

Review of support for suspended and excluded children in England and Wales

Summary

- YEF is seeking a team to conduct a mixed-method study into the support that schools in England and Wales offer to suspended and excluded children, and how this support can be improved.
- The study will inform future updates to YEF's practice and systems recommendations for the education sector.
- The deadline for the draft report is 13th March 2026. The deadline for proposals is 21st July 2025. We intend to have interviews with potential teams in w/c 28th July 2025.

Background

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is a charity with a mission that matters. We exist to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice.

Children and young people at risk of becoming involved in violence deserve services that give them the best chance of a positive future. To make sure that happens, we fund promising projects and then use the very best evaluations to find out what works. We also synthesise the best available evidence from across the world, and then aim to mobilise what we learn across various sectors to make a change to the lives of children.

It is also imperative that YEF fully understands the context in which children live, and in which services operate to support them. Only then can we make evidence-based recommendations on how best to reduce serious violence amongst children and young people. Alongside our [programme funding](#), and [evidence synthesis](#) work, we fund a wide range of research projects (including data analysis, youth understanding work, and practice reviews) to better understand young people's lives, and the systems and services that surround them.

The education sector is one such system that supports children.

YEF's education sector work

YEF has produced two guidance reports for the education sector:

- In May 2024, we published the [education practice guidance](#). This provided five actionable, evidence-based recommendations for school, college and Alternative Provision (AP) leaders across England and Wales on how to better protect children from involvement in violence.
- In May 2025, YEF published the [education systems guidance](#). This sets out eight recommendations for education policy makers on what they should do to better protect children from involvement in violence across England and Wales.

Both reports provide guidance on suspension and exclusion. The practice guidance encourages schools to provide a range of support to children who have been suspended or excluded, in addition to delivering behaviour policies and practices that reduce the risk of poor behaviour and exclusion. The systems guidance calls for changes to the new Ofsted Inspection Toolkits to encourage schools to focus more on the support they provide to suspended children.

This is because being suspended or excluded places children at greater risk of later involvement in violence. Even when accounting for a range of contextual factors (including previous behaviour), suspended or excluded children are more than twice as likely to perpetrate violence and almost five times as likely to offend.¹ Recent studies also point to a potentially causal link between exclusion and offending,² while studies of serious case reviews identify suspension and exclusion as ‘trigger points’ for risk of serious harm.³

Suspension and exclusion rates in England

The use of suspensions in England is rising. In 2022–23, they had increased to a record rate of 9.3 suspensions per 100 pupils (786,961 suspensions). This compares to a pre-pandemic rate of 5.4 (438,265 suspensions) in 2018–19. Repeated suspensions for children are also common and rising: in the spring term 2023–24, among the pupils who were suspended, 63% were suspended once, 31% were suspended two to four times, and 6% were suspended five or more times within the term.⁴ The number of children suspended at least once also rose by 28% between autumn term 2022–23 and autumn term 2023–24.

Exclusion in England is also on the rise. In 2022–23, the permanent exclusion rate was 0.11% (equating to 9,376 permanent exclusions) compared to a pre-pandemic rate of 0.10% (7,894 exclusions) in 2018–19.

Suspension and exclusion rates in Wales

We see a similar rise in fixed-term exclusions, and permanent exclusions in Wales. In 2013–14, the fixed-term exclusion rate (5 days or less) was only 41 per 1000 children; in 2022–23, it reached its highest rate recorded (65.4). Permanent exclusions are also at their highest value recorded (at 0.9 per 1000 children in 2022–23, up from 0.5 in 2018/19).

The support provided to suspended and excluded children

Deciding whether to suspend or exclude a child is challenging and requires headteachers to carefully balance the needs of the child with those of the wider school community. Headteachers in England currently think they are getting this balance right: only 2% of headteachers in England believe the suspension rate is too high.⁵ Without knowing the cause of rising suspensions, it would be wrong to call for a reduction in suspensions. Headteachers may be taking appropriate action in response to worsening behaviour.

¹ Rollings et al., *Association Between School Absence and Exclusion, and Violent Crime*, 2025 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/secondary-data-analysis/an-examination-of-the-association-between-school-absence-exclusion-and-violent-crime/>): DfE, *Education, Children's Social Care and Offending: Multi-level Modelling*, 2023

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1171532/Education_childrens_social_care_and_offending_multi-level_modelling.pdf): After controlling for a range of other factors, children who receive a suspension in years 7–10 are between four and five times more likely to be cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence. Those permanently excluded during those years are between one and two times as likely, with the risk being highest for those excluded in year 7. This risk declines with age, with those excluded in year 11 having a lower chance of later involvement in violence than children not excluded.

² Cathro et al., *School Exclusions and Youth Custody*, 2023 (<https://www.bi.team/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Nuffield-Foundation-Exclusions-and-Youth-Custody-Report-vFinal-2023-01-17.pdf>)

³ The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, *It Was Hard to Escape*, 2020

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e5e7f47e90e077e3385cb44/Safeguarding_children_at_risk_from_criminal_exploitation_review.pdf)

⁴ [Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England, Spring term 2023/24 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

⁵ Teacher Tapp survey, answered by 699 headteachers 19/12/2024

Instead, YEF contends that greater focus should be placed on what happens to children once they are suspended or excluded, as the provision of support for these children, according to the survey results below, is not currently adequate.

When children in England are suspended for five days or less, the DfE advises that schools design a reintegration strategy to support their return to school and hold a reintegration meeting (with parents attending if possible). The DfE also advises schools to consider a range of support (including setting and marking schoolwork, daily contact with a designated pastoral professional in school, report cards with personalised targets, mentoring and academic catch-up support).⁶

However, evidence suggests that the provision of this support is very limited in practice. When asked in February 2025 about the last child they suspended for between two and five days:

- Only 30% of headteachers and senior leaders in England reported setting and marking schoolwork.
- Only 24% assigned a pastoral staff member to check in with the child daily.
- Very few provided intensive support once the child returned (only 7% provided a mentor; only 9% offered academic catch-up support).
- Less than a third (31%) assessed the child's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or health needs.
- Only 17% reported providing a report card with targets to support the child upon their return.
- While 67% reported holding a reintegration meeting with parents, less than half (49%) designed a reintegration strategy.⁷

Suspended children also report a lack of support. Of 1,300 children surveyed in 2024 who reported previously being suspended:

- Only 27% received a phone call from school each day they were suspended.
- Only 29% were set schoolwork.
- Only 6% received a mentor.⁸

If a child is suspended for longer than five days, schools are expected to arrange for appropriate AP. However, children also frequently lack adequate support during this process. Only half of children, parents/carers and AP professionals believe that children are provided with the right support when moving between schools and AP.⁹

Schools' approaches to commissioning and liaising with AP also require improvement. Headteachers were asked in January 2025, 'Think of the last child you referred to off-site AP for part-time or full-time provision'. Only:

- 44% visited the setting.
- 51% shared information regarding the child's needs and context.
- 12% ensured the curriculum continued from the child's previous learning.
- 40% held regular review meetings with the child in AP.
- 33% held reintegration meetings when the child returned.

⁶ DfE, *Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from Maintained Schools, Academies and Pupil Referral Units in England, Including Pupil Movement: Guidance for Maintained Schools, Academies, and Pupil Referral Units in England*, 2024

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66be0d92c32366481ca4918a/Suspensions_and_permanent_exclusions_guidance.pdf)

⁷ Teacher Tapp survey, answered by 2,678 headteachers and members of SLT on 14/02/2025

⁸ YEF, *Children, Violence and Vulnerability*, 2024 (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/children-violence-and-vulnerability-2024/>)

⁹ Ofsted and the CQC, *Alternative Provision in Local Areas in England: A Thematic Review*, February 2024

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision-in-local-areas-in-england-a-thematic-review/alternative-provision-in-local-areas-in-england-a-thematic-review#fnref:9>): The report includes a survey of 700 parents, children and professionals. It finds that 50% agree that 'Children in AP and their families get the right support when moving between services or providers in their local area'.

- 18% provided a mentor when the child returned to school.¹⁰

When pupils are excluded in England, the responsibility falls to the local authority to arrange for appropriate support and education. Aside from the requirement to arrange for full-time education from the 6th day of exclusion, we have less understanding of what additional support local authorities are providing to children.

In Wales, children who are suspended or excluded from school are also entitled to specific support measures aimed at ensuring their continued education and facilitating their reintegration into mainstream schooling. These measures are outlined in the Welsh Government's guidance on school exclusions.¹¹ However, we know less about whether this support is being successfully delivered to children across Wales (as the aforementioned Teacher Tapp surveys only cover England).

The aim of this project

The aim of this project is to better understand suspension, exclusion, and the support that follows. Specifically, why are suspension and exclusion rates rising, and what support are schools, colleges and AP/EOTAS settings in England and Wales offering to children who are suspended (known as 'fixed term exclusions' in Wales) and excluded. In addition, how could this support be strengthened to reduce children's risk of involvement in violence. The project will explore the barriers and enablers to delivering high-quality support, the variation in how schools, colleges, and local authorities approach this work, and the changes to policy and practice that could improve support. We are especially interested in understanding how support can be improved in a way that addresses racial disparities.

The project will focus on primary and secondary schools (not further education colleges). It will also focus on the support provided *after* suspension and exclusion (not support provided beforehand, such as internal AP or school behaviour strategies). Of course, these are hugely important areas of practice; however, we are keen to ensure that the research questions and scope remains manageable.

Race equity

There are significant racial disparities in suspension and exclusion rates. For instance, in England, Gypsy and Roma Traveller children, children of Irish Traveller heritage, children with White and Black Caribbean heritage, and Black Caribbean children are most likely to be excluded or suspended.¹² Racial disparities in these rates also exist in Wales. For example, pupils with a Roma ethnic background have the highest rate of fixed-term exclusions.¹³

The Youth Endowment Fund's mission is to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. We can't achieve this mission if we do not challenge these racial inequities. Addressing these disparities is an important aspect of our work, and so race features in the research questions posed in this call for proposals.

¹⁰ Teacher Tapp survey, answered by 625 headteachers 20/01/2025

¹¹ https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2024-04/240410-exclusion-from-schools-and-pupil-referral-units.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

¹² DfE, *Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions in England, Academic Year 2022/23* (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/suspensions-and-permanent-exclusions-in-england/2022-23>)

¹³ <https://www.gov.wales/permanent-and-fixed-term-exclusions-schools-september-2022-august-2023>

Research questions

These research questions are only indicative, and we encourage bidding teams to propose amendments to them and/or additional questions that they think could help meet the aims of the project. We would expect to finalise the detailed research questions and methods with the appointed team.

Part 1. Understanding the context

1. Why are suspensions and exclusions rising? This could include (but is not limited to) consideration of:
 - a. Schools' decision making processes
 - b. Perceptions of behaviour in schools
2. What proportion of suspended and excluded children:
 - a. Experience multiple incidents of suspension and exclusion?
 - b. Are placed in different types of AP (state-funded, LA-funded, unregistered) in England, or different types of EOTAS in Wales?
 - c. How do these proportions differ for children from different ethnic backgrounds? And children of different ages?

Part 2. The support schools provide to suspended children

3. What support is currently provided to suspended children? We have *some* understanding of this from the aforementioned survey results, but we want to build on this insight. This should include consideration of:
 - a. Children suspended for less than 5 days (including support for children while they are suspended and any re-integration support offered post-suspension)
 - b. Children suspended and placed by the school in AP/EOTAS (and any reintegration support offered)
 - c. Whether children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities are able to access this support
 - d. How this support varies between school types (such as academies, LA-maintained, free schools)
 - e. What school perceptions of strong practice for supporting children are?
 - f. What additional support is there for those children who are at greater risk of involvement in violence?
4. What are the barriers and facilitators to providing better support to suspended children?

Part 3. Support provided to excluded children

5. What support do Local Authorities currently provide to excluded children? This should also include consideration of:
 - a. To what extent are children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities able to access this support?
 - b. What additional support is there for those children who are at greater risk of involvement in violence?

6. What are the barriers and facilitators to AP/EOTAS settings providing support to children in their settings? (we would expect here a discussion of how funding arrangements can be a barrier for AP settings).

Part 4. Insights for policy and practice

7. What system changes (to funding, regulation, inspection, training and guidance) are required to better support suspended and excluded children?
8. What should Headteachers and senior leaders in schools, colleges and AP do to better support suspended and excluded children?

Required outputs and suggested methodology

We are open to suggestions on methods. Bidders can consider drawing on:

- A rapid review of existing evidence and secondary data.
- Interviews and focus groups with classroom teachers, headteachers and members of senior leadership teams (in schools, colleges and in AP/EOTAS), local authorities, suspended and excluded children and their families.
- Case studies of schools providing packages of support to suspended children.
- Teacher Tapp surveys (at a cost of £1,000 per question), and additional surveys of teachers in Wales¹⁴. We are also open to teams proposing surveys of children and parents/carers.
- A survey of local authority and AP/EOTAS practitioners (Teacher Tapp surveys only cover school-based practitioners).
- Any more extensive secondary data analysis deemed to be possible. We are open to suggestion here, and would be open to expanding the timelines of the project if useful analysis (that would take longer) is suggested.
- An expert advisory group.

At the end of the study, we would expect a written report, comprising:

- a. An executive summary
- b. An introduction
- c. Methodology
- d. Findings (written discussion of each of the research questions in turn. We would also expect findings to be separated into a separate discussion for England and Wales where required)
- e. Conclusion and specific practical insights for policy and practice (again, these should be separated for England and Wales where required).

Upon sharing the final report with us, we would expect the research team to provide a short presentation to the YEF team on the study's findings. YEF will also pay for the peer review of the report.

¹⁴ Teacher Tapp surveys are only available in England. We welcome alternative ideas from bidders for teachers and school leaders in Wales.

Timeline

The deadline for proposals is 21st July 2025. We intend to have interviews with potential teams in w/c 28th July 2025. The deadline for the draft report is 13th March 2026, after which a peer review process will take place.

Budget

We expect the project to cost approximately **£100,000–£150,000**. However, we have some flexibility here, and will be judging bids on value for money rather than absolute cost. We would not expect VAT to be included in teams' budgets. Pass through VAT via sub-granting work to other organisations may in some circumstances be included. However, it is up to the bidding team to decide if they need to include VAT and any charges must be covered within the total grant amount.

Bidders are encouraged to use the [YEF budget template](#) to outline their costs, including for staff, travel and other direct costs.

Treatment of indirect costs/overhead costs is the main difference between YEF as a charity and other central government funders which operate Full Economic Costing (or a relatively high percentage of Full Economic Costing such as 80%). In this project, indirect costs include the costs of administration, such as personnel, finance, library, office costs and some departmental services. These should not exceed 20% of staff costs.

How to apply

YEF will judge research applications using the following criteria:

- **Subject expertise (20%).** How much expertise does the team have relating to suspension and exclusion?
- **Research experience (20%).** How much experience does the team have in delivering similar research projects? Does the team have expertise and experience in delivering research projects that aim to understand racial disparities?
- **Proposed methodological approach (40%).** What methodology has the team suggested, and does it match our needs?
- **Value for money (20%).** Does the bid represent value for money?

Where teams may be weak in any of the above areas, we encourage applicants to seek expert consultants and partnerships to supplement their bid. Proposals should be no longer than 2,500 words, and should set out the team's expertise, experience, methodological approach, and budget. You may attach relevant documents to support your application – this will not be included in the word count.

As noted above, we are open to research teams suggesting their own research questions, and/or suggesting improvements and amendments to our own.

Please email your application to hashim.ahmed@youthendowmentfund.org.uk and cc lucy.brimms@youthendowmentfund.org.uk by 21st July 2025. If you have any questions regarding the project, please email these to the above by 23rd June 2025.