The Trajectories of Young People at Risk of Exclusion across the UK

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Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

ACE Adverse Childhood Experiences
ADHD Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ALN Additional learning needs
ALNCO Additional Learning Needs Coordinator
AP Alternative Provision
ASD Autism Spectrum Disorder
ASN Additional support needs
AAIS Autism Advisory & Intervention Service
CAMHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CIN Child in Need
CP Child Protection
EHCP Education, Health and Care Plans
EOTAS Education Otherwise Than At School
ETA Exceptional teaching arrangement
EWS the Education Welfare Service
FSM Free School Meals
GIRFEC Getting it Right for Every Child
HTE Higher Than Expected (excluding school)
H/HTE High/Higher than expected (excluding school)
H/LTE High/Lower than expected (excluding school)
LA Local authority
LAC Looked After Children
L/HTE Low/Higher than expected (excluding school)
L/LTE Low/Lower than expected (excluding school)
LTE lower than expected (excluding school)
MASH Multi-agency safeguarding hub
MAST Multi-Agency Support Teams
MLD Moderate Learning Difficulties
PCL Pastoral care leader
PDA Pathological demand avoidance
PEF Pupil Equity Funding
PRU Pupil Referral Unit
PSE Personal Social Education
PSA Pupil Support Assistant
PTSD Post Traumatic Stress Disorder PSA time
SEMH Social Emotional and Mental Health
SEND Special Educational Needs and Disability
SENCO Special Educational Needs Coordinators
SEN K SEN Support
SEBD Socio-emotional behavioural difficulties
TA Teaching Assistant
TAF Team Around the Family
UNCRC United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This research forms part of the Excluded Lives programme of research on *The Political Economies of School Exclusion and their Consequences*. Overall, it aims to understand the contextual and institutional processes that lead to different rates and types of exclusion across the UK. Data on permanent exclusions consistently show that Scotland has the lowest rates and England the highest rates. Underpinning the research in this report is a concern to look more closely at how professionals are responding to young people at risk of exclusion in the context of different jurisdiction policies and processes and through this identify ways in which more equitable outcomes can be achieved. This is realised through examining 75 trajectory case studies of young people at risk of exclusion from secondary schools across the four jurisdictions of the UK. We investigate staff concerns and the interventions and strategies that were deployed, and the outcomes for those young people.

In brief, educational policies of the four jurisdictions varied at the time of the research with respect to the differing emphasis placed on well-being, early intervention, flexibility of the curriculum and the extent to which provision was responsive to community needs. For example, taking first the jurisdiction with the lowest level of exclusion, the policy rhetoric in Scotland is notable for its positive ethos with an emphasis on inclusion and student engagement. The guidance actively promotes early intervention and prevention underpinned by an understanding of the impact of disadvantage. There is a policy commitment to fostering positive relationships, behaviour and well-being and keeping young people safe within a nurturing environment. In contrast In England, high rates of exclusion coincide with national policy statements that are underpinned by concerns for raising standards of attainment and managing behaviours that disrupt effective teaching and learning. Schools are mainly judged in relation to pupil progress and attainment in a narrowly defined subject driven curriculum. Guidance is dominated by regulations and accountability frameworks. The growth of academies has diminished the role of local authorities (LAs) and support is purchased from a wide variety of providers. Cost inevitably determines the extent to which different forms of support are available.

Both Wales and Northern Ireland share some policy similarities to provision in Scotland although there are also some distinct differences. There is a strong commitment to the United Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in the Welsh policy discourse although the helpfulness of this has been questioned (Power and Taylor 2023). The exclusion rate in Wales is significantly lower than England although official data masks a number of informal practices (Power and Taylor 2021). There is a strong core principle of co-operation (rather than competition) with relatively little diversification of schools and a strong LA. Wales has been influenced in their approach by Scotland with a focus on pupil wellbeing and understanding why a young person behaves in a particular manner. The curriculum in Wales is more progressive than England and takes an integrated approach, structured around areas of Learning and Experience, thereby meeting a more diverse range of needs. Norther Ireland has a diversity of schools also underpinned by a commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). There is a statutory duty to promote well-being. The curriculum framework strives towards a balance of academic and vocational subjects and is characterised by a degree of flexibility. Curricula are planned around community needs and

build on local collaborations. Services provided by Education Otherwise Than at School (EOTAS) centres contribute to keeping numbers of excluded young people low, partly through providing early intervention. Provision however also suffers from funding cuts and deficit budgets

Although there are differences in policies there are similarities in who gets excluded in the four jurisdictions. Looking at the data for suspensions, consistently, pupils with special educational needs and disability (SEND)/additional learning needs/additional support needs (ASN) and those on Free School Meals (FSM) are over-represented. There are shared common concerns in relation to young people with SEND. These include concerns about the rising numbers and the complexity of need (DfE 2023, O'Connor et al 2022) including growth in the category of young people with Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs (SEMH) (Riddell and Carmichael (2019); the rising and unsustainable costs of supporting these young people (DfE 2023; NIAO 2020; O'Connor et al 2022) delays in assessment and the shortage of specialists to carry these out (NIAO 2020; DfE 2023), and failure to provide early intervention.

Methodology

This report is based on interview data collected from Co-ordinators of SEN/ALN/ASN and Pastoral Leads in 26 secondary/post primary schools across the four jurisdictions of the UK. These included both high and low excluding schools with strategies for sampling varying with the geographies and landscape of provision. Details are described in the jurisdiction reports.

Jurisdiction	Schools	Student Case Studies
England	11	34
Northern Ireland	4	8
Scotland	6	16
Wales	5 (+2 AP)	17 (+3)
Total	26	75

Table EX1 Participant numbers in each jurisdiction

Members of staff were interviewed at two points in time with a gap on average of five months between interviews (4-9 months). The Covid-19 pandemic constrained access to some settings. In order to understand how schools', mitigate against the risk of exclusion Interviewees were asked to identify two or three students who they understood to be at risk of exclusion (formal and informal) who may have additional vulnerabilities such as health, education, peers, family. Key Questions at Time 1 included: What triggered their concern about the students? What was the aim of the intervention? How well did they feel the intervention strategies worked? Did they encounter any difficulties? Who else currently worked with the students? What they were wanting to work on next? Prior to the second interview, each member of staff was sent a brief summary of the key points they had made concerning each of the case study students to serve both as an aide memoire and member checking. The summary also set out the purpose of the second interview, namely as a follow-up on the at-risk students who they identified in the first interview and to learn what had happened since. By following up case study examples we aimed to understand the detail and complexities of practices in action as distinct from policy/guidance. We also asked if they felt the level of risk had changed for that individual. These risk trajectories were used to group case study

students for analysis in order to examine: the triggering concerns staff expressed, the aims they had for intervening, the strategies and approaches they used and the outcomes that resulted. Based on this first stage analysis researchers within each jurisdiction then explored factors that might account for the differences in outcome; how schools accessed the resources they needed and what staff perceived as the barriers and supports to successful interventions. The final stage of analysis was a cross jurisdiction comparison. Details of the first stage analysis of the 75 case studies can be found in the full report. We focus in the Executive Summary on factors that contribute to perceived levels of changing risk.

Findings

Jurisdiction	De-Escalating Risk	Escalating Risk	Same (and Queries England)
England N= 34	15 (44%)	11 (32%)	8 (24%)
Northern Ireland N=8	2 (25%)	3 (38%)	3 (38%)
Scotland N=16	4 (25%)	11 (69%)	2 (13%)
Wales N=20	6 (30%)	12 (60%)	2 (10%)

Table EX2 Perceived Levels of Changing Risk at Time 2

Table EX2 sets out the numbers of students in each of the risk groups at time 2 in each of the four jurisdictions as a context for each jurisdiction's commentary.

Findings from England
   What accounts for some of the differences in outcome in England?

Although England had the largest overall sample, the numbers in any one risk category are small so any inferences from the data were cautious. Additionally, it was noted that when staff were asked about levels of risk a number were either unclear or gave caveats to their decision. Individuals level of risk could change with one incident and this was evident with some young people who had been responding positively to the interventions but events just prior to the second interview had led staff to re-think the trajectory.

England had the highest proportion of students 15/34 (44%) who were seen to have a de-escalating level of risk at Time 2. Staff in seven schools judged one or more of their nominated students as having a reduced level of risk. On closer inspection a third of the de-escalating risk students came from one school which was a low (but higher than expected) excluding school. In fact, three quarters of the students in schools in this category (low but higher than expected) were seen to have a de-escalated risk. Looking across risk groups girls form a higher proportion of the de-escalating group than the escalating group. Similarly, with respect to age, there are a higher proportion of older pupils (Years 10 and 11) in the de-escalating group compared to the escalating risk group. Conversely pupils with a history of involvement in social care are more highly represented in the escalating risk group, when compared to the whole sample or the de-escalating risk group. Notably the escalating

risk group also contained more pupils who did not start school in Year 7 than other risk groups. Between Time 1 and 2 three young people moved from being registered as SENK to having an EHCP. All three were in the de-escalating group. Due to sample size, it is however difficult to disentangle school level and student level factors.

Resources: *how* do the schools in England access the resources they need?

School spending per pupil in England has fallen in real terms since 2009 and this is particularly true for secondary schools particularly those in the most deprived areas. Staff described how in the face of "cutbacks everywhere" they had to "beg for money" to access specialists, for example, in autism, educational psychology, and youth work. There was therefore a particular financial incentive in having a student assessed for an EHCP as this gave access to additional "high needs" funding.

What do the schools in England perceive as the barriers and supports to successful intervention?

Staff spoke particularly, and generally, about the barriers they encountered, but with supports linked to individual students' trajectories.

School systems and structures

Some members of staff talked directly about the difficulty of navigating the culture of the school, and having to mediate between young people at risk of exclusion and the actions of other staff. They spoke of the need for flexibility within the school and staff to be more understanding. SENCOs and Pastoral leads wanted to break the cycle of exclusion and seclusion which in many instances they felt increased the risk of permanent exclusion. Others decried the lack of special school places.

Some staff also noted the lack of staff time (SENCOs and TAs) and space for withdrawal, but others spoke of the need for qualified teachers to meet the students' needs rather than providing ad hoc interventions. They recognized the impact of changes in routine and personnel alongside Covid-19.

Working with other agencies and Access to specialist support
Staff were often looking for a diagnosis that explained the student behaviour as well as guidance on appropriate support and there were issues for them in agencies holding different thresholds for intervention, particularly with respect to social work, CAMHS and other mental health support. Some of the barriers of multi-agency working included the expectations of other agencies, and where the responsibility for actions and interventions lay. They made positive comments about the preventative work that some police contributed but also wanted more direct intervention.

The relationship between school and family was seen as central to the effectiveness of intervention and therefore a barrier when communication broke down. Bridging what happens at home with what happens in school was seen as vital.

They also felt that a barrier existed with respect to accessing subject teaching that could lead the student to work experience as well as alternative qualifications

What are the implications for policy and practice?
The young people nominated by the SENCOs and Pastoral Leads as being at risk of exclusion presented a complex set of circumstances that brought a number of uncertainties for staff. This was evidenced in a number of ways. Firstly, in the search by staff for more information, often evidenced

in the assessment for an EHCP or diagnosis and consequent reliance on specialists to provide them with guidance. Secondly, in the evaluation of changes in risk, and a sense that, for some young people, "trouble" could erupt at any time. Thirdly, in staff decisions about the way forward, whether this was to another form of provision, or about future strategies and a sense of the situation being out of their control; a feeling that there was nothing more they could do.

It was notable that the largest group were those individuals whose risk was perceived as de-escalating group. Contrary to providing evidence for the effectiveness of early intervention, this was an older group for whom staff had a more urgent and focussed aim for their educational achievement. For the escalating group, the expressed aims were largely around behaviour and attendance. These aims serve as pre-requisites on the path to other outcomes. Further, they could be seen as much as aims for the school as aims for the pupil. They are indicative of the need for a much closer communication with the young person, and their vision for the future- at a much earlier age. There were instances of staff positively describing pupils and their particular strengths but these occurred in the de-escalating group. These comments were indicative that staff had formed a positive relationship with these young people.

We can contrast this closeness, to the comment made by one member of staff about the size of the school and having 300 young people on the SEN register. This creates two areas of difficulty around communication and the flow of information. There was often a separation between those who operationalise the interventions and those members of staff we spoke to whose role was managerial and strategic. This was evidenced in the uncertainty with which interviewees could report on some of the key demographics.

The interviews revealed that there was no golden bullet or single intervention strategy that was effective. The complexity of pupil need called for a range of strategies that were personalised to reflect pupils' strengths and interests as well as designed to meet their differing needs and circumstances. As the latter changed, so the strategies needed to be altered often calling for decisions to be made "on the ground." This calls for a level of knowledge, experience and skill, both to evaluate changes in the effectiveness of a particular strategy and to identify changes in need and appropriate adaptations. Where teaching assistants carried out the interventions, knowledge of their effectiveness and the need for adaptations is handled by the least qualified members of staff. Schools need to ensure that TAs are given appropriate support and training. Schools also require an effective two-way reporting structure.

There were a number of instances where the interviewed staff had pro-actively supported classroom teachers in understanding and re-interpreting behavioural incidents in their classroom. These lines of communication facilitate the use of reasonable adjustments for individual pupils. They are one step along the path to a more inclusive school. The interviews however also revealed the frustrations of the interviewed staff about a broader phenomenon, the culture of the school, that worked against the inclusion of these young people at risk. Interactions with particular members of staff could trigger more extreme forms of behaviour rather than serve to defuse situations. There were constraints voiced about the extent to which they could reasonably expect staff to make individual adjustments. Intervention strategies therefore typically occurred outside the mainstream classroom with often no clear aim expressed for how and when that would enable transfer to the mainstream class.

Schools identified a lack of alternative provision, including a lack of special school placements. Any growth of this sector serves only to confirm an expectation that secondary schools can and should only meet a fairly narrow range of pupil needs, rather than the diversity indicated by the descriptor mainstream.

It is important to recognize here the vital contribution made by a member of staff forming a strong relationship with a member of the pupils' family or their carer. This can be challenging for schools especially where the home background is fragile or unstable, and the expectations on both sides are limited. Skilled staff that are part of the community and have an understanding of the family history have a vital role to play. Schools would benefit from reviewing their policies for home school liaison and the lines of communication to other key members of staff. Staff frustrations with their involvement with outside agencies also calls for a review of communication strategies, and the case load of other professionals.

The trajectories of these young people evidence the complexity of their needs that calls for professionals working collaboratively across different disciplines. The presence of different thresholds for intervention that operate across different agencies requires some cross-agency review and analysis to identify gaps and indicate priorities for future provision.

Findings from Northern Ireland
What accounts for some of the differences in outcome in Northern Ireland?

The SENCOs and PCLs identified several key factors that contributed to the varying outcomes experienced by young people who were at risk and vulnerable to school exclusion.

*Parental Engagement/Support w*as described as playing a crucial role in a student's academic success and behaviour. In most instances, the staff highlighted challenges with engaging the parents of pupils that were in a pattern of repeated negative behaviours. Often the young person had a difficult familial context and estrangement, and some were in care settings. In other cases, the parents had capacity issues and some schools were attempting to support the parents to engage better but finding it difficult without external supports, such as social services. In a smaller number of the cases while parents were quite active, the school still found it challenging to maintain a consistent message between themselves and home. Parental agreement and acceptance that their child needed support was seen as critical. When parents shifted from a confrontational stance to a collaborative one, they were more likely to work with the schools to address behavioural concerns.

Nurture Provision The schools with nurture provisions suggested that they were seeing better outcomes for students who might otherwise be at risk of exclusion. However, the resources for these units were scarce and the schools were only able to offer it to a small number of pupils.

Whole school communication Clear, consistent, and timely communication across the entire school community was seen as essential. When teachers, staff, and school leaders were aligned in their approaches with individual student needs, they were able to identify issues early and collaborate on effective solutions.

Limited Influence of School External factors exerted a stronger influence on some student's behaviour and outcomes than the school itself. These factors such as severe trauma, ongoing family crises, or involvement with negative peer groups were perceived as limiting the school's ability to affect positive change. Their capacity and authority to intervene was seen in some cases a source of frustration and an enabler in others. It was clear that the students facing challenges outside of school were bringing them into the classroom, affecting their engagement, and increasing their risk of exclusion.

Geography of Supports Students in rural areas had less proximal resources and were often described as travelling further distances to access resources like EOTAS centres. It was also unclear as to whether or not all the schools within the sample, both urban and rural, were able to call MAST meetings (Multi-Agency Support Teams), which provide coordinated interventions for at-risk youth – some of the schools had no knowledge of these.

Communication with EOTAS Effective communication between the mainstream schools in our sample and EOTAS centres was perceived as essential for ensuring continuity in a student's education. Without proper communication and coordination, students may experience gaps in their learning and support, potentially leading to further disengagement and exclusion.

Structured Environment Many young people benefitted from a structured and consistent learning environment that provided them with stability and predictability. In these settings, clear routines and expectations helped them feel secure and less anxious, which was seen as leading to improved behaviour and engagement.

Personal conversations Staff members described the value of regular one-on-one interactions with students (who were 'relational learners') and trusted adults, such as teachers or counsellors. The perception was that showing a personal interest in the student allowed for a deeper understanding of individual challenges and needs.

Resources: how do the schools in in Northern Ireland access the resources they need?

A range of resource challenges impacted on staff ability to effectively address behavioural issues among their students. These included the bureaucratic and onerous process of EOTAS referrals. A common challenge was the lack of therapeutic supports such as CAMHS and educational psychology services. The delay in interventions exacerbated behavioural issues. Schools rose to these challenges in a number of different ways. One school was proactive in resource allocation by establishing a nurture unit. Schools were also proactive in seeking solutions through collaboration with external support services. This approach enables schools to supplement their resources and expertise. There were also examples of using limited budgets creatively, while in others it meant drawing upon social capital and the goodwill of colleagues

What do the schools perceive as the barriers and supports to successful intervention in Northern Ireland?

Schools cited a disconnect among support systems, compounded by a lack of stable social work contact as a barrier to successful intervention. Without consistent collaboration and communication between school staff, social workers, and external agencies, cohesive interventions were being undermined. Destructive relational behaviours, often stemming from complex backgrounds, also impeded progress. The disruptive impact of COVID-19 on educational routines and social

interactions intensified the struggle to engage learners. Delays in statementing, prolonged gaps between EOTAS panels, and limited communication with EOTAS contributed to unaddressed needs

Leveraging existing resources, including educational psychology support, was described as essential. Parental involvement, support, and a respectful relationship between parents and school staff were seen as invaluable in fostering positive change. Further schools that prioritised early intervention, were able to maintain consistent adult relationships with students, and offered them structured environments more effectively mitigated behavioural issues. Additionally, staff maintained that interventions should account for the unique needs of students at risk.

What are the implications for policy and practice in Northern Ireland?

The observations of SENCOs and PLCs drawn together within this case study on their perceptions of school exclusion practices in Northern Ireland, highlight implications for both policy and practice, necessitating a comprehensive revision of current approaches to better address the needs of at-risk students.

Firstly, the non-linear movement of students between categories of perceived risk underscores the need for adaptable and flexible interventions. Traditional one-size-fits-all strategies may not effectively cater to the dynamic nature of students' challenges. Policymakers and educators should advocate for personalised interventions that account for the ever-changing circumstances and needs of these students. This approach requires a shift from rigid structures and ill-defined protocols to more individualised and responsive strategies that can evolve as a student's risk profile changes over time.

Secondly, the staff members' position that supports must be consistently available throughout a student's school career highlights the importance of resource allocation. Funding and resources should be allocated not only for short-term interventions but for sustained and continuous support. This extended investment acknowledges that long-term positive outcomes often require ongoing efforts to address underlying issues and provide necessary assistance. Within the NI system there is an emphasis on early intervention, however, resource constraints mean that in practice this often translates to 'earliest point once a young person is in crisis'—in many cases this comes too late, and the student's education and development has already been disrupted.

Supporting the administrative alignments among schools, alternative providers, and essential services is critical. Improved communication and collaboration are essential for a holistic approach to student support. Developing protocols and platforms that enable seamless information sharing can prevent gaps in intervention strategies and ensure consistent, well-coordinated care for those at risk of exclusion.

The burden of evidence required for schools to access and resource support for students is an area in need of review. Overly strict evidence requirements can delay vital interventions and hinder progress. Policymakers should reassess these criteria, considering the challenges schools face and aiming for a balance between accountability and practicality.

Lastly, enhancing data structures to track the destinations of young people at risk of exclusion once they leave school would be valuable. For the young people who experience school exclusion in its many forms, once they leave school, they lose a key advocate. Understanding where these students go after leaving school is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and identifying gaps in support systems (both during and upon leaving formal education). Schools hold a significant amount

of detailed data on the trajectories and needs of these young people, which becomes obsolete once they leave. Robust data sharing and analysis mechanisms could provide better insights into the longer-term impacts of interventions, needs of these young people outside school, and inform future policy decisions.

Findings from Scotland

What accounts for some of the differences in outcome?

The importance of context Some contextual factors varied by group. There were four looked after children in the Scotland sample and all of them, as well as the only child described as being adopted, were in the increased risk group. Participants often highlighted the impact of the multiple adversities facing the families of many of the children and young people at risk of exclusion: '*Poverty, substance misuse, mental health, which is not easily talked about, a kind of toxic masculinity type of culture, and as a result, most of the young people that we are now providing bespoke curriculums for and working really hard to avoid exclusions are S1 to S3 white working-class males.*'

For some of the case study young people, the wider context of their lives changed dramatically between the two interviews. Across all the case studies, staff mentioned changes in context external to school in nine of seventeen cases, although it is possible that there were also other changes that staff were not aware of. Only one of these nine context changes – a child no longer being homeless - was judged by staff to have a positive impact. The other contextual changes were all described as having a negative impact.

Of the young people with the worst educational outcomes – complete disengagement from school – two of the three had experienced sudden major life changes outside of school between the two interviews and these were described as the reason for their disengagement.

Intervention type There does not seem to be one type of intervention that works to reduce risk, although there does appear to be a common core of face-to-face, regular contact with an adult who cares. Across all three risk groups, a number of interventions were described, most of which appear in all three groups. The difference between the interventions offered by group is minimal; if anything, those whose risk had increased had been offered more interventions than the others.

Attendance was a key barrier to interventions being successful; for those who struggled to attend school, interventions could be put in place but '*all the things that you're trying to put in place need consistency and routine and that starts with being here, and if they're not here, that's a real difficulty*'.

Time, persistence and relationships Outcomes were rarely described as final; aims, interventions and outcomes were usually all described as part of an ongoing process, even when young people were at the stage of transitioning to post-school. This probably reflects Scotland's policy approach in which schools remain legally responsible for the young people on their school roll regardless of AP involvement, and where the focus is on prevention of exclusion, the building and maintaining of relationships, and the wider wellbeing of young people. There was a strong sense throughout the interviews that they are the young people's schools and that it is their responsibility to do what they can to improve outcomes, although some participants also reflected on whether other settings may have been more successful for the young people.

In many cases the importance of knowing the young people and families was highlighted, and parental involvement was often framed as an intervention. Relationships-based approaches were described across all three groups.

Perceptions of risk These case studies should be seen as situated accounts of young people's lives, coming from staff. It is possible, and even likely, that if we had spoken to the young people or their parents, they would have given us different accounts or emphasised different aspects or judged the change in risk differently. The groups presented here should not be seen as three distinct groups of children and young people; there was always a degree of uncertainty and subjectivity involved. Participants sometimes judged that the risk of exclusion had decreased but overall risk had increased. This may reflect Scottish Government's approach to exclusion, which encourages schools to focus on prevention and consider all aspects of a child's life before excluding and may also reflect wider policy approaches to risk and wellbeing.

Resources: *how* do schools in Scotland access the resources they need?

Participants often talked about Pupil Equity Funding (PEF), part of the Scottish Government funded Attainment Challenge programme which aims to reduce the attainment gap between the most and least deprived areas in Scotland. Participants described using this funding flexibly and creatively in response to need. Some schools used the PEF funding to fund AP, while others used it to employ additional staff or resources.

Local authority funding or, more commonly, resources were also mentioned, such as the local authority Additional Support for Learning team which could give advice and support; and educational psychologists' input which could be accessed through regular scheduled meetings where a specified list of pupils was discussed. Multi-agency working was a key way of accessing resources, with child planning meetings often used as opportunities for shared decision-making.

What do the schools in Scotland perceive as the barriers and supports to successful intervention?

Parents were sometimes positioned as a barrier and sometimes as a support, with parental engagement often framed as an intervention in and of itself, as a way of encouraging consistency, improved attendance and pupil engagement. Participants often acknowledged that the challenging contexts that parents faced were a barrier to engagement.

Similarly, external partners were sometimes seen as a barrier and sometimes a support. In some cases, for example, social work involvement was perceived to improve a young person's situation and therefore their experience of education, while at other times their perceived higher threshold for involvement, and lack of involvement in child planning meetings, was seen as a barrier. Extremely long CAMHS waiting lists were raised as a barrier. Multi-agency child planning meetings and other regular planning meetings were described as a positive way to consider new approaches, although some participants also acknowledged that they were time-consuming.

School ethos, and the resulting ability and encouragement to be flexible and creative, were often framed as supports; new ideas could be gleaned from planned meetings and by learning from and sharing good practice, within school and between various professionals.

The Covid-19 pandemic had an ongoing and disproportionate impact particularly in connection with attendance.

What are the implications for policy and practice in Scotland?

The Scottish policy focus on prevention and wellbeing was evident throughout the case studies. A wide range of interventions was used across all three risk groups, within frameworks that prioritised relationships and inclusion. It was clear that the participants were strongly invested in the young people they described and had worked extremely hard to support them. There was a sense of tenacity in participants' accounts of the case studies; it was clear that young people were seen by participants as part of their schools, whether or not they were currently there.

Although there does not seem to be one type of intervention that works to reduce risk, the importance of face-to-face, regular contact with an adult who cares was highlighted throughout the case studies. The commitment to prevention of exclusion was clear throughout the case studies, with interventions often put in place at an early stage to prevent, rather than solely respond to, exclusions.

Despite this commitment to and investment in young people, outcomes by the time of the second interview were not always positive. Across the groups, the impact of the wider contexts of young people and their families was huge and should not be underestimated. There was widespread acknowledgement that what happened for young people within schools was intricately connected to their lives outside of school, and that the increasingly challenging broader environment, including the impact of Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, was likely to exacerbate the challenges already faced by many families. This highlights the crucial importance of addressing broader inequalities and adequately resourcing services beyond education. Positive communication and multi-agency working were positioned as crucial. Knowledge of and support for multi-agency working was high, reflecting Scottish Government's GIRFEC approach. Some challenges were raised, however, around ensuring that multi-agency working was in practice as effective as possible in the context of extremely high caseloads for some practitioners such as social workers and CAMHS.

Participants often highlighted resourcing within schools as challenging too, with staff time a precious commodity to be balanced with the needs of children and young people. PEF funding was often highlighted as particularly helpful.

Compared to other jurisdictions, a relatively high number of young people were considered – either by participants or, based on participants' accounts, the researchers – to have elevated risk. Exclusion statistics suggest that it is unlikely that this reflects heightened risk of exclusion or ineffective interventions in Scotland. It may be more likely to reflect differences in approaches to exclusion and to risk across the jurisdictions; the focus on relationships and wellbeing in Scotland encourages school staff to know the young people well and to consider the whole child when making judgements about risk rather than focusing narrowly on risk within the education setting.

Reflecting Scottish Government policy, participants' accounts of case studies were strongly underpinned by an understanding of behaviour as communication. This understanding was evident in the practice they described, which overwhelmingly focused on supporting young people and trying to meet need, rather than punitive approaches. In Scotland in recent months there has been a renewed interest in behaviour, culminating in the Education Secretary's announcement of a

forthcoming 'behaviour summit'[1,2,3]. The case studies included in this report may act as sobering reminders of the complex issues surrounding experiences and perceptions of behaviour in schools, including poverty, societal and cultural issues, structural issues, adults' actions, interactions and perceptions, resourcing and staffing in schools.

Findings from Wales

What accounts for some of the differences in outcome in Wales?

At the level of the school, there was no discernible pattern of changing risk between high and low excluding schools. There was some evidence within the data that staff used slightly different criteria to select their case study students. There were however some differences between the pupils whose risk had de-escalated and those for whom it had escalated.

A more stable home-life. Of the young people that school staff felt had shown a de-escalation of risk, although they were still vulnerable and at risk, circumstances seemed to have stabilised for them. Two of the young people were living in kinship care which was going well, one young person who had issues in the community had moved house. Conversely staff explained the twelve young people whose level of risk escalated continued to have a turbulent home life. These young people had experienced additional vulnerabilities including involvement in county lines, witnessing domestic abuse and having a parent in prison.

Smaller class size The remaining learners that showed a de-escalation of risk were educated in AP. One of the learners, from the HTE excluding school in LA3 was being educated in the schools internal AP. The remaining two young people in Group A were being educated in the AP setting. School staff reflected that this could be because of a higher teacher to student ratio and smaller class sizes meaning that they had the time and attention they needed.

Relationships with parents Another factor that school staff identified in the de-escalating risk group was relationships they tended to have good relationships with parents and had been effective at building relationships with the young people. Conversely parents in the escalating risk group often did not want to work with the school.

Improved Attendance School staff explained that a common theme with the de-escalating group was attendance had improved, and that those with escalating risk struggled with attendance meaning that they were not in school to benefit from the support that they had put in place for them.

Resources: how do the schools in Wales access the resources they need?

Participants talked positively about the resources available from LAs to prevent exclusions, notably, the LA's attendance officers, specialist teachers and wellbeing services. Conversely, they also spoke

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[1] J.P. Holden (2022), 'Education in Scotland: Pupil Behaviour "The Worst It's Been in Years", *Herald Scotland*, https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/20139609.education-scotland-pupil-behaviour-the-worst-years/

[2] Scottish Parliament Debate (24th May 2023), 'Motion S6M-09126', *My Society*, https://www.theyworkforyou.com/sp/?id=2023-05-24.17.0&s=Schools+Exclusion#g17.26

[3] Scottish Government (May 2023), 'Behaviour in Schools', https://www.gov.scot/news/behaviour-in-schools/

about the impact of delays in accessing funding leading to the escalation of risk, and the lack of funding meaning that some young people could no longer access interventions that they had previously. They also noted the cost implications of some alternative provision such as local college provision as well as the ability of schools to provide their own school based alternative provision. As a result of these factors, students were not able to benefit from effective interventions and in some cases their behaviour deteriorated to the point of permanent exclusion.

What do the schools in Wales perceive as the barriers and supports to successful intervention?

The challenges of recruiting Teaching Assistants (TAs) to work with young people at risk of exclusion were identified, meaning sometimes they must rely on agency TAs to work in the schools internal AP. They have had to go to the LA and explain they need help because if they 'can't recruit', they 'can't meet the needs of children.' School staff identified the need for more trauma-informed mental health training. The need for pastoral support staff to have a more strategic view of pupils who need professional help from social services. There was a need in some instances for staff to be empathetic, use kinder language, and build relationships. School staff also wanted to have more time to work with the children who were at risk and vulnerable.

Staff wanted a menu of support available at each school based on the needs of the young person and where a school could not offer this support, for example, because it was a smaller school then the LA should provide these services.

While partnership working could be beneficial, external partners were not always aware of the challenges schools were experiencing and consequently felt that some of the suggestions that were made were inappropriate.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice in Wales
Research has found that positive school staff relationships and low student-staff ratios has led to the positive re-engagement of young people in education.[4] While this was effective for some learners whose risk de-escalated for others, it was not. More research is needed to understand why this approach works for some young people and not for others.

Welsh Government should review the role and pay of Teaching Assistants. Teaching Assistants' vital role in supporting at-risk and vulnerable young people was evident. They could make a difference between a de-escalation and an escalation of risk.

Local authorities should review their exclusion policies. Schools should never have to permanently exclude young people so they can receive the support that they need. A young person should never have to be permanently excluded from school to access the support they need.

Welsh Government and local authorities should review the support needs of pupils excluded from school. The young people who showed an escalation of risk had turbulent lives outside of school. There needs to be an analysis of these risks so young people can be supported to remain in education and fulfil their full potential.

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[4] Nicholson, L., & Putwain, D. (2015). Facilitating re-engagement in learning: A disengaged student perspective. The Psychology of Education Review, 39(2), 37–41.

The importance of school as a protective factor that helps mitigate further harm needs to be considered.[5] Where young people are having a turbulent life outside of school, the support school puts into place may be ineffective. However, where young people are experiencing challenges like involvement in county lines, schools should work with specialist agencies to ensure that young people are supported to remain in education to mitigate the risk of further harm.

While Welsh Government measures are welcome to increase attendance, including Family Engagement Officers to improve relationships with families, the complexity of the issues that some of these young people were experiencing shows the need for specialist support for families.

Increased funding for Education Welfare Officers from Welsh Government is welcome, especially if they focus on early intervention. However, they need to be aware of the complex challenges, such as youth homelessness and county lines involvement, that young people face and, if necessary, work with specialist agencies.

Cross Jurisdictional Comparison

This section of the report raises some issues that arise from comparing the data represented in the four jurisdiction reports and their analysis of what accounted for differences in outcome. These must be viewed as somewhat tentative due to sampling differences in the identification of high and low excluding schools, the shorter than anticipated trajectory due to Covid-19. Although students were placed in three risk groups it was recognized that this was a snap-shot in time. However, the interviews were carried out by "home" researchers who also analysed and reported on the data drawing on their knowledge to situate their findings. This gives each case study, based on two hours of interview data a particular integrity.

Figure EX1 Differences in Outcomes within Jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Explanations for Differences in Outcome *Within* Jurisdictions
England	Staff calibration of risk Older pupils, staff had clearer aims- more often linked to strengths and interests Staff knowledge of the young person Identification of SEN Disadvantage and home life Gender (?)
Northern Ireland	Parental Engagement & Support Nurture Provision Whole School Communication Schools limited Influence over External Factors Geography of Supports Structured Environments Personal Conversations
Scotland	Contextual Factors- being looked after, adopted, multiple adversities facing families, major life changes Intervention type- face to face regular contact with an adult who cares Attendance Time, persistence and relationships- schools responsibility and concern wellbeing
Wales	No difference between high and low excluding schools More stable home life Smaller class sizes Relationships between school and parents Improved attendance

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[5] Arnez, J. & Condry, R. (2021) Criminological perspectives on school exclusion and youth offending, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 26:1, 87-100.

Figure EX1 reveals the similarities and differences between jurisdictions in how they explained the changed risk outcomes. Turning to look at these in more depth, we also note factors that are absent from these accounts.

Changes in Levels of Risk

In all jurisdictions, levels of risk could change quite suddenly often due to actions or events that occur outside school. The smallest group were those whose risk remained unchanged. Taken together this was indicative of the instability and uncertainty of the trajectories of many of the young people. Young people in the escalating risk group generally faced more adverse difficulties, as the reports note: additional vulnerabilities (Wales) higher prevalence of looked after children, young people facing multiple adversities, experiencing sudden major life changes (Scotland) challenges with their family life (Northern Ireland) more involvement with social care, and a higher proportion joining their school after year 7 (England).

Contrary to expectations, given the different levels of exclusion in each jurisdiction, the largest group in England were those whose risk level was judged (with a few caveats) as de-escalating. Scotland, the jurisdiction with lowest reported rates of school exclusion. had the highest proportion of students whose risk was perceived to have escalated. This finding is particularly important as risk is largely understood as indicative of the need of support. Where risk is seen as escalating, there is more likely to be increases in targeted support. Conversely where risk is seen to reduce, there is a perception that no further additional support is needed.

Both school and individual level factors provide some explanations. In England, a third of the de-escalating group were the result of judgements from just one school, where all five of their case studies were identified as having lowered risk at Time 2. Additionally, a number of other explanations were explored that could contribute to differences or difficulties in calibrating risk:

- Scotland uses a more holistic system for examining risk that draws on better links with the community
- The use of numerical data systems in England to track young people are not sufficiently nuanced to give useful feedback
- Large numbers of students in England on the SEND register making it more difficult to know the young person well enough
- A disconnect between the person planning the intervention and those who implement the provision

A commonality between the jurisdictions was that the smallest group were those for whom the risk remained broadly the same. Given that in some cases the return visit was only four or five months later it is not surprising that some young peoples' risk was unchanged. The small size of this group however is indicative of the instability and uncertainty of the trajectories of the majority of these young people.

Differences in School Responses

In each of the jurisdictions, young people received a package of interventions in order to meet their diverse needs. The Scottish report notes that those who had the higher level of risk had been offered more. This is consistent with the view of risk level indicating need for support. In other respects, no particular interventions were linked to risk changes. We there turn to look at how jurisdictions differed or not with respect to their aims and the intervention strategies used.

The aims of the interventions were remarkably consistent across case studies *within* each jurisdiction.   Looking across jurisdictions, in the Scottish data emotional well-being and relationships are central, in the other jurisdictions there is a greater mixture of wellbeing, academic, and behavioural aims. The aims of staff in Northern Ireland also highlighted addressing self-esteem, of building confidence as under- pinning educational success. This was linked in their escalating group to achieving adequate qualifications. In the Welsh report there is also reference to relationship building which is seen as an important outcome in the personal lives of young people. Also, in the Welsh data are aims that focus on following the behaviour policy, on engaging with lessons and managing behaviour. In a similar vein there were aims in the English report that are expressed more as staff aims "keeping them in school" often with a focus on behaviour and attendance. Self-regulation and safety were a frequent part of the discourse. There was also an intent to find out and understand more about the needs of the young people in England, although this was often linked to an expectation that specialists could provide the answer rather than young people themselves. It was also an important route to securing additional or different provision.

Turning to compare intervention strategies, for each of the jurisdictions there were descriptions of how these were personalised, although this could mean different levels of individualisation. These levels ranged from identifying strategies from a "menu" of options that the school could provide, through to those which were clearly student centred and which were described in jurisdiction reports as "creative" (Northern Ireland and Scotland) and "flexible" (England, Northern Ireland and Scotland).

A hallmark of a student- centred approach is that it is based on conversations with the young person. These conversations were evident in the data for all jurisdictions but were framed slightly differently in the reports. In the Scottish report student voice does not appear to be linked to a particular event, rather the emphasis is on a relationship- based approach with a "common core of face to face and regular contact with an adult who cares." This is indicative of a more open form of conversation. In other reports the dialogue was contingent on the behaviour [in Wales why the young person behaved in a certain way] and often formalised [target setting and contracts in N. Ireland and re-entry conversations in England].

There was a lot of similarity in the interventions that were deployed but some subtle or nuanced differences in some of descriptions. There is common mention of both reduced timetables and alternative provision, but common labels did not always indicate common approaches. While there is pervasive reference to reduced timetables in the English data, the Scottish data refers to part-time timetables as does the Welsh data, but in the Northern Ireland data this strategy is used sparingly and is rejected in favour of modifications that are within the control of the pupil: for example, rest breaks, use of the well-being room, and movement passes. In contrast reduced timetables can marginalise young people through reducing contact with their peers, and with this a sense of belonging.

Jurisdictions differ in the landscape of their external AP[6], with England, followed by Wales the most diverse, giving access to different activities, for example, therapeutic sports and arts based, vocational, and tutoring. Many of these are private providers and consequently schools are limited by their cost and availability. In Northern Ireland young people can attend EOTAS either for short and longer-term placements. The bureaucracy for accessing this is seen by staff as burdensome. There are fewer references to the use of external AP in the Scottish data.

A lack of external AP can be conducive to schools developing their own provision and there was frequent mention of its use across three jurisdictions. In the Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland reports reference is made to the use of nurture provision, and in Northern Ireland this is seen as a contributory factor to a successful outcome. In Scotland staff referred to the "support base" whereas in the English data staff referred to the "inclusion room", often in relation to safety but also to access adult support. It is not clear whether the distinctiveness of internal AP lies with being part of a smaller group with higher levels of adult support. The relevance of this is reinforced in the Welsh report in their recommendations for policy changes for a review of the role and pay of TAs. Research indicates that withdrawal from mainstream classes put the young person at a disadvantage (Webster 2022)

Scotland was the only jurisdiction report to provide a clear example of early intervention with a literacy support group. Poor literacy skills prevent young people accessing the curriculum and in turn lead to disengaging with school. Difficulty with reading is also linked to poor self-esteem and confidence. Arguably the identification of levels of literacy should be a routine assessment in all secondary schools and not seen only in relation to SEN. Ill health and poor attendance can also lead to significant gaps in young people's attainment and the earlier these are addressed, the less likely that secondary difficulties arise.

Other Explanations for Differences in Outcomes

A common theme in the jurisdiction reports concerns the multiple adversities that some young people (Scotland, England) face and the ways in which a complex and turbulent home life (Wales) impact on risk outcomes. Relationships with parents and knowledge of local communities were foregrounded. As the Scottish report describes positive multi-agency communication was crucial. The Northern Ireland report outlines the numerous barriers and challenges staff faced. These were largely echoed in each of the jurisdictions, factors that were positioned as challenge when they were absent or hard to access and as a particular support when they were working well. Each jurisdiction indicates the disconnect with social care, the lack of stable social work contact which although staff recognised that they were over-burdened, caused an element of frustration. Stretched services have led to raised thresholds for intervention which are much higher than schools. A similar concern is raised around CAMHS. In England and Wales there were concerns that external partners did not fully understand the challenges schools faced.

In Scotland there was creative use of funding but in the other jurisdictions the pipeline to accessing funding for provision was through the formal assessment process. Many of the young people were

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[6] Power et al. (2023) The Varied Landscape of Alternative Education Provision in the UK: a Home international Comparison.

seen to have social, emotional and mental health needs and access to therapeutic support was raised as a particular issue in Northern Ireland. In England, staff spoke about offering counselling but that this was not an option if the young person was accessing CAMHS support. There were delays and difficulties in getting a statement (Wales and Northern Ireland) or an EHCP (England). Delays accessing funding meant that in some cases the statement came too late and the young person had already been excluded from school.

Conclusion and Implications

This strand of the Excluded Lives programme of research focuses on how schools respond to young people they see as being at risk of exclusion. It seeks to contribute to understanding how policies and practices interact with characteristics of young peoples' trajectories including their involvement with different agencies. Each jurisdiction looked within the data for how they could account for differences in young peoples' trajectories of risk.

There was some evidence within the data that there were differences at jurisdiction level in how staff calibrated risk with a higher proportion of schools in the English sample judging students to have de-escalated their level of risk over the time of the project. Conversely, Scotland had the highest proportion of case study students whose level of risk was judged to have increased. On the one hand this runs contrary to expectations given the much higher level of excluded students in England, and the very low level in Scotland. However, level of risk is conventionally seen as indicative of the need for support and raises the question of how risk is calibrated. The data suggests that in Scotland risk is judged more broadly with reference to the home and the local community, with which they have stronger links.

- This is indicative of the need to introduce measures that support staff in England in making judgements about the effectiveness of interventions and the impact on students' risk level.

There are a number of pupil level factors that are shared across jurisdictions and reflected in the challenging circumstances of their home lives. The need for a multi-agency response and the frustrations expressed by many staff were frequent. In some respects, young people's trajectories are propelled by uncertainty. This was in part an outcome of the complexity of some of the young peoples' circumstances to which Covid-19 had contributed, particularly with respect to mental health.

- The speed with which young peoples' lives can change calls for agile responsive systems rather than lengthy bureaucratic protocols.

The prime route to access funding for provision that was outside of mainstream, was through formal assessment of young people's additional/special needs. There is a concern within the governments of England, Wales and Northern Ireland of the rise in the number of statements/EHCPs. This process is both lengthy and costly, and can result in channelling funding out of mainstream education.

- It is indicative of a need to examine more closely how schools can meet the diversity of pupil need.

In all jurisdictions packages of interventions are used and, to differing degrees, personalised to reflect the strengths and needs of the young person. This makes it difficult for staff to evaluate the

impact of a particular component. This is compounded where there are not frequent lines of communication between school staff, home, and other agencies.

- Good data collection systems have a role to play but these can constrain the type of information shared. Often the crucial information is *how* a young person responded requiring a dialogue that can shape the way forward.

The reports indicate a particular thread concerning supporting the development of relationships. This was strongest in the Scottish data where the importance of frequent conversations with a trusted adult, and the use of relationship-based approaches was a core element. In other jurisdictions, while they included the use of mentoring and a key person, conversations were often formalised and tied to particular parts of the intervention, and in some schools, part of a contract.

- As the Scottish report notes, a focus on relationships and well-being encourages staff to consider the whole child and to get to know them well.

The Scottish report provided the only reference to early intervention in a mainstream setting, although the Northern Ireland report identifies the contribution of nurture groups.

- Early intervention is an important area for further research as it brings with it the challenges of identification without labelling. It's not a replacement for preventative approaches that take account of the systemic factors that operate.

Schools have the potential to provide stability and a safe environment. This was evident in a number of the aims of intervention. However, reduced timetables and time spent in different forms of AP serves to increasingly marginalise them from their peers. The interaction between young people's social and emotional lives and some of the provision available in school can form a pipeline to further exclusion.

- There is much to be learned from the Scottish policy with its focus on inclusion, engagement, well-being and a relationship -based approach to intervention.

The Trajectories of Young People at Risk of Exclusion across the UK: Full Report

1. Introducing the Context for the Research

This report presents an analysis of the trajectories of young people perceived by staff to be at risk of exclusion from mainstream secondary schools in each of the jurisdictions of the UK. These data are part of a larger ESRC funded Excluded Lives project that aims to understand the disparities between the jurisdictions in the numbers of young people suspended from school either for a fixed period or permanently excluded. Consistently the figures are highest for England and lowest for Scotland (McClusky 2019). Table 1 below shows the most recent figures:
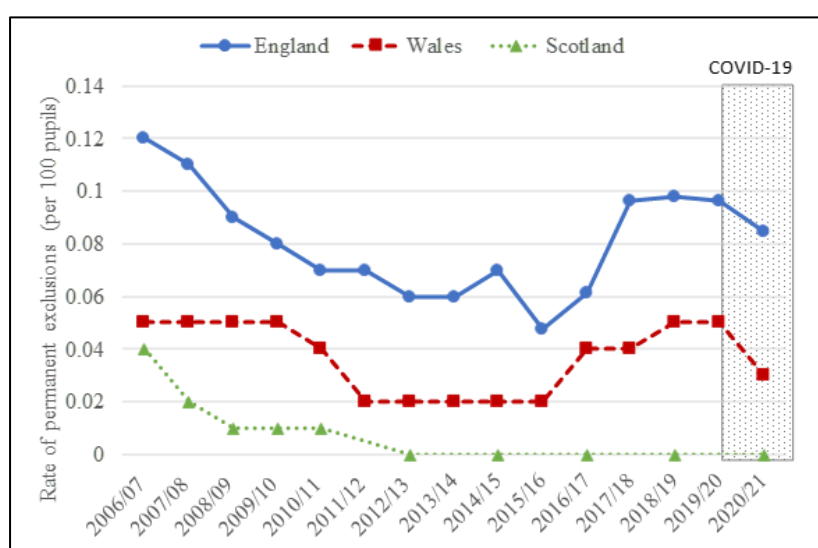
Figure 1: Permanent Exclusion in England, Wales and Scotland[7]

Set within this broader project, this research package explores professionals' conceptualisations of risk and vulnerability and their responses to young people that are of particular concern. Here we focus on the case study young people, staff concerns, and the interventions and strategies that were deployed and the outcomes for those young people. This report forms a companion to "Conceptualisations of Risk and Vulnerability to Exclusion in the UK," in which we examined how staff in the different jurisdictions of the UK understood the vulnerabilities and risks associated with these young people.

 A notable difference between the jurisdictions lies with their policies and these have been explored in previous publications (Cole et al, 2019, McCluskey et al 2019; Duffy et al 2021, Tawell and McCluskey 2022, and Power and Taylor 2022). As Power and Taylor however caution, national policies provide a partial explanation and do not explain the considerable variation between schools

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[7] Tseliou, F., Taylor, C., & Power, S. (2023). Recent Trends in Formal School Exclusions in Wales. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *72*(3), 269–293. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2023.2276404)

in a given jurisdiction. It is however important to briefly explore some of these contextual policy differences as they are likely to be reflected to some degree in the data analysed here.

In England, high rates of exclusion coincide with national policy statements that are underpinned by concerns for raising standards of attainment and behaviours that disrupt effective teaching and learning (see Cole et al 2019). Guidance is dominated by regulations and accountability frameworks. Academisation has led a disintegration of links with local authorities (LAs). Instead, support is purchased from a wide variety of providers. Cost inevitably determines the extent to which support is provided. England has a narrowly defined subject driven curriculum and has shifted towards a largely exam-based assessment. Schools are mainly judged in relation to student progress and attainment. Published league tables fuel competition between schools and contribute towards defining student numbers and consequently funding.

Norther Ireland has a diversity of schools divided both by faith and by governance (see Duffy et al). As a result, responsibility for school exclusion varies across school type. There is a strong ethos on pastoral care and an underpinning of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). There is a statutory duty to promote well-being. The curriculum framework strives towards a balance of academic and vocational subjects and is characterised by a degree of flexibility. Moreover, the curricula are planned around community needs and build on local collaborations. Services provided by Education Otherwise Than at School (EOTAS) centres contribute to keeping numbers of young people excluded low, partly through providing early intervention. Provision however also suffers from funding cuts and deficit budgets with concerns that the costs of supporting young people with SEND is spiralling out of control (NIAO 2020). Budget cuts are also having an impact on the availability of mental health support and counselling.

The policy rhetoric in Scotland is notable for its positive ethos being underpinned by inclusion with an emphasis on engagement. Guidance documents concerning exclusion are entitled "Included, Engaged and Involved" (Scottish Government 2022) signifying their commitment to the UNCRC, "to be understood and respected." The guidance actively promotes early intervention and an understanding of the impact of disadvantage. There is a policy commitment to promoting positive relationships, behaviour and well-being and keeping young people safe within a nurturing environment. The policy embraces a core quality indicator called 'Ensuring equality, wellbeing and inclusion', and to that end promotes inter-agency work and partnerships between schools and local authorities. In 2019 some stakeholders saw these intentions as aspirational (McCluskey et al 2019) but they provide a clear indication of the direction of travel.

The exclusion rate in Wales is significantly lower than England although official data masks a number of informal practices (Power and Taylor 2021). There is a strong core principle of co-operation rather than competition with relatively little diversification of schools and a strong LA. Wales has been influenced in their approach by Scotland with a focus on student wellbeing and understanding why a young person behaves in a particular manner. Moreover, young people cannot be suspended for minor incidents such as lateness or appearance, nor for truancy, failure to complete homework or poor academic performance. With respect to the curriculum Wales is more progressive than England and takes an integrated approach structuring the curriculum around integrated areas of Learning and Experience, thereby meeting a more diverse range of needs.

Although there are differences in policies there are similarities in who gets excluded. Looking at the data for suspensions, consistently, students with special educational needs and disability (SEND) or additional learning needs (ALN), additional support needs (ASN) and those on Free School Meals (FSM) are over-represented with rates up to 5 times higher for ALN than non-ALN students in

Scotland[8], almost four times higher for SEND than non-SEND in England,[9] 3 times higher for ASL than non-ASL in Wales[10] and over twice as high in Northern Ireland[11] for SEND compared to non-SEND .

Given this disproportionality of who gets excluded from school it is relevant to consider differences with respect to policies for SEND. Both Scotland and Wales now have a wider category of ASN/ALN, rather than a disability driven SEND, although ALN is used interchangeably with SEND in current Welsh government reports. Scotland includes 24 barriers to learning under the umbrella of Additional Support Needs (ASN) and recognizes the way in which situational factors may impact on progress in school. Northern Ireland continues to use the same definition as England of a special educational need. It is difficult to make hard and fast comparisons between the jurisdictions due to differences in the ways they report their statistics, the use of different definitions and time intervals of reporting. Additional there are important contextual differences (a young person has a special educational need if they require additional support to what is generally available) which is often lost in the data. Given these limitations, the European Agency for Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Education (EASIE) provide some indicative data with respect to country reports on young people that have been officially recognised as having SEN and the extent to which they access inclusive provision. These in turn can highlight differences in the way in which mainstream classes can respond to the diversity of learners.

The European data (in Table 1 below) suggest that England has the greater share of lower secondary aged students educated outside mainstream schools but Northern Ireland, perhaps because of its use of EOTAS, has a greater share of students educated in non-inclusive settings. England is less likely to use separate classes in mainstream schools in contrast to Scotland. However, because these figures are based on enrolment rates the ad hoc and short-term use of special or separate classes may not be reflected in these official data.

Elsewhere in the literature there are indications of common concerns in relation to young people with SEND. These include concerns about the rising numbers and the complexity of need (DfE 2023, O'Connor et al 2022) including growth in the category of young people with Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs (SEMH) (Riddell and Carmichael (2019); the rising and unsustainable costs of supporting these young people (DfE 2023; NIAO 2020; O'Connor et al 2022) delays in assessment and the shortage of specialists to carry these out (NIAO 2020; DfE 2023) , failure to provide early intervention (DfES 2023 NAIO 2020) and the heavy reliance on adult support given the varied evidence on its effectiveness (Webster and Blatchford 2019).

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[8] https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland/pages/8/#:~:text=The%20rate%20of%20exclusion%20for,with%20a%20higher%20exclusion%20rate.
[9] https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england
[10] https://www.gov.wales/permanent-and-fixed-term-exclusions-schools-september-2019-august-2020-html
[11] https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Pupil%20Suspensions%20and%20Expulsions%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%202020%202021%20%20Experimental%20Statistics.pdf

	Enrolment rate in inclusive education: where the child/learner with an official decision of SEN follows education in mainstream classes alongside their peers for the largest part – 80% or more – of the school week.	The enrolment rate of children/learners with an official decision of SEN in separate, non-inclusive groups/classes within mainstream education (%) Lower Secondary	The share of children/learners with an official decision of SEN who are educated in all forms of segregated (separate, non-inclusive) provision (%) Lower Secondary	The share of children/learners with an official decision of SEN who are educated outside of mainstream education (%), Lower secondary
England	97.69	0.04	2.14	2.10
Northern Ireland	96.98	0.83	2.61	1.78
Scotland	97.48	0.94	2.52	1.58
Wales	N/A	N/A	N/A	1.33
European Average	97.13	0.82	1.93	1.76

Table 1 EASIE 2023 Data for year 2019/2020- Lower Secondary

1.1 Relationship between policies and interventions

Policies for inclusion emphasize the importance of introducing systemic changes to reduce levels on exclusion. The Timpson review (2019) highlights contributory factors of feeling a sense of belonging (and the converse of bullying) and meeting the needs of young people with a SEMH. The review identifies the importance of creating a positive school culture, one in which staff are supported to understand as well as manage behaviour; to intervene early and to recognize that some young people will need targeted support often outside the mainstream classroom. Their review while recognizing that strategies to reduce suspensions and exclusions can be targeted at the whole school or targeted at the individual student place more emphasis on universal aspects of provision. However individual targeted intervention is often the more common response where jurisdictional policies focus on the processes and procedures that accompany the decision to exclude. There is limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of different intervention strategies in the UK. A review of reviews that sought to evaluate worldwide evidence on the effectiveness of school-based interventions to prevent youth offending (Gaffney et al 2021) noted the effectiveness of the following interventions: violence reduction; mentoring/monitoring; counselling, mental health; and lastly enhancement of academic skills and the targeting of individual students. This draws attention to the need for multi-agency responses, consistent with Scottish policy.

The data gathered here enable us to look both within and across jurisdictions to identify variation at the level of the school as well as wider variation. Through an analysis of young peoples' trajectories we can better understand what school professionals see as the object of the activity as they seek to lower the risk of exclusion. The study will enable us to consider the relationship between schools and other bodies, about the ways in which resources are allocated and support sought. Through

engaging at two points in time we will learn about changes in provision, about the application of school systems and structures and some tentative outcome data.

1.2 Methods

This report is based on interview data collected from SENCOs and Pastoral leads in 26 core secondary/post primary schools across the four jurisdictions of the UK. Schools were part of the larger Excluded Lives Research Project and selected by slightly different processes that reflect policy, organisational and geographical differences in each of the jurisdictions. Details of the sample are provided in the following jurisdiction level report sections.

Members of staff were interviewed at two points in time with a gap on average of five months (range 4-9months) between interviews. The Covid-19 pandemic constrained access to some settings. Informed consent was gained prior to the first interview with information provided on both the project as a whole and on the purpose of the interviews. The aim of this part of the project was clarified, namely to understand how schools mitigate against the risk of exclusion Interviewees were asked to identify two or three students who they understood to be at risk of exclusion (formal and informal) who may have additional vulnerabilities such as health, education, peers, family. In addition, they were informed that the interview would include discussion of what they understood by the terms 'vulnerable' and 'at-risk' and the criteria used to identify the case study students and the strategies they used with them. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

Key Questions at Time 1 included:

- What triggered their concern about the students?
- What was the aim of the intervention? How well did they feel the intervention strategies worked? Did they encounter any difficulties?
- Who else currently worked with the students?
- What they were wanting to work on next?

Prior to the interviews at Time 2, each member of staff was sent a brief summary of the key points they had made concerning each of the case study students to serve both as an aide memoire and member checking. The summary also set out the purpose of the second interview, namely as a follow-up on the particular two to three students who they identified in the first interview as at risk of exclusion and to learn what had happened since. By following up case study examples we aimed to understand the detail and complexities of practices in action as distinct from policy/guidance.

Following on from the first interview at time 2, interviewees were asked for an update on each of their case study students. During these discussions they were prompted to consider:

1. If anything had changed for the young person inside and outside of school since the last interview?
2. If, in their view, the student felt a sense of belonging to school?
3. Whether they continued to use the listed strategies and why?
4. If they had worked on other things with the case study student how and why they were chosen and what was the intended outcome?
5. How they tracked progress towards the outcome(s)?
6. If the strategies/interventions were effective in achieving the outcome?
7. Who else had been involved, what had they been working on and how effective it had been?
8. What barriers they had encountered, and what had helped
9. Whether the student's level of risk had changed, and in what ways?

1.2.1 Analysis

We drew on Activity Theory (Engeström (2001) 2nd generation) to inform our analysis and to enable us to understand contradictions within the activity system- for example specific goals that were associated with particular actions or interventions but not necessarily consistent with the overall activity of reducing the risk of exclusion, or the ways in which constraints within the system operated to shape decision-making. This might occur when a student was removed from a classroom and they miss out on the ongoing curriculum activity of the rest of their peers. Falling behind in their learning could make them less likely to engage on their return. Equally it draws our attention towards the division of labour within a school, the ways in which tasks are divided and assigned, shapes the activity of intervention.

For the purposes of this report data on each of the case study students was analysed to provide a portrait that captured demographic data, background of the young person and what triggered the interviewee's concern; what staff were working on; what strategies they were using, why and what they were aiming to achieve, who they were working with and who was doing what, what enabled or supported their work and what constrained it; what the outcome had been and how the young person's risk had changed. These data were then summarised to facilitate comparisons and draw out initial themes at the level of the jurisdiction. In the next iteration of data analysis, the case studies were divided into groups, representing those whose risk was seen to increase, those whose level of risk had decrease and those who remained the same or for whom it was unclear. These judgements were made directly from the comments of members of staff or where these data were missing but other data indicated the risk outcomes, judgements were made accordingly through discussion between members of the research team. It was not always possible to make these judgements for all case students. Looking across these groups enabled the jurisdiction team to draw out comparative data regarding the use of different strategies, the aims and outcomes set within a context of the young person's background and what triggered the schools concern.

1.2.3 Ethics

In addition to gaining informed consent for the involvement of the SENCos and Pastoral Leads in two interviews, we also sought permission for audio recording and the use of quotations. Participants were also assured of the steps taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, and the management and storage of the data. In this report we have were necessary retracted details that would lead to the identification of the interviewee, the case study young people, the school and local authority or region. The project was reviewed and received ethical clearance from the Department of Education, University of Oxford Departmental Research Committee (ethics approval number ED-C1A-20-057).

1,2,4 Challenges in the data collection and analysis process

An element of deepening our understanding of student trajectories to exclusion lies with the selection and evaluation of strategies. In many instances, surfacing these details proved a challenge to the project. For example, the person interviewed did not always specify *why* particular strategies were selected over others. This may reflect constraints placed through access to resources. Often a number of different strategies were used simultaneously in packages that were described as tailored to the particular individual. The evaluation of the effectiveness of individual strategies was therefore limited. Additionally, while the person interviewed had access to school recorded data, including outcomes, they were not usually part of the day- to- day implementation and therefore their commentary on the utility of different strategies was dependent on conversations with front line members of staff. The same designated staff role resulted in different responsibilities and expectations in different schools. They drew on varied previous experiences. Their role in school

often meant that the focus of their activity was broad with several lines of responsibility and often at the level of strategy development and monitoring systems rather than having an individual student focus.

These were wide ranging interviews but of necessity, time limited and inevitably more time was given to some aspects and students than others. For example, interviewees might digress to talk more broadly about policy issues and systems, or refer to other students by way of comparison who were not part of the identified case study students. This made for rich but uneven data.

2. Case Study Students in England

Alice Tawell and Jill Porter

2.1 Participants

In England, we interviewed SENCOs and Pastoral Leads across 11 schools in four LAs; one North West England, two in the South East of England, and one in North Central England. At the time of selection two LAs had low rates of suspension but high rates of permanent exclusion. One had average rates of suspension and low rates of permanent exclusion and one had high rates of both suspension and permanent exclusion (based on figures from the 2017/18 statistical first release; Department for Education 2019).[12]

To select case study schools, we ran linear regression analyses to identify schools with fixed period exclusion rates that were higher and lower than would be expected given the percentage of students in their schools in receipt of SEN support, and FSM at any time during the past six years. We used data over a five-year period (2014/15-2018/9) from the Statistical First Releases of the School Census on Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions in England. We created four quadrants from which to choose case study schools, by plotting the regression standardised residual against the average fixed period exclusion rate for the time period. The horizontal line was set to the LA's mean fixed period exclusion rate on the Y axis and the vertical line was set to 0 on the X axis. The top left-hand quadrant included schools with high rates of exclusion but lower than expected given their demographic profile, the top right-hand quadrant included schools with high rates of exclusion, which were above expected. The bottom left-hand quadrant included schools with low rates of exclusion, which were below expected, and the bottom right-hand quadrant included schools with low rates of exclusion, but above expected. The aim was to select one school from each of the four quadrants for all four LAs, which would have resulted in a total of 16 schools. Due to recruitment issues brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, we were unable to fill all quadrants for three of the LAs. In one LA two schools from the Low/Lower than expected quadrant were selected as there was a limited number of eligible schools

LA	School	Designation
LA 1	School 1	Low/Lower than expected
LA 1	School 2	Low/Lower than expected
LA 2	School 3	High/Lower than expected
LA 2	School 4	Low/Lower than expected
LA 2	School 5	Low/Higher than expected
LA 2	School 6	High/Higher than expected
LA 3	School 7	High/Higher than expected

[12] Looking at the figures for all state funded primary, secondary and special schools the designations of three of the four LAs change slightly, with LA 1 and LA 3 having average rates of suspension but high rates of permanent exclusion and LA 4 having average rates of suspension and permanent exclusion.

LA 3	School 8	Low/Higher than expected
LA 4	School 9	High/Higher than expected
LA 4	School 10	Low/Higher than expected
LA 4	School 11	High/Lower than expected

Table 2: School Sample in England

in the Low/Higher than expected quadrant.[13] Two schools (School 2 and 9) did not complete both stages of field work and have been removed from this analysis and one participant did not take part at time 2.

Our final sample comprises interviews from 18 participants, eight SENCOs and ten Pastoral Leads. While the SENCO role is a designated role, the nominated "Pastoral Leads" held various different job titles covering areas including: student progress, behaviour, attitudes and personal development, attendance, student experience and well-being, safeguarding, student welfare, inclusion, pastoral care, culture and character, and alternative provision or a variation or combination of the above. Ten participants were members of the school's Senior Leadership Team. In one case the interviews at time 1 and 2 were joint. The intention had been to leave a 6- month gap between interviews but on average the time gap was 5 months.

The eighteen staff selected across the nine schools, identified between one and four case studies each, who they considered at risk of exclusion. Time constraints inevitably led to diminished levels of detail about each case and we therefore selected their first two cases to represent in the data. One young person was spoken about by two different participants. This resulted in a total sub-sample of n = 34 case studies. In order to check that this selection process had not skewed our sample we compared their key characteristics with those of the full sample and replaced one student to create a better match.

The 34 case studies were comprised of 23 boys (68%), 10 girls (29%) and one young person who identifies as gender variant. Three young people (9%) were in Year 7 at Time 1, seven (21%) were in Year 8, seven (21%) were in Year 9, eight (23%) were in Year 10 and nine (26%) were in Year 11. Our sampling strategy and school recruitment resulted in an under-representation of some groups that are more likely to be excluded from school. For example, twenty-three (68%) of the young people were White British, with 32% representing other ethnicities which staff described as Black, Black and Minority Ethnic, White and Black Caribbean, Mixed Race African, mixed race, Pakistani, Filipino, and Gypsy/Roma. One young person's ethnicity was unknown.

Twenty two (65%) of the young people were identified as in receipt of SEN Support (SEN K), five (15%) had Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), three young people (9%) were issued EHCPs in the time between the Time 1 and Time 2 interviews meaning their status changed from SEN K to EHCP, seven of the young people (21%) had no identified special educational needs and for two (6%) their SEN status was unclear. The most frequently mentioned needs included, in order, Social Emotional and

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[13] We decided to exclude single sex schools, which reduced the number of eligible schools in this LA.

Mental Health (SEMH), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) and Dyslexia.

With respect to disadvantage, eighteen of the young people (53%) were in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM), thirteen (38%) were not, and for three (9%) the participants were unsure if they were in receipt of FSM or not. Twelve of the young people (35%) had current involvement with Children's Social Care; one was on a Child in Need (CIN) plan, two were on Child Protection (CP) Plans and three were Looked After Children (LAC). For four of the young people their social care status escalated between the Time 1 and Time 2 interviews from (1) no social care involvement to social care involvement, (2) previous social care involvement to Team Around the Family (TAF), (3) previous social care involvement to CIN, and (4) TAF to CP. For two, their social care status had deescalated between Time 1 and Time 2 from (1) TAF to closed to social care, and (2) temporary foster placement to CIN. A further six young people (18%) had previous social care involvement, with two young people having been adopted. Twelve of the young people (35%) had no involvement with children's social care and for four (12%) this information is not known (for two this information was not requested during the interview). In three of the cases, the participants also mentioned that the young people had been referred to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH).

Staff nominated young people who had a range of previous school experiences, 10 (29%) had joined their secondary school after year 7 (four in Year 8, four in Year 9, one in Year 10 and one unknown). Twenty-four young people (71%) had previously been suspended from school and an additional four (12%) who had previously been permanently excluded. Four (12%) were reported to have no history of formal exclusion and for two young people (6%) the participants were unsure of their exclusion history. At Time 1, 27 of the young people (79%) were single registered at their current school, three (9%) were dual registered and four (12%) moved from being single to dual registered between Time 1 and Time 2. Two of the young people had been permanently excluded from their school by Time 2 (one from a Low/Lower than expected excluding school and the other from a Low/Higher than expected excluding school). It must be noted that the above figures were often reported by participants from memory rather than from official records so should be treated with caution.

2.2 Findings

2.2.1 Group A: De-escalation of risk

Levels of risk were considered to have de-escalated for 15 of the young people between Time 1 and Time 2. These 15 young people attended seven schools across LAs 2, 3 and 4. School 10 (Low/Higher than expected) reported that risk had decreased for all of their case study students. In two schools (School 1 in LA 1 – Low/Lower than expected excluding school – and School 6 in LA 2 – High/Higher than expected excluded school) no young people were identified as being in Group A: De-escalated risk. Ten of the 15 (67%) young people attended low excluding schools; one attended a Low/Lower than expected excluding school, nine attended Low/Higher than expected excluding schools, three attended High/Lower than expected excluding schools and two attended a High/Higher than expected excluding school. Of the 15 young people in Group A, judgements of de-escalating risk had been made by seven SENCOs and eight Pastoral Leads.

In terms of demographics, Group A was skewed towards older students. One was in Year 8 at Time 1, two in Year 9, six (37.5%) were in Year 10 and six (37.5%) were in Year 11. Eight were male, six were female and one identified as gender variant. Females were therefore slightly higher represented in this group (40%) than they were in the total sample (29%). There was a similar proportion of participants whose ethnicity was described as white British compared to the original sample, with the following reported ethnic groups also represented: Black and minority ethnic, Gypsy/Roma, Mixed race, White and Black Caribbean, and Unknown.

Only two of the group had no identified special needs. Three had EHCPs and one young person was assessed for an EHCP between time 1 and 2 and another young person was given an EHCP during that time period. A further eight young people were receiving SEN Support. Group A therefore largely reflected the wider group in relation to SEN.

Nine of the young people (60%) were in receipt of FSM, five were not, and for one this information was unknown. This group therefore over-represented young people on FSM.

Only seven of the group had not had previous involvement with social services, reflecting the proportion overall in the wider sample. Three young people who had previous involvement with children's social care were in this group (18.75%), including one young person who had been adopted. Four of the young people (25%) had current involvement with social care (one CIN, one CP and two LAC). For one, this information was unknown. No young people whose social care status changed were in the de-escalated risk group.

Eleven students had started their current school in Year 7 and four had not. Of these four, one had started in Year 8, one in Year 9, one in Year 10, and for one this information is unknown. All but one of the group had a history of suspensions and/or permanent exclusion (3). Three had moved following a permanent exclusion, and the other young person had moved because they had been racially bullied in their previous school. The three young people who had previously been permanently excluded were now in Years 10 and 11. Two of the group were dual registered.

Areas of concerns for case studies in Group A

This was a group for whom staff expressed mixed concerns although perhaps unsurprisingly their commentaries were dominated by issues around attendance and behaviour. The latter varied between one off explosive or violent incidents, and those relating to persistent disruptive behaviour and a refusal to follow or respond to instruction. Non-attendance was extreme in some instances: Student 30 refused to come to school; student 15 has been out of education most of their life and never stepped foot in a mainstream classroom.

Poor attendance was understood to have heightened the students' vulnerability to outside influences and their involvement in criminal or violent activity. Issues of safeguarding shape the responses that staff make:

The Pastoral Lead described how student 25 *"causes challenge every single day, but she needs to be in this building. If she's not in the building, she is vulnerable to outside, as soon as she sets a foot outside she's vulnerable."*

For some young people staff recognized the cross over between having SEN needs and the young person's behaviour:

"With [Student 21], it tends to be one-off instances, so an incident of violence, which isn't intended to be violent, but perhaps a lack of understanding as to how to respond in a scenario."

There was a recognition of the likely impact of undiagnosed needs. A third of the group experienced mental health difficulties which also impacted on young people's physical health.

Within staff commentaries however there were also some positive aspects that were noted that may have a bearing on some young people's trajectories. For example, descriptions also included recognition of strengths. Student 34 was described as *"an absolute delight.. A bit of a child star."* Student 30 was described as *"absolutely stunning with other students who show similar traits."*

There was also recognition of the progress some of the young people had already made: [student 21] *"has come a long way since joining the school."* And another commented that it was the longest that student 28 had ever been in one school. Positive framing of some of the young people and their trajectories is consistent with a judgement that their level of risk was decreasing over time.

Aims of staff working with Group A

The aims of staff working with young people in this group centred in the main around getting them back on track, particularly with respect to gaining qualifications and having their post school future lined up. This set of aims reflect the fact that 12 of the 15 young people were in Years 10 and 11. In order to achieve this some staff talked about the importance of keeping them in school (or in one case in the building) and therefore avoiding a permanent exclusion.

"what I want for [student 34] next is that he's in school….it's now up to sort of 50-50%..we want to getup to ..close to 100%..and I want that to be predominantly in the main building and not there [inclusion]..I feel really confident he's a student we can hang on to.. support to be successful through to the end of year 11, and possibly even beyond.."

Having a "destination" in sight provides a tighter focus to decisions about what staff should be working on and if they have achieved their aim. This can be contrasted to the aim for the youngest Year 8, Student 31, which was a little looser:

" We want them to be in the curriculum, learning from the teachers to help promote them to be a part of it to help them promote good behaviours." In order to achieve this staff were working on enabling them to access learning through improving their phonics and reading age.

Although this gives Year 8 staff a direction of travel it does not describe the end point with the same specificity as the aim for Year 11 Student 22, *"to leave with their English, Maths and Science at a good grade that will help them secure a place at college or in employment."*

In the above we see a concern for achievement. For three young people the aims included keeping them safe and for a further two young people a broader concern around their well-being including their health and sense of belonging. In contrast one member of staff aimed to take the pressure of staff who dreaded the student coming into their class.

Interventions for Group A

Participants reported using a range of interventions with the young people in this group, with a number described for each young person. Given the aims, many of the strategies involved the core curriculum subjects and reduced or adapted timetables. In addition to 1:1 or small group support in core subjects, a variety of other activities were sometimes offered, depending on the young person's

interests (business studies, citizenship, car and motorbike maintenance, art, time in music studio). These timetable adjustments often took place in other settings. The personalisation of provision extended to exam arrangements:

For student 27 the SENCO described: *"right exam support for her.. she could leave after a certain amount of time, she didn't have to stay in there. She had a room to herself. We made sure the invigilator was the same;"*

To address attendance with Student 5:

"Slightly delayed start to the day, [name] brings him in through front reception, and he is collected by somebody."

Notably a number of these interventions involved communication with home (usually but not always mum) and also strategies to improve communication between staff and how to respond in particular situations.

Equally examples of schools' individualised strategies with respect to behaviour were identified:

For student 28 the Pastoral Lead described how "*she will deliver bits of paper to me that just.. have swear words written on them that she's wanted to say in the toilet and has just gone "I wrote it down and here it is*".

This not only provides a safe space for her to express her feelings but also teaches her a self-management strategy. This was similarly reflected in the use of report cards that act as a reminder as illustrated with Student 29:

"He has to give it [the report card] into the teacher, he has to explain his targets, every lesson and it just reminds him for that hour, this is what I need to do."

The interventions often included a key worker or advocate, for example the pastoral lead described how she had weekly meetings with student 28, checking in with her on a Monday morning and out again on a Friday during tutor time in order to remind her of what went well for her during the week. The family of student 24 employed an advocacy worker and the pastoral lead described how strong that relationship was because the student trusted him.

School liaison with families was seen as important in developing a joined-up response.

"Mum has sorted out work experience for him"

While the family have been central in forging these links schools also cited a range of other people and services they had drawn on including: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), specialist autism services, substance misuse services, youth workers, working with police and social care.

Case Study of Student 24 in Year 9 with a history of difficulties

Student 24's difficulties had started in Year 7 : *"His Year 7 wasn't good. It wasn't good at all. But then we went into lockdown and that sort of…saved him [laughing], really, ..because he'd had, .14 suspensions in Year 7, up to the spring term, and then, in the autumn term of Year 8, after they came back from lockdown,.. seven suspensions, which is when we put the…alternative provision package in place for him. …basically, …he just wouldn't comply with any instructions. ..There was a physical assault in there, but most of it was persistent disruptive behaviour."*

By Year 8 he was in danger of permanent exclusion. He received a package of alternative provision and in Year 9 was reintegrated back into school. The SENCO expressed the aim for him to avoid permanent exclusion. She described the following package of interventions:

Alternative provision (doing some work remotely).
An individual curriculum plan (ICP).
Space for assessment (CAMHS) and development of treatment plan.
[Thresholds] tracker.
Working closely with Mum.
"He's got a [Needs document]. We have reviewed it. There are some successes. There are…some things that are less successful."
Extra literacy support.
Behaviour support.
ICP continued.
CAMHS reviewed and changed his medication.

His risk of exclusion was seen to be decreasing. He has received fewer suspensions. He has also been given medication for his ADHD. The SENCO described how he was successful in behaviour support and English because they are smaller, calmer spaces. The work that he did with the AP provider also identified that working in smaller groups provides a safer space for him.

Group A Outcomes: De-escalation of Risk

The description of risk as having de-escalated did not imply that it had been conclusively removed, and many staff gave a qualified response in describing the outcomes. Outcomes formed a continuum from a highly positive:

"I know she's going to get through this year and I know that she's going to come out with results" (Student 28).

To a recognition of how the young person still experiences school, as in the case of Student 34:

"Still finds being at school, very, very challenging but far fewer incidents with the police involved…the support workers he has have worked hard to.. disengage him from the gang, and that's had some success."

In deciding on levels of risk there is reference to the number of incidents (or in some cases suspensions) and a weighing up of the level of change. The SENCO described the outcome for Student 24:

"He's not at risk of permanent exclusion. His risk level is… we've managed his risk level, I guess, successfully. What we haven't managed as successfully is his engagement in all learning across the curriculum, and, actually

that's partly a behaviour response but it's also a curriculum response.. and we haven't got the curriculum bit right either."

In addition to careful evaluation this response is also indicative of seeing the schools' responsibility in creating optimum learning opportunities to fully impact on behaviour.

There is also recognition in the description of outcomes of the role of safe spaces, of building relationships, resilience and changing mindsets. All contribute to the recognition of a positive outcome.

Summary of Group A: De-escalation of risk

This was the largest of the three groups that had a higher incidence of young people on FSMs and girls (slightly). The group was skewed towards students in Years 10 and 11. Interestingly 10 of the 15 students in this group were from low excluding schools and a further three from schools that were high excluding but lower than expected. Staff described a range of vulnerabilities, recognizing the crossover between special educational needs (and undiagnosed needs) and behaviour. They also in some instances reflected on positive aspects of their nominated students, including strengths and progress. Aims for this group were predominantly focussed on qualifications and attendance, the last chance for these young people to achieve. For a small proportion of the students the emphasis was on keeping them safe and their health and well-being. In many instances it was clear that interventions were personalised to take account of individual circumstances. A common theme was the use of reduced and adapted timetables and tutoring in core subjects. The setting for this varied. Schools drew on a range of other services, liaised with families and strengthened communication between staff. The role of building relationships was also seen from the young person's perspective for the need for a trusted adult. For the majority of young people, staff were clear that risk had decreased but not disappeared. For some it was a finely judged balance and their inclusion in this group was seen as somewhat precarious.

2.2.2 Group B: Escalation of risk

Levels of risk were considered to have escalated for eleven of the young people between Time 1 and Time 2. These eleven young people attended six schools across LAs 1, 2 and 3. Three schools reported no cases of escalated risk. One school (High/Higher than expected excluding school) reported that risk had escalated for both of their case study students. Of the eleven cases, four (36.36%) attended Low/Lower than expected excluding school, three (27.28%) attended Low/Higher than expected excluding schools and four (36.36%) attended High/Higher than expected excluding schools. The nominations of these young people were evenly distributed across SENCO and Pastoral Leads but with three the risk level was reached in joint interviews.

In terms of demographics, this was a younger group than the de-escalating risk group. Two of the young people (18%) were in Year 7, three (27%) were in Year 8, three (27%) were in Year 9 and three (27%) were in Year 11. Eight were male and three were female. Again, this group were predominantly White British (8) and the remaining three were identified as White British and Turkish, Black, and White and Black Caribbean. Notably none of the young people had an EHCP either at Time 1 or 2, although five received SEN Support (45%). Four (36%) were identified as having no SENs and for two (18%) this information was unknown or unclear. For the five in receipt of SEN Support two were identified as having ASD and ADHD, two were identified as having SEMH and one was identified as having SEMH and ADHD. One of the young people whose SEN status was not clear was also thought to have SEMH needs.

Other demographics were largely consistent with the proportions of the sample as a whole. Six (55%) of the young people were in receipt of FSM, four (36%) were not and one (9%) this information was

unknown. One (9%) young person had previous involvement with children's social care. Six of the young people (55%) had current involvement including one young person on a CP plan, one Looked After Child, three young people where involvement had increased and one where it had decreased. Two young people had no children's social care involvement (18%) and for two this information was unknown (18%). Six (55%) had started their current school in Year 7 and five (45%) had not. All five were male.

One factor that set them apart was their previous schooling history, with five out of the eleven young people not starting their current school in Year 7. Three joined in Year 8 and two in Year 9. Only three (27%) had no exclusion history in that school. Seven (64%) had a history of suspensions, one (9%) had previously been permanently excluded and staff were unclear if another had also experienced permanent exclusion. Nine of the young people (82%) were single registered and two (18%) changed from being single to dual registered between Time 1 and Time 2. Both of these young people had joined their schools in Year 9.

Areas of staff concern for case studies in Group B

Staff descriptions of their concerns for this group of young people revealed that a number of them experienced very challenging home lives and these were set alongside their concerns about the young people's behaviour in school. A number lived in nonconventional and/or changing family units with some experiences of emotional and domestic abuse. Staff described the impact on the young persons' ability to regulate their emotions, to engage with and interact with others and on their feelings of safety and how these factors contributed to explosive, verbally or physically aggressive behaviours. They were seen as vulnerable to exploitation, with reference to drug use, and country lines, but also in some cases posed a risk to others, both "out of control" and "wanting to control." A number of the young people appeared to have never settled in school or understood the social norms that operate within that environment. They are described as missing school, absconding or truanting, wandering around school, disappearing or refusing to go to lessons. In two case staff said that Covid-19 and lockdown had contributed to the disengagement with school and a deterioration in behaviour.

Students in this group are described as having mental health needs, having experienced trauma or in some cases having SEMH needs, with not all of their needs having been met. Unlike group A, their descriptions note few if any positive elements in their lives. One member of staff stated for Student 3 "*This young individual was always going to be a problem.*." because of his earlier experiences.

Aims of staff working with Group B

The stated aims of staff generally focussed on behaviour and attendance. Staff however described these in different ways with some staff mentioning an underlying need. For Student 16 the aim was:

"To modify her behaviour in how she responds to being questioned, in how she carries herself around school, how she interacts with other children. So, modification to her behaviour and show her what the social norms are."

Another member of staff, the Pastoral Lead, described the aim for Student 11:

"So, I think the outcome really is around the emotion, providing them with the emotional language. Ultimately, we want to get to the point where they're able to self-regulate a little bit better. And avoid those situations where they are going to either be sent out in a lesson or their interaction with somebody else means that they are aggressive to someone."

With respect to attendance they wanted to increase the amount of time in school, to be in lessons to make it through a whole school day.

Some stated aims were more aspirational, for example with respect to Student 3 this included: "*to have a positive impact on society; to understand their mentality and how they perceive school*." This aim was reflected in other statements where staff said they wanted a better understanding such as for Student 17:"*to find out more information.. Build a better picture of what's going on in his life.* " This could be pursued through liaising with other agencies, for example through a TAF meeting or MASH referral. One member of staff wanted to communicate the young person's needs with other members of staff to make them more understanding. In two instances (only) there was specific mention of academic learning.

Taken as a whole the aims varied in the extent to which they revealed the path to travel.

Interventions for Group B

As with Group A, staff listed a number of intervention strategies for each case study young person. Using a variety of different strategies, they reduced the demands on the young person. For example, taking a "look" as consent rather than always requiring a verbal response, being more flexible about allowing banned items of clothing. As with Group A staff also spoke about reduced, personalised timetables and alternative curricula.

Staff used both specific interventions for behaviour and more general ones. Some of these aimed to teach the young person alternative ways of expressing and regulating their emotions, for example, the SENCO described how staff in the SEND room worked with Student 14 to find alternative ways for him to express his frustrations. The pastoral lead described giving Student 11 some emotional language to start looking at scenarios, and then thinking about, what and how they feel. Through helping Student 11 to recognise their feelings they could develop tactics to manage their feeling better through for example, taking a minute out to go outside, regulate and then come back in.

Other students were given specific preparation for the day, for example, the SENCO and Pastoral Lead in a joint interview described provision for Student 23:

he used to come into school and the first period he would spend in the Behavioural Support Room with a female member of staff in there in order to help him settle for the day. She would go through what he had and things like that."

Reference was made to specialist input on cognitive therapy, and counselling, although these were not always being effective. Student 13 was also received counselling sessions in school but the SENCO described how they weren't having an impact*,* they were still seeing *"the same outbursts".*

Some of the interventions staff introduced were initially successful but then reduced in effectiveness and in some instances, they had unintended consequences.

"… *dad would drop them off and pick him up from school, but that that has an impact in terms of peers."*

For Student 1 the SENCO described **"***Use of humour and hugs to get her to the [SEND room]. Taking baby steps to get her in. She doesn't really respond to humour now. We've kind of stopped that because obviously, that was what worked at the time. Now, she's defiant and disrespectful to some staff."*

This change in effectiveness was also evident with student 11:

"in terms of those kind of emotional regulation intervention, so they started and actually to start off with, they were really good. And he, we could actually see evidence of him using it in lessons. And so we use that as positive praise to say, Oh, look, you're doing really, really well. You know, and he was able to talk about the volcano effect, and how he would manage himself from here,.. The challenge then came in those times of the day when you don't have that regulation and routine. So the incidents were taking place in breaks and lunchtimes for before school and after school, which were then impacting so we then had to go look at look at an approach to help provide structure to him. And for us, breaking lunch, we don't have really any clubs or anything like that, because there's such short time"

For a number of case study students between Time 1 and 2 staff set on the path to understanding their needs with two young people diagnosed as ADHD and two with ASD. In a further three instances they started the process of applying for an EHCP. These strategies exemplify their concern that these young people have unmet needs.

While the intention may have been to gradually introduce the young person back into a mainstream class, there were few examples of this, many were taught in the SEND room, internal alternative provision or a time out class.

Escalating Risk: Case Study of Student 1: the impact of Covid-19.

Staff described the ways in which Covid-19 had exacerbated the difficulties Student 1 experienced. She really enjoyed home learning during the Covid lockdown and wants to be able to continue working from home. They described her mental health issues at Time 1 not wanting to go to school; having meltdowns; not budging from school entrance; She was been off with Covid for two weeks and the staff worried that she will "go back to ground zero". At Time 2 they described further concerns: **"…**_what's happened now is she's displaying a complete defiance and disrespect to the staff in the [SEND room], which is huge and we haven't seen before, and we're just now working with that."_ Further, _"[Student 1] has now started being quite rude and disrespectful to her mum in front of the head here, doing things like…where you were sitting this morning, threw herself on the floor there, trying to leave the building and, you know, really quite…regressing almost, with some of the, the demands on her. But we haven't really got to the bottom of why she's…that seems to be a trigger at the moment and why"_ Her maths teacher being off was a setback. She is "…at risk of an exclusion for her behaviour."
The staff aim was to get her in the school building and having work supplements. They also wanted to secure outside support.

Intervention Strategies: A range of intervention strategies were described:
   • Use of humour and hugs to get her to the [SEND room]. Taking baby steps to get her in.
   • Taking a "look" as consent rather than always requiring a verbal response
   • Dad/mum dropping her off in the morning
   • Referral for outside support from [Youth information advice and counselling service]
   • Educational psychologist's report. Working with Educational Psychologist to figure out what. to do next.
   • The [SEND room] and work supplements
   • Gradual introduction back into mainstream.
   • Facilitating maths lessons in [SEND room].
   • Allowing her to work in the SEND room if there is a cover teacher or she is feeling unwell.
   • Head of Year had a meeting with Mum and her about being at risk of exclusion.

Additionally, staff were trying to understand what the trigger is. They were exploring whether she had Pathological Demand Avoidance. Participant 1 had given "*Mum information about, PDA, pathological demand avoidance, and I feel that that's an area that we need to explore a little bit with her.*"

…one of the things that we're doing is…sometimes just leaving her… we…needed to avoid, was the negative, anything negative being said to her, because then she would overthink and overanalyse that and that would become huge for her." They had accessed some external support: "*So, the [Outreach Service for Autism Initiatives] practitioner, she observes them in lesson and she observed that she felt very uncomfortable when there was a particular change in the class or when the teacher was directing questions openly. She'd shut herself down. She also mentioned to the [Outreach Service for Autism Initiatives] worker .. [that] she liked to sit in the corner at the back and felt quite safe in that area, so that was one of the things, was actually the sensory details of where she sat and who she was sat by, or mainly, most of the time, if we can accommodate it, a desk on her own, rather than.. they have a desk of two where they share. Those were the type of things that she was able to… Just…they seem tiny, but, to her, they're huge. And obviously, they're related to all the…the teaching staff as well.*"

Outcomes: It got to the point where she will not leave the SEN room.

"*Yeah, she's reduced engagement with the [SEND room], which is a huge positive, where she was literally in there all the time, you know…… she's now coming in with her brother, so we've made progress in that, in that sense.*"

The school have secured outside support which has had a positive impact:

"*[Youth information advice and counselling service] was massive because she then started going to lots more lessons.*"

"*So…it's…you get so far and then it's a kickback.*"

She's changed from self-exclusion to being at risk of formal exclusion due to her behaviour.

Group B outcomes: Escalation of risk

There were clear indications in the outcomes described that behaviour had escalated. There was a sense of frustration that they had tried everything they could without success as with our case study Student 1.

For Student 17 who had been on a reintegration timetable when he started terrorising other students: "*… we're actually no further forward with this boy, other than he's now accessing interim provision at [AP Academy] on a 6-week local authority placement where he's received suspensions for substances and aggression... So we're not anywhere near addressing his needs.*"

With Student 3 they felt a fresh start was needed in AP: " *Their focus and their level of risk has definitely escalated, and it's not from want of trying or putting things in place. It is just purely down to the individual student and their…their drive and focus and how they perceive their journey in education, and, at this moment in time, they're not switched on by education at all.*"

The decisions to permanently exclude was not made lightly for either Student 18 or 17;

Because we don't really want to permanently exclude children, because like [Student 17] who's at [AP Academy] – that's where they're going, and that doesn't solve the problem… It solves the problem for school…, it doesn't address the problem, and you just feel you're pushing vulnerable children away to say we don't want you either, and reinforcing that nobody wants them. So you know yes we're permanently excluding the child who punched you in the face twice – because that's quite an extreme …   .. and you have to draw the line somewhere. But [Student 18] is walking the path that if

he's going to continue the level of violence he's demonstrating he will be permanently excluded to ensure the safety of the rest of our school community"

Safety was often an important element in their decision-making, as with the case of Student 23:

Unfortunately, we didn't see any change in behaviours, despite all that support, and,…his threatening behaviours towards staff, female staff in particular, were such that, .. we took the decision that we couldn't maintain his…provision here because it was…to the detriment and the safety of the staff and the other students that we had. So, he's now at [Name] which is the [LA] PRU."

The decision to exclude was a last resort for Student 23:

".. we didn't have any other avenues left to explore. We didn't have any strategies that we hadn't deployed. We'd had failed managed moves, we'd had failed step-outs, we'd had a period of counselling, we'd had a significant period of externally funded alternative provision, and we were still getting the same behaviours that had started all that intervention in the first place."

Prior to exclusion staff in this instance had engaged in alternative steps to find a different setting through time spent in other schools. Moving to another provision was seen in some instances to be a good thing, as for Student 3, staff said

"You need a fresh start – we'll support you in that process. You need to make that step."

It can also provide a space in which a young person's needs are better observed as staff said for Student 17.

I think probably having more eyes on less children (PRU) has even increased everyone's anxiety even more about him because there's obviously things going on. But you know when you see it in that small venue it's very very clear."

In the case of Student 17 he was withdrawn from school by his parents.

Summary of Group B Escalation of Risk

This was a younger group than Group A with young people from both high and low excluding schools. They included young people who experienced challenging and chaotic homelives, were often missing education and vulnerable to criminalisation and abuse. While none of them had EHCPs at Time 1, staff recognised the possibility of undiagnosed mental health and SEMH and between Time 1 and Time 2 pursued a diagnosis and assessment for an EHCP. Staff expressed aims that largely focussed on behaviour and attendance, and deployed interventions consistent with these, reducing the demands on young people, introducing strategies to change the way emotions were expressed, changing timetables, and educating them outside of mainstream classes. Staff expressed concern and frustration that their strategies had not been successful and where the young person was eventually excluded the decision was not reached lightly**.**

2.2.3 Group C: Same level of risk

Levels of risk were considered to have stayed the same for four young people between Time 1 and Time 2. These four young people attended three schools across three LAs. Two of the schools were High/Lower than expected excluding school and one was a Low/Lower than expected excluding school. Two of the young people had been nominated by SENCOs and two had been nominated by Pastoral Leads.

In terms of demographics, three of the young people were in Year 8 and one was in Year 10. Three were male and one was female. All four were White British and receiving SEN Support. Two were in receipt of FSM, one was not, and for one this information was not known. One young person had previous involvement with children's social care, and another was in a foster placement. One had current involvement which decreased between Time 1 and Time 2 and for one this information was not known. All four young people started at their current school in Year 7. Three had a history of suspensions. For one their exclusion history was not known. All were single registered.

Areas of concerns for case studies in Group C

Concerns for these four young people referred to their behaviour – attention seeking, defiant, impulsive, melt downs, and not being able to control themselves. For two a contributor was seen as their ADHD, and in one case the difficulty of adjusting to secondary schools.

For Student 2 the difficulties in Year 8 were seen to stem from Covid-19: *"he was in a bubble for his Year 7, and our bubbles meant you were in one classroom all day. The teacher came to you. That was…huge for him, a huge trigger for him."*

Staff recognized the impact of an adverse home life:
"I think Student 7's issues are entirely … well not entirely, but completely exacerbated by what happens at home. So I would put money on there being something that's happened at home that we're not aware of that's triggered. And I wonder whether the phases that we experienced before were equally relative to things being tumultuous at home and then things settling again. And I think that perhaps then combined with that transition from child to teenager – we're now just in a very long phase of challenging behaviour from Student 7"

They also demonstrated an understanding of the cross-over of having SEN needs and high numbers of behaviour points. Difficulty in accessing learning was further compounded for one young man by missing a whole term of school.

Aims of staff working with Group C

Aims for all four referred to their behaviour or keeping them in school, or to avoid permanent exclusion, or not to receive any more fixed term exclusions, and improved behaviour. Negative aims are more limited in providing a clear path for positive intervention. One interviewee also indicated the need for an EHCP.

Interventions for Group C

Staff described a number of strategies with respect to behaviour. In one school they made reasonable adjustments responding to the emotional needs of the young person as staff described for Student 7:

if they've just walked into a class and said F-off – that's been a suspension. But if it's the tirade that comes after, we already know she's in crisis, we haven't suspended her for that

In another school they used mind management, but felt it hadn't helped. Others spoke of a combination of approaches "time out, mentoring, reset" and the use of self-reflection.

Outside specialists provided some input, with one young person accessing intervention with a specialist ADHD service. Another young person was given counselling – although absence had limited his access to this.

In another school the link between behaviour and learning needs was clearly addressed through a description of a behaviour plan where the aim was to improve literacy in order to support their engagement in lessons. This was to be achieved through one to one phonics support for Student 32 and a TA in class to help him manage but also take him for timeouts. A teaching assistant was also introduced for Student 2:

"… he was failing maths all the time. Him and this teacher just had a full-on… So, also, what I've put in is a teaching assistant for all his maths lessons now."

Safety issues were also addressed. One school described sending Student 2 home with his mum for his wellbeing and keeping him safe from negative interactions. In another school, a similar concern was addressed in a different way, identifying a safe space within school that the student could go to at break and lunch time to settle before going to class. Separating students was not always successful as illustrated by Student 7:

"when we got to the very final part of Year 8 there became a really toxic friendship with another Year 8 student that had self-harm at the centre of it, really defiant behaviour with regards to parents and to school… Anyway, we got to the point where we decided that the friendship was extremely toxic and that we had a duty of care to try and split them. So, Student 7 is currently in different provision, so our [Internal AP]. So it's onsite, but it is separate from mainstream, to try and separate that friendship. Which has had limited success, but I think we still feel that it's the right thing to make sure that that friendship is not encouraged in any way within the school."

Group C Outcomes: Same levels of risk

There was a recognition within this group that the issues or concerns had not been solved. Although within the group there was evidence of improvement, in two cases recent incidents had indicated that this might be temporary:

For Student 33 *"… the concern remains that we are reaching the end of our resources, but I'd say the mentoring is helping and I'd say he's a little bit more settled, but definitely he still has significant challenges with his behaviour and has had suspensions since January."*

"Moved into internal AP. risk of exclusion is lowered definitely, because their world shrinks and so it's much easier to cope… Student 7 you know, I don't know where we'd go next, so what I think the risk varies is that we probably will have Student 7 back out again, and I think we will end up suspending Student 7 on a number of occasions and what we do next … I don't feel satisfied that we know that we've got something lined up that's going to work… Student 7 – at this moment in time reduced, but that provision will come to a close soon, and what we do next I don't know."

The concerns of these members of staff echo that of the escalating group that there is uncertainty around what strategies they can use or how to access them. There is also some recognition that what has been introduced is a temporary solution. For the oldest of this group, the staff are considering where Student 33 goes next to complete his education:

"the team are considering whether he starts his.. next year, with a bit of a break from us [laughing] to give him a bit of a chance to settle, but I'm not…I'm not sure that that's the right decision. I think we've got two choices: we can have him doing a placement at another school, being …educated [in]off-site provision; or we can look at a placement at the [local AP provider], but I would be quite unsure whether that's the right thing for him… What the [Local AP provider] can offer is a smaller setting with more support, in some ways. They can definitely offer a clear focus on core subjects, rather than a broad focus on all subjects."

There are therefore a number of issues of uncertainty that surround this group.

Summary of Group C: same level of risk

Staff concerns for this group largely centred around the behaviour of these four young people but with a recognition that in some cases these concerns needed to be seen within the context of their home environment and their learning needs. They addressed those needs through a mixture of strategies directed at supporting positive behaviour and meeting their learning needs. Safety issues were also addressed. In a number of ways (use of TAs; safe spaces away from others, provision in SEND/inclusion room) the behaviour of these young people was contained, by separating them from others. In reflecting on the outcomes staff described some positive changes but also identified the limitations and temporary nature of these, and some uncertainty about how to move forward.

2.2.4 Group D: Uncertain level of risk

This uncertainty was reflected in decisions about changes in the level of risk for the final group of four young people, two of whom staff also spoke about the behaviour possibly escalating. The four young people attended one of two schools. One of the schools was a High/Lower than expected excluding school and one was a Low/Lower than expected excluding school. Two of the young people had been nominated by SENCOs and two had been nominated by Pastoral Leads.

In terms of demographics, one young person was in Year 7, two were in Year 9 and one was in Year 10. All four were male. One was White British, one was Pakistani, one was Filipino and one was Mixed Race African. One was receiving SEN Support, two had EHCPs and one was identified as having no special educational needs. One was in receipt of FSM and three were not. One young person had previous involvement with children's social care and had been adopted, one young person had current involvement from children's social care and this involvement had increased between Time 1 and Time 2. The other two young had no involvement with children's social care. Three of the young people had started at their current school in Year 7 and one started in Year 9. All four had a history of suspensions and one had experience of a Managed Move. Two were single registered and two had gone from being single to dual registered between Time 1 and Time 2.

Areas of concerns for case studies in Group D

Issues of safety underpinned the concerns of staff as members of this group were seen to pose a risk to others, for example through their aggressive behaviour and carrying of weapons but were also seen as at risk of exploitation, and in one case radicalisation, due to their involvement with others outside the school. Staff described the young people as experiencing periods of fear, anxiety, psychosis, sexualised behaviour and social emotional needs. One member of staff related issues with identity, another of feelings of shame and having few firm friendships. There are indications of criminality with three of the young men and for two involvements with the police.

Aims of staff working with Group D

Staff concerns are reflected in their aims, two of which relate to understanding the root cause of the behaviour (Student 12) or identifying the young persons' needs in order to provide appropriate support (Student 8). Another member of staff was working with a Student 10 on "*his mental health needs and keeping him in school in a safe place with security and routine,*" another was working with Student 6 simply to keep him in school.

Interventions for Group D

Three of the young people in this group received a package of interventions (Students 6,10 and 12). These included a reduced timetable/curriculum and in one instance the opportunity to opt out of

particular lessons. They received emotional support with two receiving CAMHS support, one counselling and another emotional literacy. As with the previous group there is frequent mention of internal and external AP and quiet spaces away from other students. In one instance mum is consulted. The fourth young man (Student 8) refused to do the "SEND tests" and by time 2 was already full time in AP. The uncertainty with which this decision had been made is reflected in the following quotation with respect to Student 8:

"If you just wear a safeguarding hat, it's the worst thing you could possibly do, right - send him to [AP Academy] with a bunch of students who potentially are going to be up to their eyeballs in exactly what we're worried him being up to his eyeballs in … and we put them all together in one place. But you also then have to weigh up the safety of our community – so many violent incidents in such a short period of time that you could argue we were going to be neglectful for putting him back into our school community when we knew there was no pattern to his behaviour, it was whoever he took a dislike to today, so you couldn't get in front of it. And equally his SEN needs … I think we collectively felt that academically he was weaker because he had been missing so much school. And whilst we thought that there was a need, an undiagnosed need that would have supported him better if it was diagnosed earlier on, I think we all felt like he can access education, it's not that he's not able to access education. So therefore what [AP Academy] can offer Student 8 you know is a good offer, it is a good offer, and it will suit him … and it is suiting him, and he is succeeding there. But yeah, I always do worry when we send students who we're worried about from a safeguarding point of view to go and hang around with other students we've been worried about from a safeguarding point of view."

We can see in this quotation the impact of both missing school and professional uncertainty about the needs of this student that has not been resolved.

Group D Outcomes: Uncertain

As the quotation above illustrates staff expressed uncertainty in relation to the effectiveness of the provision and in relation to meeting the young persons' needs, especially where the mental health needs were so complex or they had been unable to identify an underlying learning need. Even when there were positive aspects to the intervention there was still doubt about the stability of the outcome as staff described for Student 6:

"he's in a routine, there are clear expectations that are not onerous, and you know he's being connected to subject specialists delivering the core curriculum. So, I mean that's a good deal. And you know – does that deal become lessened if you extend the time? So instead of the 12 weeks supposing if it was a 38-week provision? You know would that be effective or not?.. I think it works. Keeping him safe outside of the school environment I think is really difficult, and some people learn not through discourse but through experience, and it may be being brushed up against the law with this might help him and might not.. [he's] going through police processes at the moment. So when we know what happens then .."

Others recognize that there are new risks:

"Student 8 is not going to get suspensions for defiant behaviour, truancy, not following instructions. Where Student 8 is going to be at risk is taking drugs into [AP Academy], or taking a knife into [AP Academy] which … it's really hard for us to predict the likelihood of that, but I'd say that's a real risk."

This was probably the most complex group for staff to evaluate change in risk levels.

Summary of Group D: Uncertain level of risk

This small group of young men posed some of the greatest challenges to staff, partly around the complexity of their mental health needs but also around the risks to their safety and that of others. Three received a variety of interventions around their mental health and a reduction in the timetabling demands. Despite the planned interventions a decision was made for one young man to be placed in AP full time between Time 1 and 2 and another had been referred to AP and a third was in Internal AP. In effect these young men had been removed from mainstream classes.

What accounts for some of the differences in outcome?

Looking first for differences between schools deemed high and low excluding. The numbers of case studies in each of the 4 levels of risk preclude firm inferences from the data but it is notable that three quarters of the de-escalating risk group were from low/HTE schools. In order to understand this further we looked at school level profiles.

	De-Escalating Risk group N=15	Escalating Risk group N=11	Same or Uncertain (N=8)
Low/Lower than Expected N=8	1 (12%)	4 (50%)	3 (38%)
Low/Higher Than Expected N=12	9 (75%)	3 (25%)	0
High/Lower than Expected N=8	3 (38%)	0	5 (63%)
High/Higher than Expected N=6	2 (33%)	4 (67%)	0

Table 3 Changes in Risk and Levels of Exclusion in England.

Turning to school level differences, as Table 4 reveals, a third of the de-escalating risk students came from School 10, a Low but Higher than Expected excluding school. These were judgements made by two pastoral leads and a SENCO indicating that school level factors were important here.

School	De-Escalating Risk group N=15	Escalating Risk group N=11	Same or Uncertain (N=8)
1 N=4		3	1
3 N=4	1		3
4 N=4	1	1	2

5 N=4	2	2	
6 N=2		2	
7 N=4	2	2	
8 N=3	2	1	
10 N=5	5		
11 N=4	2		2

Table 4 Changes in risk at school level in England.

When staff were asked about levels of risk a number were either unclear or gave caveats to their decision. Individuals level of risk could change with one incident and this was evident with some young people who had been responding positively to the interventions but events just prior to the second interview had led staff to re-think the trajectory. Table 5 below compares the demographics of each group and the proportion within the sub-group compared to the whole the group.

	Whole sample N=34	De-Escalating Risk Group N=15	Escalating Risk Group N=11	Same or Uncertain (N=8)
Boys	23 (68%)	8 (53%)	8 (73%)	7 (88%)
Girls	10 (29%)	6 (40%)	3 (27%)	1 (12%)
Gender Variant	1	1	0	0
SENK (Time 1)	22 (65%)	10 (67%)	5 +2?* (45%/ 64%)	5 (63%)
EHCP (Time 1)	5 (15%)	3 (20%)	0	2 (25%)
FSM	18 (53%)	9 (60%)	6 (+1?) (55%/64%)	3 +1? (38/50%)
Social care Involvement	17 (50%)	7 (47%)	7 +2? (64%/82%)	4 +1? (50/63%)
Year 7	3 (9%)	0	2 (18%)	1 (12%)
Year 8	7 (21%)	1 (7%)	3 (27%)	3 (38%)
Year 9	7 (21%)	2 (13%)	3 (27%)	2 (25%)
Year 10	8 (24%)	6 (40%)	0	2 (25%)
Year 11	9 (26%)	6 (40%)	3 (27%)	0
Ethnicity: WB	23 (68%)	11 (73%)	8 (73%)	4 (50%)
Ethnicity Other	11 (32%)	4 (27%)	3 (27%)	4 (50%)

Table 5: Student demographics: Proportion of whole sample compared to proportion in different risk groups in England

*staff member uncertain

The numbers in each category are small so any inferences from the data must be cautious but there are indications that girls form a higher proportion of the de-escalating group than the escalating group. Similarly, with respect to age, there are a higher proportion of older students (Years 10 and 11) in the de-escalating group compared to the escalating risk group. Conversely students with a history of involvement in social care are more highly represented in the escalating risk group, when compared to the whole sample or the de-escalating risk group. Notably the escalating risk group also contained more students who did not start school in Year 7 than other risk groups. Between Time 1 and 2 three young people moved from being registered as SENK to having an EHCP. All three were in the de-escalating group.

Resources: how do the schools access the resources they need?

An analysis of school budgets indicates that school spending per student in England has fallen in real terms since 2009 and this is particularly true for secondary schools and schools in the most deprived areas[14]. The Education Policy Institute estimated in 2022 that costs would increase faster than increases in the rate of funding, which in an average secondary school would mean a cut of £210,000 equating to 3-4 teachers. [15] While school funding takes into account indices of deprivation it does not reflect numbers of pupils designated SENK. Having an EHCP however provides access to additional top up "high needs" funding. There is therefore a particular financial incentive for schools in having students assessed for an EHCP. As financial pressures have increased there has been a rise in the numbers of young people with an EHCP[16].

Staff commented on the financial pressures:

 "..it's more challenging this year, you know, because we do pay a lot of money on our electricity, bills,…... And that does impact, you know, the decisions that you make"

"I've had to beg for money for autism initiatives, for [Youth information advice and counselling service], for educational psychologist – you know, I have to go for the funding, and there's cutbacks everywhere"

This illustrated some of the ways in which a lack of resources increasingly have an impact on school responses to young people at risk of exclusion.

2.3. What do the schools perceive as the barriers and supports to successful intervention?

School systems and structures

Some members of staff talked directly about the difficulty of navigating the culture of the school:

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[14] Sibieta, L. (2021). *School spending in England: trends over time and future outlook.* London: IFS. Available at: https://ifs.org.uk/publications/school-spending-england-trends-over-time-and-future-outlook (accessed: 27 September 2023).

[15] Education Policy Institute (2022) https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/current-estimates-of-school-funding-pressures/

[16] Dfe (2023a) Special educational needs in England https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england

"*.. they need to change their approach, but how do I have that conversation when they're two assistant headteachers who are… they're much more experienced to me, but how do you have that conversation with them without them being defensive?.. they need to change their approach.*"

This member of staff goes on to explain how she actively mediates between young people at risk of exclusion and the actions of others:

"*..as I hear [a duty call] – we have little radios. So, we're supposed to be on a rota, but as soon as I hear the name of one of my kids, [I want to] get up and go to them to try and resolve that situation before somebody creates another issue for them. I mean, they were crying for his head on a chopping board – 'You need to exclude and he needs this…!' Does he really? you know… And I said to the head, 'I'm not giving him an exclusion because our staff were at fault.' He's not having an exclusion because we didn't deal with it appropriately, so I don't feel it's fair.*"

They exemplify how the actions of others increase the risk.

 "*So you have members of staff who understand she will explode, she will swear, she'll kick off. But that's not personal, and so they are skilled enough to see that if we're going to exclude her every time she swears, we're in a, where do you go? Whereas other members of staff who say, will be going, but we were told at the beginning of the year, if you swear at a member of staff, you get excluded. So I want this exclusion. So we're trying to stop that conflict going on.*"

Schools that were less rigid in their approach were seen as enabling:

"*flexibility within the school - that's what kept him going.*"

Many interviewees expressed the need for staff to be more understanding:

"*what worked well with this student was the understanding with all staff, so, you know, in terms of the risk assessment and teachers being able to give the young man the space that needed when he was in crisis*"

They wanted to break the cycle of exclusion and seclusion.

In particular the SENCOs spoke about issues of staffing:

"*we're a massive school… Massively oversubscribed. And they give us kids with incredibly high anxiety, who can't have crowded jostling places and all the rest of it. We've got 20, we've got less than 20 TAs, and we've got over 70 EHCPS, 300 kids on SEND registered …. We haven't got enough classrooms to offer withdrawals or interventions. And interventions aren't inclusion or exclusion. So* the system is *absolutely appalling.... ideally, ..you'd have two SENCOs minimum, you'd have another attendance officer. You'd have, you'd have a lot more support.*"

"*we're really stretched in the SEN department, we don't have nearly enough TAs to do everything that I want to do. You know, we're struggling to meet our legal obligations in Section Fs of the EHCPs, let alone anybody who's just on K. And that's a real challenge, because he's somebody whose behaviour will escalate to the point where we end up writing him another EHCP, because that's the only way we can get him the support. So that's a real challenge.*"

Echoing the literature, SENCOs also spoke about the amount of time they spent on undertaking annual reviews*:*

" I spent 20 weeks this year running annual reviews, which, you know, at the end of the day, what's going to have the most impact on these students…? …. I get why that exists, but it feels now as if it's the paperwork that's driving the process rather than the students."

Given problems with staffing it is perhaps unsurprising that interviewees spoke about the negative impact of supply teachers on young people at risk of exclusion. In part this reflected the difficulty they had with changes in routine and personnel.

On the one hand the issue is seen to be about staffing levels (and the time spent on bureaucracy) but on the other an issue is raised around the demarcation between types of support rather than categories of young people:

'What we need is separate pathways. We need to teach these children with qualified teachers rather than taking them out for ad hoc interventions." We [have/had] fabulous TAs, but they're not the same as a qualified teacher…working together, so, actually, if there's a student who needs this type of intervention, well, that could be run by [Internal AP]. So, rather than these are [Internal AP] children and these are [SEND room] children, it's these are interventions run by [Internal AP] because they fit under this umbrella, and these are interventions… And it's just sharing the resources in the best way.."

Access to specialist support

Lacking access to expertise within the school, staff also spoke about the importance of access to external specialists. There was strong appreciation in one school (L/LTE):

"But we have it so, so good here…is that I can make a referral to a hospital, and within, you know, sometimes sooner than 20, 30 weeks, we've got a diagnosis or an acknowledgement that they're on the pathway.. The information that we get, the training that we get put on, is really, really huge to be able to…for us to then feel confident about what we're providing here for these students because…I'd hate to think if we didn't have those external agencies on board."

"we've had the educational psychologist's report. The young lady would not engage with the EP at all. Mum and dad utilised that time really, really well.. the report was really useful from what the parents see and what we saw as a school. So, they said that she was really struggling with anxiety and was quite overwhelmed really.. and gave us a couple of strategies to think of, which we did, but also, …confirmed what we were doing, so that made us feel competent in that we were doing the right thing, you know."

As we can see from the previous quotations staff are looking for a diagnosis that explains the behaviour as well as guidance on what type of support is appropriate:

"I think it has been helpful for him to have the ADHD diagnosis and the treatment and the medication around that, which has changed some of the impulse behaviours, or lessened some of the impulse behaviours, but it's always about the package, isn't it?"

One of the challenges that staff raised was the delay in a young person accessing CAMHS but also the knock- on effect of having to delay access to other forms of mental health support:

"..we couldn't have a situation where he was potentially going to be seen by a CAMHS counsellor and one of our counsellors as well, so we had to wait for CAMHS to say, no, we're not going to…counsel him… And the…the delay is significant.."

They also expressed frustration that they received no report from CAMHS due to patient confidentiality. The challenges of working across agencies are discussed further below.

Many schools had developed their own alternative provision but there were limitations in what this could provide. Specialist support can also be seen as teaching in areas such as mechanics, construction, hairdressing, subjects that can lead to work experience as well as alternative qualifications. Staff also identified a number of advantages to accessing other environments.

"college gave her a totally different environment- no bells or uniform, treated as adult, first name terms with tutor.. "

The lack of alternatives included a lack of special school places and one member of staff described the outcome of this as having to package together a number of alternatives which in her view could best be described as "containment".

Working with other agencies

Challenges with the interface with CAMHS was echoed in the frustrations of working with other agencies who also had different thresholds for intervention:

"..we often don't feel like she's safe, and we often feel it is our duty to call the police. And we are often told that we shouldn't be calling the police and wasting their time, and we are often told that she doesn't meet the threshold for the particular incidents that we've reported.."

"… there have been some difficulties recently where our feeling about where our student is at in terms of certain things going on in their life, has been very different to one of the external agencies that we're working alongside with them.."

There were positive comments about the preventative work that some police contributed but also a demand for more intervention:

"..a challenge to the police, I think, you know, they will do preventative work from the perspective of assemblies, they may pick up the child to have a chat with, but in terms of a programme of interventions, we don't have access to that.."

A number of the barriers that staff encountered raised the issue of their expectations of other agencies, and the extent to which current systems facilitated communication about what schools and other services could be expected to provide:

"..we need other agencies to step up and take part and if necessary fund."

In complex cases however it may not be clear where the responsibility lies:
"..it's out of our control. What we want to try and control, it's his lifestyle and it's what he's getting involved with in the community.. But when you're in these meetings, it is very much about safety at this – given the context of what he's doing now, but also, these agencies have got to be in communication with each other and we've got to make sure that we're all speaking regularly and we're updating what we're doing and where we're up to and what [Student 1] is about and where he is."

This sense of frustration is echoed elsewhere in staff perceptions of what is happening:

"It's now become a CP [child protection] case, so it's elevated quite quickly. So, there are a lot of professionals involved, and it's the old – every professional is saying that the responsibility lies somewhere else."

"…it felt very much as if it was a covering backs exercise – which sounds really cynical, doesn't it, … It's just that, independently, we've all reached the end of what we're capable of doing, and there's

been no sense of…let's work together to understand. I think the biggest problem is that there is nowhere for her to go to receive the education that she needs, and I think that's… We're trying to make her fit here, and in doing so, probably exacerbating the issues that she's already got."

Relationships with the family

Staff comments on the relationship between school and family was central to the effectiveness of intervention and therefore a barrier when communication broke down and an enabler when both were working together. This highlighted the need for understanding the situation from the home perspective:

"Mum, to begin with was extremely supportive when we were trying to improve his behaviour. …it did get to the point, if I'm honest, where there were times – I remember there was two or three times where we needed to get that student out the building because of some…it was quite threatening behaviour, intimidating behaviour, but we couldn't contact mum – she wouldn't pick up the phone. She was out at the time and she didn't want to come back from being out. But, as a parent, I suppose, if every day that your son or daughter goes to school, you're just waiting for that phone call, it must be a…a not very nice feeling...."

Staff talked about the importance of weekly or, in some instances, daily communication with the home (or foster home), making home visits and other activities that bridged the home school gap:

"...you know as always it's bridging what happens at home with what happens in school – you need people physically to go into the home and to bring them into school, creating that golden bridge. I mean we just don't have the staffing for it, I mean it's as simple as that. But we are always thoughtful that we understand his school experience from his own perspective, and we feel that we've got sufficient members of staff that he feels comfortable with that he can talk through."

"We won't get to the point with this student being permanently suspended, permanently excluded, because of the things that are in place and because she's in such a supportive care home now that that will have…you know, that we'll work with…we can work with that foster care home to make sure that provision is right."

2.4 What are the implications for policy and practice?

The young people nominated by the SENCOs and Pastoral Leads as being at risk of exclusion presented a complex set of circumstances that brought a number of uncertainties for staff. This was evidenced in a number of ways. Firstly, in the search by staff for more information, often evidenced in the assessment for an EHCP or diagnosis and consequent reliance on specialists to provide them with guidance. Secondly, in the evaluation of changes in risk, and a sense that, for some young people, "trouble" could erupt at any time. Thirdly, in staff decisions about the way forward, whether this was to another form of provision, or about future strategies and a sense of the situation being out of their control; a feeling that there was nothing more they could do.

It was notable that the largest group were those individuals whose risk was perceived as de-escalating group. Contrary to providing evidence for the effectiveness of early intervention, this was an older group for whom staff had a more urgent and focussed aim for their educational achievement. For the escalating group, the expressed aims were largely about behaviour and attendance. These aims in many ways serve as pre-requisites on the path to other outcomes. Further, they could be seen as much as aims for the school as aims for the student. They are indicative of the need for a much closer communication with the young person, and their vision for the future- at a much earlier age. There were instances of staff positively describing students and

their particular strengths but these occurred in the de-escalating group. These comments were indicative that staff had formed a positive relationship with these young people.

We can contrast this closeness, to the comment made by one member of staff about the size of the school and having 300 young people on the SEN register. This creates two areas of difficulty around communication and the flow of information. There was often a separation between those who operationalise the interventions and those members of staff we spoke to whose role was managerial and strategic. This was evidenced in the uncertainty with which interviewees could report on some of the key demographics. Where teaching assistants carried out the interventions, knowledge of their effectiveness and the need for adaptations is handled by the least qualified members of staff, and schools need a reporting structure to ensure that they are given appropriate support and training. The interviews revealed that there was no golden bullet or single intervention strategy that was effective. The complexity of student need called for a range of strategies that were personalised to reflect students' strengths and interests as well as designed to meet their differing needs and circumstances. As the latter changed, so the strategies needed to be altered often calling for decisions to be made "on the ground." This calls for a level of knowledge, experience and skill, both to evaluate changes in the effectiveness of a particular strategy and to identify changes in need and appropriate adaptations. This has implications for schools' staffing structure and with whom the expertise lies.

There were a number of instances where the interviewed staff had pro-actively supported classroom teachers in understanding and re-interpreting behavioural incidents in their classroom. These lines of communication enable the use of reasonable adjustments for individual students. They are one step along the path to a more inclusive school. The interviews however also revealed the frustrations of the interviewed staff about a broader phenomena, the culture of the school, that worked against the inclusion of these young people at risk. Interactions with particular members of staff could trigger more extreme forms of behaviour rather than serve to defuse situations. There were constraints voiced about the extent to which they could reasonably expect staff to make individual adjustments. Intervention strategies therefore typically occurred outside the mainstream classroom with often no clear aim for how and when that would enable transfer to the mainstream class.

Schools identified a lack of alternative provision, including a lack of special school placements but the growth in this sector serves only to confirm an expectation that schools can and should only meet a fairly narrow range of student needs, rather than the diversity indicated by the descriptor mainstream.

It is important to recognize here the vital contribution made by a member of staff forming a strong relationship with a member of the student's family or their carer. This can be challenging for schools especially where the home background is fragile or unstable, and the expectations on both sides are limited. Skilled staff that are part of the community and have an understanding of the family history have a vital role to play. Schools would benefit from reviewing their policies for home school liaison and the lines of communication to other key members of staff. Staff frustrations with their involvement with outside agencies also calls for a review of communication strategies.

The trajectories of these young people evidence the complexity of their needs that calls for professionals working collaboratively across different disciplines. The presence of different thresholds for intervention that operate across different agencies requires some cross-agency review and analysis to identify gaps and indicate priorities for future provision.

3 Case Study Students in Northern Ireland

Gareth Robinson

3.1 Introduction

This case study reports on the Northern Ireland specific findings emerging from the B1 work package of Excluded Lives. It will present the perceptions of school professionals on students' risk of exclusion, the strategies and interventions used in reference to this risk, and their effectiveness in mitigating risk.

In Northern Ireland (NI), the in-school responsibility for students with additional (behavioural and academic) or special educational needs (SEN) is typically entrusted to pastoral care leads (PCLs) and/or special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs). We interviewed seven staff members occupying these positions, across four of our core schools.[17] In all but one, both PCL and SENCO were interviewed together. Each staff member was interviewed at two time points. They identified eight young people who they deemed to be vulnerable to, or at risk of, school exclusion, and offered data on the change in circumstances of the young people between interviews. This is a small number of cases relative to the other jurisdictions included in Excluded Lives and is reflective of the availability of the core schools involved in NI at the time.

The process of categorising schools in NI is arguably more complex relative to the other jurisdictions, as the structures of its education system are organised in a way that reflects the wider historical divisions of the society. Young people are seen to be divided along lines of religion, ability, and gender by a number of long-standing structural mechanisms. While schools are managed by a single education authority, there are a number of sectoral bodies that represent the interests of different school types, each with their own degrees of authority. In this case study, our educational settings are organised according to management types: *Catholic Maintained* (n=1), *Controlled* (n=2), or *Integrated* (n=1). All of these settings are mainstream, non-selective, post-primary schools. No cases are reported from alternative providers.

This report broadly groups the young people that participants identified as vulnerable and at risk of exclusion into three categories. These are *Group A* – young people whose risk was seen to be de-escalating, *Group B* – young people whose risk was seen to be escalating, and *Group C* – young people whose risk broadly stayed the same. The change in level of risk is presented in Table 6 and can be broken down by management type and whether the school had a HIGH, VARIABLE, or LOW rate of exclusion.

School ID	Management Type	Rate of Exclusion	Group A n=2 De-escalating risk	Group B n=3 Escalating Risk	Group C n=3 Risk level about the same
1	Controlled	Low	-	1	1
2	Catholic Maintained	Low	1	1	-
5	Integrated	Variable	-	-	2

[17] We were unable to access a SENCO or Pastoral Lead from schools two core schools, due to extended sickness.

| 6 | Controlled | Low | 1 | 1 | - |

Table 6 Change in the Level of Risk, Northern Ireland

Staff members stated during their second interview that the level of risk for two young people had decreased, the perceived level of risk had increased in three of the cases and stayed about the same level in a further three cases.

Characteristics of the Young People

The staff members we interviewed reported on the cases of eight young people, deemed to be at risk of and vulnerable to school exclusion, with whom they had been working within their four respective schools. Most of these cases involved young males, one referred to a female student, and another who was non-binary. At the time of interview, the students were at various stages of their post-primary education, with two from each year group: year 9 to year 12. Nearly all of the students had been enrolled in their respective schools since year 8[18], whilst one young person had transitioned to their school in year 9 with little information about their primary education. Three young people had formal statements for support: two for socio-emotional behavioural difficulties (SEBD) and one specified as being for SEBD, wellbeing, dyslexia, and a medical condition. One young person had an ASD diagnosis, but no statement. Another young person was said to be on the school's own SEBD register as there was a query around ASD, but no formal statement of support. Three of the presented cases had no statements in any form. Six of the young people were involved with or known by social services, with four being care experienced. Only one of the reported cases had never involved suspensions, while seven had been suspended at least once. The majority of these were for low-level, persistent behavioural transgressions. Across the sample, there were varying levels of engagement with alternative provision (Education Other Than at School [EOTAS]); only one student was confirmed as dual registered, while the remaining seven were singularly registered with their respective schools, at the time.

Information on FSM was only provided for three of the cases; two were entitled to meals, while one was not. Similarly, the staff members provided limited information on the ethnicity of students.

3.2 Findings

Data from both T$_1$ and T$_2$ interviews have been analysed and used to present the subsequent findings on the trajectories of the student cases. Where relevant a vignette has been included to evidence each point and provide context. We will discuss each of the three categories of risk and vulnerability to exclusion has changed, separately, before looking more broadly at some of the implications of what has been reported.

Across all the cases presented by staff members, there was a common aim of ensuring that the students had 'academic currency' by the time they left school, whether by acquiring qualifications, improving their engagement with studies, or attendance. Staff members described a range of interventions and strategies that were designed to regulate behaviour in such a way that enabled or encouraged the young people to positively change the trajectory of their educational outcomes.

Academic Currency

Student 1:

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[18] The post-primary phase in Northern Ireland begins with year 8, at age 11-12.

"And we sort of talked about, you know, the way things were going to go in terms of ourselves and linking in with EOTAS. Mum was actually quite happy, and she saw that this was possibly the best option in terms of, you know, keeping him in an educational environment."

Learner 4:

"Student 4, ideally we would like to see them through to the end of Year 12 in school, er, and – [...] Well, capable of achieving their GCSEs, potentially, if we can, you know – [...] I mean, that child potentially could do A-Levels, couldn't they, if, if we managed to... you know?"

Student 6:

"[...] ensure that [Student 6 name] has access to at least five GCSEs, including English and maths."

Student 7:

"[...] Because we, we have to think about this as a Year 11 child now so we have to think about getting them some currency from school, getting them some grades, and when... you know, we're at the end of the first half-term and really probably they haven't put pen to paper for eight weeks, you know, and it's not Key Stage 3 anymore, it's... I would call it the business end of school, we have to get this child some qualifications, and our concern would be that if we keep on going the way that we're going now they've going to leave school with nothing, which... you know? And they have talked about having ambitions, talked about wanting to be like a tattoo artist or running their own business or something within arts so they do have their own ambitions but [...]"

3.2.1 Group A: De-escalation of Risk

The young people located within this category are those who were observed as seeing a de-escalation in their level of risk between interviews. However, while they are located within this category, it is important to note that the change in their risk level was not conclusive. One young person (student 3) was described as having improved educationally, in terms of their work, but was still presenting with problematic behaviours outside school. The second case (student 7) was reported as having improved academic performance with 'no suspensions and no negative incidents'—but there was uncertainty with the stability of this situation as the staff members were about to reintegrate the student from nurture provision into mainstream classes. It was evident that despite de-escalation, both student cases remained very complex.

Vulnerabilities and Support Needs

Both of the students in group A were described as being care experienced, having been in family or foster placements. The perception of staff members was that the respective students had challenges in building and managing positive relationships with peers and adults. In some instances, their relational behaviours had raised safeguarding concerns for peers. Moreover, these behaviours were seen as spilling over into challenges with classroom routines and behaviours. For that reason, the staff indicated that both students needed support to address attachment issues, and that smaller group provision and constant monitoring of impacts were required. One of these students was identified as being in a crisis situation during the first interview with staff members.

Student 7: Managing Friendships

"And then this year, more so than last year, the friendship thing. So he is really struggling with friendships and again, it is about, there's a bit of control and then there's a bit of wanting everybody to really like him."

Only one of these two students had a statement – this was stage 3 and included a medical condition – although the second student had recently started the process of statementing with queries around ASD. Both students were identified as needing significant support with SEBD, with only one entitled to formal support for a classroom assistant. The school of the second student had found ways internally to share the provision of classroom assistants amongst both statemented and non-statemented students who were in need of support. The adequate provision of supports was one of the ongoing barriers to successful intervention that we encountered.

Student 3: Lack of / Delays in Supports

"[...] With Student 3 moving into GCSE we had… I'm also still awaiting the statement. Our feeling was that if we had applied for an EOTAS placement for this student with the panel sitting last week they probably would've come back and said, "You're waiting on the statement and you haven't got the advice from that yet, you need to wait for that advice to come before we can offer a placement," so that…"

"[...] And, once again, I know I've already raised the sort of lack of hours that we get but even thinking about following the ASD route and support we can get there, you know, I've exhausted that as far as I can because I need Ed Psychology to, to refer – [...]"

"And, you know, we've, we've gone out to them and said that the problem is – and [Name] maybe said to you – is that there's a huge gap between, umm, the panel meetings for EOTAS [...] but this child unfortunately hasn't found things easier and so now we're in a position where the, the next panel meeting is 18th December – it's a long time to wait with a child that's completely, you know, in crisis, umm, and that's… you know. And so obviously, you know, we've gone and asked for an interim placement but, umm, you know, that's because… You know, [Name] would be good at doing that and you'd be good at going to these services and saying, "Look, I know that this is not when your panel is, but we need this" rather than just saying, "Okay, it's 18th December," rolling over and just dealing with it being 18th December."

Aims of staff working with Group A

Given the family context of both cases presented within this group, the intention of staff members was to break the cycle of low educational outcomes due to adverse childhood experiences. This is relevant to the notion of trajectories and risk as it suggests that intervention through education can alter the course for these young people. Staff members also looked very specifically at the unique behavioural patterns of both students, respectively, to decide what the best course of action would be and tailored their aims for working with the students in group A according to their vulnerabilities and needs.

In the case of both students one of these objectives was to build positive relationships, and for student 7, this included classroom assistants. The key aim for staff members working with student 7 was to address the manifestations of attachment issues including building better communication skills.

Student 7: Communication Skills

"So, I know he was working with, um, this pupil on communication. That communication that, um, you know, he created, and this was part of, and actually it's what he needed. You know, what he needed to learn to communicate and accept communication two-way and all of that. So he's been doing that with him and that's been ongoing."

For the staff members working with student 3 their aim was to acquire the appropriate therapeutic supports to address the complexity of the case. Their initial aim—having recognised that the school could not provide what was needed—was to secure a partnership arrangement for the student through EOTAS.

Student 3: EOTAS Placement

"So, we're at the stage now where we feel that an EOTAS placement at Key Stage 4 for this particular child is probably the best thing. Because we, we have to think about this as a Year 11 child now, so we have to think about getting them some currency from school, getting them some grades, and when… you know, we're at the end of the first half-term and really probably they haven't put pen to paper for eight weeks, you know, and it's not Key Stage 3 anymore, it's… I would call it the business end of school, we have to get this child some qualifications, and our concern would be that if we keep on going the way that we're going now they've going to leave school with nothing, which… you know? And they have talked about having ambitions, talked about wanting to be like a tattoo artist or running their own business or something within arts so they do have their own ambitions but […]"

Interventions: what interventions are schools using and why?

In both cases, the staff members can be seen to apply a range of interventions aiming to alter the trajectories of these students in their education. The staff in school two described five different interventions, while school six noted fourteen in total, all listed in Table 7.

School	Student	Interventions
2	3	Stage 1b Behaviour Intervention
		Key Adults
		School SEBD Register
		Modified Timetable
		Coordinating External Services
6	7	SEN Route Over Pastoral
		Full Time Nurture Provision
		Lower Ability Set for Additional Support

Learning Support – Structured Time

One to One Engage Teacher

Stretch and Challenge

Lunch Out of School

Reward Periods

Phasing Back

Reduced timetable

Movement Passes

Ad hoc Removals from Class – Timeouts

Report

Student Contract

Table 7 Group A Interventions, Northern Ireland

Common to both settings was an attempt to modify the timetables of the students but there were variations in the ways the respective staffs described this. In school two, the staff talked about how they would look to modify the timetable without reducing it by including 'rest breaks', the use of a wellbeing room, and opportunities for the young person to decide when they needed 'time out'. The staff in school six described an initial 'reduction of timetable', which was highlighted as unusual for the school, and the student having their lunch at home, before moving into the school's internal nurture provision fulltime[19]. Similarly, school six also offered their student time outside the classroom by using 'movement passes'. The strategies highlighted to support this student were said to be in place to provide structure, compliance with rules, and promote routine within their school day.

> **Student 7: Reduced Timetable**
>
> "But we did go there - reduced timetable - for him, and we…we started quite reduced. And we, we normally, we don't do that, and we don't like reduced timetables at all. But we felt for him it needed to be really his day was really short and that he had an incentive to want to build it up. Because he wanted to be in school, he really didn't enjoy this. Um, and because he'd had sort of lockdown the year before, you know, it was that was bothering him that come back to this home learning. Um, and we did provide home learning for him, he wasn't going home to do nothing. So, but he did build back up. So I think we went, it was from Halloween to Christmas actually, that it took him to build."

It was clear that the range of interventions had been applied over a longer time period and did not occur simultaneously. Staff were cycling through different approaches and strategies to find one, or a combination of these, that were appropriate to the changing needs and contexts of their students. In some instances, across all the groups, an intervention or strategy would work for a certain length of time before it became ineffective. For student 7, in group A, this was seen in how their relationships

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[19] It should be noted that this was not a registered AP unit within the school, but the school had used internal budgets to meet the needs of pupils who required smaller group settings.

with classroom assistants and other staff members played out. They would often breakdown over a period of time.

In both cases, the staff members stated the short-term target for their students as being 'reintegration' into mainstream classes or education. However, this aim would only be reachable in combination with additional supports. For student 3 this included the need, as perceived by the school staff, for therapeutic interventions and the additional leverage that would be provided by a formal statement, so they could apply for alternative provision.

Group A Outcomes

The staff members had pursued a partnership arrangement with EOTAS for student 3, believing that this was the optimal arrangement according to their needs and in line with their school's ethos, values and aim of keeping the pupil within school. However, this EOTAS model was unsuccessful and rejected by the student. At the time of the second interview, they had moved to EOTAS full time. The SENCO and PCL suggested that student 3 was now in the right place to de-escalate their overall level of risk as they would now have access to appropriate therapeutic supports. However, they also conceded that student 3's risk had only de-escalated in terms of their educational outcomes improving and now having the opportunity to focus on studying for technical qualifications. While an EOTAS placement for student 3 was seen as being in their better interests, there was also a recognition that their interactions with the school had now changed but a sense of belonging seemed to remain, albeit a very tenuous one.

> ***Student 3: Full Time EOTAS Placement***
>
> "So, yes, we've had a lot of change in school. So, the... child 3 is now at EOTAS full time […] And obviously there was... there was... obviously there was a lead-up to that, you know, but in the present day that child is attending EOTAS full time."
>
> "I suppose it's reduced in terms of the potential of educational attainment because if child 3 had stayed with us, they probably wouldn't have achieved any qualifications I think is the first point because they were never in class anywhere. When they weren't in class, they weren't doing anything, you know. So, I think it's reduced in that respect. Unfortunately, life outside of school is still very, very difficult and there is ongoing concerns with Social Services and police, and so actually that reduce... that risk has not reduced and it would be my concern that that's, you know, that's the difficulty here. But I do think the move to EOTAS was the right move to ensure that this particular child gets the support that they need to achieve qualifications."

The staff in school six reported that since moving to the internal nurture unit full time, there had been no negative incidents, nor suspensions in the case of student 7. They stressed the need for constant monitoring of targets set with the student, but that communication, literacy, and overall academic performance had improved. This was in recognition of how early it was in the process of what would need to be a much longer-term framework of supports for the student, while they began reintegration into mainstream classes.

> ***Student 7: No Negative Incidents***
>
> "No suspensions […] No negative incidents. We would track his targets then in the nurture provision and then as he integrates back into classes, he would have specific targets that we're tracking him

on, and he's meeting them, massively. He's now very highly back in his class, he's been reintegrated quite successfully."

"[…] to be honest, it is in its early stage, and the progress that the students have made is not built on better teaching of literacy and numeracy, it's not, you know, it's built…it had to be built on something else, and I think it was their self-esteem, their self-confidence, that once those basic needs were met, when they approached their standardised tests, they had more confidence, they took it more…they just applied themselves better to the test, and then what was actually in there, their ability, was then reflected. I don't think it's that they've made that academic progress in the last eight months. I think it's that emotionally, they've made loads of progress, which now allows them to show where they are academically. And that's not criticising the curriculum or the level of teaching on it, it's not, it's just I think it's a bigger picture, and I think the amount of progress that two of them made can be put down more to the emotional progress."

Summary of group A

In both cases, the students were taken out of mainstream classes and placed into pathways that offered additional supports in smaller group settings. One was accepted into EOTAS full time, while the other remained in school within a nurture unit before the staff began reintegration into mainstream classes. They both used mechanisms that permitted the students to be outside the classroom during teaching periods. This has an impact on the contact time they would have with studies, which may be seen as problematic. However, the school staffs were making a decision based on the students' unique needs to justify this form of informal exclusion.

While the staff members described how the cases in group A had de-escalated their risk of exclusion, the measure by which this happened is not conclusive. In the first instance, as reported above, the pupils would be outside the classroom often and so could be seen as within an enabled cycle of informal exclusion. Second, assessing the trajectory or change in risk is more complex than simply a binary, increase or decrease. The staff reported an improvement in some aspects of the young person's case, but that work was still to be done in other areas, or that things could yet change. As such there is an element of instability in the status of group A students—being in group A doesn't necessarily mean the students would remain in group A, unless supports continued.

3.2.2 Group B: Escalation of Risk

The three students categorised as being within group B are those who were observed as seeing an escalation in their level of risk between interviews. One young person's (student 2) situation was described as having become 'dramatically worse' due to their situation outside school. The second case (student 4) was reported to have left the school in which we interviewed staff, but their understanding was that the student had since been suspended elsewhere. While the third case (student 8) within this group was unique—they had never been suspended—but their level of risk and vulnerability was recognised by staff members, and they had increasingly become involved in 'risk taking behaviours' outside school, which were starting to affect school performance.

Vulnerabilities and Support Needs

Each of the three students were reported as having different backgrounds to one another and very different presentations of behaviour. Two were male, one female, and each had their own challenges

with their families. One of the male students (student 2) was care experienced and living in a children's home at the time of interview, while the second male student (student 4) was said to have no consistency or boundaries at home. The female student (student 8) had a parent who had allegedly been caught up in criminal activity and so there had been a breakdown of the family unit[20].

Student 2 was seen as having challenges that related to attachment, with a lack of consistent adult relationships and parental support, which had developed into a suspicion of adults. This had then presented as patterns of school refusing and negative behaviours that had led to suspensions in junior school.

> ### Student 2: Lack of Trust
>
> "He has huge social difficulties in terms of maintaining a friendship group, and I believe that comes back to trust issues that he has across the board. He is now in a situation whereby he has been involved with the PSNI on multiple occasions, he is no longer living in the family home, he is now in a children's home."
>
> "I'm even thinking actually in terms of having go-to people when he goes into school, because that would be a massively challenging area for a member, for a member of staff to actually to gain sort of a level of trust with him."
>
> "[…] no support whatsoever from home. None. If we rang, it was our fault or again, as I said, ended up voluntarily giving away the parental rights."

Student 4 was stated as having a 'privileged middle-class' home life, who had reportedly arrived at the school with reports of problematic behaviour during primary. There had been problems with disruptive behaviour and the staff members stated that the student struggled to self-regulate emotions as behavioural triggers tended to escalate very quickly, which had frequently led to a breakdown of relationships. These triggers were often unclear. The student had been diagnosed with ASD during COVID and the school had since been looking to make the case for additional supports through statementing.

> ### Student 4: Self-Regulation
>
> "I guess then we started to see that this child would really have struggled with, I suppose, escalation in that it would go from being a small issue to a massive issue very, very quickly […] something quite small just would've gone huge. Umm, and we would've had incidents of like chairs being flipped, tables being flipped, uniform being ripped off and stuff being kicked and verbal abuse of staff and that sort of thing and really it was just one of those, umm, examples of a child who just when he's not regulated just really struggles to bring himself back down."

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[20] For the purposes of anonymity this report will not include any further details on this student's family situation.

Student 8 had no history of SEN nor a history of behavioural difficulties, but staff had concerns primarily around their growing lack of motivation and disengagement from school. Staff had observed changes to their wellbeing with a drop-in mood, they started to appear unhappy and disengaged, and there were some issues with substance misuse. Their friendships were also observed as being intense and prone to breaking down, which staff had seen as affecting the student's confidence and trust. The biggest concern to the staff members was that student 8 had found themselves negatively influenced by an older peer group outside school. It was conceded that the school lacked the specialist capacity to offer student 8 the necessary support and there was a need to rebuild a connection between the student and the school.

> ### Student 8: Risk-Taking Behaviour
>
> "[…] at that stage there was very little behavioural difficulties actually within classrooms. She was probably on the surface appearing to cope well or behave well, but actually I think she was really unhappy and was just disengaging from everything. Um, that kind of led to at risk behaviours with substance issues […]"
>
> "[…] you felt no matter what you were saying or trying to do to help her, you weren't really getting through. You couldn't build that relationship. She was just totally disengaged. So, she was quite a… she was really sad."

Aims of staff working with Group B

Staff had different aims for each of the three students in group B, which is unsurprising, as the behavioural issues in each had presented quite differently. The only common objective reported by staff was their intention of making sure the three students received adequate qualifications before leaving formal education.

> ### Student 4: Academic Currency
>
> "Ideally we would like to see them through to the end of Year 12 in school, er, and […] Well, capable of achieving their GCSEs, potentially, if we can, you know […] I mean, that child potentially could do A-Levels."

For student 2, who had significant challenges with trust and maintaining relationships, the staff were focusing on building confidence and self-esteem, with the intention of seeing a result in their socio-emotional development. The staff members spoke of this work providing the foundation upon which they could later focus on improving the student's academic outcomes. Whilst time was not mentioned explicitly, it was suggested that small, incremental steps would be taken with this student over a prolonged period.

> ### Student 2: Confidence / Re-Integration
>
> "The rationale for this kind of work with these kinds of interventions was about […] young person's confidence, struggling with social and emotional behaviour and you wanted to continue

sort of in the home to sort of positively engage him, maintain his key skills in around numeracy and literacy and a phased and then a full reintegration back into school."

The main aim for student 4 was to prepare him for life outside school. This was based on the staff members' observations that this particular student had a tendency to clash with peers, because of incompatible relational behaviours and immaturity. For that reason, the staff had been focusing on supporting the student with strategies to manage emotions and build positive relationships, but these had frequently been dismissed or rejected. Staff were keen for student 4 to recognise that once school ends the support structures around them will be very different.

Student 4: Embracing Strategies

"And just even they, you know, embrace strategies, you know, 'cos that escalation of temper is going to be there whenever they leave school. Just even that they're, they're being given strategies or embracing the strategies to manage that."

In the case of student 8, the staff members were aiming to reduce risk-taking behaviours outside school, which would hopefully then improve engagement within the classroom and school. It was acknowledged that this would be particularly difficult as the school lacked the specialist resource required by this student. They were hoping to involve the student with therapeutic interventions to support them emotionally.

Student 8: Therapeutic Intervention

"[…] my wish would be that they would engage with some meaningful therapeutic intervention that's beyond our specialism, that would actually bring about the meaningful change for them, that we probably won't reap the benefits of, because none of that work is actually going to be quick or fast. I genuinely think she needs a relationship with a very specialised therapist that she trusts, that's going to remain invested in her long-term, that will work through some of that stuff for adulthood."

"I think it's beyond our capacity […] So I do. I think we're trying our best with…but even all our pastoral supports that we have in school, she would be way beyond that too. I do think that she needs specialised therapeutic stuff."

Interventions: what interventions are schools using and why?

The PCLs and SENCOs from the three schools reported 14 unique interventions used with the group B students (see Table 8). Two of the schools were working on securing their student a placement within EOTAS, respectively, and two also described using modified timetabling with their student.

School	Student	Interventions
1	2	Exceptional Teaching Arrangement (ETA)
		EOTAS Application
		Strategic Timetabling
		Tailored Entry/Exit
		Formal & Internal Suspensions (Cool-downs)
2	4	Stage 1B Intervention Targets
		Don't Make Small Things Big
		What's Appropriate, What's Not Appropriate?
		Are You a Friend Magnet?
		Generalise Instructions
6	8	Mindfulness Club
		Addiction Recovery Programme
		Take Ten App
		Modified Timetable
		EOTAS Partnership Arrangement
		Family Support Worker

Table 8 Group B Interventions Northern Ireland

In the case of student 2, the portfolio of interventions used by the school was intended on building their capacity for reintegration to the classroom and supporting the student to 'manage load'. This began with giving more structure to routines through modifying timetables and thinking more strategically about the student entering and exiting the classes and the school. The staff acknowledged the use of 'cool-down' periods, which they also referred to as a form of internal suspension. They also observed that this student had responded better to one-to-one conversations and tuition, so an 'exceptional teaching arrangement' (ETA) was sought, with the intention of building evidence for an EOTAS placement. Part of the rationale for this work with student 2 was informed by safeguarding concerns for both staff and peers—tuition in smaller, non-classroom settings was seen as less triggering for student 2.

> **Student 2: ETA – EOTAS**
>
> "[…] after a number of applications, we made to ETA, he got the five hours' tuition a week. And that was kind of the first step for us in a reintegration plan back into school […] Now it sort of became apparent as time went on that that wasn't going to be something that was ideal for him, and he didn't particularly... well he did, in one way, want... he wanted to go to a school, not necessarily our school. So, we, myself and [name] then, well, more [name] probably than me, to be fair, we made an application again to EOTAS."

"There would have been, I would imagine, situations that became more heightened with him aggression, and potentially how that would have turned onto staff. We were already having disquiet from staff members about how aggressive he could be in class verbally, you know, and there could have become the stage where we would have teachers going, "I don't feel safe with this boy in my room.""

The range of interventions used with student 4 were intended to support them deescalate and manage social situations in a more positive way. At the time of the first interview, the student was found to be on 1b of a staged behaviour management strategy applied as part of the school's promoting positive behaviour policy. To prevent this student escalating through the stages, staff members had been using a range of social skills resources provided by the Autism Advisory & Intervention Service (AAIS), including 'Are you a friend magnet?' and 'Don't make the small things big'. These can be found online via most NHS trusts and are basic therapeutic tools. Alongside these, the PCL and SENCO acknowledged that student 4's classroom support was limited and so they were attempting to get a statement. In the meantime, they had instructed all this student's teachers to generalise instructions.

Student 4: Interventions for Peer Interactions

"Like we talked about Pupil 4 kinda struggling with peer interaction and things like that. This is… It's called 'Are you a friend magnet?' but it's, you know, "If you say hello do you take it in turns?" and it's kinda getting him to tease out. And then it would maybe be, umm, like "What can I do? What might I need to do?" So it might be something like "I need to take a movement break," umm, "I need some sensory input," umm, "I need the teacher to give me a visual breakdown of my behaviour, not just the work that I'm doing," and even getting them to think, you know, "Why is it I'm reacting like that, is it a green(?) response?" So that's kinda the little sort of interventions."

The interventions put in place around student 8 offered different levels of therapeutic supports. Things like the take ten app enabled the student to recognise stressors that they encountered during the school day. The staff members had also encouraged the student to get involved with designing the school's mindfulness club, which meant working with a group of peers to establish and dress a dedicated space within the school building. Part of the goal for this was to support the student build positive relationships with staff and a connection with the school. The staff stated that this student functioned better with clear boundaries and structure, so they modified their timetable and began to explore an EOTAS partnership arrangement.

Pupil 8: Structure and Boundaries

"She actually copes best with just clear boundaries and structure."

"[She] closed the door and then was… didn't give us an. And then we were having to deal with negative incidents at the same time as trying to build a positive relationship. That made things quite difficult early, in the early stages she was totally supported through the pastoral system."

When reviewing the list of interventions (listed in Table 8) used by the staff members with students in group B, it is evident how flexible, and to some extent creative, the three schools had been. While this may be seen as advantageous it was also a reflection that the existing expertise and resources on offer within the schools were not specialised enough to support these three students. And in two of the cases this was leading towards an application for some form of EOTAS application.

Group B Outcomes:

At the time of second interview, the situation for each of the group 3 students had deteriorated in terms of their levels of risk. In the case of student 2, the school had been facilitating an ETA that had subsequently broken down and the student had eventually refused to attend school from the start of the academic year. The staff members explained that things outside school had become 'dramatically worse' for student 2, including involvements with the Police service. Their worries were now about more than just academic outcomes for this student and had successfully applied for a full-time EOTAS placement.

Student 2: Unsuccessful Reintegration Plan

"…the situation with student 2 is that he has refused to come to school basically all this year […] we actually had got ETA, exceptional teaching arrangement in place at that stage, but he did, after a number of applications we made to ETA, he got the five hours' tuition a week. And that was kind of the first step for us in a reintegration plan back into school. Now it has sort of became apparent as time went on that that wasn't going to be something that was ideal for him, and he didn't particularly... well he did, in one way, want... he wanted to go to a school, not necessarily our school […] so, we submitted that, and he has gained a placed on EOTAS for September for his year 11."

Similarly, student 4 had left school. The staff members reported that behaviours had continued to deteriorate and the AAIS strategies they had been working on had little effect, so they had consulted externally with educational psychology and during a MAST meeting[21]. It was the staff members' belief that this student would benefit from more support within the classroom and had explored an EOTAS outreach placement. However, the student's parents decided to enrol them in another school, hoping for a fresh start. It was the understanding of the staff that the same patterns of behaviour had started to repeat in this new setting, but this time were questioning how much patience a new school would tolerate it. The suggestion was that this pupil was now at a higher risk of being excluded.

Student 4: Greater Risk of Exclusion

"Is because I've been told that by behavioural support. I think, I suppose, maybe the risk of exclusion is now greater because I'm not... I think other schools don't possibly go for as long as we do before they say enough's enough, if that makes sense."

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[21] Multi-Agency Support Team.

Student 8 had never been suspended before and this was still the case by the time the second interview with staff came around. The concerns staff had with the student's relationships frequently breaking down had also seen an improvement within school. However, they had observed an increase in risk taking behaviour outside school, which they appeared to be deeply worried about. It had reached the point where the staff members no longer felt they could offer the supports required, and because the student had such a dislike for school generally, an EOTAS placement had been arranged with the student preparing to start a short time after our second interview.

> ### *Student 8: Increasing Risk-Taking Behaviour*
>
> "[…] outside of school, a lot has changed. […] Yeah, increasing level of becoming involved in at risk behaviours."
>
> "I think it's beyond our capacity […] So I do. I think we're trying our best with…but even all our pastoral supports that we have in school, she would be way beyond that too. I do think that she needs specialised therapeutic stuff."

Summary of group B

In all three of these cases the staff members appeared to have a sense of frustration and discontent at how things had been progressing. Also, in all three cases the students had either left their respective schools as their full-time place of enrolment or were preparing to do so. Another factor common to all three of these cases was that staff members reported feeling ill-equipped or under-resourced in terms of providing appropriate supports that would prevent the students' risk from escalating. In the case of student 2 this would have required consistent adult key workers and a resource for reintegration into mainstream classes; for student 4, a full-time classroom assistant and ASD supports may have been effective; whilst student 8 required specialist therapeutic supports. The perception of the staff members we interviewed was that on their current trajectories the young persons' risk had increased, however, there was equally an argument to be made that student 2 and student 8 might find the supports they need in their EOTAS placements. There was an interesting tension in this between the staff members wanting to maintain oversight of the cases whilst also recognising the need to look elsewhere to support the students.

3.2.3 Group C: Level of Risk Stayed about the Same

The young persons categorised within group C were those who PCLs and SENCOs perceived as remaining at the same level of risk between interviews. In total, three cases were presented between two separate schools. Similar to other the groups the trajectories of these students' risk of exclusion levels were not conclusive. Both student 1 and student 6 had finished formal education and left their respective schools by the time the second interview took place and the third student had moved to EOTAS and returned to school after an unsuccessful placement, to repeat the same patterns of behaviour. Part of the reason for categorising the cases of student 1 and 6 within group C was that the interviewed staff had insufficient data or knowledge about the students' trajectories now they had left and therefore the assumption was that very little had changed.

Vulnerabilities and Support Needs

The behavioural pattern of Student 1 reportedly involved persistent confrontations with staff. There were some issues around integration of the student when first arriving at the school and there were

tendencies around anger towards other pupils and staff. The PCL and SENCO reported concerns around self-harm and certain acts of physical violence towards themselves, and extreme outbursts followed by emotional outbursts. This had led to "a couple" of formal suspensions. Staff reported that engagement with the family had been challenging at times, with the parents resisting efforts by the school to address the young person's needs, perceived by staff as being triggered by parental separation. The school heavily advocated for an EOTAS placement to accommodate the support needs of student 1, to which the parents were eventually supportive. Staff members claimed that student 1 required flexible and appropriate curricula and that the placement would also address safeguarding concerns for peers and the student themselves.

> ### Student 1: Self-regulation Concerns
>
> "It would have been, you know, looking at severe anger issues and quite uncontrolled anger issues and almost to the extent of self-harming, you know, when these were being…coming to the point he would have been punching walls, you know, physically violent. More to himself, I would say, more than to staff. Extremely verbally aggressive."

Student 5 arrived at their school in year 8 already flagged as vulnerable, having been known to the Education Welfare Service (EWS) and had since moved off the child protection register. The student also had a statement for SEBD. Parental engagement was reportedly intermittent, but the school acknowledged that the student's mother had been working with social services in an effort to develop their capacity. Within school student 5's behaviour was seen to be persistently confrontational, alongside claims of anger issues. This had resulted in multiple suspensions in the short time they had been at school. Student 5's vulnerabilities were perceived as relating to their history of social services involvement and being wary of adults. This student was observed as often finding it difficult to establish relationships with people. However, the claim was that as a relational learner, student 5 needed familiar adults in school and people they trusted in order to support them with self-regulation.

> ### Student 5: Wary of Adults
>
> "He is very wary of adults, very wary, he's had probably so many different adults in his life who've come in and out, that when he does establish a relationship with you, he works with you, you know. So that kind of de-escalation and the softer support through staff within [school name] who know the boy every day, I think at times works better and is more impactful than the strange adult who comes in for 40 minutes per week to tell him how to behave from sheets or a textbook."

The third case within group C, student 6, did not present with any overt behavioural issues when they first arrived at the school in year 9. Staff reported that this student had a complex background as a settled traveller and a breakdown of relationship with family. The student—statemented for SEBD and now in their final year of school—was care-experienced having been in emergency care situations, multiple placements, and eventually a children's home. The complexity of the ACEs experienced by this student, and their mistrust of adults, had been presenting as patterns of school refusing and absconding from school. In the early stages, the school had issued multiple suspensions in response to them leaving school after registration, but they eventually realised that this was enabling the student's pattern of behaviour. Staff highlighted this student as being vulnerable to leaving school

with no qualifications and had been attempting to put in place supports to re-engage them with their education.

> ### Student 6: School Refusing
>
> "[Student 6 name] then has started more than ever to disengage with school, would come into school in the morning and would literally just abscond immediately, and we had to ring social services to try and locate him, but he's now…he's 16 now, and very difficult for anybody to influence him."

Aims of staff working with Group C

The focus of staff members across each of the three cases during the first interview was to keep the students engaged with education for as long as possible, with the intention of supporting them to gain qualifications. For student 1, the staff were aiming to support re-engagement with an EOTAS placement until the end of their academic year. Similarly, the objective for student 6 was to arrange a school-work partnership that would support the young person gain qualifications before they too left school at the end of the academic year.

> ### Student 1: Sustaining Attendance Until the End
>
> "…when I was last talking to the senior teacher in EOTAS, they were sort of trying to sort of make sure that he... everything was getting ticked and signed off because there was maybe, you know, I think they were trying to sort of keep the attendance sustained, because as... what happens in these situations is when they come towards sort of April, May-time, they start to slip away and then that starts to erode a wee bit in terms of attendance, and he was so close that they were just trying to get him to just that last bit of the edge."

> ### Student 6: School-Work Partnership
>
> "We then decided to apply to EA for the school-work partnership, I don't know the exact acronym of it, I forget it, but there is an opportunity for students who are disengaging and at threat of being expelled really, to get one day work placement within industry, while also going to school. So, we've set [Student 6 name] up with that and also have reduced his timetable."

The case of student 5, whilst having similar aims as the other two cases in group C, was slightly different in that they were not due to leave the school for another few years. The aim for the year 9 student was to keep them in education for as long as possible. The staff believed this would be enabled by using strategies for self-regulation and the support of an EOTAS partnership arrangement—two days in school and three days on placement.

> ### Student 5: Keep the Student in Education
>
> "Keeping him in, within the instream education probably was the first – priority […] because we work really well with the [EOTAS Centre] for a number of years, and we do that to try and ensure

that he stays within mainstream education until year 12, rather than in preparation for a full-time key stage four EOTAS placement."

Interventions: what interventions are schools using and why?

The obvious challenge for the staff supporting group C students was the limited contact hours they had with the pupils not in school. Table 9 illustrates this point, with staff reporting only four interventions in relation to student 1 and five in their work with student 6. Student 5 on the other hand, had a long list of fifteen interventions.

School	Student	Interventions	Risk Levels of Students
1	1	Suspensions Tailored Entry/Exit Behaviour support Strategic timetabling EOTAS Placement	1
5	5	Nurture Group No Reduced Timetable Smaller Group Work Time Out Card Cooling Off Periods Key Adult – Learning Mentor AEN Supports Student Passport Managing Peer Group Numeracy and Literacy Support School Social Worker SPSS Behavioural Support Learning Mentors Street Beat Strive Programme	2
	6	Reduced Timetable Portfolio-Based GCSEs KS4 Engage Teacher Learning Mentor School Social Worker	

Table 9 Group C Interventions Northern Ireland

The common reason for using these interventions was to ensure all the students gained academic currency. However, what emerged from our analysis was that in order to engage the students as best

as they could in the time available, staff were locking onto certain traits and developing a portfolio of supports around these. In the case of student 5 this was building on the recognition that they were a "relational learner" by adopting a softer approach, which staff found to be more impactful for avoiding confrontation alongside assigning key adults within the school and keeping other staff members informed. Similarly, with student 1, the staff were using a more personal approach alongside more structured supports like EOTAS. And for student 6, the PCL recognised that the school had little influence left and so attempted to build on the connection with the student's place of employment.

Student 1: Personal Conversations

"[…] when you have those one-to-one conversations, he had a level of awareness that he had actually realised that you were trying to do something that was best for him."

Student 5: Relational Learner

"He very much is…. see up there, taking boys seriously, boys as relational learners, [Student 5 name] is very much a relational learner. If you do not have a relationship with him or understand his learning plans, or his pupil passports as we call them, you could be in…not in trouble, as in he's not openly physically aggressive, but he will not respond to you. So, he's very much a relational learner, and that's just through time and talking with him."

Student 6: Limited Influence of School

"He's bright, most of the time, you can work with him, but has it made a big difference? I'm going to be honest, not really, not really. I think he's got to the stage in his life where he's 16 now, he's earning some money working in the [shop], he just doesn't see authority like schools or social services as something that brings any positivity to his life, which is really sad."

Group C Outcomes

Both Student 1 and student 6 left their respective schools on their own terms at the end of year 12[22]. Student 1 reportedly finished their EOTAS placement with the equivalent of nine GCSE qualifications having been motivated to pursue a particular career path. They also were seen to have developed a better relationship with the school and previous teachers having moved to EOTAS and away from potential triggers and confrontations. There is an argument to be made that this particular student may have been a better fit for group A, however, the staff member was unable to provide any data on the change in their risk level because they had since left school.

Student 1: Motivation

"…from [Student 1]'s point of view that he basically... he sees a career trajectory now, something that he wants to do, so he's got the motivation."

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[22] In Northern Ireland, year 12 (Key Stage 4; age 16-17) is the final year of statutory education. Post-16 study in school, or further education college, is optional.

Similarly, the PCL who reported on the case of student 6 had no knowledge of their whereabouts or destination at the time of second interview as they had left the school before the end of the school year. What they did have was evidence that the student had finished school with low/no qualifications. Again, there is an argument to be made that this student may have been better positioned within group B, as lack of qualification may lead them in a disadvantageous direction. But there was not enough evidence available to corroborate this assertion.

> **_Student 6: Left School with No Qualifications_**
>
> "Er, the, the, the boy didn't finish Year 12. He didn't, he absconded.
>
> Didn't even leave with GCSEs?
>
> No
>
> Nothing?
>
> I think he maybe left for Prince's Trust.
>
> So, three?
>
> Two.
>
> Two?
>
> Two. He didn't… he, he, we didn't see Student 6 from… yeah. I don't even know from March maybe onwards. He just stopped coming to school."

It should be noted that the school were incredibly frustrated in how student 6's situation had been allowed to deteriorate over a number of years, despite their efforts in school. The staff member claimed that the student had been "lost to the system […] the system let that boy down." It later transpired that student 6 had experienced up to fourteen changes in care placement during their time at school.

Student 5 was back in school having refused an EOTAS placement. The school had invested significant time in building a portfolio of evidence—for what has often been described during these interviews as a lengthy, burdensome application process—only for the student to abscond from the centre and then refuse to return. This situation was highlighted as undermining the student's support needs, but the school had little choice as the primary setting of the student's enrolment. The staff had returned to attempts at building strategies for the pupil to avoid confrontation and develop better relationships. It was the perception of staff that the student had improved since their return, with less suspensions, being more settled, and seemingly enjoying school life. However, while the staff reported a de-escalation in the student's risk of exclusion, they also had concerns about their vulnerability outside school and what would happen after leaving post-16. Our interpretation of this, again, relates to the limited window the staff had across a student's school career to make a positive change.

> **Student 5: Still Concerns**
>
> "Erm, yes. Erm, he was at high risk… well, he was at high risk from non-permanent exclusion, suspension, quite regularly. Erm, but he was probably also at risk… I'm not sure. I, I think the exclusion, the permanent exclusion process again is quite complicated and so I don't think, er, he's certainly not at risk of permanent exclusion now. Our only, our only concern now is that we're going to have to manage this student now until he's 16."
>
> "When he leaves the, the system. Of school and all the key adults. We're still, we're still very concerned, he's a very vulnerable boy. You know? Erm, risk of permanent exclusion at the minute, no. Risk of, of non-permanent ex-, suspension? Yeah, but lessened, you know? Less incidents, which is good."

Summary of group C

The risk level of exclusion for the three students in group C was perceived as remaining the same, yet the work being done by the staff members, respectively, felt abbreviated and incomplete. The level of contact hours within each of the schools was relatively low compared to a normative student experience and so the staff had limited time to accomplish their plans. Once the students had left school there was very little influence, input, or knowledge of their situation. This highlighted a real challenge in tracking the destinations and outcomes of young people once they left school, with no clear use or destination for all the data that had been collected.

Efforts to influence the trajectory of these three students, whilst being frustrated by time, were foregrounded by a need to build upon positive relationships the students had with key adults. In the case of student 1 this was the personal connection they had with the SENCO, for student 5 this was ensuring staff recognised they were a relational learner, and for student 6 the most influential relationship was with their employer.

3.4 What accounts for some of the differences in outcome?

The SENCOs and PCLs identified several key factors that contributed to the varying outcomes experienced by young people who were at risk and vulnerable to school exclusion. These factors encompass a range of aspects, both within and beyond the school environment, that were perceived as significantly impacting a student's educational trajectory and overall well-being.

Parental Engagement/Support

Parental involvement was mentioned frequently by staff members and described as having a crucial role in a student's academic success and behaviour. In most instances, the staff highlighted challenges with engaging the parents of pupils that were in a pattern of repeated negative behaviours. For a number of the cases that the staff members presented to us, the young person had a difficult familial context and estrangement, and some were in care settings. In other cases, the parents had capacity issues and some schools were attempting to support the parents to engage better. However, this was often described as difficult without external supports, such as social services. In a smaller number of the cases described in our sample, while parents were quite active, the school still found it challenging to maintain a consistent message between themselves and home. Parental agreement and acceptance that their child needed support was seen as critical. When parents shifted from a confrontational stance to a collaborative one, they were more likely to work with the schools to address behavioural concerns.

Nurture Provision

Schools that offered nurture provision claimed to have a more supportive and inclusive environment for at-risk students. These nurture 'units' within a mainstream school setting were few and seemingly focused on addressing emotional and social needs, with the intention of mitigating challenging behaviours and improving overall well-being. The schools with nurture provisions suggested that they were seeing better outcomes for students who might otherwise be at risk of exclusion. However, the resources for these units were scarce and the schools were only able to offer it to a small number of pupils.

Whole school communication (S1P2)

Clear, consistent, and timely communication across the entire school community was seen as essential. When teachers, staff, and school leaders were aligned in their approaches with individual student needs, they were able to identify issues early and collaborate on effective solutions. Poor communication, on the other hand, was seen as a barrier for timely implementation of interventions that exacerbated problems.

Limited Influence of School

In some reported cases, external factors exerted a stronger influence on the student's behavior and outcomes than the school itself. These factors such as severe trauma, ongoing family crises, or involvement with negative peer groups were perceived as limiting the school's ability to affect positive change. Their capacity and authority to intervene was seen in some cases a source of frustration and an enabler in others. It was clear that the students facing challenges outside of school were bringing them into the classroom, affecting their engagement, and increasing their risk of exclusion. For example, young people who were known to the police outside school and those particular issues spilling over into the school setting. Conversely, the staff also talked about how they were able to use their schools' reputation as pillars within the community to leverage additional supports for students, such as school-work partnerships. The deep frustration for many of the staff members was the lack of predictability and stability with what happened outside school – they could be working on a particular intervention with a young person that was showing good progress, but all of this could be undone by one incident outside of school and their control.

Geography of Supports

How the schools and staff accessed essential support services for their students appeared to be geographically inconsistent. Students in rural areas had less proximal resources and were often described as travelling further distances to access resources like EOTAS centres. It was also unclear as to whether or not all the schools within our sample, both urban and rural, were able to call MAST meetings (Multi-Agency Support Teams), which provide coordinated interventions for at-risk youth – some of the schools had no knowledge of these. It might be the case that local knowledge of available supports varies between schools.

Communication with EOTAS

Effective communication between the mainstream schools in our sample and EOTAS centres was perceived as essential for ensuring continuity in a student's education. Without proper communication and coordination, students may experience gaps in their learning and support, potentially leading to further disengagement and exclusion. For that reason, the staff members in some cases reported the frequency and depth of updates for EOTAS as problematic.

Structured Environment

For a number of the student cases described by the staff members, the young person benefitted from a structured and consistent learning environment that provided them with stability and predictability.

In these settings, clear routines and expectations helped them feel secure and less anxious, which was seen as leading to improved behaviour and engagement. They ways in which the schools offered this structured environment varied, with some opting for EOTAS placements, partnership arrangements, or smaller group settings within school.

Personal conversations

Staff members described the value of regular one-on-one interactions with students (who were 'relational learners') and trusted adults, such as teachers or counsellors. The perception was that showing a personal interest in the student allowed for a deeper understanding of individual challenges and needs.

Resources: *how* do the schools access the resources they need?

The schools within our sample face a range of resource challenges that impacted their ability to effectively address behavioural issues among their students. A common challenge was the *lack of therapeutic supports* such as CAMHS and educational psychology services, which was restricting the schools from providing specialised interventions and comprehensive emotional support, particularly with complex cases. In response to these limitations, School 5 stood out as an example of proactive resource allocation, by establishing a nurture unit, they demonstrated a holistic approach to fostering a supportive environment for their students' social and emotional well-being.

Another notable resource challenge across the sample was the onerous process of EOTAS referrals. The bureaucratic hurdles associated this application processes were seen as hindering the schools' ability to respond quickly for students at risk of exclusion. In many reported instances, the process had delayed necessary interventions, inadvertently exacerbated behavioural issues and prolonged the stresses on both the staff and student involved.

Despite these challenges, schools were proactive in seeking solutions through collaboration with external support services. This approach enables schools to supplement their resources and expertise, offering tailored intervention plans that cater to the diverse needs of their at-risk students. In some cases, this meant using limited budgets creatively, while in others it meant drawing upon social capital and the goodwill of colleagues across the sector. A good example of this given by one of the SENCOs referred to an educational psychologist that the school could no longer fund, who committed to more sessions with a student at no cost, rather than ending the intervention before completion.

What do the schools perceive as the barriers and supports to successful intervention?

The staff members in our sample described overcoming multiple barriers when intervening with students at risk of exclusion, whilst also having to leverage essential supports to facilitate positive outcomes.

Numerous barriers emerged that were seen as problematic for effective interventions. The disconnect among support systems, compounded by a lack of stable social work contact, posed a challenge in some of the reported cases. Without consistent collaboration and communication between school staff, social workers, and external agencies, cohesive interventions were being undermined. Destructive relational behaviours, often stemming from complex backgrounds, also impeded progress. Furthermore, the disruptive impact of COVID-19 on educational routines and social interactions intensified the struggle to engage and support their at-risk students. Delays in statementing, prolonged gaps between EOTAS panels, and limited communication with EOTAS contributed to unaddressed needs and prolonged intervention timelines. The burden of evidence

required for intervention decisions, exacerbated by cuts to services, put a strain on schools and this was also seen as detracting from their primary focus.

On the other hand, several factors were described as contributing to successful interventions. Establishing clear lines of communication and collaboration between school, external agencies, and families was perceived as crucial. Parental involvement, support, and a respectful relationship between parents and school staff were seen as invaluable in fostering positive change. Schools that prioritised early intervention, able to maintain consistent adult relationships with students, and offered them structured environments, may have more effectively mitigated behavioural issues. Leveraging existing resources, including educational psychology support, was described as essential. Additionally, the staff maintained that interventions should account for the unique needs of students at risk, which required flexibility and responsiveness from external supports, such as EOTAS. While external factors like summer breaks and unstable guardianship contexts presented challenges, they also emphasised the importance of continuity in intervention strategies.

3.4 What are the implications for policy and practice?

The observations of SENCOs and PLCs drawn together within this case study on their perceptions of school exclusion practices in Northern Ireland, highlight implications for both policy and practice, necessitating a comprehensive revision of current approaches to better address the needs of at-risk students.

Firstly, the non-linear movement of students between categories of perceived risk underscores the need for adaptable and flexible interventions. Traditional one-size-fits-all strategies may not effectively cater to the dynamic nature of students' challenges. Policymakers and educators should advocate for personalised interventions that account for the ever-changing circumstances and needs of these students. This approach requires a shift from rigid structures and ill-defined protocols to more individualised and responsive strategies that can evolve as a student's risk profile changes over time.

Secondly, the staff members' position that supports must be consistently available throughout a student's school career highlights the importance of resource allocation. Funding and resources should be allocated not only for short-term interventions but for sustained and continuous support. This extended investment acknowledges that long-term positive outcomes often require ongoing efforts to address underlying issues and provide necessary assistance. Within the NI system there is an emphasis on early intervention, however, resource constraints mean that in practice this often translates to 'earliest point once a young person is in crisis'—in many cases this comes too late, and the student's education and development has already been disrupted.

Supporting the administrative alignments among schools, alternative providers, and essential services is critical. Improved communication and collaboration are essential for a holistic approach to student support. Developing protocols and platforms that enable seamless information sharing can prevent gaps in intervention strategies and ensure consistent, well-coordinated care for those at risk of exclusion.

The burden of evidence required for schools to access and resource support for students is an area in need of review. Overly strict evidence requirements can delay vital interventions and hinder progress. Policymakers should reassess these criteria, considering the challenges schools face and aiming for a balance between accountability and practicality.

Lastly, enhancing data structures to track the destinations of young people at risk of exclusion once they leave school would be valuable. For the young people who experience school exclusion in its many forms, once they leave school, they lose a key advocate. Understanding where these students go after

leaving school is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and identifying gaps in support systems (both during and upon leaving formal education). Schools hold a significant amount of detailed data on the trajectories and needs of these young people, which becomes obsolete once they leave. Robust data sharing and analysis mechanisms could provide better insights into the longer-term impacts of interventions, needs of these young people outside school, and inform future policy decisions.

4. Case Study Students in Scotland

Annie Taylor

4.1 Introduction

In Scotland, we interviewed staff responsible for pastoral care and additional support needs across six schools in two local authorities (LAs). Both LAs were urban but LAa has a larger population, a higher number of pupils and schools, and a higher proportion of children and young people who are eligible for free school meals.

Twelve staff across the six schools identified eighteen case studies of young people who they considered at risk of exclusion. One staff member left the school between interviews, so his case studies were excluded from the sample. The remaining eleven staff were all interviewed twice, at around six months apart.

Characteristics of the Young People

The eighteen case studies comprise ten individual boys, one group of ten boys, and seven individual girls. One staff member left the school between interviews, so follow-up interviews with trajectory data are available for fifteen young people plus the group of ten boys. The group of ten boys was used as a case study by two staff members who discussed different interventions used with sub-groups within the group; case studies 3A and 3B capture the varying interventions and outcomes of the two sub-groups.

Five of the young people were not considered by staff to have any additional support needs that affected their learning (ASN); the others had a range of needs including ADHD, ASD, dyslexia, PTSD, and trauma or attachment issues, and frequently multiple co-existing issues. Some of the ASNs had not received any formal diagnosis. Young people in nine of the case studies (including the group of ten) were known to be eligible for free school meals, although this figure may be higher in reality, and all were white Scottish. All of the young people, including those in the group, had experienced school exclusion of some kind prior to the first interview, although some of these exclusions had been informal, such as being sent home to cool off, or internal exclusions within the school building. All of the young people had been at their current school since S1. Ten of the individual young people and all of those in the group had experienced either current or previous social work involvement in their families, and four were known to staff to currently be Looked After Children (LAC).

4.2 Findings

These case studies are situated accounts of young people's lives, coming from staff, so findings around levels of risk of exclusion should be interpreted cautiously, as they may tell us more about staff perceptions than reflecting 'actual' risk (see 'perceptions of risk', section 3). This caveat notwithstanding, case studies have been grouped into three categories according to perceived risk. Eleven young people were perceived to be at a higher risk at the time of the second interview than

at the first; in four cases risk was judged to have decreased, and in two cases it was considered to have stayed the same (see table 10).

Table 10: Perceived risk change – all case studies in Scotland

Case study number	Year group	Gender	Ethnicity	Perceived risk change	Local authority/school
1	S1	Female	White Scottish	Increased	LAa/1
2	S1	Male	White Scottish	Same	LAa/1
3A (group)	S3	Male	White Scottish	Decreased	LAa/2
3B (group)	S3	Male	White Scottish	Decreased	LAa/2
4	S3	Male	White Scottish	Increased	LAa/2
5	S1	Female	White Scottish	Increased	LAa/2
6	S2	Male	White Scottish	N/A (staff member left school)	LAa/3
7	S3	Male	White Scottish	N/A (staff member left school)	LAa/3
8	S1	Female	White Scottish	Decreased	LAa/3
9	S2	Male	White Scottish	Increased	LAa/3
10	S3	Male	White Scottish	Increased	LAb/1
11	S4	Male	White Scottish	Increased	LAb/1
12	S4	Female	White Scottish	Same	LAb/2
13	S4	Male	White Scottish	Increased	LAb/2

14	S1	Female	White Scottish	Decreased	LAb/2
15	S1	Female	White Scottish	Increased	LAb/3
16	S2	Male	White Scottish	Increased	LAb/3
17	S3	Male	White Scottish	Increased	LAa/1
18	S4	Female	White Scottish	Increased	LAa/1

4.2.1 Group A De-escalation of Risk: Vulnerabilities and Support Needs

Staff in three schools (two schools in LAa and one in LAb) considered risk to have decreased for one or more of their case study students by the time of the second interview. None of the schools said that risk had decreased for all their case study students.

There was sometimes a degree of uncertainty around whether risk had decreased. For case study 8, for example, the number of behaviour 'referrals' had decreased, but attendance had also decreased, so the participant was unsure whether the referrals indicated decreased risk or were simply a reflection of the young person spending less time in school. For case study 3A – the group of boys - the participant was not sure whether the risk had decreased or remained the same. For case studies 3B and 14, the researcher made an assessment about the level of risk change as the question was not explicitly asked in the interview. In these two cases, the participants stated that the young people were more engaged in their learning and had improved attendance.

> **Vignette: Scotland case study 14**
>
> ***Creative practice***
>
> The S1 girl in case study 14 was in the process of being assessed by CAMHS for ADHD. Her behaviour was described as 'dysregulated', and she was disruptive in classes and bullying other students. Along with some other students she would often not attend classes and end up '*roaming around the school, egging each other on, noising up the school*'. She was often absent from school due to health issues, and her diet was a contributory factor although the school was initially unaware of her dietary needs due to a lack of information during the transition from primary school. She was described as having a '*challenging family background*' which the school was aware of as she had an older sister at the school. Her family was eligible for free school meals.
>
> At the time of the first interview, the key focus was building relationships with key staff, building confidence, and enabling the development of key skills. She had been excluded internally 2-3 times before the first interview as due to her family background and support needs, '*external exclusion wasn't appropriate*'. The participant talked about external exclusion often conflicting with the ethos of the school, '*keeping them close was the way of nurturing them, engaging with them, by trying to work with them in that way*'.
>
> Support from a pupil support assistant was put in place because the school felt that some of the young person's behaviours were a result of being unable to engage with the curriculum. The school

supported the young person to communicate what was going well and not so well, trying to learn from where things were working well and transfer this to other subjects. They also took a creative approach to assessment, providing an iPad and trying not to rely on writing as this was a key area of difficulty. She was also given a '*time out*' pass so she could spend time in the base when she wanted to, and this was used as an opportunity to build relationships with the support for learning leader and other key staff.

At the time of the second interview, the young person was in S2 and had moved out of the remit of the support base and into the wellbeing hub. She had a mixed timetable, with some time in mainstream classes, some in the wellbeing hub doing formal curriculum-based work, and some time working on life skills. The rest of the approaches also remained in place. Having some planned time in the wellbeing hub was seen as a way to '*manage their emotions and their day*.' She was no longer missing lessons on an unplanned basis. Overall '*she does seem quite a bit calmer*' and there had been no recent internal exclusions.

Aims of staff working with Group A

The aims of staff working with young people in this group centred around either relationships (case study 14, case study 8) or qualifications (case studies 3A and 3B). This may be due to age – the young people in case studies 14 and 8 were both in S1 at the time of the first interview, and those in case studies 3A and 3B were about to begin S4 so would potentially be leaving school soon.

Interventions: what interventions are schools using and why?

Participants reported using a range of interventions with the young people in this group.

Table 11: Group A interventions (decreased risk) Scotland

Case study	Interventions	Purpose of intervention	Local authority/school
3A	Alternatives to school (AP) bespoke programme (set up through school's partnership base)	Gain qualifications before leaving school roll	LAa/2
3B	Literacy support through small group literacy work – bespoke course set up by the school for this group of young people	an aim in and of itself but also as a way of improving behaviour and preventing exclusion	LAa/2
8	internal rather than external exclusion; Sharing information; Relationship with young person's mum; plan with child (child participation)	Prioritising wellbeing and young person's best interests; maintaining relationship with school; support feeling of belonging; Sharing	LAa/3

		information to share good practice	
14	Internal rather than external exclusion; Support for learning (PSA time); Wellbeing hub; Flexibility/ 'time out'; Understanding what works (child participation); iPad; creative assessment (not writing)	nurturing and engaging, focus on wellbeing; access curriculum, improve behaviour; Wellbeing hub helps to enable young person to sustain school; Understanding what works so can replicate in other subjects	LAb/2

Vignette: Case studies 3A and 3B

Same group, different interventions

Case studies 3A and 3B relate to the same group of young people who were in S3 (almost S4) at the time of the first interview, some of whom now attend AP instead of the school building (3A) and some of whom now attend school (3B).

In an S1 year group of around 300 pupils, a group of ten boys were identified in S1 as requiring specific additional support, particularly around literacy. They had a range of additional support needs including ADHD, dyslexia and ASD, all were experiencing poverty and eligible for free school meals, and all had had social work intervention in their families either in the past or currently. In S1 there was a range of challenging behaviour including physical fighting and being photographed on social media with weapons. In S2 during the second lockdown the school received police reports of these young people being out in the community with drink and drugs, and some brought drugs to school to sell when it reopened. Many disengaged completely during and after lockdowns.

The first participant had supported this group since S1 when their literacy support needs were identified. She set up a bespoke literacy group which met regularly for two years. She described this group as small and '*nurturing*' so that it could serve the dual purpose of meeting their literacy needs and building relationships within the school.

In S3, some of the young people in this group stayed at school and some attended an external AP programme put together by the school. The group who stayed in school (case study 3B) '*weren't appropriate candidates for college and they're very much part a' the school'.* They continued to attend the school's bespoke literacy programme which has now been taken on by the English department. The young people from the literacy group are largely now able to access the mainstream curriculum, and they still come and visit the participant although she no longer teaches them. She describes them as '*flourishing*' – they are achieving, have a strong sense of belonging, and have their additional support needs met. She says they are benefitting from having '*not got that pressure tae be part a' this gang*' since some of the group went to the AP programme.

The group who did not stay in school (case study 3A) attend a programme of AP funded by the school's PEF funding. They attend a range of activities including a vocational training provider specialising in construction, a youth work provider working with the young people on literacy and

numeracy qualifications, a local football club, and wider achievement awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh's award. By the time of the second interview, an additional partner agency had been brought in to work with the group on violence reduction through mentoring. This had become available as part of the LA's overall violence reduction response to rising 'anti-social behaviour and gang culture' during the second Covid lockdown. Between the two interviews, problems had arisen due to the vocational training AP being based in an area of the city where a rival gang was based. To rectify this, the school brought in a second vocational trainer and they split the groups according to who else would be there and where in the city they were from. This was made possible by the school's dedicated partnership base and funding for full-time staff, and the local knowledge and relationships of the partnership coordinator, who was able to recognise what was happening and intervene, as the young people would not have been able to tell the pastoral lead because *'you can't be a grass in [area], you can't, so you would never tell, so I wouldn't know, because they would rather die than say, 'The reason I'm not going to college is because so and so battered me at the weekend and that's why I can't go.''*.

Most of the boys in both groups are attending regularly, are participating in their learning, and are on track to achieve at least five qualifications by the time they leave school. One young person who has severe mental health issues and ASD is no longer attending school and did not meet the criteria to attend a special school so is currently not getting an education. The school is now looking into college-based options for this pupil.

Group A Outcomes: De-escalation of Risk

Across all four case studies, with the exception of one young person in 3B, the young people were engaged in their learning, and the aims of the interventions were either met or on track to being met. Case studies 8 and 14 were no longer experiencing exclusions and were 'calmer' (14) and had built trusting relationships at school (8, 14). Case study 8, who was homeless at the time of the first interview and was no longer homeless six months later, was perceived to be at '*probably*' a decreased risk because she had fewer '*referrals*', although there was a level of uncertainty around this, and it was highly likely that any reduction in risk was linked to a more stable home life. For case study 14, planned time in the wellbeing hub seemed to have helped as she was not so often out of lessons. For case studies 3A and 3B, all but one young person were on track to achieve their qualifications and move into positive destinations. The head of pastoral care talking about 3A said they had increased in confidence and sense of responsibility, were showing less offending in the community, had more of a sense of purpose and were experiencing success and planning for the future. She framed the AP they were attending as a direct alternative to exclusion: *'he's planning for, for what his future is, and if he'd stayed here, all that would be happening is me phoning his mum and saying, 'Can you come and pick him up?'*.

Summary of Group A

For pupils in this group, a wide range of interventions had been utilised and it was not possible to identify one single factor or intervention which had led to decreased risk. For those attending external AP (case study 3A), the school's continued communication with providers and knowledge of the local areas had probably helped to prevent the escalation of risk. Perhaps the common factor across all four considered to have decreased risk was the focus on relationships and meeting need, *'it's knowing the individual isn't it and know what their needs are'* (case study 3B), although this was key across almost all the case studies, not only those considered to have decreased risk.

4.2.2 Group B Escalation of Risk: Vulnerabilities and Support Needs

Eleven young people across all six schools were considered to be at a higher risk by the time of the second interview. There were four girls and seven boys in this group. Like those in the other groups, the young people with increased risk had a variety of additional support needs including ASD, ADHD, dyslexia, processing difficulties, trauma and attachment difficulties, PTSD and mental health difficulties. Only one of the eleven young people in this group was not considered to have any additional support needs that impacted on their learning. Five of the young people were known to be eligible for free school meals. Two of the eleven were Looked After and living in care homes, one was Looked After and living with a carer, one was in kinship care, and one was adopted; this meant that all the care experienced children in the case study sample were in the increased risk group.

Aims of staff working with Group B

The aims of the staff in relation to the young people in this group usually related either to improving increasing attendance and enabling access to education and attainment or improving relationships and life skills. For a full list of aims see table 12.

In some cases, the aims of staff had changed as the young people's circumstances changed. Sometimes this was due to factors outside school, for example one of the young people became pregnant between interviews so the overall aim changed from attendance to attainment, because she no longer wanted to attend school but she was still willing to engage in learning and the staff member wanted to support the young person to gain as many qualifications as possible before the baby was born. In other cases, changing aims were due to educational outcomes; for example, one of the young people had achieved the qualifications they had been aiming for and so they were now working towards a positive post-school transition.

Vignette : Case study 15

Relationship-based aims

Case study 15 was in S1. She was in kinship care and had an ADHD diagnosis. Her mum's partner had just been sentenced for a serious offence. She was described as having a '*significantly disruptive background*' and '*massive gaps in her learning*' due to '*chunks out of school*'. She had attended a special primary school and then moved to mainstream high school due to family choice. The transition '*wasn't done very well*' and she was moved straight to a full mainstream secondary timetable '*with no supports at all*'. She soon became involved in fights, bullying, and abuse towards staff and peers, and had had one formal temporary exclusion. Participants described this behaviour as '*masking her massive anxiety about being dumped in this school',* and the young person as *'vulnerable'.* The overall aim was developing life skills so that she could maintain relationships, develop self-worth and keep herself safe; academic achievement was secondary. It was difficult to '*assess her actual academic ability*' because '*she won't engage enough to even get an understanding'*. Participants shared their concerns that although she was literate and numerate, gaps in her learning would continue to increase.

At a child planning meeting a decision was made to '*traffic light*' her timetable, and her '*red*' lessons were replaced with '*nurture periods'* in the base, with the aim of making it possible for her to engage in school. By Christmas she was attending very few green lessons, often vaping in the toilets instead. Her attendance was poor, and worsened by medication which affected her sleep cycles. Several

interventions were put in place; frequent communication with home supported attendance, and multi-agency planning meetings and fortnightly Planning Support Group meetings. A PSA took her on outdoor education days with local providers as a way of engaging her, and when this went well this was offered on a weekly basis so she could experience some of the opportunities that '*she's just not had*'. Her time in the base increased, in a '*blended model'* with '*occasional mainstream classes*' which someone from the wellbeing hub took her to and from.

Between the two interviews there was a period when the young person was engaging with school, mainly in the base, followed by a period of non-engagement with school following the summer holidays, although she was still sometimes attending the outdoor activity AP. Participants were particularly worried at this point, and social work increased their engagement with the young person. She then stopped attending all AP but began engaging with school on a '*very part-time'* timetable (8 hours per week), based in the hub.

At the time of the second interview the young person was off sick. Participants were expecting another challenge in supporting her return and were planning proactive daily phone calls to encourage attendance. She was still struggling socially, which made it harder to attend school. Participants were planning further changes to her timetable with increased one-to-one support to support relationships. She would stay on the school roll, with AP involvement where possible, taking a flexible approach to meeting need, and participants would continue to work on '*building relationships and that unconditional positive regard*'. They would also '*try and get some wee qualifications out of her*' but the main aim remained social.

Her risk of exclusion was perceived to have decreased because she was not in school much and '*the time that she's in is so heavily controlled*', for example the participant walked her to and from the side entrance of the school. Her general risk was still considered high and may have increased but was largely unknown, for example her family said she didn't really leave the house, but she was recently caught shoplifting. Participants worried that she was at risk of sexual and other exploitation.

Interventions: what interventions are schools using and why?

Schools described a wide range of interventions and they were usually tailored to the individual young person, with a range of interventions attempted concurrently and over time as the context and the young person's needs developed. Creative, flexible approaches were key; participants were reflective about why interventions had or had not worked, and described using multi-agency meetings as a platform to discuss young people's needs and potential interventions. Participants described multiple interventions being made available to all the young people in this group.

Interventions often related to accessing the curriculum and providing adequate support for young people to learn; supporting young people to develop relationships with peers and staff; and enabling basic needs to be met (food, safety). In all the case studies there was a focus on wellbeing rather than a narrow focus on academic achievement.

Table 12: Group B aims and interventions Scotland

Case study	Aim	Interventions	Purpose of intervention	Local authority/ school

1	Building/ repairing relationships, building confidence, rights and participation	Restorative practice sessions with specialist worker; police officer involvement; pastoral support; meetings with parents; providing reassurance; nurture base; sent home informally	Providing time and space to reflect; police officer providing legal info and 'the threat of a charge'; reassurance as student feeling out of her depth; rights based approach; sent home informally for 'cooling off'	LAa/1
17	Cope in classroom and attain well	Pastoral care card; changing lessons 5 mins early; pupil profile shared with all staff; earphones in lessons; flexible approach (e.g. no PE); autism work skills group for three years; positive relationship with pastoral lead; talking about anger; helping to navigate distress/ anxiety/ worry; increased one-to-one work	Autism skills group has been consistent for three years and will continue into S4; flexibility e.g. headphones, leaving class early is in response to identified triggers; recent focus on anger and emotions is in response to increased anxiety due to recent referral to children's reporter	LAa/1
18	Improved attendance (later attainment)	Flexible timetable; understanding behaviour as communication; focus on relationships; counselling; input from ed psych; home visits; one-to-one support working towards national 4 qualifications	Flexible timetable to allow student a sense of control over her life; flexible approach even more important by time of second interview due to pregnancy	LAa/1
4	Keep on school roll and adapt to YP and his changing circumstances	Nurture base; anger management group work; mentor; CAMHS; external AP; outdoor education and youth centre	Support friendships; mentor to help with de-radicalisation; CAMHS due to PTSD; external AP due to smaller class sizes and calmer environment; outdoor ed and youth centre to re-engage in education	LAa/2
5	Keep YP in school, safe and achieving	One-to-one support; staged intervention meetings; full-time timetable but with a 'time-in' pass (to base); enhanced transition from primary school; wellbeing assessment plan; departmental attendance monitoring;	Relationships as most important tool, especially as YP has experienced significant trauma; time-in pass so can come to base when feeling overwhelmed; staged intervention meetings to discuss potential school move	LAa/2

9	Attend classes, access learning, form relationships	Plan with child; daily meetings with deputy head; small group sessions periods 1-3 daily; 'chunking' work; helping him to understand dyslexia; providing food; nurture specialist; joint support team meetings; staff member mentoring; various short-term external AP	Plan helps him to know where to go/ who to see; daily meetings to go through timetable and prevent overwhelm; small group to build confidence and relationships; chunking and discussing dyslexia to build confidence and experience success; providing food as is often hungry; nurture specialist helps school to tailor support and avoid exclusion; mentor – trying to find a staff member he respond positively to (not DHT); AP building skills, building relationships, confidence, self-esteem	LAa/3
10	Enable YP to access learning and education opportunities	Pastoral support; identifying triggers; flexible/ part-time timetable; emotional literacy/ regulation programmes; 'alternative to exclusion' system; proactive communication with staff; CAMHS; input from EWO; time in wellbeing/ nurture hub; restorative justice approaches; soft starts; one-to-one check-ins; flexibility	High level of support and identifying triggers to prevent exclusions; CAMHS for ASD assessment; changes to timetable to minimise confrontation; flexibility e.g. allowing to stay in hub until friends finish school – keeps calm and included	LAb/1
11	Qualifications (later transitions)	GIRFEC planning; time in nurture hub; three periods a week one-to-one wih closing the gap teacher; one period a week with ASL teacher; 1 period a week with a wellbeing-focused AP provider; flexible timetable and soft start; texts home re truancy; input from Skills Development Scotland; online education	Soft-start, flexible timetable and nurture hub to support YP; online learning when relationship with school broke down following exclusion; skills development Scotland to plan transitions post-school	LAb/1
13	Improved engagement and attendance	Part-time timetable; caring approach; avoiding triggers (e.g. covid mitigations); positive relationship with parents; keeping YP in support base at	Relationship with parents important because parents have a wider range of strategies; YP kept in support base due to a previous incident	LAb/2

	break times; YP in support base rather than mainstream classes; planned small-group school trips; creative, flexible approach to work		with another young person; in support base rather than mainstream a Y has 'railed against' mainstream; small group work in base and on trips to establish relationships and prepare for mainstream or college; creative approach to work – so it doesn't seem like work and YP more likely to engage;	
15	Life skills, safety, self-worth	Part-time timetable (currently 'very part-time'); time in support base; different start and finish times and lesson changeover times; child planning meetings; frequent communication with home; fortnightly planning support group meetings (external, including ed psych); outdoor education days at two local charities; building wider achievement opportunities into timetable; being led by YP's interests	P/T timetable and time in support base make it easier to navigate relationships as not surrounded by lots of people, and also to try to make it possible for YP to access school in some way; communication with gran to support attendance; planning support group meetings act as a 'sounding board'; being led by YP's interest e.g. horse riding/ animals, as a way of engaging her; wider achievement opportunities provide opportunities to 'catch up on missed aspects of childhood'	LAb/3
16	Trying to get him to engage with the wellbeing hub	ompanying to classes when he wants to go; flexible approach, welcoming him to hub but no pressure to do work; making it easier for his mum to engage by e.g. phoning for consent for trips and vaccinations instead of requiring written consent; unconditional positive regard; referral to children's reporter	Building confidence and self-esteem; enabling to engage with work; supporting parental engagement to enable inclusion; children's reporter as last resort and because need 'paper trail' if attempting a move to specialist provision	LAb/3

Vignette: Case study 10

Alternatives to exclusion

Case study 10 was an S3 boy with no formal diagnosis but potential ASD. His parents were separated and communication between them was strained. His mum was a single parent, working long hours, struggling with his behaviour at home, and found texts and calls from school stressful, leading to lack of engagement with school and potential wider supports. He was getting a lot of '*referrals*' because of '*behaviours in the classroom… he'd be quite abusive when he talked back*'. He had '*only been excluded twice because of the level of support around him*', but there had been '*more situations where he could have been excluded*'. His attendance was '*not always great*', which the participant saw as a sign of increased anxiety. The aim was to enable the young person to access learning and education.

At time of the first interview it was hard to engage with external supports as the young person's mum was reluctant. Several interventions were in place, including intensive pastoral support; identifying triggers; '*training staff to deal, to respond, to anticipate… situations';* flexible timetable*, 'looking closely… whether there are places where we need to support in class or whether we need to take out in order to undertake a piece of work';* support from the LA ASL team; '*constant dialogue about reflection on behaviour, reflection on how otherwise… things could have happened*', use of the school's '*alternative to exclusion*' system in which '*they are out of the timetable for… one day or two day… and then we work with them one to one, we've got a learning nurture hub with a pupil support officer who can support with the work, so the work is being sent, and it… gives the young person an opportunity to reflect and to have… peace and quiet and, and less stimulation… to concentrate on their work, and… it allows us to have more interaction with that young person and more meaningful conversations and to undertake specific intervention.*'

In between the two interviews, the young person's attendance dropped. Once he returned he was struggling to complete work in the nurture hub, so the participant worked with him on lowering his anxiety. There had been some violent incidents including one with police involvement. His mum was still struggling to engage with school, but had agreed to a CAMHS assessment because things had become harder between interviews and his brother now had an ASD diagnosis. The young person was more willing to accept support, but the lack of diagnosis was problematic and entangled with his deficit view of disability. He was re-referred to CAMHS for an ASD assessment.

Additional interventions had been put in place: input from the education welfare officer to support attendance; part-time timetable with time in the nurture hub including waiting there for his friends, which was not usually allowed but this flexible approach helped promote a sense of belonging; supporting emotional literacy, for example following a recent incident the participant reminded the head teacher to let the young person share his feelings; and the use of restorative justice approaches; working on anxiety; soft starts; one-to-one check-ins; and further changes to his timetable to minimise confrontation. There has been some progress but there will be further police involvement because of the recent incident.

The participant said his level of risk '*increases with age*' due to his size and being put in '*vulnerable positions'* where '*other people will take advantage… entice him to do things'*, for example getting into fights or '*becoming more confrontational and towering over*' teachers, or '*being quite intimidating as part of a group*'. The next steps were to re-engage the young person's mum, continue proactive communication with staff, work on subject choices, and possibly engage with external agencies in S4 for work experience.

Group B Outcomes: Escalation of Risk

Although none of the young people in this group were permanently excluded, their outcomes varied widely. This possibly reflected participants' varying perceptions of risk (see 'perceptions of risk' section), although it is also likely to reflect the breadth of young people's experiences.

All the young people (with the possible exception of one) were still on the school roll at the time of the second interviews, but their engagement with education was highly variable. Of the eleven young people in this group, four were still attending school, sometimes with some internal or external temporary exclusions. Three were not currently attending or engaging with school at all (although one of these may have started going to another school – see case study 5: disentangling context). Four young people were not currently attending school but were still engaging in some way with their education: one was occasionally engaging online (case study 11), one was not attending but was doing work at home with her support worker (case study 18), one was currently off sick and staff anticipated a period of disengagement so were making a plan for re-engaging the young person (15), and one occasionally came to school but very rarely went to lessons or the support base (case study 16).

In some cases, things had catastrophically broken down by the time of the second interview and the young people were seriously struggling with mental health issues, attendance and 'risky behaviour'. Sometimes, the outcomes were unknown to staff, and for some staff this uncertainty was itself a cause for concern and was seen as risky. For four of the eleven young people, the risk of school exclusion was perceived to have decreased while risk to the young people generally was perceived to have increased, for example through violence, the risk of criminalisation, perceived unsafe or unhealthy family situations, health concerns, young people's growth (e.g. no longer being perceived as children/ likelier for behaviour to elicit a more punitive approach), and sometimes a lack of parental engagement with the school. In these cases, the risk of school exclusion had only decreased because attendance had decreased so drastically that the young people were almost never in school.

Vignette: case study 9

Barriers to positive outcomes

Case study 9 was an S2 boy with dyslexia and processing issues. He had previously been excluded once for a safety issue in the classroom. He was often involved in disruptive behaviour in school corridors, and struggled to form relationships. His friendship group was '*gangish*' and coercive but represented his source of belonging and was important to him. The overall aim was for the young person to attend classes, access learning, and form relationships within the school.

At the time of the first interview the participant was working pre-emptively to improve behaviour with the aim of the young person being able to attend classes, access learning, and form relationships in school.

Interventions included a written plan to help him to know where to go/ who to see when he needs help; daily DHT meetings to go through his timetable, prevent overwhelm and understand '*flash points*'; timetabled daily small group literacy, numeracy and nurture sessions to build confidence and relationships; and joint support team meetings to get ideas and support (social work, educational psychology, health, education). He had also had access to some part-time youth work AP and martial arts, and the participant had been working with him to help him understand dyslexia and overcome

his perceived negative mindset about it. Staff in the nurture base would offer him food in the mornings because the participant had noticed that he was often hungry at school.

At this point the participant had noticed a reduction in the running through the corridors that was causing problems. '*Building in that trust and being quite responsive to needs as they arise and listening*' had been key. The school paid for a nurture specialist to come in two days per week, and he had weekly sessions with her. When he was involved in a '*serious assault*' and '*that action deserves an exclusion*', the participant let him stay in the building to see the nurture specialist at his request, which led to him sharing information about difficulties at home, which in turn meant the participant then contacted his mum and have a meeting with her and the nurture specialist so that '*he could have that support next to him*'.

By the time of the second interview, the participant had tried to introduce a new intervention by supporting the development of a mentoring/ role modelling relationship with a teacher at school with similar interests as YP, to '*try to build the relationship that would give him that sort of sticking power in school*', but this didn't work because the young person was rarely in school when the mentoring was scheduled. The daily catch-ups continued, although he was often not at school first thing in the morning. The young person had become reluctant to attend some aspects of AP. Between the two interviews, his mum's engagement with school had decreased, and his attendance was still poor, which was problematic because he was not there to benefit from the interventions.

The participant felt that the interventions put in place had not been successful, '*I just don't feel like I've had a win at all, I just don't feel like anything that looked like it was working, didn't sustain*'. She reflected in the interview that this was likely to be partly due to '*me not getting the right strategy or finding the right approach to meeting his need'* and partly due to '*his specific profile that means processing is challenging for him*'.

The participant concluded that although the young person's situation and behaviour had largely stayed the same, the risk had probably increased between the two interviews because he had got older and bigger so potentially people were looking out for him less in the community and he was experiencing less '*social parenting'*.

Summary of group B

Similarly to Group A, participants described using a wide range of interventions with pupils in group B. Interventions were often used concurrently and were reviewed and adapted in flexible, creative ways responding to the changing needs of the young people. It was not therefore possible to identify one single factor or intervention which had led to increased risk.

Within the general group of 'increased risk', there were several different outcomes, with some young people still attending school regularly, some not currently attending but still engaging education, and some who were completely disengaged. Very often, factors beyond the school were acknowledged by participants as contributory – and sometimes primary – factors in young people's outcomes (see 'the importance of context').

4.2.3 Group C Same level of Risk: Vulnerabilities and Support Needs

Two young people from two local authorities were considered to have an unchanged risk level at the time of the second interview (case studies 2 and 12). One of the young people was a boy in S1 and the other was a girl in S4. The S4 girl had experienced a period of increased risk and then the risk had fallen again, while the other was described as '*around about the same*' throughout the time between the interviews.

Aims of staff working with Group C

For the S1 boy, staff aims were mainly about preventing his behaviour from escalating, an aim which remained the same in the second interview. For the S4 girl, the aim was initially about attendance and attainment, but by the time of the second interview it was about a transition from school to a positive destination, because she had achieved her qualifications and had reached school leaving age.

Interventions: what interventions are schools using and why?
In both cases, close monitoring of how things were developing for the young people was an important part of interventions.

Table 13: Group C interventions Scotland

Case study	Interventions	Reasons for interventions	Local authority/ school
2	Pastoral notes; enhanced transition from primary school; building relationships with pastoral care teacher and PT behaviour support; communication with parents; gentle reminders; attendance check; keeping in at lunchtime; informal exclusion	Mainly preventative - part of the purpose of the current tools is to be able to monitor the situation so they can intervene further if necessary; pupil responds well to gentle reminders; communicating with parent means everyone has a 'common understanding' of what needs to happen; keeping him in at lunchtime as a 'sanction'/ to 'set boundaries'; informal exclusion due to fighting.	LAa/1
12	Flexible, non-mainstream timetable; one-to-one support in support base; AP one morning a week (later increased); work experience (later decreased); child planning meetings; input from social work; communication with family; dual lead between depute head and pupil support leader	Flexible/ alternative timetable has enabled YP to attain qualifications; Support and challenge from social work has been key to engagement with family and strengthening home/community. Referral to children's reporter had a perceived impact on parental engagement. Trying to avoid criminalisation. Attendance-focused support was about trying to find a balance between improving attendance, attainment and achievement, but also YP's role as a young carer. Dual lead between the depute and the pupil support leader ensures policy/ requirements of local authority are met (re. for example implementing a flexible timetable). Flexible approach to planning, and	LAb/2

	relationships with family – meant that when YP was struggling, YP's mum could contact the school to put a 'plan B' in place. Because of pre-existing positive relationships with [AP – community centre] YP was able to widen out the placement there, attending more groups including some on topics that she had previously refused to engage with e.g. mental health.	

Case study 2: preventative intervention

Case study 2 was a boy in S1 who had often been in '*low-level trouble*' for his behaviour and had been accused of things like punching; other young people were '*a bit nervous of him*'. He was also often late for school. He had an enhanced transition as behavioural issues had been flagged by the primary school. There was no history of exclusion at time of the first interview, although he had been removed from the classroom a couple of times and spent this time with the principal teacher. The participant was not aware of any specific additional support needs.

The aim of the interventions with this young person was '*keeping a very close eye on what was happening*' to prevent his behaviour escalating. A variety of interventions had been used; pastoral notes were used as a communication tool to ensure his pastoral care teacher was kept in the loop; the planned/enhanced transition from primary school had helped to build relationships and confidence; meetings and communication with parents had helped to with consistency; a focus on building relationships with key staff; and he was responding well to '*gentle reminders*' and attendance checks, although sometimes '*it kind of drifts again*' so these interventions needed to be continuous.

By the time of the second interview, the pupil had formed a positive relationship with the principal teacher behaviour support, who had supported him to join in with the school rugby, and he had represented the school.

The participant talked about the use of sanctions in the second interview; specifically keeping him in at lunchtime after he '*wasn't playing ball*' in a lesson, to '*set boundaries*'.

There had also been one informal exclusion between interviews, when the pupil was involved in '*an aggressive thing and so he went home*' for a day. The pupil did not return for over a week, so the participant contacted his mum and he returned, but was '*very kind of down, very downcast*'. He had some '*behaviour checks*' with the principal teacher behaviour support when he came back.

Overall, the participant says the risk was '*probably around about the same*' for this pupil. Although he was '*very volatile*', she could '*see more positives for him*' and thought that this may be a '*daft phase*' that he would grow out of as he went through school.

Group C Outcomes:

The two young people in this group had different outcomes, largely due to their different ages. Case study 12 had gained some qualifications, was of school leaving age, and was moving to an Activity Agreement. The participant saw this as a positive step and was confident that she would have '*the right support from the right people that meets her needs… they will work with her in a way that meets her needs, rather than expecting her to fit into a system that is gonna set her up for failure.*' The second young person was still at school and receiving input from his pastoral care teacher and principal teacher behaviour support, and had been informally excluded once.

Summary of group C

Like the other groups, schools had used a range of interventions with young people in group C. They were at different stages of their school careers and so had different outcomes during the six months that we discussed them.

4.3 What accounts for some of the differences in outcome?

The importance of context

For some of the case study young people, the wider context of their lives changed dramatically between the two interviews. Across all the case studies, staff mentioned changes in context external to school in nine of seventeen cases, although it is possible that there were also other changes that staff were not aware of. Only one of these nine context changes – a child no longer being homeless - was judged by staff to have a positive impact. The other contextual changes were all described as having a negative impact. All the young people described as having experienced a context change were considered to have increased risk, except for the one who had a positive change (case study 8, no longer homeless) and one whose risk had increased following the context change and then reduced again with adapted interventions from the school and AP provider (case study 12).

Although almost all the young people who had experienced a negative context change had increased risk, not all the young people with increased risk had experienced a negative context change.

Table 14 –young people across all three groups who had experienced context change between interviews Scotland

Case study	Context change	Risk change
4	Family illness	Increased
5	Care home move	Increased
8	No longer homeless	Decreased
11	Involved in violence/ police involvement outside of school	Increased
12	Social work involvement suddenly ceased (impact on attendance and parental engagement)	Increased then reduced - stayed same overall

15	Family member imprisoned, increased social work involvement	Increased
16	Parental engagement decreased (possible worsening of parental mental health)	Increased
17	Increased violence towards family	Increased
18	Pregnancy	Increased

Of the young people with the worst educational outcomes – complete disengagement from school – two of the three had experienced sudden major life changes outside of school between the two interviews and these were described as the reason for their disengagement. The other young person (case study 13) was considered to have increased risk due to '*safety*' and '*dignity*' concerns when he was in the school environment.

For those who were not described as experiencing major context change between the two interviews – six young people plus the group of ten boys – outcomes were more mixed; four had increased risk, one stayed the same, and two (including the group of boys) decreased.

Regardless of changing context, it is worth noting that some contextual factors varied by group. There were four looked after children in the Scotland sample and all of them, as well as the only child described as being adopted, were in the increased risk group. Participants often highlighted the impact of the multiple adversities facing the families of many of the children and young people at risk of exclusion: '*Poverty, substance misuse, mental health, which is not easily talked about, a kind of toxic masculinity type of culture, and as a result, most of the young people that we are now providing bespoke curriculums for and working really hard to avoid exclusions are S1 to S3 white working-class males*'.

Vignette - Case study 5: disentangling context

Case study 5 was an S1 girl who the participant described as an '*able student'*. She was a Looked After Child with experience of trauma, living in residential care. She had previously been temporarily excluded twice for shouting and swearing, calling teachers names, and threatening violence. The participant was worries about her safety due to self-harm and 'risky behaviour'.

At the time of the first interview the main aim was to keep her in school and to make sure that she was safe and achieving – and build independence so not so she could become less reliant on support for learning staff. In the short term, goals were improving attendance and relationship building. She was receiving 1:1 support from a dedicated support for learning worker in the support for learning base, and she was being discussed at staged intervention meetings. There had been discussions at these meetings about whether the young person might need an alternative placement in a special school, but the participant was concerned about the possible negative impact of another change in the young person's life, although she thought it possible that another school may be able to better meet her needs due to smaller classes and SEBD specialists. She had a full-time timetable with a time-out pass for use when feeling overwhelmed, had had an enhanced transition from primary school, a wellbeing assessment plan and departmental attendance monitoring, and her views had

been gathered using a motivation and wellbeing profile. They had also tried a nurture group but this didn't work as the young person's behaviour was too '*out there*' for the rest of the group.

Support for learning staff were taking her to and from classes and were available in the base when needed. There was a focus on relationships as the most important tool, and an acknowledgment that her relationship with the support for learning teacher was crucial. Her care home was liaising with the school to support her education. At the time of the first interview, the interventions seemed to be working well. The young person was using the support for learning base and had developed a positive relationship with the support for learning teacher. The participant was cautiously optimistic that she might not need a move to a special school.

'*It all fell apart*' between the first and second interviews; the young person's risky behaviour became more extreme and she was '*basically out of control*'. There were incidents involving aggression towards staff and a weapon. The pupil's timetable was reduced to part-time but after '*a series of events*' and '*police involvement*' she was '*deemed to be unsafe*' and '*asked not to come in to school*'.

Around the same time there were reports from the care home of '*her unsafe behaviour, her influence on other children*'. She was moved to a different care home; the participant didn't know whether this happened before or after the school exclusion, but it all happened around the same time so was difficult to disentangle. She was '*there one day and then just hadn't been in for a while and then just didn't come back*'. The support for learning teacher who had been '*working really closely with her*' didn't get a chance to say goodbye, and the participant found it worrying that she didn't know what had happened for the young person. This 'unknown-ness' was key in the participant's categorisation of the young person being at increased risk: '*I liked to see her every day even though she was careening around the corridors and obviously screaming for attention and help. I like to see her every day. I find that as a teacher it's, it's best to have eyes on young people. So that, that kind of troubled me just the fact that we didn't see her any more and we were only hearing, you know, third hand about how she is. And that kinda troubles me as well that just young people can just disappear and your teachers aren't told, nobody really knows. I think there's a real lack of kinda information sharing and even though she's not in school we'd be, it would be good to know how she's doing. So I think that's important.*'

Intervention type

There does not seem to be one type of intervention that works to reduce risk, although there does appear to be a common core of face-to-face, regular contact with an adult who cares. Across all three groups, a number of interventions were described, most of which appear in all three groups. The difference between the interventions offered by group is minimal; if anything, those whose risk had increased had been offered more interventions than the others. This may reflect differences in the groups themselves; a wide variety of young people were picked as case studies, with many different definitions and understandings of 'risk', so it may be that those who were already in more complex or longstanding situations, and had therefore experienced a multitude of interventions, were overrepresented in the increased risk group.

Attendance was a key barrier to interventions being successful; for those who struggled to attend school, interventions could be put in place but '*all the things that you're trying to put in place need consistency and routine and that starts with being here, and if they're not here, that's a real difficulty*'.

Time, persistence and relationships

The data we present here, although in one sense longitudinal, represents a snapshot in time. It is likely that some of the young people described here as at increased risk would be perceived to have reduced risk in the future, and vice versa.

Outcomes were rarely described as final; aims, interventions and outcomes were usually all described as part of an ongoing process, even when young people were at the stage of transitioning to post-school. This probably reflects Scotland's policy approach in which schools remain legally responsible for the young people on their school roll regardless of AP involvement, and where the focus is on prevention of exclusion, the building and maintaining of relationships, and the wider wellbeing of young people. There was a strong sense throughout the interviews that they are the young people's schools and that it is their responsibility to do what they can to improve outcomes, although some participants also reflected on whether other settings may have been more successful for the young people.

In many cases the importance of knowing the young people and families was highlighted, and parental involvement was often framed as an intervention. Relationships-based approaches were described across all three groups.

Perceptions of risk

These case studies are situated accounts of young people's lives, coming from staff. It is possible, and even likely, that if we had spoken to the young people or their parents, they would have given us different accounts or emphasised different aspects, or judged the change in risk differently. It is also possible that if another group of staff had been asked, or if we had interviewed them at a different point in time, their perceptions of risk may have been different.

In any case, the groups presented here should not be seen as three distinct groups of children and young people; there was always a degree of uncertainty and subjectivity involved. Sometimes participants were not confident about knowing the level of risk, possibly reflecting decreased contact with young people and the complexity of young people's contexts. Sometimes, as in case study 5, a lack of clarity about the young person's situation was interpreted by participants as increased risk. In some cases the researcher allocated the case study to a risk group because participants were not asked about risk change in the second interview due to time constraints. In other cases, participants judged that the risk of exclusion had decreased but overall risk had increased. This may reflect Scottish Government's approach to exclusion, which encourages schools to focus on prevention and consider all aspects of a child's life before excluding, and may also reflect wider policy approaches to risk and wellbeing.

Resources: how do the schools access the resources they need?

Participants often talked about Pupil Equity Funding (PEF), which is part of the Scottish Government funded Attainment Challenge programme which aims to reduce the attainment gap between the most and least deprived areas in Scotland. Participants described using this funding flexibly and creatively in response to need. Some schools used the PEF funding to fund AP, while others used it to employ additional staff or resources.

Local authority funding or, more commonly, resources were also mentioned, such as the local authority Additional Support for Learning team which could give advice and support; and educational psychologists' input which could be accessed through regular scheduled meetings where a specified list of pupils was discussed. Multi-agency working was a key way of accessing resources, with child planning meetings often used as opportunities for shared decision-making.

What do the schools perceive as the barriers and supports to successful intervention?

Parents were sometimes positioned as a barrier and sometimes as a support, with parental engagement often framed as an intervention in and of itself, as a way of encouraging consistency, improved attendance and pupil engagement. Participants often acknowledged that the challenging contexts that parents faced were a barrier to engagement.

Similarly, external partners were sometimes seen as a barrier and sometimes a support. In some cases, for example, social work involvement was perceived to improve a young person's situation and therefore their experience of education, while at other times their perceived higher threshold for involvement, and lack of involvement in child planning meetings, was seen as a barrier. Extremely long CAMHS waiting lists were frequently raised as a barrier, with schools sometimes saying they were taking on some of the work that they previously would have expected CAMHS to do.

In most cases, multi-agency child planning meetings and other regular planning meetings were described as a positive way to consider new approaches, although some participants also acknowledged that they were time-consuming and there were barriers around the resourcing of caseloads for some external staff such as social workers.

The ongoing and disproportionate impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic were raised as a barrier, particularly in connection with attendance.

School ethos, and the resulting ability and encouragement to be flexible and creative, were often framed as supports; there was a sense across all the interviews that if interventions didn't work then they would try something else, and that new ideas could be gleaned from planned meetings and by learning from and sharing good practice, within school and between various professionals.

4.3.1 What are the implications for policy and practice?

The Scottish policy focus on prevention and wellbeing was evident throughout the case studies. A wide range of interventions was used across all three groups, within frameworks that prioritised relationships and inclusion. It was clear that the participants were strongly invested in the young people they described and had worked extremely hard to support them. There was a sense of tenacity in participants' accounts of the case studies; it was clear that young people were seen by participants as part of their schools, whether or not they were currently there.

Although there does not seem to be one type of intervention that works to reduce risk, the importance of face-to-face, regular contact with an adult who cares was highlighted throughout the case studies. The commitment to prevention of exclusion was clear throughout the case studies, with interventions often put in place at an early stage to prevent, rather than solely respond to, exclusions.

Despite this commitment to and investment in young people, outcomes by the time of the second interview were not always positive. Across the groups, the impact of the wider contexts of young people and their families was huge and should not be underestimated. There was widespread acknowledgement that what happened for young people within schools was intricately connected to their lives outside of school, and that the increasingly challenging broader environment, including the impact of Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis, was likely to exacerbate the challenges already faced by many families. This highlights the crucial importance of addressing broader inequalities and adequately resourcing services beyond education. Positive communication and multi-agency working were positioned as crucial. Knowledge of and support for multi-agency working was high, reflecting Scottish Government's GIRFEC approach. Some challenges were raised, however, around ensuring

that multi-agency working was in practice as effective as possible in the context of extremely high caseloads for some practitioners such as social workers and CAMHS.

Participants often highlighted resourcing within schools as challenging too, with staff time a precious commodity to be balanced with the needs of children and young people. PEF funding was often highlighted as particularly helpful.

Compared to other jurisdictions, a relatively high number of young people were considered – either by participants or, based on participants' accounts, the researchers – to have elevated risk. Exclusion statistics suggest that it is unlikely that this reflects heightened risk of exclusion or ineffective interventions in Scotland. It may be more likely to reflect differences in approaches to exclusion and to risk across the jurisdictions; the focus on relationships and wellbeing in Scotland encourages school staff to know the young people well and to consider the whole child when making judgements about risk rather than focusing narrowly on risk within the education setting.

Reflecting Scottish Government policy, participants' accounts of case studies were strongly underpinned by an understanding of behaviour as communication. This understanding was evident in the practice they described, which overwhelmingly focused on supporting young people and trying to meet need, rather than punitive approaches. In Scotland in recent months there has been a renewed interest in behaviour, culminating in the Education Secretary's announcement of a forthcoming 'behaviour summit'[23,24,25]. The case studies included in this report may act as sobering reminders of the complex issues surrounding experiences and perceptions of behaviour in schools, including poverty, societal and cultural issues, structural issues, adults' actions, interactions and perceptions, resourcing and staffing in schools.

5. Case Study Students in Wales

Jemma Bridgeman

5.1 Introduction

In Wales, pastoral care staff and staff responsible for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) identified twenty young people who were vulnerable and at risk of exclusion. The sample is drawn from interviews with staff from five mainstream schools and an alternative provision (AP) provider across three local authorities (LAs) in Wales. In Wales, educational settings have been categorised by the local authority (LA). They are LA1, LA2 or LA3, and whether they are lower than expected (LTE) or higher than expected (HTE), excluding mainstream schools. The AP provider operates in different LAs and is just referred to as AP and not been assigned an LA. This report broadly groups the young people that participants identified as vulnerable and at risk of exclusion into three broad categories.

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[23] J.P. Holden (2022), 'Education in Scotland: Pupil Behaviour "The Worst It's Been in Years"', *Herald Scotland*, https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/20139609.education-scotland-pupil-behaviour-the-worst-years/
[24] Scottish Parliament Debate (24th May 2023), 'Motion S6M-09126', *My Society*, https://www.theyworkforyou.com/sp/?id=2023-05-24.17.0&s=Schools+Exclusion#g17.26
[25] Scottish Government (May 2023), 'Behaviour in Schools', https://www.gov.scot/news/behaviour-in-schools/

These are Group A young people whose risk was de-escalated, Group B young people whose risk escalated, and Group C young people whose risk broadly stayed the same. The change in level of risk has been broken down by LA and whether the school was a HTE or LTE school and listed in Table 15.

LA	School	Group A: De-escalation of risk N= 6	Group B: Escalation of risk N= 12	Group C: Risk stayed the same N= 2
1	HTE	1	1	1
1	LTE	-	5	-
2	HTE	-	1	1
3	HTE	2	2	-
3	LTE	1	2	-
AP		2	1	-

Table 25: Change in level of risk Wales

Characteristics of the Young People

The cases of 20 children who were vulnerable and at risk of exclusion from school are discussed. In terms of gender, school staff identified 16 young men and four young women. Only two schools identified young women at risk of exclusion. They were the lower than expected (LTE) excluding schools in LA1 and the higher than expected (HTE) excluding school in LA3. Most children were White British, with two children in the LTE school in LA1 being mixed race and of Black African/ White British heritage. In LA3 in the HTE excluding school, they were unsure if one pupil was of White British or Irish heritage. Fifteen of the young people received free school meals (FSM). School staff were uncertain if the five remaining young people were eligible for FSM. At the time of the interview, they could not check the system. In terms of additional learning needs (ALN), three young people had Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD), five had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), One had speech and language difficulties, one had foetal alcohol syndrome, and one had Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Three had been tested for an ALN, but nothing had been found; ADHD was also suspected for one of the young women. Only five of the young people had no suspected ALN. Ten of the twenty young people were involved with the care system. A further young person's mother was terminally ill.

5.2 Findings
Aims of Staff

Most school staff explained that they were trying to prevent permanent exclusions. This is unsurprising as the Excluded Lives team asked school staff to identify young people who were vulnerable and at risk of school exclusion. However, they also wanted learners to engage with lessons

and manage behaviour, and they hoped they would not have to exclude them so they would continue to get the support they needed. For all 20 students, the aim that school staff discussed was to get the pupils they identified to follow the behaviour policy so they could stay in mainstream education until Year 11 and achieve their ambitions.

5.2.1 Group A De-escalation of Risk: Vulnerabilities and Support Needs

The level of risk had de-escalated for six of the twenty learners. They were all identified as vulnerable in the first and second interviews. Three learners had struggled with 'unstructured time' or focus, and two had ADHD. Two of the young people were living in kinship care, and although they had a 'huge turnover of social workers, ' things seemed to have stabilised. One learner had not been sleeping, and there was a worry about what was happening in the community. When he recently moved house, things had improved. Whilst the young people in Group A had undoubtedly had a difficult time, things were improving for them.

Vignette: De-escalation of risk

Learner 12, LA3 Lower than Expected (LTE) Excluding School

Learner 12 was in Year 8. He had been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). He had not been consistently medicated. When he was not medicated, he was very impulsive. The Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCO) explained that he was the worst ADHD child they had ever seen because when he was 'unmedicated, he couldn't have a focused thought'. Learner 12's mother was also impulsive and not consistent. His mother often said that 'she (was) going to take him out of the school' and then he would 'just turn up the next day' when they were not expecting him.

Learner 12 did have a key person in the school, but she had been 'worn down by it'. He went to his key person all the time, but his 'behaviours needed challenging', and that 'got to the point where it seemed like it was just challenge.' The Deputy Head described how learner 12 had started to 're-engage with people.' the school gave him a 'different key person, a different one-to-one,' and they reflected that this was 'working well.' Another thing that was working was the Deputy Head explained that he was 'popping into (his) office now and again' and that was 'helping him as well, even if it was only for 10 minutes.' The Deputy Head explained that learner 12 was 'getting interventions with literacy and speech and language.'

The school's relationship with learner 12's mother had improved. Learner 12 had previously been accused of bullying, and his mother had felt the sanction for this 'was ridiculous, and the school were just targeting him', and she had been 'very angry about this.' However, when learner 12 had been on the receiving end of bullying, the Deputy Head phoned her and said that the behaviour had been deliberate and bullying'. She had been more positive about that.

Learner 12 is still in mainstream school, and things are going well. He had only had a half-day exclusion this year. The Deputy Head described this as 'absolutely marvellous for him.' He felt

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that it was a 'combination of all sorts of things' that had made the difference to his behaviour. Including having a key person, him coming to (him), (the school) investing in him, in terms of protecting him with other people, the way he's been treated.'

Aims of staff working with Group A: De-escalation of risk

There was some consistency amongst school staff about their aims for pupils in group A whose level of risk had de-escalated. Across this group, school staff reported improved relationships with these pupils. Staff identified the need to continue to develop relationships and improve rapport with these pupils. Another theme was that attendance had improved, although in many cases, it needed improvement. The aim was to continue supporting these pupils to leave school with qualifications and achieve their ambitions.

Interventions: what interventions are schools using and why?

Three schools and an AP provider believed that pupils' level of risk had de-escalated at the time of the second interview. For the young people discussed in interviews, based on the judgements of school staff, schools with HTE exclusions reported that they appeared to be more successful at de-escalating risk. However, this could also have been because they had selected pupils who were at a lower risk of exclusion. The risk of exclusion was de-escalated for one learner in the HTE school in LA1 and for two learners in the HTE excluding school in LA3 and one learner in the LTE excluding school in LA3. The risk was also judged to have de-escalated for two students attending AP.

The range of interventions available in each school, and the AP provider, where learners showed a de-escalation of risk, are listed below. One of the interventions all three schools had in common was an internal alternative provision facility.

School	Interventions	Risk Levels of Students
LA1 HTE	The school in house behavioural 'Steps' alternative provision (AP) with a full-time alternative curriculum, the school's internal 'Step-up' provision for young people who struggled with the transition from primary to secondary school part-time with a literacy and numeracy intervention, mentoring project, external therapeutic rugby intervention, external football intervention, counselling.	1 x Group A level of risk de-escalated.
LA3 LTE	School-based youth workers delivering self-esteem, teamwork and relationship-building support, schools internal AP, literacy and language	1 x Group A level of risk de-escalated.

	interventions, key person support, external sports-based AP.	
LA3 HTE	Partnership working with other agencies, including youth justice, school-based alternative provision counselling, external sports-based AP, work on trauma and attachment and relationship building.	2 x Group A level of risk de-escalated.
AP	School-based counsellor, external farm-based AP, Internal vocational and sporting AP, Thrive practitioner.	2 x Group A level of risk de-escalated.

Table 16: School interventions de-escalation of risk Wales

No particular support appeared to be a panacea for the learner's support needs. Three of the five schools had developed some alternative provision for learners struggling with behaviour in a mainstream setting. These were the higher-than-expected excluding schools in LA1 and the HTE excluding and LTE excluding schools in LA3. Of the seven learners being educated in their school's internal AP, three had shown a de-escalation of risk and two were being educated in external AP. Learner 6's Head of Year reported that it was 'working wonders' for learner 6, and the head of the AP described how learner 16 'was weirdly enjoying lessons'. The biggest transformation had been learner 15, who 'brought balance to the classroom' and wanted to be a teacher. Two of the learners educated by the AP provider also showed a de-escalation of risk.

Schools Internal AP: De-escalation of Risk

Learner 15 in the HTE, excluding school in LA3, particularly thrived in the school's internal AP provision. The teacher in charge of the provision explained that 'he's a good person to have around and he…brings balance to the classroom now, which I would never have said six months ago.' He has decided he wants to be a teacher when he leaves school, so the school has put things in place so that he can achieve that. The Deputy Head described how he has gone from 'strength to strength'. The only thing that has changed is that he is only in school four days a week because he is in 'primary school one day a week.' They explained, 'he's now going into his primary school one day a week as a Teaching Assistant (TA).' The Deputy Head explained that they have 'realised that…removing him too quickly from subjects' was difficult when he decided he wanted to 'become a teacher and was struggling because he doesn't do science.' The headteacher is teaching Learner 15 biology so he can still achieve his aspiration of becoming a teacher. The school reflected that this would make them more aware in the future because while an alternative

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curriculum is 'sometimes brilliant', putting learners back into mainstream subjects is 'sometimes impossible.' The Deputy Head explained that he was doing hugely well' and 'if he ever wanted to work at the school,' they would employ him.

Group A Outcomes: De-escalation of Risk

The two consistent themes from interviews discussing learners where the level of risk had decreased, were that schools had a good relationship with parents and school staff had been effective at building relationships with learners. In terms of relationships with parents, a concern for student 6, who was doing well in the school's internal AP, was 'busy in the community', but his mother 'was keeping an eye on it.' The relationship between parents and the school had been turbulent at times, but schools and parents worked effectively together. For example, Learner 12's mother thought her son had been mistreated when he was accused of bullying but appreciated the school's response when her son had been bullied. Another thing that contributed to a de-escalation of risk was school staff building relationships with young people. For learner 6, who was being educated in the school's internal AP, his Head of Year felt that he was benefiting from 'more of a structure, more of a focus and role models around him that can give him the time, attention and support that he probably needs on a more one-to-one basis.' The Deputy Head of Learner 12's school explained that his progress was 'marvellous.' He felt that it was a 'combination of all sorts of things' that had made the difference to his behaviour. Including having a key person, him coming to (him), (the school) investing in him, in terms of protecting him with other people, the way he's been treated.' The Deputy Head described how learner 2 had started to 're-engage with people.' the school gave him a ''different key person, a different one-to-one,' and they reflected that it was 'working well.' Another thing that was working was the Deputy Head explained that he was 'popping into (his) office now and again' and that was 'helping him as well, even if it was only for 10 minutes.'

Summary of Group A

In the second interview, there was a de-escalation of risk for six of the twenty students. Although this group was still vulnerable, there was an improvement in their personal lives. For example, two care-experienced learners' living situations had stabilised as they now lived in kinship care. School staff reported no communication problems with the parents of pupils in this group. One school explained that one learner's behaviour improved alongside their relationship with his mother improving. Interventions that worked mainly with learners that showed a de-escalation of risk were school staff building relationships with young people. Schools internal AP worked well for this group, and staff reflected this could be because of a higher teacher-to-student ratio and smaller class sizes. School staff reflected that in AP units' teachers can give these students the 'time and attention they need.'

5.2.2 Group B Escalation of Risk: Vulnerability and Support Needs

The level of risk had escalated for twelve of the twenty students. School staff explained that these learners continued to have a turbulent home environment. This could be why the school's support was ineffective and their risk of exclusion escalated. These learners shared the characteristics of the learners in Group A. Some were in the care system, and some had ALN. These young people had additional vulnerabilities. Two had been involved in county lines, five were involved with social

services, and three had witnessed domestic abuse. One of the student's fathers had been deported, and another had been in prison. School staff spoke of a complex or turbulent home life. Most of the pupils were currently experiencing a challenging time, and their personal lives had recently worsened.

Vignette: Escalation of Risk

Learner 1, LA1 LTE Excluding School

Learner 1 was in Year 8. His primary school had identified him as a student likely to struggle in high school. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted his start in high school. Concerns were raised about his attendance and anxiety about attending school in Year 7. The Head of Pastoral Care explained that 'his vulnerability is around his finding it difficult to behave in school and, therefore, his behaviour, is putting him at risk of exclusion and potentially permanent exclusion.' The school saw a disruptive child that was struggling with his behaviour. His father had been deported from the UK, and school staff explained that he had experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). However, he had a supportive relationship with his mother and a good relationship with his stepdad. Student 1's mother was convinced he had Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). His mother felt his behaviour might be a result of his experiencing anxiety.

The local authority (LA) specialist teacher supported the school in getting a statement. Student 1 received a statement for behaviour, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) rather than ASD. They said there was no ASD, but his mother believed there was. The Head of Pastoral Care explained that the specialist teacher 'talked to him about his behaviour and why he behaved that way. But again, very little of that was done because he was not always in school for it. Because he only comes in one day a week. If this young man is not in on that day, he doesn't get to pick him up.'

They explained by the time the school had got the statement for behaviour, he had already been permanently excluded from school. The Head of Pastoral Care explained, 'Because the statement came through literally a few weeks ago, we'd applied for interim funding to put a TA in place to work one-to-one with him. We still haven't had the funding for that – and obviously, he's now been permanently excluded.' They felt things might not have escalated if they had gotten the statement sooner. The one-to-one would have been full-time and supported him during break times and lunchtime. Meaning he would not wind himself up and get himself in difficult situations in class.

The headteacher decided to exclude student 1 permanently. The Head of Pastoral Care explained that 'it was not an easy decision. It was incredibly difficult.' She explained that what was so 'frustrating' was that despite the support they put in place, no matter what they did, they 'didn't seem to be making any progress whatsoever – and (they had) never been in that situation before. There's always been some positives or some glimmer.'

Aims of staff working with Group B: Escalation of risk

School staff across schools reported that they had aimed to put appropriate support in place for this group of pupils. In interviews, school staff told us that eight of the pupils in this group had been permanently excluded. A consistent theme where pupils had been excluded was that school staff had put support in place to de-escalate risk. However, pupils' attendance had been so low they were not accessing the support that had been put in place. Unfortunately, when they were in school, their behaviour had been so disruptive their headteachers felt they had no choice other than to permanently exclude them. Of the two pupils in this group who were now being educated in alternative provision, one in their school's internal AP and another in a pupil referral unit (PRU), the aim was for them to return to the mainstream. School staff were looking for a more suitable educational setting for another student. For the remaining student, the school staff felt they were at an impasse; her attendance was an issue. They aimed to support her but were unsure what they could do next.

Group B Risk Escalated: Aiming to Minimise Exclusions Learner 1

At the first interview, learner 1 had received one fixed-term exclusion. The Head of Pastoral Care explained that they were trying to 'minimise those exclusions.' They explained if they had not put in place other things, he could have had 'significantly more exclusions.' Learner 1 had access to the school's nurture provision; he had a positive relationship with his head of year. However, school staff explained that they struggled with his behaviour on a day-to-day basis. Learner 1 was also supported by the Education Welfare and Emotional Wellbeing service, and he worked with a specialist teacher every Friday. At the second interview, the Head of Pastoral Care explained that student 1 'was rarely in school. When he was in school, he spent most of his time truanting; he spent the vast majority of his time wandering around the school and hiding from staff members. He was not accessing the nurture provision. This meant even though school staff had put support in place to prevent exclusions he was not accessing this support.

Interventions for Group B: Escalation of Risk

The level of risk of exclusion escalated for 12 of the 20 learners. All five learners in the LTE excluding school in LA1 level of risk had escalated, four had been excluded and alternatives to the mainstream were being discussed for the remaining student. Whilst the level of risk had only escalated for one of the young people in the HTE, excluding school in LA1. This could be in part due to the way school staff identified learners. School staff were asked to identify young people who were vulnerable and at risk of exclusion. Some school staff picked their most vulnerable learners, whilst some picked a selection of learners, including some that they thought whose risk was likely to de-escalate. The LTE-excluding school in LA2 explained that they were an 'inclusive' school where young people are educated in the mainstream. One of their learners showed an escalation of risk and was being educated in the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). School-based internal AP and external AP were not successful for all learners. Two learners in the LTE and HTE, excluding school risk, escalated despite the school having internal AP. The two students from the HTE school were being educated in specialist provision for students with ASD and by a home tutor. In the LTE in LA3, one student had been excluded, and they felt like they were at an 'impasse' with the remaining student.

Interventions in core schools

The range of interventions available in each school, and the AP provider, where learners showed an escalation of risk, are listed below. The LTE excluding schools in LA1 did not have internal AP but did have a schools-based nurture activity. The support interventions in the LTE school in LA1 are about therapy, emotional and well-being support. Similarly, the LTE excluding schools in LA2 aimed to be 'inclusive' and educated learners in the mainstream. Whilst the HTE excluding schools in LA1 and the LTE and HTE excluding schools in LA3 had internal alternative provisions where learners at risk of exclusion could be educated.

School	Interventions	Risk Levels of Students
LA1 LTE	Teaching Assistant (TA) support with learning and behaviour, school nurture facility, access to the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service, music trauma therapy, therapeutic animal-assisted activities, pupils worked with the LA Behavioural specialist.	5 x Group B escalation of risk
LA1 HTE	The school in house behavioural 'Steps' alternative provision (AP) with a full-time alternative curriculum, the school's internal 'Step-up' provision for young people who struggled with the transition from primary to secondary school part-time with a literacy and numeracy intervention, mentoring project, external therapeutic rugby intervention, external football intervention, counselling.	1 x Group B level of risk escalated.
LA2 LTE	Educated in the mainstream with tailored support, including the options to have additional literacy and numeracy interventions and book-based rather than exam-based qualifications in subjects such as Personal Social Education (PSE), work on trauma and attachment and relationship building.	1 x Group B level of risk escalated.
LA3 LTE	School-based youth workers delivering self-esteem, teamwork and relationship-building support, schools internal AP, literacy and language	2 x Group B level of risk escalated

	interventions, key person support, external sports-based AP.	
LA3 HTE	Partnership working with other agencies, including youth justice, school-based alternative provision counselling, external sports-based AP, work on trauma and attachment and relationship building.	2 x Group B level of risk escalated
AP	School-based counsellor, external farm-based AP, Internal vocational and sporting AP, Thrive practitioner.	1 x Group B level of risk escalated

Table 17 Interventions in core schools Wales

5.2.3 Group B Outcomes Escalation of Risk: Permanent exclusion from school

Six of the learners whose risk had escalated had been permanently excluded from school. The most common theme for those excluded was a lack of engagement from the young people, coupled with low attendance and parents that did not work with the school. It has been previously mentioned that the learners in the escalation of risk group also tended to have more significant vulnerabilities. The Head of Pastoral Care explained that Learner 2 was 'highly vulnerable and highly at risk. Whilst the school had referred her to social services, they knew 'Children's Services are stretched to the limit.' When she was permanently excluded, she was also sofa surfing. The Head of Pastoral Care explained. Learner 2's behaviour was coupled with low attendance, which was lower than 60%. The school had arranged various forms of support and interventions for her, including music therapy and emotional support, and arranged access to the school's nurture provision. The Head of Pastoral Care also explained that she felt that she was 'highly vulnerable and highly at risk.' The 'lack of engagement from her mother had hindered progress. 'At the time of the second interview, she was also sofa surfing in her uncle's one-bedroom flat. The headteacher took the difficult decision to exclude her because of cumulative disruptive behaviour.

Learner 18 had been permanently excluded from his AP provision after his behaviour 'really deteriorated after Christmas.' He had been educated in a small group and supported by a high-level teaching assistant (HLTA) to 'flexibly manage his mood.' The school had also put a Behaviour Plan into place. The ALNCO explained the plan had been 'written out with him and a learning outreach worker. They had gone through the plan with him and explained that he should not be threatening staff members. Learner 18 had signed and agreed on the actions in the Behaviour Plan. The Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCO) explained that if learner 18 felt angry or frustrated, he should go to a room to calm down with an outreach worker. However, the problem was that he was 'not adhering' to the Behaviour Plan. The ALNCO explained that even though they 'were trying to put so much support and help in place, he just disengaged in the end.' It was agreed with the local authority that the school did not seem to be working for him, and 'they moved him to a different

provision**.'** The ALNCO said it was a real shame because **'**he had a lot of potential, a real lot of potential,' but he did not want to work with them. Learner 18 was living in a residential home. There were barriers in place that made it difficult to visit his mother. One of them was that he had been involved in county lines when he had lived with his mother. There was a risk that he get involved again if he visited her. After Christmas, the ALNCO said, 'He just continued to get worse', and he was 'verbally abusive towards staff, threatening to beat up staff, just being very, very abusive towards staff. Then it got to the point where we thought he was going to hit a member of staff. So, it was in the best interest that he was permanently excluded.'

Outcomes Escalation of Risk: Specialist provision

Four of the learners whose risk had escalated were still registered and one was dual registered with their schools. Two learners whose level of risk had escalated were educated in schools-based AP. Despite being supported by a specialist-trained TA, this had not had led to an improvement in learner 8's behaviour. His Head of Year thought this might be because he did not want to return to the mainstream. The school had got him a mentor from a local football team as he loved football. Learner 17 was being educated in her school's AP, but the teacher in the provision explained that it was 'difficult to get any momentum going because she is hardly ever in school.' Learner 13 was being educated in a local library. The school had put him on a reduced timetable. The LA would only consider alternatives once he was engaged in education full-time. Learner 9 was dual registered and educated in a PRU. The issue with this was it was a short sharp intervention, and the Head of Inclusion was concerned that his behaviour would escalate when he returned to school. One learner's permanent exclusion had been overturned. Learner 11 had ASD and a terminally ill mother and is now being educated at a specialist provision for learners with ASD. Additionally, the LA behaviour specialist had decided that mainstream education was not appropriate for learner 4, and the most suitable alternative for him was being discussed at an LA panel.

Escalation of Risk: Attendance and Behaviour

School staff identified two things that made interventions that aimed to reduce the risk of exclusion ineffective. Firstly, attendance pupils needed to attend schools to benefit from the interventions put in place and needed parents to work with them rather than against them. In the LTE school in LA1, the Head of Pastoral Care described how the parents were working against them rather than with them. Learner 1's attendance was '40% at one point, and his behaviour continued to escalate.' His mother was convinced he had ASD, but the school saw a disruptive child struggling with his behaviour. Learner 2's attendance was 'less than 60%', (making) it difficult for this support to be effective.' The Head of Pastoral Care described a complete and utter shutdown and lack of engagement with the school.' The Deputy Head of the HTE school in LA3 explained student 17 was 'now refusing to come to school on more days than not, so her attendance has significantly dropped. She rocks up whenever she feels like it.' The Deputy Head explained that learner 17's home life continued to be challenging.

Escalation of Risk: Mainstream Education Not the Right Setting

For four young people whose risk escalated, school staff explained that mainstream education was not the right setting for them. Student 4 spent most of his time in the school's nurture provision or internal inclusion. The LA behavioural support team had explained to the school his 'needs are not being met in the best way' at the school. He was 'volatile' and would 'strike out verbally and physically.' School staff were meeting with the LA to discuss alternatives. Student 9 had been

diagnosed with foetal alcohol syndrome. His school did not have an internal AP unit. The Head of Inclusion explained that student 9 often did not remember why he had behaved in a disruptive way. The school worked with him, asking him the 'wonder' questions, e.g. 'I wonder why I behaved that way.' When he was becoming increasingly disruptive, it was decided he should attend the PRU, and it was 'working for him there.' The Deputy Head described that when student 11 reached the end of Year 9, he had amassed 'another 46' fixed term exclusions. His behaviour was still disruptive despite being educated in the school's internal AP. The local authority intervened, found a specialist provision for students with ASD, and the exclusion was withdrawn. Since the move to the new provision, he has 'been attending regularly, he's had his statement amended, and he's been successful.

Summary of Group B

School staff reported that the level of risk escalated for 12 of the 20 students that they had selected. These learners tended to have the same vulnerabilities as learners whose risk had de-escalated, such as having ALN or being in the care system. However, they tended to have additional vulnerabilities. For example, some were involved in county lines. Their home life had either continued to be turbulent or had recently worsened. For example, one learner's mother was terminally ill, and another had become homeless and was sofa surfing, and school staff explained that this 'impacted how they were in school.'

School staff identified a lack of engagement and low attendance as crucial factors contributing to the escalation of risk. Whilst schools would arrange various forms of support and intervention, students needed to attend school to benefit from them. Another factor that contributed to an escalation of risk was the relationship of school staff with parents. Some schools reported that parents were working against them rather than with them' or there was a 'lack of engagement.' For four of the learners identified, school staff explained that mainstream education was just not the right setting for them. They were being educated elsewhere, including specialist provision for learners with ASD, and a PRU, while one was going to a LA panel to discuss the best option for them.

5.2.4 Group C: Level of Risk Stayed about the Same

The level of risk stayed the same for two of the twenty learners. Both learners were being educated in the mainstream, and both their schools were worried that things might 'escalate' or something could happen that would be the 'final straw', and they would be permanently excluded. Not much had changed for learner 7, who was 'very quiet' and could go under the radar. His Head of Year described how he had not had the best start in life and had witnessed domestic abuse when he was younger. Learner 10 had been identified as vulnerable in primary school and had been supported with his behavioural issues. The vignette below describes learners 7's experiences in more detail.

Vignette: Risk stayed the same

> **Learner 7, LA1, HTE Excluding school.**
>
> Learner 7 was in Year 7. When he came to the school, they knew there was a history of domestic abuse when he was younger. He was very quiet. He could go under the radar because he was not one of the loud students throwing things. He had become very defiant, leading to conversations

with teachers about how he could be managed. He did not respond well to teachers shouting. He responded well when teachers were calm and rational. He had been involved in some nasty fights. This might stem from what he had seen as a younger child. He was on the headteacher's radar, and that did not tend to happen with Year 7 pupils. The fights were more about him attacking students. There had been two quite nasty incidents. His Head of Year was interviewed at the end of the school year, and she explained there was a worry that the six-week holiday may push him back. When he attacked students, it was vicious, but his Head of Year felt that this was because of the trauma he had experienced. His Head of Year thought that he had potential, but because of all the fights he had gotten into, he was on his last warning from the headteacher. The hope was that the school's support would prevent him from being permanently excluded.

He had been assessed for an Additional Learning Need (ALN), but he came back as having low ability. The school has an internal alternative provision (AP) called 'Step-up.'[26] for young people who have struggled with the transition to secondary school. The Step-up programme focuses on literacy and numeracy. The Step-up provision has smaller class sizes, and there is a focus on literacy and numeracy. They are smaller classes than in the mainstream, and learners are supported by Teaching Assistants (TAs). He had a good relationship with a school-based mentor, but the school no longer had the funding to run the mentoring scheme this year. His mentor is still involved with the school in another capacity. She still monitors him because his 'dependency is horrific' and she 'unofficially still mentors him.' His Head of Year explained that they felt that 'more could be done for him, but as in every school, it's just funding. We just don't have the funding.'

In the second interview, learner 7 was still in the mainstream. School Staff had told him when he started Year 8, 'It's a fresh start', and they again put him in the literacy and numeracy intervention. He does not like this. He says it makes him 'feel thick.' Not much has changed for him, but 'his attendance has dropped massively. He had been internally excluded on the day of the second interview. His Head of Year explained that the aim was to get him into the school 'progression.'[27] AP, where he could attend full-time and there would be smaller classes. This provision is currently full, and he can 'get missed because he is quiet.'

His Head of Year explained the concern with him is because he is 'not loud, he doesn't throw things, he doesn't argue with teachers' despite there being something 'deep-rooted there.' He has been offered different interventions like counselling, but he has yet to accept them. The concern is that he will 'slip through the net'. He could end up doing something that is the 'final straw' and is at risk of permanent exclusion. This is sad because 'he hasn't had the best start in life.'

Aims of staff working with Group C: Risk stayed the same

School staff reported that the level of risk stayed the same for two pupils. However, school staff also explained that a single behavioural incident could lead to a permanent exclusion for either learner. School staff were aiming to get one of the learners into the schools' alternative provision. However, there were concerns that more disruptive students would be given a place rather than him because the majority of the time he was a quiet pupil. For the other pupil staff were aiming to find the best way to support him and were considering sending him to a PRU.

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[26] The name of the provision has been changed
[27] The name of this provision has been changed.

Interventions: what interventions are schools using and why?

The level of risk of exclusion stayed the same for two of the 20 learners. These two learners went to two different schools. One went to the HTE excluding school in LA1, and one went to the LTE school in LA2. Learner 7 was educated in the HTE, excluding school in LA1. Learner 7 had attended his school's 'Step-up' provision. This was a part-time intervention for young people who had struggled with the transition from primary to secondary school and focused on 'literacy and numeracy. Learner 10 was educated in the LTE excluding school in LA2, which is an 'inclusive' school where learners are educated in the mainstream. The range of interventions available in each school where learners' level of risk stayed the same is listed below.

School	Interventions	Risk Levels of Students
LA1 HTE	The school in house behavioural 'Steps' alternative provision (AP) with a full-time alternative curriculum, the school's internal 'Step-up' provision for young people who struggled with the transition from primary to secondary school part-time with a literacy and numeracy intervention, mentoring project, external therapeutic rugby intervention, external football intervention, counselling.	1 x Group C's level of risk stayed the same.
LA2 LTE	Educated in the mainstream with tailored support, including the options to have additional literacy and numeracy interventions and book-based rather than exam-based qualifications in subjects such as Personal Social Education (PSE), work on trauma and attachment and relationship building.	1 x Group C's level of risk stayed the same.

Table 18 Interventions risk stayed the same Wales.

For the two learners whose level of risk had not changed. Although these learners attended different schools, school staff felt that a single behavioural incident could lead to a permanent exclusion in both cases. Staff from both schools explained they were still at risk of permanent exclusion. Learner 7's Head of Year explained that 'not much had changed' for him, but his attendance had 'dropped massively.' He was on the waiting list for the school's internal AP because he 'benefits from one-to-one support and consistency. The smaller classes and the lower student-to-teacher ratio would benefit him.' The worry was that 'with him currently being in the mainstream, he is still at risk of a permanent exclusion.' For learner 10, the Head of Inclusion explained that they were 'just in a position where we're thinking about what else ... If things escalated, what else is there.' They are still determining if it would be the pupil referral unit (PRU).

Summary for Group C

School staff identified that two of the twenty learners' risk of exclusion had not changed. Whilst the level of risk had not changed, both these learners were still at risk of exclusion from school. School staff from both schools were worried that things could 'escalate' and that something would happen that would be the 'final straw.' School staff aimed to get student 7 into the school's internal AP, where he would benefit from smaller class sizes and one-to-one support. However, because he was quiet, he could get missed. For learner 10, the Head of Inclusion explained they were thinking 'what else' and were working with colleagues to identify the next steps for him. School staff expressed concern for both these learners that one single behavioural incident could lead to a permanent exclusion.

5.3 What accounts for some of the differences in outcome?

Some differences in outcomes can be explained by how schools selected learners. Before interviews ALNCOs and staff responsible for pastoral care were asked to identify learners who were vulnerable and at risk of exclusion. Whilst the LTE-excluding school in LA1 selected their most vulnerable learners, the HTE excluding school in LA3 selected two students who they thought were likely to improve and two who were likely to struggle. Whilst the other approaches school staff use to select learners need to be considered, it only partially accounts for the differences in learner outcomes. The learners in Group A who showed a de-escalation of risk had vulnerabilities, including ALN and being in the care system. Things had stabilized or improved for these learners. One of the learners had been falling asleep in class leading to concerns about what he was doing in the community and he had recently moved house, his sleeping in class had improved. Five of the six learners whose level of risk de-escalated were being educated in either their school's internal AP or external AP. But it could be the higher staff-to-student ratio where school staff can give learners the time, attention and support they need on a one-to-one basis. School staff also explained that they had a good relationship with pupils in Group A and their parents.

School staff identified 12 of the twenty learners in Group B as showing an escalation of risk of permanent exclusion. Schools identified a lack of engagement, low attendance, and parents not working with them as key factors that could escalate risk. School staff were working hard to put a range of support and interventions in place. They were frustrated because learners could not benefit from this support if they were not in school. However, the 12 learners in Group B showed an escalation of risk and had the same vulnerabilities as the learners in Group A, including ALN and being in the care system. Where they had these vulnerabilities, they were also experiencing a complex or turbulent home life. Learner 2 was at risk, and the school had referred her to social services, which were 'stretched to the limit' when she had been permanently excluded from school. She was sofa-surfing, experiencing homelessness. Learner 11 had been diagnosed with ASD his mother was terminally ill. Learner 11 was initially permanently excluded from school, but this was overturned, and he is now being educated at a specialist provision for learners with ASD. Whilst there is support and various interventions available in schools, including therapeutic interventions, internal AP, and counselling, these may be insufficient for some of the most vulnerable learners. It is clear that more suitable support and interventions are needed if the young people facing these challenges are to thrive in school.

Resources: how do the schools access the resources they need?

Resources

In interviews, participants talked positively about the resources available from LAs to prevent exclusions. Notably, the LA's attendance officers, specialist teachers and wellbeing services. There was also evidence of partnership working with other agencies. For example, the HTE school in LA3 worked with the youth offending team, who were able to get speech and language assessments for the pupils they were working with. School staff also explained how they had made referrals to social services and Team Around the Family. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, because the job roles of the people we interviewed were around supporting young people rather than budgets, they were more concerned with a need for more resources.

Delays accessing funding for BESD leading to an escalation in risk

By the time the LTE excluding school in LA1 had got a statement for BESD, learner 1 had already been permanently excluded from school. The Head of Pastoral Care felt things might not have escalated if they had gotten the statement sooner. They needed the statement to access funding for a dedicated one-to-one. The one-to-one would have been full-time and supported him during break times and lunchtime. Meaning he would 'not wind himself up and get himself in difficult situations in class.' The Head of Pastoral Care explained, 'We'd applied for interim funding to put a TA in place to work one-to-one with him. We still haven't had the funding for that – and obviously, he's been permanently excluded.'

Lack of funding means risk stays the same.

Similarly, learner 7 from the HTE excluding school in LA1, whose risk had stayed the same, was not receiving the necessary interventions because of a lack of funding. He had a good relationship with a school-based mentor, but the school no longer had the funding to run the mentoring scheme this year. His mentor was still involved with the school in another capacity. She still monitored him because his 'dependency is horrific' and she 'unofficially still mentors him.' His Head of Year felt that more could be done for him if they could access more funding.

Lack of funding for alternative provision

One of the frustrations around resources for the HTE school in LA3 was the 'cost implications' of some alternative provisions. School staff expressed concerns about the lack of funding for interventions to prevent exclusion from school. The ALNCO described how two or three learners could benefit from a Junior Apprenticeship programme at a local college, which takes away a staff member and only helps a few children. The ALNCO explained, 'Those resources could have gone into ten kids and had a massive lifelong impact on them… I can still invest all of this into that one child but at the risk of all those others.'

Schools Based: Alternative Provision

The Head of Year in the HTE excluding school in LA1 explained that things always came down to funding because there needed to be more time or money in schools. They had just had ACEs training and felt that in the area the school was in, 'there needs to be far more government funding for different interventions because that helps us prevent exclusions. They felt that learners 6 and 8 would have been permanently excluded if they were not being educated in the school's internal AP.

They explained that funding was still an issue for the school's internal AP provision. They felt that funding was key. They explained the 'pay was not great', meaning sometimes they must rely on agency TAs to work in the schools internal AP.

What do the schools perceive as the barriers and supports to successful intervention?

The challenges of recruiting Teaching Assistants (TAs) to work with young people at risk of exclusion were identified. In one school, school staff explained each time they advertised for TA roles, they would get two or three applications and usually had two or three jobs available. They explained the number of TAs needed had 'increased significantly', and they have gone from needing a team of 'six or seven' to a 'team of 20.' They have had to go to the LA and explain they need help because if they 'can't recruit', they 'can't meet the needs of children.' They felt low wages of '£12,000/£13,000/£14,000' made recruitment challenging, particularly in a cost-of-living crisis.

School staff identified the need for more trauma-informed mental health training. The need for pastoral support staff to have a more strategic view of pupils who need professional help from social services etc., and for those who 'need to touch base with school staff' and 'build relationships.' The need to be empathetic and use kinder language, not asking, 'Why haven't you done your homework' but 'What stopped you from doing your homework, and how can I help.' School staff also wanted to have more time to work with the children who were at risk and vulnerable.

One staff member felt there should be a menu of support that each school should be able to provide. Where a school could not offer this support, for example, because it was a smaller school then the LA could provide these services. They wanted a menu of support available at each school based on the needs of the young person.

While partnership working could be beneficial external partners were not always aware of the challenges schools were experiencing. Learner 17 was not engaged in education and was at risk of permanent exclusion. The Pastoral Care team at her school thought because of her background in the care system, 'she doesn't trust any adult whatsoever' They felt she needed 'an aspiration' and 'some relationships' and, hopefully, later on, that would 'result in behaviour changes.' However, the ALNCO described her attendance as sporadic. This made it difficult to get any momentum going. The Deputy Head explained how they sought advice from the educational psychologist as they needed to get through to this learner. The educational psychologist had suggested that they 'record…the start of the lessons and produce resources in a pack for her, so when she comes in, (she could) catch up.' The Deputy Head felt that this 'wasn't an appropriate thing to ask 14 teachers to do with someone who wasn't even engaging, and surely that was condoning her just turning up whenever she felt like it.' They felt this would encourage her to be late because 'there'll be a pack for (her) to do.' The school described how they were frustrated because even when they 'sought advice, the advice we're being given is just not useful.'

Conclusion

It is difficult to draw conclusions from the data about whether LTE or HTE excluding schools were more likely to exclude the young people they discussed. School staff were asked to identify two or three young people that were vulnerable and at risk. Where there are differences it could be because of how young people were selected. For example, in the LTE excluding school in LA1 where

the five young people showed an escalation of risk four had been permanently excluded and they were discussing alternative placements for another. They may have chosen five of their most vulnerable and at-risk pupils. Conversely, in the HTE excluding school in LA3 two pupils showed an escalation of risk and two showed a de-escalation of risk. The HTE excluding school may have selected two pupils whose risk was likely to de-escalate and two whose risk was likely to escalate.

Of the young people in Group A that school staff felt had shown a de-escalation of risk, they were still vulnerable and at risk, but things seemed to have stabilised for them. Two of the young people were living in kinship care which was going well, one young person who had issues in the community had moved house. For these three young people staff described how although they were still vulnerable and at-risk things were improving for them. The remaining learners that showed a de-escalation of risk were educated in AP. One of the learners, from the HTE excluding school in LA3 was being educated in the schools internal AP. The remaining two young people in Group A were being educated in the AP setting. School staff reflected that this could be because of a higher teacher to student ratio and smaller class sizes meaning that they had the time and attention they needed. Another factor that school staff identified in this group was relationships they tended to have good relationships with parents and had been effective at building relationships with the young people School staff explained that a common theme with this group was attendance had improved, although there was still room for improvement.

Staff explained the twelve young people in Group B whose level of risk escalated continued to have a turbulent home life. Young people had similar characteristics of those in Group A some were in the care system and some had ALN. However, these young people had experienced additional vulnerabilities including involvement in county lines, witnessing domestic abuse and having a parent in prison. The most common theme discussed by school staff was that the young people in Group B were experienced a challenging time and their personal lives had recently worsened. School staff explained that this group struggled with attendance meaning that they were not in school to benefit from the support that they had put in place for them. Some of the learners in this group were being educated in AP, but unlike the learners in Group A who staff said risk had de-escalated, theirs had escalated. In LA3 the level of risk escalated for learners in both the LTE and HTE excluding schools. The level of risk also escalated for one of the learners being educated in the AP setting. Whilst school staff tended to identify more risk factors for this group future research could examine why AP is effective for some learners and not for others. The common themes that staff identified that young people who showed an escalation of risk was a lack of engagement from young people, coupled with low attendance and parents not wanting to work with the school. School staff explained for interventions to be successful that aimed to prevent exclusion pupils needed to attend school to benefit from them and parents needed to work with them instead of against them.

School staff thought that the level of risk had stayed the same for two young people. Both were still being educated in the mainstream. However, in both cases school staff were worried that there would be an incident that would be a final straw which would lead to a permanent exclusion. One of them, who was in the HTE excluding school in LA1, was on the waiting list for the schools internal AP where school staff felt that he would benefit from a lower teacher to student ratio and more consistency of teachers. For the other learner, in the LTE excluding school in LA2, school staff were working with the LA to examine what the next steps were if things escalated.

5.4 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Research has found that positive school staff relationships and low student-staff ratios has led to the positive re-engagement of young people in education.[28] While this was effective for some learners whose risk de-escalated for others, it was not. More research is needed to understand why this approach works for some young people and not for others.

Welsh Government should review the role and pay of Teaching Assistants. Teaching Assistants' vital role in supporting at-risk and vulnerable young people was evident. They could make a difference between a de-escalation and an escalation of risk.

Local authorities should review their exclusion policies. Schools should never have to permanently exclude young people so they can receive the support that they need. A young person should never have to be permanently excluded from school to access the support they need.

Welsh Government and local authorities should review the support needs of pupils excluded from school. The young people who showed an escalation of risk had turbulent lives outside of school. There needs to be an analysis of these risks so young people can be supported to remain in education and fulfil their full potential.

The importance of school as a protective factor that helps mitigate further harm needs to be considered.[29] Where young people are having a turbulent life outside of school, the support school puts into place may be ineffective. However, where young people are experiencing challenges like involvement in county lines, schools should work with specialist agencies to ensure that young people are supported to remain in education to mitigate the risk of further harm.

While Welsh Government measures are welcome to increase attendance, including Family Engagement Officers to improve relationships with families, the complexity of the issues that some of these young people were experiencing shows the need for specialist support for families.

Increased funding for Education Welfare Officers from Welsh Government is welcome, especially if they focus on early intervention. However, they need to be aware of the complex challenges, such as youth homelessness and county lines involvement, that young people face and, if necessary, work with specialist agencies.

6. Cross Jurisdictional Comparison

This section of the report raises some important issues that arise from comparing the data represented in the four jurisdiction reports. These must be viewed as somewhat tentative as there are some important caveats that arise due in part to sampling factors. Each jurisdiction identified high and low excluding schools in slightly different ways, and these then varied in the extent to which identified schools were able to participate in the time frame of the pandemic. For similar reasons, this resulted in the under-representation of particular groups, especially with respect to

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[28] Nicholson, L., & Putwain, D. (2015). Facilitating re-engagement in learning: A disengaged student perspective. The Psychology of Education Review, 39(2), 37–41.
[29] Arnez, J. & Condry, R. (2021) Criminological perspectives on school exclusion and youth offending, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 26:1, 87-100.

jurisdiction level ethnicity. Covid-19 also had an impact on the timing of the first and second interviews leading to a shorter than planned trajectory.

The researchers used a common framework for interviewing but it is noted in the Welsh report that interviewees may have used different rationales for who they chose as case study young people. This will have a bearing on who is represented in the case studies. However, perceptions of risk by our key staff will in turn influence the responses that are made in school. Each case study will therefore have an internal consistency.

In spite of the challenges, the research also had a number of strengths. The interviews were carried out by "home" researchers who also analysed and reported on the data, drawing on their contextual knowledge to situate the findings. This gives each case study a particular integrity. It is on the jurisdiction reports of the home researcher that the comparisons are made.

6.1 Changes in Levels of Risk

One of the strongest narratives in the data is how levels of risk can change quite suddenly for many of the case study students, often due to actions or events that occur outside school. These are largely seen regretfully, as outside the control of staff. There are differences in the extent to which staff had knowledge of these events, and are in touch with what was happening in local communities. For many members of staff this makes the question of whether the risk has increased, decreased, or remained the same, challenging to answer, requiring careful thought and internal (and spoken) debate.

Table 19 below displays the allocation of categories of risk for each jurisdiction. Contrary to expectations, given the different levels of exclusion in each jurisdiction, for three of the jurisdictions, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, the largest group are those young people whose risk is perceived as escalating at the time of the second visit. In contrast, the largest group in England are those whose risk level was judged (with a few caveats) as de-escalating. The jurisdiction with the greater proportion of young people deemed to have escalating levels of risk, namely Scotland, have the lowest reported rates of school exclusion. This finding is particularly interesting as risk is largely understood as indicative of the need of support. Where risk is seen as escalating, there is more likely to be increases in targeted support. Conversely where risk is seen to reduce, there is a perception that no further additional support is needed. This raises the question of whether one factor that contributes to differences in exclusion rates between the jurisdictions is how they calibrate risk?

The data suggest that some staff in England were less cautious about describing young people as de-escalating risk, and raises some interesting questions about that judgement. Looking more closely at the English data, seven of the eleven schools had at least one pupil whose risk at time 2 was seen as de-escalating. However, a third of the de-escalating group were the result of judgements from just one school, where all five of their case studies were identified as having lowered risk. A number of different reasons may lie behind these differences. This could simply reflect who staff in English schools nominated as case study young people. Alternatively, other reasons may prevail. An Ofsted (2021) report identified that, with respect to SEND, schools in England often did not know their young people well enough to identify need and this impacted on the quality of provision. This may well be indicative of a gap with respect to the wider group of young people at risk of exclusion. Many of the English interviewees did not have immediate access to key demographic information about their chosen cases. The England jurisdiction report indicates the large school sizes impacting on contact with the students. There is also the potential for a greater disconnect between the SENCO

planning the intervention and those who implement the provision (often TAs). It is possible that this gap also holds within pastoral support where the leaders were often assistant or deputy heads. The English report also notes that girls are over-represented in the de-escalating group, additionally students in this group are older and the aims and interventions for the group more tightly focussed on educational achievement, prior to leaving school. English education policy requires schools to have good systems in place to collect data on achievement, as well as attendance and behaviour. These numerical systems may not be sufficiently nuanced to inform the way that impact of intervention is judged and risk calibrated.

As well as reflecting difficulties or differences in calibrating risk, a contributing factor may also be the use of different criteria to make judgements. In the data for Scotland, judgements of risk often reflected what was happening *outside* of school. Stronger links with the community will facilitate the evaluation of these risks. Additionally, in Scotland where the interviewees express uncertainty about risk due to a lack of information about a student's trajectory post school, the risk was deemed to continue. There are therefore a range of possible explanations for these differences in trajectories. Further research is needed to investigate the contribution of these different factors.

Jurisdiction	De-Escalating Risk	Escalating Risk	Same (and Queries England)
England N= 34	15 (44%)	11 (32%)	8 (24%)
Northern Ireland N=8	2 (25%)	3 (38%)	3 (38%)
Scotland N=16	4 (25%)	11 (69%)	2 (13%)
Wales N=20	6 (30%)	12 (60%)	2 (10%)

Table 19 Group Size and Risk at Time 2 in each Jurisdiction

A commonality between the jurisdictions is that the smallest group are those for whom the risk level at Time 2 remains broadly the same. Given that in some cases the return visit was only four or five months later it is not surprising that some young peoples' risk is unchanged. The small size of this group however is indicative of the overall instability and uncertainty of the trajectories of the majority of the young people in our research. One extreme incident either in or outside of school could have a significant impact on a young person's future. This calls for an agile, responsive system to meet changing needs. It is therefore important that staff responsible for the intervention plan receive timely feedback from those who have close contact with young person in order to review the support they are receiving.

6.2 Differences in School Responses

In each of the jurisdictions, young people receive a package of interventions in order to meet their diverse needs. The Scottish report notes that those who have the higher level of risk have been offered more. This is consistent with the view of risk level indicating need for support. In other respects, the jurisdiction reports indicate that no particular interventions are linked to risk changes. We now turn to look at how jurisdictions differed or not with respect to their aims and the intervention strategies used.

6.3 Aims of the Interventions for those At Risk

The aims of the interventions are remarkably consistent across case studies *within* each jurisdiction. Looking across jurisdictions, in the Scottish data emotional well-being and relationships are central, in the other jurisdictions there is a greater mixture of wellbeing, academic, and behavioural aims. The aims of staff in Northern Ireland also highlight addressing self-esteem, building confidence as under- pinning educational success. This is linked in their escalating group to achieving adequate qualifications. In the Welsh report there is also reference to relationship building which is seen as an important outcome in the personal lives of young people. Also, in the Welsh data are aims that focus on following the behaviour policy, on engaging with lessons and managing behaviour. In a similar vein aims in the English report often have a focus on behaviour and attendance including those which serve as staff aims of "keeping them in school". Self-regulation and safety are also a frequent part of the English discourse. There is also an intent to find out and understand more about the needs of the young people in England, although this is often linked to an expectation that specialists could provide the answer rather than young people themselves. Specialist assessment is also an important route to securing additional or different provision.

6.4 Strategies for those At Risk

Turning to compare intervention strategies, for each of the jurisdictions there are descriptions of how these are personalised, although this could mean different levels of individualisation. These levels range from identifying strategies from a "menu" of options that the school could provide, through to those which are more clearly student centred, based around the young person's strengths and needs. These strategies are described in jurisdiction reports as "creative" (Northern Ireland and Scotland) and require, at times, an innovative approach, and at others a requirement for schools to be "flexible" (England, Northern Ireland and Scotland).

A hallmark of a student- centred approach is that it is based on conversations with the young person. These conversations are evident in the data for all jurisdictions but are framed slightly differently in the reports. For example, in the report from Wales there is description of conversations concerning "why he behaved that way" and in England of "re-entry" after suspension conversations as well as asking young people about the triggers for their behaviour, and the classes they find difficult. In Northern Ireland there are examples of targets being set with young people, in England and Northern Ireland this is sometimes framed as a contract. These conversations are clearly linked to the misbehaviour and often formalised. In contrast, the Scottish report student voice does not appear to be linked to a particular event, rather the emphasis is on a relationship-based approach with a "common core of face to face and regular contact with an adult who cares." This is indicative of a more open form of conversation, where aspects that are important in the young persons' life can be talked about with a sympathetic person. The approach is consistent with staff aims that frequently refer to improving relationships and life skills in the Scottish data. There are further indications of being student centred in reference to emotions, to building confidence and self- esteem. The careful linking of interventions and purpose provides a clear indication of the coherence and consistency of the approach and which reflected Scottish policy documents.

In other respects, there is considerable similarity in the interventions that are named in each of the jurisdictions but some subtle or nuanced differences in some of descriptions. For example, for many of the case study young people, especially those for whom attendance at school is low, there is common mention of both reduced timetables and alternative provision. However, common labels do not necessarily indicate common approaches. While there is pervasive reference to reduced timetables in the English data, it is not always clear the extent to which a reduced timetable refers only to access to the curriculum, or to less time spent in school. The Scottish data refers to part-time

timetables as does the Welsh report, but in the Northern Ireland data this is used sparingly and is rejected in favour of modifications that are within the control of the pupil: for example, rest breaks, use of the well-being room, and movement passes. This latter approach is both more empowering to the young person and also more flexible and responsive to changes in circumstance.

Jurisdictions differ in the landscape of their external AP[30], with England, followed by Wales the most diverse, with publicly funded PRUs, AP Academies and Free Schools providing general provision, and a range of alternative providers, giving access to different activities, for example, therapeutic sports and arts based, vocational, and tutoring. The Welsh report illustrates a wide and varied range of external AP being used. Many of these are private providers and consequently schools are limited by their cost and availability. In Northern Ireland access to EOTAS provides both short and longer-term alternative provision, although the bureaucracy for accessing this is seen as burdensome. The use of AP/EOTAS was a common intervention strategy in England, Wales and Northern Ireland with fewer references to its use in the Scottish data.

Challenges in accessing external AP, either through availability, suitability or cost, can encourage schools to develop their own provision and there is frequent mention of its use across three jurisdictions. In the Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland reports reference is made to the use of nurture provision, and in Northern Ireland this is seen as a contributory factor to a successful outcome. Similarly, in Wales, a common element in provision for some of the group of young people whose risk was de-escalating was the use of internal AP. In Scotland staff referred to the "support base" whereas in the English data internal AP is more likely to be referred to as the inclusion room often in relation to safety but also to access adult support. The NI report identifies the importance of a structured, consistent environment for some young people. It is not clear whether the distinctiveness of internal AP lies with being part of a smaller group with higher levels of adult support, or some other features of its provision. The importance of staffing is raised in the Welsh report, with a recommendation for a review of the role and pay of TAs. However, the reliance on TAs is an area of concern in England given research (Webster 2022) that indicates that withdrawal from mainstream classes put the young person at a disadvantage and further

 "*There was a balance to be struck between the appropriate use of the learning support room as a place to retreat and reset, and routine or excessive use, which could add to the extent and effects of marginalisation.*" Webster 2022 p50

These concerns are raised in the English report by staff who want to make changes to the mainstream classroom and ensure that all pupils have access to qualified teachers.

The use of reduced timetables and widespread use of internal and external AP raises issues about the extent to which individually targeted strategies serve to marginalise young people and sever their connection to school. The following quotes taken from a Pastoral Lead about the provision for a year 8 boy in an English school indicate that some staff are aware of the limitations of the strategies available to them.

> • *for this particular student, because he **had gaps in his educational experience due to suspension**, etc. And being able to, you know, **going into AP and back in again**, I think that he then felt that he wasn't able to kind of keep up with the pace of things in school.*

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[30] Power et al (2024) The Varied Landscape of Alternative Education Provision in the UK: a Home international Comparison.

> *So then he initially started acting up to kind of mask that, which then irritated the other students, because they'd be like, Oh, God, we just want to get on with the lesson. So then it creates like a negative impact. So I don't think that he ever really felt that he belonged to the school.*
> - *You kind of separate children off…*
> - *I think he certainly felt that there are adults that he could speak to, but I think that's because quite often, **they're flooded with adults**, because they'll come into school, and they'll be mentored by an adult. So in a way, **you kind of almost create the exclusion through your intervention for the child.***

Arguably, it is not simply a case of re-thinking interventions but also re-examining the purpose and aims of these to reflect a more holistic view of the young person's needs. Reduced timetables and AP can act as an accelerant, rather than serving as a preventative tool.

Scotland is the only jurisdiction report to provide a clear example of early intervention with a literacy support group. Poor literacy skills prevent young people accessing the curriculum and in turn lead to poor self-esteem and disengaging with school. Arguably the identification of levels of literacy should be a routine assessment in all secondary schools and not seen only in relation to SEN. Ill health and poor attendance can also lead to significant gaps in young people's attainment and the earlier these are addressed, the less likely that secondary difficulties arise. The significance of this is underpinned by data that indicates that around a quarter of pupils in England have below the expected reading age on entering secondary schools (Ofsted 2022). It is likely that COVID has exacerbated this. The emphasis in Northern Ireland is also on early intervention, but resource constraints mean that in effect this is the "earliest point when a young person is in crisis."

6.5 Other Explanations for Differences in Outcomes

A common theme in the jurisdiction reports concerns the multiple adversities that some young people (Scotland, England) face and the ways in which a complex and turbulent home life (Wales) impact on risk outcomes. Relationships with parents and knowledge of local communities are foregrounded. The Northern Ireland report describes parents as playing a crucial role but also notes a number of challenges. Even when parents are active it can be difficult to maintain a consistent message between home and school. In many cases it is difficult to engage parents without external support, especially when there were capacity issues. The Welsh report similarly identifies the central role of parents especially with respect to attendance, a key barrier with respect to interventions being successful.

As the Scottish report describes positive multi-agency communication is crucial. The Northern Ireland report outlines the numerous barriers and challenges staff face. These are largely echoed in each of the jurisdictions, factors that are positioned as a challenge when they are absent or hard to access and as a particular support when they are working well. Each jurisdiction indicates the disconnect with social care, the lack of stable social work contact which caused an element of frustration even though staff recognised that staff were over-burdened. Stretched services have led to raised thresholds for intervention which are much higher than schools. A similar concern is raised around CAMHS. In England and Wales there are concerns that external partners do not fully understand the challenges schools face.

Many of the young people are seen to have social, emotional and mental health needs and access to therapeutic support is raised as a particular issue in Northern Ireland. In England, staff spoke about offering counselling but that this was not an option if the young person is already accessing CAMHS support. There are significant delays and difficulties in getting a statement (Wales and Northern Ireland) or an EHCP (England). Delays accessing funding mean that in some cases the statement came too late and the young person has already been excluded from school. In Scotland there is creative use of funding, and proactive examples of accessing resources in Northern Ireland. In the other jurisdictions the main vehicle for accessing funding for provision is through the formal assessment process.

7. Conclusion and Implications

This strand of the Excluded Lives programme of research focuses on how schools respond to young people they see as being at risk of exclusion. It seeks to contribute to understanding how policies and practices interact with characteristics of young peoples' trajectories including their involvement with different agencies. Each jurisdiction looked within the data for how they could account for differences in young peoples' trajectories of risk.

There is some indication within the data that there are differences at jurisdiction level in how staff calibrate risk with a higher proportion of schools in the English sample judging students to have de-escalated their level of risk over the time of the project. Conversely, Scotland has the highest proportion of case study students whose level of risk is judged to have increased. On the one hand this runs contrary to expectations given the much higher level of excluded students in England, and the very low level in Scotland. However, level of risk is conventionally seen as indicative of the need for support, and raises the question of how risk is calibrated. The data suggests that in Scotland risk is judged more broadly with reference to the home and the local community, with which they have stronger links. This finding illustrates the ways in which policy differences are enacted at the school level. It is indicative of the need to introduce measures that support staff in England in making judgements about the effectiveness of interventions and the impact on students' risk level.

There are a number of pupil level factors that are shared across jurisdictions and reflected in the challenging circumstances of their home lives. The need for a multi-agency response and the frustrations expressed by many staff were frequent. In some respects, young people's trajectories are propelled by uncertainty. This was in part an outcome of the complexity of some of the young peoples' circumstances to which Covid-19 had contributed, particularly with respect to mental health. The speed with which young peoples' lives can change calls for agile responsive systems rather than lengthy bureaucratic protocols.

The prime route to access funding for provision that was outside of mainstream, was through formal assessment of young people's additional/special needs. There is a concern within the governments of England, Wales and Northern Ireland of the rise in the number of statements/EHCPs. This process is both lengthy and costly, and can result in channelling funding out of mainstream. In effect it changes the trajectory of the pupil in the same way that permanent exclusion can. It is indicative of a need to examine more closely how schools can meet the diversity of pupil need.

In all jurisdictions packages of interventions are used and, to differing degrees, personalised to reflect the strengths and needs of the young person. This makes it difficult for staff to evaluate the impact of a particular component. This is compounded where there are not frequent lines of communication between school staff, home, and other agencies. Good data collection systems have

a role to play but these can constrain the type of information shared. Often the crucial information is *how* a young person responded requiring a dialogue that can shape the way forward.

The reports indicate a particular thread concerning supporting the development of relationships. This is strongest in the Scottish data where the importance of frequent conversations with a trusted adult, and the use of relationship-based approaches forms a core element. In other jurisdictions, while they include the use of mentoring and a key person, conversations are often formalised and tied to particular parts of the intervention, and in some schools, part of a contract. As the Scottish report notes, a focus on relationships and well-being encourages staff to consider the whole child and to get to know them well.

The Scottish report provides the only clear reference to early intervention in a mainstream setting, although the Northern Ireland report identifies the contribution of nurture groups. Early intervention is an important area for further research as it brings with it the challenges of identification without labelling. It's not a replacement for preventative approaches that take account of the systemic factors that operate.

Schools have the potential to provide stability and a safe environment. This was evident in a number of the aims of intervention. However, reduced timetables and time spent in different forms of AP serves to increasingly marginalise them from their peers. The interaction between young people's social and emotional lives and some of the provision available in school can form a pipeline to further exclusion.

Finally, the individual jurisdiction reports and the cross-jurisdiction analysis reveals that there is much to be learned from the Scottish policy with its focus on inclusion, engagement, well-being and a relation-based approach to intervention. The complexity and instability of many young peoples' circumstances, as evidenced in this study, requires a holistic understanding and a response that recognizes the structural and cultural inequalities that are shaping their future lives.

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