion rate by SEN status, SEMH specific.

Children who have been identified as having SEMH needs have significantly higher exclusion rates across all measures.

Other SEN needs are also associated with higher rates of exclusion.

Note: SEMH, ASD, SLCN, SpLD, MLD as above.
Maximising Access to Education: Who’s at risk of exclusion?

Special Educational Needs
Pupils with SEN support are eight times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion than their peers (see Figure 9). While EHCP may protect against school moves, they do not reduce risk of exclusion (either permanent or fixed term). SEMH needs, in particular, carry a far greater exclusion risk compared to other SEN needs, consistent across all types of exclusion (see Figure 10).

Priority cohort
Based on the above analysis we identified a priority cohort: pupils receiving social care support or SEMH needs. This 15% of all pupils account for 58% of multiple exclusions, when defined as two or more FTEx.

Building on this finding, we identified three key groups most at risk of multiple FTEx, namely high risk, very high risk and top risk (see Figure 11).

We looked practically at what risk factors overlap and how this changes risk of exclusion.

Discussion
These findings demonstrate that, due to their needs, a priority cohort can be identified early as at risk of exclusion. Bringing data together from across agencies would create an informed approach, providing an opportunity to effectively target preventative support to the pupils who need it most, as early as possible. This could allow schools to support pupils contextually before issues arise based on the factors and flags identified. This kind of approach takes commitment as it responds to complex needs and relies on different actors working together, but the benefit to the pupils, schools and local area could be very significant.

Early identification in this way will also enable resources to be directed towards tackling the heart of the issue. By supporting this cohort of 15% of pupils, early identification may impact up to 58% of likely multiple fixed term exclusions. Using data in this way is not about predicting future exclusions but rather understanding

Note: SEMH here is based on identified need in Year 7 and includes both SEN Support/School Action/School Action Plus, and EHC Plans/Statements. Social care categories are based on whether a pupil has had that label at any point during secondary school, and are exclusive, where Very High Vulnerability excludes Top Vulnerability, and High Vulnerability excludes Top Vulnerability and Very High Vulnerability.

Special Educational Needs

Figure 11: Vulnerability cohorts and likelihood of multiple fixed term exclusion (two or more).

Probability of multiple exclusions

- LOW VULNERABILITY
  - GROUP
  - Child Protection Plan
  - Social Emotional Mental Health
  - 8256 children
  - 3%

- HIGH VULNERABILITY
  - Child in Need
  - 974 children
  - 20%

- VERY HIGH VULNERABILITY
  - Child Protection Plan
  - Social Emotional Mental Health
  - 343 children
  - 30%

- TOP VULNERABILITY
  - Looked After Child
  - 97 children
  - 43%

Note: SEMH here is based on identified need in Year 7 and includes both SEN Support/School Action/School Action Plus, and EHC Plans/Statements. Social care categories are based on whether a pupil has had that label at any point during secondary school, and are exclusive, where Very High Vulnerability excludes Top Vulnerability, and High Vulnerability excludes Top Vulnerability and Very High Vulnerability.

29 For more information on ECHPs see Appendix 2 for Glossary.
additional needs that put children at risk of exclusion. This approach allows risks to be identified earlier so support can be targeted preventatively and should be used in collaboration with more reactive approaches that identify warning signs for possibly imminent exclusions (see ‘section 4: recognising warning signs and adapting support’ of this report). Early intervention, multi-agency working and contextual decision making should be incentivised nationally to respond to the needs of this cohort and reverse the current trend of increasing exclusions. There is also a role here for non-statutory funders to support actors working in the same issue and area to facilitate this kind of work.

**RECOMMENDATIONS (2)**

**Foundations:** Provide long term funding for multiple projects in the same issue, supporting the creation of well evidenced local marketplaces to tackle complex systemic issues.

**Local Government:** Build capacity for multi-agency working to enable earlier identification of pupils in need of additional support. This means prioritising contextual decision making based on the multiple factors and flags such as those outlined in this report.

**National Government:** Invest in and incentivise early intervention based on contextual decision making across agencies, to reduce exclusions and their associated social and financial costs.

**III. Targeting support to schools under pressure**

Exclusions are a societal issue and can affect any child or school. However, there is a small proportion of schools in deprived areas that are under disproportionate pressure due to the needs of their pupils. This means exclusions are concentrated in a small number of schools, where high proportions of pupils require additional support. Support should be targeted to these schools.

**High need schools**

High rates of formal exclusions mainly occur in a few schools in west Cheshire. The highest excluding schools do so at rates that are five to ten times higher than that of the lowest excluding schools (Figure 12). In the five highest excluding schools, more than 10% of students received two or more FTEx. By contrast, in the five lowest excluding schools, less than 2% of students received two or more FTEx.

We found these high-excluding schools to be clustered in areas of deprivation, namely Chester, Winsford, Ellesmere Port, and Northwich, as shown in Figure 13. Building on our findings about at risk pupil cohorts, this suggests there is a link between place based deprivation, the level of need in a school and higher rates of exclusion.

**School behaviour policies**

Every school has a behaviour policy, which lists the rules of conduct for pupils before and after school as well as during the school day. Headteachers can exclude pupils for breaches of the school’s behaviour policy. Behaviour policies
Maximising Access to Education: Who’s at risk of exclusion?

**Figure 12: Exclusion rates across the 20 mainstream secondary schools in Cheshire West and Chester**

![Exclusion rates graph](image)

*Note:* Only includes schools with more than 100 pupils in our cohort in year 7. Exclusion rates are not based on excluding school but which school a pupil attended in year 7.

**Figure 13: Maps of Exclusion Rates compared with Indices of Multiple Deprivation**

**Deprivation**

Dark red = most deprived.

**Rate of multiple exclusions**

Dark red = highest levels of multiple fixed term exclusion.

1 = Ellesmere Port  
2 = Chester  
3 = Northwich  
4 = Winsford

*Note:* Deprivation scores based on home lower super output area, and coloured areas only include areas in the 20% most deprived nationally.
can differ greatly between schools and are commonly cited as a key driver of schools’ rates of exclusion.\(^\text{30}\)

In our qualitative research, the key differences that emerged in schools’ behaviour policies were the kinds of incidents deemed to merit exclusion, whether cumulative or ‘inexcusable’, and the rigidity or flexibility of assessing consequences for behaviour. Regarding the first, there were inconsistencies in what constitutes ‘inexcusable’ behaviours across schools. For some, only ‘inexcusable’ incidents will result in a permanent exclusion, whereas for others several fixed term exclusions could induce a permanent exclusion. Secondly, variation exists in the extent to which schools have defined consequences for actions, compared with assessing actions and deciding consequences in a contextual way on a case-by-case basis. There was also variation more broadly in what schools considered to be an ‘inclusive’ approach, ranging from one-to-one support to tailored interventions, and in the use of behaviour management platforms to enforce and uphold behaviour policies and to identify students at risk of becoming disengaged.

**Comparing exclusion rates**

To understand the variation in exclusion rates between schools, we used two data points to create an “expected” or “predicted” rate of exclusion. These data points were the factors identified above: the level of local deprivation, and the number of students with SEN and social care support. We compared this to the actual rate of exclusion and found that most of the variation (\(R^2 = 56\%\)) is explained by these factors (see Figure 14). This indicates that the level of need within a school is a key factor in understanding exclusion rates and the approach to supporting those needs is a crucial part of the solution.

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Discussion

Understanding the level of deprivation and additional needs in a school is key to targeting support effectively.

As noted in the Timpson Review, there is “too much variation” in the use of exclusions across the country. Differences in school behaviour policies are a part of this, but our analysis suggests they are not the most important driver of variations in exclusion rates between schools.

High excluding schools are those situated in areas with high levels of deprivation and with cohorts of pupils with relatively high levels of need. The variation in levels of need between schools do not, however, change the pressures schools face. Schools mentioned facing remarkably consistent pressures, including Progress 8 and attainment measures, despite great differences in their context. This suggests that local coordination of support needs to factor in the disproportionate pressure on these schools and effectively redress this. Statutory and non-statutory actors working in collaboration could be an impactful way of supporting this kind of work.

This approach will need to ‘go beyond the school gates’ given the needs of pupils, rather than putting more pressure on teachers and schools to ‘reduce poor and disruptive behaviour’ alone. This means working closely with schools to respond to the needs of pupils in the priority cohort identified in section 2, to ensure best use of resources while giving vulnerable pupils the additional support they need. This broader understanding of the pressure placed on schools would be most significant if supported by national action, whereby assessments of schools go beyond academic standing and also take into account their role in supporting vulnerable pupils from the local area.

RECOMMENDATIONS (3)

**Foundations:** Use funding to strengthen local support to parts of the system under pressure. Where possible, seek to work in partnership with the statutory sector to align support and foster a more effective approach to tackling local inequalities.

**Local Government:** Proactively target support to schools in deprived areas with higher proportions of pupils with additional needs. Where possible, seek to work in partnership with the non-statutory sector locally.

**National Government:** Go beyond comparative academic standing when assessing schools, to take into consideration deprivation levels and the proportion of pupils with additional support needs.

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IV. Recognising warning signs and adapting support

We found data points that can act as flags to alert schools of heightened risk of imminent exclusion: new and specific forms of contact with social care, persistent absenteeism, and a build-up of FTEx.

**Contact with social care**

Analysis showed that events of contact with social care tend to cluster around a permanent exclusion, namely CIN Plans, CPPs, SEN diagnosis or EHCPs or the pupil becoming a LAC. These often occur either in the run up to, or the fall out of, a permanent exclusion. CIN Plans in particular, emerged as a notable flag, with 15 of the 44 permanently excluded pupils in this analysis becoming CIN in the year prior to the permanent exclusion and another eight in the year after (see Figure 15).

**Figure 15: Permanent exclusion, social care, and SEND events over time.**

Individual journeys – each line represents 1 pupil

- CIN
- CPP
- LAC
- SEN
- EHCP

Years before and after exclusion
**Absenteeism**

Analysis showed that attendance rates deteriorate in the run-up to a formal exclusion (either permanent or fixed term) or a school move (Figure 16). Increasing absenteeism could be an indicator for unmet need and imminent exclusion.

**Build up of fixed term exclusions**

We found that a quarter of permanently excluded pupils (25%) had received 16 or more FTEx over the course of their time in mainstream secondary education. Repeat fixed term exclusions tend to build up ahead of a permanent exclusion, although this is sometimes explicit school policy (see school behaviour policies section above). Figure 17 shows that on average, pupils receive between two and three FTE in the term before a permanent exclusion. This build up of FTEx is a strong trend that can be used as a warning sign of imminent permanent exclusion.

*Figure 16: Average school attendance trajectories surrounding pupils’ first permanent exclusion, fixed term exclusion, and school move.*

*Figure 17: Average number of fixed term exclusions per term, for pupils who go on to receive a permanent exclusion.*

Note: These attendance figures are based only on children attending a school and do not include those for whom we did not have a record of their attending a school following the exclusion/move, for example if they are between schools or out of borough.
Discussion
These three data points can serve to spot escalating needs that indicate a permanent exclusion may be more likely. Given we know that most exclusions happen around year ten, these warning signs can be used to trigger support before then. This may be used to target support to pupils who had not previously shown signs of unmet need, or to adapt in the case of pupils already receiving additional support. Locally, data can therefore be used to support conversations on how to best respond to pupils’ emerging needs, to prevent a highly likely exclusion.

The findings also show that exclusions often do not work to improve attendance or behaviour for this cohort. As shown in Figure 16 above, absenteeism often increases before an exclusion, and generally remains poor within the new school setting thereafter. Similarly, we know that a small group of pupils are getting 16+ FTEs and often getting three in the term before permanent exclusion. Behaviour policies often play a part in the use of FTEs, but this suggests they do not work to improve behaviour for these pupils with these additional needs. Resources are therefore needed to help explore what works to improve attendance and behaviour for pupils with these needs, on a local and national level.

RECOMMENDATIONS (4)

Foundations: Apply common outcomes across grant making to multiple organisations, to better understand what works for vulnerable pupils holistically.

Local Government: Work with schools to use data, alongside their experiences, to understand what works to support emerging needs and to subsequently reduce exclusions.

National Government: Gather evidence on what works for this cohort in different contexts to provide robust guidance for schools and local authorities.

V. Funding
Our findings indicate that the funding formula is not working to help schools support pupils with additional needs: high thresholds for receiving additional funding and gaps in school budgets are key issues. There are also perverse financial incentives for schools to exclude pupils with additional needs, particularly if they do not reach thresholds for support.

Notional SEN budget
We found that the overall funding envelope for schools based on their pupil populations is often not enough to address the level of need, having an impact on notional SEN budgets. Notional SEN budgets are calculated by looking predominantly at the historical (rather than actual) needs data of the school population (between £400-£1,000 allocated per pupil with the assumption not every pupil will have needs that require additional funding). This overall budget should therefore only be used to support pupils with higher levels of need, up to a maximum £6,000 per pupil. Importantly, notional SEN budgets are not ringfenced and due to gaps in the school budget, we found that they were at times committed to covering costs elsewhere.33 It is a rational choice for schools to use these budgets for other activities, because the actual spend required by pupils

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33 Examples included covering additional pastoral staff costs and bringing in additional support such as mental health practitioners or primary school teachers in a secondary school setting.
is not known at the start of the school year, nor do they know who will require exactly what. Consequently, schools deploy the notional SEN budgets for other school wide activities and/or support in the absence of wider funding.

This means the allocated amount per pupil with additional needs is often not fully available to a single pupil when it is needed. A pupil cannot qualify for an EHCP or top-up funding, unless a school has demonstrated they have already spent this £6,000 on this pupil, and there is no such top-up funding for those without a SEN.

**High thresholds**

During our qualitative research, we developed pupil personas and pupil journey mapping based on examples of real pupils who had been excluded. This research consistently showed that excluded pupils commonly have multiple needs, such as experiences of trauma or undiagnosed SEN, for which there is limited or no funding, or where they do not meet any singular threshold for additional support. High thresholds for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) was cited as a key reason many schools could not access funding support for pupils with these needs.

We identified three categories of reasons why pupils were commonly excluded, each tied to a lack of funding for additional support:

- Experiences of trauma leading to increasingly disruptive behaviour over time, with pupils often presenting as minimally responsive to punishment or interventions. There is limited or no funding available to schools to support these pupils and even when available, lack of capacity across agencies means services are difficult to access.

- Special educational needs and disabilities, most commonly ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD), which would generally present in classroom contexts as persistent disruptive behaviour. Funding support, however, would depend on diagnosis, with many common disorders such as ADHD alone being insufficient to access an EHCP for the pupil.

- Single incidents, which happen with minimal or no prior record, were occasionally the reason for exclusion. Whether single incidents are considered enough to justify an exclusion depends on school policy, but the kinds of incidents which were in some cases considered to justify exclusion include violence or possession of drugs/ weapons.

**Perverse financial incentives**

After mapping case studies of real pupil’s journeys through school to the point of exclusion (see Figure 18), we overlaid the costs to the school of supporting them and the funding made available to the school for this purpose (see Figure 19). This process illustrated that pupils with multiple needs who are not able to access additional funding, often end up costing schools more than the allocated budget for that pupil.

When a pupil is permanently excluded, a school will lose the equivalent of the per pupil funding, which is the same for all pupils regardless of need. Any additional spend that was used to support that pupil is saved, however. This means the school frees up funding that can be spent elsewhere, whilst passing the cost of onwards support for that pupil to the local authority. This can create a perverse incentive to exclude pupils, particularly when they have additional needs that do not qualify for funding support.

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34 Now being funded by High Needs Block in the local authority budget.
Discussion

Whilst we know schools do not exclude based on financial incentives, this system does not currently help them support all pupils with additional needs. The current funding formula puts even more financial pressure on schools in the long term and increases the incentives to exclude pupils who need support above the allocated budget. The support given to schools under pressure needs to be reviewed nationally. In the meantime, locally, resources should be used to redress this and therefore support schools with pupils who have multiple additional needs but do not meet thresholds. Cheshire West and Chester Council is currently exploring alternative ways to create evidence based, sustainable funding cycles on a local level. Non-statutory actors could support such commitments locally to leverage impact, ease financial pressures on local actors and reduce longer term incentives to exclude particular pupils.

Figure 18: Example of a pupil journey map.

Year 7: pupil from a deprived background (qualifies for Free School Meals pupil premium) with safeguarding issues arising prior to his arrival at school. Moves into foster care during the year and begins to use the school’s internal behavioural centre.

Year 8: Pupil using internal behaviour centre. A Team Around the Family is created but behaviour continues to escalate and student has multiple FTEx and school uses external AP. Note: in this example, the pupil qualified for additional pupil premium funding, due to being in foster case. However this is not representative. Funding via top-up and EHCP is also available for some pupils, if the school can demonstrate they have used the notional SEN budget. In the majority of exclusions within our research however, the pupils either qualified only for FSM pupil premium or no additional funding at all.

Year 9: Severe safeguarding issues are highlighted out of school. Pupil not able to attend AP due to safeguarding concerns for AP staff. Pupil remains in school, being taught by a teaching assistant in the library. Behaviour continues to escalate and pupil assaults a member of staff and is permanently excluded. At this point responsibility is transferred to the local authority and the cost of an alternative provision place is approximately £26,000 (£10,000 base cost with £16,000 top up), which is entirely funded by the high needs block.
RECOMMENDATIONS (5)

**Foundations:** Match or leverage local authority commitments to early support approaches, this will help reduce incentives to exclude and ease financial pressures on schools and local authorities.

**Local Government:** Target support to help schools address multiple additional needs at lower levels, where these do not meet thresholds, to better support pupils and save money in the longer term.

**National Government:** Review the funding formula to compensate for the financial pressures faced by disadvantaged schools to support pupils with additional needs.

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**Figure 19:** Example of a pupil case study overlaid with funding available to the school.
Conclusion and our future work

Although west Cheshire's rates of exclusion are below the national average, this report has drawn out a number of insights which support the local authority to better support vulnerable pupils in their area. As part of the Maximising Access to Education programme at Social Finance, we will continue working in close partnership with Cheshire West and Chester Council (and Gloucestershire County Council) to build on these findings and develop locally tailored infrastructure to respond to the issue of rising exclusions.

Coproducing in partnership

Coproduction means different things to different people. For us, coproduction means an equal partnership across local actors to develop a deeply informed and contextually relevant response for pupils at risk of exclusion in west Cheshire. This process will involve working closely with the local authority, other agencies, providers, teachers, pupils and parents/carers. This is an opportunity to combine data analysis with lived experience to develop a holistic understanding of the issue locally and to collaboratively identify and build opportunities for change.

A systemic response

This report has given us insights into who is being excluded in west Cheshire, which will be key to any local response to the issue. Now, we will continue to explore the other elements needed for a systemic response - how a response could work and what that response could be (see Figure 2 for high level theory of change). This approach keeps the needs of the pupil at the centre while developing a contextual understanding of how the system could function differently to respond to their needs.

Develop locally, scale nationally

Despite the bespoke nature of this analysis, the findings could have significant implications for national policy making. As we continue this programme of work, we will actively engage national stakeholders and other local authorities to share relevant learnings and insights. Thanks to additional support from our partners, as we work to develop local responses across the two local authorities in the programme, we will capture and disseminate cross-cutting insights and learnings from both areas, with a view to scaling nationally in the longer term. By working both locally and nationally, we hope to influence the way we make change happen for vulnerable pupils disproportionately at risk of exclusion.
APPENDICES
Appendix 1: Research limitations

**Data quality:** The accuracy of our data relies on the correct coding of school exclusions in school census data. Inconsistent reporting or a lack of data on certain forms of educational exclusion, for example the use of internal isolation units, limited our analyses. Lack of clear and consistent data collection made it challenging to identify dual-rolling and incidents of off-rolling. We also faced challenges identifying managed moves as they are not statutorily regulated, so are not recorded by a distinct code on the school census. To do so, we constructed a proxy measure using data on dual registrations and enrolment status. These limitations in the quality of data are indicative of wider inadequacies in the current form of data collection and reporting on school exclusions.

**Scope of dataset (secondary only):** Our dataset is limited to secondary school only, which provides only a partial reflection of pupils' experiences. We decided on this approach for the following reasons:

- Permanent and fixed term exclusions are events that happen significantly more in secondary school compared to primary;
- Our user research and wider work has shown that primary schools tend to be able to manage behaviours in a way that avoids exclusion, although we are aware exclusions are rising in primary schools also;
- Previous research around exclusion highlighted that secondary schools have a more diverse cohort of pupils due to their wider geographical reach, especially in rural areas, whilst primary schools may have a characteristically more homogenous pupils cohort;
- We wanted to ensure we had a complete school picture for pupils (e.g. years 7 to 11 or years 1 to 6) and therefore focused on the former.

This approach does however, limit the scope of our work and does not pick up exclusions that occur in primary school. We know that primary contexts and the role of Early Help are crucial to understanding and responding to exclusions, even when they occur later in a pupil's education, so we welcome further research on this.

Finally, our snapshot of secondary school data does not include any longitudinal data on long term life outcomes. However, our research into existing literature showed clear evidence that exclusion from school is associated with poorer life outcomes. For example:

- Children excluded from school are much less likely to go on to receive level 5-9 at GCSE;\(^{35}\)
- More than one fifth of pupils with a permanent exclusion later go on to become NEET;\(^{36}\)
- Exclusion is 'a predictor of grooming but also a barrier to support' concerning children's exploitation along county lines;\(^{37}\)

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• 58% of young adults in prison were permanently excluded at school.\(^{38}\)
• Children excluded from school are twice as likely to carry a knife.\(^{39}\)

A recent report revisiting the Marmot Review ten years on has linked the effect of such poorer life outcomes on those groups at disproportionate risk of exclusion, presenting evidence of a compounding effect of socioeconomic inequalities.\(^{40}\) We rely, therefore, on the well established body of existing literature demonstrating the impacts of school exclusion in this regard.

**Scope of dataset (limited sample):** To avoid biasing our results, we reduced the dataset to only the students with full secondary school history. This limited our sample to 10,087 students in total covering three school years (secondary school cohorts 2012-2016, 2013-2017, and 2014-2018).

Of these students, 1,000 had received a fixed term exclusion, and 44 had received a permanent exclusion. By restricting our sample in this way, we omitted data on those pupils for whom we had only a partial reflection of their secondary school education. Some of these pupils might have experienced exclusion, particularly as most permanent exclusions occur later in a pupil’s education, but were not included in our analysis.

**Quantified factors and statistical power:** As the bulk of this data analysis was quantitative, we were limited to exploring factors which are quantifiable and recorded within existing data sets. We were therefore unable to further explore some of the factors raised in our qualitative research, such as the importance of relationships with a trusted adult as a protective factor, which is supported by other research.\(^{41}\) Where possible, we are seeking to explore these themes in our ongoing qualitative research and continue to draw upon the important work of others in this space which is complementary to our own. Ethnicity was another key theme that was raised during our research but does not feature in this report. This is because, in Cheshire West and Chester, as pupils are predominantly White British, with 3% of minority ethnicities, we did not have sufficient statistical power to meaningfully analyse this. We are therefore drawing on the findings of the Timpson Review (2019), amongst others cited in this report, to inform our response and to mitigate against disproportionate risk of exclusion for pupils of particular ethnic backgrounds, notably pupils with Black Caribbean, Irish traveller and Roma backgrounds or heritage, as noted in the Timpson Review.

**Voices of people with lived experience:** Given the sensitivity of the issue, we were cautious to safeguard the stories of children and young people, as well as their parents/carers. We acknowledged the importance of providing channels of support when opening potentially re-traumatising experiences for discussion, which we were not able to provide on this occasion. For this reason, we built up detailed pictures of real pupils’ journeys through communicating with schools and the local authority, rather than directly with those with lived experience. However, we recognise the limitations of this approach and we are wary of contributing to a wider dynamic that renders the expertise of those with lived experience.

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\(^{38}\) p.20, The Centre for Social Justice, 2018, *Providing the Alternative: How to transform school exclusion and the support that exists beyond.*


experience peripheral. As we enter the next phase of this programme, we are seeking to work with local partner organisations with expertise in providing support to children, young people, and families, who have lived experience of school exclusions. We will work through these local channels to engage people with lived experience on our initial data findings and our future work developing a systemic response to exclusions locally. We will be sharing our approach and learnings from this process in a future publication.

**Changing context:** Our data represents only a snapshot in time and we recognise the education and early help and support landscape has changed dramatically since then. For example, in March 2019 Cheshire West and Chester Council introduced a New Ways of Working – Trauma Informed Practice approach in partnership with the Department of Education under the Partners in Practice programme.

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Appendix 2: Glossary

Contact with Social Care:

- **Child in Need (CIN):** When a child is assessed by a social worker as in need of support to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development.\(^\text{43}\)
- **Child Protection Plan (CPP):** Where a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm.\(^\text{44}\)
- **Looked After Child (LAC):** Where the court places a child in the care of the local authority, for example in a foster family or in a children’s home.\(^\text{45}\)

**Early Exit:** A pupil whose last census return was before the summer of year 11. This could be for many reasons including moving out of county, attending an educational institution out of county, being home educated, or being off-rolled.

**Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP):** a plan for pupils aged up to age 25 who need more support than is available through special educational needs support. EHCP plans identify educational, health and social needs and set out the additional support to meet those needs.\(^\text{46}\)

**Formal exclusions:** an exclusion enacted by a headteacher, whereby the parents/carers of the pupil must be informed and the local authority also. There are two types of formal exclusion: fixed term exclusion and permanent exclusion:
- A fixed term exclusion (FTE) refers to a suspension of up to several days. A pupil can receive multiple FTEx but cannot be excluded for more than a total of 45 days in an academic year.
- A permanent exclusion (PEx) refers to a permanent expulsion from school. According to Government guidance this should only be used as a ‘last resort’. Following a PEx it is the local authority’s statutory responsibility to find another school place for that pupil within six days of exclusion – this may be another mainstream school, alternative provision or pupil referral unit.

**Independent Review Panel (IRP):** each local authority is required to have a fair access protocol, which directs how they handle admissions outside of the normal admissions rounds. The protocol must be agreed by a majority of schools and is binding for all schools within the local authority area. It is intended to ensure that pupils, particularly the most vulnerable, are offered a school place quickly. This includes pupils who have been excluded from school. Local authorities often coordinate the placement of pupils in partnership with local schools through a regular meeting, commonly referred to as a ‘fair access panel’. This aims to ensure that each pupil receives the most appropriate placement for their needs and that no school receives a disproportionate number of pupils with additional needs.\(^\text{47}\)

**Indices of multiple deprivation:** a multi-dimensional view of poverty incorporating income; health and disability; living environment; crime; barriers to housing and services; employment; education, skills and training. This measure of deprivation goes beyond the commonly used metric of Free School Meals (FSM), which is limited by the fact that, to receive FSM, a family needs to apply for the service, which may

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\(^\text{47}\) Ibid., p.9.
miss the most economically vulnerable who are unaware of service provision. Indices of multiple deprivation are measured at a Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) which are a standard statistical geography designed to be of a similar population size; an average of approximately 1,500 residents or 650 households in an LSOA.\textsuperscript{48}

**Informal exclusions:** other forms by which a pupil can be excluded from education (that are not ‘formal’). In this analysis, this includes persistent absence, school move, managed move and early exit.

**Managed Move:** A pupil moves from one school to another, including Alternative Provision and Pupil Referral Units, with consent of the pupil, family and both schools.

**Off-rolling:** ‘Off-rolling is the practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without a formal, permanent exclusion or by encouraging a parent to remove their child from the school roll, when the removal is primarily in the interests of the school rather than in the best interests of the pupil.’\textsuperscript{49} It is distinct from other types of pupil move because it does not involve identifying a new educational placement for the pupil. The practice of off-rolling is unlawful\textsuperscript{50}

**Persistent Absence:** A pupil has missed at least 10% of school days; both through authorised and unauthorised absences. Our definition removes all absences recorded as exclusions.

**Progress 8:** This is a measure that captures the progress that pupils in a school make from the end of primary school to the end of key stage 4. A Progress 8 score is calculated for each pupil by comparing their Attainment 8 score with the average Attainment 8 scores of all pupils nationally who had a similar starting point at the end of primary school.\textsuperscript{51}

**Social and Emotional Mental Health needs (SEMH):** a type of special educational needs where the child has severe difficulties in managing their emotions and behaviour. This means that they have trouble in building and maintaining relationships with peers and adults; they can also struggle to engage with learning and to cope in classroom without additional strategies and interventions. They often show inappropriate responses and feelings to situations.\textsuperscript{52}

**Special Educational Needs and disabilities (SEN):** A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for them.\textsuperscript{53}

**Trauma-informed practice:** this is practice designed to enhance, and work alongside, existing safeguarding protections, policies and measures for children and vulnerable adults.\textsuperscript{54}

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\textsuperscript{48} Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019, English indices of deprivation. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019


\textsuperscript{50} Partridge, L., Landreth Strong, F., Lobley, E. and Mason, D. RSA, 2020, Pinball Kids, p. 11. Available at: https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/preventing-school-exclusions


\textsuperscript{52} Department for Education, 2018, Mental health and behaviour in schools. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/755135/Mental_health_and Behaviour_in_schools__.pdf

\textsuperscript{53} Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care, 2015, SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years. p. 15. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25

\textsuperscript{54} Young Minds, 2019, Adversity and Trauma-Informed Practice: A short guide for professionals working on the frontline, p. 21. Available at: https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3091/adversity-and-trauma-informed-practice-guide-for-professionals.pdf
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