

PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES: SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS, DISPROPORTIONALITY AND CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION

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1. Background

Background and aims of the research project

Listen Up was commissioned by County Lines Pathfinder, which is funded by the Youth Justice Board (YJB), to carry out research exploring relationships between disproportionality, school exclusions and increased vulnerability, to child criminal exploitation (CCE). The findings from this research complement and add to the findings from other recently published reports and reviews relating to similar themes in child safeguarding.

These published reports include:

1. Education Inclusion Project: exploring the impact of school exclusions on young people's vulnerability to serious violence in West Yorkshire (Crest, 2021)¹
2. Thematic inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation: on the experiences of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system (HM Inspection of Probation, 2021)²
3. Excluded or missing from education and child exploitation: literature review and stakeholders' views on safeguarding practices (Graham, 2021)³



¹ Crest 2021 - Education inclusion project – West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit (VRU)

² HM Inspectorate of Probation 2021 – A thematic inspection: Experiences of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system

³ Graham, 2021 – Excluded or missing from education and child exploitation: literature review and stakeholder views on safeguarding practice — report (Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme (TCE))

Table 1 below highlights several key points from the above-mentioned reports that resonate with the findings from this research. This includes the identified relationships between school exclusions, criminal exploitation, and exposure to violence and crime. Additionally, the inconsistencies in the availability and quality of early intervention services for minoritised⁴ children and young people are similarly investigated.

Table 1. Key findings from published research

| Education Inclusion Project Crest and West Yorkshire VRU | Thematic Inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation | Literature review TCE |
|--|--|---|
| There is a strong relationship between attending Alternative Provision (AP), Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and Special Units, and serious and/or violent offending. E.g., Research conducted by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) on young people and knife possession offences found that 85% of the study population experienced fixed-term exclusions and 21% experienced permanent exclusions. | HMI Inspectorate of Probation report that 60% of the boys subjected to court orders were excluded from school, out of which most of them were permanently excluded, and a third of them were victims of criminal exploitation. | While there exists a relationship between school exclusion and child exploitation causality is not established. Permanent exclusion of children and young people was found to increase risk of exploitation, while attending school on a full-time basis has proved to be a protective factor. |
| Schools are most likely to exclude children with social, emotional, and mental health needs, Special Educational Needs (SEN), those eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and those from 'Black, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT), backgrounds. | Opportunities for early intervention for boys, prior to becoming known to criminal justice services, were often poor or missed altogether. | Early help is crucial in stopping children or young people from being exploited. Once a child becomes entrenched in exploitation, it is often harder to provide support to put an end to their abuse and exploitation. |
| Inconsistencies in school inclusion policies translate to disconcerted and ingenuine efforts to proactively work on issues such as disproportionality and diversity. This can disadvantage ethnically minoritised children and families. E.g., Black Caribbean pupils are 3.5 times more likely to be PE. | There is insufficient exploration of the impact of racial discrimination upon the life experience of ethnically minoritised boys. | Expectations placed on schools become unrealistic and inadequate when a child is unable to access the support and resources, schools are to provide. |
| Socio-economic factors can further disadvantage some children and young people. E.g., MoJ research (2018) found that of the children who had committed the offence of possession of a knife, 41% were eligible for free school meals. | There is a disconnect between the national data on disproportionality and how it translates to supporting boys. Although many YOS have implemented action plans to address disproportionality, it is too early to review their impact. | Funding of schools can sometimes act as a barrier to supporting children and young people. There is a 'perverse' financial incentive for schools to permanently exclude a child or a young person who requires intensive, and thus expensive, support. It is cheaper for schools to exclude such pupils and have the local authority assume funding than have these pupils dual-registered in an alternative education setting such as a PRU. |

⁴ The term 'minoritised' recognises those individuals have been minoritised through social processes of power and domination, rather than just existing in distinct statistical minorities; it also better reflects the fact that minoritised ethnic groups, that are minorities in the UK, are majorities in the global population.

2. Research aims

The initial objective of this research was to undertake both quantitative and qualitative data analysis at the same level, exploring the relationship between school exclusion, disproportionality, and child criminal exploitation. However, due to the high level of quantitative data analysis established in the Crest Report (2021) it was decided to revise the focus of this research and concentrate on understanding the perspectives of professional stakeholders.

Therefore, the focus of this research was to explore educational and youth justice professionals' understanding and perspectives on the relationship between disproportionality in school exclusions and increased risk of child exploitation.

The following research questions were designed to guide the research and to contribute to the growing body of knowledge relating to disproportionality in school exclusions and increased risk of child exploitation.

Research questions

In relation to disproportionality in school exclusions and increased risk of child exploitation,

1. If and to what extent does the current data collected support a detailed analysis of individual experiences and how can an intersectional lens strengthen our understanding?
2. How can the experiences and insights of safeguarding professionals support improved outcomes for children and young people from minoritised backgrounds?
3. What current approaches, strategies or services are in place (whether individually or organisationally) that can support developments in addressing disproportionality in school exclusions?

3. Research design

The YJB selected four local authorities to be part of the pathfinder project. These local authorities were identified by the National Crime Agency (NCA) as areas with high numbers of county lines feeding into them. To ensure the anonymity of the children, young people, and the organisations themselves, the four local authorities are referred to numerically in this report. Quantitative data from the four areas, including relationships between school exclusions and a number of variables such as ethnicity, gender, age, SEN and types of exclusion, were collated by the YJB and shared with Listen Up.

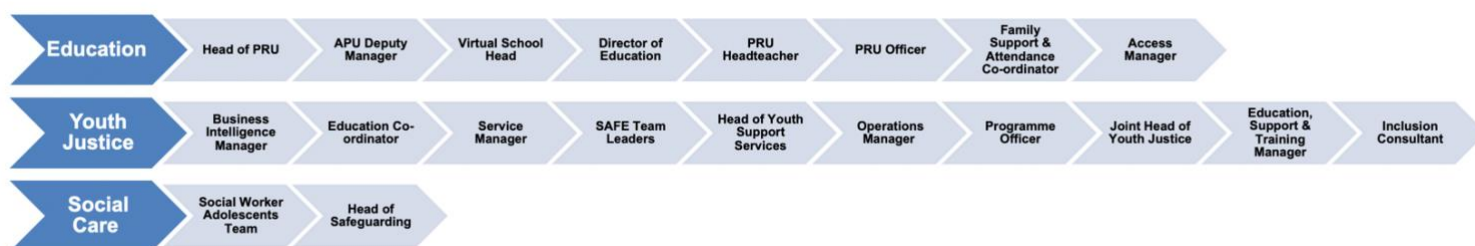
The research design included:

1. Undertaking a quantitative analysis of school exclusion data from the four areas, for 2018-19 and 2019-20. The analysis specifically focused on children, young people from ethnically minoritised backgrounds, and identified significant patterns across the

four areas. Where possible the data was analysed using an intersectional⁵ lens. School exclusion data in relation to ethnicity was mapped against total school populations.

2. Undertaking qualitative analysis of data from three focus groups. The focus groups were attended by twenty-seven professionals who were connected to supporting children and young people who may become vulnerable to CCE through school exclusion. The professionals represented relevant agencies across the four areas. These agencies included youth offending/justice, alternative education providers, social care, pathfinder leads and third sector organisations (please see figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Focus group participants by profession



3. A short survey was disseminated to the four pathfinder leads to identify services which are, or have been, available to support children and young people from minoritised backgrounds, in their respective areas. Other survey questions related to exploring the services needed to improve the support for children and young people from minoritised backgrounds.



⁵ Intersectionality refers to the understanding that people's identities and interactions with the world are layered and multifaceted – and that forms of discrimination like racism, sexism, ableism, classism, and homophobia can be experienced simultaneously.

3. Quantitative data analysis

Analysis of quantitative data on school exclusions and ethnicity: 2018/19 - 2019/20

Similar patterns emerged across all four areas in terms of disproportionality and school exclusion. The children and young people at most risk of exclusion included: GRT, White Irish Traveller, Mixed White Black, and Black Caribbean. A few inconsistencies were identified in the collected data, and some additional work was required to achieve uniformity across the data sets.

Table 3A. Comparison of research findings from areas 1-4 with national data on school exclusions

| Quantitative data category | Area 1 | Area 2 | Area 3 | Area 4 | National data (Permeant Exclusions) |
|--|---|--|---|-------------------------|--|
| Highest disproportionality group | GRT | GRT | 'Not obtained/refused' followed by White Irish Traveller | White Irish Traveller | GRT |
| 2 nd highest disproportionality group | Mixed White Black | White Irish Traveller | GRT | Black Caribbean | White Irish Traveller* |
| 3 rd highest disproportionality group | Black Caribbean | Mixed White Black | Black other | GRT | White/Black Caribbean* Different term used to data provided |
| 4 th highest disproportionality group | White Irish Traveller | Black Caribbean | Mixed White Black | Mixed White Black | Black Caribbean |
| Lowest exclusion rates | Asian Indian | Asian other | Chinese | Asian | |
| 2 nd lowest exclusion rates | Chinese | Mixed White Asian | Indian | | |
| 'Not obtained/refused' | Highest of all categories for this area 18/19 | | | | |
| Significant change in 19/20 | White Irish Traveller becomes the highest disproportionality group. | White Irish Traveller becomes the highest disproportionality group; a significant decrease in the GRT group. Chinese group increases and for the first time becomes a disproportionately represented group. | GRT becomes the highest rate; there are no longer any exclusion rates showing for the Chinese and Asian Bangladeshi groups. | Chinese rate decreases. | |

Research findings from quantitative data

1. As highlighted in the above table, the findings in the four areas closely reflect the national government data⁶ as well as the findings from the Crest Report (2021) and HM Inspection of Probation (2021). Across all four areas for the 2018-20 period, the following ethnic groups were disproportionately excluded (in descending order): White Irish Traveller, GRT, Black Caribbean, Mixed White Black Caribbean and Black other (terminology used in data collection methods).
2. In 2018-20 across all four areas, children, and young people from,
 - a. White Irish Traveller and GRT backgrounds were subjected to the highest disproportionate rates of school exclusion.
 - b. Black and GRT backgrounds were notable for high rates of exclusion.
 - c. other ethnic minoritised backgrounds were disproportionately excluded, but to a lesser degree, though this pattern was not observed across all four areas.

The ethnicities of the other children and young people who were disproportionately excluded include White Irish; Black African; Mixed White Black African; Asian Bangladeshi; Asian Pakistani; Asian Indian and Asian other.

3. Children and young people from White British backgrounds formed the largest excluded group. While making them the largest recorded ethnic group, there was no disproportionality recorded for children and young people from White British backgrounds in any of the four areas.
4. Children and young people of Chinese ethnicity were only disproportionately reflected in one of the four areas– in area two for the year 2019-20. Reasons for this remain unknown and are not explored in this research.
5. A high proportion of data in the reports was classified as either ‘not obtained/refused’ or ‘not yet obtained’. The ‘not obtained/refused’ rates were the highest in 2018/19 for areas one and three, and the highest for area three in 2019/20 for a subsequent time. Although this compromised the data set for these two areas, trends in the overall data sets were in agreement with local and national data, after excluding this anomaly. Further investigation is required on reasons behind not recording the ethnicities of children and young people in these two areas.
6. The ability to conclusively arrive at any intersectional findings was limited due to the small scale and focused remit of this research. Additionally, the shift in aim towards the perspectives of professionals also limited a deeper understanding of intersectional experiences. However, some basic intersectional analysis was achieved, although this mainly focused on ethnicity, eligibility for FSM and SEN. Table 3B below highlights the extent of the intersectional analysis

⁶ National government data is drawn from the latest census. More details can be found here <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/ethnic-groups>

Personal characteristics

An intersectional perspective requires sophistication in the collected data, to explore the combining influences of a person’s intersecting characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, class, age, disability and/or sexuality. In this research, an intersectional understanding of school exclusions was unable to be achieved due to the methods of data collection employed. Consequently, this section presents an alternative analysis comprising overlapping personal characteristics and experiences as opposed to an intersectional understanding. Additionally, when using intersectionality as an analytical tool, it is important to acknowledge its origins in Black feminism. When employing intersectionality as a framework researchers and practitioners in safeguarding should be mindful that their work amplifies the voices of Black women and girls and does not contribute to the erasure of their experiences (Davis and Marsh, 2022)⁷

Table 3B. Analysis of overlapping personal characteristics and experiences

| Area | Example of findings | Example of findings |
|------|---|--|
| 1 | White Irish Travellers are disproportionately eligible for free school meals. Although the difference between eligibility for FSMs and exclusion rates are the same for all three ethnic groups, it highlights a relationship between socioeconomic disadvantage and school exclusions. | Black Caribbean children and young people who were excluded for a fixed-term in area one in 2019/2020 were more likely to be eligible for FSMs than their White British peers and the population as a whole. |
| 2 | While 12% of the population was excluded for fixed-term, White Irish Travellers were found 7 times more likely to face fixed-term exclusions. This shows they are significantly more vulnerable to exclusions in proportion to other ethnic groups. | White Irish Travellers were disproportionately 10% more likely to be excluded than the White British population, or the total population, if eligible for FSMs. |
| 3 | White Irish Travellers were not disproportionately excluded in 2019/2020 and numbers were too low to comment on FSMs. | 40% of the overall excluded student population were eligible for FSMs. |
| 4 | 38% of Black Caribbean children excluded were eligible FSMs, which is less than the White British population and the population as a whole. | 80% of Gypsy Roma students excluded in 2019/2020 were recognised as having special educational needs, in comparison to 54% of Black Caribbean students and 64% of White British students. |

⁷ Davis and Marsh (2022) – The Myth of the Universal Child - in Holmes, (ed) - Safeguarding Young People Risk, Rights, Relationships and Resilience

4. Qualitative data analysis

Data analysis from focus groups

Focus group discussions were held with professionals to understand their experiences and perspectives relating to the issue of disproportionality, school exclusions and CCE. The data collected from the focus groups was thematically analysed and four principal themes were identified.

Table 4A below sets out two approaches to presenting the identified themes: the most relevant to the research objectives (left) and significance, in terms of the most frequently discussed, in the research findings (right). Both are presented in descending order of importance, top-to-bottom of the table.

Table 4A. Focus group themes identified in this study

| Most relevant theme to the research objectives | Most frequently and/or discussed in good depth in the findings |
|--|--|
| The issue of children and young people from minoritised backgrounds being disproportionately excluded from school is insufficiently highlighted, examined or understood within services and service responses. | Agencies supporting excluded children and young people can feel overwhelmed by the challenges they are presented with. Early interventions are either lacking or not comprehensive enough. |
| Specialist (culturally appropriate) services, where available, can be effective in supporting children, young people, and families from minoritised backgrounds. | Professionals find it difficult to talk about race and racism. |
| Agencies supporting excluded children and young people can feel overwhelmed by the challenges they are presented with. Early interventions are either lacking or not comprehensive enough. | Specialist (culturally appropriate) services, where available, can be effective in supporting children, young people, and families from minoritised backgrounds. |
| Professionals find it difficult to talk about race and racism. | The issue of children and young people from minoritised backgrounds being disproportionately excluded from school is insufficiently highlighted, examined or understood within services and service responses. |

Focus group themes

The four identified themes from the focus groups are discussed in detail below. The themes are presented with in the most relevance to the research aims.

1. The issue of children and young people from minoritised backgrounds being disproportionately excluded from school is insufficiently highlighted, examined or understood within service and service responses.

Although participants generally acknowledged that disproportionality in school exclusions of the named ethnic groups was of concern, it was not always clear whether they had been previously aware or considered the impact of these findings within the capacity of their roles. When discussing the issues of disproportionality, participants reported a lack of open and honest conversations within their service/organisation, including the need to conduct some difficult conversations within and across agencies. Quotes from various focus groups are shared below, as part of the research findings. Several of these highlight a potential intention to systematically avoid uncomfortable professional conversations and their impact on children and young people, from minoritised backgrounds.

'There's this constant shying away from those tough conversations and focusing on other aspects, like children with educational health care plans, or, you know, the girl - boy divide that sort of thing rather than....So, it's- it's, not actually raised, mentioned, it's shied away fromI think that's a failing....I think we don't have those tough conversations there in terms of your relationships with schools and or are any of those conversations being held at the moment?...We're polite....I'm trying to say we don't want to call a headteacher out for, your policies are racist. Nobody wants to use that word or that language. So, we shy away from it, I think.'

'I mean it's, it's shocking, but not surprising if that makes sense that this is endemic. What I would call endemic racism that exists, it will. It's institutionalized. completely institutionalized.'

'First thing we need is education on how to represent our minoritized communities because if we're gonna advocate for people, we need to do it in the right way. With the information from those minoritized groups about how to do it and how to represent them appropriately.'

'There is almost a fear in services of engaging with Gypsy Roma traveller communities sometimes like Traveller sites are kind of anecdotally spoken about as no-go areas for professionals and I wonder what the impact of that is...what impact that has on the way that the parents of Gypsy Roman traveller young people who are engaged when there are issues. I wonder how much that conversation, that open conversation with parents and young people happens around you know the behaviour we're seeing. How does that fit with the cultural norms? Because there are different cultural norms in terms of how disputes are resolved. I wonder what barriers that puts up in terms of the family's kind of trust and willingness to engage.'

The quotes above illustrate the complexity of issues in addressing disproportionality in school exclusions. It appears that many professionals and organisations are not having frank and challenging conversations about equity, diversity and inclusion, or the legal imperative to uphold the rights to protect children and young people from ethnically minoritised backgrounds. From all three focus groups in this study and those highlighted in Graham (2021), it appears that professionals are resolved to sustain interpersonal relationships over

identifying policies and processes that discriminate against children and young people from minoritised backgrounds.

2. Specialist (culturally appropriate) services, where available, can be effective in supporting children, young people, and families from minoritised backgrounds.

Support services that are designed to support children, young people, and families from specific minoritised backgrounds (such as Traveller specific services) were considered to be effective, but most have been reduced or cut back. These services were considered an important source of support for schools and young people by the participants in the focus groups. However, professionals reported that, although these services were considered effective at providing support, there was a lack of interest/referrals by schools when these services were available. Additionally, discussions across all three focus groups stated that schools are not always deemed to be culturally competent and able to meet the needs of children, young people, and families from minoritised backgrounds

The HM Inspection of Probation review (2021) discussed the importance of specialist services supporting the needs of children, young people, and families from minoritised backgrounds. The report stated the importance of early intervention services and noted that Black and mixed heritage boys have less access to such services prior to their entry into the criminal justice system.

Focus group discussions also reported that specialist services commissioned to support children, young people, and families from minoritised backgrounds were needed and useful. Examples of positive practice were shared on supporting children, young people, and families from GRT, leading to the development of a good knowledge base supporting GRT in this area. This was reported to positively impact the knowledge and confidence of staff to work with minoritised groups. E.g., one headteacher and deputy-head visited the GRT children and young people on-site, which led to positive engagement with the community, subsequently improving results.

From the survey on the availability of specialist services of the four areas, it was found that the need to have specialist services was understood. However, at least half did not have such services in place, and some were disbanded due to cutbacks. This finding was also echoed in the focus group data.

3. Agencies supporting excluded children and young people can feel overwhelmed by the challenges they are presented with. Early interventions are either lacking or not comprehensive enough.

The findings on this theme indicate that the challenges faced by professionals and agencies supporting children and young people excluded from school, are both chronic and complex. Focus group participants stated that this often made addressing disproportionality difficult and almost impossible. Participants of the focus groups acknowledged that the role of the school is critical in developing support for excluded children and young people. There was a strong narrative around schools' zero-tolerance and behavioural policies, which contradict agency strategies to re-engage children and young people back into education. These policies were also recognised to disproportionately impact males, Black children and young people and those at risk of, or experiencing, criminal exploitation. The quote below highlights the sentiments expressed across all three focus groups about the lack of resources and (perceived) attention afforded to positively engage with excluded children and young people.

'We've had young people who really want to get back into education ...I really struggle sometimes to understand why, you know teams can kind of engage with children, but sometimes education providers can't. I think some of our excluded cohorts are the most kind of captivating, motivated, you know, young people with so much potential, and ultimately we are kind of shutting down their worlds all the time'.

In Graham's review (2021), it is noted that schools also feel this pressure and that the expectations placed on them do not reflect the resources available, or the school environment. Focus group participants also shared a sense of disconnect between the excluded children's lived experiences and the support provided. This includes the lack of sharing of critical information on the child's life and not recording sufficient information regarding the reasons for the child to be excluded. This is an important issue to raise and has also been referred to in the Crest Report (2021). For instance, the report states that teachers tend to overreact to misbehaviour from children from GRT and Black Caribbean backgrounds. Participants felt that the schools they frequently work with would benefit from support to improve cultural competence and address implicit and explicit biases. The participants also expressed that it is nearly impossible to reverse the impact of children and young people's lived experiences, including trauma. Some professionals felt that it was almost 'too late' for agencies to make a difference and emphasised the need for comprehensive early intervention.

'I think by the time we're looking at young people who are either being made a subject of fixed-term exclusions at secondary school or at risk of permanent exclusion, the- the story behind them....it's a really long one, and there's an awful lot to undo to have a successful outcome..... I wonder how inclusive things feel for ethnic minority families. How much do they feel included in the school community? How much do they feel that their culture is understood? How does that relationship start off? What is that language that's used around ..behaviour and inclusion?

The findings relating to this theme appear to indicate an underlying tension between the role of support and safeguarding services and that of alternative education providers and mainstream schools. Focus group participants appeared overwhelmed and under-resourced in their capacity to address the needs of excluded children and young people. As highlighted above, the same sentiments have been echoed by schools. As with findings elsewhere (The Crest Report, 2021; Graham, 2021), the findings from this research reinforce the importance of early intervention that is both comprehensive and culturally sensitive.

Additionally, more needs to be done to create a national framework to tackle both high rates of exclusions and the levels of disproportionality discussed throughout this document. Taking note of joined up approaches such as the new policy guidance 'Developing a positive whole school ethos and culture- Relationships, learning and behaviour' implemented across Scotland. This framework sets clear priorities to deliver excellence and equity. It follows on from the 2013 relationship-based publication 'better relationships, better learning, better behaviour' and has a strong focus on restorative and inclusive approaches. Whilst not claiming to have solved the issue of equity in attainment, improvements in behaviour and school exclusion, nonetheless, permanent school exclusions have almost been eliminated in Scotland and fixed term exclusions have more than halved in the last decade.

4. Professionals find it difficult to talk about race and racism.

Although participants generally accepted that there was a need to address disproportionality, there was significant deviation and pushback when talking about race and ethnicity. Though this was not true for all participants. As highlighted above, some focus group members spoke candidly about the role racism may play in school exclusions and providing support. However, when discussing issues of race and racism, conversations were frequently swerved and shied away from. This included participants introducing other topics, such as the experiences of other minoritised groups (primarily Eastern European) who also appear in large numbers in youth offending and CCE figures. Other comparisons were made to the disadvantages faced by White working-class children and young people. Some other participants wanted to focus on the vulnerabilities of Looked After Children. This type of frequent deflection from potentially sensitive and uncomfortable topics is known as 'whataboutery'⁸. Purposeful and frequent deviation from the topics such as racism make it challenging for organisations to move into action. When conversations struggle to maintain focus on specific issues affecting children and young people from certain ethnic minoritised backgrounds, it proves challenging to increase accountability and progress into action.

This research does not intend to veer into whataboutery by sharing specific details and examples. However, the apparent difficulty in professionals discussing race and racism, and its impact appears to be an important stumbling block and requires addressing in a plain, urgent, and planned manner. The consequence of not doing so will undermine any future work in the area of disproportionality in school exclusions and the relationship to CCE.

5. Conclusions

Summary of findings

1. Disproportionality in school exclusions is an established pattern observed locally and nationally. More needs to be done to drive up levels of accountability and sophistication in data collected, analysed and in the actions taken by education providers.
2. Disproportionality in school exclusions relating to ethnicity did not appear to be routinely embedded into the knowledge or practice of professionals working with children and young people who are excluded from school.
3. When discussing racism, professionals can get stuck in defensive techniques (such as whataboutery). This limited the exploration of the links between disproportionality in school exclusions and which children may be at an increased risk of CCE.
4. There is an observable level of discomfort when talking to professionals about race and racism. This has a direct impact on opportunities to act.

⁸ The technique or practice of responding to an accusation or difficult and uncomfortable questions by making counteraccusations or raising different issues.

Conclusions

This research has looked at disproportional rates of school exclusions experienced by children and young people from ethnically minoritised backgrounds. These findings were reiterated in four areas identified by County Lines Pathfinder. Although some intersectional findings have been provided which speak to the influences of SEN and accessing FSM, this requires further research to draw any firm conclusions. As data on children at risk of, or experiencing, CCE was not available, conclusions on whether disproportionalities observed in school exclusions extend to vulnerability and actual experiences of CCE could not be reached. Further research in this area is welcomed and would be useful to the wider field of safeguarding practice.

As to be expected, schools were found to play a fundamental part when investigating exclusions. However, tensions between support and safeguarding services, and education were widely noted. The professionals in this research acknowledged that the relationship between support and safeguarding services and schools, needs to be nurtured and developed to ensure continuity of care and optimal outcomes for children and young people. Furthermore, this research highlights the need for partner agencies to acknowledge the impact of finite resources which is an evident pressure throughout the system.

The necessity to act at the right time with the right service was also discussed in relation to preventing school exclusions from occurring in the first place. Once a child has been excluded, more needs to be done to develop our collective understanding of the reasons and actions leading up to exclusions of minoritised children and young people. This should also include a review of school policies (such as zero-tolerance drugs or behavioural policies) that disproportionately affect children from minoritised backgrounds.

Another important finding relates to the reluctance and resistance of some professionals to discuss issues of inequality, race, and racism. An unwavering commitment to holding and acting on uncomfortable conversations is necessary if progress is to be made.

Finally, it is important that any further research in this area listens directly to the voices and experiences of children and young people from minoritised backgrounds.



5. Recommendations

| # | Recommendations | Suggestions for implementation |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | It is important that steps towards addressing disproportionality in school exclusions are founded in the experiences of children and young people from minoritised backgrounds. Therefore, the principal recommendation from this report is for the commissioning of further research that explores minoritised children and young people's experiences of school inclusion and exclusion. This research should also focus on the relationship between school exclusions, criminal exploitation, and exposure to criminality, more generally. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders are encouraged to form research partnerships that could lead to the commissioning of relevant research, and the shared support and engagement of children and young people from minoritised backgrounds. As the focus of this suggested research relates to the experiences of children and young people from minoritised backgrounds, every effort should be made that the research partnership appropriately reflects the diversity and inclusion the report aims to amplify. |
| 2 | Though there is growing acknowledgement of the relationship between school exclusions, criminal exploitation, and exposure to crime more generally, (Crest, 2021; HM Inspection of Probation, 2021 ⁹ Graham, 2021; The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2020) further work needs to be done to safeguard children and young people at the risk of exclusion. This includes improving data collection and increasing organisational accountability. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recording of children's and young people's demographic data should be monitored and reported annually, across all education provisions. There also should be the removal of categories such as 'not obtained', 'not yet obtained'. Categories such as 'refused' should only be used when the child young person or parent/carer has refused to share their ethnicity. In line with the finding from HM Inspection of Probation (2021), the Department for Education should hold academy trust chains, alternative education providers and local authorities, accountable for the disproportionality of minoritised children and young people in the context of permanent exclusions. |
| 3 | Agencies are encouraged to review their working relations and practices with education providers to (a) address commonly cited challenges and pressure-points, and (b) adopt and mirror restorative and relationship-based practices. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National and senior leaders across the sector are encouraged to review Scotland's approach to developing a nationwide inclusive school ethos based on relationships, learning and behaviour. |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The above approach requires the government, partner agencies, professional bodies, and unions to work collaboratively to move away from a practice of school exclusions and towards a culture of inclusion and restorative approaches. Over the last decade, permanent school exclusions in Scotland have almost been erased, and fixed-terms exclusions have more than halved. • Other approaches to improving inter-agency relationships may include increasing cross-organisational networking opportunities. |
| 4 | The decision to permanently exclude a child is never taken lightly, as recognised in this study, however, strengthening of children's rights and safeguarding in this process may increase the robustness of decision-making. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education providers are encouraged to include social workers and youth offending services in decision-making forums in cases of permanent exclusion. • Agencies should be urged to ensure that children from minoritised backgrounds have access to advocacy, and where necessary, legal representation, in case of permanent exclusions. |
| 5 | Agencies are encouraged to review their Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion policies in terms of holding and encouraging open conversations. Action should be taken to support services to become more culturally competent. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and support on cultural competence should be provided to all staff members and included as part of induction processes. • Training should be relevant to the organisation, of high quality and regularly updated. • Training should include a space for critical reflection and discussion around the organisation's EDI policies, diversity in the workforce and inclusion and support in the workforce. • Data relating to the demographics and experiences of the children, young people and families accessing the organisation's services should also be reflected in the training. |
| 6 | Education and youth-orientated services should review zero-tolerance and behavioural policies that disproportionately affect children and young people from minoritised backgrounds. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review of such policies should include the voice of children and young people from minoritised backgrounds. • Inclusion and restorative approaches (as adopted in Scotland) should underpin any reviews of exclusionary or zero-tolerance policies. |



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