

Investigation into the causes and implications of exclusion for autistic children and young people



UNIVERSITY OF
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- **Autistic pupils are twice as likely** to be regularly and unlawfully excluded from school for a fixed term than those who do not have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- **Exclusions for autistic children and young people rose by 59%** between 2011-2016 compared to a rise in overall exclusions of 4% over the same period.
- **Educational exclusions cause a net cost to the UK economy of approximately 2.1 billion** for every cohort of excluded pupils.
- **Every region in England has had an increase in the number of school exclusions** for pupils on the autism spectrum of between 45% and 100% in the last five years.

within school behaviour policies and how to train their staff on the matter.

- 6) Introduce greater independent monitoring of schools' exclusion processes and interventions when illegal exclusions occur.

About the research

The investigation of the causes and implications of exclusion for autistic children and young people involved data from questionnaires to parents of autistic pupils, educational leaders and autistic adults on the causes, the types and the consequences of school exclusion. With the aim of highlighting the impacts of exclusion on the child, young person, and their family as well as generating a better understanding of the causes underlying exclusions.

Policy recommendations

- 1) Provide national and individual school guidance on exclusion policy related to autism and more broadly on SEN and SEMH.
- 2) Create good practice guidelines on how and what to communicate to families and pupils at each stage of the exclusion process, to ensure essential information is passed on at appropriate times.
- 3) Make it a legal requirement for schools to use a specific code for recording absence due to pupils being on part-time timetables.
- 4) Provide clearer guidance to schools as to the decision process they should be undertaking when making exclusions (i.e. justifying their reasons).
- 5) Provide guidance on how senior leadership should be including statements on SEND and autism

Why do exclusions happen?

From the 2018-19 DfE dataset the most common reason for permanent and fixed-term exclusions in the general school population is persistent and disruptive behaviour. For autistic pupils, the most common reasons given for permanent exclusions were 'physical assault against an adult' (32%) and 'persistent disruptive behaviour' (21%). For fixed term exclusions 21% of schools reported 'physical assault against an adult' as the reason, with 'persistent disruptive behaviour' given as a reason in 22% of cases. In the DfE categories of reasons for excluding, there is an option for the school to select 'other'. It is unclear what fits in this category, and a deeper understanding of the 17% of permanent and 14% of fixed-term exclusions categorised as 'other' would provide insights into the reasoning behind and purpose of some exclusions made of autistic pupils that are not covered by the standard list of exclusions.

Our findings demonstrated that autistic pupils often communicate distress through their behaviour, and that there is a need to focus on how the education system can better meet the needs of autistic pupils. We found that exclusion of autistic pupils is linked to the failure of staff to make reasonable adjustments, inadequate systems and policies, or budgets being cut in the areas of pastoral and mental health support. It was clear that this is an area of tension between education systems (and possibly policy makers) on the one side and autistic CYP and their families on the other.

The impact of exclusions

The impact of exclusion on autistic CYP is profound and lifelong. Many of the autistic adults we spoke to were still emotionally affected, even in their 40s and 50s. It left for many a sense of injustice and anger. For some autistic respondents, being excluded had impacted on their later successes or they were having to work even harder to catch up. Parents spoke about the emotional impact of exclusion for their children and how they felt stigmatised and let down by the education system.

The most common responses were:

- Impact on their self-esteem (83%)
- Isolation from their friends (58%)
- Feeling let down by the education system (54%)
- Impact on academic performance (50%)
- The child feeling stigmatised (48%).

Exclusion places additional demands on families as managing reduced timetables is complex and leads to additional pressures. Many families need to give up work and this often leads to financial pressures. This has a disproportionate impact on mothers. Parent data on the impact of exclusion highlighted the following most frequent impacts on families. These concluded that exclusion:

- Caused stress (97%)
- Led to having to take time off work (76%)
- Impacted on finance (47%)
- Caused problems for siblings (42%).

Several strands of our data found that exclusion also leads to isolation and stigma for the whole family. This in

turn impacts on family relationships and dynamics, including siblings.

Conclusion

Children and young people on the autism spectrum face disproportionately high rates of school exclusion and frequently report a range of negative educational experiences, which can have a significant impact on their wellbeing and educational outcomes. The implementation of appropriate educational support for these pupils is vital to reduce school exclusions and ensure positive educational experiences.

There is urgent need for:

More support - this includes support from local authority, autism teams and other external services for the pupil and their family during exclusion.

Training for education staff - in-depth understanding of autism, supporting behaviour and understanding exclusion process.

Better funding - to make required environmental changes and to provide additional staff.

Appropriate placement - greater availability of special school placements and ensuring that the children placed in mainstream schools can cope in this situation.

Improved resources - more space in the schools to provide safe spaces, sensory rooms etc., and staff.

Systemic changes - individualised behaviour policies, change in inspection criteria, careful management of admissions, less bureaucracy.

Contact

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