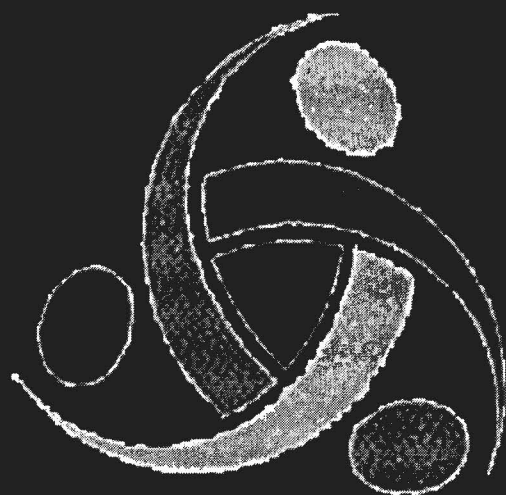


# Truancy and School Exclusion



**May 1998**

**Report by the Social Exclusion Unit**

---

# Truancy and School Exclusion Report by the Social Exclusion Unit

Presented to Parliament by the  
Prime Minister  
by Command of Her Majesty  
May 1998

ISBN 0 - 10 - 139572 - 8

This report meets the Social Exclusion Unit's (SEU) remit to report to the Prime Minister on how to:

**'make a step-change in the scale of truancy and exclusions from school, and to find better solutions for those who have been excluded'.**

The report has been prepared in consultation with other interested Whitehall departments. We have also been greatly helped by the many organisations and individuals who have responded to our consultation exercise and arranged meetings and visits for us.

This report covers England only and its recommendations are specific to England. The issues of exclusion and non-attendance of school are also being addressed within the separate education systems in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

## Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Chapter 1: What we know about Truancy](#)
- [Chapter 2: What we know about Exclusion](#)
- [Chapter 3: A Joined-up Problem](#)
- [Chapter 4: Reducing Truancy](#)
- [Chapter 5: Tackling Exclusions](#)
- [Chapter 6: Follow-up and Joined-up Government](#)
- [Annex A: Summary of Recommendations](#)
- [Annex B: Action Plan](#)

[Social Exclusion Unit Homepage](#)

## **Introduction**

### **The problem**

Truancy and exclusions have reached a crisis point. The thousands of children who are not in school on most schooldays have become a significant cause of crime. Many of today's non-attenders are in danger of becoming tomorrow's criminals and unemployed.

No one knows precisely how many children are out of school at any time because of truancy or exclusion. But each year at least one million children truant, and over 100,000 children are excluded temporarily. Some 13,000 are excluded permanently.

### **Why it matters**

This damages the children themselves and everyone else:

- the children themselves lose out because they stop learning. This is self-evident for truants, but it is also a problem for excluded pupils. Many are now receiving as little as three or four hours of tuition each week and some get nothing. These lost years matter: both truancy and exclusion are associated with a significantly higher likelihood of becoming a teenage parent, being unemployed or homeless later in life, or ending up in prison;
- the wider community suffers because of the high levels of crime into which many truants and excluded pupils get drawn. Time lost from education is a direct 'cause of crime'. For example, in London it has been estimated that 5 per cent of all offences are committed by children during school hours. 40 per cent of robberies, 25 per cent of burglaries, 20 per cent of thefts and 20 per cent of criminal damage in 1997 were committed by 10 to 16 year olds. The police and the public are paying a huge price.

### **Why it happens**

There are many reasons why children drop out of education. Problems in families play an important role, and in too many cases parents actively encourage or condone truancy. Poverty and fear of a lack of job opportunities can undermine young people's motivation. Children can become disaffected when school seems boring, too difficult, or unlikely to lead anywhere. Many schools and other agencies lack the training, support, or simply time to get to grips with what are very difficult problems.

All this has been compounded by fragmented responsibilities and lack of political attention at the highest level. At the moment, no-one either nationally or locally has a clear overall responsibility to bring the level of truancy and exclusions down. We need to change that.

### **Who can solve the problem?**

Effective solutions depend on clear goals and a clear allocation of responsibility, encompassing not only schools but also parents, the police and local authorities.

Schools clearly have a central role to play, through high standards, committed teachers and careful steps to ensure that children do not become disaffected because they cannot keep up.

Discipline matters too, and in the best schools, there are unambiguous rules, and a clear hierarchy of sanctions, applied consistently when the rules are broken. That means parents, staff and governors stand shoulder to shoulder on discipline, and children are in no doubt that they must attend school and behave.

But some children can be exceptionally disruptive and even violent, placing unacceptable pressures on teachers and harming other children's chances of getting a decent education. There are often good reasons for schools to exclude pupils. But too many children are being excluded for relatively minor reasons or because they needed help they didn't get.

There is now enough good practice to show that exclusion and truancy are not insoluble problems. Some schools with broadly similar intakes and academic performance are achieving much lower levels of truancy and exclusions than others. Many children who currently fall out of school could be kept engaged if best practice were universally followed.

But schools cannot be expected to solve these problems on their own. Parents need to play a part too, and to know that there will be penalties if they break their legal responsibility to ensure that their children attend school. The police need to contribute by ensuring that children out on the streets during school hours will be picked up. Social services departments need to take action to support the education of children in care and make sure they go to school.

### **What should the objective be?**

In the long run, the objective must be to ensure that education ceases to be optional. All children of school age need to be in education. No children should be left to roam the streets during school hours.

This goal will not be achieved quickly. But this document commits the Government to the goal of a one third reduction in the level of truancy and the numbers of permanent and fixed-term exclusions by 2002. This is tough but achievable.

Specifically, this report sets out a package of policies to complement the steps that are already being taken to tackle educational underperformance and poor motivation.

### **The measures**

On **truancy**, the measures include:

- targets for reducing truancy, focused on the worst performers;
- help to schools for achieving these targets, and spreading best practice;
- giving priority in Education Action Zones to plans for achieving serious reductions in both truancy and exclusions;
- tackling disaffection with more imaginative approaches to the curriculum;
- a tougher approach to parents who fail to fulfil their responsibility to ensure that children are in school;
- a new power for the police to pick up truants.

On **school exclusions**, the measures include:

- targets for Local Education Authorities to cut the numbers of exclusions;

- more resources focused on preventive work with children at risk of exclusion;
- clearer guidance, with legal force, to cut down on inappropriate exclusions;
- some Education Action Zones to focus on areas with particularly high levels of exclusion;
- special OFSTED inspections for high-excluding schools;
- a requirement that, by 2002, all excluded pupils receive full-time education;
- changes to performance tables, so exclusion cannot be used as a device to manipulate the reported figures;
- a major push to improve the school performance of children in care;
- measurement and reporting of the number of children from ethnic minorities who are excluded, as well as support for mentoring schemes.

The package of measures set out here is designed to bring all agencies together with parents and pupils to cut time lost from education. It will re-establish the principle that education should be universal not optional. It underlines the Government's commitment to raising educational standards and to be tough on the causes of crime. It is a crucial part of the Government's wider strategy to tackle and prevent social exclusion.

[Back to top](#)

## Chapter 1: What we know about Truancy

### How many and for how long?

1.1 Official figures show relatively low, and stable levels of truancy. But according to surveys of young people, the levels are far higher. The twice-daily registrations carried out by schools fail to capture the extent to which truancy is the norm for many children.

1.2 Last year, secondary schools reported that 1 per cent of school time was lost to unauthorised absence. For primary schools the figure was 0.5 per cent. About one million children - around 15 per cent of all pupils - took at least one half day off without authority. In primary schools, the average time missed per absent pupil totalled five days over the year. For secondary schools, it was ten days<sup>1</sup>. These numbers have been roughly stable since records began in 1992-93.

1.3 However, anonymised surveys of pupils give a very different picture. One major study<sup>2</sup>, based on a confidential questionnaire covering 35,000 pupils in Year 10 and 11, showed much higher figures. 30 per cent of those who responded said they had truanted at least once in the previous half term. Nearly one in ten 15 year olds truanted at least once a week. Of the truants, all but 10 per cent had engaged in 'post-registration truancy'. The study had an 83 per cent response rate: it is likely that many of those who did not respond were truanting at the time of the survey.

1.4 Other surveys have shown a similar picture:

- in 1992 a Home Office random interview survey<sup>3</sup> showed that 37 per cent of young men and 28 per cent of young women admitted to skipping school for at least one day without permission;
- A 1990 study of 40,000 Year 11 pupils found more than a half had taken unauthorised absence<sup>4</sup>;
- and the latest Youth Cohort Study<sup>5</sup> showed that 2 per cent of children in Year 11 truanted for *weeks* at a time, a further 2 per cent for several days at a time, and another 34 per cent truanted occasionally.

### Who and where?

1.5 Truants tend to be older pupils, and from poorer backgrounds. Analysis of Youth Cohort Study data showed that the parents of truants were more likely to be in low skilled than in professional or managerial jobs, and more likely to be in local authority housing than owner occupiers<sup>6</sup>. For boys, living in a single parent family appears to be a risk factor<sup>7</sup>. Some studies have suggested that truancy is more common in inner city areas<sup>8</sup>. But there is no particular sex bias<sup>9</sup>.

1.6 Some groups are particularly prone to truancy. For example, OFSTED information shows around a fifth of primary school age and a third of secondary age Traveller children have attendance levels below 50 per cent. Many others may not even be registered at school<sup>10</sup>. However other groups that show up disproportionately in school exclusions (notably ethnic minorities) are not more likely to be persistent truants.<sup>11</sup>

## Why?

1.7 Some of the most important factors behind truancy lie outside school: above all in family relationships and peer pressures. But how schools operate can make a great difference in shaping whether children do in fact truant.

### *Families*

1.8 Parents bear the primary responsibility for ensuring that their children attend school regularly and home circumstances exert an important influence over pupils' attendance and punctuality. Poor parental supervision and lack of commitment to education are crucial factors behind truancy. One study<sup>12</sup> found that 44 per cent of truants believed their parents knew they were truanting, while 48 per cent of non-truants said they were held back by fear of their parents finding out. A survey of senior managers, year heads, and form tutors in 14 Local Education Authorities<sup>13</sup> found that family circumstances or values were consistently cited as causes of non-attendance. Some families condone unauthorised absence, for example, for family shopping trips. Others expect school-age children to look after younger brothers or sisters during the day, or to take on excessive responsibilities for helping out at home.

### *Peers*

1.9 Surveys of pupils<sup>14</sup> have shown that they see the influence of friends and peers as even more important than family. Home Office research<sup>15</sup> has identified a statistical relationship between truancy and strong attachment to siblings or friends in trouble with the police.

### *Educational and school-based factors*

1.10 The influence of families and peers on truancy is matched by the effects of problems at school:

- OFSTED has found<sup>16</sup> that in some schools poor attendance is centred among pupils who are weak readers;
- it also found that non-attendance can be a result of anxiety about GCSE coursework deadlines;
- anxiety about bullying is frequently cited as a reason. One research study reports that a third of girls and a quarter of boys described being afraid of going to school at some time because of bullying<sup>17</sup>;
- in a number of surveys, pupils<sup>18</sup> have said that they truant because they dislike particular lessons or teachers, or see school or the National Curriculum as irrelevant.

1.11 The importance of what happens in schools in shaping truancy can be gauged by the wide variations in truancy levels between schools that appear to have similar intakes. DfEE research has found that 'there is ample evidence that schools can and do have significant impact in improving attendance and reducing disaffection'<sup>19</sup>. This is borne out by the wide variations between regions and between schools. For example, the level of unauthorised absence in Manchester is four and a half times that in South Tyneside and nearly nine times that in Oxfordshire<sup>20</sup>. And there are many examples of schools with similar intakes and results but very different truancy rates.

## What works in tackling truancy?

1.12 There is now a sufficient quantity and range of good practice to show that schools can substantially cut truancy. The most effective anti-truancy measure is to act quickly and consistently, and always to contact parents immediately children are absent. This shows that the school does not tolerate truancy and means that parents can't ignore it either. With measures of this kind, attendance rates rise quickly by 5 to 10 per cent. Home-school agreements also help to make parents take their responsibilities seriously.

1.13 The other ingredients of effective approaches are:

- making a truancy crackdown an issue for the whole school - all children, all teachers, parents, ancillary staff and the local community. This can be extended to 'truancy watch' schemes, involving the police, local businesses and others;
- unambiguous discipline policies, applied consistently to stamp out bullying and negative peer pressures;
- computerised registration so schools can identify patterns and possible causes, for example particular groups of children who are truanting or particular lessons that are being missed;
- dealing early with children's literacy and numeracy problems so they catch up academically, and offering an alternative curriculum for those unlikely to achieve at GCSE;
- extra-curricular activities - such as after-school clubs, study support, vocational learning, work experience and education-business-community links - have also been shown to motivate children at risk of becoming disaffected.

Some examples of these approaches in practice are set out below.

---

*Staffordshire:* In 1994 in Stoke-on-Trent, police and the LEA launched a scheme to tackle crime and truancy in the town centre shopping malls. A strategy was put in place which shopkeepers were committed to:

- any child of school age found in a shop during school hours was challenged by shopkeepers and would not be served;
- there were joint patrols of police and education staff, who also challenged children whether they were with adults or alone;
- education staff told shopkeepers when schools were off on holiday or on staff training days.

The outcome was a marked reduction in both the number of children in the shopping malls and in truancy. There was also a cut of a third in crimes previously attributed to truanting pupils. The award-winning scheme has now been replicated in some 70 town centres across the country.

---

*Bolton:* Smithills Comprehensive and the Borough Council have undertaken a six-week trial project combining electronic registration (which allows six whole school registrations a day) and



electronic pagers for parents of pupils who truant. Parents are contacted the moment the school knows the child is missing and are expected to follow this up immediately. Attendance has improved by between 19 and 23 per cent and internal (post-registration) truancy has been virtually eliminated: children now know they will be caught out.

---

*Compact Plus for Jobs:* A partnership project in the West Midlands, designed to tackle the school to work transition by improving the motivation and achievement of 'at risk' final year students through curriculum flexibility. An important element of the design was the use of project staff not very different in age from the students and who seemed to have more success in engaging disaffected young people. These project staff adopted an advisor-counsellor role.

Analysis of the first year of the project demonstrated:

- attendance improved at a time when it typically starts to fall off into apathy and disaffection. (Two students achieved 100 per cent attendance.);
  - 94 per cent of students obtained or exceeded predicted grades;
  - better career planning and outcome - 33 per cent obtained employment rather than the 19 per cent predicted.
- 

## References

- 1 DfEE, 1997 National Pupil Absence Tables
- 2 O'Keeffe, 'Truancy in English Secondary Schools', 1993
- 3 Graham & Bowling, Home Office Research Study 145, 'Young People and Crime', 1995
- 4 Gray & Jesson, 'Truancy in Secondary Schools amongst fifth year pupils', 1990
- 5 Graham & Bowling, op cit
- 6 Youth Cohort Study report No.34, 'Truancy and Youth Transitions'
- 7 Graham & Bowling, op cit
- 8 Gray & Jesson, op cit
- 9 ibid
- 10 Many LEAs have a special Traveller education service funded by DfEE. Primary legislation recognises their particular difficulties. OFSTED has found that at primary school level, progress has been made in improving attendance of Traveller children, but there is still much to be done at secondary school level. A DfEE-led ministerial group is currently reviewing the education of Traveller children, so we have not addressed it in this report.
- 11 Gillborn, 'Exclusion from school', 1996
- 12 O'Keeffe, op cit
- 13 Kinder, 'Three to remember, strategies for disaffected pupils', 1995

14 Kinder, 'Talking back, pupils' views on disaffection', 1996

15 Graham & Bowling, op cit

16 OFSTED, 'Access, achievement and attendance in secondary schools', 1995

17 Balding, 'Young people in 1995', 1996

18 Kinder, 1996

19 Learmonth, 'More Willingly to School?', Independent Evaluation of DfEE, GEST Programme 1995

20 DfEE, 1997, op cit

---

[Back to top](#)

## Chapter 2: What we know about Exclusion

### How many?

2.1 The number of *permanent exclusions* is small in relation to the overall school population, but has risen fast in recent years:

- the first survey figures reported 4,000 permanent exclusions in 1991-92, up from 3,000 in 1990-91<sup>21</sup>;
- in 1995-96 there were 12,500 permanent exclusions, up from 11,100 in 1994-95<sup>22</sup>;
- a recent independent survey of a sample of LEAs suggests there may have been about 13,500 in 1996-97<sup>23</sup>;
- permanent exclusions represent 0.04 per cent of primary school pupils; 0.34 per cent for secondary schools and 0.54 per cent for special schools<sup>24</sup>.

### Children permanently excluded from school in England

*Note: figures for the first two years were collected on a voluntary basis and so almost certainly underestimated. There are no figures for 1992-93 and 1993-94. The figure for 1996-97 is an estimate based on a sample of LEAs.*

2.2 Schools have to report to LEAs *fixed-term exclusions* (defined as exclusions of between five and a maximum 15 days per term) but the information is not collated. OFSTED estimates there are around 100,000 a year<sup>25</sup>. Some of these may be repeat exclusions of the same child.

2.3 All of these figures cover only decisions to exclude in any given year. They do not include children who were excluded in previous years and are still not in school. And obviously they do not cover children who are excluded 'informally': anecdotal evidence suggests this is not uncommon.

### Who?

2.4 Most excluded pupils are white, male young teenagers. But a number of groups are disproportionately likely to be excluded:

- children with special needs are six times more likely than others to be excluded<sup>26</sup>;
- African-Caribbean children are more than six times more likely<sup>27</sup>; and

- children in care are ten times more likely<sup>28</sup>.

2.5 83 per cent of excluded pupils are boys. 80 per cent are between 12 and 15 and half are 14 or 15. However, exclusions at primary ages are rising fast - by 18 per cent in 1995-96<sup>29</sup>.

2.6 Exclusion rates vary greatly from school to school, but tend to be higher in areas of social deprivation. The regions with the highest rates are inner and outer London<sup>30</sup>.

### What for?

2.7 Reasons for exclusion vary greatly from relatively minor incidents to serious criminal offences. The circumstances in which exclusion might be justified are not set out in the law, and the DfEE guidance on the subject does not have statutory force.

2.8 The guidance says that:

- exclusion should be used 'only in response to serious breaches of a school's policy on behaviour or of the criminal law';
- it should be used as a last resort when all other reasonable steps have been taken and when allowing the child to remain in school would be seriously detrimental to the education or welfare of the pupil or others;
- exclusion is not appropriate for minor misconduct, such as occasional failure to do homework or to bring dinner money;
- pregnancy is not in itself sufficient reason for exclusion.

2.9 However, practice varies enormously and in too many schools is at odds with this guidance. There have been press reports of exclusion for relatively minor issues such as wearing trousers not bought from the nominated supplier; a 7 year old excluded for sticking her tongue out at a teacher; breaking a school rule about using a subway to cross the road; wearing a nose-stud, dreadlocks or having tramlines shaved into hair. Other schools may veer too much in the opposite direction, and are too slow to use exclusion where it is necessary.

2.10 To quote OFSTED:

'Some schools are so anxious to avoid exclusions that they incur some danger to themselves as institutions, to staff and pupils. Others are only too ready to exclude. A few are irresponsibly profligate in the use made of exclusion, devaluing it as a sanction'<sup>31</sup>.

2.11 We know less than we would like about the reasons given for exclusions. A study of exclusions in one large local authority<sup>32</sup> produced the following analysis.

### Summary of reasons offered by schools for exclusions (per cent)

Bullying, fighting and assaults on peers	30.1
Disruption, misconduct and unacceptable behaviour	17.0
Verbal abuse to peers	14.

	9
Verbal abuse to staff	12.0
Miscellaneous	8.1
Theft	5.5
Defiance and disobedience	5.0
Drugs (smoking, alcohol, cannabis)	4.0
Vandalism and arson	2.4
Physical abuse and assault on staff	1.2

2.12 These categories are very broad, and some clearly could encompass both serious and more minor incidents. But the broad message concurs with research by others which has found that physical and verbal abuse, particularly to peers, are the most common grounds.

### Local variations

2.13 As is the case with truancy, exclusion rates vary widely between schools and LEAs, even after taking account of different local socio-economic conditions:

- last year, the exclusions rate in Hammersmith and Fulham was four times that of Newham and more than six times that of Oxfordshire<sup>33</sup>;
- a quarter of secondary schools permanently exclude five or more children a year and are responsible for around two thirds of all permanent exclusions. About a quarter do not permanently exclude any children<sup>34</sup>. If the bottom quarter of schools cut their exclusion rate to that of the average, exclusions would be halved.

### Why have the figures risen?

2.14 Many of the same social and family risk factors apply to exclusion as to truancy. Research findings<sup>35</sup> emphasise the considerable disadvantage excluded pupils generally experience with evidence of high levels of family stress including unemployment, low income and family disruption. OFSTED research<sup>36</sup> highlights poor acquisition of basic skills, particularly literacy; limited aspirations and opportunities; poverty; and poor relationships with pupils, parents or teachers. Since some of these factors have worsened over the last two decades, these factors may explain some of the rise in exclusions. OFSTED notes that:

'what appears to be happening is a degree of polarisation between the great majority of children who appear orderly and a small minority who are becoming increasingly intractable'<sup>37</sup>.

2.15 Others have focused on reasons relating to educational climate and policy, resource constraints and lack of training:

- some feel the problem is that schools have been under such pressure to meet demanding

academic standards and compete with each other, that excluding borderline cases could seem more attractive;

- performance tables have often been blamed for this, particularly since - until recently - raw data only was used, there was no measure of value added, and children moving from grade F to D gained no recognition at all. The Government is moving to include value added in the performance tables. The academic achievement of all children will be valued, not just children at the C to D borderline;
- some feel that many behavioural problems are the response of those who have fallen behind and are not being helped to catch up, for whom an academic curriculum seems increasingly difficult, uninteresting, or irrelevant;
- many teachers and LEAs say they need more external support for learning and behavioural needs, and draw attention to the lack of specialist staff, time and expertise within mainstream schools to deal with behavioural difficulties;
- related to this, the need for more training in handling behaviour problems was often mentioned in our consultation and OFSTED found<sup>38</sup> that many teachers were unsure of the distinction between poor behaviour and behaviour springing from deep-seated emotional disturbance, requiring treatment.

## **Why are some groups disproportionately affected?**

### *Ethnic minorities*

2.16 16 per cent of permanently excluded children are of ethnic minority origin; and nearly half of those are African-Caribbean. Yet African-Caribbean children make up only a little over 1 per cent of the school population<sup>39</sup>.

2.17 One study found that African-Caribbean children who had been excluded had different characteristics from other excluded children in the study: a higher proportion lived with a lone parent, and they also tended to be of higher or average ability (but said by schools to be underachieving). They had not usually shown disruptive behaviour from early in their school career, and showed less evidence of deep-seated trauma.<sup>40</sup> Statistically, African-Caribbean children are no more likely than other children to be persistent truants: this suggests that they are not disaffected with education<sup>41</sup>.

2.18 A 1996 OFSTED research review<sup>42</sup> explored the issue of ethnic origin and teacher-pupil interaction. It concluded that qualitative research has frequently pointed to a relatively high level of tension, even conflict, between white teachers and African-Caribbean pupils. Examples quoted varied from teacher complaints about 'troublesome' black pupils, disproportionate levels of criticism and control of black pupils, negative stereotypes, and a 'stimulus-response' situation where pupils identified and responded to expectations of low ability and disruptive behaviour.

### *Children in care*

2.19 There is a great shortage of data about the educational circumstances and achievements of children in care<sup>43</sup>, and this in itself is a symptom of the low priority often given to their schooling. However, different small studies have shown that:

- the permanent exclusion rate among children in care is 10 times higher than the

average<sup>44</sup>;

- perhaps as many as 30 per cent of children in care are out of mainstream education<sup>45</sup>, whether through exclusion or truancy.

2.20 Some of this may be attributable to poor communication between professionals. Studies have shown that social services staff are often vague about the exclusion status of children in their care or how to appeal and that schools do not always know that a child is in care<sup>46</sup>. But other relevant factors include the influence of family relationships before the child entered care, and the frequency of placement breakdowns. A new placement in a new area disrupts education through a change of school. Exclusion can add to this vicious circle: many foster parents cannot cope with a child at a loose end all day so exclusion often triggers a breakdown in care placement.

### **What happens to children who are excluded?**

2.21 Children who are permanently excluded should be quickly reintegrated back into school wherever possible. But this happens in only about a third of cases<sup>47</sup>. The rest lose their entitlement to full-time education and receive what is known in education law as 'education otherwise'. This is arranged by LEAs in most cases, either in special centres known as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), through home tuition which may only be for a few hours per week, or in a further education college.

2.22 Current guidance recommends that teachers set work for children who are excluded for a fixed term. However, the guidance is not statutory and our consultation indicated that this often does not happen.

2.23 There are about 25,000 children receiving education otherwise. One survey suggests it costs about four times as much to provide as mainstream schooling but that children receive on average only 10 per cent of full education<sup>48</sup>.

2.24 OFSTED's report on the first 12 inspections of PRUs painted a generally poor picture: a full timetable was rarely provided. Once it had inspected 100, five had been found to be failing and in need of special measures. However, more recent inspections show that PRUs are becoming more successful in improving attendance and stimulating positive attitudes to learning and behaviour. They are less successful in their assessment of children's prior attainments and monitoring academic progress.

### **What works in preventing and managing exclusion?**

2.25 The best approaches to exclusion ensure that problems are prevented and dealt with quickly, and that when children are genuinely disruptive they are not abandoned but provided with help and education outside the school environment. The best approaches always include some or all of the following:

- unambiguous rules, a clear hierarchy of sanctions, applied consistently when the rules are broken. Parents, staff and governors need to stand shoulder to shoulder on discipline, and children need to be in no doubt about the consequences of bad behaviour. Where this is done, schools see fewer disruptive incidents, and more class time is spent learning;
- behavioural problems need to be identified at primary school or early in secondary school and teachers need to be well trained in behaviour management with an equal opportunities perspective;

- where necessary, help available quickly from specialists, perhaps educational psychology service or child and adolescent mental health services;
- good arrangements for sharing information between services and for joint working more generally, overcoming agency and professional boundaries;
- early involvement of parents, good community links, role modelling and mentors;
- a more flexible and creative approach to the curriculum, particularly for older children.

2.26 When children have to be disciplined or behaviour may lead to exclusion:

- a very clear process, case conferences and mediation give an opportunity for other agencies and the parents to get involved;
- 'internal exclusion' from, for example, part of the school or a particular lesson, can be useful. It ensures children are on site all day, learning, rather than roaming the streets. Some schools have 'sanctuary' rooms, where children can be sent to cool off, under supervision, for a lesson or two;
- dual registration at school and a PRU can mean the child gets specialist support without having to be excluded from the school. It can help if the PRU is on the same site as the school;
- if groups of schools work together to run informal 'one in - one out' arrangements for excluded children, time out of school is minimised;
- when a child already has special educational needs, it is generally better to hold a review to find alternative or additional resources rather than to exclude.

*The London Borough of Newham* has succeeded in reducing the numbers of children excluded from school, including black and other ethnic minority children, children in care and children with a special educational needs. Its policies have been agreed corporately by the council. The numbers of permanently excluded children have decreased across the authority in secondary schools from 76 in 1993-94 to 31 in 1996-97.

Langdon School is a large comprehensive in East Ham which did not exclude any pupils in 1996-97 and only one pupil in 1995-96. It has a whole-school approach that includes:

- very clear preventive policies;
- early help for behaviour and learning;
- home-school agreements;
- targets for each pupil;
- a sanctuary room for children.

## **Education otherwise**

2.27 When children do have to be permanently excluded, the best provision has a number of common features:

- for all pupils there should be a very clear learning plan, with objectives and targets, time



scales for achievement, overseen by a named worker. Attendance at a pupil referral unit needs to be enforced as rigorously as at mainstream schools;

- for younger children, there should be a very clear plan and time scale for reintegration, with good links back to mainstream provision. This could be from a PRU or from home tuition with opportunities for group work. A key worker who takes a special interest in the child and who has responsibility for following up progress helps a great deal;
- if reintegration really is not possible, plans for a permanent satisfactory solution should be in place, with clearly allocated responsibility to make it happen;
- some older children need, and respond better to, more flexible and vocational learning than to the National Curriculum. Work experience and further education leading to further training or employment are very positive;
- a mentor, perhaps a university student, someone from the local community or business, or someone who has overcome earlier school difficulties, can help to remotivate young people and turn them away from antisocial behaviour.

*Include (previously called Cities in Schools) works in partnership with 25 local authorities to help over 1,000 young people who are all either excluded or long-term non-attenders. 40 per cent are persistent or serious offenders and 33 per cent are in care. Include's Bridge Courses for 14 to 16 year olds who have suffered irretrievable breakdown in their education blend a further education course with work experience and a personal development programme supported by a key worker. The full-time cost is about ?5,000, which compares to an average of ?8,000 for education otherwise. Include is also developing reintegration and prevention services.*

## **Children in care**

2.28 Our consultation showed that joint planning between LEAs and social service departments was now happening in quite a number of authorities, and can help to reduce the excessive numbers of children in care who are excluded. It needs to become the norm.

*Hampshire social services department provides a model of good practice. It has a specialist service, involving nine qualified teachers, who make sure the 700 children in care have access to the best educational opportunities. They work with social workers, young people and the schools. Each young person has his or her own education plan, which is actively monitored and followed up. This service produces regular reports showing:*

- attendance levels;
- numbers permanently excluded;
- numbers in mainstream, special and other education;
- areas of concern and good practice.

In 1997, children in care in Hampshire achieved the following results:

- 56 per cent passed one or more GCSEs;
- 14 per cent passed five or more GCSEs at A to C;

- 27 per cent in mainstream schools passed five or more GCSEs at A to C.

### **African-Caribbean children**

2.29 Successful projects work with parents and the wider African-Caribbean community. Mentoring programmes can be successful when they are part of a wider school strategy, when there is commitment from senior managers, well-trained mentors and good links with teachers and parents. As well as providing role models, mentors have an impact more widely in the school.

*KWESI:* This is a rapidly growing project in Birmingham. It was started after concern about high exclusion rates and low attainment of African-Caribbean children. KWESI largely provides mentoring support to schools. The project has won the support of both schools and the LEA; successfully recruited from the community, trained and put in place mentors; and has seen exclusion rates falling by 23 per cent. Two thirds of this reduction comprises ethnic minority pupils.

*Lifting the Exclusion Zone:* This is a partnership project of Divert, three local schools in Nottingham, local black-led churches and statutory agencies. Its aims are to reduce exclusions of African-Caribbean and mixed race children, to provide support for their families and to improve self-esteem, behaviour and school attainment. The project has recruited and matched 14 mentors with children, established a multi-agency advisory group, engaged with schools in case conferences and exclusion panels and won funding from local companies, LAs and health trusts.

### **References**

- 21 DfEE, National Exclusions Reporting System. This excludes special schools
- 22 DfEE, 'Permanent Exclusions from schools in England' 1995-96. This excludes special schools
- 23 Godfrey & Parsons, 'Follow-up survey of permanent exclusions' 1996-97
- 24 DfEE, 'Permanent Exclusions from schools'
- 25 OFSTED 'Exclusions from secondary schools' 1995-96
- 26 DfEE, 'Permanent Exclusions from schools'
- 27 Census data 1991, DfEE
- 28 National Foster Care Association - UK Joint Working Party on Foster Care
- 29 DfEE, 'Permanent Exclusions from schools'
- 30 *ibid*
- 31 OFSTED, 'Exclusions from secondary schools'
- 32 Imich, 'Exclusion from schools, current trends and issues', 1994

33 DfEE, 'Permanent Exclusions from schools'

34 ibid

35 Brodie & Berridge, 'School Exclusions research themes and issues 1996', 1997

36 OFSTED, 'Access, achievement and attendance in secondary schools'

37 OFSTED, 'Exclusions from secondary schools'

38 ibid

39 Census data 1991, DfEE

40 OFSTED, 'Exclusions from secondary schools'

41 Graham & Bowling, op cit

42 OFSTED, 'Recent Research on the Achievement of Ethnic Minority Pupils', Gillborn and Gipps, 1996

43 The Children Act uses the term 'looked after' to describe children who are cared for by the LA at the request of their parents and those who are the subject of a 'care order' following court proceedings. This report has used the term 'in care' throughout for both groups for ease of reference.

44 National Foster Care Association, op cit

45 Sinclair et al, 'Social Work Assessment with Adolescents - National Children's Bureau', 1995

46 OFSTED, 'Exclusions from secondary schools'

47 Parsons, 'Exclusions from School, The Public Cost', 1996

48 ibid

---

[Back to top](#)

## Chapter 3: A Joined-up Problem

3.1 Teachers are in the front line in having to deal with difficult pupils. But neither the causes nor the effects of truancy and exclusion can be understood solely in educational terms.

3.2 As we have seen, schools often find themselves having to deal with problems that should have been dealt with by families, or by other public agencies. Similarly, when schools fail to keep children on their premises, or exclude them, the costs spill over onto other agencies and onto the wider community.

### What are the costs?

#### *Educational underachievement*

3.3 The most obvious impact is, of course, on education itself. Truants are more likely than non-truants to leave school with few or no qualifications. The latest Youth Cohort Study<sup>49</sup> showed that 38 per cent of truants reported that they had no GCSEs, compared with 3 per cent of non-truants. Of those who had truanted, only 8 per cent obtained 5 or more GCSEs at grades A to C, as against 54 per cent of those who had not truanted in Year 11.

#### *Unemployment and homelessness*

3.4 Like others with low qualifications, those who miss school are more likely to be out of work at age 18<sup>50</sup>, and are more likely to become homeless. For example, over three quarters of homeless teenagers in one Centrepont study were either long-term non-attenders or had been excluded from school.

#### *Crime*

3.5 But the most striking link is with crime:

- according to the Audit Commission, nearly half of all school age offenders have been excluded from school; and a quarter truanted significantly<sup>51</sup>;
- Home Office research showed that truants were more than three times more likely to offend than non-truants. One study found that 78 per cent of males and 53 per cent of females who truanted once a week or more committed offences<sup>52</sup>. And a Basic Skills Agency study of 500 convicted offenders in Shropshire found that 64 per cent said they were habitual truants<sup>53</sup>;
- a six-month study by the Metropolitan Police found that 5 per cent of all offences were committed by children during school hours. 40 per cent of robberies, 25 per cent of burglaries, 20 per cent of thefts and 20 per cent of criminal damage were committed by 10 to 16 year olds<sup>54</sup>;
- in 1995-96, the Metropolitan Police arrested 748 excluded children, some of whom had committed between 20 and 40 offences before arrest<sup>55</sup>;

- there is evidence that sentencing of those who have truanted or been excluded is severe: one study<sup>56</sup> showed that pupils who have a poor attendance record were much more at risk of a custodial sentence than those with more positive reports.

3.6 Exclusion and truancy have costly effects, whether those costs are borne by the police, courts and prisons, by the social security budget or by the victims of crime. The Government is already substantially overhauling the system for dealing with young offenders. Tackling exclusion and truancy should contribute to stopping youngsters being drawn into crime in the first place.

### **Who is responsible?**

3.7 Both nationally and locally responsibility for dealing with the problems associated with truancy and exclusions is fragmented.

3.8 In Whitehall, DfEE has the main responsibility for policy on truancy and exclusions, but the Department of Health also has a key interest, notably through social services, as does the Home Office for the crime and criminal justice aspects.

3.9 Several departments run specialist funds to support exclusion and truancy projects. DfEE runs two: the Standards Fund, of which ?22 million goes to attendance and behaviour projects, and New Start which aims to bring together multi-agency programmes for young people aged 14 and over who are disaffected and at risk. Other projects are funded through the Single Regeneration Budget, on which DETR leads. The Home Office and The Department of Health sponsor projects through mainstream funding. In addition, local projects may get funding from other sources, whether private giving, charitable trusts, the lottery, business or the European Social Fund.

3.10 At a local level, responsibility is divided between schools, local education authorities and the police. It is simply not clear who is responsible if overall levels of truancy and exclusions rise.

3.11 The professionals who look after children who may truant or be excluded are required by law to produce a range of strategic 'plans' including Children's Services Plans, Behaviour Support Plans, Education Development Plans, Youth Justice Plans, Drug Action Strategies. The purpose of these plans is to focus on particular problem issues. But the number of them runs the risk of duplication and lack of co-ordination. And some children have as many as eight different professionals dealing with them, not always communicating with each other.

3.12 A complex set of interrelated problems has not been well-managed by government, whether at national or local level. Responsibility has been divided and dispersed without sufficiently coherent policies to prevent behavioural problems, and to deal with them when they do arise.

3.13 'Joined-up problems' of this kind were one of the main reasons behind the setting up of the Social Exclusion Unit. The proposals in this report bring a genuine cross-departmental focus to exclusion and truancy. But this subject has also highlighted some more general barriers to joint working at local level which the unit will now pursue as part of its work on better integration.

---

### **References**

49 Graham & Bowling, op cit

50 Youth Cohort Study Report No. 34, op cit

51 Audit Commission, 'Misspent Youth', 1996

52 Graham & Bowling, op cit

53 Basic Skills Agency, 'Basic Skills and Young Offenders', 1997

54 Metropolitan Police, Performance Information Bureau

55 ibid

56 Parker, 'Unmasking the Magistrates: the 'custody or not' decision in sentencing young offenders', 1989

---

[Back to top](#)

## Chapter 4: Reducing Truancy

4.1 Chapter 1 demonstrated that there was plenty of evidence about good practice in tackling truancy. We *know* what works, and where this is put into practice, dramatic improvements can be achieved.

4.2 This chapter sets out measures to ensure that this happens more widely. The measures affect not just schools and LEAs, but also the police, courts, parents and pupils. The overarching aim of the package is to deliver, by 2002, the target of a reduction of one third in the amount of time lost to truancy.

### Schools

4.3 A number of the problems identified in Chapter 1 as contributing to truancy are already being addressed by the DfEE school improvement agenda. For example:

- measures on failing schools and school improvement should help all aspects of school performance, including attendance;
- the literacy and numeracy strategy, and the encouragement of out-of-hours learning and summer schools should reduce the numbers who truant because they find lessons too difficult.

4.4 But levels of truancy vary greatly between schools and local authorities. To make a real difference we need action to bring the weaker performers up to the level of the best.

### *Local targets*

4.5 The first step is to turn the national target of a one third reduction into a series of targets for improvement at local authority level. These should be set out in LEAs' Education Development Plans, as attainment targets are, and apply from September 1999. Like the attainment targets, the improvement required should be most demanding for those who are the poorest performers now.

4.6 DfEE will consult with local authorities over the procedure for setting the targets. The measurement of performance is a particular difficulty, given the concerns described in Chapter 1 about the extent of post-registration truancy and therefore the accuracy of schools' reporting. The consultation should consider how this can be addressed, whether through supplementary surveys or other audits.

### *School-based targets*

4.7 Too many targets at school level could lead to unnecessary bureaucracy. But schools are already required to record attendance twice daily, and follow up unauthorised absence, and the best schools give this high priority. The Government therefore will take a power to require school-level truancy targets, to ensure that improvement takes place where necessary. This will be used where a school's attendance record is significantly below average. This power will be taken in the Schools Bill, currently before Parliament.

### *Publication*

4.8 The Government will publish data on schools' performance on truancy in the same way as performance on attainment targets (down to school level for secondary schools and LEA level for primary schools).

### *Help for schools with truancy problems*

4.9 Schools will be better able to play their part in achieving the national targets if they are properly supported. The Government already does a great deal to disseminate good practice and support projects through the Standards Fund. But the Government also proposes to make attendance issues central to the programme of *Education Action Zones* (EAZs) by making high levels of truancy and exclusion an explicit feature of the bidding guidance for the next round.

4.10 The competition for the first 25 zones is under way at the moment. Truancy was not an explicit condition of the bidding round but many bids include schools with high levels: the average level of truancy across all bids is almost three times the national rate. The EAZs' emphasis on educational underperformance will help to break the vicious circle of learning and attendance problems, while the community focus of zones will help to draw in other partners to bolster the efforts of the schools.

### *The curriculum*

4.11 Chapter 1 noted that some children say they truant because they see the National Curriculum as irrelevant. Alternative approaches, especially those which are more work-based, can be successful in preventing truancy.

4.12 The DfEE is currently consulting on opening up opportunities for the wider use of work-related learning at Key Stage 4 (age 14 to 16). In addition, the Government will also issue clarifying guidance on the position for younger age groups, where head teachers currently have the power to disapply the curriculum for a limited period if they believe the child will then be able to return to the curriculum. It is important to ensure this power does not weaken literacy or numeracy teaching. Subject to this, it could offer a useful way of re-engaging some pupils at risk of disaffection.

## **Parents**

4.13 Chapter 1 reported survey evidence that 44 per cent of truants believe their parents know they skip school, and 48 per cent of non-truants were deterred by fear that their parents would find out. There can be no greater testimony to the importance of parental supervision and attitudes in preventing truancy. It is intensely demoralising for schools if parents condone truancy - or indeed actively encourage it by taking children out of school, for example for family shopping trips.

4.14 Home-school agreements should help with this, but for more serious problems, more serious sanctions are needed. Where parents fail to ensure that their child attends school, they - not the child - commit an offence. But many schools and local authorities complain that when cases are taken to court and a conviction obtained, the fines imposed are very low. There is the question of the parents' means to consider and the courts may also have to have regard to other factors. The Government is anxious that the issue should be taken seriously, and the DfEE will be encouraging Local Education Authorities to inform magistrates of local truancy problems so they



have them in mind when considering cases.

4.15 The Crime and Disorder Bill will give Courts an additional option. Where a parent has been convicted of failing to secure a child's attendance at school, the Court will be able to impose a Parenting Order for up to 12 months. The Order will be able to include specific obligations upon the parent, for example that the parent escorts the child to school.

### **The police**

4.16 Schools need help from all local agencies, if they are to reduce truancy. The police are sometimes held back when dealing with truancy by the lack of an explicit power to pick up truants. The Government has decided to give the police such a power and this is being taken forward in the current Session's Crime and Disorder Bill, expected to be in law by July.

4.17 This will enable the police to take truants back to school or to such a place as the local education authority may designate. The power will be framed in a way which reinforces multi-agency working and local truancy reduction schemes, thereby avoiding the risk that it will be seen as passing the responsibility for the problem onto the police alone.

### **Changing the culture**

4.18 With the measures set out in this report the Government will have in place the tools to achieve a step-change in truancy, and will end a situation in which failure to attend school is tolerated and sometimes condoned.

4.19 Schools and LEAs will have to meet tough targets for cutting truancy. Police will be able to pick up children who fail to attend school. Courts will be able to fine parents and in some cases subject them to Parenting Orders. Parents already have a legal duty to ensure that their children attend school; the Government will ensure that this duty is reinforced.

4.20 Together these measures will also have another important effect: they will change the attitudes of children themselves, as children learn that there is zero tolerance of truancy. This should achieve the step-change the Government seeks. However, the effectiveness of the strategy will be monitored carefully. The Government is determined to achieve a step-change in attitudes and behaviour, and all options will be kept under review.

---

[Back to top](#)

## Chapter 5: Tackling Exclusion

5.1 Chapter 2 set out the key features of the exclusions problem. The picture is of young people excluded from school for reasons that differ vastly in seriousness:

- i incidents that are relatively minor and were never meant to be grounds for exclusion;
- ii more serious incidents, which with the right support could be prevented from arising, or could be tackled in schools, without the draconian sanction of exclusion. Many of these cases are ones in which numerous different local agencies are involved, often without knowing it or sharing information;
- iii a final category of serious, possibly criminal, incidents, where exclusion is fully justified.

5.2 It is not the aim of this report to suggest that exclusions in the third category should be reduced. That would make no sense. But the measures set out below aim to set a new framework where:

- the first category, unjustified exclusions, become a thing of the past;
- there is encouragement and support for schools and other local agencies to try to prevent exclusions in the second category;
- children who have to be excluded for anything more than a few weeks get appropriate full-time provision somewhere else, designed to tackle their problems and reintegrate them back into school where possible.

5.3 The overarching targets of the strategy are that by 2002:

- there will be a reduction of one third in the number of both permanent and fixed-term exclusions from the current level; and
- all pupils excluded from school for more than three weeks will receive alternative full-time and appropriate education.

### Implementing exclusion targets

5.4 As with truancy targets, the first step is to turn the national target of a one third reduction into a series of targets for improvement at local authority level. These should be set out in LEAs' Education Development Plans, as attainment targets are, and apply from September 1999 for permanent exclusions and September 2000 for fixed-term exclusions. Like the attainment targets, the improvement required should be most demanding for those who are the poorest performers now.

#### *Measurement issues*

5.5 DfEE will want to consult with local authorities over the procedure for setting the targets, and measurement issues. There is a particular problem with data on fixed-term exclusions. At present, schools only have to report exclusions of five days or over, but LEAs do not collate the figures routinely or give them to Government. This means the target for fixed-term exclusions

can only be fixed after one year's information has been collected and a base line set. The target should only bear on exclusions of five days or more.

5.6 The unit's work has focused attention on how little is known about exclusions generally. The Government therefore plans three further steps to improve our knowledge base:

- although they will not feature in targets, the Government plans to require schools to notify LEAs of all fixed-term exclusions of one day or more so that the scale of this can be quantified;
- the Government also plans to commission a major research study on the reasons for exclusion, to provide better information on the distribution of exclusions between the three categories set out in paragraph 5.1;
- the Government also plans to collect aggregated data on the educational achievement of children being educated out of school. At the moment, we do not even know how many there are, never mind whether they get any qualifications.

#### *Publication*

5.7 The Government will publish data on schools' performance on exclusion in the same way as performance on attainment targets (down to school level for secondary schools and LEA level for primary schools).

5.8 Since the problem of exclusions of ethnic minorities is so serious, the Government has decided that published performance data on exclusions should be broken down by ethnic group.

### **What is going to change behaviour?**

#### *Clear rules*

5.9 The Government does not favour reversing the fundamental principle that head teachers should retain responsibility for behaviour and discipline. But it does believe the law needs to be changed to make the rules much clearer. The Government plans to amend the Schools Bill to give the guidance on exclusions statutory force. This will create new grounds for appeals against exclusions, and end the inappropriate use of exclusion for very minor incidents.

#### *A focus on prevention*

5.10 The guidance itself needs strengthening and the Government plans to rewrite it to be stronger and focus more on prevention. It should include the requirement to demonstrate that all reasonable steps have been taken by the school to avoid excluding the child and that allowing the child to remain would be seriously detrimental to the education or welfare of the child or others in the school. It should focus on best practice for the measures that would be expected before exclusion, including preventive action, meetings with parents and the child, discussions with other involved agencies and cooling off periods before permanent exclusions to allow parents and the LEA to put their cases. The Government will also amend the Schools Bill to give LEAs the right to be represented and heard at the governors meeting.

#### *Publishing performance data*

5.11 The Government believes it should tackle head-on the concern that school performance tables may indirectly encourage schools to exclude poor performers, particularly in the run up to GCSEs, which are the peak years for exclusion. Exclusion during these years is particularly disruptive to a child's education, reintegration is very hard, and the child is very likely to end up with no qualifications at all.

5.12 The Government therefore plans to change the procedures for calculating the performance tables with a view to ensuring that exclusion cannot be used as a device for manipulating the reported figures. One option would be for pupils who were in school at the beginning of Year 10 to continue to count on the school's roll until the end of Year 11. The Government will, however, consult widely on the best way to achieve this objective.

#### *Special inspections of high excluding schools*

5.13 The Government does not favour targets for exclusions at the level of individual schools. Most schools exclude only a handful of children, so managing to a numerical target would be impractical and unwieldy. But there is a clear need for measures to deal with schools which have disproportionately high levels of exclusion or truancy, either overall or among specific groups and particularly African-Caribbean children.

5.14 The Government therefore proposes that the Secretary of State for Education and Employment should ask OFSTED to inspect ten schools in this category each year, outside their normal six-year scheduled programme.

5.15 It is not just the DfEE that can trigger this. Local authorities can ask OFSTED to investigate if they have similar concerns. The independent appeal panels which meet to consider disputed exclusions could also be an effective check on high excluding schools. The guidance to these panels will emphasise that, if they have concerns about the practice of exclusion in particular schools, they should draw it to the attention of the local authority.

### **Supporting teachers and schools in preventing exclusions**

#### *Education Action Zones*

5.16 The Government already provides support to individual schools through Standards Fund projects and other means. But, as with truancy, the Government plans to make exclusion issues central to the programme of Education Action Zones, with high levels of exclusion one of the priorities for the next round. Bids for the current round already include a large number of schools with significant behaviour and exclusion problems.

#### *Targeting funds*

5.17 The Government also has a commitment from 'Excellence in Schools' to review the funding arrangements for schools. This review will produce by July proposals for specific measures to target funds on schools for preventive work with children at risk of exclusion and schools that receive excluded children: such funds will be conditional on there being joint plans and partnerships locally to engage all the relevant agencies.

#### *Local authorities*

5.18 Local authorities too should and do provide staff and financial resources for schools in tackling pupils at risk of exclusion. As paragraph 5.23 below sets out, local authorities are in future going to be required to provide full-time out-of-school education for all children excluded for more than three weeks. Since out-of-school provision is commonly up to four times more expensive than the average cost of maintaining a child in school, LEAs will acquire strong incentives to support schools better in holding onto children at risk of exclusion: a logical system would be for them to offer 'dowries' to schools as a support package to receive or hold on to children at risk of exclusion.

## **Groups particularly at risk**

### *African-Caribbean boys*

5.19 A number of the measures already covered will bear particularly on African-Caribbean children. Exclusion statistics will be broken down by ethnic group. OFSTED will be asked to target special inspections on schools with disproportionate rates of exclusions among high-risk groups.

5.20 In addition to this:

- the Government will ensure that equal opportunities issues, as well as behaviour management, are adequately incorporated in the requirements for initial teacher training, and in in-service training;
- a DfEE Task Group is considering how to forge a new partnership at national and local levels to tackle the wider problem of raising achievement of ethnic minority pupils. It will also look at what can be done to promote community mentoring in ethnic minority communities. Many such projects are already supported by Government funding.

### *Children in care*

5.21 Improving attendance and reducing exclusions among children in care is critical to improving their very poor educational outcomes. The Government has already announced that it intends to set targets for the educational attainment of children in care. It has in mind that the starting point might be that 50 per cent of all children in care should achieve a qualification by 2001, and 75 per cent by 2003. Specific proposals to underpin this, particularly to promote the better co-ordination of professionals that is necessary, will be announced later this summer. In addition, effective education should be considered a key outcome of relevant social services work involving school-aged children.

## **Better solutions for children that have to be excluded**

5.22 No-one would disagree that solutions for children excluded from school need to be flexible and suitable for their particular problems. But there is no defence for the routine assumption that part-time education, or none at all, will do.

5.23 The Government has therefore decided that LEAs must be obliged to provide every child who is excluded for more than three weeks with full-time and appropriate education. This can be imposed through changes in guidance.

5.24 Although some local authorities come close to this now, many do not. This is undoubtedly a new burden on local authorities, and the resource implications will be considered within the

Comprehensive Spending Review. Full provision will need to be phased in, but this should take no longer than three years.

5.25 It is not easy to say what resources will be needed to deliver this recommendation. One effect of the other changes the Government is announcing is that fewer children should be excluded. And it must not simply be a matter of extending existing PRU provision to all excluded children on a full-time basis. Many would argue that some of the provision LEAs currently fund is both ineffective and unduly expensive. Some voluntary organisations believe that they are both more effective and cheaper. The Government is attracted to the idea that LEAs should look at such options and DfEE can also require the LEA to contract the services out if it is failing in its performance.

5.26 On the content of 'education otherwise', the Government plans that:

- all children should have a clear individual plan, including a target date for reintegration. Mentoring could be a key component of this;
- for children coming up to the end of compulsory school, further education or training may be a more realistic aim than school;
- the LEA's arrangements should all be set out in its Behaviour Support Plan.

---

[Back to top](#)

## **Chapter 6: Follow-up and Joined-up Government**

6.1 The Prime Minister has decided to establish a Ministerial task force to review progress in tackling exclusion and truancy, and monitor the follow-up to this report. All relevant Departments should be represented. This will be chaired by the Minister for School Standards and make an annual report. It will be responsible for reviewing progress against the targets. If progress is off track it will be responsible for looking at additional measures to correct this. It will also be responsible for overseeing the preparation of an evaluation plan.

6.2 Follow-up action from this report will be incorporated into all relevant Departments' main objectives. But the work on exclusion and truancy has raised a number of wider issues of 'joined-up government' such as:

- the multiplicity of statutory plans affecting young people, the case for integrating these, and the arguments for joint audit and inspection of different services as they bear on the same client group;
- the need for better information-sharing between professionals, and any necessary safeguards;
- training to produce better understanding of inter-professional interfaces, such as those affecting children in care;
- joint dissemination of the lessons of different departments' programmes to fund anti-exclusion and truancy work. This should include an examination of the case for a single consultancy resource within DfEE to spread good practice and provide field support to aid the introduction of the new targets.

The Social Exclusion Unit plans to look at these points with other departments in its further work on better integration.

---

[Back to top](#)

## **Annex A**

### **Summary of Recommendations**

#### **Truancy**

1. The overarching aim of the package is to deliver, by 2002, the target of a reduction of a third in the amount of time lost to truancy.
2. The national target will be broken down into a series of targets for improvement at local authority level. The improvement required should be most demanding for those who are the poorest performers now. DfEE will consult with local authorities over the procedure for setting the targets.
3. The measurement of performance is a particular difficulty, given the concerns described in Chapter 1 about the extent of post-registration truancy and therefore the accuracy of schools' reporting. The consultation should consider how this can be addressed, whether through supplementary surveys or other audits.
4. The Government will take a power to require school-level truancy targets, to ensure that improvements take place where necessary. This power will be taken in the Schools Bill currently before Parliament. It will be used where a school's attendance record is significantly below average.
5. Data will be published on schools' performance on truancy in the same way as performance on attainment targets (down to school level for secondary schools and LEA level for primary schools).
6. Attendance issues will be made central to the programme of *Education Action Zones* by making high levels of truancy and exclusion an explicit feature of the bidding guidance for the next round.
7. The DfEE is currently consulting on opening up opportunities for the wider use of work-related learning at Key Stage 4 (age 14 to 16) and issue clarifying guidance on appropriate circumstances to disapply the national curriculum for younger age groups.
8. DfEE will be encouraging Local Education Authorities to inform magistrates of local truancy problems so they have them in mind when considering cases.
9. The Crime and Disorder Bill will give Courts the option, where a parent has been convicted of failing to secure a child's attendance at school, to impose a Parenting Order for up to 12 months.
10. The police will be given an explicit power to pick up truants in the current session's Crime and Disorder Bill.

#### **Exclusions**

1. The overarching targets of the strategy are that by 2002 there will be a one third reduction in the numbers of both permanent and fixed-term exclusions from their current levels, and all pupils



excluded from school for more than three weeks will receive alternative full-time and appropriate education.

2. The national target of a one third reduction will be broken down into a series of targets for improvement at local authority level. These should be set out in LEAs' Education Development Plans, and apply from September 1999 for permanent exclusions and September 2000 for fixed-term exclusions. The improvement required should be most demanding for those who are the poorest performers now.

3. DfEE will consult with local authorities over the procedure for setting the targets, and measurement issues.

4. To improve the knowledge base about exclusions, schools will have to notify LEAs of all fixed-term exclusions of one day or more; the Government will commission a major research study on the reasons for exclusion; and from September 1999, the Government will collect aggregated data on the educational achievement of children being educated out of school.

5. The Government will publish data on performance on exclusion down to school level for secondary schools and LEA level for primary schools. Since the problem of exclusions of ethnic minorities is so serious, the Government has decided that published performance data on exclusions should be broken down by ethnic group.

6. The Government plans to amend the Schools Bill to give the guidance on exclusions statutory force. This will create new grounds for appeals against exclusions, and end the inappropriate use of exclusion for very minor incidents. The guidance will be rewritten to focus more on prevention, and cover all the reasonable steps that should have been taken by the school to avoid excluding the child.

7. The Government will also amend the Schools Bill to give LEA's the right to be represented and heard at the governors meeting.

8. The Government plans to change the procedures for calculating the performance tables to ensure that exclusion cannot be used as a device for manipulating the reported figures. One option would be for pupils who were in school at the beginning of Year 10 to continue to count on the school's roll until the end of Year 11. The Government will consult on the best way to achieve this objective.

9. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment will ask OFSTED to conduct special inspections of ten schools each year which have disproportionately high levels of exclusion or truancy, either overall or among specific groups, and particularly African-Caribbean children. This will be outside their normal six-year scheduled programme. Local authorities can also ask OFSTED to investigate if they have similar concerns, and the independent appeal panels which meet to consider disputed exclusions should draw to the attention of the local authority concerns they have about high excluding schools.

10. Exclusion issues will be made central to the programme of Education Action Zones. High levels of exclusion will be one of the priorities for the next round.

11. DfEE will produce by July proposals for specific measures to target funds on schools for preventive work with children at risk of exclusion and schools that receive excluded children: such funds will be conditional on there being joint plans and partnerships locally to engage all the relevant agencies.

12. The requirement to provide out of school education for excluded pupils will encourage LEAs

to support schools better in holding on to children at risk of exclusion: a logical system would be for them to offer 'dowries' to schools as a support package to receive or hold on to children at risk of exclusion.

13. The Government will ensure that equal opportunities issues, as well as behaviour management, are adequately incorporated in the requirements for initial teacher training, and in-service training.

14. The DfEE Task Group on raising achievement of ethnic minority pupils will look at what can be done to promote community mentoring in ethnic minority communities.

15. The Government intends to set targets for the educational attainment of children in care. It has in mind that the starting point might be that 50 per cent of all children in care should achieve a qualification by 2001, and 75 per cent by 2003. Specific proposals to underpin this, particularly to promote the better co-ordination of professionals that is necessary, will be announced later this summer. In addition, effective education should be considered a key outcome of relevant social services work involving school-age children.

16. LEAs will be obliged to provide every child who is excluded for more than three weeks with full-time and appropriate education. This can be imposed through changes in guidance. It is a new burden on local authorities and the resource implications will be considered in the Comprehensive Spending Reviews. Full provision will need to be phased in, but this should take no longer than three years. Once this pledge has been implemented, all children should have a clear individual plan, including a target date for reintegration.

### **Follow-up**

1. The Minister for School Standards will lead a Ministerial task force to review progress in tackling exclusion and truancy, and monitor the follow-up to this report. All relevant Departments should be represented. It will make an annual report. If progress is off track it will be responsible for looking at additional measures to correct this. It will also be responsible for overseeing the preparation of an evaluation plan.

2. Follow-up action from this report will be incorporated into all relevant departments' main objectives.

3. In its further work on better integration, the Social Exclusion Unit will look at some of the 'joined-up government' issues underpinning exclusion and truancy, including the multiplicity of statutory plans affecting young people, arguments for joint audit and inspection of different services as they bear on the same client group; the need for better information sharing between professionals, training to produce better understanding of inter-professional interfaces, and joint dissemination of the lessons of different departments' programmes to fund anti-exclusion and truancy work. This should include an examination of the case for a single consultancy resource within the DfEE to spread good practice and provide field support to aid the introduction of the new targets.

---

[Back to top](#)

## Annex B

### Action Plan

Timing	Action
May	<p>Setting up of ministerial task force to follow up this report.</p> <p>Government tables amendments to the Schools and Crime and Disorder Bills.</p>
June	<p>Decisions on the DfEE Comprehensive Spending Review.</p> <p>DfEE goes out to consultation on target distribution, issues around measurement of truancy, changes to league tables.</p> <p>DfEE commissions research on reasons for exclusion.</p>
July	<p>DfEE Task Group on raising the achievement of ethnic minority pupils looks at community mentoring.</p> <p>DfEE produces proposals to target funds on schools with disproportionate problems; considered by ministers.</p>
1998-99	<p>DfEE issues new guidance on curriculum flexibility.</p> <p>DfEE's consultancy resource set up; starts fieldwork to pave way for new targets.</p> <p>Department's main objectives to incorporate follow-up action on this report.</p> <p>Education Action Zones begin, covering many areas with high truancy and exclusion.</p> <p>Targets for truancy and permanent exclusions set.</p> <p>Measurement of fixed-term exclusion starts.</p> <p>Educational attainment targets for children in care set.</p> <p>New, stronger guidance on exclusions drafted.</p> <p>New training for teachers planned.</p> <p>Police power to pick up truants comes into force.</p> <p>Notifications to magistrates of truancy problems introduced.</p>
1999-2000	<p>Targets for truancy and permanent exclusions introduced.</p> <p>Educational attainment targets for children in care introduced.</p> <p>New, stronger guidance on exclusions, with statutory force, applies.</p>

	<p>OFSTED inspections of problem schools begin.</p> <p>New training for teachers introduced.</p> <p>Targets for fixed-term exclusions set.</p> <p>Government begins to collect aggregated data on the educational achievement of children being educated out of school.</p>
2000 -01	<p>Targets for fixed-term exclusions introduced.</p> <p>First new set of data on truancy and permanent exclusions published.</p> <p>First review of overall effect of measures.</p>
2001 -02	<p>All excluded children now receiving full-time education.</p> <p>First new set of data on fixed-term exclusions published, with second new set of data on truancy and permanent exclusions.</p>
2002 -03	<p>Second set of data on fixed-term exclusions published, with third set of data on truancy and permanent exclusions. Should show a reduction of one third.</p>

[Back to top](#)