



Department
for Education

Evaluation of the School Exclusion Trial (Responsibility for Alternative Provision for Permanently Excluded Children)

First Interim Report

Research Brief

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**The Institute of Education, University of London (IOE)
& the National Foundation for Educational Research
(NFER)**

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Key points

Overview

The Department for Education is running a three-year school exclusion trial, which started in autumn 2011 and continues until July 2014. It currently involves around 180 participating schools in 11 volunteer local authorities (LAs).

The trial sees schools taking on responsibility for placing permanently excluded pupils in alternative provision (AP), funding the placements from money devolved from LAs; and gives flexibility for funding earlier intervention to reduce the need for exclusion in the first place.

An evaluation is running alongside the trial, with the final report due in spring 2015. The evaluation will assess the issues arising from the implementation of the trial and the impact it has on pupils, schools, LAs and AP providers.

This report is a summary of the first of two interim reports. The report focuses on establishing a qualitative and quantitative baseline for the evaluation, but also presents some early findings from the first year of the trial. It is based on schools in the eight LAs that participated in the initial stage of the evaluation. Future reports will consider the outcomes of the trial, including the impact on pupils' attainment, and provide case studies of how particular issues have been addressed.

Key findings

Although at a very early stage of the trial, there was evidence from some trial schools that they have already started to implement changes, such as:

- changes to school processes (the introduction of new school-wide policies and strategies; the employment of new staff in specialised roles in schools; allocated budgets for AP);
- additional training for existing staff; and
- changes to the types of interventions offered (increased support for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion, including external AP and in-school provision).

There was also qualitative evidence from LAs that:

- partnership working between schools has increased and processes have been made more rigorous;
- some schools are directly commissioning AP;
- some pupil referral units (PRUs) have closed and the role and offer of others has changed to meet the needs of schools more closely;
- there has been an increase in the use of 'dual roll' where students remain on the school roll but are also registered with an AP provider;
- schools are taking increased responsibility for pupils at risk of exclusion;

- schools are preparing to offer a broader curriculum to meet the needs of all of their pupils; and some secondary schools are working in partnership with primary schools on transition issues to support pupils at risk of permanent exclusion.

Two issues were identified that directly relate to the future implementation of the trial. These were:

- ensuring that schools had the capacity and expertise to commission, manage and monitor AP; and
- increasing the extent of early intervention at the first sign of difficulties.

A more general issue that emerged was concern about the availability of sufficient, local, flexible, high quality AP to meet the needs of students, particularly at Key Stage 3 and Level 2.

These issues will be followed up in the subsequent evaluation reports.

1. Background

Context

Currently, local authorities (LAs) are responsible for arranging suitable full-time education for permanently excluded pupils, and for other pupils who – because of illness or other reasons – would not receive such education without arrangements being made (DfE, 2012). The governing bodies of schools are responsible for arranging suitable full-time education from the sixth day of a fixed period exclusion. Schools may also direct pupils off-site for education, to help improve their behaviour. Statutory guidance sets out the Government's expectations of LAs and schools who commission alternative provision (AP).

The children and young people educated in AP are amongst the most vulnerable in society. Providing AP is complex, as those needing it have a diverse range of needs, which may extend beyond school exclusion to medical issues, lack of a school place, or an inability to thrive in a mainstream educational environment. To be effective, AP must be capable of providing support to all pupils in order for them to achieve their full potential (O'Brien et al., 2001).

To meet these diverse needs, alternative provision in England can include pupil referral units (PRUs), hospital schools, further education (FE) colleges, training providers, employers, voluntary sector organisations, community services, youth services and other local agencies (QCA, 2004). More recently, AP academies and AP free schools have been introduced as a source of provision.

The White Paper, *'The Importance of Teaching'* (2010), set out the aim to improve the quality of AP, by increasing autonomy and encouraging new providers. In an Ofsted review on AP (2011), the quality of AP was found to be varied.

In 2011, Charlie Taylor, at the time the Government's advisor on behaviour, was asked to conduct a review of AP. His review confirmed that the quality of AP was variable; the system failed to provide suitable education for pupils; and that there was a lack of accountability in relation to outcomes (Taylor, 2012).

The trial

The school exclusion trial is a pilot programme implementing a proposal set out in the White Paper and highlighted in the Taylor review. The trial reiterates the authority of head teachers to permanently exclude pupils where this is warranted, but balances that authority by proposing that schools should have greater responsibility for the quality of education that those pupils receive and the attainment levels they achieve.

The trial started in autumn 2011, with volunteer LAs and schools rolling out the changes in processes and financial responsibility for AP from this date until April 2013. The trial continues until July 2014.

The trial sees schools gaining responsibility for finding and funding AP, by shifting money from LAs to schools, so that they can purchase the AP that they think will best meet the needs of their

pupils. This might include collaborating with other schools to provide suitable places or buying them from the LA, the voluntary sector or local colleges. The purpose of the trial is to test the workability of the approach, identify issues and barriers, develop solutions and ensure that the incentives work effectively.

The trial evaluation

The main aims of the evaluation are 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 has increased the use of early intervention and family support and whether this has had any impact on pupil outcomes for those at risk of 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.

This report is a summary of the first of two interim reports, the second to be delivered in spring 2014 with a final report in spring 2015. It is based on data collected from schools relating to the academic years 2010/11 or 2011/12 (depending on the date they joined the trial) and therefore provides baseline data for the subsequent years of the trial. Some tentative findings relating to progress and the forward trajectory of the trial were gathered in interviews undertaken in the summer term 2012 with LA and school staff. Future reports will consider the outcomes of the trial, including impact on pupils' attainment, and provide case studies of how particular issues have been addressed.

2. Evaluation methods and sample

Overall design

A mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative), longitudinal (over three years 2012-2015) and comparative (trial and comparison schools) design was adopted for the research. This report presents baseline findings from the LAs and schools that had agreed to participate and were able to return data by 31 October 2012. Any participants joining after this point will be included in future reports.

Survey instruments

Several ***data collection instruments*** were developed and a version of each was sent to trial and comparison schools and LAs at the start of the evaluation. The instruments developed so far are:

- a lead teacher questionnaire completed by trial and comparison schools;
- a pupil profile form (PPF) completed by trial and comparison schools; and
- an LA questionnaire completed by each LA.

These three instruments will be repeated in summer 2013 and summer 2014. In spring 2014, a further questionnaire will be developed to capture the views of subject teachers in each school taking part in the evaluation.

The ***national pupil database*** 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 (this will continue through each year of the trial).

In addition, ***telephone interviews*** were undertaken with lead LA officials in each of the 11 LAs involved in the trial to follow up questionnaire responses in more depth.

Six LAs have also been selected for ***in depth case study visits*** with three of the LAs visited in the summer of 2012 and visits planned to the other three LAs in the summer of 2013. A detailed questionnaire was developed to collect evidence from these LAs by post in alternate years.

The sample

At this initial stage, 11 LAs in total are participating in the trial, with 51 schools from eight of these LAs participating in the evaluation as of October 31 2012. The comparison group, selected from LAs where practices were not considered likely to confound the findings, consisted of 43 schools and 31 LAs at the end of October 2012¹.

The numbers of participants for the baseline data collection are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Participants in baseline data collection as of 31 October 2012

	LAs in evaluation	Schools in trial	Schools in evaluation	Pupil profile form	Lead teacher questionnaire	LA questionnaire
Trial sample	8	144	51	43	49	7
Comparison sample	31	N/A	43	31	42	31

Note: One PPF was returned per school with details of **all** pupils at risk of permanent exclusion recorded on each form.

Three out of the six case study areas were visited in summer 2012 with 47 participants involved in semi-structured interviews during the fieldwork. Questionnaires were sent to staff in the other three LAs and five responses were received to these questionnaires.

¹ This includes some comparison LAs that completed the LA questionnaire but none of their schools are participating, and the reverse situation whereby some comparison schools are participating but their LA has not completed a questionnaire.

3. Key findings

Although at a very early stage of the trial, the evaluation provides preliminary findings in the following areas:

- implementation of the trial;
- baseline quantitative findings regarding pupils at risk of exclusion ; and
- qualitative findings regarding provision of alternative education either externally by the LA or in school.

Future reports will consider the outcomes of the trial, including the impact on pupils' attainment, and provide case studies of how particular issues have been addressed.

3.1 Implementation of the trial

Baseline interviews demonstrated that LAs took a range of different approaches to implementing the trial. Despite this, LA staff held similar expectations. They perceived that the trial would increase head teachers' awareness of their responsibilities in relation to exclusion and the challenges involved. As schools took responsibility for permanently excluded pupils, staff believed this might:

- reduce the need for exclusions;
- create clearer funding streams;
- guarantee appropriate funding to meet often complex needs; and
- increase levels of in-school provision.

There were examples where LAs were putting in place shadow or ghost budgets so that schools could have some measure of control over their AP funds.

Some LAs joined the trial 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 and for these LAs the evaluation constitutes the documentation of an on-going journey.

Within this overall picture, the research revealed a wealth of information which provides the baseline against which later findings will be measured. This included data about pupils at risk of exclusion; the practice in providing for them; the attitudes and opinions of the staff involved; and issues and concerns that have arisen.

3.2 Baseline quantitative findings

These findings are based on the evidence from the pupil profile forms, lead teacher questionnaires and national pupil database analysis.

Numbers of pupils at risk of permanent exclusion: Lead teachers in trial and comparison schools reported very low numbers of pupils at risk of permanent exclusion (1-4 per year group on

average) with more pupils identified as at risk of exclusion in the older year groups. In the trial schools, the number increased from 2.2 to 3.9 from Year 7 to Year 11 and in the comparison schools from one in Year 7 to 3.3 in Year 10, declining to 2.8 in Year 11.

Characteristics of pupils at risk of permanent exclusion in trial and comparison schools:

Using the characteristics of pupils identified as at risk of permanent exclusion from trial and comparison schools, four types of analyses were conducted:

- comparison between pupils identified at risk and other pupils in their school;
- a comparison of the differences between at risk pupils in trial schools and comparison schools;
- analysis of the National Pupil Database (NPD) and school administrative data to identify pupils with characteristics historically associated with permanent exclusion;
- comparison between pupils identified by schools and those identified using the NPD.

When all other factors were taken into account, the 'at risk' pupils' prior attainment was not significantly different to that of their counterparts' in the same schools. Nevertheless, pupils' current teacher assessment levels in English were consistently below that expected in each year group, typically by around two National Curriculum levels. The most common reasons given for pupils to be identified as at risk of permanent exclusion were school based, with poor behaviour in school being a factor (amongst others) in the vast majority of cases. All else being equal, trial schools were more likely to include pupils on the pupil profile form as at risk of permanent exclusion than comparison schools.

There was a reasonable correspondence between the group of pupils identified by schools as being at risk of permanent exclusion, and the group with characteristics associated with a high risk of permanent exclusion based on historic national data. Both groups shared similar characteristics. However, there were fewer children from ethnic groups in the evaluation sample than in the sample identified using the NPD, based on assumptions informed by trends in exclusions in previous years.

In-school support for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion: Schools in trial and comparison schools offered multiple supports for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion. No lead teacher indicated having fewer than five interventions in place and the average across the whole sample was 15. There were no significant differences between trial and comparison schools. The most commonly available interventions were behaviour management, teaching assistants and using a revised school timetable (all in use by more than 90% of schools). Of a list of 22 possible interventions, most were commonly adopted.

Overall, lead teachers rated the effectiveness of in-school interventions relatively highly, although the most common interventions were not necessarily perceived to be the most effective. Interventions were rated differently according to different outcomes. Generally, interventions were perceived as more effective for preventing exclusions, than for improving attainment. Interventions that were rated relatively highly overall, e.g. inclusion coordinators and learning mentors had lower ratings for attainment than other outcomes. However, Learning Support Units (LSUs) were rated highly by more than half of teachers for all outcomes.

Alternative provision for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion: On average schools reported that five forms or types of AP were in place for pupils at risk of exclusion. The most commonly used types of AP were specialist support such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)); pupil referral units (PRUs); individual work placements; additional services provided by the LA, e.g. Traveller Education; and time spent at an FE college. AP was less common than in-school interventions. The more common types of AP were not necessarily perceived to be the most effective. Individual work placements were quite common (cited by 50% of schools) and rated highly for most outcomes. Training providers were less common (mentioned by 25% of schools) yet rated almost as high on most outcomes. Some types of AP were rated differently according to outcome. PRUs were rated highly for preventing exclusions, poorly for improving attainment, and moderately for improving attendance and behaviour. The disparity between the perceived impact of AP on attainment, as compared with the other outcomes, was even more pronounced than for in-school interventions.

Lead teachers in trial schools were more likely than comparison schools to comment negatively on individual work placements as being effective in terms of academic attainment.

Very few pupils designated by trial and comparison schools as being at risk of permanent exclusion were actually being provided with AP at the time of the research. In some schools none of the identified pupils were in receipt of AP. Provision of AP was more common for the older year groups in both trial and comparison schools.

Overall success factors for AP placements included: the level of information made available about the pupil; strong and trusting relationships between schools and AP providers; and the provision of maths and English tuition.

Schools used AP to meet individual or complex needs; to provide a much needed alternative setting which gave students a fresh start; and to improve pupils' behaviour, motivation and engagement in learning. In some cases, AP was used to reduce disruption to other pupils, to avoid health and safety issues or when all else had failed.

Across both trial and comparison schools, senior school staff often had responsibility for arranging AP. Almost one-third of teachers in comparison schools reported that an individual or group external to the school had responsibility for arranging AP, e.g. an LA or multi-agency team. However, only 3% of teachers in trial schools reported external involvement. In trial schools, LAs and schools were more commonly responsible for commissioning.

In trial schools 71% of lead teachers reported that arrangements for AP typically involved collaboration with providers. This was much less the case in comparison schools (38%). In trial schools, the collaborative nature of the process was seen as a strength.

Amongst trial schools, 37% reported having a dedicated budget for in-school provision and 59% reported having a dedicated budget for AP. In comparison schools, the percentages were 42% and 38% respectively.

About one-third of all lead teachers mentioned working with parents, carers or pupils when arranging AP. Smaller proportions of lead teachers also mentioned working with external agencies.

Changes due to the trial: Although the data were collected at a very early stage of the trial, 47% of lead teachers in trial schools indicated that their school had made changes due to the trial. Most common in changes relating to school processes was employing new staff in specialised roles, e.g. Behaviour for Learning Mentors and careers advisors. Partnership working had increased; new school-wide policies or strategies had been introduced; budgets for AP had been allocated; and there was more training for existing staff. About two-thirds of lead teachers who indicated changes mentioned increased support for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion including external AP, in-school provision, internal exclusions and managed moves.

3.3 Qualitative findings

These findings are based on the evidence from the 11 LA interviews and the case study research.

Expectations of changes to be made during the trial: The interview data revealed expectations that the trial would: raise the profile of issues relating to exclusion and as such make head teachers more aware of the challenges and their responsibilities; create clearer funding streams; and increase the level of in-school provision for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion.

3.3.1 Issues relating to alternative provision

Meeting the needs of children at risk of permanent exclusion: Existing practices meant that where AP was full-time, pupils could lose contact with the school and miss out on their core education. This issue is being addressed as part of the trial. AP offered on a part-time basis and combined with in-school provision was viewed as particularly successful.

Interviewees reported that when they attempted to tailor AP to meet their pupil's needs, there were sometimes difficulties in finding the right provision. In some schools, evidence was collated relating to the pupil's needs when arranging alternative provision for them. Other schools submitted the request for AP to a panel, while some used individual plans for pupils in the arrangement process.

Commissioning of AP: In relation to the commissioning process, trial LAs expected that schools would become more involved in commissioning as the trial progressed.

The AP offer: There were issues relating to the availability of AP in terms of types of AP and the number of placements on offer, in particular a lack of provision at Key Stage 3 and at Level 2. Generally, academic provision was seen as weak.

Other issues raised included the cost of AP, the logistics of travel arrangements for pupils and the breakdown of placements where they were found to be unsuitable.

Monitoring of AP: The interviews revealed that arranging and monitoring AP was time consuming for schools. Schools reported that the monitoring of AP was effective when shared data were detailed, accurate and timely. Having good relationships was viewed as important to the process. Monitoring enabled problems to be identified early and was valuable in contributing to pupil success by acting as an incentive. Weaknesses included the quality and quantity of data (particularly attendance and attainment), schools not being informed of problems quickly enough

to take action and the lack of consistency across providers. Monitoring provision was perceived as expensive and time consuming.

Quality assurance of AP: Typically, rigorous quality assurance processes were in place relating to LA or ex-LA AP. Where this was the case, school staff had increased confidence in the provision.

The role of PRUs: The interviews revealed that LAs had adopted very different approaches to the role of PRUs, ranging from the closure of a PRU at one extreme, through to seeing their role as being critical to the success of how collaborative working operated in the LA. There was considerable evidence of schools wanting more flexibility in the working of PRUs and of such flexibility being delivered in some LAs.

Managed moves and collaboration between schools: As a result of the trial, in some cases, collaborative processes had become more rigorous. However, in some LAs there were challenges including the small number of possible schools where pupils could move to; perceived inequities in the number of pupils that different schools had taken as part of managed moves; and different expectations of what behaviour might lead to a managed move. The success of collaborative partnerships was reported to rely on their stability.

3.3.2 In-school provision

The curriculum on offer in schools: The case-study interviews revealed that some schools were broadening their curriculum offer with the introduction of on-site provision of vocational programmes. A wider range of qualifications was also being made available. As the trial and the evaluation progress, it will be possible to explore the impact on the types of vocational qualifications offered by schools and examine the relationship between changes as a result of the trial and any changes made in response to the Wolf Report on vocational education (Wolf, 2011).

Early intervention and work with primary schools: The interview data indicated that early intervention was seen as key to the implementation of the trial but also highlighted that this was not always happening. There was a perceived need for interventions at primary level which addressed the underlying causes of poor behaviour. In some cases secondary schools were working with primary schools on transition issues.

The role of parents: Lack of parental engagement was an issue and in some cases taking account of parental preferences was a challenge.

4. Challenges to the success of the trial

Many of the challenges which emerged during this early stage of the trial were related to external factors which, although not directly related to the trial itself, may impact on its implementation. These are outlined below. As the trial and its evaluation progress the impact of these factors will be assessed.

Availability of AP: Concerns were expressed about the availability of AP in terms of breadth, number of placements and lack of flexibility. There were particular concerns about the lack of AP at Key Stage 3 and Level 2.

Unrealistic expectations of AP providers: Providers of AP indicated that expectations regarding attainment were frequently unrealistic given the complex problems of referrals which usually related to personal and social issues. The resolution of these issues required activities which developed trust and did not put pressure on students.

Parental and student choice: Some students wanted to remain in full time AP and not return to school. There were also cases where parents challenged the AP arrangements made.

School capacity to manage AP: LA officers and some school staff expressed concerns that some schools may not currently have sufficient expertise to be able to successfully commission, manage and monitor AP. Assessing quality and progress in an AP provider was viewed as difficult unless there was regular training and sharing of practice. The evaluation will monitor the extent to which this changes as the trial progresses.

5. Issues to be considered as the trial goes forward

This first interim report is based on data collected at a very early stage in the trial and it is intended to be used as a summary of the baseline position. Drawing conclusions about the impact of the trial is therefore premature, although the evidence to date suggests that participating schools and LAs are committed to the approach. The baseline research identified a range of issues for consideration as the trial goes forward.

Most of the issues raised during this baseline research phase were not directly related to the trial but concerned issues related to AP. These included:

- the shrinking of the AP market currently underway;
- problems in rural areas where the possibilities for managed moves and AP were limited because of geographical location;
- managing changes in demand and requests for increased flexibility when AP providers may have limited capacity;
- providing AP providers with regular income, particularly when they are not operating in highly populated urban areas, to ensure stability of provision and high quality staff;
- the current lack of AP at Key Stage 3; and
- the availability of AP at Level 2.

Some issues, which may impact on the trial, but are not directly related to it, concerned schools. These included:

- the difficulty of engaging some parents;
- the need to improve intervention in primary schools to address underlying serious behavioural problems early on; and
- ensuring that schools have sufficient accommodation to be able to provide a range of in-school provision on and off-site.

Two issues were identified which directly relate to the implementation of the trial. These are:

- ensuring that schools have the capacity and expertise to commission, manage and monitor AP; and
- increasing the extent of early intervention at the first sign of difficulties.

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