

# Inclusion not exclusion:

Cross-sector collaboration needed to prevent and reduce the number of pupil suspensions and exclusions in UK schools.



## Background

**School suspension and exclusion is a growing and costly problem – for our children and young people, for school communities and for society as a whole.**

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) calculated the lifetime cost to the state for last year's cohort of officially excluded young people, at over £2.9bn.

However, there is evidence of what can help, and solutions and examples of good practice that have a growing body of evidence to support them.

Our challenge now is to marshal a concerted national effort to support the implementation of these solutions, in a sustainable way. Throughout, we must keep the individual needs of each young person at the centre of our thinking.

## Purpose

Children's mental health charity Place2Be hosted a cross-sector roundtable on 18 May 2023, during Mental Health Awareness Week. Chaired by former Director of Mental Health for Public Health

England, Gregor Henderson, the session brought together leading figures from the education, health, justice and voluntary sectors to focus on the solutions to reducing exclusions and suspensions. Participants discussed the problem and its drivers, from the perspectives of their different sectors. Speakers highlighted the growing concern about the exclusion or suspension of children and young people from schools. They also discussed the connection between poor mental health and school exclusion, highlighted by evidence from Place2Be's published research.

Some **key challenges** identified by the group are:

- Ensuring that we do not locate the problem in the child;
- A child in difficulty should not be the sole responsibility of the school;
- The importance of understanding and addressing the underlying causes that can lead to exclusion and suspension from school. Evidence shows the key risk factors include: being from lower socio-economic groups, being from certain marginalised ethnic and racial groups, and having Special Educational Needs (SEND) - including speech, language and communication needs - which have not been addressed;
- A lack of understanding or awareness of the underlying causes of mental health issues and the importance of recognising that behaviour is a means of communication – which is sometimes the case among parents/carers, families, teachers, teaching assistants, and others with responsibility for the child's care and welfare;
- Potential perverse incentives e.g. Ofsted pressures for academic success, resulting in 'problem' children sometimes being excluded from school, to minimise their impact on a school's performance;
- A lack of - or limited - available funding for in-school targeted mental health support;
- The importance of senior decision-makers, such as school governors, understanding why this investment is needed.

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**Practical solutions** identified by the group are:

- Better understanding of the individual needs of a child. This includes better and faster assessment to identify which children and young people need which type of help; and which children are more at risk of exclusion;
- A recognition of the importance of good relationships to give a child or young person the best start in life and support throughout their school years;
- Engendering a school culture and ethos, which sees the nurturing approaches of targeted mental health support adopted throughout the school, as part of a whole-school approach to wellbeing and inclusion, from Governors and School Leadership to classroom support staff;
- Supporting the school workforce. Building and developing a school workforce with a better understanding of child development, mental health and risk factors. This includes incorporating mental health into all teacher training; and this should include training for teaching assistants too;
- Involving parents and families, supporting them to help their children to move forward, through mental health training and advice;
- The need for high quality and regulated Alternative Provision, for children who are not in mainstream school;
- Better data to examine the scale and impact of the problem; and better sharing of this data. This is fundamental to ensure a better, more informed understanding of the true scale and cost of school suspensions on society; and to assess how funding is currently allocated and how effective this is;
- School governing bodies to have the skills to understand the needs of children and how vulnerabilities impact on behaviour; and their role in addressing these needs;
- Providing specialist, targeted mental health support within all UK schools, which is proven to help reduce the number of exclusions. Place2Be discussed its experience of delivering embedded mental health support in schools and the evidence underpinning why this can be part of the solution. The findings from Place2Be's published research paper were shared in the session.

## Outcomes

**The group agreed that a systemic approach to preventing exclusions is essential. We need a multi-agency, integrated and collaborative approach, to agree joined-up solutions to address the underlying causes that lead to exclusions and suspensions.**

The roundtable participants agreed to continue to work together to share learnings and best practice, as part of their shared mission to improve the life chances and educational outcomes for some of society's most vulnerable children and young people across the UK.



## Definitions

The term '**suspension**' is a reference to what is described in legislation as 'an exclusion for a fixed period'.

**'Permanent exclusion'** means a child is expelled. They are barred from attending school and their name is removed from the school register. The Local Authority must arrange alternate full-time education from the sixth school day following a permanent exclusion.

Only the Head Teacher of a school can suspend or permanently exclude a pupil on disciplinary grounds.

A pupil may be suspended for one or more fixed periods (up to a maximum of 45 school days in a single academic year), or permanently excluded.

## Roundtable participants

Chris Brown

Principal

**Bridge Academy (Secondary)**

[bridgeacademy.hackney.sch.uk](http://bridgeacademy.hackney.sch.uk)

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Alexandra Galvin

Senior Policy Researcher – Family Policy Unit

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Sonia Chhatwal

Chief Executive

**DHL Foundation**

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Rose Hughes

Chief of Staff

**The Difference**

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Jo Hutchinson

Director for SEND and Additional Needs

**Education Policy Institute**

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Jack Reynolds

Co-Founder and Chief Executive

**Football Beyond Borders**

[footballbeyondborders.org](http://footballbeyondborders.org)

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Prof. Alice Jones Bartoli

Director - Unit for School and Family Studies

**Department of Psychology, Goldsmiths,  
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Danny Swift

Investment Director

**Impetus**

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Sharon Jones

Head of Grants

**Mission 44**

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Fiona Fearon

Policy and Projects Manager

**National Governance Association (NGA)**

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Adam Browne

Regional Director for London and Southeast  
and National Lead on Exclusions

**Oasis Academies / Oasis Community Learning**

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Brenda McHugh MBE

Consultant Psychotherapist, Inclusion and  
Specialist Help in Schools Lead & School Co-  
Founder

**The Pears Family School / Anna Freud Centre**

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Jon Franklin

**Chief Economist**

ProBono Economics

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Mehak Tejani

Education Systems Lead

**The RSA (Royal Society for Arts,  
Manufactures and Commerce)**

[thersa.org](http://thersa.org)

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Prof. Tamsin Ford CBE

Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
Place2Be Research Chair

**Department of Psychiatry, University of  
Cambridge**

[psychiatry.cam.ac.uk/groups/developmental-  
psychopathology](http://psychiatry.cam.ac.uk/groups/developmental-psychopathology)

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Catherine Roche - Chief Executive

Sarah Golden - Head of Evaluation

Liz Greetham - Trustee

David Weaver - Adviser to Board of Trustees

**Place2Be**

[place2be.org.uk](http://place2be.org.uk)

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Tamsin Ford, Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, University of Cambridge:

“If you have poor mental health, you are more likely to be excluded. From a mental health point of view, exclusion is a blunt and not helpful tool. There are things we can do at a whole-school level and individually that improve mental health, but also prevent children from being excluded.”

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Jo Hutchinson, Director for SEND and Additional Needs – Education Policy Institute:

“It’s really important that we build the understanding in schools around the impact of exclusions. When we exclude or suspend a child from school, we are severing a sense of community, belonging and safety – which can be a trigger for things to spiral out of control.”

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Chris Brown, Principal, The Bridge Academy (Hackney):

“Having in-school mental health expertise has been transformative. The impact on families and students is incredible. We recognise we are fortunate in having matched funding for this support – and not all schools are in that position.”

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Mehak Tejani, Education Systems Lead, The RSA:

“You can provide counselling, but if the child is going back into a school that doesn’t have the right environment and culture to support the child and understanding of what’s going on, then the pattern of disruption caused by unmet need will repeat. As well as whole-school approaches, we also need to support schools to deliver on their universal offer and ensure a universal understanding of inclusion.”

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Catherine Roche, CEO, Place2Be:

“From our first-hand experience of providing universal, integrated, and comprehensive whole-school mental health support in schools, we know solutions exist and the long-term human and social cost of a child being excluded from education can be prevented. Today’s roundtable shows the opportunity, commitment and value of working collaboratively to solve this challenge.”