



Department  
for Education

# **School exclusion trial evaluation**

**Research brief**

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**The Institute of Education (IoE) and the  
National Foundation for Educational  
Research (NFER)**

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## Overview

### *Background*

The School Exclusion Trial (SET) tests the benefits of schools having greater responsibility for meeting the needs of permanently excluded pupils and those at risk of permanent exclusion. This includes schools having more responsibility for commissioning Alternative Provision (AP), and local authorities (LAs) passing on funding to schools for this purpose.

The trial started in autumn 2011 (with changes being implemented at different times since then) and runs to August 2014. It involves volunteer schools drawn from 11 LAs.

The trial is taking place in the context of a range of educational reforms relating to behaviour, AP and attainment that have impacted on *all* schools, such as new Ofsted inspection arrangements, reforms to school performance measures and changes to AP governance and funding. Taken together, these reforms have changed the way that *all* schools approach the education of all pupils and particularly those at risk of exclusion. In terms of the evaluation, both trial and comparison schools have responded to these reforms, which means that the lack of differences between trial and comparison schools in many of the aspects explored in the research was almost certainly as a result of all schools responding to these changes.

The evaluation assessed the issues emerging from the implementation of the trial and the impact it has had on pupils, schools, LAs and AP providers.

### *Key findings*

#### The local authority perspective

LAs took a range of approaches when implementing the trial. In one LA, the legal duty to arrange suitable education for permanently excluded pupils was temporarily transferred to schools through a Power to Innovate (PTI). The remaining ten LAs implemented their approaches under the existing legislative framework.

Participating schools and LAs had different conceptions of what it meant for schools to take increased responsibility for permanently excluded pupils and those at risk of permanent exclusion.

Overwhelmingly the evidence suggested that trial schools were taking increased responsibility for pupils at risk of exclusion. Trial LAs reported that school staff were at least partly responsible for making AP arrangements. This was not the case in comparison LAs.

Trial schools were more likely than comparison schools to have funding devolved to them, be involved in commissioning AP and monitoring the outcomes of AP.

Changes resulting from the trial included the increased use of partnership working and collective decision making through the use of panels (e.g. district panels, fair access panels); enhanced quality assurance (QA), accreditation systems and service level agreements for AP providers; increased collaboration between schools (e.g. pupils transferred to another school for a trial period); an increase in managed moves; revised commissioning procedures; more early intervention programmes to prevent exclusion; the use of time-limited AP (to avoid permanent exclusion); and the closure of pupil referral units (PRUs).

LA leads and lead teachers agreed that partnership working, particularly as it related to managed moves, had increased as a result of the trial, processes were more transparent and rigorous, and information about pupils and tracking of progress were improved.

#### The school perspective

Teachers reported that fewer children on average had been permanently excluded from trial schools than comparison schools.

There was a change in the pupils designated as at risk during the trial. Schools' judgements of pupils at risk of exclusion were reviewed regularly and adjusted and the provision to support many of these pupils was effective insofar as they were removed from the at risk list.

#### In-school provision

Learning support units, inclusion coordinators, and revised school timetables were considered effective in relation to preventing exclusions, improving attendance, improving attainment and improving behaviour.

#### Alternative Provision

Schools were making more effective use of data to identify patterns of behaviour in order to put in place appropriate support for pupils.

#### Pupil characteristics and outcomes

There was no identified difference in attainment between trial and comparison schools. It may be too soon for this to have occurred, or it may be a reflection of changes in approach adopted by both trial and comparison schools in response to wider educational reforms. In many trial schools there had been an increased focus on GCSE attainment, particularly in English and maths, for those in PRUs and AP.

## Background

In recent years there has been increasing concern about the variable effectiveness of Alternative Provision (AP) in providing suitable education for excluded pupils, the low levels of attainment of pupils in AP and the level of accountability in relation to AP (Ofsted, 2011; Taylor, 2012; DfE, 2014). A raft of measures has been put in place to address these issues including the opportunity for setting up AP academies and free schools and an increasing focus in Ofsted inspections on the behaviour, attainment and safety of pupils in AP. Other significant reforms relating to raising standards of behaviour and attainment in schools have also been implemented including more rigorous inspection criteria and changes to GCSE and vocational qualifications. These reforms can be expected to impact on all schools nationally.

Currently, if a pupil is permanently excluded from school, local authorities (LAs) are responsible for arranging suitable education for such pupils (DfE, 2012). Increasingly, LAs are delegating some responsibilities for excluded pupils to schools and it is within this context that the School Exclusion Trial (SET) was implemented.

SET is a pilot programme implementing the proposals set out in the White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010). The paper reiterated the authority of headteachers to exclude pupils when there is no other option, but proposed that this should be balanced by giving schools responsibility for the quality of the education that those pupils received and the attainment levels that they achieved. The trial gave schools the opportunity to find and fund AP for permanently excluded pupils and those at risk of permanent exclusion and explored the impact of these changes.

The trial started in autumn 2011, with LAs and schools rolling out the changes in processes and financial responsibility for AP from this date until August 2014. This is the final evaluation report.

## Aims

The main aims of the evaluation of SET were to:

- assess the impact on schools, pupils (including those most vulnerable to exclusion) and LAs of devolving the responsibility for AP for excluded pupils to schools;
- assess whether the trial had increased the use of early intervention and family support and whether this had had any impact on pupil outcomes for those at risk of permanent exclusion;
- identify the lessons for any future implementation of the approach; and
- assess the cost-effectiveness of the new approach and the impact on the AP market.

## Methods

### Overall design

A mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) longitudinal (over two years 2012–2013) and comparative (trial and comparison schools) design was adopted for the research.

### Data collection instruments

A pupil profile form (PPF) was used to collect information about pupils at risk of permanent exclusion in trial and comparison schools and the interventions adopted to support them. This was completed by schools throughout the summer and autumn of 2012 and followed up in 2013. It enabled identified ‘at risk’ pupils to be followed up throughout the course of the trial.

The National Pupil Database (NPD) was used to:

- model the national profile of permanently excluded pupils;
- enable a comparison of the characteristics of the pupils at risk of permanent exclusion in trial and comparison schools and the national profile; and
- provide additional information about pupils designated as at risk of permanent exclusion by trial and comparison schools.

Questionnaires for lead teachers in trial and comparison schools reflected the position in schools as a whole and were used to establish:

- levels of permanent exclusion;
- availability and perceived effectiveness of in-school provision to support pupils at risk of permanent exclusion;
- availability and perceived effectiveness of AP for such pupils;
- processes for commissioning and monitoring AP;
- strengths and issues relating to these processes; and
- financial information relating to in-school and AP resourcing.

Lead teachers in trial schools were also asked about changes occurring as a result of the trial.

Questionnaires were developed for lead staff in trial LAs to establish the provision for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion, changes resulting from the trial and financial information.

In the final data collection a subject teacher questionnaire was developed to explore any possible impact on the whole-school climate.

## Qualitative data

Telephone interviews were undertaken with lead staff in trial LAs to follow up questionnaire responses in more depth.

Seven case-study visits were undertaken, three in the first year of the trial and four in the second year. Semi-structured interview schedules were developed for use with a range of school staff including members of the Senior Management Team, Special Educational Needs Coordinators and support staff. Interviews were also undertaken with managers of AP, and pupils and parents/carers. The interviews were designed to gain deeper insights into current practices, changes underway and the experiences of pupils and parents/carers.

Questionnaires with open questions paralleling the interviews were sent to staff in the LAs involved in face-to-face fieldwork visits during the years when they were not visited.

## The sample

Eleven LAs in total participated in the trial. Table 1 sets out the return rates for each of the instruments.

**Table 1 Participants in final data collection (2013)**

	<b>Schools in sample</b>	<b>Lead teacher questionnaire</b>	<b>Subject teacher questionnaire</b>	<b>Pupil profile form (PPF)</b>	<b>Pupils listed on PPF</b>
Trial sample	88	63	267	47	677
Comparison sample	47	29	138	21	308

These numbers are small and are lower than anticipated. Findings based on the teacher surveys or on pupil data collected directly from schools should be interpreted with caution. They are unlikely to be nationally representative or to give a reliable measure of impacts.

Telephone interviews were undertaken with LA officials from all LAs involved in the trial in phase 1 and the final phase of the research.

Seven LAs participated in the fieldwork. Three were visited during the 2011–12 academic year, and four in 2012–13. In the years when they were not visited questionnaires were completed. In addition, across the two years of the research, 56

school staff were interviewed face to face, 12 parents/carers, 35 pupils, 20 AP providers and five LA staff. Visits were made to a total of 20 schools.

## Key findings

### Implementation of the trial: the local authority perspective

LAs, who were all volunteers, joined the trial for a variety of reasons. For example, some LAs were keen to be a part of shaping future policy; some wanted to try a different approach to address particular local issues; and some joined because they felt that the approach they were already adopting reflected the principles of the trial. As a result, some change was already underway prior to the start of the trial.

Approaches to implementation differed between authorities. Only one LA adopted the Power to Innovate as a means of transferring the LA's legal duty to arrange suitable education for permanently excluded pupils to schools. The remaining ten LAs implemented the trial under the current legislative framework.

The concept of greater school responsibility was interpreted in a variety of ways. For example, in some trial areas it meant schools taking a range of actions to avoid the use of permanent exclusion (with the LA playing more of a role once a permanent exclusion was deemed necessary), while for others, school responsibility extended to pupils who were permanently excluded.

There were differences in the perceptions of schools and LAs in relation to the extent to which schools had taken responsibility for permanently excluded pupils. This may have been because LAs and schools had different conceptions of what it meant to be responsible, for instance, legal, financial, practical or moral responsibility.

A range of funding approaches were adopted in trial LAs. For example, some LAs had put in place shadow budgets so that schools could have some measure of control over their AP funds, whilst some others assigned each school with a set number of AP places.

There was considerable variation in the AP practices of schools as reported by LAs. Trial schools were more likely than comparison schools to have funding devolved to them, be involved in commissioning AP and monitoring the outcomes of AP. Being part of the trial had made a difference to the prevalence of these practices but all were already in place in some LAs prior to the trial. Changes resulting from the trial that were particularly highlighted by LAs included increased use of partnership working and collective decision making through the use of panels particularly in relation to managed moves, e.g. district panels, fair access panels; enhanced quality assurance (QA), accreditation systems and service level agreements for AP

providers; increased collaboration between schools, e.g. pupil transferred to another school for a trial period; more managed moves; revised commissioning procedures; an increase in early intervention programmes to prevent exclusions; time-limited AP (to avoid permanent exclusion); and the closure of pupil referral units (PRUs).

Most LAs had retained PRUs but frequently with new roles, for instance, commissioning or quality assurance of AP.

Pupil placement panels were in place in several LAs. Their work had become more transparent and rigorous since the implementation of the trial. In many instances, partnerships used managed moves successfully. The regularity of partnership meetings and the transparency of processes contributed to the success of managed moves.

LA leads and lead teachers commented that partnership working had increased and that processes had been made more rigorous. Information about pupils was improved and better tracking of progress was in place.

The overriding theme which emerged from the LA interviews and case-study visits was that trial schools were taking an increased responsibility for pupils at risk of exclusion, which in turn meant that they were working to place young people in the most appropriate provision.

## **Implementation of the trial: the school perspective**

More trial schools than comparison schools had retained responsibility for excluded children, although, overall, the percentage of trial schools that reported having continuing responsibility for the educational provision of permanently excluded pupils was very low. This may have been in part because some were committed to avoiding permanently excluding any pupils.

Fewer children on average were reported by lead teachers to have been permanently excluded from trial schools than comparison schools.

The majority of lead teachers reported that their schools had not made changes to exclusions policies as a result of the trial, although some changes had occurred in relation to practice in terms of early intervention/behavioural support in schools, use of AP and working with other schools.

Schools' judgements of pupils at risk of exclusion were reviewed regularly and often adjusted, with pupils quite likely to be removed from, or added to, the list from one year to the next. This suggests that the provision for pupils deemed at risk of permanent exclusion is frequently effective, to the extent that they can be removed from the at risk category.

Overwhelmingly, trial schools were taking an increased moral and practical responsibility for pupils at risk of exclusion which in turn meant that they were working to place young people in the most appropriate provision.

### **Implementation of the trial: in-school provision for pupils**

Schools were doing a great deal to identify and support pupils at risk of exclusion. On average, schools had 15 in-school interventions in place. There were no statistically significant differences between trial and comparison schools in the academic year 2012–13 in relation to which in-school interventions were adopted.

The use of inclusion/learning support units increased in all schools during the trial, while the use of 'time out' provision decreased. Involvement in the trial per se did not seem to have an impact on the type of provision in place at school level – provision changed in comparison schools too.

In trial schools, at risk pupils were likely to be in receipt of school–home liaison, behaviour management, behaviour support and a revised timetable. Support via a learning support unit (LSU) was adopted less in comparison schools than in trial schools.

LSUs, inclusion coordinators, and revised school timetables were considered effective in relation to preventing exclusions, improving attendance, improving attainment and improving behaviour in trial and comparison schools. Comparison teachers were less positive about the effectiveness of LSUs for reducing exclusions or improving behaviour. They were more positive about the impact of time-out provision for enhancing attainment or behaviour. The interventions which were in place were not always those which were evaluated more positively by schools.

### **Implementation of the trial: AP for pupils**

The percentage of trial schools sending pupils to spend time in another school was statistically significantly higher than that of comparison schools (59 per cent and 34 per cent; due to a greater increase in this type of provision over time in trial schools), as was the percentage of trial schools using additional services provided by the LA, such as a traveller education support service or a Looked-After Children (LAC) team (49 per cent compared with 28 per cent; due to a decrease in this type of provision in comparison schools since 2011-12). Specialist support, for instance, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and PRUs, remained the most common type of AP in place in both groups of schools.

Training providers, private sector organisations and work placements were all seen as effective in preventing exclusions and improving attendance. In addition, PRUs

were considered effective in improving behaviour and attainment, while time spent in a further education (FE) college was also seen as improving attainment. Trial schools were more positive about the effectiveness of PRUs for improving attainment than comparison schools.

The number of pupils subject to managed moves was small but trial schools accepted a statistically significantly higher proportion of pupils as the result of managed moves and had statistically significantly fewer pupils under consideration for moving out, than comparison schools.

There was increased transparency and more rigorous processes were in place relating to the use of managed moves in trial schools.

Schools in trial LAs were making effective use of data to identify patterns of behaviour in order to put in place support packages for young people.

Lead teachers in trial and comparison schools reported an increase in involvement in making arrangements for excluded pupils through managed moves or commissioning AP during the trial. A range of people were involved in making these arrangements.

LA leads and lead teachers in trial schools commented that partnership working had increased and processes had been made more rigorous, there was greater information about pupils and there were better tracking processes in place.

Lead teachers commented that the strengths of their AP arrangements depended on collaboration (good relationships with the LA, other schools and providers) and the process (its efficiency and rigour, quality assurance, and involvement of pupils and parents/carers).

Lead teachers perceived weaknesses relating to AP as processes (time, logistics, timetabling, costs); the provision (quality control, monitoring); and a lack of pupil or parent/carer engagement.

Trial and comparison LAs used site visits and written and verbal communication to monitor AP. Trial LAs were more likely than comparison areas to use feedback from parents/carers and pupils and monitor available LA or school databases.

LAs perceived that the strengths of monitoring included process (effective data sharing and tracking); collaboration (good communication with providers); and positive impact (helping to identify pupils' problems early and helping with reintegration). The most common issues mentioned by LAs were that monitoring was not sufficiently consistent and robust and that schools should be more involved and engaged.

## Characteristics of the pupil sample

Statistical modelling (based on data collected in administrative datasets and available just one year after the start of the trial) revealed that there was *not* a statistically significant difference between trial and comparison pupils at risk of permanent exclusion in relation to permanent exclusion, attendance, behaviour or attainment outcomes. It may be that it is too early to be able to detect an impact of the trial on such outcomes. There were also no statistically significant differences specifically related to being identified on the pupil profile form by the school.

There was a change in the pupils designated as at risk during the trial. Only 309 pupils of the original 985 (across both trial and comparison schools) were listed as at risk on both data collection occasions. The evidence suggested that the interventions had been successful in improving pupils' behaviour in terms of their designation as being at risk.

At risk pupils were much more likely to be boys, were unlikely to have achieved National Curriculum level 4 at the end of primary school, and had a relatively high likelihood of being eligible for free school meals (FSM). A high proportion had an identified special educational need (SEN) usually met through School Action or School Action Plus; only a small proportion had statements. A smaller proportion of pupils deemed at risk in the second data collection had SEN than those already on the list, in both trial and comparison schools.

Across trial schools there was limited evidence of a relationship between permanent exclusion and particular groups of young people.

The reasons given for pupils being designated as at risk related to factors within (poor behaviour) and outside school. Trial schools were significantly more likely to identify the home situation as a reason for concern than comparison schools.

## Pupils' outcomes

Multilevel modelling exploring the impact of the trial on attainment (key stage 3 average point score; key stage 4 total point score; and number of Level 1 and 2 GCSE passes), fixed-period exclusions<sup>1</sup> (number and length) and attendance (persistent absence and number of unauthorised absences) of pupils revealed no statistically significant differences between trial and comparison pupils who were identified through modelling to be at risk of permanent exclusion over the period of the trial evaluation. There were also no statistically significant differences specifically related to being identified as at risk by trial and comparison schools. The lack of

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers of permanently excluded pupils were too small to model.

differences may be due to the relatively short period of time that the trial had been in place or the other educational reforms impacting on both trial and comparison schools.

The interview data suggested that the overall outcomes for young people at risk of exclusion were improving. Strong systems were in place to monitor attendance, attainment and behaviour and tracking systems were also in place to monitor the destinations of young people after leaving school, AP and/or PRU provision. There was also evidence that AP was keeping young people engaged with education who otherwise might have become 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET).

In many trial schools there had been an increased focus on GCSE attainment, particularly in English and maths, for those in PRUs and AP. Within the trial LAs the PRUs were taking an increased responsibility to deliver GCSEs.

Schools and PRUs were seeking a balance between helping young people to achieve GCSEs in core subjects and in providing a wider curriculum offer that would engage them with education.

Changes in the criteria for the formulation of performance tables and 'accepted qualifications' over the period of the SET appeared to have had an impact on the qualifications that young people were offered. It also seemed to have made schools and LAs pay more attention to the value of the qualifications that young people achieved.

## **Initial impacts at school level**

Ninety-eight per cent of responding subject teachers had a positive view of their pupils' engagement during their own lessons and over 80 per cent viewed their school's approach to managing disruptive behaviour as at least 'quite effective'. There were no statistically significant differences in this regard between trial and comparison schools. Around a half of teachers reported an improvement in the effectiveness of their school's approach to managing disruptive behaviour and in the extent of the school's intervention work for behaviour or engagement.

Overall, the findings from the subject teachers across trial and comparison schools indicated that the management of pupils at risk of exclusion was generally effective and improving.

Multilevel modelling was undertaken to explore whether there had been an overall beneficial or detrimental effect on schools of being involved in the trial in relation to attainment, fixed-period exclusions and attendance. There was no statistically significant difference in any of the outcomes for trial and comparison schools. It may be too soon to identify the impact of the changes implemented by trial schools, or it

may be due to the fact that changes to the wider policy landscape meant all schools were making changes.

## **Value for money**

During the period of the trial, a higher percentage of trial schools had dedicated budgets for in-school interventions and AP. The proportions of all schools having dedicated budgets increased over the course of the trial, with a greater increase in trial schools.

In the trial schools, the budgets for in-school provision and AP reduced slightly over the course of the trial, while in comparison schools, the budget for in-school provision increased while that for AP decreased. These differences were not statistically significant. The budgets for both in-school provision and AP remained higher in trial schools. However, the difference was only statistically significant for AP.

The comparison schools had higher staffing levels for in-school support, allocated more hours and had a greater number of pupils receiving support than the trial schools. Comparison schools were clearly investing in a range of in-school support.

## **Conclusions**

At the time of the trial a great many educational reforms relating to behaviour, AP and attainment were taking place. These impacted on trial and comparison schools alike. The lack of differences between trial and comparison schools in many of the aspects explored in the research was almost certainly as a result of all schools responding to these changes.

The findings demonstrated that both trial and comparison schools had been engaged in enhancing their in-school provision for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion. Schools were clearly making great efforts to support these at risk pupils and had implemented a wide range of different interventions in school.

Trial schools were taking increased responsibility for pupils at risk of exclusion, which, in turn, meant that they were working to place young people in the most appropriate provision. They were involved in commissioning AP and monitoring its outcomes and there was evidence of increased partnership working, enhanced robustness of processes and greater use of data.

Over the course of the evaluation there was change in the pupils designated as at risk in both trial and comparison schools, with many of the pupils initially designated at risk no longer considered so. This suggests that the changes in processes and the interventions adopted by schools were having a positive impact on at risk pupils.

Schools were increasingly focused on raising attainment, particularly in relation to GCSE outcomes, especially in English and maths, for at risk pupils.

While at this point there were no quantitatively measurable differences in outcomes between trial and comparison schools, the self-reports from trial schools indicated that outcomes were improving. As a result of the trial, teachers reported that fewer pupils on average had been permanently excluded. Trial schools were also taking seriously their obligations to pupils once they had been excluded from school, although their responsibilities tended to be seen in practical and moral terms rather than those relating to financial or legal responsibilities.

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