

# Where Next for Pupils Excluded from Special Schools and Pupil Referral Units?

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Research Report No  
DCSF-RR163

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ISBN 978 1 84775 537 7

September 2009



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## **Acknowledgements**

This report could not have been written without the help and support of many people. We are greatly indebted to those individuals - young people, parents, teachers and other service providers - who agreed to take part in the study, and who gave so generously of their time. The young people's stories are complex and uncertain, and we hope that we have conveyed this to readers of this report.

We would like to thank Marian Grimes, Mandy Winterton and Christina MacMahon of the University of Edinburgh for their assistance with data collection and analysis; Pamela Munn for her advice during the early stages of the project; and Jon Lewin of the University of Glasgow for research and information services, and for designing and producing the project leaflets. Finally, we would like to thank all the members of the Project Advisory Committee for their invaluable advice and support throughout the project.

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## List of acronyms

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| ADHD  | Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder                      |
| ADD   | Attention deficit disorder                                    |
| ASD   | Autistic (or autism) spectrum disorder                        |
| BESD  | Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties                |
| CAMHS | Child and adolescent mental health services                   |
| CAF   | Common Assessment Framework                                   |
| CPN   | Community Psychiatric Nurse                                   |
| CISC  | Children in Special Circumstances                             |
| CTC   | City Technology College                                       |
| DCSF  | Department for Children, Schools and Families (formerly DfES) |
| DfEE  | Department for Education and Employment                       |
| DfES  | Department for Education and Skills (now DCSF)                |
| DoH   | Department of Health  |
| DTI   | Department of Trade and Industry                              |
| DWP   | Department of Work and Pensions                               |
| EBD   | Emotional and behavioural difficulties                        |
| ECM   | Every Child Matters   |
| FE    | Further Education   |
| GOR   | Government Office Region                                      |
| HI    | Hearing impairment  |
| IEP   | Individual education plan                                     |
| LA    | Local authority   |
| LAC   | Looked after child  |
| LP    | Lead professional   |
| MLD   | Moderate learning difficulties                                |
| NEET  | Not in education, employment or training                      |
| NSF   | National Service Framework                                    |
| NQT   | Newly qualified teacher                                       |
| PAs   | Personal Advisers (Connexions)                                |
| PRU   | Pupil Referral Unit   |
| SEAL  | Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning                      |
| SEBD  | Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties                |
| SEBDA | Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Association    |
| SEN   | Special educational needs                                     |
| SENCO | Special educational needs coordinator                         |
| SLD   | Severe learning difficulties                                  |
| SLT   | Speech and language therapy                                   |
| SpLD  | Specific learning difficulties                                |
| YOI   | Young offenders' institution                                  |
| YOT   | Youth offending team  |

# Executive summary

## Introduction

This study of routes, destinations and outcomes for pupils permanently excluded from special schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) was commissioned in the autumn of 2006 in the light of concerns expressed in the report of the Practitioners' Group on School Behaviour and Discipline [The Steer Report]. These related to the quality of educational provision for young people with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD)<sup>1</sup> (DfES, 2005a, p. 9). The Steer Report recognised that 'there are occasions when it is necessary to exclude pupils from a PRU or a BESD special school (including residential schools)' and expressed concern about 'what alternative forms of education are available for these most vulnerable pupils, particularly in smaller authorities that may only have one PRU' (DfES, 2005a, p. 57).

The policy context in which the research was conducted is complex, and comprises four discrete but closely inter-related policy strands, namely: *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* and the *National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services*; the *Respect Action Plan*; the *Reaching Out* policy suite; and *The Children's Plan. Building Brighter Futures* and the ensuing *White Paper Back on Track*. The latter, a strategy for modernising alternative provision for young people, is of particular relevance to this study. These four main policy strands are the immediate context in which the research was conducted. Other more specific policy is outlined in the Final Report.

The key themes running through policy in this area are:

- Parents' rights to support from the state balanced with their responsibilities to their children.
- A shift in emphasis towards universal prevention and early intervention, as well as targeted intervention and child protection.
- Eradication of child poverty and a focus on enabling every child to reach their potential.
- Identification and meeting of needs of marginalized groups, including children of prisoners, looked after children and unaccompanied children; and of children with the full range of SEN, including BESD.
- Recognition of the need for children (and their families) to inform the development of policies that affect them.
- Reorganisation of service delivery around the needs of families (children and parents), with a greater focus on multidisciplinary working, inter-agency collaboration and information sharing.
- Workforce and legislative reform to support the above themes.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms BESD and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) are used interchangeably in this report. BESD is the term used in the research specification. The authors prefer the term SEBD, as they believe it more accurately reflects the nature of the difficulties many young people experience. Daniels (2006) refers to 'a long tension ... between those who have adopted within-person and those who have adopted systemic accounts of causation which have in turn led to specific approaches to intervention (see, for example, Visser, Daniels & Cole, 2001)' (p. 105). We return to the issue of terminology in Section 2.2 below.

## Research objectives

The research objectives for the study, as set out in the research specification, were as follows:

- To examine the events and processes that led up to the young person's permanent exclusion from a special school or PRU (RO1)
- To identify what forms of alternative provision are available to the young people once they have been excluded from a special school or PRU (RO2).
- To identify the destinations of the young people after their permanent exclusion, and the appropriateness of these destinations (RO3).
- To identify the outcomes for these young people after exclusion (RO4).
- To identify best practice in planning for permanent exclusion, managing the process, involving young people and their parents, identifying appropriate alternative provision, transition planning, re-engaging young people, etc (RO5).

In the light of discussions with the Project Advisory Group, it was agreed that the research team would interrogate the existing research data in respect of the following supplementary objectives:

- The relationship between policy and practice (with specific reference to the themes of multi-agency working, the role of the lead professional, and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) (RO6).
- The role and function of PRUs in the light of current strategies for modernising alternative provision (RO7).

## Methodology

The research was conducted in three of the ten Government Office Regions (GORs): namely Inner and Outer London, the South East and the North West. These three GORs were selected because of their relatively high number of permanent exclusions from special schools. Further criteria informing the selection of the GORs in which to conduct the research were geographical distribution; and location (urban/rural). Permission was sought from the Directors of Children's Services in all 65 LAs. The project comprised two main strands.

### ***Strand 1: census of special schools and PRUs***

A short questionnaire was sent to all special schools (634) and PRUs (193) on a database provided to the research team by the Department. The final response rates were 57 per cent (n= 365) and 61 per cent (n= 112) for PRUs. The main purpose of the census was to identify a group of approximately 45 young people (the 'outline sample') who had been permanently excluded in the 2005-06 school year, from which the study sample of 30 could be drawn.

The final study sample comprised 28 young people, from whom written opt-in consent was received. The young people were aged between 9 years and 7 months and 14 years and 8 months at the time of their most recent permanent exclusion. Twenty-two of these young people had been permanently excluded from special schools, and 6 from PRUs. The ratio of male to female in the sample was 26:2. In respect of stated disability, medical or psychological diagnosis, the key point is the complexity of some of the young people's needs (e.g. MLD and BESD, SLD and ASD).

## ***Strand 2 - interviews with young people, families and service providers***

The original research design comprised three 'waves' of interviews with a relatively small group of young people (30), their parent(s) and/or carers, and interviews with up to five key service providers known personally by the young person. The interviews were conducted between March 2007 and March 2009. The main advantage of this approach was that it generates rich qualitative data that provides considerable insight into the lives of a small number of young people who have been permanently excluded from a special school or a PRU. The main limitation of a small-scale qualitative study of the type reported here is that the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of young people who have experienced permanent exclusion from a special school or PRU.

### **Key findings**

#### ***Profile of the sample***

The findings reported below relate specifically to the 24 young people who participated in the study, and to the outline sample.

- Most of the young people in the sample lived in family situations that were considered by service providers to be disrupted or difficult.
- Paternal absence, or the absence of another primary care giver, was a factor for many of the young people in the sample.
- Many parents reported that they were unable to sustain employment as a result of their children's difficulties.
- All of the young people in the sample had multiple and complex support needs, with BESD with MLD the most common combination.
- Underlying learning difficulties and/or inappropriate placement were often contributory factors in challenging behaviour.
- Poor attendance, repeated fixed-term and permanent exclusions, placement in a large number of schools and substantial periods out of school may have exacerbated pre-existing learning difficulties.
- Many of the young people in the sample were considered by service providers to be at the extreme end of a broad spectrum of need.
- The young people's difficulties, particularly in respect of challenging behaviour, varied substantially according to setting.
- The complex nature of some young people's SEN made it extremely difficult to identify a placement that would meet all their needs.
- Many of the young people in the study sample had experienced severely disrupted educational pathways prior to their permanent exclusion in 2005–06.
- Extended periods out of school exacerbated pre-existing difficulties, and made the identification of subsequent placements even more challenging.
- The burden on parents increased substantially when young people were out of school for extended periods.

- The catalyst for a young person's permanent exclusion was generally a violent assault on a member of staff.
- Persistent disruptive behaviour, often involving systematic bullying of younger children, instances of physical assault and damage to property, were contributing factors.
- Exclusion was viewed by staff as a last resort, and as the only means of regaining control of an extremely challenging environment.
- Schools and families appeared to have limited capacity to mitigate the impact of the exclusion, or to plan alternatives.

### ***Destinations post-exclusion***

The findings reported below are derived from face-to-face and telephone interviews with young people, their parents and/or carers, and a range of front-line service providers involved in their care and education.

- There were substantial delays in identifying subsequent placements for some young people, particularly those with a history of violent behaviour or multiple and complex needs.
- These delays caused additional strain for families that were already perceived to be troubled.
- Outreach tuition for c 6 hours per week was a common interim arrangement while a placement was being negotiated.
- The range of alternative provision accessed was very diverse, with input from the private and voluntary sectors.
- Service providers perceived that there were age and stage-related restrictions on some forms of provision (e.g. college-based, work-experience oriented placements) that they considered might have been suitable for some young people in Y8 or Y9.
- Many young people experienced a lack of continuity of service providers.
- Several service providers and families considered that personalised support in a nurturing environment where there is some contact with the peer group as the key to a successful placement.
- Some young people were placed in provision in which they considered that the academic work was insufficiently challenging.

### ***Further perspectives from service providers***

The findings reported below are derived from interviews with service providers involved in the care and education of the young people who participated in the study, and from 13 additional interviews with service providers on a range of supplementary issues, as agreed with the Department.

- There was a diverse range of service providers involved with the young people participating in the study.

- The researchers had to demonstrate considerable tenacity in order to identify service providers who had actually met the young person.
- There was substantial variation in the extent to which service providers had an informed view of young people's educational pathways.
- Some front-line service providers appeared to have an understanding of the young person's case that was limited to the sector in which they worked.
- The evidence from the additional interviews with service providers confirms that there has been a perceived increase in the range of alternative provision available to young people who have been permanently excluded from special schools or PRUs.
- There were no major concerns expressed about the number of places available in alternative provision, but there were some about the difficulties in identifying suitable placements for young people with complex needs.
- Concern was expressed about the waiting time for CAMHS referrals.
- The CAF was perceived to facilitate multi-agency working.
- There was some evidence from the service provider interviews that collaboration between education and social work could be improved.
- Holistic assessments under CAF presented some challenges, in that they require 'practitioners to think beyond traditional sector boundaries.'
- The 13 service providers interviewed had extensive experience of working across local authority boundaries, and considered that this practice was becoming more widespread.
- Service providers expressed some concern about the impact of the requirement to find a subsequent placement six days after a permanent exclusion.

**Table 1: Overview of young people's trajectories after their permanent exclusion in 2005-06**

| <i>ID</i> | <i>Name<sup>1</sup></i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Ethnicity</i> | <i>PEx</i> | <i>Placements</i>  | <i>Attainment and achievement</i>   | <i>Attendance</i>  | <i>Remarks</i>  |
|-----------|-------------------------|---------------|------------------|------------|--|---|--|---|
| 1         | Mal*                    | M             | Black British    | SS         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Residential SS</li> <li>2. P-1 in residential SS and p-1 in mainstream secondary</li> <li>3. P-1 in day SS and p-1 in mainstream secondary</li> <li>4. Custodial sentence</li> <li>5. As in 3</li> </ol> | <p>Varied in different schools. In residential school, his Y7 results showed no progress since Y4. In day SS, his access to curriculum limited to core subjects. In mainstream secondary, he was 'in high sets'. Researcher asked repeatedly to see a copy of current IEP, but none was provided.</p> | <p>Varied in each school – poor at residential SS, 83% during 2-day p-1 placement at mainstream secondary; variable in day SS but overall good because attendance was a condition of bail.</p> | <p>Camahis user and involved with gang</p>                                |
| 2         | Rob                     | M             | White British    | PRU        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Outreach</li> <li>2. YMCA</li> <li>3. College</li> </ol>   | <p>Working towards diploma in painting &amp; decorating and an IT qualification, and business qualification and maths/English key skills</p>  | <p>Attendance almost 100 per cent.</p>   | <p>Clear aspirations as to career path (in a trade)</p>                   |
| 3         | Kas                     | M             | Black British    | SS         | BESD school  | <p><b>Attained GCSEs in ICT E, D&amp;T F, English G, Maths G, Science E and Art and Design EE</b></p>   | <p><b>Attendances almost 100 per cent</b></p>  | <p><b>Planning to go to college</b></p>                                   |
| 4         | Jake                    | M             | White British    | SS         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Independent BESD unit</li> <li>2. Secondary special school (range of needs)</li> </ol>   | <p>Working towards the following IEP targets:<br/>I will allow others to feel safe by not threatening them or shouting at them<br/>I will try to stay in lessons, but ask for time out when I need it<br/>I will continue to work on personal hygiene</p>   | <p>Perfect attendance since September.</p>   | <p>Sometimes meets targets</p>  |
| 5         | Ivan                    | M             | Black British    | PRU        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mainstream primary</li> <li>2. Mainstream secondary</li> </ol>   | <p><b>Working towards the following IEP targets:<br/>Turn up on time<br/>Do the work set<br/>Do what the teacher says</b></p>   | <p><b>Attendances 64.5 %</b></p>   | <p><b>Multiple fixed-period exclusions<br/>Rarely meets targets</b></p>   |
| 6         | Phil                    | M             | White British    | SS         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Outreach support</li> <li>2. Independent school for pupils on AS</li> </ol>  | <p>Full timetable modified national curriculum, working towards targets in basic literacy, numeracy and PHSE</p>  | <p>Attendance near 100 per cent (weekly boarder)</p>   | <p>Making good progress, not as many incidents as the school expected</p> |
| 7         | Leo                     | M             | Black British    | SS         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Outreach Support</li> <li>2. Secondary school for pupils with SLD</li> </ol>   | <p><b>Reciprocal arrangements with local PRU. Working towards IEP targets in literacy and numeracy</b></p>  | <p><b>Attendance good</b></p>  |   |
| 8         | Sasrutha                | M             | Sri Lankan Tamil | SS         | Outreach Support   | Basic literacy and numeracy   | N/A  | Problems identifying appropriate tutor and translator                     |

<sup>1</sup> The names of all young people have been changed to protect their identities.

| 9  | John*   | M | White British             | SS          | BESD school   | Attained GCSEs in ICT D D&T D English: U Maths<br>G Science D PE D Art and Design FF<br>Maths EL1 English EL2 Food technology EL1                                  | Good attendance  | Plans to go to college   |
|----|---------|---|---------------------------|-------------|---|--|--|--|
| 10 | Matt*   | M | White British             | PRU         | 1. Training provider<br>2. College  | Attained NVQ 1 and 2 in customer service; NVQ 1 catering   | Attendance improved and steadied when settled with training provider | Very good working relationships with staff at training provider. Offered job at RAC club on basis of excellent reference from training provider. |
| 11 | Rebecca | F | White British             | PRU         |   |  |  |  |
| 12 | KC      | M | Mixed (MWBC) <sup>2</sup> | SS          | 1. Nothing for 18 months (offered home tuition and place at special school)<br>2. College     | No detailed attainment data available. According to tutor from college KC is doing well  |  | Course tutor at FE college requested no further involvement from Connexions PA   |
| 13 | Isaac   | M | Mixed (MWBC)              | SS          | 1. PRU<br>2. Custodial sentences (15 months and 23 months)                                    | No formal record of attainment available – functionally illiterate   | Attended PRU for few days only                                       |  |
| 14 | Joe     | M | Black British             | Primary PRU | Psychiatric day unit  | Working towards individual targets in literacy and numeracy, at level two years below his chronological age  | Almost 100%  | Settled in placement, reduction in violent incidents   |
| 15 | Simon*  | M | White British             | SS          | Specialist unit for young people with severe ASD  | TEACHH and basic life skills (personal hygiene and care). Cognitive ability is that of a 3-year old child.   | Almost 100% (residential)  | Settled in placement, although occasional difficulties in residential provision  |
| 16 | Peter   | M | White British             | SS          | 1. Independent special school<br>2. College<br>3. Independent training provider<br>4. College | Attained GCSEs in Maths (F) Maths (EL1) Lifeskills (EL1) Graphics and materials (L1) National Skills Profile (catering) ASDAN units in personal care and community | Attended well at training provider                                   | First college placement broke down, making good progress in second college placement   |
| 17 | Tom     | M | White British             | SS          | BESD special school   | Working towards individual targets in literacy and numeracy  | Attendance fair, at around 60 per cent                               | No Speech and Language Therapy for 15 months despite hearing impairment  |

<sup>2</sup> Mixed: White and Black Caribbean

|    |        |   |               |    |  |   |                                       |  |
|----|--------|---|---------------|----|--|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| 18 | Mike   | M | White British | SS | BESD school (PEX from there then readmitted)   | No detailed attainment data available. Placement very vulnerable. Mother wants residential, trying to arrange early college place   |                                       |  |
| 19 | David* | M | White British | SS | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. PRU</li> <li>2. Independent residential special school (out of authority placement)</li> </ol>                         | <p>No attainment data available. Making very good progress at residential therapeutic school – building up friendship networks which hadn't happened before</p>   | N/A (full-year residential placement) | Displaying much less violence and aggression.  |
| 20 | James  | M | White British | SS | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. PRU with links to college and nurture group setting</li> <li>2. Post-16 plan was to go to college</li> </ol>           | <p>Working towards the following IEP targets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To maintain appropriate behaviour</li> <li>To manage anger and frustrations</li> <li>Literacy and numeracy skills</li> <li>To improve motivation and approach to learning</li> <li>To enhance his self-esteem and confidence as a learner</li> </ul> | Good                                  | Consideration given to tensions around maintaining a young person with a statement in a PRU long-term rather than in a special school but, given the options available, PRU was considered better able to provide for James' needs |
| 21 | Derek* | M | White British | SS | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. PRU with 1:1 support</li> <li>2. Home tuition</li> </ol>   | <p>Working towards very low level targets around improving literacy and numeracy; behaviour targets such as avoiding kicking or hitting staff or students</p>   | No data                               | PRU unable to maintain place despite 1:1 support   |
| 22 | Stuart | M | White British | SS | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nothing (mum refused outreach)</li> <li>2. PRU</li> <li>3. Independent Provider</li> <li>4. Resource Centre</li> </ol> | <p>No data on attainment available. Had managed 2 days at Resource Centre without incident at time of last contact</p>  | No data                               |  |
| 23 | Jamie* | M | White British | SS | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Secure unit (out of authority)</li> <li>2. Therapeutic school</li> </ol>   | No data on attainment available   | N/A                                   | Severe mental health issues, personality disorder  |
| 24 | Drew   | M | White British | SS | Outreach from PRU  | Working towards targets relating to basic literacy and numeracy and social skills   | N/A                                   |  |

\* Looked after

## Conclusions

The causes, origins and evolution of the young people's difficulties were often obscure, and were not solely attributable to the nature of the educational provision that they had received. It is our view that complex social problems can only be addressed by large-scale social reform that goes far beyond the raft of policy relating to children and families, and certainly beyond more specific policy relating to exclusion from school and special educational needs and disability. It should be borne in mind that issues relating to what happens to young people who have been permanently excluded from school are unlikely to be resolved by adjustments to systems of accountability alone.

The conclusion to be drawn from this can be expressed in the terms used in the Ministerial foreword to *Back on Track*: namely, that [the challenge is] 'to improve educational provision for those who are permanently excluded from school', and the recommendations formulated below are intended to contribute to this process. Such is the complexity, severity and deep-rooted nature of the difficulties faced by many these young people that it is unlikely that permanent exclusion can be entirely obviated, and this is acknowledged in the policy documentation.

The evidence from the interviews with young people, their parents and a large range of service providers conducted in the course of the research suggests that what makes the difference is the quality of the personal relationships. It is these, rather than the search for more perfect forms of accountability that ultimately made the difference for some young people.

## Recommendations

The key messages to emerge from the research are as follows:

- Achieve a balance in education policy between improving performance in external examinations and enhancing young people's social and emotional well-being.
- Further promote personalised support in a nurturing environment in which both academic and social and emotional needs can be addressed by increasing the complement of highly trained staff with specific expertise in this area.
- Further facilitate and sustain parental involvement by having a family liaison lead within PRUs and special schools for each young person, prioritising those whose educational pathways have been most severely disrupted.
- Retain a degree of flexibility in respect of the duration of a placement in a PRU, particularly for those young people who are responding positively to a stronger social-skills orientation.
- Monitor the impact of the implementation of the requirement to provide a subsequent placement for a child or young person who has been permanently excluded from the sixth day.
- Make service providers aware of the regulations regarding access to vocational and work-experience-based provision by age and stage by indicating the degree of flexibility to access such provision earlier.

- Secure further funding for alternative education providers to work in partnership with PRUs and special schools as appropriate in order to continue to provide a range of vocational and work-experience-based provision.
- Increase the level of support to the families of children who have been permanently excluded from special schools or PRUs, for example through an allocated Parent Support Adviser who can offer practical and emotional support.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This study of routes, destinations and outcomes for pupils permanently excluded from special schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) was commissioned in the autumn of 2006 in the light of concerns expressed in the report of the Practitioners' Group on School Behaviour and Discipline [The Steer Report]. These related to the quality of educational provision for young people with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD)<sup>2</sup> (DfES, 2005a, p. 9). The Steer Report recognised that 'there are occasions when it is necessary to exclude pupils from a PRU or a BESD special school (including residential schools)' and expressed concern about 'what alternative forms of education are available for these most vulnerable pupils, particularly in smaller authorities that may only have one PRU' (DfES, 2005a, p. 57).

We begin with a brief overview of the policy context in which the research was conducted; and an outline of the study, including aims, objectives and research questions. There follows a brief summary of the research methodology, further details of which can be found in Appendix 1.

In this Final Report, we shall focus on both the actor level (i.e. the young people and their personal histories) and the structural level (the policy context and the service provider perspective). We shall attempt to analyse agency (i.e. the trajectories of individual young people and their personal histories) in relation to structures, and structures in terms of agency. This will enable us to develop an understanding from 'within' as well as an understanding from 'without'.

It is a formidable task to account for the wide range of structural influences that shape the development of a particular social phenomenon (especially one as complex as permanent exclusion from a special school or PRU), and to provide a vivid narrative that adequately reflects the complexity of people's lives. Our aim throughout this Final Report is to distil the practical wisdom derived from both the research findings and the process of conducting the research in a manner that will serve the purposes of the policy community. Following Flyvbjerg (2001), our purpose is to make social science matter.

## 1.2 The policy context

The policy context in which the research was conducted is complex, and comprises four discrete but closely inter-related policy strands, namely: the *Every Child Matters* agenda (DfES, 2004a) for transforming children's services (henceforth ECM), augmented by the *National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services* (Department of Health, 2004a-d) (NSF); the *Respect* agenda (Respect Task Force, 2006); the *Reaching Out/Think Family* policy suite (Cabinet Office, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008); and *The Children's Plan. Building Brighter Futures* (DCSF, 2007) and the ensuing White Paper *Back on Track* (DCSF, 2008a). The latter, a strategy for modernising alternative provision for young people, is of particular relevance to this study. Strategies such as Connexions (DfEE, 2000) and Education Improvement Partnerships (DfES, 2005b) 'aim to provide effective services for vulnerable children through more coordinated and collaborative efforts between relevant organisations' (Vincent et al, 2007, p. 284).

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<sup>2</sup> The terms BESD and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) are used interchangeably in this report. BESD is the term used in the research specification. The authors prefer the term SEBD, as they believe it more accurately reflects the nature of the difficulties many young people experience, as these often have their origins in the social situations in which young people find themselves. Daniels (2006) refers to 'a long tension ... between those who have adopted within-person and those who have adopted systemic accounts of causation which have in turn led to specific approaches to intervention' (see, for example, Visser, Daniels & Cole, 2001) (p. 105). We return to the issue of terminology in 2.2 below.

These four main policy strands are the immediate context in which the research was conducted. However, *Excellence for All Children Meeting Special Educational Needs* (DfEE, 1997) is part of the wider agenda, as is the raft of ensuing national strategies, which comprised guidance on the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) curriculum initiative (DfES, 2005c); the *Implementation Plan for 14–19 Education and Skills* (DfES, 2005d); and a series of policies enforcing the responsibilities of parents for ensuring their children's school attendance and good behaviour through parenting orders (DfES, 2004b).

We begin with a brief digest of the main proposals in each of the four strands outlined above.

### **1.2.1 The Every Child Matters agenda and the Children's National Service Framework**

*Every Child Matters* (ECM) (DfES, 2004a) has been described as 'the biggest shake up of statutory children's services since the Seebohm Report of the 1960s' (Williams, 2004, p. 406). The four main areas of action are around support for parents and carers; early intervention and effective protection; local, national and regional integration; and workforce reform. These priorities are reflected in subsequent legislation and guidelines, including the Core Standards of the NSF, which refer explicitly to supporting parenting; child and family-centred services; and safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. These objectives are located within a broad policy framework that emphasises inclusive local strategies between health, education and social care services and a shift in the balance of provision towards prevention; and the promotion of health and well-being and successful transitions to adulthood. The NSF uses the phrase 'children in special circumstances' (CISC) to describe those young people requiring

*... a high degree of co-operation between staff in different agencies, but who are also most at risk of achieving poorer outcomes than their peers. Those children tend to be 'lost' between agencies are therefore not in receipt of services, even those that are universally provided. (Department of Health, 2004b, p. 176)*

Young people who have been excluded from school and looked-after children are explicitly referred to as CISC.

### **1.2.2 The Respect agenda**

The *Respect Action Plan* (Respect Task Force, 2006) made explicit the link between poor attendance and behaviour at school and anti-social behaviour. New legislation was introduced to address poor behaviour (Education Act 2006). The Act also prioritised improving provision for those permanently excluded from school. The ramifications of the requirement to identify a suitable placement from the sixth day will be explored later in the Report. Supporting families, including those living in challenging circumstances, was also an explicit focus of the *Respect Action Plan*.

### **1.2.3 Reaching Out/Think Family**

*Reaching Out: an action plan on social exclusion* (Cabinet Office, 2006) re-articulated some of the guiding principles of ECM: specifically, early intervention throughout the life-cycle; and workforce reform, with an explicit focus on improving multi-agency working. Addressing cycles of disadvantage is a priority area in the *Reaching Out/Think Family* policy suite (see also Cabinet Office, 2007a & b; 2008) which focuses on the approximately 2% of families experiencing multiple problems. As our research drew to a close, the DCSF was issuing guidance to local authorities encouraging them to 'reform systems and services provided for vulnerable children, young people and adults' around a 'Think Family' ethos. This involves identifying and supporting families at risk at the earliest opportunity and meeting the full

range of needs within each supported family, with a view to supporting even the most challenging families and strengthening their ability to care for and support each other (DCSF, 2009). In addition, the DCSF made funding available to every local authority to deliver targeted parenting and family support programmes to families where children were at risk of poor outcomes.

#### **1.2.4 The Children's Plan and Back on Track**

*The Children's Plan. Building Brighter Futures* (DCSF, 2007) is the key children's services blueprint for the next decade. It echoes previous legislation by putting families at the centre and reiterating the need for early intervention and for services that '*are shaped by and responsive to children, young people and families, not designed around professional boundaries*' (pp. 5-6) (our emphasis). It underlines the government's commitment to the eradication of child poverty by 2020; and sets out a series of health and education targets for children and young people aged 5 to 19, including a 25 per cent reduction in the number of young people receiving a conviction, reprimand or final warning for a recordable offence by 2020. Of particular relevance to the study reported here is the commitment to improve the quality of teaching for children with special educational needs (SEN); piloting new forms of alternative provision; and the requirement that local authorities (LAs) collect and publish performance data for pupils not on a school roll.

The Children's Plan has since generated policy and action plans directly related to commitments made within it, some of which are of central relevance to this research. These will be explored below.

The focus of *Back on Track* (DCSF, 2008a) is on improving the quality of alternative provision for young people excluded from school, or who are otherwise without a school place. *Back on Track* foresees a transformation in the quality of provision that will be achieved by making progress in a number of areas: namely,

- *Bringing about a step change in improvement* (in terms of educational attainment and achievement)
- *Starting from the child* (by ensuring that all young people in alternative provision have a personalised education plan; that there is a clear responsibility for education and well-being; and that young people have access to an appropriate curriculum)
- *Better planning and commissioning of alternative provision* (for example, by opening up the supply of alternative provision from the best and most innovative organisations)
- *Increasing accountability* (for example, by publishing data on attendance and educational outcomes; and consulting on how to develop progression and value-added measures)

#### **1.2.5 Other social policies directed at children and parents**

The policy strands outlined above are in turn part of a broader portfolio of social policies aimed at supporting children and families: for example, the National Childcare Strategy with its guarantee of a place for every three- and four-year old by April 2004, the development of Sure Start and Children's Centres in areas of socio-economic deprivation; and the Working Tax Credit, one of a range of measures to help working parents.

In a move that signals a co-ordinated approach to tackling child poverty, these measures came from the Treasury, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the

Department of Health (DoH).<sup>3</sup> Further measures include commitments to extended maternity leave and pay, paid paternity leave, the right to part-time work for the parents of young children and unpaid time off to look after dependants.

### **1.2.6 Promoting inclusion and achievement for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)**

There is a range of more targeted policies that compliment the universal approach to children evident in ECM. We begin with a brief overview of those relating to children and young people with SEN.

In January 2002, the revised *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice* (DfES, 2001) came into force, followed by *Removing Barriers to Achievement: The Government's Strategy for SEN* (DfES, 2004c). This set out the expectation that 'only those children with the most severe and complex needs, requiring support from more than one specialist agency [would] need the protection of a statement of SEN.' In relation to young people with BESD, the revised Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) stated that children and young people who demonstrate features of emotional and behaviour difficulties may require help with, inter alia, 'adjusting to school expectations and outcomes'.

The publication of *Aiming Higher for Disabled Children: Better Support for Families* (HM Treasury and DfES, 2007) is further evidence of a continuing commitment to families. One of the three priority areas for action is of particular relevance to the current project: namely the need for responsive services and timely support. Here there are specific references to improved data collection at local and national level; and a new Transition Support Programme to include intensive, co-ordinated support and person-centred planning for the transition to adulthood. New guidance on *Planning and Developing Special Educational Provision* was issued in 2007.<sup>4</sup>

The guidance contained within *The Education of Children and Young People with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties as a Special Educational Need* (DCSF, 2008b) updated and replaced DfEE Circular 9/94 and DH Circular LAC (94), and is of particular relevance to the current study. In discussing the range of provision for pupils with BESD, it states that

*PRUs are not planned or designed to be a long-term setting and should not be regarded as part of the local authority's range of planned SEN provision. (p. 8)*

This is echoed in *Back on Track* (DCSF, 2008a), although the time-frame is not made explicit: 'alternative provision should enable young people to get back on track'.

### **1.2.7 Mental health and well-being**

July 2008 saw the publication of the interim report of the national Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Review *Improving the Mental Health and Psychological Well-being of Children and Young People* (CAMHS, 2008). The Review was a commitment from *The Children's Plan* and was sponsored by the DCSF and the Department of Health. It considers progress since the NSF and ECM and what further improvements could be made 'to meet the educational, health and social care needs of all children, young people at risk of, or experiencing, mental health problems' (p. 1). Of particular relevance to the study reported

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<sup>3</sup> The DTI was disbanded in June 2007 and its functions transferred to the new Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR). The DCSF was one of two departments that replaced the DfES in June 2007. The other one, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), is responsible for further and higher education.

<sup>4</sup> Available at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg/guidance.cfm?id=24>

here is the observation that the term behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, viewed from the special educational needs perspective, covers broadly the same area of interest as mental health and psychological well-being.

### **1.2.8 Overview of priority areas**

The key themes running through the policy documents outlined above are:

- Parents' rights to support from the state balanced with their own responsibilities to their children.
- A shift in emphasis towards universal prevention and early intervention, as well as targeted intervention and child protection.
- Eradication of child poverty and a focus on enabling every child to reach their potential.
- Identification of needs of marginalized groups, including children of prisoners, looked after children and unaccompanied children; and of children with the full range of SEN, including BESD.
- Recognition of the need for children (and their families) to inform the development of policies that affect them.
- Reorganisation of service delivery around the need of families (parents and children), with a greater focus on multidisciplinary working, inter-agency collaboration and information sharing.
- Workforce and legislative reform to support the above themes.

## **1.3 About the project**

The original aim of the project was to identify and explore the routes, destinations and outcomes of a small number of young people who had been permanently excluded from a BESD special school or PRU in the 2005–06 school year.

The terms of reference were renegotiated and it was agreed that the research would focus on a sample of 30 pupils excluded from PRUs and all types of special school, not just those offering specialist provision for children and young people described as having BESD. The rationale was to ensure that no vulnerable young people were excluded from the study due to vagaries of placement.

### **1.3.1 Objectives**

The objectives of the study, as detailed in the research specification, are outlined below:

- To examine the events and processes that led up to the young person's permanent exclusion from a special school or PRU (RO1).
- To identify what forms of alternative provision are available to the young people once they have been excluded from a special school or PRU (RO2).
- To identify the destinations of the young people after their permanent exclusion, and the appropriateness of these destinations (RO3).

- To identify the outcomes for these young people after exclusion (RO4).
- To identify best practice in planning for permanent exclusion, managing the process, involving young people and their parents, identifying appropriate alternative provision, transition planning, re-engaging young people, etc (RO5).

In the light of discussions with the Project Advisory Group, it was agreed that the research team would interrogate the existing research data in respect of the following supplementary objectives:

- The relationship between policy and practice (with specific reference to the themes of multi- agency working, the role of the lead professional, and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) (RO6).
- The role and function of PRUs in the light of current strategies for modernising alternative provision (RO7).

### **1.3.2 Research questions**

The research set out to address the following research questions:

- What are the histories and contexts of the young people participating in the study? (RO1)
- What events led up to the young person's permanent exclusion? (RO1)
- What action (if any) was taken to prevent the exclusion? (RO1)
- What action (if any) was taken to mitigate the impact of the exclusion? (RO1)
- What planning of alternatives for the young person took place? (RO1)
- What forms of alternative provision are available in the area? (RO2)
- Are these being used? If not, why not? (RO2)
- How appropriate are these for the young people? (RO2)
- Are there any gaps in provision? (RO2)
- Where did the young people go after their permanent exclusion? (RO3)
- How was this decision reached? (RO3)
- What factors influenced this decision? (RO3)
- How were the young person and their parents involved in the decision-making? (RO3)
- How appropriate was the provision to the young person's needs? (RO3)
- How effective is the alternative provision for the young person? (RO4)
- What is the provisional outcome in terms of behaviour, attitudes, attainment and achievement? (RO4)
- What planning is done for transitions? (RO4)
- Were there particular examples of best practice? (RO5)

## 1.4 Methodology

The research was conducted in three of the ten Government Office Regions (GORs): namely Inner and Outer London, the South East and the North West. These three GORs were selected because of their relatively high number of permanent exclusions from special schools, as expressed as a percentage of the total population and detailed in the most recent statistics available at the time.<sup>5</sup> Further criteria informing the selection of the GORs in which to conduct the research were geographical distribution; and location (urban/rural).

Permission was sought from the Directors of Children's Services in all 65 LAs. They were asked to provide the name, designation and full contact details of the officer in their authority who was responsible for children and young people permanently excluded from special schools and PRUs. This named individual would act as a conduit in the process of negotiating access to a sample of young people.

The project comprised two main strands, as detailed below. (See Appendix 1 for further details of the methodology and copies of the research instruments.)

### 1.4.1 Strand 1: census of special schools and PRUS

A short questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was sent to all special schools (634) and PRUs (193) on a database provided to the research team by the Department.<sup>6</sup> Respondents were invited to provide some background information on any child or young person who had been permanently excluded from their facility in the 2005–06 school year. They were not required to disclose the young person's name, in compliance with data protection legislation. The main purpose of the census was to identify a group of approximately 45 young people (the 'outline sample') from which the study sample of 30 could be drawn.

The outline sample comprised 56 pupils: 42 had been permanently excluded from special schools and 14 from PRUs (including three who had been excluded from the premises for health and safety reasons). The ratio of male to female in the outline sample was 50:4.<sup>7</sup>

The final study sample comprised 28 young people, who were aged between 9 years and 7 months and 14 years and 8 months at the time of their most recent permanent exclusion. Twenty-two of these young people had been permanently excluded from special schools, and 6 from PRUs. The ratio of male to female in the sample was 26:2. In respect of stated disability, medical or psychological diagnosis, the key point is the complexity of some of the young people's needs (e.g. MLD and BESD, SLD and ASD).

Local authority officers with responsibility for those not at school were asked to identify the young people from the information given on census returns (i.e. the young person's date of birth and date of admission to and exclusion from a named special school or PRU). The research team requested information on the current location of the young person and the name of the key professional working with them, in order that this person would negotiate the young person's participation and obtain written opt-in consent (see Appendix 1 for further information on the process of negotiating consent and for copies of the project information leaflets and the census form).

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<sup>5</sup> Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions from Schools and Exclusion Appeals in England, 2004/05. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000662/index.shtml> (last accessed 27 February 2009).

<sup>6</sup> The final response rates were 57 per cent (n= 365) and 61 per cent (n= 112) for PRUs.

<sup>7</sup> The gender of two young people was unknown.

Table 1.1 below provides an overview of the 24 young people in the study sample for whom we have some interview data.<sup>8</sup> This includes the number of interviews conducted with each young person, their parent(s)/carer(s) and a range of service providers. Brief vignettes relating to each young person are also provided. Details of 'cold cases' - that is, cases that were pursued but were not included in the study sample - can be found in Table A2, Appendix 1.

#### **1.4.2 Strand 2 - interviews with young people, families and service providers**

The original research design was developed in response to the research specification. It comprised three 'waves' of interviews with a relatively small group of young people (30), their parent(s) and/or carers, and interviews with up to five key service providers known personally by the young person, e.g. social workers, Connexions PAs, members of the relevant Youth Offending Team (YOT), etc. The interviews were conducted between March 2007 and March 2009. The main advantage of this approach was that it generates rich qualitative data that provides considerable insight into the lives of a small number of young people who have been permanently excluded from a special school or a PRU. The main limitation of a small-scale qualitative study of the type reported here is that the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of young people who have experienced permanent exclusion from a special school or PRU.

It was anticipated that interviews with the young people, members of their families and service providers would be conducted at intervals of approximately nine months. However, the research team faced major challenges in achieving the study sample (see Pirrie and Macleod, forthcoming (a) and Pirrie and Macleod, forthcoming (b); Appendix 1). These challenges meant that the process of ascertaining information about and negotiating access to the young people was considerably more protracted than anticipated; and that in some cases only a very small number of interviews were conducted (see Table 1.1). These methodological challenges are not unprecedented, as Daniels et al, 2003 also faced similar difficulties in recruiting to their study of excluded pupils (p. 13). The extent to which 'lack of data is data' (Jacklin et al, 2006) will be explored later in the report (see Appendix 1 for specific examples).

Data from formal interviews were supplemented by information gathered by the research team in a series of less formal contacts by telephone and email with a large range of service providers, including Connexions PAs, YOT workers, head teachers, attendance officers, educational welfare officers, social workers, child psychologists, psychiatrists, college placement officers, voluntary sector providers, prison officers, school and college administrators, student counsellors, work experience co-ordinators, etc.

The range of providers referred to above is a clear demonstration of the heterogeneity of the young people in the sample, and of the complexity of their needs. However, it was also an early indication that we were dealing with compartments, and with communication between these different compartments.

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<sup>8</sup> In this Final Report, we focus mainly on the 'active cases' described as being at 'level one' (n=17) where interviews have been conducted with at least two groups from parents, young people and professionals; and 'level two' (n=7) where only one of the three groups are represented among those interviewed (Macleod *et al*, 2008, p. 3). This is in response to a decision taken at a meeting of the Steering Group at which it was decided that the focus for data collection in the final months of the project should be on gathering data from service providers.

## **1.5 About this report**

This report is designed to provide a clear overview of the main findings, which are reported thematically. Brief vignettes are included in order to illustrate particular themes, and to provide specific examples.

Chapter 2 provides the context for the study, and comprises a review of statistical trends in relation to permanent exclusions from special schools. At the time of writing, there were no comparable data available for PRUs. The changing nature of the special school population, particularly in respect of the recorded increase in the incidence of BESD and autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) is also explored. These have been described as ‘the fastest growing types of special needs’ across all education sectors (Third Report of the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, June 2006). The review of the statistical evidence concludes with an overview of inter-authority variations in respect of classification of children in the special school sector by type of need. This will pave the way for a brief review of the literature that will consider constructions of BESD; and the causes and consequences of exclusion from school.

**Table 1.1: overview of cases in the study sample**

| <i>ID</i> | <i>Name<sup>1</sup></i> | <i>Age at p ex</i> | <i>Ethnicity</i>          | <i>G</i> | <i>Ex</i> | <i>SEN - statement</i>  | <i>Young pers.</i> | <i>Parent/carer</i> | <i>Service pr</i> |
|-----------|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|----------|-----------|---|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1         | Mal*                    | 11                 | Black British             | M        | SS        | BESD  | 1                  | 2                   | 9                 |
| 2         | Rob                     | 12                 | White British             | M        | PRU       | Capable of extreme aggressive and abusive behaviour, difficulties in literacy – large discrepancy between literacy and underlying cognitive ability | 3                  | 0                   | 6                 |
| 3         | Kas                     | 13                 | Black British             | M        | SS        | Poor attention /concentration skills; low self-esteem and poor social skills  | 3                  | 0                   | 7                 |
| 4         | Jake                    | 11                 | White British             | M        | SS        | MLD/ specific LD (dyspraxia)  | 2                  | 2                   | 5                 |
| 5         | Ivan                    | 9                  | Black British             | M        | PRU       | BESD  | 3                  | 3                   | 4                 |
| 6         | Phil                    | 9                  | White British             | M        | SS        | ASD   | 2                  | 2                   | 3                 |
| 7         | Leo                     | 13                 | Black British             | M        | SS        | ASD   | 2                  | 1                   | 2                 |
| 8         | Sasrutha                | 14                 | Sri Lankan Tamil          | M        | SS        | ASD   | 1                  | 1                   | 1                 |
| 9         | John*                   | 13                 | White British             | M        | SS        | LD: demanding and challenging behaviour; poor concentration   | 3                  | 0                   | 5                 |
| 10        | Matt*                   | 13                 | White British             | M        | PRU       | None  | 3                  | 1                   | 2                 |
| 11        | Rebecca                 | 14                 | White British             | F        | PRU       | Not known   | 2                  |                     |                   |
| 12        | KC                      | 14                 | Mixed (MWBC) <sup>2</sup> | M        | SS        | Not known   | 2                  | 1                   | 6                 |
| 13        | Isaac                   | 13                 | Mixed (MWBC)              | M        | SS        | BESD  | 3                  | 1                   | 5                 |
| 14        | Joe                     | 8                  | Black British             | M        | PRU       | BESD  | 2                  | 2                   | 2                 |
| 15        | Simon*                  | 14                 | White British             | M        | SS        | ASD/SLD   | 2                  | 2                   | 4                 |
| 16        | Peter                   | 14                 | White British             | M        | SS        | Learning difficulties; attention deficit  | 2                  | 2                   | 4                 |
| 17        | Tom                     | 12                 | White British             | M        | SS        | ADHD/ BESD /HI  | 1                  | 2                   | 4                 |
| 18        | Mike                    | No info            | White British             | M        | SS        | Aspergers   | 2                  |                     |                   |
| 19        | David*                  | 13                 | White British             | M        | SS        | BUSD also MLD and social interaction  | 0                  | 0                   | 1                 |
| 20        | James                   | 13                 | White British             | M        | SS        | BESD also MLD and SpLD  | 0                  | 0                   | 2                 |
| 21        | Derek*                  | 12                 | White British             | M        | SS        | BESD also MLD   | 0                  | 0                   | 2                 |
| 22        | Stuart                  | 12                 | White British             | M        | SS        | Not known   | 2                  |                     |                   |
| 23        | Jamie*                  | 14                 | White British             | M        | SS        | BESD  | 1                  |                     |                   |
| 24        | Drew                    | No info            | White British             | M        | SS        | ASD   | 2                  |                     |                   |

\* Looked after

<sup>1</sup> The names of all young people have been changed to protect their identities.

<sup>2</sup> Mixed: White and Black Caribbean

## 2 Setting the scene

### 2.1 The impact of permanent exclusion on young people

In this section, we consider the impact of permanent exclusion from school upon young people, many of whom have pre-existing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties that are further exacerbated by their permanent exclusion. We draw primarily upon the research literature and on the statistical evidence relating to exclusion from school.

It should be noted at the outset that rise of inclusion as a social reform strategy has exposed fundamental tensions between ‘the will to punish’ (Parsons, 2005), as evidenced by the exclusion from school of young people who are ‘troubled and troublesome’ (McCluskey et al, 2004), ‘difficult’ or ‘challenging’ (Parsons, 2005) and ‘a political and social struggle which foregrounds difference and identity and which involves whole-school and teacher reform’ (Allan, 2003). Nussbaum (2004) describes how liberal society and its legal institutions are cut through by deep tensions between

*...support for punishments that humiliate and the general concern for human dignity that lies behind the extension of stigma-free status to formerly marginalized groups — and, in general, between the view that law should shame malefactors and the view that law should protect citizens from insults to their dignity (p. 2)*

There is substantial evidence built up over more than a decade that young people who have been permanently excluded from school are at greater risk of a variety of negative outcomes, including prolonged periods out of education and/or employment; poor mental and physical health; involvement in crime; and homelessness (Audit Commission, 1996; Donovan, 1998; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; Lyon et al, 2000; Berridge et al, 2001; Coles et al, 2002; Daniels et al, 2003; Ofsted, 2004; Ofsted, 2005). Only about half of the 141 young people tracked by Daniels et al (2003) were in education, training or employment two years after their permanent exclusion.

Visser et al (2005) note that pupils who have been permanently excluded from school ‘feature prominently amongst the “missing”’ (p. 46) (see also Daniels et al, 2003). It is not surprising that young people experience feelings of rejection and alienation post-exclusion (Munn et al, 2000, Osterman, 2000) or that they find ‘schooling irrelevant to their aspirations; experience teaching and learning at an inappropriate level of challenge’ (Visser et al, 2005, p. 45); and that levels of attendance at subsequent provision are severely compromised (Vincent et al, 2007).

### 2.2 Trends in permanent exclusion from special schools

The research undertaken by Daniels et al (2003) was commissioned in response to ‘considerable concern about the general rise in the numbers of pupils permanently excluded from schools’ (p. 1) in the decade preceding the study. Permanent exclusions peaked in 1996–97, prompting a raft of Government guidance, in the form Circular 10/99 (DfEE, 1999a) and Circular 11/99 (DfEE, 1999b) that established clear protocols in respect of managing exclusion. The Steer Report (DfES, 2005a) subsequently recognised that ‘exclusions are an important sanction for pupils involved in serious or persistent misbehaviour’, but reinforced the message from earlier Circulars, namely that the focus should be on ‘preventative action [including ‘managed moves’] and early intervention, to ensure that exclusion rarely becomes necessary’ (p. 53) (see also DCSF, 2008b, paragraphs 95-98).

The statistical evidence suggests that there has been a steady reduction in the number of pupils permanently excluded from special schools over the last decade. Our focus here is on the statistical data relating to permanent exclusion from special schools, as there is no comparable data available on exclusions from PRUs. We note that performance data for on attainment alternative education providers and local authorities will be published as part of the *Back on Track* agenda (DCSF, 2008a).

The most recent statistics provide an overview of trends in permanent exclusion over time.<sup>9</sup> In 1997–98, there were 570 permanent exclusions from special schools; by 2006–7, this had dropped to 180. If we take into account changes in pupil population this represents a drop of 66 per cent. According to the most recent statistics on special educational needs in England, in 1998 93,472 pupils attended a special school. By 2007, this figure had declined to 84,690, representing a fall of 9 per cent.<sup>10</sup> Although there has been a decline in the numbers attending special schools (and a parallel decline in the issue of statements), the percentage of the population educated in the sector has remained relatively constant.

In respect of permanent exclusions from special schools, the salient point is that if the number of permanent exclusions is expressed as a percentage of the number (headcount) of all pupils (excluding dually registered pupils in special schools), a marked decrease is also evident: namely, from 0.58 per cent in 1997-98 to 0.20 per cent in 2006-7 (see note 1 above). However, some caution is required in the interpretation of these findings, as they need to be considered in relation to diverse practices relating to 'managed moves' informal or 'grey' exclusions (Daniels et al, 2003). Visser et al (2005) note that the practice of advising parents to withdraw their child from school to obviate a permanent exclusion puts the onus on parents to identify a suitable placement, and that this can prove a considerable challenge. However, there is some evidence that where local authorities have introduced managed transfer arrangements these difficulties have been overcome, with the result that fewer young people go missing from education (Vincent et al, 2007; Visser et al, 2005).

In sum, it is important to emphasise that the reduction in the number of young people permanently excluded from school does not necessarily indicate that there have been substantial improvements in the quality of their educational and social experiences. Furthermore, it can be argued that the response of the sector to the repeated calls for a reduction in permanent exclusions has made it more rather than less difficult to determine the nature of young people's experiences. The methodological challenges outlined in Appendix 1 certainly appear to support this hypothesis. However it must be noted that given the lack of evidence around the use of 'managed moves' it is not possible to reach any firm conclusions as to whether the outcomes for young people are better or worse.

It is illuminating to compare trends in permanent exclusion from special schools with those that are evident in the mainstream sector. For example, in 1997-98, the percentage of the school population permanently excluded from LA maintained secondary schools was 0.33. The corresponding percentage in respect of special schools was 0.58. By 2006-7, the percentage of the school population permanently excluded from state-funded secondary schools, including City Technology Colleges (CTCs) and Academies had decreased to 0.23; for LA maintained secondary schools, the decrease was to 0.22; and for special schools to 0.20, broadly on a par with the situation in the mainstream secondary sector.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> DCSF: Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions from Schools in England 2006/07 -Table 1. Available at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000793/index.shtml>

<sup>10</sup> Data supplied by DCSF

<sup>11</sup> See DCSF: Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions from Schools in England 2006/07 -Table 1. Available at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000793/index.shtml>

## 2.3 Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and permanent exclusion

Around sixty per cent of the 16,000 young people attending a PRU in January 2008 had SEN. However, only 12.2 per cent of these had a statement. The guidance makes it explicit that 'PRUs are not planned or designed to be a long term setting and should not be regarded as part of a local authority's range of planned SEN provision' (DCSF, 2008b, p. 32; see also OFSTED, 2007, which reports that 'commonly, pupils with statements of special educational need had been admitted to PRUs without appropriate decisions being taken about long term placement'). The consensus in the policy documentation is that PRUs are part of a range of provision for behaviour management.<sup>12</sup> Behaviour provision overlaps with, but is not identical to provision for young people with SEN. Some young people with SEN have challenging behaviour. However, the guidance states that young people with BESD are only considered to have SEN 'if they have a *learning difficulty* that calls for special educational provision' (DCSF, 2008b, paragraph 6) (our emphasis). However, the guidance also recognises that 'learning difficulties and behaviour difficulties are often in a two-way relationship' (DCSF, 2008b, paragraph 57). There are key differences in the wording of paragraph 6 and 59, which reads as follows:

*The majority of children and young people with any form of BESD should be considered to have SEN if they require additional or different educational arrangements or interventions from those that are generally offered in a mainstream school (our emphasis).*

This extract illustrates the tension between within-person and systemic accounts of causation (Daniels, 2006). However, as we saw above the guidance does recognise that the inter-relationship between within-child and environmental factors.

For our current purposes, the most important point is that PRUs provide for a very diverse range of young people, many with complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, of whom some 'arrive in an unplanned way' (OFSTED, 2007, p. 4). Young people admitted to a PRU will also include those who have been absent from school on medical grounds, teenage parents and those in public care. Some young people will attend a PRU for a matter of days; and others for 'an indefinite period' (OFSTED, 2007, p. 5). There will be a combination of part-time and full-time placements. For these reasons, and in view of the considerable fluctuations in patterns of attendance, monitoring the population of PRUs presents particular challenges.

## 2.4 Reasons for exclusion

The consensus that emerges from the statistical evidence is that the reasons that young people are most commonly permanently excluded appear to be<sup>13</sup>: physical assault against a pupil; physical assault against an adult; persistent disruptive behaviour, and in the secondary sector 'other' (Hayden and Dunne, 2001; Harris et al, 2006, SFR 14/2008). However, there are some variations between secondary schools and special schools in respect of the reasons given for exclusion. For example, in the 2006-7 school year, the percentage of pupils in special schools permanently excluded for physical assault against an adult was 26.6 per cent; the corresponding figure for secondary school permanent exclusions was 9.0 per cent. Persistent disruptive behaviour was the reason given for 31.4 per cent of permanent exclusions from secondary schools; and for 22.8 per cent of those in special schools.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The full range of provision for behaviour management includes special schools for pupils with BESD, PRUs, whole-school approaches to behaviour management in the mainstream, learning support units (LSUs) and designated SEN units in mainstream schools, outreach behaviour support services (from special schools for pupils with BESD to other schools and from LAs to schools). It also includes other alternative provision commissioned by the LA, and LA-commissioned placements in independent special schools.

<sup>13</sup> Twelve categories reasons for exclusion are reported in SFR 14/2008. Our focus here is on the most commonly reported reasons.

<sup>14</sup> DCSF Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions from Schools in England 2006-7 Amended. Table 9. Available

It is important to emphasise that these reasons are not mutually exclusive, as will be evident when we examine in more detail the histories of the young people in this study. As we shall see, physical assault on an adult was usually the catalyst for but rarely the sole cause of a young person’s permanent exclusion (see also Daniels et al, 2003, p. 137). Daniels et al, 2003 report that ‘permanent exclusion usually followed a long history of behavioural challenges by the young person to the excluding school’ (p. 15; see also p. 25). Although there are positive outcomes associated with the practice of ‘managed moves’, ‘a process whereby a collaborating school agrees to accept a pupil at risk of exclusion from another collaborating school’ (Vincent et al, 2007, p. 284), the lack of robust statistical evidence of the extent of the practice makes it difficult to gain a clear overview of the extent to which has resulted in a reduction in permanent exclusions.<sup>15</sup>

We shall now consider another important contextual variable for this study, namely the changing nature of the special school population.

**2.5 The changing population of special schools**

Further contextual information, particularly in respect of the changing composition of the special school population, will underline the extent of progress achieved in reducing the percentage of young people permanently excluded from this sector. We were limited in the extent of statistical analysis that we were able to carry out, as comparable data in relation to type of need were only available between 2005 and 2008.

**2.5.1 Incidence of BESD and ASD**

The rapid increase in the number of young people receiving a diagnosis of ASD and/or ADHD and / or BESD in all jurisdictions of the UK is well documented (Lloyd, 2003; Pirrie et al, 2006). The recent House of Commons Education and Skills Committee’s Report on Special Educational Needs (HC 478-1) states that ‘children with SEBD<sup>16</sup> and autism are the fastest growing categories of SEN’. It has also been established that ‘pupils with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autistic behaviour and mental health problems’ make up a significant proportion of permanent exclusions from school (p. 31). Table 2.1 below shows a gradual increase in the number and percentage of young people attending special schools who are described as having BESD or ASD<sup>17</sup>.

**Table 2.1 - special schools, number and percentage of pupils by type of need**

| Year | Type of need |      |        |      |                     |
|------|--------------|------|--------|------|---------------------|
|      | BESD         |      | ASD    |      | BESD/ASD<br>Total % |
|      | N=           | %    | N=     | %    |                     |
| 2008 | 13,240       | 14.9 | 14,200 | 16.0 | 30.9                |
| 2007 | 13,160       | 14.9 | 12,550 | 14.2 | 29.1                |
| 2006 | 12,740       | 14.4 | 11,260 | 12.7 | 27.1                |
| 2005 | 12,470       | 13.9 | 9,900  | 11.1 | 25.0                |

at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000793/index.shtml>  
<sup>15</sup> On the practice of managed moves, see paragraph 9(d) of the Department’s guidance on exclusions: *Improving Behaviour and Attendance – Guidance on Exclusion from Schools and Pupil Referral Units*, published in September 2007.  
<sup>16</sup> The terms BESD and SEBD are used interchangeably in the Commons report. Footnote 95 on p. 31 states that BESD is the ‘normal’ term, but that ‘SEBD is a better reflection of the priority of need for these young people.’  
<sup>17</sup> SFR15/2008; SFR20/2007; SFR23/2006; SFR24/2005

The Commons report notes that although BESD and ASD are now 'high incidence types of special needs ... there are relatively few pupils in special schools (around a third in each case)' (p. 31). Two possible explanations are suggested:

*This could be because such children are being effectively included in mainstream schools, or it could be that the system has been slow to re-structure to meet the changing needs of pupils with particular types of special needs. (p. 31)*

Given the variability in diagnostic practice in respect of ASD, it is difficult to compare the incidence in the school population across the different jurisdictions of the UK. Research conducted in Scotland suggests that both mainstream and special schools are providing for increasing numbers of young people with ASD (Pirrie et al, 2006). For example, there has been a steady rise in the number of pupils with ASD in the special education sector between 1998 (the year that ASD first appeared as a 'category of main difficulty of learning') and 2004. During the same period, however, there were only minor fluctuations in the number of pupils categorised as having SEBD educated in special schools. This is difficult to interpret, given the complex inter-relationship between these two categories of 'main difficulty of learning'.

### **2.5.2 Range of need**

As we shall see when we come to explore the trajectories of individual young people in this study, there were cases where the young person's permanent exclusion was partly explained by the fact that the population of the specialist provision that they were attending had become increasingly diverse. The co-location of young people who presented with challenging behaviour and those in fragile health in buildings that are not fit for purpose posed particular challenges for young people. Service providers also faced challenges in providing for young people with a broad range of complex needs. This case underlines one of the findings reported by Pirrie et al (2006), namely the challenges for the sector associated with the increase in the range and complexity of need amongst those attending special schools. This had ramifications for staffing and skill mix, for staff morale and professional esteem, and for the climate for teaching and learning in special schools.

### **2.5.3 Impact of prior educational experience**

The evidence from the case studies of the young people participating in this study certainly suggests that individuals have experienced a mixed economy of provision; and that most had attended mainstream provision at some point in their school career. Moreover, the evidence suggests that several have been adversely affected by repeated breakdown of placements in the mainstream sector. As we shall see, another explanation for the over-representation of older children<sup>18</sup> in the special school population is that the process of reaching a diagnosis can be very protracted. Moreover, even after a diagnosis has been reached, the process of identifying the most suitable placement can be complex and time-consuming. For instance, it may involve balancing competing needs (e.g MLD and BESD) and waiting for a suitable placement to become available. For obvious reasons, these difficulties are exacerbated in the case of young people with multiple and complex needs.

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<sup>18</sup> There is a larger proportion of children aged 11-15 in special schools (54%) than in mainstream schools (38%) SFR 09/2008

This can be illustrated by considering the statistical evidence relating to the population of young people with statements in mainstream schools. If we compare the number of pupils in state-funded primary and secondary schools by age and gender,<sup>19</sup> it is evident that most pupils with statements are aged between 9 and 15 years, with the peak at age 14. Moreover, the ratio of boys to girls with statements is in the order of 3:1. The evidence also suggests that a greater percentage of young people of Black Caribbean or White and Black Caribbean origin have statements of SEN (2.9 and 2.5 per cent of secondary pupils respectively) than White British (2.1 per cent)<sup>20</sup> (see also Daniels et al, 2003, p. 139; Parsons et al, 2005; Parsons, 2008; Parsons, 2009). Children who are 'looked after' are also over-represented in exclusion statistics.

Statistical data relating to trends in exclusion in the mainstream and special school sectors and in statementing patterns, together with the changing composition of the special school population, particularly the rising incidence of types of need that are directly associated with challenging behaviour, are the background against which the individual stories reported below should be considered. Other relevant issues are the over-representation of boys, not just amongst young people with statements of SEN, but also amongst those permanently excluded from school and the over-representation of young people with SEN amongst those permanently excluded from school. Young people with SEN are about three times as likely to be permanently excluded from school than their peers without statements of SEN.<sup>21</sup> Forty per cent of the sample in the study of young people permanently excluded from school conducted by Daniels et al (2003) 'had identified special educational needs (literacy or numeracy difficulties or behavioural difficulties or a combination of these factors) (pp. 22 and 27).

## 2.6 The meaning of BESD

The consensus in the research literature is that there are very few generalisations that can be made about pupils with the label BESD, or the associated terms emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), the term generally used in Scotland. This is a direct consequence of a 'lack of consensus as to what [BESD] actually is', and 'broad agreement in the literature that the definition ... is problematic' (Macleod and Munn 2004, p.171; see also Visser, 2003; Cole, 2006; O'Mahony, 2006; Macnab et al, 2007; Vincent et al, 2007).

In their study of admissions and exclusions of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) Wilkin et al (2005) report that there was 'considerable debate as to whether "behaviour difficulties" were "special educational needs" and difficulty in distinguishing between "naughtiness" and an inability to behave appropriately (see also Lloyd et al, 2006). The emphasis on behavioural rather than emotional difficulties is reflected in the change in nomenclature and perhaps reflects a growing concern with the 'uninhibited, aggressive and antisocial behaviours from the externalising end of the spectrum' (O'Mahoney, 2006, p. 168). This is perhaps not surprising, given that these present the greatest challenge to the school system. It is worth noting, however, that the Practitioners' Group on School Behaviour and Discipline found that the 'vast majority of [cases of unsatisfactory behaviour] involve low level disruption in lessons' (DfESa, 2005, p. 6; see also Munn et al, 2004; Wilkin et al, 2006). As we saw above (2.1.1), in 2006-7, persistent disruptive behaviour accounted for 22.8 per cent of permanent exclusions from special schools.

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<sup>19</sup> DCSF: Special Educational Needs in England: January 2008 Table 5. Available at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000794/index.shtml>

<sup>20</sup> DCSF: Special Educational Needs in England: January 2008 Table 8b <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000794/index.shtml>

<sup>21</sup> DCSF: Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions from Schools in England 2006/07 - Amended. Table 7. Available at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000793/index.shtml>

Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) is the term preferred by some leading commentators in England (Cooper, 2001; 2004; Visser et al, 2005) and by the Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Association (SEBDA).<sup>22</sup> The use of this term signals a recognition that disruptive and challenging behaviour may be a 'positive adaptive response' to a situation or an environment that places communication demands upon young people that they are unable to meet.<sup>23</sup> The breakdown of the school population by main type of need<sup>24</sup> in the statistics systematically downplays the complex inter-relationship between BESD and other areas of special educational need that is evident in the profiles of the young people who participated in this study, although this inter-relationship is frequently acknowledged in the policy documentation. For example, the statistics for 2008 indicate that 77.5 per cent of the special school population had special educational needs that were ascribed to the following four categories of need: SLD (23.7%); MLD (22.9%); ASD (16.0%); and BESD (14.9%). The cases of the young people in the study sample underline the fact that these are not discrete categories.

This is recognised in the recent guidance on the education of children and young people with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (DCSF, 2008b), which devotes several paragraphs to exploring various definitions, and the interaction between challenging behaviour and learning and/or communication difficulties. Vincent et al (2007) cite research evidence of a reciprocal link between learning difficulties and behaviour problems (Hamill and Boyd, 2002; Wearmouth, 2004). The DCSF guidance cites the SEN Code of Practice (2001), which describes BESD as 'a learning difficulty where children and young people demonstrate features of emotional and behavioural difficulties such as: being withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing; being hyperactive and lacking concentration; having immature social skills; or presenting challenging behaviours arising from other complex needs' (DCSF, 2008b, paragraph 49) and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA), which includes anyone with 'a mental or physical impairment that has a long-term and substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities [memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand]' among those described as having a disability (DCSFb, 2008, paragraph 51). Paragraph 54 makes explicit reference to 'conduct disorders and hyperkinetic disorders (including attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD))' and to 'children and young people whose behavioural difficulties may be less obvious, for example, those with anxiety, who self-harm, have school phobia or depression, and those whose behaviour or emotional well-being are said to be deteriorating.' It is implicit in this last extract that behavioural difficulties can shade into mental illness, although the precise nature of the articulation between these two concepts is difficult to define (Macnab et al, 2007). Whether a child or young person is assigned the label BESD 'depends on a range of factors, including the nature, frequency, persistence, severity and abnormality of the difficulties' (paragraph 55). These terms are themselves open to interpretation, and thus represent an infinite regression of fractured meanings and unclear boundaries. The links between troubled and troublesome behaviour and incipient or established mental illness are of particular interest given the current interest in children's mental health.

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.sebda.org/>

<sup>23</sup> Growing up talking in the ASBO age: vulnerability and change in the development of children's language. Queen Margaret Professorial Lecture, 22 November 2006.

<sup>24</sup> See DCSF: Special Educational Needs in England: January 2008 Tables 20–22 for the breakdown by type of need in maintained primary schools, state-funded secondary schools and special schools respectively

## 2.7 Summary

The main points to emerge from this chapter, which set the context for the research reported below, can be summarised as follows:

- Continuity of education is severely compromised by permanent exclusion.
- Young people permanently excluded from school figure prominently among those who are described as 'missing' from education.
- The statistical evidence suggests that there has been a steady reduction in the number of pupils permanently excluded from special schools over the last decade.
- There have been positive outcomes associated with the practice of 'managed moves'
- The lack of robust statistical evidence of the incidence of the practice makes it difficult to gain a clear overview of the extent to which has resulted in a reduction in permanent exclusions.
- Since 2004, there has been a gradual increase in the number and percentage of young people attending special schools who are described as having BESD or ASD.
- The complex inter-relationship between BESD and other types of need is recognised in recent DCSF guidance.

## **3 Introducing the young people**

### **3.1 Profile of the sample**

This section of the report comprises an overview of the histories and social contexts of the young people in the study sample. The complex nature of the young people's disabilities and difficulties is explored, and an account is given of what is known about their educational history: i.e. the number of schools (mainstream and/or special) attended prior to the special school or PRU from which they were excluded in 2005-6; previous fixed period and permanent exclusions; periods spent out of school; and the event(s) that precipitated the permanent exclusion that was the criterion for participation in the study.

#### **3.1.1 Age, gender and ethnicity**

As we have already seen, the profile of the study sample in respect of gender reflects the patterns evident in the statistics on exclusion from school: namely that boys are over-represented amongst those permanently excluded from school; and that the peak age range for permanent exclusion is between 12 and 14.<sup>25</sup> The young people participating in the study were aged between 9 years and 7 months and 14 years and 8 months at the time of their permanent exclusion from a special school or PRU. However, the majority (16:24) were aged between 12 and 14. Eight of the 24 young people were from minority ethnic groups; and seven were looked after. These findings are broadly consonant with what is known from previous research about the unequal distribution of the chances of experiencing disciplinary exclusion (Parsons, 2005; Parsons et al, 2005 Munn and Lloyd, 2005; Brodie, 2000). However, it is also possible that this distribution is an artefact of the sampling procedure (and of the difficulties of accessing the sample) rather than a true reflection of the characteristics of the population of pupils permanently excluded from school.

#### **3.1.2 Family circumstances**

Most of the young people in the sample lived in family situations that were disrupted or difficult, characterised by the complex interaction of number of variables including family breakdown; low levels of employment; mental ill-health (amongst both young people and their parents); and low income. This is consonant with the findings from an earlier study (Daniels et al, 2003, p. 15, p. 17) on exclusion from school.

Two of the young people lived between family members, including a parent, grandparents and aunts and uncles. Others were dealing with tensions arising from reconstituted families. For example, the challenging behaviour of the youngest child in the sample (who was aged 9 years and 7 months at the time of his permanent exclusion) was considered by one of his current service providers to have been exacerbated by the recent breakdown of his parents' relationship, and by the birth of siblings in both his parents' subsequent relationships. Simon, the oldest in the sample, has autism, SLD and no verbal communication. The family's social worker explained how his behaviour deteriorated rapidly when his mother's new partner and his son moved in. Simon had to move out of his bedroom and sleep on the sofa in the family's living room. This room was the main point of access into the house, and the lack of privacy precipitated a series of violent outbursts from Simon that resulted in physical injury to various members of the family. The fact that Simon's natural father died suddenly when Simon was a young child and that his mother has been unemployed since that time, illustrates that there were other variables involved in this case. However, it is not possible to hypothesise about the possible interactions between the different variables on the basis of the available evidence.

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<sup>25</sup> DCSF Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions from Schools in England 2006–2007 Amended. Table 3.

Paternal absence, or the absence of a paternal role model, was a factor for many of the young people in the sample. Mal's mother was a single parent who had given birth at age 14; Isaac, who had himself become a father aged 16, had no clear recollection of his own father, who had been in prison for most of his childhood. Isaac's mother was one of the few parents in full-time employment. It is a sad irony that one of the reasons for her persistent refusal to engage with the range of services offered (including family therapy by the Community CAMHS team) was her fear that this would have a negative impact upon her employment status.

The fact that only 5 of the 28 young people initially identified were from a family where there was an adult in paid employment is broadly consistent with the findings from previous research studies. Daniels et al, 2003 reported that 25 per cent of the fathers of the young people in their study were believed to be unemployed. It is not surprising that there was an even higher proportion of unemployed adults in this study, given the association between having a child with poor health status, as measured by general reported health, hospitalizations, activity limitations, and chronic condition or disability status and reduced maternal and paternal employment (Kuhltau and Perrin, 2001).

There is no clear causal link between having a child with SEN and employment status. Nevertheless, in the current study, during interview four parents explicitly attributed the fact that they were not in paid employment to the delays in identifying a suitable placement for their child, or to other factors related to the young person's SEN. For example, Sasrutha's father felt unable to leave him in the sole care of his mother, as his behaviour was often unpredictable and violent. Jake's mother had chosen to educate him at home after his permanent exclusion, in the absence of anything else on offer from the local authority, and this meant that she was unable to take on paid employment.

### **3.1.3 Complex co-morbidity**

As is evident from Table 1.1 and illustrated by some of the examples above, all of the young people in the sample had multiple and complex support needs. The most common combination was BESD with MLD. Even in the minority of cases (10) in which only one category of difficulty was mentioned on the young person's statement (e.g. BESD, ASD), the nature of their difficulties was extremely complex. It has been established that BESD is associated with learning difficulties (Hayden and Dunne, 2001; Berridge et al, 2001; Daniels et al, 2003), although the causal relationship is not always clear. The evidence from this study suggests that in some cases underlying learning difficulties and / or inappropriate placement were contributory factors in challenging behaviour; however poor attendance, combined with repeated instances of fixed period and permanent exclusion, placement in a large number of schools (mainstream and special schools and PRUs) and substantial periods out of school while a suitable subsequent placement was identified may have exacerbated pre-existing learning difficulties (see Table 3.1). As we shall see below, the complexity of these young people's needs was a major factor in the substantial delays in identifying a suitable placement.

It is important to recognise that many of the young people in the sample were considered by service providers to be at the extreme end of a spectrum of need. This is relevant in respect of prospective answers to the third research question: (namely, what action, if any, was taken to prevent the young person's exclusion) as there may be less scope for mitigating action for young people who are at the extreme end of a continuum of need. The following examples indicate the 'high tariff' nature of some young people's difficulties. Mal was considered by a local authority service manager to be 'in the top eighteen in terms of need of that type of specialist [BESD] need in the city' [with just under 500,000 inhabitants]. By the time Isaac received his second custodial sentence (24 months) post-exclusion, at the age of 17, he was considered by the head of the local YOT team to be one of the twenty most prolific offenders

in an inner-London borough. In addition, many of the young people had previously been permanently excluded from a range of other provision prior to the exclusion during the reference period for the study, with the result that their education had been greatly disrupted (see Table 3.1).

It appears that one of the reasons that it proved difficult or indeed impossible to ascertain what was on a young person's statement of SEN was that the current service providers were attempting to address a range of issues that went far beyond the 'category of need' described on the statement. Leo's mother described how she had discovered that service providers were still operating on the basis of a statement written when her son was three. This discovery was made when Leo was eleven years old. In short, there is evidence to suggest that service providers involved with the young people on a day-to-day basis (e.g. teachers, outreach tutors and other school-based support staff) tended to view the statement as a historical document that did not necessarily reflect the full range of the young person's current needs. This was also partly a reflection of the context-dependent nature of some young people's difficulties. For example, Simon's behaviour in the special school from which he had been permanently excluded was considered a major threat to the health and safety of pupils and staff alike. However, his subsequent placement was in a small specialist unit for seven young people with autism, where he was receiving one-to-one attention. There had been a marked improvement in his behaviour since his admission to this purpose-built unit, which was located in a neighbouring local authority. 'KC' (his preferred code-name) was considered by staff to have been inappropriately placed in a school for pupils with learning difficulties, where younger children were frightened of him. Like four other young people in the sample he had been involved in criminal activity. The head teacher of the special school from which he was permanently excluded explained:

*'I was involved in his assessment to determine the appropriate provision for him at secondary school. We prepare the transfer information at the end of Year 5. He has MLD, so overall we felt this was the best place for him. At the time the school was less skilled up in dealing with children with a profile of behavioural difficulties. On reflection, KC exhibited a pattern that included EBD.'*

A recurring theme in the interviews with staff from the excluding schools was that the level of challenge increased with the physical size of the young person. As KC's former tutor observed that 'by Y10 he was uncontrollable and difficult to manage, and physically big.' In other cases, the rationale for a placement in a particular setting was not always clear to the young person. For example, Rob had been in five placements in total, and had been permanently excluded twice before the permanent exclusion in 2005–6. Interviewed while on a painting and decorating course at college, he reflected on his previous experiences in the following terms: 'I weren't really doing nothing before ... they were just moving me about everywhere.'

**Table 3.1: Profile of young people pre- and post-permanent exclusion in 2005-06**

| <i>Id</i> | <i>Name<sup>1</sup></i> | <i>Age at P ex</i> | <i>Ethnicity</i> | <i>Mainstr primary placements</i> | <i>Subsequent placements</i> | <i>P ex/MM<sup>2</sup> before 05-06</i> | <i>SEN - statement</i>   | <i>Attend.</i> | <i>F-T ex</i> | <i>Reason for permanent exclusion in 2005-06; other salient factors</i>  |
|-----------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|---|--|----------------|---------------|--|
| 1         | Mal*                    | 11                 | Black Br         | No                                | N/A                          | 1 PEx                                   | BESD   | Poor           | >1            | Violent assault on a teacher; bullying   |
| 2         | Rob                     | 12                 | White Br         | Yes                               | 4                            | 2 P Ex                                  | BESD, learning difficulties  | No data        | No data       | Violent behaviour; drug use  |
| 3         | Kas                     | 13                 | Black Br         | Yes                               | 3 (SS)                       | 1 PEx                                   | Poor attention /concentration skills; low self-esteem and poor social skills | No data        | No data       | Violent assault on a teacher (stabbing with a compass) spitting, projectile vomiting; racist bullying; self-harm               |
| 4         | Jake                    | 11                 | White Br         | Yes                               | 1 + h-sech (2yrs)            | Withdrawn                               | MLD/ specific LD   | V poor         | No data       | Assault on five teachers and 'trashing' library  |
| 5         | Ivan                    | 9                  | Black Br         | Yes                               | 3 (2MS/IPRU)                 | 2 PEx                                   | BESD   | V poor         | No data       | Excluded from mainstream PS for carrying knife   |
| 6         | Phil                    | 9                  | White Br         | Yes                               | 2 (SS)                       | 1 MM                                    | ASD  | V poor         | No data       | Threw a chair; strips, urinates, punches   |
| 7         | Leo                     | 13                 | Black Br         | No                                | 6 (SS/PRU)                   | MMs                                     | ASD  | V poor         | No data       | Assault on teacher   |
| 8         | Sasrutha                | 14                 | Sri Lankan Tamil |                                   |                              |   | ASD  |                |               | Assault on teacher (hospitalised); concerns about sexualised behaviour   |
| 9         | John*                   | 13                 | White Br         | Yes                               | 3 (SS)                       | 1 SS                                    | L.D: demanding and challenging behaviour; poor concentration                 | No data        | No data       | Violent assault on pupils and staff;   |
| 10        | Matt*                   | 13                 | White Br         | Yes                               | 6 (MS/PRU/ Training Prov)    | 1 PEx/1MM                               | None   | Variable       | > 2           | Threatening a pupil; knife carrying  |
| 11        | Rebecca                 | 14                 | White Br         | No info                           | No info                      | 1 PEx                                   | Not known  | V poor         | > 2           | Not known  |
| 12        | KC                      | 14                 | Mixed (MWBC)     | Yes                               | 1 SS                         | 1 PEx                                   | Not known  | Poor           | >10           | Violent physical assault on teacher; history of physical assaults on staff/pupils; bullying; involvement in petty crime        |
| 13        | Isaac                   | 13                 | Mixed (MWBC)     | Yes                               | 3                            | 1 MM                                    | BESD   | V poor         | >5            | Violent assault on teacher while under influence of drugs; knives in school; gang-related activity; drug user; racist bullying |
| 14        | Joe                     | 8                  | Black Br         | Yes                               | 2                            | 2 PEx                                   | BESD   | V poor         | >5            | Assault on HT (broke finger); severe volatility  |
| 15        | Simon*                  | 14                 | White Br         | No                                | N/A                          | None                                    | ASD/SLD  | No data        | >6            | Violent assault on pupils and staff  |
| 16        | Peter                   | 14                 | White Br         | Yes                               | 1                            | None                                    | Learning difficulties; attention deficit                                     | No data        | No data       | Violent incident in classroom  |
| 17        | Tom                     | 12                 | White Br         | Yes                               | 1                            | 1 PEx                                   | ADHD/ BESD/HI  | V poor         | 3             | 'Went on rampage in grounds'; previous history of violent outbursts  |
| 18        | Mike                    | No info            | White Br         | Yes                               | 1                            | None                                    | Aspergers  | No data        | No data       | Violent outbursts  |
| 19        | David*                  | 13                 | White Br         |                                   |                              |   | BESD also MLD and difficulties with social interaction;                      | V poor         |               | Violent attacks on staff and pupils over 2-week period   |
| 20        | James                   | 13                 | White Br         | Yes                               | 1                            | 1 PEx                                   | BESD also MLD and SpLD   | V poor         |               | Severe physical assaults on staff; use of sharp instruments; biting; sexualised behaviour                                      |
| 21        | Derek*                  | 12                 | White Br         | Yes                               | 1                            |   | BESD also MLD  | No info        | No info       | Severe physical assaults on staff.   |
| 22        | Stuart                  | 12                 | White Br         | Yes                               | >3                           | Not known                               |  | No info        | No info       |  |
| 23        | Jamie*                  | 14                 | White Br         |                                   |                              |   | BESD   |                |               |  |
| 24        | Drew                    | No info            | White Br         |                                   |                              |   | ASD  |                |               |  |

\* Looked after

<sup>1</sup> The names of all young people have been changed to protect their identities.

<sup>2</sup> MM = managed move.

### **3.1.4 Disrupted educational pathways**

As is evident from Table 3.1, many of the young people in the study sample had experienced severely disrupted educational pathways. This is a reflection of the complexity of their profile of needs, and of the difficulty of identifying a suitable placement, an issue to which we return when considering the young people's trajectories after the 2005-6 exclusion. As a consequence, many had been out of school for extended periods with very little or no educational provision.

#### ***Vignette 1: identifying a placement for a child with complex needs***

*Leo was diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum at 2yrs and 7 months. At 13, he had a managed move out of an out-of-authority placement in a special school for children with moderate/severe and complex learning difficulties. This school was his eighth placement since pre-school, not including two extended periods of over 6 months during which he was at home with no educational support. His mother reported that it had been 'difficult every step of the way', as she has struggled to find the right school for him. He seems to be too able for a school for pupils with severe difficulties, but his difficulties are too complex for a school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. His mother has applied to 15 schools, she has visited 5 of them, but none was prepared to take her son. Leo has just started a programme of gradual integration into a school for pupils with severe difficulties after a period of 18 months at home with some minimal (4 hours a week) outreach support. His mother says that he is going there because it is the only school in the authority that he hasn't been to before. She is not happy, and is not convinced that this is the best place for him.*

#### ***Vignette 2: placement delays and time out of school***

*Joe's mother was very frustrated by the discontinuities in her son's education. He had been re-instated after his first permanent exclusion (in Year 1). However, his father did not want him to return to the same school, and he had received home tuition for a few months. After Joe's parents separated, his mother moved into a neighbouring borough, and Joe's case was referred to the new LA at the end of the summer term in 2004. According to Joe's mother, the authority was slow to pick up, and the onus was on her to identify a school. Joe's mother is bi-polar, and the strain of having him at home was beginning to take its toll on her mental health. The CPN intervened and 'put pressure on the education department. Joe was out of education completely for six months, before this gradual reintegration into the system through involvement with a voluntary sector project with a specific focus on challenging behaviour. When the placement at the Primary PRU came up, Kay felt she 'had no choice but to accept it'. Joe's behaviour deteriorated rapidly in the setting, as he 'was surrounded by naughty boys' and he was permanently excluded in December 2005. There was another long delay until the next placement (in a children's psychiatric day unit) was identified. Joe started there in November 2006 and has made some progress. His mother is very satisfied with the current provision, and feels that his needs are being met. However, due to a combination of complex difficulties and extended periods out of school, Joe is considerably behind his peers. The initial plan to re-integrate him into a mainstream school has been revised, and a placement in a special school in another authority is the most likely option.*

It is very likely that extended periods out of education have a deleterious effect on future progress. Tom is a case in point. He spent eight months at home after being permanently excluded from a mainstream primary school. According to his mother, he received three hours home tuition per week during this period. She and her husband paid for additional tuition, as they were concerned that Tom was falling further behind his peers. He had no SLT, and did not wear his hearing aids during the time he spent at home after his first permanent exclusion (from a mainstream primary school). Tom was out of school for a further six months after his second permanent exclusion. His mother recounted visiting 'five or six schools, but none of them would take him.' He was finally placed in a school for pupils with BESD that had recently been in special measures. We shall return to the implications of these stories, and others like them, later in the report.

## **3.2 The permanent exclusion**

### **3.2.1 Events leading up to permanent exclusion**

Table 3.1 gives an overview of the events that led up to the young person's exclusion during the reference period. In the vast majority of cases where the reason for the young person's exclusion is known, the catalyst was a violent assault on a member of staff. This is in accordance with the statistical evidence reported in 2.4 above, namely that pupils in special schools are more likely to be excluded for a physical assault on a member of staff than are pupils in mainstream schools. However, in the cases reported here, there is strong evidence that persistent disruptive behaviour, often involving systematic bullying of younger children, instances of physical assault and damage to property, were contributing factors. This is reflected in the number of fixed period exclusions recorded for some young people. The research team faced some challenges in determining the number of recorded fixed period exclusions. As is evident from Table 3.1, some of the young people had complex trajectories that were often difficult to piece together. The reasons for this, and the implications for future policy development, will be explored below. What is clear, however, is that the event that precipitated the permanent exclusion was the culmination of a series of disruptive incidents. In most cases it was the severity of the assault, and the fact that it was directed at the head teacher that resulted in the permanent exclusion.

### **3.2.2 Perceptions of the permanent exclusion**

Not surprisingly, there were substantial differences between the perceptions of staff and pupils as to the nature of the incident that led to the young person's exclusion. For example, Tom seemed unable to recall the events that led up to his exclusion, although in his case this could in part be attributed to poor memory associated with his complex disability. In contrast, the head teacher of the school from which he had been permanently excluded remembered the incident vividly, even although it had taken place some 18 months prior to the interview:

*'He got a brick and tore a large piece of wood from a fence to use as a weapon. It was horrific, quite unprecedented in the life of this school.'*

Only two young people thought that their permanent exclusion had not been justified. For example:

*'I got kicked out for a really stupid thing, yeah. I was walking down a corridor and a teacher was walking towards me ... and that was stupid, I didn't move out of the way, I just carried on walking, and he could have been polite and let me through. I, we, just glided, like, with our shoulders ... and he went to the HT and said I assaulted him. He got me done for assault and that's why I got kicked out.'* (Rob, aged 15)

To put the above in context, Rob's statement describes him as 'capable of extreme aggressive and abusive behaviour towards his peers and adults', and observes that 'he feels he is often treated unfairly by adults in school'. KC and his mother questioned the alleged severity of the assault that had led to his exclusion, and suggested that the young person who had been attacked had only been unconscious for two minutes rather than five. They disputed that the young person had required hospital treatment. It is not possible to determine the veracity of the different accounts. However, the example above demonstrates that there can be different perspectives on an event.

### **3.2.3 Relativity, agency and dynamics**

Munn and Lloyd (2005) report that 'this sense of being singled out, of the unfairness of exclusion, is a common theme in pupils' views' (p. 207). This was not generally the case in the research reported here. The reasons for this may be explored with reference to three elements identified by Atkinson (1998) and reported in Micklewright (2002): namely relativity, agency and dynamics. These dimensions are outlined in Munn and Lloyd (2005):

*Relativity. Exclusion can only be judged by looking at a person's circumstances relative to those of others in a given place (and at a given time).*

*Agency. People are excluded by the act of some agent. The emphasis on agency may help in the identification of the source of the problem and hence with the efforts to tackle it...*

*Dynamics. Exclusion may come about because of dim future prospects and not just because of current circumstances. For example, if young people perceive themselves to be part of a poor neighbourhood with a history of high unemployment, they may be sceptical about the value of schooling. The curriculum may seem irrelevant and they may place little worth on educational qualifications. (pp. 206-7)*

As we saw above, the majority of the young people in the current study had a previous history of exclusion from school. It is also possible to hypothesise that they had peers who had had similar experiences. It is therefore not entirely surprising that the events that led up to the permanent exclusion in the 2005–6 school year did not stand out for them, nor that some young people appeared not to recall the events in great detail. Moreover, the fact that some, for example Isaac, had no clear aspirations for the future may suggest that the exclusion 'came about because of dim future prospects and not just because of current circumstances'.

John explained his exclusion in the following terms: 'I lost my temper and beat up the kid and then attacked the head teacher, so I was excluded'. The subtext was, according to John, 'hey, this is no big deal, it's happened before, this is how it is'. In John's case it would be misleading to equate an admission of the actions that precipitated the exclusion with any real sense that John had any sense of having control over what was happening to him. At a profound level, John believed he was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and that this was ultimately what had led to his exclusion:

*'It was the worst school ever ... it made me lose my temper. It was for demented, spastificated [sic] kids, and I didn't know why I was there.'*

Jake's mother reported that he too had felt profoundly out of place in the provision from which he was excluded:

*'He looked round and saw all these other kids who could barely talk and he didn't recognise himself in them and he thought he didn't belong.'*

The head of Jake's current provision explained how inappropriate care or placement could cause the young person to behave in a way that confirms stereotypes:

*'If he doesn't get the support he needs he'll get angry and he'll turn the tables over and he's an EBD kid with the B and if he gets the support he needs he'll be an EBD kid with an E.'*

If the young people did not really feel that they were in control of what was happening, the same can be said of the senior management of the excluding school.

Exclusion was viewed as a last resort, and as the only means of regaining control of an extremely challenging environment. This is illustrated by the following example. David, James and Derek had been permanently excluded from the same BESD special school. The Children's Services manager in the LA explained how this had come about:

*'The situation was at times very unsafe. It was apparent that the young people in the school were running the show, if you like, and the teachers weren't. That's a very dangerous mix in an EBD school, so we were keen to [...] put the ownership back with the teaching staff.'*

#### **3.2.4 Factors that limit prevention of exclusion**

In some cases, the permanent exclusion does seem to have been regarded by everyone concerned, including the young person, as something to be welcomed rather than regretted. Many head teachers described how they had 'reached the end of the line' in respect of what they could offer the young person, in this case Kas:

*'We had flagged up to the LA towards the end of Y9 that we would not be able to keep him. We were already looking for places, but EBD places are at a premium. He was getting too big and too strong, we were already letting him do what he wanted to try to keep him calm.'*

The senior management in the school from which Mal was excluded had been pressing for a residential placement for some time, as it was considered that 'a lot of his problems come from the lack of discipline at home'. In the event, his next destination was indeed a residential placement. However, it was not an action taken to prevent exclusion. Permanent exclusion was the lever that made this a viable option.

This is the context against which responses to the question of what action (if any) was taken to prevent the exclusion should be considered. There were instances in which parents had chosen to withdraw a young person from school in order to prevent a permanent exclusion (see Table 3.1). As we saw in the cases of Leo and Joe, the onus was often on the parents to manage the process, and to identify another placement for a child with complex needs and a reputation for extremely challenging behaviour. These demands were placed on families when they were already under considerable stress due to a range of extraneous factors (family breakdown; family illness; and chronic mental illness). Schools and families appeared to have limited capacity to mitigate the impact of the exclusion, or to plan alternatives.

### 3.3 Summary

The main points to emerge from the above can be summarised as follows:

- Most of the young people in the sample lived in family situations that were considered by service providers to be disrupted or difficult.
- Paternal absence, or the absence of another primary care giver, was a factor for many of the young people in the sample.
- Many parents reported that they were unable to sustain employment as a result of their children's difficulties.
- All of the young people in the sample had multiple and complex support needs, with BESD with MLD the most common combination.
- Underlying learning difficulties and/or inappropriate placement were often contributory factors in challenging behaviour.
- Poor attendance, repeated fixed-term and permanent exclusions, placement in a large number of schools and substantial periods out of school may have exacerbated pre-existing learning difficulties.
- Many of the young people in the sample were considered by service providers to be at the extreme end of a broad spectrum of need.
- The young people's difficulties, particularly in respect of challenging behaviour, varied substantially according to setting.
- The complex nature of some young people's SEN made it extremely difficult to identify a placement that would meet all their needs.
- Many of the young people in the study sample had experienced severely disrupted educational pathways prior to their permanent exclusion in 2005–06.
- Extended periods out of school exacerbated pre-existing difficulties, and made the identification of subsequent placements even more challenging.
- The burden on parents increased substantially when young people were out of school for extended periods.
- The catalyst for a young person's permanent exclusion was generally a violent assault on a member of staff.
- Persistent disruptive behaviour, often involving systematic bullying of younger children, instances of physical assault and damage to property, were contributing factors.
- Exclusion was viewed by staff as a last resort, and as the only means of regaining control of an extremely challenging environment.
- Schools and families appeared to have limited capacity to mitigate the impact of the exclusion, or to plan alternatives.

### **3.4 Discussion**

In relation to the young people, the findings reported above illustrate the complex interrelationship between challenging family circumstances, multiple and complex support needs and disrupted educational pathways. They also illustrate the extent of the challenge to the educational system in making adequate provision for young people on the extreme edge of a broad spectrum of need. Moreover, it is in the very nature of complex needs that they are inherently unpredictable and constantly evolving. Young people can and do outgrow educational settings that for a time appeared to meet their needs. Moreover, it appears that there is limited capacity within the system to plan for these changes, and that permanent exclusion is sometimes used as a lever to enable alternatives. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that every system is subject to challenge at its margins, that 'what works' is often contingent, and ultimately dependent upon the quality of relationships between committed service providers and young people. The impact of systems of accountability and information management impact upon these relationships will be explored later in the report.

## 4 Destinations post-exclusion

### 4.1 Introduction

The focus in this section is on the destinations of the study sample after their permanent exclusion in 2005-06. The first point of note was that there was considerable variation in the length of time required to identify and negotiate access to subsequent placements. As we shall see, this is in part a consequence of the complex profile of needs of individual young people, and of the breakdown of a number of previous placements. The range of provision available to the young people post-exclusion is explored, as is the extent to which parents and young people were involved in placement decisions; and the perceptions of providers, young people and their parents as to the appropriateness of placements. Data relating to attainment and achievement (in respect of targets and awards achieved) and attendance are also presented (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 tells a story of mixed fortunes. Firstly, it is evident that the pattern of fragmented educational pathways that was evident before the permanent exclusion in 2005–06 (see Table 3.1) has persisted. This underlines the deep-rooted and intractable nature of many of the young people's difficulties. Secondly, the table demonstrates the range of alternative provision accessed, and the creativity of solutions for individual young people that involved input from private and voluntary providers. Thirdly, the data on attainment and achievement illustrate the scale of the challenge in 'bringing about a step change improvement' in terms of pupils' performance (DCSFa, p. 10). Finally, the data on attendance raise the question of the limits of accountability in respect of outcomes for young people. These are issues to which we shall return in the concluding chapters of the report.

### 4.2 Time out of provision

Table 4.1 below indicates the length of time the young people in the study sample were not attending any educational provision immediately after their permanent exclusion in 2005–06.

**Table 4.1 Time out of provision post-2005-06 exclusion**

| <i>Time out of provision</i> | <i>Number of young people (N=24)</i> |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Less than 2 weeks            | 8                                    |
| 2 weeks - 3 months           | 3                                    |
| 4-6 months                   | 3                                    |
| 6 months - a year            | 5                                    |
| More than a year             | 4                                    |
| Not known                    | 1                                    |

Outreach tuition from a local PRU for up to six hours a week was a common form of provision in the immediate aftermath of the permanent exclusion. This accounts for the relatively high number of young people who fell into the first category.

For some young people, however, particularly those who were aged 13+ and had a history of violent behaviour (for example Rob, Isaac and KC), this arrangement persisted for long periods. For example, Rob received about six hours per week outreach provision for 23 months during Y9-Y10, before taking up a placement in an additional resource centre. It is important to set this in the context of Rob's educational history. This was a young man who had had multiple placements prior to the fifteen months spent in the provision from which he was permanently excluded in March 2006, aged 13 years and 11 months. Isaac had a rather similar profile, as he also had multiple placements since beginning his education in a mainstream primary school. Like Rob, Isaac had a history of violent behaviour, and was a known drug user while attending the BESD special school from which he was permanently

excluded in 2006, aged 14. His attendance during the three years he spent at the special school was very poor (c. 40 per cent). His education effectively came to an end at age 14. After his exclusion, his next placement was in a PRU, which he attended for a matter of days. The head of the facility declined to be interviewed by the research team. Isaac's YOT worker informed the research team that extensive risk assessment had been carried out before the placement in the PRU was agreed, as there was a history of knife carrying and violent behaviour. Lengthy periods out of school only served to deepen this young man's involvement in criminal activity, and towards the end of 2006 he received the first of two custodial sentences. The first 14-month sentence was served in a YOI located 120 miles from his home. During this time, his girlfriend had given birth to their son. The absence of a paternal role model that Isaac had experienced looked set to continue into the following generation, as he was no longer in contact with his girlfriend. 'KC' was out of provision for 22 months after being permanently excluded aged 14 from the special school he had attended for three and a half years. A subsequent placement was identified much earlier, and KC attended for a visit. The reasons why the placement did not go ahead are disputed. According to the Connexions PA, it was KC's decision not to take up the place. However, both KC and his mother claimed that they did not hear from the school after the visit, and that no offer of a place was made. KC's case was further complicated by the fact that he moved across local authority boundaries around the time of his permanent exclusion. The research team was last in contact with KC in December 2007 (two years after his permanent exclusion). At that time he was still attending college and was being supported by his Connexions PA, whom he described in the following terms: 'Julie has helped me a lot. I've met no one like Julie. She's helped me to move steps forward, actually, not just sit around waiting for them'.

We return to the theme of the importance of personal relationships, and the range of support services accessed later in the report. The cases of Isaac and KC are of particular concern, as 'we know that 60 per cent of excluded young people report having offended in the last 12 months compared with 26 per cent in mainstream education' (DCSF, 2008a, p. 18).<sup>26</sup>

Leo was another young man who was out of formal provision for an extended period. He was permanently excluded in February 2006 and received outreach tuition from the local PRU (c. 6 hours per week) until October 2007 before being admitted to a special school for pupils with SLD. He has complex needs, was diagnosed with ASD aged 31 months and received 1:1 support in one of the three pre-school centres he attended. Phil's profile was broadly similar. He was statemented at pre-school (global developmental delay) and diagnosed with ASD during Year 1. Although he had no previous history of permanent exclusions, he was out of school for periods of two to three months on several occasions. Vignettes 1 and 2 above also illustrate the challenges of identifying suitable educational provision for a child with severe and complex needs and challenging behaviour. Phil's mother Angela described the impact of her son's permanent exclusion in the following terms: 'now that he's got permanently excluded from a National Autistic Society school on his record, nobody wants to touch him.' Stuart's social worker made a broadly similar point:

*'We've approached many, many schools, day and residential. We started locally and widened the net, looking at independent as well as LA provision, but vacancies seem to disappear once the office send details of Stuart's case, probably as a result of the high levels of violence recorded.'*

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<sup>26</sup> Source: MORI Youth Survey 2004.

**Table 4.2: Overview of young people's trajectories after their permanent exclusion in 2005–06**

| <i>ID</i> | <i>Name<sup>1</sup></i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Ethnicity</i> | <i>PEx</i> | <i>Placements</i>  | <i>Attainment and achievement</i>   | <i>Attendance</i>  | <i>Remarks</i>  |
|-----------|-------------------------|---------------|------------------|------------|--|---|--|---|
| 1         | Mal*                    | M             | Black British    | SS         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Residential SS</li> <li>2. P-t in residential SS and p-t in mainstream secondary</li> <li>3. P-t in day SS and p-t in mainstream secondary</li> <li>4. Custodial sentence</li> <li>5. As in 3</li> </ol> | <p>Varied in different schools. In residential school, his Y7 results showed no progress since Y4. In day SS, his access to curriculum limited to core subjects. In mainstream secondary, he was 'in high sets'. Researcher asked repeatedly to see a copy of current IEP, but none was provided.</p> | <p>Varied in each school – poor at residential SS. 83% during 2-day p-t placement at mainstream secondary; variable in day SS but overall good because attendance was a condition of bail.</p> | <p>Cannabis user and involved with gang</p>                               |
| 2         | Rob                     | M             | White British    | PRU        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Outreach</li> <li>2. YMCA</li> <li>3. College</li> </ol>   | <p>Working towards diploma in painting &amp; decorating and an IT qualification, and business qualification and maths/English key skills</p>  | <p>Attendance almost 100 per cent.</p>   | <p>Clear aspirations as to career path (in a trade)</p>                   |
| 3         | Kas                     | M             | Black British    | SS         | BESD school  | <p>Attained GCSEs in ICT E, D&amp;T F, English G, Maths G, Science B and Art and Design EB</p>  | <p>Attendance almost 100 per cent</p>  | <p>Planning to go to college</p>  |
| 4         | Jake                    | M             | White British    | SS         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Independent BESD unit</li> <li>2. Secondary special school (range of needs)</li> </ol>   | <p>Working towards the following IEP targets:<br/>I will allow others to feel safe by not threatening them or shouting at them<br/>I will try to stay in lessons, but ask for time out when I need it<br/>I will continue to work on personal hygiene</p>   | <p>Perfect attendance since September.</p>   | <p>Sometimes meets targets</p>  |
| 5         | Iven                    | M             | Black British    | PRU        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mainstream primary</li> <li>2. Mainstream secondary</li> </ol>   | <p>Working towards the following IEP targets:<br/>Turn up on time<br/>Do the work set<br/>Do what the teacher says</p>  | <p>Attendance 64.5 %</p>   | <p>Multiple fixed-period exclusions<br/>Rarely meets targets</p>          |
| 6         | Phil                    | M             | White British    | SS         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Outreach support</li> <li>2. Independent school for pupils on AS</li> </ol>  | <p>Full timetable modified national curriculum, working towards targets in basic literacy, numeracy and PHISE</p>   | <p>Attendance near 100 per cent (weekly boarder)</p>   | <p>Making good progress, not as many incidents as the school expected</p> |
| 7         | Leo                     | M             | Black British    | SS         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Outreach Support</li> <li>2. Secondary school for pupils with SL/D</li> </ol>  | <p>Reciprocal arrangements with local PRU. Working towards IEP targets in literacy and numeracy</p>   | <p>Attendance good</p>   |   |
| 8         | Sasrutha                | M             | Sri Lankan Tamil | SS         | Outreach Support   | Basic literacy and numeracy   | N/A  | Problems identifying appropriate tutor and translator                     |

<sup>1</sup> The names of all young people have been changed to protect their identities.

| 9  | John*   | M | White British             | SS          | BESD school   | Attained GCSEs in ICT D D&T D English U Maths<br>G Science D PE D Art and Design FF<br>Maths EL1 English EL2 Food technology EL1                                   | Good attendance  | Plans to go to college   |
|----|---------|---|---------------------------|-------------|---|--|--|--|
| 10 | Mat*    | M | White British             | PRU         | 1. Training provider<br>2. College  | Attained NVQ 1 and 2 in customer service; NVQ 1 catering   | Attendance improved and steadied when settled with training provider | Very good working relationships with staff at training provider. Offered job at RAC club on basis of excellent reference from training provider. |
| 11 | Rebecca | F | White British             | PRU         |   |  |  |  |
| 12 | KC      | M | Mixed (MWBC) <sup>2</sup> | SS          | 1. Nothing for 18 months (offered home tuition and place at special school)<br>2. College     | No detailed attainment data available. According to tutor from college KC is doing well  |  | Course tutor at FE college requested no further involvement from Connexions PA   |
| 13 | Isaac   | M | Mixed (MWBC)              | SS          | 1. PRU<br>2. Custodial sentences (15 months and 23 months)                                    | No formal record of attainment available – functionally illiterate   | Attended PRU for few days only                                       |  |
| 14 | Joe     | M | Black British             | Primary PRU | Psychiatric day unit  | Working towards individual targets in literacy and numeracy, at level two years below his chronological age  | Almost 100%  | Settled in placement, reduction in violent incidents   |
| 15 | Simon*  | M | White British             | SS          | Specialist unit for young people with severe ASD  | TEACHH and basic life skills (personal hygiene and cars). Cognitive ability is that of a 3-year old child.   | Almost 100% (residential)  | Settled in placement, although occasional difficulties in residential provision  |
| 16 | Peter   | M | White British             | SS          | 1. Independent special school<br>2. College<br>3. Independent training provider<br>4. College | Attained GCSEs in Maths (F) Maths (EL1) Lifeskills (EL1) Graphics and materials (L1) National Skills Profile (catering) ASDAN units in personal care and community | Attended well at training provider                                   | First college placement broke down, making good progress in second college placement   |
| 17 | Tom     | M | White British             | SS          | BESD special school   | Working towards individual targets in literacy and numeracy  | Attendance fair, at around 60 per cent                               | No Speech and Language Therapy for 15 months despite hearing impairment  |

<sup>2</sup> Mixed: White and Black Caribbean

|    |        |   |               |    |  |   |                                       |  |
|----|--------|---|---------------|----|--|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| 18 | Mike   | M | White British | SS | BESD school (PEX from there then readmitted)   | No detailed attainment data available. Placement very vulnerable. Mother wants residential, trying to arrange early college place   |                                       |  |
| 19 | David* | M | White British | SS | 1. PRU<br>2. Independent residential special school (out of authority placement)               | No attainment data available. Making very good progress at residential therapeutic school building up friendship networks which hadn't happened before  | N/A (full-year residential placement) | Displaying much less violence and aggression.  |
| 20 | James  | M | White British | SS | 1. PRU with links to college and nurture group setting<br>2. Post-16 plan was to go to college | Working towards the following IEP targets:<br>To maintain appropriate behaviour<br>To manage anger and frustrations<br>Literacy and numeracy skills<br>To improve motivation and approach to learning<br>To enhance his self-esteem and confidence as a learner | Good                                  | Consideration given to tensions around maintaining a young person with a statement in a PRU long-term rather than in a special school but, given the options available, PRU was considered better able to provide for James' needs |
| 21 | Derek* | M | White British | SS | 1. PRU with 1:1 support<br>2. Home tuition   | Working towards very low level targets around improving literacy and numeracy; behaviour targets such as avoiding kicking or hitting staff or students  | No data                               | PRU unable to maintain place despite 1:1 support   |
| 22 | Stuart | M | White British | SS | 1. Nothing (mum refused outreach)<br>2. PRU<br>3. Independent Provider<br>4. Resource Centre   | No data on attainment available. Had managed 2 days at Resource Centre without incident at time of last contact   | No data                               |  |
| 23 | Jamie* | M | White British | SS | 1. Secure unit (out of authority)<br>2. Therapeutic school                                     | No data on attainment available   | N/A                                   | Severe mental health issues, personality disorder  |
| 24 | Drew   | M | White British | SS | Outreach from PRU  | Working towards targets relating to basic literacy and numeracy and social skills   | N/A                                   |  |

\* Looked after

### 4.3 Destinations post-exclusion

Table 4.2 gives an overview of the immediate and subsequent destinations of the young people in the study sample after their permanent exclusion in 2005-06. These show diverse trajectories and duration of placements, and diverse outcomes in terms of continuity and progression, attendance, attainment and achievement. For example, Mike was permanently excluded from his subsequent placement (in a special school). In his case, the negative effects of this were mitigated by the fact that he was readmitted to the school from which he had been excluded, in the absence of any viable alternative. Isaac effectively excluded himself by failing to attend the PRU in which he was placed following his permanent exclusion from a BESD special school, and attempts to engage his mother in family therapy were unsuccessful. Stuart was placed very briefly in an independent BESD special school where he did not last a week's trial. Joe, one of the younger children in the sample, was still attending the psychiatric day unit in which he was eventually placed after his exclusion from a Primary PRU, and was considered by staff to be making good progress.

#### **Vignette 3: disrupted pathways**

Matt is a looked after child, described by his foster parents as 'vulnerable', 'too trusting' and 'angry'. He has no SEN statement. He attended a mainstream primary school and his behaviour began to cause concern when he was around nine. He met his long-term foster carers through a befriending scheme arranged through school. His relationship with his carers has not always been straightforward. When his foster father had to work abroad, the strain on the family led to a crisis. Matt moved to a series of different foster care placements over the next year, all of which broke down. During this period he stayed briefly with his mother, who has addiction and mental health difficulties. This arrangement was not sustainable and Matt moved back to stay with his foster parents. He has been settled there for around two years now.

His schooling has been marked by interruptions and crises. He was first excluded from mainstream school for carrying a knife. His foster parents appealed but realised at the appeal meeting that the school were so fixed in their view of Matt and determined not to have him back that they even though the appeal was likely to be successful (the school had not followed its own procedures), they decided to find another school. Matt was later excluded from another mainstream school and then a PRU. Through a managed move from another PRU he moved to a training provider and focused on catering. There were attendance difficulties initially here but Matt has now started to develop a talent and enthusiasm for cooking and is keen to make his career in this area.

Some changes were due to age- and stage-related transitions, i.e. when a young person reached a natural transition point. For example, Peter left the independent special school in which he had been placed when he reached school leaving age. After a very successful work experience placement (negotiated through personal contacts) he enrolled at a local college to do a painting and decorating course. He left the course after a short time due to what in his account was persistent bullying. Supported by his Connexions PA, he subsequently attended a small specialist unit delivering tailored programmes to 14–19 year olds in order to support their entry to employment. He then went back to college, where at the time of the last contact (November 2008) he was doing a catering course. Ivan made the transition from the mainstream primary school in which he was initially placed after his permanent exclusion from a Primary PRU to a mainstream secondary school. At the time of the last contact with

the research team (November 2008), he was considered to be 'on his last legs now', and at risk of exclusion, and had had a number of fixed period exclusions on his record. He was receiving one-to-one support, but his progress was limited due to frequent absence from school, and his behaviour continued to be 'hard to control and disruptive'. The Behaviour Improvement Manager explained that a reduced timetable is being considered as a means to prevent permanent exclusion. It was considered that 'keeping Ivan in school full-time would be setting him up to fail'. However, identifying additional external provision was a challenge, as the perception amongst service providers was that most provision of this type was only available to pupils in Yr 9, and Ivan was currently in Yr 8. This is an issue to which we shall return later in the report.

#### **4.3.1 Range of provision**

The young people's destinations show that the range of alternative provision accessed was very diverse and composed of a variety of different elements, particularly in the case of those aged 14+. There was some input from the private and voluntary sectors, as advocated in *Back on Track* (DCSF, 2008a, p. 14). In addition to local authority PRUs and special schools, some of which provided outreach or temporary 'hosting' arrangements, independent special schools and providers in other local authorities were used. Residential provision was used as a last resort, as one Children's Services Manager explained:

*'The decision [to seek a placement for David in a residential school in another authority] was not taken lightly, because of the expense, but we knew from experience that it would be able to cater for his needs.'*

There was also recourse to alternative settings such as additional resource centres and alternative curriculum centres run by voluntary sector organisations such as the YMCA. These arrangements are often only available to young people in the last two years of compulsory schooling, even although there is evidence (as in the case of Ivan) when long-term benefits might accrue and an exclusion be avoided if such provision were available earlier. A number of young men (Rob, KC and Stuart) requested access to college-based, work-experience oriented provision while in Y9, but were unable to access it due to perceived age/stage restrictions. Mal is an example of a pupil who three times in his educational journey appeared to service providers and to his mother to benefit both educationally and socially from being placed with older pupils. He was placed in higher year-group classes twice and once in residential provision designed for older boys. Jake, who has a statement of MLD and dyspraxia was described by the service provider in his first placement post-exclusion (a small unit for pupils in Y7 and Y8) as 'cognitively bright ...not a typical MLD child with MLD understanding'. Towards the end of Y8 the head teacher described the challenge of identifying his next placement:

*'It's very hard to find where he would best fit. He's a socially able child but functions at a very low level. He can't retain information. He is not suitable to be with 14–16 year old EBD kids and he needs a small space because of his severe dyspraxia and processing problems. He couldn't negotiate his way around a big school.'*

The difficulties of identifying an appropriate placement for Jake meant that he repeated Y8 in the small unit he has been attending in a special school since September 2008. This had been identified as his best chance over a year earlier, but the school had been reluctant to admit him at that time. The assistant head teacher in this second placement reported that she attended the transition meeting with the head teacher and they said that they did not think that this was the right placement for Jake, but they were told that they had to take him by the LEA. Jake's placement was effectively delayed for a year because the only suitable school would not admit him until directed to do so by the LA.

On the other hand, the evidence suggests a wide range of 'packages' built up around the needs of individual young people. These included outreach tutoring, usually from a local PRU, work experience, and regular sessions with support workers and / or therapists in the statutory and voluntary sectors. Some young people (for example John and Kas) had split placements between school and college (each spending two days at the former and three days at the latter). At the time of the most recent interview (November 2008) Rob was attending college and doing a course in painting and decorating. In five cases, professionals talked of 'building something around' a young person for whom all other options had disappeared. Mike's caseworker explained how a package had been put together for him that was anticipated to last until he was 16.

#### **4.3.2 How are placement decisions made?**

Decisions about where to place a young person after a permanent exclusion appeared to be taken in much the same way as earlier decisions regarding transitions (including managed moves and previous permanent exclusions). However, the evidence from the interviews suggests that options for young people who had been permanently excluded more than once were more limited. Moreover, the process of negotiating subsequent placements was more protracted and the scope for parents and pupils to have a real say in future placements severely restricted. As we saw above, Phil's mother described how 'no-one would touch' her son after he had been permanently excluded from a specialist facility for young people with ASD. Leo's mother described that the main criterion for the selection of her son's current destination was that 'it was the only school in the borough that he hasn't been to before' (see Vignette 2 above).

The service protocol post-exclusion was generally as follows. Papers for the case were sent to a range of schools and units, and a decision was made whether or not to accept the young person concerned. In the meantime, interim arrangements (such a placement in a PRU or the provision of outreach tuition) are made. In addition to the availability of places, factors reported to influence placement decisions included whether the young person and their parents agreed to the placement; the cost to the local authority of placements in other authorities; the profile of the student population in the proposed destination; and the number of referrals rejected. It is thus not surprising that placement decisions were often contingent, and that young people, their parents and indeed service providers experienced no real sense of agency. In a number of cases, service providers described the process of searching for the next placement as 'trawling in ever widening circles'. In situations where local authority day provision rejects applications, schools or units in other authorities are considered until such times as a placement is found, or the young person reaches an age at which they become eligible for different types of provision, such as a place at college. The local authority in which three young people were excluded from the same school has a policy that prior to the permanent exclusion of a young person with a statement of SEN, a multi-agency meeting is called for an emergency interim review of the statement. In other areas, decisions seemed to be more *ad hoc*.

In a number of cases, the level of violence displayed during the period preceding their permanent exclusion (and indeed in earlier permanent exclusions) resulted in the re-classification of their main area of difficulty. This meant that some young people became eligible for a placement in a BESD special school, sometimes as a matter of priority.

#### **4.3.3 Gaps in provision**

The strategy set out in the White Paper *Back on Track* (DCSF, 2008a) is based on the principle that 'we should start from what will work best for each young person, taking account of his or her different needs and in consultation with parents and carers' (p. 5). The interviews with providers generally reflected this renewed emphasis on 'starting from the

child'. Many interviewees prefaced their remarks with comments like 'of course ideally what we are looking for is...' The 'wish list' generally comprised examples of provision that would enable the young person to receive intensive therapeutic support in an environment that involved some contact with peers (in relation to Jake, Daniel and Mitch); and flexible work-based programmes that were available to young people earlier in their school career (Rob, Stuart and KC).<sup>27</sup> Some of the best examples of successful placements (as measured by levels of satisfaction expressed by young people and their parents/carers, improved attendance<sup>28</sup> and a reduction in the incidence of severely challenging behaviour) encountered in this research were a small specialist autism unit catering for 6–8 young men (aged between 16 and 19) nested within a special school (Simon); and special schools or specialist units with facilities for teaching small groups of children with EBD, ADD and ASD in a therapeutic and nurturing environment (Jake and Joe) (see Table 4.2).

The impression gained through the process of negotiating access to the young people and conducting the interviews is that there are frequently several professionals involved with a particular case (e.g. Connexions PAs, YOT workers, voluntary sector providers, etc). However, it took us some time to identify the person who 'held the story', that is someone who knew the young person (and his family) well, and had a clear, holistic overview of how their needs had evolved, and of their history of engagement (or lack of engagement) with services over time. As we shall see below, we did identify such people in the case of Ivan, Jake, Kas, Leo and Simon, but discontinuities were commonplace. One young person had three different outreach tutors in the period between his permanent exclusion and his next placement. Isaac had seen a series of different staff in the YOT and social work teams. It was apparent during interview that he had no expectation of continuity, and of the benefits that sustained contact with a caring adult could bring. This was perhaps not surprising, given the disrupted nature of his education, and the fact that he had poor relationships with his birth family.

#### **4.3.4 Appropriateness of provision**

It is difficult to determine the appropriateness of provision, given the challenges of identifying a placement that could meet a young person's needs and was willing to accept them. Improved attendance may be one indicator - although as we saw above caution needs to be exercised here - as might the reduction in the incidence of challenging behaviour.

Table 4.2 underlines the relatively poor outcomes for many of the young people in terms of examination results and qualifications achieved. Nevertheless, it is important to set these in the context of the disrupted educational pathways experienced by the young people. It should also be emphasised that other indicators that are more difficult to quantify, such as level of engagement with peers and adults in the educational setting, and with friends and family in the community, may ultimately be just as important (although much more difficult to measure) as formal qualifications in ensuring that young people get 'back on track'.<sup>29</sup> As the head of a small, secondary special needs school put it:

*'What you've got to recognise when you're looking at the really, really sharp end children is that provision will not be sitting in a classroom learning their numeracy lesson. It might be taking the dog for a walk with a learning mentor... It's about travelling independently around town.'*

<sup>27</sup> The BESD guidance (paragraph 124) states that 'work-focused learning for 14–16 year olds provides an additional curriculum option' (DCSFb, p. 29). It is not clear to what extent there is flexibility in respect of age/stage restrictions.

<sup>28</sup> There are limitations in the extent to which improved attendance can be adopted as a criterion for the success of a placement. For example, in Mal's case, improved attendance was a condition of bail (see Table 4.2).

<sup>29</sup> See the SEBDA response to *Back on Track*, SEBDA News, Issue 16, Summer/Autumn 2008.

Whatever indicators are adopted, it is clear that six hours of tuition per week, often with a different teacher each week for extended periods is inadequate. The evidence suggests that local authorities are making valiant attempts to build complex 'packages' around individuals who cannot or will not attend a special school, PRU or other form of alternative provision on a full-time basis. Many of these arrangements involve 1:1 contact with an adult, and hence do little to address the difficulties some young people have in interacting with their peers. Addressing this latter issue is part of '[securing] an appropriate curriculum for young people in alternative provision' (DCSF, 2008a, p. 17).

Some young people complained that their current provision was not sufficiently challenging. Rebecca expressed disappointment about the lack of qualifications she was likely to receive because she was attending a PRU. Mal, although initially more settled than in his previous placement, also thought that the level of work was 'too easy'. In his next split placement, he could access only the core curriculum in his three days a week in a day special school yet was expected to access the full curriculum in his two days at a mainstream secondary. Neither he nor his mother were happy about the impact this would have on his ability to gain GCSEs. Rob was concerned that the outreach tutoring he was receiving between placements would not enable him to improve his literacy and numeracy sufficiently to get a job or a place in college. When asked where he would like to go next, Jake replied 'somewhere better, somewhere where there is more work, more different subjects and where I'm there for more time.' However, Peter had surpassed original expectations and gained more qualifications than originally anticipated.

#### **4.3.5 What makes for a successful placement?**

Although there were certain systemic factors, such as the provision of 1:1 support in a nurturing environment that made for a relatively successful placement (as measured by improved attendance, greater engagement with the curriculum and a reduction in instances of violent behaviour towards others), there were many more cases in which the reasons for success were more contingent. In a surprising number of cases, the transition between placements seems to have been made easier for the young person by the fact that familiar people came into their lives a second time, in different roles, thus giving the young person and their parents a sense of continuity. For example, the head of the PRU at which Leo was registered knew him from the Primary PRU at which she had first met him eight years earlier. The head of the inclusion team in the authority where Ivan was currently attending a mainstream secondary school remembered him from her time as an interim head of the primary school to which he had been referred in Y3. The head teacher in Jake's current school had been a SENCO at his primary school. Kas's family therapist had been a residential worker at the primary BESD school he had attended.

#### **4.4 Parental choice and young people's agency**

There was considerable variation in the extent to which the young people and their parents were involved in the decision-making process in respect of subsequent placements. As we saw above, in many cases there was very limited scope for involvement in respect of placement selection, as very often the next placement was the only available option. Service providers played a proactive role in persuading parents that this was the best option, particularly in cases where the home background was felt to be contributing to the young person's difficulties.

There was also substantial variation in the extent to which parents were able to respond to the challenge of working with the LA to identify an appropriate placement. In some cases (e.g. for the parents of Leo, Tom, Joe and Phil), this meant visiting a large number of placements, often located at some distance from their homes. KC's mother explained that

*'... if I hadn't kept pushing and persevering, KC wouldn't be where he is at the moment. It was stressful getting hold of people especially when they're either at a meeting or they don't return your phone calls. They write you letters saying they didn't hear from me when, you know, I've left messages here and there and nobody's ever taken the time to look.'*

Looking back on the process of getting a statement of SEN for her son, Kate, Joe's mother commented that 'sometimes it's useful being bi-polar. When you're manic you can really make things happen'. Nevertheless, there were times when her depression made it extremely difficult for her to be proactive in respect of her son's education. One of the benefits of her son's current stable placement in a small psychiatric day unit is that she too is benefiting from increased support, and is being enabled to play a role in forward planning for an age-related transition (to a special school in another borough). It appears that a family's capacity to become involved is to some extent dependent upon their resources, financial as well as social and emotional, and the degree to which they receive support from professionals:

*'I had no idea when I undertook it how much it would take out of me when I went to a tribunal, it cost thousands. I had to pay for a private Speech and Language report and educational psychologist's report to look at available schools. Had Riverside said they would take him without trial the judgement would have been that we would have been reimbursed, but as it was they weren't, and we had to pay.'* (Angela, mother of Phil)

Leo's mother (see Vignette 1) is disabled and has limited mobility. She does not drive, and used taxis to visit potential providers, all of whom were located outside her home borough. In addition, Phil's mother and Leo's mother are both single parents (as is Joe's mother), and they all had caring responsibilities that made placement visits difficult to arrange. Jake's mother made the following observations about parental choice:

*'Although all the talk is of parental choice it's meaningless if schools aren't willing to take the young person. Options are raised, but in the end it's about where there's a place, and of course about whether the authority would pay.'*

In effect, the only discretion parents were able to exercise was in vetoing suggested placements (as we saw in the case of KC, above). Some parents resisted residential placements, particularly if the young person was generally settled at home, or if the child was very young. However, in Stuart's case, the service provider's view was that Stuart's mother was resisting a residential placement in her own interests, not those of her son. A residential option was proposed for Joe, who was only eight years old at the time of his permanent exclusion, but both his parents strongly resisted this option on account of his age. Day placements at a distance from the family home were also unpopular, for obvious reasons. However, some young people did travel relatively large distances. Tom made a 40-minute journey to school in a taxi every morning.

#### **Vignette 4: placements, parental choice and conflicts of agency**

Mal was permanently excluded for the first time from a mainstream primary school in 2004-5, aged 10. His mother had been persuaded that this was an appropriate placement for him but believed that the promised one-to-one support had not materialised. She explained that '[The primary special unit] was just a little suite really where the teachers were teaching children in little classrooms. He was meant to be getting a special teacher working mainly with him most of the time but he wasn't getting much one-to-one as he was supposed to be getting. He's got ADHD and he had emotional and behavioural problems so that was why he was to get the one-to-one. The head teacher of that unit had thought from the start that Mal's needs required a residential placement, and had pressed for that prior to the permanent exclusion, but Mal's mother's did not agree. Mal's second permanent exclusion was from that SEBD unit within a specialist support school in 2005-6. His mother stated that she was given no choice about his subsequent school placement: 'I got a call saying this is the only school we've got. You either take it or you don't. They gave me, what, a week to decide, and it was like, well, I've got no choice'.

The head teacher of that residential special school for children with EBD also believed he had no choice but to accept Mal, despite viewing his needs as falling outside the school's designated purpose: 'There is an expectation that we pick up all sorts of problems which we were never designated for in the first instance.' He believed that there was no suitable provision for pupils like Mal, whom he described as 'streetwise', 'criminal' and 'delinquent'. During 2007/08, Mal's mother removed him from the residential special school and insisted on his return to mainstream (on a part-time basis initially). She believed that professionals had misinformed her in the past and this time she was determined to make her own choice. She accepted that Mal would spend the rest of the school week in a day special school. The senior staff in both schools believed that they had been pressured to take Mal on a more extended basis than originally agreed.

In some cases, it was the young person who effectively vetoed the placement. Drew would not attend the local PRU as other pupils there belonged to a group with which he and his friends had been in conflict in the past. Rob refused to attend the alternative placement offered as it did not offer a route to college. When he was finally offered a placement (about a year later) that met this criterion, his attendance improved to around 90 per cent. Although service providers put considerable emphasis on negotiating with parents and young people as to the next placement and securing 'buy-in', the language used by some of the young people tells a rather different story. Rob, interviewed towards the end of the study reflected on his history post-exclusion as follows:

*'... he got me done for assault and that, and that's why I got kicked out. I wouldn't have rather stayed there. I'd rather go to work. They kicked me out and I went to work for a couple of years doing bits and bobs and then they put me into that YMCA and then they put me here [college].*

This account is not untypical. It betokens a certain lack of personal agency, as well as a general vagueness about the couple of years spent 'doing bits and bobs'. Rob admitted to 'not being good at reading and writing', and that this might have been different had he not been permanently excluded, and is receiving additional support for literacy at college. Despite the lack of agency evident in the quotation above, Rob does have aspirations and perspectives on the future, namely to get a diploma in painting and decorating this year,

another one next year, and then to move on to another trade. He explained that he 'might be an air conditioner ... like putting air conditioning in ... cos that's good money, or an electrician or a plumber'. Although he is currently making good progress, it is evident that he and other young people in similar situations (for example, Matt and Peter) will continue to need support. They will benefit from consistent mentoring throughout their time in college and during the transition to the labour market.

#### **4.5 Summary**

- There were substantial delays in identifying subsequent placements for some young people, particularly those with a history of violent behaviour or multiple and complex needs.
- These delays caused additional strain for families that were already perceived to be troubled.
- Outreach tuition for about 6 hours per week was a common interim arrangement while a placement was being negotiated.
- The range of alternative provision accessed was very diverse, with input from the private and voluntary sectors.
- Service providers perceived that there were age and stage-related restrictions on some forms of provision (e.g. college-based, work-experience oriented placements) that they considered might have been suitable for some young people in Y8 or Y9.
- Many young people experienced a lack of continuity of service providers.
- Several service providers and families considered that personalised support in a nurturing environment where there is some contact with the peer group as the key to a successful placement.
- Some young people were placed in provision in which they considered that the academic work was insufficiently challenging.

#### **4.6 Discussion**

It is evident from this examination of young people's trajectories since their permanent exclusion in 2005-06 that it is extremely difficult to break out of a cycle of disrupted educational pathways. Moreover, the impact of repeated breakdown of placements on already fragile home circumstances is incalculable, and may only serve to exacerbate the problems that led to the young person's exclusion in the first place.

On the credit side, however, there is substantial evidence that service providers are responding positively to the challenge of making provision for young people who challenge the boundaries of an educational system in which success is still largely measured in terms of performance in GCSEs, and there is a strong economic imperative for getting people 'back on track'. The findings reported above underline the need for 'greater differentiation of provision to enable the widely diverging needs of young people to be met' (DCSF, 2008a, p. 17). They also support the suggestion in *Back on Track* that some young people's 'special educational needs may not have been adequately identified or met' (DCSF, 2008a, p. 17) in one or more of their previous placements. These are issues to which we shall return in the concluding section of this report.

## 5 Service providers' perspectives

### 5.1 Introduction

The research evidence reported above is derived from face-to-face interviews with young people, members of their families and front-line service providers directly involved in their care and education. As the main focus of the study was on what happens to young people after they have been permanently excluded from a special school or PRU, the perspectives reported above were generally those of head teachers and other members of the teaching and support staff, including outreach staff; Connexions PAs; YOT workers; and social workers.

In this chapter, we will draw mainly on data collected through additional interviews with 13 other service providers, some of whom were in front-line roles (e.g. school social worker; curriculum support worker, FE), and some in strategic roles (e.g. KS4 Alternative Provision Co-ordinator; Director of 14-19 Strategy; Head of SEN). These interviews were conducted in late 2008/early 2009, at a time when the latest guidance on exclusion from schools and Pupil Referral Units (DCSF, 2008c) was available. The interviews were conducted in order to elicit a range of views on supplementary issues agreed with the Project Advisory Committee, namely:

- range of provision for young people who had been permanently excluded
- multi-agency working
- working across local authority boundaries
- the role and purpose of PRUs
- recruitment and retention.

Perceptions on these issues are located within the respondents' understanding of the policy environment in which the research was carried out. It was evident from the additional interviews that the main policy influence on current practice was the recent guidance on exclusions (DCSF, 2008c). The frame of reference of individual respondents tended to be restricted to their immediate policy remit. For example, for the Director of 14–19 Strategy in one authority, *Raising Expectations: staying in education and training post-16* (DfES, 2007) was a key policy document, although the terms of reference were not discussed in detail during the interview. For the social worker in a BESD special school, the most relevant policy documentation related to children in care and to child protection issues; and the KS4 alternative provision co-ordinator interviewed was mainly concerned with policy and performance indicators developed at the local authority level. The following quotation from a curriculum support worker in an FE college gives some insight into the importance attached to policy documentation by a busy front-line service provider:

*'Yes, they've probably sent me some stuff. I've never heard of Back on Track. They take up a long time to read, its all red tape and bureaucracy. I have to read it, well scan it and then I put it on the shelf. Go back to it? Never, well hardly ever...'*

We begin with some observations on the context in which respondents' understanding of multi-agency working is located, drawing upon the process of conducting the research. Service providers' perspectives on the range of provision available are then explored.

## 5.2 Front-line service provision

It is a reflection of the complex profile of needs and the wide age-range (8–14)<sup>30</sup> of the young people in the sample that face-to-face and telephone interviews were also conducted with local inclusion team members; SENCOs; residential care workers; family therapists; Connexions PAs; social workers; training and work experience providers; and YOT workers. In the process of defining the outline sample, the research team consulted over the telephone with a very diverse range of respondents; psychiatrists, lead officers in CAMHS; prison officers; educational welfare officers; educational psychologists; college placement officers; work experience co-ordinators; voluntary sector providers; inclusion support officers in FE colleges, etc. Moreover, the evidence from the inception phase suggests that the extent to which services are involved with a particular young person can vary substantially, even within a relatively short period of time. Thus it was largely contingent as to which particular agent was most involved with the young person at the point when the research team was negotiating access. This meant that there was considerable variation in both the amount and quality of the information made available to the research team. This is reflected in the data presented in Table 4.2 above. Due to constraints of time and budget, and in the interests of fulfilling the broader research objectives, it was not always possible to locate and peruse all the relevant information relating to individual young people (e.g. their SEN statement or IEP) (see Vignette 5). As we shall see, this experience mirrored that of many of the front-line service providers whom we interviewed. Garland (2001) describes the kind of landscape inhabited by many of the front-line service providers interviewed (and by the research team):

*Socially situated, imperfectly knowledgeable actors stumble upon ways of doing things that seem to work, and seem to fit with their other concerns. Authorities patch together workable solutions to problems that they can see and can get to grips with. Agencies struggle to cope with their workload, and do the best job that they can in the circumstances. (p. 26)*

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<sup>30</sup> Age range at the start of the project in October 2006.

**Vignette 5: visit to an inner-London PRU (supporting 11–16 year olds who have been permanently excluded, or are at risk of exclusion)**

Researcher A had an appointment with Janis, the head at 10.30am for an update on the progress on members of the sample. She was slightly late for the appointment due to transport difficulties. She was greeted by a member of the reception staff and invited to wait. Janis arrived about 15 minutes later and apologised profusely. She was warm, friendly and welcoming and had a rugged take-us-as-you-find-us attitude. She explained that a member of staff hadn't turned up for work that day, and that Leo would be in the room with us. It seemed a good opportunity to meet him, but it would be difficult to find out much when he was in the room. He had been working one-to-one with Janis on basic literacy tasks. Janis explained that there were a number of supply teachers in the PRU and that it was sometimes difficult to staff the centre's outreach activities. Researcher A wondered if she and Janis would have more time to talk during the break, but Janis swept down the corridor towards the recreation area, explaining her casual watchfulness, and the importance of monitoring parts of the building which were known flash points. Her attentiveness made a strong impression. She greeted every young person she passed, usually with a comment addressed to them personally. She said that she'd known some of the kids for a long time, as she lived in the area. She stressed the importance of slightly exaggerated gesture and facial movements, as some of the young people found it difficult to read expressions and nuanced behaviour. She negotiated with a member of staff to see if she was prepared to do outreach that afternoon. Then Janis said she'd have to cut the meeting short, as there was a prospective member of staff sitting downstairs waiting for an interview.

The PRU had received a good report from OFSTED in 2007. Improving young people's personal and social skills was deemed its greatest success. Researcher A reflected on the 'can-do ethos' referred to in the OSFTED report, and how this was entirely consistent with the warm welcome extended on a morning when there was a lot going on, much of it unpredictable and contingent. Just like any other morning, in fact.

Given the challenges of identifying some young people's case workers, it was difficult for the research team to build up a detailed picture of individual young people's needs, and of the response of the service(s) to them. The researchers had to demonstrate considerable tenacity in order to identify service providers who had actually met the young person (as opposed to meeting a performance indicator in relation to the young person) and thus had an informed view of their educational pathways and current placement.

It also emerged in the course of the research that many of the front-line service providers had a fairly limited view of the case with which they were dealing, and were sometimes not aware of the full details of a particular case. This posed particular challenges as the research was being conducted from a distance. For example, in the case of Isaac, YOT staff focused on patterns of offending, and had relatively little knowledge of his education pathways. Social workers were concerned with whether or not changes in a young person's home circumstances posed a threat to their health and well-being. Moreover, as one young man's social worker explained, her first priority was child protection involving much younger children. School-based staff focused on enabling young people to realise their potential by achieving targets relating to achievement and attainment and to develop more harmonious relationships with their peers. These findings raise interesting questions in respect of inter-agency co-operation that are explored further below.

The range of provision entered into by the young people after their permanent exclusion in 2005–6 (see Table 4.2 above) was a reflection of the creativity, perseverance and personal commitment of these front-line service providers, many of whom were working in extremely challenging circumstances (see Vignette 4). This included local authority PRUs, independent special schools; residential provision; and tailored arrangements involving input from the private and voluntary sectors and (in the case of one young man) Adolescent Resource Centres (ARC) led by social work.

### 5.3 Service providers' perspectives on range of provision

The data from the thirteen additional interviews with service providers confirms that there has been a perceived increase in the range of alternative provision available to young people who have been permanently excluded from special schools or PRUs. According to the Director of 14-19 Strategy in one authority, this was a direct result of work undertaken by a multi-agency task group that had been established to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). Ensuring that there was a wider range of provision for KS3 pupils was now a priority. This is interesting in the light of one of the findings reported in 3.3.1 above, namely that three young men requested access to college-based, work-experience oriented provision while in Y9, but were unable to access it due to perceived age/stage restrictions.

There were no real concerns expressed about the number of places available in alternative provision, although one respondent (the manager of a primary behaviour and inclusion service) thought that there was a shortage of EBD provision at KS2; and another (the head of a BESD special school) to the need 'to sharpen up provision for the high tariff kids', and for mainstream schools 'to work harder at keeping lower tariff kids in school.' The social inclusion team manager in an inner-London borough attributed the fact that supply generally outstripped demand due to the impact of the recent BESD guidance (DCSF, 2008b). In his view, this had resulted in a marked decrease in the number of lengthy fixed period exclusions, and had thus reduced pressure on the system.

One respondent (a social worker attached to a BESD special school) expressed concern about the length of time it took to identify subsequent placements (up to 18 months) for young people permanently excluded from school. She also mentioned that the waiting list for the provision in which she worked was 'a page long.' Two respondents (one from a KS1–2 PRU and one from a KS4 PRU) made specific reference to the long waiting times for CAMHS referrals<sup>31</sup>, and in one authority, 'mop-up' clinics were being organised in order to meet the target of a referral within 13 weeks. Two respondents considered that the current arrangements for information sharing were inadequate. As the manager of an inner-London PRU put it:

*'We need to look at better ways of sharing information, as not all the professionals can come to every meeting. It's not about quantity, but about focusing on the relevant facts.'*

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<sup>31</sup> This is consistent with one of the findings reported in *Back on Track*, namely that 'a third of Pupil Referral Units found it difficult to gain sufficient support from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)'. (DCSF, 2008a, p. 19).

## 5.4 Perceptions of multi-agency working

### 5.4.1 Traditional boundaries between service providers

The evidence from the additional service provider interviews, and indeed from the front-line providers, suggests that multi-agency working is already established practice, and that the CAF is facilitating this by streamlining recording systems. The Personal Development Record and IEPs were also considered to offer some leverage in supporting multi-agency working. The head of a KS3 PRU reported that this had been facilitated by the re-structuring of departments within the LA, for example from discrete Education and Social Services departments to Children and Families. However, even within this new constellation, there were some axes of collaboration (for example between social work and health; and between education and YOT) that remained more efficient and effective than others. Moreover, there were established precedents for inter-agency collaboration in some areas. For example, in one Inner London authority, there was formal liaison between health visitors and social workers through the two Safeguarding and Social Care Teams.

There were five other respondents who signalled the challenges of inter-agency working involving education and social work. The first two quotations suggest that workload may be a significant inhibiting factor; the third signals the importance of personal champions of multi-agency working:

*'Social services just aren't interested, they're just waiting for them to turn 16 and they can go... The social services are just so busy. The one [social worker] I saw last week [early November] hadn't seen the girl since June, and she's the main case-worker.'*  
(Curriculum support worker, FE college)

*'Social care are the hardest to engage. Often they don't attend meetings because they're just too busy.'* (Primary Behaviour and Inclusion Service Manager)

*'Collaboration with YOT is relatively well established, and with child protection. It's sometimes difficult with health, especially as regards confidentiality and information sharing. Did we get that report from the GP? Did they go to the GP? We don't know, and the GP doesn't want to say. It's historical ... CAF [and working across London boroughs] will have an effect. Historically education and health were very separate, and are slower to join up.'* (Head of PRU, Inner London)

*'Historically education, health and social services have had different ways of operating, so the task [of working together] is very hard.... Five years ago we would not have had the police or GPs at meetings. What has changed? I think it comes down to people. There are some people in key positions who actually believe in multi-agency working and will at all costs hold it together, and sometimes drag other agencies to the table.'*  
(HT BESD special school)

The cultural and operational differences between education and social work seem to be particularly entrenched, as the following quotation illustrates:

*'It's sometimes difficult to understand social care thresholds in accepting cases. You're concerned about a young person and you think it is quite high end child protection and the social worker goes to do an assessment and you're told the child is still at home. The problems are mostly to do with communication. Professionals need to share how decisions are reached, so you don't get 'oh god, here's social care not doing anything again'.* (Targeted youth support manager)

#### **5.4.2 The lead professional (LP)**

The additional interviews with service providers appear to support the finding reported in the evaluation of CAF and lead professional guidance and demonstrate ‘considerable enthusiasm at both grass roots and management level for CAF and LP work’ (Brandon et al, 2006, p. 2). The consensus from the limited data gathered during the final phase of the study was that the CAF promoted better multi-agency working. However, the quotations above underline the fact that ‘threshold differences and lack of join up between agencies’ (Brandon et al, 2006, p. 2) persist. The rather limited perspectives of some front-line service providers (see 5.2 above) meant that holistic assessments still presented some challenges, in that they require ‘practitioners to think beyond traditional sector boundaries’ (p. 2).

There was general awareness that the professional background of the LP should be determined by the needs of the young person. However, amongst the minority who expressed a view on this issue, the consensus was that the LP was usually from education. As a head teacher in a BESD special school put it:

*‘In reality the lead professional is usually from education, but if someone’s needs are complex due to mental health issues, the LP should really come from CAMHS, but this is a massive challenge. The LP has to look at the whole range of the child’s needs, and I’m not sure if some of the other agencies have the capacity to do this... Education is the only core provider, and this can make the relationship very difficult.’*

A social worker in a BESD school described how the LP was identified in another case in which she had recently been involved.

*‘I was beginning to have concerns about this boy, and I began the pre-assessment for CAF. I spoke to the ASBO worker [YOT] who shared my concerns. We agreed we’d both complete the pre-assessment. The ASBO worker visited the home. I spoke to the mum on the phone, as I couldn’t fit in a visit, and with the boy. We met, bringing together the educational psychologist and others with an interest. We discussed it and decided that the ASBO worker should be the LP. We were all happy with this, and with how it’d been decided.’*

This quotation also illustrates the point made above, namely that collaboration between some agencies, for example social work and YOT and/or health is more established than it is between these agencies and education.

#### **5.4.3 Range of agencies involved**

The range of agencies involved is a reflection of the complexity of some young people’s needs. A social worker at a BESD special school reported how she worked on a case by case basis with SEN, health, housing, CAMHS, the locality team, Parentline Plus, the courts, the police, YOT, social work, social care, the Educational Welfare Service (EWS), educational psychologists, youth workers, Connexions PAs and other local schools. In one local authority there was a complex cases subgroup, with representation from integrated children’s services and CAMHS.

### **5.5 Working across local authority boundaries**

The 13 service providers interviewed all had extensive experience of working across local authority boundaries, and the consensus was that this practice was becoming more widespread. The two respondents located in inner London reported that inter-authority placements were relatively common, and that there were now more formal arrangements in place for partnership working. In one north London borough, the inclusion lead met regularly

with counterparts in neighbouring boroughs. Two respondents reported that in some London boroughs it was not uncommon for a young person to live in one borough, go to school in another, and for his or her primary care provider (GP) to be located in a third, and that this could in some instances make effective communication difficult. Access to CAMHS, for example, would be negotiated through the authority where GP was located; social care and YOT would be from the authority where the family resided.

Three respondents referred to the need for better information sharing, particularly in cases where the lead professional had a large caseload, and there was little continuity in respect of representation at meetings. As we saw above (4.3.1) cost was a major consideration, and out-of-borough places were only considered as a last resort (as in the case reported in 4.3.1 above and in the case of one other young man with SLD and ASD, for whom there was no appropriate provision in his home borough). One respondent made reference to cost differentials between neighbouring boroughs, one of which was classed as urban, the second as rural. Per capita costs in the former were considerably higher, which made an out of borough placement from the latter an extremely expensive option.

## **5.6 The role and purpose of PRUs**

The guidance on education of children and young people experiencing BESD (DCSF, 2008b) states that 'PRUs are not planned or designed to be a long-term setting and should not be regarded as part of a local authority's range of planned SEN provision' (p. 8). The data gathered from front-line service providers and the additional service provider interviews (13) suggests that there is broad compliance with the guidance. As the head of an inner-London PRU explained: 'ideally, they're not here for more than half a term', although it was sometimes agreed that it was in a young person's best interests to remain for a longer period. 'It's important that parents don't feel they have been pushed down a particular avenue, and that we're trying to get rid of their child', she explained. In another London borough, some pupils remained at the primary or KS3 PRU for two terms, or for up to a year in a small minority of cases. At KS4, on the other hand, the emphasis was on 'getting them to commit to a place of learning', in order to maximise their chances of gaining GCSEs and vocational qualifications. The KS4 PRU offered GCSEs in eight subjects.

In a written communication to the research team, a head of service (SEN) reflected on the challenges posed by the requirement to arrange for provision from the sixth day of a young person's exclusion (DCSF, 2008c):

*'If a young person is permanently excluded from a special school and has complex needs perhaps requiring therapies, this is a real issue for the LA to source appropriate provision in six days. The best choice is to find another special school that can meet their needs, but that can take longer than six days, also change can be very difficult for these young people and this needs to be managed very carefully. They would not be appropriately placed in a PRU and the PRUs would not be able to meet their needs, home tuition would not be appropriate or sufficient and e-learning would be impossible. So it's impossible for us to adhere to this.'*

The head of a KS3 alternative curriculum provision in another authority expressed a similar view: 'it would be better to shift attention from the target of getting the kid in and spend a little more time working out the most appropriate placement.' The school inclusion team manager in an inner-London authority thought that the government had 'thrown down the gauntlet' in respect of the 6-day requirement, and had accepted that there would be a period of 'bedding down'. He considered that this is a difficult target to meet, particularly in the case of a young person with complex needs residing in the borough but attending a facility 20 miles away. It was not uncommon for there to be a delay of a day or two in providing notice of an exclusion, particularly in these circumstances, which left the LA just three days to find a suitable

placement for a young person who was 'very hard to place'.<sup>32</sup> Two respondents expressed concerns about the recruitment and retention of suitably qualified staff to PRUs. The head of the PRU featured in Vignette 5 made the same point.

## 5.7 Summary

- There was a diverse range of service providers involved with the young people participating in the study.
- The researchers had to demonstrate considerable tenacity in order to identify service providers who had actually met the young person.
- There was substantial variation in the extent to which service providers appeared to have an informed view of young people's educational pathways.
- Some front-line service providers appeared to have an understanding of the young person's case that was limited to the sector in which they worked.
- The evidence from the additional interviews with service providers confirms that there has been a perceived increase in the range of alternative provision available to young people who have been permanently excluded from special schools or PRUs.
- There were no major concerns expressed about the number of places available in alternative provision, but there were some about the difficulties in identifying suitable placements for young people with complex needs.
- Concern was expressed about the waiting time for CAMHS referrals.
- The CAF was perceived to facilitate multi-agency working.
- There was some evidence from the service provider interviews that collaboration between education and social work could be improved.
- Holistic assessments under CAF presented some challenges, in that they require 'practitioners to think beyond traditional sector boundaries.'
- The 13 service providers interviewed had extensive experience of working across local authority boundaries, and considered that this practice was becoming more widespread.
- Service providers expressed some concern about the impact of the requirement to find a subsequent placement six days after a permanent exclusion.

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<sup>32</sup> Schools are required to notify the LA 'without delay' when a young person is excluded from school. See The Education (Pupil Exclusions and Appeals) (Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2002 (<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2002/20023178.htm>) and The Education (Pupil Exclusions and Appeals) (Pupil Referral Units) (England) Regulations 2008 ([http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2008/uksi\\_20080532\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2008/uksi_20080532_en_1))

## **5.8 Discussion**

Caution is required in interpreting some of the findings reported above due to the fact that they are derived from 13 respondents. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that these were all experienced professionals who had been in post for some time. Several had worked in various local authorities, and all were drawing on a considerable experience of service provision for young people permanently excluded from special schools and PRUs. Moreover, many of the findings reported above echo those that have emerged from interviews with young people, their parents and/or carers and the front-line service providers involved in their case, or from the researchers' experience of conducting the study: for example, in respect of the range of service provision accessed; the situated understanding of many service providers; and experience of working across local authority boundaries.

The findings relating to CAF are broadly consistent with those reported in the evaluation commissioned by the DfES (Brandon et al, 2006). Finally, the ramifications of the requirement to find a subsequent placement for a young person permanently excluded from school from the sixth day contained in the recent guidance (DCSF, 2008c) may merit further exploration.

## 6 Conclusions and recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusions

It is evident from the findings reported above, particularly in Chapters 3 and 4, that all the young people in the study have had severely disrupted educational pathways, and that a broad complex range of needs is a feature common to all the cases. In addition, many of the young people have experienced family breakdown, or have grown up in domestic circumstances that have been or remain extremely difficult. Several parents described how they found themselves at breaking point in the wake of repeated permanent exclusions and managed moves.

Several parents had suffered periods of physical and mental ill health that were both the result of and the catalyst for some of their children's difficulties, particularly in respect of behaviour that challenged the boundaries of the education and welfare system. It is important to bear in mind that these were parents or carers who were prepared to engage with the research team. The circumstances of those with whom it was not possible to engage are likely to have been more difficult still.

The other constituency that contributed to the research by taking part in interviews and responding to requests for information was front-line service providers. They occupied a wide variety of roles and were drawn from several different agencies: for example, education; health; social work and social care; and juvenile justice. The creativity, perseverance and commitment of the vast majority of these respondents made a strong impression upon the research team. Many were working in very challenging circumstances, in which contingency, unpredictability and instability were the norm.

There were several moments that gave pause for thought during this particularly challenging project. There are two that are particularly relevant here. They give rise to questions that relate to the both groups. Why, in view of the raft of recent policy relating to children and families, including those who are vulnerable and at risk of exclusion, did it take us so long to identify a group of young people to participate in the study? Were these difficulties an artefact of the research process, or a reflection of some young people's fragmented educational pathways? The likely answer is that they were attributable to both. Finally, why did a particular utterance made by one service provider: 'No, I haven't met him, I've met the standard' resonate so strongly with some members of the research team?

Part of the answer to these questions is that we were dealing with young people who were at the very margins of the system. Moreover, the causes, origins and evolution of their difficulties were often obscure, and were not solely attributable to the nature of the educational provision that these young people had received. Complex social problems can only be addressed by large-scale social reform that goes far beyond the raft of policy relating to children and families, and certainly beyond more specific policy relating to exclusion from school and special educational needs and disability. It should be borne in mind that these are problems that are unlikely to be resolved by adjustments to systems of accountability alone.

What are we to conclude from this? Our first conclusion can be expressed in the terms used in the Ministerial foreword to *Back on Track*: namely, that [the challenge is] 'to improve educational provision for those who are permanently excluded from school', and the recommendations formulated below are intended to contribute to this process.

Such is the complexity, severity and deep-rooted nature of the difficulties faced by many these young people that it is unlikely that permanent exclusion can be entirely obviated, and this is acknowledged in the policy documentation. The manager of a PRU for pupils aged

14–16 in inner London expressed the need to remove the stigma from permanent exclusion and to re-frame it as an opportunity rather than the ultimate sanction:

*‘If exclusion happens, let’s try to get something positive out of it. It’s not necessarily such a bad thing. It can be an opportunity to highlight a situation and it could be used by parents to actually delve a little bit deeper in terms of what is happening to their child, why they aren’t behaving, what is the school’s reaction to that behaviour, and what can they do to support the child, and what might other agencies do to support the child and the school.’*

This raises the question of what would enable parents ‘to delve a little deeper’ and what would enable special schools and PRUs to explore how they could respond more positively to the diverse needs of their populations. The answer to these questions brings us back to the utterance of the service provider who claimed to have met the performance indicator but not the young person.

The evidence from the interviews with young people, their parents and a large range of service providers conducted in the course of this project suggests that what makes the difference is the quality of the personal relationships. It is these, rather than the search for more perfect forms of accountability that ultimately made the difference.<sup>33</sup> O’Neill (2002) makes a strong case that a strong culture of accountability serves to undermine rather than to reinforce trust. Below we reconsider some examples of this in relation to this study of destinations and outcomes for young people permanently excluded from special schools and PRUs.

As we saw above (5.6), some service providers expressed reservations about the impact of the requirement to find another placement from the sixth day post-exclusion. For example, some respondents believed that meeting this performance indicator might not necessarily be in the best interests of the young person concerned.

It was also apparent, albeit that the evidence came from a relatively small number of interviews (see 5.4 above), that traditional boundaries between, for example, health and education, have persisted despite the renewed commitment to delivering integrated frontline services that are focused on young people and their families. It is important to recognise that the promotion of co-ordinated service provision will not in itself bring about a deeper understanding among educationalists of the role and responsibilities of social workers, or vice versa. If this is to be achieved, then professionals need to have more flexibility to exercise their professional judgement, and to work creatively with others to achieve the best possible outcome for the young people in their care. We realise that this has major implications in terms of staffing levels and associated costs. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that in absolute terms very few young people are permanently excluded from special schools and PRUs, and that the impact on costs would therefore be limited.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

The key messages to emerge from the research are as follows:

- Achieve a balance in education policy between improving performance in external examinations and enhancing young people’s social and emotional well-being.
- Further promote personalised support in a nurturing environment in which both academic and social and emotional needs can be addressed by increasing the complement of highly trained staff with specific expertise in this area.

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<sup>33</sup> However, it should be acknowledged that an important dimension of the CAF, which was generally well received by the service providers in the study, is about recording and accountability, as well as information sharing.

- Further facilitate and sustain parental involvement by having a family liaison lead within PRUs and special schools for each young person, prioritising those whose educational pathways have been most severely disrupted.
- Retain a degree of flexibility in respect of the duration of a placement in a PRU, particularly for those young people who are responding positively to a stronger social-skills orientation.
- Monitor the impact of the implementation of the requirement to provide a subsequent placement for a child or young person who has been permanently excluded from the sixth day.
- Make service providers aware of the regulations regarding access to vocational and work-experience-based provision by age and stage by indicating the degree of flexibility to access such provision earlier.
- Secure further funding for alternative education providers to work in partnership with PRUs and special schools as appropriate in order to continue to provide a range of vocational and work-experience-based provision.
- Increase the level of support to the families of children who have been permanently excluded from special schools or PRUs, for example through an allocated Parent Support Adviser who can offer practical and emotional support.

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# Appendix 1 - Methodology

## Challenges of negotiating access

In all but a very few cases, locating the young person’s key worker was extremely challenging, and involved a relatively large number of telephone or email contacts (see Table A1 below). In some cases, this was due to the fact that the local authority contact was not able to identify the young person on the basis of the evidence provided by the research team and derived from the census, namely date of birth, date of admission to and exclusion from a named special school or PRU. In others, it was not clear who had responsibility for a particular case. Some local authority officers were extremely reluctant to give any information that might identify the young person, despite assurances that any such information would remain confidential to the research team. Others were willing to disclose the young person’s name once they had been fully briefed as to the purposes of the research (see project information leaflets below).

Table A1 shows the outcome of attempts to achieve the study sample of 30 young people.

**Table A1 - Negotiating participation**

|   | <i>n</i> |
|---|----------|
| Consent achieved  | 28       |
| Consent declined  | 6        |
| Parental permission refused   | 2        |
| Professional advice not to continue attempts to recruit               | 2        |
| LA / school did not respond to enquiries*                             | 15       |
| LA / school refused to give information on young person’s whereabouts | 2        |
| Location unknown  | 1        |

\* The number of enquiries made for each young person ranged from 9 to 26, often involving many different contacts.

These difficulties had a substantial impact on the research process, and upon the total number of interviews conducted. Although we received consent from 28 young people, we were only able to conduct interviews with individuals related to 24 cases (see Chapter 1, Table 1). The methodological challenges posed by the research were explored in detail in the first Interim Report to the DCSF and are addressed in Pirrie and Macleod, forthcoming (a) and (b).

The priority in this Final Report has been to report the substantive research findings, and to relate these to policy and practice in the policy area of children and families, with specific reference to policy relating to exclusion from school and special educational needs and disabilities. Nevertheless, the difficulties in achieving the sample and in negotiating access to the young people are substantive research findings in their own right. They underline the need to monitor more effectively the trajectories of the small minority of young people permanently excluded from special schools and PRUs in order to develop a sound evidence base in relation to what works in relation to this group of vulnerable young people.

**Table A2: Overview of 'cold cases'**

| <i>ID</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Looked After Status</i> | <i>GOR</i> | <i>P.Ex. from Traced?</i> | <i>SEN</i> | <i>Reason(s) for non-participation</i> |   |
|-----------|---------------|----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|------------|--|---|
|           |               |                            | L          | SS                        | Yes        | profoundly deaf                        | no reply to letter/ attempts to contact     |
| 01        | M             |                            |            |                           |            |  |   |
| 02        | M             | Accommodated (secure)      | SE         | SS                        | Yes        |  | on advice of SW                             |
| 03        | M             |                            | SE         | PRU                       | Yes        |  | on advice of SW                             |
| 04        | M             | LAC                        | SE         | SS                        | Yes        |  | invited via connexions PA - declined        |
| 05        | M             |                            | SE         | PRU                       | Yes        |  | Young person declined                       |
| 06        | M             | Accommodated (secure)      | SE         | PRU                       | Yes        |  | Mother declined                             |
| 07        | M             |                            | SE         | PRU                       | Yes        |  | Young person declined                       |
| 08        | F             |                            | SE         | SS                        | Yes        |  | Young person declined                       |
| 09        | M             | LAC                        | SE         | SS                        | No         |  |   |
| 10        | M             |                            | SE         | SS                        | Yes        |  | HT to approach parents                      |
| 11        | M             |                            | SE         | SS                        | Yes        |  | Invited by letter – no response             |
| 12        | M             | LAC                        | SE         | SS                        | Yes        |  | invited via SEN caseworker - declined       |
| 13        | ?             |                            | SE         | SS                        | No         | BESD                                   | LA refused to disclose info                 |
| 14        | ?             |                            | SE         | SS                        | No         |  | private school refused to give info         |
| 15        | M             |                            | L          | SS                        | Yes        |  | Depute head did not consent                 |
| 16        | M             |                            | L          | SS                        | Yes        |  | Mother did not consent                      |
| 17        | M             |                            | L          | SS                        | No         |  | No response from school or LA (14 contacts) |
| 18        | M             |                            | L          | SS                        | No         |  | As above                                    |
| 19        | M             |                            | L          | SS                        | No         |  | As above                                    |
| 20        | M             |                            | L          | PRU                       | No         |  | No info from LA (9 contacts)                |
| 21        | M             |                            | L          | PRU                       | No         |  | As above                                    |
| 22        | M             |                            | L          | PRU                       | No         |  | As above                                    |
| 23        | M             |                            | L          | SS                        | No         |  | No info from LA (18 contacts)               |
| 24        | M             | LAC                        | L          | SS                        | No         |  | As above                                    |
| 25        | F             |                            | L          | SS                        | No         |  | As above                                    |
| 26        | M             | LAC                        | L          | SS                        | No         |  | As above                                    |
| 27        | M             |                            | L          | SS                        | No         |  | As above                                    |
| 28        | M             |                            | L          | PRU                       | No         |  | As above                                    |

## Appendix 2 - Questionnaire to providers that have permanently excluded pupil(s) in the 2005-06 school year

What happens to pupils excluded from PRUs and special schools?

### SECTION 1

#### Information about your PRU or special school

1. What is the postcode of your provision? *Please write in.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
2. How many pupils are currently on the roll? \_\_\_\_\_  
*Please include **all** pupils enrolled on both a full- or a part-time basis.*
3. How many FTE places does this represent? *Please write in.*  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What are the main areas of difficulty or need catered for in your provision?  
*Please tick all that apply.*

**Cognition and learning needs**

- Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD)
- Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD)
- Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD)
- Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty (PMLD)

**Behaviour, Emotional and Social Development Needs**

- Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulty (BESD)

**Communication and Interaction Needs**

- Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

**Sensory and/or Physical Needs**

- Visual Impairment (VI)
- Hearing Impairment (HI)
- Multi-Sensory Impairment (MSI)
- Physical Disability (PD)

| <b>Other area of difficulty or need</b>                               |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| Excluded, or at risk of exclusion from school (mainstream or special) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Pregnant and/or young parent  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| School refuser/phobic   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Absent from school on medical grounds                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other ( <i>please specify</i> )                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. How many pupils were permanently excluded from your provision in the 2005/06 school year? *Please write in.*  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Do young people attending your provision have access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)? *Please consider those who have attended in the past, and those who are currently attending.*  
Yes  **Go to Q7)**      No  (**Go to SECTION 2 overleaf**)
7. If 'YES', please specify in what capacity.

## SECTION 2

### Information about the young person permanently excluded from your provision (CONFIDENTIAL).

Please provide the following information for each young person excluded from your provision in the 2005/06 school year.

*You may make additional copies of Section 2 as necessary.*

#### About the young person

1. Date of birth:  
*Please write in (dd mm yy).*

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| d | d | m | m | y | y |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

2. Sex: Male  Female

3. What is the ethnic background of the young person?  
*Please tick one box.*

- White   
Mixed   
Asian or Asian British   
Black or Black British   
Chinese

Other (*please specify*) \_\_\_\_\_

4. Is English the main language that the young person speaks at home?  
*Please tick one box.*

Yes  **Go to Q6**                      No  **Go to Q5**

5. If no, what language does the young person mainly speak at home? *Please write in.*

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Please give the postcode of the young person's main place of residence at time of permanent exclusion.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|

7. While at your provision, did the young person have free school meal entitlement (FME)?  
*Please tick one box.*

Yes                       No

8. Please briefly state any disability, medical or psychological diagnosis (eg, ADHD, epilepsy) *Please write in.*

\_\_\_\_\_

9. When was the young person placed in your provision? *Please write date, eg 15 04 03*

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| d | d | m | m | y | y |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

10. What was the main reason for young person's referral to your provision? *Please write in.*

---

11. When was the young person permanently excluded from your provision? *Please write in date, eg 12 04 06*

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| d | d | m | m | y | y |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

12. At the time of their permanent exclusion from your provision, was the young person attending as a ...

day pupil?

residential pupil?  **Go to Q13**

13. If the young person was attending on a residential basis, what was the nature of their placement? *Please tick one box only.*

Weekly

Termly (approx 36 weeks)

Full-time (approx 52 weeks)

Other (*please specify*) \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your assistance.**

**Please return to Dr Anne Pirrie at the SCRE Centre, Faculty of Education,  
University of Glasgow, St Andrew's Building, 11 Eldon Street, Glasgow, G3 6NH**

## Appendix 3 - Interview Schedules

### Where next for pupils permanently excluded from PRUs and special schools?

#### *Wave 1 - Interview schedule for first interview with service providers*

##### Preamble

The researcher will introduce herself and briefly outline the project. She will distribute a leaflet, and emphasise and the potential contribution of the young person as a participant. The initial focus will be on the interviewee's perceptions of what the young person is doing now, and any other relevant information about the young person, including other provision and their home circumstances. Later in the interview, we will explore what the respondent knows about the events that led up to the young person's exclusion.

The researcher will make it quite clear that no individual will be identified in the report(s), while emphasising the importance we attach to getting the messages of different across. The researcher will ask permission to record the interview, and give an opportunity to ask any questions. The order of the questions is indicative only, and intended as a guide for the research team.

**STUDENT'S NAME**

**LA**

**RESPONDENT'S NAME**

**Job Title / Role**

##### CURRENT EDUCATIONAL PROVISION/HOME CIRCUMSTANCES

*The aim is to get as full a picture of possible of the young person's activities during the day, and the nature and quality of relationships with adults and peers.*

- 1 Can you tell me a bit about [name of young person's] home circumstances?**  
*Probe about any immediate family members that do not reside at this address (e.g. parent, siblings).*  
*Probe for contact with absent family members.*
  
- 2 How does [name of young person] spend his/her time in the evenings and at weekends?**  
*Probe for participation in leisure activities (names of coaches, club organisers, etc)*  
*What do they enjoy doing? When do they feel bored or fed up?*  
*Probe for computer use: games / MSN MySpace, email. Going out - where, with whom, etc.*
  
- 3 Can you tell us what [name of young person] is doing now. Can you tell us how they're spending the time during the day, Monday to Friday?**  
*Prompt about each day of the week if necessary. How are specific needs met (educational, social, psychological/emotional)*  
*Probe for views (positive and negative) about what they are doing.*  
*If applicable,ask about each element of the alternative programme.*  
*Probe for duration of course / placement / activity.*  
***It will be important to get an accurate breakdown of all placements/activities, and the names and contact details of key contacts.***
  
- 4 Can you tell us about your role in [name of young person's] case?**  
*Probe for how the decision on this particular placement was reached.*  
*Probe for extent and nature of liaison with others, and any other help or support they think would benefit the young person.*

- 5 **What has it been like for [name of young person] since he / she started at X?**  
*Probe for how much respondent knows about what is going on for the young person.  
 Probe for any difficulties, and if / how they were resolved.  
 Relationship with staff / students.*
- 6 **Is X still in touch with anyone from [name of PRU / special school]?**  
*Probe for how they maintain contact, and any obstacles to sustaining relationships.*
- 7 **Overall, what do you think it's been like for [name of young person] since they were excluded from [name of PRU / special school]?**  
*Probe for perceptions of gaps in service provision*

#### WHAT NEXT?

- 8 **What do you think [name of young person] will do once they leave education?**  
*Probe about future education and / or employment. Where might the young person be living?*
- 9 **Can you think of any additional support that would help [young person] get where s/he wants to go in terms of education, work or training; relationships with family; social relationships?**  
*Probe for support from external agencies / from within the family.*

#### EXCLUSION FROM SPECIAL SCHOOL

- 10 **One of the purposes of the research is to explore the events that led up to [name of young person's] exclusion from [name of PRU or special school]. Can you tell me what you know about that?**  
*Probe for immediate events leading up to exclusion  
 Probe for any longer-term and wider 'causes' in terms of family background, peer group, school history, resources available within the local authority*

**Were you involved with [young person] at the time?**  
*Probe for source(s) of information/perceptions of reliability.*

#### CONCLUDING THE INTERVIEW

It's been good to meet you today. As you know, the plan is to keep in touch with [name of young person] over the next couple of years in order to explore what happens to them over the course of time. It is very important for the overall success of the project that we have as accurate a picture of possible of what they're doing. We're relying on you to keep us informed about any developments or changes in personnel. **Please let us know immediately.**

**Probe for most appropriate means.**

*Make sure you exchange telephone numbers, email addresses and postal addresses.*

## **Where next for pupils permanently excluded from PRUs and special schools?**

### ***Wave 1 - Interview schedule for first interview with parent(s)/carer(s)***

#### **Preamble**

The researcher will introduce herself and briefly outline the project. She will distribute a leaflet, and emphasise and the potential contribution of the young person as a participant. The initial focus will be on what the parent'(s) / carer'(s) perceptions of what the young person is doing now, their likes and dislikes and any other relevant information about the young person. Later in the interview, we will explore perceptions of the events that led up to the young person's exclusion.

The researcher will make it quite clear that neither the young person nor their family will be identified in the report(s). That anything they tell us will be used anonymously, the researcher will emphasise the importance we attach to getting their story heard.

The researcher will make it clear that everything that is said in the interview is confidential unless something is said which makes us think that the young person is being harmed in any way, for example they may tell us that they have noticed bruises on the young person and don't know where they have come from. If that happens then the researcher will discuss with the parent/ carer the best person to pass the information on to. They will then ask permission to record the interview in order that we can have a record of exactly what they have said when we come to write our report. The researcher will explain that we may want to use their exact words, but will remind them that they will not be identified. They will be given an opportunity to ask any questions. The order of the questions is indicative only, and intended as a guide for the research team. The approach to the interview will be tailored to the needs of the individual, and any additional support required will be negotiated with the case-worker prior to interview.

#### **CURRENT EDUCATIONAL PROVISION / HOME CIRCUMSTANCES**

***The aim is to get as full a picture of possible of the young person's activities during the day, and the nature and quality of relationships with adults and peers. Questions 4 - 6 are only relevant for a young person in current education.***

- 1 Can you tell me a bit about who lives at this address?**  
*Probe about any immediate family members that do not reside at this address (e.g. parent, siblings). Probe for contact with absent family members.*
  
- 2 Can you tell us what [name of young person] is doing now? Can you tell us how they're spending the time during the day, Monday to Friday?**  
*Prompt about each day of the week if necessary  
Probe for views (positive and negative) about what they are doing.  
If applicable, ask about each element of the alternative programme.  
Probe for duration of course / placement / activity.*
  
- 3 Who does the young person go to for help with any problems that come up with [current activity]?**  
*Prompt for:  
If they want something to change  
If they are unhappy  
If they need something*

- 4 And where do you think they turn to for help on personal matters?**  
*Probe for significant others within and outside the family.*
- 5 What has it been like for you since [name of young person] started at X?**  
*Probe for how much the parent(s) / carer(s) know about what is going on, and how they feel about that.*  
*Probe for what happened, and if / how it was resolved.*
- 6 Does [name of young person] talk about the staff at X (and Y/Z, as applicable) all? How do you think he/she is getting on with them?**  
*Probe for the quality of the relationships, and how these compare with the relationships at the PRU / special school from which the young person was permanently excluded.*
- 7 How does [name of young person] get on with the other students/people his or her age at X? Does he/she ever talk about them.**  
*Probe for how much the parent(s) / carer(s) know about the young person's peers, and whether or not they've made any friends. Probe for activities, etc.*
- 8 Is X still in touch with anyone from [name of PRU/special school]?**  
*Probe for how they maintain contact, and any obstacles to sustaining relationships.*
- 9 What does [name of young person] do in the evenings and at weekends?**  
*Probe for participation in leisure activities (names of coaches, club organisers, etc)*  
*What do they enjoy doing? When do they feel bored or fed up?*  
*Probe for computer use: games / MSN MySpace, email. Going out - where, with whom, etc.*
- 10 Overall, what's it been like for [name of young person] since they were excluded from [name of PRU s pecial school]?**

#### WHAT NEXT?

- 11 What do you think [name of young person] would like to do when they have left school/ education**  
  
*Probe about future education and/or employment. Where might the young person be living?*
- 12 Is there any kind of support or help that you think would make things better for [young person] in terms of helping them get where they want to go?**  
*Probe for support from external agencies / from within the family.*

#### VIEWS ON EXCLUSION FROM PRU/SPECIAL SCHOOL

*The aim here is to explore whether the exclusion was considered preventable. What systemic factors, if any, were considered to have precipitated their exclusion?*

- 13 I'd like you think back to the time when [name of young person] was at [name of PRU or special school]. Can you tell me what you know about the events that led up to exclusion?**

*And after [X] was excluded, can you tell me a bit about what happened next? [note there may be a number of stages in this story so probe about each step up to current circumstances].*

*Probe:*

*Who decided what should happen to them*

*Where did they go? (at home full time, another PRU / School)*

*Did anyone ask X about what you wanted?*

*If they had done, what do you think X would you have said?*

*Had X been excluded before? If so was this just the same or different in any way?*

**What adults were working with X/ helping you at that time (after the permanent exclusion)?**

*Probe:*

*Did X know them already?*

*How did X get on with them?*

*Was there anyone from the PRU/ SS that X would have liked to stay in touch with but hasn't (staff or pupils)*

**And since X has been [current circumstance - at X, working with Y], How have things been going for them?**

*Probe:*

*Have any of the same problems arisen?*

*Does X like being here / working with Y?*

*Has X been excluded from anywhere else since the PRU / SS?*

*Give time and plenty of encouragement.*

*'Tell me more about that.'*

*'What happened next?'*

*'How did X feel about it?'*

*'How did **you** feel about it?'*

*'What does X think about it now?'*

#### **14 And what has it been like for you during this time?**

#### **CONCLUDING THE INTERVIEW**

It's been good to meet you today. As you know, the plan is to keep in touch with [name of young person] to see how they're getting on. I hope that we can meet up with them later in the year, in September or October. We'd also like to know how things are going for you. I hope we can meet again at that time too. What would be the best way of keeping in touch in the meantime?

***Probe for most appropriate means.***

*Make sure you exchange telephone numbers.*

## **Where next for pupils permanently excluded from PRUs and special schools?**

### ***Wave 1 - Interview schedule for first interview with young person***

#### **Preamble**

The researcher will introduce herself and briefly outline the project, emphasising the potential contribution of the young person as a participant (including the incentives for participation). The incentives for participation will be explained - vouchers for High Street stores of increasing value over the 3 years. The initial focus will be on what the young person is doing now, on their likes and dislikes and any other relevant personal information. Later in the interview, we will explore the young person's perceptions of the events that led up to his or her exclusion.

The researcher will make it quite clear to the young person that they will not be identified in the report(s), while emphasising the importance we attach to telling their story. The interviewer will mention the use of a code name, which should be the young person's choice, - if they can't think of one straight away return to this at the end of the interview.

The researcher will make it clear that everything that is said in the interview is confidential unless there is a child protection issue (i.e. something the young person says leads the researcher to believe that they might be being harmed in some way; for example 'I get a hammering from my Dad when he comes home drunk'), in which case the researcher will talk to the young person about the best person to share this information with.

The researcher will then ask permission to record the interview in order that we can have a record of exactly what they have said when we come to write our report. We may want to use their exact words, but the code name they give us will be used to preserve anonymity. The researcher will then give the young person an opportunity to ask any questions. The order of the questions is indicative only, and intended as a guide for the research team. However the interview should start with general current circumstances, followed by their exclusion, then how they got from exclusion to where they are now, and finally how they are getting on in their new setting.

The approach to the interview will be tailored to the needs of the individual, and any additional support required will be negotiated with the case-worker prior to interview. See Appendix 1 for an outline of techniques that may be deployed during the interview (or afterwards, with support from a case-worker or tutor).

#### **YOUR LIFE NOW: LEISURE ACTIVITIES AND INTERESTS**

***The aim here is to build up a picture of what makes the young person tick. Information about their leisure activities, what they enjoy/don't enjoy doing, how they keep in touch with friends, etc, will underline the fact that we are interested in the young people themselves - not just in their exclusion - and help us to sustain contact over time.***

##### **1 What do you do in the evenings and at weekends?**

[Props: thermoevaluator]

*Probe for participation in leisure activities (names of coaches, club organisers, etc)  
What do you enjoy doing? When do you feel bored or fed up?*

*Probe for computer use: games / MSN MySpace, email. Going out - where, with whom, etc.*

## YOUR LIFE NOW: HOME AND FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES

*This is also chance to find out about the young person's home circumstances and to revisit some of the areas covered above. Some of the answers to these questions will help to prepare the way for future contact.*

### 2 **Researcher: 'I live at home with x and x ...'**

#### **Who do you live with?**

*Probe about any immediate family members they don't live with (e.g. parent, siblings). Pets? Birthdays and special days and if / how these are celebrated (in order that the researcher can make contact on these days if appropriate; or refer to in subsequent interviews).*

### 3 **Let's talk about who is important in your life.**

*Begin by giving examples from your own life (family / birth family / friends / acquaintances / colleagues) [Props: circle drawings]*

*Probe for **family members**: parents / carers; siblings; grandparents; uncles; aunts; cousins*

*Friends*

*Leisure activity people: sports coaches, youth workers, etc*

*Current education providers: tutors, teachers, support staff*

*Past education providers: tutors, teachers, support staff*

*Others: social worker, Connexions PA, CAMHS worker, etc*

***Explain that you would like to talk to some of these people as well about what happened at [name of PRU or special school] and what happened next.***

### 4 **What do you like about your life right now?**

### 5 **And what would you like to change?**

## VIEWS ON EXCLUSION FROM PRU / SPECIAL SCHOOL

*It is important to remember that we will be asking some young people to recall events that took place over a year ago. This may present challenges for some; for others, the recollection may be vivid. It is important to bear in mind that lack of detailed recall is also data.*

### 6 **Now you're [whatever they're doing now]**

**I'd like you think back to the time when you were at [name of PRU or special school]. Can you tell me what happened there that ended up with you being excluded?** [Props: speech and thought bubbles]

**And after you were excluded, can you tell me a bit about what happened next? [note there may be a number of stages in this story so probe about each step up to current circumstances].**

*Probe:*

*Who decided what should happen to you?*

*Where did you go? (at home full time, another PRU / School)*

*Did anyone ask you about what you wanted?*

*If they had done, what would you have said?*

*Had you been excluded before? If so was this just the same or different in any way?*

**What adults were working with you/ helping you at that time (after the permanent exclusion)?**

*Probe:*

*Did you know them already?*

*How did you get on with them?*

*Was there anyone from the PRU/ SS that you would have liked to stay in touch with but haven't (staff or pupils)*

**And since you've been [current circumstance - at X, working with Y], How have things been going for you?**

*Probe:*

*Have any of the same problems arisen?*

*Do you like being here/ working with Y?*

*Have you been excluded from anywhere else since the PRU/SS?*

**Give time and plenty of encouragement.**

*'Tell me more about that.'*

*'What happened next?'*

*'How did you feel?'*

*'What did you say then?'*

*'What did they say?'*

*'What do you think about it now?'*

## **CURRENT PROVISION**

***The aim is to get as full a picture of possible of the young person's activities during the day, and the nature and quality of relationships with adults and peers. It also underlines the fact that we're interested in the here and now, and not just in the events that led up to their permanent exclusion and its immediate aftermath. Questions 9-11 are only applicable to those young people who are currently in education.***

**7 What are you doing now during the day, Monday to Friday?**

*Prompt about each day of the week if necessary*

*Probe for views (positive and negative) about what they are doing. [Props: hands/scales]*

*If applicable, ask about each element of any alternative programme. Probe for duration of course / placement / activity.*

**8 Who helps you?**

*Prompt for:*

*If they want something to change*

*If they are unhappy*

*If they need something*

*Probe for any other help or support they'd like to help them to do well.*

**9 Have you had any problems since you started at X?**

*Probe for what happened, and if / how it was resolved.*

**10 What do you think of the staff at X (and Y/Z, as applicable)?**

*Probe for the quality of the relationships, and how these compare with the relationships at the PRU/special school from which the young person was permanently excluded. [Props: gingerbread people]*

- 11 How do you get on with the other people your age at X?**  
*Probe for whom they've met up with, and whether or not they've made any friends.  
Probe for activities, etc.*
- 12 Are you still in touch with anyone from [name of PRU/special school]?**  
*Probe for how they maintain contact, and any obstacles to sustaining relationships.*

#### **WHAT NEXT?**

***The notion of 'planning' may be difficult to get across. Nevertheless, it will be important to get some idea of perceptions of agency and control.***

- 12 What would you like to do in the future, once you've left school/ education?**  
[May need to use a time-line with 'now' and 'next']

#### **CONCLUDING THE INTERVIEW**

***It is important to build on any rapport developed during the interview, and to make arrangements to keep in touch. This is the time to hand over the Boots HMV voucher or JB Sports voucher, and to make sure that the young person (and the key worker) have your business card.***

'It's been great to meet you today, and I've really enjoyed talking to you. I hope we can meet up later in the year, in the autumn. I'll come and visit again. In the meantime, it would be good to keep in touch. What do you think is the best way of doing that?'

***Probe for most appropriate means.***

*Texting [exchange mobile numbers]?*

*Mobile phone calls [exchange mobile numbers]?*

*Cards?*

*MSN (at arranged times)?*

*Email [exchange email addresses]?*

***Ask if they have thought of a code-name.***



**Mairi Ann Cullen**

Mairi Ann works at the University of Warwick. She used to work with Anne in Edinburgh



**Jon Lewin**

Jon works at the SCORE Centre in the University of Glasgow. He lives in Edinburgh with his partner and three young children.



**Gillian McCluskey**

Gillian lives in a village in the Scottish Borders with Tom and Sam, and likes running and swimming

### how to contact us

If you would like further information on the project, you can send an email to [anne.pirrie@uws.ac.uk](mailto:anne.pirrie@uws.ac.uk) or telephone Dr Anne Pirrie on 01292 886376 (voicemail) or Dr Gale Macleod on 0131 651 6448.



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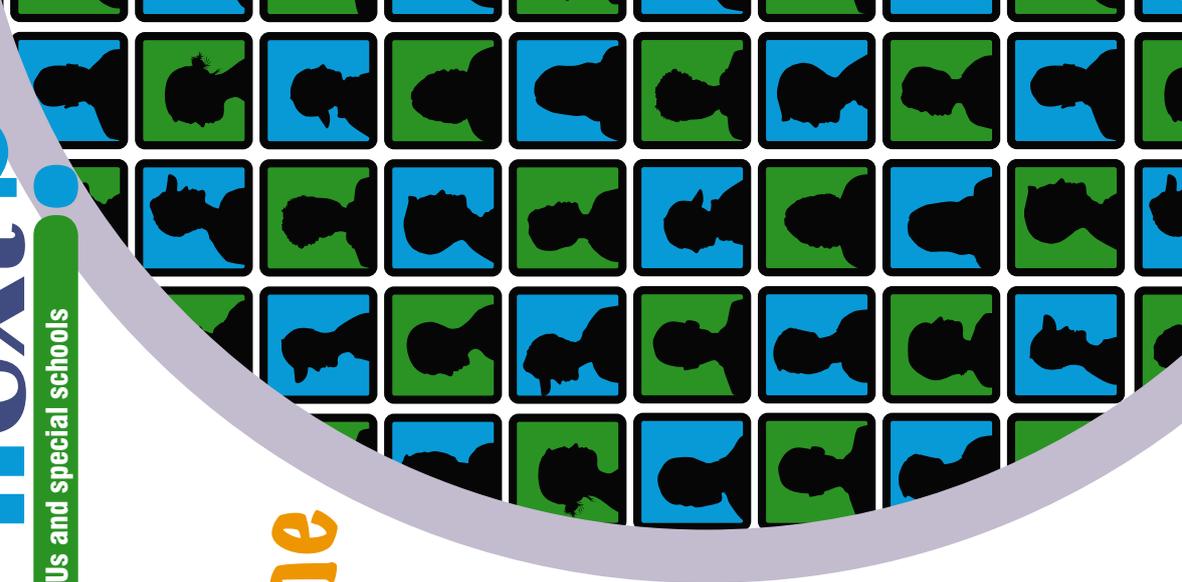
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# where next?

for pupils excluded from PRUs and special schools

## About the Project



*We are really interested in your views. We want to find out what you've been doing, and how things have been going for you. We're not going to name names — we're just going to tell it like it is. And we need your help.*

What's in it for you? Well, for a start, *it's a chance for you to tell your side of your story.* That's probably the biggest deal.

It's also a chance for you to *tell people in the government* what life's like for people who've been permanently excluded. Maybe that way they can sort something out, so that things might be different for other young people.

Oh, and *we'll give you some vouchers too* — for mobile phone top-ups or music.



Getting involved in this project will mean talking to us about your life. *What's important for you? What do you enjoy doing? And what do you find a hassle?*



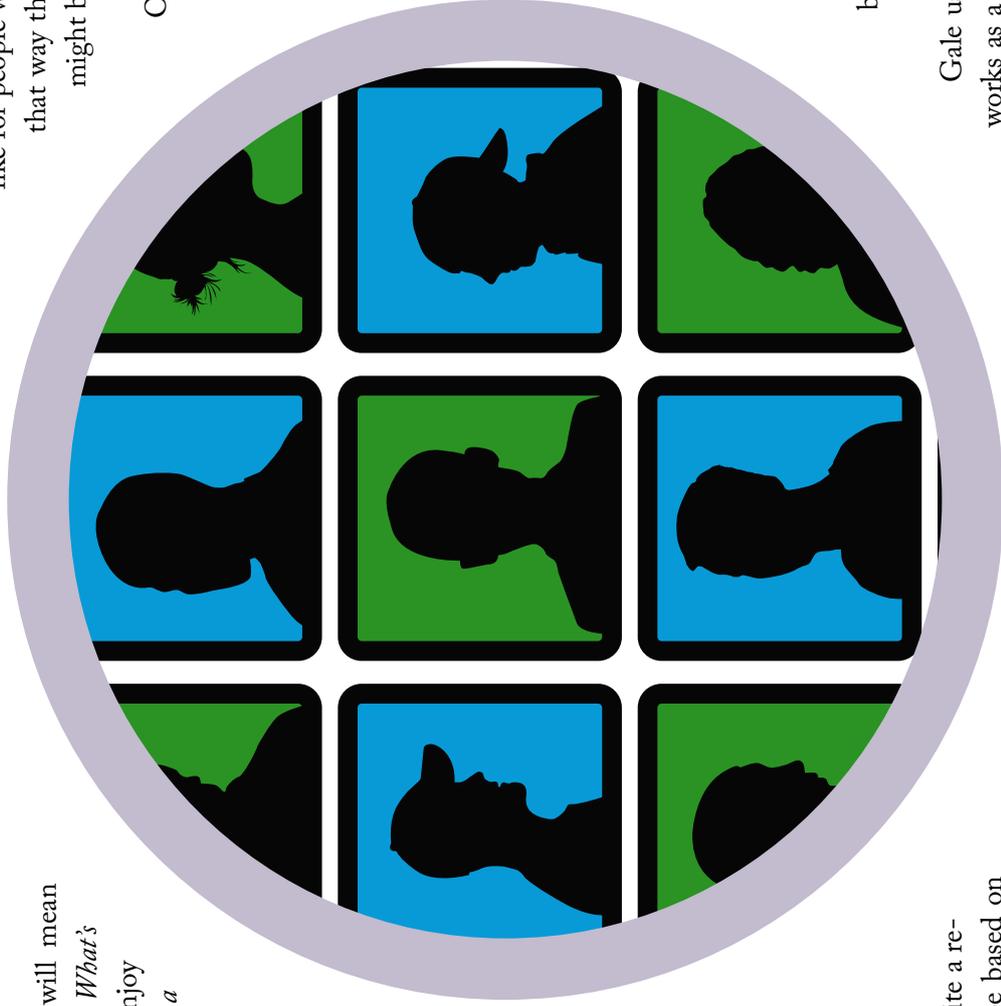
We'll talk to you face-to-face at a time and in a place that suits you. We'll also talk about how we'll keep in touch.



We'll be talking to some other people who are important in your life. We'll keep you in the picture. This is all about you. We'll need your help to speak to these people.



At the end of the project, we'll write a report for the government. It will be based on the stories you and other young people like you tell us.



about us

We're researchers. We work in different universities in different parts of Britain, but we like to keep in regular contact with each other.

**Anne Pirrie**

Anne works at the University of the West of Scotland. She lives in Edinburgh with her husband and her daughter.



**Gale Macleod**

Gale used to be a teacher but now works as a researcher and lecturer. She lives in Edinburgh with her husband and two young children and supports Motherwell FC.





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WEST OF SCOTLAND

The young people participating in the study will be asked to identify the key individuals in their lives. We anticipate conducting approximately 5 interviews for every young person in the sample of 30, including those in the parental role. This represents approximately 210 interviews per year in each of the three years of the study.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research team will provide regular written reports to the DCSF throughout the project, and the final report will be submitted in March 2009.

## HOW TO CONTACT US

If you would like further information on the project, please send an email to [anne.pirrie@uws.ac.uk](mailto:anne.pirrie@uws.ac.uk) or telephone Dr Anne Pirrie on 01292 886376 (voicemail) or Dr Gale Macleod on 0131 651 6448.

# where next?

for pupils excluded from PRUs and special schools



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In September 2006, the Department for Education and Skills (now the Department for Children, Schools and Families – DCSF) commissioned The SCORE Centre at the University of Glasgow to undertake a three-year study of young people excluded from Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) or special schools. In June 2007, the research grant was transferred to the University of the West of Scotland.

The main focus of the study will be a group of 30 young people whom we will track over a three-year period. The research will be carried out in collaboration with researchers at the University of Edinburgh and the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) at the University of Warwick.

We know that many young people permanently excluded from specialist provision will experience poor and costly outcomes, such as not being in education, employment or training (NEET). Moreover, we know that young people in such circumstances are more likely to become involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour. In sum, the stakes are high, and it is vital that we obtain high-quality information that will enable us to improve outcomes for this vulnerable group.

The results of the study will inform the work of policy-makers and service providers, and help them to support these young people and their families, and to manage the process of permanent exclusion from PRUs and special schools.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the research is to identify and explore the routes, destinations and outcomes of a group of young people who have been permanently excluded from a PRU or special school.

The specific objectives are as follows:

- To examine the events and processes that led up to permanent exclusion from a PRU or special school.
- To identify what forms of alternative provision are available to young people in these circumstances.
- To identify where young people go after their permanent exclusion, and the appropriateness of their destinations.
- To explore in greater depth what happens to them in terms of behaviour, attitudes, attainment and achievement.

### Selecting the sample

The first stage of the research will involve a census of all PRUs and special schools in a number of Government Office Regions (GORs). The GORs will be selected to ensure sufficient geographical spread; and to encompass a wide spectrum of types of provision.

The purpose of the initial census is to ascertain how many young people were permanently excluded from PRUs and special schools in 2005/06. Providers will be asked to provide some basic background information on the pupils, including any relevant diagnostic information relating to Special Educational Needs (SEN), and reason for exclusion. *PRUs and special schools will not be required to disclose the identity of any young person.*

Once these providers have given their consent, the research team will liaise with the officer in the local authority who is responsible for this group of young people in order to negotiate access. Written consent will be obtained from all parties, and it will be made clear that any information disclosed will only be used for research purposes, and will remain confidential to the research team.

### Tracking a sample of young people

A sample of 45 pupils will be identified from the PRUs and special schools that have indicated their willingness to participate. Thirty of these young people will be selected in the first instance, and we will then follow their progress closely over a three-year period. There will be annual face-to-face interviews with the young people themselves, and with those in the parental role. We will maintain contact with the group throughout the year by sending text messages, birthday cards, etc.

This regular and informal contact is an important dimension to the project. We believe that the quality of the information gathered is dependent on the quality of the relationships we are able to develop with the young people and their families, and with the wide range of professionals involved in their cases.

Building up detailed profiles of the young people, and forming a clear picture of their routes, destinations and outcomes will involve close co-operation with a number of key individuals. These will include the young person's parents, carers and other significant adults in their life (grandparents, football coaches, youth workers); teachers; educational psychologists; education welfare officers; Connexions PAs; social workers; police; and members of the Youth Offending Team.

Ref: DCSF-RR163

ISBN: 978 1 84775 537 7

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**[www.dcsf.gov.uk/research](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research)**

Published by the Department for  
Children, Schools and Families