# School's out?

## Truancy and exclusion

A guide for donors and funders



phf THE PAUL HAMLYN FOUNDATION

ef Esmée Fairbairn FOUNDATION

# School's out

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# Executive summary

## The need

Official statistics show that around one pupil in every 1,000 is permanently excluded from school every year in the UK. On any given day, at least 70,000 children play truant. The true figures are likely to be even higher. The causes of truancy and exclusion often derive from a combination of different influences. Home, peer, school and personal factors all affect children's engagement with their education. Many pupils need support as early as possible to prevent problems from spiralling. Research shows the damaging effects of truancy and exclusion. Both are associated with lower educational attainment, poorer job prospects, poorer health, crime and imprisonment. For example, persistent truants are over six times as likely to obtain no qualifications on leaving school. Nearly three-quarters of young offenders have been excluded or truanted regularly. These negative outcomes are damaging for both the individuals involved and society in general. Unchecked, the problems of truancy and exclusion impose costs on society. It is sound investment advice to tackle, in order to prevent, the problems discussed above.

## The role of government

Despite a plethora of initiatives and over £1bn spent on tackling poor attendance and challenging behaviour in schools, rates of unauthorised absence have not changed in ten years, and permanent exclusions have risen by 20% since 2000. Evidence from progressive schools, local education authorities (LEAs) and charities shows that levels of truancy and exclusion can be reduced. However, significant change at a national level is hampered by not only a number of practical difficulties, but also the increasing tension between being seen to be tough on problem behaviour and balancing the needs of all pupils.

## The role of charities

Charities provide many services, tackling various issues that contribute to, and result from, truancy and exclusion. Charities are active both within and outside schools. They are frequently well placed to access and support vulnerable children and young people at risk of truancy and exclusion. Four main areas of charitable activity were identified by NPC's analysis. *Social support* covers a range of activities which provide practical and emotional support to children and their families. *Advising parents* how to negotiate the complex education system can improve how schools respond to pupils and parents. *Alternative provision* is essential for excluded pupils and persistent truants, helping young people in breaking down barriers to education, and delivering alternative education. *Helping the state* to respond better to these problems could significantly reduce rates of truancy and exclusion.

## Recommendations for donors and funders

NPC has identified a range of charities working in each of these four areas. Funding these charities can have a significant impact on the types of problems and behaviour that can lead to truancy and exclusion; it can reduce rates of truancy and exclusion themselves; and it can lessen the negative outcomes associated with truanting or exclusion. Private funding is needed across the range of charities, from small, local charities delivering innovative solutions directly to children and their families, to charities with the aim, resources and ability to influence government policy.

## Charity recommendations

Funders interested in supporting work with young people at risk, or those who truant or have been excluded, are encouraged to contact NPC for the detailed reports compiled on a wide range of exciting opportunities. Examples of recommended charities are given here.

‘Generally speaking, most kids get by on a lot of goodwill and kindness given by a particular professional, rather than what you might call a terribly well thought out and planned professional response.’
Education welfare officer

# Contents

# Introduction

## The purpose of this report

*School's Out?* provides a guide for funders, donors and grant-makers who are interested in supporting young people at risk of truancy and/or exclusion from school. The report sets out to provide the information and analysis required to gain a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding truancy and exclusion, and the types of responses offered by government and charities. New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) highlights charitable activities that are achieving significant results in this field. This enables donors to target resources more efficiently to maximise impact. In the course of this research, NPC visited government departments and charities in Northern Ireland, Scotland and England. However, much of the report focuses on the situation in England.

Funding charities in this sector is far from straightforward. There are many causes of truancy and exclusion and a wide range of charities working on these issues. In addition, there are various points at which one can intervene along the route of truancy and exclusion, which is simplified in Figure 1. In this report, we aim to highlight the greatest needs and the most effective charities working to tackle truancy and exclusion that we have uncovered in the course of our research, enabling funders to target their resources more efficiently. NPC has also compiled more detailed reports on individual charities, which are available on request.

## The contents of this report

**Section 1** takes an in-depth look at the issues surrounding truancy and exclusion, as well as investigating some of the underlying causes of the problem. **Section 2** examines the role of government in tackling truancy and exclusion in order to highlight the complementary role for private funding. **Section 3** reviews the role of charities in approaching some of these issues, and points to factors that might increase the chance of achieving positive outcomes for the young people affected. **Section 4** describes the outcomes that funders can expect to achieve by supporting charities in this sector. In **Section 5**, we draw some conclusions and offer example recommendations of charities funders should consider supporting.
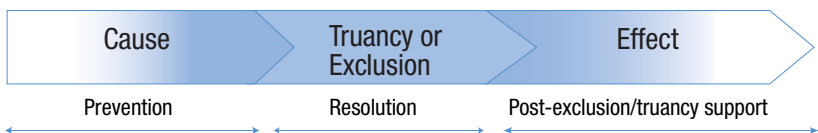
## Methodology

During the course of our research, we identified 140 charities working in this field in the United Kingdom. Of those, around 90 charities had the requisite focus on truancy and exclusion for us to study them further. We visited and analysed around 40 charities in order to identify those with the strongest focus on truancy and exclusion, and those that could benefit most from additional funding. From this shortlist, NPC has identified a number of charities that appear to be particularly efficient or effective. These form the basis of our recommendations to funders.

NPC's analysis is based on numerous sources, including academic research, consultation with experts, reviews of policy literature and meetings with policy-makers. One of our main sources of information has been our discussions with practitioners and charities, including visits to charities in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. We chose a range of charities dealing with truancy and exclusion in different ways to show a cross section of work in this area.

Finally, NPC drew upon a reference group that helped to shape our thoughts. These individuals and organisations are listed and thanked in the Acknowledgements.

> NPC's research enables donors to target resources more efficiently to maximise impact.

**Figure 1: The charitable spectrum**



| Cause | Truancy or Exclusion | Effect |
|---|---|---|
| Prevention | Resolution | Post-exclusion/truancy support |

# The need

Official statistics show that around one pupil in every 1,000 is permanently excluded from school every year in the United Kingdom. Meanwhile at least 26 pupils out of every 1,000 are excluded from school for a fixed period. On any given day at least seven out of every 1,000 pupils are playing truant from school. This is almost 70,000 children across the United Kingdom. The true figures are likely to be even higher. The following section defines truancy and exclusion, before describing the causes and effects of the problems and behaviours that lead to these twin problems of disaffection. Finally, this section also examines the personal and social costs of truancy and exclusion, which can include poor qualifications, unemployment and criminality.

## Defining truancy and exclusion

The twin problems of truancy and exclusion can both be viewed as the result of disaffection with school. Exact figures are difficult to calculate, but it is estimated that one in six school-age children in the UK is disaffected.[1] The results of this alienation from the education system are evident in the low participation rates in education after the age of 16. Around one in ten 16–18 year olds are not enrolled in education, employment or training.[2] In fact, the UK ranks a disappointing 23rd out of 28 countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as far as 17 year olds participating in education or training is concerned.[3]

One form of disaffection is essentially passive and involves withdrawal from learning. A psychologically withdrawn pupil may be present in the classroom and pose no particular discipline problems. Yet these pupils might minimise their relationship with education and, as a result, not achieve their full potential. However, the focus of this report is on other more visible forms of disaffection, manifested in the 'fight or flight' response to school.[4] The 'flight' element is truancy, when the pupil chooses to withdraw physically from education. The 'fight' element is the more noticeable and disruptive form of disaffection and is displayed in challenging behaviour or violent conduct. This is disruptive both to teachers and to fellow pupils, and can lead to exclusion. These two forms of disaffection have similar causes and effects. The main difference is that, with truancy, it is the pupil who makes the withdrawal from school explicit. With exclusion, the decision to keep the pupil away from school lies with the education system.[5]

Figure 2 shows the three forms of disaffection that we investigate in this report. Although there can be movement along this scale, from right to left, it is important to note that there is no clear path of disaffection. As one study recently noted: *'exclusion and inclusion should be seen as part of a continuum and an individual may move along that continuum at different points in her school career'*.[6]

**Figure 2: The continuum of school disaffection**

| Excluded | Absent | Disaffected, at risk of absence/exclusion |
|---|---|---|

## Defining truancy

The majority of children absent from school on any given day are not playing truant, but are legitimately absent. Their non-attendance will have been authorised by the school as a result of a parent or guardian providing a reasonable explanation for their absence, such as illness. A significant proportion of children, however, are absent from school with no legitimate reason. An Audit Commission study in 1999 found that at least 10% of the pupils absent from school each day were *'truanting or being kept off school by their parents without permission'*.[7]

Truancy has been defined as *'absence from school for no legitimate reason'*.[8] However, as noted by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), *'truancy is not synonymous with unauthorised absence'*. This is because schools may not authorise an absence that parents deem acceptable.[9] Parentally condoned absence (or more aptly, parentally condoned truancy[10]) is a major problem. Children truant to varying extents; some may miss a single lesson, whilst others may be absent for weeks at a time. Truancy is not just about skipping school because of rebellion, boredom or lack of interest in lessons, although these can be reasons for playing truant. In the majority of persistent cases, the causes are more complex.

On any given day in the UK, at least 70,000 children are playing truant.

Truancy is not just about rebellion, boredom or lack of interest in lessons. The causes are often more complex.

**Over 200,000 pupils are excluded in any given year. 10,500 are excluded permanently.**

Parentally condoned absence is a major cause of non-attendance. This type of absence is extremely hard to tackle, as targeting the child in isolation is unlikely to be effective. Fear of angering parents is a major factor in preventing most children from truanting. This demonstrates the importance of parents' attitudes to their child's attendance and behaviour at school. Just as there are many reasons why a child truants, there are many reasons why parents might condone their child's absence from school. Examples include parents who take an anti-education stance, or those who depend on their children for emotional or practical support during the daytime.[11] Given that there are a range of reasons why a parent may collude with their child's absence, it is unlikely that there is any single solution to the problem of parentally condoned absence.

One problem that is significant but often over-looked is post-registration truancy. This happens when children register for school in the morning or afternoon, but then fail to attend certain lessons. This form of truanting can either be opportunistic or systematic, such as absence from specific lessons. Surveys suggest that post-registration truancy is a common form of truanting, but it is also the hardest to detect, as it does not show up in official statistics.[12]

### Defining exclusion*

Exclusion can be divided into three categories: permanent, fixed period and unofficial.

Permanent exclusion (previously known as expulsion) involves a child being banned from the school where they are enrolled. This is usually because of persistent, disruptive behaviour, but certain incidents are considered serious enough to merit immediate exclusion. These include serious, actual or threatened violence; sexual abuse or assault; supplying illegal drugs; and carrying an offensive weapon.[†] Once the head teacher has taken the decision to exclude a child permanently, the school's governing body has the power to overturn an exclusion. However, governors are not expected to overturn a decision where the pupil has committed a serious offence, nor in the event of *'persistent and defiant misbehaviour including bullying […] or repeated possession and/or use of an illegal drug on school premises.'*[13] Parents have the right to a hearing at an appeals panel. If the exclusion is upheld, the pupil is struck from the school roll. The local education authority (LEA) is then responsible for providing full-time alternative education provision within 15 days of the exclusion. In the meantime, pupils typically receive little or no education.

A fixed period exclusion (previously known as suspension) can last for up to 45 days in any school year. In 2003/2004 there were 344,510 fixed period exclusions in England alone.[14] The number of pupils affected (once repeat exclusions were accounted for) was just over 200,000, which is almost 2.6% of the school population. The average length of a fixed period exclusion is just under four days. During this time the pupil is not allowed to attend school. Parents have the right to appeal against a fixed period exclusion.

Unofficial (or 'informal') exclusions are illegal, yet they are thought to be relatively widespread. There is little concrete evidence regarding the numbers of children involved, but it is estimated that unofficial exclusions could represent anything up to one-and-a-half times the rate of official exclusions.[15] Various practices fall under this description, but each case usually involves a pupil being sent home from school for disciplinary reasons without the requisite procedures in place. This practice is illegal, whether for a short period of time (typically referred to as 'cooling off' or 'time out') or for a longer period. Schools sometimes attempt to defend unofficial exclusions by arguing that it is better for the child not to have an exclusion on their school record. However, in reality the effects are potentially more damaging for a child than receiving an official exclusion because unofficially excluded pupils typically receive no education or support since the authorities are unaware of their status. In addition, other bodies working with excluded pupils, such as charities, are unable to access the funds they are entitled to, which remain with the excluding schools.

Excluding a pupil from school will always be necessary on occasion. At the same time, evidence from progressive LEAs indicates that the rate of exclusions can be dramatically reduced using methods that lead to satisfactory outcomes for the excluded pupil, as well as their fellow pupils and teachers. Guidance from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) outlines recommended practice for avoiding exclusions, ranging from early intervention through to alternatives to exclusion.[16] However, this information is open to interpretation and practice varies from one school to another. As such, much remains to be done to reduce the rate of exclusions.

This report argues that the majority of exclusions and their harmful consequences can and should be avoided. There are many ways for private funders to contribute to reducing the rate of exclusions, often by tackling the root causes of some of the problems that lead to exclusion. These possibilities are explored in more detail later.

> ' That was a big thing, particularly when we were at [name of school]. [Name of child] would be like a month out of school but it was never ever on record. You can't access anything. You can't get help. Nobody knows. '
>
> Parent **

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* England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have differing definitions and legislation. This is covered in more detail in Section 2. For clarity and consistency, we will focus in this section on England.

† Legislation is different in Northern Ireland, where a pupil cannot be permanently excluded unless they have previously served a fixed period exclusion.

** All quotes in the margin, if not in the main body of text, are taken from one of two sources, referenced in endnotes 207 and 208.

## 'Missing' pupils

A recently identified category of school absence is that of 'missing' pupils. A conservative estimate from Ofsted places the number of missing pupils at 10,000 on any given day.[17] Nacro, the crime reduction charity, estimates that the national figure is closer to 100,000.[18] There are various routes to pupils going missing, which include being unofficially excluded, self-excluding or being withdrawn from education by parents.[19] Some of these missing pupils are chronic truants, but the figure also includes those children who are keen to attend school, but who have somehow slipped through the net and missed out on a school place.[*]

Asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable to dropping out of the system in this way. A recent investigation by the Metropolitan Police tracking African boys aged between four and seven found that 300 boys went missing in three months alone, from June to September in 2001.[20] Although it is possible that most of these children are simply moved on to other schools without cause for concern, nobody has tracked exactly where they have gone. There is a possibility that some of these children are not receiving an education and are at risk of abuse. A forthcoming report by NPC will concentrate on refugees and asylum seekers.

Other children who are particularly vulnerable to going missing include those who move home, those at the transition between primary and secondary school, and those who are excluded in the final two years of schooling. In the latter case, there is little incentive for another school to offer pupils a place. Children who are missing are not the specific subject of this report and will not be studied in detail. However, much of the charitable work being done in this area should contribute to a reduction in the number of children who go missing.

## Numbers involved

This section explains the large numbers of children involved in each type of absence, although it is widely agreed that official government statistics significantly understate the numbers of children affected.

## Official figures

There are over 10 million pupils in the UK, 8 million of whom are in England.[21] It is difficult to gather precise statistics about the number of children absent from school because data collection varies across the UK. School attendance rates are based on the percentage of half days missed, but level of detail beyond this varies greatly from country to country. This also applies to exclusion statistics.

Officially, just over 6% of school-age children (nearly 600,000 pupils) are absent from school across the UK on any one day.[22] The majority of these cases are recorded as authorised absences for reasons such as doctor's appointments and illness. However, almost 1% of all schoolchildren (70,000 pupils) are unaccounted for on any one day. These pupils are registered as absent without authorisation. Northern Ireland has the highest unauthorised absence rate. On average, 2.35% of secondary school pupils in Northern Ireland are absent without authorisation, more than twice the rate in English secondary schools.[23] Analysis of data on an individual pupil basis is lacking. A recent analysis of attendance data of 60,000 students in England showed that, while the majority of students had no record of unauthorised absence, schools were unable to account for more than 5% of pupils for up to two weeks of the year, and more than 1% of pupils were absent for over half a term. Schools were unable to account for around 300 of the pupils analysed (0.5%) for more than one third of the year.[24]



It is widely agreed that official government statistics significantly understate the numbers of children involved.

More than 1% of pupils are absent for over half a term.

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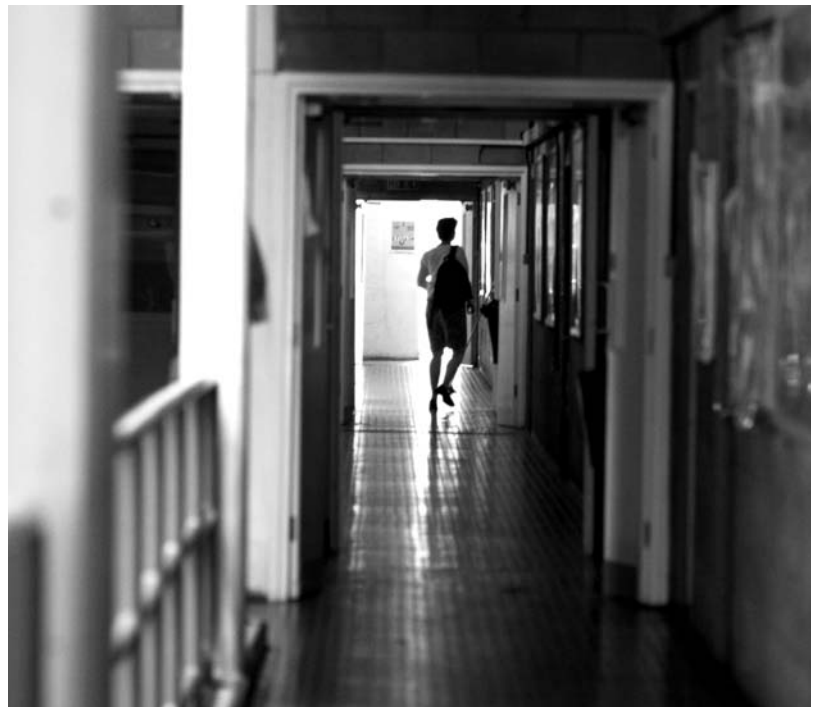
* Therefore, numbers of 'missing' children may overlap with NPC's estimate of numbers of truants and excluded pupils.

It is not unheard of for schools to massage pupil attendance figures.

In 2004, there were 10,500 permanent exclusions in the UK.[25] This represents around one in every 1,000 pupils. Figures are much lower in Scotland and Northern Ireland, where around one in 5,000 pupils is permanently excluded. However, there is no limit on the length of a fixed period exclusion in Scotland, where fixed period exclusions affect 4.6% of the school population. This is almost double the rate in England. Fixed period exclusions are estimated to affect around 240,000 students across the UK.[26] In England, around 35% of students who receive fixed period exclusions are excluded on more than one occasion.[27] This rises to 39% in Scotland.[28] More than 80% of exclusions are at secondary school level. This applies to both permanent and fixed period exclusions across the UK. The peak age for exclusion is 14, when pupils begin their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) years. Exclusions among 13 and 14 year olds account for almost half of all cases of exclusion in England.

### Unofficial figures

As noted, the official statistics are thought to be a significant understatement of the true numbers. Concerns have been raised about record-keeping in LEAs and about schools falling under pressure to misrepresent numbers. As one academic explains:

*'Official figures are widely regarded by researchers as considerable underestimates […] and the practice of schools and LEAs carefully 'laundering' their truancy and exclusions figures has been privately admitted.'*[29]

It is not unheard of for schools to massage pupil attendance figures. One way of doing this is to register unauthorised absences as authorised to mask the fact that the school has an attendance problem. A DfES report quotes one head teacher as saying:

*'[The system of recording absences as authorised or unauthorised] allows the political administration to say they are cracking the truancy problem. And they are NOT cracking the truancy problem. What the schools are doing on their behalf is cracking the statistics problem.'*[30]

The current focus in schools is on reducing the total number of absences, not just on reducing the rate of unauthorised absences. This is a sensible approach, since the impact of non-attendance on pupil performance is comparable, regardless of the reason for the absence.[31]

The issue of post-registration truancy is significant and needs addressing. Data collection in this area is poor. The most often-quoted survey was conducted over ten years ago. In this survey of 38,000 pupils aged between 14 and 16, truancy levels of around 30% were revealed, including post-registration truancy.[32] The majority of these cases were occasional truants (less than once a month), but 8.2% of all students were truanting once a week or more. Even these startling figures are conservative estimates; 17% of the pupils were not present at the time of the survey. How many of these pupils were actually truanting is unknown, but persistent truants are unlikely to have been present.[33]



Disturbingly, high truancy levels are not unique to secondary schools. A recent study by the DfES shows that truanting amongst primary schoolchildren is more extensive than previously thought, with 27% of pupils admitting to truanting without their parents' knowledge.[34] Even more disturbingly, 17% of these children were able to leave the school without detection. This is worrying both for the increased danger these children are placing themselves in, but also because a significant proportion of secondary school truants say that the habit began in primary school. This highlights the need for early intervention.

The roll-out of electronic registration schemes, where a register is taken every lesson, should act as a deterrent for post-registration truancy. However, these schemes are currently implemented in just 40% of primary schools and 60% of secondary schools.[35]

'When the initial 45-day exclusion was up, it became apparent that he couldn't come back […] The headmaster said, "This is my school and I don't want him back".

Parent

There is no data available on unofficial exclusions. Therefore the actual number of children outside full-time education is likely to be higher than the official numbers of excluded pupils. One government official in Northern Ireland estimated that the unofficial permanent exclusion rate doubled the instance of exclusions.[36]

### Pupils at risk

It is difficult to measure accurately the number of children who are at risk of truancy and exclusion. However, it is possible to identify risk factors that enable a greater understanding of the issues surrounding truancy and exclusion, and to highlight potential areas of focus for tackling these problems.

All of the reasons given in official statistics for exclusions are related to antisocial behaviour. However, it is difficult to establish from the official reasons given for permanent exclusion whether this behaviour is persistent or one-off. As noted above, many excluded pupils have experienced several fixed period exclusions prior to a permanent exclusion, which suggests that, in the majority of cases, the antisocial behaviour is persistent. It is assumed that the remainder of exclusions are given for serious incidents of bad behaviour that are one-off and unpredictable in nature. As mentioned previously, in cases involving serious, actual or threatened violence, sexual abuse or assault, supplying illegal drugs, or carrying an offensive weapon, a first offence can merit a permanent exclusion. Given the lack of available data on the path to exclusion for individual students, it is impossible to put a precise figure on the number of pupils at risk.

Using conservative figures from recent sources which do not include post-registration truancy, it is possible to say that at least 2% of pupils are persistent truants. This translates as over 180,000 pupils across the UK.[37] There are many different reasons why a pupil may truant persistently, which again makes early identification of this group difficult. However, it is reasonable to assume that persistent truants begin as occasional truants. Therefore, interventions targeted at occasional truants may prevent the situation from worsening.

### Trends

The official UK exclusion rate is far greater than rates in other western European countries. In several countries in western Europe, it is the responsibility of the head teacher to find a place in another school for a pupil prior to exclusion, which in part explains low exclusion rates in those countries.[38]

Although not a new phenomenon, exclusion has become increasingly high profile over the last ten years. There was a huge rise in exclusions in the 1990s. A major cause of this was the 1988 Education Reform Act, which introduced the publication of league tables and widened the concept of parental choice.[39] Some claim that league tables have contributed to the widening of the gap between high-attaining and low-attaining pupils.[40] The rise of a 'quasi-market' in education has made certain pupils more desirable to schools than others. One effect of the 1988 legislation is that the media, government and Ofsted focus on overall performance of schools, which is measured through results in national tests and examinations. Disadvantaged pupils are therefore at risk of becoming marginalised as schools face disincentives to retain children at risk of poor attainment and exclusion.[41] Teachers themselves express concern that their workload means that they do not have time to encourage pupils to talk about their problems.

Increased use of exclusions is not only a result of schools protecting their attainment figures by getting rid of pupils who may damage those targets, but is also a result of pressure from parents who do not want their children's education disrupted by lower performing or difficult pupils. The present government is looking at ways to give parents more power in their child's education, but this has been met with resistance in some quarters. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) argues that *'teachers will fear that unrepresentative groups kicking up a fuss at the school gates could have too much influence over a school to the detriment of all the children.'*[42]

### Causes of truancy and exclusion

The reasons why pupils truant or are excluded are distinguishable from the causes. For example, one reason for truancy could be a pupil staying at home to care for a parent. To understand truancy and exclusion, one must identify the underlying causes, which are essentially the difficulties faced by children that may lead to disaffection and problem behaviour. In the above example, the underlying cause of truancy would be the lack of appropriate care for the parent, placing the child in the role of carer. In any one case, there are often a variety of underlying causes, which makes it difficult, and potentially misleading, to highlight any one individual problem as the root cause of a pupil's disaffection. In addition, these 'causes' are not in fact guarantees of disaffection. It is therefore useful to refer to them as risk factors.

Schools face disincentives to retain children at risk of poor attainment and exclusion.

'It was really frustrating. I was doing really well in school, it was just one fight I got into, my first fight ever and nobody else got expelled, just me.'

Young woman, aged 14

> ' I'm not saying that it wasn't my fault, but sometimes it wasn't me and they wouldn't listen. I tried to talk to them, but then I just gave up. '
>
> Young man, aged 15

Reasons for truancy are infrequently recorded. Although schools submit attendance data to LEAs, only one in three authorities analyses the data according to reason for non-attendance.[43] This hampers efforts to identify who truants and why, but various small-scale studies and anecdotal evidence indicate that there is no typical truant. The risk factors for truancy are often similar to those for exclusion: a complex collection of factors relating to problems at home or school, personal issues or peer pressure. This section describes some of the key elements of each of these.

Exclusion almost always arises as a result of persistent, disruptive behaviour, which is the most common single reason for both permanent and fixed period exclusions in England.[44] On the one hand, official reasons may overdramatise the actual incident (ie, 'assault' may cover incidents such as pushing or playground fighting). On the other hand, the official reason given often does not reflect instances where a relatively minor offence is the final straw in a series of unacceptable events. The most common reason for permanent exclusion is persistent, disruptive behaviour.[45]

The causes of such behaviour are not so widely recorded, studied or understood. For some of the issues outlined below, it is difficult to ascertain whether they are the cause or the effect of the problem, as there is substantial overlap. Again, research points to a complex web of factors, which are shown in Table 1 and described in more detail below.

## Home factors

Parents have a significant influence on their child's attendance at school. Some parents actively prevent their children from attending school, whether due to an anti-education stance, or because they are in great need of emotional or practical support at home. According to one study, most excluded children said their parents showed little interest in homework and rarely attended parent-teacher evenings. Only half of those excluded children could recall being praised by their parents, compared with two-thirds of their non-excluded peers. Excluded children were twice as likely to say they had never been disciplined at home.[46] Practitioners report that some children truant because they have little order or routine in their life. If parents do not work, or are working late, they may not wake their children up in the morning. Simple interventions such as providing children with alarm clocks may prove beneficial.[47]

Excluded children often come from reconstituted families (ie, those with a step-parent), or from lone parent families. Only one in four children who have been excluded lives with both parents, compared with three in five of their non-excluded peers.[48] Excluded pupils often come from chaotic and/or stressful home lives, with death or illness in the family often cited as a risk factor. One small-scale study cited by the bereavement charity, Winston's Wish, showed that 63% of a group of 15 to 16 year old children outside normal schooling had been bereaved.[49]

### Table 1: Risk factors for truancy and exclusion

| Home | Peer | School | Personal |
|---|---|---|---|
| Parents | Peer pressure | Lack of provision for low achievers | Gender |
| Socio-economics | Bullying | Reduction in pastoral care | Special educational needs |
| Substance abuse | Racism | Focus on attainment | Health |
| Specific groups (e.g. travellers) | | Transition period | |
| Young carers | | | |
| Stress/bereavement | | | |

> ' I thought we'd have some understanding and some sympathy because he was starting to get disruptive in class, but on the first day back after the funeral they sent him home. To me there was no tolerance. They knew the situation but they weren't prepared to deal with it. '
>
> Parent

The DfES ranks children from families under stress amongst those most at risk of exclusion.[50] The paradoxical nature of excluding a child due to behaviour influenced by a stressed home life is highlighted in a quote from one head teacher:

'A lot of students unfortunately do have dysfunctional families. I suppose, in a way, it's defeating its own object—you are getting rid of the problem, but you are sending them off to reinforce their dysfunctional behaviour by sending them back to a dysfunctional set-up.'[51]

The single biggest cause of unauthorised absence is children being taken on holiday by their parents. Although this undoubtedly conveys an inappropriate message about schooling to children, it is rarely a sign of school disaffection. In some areas, however, officials describe their biggest challenge as children being taken on extended holidays to visit family abroad or to learn about their culture.[52]

Socio-economic factors are also strongly linked to school attendance.[53] Poverty and a lack of employment prospects both influence disaffection and low motivation. There is a correlation in schools, for example, between the number of free school meals (an indication of poverty) and truancy. Official statistics from Wales show that, in secondary schools where more than 30% of pupils have free school meals, unauthorised absence rates are as high as 4.6%, which is over six times the national average.[54] In Scotland, the rate of exclusions amongst pupils accessing free school meals is almost four times higher than amongst their peers.[55]

Substance abuse is another risk factor, both amongst family members and amongst pupils themselves. In the UK, it is estimated that there are between 250,000 and 350,000 dependent children living with parental drug abuse, whilst 920,000 are living with parental alcohol abuse. The risks for children being brought up in such an environment range from emotional and physical neglect in the short-term to the development of emotional and social problems later in life.[56] Children often find themselves caring for their parents in these situations, which has a direct effect on school attendance.

A number of other groups are over-represented in the statistics for excluded pupils. The DfES acknowledges that one in four looked after pupils (previously known as children in care) over the age of 14 do not attend school.[57] Official statistics published in Scotland show that looked after pupils are five times as likely to be excluded from school as their peers.[58]

A third of traveller children in England are reported to have an attendance rate of below 50% in secondary school.[59] Travellers of Irish heritage are the most likely ethnic group to be permanently excluded from school; although actual numbers are small, the exclusion rate is four times higher than the national average.[60]

## Peer factors

Over the last 40 years or so, there has been a shift in truancy patterns. Currently, it is estimated that 70–80% of truancy involves groups of young people (usually between two and six children), whereas traditionally truancy was predominantly a solitary activity of *'lonely isolates'*.[61] As such, peer pressure is a risk factor. Truancy can be viewed as a status-seeking activity, or as a way of blending in.

Some pupils are teased into truancy, which raises the question of bullying. A third of girls and a quarter of boys have at some point been afraid of attending school because of bullying.[62] Ofsted reports that *'records and discussions with staff, pupils and parents suggest that girls are more involved in sustained bullying than boys, who more often resort to actual violence as opposed to threatening it'*.[63] Girls are more likely to engage in verbal and psychological bullying, which is both harder to detect and more difficult to tackle than physical bullying.



In one recent study, parents perceived the main causes of truancy to be, in order of priority, bullying, problems with teachers and peer pressure to stay away from school.[64] However, pupils' views of the reasons for truancy differ. They perceived the main causes to be the influence of friends and peers, school factors (such as relationships with teachers and the content and delivery of the curriculum), home factors and then bullying.[65] Whilst bullying may be cited as the most significant cause of truancy in one school, it may not be cited at all in another school. This, and the different priorities given by parents and students, illustrates that there is no definitive list of causes that can be referred to in order of priority.[66]

Two thirds of truants skip school to avoid a particular lesson or teacher.

11

Racism is a factor in disruptive behaviour amongst ethnic minority groups.[67] Evidence suggests that, when black pupils confront racism in school, they are seen by teachers as having behavioural problems.[68] In all but two complaints made to the Racial Equality Council in Birmingham relating to exclusion, the violent behaviour resulting in exclusion was a direct response to racial abuse.[69] Black boys are not the only minority ethnic group at risk, as there are reports that levels of exclusion amongst Pakistani boys are on the rise.

## School factors

School factors are the institutional influences on levels of truancy and exclusion. These feature strongly in pupils' perceptions of the reasons for truancy. As long as there has been compulsory schooling, there have also been disaffected pupils, but the situation seems to be getting worse. It is estimated that 65–80% of persistent truancy (including post-registration truancy) is due to school factors. Over half of pupils in one survey listed school factors as the reason for their first instance of truancy. This group of truants is the most likely to be dismissive of authority and aggressive when confronted.[70] It is not surprising that some teachers are secretly relieved when disruptive or disengaged pupils absent themselves. Poor teacher-pupil relations are both a cause and an effect of absenteeism.

One expert on exclusion has identified three trends that are generating increased disaffection: achieving in school no longer guarantees employment; children mature earlier, yet have to wait longer to gain adult status; and the inflexibility of the school curriculum coupled with the narrow role of teachers.[71] It is important to note that, although some of the risk factors for both truancy and exclusion undoubtedly lie outside school, which makes the problem difficult for the school to tackle in isolation, problems in the home do not necessarily entail problems in school. This would suggest that the disparity amongst schools with similar intakes can be explained to an extent by management within the school. When discussing causes of truancy, one study stated that:

*'The data uncovered […] points both ways [ie, to school factors and to the background of pupils], but more consistently in the direction of institutional explanations. This proposition seems hopeful, at least in the sense that it is easier to work on improving schools than it is to work on improving homes and background.'*[72]

Truancy and exclusion rates vary according to the type of school. Independent schools suffer less from high rates of truancy and exclusion, not least because poor behaviour is closely linked with deprivation. In the state sector, special schools (which cater for children with learning difficulties or physical disabilities) have up to twice the rate of truancy and exclusions compared with mainstream schools.

There is some evidence to suggest that the National Curriculum is a factor in children's disaffection from school, partly due to the focus on attainment, but also because of a perceived lack of relevance.[73] The significance of post-registration truancy suggests that pupils are not disengaged from school as a whole, but from individual lessons. In one survey, 67% of all truants (including post-registration truancy) were absent from school in order to avoid particular lessons that were deemed irrelevant or were avoided due to a dislike of the teacher or the subject.[74]

Related to the perceived irrelevance of the curriculum is the lack of provision for low achievers. In 2003, 5.4% of school leavers did not achieve any GCSE or General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) passes.[75] However, there is little alternative provision available for this group. One study showed that six times as many truants as non-truants were low achievers.[76] (See, also, Figure 3). Whether this is a cause or an effect of truancy is difficult to establish. What is clear is that, when a child skips school, they fall behind their peers. This makes returning to the classroom increasingly unattractive and is likely to lead to further truanting.

> 'I spent loads of time out of school and missed loads of work and now I have to start catching up […] I don't think the school feels that I have missed out on a lot, but personally I feel that I have missed out on loads.'
> Young person

Pupils perceive the greatest impact on their behaviour to be the amount of quality time teaching staff spend getting to know and value pupils as individuals.

In addition, the increased focus on attainment has had a negative impact on pastoral care. A recent survey conducted by the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) looked at indiscipline in schools and found that pupils perceived the greatest impact upon their fellow pupils' behaviour to be the amount of quality time teaching staff spent getting to know and value pupils as individuals.[78] Ofsted also reports that appropriate pastoral support is key to reducing the number of exclusions.[79]

The transition period from primary to secondary school is particularly difficult for pupils. Not only do many young people have to negotiate puberty at this age, but they are also exposed to older pupils. Crucially, they are also moving from a system where they have one key class teacher to a more complex setting where they have many different teachers. This can be bewildering for many pupils, and instances of behavioural issues and truancy increase significantly around this time. Seven out of eight exclusions occur at secondary school age.

This is not to understate the seriousness of primary school exclusion. The problems facing disruptive children at primary school level are more often than not linked to factors outside the school's control (ie, poor prior learning, disruptive and disorganised home circumstances and emotional and behavioural difficulties). These are not unique to pupils excluded at primary school, but they are certainly characteristic of excluded children.[80] The same applies to truanting primary school children, as a report from the Department of Education in Northern Ireland (DENI) concluded:

*'The classic reasons for truancy—the mixture of disaffection and opportunity—are not applicable to the majority of primary age pupils. Poor attendance may be symptomatic of family-based problems and require support from agencies outside of education.'*[81]

This raises important questions about the appropriateness of using punishment as a response to truancy, specifically punishment by exclusion, when dealing with primary age children.

Black pupils are on average three times more likely to be excluded than other racial groups. They are no more likely to truant.

**Figure 3: Educational achievement at year 11**[77]
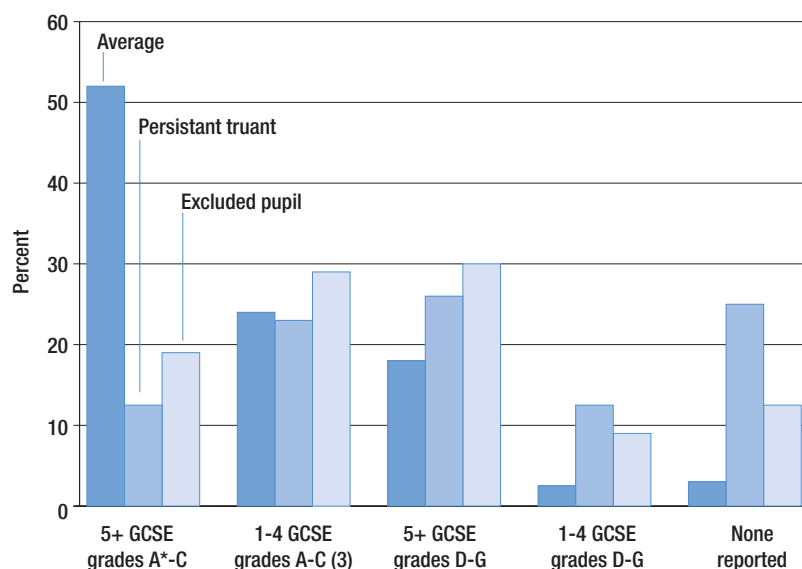


There are certain groups that are considerably over-represented in exclusion figures. The exclusion rate of black pupils has diminished in recent years, but they are still on average three times more likely to be excluded than other racial groups.[82] They are no more likely to truant, indeed, ethnic minority pupils are less likely to truant than their white peers.[83] One possible explanation refers to anecdotal evidence that *'when white youngsters are turned off schools and the curriculum, they truant. Black youngsters are forced by their parents to go to school when they become disruptive and in due course expelled.'*[84] A report by Ofsted found that black excluded pupils do not experience home and social problems as commonly as white excluded pupils,[85] which supports the case that high exclusion rates amongst this group are linked to institutional factors.[86]

These disturbing findings, along with the racism amongst peers discussed above, highlight the fact that schools operate as societies in microcosm. Each school has their own ethos, which has an impact on exclusion and discipline policies. There is a great disparity in exclusion rates across LEAs and even within LEAs. Over 40% of secondary schools did not exclude any children in 2001, while 100 schools were responsible for around 10% of all permanent exclusions.[87] This is in part due to school management. In the course of NPC's research, several sources gave examples where a change in management had resulted in groups of children being excluded as a show of force. Higher rates of exclusions in certain schools can also be explained by the perceived existence of 'sink schools' in particular areas, where other schools have refused to take children who may place high demands on their system.

Over 40% of secondary schools do not permanently excluded any pupils, while 100 schools are responsible for 10% of exclusions.

## Personal factors

Boys account for eight out of ten exclusions at secondary school level, while in primary school boys are ten times as likely as girls to be excluded.[88] An Ofsted report into the achievement of boys in secondary schools stressed that *'the importance of a clearly defined disciplinary framework is especially marked for boys. Boys respond best when there is a consistent and fair-minded approach to discipline, backed up by effective pastoral systems and learning support.'*

That is not to say that girls do not have their own problems, which are often overlooked. Girls tend to internalise their difficulties, and adopt coping strategies which may lead to withdrawal within school or truancy. Girls mature earlier than boys, which results in earlier signs of disaffection. A recent report by Ofsted, entitled *Managing Challenging Behaviour*, states that inappropriate behaviour by girls sometimes goes unnoticed or is ignored.[89] At the same time, however, if girls display behaviour such as violence, they are more likely to be punished than their male counterparts. As one head teacher commented: *'they do not have the ability to be "loveable rogues".'*[90] When girls' problems are identified, there is often a lack of appropriate service provision to help them. It is considered unsuitable to place girls in an extremely male-dominated environment such as a pupil referral unit (PRU), the LEA-run provision that is the main destination of children excluded from school.

A minority of truants have psychological issues with school, a condition linked to anxiety and known as school phobia. One estimate places the numbers involved at between 2% and 10% of truants.[91] It is probable that school phobia is caused by school or home factors, such as friendship difficulties, exam stress, parental pressure, marital breakdown and some of the factors mentioned previously.

Children with special educational needs (SEN) are at heightened risk of exclusion. These pupils represent 64% of permanent exclusions in England.[92] Undiagnosed or unsupported learning difficulties can lead to poor performance in school, which can result in increased disaffection, challenging behaviour and non-attendance. As mentioned previously, this can become a vicious circle, as the pupil will fall further behind in class work, resulting in school becoming increasingly unattractive. More information on children with special educational needs is available from NPC's report *Making sense of SEN*.

Mental health problems are increasing across the population as a whole and this is reflected in schools. One of the four most common problems exhibited by children with mental health problems is disruptive, antisocial or aggressive behaviour. According to the charity YoungMinds, only 27% of children who require help for mental health problems receive any assistance.[93] More boys than girls suffer from mental health problems, and they are more likely to have conduct disorders than emotional disorders. This may in part explain the predominance of boys amongst those excluded from school.

Antisocial behaviour is a risk factor for both truancy and exclusion. Ken Reid, an expert on truancy, found that absentees are on average three times more likely than their peers to have poor behavioural traits, and to display neuroticism and antisocial conduct.[94] Research into antisocial behaviour amongst children highlights certain influences as risk factors. Two or more risk factors (such as the home influences discussed above) increase the likelihood of having antisocial behaviour.[95] Behavioural difficulties represent a continuum of behaviour, from challenging but normal conduct through to severe mental illness. Behaviour can be internalised or externalised, with many services focused on the latter due

> **'We feel the school was badly advised generally, didn't know what they were doing and couldn't cope with my son's SEN.'**
>
> Parent

to its more obvious and noticeable nature. Ofsted reported in 2004 that only a third of secondary schools were effective in meeting the needs of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.[96]

It is estimated that 15% of children display oppositional and defiant behaviour when they begin primary school. As children get older, this figure steadily decreases, with only 7.5% of pupils displaying antisocial behaviour at age 14.[97] This figure is higher in inner city areas, where up to 25% of children are estimated to have emotional, social and behavioural difficulties.[98] A recent report by the Belfast Education and Library Board showed that almost half of primary school pupils in the area were on the mild, moderate or serious behavioural difficulties continuum. The figure increased to 78% amongst secondary school pupils, a figure which has steadily grown in recent years, most notably in the mild to moderate category.[99]

As discussed previously, overlapping risk factors make it difficult to pinpoint key causes of truancy or exclusion. As an example, in a recent study by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) into the mental health of young people, 40% of looked after 10–15 year olds were shown to have clinically significant conduct or oppositional disorders, compared with 6% of children in private households.[100] As mentioned earlier, looked after children are over-represented in exclusion and truancy figures. It is impossible to generalise and conclude that this over-representation is due to mental health problems, peer difficulties, school factors, some other factor or a combination of different factors. What is important is that the various risk factors are flagged and that those children at greater risk are offered additional support before a crisis point is reached. At present, many children are failed by the system in this regard. The DfES admitted in 2004 that:

*'[We] fail our most disadvantaged children and young people—those in public care, those with complex family lives, and those most at risk of drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and involvement in criminal activity. Internationally, our rate of child poverty is still high, as are the rates of worklessness in one-parent families, the rate of teenage pregnancy, and the level of poor diet among children. The links between poor health, disadvantage and low educational outcomes are stark.'[101]*

## Effects of truancy and exclusion

Truancy and exclusion are associated with a raft of negative outcomes. As noted above, there is substantial overlap between causes and effects. It is unlikely that the majority of effects are directly attributable to an exclusion or truancy, but rather they are a result of the types of problems and behaviours that lead to truancy and exclusion. Tackling these issues would not only lead to improved attendance and behaviour, but also to a reduction in the negative outcomes listed below.

An immediate effect of truancy is that the pupil is in increased danger. One of school's many roles is as custodian. Recent research cited above showed that truanting amongst primary school age children is more extensive than previously thought.[102] Pupils of primary school age are particularly vulnerable given their young age. In addition, as mentioned previously, a significant proportion of secondary school pupils began truanting whilst at primary school, which highlights the need for early intervention.

The negative effect of truancy on teachers is significant. Teachers are often frustrated and demoralised by the persistent non-attendance of certain pupils, particularly as helping students to catch up takes time and effort. Many teachers fear that this has a negative impact on other pupils. Poor attendees are likely to suffer from low confidence and self esteem, because when they return to school they will have fallen behind their peers. Another outcome is that pupils who are frequently absent have trouble making and keeping friends. In a recent survey, primary school age children reported that their friendship groups diminished the more they truanted. This is a vicious circle, as school is likely to become an increasingly unattractive option for the pupil who is struggling both academically and socially.

Truancy and exclusion both create costs for the education system. For example, in the short term, management of each exclusion process typically costs in the region of £1,000. This includes the involvement of education welfare officers (who are mainly focused on ensuring attendance, but more broadly offer support to pupils), administration costs and the cost of any appeals following exclusion.[103] After exclusion, pupils are educated in alternative provision, which takes place in a PRU for around 60% of pupils, at a cost of £14,000 per pupil per annum.[104] Other destinations include further education colleges or home tuition.[105]

'So you miss a month of schooling or something like that, when you go back to school everyone is on a different project than you, you're way behind and that's really hard, because the teachers don't really help you, like you don't know nothing and the teachers say "just go and ask somebody else".'

Young woman, aged 14

**Excluded pupils are two-and-a-half-times as likely to be unemployed at age 19 than their peers. Truants are four times as likely.**

**65% of young offenders have been excluded or truanted regularly.**

Not only are truanting or excluded pupils less likely to obtain qualifications (see Figure 3), but they are also less likely to be in possession of basic skills. Literacy and numeracy suffer, as do communication and language skills. Essential training for working life, such as punctuality, is learnt through attending school. One study concluded that truancy is a predictor of employment problems of a more severe kind than those experienced by others who share the disadvantaged background and low attainment. Poor qualifications stem from the disruption to education and the lower quality education received by young people who have been excluded. Qualifications also suffer when the additional educational needs of excluded pupils are not being met adequately in the first place.

Unemployment results in a number of costs to the state. A separate study showed that excluded pupils are around two-and-a-half times as likely to be unemployed at age 19 than their non-excluded peers.[106] Persistent truants were more than four times as likely to be out of work at age 18 than non-truants.[107] The unemployment rate in early 2005 was 4.7%.[108] Assuming that the relative gap between excluded pupils, truants and their peers remains beyond the age of 19, the average unemployment rate for excluded pupils is around 12%, and 20% for persistent truants. The annual cost to the state of being unemployed is estimated to be around £10,000 per person.[109]

Unemployment also has an effect on an individual's well-being. Those 16 to 18 year olds who are not in education or employment (known as NEET) are more likely to experience mental illness and depression at age 21. Given that excluded pupils are two-and–a-half times more likely to be out of work at age 19, they are therefore more likely than their non-excluded peers to experience mental illness and depression. One study has shown that truants are also more likely to experience marital breakdown and psychological problems than non-truants. In early adulthood, truants are three times more likely to report depression. They typically also have more children, and at an earlier age, than their non-truanting peers. Female truants were six or seven times more likely than non-truants to be single with children, and six times more likely to have two or more children by the age of 23. These differences remained after controlling for social background and prior educational attainment.[110]

Figure 4 shows the strong relationship between educational attainment and poor health.[111] In the short term, truants and excluded pupils are more likely to be sexually active and smoke, drink and take drugs. A recent study on drug abuse amongst pupils in secondary schools in Edinburgh showed that both were significantly more likely to smoke daily and consume alcohol on a weekly basis, a habit that increases year on year.[112] Smoking and drinking pose obvious health risks, most evident with regards to long-term use. In addition, an excluded child is on average ten times more likely to use Class A drugs than a non-excluded child.[113] It is likely that health problems are both a cause and an effect of truancy and exclusion.

A study commissioned by the Home Office indicated that attachment to school protects children, especially boys aged 12–16, from involvement in criminal activity.[114] Success and achievement in school is an even greater protector. Research on the link between crime and truancy and exclusion is varied and inconclusive. A report from the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) on prisoners found that they were ten times as likely to have regularly truanted as non-prisoners.[115] The Audit Commission found in a 1996 survey that 65% of young offenders had been excluded or truanted regularly. Other surveys have put this number as high as 95%. The same Audit Commission study showed that 23% of school-age children who were convicted in youth courts were truants, while 42% had been excluded.[116] In London, it has been estimated that 5% of all offences are committed by children during school hours. In 1997, 40% of robberies, 25% of burglaries, 20% of thefts and 20% of criminal damage were committed by 10–16 year olds. In addition, there is some evidence that the criminal justice system is harsher on children who are excluded or who truant, with more inclination to impose custodial sentences.[117]

**Figure 4: Relationship between education and health outcomes**
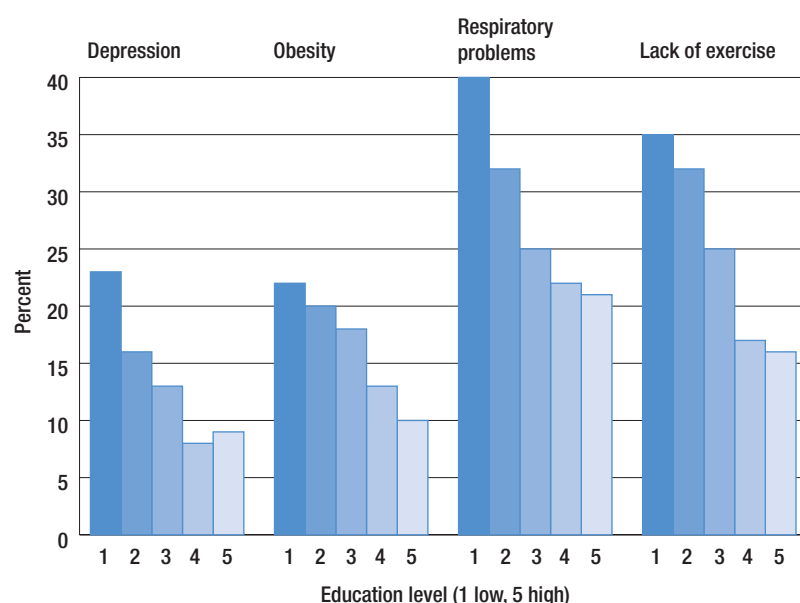
Truancy and exclusion become interlinked with social exclusion. Pupils who are frequently not in school find themselves on the margins of society. For instance, over three quarters of homeless teenagers in one study by the charity Centrepoint were either long-term truants or were excluded from school.[118]

These negative outcomes are damaging for society as well as for the individuals concerned. Reducing rates of truancy and exclusion is therefore not only beneficial for these individuals, but also for others. This applies both in the long term and the short term, socially and financially. A future report by NPC assesses the financial costs incurred by these negative outcomes associated with truancy and exclusion. Keeping pupils in school for the sake of reducing statistics is not the answer, however, either for truancy or exclusion. There have been a series of high-profile cases recently of shocking behaviour in schools, which have led to justifiable concerns over the inclusion of pupils who display challenging behaviour. These extreme cases are the exception rather than the rule. The majority of exclusions are for persistent, low-level disruption.[119] Despite government guidelines, the type of behaviour that merits an exclusion varies greatly from school to school. Much can be done to improve the outcomes for all involved, from the pupil concerned to society as a whole. This could include early intervention strategies aimed at avoiding the punishable behaviour in the first place through to alternatives to exclusion to deal with poor behaviour.

## The negative outcomes of truancy and exclusion are damaging for society and for the individuals concerned.

Persistent truants and excluded pupils often find themselves on the margins of society, where their social, emotional and physical well-being is threatened.

## Summary: the need for action

Truancy and exclusion are both forms of school disaffection. There is little data on the types of truancy and exclusion not captured in official statistics, such as post-registration truancy and unofficial exclusion. As a result, although official figures are already high, there is widespread consensus that true figures are likely to be even higher.

Also missing from official figures are the reasons behind the non-attendance or poor behaviour, an understanding of which is essential if truancy and exclusion are to be effectively tackled. Analysis of individual cases of truancy and exclusion highlight a large numbers of risk factors. There are four main categories of risk factors (home, peer, school and personal) which are associated with both truancy and exclusion. This list is neither definitive nor can risk factors be prioritised in order of importance. They are, nonetheless, useful for identifying potential difficulties early on, before problems spiral and the focus switches to the problem behaviour as opposed to the underlying causes.

The distinction between cause and effect is often blurred. For example, it is not always clear whether a child becomes disaffected because they are struggling with their school work, or whether they are struggling because they are disaffected. Pinpointing the exact reason behind a pupil's challenging behaviour and/or truancy is extremely difficult. The root of the problems may lie outside the school, but these become the school's problem given that they are manifested in challenging behaviour at school and/or poor school attendance. How schools respond to at-risk pupils is of key importance in preventing such behaviour from arising in the first place, and in preventing problems from escalating if they do occur.

Persistent truants and excluded pupils often find themselves on the margins of society, where their social, emotional and physical well-being is threatened. It must be remembered that those involved are minors, and are therefore in all likelihood not well-equipped to negotiate the difficulties they may encounter.

This compelling case for intervention and the description of the complexities of the issues involved set the scene for Section 2, which analyses the role of government in this field.

# The role of government 2

The previous section showed that the issues of school disaffection should not be thought of solely as 'education' problems, since the risk factors for truancy and exclusion include a range of personal and social difficulties that go beyond the boundaries of school. However, schools and LEAs have a crucial role to play in identifying and responding to vulnerable children. With this in mind, this section discusses government's responsibilities and abilities in this field. The focus is on England, but examples of good practice in Scotland and Northern Ireland are highlighted where appropriate.

Despite government efforts in England, unauthorised absences have remained at just under 1% for ten years, while permanent exclusions rose 6% in England from 2003 to 2004. There has been a range of government initiatives intended to reduce exclusions and to tackle the type of behaviour that leads to exclusions and truancy, many of which are outlined in this section. At the same time, the government is under pressure to be seen to be tough, which creates an uneasy tension. In addition, there are a number of practical considerations hampering significant change. These are highlighted in this section.

## Responsibility and commitment

Statutory duties towards children and young people are enshrined in the Children Act (1989), and, more recently, in the Children Act (2004), which arose from the Every Child Matters Green Paper. Every Child Matters identifies five outcomes expected for children and young people. These are:

- Being healthy: enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle.

- Staying safe: being protected from harm and neglect.

- Enjoying and achieving: getting the most out of life and developing the skills for adulthood.

- Making a positive contribution: being involved with the community and society and not engaging in antisocial or offending behaviour.

- Economic well-being: not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving their full potential in life.[120]

The Children Act (2004) is intended to encourage multi-disciplinary working, in order to improve these five outcomes for children and young people. The Children Act covers LEAs rather than schools. However, schools are expected to play an integral part in the changes to children's services. One development is the New Relationship with Schools, beginning in September 2005. This will include School Improvement Partners, consultants who will challenge and support schools in implementing improvements and advising on the five outcomes of Every Child Matters. New Inspection Arrangements mean that the school's contribution to pupil well-being will be covered under inspection criteria.

These five outcomes are inconsistent with the current rates of truancy and exclusion. As seen in Section 1, the negative outcomes associated with truancy and exclusion are manifold. However, there is not one single agency, either nationally or locally, that has a clear overall responsibility for the problem of truancy and exclusion. Legal responsibilities are shared amongst a range of different bodies. All children must receive education from the ages of five to 16, whether in schools, through home tuition or some other type of provision. LEAs have a responsibility to ensure that provision is appropriate. Parents have a legal duty to ensure their child's regular attendance. LEAs are required to enforce parent's responsibility, if necessary through prosecution. Social services also have legal responsibilities for the children they work with (totalling almost 400,000 in England alone).[121]

Despite the commitment to multi-agency working, Ofsted reported recently that only half of schools have established satisfactory arrangements with an appropriate range of services. Many LEAs were said to inadequately support multi-agency working.[122] Links between schools and social services are weak. In a handful of areas, social and education services work in a unified department and are joint funded, which enables information to be shared. On the whole, however, social service involvement is minimal in schools due to the immense pressure on the service in general.

Even the basic commitment to education fails at times. Some of the charities NPC spoke to that are educating excluded children or persistent truants found themselves unable to recover the full costs of their work from schools and LEAs. This forced the charities to seek private donations to make up the shortfall. In Northern Ireland, the situation is at its worst, with some charities experiencing severe financial difficulties as a result of a lack of funding from statutory sources.

Unauthorised absences have remained at just under 1% for ten years, while permanent exclusions have risen by 20% since 2000.

**Many people in the field agree that it is preferable and possible to reduce the number of exclusions.**

**Schools have a staff turnover of 10%, making it hard to maintain consistent discipline policies.**

The government's focus on truancy and exclusion has been significant over the past few years. A large number of initiatives have been launched—36 initiatives in secondary schools relating to school absence in the last two years alone, according to one academic in the field.[123] Government's approach was described as *'pragmatic, reactive, and sometimes desperate top-down solutions'* by one teaching union in 2004.[124] A selection of initiatives is described in this section.

A number of experts and practitioners believe that, whilst the government is committed to making a difference in this field, to do so is very difficult and is a long-term process. A lot can be done by spreading good practice in schools—which is the government's focus— but this will inevitably take time. This was echoed in a recent report by the National Audit Office (NAO) into school attendance. Seventeen schools were visited for the report. In those where attendance rates were good, the schools had adopted good practice methods some time ago and were following them consistently. In schools that had only recently adopted the schemes, there were early indications of improvement.[125]

The current government's position is that exclusions are a necessary tool. Despite this, many people in the field agree that it is preferable and possible to reduce the number of exclusions. A response to the steep rise in exclusions in the 1990s was announced by the government in 1998, when it set a target for the reduction of permanent exclusions by one third within four years. This target was successfully met (see Figure 5). However, targets were dropped in 2000 and recorded permanent exclusions have since risen by almost 20%.

The targets may have been dropped in 2000 due to pressure from teachers and parents. One teaching union suggested that *'the reduction in exclusions is, in reality, masking the retention of pupils in schools where their behaviour merits permanent exclusion.'*[126] Other teaching unions have voiced similar concerns. According to a recent survey, 45% of teachers leaving the profession cited behaviour as one of the main reasons for doing so.[127] Ofsted recently reported that almost all of the secondary schools it visited while compiling a report into challenging behaviour had lost at least 10% of their staff in the past year. In one in five schools, this figure rose to 25%. As noted, maintaining consistent behaviour policies with this level of staff turnover is extremely difficult.[128]

Exclusion rates continue to rise. The most recent statistics show a 6% rise in permanent exclusions between 2003 and 2004. The release of these figures was accompanied by an announcement from the Schools Minister that government was pursuing *'a zero tolerance approach to disruptive behaviour in all our schools on everything from backchat to bullying or violence […] I fully back Heads who decide to remove or prosecute anyone— parent or pupil—who is behaving in an aggressive way.'*[129] This tough approach is open to interpretation, potentially at odds with official guidance on exclusions which states that: *'A decision to exclude a child permanently is a serious one. It will usually be the final step in a process for dealing with disciplinary offences following a wide range of other strategies, which have been tried without success. It is an acknowledgement by the school that it has exhausted all available strategies for dealing with the child and should normally be used as a last resort.'*[130]

One priority area for government is to make sure that all excluded children are in full-time alternative education, a target that it had aimed to achieve by 2002. A study in 2000 found that the average time between permanent exclusions and a placement in alternative provision was over three months, and 14% of children waited more than six months for a place.[131] The target for alternative provision has still not been met and a report by Ofsted into such provision concluded that *'high turnover of staff, inadequate subject knowledge and problems managing difficult behaviour contributed to unsatisfactory or poor teaching in units and centres.'*[132]

**Figure 5: The trend of permanent exclusions in England**
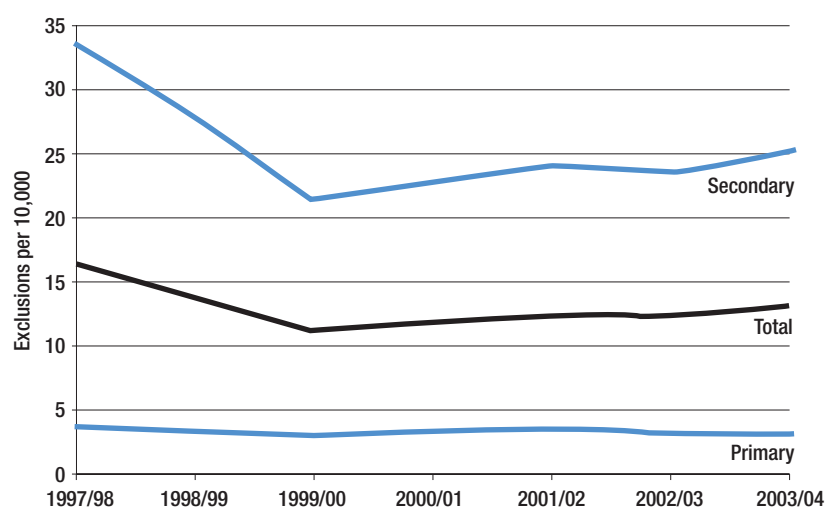
School absence figures are also now the focus of government in this field and the current subject of government targets. The DfES has set a target of an 8% reduction in total absence by 2008, from the total absence rate of 6.83% in 2003 to 6.28% within five years. Although unauthorised absence rates have not changed since 1997, total absence is gradually moving towards this target, as shown in Figure 6. This is mainly thought to be as a result of a crackdown on parents taking their children on holiday during term time. Ofsted reports that attendance remains unsatisfactory in over a quarter of all schools.[133] This is in spite of the fact that £885m has been allocated to schemes intended to reduce absence since 1997, with a further £560m pledged to be spent by 2006.[134]

**Figure 6: The trend in absence in England**

Authorised absence (percent)



Unauthorised absence (percent)
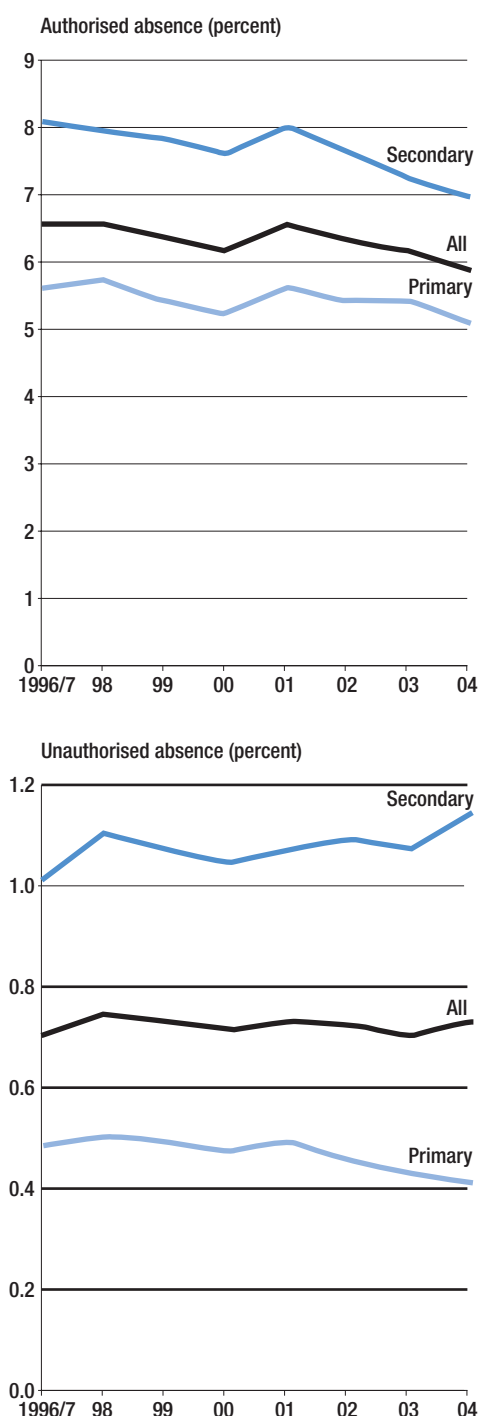


Wider disaffection is not a subject that receives as much attention as either exclusions or truancy. In part, it is believed that those who are *'compliant in the classroom but "psychologically absent", not engaging with, or committed to, any classroom activity'* do not receive government focus because they do not represent a 'political challenge.'[135] These children are likely to underachieve though, and are also at risk of becoming more overtly challenging.

## The tension in schools

Whilst greater focus by schools and wider implementation of best practice would go a long way to reducing exclusions, non-attendance and disaffection, it is not as simple as blaming schools for not paying these issues due attention or for badly managing the situation. The majority of schools are strongly committed to the welfare of their pupils. There is a clear tension within schools, which are under immense pressure to balance the needs of all pupils with staff needs, but also to become more inclusive and to focus on academic results. The effects of the Education Reform Act, as discussed in Section 1, have served to focus schools more heavily on academic achievement meaning that less time is available for children who may threaten this focus.

One difficulty with schools coordinating improvements in exclusion, attendance and disaffection is the fragmented nature of the education system. Schools have been given more power, meaning that change must be encouraged or incentivised rather than ordered. This means that change at the level of the education system overall, particularly on issues such as these, is a slow and often frustrating process. The range of initiatives also presents a confusing picture to schools.

A central issue for schools appears to be a shortage of quality staff, in the form of teachers trained in behavioural management, counsellors, and staff trained in social work.[136] In addition, new teachers are starting work in schools without any formal training on attendance and truancy. Often, new teachers have no experience of registration or form tutor responsibilities that are so important in tackling truancy.[137] The teaching union, NASUWT, conducted research into the experiences of newly qualified teachers (NQTs). This demonstrated that 60% were concerned about behaviour and indiscipline even before they took up their first teaching post. Many NQTs felt that their training had not adequately prepared them to deal with disruptive pupil behaviour, and over half felt unable to cope with the challenges presented by bullying and harassment in the classroom.[138]

**Many newly qualified teachers feel that their training has not adequately prepared them to deal with disruptive pupil behaviour.**

**Box 1: 'Adult accelerating exclusions'**[140]

One school's attitude to poor discipline was given as an example in research sponsored by the DfES into exclusions of pupils with special educational needs. This particular school had a high level of fixed period exclusions due to a lack of tolerance of persistent low-level disruptive behaviour. As one staff member commented: *'We have rooted out quite a lot of the undesirable kids'*. The school lacked a consistent discipline policy, with some staff going as far as to provoke pupils. One head of year admitted to *'pushing'* a 12 year old pupil who had ongoing behavioural problems to the point that a confrontation occurred. The pupil was eventually permanently excluded. This particular head of year was quoted as saying:

*'As far as I'm concerned if a kid is misbehaving in class then they should be removed [...] I always make a point of challenging those pupils, and it's either black or white, they either conform to what I want or it results in a very serious incident where I challenge them to the point where they swear at me or do something. [...] I challenge them to the point that neither of us will back down.'*

The Department for Education and Skills has invested £470m in a National Behaviour and Attendance Strategy.

Good behaviour, attendance and attainment go hand in hand.

It is disturbing that behaviour management constitutes such a small part of the teacher training process. As one study concluded:

*'Initial teacher training pays very little attention to strategies for dealing with behavioural problems, concentrating as it does almost exclusively on developing subject-specific skills.'*[139]

A lack of behaviour management training and a clear school discipline policy can encourage high levels of exclusion, as is shown in Box 1.

## Understanding and action

The following outlines the state of government understanding regarding how to intervene to reduce disaffection, truancy and exclusion, as well as examining the state of current government initiatives in this area. We first discuss cross-cutting initiatives, part of wider strategies to improve schools, in order to place the discussion in the context of wider government objectives.

### Cross-cutting initiatives

The DfES has invested £470m in a National Behaviour and Attendance Strategy. This is delivered through three separate programmes: the Primary National Strategy, the National Strategy for Key Stage 3 and Behaviour Improvement Programmes. The Primary National Strategy is based on the understanding that a proactive, whole-school approach to developing children's social, emotional and behavioural skills is needed to promote positive behaviour. Over 50 LEAs were involved in a pilot scheme in 2004/2005, the findings of which will be disseminated in autumn 2005. The Key Stage 3 strand, which involves 11 to 14 year olds, encouraged schools to review behaviour and attendance via a nationwide audit and offered consultants specialising in behaviour and attendance to all LEAs.

The focus of the national strategies is on increasing attainment, which is the main measure of success of these programmes. Good behaviour, attendance and attainment go hand in hand. An evaluation of the National Strategy for Key Stage 3 reported that the result of improvements in teaching styles was that *'lessons moved at a swift pace, both boys and girls found the teaching engaging and pupils were enthused. Their attitudes to learning were often very positive, behaviour was good and pupils remained on task with rarely a moment for idle chatter.'*[141] The programmes are therefore promising, but as yet there is no publicly available data on their impact on rates of attendance and exclusion.

Behaviour Improvement Programmes (BIPs) were introduced in 2002 as part of the government's Street Crime Initiative. BIPs were then integrated into a wider programme called Excellence in Cities (EiC) in 2003. EiC is aimed at driving up educational standards in deprived areas. Government is committing substantial sums to this programme: £350m for 2003/2004 alone. BIPs are active in 1,500 primary schools and 400 secondary schools, which is just under 10% of all English schools.[142] Schools that take part in the behaviour improvement strands agree to a series of objectives. These include: reducing the number of serious behavioural incidents; reducing truancy; lowering the rate of exclusions; ensuring that there is a named key worker for every child at risk of truancy, exclusion or criminal behaviour; and ensuring the availability of full-time, supervised education for all pupils from day one of their exclusion.

BIPs and EiC have a range of options available to help meet these objectives.

**Learning Mentors** work alongside teachers and pastoral staff to assess, identify and work with pupils who are experiencing difficulties, whether in or outside of school. Around 3,500 learning mentors have been appointed in secondary and primary schools. They were thought to have a positive impact on pupils in terms of behaviour, social skills, attendance, self-confidence, self-esteem and attitudes to school. Evaluations have highlighted the fact that learning mentors are one of the most popular aspects of the EiC programmes with both pupils and staff, but that their impact is difficult to quantify.

**Learning Support Units** are for pupils at risk of exclusion. They are based in schools and provide separate short-term teaching and support programmes tailored to the needs of difficult pupils. The aim is to reintegrate pupils back into the classroom as quickly as possible. There are over 1,000 such units in primary and secondary schools. These are instrumental in reducing exclusions, while keeping children on the school site and continuing to learn. These units are likely to reduce the instance of unofficial exclusions.

**Safer Schools Partnership** (SSP) builds on traditional relationships between schools and the police force, and is a joint initiative between the DfES and the Youth Justice Board. In selected areas with high levels of street crime, police officers are based full-time in a secondary school and the primary schools feeding into that school. The aims are: to reduce crime and victimisation; to make schools safer, more secure environments; to keep children in education; and to deliver a partnership approach to engage young people and reduce disaffection. The SSP links in with efforts to reduce truancy and exclusion in a variety of ways, such as truancy sweeps, in which specific areas are targeted, such as shopping centres. Children are returned to school if found to be absent without authorisation. SSPs have been effective in raising the profile of non-attendance and in uncovering missing and vulnerable pupils, responsibility for whom is then handed on to partner agencies. This multi-agency working is crucial, and could be improved. One example of this is an instance when pupils were immediately thrown out of school for wearing incorrect uniforms when brought back to school by police officers.[143] It is crucial that reintegration packages are in place to prevent truancy from reoccurring.

**Behaviour and Education Support Teams** (BESTs) began life as part of the Street Crime Initiative in 2001, but were integrated into BIPs in 2002. BESTs are multi-agency teams that support schools, pupils and families in identifying and preventing the development of attendance problems, as well as emotional or behavioural problems, through early intervention. Teams are made up of professionals, including clinical psychologists, education welfare officers, educational psychologists, school nurses and social workers, some of whom may be provided by charities. These teams deliver services at a whole-school level, through group work and, most commonly, through intensive support for individual families and children. An interim evaluation showed that each team works with an average of 60 children and families per annum. The evaluation reported that, overall, BESTs were regarded as a success, and that they had led to reductions in exclusions and improved attendance. This included a reduction in unauthorised absence and better outcomes for pupils receiving fixed period exclusions.[144] At the time of going to print, a full evaluation of the programme was expected imminently.

Ofsted published a favourable report on the management and impact of the EiC programme in 2003. There was a reduction in exclusion and an improvement in attendance relative to areas outside the EiC zones. The evaluation focused on attendance rates overall, which were shown to improve in one third of schools. As such, the effect on truancy specifically is unknown. Systems for monitoring and evaluation were deemed to be inconsistent, and the criteria by which the outcomes are judged were criticised as too vague. The interim evaluation of the BEST programmes reported that *'monitoring and evaluation work is fairly limited.'*[145]

According to Ofsted, in EiC areas *'too often, teachers are expected to monitor and evaluate the initiatives without sufficient guidance or training, so that their views are too subjective, and this leads to inconsistency.'*[146] This seems to be an ongoing problem. A more recent report by Ofsted complained that *'schools, units and colleges are poor at monitoring and evaluating their own provision and the impact of support from external agencies on the attitudes and behaviour of the more difficult pupils [...] In a third of the secondary schools, systems for identifying difficulties and tracking progress are weak.'* Nonetheless, on the basis of their school inspections, Ofsted maintained that the substantial government spending on behaviour and attendance *'is proving generally beneficial'*.[147]

Research suggests that schools might tolerate truancy amongst pupils with challenging behaviour given their nature and likelihood of achieving in school.

**Over a third of truancy and other forms of non-attendance begin whilst pupils are at primary school, highlighting the need for early intervention.**

Behaviour and attendance targets are sometimes found as part of wider government programmes. One example is the Youth Inclusion Programmes (YIPs), which are funded by the Youth Justice Board and aimed at reducing the rate of crime amongst 13 to 16 year olds. The 72 YIPs in place across some of the most deprived estates in England and Wales focus on the 50 most at-risk youngsters in each estate. In relation to truancy and exclusion, the project aimed to reduce rates amongst the target groups by a third by 2002. An evaluation of the first phase, extended to 2003, showed that there had been a reduction of 12% in fixed period exclusions and a reduction of 27% in permanent exclusions. Figures for absence were disappointing, however. Unauthorised absence increased by 55%. This increase is unexplained, but it was suggested that, in general, schools might tolerate higher levels of unauthorised absence amongst the target group, given their nature and likelihood of success in GCSEs. The report points out that this data is flawed, however, because of incomplete returns on behalf of the schools involved. The explanation given is worth quoting at length, as it highlights the poor data collection, analysis and lack of cooperation that hamper efforts to improve the situation:

*'In order to measure these outcomes, projects are required to collect data on absence (authorised and unauthorised) and exclusion (fixed term and temporary) from every school attended by members of the "top 50". But, in common with a number of similar programmes, there have been severe difficulties in obtaining this information. The Board has helped by sending letters to local schools, emphasising that YIPs have the full backing of the DfES and that their cooperation is essential for the evaluation of the project. However, there is no real pressure that can be exerted on schools to supply the data and the projects rely on local goodwill. Moreover, even when the data is supplied, this is often incomplete and insufficient to make comparisons.'*[148]

In Scotland, there are several measures in place that are likely to have an impact on truancy and exclusion. A national task group on discipline, set up in 2001, published a report entitled Better Behaviour Better Learning. The emphasis here is on promoting pupils' self-discipline, aimed at improving not only educational attainment, but also general social skills as preparation for adult life. The report recommends change at the level of the Scottish Executive, local authorities and schools. The recommendations are wide-ranging and include: funding for additional

support staff and home-school link workers; a national framework for the professional development of teachers and curricular flexibility; and proposals to create an action plan that forms a key part of Scotland's National Priorities in Education. Although the link with truancy and exclusion is acknowledged and implementation of the various initiatives should help to reduce rates, no specific targets have been set as part of this action plan.

There have been calls in England for a behaviour audit. At the time of going to print, the DfES announced a task force on behaviour, made up of teachers and head teachers, similar to that undertaken in Scotland. The committee is due to report in November 2005 on strategies to ensure effective school discipline, to improve parental responsibility for children's behaviour and to deliver a culture of respect in all schools. It seems that the government is keen to replicate success stories from schools that effectively manage pupils' behaviour.

The Additional Support for Learning Act, which comes into force in Scotland in autumn 2005, requires all local authorities to provide an independent mediation service to parents and carers of children with additional support needs (ASN). ASN will broaden the scope of, and replace all references to, special educational needs (SEN). *'The new concept will apply to any child or young person who, for whatever reason, requires additional support, long term or short term, in order to learn and to work to their full potential.'*[149] As such, many of those pupils at risk of truancy and exclusion will be entitled to support. Education authorities will be responsible for identifying and meeting the additional support needs of children in their areas, with the help of other agencies such as the local health board or social services. Education authorities are being given £35m over the next three years with which to implement additional support for learning.

Resolve is a scheme run by a charity called Children in Scotland, which is funded by the Scottish Executive. The scheme offers support to all education authorities in establishing an independent mediation service. It is conceivable that the statutory commitment to recognising and supporting the needs of children who are experiencing difficulties in school, combined with the increased emphasis on parental involvement, will reduce the rates of truancy and exclusion.

**Government has spent almost £1.5bn in nine years on initiatives aimed at increasing attendance.**

## Disaffection

As noted in Section 1, studies show that disaffection is closely linked to a perceived lack of relevance of the National Curriculum.[150] The UK is unusual because it does not have either a technical or a vocational curriculum alongside its academically focused National Curriculum.[151] As one academic put it: *'far too many pupils are studying subjects for which they do not have the appropriate interest or aptitude.'*[152]

The recent government response to the 14–19 curriculum reform working group (the Tomlinson report) suggests some reforms. Schools already have the power to 'disapply' the curriculum in special circumstances in order to concentrate on key skills, but the report recommends a greater commitment to core skills, vocational studies and improved links with further education colleges and employers. Proposals include the introduction of 14 specialised diplomas covering a broad range of sectors and skills. These will be a mix of academic and vocational learning, in an attempt to motivate disaffected pupils.

The many risk factors identified in Section 1 can help schools to identify children who may go on to truant or be excluded. However, schools are often not given the support they need from outside agencies, as teachers have little faith that assistance will come. One suggested explanation was that outside agencies were focusing on young people who had already truanted or been excluded at the expense of early intervention.[153]

Research clearly shows that the prevention of truancy is continually hampered because of the lack of early intervention. Over a third of truancy and other forms of non-attendance begin whilst pupils are at primary school. As one expert describes it:

*'It is likely that the pattern of absence will continue and escalate throughout the pupils' subsequent school careers. This reinforces the importance of "treatment" and preventative measures being taken in the primary schools and in the first three years of secondary schooling. Later casework will almost certainly fight either a "lost" or a more difficult cause.'*[154]

Currently, the emphasis is on tackling persistent absentees at the secondary stage. Earlier intervention at the age of onset, especially amongst primary-age pupils, is likely to lead to much more successful interventions.[155] The National Behaviour and Attendance Strategy is therefore a welcome step in this direction.

## Truancy

As mentioned previously, between 1997 and 2004 DfES proactive expenditure on initiatives intended to reduce absence was £885m. Another £560m is committed to these initiatives until 2006. This is roughly equivalent to over £3,000 per truant every year.[*] In spite of this expenditure, official statistics show that truancy levels have remained constant since 1997.[156]

One agency that has long been involved in this field is the Education Welfare Service (EWS), whose primary focus is to help LEAs meet their statutory obligations on school attendance. The EWS is the *'attendance enforcement arm of most LEAs.'*[157] The causes of a child's absence from school may call for the involvement of an education welfare officer (EWO) in complex casework within the education service, as well as with social service departments and the National Health Service (NHS).[158]

Unfortunately, the EWS is of variable quality and some LEAs employ less than half as many EWOs as others, despite similar levels of absence.[159] One consequence of the move towards a quasi-market system in education has been a decline in the resources available to LEAs for the central provision of education welfare services. Ofsted recently reported that only a small proportion of primary schools and half of secondary schools have well-established links with EWOs.[160] There have been calls for a national inquiry into the role of the EWS.

*'Far too many schools do not have adequate education social work support. Workloads among education welfare staff are often notoriously high within a service that has taken a disproportionate share of cuts throughout the last twenty years. [In one] LEA, there are currently two EWOs; ten years ago in the same authority there were thirty-five.'*[161]

There is no clear solution to the problem of non-attendance. Given the many and varied causes of truancy, strategies themselves must reflect this complexity. The DfES has three aspects to its strategy in this regard, each of which has many elements.

> **Far too many schools do not have adequate education social work support.**
>
> Expert

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*Dividing the total sum between the nine years gives a figure of £161m per annum. For the last ten years unauthorised absence has stayed at 0.7%, which is around 50,000 pupils. £126m divided by 50,000 equals £3,200.

**Improvements in absence rates have been hampered because some schools have not adopted or maintained good practice.**

Firstly, the DfES is putting pressure on parents to take responsibility for school absence. This involves home-school agreements introduced in an effort to involve parents and fast-track prosecution for those parents who are unable to control their children's truancy. Home-school agreements should be in place in all schools and they should lay out the responsibilities of the school and the parents, as well as containing information on what the school expects of its pupils. With regard to prosecution, parents are given one term to tackle their children's truancy. After that, parents can be issued with a court summons. They can be prosecuted by their LEA and fined up to £2,500 per parent per child, or face up to three months in prison. Often the threat of prosecution is sufficient for the child to return to school, but in a minority of cases parents have been issued with penalty notices or statutory parenting contracts. However, it currently takes an average of seven months to bring an 'attendance' case to court in England.[162] In addition, there has been considerable scepticism from schools with regards to penalty notices. Schools are being asked to improve home-school links, whilst at the same time being told to issue threats of prosecution, which undoubtedly sends out mixed messages. In addition, independent research has shown that *'it is not possible to reduce truancy rates solely by relying on more parental prosecution, which does not have meaningful immediate or long-term impacts on truancy.'*[163]

Secondly, the DfES is targeting and assisting schools in areas with significant difficulties in reducing school absence. This takes many shapes, and is often delivered through the behaviour and attendance schemes outlined previously. Other initiatives in this area include providing £11m for 500 schools in 2002/2003 to introduce electronic registration, which is available from a range of private companies. Electronic registration enables schools to collect and analyse data for each lesson swiftly, which should serve as a disincentive to opportunistic post-registration truants. Around half of schools have electronic registration systems in place.[164]

The third aspect of the DfES plan is to spread good practice in reducing school absence. In this regard, the DfES has coordinated conferences and training sessions on the subject and established a website sharing best practice case studies.[165] Effective practice is emerging from these efforts. The NAO has identified several key elements of good practice including: having a clear policy on attendance (communicated to staff, pupils and parents); having the head teacher support and resource attendance management; collection and regular analysis of attendance data; and 'first day calling' of parents of absent pupils.[166]

Although effective solutions depend very much on the individual needs of schools, hence the need for flexibility, improvements in absence rates have been hampered because some schools have not adopted or maintained good practice. The DfES and LEAs could do more to disseminate and sustain their commitment to combating absence.

Whilst these three aspects of the DfES plan include many interesting projects, there is no clear strategy that looks likely to lead to significant improvements in the short or medium term. In part, this might be put down to the sheer number of possible approaches. One book on the subject lists a selection of 120 different approaches that schools have tried, yet gives an example of a school that, despite its best efforts, had been unable to make an impact on its absence statistics.

Furthermore, the vast majority of these approaches remain unproven, at best, and, at worst, they are thought to be of no significant use. As one academic put it: *'it is abundantly clear that most of these, with the possible exception of first day response schemes, are making comparatively little difference to overall local and national rates of daily attendance within schools.'*[167]

## Exclusions

There are specific initiatives aimed at reducing exclusions, in addition to the schemes mentioned above, such as EiC, which are proving successful in combating bad behaviour. These are discussed in the following section.

Although this report focuses mainly on permanent exclusion, reducing the number of fixed period exclusions is also important. A significant number of permanently excluded pupils have experienced a series of fixed period exclusions. Improved reporting of the latter would help to map the route towards permanent exclusion, which could help researchers to focus on the effectiveness of early intervention and prevention initiatives. Most exclusions are one-offs and temporary. Almost two-thirds of pupils who are given a fixed period exclusion receive only one in any given year.[168] But where pupils' exclusion patterns have been recorded, data shows that just over a quarter of pupils receiving a fixed period exclusion go on to be permanently excluded. This finding led the authors of the report to conclude:

*'This would suggest that the use of multiple suspensions [fixed period exclusions], for this group anyway, had little impact on behaviour. It further reinforces the notion that pupils who are multiply-suspended might be better supported through pastoral care and/or special education needs systems within schools since their problems may be rooted in emotional and behavioural difficulties for which they have few or inadequate coping strategies.'*[169]

In addition to the cross-cutting work mentioned earlier that focuses on reducing the behaviours leading to exclusion, there are two main aspects to government work on exclusions. The first is exploring alternatives to exclusion, and the second is improving the provision of alternative education for those who are excluded.

There are indications that the understanding of how to reduce permanent exclusions exists and that small steps are being taken towards actions that should lead to a reduction. LEAs such as Slough have shown that implementing a system targeted at reducing permanent exclusions can reduce them to extremely low levels. In 2003/2004, Slough reduced

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**Box 2: The benefits of restorative justice in schools**

The following perspectives from various participants are taken from a recent evaluation of a national pilot of restorative justice in schools:

*'We had a parent attend [a conference] who had a really bad opinion of the school. After the conference, they went away with a completely different view of the school. We have a much more constructive relationship now.'* Head teacher

*'The conferences help young people to separate facts from emotions. It has helped perpetrators to be more aware of the effects of their actions and to take responsibility […] particularly when they thought that things were just a joke, and they had not realised the impact that their behaviour was having on their victims. It has also helped to increase the confidence of victims.'* Deputy head teacher

*'It was fair. We both had our say. It didn't take long to sort out. There was no yelling or shouting. It was good.'* Boy, aged 8

*'We both had the chance to tell our side of things without being interrupted. It made a change for adults to listen to us. I felt respected, as a person. Rather than being treated as a child and told what to do.'* Young man, aged 14[173]

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permanent exclusions from 50 to just seven.[170] Elsewhere, Norfolk LEA reported that, out of 45 possible permanent exclusions in the last academic year, 39 were avoided, and Southampton schools reported an 80% reduction in permanent exclusions.[171]

Slough's system involved two key aspects. Firstly, difficulties were not allowed to develop to the point where removing pupils from schools was a necessary step. Restorative justice and other conflict resolution methods were used to this end. Restorative justice has its roots in the criminal justice system and is defined as a process in which: *'All the parties with a stake in a particular conflict or offence come together to resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the conflict or offence and its implications for the future […] Offenders have the opportunity to acknowledge the impact of what they have done and to make reparation, and victims have the opportunity to have their harm or loss acknowledged and amends made.'*[172] (see Box 2).

Secondly, where these steps did not work and it became necessary to move a child from a particular school, Slough ensured that relationships were in place between schools that allowed pupils to quickly and smoothly begin study at an alternative school. This is called a managed move. Managed moves are an alternative to exclusions, because alternative provision is planned from day one and pupils are moved with their agreement and with the agreement of the parents. With these aspects in place, the pupil's education is not disrupted to the same extent, and anger and bad feelings are discouraged. Managed moves also remove the stigmatisation for the child of having a permanent exclusion on their record, as well as being less disruptive to their education and less stressful for the child, for school staff and for parents. If the move is not voluntary, however, these positive outcomes are unlikely.

> There's no one we can talk to. I'm blaming me, you're blaming me, we're blaming Tina. Every time we'd open our mouths, it turned into a slanging match. They don't realise what we have gone through prior to all this and, quite frankly, I don't think they cared.
>
> Parent

One in seven local education authorities report that they are 'only occasionally' able to meet full-time provision for excluded pupils.

It is thought that only a third of LEAs are encouraging managed moves in schools.[174] The process takes time and commitment to implement, a crucial investment if managed moves are to be successful. In a fragmented education system such as England's, this means a substantial period of time. The DfES is considering encouraging all schools to accept permanently excluded pupils on managed moves such as these. If implemented throughout the education system, experts feel that this would make a significant difference to the rates of school exclusion.

The DfES and Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) guidance states that, ideally, excluded pupils should rejoin a mainstream school or receive alternative provision within 15 days of being excluded since *'the longer a young person is out of school the more difficult it can be for them to reintegrate'*.[175] However, a study in 1999 found that the mean time taken to offer substantial education or training was 3.2 months.[176]

Nearly every LEA either runs a range of specialist or alternative provision, or pays for access to facilities provided by other LEAs or the charitable sector.[177] As we have already seen, direct provision by LEAs is often in the form of PRUs, which were set up in 1994 to provide education for those outside mainstream education. Provision is also offered through further education colleges, work experience, home tuition or education delivered at centres attached to the school.

There are currently over 460 PRUs in England, which provide the main form of alternative education to pupils permanently excluded from school. There has been a 25% increase in the number of these units compared with the previous year, which is due to certain LEAs reviewing their alternative provision and reorganising and establishing new units as a result. At the same time, the DfES prompted LEAs to register previously unregistered establishments. In 2003, around 17,500 pupils attended PRUs at some point during the school year. One tenth more pupils attended PRUs in 2004.[178]

Following an inspection in 2003, Ofsted reported that one fifth of lessons in PRUs *'lacked interest, challenge and structure.'*[179] In addition, although in many units pupils' attendance was better than when they were at school, average attendance rates rarely reached 90%.[180] There are worries that PRUs are seen as 'sin bins' or 'dumping grounds', and that enforced association with antisocial peers may exacerbate rather than improve behavioural problems.

A study in 2003 showed that one in seven LEAs reported that they were *'only occasionally'* able to meet full-time provision for excluded pupils. They cited reasons such as: high and/or increasing numbers of excluded pupils; the complexity of pupils' needs; difficulties with reintegration; limited funding; inadequate staffing; and difficulties accessing alternative providers.[181] At present, it is up to the LEA to decide how to fulfil their legal requirement to meet the educational needs of all young people in their area. Alternative provision, such as that provided by charities, offers LEAs the opportunity to broaden the range and volume of provision on offer.

The DfES ran a series of workshops on reducing exclusions, in an attempt to disseminate good practice. Case studies are available on their website on exclusions and alternative provision.[182] It is hoped that the implementation of Education Improvement Partnerships (EIPs, formerly known as Foundation Partnerships) will lead to improvements in the current state of alternative provision, and the furthering of initiatives such as managed moves. EIPs are one of eight key reforms outlined in the DfES's Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners announced in 2004, reforms that are aimed at encouraging local collaboration and the creation of school networks. EIPs are dependent on these new networks capitalising on existing funding streams and pooling resources in order to provide a range of options that best respond to local needs. LEAs are encouraged to act as commissioners, as opposed to deliverers, of services.[183]

EIPs have a clear potential to improve service delivery for disaffected and vulnerable children in a variety of ways. Firstly, they should lead to a greater range of study options, offering education or training for secondary school pupils through further education colleges or voluntary sector providers. As well as assisting the implementation of supported managed moves for disruptive pupils, EIPs will support the development of local protocols on reintegrating excluded pupils. All secondary schools are required to have a protocol for placing previously excluded pupils for whom reintegration is appropriate by September 2007.[184] However, EIPs are neither accompanied by additional funding nor by new legislation, and the creation and development of EIPs depends on impetus at a local level.

A similar system is being proposed in Northern Ireland, where a collegiate system is envisaged amongst clusters of secondary schools that could support one another in providing for problem pupils and in offering a wider range of education and training routes in the final two years of schooling.

> ' I don't want him pushed back into mainstream school, because he's not fitting in there. '
>
> Parent

The Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) has been more coordinated than the DfES or DENI in their response to exclusion. Scotland has traditionally promoted an inclusive ethos in schools, and historically the rate of permanent exclusions has been low. There are similarities with the English system, such as the appeals system, but also significant differences. For instance, it is the responsibility of the LEA to make arrangements for alternative education for permanently excluded pupils immediately upon exclusion, and it is expected that provision be in place within ten days. Four out of five permanently excluded students are placed in another mainstream school.[185] There are no PRUs in Scotland, but internal support units are emerging in schools. SEED is soon to release best practice guidelines on these.

One interesting aspect of the Scottish system is its emerging work with charities. The Trojan Project is an online project that gathers the views of disaffected pupils on their school experiences. Charities play a central role in gathering this data, as they are well positioned to gather the views of disaffected pupils. One initiative arising from the Trojan Project is the Pupil Inclusion Network (PIN), which SEED is in the process of facilitating. The network is led by charities working with disaffected pupils, with the aim of coordinating their work. A network of alternative providers—called Glasgow Access to Education (GATE)—is already established in Glasgow. It is an informal collection of five charities, which provide support for disaffected pupils at various stages. Pupils are assessed to identify the type of provision that would suit them best, whereas previously schools were referring pupils to every service in the area, regardless of the pupils' needs, in the hope of finding a place. The network is in talks with Glasgow's LEA to establish standardised service provision, working towards a clear set of values, standards and costs and service level agreements.

Although official statistics indicate that only a handful of students are accessing alternative provision as a result of exclusion, there remains a significant need for provision other than through mainstream schools, as the existence of GATE demonstrates. Having a variety of programmes on offer means that LEAs can better meet the needs of individual pupils, as opposed to using a one-size-fits-all model. As Section 1 showed, there is a whole range of risk factors for truancy and exclusion, and therefore a flexible response is preferable.



*Photograph supplied by Extern.*

## Summary: a role for private funding?

Unauthorised absence rates have not improved in ten years and exclusion rates have risen 20% since 2000. There are a raft of negative outcomes associated with truancy and exclusion, as discussed in Section 1. These facts do not sit well with the government's commitment to the welfare of children and young people, specifically, that they are entitled to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and experience economic well-being.

Despite a plethora of initiatives and over £1bn in investment, it seems that change has been hampered by a number of factors:

- The lack of research and analysis into the true extent of the problem, which would enable a clearer of picture of who truants or is excluded and why, and how patterns of non-attendance or poor behaviour develop.

- No one agency has overall responsibility for the problems of truancy or exclusion.

- A lack of multi-agency working.

- High staff turnover coupled with poor discipline policies and behaviour management strategies in some schools.

- Continued pressure on schools to perform (measured through attainment) but also to be inclusive and to meet the needs of all pupils and staff.

- The nature of the education system, in which schools have increasing power and in which change therefore needs to be incentivised. However, schools have little incentive to keep pupils who have difficulties, place a strain on the system and are unlikely to achieve academically.

'Schools are not exactly knocking down the door to get these children back into education […] It is quite hard for those children who are outside of the education system because schools are not welcoming them with open arms.'

Education professional

## Truancy and exclusion are damaging, for the individuals concerned and for the rest of society.

• The imbalance in the national debate on truancy and exclusion, which rarely includes the views of pupils and families directly involved. As a result, there is a tension at government level between being seen to be tough and adopting an inclusive ethos.

Added to the failure to reduce rates of truancy and exclusion is the lack of appropriate provision for those pupils who have been permanently excluded or are persistent truants. Too many are dropping out of the system. It is important to prevent those who are already out of the education system from becoming more socially excluded. At present, there seems to be an over-reliance on PRUs to cater for pupils not in mainstream education. PRUs are not only extremely costly but have developed a reputation as 'holding units' as opposed to educational centres where individuals can achieve their academic and social potential.

As discussed in this section, many government initiatives are in their early stages, the benefits of which may not be apparent for some time. There are certainly a number of encouraging initiatives, from early intervention schemes through to increased vocational options for pupils in their final years of schooling. Improving the situation for pupils and schools involves tackling the kinds of problems and difficulties, identified in Section 1, that lead to truancy and exclusion rather than simply reducing rates (as was attempted by government with regards to exclusion between 1998 and 2000). Many of the schemes discussed in this section seek to do just that, such as elements of the National Behaviour and Attendance Strategy. Worryingly, evaluations which have taken place of existing schemes point to a lack of in-built monitoring and evaluation systems which is hampering efforts to track positive outcomes.

Government has a responsibility for providing education and it is tempting to rely on government to tackle truancy and exclusion as part of this. However, as yet government has failed to address these problems adequately and (in the case of exclusions) sends out conflicting messages. The failure to significantly improve the situation is partly because responsibility is shared amongst a number of agents – young people themselves, parents, communities, schools, LEAs, social services, police, and so on.

Truancy and exclusion are damaging. They are damaging for the individuals concerned who end up less well qualified, more likely to commit crime and frequently marginalised in society; they are damaging for the rest of society because tax receipts are lower, welfare payments higher and crime is a greater problem for us all. Therefore, it is short sighted to absolve oneself of responsibility for tackling truancy and exclusion. Considerable good can come from targeted charitable interventions with proven records of helping children, their families and, by association, the rest of society.

This is not to apologise for ill-disciplined school children who disrupt the education of others or who have no interest in gaining an education for themselves. Rather, it recognises that many children come from backgrounds with particular problems. These problems can be addressed and better futures opened up for these young people. As we discuss below, early interventions can prevent bigger problems emerging later.

Exclusions will always be necessary. But the number of exclusions can be reduced and doing so is likely to reduce future tax burdens. High rates of exclusion are not a sign of a tough approach to discipline. They are a sign of failing to educate children and the building of future trouble. It is as legitimate for private donors to accept this logic in their capacity as individual tax payers as it is for government. Investing to save is worthwhile. Moreover, private funding can help build the case for more concerted government efforts in the future, thereby magnifying its direct impact. With government policies currently failing, there is a powerful case for private funders to get involved with the many charities active and effective in this important area. These charities are the subject of the next section.



*Photograph supplied by Extern.*

# The role of charities

As discussed in the previous sections, the causes and effects of school disaffection go beyond education. Charities provide many services, tackling various issues that contribute to and result from truancy and exclusion, both within and outside schools. As outlined in Section 1, a number of social issues feed into truancy and exclusion. Many charities undertake important work in specific areas, such as in poverty reduction, which potentially has an impact on truancy and exclusion. These charities are not the focus of this report. Here we concentrate on activities that are focused directly on reducing truancy and/or exclusion, or those that seek to increase the protective factors for young people at risk of disaffection. Many of the interventions reduce both truancy and exclusion, and therefore the categories are not separated here as they have been in previous sections.

## Charitable activities in this field

Despite this government's commitment to tackling truancy and exclusion, there remains a significant role for charities in this sector. The government is limited in its ability to initiate change by the decentralised nature of the education system. It is also hampered by the tension between promoting an inclusive, caring ethos and appeasing criticisms that policies are *'turning a blind eye to the behaviour of yobbish parents or thuggish pupils'*.[186] Certain groups are disturbingly over-represented in exclusions, which suggests that the system is failing some children as opposed to these children failing the system. As the Audit Commission reported in 1999:

*'Analysis of the pupils present in PRUs, and other 'education otherwise' provision, is useful as it picks up those whom the current system has failed and can show where improvement may be needed most.'*[187]

NPC has identified a range of activities provided by charities. Frequently, charities are well placed to intervene in sensitive areas, as they are often rooted in the local community and do not carry the stigma of certain government agencies. For instance, it may be easier for a charity worker to gain access to a child from a hard-to-reach family than for a social worker, who the family may fear, given their power to place the child in care. Many teenagers in this field are mistrustful of authority, and therefore charities working as independent agents are typically well received.

As discussed in Section 1, recognising risk factors for truancy and exclusion is crucial. Several experts in this field argue that early intervention is key to prevent problems from mounting and becoming entrenched.[188] In addition, children may be more receptive to targeted support at primary school level, when they are less sensitive to stigmatisation. As such, many of the charities featured here are engaged in early intervention.
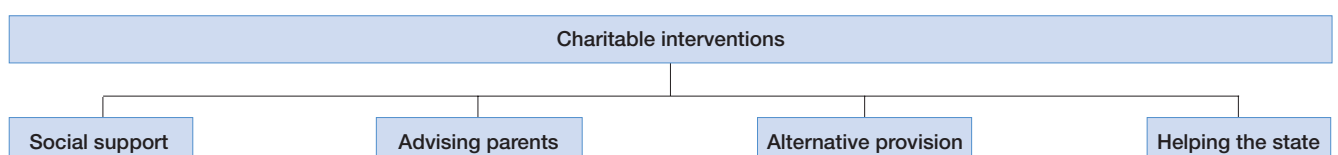
As was established in Section 1, the causes of truancy and exclusion are manifold. There are many charities working with children and families who are experiencing particular issues, such as poverty or substance abuse. This report is focused on charities that are dealing with a range of issues, but with a focus, at least in part, on the issues of truancy and exclusion. This may include charities that are focused on promoting resilience in children, for instance, through providing a trustworthy adult to help them work through their behavioural issues.

This report focuses on four main activities in this area, representing a range of services from early intervention, which is preventative, to services focused on spreading good practice, which can have a wide impact. These activities are described in more detail below, accompanied by examples of charities working in those areas, and shown in Figure 7.

Some of the charities described here are looked at in more detail in Section 4. These particular charities are underlined in the text below.

> Charities are well placed to intervene in sensitive areas, as they are often rooted in the local community and do not carry the stigma of certain government agencies.

Figure 7: NPC's identified interventions



| Charitable interventions | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Social support | Advising parents | Alternative provision | Helping the state |

The right school climate can be of considerable psychological and social benefit for a child.

## Social support

Section 1 outlined the factors that lead children to truant or become excluded. As we have already seen, these require a response that goes beyond education. A plan of action is required that seeks to understand and resolve children's complex social and emotional needs. New government initiatives, such as the Primary National Strategy described in Section 2, are moving in this direction. Some young people have considerable barriers to learning, which must be broken down before one can hope to see improvements in commitment to school. NPC identified a number of charities that are helping schools to respond to the social and emotional needs of pupils. Many of these charities intervene early on in a child's schooling.

Charitable activities in this area can be based in schools or in the community. If based in schools, the charity's staff are often treated as core members of the school staff team. Funding mainly comes through a combination of money from the school and other local government funding streams. Private funding in this area has the ability to be highly leveraged. Funders may support activities such as the expansion of programmes into new regions, or the development of the service at a national level, and so capitalise on state funding for the actual service provision in individual schools.

Some of the features that make programmes with young people more effective include: making programmes comprehensive (ie, tackling many issues); attention to the individual; beginning early and continuing in the long term; involving families; and being well structured.[189]

## Emotional health

Deprivation, or the fact that a child is experiencing stress at home, does not necessarily entail difficulties at school. As one study notes:

*'Children who experience a high level of stress due to disharmony in the home, for instance, may or may not use the school to vent their frustration, depending upon their perception of what is expected of them at school and how they believe they are valued in the school community.'*[190]

For many pupils who experience difficulties in the home, school can provide welcome respite. The right school climate can be of considerable psychological and social benefit for a child. Studies have shown that, when a child feels included in a school community, this can enhance his or her academic performance, motivation and emotional well-being.[191] Although often not focused on behaviour and attendance as a primary goal, school-based social support can improve both. Some charities have developed models that are specifically focused on emotional health. Here are two of them:

**Antidote** has been working for four years with one primary and one secondary school in London, helping to develop good practice models in shaping schools' emotional environments. The aim is to promote the well-being, good behaviour and achievement of pupils. Essential to the process is allowing schools to be creative in identifying their own solutions, with the help of Antidote acting as a 'critical friend'. This model has led to a variety of initiatives, such as a weekly Philosophy for Children programme in the primary school, an open and equal discussion group, and peer mentoring schemes in the secondary school. When the schools identified their own solutions, processes were more sustainable. Both schools reported a change in ethos. This whole-school approach has resulted in a steady rise in attendance levels in both schools over the past few years, by several percentage points. The work has also enabled Antidote to develop a tool for schools to evaluate their emotional environment, entitled the School Emotional Environment for Learning Survey (SEELS). Antidote is in the process of developing a range of materials that will be made available to schools around the country.

**The Place2Be** works in over 90 schools across nine 'hubs' (five London boroughs, Medway, Nottingham, Durham and Edinburgh). The charity provides emotional and therapeutic support through the use of teams of paid clinicians and volunteer counsellors placed in schools. Around 70% of children in the schools use the service in one form or another. Services include the Place2Talk, a drop-in service where children can talk about whatever is worrying them. Around one in five children are then referred to more specialist therapeutic services through group work or one-to-one services. The charity also provides services to parents and professionals. A Place for Parents offers one-to-one therapy or group parenting skills sessions for those parents who are experiencing difficulties. Accredited training and development has been developed by the charity, delivered both internally (to staff and volunteers) and externally (to professionals working in schools, from learning support assistants to police officers).

## Support networks within schools

A supportive and inclusive school ethos can be instrumental in preventing school disaffection. There are various charities promoting and establishing sustainable support networks within schools, aimed at enabling pupils to help one another:

**Childline in Partnership with Schools (CHIPS)** provides advice and training on establishing peer support networks within primary and secondary schools across the UK. Pupils, or 'buddies', are trained in communication and listening skills to enable them to provide emotional support to fellow pupils. In the last seven years, the charity has trained many thousands of buddies, over 8,000 in 2004 alone.

**The Children's Society's Genesis Project** is run in a dozen primary and secondary schools in south London and began as a result of discussions with local schools. It sets up drop-in centres, peer mentoring schemes and schools councils that involve children and teaching staff working together. The charity runs group sessions in which children work together on issues such as confidence-building and behaviour management. Many referrals are from pupils around the transition period between primary and secondary school. The charity aims to set up a programme that can be successfully continued and owned by the school, a process which takes on average five years to establish. The various facets of the service help children to settle into school. For children, this results in greater confidence through to developing pride in their school, outcomes that can lead to raising attendance and attainment.

Schools cannot always effectively tackle disaffection in isolation. There is often a need to include support for parents, as is reflected in recent government initiatives to encourage parental responsibility. As discussed in Section 1, home factors can be very influential on a child's attitude and ability to engage at school. Some parents are colluding in their child's truancy. A healthy relationship between school and home may help prevent pupils from reaching a crisis point in school, as problems could be identified earlier through dialogue between parents and teachers. For instance, research shows there is a strong need to find constructive ways to communicate concern about a child's behaviour to its parents, if exclusion is to be avoided.[192] In addition, Ofsted reports that '*behaviour is significantly better in settings that have a strong sense of community and work closely with parents. In these settings learners feel safe and are confident that issues such as bullying are dealt with swiftly and fairly*.'[193]



**School-Home Support** has been working with schools, pupils and parents for over 20 years to help identify and solve the underlying causes of concern affecting children's attendance and behaviour. The core work of the charity is the provision of school-home support workers Support workers to over 100 schools in nine London boroughs and ten schools in York. Support workers handle on average 90 cases a year, often on a one-to-one basis. The support worker is flexible in his or her approach to meeting the needs of children and parents, and projects differ by school. Typically, support workers' offices provide a drop-in centre for children and parents. Optional parenting classes are available in about 75% of schools. These are made available for parents who have been identified as experiencing difficulties. Some schools run themed projects that address other types of problems, for example, transition from primary to secondary school. Support workers detail every 'intervention' made, from phone calls to one-to-one sessions with a child. In 2004, support workers reached more than 13,700 families.

**Family Services Units** (FSU) offer nationwide community units that deliver a range of services to families, depending on local need. In Scotland, there are several community programmes focused specifically on children's needs. Traditionally, the organisation has delivered work in conjunction with social services, but recently they have started projects working closely with schools. The Haven project (Edinburgh) is based in a primary school and offers support to all the children in the school, as well as parents, through activities that include friendship groups and a support service for fathers. The Restalrig (an area of Edinburgh) and Hamilton (Lanarkshire) projects employ home/school liaison workers, who cover five schools in each area and offer individual and family support in response to issues that surface in school.

Schools cannot always effectively tackle disaffection in isolation.

'If I had been informed from the start that he was playing up, then I could have stepped in and done something. It was six to eight months before I was informed [...] If you don't know, then you can't do anything, can you?'

Parent

Charities have a role to play in highlighting those over-represented in truancy and exclusion.

## Community-based support

In addition to social support schemes based in schools, there are community models that can increase the resilience of children. Some community-based initiatives are actively combating the causes of truancy and exclusion. School-based initiatives cannot always reach the most disaffected children, who may not be regularly accessing mainstream provision for one reason or another, therefore community-based services may be instrumental in identifying and dealing with those in need of support. They also serve to address the needs of children out of school hours and can complement services provided by schools.



*Photograph supplied by Chance UK.*

**Chance UK** provides mentoring for five to 11 year old children with behavioural difficulties in the London boroughs of Hackney and Islington. The charity is focused on improving behaviour and attainment in school and reducing the risk of later criminal or antisocial behaviour. Children set their own goals with their mentors, who then help them achieve these goals over the course of a year. Chance UK has been particularly successful in recruiting male mentors, and mentors from ethnic minority backgrounds, which has proved difficult for other organisations. This enables more effective gender and ethnic matching with children. The charity has also piloted a parent mentoring programme, ParentPlus. As of this year, a ParentPlus programme manager has been appointed to work intensively with parents. The current service to children includes a compulsory home visit by the ParentPlus programme manager, who identifies those most in need. Struggling parents are then offered direct support from Chance UK, either through intensive one-to-one support or in groups, or they are signposted to other agencies where appropriate.

**Friends United Network** (FUN) has provided befrienders for hundreds of vulnerable children from isolated lone-parent families in Camden and Islington over the past 21 years. Many of these friendships have lasted ten to 15 years and look set to last for life. Four out of five children are referred to the network through social services, as a result of family crises that result in children facing urgent emotional needs. Data collected in 2002 showed that 54% of children had subsequently improved school performance and 45% reported better attendance in school. Other benefits include helping children to fulfil their educational and social potential and improving relations between parent and child. Adolescence is a particularly difficult time for children and their parents, and a peak time for disengagement from school. Sustained support from a trusted mentor can be of crucial benefit during this period.

## Work with specific at-risk groups

The charitable sector has a clear role to play in highlighting those over-represented in truancy and exclusion, and helping those from particular groups at risk of truancy or exclusion. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, charities that work with particular groups are not the focus of this report as NPC plans to cover specific groups in future reports. However, certain charities have stood out as achieving results in providing services to high-risk groups.

**Kwesi** is a community-based organisation working with black pupils in the Lozells district of Birmingham. It provides a range of services, both within and outside school. Kwesi's main activities are the provision of mentoring for children identified as at risk. The charity also offers alternative provision for excluded pupils at their Diamond Academy, aimed at reintegrating them into mainstream education and/or preparing them for the transition to post-16 training, education or employment.

**Shaftesbury Homes and Arethusa** work with looked after children in residential homes in three south London boroughs. The charity runs an education programme, supporting the 80 children that it accommodates every year. Only 50% of the children in its homes are attending school. The main aim of the programme is to get children back into mainstream education. Once the charity has secured a school place for a child, the charity works with the school to provide a package of support for the child. In addition to advocacy, the charity provides one-to-one support in school, tuition, revision courses, a homework club and cultural outings. The work is intensive, due to the amount of schooling missed and to the level of needs amongst the children. In addition to the crucial outcome of reducing social exclusion through securing a place in mainstream education for a child,

once in place, the intensive support that the charity provides results in improved attendance and reduced behavioural incidents. It also results in improved attainment. Of those entered for GCSEs, 81% passed one or more exams, compared with 17% for children in care nationally.

## Advising parents

As has been discussed previously, parents play a key role in reducing their child's truancy and exclusion. The government has no clear statutory responsibility in this regard, indeed, the issue of parenting is a sensitive area and one in which charities may be better placed to provide advice and support. As was discussed in Section 1, just as there is no typical truant or excluded pupil, parents are a diverse group who have different needs. The best interventions reflect this, tailoring their services appropriately.

One way of helping parents is during the exclusion process. Supporting parents in understanding the exclusion process minimises the negative impact on the child. The main difficulty of these advice services is that they may not reach those most in need. Their clients are likely to be those who have the time, effort and inclination to fight on behalf of their child. As such, funders can ensure their support goes to those most in need by targeting charities that are trying to reach parents who are particularly in need.

**The Advisory Centre for Education** (ACE) provides a unique service in England and Wales, offering advice on education law and explaining how parents can act as advocates for their own children. In addition to two freephone general helplines, ACE offers two helplines dedicated to exclusions. In 2004, their website received over 130,000 hits and more than 27,000 of their advice packs were downloaded. Certain groups, such as those from ethnic minorities and those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, are less likely to access the helpline and website.[194] ACE is striving to access these groups with its Education Step by Step programme, which trains workers in community groups (as well as education professionals) so that they can then disseminate their knowledge and help in the community where they work.

**IPSEA** provides advice and support to families of children with special educational needs, who represent around two thirds of all excluded children. IPSEA helps parents to understand and navigate the complexities of the exclusions process, with often detailed casework. Advice and support is delivered through a telephone advice line and through more intensive face-to-face support for parents who need it, using four part-time exclusions representatives. Low-income families are specifically targeted, with 50% of those parents advised coming from households with incomes of less than £15,000 per annum. Around 4,500 calls are taken every year, of which around 20% relate to children who are threatened with exclusion, or who have been excluded from school.

Other charities that actively involve parents at the heart of their work have already been mentioned, namely School-Home Support, Chance UK and FSU. Many more charities recognise that engaging parents is essential to improve a child's behaviour or attendance. A recent report investigating early intervention strategies to reduce the risk of crime and antisocial behaviour in later life states that certain tried and tested parenting programmes lead to improvements in children's behaviour, which suggests that poor parental supervision and discipline is a high risk factor.[195] Indeed, earlier research suggests that quality parenting affords protection against further risk factors, such as low socio-economic status. The research found that *'as mothers are given opportunities to acquire further positive parenting skills, levels of economic disadvantage become less important in predicting treatment success or failure.'*[196]

## Alternative provision

Alternative provision usually refers to any education service that replaces mainstream schooling. The use of the term here refers specifically to educational provision provided by charities, not necessarily outside mainstream education, for pupils at risk of exclusion or truancy to those who have been disengaged from education for a long time.

### In-school programmes

Charities can be found running in-school education programmes for pupils at risk of truancy and exclusion. There are a wide variety of after-school clubs that can serve to combat disaffection. These will form part of a future report by NPC. Some after-school clubs provide alternative options at GCSE level, working with children during school time as a significant part of that child's education. Such provision can serve as an incentive for pupils to remain in mainstream school.

**The Prince's Trust xl network** currently operates over one thousand clubs in England and Scotland. The xl club is based within schools and is an alternative option for pupils at Key Stage 4. The clubs have 12–15 members, identified by teachers, and are run by an employee of the school who is trained and supported by the Prince's Trust. Pupils put together a portfolio of work on topics selected by the group, which can lead to an accredited certificate.

> ‘Hell, absolute hell. I mean, it was a real crisis […] I was being rung everyday and I didn't really know what was wrong and it was just worse and worse really.’
>
> Parent

Many excluded pupils continue to fall through gaps in the system. Some of these children are picked up by the charitable sector.

Chasing the funding that a child is entitled to is a major problem for many charities providing alternative education.



**Skill Force** is a nationwide charity, providing accredited vocational training to groups of up to 25 students in the final two years of compulsory schooling. The charity is currently working with over 3,000 14 to 16 year olds across the UK. The programme is offered to all students, from those at risk of exclusion to gifted and talented pupils. The training is integrated into the school timetable, replacing two GCSE options. One team of five instructors—typically former Armed Forces personnel—serve four secondary schools, spending one day a week with each year group in each school. The work is key skills-based, using schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Junior Sports Leaders Awards. The charity aims to reduce truancy, as well as improving self-esteem, confidence and behaviour amongst the young people with whom it works.

### Provision for pupils outside of mainstream education

Despite a clear government responsibility to provide education for excluded pupils, there is a lack of high quality alternative provision. Many excluded children continue to fall through gaps in the system. Some of these children are picked up by the charitable sector.

Guidance on minimum standards in alternative provision for those outside of mainstream schools was only recently issued by the government, which is keen for LEAs and schools to exercise their consumer power when commissioning alternative provision from external providers. The hope is that, in doing

so, they will *'drive up'* the quality of provision.[197] Initiatives such as the EIPs mentioned earlier should improve the range and quality of alternative provision. However, the likelihood of consumer power doing this is dubious. Commissioners, under financial pressure, seem more likely to fund provision on the basis of cost than on the quality of provision. Also, the focus is likely to be on educational outcomes, which can be too narrow a measure for the most disaffected pupils.

In a selection of alternative education projects recently inspected by Ofsted, the quality of the curriculum was judged *'uneven and often poor.'** Ofsted went on to say that '*in the weakest projects, the young people were merely kept out of harm's way with desultory or diversionary activities.'*[198]

NPC spoke to a number of alternative providers who were achieving impressive results, both in terms of breaking down barriers to learning and in educational attainment. These charities experienced varying degrees of success in recovering their costs from schools and LEAs. Shortfalls occur especially where there are unofficial exclusions. Chasing the funding that a child is entitled to is a major problem for many service providers, who are reluctant to turn away a child just because funding is not forthcoming. Alternative provision is much more expensive than keeping a child in mainstream education, due to the low staff-to-pupil ratio. As we have already heard in Section 1, the average cost of a place in a PRU is in the region of £14,000 per person per annum.[199] Many charities deliver services for less than this per pupil. This partly reflects the difficulties they have in accessing funding, and also indicates that charity-run provision may not be able to offer the same standard of facilities.

However, charities are often well-placed to reach out to those children who have been failed by the system. Success in this field is often attributed to pupil relationships with staff, and quality staff (usually with a background in social or youth work as opposed to education) are of key importance in re-engaging children.

Private funding in this area typically supports topping up shortfalls in statutory funding, expansions of programmes to serve new or more disaffected young people, or investments in improvements in the quality of provision. These are all aspects that should be covered by the state under its statutory obligations to fund education for children excluded from school and under its commitment to paying the full cost for that provision. However, in reality this is not always the case.

'All the teachers here listen to you. I don't know why some teachers don't listen. I suppose it depends on the type of teacher but that's what it's like, isn't it?'

Young man, aged 13

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* *The majority of alternative education projects were run by the voluntary sector. Which projects were visited is not published in Ofsted's report.*

Funders must recognise that charities may not have the resources to negotiate contracts, and some charities may enjoy better relations with schools and LEAs than others. Although schools and LEAs have weighted budgets, calculated on the basis of numbers of pupils and the level of need in the intake, how they spend that money is ultimately their decision. As mentioned previously, some LEAs are more progressive than others, while some manage their budgets better. These factors have an impact on alternative provision. The following charities identified were successful (at least in the branches NPC visited) at accessing statutory funding:

**Include** runs a range of services tackling social exclusion across the UK. The charity's Bridge programme works in ten towns across England and Wales with 14 to 16 year olds who are out of education. NPC visited the project in Aylesbury, which is fully paid for by local authorities. The Bridge programme involves full-time education in community buildings, offering the core National Curriculum but also arts and sports-based learning and vocational placements with other charities. Include also runs a primary intervention scheme. This offers a short-term (8–12 weeks) support programme for four to 13 year olds who are experiencing difficulties (one third were facing exclusion in a recent evaluation).

**Community Links** provides a range of services in East London. The charity runs a successful programme called Moving On, which provides full-time education for over 100 secondary school age children per week. The pupils are referred by local schools and the LEA. Community Links works with children who are unlikely to make it back into mainstream education as well as those who are on fixed period exclusions. Community Links also provides support to schools in the form of a transition programme for those identified as needing extra support in the move from primary to secondary school. The charity also has a reintegration programme for ten to 15 year olds whose behaviour is affecting their attainment.

**Nacro**, the crime reduction charity, works with children who have been excluded or who are not attending school across England and Wales. Nacro is developing a standard model for its work with pre-16s. The aim is to reintegrate children into mainstream education wherever possible or, more commonly, to enable them to access post-16 further education, training or employment. NPC spoke with one project in Liverpool, where pupils are referred through the local Youth Offending Team (YOT). The LEA buys 20 places per annum on a full cost recovery basis.

**Cheltenham Community Projects** (CCP) runs a training programme for 13 to 16 year olds who are unsuited to formal education. The young people they accept onto the programme are typically not in any kind of education and have not been for some time. The focus is on breaking down barriers to learning, such as substance abuse problems or homelessness. The Gloucestershire Reintegration Service, which is responsible for the education of children who are out of mainstream schooling, funds six places for those pupils for whom other provision is considered unsuitable (such as the local further education college). The attendance rate in mainstream school of some of the pupils accepted by the project was below 5%. In state-run alternative provision, the attendance rate rose to 20%, but in CCP's Alternative Curriculum project, attendance averages 80%.

Some children are not able to access full-time education, even in special units such as PRUs, due to many years outside of school or severe barriers to learning. Charities that reach out to young people through routes other than schools or other LEA agencies have particular difficulty in accessing statutory funding. These charities are providing an invaluable service in engaging those who have slipped through the web of agencies whose responsibility it is to ensure the well-being and education of young people:

**Fairbridge** has a strong history of accessing difficult-to-reach 13 to 25 year olds, having developed links with over 1,000 local organisations across the UK. Over the past few years, increasing referrals from schools and self-referrals from under-16s have led to the development of a separate programme for 13 to 16 year olds. Following a successful pilot in Edinburgh, Bristol and Teesside, Fairbridge is seeking funding to roll out the model in 14 inner city areas by the end of 2007. Following an individual assessment, young people take part in a ten day Access course, which involves a residential experience. After the Access course, each participant is assigned a development worker to work with them on an ongoing basis to draw up an individual action plan. Young people are able to pick and choose further courses, ranging from music to outdoor pursuits, through which they can gain accredited qualifications. Independent evaluations consistently attribute Fairbridge's success to the committed staff (one fifth of whom are ex-clients), who are able to engage with and motivate young people. There is no limit to the length of intervention, but a recent pilot showed that one third of young people helped by Fairbridge were reintegrated into mainstream education. Fairbridge has developed sophisticated measurement systems to monitor the distance travelled by users, which is being adopted by other charities.

Some children are not able to access full-time education due to many years out of school or severe barriers to learning.

Charities delivering alternative provision are providing an invaluable service in re-engaging children.

**Kids Company** runs two drop-in centres in London, where children aged between eight and 21 with severe emotional, behavioural and social difficulties self-refer or are referred. The charity re-engages young people who are 'missing' from the system. Children accessing the service are typically out of mainstream education. Three quarters have been abused and over half are not living at home. The main aim of the centres is to nurture severely disaffected young people through counselling, practical support and arts-based therapy. Kids Company provides advocacy as children are typically not accessing the services they are entitled to, such as education. There is an educational programme at the centres, which aim to reintegrate pupils wherever possible. The centres currently deal with 330 people every week. The charity also works with children in 21 schools across London in one-to-one or group therapy sessions, using arts-based activities.

The funding situation is especially acute in Northern Ireland. A more extreme need for alternative provision exists because of the levels of deprivation in certain communities. This is combined with the lack of an established network of PRUs to cater for the need. As a result, many communities have taken it upon themselves to set up charitable activities, but the state is not equipped to support these financially in the way that they would be in other parts of the UK. The education sector in Northern Ireland is currently facing a crisis. Two out of the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs, which are broadly equivalent to English LEAs) overspent on allocated budgets in 2003/2004 and 2004/2005. The Belfast ELB was estimated to be in deficit to the tune of £5.6m. At the same time, DENI funds are estimated to be insufficient to maintain the current level of service across all five Boards, which collectively predict a shortfall of £25–30m for 2005/2006.[200] In such circumstances, vulnerable pupils are the first to suffer. Prevention services, pupil support and alternative provision are all likely to have their funding cut. One organisation delivering alternative provision in Northern Ireland stood out and is likely to become a casualty of the difficulties outlined above unless alternative funding is found.

**Extern** works with socially excluded children, adults and communities across Ireland. More than 60% of their expenditure is spent on services for children, young people and their families. These services range from diversion through to intensive high support programmes. One of these projects, Pathways, works with pupils in the final year of school with the aim of providing them with the skills and motivation to access post-16 education, employment or training. The project takes pupils from schools

in deprived areas that have a history of sectarian violence. The project is actively engaged in promoting cultural identity, diversity and tolerance of others.

In Scotland, there seems to be good progress in the provision of alternative education. NPC visited Edinburgh and Glasgow, where there was clear evidence of joined-up working. The rate of permanent exclusions is very low in Scotland, but there is still a need for alternative provision for those who have been temporarily excluded and for those who have become disengaged with formal education. Developments such as the Pupil Inclusion Network (PIN) and initiatives such as GATE (both discussed in Section 2) are extremely positive. Coordination of services can prevent children from falling through the gaps, and enable tailored provision as opposed to children being placed wherever there is space, regardless of their particular needs. Alternative providers are clear that their particular programmes are not suitable for all, and initiatives such as GATE are crucial in responding quickly and effectively to local needs. The following organisation is a member of the scheme:

**Right Track** runs a project entitled Education Initiative in Glasgow, which works with 15 and 16 year old persistent truants. The aim is to re-engage pupils with learning through personal guidance, the provision of core educational skills and a personalised development syllabus. Pupils are also given the opportunity to undertake work experience. The average school attendance rate of users prior to the programme is 20%, while 60% of users have had involvement with social services. The main focus of the programme is on achieving a shift in pupils' attitudes. Pupils report increased confidence and improvements in communication skills, personal relationships, time-keeping and attendance, as well as increased vocational awareness and aspiration. Average attendance on the programme is 90%, and over 75% of pupils gain basic skills certificates in literacy, numeracy and computer skills. Subsequently, 85% of pupils progress to education, employment or training following the course.

There are many charities running various forms of complementary provision (as opposed to 'alternative provision', described here), such as outdoor activities or after-school clubs. These are add-on services that have a wide range of aims, from enabling children to socialise to improving basic skills through informal educational activities. The recent 14-19 curriculum reform report recognises the importance of what it terms 'wider activities.' The charitable sector is well placed to deliver such activities. For children under 16 who are disengaged from mainstream education and at

> ' Do you really think that another school is going to want me? I went to one of the worse schools in the area and got expelled from it. If I got expelled from the worse school in [name of town] do you really think that another school round here is going to want me in their school? I mean, once you're labelled, that's it. '
>
> Young man, aged 15

high risk of social exclusion, these activities can be a successful way of reintegration and, as such, have a strong role to play. A future report by NPC will investigate the role of after-school clubs in increasing pupils' attainment.

## Helping the state

Despite the large number of initiatives launched in recent years, there remains a lack of coordination in helping schools. There is a proliferation of good practice guidelines, but this falls short of creating a consensus in interpretation and implementation. An extract taken from independent research into managed moves illustrates this point:

*'DfES guidance suggests Heads might like to try a managed move as an alternative to permanent exclusion by negotiation between Heads, and one LEA has interpreted this by saying it prefers not to make too many enquiries in case it seems like 'interfering'. Another LEA issued guidance saying that Heads are now obliged to try a managed move before permanently excluding. These two examples illustrate the breadth of interpretation being applied to the DfES guidance, which is about one paragraph in length.'*[201]

Charities have freedom to innovate and some have developed successful models aimed at helping the state to improve the way it tackles truancy and exclusion. Sometimes, as seen in Section 1, school management is the crux of the problem and therefore successful initiatives in this field are important.

All of the charities included as examples in this category offer solutions to the education system. This can take many forms, such as the provision of consultancy and training to individual schools and LEAs, or encouraging government and the media to listen to the voice of the children and families directly involved in order to strike a more even balance in the national debate surrounding truancy and exclusion.

This type of activity offers charities the opportunity to prevent truancy and exclusion without committing staff to prolonged engagement on the ground. As such, NPC believes this to be an excellent, leveraged use of charitable resources. Conversely, there is a heightened risk that outcomes will not be achieved. Given that the charities identified here offer opportunities for achieving a wide impact with few resources, it was disappointing not to find more examples with the aim, the resources and the ability to do so.

Three charities pioneering exciting developments in this area stood out during our research:

**Inaura** encourages the use of managed moves as opposed to exclusions. Inaura works in partnership with LEAs and schools to implement restorative justice conferences and

managed moves where needed. This organisation set out to prove its model of working in three LEAs. Each model was successful in reducing exclusions to extremely low levels. Inaura's next phase of work is to package its model and encourage other LEAs to use it, through writing and delivering training courses for schools and running a national conference promoting managed moves.

**Save the Children** launched a three-year pilot independent education advocacy and mediation project in April 2005, with a focus on those groups of pupils who are over-represented in exclusions. The project will run drop-in surgeries both in and out of school, for primary and secondary school children in urban and rural areas. The charity will provide advice and support, not only on the exclusion process, but also on school disaffection in general. Save the Children is also lobbying government in order to alter legislation on exclusions, so that the child can launch an appeal against an exclusion, rather than the child's parent.



*Photograph supplied by School-Home Support. Taken by Hester Marriott.*

**Advisory Centre for Education** (ACE), in addition to its direct advice services for parents described above, has traditionally functioned as a watchdog on education policy. The charity lobbies government on its exclusions and SEN policy. ACE also aims to influence organisations such as the media to report on exclusions in a more balanced manner. Action taken by the charity in 2004 included briefing and lobbying parliament on the revised Exclusion Regulations, pointing out a major flaw in a proposed revision to exclusions guidance that has now been corrected, and raising with the DfES conflicts and problems in the law on exclusions appeals and disability discrimination. The charity is currently in talks with the Children's Commissioner regarding the absence of children's and parent's voices in the debate on exclusions.

'[Teachers and professionals] don't even listen to the parents, so they are not going to listen to the children.'

Parent

## Charities rely on the support of private funders.

As mentioned previously, it is disturbing that behaviour management constitutes such a small part of the teacher training process. Effective behaviour management in the classroom is of key importance in reducing disaffection. A key recommendation of Ofsted's *Managing Challenging Behaviour* was that LEAs should offer teaching staff some training in the application of behaviour management strategies. NPC identified one charity offering a unique solution:

**The Learning Challenge** (TLC) aims to tackle disaffection by providing a range of services to schools to help them manage poor behaviour. The charity has pioneered an extremely effective model of group therapy. It provides training for staff in schools in delivering short courses of group skills work with children, using a model proven to have long-term benefits. The service is open to all schools across five LEAs in the north east of England. The charity also delivers a module of school-based initial teacher training in one local area, with the hope that this will spread to other regional training programmes.

### Summary: the options for private funding

This section has outlined four main areas of charitable activity which are responding to the need identified in Section 1, the areas for improvement detailed in Section 2, and which are in need of private funding.

**Social support**: Given the wide range of risk factors for truancy and exclusion, recognition of these and early intervention are crucial in preventing problems from mounting and becoming entrenched. Many children have social, emotional and behavioural needs. Attention to these needs can prevent problems from spiralling. There are various models achieving real success in this area, based in schools or in the community. Many organisations engage with parents, who are often of key importance in achieving change.

**Advising parents**: Parents are crucially important in this field. In addition to the work performed by charities providing social support, there are charities that advise and support parents in negotiating the complex education system. Certain social groups are over-represented in rates of truancy and exclusion. Parents from these groups are in additional need of support to enable them to act as advocates for their children.

**Alternative provision**: There are a variety of charities delivering educational services to pupils, either in schools to pupils at risk, or outside schools to those who are out of

mainstream education. In the latter case, children and young people often have significant barriers to learning that require support. Given the government's responsibility to provide appropriate education for all children up to the age of 16, charities should fully recover their costs from schools and LEAs. However, this is often not the case, and private funding is often used to make up the shortfall.

**Helping the state**: Some charities are offering solutions to schools, LEAs and government to help improve the way the education system responds to truancy and exclusion. These range from delivering consultancy and training to providing a platform for young people who are directly affected, in order to help balance the debate. As discussed in Section 2, there remains a significant need for this kind of work and it was therefore disappointing not to find more charities active in this field.

The following section returns to these four areas of activity and analyses the outcomes available to funders from supporting charities in each area.

# Outcomes

**Outcomes, the desired achievements of charitable activity, are the subject of this section. Here we articulate to funders the potential consequences of funding each of the interventions described in Section 3. We discuss the general outcomes of charities working in each intervention, as well as giving examples of the measured outcomes achieved by specific charities we have analysed. From our research and analysis, we are confident that many of the charities we recommend play an important role with a high probability of achieving the outcomes described here.**

## Introduction to outcome analysis

All charitable activity is aimed at achieving outcomes, whether or not these are clearly articulated. Outcomes are distinct from the outputs of charities. An output is the activity of the charity itself, for example, the education classes provided to a number of young people. The outcomes are the educational attainments and qualifications resulting from these classes. Further outcomes can result, such as greater engagement with school or a reduction in antisocial behaviour. In the field of truancy and exclusion, an output might be counselling, the interim outcome increased confidence and the final outcome improved attendance. Similarly, an output might be a restorative justice session following an incident, the desired outcomes from which are reconciliation and the prevention of an exclusion.

Considering outcomes is beneficial for both charities and funders. For charities, attempting to define and measure outcomes enables them to develop their services in order to achieve the greatest impact. For funders, they give a useful indication of potential returns from their funding. Describing outcomes is difficult and measuring them is even more so, especially given that many charities do not have the resources to do so. However, grappling with this area is a useful exercise, because some understanding of what constitutes success is better than none. The discussion here is best regarded as indicative and illustrative rather than definitive, because of these difficulties.

In the absence of outcomes measurement, charities may give evidence of their outputs. These are easier to compile, but do not indicate effectiveness as well as outcomes.

For example, an organisation working with young people excluded from school may record the number of children it works with and the type of provision on offer. It may, however, have difficulty measuring the extent to which it engages children's interest through that provision. A useful indication of success in a charity's work could be the grades that the pupils have achieved in their exams. However, this depends on how engaged the young person was prior to joining a programme, or when they began the programme. Establishing the baseline is often fraught with difficulty. Another complication arises because charities are frequently seeking outcomes beyond a focus solely on education, which can be a narrow measure of success for some of the children accessing such provision.

The charitable activities discussed so far all contain elements of the following, which are indicators of good practice in working with vulnerable children:

- The availability of one-to-one or similarly intensive quality support, which may be provided in the long term. Many young people in this area have had bad experiences, whether at home or in school, and have greater needs than their peers. Quality staff are crucial to the success of programmes working with disaffected pupils.

- Open to users who have a diverse range of needs. The many risk factors associated with truancy and exclusion could each be tackled separately. However, charities can have the greatest impact when they are able to respond to a variety of issues.

- Young people are helped where possible to remain in mainstream education. Where this is not appropriate, the focus is on re-engaging young people, preferably leading to accessing further education, employment or training.

- Collaboration with a range of agencies, such as schools, LEAs, social services and other charities. Impact is likely to be greater when the various agencies that have contact with an individual child or family are working together.

Considering outcomes is beneficial for both charities and funders. For funders, they give a useful indication of potential returns from their funding.

Charities frequently seek outcomes beyond a focus solely on education, which can be a narrow measure of success.

**The ultimate aim of activities in this field is to improve children's personal, social and life chances.**

## Outcomes of interventions

In this section, we give an indication of the outcomes that private funders could expect to achieve by supporting each of the four primary interventions that NPC has identified, as shown in Figure 8. Each intervention offers a different route to success and differing prospects for measuring outcomes.

We give an estimate of the cost per user for each charity. Although charities are listed together according to similar types of intervention, charities working in the area should not be expected to have similar costs. Provision differs in each instance for a variety of reasons, such as geography, the precise nature of the intervention and the scale of needs of the young people with whom the charity is working. However, the cost per user given here provides a useful reference point for individual charities.

In defining and measuring outcomes, it is possible to give an indication of 'success' rates. Measures of success depend on available data, and, as noted above, some charities are more able than others to articulate and record their successes. Equally, some charities are dealing with more difficult children than others, and therefore, what constitutes success differs from one case to another. It is also important to bear in mind that there are many factors in both individual children's lives and in whole school environments that affect outcomes. Notwithstanding these caveats, it is useful to articulate success rates. Where possible, NPC estimates a cost per successful intervention, which is intended as an indication of potential outcomes rather than as a definitive guide.

As Figure 8 shows, the ultimate aim of activities in this field is to improve children's personal, social and life chances. This is a long-term outcome that is intangible and difficult to attribute to any one cause. Reducing the rates of truancy and exclusions is a more measurable outcome, and many charities in this field may focus on this objective. However, often charities who contribute to reducing truancy and exclusions actually have more immediate outcomes they are striving to achieve. For some, engaging young people in education is a key outcome, and for others, reducing the social difficulties children face is the aim. The various outcomes that charities achieve and measure are described in the following.

### Social support

A common measurement tool used by charities in this field is the Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).[202] This is a standard questionnaire that assesses emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer relationship problems and behaviour. Scores for individual children may then be compared to scores for others in the school and across the population as a whole, in order to understand the need and prioritise interventions. To assess whether this type of activity is effective in preventing truancy and exclusion, ideally, an assessment would need to be undertaken some time after the intervention had taken place, in order to test the longevity of the intervention's outcomes. In reality, it is rare that charities have the resources to track long-term outcomes. There are few academic studies on the long-term impact of such interventions. Nonetheless, the immediate change brought about in a child's well-being is ample justification for the intervention. In addition, it is likely that tackling the root causes of a child's difficulties will lead to a lasting improvement in behaviour and attendance. In reality, activities of this kind may not be explicitly geared towards reducing truancy and exclusion, and may benefit a larger number of children as a result.

Figure 8: NPC's identified interventions and their outcomes
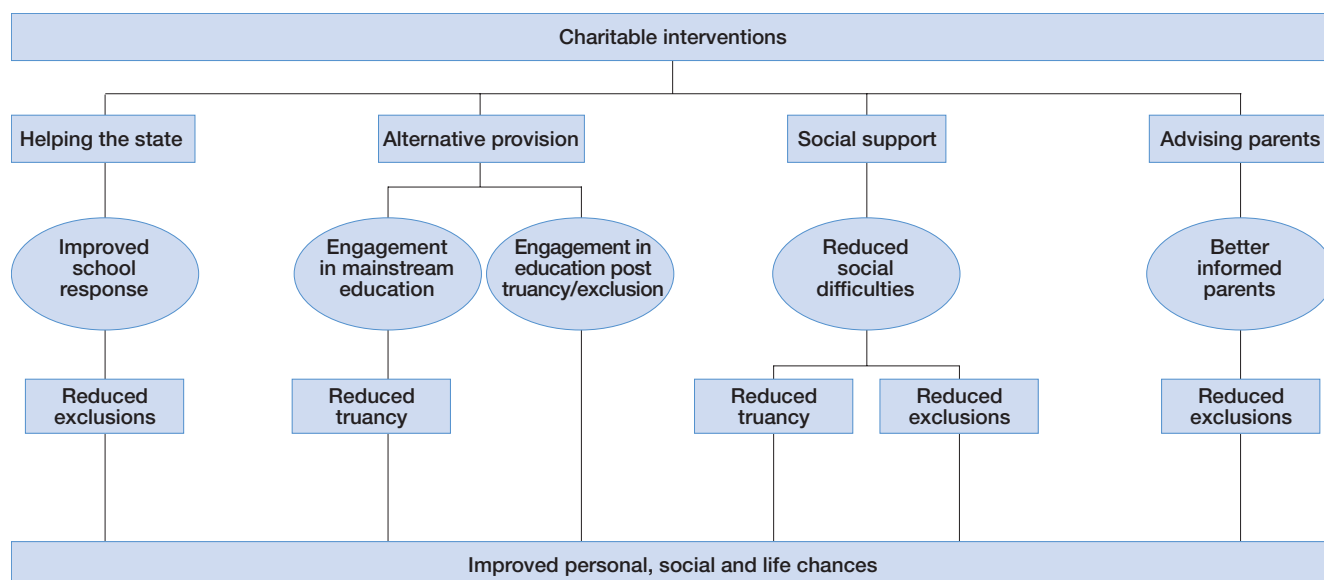
The Place2Be's provision of emotional and therapeutic support increases children's self-esteem and 'coping' skills and helps them communicate more effectively. The charity uses volunteer counsellors, which reduces the cost of service delivery. Dividing the total income of £2.5m amongst the 21,500 children who directly accessed the service last year gives a cost of £115 per user. The majority of these children accessed the less intensive Place2Talk service. The cost for the more intensive group and one-to-one work is likely to be higher. The change in children referred to these services is monitored using the SDQ, and data collected shows that for 60% of children there is an improvement in score before and after counselling, which indicates that children are better able to cope with issues that are challenging their well-being, which may result in reduced risk of truancy and exclusion. In practice, the charity reaches a larger number of people (including parents and educational professionals). Outcomes for parents include a better understanding of their children, improved parenting skills and increased confidence. Schools have also noted improved relations with parents as a result of the sessions. The reduction in challenging behaviour means that classrooms are more conducive to learning. Staff report improved morale, increased retention and reduced stress. This type of work in schools is also felt to reduce the likelihood of inappropriate referals to local authority services where capacity is already limited.

Reducing strain on schools is a valuable outcome of activities of this type. Support workers save senior management time, improving the allocation of resources within schools. A study of school-based support funded by the Home Office noted:

*'Many benefits—such as improving the quality of home-school liaison or relieving staff of the stress caused by pupils' challenging behaviour—are impossible to quantify […] a support worker might save up to six hours of senior management personnel's time per week and up to 14 hours for other teachers. Given that social work pay scales are considerably less than those of teachers (and about half that of senior management), there are therefore significant potential savings in staff costs.'* [203]

Providing practical support to students can directly prevent exclusions, as several studies have shown. The study quoted from above was of a scheme aimed at reducing exclusion through one-to-one support and multi-agency working. It showed that 25% of permanent exclusions were saved across schools with support workers. Each home-school support worker was allocated 10–20 students with challenging behaviours.

*'Pupils found support workers helped them to avert exclusion, supported them through fixed-term exclusions and helped them to re-integrate into school […] Other benefits cited included: preventing confrontational situations in lessons from escalating; assistance with schoolwork; improving relationships between them and their parents; and preventing bullying.'* [204]

The report concluded that, although working to counteract truancy was not in the support workers' job description, this was achieved *'both as a result of increased home-school communication with families and through direct intervention.'* [205]

**School-Home Support** provides practical and emotional support for children and their families, from one-to-one counselling to simple initiatives such as providing alarm clocks to families whose children have attendance problems. Outcomes vary, as school-home support workers are flexible in their approach to tackling problems. The primary aims of each support worker are decided in response to the individual school's needs. Frequently, school attendance is improved by the following factors: the provision of support to individual children; increased parental involvement; resolving problems facing families and improving home-school relations; and improved attendance monitoring systems and the degree to which the schools implement early intervention strategies. Another key outcome is improving the level of help families receive from statutory sources, as support workers are instrumental in bringing together education, health and social services staff. In the most recent academic year, School-Home Support worked with over 13,700 families, from phone calls to face-to-face meetings. Total expenditure was £2.9m, which suggests a cost per family of around £210. This is modest, given that the identification of underlying causes of distress and resolution of the issues may require considerable patience and time spent building relationships both with pupils and parents.

Working with parents can be challenging. As explained in Section 1, children from deprived backgrounds and with difficulties in the home are over-represented in truancy and exclusions rates. The independence of charities is frequently cited as helping establish good relations with parents, who may have had poor previous experiences with social services or other public sector agencies. Nonetheless, establishing trust takes time and effort, which accounts for the increased costs of organisations working with parents. Equally, even where parents are keen to participate, in some cases getting them to accept their responsibilities regarding the attendance and behaviour of their children can be tough. In addition, some communities face greater difficulties and these are all too evident in the schools. Very intensive work is needed with some families. In some areas, this work is taken on by charities.

The Place2Be's emotional and therapeutic support leads to benefits for individual children, their parents and teachers.

A key outcome of School-Home Support's work is improving the level of help families receive from statutory sources.

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**FSU identifies the root causes of children's school difficulties, such as substance abuse in the home, and works directly with families and other agencies to create a sustainable change in quality of life.**

**Chance UK's mentors help children to change behaviour and develop new skills, which act as protective factors.**

**FSU Scotland**'s Restalrig and Hamilton projects are pilot projects that, in the first year, each took referrals of around 20 families from five schools. Children are referred for a variety of problems including poor school attendance, bullying, isolation, difficulty with school work, challenging behaviour and transition issues. Given that one case worker supports five schools, covering hundreds of children, in selecting the 20 or so families they can work with in the year they are necessarily dealing with the most pressing and needy cases. FSU identifies the root causes of problems, such as substance abuse in the home, and works directly with the families and other agencies to create a sustainable change in quality of life. The case worker provides intensive support, through one-to-one meetings with the child and the parents, both in and out of school, and group sessions for parents and children. Detailed case notes are compiled for each child and family, indicating individual improvements in attendance and behaviour. In one case, attendance went from 50% to 80%. Each project currently costs in the region of £46,000. In the first year (2003/2004), the Restalrig project worked intensively with 16 families, which gives a cost per family of £2,900.

There are charitable activities with an impact on truancy and exclusion that work exclusively in the community. Given that truancy and exclusion rates are measured by individual schools, it is harder for charities working with children outside schools to measure rates of truancy and exclusion. Even DfES-backed government initiatives working in the community found it difficult to access such data from participating schools, as seen in the case of the YIP in Section 2. In addition, many community-based programmes are not focused on reducing rates of truancy and exclusion, but rather on improving the quality of life of individual children. However, through tackling the types of risk factors identified in Section 1, or helping children to deal with those risk factors, anecdotal evidence demonstrates that rates are reduced. Despite using volunteers to work with children, the costs of these programmes are high given the intensive and sensitive nature of one-to-one work in the community. Costs typically include recruitment, selection, training and supervision of volunteers.

**Chance UK** measures its outcomes using the SDQ, which gauges the level of behavioural difficulties. The charity measures children's scores on entry and at exit of the year-long programme. Figures show an improvement in scores for 90% of pupils. An improvement of ten points or more is registered in 70% of cases. This change is achieved through the children setting goals for the year with the help of their mentor. These are focused on changing behaviour and developing new skills, which can work as protective factors. The goals are broken down into manageable steps, which are achieved in 92% of cases. Annual turnover of £400,000 indicates a cost per child of £4,900. A cost per successful intervention, based on a drop in SDQ score, is estimated to be £5,400. However, in addition, the charity is working with parents of mentors and has increased its pool of volunteers through successful advertising, enabling Chance UK to mentor more children. As such, the number of beneficiaries is likely to double in the next year without greatly increasing expenditure, which will lower the cost of intervention.

**FUN** is focused on providing lasting and meaningful relationships for children experiencing difficulties that range from school problems to domestic factors, to prevent problems spiralling. Outcomes differ from child to child. They include improvements in attitude towards school, increase in self-esteem, improvements in peer and family relationships, awareness of consequences of own actions, ability to express own feelings and empathy for others. These 'soft' outcomes lead to 'hard' outcomes. The mentor, parent and child complete evaluation forms at regular intervals, which indicate that attendance increased in 45% of cases. Total turnover of FUN in 2004 was £200,000. In the same year, there were 84 matches between child and mentor. This gives a cost per match of £2,500 per child per annum. As outcomes are assessed on an individual basis, a universal measure of success is more problematic in this case. A recent analysis of 30 matches showed that 70% of matches were moderately to highly successful, meaning that the children benefited from a positive role model and reported significant sustained benefits in self-esteem, social skills and school attendance and attainment. Based on this success rate, a cost per success is estimated to be around £3,500 per child per annum.



*Photograph supplied by Chance UK.*

## Advising parents

Advising parents is ultimately about helping children to avoid truancy and exclusion, or to deal with these problems more effectively, although this is achieved through the more immediate outcome of creating better-informed parents. This is of benefit in a number of ways, including:

- understanding of issues, laws and remedies;

- increased parental awareness of their rights and increased ability and confidence to assert those rights;

- empathy in a tense situation and reduced family stress.

Ultimately, the aim is that the child's education is successfully continued, once the immediate problems have been resolved.

**ACE** provides accurate and up-to-date information and advice on education policy for parents. ACE follows up a sample of calls for feedback, which shows that ACE's advice helps parents to understand their specific problems better. This can lead to improved and more equal communication with the school, as well as challenges to discrimination on the grounds of disability or ethnic origin. Parents report that they are better prepared to present their case and they know how to engage with the education system more effectively where complex needs arise. Over three quarters of callers take further action following their call to ACE. The annual income of ACE is £550,000, while nearly 6,000 callers accessed the helplines in 2004. This gives a cost per caller of £90. In reality, the knowledge of ACE is disseminated much more widely. As noted earlier, the website received over 130,000 hits, and thousands of advice packs were sent out to both families and education professionals. In addition, the charity trained 90 people in 2003/2004 and provided training updates and support to an additional 350 people. This ensures the charity reaches more families.

When monitoring the impact of advice services, outputs are frequently used as they are easier to monitor than outcomes. Detailed logging from one helpline studied by NPC suggested that 30–40% of callers were able to achieve better educational opportunities for their children as a result of the assistance, although no data is available on the number of exclusions or truancies that may have been averted. Nevertheless, using a definition of success as better education, this would suggest a cost per successful intervention in the range of £230–300.[206]

## Alternative provision

The aims of alternative provision are similar to those of the education sector as a whole, ie, engaging young people in learning. Outcomes for alternative provision are in fact more varied and more complicated, due to the disaffection and the increased challenges posed by the young people involved.

Charities providing alternative options at GCSE work hard to keep children at risk of truancy and exclusion engaged in education. The desired outcome of this work is increasing the engagement of those young people. Being engaged in education clearly leads to a reduction in truancy and in behaviours likely to result in exclusion. However, engagement is difficult to measure. Some charities are working with more disaffected children than others. Levels of disaffection vary from child to child, even within individual projects. As such, the best projects set and measure outcomes for individual children, based on their aptitude and expectations on entering the intervention. What counts as success therefore differs from child to child.

For young people still in mainstream education, full attendance and application to the course and to their other studies would be the desirable and achievable outcome.

**Prince's Trust xl clubs** are evaluated each year through students self-reporting their occupational intentions, personal and skill development, as well as their life and goal satisfaction. The latest data shows that 72% of pupils attending xl clubs were aiming to progress to further education or post-16 training. Each xl club costs £10,000 over the two year course, half of which is typically provided by the school. Each course works with 12–15 pupils, and so the cost per child is, at the most, £830. As yet, there is only anecdotal evidence with regards to reduced exclusions and increased attendance. More than 80% of xl club advisers believe that the clubs have a large impact on school attendance.

Re-engaging pupils who are out of mainstream schooling with education and offering them a path to employment and training post-16 provides these children with increased life opportunities. Children who are disengaged from education are at greater risk of social exclusion, substance abuse and criminality. Keeping these pupils in education and training provides them with stability, protects them in the short term, and offers them greater opportunities in the long-term.

The 'soft' outcomes achieved by FUN lead to 'hard' outcomes—45% of children improve their attendance.

ACE's advice helps parents to understand the problems they are going through better.

82% of young people on Extern's Pathways course went on to further education, training or employment.

In alternative provision for excluded children, re-engaging in learning and improving behaviour such that these pupils can eventually return to a mainstream school might be an appropriate goal. Increasing attendance will be an appropriate aim for some children, although equating success solely with attendance rates can be deceptive, as users may have multiple problems that legitimately prevent their attendance. The best charities in this field again understand and articulate expected outcomes for individual children and measure progress towards those outcomes.

**Community Links' Moving On programme** works with over 100 excluded secondary school pupils. The cost per pupil is on average £6,500. Attendance rates are monitored weekly. On average, pupils have a 96% attendance rate and only 5% of pupils do not complete the course. Ninety-six per cent of pupils leave the project with at least four GCSE passes.

Poor experience in mainstream schooling may mean a pupil is unlikely ever to return to the school setting. Alternatively, the age and record of a pupil may mean that mainstream schools refuse admission.

**Cheltenham Community Projects** (CCP) works with pupils experiencing particularly acute problems. Students are referred by the Gloucestershire Reintegration Service, which places with CCP pupils who are not suited to other alternative provision. Success is difficult to measure with this user group, given their high levels of social exclusion. The first priority of CCP is to ensure pupils' basic needs are met, such as dealing with housing or substance abuse issues. However, CCP is successful in engaging young people, which is the first step to helping them. Attendance rates for their pupils are typically around 20% in schools, while at the last data collection average attendance on the CCP programme was 80%. Three users progressed into mainstream education (with ongoing support from CCP) and two had applied to study at the further education college. CCP receive £6,500 per placement per annum from the Gloucestershire Reintegration Service for this service.

**Extern** currently works with 33 pupils, at a cost per head of £9,500. Average attendance for users before joining the programme is 64%, but, once on the programme, average attendance levels were 82% last year. An analysis of attendance records for last year's intake shows that 70% stayed the course and improved attendance. A greater proportion, 82%, went on to education, training or employment. Using this as a success rate indicates a cost per user of just under £12,000.

90% of pupils on Community Links' Moving On programme leave the project with at least 4 GCSEs.

## Helping the state

Charities in this category vary from those training school and LEA staff in how to handle disruptive pupils, to others advocating policy and practice changes to reduce the incidence and problems of truancy and exclusions.

All of the charities that stood out in this field aim to improve the way the education sector responds to children at risk of truancy and exclusion. The immediate outcome these charities are working towards is an improved school or LEA response to problems and difficulties. This is extremely difficult to measure, but rates of attendance or exclusions may act as an imperfect proxy for this number. For example, better handling of a possible exclusion by the school is a positive outcome, even if the child is then excluded. Better handling of the situation leads to improved relationships, removing some of the stress and stigma attached to exclusion and increasing the chance that the exclusion will be for a fixed period rather than becoming permanent, as well as the chance that the child may return to the school once the exclusion is over.

One other outcome of work in this field, and of preventative programmes in general, is a reduction in pressure on alternative provision. This will allow pupils with more severe needs better access to alternative provision.

Given the differing nature of this intervention, it is difficult to give meaningful unit costs. Below is an indication of costs of a selection of individual organisations:

**Inaura**'s work with schools and LEAs has reduced exclusions through helping schools to resolve conflicts through the use of restorative justice and to use managed moves as an alternative when this proves ineffective. Over the period that Inaura worked in Slough, fixed period exclusions across the authority were reduced by around 75% (by approximately 170 incidences per annum) and permanent exclusions were reduced by 86% (by 65 exclusions per annum). Inaura's income for the project was £30,000. The number of permanent and fixed period exclusions saved in that period was 235, which indicates a cost per exclusion saved of just £130.

**Save the Children**'s Independent Education Advocacy and Mediation Project aims to provide face-to-face independent, confidential advice and support to five to 16 year olds who are at risk of disengagement, or who have become disengaged from school. The charity estimates it will work with 900 children over the next three years. The total cost of the project is £800,000, and as such a cost per user equates to £890. The outcomes envisaged for the young people are: enhanced

educational opportunities; an improvement in accessing prevention and support services; and better relations between pupils and the statutory service providers. It is likely that making pupils aware of their rights and giving them information to empower them to make decisions should reduce the instance of unofficial exclusions. Although this is a pilot project of limited duration, the scheme could have a considerable impact and the findings will be of use at a national level.

**The Learning Challenge** (TLC) uses a method proven to improve behaviour. An independent evaluation was conducted in which 122 11 year olds displaying emotional and behavioural difficulties were randomly allocated to drama group therapy (TLC's pioneered method), a curriculum studies group or a control group for one hour a week over 12 weeks. Results showed significant effects associated with both the curriculum studies and drama groups, but teacher reports showed a clear advantage of group therapy over both the control and curriculum studies group.

These effects were sustained over a year following the intervention, with change most apparent in those displaying more problematic behaviour. TLC offers an evaluation component as an integral part of its services to schools. Pupils are assessed using the SDQ before and after the short therapy course, and the attendance and number of behavioural incidents is monitored. A year-long programme in one school costs around £20,000. This includes on-site training and supervision of 15 staff in delivering group therapy. The teachers trained are supervised in delivering the group therapy in teams of two. Training 15 teachers could therefore directly benefit 168 children per annum, with teachers working with a new group of eight students each term. Therefore the cost per pupil is extremely low, at only £120 per child. Data available as a result of work in one secondary school demonstrates an average success rate for improving attendance of 63%. Behavioural incidents were reduced in 90% of cases. Using these figures, a cost per success can be estimated to be, at most, £190.

Inaura's work helped to significantly reduce exclusions at a cost per exclusion saved of just £130.



*Photograph supplied by Chance UK.*

TLC's work improved attendance in 63% of cases and behavioural incidents were reduced in 90% of cases, at a cost of £120 per student.

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## Summary table of outcomes

A summary of activities, costs and key outcomes of the type of activities described so far are summarised in Table 2. This is intended as an illustration, one which provides an overview for funders interested in creating real change for children. As we have seen so far, many of the key outcomes listed here result in improved attendance, behaviour and attainment, whether at whole school or individual level. Few of the benefits of these activities are exclusively felt at one 'level'. For example, a support network within a school may not only benefit a child who is experiencing problems, but also fellow pupils, teachers, the child's family and so on.

**Table 2: Summary of activities, costs and key outcomes of charitable activities in this field**

| Description | | Indication of cost per child/young person | Key outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Social support | Emotional health | £115 per annum | Improved school environment <br><br> Improved well-being of teachers and pupils <br><br> Increased behaviour and attainment at whole-school level <br><br> Better behaviour, emotional well-being and peer relations amongst individual pupils |
| | Support networks within school | £210-£2,900 per annum (depending on intensity of need and level of work with parents outside of school) | Improved well-being for individual children experiencing difficulties <br><br> Improved school response to at-risk children <br><br> Improved relationship between school and parents <br><br> Identification and resolution of difficulties in the home |
| | Community-based support | £2,500-£4,900 per annum (depending on length of programme and level of disaffection) | Development of new skills for children which work as protective factors <br><br> Provision of appropriate role model for children <br><br> Improved relationship between parent and child and between child and peers <br><br> Improved behaviour, attendance and attainment at individual level |
| Advising parents | Advice on education policy to professionals and parents | £90 per call to helpline | Increased understanding of education system <br><br> Increased awareness of rights and the ability and confidence to assert those rights <br><br> Improved ability for parents to act as advocate for their children <br><br> Improved education for children |
| Alternative provision | In-school programmes | £830 per annum | Increased motivation and engagement in school <br><br> Improved self-esteem, confidence and behaviour amongst individuals <br><br> Improved attendance and attainment |
| | Provision for pupils outside of mainstream education | £6,500-9,500 per annum (depending on facilities on offer; level of need amongst pupils and geography) | Provision of education and life skills <br><br> Reduction in barriers to learning (ie, housing or substance misuse issues) <br><br> Reduced social exclusion |
| Helping the state | Providing solutions to truancy and exclusion at a national level | £130-£890 per annum (depending on service offered) | Improved response on the part of the education system to at-risk pupils <br><br> Offering a greater voice to truanting and excluded children and their parents |

## Summary

This section has given an indication of outcomes and costs in each of the four main areas of charitable activity, as identified by NPC. Each area offers significant opportunities for private funders to support those children at risk of truancy and exclusion, and each has different risks, costs and outcomes.

There are several important points to remember when looking at outcomes:

- Charities working in similar areas of activity, eg, alternative provision, should not necessarily be expected to have similar costs. Provision differs in each instance, for a variety of reasons, such as geography and nature of the intervention.

- Measures of success depend on the data available and some charities are more able than others to articulate their success.

- Some charities are dealing with more vulnerable children than others and therefore what constitutes success may differ from one case to another.

Nonetheless, looking at outcomes and costs of different activities is a useful activity. This section has given an indication of what outcomes funders can expect from charitable activity in this field and the cost of different types of activities. NPC has estimated an indication of unit costs and costs per successful intervention where possible for a variety of charities in each area of activity. As a result we can see that:

- **Social support** can achieve real and lasting change for vulnerable young people and their families. Costs and outcomes vary, depending on the model used and the level of problems the child is facing.

- **Advising parents** can improve a child's access to education. Quantifying outcomes in this area is difficult given the nature of the work, but reported results range from reducing stress levels to parents becoming better advocates for their children.

- **Alternative provision** is the most costly form of charitable activity in this field. This is because the charity is working full-time with the pupils who typically have a high level of need.

- **Helping the state** has the potential to have a significant impact at a small unit cost.

Few of the benefits of these activities are exclusively felt at one 'level'.

This section has shown that the outcomes resulting from these charitable activities in this field are manifold. The various outcomes identified lead to improvements at many different levels: in the lives of individual children; in the lives of their families; for teachers and other pupils; for schools and other public sector agencies; and, ultimately, for society. Combating the problems and behaviours associated with truancy and exclusion, and improving the way the education system responds to those problems, can result in fewer people socially excluded in the long term which reduces the burden on social services, the police, the health service, and the criminal justice system. Charities working in this area can help children and young people to achieve their true academic and social potential, often in the face of considerable adversity, which is of immeasurable long-term benefit.

Combating the problems and behaviours associated with truancy and exclusion can result in fewer young people socially excluded in the long term.

# Conclusion and recommendations 5

**This section draws together themes and conclusions from the report to provide a conclusion and an example set of charity recommendations as to how funders might ensure their funding has the maximum impact.**

Despite government commitment, major difficulties remain and there exists a significant need for the continued intervention of charities.

## Conclusion

Tens of thousands of children and young people under the age of 16 are becoming disengaged from the education system each year. There are a large number of reasons why pupils may not attend school or why they may behave poorly when in school, related to home, peer, school and personal factors. The distinction between cause and effect is often blurred. Pinpointing the exact reason behind a pupil's challenging behaviour and/or truancy can be difficult. The root of the problems may lie outside the school, but how schools respond to pupils is crucial in both preventing such behaviour from arising in the first place and preventing problems from escalating if they do occur. When problems do escalate, and young people become disengaged from the education system, they find themselves on the margins of society, where their social, emotional and physical well-being is threatened.

Despite a plethora of initiatives and over £1bn in investment, national rates of truancy and exclusion have not improved. Change has been hampered by a number of factors, ranging from the failure of individual schools to implement effective discipline policies and respond adequately to the needs of their pupils through to continued pressure on schools to improve attainment, to be inclusive and to meet the needs of all pupils and staff. In addition, there is a lack of appropriate provision for those pupils who have been permanently excluded or are persistent truants which results in thousands completely dropping out of the system.

There is some hope, however. Government remains committed to tackling truancy and exclusion, and there are a number of schemes ranging from early intervention through to crackdowns at the tail end of the problem, some of which are showing early signs of promise. Nonetheless, many major difficulties remain and there exists a significant need for the continued intervention of charities in this field. NPC has identified four main areas of charitable activity which are responding both directly to the need which exists to support these young people and to the failings of the public sector to solve the problems. The four areas are:

- **Social support**: Charities have been instrumental in recognising the factors which can lead children to truant or be excluded, and the increased burden on public sector workers (ie, teachers and social workers). They are intervening early on, both in schools and in the community. This is resulting in real and lasting change for vulnerable young people and their families. Activities in this area range from one-to-one intensive support for vulnerable young people through to working with school staff on how to improve the whole school environment, thereby reducing rates of truancy and exclusion. Charitable activities in this field also work closely with public sector workers, and can improve multi-agency working and therefore the well-being of many more children.

- **Advising parents**: Parents are of crucial importance when it comes to tackling truancy and exclusion. Many of the charities engaged in social support activities actively involve parents in their services and run separate activities for parents experiencing difficulties. In addition to this work, there are charities that advise and support parents, via the use of helplines and training, in negotiating the complex education system. This not only provides empathy in an often stressful situation, but enables parents to act as advocates for their children.

- **Alternative provision**: There are a variety of charities delivering educational services direct to pupils. This may be in schools, acting as a hook for pupils to remain engaged, or outside of mainstream schools for those who are already permanently excluded or persistently truanting. In the extreme, children and young people outside of mainstream schooling may have significant barriers to learning that require intensive support, such as help with substance abuse or housing difficulties. Charities in this field are providing a service by seeking to engage young people who are on the margins of society.

- **Helping the state**: Some charities are offering solutions to schools, LEAs and government to improve the way the education system responds to truancy and exclusion. A variety of activities fall in this category, from delivering training to LEAs to attempting to include the voice of those young people directly affected in the national debate on truancy and exclusion. Typically, charities in this category can have a significant impact at a small cost.

The case for reducing the rates of both truancy and exclusion is compelling. Truancy and exclusion are symptoms of more deep-seated problems, both in individuals and in the education system. Although there will always be instances of truancy and exclusion, there is significant scope for change. Many of the charities here are working with individual children and young people to create significant and lasting change. They are also working with the families of those young people, the teachers of those young people, and the LEAs and government bodies who have the potential to create real change at an institutional level. Achieving change at these various levels is extremely desirable, as it results not only in greater well-being for the children, their families, their fellow pupils, and their teachers but in long-term benefits for society. Truancy and exclusion too often result in social exclusion, and at a premature age, which is costly to the state. Funding the charities which are identified in this report can decrease the number of children and young people who are becoming disengaged from the education system each year and, ultimately, from society. It can also enable children and young people to achieve their true academic and social potential, often in the face of considerable adversity, which is of immeasurable long-term benefit.

## Recommendations

NPC has identified a range of charities working in each of these areas and has a selection of detailed reports on individual charities that require additional funding. A sample of these charities with a summary explanation, bringing together information provided in Sections 3 and 4, is given here. Private funding is needed across the range, from small local charities delivering innovative solutions directly to children and their families, to charities with the aim, resources and ability to influence government policy.

### The Place2Be

The Place2Be was set up in 1994 and is now working in 92 primary schools in nine 'hubs' (five London boroughs, Medway, Nottingham, Durham and Edinburgh). The charity provides emotional and therapeutic support through the use of teams of paid clinicians and volunteer counsellors placed in schools. Around 70% of children in these schools use the service in one form or another. The charity provides various services, including:

- Place2Talk is a drop-in service open to all pupils, where children can talk about whatever is worrying them. Common topics include relationships, bereavement and learning disabilities. Around half of users self-refer to the scheme. Around one in five children are then referred to more specialist, therapeutic services. Group work is focused on specific themes, such as transition from primary to secondary school, a source of concern for many children. For more intense needs, one-to-one therapy is provided.

- A Place for Parents offers one-to-one therapy or group parenting skills sessions for parents experiencing difficulties. Over 2,000 hours were spent working with parents in 2003/2004.

- Accredited training and development has been developed by the charity, delivered both internally (to staff and volunteers) and externally (to professionals working in schools, from learning support assistants to police officers). The charity is therefore able to reach many more children than those in the 92 schools where it operates.

The Place2Be increases children's self-esteem and 'coping' skills, helps them to communicate more effectively, and builds positive relationships. The change in children referred to group and one-to-one work is monitored using the SDQ described earlier, which assesses emotional and social problems. SDQ scores show that, for the majority of children, there is an improvement in score before and after counselling, which indicates that children are better able to cope with issues that are challenging their well-being, which may result in reduced risk of truancy and exclusion.

Parents who have used the Place for Parents service report better understanding of their children, improved parenting skills and increased confidence. Schools have also noted improved relations with parents as a result of the sessions. The reduction in challenging behaviour means that classrooms are more conducive to learning. Improvements for staff include improved morale, reduced stress and increased staff retention. This type of work in schools is also felt to reduce the likelihood of inappropriate referals to local authority services where capacity is already limited. The training work of Place2Be is helping to spread the charity's good practice beyond the schools in which it directly delivers services.

These impressive results are delivered at a low cost. Dividing the total income of £2.5m amongst the 21,500 children who directly accessed the service last year gives a cost per user of £115. In practice, the charities reach a much larger number of people and therefore the true unit cost is likely to be lower.

Funding the charities which are identified in this report can decrease the number of children and young people who disengage from the education system each year and, ultimately, from society.

NPC has identified a range of charities working in each of these areas and has a selection of detailed reports on individual charities that require additional funding.

## Chance UK

Chance UK was established nearly ten years ago. Over one third of the children the charity works with have been excluded and many more are at risk of exclusion. The majority of children have free school meals, while one quarter of referred families are involved in crime and over one half report substance misuse. The charity has three main activities, based on their unique mentoring model:

- The charity recruits, trains and monitors volunteer mentors, who focus on improving behaviour and attainment in school and reducing the risk of later criminal or antisocial behaviour of children aged 5–11. The charity is currently working with 100 children, and has a pool of 120 volunteer mentors with a range of ages and professional backgrounds. It has been particularly successful in recruiting male mentors, and mentors from ethnic minority backgrounds. This enables more effective gender and ethnic matching.

- Chance UK is extending its parent mentoring programme, ParentPlus, this year, piloted in 2003. Every child on the mentoring programme receives a home visit by the ParentPlus programme manager, who identifies parents most in need. Struggling parents are offered direct practical support from Chance UK, either through intensive one-to-one support or in groups, or they are signposted to other agencies.

- Chance UK has appointed a National Development Manager to support charities across the UK in replicating Chance UK's model of good practice. Requests have come from organisations in over 25 areas of the UK. To date, the project has been replicated successfully in Belfast.



*Photograph supplied by Chance UK.*

Over the past nine years, 328 children have graduated from the Chance UK programme. In addition to the problems at home mentioned above, the children Chance UK helps are typically hyperactive, have inadequate social skills and/or conduct problems. These difficulties are measured on entry and exit. The results of the SDQ demonstrate a significant drop in emotional problems at the end of the year-long programme, which indicates the children are at reduced risk of truancy and exclusion. In addition to the positive questionnaire scores, there have been several independent evaluations that praise the programme.

Given the home difficulties the children face, working with parents is a key development area of the charity. Interim assessment of the parent mentoring suggests that parents are better able to discipline their children and manage family conflict, leading to improved relations. The benefits of working with parents extend to the whole family.

The cost per child is £4,900 for a year-long programme. This includes recruiting, selecting, training and intensely supervising the mentor pairing. This is necessarily intensive given the sensitivity of the work.

## Extern

Extern has worked with socially excluded children, adults and communities across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland since 1978. The charity runs 40 programmes. Thirty-three of these focus on young people and their families, providing services ranging from prevention, such as school-based recreational activities, through to intensive high-support programmes for young people at crisis point.

One such high-support programme is Pathways, which works with 33 students in their final year of secondary education (15 to 16 years old). Referrals come from six schools in Belfast. The charity provides full-time education for the students, for one year, preparing them for entry into adult life. The projects are based in particularly deprived areas, which have a history of sectarian violence. The project promotes cultural identity, diversity and tolerance of others. Of the participants, 73% have been excluded, 50% have a history of persistent truancy and 70% are in contact with other support services/agencies.

Extern's Pathways project is intensive given the high levels of need amongst pupils. There are three staff for each group of ten pupils, which makes provision costly. Pathways costs £9,500 per pupil, which is more than two-and-a-half times the cost per child in mainstream education. However, the results of the project are proven: over one third of pupils achieved an attendance rate of 95% or more; students were on average attending almost one more day per week; 97% of students achieved at least four qualifications in literacy, numeracy and computer

skills; and 83% completed at least one GCSE course. Four fifths of students went on to further education, training or employment.

Re-engaging children with education and offering them a path to employment and training post-16 provides them with increased life opportunities. Children who are disengaged from education are at greater risk of social exclusion, substance abuse and criminality. Keeping these children engaged in education and training provides them with stability, which protects them in the short term, as well as leading to longer-term opportunities.

## Inaura

Inaura was established in 2000 to eliminate the use of permanent exclusion as a school management tool. Inaura's work promotes community-based inclusion in schools. This focuses on building bridges between schools; broadening schools to enable them to cater for a wide range of pupils; and finding a place for every child in suitable educational establishments. The model uses different tools, such as:

- Restorative justice: which can help those in a conflict to reach satisfactory conclusions, without reaching the crisis point of an exclusion.

- Managed moves: an alternative to exclusion. If conflicts do reach crisis point, pupils move to a new school without disruption to their education.

The charity set out to prove this model in Slough, Somerset and Sutton. Each model was successful in reducing the number of exclusions, through methods recommended by government and developed by Inaura.

The direct and measurable outcome of Inaura's work is fewer school exclusions. The effect of this is a reduction in the effects of exclusions on the child, such as poor academic performance and job prospects, and on society more generally, such as levels of criminal and antisocial behaviour. These outcomes also improve the situation for teachers and other pupils in the class, as they seek to resolve the issues surrounding conflict through the use of restorative justice. Inaura's project in Slough was independently evaluated over its first year. Data shows that fixed period exclusions were reduced by around 75%, and permanent exclusions by 86%. These figures can be expected to improve further as the systems become better understood by Slough and as they become more developed through further implementation. The project cost £30,000 to run. This suggests a cost per prevented exclusion of just £130.

The unmet need for Inaura's work is significant. Although government guidelines recommend the use of managed moves, there is very little in place to put this into practice. Preliminary research by Inaura shows that one third of LEAs are using managed moves. However, with little or no guidance on good practice, implementation differs greatly from one authority to another. Without support, there is a risk that managed moves are not implemented correctly, which could result in negative outcomes for children involved. Inaura is well placed to advise authorities, and has developed training tools to this end.

## The Learning Challenge

The Learning Challenge is a small, unique charity established in 1995, which provides behaviour management advice, training and support to primary and secondary schools in the north east of England. It works directly with school staff, facilitating group therapy work with pupils at risk of disaffection. Over the last ten years, it has worked with around 75 schools.

TLC tailors its service to the needs of the individual school. Ideally, the organisation works with a school for three years, in which time it is possible to create sustainable change. The focus is on behaviour management, which is the first step to creating classroom environments that are conducive to learning. A typical year-long programme in one school costs roughly £20,000. This includes on-site training and supervision of 15 staff in delivering group therapy. Group therapy programmes work best with eight pupils and last for one school term (12 weeks). The teachers trained are supervised in delivering the group therapy in teams of two. Training 15 teachers could therefore directly benefit 168 children per annum, if teachers worked with a new group each term.

Pupils who take part in the group work report improved self-esteem and confidence, both in school and out. They are typically better able to express themselves. Consequently, there is a reduction in behavioural incidents and in poor attendance. In one school, attendance amongst pupils involved in group therapy work improved in 63% of children and behavioural incidents were reduced in 90%.

Given the reduced numbers of staff, TLC is currently working in only six schools. The aim is to increase the service, but to do this will require substantial financial support over three years. NPC estimates that the cost per pupil is extremely low, at only £120 per child. In reality, more children will benefit as the skills learnt will be of use to all the pupils taught by the teachers. In addition, the teachers can go on to work with many more pupils over their careers. TLC recommends working in partnership with a school for three years, after which the school should be able to implement the strategies itself.

**For more information on how you could support organisations working with young people at risk of truancy and exclusion, please contact NPC or visit www.philanthropycapital.org.**

# Acknowledgements

## Charities visited and consulted

We would in particular like to thank the many charities that we met and spoke to during the research for this report. Each charity gave their valuable time to answer our questions and provide us with materials. Without them, this report would not be possible and for this we thank them.

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)

Anti-Bullying Alliance, NCB

Antidote

Barnardo's Scotland

Birmingham Mentoring Consortium

Chance UK

Cheltenham Community Project (CCP)

Childline in Partnership with Schools (CHIPS)

Communities Empowerment Network (CEN)

Moving On Project, Community Links

ContinYou

Eastside Young Leaders Academy

Emotional Health Alliance

Extern

Fairbridge

Family Service Units (FSU)

Friends United Network (FUN)

Genesis Project, Children's Society

Inaura

Include

Include Youth

Kids Company

Kwesi

Nacro

Newstart Youth Project

Parents for Inclusion

Prince's Trust xl Club

Pupil Inclusion Network, NCB

Resolve ASL, Children in Scotland

Right Track, Scotland

Restorative Justice Consortium (RJC)

Walmer Road School, Rugby Portobello Trust

Independent Education and Advocacy Project, Save the Children

Rathbone, Scotland

School-Home Support

Shaftesbury Homes and Arethusa

Skill Force

The Learning Challenge (TLC)

The Place2Be

YoungMinds

Youth Education Support Services (YESS)

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15  Personal communication with Carl Parsons (2004). Other sources suggested that in Northern Ireland the figure was anything up to twice the rate of official permanent exclusion. Personal communication with Mary Potter, DENI (2005).

16  Section 1 of DfES (2004) *Improving behaviour and attendance: guidance on exclusion from schools and pupil referral units*. http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/ behaviour/exclusion/guidance/

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# Notes

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## Community

- **Ordinary lives:** Disabled children and their families (2005)

- **Grey matters:** Growing older in deprived areas (2004)

- **Side by side:** Young people in divided communities (2004)

- **Local action changing lives:** Community organisations tackling poverty and social exclusion (2004)

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## Education

- **Making sense of SEN:** Special educational needs (2004)

## Health

- **Valuing short lives:** Children with terminal conditions (2005)

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## Other research

- **Surer funding:** Improving government funding of the voluntary sector (2004, published by acevo)

- **Full cost recovery:** A guide and toolkit on cost allocation (2004, published by acevo)

- **Just the ticket:** Understanding charity fundraising events (2003)

- **Funding our future II:** A manual to understand and allocate costs (2002, published by acevo)

# Forthcoming publications

- **Prisoners and ex-prisoners (2005)**

- **Education overview (2005)**

- **Refugees and asylum seekers (2006)**

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