

NEWS RELEASE – 21 JULY 2020

School's out for 'invisible' girls

Vulnerable girls missing from formal school exclusion figures

- Analysis reveals gender bias with 'invisible girls' missing from official exclusions data
- Pupils with experience of social care more likely to experience all forms of exclusion
- 15% of vulnerable children experience 58% of multiple fixed term exclusions
- Pupils with Special Education Needs eight times more likely to be permanently excluded
- Report calls for changes to Government data collection on exclusions to mitigate gender bias
- Report calls for Government to invest in multi-agency preventative interventions for vulnerable pupils

Girls who are 'informally' excluded are absent from official school exclusion statistics, whereas boys are much more likely to go through formal processes. [A new report](#) by Social Finance for Cheshire West and Chester Council reveals a possible blind spot in exclusion statistics, as girls were found to be much less likely than boys to experience formal exclusions but more likely to experience 'informal' exclusions such as school change or early exit¹. While the disproportionate risk of exclusion to boys in England is widely evidenced², informal exclusions are not required to be recorded in the same way.

The report provides key insights on pupils most at risk of exclusion from school and presents recommendations on how to address these challenges.

Councillor Bob Cernik, Cabinet Member for Children and Families at Cheshire West and Chester Council, said:

"In west Cheshire we understand how damaging exclusion can be for children and young people, their families and carers, and how this can have a long-term impact for everyone involved. Although our exclusion rates are below the national average, we wanted to challenge ourselves to really understand which pupils are most at risk and how we can better support them."

Formal permanent exclusions rely on a panel decision made with involvement from the school, governors, the council and the child's parent/carer. The decision is recorded in schools' data, along with the reason for exclusion. This can trigger support for the child and parents or carers have the right to request a review of the decision.

'Informal' exclusions do not result in flags against a child's name in the way formal ones do. But they also do not result in the same processes that provide accountability checks and balances for the child and parent/carer. This means girls may be missing out on support available to excluded children.

Sara Parsonage, Associate Director at Social Finance, said:

¹ When a pupil leaves school before finishing year 11 and does not finish school elsewhere

²The Government's Timpson Review noted "this is a trend that has persisted for many years."

“Nationally, we need to use data to look beyond only formal exclusions. Otherwise, we risk keeping girls ‘invisible’ in our data and in our responses. We cannot allow gender bias to prevent girls from getting the vital support they need.”

The reason for this gender disparity is unclear and requires further research. The study found that boys were more likely to receive a formal exclusion for every reason, even when other factors were controlled for. Proportionately, formal fixed term exclusions for girls are more likely to be recorded as due to “disruptive behaviour” (45%) than boys (33%). Whereas physical or verbal abuse account for 41% of recorded fixed term exclusions for girls and 47% for boys, failing to explain the difference in statistics.

Pupils with experience of social care were also found to be at higher risk of all forms of exclusion compared to their peers. They were found to be four-to-five times more likely to be persistently absent (absent over 10% - more than double the average). Girls and boys were found to experience similar levels of persistent absence, another under reported form of exclusion as shown in the study.

“We found that absenteeism increases around the time of an informal or formal exclusion and does not recover afterwards. This questions the usefulness of exclusion as a disciplinary measure for vulnerable children. We need to better understand the relationship between absenteeism and a child’s needs. This is hugely important in the context of Covid-19 as schools return.” **says Parsonage.**

Vulnerable children not attending school during lockdown has been a challenge for schools across England. Issues like undetected child protection needs, in the context of increased domestic abuse reports during lockdown, are raising concerns for schools and local authorities across the country. It’s feared many children will return with higher needs, which could result in an increase in exclusions in the coming academic year. The damaging impact of which is well documented in terms of educational outcomes and life chances.

Many pupils who are excluded have needs that do not meet thresholds for targeted support. Some schools told Social Finance that excluding a pupil can be a last resort way to access support for them, due to the pressures created by high thresholds, squeezed budgets and performance tables. The report shows this can act as a perverse incentive to exclude children with additional needs, working against schools and councils who want to provide pupils with the support they need earlier.

Disadvantaged schools with high proportions of pupils with additional needs were found to be under increasing pressure pre-lockdown, with some excluding over 10% of pupils formally or informally. The analysis shows the small number of high excluding schools, often in deprived areas, were a symptom of budgetary pressures and a lack of support for lower level needs. This particularly affected pupils experiencing challenges at home and with mental health or learning needs, key issues in the context of Covid-19. The report recommends targeting Government and local support to these schools, which are likely to be under ever increasing pressure post-lockdown.

“It’s highly likely that this will be an issue in other local authority areas and we hope that sharing our findings will help other councils target support better to children most at risk of being excluded after lockdown” **says Councillor Cernik.**

At the point of exclusion, councils become financially responsible for the pupil and support their onwards education through alternative schooling. The high cost of exclusion to the state is

documented in other research³ and is estimated at £370,000 per pupil in extra education, benefits, healthcare and criminal justice costs. As exclusions rise, council budgets are put under increasing strain, further limiting resource available for early interventions.

“Our analysis shows we need a better understanding of exclusions, in order to prevent them. Without the right data, we cannot effectively respond to the academic, social or financial impacts of this issue. All pupils, whether boys or girls, deserve to access the support they need, when they need it.” **says Parsonage.**

“There is strong partnership working across the local authority, schools and others working in the borough. All key stakeholders share the collective vision and dedication to address this issue. The findings of this report will be instrumental in re-modelling pathways, systems and support around school exclusions in west Cheshire as we work together to ensure that children and young people get the support they need to achieve their best” **says Councillor Cernik.**

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

For further information contact Huw Thomas (huw.thomas@socialfinance.org.uk, 020 7770 6836 #5157) or Antoinette Ale (antoinette.ale@socialfinance.org.uk, 020 7770 6836 #5160)

About Social Finance

Social Finance is a not for profit group that creates better solutions to social problems in the UK and internationally. We partner with the government, the social sector and the financial community to improve people’s lives through better public services, a stronger voluntary sector and a clear focus on outcomes. We combine data science, financial insight, service design and social issues analysis. For more information visit: <https://socialfinance.org.uk>

About the report

The [‘Maximising Access to Education: who’s at risk of exclusion? An analysis in Cheshire West and Chester’](#) report uses a child-centric approach to data science to identify the pupils most at risk of exclusion locally. The report provides key insights on pupils most at risk and presents recommendations on how to address these challenges. Through combined qualitative and quantitative research methods, the report brings forward insights from interview with schools, pupil referral units, social care and a range of Local Authority education teams. The analysis combines datasets from across schools, children’s social care, SEN and indices of multiple deprivation. We are grateful to Cheshire West and Chester County Council for their proactive partnership, as well as their openness and willingness to share learnings to further a collective understanding of this national issue.

Key findings include:

- 58% of multiple fixed term exclusions (2+) experienced by 15% of children – those with experience of social care support or Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) needs
- Pupils with SEN are eight times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion
- Pupils with SEMH needs were more likely to receive all forms of exclusion (permanent, fixed-term, school move, managed move, early exit and persistent absence)
- Pupils with experience of social care more likely to experience all forms of exclusion (as above) and four-five times more likely to be persistently absent in particular
- Girls more likely to experience informal exclusions where there are no accountability measures – early exits and school moves.
- Boys more likely to experience formal (permanent or fixed-term) exclusions. Three quarters of formal exclusions experienced by boys.

³ Gill, Quilter-Pinner & Swift, ‘*Making the difference: breaking the link between school exclusion and social exclusion*’, IPPR, 2017

- Persistence absenteeism (more than 10%) increases before exclusion (PEX, FTE or school move) and does not reduce after it. Average absenteeism 5%.
- In the highest excluding schools, more than 10% of pupils receive two or more fixed-term exclusions
- Lack of financial support for pupils who do not meet thresholds is creating perverse incentives to exclude vulnerable children. Excluded pupils are putting pressure on Local Authority budgets – costs could be saved if pupils are given the support they need earlier
- Although Looked After Children are protected from permanent exclusion they are most likely to receive all other forms of exclusion. They represent 3% of children and a quarter of all serious multiple exclusions (more than five fixed-term)
- ‘Informal’ exclusions used here is not a formal definition – it refers to forms of exclusion identified in the report other than permanent or fixed term.