

Permanent School Exclusions in Surrey

What works to keep children and young people in education?

Dr Emily Glorney¹, Natasha Rhoden¹ and Professor Frank Keating²; Department of Law and Criminology¹ and Department of Social Work²; School of Law and Social Sciences; Royal Holloway, University of London

Research summary – July 2021



Image courtesy of Nathan Dumlao on Unsplash

Our research focuses on children and young people permanently excluded from school in Surrey and considers how systems and services might work together to support school inclusion and the right of all young people to education. This research sits in a national context of awareness of disadvantage to children and young people who do not have access to education, as a consequence of national lockdown in a global pandemic.

There are many factors that contribute to children and young people being excluded from school, not least systemic challenges to practice and equity of access to educational opportunity and support. Children and young people excluded from school have been found to have

poorer life opportunities than their in-school counterparts. This is reflected in factors that make some children and young people vulnerable to exclusion (e.g. a history of adverse childhood experiences, unmet special educational needs, the subjective experience of social exclusion) and also vulnerabilities as a consequence of exclusion (e.g. increased vulnerability to exploitation and engaging in crime). Therefore, reducing school exclusions and promoting inclusion is linked to broader social issues that reflect the state of society.

Through our research in Surrey, we found that:

- Children and young people were excluded at the point where schools felt that they had exhausted all available, alternative

means of supporting pupils and managing behaviour.

- Resource gaps contribute to the decision to opt for school exclusion.
- Challenges in sharing information about children and young people across services mean that critical information about vulnerabilities and risk is not used to best effect to support early intervention to support children and young people remaining in full time education.
- Feasible future directions include the coordinated, child-centred approach to supporting inclusion enabled by the South-East quadrant SALP model, enhancing early intervention, safeguarding, and enhancing resilience within children.

"...sometimes, there just needs to be a reminder ... what are we actually saying to a child and their family? That they no longer belong to their school community ... and that's really hard for the family and child to hear. They're out the door, they're forgotten ..." (interviewee)

"Exclusion can be a cliff face. It's suddenly there. You're not only dealing with the actual behaviours but the trauma of saying to a child 'you can't come to school'"(interviewee)

"There's usually a well-trodden path where you've excluded a child. Once for one day on a fixed term, and then they've had a three-day, and then a four-day, and then a five-day, and you can see that trouble is ahead ... I can't think of many incidents where we've got to permanent exclusion just for persistent disruptive behaviour" (interviewee)



ROYAL
HOLLOWAY
UNIVERSITY
OF LONDON

How we explored school inclusion and permanent exclusion practice in Surrey



We reviewed national and international literature on evidence-based or best practice in supporting school inclusion and managing exclusion. There is evidence to support the effectiveness of whole-school approaches in reducing exclusions, drawing on attachment and nurture-based frameworks, restorative approaches, school-wide positive behavioural interventions and supports, and developing pupil academic skills. The promotion of inclusive cultures and targeting interventions towards children and young people most at risk of exclusion can decrease the likelihood of escalation of behaviours that lead to exclusion. However, once these behaviours have occurred, it is important that fair and appropriate access to education is provided to students who might otherwise disengage from the education system entirely.

We identified areas of good practice in Surrey. SCC guidelines and policy demonstrate a strong awareness of evidence-based and best practice.

The Short Stay Schools approach provides excellent support for pupils with SEMH and SEN.

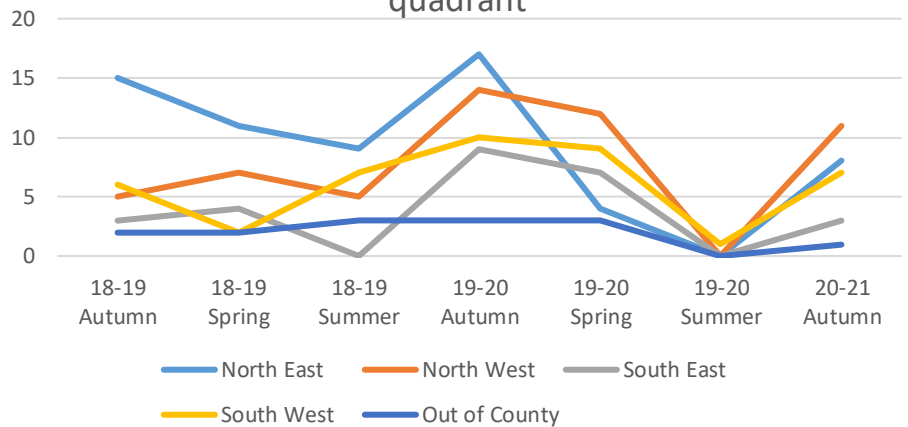
SCC increase in SEMH support following impact of school closures in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Schools Alliance for Excellence (SAfE) committee strategy of enhancing inclusive education and promoting improved education outcomes for at-risk pupils shows potential to reduce school exclusions.

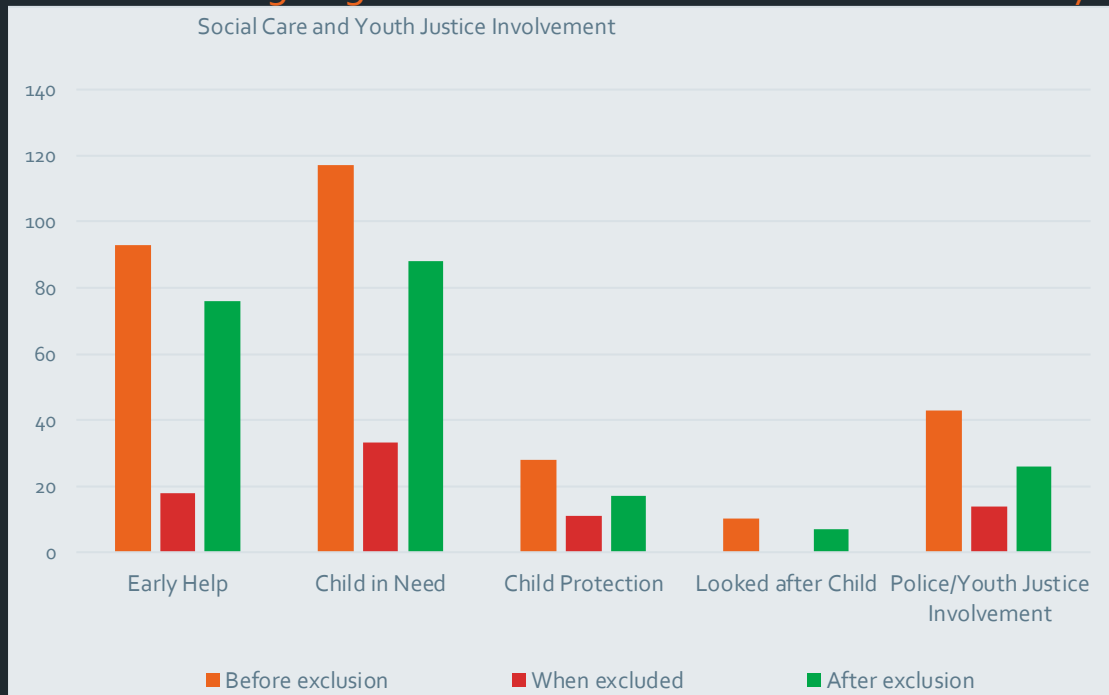
We examined characteristics of pupils permanently excluded from Surrey schools.

Between September 2018 and December 2020, 200 pupils were excluded; 21% were female, 79% were male, ages ranging from 5-18 years. White children accounted for 85% of all permanent exclusions, followed by young people of Black (3.5%), Mixed (3.5%) and Asian (2%) heritage. The five most common indicated reasons for exclusion were persistent disruptive behaviour (34%), physical assault against a pupil (16%) or adult (15%), drug and alcohol related (12%), and verbal abuse/threat against an adult (7.5%). The North East of Surrey had the highest frequency of exclusions (32%), followed by the North West (27%), South West (21%), South East (13%) and out of county (7%). Frequencies of exclusions by quadrant most likely reflect differences in practice, such as SALP boards.

Exclusions by academic year/term and Surrey quadrant



What else was going on for the school excluded children and young people?



60% had SEN support, an EHCP or identified SEN primary need.

Linked to receiving early help, being a child in need.

Police/youth justice involvement before exclusion linked to receiving:

SEN support (not EHCP), early help, being a child in need, and having FTEs.

early help and child protection after exclusion.

57% were eligible for free school meals (as at December 2020)

What concerns and solutions do educational stakeholders identify relating to the practice of permanent school exclusions in Surrey?

We conducted 15 scoping interviews with stakeholders across Surrey, including head teachers, third sector leads, and educational and youth justice professionals in Surrey County Council. The interviews focused on concerns and solutions to the practice of permanent school exclusions in Surrey. Our analysis produced six key themes.

1 - There was a **perceived ease related to the exclusion process**, and the reputational impact of attainment outcomes and exclusions on Ofsted inspection were acknowledged. In contrast, SEND provision seemed more of a challenge than deciding to exclude.

2 - A call for improved openness and **collaborative approaches** between multiple services and agencies supporting children at risk of exclusion.

3 - Early years and primary to secondary school transitions as being **key developmental milestones/periods for intervention**.

4 - Greater **variety and availability of alternative options to exclusion** such as pupil-centred, personalised interventions, short-term breaks at an alternative learning provision, were called for.

5 - Improved support for school staff in **understanding the underlying causes of behaviour** might support a child-centred approach to supporting inclusion and reducing exclusion.

6 - Support for the **Glasgow model** and reducing prevalence of excludable behaviour but limited support for a 'zero exclusion' policy.

1 - Perceived ease of school exclusions

"... some schools really bend over backwards ... to nurture those pupils and avoid [school exclusions] ... other schools know how to play the system ... they want good results ... it's easier not to have the child in the school"

2 - Collaborative approaches

"Social workers were not getting to speak to parents because parents didn't want to engage, but the school spoke to parents all the time ... we need to bring these services towards the school"

3 - Key milestones/periods for intervention

"Working together around our most vulnerable children ... needs to start younger ... Even in nursery schools, they'll be able to pick out kids by age 3 ... and see that they are likely to be the ones that'll go on to be excluded"

4 - Variety and availability of alternative options to exclusion

"... a bit more flexibility for those young people for whom a spread of options would be better ... The opportunity to have a mentor, or ... family therapy, or have a placement somewhere that isn't like a mini prison ... and that's available quickly ... before the crisis happens"

5 - Concerns around underlying causes of behaviour

"... with looked after children we know that so many have attachment needs and have been through childhood trauma ... we're always trying to dig under it [excludable behaviour] ... sometimes it shows a deeper need"

6 - Views on the Glasgow model

"What can we do to cut exclusions? We're asking the wrong question. The question you need to ask is 'what can we do to minimise excludable behaviour?'"

What are the barriers and facilitators to best practice in managing permanent school exclusions in Surrey?

We took forward the findings of the scoping interviews to explore in further detail barriers and facilitators to best practice around school exclusions in Surrey. We interviewed eight stakeholders across Surrey, including head teachers, CAMHS and SEND leaders, and educational professionals in Surrey County Council. Our analysis produced four key themes.

1 - **Surrey Alternative Learning Provision (SALP): a coordinated approach to support children at the brink of exclusion.**

"...all those young people ... don't have to be permanently excluded but [instead] supported into the PRU ... schools are accountable to each other ... the best solutions are local ... a local system, with local people co-ordinating it and local authority funding ... [with] a real sense of the child being at the centre and being first"

"... the epitome of good practice would be that you don't have any exclusions, because no child should be moved from their school community ... it is incredibly important that there is multi-agency support and engagement around the child ... sending a child to a PRU doesn't win the game either because we're talking about potentially vulnerable children ... if you're a bad person looking to groom children then that's your magnet. That's where you know you've got a vulnerability".

2 - **A public health approach: The Glasgow model.**

"Let's just be bold and go to Glasgow City Council and see how they made it rock and then bring it back ... I don't think we should be doing anything now in terms of interventions unless there's an evidence base".

"This is where the local authority has a really powerful role to play in promoting [collaboration] ... with schools, health and social care joining up our support ... where things have worked best, there's been a shared understanding, language and goals. This is something the local authority can absolutely promote and get behind".

3 - **Building resilience within children.**

"If you look at the Early Years, the curriculum starts with your ability to regulate yourself, but that never appears after the Early Years, in any curriculum ... the idea of a stranger walking up behind you, it's still there, don't get me wrong, but the data doesn't suggest that's the predominant risk for children at the moment ... the Junior Citizens Scheme ... has an opportunity in Surrey to reach out to 8,000 children aged between 10 and 11 annually. And we can get the messages [serious youth violence and gangs engaged in criminal behaviour] out there at the earliest opportunity"

"... there is an opportunity for us to work together across agencies, to support schools to make reasonable adjustments ... child-centric education ... clinicians will talk to me about the importance of having the right environment, the right kind of rhythm of study, places that [children] can feel safe in and ... have that sense of empowerment around how they manage their own emotions and anxieties and cope with day-to-day school life".

"...some of the most significant needs ...are around well-known families ... if we could work with this family as a unit, we might well address issues not just for one child, but for multiple siblings in a family group".

4 - **Early intervention beyond individuals: the family and school.**

"...rather than waiting six months to find out ... that inclusion officer goes out to all of the feeder primary schools, to speak to the children whilst they're in their last year of primary school ... to look at what support can be given [in secondary school] to those that are already showing signs of struggling."

"... all I want is for the agencies in Surrey to be able to signpost. I don't want them to become trauma experts ... but just knowing how to signpost families and noting what you see will be a tremendous help."

Implications

Greater acknowledgement of schools that invest resources in supporting children at risk of exclusion might incentivise other schools to reduce permanent exclusions.

Bringing services towards the school is likely to be welcomed by parents/guardians.

Data sharing between organisations and services involved in child safeguarding could facilitate access to services through school referrals, and as a result are more likely to be perceived as non-threatening to the family unit. This seems critical to reduce the risk of exclusion from school and possible involvement in the criminal justice system.

Nursery school staff could provide valuable guidance in highlighting the children most likely to benefit from targeted academic and SEMH interventions in the earlier stages of child development. This could help to reduce subjective feelings of failure among pupils of secondary school age, if SEN and SEMH needs can be addressed before attainment gaps widen among peers.

The combination of alternative provision sourced from local PRUs with child-centred nurture classrooms within mainstream schools, both managed through local SALP boards, may help to reduce pressure on alternative resources external to schools. In addition, the joint planning of funding allocation across local schools, in line with the SALP model, could assist PRUs with accurate anticipation of demand and improve the planning capabilities of local PRUs.

Training and support outreach by PRU staff to mainstream schools might support retention of pupils in school but also help to re-settle pupils on return.

Consistent operationalization and application of thresholds for permanent exclusions across the county might be achieved through a local committee with oversight; the structure of SALP executive boards might provide a good model. The oversight group could promote the need to understand the root causes of pupil behaviours.

Multi-agency working and communication could support sharing of information to support children and young people but also signpost families to timely support.



Image courtesy of Nathan Dumlaio on Unsplash

Research is ongoing. The final report is due to be published at the end of 2021.

Acknowledgement and thanks for their guidance and support to: High Sheriff Dr Julie Llewelyn 2021/22 and Lady (Louise) O'Connor DL, Education Adviser to Surrey Shrievalty. Special thanks also to Mark Keiller, Sandra Morrison and Ron Searle for guidance and facilitation.

With thanks to all who supported this research, including: participants, Surrey County Council, Surrey Police, Surrey Youth Justice, NHS and third sector staff, volunteer researchers, Carl Bussey, Jo Butler, Kirstin Butler, Jessica Clark, Jim Glover, Gemma Neathey, Siobhan Neave, Ailsa Quinlan, Bradley Smith and Mairead Warner.

With thanks to the School of Law and Social Sciences at Royal Holloway, University of London, for sponsoring the event.

Next Steps

We are in the process of interviewing young people and parents/caregivers with experience of permanent school exclusion in Surrey. Through interviews with this critical stakeholder group, we aim to further inform good practice in keeping children and young people in full time education.

Conclusions

There are systemic challenges to keeping children and young people in education in Surrey, and steps are being taken to overcome these.

There is evidence in our data that social, emotional, and mental wellbeing are critical considerations for children and young people at risk of exclusion. Many also had contact with the police or youth justice prior to permanent exclusion. For many children and young people, permanent school exclusion was yet another disadvantage faced in their young lives. School exclusion is certainly not the end of the problem for the child/young person or society.

A whole-school approach that targets interventions towards children and young people most at risk of exclusion can decrease the likelihood of escalation of behaviours that lead to exclusion.

The SALP model of collaborative working between schools and services across the County can support reduction in permanent school exclusions when schools believe exclusion is an option.

Perhaps crucially, research suggests Surrey-wide multi-agency working and communication could support sharing of information to support children and young people but also signpost Surrey families to timely support.