

# PERMANENT SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS IN SURREY: WHAT WORKS TO KEEP CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN EDUCATION?

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## Declarations(s)

None.



## Foreword

**Dr Julie Llewelyn, High Sheriff of Surrey 2021-22**

I have been delighted to work with the Royal Holloway, University of London, research team on this unique piece of independent research that establishes the facts around permanent school exclusion in Surrey. The report is particularly important because it identifies specific changes that will increase the chances of our young people staying in the type of education that is right for them.

This work builds on the considerable efforts of two of my predecessors as High Sheriff of Surrey, Robert Napier and Jim Glover; like them, I am enormously grateful for the invaluable support of educational specialists Louise O'Connor and Ron Searle. Surrey County Council and Surrey Police had the foresight to recognise the potential of this work: their collaboration has been instrumental to our success. It is particularly encouraging to observe the increasing levels of alignment between the work of the statutory bodies and the critical activities undertaken by the many charity and voluntary organisations across the county.

I feel confident that many share the desire to make positive changes in Surrey and, with continued cross agency cooperation, we can go further to improve the lives and life chances of every child and young person. The inputs of people with lived experience of all aspects of permanent school exclusion in Surrey bring this report to life and we owe it to all of them to implement its recommendations.



## **Foreword**

**Denise Turner Stewart, Cabinet Member Education and Lifelong Learning**

As the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning I welcome the outcome of the research commissioned by Surrey County Council in 2019. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the work of the Royal Holloway, University of London, research team who have produced this independent research that establishes the context and impact of permanent school exclusion in Surrey.

This report focuses on the lived experience of a significant number of young people who have experienced a permanent exclusion. It is nationally understood that there is a clear link between permanent exclusion, the risk of exploitation and the potential for youth offending as young people lose the protective factor of being in school. In Surrey we mitigate this by minimising the number of children who are excluded and ensuring that our excluded pupils access a place at a Pupil Referral Unit, alternative educational provision or a place in another school setting. We have paid particular attention to the protective factor of education for our young people. As a result, I am pleased that during our recent Youth Offending Service Inspection (YOS) we were able to share with the inspectors that we do not have any children involved with the YOS of statutory school age who are not in education.

As well as the good practice of above it is important to note the exclusion numbers in Surrey are low. I believe this is a result of the strong partnership working we have in place between the council, the police, our schools and the voluntary sector and the good practice we already have in place such as the Surrey Alternative Learning Programme (SALP).

Whilst we may have low permanent exclusion numbers, we acknowledge each exclusion has an impact on each individual and their families. By understanding the characteristics of the children who are permanently excluded from school in Surrey and quantifying geographic disparities within the county, the report is able to make evidence-based recommendations for change.

I acknowledge that there remains much to be done including utilising the results of this work to develop an early identification risk of permanent exclusion index for children in Surrey.

We know that early support for vulnerable young people is a game changer for young people and their future outcomes. This research will enable us to use evidence to act pre-emptively, change their educational course, avoid permanent exclusion, and improve life chances.



## Executive Summary

There is a statutory right for all children to have access to education and be included in schools. Permanent exclusion from mainstream schooling and vulnerability to dropping out of subsequent provision are reasons why some children are missing education. Exclusion is known to be a method of behaviour management that is used to address challenging behaviours. However, systemic issues such as inter-agency working and funding of services, and preventative support and interventions for children and young people are key considerations in reducing permanent school exclusions. Reducing exclusions is important because, nationally, children and young people excluded from school are known to have poorer life opportunities than their in-school counterparts. This is reflected in factors that make some children and young people vulnerable to exclusion (e.g. a history of adverse experiences, Special Educational Need, the subjective experience of social exclusion) and also vulnerabilities as a consequence of exclusion (e.g. increased vulnerability to exploitation and serious youth violence).

Surrey is an affluent county offering opportunity and a good quality of life. However, within the county sit pockets of deprivation where some of the most disadvantaged children and young people live and school. The Community Foundation's *Surrey Uncovered* 2017 report (*recent data are due to be published*) set out that 13 neighbourhoods in Surrey were in the 20% worst areas nationally for income deprivation, and in 17 neighbourhoods 30% or more of children lived in poverty. Department for Education data reflect that almost half of children and young people in Surrey in alternative school provision have free school meals (often used as an index of deprivation), in comparison to 18% of the same across the South East. Furthermore, the number of children in Surrey with Special Educational Need (SEN) is increasing, yet educational attainment for pupils with statutory plans is poorer than for young people in comparable counties. Nationally, high exclusion rates occur in schools serving deprived communities. In Surrey, the subjective experience of social exclusion (e.g. living with deprivation, schooling next to affluence) could exacerbate other known factors for permanent exclusion, such as poor mental health.

Our research focuses on children and young people permanently excluded from school in Surrey and considers how systems and services might work together to support school inclusion and the right of all young people to education. This research sits in a national context – lockdowns and school closures during a global pandemic – of increased awareness of the disadvantages to children and young people who do not have access to education.

In one strand of the research, we created a sample of 200 children and young people permanently excluded from schools in Surrey between September 2018 and December 2020, and sourced data from education, social care and police/youth justice. Our data set is unique because it provided the first opportunity to explore a multi-agency perspective of permanent school exclusions in Surrey. Data were explored in the context of county geographical quadrants and boroughs, as well as the characteristics of the children and young people.

In the second strand of the research, we conducted 37 interviews with educational professional stakeholders (including headteachers, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and SEN leaders, educational professionals in Surrey County Council), parents, caregivers, and young people with experience of permanent school exclusion. Through these interviews, we identified concerns about the practice of permanent school exclusions in Surrey, and practical, feasible approaches to reducing permanent school exclusions in the county.

The 200 children and young people excluded from schools in Surrey were similar to children excluded throughout England in terms of age, gender, behaviour that led to exclusion, and prevalence of special educational need and having an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). However, there were key points of difference between Surrey and the national data as presented in the 2019 *Timpson Review on School Exclusions*. Children and young people permanently excluded from schools in Surrey presented with multiple and possibly complex needs and vulnerabilities relating to possible deprivation (as indexed by free school meals), mental health (SEN/EHCP) and social care, and at a higher level than reflected in the national data. For most of the young people in Surrey, systems of support were not in place at the point at which they were permanently excluded from school.

The North East quadrant of Surrey had the highest frequency of exclusions (32%); the South East the fewest (13%). This most likely reflected differences in practice across quadrants, such as how the Surrey Alternative Learning Programme (SALP) boards operate. SALP is a coordinated approach to support children at risk of exclusion and holds headteachers to account for decision-making. SALP resources are used with support of the Pupil Referral Units to access alternative support for young people.

There were differences too in permanent exclusion patterns depending on the frequency with which pupils had received prior fixed term exclusions. Pupils who were excluded for persistent, disruptive behaviour often had an extensive history of fixed term exclusions, whereas it was not uncommon for pupils who were permanently excluded for drug-related reasons to have no history of fixed term exclusions.

Furthermore, most children and young people who were justice-involved had their first contact with police and youth justice services before or at the time of permanent exclusion. Half of children and young people who continued to be justice-involved after exclusion had all three needs relating to free school meals, SEN and social care.

Through the stakeholder interviews, we found that children and young people were excluded at the point where schools felt that they had no alternative means of supporting pupils and managing behaviour; this problem was attributed by participants to a gap in resources available to schools. There were challenges in sharing information about children and young people across services. The impact of this was that critical information about vulnerabilities and risk was not used to best effect to support early intervention to keep children and young people in full time education.

Through our research, we made several recommendations that reflect the need for partnership working across the county to reduce permanent school exclusions and associated disadvantages and harms. The recommendations are summarised below and expanded upon in Section 7 of this report (Summary and Recommendations):

- Accept permanent exclusion as a public health issue; nurture, understand and support behaviour as a form of communication.
- Enhance implementation of SALP across the county quadrants.
- Encourage mainstream schools to provide enhanced support for children at risk of permanent exclusion.
- Bring statutory and third sector services to the school; work together to support families and intervene earlier for SEN.
- Ensure continuity of support for children and young people with multiple needs (e.g. SEN, social care, possible deprivation, justice-involved).
- Protocols to ensure close communication and collaboration should be established for the transition from primary to secondary schools for vulnerable children.
- Develop an indicator of evidence-based risk and protective factors for permanent exclusion.
- Ensure information sharing and collaboration between services; consider having a local champion in each school/agency.
- Ensure 'critical patterns' of at-risk behaviours and events about children are shared between agencies to prevent escalation to 'critical incidents' that require a justice response.
- Consider creating leadership and governance roles to support an agenda to reduce exclusions and monitor progress against outcomes of this research, such as a named Cabinet member, local authority Lead, headteacher, Governor and Police/Youth Justice Representative.
- Create a Surrey Collaborative Implementation Plan with multi-agency-specific actions; measure impact and continually improve provision.

At the time of finalising this report, Surrey County Council had already committed to several of these recommendations, the outcomes of which are not within the scope of this report.

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

*"He'd gone through some trauma when he was living with his parents ... At school ... They didn't know how to help him. In a classroom full of 30 kids, they just couldn't do it ... They didn't have the time, or the resources ... to help him, so in the end he got expelled from school and he was only five ... I do sympathise with the teachers; they don't get the training ... I don't know if it's possible for him to go back into mainstream ... But the damage is done. He absolutely hates school ... on top of his trauma from [pre-school age], he's now got trauma related to school"* (caregiver of a child excluded from school)

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

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	10
<b>Section 1. School exclusions in context</b>	11
What is the scale of the issue nationally?	11
What does and does not happen in the formal exclusion process?	11
Which children and young people are most vulnerable to school exclusion?	12
What is the impact of school exclusion on a child or young person?	13
The inclusion debate	14
Section 1 summary of key questions to take forward to the Surrey context	14
<b>Section 2. Evidence based approaches to promoting school inclusion and reducing exclusion</b>	15
The whole-school approach	15
Attachment aware framework and programmes	15
Nurture aware schools, nurture groups, and emotional coaching	16
Restorative approaches	17
School-Wide Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports	17
Developing pupil academic skills	17
Summary and model of best practice	18
Case study: Glasgow City Council's Getting It Right for Every Child	19
<b>Section 3. Setting the research context and the rationale for a focus on school exclusions in Surrey</b>	21
Surrey school exclusions in context of the national picture	22
Examples of good practice in managing exclusions in Surrey	24
What might the Glasgow model mean for Surrey?	25
Summary of sections 1-3 and research questions	26
<b>Section 4. Children and young people permanently excluded from schools in Surrey</b>	27
Who are the children and young people permanently excluded from school in Surrey?	27
Age and gender	27
Ethnicity	27
Needs and vulnerabilities	28
Youth Justice involvement	31
Case Study: Who are the children and young people repeatedly involved with police and youth justice before and after permanent exclusion?	32
Fixed term exclusion history	34
What are the patterns of permanent exclusion across Surrey?	35
Age, gender and ethnicity	37
Needs and vulnerabilities	37
Youth Justice involvement	38
Fixed term exclusion history	39
Case study: Borough focus	40
What are the outcomes for children and young people permanently excluded from school in Surrey?	41



	<b>Page</b>
<b>Section 5. Understanding the barriers and facilitators to best practice in managing permanent school exclusions in Surrey</b>	43
What concerns and solutions do educational stakeholders identify relating to the practice of permanent school exclusion in Surrey?	43
Theme 1 – Perceived ease of social exclusions	43
Theme 2 – Collaborative approaches	45
Theme 3 – Key milestones/periods for intervention	48
Theme 4 – Variety and availability of alternative options to exclusion	49
Theme 5 – Concerns around underlying causes of behaviour	52
Theme 6 – Views on the Glasgow model	57
What are the barriers and facilitators to best practice in managing permanent school exclusions in Surrey?	58
Theme 1 – Surrey Alternative Learning Programme: a coordinated approach to support children at the brink of exclusion	58
Theme 2 – A public health approach: the Glasgow model	62
Theme 3 – Building resilience within children	63
Theme 4 – Early intervention beyond individuals: the family and school	65
Summary: What are the barriers and facilitators to best practice in managing permanent school exclusions in Surrey?	67
<b>Section 6. Case Study: Alex</b>	68
<b>Section 7. Summary and Recommendations</b>	69
<b>References</b>	72

## INTRODUCTION

This report focuses on children and young people permanently excluded from school in Surrey and makes recommendations for how systems and services might work together to support school inclusion and the right of all young people to education.

Section 1 sets out the scale of the problem and the process of permanent exclusion from mainstream education. A description of the evidence base of the characteristics of children and young people most likely to be permanently excluded from mainstream education follows, as well as the impact of exclusion on the pupils concerned. This section ends with a shift from exclusion to inclusion, with discussion of the school inclusion agenda, before presenting the key questions to take forward to the Surrey context from the research literature.

In Section 2 we present a review of evidence-based or best practice in supporting school inclusion and managing exclusions, with reference to a continuum model of best practice. Section 3 sets out the context and rationale for a focus on children and young people excluded from schools in Surrey, and presents the questions that we take forward in our research.

Section 4 presents an examination of the characteristics of children and young people in Surrey who were permanently excluded from school over a two year period, and support available to them around that time. We explore this from the unique perspective of linking education, social care, and youth justice data to understand the systems around the children and young people as well as the complexity of need with which they present. These analyses provide a context for the scope and nature of the issues of exclusion in Surrey. This is followed – in Section 5 - by key themes generated from a series of interviews with professional educational stakeholders, parents/caregivers, and young people excluded from school, focused on barriers and facilitators to best practice in managing permanent exclusions in Surrey. Some of the issues highlighted in Sections 4 and 5 and exemplified in the case study of 'Alex' presented in Section 6.

The report draws conclusions (Section 7) on the factors that put children and young people at risk of exclusion, and the actions, interventions and collaborations that support continued engagement in full-time education. The report makes recommendations for changes to policy and practice in Surrey that are most likely to reduce the numbers of children and young people missing out on full-time education.

## Section 1. School exclusions in context

There is a statutory right for all children to have access to education and be included in schools<sup>1</sup>. Permanent exclusion from mainstream schooling, whether through [legal, formalised procedures](#) or unlawful methods such as invisible, 'off-the-record' processes available to schools<sup>2 3 4</sup> are key reasons why some [children are missing education](#). Exclusion is known to be a method of behaviour management that is used to address behaviours that challenge, and sometimes in place of alternative preventive measures requiring financial investment, such as provision for early identification of Special Educational Need (SEN) and therapeutic intervention through agencies such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, systemic issues relevant to inter-agency working and funding of services, support and interventions for children and young people are likely to be key considerations in reducing school exclusion practice.

Unlawful exclusions are problematic due to concern for a school's performance taking precedent over consideration of the child's future outcomes<sup>5</sup>. [Unlawful exclusions](#) circumvent scrutiny inherent in official processes and involve little to no access to formal support or appeal for the excluded child<sup>6</sup>. For example, encouraging a parent to remove their child from a school to avoid any future stigma to the child for having a formal exclusion on their record attendance roll, commonly referred to as '[off-rolling](#)'<sup>5</sup>. A problem with this approach to exclusions is that the full picture of 'who, why, and what?' around the excluded child or young person is missing. The problem of unlawful exclusions is perhaps exacerbated in the context of national lockdown and school closures during a global pandemic, during which time [Ofsted](#)<sup>7</sup> noted a 38% increase in children who were reportedly home-educated due to parental concerns about Covid-19 infections. Trends towards home-schooling, which are not primarily motivated by a child's future attainment, may lead to an increase of inappropriate off-rolling.

### What is the scale of the issue nationally?

During the academic year 2018-19, the average rate of formal, permanent exclusions in England was 10 pupils per 10,000<sup>8</sup> and formal, fixed-term exclusions was 536 pupils per 10,000<sup>8</sup>. However, when unlawful exclusions are taken into account the ratio is likely to be higher. There is no optimal, benchmark rate of school exclusions; this would be unlikely to promote individualised approaches to behaviour management, nor reflect the challenges of supporting students within schools serving disadvantaged communities<sup>9</sup>.

### What does and does not happen in the formal exclusion process?

[Permanent exclusion](#) is one intervention that usually follows many beforehand. It is not unusual for children and young people to have periods of fixed term exclusion from school prior to permanent exclusion. The intention might be for the fixed term exclusion to have a transformative effect on conduct, academic attainment and life outcomes<sup>10</sup>. Permanent exclusions might be implemented to promote behaviour that is conducive to learning, as well as to enhance the safety of the school environment<sup>11</sup>. When considering the permanent exclusion of a student, school leadership can suggest that an Alternative Provision (AP) curriculum might provide a better match to a child's needs and abilities<sup>12</sup>. Regardless of whether the exclusion is fixed term or permanent, the decision to exclude must be "rational; reasonable; fair; and proportionate"<sup>2</sup>.

When a pupil is identified as at risk of exclusion, schools work in partnership with external organisations and other schools to proactively engage with the child or young person to prevent escalation of behaviour, or to locate temporary or permanent placement elsewhere. Interventions focus on the emotional, behavioural, psychological and/or academic needs of the child or young person concerned. This might be through attending to the multiple needs of the child or young person and the relationships they build, promoting attendance, inclusion and academic attainment.

Once a headteacher has made the decision to exclude a child from an English state-funded school, either governing bodies (in the case of fixed term exclusions) or local authorities (in the case of permanent exclusions) are required to provide alternative educational provision for the child concerned from the sixth day<sup>23</sup>. Parents and carers have the option to request an Independent Review Panel (IRP) within 15 working days of a school governing bodies' ruling to support a headteacher's decision to permanently exclude a child<sup>24</sup>. However, the *Pinball Kids*<sup>25</sup> report emphasised that a lack of awareness among parents and carers regarding legal requirements around school exclusions can prevent effective advocacy for children and young people.

Furthermore, parents and carers of children at risk of being excluded might have limited time to allocate to attending governing body meetings and IRPs. Additional barriers to successful advocacy of children at high risk of exclusion might include a lack of procedural understanding to gain timely access to appeal documentation, comprehension of documentation, effective communication of grounds for appeal, limited awareness of appropriate alternative provision and subjectively low levels of comfort with asserting oneself into the decision-making process, as an outsider<sup>16 17</sup>.

### **Which children and young people are most vulnerable to school exclusion?**

The Department for Education recommends that schools consider individual pupil vulnerabilities to exclusion, identify long- and short-term factors for problematic behaviour, and intervene early (including referring to external agencies, as relevant) to support access to full-time education and prevent exclusions<sup>2</sup>.

The [\*Timpson Review of School Exclusion\*](#)<sup>18</sup> identified consistently high rates of exclusion experienced by children (particularly boys) with a history of contact with social care services, from disadvantaged communities, and with statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as neglect, abuse, or being supported by or under the care of Local Authority services are known vulnerability factors for school exclusion<sup>19</sup>. Educational outcomes for these vulnerable children and young people might be improved if assistance for mental health and relationship building were offered, particularly to those who had experience of being housed in non-familial settings, such as care homes<sup>20 21</sup>. However, the gap between level of mental health need of children and young people and limited access to appropriate intervention through, for example, budget cuts to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), has resulted in two-thirds of eligible children not receiving specialist mental health support<sup>22</sup>.

Differences in exclusion rates between students with, or without SEND, as well as those with, and without Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) or Statements of Need, demonstrate that an inclusion approach based on student need may be helpful in reducing rates of exclusion. For example, the Department for Education<sup>23</sup> reported that pupils with SEND, but lacking an EHCP or SEN statement, experienced higher rates of permanent exclusion during the academic year 2018-19 than pupils with an EHCP/SEN statement, as well as pupils with no SEND, in turn. Indeed, statutory guidance recommends that headteachers avoid the permanent exclusion of children and young people with an EHCP or children who are looked after<sup>2</sup>. This might suggest that the likelihood of permanent school exclusion increases where no EHCP has been provided for a child with SEND. In this situation, it might be that schools do not have access to behaviour support guidelines or resources pertaining to a child's particular SEND, which could have been implemented successfully in place of permanent exclusion<sup>16</sup>. Alternatively, it might be that the needs of children and young people with identified SEND are not best addressed through an EHCP, but there are also shortfalls in available provision.

The Department for Education<sup>28</sup> identified specific ethnic groups of children at high risk of exclusion. Gypsy/Roma, Travellers of Irish Heritage, and Caribbean children had rates of exclusion consistently

well above the national average. In another study<sup>24</sup>, mixed White/Black Caribbean children in English schools were the dual ethnicity group at highest risk of school exclusion, and were disproportionately represented in exclusion figures. In comparison, Bangladeshi and Indian children were excluded from school proportionately less frequently than White British children<sup>28</sup>. These findings set out a need to differentiate between ethnic minority groups, rather than analysing Black and Ethnic Minority (BAME) children as homogeneous with similar experiences in education; doing so might provide useful insights for policy and practice at a local level.

It is noteworthy that disproportionately high school exclusion rates occur in schools serving deprived communities, while high deprivation is also a predictor of academic performance below the national average<sup>25 26</sup>. Schools serving catchment areas that include the highest proportions of White British children eligible for free school meals (FSM) are also most likely to be rated by Ofsted as 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate'<sup>27</sup>; there are links between food insecurity, poor mental health, wellbeing and life satisfaction, and most pronounced in areas where food insecurity was uncommon<sup>28</sup>.

Considering the associations between attending an under-performing school, eligibility for FSM, poor mental health and wellbeing, and exclusion, White British children attending schools within a context of local deprivation might be at high risk of fixed-term, or permanent, school exclusions. However, at present, little evidence exists to establish the causal direction of associations between White British ethnicity, FSM eligibility, mental health and school exclusions.

For any child or young person in school, the subjective experience of social exclusion (e.g. being registered at school but not feeling a part of that community) could exacerbate other known risk factors for formal exclusion from school. For example, subjective social exclusion can have a detrimental impact on the mental health of children and young people, which could compound pre-existing mental health difficulties for those identified as benefitting from additional Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) support<sup>29</sup>. Children and young people who experience difference between them and peers and staff, or a lack of common identity, might experience difficulties in developing and maintaining positive relationships with staff and peers, causing students to feel isolated from the wider school environment<sup>30</sup>.

One way to promote a sense of community inclusion is through consideration of diversity and culture among the staff group. For example, it might be that improved retention of Black and Asian staff in the teaching profession in England could help to promote positive relationships between ethnic minority students and teachers and raise academic expectations for these groups of students<sup>16</sup>.

In summary, there is a complex interplay between individual and systemic factors that increase risk of a child or young person being excluded from education.

### **What is the impact of school exclusion on a child or young person?**

Outcomes for children who experience school exclusions can include severe disruptions in education and consequent curtailing of future life prospects<sup>31 32</sup>. For example, excluded children of working parents are more likely to experience greater exposure to anti-social peers and early involvement with the criminal justice system through limited adult oversight and long periods without alternative placement<sup>35</sup>. There is also evidence that educational attainment of young people in Alternative Provision (AP), who have often experienced exclusion from mainstream schooling, is generally very poor<sup>33</sup>.

Given that children and young people with difficulties relating to social and emotional development and mental health are high-risk for exclusion, and the experience of social exclusion is additionally detrimental to mental health, it follows that school exclusion could exacerbate existing vulnerabilities

to and experience of poor psychological, emotional, mental health and wellbeing. The long term impact of school exclusion not only disrupts education and future opportunities for secure employment <sup>34</sup>, but interfaces with multiple life domains that further reduce life prospects.

### **The inclusion debate**

Given the disproportionate disadvantages surrounding children and young people vulnerable to and impacted by school exclusion, a positive shift in terminology and practice towards inclusion makes explicit an intention to keep pupils in full-time education <sup>35 36</sup>. Supporting inclusion is regarded as a systemic process of working with staff, pupils, and senior management, developing good policy and practice, evaluating change and focusing on high expectations for students' progress and aspirations <sup>37</sup>. Furthermore, based on extensive work by the Traveller Education Service to support mainstream school inclusion for children from traveller or traveller heritage communities, inclusive practice is defined as involving measures which *"take[s] local circumstances, cultures and history into account"*<sup>38</sup>. Schools play an important role in promoting connectedness and relationships, which can support student attainment, achievement, engagement and inclusion<sup>39</sup>.

However, a focus on alternatives to school exclusion practices in England might have neglected the needs of the most vulnerable groups of children and young people, and resulted in an over-representation of those with SEND who reach the point of exclusion<sup>40</sup>. This might reflect an increased need to develop initiatives to help students with SEND feel that they are a valued part of their school community and experience subjective success in their educational attainment<sup>41</sup>.

There is growing evidence that a breakdown of school exclusion rates along metrics such as gender, SEND, social care support and mental health concerns, as well as assessment of the ways in which risk factors for exclusion overlap and interact with each other, could highlight areas of need and subsequent intervention to improve inclusion practices within schools <sup>18 42 43</sup>. An approach that takes account of the specific needs of children and young people set in a context of local circumstances and culture might help to improve referral and assessment processes, more timely direction to appropriate provision and reflect inclusive practice.

### **Section 1 summary of key questions to take forward to the Surrey context**

From the review of the literature of the context of school exclusions, we identified the following key questions to take forward to exploring the exclusion context in Surrey:

- What are the systemic issues relevant to inter-agency working and funding of services, support and interventions for children and young people at risk of permanent exclusion?
- What does permanent exclusion practice look like in Surrey? Are there areas for improvement?
- Who are the children and young people being permanently excluded from school in Surrey?
- What are the outcomes for children and young people permanently excluded from school in Surrey?

These questions are addressed in Sections 4 and 5 of this report.

## Section 2. Evidence based approaches to promoting school inclusion and reducing exclusion.

The whole-school approach recognises the impact that an inclusive and positive school ethos and culture can have on students' social and emotional wellbeing, development and behaviour, and thus their ability and motivation to engage in learning<sup>44 45</sup>, over and above the provision of learning and teaching. The whole-school approach is not a novel concept in education, yet over the last few years a momentum has developed following evidence- and practise-based support. The whole-school, system-wide approach engages multiple parts of the education system that have an impact on pupil development<sup>39</sup>.

### The whole-school approach

The whole-school approach aims to address the systemic needs of schools, students and teachers, and was developed to focus on specific needs of all children and their healthy social and emotional development and mental health. Schools adopting the whole-school approach have experienced positive outcomes for increasing awareness of, responding to and managing students' mental health and emotional needs<sup>46</sup>.

A useful set of principles to guide practical implementation of a whole-school approach were published in [2015 by Public Health England and The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition](#). The principles set out the importance of multi-agency partnership working, good leadership, a culture of inclusion, promoting agency among students, identification and monitoring of student need to inform effective commissioning, targeted support to students with vulnerabilities to social and emotional difficulties, support for parents and caregivers, staff support and training, and the promotion of student resilience, emotional intelligence, thinking and coping skills. Similarly, the [Welsh Government's draft guidance](#) on embedding a whole-school approach for improved student emotional and psychological well-being emphasises commitment from school staff at all levels.

Sitting within a whole-school approach are evidence-based frameworks and programmes to enhance emotional and psychological wellbeing. These include attachment informed, nurture aware, restorative, and school-wide positive behavioural interventions and support; these are discussed in turn in subsequent sections. These frameworks have been implemented at policy level, as well as targeting more specific changes to school climate and ethos, inter-agency or family connections and the interactions and communication within the day-to-day experiences in schools.

### Attachment aware framework and programmes

The attachment aware framework focuses on the relationship between students and staff to promote inclusion. There is some evidence that this relational approach (rather than one focused on behavioural rewards and punishments) is better suited to students who are most at risk of exclusion, such as those with complex social, emotional and mental health need<sup>45</sup>. Supporting students to develop secure attachment figures at school can help lessen distress from threatening situations and sooth response systems<sup>47 48</sup>, so support emotional development. Attachment aware frameworks in schools also support inclusivity, academic attainment and better teacher-student interactions<sup>48 49 50</sup>. The [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\)](#) and the DfE encourage the use of attachment-informed practice and intervention in schools to avoid the exclusion of children who are in the care system and who present with attachment difficulties. Schools are advised to offer appropriate training for staff working with children with attachment difficulties<sup>51</sup>.

A practical approach to introducing an attachment aware framework in schools was set out by [Brighton and Hove City Council in 2018](#). This approach includes core values and commitment across Local Authorities and schools, staff training and resources, promotion of attachment models for staff to take

forward in day-to-day practice with students and parents/caregivers, and specific attachment-based interventions.

There is good evidence for school-wide benefits of attachment programmes. For example, the Alex Timpson Trust and Rees Centre collaborated to implement the [Alex Timpson Attachment and Trauma Programme in Schools](#) in 238 schools across 20 Local Authorities. The programme included training staff on attachment, trauma and skills on emotional coaching and nurturing. Evaluations pre- and post-programme highlighted improved staff confidence in working with attachment, positive changes in practise that led to a reduction in pupil challenging behaviour, benefits to the school environment, improved student wellbeing and academic skills, and the importance of leadership and support of the programme<sup>52 53 54</sup>.

There is also good evidence for the attachment-informed programme [Thrive](#), which is recommended by Ofsted for early intervention. A 2019 evaluation of the Thrive approach reported positive outcomes for behaviour, relationships, learning, and social and emotional wellbeing, with a reduction in fixed term and permanent exclusions.

### **Nurture aware schools, nurture groups, and emotional coaching**

Nurture aware schools aim to create an environment that supports healthy social and emotional development by providing a balance between caregiving, warmth, connectedness and attunement, focused on safety, engagement and environment<sup>55</sup>. The theoretical basis of nurture aware schools is similar to that of attachment awareness, where early life experiences of nurture can impact emotional, social and cognitive development.

[Nurture UK](#) set out six principles of nurture: the importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing; the importance of transitions in children's lives; the classroom offers a safe base; children's learning is understood developmentally; language is a vital means of communication; and all behaviour is communication. As with an attachment aware framework, the challenge for Local Authorities in implementing a nurture aware approach is shifting from a behavioural to a relational approach, the implementation and impact of which are difficult to evidence<sup>56</sup>.

There is a sizeable evidence-base supporting the use of nurture groups for improving students' social, emotional and behavioural difficulties<sup>57 58 59 60 61 62 63</sup>. Nurture groups are evidence-based interventions targeting children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) and social, emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH) through building positive relationships and behaviour<sup>61</sup>. Groups focus on building language, communication, and emotional literacy, and foster warmth and an inclusive ethos to enhance feelings of nurture which might not have been experienced in the student's early life. Positive and supportive relationships with teachers who run the groups are important in reinforcing feelings of safety and security<sup>57 61</sup>.

In addition to the targeted improvements, nurture groups also improved whole-school approach and school ethos<sup>57 58 12</sup>, attendance and reduced exclusions<sup>12</sup>, general social and emotional skills such as self-esteem and empathy<sup>62</sup>, and academic achievement<sup>58 59 60 62 63</sup>.

Emotional coaching applies the principles of nurture to use emotionally safe, trusting, secure and supportive relationships to provide a space to validate children's emotions within set boundaries<sup>64 65</sup>. Emotional coaching develops the awareness of the child or young person of their emotions so that they can learn to better regulate their own emotions, build resilience, and to self-soothe when experiencing negative emotions<sup>65 66</sup>.



There is evidence that emotional coaching promotes positive teacher-student relationships and contributes to better school behaviour, reductions in behavioural incidents, increases in pro-social behaviour, and better academic attainment<sup>65,66</sup>. It is most effective in response to low-level indicators of challenging emotions<sup>64</sup>.

### **Restorative approaches**

Restorative approaches work with relationships, respect and responsibility to improve behaviour, relationships between students, wellbeing and academic performance<sup>39,67</sup>. Many schools in Scotland have embedded a restorative approach as part of their whole-school approach to good effect with improvements in students' relationships with staff and peers, as well as improved behaviour of students<sup>40</sup>.

In England, Restorative Approaches in Schools (RAiS) was implemented in a large-scale study in Bristol to assess the impact on reduction of exclusions, anti-social behaviour, conflicts and bullying, and unauthorised absences<sup>67</sup>. There was no clear evidence of improved whole-school effectiveness as a result of implementing RAiS approaches when compared to a targeted focus approach but positive outcomes included reductions in fixed-term exclusions, anti-social behaviour, conflicts and bullying, and increased attendance. The children seemed to experience interactions with teachers and peers as fairer and more positive, when compared to the quality of interpersonal relationships prior to the implementation of the RAiS approach.

Originally developed in the criminal justice system, restorative justice has been applied in schools to reduce and prevent exclusions through improving student behaviour, focusing on understanding relationships, taking responsibility and accountability for the impact of behaviour on relationships, and building on developing damaged relationships<sup>68</sup>. In a [large-scale implementation of restorative justice in the USA](#), outcomes included reduction in the number of exclusions and improved school climate<sup>68</sup>.

### **School-Wide Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)**

School-Wide Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) is a popular programme in the USA, focused on developing positive behaviours through proactive school-wide disciplinary procedures. Similar to the whole-school approach, the SWPBIS concentrates on developing an inclusive positive school culture for relationships and academic attainment, early identification of students' behavioural challenges, teaching social skills, engaging practises that support behaviour, and being evidence-based. The SWPBIS can be engaged at different levels: whole-school, group-based intervention and 1:1 student intervention<sup>69</sup>.

SWPBIS has been found to improve behaviour in schools<sup>70,71</sup>, reduce fixed term exclusions and discipline referrals for primary school pupils<sup>72</sup>, improve learning climate<sup>71</sup>, and reduce the number of segregated students in Norwegian schools<sup>71</sup>. Implementing the SWPBIS has been challenging for many schools, including a lack of staff buy-in, information sharing, disjointed universal models and differences in practice between schools or agencies<sup>69</sup>.

### **Developing pupil academic skills**

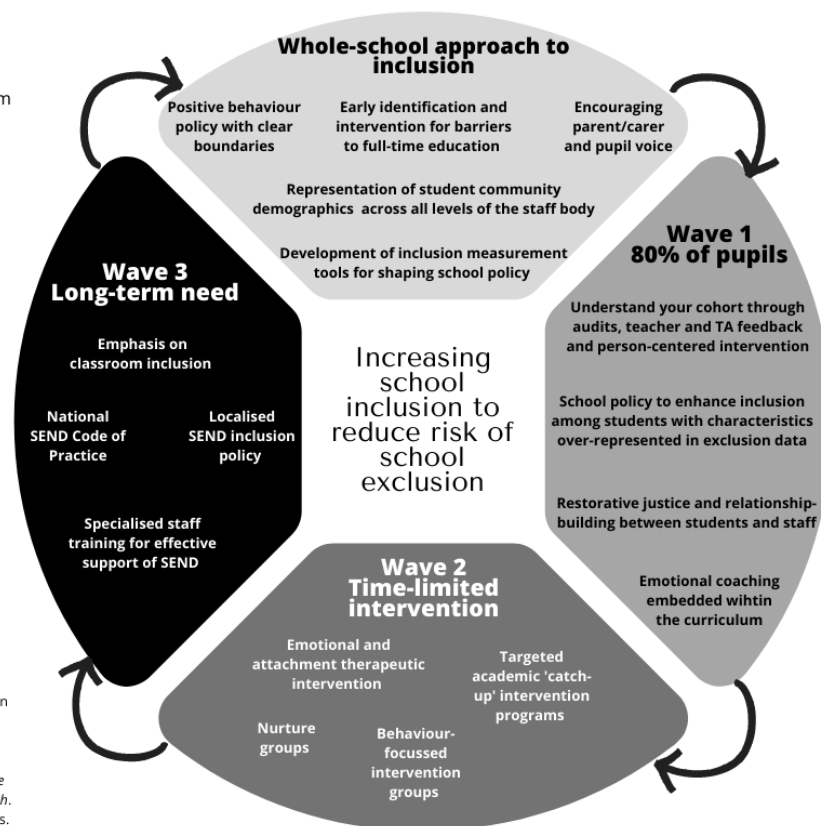
Mentoring or monitoring of academic achievement and enhancing academic skills are effective in reducing exclusion<sup>34</sup>. This approach has been popularised in England by national programmes such as the [National Strategy Intervention](#), which provides additional support in core subjects of literacy and maths, and revision material for those students working below the national average<sup>73</sup>. The intervention has a good impact in primary schools, but less so in secondary schools<sup>73</sup>. Important factors in creating a positive impact included: leadership and management, analysis of student needs, early identification, adjusting the programme to the needs of the students, and good quality training and monitoring of the provision<sup>73</sup>.

## Summary and model of best practice

The encouragement from DfE to engage in a whole-school approach indicates a need to be moving towards developing inclusive cultures on a broader platform, and there is evidence to support the effectiveness of this approach in reducing exclusions. Proactive approaches include the promotion of inclusive cultures and addressing risks for exclusion, and reactive approaches manage behaviours that lead to exclusion once they have occurred. Targeting interventions towards children and young people most at risk of exclusion can decrease the likelihood of escalation of behaviours that lead to exclusion. However, once these behaviours have occurred, it is important that fair and appropriate access to education is provided to students who might otherwise disengage from the education system entirely.

A model of best practice based on research and policy recommendations is presented in Figure 1, below.

Figure title:  
Understanding  
exclusions as a  
systemic problem



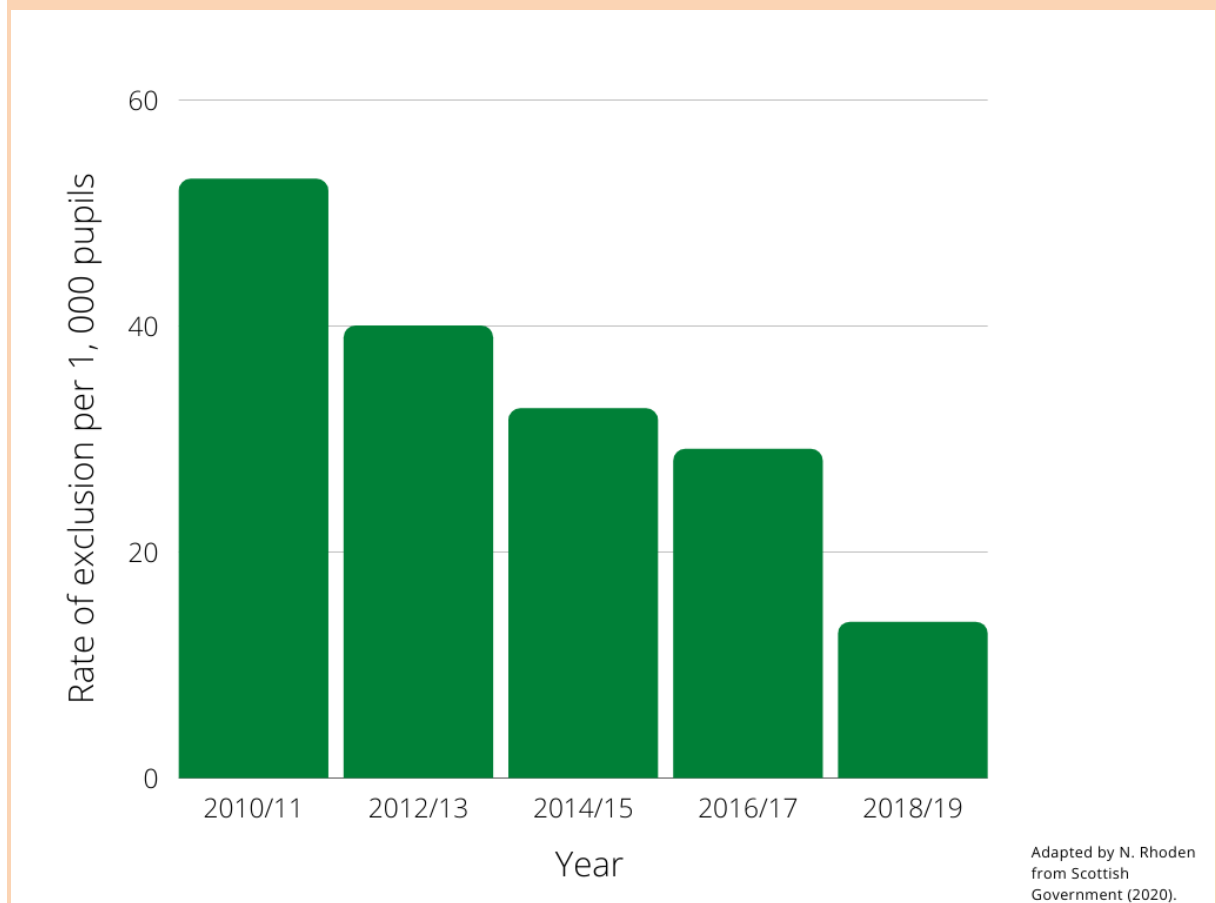
Adapted by N. Rhoden and S. Neave from: Ekins, A. & Grimes, P. (2009). *Inclusion: Developing An Effective Whole School Approach*. Open University Press.

### Case study: Glasgow City Council's Getting It Right for Every Child

Since its implementation in 2006-07, Glasgow City Council's Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) strategy has reduced exclusions through a local authority-wide whole-school approach. School exclusions were reduced from 12.8 primary school and 51.0 secondary school exclusions per 1000 pupils, during the academic year 2006-07, to 4.7 and 24.6, respectively, during the academic year 2018-19<sup>74 75</sup>. A focus on improved aspirations and chances for success for all residents of Glasgow was the foundation of the philosophy for this strategy, which was spearheaded by Glasgow's Director of Education, Maureen McKenna.

Rethinking approaches to pupils demonstrating behaviours which may challenge, child-centred decision making around school exclusions and creating an inclusive school culture were specifically promoted with the aim of improving the educational opportunity for children. The results from the GIRFEC strategy included year-on-year reductions in school exclusions, which is credited for playing an important role in a city-wide decrease in reported youth crime<sup>76 77</sup>.

Figure 2: Pattern of exclusions in Glasgow, 2010-2019



Glasgow's GIRFEC strategy may represent a useful model for guiding best practice in Surrey schools, with the aim of reducing fixed-term and permanent exclusions. With the main driver of change taking place through the GIRFEC model being a shared shift in philosophy among school staff, rather than a focus on funding initiatives, a similar, Surrey-specific approach to reducing school exclusion could be planned and applied in practice in schools over a relatively short time frame.

In line with the shift of focus and philosophy in Glasgow schools, staff are encouraged to regard the behaviour of children as forms of communication (one of the nurture principles), with the proviso that behaviours which may challenge could be linked to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)<sup>78</sup>. The potential for ACEs to be detrimental to a child's experiences in education, or to place a child at greater risk for exclusion from school, can be mitigated by protective factors such as building resilience in children, supporting parents and families, as well as preventing household adversity<sup>80 79</sup>.

As part of the GIRFEC strategy, teachers received training on the potential for ACEs and childhood trauma to impact the behaviour of pupils. This approach to supporting children demonstrating behaviours which may challenge, coupled with possible links to ACEs, complements the changes to decision-making around school exclusions brought about by GIRFEC. Under this model, decisions to exclude children emphasised an individualised, child-centred assessment of a child's ACEs and the impact these may have on behaviour that could lead to exclusion from school. Furthermore, McKenna states that the purpose of exclusions should be "*to ensure the safety of the children in question, or the safety of other children*"<sup>80</sup>.

A key aspect of GIRFEC is raising aspirations for children living within a community which comprises 44% of the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland<sup>81</sup>. Glasgow City Council's strategy involved providing new experiences for children in Glasgow and building awareness of unfamiliar opportunities for success, which may have previously been deemed inaccessible to this group of children and their parents/carers. For instance, McKenna<sup>82</sup> refers to voluntary school visits, in which adults share their experiences and function as an exemplary role model for school-age children. There was also emphasis on the greater likelihood of advantageous, long-term attainment and income which results from continuing further education beyond the national compulsory schooling age<sup>84</sup>.

Increasing exposure to sporting events for Glaswegian children, as a potentially beneficial motivator to aspire to successful outcomes, were also recommended. This approach may be helpful if combined with transferable skills developed through sporting activities, such as resilience, communication and teamwork. In this way, GIRFEC may help to build the confidence needed for children to access unfamiliar, highly reputable, further education establishments and prestigious non-sporting occupations, which offer careers with relatively greater longevity and lower risk of non-progression than may be offered through professional or Olympic sports<sup>83 84</sup>.

Crucially, the outcomes of GIRFEC suggest that deprivation and poverty may not have a significant link to school exclusion. In contrast, prevalence of additional support needs appeared to be associated with rates of school exclusions in Glasgow. Children in need of additional support have been outlined those with SEMH needs, care-experienced children, and children with learning difficulties<sup>84</sup>. This finding is in accordance with the over-representation of children with SEND, experience of care and SEMH needs in national school exclusion figures, as detailed earlier in this review (see section *Which children and young people are most vulnerable to school exclusion?*).

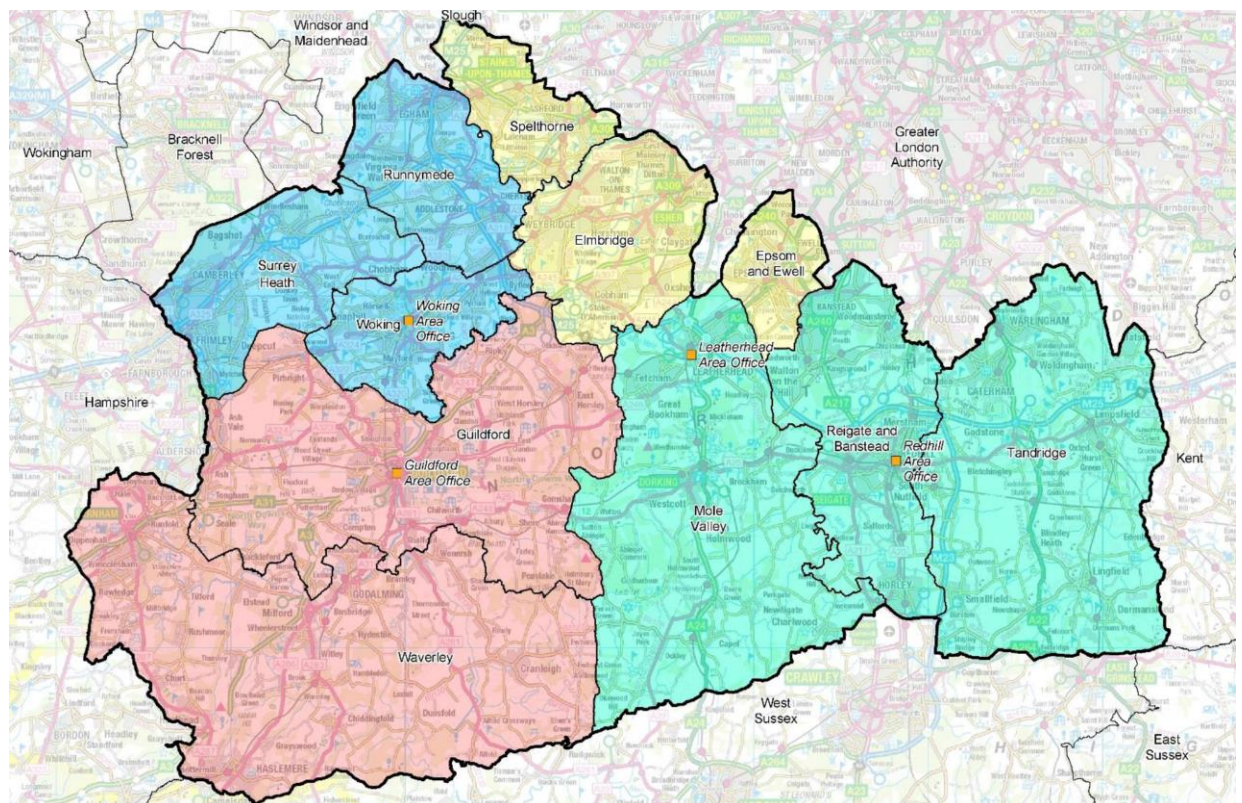
Consequently, McKenna<sup>84</sup> highlights the importance of reducing reliance on exclusion as a behaviour management tool, stressing that exclusion may place a child into the very context that increases their exposure to ACEs and exclusion from school<sup>85</sup>. For example, the reduction of reported youth crime in the Glasgow city area which coincided with the reduction in school exclusions may have resulted from limiting at-risk children's exposure to peer groups involved in crime. This outcome is in line with the extra-familial contexts that can pull children towards criminal activity such as the influence of peer groups and subjective neighbourhood safety<sup>86 87</sup>. Lack of engagement with education due to school exclusion might prevent effective safeguarding of a child and increase the likelihood of their involvement in youth crime (see section *What is the impact of school exclusion on a child or young person?*).

### Section 3. Setting the research context and the rationale for a focus on school exclusions in Surrey.

Surrey is an affluent county offering opportunity and a good quality of life. However, within the county sit pockets of deprivation where some of the most disadvantaged children and young people live and school. The Community Foundation's *Surrey Uncovered 2017* report (*recent data are due to be published*) set out that 13 neighbourhoods in Surrey were in the 20% worst areas nationally for income deprivation, and in 17 neighbourhoods 30% or more of children lived in poverty. Although the national averages for children eligible for free school meals (often used as an index of deprivation) are higher than those for the South East of England (21.7% and 7.8%, respectively, in 2020/21<sup>88</sup>), prevalence in Surrey (11.9%) is higher than the regional average. For example, Department for Education data reflect that 52.5% of children and young people in Surrey in alternative school provision in 2020/21 were eligible for free school meals, higher than the average in the South East (45.6%) but in line with the national average of 54.4%<sup>88</sup>. Among nursery children, 8.3% were eligible for free school meals in Surrey, in comparison to the national average of 7.2% and the South East average of 1.7%<sup>88</sup>. Nationally, high exclusion rates occur in schools serving deprived communities. In Surrey, the subjective experience of social exclusion (e.g. living with deprivation, schooling next to affluence) could exacerbate other known factors for permanent exclusion, such as poor mental health<sup>89</sup>.

The percentage of children and young people in Surrey with EHCPs or SEN statements increased between 2015 and 2021, with an average (4.2%) higher than the national (3.7%) and regional (3.9%) comparators<sup>90</sup>. Young people in pupil referral units in Surrey also presented with a high level of special education need, with 71.3% in receipt of support in 2020/21, in comparison to 60.4% in the South East and 58.7% nationally<sup>90</sup>. This is of additional concern because in 2017 educational attainment for Surrey pupils with statutory plans was poorer than for young people in comparable counties.

Figure 3: Map of Surrey including quadrants: North East (yellow), South East (green), South West (red), North West (blue)



Surrey Local Authority’s strategic vision for 2030 includes improving the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Surrey residents. Alongside this sits the [Surrey Healthy Schools guidance](#), to promote physical, emotional and mental health and wellbeing in Surrey students. The guidance supports a whole-schools approach to promoting healthy wellbeing through building resilience, self-esteem and belonging in students, guided by principles of fairness and equality<sup>91</sup>. It is intended that the whole-schools approach – which draws on a Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) curriculum, healthy eating and physical exercise - will aid wellbeing and inclusivity, and promote pupil readiness to learn.

### Surrey school exclusions in context of the national picture

The rates of permanent and fixed-term exclusions from Surrey schools have increased since the academic year 2014/15. The rates of fixed term exclusions are similar to the national trend (Figure 4) whereas the rate of permanent exclusion in Surrey has remained static whilst the national trend has been upwards (Figure 5). In 2017/18 and 2018/19, SEND children accounted for 53% and 56% of permanent exclusions, respectively, and 48% and 51%, respectively, of fixed-term exclusions in Surrey. Although the frequency of SEND among permanent exclusions in 2019/20 decreased slightly (51%), the fixed-term exclusions remained at 51% (it should be noted that there are limits to the scope of comparison of 2019/20 data due to school closures in the context of the pandemic). These percentages suggest an over-representation of SEND in Surrey County Council exclusion figures<sup>92</sup>.

Figure 4: Fixed term exclusions 2014-2019 in England and Surrey

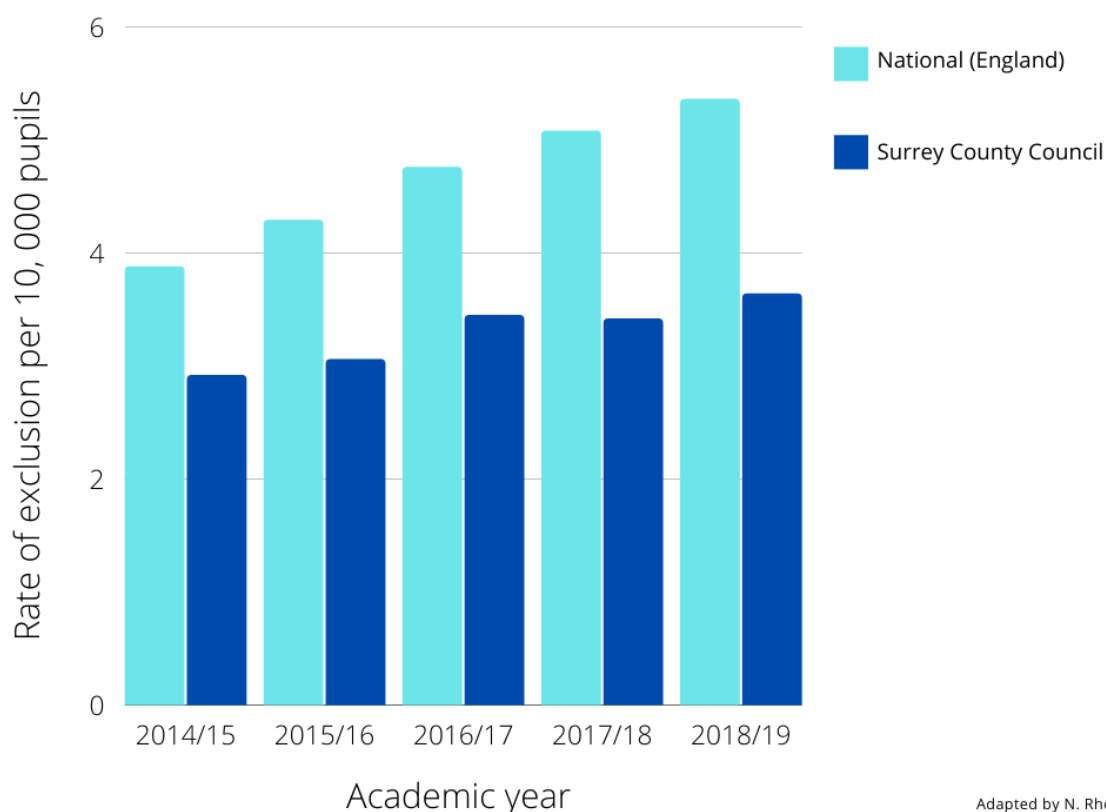
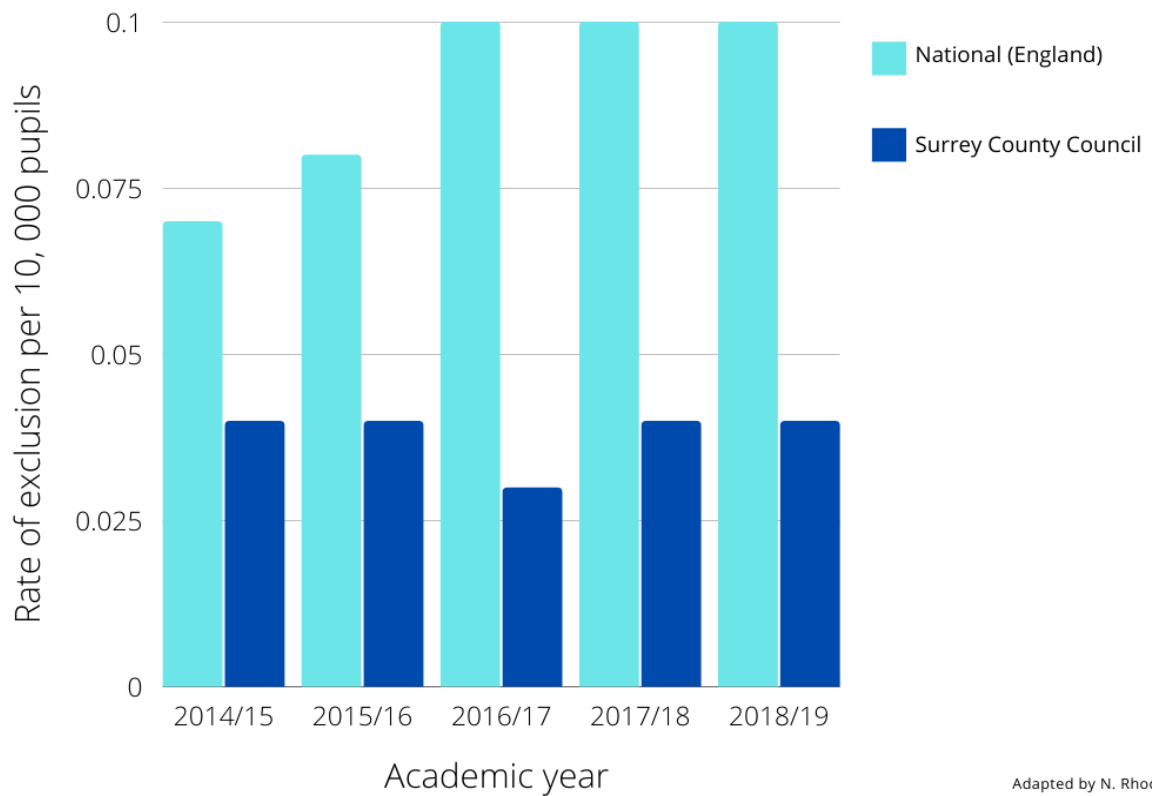


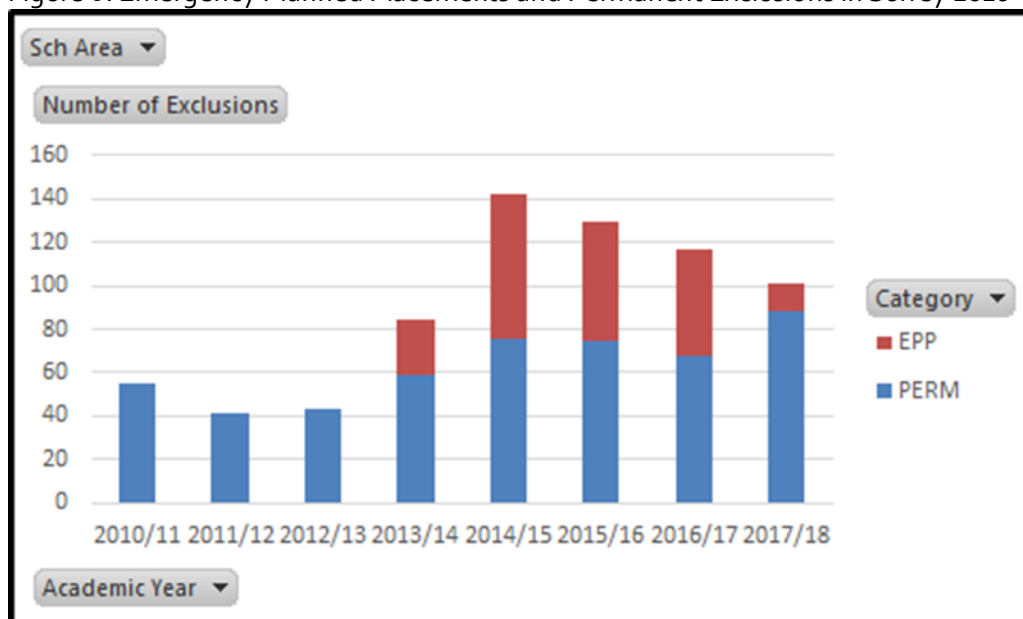
Figure 5: Permanent exclusions 2014-2019 in England and Surrey



Adapted by N. Rhoden from DfE (2020).

However, the static fixed term exclusion rates in Surrey might be partly explained through use of Emergency Planned Placements (EPPs). The number of permanent exclusions were highest in 2017/18 (Figure 5), the same year in which EPPs were least frequent (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Emergency Planned Placements and Permanent Exclusions in Surrey 2010-2018



Source: Surrey County Council (2018)

Another possible explanation for the static permanent exclusion rates in Surrey is school absence, chosen by parents and carers as a means to prevent their child or young person being excluded from school. A 2016 Ofsted joint local area SEND inspection in Surrey and revisit in 2019 suggested that parents and carers who lacked the support required for their child or young person used school absence as a way of preventing escalation of the child's behaviour towards an exclusion threshold. This issue might have been a particular problem for children and young people with SEND, as the 2019 Ofsted revisit concluded that Surrey had not made sufficient progress in addressing absence and exclusion among children and young people with SEND in mainstream schools. Since that time, substantial improvements in the monitoring of SEND children and young people led to the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) being withdrawn by the Department of Education; Surrey was the only Local Authority to have a WSOA withdrawn during the pandemic. It should also be noted that 2019 data indicate that Surrey Primary and Secondary schools have absence at a slightly lower level than the national average<sup>93</sup>. The pressures placed upon school performance evaluations, such as Ofsted inspections, are thought to play a role in off-rolling and other types of unlawful exclusions across England.

### **Examples of good practice in managing exclusions in Surrey**

There are several examples in Surrey of schools that provide excellent support for students with SEMH and SEN. This is evidenced by the Short Stay Schools approach which is used across the county. For instance, several alternative provision schools have received an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating within the last five years, such as the Fordway Centre and Reigate Valley College<sup>94</sup>. These Short Stay Schools could provide further training on support for students attending mainstream schools with SEMH and SEN and it is understood that a strategy document for alternative provision is in progress.

The Surrey Alternative Learning Programme (SALP) works with some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the county and has a specific focus on reducing exclusions. One of the strengths of the SALP initiative is that all secondary head teachers in each of four geographical areas of the county (quadrants) contribute to the decision as to the way SALP funding is directed to support vulnerable students. Often, schools in more affluent areas are happy for placements and interventions to be purchased to support other schools in deprived areas.

To address unlawful exclusions, any instance in which a child is sent home in response to a breach of their school's Behaviour Policy must be formally recorded as an exclusion<sup>95</sup>. This approach might help to prevent cases when a child who meets the threshold for permanent exclusion is not identified as being at risk for exclusion and thus not able to access legal alternatives, such as a Managed Move to another school.

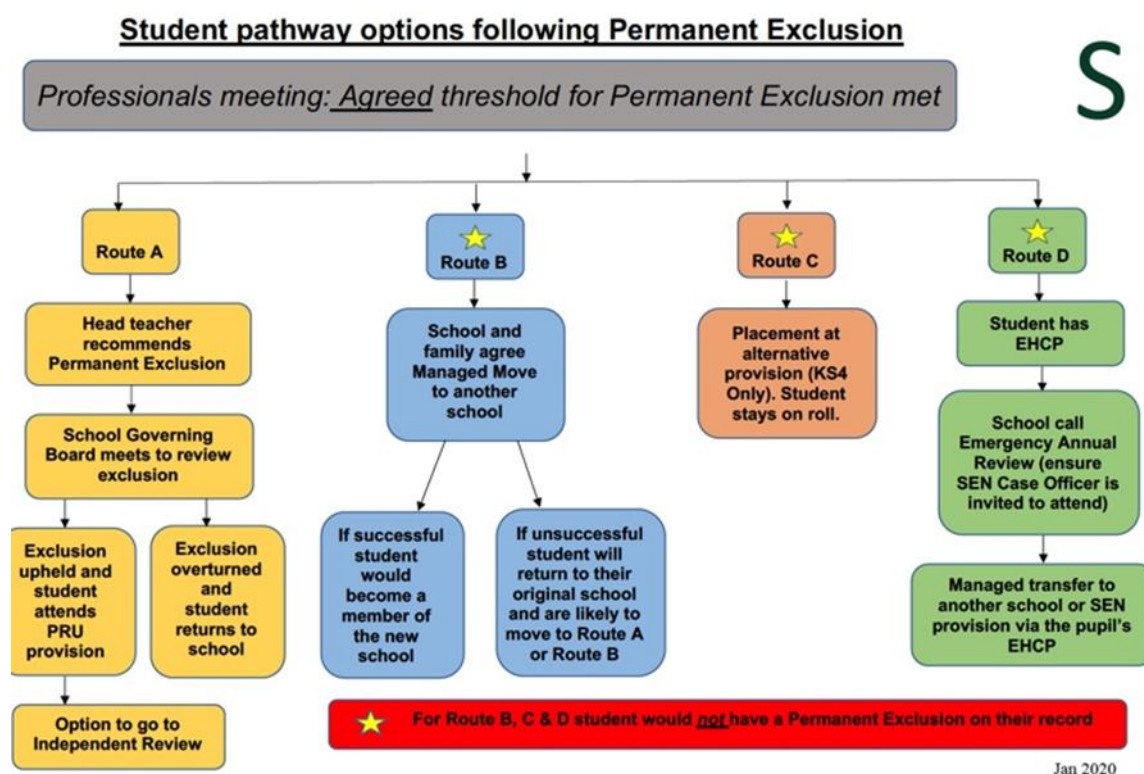
Following national school closures resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, Surrey County Council highlighted the increase in SEMH support which is likely to be required for children transitioning back to full-time, face-to-face teaching. This demonstrates anticipation of need and the role schools can play in successfully identifying and meeting the needs of children. This approach suggests that early identification of SEMH support needs and enabling engagement with services might help to prevent an upsurge in exclusion rates among children experiencing SEMH needs. This risk factor is further compounded by the proliferation and intensification of demand for SEMH intervention, which is related to children's concerns around Covid-19 and national lockdown policies<sup>92</sup>.

With a focus on enhancing inclusive education for children in Surrey and promoting improved outcomes for vulnerable groups, the Schools Alliance for Excellence (SAfE) committee is also working towards enhanced support that SEN and disadvantaged children are likely to require for their disproportionate risk of school exclusion<sup>96 97</sup>. The SAfE strategy of improving the academic results of at-risk groups could work to reduce the number of school exclusions across Surrey.



There are extensive evidence-based interventions implemented across Surrey. The Healthy Schools and Whole School SEND roll out are examples of whole school approaches, the Compassionate Schools Programme draws on attachment and trauma-informed principles, and nurture groups are in place. The Inclusion Roundtable, Specialist Teachers for Inclusive Practice (STIPs), and outreach provision from PRUs and special school are all additional examples of best practice.

Figure 7: Permanent exclusion student pathway flowchart, 2020<sup>93</sup>



Overall, Surrey County Council guidelines and policy concerning school exclusion demonstrate a strong awareness of evidence-based best practice. The question remains, however, as to the extent to which school leadership has access to sufficient time and the resources needed to consistently apply best practice guidelines in supporting children at risk of exclusion to ensure that they remain in Surrey schools.

### What might the Glasgow model mean for Surrey?

In comparison to the 69,830 children served by schools in Glasgow, approximately 200,000 pupils are served by Surrey County Council<sup>91</sup>. Of these students, Surrey schools supported 8,600 children with EHCPs, during 2018<sup>92</sup>.

It should be noted that, while exclusion rates in Glasgow have progressively decreased since 2014/15, rates of school exclusion across Surrey and Glasgow City local authorities cannot be directly compared as figures published by the Scottish Government combine fixed-term and permanent exclusions whereas Surrey publishes separate permanent and fixed-term exclusion rates<sup>8 98</sup>.

There are some differences too regarding terminology. For example, Surrey County Council guidelines for schools describes exclusion as a disciplinary measure, whereas the Glasgow GIRFEC approach emphasises that the purpose of school exclusion is to ensure the safety of the child, or other pupils in the school, rather than an explicit focus on discipline<sup>74 75 99</sup>. Exclusion as a disciplinary tool (Surrey)

presents a contrasting conceptualisation of behaviour to Glasgow, in which the nurture principle of behaviour as a form of communication is promoted<sup>61 82</sup>.

The drive to establish Surrey as a fully inclusive county by 2030 involves giving students a voice by improving the sense that all children attending Surrey schools are "*valued and respected*"<sup>100</sup>. Additionally, the focus of the Surrey social inclusion plan on raising high expectations and achievements appear to be similar to the key aims of the Glasgow GIRFEC model, which appears to have been successful in reducing rates of school exclusions year-on-year<sup>74 75</sup>.

### **Summary of sections 1-3 and research questions**

There is clear evidence for individual vulnerabilities to permanent school exclusion and the negative impact of this on life outcomes. Exclusion practices differ within and across schools and Local Authorities of England and there is evidence that these practices and challenges to multi-agency resourcing contribute to permanent school exclusions. The whole-systems Glasgow model – Getting it Right for Every Child – is a promising approach to reducing permanent school exclusions. The model draws strongly on evidence-based approaches to enhancing wellbeing, promoting inclusion and reducing exclusion among children and young people in school, particularly the principles of nurture.

There is no ratio threshold or benchmark for the numbers of permanent school exclusions; all children and young people have a right to education and, arguably, one permanent exclusion is too many. A key focus for Surrey County Council is reducing school exclusions. There is evidence that good practice takes place across the County and that there are initiatives to enhance fair and appropriate access to education for students who might otherwise disengage from the education system entirely in the context of school exclusion.

Therefore, the research presented in the following sections 4 and 5 will address these questions:

- Who are the children and young people being permanently excluded from school in Surrey?
- What are the outcomes for children and young people permanently excluded from school in Surrey?
- What does permanent exclusion practice look like in Surrey? Are there areas for improvement?
- What are the systemic issues relevant to inter-agency working and funding of services, support and interventions for children and young people at risk of permanent exclusion?

## Section 4. Children and young people permanently excluded from schools in Surrey

This section sets out the characteristics of children and young people permanently excluded from schools in Surrey between September 2018 and December 2020. Data were sourced from education, social care and police/youth justice and, for the first time, linked so as to provide a multi-agency picture of the context of permanent school exclusion in the county. Data were explored in the context of the county quadrants, as well as the characteristics of the children and young people.

### Who are the children and young people permanently excluded from school in Surrey?

Two hundred children and young people were permanently excluded from schools in Surrey between September 2018 and December 2020. Two children had two or more permanent exclusions; for the purposes of description and analysis here, only the first permanent exclusion for each of these two children is included.

The three most common indicated reasons for permanent exclusion were persistent disruptive behaviour (34%), and physical assault against a pupil (16%) or adult (15%), in line with national data in 2018-19. In Surrey, the next most common reasons for exclusion were drug and alcohol related (12%), and verbal abuse/threat against an adult (7.5%), whereas the five most common national reasons included sexual misconduct and 'other'.

#### Age and gender

The average age of permanent exclusion was 12 years, in line with the national average, and ranged from 5 to 18 years. Secondary school phase exclusions accounted for 75% of all exclusions. Most of the young people excluded (79%) were boys.

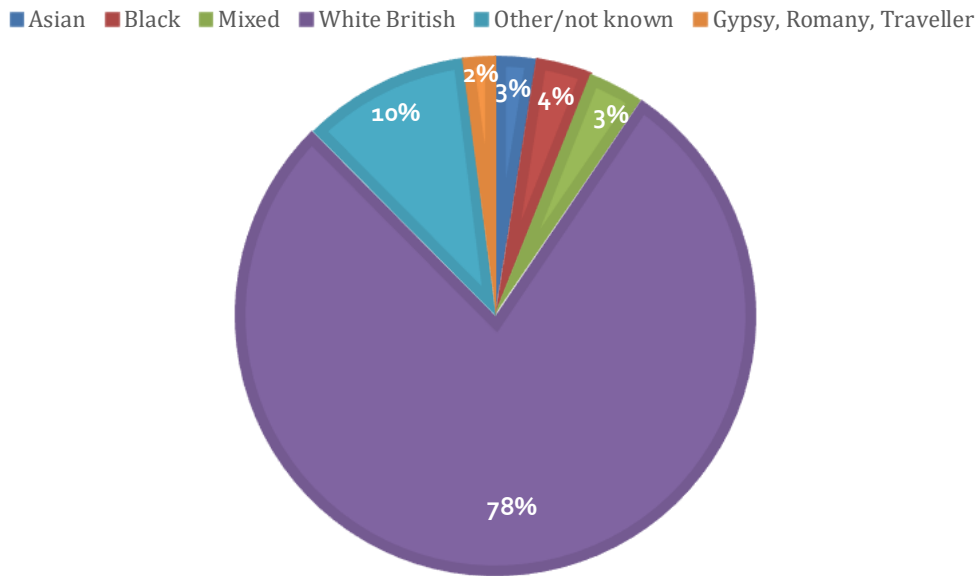
#### Ethnicity

Previous research has identified that children and young people from Black Caribbean and Gypsy and Traveller heritages are over-represented in exclusions. Identifying the ethnic backgrounds of all children and young people in Surrey was not within the scope of this project, so identification of possible over-representation of ethnicity of permanently excluded children was not possible for these cases.

Ethnicities of the 200 children and young people permanently excluded from schools in the study period are set out below. Broad descriptive categories are used here so as to protect anonymity of the children and young people excluded where low frequencies occur. We acknowledge the issues and limitations of over-simplification of ethnicity. White British is included as a discrete group because of the large proportion of children from this group; anonymity is unlikely to be compromised. Gypsy, Romany and Traveller is included as a discrete group because this is a group of interest in the research literature and because anonymity was thought not to be compromised with the percentage of children excluded. Black Caribbean children are not included as a discrete group due to low frequency.

Ethnicity data were broadly categorised as Asian, Black, Mixed, White and Other/Not Known. There were 19 children from Asian, Black or Mixed heritage, 169 identified as White (including Gypsy, Romany, Traveller), and 12 children who did not identify with either category or whose ethnicity was unknown. Children and young people from Asian, Black and Mixed heritage were statistically significantly older than their White counterparts when they were permanently excluded from school (average of 14.5 years of age, in comparison to 12.5 years of age).

FIGURE 8: ETHNICITY



Unlike [national data](#)<sup>101</sup> that identified girls from Black and Mixed (White) Caribbean heritages as being more likely than girls from other backgrounds to be permanently excluded from schools, 93% of the 42 girls in Surrey were from a White background; 86% were White British. Of the 158 boys, 82% were White; 77% were White British.

#### Needs and vulnerabilities

Children and young people eligible for free school meals (commonly used as an indicator of deprivation), involved with social care, or with special educational needs or disabilities are over-represented nationally in permanent school exclusions. In Surrey there is a similar picture.

When our data are compared to the permanently excluded secondary phase children and young people in the Timpson report (see Figure 9), excluded children and young people in Surrey were comparable in terms of special educational need and having an education, health and care plan. However, there is a higher prevalence of young people eligible for free school meals in Surrey and also social care vulnerability (an index generated in the Timpson report from information regarding child in need, child protection and looked after child status).

The Timpson report presented an index of multiple needs, to indicate whether pupils had one or more needs relating to SEN/EHCP, FSM or social care status. Again, in Surrey, children and young people permanently excluded from school had higher prevalence of multiple needs than their Timpson counterparts (see Figure 9). Of our 200 children and young people permanently excluded from school, 89% had needs relating to SEN/EHCP, FSM and/or social care.

To explore the breadth of needs, we identified how many children and young people had one, two, three or none of these vulnerabilities. The Timpson report provided these frequencies for children with no or three vulnerabilities, but not for single or two identified needs. Figure 10 shows that it was most common among our Surrey young people to have two identified needs. However, 29% of Surrey excluded children and young people had all three needs pertaining to SEN, FSM and social care, a much greater figure than the national picture presented in the Timpson report. This presents a striking picture of the multiple and possibly complex needs and vulnerabilities of children and young people excluded from schools in Surrey.

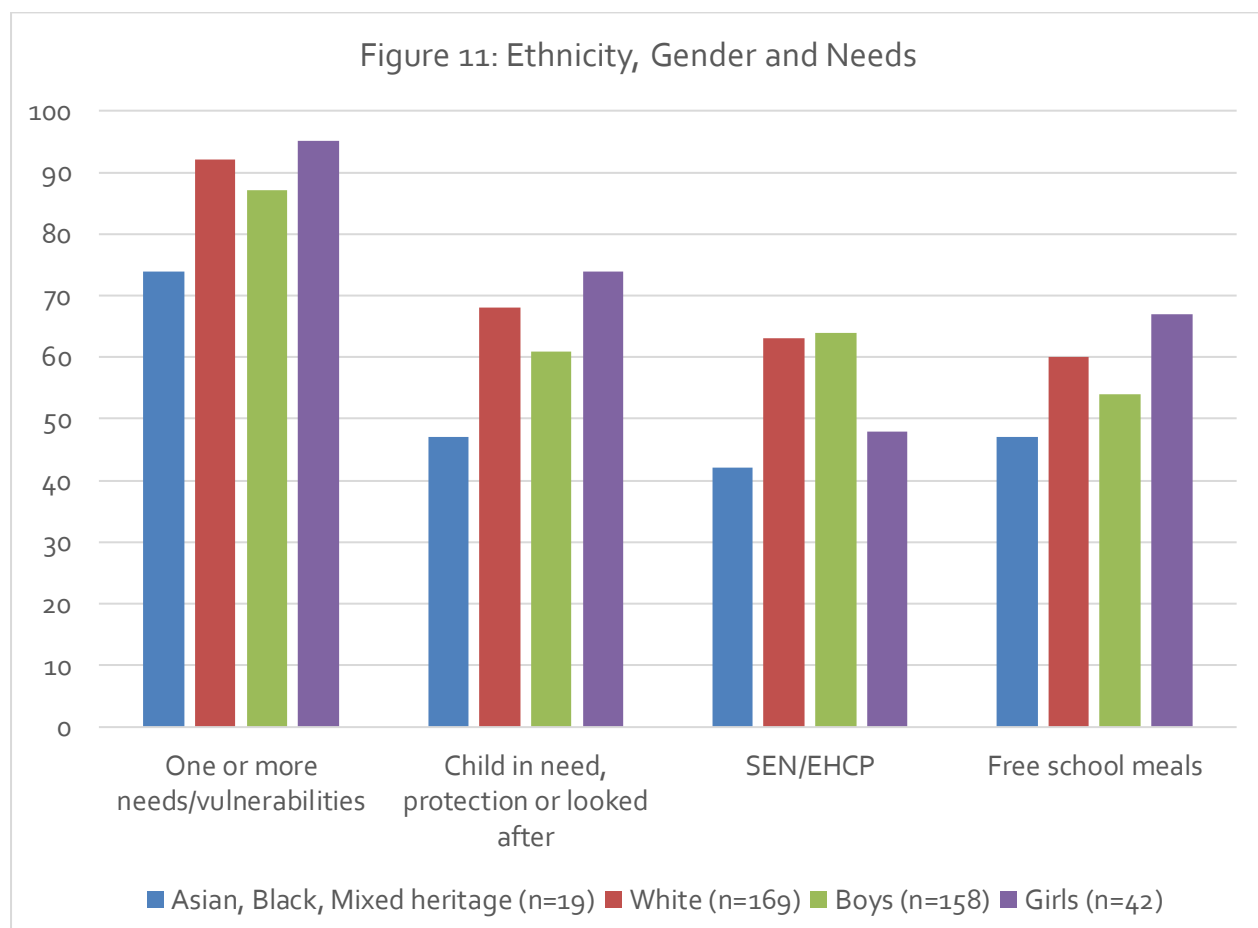
Figure 9: SEN/EHCP, Free School Meals and Social Care: Surrey and Timpson Report



Figure 10: Multiple Needs and Vulnerabilities

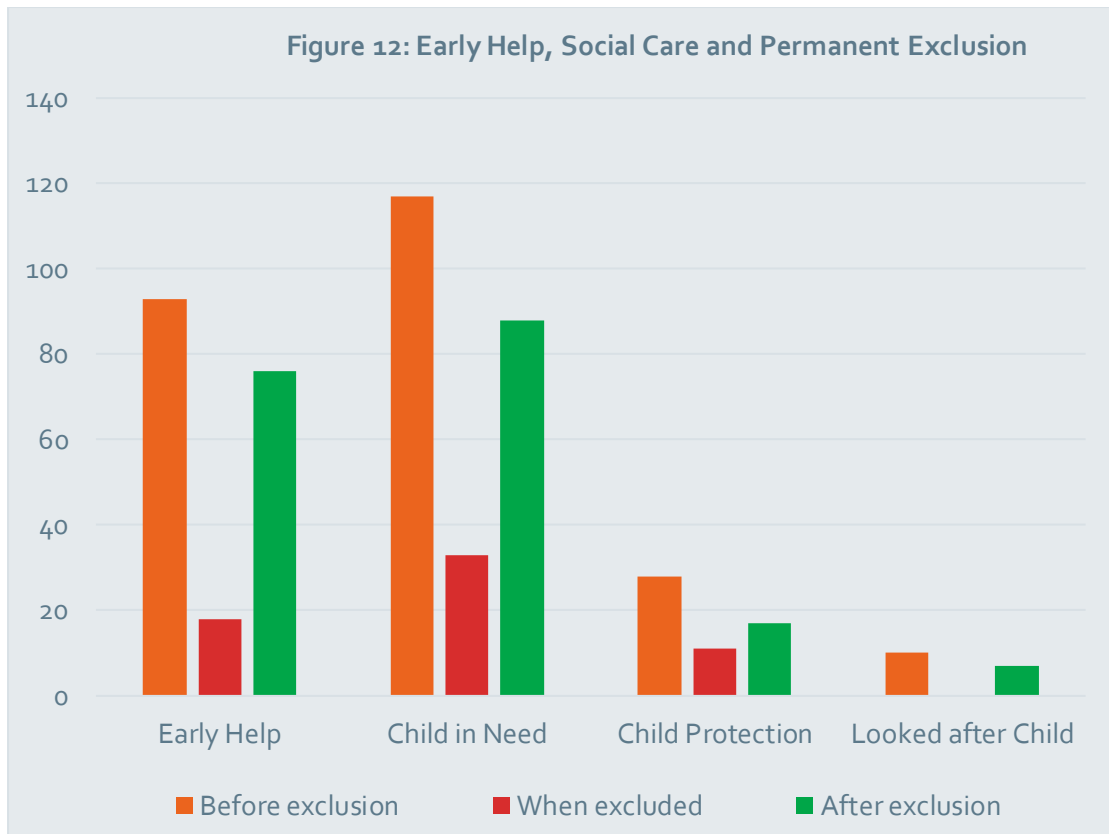


We then explored needs across gender and broad ethnic groups. Figure 11 sets out that there was a higher level of need identified among the white children in comparison to the Asian, Black and Mixed heritage children. This might not necessarily reflect a true picture of need as we know from the research literature in related areas of work that parents and caregivers from some minority ethnic groups can be reluctant to engage with formal services that offer support and this might contribute to a picture of needs being unidentified among Asian, Black and Mixed heritage children and young people vulnerable to exclusion. The data here might reflect broader systemic issues relating to who is identified as having social care and special educational needs.



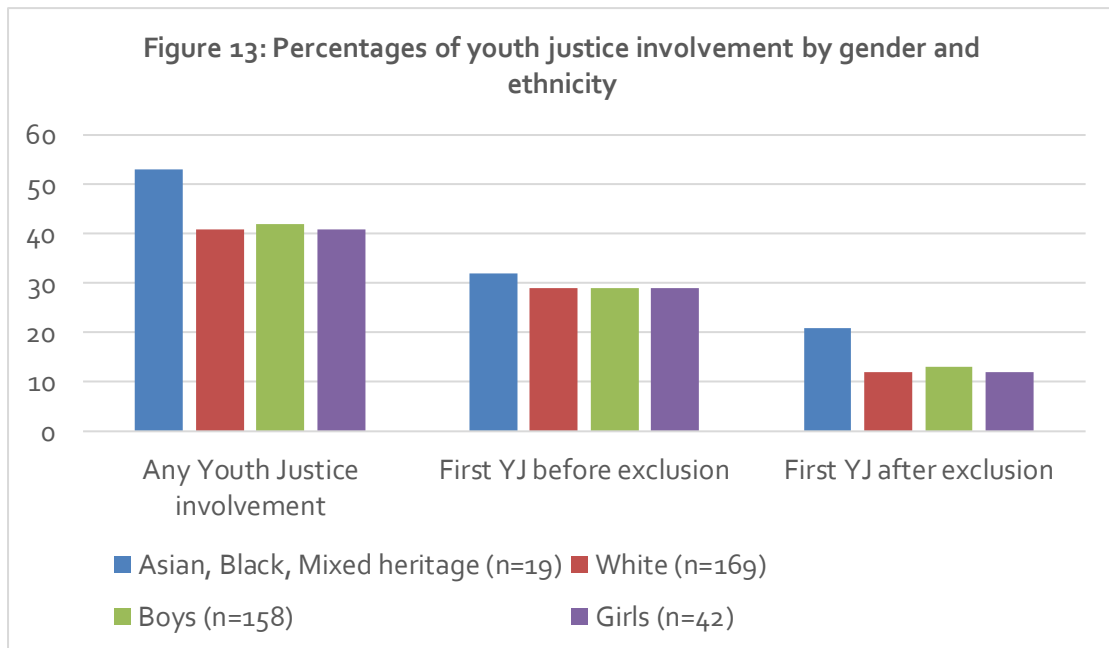
As represented in Figure 11, over 90% of girls had one or more identified need and over 70% of girls were known to social care. In line with the national picture, boys were statistically significantly more likely than girls to have needs relating to SEN or have an EHCP. Given the high prevalence of social care and special educational needs among our sample of 200 excluded children, it is perhaps unsurprising that a statistically significantly higher number of children in need also had special educational needs.

We explored the data around early help, child in need or protection, and looked after child status relative to when the 200 children and young people were permanently excluded from school (Figure 12). Almost 60% of young people had a history of being a child in need before they were excluded from school, and around 45% had early help. However, what is notable in Figure 12 is that these systems of support were not in place for most of these children and young people at the point at which they were excluded. This finding of a gap in intervention at the time of exclusion cannot be completely accounted for by children transitioning from primary to secondary schools. For example, no children were excluded from primary schools whilst receiving early help, but 20 primary-phase excluded children had a history of receiving early help. Opportunities for early intervention to prevent school exclusions might be enhanced through greater multi-agency working and sharing of information.



Youth Justice involvement

Permanent exclusion is often referenced as a risk factor for engaging in offending behaviour and serious youth violence. We explored when young people permanently excluded from school got involved with the justice services and the educational and social care needs of these young people.



Across all 200 children and young people excluded from school in Surrey, 83 (42%) had engaged in behaviour before or after permanent exclusion that meant that the police and youth justice services made a formal recording of the behaviour. Young people from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds

are known to be over-represented in the youth justice system. Although there were no statistically significant differences in police and youth justice involvement between children from Asian, Black or Mixed and White heritage, Figure 13 sets out that proportionately more Asian, Black and Mixed heritage children were involved with the justice services, and particularly so after exclusion. Engagement in behaviour that came to the attention of the police and youth justice services was similar for boys and girls (see Figure 13).

Of the 83 children and young people who had contact with the police or youth justice services, 22% had first contact before they were excluded; 7% in the month around the exclusion (so might have been prompted by the behaviour that led to the permanent exclusion); and 13% became known to police or youth justice for the first time after they had been permanently excluded from school.

Of the 57 children and young people who had police or youth justice involvement prior to or at the point of exclusion, 20 (35%) continued to come to police attention after they were permanently excluded. The characteristics of these children and young people are set out in the case study below.

*Case study: Who are the children and young people repeatedly involved with police and youth justice before and after permanent exclusion?*

Twenty children and young people were involved with the police and youth justice services both before and after being permanently excluded from school. These 20 children were comparable in terms of gender, age, and ethnicity to the broader group of 200 young people who were excluded from schools in Surrey during the study period.

When these children were excluded from school, 70% had either an identified SEN primary need, were receiving SEN support or had an EHCP in place. Sixty five percent of children were eligible for free school meals and 90% had previous fixed term exclusions.

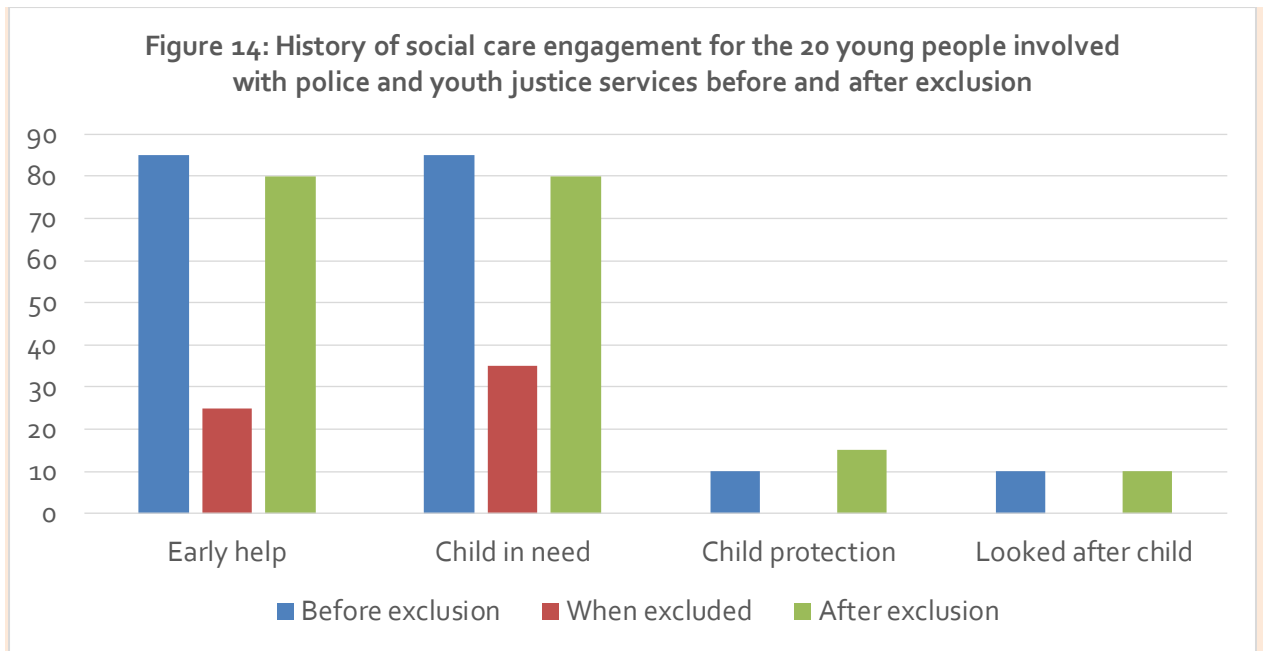
Children were most commonly excluded for persistent, disruptive behaviour. However, 75% of children had a formal record of violence (e.g. assault, actual bodily harm, possession of a weapon/blade) that occurred either before or after exclusion. The most common reasons for police and youth justice service contact after being excluded from school related to drugs (40% of children), acquisitive (30% of children), public order (25%), and violent (20%) behaviours or offences.

Perhaps most striking is that 90% of these children had a history of being a child in need, under protection, or looked after; the remaining 10% also had a history of early help. Therefore, all 20 of these children had additional interventions through education or social care. Of the 20 children, 85% had a history of early help and being a child in need before permanent exclusion.

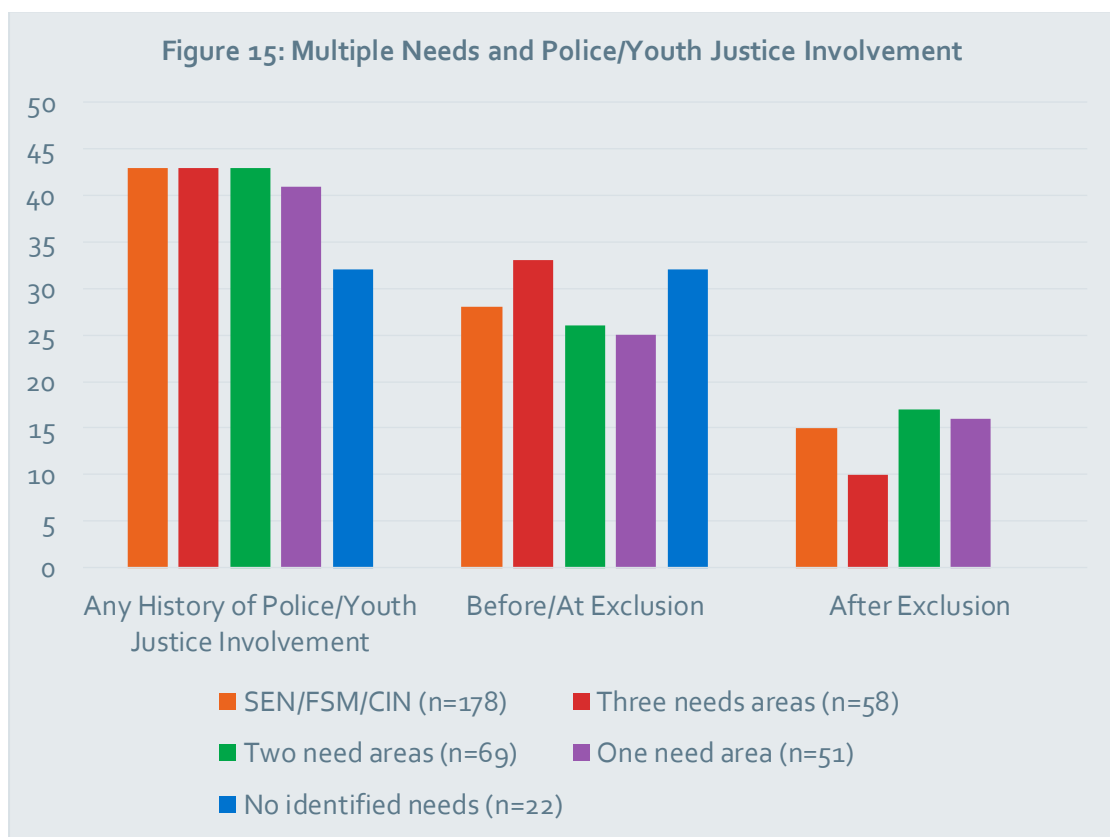
Children who were involved with the police or youth justice services before and after exclusion were statistically significantly more likely than children who had police contact only before or after exclusion to have a history of social care (including early help) before exclusion. There were no significant differences between these groups in terms ethnicity, SEN, having a history of use of violence, nor whether they were in contact with social care (including early help) at the point of exclusion.

Half of the 20 children who were repeatedly engaged with police and youth justice met the criteria for having three of the vulnerability needs as indexed in the Timpson report. A quarter of children had two needs, and the remaining quarter had one identified vulnerability.





To understand more about who the 83 children and young people were who had contact with the police and youth justice services, we linked needs and vulnerabilities (the Timpson index) to justice system contact. In Figure 15 data are presented on the percentages of children and young people with single, multiple, or no needs relating to SEN, FSM and social care who had their first contact with the police before or at the point of exclusion, and those who had their first contact with police after permanent exclusion from school. Most children were already known to the police or youth justice services when they were permanently excluded from school, although some young people – those with needs relating to SEN, FSM or social care – did have their first contacts with justice services after they were excluded.



Children with three or no identified needs had most youth justice or police contact prior to their permanent exclusion from school (33% and 32%, respectively). However, there were no children with no identified needs who had their first contact with the youth justice and police services after exclusion, whereas 15% of children with needs related to SEN, FSM or social care progressed to their first contact with justice services after they had been excluded from school. Children and young people with needs relating to SEN, FSM or social care after they have been excluded from school seem to be most vulnerable to police involvement. However, children without these needs who have not already had police contact are unlikely to do so after exclusion.

In comparison to non-justice-involved excluded children, young people with police and youth justice contact at or by the time of permanent exclusion were statistically significantly more likely to have SEN support, a history of early help, and current or prior child in need status. Furthermore, they were more likely to have early help and child protection status after being permanently excluded than their non-justice-involved counterparts. Although the numbers were small in the overall sample of 200 children, those young people on an Education, Health and Care Plan were statistically significantly less likely to have contact with the police and youth justice services; this might be as a consequence of the enhanced level and targeted nature of support offered through the EHCP.

These data suggest that police and youth justice services have information about children and young people that might help inform decision making with regards alternatives to permanent exclusion. Furthermore, these data indicate need for these children and young people across services, not limited to education providers. From exploring this interface between needs and youth justice, it is clear that youth justice involvement is not only a consequence of permanent exclusion, but further evidence of the pervasive difficulties that some of these children and young people experience both before and after exclusion.

#### Fixed term exclusion history

Almost three quarters (72%) of the children and young people permanently excluded from school had a history of fixed term exclusions (FTEs). The average number of prior FTEs was 5, but the highest number was 39.

Girls were statistically significantly more likely than boys to have received FTEs, and they also had a statistically significantly higher average number of FTEs (8, compared to 5).

Children and young people with Asian, Black or Mixed heritage were statistically significantly less likely to have a history of FTEs than their White counterparts. They also had a statistically significantly lower average number of FTEs (2, compared to 6). Specifically, children from Black and Mixed heritages had fewest FTEs.

These data indicate differences in fixed term exclusion practice between boys and girls, and between ethnic groups.

#### *Children and young people without a history of fixed term exclusions*

Of the 28% of children and young people with no history of fixed term exclusions, the most common reason for permanent exclusion was for drug and alcohol related behaviour (48%). The average age of permanent exclusion for these children was higher than the sample average, at 15 years (range from 13 to 18). They were also very unlikely to have had prior contact with the Youth Justice Service and none of these young people had contact with the Youth Justice Service or police after the permanent exclusion. This might suggest that the context of drug and alcohol related exclusion was linked to developmental experimentation rather than enduring emotional, social, and mental health difficulties common among young people who present with behaviours that may challenge and that lead to permanent exclusion.

Indeed, when exploring support needs among all children without a history of fixed term exclusions, it was found that they were significantly less likely to have received early help, been a child in need or under child protection before permanent exclusion than their FTE counterparts; it was very unlikely that they were known to social care. Children without a history of fixed term exclusions were also significantly less likely than their FTE counterparts to have SEN or to be eligible for free school meals. They were significantly less likely than their FTE counterparts to have all three vulnerabilities relating to social care, SEND and free school meals. Furthermore, children with no history of fixed term exclusions were significantly less likely than their FTE counterparts to have been known to Youth Justice or the police before and after permanent exclusion, or indeed to have any contact with these justice services. Children who became known to the police at the time they were permanently excluded most commonly were excluded following a physical assault on another pupil.

#### *Children and young people with a history of fixed term exclusions*

Of the 72% of children and young people with a history of fixed term exclusions, the most common reason for permanent exclusion was for persistent, disruptive behaviour (39%). Over a third of these young people (36%) were already known to the police or youth justice services before they were permanently excluded for persistent disruptive behaviour, and a further 4% had their first contact with the police or youth justice service at or around the time of permanent exclusion. Therefore, 40% of children and young people permanently excluded from school for persistent and disruptive behaviour and who also had a history of fixed term exclusions were known to the police at the point of permanent exclusion. This paints a picture of children and young people with enduring and pervasive difficulties and with needs that likely differ from their counterparts with no history of fixed term exclusions.

Indeed, the children and young people with a history of fixed term exclusions were statistically significantly more likely than their non-FTE counterparts to have one or more vulnerabilities relating to social care, SEND, and/or free school meals. Of all children and young people with a history of fixed term exclusions, half had contact with the youth justice or police services: 28% had their first contact prior to permanent exclusion, 6% had first contact at or around the time of permanent exclusion, and 17% had their first contact after exclusion. Children who became known to the police at the time they were permanently excluded most commonly were excluded for 'other' reason, persistent disruptive behaviour, or physical assault against another pupil.

#### **What are the patterns of permanent exclusion across Surrey?**

Using information about the borough and geographical county quadrant (North East, North West, South East, South West) within which a school was located, we explored patterns of permanent exclusion among the 200 children and young people in our sample.

In Figure 16, the frequencies of permanent exclusions in the 2018-19 and 2019-20 academic years are presented (the Autumn term of 2020 is omitted for the purpose of this illustration), along with the percentage of all 200 exclusions accounted for within a specific borough (not totalling 100% because some exclusions took place out of county). The boroughs are presented in order of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Indices of Deprivation 2019 Local Authority Rank. The 317 national boroughs are ranked from 1 (high deprivation) to 317 (low deprivation) across multiple indices (such as employment, crime, housing). In Surrey, Spelthorne is ranked as having the highest and Waverley the lowest deprivation.

Figure 16:Frequencies of permanent exclusions by borough and academic year; presented in order of Local Authority Rank relative deprivation

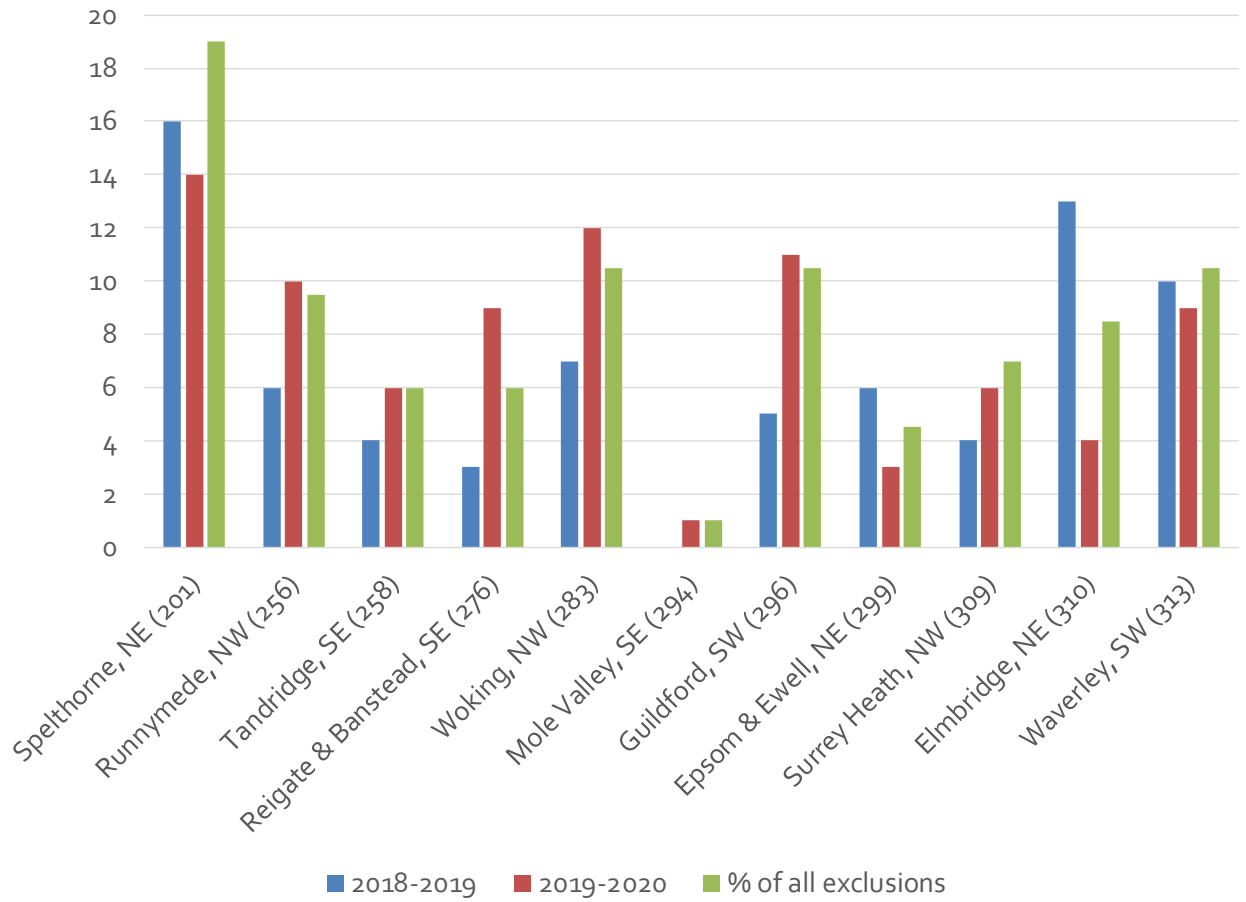
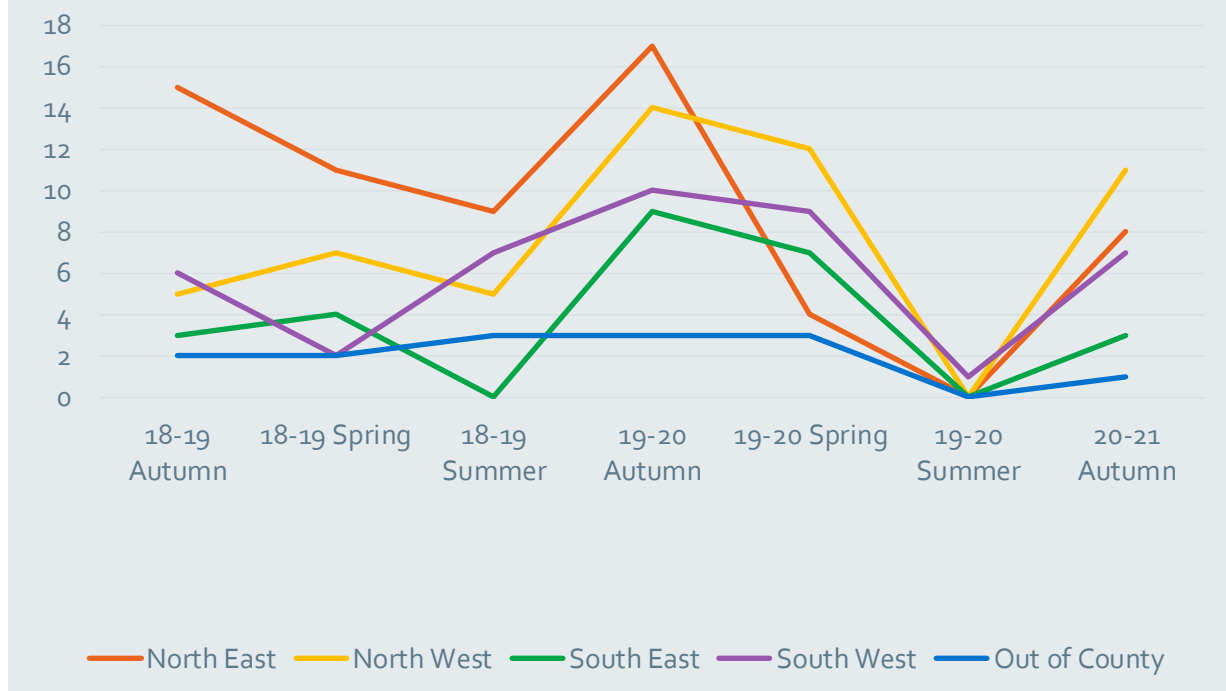


Figure 16 indicates that although the most deprived borough of the county accounts for the highest frequency of permanent exclusions, deprivation alone is not sufficient to explain the variation in exclusion practice across Surrey. Furthermore, Spelthorne, Epsom and Ewell, and Elmbridge – all in the North East quadrant – had fewer exclusions in 2019-20 than the previous academic year; with the exception of Waverley, all other boroughs had a small increase in exclusions in 2019-2020. It is notable that Mole Valley had just one permanent exclusion across the two academic years.

Reflecting the geographical quadrants of Surrey, Figure 17 indicates that there are peaks in permanent exclusions in the Autumn terms, in line with national data. There is a noticeable drop in permanent school exclusions in the Summer term of 2020 due to school closures as a consequence of Covid-19 lockdown, rather than a policy shift in exclusion practice at that time.

Figure 17: Permanent exclusions by academic year/term and Surrey quadrant



The differences in exclusions across the quadrants might reflect differences in practice in the Surrey Alternative Learning Provision (SALP); the South East, active with the SALP model, has the lowest number of exclusions across the study period, and a noticeable drop in exclusions is evident in the North East after the Autumn 2019 term when a change in exclusion practice was implemented (and as reflected in Figure 16).

#### Age, gender and ethnicity

Children and young people in the South West were significantly older than their counterparts in the North West when they were excluded (13.5 years – vs – 11.5 years, respectively). The reason for this is unclear; there was a higher prevalence of children and young people being excluded due to physical assaults to adults and peers in the North West, in comparison to the South West, but otherwise the reasons for exclusion were comparable. There might be differences across quadrants in the nature of support available to children transitioning from primary to secondary school, which might help to protect against permanent exclusion at the critical risk age of 12 years and keep young people in mainstream education.

The North East quadrant excluded statistically significantly more girls (30%) than other quadrants.

The South East quadrant excluded statistically significantly more children and young people from Asian, Black and Mixed heritage (23%) than might be expected given the frequencies of exclusions in that quadrant.

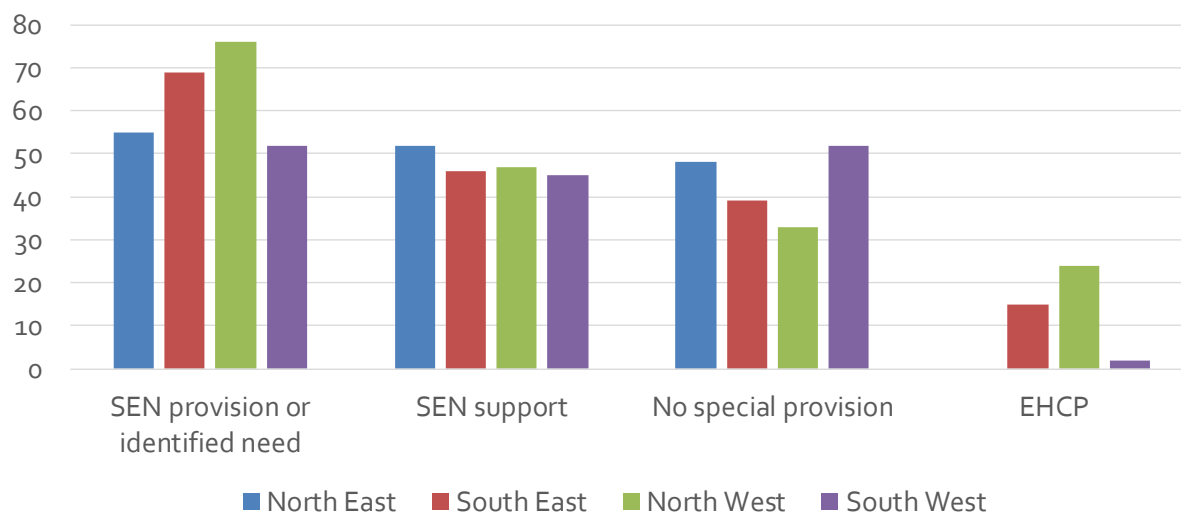
#### Needs and vulnerabilities

There were no significant differences across quadrants in the frequencies of children and young people excluded with multiple vulnerabilities; the profile of children across the county was similar.

However, there were differences across the quadrants relating to children who had an identified SEN or were receiving support related to SEN at the point at which they were permanently excluded from

school. Specifically, the North West quadrant excluded statistically significantly more children with SEN provision or identified need than other quadrants, and more on Education, Health and Care Plans (see Figure 18). Children and young people with social, emotional and mental health needs seemed to disproportionately account for exclusions in the North West. This reason for this difference is unclear, but might quadrant level exclusion practice and decision-making and/or resources.

**Figure 18: Prevalence of permanent exclusions within quadrants and SEN status at the time of exclusion**

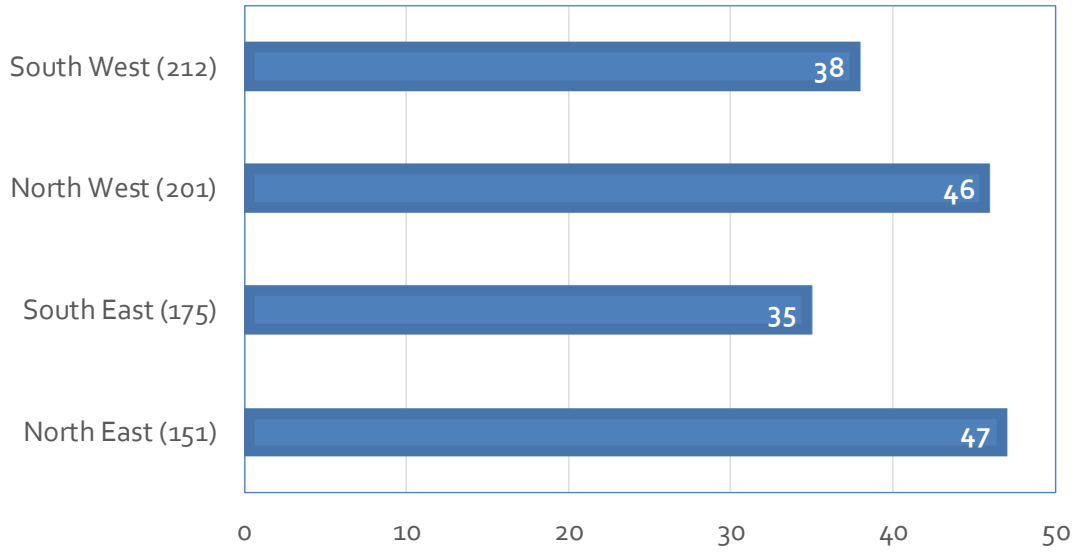


#### Youth Justice involvement

There were no statistically significant differences between quadrants on the frequency or timing (e.g. before/after exclusion) of children and young people having Youth Justice and police involvement. Figure 19 sets out the percentage of exclusions within quadrants where children and young people had some involvement with the Youth Justice or Police services before or after being permanently excluded from school. To contextualise these data to the quadrants, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Indices of Deprivation 2019 Local Authority Crime Ranks for each borough were used to form an average quadrant ranking (with 1 being high crime to 317 low crime). Therefore, Figure 19 sets out the justice service contacts in the context of what might be expected in the quadrant population.

The North East is the quadrant with the highest average level of crime and 47% of children excluded in the North East were engaged with the Youth Justice or Police services before or after school exclusion. However, the quadrants do not determine the likelihood of children and young people being justice involved. For example, the South East has the second highest average level of crime, but the lowest proportion of children and young people becoming justice involved (which might be reflected by the low numbers of exclusions in the South East overall). Children and young people in the North West were justice involved at a similar proportion to their counterparts in the North East, but less crime would be expected in the East in comparison to the West. This suggests that youth justice and police involvement for children and young people permanently excluded from schools is a problem across the county and not specific to geographical areas where crime is known to be higher.

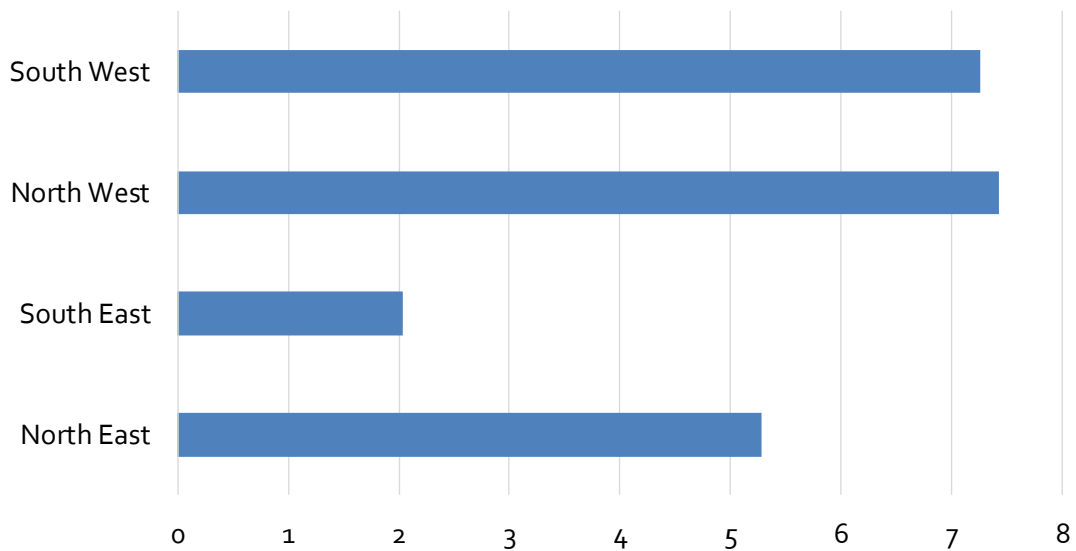
**Figure 19: Youth Justice and police involvement by quadrant;  
presented in order of average Local Authority Crime Rank**



Fixed term exclusion history

There was no difference between quadrants in the number of children and young people excluded with or without a history of fixed term exclusions, but there was a statistically significant difference in the number of fixed term exclusions per child, indicating that children in the South East had fewer than their counterparts in the North West and South West (see Figure 20). There were no clear differences between quadrants in the reasons why children and young people were permanently excluded from school to account for this finding, so it might be that the low frequency of fixed term exclusions is related to the SALP model in the South East.

**Figure 20: Average number of fixed term exclusions per child**



### **Case study: Borough focus**

We looked in more detail at the boroughs with the highest prevalence of permanent school exclusions: Spelthorne, North East (n=38), Woking, North West (n=21), Guildford, South West (n=21), and Waverley, South West (n=21). To ensure representation of all quadrants, we selected Reigate and Banstead in the South East as this had the highest number of permanent exclusions in that quadrant (n=12). The boroughs represent a full spread of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Indices of Deprivation 2019 Local Authority Ranks in the county of Surrey.

Of the statistical analyses that were possible on the basis of sample sizes, there were statistically significant findings for gender and children having a history of fixed term exclusions. Specifically, Spelthorne excluded more girls than would be expected; Reigate and Banstead excluded none, which was also unexpected. Reigate and Banstead was the borough most likely to exclude children and young people with no history of fixed term exclusions (so mirroring the findings set out in Figure 20).

Although Spelthorne accounted for the highest number of permanent exclusions, and is the most deprived borough in Surrey, there were no clear patterns of children and young people excluded that were different from other boroughs or from the total sample of children excluded from schools across the county. The only exception was gender, as described above.

In Woking, there was a high prevalence of excluded children who had needs relating to SEN and eligible for free schools meals (91%), and 57% of children (the highest across the five boroughs) were identified after exclusion as being a child in need. This indicates that children and young people in Woking who were excluded present with specific vulnerabilities to a greater extent than their counterparts in other areas. A third of children and young people in Woking were excluded due to sexual misconduct, perhaps adding to the picture of vulnerabilities that these young people experience. Of all the excluded children in Woking involved with the Youth Justice and Police services, 89% had a history of violence.

Children and young people excluded from schools in Guildford presented yet another picture of multiple need and adversity. Almost three quarters (71%) of children had been a child in need prior to exclusion, but only 14% were indicated as such at the time they were excluded from school. A quarter of children (24%) had a history of being under child protection before exclusion, but only 5% at the point of exclusion. As an index of deprivation additional to the vulnerabilities already presented, 86% of excluded children in Guildford were eligible for free school meals, with 95% having either free school meals or needs relating to SEN. Children in Guildford had the highest prevalence of three of the Timpson report multiple vulnerabilities, with 38% of children having all three and 43% having two of the needs. Like the children in Woking, a third of young people were excluded for sexual misconduct. Children in Guildford also had the highest prevalence of justice involvement, with 62% of children and young people having had contact with Youth Justice or Police; 88% of these children had a history of violence. Guildford young people were also the children who were most frequently engaged in justice-concerned behaviour before the point of permanent exclusion from school.

A slightly different picture again is presented in Waverley. Children and young people who were excluded were more frequently indicated as a child in need before (76%) and at the time of exclusion (24%) than their other borough counterparts, and the highest prevalence of children excluded with a history of child protection (24%) was in Waverley. Over a third (38%) of children and young people in Waverley were involved with social care at the time of permanent exclusion from school, and 81% had a history of social care involvement (excluding early help) when they were excluded. Over a half (57%) of children excluded had two of the Timpson index vulnerabilities. The most common reason for school exclusion (24%) was drug and alcohol related behaviour, and children and young people in this borough accounted for the highest prevalence of those justice-involved prior to or at the time of permanent exclusion from school (88%). A low proportion of children in Waverley (13% of those with any history of



Youth Justice or police involvement) went on to become justice-involved for the first time after being permanently excluded from school. All of the excluded children in Waverley were White.

Finally, the children and young people excluded from schools in Reigate and Banstead had the highest frequency of SEN provision or identified need (75%). Exactly half of the excluded children were of Asian, Black or Mixed heritage, and this represents an anomaly in the borough and county data. There was a low frequency of fixed term exclusions per child, and just 42% of children had a prior fixed term exclusion. This perhaps adds to the picture of the county-wide finding that children from Asian, Black and Mixed heritage backgrounds have statistically significantly fewer fixed term exclusions than their White counterparts. The most common reasons for exclusion in Reigate and Banstead were for drug and alcohol related and persistent disruptive behaviour (25%). Of the children in this borough who had ever had a history of justice involvement, all were known to the police or Youth Justice services before they were permanently excluded from school, and 67% continued with justice-concerned behaviour after permanent exclusion. Although the practice of permanent exclusions in the South East is less frequent than in other quadrants, it is of concern that the young people known to Youth Justice and Police services prior to exclusion are likely to continue to be known. This suggests that a change in county-wide practice to reduce permanent school exclusions should involve multi-agency working and close collaboration with Police and Youth Justice to reduce vulnerability to continued justice involvement and, arguably, poorer life outcomes for children and young people permanently excluded from school.

### **What are the outcomes for children and young people permanently excluded from school in Surrey?**

Our unique data, linked across education, social care and police/youth justice, provided the first opportunity to explore a multi-agency perspective of permanent school exclusions in Surrey. The 200 children and young people excluded from schools in Surrey between September 2018 and December 2020 were similar to children excluded throughout England in terms of age, gender, behaviour that led to exclusion, and prevalence of special educational need and having an education, health and care plan. On this basis, there are no specific reasons why models and interventions that support best practice in reducing school exclusions (as set out in Section 2) could not be applied to Surrey.

Points of difference for children and young people excluded from schools in Surrey include a higher prevalence of:

- children eligible for free school meals.
- social care vulnerability (an index generated in the Timpson report from information regarding child in need, child protection and looked after child status).
- multiple needs (free school meals, social care, SEN; in comparison to Timpson report counterparts).

This presents a striking picture of the multiple and possibly complex needs and vulnerabilities of children and young people excluded from schools in Surrey. What was notable in our data was that systems of support were not in place for most of these children and young people at the point at which they were excluded. There is perhaps an argument for improving continuity of support for children and young people with multiple needs, with a view to reducing school exclusions and enhancing life outcomes.

For the first time, we linked information about the children and young people excluded from schools in Surrey to Youth Justice and Police services data. Therefore, there is no national comparison data for justice involvement among children and young people permanently excluded from schools. Previous research has identified permanent school exclusion as a common factor among young people who present to the police, but there is limited research on whether permanent exclusion enhances vulnerability to police involvement. Our data indicated that most children and young people in Surrey

who were justice-involved had their first contact with the police and youth justice services before or at the time of being permanently excluded. However, not all of these children continued to be justice-involved after being permanently excluded from school, and some children (with multiple vulnerabilities) first became involved with the police and Youth Justice services after being excluded from school.

Furthermore, in comparison to non-justice-involved excluded children, young people with police and youth justice contact at or by the time of permanent exclusion were statistically significantly more likely to have SEN support, a history of early help, and current or prior child in need status. They were also more likely to have early help and child protection status after being permanently excluded than their non-justice-involved counterparts. The children and young people who were justice-involved before and after being permanently excluded from school presented with specific vulnerabilities, with half having all three needs relating to free school meals, SEN and social care.

This indicates that the relationship between permanent school exclusion and Youth Justice or police involvement is not straightforward. Youth Justice involvement is further evidence of the pervasive difficulties that some of these children and young people experience both before and after exclusion, and this undoubtedly has an impact on life outcomes.

One key point of difference between children and young people excluded in Surrey and their national counterparts was ethnicity. There is a lack of data from which to assess whether children and young people from minority ethnic groups are over- or under-represented in our sample. However, proportionately more children from Asian, Black and Mixed than White heritages were involved with the justice services in Surrey, and a lower level of need was identified in comparison to White counterparts. The data here might reflect broader systemic issues which are known to impact on life outcomes, relating to who is identified as having social care and special educational needs and who comes to the attention of the police and Youth Justice services.

There is some emerging evidence from our data that there are differences in post-exclusion outcomes between children and young people with or without a history of fixed term exclusions. Specifically, children permanently excluded with no history of fixed term exclusions were very unlikely to have had prior contact with the Youth Justice Service and none of these young people had contact with the Youth Justice Service or police after the permanent exclusion. These children were also significantly less likely than their FTE counterparts to have SEN or to be eligible for free school meals.

In comparison, the children and young people with a history of fixed term exclusions were statistically significantly more likely than their non-FTE counterparts to have one or more vulnerabilities relating to social care, SEND, and/or free school meals, and half had contact with the youth justice or police services before or after permanent exclusion. This highlights the need for individualised approaches to reducing school exclusions and perhaps differentiates between children and young people with enduring and pervasive difficulties, probably with poorer life outcomes, and with needs that differ from their counterparts with no history of fixed term exclusions.

Variations in exclusion practice across the county also contribute to outcomes for children and young people permanently excluded from school. There was a low frequency of permanent school exclusions in the South East quadrant of Surrey, but the case study of Reigate and Banstead highlighted the multiple vulnerabilities across SEN, social care and justice involvement of the relatively small number of children and young people permanently excluded from schools. This suggests that a change in county-wide practice to reduce permanent school exclusions should involve multi-agency working and close collaboration with Police and Youth Justice to reduce vulnerability to continued justice involvement and, arguably, poorer life outcomes for children and young people permanently excluded from school.

## Section 5. Understanding the barriers and facilitators to best practice in managing permanent school exclusions in Surrey

The objectives of this phase of the research were to explore how permanent school exclusions were managed in Surrey and identify practice to reduce exclusions.

We interviewed educational professional stakeholders, parents, caregivers, and young people with experience of permanent exclusion. We developed interview schedules and consulted on these with professionals with expertise of the education system in Surrey and young people with experience of permanent exclusion. We received permission from relevant authorities (including the Royal Holloway, University of London Research Ethics Committee) prior to starting the interviews, and adhered to the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics<sup>102</sup>. We audio recorded all of the interviews, then transcribed the recordings so that we could analyse the data using an established and rigorous technique; latent, interpretative, thematic analysis<sup>103</sup>. Through these interviews we addressed the following questions:

- What concerns and solutions do educational stakeholders identify relating to the practice of permanent school exclusion in Surrey?
- What are the barriers and facilitators to best practice in managing permanent school exclusions in Surrey?

The key findings for each of these questions are set out below.

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

We conducted short (up to 30 minutes) interviews with 29 stakeholders. Participants had leadership roles in schools (n=6), alternative provisions (n=4), Surrey-wide governance n=(3), third sector organisations (n=2), public services (n=4), parents/caregivers (n=2), and children or young people permanently excluded from mainstream schools (n=8; aged between 11-16 years). We identified six key themes from these interviews, each of which are summarised in turn.

Theme 1 and sub-themes	Summary	Example quotation
<b>Perceived ease of school exclusions</b>	There was a perceived ease related to the exclusion process, and the reputational impact of attainment outcomes and exclusions on Ofsted inspection were acknowledged. In contrast, SEND provision seemed more of a challenge than deciding to exclude.	" <i>... some schools really bend over backwards ... to nurture those pupils and avoid [school exclusions] ... other schools know how to play the system ... they want good results ... it's easier not to have the child in the school</i> "
Shifting responsibility for child outcomes		
School reputation and Ofsted inspection outcomes		

This section sets out the perceived reputational impact of exclusions on Ofsted inspection and attainment outcomes in participant accounts of the decision-making processes underlying school exclusions. The perspectives of participants on the SEND experience, and that of parents/carers for SEND children are also discussed.

#### Shifting responsibility for child outcomes

Participants described a general perception that it may be easier for a school to rely on fixed term exclusions and permanent exclusions, rather than the provision of additional academic and/or SEMH supportive measures. For example, "*I find personally that schools... when it gets to the point of, 'you've*

*got to help this [specific child], it's much easier to let them go than to help. That's my personal experience"* (Participant V).

At the point of considering permanent exclusion, school management thought that alternative options, such as restorative approaches or short-term breaks at other school sites, were either not available, had been exhausted, or were not appropriate, given the intensity or frequency of behaviours which may challenge. For example, *"... No school really wants to exclude... Schools do try lots of different strategies to avoid that wherever possible. But sometimes you get to the point where we've tried all of the limited options we have available to us... and it might help the student to place them at another setting..."* (Participant J).

However, the perception of the young people who had each experienced a permanent exclusion from a mainstream school in Surrey was that schools did very little to help them continue in mainstream education. Participant AA said *"My old school didn't try. They blatantly wanted me out, you could tell... Put me in isolation for 3 months and didn't do nothing. Three months straight. They just told me that they were trying to find somewhere else for me to go... Then it was 'oh you're going [current alternative provision] after the school holidays'"*. Participant CC commented *"They didn't help me, I only think they help their image. The things they put in place for me... they only put those things in place after they'd decided to get rid of me. Before that they were putting me in isolation and excluding me constantly, that wasn't helping me, just putting me in a room. Towards the end... that's when they started putting things in place so that they can have something to say, that they've helped me"*.

The example quotes above suggest divergent opinions and/or experiences between school leadership teams and pupils, regarding the extent to which schools strive for best practice in supporting children at risk of exclusion to continue in mainstream schooling.

The efforts of schools and teachers were acknowledged in the interviews. Several participants shared a view that a minority of schools are investing inordinate resources into enhanced support for children at risk of exclusion, compared to other schools of comparative size or location. It was noted that these schools perform this additional work despite the potential for a negative impact on overall school performance. For example, Participant I said *"I think some schools really bend over backwards and do everything they possibly can to make sure they don't exclude pupils, and take lots of different actions to nurture them and avoid it, and then other schools really know how to play the system and choose to move children on as quickly as they can... effectively they're playing the system, they want results... it's easier not to have the child in the school"*.

Furthermore, participants expressed a perception that individual teachers often go the extra mile in attempting to prevent a permanent exclusion. For example, *"The... teacher I had... he was really nice. When I first went into his lesson in year 7... we always got on really well so when they said, 'do you want a 1-to-1 teacher?', I chose him. And, we've never had a problem. He was actually the one who was fighting hard for me not to leave the school. I think he was doing the most work out of everyone, not just trying to wipe his hands of [me]... But then he got changed to [an alternative role] in the school, so he wasn't working with me anymore"* (Participant CC).

In general, participants were of the view that there was a lack of incentives for schools to provide continued support and promote the inclusion of children at risk of school exclusions. Here and elsewhere it was suggested that the schools investing disproportionate time and resources into school inclusion would not gain any tangible benefits in terms of compensatory financial resources, or enhanced Ofsted ratings.

### School reputation and Ofsted inspection outcomes

Participants placed emphasis on concerns around school attainment, and the role played by children at risk of exclusion in potentially lowering a school's average attainment, for instance, by persistently disrupting the learning of others, or by skewing the school's fixed term exclusion rate. Some participants thought that vulnerable children were at disproportionately greater risk of exclusion. There was also some concern that allocating several hours of staff time to the behaviour management of a small number of pupils drew attention away from pupils in need but presenting less of a challenge; in this context, there was reluctance to move away from exclusion as a disciplinary tool. For example, "... *A member of my staff spending three, four, five hours a day trying to get one person into a lesson, the other 1000 kids in the school don't get that time and attention; that is wrong. To miss all the other kids ... with possible [need]... that are flying just under the radar and could do with that support, that's wrong*" (Participant M).

Participants were of the view that the structure of Ofsted inspections was not conducive to finding effortful alternative approaches to school exclusion, as schools were driven by outcomes. For example, "... *I can understand how... giving up on people is entirely logical when you've got an Ofsted agenda ... but for the individual it's tragic [...]* The inspection regime for England is problematic when it comes to exclusions ... *for children with special educational need in Wales, the inspection regime was far more conducive to working with people holistically... and I'm not saying Ofsted is wrong, but the regime is much more about making judgements, about attendance, about attainment, about behaviour, and that is problematic. Certainly where special educational need is concerned*" (Participant E).

To overcome the problem of use of exclusions to manage Ofsted inspection results, it was hoped that an ideological shift towards evaluating school performance based on efforts to be inclusive of children at risk of permanent exclusion could be effected.

Theme 2 and sub-themes	Summary	Example quotation
<b>Collaborative approaches</b>  Wide variation of approaches at the school, local and quadrant levels  Shared vision between local Surrey partners  Data sharing and cross-comparative analysis	A call for improved openness and collaborative approaches between multiple services and agencies supporting children at risk of exclusion.	" <i>Social workers were not getting to speak to parents because parents didn't want to engage, but the school spoke to parents all the time ... we need to bring these services towards the school</i> "

The focus of this second theme calls for improved openness and collaborative approaches between services and agencies supporting children at risk of school exclusion. Examples of the proposed collaborative partnerships highlighted by participants included local police, social work, local authorities, mainstream schools, pupil referral units (PRUs), local communities and parents/carers.

### Wide variation of approaches at the school, local and quadrant level

Participants wanted to improve information-sharing between schools, services and agencies supporting different children within the same family. There were many examples given in which educational establishments, social work and local police forces had some awareness of the various support needs among individuals within a single family but were not able to collaborate their support or coordinate interventions due to a lack of communication across services. Participant C shared an example of

practice applied by Surrey Phase Councils comprised of headteacher representatives for early years, primary, secondary, and special phases, meeting on a termly basis, and feeding back to committees across Surrey:

*"... Where we've got families that cross over in each phase, that's really key for us to make sure that if there's a problem for one of the children, that's going to impact on all of them. So we need to talk to each other. We need to share what's happening ... sadly, a youth worker might be working with a teenage child and won't tell [the pre-school aged sibling's nursery] what's going on because they don't think it'll impact on the little one. [Surrey Phase Council's] team around the family approach is what works so well. Professionals trusting each other with the relevant information, that they're allowed to share ... and if you get that relationship right with the family, that makes the whole information sharing process much, much smoother" (Participant C).*

Some of the difficulties in comparing behaviour management outcomes across schools in Surrey were highlighted. For example, *"behaviour management, it's not consistent across the county... where a school is considering a permanent exclusion... [due to] the amount of inconsistencies around exclusion and schools in competition with each other, it can be a postcode lottery in terms of approach..." (Participant T).*

Participants considered that these difficulties in direct comparisons also made the design of new strategies to reduce exclusions difficult. Furthermore, participants were of the view that approaches to referrals for children in need of intervention differed between schools and social services. For example, *"currently, how children's services works is, somebody refers to it, a professional, a parent or neighbour refers to it, and then the system responds based on the threshold. But... there were certain schools where social work were clearly getting more of their work from, but they were still adopting the same approach, and when you talk to the school they say they're spending too much time phoning social care, following up on referrals... why are we doing that? Then social workers were not getting to speak to parents because the parents didn't want to engage. But the schools speak to parents all the time because they saw them every day... We needed to bring the services towards the school... rather than the schools banging down the door to get the services for the children... It's better that the professionals can build a relationship with the schools, the teachers, the safeguarding leads, the pupils, the parents, and you also take away some of the stigma of having a social worker" (Participant G).*

The recommendation for bringing services towards schools was well-supported and viewed as an opportunity for improving collaboration between services, particularly in terms of reducing lengthy time frames for referrals of at-risk children to specialist, professional services. It was anticipated that access to services might also be less intimidating for parents/carers if pathways to services could build on pre-existing relationships with schools.

#### Shared vision between local Surrey partners

Several participants called for a shared vision between services, agencies, and schools, as an effective means to guide interventions and collaborations towards a common goal of reducing school exclusions. This shared vision included clear goals and values, with adults of various services supporting pupils by acting as role models.

*"The school in Glasgow... didn't need to exclude because they had a public health approach, they had youth workers in the school who then worked in the community in the evening. I would die for that... I reckon we could knock 20% off our exclusion rate after six months if we had... youth workers in the community who also came into the school and in the playground... to be seen by the kids as a role model, somebody a bit... closer to their age. I'd grab it with both hands. It needs to be joined up between all the services... CAHMS, health services... and have that community aspect within school" (Participant M).*

Participants' ideas for developing a shared vision and reducing the inconsistencies around school exclusions included consideration of a central authoritative body responsible for scrutinising the processes which lead to school exclusions, much like the structure of the model applied by Glasgow City Council.

#### Data sharing and cross-comparative analysis

The legal requirement for parental consent was identified as a potential barrier to the sharing of data within the appropriate data sharing protocols of the Safeguarding Children's Board. Some participants were of the view that a requirement to obtain parental consent prior to sharing information was a barrier to improved collaboration between services. For example, *"a lot of these are known families and older children in the same families are known to services... schools can sometimes pick up on rumours around criminal activity, and expertise and guidance are needed to come in at that point... data would show that these families are known to multiple services, but we have huge issues around parental consent"* (Participant F). Others were of the view that parents would be happy to give consent for data sharing, where they perceived some tangible benefit for their children. For example, *"I don't think you'll get any parent with a child coming to the attention of social services or the criminal justice system who's asked about sharing data, saying 'no, I don't want you to have that, I don't want you to help my child'... often the parents are the ones asking for help"* (Participant HH). Once permission is obtained, data can be shared among the membership of the Surrey Safeguarding Partnership, which includes school phase leads, police, and social care.

A Surrey-wide data sharing policy was proposed for the purpose of identifying certain schools or student demographics that are over-represented in permanent exclusions figures, and holding schools accountable to the exclusion of vulnerable children. For instance, it was stated that schools may be motivated to avoid placing highest on a league table of school exclusions. Participant H commented *"what is really useful is providing the data, which really shows disproportionate impacts on the cohort of children in care, for example. They're over-represented in fixed term exclusion figures... they're not for permanent exclusions but that's because every local authority has a virtual school... and also there's a collective understanding among schools that that is really the last resort"* (Participant H).

This view was supported by participants who thought that use of exclusion data for monitoring may help to identify schools offering places for excluded children, at the expense of their limited resources, as well as highlight how the practice of supporting children back into mainstream schools could be improved: *"I think we do need a system of monitoring at a county-wide or quadrant level, who's excluding from schools and for what reasons, and why. We definitely need some monitoring of what happens in the other direction as well. So, who are the schools who are taking in students who've been formerly excluded, how's that working, is that fair and equitable as a system?"* (Participant F). Such an approach would shift practice towards parity of resource expenditure between schools, consistency of approach and agreed thresholds for permanent exclusion. Surrey County Council holds and monitors these relevant data and engage with identified schools on an individual basis. Although a data sharing tool is in use in the SALP Executive Boards (focused on secondary schools) and Fair Access Panels, there is perhaps a need to enhance access to this for primary schools so that there is transparency for all schools.

However, monitoring and accountability issues were not thought to be straightforward and the value of competition between schools was questioned. Some participants commented that exclusion was sometimes a communication by a school, that greater support was required for them to keep a child at risk of exclusion on the school roll: *"it's about trying to unpick what's causing the behaviour... which makes a school think of excluding... Identify early, intervene early, and you've got to break the culture by which exclusion is a way for schools to be heard when they say 'we can't meet need'"* (Participant L).

Overall, it was suggested that data sharing could be a useful tool to track rates of exclusion among vulnerable groups of children and ensure equal levels of support for children at risk of permanent exclusion.

Theme 3 and sub-themes	Summary	Example quotation
<p><b>Key milestones/periods for intervention</b></p> <p>Pre-primary school indications for early intervention</p> <p>Transition from primary to secondary school</p>	<p>Early years and primary to secondary school transitions as being key developmental milestones/periods for intervention.</p>	<p><i>"Working together around our most vulnerable children ... needs to start younger ... Even in nursery schools, they'll be able to pick out kids by age 3 ... and see that they are likely to be the ones that'll go on to be excluded"</i></p>

This theme highlights participants' understanding of the most effective points for intervention, over the course of a child's development. Key periods were noted by most participants as pre-primary school age, and the transition from primary to secondary school, as having the greatest reductive effect on the risk of permanent exclusion from school.

#### Pre-primary school indications for early intervention

There was a view that at nursery school age it is possible to identify the children who would later be at risk of exclusion from primary and secondary schools: *"we need to start younger... if you ask a primary school teacher, or even in nursery, they'll be able to pick out the kids... at age 3, and see that they're the ones most likely to be excluded... by the time they get to secondary school, they're already on that path and there's a lot of work to be done"* (Participant I). Whilst this view speaks to the experience of the people working with young children, it also highlights a need for objective risk indicators of vulnerability to permanent exclusion to support early intervention for those most at risk.

One indicator of children who might benefit from targeted interventions was repeated fixed term exclusions. Once at-risk children had been identified, it was thought by participants that the most effective interventions for reducing school exclusions should wrap around the entire family unit and, for instance, provide training on communication skills and coping strategies.

#### Transition from primary to secondary school

Although participants noted that the period of transition between primary and secondary school was key to improving the likelihood of successful adaptation to the structure and self-management required in a secondary school environment, participants also thought that transition support from primary to secondary schools seemed ad hoc. Specifically, key information needed for building productive relationships between secondary school staff and peers was often not transferred with a child making a school transition. For example, participant CC commented: *"they knew I was struggling in year 7 but didn't do anything, even though they knew I'd had problems in primary. Social workers and stuff, who knew me from my primary school wouldn't tell [my secondary school] about any of my struggling bits, only after I got in trouble. They'd probably say they helped me, but I don't think they helped me at all."*

Wraparound support needed for the transition from primary to secondary school was thought to be an effective method to improve a pupil's chances of a successful transition. A child's primary school teaching assistant was identified by several participants as a valuable source of information and a key individual who should have active involvement in transition planning and the bridging period.

An effective transition period intervention, as suggested by interviewees, was to create a primary school style-environment within the secondary school for a limited period. For example, pupils showing



delayed development in literacy and maths attainment could be permitted access to the secondary school grounds during school holidays. This intervention would allow pupils to develop knowledge of the secondary school environment and meet some peers at their own pace, in the absence of congested corridors and the demands of the regular school timetable.

The benefits of interventions to support transitions were confirmed by the young people with experience of exclusion, who spoke about a dislike for the crowded atmosphere at secondary schools and feeling overwhelmed by navigation of social spaces at school. For instance, participant BB set out their preferences for support when transitioning to a new school: *"They could introduce you to other students, give you some one to walk around with, so that you're not walking around on your own looking like an idiot. That's what half the time will make you act up and get kicked out... meeting the form teacher wouldn't make a difference, we don't care about the teachers"* (Participant BB).

The young people who were interviewed also commented that the mainstream secondary school environment would most likely never be a good fit for them: *"At mainstream there's too many people... like about 5000 people and 31 in your class. They'll never make mainstream how you'd want it. It'll never be small like this... What would work is if there were two sites, so say you have a mainstream that had a site like this but you were there permanently so you'd never enter the mainstream building... if you have to go between [the mainstream school building and the smaller building], then that's just called the special unit (laughter). You'd get [mocked]... They tried to put me in that at my old school, I told them to leave me alone. I ain't [sic] going in there"* (Participant Z). Participant X commented *"give children smaller classes, up to about 10 kids, just a bit more quieter [sic]... Here [alternative provision] there's fewer kids. Whereas at a mainstream school you've got all these annoying friendship groups. You can't just walk into the playground and play basketball. You can't just rock up and join in... but here if you want to play football or basketball, you can just go out and play"*.

This participant's feedback suggests that pupils at risk of exclusion from school may experience concerns about navigating the social landscape of a mainstream secondary school. Considering the statements above, social resilience support may be beneficial for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion.

Theme 4 and sub-themes	Summary	Example quotation
<p><b>Variety and availability of alternative options to exclusion</b></p> <p>Short breaks at alternative learning provision</p> <p>Confidence in viable alternatives</p>	<p>Greater variety and availability of alternative options to exclusion were called for, such as pupil-centred, personalised interventions, and short-term breaks at an alternative learning provision.</p>	<p><i>"... a bit more flexibility for those young people for whom a spread of options would be better ... The opportunity to have a mentor, or ... family therapy, or have a placement somewhere that isn't like a mini prison ... and that's available quickly ... before the crisis happens"</i></p>

This theme draws attention to the perceived availability of pupil-centred, personalised alternatives to school exclusions.

Effective, available alternatives to exclusion are important for pupils, parents and schools; they might prevent breakdowns in relationships as well as prevent exclusions. For Participant V, a lack of trust in the support provided for pupils at risk of social exclusion hindered willingness to support their child to transition back to mainstream education: *"I would rather my [child] be at school, they need to learn how to mix with good and bad people in life... [but] now there's a lack of trust, and I don't know how that can be rebuilt"* (Participant V).

### Short-term breaks at alternative learning provision

The use of short-term breaks at an alternative learning provision (ALP) for children at the brink of facing an exclusion from school was recommended to be increased. The availability of spaces was described as crucial in providing a breather for both staff and pupils and preventing continued deterioration of the relationship between the child and the school community. For example, *"a bit more flexibility for those young people for whom a spread of options would be better ... The opportunity to have a mentor, or ... family therapy, or have a placement somewhere that isn't like a mini prison ... and that's available quickly ... before the crisis happens"* (Participant A).

Availability of 'short-break' options which do not have the appearance of being a place of punishment for children at risk of permanent exclusion was important. In the ALP, key factors underlying behaviours which may challenge can be identified and appropriate support given at the individual, family, or school level. Participants thought that having an accessible service might help school management teams feel as though they do not have to rely on permanent exclusion to find a person-centred, educational solution which could better meet the needs of the child. Participant F commented that *"particularly, in the North-East [Surrey quadrant], capacity-wise... there are real gaps in the landscape in terms of alternatives to exclusion... There are very few respite places... if you do get a child onto respite, do they spend six weeks playing table tennis? Or do they get some genuine therapeutic input... so they can come back and be successful? [...] The PRUs in all four quadrants need an agreed and equitable offer for schools"* (Participant F).

ALP was seen to provide an important reset option for the child and school staff involved in their support. However, gaps in alternative provision were commonly highlighted, with availability of places in ALP and short-stay capacity ranging from good to very limited in some Surrey quadrants: *"I do think that some of the provision in Surrey is not always attuned to the motivations of young people... what you'd want is provision that looks very homely, it doesn't look school-based, it's very individual, it's very tailored to young people, it concentrates on building confidence, it concentrates on engaging, and that is a very challenging thing to do"* (Participant E).

Participants with experience of working with children who had been excluded from mainstream school discussed best practice for the structure of daily learning activities at alternative provision: *"we might have kids who have slept their way through mainstream. They've just put their head on the desk and slept. Because some of the students, their confidence plummets in those large classes, 'he's better than me, she's better than me'... So, they've missed big gaps, it's not that they can't do it, it's that they've missed it... There needs to be more money in here to make it different [from mainstream education] ... Carpentry, mechanics, hair and beauty... we're having to spend thousands to send them out to college courses for those things. Whereas, if we could have them here, we could do English and Maths at the start of the day then... have them earn their pass for the vocational skills"* (Participant GG).

Almost all participants thought that alternative provision could be enhanced to improve engagement and interest in learning. However, there was also uncertainty around how best to achieve this, given the limits on resources.

### Confidence in viable alternatives

There is a need for a variety of viable alternative approaches to exclusion, which schools have confidence in using. A 'menu' of options for alternative provision was noted as particularly helpful for schools attempting to source personalised intervention strategies and reduce reliance on exclusion. The limited selection of alternatives available meant that interventions felt like a 'one-size-fits-all' and there was a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of that approach in supporting children at risk of exclusion. For instance, personalised timetables for pupils were highlighted as a particularly useful strategy, where pupils are enabled to access regular classroom-based lessons where they show engagement, while

altering the setting or content of lessons in which pupils are most likely to demonstrate disruptive behaviour.

For example, one participant explained that their former school attempted a person-centred approach, implementing a system in which the pupil was permitted to take a limited number of breaks from lessons during the school day. Their school had also attempted to limit this pupil's unstructured time in contexts where behaviours which may challenge were likely, such as in the lunch queue: *"they gave me exit cards... so I can get out of class, no questions asked. And gave me a fast pass for the lunch queue"* (Participant Y). Participant Y went on to claim that exit cards could help to reduce unforeseen permanent exclusions for children who intentionally behaved to secure fixed term exclusions (suspensions) so as to absent themselves from school: *"Suspensions is [sic] the reason [that permanent exclusions happen]... Kids want suspensions until they get kicked out of school. Because they get the days off school and they don't see it coming and then they just (punched fist into hand) get kicked out"* (Participant Y).

Person-centred interventions, such as exit cards, could offer children socially acceptable means of communicating their anxieties about lessons and the school environment, without requiring escape-oriented behaviours which may challenge staff.

Participants were of the view that the availability of current alternatives to exclusion did not meet demand: *"There's... not enough alternatives to an exclusion that schools would have confidence in but also doesn't remove the child and further disenfranchise them"* (Participant G). Participant F spoke about this being a concern in limiting disruptive behaviour: *"if you actually tried to write a list of sanctions that schools have available to them, it's very short... giving a child a detention, picking up litter... have them write lines... but effectively they're all detentions. You really have a very limited range of sanctions. So the ability to say... 'you're on a fixed-term exclusion for half a day' is very important. And the vast majority of pupils don't need to be excluded again after the first one"* (Participant F). This reference to sanctions also reflects limits to the 'menu of options' currently available to schools, and the need for increased emphasis on prevention of exclusion and alternative provision.

The perceived limited availability of alternatives to exclusion was viewed as a contributing factor to a school's decision to permanently exclude. Views that emerged from interviews suggest that a child's vulnerabilities are often exacerbated by exposure to a student body of similarly vulnerable peers at PRUs. Furthermore, young people located at a PRU could be at increased risk of exploitation by criminal gangs in the local area, by virtue of being a member of a service for vulnerable young people. Reflecting on a series of serious case reviews of young people killed in England, one participant highlighted the issue of enhanced vulnerability for some young people when placed in PRUs: *"one of the resounding features is that a lot of these kids who subsequently died were kicked out of school, unnecessarily... they were then placed in PRUs and exposed to greater risk and were made more vulnerable... those risks and vulnerabilities contributed to their deaths"* (Participant G).

Similarly, participants commented that children may then perceive that they are stranded at an AP placement (even though they can step back into mainstream provision), especially when intensive behaviour intervention no longer seems necessary: *"once he got medicated and had the right support in place, he's doing fine at school now... Now we've got the problem where he doesn't like it [the specialist placement] because the other children that are in the specialist school, he doesn't like their behaviour, their swearing, their violence, that they're always being held... So now he's... in a place that he finds distressing"* (Participant W).

Other negative outcomes of alternative placement were reflected in life opportunities. For example, participants with experience of supporting vulnerable children and their families suggested that

children who ended their compulsory schooling at a PRU, rather than at a mainstream school, were at a disadvantage when applying for jobs: *"the feedback from some young people is 'we want to be on the roll of a school. When we're going to employers and saying we're on the roll of a PRU... sometimes you can be judged'... PRUs do an amazing job but they're an intervention, rather than a destination"* (Participant H). The reference to PRUs as an intervention reflect the Surrey County Council strategy for Alternative Learning Provision, in which it is set out that PRUs are to be used for short-term interventions and to support in-reach support services for schools. Opportunities to transition back into a mainstream school following a permanent exclusion is highly valued by children approaching the end of their statutory schooling.

Theme 5 and sub-themes	Summary	Example quotation
<p><b>Concerns around underlying causes of behaviour</b></p> <p>Joint effort between pupils, parents/carers, and schools</p> <p>Training on attachment, trauma and culture</p> <p>Guidance for supporting pupils with SEND</p> <p>Anticipated burden on CAMHS and mental health support resulting from COVID-19 lockdowns</p>	<p>Improved support for school staff in understanding the underlying causes of behaviour might support a child-centred approach to supporting inclusion and reducing exclusion.</p>	<p><i>"... with looked after children we know that so many have attachment needs and have been through childhood trauma ... we're always trying to dig under it [excludable behaviour] ... sometimes it shows a deeper need"</i></p>

Understanding the reasons behind a pupil's behaviour, rather than a focus on the behaviour itself, could help to prevent permanent exclusions and the breakdown of relationships between pupils and their school community, although the resource challenges of undertaking this task were emphasised. Additionally, participants thought that training on attachment, trauma, and Gypsy, Romany, Traveller culture might help staff to understand behaviour and reduce risk of permanent exclusion among pupils. Training for attachment awareness and trauma informed approaches are available in Surrey through the Compassionate Schools Programme, although this is elective. The Race and Ethnic Minority achievement service provides direct support and training on understanding the Gypsy, Romany and Traveller community, but only primary schools invest in this service. At the least, it might be helpful for there to be a 'champion' in every school who can be a source of support in understanding behaviour through an attachment- and trauma-informed lens. Secondary schools could also reconsider investment in training and expertise in racial and cultural diversity. Finally, an increase in social, emotional, and mental health difficulties were anticipated in the context of students returning from national Covid-19 lockdowns, and the additional strain on already stretched CAMHS services was acknowledged.

#### Joint effort between pupils, parents/carers, and schools

A range of perspectives were voiced regarding the underlying causes of permanent exclusion. For example, one child excluded from secondary school commented *"I would just want [headteachers and deputy headteachers at my former school] to know that I would never want to go back to mainstream. Because of them. Not because of me, because of them. I wouldn't go... I wouldn't want to"* (Participant BB). Conversely, Participant A thought that pupils should be encouraged to take responsibility for their

permanent exclusion from a school: "Do they recognise that it's their fault, or do they blame the school, or the teachers, or the system, or anybody except themselves?" (Participant A). These two positions perhaps speak to a disconnection between the pupil experience of exclusion and the challenges experienced by schools; underlying this is the importance of relationships and understanding.

A collaborative perspective on reducing a child's risk of being permanently excluded, a joint effort between schools, families and pupils to have a shared responsibility in working towards a better understanding of behaviour which may challenge, was supported by Participant N:

*"When I became the headteacher ... there were something like 524 fixed term exclusions... whereas last year ... there were something like 24 fixed term exclusions... If you hear that number, you think 'gosh, that's a school in crisis, appalling relationships... falling apart', and it was anything but. The relationships were really strong, the children liked the school, they made good progress. It was about culture... that if you reach the end of a discipline road, then quite quickly you arrived at a fixed term exclusion... families liked the clarity about discipline... The difficulty was that... of those 524, about 350 of them, it was a one-off and never happened again, job done... Whereas for the other 150-something who kept ending up on fixed term exclusions, what's the message? The message is that we don't want you here. We say we're inclusive, but you're not included... We needed a sanction, but one that said, 'we're in this together'. So it's not just your problem, it's our problem, there's shared responsibility here... and that was our on-site referral centre."*

#### Training on attachment, trauma, and culture

There was some support for a collaborative approach informed by an understanding of attachment, trauma and culture: "A curiosity around what's causing the behaviour in the first place, rather than the focus being on the presenting behaviour, it's thinking about what are the causes of that behaviour and what's triggering it... For looked-after children, we know that so many have had attachment needs and they've been through childhood trauma... rather than excluding, it takes courageous school leadership to say, 'no, there is another way'. Which many are, actually" (Participant H).

As well as improving the support available for looked-after children in the school environment, trauma-awareness training for staff could help provide emotional support for other young people with trauma-related needs, children who might be below the threshold for targeted support or intervention. For example, there was reference to high prevalence of trauma within whole school populations, for example in geographical areas where there was high parental separation or divorce, and domestic violence. Engaging staff in trauma awareness training might support a culture of paying attention to the function of behaviour and, in line with nurture principles, understanding behaviour as communication. Intervention in response to an understanding of behaviour might support a reduction in permanent exclusions.

For example, children and young people with experience of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are likely to be vulnerable to difficulties with attachment and trauma, and additionally so when there has been a history of ACEs across generations of a family. Training for school staff on the impact of ACEs, and the effect these can have on a child's behaviour within the school environment, might be a useful allocation of training resource.

Participant W provided a good example of some of the difficulties experienced by their young person, and the challenges faced by schools in working with ACEs: "he'd gone through some trauma when he was living with his parents, and he had developmental trauma and attachment disorder... at school, they didn't have a clue about children who'd been removed from their parents... They didn't know how to help him. In a classroom full of 30 kids, they just couldn't do it, they couldn't get the funding from the local authority for a learning support assistant, he had a 30-hour EHCP, and I don't feel that anybody took any

*notice of it whatsoever [...] They didn't have the time, or the resources... to help him, so in the end he got expelled from school and he was only five. And the exact same thing happened to my son [the five year old boy's father] ... I work with children in care, and it seems school still don't have the training to understand kids who've been removed from their parents. They're constantly in fight or flight... I do sympathise with the teachers; they don't get the training... It's just so difficult in a mainstream school".*

Training on culture was also thought to be important. For example, some participants thought that children and young people from the gypsy and traveller community were the largest ethnic minority group in Surrey schools, and there were specific issues related to social and school exclusion for those children and young people. Some participants thought that staff training on culture could have a positive impact on a gypsy or traveller child's experience of social inclusion within the school community, as well as for their parents/carers. Furthermore, it was clear that some teaching staff were self-motivated to learn more about supporting gypsy and traveller children with a view to helping them thrive at mainstream school:

*"Even though we're saying that everyone has got equal rights, it still never applies to the gypsy or traveller... as an example of good practice, most gypsies are very reluctant to have their children go on visits and school trips. [At our school we] listened to those concerns and bent over backwards to reassure parents, rather than responding with 'oh you're being difficult again'... Credit to the teachers who really do want to know more about the gypsies and travellers in their classes, but sometimes they had zero information.... and then at other [schools], the reaction is often just 'well, they should adapt to us' and that was very deeply entrenched" (Participant V).*

In summary, participants were of the view that best practice for reducing permanent school exclusions involved greater opportunities for attachment, trauma and cultural understandings of behaviour. Continued training was expected to enhance the ongoing efforts of school staff to support and include children from ethnic minority backgrounds, as well as children who may have experienced trauma or attachment difficulties.

#### Guidance for supporting pupils with Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND)

There was a need to set out additional support for children and young people with SEND, staff, schools, policy and practice, and multiagency working. SEND was understood to be a critical issue in reducing school exclusions.

Participants from organisations that provided support to parents and carers of children with SEND raised concerns about use of unlawful exclusions, such as reducing the child's timetable or asking carers/parents to collect their child before the end of the school day: *"The world of exclusion in SEND is a little bit murky, most of the worries we have from parents... [are] the child having severe anxiety or behaviour challenges and then there'll be a conversation, often off the record... 'maybe it would help if [child] had a reduced timetable, and maybe you could pick them up after lunch, so that the school can check the register'. Then of course there's no record of the child having left early... When you're a parent that can be a relief, or they may feel pushed into it... some parents may want the school to exclude their child to demonstrate that they have additional need... it's all in this very unclear, uncomfortable space" (Participant L).*

For parents and caregivers of children and young people with SEND, participants thought that clear written guidance on how school behaviour policies could be adapted for SEND would be useful. For example, *"I think it would be very, very helpful to have clear written guidance, and it would be extremely helpful for that guidance to state, where there is SEND, how the behaviour policy changes... for example, is it appropriate to exclude a child with SEND... for wearing the wrong kind of socks? If the right kind of socks cause them such sensory distress that they can't learn. Or if they've had a meltdown?... there is always a*

*reason for the behaviour, we can always find the trigger... is this behaviour malicious, or is this tied to their SEND?" (Participant L). Reasonable, appropriate adaptations to behaviour policy might be achieved by working closely with families, ascertaining their daily life experiences related to SEND and determining what constitutes a positive, constructive outcome for the child and their family.*

Clarity of written guidance extended also to policy regarding exclusion and alternative placement. For example, Participant W was unsure about whether a child with SEND would be able to return to mainstream education during the transition from primary to secondary school: *"When he gets to secondary school, I don't know if it's possible for him to go back into mainstream, I don't know how that works. But the damage is done. He absolutely hates school... on top of his trauma from [pre-school age], he's now got trauma related to school"* (Participant W). For children and young people who no longer require intensive behaviour support, parents of children with SEND could be supported with guidance on the process of re-entry into mainstream schools.

Participants spoke about challenges of reducing exclusion among children and young people with SEND due to limited availability of educational psychologists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists. Participant F set out the importance of increased specialist provision in schools for staff working with and for children and young people with SEND: *"there is a sense that far too many of the students who are excluded from school have special educational needs. Statistically that would be borne out both nationally and in Surrey. The reason for that very often is they've reached the threshold for a permanent exclusion, because of their behaviour. The question is, how much of that behaviour is driven by their needs, or the school setting not being able to meet their needs, and so the behaviour follows? ... We desperately need additional expertise to come into mainstream settings, to provide guidance on support for these students... not just for five minutes, but tracking, monitoring, spending a day with them every so often, demonstrating strategies themselves, working with staff and parents and carers"*.

Following permanent school exclusion, additional educational needs are often identified and supported, for example in alternative provision. Participant FF explained how earlier identification of SEND could reduce demand on alternative provision, thereby freeing up space for other children with behavioural support needs: *"when [excluded children] are coming here, we're then applying for EHCPs, whereas if they had those prior, they wouldn't end up coming here. Then you'd have space here for children who need to come here for a behaviour issue, rather than an EHCP issue... But sometimes there's another issue there that if they get an EHCP, then it's not possible to exclude them... I think it's getting better. But by the time they get to age 14, 15, you're looking at years wasted. If they'd had the support they needed, they might have been able to stay in mainstream"*.

Similarly, Participant W suggests that the need for an EHCP is often not identified among children in care, with the impact of relatively late identification of SEND detrimentally affecting their outcomes beyond their school years: *"we're having care leavers being allocated to us at 16 and 18, and they've got autism and ADHD and everything and that should have been picked up way back when they were five years old. They come out of school with no certificates and so how are you supposed to find a job? For these young people the effect of that is... they're on drugs. Because they don't know what else to do... Schools have got to be able to work with outside agencies to support these children. But what they do is, 'Oh, we're going to send him home early today. Oh, now he's on reduced hours. Oh, sorry, he's expelled. We can't have that behaviour in this school'... It's not good enough"*.

Processes leading to permanent exclusion can involve conflict and a sense of rejection from the child's school community, as well as irreparable damage to the relationship between schools and pupils and their families: *"my concerns are whether schools fully understand the impact [fixed and permanent exclusions] can have on a looked-after child, there's the rejection which many looked-after children face in their lives, and then this is added to. There's interruptions to peer and adult relationships which many*

*looked after children find so difficult. There's extra transitions going in and out of schools... and exclusion can also put more pressure on the care placement, and make that more vulnerable to breaking down. It's layer upon layer of additional challenges... Does the child... learn from that experience?"* (Participant H).

The excerpt below describes a similar experience of alienation from a primary school community, for a family with an excluded child with SEND: *"[Child] feels abandoned. He feels as though he wasn't good enough... all the friends he made; he's lost all of his connections again... I felt angry and frustrated and sad and, I'll be honest, at times, unable to cope. Because whenever you turned up at the school, you'd have other parents there. 'Oh, that's [child]'s nan.' It makes you feel as though it's all your fault, as though he's naughty. And I see it with care leavers all the time"* (Participant W).

An intervention that seemed to have a positive impact on academic performance was enhanced pastoral support, and this might also help to reduce permanent school exclusions including among pupils with SEND. However, some participants with experience of working at mainstream schools explained the challenges of providing high-quality pastoral care alongside the demands of teaching: *"I was a [subject] teacher... I had 200+ kids in my year group and two free periods a week to deal with pastoral care for the year group... At one point they brought in non-teaching heads of year, but also brought the money down... 'reduced teaching' heads of year might be a good idea"* (Participant FF). A lack of time to provide adequate pastoral support and a lower salary in a pastoral support role (which might disincentivise experienced teachers) suggests a resource gap. Participants were of the view that it is one thing to identify need and initiatives that could reduce school exclusions, but current resources were unlikely to address need. Current demands on mainstream schools mean that it can be difficult to find time to unpick reasons underlying behaviour, particularly where this may be linked to SEND which have not been formerly identified through an EHCP.

Issues raised in this sub-theme regarding resourcing and the late identification of SEND among children at risk of permanent exclusion from school echoes those in theme 2, regarding calls to improve collaboration between schools and services responsible for the health, wellbeing and welfare of children.

#### Anticipated burden on CAMHS and mental health support resulting from COVID-19 lockdowns

The national lockdowns and school closures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were often described by participants as exacerbating SEMH needs across school populations, damaging well-being and motivation for some children, who felt lost due to the lack of routine: *"vulnerable children's support mechanisms, the structure of going to school, their routine of going to school has been removed... there is an impact upon emotional well-being, and not having that protective factor to reinforce and energise them is a challenge"* (Participant G).

Several participants stated an expectation of an increased rate of referrals to CAMHS, and were concerned that increased need would mean that providing appropriate support to children at risk of exclusion in schools would be unmanageable. Participants wondered whether a consequence of the lockdowns might be that staff were more likely to give consideration to the individual circumstances of a child presenting with challenging behaviour, and that this might help schools to identify and map out context-appropriate interventions for pupils through multi-disciplinary reintegration meetings.

Furthermore, almost all participants claimed that some of the educational practices found to be helpful for engaging children in remote learning should be retained. For instance, the use of smart tablets to address individual needs in understanding material during lessons, as well as the ability to feed this information back to class teachers in real time: *"the impacts of lockdown overall... it's not all negative, we've had some gifts from lockdown... with teachers using virtual whiteboards and virtual feedback systems to check understanding which go straight to the teacher, that they can address in real time"*



without having to stick your hand up in front of the whole class... the use of technology during lockdown, I would say, mirrors societal changes towards more and more pervasive tech and is arguably more relevant for learning" (Participant P). Encouraging children to develop problem-solving skills through searching for relevant information on smart tablets was seen as a helpful, modern addition to remote and face-to-face school lessons in future. In this way, the experience of remote learning may help school systems to adapt to the contemporary needs of the school population it serves, and support inclusion.

Theme 6	Summary	Example quotation
<b>Views on the Glasgow model</b>	Support for the Glasgow model and reducing prevalence of excludable behaviour but limited support for a 'zero exclusion' policy.	"What can we do to cut exclusions? We're asking the wrong question. The question you need to ask is 'what can we do to minimise excludable behaviour?'"

Participants were in support of the Glasgow model, specifically the focus on inclusion and nurture. In line with the nurture principle of behaviour as communication, some participants thought that a re-framing of this research from 'best practice around exclusions' to 'best practice around behaviours which may challenge' might support a change in culture in schools across the county. For example, Participant M commented "*What can we do to cut exclusions? You're asking the wrong question. The question you need to ask is, 'what can we do to minimise excludable behaviour?' If you don't get excludable behaviour, then you won't get exclusions*".

Participants were of the view that greater accountability for schools in their decisions to permanently exclude could be possible through a central oversight mechanism, and that adopting an exclusion criterion which required a 'risk to safety' to be evident needed to be carefully operationalised and defined. For example, Participant J commented "*I suppose it's the element of grey in terms of what that would look like, isn't it?... Is it at the point of bringing a knife into school and threatening a student, or is it at the point of actual physical bodily harm?... I think we'd all have a different interpretation of where that harm starts*".

When providing feedback on an approach where pupils were only excluded where safety of pupils or staff was a concern, several participants suggested that this approach could help ensure that children in care are supported to continue in mainstream schools: "*if it's the right thing for the child to move school, the parents can still do that... often [permanent exclusion] is moving the child on to the 'too difficult' pile for someone else to pick up... some of our most vulnerable children in care, who get moved on from pillar to post... some of them already feel like they're not wanted in this world, and they'll feel even more like that if they're kicked out of school as well*" (Participant I).

Some participants extended ideas of exclusion and safety to victims of serious youth violence: "*I'm supportive of any approach which minimises school exclusions and creates robust alternatives... I think the safety of other pupils is something that needs to be considered... But let me give you the other side of the coin... Child Y, his behaviour at school wasn't too bad. He went to a party one night and was stabbed. He was excluded... because he posed a risk to other children. He was the victim of a stabbing, but the school chose to remove him from their roll because of the potential that someone... could come to the school for him and potentially put other pupils at risk[...] You'd need to manage the caveat that I've just described*" (Participant G).

Further to this, some participants expressed concerns about the disenfranchisement of schools in their approach to managing behaviour, as participants felt that some children and parents would quickly gain

awareness of these new boundaries and push the limits of behaviour which would not meet the 'risk to safety' threshold for exclusion from school. Some stated that a push towards zero exclusions (in line with the Glasgow approach) would simply prompt teachers to seek employment in counties which permit exclusions in response to behaviours which may challenge: *"define safety... If my learning at school had been continually disrupted, I would never have gone to university... the safety of my education meant something. If you say to me that when a child is constantly disrupting a classroom I can't exclude them, the kids will know that. They pick up on it... They're clever, and so are their parents... refusing to work, disrupting the learning of others, throwing chairs, running around the school and carrying on [...] If Surrey go for that policy, you'll not keep your teachers... they won't be putting up with that"* (Participant M).

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

Having identified concerns about practice of permanent school exclusions in Surrey and some solutions to reduce exclusions, we conducted eight in-depth interviews to explore practical and feasible approaches to reducing permanent school exclusions in the county.

Interviews were up to an hour duration and with professional stakeholders across the county of Surrey including head teachers, CAMHS and SEND leaders, and educational professionals in Surrey County Council. Our analysis produced four key themes, each of which are summarised in turn.

Theme 1 and sub-themes	Summary	Example quotation
<p><b>Surrey Alternative Learning Programme (SALP): a coordinated approach to support children at the brink of exclusion</b></p> <p>Improved coordination and oversight</p> <p>Child-centred alternative learning provision and emergency placements</p> <p>Different pathways towards the same aim: emergency placements outside of schools and nurture units within schools</p>	<p>Local management of support and alternative provision for children on the brink of school exclusion was thought to be the most effective approach to reducing school exclusion rates and improving inclusion in Surrey.</p>	<p><i>"...all those young people ... don't have to be permanently excluded but [instead] supported into the PRU ... schools are accountable to each other ... the best solutions are local ... a local system, with local people co-ordinating it and local authority funding ... [with] a real sense of the child being at the centre and being first"</i></p>

Local management of support and alternative provision for children on the brink of school exclusion was thought to be the most effective approach to reducing school exclusion rates and improving inclusion in Surrey. The SALP model, praised by several participants, offers oversight of school exclusion at the geographical county quadrant level. The south-east quadrant of Surrey, in particular, was highlighted as having had success in supporting children at risk of exclusion through the application of SALP.

The SALP model involves quadrant head teachers working together to coordinate allocation of local authority funding, with decision-making taking place at meetings held every half-term. Arrangements agreed at SALP meetings can include the purchase of therapeutic interventions, placements on

vocational college courses, or at local PRUs, as well as emergency placement strategies for children at risk of impending exclusion from school. The process of SALP in the south-east quadrant was described by Participant Q: *"There are SALP places at the PRU... where children who have been... identified by schools as those who probably are going to struggle in key stage four and at risk of exclusion... So that all those young people, they don't have to be permanently excluded but [instead] supported into the PRU... all of it is underpinned by an annual agreement [with] the PRU, the local authority and the headteachers of the area about how that money is going to be used"*.

The south-east quadrant established a SALP executive board, which meets in advance of half-termly meetings between headteachers. Participants described the purpose of this executive board as development of clear, coherent strategy by the headteachers charged with oversight of the SALP model within their respective borough, ahead of the full meetings attended by headteachers across the quadrant: *"If a head[teacher] had come to a point where they felt they needed to exclude... the idea was that they called their representative in their borough and would say, 'look, I'm going to do this exclusion', and a conversation would be had that would say 'okay what other options have we got on the table that we could provide?'"* (Participant P). The collaborative organisation around emergency placements and alternative provision, as well as reduced reliance on school exclusions, will be explored further in the following section.

#### Improved co-ordination and oversight

Barriers to best practice in reducing school exclusions were thought to be a lack of coordination and joint forward planning, resulting in headteachers making exclusions because they were uncertain about the ongoing availability of alternative provision for children requiring extensive support. Participant Q summarised the uncertainties that headteachers can face: *"if you've got a school in one part of the area [which] kicks out five kids that then takes up five places at the PRU, and then you've got a school down the road that hardly ever uses any PRU places having to exclude, but then all of a sudden all the places are filled"* (Participant Q).

Participant F raised a similar point about equivalence of access to resource: *"There are challenging youngsters all over Surrey and in every quadrant. And what we want to be sure of is that there aren't some schools that are being inclusive, because that's part of their ethos and culture, where others are being less so. Everyone's getting funded in the same way, why should one school be saying "Oh yeah, we'll give them a go" when the school down the road always says 'no'?"* (Participant F).

In order to build on the successes of the south-east quadrant, the structure of the SALP approach requires collaborative planning between headteachers. The SALP co-leadership structure could continue to help build and strengthen collaborative relationships between more local schools in future. The benefits of the oversight of school exclusions through the SALP model are outlined by Participant A: *"the more that schools are bound into discussions, the better it is... it's really important that schools are not deterred from finding alternatives to permanent exclusions. You need to have check and balances. Otherwise, it becomes too easy for a school to just... pass on the students who are causing them difficulties, but if you've got the right checks, balances, feedback loops, then schools will be working as part of a system. That's the key aspect.... It's got to be a local system, with local people co-ordinating it and local authority funding"* (Participant A).

The potential for effective tracking and auditing was discussed as a key benefit of SALP. For instance, Participant Q thought the development of partnership working across the quadrant enabled the assessment of expenditure and analysis of school exclusion prevalence: *"we're able to have a blended offer that... is something you can see, it's something that you can visit, it's something that you can audit... all those things that that are helpful for measuring whether an intervention is successful... but it's only ...*

*happened because those conversations have taken place. You know there's a real sense of supporting each other and a real sense of the child being at the centre and being first" (Participant Q).*

A facilitator of best practice was thought to be the collaborative structure of SALP group meetings every half-term, involving headteachers with oversight of Surrey quadrants. The model helped to develop local strategy to support children at risk of exclusion gain access to alternative learning provision. Participant A reflected that *"the success of the south-east SALP lies in that... it has effectively integrated its provision with the PRUs"*. Extending this collaborative effort beyond schools and in to public sector partner agencies was thought to further improve the effectiveness of the SALP model and reduce duplication of work and resource across multiple agencies: *"the 14 to 19 partnership board ... was about those students in that transition and needs... we were talking about the same kids in each of those silos but ... none of the silos ever talked to each other. So huge amounts of time and resources were being used on talking about the same kids in different contexts and not pulling them together... it would really help if we had a more... strategic and unified response..." (Participant P).*

The mutual support and opportunities for networking between local schools embedded within the SALP approach were also welcomed by participants. A key advantage of the SALP model was perceived to be the focus on local solutions to support children and reduce exclusions from schools. For example, development of a system focussed on local need relating to school inclusion, with feedback on performance which was relevant to the particular cohort of children attending schools in Surrey, was described as holding greater potential for reducing exclusions than could be provided through any nationally managed system. Participant S outlined their view on optimal approaches to reducing school exclusions: *"I don't think they should be nationally driven ... I think the best solutions are local. I don't honestly feel you can have a one size fits all solution to this, and quite often when national government gets involved... it becomes... it's not sustainable. We need to look locally at some sustainable funding opportunities here"*.

Participants praised the investment by the local authority in reducing the prevalence of school exclusions, while also acknowledging the limits of local authority financial resources. Participant Q commented that *"the local authority's continued investing in reducing exclusion... is great, but... when there's other financial challenges it's not a bottomless pit"*. The SALP model appears to recognise the limited nature of financial investment for reducing exclusion and enhancing school inclusion, which was seen as further reasoning in favour of the collaborative planning approach. Identification of the most effective application of funding for local children at risk of exclusion from school, and methods for sharing resources between schools through SALP, is discussed in the next section.

#### Child-centred alternative learning provision and emergency placements

The SALP approach to collaborative, planned expenditure of funding provided the opportunity to create offers for children at risk of exclusion. Some participants were of the view that conventional alternative provision was often similar to a small-scale mainstream school, even though children who did not thrive in a mainstream context were referred there. Through SALP, headteachers could liaise with PRUs and the local authority to achieve person-centred offers for alternative settings, therapeutic intervention or emergency placements. This was described as a helpful step forward in reducing reliance on school exclusions. The practical benefits of this arrangement are illustrated by Participant F: *"the exact aim is to give them a slightly alternative curriculum so that they are able to stay in mainstream education, not hit a permanent exclusion threshold, and be supported, most importantly... to achieve some qualifications... those students who go there get a different diet, it's very small scale... it works really well"*. The flexibility that SALP offers to plan for children who need emergency placements or interventions could help to prevent decisions to exclude a child in cases when options for alternative provision have been exhausted.

All participants raised concerns about the suitability of the environment and structure for learning provided by the traditional, contemporary education system for children at risk of exclusion. For example, Participant R reflected on the potential benefits of changes to routine and surroundings for children who may benefit from adaptations to the typical school environment: *"I think the changes could be everything from... the noise levels or where the child's sitting in the class, through to having quiet spaces. You know, anecdotes of children having melt-downs because they're not able to cope with three languages... so having that kind of bespoke approach to what the learning capacity is of that child, and how best to accommodate the emotional well-being and mental health needs that they might have... because then they wouldn't have to cope with the... anxiety"*.

However, there were differences of opinion as to how best to achieve the child-centred educational settings for those requiring additional support. Two contrasting approaches were suggested and are outlined in the following section.

#### Different pathways towards the same aim: Emergency placements outside of schools and Nurture units within schools

The first position emphasised the requirement of headteachers to balance the limited availability of appropriate interventions at state-funded schools and the enhanced support possible for children attending PRUs, with the needs of their school community as a whole. Participant P suggested that exclusions sometimes take place because headteachers are doing what they think could be in the best interests of the child, who may be at an educational disadvantage in mainstream schools: *"the presence of a young person in school causing significant harm to the... learning and progress of the others... is their presence in the school also damaging the progress that they might make themselves? So... the problem is that actually sometimes a headteacher will think... it would be better for this young person if I exclude them because then they will go to the PRU and that's where they'll have greater support"*.

The balanced considerations required of headteachers was also discussed by Participant U: *"ideally, the epitome of good practice would be that you don't have any exclusions, because no child should be moved from their school community... [but] when does it shift to not being in the best interest of that child, nor the other children in that child's class?"*.

There were concerns about the practicality of implementing bespoke, personalised timetables for multiple pupils within mainstream Surrey schools: *"it is incredibly important that there is multi-agency support and engagement around the child, and that there is a comprehensive and proactive approach to thinking about what the needs of that child might be... Of course, it's incredibly difficult for schools to be able to flex their curriculum and their school day to any one child... that could lead to chaos"* (Participant R).

Concerns also regarding continued oversight of student progress, once it is determined that a mainstream school may not be equipped with appropriate resources to meet a child's academic or social, emotional and mental health needs: *"sometimes, there just needs to be a reminder to schools... what we actually are saying to a child and their family? That they no longer belong to their school community... and that's really hard for the family and child to hear. They're just out the door, they're forgotten... Encouraging schools to have ownership of those decisions would be really important"* (Participant Q). Participant A proposed the use of emergency placements to ensure that schools continue to hold responsibility for a child's progression and attainment, even after the child concerned had left mainstream schooling: *"an emergency placement is not a permanent exclusion, and so the child still remains the responsibility of the school... to me, that's the key thing, because that cuts the risk of students disappearing off the radar"*.

An alternative approach to emergency placements was the implementation of inclusion facilities, functioning as an embedded component within mainstream Surrey school sites. Some participants raised safeguarding issues of placing vulnerable pupils at PRU settings, due to a risk of exploitation: *"sending a child to a pupil referral unit doesn't win the game either because... we're talking about potentially vulnerable children, that become even more vulnerable... to exploitation [...] My other concern is out of sight out of mind mentality. I've heard some schools say well we're not giving up on that child in terms of their educational ability, it's just that that will be taken forward somewhere else. And quite often that's a pupil referral unit. And I'm not saying they're bad, I'm just saying that if you're a bad person looking to groom children, then that's your magnet. That's where you know you've got a vulnerability"* (Participant S).

This potential safeguarding issue influenced the principles of the inclusion framework developed at Dunraven School in the London Borough of Lambeth. The use of dedicated settings for child-centred support within mainstream school sites is also a key component of the Glasgow model. Participant views on the influence of Glasgow model concepts on school exclusions in Surrey are explored in the following section.

Theme 2 and sub-themes	Summary	Example quotation
<p><b>A public health approach: the Glasgow model</b></p> <p>Behaviour as a form of communication</p> <p>Applying examples from ongoing practice</p>	<p>Application of the Glasgow model in Surrey schools could shift perspectives on the link between a child's needs and the challenging behaviour they may present.</p>	<p><i>"This is where the local authority has a really powerful role to play in promoting [collaboration] ... with schools, health and social care joining up our support ... where things have worked best, there's been a shared understanding, language and goals. This is something the local authority can absolutely promote and get behind"</i>.</p>

This section identifies how application of the Glasgow model in Surrey schools could shift perspectives on the link between a child's needs and the challenging behaviour they may present. The long-term impact of school exclusion on a child's sense of community belonging is also discussed.

#### Behaviour as a form of communication

There was commitment to the need to understand behaviour as a form of communication. In line with the public health approach rooted within the Glasgow model, Participant S stated that further cooperation between health services, social care and schools could be a successful pathway for reducing exclusions in Surrey: *"we've really got to get to some of the causal factors. So, we've linked in our work with the wider health and well-being boards to tackle it through the health determinants as well"* (Participant S). Joint working would help to develop an understanding of the underlying causes of behaviours which may place a child at increased risk of exclusion, and also assist with the planning of interventions appropriate for a child's particular needs: *"suppose you've got a young person whose issues are essentially social care issues but as a result of those social care issues they develop some special education needs or challenging behaviour... because they have these vulnerabilities... how are you going to decide what percentage of their problem is a social care problem and what percentage of their problem is an education problem [...] if we could get education, health, social care well knitted together I think that we could do better and we're improving"* (Participant P).

Driving joint working through the local authority was also supported in promoting an understanding of behaviour: *"this is where the local authority has a really powerful role to play in promoting*

[collaboration]... with schools, health and social care joining up our support... where things have worked best, there's been a shared understanding, language and goals. This is something the local authority can absolutely promote and get behind" (Participant Q). Understanding behaviour as a form of communication and effective joint working could have a positive impact on reducing permanent school exclusions.

Applying examples from ongoing practice

"Someone will have walked that journey somewhere else in the UK. Let's just be bold and go to Glasgow City Council and see how they made it rock and then bring it back. Sometimes we seem to be reinventing the wheel... I don't think we should be doing anything new in terms of interventions unless there's an evidence base" (Participant S).

The comments of Participant S highlight the advantage of having an evidence-based model in Glasgow from which to learn, be guided, and apply to the Surrey context. There was support from participants in advancing a public health triumvirate across Surrey schools, health care and social services, and reference was made to the ongoing collaborative work of schools, health and the local authority: "a lot of... work involves linking in with education, in the local authorities and... helping make decisions on eligibility for plans and... joint commissioning" (Participant O).

The steps taken by health services towards supporting school staff to replicate public health approaches prior to referral for social, emotional and mental health intervention were also acknowledged. Participant R reflected on the feasibility of a shift towards a wholesale public health approach to further enhance efforts to prevent school exclusion among children meeting thresholds for specialist intervention: "we've brought together all the professionals that work in schools, whether it's school nursing, or SENCO [Specialist Educational Needs Coordinator], or primary mental health workers, or child well-being practitioners... and ensure that they have sufficient understanding to be able to provide a constructive response to schools about how they might support that young person [at risk of exclusion], without the need for referral to mental health services".

Overall, participants were of the view that examples of successful practice elsewhere in the UK and building on existing partnership working between services within Surrey could represent quick wins in terms of implementing the Glasgow model.

Theme 3 and sub-themes	Summary	Example quotation
<b>Building resilience within children</b>  Promoting awareness of youth violence and crime  Alternative barometers of success  Support for resilience skills development	Developing tools to promote resilience among children requiring support for emotional or academic development was thought to be necessary to complement systemic approaches to reducing exclusion.	<i>"... there is an opportunity for us to work together across agencies, to support schools to make reasonable adjustments ... child-centric education ... clinicians will talk to me about the importance of having the right environment, the right kind of rhythm of study, places that [children] can feel safe in and ... have that sense of empowerment around how they manage their own emotions and anxieties and cope with day-to-day school life".</i>

Developing tools to promote resilience among children requiring support for emotional or academic development was thought by participants to be necessary to complement systemic approaches to reducing exclusion. For example, children who struggle to maintain attention and recall instructions may have never experienced contexts in which these skills were encouraged, prior to starting school. Participants thought that children with relatively few opportunities to practice academic or social skills could be helped through resilience training to boost their self-confidence. The benefits of this would go beyond reducing school exclusion and might help to improve life opportunities.

#### Promoting awareness of youth violence and crime

Several participants acknowledged links between criminal activity and involvement in serious youth violence with school exclusion: *"anything drug-related, anything knife-related, will get a child close to the threshold for a permanent exclusion... [as well as] extreme physical violence... but these are very, very rarely total surprises. There's usually a well-trodden path where you've excluded a child once for one day on a fixed term, and then they've had a three-day, and then a four-day, and then a five-day, and you can see that trouble is ahead, if you like... I can't think of many incidents where we've got to permanent exclusion just for persistent disruptive behaviour"* (Participant F).

Further to this, participants suggested that building resilience and self-management skills may benefit children who are vulnerable to engagement in youth violence and crime. Involvement in serious youth violence was one factor, addressed repeatedly during interviews, which was believed to heighten a child's risk of exclusion from school. The Surrey Junior Citizens training programme was spoken of as an example of risk reduction for vulnerable children. It was proposed by Participant S that the Surrey Junior Citizens training programme might benefit from an updated shift of focus onto gang recruitment strategies targeting children: *"the serious youth violence case, whatever we try to do there is not scare the children, but it's just alert them at the earliest possible stage. So, how can we do that in a format that they're comfortable with [...] the Junior Citizens Scheme... it's still about stranger danger... the risk of falling into water... It's just very old, whereas it has an opportunity, in Surrey, to reach out to 8,000 children aged between 10 and 11 annually. And we can get the messages in there at the earliest possible stage... in relation to youth violence. They [gangs engaged in criminal behaviour] become your family don't they... So, the idea of a stranger walking up behind you, it's still there don't get me wrong, but the data doesn't suggest that's the predominant risk for children at the moment"* (Participant S).

The combination of messaging, resilience training, and targeting ages of school transitions might support reduction of risk not only relating to vulnerability and exploitation but also school exclusion.

#### Alternative barometers of success

Re-defining successful outcomes, so that the concept of successful attainment becomes person-centred and works to build confidence, might also support inclusion of children and young people at risk of permanent school exclusion. There was a perception among participants that the definition of 'success' in mainstream education has a narrow focus on academic attainment and league tables, and that this approach probably alienates some children from their school community. For instance, Participant P commented: *"if the job at the school is to teach them to read, write and all the rest of it but they're not yet toilet trained it's a real problem and therefore those kids will fall behind... if they fall behind, if you're... a child who's not able to succeed in... a classroom and you see others succeeding, one it's not good for your self-esteem and you'll exceed at anything you can do and usually that's mucking about and causing a problem and getting attention that way because all attention... [is] good attention, even if it's for the wrong reasons"*. Participant U added *"the curriculum and education design of this country narrows so quickly for children... we inhibit innate abilities to do extraordinary things [...] If you look at the Early Years, the curriculum starts with your ability to regulate yourself, but that never appears again after the Early Years, in any curriculum"*. Strategies to help children define their own measures of success might reduce the prevalence of behaviour which increases a child's risk of exclusion from school.



### Support for resilience skills development

Support to build inclusion among children at risk of exclusion can often be implemented at a point where the relationship between the school and the child is at breaking point. However, an inclusive culture might prevent escalation of behaviour and earlier support and intervention could help children and young people stay in the mainstream school system. A resilience intervention focused on emotional self-regulation and managing anxiety could be useful: *"there is an opportunity for us to work together across agencies, to support schools to make reasonable adjustments... child-centric education... clinicians will talk to me about the importance of having the right environment, the right kind of rhythm of study, places that [children] can feel safe in and... have that that sense of empowerment around, how they manage their own emotions and anxieties and cope with day-to-day school life"* (Participant R).

Continued work by schools to integrate similar perspectives into the ethos of their school communities could help children most at risk of exclusion to develop their intra-personal skills, as well as feel included and valued. There was recognition that support is reactive rather than proactive in this regard. Participant S reflected on a discussion with a young person who experienced permanent school exclusion. The child said *"it's only when I reached the cusp of the criminal justice system that then people were knocking on my door Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday offering similar help, but it just wasn't co-ordinated, in fact it was overwhelming"* (Participant S). There was support across participants for effective, early intervention through dedicated support for children in families known to various local services. For example, Participant P commented *"the first thing would need to be done I think in terms of specialist education needs is really early identification of young people's needs... and when I say that I mean both their special education needs and potentially additional needs... you know we know fairly early on which students are... in families that are likely to be known to social services, where there are multiple vulnerabilities for that young person, what are we doing to support them knowing that they are the kinds of young people who may find it difficult initially to settle in to a... school?"*. Similarly, Participant F said *"very often, some of the most significant needs when it comes to exclusion are around well-known families... where there have been prior siblings who've struggled, where... the family is well known to social care, where the family is sometimes known to the police... there are really, really significant families who you can identify and say if we could work with this family as a unit, we, we might well address issues not just for one child, but for multiple siblings in a family group"*. Family-based interventions, coordinated between services, might reduce risk of exclusion, particularly among the younger siblings within family units.

The following section outlines creative methods for identification of families who might benefit from early support, as well as strategies for intervention during the transition phase between primary and secondary schools.

Theme 4 and sub-themes	Summary	Example quotation
<b>Early intervention beyond individuals: the family and school</b>	Creative methods for early identification of families who might benefit from early support, as well as strategies for intervention during the transition between primary and secondary schools.	<i>"... all I want is for the agencies in Surrey to be able to signpost. I don't want them to become trauma experts ... but just knowing how to signpost families and noting what you see will be a tremendous help."</i>
Inclusion interventions during transition to secondary school		
Support for families – new ways of signposting to services		

This final theme outlines participant suggestions for effective interventions to reduce permanent exclusions from mainstream schools, which could take place at the school level or build on existing efforts to support families.

#### Inclusion interventions during transition to secondary school

Transition from primary school to secondary school can exacerbate the risk of exclusion, as explained by Participant F: *"you can have a child... for whom the primary school are doing great things. And that child can move to secondary school and things can unravel through nobody's fault... In year six, you have a child who has additional needs, who arrives every day to the same class teacher and the same Learning Support Assistant who... know their needs really well. They're in one room every day... they're stable... They arrive at the neighbouring secondary school... on an average day they will see their form tutor probably in the morning briefly, in the afternoon briefly, and then... five different staff members who might see them once a week, once a fortnight"*.

Child-centred transition interventions, which acknowledge transition difficulties and support a decelerated transition, could be useful. For example, *"the transition group... brings a small group of learners into year seven... identified with either very low basic literacy or very low basic numeracy, or anxiety or social skills, and they do all their literacy-based subjects with one teacher in one base... About half the week, they'll be together, and the rest of the week they'll go off and mix with everybody else. It's much more of a transition from a primary model... not just a huge leap"* (Participant F).

This method of supporting pupils who are identified as at risk of finding transition difficult appears to be similar in principle to the use of dedicated Nurture rooms described in the Glasgow and Lambeth models. Splitting timetables between small-scale, Nurture rooms and the mainstream secondary environments may work to improve school inclusion in Surrey secondary schools. Although early intervention was supported by participants, it was acknowledged that opportunities to provide early intervention could be missed and particularly for children with sub-clinical levels of Special Educational Need (SEN). A possible consequence of not intervening early was higher expenditure at a later point in the child's education to support the development of academic skills and adaptive behaviour. Most participants thought that challenges in implementing interventions resulted from increased demand for services: *"it grows exponentially, year-on-year... the need around mental health and additional support for young people"* (Participant O).

An example of good practice in managing transitions in a context of limited school resources was identified at Ash Manor School. The deployment of an inclusion officer for identification of children likely to benefit from enhanced support at their feeder primary schools was recognised as an effective, pro-active method of intervention prior to a child joining the Ash Manor School community. The school receives children *"knowing what the child's needs are, this is absolutely crucial rather than waiting six months to find out [...] That inclusion officer goes out to all of the feeder primary schools, to speak to the children whilst they're in their last year of primary school... to look at what support can be given to those that are already showing signs of struggling, whether that's behavioural or academic [...] I would say we've got an exemplar in Surrey now, so if a head teacher has been able to recruit out of [their] own funding streams an inclusion officer, why wouldn't other schools want to follow that lead?... There's nothing more compelling than one of your own who's already done it. You know, they understand the challenges... we might not be able to employ inclusion officers everywhere but let's test the concept, let's really push it"* (Participant S).

#### Support for families – new ways of signposting to services

The impact of school exclusion is felt by the children/young people and their parents/caregivers, often meaning that there is a loss of belonging to what might be perceived as a supportive community: *"to be taken from the sanctuary I like to think we provide here... Exclusion can be a cliff face, it's suddenly there,*

*and therefore, you're not only dealing with the actual behaviours but the trauma of saying to a child you can't come to school for a fixed period, or worst case you can't come back at all" (Participant U).*

Promoting a sense of inclusion for children was thought to extend beyond the school, both during a pupil's school registration and once they have been excluded. Signposting families to support might address reluctance in some families to engage with social services: *"it's got a stigma around it, everyone thinks that if anything goes to the social care next step is we're going to lose our child"* (Participant S). Enhancing signposting for families to statutory and third sector services could help families have access to appropriate and timely intervention. In some cases, enhancing inclusion and support might help to reduce permanent school exclusions.

Extending support for multi-agency working, Participant S suggested that Surrey Fire Service could contribute to the safeguarding of children, if they are informed on how best to highlight that a family may be in need of support: *"Surrey Fire Rescue... they're a tremendous resource in terms of eyes and ears and going into families, when they go in [to homes] to fix smoke alarms or do whatever else, if they see anything that they feel the family needs support on then they need to know how to signpost. That's all I want; all I want is for the agencies in Surrey to be able to signpost. I don't want them to become trauma experts, you know, they're there for a different job. But, just knowing how to signpost families and noting what you can see will be a tremendous help... That's success"* (Participant S).

However, signposting families should focus on what the family would like support with, and what success might mean for them, rather than concerns around which services would best support the interventions required to meet the families' needs: *"let's stop referring between agencies, and let's actually start to think more creatively and differently together about how to respond [...] you're very child-centric and you focus on what's important to the child and the family, for them, in the here and now, and how you might address that creatively together, so you're not saying 'oh you need psychology, you need psychotherapy, you need CBT', you're saying 'what are the things that really matter to you at the moment, and how can we build your confidence around those things?'"* (Participant R).

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

Children and young people were excluded at the point where schools felt that they had exhausted all available, alternative means of supporting pupils at risk of exclusion and managing their behaviour, while also continuing to balance the educational and developmental needs of other pupils in the school community. Resource gaps might contribute to the decision to opt for permanent exclusions, whether resulting from limited availability of alternatives, financial pressures, or staff time constraints.

Schools across the county are making efforts to improve inclusion and reduce exclusions and feasible future directions include: the coordinated, child-centred approach to supporting inclusion enabled by the South-East quadrant Surrey Alternative Learning Provision (SALP) model; enhancing early intervention; safeguarding children and families across various levels of their social environment; and enhancing resilience of all children. To achieve this, collaboration between schools is required regarding exclusion practice, statutory and third sector services could work together to provide support for families and intervene earlier for educational and SEMH needs, and schools could attend to transitions as a critical risk period for inclusion and reducing vulnerability to exploitation and deterioration of coping.

There is a need to enhance child-centred alternatives to the contemporary structure of education. Strengths and disadvantages were presented to both attendance at local Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and through dedicated Nurture rooms based on mainstream school sites.

## Section 6. Case study: Alex

Alex's story exemplifies some of the difficulties that can be experienced in a mainstream school environment for students known to social care and who have unaddressed special educational needs, as well as the importance of attending to transitions and sharing of information across services.

Alex is not the real name of the child described here. Alex was invited to talk about his home, family, and involvement with police and youth justice, to build a picture of systems of support and difficulty beyond school, but he preferred to keep the focus of discussion on his experience of school.

At primary school, Alex was popular and sporty. He particularly enjoyed lessons in maths and PE. Although Alex had an enjoyable experience at primary school overall, he described early years at school as involving "ups and downs". Namely, praise for athletic endeavours and some difficulties attending to classwork during lessons. Alex was known to social services and he had received support with learning and behavioural interventions.

Alex looked forward to doing well in sports and academic work at secondary school. He had aspirations to gain the qualifications needed for well-paid work later in life.

The initial transition from primary into secondary school caused some anxiety for Alex, particularly the unfamiliar environment and high number of pupils. Alex found that he became even more distracted during lessons and he was often reprimanded for distracting others. Lessons taking place immediately after break and lunch times were particularly problematic because Alex felt hyperactive on re-entering the classroom after unstructured periods of play. At these times, Alex's behaviour disrupted the learning environment and he regularly got into trouble for shouting at teachers who attempted to re-focus him on classroom tasks or reprimand disruptive behaviour.

Shortly after arriving at secondary school and after continued disruptive behaviour, a session with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) determined that an assessment for special educational needs would be useful in understanding how best to support Alex with his learning. Around this time, some information was shared between social services and the secondary school.

Alex thought that key information about previous behaviour interventions and support with learning could have been shared proactively between social services and the secondary school before or at the point of school transition. Alex thought that if the secondary school had this information earlier then it might have helped him to build positive relationships with secondary school staff and reduced the frequency of disruptive behaviour.

Additional pastoral support was then put in place for Alex. He was allocated to a named teacher for one-to-one conversations about daily goings-on at school. Alex felt that this arrangement was extremely helpful and he was able to build a trusting, productive relationship with this member of staff. When they were repositioned to work elsewhere in the school and the support provision was not replaced, Alex felt that he had lost out on developing a strong relationship with a very supportive member of staff.

Alex and his family were involved in discussions with the school for a few weeks about his behaviour and the suitability of the school placement for him; Alex wanted to stay at the school. Alex said that the outcome of these discussions was received by his family by email. The email informed Alex and his family that a place at an alternative school would be identified. In the final term of Year 7, at the age of 12 years, Alex was permanently excluded for persistent disruptive behaviour and finished the school year at an alternative learning provision (ALP). Alex had a good understanding of what it meant to be

permanently excluded, and the exclusion process in general. The family unsuccessfully appealed the school decision to permanently exclude Alex.

Alex made a positive start at the ALP. He found it easier to concentrate on tasks in the classroom, due to a smaller class size of two or three pupils and increased opportunities for one-to-one support. Alex felt understood by staff, who were good at motivating pupils to engage in learning and encouraged pupils to develop their aspirations. Alex received a 'student of the week' award as well as several school awards for working well during lessons.

At the start of Year 8, Alex was visited by CAMHS staff. A recommendation was made for assessments for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Learning Developmental Delay and Autistic Spectrum Disorder; these have not been concluded at the time of writing.

Alex wants to return to mainstream education. He recognises that his behaviour would need to change if he were able to return to and remain in mainstream school and he is determined to improve his behaviour during lessons if he were given a chance to return. He would like support to help him achieve this.

Alex is performing well at ALP. He has developed constructive relationships with staff and he aspires to achieve an apprenticeship in Physical Education or to study sport at University. Alex wants to turn his life around by doing well at school and making the school community, his teachers, family and himself proud of his achievements.

## Section 7. Summary and Recommendations

Reducing permanent school exclusion requires consideration of the individual vulnerabilities that a child or young person presents with, as well as systemic factors. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as neglect, abuse, or being supported by or under the care of Local Authority services, and having SEND are known vulnerability factors for school exclusion. The same is true of children and young people in Surrey, and these vulnerability factors (in addition to free school meal eligibility) were the clearest among our sample of 200 pupils permanently excluded from schools, and prevalent at a higher level when compared to national data. This presents a striking picture of the multiple and possibly complex needs and vulnerabilities of children and young people excluded from schools in Surrey. What was notable in our data was that multi-agency systems of support were not in place for most of these children and young people at the point at which they were permanently excluded from schools. Furthermore, educational, social, and police/youth justice services held information about children at risk of exclusion but barriers to sharing knowledge across services might have contributed to decisions to permanently exclude.

Being from a minority ethnic background and living in a deprived area are other factors common among school-excluded children. These factors in Surrey are not quite so pronounced in our data, partly because the county is affluent relative to many others in the country, there are differences in exclusion practice across the county, and there is a lack of data on which to understand the over-or under-representation of school exclusions among children and young people in Surrey from non-White British ethnic groups. However, it is known that there are pockets of deprivation adjacent to high wealth across the county, and that the majority of people in Surrey would identify as being of White ethnicity. Therefore, the subjective experience of social exclusion must be attended to in schools, and inclusive school communities should be promoted to support educational attainment and aspirations for all children and young people in the county. For many children and young people, permanent school exclusion was yet another disadvantage faced in their young lives.

The whole-school approach recognises the impact that an inclusive and positive school ethos and culture can have on students' social and emotional wellbeing, development and behaviour, and thus their ability and motivation to engage in learning. There is good research evidence for the attachment-informed programme [Thrive](#) and nurture groups in reducing fixed term and permanent school exclusions. Evidence too in support of emotional coaching, which promotes positive teacher-student relationships and contributes to better school behaviour, reductions in behavioural incidents, increases in pro-social behaviour, and better academic attainment. In the Glasgow Getting It Right for Every Child approach, the nurture principle of behaviour as a form of communication is promoted; this underpins the success of reducing permanent school exclusions by understanding behaviour, rather than using exclusion as a disciplinary tool in response to behaviour as a form of communication. The Glasgow model draws strongly on evidence-based approaches to enhancing wellbeing, promoting inclusion and reducing exclusion among children and young people in school, particularly the principles of nurture.

The drive to establish Surrey as a fully inclusive county by 2030 involves giving pupils a voice by improving the sense that all children attending Surrey schools are "*valued and respected*". Additionally, the focus of the Surrey social inclusion plan on raising high expectations and achievements appear to be similar to the key aims of the Glasgow model. There are already several examples in Surrey of schools that provide excellent support for students with SEMH and SEN, such as the Short Stay School approach. Furthermore, the Surrey Alternative Learning Programme (SALP) offers a model of accountability for reducing permanent school exclusions and coordinating resources across the county, with good evidence for a reduction in permanent exclusions in the South East of the county, where SALP is fully operational. The Schools Alliance for Excellence (SAfE) committee is also working towards enhanced support that SEN and disadvantaged children are likely to require for their disproportionate risk of school exclusion.

Our data clearly demonstrate that to reduce permanent school exclusions in Surrey, collaboration is required between schools, statutory and third sector services. Earlier intervention for SEND; sharing of knowledge to effect continuity of understanding and support to children with known vulnerability factors; attending to transitions as critical risk periods for inclusion, reducing vulnerability to exploitation and deterioration of coping; and support for families, are all required in a systemic approach that keeps the child at the centre of inclusion in education.

These research findings lead to the following recommendations that reflect the need for partnership working across the county to reduce permanent school exclusions and associated disadvantages and harms. The recommendations reflect responsibilities across systems – not limited to schools or the local authority - working with and around a child or young person who is vulnerable to or who has been permanently excluded from school:

- **Accept permanent exclusion as a public health issue; nurture, understand and support behaviour as a form of communication.**
- **Enhance implementation of SALP across the county quadrants.** The SALP model of collaborative working between schools and services across the County can support reduction in permanent school exclusions. A combination of alternative provision sourced from local PRUs with child-centred nurture classrooms within mainstream schools, both managed through local SALP boards, may help to reduce pressure on alternative resources external to schools. In addition, the joint planning of funding allocation across local schools, in line with the SALP model, could assist PRUs with accurate anticipation of demand and improve the planning capabilities of local PRUs.
- **Encourage mainstream schools to provide enhanced support for children at risk of permanent exclusion.** An assessment system that praises schools for supporting children holistically, rather than heavily weighting assessment results on specified targets and outcomes, could allow for improved support of children at risk of exclusion. This could be supported by the development of an

assessment tool that helps schools to identify children and young people most vulnerable to permanent exclusion.

- **Bring statutory and third sector services to the school.** Work together to support families and intervene earlier for SEN. Doing so might reduce waiting times for referrals to services and improve multi-agency collaboration and information sharing.
- **Ensure continuity of support for children and young people with multiple needs.** For example, nursery school staff could provide valuable guidance in highlighting the children most likely to benefit from targeted academic and SEMH interventions in the earlier stages of child development. Support then follows the child between schools. If SEN and SEMH needs can be addressed before attainment gaps widen among peers then this might enhance social inclusions rather than exclusion through feelings of failure at secondary school.
- **Attend to transitions as a critical risk period for inclusion.** Share information on needs, vulnerabilities and intended communications through behaviours. Training and support outreach by PRU staff to mainstream schools might support retention of pupils in school but also help to re-settle pupils on return to mainstream education.
- **Develop an indicator of evidence-based risk and protective factors for permanent exclusion.** Apply this to enhance support for children and young people most vulnerable to exclusion.
- **Ensure information sharing and collaboration between services and consider having a local champion in each school/agency.** Data sharing between organisations and services involved in child safeguarding could facilitate access to services through school referrals, and as a result are more likely to be perceived as non-threatening to the family unit. This seems critical to reduce the risk of exclusion from school and possible involvement in the criminal justice system.
- **Ensure 'critical patterns' of at-risk behaviours and events around children are shared between agencies to prevent escalation to 'critical incidents' that require a justice response.**
- **Consider creating leadership and governance roles to support an agenda to reduce exclusions** and monitor progress against outcomes of this research, such as a named Cabinet member, local authority Lead, headteacher, Governor and Police/Youth Justice Representative.
- **Create a Surrey Collaborative Implementation Plan with multi-agency-specific actions;** measure impact and continually improve provision.

At the time of finalising this report, Surrey County Council had already committed to several of these recommendations, the outcomes of which are not within the scope of this report.

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