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Factors associated with high and low levels of school exclusions

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Abstract **[143 words]**
This article draws on findings from the first cross-national study of school exclusion in the four jurisdictions of the UK. It sketches factors associated in past research with the reduction of exclusion of pupils presenting challenging behaviour in schools. It then reports interview data gathered in England in 2018 from five specialist inclusion officers working in two local authorities and a senior officer working for a national voluntary organisation. The officers describe continuing good practice but also national, local and school level developments contributing to a deteriorating situation. These developments include unhelpful government guidance and regulations; school accountability frameworks affecting curriculum and leading to the neglect of special educational needs; loss of LA powers and funding resulting in reductions in support services. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, and to a lesser extent in Wales, practice that avoids school exclusions appears to have persisted.

Introduction

Research indicates that exclusion from school has devastating long-term consequences for many of the young people affected and is associated with wider social problems particularly youth offending (Berridge et al., 2001; Daniels et al., 2003; Parsons, 2009; Scottish Government, 2017)**.** There are therefore grave concerns in England about the dramatic increase since 2012/13, from an already high level in comparison with other parts of the UK, in recorded permanent and fixed-period exclusions (see Figure 1). Worries at government level led to an independent review led by Edward Timpson (DFE, 2019).The increase in numbers in England is in stark contrast to the situation in Scotland where the use of permanent exclusion has been virtually eliminated. Caution is needed in interpreting statistics on non-permanent exclusions[1], given unrecorded unofficial practices sometimes known as 'off rolling' (see McCluskey et al., in press; Ofsted, 2018; Hutchinson and Crenna-Jennings, 2019; DFE, 2019) but official figures for 'temporary' exclusions in Scotland also reduced (by 16.2% - see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Numbers of incidents of exclusion from school also expressed as percentages of total maintained primary, secondary and special school populations[2]

	Permanent exclusions[3]		Non-permanent exclusions	
	2012/13	2016/17	2012/13	2016/17
England	4630 (0.06%)	7720 (0.10%)	267520 (3.51%)	381865 (4.76%)
Scotland	21 (c.0%)	5 (c.0%)	21934 (3.27%)	18376 (2.68%)
Wales	102 (0.02%)	165 (0.04%	13879 (3.05%)	15936 (3.42%)
N. Ireland	19 (0.01%)	33 (c.0.01%)	5772 (1.87%)	6805 (2.14%)

The inter-university and third sector 'Excluded Lives Research Group'[4] of which the authors are members, has been studying the reasons for this situation. In a significant preliminary step towards a detailed and comprehensive project[5], the Group examined exclusions data, relevant government guidance documents and, in 2018, interviewed a sample of key stakeholders across the four jurisdictions of the UK (Cole, 2018; Cole, 2019). Shortly before the Timpson Review commenced, views were gathered from three specialist inclusion officers employed by a northern English local authority, two specialist officers by a southern LA and a senior officer working for a London-based national third party organisation, with expertise in the exclusions and special educational needs/disability field.

This article first outlines research conducted over the last thirty years into approaches associated with minimising exclusions from school (many of which factors were re-identified in DFE, 2019). It then focuses on the findings from the

English stakeholder interviews. The data suggest factors at national, local and school levels that contrast with the situation in Scotland (see McCluskey et al, in press) and which could help to explain the upward trajectory in exclusions in England.

The phrase 'children at risk of exclusion' encompasses pupils who have not been excluded but display disruptive and challenging behaviours in schools that commonly lead to school exclusion; those who have experienced one or more fixed-period exclusion, commonly for between 1 and 5 days and those who have been permanently excluded (or 'removed from register' in Scottish schools; or 'expelled' from Northern Irish schools).

The term 'inclusive practice' refers to the policies and interventions adopted in schools that help to avoid exclusion, rather than to the education of children with special educational needs/disabilities (SEND) in mainstream schools. There is of course overlap as many at risk of exclusion also have pronounced SEND (particularly social, emotional and mental health difficulties [SEMH] or autistic, spectrum disorders [ASD]) (Cole, 2015; DFE, 2019).

Methodology

Between January and April 2018, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 27 key stakeholders[6] by members of the Excluded Lives Research Group, with the same senior researcher (one of the present writers) leading every session. Six interviews happened in England, with English Local Authority South officers (ELAS1 and 2), English Local Authority North officers (ELAN1, 2 and 3) and with English Third Sector Officer (ETSO1). Each interview, using a common schedule, lasted between 50 minutes and an hour a half. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, analysed and then collated into Cole (2018). Further details on the methodology are given in McCluskey et al. (in press).

The research background: factors minimising school exclusions

Research involving randomised control trials into children at risk of exclusion is lacking, as Whear et al. (2013) noted in connection with psychiatric disorder and school exclusion. However since the Elton Report (DES, 1989), there have been substantial quantitative, qualitative and/or observational studies, surveys and reviews of UK and international literature investigating and reporting the factors in and around schooling that help to determine whether pupils presenting challenging behaviour[7] remain in their host schools or whether they are excluded. This literature includes Gray, Miller and Noakes, 1994; Cooper et al, 2000; Cooper, Bilton and Kakos, 2013; Ofsted, 1999, 2005, 2009; DfES, 2005; Munn, Lloyd and Cullen, 2000; Daniels and Williams, 2000; Daniels et al., 1999; Daniels et al., 2003; Daniels and Cole, 2010; Cole, Visser and Upton, 1998; Cole, Daniels and Visser, 2003; Cole and Visser, 2005; Cole & Knowles, 2011;Cole, Daniels and Visser, 2013; Clough et al, 2005; Hallam and Rogers, 2008; Parsons, 2009; Pirrie et al, 2009; Mackay, Reynolds & Kearney, 2010; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2012; Garner, 2013; Hancock, 2013; Porter, 2013, 2014; Cole, 2015; McCluskey, 2018). The governments of the UK jurisdictions have also released detailed research-informed guidance outlining how schools and support services should help at risk children (e.g. DES, 1994,a,b,c and d; DFES/DoH 2004; DFES, 2003a, 2007a and b, 2009; DENI, 2001; CCEA, 2014; Scottish Government, 2013, 2017; National Assembly for Wales, 2006; Welsh Government, 2015). The latest advice for England is offered in the Timpson Review (DFE, 2019). We now present a summary of persistent themes identified by this body of work. This summary suggests that success in coping with disruptive behaviour and minimising levels of exclusion relates to values, policy and collaborative, multi-agency, adequately funded practice at a range of levels: national, local, school (whole-school, targeted group and individual child).

National government level

When a government of a UK jurisdiction works proactively to reduce school exclusion and supplies adequate funding for effective support work, exclusions fall substantially. Policies stressing academic achievement do not divert attention and resources from addressing the social, emotional and behavioural aspects that impact on pupils' learning. Emphasis is placed on identifying and responding to the additional /special educational needs of children often placed at risk of exclusion. This was the situation in England from the late 1990s through to the change of government in 2010, described as ' a period of enlightenment' by Garner (2013, p.332). Permanent exclusions fell from 12,300 (0.16% of the school population) in 1997/8 to 4630 (0.06%) in 2012/13 (Cole, 2015) before a new government's policy alterations came into effect. Instances of fixed-term exclusions fell by almost a third in the same period. Revised government policy included new exclusions guidance (DFE, 2012), characterised by Garner (2013, p.333) as 'back to basics: punishment and retribution' and reduced funding for LAs and schools (Cole, 2015; Andrews and Lawrence, 2018). After 2012, exclusions in England rose in contrast to Scotland, where the long-term social and educational inclusion strategy, re-iterated in SG (2017), continues.

Local government level

Key factors include: LA officers and councillors' believing in inclusive practice and having power to ensure that school governing bodies follow government policies; funding allowing local authorities [LAs] to employ a range of professionals (behaviour support teachers, educational psychologists, education welfare officers, family link-workers, social workers) and to provide services (on-site interventions, off-site specialist units in England called 'pupil referral units' [PRUs], special schools, staff development/ training, work with parents) in support of mainstream schools, and of children at risk of exclusion.

Institutional level (mainstream school, special school or unit/resource base)

A 'Staged Intervention Model' is applied involving whole-school, targeted group and individual approaches. The Scottish Government (2013, p.3) precedes a visual representation of this model with the wording: 'meeting needs at the earliest opportunity with the least intrusive level of intervention' (see also the 'Three Wave Model' of the National Strategies, e.g.DCSF, 2008; Oxfordshire CC, 2009; Cole, 2015).

Whole-school approaches

School leaders have a strong belief, shared by a critical mass of their staff, in inclusive practice, which is embedded in a school's ethos. Behaviour policies seek to encourage pupils and are restorative rather than punitive. Such policies recognise the symbiosis between pupils' behaviour and positive relationships with staff. They stress early identification and intervention to address the difficulties of at risk children. Staff members view their pastoral responsibilities seriously. With reference to curriculum, subject content is presented in a flexible differentiated manner, responsive to the capabilities of pupils who find traditional 'academic' learning difficult. This struggling minority of learners is able to experience success through practical, creative and/or physical activities. Continuing professional development is delivered to staff to enhance their microteaching and relationship building skills. Adequate funding is devoted to providing support to children at risk of exclusion, securing help when needed from LA or other specialist services. Recognising the ecosystemic nature of challenging behaviour, school leaders work closely with partner agencies and families of children at risk.

Targeted support for vulnerable groups and individuals

Efficient procedures exist to identify, assess, monitor and provide assistance to vulnerable groups and individual children (and sometimes their families). Children at risk

include those with literacy or communication difficulties or other SEND; those showing signs of disaffection and disruption; those who experience social deprivation/family difficulties (particularly children 'looked-after').

Effective group and individual interventions involve a range of workers:
- *(from an institution's own resources)* deployment of teaching assistants, involvement of pastoral support/guidance teachers, SEN/ASN teachers and counsellors, family liaison workers.
- *(from beyond the institution)* input from LA support services (listed above) operating at times as part of a multi-agency team with social workers, youth justice workers and child and adolescent health service (CAMHS) professionals.

A range of provision to match individual need
A range of 'alternative' provision exists outside 'mainstream' classes or schools. For example, helping a primary school pupil cope may be enhanced by withdrawal for a period of time to a nurture group. Re-engaging the disaffected older child might require placement for a period in specialist provision on a mainstream school site, perhaps in an 'Inclusion Unit' whose aim is to promote re-integration.

Where difficulties in a learner's relationship with a particular institution become irreparable, a different placement for the learner is found without invoking formal exclusion (e.g. through a 'managed move') to allow a 'fresh start' in a new mainstream school; a special school or unit that offers teaching in small groups in a therapeutic and nurturing environment; or a vocational course offered by a college of further education or voluntary body. Where re-integration is realistic, the process of helping learners back into mainstream school is well-planned, adequately resourced and timely. Effective support is provided by a skilled keyworker/ inclusion officer, acting as advocate for the young person and family.

The data from the stakeholder interviews for this present study suggest the continuing relevance of the factors outlined in this section. In 2018, the factors seemed to be prevalent to a far greater extent in Scotland and more so in Northern Ireland and Wales (Cole, 2018; McCluskey et al, in press) than in England.

Findings from the interviews in England
The English interviewees felt - at times passionately - that many young people at risk of exclusion were unfairly treated, leading to disadvantaged adulthoods:
> 'By discarding them when they're at school, we are excluding them for the rest of their lives; they will not become contributing members of society, they will be on the edges, they'll be on benefits, they'll be involved in crime in some way ...it breaks my heart.' (ELAN1, p.16, Cole, 2018[8])

All interviewees reported a deteriorating situation, exacerbated, in their view, by national policy and acute funding difficulties at local authority level and within individual schools. Reported inclusive practice, usually couched in terms of reduced range, quality and availability, was in line the 'Research background' section above.

Effective local practice restraining the rise in exclusions
Approaches that minimise school exclusions
> 'are no different from what we already knew... it's about schools working together closely with the local authority to try to understand what's causing [*a child's challenging behaviour],* to have good SEN provision in place, to have good approaches to behaviour ...good support from the NHS in relation to mental health.' (ETSO1, p.93)

The third sector officer recalled the 'Every Child Matters' strategy (DfES, 2003b)
'which a lot of people haven't let go of and are in fact waiting to reintroduce,
because it seemed to work. Youth offending teams, the police, all working in
one unit, commissioning services, working together to prevent exclusions. So
that's still out there.' (ETSO, p.93)

Interviewees endorsed the 'Staged Intervention' approach. ELAS1 (p.21) used the
language of the 'three wave' model of the English National Strategies of pre-2010.
The interviewees still observed elements of such practice but feared that it was under
increasing threat (see next section). The importance of collaborative inclusive values
at whole-school level ('wave one') was recognised. ELAS2 thought keeping
exclusions to a minimum 'probably comes down to the individual ethos and the
structure within a school and that does start at the top' (p.18). ELAN2 reported 'Some
schools just have really good inclusive practice and inclusive systems' (p.18). ELAS1
said
'We have headteachers who are inclusive who say, ''Look, we're not going to
exclude for persistent disruptive behaviour...Our job [is] to guide those young
people and mentor them to a point where they're not behaving like that".' (p.18)
These schools were reported to have a deep understanding of and empathy for
pupils with SEND, particularly SEMH. They were willing to abide by national and
local guidance. They had a good relationship with the LA and other schools. ELAN2
talked of
'Schools having a shared ownership of the children in their area...not leaving
one school hanging them out to dry with a really difficult child, but actually
looking for shared solutions...That still happens ... but not as often perhaps as
...in the past.' (ELAN2, p.17)

When asked about targeted and individual support that helped avoid exclusions
(National Strategies 'wave two' and 'wave three'), the English interviewees said they
still encountered effective within-school intervention of the kind reported in the
'Research Background' above: 'nurture groups' (ELAN2); support through SEND
systems, School Support and Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs[9]); or
through pastoral/well-being support, often involving school counsellors (ELAN2,
ETSO1); maintenance of 'inclusion registers' of vulnerable children (ELAS1); or
through still operating LA and other support services (advisory teachers,
educational psychologists).

On-site 'inclusion units' were 'the first thing you do to reduce your fixed term
exclusions' (ELAS1, p.25).   Such facilities had been observed by ELAN1 in her
previous authority:
'They [were] basically like a PRU on the premises. It was, "There's been some
problems, go and do some intensive work and you go back in" [to your mainstream
classes] and that actually worked really well and prevented exclusions.' (p.24)

ELAS1 described effective training in inclusive practice, funded as a time-limited project
for 'primaries who'd rung up the LA saying, ''Right, this child's at risk of PEX [permanent
exclusion]. We can't do anything more with them'' ' (p.19). Staff were encouraged 'to
self-reflect' on how they were managing the challenging pupils, to look for triggers for
disruptive behaviour, to work as a team to develop strategies for a child. Rather than
staff setting a plan 'which is ... you set kids targets, they fail, so then we've got a
document that says they failed and we can get rid of them' (p.19), it was about 'What can
we all do collectively as a team at that point to reduce the risk of that behaviour
escalating?' (p.19). She claimed 'a real success rate': after the training, staff retained 29
out of 30 children in their schools.

ELAN3 looked back a decade when 'there were so few permanent exclusions' (p.35) and PRU teachers could undertake 'outreach support' (p.34) observing children and teachers in mainstream settings, identifying unmet needs and calling in more substantial support from other services. There was also more scope for dual registration, ELAN3 reported, with pupils saved from permanent exclusion by splitting their week between host school and PRU or extended courses at further education colleges. ELAS2 referred to the PRU offering four week short-stay courses addressing difficulties off-site prior to re-integration.

ELAS2 reported schools still buying Key Stage 4 vocational placements in local FE, or if they needed a greater degree of supervision and support, at the PRU. ELAN1 had personal experience:

> 'I set up a whole programme ... working with our local FE college...to deliver alternative programmes for children either at risk of, or who had been permanently excluded...they were taken out of the school environment, given a very different environment [including] a safe place for the children to retreat to when it got too much for them, where they could... have one-to-one time and the rest of the time they had vocational education, with some ... Maths and English ... focused on preparing for adulthood, for employment, and it was so successful.' (p.24)

In 2018, the northern LA still operated an 'Early Help' strategy that involved social services and CAMHS or the School Nursing service's 'Strengthening Families' programme, sometimes triggered when a pupil received a fixed period exclusion. This seemed a good example of what ETSO1 advocated:

> 'a local area approach, bringing together all the agencies that have an interest in supporting children, working together, understanding the needs of the population, commissioning preventative services to meet need at the earliest possible point.' (p.92)

He still came across 'plenty of positive practice' and 'very low levels of exclusions...where there's what were behaviour and attendance partnerships [part of the 'National Strategies'], so clusters or groups of schools working together, who're basically saying, "We're not going to exclude".' (p.92)

For pupils actually excluded, the work of LA specialist inclusion officers, described by ELAN2, advising and supporting schools as well as being advocates of excluded children and their families seemed important. They supported the re-inclusion of pupils after fixed-term exclusions and made alternative arrangements for those permanently excluded. The officers attend monthly district inclusion panel meetings, the usual mechanism for 'Fair Access Protocols' (DFE, 2019) set up between LAs and headteachers.

Discussions at such panels could be the catalyst for a child's transfer to a special school, particularly establishments for pupils deemed to have SEMH difficulties[10]. The southern LA continued to maintain its own SEMH school while ELAN bought places in independent schools. ETSO1 stressed the historical and continuing important role of these schools, providing for about 14000 pupils, many of whom will have previously experienced exclusions from mainstream schools.

However, the usual LA response to the child experiencing a fixed-period exclusion of six days or more or a permanent exclusion continued to be placement in the local pupil referral units.

English government policies associated with the rise in exclusions
The English interviewees were deeply concerned by current government behaviour (DFE, 2011) and exclusions guidance (DFE, 2012), seeing this having a negative

impact on their work, on schools and on children at risk of exclusion and their families. Government policy on school curriculum is explored later.

Interviewees remembered detailed guidance (DfES, 2007) that left less doubt that exclusion should be a last resort, and regulations giving LAs real power to fight schools' plans to exclude pupils. ELAN3 believed 'the political party at the time was encouraging inclusive practices' (p.14) and he recalled the success of his team in overturning planned exclusions. ELAN1 believed:

> 'This Government is giving permission to schools to not ... work with those young people who are difficult or challenging or not going to achieve at the level the Government says everybody has to achieve at. It feels like it's okay to put those kids in the bin.' (p.14)

ETSO1, echoed by ELAN3, referred to specific changes to the law and guidance, made by government (DFE, 2012), which removed the powers of LA officers to overturn exclusions. The infrequently used 'independent review panels' (DFE, 2019) could only recommend reinstatement: 'So that was an obviously very clear message to schools that the accountability around it [exclusions] was going to be relaxed.' (p.89)

The interviewees were critical of the lack of coordination between current school behaviour and exclusions guidance and advice on mental health and behaviour (DFE, 2014). Cross references are made in these documents but not stressed. ETSO1 noted the

> 'conflicting guidance coming out of DfE. You've got the strict behaviour, rigorous curriculum and assessment ...and then the much more...progressive stuff [on SEND and mental health] on the other. Different bits of policy that were coming out of central government didn't necessarily match up with one another'. (p.89)

ELAS1 was similarly concerned about the separation of SEND and behaviour guidance, believing it exacerbated tendencies in secondary schools for SEN and behaviour staff not to communicate about vulnerable pupils (p.48-9).

Interviewees worried about successful local schools using their legal right to become self-governing 'converter academies', free from local controls and receiving their funding directly from central government. They also had concerns about under-performing schools being forced under current government law to become so called 'sponsored academies'. ETSO1 saw the academisation policy as a 'big thing': 'this move to say schools are... islands and they don't need to be part of a wider community...part of the local authority's remit, and therefore if they need to exclude a child, so what? ...there were a lot of messages coming out that exclusions were...okay.' (p.89)

Academisation is examined in more detail later.

Local factors associated with the increase in school exclusions

The English officers observed many schools compelled or choosing to adopt practices associated with the need to exclude more pupils. They also alluded to issues beyond schooling. The data suggest as key factors:

- accountability systems and curricular demands undermining inclusive practice.
- the shift of power and resources away from LAs and towards headteachers, in part through academisation.
- acute financial pressures exacerbating schools' and LAs' ability to offer the flexible support needed to minimise exclusions.
- wider societal issues including parenting and social deprivation.

Accountability systems and curricular demands undermining inclusive practice

The accountability system known as 'Progress 8', introduced in 2016, became the main mechanism determining whether schools fell beneath national inspection (Ofsted) 'floor standards' and were declared 'coasting' or 'inadequate', in extremis leading to enforced academisation. Progress 8 was planned to assess achievement in curriculum in a way that recognised the achievements of all secondary aged pupils (Andrews, 2017). However, success in GCSE examinations in Mathematics, English (given double weighting) and other English baccalaureate (E-bacc) subjects (separate sciences, computer science, history, geography, languages) largely determined whether a school was judged 'outstanding', 'good' or 'failed' its Ofsted inspection. Subjects more likely to engage and provide success for the 'struggling' learner, often the child at risk of exclusion, were given less weighting - and only if pupils gained good examination passes in approved courses. Diagrams portraying Progress 8 measures, linked subjects to a series of cylinders, commonly referred to as 'buckets' (e.g. NAHT, 2016). Progress 8 does not allow for pertinent contextual factors such as the extent of social-deprivation in a catchment area, the ethnic balance or the percentage of pupils in a school with SEND.

Progress 8 evoked strong, negative opinion from the interviewees. They condemned what they saw as a prescriptive curriculum worsened by unrealistic expectation that all children would reach age-related levels, described by ELAS2 as 'bizarre and ridiculous' (p.15) given the literacy, communication and sometimes other learning difficulties of those at risk of exclusion. ETSO1 commented:
  'Teachers who want to teach inclusively are finding it very, very difficult. And, when you can't teach inclusively because the curriculum won't allow you to, you can't get those kids engaged in their learning, which then leads to them becoming disaffected and getting into the disciplinary system.' (p.94)
Reflecting on why permanent exclusions had more than tripled in his county in recent years, ELAN1 felt
  'it is because of how schools are judged...It's about if kids aren't going to succeed in terms of the data and 'Progress 8' ... That is making [schools] move to exclusion quicker than they perhaps would otherwise. It feels like there's a culture of much less tolerance of behaviours in schools than there used to be.' (p.14)
Progress 8 undermined inclusive practice as the accountability 'was much higher' and teachers more likely to try to ease out children saying, 'Well, this child can't cope in my class' ... (ELAS2, p.15).
  'The focus is on certain core subjects now, and making your Progress 8 measures...And if you don't fit into those 'buckets' then you're more of a challenge, and the vocational and the flexibility that schools had before to include alternative and different subjects at GCSE, that's not there to the same extent. So, those children who might have had the opportunity to tag along ...a GCSE in something more vocational [or] a GCSE equivalent subject, that flexibility seems to have gone a bit.' (ELAN2, p.51)
ELAN 1 quipped (as she looked at a Progress 8 diagram) 'You could do 20 buckets over here of vocational, personal skills and they won't equate to half a bucket of English' (p.54). She failed to see why 'everybody should be getting five A stars to Cs, if a person can be a really good painter and decorator, bin man, filing clerk... without that' (p.16).

ELAN1 thought good teachers were 'being told very clearly ... "You focus on the kids who are going to get the grades and you don't spend your time supporting the kids who won't" '(p.52). In ELAN1's view: 'the framework we're working in prevents

us doing what needs to be done which is to engage those kids differently and give them opportunities to succeed' (p.52). ELAS1 feared schools, wrapped up in national demands: 'forget about... what does the child need...It's sort of square pegs, round holes ... These schools [aren't] meeting the needs of these children,' (p.14). ELAN2 regretted that

> 'We don't measure the distance the child's travelled. Actually, when you see where some of these children come from, and where they get to, that is surely more significant than getting a Level 8 in your Progress 8 GCSE.' (p.51)

Interviewees perceived a decline in the pastoral side of teaching: ELAN1 thought children at risk of exclusion were given 'opportunities to talk' with sympathetic staff. Her views were echoed by ELAS2:

> 'I believe behaviour is communication...We really need to think [differently to] that very behaviourist approach of "You've done something wrong, this is the consequence, and because you're stuck in that little [isolation] room on your own, you will never do that again"...No-one's actually got to the root cause of why the child did whatever they did in the first place.' (p.42)

She condemned schools outside her LA: 'academy chains that are, kind of, zero tolerance behaviour and ... five steps and you're out systems' (p.42). ELAS1 thought such approaches were having a negative impact on teacher attitudes:

> 'I do training for schools in mental health and how to support kids because a lot of teachers...will say, "I'm a teacher. I am not a social worker"... "I'm in education"... "I'm a physics teacher. I shouldn't have to deal with this" ... I think we've got to turn that tide a bit and say… You can't just teach a subject.' (p.42)

Many of the interviewees believed empathy and patience for those at risk of exclusion had been hindered by the plethora of 'reforms' that put teachers under additional pressures: change of curriculum, of assessment, of SEND code of practice (DFE, 2015): 'I think if teachers are stressed, they find it harder to manage stressed children' (ELAS1, p.15). Many of these 'stressed' and often different, disruptive and/or disaffected pupils in mainstream schools were learners with SEND, sometimes assessed and addressed but too often not.

ELAN2, ELAN3 and ELAS2 worried about growing numbers of children with SEMH and autistic spectrum disorders [ASD] whose behaviour could regularly disrupt classes. ETSO1 saw ASD as a significant issue. He alluded to schools with 'very inflexible regimented' systems where teachers could not respond to pupils 'who behave differently and need flexibility...When it comes to exclusions, [children with autism] most need reasonable adjustments, and it's often not happening.' (p.94).

ELAS2 claimed 'Every single ...primary permanent exclusion is due to unmet SEN need, unequivocally' (p.51). ELAN1 saw 'a very strong link between SEND and exclusions' (p.48) and children with EHC plans sometimes being excluded, also noted by ELAN3 (p.49). ELAS1 regretted the lack of coordination between staff responsible for behaviour and those for SEND (p.48), leading to unmet need.

Referencing the revised SEND Code of Practice, ETSO1 highlighted the 'massive decrease in the overall number of children with SEN' (p.94), citing DFE (2018) figures showing that between 2010 and 2016 there was a 27.93% reduction in such pupils (476,195 less):

> 'What's happened to those hundreds of thousands of children with SEN, who had SEN five years ago and now don't? Now is that why we're suddenly seeing a big increase [in exclusions], because all of those children at [what was until 2015] 'School Action' ... have simply had their support removed and are now

struggling with their learning and therefore getting into trouble through the disciplinary side?' (p.94)

Recognising the SEMH challenge, ELAN1 believed schools: 'don't want those kids ... what they really want us [the LA] to do is to set up more special schools, old style EBD schools that ...they have nothing to do with...that's where we're headed' (p.40). ELAN1 reported the county's 'PRUs are full to overflowing' and schools were trying to get pupils with SEMH 'in there through the back door. We're having kids dual-registered at the PRU and at a school... but actually they're at the PRU all the time' (p.56). Both northern and southern LAs were seeking to increase the range of alternative provision for pupils with SEMH. ELAN3 wanted 'some specialist provision in terms of the staffing ratios [allowing targeted and individual work] and the specialist knowledge of the staff, to support them effectively...managed through the PRUs' (p.49).

ELAN1 regretted the growing ineffectiveness of the systems set up to promote collaborative, inclusive working. The Fair Access Protocols and Inclusion Panels in each district 'where theoretically, the schools get together and agree to place a child who's been excluded and needs a new school' worked well in 2013 but in 2018 'we have real struggles to get any school on that panel to take [excluded] kids' (p.56).

The power shift from LAs to headteachers, in part through academisation

In low-excluding Scotland there are no self-governing academies. In contrast, in England, the pace and extensiveness of this practice has increased - so to what extent might this link to the rise in exclusions? Interviewees made connections but they perhaps saw this policy, unique to England, as of less significance than LAs' more general loss of input into and influence over all schools (whether maintained or self-governing).

ETSO1 believed 'academisation did not help': it took away LAs' ability 'to challenge schools' and lessened LAs' support capacity 'because academies get the funding that local authorities previously held' (p.89). ELAN1 believed that: 'The whole academisation programme has seriously undermined the relationship' (p.44) between the LA and many but not all academies' (p.44): 'we ...find that it tends to be ... when they want something from us, we're friends; when we ... tell them that we don't think they're doing something the way they should be, it's none of our business' (p.44). She saw academisation as adding complexity: 'There are so many different people now in charge' (p.42). It could also obstruct collaborative inclusive practice:
> 'Some academies have gone,"This is what we're doing. We're in competition with everyone else ... Parents like good behaviour in schools. That's a big selling point. And we don't care about our neighbours next door" ' (ELAN1, p.42).

She perceived an unhelpful ethos in some academies: heads were
> 'looking for business people and it's a totally different culture.. it is [should be] about relationships but that's what's become so difficult, the supports and the framework that enabled relationships to thrive have been changed.' (p.42)

Academies seemed poorly informed about SEND and behaviour:
> 'We assume that if they aren't getting information from us [the LA], that they'll be getting information direct from central government...Actually they feel very isolated... they've gone away and become an academy. They've lost that nurturing presence of the local authority and they haven't got anything to replace it.' (ELAN1, p.44)

Academies resisted inclusion officers' support for parents: 'We will challenge a permanent exclusion where we think it's inappropriate and they don't like that'

(ELAN1, p.45). Similarly ELAN2 regretted that if she or colleagues wished to attend an exclusion governors' meeting, 'We have to be invited, and [then] invited to speak' (p.38). She reported difficulties in monitoring quality of provision in academies for children with SEMH, and at risk of exclusion. The local PRU service had also become an academy thereby placing, ELAS2 thought, obstacles in the way of providing a co-ordinated response to the needs of pupils excluded.

However, ETSO1, ELAS2 and ELAN3 referred to some academies being resistant to exclusions, having good relationships with the LAs and willing to accept their advice. ETSO1 noted (stressed in DFE, 2019) that exclusions were now no more frequent from an academy than from maintained secondary schools (although primary academies were more likely to exclude than their maintained schools). In summary ETSO1 commented: 'I don't know if academies are better or worse per se. It's just if they are bad, there's no lever [available to the LA] to really do anything' (p.94).

Beyond academisation, ELAS1 referred to another development in England seen as impacting on effective support. A decade previously, nearly all support services were provided by the LA without financial cost to any state (LA 'maintained') school. Now many services were 'traded' i.e. they had to be bought from the LA by headteachers using money from their own school budgets. This fundamental change had introduced the uncertainties of the 'marketplace [of support] that's changing all the time...Everyone will try and sell you something, and it's very confusing for head teachers' (p.15). Some ignored sound LA advice and bought in ineffective interventions.

Acute financial pressures reducing support for children at risk of exclusion

The English interviewees referred to a two-pronged financial assault on support for the child at risk of exclusion. The first was school leaders (whether of academies or maintained schools) prioritising increasingly limited funding away from inclusive practice. Schools could transfer costs for a challenging child to the local authority through exclusion and sometimes did so. The second factor was the sharply reduced funding for LA support services, resulting in destabilising reorganisations and reduced staffing.

ETSO1 noted:
> 'Because schools are being asked to do ...quite a lot more for about the same ... [union surveys suggest] Where do schools go first? And it's pastoral support and it's support for children with special educational needs.' (p.96)

Spending on inclusive practice could not be prioritised if it did not enhance Progress 8 results: 'The other week I asked a Head Teacher if he'd consider an alternative package for this young man, and his answer was financially it wasn't an efficient use of the school resources, so the answer was "No" ' (ELAN3, p.55). Schools 'feeling the pinch financially' and struggling with a 'reduction in all services across the board and support systems' were 'increasingly turning to exclusion' because they felt they had no other 'viable option' (ELAS2, p.62).

ELAN2 said:
> 'It's cheaper to permanently exclude a child than to put in an alternative package... they've [not] got the finances to look at being as creative as they perhaps would have done in the past...' (pp. 64-5).

A headteacher told ELAN3: '"It'll probably cost me about £4,000 in terms of clawback to permanently exclude. It'll cost me £12,000 to put in a full-time alternative package in" (p.57). ELAS2 also referred to the £4000 'fine': 'There are cases where school staff would say, "We'll take the hit" ' (p.56).

With reference to SEND, ELAS2 reported: 'Schools feel they can't afford to do actually what ought to be happening in terms of their SEN and their funded hours [and] they certainly don't feel they can go anywhere beyond that' (p.56). ELAN3 believed schools were discouraged from pushing for EHC plans because of the £8000 cost to their own budget. ETSO1 claimed: 'As schools' budgets reduce, schools... have less capacity and they're certainly not up for buying in extra things. They're struggling enough to keep the staff that they do have' (p.96).

Frequent references were made to LA service cuts. 'We've lost our children's centres ... We're starting to see real challenge in early years because we haven't got that early support' (ELAS1, p.62). There were no parent training groups, no mentoring for at risk pupils and reduced link-work between schools and families. The behaviour support service went 'traded' and 'people didn't buy it and we lost that a couple of years ago' (ELAS1, p64). The educational psychology service also went 'traded' and schools were reluctant to buy it in. In the northern LA, there was less capacity to work with families, ability to do home visits or to get disaffected pupils into school. Taking a holistic approach was more difficult '...getting social care support ...it's not necessarily just access to education support, it's having the right support for the family' (ELAN2, p.69). ELAN3 regretted 'We now don't have any behaviour specialists ' (p.68). The educational welfare service, previously active in preventing exclusions, went from '38 or 39 EWOs ...to a currently functional ... team of nine' (ELAN3, p.65).

For the staff still in post, the reductions meant more responsibilities and less time to devote to tasks. ELAN1 described her expanded role responsible for:
> 'all school admissions, the Access and Inclusion Team which is attendance, exclusions, children missing education and child employment. All the non-statutory and statutory work for children with SEND.' (p.65)

The LA had 'saved £40 million' but had a greater figure still to find (p.65). She despaired:
> 'We can't do it with any less than we have now...every time somebody leaves there's a debate about, "Do we have to replace them? ... Can we make them half time?" ...Most of the time we actually end up running so hard and we're still going backwards (p.66).'

ETSO1 claimed 'most of the support has already gone' (p.96): 'They're going through the next round of reorganisations and ... redundancy, and there is nothing left to cut' (p.96). He referred to the 'high needs' block of funding that LAs receive from central government to finance SEN and alternative provision. The amount available
> 'gets smaller and smaller [reducing] the support that they can give to schools ... mainstream is even less able to keep them in, so more kids fall out, so we end up in a cycle, and that's where we are now ...everyone knows this is an unsustainable system' (p.96).

Interviewees referred to frequent re-organisations and redundancies necessitated by the ongoing financial crisis and disrupting continuity of services. When occasionally new funding was found for projects, ELAS2 regretted the lack of experience and knowledge: 'the staff that you have with the expertise, they go, so [you're] trying to set something up ... from scratch' (p.69).

Wider societal issues including parenting and deprivation

Aware of the systemic nature of behaviour difficulties, interviewees alluded to other issues and societal attitudes which they thought could be connected to the rise in exclusions:

'It's bigger than education...whereas in the past, teachers might have felt uncomfortable saying, "I'm not working with that child" ...we seem to have moved to a culture [in wider society] where it's quite acceptable..." I can just say... it's the child's fault, get them away because my job is to get everybody to A star".' (ELAN1, pp 14-15)

ELAS1 linked exclusions to austerity, more families with two parents working full-time; children 'spending far too much time on their phone [or other screens]' (p.16). There were more 'children in very challenging circumstances, and we've seen a rise in the number of kids going into care...more kids being referred to CAMHS' (p.16). ELAN1 felt passionately: 'Most of these children are coming from very challenging backgrounds and I'd really like to... say to certain MPs, "You go and live that child's life...live in that home where the dog gets to eat but you don't and just see you achieve your A star English and Maths" ' (p.52).

Discussion and conclusion

In terms of national policy, the interviewees alluded to elements of Garner's (2013, p.332) 'age of enlightenment' when the pre-2010 English government actively promoted inclusive practice through the 'Every Child Matters' agenda and national strategies for behaviour and attendance. The interviewees saw residues from these multi-agency approaches influencing practice in 2018 but the former government's stress on the social and emotional aspects of learning had dissipated and revised, truncated exclusions guidance and behaviour policies from the Coalition Government were seen as condoning rather than condemning exclusionary practices. In further contrast to the pre-2010 situation, the English interviewees noted insufficient government recognition of how guidance and policies on behaviour in schools, mental health, SEND and exclusions must blend and complement each other to maximise inclusive practice. This situation was noted - and seen as a serious shortcoming - by the Timpson Review (DFE, 2019).

Meanwhile governments elsewhere in the UK continued to recognise the importance of a systemic, interdisciplinary approach. In Scotland, the national school exclusions guidance issued in 2011 was significantly called 'Included, Engaged and Involved: A positive approach to preventing and managing school exclusions' (SG, revised 2017). Its detailed material interlocked with another key document 'Better Relationships, Better Behaviour, Better Learning' (SG, 2013). The wording of these titles, when allied to a 'Staged Intervention' multi-agency approach (see above), captured the essence of inclusionary practice described in the Research Background Section of this article. They reflected the ecosystemic or biopsychosocial approach long advocated by, for example by Apter (1982), Cooper, Smith and Upton (1994) or Cooper, Bilton and Kakos (2013) and alluded to by the English interviewees. Similarly the detailed guidance of the Welsh Government, continued to emphasise systemic interventions that avoided exclusions - and perhaps critically - left local authorities with the powers to override schools who resorted to exclusion prematurely (WG, 2015).

The English interviewees saw changes to schools inspection criteria as curtailing approaches that had previously promoted inclusive practice, a view shared by the Timpson Review (DFE, 2019). Giving voice to teacher and researcher concerns (NEU, undated; Andrews, 2017; Leckie and Goldstein, 2018; George, 2019; Staufenburg, 2019) about flaws in the revised schools accountability system, the interviewees believed Progress 8 made it more difficult for teachers to respond to cognitive, social and emotional needs of 'at risk' children, and drew staff attention -

and funding - away from the identification and addressing of SEND (also noted in DFE, 2019) and practical experiences that could re-engage and build the life skills of disaffected teenagers. Again the English interviewee views contrasted with those of the Scottish officers, who commented on the flexibility and inclusive nature of the present Scottish 'Curriculum for Excellence' and 'Getting It Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC) national strategy. Pressures were reported in Scotland for more alternative and special provision (Cole, 2018; McCluskey et al., in press) but not to the extent described by the English interviewees.

The interviewees in all UK jurisdictions reported a worsening financial situation, leading to service reductions and strained budgets in schools (Cole, 2018; Seith, 2018; Andrews and Lawrence, 2018). However, the cuts in England were possibly more severe (JRF, 2015) and were reflected in the English interviewees' accounts of sharp reductions in LA support that previously helped to avoid school exclusions. Where services survived, they tended to be hollowed out shells or reliant on schools to buy in the LA service, which many schools could not or chose not to do. Consequently, schools were contributing less to maintaining LA support services as concurrently, central government reduced funding in real terms to local councils.

LAs' effective support seemed to be further eroded by the 'churn' of re-organisations and redundancies, resulting from lack of money. ELAS1 (p.15) referred to Mack et al.'s (2016) 'VUCA' (*volatility, uncertainty, complexity* and *ambiguity),* dominating the local authority's and schools' short and medium term practice and obstructing long-term strategy. Academisation contributed to this and was perceived by ELAS1 (p.15) as causing 'a breakdown of the system' with a lack of 'architecture' for what was to replace the old order. However, other interviewees noted some academies following inclusive practice and current exclusion figures showing secondary academies not excluding more than maintained schools (a point stressed by DFE, 2019). Further, exclusions in the 1990s before the era of academisation, were at a far higher level. The policy nevertheless muddled areas of responsibility and diverted funding away from LA support services. The degree of 'VUCA' would seem to have been far greater in England than in Scotland and Wales during the last decade and some interviewees clearly associated this with the rising levels of school exclusions.

Further investigations are needed into the wider societal issues, such as austerity exacerbating social deprivation or the impact of social media, mentioned as possibly contributing to exclusions - and whether these factors were more widespread and influential in England than in other parts of the UK.

Our 'Excluded Lives' Research Group is acutely aware of enquiries (e.g. Ofsted, 2018; Hutchinson and Crenna-Jennings, 2019; DFE,2019) indicating that unofficial practice or 'off-rolling' is a common phenomenon in England, disproportionately affecting children with SEND and pupils from socially deprived backgrounds. The third sector interviewees in each of the four UK jurisdictions reported unquantifiable use of reduced timetables, unofficial 'sending children home', pressure on parents to place their children in different schools or face exclusion, or induced elective home education (in Wales and England). Caution is therefore needed in interpreting and comparing national published statistics (Cole, 2019; McCluskey et al, in press). Perhaps unofficial practice is masking the true level of exclusions in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales more than in England? However, national and local government interviewees from beyond England claimed such unofficial practice was limited. They referred to the compact nature of their jurisdictions and collaborative inter-agency working allowing more effective oversight by still powerful local councils. They thought it easier, using advanced, integrated information technology systems, to control and reduce such practice (see Cole, 2018; McCluskey et al., in press). We

do not sense that unofficial practice distorts official figures in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland more than in England but hope to research this topic further.

In conclusion, the new data in this article emanates from a small and possibly one-sided sample of 'expert witnesses'. However, their views sit comfortably beside those of the 21 stakeholder interviewees in the other UK jurisdictions (Cole, 2018; McCluskey et al., in press) and point to the continuing importance of the key ingredients of anti-exclusionary practice outlined in the Research Background Section above. Further, they give authentic 'front line' expression to recent teacher organisation, researcher and the Timpson Review's (DFE, 2019) concerns on England's adjusted schools accountability system and sometimes perverse financial incentives to exclude pupils. In short, the data cast important contemporary light on factors probably associated with the rise in numbers of exclusions from English schools. Inclusive practice would seem to have been increasingly forgotten or ignored or, in an era of squeezed public spending, made financially impracticable. The challenge, as identified in DFE (2019), is to help high excluding schools to embrace approaches known to promote inclusive practice while concurrently addressing conflicting demands from governments and parents. This endeavour could be facilitated by increases to funding, alterations to funding formulae and revision to school inspection procedures (as could be happening - DFE, 2019). We also suggest - possibly diverging from DFE (2019) - the likely benefit of restoring some funding and powers to local council support services allowing LAs to operate in a similar way to effective Scottish and Welsh councils in 2018 or English authorities pre-2010.

Notes

1.. The term 'non-permanent exclusion' includes 'fixed period' exclusions (England) 'fixed term' exclusions(Wales), 'temporary exclusions' (Scotland) and 'suspensions' (N Ireland).

2. Further details of how government statistics have been used to allow valid cross-UK comparisons are given in McCluskey et al. (in press) and Cole (2019).

3. Scotland uses the term 'removal from register' and N. Ireland the term 'expulsion' in place of 'permanent exclusion'.

4. The 'Excluded Lives Research Group' is an inter-disciplinary collaboration bringing together expertise at Oxford, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Queen's Belfast, London School of Economics and Reading universities as well as from voluntary organisations.

5. At the time of writing, funding is being sought for this larger project.

6. A request for an interview with an official at the Department for Education, London, was declined. Two other interviewees withdrew.

7. Following Gray, Miller and Noakes' (1994) and Ofsted's (2005) precedent, the term 'pupils presenting challenging behaviour' encompasses children of all abilities not just those with severe learning disabilities whose behaviour is difficult to manage.

8. All subsequent page numbers refer to Cole (2018) Part 1: England.

9. In September 2014 Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans started to replace Statements of Special Educational Needs.'

10. In DFE (2015), 'SEMH' replaced 'Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties' (BESD) and the earlier term 'EBD'. It is equivalent to the Scottish term 'Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties' (SEBD).

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