

This is an Open Access document downloaded from ORCA, Cardiff University's institutional repository: <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/152848/>

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted to / accepted for publication.

Citation for final published version:

Power, Sally and Taylor, Chris 2022. Classroom exclusions: patterns, practices, and pupil perceptions. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*  
10.1080/13603116.2022.2121434

Publishers page: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2022.2121434>

Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite this paper.

This version is being made available in accordance with publisher policies. See <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/policies.html> for usage policies. Copyright and moral rights for publications made available in ORCA are retained by the copyright holders.



## **Classroom exclusions: patterns, practices, and pupil perceptions**

**Sally Power and Chris Taylor, WISERD, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University**

### **Abstract**

*This paper examines the under-researched phenomenon of classroom exclusions and their implications for school exclusions. Responses from nearly 1500 secondary school pupils indicate that being expelled from the classroom is a common phenomenon. On average, one third of pupils have been asked to leave the classroom at some point in the previous year. However, it is more common in some schools, and for some pupils, than others. Most often, excluded pupils stand in school corridors with nothing to do. Not only does classroom exclusion lead to a loss of learning time, it may mark the beginning of a trajectory towards school exclusion. Whether it takes on this more serious significance may depend on the extent to which the pupil perceives the teacher's action as appropriate and fair. The paper concludes that classroom exclusions are worthy of investigation not only for lost learning time but because of their significance for future school exclusion. However, in unravelling whether a classroom exclusion 'matters', it is important to examine not only the circumstances which led to it, but the pupil's perception of the legitimacy of the teacher's action.*

### **Key words:**

School exclusions, classroom exclusions, behaviour management, disaffection

Contact details:

Sally Power

[Powers3@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:Powers3@cardiff.ac.uk)

Chris Taylor

[Taylorcm@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:Taylorcm@cardiff.ac.uk)

## **Classroom exclusions: patterns, practices, and pupil perceptions**

### **Abstract**

*This paper examines the under-researched phenomenon of classroom exclusions and their implications for school exclusions. Responses from nearly 1500 secondary school pupils indicate that being expelled from the classroom is a common phenomenon. On average, one third of pupils have been asked to leave the classroom at some point in the previous year. However, it is more common in some schools, and for some pupils, than others. Most often, excluded pupils stand in school corridors with nothing to do. Not only does classroom exclusion lead to a loss of learning time, it may mark the beginning of a trajectory towards school exclusion. Whether it takes on this more serious significance may depend on the extent to which the pupil perceives the teacher's action as appropriate and fair. The paper concludes that classroom exclusions are worthy of investigation not only for lost learning time but because of their significance for future school exclusion. However, in unravelling whether a classroom exclusion 'matters', it is important to examine not only the circumstances which led to it, but the pupil's perception of the legitimacy of the teacher's action.*

### **Key words:**

School exclusions, classroom exclusions, behaviour management, disaffection

### **Introduction**

This paper explores the under-researched phenomenon of classroom exclusion. Most research on educational exclusion concentrates on formal exclusion from the school premises. However, this is only one form – the most extreme form – of school exclusion. In this paper we focus on a far less severe form of exclusion – the pupil being told by the teacher to leave the classroom because of what they perceive to be the inappropriate behaviour. We argue that exploring the causes and frequency of these less severe forms of exclusion might help us to understand schools' behaviour management processes and the extent to they might, or might not, mark the beginning of a pupil's trajectory towards school exclusion and all the associated negative consequences (Munn & Lloyd 2005; Pirrie *et al.* 2011; Gill *et al.* 2017)

Many countries use data on school exclusions (sometimes referred to as suspensions or expulsions) as an indicator of the inclusiveness of particular institutions, authorities, districts and even the system as a whole. Wales' track record of excluding children from school is (like that of Scotland) often compared favourably with that of England. However, as we have argued elsewhere (Power and Taylor 2020), official exclusion figures can be misleading. It has long been recognised that official data on exclusions do not tell the whole story and that there is widespread use of other forms of exclusion – variously termed 'illegal' (e.g. Done *et al.* 2021), 'unofficial' (e.g. McCluskey *et al.* 2019) or 'informal' (e.g. Gazeley 2010). The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) report (Gill *et al.* 2017) claims that, in England, five times as many children are being 'educated' off school registers than the official data would suggest – with many tens of thousands more being 'off-rolled' from school registers illegally. In addition to these kinds of unofficial exclusions, where pupils are removed from the school altogether, we want to broaden the definition of what it means to be 'excluded' from education even further

to include practices where pupils are expelled from the mainstream classroom but remain within the school building.<sup>1</sup>

School exclusion is unlikely to arise from a ‘one-off’ incident, but rather the culmination of a series of (failed) behaviour management strategies that will have entailed successive removals from the classroom (e.g. Kane 2013). Charting the frequency and causes of *classroom* exclusions is therefore important not only in terms of trying to understand the extent to which young people ‘miss out’ on mainstream education, but also in trying to understand the ‘exclusion journey’ – the trajectory that begins with being asked to leave the classroom but then may lead to being required to leave the school.

On a more general level, patterns of classroom exclusions are likely to reflect the extent to which there is compliance and consent within education systems as a whole and within particular institutions and classrooms. Bernstein’s (1977) framework for understanding ‘consensus’ and ‘disaffection’ in education provides a means of conceptualising and unravelling the different ways in which pupils comply with their schools.

As Bernstein argues, a pupil’s relationship with their school is multifaceted. There is no simple continuum between high and low levels of engagement. Moreover, the level and nature of that engagement may change over time. Briefly, Bernstein outlines a framework for conceptualising pupil engagement based on the extent to which any pupil is able to understand and accept the aims of the school and fulfil what it is the school expects of them – both in terms of the school’s academic expectations (which Bernstein characterises as the instrumental order) and its social requirements (the expressive order). These contrasting levels of pupil engagement can be represented diagrammatically (Table 1).

**Table 1: Types of pupil engagement (adapted from Bernstein 1977)**

	Academic (instrumental) objectives		Social (expressive) objectives	
	means	ends	means	ends
Commitment	+	+	+	+
Detachment	+	+	+	-
Estrangement	-	+	+/-	-
Alienation	-	-	-	-

*Commitment* is the strongest form of involvement. This is where the pupil not only understands what the school expects of them in terms of their academic and social conduct, but is also able and willing to fulfil these expectations. *Detachment* involves high levels of engagement with the academic dimension of the school, but a more uncertain relationship with the social order of the school. The pupil may be able to do the work, but be unable or unwilling to meet the social demands. *Estrangement* occurs when the pupil accepts the social and academic ends of the school, but does not understand how to realise these ends. *Alienation* is the most negative form of involvement with the school and involves an unwillingness or inability to fulfil or accept

---

<sup>1</sup> We recognise that exclusion can also be used to refer to a variety of structures and processes that marginalise disadvantaged young people (e.g. Whitty 2001). For the purposes of this paper though we are using the term to refer to a decisive act of removal on the part of the teacher or school.

both the academic expectations and the social order of the school. It should also be noted that these contrasting levels of engagement are shaped by the enduring inequalities of social class, gender and ethnicity that contribute to unequal educational outcomes.

Being removed from the classroom reflects only one small incident in a pupil’s educational career. But this one incident that may not only reflect, but also reinforce or reconfigure their relationship with their school. It may mark the beginning of a shift from commitment to detachment, from detachment to alienation, or from estrangement to alienation. Alienation is probably the precursor to school exclusion.

### **The research**

Because there are few official records of classroom (as opposed to school) exclusions, we asked pupils in the WMCS (WISERD Education Multi-Cohort Study) to tell us about their own experiences of being asked to leave the classroom. The WMCS is a longitudinal study that has collected sweeps of data from a representative sample of children attending secondary schools (ages 11 to 18) in Wales every year since 2012-13. Ethical approval for the WMCS is granted by the Social Research Ethics Committee of Cardiff University.

The sample design for WMCS is based on a form of clustered sampling drawn from 14 carefully selected schools serving very different kinds of communities (advantaged and disadvantaged, rural and urban, Welsh-speaking and English-speaking) across Wales (Table 2). Sweep 7 of the WMCS was undertaken in class in the medium of English or Welsh during the summer term of 2019. Data are collected by researchers visiting the schools and distributing computer tablets to consenting pupils to complete. Sweep 7 contains responses from 1465 pupils (673 Year 7, 631 Year 9 and 161 Year 12).

**Table 2: School characteristics**

<i>School</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Medium of Instruction</i>	<i>Level of disadvantage</i>
Ashford	Rural	Bilingual	High
Bro Henyg	Town	English	High
Burrington	Town	English	Low
Clifton	Rural	English	Low
Freshfield	Urban	English	High
Heath VC	Town	English	Medium
Llyn Du	Rural	English	Low
Merryvale	Town	English	High
Owensbridge	Urban	English	Low
Penpentre	Urban	Welsh	Low
Portside	Town	English	Low
Ysgol Blaenglan	Town	Welsh/Bilingual	Medium
Ysgol Glan	Rural	Welsh/Bilingual	Medium
Ysgol St Nons	Town	English	Low

The WMCS surveys collect data on a wide range of issues, but the questions we are analysing here are as follows:

Have you ever been asked to leave the classroom because of your behaviour?

*If yes*, how often are you asked to leave the classroom

Frequently – about once a week

Occasionally – a few times this year

Rarely – only once or twice this year

Thinking of the last time you were asked to leave the classroom, why were you asked to leave?

Where did you go when you left the classroom?

I stood in the corridor

I went to a senior teacher's office

I went to a special classroom that is used for pupils who have been sent out of class

I went home

Other

What activities did you do after you had been sent out of the classroom?

I carried on doing usual schoolwork on my own

I had to do nurture-based activities

Nothing

Other

In addition to descriptive statistical analysis, analysis of responses to the open-ended questions entailed inductive content analysis (Cohen *et al.* 2007) and then thematic grouping (Denzin and Lincoln 2000) using the Bernsteinian concepts outlined above.

In citing the pupils' responses, we have kept their original spellings, except for those responses in Welsh, which we have translated. Pseudonyms are used for the schools throughout.

## **FINDINGS**

In the following section, we provide an indication of the frequency with which pupils are asked to leave the classroom and then a profile of who gets asked to leave, where they go when they are expelled from the class, and what they did when they were outside the classroom. We then go on to explore the pupils' accounts of *why* they were excluded. We analyse these data in two ways. Firstly, we look at the nature of the 'misdemeanour' and then we look at the pupil's perception of the legitimacy of the teacher's action through analysing the tone and register of their account. Clearly, these survey responses only provide 'snippets' of data, but they do reveal very different attitudes which these young people have about their teachers' actions

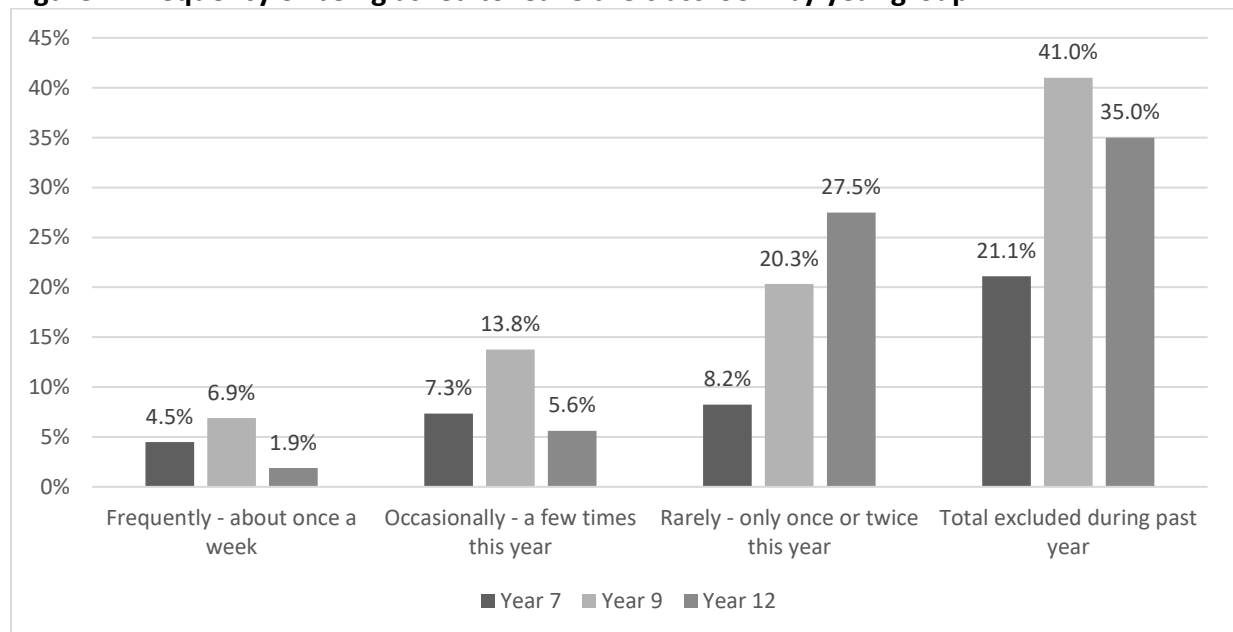
which may indicate different degrees of consensus and disaffection (Bernstein 1977) with the not only the teacher but the school

### The frequency of classroom exclusions

One of the very clear and salutary findings from the pupil responses is that being excluded from the classroom is a common occurrence. Nearly one third (31.2%) of the cohort reported that, at some point in the last 12 months, they had been told to leave the classroom because of their behaviour. For a significant minority, being asked to leave the classroom appears to be a frequent event – with 15.4% reporting that they have been excluded from the classroom several times during the previous 12 months, and 5.4% reporting that they have been excluded ‘about once a week’.

The frequency varies according to age group. As Figure 1 shows, for our Year 9 respondents (aged 13-14 years), over 41.0% had been asked to leave the classroom at least once in the previous 12 months, and for 6.9% this happened about once a week. The equivalent figures for the Year 7 pupils (aged 11-12 years), are lower at 21.1% and 4.5% respectively. Not surprisingly, our Year 12 pupils, who at this age had elected to stay at school for further study, reported the lowest level of being frequently asked to leave the classroom (1.9%).

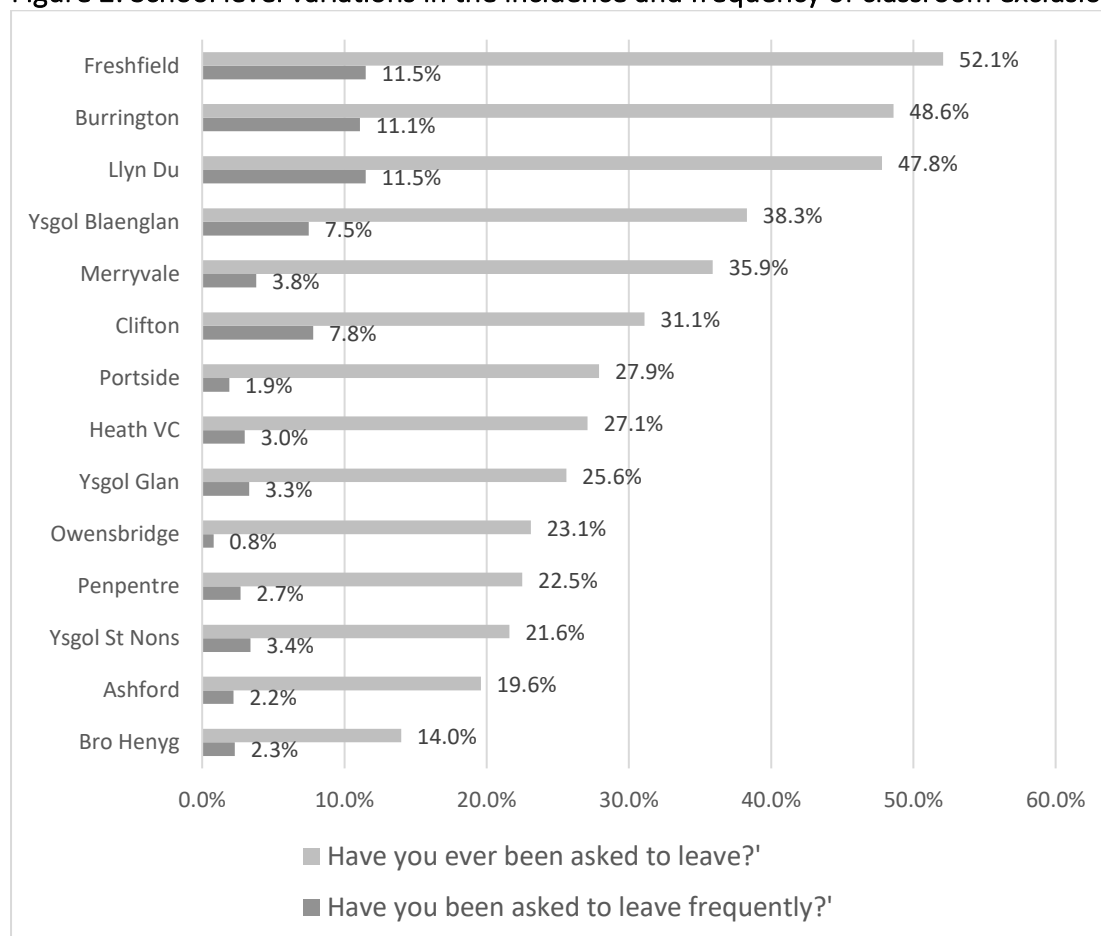
**Figure 1: Frequency of being asked to leave the classroom by year group**



However, while being excluded from the classroom is a relatively common occurrence, it is more common in some schools than others. As Figure 2 demonstrates, there are wide school-level variations in the incidence and frequency with which pupils report being excluded. If we look across our 14 schools, some schools hardly ever appear to require pupils to leave the classroom, while other schools do so often. In general, although not inevitably, those schools which appear to have a high incidence of excluding pupils from the classroom, also do so frequently. Thus, at Freshfield School over half the pupils (52.1%) report being asked to leave the classroom at some point in the previous year, and for nearly one in eight (11.5%) this happens about once a week. In other schools, such as Merryvale and Portside, the incidence is

also fairly high (35.9% and 27.9%), but the proportion being frequently excluded is significantly lower (3.8% and 1.9% respectively).

**Figure 2: School level variations in the incidence and frequency of classroom exclusions**



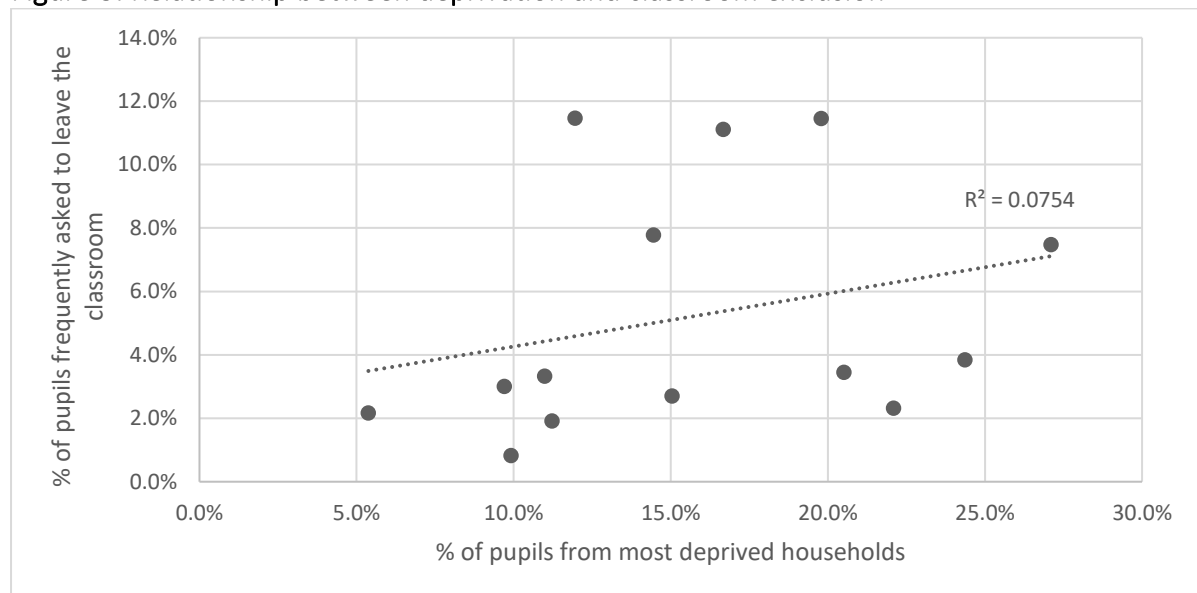
It is difficult to know whether this variation between schools indicates lower levels of 'disruptive behaviour' in their classrooms or higher levels of tolerance of pupil misdemeanours. As Figure 3 shows, there is an association between the proportion of pupils reporting being frequently excluded and the level of deprivation (as measured through the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals – eFSM). However, the association is fairly weak. Those schools at the 'top' of the chart in Figure 2 are highly varied in terms of their characteristics. While Freshfield can be characterised as an inner-city school with high levels of deprivation, this is not the case for either Burrington, where the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is less than half the national average. Ashford and Bro Henyg, at the 'bottom' of the chart, have levels of eFSM twice as high as Burrington. Similarly, Welsh medium schools can be found near the 'top' (Ysgol Blaenglan) and 'bottom' (Penpentre) of the chart.

However, while there is only a weak association between classroom exclusions and social deprivation at the level of the school, there is a stronger association between pupil characteristics and classroom exclusions if we look across all the pupils. In general, the pattern of classroom exclusions mirrors the widely confirmed pattern of school exclusions across the

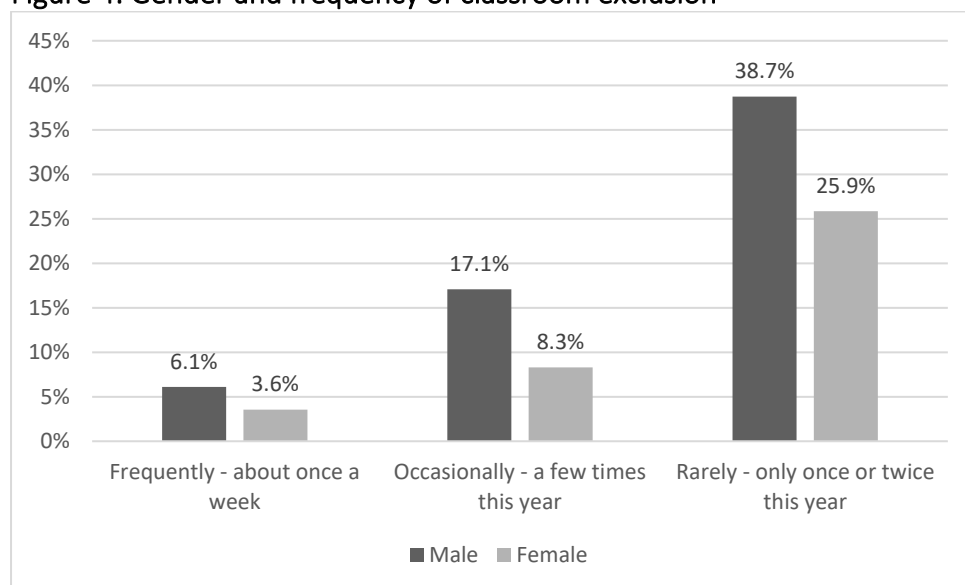


UK (Gazeley *et al.* 2014). As one might expect, boys get asked to leave the classroom more often than girls, and are nearly twice as likely to be asked to leave the classroom frequently. (Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Relationship between deprivation and classroom exclusion**



**Figure 4: Gender and frequency of classroom exclusion**



In our sample, pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged households are just as likely to be asked to leave the classroom as those from the least disadvantaged households. However, the relationship between gender and socio-economic status is worth noting. Girls from the most deprived households are significantly more likely to have been asked to leave than their male equivalents. This raises some interesting questions about the intersection of class and gender. It is possible, for example, that there are lower degrees of tolerance for girls in terms ‘inappropriate’ behaviours – and particularly for working-class girls – than for boys. As Kane

(2011: 40) comments, it may reflect the rise and vilification of ‘ladette’ culture (also see Jackson 2006).

Unfortunately, we are not able to undertake analysis of the extent to which Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) pupils are excluded from the classroom because of sample size. While we do have BAME pupils in the sample, we would need to aggregate the different ethnic groups to perform any meaningful statistical analysis. This would give a misleading result given the very different educational outcomes of pupils from, for example, Chinese and Bangladeshi, backgrounds. Within Wales this is often an issue because of the small national population (just over 3 million) and the smaller proportion of BAME members (around 4.5%). Analyses of Welsh Government school exclusions data, though, indicate that pupils of White British ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be excluded from school, although this might arise from grouping all pupils from White (British) and White (Non-British) together, which will include Irish Traveller pupils who have higher exclusion rates in Wales (Tseliou 2021).

### **Practices associated with classroom exclusions**

There has been growing awareness of and concern about the use of internal ‘isolation’ booths and ‘seclusion’ units in schools (e.g. Sealy et al 2021), and, as we have reported elsewhere (Power and Taylor 2020), we know they are used by many of the schools which participate in the WMCS. However, these do not appear to be the destination for most pupils excluded from the classroom. The vast majority (81.2%) of children said they simply stood in the corridor after being asked to leave the classroom (Table 3). Only 4.2% of those that were asked to leave the classroom said they went to a dedicated behaviour or isolation room.

**Table 3: Where did you go when you left the classroom?**

I stood in the corridor	81.2%
I went to a special classroom that is used for pupils who have been sent out of the class	4.2%
I went to a senior teacher’s office	2.7%
I went home	0.4%
Other	11.5%

‘Other’ responses include going to another teacher’s class (11 mentions), ‘wandering’ or ‘walking around’ the school (7 mentions), going to the toilets (3), or, on two occasions, being sent to an external agency.

There are, though, school level variations – probably dependent on the availability of alternatives within the building. Thus, 20.7% of those excluded from the classroom in Portside, and 12.0% of those in Penpentre were sent to a ‘special classroom’. In contrast, no pupils from Freshfield or Merryvale report being sent to these kind of spaces – even though there is a high incidence of classroom exclusion in both schools (Figure 1).

Perhaps not surprisingly, given that in the overwhelming majority of cases the pupils were left to stand in the school corridors, they generally report (50.2%) that they spent their time out of the classroom doing ‘nothing’ (Table 4). ‘Other’ responses include ‘talked with friends’, ‘reflect on my behaviour’, ‘I cried’.

**Table 4: What activities did you do after you had been sent out of the classroom?**

Nothing	50.2%
I carried on doing usual schoolwork on my own	40.0%
I had to do nurture-based activities	1.3%
Other	8.5%

We do not know from these data how long the pupils spent outside the classroom. However, given the frequency of being excluded from the classroom, and especially for some pupils and in some schools, combined with the lack of learning opportunities provided during the time spent outside the classroom, there must be concern about a significant loss of learning time. Being excluded from the classroom, though, is likely to have greater significance than simply lost learning time. It may mark the beginning of a trajectory towards school exclusion. It is this issue that we explore next.

### **Classroom exclusions and school exclusion trajectories**

As reported in the previous sections, being excluded from the classroom is a frequent event – especially for some pupils and in some schools. In most instances, though, a classroom exclusion is unlikely to have long-lasting consequences. If that were the case, the rate of school exclusions would be far higher than it is. Nevertheless, frequent classroom exclusions might usefully be seen as an indicator of a wider disaffection with school. As Kane’s (2011) ethnography illustrates, school exclusion usually results from cumulative, relatively minor, misdemeanours. It is also the case, that classroom exclusions may not only reflect disaffection, they may also contribute to and compound degrees of disaffection.

We asked the pupils to think back to the last time they were asked to leave the classroom and let us know why. They were therefore only able to provide one response. Nevertheless, coding their explanations indicates that, in the main, their misdemeanours can be viewed as relatively minor (Table 5).

**Table 5: Coded pupil accounts of why they were sent out (n=337)**

General disruption	25.5%
Talking	21.1%
Laughing	12.5%
Rudeness to teacher	11.0%
Unfairly asked to leave	5.0%
Unspecified incident	4.7%
Pupil conflicts	4.5%
Work related	4.2%
Other	7.7%
Don't know/can't remember	3.9%

The majority (59.1%) of children said they were asked to leave the classroom because they were being generally disruptive, talking and laughing. Examples of generally 'disruptive' behaviour include:

*because i was messing around*

*For walking around and shouting out*

*I threw a bit of paper across the class*

*Juring Welsh I was sent out for smiling at somphing funny on a vidio*

*Misbehaving and drawing attention towards myself during a classroom enviroment*

Being able to keep quiet or laughing at the wrong time were also cited as causes for being asked to leave the classroom:

*For talking when I was not supposed to*

*chatting to my mates*

*Because me and my mate found something funny and we couldn't stop laughing.*

*laughing non stop during a pe lesson*

*I was in maths and there was a stupid question which I found funny and i got sent out for laughing*

Eleven percent reported that they were asked to leave because they had been rude to the teacher. This covered a range of misdemeanours from answering back, name calling, challenging the teacher or other behaviour that might be considered inappropriate or disrespectful, e.g.:

*Because I rolled my eyes*

*Because I was swearing and being disrespectful*

*I said alright mate to a teacher*

*called my teacher a creep*

*Because I was backchating*

*Mr Evans sent me out because I said when's is it 3 o clock*

While most pupils accepted that they had engaged in behaviour that might be considered disruptive or disrespectful, 5.0% indicated a sense of unfairness that they been expelled from the classroom. Either they felt they had been singled out when others were equally 'guilty', blamed for something somebody else had done, or simply disliked by the teacher e.g.:

*... how I was the one who got in trouble for someone elses mistakes*

*Because the teacher doesn't like me*

*The teacher hated me for no reason*

*I got picked out of the whole class that was laughing*

*I was wrongly accused of lobbing a pencil across the class.*

*My Welsh teacher said something funny and the whole class laughed, i was in her eye view so she asked me why I was laughing. I said "because we found it funny" and she sent me out.*

*Because I had bad atechud when I didn't*

Sometimes (in 4.5% of cases) pupils were excluded from the classroom because of conflict with other pupils, rather than with the teacher.

*For not being nice and getting into an argument with someone*

*Problems with other students*

*For stabbing someone with a pen*

*Because a fall out.*

A similar proportion (4.2%) were asked to leave the classroom because of what can be called school-work related issues, e.g.:

*because i asked for a rubber off my friend*

*Because I said I want to drop Welsh*

*because my planner wasnt signed*

*For apparently arguing with the teacher I said I have no pen she said tough and I said what am I gonna do and she sent me out*

Of the remaining categories in Table 5, 'Unspecified incident' includes responses such as 'being a pain', 'doing something wrong' and 'because of my behaviour'. The 'Other' category includes various explanations for exclusion, often related to classroom 'etiquette' such as:

*because i didnt walk to my chair quick enough*

*I was eating tost during a lesson*

*Chewing gum*

*By not handing the phone to the teachers*

*I lend over the table*

*Walking to get my bag from the class*

*For not taking off my coat*

*Prefer not to say*

Pupil explanations are not only revealing of the kinds of incidents that lead to classroom exclusion, they also provide indications of whether the pupil thinks the teacher's action was legitimate and proportionate. It is probable that classroom exclusions contribute to a school exclusion trajectory when they are perceived by the pupil to be unjustified and disproportionate. Even though we have only short responses from our pupils, the tone and character of their accounts reveal their feelings about the legitimacy of the authority of the teacher and, most probably, the school in general. As illustration, there is a huge difference in

the following two examples of responses to the question of why they were asked to leave the classroom:

Example 1: *Because I couldn't control my impulsivity and kept talking*

Example 2: *I breathed*

In Example 1, the pupil clearly puts the blame for the classroom exclusion on themselves. They see the fault as entirely their own and imply that the teacher was justified in excluding them. In Example 2, there is no such acknowledgement of blame. Indeed, the pupil's response reveals a thinly disguised contempt for the teacher. It is the tone of these responses, rather than the actual nature of the misdemeanour, that might be more indicative of how minor infractions mark the beginning of a pupil trajectory towards exclusion.

As we outlined earlier, Bernstein's (1977) framework for understanding 'consensus' and 'disaffection' in education provides a possible means of unravelling the different ways in which pupils relate to the academic and social demands of their schools (Table 1).

To briefly reiterate, commitment is the strongest form of involvement, where the pupil understands, accepts and can fulfil both the academic and the social demands of the school. To some extent this category of engagement is of only passing interest to us here as 'committed' pupils are unlikely to be asked to leave the classroom on account of their behaviour. There are, however, indicators in our pupils' albeit brief responses of relationships with their school that can be characterised as 'detached', 'estranged' and 'alienated'.

It is possible to argue that detachment is evident in the following pupils' explanations of why they were told to leave the classroom. There is no indication in their responses of a disengagement from the academic dimension of their schooling, but there is evidence of a resistance to accepting the social order of the school as embodied in the authority of the teacher:

*Because I was 'talking back'. That's code for answering a rhetorical question proving the teacher wrong and calling her a cheat*

*For talking with a friend despite both of us having finished all the given work and letting the teacher know we had completed it*

Conversely, the following responses indicate degrees of estrangement. In these responses, it is clear that, unlike to comments cited above, the pupils do accept the authority of the teacher. However, they are unable or unwilling to do the academic work:

*.. was frustrated I couldn't understand*

*I find it hard to focus/ concentrate*

*shouting rong asers i mean why*

Finally, the following responses suggest a more profound alienation – a rejection of both the academic objectives and the authority of the teacher:

*Swearing at teacher told her to f off*  
*Using my middle finger at one teacher*  
*I said fuck you to a teacher*

It is not difficult to see that these kinds of behaviours will bring down disciplinary sanctions that may entail temporary or even permanent exclusion from the school.

Clearly we have only short fragments of qualitative data here. Nevertheless, these pupils' accounts indicate that what matters is not so much *why* they were asked to leave the classroom, but their interpretation of the appropriateness of the teacher's action, which may be indicative of their wider relationship with the school. As Bernstein argues, a pupil's engagement with their school can change with time – especially when they feel that their teachers' actions are unjustified and disproportionate. It is in these instances that classroom exclusions may lead to alienation and subsequently school exclusion.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to throw some light on the very under-researched topic of classroom exclusions – and their potential relationship with school exclusions. Our data, from nearly 1500 young people, indicate that being excluded from the classroom is a common phenomenon. However, it is more common in some schools, and for some pupils, than others.

While there has been increasing awareness of the use of internal 'seclusion' units in schools, our data would suggest that these are used only rarely for pupils expelled from the classroom – again though there are variations across schools. Most often, excluded pupils just spend time in the school corridors. And, relatedly, it appears that there is relatively little schoolwork done during this time outside the classroom.

Given the frequency of being excluded from the classroom, and especially for some pupils and in some schools, and the lack of learning opportunities provided during the time spent outside the classroom, there must be concerns about a significant loss of learning time.

However, being excluded from the classroom is likely to have greater significance than simply lost learning time. It may mark the beginning of a trajectory towards school exclusion. Of course, not every classroom exclusion should be seen in this way – or the rate of school exclusions would be far higher than it is. Nevertheless, classroom exclusion, particularly when it is frequent must be a warning sign a pupil's increasing disaffection or the management of 'disorderly' behaviour. It may also be a contributor to that disaffection.

The extent to which classroom exclusion takes on this more serious significance is likely to depend on the extent to which pupils perceive the teacher's action as appropriate and fair. Pupil explanations of why they were excluded from the classroom indicate that, in the majority, of cases the misdemeanours were relatively minor, indicative of the low-level disruption reported elsewhere (e.g. Haydn 2014) as being the main challenge facing teachers.

However, the pupil accounts are important not only in terms of the cause of the exclusion, but their perception of the legitimacy of the teacher to exclude them. The questioning or denial of this legitimacy may reflect a wider degree of disaffection with the school as a whole – a disaffection that might be conceptualised in terms of Bernstein’s categorisation of modes of engagement. It is not difficult to see that when this happens, commitment can become detachment. And detachment and estrangement can lead to alienation.

In short, we argue that classroom exclusions are worthy of investigation because of their implications for loss of learning time and for their potential significance as marking the beginning of a trajectory towards school exclusion and all the negative consequences which that brings with it. We also argue that, in unravelling whether a classroom exclusion ‘matters’, it is important not only to understand the circumstances which led to it, but the pupil’s perception of the legitimacy of the teacher’s action.

Our data on pupil perceptions comprise only brief responses to an open-ended question, and more qualitative research is badly needed to delve more deeply into the extent which pupils see the teacher’s actions as appropriate and legitimate – from the perspective not only of the excluded pupil and also of their fellow classmates. While there are significant challenges in undertaking such research because of the unplanned-for and sporadic frequency of classroom exclusions, such research is essential if we are to understand more fully the processes through which apparently minor misdemeanours in the classroom can have major implications for the subsequent educational and social careers of young people.

### **Acknowledgements**

This paper is based on research supported by the Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research and Data (WISERD). WISERD is a collaborative venture between the Universities of Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, South Wales and Swansea. The research that this publication relates to was undertaken was funded by HEFCW (Higher Education Funding Council for Wales). Rhian Barrance and Constantino Dumangane assisted in the collection of data.

### **References**

- Bernstein, B. (1977) Sources of consensus and disaffection in education. *Class, Codes and Control Volume 3: Towards a Theory of Educational Transmissions*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Cohen L, Manion L, Morrison K. (2007) *Research Methods in Education*. Routledge: London and New York.
- Denzin N.K. and Lincoln Y, S. (2000). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA.



Done, E. J., Knowler, H., & Armstrong, D. (2021). 'Grey' exclusions matter: mapping illegal exclusionary practices and the implications for children with disabilities in England and Australia. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 21, 36-44.

Gazeley, L. (2010). The role of school exclusion processes in the re-production of social and educational disadvantage. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 58(3), 293-309.

Gazeley, L., Marrable, T., Brown, C., & Boddy, J. (2015). Contextualising inequalities in rates of school exclusion in English schools: Beneath the 'Tip of the Ice-Berg'. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 63(4), 487-504.

Gill, K., Quilter-Pinner, H. and Swift, D. (2017) *Making the difference: Breaking the link between school exclusion and social exclusion*. London: IPPR.

Haydn, T. (2014). To what extent is behaviour a problem in English schools? Exploring the scale and prevalence of deficits in classroom climate. *Review of Education*, 2(1), 31-64.

Jackson, C. (2006) *Lads and Ladettes in School: Gender and a Fear of Failure*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Kane, J. (2011) *Social Class, Gender and Exclusion from School*. Abingdon: Routledge.

McCluskey, G., Cole, T., Daniels, H., Thompson, I., & Tawell, A. (2019). Exclusion from school in Scotland and across the UK: Contrasts and questions. *British Educational Research Journal*, 45(6), 1140-1159.

Munn, P., & Lloyd, G. (2005). Exclusion and excluded pupils. *British Educational Research Journal*, 31(2), 205-221.

Pirrie, A., Macleod, G., Cullen, M. A., & McCluskey, G. (2011). What happens to pupils permanently excluded from special schools and pupil referral units in England?. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(3), 519-538.

Power, S., & Taylor, C. (2020). Not in the classroom, but still on the register: Hidden forms of school exclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 24(8), 867-881.

Sealy, J., Abrams, E. J., & Cockburn, T. (2021). Students' experience of isolation room punishment in UK mainstream education. 'I can't put into words what you felt like, almost a dog in a cage'. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1-15.

Tseliou, F. (2021) Characteristics of excluded children in Wales. WISERD Blog. <https://wiserd.ac.uk/news/characteristics-excluded-children-wales>

Whitty, G. (2001). Education, social class and social exclusion. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16(4), 287-295.