



Policy briefing

School exclusions and the risk of offending

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Executive summary

Permanent and temporary exclusions are an integral part of the school behavioural management system in England. Results from this new study draw on Administrative Data Research UK (ADR UK)'s flagship dataset that links Ministry of Justice data with Department for Education data for the first time.

Linking data in this new way allows researchers to examine the relationship between school exclusions and offending throughout the school journey into early adulthood through a substantial dataset of over 260,000 people. **Findings identify that the odds of any criminal justice system involvement for pupils with at least one permanent exclusion were 2.4 times higher than those with no permanent exclusion.**

When considering temporary exclusions, this difference was more pronounced as rates increased. For pupils with between two and four temporary exclusions, the odds of any criminal justice system involvement were 2.4 times higher than those with just one exclusion. This increased to 4.7 times higher for pupils with between five and nine temporary exclusions, and 6.5 times higher with 10 or more temporary exclusions.

Potential implications for policy include reviewing whether permanent and temporary exclusions – particularly as these escalate – should prompt a safeguarding approach. Considerations should also be taken for when and how schools should use (and be supported to use) alternative strategies for school sanctions.

Policy context

School exclusions are the most severe form of school sanction: removing children from the school environment either on a temporary or permanent basis. Schools have statutory duties to safeguard children; therefore, having a deeper understanding of the experiences of excluded school pupils can help schools identify vulnerabilities to criminal justice system involvement.

This analysis shows that temporary and permanent exclusions are related to an increased likelihood of criminal justice system involvement. This likelihood increases markedly in relation to increases in temporary exclusion rates.

The implication of this finding is that the impact of excluding school pupils goes beyond the school environment, or concern at an individual pupil level, and should be a matter of interest and response for wider society.

In the context of the Safer Streets and Opportunities missions, these findings could contribute both to the current policy debates in these areas, and, through collaborative working between policymakers and those in practice – for example school leaders – potentially to actionable change in guidance on sanctions leading to real-world impact.

Research aims

By linking Ministry of Justice and Department for Education data, we looked to:

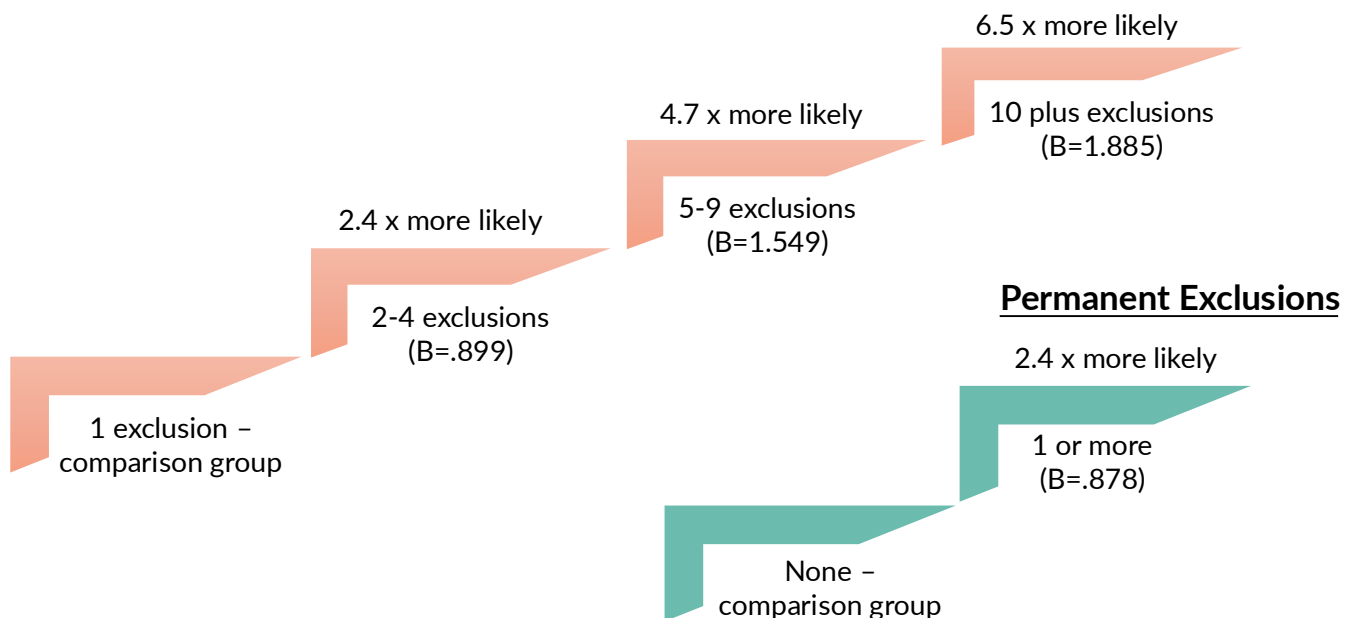
- Estimate the probability of excluded school pupils being involved with the criminal justice system through offending.
- Specifically, to consider the different types (and number) of school exclusions (temporary and permanent) and their relationship with criminal justice system involvement.
- More widely, to consider the possible relationship with a range of socio-demographic factors.

Research findings in detail

Our findings, based on a dataset of over 260,000 people, show that both temporary and permanent exclusions are related to criminal justice system involvement through offending. The odds of criminal justice system involvement for pupils who had received at least one permanent exclusion were 2.4 times higher than those with no permanent exclusion.

When considering temporary exclusions, this difference was more pronounced as the number of temporary exclusions increased. When compared to pupils with one temporary exclusion, the odds of any criminal justice system involvement were 2.4 times higher for those with between two and four exclusions. The odds increased to 4.7 times higher with between five and nine exclusions, and to 6.5 times higher for those with 10 or more temporary exclusions.

School exclusions and CJS involvement



all exclusions variables= $p < .001$

Even after accounting for a wide range of other factors, exclusions remain the strongest predictor of criminal justice involvement. Other characteristics—including gender, some ethnic backgrounds, economic disadvantage, special educational needs, and lower attainment—are also linked to higher likelihoods of offending, though their effects are smaller. The findings presented here are not causal, but do highlight a strong and consistent relationship between exclusion from school and contact with the criminal justice system.

Key messages

- Data demonstrates that **exclusions are strongly associated with involvement in the criminal justice system.**
- Around **one in six excluded pupils had a caution or conviction**, with the likelihood notably higher among those who experienced more severe or repeated exclusions.
- **Both permanent and temporary exclusions are important**; and there is a clear pattern showing that as the number of temporary exclusions increases, so too does the likelihood of criminal justice system involvement.

Policy implications

This new, data-led evidence suggests that, alongside permanent exclusions, temporary exclusions and, importantly, their rates, are key indicators when considering the criminal justice system involvement of school pupils. An escalation in temporary exclusions should be treated as a serious cause for concern.

Implications for policy and practice consideration include reviewing whether both permanent and temporary exclusions – particularly as these escalate – should prompt a safeguarding approach in the school environment and wider support networks. Considerations should also be taken for when and how schools should use (and be supported to use) alternative strategies for school sanctions and how early interventions can be implemented.

Findings could be of use specifically in the context of the Safer Streets and Opportunities missions, due to the potential to develop positive interventions in relation to identifying and responding to increased vulnerability to youth offending.

This could begin with utilising this new evidence in debates and select committee activity as data-led findings to inform discussion. Collaborative working between policymakers and those in practice – for example school leaders – to explore the implications of these findings further could lead to change in policy or guidance with real-world impact for the future of our young people.

Note that the findings in this brief have been further supported by a recent Data First report, also funded by Administrative Data Research UK, and delivered with the Ministry of Justice. The report is available in ‘News, publications and events’ on the ADR UK website: www.adruk.org.

Author details

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Data information: This work was undertaken in the Office for National Statistics Secure Research Service using Data First linked administrative data. The use of the data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS or data owners (MoJ and DfE) in relation to the interpretation or analyses of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates. National statistics follow consistent statistical conventions over time and cannot be compared to Data First linked datasets.

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