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Review of practices used in maintained schools and pupil referral units to prevent exclusions

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Review of practices used in maintained schools and pupil referral units to prevent exclusions

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Glossary

Acronym	Definition
ACE	Adverse childhood experience
ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
ALN	Additional learning needs. Prior to the ALNET Act 'Special Educational Needs' or 'SEN', were terms used for needs requiring additional provision. These old terms may still be used as the Act becomes fully implemented.
ALN	Additional learning needs
ALNCo	Additional learning needs co-ordinator
ASD	Autism spectrum disorder
CAMHS	Child and adolescent mental health service
CBT	Cognitive behavioural therapy
FSM	Free school meals[1]
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
eFSM	Eligible for free school meals
ELSA	Emotional literacy support assistant
EOTAS	Education otherwise than at school
PLASC	Pupil level annual schools census
PRU	Pupil referral unit

[1] This does not refer to those receiving FSM via the Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM) offer.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Welsh Government commissioned York Consulting to undertake a review of practices used by maintained schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) to prevent fixed-term and permanent school exclusions and to explore how local authorities, schools, children, and their parents/carers[2] can be supported to prevent school exclusions.

1.2 The objectives of the research were to:

- Explore practices and approaches used by maintained schools and PRUs that are considered to be effective for:
  - Preventing fixed-term and permanent exclusions.
  - Maintaining contact and engagement with children who are excluded for a fixed-term.
  - Supporting the reintegration of children back into mainstream education following an exclusion.
- Understand the support local authorities, maintained schools and PRUs, parents, and children need to prevent exclusions, maintain engagement following fixed-term exclusions, and support transition back into mainstream education where children have been excluded.
- Develop recommendations for how maintained schools and PRUs can prevent fixed-term and permanent school exclusions, as well as how local authorities, schools, children, and parents can be supported to prevent school exclusions, maintain engagement following fixed-term exclusions, and support transition back into mainstream education where children have been excluded.

1.3 This report details the findings from the review.

Background and context

1.4 Published literature highlights a range of negative impacts for children excluded from schools. In the shorter-term, this includes direct adverse impacts on mental health and wellbeing (Munn and Lloyd, 2005; Martin-Denham, 2020) and poor

[2] Throughout the rest of this report, the term ‘parents’ will be used to refer to parents and carers for ease.

educational outcomes (DfE, 2011; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2020; Martin-Denham 2020). In the longer-term, school exclusion has pervasive negative effects into adulthood with decreased earnings potential and increased risk of unemployment, mental and physical issues, homelessness and involvement with criminal activities (Daniels, 2011; Madia et al., 2022; Pirrie et al., 2011).

1.5 Research evidence on the potential benefits of exclusions is scarce by comparison (Madia et al., 2022). Martin-Denham's (2021) research with headteachers in the UK found that while some identified benefits, including the safety of children and staff, opportunities to find external solutions, and time for the child and caregivers to reflect, others reported that there were no benefits to school exclusion and no lasting positive effect on the behaviour of those that are excluded. Other research highlights the shortfalls of exclusion practices due to their reluctance to identify the child's underlying difficulties (Dupper et al., 2009; Bowman-Perot et al. 2013; Martin-Denham 2020).

1.6 The Welsh Government has an enduring priority of supporting learning settings to ensure that learners can be supported to achieve their potential. The *Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2011*, the Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being (Welsh Government 2021b) and the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 are examples of some of the most substantial interventions that include focus on ensuring that the needs of children experiencing difficulties at school are met.

1.7 Exclusion from Schools and Pupil Referral Units (Welsh Government, 2019a – first published 2012) provides guidance on exclusions and appeal procedures for both mainstream schools and PRUs. At the time of writing, the guidance was being updated to reflect recent legislative and policy changes, to strengthen the guidance around children with protected characteristics and to promote a rights-based and trauma-informed approach.

1.8 A range of other Welsh Government guidance sets out further advice and expectations for schools and PRUs regarding attendance, attainment, wellbeing, behaviour and inclusion. These include 'Inclusion and Pupil Support' (Welsh Government, 2016a), 'Effective Managed Moves' (Welsh Government, 2011), 'Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental

wellbeing' (Welsh Government, 2021b), 'Youth Engagement and Progression Framework: Overview' (Welsh Government, 2022a – first introduced in 2013), 'Rights, Respect, Equality' (Welsh Government, 2019b), 'Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales' (Welsh Government, 2016b) and 'Belonging, engaging and participating: Guidance on improving learner engagement and attendance' (Welsh Government, 2023a).

Defining exclusion

1.9 Under Section 52 of the *Education Act 2002*, only the headteacher of a school or PRU has the power to exclude a child.

1.10 The decision to exclude a pupil should be taken only if a serious breach of the school's behaviour policy has occurred and if allowing the child to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the child or other children.

1.11 There are two types of school exclusion – permanent and fixed-term (Welsh Government, 2019a)[3]:

- **Permanent exclusion:** The child is not allowed to return to the school and their name is removed from the school roll (following the conclusion of any appeals process). The guidance makes it clear that permanent exclusion is a matter of last resort and is a recognition that all available strategies to help the child remain in school have been exhausted.
- **Fixed-term exclusion**: The child is excluded for a specific period and is not able to attend their school during that time. In Wales, fixed-term exclusions must not exceed 45 days in one school year.

1.12 There are also some exclusion practices that are not legal nor recorded in official statistics. These include:

- **Unlawful exclusion:** this includes sending children home for disciplinary reasons, or to 'cool off', but not following the procedures required for formal

[3] 'Fixed period' and 'permanent' school exclusions were introduced by The Education Act (1986, c.61) allowing the removal of a child from school if they were deemed to be persistently or severely deviating from the school's behaviour policy, and when allowing them to remain would seriously harm the education or welfare of others. (DfE, 2017).

exclusion. Such practices are unlawful regardless of whether or not they are carried out with the parents' agreement (Welsh Government, 2019a).

- **Off-rolling:** this includes removing a pupil from the school roll where this is not provided for under the *Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010* or encouraging a parent to 'voluntarily' withdraw the pupil from the school roll. These practices are primarily in the interests of the school (e.g., to avoid recording a formal exclusion or to enhance reported Year 11 outcomes data), rather than in the best interests of the pupil (Estyn, 2019; Ofsted, 2018).

1.13 Whilst there has been some evidence of off-rolling in Wales (Welsh Government 2018; Estyn, 2019), current policy supports a removal of the systemic incentives that can contribute to it. Specifically, there is a greater focus on enabling progression for all children via the Curriculum for Wales and School Improvement Guidance: Framework for Evaluation, Improvement and Accountability (Welsh Government, 2022c).

1.14 Welsh Government Guidance (2019a) further requires that exclusions should not be used if alternative solutions are available. These might include the following, which are also considered as preventative approaches later in this review:

- **Pastoral support programmes:** plans to help children better manage their behaviour, drawn up using a multi-agency approach and reviewed on a regular basis.
- **Restorative justice:** an approach to addressing behavioural issues and conflict which uses dialogue to encourage accountability for an individual's actions and the repairing of relationships where harm has occurred.
- **Internal exclusions:** used to diffuse situations in school that require a child to be temporarily removed from the classroom to a designated area within the school or to another class.
- **Managed moves:** where it is in the best interests of the child to move schools to provide a fresh start.

1.15 Whilst reduced timetables might also be considered an alternative to exclusion by some stakeholders, the guidance (Welsh Government, 2023a) is clear that reduced timetables should only be used in exceptional circumstances as a short-term

measure, (generally no more than a six-week period) with the intention of returning to full-time attendance at school sooner, if feasible. Schools should ensure children who are on a reduced timetable, receive a full education, where this is appropriate for individual children.

1.16 In addition, the guidance is clear that reduced timetables should never be used as a means of managing behavioural issues. Thus, reduced timetables should not be used as an alternative to exclusion Welsh Government (2023a).

Exclusion rates

1.17 As shown in Table 1.1, permanent exclusion rates in maintained schools rose each year between 2014/15 and 2018/19 (Welsh Government, 2022b). The rate falls in 2019/20 and 2020/21 and this reduction should be interpreted with caution as it likely to be due to the widespread and frequent closure of schools between March 2020 and February 2021 during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. A phased return of all pupils was not completed until April 2021. There was a small increase in permanent exclusions in 2021/22 from 2018/19 to the highest rate seen during this period.

Table 1.1 Rates of permanent exclusion in Wales – 2014/15 to 2021/22

Academic year	Rate of permanent exclusions per 1,000 pupils
2014/15	0.19
2015/16	0.23
2016/17	0.35
2017/18	0.36
2018/19	0.53
2019/20	0.47
2020/21	0.27
2021/22	0.58

Source: Exclusions from Maintained Schools: September 2021 to August 2022, Welsh Government (2023b)

1.18 Table 1.2 displays fixed-term exclusion data in maintained schools broken down into two categories: exclusions of five days or less and those over five days. Each category shows a different pattern:

- **Five days or less**. Year-on-year increases occurred between 2014/15 and 2018/19, followed by decreases influenced by school closures during the COVID-

19 pandemic. There was an increase in the rate of fixed-term exclusions (5 days or less) in 2021/22 from 2018/19 to the highest rate observed during this time period.

- **Over five days**. Overall rates have remained similar despite some fluctuations each year between 2014/15 and 2018/19. There was a clear decrease over 2019/20 and 2020/21, again influenced by school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021/22, the rate of fixed-term exclusions (more than 5 days) increased from 2018/19 to the highest rate seen during this time-period.

Table 1.2 Rates of fixed-term exclusion in Wales per 1,000 pupils – 2014/15 to 2021/22

Academic year	Five days or less	More than five days
2014/15	28.01	1.68
2015/16	28.81	1.35
2016/17	32.43	1.80
2017/18	34.74	1.67
2018/19	39.10	1.68
2019/20	27.19	1.17
2020/21	26.41	1.07
2021/22	48.83	1.98

Source: Exclusions from Maintained Schools: September 2021 to August 2022, Welsh Government (2023b)

1.19 Overall, this data highlights that exclusion rates for permanent and fixed-term exclusions (5 days or less) increased each year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic from 2014/15 to 2018/19. Compared to 2018/19, all exclusion rates have further increased since the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.20 Similarly, local reports suggests that exclusion rates have increased:

- Caerphilly County Borough Council (2023) reported an increase in permanent and fixed-term exclusions in autumn 2022. The council also noted that “the number of permanent exclusions across secondary schools remains too high and the rates of fixed-term exclusions and number of days lost are too high across primary and secondary schools”.
- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (2023) reported an increase in fixed-term and permanent exclusions between September 2022 and March 2023,

when compared with the same period in the previous year. They also stated that "similar patterns of increases are being experienced by local authorities across Wales post COVID".

1.21 Table 1.3 shows average rates of exclusion (per 1,000 pupils) by school sector in Wales in 2021/22. For both permanent and fixed-term exclusions, rates are lowest, by a considerable margin, in primary schools. Secondary schools had the highest rates of fixed-term and permanent exclusions (Welsh Government, 2023b).

Table 1.3 Rates of exclusion in Wales per 1,000 pupils by school type – 2021/22

	Permanent	Fixed-term (5 days or less)	Fixed-term (Over 5 days)
Primary schools	0.03	9.77	0.33
Middle schools	0.89	95.71	2.40
Secondary schools	1.40	101.14	4.31
Special schools	0.00	76.56	2.56

Source: Exclusions from Maintained Schools: September 2021 to August 2022, Welsh Government (2023b).

Factors influencing exclusion rates

1.22 Published literature highlights several factors that influence exclusion rates, and recent increases in some of these could explain a rise in exclusions in Wales (pre and post COVID-19). Factors influencing exclusion rates can be broadly categorised into societal, school-based, family-based, and child-based factors.

1.23 **Societal factors:** Broader societal issues, such as poverty, family instability and family mental wellbeing, can affect children's behaviour and wellbeing (Kiernan and Mensah, 2009), which in turn has potential to impact on rates of exclusion (Klein, Sosu and Dare, 2020). For example, Tseliou (2021a, 2021b) suggests that excluded children are more likely to be eligible for free school meals (eFSM), highlighting the link between deprivation and school exclusions. The COVID-19 pandemic has had direct impacts on exclusion rates, leading to decreases in the short-term because of school closures, followed by sharp increases in exclusion rates. This increase may reflect a wealth of different reasons such as a backlog of disciplinary issues, an adjustment period as children returned to schools, but also more complex underlying reasons caused or exacerbated by the pandemic such as increased mental health difficulties in children and families (Samji et al. 2022),

greater familial stress and pressures (e.g., increased financial instability (Gayatri and Irawaty, 2021)), and persisting impacts of educational disruption or inequalities experienced during the pandemic (Parentkind, 2023; Blundell et al. 2022). The adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic may have been further compounded by the cost-of-living crisis, which has put increased financial and mental strain on individuals (Chapman et al. 2022). Indeed, Partridge et al. (2020) and Samaritans (2019) highlight rising poverty, loneliness and social isolation, together with a rise in mental ill-health and increasing numbers of children with a social worker. These complex and interacting wider societal trends and pressures may have contributed to the rising exclusion rates in children and young people.

1.24 **School-based factors:** Factors that influence exclusion rates include a range of conditions at school level such as school-specific behaviour management practices and values, teacher training and specialist support structures in place for identifying and meeting learning needs, the availability of pastoral and transition support, and effective connections with parents (Partridge et al., 2020; Graham et al., 2019). Power and Taylor (2021) found that some schools in Wales are much better placed than others to provide these support structures, with better access to resources (physical space and dedicated staffing) to manage them internally.

1.25 **Family-based factors**: There is evidence that parental attitudes toward school attendance have shifted significantly due to COVID-19 and socio-economic factors. Burtonshaw and Dorrell (2023) reported that many parents no longer consider every school day crucial, and there has been a worsening in the relationship between schools and parents across socio-economic groups. Further, increasing mental health difficulties, family poverty, acceptance of term-time holidays, and strict attendance systems adversely contribute to attendance issues. While not directly exploring school exclusions, poor school attendance shares many of the same risk factors (e.g., exposure to family and domestic violence, Orr et al., 2023) and can be an early warning sign of poor later outcomes.

1.26 **Child-based factors:** Exclusions occur at a disproportionately high rate amongst certain groups of children (Welsh Government, 2023b).

- **Boys:** In 2021/22, boys were excluded from schools around twice as often as girls.
- **Ethnic background:** In 2021/22, children with a Roma ethnic background had the highest rate of shorter fixed-term exclusions (5 five days or less), while those with a White ethnic background had the highest rate of longer fixed-term exclusions (over 5 five days). Children with a Black ethnic background had the highest rate of permanent exclusions.
- **Children eligible for FSM:** In 2021/22, the rate of exclusions amongst children eligible for FSM was almost four times higher than amongst those not eligible.
- **Children with additional learning needs (ALN):** pupils with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties needs had the highest rates of exclusions in 2021/22:
    - The rate of fixed-term exclusions for pupils with an ADHD special educational needs (SEN)/ALN was 407 per 1,000 pupils.
    - The rate of fixed-term exclusions with a or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties SEN/ALN was 394 per 1,000 pupils.
    - Pupils with a profound and multiple learning difficulties need have the lowest rate of fixed-term exclusions. These pupils are the only group with SEN/ALN that have a lower rate of exclusions than pupils with no SEN/ALN.
- The rate of fixed-term exclusions has increased for most needs between 2018/19 and 2021/22. However, the rate of exclusions for pupils without SEN/ALN has almost doubled from 16.5 to 31.4 in the same time period.

1.27 Research further highlights links between cognitive, emotional and socio-economic vulnerabilities in children with an increased risk for and the likelihood of school exclusion:

- **Mental health and wellbeing:** John et al. (2022) found that individuals with a record of a neurodevelopmental disorder, mental disorder or self-harm were more likely to be absent or excluded, while research undertaken as part of HeadStart (Lereya and Deighton, 2019) found that children who were excluded had lower scores for positive wellbeing compared to those not excluded. Tseliou

(2021c) found that, between 2011/12 and 2018/19 in Wales, children with mental health needs were more likely to have been excluded than those without.

- **Social and emotional difficulties:** Graham et al. (2019) identified social and emotional needs as one of several vulnerabilities increasing a child's risk of exclusion. Lereya and Deighton (2019) also found that excluded children typically reported higher perceived stress, lower levels of empathy and poorer problem solving, goal setting and emotion management than those not excluded.
- **Behavioural:** Lereya and Deighton (2019) noted that children who were excluded from schools had higher scores for behavioural difficulties, difficulties with their concentration and relationships with peers and attention difficulties.
- **Multiple ALN types**: Tseliou (2022) found a higher proportion of longer fixed term and permanent exclusions were recorded among children with multiple ALN types, suggesting that children with complex needs could be experiencing more disruptions in their education.
- **Poverty and challenging home lives**: Graham et al. (2019) and Gill (2017) identified certain vulnerabilities that increase a child's risk of exclusion. These include growing up in poverty, life trauma such as adverse childhood experiences (ACE), having a social worker and challenges in home life.

Why are children excluded?

1.28 Welsh Government data (2023b) shows that the most common reason given for all exclusions (all exclusions, of all lengths, fixed term and permanent) in 2021/22 was 'persistent disruptive behaviour' at just under a quarter of all exclusions. The second most common reason was 'verbal abuse/threatening behaviour against an adult' at 20 per cent of all exclusions.

1.29 Looking at specific lengths of exclusions:

- 'Persistent disruptive behaviour' was the most common reason given for fixed-term exclusions of 5 days or less at 25.0 per cent of those exclusions.
- 'Physical assault against a pupil' was the most common reason for fixed-term exclusions of 5 days or more accounting for 25.4 per cent of those exclusions.

- The most common reasons for permanent exclusions were ‘physical assault against a pupil’ at 22.7 per cent of those exclusions.

Report structure

1.30 The rest of the report is structured as follows:

- **Methodology:** Presenting the sample characteristics and methods used as part of the research, outlining the approach for the: literature review, scoping interviews, school/PRU survey, interviews with local authority staff, school staff, parents and children.
- **Research findings: contextual issues about the current system.** Outlines issues highlighted by interviewees that give context to the practices used by schools and PRUs to prevent fixed-term and permanent exclusion.
- **Research findings: practices used by schools and PRUs to prevent exclusion.** Describes the practices used to identify children at risk of exclusion and those used to prevent exclusion in Wales.
- **Research findings: practices to maintain contact during fixed-term exclusion.** Covering communication with the child and their parents and the checking and monitoring of schoolwork.
- **Research findings: practices to support reintegration following a fixed-term exclusion.** Including the approaches taken during reintegration meetings and regular dialogue with the child and their parents.
- **Support needed to prevent exclusions, maintain engagement and support reintegration back into mainstream education.** Describes the varied support that stakeholders identified as helpful.
- **Conclusions and recommendations.** Sets out the conclusions from this review and outlines recommendations which could be effective in preventing exclusions, maintaining engagement and supporting reintegration back into mainstream education.

1.31 Three annexes include:

- **Research framework.** Sets out the detailed questions to be explored through the research.
- **Research instruments.** Topic guides and questionnaires used in the research.

- **Research findings: literature review.** Discusses available literature on approaches and interventions to reduce exclusion and evidence of their effectiveness.

Reporting conventions

1.32 The word ‘parent’ is used throughout this report to include parents and carers. The term ‘headteacher’ includes ‘teacher in charge’ at PRUs. The term ‘middle’ school includes ‘all-through’ schools.

2. Methodology

Introduction

2.1 The research (literature review and scoping interviews) began in March 2023. The fieldwork was conducted between April and July 2023. The research included:

- A literature review.
- Scoping interviews with national and local stakeholders.
- A school survey (pro forma) to recruit schools for fieldwork.
- Interviews with local authority inclusion officers.
- Interviews with senior leaders, teachers and pastoral staff in schools and PRUs.
- Interviews with children previously at risk of exclusion or who had experienced exclusion.
- Interviews with parents of children previously at risk of exclusion or who had experienced exclusion.

2.2 The research questions were:

- What strategies or approaches are considered to positively support the prevention of fixed-term and/or permanent exclusions for children in maintained schools and PRUs respectively, and how?
- Are there strategies or approaches that are considered to positively support the prevention of school exclusions around specific times in a child's education?
- For children who have experienced fixed-term exclusions, what strategies or approaches are considered to positively support the prevention of further exclusions, including permanent exclusions, and why?
- What strategies or approaches are considered effective in maintaining positive contact and engagement with children who have been fixed-term excluded, and why?
- What strategies or approaches are considered effective in positively supporting the reintegration of children who have been fixed-term excluded to mainstream education, and why?
- How can local authorities, schools and PRUs be supported, and by whom, to help children and their parents avoid exclusions?

- How can these organisations and participants be supported to facilitate the return of children who have been permanently excluded to mainstream education?

2.3 A research framework set out the detailed questions to be explored through the research (Annex A). All research instruments, such as topic guides, were developed with and signed off by the contract manager and Welsh Government policy team (see Annex B). All research tools, information sheets and privacy notices were made available via the medium of Welsh and English.

Literature review

2.4 The literature review in Annex C discusses interventions and practices that can help prevent exclusions. The review was undertaken iteratively between March and September 2023. The original search terms used in the review are shown below (where appropriate, these were appended with '+ exclusion' and '+ Wales'). As findings began to emerge from the primary research, the scope of the review was broadened to ensure that the interventions and approaches cited in the primary research were also covered by the literature review. The scope was then broadened further to consider not only the direct impacts of the interventions on exclusions, but also indirect impacts. This meant considering literature that explored the impact of interventions and practices on outcomes that are known risk factors for exclusion (social and emotional wellbeing, challenging behaviour etc.).

Original search terms used in the literature review		
School exclusion	Permanent exclusion	Fixed-term exclusion
Alternative provision	Education otherwise than at school / EOTAS	Practices to prevent school exclusion
Interventions to prevent school exclusion	Preventing school exclusion	School exclusion case studies
Pupil Referral Unit exclusion	Reintegration after exclusion	Managed move
Alternative provision and mainstream school	Reasons for school exclusion	Additional learning needs
Pastoral support programme	Whole-school approach to exclusion	Hidden exclusion
Pastoral support plan	Illegal moves school exclusion	Counselling in school
Classroom exclusion	Nurture group	Therapeutic approaches in school
Mentoring in school	Emotional Literacy Support Assistant	Trauma-informed practice
Social and emotional skills development	Reduced timetable	Person-centred practice[4]

2.5 Google and Google Scholar were used to identify relevant material for inclusion in the review. Academic databases and journal repositories were also used, including the British Education Index, the International Education Journal and the Cambridge Journal of Education.

2.6 It was agreed between the researchers and the client team at the Welsh Government that the primary inclusion criteria (in addition to subject matter relevance) would be:

- Written in English.
- Published no earlier than 2010. Note, however, that this criterion was relaxed during the review to allow the research team to exercise their judgement on this criteria as it became apparent that several key reports/papers had been published pre-2010. If, in the researchers' view, these reports/papers were

[4] Person-centred practice is a way of working together and communicating positively, with the child at the centre of the process. The views, wishes and feelings of the child should be central to decision making. See link for more details: Person-centred practice in education in Wales

relevant to the aims of the review, and especially if they covered a topic(s) on which evidence published more recently was scarce, then the decision was taken to include them (22 of 188 references were published pre-2010).

- Focused on practice or research in Wales, elsewhere in the UK or in countries with comparable education systems, such as the USA, Australia or New Zealand.

2.7 In excess of 200 sources were accessed, of which 188 were included in the review. Sources were excluded either on the grounds of them making only very limited reference to the subject matter of the review, or because they had been produced by organisations with a commercial interest in specific interventions.

2.8 The 188 sources used in the review are listed in the bibliography at the end of the report. Their key characteristics are summarised in Tables 2.1 to 2.3.

Table 2.1 Type of source

Type of source	No. sources
Report	54
Webpage or blog post	21
Journal article	74
Guidance or policy document	31
Dissertation or thesis	6
Book	1
Case study	1

Source: York Consulting literature review, September 2023.

Table 2.2 Geography

Geography	No. sources
Wales	49
England	65
UK	33
USA	24
Scotland	5
Australia	1
Ireland	2
Italy	1
Multiple countries	3
Sweden	1
Not specified	4

Source: York Consulting literature review, September 2023.

Table 2.3 Education phase

Phase	No. sources
Early years	17
Primary	107
Secondary	125
Not specified	38

Source: York Consulting literature review, September 2023.
Note: Numbers sum to more than 178 as many of the sources covered more than one education phase.

Terminology

2.9 Throughout the review, ‘schools’ refers to maintained schools and not to independent schools or sixth form colleges (as they determine their own exclusion procedures).

2.10 In many cases, the literature included in the review refers only to ‘exclusions’ and does not distinguish between permanent and fixed-term exclusions. For that reason, there are numerous references to exclusions in this paper where it has not been possible to make a distinction between permanent and fixed-term exclusions.

Scoping interviews with national and local stakeholders

2.11 The aim of the scoping interviews was to help the sampling approach, inform search terms for the literature review and develop themes for later interviews. The sample was constructed in dialogue with Welsh Government research and policy officials to cover representatives from relevant advisory groups and networks.

2.12 The topic guide is included in Annex B. Interviews lasted between 52 minutes and 75 minutes. Participants were offered a choice of taking part in the medium of Welsh or English; all chose to participate in the medium of English.

2.13 A total of 14 interviews were undertaken with national and local stakeholders between April and May 2023 (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4 Scoping interviews

Region	Number of interviewees
Local authorities	5
National stakeholders[5]	4
Education consortia	2
PRU	2
School	1
Total	14

Source: York Consulting interview data, July 2023.
Base: 14 interviewees.

Analysis

2.14 Scoping interview analysis was undertaken using thematic analysis with NVivo qualitative data analysis software. The first three write-ups were coded by a researcher and discussed with the project manager to develop a coding framework. The framework included codes that mapped onto the study research questions. Once this was agreed the remaining interviews were coded by one member of the research team, with a sample being quality assessed by a second researcher. The coding framework was amended as coding progressed to include new codes to accurately capture the views of participants. On completion of coding, the research team developed key themes that addressed the study research questions.

[5] Organisation names withheld.

Strengths and limitations

2.15 The scoping interviews were valuable in shaping themes and questions for the upcoming fieldwork, enabling in-depth exploration of various perspectives. Though the smaller number of interviews facilitated a deep dive into key issues, a larger sample might have provided more diverse viewpoints. However, the stakeholder selection process may have missed some essential views and experiences.

School survey

2.16 The aim of the online survey (short pro forma) was to identify potential schools for inclusion in the qualitative fieldwork and to gain some answers to five high-level questions. The survey was designed to be completed by school and PRU staff involved in exclusions or supporting children to avoid exclusion from school, for example, members of the senior management and leadership team, additional learning needs coordinators (ALNCo) and wellbeing leads. The survey (at Annex B) was developed with and signed off by the contract manager, Welsh Government policy team.

2.17 The survey was hosted online and was made available in both Welsh and English. Due to the short timescale for conducting the review, it was not possible to pilot the survey.

2.18 The survey was shared with schools and PRUs in Wales via the May 2023 Dysg[6] newsletter and on the Hwb[7] platform. Some local authority stakeholders interviewed also shared the survey directly with schools and PRUs in their network. The survey was live from 4 May 2023 to 1 July 2023.

2.19 A privacy notice was created for the survey, which was shared along with the survey link. In total, 37 responses were received to the school survey (Table 2.5). No target number of responses was set.

[6] Dysg is the official education e-newsletter from Welsh Government to schools covering the pre-11 sector and the post-11 sector.
[7] Through Hwb, the Welsh Government provides bilingual, digital services to all maintained schools to support teaching and learning through the Curriculum for Wales.

Table 2.5 Schools and PRUs responding to the school survey by role of respondent

Role of respondent	Number of respondents
Headteacher or acting headteacher	24
Assistant headteacher	5
Deputy headteacher	5
Head of department	1
Chair of governors	1
Parent liaison officer	1
Total	37

Source: York Consulting survey data, July 2023.
Base: 37 school survey respondents.

2.20 Respondents were asked to provide their school ID reference number to enable matching to Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) data and EOTAS Census data. This was done to reduce the burden of asking questions about school and PRU characteristics. Most respondents (34) provided their school ID reference number, although in three cases this was not provided.

2.21 Most respondents to the survey were secondary schools and primary schools (Table 2.6). However, primary schools were under-represented.

Table 2.6 Schools and PRUs responding to the school survey by school type

Region	Number of schools or PRUs
Secondary school	16
Primary school	11
Middle school	5
PRU	2
Unknown	3
Total	37

Source: York Consulting survey data, July 2023.
Base: 37 school survey respondents.

2.22 Most respondents to the survey were English medium schools and four were Welsh medium/bilingual schools (Table 2.7).

Table 2.7 Schools and PRUs responding to the school survey by language medium

Region	Number of schools or PRUs
English medium	28
Welsh medium/bilingual	4
PRU	2
Unknown	3
Total	37

Source: York Consulting survey data, July 2023.
Base: 37 school survey respondents.

2.23 Respondents to the survey came from all regions of Wales. A breakdown of the schools by region is shown in Table 2.8.

Table 2.8 Schools and PRUs responding to the school survey by region

Region	Number of schools or PRUs
Central South Wales	5
North Wales	11
South East Wales	6
South West and Mid Wales	12
Unknown	3
Total	37

Source: York Consulting survey data, July 2023.
Base: 37 school survey respondents.

2.24 The schools responding to the survey tended be those with higher proportions of children eligible for FSM than all schools across Wales (Table 2.9).

Table 2.9 Schools and PRUs responding to the school survey by eFSM quartile

Region	Number of schools or PRUs
First quartile 32.4% to 85.7% (highest levels of eFSM pupils)	9
Second quartile 20.1% to 32.3%	12
Third quartile 12.0% to 20.0%	5
Fourth quartile 0% to 11.9% (lowest levels of eFSM pupils)	6
PRU	2
Unknown	3
Total	37

Source: York Consulting survey data, July 2023. Quartile ranges were derived from PLASC, February 2022.
Base: 37 school survey respondents.

2.25 The schools responding to the survey tended be those with higher proportions of children with ALN than all schools across Wales (Table 2.10).

Table 2.10 Schools and PRUs responding to the school survey by ALN quartile

Region	Number of schools or PRUs
First quartile 21.9% to 100% (highest levels of ALN pupils)	13
Second quartile 13.7% to 21.8%	12
Third quartile 8.2% to 13.7%	5
Fourth quartile 0% to 8.1% (lowest levels of ALN pupils)	2
PRU	2
Unknown	3
Total	37

Source: York Consulting data, July 2023. Quartile ranges were derived from PLASC, February 2022.
Base: 37 school survey respondents.

Analysis

2.26 School data was linked to the survey responses where the respondent provided a valid school ID reference number. Descriptive data analysis was conducted on the survey data using Excel to explore the frequency of responses.

Strengths and limitations

2.27 While the survey response rate was low, the survey data was generally representative across most categories, especially in terms of having a sufficient sample of schools with higher levels of both eFSM and ALN. It was used to invite schools to participate in the main fieldwork. There were limitations. Not all respondents provided a school number meaning their data could not be matched. In proportion to the number of schools with these characteristics, there were fewer Welsh medium/bilingual schools than English schools and fewer schools in Central South Wales and South East Wales, than other regions. A total of eight respondents did not agree to participate in the follow-up research and they may have offered a different perspective. The spread of schools helped achieve most of the sample targets for the selection of schools and PRUs in the qualitative fieldwork.

Interviews with local authority inclusion officers

2.28 The aim of interviews with local authority inclusion officers was to gain an understanding of practices to prevent exclusion across schools and PRUs within selected local authority areas and to identify potential schools to include in the qualitative fieldwork. A Welsh Government invitation to participate in this research

was shared with staff from all 22 local authorities via the Association of Directors of Education in Wales.

2.29 The topic guide is included in Annex B. Interviews lasted between 56 minutes and 80 minutes. Participants were offered a choice of taking part in the medium of Welsh or English and two chose to participate in the medium of Welsh. A privacy notice was shared with respondents prior to interview.

In total, 20 staff from 15 local authorities, primarily local authority inclusion officers and another members of staff involved in school exclusions, were interviewed between May and June 2023 (Table 2.11).

Table 2.11 Local Authority interviews by regions of Wales

Region	Number of local authorities	Number of interviewees
Central South Wales	4	6
North Wales	4	3
South East Wales	2	3
South West and Mid Wales	5	8
Total	15	20

Source: York Consulting data, July 2023.
Base: 20 interviewees.

Analysis

2.30 The analysis of interviews with local authority inclusion officers was undertaken using thematic analysis with NVivo qualitative data analysis software. The first three write-ups were coded by a researcher and discussed with a second researcher to develop a coding framework. The framework included codes that mapped onto the study research questions. Once this was agreed the remaining interviews were coded by one member of the research team, with a sample being quality assessed by a second researcher. The coding framework was amended as coding progressed to include new codes to accurately capture the views of participants. On completion of coding, the research team developed key themes that addressed the study research questions.

Strengths and limitations

2.31 The scoping interviews helped to develop themes and questions for the subsequent fieldwork. Through the interview method it was possible to explore views from

various perspectives in depth. However, not all local authorities were able to participate in an interview, and they may have offered diverse perspectives.

Interviews with school and PRU staff[8]

2.32 The aim of the interviews with school and PRU staff was to understand how they prevent school exclusions, and to explore what support schools, PRUs, children and their families need to avoid exclusions and support the reintegration back into mainstream education.

2.33 Schools and PRUs were selected for interviews based on the target sample criteria (see Table 2.14), alongside an evaluative judgment of schools' approach and their perceived success in preventing school exclusions as informed by discussions with local authority staff (where this insight was gained through local authority staff interviews). The aim was to have a good representation of schools who were perceived to be doing well and those who were not. Schools and PRUs were matched to the sample criteria from those agreeing to participate through the school survey and through referrals from local authority staff. Over three-quarters of survey respondents (29 out of 37) agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. A privacy notice was created for schools and PRUs, which was shared with respondents prior to interview.

2.34 The first interviewee in each school or PRU was a headteacher or senior leader. These contacts were then asked to introduce us to other relevant staff with roles linked to preventing exclusion.

2.35 Interviews with schools and PRU staff took place between June and July 2023. Table 2.12 shows the breakdown of the 23 schools and PRUs interviewed by type. Interviews were completed through a combination of face-to-face and online methods. In some cases, multiple interviews were completed with individuals from the same school or PRU.

[8] See annex B for the interview topic guides used.

Table 2.12 Schools and PRUs interviewed by type

Type	Number of schools or PRUs	Number of interviewees
PRU	6	10
Primary	4	5
Middle	4	9
Secondary	9	16
Total	23	40

Source: York Consulting data, July 2023.
Base: 40 interviews.

2.36 School and PRU staff interviewed included 15 headteachers, 10 assistant or deputy headteachers and 15 other staff including ALN coordinators, inclusion leads, pastoral officers, lead behaviour officers and other roles. It proved necessary to speak with more staff than planned within each school or PRU to gain a full understanding of their approach to exclusion. Table 2.13 shows the breakdown of schools and PRUs interviewed and total interviewees by region.

Table 2.13 Schools and PRUs interviewed by region

Region	Number of schools or PRUs	Number of interviewees
Central South Wales	4	8
North Wales	6	7
South East Wales	5	7
South West and Mid Wales	8	18
Total	23	40

Source: York Consulting data, July 2023.
Base: 40 interviews.

2.37 The achieved sample was generally in line with the planned representation across key variables (Table 2.14). There was one fewer school than planned in Central South Wales and fewer Welsh medium/bilingual schools than planned for primary and secondary schools. Schools with both high and low rates of children eligible for eFSM and children with ALN were appropriately represented in the sample. The research is slightly skewed towards South West and Mid Wales (although feedback was consistent across geographical areas).

Table 2.14 School and PRU sample characteristics by target and actual numbers

Characteristics	Target	Actual
Total	20	23
Geography:		
• Central South Wales	5	4
• North Wales	5	6
• South East Wales	5	5
• South West and Mid Wales	5	8
Rurality:		
• Urban	10	10
• Rural	10	13
Setting type:		
• Primary schools	4	4
• Middle schools	2	4
• Secondary schools	8	9
• PRUs	6	6
Language (primary):		
• English	2	4
• Welsh-medium	2	0
Language (middle and secondary):		
• English with significant Welsh	3	1
• English medium	3	7
• Welsh medium	1	3
• Bilingual (Category A)	0	2
• Bilingual (Category B)	1	0
• Bilingual (Category C)	1	0
• Bilingual (Category Ch)	1	0
eFSM [1]:		
• 1 - 32.4% to 85.7%	-	4
• 2 - 20.1% to 32.3%	-	4
• 3 - 12.0% to 20.0%	-	5
• 4 - 0% to 11.9%	-	4
ALN [1]:		
• 1 - 21.8% to 100%	-	5
• 2 - 13.7% to 21.8%	-	7
• 3 - 8.1% to 13.7%	-	3
• 4 - 0% to 8.1%	-	2

Source: York Consulting data, July 2023. Targets derived from PLASC data, February 2022.

Base: 23 schools and PRUs. Note [1]: eFSM and ALN data was not available for the six PRUs.

Analysis

2.38 School and PRU interview analysis was undertaken using thematic analysis with NVivo qualitative data analysis software. The first three write-ups were coded by a researcher and discussed with the project manager to develop a coding framework. The framework included codes that mapped onto the study research questions. Once this was agreed the remaining interviews were coded by one member of the research team, with a sample being quality assessed by a second researcher. The coding framework was amended as coding progressed to include new codes to accurately capture the views of participants. On completion of coding, the research team developed key themes that addressed the study research questions.

Strengths and limitations

2.39 The interviews with school and PRU staff generated a wide range of insight linked to the topic guide questions. Through the interview method it was possible to explore views from different perspectives in depth. In some schools and PRU interviews were undertaken with more than one member of staff. There were limitations. Not all individuals were able to participate in an interview, some school staff did not agree to an interview, despite indicating willingness in the survey, and they may have offered a different perspective.

2.40 It is important to note the context and chronology in which the qualitative data was gathered from schools and PRUs. Given that the scope of the literature review was broadened (see Annex C), the literature review and fieldwork were undertaken in parallel. Therefore, the list of practices in the literature did not inform the design of the research tools. One consideration for any future similar research would be to use the list of practices to check if schools and PRUs utilise these. In the school and PRU qualitative interviews the mentions of practices in relation to exclusions were unprompted, so we cannot presume this is an exhaustive list of all activities in a given school or PRU or that some practice not mentioned in an interview could be utilised.

Interviews with children and parents[9]

2.41 The aim of interviews with children was to further understand the issues in preventing school exclusions, and to explore what support children and their families need to avoid exclusions and support the reintegration back into mainstream education.

2.42 Schools and PRUs were asked to approach parents and children to invite them to participate in the research, where the child had previously been excluded or had been at risk of exclusion. Privacy notices and information sheets were created to explain the research to parents and children. An incentive of £30 was provided to parents to participate in the interview.

2.43 Interviews with children and with parents[10] took place in July 2023. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face with parents and pupils together, or individually if not available at the same time. For parents this was a telephone interview. Individual interviews with children took place in school with a member of school staff present during the interview which had been organised prior to the visit. In some instances, only the child was interviewed and in one instance only the parent was interviewed. These interviews were conducted with parents and children from schools and PRUs across all regions. Table 2.15 shows the breakdown of children and parents interviewed as part of the review.

Table 2.15 Children and parents interviewed

Interview type	Number of children	Number of parents
Child only	8	-
Child and parent	8	8
Parent only	-	1
Total	16	9

Source: York Consulting data, July 2023.

Base: 16 children and 9 parents interviewed.

2.44 In total 16 children were interviewed. Six additional interviews with children were arranged but they were not available or not at school on the day of the interview.

[9] See annex B for the interview topic guides used.

[10] In this report the term parent is used to include parents and carers of children who attend schools or PRUs.

Attempts to re-arrange these were unsuccessful, as the research ran out of time to reschedule due to the summer holidays.

2.45 Most of the children (12) identified as boys and four as girls. The children were at different school stages[11]:

- Five children from Key Stage 2.
- Five children from Key Stage 3.
- Six children from Key Stage 4.

2.46 Most of the children (nine) had been fixed-term excluded, six had been at risk of exclusion and one had been permanently excluded. Similar numbers of children were attending school (six) and a PRU (six), with four attending both a PRU and a school.

2.47 Nine parents were interviewed and their children included:

- Five fixed-term excluded and four at risk of exclusion.
- Eight boys and one girl.
- Two from Key Stage 2, three from Key Stage 3 and four from Key Stage 4.
- Five received their education in school, two in a PRU, and two across both a PRU and a school.

2.48 Some schools said they were unable to prioritise organising interviews or initially said that they could organise interviews but then said it was not possible or they needed more time. Other schools reported that parents were reluctant to participate due to the perceived stigma of their child being at risk of exclusion or having been excluded. In some cases, parents did not respond to the school when the school approached them about the research. The research ran out of time to recruit further parents for interviews due to the summer school holidays given that the interviews were arranged through schools/PRUs.

2.49 The parent interviews covered those with children in Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4.

[11] Key Stage 2 (children aged seven to 11 years old), Key Stage 3 (children aged 11 to 14 years old), Key Stage 4, (children aged 14 to 16 years old).

Analysis

2.50 Parent and child interview analysis was undertaken using thematic analysis with NVivo qualitative data analysis software. The first two write-ups were coded by a researcher and discussed with the project manager to develop a coding framework. The framework included codes that mapped onto the study research questions. Once this was agreed, the remaining interviews were coded by one member of the research team, with a sample being quality assessed by a second researcher. The coding framework was amended as coding progressed to include new codes to accurately capture the views of participants. On completion of coding, the research team developed key themes that addressed the study research questions.

Strengths and limitations

2.51 The interviews with parents and children generated a wide range of insights linked to the topic guide questions. Through the interview method, it was possible to explore views from diverse perspectives in depth. There were limitations. Parents and children were selected by schools and PRUs, which may have involved subjective bias. Lower than anticipated numbers of parents, compared with other stakeholder groups, participated in an interview. Some parents, and a few children, agreed to an interview but were unavailable and they may have offered a different perspective to those who participated in the research.

Analysis within this report

2.52 When describing qualitative data in this report, broad quantifiers are used to indicate the proportion of respondent organisations or individuals commenting on a particular issue. These quantifiers[12] are:

- nearly all = with very few exceptions
- most = 90% or more
- many = 70% or more
- a majority = over 60%
- half = 50%
- around half = close to 50%

[12] Taken from Estyn website Glossary | Estyn (gov.wales)

- a minority = below 40%
- few = below 20%
- very few = less than 10%.

Project Advisory Group

2.53 A Project Advisory Group provided governance and strategic oversight. The group met three times over the course of the study. It comprised of the contract manager, Welsh Government policy team and research team, in addition to relevant policy-makers and education specialists. The group provided input on the study design, research plan, and met to discuss emerging findings. The group also had the opportunity to comment on key documents during the project.

3. Research findings: issues which influence rates of exclusion

3.1 This chapter describes a range of issues highlighted by different stakeholders that were considered to provide important context regarding schools' ability and capacity to prevent exclusions.

Changes in behaviour and attendance

Increased challenging behaviour

3.2 Many interviewees described the increasingly challenging nature of children's behaviour over the past five years but in particular since the COVID-19 period of school closures. Whilst there were a range of potential reasons identified for this, interviewees typically attributed children's increasingly challenging behaviour to a combination of children experiencing challenges at home generally, exacerbated by the pandemic (such as lack of stable housing, lack of personal space, family breakdown, domestic violence and a lack of sleep) and having ALN (which was also exacerbated by the pandemic).

3.3 Many school and PRU interviewees described the effects of deprivation on children eligible for FSMs. Teachers described five main factors that negatively impact on children's behaviour, described below.

- A lack of sleep can mean children are exhausted and irritable which can lead to them struggling to concentrate and risks more challenging behaviour.
- Having had insufficient food (the previous day and/or for breakfast) leaves children hungry which negatively impacts on their concentration and leads to them getting frustrated. Many schools and PRUs address this through breakfast clubs and similar initiatives.
- Negative incidents at home such as arguments, with and between parents, mean that children may be emotionally upset or angry (and may often not mention this to teachers) resulting in unpredictable and challenging behaviour in school.
- Incidents outside of school prior to starting the school day, such as disputes or fights with other children to more serious incidents such as encounters with anti-social or criminal influences (examples that teachers described included gangs and county lines drug dealing). Experience of such incidents, according to

teachers interviewed, may leave children feeling threatened or distracted which can lead to a variety of challenging behaviours ranging from distraction and non-compliance to confrontation.

- Coming to school dysregulated, often linked to ADHD but also to the other aspects described below, limits a child's ability to focus and increases their likelihood to lose self-control verbally or physically.

3.4 Some staff from schools and PRUs described children they work with, who were at risk of exclusions, as experiencing multiple ACEs - they did not describe all the ACEs - but the most frequently mentioned was experience of the care system.

3.5 Many respondents mentioned the ALNs of their children, as well as needs related to diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), ADHD, and their mental health, and the behavioural challenges of some of these children. There is evidence of children with neurodevelopmental disorder being at greater risk of exclusions (John et al. 2022). The number of children with ASD increased from 7,655 in 2018[13] to 9,994 in 2022[14], an increase of around one-third. The same school census data shows the number of children with ADHD remaining stable between 2018 (2,840) and 2022 (2,836). Part of the explanation for teacher observations is that they described ADHD-like characteristics rather than children necessarily being diagnosed at a higher rate.

3.6 In addition, a few interviewees highlighted the transition between Year 6 and Year 7, plus Key Stage 3 in general, as contributing to an increase in challenging behaviour. Headteachers attributed the challenges in Key Stage 3 groups to the development of children who were in the primary phase during the COVID-19 pandemic and had underdeveloped social skills.

3.7 A few school and PRU interviewees also cited incidents that led to exclusions linked with vaping (having, using or selling vapes in school against school policies), mobile phones (having or using phones in schools where school policies prohibited their use) and social media (linked to inappropriate language, images and bullying).

[13] Schools' census results: at January 2018
[14] Schools' census results: February 2022

Vaping, mobile phones and social media were described as sources of tensions, between children and between children and staff, affecting children's behaviour.

Attendance issues

3.8 While not equivalent, poor school attendance shares many of the same risk factors of school exclusions (e.g., Orr et al., 2023) and can be an early warning sign of similar poor later outcomes (Madia et al. 2022; Cattan et al. 2023). Many school and PRU interviewees described the lower levels of school attendance since the COVID-19 period of school closures. Staff described a link between some children's relationship with, and attitude to, school and their behaviour in school. Some attributed this to a change in attitude towards school attendance, with a minority of children and parents viewing attending school as less important or more negatively since having to learn remotely during lockdowns. Examples were given of parents not insisting that their children attend school. In addition, school staff described increasingly challenging behaviour from parents towards teachers and other school staff.

Exclusion practices

Evidence of increased internal exclusion

3.9 There has been an increase in the use of internal exclusions, according to many local authority, school and PRU staff interviewed. This was attributed to limited spaces being available in PRUs or special schools and to schools trying to reduce numbers of fixed-term and permanent exclusions. Around half of schools had developed their internal exclusion arrangements over the past few years and a few others had just started to develop their internal exclusion arrangements. A few were evaluating the effectiveness of recently implemented internal exclusion arrangements.

3.10 A few local authority and PRU staff indicated concerns about the quality of support taking place in some internal exclusion spaces. An example of such concerns involved teaching assistants being allocated to internal exclusion rooms but without specific training to support the needs of particular children.

3.11 The language used by a few schools to describe internal exclusion rooms was more negative and punitive than others, for example, isolation unit, isolation room,

exclusion room, and sometimes references to waiting or working outside the headteacher's office.

3.12 Some headteachers have been actively avoiding fixed-term exclusions, but using forms of internal exclusion instead. They did, however, describe the difficult decisions they had to make between choosing to fixed-term exclude a child compared with the risk of physical harm to school staff and other children.

School approaches to exclusion vary

3.13 In many local authorities, staff described variation in practice across their schools, especially secondary schools. This covered schools' general approach to exclusion, the length of exclusion for similar incidents and the exclusion of children with ALN.

3.14 Staff from around half of local authorities described variations in the length of fixed-term exclusions for the same type of incident. They explained that parents sometimes have become aware of this and contacted the local authority about inconsistency across schools.

> "Incidents that may receive a five-day exclusion in one school may receive a 15-day [fixed-term] exclusion in another school, which causes all sorts of problems." (Local authority interviewee)

3.15 A few school interviewees described fixed-term exclusions as a means to buy the child some time to cool down, reflect, and refocus and to implement better support for children.

3.16 A few local authority staff stated that some headteachers and their schools had room for improvement regarding exclusion. It was felt that exclusion is a "highly emotive" (local authority inclusion officer) issue that requires strong leadership within a school. One interviewee said that if leadership is not robust then challenges can emerge which can derail other areas of work in the school. Challenges can emerge from parents, the wider community and from teachers within the school. These challenges can be about how policies are implemented and the effects of disruptive children at risk of exclusion.

> "Headteacher's interpretations of being 'inclusive' vary. Some of our schools could do a bit more." (Local authority interviewee)

3.17 Interviewees in a few local authorities explained the challenge of working with schools in cases of children with ALN:

> "[The] interface between ALN and exclusions is quite complex and is often interpreted differently from school to school. There will be some schools that feel they can't exclude, which isn't the case. Naturally, they should do all they can to avoid exclusion, but there is no legal aspect of the guidance that precludes them from doing so, even those that are statemented." (Local authority interviewee)

3.18 One local authority interviewee suggested a need for guidance to keep pace with the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act. They described it as "a really tricky space to work in", supporting children at risk of exclusion who may have ALN and/or a diagnosis, such as ASD/ADHD. Local authority staff recognised the conflict of interest around balancing the needs of the child against the needs of other children and teachers, with a view to keeping them safe.

How schools identify those at risk of exclusion

3.19 The main methods of identifying children at risk of exclusion from school interviews were through systems such as behavioural points, the general relationship between teacher and child, and through assessment. These approaches applied to both primary and secondary phases of education.

3.20 Some schools and PRUs have systems of behaviour points, in some cases children are rewarded for good behaviour through gaining points and lose points when behaviour does not meet expectations for behaving well. In other schools, behaviour points are only given when behaviour does not meet expectations. This data, together with the wider understanding of teachers, builds evidence of a child's general behaviour. Children are identified through such systems as being at risk of exclusion if there is consistent evidence of challenging behaviour or systematic changes that cannot be explained. Headteachers referred to identifying "high tariff pupils" who were escalating in terms of behaviour points. In such schools, the behaviour team and the head of pastoral support and wellbeing will review the support for these children on a regular basis (often weekly, sometimes daily). Linked to this, some schools operate a RAG system (red, amber, green) to identify children who are experiencing challenges in school. A secondary headteacher said

that teachers “RAG rate each child in terms of where they are emotionally and in terms of their general wellbeing”. One school respondent described operating a ‘log’ system, where teachers send a log of behaviour related incidents to the head of year. These are then collated and can be reviewed in a similar way or alongside the data described above.

3.21 A few headteachers said that their teachers have an understanding of the issues that children they teach face, built up through their relationship with each child and through observation to notice triggers of misbehaviour.

> “Culturally, the school is very good at building relationships with pupils, and teachers are encouraged (and expected) to keep an eye out for any pupils that are experiencing challenges and/or displaying worrying behaviours. This is supported through structured and formal procedures, but fundamentally it is about relationship building and teachers knowing their pupils.” (Secondary Deputy Headteacher)

3.22 Identification of children at risk through assessment was mentioned less often but was described by respondents in both primary and secondary phases (although some of the approaches are more focused on wellbeing). It was reported on a couple of occasions that schools were using assessments (e.g., attitudes towards themselves and school, their wellbeing) to estimate risk of exclusion and identify those who may require further support. It was however not clear whether these assessments were administered to all children or only those perceived to be at risk.

Stakeholder relationships

Varied PRU arrangements

3.23 PRUs existed in 17 out of 22 local authorities as of 30 July 2023. Those that did not have PRUs were Neath Port Talbot, Anglesey, Gwynedd, Blaenau Gwent and Vale of Glamorgan. In each of these, other arrangements existed, typically based at school sites or other locations to support children with varying needs. PRUs in the 17 local authorities were a mixture of single site and multi-site locations, designed to provide different types of support to different age groups.

3.24 Some PRU and school staff described outreach support that was delivered by PRU staff in schools. In some cases, this was focused on support for specific children

who were at risk of exclusion. In other examples, PRU staff were supporting a number of teaching staff to develop their skills in behaviour management or different forms of support. Some headteachers said this was beneficial both in terms of skills transfer and relationship development between professionals. One PRU respondent said they aspired to deliver this model of support to their schools and were developing a plan to be able to do this through the development and coaching of their staff. These arrangements were generally positive and it is an area that could be further developed.

3.25 Where children are not permanently excluded, school and PRU staff described dual registration for some children who attend both a school and a PRU. This was particularly mentioned in connection with primary school children. Some PRU staff felt that maintaining contact with the children's peer group can be beneficial for their development, and necessary, if there is any chance for them to return to mainstream school. Dual registration was not popular with school respondents, who felt that it was simply too confusing and jarring for the pupil as they moved between two completely different settings.

3.26 Some headteachers described operating units on their school site that provided support to children who might otherwise be permanently excluded or attend a PRU. Headteachers stated that they operated this type of provision to prevent exclusions. Some headteachers made the case that this type of support was different to an internal exclusion unit because of the support provided. This support included the practices described in Chapter 4.

School, PRU and local authority relationships

3.27 Amongst those interviewed, there was evidence of strong relationships between many local authorities and their schools. In these instances, local authority interviewees described effective regular dialogue between the local authority and individual schools, as well as agreed common approaches to exclusion between the local authority and all schools. "We need to be able to challenge without damaging the relationships with a headteacher." (Local authority interviewee)

3.28 Where relationships worked well, there were examples of effective communication that benefited children. For example, a school got in touch with their local authority

about a child they had limited knowledge of and the safeguarding team in the council contributed important contextual information to inform the investigation and decision. In this instance, it turned out that the female child was a young carer, which the school was unaware of.

3.29 In a few local authorities there were weaker relationships, local authority staff described having limited influence.

- "Some [headteachers of] schools will tend to make their decision and then only speak with the authority afterwards." (Local authority interviewee)

3.30 A few local authorities created supplementary guidance for their schools, in addition to the Welsh Government guidance on exclusion from schools and PRUs. These supplementary guides all referenced the Welsh Government guidance and were tailored to fit the local authority including contact details and how arrangements should work in that area. Some of these guides were published on local authority websites (Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, 2017; Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, 2021) others were shared with schools and PRUs, but were not in the public domain.

3.31 The organisation of the inclusion function within the local authority and its relationship with schools and PRUs creates different lines of communication with schools across different local authorities. Two different examples are presented below:

> "The local authority has a large team that is available to go into schools to offer support and help come up with bespoke solutions, especially in terms of coming up with individualised plans and supporting pupils with ALN or emotional welfare issues." (Local authority interviewee)
>
> "[There is] no behaviour support team in the local authority so it is hard to get into schools." (Local authority interviewee)

3.32 Many school staff interviewed were positive about the role of local authority inclusion staff, describing positive relationships which were effective in supporting children. This included local authority staff being easy to contact, being informed and being able to advise teachers or signpost them to other colleagues or contacts. Where this worked well it led to quick and effective support for children.

"[The] relationship with the local authority is positive and they generally do a good job. They are however exceptionally bureaucratic and that is a source of frustration. Room for improvement, but overall we are happy with their approach. They appear to be working towards creating a common ethos across the area, which is positive." (Secondary Headteacher)

"There is a constructive and supportive relationship." (Middle School Headteacher)

3.33 A few school staff interviewed, commented positively on the support from their local authority for children at risk of exclusion.

"There are good support systems in place. They [the local authority] have effective support packages that are relatively well resourced. Most of the interventions they have developed are appropriate for the needs of pupils in the area." (Secondary Headteacher)

3.34 In a few local authorities there was an early help unit or similarly named team (as a voluntary service or through social services[15] that aims to support children and families as soon as problems emerge). A few school staff mentioned this from a positive perspective describing how early support prevents some children's situations from escalating. One primary headteacher described how their local authority early help panel identified local voluntary organisations that the school could engage with.

"The early help panel is excellent as they work with lots of voluntary agencies which can support the child or family." (Primary Headteacher)

3.35 In other areas there were believed to be difficulties in receiving the expected support.

"There is real frustration with the service that schools are getting from children's social services. Efforts were made to address this, but messages seem to get lost and very little happens. It is evident that communication between education and other departments is poor, and this has a knock-on impact on the support

[15] Examples include an early help service in Bridgend and Families First in Flintshire.

that schools and pupils can access, and the timely flow of information in general." (Secondary Headteacher)

3.36 In some cases, school and PRU interviewees were frustrated that appropriate services were not available quickly enough to support children. This was particularly the case for diagnostic assessments from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), ASD and ADHD.

3.37 A few school staff identified frustrations and challenges linked to their perceptions of local authority staff experiences and familiarity with school environments and differing priorities:

"Overall, the relationship with the local authority is challenging. We have concerns about the capabilities of local authority officers. [Many have not] had recent experience of working in a school environment, therefore they cannot grasp the reality of the challenges that schools face. They lack an ability to think strategically about these issues… [There is] a lack of urgency or planning around the factors that impact on exclusions." (Secondary Headteacher)

"This is an inconsistent relationship with, and approach from, our local authority ... with different priorities. They want to keep exclusion statistics down, and they aren't focused on what that specific child needs. The system doesn't help anybody." (Secondary Headteacher)

3.38 A few school and PRU interviewees also wanted a better understanding of how their local authority could help them understand the range of support available and how to access it for their children.

Multi-agency working

3.39 Many interviewees referenced different examples of multi-agency working for the benefit of children who had been identified as being at risk of fixed-term or permanent exclusion. There were extensive references to Team Around the School and similar initiatives. In some cases, these were described as organised by the school and in others the local authority was the lead. One example of multi-agency working for supporting a child at risk of exclusion involved the school, Barnardos, Children Services and the Young Carers charity meeting to decide if they would make a team around the family referral or a child protection referral for a particular

child. Another example from a primary headteacher indicated how they were setting up these arrangements.

> "The school takes part in child protection conferences, caring support meetings, and we share a lot of information with social services…I am in the process of starting up a Team Around the School approach, where the school will work with police, social services and the community cohesion team to discuss what the risks are for particular children. We plan to implement this in September, this community approach is needed as many of the risks that pupils face start outside of school. The school needs to work alongside other agencies to change things in the community – not easy, but we are trying to make a difference." (Primary Headteacher)

3.40 Respondents reported instances where various agencies met on a monthly or half-term basis to assess new cases and review existing cases to enhance outcomes for children at risk of exclusion.

3.41 Examples were given of monthly or half-termly meetings, to assess new cases and review support for existing cases. The purpose was to achieve collaboration across services to improve outcomes for children at risk of exclusion. These meetings typically involved a range of relevant agencies, including:

- Local authority departments such as social services, youth services, mental health teams, Families First, and early help/early intervention teams.
- Career Wales.
- Health/CAMHS.
- Community police.
- Youth justice.
- Funded projects such as TRAC[16].
- National charities such as the Prince's Trust, Women's Aid and MIND.
- Location specific community groups supporting families.

3.42 A few schools and PRUs described the challenges of engaging with services and partners such as CAMHS. One interviewee from a PRU explained that some

[16] TRAC is the name of a programme, not an abbreviation, which supported young people aged 11-16 who were disengaging from education and at risk of becoming NEET.

agencies who were already involved with a child at school saw the PRU as being specialist provision and would aften disengaged quickly. They have therefore had to develop strategies to stop this happening.

3.43 A few schools and PRUs noted another challenge of multi-agency working which is linked to the capacity and resources of partner agencies. It was felt that other organisations involved in a child's multi-agency care were typically also stretched and may be struggling to engage as fully as they might have in the past. One secondary school referenced that a few years ago there were lots of additional posts funded locally that helped facilitate effective multi-agency work, however many of these roles have now disappeared due to budgetary pressures.

3.44 A few local authority interviewees stated that multi-agency working could be developed further. They said this represented a challenge for local authorities and schools:

> "The biggest thing that I would change is that sense of ownership with the schools. The best solutions come from all services and agencies working together, and there is a need to develop this approach further so that everyone can say they are doing everything they can to support each child. How to achieve this coordination so that resources fit around … the pupil and family is the big question. But, these things won't be resolved just by the school's following a process and a policy and then the local authority agreeing or not agreeing. Eventually we'll run out of PRU space, out of tuition space, alternative curriculum space, etc. Every local authority is going run out of provision if you just try and do it by yourself. We've got to get in early, effectively, and work in a multi-agency way." (Local authority interviewee)

3.45 One local authority interviewee stated that there was a willingness among schools and other agencies to work together to address issues, however, there was a need to build knowledge of 'who can do what'. This local authority was trying to bring stakeholders together to improve understanding of the expertise and resources that were in place, and to look at how new creative solutions could be developed.

3.46 Another local authority interviewee described the challenges and effects of delay when trying to support children using multi-agency working:

"[The] multi-agency approach is important because what we're noticing is ALN pathways are taking a long time, with various advocates, social workers saying they [children] shouldn't be excluded, but they [children] are presenting risk. Coming together around how we can best meet the needs of the child considering CAMHS and neurodevelopmental pathways takes so long, creating an associated anxiety in some schools." (Local authority interviewee)

Resource constraints

3.47 Many interviewees mentioned constraints that limit support available for some children at risk of exclusion. Some school and PRU interviewees described this in terms of funding – one headteacher explained that school budget used for existing provision of additional support for young people in the current year would not be available in the following year due to the budgetary pressures.

3.48 Headteachers at a few schools explained the limitations of physical space and appropriate rooms within their school for providing additional support, while others faced challenges in recruiting staff with appropriate skills in behaviour management and support. A few headteachers also described the amount of teacher time used to manage behaviour-related situations, with consequences for teachers' other responsibilities and their general wellbeing.

3.49 Interviewees from around a half of local authorities described funding limitations for services they provide, limited availability of spaces within their PRUs and limited availability of special school provision. Staff from a few local authorities described recruitment difficulties within the local authority for roles connected with exclusion support and constraints on their time, "having time to sit down and have team meetings with schools is challenging." (Local authority interviewee)

4. Research findings: practices used by schools and PRUs to prevent exclusion

4.1 This chapter draws on the survey of schools and PRUs, and interviews with national stakeholders, local authorities, schools, PRUs, children and parents, to describe the practices used by schools and PRUs to prevent exclusion. Evidence from the literature review on the effectiveness of each of the practices at preventing exclusion is also summarised.

4.2 A wide range of school-based interventions can be employed aimed to reduce the risk of fixed-term and permanent exclusion. These interventions can target risk factors and behaviours at an individual/child level, at a school level, or both. In doing so, they can involve parents, teachers, school staff and the wider community (Gaffney, Farrington and White, 2021). Evidence from the qualitative fieldwork indicates that in some cases different combinations of these practices may be used to support children.

4.3 The practices identified are each described below. They have been organised by the following two headings:

- **Universal.** Describing practices that can be implemented for all children (e.g., through a school-wide approach).
- **Targeted**. Describing practices that are focused on the needs of a subset of children or specifically selected children.

4.4 Within each of these headings the practices are ordered by the volume of mentions across the qualitative fieldwork.

Universal practices

Trauma-informed practice

4.5 Trauma-informed approaches in schools are strategies and practices designed to create a supportive and understanding environment for students who have experienced trauma (see Annex C).

4.6 A minority of schools and PRUs answering the survey highlighted the use of trauma-informed practice. A majority of schools and PRUs described the use of trauma-informed practice to prevent exclusions according to staff interviews. Staff

described a variety of views on the use of trauma-informed practice to ensure consistent and clear messages for children, particularly for those children who were dysregulated:

- Some schools and PRUs ensured that the use of trauma-informed practice was a school-wide effort and that staff values aligned with the values within this practice.
- Ongoing and regular training in trauma-informed practice was highlighted as important for its successful delivery. Some schools had designated trauma leads that were embedded throughout the school.

4.7 A secondary deputy headteacher illustrated how trauma-informed practice and restorative approaches have started to be combined into one school policy to fully embed these into the school's ethos.

> "Rather than have separate polices for trauma-informed and restorative, we've tried to capture both approaches into our ethos. However, this takes time to embed and for students to understand the restorative approach and the culture of the school." (Secondary Deputy Headteacher)

4.8 Many local authority respondents specified that trauma-informed practice was used to some degree in schools across their authority. They highlighted a number of perspectives:

- Trauma-informed practice helped school staff to understand the reason for the behaviour that placed a child at risk of being excluded and helped them question whether an exclusion was appropriate.
- Schools using trauma-informed practice were achieving better outcomes for children such as reduced exclusion rates.
- A few local authorities have employed behaviour and wellbeing officers, who are trained trauma-informed practitioners, to support secondary schools.

4.9 A few local authority respondents expressed the view that to change the mindset effectively within schools of using trauma-informed practice, there needed to be positive engagement across all levels of school staff.

"For this to be effective, it is essential to secure 'buy in' at all levels, especially from leadership. This has been a battle at times. Significant progress has been achieved in [local area], as we have made a concerted effort to become a locality that takes trauma fully into account." (Local authority respondent)

Case study: Trauma-informed practice

This case study of a child in a school demonstrates the importance of school staff members being aware of the child's ACEs and deploying trauma-informed practice. The use of trauma-informed practice allowed the child, in this case, to feel comfortable in their environment and trust certain members of school staff. This has enabled them to finish their secondary education and look towards the future.

A care-experienced child, who had experienced a difficult childhood with many ACEs struggled to engage with school, used bad language and was considered by teachers to always be in 'fight-mode'. On starting at the school, the child also developed a peer group that staff felt was a negative influence.

School staff used a trauma-informed approach to working with the child. The school put in place a package of support for this child, including support from youth workers who worked closely with the child's fosters carers. There were clear lines of communication between the foster carers, school and the child. The school provided the child with a safe physical location to express their emotions, in line with the school's trauma-informed approach.

The child was able to build rapport and links with specific staff members who could see an improvement in their behaviour, and the child started to feel as though they could trust these members of staff and not be let down.

The child has now finished education at the school and is going on to complete an apprenticeship in beauty.

4.10 Trauma-informed approaches enable school staff to recognise the experiences that may underpin a child's behaviours, understand the impact of them, acknowledge the lack of control a child may have, modulate their responses and actively build the skills of the child to be able to deal with the challenges they face. Trauma-informed practice is a common approach used in children's services and within schools internationally and across the UK. In Wales, a national trauma practice framework was launched in 2022 (ACE Hub Wales, 2022) and Public Health Wales, together with other charities, have been delivering training to schools.

4.11 There is encouraging evidence from the literature that trauma-informed practice results in positive outcomes (such as improved attendance, academic achievement, emotional regulation and confidence) for children with similar characteristics to those identified as being at risk of fixed-term and permanent exclusion (e.g., with ACEs and behavioural issues).

4.12 There is limited evidence of experimental studies exploring the effects of trauma-informed practice to prevent fixed-term and permanent exclusion. One pre- and post- intervention study in England identified decreases in exclusions resulting from a trauma-informed approach (called the Attachment Aware Schools Pilots) in two local authorities. Two other studies in England link trauma-informed practice in schools to reductions in exclusions.

4.13 Overall, trauma-informed practice was mentioned frequently by school and PRU interviewees as being used with children to prevent fixed-term and permanent exclusion. In addition, there is evidence that trauma-informed practice is used extensively in many schools and PRUs across Wales. It is, however, important to note that the effectiveness of trauma-informed practices can vary depending on several factors including the level of commitment from school leadership, school culture, the quality of staff training and available staff time.

Parental engagement

4.14 Parental engagement can be defined as teachers and schools involving parents in supporting their child's academic learning and wellbeing. Parental engagement can include general approaches which encourage parents to support their child's reading or homework, involving parents in their child's learning activities or more intensive support programmes for families in crisis.

4.15 By school staff deploying parental engagement strategies there can be a positive impact on a number of outcomes for children, including literacy skills and educational attainment, which can then go onto reduce the risk of a fixed-term or permanent exclusion (see Annex C).

4.16 Although only a minority of schools and PRUs referred to parental engagement in the survey, most schools and PRUs made reference to parental engagement within staff interviews. Interviewees described:

- Building positive working relationships with parents to help reduce the risk of fixed-term and permanent exclusions through dialogue to understand underlying issues at the earliest stage.

  "School works hard to be open and honest with parents, and this has helped bring them (mostly) on side. The emphasis is on bringing parents into the

conversation early and making them part of the solution, rather than chastising them for being part of the problem. The school appreciates the challenges faced by parents and tries to work with them." (Primary Headteacher)

- A 'three-way survey' being deployed in some schools between teacher, child and parent to build a picture of a child's needs (social, behavioural or emotional) to explore targeted, bespoke practices for the child.
- Schools reported that working with parents and bringing them into conversations in school is very much a 'trial and error process' as it does not work with every family.

4.17 A minority of local authority respondents referred to parental engagement within their interviews. In particular, building relationships with parents early on if there is a need for the local authority to become involved with parents. Local authority support was described as asking parents if they felt supported, if anything was missing and being proactive in these discussions. By building these relationships, a few local authorities expressed that they were more able to point parents to specific local authority services they felt would be beneficial.

4.18 The use of multi-agency working involving local authorities, schools, PRUs and others to support parents was also seen as beneficial.

"[We] have good relationships with the child and family service, youth services and education welfare officers (EWOs) that sit in early help hubs and are part of these [exclusion] conversations and activities." (Local authority respondent)

4.19 The majority of parents within their interviews referenced the ongoing communication and correspondence they had with schools, which helped to build a really effective 'home-school link.' In these instances, communication was provided by a member of the pastoral team or leadership team in the school or PRU.

4.20 Most parents interviewed felt well-informed about any issues occurring within school and any practices that were being implemented for their child.

Case study: parental engagement

This case study demonstrates how effective parental engagement can reduce the risk of permanent exclusion. The secondary school in this case study was able to work closely with the child's parent and have their full support in decisions.

A child who displayed very challenging behaviour had become a safety concern when in school. The behaviour included the child leaving school premises without permission, walking away when being spoken to and setting off fire extinguishers.

The child's mum engaged fully with the school and re-enforced the messages from teachers about the importance of the child positively engaging with teachers and their education. Because of this, behavioural issues reduced and engagement with schooling improved leading to a reduction in the risk of permanent exclusion.

The school noted that if the mum was not as supportive, it would have already led to a permanent exclusion. There was suspicion that the child was involved in county lines activities, but as the mum was willing to support the school in their decisions, they were able to mitigate this.

The school noticed the child's behaviour had improved recently.

4.21 Literature and evidence on the effectiveness of parental engagement on preventing exclusion is limited. However, there is a large body of evidence regarding its impact on academic attainment, with a review of 97 studies highlighting that parental engagement can have a positive impact, particularly with parents of younger children, equivalent to an average of four months additional progress for children. In addition, a small number of case studies and qualitative evaluations of parental engagement programmes suggest they can help to reduce the risk of exclusion.

4.22 Common barriers to effective parental engagement are noted in the literature, including staff lacking the time to engage with parents, staff concerns that parental engagement, if done badly, could make the situation with the child worse, and a lack of staff training on how to have difficult conversations with parents. It is also important to ensure that parental engagement strategies reach all parents to avoid the risk of increasing the attainment gap for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

4.23 Parental engagement was commonly mentioned by school and PRU respondents in the fieldwork. It was felt that building positive relationships with parents helped to identify the underlying issues influencing the child's challenging behaviour, although it was also noted that attempts to build such relationships were not always successful. This is supported by the Developing Family Engagement annex of the Community Focused Schools guidance (Welsh Government, 2023c). As highlighted in the literature, effective parental engagement can be challenging and therefore requires sufficient time and dedicated training to build staff confidence. Despite this, parents interviewed for this review generally reported that communication with their

child's school or PRU was effective, ensuring they were well informed about any issues and support provided.

Restorative practice

4.24 Restorative practice is an approach to addressing behavioural issues and conflict which uses dialogue to encourage accountability for an individual's actions and the repairing of relationships where harm has occurred. Restorative practice can be used as part of a school-wide approach or in a focussed way as a response to incidents and/or with targeted groups of children (see Annex C).

4.25 A minority of schools and PRUs responding to the survey noted the use of restorative practice to prevent exclusions. Just under half of schools and PRUs described the use of restorative practice based on staff interviews. These included:

- A few school and PRU staff interviewees describing that they had developed a restorative culture across the whole school and used these approaches. School staff described a 'culture shift' that enabled their school to move away from previous behaviour management systems. One respondent said they had, "moved away from consequence and sanction towards restorative [practice]" (Secondary Deputy Headteacher). For one school, this resulted in fewer fixed-term exclusions than they believed they would have otherwise experienced. Senior staff explained that changes like this take time to embed, but it was resulting in improved dialogue between staff and children.
- Other school and PRU interviewees mentioning children being able to have restorative conversations with staff members or check-ins with a member of staff to help repair relationships that may have broken down. Interviewees reported that this was effective, especially when done quickly to avoid children adopting entrenched positions that are harder to resolve.

4.26 One headteacher from a PRU expressed how well restorative practice to prevent exclusions had been embedded. This example involved a 15-year-old child who was elected to their PRU school council resulting in a positive impact in their life through increased confidence, reduced likelihood of further exclusions and taking responsibility for contributing to a new peer-developed behaviour policy and reward system.

"Older pupils, in particular, recognise the benefit of restorative practice when there is conflict between peers, and seek advice from staff to resolve this." (PRU Headteacher)

4.27 Interviewees from a minority of local authorities described schools' increasing use of restorative practice to help schools and PRUs to build relationships with and between children. One local authority noted the work of their educational psychologists, training school staff in positive behaviour systems to support implementation of restorative practice. This was positively received and resulted in consistent and effective support being provided to children.

4.28 A few local authorities commented on the importance of having a restorative ethos, illustrated by the following quote.

"I feel like we're getting there, talking about restorative approaches and by using this model, behaviour management policies are being replaced by relationships policies, to create an ethos of repair rather than just consequence." (Local authority respondent)

4.29 A few children in their interviews noted restorative practice being used, when they were at risk of exclusion, and how this worked. These children described how reflecting on their actions helped them to think about their future behaviour.

"We do restorative practice after being in inclusion for the day ... where we look at the situation, what I've done, and then we go over and look at ways to prevent it again." (Child)

Case study: Restorative practice

This case study of a child within a PRU demonstrates how restorative practice has helped to develop a dialogue with the child around their behaviour and helped them with self-regulation.

The child had come to a PRU displaying very challenging behaviour.

Their behaviour became increasingly disruptive, as they wanted to be excluded and could not understand why staff had not triggered an exclusion as punishment for their behaviour. The child felt as though there were no rules for them and became very abusive and challenging towards staff. This led to the child taking time off from the PRU because they were too embarrassed to face teachers in restorative meetings.

After several months patiently working with this child in a restorative way, their behaviour started to calm down and the child started to express real regret and remorse about some of their actions. PRU staff recognised that the child felt that an exclusion was an escape

from their troubles and had come to feel as though they deserved an exclusion for their behaviour.

4.30 Literature review evidence suggests that schools implementing restorative practice experience a decline in the number of exclusions issued. Most of the studies reviewed across the identified literature reported positive outcomes of restorative practice, including improved social, emotional and behaviour skills of students. The review found experimental and quasi-experimental studies assessing the impact of restorative practice, with mixed findings regarding the efficacy of the approach for reducing exclusions.

4.31 Key enablers to the effective implementation of restorative practice in schools include taking a school-wide approach, the commitment and modelling from senior staff, and staff confidence supported by regular training. Implementation challenges include securing staff buy-in and having sufficient time for restorative conversations.

4.32 Overall, there is evidence that restorative practice, particularly when implemented as a school-wide approach, can improve behaviour and reduce exclusions. Whilst the literature review did not find any research into the effectiveness of restorative approaches in Welsh schools specifically, some respondents in the fieldwork described its benefits, including how it helps to foster positive relationships between staff and children and, in some cases, reduces the risk of exclusion.

Whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing

4.33 A whole-school approach to children's emotional and mental wellbeing seeks to support good emotional and mental wellbeing by promoting a positive cultural environment in schools. There is evidence of a link between poor mental health and wellbeing, and an increased risk of exclusions (see Annex C).

4.34 Although no schools or PRUs referenced the whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing in the survey, half of school and PRU staff interviewed described the use of the whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing as a factor to help prevent exclusions. Interviewees described aspects of their approaches:

- Dedicated wellbeing teams available within schools and PRUs to allocate support to children with more challenging wellbeing needs.

- Provision of social-emotional support to children within schools and PRUs. In some schools this included a pastoral worker in every year group.
- Wellbeing teams often included in-house pastoral staff and in one case a CAMHS worker.

"Mental health is an increasing emerging theme which is why we have a wellbeing centre with four Level 2 self-harm pathway trained staff and an in-reach CAMHS worker." (Secondary Deputy Headteacher)

4.35 A minority of local authority respondents in their interviews referenced a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing. Interviewees highlighted that:

- It enables children to come into a school knowing what to expect when they are feeling vulnerable, where they are able to identify and talk about emotions.
- It has had a big impact in specific wellbeing areas for some authorities, who use Thrive[17] practitioners, but their caseloads can be overwhelmed very quickly.
- It combines aspects of nurture with wellbeing which enables a greater focus on understanding needs and ACEs, and is described as helping to prevent exclusions in some local authorities.

4.36 Parents and children did not reference whole-school approaches to emotional and mental wellbeing within their interviews.

Case study: Whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing

This case study demonstrates how a PRU utilised their whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing through a range of practices, support programmes and wellbeing assessments.

One PRU described the range of practices and support programmes they had in place to assist children in developing their emotional health and social skills. Children within this PRU have access to anger management, yoga and mindfulness sessions.

Wellbeing assessments are regularly carried out to ensure that appropriate and targeted interventions are in place to support children's social and emotional needs. Subsequent interventions from these assessments may include therapeutic play and counselling, which are available to all children.

The result of this was generally calmer, more regulated children, which helped to prevent incidents that might lead to exclusion.

[17] The Thrive Approach is a social and emotional wellbeing program designed to support the emotional development and mental wellbeing of primary age children.

4.37 There is some evidence from the literature review linking improvements in children's emotional and mental wellbeing to better educational outcomes, but not for reduced exclusions. However, improved emotional and mental wellbeing is associated with better educational outcomes, including reduced exclusions, for children. Respondents in the fieldwork also identified a reduced risk of exclusion associated with support to address children's emotional and mental wellbeing. Important implementation factors include clear communication from senior leaders, review of all school policies, reference to staff wellbeing, staff training, balance of universal and targeted support and involving parents, families and the community.

Transition support

4.38 Transition support refers to practices (either universal or targeted) aimed at addressing the potential challenges that children may face when moving from primary to secondary school. It can include approaches aimed at developing links between secondary schools and their feeder primaries or activities to help address children's concerns about the transition and familiarise them with their new school (see Annex C).

4.39 No schools or PRUs when responding to the survey made reference to specific transition support. However, many school and PRU staff did mention the importance of transition support during their interviews and how this could support children's wellbeing and minimise risks of exclusion. They described support to build relationships with teachers and other children at the new school, cope with the change in environment, comply with new rules and behaviour expectations, and deal with stress from higher-level learning and teaching methods. Examples from schools and PRUs included:

- One secondary school described specific work that was carried out with cluster primary schools to identify those children who are likely to need extra support when they transition to secondary school.
- Small primary schools during an internal transition provide children with designated time with their new teacher before moving up classes. A one-page profile of the child is often used to share information between the two teachers

and helps the new teacher to be informed about the needs of the child. Other elements that increase trust include parental involvement.

"Transfer of trust from one adult to another – we work hard prior to summer to put the child in space with their current teacher and new teacher. Photos of staff taken home. Parent meetings with both teachers." (Primary Headteacher)

4.40 The majority of local authority respondents made reference to transition support and why this could help to minimise the risks of exclusion.

- Some local authority staff felt more work was needed at the time of transition, in parts of their geographical areas, where they feel it is given a low priority, so that secondary schools have a real understanding of a child's needs, based on their primary school experience.
- Nurturing resources were described as differing between primary and secondary schools in some cases and, therefore, a greater emphasis was felt by local authority staff to be needed to ensure consistency for certain children who had benefited from a primary school nurturing environment.

4.41 Parents and children did not make explicit reference to specific transition support within their interviews. In some instances, where children had been moved from a mainstream school to a PRU, parents described the general levels of support provided by PRU staff that were greater than mainstream schools.

4.42 Whilst much literature exists on primary to secondary transition generally, research evaluating specific interventions aimed at improving children's experiences of transition is more limited, with no studies found that specifically assess the impact of transition support interventions on the risk of exclusion.

4.43 The available evidence typically focusses on the effectiveness of transition support interventions in reducing children's transition worries and improving their wellbeing. It suggests that interventions which bridge both levels of schooling, supports children's relationships with their peers and teachers, involves parents, addresses common transition concerns, and provides individualised support for children vulnerable to negative outcomes are likely to be the most effective at supporting wellbeing during transition.

4.44 Given the varied nature of transition support activities, it is difficult to identify common barriers and enablers to implementation. Some barriers highlighted within the literature that could apply across different types of transition support activities include competing activities taking place during the final summer term of primary school and the risk of stigma and labelling for groups participating in targeted interventions. Key enablers include the commitment and support of the local authority, buy-in and leadership from senior leaders at both schools, and strong communication between all those involved, including school staff, parents and children.

4.45 Overall, while evidence on the effectiveness of transition support interventions is limited, the available literature indicates that it can have a positive impact on children's wellbeing, particularly in helping to reduce anxiety about the change. This aligns with views obtained during the fieldwork, with many respondents recognising the value and importance of transition support in helping children deal with the challenges that moving to secondary school brings. Respondents also held the view that transition support, particularly that which helps secondary schools have a clear understanding of a primary school child's needs, before the start of term, can help to reduce the risk of exclusion.

School-wide approach to behaviour

4.46 A school-wide approach to behaviour is one where the standards and expectations of good behaviour pervade all aspects of school life. This includes the culture, ethos and values of the school, how children are taught and encouraged to behave, the response to misbehaviour and the relationships between staff, children and parents. It should be implemented consistently and fairly to create a predictable environment across the school (see Annex C). School-wide approaches to behaviour can include teacher training, rewards systems, reinforcement of prosocial behaviour, and discipline for misbehaviours.

4.47 A minority of schools and PRUs when responding to the survey referenced school-wide approaches to behaviour. Just over half of school and PRU interviewees mentioned school-wide approaches to behaviour within their interviews. They described:

- Schools needing to have a clear ethos and culture coming from a strong leadership team for all school staff and children to understand the use of exclusion.
- Exclusion as being used as a last resort where all other options have been explored, which leads to greater consistency of its use.
- A lack of focus on the root issues children are facing, with more of an emphasis on discipline.

4.48 The majority of local authority respondents made reference to school-wide approaches to behaviour in their interviews. This included suggestions that:

- The 'more successful' schools and PRUs are those that are able to adopt a flexible approach, tailored to the needs and behaviours of the individual child.
- Exclusion rates are often shaped by the behavioural ethos of schools and PRUs, their specific processes, the attitudes from the leadership team and whether or not there is commitment to 'doing everything possible' for a specific child.

  "Schools have the tools they need to do the job, but ultimately it comes down to leadership and ethos." (Local authority respondent)

4.49 No parents or children mentioned school-wide approaches to behaviour in their interviews. This may be due to schools and PRUs providing parents and children with more knowledge of specific practices that would be used, as opposed to a focus on school-wide approaches to behaviour.

4.50 A systematic review of evidence on the impact of school-wide behaviour interventions found they had some beneficial effects on behaviour outcomes. It was identified that either training teachers or putting in place clear reward systems can improve pupil behaviour for all children, and even more so when targeted towards and adapted for children displaying disruptive behaviour. Approaches that combine both targeted and universal elements may be the most successful for improving behaviour. There is also some evidence from experimental studies in the U.S. that school-wide positive behaviour interventions can reduce rates of fixed-term exclusions. It was noted in the literature that approaches which focus on encouraging positive behaviour tend to have more of an effect on improving behaviour than punitive measures such as zero-tolerance approaches. However,

consistency of application and coherence was commonly highlighted as being key to effective delivery of school-wide approaches to behaviour, regardless of the overall approach used.

4.51 Other key features identified as important for implementing effective school-wide approaches to behaviour include the commitment of senior leaders, high behaviour expectations for children, training for staff to manage behaviour, shared responsibility amongst staff, and an understanding of expected impact of the school-wide approach and how this will be measured. Overall, there is a lot of evidence that school-wide approaches can improve behaviour, with some evidence to suggest that positive, as opposed to punitive, approaches are more effective in this regard. School-wide approaches to behaviour were highlighted as a factor in reducing exclusions by some school and PRU respondents and most local authority respondents. Aligning with some of the literature on positive school-wide behaviour approaches, there was a shared view that those which consider the individual needs of the child and have an ethos of using exclusion as a last resort are the most effective at reducing exclusion rates.

Targeted practices

4.52 Within each of these headings the targeted practices are ordered by the volume of mentions across the qualitative fieldwork. The exception being internal exclusions and reduced timetables which are discussed at the end due to some limitations in how they are used.

Nurture groups

4.53 Nurture groups are small, structured, and supportive educational environments designed to support behavioural, emotional and social difficulties in school-aged children. They are an inclusive approach that can increase access to learning for children who find it hard to learn in a mainstream class. Where nurture groups are used to reduce the risk of exclusion, they typically aim to promote good mental health by helping children feel valued and building their confidence and self-esteem (see Annex C).

4.54 Around half of schools and PRUs described the use of nurture practices in the survey. A majority of schools and PRUs provided nurture practices according to staff interviews. Interviewees described how these were used:

- Nurture rooms were variously described as spaces to “calm down and self-regulate” (Secondary Headteacher), for “therapeutic or academic interventions” (Secondary Assistant Headteacher), or “spaces for working with students who are struggling with anxiety and mental health” (Secondary Headteacher).
- Some school staff stressed the importance of nurture support being delivered in part of the main school building, so that it feels inclusive and supportive to children. Other school staff said nurture support was delivered in a separate building on the school site and that this worked well.

4.55 A member of staff from a middle school described their “Nurture Area” which is a building where children can go to if they are finding particular lessons difficult. This includes a “calm down room”, which enabled children to gather thoughts before behaviour escalates. This respondent felt that this space worked well and contributed to preventing exclusion of children who might otherwise become dysregulated and risk breaking the school’s behaviour code.

4.56 An ALNCo from a PRU illustrated how approaches within nurture groups worked well for their children.

> “What pupils sometimes don’t see are all the subtle interventions that staff use to de-escalate their behaviour and provide a calm, nurturing environment. This can then deliver positive change without pupils fully appreciating that they are doing work.” (PRU ALNCo)

4.57 Respondents from many local authorities mentioned nurture provision (fewer specifically referenced nurture groups) to support children who were internally excluded and those at risk of fixed-term exclusion. They described a variety of perspectives:

- Nurture practices were evolving in some schools but needed to become more widely embedded across all schools to support children.

- Schools using nurture practices were achieving improved outcomes for children being supported, such as children's performance against expected levels of progress and reduced risk of fixed-term exclusion.
- Some children go to the nurture provision for registration if that is a point of anxiety for them.
- Nurture provision was often linked to wider approaches in the school on wellbeing, trauma-informed practice and ELSA support.

4.58 A few local authority respondents stated that some schools had little physical space to offer additional nurture provision.

> "Heads will say that they'd love to have a nurture provision with loads of extra space and a nice garden area but point out that they are full and work on cramped sites." (Local authority respondent)

4.59 Parents referenced nurture provision in interviews, describing them as spaces to calm down and de-escalate. For example:

> "[My son] does sensory circuits but that's for years 7-9, not sure if that will still be available in year 10 but they have been good to help him self-regulate and de-escalate in a calming space. [The school] is a noisy place and you can hear doors slamming which makes it hard for my son." (Parent)

Case study: Nurture support

This case study of a child in a primary school demonstrates the positive impact a nurturing support group can have on a child. This case study combines nurture support with multi-agency working.

A primary school child in Year 6 with a previous special guardianship order due to abuse and neglect benefitted from attending a nurture unit during Year 5. The child worked hard within the nurture group and had support from a play therapist and outreach services coming in weekly to support the child within the nurture unit. Across the whole of Year 5, the child had one-to-one support from a teaching assistant.

The child has now reintegrated back into Year 6 without any additional one-to-one support. They are now back with their birth dad following work with social services.

4.60 Literature review evidence indicates that, for children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, nurture groups can be effective at improving social and emotional functioning, behaviour and attainment. The majority of evidence relates to primary schools. Whilst evidence on the effectiveness of nurture groups on reducing

exclusions is more limited, regulators such as Estyn and Ofsted have recommended nurture groups as an approach to prevent exclusions and improve attendance.

4.61 Some research suggests that to maximise the effectiveness of nurture groups, they need to be delivered as a long-term intervention i.e., over two years or more. Providing opportunities for children to practice their social skills outside of the nurture group environment and planning for reintegration into mainstream lessons were also cited as important for effective implementation. Other enablers include embedding emotional literacy in all aspects of the nurture group provision, keeping the number of children in the nurture group low, ensuring the group is adaptive to each individual's needs, and involving parents at every stage of the process.

4.62 Overall, while there is evidence on the effectiveness of nurture groups for addressing social, emotional and behaviour difficulties, respondents to this review typically described nurture practices used by staff or spaces that children could go to if they felt overwhelmed, rather than the more structured groups outlined in the literature, although a few examples of such groups were given.

Modified curriculum

4.63 A modified curriculum involves alterations being made to the curriculum to support a child's needs who may be struggling in mainstream lessons. By implementing a modified curriculum, it gives the child the opportunity to continue their education whilst also receiving a more diverse curriculum to support this. These alternations may reduce the risk of fixed-term and permanent exclusions as children receive bespoke support to meet their needs, which has the potential to reduce challenging behaviour (see Annex C).

4.64 In Wales, the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 requires schools and local authorities to deliver the Curriculum for Wales. 'Modified curriculum' is not a term that is used as part of Curriculum for Wales and any modifications to the curriculum must be carried out in line with the duties and responsibilities for a balanced curriculum as part of Curriculum for Wales. Schools should be aware of the needs and circumstances of all their learners when designing their own curriculum, considering equity of opportunity when putting into place support and interventions or making reasonable adjustments. In addition, the power to disapply

the curriculum to individual children or young people must be conducted by headteachers consistent with relevant grounds outlined in the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021. To note, the roll-out of Curriculum for Wales has been staggered so that it applies to education settings with children up to year 8, while settings with older learners continue with Curriculum 2008. Section 114 of the Education Act 2002 sets out relevant grounds for headteachers to make temporary exceptions from Curriculum 2008 for individual pupils.

4.65 A few schools and PRUs responding to the survey referenced modified curriculum. Just over half of schools and PRUs referenced modified curriculum within the staff interviews. They described:

- Hybrid learning packages in some schools for those children who are dysregulated, which includes outdoor learning, going off-site to do activities and traditional lessons.
- Schools making applications to the local authority for modified curriculum provision and in some cases commissioning external providers where demand cannot be met in-house, and children are not responding to mainstream curriculum provision and additional support.
- A modified curriculum and outreach being used for children who are waiting for spaces at a PRU to become available. “There are some pupils who have been on the list for a couple of years, who may be following a reduced timetable, and then accessing other specialists’ provisions (outdoor education, sporting provision, work experience, etc.) locally.” (PRU Headteacher)

4.66 Around half of local authority interviewees highlighted their awareness of modified curriculum arranged by the school or the local authority. They referred to:

- A number of schools that run their own provision and have a set location where children attend and receive a form of behaviour and nurture intervention as part of a graduated response to address risks of exclusion.
- Youth mentor schemes and the Youth Service providing alternative outdoor provision in some local authority areas. Referrals to the local authority are often needed to access this type of provision, this can result in delays linked to waiting lists for limited provision.

- Inclusion officers in some areas focused on the importance of adapting the school curriculum and how best to deploy bespoke packages around the activities that were available in the community for children.

4.67 No parents within their interviews made explicit reference to the use of a modified curriculum. Children in PRUs referenced 'point schemes' whereby, if behaviour remained appropriate, children could extend their work experience scheme. Children noted that they did this for several months as the PRU understood they were enjoying it.

Case study: Modified curriculum

This case study demonstrates how a modified curriculum was used by a school for a child who was refusing to attend lessons. By using a modified curriculum, the child was able to attend their core lessons and take part in construction work that the school had arranged for them.

A child in Year 11 was refusing to attend school as they wanted to work with their dad in construction.

The enhanced provision unit organised for the child to attend their core lessons throughout the week and spend the remaining time building decking for the school garden. The school acquired funding for the building supplies. This kept the child in school for the remaining six months.

4.68 Literature and evidence on this topic are mainly focused on attendance, wellbeing and behaviour as positive outcomes of a modified curriculum. There is a small body of evidence on the effectiveness of a modified curriculum to reduce the risk of fixed-term or permanent exclusions. This includes case studies of how work-related learning programmes have improved children's engagement with education, attendance, and behaviour, with qualitative feedback suggesting these programmes reduced the likelihood of exclusion. Key factors associated with effective delivery of a modified curriculum include keeping teaching groups small, taking a multi-agency approach to development and delivery, and fostering positive, trusting relationships between children and staff.

4.69 Overall, implementing a modified curriculum was an approach commonly mentioned by respondents, although its effectiveness for reducing the risk of exclusion was not commented on. Feedback from some children consulted as part of this review aligns with literature review findings on work-related learning helping to improve engagement with education.

ELSA

4.70 The ELSA intervention involves teaching assistants, who are trained by educational psychologists, delivering individualised support aimed at helping children to develop emotional awareness, understanding and coping skills (see Annex C).

4.71 A minority of schools and PRUs responding to the survey mentioned the use of ELSAs to prevent exclusion. A few schools and PRUs referenced the use of ELSAs during interviews, covering primary and secondary age groups to help children develop emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and social skills. Typically, several school teaching assistants were trained in delivering ELSA provision. In one secondary school, ELSA provision was provided as part of a graduated response to a child's needs linked to other therapeutic support such as CAMHS.

4.72 A minority of local authority interviewees referenced the use of ELSAs. In one local authority area, the increase in number of primary schools now implementing ELSA provision had, in the interviewee's opinion, helped reduce risks of exclusion. Another local authority interviewee described how emotional literacy assessments were being used to target ELSAs' work and as a baseline to pick up emotional wellbeing issues before they became an overwhelming challenge for both the child and school staff. A few local authority interviewees noted the support provided by local authority educational psychologist delivering ELSA training and supervision. The benefits of this included improved school ELSA staff capabilities and positive professional relationships (which could be used to support more challenging cases).

4.73 No parents or children within their interviews made explicit reference to ELSAs, although support from teaching assistants was mentioned, some of whom may have been ELSA trained.

4.74 There is evidence that ESLAs can improve children's emotional literacy and lead to other positive outcomes such as improved attendance and engagement with education although this evidence largely comprises teacher assessments of children's emotional literacy and qualitative feedback from school staff. Qualitative feedback from school leaders suggests that – in their view – ELSA interventions resulted in fewer exclusions. These subjective aspects represent a limitation of some of these studies.

4.75 Effective facilitation of ESLA interventions include planning the support that will be provided to a child, having clear aims for each session, ensuring good communication with parents about the work being undertaken, and garnering support from school leaders, particularly to manage teacher expectations for what can be achieved and facilitate children being released from lessons. A lack of funding, teaching assistants having insufficient time or lacking a dedicated space to deliver ELSA activities and parental engagement are identified as key constraints to implementation.

4.76 Overall, there is a lack of robust evidence on the effectiveness of ELSA activity in reducing the risk of exclusion, although qualitative evaluation feedback from school leaders suggests it can help. Whilst ELSA activity was not commonly mentioned by respondents to this review, some of those who did mention it felt it could help to reduce the risk of exclusion.

Managed moves

4.77 A managed move is a carefully planned transfer of a pupil from one school into another (see Annex C). It enables a child to move on to a new placement or programme in a way which is acceptable to all appropriate parties, especially the child. The process is designed to help the child move forward and make a fresh start.

4.78 Few schools and PRUs responding to the survey referenced managed moves nor within staff interviews. The views expressed included:

- Differing attitudes among headteachers to seeking or receiving managed moves, some being positive and open (describing benefits of a new start for some children), while others described negative experiences (including a few who perceived inequity between local schools, such as a school that never accepts managed moves).
- Some mainstream schools reported a lack of capacity to support children displaying difficult behaviour. In these instances, managed moves are seen as one option. However, as the quote below indicates, some headteachers do not feel that managed moves are always the best option for a child.

"Because of the lack of capacity [to support children challenging behaviour], managed moves are being used as a 'sticking plaster'. The school does accept managed moves where the circumstances are right, and the pupils stand a chance of succeeding in mainstream." (Secondary Headteacher)

4.79 Many local authority respondents referred to the use of managed moves. They highlighted:

- An increase in primary schools needing to consider managed moves, as an alternative to permanently excluding a child.
- That effective managed moves are ones where fresh opportunities can be given to the child. This effectiveness relies on managed moves being part of an early intervention tool, with weekly meetings between schools and local authorities where relevant.
- That schools can face difficulties in completing managed moves due to the geographical area of the local authority, meaning that schools can be quite distanced from each other. This distance can mean that children may have to travel longer distances, making the managed move not viable or unsustainable.
- How, in some local authorities, it can be difficult to 'match' schools based on a child's requirements and also preferences, such as faith schools and Welsh Medium schools.
- That some local authorities do not complete many managed moves as headteachers in certain circumstances find it difficult to work together and moves are not seen as equitable.
- How some local authorities have created a 'fair access protocol' where each school within the authority takes it in turn to 'take on' children that need to be moved.

4.80 Parents and children did not discuss managed moves within their interviews explicitly. A few parents referenced moving their child to an alternative school where they felt the support provided was more helpful, however they did not articulate it as a managed move process.

Case study: Managed move

This case study demonstrates that a managed move can be an effective way for a child to have a fresh start away from where their trouble stems from.

A child had a managed move to another local school and subsequently returned to the sixth form of their original school. The school viewed this as a positive, as the move was not about a breakdown in the school-child relationship but was linked to friendship issues and the child subsequently behaving in certain ways.

By completing the managed move, the child was able to have a fresh-start and reinvent themselves at the new school, and progress successfully through their education.

4.81 There is limited evidence available on the effectiveness of managed moves on reducing the risk of exclusion or achieving positive outcomes for children. One research study found that a group of children who experienced a managed move achieve slightly better levels of attainment at Key Stage 4 than those who were permanently excluded.

4.82 Other available literature on managed moves tends to focus on factors for effectively sustaining a managed move, rather than evidencing positive or negative impacts. A review of nine studies on the use of managed moves as an alternative to exclusions in the UK identified building positive relationships – between the child, their peers and teachers, as well as between teachers and parents – as key to the successful integration of a child into a new school. In addition, a review of local authority practices regarding managed moves found that early identification and understanding of a child's needs, with timely and appropriate referrals to multi-agency support, was a key factor in helping to sustain a managed move.

4.83 Overall, whilst managed moves prevent permanent exclusion in the short-term, it is unclear from the literature whether they reduce the risk of exclusion over the medium or long-term, or the extent to which they lead to other positive outcomes for children. Local authority respondents in the fieldwork typically mentioned managed moves more frequently than school and PRU respondents, although both respondent groups highlighted challenges in the managed move process and had mixed views on their effectiveness. Where respondents felt they could be effective, it was noted that this relies on their use as an early intervention as well as strong, frequent communication between all those involved.

School-based counselling

4.84 School counselling services aim to support children and young people experiencing mental health and wellbeing problems or emotional distress. Counselling can help children explore, understand and overcome issues in their lives which may be causing them difficulty and/or distress. Wellbeing and mental health issues are a recognised risk factor for exclusions, and therefore effective counselling aimed at addressing these challenges may contribute to a reduction in school exclusions (see Annex C).

4.85 A few schools and PRUs responding to the survey referenced the use of school-based counselling. Interviewees from a minority of schools and PRUs referenced the use of school-based counselling. The type of services varied a lot across schools and local authorities.

4.86 A PRU staff member described being able to have open conversations with children around counselling which ensured that children were open and aware of the support available to them and not something to be embarrassed about.

4.87 One school interviewee explained how school-based counselling fitted into a graduated response to mental health support:

> "In school, if a child needs emotional support then they would start with support from an ELSA, plus contact with the school counsellor, then they may be referred to CAMHS…we have a CAMHS hub, comes in once per month." (Secondary ALNCo)

4.88 A few interviewees from local authorities mentioned school-based counselling. One local authority staff member described the use of school-based counselling in their area and how it helped children:

- Schools having a school-based counselling team, which was supported by a head educational psychologist from the local authority, enabled professional learning and was considered supportive for children.
- An educational initiative similar to TRAC 11-24 - a recently ended European Social Fund project - that included aspects of mentoring and counselling for children and young people provided important support to children.

4.89 A few children referenced that school-based counselling was available in their schools. One said they had accessed this support and it had helped with their feelings of anxiety. Another did not utilise the counselling as they felt unable to go down to the counselling room and talk to anyone.

4.90 A minority of parents described that their children had received school-based counselling. One described it as a course of six weekly counselling sessions through the school.

Case study: School-based counselling

This case study highlights how effective counselling and parental support can be in helping both the family and child in reducing exclusions. In this case, the child and their parent were able to repair a broken relationship and the school were able to communicate more effectively with the parent as a result. The use of joint therapy/counselling sessions was seen to be effective.

This child was deemed to be at risk of exclusion. There were some drug issues in the home, but the family was able to access support and counselling from the school around drug and alcohol misuse. The child's mum was also a part of these sessions.

The child responded well and this led to the child and mum having joint therapeutic sessions together, which re-established a relationship that had broken down. The school reported a few hiccups and issues within the community, but the child's behaviour in school overall was really positive. School staff reported being able to have civil and positive conversations with the child and their mum now.

4.91 There is limited evidence on the impact of counselling interventions to prevent exclusions, although a small number of studies examining the impact of counselling in schools reported reductions in exclusions. An evaluation of Place2Be's one-to-one counselling service (Little, 2018) also found that children who had received counselling lost fewer days to fixed-term exclusion in the year after the intervention compared with the year before, including half who did not have any subsequent fixed-term exclusions.

4.92 In addition, a rapid evidence review of school- and community-based counselling services in the UK found that there was overall some evidence of the positive impacts of counselling on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing across a range of settings. There was limited evidence to support a specific approach to counselling. There were concerns over the quality of the evidence with weaker study designs reporting more positive impacts of counselling services.

Importantly, no study indicated that counselling had a negative or harmful impact on children or young people's mental health and wellbeing.

4.93 Evidence suggests that counselling services which are integrated within a wider whole-school approach to mental wellbeing, delivered by good quality counsellors providing tailored support within a dedicated space at the school, and with support from parents, are likely to be the most effective. Funding to help schools introduce and sustain counselling services was also highlighted as a key enabler.

4.94 Overall, there is a lack of robust evidence on the effectiveness of counselling for reducing school exclusions, but some positive evidence for its impact on wellbeing and mental health. It was not commonly mentioned by interviewees during the fieldwork as an intervention to support those at risk of exclusion, although where it was used, positive outcomes for children were reported.

Therapeutic approaches

4.95 In addition to the one-to-one counselling discussed above, there are several other therapeutic interventions that schools might use to support children and young people with their mental, social, and emotional wellbeing, including management of behaviours. Given, as referenced earlier, these are risk factors linked to school exclusions, there is the potential that these activities might contribute towards reducing exclusions in the school context (see Annex C).

4.96 A number of practices outlined elsewhere in this report commonly incorporate therapeutic approaches, including trauma-informed and restorative practices, behaviour intervention plans, nurture groups, ELSAs and mentoring.

4.97 Three other types of therapeutic intervention not explicitly mentioned elsewhere are:

- Play and creative therapies. Therapies using play or creative expression to support children to express and understand their emotions, cope with stress and worries, and develop self-awareness and self-esteem.
- Mindfulness. This involves intentionally paying attention to the present-moment experience. Mindfulness approaches within schools might involve establishing mindfulness champions, training teachers to teacher mindfulness, and delivering mindfulness activities.

- Social and emotional learning programmes. Interventions which seek to improve children's decision-making skills, interactions with others and their self-management of emotions.

4.98 Very few schools and PRUs responding to the survey made reference to play therapy. A minority of schools and PRUs referenced play therapy in their staff interviews. Interviewees highlighted:

- Children in a specific PRU setting being able to talk and play games in a safe space which helped to regulate behaviour.
- A specialist play therapist being available in certain primary schools to aid school staff and work with children and families.

  "Absolutely transformative to those who have had fixed-term exclusion. They [play therapist] do a lot to stop permanent exclusions." (Primary Headteacher)

- Sand or Lego therapy often being used as forms of play therapy when distractions are needed. School staff in certain cases were able to recognise when a child had been having issues outside of school and could use these forms of play therapy to focus them and help them to start to feel better.

4.99 Very few local authority respondents made reference to play therapy. One respondent described the support in their area:

"Additional support to children struggling may include working with the educational psychologist or interacting with play therapy." (Local authority respondent)

4.100 No parents made specific reference to play therapy during their interviews. A child described that they "sit down and play games" with the pastoral behavioural lead within their school as part of the additional support they are provided with when they are not in mainstream classes.

Case study: Play therapy

This case study of a child in year 7 demonstrates how play therapy can be an effective practice to implement to help build self-esteem and trusting relationships. By utilising this practice, the school feels in this case that it has allowed them to prevent fixed-term exclusions on numerous occasions.

A child in Year 7 who displayed challenging behaviour when they arrived at the school and immediately was verbally abusive towards senior staff.

The child received lots of support from their head of year and through play therapy using Lego (to help them talk while doing something creative) and was also supported by engaging with a therapy dog to improve this child's confidence and provide an opportunity to build relationships and regular their emotions.

The school expressed that the child is bright and is now thriving. While the child still has difficulties, the school can successfully support them to better manage their behaviour.

The school have helped the child avoid fixed-term exclusion due to the investment and therapeutic measures they put in place. The school headteacher felt that a lot of the success had been around building up the child's sense of self-worth through taking the time to speak with them.

4.101 There is evidence that arts therapies, mindfulness, and social and emotional learning interventions can improve children's mental health and wellbeing and help children develop social and emotional skills, including pro-social behaviour and resilience. However, research into the longer-term effects of such interventions is limited and, aside from individual case studies, there is no research explicitly linking these therapeutic interventions to reduced exclusions.

4.102 Factors for successful implementation include sufficient resourcing, integrating the therapeutic interventions within a school-wide approach, commitment and understanding from senior leaders and ongoing staff development and support.

4.103 Overall, despite some encouraging evidence on the effectiveness of arts therapies, mindfulness and social and emotional learning interventions for children's mental and emotional wellbeing, little is known about their effectiveness for reducing exclusions and such approaches were not commonly mentioned by respondents.

Enhancing academic skills

4.104 Enhancing academic skills can involve programmes that target specific children who are experiencing challenges with their academic learning or literacy. It can also include programmes that support children with behavioural problems which have a component of academic support. Academic skills support can include help from learning support assistants, the use of specialist teaching strategies and tools, and tutoring. Providing academic support to children who are disengaging from lessons and displaying challenging behaviour can help to ensure that they can still progress

academically and reduce the risk that they are excluded from mainstream lessons (see Annex C).

4.105 Very few schools and PRUs when responding to the survey referenced enhancing academic skills or tutoring as some schools and PRUs referred to it as. Similarly, very few schools and PRUs referenced academic tutoring during staff interviews. Interviewees commented on:

- The use of a ‘preventative hub’ within one school where academic interventions take place for children who are becoming disengaged, avoiding school due to anxiety, or not going to certain lessons. The hub is used as an alternative to mainstream classes during this time to maintain academic progress (for certain lessons).
- How academic learning within PRU settings can sometimes only last 10-minutes, with the remaining 50 minutes being more nurture-based. This means that implementing extra academic support can be useful to ‘mix-in’ with the more nurture-based practices.

4.106 Respondents from a few local authorities referenced academic tutoring that schools provide. For example, learner support assistants being employed by schools in some local authorities for children who are in a ‘satellite’ room away from the main school site.

4.107 A few parents mentioned that additional literacy support had helped their children progress academically.

4.108 Another parent commented that their child, aged 12, was not able to read or write and was very challenging behaviourally before attending the PRU but “has made a complete turnaround since being here [PRU].” The PRU provided good relationships with teachers, and safe spaces in smaller classrooms with one-to-one sessions.

Case study: Academic tutoring

This case study demonstrates the use of academic tutoring for a specific child to be able to keep up with their mainstream lessons while attending 'internal alternative provision’ within the school.

A Year 10 child had been presenting with challenging behaviour for the previous couple of years and was at risk of permanent exclusion. The child faced multiple challenges, such as undiagnosed ADHD and their dad being in prison.

The child had a good relationship with their head of year as they had known them since Year 7. School staff described the child as angry with a lot going on. The child would often flip tables in maths, throw bins and punch walls.

The child spent two years in 'internal alternative provision' full-time and did core lessons there including maths, English and science. The 'internal alternative provision' is a centre on the school site for those disengaged in lessons or who were not attending at primary school – opened in 2019. The child's teachers were able to go with the child and support them. The child has also completed the Princes Trust Achieve[18] programme. The child has had no fixed-term exclusions since they have been attending the 'internal alternative provision'.

4.109 Literature and evidence on the effectiveness of academic skills programmes for reducing the risk of exclusion is limited. The available evidence comprises of a small number of experimental or quasi-experimental studies from which the authors noted that firm conclusions cannot be drawn.

4.110 The small number of respondents to this review who mentioned academic skills support did not comment on its effectiveness for reducing exclusions. However, their comments suggest that additional academic support can play an important role in sustaining academic progress for children at risk of exclusion, particularly for children in PRUs or where children are removed from mainstream lessons.

Mentoring

4.111 Mentoring refers to one-to-one support for a child from an older peer or adult who acts as a positive role model and aims to build a positive relationship with them and support the child's needs (see Annex C).

4.112 Mentoring was not mentioned very often in the fieldwork. Very few schools and PRUs when responding to the survey referred to mentoring as a practice. Very few staff in schools and PRU referenced mentoring in relation to preventing exclusions within interviews. Where it was used in schools, it tended to be with secondary aged children and on a selective basis (as part of a graduated response to supporting children identified as being at risk of exclusion). One headteacher said they would

[18] Princes Trust Achieve programme

like to provide more mentoring support to their children but that they could not afford to.

4.113 One school respondent explained that mentoring was available to all their children, if required. This respondent described challenges around the time-consuming nature of planning for individual needs in advance (such as mentoring) due to needs constantly changing. This is challenging for mentoring because it is generally a longer-term commitment, for a school term, a school year or longer.

4.114 Respondents from a few local authorities highlighted mentoring practice. They described:

- The former TRAC programme (for children aged 11-16) where Lead Workers acted as mentors to children identified at risk of not being in education, employment or training (through use of a learner profile tool (Maughan et al., 2020)) as part of a wider support programme[19]. While TRAC is broader than a mentoring intervention the Gwynedd evaluation report stated that:

  "Some stakeholders felt that TRAC had helped to prevent exclusions by catching cases early" (Maughan et al., 2020).

- School staff members being trained in resilience and mentoring linked to delivery of the TRAC programme.
- Examples of a few schools purchasing mentoring services for children.
- Cardiff local authority offers youth mentoring[20] (including school children aged 11 to 18) through their youth services provision. The programme is delivered in secondary schools to children that are identified as, or at risk of becoming, not engaged in education, employment or training (some of these children will be at risk of exclusion). Youth Mentors are placed within schools, where they provide one-to-one support based on the child's wellbeing, attainment and attendance.

4.115 No parents mentioned mentoring within their interviews.

[19] TRAC incorporates a multi-agency approach, working with Careers Wales and the Activate programme within all the secondary schools. The support provides tailored interventions for those young people including: support for wellbeing and attendance, counselling and mental health support, courses and work placements and sessions delivered by Careers Wales.
[20] Cardiff Youth Service

4.116 There is encouraging evidence that mentoring can help to reduce levels of fixed-term or permanent exclusions and reduce violence and disruptive behaviour. Valdebenito et al., (2018) reported that mentoring demonstrated one of the most stable results for its positive impact for reducing school exclusions. In relation to children based in a PRU, there was some evidence that mentoring could lead to improvements in physical and mental health, as well as behavioural and educational outcomes.

4.117 Research highlighted the importance of sustaining mentoring programmes over a long-term period (ideally a school year), management of mentoring relationships that do not work out successfully and the importance of supporting children when the intervention finishes as they have lost a supportive relationship which can be disruptive and destabilising for them.

4.118 Overall, while mentoring was not mentioned frequently by respondents, there is evidence of use in Wales particularly for children at risk of fixed-term or permanent exclusion. Indeed, the literature supports the use of mentoring as it can lead to positive outcomes for children showing disruptive behaviour and those at risk of exclusion, including positive impacts on preventing exclusions. However, it appears important to sustain mentoring programmes over a long period and there are challenges for supporting children who have established good relationships with their mentor when the mentoring programme ends.

Internal exclusions

4.119 Internal exclusions, or specifically removal from the classroom, was one of the alternative solutions which the Welsh Government Guidance (2019a) suggested could be considered before a permanent or fixed-term exclusion was made. Internal exclusion is a broad term but can be defined as when a child is removed from their regular mainstream classroom and placed in a designated area within the school premises for a specified period of time (see Annex C). Internal exclusion may include more supportive forms of removal such as learning support or inclusion groups combined with other practices described in this chapter, but also encompasses isolation spaces with limited support (see Annex C).

4.120 There were varied descriptions of internal exclusion spaces, which in some cases were rooms or spaces within the main school and in others were separate buildings and gardens in the school grounds. Examples of terms used in secondary schools were on-site inclusion centre, inclusion centre/room, self-regulation room, isolation room, alternative provision[21], return to learn and hafan [haven]. In primary schools, labels included: rainbow room and cwtch [hug].

4.121 Just below half of schools and PRUs responding to the survey described the use of internal exclusion practices. Around half of schools and PRUs referenced internal exclusions across the staff interviews. Descriptions of use included:

- Some schools noted in staff interviews that they used 'isolation rooms' or 'internal exclusion rooms' as an attempt to reduce fixed-term and permanent exclusions. The rooms were described by interviewees as allowing staff members to manage behaviour onsite at an earlier stage than would be the case with a fixed-term exclusion.
- School staff interviews referenced that they used internal exclusions as an alternative to fixed-term exclusions, particularly where they were aware that the child's home circumstances were more challenging, to avoid compounding the child's circumstances. For example, one secondary school teacher said they may decide to set isolation outside the Headteacher's office instead of starting a process of fixed-term exclusion. The following headteacher explained that they can face difficult choices between internal exclusion and fixed-term exclusion which both have negative consequences for the child.

  "It is about knowing the children and finding an approach that's appropriate and effective. There are sometimes no good options." (Headteacher)

- School interviewees were aware that, whilst an internal exclusion is a sanction, which removes a child from the classroom, it was not regarded as being quite as serious as a fixed-term exclusion from school.

4.122 One school had an isolation room, which was used to attempt to reduce fixed-term and permanent exclusions by managing challenging behaviour on site at an early stage a headteacher said. This isolation room was used for lower-level behavioural

[21] The term 'alternative provision' was used to describe PRU-style provision in a school, not EOTAS provision.

issues, where children may be placed to undertake class-related work, monitored by a teacher, for a half-day, or even up to four or five days. The headteacher described that this formed part of the graduated response and involved children losing their breaktimes and lunchtimes, to send a message that certain behaviours are unacceptable.

4.123 A few school and PRU interviewees noted that there is a perception amongst staff that internal exclusions do not necessarily help the situation or the child, as there may not be any additional support provided, rather, they make things easier for the staff to cope in the short-term. School interviewees commented that internal exclusions do not typically "get to the bottom of the situation" (Deputy Headteacher), although sometimes the shock effect can be sufficient to stimulate a change in behaviour. More often the child requires specialist support to deal with trauma and other challenges which can take time to organise.

4.124 A few school staff described how they combined internal exclusion and other practices to support children.

- One school had an inclusion room where children received therapeutic interventions, such as working with an ELSA. By adopting this approach, they believed that children worked more constructively and were able to reflect better and improve on their behaviours if they received support. A teacher at this school described a sharp decline in exclusions as a result and that "significant progress" (secondary teacher) had been made with individual behaviours leading to better levels of engagement.
- A few school staff stated that they operated internal provision that is very similar to that delivered in a PRU. This had various labels including alternative provision and an on-site exclusion centre.

4.125 PRU staff expressed in interviews that they use internal exclusions for breaches of school behaviour policy. Although they explained that there was typically a higher level of tolerance for disruptive behaviour in PRUs compared with mainstream schools, in line with the PRU behaviour policy.

4.126 A minority of local authority interviewees referenced the use of internal exclusion. They highlighted that:

- Internal exclusion was often not seen as inclusive practice across their local authority.
- Schools were trying to reduce fixed-term and permanent exclusions and, as a consequence, internal exclusions were increasing, which was concerning for local authorities.
- Schools were using isolation units/rooms which go against the trauma-informed practices that are being implemented in many schools and PRUs across local authorities, because isolation units/rooms tend to be regarded as a punishment with limited support in some cases. Some local authorities are trying to support schools and PRUs while challenging this contradictory practice, through provision of training, such as in trauma-informed practice. One interviewee explained that as teachers and school staff develop insight and better understanding of approaches (for example, of trauma-informed practice) then this improves their understanding of children's behaviour and their interactions with other professionals.

  "[Schools] will feel more confident to do this [use trauma-informed practice] now as training is more embedded. Language used across teams is already consistent now with ALNCo, psychologists etc. around genuine inclusion." (Local authority respondent)

4.127 Parents and children referenced internal exclusions within their interviews as situations where they [children] had been removed from the classroom and put in alternative spaces within the school such as 'isolation units' or other buildings on the school site away from mainstream classrooms. This was described by one parent whose child had experience of a mainstream secondary school and a PRU.

"Mainstream would exclude for small things and [child would] go to isolation and be left there." (Parent).

Case study: Internal exclusion

This case study highlights how a primary school may use internal exclusions, expressing that the ethos of the school is to try and keep children within the classroom where possible and use internal and external exclusions as a last resort.

One primary school noted their use of internal exclusions. The school uses this practice when a child has done something they should not have done, that breaks their behaviour policy but where the behaviour does not warrant a fixed-term exclusion. The internal

exclusion means the child is sent to another class to work for the day, where they will generally not have the same peer relationships as their usual class.

Case study: Internal exclusion

This case study demonstrates how a secondary school uses internal exclusions within the headteachers office, due to difficulties in resourcing an appropriate space for internal exclusions to take place.

One secondary school expressed that they have no additional resources to facilitate internal exclusions. While the school does use this practice, it often means that the headteacher has several children in their office where they are trying to do their work. The headteacher feels that more funding and resources are needed to be able to resource this.

4.128 Literature evidence on internal exclusions largely consists of research to understand its use in schools across the UK and school staff views on its effectiveness at addressing behaviour issues and preventing fixed-term and permanent exclusion. Across these studies, which typically explored isolation spaces rather than more supportive forms of internal exclusion, findings are mixed. Some school staff view internal exclusion as a useful 'halfway' point (between a mainstream classroom and fixed-term or permanent exclusion) that helps to reduce the risk of exclusion by giving children useful time and space away from the classroom and their peer group. Other research has highlighted that it is often the same children who repeatedly receive internal exclusions, suggesting that the approach is not effective at improving behaviour. A few studies suggest that internal exclusions should be supportive rather than punitive.

4.129 Internal exclusion was commonly mentioned by school and PRU respondents, with views largely reflecting the literature review findings. Overall, it was felt that, whilst punitive approaches to internal exclusion can help to communicate to children that certain behaviour is unacceptable, they typically do not effectively address the causes of disruptive behaviour. Some examples of internal exclusions with support were identified as preventing fixed-term and permanent exclusion. There was also some concern that, as schools attempt to reduce rates of fixed-term and permanent exclusion, the use of internal exclusion has increased.

Reduced timetables

Schools may need to implement a reduced timetable to support a child who cannot attend school full-time for a short, agreed period. Such circumstances may include reintegration into school (e.g., following a fixed-term exclusion or extended absence due to ill health).

4.130 A reduced timetable is recorded in a plan (such as a pastoral support plan, individual behaviour plan or reintegration plan) as a formal agreement between the child, their parents, and school. An agreed reduced timetable may also include distanced or online delivery of lessons where applicable to ensure continuity of learning for the child. Once the reduced timetable has been agreed, the school must then share this with their local authority. Schools should never use reduced timetables as a measure for managing behavioural issues (Welsh Government, 2023a).

4.131 A few of the schools and PRUs responding to the survey mentioned the use of reduced timetables. However, just over half of school and PRU staff commented on the use of reduced timetables, as part of pastoral support plans, within the staff interviews. This included:

- A few schools and PRUs used reduced timetables as a measure to reduce the risk of exclusion by providing “breathing space” as a temporary measure to support the child’s needs, which would then form part of a plan to build the child back up to full-time education.
- Schools are using reduced timetables in different ways to support learners’ needs, including the use of other support such as youth worker and family support alongside.

  “Support is through a session in the morning for school refusers/those with anxiety for one lesson, then educational check-in for a lesson. Some [children] then go home, some go into lessons, some have alternative [reduced] timetables.” (Secondary ALNCo)

  Those children who go home after attending the morning sessions are those that are not able or ready to attend more regularly until the children can be supported to attend more regularly.

"The '3-4 Provision' is used for students who are not coping or who have been disruptive. This means they only come in between 3 and 4 in the afternoon. Whilst the school does also reduce timetables in terms of PSPs [pastoral support programme], this is a further, escalated option." (Secondary Deputy Headteacher)

- A few school staff stated that the number of children with a reduced timetable had increased over time, which they felt reflected the pressure that staff experienced in managing children's behaviour in line with their school policy.

4.132 Interviewees from the majority of local authorities referenced the use of reduced timetables. These comments included:

- Local authorities needing a better understanding of individual arrangements, which a few believed required a systematic change of the process to ensure they are aware of all children on reduced timetables.

  "[We] put a policy in place in 2020, and this is being reviewed now as part of the Behaviour Strategy to put a bit more rigour in the system to ensure they [reduced timetables] are being used correctly." (Local authority respondent)

- At times, interviewees described that local authorities receive evidence from schools and PRUs that reduced timetables have been used effectively (as a temporary measure) and can see the steady increase of hours spent in school, progressing to a full timetable for specific children, but that was not always the case.
- The need for schools to ensure that the use of reduced timetables was part of a package of support for children to return to full-time attendance, as concerns were raised that reduced timetables were not necessarily conducive to inclusion.

4.133 A few children commented on the use of reduced timetables being used. They expressed that at times, it felt like a way for their school to get them out of the way because the staff could not deal with them.

Case study: Reduced timetable

This case study demonstrates how a reduced timetable was perceived to be an effective way of supporting a child who was struggling to attend school full-time. This child had a

reduced timetable alongside having a good relationship with a pastoral member of staff, with protocols in place so that the child could leave school safely if necessary.

A child in Year 10 was displaying disruptive behaviour and experiencing multiple challenges within their family. The school tried various part-time learning programmes to adapt to the needs of the child and tried a managed move, but this broke down and the child returned to the school.

The child attended the school's enhanced provision unit to receive support and focused on core subjects, on a reduced timetable. The school agreed with their local authority that the child would not attend school full-time.

The child had a good relationship with a pastoral worker, and the school had agreed protocols with teachers that if the child was in distress or had a meltdown, there was a route for the child to leave site in a managed way.

4.134 Recent research about the use of reduced timetables in Wales highlighted ambiguity around their purpose and intended outcomes. There is evidence of widespread use of reduced timetables from respondents to this review, with school and PRU staff commenting that reduced timetables are often a feature of pastoral support programmes. Local authority staff suggested there was a need for clearer understanding about how reduced timetables are used by schools and PRUs.

Summary

4.135 There was some evidence from the literature review and fieldwork that school-based interventions and approaches can have a positive impact on preventing exclusions. Restorative practice followed by school-wide approaches to addressing behaviour were the universal approaches that had the strongest current evidence base supporting its use for preventing exclusions in schools, while for targeted interventions mentoring demonstrated the most stable effects.

5. Research findings: practices to maintain contact during fixed-term exclusion

5.1 This chapter reviews the evidence about practices used by schools and PRUs to maintain contact with children during a fixed-term exclusion.

5.2 The broad approach across schools and PRUs tends to cover the following headings:

- Communication with the child and parent.
- Provision of schoolwork.
- Checking understanding of schoolwork.
- Monitoring the completion of schoolwork.

5.3 Interviewees from most schools and PRUs explained that the approach varied depending on the length of the fixed-term exclusion. For short exclusions of up to one day, the approach was generally described as light-touch with less focus on the provision, checking or monitoring of schoolwork.

Communication with the child and parent

5.4 All interviewees recognised the importance of communication from schools and PRUs with all parents and children. Interviewees from around half of schools and PRUs described that they established an effective relationship with the child and parent well before any exclusion might take place. A few school interviewees described resilient relationships with parents and children as involving teachers establishing trust, showing understanding, providing support. Therefore, early engagement with parents of children at risk of exclusion was the preferred approach, although the interviewees acknowledged that not all parents are receptive to this early communication.

5.5 Interviewees from all schools and PRUs described the dialogue that takes place with the parent and child at the beginning of and during a fixed-term exclusion. A variety of mechanisms for this to be achieved were described, such as:

- A member of the school behaviour team, pastoral team or a family engagement officer agreeing the frequency of contact with the child during the fixed-term exclusion (depending on the length of the fixed-term exclusion).

- A head of year for pastoral support leading on providing support to children during their fixed-term exclusion (this may range from checking understanding of planned work through to tuition, typically online but in some instances at home, to help them undertake work given). They will also liaise with other teachers around the child's academic needs to provide them with work.
- A few schools described the existence of a direct phone line to the ALN department for parents of children with ALN to ring if they were struggling at home with a child who is fixed-term excluded.

5.6 A few school staff members explicitly emphasised the importance of speaking with both the parent and child during a fixed-term exclusion (teachers referenced discussing their learning and future behaviour through reflecting on why the fixed-term exclusion occurred). Others said this was often difficult to achieve in practice, particularly if parents or children wanted to avoid contact. In a small number of cases, this contact might be face-to-face in the child's home with parental consent, but in the main it would be by phone or online.

5.7 In a few cases, interviewees described arranging meetings with parents and/or children in neutral community venues (staff described the aim of these meetings as to maintain dialogue, discuss their work and discuss behaviour on their return to school). For example, this might be at the mid-way point of a longer fixed-term exclusion of more than a week.

Provision of schoolwork

5.8 Staff from all schools and PRUs recognised the importance of providing schoolwork to the child while on a fixed-term exclusion (in line with their statutory duty). A few said it is sometimes not possible to engage the child to complete work away from school, either online or otherwise (as the children, and sometimes parents, do not respond to school staff attempts to make contact or refuse to complete work).

5.9 The following processes were described as enabling the provision of work for children on fixed-term exclusions:

- A request for staff to upload work onto Google Classroom for the child (in cases where this did not happen automatically). There were also some instances where

children or their parents requested work on paper which schools say they responded to.

- The nominated contact, such as those described above, liaises with a child's class teachers to coordinate the preparation of work for the child.
- A member of the school behaviour team, pastoral team or a family engagement officer will provide work and support either online or in-person (as described above, if agreed with parents).

5.10 An example of support provided in one case illustrates how this happens in practice.

> A child who had a fixed-term exclusion had regular contact with a youth worker, arranged by the school, every other day. The youth worker shared the necessary work with the child, talked through what the work involved, supported the child if they had any issues related to the work, and liaised with the school to see if a video call was needed with a particular member of staff.

5.11 In a few cases, school staff mentioned that some children do not have laptops, meaning they are unable to complete electronic-based work at home. One school said they were unable to supply laptops in these instances, so usually provided paper-based school work instead. Another school tried to make IT equipment available where they could, although the interviewees explained that resource limitations sometimes constrained this.

Checking understanding of schoolwork

5.12 A few schools described the importance of staff checking the child's understanding of the work provided. Some secondary schools described a variety of school staff (e.g., the child's form tutor, a subject teacher, a member of the pastoral team, a school welfare officer or an ALNCo) making contact to check that the work was understood.

5.13 A few school interviewees described the engaged nature of this contact in order to check understanding and that the child was doing the work.

> "The member of staff who works with children regarding attendance [makes this contact] part of this is to check that when we say online, we don't mean just log into Google classroom and get a sheet, but they (the child) actually have a call and go through the work with this member of staff." (Secondary school deputy head)

5.14 A few schools explained that this process of checking schoolwork could be improved and that it may not be conducted on a systematic basis.

Monitoring the completion of schoolwork

5.15 The monitoring of was described by some school staff explained that they monitored schoolwork through electronic teaching system, such as Google Classroom or similar, which enabled staff to see that work was being undertaken and to see the results of the work.

5.16 Although, one respondent explained that this could be complicated in the situation where children did not have access to a computer at home. In these instances, the work would be paper-based and checking would generally be done by phone call and sometimes through visits to the family home (for longer fixed-term exclusions).

5.17 This stage was the least well monitored according to interviews with a few school staff.

> "Although work is sent, it does not always come back, this is not monitored systematically and is an area for the school to improve." (Secondary Senior Leader)

5.18 These staff explained that they had identified this as a weakness in their systems and were looking to improve it.

6. Research findings: practices to support reintegration following an exclusion

6.1 This chapter reviews the evidence about practices used by schools and PRUs to support the reintegration of children following an exclusion.

6.2 The broad approach across schools and PRUs tended to cover the following:

- Reintegration meeting.
  - Agree a behaviour plan.
  - Restorative practice approach.
  - Implement additional support where required.
  - Agree self-management strategies.
- Maintain regular dialogue with child and family.

Reintegration meeting

6.3 There was a strong message from nearly all school and PRU staff interviewed about the importance of a return to school meeting for the child and parents following school exclusion. Many interviewees from schools and PRUs noted challenges if the parent does not engage with the initial return to school meeting. Challenges included not being able to agree on how best to move forward from the behaviour that resulted in the child's exclusion and how it was possible to promote more positive behaviour through supportive interventions, to agree any additional support, for schools to have the opportunity to listen to families and to check that parents were re-enforcing messages from the school to the child. A few interviewees emphasised that the level of engagement from parents can vary in terms of the extent to which they positively engage with the school at this initial reintegration meeting or at other opportunities, at a later date, to discuss the child's reintegration (dependent on individual school reintegration processes). Improved engagement between schools and parents can allow for greater collaboration around strategies to support the child and encouragement for the parent to reinforce the messages at home.

6.4 One interviewee from a school explained that the initial reintegration meeting takes place with the child's head of year or senior leader depending on the nature of the incident that required an exclusion. Expected behaviour upon returning to school

and any support requirements are discussed with parents and the child during this meeting dependent on the child's individual needs. Some schools reported that the support requirements can involve time in the learning support centre or reduced time in school, and there is also the opportunity for a restorative meeting.

6.5 One school interviewee referred to how some parents viewed these reintegration meetings negatively and the difficulties with engagement:

> "Parents felt these meetings were more of a rule-based meeting 'laying down the law' and discussing the rules around what they [child] were excluded for as opposed to what measures could put in place to prevent further exclusions." (Secondary Chair of Governors)

6.6 This was evident in the parent interviews whereby some parents referred to the lack of communication from the school or PRU when their children had been excluded and that the reintegration meeting was spent outlining why the child was excluded rather than a focus on the support that would be implemented to prevent the exclusion from happening again.

6.7 Other school interviewees described the reintegration meeting as an opportunity to meet with the child and family and move forward positively. The meeting gives the child the space to help them understand that they are an important member of the school community, while the school listens carefully to the opinions and needs of the child and their family and what the school can do differently to support them.

Agree a behaviour plan

6.8 A behaviour plan is often agreed during the reintegration meetings. The majority of school and PRU interviewees described the following processes for this, to ensure that there are clear expectations of behaviour going forward:

- Children are provided with a detailed set of expectations about their future behaviour during the reintegration meeting which leads to a 'contract' or 'agreement'. The parent is also invited and is able to contribute to the discussion and agreement. If the parent is not present, the agreement or contract is sent to them.
- The child would sign a 'contract' on return, to affirm a commitment to learning and behaviour. In this instance, the school explained that children will also have a

one-page profile with targets that staff will use. This profile is then shared via the pupil information system so that all relevant staff members have access.

Restorative practice approach

6.9 Most school and PRU interviewees described taking a restorative approach to reintegration meetings which could also include follow-up therapeutic work after an exclusion. It was felt this approach allowed the child to reflect on the situation and talk through what had happened, and possible reasons for their behaviour.

6.10 An interviewee from a PRU referenced that exclusions (particularly after a physical assault or incident of that nature) not only serve a purpose of being a sanction, but also to provide some time for children to say “Okay, this has happened, how are we going to reflect on it, lessons learned, those sort of things.” (PRU Teacher).

6.11 One other interviewee from a PRU explained that sometimes it can be hard to engage with children during restorative reintegration meetings as they are often embarrassed by their actions and just want to move on from the situation. In some instances, this can result in the child being absent from school to avoid these meetings which can further exacerbate the situation. In such circumstances staff work to ensure a discussion can take place, for example, making it less formal initially.

> “When some children do something that they feel is really bad, like call a teacher a really nasty name, they will often be reluctant to engage and simply want to move on from the incident. Children will even stay off school for a couple of days to avoid facing the teacher in that restorative session, so staff have to work through that and ensure it doesn’t become a source of further problems.” (PRU ALNCo)

Additional support

6.12 Almost all school and PRU staff interviewees described a big emphasis in reintegration meetings on improvement and identifying what support is needed when children are reintegrated following a fixed-term exclusion.

6.13 One headteacher from a secondary school noted that some children find it difficult to reflect on what they have done, and often have behaved impulsively and cannot

explain why. By supporting children to reflect on their behaviour, it allows schools and PRUs to implement additional support that can help children self-reflect and be more aware of their actions.

6.14 According to staff who were interviewed, reduced timetables were put in place by many schools and PRUs following a fixed-term exclusion for children who found it challenging to undertake a full timetable. Staff from schools and PRUs also described that a reduced timetable can help reintegrate children who have been long-term non-attenders due to anxiety and other issues. However, it is not clear whether the use of reduced timetables in schools for children following fixed-term exclusions was always consistent with the Welsh Government (2019a) guidance on reintegration back into mainstream school.

6.15 Following an exclusion, many school and PRU interviewees discussed that there would be an opportunity for children to work with ELSAs. The aims of this support were described by staff as helping children to: develop coping strategies and talk about difficulties, interact more successfully with other children and teachers, and develop greater self-awareness to manage school better and feel better about themselves.

6.16 A few schools and PRUs described that additional support for children who are reintegrating following an exclusion was discussed during team meetings. This process often brings together all the relevant staff (pastoral staff, heads of year, phase leaders, safety officer, counsellors) every few weeks, to look at each school year. They then consider if any children need further additional support or a review of existing support. By discussing children reintegrating following an exclusion within the team meetings allows for all relevant school staff members involved with the child to be aware of the arrangements, ensuring consistency and a smoother return for the child.

Agree self-management strategies

6.17 A few school and PRU interviewees highlighted that agreeing emotional-management strategies often formed part of reintegration meetings. This involved agreeing ‘exit strategies’ if situations become overwhelming for the child. Respondents described that they agreed ways with children for them to

communicate their needs, concerns or discomfort to a trusted adult which minimises anxiety for themselves and others, and going to a safe place such as a designated room or member of staff's office. A few school and PRU staff members in their interviews mentioned that 'agreeing exit' strategies gives the child an 'out' and stops situations from escalating further.

6.18 One PRU interviewee described a self-management strategy whereby phrases are agreed upon between the child and staff that are then recorded on the child's behaviour plan. This allows all staff access so they can then use the agreed phrases to help the child regulate themselves. These phrases are personalised to the specific child. In another example, a child did not like asking for help, which was also a trigger, so they agreed the child could give the teacher a coloured card to indicate that they wanted help.

Regular dialogue with children

6.19 Staff from all schools and PRUs recognised the importance of establishing regular dialogue with a child on reintegration to their school or PRU following an exclusion.

6.20 A staff member at one school explained that after a fixed-term exclusion reintegration meeting the school's wellbeing and positive relationships officer takes time to build up trust and develop the relationship with the child. This means that the child is aware that they can talk to the officer when needed and establish that regular dialogue. An interviewee from another school referred to regular dialogue taking place with the child through support from the welfare team for around six weeks after the fixed-term exclusion to check on progress, discuss how the child is feeling and offer support around anxiety, confidence and anger.

6.21 Weekly progress appointments were also discussed by some interviewees from schools, during which the child can discuss their support needs with a welfare officer.

7. Research findings: support needed to prevent exclusions, maintain engagement and support reintegration back into mainstream education

7.1 This chapter describes the support needed by the following stakeholders to prevent exclusions, maintain engagement and support reintegration back into mainstream education:

- Local authorities
- Schools and PRUs
- Parents
- Children.

7.2 For each heading, a summary table links the support to the three categories. This is then described in more detail.

Local authorities

7.3 Interviewees described a range of support needs (Table 7.1), most of which focused on preventing exclusions although some had links to maintaining engagement with children on fixed-term exclusions and supporting reintegration back into school.

Table 7.1 Support needed by local authorities

Area of support	Prevent exclusions	Maintain engagement	Support reintegration back into mainstream education
Updates to Welsh Government guidance	✓	✓	✓
Funding and resources	✓	✓	✓
Effective practice around partnership working with schools	✓		
Guidance on reviewing quality of practice delivery in schools	✓		✓
Dialogue with schools to discuss cases earlier	✓		
Support to achieve multi-agency solutions	✓		
Reduce waiting lists for support services	✓		
Mandate governor training on exclusion	✓		

Updates to Welsh Government guidance

7.4 Staff from nearly all local authorities interviewed mentioned the Welsh Government guidance on school exclusion. Interviewees from a majority of local authorities said the guidance was clear and easy to follow, with some describing it as their "bible" and "in constant use".

> "It's my favourite Welsh Government guidance. It is descriptive and clear. Whilst it has been in place a long time, it's still relevant and accurate." (Local authority interviewee)

7.5 Alongside the above positive sentiment, most interviewees also identified areas for improvement or updates that would be beneficial.

Table 7.2 Examples of local authority feedback on Welsh Government guidance

Theme	Feedback from local authority interviewees
Supporting schools	• Schools often contact the local authority to help interpret the guidance. • Additional worked examples and case studies as part of future guidance would help practitioners envisage and consider different scenarios and consider different 'exceptional circumstances'.
Clarity	• Consider distinct guidance around internal exclusions of children. • Consistency of response to similar events / circumstances / behaviours.
Adapt language	• Adapt some categorisations e.g., broaden types of bullying to include more specific categories, for accurate reporting. • Verbal abuse needs to have more specific categories, for accurate reporting.
Updating	• Amend references from SEN to ALN.
Navigation	• Improve the ease of navigation. For example, using process or flow charts and checklists for headteachers, so that they know they have done the necessary things. • Consider colour coded layout, especially for template letters which are easy to get confused.
Alternative versions	• Consider a child-friendly and a parent friendly version. [Interviewee unaware that a child-friendly version exists (Welsh Government, 2015)]
Other	• Transport costs for managed moves.

Funding and resources

7.6 Interviewees from most local authorities described the challenges they experienced in relation to funding and resources. The two issues were often intertwined, and the terms often used interchangeably.

7.7 Interviewees mentioned spending too much time “firefighting” and not being able to take a planned strategic approach to providing schools and children with support. Some mentioned resources being under pressure and difficulties balancing priorities. In a few areas, interviewees mentioned that schools and PRUs were full, which created capacity constraints.

7.8 One interviewee described their frustration at not being able to provide the specialist provision that they believed schools and children required. Another explained that, whilst Welsh Government grants were helpful, they were difficult to use in a joined-up way and details about the grants were not available in advance. They felt they had to be reactive to grants when they became available but if they did not know the details before a new academic year then they could not make provision in the school plan, which made their planning less strategic.

Effective practice around partnership working with schools

7.9 Interviewees from a minority of local authorities wanted more opportunities to share and learn from other local authorities and support for how to develop these partnerships initially.

> “I would be interested in hearing about practice from elsewhere that has been evidenced as being effective. All areas [are] facing similar problems, so it’s essential that effective practice is examined, tested, evidenced and shared.” (Local authority interviewee)

7.10 A few interviewees expressed an appetite to bring local authorities together to discuss such issues across Wales. Some wanted this to be wider than their local consortia to support learning and generate new ideas.

7.11 One interviewee described how exclusion dialogue became caught up with attendance issues which they felt limited dialogue around exclusions.

> "[There are] limited opportunities for local authorities to compare practice and develop thinking on the issue of exclusions. It tends to be covered as part of Attendance Framework Meetings, which are largely attended by education welfare services, rather than those staff that are responsible for behavioural support and exclusions. Therefore, there might be value in developing spaces for practitioners to have more focussed discussion around exclusions at a national level. Lumping exclusions in with attendance means that it dilutes the focus." (Local authority interviewee)

Guidance on reviewing quality of practice delivery in schools

7.12 Interviewees from a few local authorities wanted guidance on how they could offer feedback and challenge to schools around the organisation and delivery of practices to prevent exclusion. A few interviewees stated that some schools' provision of certain interventions, an example given was nurture groups, was not as robust as other schools. They felt this could be improved with clear guidance for local authorities.

Dialogue with schools to discuss cases earlier

7.13 Interviewees from a few local authorities wanted to ensure dialogue with schools about a given child occurred at an earlier stage, well before a permanent exclusion might be required.

7.14 Some local authorities did not report experiencing this issue. Therefore, there may be merit in this being an issue to be discussed in sharing effective practice around partnership working with schools.

Support to achieve multi-agency solutions

7.15 While extensive examples of multi-agency working were described by local authorities and schools to support children who have been excluded or those at risk of exclusion, interviewees from a few local authorities identified areas of additional support needed. In a few cases, this was around the organisation of services and the challenge of engaging with some other local authority departments or teams effectively. In particular, it was highlighted that youth services often sit outside of education, and this can limit the extent they are drawn into early help and engagement with schools. By improving the multi-agency working with

organisations such as the youth service it would allow for support to be delivered at an earlier stage for children, which may help to reduce the risk of exclusion and prevention of escalation.

Reduced waiting lists for support services

7.16 Interviewees from a few local authorities described specific challenges with waiting lists for specialist support from CAMHS and ALN pathways which they felt were taking too long.

Mandate governor training on exclusion

7.17 Interviewees from a few local authorities mentioned that some school governors participating in tribunals had not received local authority training on exclusion. One interviewee pointed out that some training modules are mandatory, such as new governor training and understanding data, but said that training on exclusions was not. While the 2019 Welsh Government Guidance on exclusions is clear that this is a responsibility of the local authority, the interviewee felt their local authority had been unable to make this happen.

7.18 One interviewee described that a consequence of this is that governors directed questions at children and parents in governance committee meetings rather than at the headteacher to check if all alternative courses of action had been considered before a permanent exclusion was decided.

Schools and PRUs

7.19 Interviewees described a range of support needs (Table 7.3), with many covering preventing exclusions, maintaining engagement with children on fixed-term exclusions and supporting reintegration back into school.

Table 7.3 Support needed by schools and PRUs

Area of support	Prevent exclusions	Maintain engagement	Support reintegration
Funding and resources	✓	✓	✓
Training for teaching and non-teaching staff	✓	✓	✓
Early identification (diagnosis) and support of needs	✓		
Family support	✓	✓	✓
Sharing of examples of effective practice	✓	✓	✓
Developing specialist expertise	✓		
Understanding access to external expertise	✓		
Increase in PRU places and special school provision	✓		
Template for behaviour policy	✓	✓	✓
Updates to Welsh Government guidance	✓	✓	✓

Source: York Consulting analysis, 2023.

Funding and resources

7.20 Just under half of schools and PRUs that replied to the survey described additional funding and additional resources as being needed to help reduce exclusions. Interviewees from over half of schools and PRUs indicated that funding was needed to reduce exclusion. Interviewees explained the following:

- While schools received funding around reading and literacy programmes, they felt there was insufficient specific funding to tackle behaviour and dysregulation of certain children.
- Support aimed at avoiding permanent exclusions costs schools money which has to be justified every year. While this benefits children, schools face a trade-off between this and other discretionary spending. One school described experiencing a deficit of over half a million pounds linked to the scale of additional support provided to children at risk of exclusion.
- A few headteachers described funding requirements for elements such as ‘family support workers’, which were often a struggle to fund. One headteacher explained that additional funding was required to resource their nurture programmes sufficiently.

> "If money was no object, you'd be able to effectively end the need to exclude, because you would find a way of engaging and occupying these children and keeping them out of trouble". (Secondary Headteacher)

7.21 A primary headteacher said that the local authority "behaviour support team…visits once every two weeks for two hours and the case load is full", so they must make difficult decisions about how they allocate this support.

7.22 A middle school ALNCo in a rural school described the limitations of transport funding for children eligible for FSM and others facing poverty to access services and for wider life experiences outside of the locality. Without this, the ALNCo felt that some disadvantaged children feel very despondent, which can put them at risk of exclusion.

7.23 The particular challenge of maintaining engagement during a fixed-term exclusion was mentioned by some school and PRU staff. They explained that reacting to a fixed-term exclusion with a tailored package of work can be challenging for staff who may be stretched in their mainstream delivery. One PRU headteacher described how this could be variable.

> "Some weeks we are very good and other weeks we struggle to put all the arrangements in place if we have been dealing with other crises." (PRU Headteacher)

7.24 The same PRU headteacher also described how meeting the expectations of some parents, that one-to-one tutoring would be delivered at their home during a fixed-term exclusion, was not possible.

Training for teaching and non-teaching staff

7.25 Interviewees from just under half of schools described training that would help their workforce to develop consistency of practice across the school. Subject areas mentioned by interviewees included restorative practice, ELSA training, trauma-informed approaches, ASD awareness and practices sharing with the local PRU. A few school respondents to the survey suggested there should be mandatory training for all teaching staff in trauma-informed practice, understanding ACEs and supporting children's ALN.

7.26 One secondary headteacher, who had made training in a school-wide trauma-informed approach a priority, said:

> "We want our teachers to be curious, to love the kids and be resilient to some of their more challenging behaviours. There is little point getting worked up when a child uses the 'f word' because in some of their households, that word is used like a comma, so we have to really help staff to focus on what is important". (Secondary Headteacher)

7.27 Another secondary headteacher described the backfill costs to the school of ELSA training:

> "The school tried to be a Thrive and ELSA school, but regularly struggles to access educational psychologist support and CAMHS support for pupils. The school is trying to become as self-sufficient as it can be, because of the challenges of not being able to access support. However, training costs money - ELSA training costs £415 per member of staff, but it is also six days out, which is the hard bit to resource." (Secondary Headteacher)

Early identification (diagnosis) and support of needs

7.28 Interviewees from a few schools and PRUs described the importance of early identification of needs, subsequent diagnosis and support. They felt this could have a major effect on reducing exclusions, provided children are subsequently able to access specialists in the local authority, such as from CAMHS.

Family support

7.29 Interviewees from a few schools and PRUs and a few survey respondents described the need for more family support services that can work with the parent and the child. While some schools already employ family support workers or engage them through the local authority or through another funded project or charity, there were a few schools and PRUs that said they needed this support but could not find it or afford it. Those schools and PRUs that did have access to family support workers explained that some parents can be very resistant, and it can take sustained work to overcome their barriers to the support.

Sharing of examples of effective practice

7.30 Interviewees from a few schools wanted more examples of effective practice in supporting children at risk of exclusion. Despite recognition that some limited examples were on Hwb, it was felt that more examples and clearer signposting would be helpful.

Developing specialist expertise

7.31 Interviewees from a few schools and PRUs described increasingly needing to employ specialist staff and non-teaching staff. Examples included teachers with experience of special schools or working in PRUs and staff with behavioural expertise who are able to work alongside teaching staff within internal exclusion areas of schools. In some parts of Wales, particularly, but not limited to rural areas, schools found it hard to recruit such expertise. Therefore, some posts went unfilled or had to be re-advertised.

Understanding access to external expertise

7.32 Interviewees from a few schools described the challenges of finding out about the services and expertise available in their area to support children at risk of exclusion. In some cases, it was reported that local authority staff or searching online themselves for services were viewed as helpful. In other areas, school staff felt that provision involving expertise that was external to the school was limited or they doubted that the available provision would meet the varied needs of children at their school.

Increase in PRU places and special school provision

7.33 Interviewees from a few schools and PRUs felt that exclusion could be prevented with an expansion of PRU provision and places in special schools. A few school and PRU interviewees explained that PRUs were increasingly supporting children who might otherwise receive specialist provision which was not available locally and that this was reducing PRUs capacity to offer temporary provision for children who had the potential to return to mainstream schooling.

Template behaviour policy

7.34 Interviewees from a few schools and PRUs indicated that a template behaviour policy would help ensure consistency of supporting children at risk of exclusion,

across a local authority area. Although Welsh Government Guidance (2012) exists on approaches to behaviour management, these interviewees felt a template policy would be a helpful addition. A few examples of this happening within individual local authorities were identified, but this appeared not to be common practice.

> "This could ensure greater consistency and help staff who are struggling to deal with the pressures of developing and revising a whole raft of strategic plans. This might lead to more consistency around the way that exclusions are dealt with, albeit there still needs to be flexibility to give schools that autonomy." (Middle School Headteacher)

Updates to Welsh Government guidance

7.35 Interviewees from a few schools and PRUs were supportive of the existing Welsh Government Guidance on exclusion. They said they used it regularly and found it helpful. Some schools provided a link to the Guidance on their website.

> "I think the guidance is very detailed, I use it frequently and often refer to it." (Secondary Deputy Headteacher)

7.36 A few interviewees suggested some updates to the Welsh Government Guidance on exclusion, which are outlined in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4 Examples of school and PRU feedback on Welsh Government guidance

Theme	Feedback from school and PRU interviewees
Access to support	• The guidance does not reflect the reality of the situation in terms of a lack of provision and the capacity constraints that make it hard to gain access to additional or specialist support.
Clarity	• More guidance is needed on the sort of actions that are appropriate for different types of behaviours. • Some additional detail would be useful around sanction levels and how these should be escalated for repeat instances.
Updating	• Schools talked about their experience after COVID-19. For example, the requirement to hold a meeting upon return to school, when sometimes a meeting at the beginning of the process works better. School staff said parents tend to be most engaged before an exclusion takes place. However, schools can in fact hold meetings with parents when they think it is appropriate to do so, as well as holding those required by law. • The issue of how to support children with ALN. This school felt that there is often strong overlap between behavioural issues and children who have ALN. This creates a really challenging situation for the school, as they are not sure how best to manage behaviour and the graduated response for these children. • Update from SEN Act to ALN Act. • Recognise variations in PRUs.
Alternative versions	• Consider PRU specific guidance.

Source: York Consulting analysis, 2023.

Parents

7.37 Interviewees described a range of support needs (Table 7.5) with many covering preventing exclusions, maintaining engagement with children on fixed-term exclusions and supporting reintegration back into school.

Table 7.5 Support needed by parents

Area of support	Prevent exclusions	Maintain engagement	Support reintegration
Established relationships	✓	✓	✓
Support to help their child	✓	✓	✓
Clarity around internal exclusions	✓	✓	✓
Clear point of contact at school		✓	✓
Direct phone line to ALNCo	✓	✓	✓
Agreement to administer medication	✓		
Check sufficient digital capability and connectivity		✓	

Source: York Consulting analysis, 2023.

Established relationships

7.38 Many parents noted that having good relationships with school staff and proactive conversations with them about their child helped to ensure a more positive experience for all involved and minimise the risk of exclusion. Parents noted that engagement "worked both ways" and that they found it helpful when school staff contacted them to discuss improvements their child was making as well as negative issues. "[The] behaviour lead phones at least every other week. Informs me about when child has done good in school as well not just the bad things. Lots of praise for him." (Parent)

7.39 One parent noted that the school behaviour lead would contact when they could see the child's behaviour escalating, inviting the parent to then pick the child up from school to reduce any further escalation.[22] "[The] behaviour lead will ring me if they can see things escalating, for [my child] to be picked up from school, so this does not result in any further risks of exclusions." (Parent)

Support to develop parenting skills and understand how to help their child

7.40 Many parents expressed that they would have liked further support to understand how to help their child, whether that be how to ask for additional support or support to help them develop their parenting skills.

[22] This may be an instance of unlawful exclusion, as it is unlawful to informally exclude a child even with the parent's permission.

7.41 One parent felt their child's mainstream school was internally excluding "for the smallest of things" and that the child would have to go to an isolation unit and "be left there". Subsequently, the child had been attending the local PRU. The parent reported that the child was being supported in a more positive way by the PRU, and that they felt they themselves were feeling more able to understand their child's situation better and the approach taken when behaviour escalated.

7.42 A few parents noted difficulties asking for help from some schools and not feeling listened to or supported enough. "I knew [child] needed help – I'd been asking for ages." The parent was asking for support, which could have helped them to understand how to support their child.

7.43 Related to the previous point, school and PRU staff noted that the introduction of parenting skills workshops would be useful support for parents and would aid parents in understanding how to help their children. One secondary headteacher noted that they run sessions for parents on how to help manage their child's emotions, which had received positive feedback from those involved.

Clarity around internal exclusions

7.44 A few parents indicated some confusion around their understanding of the status of an internal exclusion, which suggests that schools may need to be clearer about explaining the purpose of internal exclusions compared to their child being in full-time education and mainstream classes.

> "There was three exclusions, I think two were sort of unofficial. One official where we had a letter." (Parent)

Clear point of contact at school and open information

7.45 A few parents who had contact with a 'behaviour lead' within their child's school were appreciative of this and found the clear point of contact helpful.

7.46 A few parents expressed that they would have liked more communication with their child's school, particularly around what the school was implementing for their child in terms of support and why this may be necessary. This suggests that some schools may need to be more communicative with parents around their practice decisions for specific children.

7.47 One parent felt telephone calls were the best mode of communication with the teacher involved in any specific incidents. This was because the application that their child's school used for reporting to parents did not always give all the information the parent would have liked, and often led to the parent having to chase the school for an explanation.

> "[Child] will find out when they come home and I say you've got behaviour points, and then I have to phone the school and find out what they're for, asking what [child] has done. Not communicated to them what the punishment is, has to come through me. No explanation for what's going on." (Parent)

7.48 For some parents there was a clear need for more communication between the school and themselves and their child when their child has been excluded. One parent suggested that they would have liked a meeting with the school prior to the exclusion taking place.

Direct phone line to ALNCo

7.49 A few parents noted that it would be useful to have a direct phone line to their child's ALNCo.

7.50 For parents "to know it was ok to call" encourages engagement between the school and the parent. This is important as often the alternative may be the parent thinking about how difficult it is to get hold of the school to understand what is happening with their child, in what may be an already stressful situation.

Agreement to administer medication

7.51 For those very few parents who described having an agreement with their child's school or PRU for them to administer a child's ADHD medication, it was reported as being a useful support for parents. The benefit of this is that the parent knows that their child will receive their medication and be more able to regulate themselves, compared with a scenario where the parent forgets to administer the medication. It was noted by a PRU staff member that this could be helpful early in the morning, to get the child settled and ready for learning, if a parent has struggled with setting a consistent morning routine.

Check sufficient digital capability and connectivity

7.52 A few staff interviewees reported that it would be useful for schools and PRUs to check that children and parents have sufficient digital access to devices and connectivity of IT/Broadband prior to an exclusion.

7.53 Often work is provided to a child via Google Classroom or a similar programme and so it is important that children and their parents can readily access, use and understand this. One school ALNCo did note that often families request paper versions of the work, with another primary school headteacher explaining that they can 'loan' a device to the child to take home with them from the school.

Children

7.54 Interviewees described a range of support needs (Table 7.6) for maintaining engagement with children on fixed-term exclusions, and some focused on preventing exclusions and supporting reintegration back into school.

Table 7.6 Support needed by children

Area of support	Prevent exclusions	Maintain engagement	Support reintegration
Understanding reasons for behaviour	✓	✓	✓
Earlier identification of needs, diagnosis and support	✓		
ALNCo as child advocate to check if child's ALN are being met by class teachers	✓	✓	
Check child's understanding of work provided		✓	
Regular contact to keep engaged		✓	
Check usernames and passwords are known for digital access		✓	
Consider a phased return to the classroom for some children			✓

Source: York Consulting analysis, 2023.

General

7.55 There were a number of general support issues raised by interviewees. These included children needing more support as they struggled with self-regulation and handling their emotions which in some cases led to children being rude and abusive to staff within schools and PRUs.

7.56 A few schools and PRUs felt that a graduated response, which is often used as part of a wider behaviour policy within schools, was too slow to react for some children and intervening support was required at an earlier time point.

Understanding reasons for behaviour

7.57 Interviewees noted that there needed to be a higher level of understanding, among school and PRU staff, of the reasons for children displaying certain behaviour that led them to be at risk of fixed-term or permanent exclusion.

7.58 Suggested support for children included introducing the option of timeouts, so that the child could easily remove themselves from escalating situations. By children knowing where to go within the school or PRU and knowing who to speak to, it could mean that school or PRU staff members are more easily able to identify and understand what is happening for that child at that specific time without the situation escalating.

7.59 One school staff interviewee noted that some children need more challenging work to keep them engaged in lessons, otherwise they can become bored resulting in disruptive behaviour in the classroom. Understanding the reason for this behaviour was important to be able to implement appropriate steps to prevent it.

7.60 Parents who had a child within a PRU setting for some of the week, felt that the child, when in their mainstream school, needed further support. Parents felt that the school needed to talk to the child more about why there was a risk of exclusion and the reasons around their behaviour, mirroring how the PRU had been communicating with parents. Within the PRU, the child's parents noted that – "the PRU would ring us and explain to [child] that this was a last resort if he needed an exclusion." (Parent). This allowed the child to understand the process and severity of being permanently excluded, which was not explained previously.

7.61 Another parent expressed that their child had always been given an explanation of why they were being fixed-term excluded, and why their behaviour had broken the behaviour policy. While the child accepted this, they were not always ready to listen and if they were still angry or dysregulated then they would "storm out of the office a few times." (Child). The child expressed that they did not always understand why "silly things I did needed an exclusion, as once I was told, I wouldn't have done it again – so I didn't see the point of me having to sit at home for a day." This suggests that further communication and exploration of the reasons behind the behaviour were needed between the school, the child and parents.

Earlier identification of needs, diagnosis and support

7.62 Parents and children referred to needing an earlier identification of the child's needs, potentially including referral for a diagnosis, to facilitate the earlier delivery of support. For example, if a teacher notices that a child struggles with reading and spelling then they may discuss this with the school's ALNCo to request an assessment from an educational psychologist. If the educational psychologist diagnoses that the child has dyslexia, then the school can develop an individual development plan that includes support such as extra time for reading and writing tasks, access to assistive technology, and targeted reading interventions.

7.63 For some children, they reported needing more things to do at lunchtime, such as clubs, so that they are not bored or hanging around with the 'wrong crowd'.

7.64 One parent, whose child attends a PRU, noted that their child needs to be doing more physical activity than written work, which the parent linked to the child's diagnosis of ADHD, but this is not always being provided. Along with this, other parents felt that one-to-one support and a quiet space to learn would be more appropriate in some circumstances for their children.

7.65 An ALNCo noted that often, part of their role was to be an advocate for children in terms of checking that their ALN were being met by class teachers.

Check child's understanding of work provided

7.66 A parent noted that there was some confusion during their child's fixed-term exclusion around the schoolwork that was provided for them. The work that was sent home was paper-based, but the child and parent's preference was to receive

this on a laptop. Considerations and understanding of the work provided is important, as the parent then had to chase the school:

> "Did send home paperwork but whole point was to have it on the laptop. Put on laptop rather than paper based and it would have got done." (Parent)

Regular contact to keep engaged

7.67 For children who are fixed-term excluded, there is a need for regular contact to keep them engaged with their school.

7.68 A few parents noted that work was being provided and sent home by the school, but there was a distinct lack of contact after this point, prior to their child's return which created further difficulties.

> "Work gets sent home but then there is no contact while he is excluded – that distance then means he doesn't want to go back into school" (Parent)

Check usernames/passwords known for digital access

7.69 For those children who are fixed-term excluded and receiving their schoolwork on platforms such as Google Classroom and similar, it was suggested by interviewees that there is a need for schools and PRUs to check usernames and passwords are known by the children to gain access to these platforms. For example, these could be included within template letters.

7.70 Within school and PRU interviews, interviewees commented that where possible, schools and PRUs did try and provide computers and electronic devices to children if and when needed.

Consider a phased return to the classroom for some children

7.71 For those children who have been internally or fixed-term excluded, it was suggested by a few parents that a phased return to the classroom would be helpful support for schools or PRUs to provide.

7.72 For example, one parent explained during their interview that their child has been in the school 'hub' for all of Year 9 and 10 and that the child's family have seen an improvement in their behaviour at school and their willingness to learn. The hub subsequently moved to a different part of the school now which the child still enjoys,

but they are not mixing with other children. The parent explained that there had been no communication about their child reintegrating fully.

> “There has been no further discussion surrounding [child] reintegrating back into the school classroom environment, [child] will stay in the hub until [they] finish school.” (Parent)

8. Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 This chapter sets out the conclusions from this review and offers recommendations for how local authorities, schools, PRUs, children and their parents can be supported to prevent school exclusions.

8.2 There were a range of negative impacts for children excluded from schools, including adverse mental health and wellbeing and poor educational outcomes. School exclusion has pervasive negative effects into adulthood with decreased earnings potential and increased risk of unemployment, mental and physical issues, homelessness and involvement with criminal activities.

8.3 There are three categories used for school exclusion rates: permanent exclusions, fixed-term exclusions of 5 days or less, and fixed term exclusions over 5 days. Since 2014/15 until the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of permanent and fixed term exclusions of 5 days or less had increased each year. All three categories of exclusions increased in 2021/22 compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic.

8.4 Stakeholders described that schools are experiencing an increase in challenging behaviour from children and young people in recent years, at a time where schools are also reporting a constraint on their resources which reduces the support they can offer to children at risk of exclusion. Schools' approaches to exclusions were influenced by their relationships with, and the support available from, PRUs and local authorities.

8.5 Evidence from the literature review and qualitative fieldwork indicates a range of universal and targeted school-based interventions with encouraging potential to reduce the risk of fixed-term and permanent exclusions.

8.6 The literature review highlighted the following universal interventions as approaches that can be used to reduce school exclusions: Parental engagement, restorative practice, school-wide approach to behaviour, trauma-informed practice, and whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing.

8.7 When considering the strength of the evidence base, restorative practice followed by school-wide approaches to addressing behaviour had the most robust current evidence base supporting its use for preventing exclusions. This does not mean that

the remaining approaches and interventions do not have a positive impact for preventing exclusions or other outcomes for children and young people, but rather the evidence base for their use in preventing exclusions was considered more limited.

8.8 However, successful implementation and context-specific considerations are crucial for achieving the desired outcomes, particularly in reducing school exclusions.

8.9 The findings for each universal intervention are summarised below:

- Trauma-Informed Practice: Trauma-informed approaches can lead to improved student outcomes (e.g., attendance, academic achievement, emotional regulation and confidence), and improved understanding from practitioners of underlying causes of challenging behaviour. There is some promising evidence that trauma-informed practice is related to reduced exclusions, but more robust research is required. Key enablers of these approaches include senior leader support and a shift in school culture to deliver a consistent school-wide approach. Participants reported that trauma-informed practice is widely used in schools and PRUs in Wales, and indeed there is some promising evidence that trauma-informed practice is related with reduced exclusions, although more robust research is required.
- Parental Engagement: Effective parental engagement can improve children's academic progress, particularly for young children, and there was some tentative evidence that parental engagement can reduce exclusions, provided that parents feel a connection with the school. School and PRU participants commonly mentioned parental engagement during the fieldwork, emphasising its role in identifying underlying issues affecting a child's challenging behaviour. The literature however highlighted that it is important to ensure that parental engagement strategies reach all parents to avoid the risk of increasing the attainment gap for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, common barriers to effective parental engagement strategies include staff lacking the time or confidence to engage with parents, and a lack of staff training on how to handle difficult conversations with parents.

- Restorative Practice: Restorative practices show promise for improving the school culture, attendance, and reducing exclusions particularly for fixed-term exclusions, and especially when implemented as a school-wide approach. Key enablers of successful implementation include taking a school-wide approach, ensuring staff buy-in, commitment, and confidence to deliver. Restorative practice was mentioned by participants in the fieldwork who described the benefits of the practice for fostering positive relationships between staff and children and preventing exclusions at times.
- Whole-School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing: Many participants described the development of their whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing as an approach that could help to prevent exclusions, through supporting children's mental wellbeing needs. While some research was identified specifically about the impacts of whole-school approaches to emotional and mental wellbeing on children's outcomes, there was no evidence for impact on exclusions. However, improved emotional and mental wellbeing is associated with better educational outcomes, including reduced exclusions, for children.
- School-Wide Approach to Behaviour: Implementing a school-wide intervention, particularly those that trained teachers to deliver the intervention and encouraged positive behaviour (e.g., reward systems), rather than utilising punitive measures, can help to improve behaviour and reduce fixed-term exclusions. These interventions can be delivered for all children, although the evidence indicated greater effects for improving behaviour when targeted towards and adapted for those at risk of challenging behaviour. Clear expectations, consistent practice, and staff training were identified as key to effective delivery of school-wide approaches to behaviour. Participants cited the use of school-wide approaches for supporting children's behaviour in schools in Wales and emphasised the importance of a positive approach that is also responsive to the individual child's needs.

8.10 One other universal practice, transition support (from primary to secondary phase) was described by schools and PRUs as helping to prevent fixed-term or permanent exclusion. While the research about transition support on reducing exclusions was

limited, there was evidence that systematic approaches to transition support can reduce school anxiety for typically developing children, and personalised approaches may benefit those with additional learning needs, emphasising the need for well-rounded, inclusive transition programs that engage students, parents, and address common concerns.

8.11 The literature review also highlighted targeted interventions that can be used to support children's needs and can prevent fixed-term or permanent exclusions. These were ELSA support, enhancing academic skills, managed moves, mentoring, modified curriculum, nurture groups, pastoral support programmes, school counselling, and some therapeutic approaches.

8.12 When considering the strength of each targeted intervention's evidence base, mentoring demonstrated the most consistent positive impacts for preventing exclusions.

8.13 The findings for each targeted intervention are summarised below:

- Nurture Groups: Research consistently shows that nurture groups can have a positive impact on children's emotional, social and behavioural development with some positive impacts on academic progress and, amongst primary-aged school children, potentially reducing school exclusions, but long-term delivery is recommended for the groups to be more effective. The evidence for secondary-aged children is more limited. From the fieldwork, stakeholders identified a range of practice and provision related to nurture groups or spaces used in schools, including spaces that children could go to if they felt overwhelmed, rather than the more structured groups outlined in the literature although a few examples of such groups were given.
- Modified Curriculum: There was some international evidence that delivering a modified curriculum adapted to children's needs can improve their engagement, behaviour, and attendance, but the evidence for reducing exclusions was limited. Participants commonly mentioned the use of a modified curriculum in Wales, with children identifying it as a way to improve engagement with education. Modifications to the curriculum must be carried out in line with the duties and responsibilities for a balanced curriculum as part of Curriculum for Wales.

- ELSA Support: ELSA interventions have shown positive effects on emotional literacy, social skills, and academic outcomes for children, particularly in primary-aged children, potentially reducing school exclusions although more robust research is required. Effective implementation requires clear communication with parents and support from school leaders to allow ELSAs sufficient time and dedicated space to plan and deliver sessions. ELSA was not frequently mentioned in the fieldwork, although some of those that did suggested the intervention's potential to prevent exclusions.
- Managed Moves: While managed moves prevent permanent exclusion in the short-term, the evidence for longer-term impacts is not clear with tentative evidence for the benefits of managed moves to reduce exclusions and improve attainment. Participants had mixed views on the effectiveness of managed moves in Wales although considered it as more effective when used as an early intervention alongside clear communication between those involved. It is important that managed moves are delivered in line with the Welsh Government (2011) guidance.
- School-Based Counselling: There is evidence of the positive impacts of school-based counselling on improved mental health, wellbeing and school engagement, although more robust evaluations show smaller effects and there is a lack of robust evidence that counselling reduces exclusion rates. The literature highlighted that counselling services that are integrated within a wider whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing, delivered by high-quality counsellors providing tailored support within a dedicated space at the school, and with the support of parents, are likely to be the most effective. Participants did not commonly mention school-based counselling during the fieldwork as an intervention to support those at risk of exclusion, although positive outcomes were reported when discussed.
- Therapeutic Approaches: Some therapeutic approaches, such as art therapies, mindfulness, and social and emotional learning, have shown positive effects on children's mental and emotional wellbeing, but their impact on reducing school exclusions is not clear, and successful implementation involves sufficient resources, support from school leadership, and teacher training. Such approaches were not commonly mentioned by participants.

- Enhancing Academic Skills: Literature exploring the effectiveness of academic skills programmes to reduce the risk of exclusion is limited. While the research provides tentative evidence that programmes that aim to enhance academic skills have shown positive impacts for reducing school exclusions and improving attendance for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and with ALN, the available evidence comprises only a small number of studies from which the authors noted that firm conclusions cannot be drawn. Enhancing academic skills was not mentioned frequently by participants during the fieldwork.
- Mentoring: Mentoring has a positive impact on reducing school exclusions, improving school engagement, attainment, behaviour and reducing violence. Research highlights the importance of consistent and long-term mentor support and careful consideration needs to be given to who the mentor is and how the mentoring ends. While mentoring was not mentioned frequently by participants during the fieldwork, some participants highlighted the use of mentoring in schools in Wales particularly for children at risk of exclusion.

Recommendation 1. Those practices identified as having evidence of preventing fixed-term or permanent exclusion should be shared with schools, PRUs and local authorities. Restorative practice followed by school-wide approaches to addressing behaviour were the universal approaches that had the strongest current evidence base supporting their use for preventing exclusions in schools, while for targeted interventions mentoring demonstrated the most consistent positive impacts. This will help inform decisions about practices that schools and PRUs decide to utilise. This should include recognition that effective practice is dependent on successful implementation that should consider the school's individual context.

8.14 Many school, PRU and local authority participants mentioned working collaboratively with other agencies to prevent school exclusions, although there were also many references to the need for improved multi-agency working. One of the main ways to improve multi-agency working is through a collaborative approach to developing pastoral support plans with other agencies involved in supporting the child at risk of exclusion or who has experienced exclusion. Some local authority staff described not having timely access to children's pastoral support plans, and therefore not being aware of a child's circumstances or the support being provided.

Recommendation 2. Ensure all pastoral support plans are drawn up using a multi-agency and person-centred practice approach, and are shared with the local authority, to help prevent exclusions. This will ensure that a range of voices inform the development of a pastoral support plan to address the child's needs and that the local authority receives timely copies of the plans for children at risk of exclusion.

8.15 It was reported by stakeholders that internal exclusion (removal from the classroom) was used sometimes as an alternative to exclusion. Views from participants about internal exclusion were mixed, with some seeing it as a preventive step, while others noted recurring use for the same students suggesting limited effectiveness to improve outcomes. In addition, punitive approaches to internal exclusion may not address the root causes of disruptive behaviour. It was also expressed that the use of internal exclusion may have increased, and it is important to ensure that their use is implemented in a way that is supportive to the child's needs. However, there is a general view among national stakeholders and many local authorities that little is known about the extent to which internal exclusions take place and how they are utilised. There are also concerns that this approach is used more frequently with certain groups of children (e.g., children with ALN) without a clear understanding of how this is supporting their needs. Data is, therefore, needed about internal exclusions to understand more about the extent and how they are being used.

Recommendation 3. Schools should record instances where a child has been internally excluded within their management information systems. This should include capturing what activity the child undertakes while internally excluded. This data will support schools to explore their own use of internal exclusions and offer the potential for aggregation of data across all schools, if consistent data measures are established, that will support a greater understanding of the extent and use of internal exclusions in Wales.

8.16 Recent research about the use of reduced timetables highlighted uncertainty around their purpose and intended outcomes. The literature identified that reduced timetables were sometimes used because schools lacked the resources to support a child to access a full timetable. Also, there was evidence that reduced timetables were at times used to pre-empt an incident that may lead to a permanent exclusion.

While this practice was understood to be somewhat effective at preventing permanent exclusions, children on a reduced timetables experienced isolation, low mood, a lack of confidence and increased relationship difficulties. The fieldwork identified that there was evidence of widespread use of reduced timetables with school and PRU staff commenting that reduced timetables were often a feature of pastoral support programmes, and a few children noting the use of reduced timetables. Local authority staff suggested there was a need for a clearer understanding about how reduced timetables are used by schools and PRUs.

Recommendation 4. Schools should record instances of where a reduced timetable has been arranged for a child within their management information systems. This should include the activity undertaken while on a reduced timetable. This data will support schools to explore their own use of reduced timetables and offer the potential for aggregation of data across all schools, if consistent data measures are established, that will support a greater understanding of the extent and use of reduced timetables in Wales.

8.17 There is evidence that staff in some schools were uncertain about the specific support or grants available from their local authority or through third sector organisations for children at risk of exclusion or experiencing fixed-term or permanent exclusion. Some school staff did not know who in their local authority could help them identify available support. It is important to note that in other schools, where children are receiving support, staff were positive about their awareness and use of support, describing a positive relationship with inclusion staff at their local authority.

Recommendation 5. Local authorities should share with schools a directory of available support (provided or funded by the local authority) for children at risk of exclusion and those children who are, or have, experienced fixed-term or permanent exclusions. This should include contact details of the relevant local authority officer, so that direct contact can be made by a school. It was also the view of school staff that it would be useful for schools to have information about available support such as the number of places available for services, eligibility, waiting times and whether support was funded.

8.18 The literature review revealed that the strength of evidence in terms of effectiveness varied across the different interventions identified. Some high-quality studies looked at exclusion often as one of many educational outcomes, while others explored these practices without considering their impact on exclusion. While there were experimental studies, many of them came from international sources and had limited relevance to the UK or Wales. Some UK-based studies were also identified, but their evidence quality was generally weaker.

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government should encourage and/or support robust and long-term research which explores the impact of interventions on reducing fixed-term and permanent exclusions.

8.19 It is clear from the research that it can be very difficult for families when a child is at risk of exclusion or has been excluded. Support that can be offered to families (e.g., family engagement officers, family information services) was typically well received by families and described as effective. The importance of family engagement prior to, during and after a fixed-term exclusion was evidenced through this research, including a parent's need for a clear point of contact at school during their child's exclusion and how they could support their child. However, this practice is not in place universally and is, therefore, not yet available to all families. As such, there is scope to share examples of 'what works' in this regard more widely across both the school and local authority sectors.

Recommendation 7. Ensure that local authorities, schools and PRUs are aware of, and provide or signpost parents and children, to parental or family support services (provided by a school, PRU, local authority or external services).

8.20 School staff are a vital component in the effective delivery of school-based interventions to prevent exclusions. It is, therefore, important that the role of staff is considered when implementing universal and targeted interventions, including their training needs to ensure consistent and effective implementation. However, the availability and coverage of training is mixed, and there are challenges for senior leaders to find the funding for training and give staff the time off from teaching for

training. Similarly, the role of staff in providing schoolwork and the need to improve monitoring of schoolwork completion during a fixed-term exclusion were highlighted.

Recommendation 8. Schools should consider the role of school staff in delivering interventions to prevent fixed-term and permanent exclusion and ensure that they have the training required to be capable and to feel confident in effective delivery of interventions to achieve positive outcomes for children. One aspect of this could involve greater use of PRU staff expertise to develop localised communities of practice. An assessment of support required by PRUs to deliver this will be necessary.

8.21 Reducing the difficulties and delays faced by schools and PRUs in sourcing specialist expertise could help prevent exclusion for those children identified as at risk of exclusion and reduce the likelihood of permanent exclusion for those who are fixed-term excluded. Children wanted earlier identification and understanding of their needs. For example, this might include securing parental/family support or CAMHS support for an identified child (e.g., via the CAMHS in-reach to schools and PRUs service that was mentioned by only a few schools during the research, which may suggest a lack of awareness). Schools would find it useful if services published their waiting times to help schools plan and manage the expectations of parents and children.

Recommendation 9. Welsh Government should work with local authorities and service providers, including health, to promote access to timely, co-ordinated support for children at risk of exclusion and those who have experienced exclusion.

8.22 Improving professional learning, the sharing of good practice and developing dialogue between schools, could help to prevent exclusions. There are a number of ways this could be achieved. For example, through cluster groups organised at a local authority level or through the role of education consortia across different regions of Wales. Some school and PRU participants described the need for a national conference on behaviour management to give the issue attention across Wales, as they felt it did not have the necessary profile.

Recommendation 10. Support ways of capturing and sharing effective practices related to preventing exclusions. This could include sharing information via Hwb, education consortia, conferences and communities of practice.

8.23 Local authority staff would like more opportunities for dialogue with their counterparts in other local authorities across Wales to discuss how best to support schools and PRUs. It was perceived that this would create greater opportunities to share practice and learn from one another.

Recommendation 11. Local authorities should ensure their staff have access to professional development to adequately support schools and PRUs to prevent fixed-term and permanent exclusions. This might include sharing practice via communities of practice.

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Annex A: Research Framework

This annex includes the research framework which set out the key research questions to be explored throughout the research.

Main questions	Areas to be explored
1. What **strategies** or approaches are considered to **positively support the prevention of fixed-term and/or permanent exclusions** for children in maintained schools and PRUs respectively, and how?	• For specific age groups (e.g., nursery, primary, early secondary, late secondary). • Considering the type of education setting (e.g., Welsh-medium) and school characteristics, including geographical area, urban/rural, the number of children eligible for FSM, and the number of children with ALN. • How do these strategies or approaches differ depending on the frequency, severity, duration, of the behaviours that may lead to a decision to exclude? • For vulnerable and disadvantaged children (e.g., looked after children, children with ALN, children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences). • What percentage of children in PRUs are diagnosed as having ASD, ADHD or other neurodevelopmental conditions or on a pathway to a diagnosis? • Do some schools use exclusions at an earlier point in time than others? Why? • To what extent is a consistent school approach undertaken? • To what extent are internal exclusions used (children being taken out of classrooms but remaining in schools) and are they supportive? • To what extent are trauma-informed restorative approaches used? • How can best practice be shared amongst schools to improve prevention of exclusions? • To what extent are early intervention strategies to support children/families available? How is early intervention defined?

2. Are there **strategies** or approaches that are considered to **positively support the prevention of school exclusions around specific times** in a child's education?	• Explore stages: starting school, the transition between nursery, primary, and secondary school. • How are transition strategies agreed between the respective schools?
3. For children who have experienced fixed-term exclusions, what **strategies** or approaches are considered **to positively support the prevention of further exclusions**, including permanent exclusions, and why?	• For specific age groups. • Considering the type of education setting and school characteristics. • How do these strategies or approaches differ depending on the frequency, severity, length, and reason for exclusions? • For vulnerable and disadvantaged children. • What further support is required by families, children and schools to avoid further exclusions, and from whom? •
4. What **strategies** or approaches are considered **effective in maintaining positive contact** and engagement with children who have been **fixed-term excluded**, and why?	• What is the typical journey of a child once excluded? • Do children still get all of the support and education they have the right to receive once excluded? • To what extent are children still trying to attend school while excluded? What approaches are used to deal with this? What is the cause of this behaviour? [e.g., communication between parents/schools, cost of living]
5. What **strategies** or approaches are considered **effective in positively supporting the reintegration** of children who have been **fixed-term excluded** to mainstream education, and why?	• To what extent are changes in perspective, motivations, and behaviours achieved? • Is there enough support for those coming into the teaching profession?

6. How can local authorities**, schools and PRUs be supported**, and by whom, to help children and their parents/carers **avoid exclusions**?	• For specific age groups. • Considering the type of education setting and school characteristics. • How do these strategies or approaches differ depending on the frequency, severity, duration, of the behaviours that may lead to a decision to exclude • For vulnerable and disadvantaged children. • How are local authority policies used/developed around exclusions to support school practice?
7. How can these organisations and participants **be supported to facilitate the return of children who have been permanently excluded** to mainstream education?	• Is the provision at a universal level appropriate and sufficient? • How do children experience permanent exclusion? • To what extent are children able to find positive ways forward for their education, ensuring their specific needs are met in a learning environment where they are able to thrive?

Annex B: Research Tools

This annex includes the following topic guides and questionnaire used in the course of this research:

- Scoping topic guide
- Local Authority topic guide
- School topic guide
- PRU topic guide
- Parent topic guide
- Pupil topic guide
- School/PRU questionnaire (pro forma).

Review of practices used in maintained schools and pupil referral units to prevent exclusions

SCOPING TOPIC GUIDE

Study overview

As you know, the Welsh Government have commissioned us York Consulting to review current practices and approaches used by maintained schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) to prevent fixed-term and permanent exclusions.

Thank you for taking part in this discussion – your views about exclusion at this early stage in the research will help us develop a deeper understanding around areas such as – practices to avoid exclusion and any issues or challenges to avoiding exclusions.

All information shared will be treated in confidence and in line with the Welsh Government's privacy notice [English/Welsh] which has been sent to you prior to this discussion. Information shared will be used to produce a report that will be published on the Welsh Government website. This report will not include any information that could be used to identify any individuals, settings or organisations.

Before I start, do you have any questions about the research [*if yes, and it involves the type of questions that will be asked see text below*] or how we will use the information you have provided *[if yes, refer to the privacy notice*.

Note to researcher: only use this text if the participant would like more information about what the questions we will explore:

We are interested in exploring the following areas through this discussion:

- *good practice in preventing fixed-term and permanent exclusions*
- *the support available for local authorities, schools, children and young people and their families to help avoid fixed-term and permanent exclusions*
- *how contact is maintained/should be maintained with children who have been excluded*
- *the support that is put in place/ should be put in place to support reintegration of children who have been excluded*
- *challenges to preventing fixed-term and permanent exclusions*
- *what is needed to support good practice.*

Introduction

1. Can I confirm your role is *[populate for the individual participant]* and where you are based [*populate organisation for the individual participant*]
2. What does your role involve in relation to exclusions?
3. Have you worked in previous roles which have related to exclusions?
4. Which local authorities do you work with?

Questions

Key points

5. From your perspective, is there anything you think we should know about behaviour policies, exclusion policies and practices or approaches used by schools and PRUs in terms of *fixed-term and permanent* exclusion?
6. What do you think are the important aspects or issue(s) from your perspective surrounding fixed-term exclusions/permanent exclusions and current practices?
7. Are there any important aspects or issues you would like to discuss which relate to the *fixed-term and permanent* exclusion of vulnerable or disadvantaged children – such as young children, looked after children (LAC), children with additional learning needs (ALN) or children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACE)?
8. To what extent do you think schools use exclusion policy and practices effectively for all pupils, including at an early stage to avoid risk of exclusion, and for those who are at risk of exclusion? How does this very across stages of education (primary, early secondary, late secondary)?
9. Which policy documents do you think help guide schools and PRUs in relation to developing exclusion/behaviour policies and practices and in relation to avoiding *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions?

Good practice

10. What practices do you think are working well to prevent fixed-term and permanent exclusions, maintaining engagement and reintegration?
11. How do these differ by school type, such as primary/secondary, their location and pupil characteristics?
12. Can you give any specific examples?
13. What do you think is involved in making this good practice a success?

    [**prompts** clear school or PRU policies/local authority policies, support from external organisations (regional consortia, local authorities, Estyn, other educational settings), effective communication with pupils/families/local authorities, reintegration approaches, resources/funding].
14. From your perspective do you think these good practices are shared between schools and those who support schools?
15. What support is available to help schools/PRUs implement approaches/good practice to avoid *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions and to support reintegration?
16. What are the barriers to implementing good practice?

Challenges

17. What do you believe are the biggest challenges surrounding the prevention of fixed-term and permanent exclusions?

    [**prompt**: in different settings – PRUs, primary and secondary schools]
18. Can you provide specific examples?

19. Any areas/specific schools/PRUs that face more of these challenges?
20. Are you aware of what approaches schools or PRUs adopt to respond to these challenges? Do you think they are effective?
21. What approaches do you think it would be useful for them to adopt to overcome such challenges?
22. What support do you think schools, PRUs, children and families would benefit from to avoid exclusions and support reintegration?

Other

23. Are there any schools, PRUs, local authorities, you think would be interested in taking part in this research or it would be useful for us to include in this research? What do you think would be the best way of contacting them? Would you be able to help us invite them to take part in the research, such as forwarding on an email to them?
24. Thinking about the next stage of our research, where we will be asking local authorities, schools, children and their families detailed questions, what do you think are the most important question or areas we should discuss?
25. Can you think of any specific documents/literature/research we should be aware of, which is relevant to this study?
26. Anything else you think we should be aware of?

THANK YOU AND CLOSE.

Review of practices used in maintained schools and pupil referral units to prevent exclusions

Local authority TOPIC GUIDE

Study overview

As you know, the Welsh Government have commissioned us – York Consulting – to review current practices and approaches used by maintained schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) to prevent fixed-term and permanent exclusions.

Thank you for taking part in this discussion – your views about exclusion across your local authority will help us develop a deeper understanding around areas such as – practices to avoid exclusion and any issues or challenges to avoiding exclusions.

All information shared will be treated in confidence and in line with the Welsh Government's privacy notice [English/Welsh] which has been sent to you prior to this discussion. Information shared will be used to produce a report that will be published on the Welsh Government website. This report will not include any information that could be used to identify any individuals, settings or organisations.

Before I start, do you have any questions about the research [*if yes, and it involves the type of questions that will be asked see text below*] or how we will use the information you have provided *[if yes, refer to the privacy notice]*.

Note to researcher: only use this text if the participant would like more information about what the questions we will explore:

We are interested in exploring the following areas through the interview:

- good practice in preventing *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions.
- the support available for local authorities, schools, children and young people and their families to help prevent *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions.
- how contact is maintained/should be maintained with children who have been *fixed-term and permanent* excluded.
- the support that is put in place/should be put in place to support reintegration of children who have been fixed-term excluded.
- challenges to preventing *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions.
- what is needed to support good practice.

Introduction

1. Can I confirm your role is *[populate for the individual participant]* and you are based at [*populate organisation for the individual participant*]
2. What does your role involve in relation to exclusions?
3. Have you worked in previous roles which have related to exclusions?

Overview

4. Can I start by asking for your thoughts about the Welsh Government approach to school exclusions?

5. What, if anything, would you like the Welsh Government to do differently in terms of policy and guidance in relation to school exclusions?

Local authority level

6. From your perspective, please explain broadly what is happening across your local authority in schools and PRUs around *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions such as:
    - numbers increasing or decreasing – what do you think are the reasons for this?
    - types of approaches adopted by schools to support children at risk of exclusion?
    - types of approaches in relation to behaviour management and policies?

7. In what ways, if any, does the local authority support schools/PRUs to prevent *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions?

    [**prompt:** developing own exclusion policy/guidance based on Welsh Government policy for schools, communicating information about interventions available]

8. What are your views/local authority policy about:
    - School/parent engagement, multi-agency support approaches to avoid exclusions
    - Exclusion from the classroom as a method for controlling behaviour
    - Managed moves
    - Part-time (reduced) timetables
    - Use of EOTAS provision/EOTAS outreach support.

9. (Follow-up question) What are the main challenges, if any, the local authority experiences in supporting schools to prevent exclusions? (Probe about:
    - Data from schools
    - Consistency across schools
    - Resources
    - Liaison with and between schools
    - Responsibility for exclusion decisions lying with headteachers/ responsibility for developing behaviour policies lying with individual schools
    - Local authority statutory provision and funding.

10. What do you think is needed to overcome the challenges discussed?

11. Are there aspects of local authority practice, provision or exclusion interventions that you think have been particularly helpful to schools or PRUs in preventing exclusions? If so, why?

12. Are there aspects of local authority practice, provision or exclusion interventions that have not been helpful for schools or PRUs or continue to not be helpful for schools/PRUs in terms of *fixed-term and permanent* exclusion? If so, Why?

School level

13. What issues are schools/PRUs facing in terms of *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions? How are schools addressing:
    - Prevention?
    - Maintaining engagement?
    - Reintegration?
14. We are interested in learning more about maintained schools and PRUs in your local authority that have effective strategies to prevent *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions.
    - Can you identify specific strategies used by schools across the local authority? Please describe these.
    - Can you identify specific schools undertaking these strategies?
15. Can you describe your experience of schools in the local authority that are not preventing *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions as well as other schools, and why this may be the case? (Even if you do not feel able to identify them specifically)?
16. What reasons for *fixed-term and permanent* exclusion are the biggest concern to the local authority? To what extent is there a plan to help schools develop strategies or approaches to prevent exclusion for children for these reasons?
17. How effectively do school strategies or approaches positively support the prevention of school exclusions around specific times in a child's education? Such as primary, transition, early secondary and later secondary?
18. Many schools have various on-site, even off-site, spaces where students can be sent to minimise disruption to other students and/or receive more individualised support. Do you know of any instances of this in the schools in this local authority?

    [**prompt:** School/parent engagement, multi-agency support approaches to avoid exclusions, part-time (reduced timetables), managed moves, nurture spaces, seclusion spaces]
19. How is quality of practice ensured in these circumstances? Does the local authority monitor the use and/or effectiveness of these practices?
20. We are aware of some instances where parents/carers continue to send their children to school when they are *fixed-term and permanently* excluded. Is this something that is happening in your local authority area? If so, do you think this is an increasing issue? Has your local authority developed at policy to respond to this?

Education other than at school (EOTAS)

21. Is EOTAS used as a way of preventing *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions? How?
22. Does your local authority have a PRU? If not, how are children requiring EOTAS provision supported?
23. Is your PRU/EOTAS provision used as a way of preventing *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions? How?

24. How do *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions affect the local authority's ability to manage demand for special school provision for children that need it?

Next steps

25. We are asking schools to complete a short pro forma/survey describing their perspective on *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions and giving them the opportunity to participate further in this research. Are you able to share the pro forma with schools in your local authority?
26. Are there any other individuals in the local authority (members of exclusion panels, ALN officers etc), schools or PRUs that you can think of that we should aim to include in the fieldwork? (If yes, please check they are happy for their details to be shared with us and/or we can provide details of the study and privacy notice to forward).

THANK YOU AND CLOSE.

Review of practices used in maintained schools and pupil referral units to prevent exclusions

School TOPIC GUIDE

Study overview

As you know, the Welsh Government have commissioned us – York Consulting – to review current practices and approaches used by maintained schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) to prevent fixed-term and permanent exclusions.

Thank you for taking part in this discussion – your views about exclusion across your school will help us develop a deeper understanding around areas such as – practices to avoid exclusion and any issues or challenges to avoiding exclusions.

All information shared will be treated in confidence and in line with the Welsh Government's privacy notice [English/Welsh] which has been sent to you prior to this discussion. Information shared will be used to produce a report that will be published on the Welsh Government website. This report will not include any information that could be used to identify any individuals, settings or organisations.

Before I start, do you have any questions about the research [*if yes, and it involves the type of questions that will be asked see text below*] or how we will use the information you have provided *[if yes, refer to the privacy notice]*.

Note to researcher: only use this text if the participant would like more information about what the questions we will explore:

We are interested in exploring the following areas through the interview:

- good practice in preventing *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions.
- the support available for schools, children and young people and their families to help prevent *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions.
- how contact is maintained/should be maintained with children who have been *fixed-term and permanently* excluded.
- the support that is put in place/should be put in place to support reintegration of children who have been fixed-term excluded.
- challenges to preventing *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions.
- what is needed to support good practice.

***Note to researcher: questions with an asterisk are for senior leaders only.**

Introduction

1. Can I confirm your role is *[populate for the individual participant]* and you are based at [*populate organisation for the individual participant*]
2. What does your role involve in relation to exclusions?
3. Have you observed changes in exclusion levels from previous years?

Overview

4. *In what ways, if any, could the Welsh Government support schools in terms of school exclusions policy and guidance?
5. What do you feel are the main school-based factors that impact upon the level of *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions from your school?
6. What do you feel are the main child-based factors or circumstances that impact upon the risk of a children being *fixed-term and permanently* excluded from your school?
7. *Do you receive support from your local authority to develop policy and practice around behaviour and exclusion? Please describe.

Preventing exclusions

8. How does your school identify those at risk of exclusions and assess their needs to prevent *fixed-term and permanent* exclusion?
9. How does your school aim to prevent *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions through practice or interventions that support children?
    - What has been effective or helpful?
    - What has not been effective or helpful?
10. How does your school aim to prevent *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions through practice or interventions that support staff?
    - What has been effective or helpful?
    - What has not been effective or helpful?
11. How does your school aim to prevent *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions through school-wide practice or interventions?
    - What has been effective or helpful?
    - What has not been effective or helpful?
12. How are the approaches, practices, or interventions employed by your school to prevent *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions tailored to the needs of your children?
13. How does your school positively support children around specific times in their education to prevent *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions? **Prompt**: Primary, transition, early secondary and later secondary).
14. What further approaches, practices, and/or interventions would you like to implement or develop at your school to prevent *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions? What do you need to implement or develop this? [**Prompt**: support, outreach provision, funding, training, multi-agency support]

Reintegration of children

15. In what ways, if any, does your school support children during a fixed-term exclusion? [**prompt**: education online, offering so many hours of work to be completed at home]
16. Does your school maintain communication with children, or their parents, who have been excluded for a fixed-term?
17. In what ways does your school support the reintegration of children who have been fixed-term excluded? **Prompt**: reintegration interview with parent present.

18. To what extent do you feel this support has been helpful or effective in supporting the reintegrating of children who have been excluded for a fixed-term? Why?

Engagement and communication

19. How does your school maintain a good relationship with parents/carers when a child is at risk of exclusion? How effective is this relationship when working to prevent fixed-term and permanent exclusions?
20. *How effective is communication with other local schools around exclusion? Does this help schools to learn about effective practice?
21. How does your school utilise wider support/multi-agency working to help prevent exclusions?

    [**prompt:** work with the local PRU, youth support services, family engagement, health services, mental health services]
22. *To what extent, and in what ways, do you think your school governing body impacts on the number of *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions from your school?

Managing exclusion

23. Are you aware of any parents/carers sending their children to school despite being *fixed-term and permanently* excluded? If so, do you think this is an increasing issue? Has your local authority developed a policy to respond to this? What do you do in these circumstances?

Wider support

24. * How does your local PRU provide support to your school?

    [**prompt:** providing outreach to support children and school staff (supporting specific children/approaches to managing behaviour etc.), communication, access to behaviour skills and good practice]

Case study example

25. Can you describe two anonymised examples of a child's experience of support. One where either fixed-term or permanent exclusion was prevented and one where either fixed-term or permanent exclusion was required? **Prompt:**
    - Context.
    - Behaviour.
    - Support/intervention provided.
    - Reaction of child, parent/carer.
    - Initial result of support.
    - Longer-term outcomes for child.

Next steps

26. We are looking to speak with children/young people, and/or parents or carers of children and young people, about their experiences of exclusions and to understand the support they need to prevent exclusions for the child/young person.

Therefore, are you able to identify any children/young people and/or parents or carers who have:

- experienced a fixed-term or permanent exclusion
- have previously been at risk of exclusion and required support to prevent this.

Explain we have the following to support this:

- Parent information sheet
- Parent privacy notice
- Children's information sheet
- Children's privacy notice
- Incentive payment of £30 Love to Shop voucher for the parent.

THANK YOU AND CLOSE.

Review of practices used in maintained schools and pupil referral units to prevent exclusions

PRU TOPIC GUIDE

Study overview

As you know, the Welsh Government have commissioned us – York Consulting – to review current practices and approaches used by maintained schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) to prevent fixed-term and permanent exclusions.

Thank you for taking part in this discussion – your views about exclusion across your school will help us develop a deeper understanding around areas such as – practices to avoid exclusion and any issues or challenges to avoiding exclusions.

All information shared will be treated in confidence and in line with the Welsh Government's privacy notice [English/Welsh] which has been sent to you prior to this discussion. Information shared will be used to produce a report that will be published on the Welsh Government website. This report will not include any information that could be used to identify any individuals, settings or organisations.

Before I start, do you have any questions about the research [*if yes, and it involves the type of questions that will be asked see text below*] or how we will use the information you have provided *[if yes, refer to the privacy notice]*.

Note to researcher: only use this text if the participant would like more information about what the questions we will explore:

We are interested in exploring the following areas through the interview:

- good practice in preventing *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions.
- the support available for schools/PRUs, children and young people and their families to help prevent *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions.
- how contact is maintained/should be maintained with children who have been fixed-term excluded.
- the support that is put in place/should be put in place to support reintegration of children who have been excluded.
- challenges to preventing *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions.
- what is needed to support good practice.

***Note to researcher: questions with an asterisk are for senior leaders only.**

Introduction

1. Can I confirm your role is *[populate for the individual participant]* and you are based at [*populate organisation for the individual participant*]
2. What does your role involve in relation to exclusions?
3. *What changes if any have you observed in *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions – across the local authority compared to previous years – such as groups of children excluded or levels of exclusion?

4. What changes if any have you observed in *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions – in the PRU compared to previous years – such as groups of children excluded or levels of exclusion?

Overview

5. *In what ways, if any, could the Welsh Government support PRUs and schools in terms of *fixed-term and permanent* exclusion policy and guidance?
6. *What do you feel are the main factors that impact upon the levels of *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions in your local authority area?
7. What do you feel are the main PRU-based factors that impact upon the level of *fixed-term and permanent* exclusions from the PRU?
8. What do you feel are the main child-based factors or circumstances that impact upon the risk of a child being *fixed-term* excluded from the PRU?

Preventing exclusions from the PRU

9. How does your PRU identify those at risk of exclusions and assess their needs to prevent exclusion?
10. How does your PRU aim to prevent exclusions through practice or interventions that support children?
    - What has been effective or helpful?
    - What has not been effective or helpful?
11. How does your PRU aim to prevent exclusions through practice or interventions that support staff?
    - What has been effective or helpful?
    - What has not been effective or helpful?
12. How does your PRU aim to prevent exclusions through school-wide practice or interventions?
    - What has been effective or helpful?
    - What has not been effective or helpful?
13. What practices and/or interventions could schools implement that would be helpful to children and their families in preventing exclusions?
14. How are the approaches, practices, or interventions employed by your PRU to prevent exclusions tailored to the needs of your children?
15. How does your PRU positively support children around specific times in their education to prevent exclusions? Prompt: Primary, transition, early secondary and later secondary).
16. What further approaches, practices, and/or interventions would you like to implement or develop at your PRU to prevent exclusions? What do you need to implement or develop this? [**Prompt**: support, outreach provision, funding, training, multi-agency support]

Preventing exclusions from schools in your area

17. *What approaches, practices, and/or interventions have been effective in preventing exclusions in local schools?
18. *What approaches, practices, and/or interventions have not been effective in preventing exclusions in local schools?

Engagement and communication

19. How does your PRU maintain a good relationship with parents/carers when a child is at risk of exclusion? How effective is this relationship when working to prevent fixed-term and permanent exclusions?
20. * Do you work with other PRUs in Wales to avoid exclusions from your PRU? [**prompt**: What does this consist of? Do you feel this is effective in contributing to avoiding exclusions? In what ways?]
21. *Do you work with schools in the area to support them to reduce exclusions? [**prompt**: What does this consist of? Do you feel this is effective in contributing to avoiding exclusions? In what ways?]
22. How does your PRU utilise wider support/multi-agency working to help prevent exclusions from the PRU?

    [**prompt:** youth support services, family engagement, health services, mental health services]

Role of staff

23. How do staff at your PRU support children to avoid being excluded?
24. How does your PRU support staff to prevent exclusions?
25. How do your staff support learning within local schools around preventing exclusion?
26. How do your staff support children to be reintegrated following a fixed-term exclusion?

Wider support

27. What additional support do you think would help you as a PRU to prevent exclusion? Which other organisations could help to provide support? [**Prompt:** support, outreach provision, funding, training, multi-agency support]

Case study example

28. Can you describe two anonymised examples of a child's experience of support. One where either fixed-term or permanent exclusion was prevented and one where either fixed-term or permanent exclusion was required?

    Prompt:

    - Context.
    - Behaviour.
    - Support/intervention provided.
    - Reaction of child, parent/carer.
    - Initial result of support.
    - Longer-term outcomes for child.

Next steps

29. We are looking to speak with children/young people, and/or parents or carers of children and young people, about their experiences of exclusions and to understand the support they need to prevent exclusions for the child/young person.

Therefore, are you able to identify any children/young people and/or parents or carers who have:

- Experienced a fixed-term or permanent exclusion.
- Have previously been at risk of exclusion and required support to prevent this.

Explain we have the following to support this:

- Parent information sheet.
- Parent privacy notice.
- Children's information sheet.
- Children's privacy notice.
- Incentive payment of £30 Love to Shop voucher for the parent.

THANK YOU AND CLOSE.

Review of practices used in maintained schools and pupil referral units to prevent exclusions

Parent TOPIC GUIDE

Study overview

The Welsh Government has arranged for us – York Consulting – to look at the ways schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) support children, and their families, to help avoid children being excluded from school.

Thank you for taking part in this discussion – your views will help us to develop a clearer understanding about how to help prevent children from being excluded from school.

All the information you share with us will be treated in confidence and in line with the Welsh Government's privacy notice [English/Welsh] which we sent to you prior to this discussion.

Your views will be used in a report we write which will be published on the Welsh Government website. This report will not include any information that could be used to identify any people who have taken part in the research.

Taking part in this discussion is completely voluntary. You can end this interview at any time without giving any reasons and you can also say if you do not want to answer any specific questions. Are you happy to continue?

Before I start, do you have any questions about the research [*if yes, and it involves the type of questions that will be asked see text below*] or how we will use the information you have provided *[if yes, refer to the privacy notice]*.

Note to researcher: only use this text if the participant would like more information about what the questions we will explore:

We are interested in exploring the following areas during the interview:

- The experiences of children and their families where children have been excluded from school or who have been at risk of exclusion.
    - When we talk about children who have been at risk of exclusion, we mean children who have experienced difficulties at school which has resulted in them breaking the school's behaviour policy.
    - The school may have spoken to you about [child's name] being at risk of exclusion if their behaviour continued to break the school's behaviour policy.
- The exclusion could either be short-term or permanent.
- The support children, and their families, have received - or could have received - from school to help children avoid being excluded.
- How the school maintained - or could have maintained contact - with children, and their families, where a child has been excluded.
- The support schools put in place - could put in place - to help children make a successful return to school after they have been excluded.

Introduction

1. Can you describe [child's name]'s experience of school generally? [**Prompt**: What do they enjoy about school? What do they find difficult about school?

2. Has [child's name] been:

   A. At risk of exclusion?

   (If text above for the definition of 'at risk' has not been read out please read out explanation of what being at risk of exclusion means)

   B. Excluded from school? If so, has your child been:

      i. Excluded for a short time (that is, your child was allowed to return to school after the exclusion).

      ii. Permanently excluded (that is, your child was not allowed to return to the school).

A. Where a child has been at risk of exclusion

(Researcher note: we are interested in all of the parent's experiences (i.e., of what was helpful, less helpful etc.) rather than a single incident. So, explore with parents their overall summary of their exclusion experience rather than focus on at risk incident or repeat the questions for each at risk incident.)

3. How did you become aware [child's name] was at risk of exclusion? [**prompt**: discussion with your child/the school?]

4. What did the school say was happening which meant [child's name] was at risk of exclusion?

5. Why do you think [child's name] was at risk of exclusion? [**prompt**: was [child's name] experiencing any difficulties at school? Did something happen which might have triggered [child's name] to behave in a way which meant they were thought to be at risk of exclusion?]

6. What help did [child's name] receive to support them to stay in school? [**Prompt**: from school, from outside school – such as the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].

   - What parts of this were helpful?
   - What parts were less helpful?

7. What help did you and your family receive to support you to help [child's name] stay in school? [**Prompt**: from school, from outside school – such as the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].

   - What parts of this were helpful?
   - What parts were less helpful?

8. What other help (if any) would have been useful to [child's name] and your family when [child's name] was at risk of exclusion? [**Prompt**: from school, from outside school – such as the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].

9. How well did the school communicate with you, whilst [child's name] was at risk of exclusion? **Prompt**:

    - Do you feel you received everything you needed to understand what was happening? If not, what do you feel would have helped your understanding?
    - Are there ways (if any) the communication from the school could have been improved?

10. How well did the school communicate with [child's name] whilst they were at risk of exclusion?

11. Do you feel [child's name] received everything they needed to understand what was happening?

    - If not, what do you feel would have helped [child's name]'s understanding?'

12. Are there ways (if any) the communication from the school could have been improved?

(If their child has not experienced temporary or permanent exclusions then skip to 'Anything else'?)

B (i). Where a child has been temporarily excluded

(Researcher note: we are interested in all of the parent's experiences (i.e., of what was helpful, less helpful etc.) rather than a single incident. So, explore with parents their overall summary of their exclusion experience rather than focus on one exclusion or repeat the questions for each exclusion.)

13. What did the school say had happened which meant [child's name] was temporarily excluded?

14. Why do you think [child's name] was temporarily excluded? [**prompt**: was [child's name] experiencing any difficulties at school? Did something happen which might have triggered [child's name] to behave in a way which meant they were temporarily excluded?]

15. What help did [child's name] receive during their exclusion and return to school? [**Prompt**: from school, from outside school – such as the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].

    - What parts of this were helpful?
    - What parts were less helpful?
    - What help did they receive prior to exclusion to support them to stay in school?

16. What help did you and your family receive to support [child's name] during their exclusion and return to school? [**Prompt**: from school, from outside school – such as the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].

- What parts of this were helpful?
- What parts were less helpful?
- What help did the family receive prior to exclusion to support them to stay in school?

17. What other help (if any) would have been useful to [child's name] and your family when [child's name] was excluded and when they returned to school? [**Prompt**: from school, from outside school – such as the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].

    - What help would have been useful prior to exclusion to support them to stay in school?

18. How well did the school communicate with you about [child's name]'s exclusion and return to school? **Prompt**:

    - Do you feel you received everything you needed to understand what was happening? If not, what do you feel would have helped your understanding?
    - Are there ways (if any) the communication from the school could have been improved?

19. How well did the school communicate with [child's name] about their exclusion and return to school?

20. Do you feel [child's name] received everything they needed to understand what was happening?

    - If not, what do you feel would have helped your child's understanding?
    - Are there ways (if any) the communication from the school could have been improved for your child?

(If their child has not experienced permanent exclusions then skip to 'Anything else'?)

B(ii). Where a child has been permanently excluded

(Researcher note: we are interested in all of the parent's experiences (i.e., of what was helpful, less helpful etc.) rather than a single incident. So, explore with parents their overall summary of their exclusion experience rather than focus on one exclusion or repeat the questions for each exclusion.)

21. What did the school say had happened which meant [child's name] was permanently excluded?

22. Why do you think [child's name] was permanently excluded? [**prompt**: was [child's name] experiencing any difficulties at school? Did something happen which might have triggered [child's name] to behave in a way which meant they were permanently excluded?]

23. What help did [child's name] receive whilst they were excluded and during their return to education? [**Prompt**: from the school, a new school, from an EOTAS provider, the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].

    - What parts of this were helpful?
    - What parts were less helpful?
    - What help did they receive prior to exclusion to support them to stay in school?

24. What help did you and your family receive to support [child's name] during their exclusion and return to education? [**Prompt**: from the local authority, from a new school, from an EOTAS provider, from health services or from another organisation].

    - What parts of this were helpful?
    - What parts were less helpful?
    - What help did the family receive prior to exclusion to support them to stay in school?

25. What other help (if any) would have been useful to [child's name] and your family when [child's name] was excluded and when they returned to education? [**Prompt**: from the local authority, from a new school, from an EOTAS provider, from health services or from another organisation].

    - What help would have helped prior to exclusion to support them to stay in school?

26. How well did the school and local authority communicate with you about [child's name]'s exclusion and return to education? **Prompt**:

    - Do you feel you received everything you needed to understand what was happening? If not, what do you feel would have helped your understanding?
    - Are there ways (if any) the communication from the school or local authority could have been improved?

27. How well did the school and local authority communicate with [child's name] about their exclusion and return to education?

    - Do you feel [child's name] received everything they needed to understand what was happening? If not, what do you feel would have helped your child's understanding?
    - Are there ways (if any) the communication from the school and local authority could have been improved for [child's name]?

Anything else

28. Is there anything else you would like to say about your experiences that you have described?

Thank you for giving your time to talk about this. Can I remind you that we will not use your name or anything which could identify you or [child's name] as part of this research and the report to the Welsh Government.

Review of practices used in maintained schools and pupil referral units to prevent exclusions

Pupil TOPIC GUIDE

Study overview

The Welsh Government has asked us – York Consulting – to look at the ways schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) support children, and their families, to help avoid children being excluded from school.

Thank you for speaking with us – your views will help us to understand how to help children and young people to avoid exclusion and stay in school.

We won't tell anyone what you say in the interview unless we think you or someone you talk about is at risk of being harmed.

Your views will be used in a report which will be published on the Welsh Government website. This report will not contain any personal details or information that might reveal who you are.

Please remember, you don't have to take part if you don't want to. If you take part, you don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to. Are you happy to continue?

Before I start, do you have any questions about the research [*if yes, and it involves the type of questions that will be asked see text below*] or how we will use the information you have provided *[if yes, refer to the privacy notice English/Welsh]*.

Note to researcher: only use this text if the participant would like more information about what the questions we will explore:

We are interested in talking about the following things:

- The experiences of children and their families where children have been excluded from school
- The experiences of children and their families who have been at risk of exclusion.
    - When we talk about children who have been at risk of exclusion, we mean children who are breaking the school's rules.
    - The school may have spoken to you about being at risk of exclusion.
- The exclusion could either be short or longer.
- The support children, and their families, have received to help them to avoid being excluded.
- Where a child has been excluded, how the school helped them and their families.
- The support schools put in place – or could put in place – to help children make a successful return to school after they have been excluded.

Introduction

1. Can you describe your experience of school generally? [**Prompt**: What do you enjoy about school?]

In most cases we will know answers to 2 & 3 in advance and so will not need to ask:

2. Have you been:
   A. At risk of exclusion?

   *(**If text above for the definition of 'at risk' has not been read out please read out explanation of what being at risk of exclusion means – you may need to remind them of the meaning regardless**)*

   B. Excluded from school? If so, have you experienced:
      i. Temporary exclusion (that is, you were allowed to return to the school after the exclusion).
      ii. Permanent (that is, you were not allowed to return to the school).

A. Where you have been at risk of exclusion

(Researcher note: we are interested in all of the child's experiences (i.e., of what was helpful, less helpful etc.) rather than a single incident. So, explore with the child their overall summary of their at risk experience rather than focus on one experience or repeat the questions for each experience.)

3. What was happening at school for you which meant you were breaking the rules and at risk of being excluded?

4. Why do you think you were breaking the rules and at risk of being excluded? [**prompt**: were you having any problems? Had something happened which was causing you problems?]

5. What help did anyone give you to help you to stay in school? [**Prompt**: focus on aspects that prevent exclusion from school, from outside school – such as the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].

   - What parts of this were helpful?
   - What parts were less helpful?

6. What help did anyone give your family to help you to stay in school? [**Prompt**: focus on aspects that prevent exclusion from school, from outside school – such as the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].

   - What parts of this were helpful?
   - What parts were less helpful?

7. What other help (if any) would have been useful to you and your family to help you to stay in school? [**Prompt**: focus on aspects that prevent exclusion from school, from outside school – such as the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].

8. How well did the school let you know what was happening? **Prompt**:

   - Did you understand what was happening? If not, what would have helped you to understand?

- Are there ways school could have let you know what was happening in a better way?

(If they have not experienced temporary or permanent exclusions then skip to 'Anything else'?)

B(i). Where you have been temporarily excluded

(Reminder of definition: You were asked to not come into school for a day or more, but you were allowed to return after this period.)

(Researcher note: we are interested in all of the child's experiences (i.e., of what was helpful, less helpful etc.) rather than a single incident. So, explore with the child their overall summary of their exclusion experience rather than focus on one exclusion or repeat the questions for each exclusion.)

9. What happened at school for you which meant you were excluded for a short time?
10. Why do you think you were excluded? [**prompt**: were you having any problems? Had something happened which was causing you problems?]
11. What help did anyone give you when you were excluded and when you returned to school? [**Prompt**: from school, from outside school – such as the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].
    - What parts of this were helpful?
    - What parts were less helpful?
    - What help did you receive prior to exclusion to support you to stay in school?
12. What help did anyone give your family to support you when you were excluded and returned to school? [**Prompt**: from school, from outside school – such as the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].
    - What parts of this were helpful?
    - What parts were less helpful?
    - What help did your family receive prior to exclusion to support you to stay in school?
13. What other help (if any) would have been useful to you and your family when you were excluded and returned to school? [**Prompt**: from school, from outside school – such as the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].
    - What help would have helped prior to exclusion to support you to stay in school?
14. How well did the school let you know was happening? **Prompt**:
    - Did you understand what was happening? If not, what would have helped you to understand?
    - Are there ways school could have let you know what was happening in a better way?

(If they have not experienced temporary or permanent exclusions then skip to 'Anything else'?)

B(ii). Where you have been permanently excluded

(Reminder of definition: Your school decided that you were not allowed to return to the school.)

(Researcher note: we are interested in all of the child's experiences (i.e., of what was helpful, less helpful etc.) rather than a single incident. So, explore with the child their overall summary of their exclusion experience rather than focus on one exclusion or repeat the questions for each exclusion.)

15. What happened at school for you which meant you were excluded permanently? [**Prompt**: completely excluded and not allowed to return to that school]

16. Why do you think you were excluded? [**prompt**: were you having any problems? Had something happened which was causing you problems?]

17. What help did anyone give you when you were excluded and returned to education? [**Prompt**: from school, from outside school – such as the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].

    - What parts of this were helpful?
    - What parts were less helpful?
    - What help did you receive prior to exclusion to support you to stay in school?

18. What help did anyone give your family to support you when you were excluded and returned to education? [**Prompt**: from school, from outside school – such as the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].

    - What parts of this were helpful?
    - What parts were less helpful?
    - What help did your family receive prior to exclusion to support you to stay in school?

19. What other help (if any) would have been useful to you and your family when you were excluded and returned to education? [**Prompt**: from school, from outside school – such as the local authority, from health services or from another organisation].

    - What help would have helped prior to exclusion to support you to stay in school?

20. How well did the school let you know was happening? **Prompt**:

    - Did you understand what was happening? If not, what would have helped you to understand?
    - Are there ways school could have let you know what was happening in a better way?

Anything else

21. Is there anything else you would like to say about your experiences that you have described?

Thank you for giving your time to talk about this. Can I remind you that we will not use your name or anything which could identify you as part of this research and the report to the Welsh Government.

Text email intro and pro forma introduction

Pro forma (Survey) about exclusions from maintained schools and pupil referral units (PRUs)

The Welsh Government has asked York Consulting to gather, via a short [pro forma (survey)], information from maintained schools and PRUs about:

- What schools/PRUs do to prevent exclusions, maintain contact with children who are excluded, maintain contact with excluded children and support reintegration of children following an exclusion.
- The support schools/PRUs, children and their families may need to avoid exclusions.

The findings from the research will be used to inform the development of Welsh Government exclusion policy.

The pro forma (survey) consists of 7 questions and takes around 10-15 minutes to complete. We would really appreciate you completing this pro forma (survey) and/or sharing with colleagues who work in schools/ PRUs who are involved in exclusions/supporting children to avoid exclusion from school.

All information provided will be treated in confidence, in line with the Welsh Government's [privacy notice] which will be sent to you prior to the meeting.

To take part, you can access the survey [here]

Thank you for your time.

Philip Wilson (Lead Researcher)

Philip.wilson@yorkconsulting.co.uk

SCHOOL PRO FORMA (SURVEY)

Please provide your school's reference number. This is a 7-digit school number known as the 'LEA and Establishment number' (also referred to as a 'DfE number')

What is your main role at your school or PRU? Please select one option

- Headteacher or acting headteacher
- Deputy headteacher
- Assistant headteacher
- Teacher in charge (of a PRU) or acting teacher in charge (of a PRU)
- Head of phase
- Head of year
- Head of department
- Subject teacher
- School nurse
- Parent liaison officer
- Community pastoral worker
- Family support worker
- Wellbeing officer
- Family engagement officer
- Additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo)
- Other - please specify

1. What is your role in relation to exclusions? [open text]
2. What strategies or approaches does your school or PRU use to prevent school exclusion? [open text - optional]
3. What strategies or approaches does your school or PRU use for maintaining engagement with children who are excluded? [open text - optional]
4. What strategies or approaches does your school or PRU use for supporting the reintegration of children following an exclusion? [open text - optional]
5. Are your policy documents in relation to behaviour/exclusion published on your website? Y/N. If yes, please provide a link
6. What support do you think schools, PRUs, children and their families may need to avoid exclusion? [open text - optional]

As part of this research project, we will be conducting follow-up interviews with staff from schools and PRUs. If you would like to take part in this research please provide your name and email address below.

Annex C. Literature review

Introduction

A literature review was conducted to examine interventions and practices that can help prevent exclusions, as well as the impact on known risk factors for exclusion (social and emotional wellbeing, challenging behaviour etc.). More information on the methodology of the literature review is provide in Chapter 2.

A wide range of school-based interventions can be employed aimed to reduce the risk of fixed-term and permanent exclusion. These interventions can target risk factors and behaviours at an individual/child level, at a school level, or both. In doing so, they can involve parents, teachers, school staff and the wider community (Gaffney, Farrington and White, 2021).

Valdebenito et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of studies published between 1980 and 2015 to examine the impact of school-based interventions on reducing exclusion from mainstream schools. They defined exclusion as the removal of a child from their normal schooling and, therefore, included both in-school (i.e., excluded from the classroom) and out-of-school (i.e., excluded from the school premises on a fixed-term or permanent basis) exclusion. The interventions in their analysis were grouped into nine categories:

- Enhancement of academic skills.
- After-school programmes.
- Mentoring/monitoring programmes.
- Social skills training (for students).
- Skills training for teachers.
- School-wide interventions.
- Violence reduction.
- Counselling and mental health interventions.
- A miscellaneous category.

Across 37 randomised control trials, mainly in the USA but also in the UK, the key findings from the review were that:

- School-based interventions can produce a small and significant reduction in exclusion rates, i.e., children that participated in the school-based interventions were, on average, less likely to be excluded than those allocated to control/placebo groups.
- Some specific types of interventions showed more promise based on more robust and consistent evidence, namely those involving mentoring/monitoring, skills training for teachers, enhancing academic skills and counselling/mental health services. However, the small number of studies involved in the effect size calculations for each of these interventions means that this should be interpreted with caution.
- The results were based on measures of impact collected immediately during the first six months after intervention (on average). When they examined a smaller subset of studies that measured impact at follow-up (12 or more months after intervention), while there was still a positive impact of the interventions, this improvement was reduced and was no longer statistically significant. Further analysis examined studies that included both short-term and long-term impacts of interventions; it was found that the short-term impact of the intervention was positive but reduced compared to the overall findings although this short-term impact was longer than the overall impact findings (12 months rather than 6 months). Overall, these findings suggest that school interventions show positive impacts on reducing exclusions in the short-term, but the effects may not be sustained longer-term although there is less conclusive evidence around this.

Mielke and Farrington (2021) also conducted a meta-analysis, looking specifically at randomised control trials between 2008 to 2019 that had at least 100 students and official school district records of either fixed-term exclusion or arrest. Fourteen such studies were found, predominantly in the USA and delivered in low-income neighbourhoods. They covered a range of interventions and approaches including universal restorative practice, academic support and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and with an application ranging from five to 165 hours (reflecting the different objectives, formats, intensities and take-up rates of the interventions). The study concluded that:

- Overall, the interventions showed small but not statistically significant reductions on fixed-term exclusions.
- Universal interventions tended to reduce fixed-term exclusions more than interventions targeted at students with additional needs.

- Interventions in high schools (i.e., secondary schools) reduced fixed-term exclusions significantly, whereas those in elementary schools (i.e., primary schools) did not.
- Interventions that were designed specifically to reduce fixed-term exclusions did so to the same level as interventions that were more general and targeted towards reducing fixed-term exclusions.

The Mielke and Farrington (2021) study was primarily a statistical exercise and did not seek to explain why, from a design or delivery perspective, certain interventions had been more effective than others in reducing fixed-term exclusions. However, they did identify one common theme, namely that those interventions with the largest positive effect on fixed-term exclusions sought to build children's skills in behaviour and emotional management, be that through one-to-one sessions (e.g., the Rochester Resilience Project) or classroom-based programmes (e.g., Positive Action).

Interventions and approaches in this review

The Valdebenito et al. (2018) and Mielke and Farrington (2021) studies helped to inform the scope and focus of this review[23]. As outlined in Chapter 2, emerging findings from the primary research strands of this study also influenced which interventions were focused on in the literature review.

The interventions are presented here alphabetically.

Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs)

Introduction

Originally developed by Sheila Burton, the ELSA intervention is designed to build the capacity of schools to support the emotional needs of their children from within their own resources (ELSA Network, 2017). ELSAs deliver programmes to support children's emotional and social skills including emotional literacy, friendship and play, emotion

[23] With particular reference to the Valdebenito findings, it is worth noting here that skills training for teachers (one of the approaches cited as effective in reducing exclusions, albeit based on a sample of only three studies) is not included in the literature review as a standalone intervention. This is because it already features in several of the other interventions, especially when discussing the factors underpinning effective implementation. As such, the review has treated staff training as a cross-cutting theme rather than a specific intervention.

regulation and skills to cope with worries, grief and loss, helping children to manage their own emotions.

The ELSA programme involves teaching assistants being trained by educational psychologists to provide this emotional and social support to students. Training covers a range of topics including psychological theory, security and relationships, active listening, emotional competence, loss and bereavement, building relationships and self-esteem. For ELSAs to be endorsed by the ELSA Network, they must be employed within an educational establishment (or another organisation that works with children and young people), have completed all of the training and must receive line management support and supervision from an educational psychologist.

Effectiveness of ELSA

The ELSA Network website (2017) provides links to more than 25 evaluation reports that have explored the delivery and effectiveness of ELSA interventions across England and Wales. Results include significantly higher emotional self-efficacy in children and support assistants, increases in teacher's perceptions of the child's emotional literacy, positive impacts on pupil progress and on pupils' emotional literacy and behaviour, and positive impact on teaching assistants' emotional intelligence and skills. Some specific examples include:

- The ELSA impact evaluation, completed by the Hampshire Educational Psychology service (2010) for children attending schools in Bridgend. This evaluation included primary and secondary aged children who had either received ELSA support (intervention group) or who were waiting to receive ELSA support (control group). Pre- and post-intervention data was collected on emotional literacy and suggested that ELSA support led to improvements in empathy, self-awareness, social skills, motivation and self-regulation, especially in primary-aged children, compared to those in the control group.
- The evaluation report of the ELSA programme between 2014-15 in Cheshire West and Chester (2016) highlighted the impact that the ELSA programme had within schools. Across a sample of 47 ELSAs, 91 per cent said they believed they had enabled positive outcomes, including resilience, attendance and engagement with education. The line managers of the ELSAs identified improved academic outcomes as a result of

the ELSA support. It should be noted that while positive impacts were reported, these outcomes were based on perceived reports from those delivering the programme (ELSAs and their line managers) and more robust outcome measures would increase confidence in the impact of the ELSA programme. In addition, the outcomes were reported only five months after the ELSAs completed their training and so the longer-term impacts are not clear.

The evaluation reports on the ELSA Network website do not quantify the impact of ELSA support on exclusions, but they do include qualitative feedback, usually in the form of quotes from headteachers or other school staff, which suggest that – in their view – the ELSA interventions have resulted in fewer exclusions.

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

The ELSA Network outlines a 'code of practice' for effective delivery of the intervention, emphasising the importance of planned support programs, communication with parents, regular sessions, and support from school leaders. While group work can be beneficial for certain purposes, it's cautioned against for anger management. Constraints on the ELSA role in various schools include issues like funding, time allocation, parental engagement, and the availability of dedicated rooms or spaces for sessions.

Some of the evaluation reports referenced on the ELSA Network website (2017) consider constraints or limitations affecting the ELSA role in specific schools or local areas, such as:

- **Lack of funding:** Some ELSAs are reported to have purchased resources to support children using their own money.
- **Allocated time:** Demand for ELSA support can sometimes exceed the available time and resources. ELSAs have also commented that they are not always allocated sufficient planning time or have had to cover classroom lessons leaving them unable to run ELSA sessions.
- **Parental consent/engagement:** Despite their best efforts, ELSAs can find it difficult to successfully engage parents in the work they are doing with their child.
- **Rooms:** Some ELSAs do not have a permanently allocated room/space from which to run sessions, which can hinder the effectiveness and continuity of their work.

Enhancing academic skills

Introduction

Enhancing academic skills in this context involves programmes or activities that target specific children who are facing academic difficulties in school. They may also be disengaging from lessons and displaying challenging behaviour (Gaffney et al., 2021), and so such programmes aim to support learners' academic needs which can reduce the risk of challenging behaviour and exclusion.

Specific activities and resources can include:

- Precision teaching – designed to improve the accuracy of reading, spelling and maths.
- Phonics-based reading manuals to help children who find reading difficult.
- Specific software to support children with dyslexia.
- Tutoring.

Effectiveness of enhancing academic skills

There is limited UK-based research discussing academic tutoring or the enhancement of academic skills as a specific intervention designed to help prevent exclusion. However, enhancing academic skills was cited in Valdebenito et al. (2018), drawing on findings from two US-based studies:

- Cook et al. (2014) conducted a randomised control trial of an intervention that provided 106 children from disadvantaged backgrounds aged 14-16 in a Chicago high school with academic support in mathematics, and non-academic support based on the principles of CBT. The academic support involved individualised two-on-one mathematics tutoring (two children per one member of staff) for one hour per day over a full school year. Almost all the children receiving the support were eligible for FSM and most had been diagnosed with a learning disability (the report does not provide any further detail on the type or severity of those learning disabilities). The report concludes that fixed-term exclusions fell amongst those receiving the academic support, along with the academic intervention leading to fewer days of school being missed in the academic year 2012-2013 (an average of 13 fewer days missed per pupil across the sample of 98 pupils) and their motivation improved. However, due to a

high standard deviation in the data, it was not possible to assert that the reductions were statistically significant.

- Edmunds et al. (2012) undertook an experimental study of the impact of the 'early college high school model' on Grade 9 (Year 10 in the UK) outcomes in North Carolina. Early college high schools aim to increase both the number of children who graduate from high school and the number who go on to post-secondary education and are designed to accelerate the academic progress of children while minimising or eliminating any barriers that may be faced between school and college. Primarily located on college campuses, they enable children to graduate with a high school diploma, associate degree and/or up to two years of college credit, and/or certified work credentials. They enrol children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those who are low income, the first in their family to go to college, or a member of a minority group, providing accelerated courses combined with pastoral support. Edmunds et al. (2012) found a statistically significant and substantively higher proportion of children attending early college high schools in North Carolina were taking core college preparatory courses and succeeding, along with fixed-term exclusions amongst this group being statistically lower than amongst a control group in conventional high schools.

In addition, Kremer et al. (2015) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of 24 studies to examine the effects of after-school programmes on behaviour and attendance at school. After-school programmes in this instance covered play and socialising activities, academic enrichment and homework help, snacks, community service, sports and arts and crafts. They found that, on average, children participating in after-school programmes did not demonstrate improved behaviour or school attendance compared with children in the comparison groups. However, it could be argued that any impacts of academic enrichment would be hidden within the other aspects delivered within this after-school programme.

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

To enhance academic skills, schools need to be able to identify children who need support in these specific areas and be able to implement the required programmes (Gaffney et al., 2021). Where this occurs, children can start to re-engage with education and reduce

challenging behaviour which, prior to the programmes, may have resulted in being at-risk of a fixed-term or permanent exclusion.

Internal exclusions

Introduction

‘Internal exclusions’ or, specifically, to a designated area within the school, with appropriate support, or to another class on a temporary basis, is one of the alternative solutions which the Welsh Government Guidance (2019a) suggests should be considered before permanent or fixed-term exclusion.

Internal exclusion within the existing literature is a broad term, but is often defined as when a child is removed from their regular mainstream classroom and placed in a designated area within the school for a specified period of time. During this period, the child is separated from their peers and may receive additional support, depending on the school's policies. Internal exclusion may include more supportive forms of removal such as learning support, inclusion and nurture groups. It may also encompass isolation spaces and be used as a disciplinary approach, despite guidance that these forms of exclusions are not useful within schools (Welsh Government, 2019a).

Existing literature suggests that research about internal exclusions is limited, despite it being a well-established practice in schools across the United Kingdom (Walker, 2022).

Effectiveness of internal exclusions

Mills (2018) conducted a rapid evidence assessment on internal exclusions, involving interviews with staff in 276 schools and 200 alternative providers in England. They found that:

- Staff saw internal inclusion units as a halfway point between a mainstream classroom and excluding a child.
- The nature of the units varied considerably, with some schools placing an emphasis on sanctioning, i.e., using internal exclusions as a form of punishment, while others used them in a more supportive way, offering tailored learning that was not available to the same extent in the child’s mainstream classroom.

- Where school staff felt that internal exclusions had been effective, this was due to the time and space it gave children to reflect on incidents and behaviours that led to them being in the first place.

Golding (2021)[24] investigated the prevalence and efficacy of internal exclusions in England through surveys with school staff (94 respondents) and educational psychologists (83 respondents), and semi-structured interviews with nine school leaders. They found that:

- Internal exclusions are highly prevalent across England but vary in how they are implemented.
- There are an increasing number of children in internal exclusion units, with survey responses and interview data suggesting that it is often the same children being sent there over extended periods of time.
- Children with ALN more frequently attend internal exclusion units than their peers which, the authors suggest, highlights the need for clarity in government guidance around policy and practice of the internal exclusion environment.

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

For internal exclusions to be implemented successfully, and for them to prevent fixed-term or permanent exclusions, there is a need for them to be a supportive learning environment for children as opposed to being used with a punitive, disciplinary function (Golding, 2021).

Internal exclusion spaces or units also need to have the correct staff-to-child ratio in order to be able to facilitate the internal exclusion with the right amount of support and learning for children. It is suggested that not having this available could be a potential barrier in ensuring that positive relationships are built and that the children are still able to access the correct amount of education and support they need.

Mills (2018) also notes that despite schools often citing internal exclusions as a means of reducing fixed-term or permanent exclusions, there is actually a lack of reliable evidence of their impact as schools typically do not carry out formal evaluations that can accurately demonstrate impact.

[24] This is not a peer-reviewed paper.

Managed moves

Introduction

If a school feels they are unable to support a child at risk of exclusion, the school may arrange, normally through the local authority, for the child to have a fresh start at another school. This is known as a 'managed move'.

The Welsh Government (2011) provide guidance for schools, local authorities and families on this process. This guidance states that:

- A managed move should only be done with the full knowledge and cooperation of all parties involved, including the parents and the local authority, and in circumstances where it is in the best interests of the child.
- Parents should not be pressured into removing their child from school under the threat of permanent exclusion, nor should a child be removed from the school roll to encourage them to find another school place.
- Prior to considering a managed move, it is important to establish why the child is experiencing difficulties at school. Moving a child with behavioural issues, for example, without supporting the child to learn skills to interact effectively with peers and teachers might be of limited use. If the core issues are rooted in family matters, then moving a child without resolving those issues is also unlikely to be successful.

Effectiveness of managed moves

A systematic review by Messeter and Soni (2018) found some encouraging evidence on the use of managed moves as an alternative to exclusion in the UK for reducing exclusions and improving attainment. This review covered nine studies on managed moves, with a combined total of 103 participants (35 children who had experienced a managed move, 16 parents, 39 school staff and 13 local authority officers). The authors found a range of positive outcomes for children and young people as a result of a managed move. The most frequently reported outcomes were: A fresh start for the child, the development of new positive relationships, improved progress and learning, greater emotional wellbeing, and behaviour in line with expected norms. There was no evidence as to whether the managed moves prevented exclusions. The authors conclude that further research into the managed

move process is required, particularly using data on long-term outcomes for children, in order to conclude that a managed move is a successful sustained alternative to exclusion.

A report produced by Estyn (2018a) examined the use of managed moves by local authorities and schools across Wales, looking also at how they can support children at risk of exclusion or disengagement. They found that:

- Clear and consistent entry and exit criteria for off-site support (such as managed moves, alternative curriculum, EOTAS and specialist placements) is important.
- Managed moves operate most effectively where schools work closely with the local authority throughout the process.
- A managed move is usually a last resort when all other strategies have failed, and a permanent exclusion is highly likely.
- For children in Key Stages 1 and 2, a managed move often provides a fresh start, can reduce the risk of exclusion and can help children (re-)engage in learning. For these children, the authors describe that a well-planned managed move does not generally have a negative long-term impact on their learning experiences and consequently on the outcomes they achieve at the end of Key Stage 4.

Research published by Thomson (2019) compared the characteristics of children in Year 9 and 10 in England that had either been permanently excluded or had experienced a managed move in 2015/16. The research found that:

- Children experiencing a managed move were more likely to be female, but less likely to have been persistently absent, to have low levels of Key Stage 2 attainment and/or to have experienced fixed-term exclusions than those who were permanently excluded.
- Data limitations prevent a firm conclusion being drawn, but the indication is that children who have a managed move achieve, on average, slightly better levels of attainment at Key Stage 4 than those who are permanently excluded.

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

In the systematic review described above, Messeter and Soni (2018) suggest that a number of factors contribute to a successful managed move:

- An opportunity for the child to develop new relationships with staff and peers, fostering a sense of belonging in their new environment. Teachers recognised the importance of supportive staff relationships in helping children feel included, welcome and secure in their new school, with parents in the studies acknowledging that this was achieved via commitment from staff. For the children in the studies, the ability to foster new relationships determined whether or not they viewed their new school placement as successful.
- Effective communication between all stakeholders (schools, local authority, parents and child).
- Personalised and pastoral support plan for the child.
- Listening to the voice of the child is important. It was found that children's emotional wellbeing fluctuated with their feelings of "social connectedness", such as a child being distressed at leaving their friends before their managed move and would experience these emotions until establishing relationships in their new school.

An important limitation of the Messeter and Soni (2018) systematic review was that the participants within the nine studies had been consulted within a year of their managed move taking place, so no insights were available for longer-term outcomes. The review also lacks detail of the local authorities that were part of the study and so the review does not provide a comprehensive overall view of how managed moves are used across England, with practices appearing to vary widely. This means that there is reason to believe managed moves would not be as effective in reducing exclusions and improving attainment all local authority areas due to geographical location and spread. Rural local authorities may have the nearest school to its current one 25 miles away, meaning that a managed move may be impractical and exacerbate inconvenience to the family.

Estyn (2018a) report that a managed move is more likely to be successful when schools and local authorities work well with children and their families and use it as an early intervention strategy. If used as a last resort, the relationship with the home school has often broken down, there is limited scope to return to the home school and children can often demonstrate a high level of disengagement. In these cases, children are more likely to find settling into the receiving school challenging and as a result be moved to a PRU or an EOTAS provision long-term.

The timing of a managed move has to be carefully considered – in particular how it fits with the child starting Key Stage 3 or 4 and any impact on teacher assessments or examinations (Estyn, 2018a). Jones (2020) also notes the potential disruption of moving school in Key Stage 4 and the Welsh Government (2011) notes that children who are more than one term into their examination courses in Year 10 may face difficulties if they move school, including poorer examination results.

Mentoring

Introduction

Mentoring involves pairing a child in primary or secondary education with an older peer or adult who provides one-to-one support and acts as a positive role model. The mentor may be a volunteer or may be a specialist who is trained in working with children at risk of fixed-term or permanent exclusion.

Mentors usually meet with children one-to-one on an agreed frequency (e.g., weekly) over a sustained period – typically one school term, one school year or more. Mentoring sessions can take place during school, at the end of the school day or at weekends. In some cases, mentors will meet with their mentees in small groups. Mentors may also engage with other services or professionals working with the child and/or their family to help ensure a shared understanding of the issues, objectives and interventions being applied.

Mentoring aims to work by building the learner's confidence and improving relationships, developing resilience and character, and/or raising aspirations (Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), 2021a).

Mentors can provide support to children based on their individual needs and the skills and experience of the mentor. Topics may include (although will not necessarily be limited to) self-regulation strategies, self-perception and belief, aspirations for future studies and career options, attitudes to school and specific academic skills or knowledge. By focusing on the individual needs of the children, mentoring programs can provide children the guidance, support, and resources they need to overcome these challenges and stay engaged in their education, which could be beneficial for those at risk of exclusion.

Effectiveness of mentoring

There is encouraging evidence on the effectiveness of mentoring for helping to reduce levels of school exclusions and the general impact mentoring can have on school-aged children. Although, authors noted limited numbers of experimental studies (Beattie et al., 2016).

A meta-analysis was undertaken by Valdebenito et al. (2018) who found there to be a positive impact of mentoring on school exclusions. Mentoring overall seems to be an effective intervention for reducing violence and disruptive behaviour within the studies analysed. However, while the effect sizes in the mentoring studies were significant and among the highest compared with other interventions, they were moderate.

Beattie et al. (2016) assessed the feasibility and acceptability of conducting a randomised controlled trial of the 'Breakthrough Mentoring' programme – supported by South Gloucestershire Council, with paid, adult mentors providing one-to-one mentoring to secondary school students (aged between 12 and 16 years-old). A total of 21 children were randomly assigned to two groups: one group received weekly two-hour mentoring sessions for one academic year (11 children); the other group received care as usual (10 children). The children were asked to complete self-reported questionnaires and to participate in interviews. Qualitative interviews also took place with parents, school staff, mentors, and commissioners as part of the process evaluation. While intervention participants reported that having a mentor unconnected to their school helped them talk about and deal with difficult feelings, the study did not investigate the effectiveness of mentoring, pending a definitive trial.

Brinkley, Sherar and Kinnafick (2022) evaluated the acceptability and feasibility of a co-produced sport-based intervention which included mentoring, sport, education and reflection to promote physical and mental health, pro-social behavioural and educational outcomes. Within one PRU in the Midlands, England, 38 children (between 11 and 16 years of age), five support staff, eight teachers, eight mentors and three stakeholders participated in the evaluation. The study was evaluated using a multi-method approach including interviews, ethnographic work and a pre-experimental study. Findings suggested that sport is a feasible way to support mentorship, and participation can help to mitigate some challenges in engaging in reflection and education. These early findings suggest that mentoring via sports could be effective for children within PRUs on their physical and mental health, pro-social

behavioural and educational outcomes. However, the authors stressed the importance of a robust co-production design and considering children's emotional and health literacy for this type of intervention.

The UK-based social enterprise, Think for the Future (2022), which partners with over 150 schools and multi-academies across the UK to deliver its own structured mentoring intervention, reported a 15 per cent reduction[25] in fixed-term exclusions as a result of its mentoring programme for 85 per cent of children supported. This programme aims to work with secondary school-aged children to tackle disengagement from education using relatable role-models and structured social and emotional learning. The programme targets groups of children (those who are in the same year or adjacent years) who are disengaging from education, demonstrating low-level disruption to learning, have low attendance, low emotional resilience or are at risk of exclusion. The group mentoring works by identifying target outcomes such as: reducing negative behaviour points (a point system sometimes used within schools to monitor behaviour and highlight positive recognition), number of exclusions and increasing attendance and positive behaviours. The mentor from Think for the Future is onsite within the school running the group-based mentoring sessions (eight to 15 children per session based on target outcomes) and runs five to six sessions a day.

While the process of the mentoring provision is described in detail within the Think for the Future (2022) research, there is limited evidence available on the provision's methodology and therefore interpretation of the results described should be done cautiously.

Other studies have also found positive effects from mentoring. For example:

- Tolan et al. (2008), as a paper reviewed in Valdebenito et al. (2018), conducted a meta-analysis of mentoring interventions that have been evaluated for their effects on disruptive behaviour outcomes for children and young people under the age of 18. The selected studies focused on disruptive behaviour outcomes, academic achievement outcomes, drug use and aggression outcomes. The patterns of effects identified suggest that mentoring may be valuable for those young people at risk or already displaying disruptive behaviour. Mentoring was concluded to be effective for reducing disruptive behaviour, aggression and drug use, and improving academic achievement for young people. While Tolan et al. (2008) found significant but small effect sizes, it is

[25] This is not a peer reviewed paper

reported that this should be interpreted with caution due to the limited detail and comparability across the studies of what comprised as mentoring activity and implementation characteristics in each one.

- EEF (2021a) reported a small positive impact of mentoring on attainment in a meta-analysis which identified research papers where the intervention had been used. The aim of the EEF analysis was to provide schools with high quality information about the beneficial aspects of the intervention based on existing evidence. These research papers included a population sample of children and young people aged between three and 18 years-old. While activity varied across the research papers, the mentoring interventions included clearly defined programmes and recognisable approaches such as peer mentoring or small group teaching which in some cases extended out to academic support. Small positive effects were reported for children who had undertaken mentoring on attainment, confidence and behaviour, especially where programmes had a clear structure and expectations, provided training and support for mentors, and involved meetings between mentor and mentee on at least a weekly frequency.
- EEF (2021a) also reported evidence that mentoring may be particularly beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those showing low engagement with, or low expectations of, schooling.
- Eby et al. (2008) reviewed mentoring across three domains of relationships (young people, academic and workplace) to determine the overall effect size related to mentoring outcomes for mentees, and whether outcomes for this relationship varied by the type of mentoring relationship (young people, academic and workplace). Eby et al. (2008) suggest that mentoring as an intervention was significantly related to favourable outcomes including behavioural, attitudinal, health related and interpersonal. Despite the effect size being generally small, mentoring appears to be more highly related to some mentee outcomes such as improved school attitudes, rather than to outcomes relating to reducing psychological stress or strain for young people.

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

The report from EEF (2021a) above highlights useful considerations for how to implement effective mentoring. This includes mentoring programmes having clear structures and

expectations, training and support for mentors and consistent mentoring sessions showing more positive impact. This is also alluded to in Tolan et al. (2008), where stronger effects were suggested when emotional support was a key process of the mentoring structure in some papers, along with implementation factors including professional development being an explicit motivation for the mentors.

As noted in Beattie et al. (2016), for mentoring to be successfully implemented it is important to consider the use of mentors unconnected from the child's school. The reason for this, compared with mentors known within the specific school, was that children felt freer to talk about, and deal with, difficult feelings.

Some mentees reported negative experiences about the way the mentoring relationship ended (Beattie et al., 2016). This suggests that ending the mentoring relationship needs to be handled carefully with a gradual reduction in contact.

The EEF study (2021a) report that the positive effects of mentoring, including those relating to attainment and exclusion, are usually temporary and tend not to be sustained once the mentoring stops. There are also risks associated with unsuccessful mentor pairings and mentor drop-out, both of which can have detrimental effects and consequences on the mentee and could be a potential barrier in the use of mentoring. Both papers highlight that it is, therefore, important to consider ways that the mentors themselves can be supported in their work and give careful consideration to recruiting reliable mentors. This, the authors believe, would increase the likelihood of mentoring being implemented successfully.

The Think for the Future (2022) enterprise research suggests that for long-term sustained positive impact, mentoring within schools is needed for at least one full-term of the school year.

Modified curriculum

Introduction

A modified curriculum is the standard curriculum which has been updated on an individual basis to provide more, or less mainstream learning and additional support, to meet the needs of a specific child. Children who are struggling in mainstream classes and whose needs cannot be met in that setting can be offered a modified curriculum, however this is dependent on jurisdictions in local areas and may not be possible across all of Wales. A modified curriculum can include (Welsh Government, 2019a):

- A mix of mainstream lessons and off-site activities or outdoor learning (this might include sport, vocational learning or work experience).
- Additional support for improving literacy and numeracy skills outside of the child's normal classroom setting.
- School sites delivering their own provision of behaviour and nurture support for children as part of a graduated response to wellbeing and behaviour.
- Specialist support being delivered by an external provider while a child is waiting for a space at a PRU or is attending a PRU part-time.

Modified curriculums can be adapted to support a range of children's needs including those with dysregulated emotions, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties more so than other children of a similar age, who display challenging behaviours or have an additional learning need that require extra support that is more than universally provided for children (Price, 2015).

The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 requires schools and local authorities to deliver the Curriculum for Wales (Hwb, 2022).

Effectiveness of a modified curriculum

The existing literature focuses mainly on attendance, wellbeing and behaviour as positive outcomes of a modified curriculum. By contrast, there is a small body of evidence on the effectiveness of a modified curriculum to reduce the risk of fixed-term or permanent exclusions specifically which is discussed below:

- In Sweden, Ekstrand (2015) completed a literature review of 155 research reports that focused on how to prevent unauthorised absences and how schools and communities can help to increase school attendance. Of these reports, 72 were from America, 37 from the UK and the remaining 46 from other countries across Europe. The use of a modified curriculum was noted as being one factor that was effective for preventing a reduction in school attendance. One example of modified curriculum described by Ekstrand (2015) included an occupation-focused curriculum for 14- to 16-year-old children which was considered successful for motivation, communication, trust, and social competence.

- Charlton, Panting and Willis (2004) reviewed the effectiveness of a project where children undertook external study placements at external further education centres as part of a modified curriculum where off-site activities were utilised. The project also employed additional learning support workers to monitor children's work-based employment experiences. Fifteen children in Year 11 participated in the study, most of whom felt that their behaviour, engagement with education and attendance had improved. School staff indicated that most of the children would have been excluded without the project.
- White and Laczik (2016) conducted a qualitative study to identify examples of good practice in motivating children to engage with their learning who may have had a loss of interest in learning and/or those displaying disruptive behaviour and being at risk of exclusion. The children in the study were aged 14-16 years and took part in work-related learning across England. Across nine case studies, involving interviews with staff and children, they found work-related learning to be an effective way of encouraging and supporting re-engagement with mainstream education. The intervention was designed on a personalised approach for each child meaning that they had a say in what they wanted to do with no obligation to be forced into certain directions. This approach was described as allowing for more informed decisions to be made by the children about their future career choices and the sustainability of any post-16 education, employment and training. Due to the personalised aspect of the approach, the intervention offered a wide choice of vocational areas which were seen to engage the children. These included IT and media, construction and hair and beauty. The children enjoyed working in small groups and found it helpful that the learning environment was not set-up in the same way as their school. White and Laczik (2016) also suggest that there is a need to identify wider parameters of achievement and focus on softer measures that recognise children for positive achievements, rather than outcomes such as academic attainment, school attendance and gaining qualifications. They argue that motivating children who were previously disaffected to engage and participate in learning should be considered a success, and that developing skills such as communication and teamwork can help prevent exclusions.

- Bolton (2002) describes five case studies from a PRU in Slough where children are either attending part-time due to being at risk of exclusion from school or were attending full-time due to being excluded from school. The case studies describe how alternative curricula have been used (including music technology, mechanics and sports lessons) and how effective they have been. They cite examples of reductions in challenging and disruptive behaviour, and children being able to sit GCSEs, which would reportedly have been very unlikely had an alternative curriculum not been available.

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

For a modified curriculum to be implemented effectively, a number of factors should be considered:

- Bolton (2002) noted the importance of small group teaching and how this helps children to more quickly re-engage with education. Bolton (2002) also found that parents were less likely to display an anti-school attitude when their children were being taught in small groups. This is because review meetings often took place on a group basis enabling parents and children to comment on the learning and work progress that the children were doing.
- Bolton (2002) also highlighted the importance of a multi-agency approach to the development and delivery of a modified curriculum including local agencies that can support the school with children's behavioural difficulties. This may, for example, include local youth services or business communities who help to provide some activities of the child's modified curriculum. Alongside this, Bolton (2022) suggests that employing staff that can work effectively with disengaged children and offering, where possible, a range of different subject options to the children is equally important in ensuring modified curriculums can be implemented effectively.
- White and Laczik (2016) concur, stating that the positive trusted relationships developed between children and staff are integral to the positive outcomes of modified curriculums.

It is also important to note that a modified curriculum can be used for children who have already been permanently excluded from a school or PRU. This means that their modified

curriculum which is linked closely to the use of EOTAS and similar provisions, may mirror interventions that are discussed above.

Nurture groups

Introduction

Originally developed by the educational psychologist Marjorie Boxall in the 1970s, nurture groups are a focused, short-term intervention designed to support behavioural, emotional and social difficulties in school-aged children. The growing emphasis on wellbeing and mental health in schools has coincided with renewed support for nurture groups and a considerable increase in their number (Smith, 2019).

Nurture groups are an inclusive approach that can increase access to learning for children who find it hard to learn in a mainstream class. Designed to address children's social and emotional needs that can disrupt their learning, nurture groups help develop important social skills, confidence and self-respect, along with providing academic teaching (Nurture UK, 2023). They can help children take pride in achieving and behaving well, which in turn can impact positively on school exclusion rates.

Nurture groups have been used in mainstream primary schools for children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties who are at risk of exclusion. They can help children take pride in achieving and behaving well, and can teach them how to develop positive relationships with teachers and peers (Cole, 2015).

In nurture groups, teachers and teaching assistants model positive relationships, and support children to develop language and communication skills, social as well as emotional skills. As well as developing curriculum-based skills, children are encouraged to celebrate their own progress in acquiring skills such as listening, sharing and turn-taking that will reduce or remove barriers to learning, thus enabling success back in the mainstream classroom. This may involve turn-taking games, group activities, emotional literacy sessions, sharing of news or breakfast clubs (Sloan et al., 2020).

A nurture group usually contains up to 12 children and two staff. Typically, children will attend the nurture group for two terms of the academic year, after which they can usually reintegrate into their mainstream classes on a full-time basis (Early Intervention Foundation, 2023). Nurture UK (2023) suggest that children begin their day in their mainstream classroom and are picked up by staff and taken to their nurture group, where they then

complete the types of activities discussed above, and then return to their mainstream classroom for some provision each day. Another model of nurture groups can include children being full-time in the nurture group with no mainstream classroom activity (Cooper, Arnold and Boyd, 2001).

Effectiveness of nurture groups

The published research about the effectiveness of nurture groups with children appears positive (in primary schools), particularly when considering outcomes that may impact on the reduction of school exclusions:

- Cooper et al. (2001) found most parents felt nurture groups had a positive effect on the social, emotional and behavioural development of their children (this includes parents who were initially reluctant to the idea of their children attending nurture groups). Children valued the relationships they developed with peers and staff, the quietness and calmness of the environment, the predictability of the routine and the engaging nature of the activities. However, the authors also stated that children may have been reluctant to appear disloyal to their teachers and their school when talking about the nurture groups, meaning that a degree of caution is required in the interpretation of the findings.
- Cooper et al. (2001) conducted a longitudinal study over two years involving 342 children (216 in a nurture group and 126 in control groups) aged between four and 10 years in 25 schools across eight local authority areas in England. Ninety-six per cent of teaching staff in the study said that the nurture groups had a positive impact on the school as whole, particularly in terms of:
    - The development of more nurturing attitudes and practices throughout the school.
    - Changes in the ways teachers think and talk about children.
    - Contribution of nurturing principles to whole-school policies.
    - Increased sense of empowerment with disruptive children.
    - Increased awareness of developmental issues and the relationship between social-emotional factors and learning.
- Nurture UK (2021) documented five studies involving nurture group provision, looking at improvements in social and emotional functioning and academic progress. Across a

combined total of 1,239 children in 139 schools, they found that children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties are significantly more likely to improve in social and emotional functioning and academic achievement by attending nurture group provision for at least two terms, rather than remaining in their mainstream classroom.

- Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney (2009) completed a study of nurture groups involving 221 children aged between five and seven years in 32 primary schools across Glasgow. They found that children attending nurture groups showed significant gains in academic attainment, emotional development and behaviour compared with children in a matched control group.
- As cited in Sloan et al. (2020), Iszatt and Wasilewska (1997) undertook a retrospective study of 308 children in nurture groups in Enfield between 1984 and 1988. Eighty-seven per cent of the children were able to return to mainstream classes within one academic year and 83 per cent were still in these classes three years later. This, the authors reported, compared favourably to a small group of 20 non-matched children who were deemed suitable for a nurture group intervention but where no place was available (the proportion of control group children requiring statutory assessments and special provision was more than three times greater than those in the nurture groups). Findings from the study suggests that nurture groups appear to impact positively on children's social and emotional issues and self-confidence that may otherwise contribute to challenging behaviour and potentially exclusion.
- Ofsted (2009) completed a survey on exclusions with 30 primary schools that had excluded several children aged seven and under, and 27 schools that had not excluded any children. They found that nurture groups had been “highly effective in improving children’s behaviour and preventing exclusion”, although they also reported that several schools in the sample were unable to afford them.
- An Estyn report (2014) focused on strategies and actions that secondary schools and local authorities in Wales were using to improve attendance. Within the report, nurture groups (along with other interventions) were reported to be used by secondary schools which were the best at improving and maintaining high levels of attendance. Estyn

noted that nurture groups help to develop self-esteem and encourage attendance, recommending that schools not currently using them be supported to do so.

- Seth-Smith et al. (2010) suggest that children whose emotional needs are linked to self-esteem and anger management, and those children who are quiet and withdrawn, appear to benefit most from nurture groups. The research included 10 primary nurture group schools (44 children) and five primary control schools (39 children). The research also found that, on average, younger children show more improvement in behavioural, emotional and social skills following their involvement in nurture groups, while older children improve more in terms of academic skills.
- A study by the University of Southampton (Cunningham, Hartwell and Kreppner, 2019), involving a small sample of 16 children aged six to nine years who attended nurture groups, assessed social skills via feedback from teachers and children. It found that children in the nurture group used significantly more socially appropriate responses, their social skills improved, and they enjoyed attending the groups. However, they still reported challenges in engaging with peers beyond the groups, particularly in the playground.
- The County Borough of Blaenau Gwent (2023) described three of their primary schools being supported to implement nurture provision for children with wellbeing issues. The report concluded that exclusions in these schools reduced following the implementation of nurture groups, although it did not provide any quantitative data.
- In the Midlands, a small-scale research project was undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of a part-time nurture group in one primary school (Vincent, 2017). Qualitative interviews were used to gather perceptions from staff, children (aged 7-11) and parents, all of whom cited improved social skills, greater engagement with academic tasks and fewer incidents of undesirable behaviour. The study concluded that the nurture group offered an effective way of supporting social, emotional and behavioural skills in children who were considered to be at risk of school exclusion.
- March and Kearney (2017) attributed “a clear reduction in pupil exclusions” to the expansion of nurture groups across Glasgow. The Glasgow Psychological Service, in partnership with Glasgow education colleagues, used the principles of nurture groups

set out by the Nurture Group Network to develop detailed guidance and training for 8,000 school staff across the city.

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

Writing in SecEd – the UK-based secondary education magazine for teaching staff and school leaders – Freeman (2017) provided guidance on the establishment of effective nurture groups and the successful factors that are needed for implementation. This included:

- Involving parents at every stage of the child's involvement in the nurture group.
- Responding to the (changing) needs of the child and reviewing practices and approaches as new children join and others leave.
- Ensuring the room/space is welcoming and reflects the needs and achievements of the children.
- Keeping the rules of the group simple, clear and visible.

In highlighting the following nine features of effective nurture groups, Vincent (2017) echoes some of the above:

- Embedding emotional literacy into all aspects of the programme.
- Positive adult modelling, repetition and encouragement.
- Recognising and building on children's starting points.
- Quality of the relationship between staff and children.
- Individually tailored goal-setting.
- Recognising that change may take a long time.
- Carefully planned and supported reintegration from nurture group back into mainstream classroom full-time.
- Good communication between nurture group staff and class teachers.
- Small group sizes.

As discussed in Cunningham et al. (2019), it is important for children to be able to utilise their learnt social skills outside of the nurture group environment. Ideally, practitioners

should identify how they can help facilitate this, which may in turn help to address situations of poor behaviour that could result in exclusion.

It is also of note that while significant positive changes for children in nurture groups have been reported by the various authors cited above, Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) suggest that nurture groups need to operate for a minimum of two years to be fully effective.

Parental engagement

Introduction

Parental engagement in this context can be defined as teachers and schools involving parents in supporting their children's academic learning and wellbeing (EEF, 2021b). Effective parental engagement involves creating a collaborative and supportive relationship between schools and parents and can include a wide variety of activities, ranging from more regular communication and encouraging parents to support their children's at-home learning through to more intensive support such as workshops or programs to develop the literacy, IT, or parenting skills of parents, or support programmes for families in crisis.

Effective parental engagement can have a positive impact on a number of outcomes for children, including educational attainment, and can reduce the risk of a fixed-term or permanent exclusion.

Effectiveness of parental engagement

An EEF (2021b) review of 97 studies found that effective parental engagement, especially with parents of very young children, can equate on average to an additional four months' progress over the course of a year in children's general homework, reading, literacy and maths. There are also higher impacts for pupils with low prior attainment. The evidence overall was rated as strong although the EEF noted a large proportion of the studies within the scope of their review had not been independently evaluated nor had been evaluated by organisations involved in the delivery of the work, such as commercial providers. In addition, the scope of the studies was somewhat limited as most examined home reading interventions with a small number of studies that examined interventions that aimed to improve parenting skills.

Rose et al. (2017) used a mixed-method approach to investigate the Attachment Aware Schools pilot project which had been commissioned by two local authorities in England to

improve the educational outcomes of care-experienced children. The project provided whole-school and targeted attachment-based strategies to support children's wellbeing, behaviour and academic attainment while facilitating collaborative partnerships with families. Results suggested that there was a significant improvement in reading, English and maths amongst those supported by the project. There was also a decrease in exclusions both inside and outside the classroom. It should however be recognised that there was no control group in this study and so we cannot be certain that the improvements were due to the project.

Griffin (2019)[26] writes that "a school culture where parents feel part of the school will lead to whole-school improvement", emphasising the importance of effective communication between schools and parents.

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

The EEF (2021b) review of parental engagement emphasises the importance of parental engagement strategies reaching all parents. If the parents that access parental engagement opportunities are primarily from affluent backgrounds, there is a risk that this may increase the attainment gap for children who are from disadvantaged backgrounds, and in turn may fail to prevent exclusions. It was also highlighted that parental engagement strategies are typically more effective with parents of very young children and so it is important to consider how schools will maintain parental engagement as children get older.

Potential barriers to the successful implementation of parental engagement were considered by Griffin (2019), each of which could limit the effectiveness of the work with parents on reducing or preventing exclusions:

- Workloads causing some staff to see parental engagement as an 'add on' rather than a core component of their role.
- School staff being afraid of making mistakes with parents or inadvertently making situations worse.
- A lack of training meaning that staff feel unsure of how to handle difficult conversations with parents.

[26] This research is not peer-reviewed.

Reduced timetables

Introduction

In exceptional circumstances, schools may need to implement a reduced timetable to support a child who cannot attend school full-time for a short, agreed period. These circumstances may include reintegration into school (e.g., following a fixed-term exclusion or extended absence due to ill health).

A reduced timetable is recorded in a plan (such as a pastoral support plan, individual behaviour plan or reintegration plan) as a formal agreement between the child, their parents, and school. An agreed reduced timetable may also include distanced or online delivery of lessons where applicable to ensure continuity of learning for the child (Welsh Government, 2023a).

Once the reduced timetable has been agreed, the school should then share this with their local authority. Although sharing the plan containing the reduced timetable with the local authority is advised, there is no quantitative evidence across schools and PRUs available to understand their prevalence in this way.

The Welsh Government (2023a) recently made it clear that schools should never use reduced timetables as a measure for managing behavioural issues, because there is a small body of evidence to suggest they have been used in this manner (Weaver, 2023). Where this is the case, schools typically use them as a temporary intervention to address and manage the impact of significantly challenging behaviour or the emotional or social needs of some children (Weaver, 2023).

Effectiveness of reduced timetables

Recent research with local authorities in Wales (Weaver, 2023) aimed to understand the use of reduced timetables nationally. A survey of all local authorities received 13 responses and seven professionals involved in supporting children on reduced timetables were interviewed. The research highlighted a perceived lack of transparency, among local authority respondents and professionals, around the purpose of reduced timetables. There was a view, among local authority respondents and professionals, that reduced timetables were sometimes being used because schools lacked the resources to support a child, with extra needs, to access a full timetable. The use of reduced timetables to avoid an incident that may lead to a permanent exclusion was also described. In this sense, they were viewed

as somewhat effective at reducing permanent exclusion, although it was noted that children on a reduced timetable would likely feel excluded, nonetheless. These feelings of exclusion following the use of a reduced timetable were reported by Weaver (2023) as having negative impacts on children such as exacerbating feelings of isolation, low mood, lack of confidence and increasing relationship struggles which may increase externalising behaviours within school.

Restorative practice

Introduction

Restorative practice is an approach to addressing behavioural issues and conflict which uses dialogue to encourage accountability for an individual's actions and the repairing of relationships where harm has occurred (Gonzalez, 2012). It can also involve the development of a whole-school culture, including relevant policies and procedures, to reduce the possibility of conflict and harm occurring (Kane et al., 2008). Whilst there is no universal definition of restorative practice, the approach is generally viewed as an alternative to punitive and exclusionary approaches to behaviour management that promotes personal responsibility and social learning (All Party Parliamentary Group [APPG] on Restorative Justice, 2021).

The use of restorative approaches in schools starts from the assumption that "strong, mutually respectful relationships and a cohesive community [are] the foundations on which good teaching and learning can flourish" (Hendry et al., 2011). A key part of restorative practice is, therefore, repairing relationships where harm or conflict has occurred. It can be used with children of all ages, adapted to the needs and ages of those involved. During restorative conversations (often referred to as restorative conferences), those involved in an incident or conflict are invited to discuss what happened, what the impact has been and what needs to happen to put things right or make things better in the future. The process is intended to help children develop a sense of social responsibility, such that they can make better choices in the future without needing the threat of punishment.

In addition to providing a framework for dialogue between those involved in harmful behaviour, restorative practice in schools covers a range of other strategies that can be used to foster good relationships and shape better future behaviour. These include the use of affective statements (or 'I' statements when describing the impact of behaviour), giving

children a say in the development of classroom norms and expectations, and group discussions (often referred to as community building circles) to help children develop social and emotional skills and build positive relationships with one another (Augustine et al., 2018).

The restorative practices described above can be used as part of a school-wide approach or in a focussed way as a response to incidents and/or with targeted groups of children to help prevent exclusion.

Effectiveness of restorative practice

In a systematic review of research about restorative practice in schools, most of the studies reviewed reported positive outcomes of restorative practice, including improved social, emotional and behaviour skills of students (Zakszeski and Rutherford, 2021). However, the review found only a small number of experimental or quasi-experimental studies assessing the impact of restorative practice, with mixed findings regarding the efficacy of the approach for reducing exclusions. These are briefly described below, with some additional studies comprising of very recently published or non-peer reviewed research:

- A cluster randomised control trial of a whole-school restorative practice project involving 18 schools (covering ages five to 18) in an urban district in north-eastern U.S (Huang, 2023). The 18 participating schools served mostly Black and Hispanic students from low-income backgrounds. Nine schools were randomly allocated to the intervention group, with these schools receiving school-wide staff training on restorative practice and a grade-level-specific curriculum to guide social-emotional learning and restorative community building circles. The remaining schools were allocated to the control group, receiving no intervention. The study found no difference in the likelihood of fixed-term exclusion between students in the intervention and control schools. However, for students in the intervention group, there was a reduced likelihood, compared to the control group, of receiving a fixed-term exclusion for those who had previously had fixed-term exclusions.
- Another cluster randomised control trial of a two-year, whole-school restorative practice intervention involving 14 middle schools in Maine (Acosta et al., 2019). Students participating in the study were mostly white and aged between 11 and 12. Baseline and follow-up student surveys included standardised self-report measures of

school climate, school connectedness, peer attachment, social skills and bullying victimisation. No significant differences were observed across these outcomes between the intervention and control schools. The authors suggest a possible reason for this was that only a minority of students in the intervention schools experienced restorative practice to a great extent, whilst students in the control schools experienced more restorative practice than expected (this is a limitation of this study). Whilst no differences between the intervention and control groups was observed at the school level, students who had greater exposure to restorative practices reported more positive outcomes, including improved school climate and connectedness, peer attachment, social skills and reduced cyberbullying victimisation.

- Augustine et al.'s (2018) randomised control trial of a restorative practice programme delivered over two years in schools (covering ages five to 18) across the Pittsburgh Public School District (this study was noted by Zakszeski and Rutherford (2021) as being of value but was omitted from their work because it was not peer reviewed). The study found that the number of days lost to fixed-term exclusions in the intervention schools declined by 36 per cent over the study period, compared with 18 per cent in the control schools. The disparity in fixed-term exclusion rates between African American and white students, and between low-income and high-income students (i.e., that African American and low-income students are excluded at disproportionately higher rates compared to white and high-income students respectively), also narrowed at the intervention schools. However, the reductions in exclusions observed in the intervention schools were largely driven by reductions in fixed-term exclusion rates at elementary schools (age five to 10). In addition, fixed-term exclusion rates for male students and those with education plans (developed for those with SEN) did not decrease.
- A cluster randomised control trial of the Learning Together intervention to understand its impact on bullying and aggression, compared an intervention group with a control group (Bonell et al., 2018). The intervention involved staff training in restorative practice as well as non-restorative practice interventions including the facilitation of a school action group and a social and emotional skills curriculum for students. A total of 40 secondary schools in south-east England took part in the study. There were small

but significant effects on children's self-reported experiences of bullying victimisation in the intervention group, although there was no observable effect on aggression.

Quasi-experimental and observational studies into the effect of restorative practice, both peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed, show positive outcomes including reductions in exclusions. However, these studies did not involve the random selection of schools into intervention and control groups, meaning they cannot identify causal impacts of restorative practices:

- Hashim et al. (2018) explored the impact of the Los Angeles school district's ban that was introduced in 2011/12 on fixed-term exclusions for wilful defiance and implementation of restorative practices on the rates of fixed-term exclusion in 2014/15. Modelling of student discipline records across 785 schools (ages 5 – 18) found that following the ban, students had a reduced likelihood of fixed-term exclusion with a reduced gap in the rate of fixed-term exclusions between frequently disciplined children and their less-disciplined peers. This would be somewhat expected considering the ban on certain types of suspensions, but further reductions in the rate of fixed-term exclusion were seen in schools providing restorative justice training. The study also found that the use of restorative justice practices, such as peer mediation and conflict resolution, helped to create a more inclusive and supportive school environment.
- Another study using a time series design examined the use of restorative practices at 180 schools in a large urban school district in the U.S (Anyon, 2016). Modelling of 9,921 student discipline records showed that participation in restorative interventions in term one was associated with a lower likelihood of fixed-term exclusion in term two. This association held after accounting for student racial background, however, black students were still suspended at a higher rate than white students despite the intervention.
- Restorative approaches were evaluated in four Bristol schools (Skinns et al., 2009[27]) using a quasi-experimental design (comparison against a non–randomised control group made up of two schools that declined to take part in the intervention). The six schools served students experiencing high levels of deprivation and were facing

[27] Not peer reviewed.

significant issues with behaviour, attendance and attainment. The research found that the restorative practice schools had a mean attendance rate five percentage points higher than the non-restorative practice schools. However, the intervention had no observable impact on fixed-term exclusions.

- An evaluation of a restorative practice training programme delivered to staff at 16 primary schools in the London Borough of Barnet found that, over a two-year period, average fixed-term exclusion rates fell by 51 per cent in restorative practice trained schools compared with an increase of 65 per cent at the 36 schools in the borough not using taking part in the training (Moore, 2008[28]).

This review has not found any research into the effectiveness of restorative approaches in Welsh schools. Monmouth Comprehensive School reported that exclusions fell by 95 per cent over a five-year period following the introduction of restorative practice and the achievement of the Restorative Service Quality Mark (Williams, 2015). However, this was reported by the school's leadership team rather than as a finding from a research study.

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

Research and evaluation evidence suggests key enablers to the effective implementation of restorative practice in schools. These include:

- Taking a school-wide approach to restorative practice, including strategic planning and integration with the school's behaviour policies (Moir and MacLead, 2018; APPG on Restorative Justice, 2021).
- Commitment and modelling from school leaders to encourage staff buy-in (Kane et al., 2008). The experience and credibility of the person introducing restorative practice to a school also appears to be important (Youth Justice Board, 2004).
- Staff confidence in using restorative practices, supported by regular training and opportunities to reflect and discuss the approaches used (Bevington, 2015).
- For individual restorative conversations and conferences, there is a need for effective communication with all those involved about the resulting actions. Without this, there is a risk that outcomes could be perceived as unfair (Kane et al., 2008).

[28] Not peer reviewed.

A key implementation challenge identified in the literature is securing staff buy-in, with staff sometimes reluctant to use restorative practices for fear of 'losing authority' (Skinns et al., 2009) or preferring a more punitive approach (APPG on Restorative Justice, 2021). Time is also a key factor, with some estimates suggesting that shifting school culture towards restorative oriented principles and practices can take between one to three years, with fully embedded change estimated to take up to five years (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). In addition, staff turnover can weaken implementation over time, as staff trained in restorative practice leave the school (Acosta et al., 2019 and Kane et al., 2008).

Other issues or risks can include a lack of time available to have restorative conversations, agreements made in restorative conferences not being followed, and pushback from parents and staff that teachers should be teaching instead of implementing restorative practices (Lyubansky, 2019). Research into the use of restorative practice to reduce bullying also highlighted that restorative approaches may not be effective at resolving conflict in every situation, and that direct sanctions are still needed as a backup when the restorative process fails (Thompson, 2011).

The studies outlined in this section did not typically comment on the consequences of poor implementation of restorative practice, other than suggesting poor implementation as a possible reason when limited positive outcomes were observed. However, qualitative research into the use of restorative approaches in youth justice suggests poor implementation can lead to children feeling disempowered and coerced into making apologies (Barnes, 2015).

School-based counselling

Introduction

School-based counselling services aim to support children and young people experiencing mental health and wellbeing problems or distress. These are risk factors associated with school exclusion (John et al. (2022), Graham et al. (2019), Lereya and Deighton (2019), Tseliou (2021c and 2022)) and are increasing in their prevalence: (Copeland et al. (2023) cite the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people as a significant public health issue that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic).

Counselling can help children explore, understand and overcome issues in their lives which may be causing them difficulty, distress and/or confusion. As an intervention in schools, it

involves professional therapeutic support delivered face-to-face, online or via telephone by a professional counsellor. It can cover a range of therapeutic approaches including solution-focused brief therapy, CBT, mindfulness humanistic and person-centred approaches.

Effectiveness of school-based counselling

- A rapid evidence review of school- and community-based counselling in the UK (Copeland et al., 2023) found that that there is no clear evidence of effectiveness of the therapeutic approach given the lack of scientifically robust evaluations and some mixed findings. They did find, however, some tentative evidence from weaker study designs that counselling might have some positive impacts across different settings. The service was highly valued by learners, teachers and parents and is believed to improve children and young people's mental health, wellbeing, self-esteem, relationship building and school engagement.

Similarly, a literature review of school exclusions undertaken by Graham et al. (2019) for the Department for Education (DfE) found limited evidence about the impact of counselling interventions specifically to prevent exclusions. Nevertheless, they were able to cite some research which suggests some links between counselling services and improvements in school engagement and exclusion rates:

- Children and pastoral care staff view school-based counselling as accessible, non-stigmatising and effective (Cooper, 2009).
- School management report improvements in the attainment, attendance and behaviour of children who have access to counselling services (Pybis et al., 2012).
- In one study, school-based counselling helped to reduce levels of school exclusion by around 31 per cent (Banerjee et al., 2014).
- Valdebenito et al. (2018) cited a small but statistically significant reduction in exclusion rates in three US-based studies focused on counselling.

More recently, an evaluation of Place2Be's one-to-one counselling service found that school-based counselling may positively influence educational engagement and affect levels of exclusions (Toth et al., 2022). The evaluators compared fixed-term exclusion rates in the academic years before and during which 6,700 children (from 308 primary and 61 secondary schools) attended between 16 and 22 counselling sessions. They found that

children who had experienced at least one fixed-term exclusion in the year prior to attending counselling lost significantly fewer school sessions to exclusion in the year of their counselling, compared to the preceding year. More than half of these did not have any subsequent fixed-term exclusions. On average, the children also had better mental health, measured by teacher-reported improvements on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997). The researchers did also note, however, that further research was necessary (including a counterfactual) to more robustly explore the impact of school-based counselling on exclusions.

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act (2013) made it a statutory requirement for local authorities to provide an independent counselling service to support the health, emotional and social needs of children in Years 6 to 13, and young people in the area between the ages of 11 and 18 who are educated other than at school (EOTAS).

The review of statutory school and community-based counselling services undertaken by Hewitt et al. (2022) on behalf the Welsh Government found there to be a mix of delivery approaches, with some services managed by local authorities themselves, others commissioned to an external provider, and some services accessing additional sources of funding which increased the number of funded counselling hours that could be offered. In terms of the reach and availability of counselling services across school and community settings in Wales, the researchers found:

- Community-based services can increase reach, particularly for children and young people who are EOTAS.
- There can be inequality of access to counselling services, particularly amongst younger children, those not meeting threshold for a diagnosis, those less likely to seek support (e.g., due to concerns regarding stigma), socio-economically disadvantaged children and those with English as an additional language.
- Long waiting times can exist for counselling services, which can lead to challenges becoming more entrenched or children/parents becoming disillusioned with the offer of counselling.

Based on a rapid evidence review and further depth qualitative research, Hewitt et al. (2022) also identified aspects of design and delivery that can lead to successful counselling interventions:

- Integration within a wider whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing with strong links with community mental health services.
- High levels of awareness among children and young people, with the option of drop-in to support understanding and decision-making.
- Support from parents and carers.
- A tailored, flexible and inclusive range of techniques to enable person-centred approaches.
- Offering choice and encouraging young people to be involved in decision-making about counselling sessions.
- Having a designated, consistent and suitable space for the counselling to take place.
- Recruiting and retaining good quality counsellors.
- Enabling trusting and positive relationships between counsellors and children, and between counsellors and schools or community services.
- Providing funding to help schools introduce and sustain counselling services.

School-wide approach to behaviour

Introduction

Here we consider the evidence relating to the effectiveness of school-wide behaviour approaches and how they might help to limit or reduce the number of fixed-term or permanent exclusions.

A school-wide approach to behaviour is one where the standards and expectations of good behaviour pervade all aspects of school life. This includes the culture, ethos and values of the school, how children are taught and encouraged to behave, the response to misbehaviour and the relationships between staff, children and parents. It involves having clear and well communicated expectations of behaviour and consistent implementation of behaviour measures and support across the school, staff and pupils (Department for Education, 2022).

Key elements of a school's approach to behaviour include:

- School standards, including behaviours that are permitted and prohibited, the values, attitudes and beliefs they promote and the social norms and routines that should be encouraged throughout the school community (DfE, 2022b).
- Rewards, e.g., star charts, house point systems or assembly/head of year awards.
- Sanctions, e.g., verbal reprimands, traffic light systems, loss of privileges, informing parents/carers, time-outs, litter-picking, detentions or internal exclusions (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019).
- Teaching positive learning behaviours such as concentration, prosocial behaviour, communication skills and engagement.
- Staff using de-escalation techniques with learners, such as active listening, offering positive choices, and using non-threatening body language (Moore et al., 2019 and Education Endowment Foundation, 2019).
- School-wide approaches, including those discussed elsewhere in this literature review such as trauma-informed practice, parental engagement, restorative practice and a whole-school approach to emotional and mental health. At the classroom level, strategies often include routines, rewards, positive reinforcement systems and behaviour agreements. (Moore et al., 2019 and Welsh Government, 2012).
- Targeted interventions for children who need more intensive or individualised support, e.g., functional behaviour assessments and daily report cards (Educational Endowment Foundation, 2019), plus targeted interventions referenced elsewhere in this review such as mentoring, pastoral support programmes, modified curriculum, ELSAs, counselling and therapeutic approaches.

Effectiveness of school-wide approaches to behaviour

Moore et al. (2019) undertook a systematic evidence review (including UK and international sources) of the impact of school-wide and classroom based behavioural interventions, such as teacher training, rewards systems, reinforcement of prosocial behaviour, and discipline for misbehaviours. These interventions were delivered either in a targeted or universal manner. Targeted interventions were aimed to improve the behaviour of targeted groups of children at risk of behaviour difficulties. Many of the elements of the targeted interventions

were the same as the universal approaches but delivered only to the targeted group. Unique to the targeted interventions were those that focused on training student skills (e.g., functional behavioural assessments). Targeted interventions reported effect sizes that were larger than universal approaches achieving relatively large effect sizes for behavioural outcomes (median of 0.50).

Universal interventions were aimed at improving behaviour for all children across all classes and were found to achieve some beneficial effects on behaviour outcomes (effect size ranging from -0.14 to 0.37 with a median of 0.12). The authors suggested that this small effect may reflect the time taken to embed a change in behaviour for the whole school or the difficulty implementing such programmes. A larger effect size (0.57) was seen for one intervention that combined both universal and targeted elements in delivering a whole school approach to behaviour, which suggests the advantages of a more integrated school-wide approach to behaviour (Waschbusch et al., 2005).

Overall, Moore et al. (2019) identified that either training teachers or putting in place clear reward systems can improve pupil behaviour in the classroom for all children. For children displaying disruptive behaviour, implementing interventions that provide teacher training and establish specific classroom strategies can also be beneficial. These targeted interventions are often more successful when adapted to meet the needs of the individuals rather than applying the same strategies for all children involved.

Research in California sought to establish the effect of school-wide positive behaviour interventions and supports on disciplinary exclusions (Gage et al., 2019). Key elements of the approaches considered were clear schoolwide behavioural expectations, classroom-based intervention programmes (e.g., class check-ins or social skills training) and targeted interventions using functional behaviour assessments. The study used a propensity score matching approach to compare differences between schools implementing the approach with those that were not. It found that significantly fewer fixed-term exclusions occurred in the schools implementing the interventions (with an effect size of more than 0.25). However, no effects were found for permanent exclusions.

Similarly, Gage et al. (2018) undertook a review of experimental and quasi-experimental studies that had evaluated the effect of schoolwide positive behaviour interventions and support. The included studies involved 90 schools across America, with a large and statistically significant effect identified for reducing fixed-term exclusions (effect size -0.86).

In Wales, a case study developed by Estyn (2018b) outlines a special school's collaborative model of positive behaviour support. This includes improving communication, teaching academic skills and reducing disruptive behaviours based on collaboration between teachers, behaviour analysts and other professionals. The case study reports that "the model has enabled all pupils to maintain their placements successfully at the school. This has meant, for example, that there have been no permanent exclusions from the school for the last three years".

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

Important features of a school-wide approach to behaviour are identified by Bennett (2017) and the EEF (2019). They include:

- Senior leader commitment.
- Detailed and well understood and behavioural expectations.
- Training for staff, including teachers, teaching assistants, receptionists, lunchtime staff and everyone else who interacts with children.
- Consistent and thorough practices and strategies used throughout the school.
- A sense of shared responsibility and commitment among staff, parents and children.
- An understanding of expected impact and how to measure it.

In a qualitative comparative analysis, Moore et al. (2019) predicted components of interventions that would improve behavioural outcomes, highlighting two particular combinations:

- Tailoring the support to a child's needs, focusing on improving relationships and providing over 20 hours of teacher training.
- Focusing on academic issues whilst also teaching coping and resilience skills.

Other literature highlights consistency of application and coherence as being key to effective delivery, regardless of the overall approach adopted (EEF, 2019; National Association of School Psychologists, 2020; Bennett, 2017).

Therapeutic interventions

Introduction

In addition to school counselling approaches discussed earlier, there are several other therapeutic interventions that schools might use to support children with their mental, social and emotional wellbeing. Given, as referenced earlier, these are risk factors linked to school exclusions, there is the potential that these activities might contribute towards reducing exclusions in the school context.

Interventions based on therapeutic thinking focus on how children and young people can be supported in terms of their emotional wellbeing and mental health. They can also help to develop an understanding of how to respond to those who may be communicating through concerning behaviours (Czone, 2018).

A number of practices outlined elsewhere in this review often incorporate therapeutic approaches, including trauma-informed and restorative practices, nurture groups, ELSAs and mentoring. Below we outline three other types of therapeutic intervention not explicitly mentioned elsewhere – play and creative therapies, mindfulness, and social and emotional learning programmes.

Play and Arts Therapies

These therapies use play or creative expression to support children to express and understand their emotions, cope with stress and worries, and develop self-awareness and self-esteem (Moula and McDonald, 2021). In general, they aim to (MIND, 2021):

- Allow children to communicate thoughts and feelings that you find difficult to put into words.
- Help children make sense of things and understand yourself better.
- Give children a safe time and place with someone who will not judge you.
- Help children find new ways to look at problems or difficult situations.
- Help children to talk about complicated feelings or difficult experiences.
- Help children to connect with other people.

Schools engage with play therapy services to help support children's mental health and wellbeing (Thomas, 2015). They provide a natural and fun way for children to express

themselves and enhance social or coping skills using toys, games and other materials. They are often used with young children (who may not be able to express themselves verbally) but can also be used with older children and adolescents (Nopa, 2022).

Arts therapy refers to art, music, drama and dance movement therapy, which are psychotherapeutic approaches that aim to facilitate psychological change and personal growth through the use of arts media (Moula et al., 2020):

- Art therapy might involve painting, drawing, sculpture, collage or photography. The therapist encourages the child to talk about their artwork and what is represents, with the discussions serving as cues toward mental health disorders or personal issues (Nopa, 2022).
- Drama therapy might involve improvisation, role-playing or creative writing to treat various mental health issues (Nopa, 2022).
- Music therapy involves exploring music and sound – using instruments or voice to explore ways of communicating and expressing feelings (MIND, 2021).
- Dance therapy involves using body movement and dance to, for example, address difficult feelings about appearance or explore difficult experiences through movement rather than words (MIND, 2021).

Mindfulness

Weare and Bethune (2021) describe mindfulness as intentionally paying attention to present-moment experience, inside ourselves, our minds and bodies, and in our environment, with an attitude of openness, curiosity, kindness and care. A mindfulness course helps participants develop a new relationship with their experience, ‘moving towards’ their experiences, including difficult ones. It can cultivate qualities such as joy, compassion, wisdom, equanimity, the ability to pay attention, relate effectively to the emotions and to engage in more skilful action.

Developing a mindfulness approach within schools might involve establishing mindfulness champions, training teachers to teach mindfulness, or developing timetables to incorporate mindfulness sessions (Weare and Buthune, 2021). Practices include psychoeducation about emotions and mindfulness as well as teaching mindfulness exercises such as

awareness of breath, mindful body scans and awareness of thoughts, feelings and sensations (Phan et al., 2022).

Social and Emotional Learning Programmes

Social and emotional learning interventions seek to improve children's decision-making skills, interactions with others, understanding of their and other's emotions, and emotional regulation. Interventions might focus on the ways in which children work with (and alongside) their peers, teachers, family or community (EEF, 2021c). They include (Early Intervention Foundation, 2018):

- School-wide approaches involving coordinated action across curriculum, school ethos and family.
- Universal programmes which take place in the classroom, for example to teach emotional identification and regulation, effective communication, problem solving, conflict resolution and coping skills.
- Targeted interventions, often conducted through small-group work, to reinforce and supplement classroom-based instruction for children who need more intensive support.
- More specialised programmes which use elements of social and emotional learning and are targeted at children with particular social or emotional needs.

Effectiveness

A range of research evidence points to the positive effects of some of these therapeutic approaches on children's mental and emotional wellbeing:

- Through a randomised controlled study involving 62 children aged seven to 10 with mild emotional and behavioural difficulties, Moula et al. (2022) demonstrated a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing via participation in a range of art therapies, including music, dance and drama. The therapies were found to be particularly effective for expressing complex emotions and feelings that could not easily verbalised.
- Based on systematic reviews and meta-analyses, Weare and Bethune (2021) identified positive outcomes for children from engagement with mindfulness practice, including improved psycho-social and physical health and wellbeing, reduced mental

health problems (including stress and depression) and improved social and emotional skills, behaviour, cognition and academic performance.

- In a systematic review of outcome evidence, Phan et al. (2022) found that mindfulness-based school interventions increased prosocial behaviour, resilience, executive function and attention, and decreased anxiety, attention problems/attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and conduct behaviours.
- Systemic reviews of evidence on the effectiveness of social and emotional learning interventions (Clarke et al., 2015, Gedikoglu, 2021, Goldberg et al., 2019) cite evidence of effective universal programmes which had a positive impact on children's social and emotional skills, reduced behaviour problems and enhanced academic performance.

However, the above authors also acknowledged the relative lack of evidence on the longer-term effects of these interventions. In addition, research for the MYRIAD programme (Montero-Marin et al., 2022), which tested the effects of a brief mindfulness intervention for early teens, found it had no impact on children's mental health and wellbeing overall. Positive outcomes for school culture and reduced teachers' burnout were noted, however, and the study highlighted that the way in which mindfulness practices are introduced within schools is important in ensuring more impact for children. Broader systemic changes and the use of mindfulness practitioners were suggested.

Maynard et al. (2017) summarised 61 studies on mindfulness interventions and found there were good results for cognitive and socio-emotional performance but a lack of evidence for academic and behavioural performance.

This literature review has not found any research that explicitly links the implementation of these therapeutic interventions to a reduction in school exclusions on a widespread scale. However, there some isolated examples:

- Writing in Headteacher Update (a magazine for UK primary school headteachers), the headteacher of a primary school in Cornwall reported that exclusion days had fallen from 36 in the year prior to the introduction of various therapeutic approaches[29], to five

[29] These included a 'Thrive Room' (with beanbags, mirrors, cushions and puppets), music and play therapy, surf therapy and animal therapy.

days two years later (Cook, 2018). The headteacher also reported improvements in the social and emotional skills of children at the school.

- An evaluation of the Therapeutic Intervention for Peace project (Power the Fight, 2022) provided child-level case study examples of where exclusions appear to have been prevented by the project. Delivered in schools and alternative education settings in South London, the Therapeutic Intervention for Peace project aims to reduce interpersonal youth violence. Its approaches include cultural sensitivity training, art therapy workshops, one-to-one and group sessions with children, and co-developed reflective practice spaces for parents and families.

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

Across the range of therapeutic approaches discussed above, the research identifies some common themes for successful implementation. These include:

- Having sufficient resources/budgets (Nopa, 2022).
- Adopting school-wide or universal approaches that enable sessions and skills development to be integrated within the curriculum both in terms of the language used (Weare and Buthune, 2021) and opportunities to apply learnt skills to other areas are advocated (Gedikoglu, 2021).
- Support from headteachers and senior leaders, including opportunities for them to train and learn the principles themselves (Lord and Kukyen, 2020).
- Training for teachers to create therapeutic environments and implement programmes effectively (Greenberg, 2023).

There remain potential harms associated with mindfulness-based programmes that some authors suggest require further exploration, these include program-related factors, participant-related factors, and clinician- or teacher-related factors (Baer et al., 2019).

Transition support

Introduction

Moving from primary to secondary school is recognised as a significant point of change in children's lives. Whilst most children navigate this change successfully, some may find the transition more challenging (Hanewald, 2013). Transition support, therefore, refers to practices (either universal or targeted) aimed at addressing the potential challenges that children may face when moving from primary to secondary school.

The School Transition and Adjustment Research Study identified 17 common approaches to transition support, grouped into three categories (Neal et al. 2016):

- **Systematic approaches:** aimed at developing links between secondary schools and their feeder primaries, building effective communication channels between the two levels, and helping to develop social support networks. These might include shared projects or bridging units with the secondary school, peer support groups with primary children going to the same secondary, parent support groups, meetings between school staff and parents, and pupil passports (information about the child passed to the new school).
- **Cognitive strategies:** aimed at addressing children's concerns about the transition. For example, providing written information about the secondary school, class discussions about children's worries, assemblies about transition and the use of online resources.
- **Behavioural approaches:** aimed at familiarising children with their new school and the different routines, expectations and teaching methods they will encounter. For example, visits to the secondary school (whole class visits and additional visits with targeted groups), increased homework, teaching secondary vocabulary, timetable adaptations to reflect secondary timetables and teaching key organisational skills.

A recent survey of primary school Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCos) in the UK highlighted some specific transition support needs for children at risk of exclusion (Martin-Denham, 2023). SENCos expressed concern that children at risk of exclusion may struggle with various aspects of transition to secondary school, including building relationships with teachers and other children, coping with the change in environment, complying with new behaviour expectations and rules and, particularly for those with SEN,

dealing with the heightened stress brought about by new curriculum demands and teaching methods. They suggested that, for those at moderate risk of exclusion, solutions should involve additional pastoral support, identifying trusted, supportive adults at the secondary school, and staff awareness of the child's needs. In addition, for those at high risk of exclusion, social, emotional and mental health support during transition was suggested (including CAMHS or counselling), along with additional visits to the new school, small class sizes, identifying safe spaces for the child to go when they need support, check-ins during the school day, and staff being aware of how best to communicate with the child when they are overwhelmed.

Effectiveness of transition support

Whilst much literature exists on primary to secondary transition generally, research evaluating specific interventions aimed at improving children's experiences of transition is more limited, with no studies found that assess the impact of transition support interventions on the risk of exclusion. A recent systematic review of primary to secondary transitions (which included a review of nine other literature reviews) focused on what the literature says about children's experience of transition, the impact of transition on educational and wellbeing outcomes, and the key factors that make a positive or negative contribution to primary to secondary transitions (Jindal-Snape et al., 2020). Transition support interventions were not considered within the discussion of evidence related to positive or negative contributory factors.

Nonetheless, this review found a small number of studies examining the effectiveness of different transition support interventions on children's experiences of transition to secondary school. Research by Neal et al. (2016), through which the above typology of transition support approaches was developed, assessed the effect of different types of transition support on 532 typically developing children and 89 children with ALN. Using a longitudinal design, children at schools in south-east England were surveyed in the final term of Year 6 and the first term of Year 7. The study found that systematic approaches to transition support were associated with lower school anxiety amongst typically developing children, but higher levels of school anxiety amongst those with ALN, suggesting these children may require a more personalised approach. No association was observed between cognitive and behavioural approaches to transition support and school anxiety.

An evidence review of interventions to support mental health and wellbeing during transition concluded that programmes which bridge both levels of schooling, support children's relationships with their peers and teachers, involve parents, address common transition concerns and provide individualised support for children vulnerable to negative outcomes were likely to be the most effective at supporting wellbeing (White, 2020). These conclusions were drawn from a small number of studies, including the following research using an experimental or pre and post survey design:

- A quasi-experimental evaluation of the Transfer Support Team (Bloyce and Fredrickson, 2012), an intervention comprising 12 sessions delivered in the last term of primary school and first term of secondary school. Sessions were targeted at vulnerable children (defined as those eligible for FSM, who spoke English as an additional language and non-statemented children with SEN) and focussed on the organisational, social and academic aspects of transition to secondary school. A total of 351 children from 75 primary schools took part in the intervention, along with a comparison group of 106 children. Data from the School Concerns Questionnaire, completed before and after the intervention, showed that the intervention group had more concerns before the sessions, but that both groups had similar levels of concerns afterwards, suggesting that the intervention was effective. The study found the intervention to be equally effective for those eligible for FSM and non-statemented children with SEN. However, it was not as effective for children who spoke English as an additional language. In addition, reductions in school concerns were not significantly correlated with changes in peer problems or pro-social behaviour.
- An evaluation of a summer activity transition club (Akister et al., 2016), which provided after school and holiday activities for 48 children identified as at risk of negative transition outcomes due to issues related to self-esteem, behaviour, attendance or learning needs. The children were from 10 primary schools located in a rural area in the East of England. The evaluation used teacher rated SDQ scores, given pre-intervention by the child's primary school teacher and post-intervention by a secondary school teacher, to indicate change. Prior to the activity club, 65 per cent of children were scored within the likely or probably difficult range, whilst at the end of first year of secondary, only 31 per cent scored in that range. However, the study notes that very little impact on teacher rated behaviour issues was observed, and that the

improvement in SDQ scores could be a result of different teachers completing the pre and post questionnaires.

- A quasi-experimental evaluation of Talking about School Transition (Bagnall, 2021), a teacher-led support intervention comprising of weekly, one-hour sessions delivered over five weeks which aimed to build children's coping skills for dealing with transition. The study involved 143 children from seven primary schools in the West Midlands, with four primary schools in the intervention group and three in the comparison group. The evaluation found that, of the four outcome variables measured by the pre and post surveys (emotional symptoms, peer problems, coping efficacy, and transition worries) the intervention was effective at reducing transition worries amongst children in the intervention group.

In addition to the above research, Brewin and Statham (2011) examined the key factors that support children looked after when transitioning from primary to secondary school. This research, carried out in a semi-rural borough in Wales, involved interviews with Year 6 and 7 children as well as their teachers and carers. Findings highlighted a range of factors that may support or hinder transition, from within-child factors such as resilience and social skills to wider factors such as the extent of multi-agency working.

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

Of the limited evidence available on interventions to support children's transition from primary to secondary school, very few studies involved a process evaluation element. In addition, transition support encompasses a range of practices and activities, and it is likely that barriers and enablers to implementation may vary depending on the type of intervention delivered. It is therefore difficult to comment on the barriers and enablers to implementing transition support interventions.

However, one case study examining teachers' experiences of a transition support intervention based around group work did identify some barriers and enablers which could apply to other transition support interventions (Mowat, 2019). One practical barrier was the range of competing activities that often take place during the summer term of the final year of primary school (e.g., sports days and trips). In addition, as transition support is an early intervention taking place at the beginning of a child's secondary school journey, the risk of stigma and labelling for groups participating in targeted interventions was also highlighted.

This was thought to be a particular risk if children were removed from mainstream lessons for additional support or activities, however, the research cautioned that this risk should be balanced against the need for certain children to receive such support during this critical and often challenging transition period. Key enablers included the commitment and support of the local authority, buy in and leadership from senior leaders at both schools, and strong communication between all those involved, including school staff, parents and children.

Trauma-informed practice

Introduction

Based on attachment theory[30], trauma-informed practice recognises and seeks to respond to the impact of trauma and ACEs on individuals (Emerson, 2022).

Vulnerable children with ACEs are at higher risk for school exclusion, substance misuse, unemployment, homelessness and offending (Sebba et al., 2015; Cole et al., 2019; Timpson, 2019). A study undertaken by Public Health Wales (Bellis et al., 2015) commented on a strong relationship between exposure to ACEs and poor performance at school. Blodgett and Lanningan (2018) found a strong relationship between the number of ACEs and risk of poor school attendance, behavioural issues and failure to meet academic standards.

By adopting trauma-informed approaches, it is intended that adults working in schools can recognise the experiences that may underpin a child's behaviours, understand the impact of them, acknowledge the lack of control a child may have, modulate their responses and actively build the skills of the child to be able to deal with the challenges they face (Aspland et al., 2020). This in turn is expected to lead to positive effects on wellbeing, behaviour, school engagement and learning outcomes.

'Trauma-informed Wales: A Societal Approach to Understanding, Preventing and Supporting the Impacts of Trauma and Adversity' – a national trauma practice framework for Wales was launched in 2022 (ACE Hub Wales, 2022). It sets out how society "can take

[30] Attachment is a clinical term used to describe "a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1997)[1]. In particular, attachment theory highlights the importance of a child's emotional bond with their primary caregivers. Disruption to or loss of this bond can affect a child emotionally and psychologically into adulthood and have an impact on their future relationships. (NSPCC, 2021)

account of adversity and trauma, recognising and supporting the strengths of an individual to overcome this experience in their lives".

In 2018/19, over 600 Welsh schools received training on ACE awareness and trauma-informed practice (developed by Public Health Wales working with Cymru Well Wales, Barnardo's Cymru and NSPCC), with this training available to all schools in Wales from 2019/2020 (Welsh Government, 2021c).

Effectiveness of trauma-informed practice

Research from the USA has found benefits of a trauma-informed approach for children in schools. These include improved attendance, academic achievement, emotional regulation and confidence (Roseby and Gascoigne, 2021; Wall, 2021). In addition, in the UK:

- Riley and Bailey (2019) reported that trauma-informed practice gives teachers a better understanding of ACEs and the underlying causes of difficult behaviour.
- Fancourt and Sebba, (2018), Smith et al. (2013), Greenhalgh et al. (2020) and Rose et al. (2019) all found that staff become more confident and skilled at working with vulnerable children when using trauma-informed approaches.
- Aspland et al. (2020) found that staff developed increased empathy and a more relational response to children who struggle in school.

Some studies have also identified outcomes relating to exclusions:

- As part of a review of trauma-informed approaches in West Yorkshire, Cherry and Froustis (2022) undertook a survey of educational settings, including primary, secondary, further, higher, alternative and special education. Of the 29 organisations that had received trauma-informed training, 31 per cent said exclusions had fallen as a result.
- Primary schools participating in the Islington Trauma-informed Practices in Schools reported a fall in fixed-term exclusions following implementation of trauma-informed approaches (Aspland et al., 2020).
- Analysis of data from 40 schools (primary, secondary and special education) taking part in the Attachment Aware Schools Pilots in two local authorities in England

revealed statistically significant decreases in exclusions (the average number of exclusions[31] reduced from 0.46 to 0.21) over one academic year (Rose et al., 2019).

Enablers and barriers to effective implementation

Various evaluations have highlighted enablers and barriers pertinent to the implementation of trauma-informed approaches in schools. These include:

- The importance of senior leader support for a relational approach to discipline and risk management (Fancourt and Sebba, 2018, Cherry and Froustis, 2022).
- The need (in some cases) for a shift in organisational culture towards positive language, restorative discipline, empathetic relationships, staff support and a school-wide approach (Cherry and Froustis, 2022).
- Ensuring that staff have sufficient time to work with children using a trauma-informed approach (Riley and Bailey, 2019).
- Taking a school-wide and consistent approach to training (Smith et al., 2013; Cherry and Froustis, 2022).
- Offering support sessions and/or training for parents to help them understand the approach (Smith et al., 2013; Cherry and Froustis, 2022).

Whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing

Introduction

The 'Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing' (Welsh Government, 2021b) seeks to support good emotional and mental wellbeing by promoting a positive cultural environment in schools. It is designed to help schools scope their need, map their strengths and weaknesses, and develop an action plan to address gaps in their approach to mental health and wellbeing. It involves:

- Embedding good wellbeing through teaching and all other aspects of school life.
- An ethos that values inclusion, where everybody works together, contributing their individual skills and resources to the collective good.

[31] The authors describe exclusions as "inside and outside of classroom" but do not explain how this metric is calculated.

- Creating a supporting environment where young people are encouraged to fulfil their personal and academic potential, where they thrive, learn and emotionally develop, supported by teachers who operate in a culture that also values teachers' own wellbeing.
- Incorporating the work of others, such as CAMHS, which has traditionally offered assessment, treatment and interventions, and which should now be viewing the child and their needs more holistically.

Whilst exclusion is mentioned only occasionally in the guidance (understandable given its much broader remit), the link between poor mental health/wellbeing and an increased risk of exclusions has been mentioned earlier in this review (e.g., Tseliou (2021a) and John et al. (2022)).

Effectiveness of a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing

This literature review has not found any robust research which demonstrates the impact on exclusions for children arising from the introduction of whole-school approaches to emotional and mental wellbeing. There is some evidence to suggest that whole system approaches that focus on changing school environments can lead to improvements in children's mental health and emotional wellbeing (Bonell et al., 2018; Goldberg et al., 2019). A systematic review of universal, school-based interventions to promote mental and emotional wellbeing found there to be neutral to small effects, but that these were from poorer quality studies and those based in primary schools (Mackenzie and Williams, 2018). The study recommended more robust, long-term methodologies were required across the UK in order to test long-term benefits for pupils.

Critchley et al (2018) measured the impact on staff of a whole-school approach to mental health involving training for all staff across six schools (it was not plausible to measure improvements for pupils given the project's one year timespan). They found significantly greater awareness and literacy around their pupils' mental health, greater confidence in talking about and responding to mental health problems, and an increase in their own supportive behaviours at follow-up compared to their pre-training baseline.

Implementation

Considerations for the effective implementation of a whole-school approach were also identified by Brown et al. (2021), Weare (2015) and Cavioni et al. (2020). These included:

- Clear communication and consistent terminology across all stakeholders (school staff, children, parents/families and mental health practitioners).
- Commitment to, and promotion of, staff wellbeing.
- Staff training to increase awareness of the patterns and prevalence of mental health issues, as well as understanding and responsiveness to pupil disclosures.
- Undertaking a needs/baseline assessment and mapping exercise to understand existing approaches and resources within the school.
- Adopting a mix of universal and targeted support, including:
    - A positive and universal focus on wellbeing.
    - A supportive school and classroom climate and ethos.
    - More intense and long-term mental health interventions where needs are identified.

Developing and strengthening relationships with external services (e.g., school nurses, local health boards, CAMHS).