






# Rewriting futures;

Creating better alternatives to violence and exclusion for young people.



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# Forewords

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## Police and Crime Commissioner, David Jamieson

Reducing the number of young people becoming involved in violent crime is a priority for me and I am committed to working with partners to ensure the most vulnerable children are kept safe.

As a former headteacher of an inner-city secondary school I understand the challenges that teachers face. I know how disruptive some pupils can be and how difficult a job teachers have. The overwhelming majority work tirelessly with pupils to ensure their behaviour is maintained and that children are safe and are able to thrive. I also recognise that schools are under significant pressure to maintain their place in league tables and the temptation to be solely exam results driven is very attractive. This however, places a strain on the resources available for schools to do more pastoral work and non-curricular activities which are key to shaping young people for the rest of their lives. Teaching them valuable skills, allowing them to take part in learning which is not solely academic but maybe practical or vocational and will set them in good stead to become well rounded members of society.

Over the past few years, the number of young people who have been excluded from schools has risen both nationally and here in the West Midlands. This is a real concern for many teachers, youth workers and the police who too often find themselves coming into contact with excluded children.

Young people who are excluded from school are more likely to be exploited which puts them at risk of serious harm and risks them becoming involved in gangs. We have seen across the West Midlands and the country, a significant rise in violence amongst young people and effectively tackling the issue of school exclusions will help address that problem and keep young people off the streets.

Often it is the most vulnerable children who are excluded from school and we need to do more to ensure that they are supported throughout their time at school to ensure they receive the education they need to lead successful lives.

I have been campaigning for years to reduce the number of young people being excluded from school. Excluding a child from school should only happen as an absolute last resort and when this does happen they should be provided with a strong alternative education to ensure that they can succeed in life and fulfil their aspirations. This report focuses on addressing the underlying issues that often impact on a young person's behaviour. It is important that we focus on addressing any underlying issues that young people have and give them the support they need. Not every child has a stable home life, and I am pleased that the Violence Reduction Unit has adopted a trauma informed approach that is focused on tackling the root causes of problems.

Often many vulnerable young people who are excluded from school have underlying issues, whether that be a difficult home life or learning difficulties. That is why we must work to tackle the root causes of the issues that young people are facing and not simply exclude them from school. I have been urging Ministers to implement the recommendations of the Timpson Review that the Department for Education promoted and was launched in May 2019. I hope in future I can work even more closely with schools and partners to provide funding for activities that will divert children away from crime and focus their minds on positive activities.

This report highlights the excellent work that is being done by the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit and partners. I hope that as a result of this change in practice and extra investment into pastoral support we will see a fall in the number of young people being excluded from school and ultimately a fall in the number of young people becoming involved in serious violence.

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## **West Midlands VRU Director, Clare Gollop**

The West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit is a Home Office funded multi-agency unit hosted within the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. It is intended to work across organisational boundaries to create conditions that make violence less likely to occur. This means much of our work is about reducing vulnerability, particularly vulnerabilities that can be exploited by others or lead to involvement in violence - as an offender, as a victim, or both.

Reducing violence can be portrayed as story of heroes and villains – but this is almost never the case. The reality is far more complex. Multi-layered, gritty factors all feed in to make it more or less likely that violence will occur. Behind problematic behaviour, the case studies in this report reveal that children are often living very difficult and frightening lives. Being in trouble at school - or worse, being excluded from education - can catapult vulnerable young people into contexts where they are at risk of involvement in serious harm. This is a spiral that we can stop.

Through the VRU's education sector reference group, I have met with inspiring practitioners from a range of education settings who are going above and beyond to support and nurture all of the young people in their care. That they feel 'the system' sometimes pulls against rather than with them, which is a barrier that we must overcome at a policy level. This report highlights some opportunities to change that – and as such is a welcome evidence base to inform our discussions with policy makers and education leaders at every level, and in every education setting.

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## **Regional Schools Commissioner, Andrew Warren**

Some years ago, I found myself as the headteacher of an inner-city primary school which had an unenviable reputation for poor behaviour. Children were regularly sent out of the classroom; exclusions were high and staff turnover was high. It wasn't much fun for anyone, least of all the children. I began to do what many school leaders do: listening to staff, children, parents, governors and community leaders; agreeing and establishing high expectations with clearly understood boundaries and sanctions; working closely with all staff, governors and parents and children to explain what we were doing and why; providing high quality training for staff. Policies were implemented, success criteria evaluated, stakeholder meetings held, and good progress was made. However, it was also clear that something was missing; something which even the best laid plans and policies had not covered. And I only discovered it by accident.

It was a Monday morning, around 10am, and there was a knock at my door. A year 4 boy had been sent out of the class for bad behaviour and he had been brought down to my office. As I listened to the boy explain his side of the story, I asked him what he had eaten for breakfast. "Nothing," he replied. When I asked him when he had last eaten, I realised that it was many hours ago – the poor child was very hungry. Toast was ordered from the kitchen and as he ate, he shared a little of what his life was like. Over the coming weeks I realised that many of our children lived in similar situations and came to school hungry. Breakfast clubs were not yet common but it was an obvious next step and we established one. It was no coincidence that as we provided food and shelter for children early in the morning, so behaviour improved.

Behaviour is multi-layered, and the reasons for all of our behaviours are complex. This means that any support has to go deeper than what is seen, so that what is unseen is also understood. Many of our young people live in chaotic and traumatic households where survival is literally a daily challenge. They don't just need plans, they need advocates who will help them negotiate an otherwise unfriendly world. This report is an important contribution to this complex society challenge, and I commend it to you.

# Thank you

Gathering insight from a range of stakeholders and young people across schools, youth clubs and other settings was challenging – especially during the unexpected coronavirus pandemic which caused many services to shut during the time of this research.

We are extremely grateful to those across the West Midlands who helped to make this work possible, whether this be through advising, participating directly, or putting us in touch with people who could.

A big thank you goes out to all the young people who participated in our research. We included a range of people who had experienced exclusion, representing a spread of experiences:

- A range of ages, from 12-16, who had been excluded (temporarily or permanently) from school due to violent or disruptive behaviour.
- A range in ethnicity and locations across the West Midlands.
- A mix of genders with a weighting towards boys in line with the data on exclusions/violence.

We are also very grateful to all the professionals who took part in the research. We interviewed professionals who had a role in helping to manage disruptive behaviour in schools:

- We included a range in teachers' professions - including senior leadership team (SLT), head teachers, behaviour management, pastoral care and counsellors.
- Schools visited were across the West Midlands region – including some specialist schools like a Catholic school, special educational needs school, college, and pupil referral unit.

# Executive summary

Revealing Reality was commissioned by West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit (WMVRU) to explore the driving factors for disruption in school, as data shows that children excluded from schools for disruptive behaviour are more likely to become involved in violence.

Our research sought to understand how children could be better supported to stay on the road to a positive future. Our research found the following:

- Whilst staff were keen to promote wider life skills, **school systems were driven to prioritise academic achievement.**
- Whilst some specific behavioural interventions aim to help children develop the **motivation or ability** required to behave well, this was not prioritised consistently in the wider learning environment in schools.
- Schools needed to ensure that behaviour was good enough to support learning but **did not necessarily have the resources to address the root causes of disruptive behaviour, and they are currently assessed by metrics which focus primarily on academic success.**
- We propose that **a systemwide change is required to meet these challenges.** For consistent, sustained change, this must start from the top.
- One feature of a broader system-change could include the development of **standardised measures to track and analyse behaviour in schools.** This will allow these root causes to be better understood and addressed across the whole education system – ultimately helping the most disadvantaged students to gain the skills needed to perform well and secure better futures.

## Learning environments in schools were highly-controlled – but the world outside of school is unpredictable

During visits to 11 schools across the West Midlands, we observed that learning environments were often extremely controlled and disciplined.

This focus on maintaining a controlled environment meant that schools were dealing with the *symptoms* of disruptive behaviour, often relatively effectively – but rarely addressing the *cause*. This raised questions around the extent to which the more vulnerable children were equipped to cope outside in the ‘real world’, outside of the tightly controlled, predictable environment.

There was a real desire to support struggling students to develop resilience and skills that would serve them well going forward. However, in practice, good work in this area was not sufficiently rewarded. Instead, the focus on academic achievement meant that teachers were encouraged to maintain a controlled environment.

## Why is this worse for disadvantaged young people?

Many children thrive in school and are able to go on and live successful lives once their schooling ends.

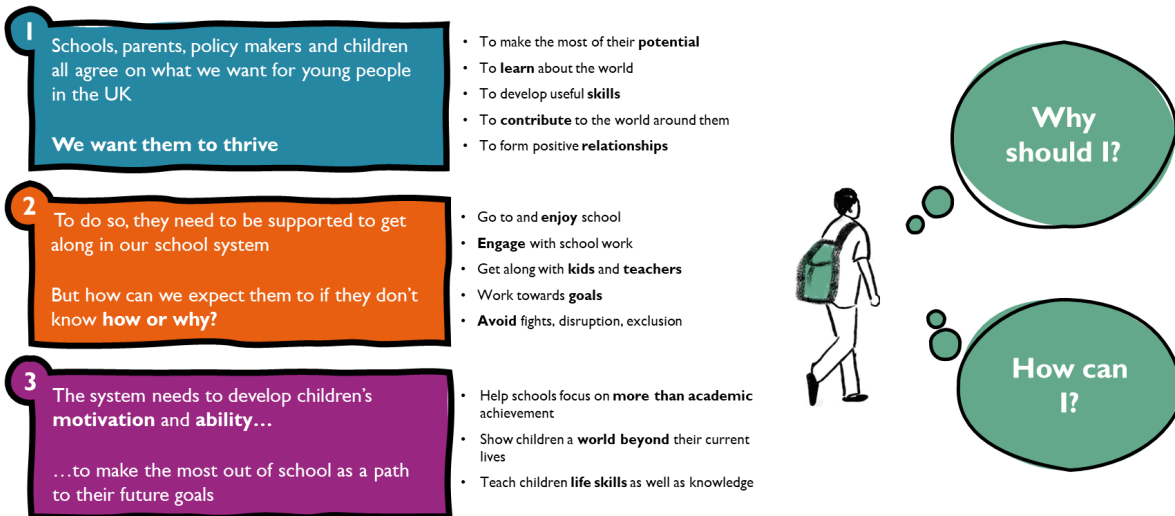
So, what is the difference between those children and the ones that aren’t able to cope? And why do some fall into anti-social or violent behaviour as soon as they’re outside the school gates?

There is a clear inequality in the experiences of children in schools, and it cuts along the line of vulnerability and deprivation. The children we spoke to and heard about in this research were experiencing at least one of the following:

- Social, emotional and mental health difficulties

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including trauma and chaotic households
- Parents who were often facing similar challenges to their children (e.g. mental health issues)
- Living in an environment where gang culture and crime are prevalent

This research found that the factors discussed above primarily impacted young people's **motivation** and **ability to control their behaviours**. For young people to gain good outcomes, they need to be motivated and able to control their behaviour in a school environment:



## Young people will not behave well unless they can see why they should

**Differences in motivation** explain why some children comply with the system and some don't.

Some young people did not see the 'point' of behaving well in school – in particular if they couldn't imagine a positive future for themselves beyond what they already knew:

- They were often living in highly localised, 'small worlds', with few models for positive futures
- They needed support to understand *what could realistically be achieved* in their future, and *how they could work towards these goals*
- The rewards for behaving disruptively could be feel closer to home: some sought status from peers for winning a fight, messing around or being funny

## Some lacked the ability to manage their own behaviours

More disadvantaged young people often struggled with the **ability to regulate their own behaviour**

Many were not learning key skills around emotional and behavioural control at home, and this was a gap that schools struggled to fill:

- Many of the children failed to link cause and effect with their behaviour
- This was sometimes compounded by parents, who sought to protect their children from blame rather than encouraging them to take responsibility for their own behaviour
- Even when children were clearer on the link between disruptive behaviour and negative outcomes, they could still struggle to make choices that aligned with this – especially if dealing with SEN or antagonistic environments

## **Schools want to re-shape futures for these children, but other pressures restrict what they can do**

Schools are keen to tackle the root causes of problems and help reshape children's futures. However, an overwhelming focus on academic achievement means that schools prioritise this over preparing children to cope outside of school.

This means that controlled and rigid environments have developed to enable academic achievement – but this disadvantages those young people who struggle to fit into these environments.

## **These issues are overlooked by educational policy, which perhaps assumes children will pick these skills up elsewhere**

It's easy to assume that children will pick up skills to manage from sources outside of school, such as parents or guardians – and many do. However, for the most disadvantaged children, there is a gap here. Young people who cannot rely on their parents or guardians to teach them these skills (often because they lack these skills themselves) are often left to figure them out for themselves.

The system, as it currently is, is failing these children – who will go on to struggle with building more positive futures for themselves.

## **Actions can be taken at every level – starting with policy**

It falls to the system as a whole to address this gap. At every level – we should be asking what would help children to gain motivation and ability to control their behaviours

Schools, parents, youth services, early years and extra-curricular activities can all promote and support positive trajectories around motivation and ability to control behaviours.

## **We need to monitor motivation and skills around behaviour alongside academic achievement**

We want to see better outcomes for disadvantaged children, and the reduction of violence in wider society. In order to this, we need to address the underlying factors. We need to re-balance priorities in schools, to ensure motivation and behavioural skills are given the attention they need.

This report argues that developing a standardised measure across schools would be a logical first step to achieve this. This would help by:

- Evidencing the relationship between motivation, ability to regulate behaviours, and negative outcomes
- Evaluating interventions against what we are actually trying to achieve for children
- Tracking progress and comparing successes
- Shifting culture so that the ingredients for future success are seen to comprise motivation, aspiration, ability to control behaviours, and other life skills as much as academic success
- Enabling schools to justify spending time and resources on equipping children with the skills and aspirations they need to succeed – even if this means directing some resource away from academic attainment



## Chapter 1

# Understanding the context

*“The way kids behave is them trying to tell us something about what **they need from us.** We need to decode that.”*

*West Midlands education provider*

# Introduction

Our school system is failing its most vulnerable students. Across the country, school exclusions have almost doubled in the last seven years<sup>1</sup> - and these figures do not impact all students equally.

Those being permanently excluded are rarely students from stable homes, where families are more likely to be able to invest in their wider emotional and personal development. Rather, they are likely to be living in chaotic or abusive home environments, grappling with mental health problems or special educational needs, and living in areas where the pull of quick money from crime appear more viable and appealing than investing in education for a future working life.

These students generally do not arrive at school with the same skills or aspirations as some of their peers. Some struggle to control their own behaviour - and don't see why they should. Their school careers soon become characterised by meltdowns, disruptive behaviours, fighting and a series of escalating behavioural interventions – often culminating in temporary and permanent exclusion.

Those who are permanently excluded from school see their options for the future shrink and may seek alternative forms of validation – including crime, violence, or using alcohol and drugs. Data shows that young people excluded from schools for disruptive behaviour are more likely to become involved in negative outcomes like violence<sup>2</sup>.

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## Whose problem is this?

Schools already work hard to do the best for their students – but they are currently not set-up or sufficiently incentivised to address the inequalities in behavioural ability and motivation they see between their most and least privileged students. The system assumes children will be arriving at school with foundational skills that they have picked up elsewhere – and there is no clear remedy for when these skills are lacking.

This is a system-wide issue that cannot be solved by schools alone. This report proposes a series of recommendations across different levels of the education system – from policy through to practice – aimed ultimately to improve the futures of disadvantaged young people.

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<sup>1</sup> Across England the number of annual exclusions has risen from 5,740 to 7,720 since 2010

<sup>2</sup> Timpson Review of School Exclusion, May 2019

# How can we improve futures for disadvantaged young people?

Our research investigated how children could be better supported to stay on the road to a positive future. To get to the heart of this, we needed to understand the wider context of children's lives, their experiences of school, friendships, home lives and the challenges they faced.

We conducted school visits and interviews with children and teachers. Our research found the following:

- Children **need a whole range of skills and influences** to broaden their worldview if they are going to perform well and secure good futures
- Those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds were not gaining these skills and influences in their home lives – and **schools were not filling this gap**
- In particular, disadvantaged students lacked the **motivation and ability** required to behave well
- Whilst some specific behavioural interventions aim to help children develop the **motivation** or **ability** required to behave well, this was not prioritised consistently in the wider learning environment in schools
- Schools needed to ensure that behaviour was good enough to support learning, but did not necessarily have the resources to address the root causes of disruptive behaviour
- This is an issue that requires **joined-up working across the system – starting with policy change**
- This could include developing a standardised measure for monitoring skills in **motivation and regulating behaviour**

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## About this research

Revealing Reality was commissioned by West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit (WMVRU) to explore this issue, and better understand the driving factors for disruption in school. WMVRU was established in October 2019 with the goal of preventing and reducing violence, vulnerability and exploitation. WMVRU strives to tackle the root causes of violence and aggression, to prevent problems emerging in the future. This work aims to inform a public health approach and early interventions around disruptive behaviours.

We conducted insight with young people, schools and supporting professionals to map out young people's journeys to exclusion. We were particularly interested to explore disruptive and violent behaviours and identify opportunity areas for intervention. This work followed on from a prior phase of work conducted by the not-for-profit behaviour science consultancy, Behaviour Change, which focussed on mapping current local practice and existing knowledge, through stakeholder interviews and an evidence review.

The outbreak of covid-19 during the fieldwork period in spring 2020, meant that a proportion of the fieldwork was shifted to remote methodologies. The research recognises that this was a disruptive time generally for young people and their education providers.

## Research method

Observing the school  
environment

Understanding teachers'  
perspectives

Talking to young people

- **Scoping visits:** 15x head teachers/SLT across 11x schools
- **School fieldwork:** 16x teachers & 20x young people engaged across 2 x days of site visit
- **Teacher & stakeholder depth interviews:** 7x teachers, pastoral care, partner agency staff
- **Young people and family depth interviews:** 9x young people & families

## Who did we talk to?

We interviewed young people who had been excluded for disruptive behaviour:

- We talked to young people aged 12-16, who had been excluded (temporarily or permanently) from school due to violent or disruptive behaviour.
- They represented a range in ethnicity and locations across the West Midlands.
- The sample comprised a mix of genders with a weighting towards boys in line with the data on exclusions/violence.

We interviewed professionals who had a role in helping to manage disruptive behaviour in schools:

- We included a range in teachers' professions - including senior leadership team (SLT), head teachers, behaviour management, pastoral care and counsellors.
- Schools visited were across the West Midlands region – including some specialist schools like a Catholic school, special educational needs school, college and pupil referral unit.

*For a detailed breakdown of the sample and methodology please see annex.*

## Permanent exclusion, and the link to violent crime

Across the UK, the figures show a marked increase in permanent exclusions, with figures almost doubling from 2010 to 2017<sup>3</sup>. There is some debate as to why this is, with different behaviours, difficulties and school policies all contributing to the change in statistics. However, despite the various underlying reasons, the fact remains the same: permanent exclusions are on the rise.

This problem is especially relevant in the West Midlands, where Department for Education figures show that children in the West Midlands are twice as likely to be excluded from school (12 in every 10,000) as children in the south-east of England (six in every 10,000)<sup>4</sup>.

These complications are felt most keenly by those experiencing poverty or special educational needs (SEN). The Timpson review commissioned by the Department of Education<sup>5</sup> highlighted the fact that on a national level, 78% of the children excluded either have SEN, are a child in need, or are on free school meals. A report from IPPR highlights that the issue is further exacerbated by an unsafe family environment, with those 'in care' being twice as likely to be excluded, and children 'in need' being three times as likely.

One of the big questions presented by the literature concerns how permanent exclusions relate to negative outcomes, like violent crime. The reports highlight that for most young people, issues are being addressed too late, leading to worsening and costly outcomes.

Whilst schools are committed to tackling these issues, they will not be able to tackle them alone. Pan-body collaboration is not currently widespread, but the literature points to a need for a more joined-up approach across different actors in the education system

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<sup>3</sup> Across England the number of annual exclusions has risen from 5,740 to 7,720 since 2010

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/dec/05/west-midlands-schools-fuelling-violent-by-excluding-pupils#:~:text=Department%20for%20Education%20figures%20show,5%2C740%20to%207%2C720%20since%202010.>

<sup>5</sup> Timpson Review of School Exclusion, May 2019

# Learning environments were highly-controlled – but the world outside of school is unpredictable

## Section overview:

- Whilst staff all wanted to support students to develop wider life skills, the system encouraged schools to prioritise academic achievement
- This meant that staff were concerned with maintaining a calm, controlled environment
- This could support academic development for many students
- However, it sometimes came at the expense of supporting the few students who were not coping well to develop key skills, or address the root causes of their disruptive behaviour

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## Schools were dealing with the *symptoms* rather than the *causes* of disruptive behaviour

During fieldwork in schools across the West Midlands, we were **surprised at how tightly controlled the school environment** was. Among staff, there was a real desire to support students to develop resilience and skills that would serve them well going forward.

Unfortunately, good work in this area was not always rewarded. Instead, the **system-wide focus on academic achievement and limiting disruption** meant most teachers were incentivised to maintain a controlled environment.

Schools with tightly-controlled environments were **dealing with the *symptoms* of disruptive behaviour effectively – but not addressing the *causes***.

## How did schools maintain controlled environments?

Most schools we visited tried to maintain a quiet classroom, in which other pupils could not disrupt or limit the progress of others. This meant that potentially **disruptive situations were ironed out**, and potentially **disruptive students were removed** – often sent out to stand in the corridors during the lesson.

Teachers sometimes reported **fear of ‘losing control’** of the classroom, so needed to remove distractions and those known to influence others. In particular, schools reported that inexperienced or ‘cover’ staff tended to find disruptive behaviour the most stressful.

**Some schools took a harsher approach**, such as one school in Walsall that took a ‘zero tolerance policy’ and had ‘one strike rules’ in place, which removed children from class after only one verbal warning. Each child was then sent to a dedicated room to refocus and received a restorative conversation with the teacher.

Others tried to control the **times and spaces** where disruption was more likely to occur. For example, one school had started limiting lunch time to only half an hour because “fights always break out in the last five

minutes”. Others thought carefully about how student flow could be managed through the premises. For example, a pupil referral unit (PRU) cleared the school at the end of the day by allowing only four children to leave the premises at a time – a procedure supervised heavily by staff.

Similarly, a school in Birmingham ensured that all pupils line up at the start of each lesson, which started with five minutes of silence. The head of pastoral care here noted that whilst this limited disruption, it meant that the children were very sensitive to change. Even small disruptions to the routine were said to trigger bad behaviour. For example, he reported that some of the pupils had struggled to cope with the change in routine when scaffolding was erected at the school building – to the point that their behaviour noticeably deteriorated.

## Coping in the ‘real world’

This raised questions around the extent to which the more vulnerable children were equipped to cope outside in the ‘real world’, outside of the tightly controlled, predictable environment. Managing environmental triggers like this decreased disruptive behaviours; but did so by focussing on the external environment rather than encouraging young people to develop internal discipline.

Teachers across multiple schools reported feeling worried about problems waiting for students outside of the school gates. They were aware that keeping them in controlled environments did not necessarily prepare them for the unpredictability of the life they would face outside the school gates – both every day after school, and also later in life, when they left the school system completely.

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## Interventions in schools

We have seen some examples of how schools maintained controlled environments. This list presents a quick overview of some of the specific interventions to tackle disruptive behaviour employed by schools in our research:

Interventions	Details about interventions
<b>Permanent exclusion</b>	<b>A permanent exclusion</b> is the most serious disciplinary measures a school can give, it involves the pupil being removed from the school roll and is no longer allowed to attend the school. It is the statutory duty on governing bodies or Local Authorities to provide full-time education for the pupil elsewhere.
<b>Pupil referral unit (PRU)</b>	<b>PRUs</b> are a type of school that caters for children who aren’t able to attend mainstream school – this could be due to a number of factors including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanently excluded due to behaviour</li> <li>• Emotional or behavioural difficulties</li> <li>• Special educational needs or in the process of getting diagnosed</li> </ul> <p>Some pupils have all their lessons at a PRU whilst others split their time between mainstream school they are registered and a PRU.</p>

**Fixed-term exclusion**

**A fixed term/temporary exclusion** is when a pupil is not allowed in school for a specific period of time for disciplinary reasons. An individual pupil may not be given more than 45 days fixed term exclusions in any one school year.

**Managed move**

**A managed move** is an arrangement between school, pupil and their guardians, in which a pupil is moved to alternative provision – generally another school or pupil referral unit (PRU). Managed moves are likely to take place in cases of poor attendance, where pupils with SEN are not being supported as well as they could elsewhere, or in cases where the pupil is at risk of permanent exclusion, or poses a risk to other students.

Managed moves may be used rather than permanent exclusions to remove students from school, to avoid a permanent exclusion being logged on a student's school record.

In practice, students may be manage-moved through several schools.

**Isolation rooms**

Schools can place pupils in a separate area/facilities when it is deemed necessary and they are removed from the classroom during the school day. They are usually part of an escalating set of disciplinary measures.

**Isolation rooms** can also be referred to as 'internal inclusion units' 'internal exclusions' or 'seclusion'.

**Escalating disciplinary measures**

Schools employ a range of **disciplinary measures** to maintain behaviour standards within school. Common examples include:

- verbal warnings;
- missing break times;
- setting written tasks as punishment;
- detention;

Schools also have the power to discipline students beyond the school gates if they perceive students to be at risk of harming themselves or others; or in a situation that could cause reputational damage to the school, such as if the pupil is wearing school uniform, or on their way to or from the premises.

Schools may also use reasonable force to control or restrain pupils if they're at risk of harming themselves or others; to remove disruptive children from the classroom; or to search for prohibited weapons.

**Searching, screening and confiscation**

Schools may choose **to search or screen** pupils for weapons or other contraband as they enter the premises, or if they hear that a student might be carrying a prohibited item. Schools are empowered to confiscate prohibited items. Depending on the item, they may pass this onto the police, retain it, or return it to students at the end of the day or lesson.

**Mentoring**

Schools may offer **mentors** to provide role models or guidance to pupils.

Schools may run this in a variety of ways, including professional, peer-to-peer or group mentorship programmes.



### Restorative approaches

**Restorative conversations** aim to develop empathy between students and teachers and reassure students that teachers are taking account of their needs and challenges. When a student is behaving disruptively, teachers may choose to have a restorative conversation to:

- Give the student an opportunity to say “what happened”/give the student a voice
- Communicate to the student how it made them and the class feel
- Demonstrate that the student is supported, whilst reiterating high expectations
- Create a plan together for both to move past the event as a team

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### School Link Police Officers

Schools may have a **‘linked’ police officer**, and they can work with the school in a number of ways. Police can be working solely with a specific school or group of schools.

The aim is for police to build positive relationships with young people, schools and the community – increasing intelligence from pupils/teachers, the ability to reach young people ‘at risk’ and reducing levels of youth crime and offending.

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### Family support workers

Schools may choose to have **family support workers** who provide advice and information to families and parents of the pupils in a number of ways - signposting to other services. 1-1 sessions.

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### Pastoral Support

Schools offer **pastoral care** which aims to ensure the physical and emotional welfare of all pupils. Within schools, staff may hold pastoral roles exclusively or it may be carried out alongside another role. Pastoral care may take place in a range of ways such as counselling, art therapy, and cognitive behavioural therapy.

A Pastoral Support Programme (PSP) is a co-ordinated intervention which aims to improve social, emotional and behavioural skills of pupils whose behaviour or attendance is deteriorating or have had multiple exclusions or other disciplinarys.

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### Summer schools & guest speakers

Schools may choose to take part in a number of extracurricular activities to broaden young people’s horizons. For example, they may have external speakers in to talk about their careers or offer summer schooling opportunities

# Why is this worse for disadvantaged young people?

## Section overview

- Calm and controlled environments work for most students – but there are a few who are disadvantaged by the system
- Those facing additional disadvantages in life will struggle the most
- For disadvantaged students, these challenges impact both motivation and ability to control their behaviour in schools – and the school-system is not set-up to help them counter some of these challenges

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## This affects students disproportionately

Calm and controlled environments are no bad thing for most students. For most, this allows them space to get the attention and learning that they need. Many children thrive in school and are able to go on and live successful lives once their schooling ends.

So, what is the difference between those children and the ones that aren't able to cope? And why do some fall into anti-social or violent behaviour as soon as they're outside the school gates?

There is a clear inequality in the experiences of children in schools, and it cuts along the line of vulnerability and deprivation. The children we spoke to in this research were experiencing at least one of the following:

### **Social, cognitive and mental health difficulties**

Both parents and young people reported issues with social, cognitive and mental health – sometimes struggling for a while before these were formally diagnosed. An example was Lindsay, who struggled for years with erratic and distracted behaviour, before being diagnosed with ADHD at the age of 15. Once she began taking medication, both she and her sister reported big changes in her behaviour, noting that she was more patient, and better able to control her mood swings.

### **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including trauma and chaotic households**

Some young people came from households where they faced challenges such as abuse, alcoholism or drug use, or unstable home environments.

For example, Reehan was raised by his-largely absent single mother, along with six siblings. This meant he was often left to his own devices and expected to look after his four younger siblings – which distracted him from schoolwork.

Similarly, Lindsay grew up in a home in which her mother, fleeing domestic abuse, moved the family into a women's shelter, where she faced many of her own issues as a result of alcoholism. The stressors of this situation meant Lindsay's relationship with her family deteriorated to the point where the two began calling the police during arguments, and her mother asked her to move out, to live with an older sister. This had a

knock-on effect on Lindsay's ability to concentrate at school, and she admitted she started 'acting out' to get attention.

*"Teachers are not trauma informed. They don't really know how to deal with kids they find challenging."*

**Teacher**

### **Parents who were often facing similar challenges to their children**

Some parents were living chaotic lives and struggling to regulate their own behaviour. This meant that parents sometimes had poor relationships with schools and other professionals; and could behave in ways that complicated the educational situation of their children.

It was common in our research that parents were in denial about how or why their child was in trouble at school, which could mean they took little responsibility for their child's behaviour, sometimes defending their child's choices. The behaviours of these parents suggested that they had an *external locus of control* – they tended to see outcomes as a result of external factors, rather than driven by their own behaviour.

Research elsewhere has linked having an external locus of control with poorer outcomes<sup>6</sup>, as it gives people little motivation to modify their actions or take responsibility for their own behaviour. There have also been studies indicating that parents with an *external locus of control* are likely to raise children who also have an external locus of control, developing a feedback loop which is difficult to break<sup>7</sup>.

In our research, we observed difficulties arising from these tendencies, when families and schools disagreed about the best way to manage disruptive behaviour, giving conflicting advice. One example was Aleena's mum, who disputed the fact that her daughter had got into trouble with the school over an incident involving the police, as she considered this to be a 'police matter'. She was quick to deny that her daughter was at fault and sought to blame teachers for their conduct instead. This resulted in Aleena receiving conflicting feedback about her behaviour from both her parent and her teachers.

### **Living in an environment where gang culture and crime are prevalent**

Some were living in areas where criminal activity was common. James talked about seeing friends from school getting caught up in gangs. He said he was keen to avoid this himself, after his best friend was fatally stabbed. He said he knew which areas to avoid if there was 'something going on' on social media.

Similarly, Ben, with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), sometimes found it hard to reflect on social dynamics. He had been caught up in local crime after 'getting mixed up with the wrong crowd.' After being stabbed himself, he was given a knife by a friend which he carried around in his backpack. He was later arrested with this in his possession, in an incident involving a stolen car. His father was sure these were not actions Ben would have taken himself without the instigation or peer pressure of others.

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<sup>6</sup> Outcomes studied include depression, work or academic performance, alcoholism, weight maintenance or smoking cessation

<sup>7</sup> Choice or Chance: understanding locus of control and why it matters, by Stephen Nowicki (2016)

## How do these challenges lead to unequal outcomes in schools?

Of course, these problems lead to unfair outcomes. Nonetheless, coming from a disadvantaged background should not limit what young people can achieve later in life. While they may not be well-placed to solve the underlying issues around poverty and deprivation, schools *can* help young people overcome disadvantages, break cycles of vulnerability, and get better outcomes.

To do this, we need to know how these external challenges impact behaviour in and out of school. This research found that the factors discussed above primarily impacted young people’s **motivation** and **ability** to control their behaviours in school. This is the focus of the following two chapters.

## For young people to gain good outcomes, they need to be motivated and able to control their behaviour in a school environment:

**1** Schools, parents, policy makers and children all agree on what we want for young people in the UK

**We want them to thrive**

- To make the most of their **potential**
- To **learn** about the world
- To develop useful **skills**
- To **contribute** to the world around them
- To form positive **relationships**

**2** To do so, they need to be supported to get along in our school system

But how can we expect them to if they don't know **how or why?**

- Go to and **enjoy** school
- **Engage** with school work
- Get along with **kids** and **teachers**
- Work towards **goals**
- **Avoid** fights, disruption, exclusion

**3** The system needs to develop children's **motivation and ability...**

...to make the most out of school as a path to their future goals

- Help schools focus on **more than academic** achievement
- Show children a **world beyond** their current lives
- Teach children **life skills** as well as knowledge

**Why should I?**

**How can I?**

## Chapter 2

# The need for motivation

*“I want every child to believe they can go to university, that they can go on to be who they want to be. Some kids have never had anyone believe that’s possible for them”*

*West Midlands education provider*

# Young people will not behave well unless they can see why they should

## Section overview:

- Some young people do not see the ‘point’ of behaving well in school – in particular if they can’t imagine a positive future for themselves beyond what they already know
- They were often living in highly localised, ‘small worlds’, in which their world-view was shaped by those around them
- This could be problematic if those around them lacked skills or were themselves wrapped up in disruptive behaviour or violent crime
- Children in these situations needed support to know *what could realistically be achieved* in their future, and *how they could work towards these goals*
- Within their small worlds, some were motivated to behave disruptively to gain status from peers – including fighting or getting involved in gang or criminal activities

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## Young people struggled to imagine a positive future for themselves beyond the lives they already knew

For many of the young people in the research, it was difficult to see the point of behaving well in school. Those who couldn’t imagine a life beyond what they already knew – or couldn’t believe their behaviour would have an impact on their future – lacked motivation to control their behaviour in school. This was partly because young people were living in **localised, small worlds**.

### Living in a ‘small world’

Many of the children included in this research were living in ‘small worlds’ and their imagination for what they could accomplish in future was limited by what they had seen others achieve. This meant they didn’t have many models for what a positive future could look like. In most cases, their conception of success was based on what their parents or other adults in their life did. This meant they may subconsciously or consciously **limit their aspirations**, in terms of careers, relationships and lifestyle – often based on experiences they had been exposed to previously. This was described by a headteacher at a PRU based in Walsall. He referred to this limited size of world as ‘templates for life’, explaining that a significant proportion of his pupils, especially those that were on the exclusion pathway, struggled to imagine anything other than the templates with which they’d grown up:

*“The young people only know what they see. They can’t imagine anything different. They have a limited template.”*  
**Headteacher, PRU**

Within a 'small world', it could feel intimidating to try something new, or to carve out a different path from friends and family. Naturally, young people developed an understanding of what 'success' looked like based on what they saw other adults in their life doing – whether this be parents, friends, or professionals they interacted with.

For example, David grew up in a Romanian family based in Birmingham. He **struggled to see what the benefits of behaving and staying out of trouble were**. His main worry was that if he were moved to a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) he would be away from his friends. In the future he was certain that he would be working in a warehouse to 'shift palettes', which is what his father did. He didn't see how controlling his own behaviour would help him to achieve this, and so was often in trouble at school.

*"When I grow up, I'll shift palettes"*

**David (15)**

Similarly, Aaliyah (15) was underperforming at school. She didn't fit in, struggled to understand what teachers were asking of her, and felt she was bullied by her peers. She was excluded from three different schools, and in between placements she had formed a relationship with learning mentors at an education charity. Seeing the work the mentors did gave Aaliyah the idea she could be a mentor one day. The charity told her she would be able to volunteer there if she completed her GCSEs. For Aaliyah, of course, this was a positive motivator. However, it showed the extent to which she was influenced by the adults in her life when planning her future.

### **Families often lacked personal life experience to show their children positive futures – and may be wrapped up in violence themselves**

For young people living in small worlds, it could be problematic when adults they knew lacked the life experience to show them alternative futures. In particular, adults who themselves faced similar challenges struggled to assess and discipline their children.

For example, Lindsay moved into a 'bedsit' when she was just 16, to be with her older sister (then only 23). Her sister had chosen to leave the family home when she was just a teenager herself. As a result, she admitted that she was struggling to support Lindsay with some of the life skills she might need:

*"I tried to show her how to make a CV and teach her about taxes – but nobody showed me those things"*

**Lindsay's (16) sister**

Some families felt that the school should step in to teach some of these wider life skills. For example, Shevon's mum initially had Shevon's elder brother when she was still a teenager and working part-time at a bingo hall. As a single mum, she had struggled with mental health issues. **She felt that the school should be responsible in her children's development**, both academically and socially – and felt frustrated when she thought that Shevon's schools "chose not to support him".

*"The schools are just as responsible as the parents; they are the supposed to be the ones nurturing him [Shevon]"*

**Shevon's (12) mum**

Some of these families were not able to give the factors that would boost motivation or skills – such as positive role-modelling or explaining why controlling behaviour was important to achieve longer-term gains.

### **Young people needed help to learn how to plan a realistic career pathway**

In the few examples we saw of children ‘aiming high’, these tended to be distant or unlikely – such as dreaming of becoming a famous sportsman. Even if they did have realistic goals, most could not articulate what steps were required to reach these goals – which could make their ambitions seem even more unattainable.

For instance, since joining secondary school, Immaz (16) had been consistently temporarily excluded. When asked about his ambitions for the future, he said he wanted to be an IT technician, married, with children and a house by the age of 21. However, he couldn’t articulate the steps that he would need to take to meet those goals.

There were a few exceptions who could articulate a more realistic career pathway and the milestones they might have to pass – but this was invariably when they had had help to reflect on this with a mentor. In James’ experience – throughout school, an expulsion and some time spent in a pupil referral unit – it was unclear what his future held. One day, when he was talking in class, a teacher called him out by asking what he wanted to do with his life. This encounter made him think about it a bit more. He decided he wanted to become an engineer and was thrilled when the teacher in question got him a part-time engineering placement at a local college alongside his schooling. The direction gave James a sense he could achieve something beyond what he had previously thought, and he was more committed as a result.

Similarly, Reehan (16) had always struggled paying attention in school and was on the pathway to exclusion due to consistent low-level disruptive behaviour and truancy. In Year 10 he was put in contact with a mentor at a local programme and started doing a voluntary placement once a week. His relationship with his mentor helped him to understand the steps required to build a career, as well as a reason to limit disruptive behaviour in school. Following this experience, he decided he wanted to become a mentor too. This was a positive step for Reehan but demonstrates that he too was heavily influenced by choices he saw other adults make.

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### **Disruptive behaviour sometimes gained popularity in the playground**

Whilst the rewards for behaving well at school could seem abstract, far away and intangible for young people, the rewards for behaving disruptively could be closer to home. Status from peers for winning a fight, messing around or being funny could serve to raise young people through social ranks in their small world.

For some, being involved in gang activities could also provide affirmation and a sense of success.

### **Seeking status from peers**

Those who couldn’t see beyond their world usually sought to gain status within it. This sometimes meant taking part in disruptive or criminal behaviours that rejected those of the school system and mainstream society.



For some, **receiving disciplinary measures was seen to be cool in their peer group**. For example, Lindsay (16) admitted that after getting expelled from school she posted a status update on social media saying: 'just got kicked out of school'. She felt that her friends would think it was 'cool' and valued the attention they gave her as a result – with many commenting on her post and sharing it with others.

During fieldwork, young people reported that when they got into **fights at school they were met with cheers**. This was something researchers observed first-hand in the playground: at a school in Birmingham, we observed a fight break out during lunchtime. It soon caught the eye of other pupils, who congregated around the event to watch and shout. The Deputy Head got involved to break it up, and as he escorted one of those involved out of the playground, the student triumphantly rose his hand to the applause of other students who shouted "hero" and "gangsta! gangsta!".

Other kids in the playground later reported that fights generally started after tensions escalated and peers challenged one another to fight. Some felt that if they did not defend themselves in a fight, they would be teased, which would be detrimental to their image. This drove many to retaliate during verbal or physical fights. In fact, young people reported that the **fighters themselves were not that keen on fighting, but were pressured into it** when others made comments like "are you gonna let him look at you that way", so started fighting rather than losing face.

One example of this was Immaz, who was excluded in Year 10 for hospitalising another pupil after punching him the eye. Immediately afterwards, he regretted his actions – until his peers told him that they "rated him for that" which made him feel he had done the right thing.

*"If I have a problem I usually fight"*

**Immaz (16)**

Teenagers also tended to act in a way that they believed would impress those of the opposite sex – for example in ways that would make them come across as 'hard' and gain attention.

## Involvement in gang or criminal activities

Some young people grew up in areas of the West Midlands where they were **influenced by criminal or gang culture**. In these places, the most successful person some people could imagine could well be a drug dealer.

The deputy headteacher of a Catholic school based in Walsall, recalled that there was gang involvement outside of the school – and sometimes these 'gang wars' would be brought into the playground. He said that he was aware that pupils' gained approval and acceptance from gang members if they had been in a fight with members of a rival gang, which may drive some of them to fight with one another. Within this environment, he reported that some felt they could gain status by committing crimes or carrying out errands for gang members to show loyalty. This could lead to some young people aspiring to make money from crime or be 'big' and play a significant role in a gang, as others in their local area had done.

Some young people we spoke to were wary of getting mixed up in local criminality. For example, James was wary about going out in his local area when he knew 'something was going on' from his networks on social media. He was wise to the risks of this lifestyle after his friend had been fatally stabbed in a gang-related incident in the previous year.

Others were less wary and got caught up in these activities themselves. Ben, a teenager with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) had got 'mixed up with the wrong crowd' in his local area. He believed he was 'set up' after a girl he considered his girlfriend took him to an area where another boy stabbed him. Following this incident, he began to carry a knife himself – and was later arrested with this in his possession. Ben's family realised he was vulnerable to violence and grooming. They began to have a more open conversation with him about who he was spending time with, and why he might want to avoid some types of people or situations.

## Conclusion

A small world view, combined with a desire to gain status within this world, could lead to children **behaving disruptively in search of short-term gains** (such as a bit of cash, the perception of being 'tough' amongst peers, being 'known' in their school or area).

However, these **short-term gains often came at the expense of their longer-term success**. Disruptive patterns of behaviour could restrict young people's options for the future and increase the chances of negative outcomes (such as exclusion or involvement in violent crime).

## Chapter 3

# The role of ability

*“Kids need to learn the skills to manage how they feel, to manage difficult situations and complex social relationships. These kids aren’t getting that from their parents”*

West Midlands education provider

# Some young people lacked the ability to manage their own behaviours

## Section overview:

- More disadvantaged young people often struggled the most to regulate their own emotions
- This could be due to difficulties at home, special educational needs (SEN), or challenges linking cause and effect

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## More disadvantaged young people struggled the most to regulate their emotions

*“We are always making assumptions that kids know certain things or how to do things – and they are choosing to misbehave. A lot of the time they actually don't know, it's a gap. We need to fill those gaps.”*

**Teacher**

Short tempers and emotional outbursts were common in the schools we visited. Teachers reported struggling to manage these outbursts and were worried about the knock-on effect on the rest of the class. A secondary school based in Birmingham, home to one of the highest pupil premium index in the country, reported that their pupils frequently had ‘meltdowns’. During these moments it was very hard to negotiate with them until they had calmed down. To eliminate further disruption, staff allowed students to go ‘off-stage’ for these outbursts, to another room to scream – sometimes supervised by teachers. Whilst this helped to maintain peace in the classroom, and gave students space to vent, it was unclear how this approach encouraged them to improve their behavioural regulation over time.

In some cases, incidents like this were related to underlying SEN or issues in their family lives which meant young people were not being taught key skills around emotional and behavioural control at home.

*“The kids we are talking about can really struggle to regulate their emotions. They've never been taught how to deal with them.”*

**Teacher**

### Difficulties at home

As we have discussed in the previous chapter, home life was difficult for many of the children in the sample. Many had seen poor emotional regulation, difficult or even abusive relationships at home. Children processing adverse experience such as trauma or abuse were further disadvantaged in managing their emotions, and many did not have good role models at home.

Some regularly saw their parents or other family members deal with difficult situations in an emotionally volatile way. For example, Lindsay used to argue regularly with her mother, who – herself struggling with alcoholism and the fallout of an abusive relationships – once got so angry she called the police and shouted at them to take her daughter away. Others, like Shevon's (12) mum, had regular outbursts at school, to the point he reported that she had been 'banned' from his primary school after threatening a headteacher. He himself had been permanently excluded from primary school and temporarily from secondary school, for "being aggressive to other kids".

Similarly, Immaz (16) reported that his dad shouted aggressively at police during an interview about Immaz's behaviour for 'wasting his time'. Environments and role-models like this could have the effect of normalising challenging behaviours for some of the children.

### Special educational needs

It was common that the young people we talked to had additional cognitive or mental health requirements. In some cases, these had gone undiagnosed for a while before being picked up. For instance, Lindsay had been disruptive at school for several years before she was diagnosed with ADHD. She received the diagnosis following an incident in which she turned up to school drunk, which saw her referred to an alcohol support service. Following this, she was given medication for ADHD which helped her to manage her own behaviour. She and her sister both noted that she was a lot more patient when taking the medication, and that this had led to more positive outcomes – such as fewer fights at school.

Some families reported a sense of relief at realising there was an underlying cause to some of their child's behaviour. For example, Ben's dad explained that a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) had explained a lot of the challenges he saw his son dealing with, and had given the family a better grasp on what some of his needs and vulnerabilities might be. In particular, they became more wary about how environmental factors like noise and a busy environment at a school could impact their son's behaviour negatively.

### Struggling to link cause and effect

Young people reported that they were not always convinced their bad behaviour would lead to a negative outcome. Those who had received multiple warnings for disruptive behaviour were sometimes surprised when it led to something more final, such as a managed move or exclusion.

For example, Lindsay said she hadn't thought about the long-term consequences to behaving disruptively. She tended to mess around in class because she wanted attention, and also to leave the classroom as she found lessons boring. The schools she attended did not really vary their approach and removed her from class as a punishment, so she often got what she wanted. She received many warnings from teachers that repeated removals would lead to an escalation in punishments, but thought that these were empty threats. She was surprised one day when her mum received a phone call telling her she would be managed-moved to another school.

*'I wanted two things. One - attention, and two - to get out of class.'*

**Lindsay (16)**

This blurring of the link between cause and effect was sometimes compounded by parents, who sought to protect their children from blame. This meant they blamed the schools instead, and these children were not encouraged to take responsibility for their own behaviour. For instance, Aleena's mum regularly argued with school staff or police on her daughter's behalf – often becoming angry and obstructive to the school's wider aims, and threatening them with legal action for 'targeting her daughter'.

## Conclusion

It often fell to the school to deal with the fallout when students **couldn't manage their own behaviour**. This was most frequently the **most disadvantaged young people**, who were not picking up skills in emotional resilience that others might learn at home.

However, **those who were consistently removed from the school environment lacked opportunities to develop foundational skills** in deferred gratification and emotional regulation. They were more likely to seek **short-term gains** from activities that may include risky, violent or criminal activities outside of school.

## Chapter 4

# The role of schools

*“Schools are judged by academic results, not their ability to keep kids engaged”*

*West Midlands education provider*

# Schools want to re-shape futures for these children, but are restricted by other pressures

## Section overview

- Schools are keen to tackle the root causes of problems and help reshape children's futures
- However, an overwhelming focus on academic achievement mean that schools were prioritising a controlled environment over other skills
- This treats the symptom rather than the underlying causes of disruptive behaviour

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## Helping young people thrive

Teachers and other school leaders talked about the importance of tackling the root causes of behaviour to secure better outcomes for pupils in future. They were also keen to avoid negative outcomes, such as getting excluded from school, involvement in violence, crime or the prison system.

Many staff expressed the importance of including wider-life skills in school and for these to be a foundational part of the curriculum. Some had set-up schemes they felt would help to inspire children to broaden their world view and future aspirations. For example, a PRU based in Birmingham arranged work experiences for the young people, partly to show them they could make good money from non-criminal activities – for example by refereeing for a local football club. They also created an open conversation between the teachers and pupils about the teachers own experiences and career progression – creating positive role models and attainable aspirations.

However, even when schools want to prioritise these things, most felt that the wider system does not provide much recognition or credit to those focussing on emotional development and non-academic aspirations – such as more vocational training or extra-curricular activities.

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## How are schools under pressure to focus on academic achievement?

*“There’s no value in keeping kids in the classroom if it impacts the academic achievement of other kids.”*

**Teacher**

Schools are under pressure to maintain their place in league tables, get good Ofsted results and perform well academically. This means that many feel they need to put the majority of their time and resources towards academic activities and boosting grades – even if they sense that non-curricular activities would be beneficial for grades and later outcomes for students.



We have discussed previously in this report how the focus on academic grades means that schools tend towards the creation of academic environments that are controlled. This serves to prioritise the many over the few: the many who are able to function well in an environment like this, over the few who are not.

This means they treat the symptom rather than the cause of disruptive behaviours – focussing on designing out disruption from the school premises, rather than the factors which underly disruptive behaviours more generally. This means that young people facing school exclusions may be growing up without developing the skills required to work towards a positive future in later life.

## How effective are the current interventions?

This list presents a quick overview of some of the interventions to tackle disruptive behaviour employed by schools in our research. The central focus of many of the interventions was maintaining a controlled environment rather than boosting children’s motivation and ability to behave. Where there were positive examples such as pastoral care, mentoring and restorative approaches, these tended to be on an ad-hoc rather than a systematic basis.

Interventions	Details about interventions	How well did this impact motivation and ability to behave?
<b>Permanent exclusion</b>	<b>A permanent exclusion</b> is the most serious disciplinary measures a school can give, it involves the pupil being removed from the school roll and is no longer allowed to attend the school. It is the statutory duty on governing bodies or Local Authorities to provide full-time education for the pupil elsewhere.	<p>Being removed from school did little to improve motivation for the students in the research, as they felt displaced, or that getting excluded was ‘cool’.</p> <p>Being removed meant that these students lacked opportunities to develop behavioural skills, as they are removed from the learning environment.</p> <p>However, for a couple of respondents, extreme nature of the reprisal made them reconsider their path and work to change their outcomes going forward.</p>
<b>Pupil referral unit (PRU)</b>	<p><b>PRUs</b> are a type of school that caters for children who aren’t able to attend mainstream school – this could be due to a number of factors including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanently excluded due to behaviour</li> <li>• Emotional or behavioural difficulties</li> <li>• Special educational needs or in the process of getting diagnosed</li> </ul>	<p>Some students reported feeling better in PRUs, which were often smaller and slower paced than in their previous mainstream schools.</p> <p>However, many also reported that the behaviour of other pupils was challenging, and the slower pace could be demotivating, leaving students with more limited possibilities for their futures.</p>

Some pupils have all their lessons at a PRU whilst others split their time between mainstream school they are registered and a PRU.

**Fixed-term exclusion**

**A fixed term/temporary exclusion** is when a pupil is not allowed in school for a specific period of time for disciplinary reasons. An individual pupil may not be given more than 45 days fixed term exclusions in any one school year.

Like permanent exclusions or being sent to isolation, some students liked being given time out of the classroom, or saw this as cool. Some in the research did not really see this as a formal punishment, and enjoyed using the days off to spend time with friends.

As such, fixed-term exclusions did not necessarily address challenges students face in managing their behaviour, or boost their motivation to engage with school.

**Managed move**

**A managed move** is an arrangement between school, pupil and their guardians, in which a pupil is moved to alternative provision – generally another school or pupil referral unit (PRU). Managed moves are likely to take place in cases of poor attendance, where pupils with SEN are not being supported as well as they could elsewhere, or in cases where the pupil is at risk of permanent exclusion, or poses a risk to other students.

For some students, especially those with SEN in the research, managed-moves were a way to trial new environments to see if they can get along better.

However, for others, managed moves did not necessarily tap into building skills in behaviour or motivation. Some students reported memorable conversations with one or two key staff – but this was on an ad-hoc basis rather than systematic intervention.

Managed moves may be used rather than permanent exclusions to remove students from school, to avoid a permanent exclusion being logged on a student’s school record.

In practice, students may be manage-moved through several schools.

**Isolation rooms**

Schools can place pupils in a separate area/facilities when it is deemed necessary and they are removed from the classroom during the school day. They are usually part of an escalating set of disciplinary measures.

Students in the research (in particular those with SEN) appreciated having time in quiet spaces to help them calm down.

However, being frequently taken out of more stimulating or distracting environments did little to help these pupils develop skills to work within these environments in the longer term.

**Isolation rooms** can also be referred to as ‘internal inclusion units’ ‘internal exclusions’ or ‘seclusion’.

In addition, for some, being taken out of class was a bonus - so this had negative impact on their motivation to behave well, as they tried to behave disruptively to get sent out of class.

**Escalating disciplinary measures**

Schools employ a range of **disciplinary measures** to maintain behaviour standards within school. Common examples include:

- verbal warnings;
- missing break times;
- setting written tasks as punishment;
- detention;

Schools also have the power to discipline students beyond the school gates if they perceive students to be at risk of harming themselves or others; or in a situation that could cause reputational damage to the school, such as if the pupil is wearing school uniform, or on their way to or from the premises.

Schools may also use reasonable force to control or restrain pupils if they're at risk of harming themselves or others; to remove disruptive children from the classroom; or to search for prohibited weapons.

Most students in the research could list a set of escalating measures used in their school, which most understood and respected.

However, in some schools and with some pupils, there was a sense of 'payback' to these punishments, leaving them feeling *transactional* rather than useful in terms of developing ability or motivation.

**Searching, screening and confiscation**

Schools may choose **to search or screen** pupils for weapons or other contraband as they enter the premises, or if they hear that a student might be carrying a prohibited item. Schools are empowered to confiscate prohibited items. Depending on the item, they may pass this onto the police, retain it, or return it to students at the end of the day or lesson.

Schools visited were confident in their ability to keep contraband off the school premises, although recognised that this alone did not encourage pupils to self-regulate their behaviours, and schools also talked about the importance of coupling these with promoting wider awareness and training.

**Mentoring**

Schools may offer **mentors** to provide role models or guidance to pupils.

Schools may run this in a variety of ways, including professional, peer-to-peer or group mentorship programmes.

Many children in the research felt motivated by mentorship and valued having relatable mentors who understood the challenges they were facing in schools.

Some in the research stated they wanted to be mentors themselves. Of course, this could be a positive step - but could also be limiting if it is the *only* path a child could imagine.

Children becoming overly-reliant to just one friendly adult could also run the risk of worsening their behaviour, if the adult left.

**Restorative approaches**

**Restorative conversations** aim to develop empathy between students and teachers and reassure students that teachers are taking account of their needs and challenges. When a student is behaving disruptively, teachers may choose to have a restorative conversation to

- Give the student an opportunity to say “what happened”/give the student a voice
- Communicate to the student how it made them and the class feel
- Demonstrate that the student is supported, whilst reiterating high expectations

Create a plan together for both to move past the event as a team

Restorative conversations could have positive impact – and several students talked about how they appreciated feeling ‘listened to’ when things went wrong at school.

Done well, these could impact both the motivation and ability of students to behave.

**School Link Police Officers**

Schools may have a **‘linked’ police officer**, and they can work with the school in a number of ways. Police can be working solely with a specific school or group of schools.

The aim is for police to build positive relationships with young people, schools and the community – increasing intelligence from pupils/teachers, the ability to reach young people ‘at risk’ and reducing levels of youth crime and offending.

It was felt by schools that students would benefit from developing better relationships with the police and this may impact their motivation – especially if they came from areas where tensions between police and local youth were common.

It was also felt that the school having good relationships with the police force meant that schools were better able to monitor behaviour and learn about risks – as well as contributing to ongoing investigations.

However, it was unclear to what extent linked police officers improved students’ ability to behave. Students in the research did not really talk about the impact of their relationships with police officers on their ability or motivation.

**Family support workers**

Schools may choose to have **family support workers** who provide advice and information to families and parents of the pupils in a number of ways - signposting to other services. 1-1 sessions.

Many schools felt that developing strong links with families was essential – in particular for the most disadvantaged children.

However, the research uncovered several examples during which schools and families had different priorities for their children. It is

unclear to what extent a role like a family support worker is able to mitigate against the confusion this can cause children.

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**Pastoral Support**

Schools offer **pastoral care** which aims to ensure the physical and emotional welfare of all pupils. Within schools, staff may hold pastoral roles exclusively or it may be carried out alongside another role. Pastoral care may take place in a range of ways such as counselling, art therapy, and cognitive behavioural therapy.

A Pastoral Support Programme (PSP) is a co-ordinated intervention which aims to improve social, emotional and behavioural skills of pupils whose behaviour or attendance is deteriorating or have had multiple exclusions or other disciplinarys.

Most schools offering pastoral support felt that this was extremely beneficial for helping students to learn more about how to manage their own behaviours, as well as finding ways to boost motivation on an individual basis.

It was noted during the research that students who developed a strong relationship with a single adult could struggle if this adult moved on.

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**Summer schools & guest speakers**

Schools may choose to take part in a number of extracurricular activities to broaden young people's horizons. For example, they may have external speakers in to talk about their careers or offer summer schooling opportunities

Many schools talked about the positive, inspiring effect of bringing in external speakers to their school – especially if they had overcome the types of challenge faced by some of their pupils.

Most felt this could boost children's motivation, as well as broadening their worldview. However, a couple noted concerns that relying too heavily on 'reformed' speakers (e.g. those who had faced issues in schools, gangs or with crime in the past) could normalise these paths for children, subliminally teaching them that these behaviours were acceptable, and consequences reversible in future.

## Chapter 5

# Recommendations

*“A lot of what schools do to ‘help’ kids who are struggling is just tick boxing. It’s not a genuine attempt to actually support that child”*

*West Midlands education provider*

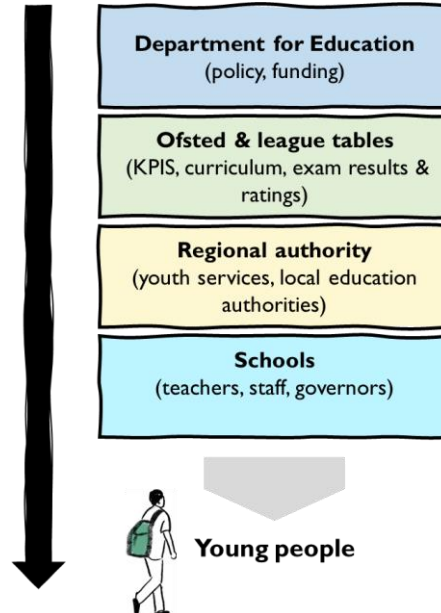
## Actions can be taken at every level – starting with policy

It is clear that there is an inequality playing out across schools, in which the most vulnerable are becoming yet more disadvantaged. It is also clear that schools alone cannot tackle these issues. Instead, it falls to the system as a whole to address the challenge.

At every level, we should be asking what would help children to gain **motivation and ability to control behaviours**. Schools, parents, youth services, early years and extra-curricular activities can all promote and support positive trajectories around motivation and ability to control behaviours.

Areas where change could be made to enable more positive futures include:

- Policy environment which shapes the world the children are in
- Professionals in contact with children
- Local agencies, education providers and community organisations
- Parents and adults who have close relationships with children



### How can we tackle the underlying factors for disruptive behaviours?

There are opportunities for positive intervention at every level affecting a child's education. Some starting ideas are listed below, but these could be developed and taken on in a number of ways:

#### Policy level

## Recommendations

- Support the creation of a standardised measure for tracking motivation and ability to regulate behaviour in students – and develop a system for embedding this widely across the system so it can be consistently applied (NB we have provided more detail on this in the section below)
- Reduce the limitations and pressure placed on schools to report primarily on academic measures
- Reshape the assessment criteria used by Ofsted, so that measures around motivation and ability to regulate behaviour (both within and outside of school) are given greater weight in Ofsted's standard assessment, and measures to tackle these underlying causes count towards the school's performance rating
- Policies which deal specifically with the skills and motivations of parents, and how these interact with other elements of the system

### Ofsted & League tables

- Assess and report on holistic development of children in schools, as well as analysing academic outcomes
- Develop KPIs which encourage the school system to address underlying factors around motivation or behavioural control
- Promote and celebrate good initiatives which support development of motivation and behavioural skills where appropriate

### Regional level

- Encourage and support employers to facilitate opportunities for young people in the world of work, such as providing work experience placements, open days, attending trade shows
- Facilitate the development of a network of employers who can share best practice about supporting young people into work, and support a positive culture around skills transfer
- Develop and celebrate opportunities for volunteering in communities, and identify ways in which young people can be encouraged and supported to take part
- Facilitate relationships between youth services and local organisations generally, to enable them to identify opportunities locally to get young people inspired and tapped into a wider system

### School level

We recognise that many schools will already be addressing these issues – but currently feel restricted by assessment criteria that prioritises academic achievement of students. It is true that much of the change at the school level will be impacted by changes in wider policy. However, there are some measures schools can take to support this and make progress:

- Developing a dialogue at a local level about issues around motivation and behaviour regulation, and lobby for change via school networks and touchpoints, such as school governors
- Embed programmes in school which aim to boost children's motivation and 'size of world' – such as by showing what life outside school might be like, and examples for how students' lives might look in the future. Examples include developing work experience programmes, day trips, inviting external speakers to the school, teachers sharing details about their own career pathways
- Developing wider options of tailored provision for students not able or interested in following an 'academic' pathway – for example through links with local colleges, apprenticeships, or local organisations able to provide additional practical training and experience



- Provide spaces where skills beyond academic skills are developed, assessed and celebrated
- Prioritise programmes that will focus on enabling young people to manage disruption and unpredictability, rather than deliberately designing these features out of the school environment
- Ensure that young people are working towards good regulation of behaviour outside of the school grounds as well as within them
- Introduce measures that allow behaviour management to be tracked and measured along a trajectory, so that children can be encouraged to develop their skills in this area (and that both young people and staff see this is a skill rather than a binary measure)

### Parent level

- Develop better working relationships with schools, in order to build perspective and share responsibilities more effectively
- Think proactively about broadening their child's size of world, through exploration and exposure to new opportunities
- Work on their own skillsets – including in emotional regulation – in order to develop opportunities for their children

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## There are currently barriers preventing schools from supporting children to regulate their behaviours

Ultimately, we should be supporting children to regulate their own behaviours in the longer term – rather than simply in a classroom environment. However, at the highest level, in government and policy, the focus is primarily on academic achievement – meaning that softer, behavioural measures are deprioritised. Whilst Ofsted collects data around students' behaviour and development of workplace skills generally<sup>8</sup>, this could go further. There are no standardised measures for analysing or tracking these underlying factors we have outlined here: namely, students' motivation, or ability to regulate their own behaviour in the longer term. This makes it difficult for schools and other agencies to understand and monitor effectively, which in turn makes it difficult to report on or celebrate progress in these areas. A useful first step in allowing schools to monitor and improve this in their students would be to **create a standardised measure for tracking these motivations and skills around behaviour regulation that could be used across agencies.**

## There is a key opportunity to monitor motivation and skills around behaviour alongside academic achievement

For real system-wide change to occur, it is important that schools are supported to pursue this goal. In an applied context, this means giving schools the space and resources so that both *motivation and students' ability to regulate behaviour* can be effectively tracked – alongside the academic and behavioural issues tracked presently.

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<sup>8</sup>Included under 'Behaviour and attitudes' and 'personal development' in Ofcom's Education Inspection Framework [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/801429/Education\\_inspection\\_framework.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/801429/Education_inspection_framework.pdf)

Developing a standardised measure across schools would be a logical first step to achieve this. This would help by:

- Evidencing the relationship between motivation, ability to control behaviours and negative outcomes
- Evaluating interventions against what we are actually trying to achieve for children
- Tracking progress and comparing successes
- Shifting culture so that the ingredients for future success are seen to comprise motivation, aspiration, ability to control behaviours and other life skills as much as academic success
- Enabling schools to justify spending time and resources on equipping children with the skills and aspirations they need to succeed – even if this means directing some resource away from academic attainment

### **Evidencing the correlation between poor motivation, ability to control behaviours and negative outcomes**

A standardised measure would allow schools to monitor the *correlation* between lack of motivation, ability to control behaviours in the longer term and negative outcomes – such as disciplinary measures, expulsion or involvement in criminal activity. Developing an evidence base will mean schools can demonstrate this correlation and allow them to make the case that change is needed, and that these are root causes which need to be addressed. This would help schools and other agencies to justify spending in certain services or resources which aim to tackle these root causes.

### **Evaluating interventions against what we are actually trying to achieve for children**

A standardised measure would enable schools and other agencies to track *progress* made in their students' motivation and ability to regulate their own behaviour – which would facilitate the evaluation of particular interventions, and empower schools to make informed decisions around what works and what doesn't when it comes to supporting their students to engage. This would also allow best practice to be shared and compared across different schools and other agencies.

### **Shifting the culture so that the ingredients for future success are seen to comprise a wider set of life skills, including motivation, ability to control behaviours and academic success**

Gaining an evidence base to show the correlation between positive interventions and a reduction in negative outcomes, would develop the wider cultural understanding of the importance of these measures.

### **Enabling schools to justify spending time and resources on equipping children with the skills and aspirations they need to succeed**

Empowering schools to make a choice over where their resources could best be spent to support the students they have, and enabling them to shift some of their resources towards developing behavioural skills and aspirations – even if this shifts some resource away from activities promoting academic achievement.

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## **Some starting ideas for developing a standardised measure**

There are many types of data, as well as tools in psychology, education and child development, that could be used to develop a standardised measure of motivation and ability to regulate behaviours. Below is a starting list of the types of data that could be considered:

# Recommendations

- Children’s locus of control
- Aspirations and future hopes of students
- Parent’s aspirations for their children
- Knowledge about careers and trajectories outside of family’s direct experience
- Emotional regulation – could use self-report and behavioural data to triangulate this
- Positive and healthy relationships between peers, staff and wider groups
- Practical skills and work experience

## How could a new measure change current practice?

**Academic focus (current system)**

**Holistic focus (what could be)**

**The current system focusses primarily on academic achievement**

**We could further emphasise skills around motivation and ability to control behaviour, alongside academic achievement**

**Department for Education**

The government department responsible for education in the UK, through policy and funding blocks, administered by local authorities. Funding blocks do cover additional needs (such as deprivation) and SEN, but not currently include funding for behavioural measures or initiatives. The DfE influences Ofsted’s remit.

**Department for Education**

Encourage a more holistic focus in the school system, reducing the pressure on schools to report according to solely academic measures

**Ofsted & league tables**

Ofsted’s Education inspection framework includes measures for behaviour, attitudes and personal development, but these could be further developed and foregrounded. League tables normally foreground grades when ranking schools

**Ofsted & league tables**

Assess and report on holistic development in schools, through developing KPIs which raise the prioritisation of wider life skills alongside academia

**Regional authorities**

Local education authorities are responsible for the management of state schools, including disseminating central government funding, co-ordination of admissions and staff. Behavioural initiatives are not currently considered in funding allocations.

**Regional authority**

LEAs and youth services could promote and celebrate initiatives in local communities which enable young people to develop motivation and behavioural control, and foster networks between communities and schools to develop these offers

**Schools**

Schools typically have pastoral teams, mentorship programmes and extra-curricular activities to support development of students. However these are rarely given the weighting awarded to academic success.

**Schools**

Embed programmes which aim to develop young people’s life skills alongside their academic achievement, monitor development of these skills, and develop a wider conversation around these skills with young people and their parents

**Young people**

**Young people**



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## **A standardised measure could drive change throughout the system in the following ways:**

### **Department for education could...**

- Develop a standardised measure to track both motivation and student's ability to regulate their own behaviour and ensure this is embedded, and used consistently

### **Ofsted & league tables could...**

- Include the measure in their reports, assessments, and rankings
- Promote advice and understanding of the measure, and why it is important
- Ensure the measure is upheld consistently

### **Schools & regional authorities could...**

- Track the correlation between poor motivation & ability to regulate behaviour and negative outcomes
- Compile an evidence base to show the importance of tackling root causes
- Measure progress and evaluate interventions
- Lobby for change more widely, and procure funding for specific interventions

### **Parents and young people could...**

- Measure their child's/their own motivation and behaviour against these standards

# Conclusion

The issues and fundamental mechanisms we have seen are not unique to the West Midlands. Across the country, national policies mean that academic achievement and the desire to maintain controlled environments in schools are dominating the agenda for many schools.

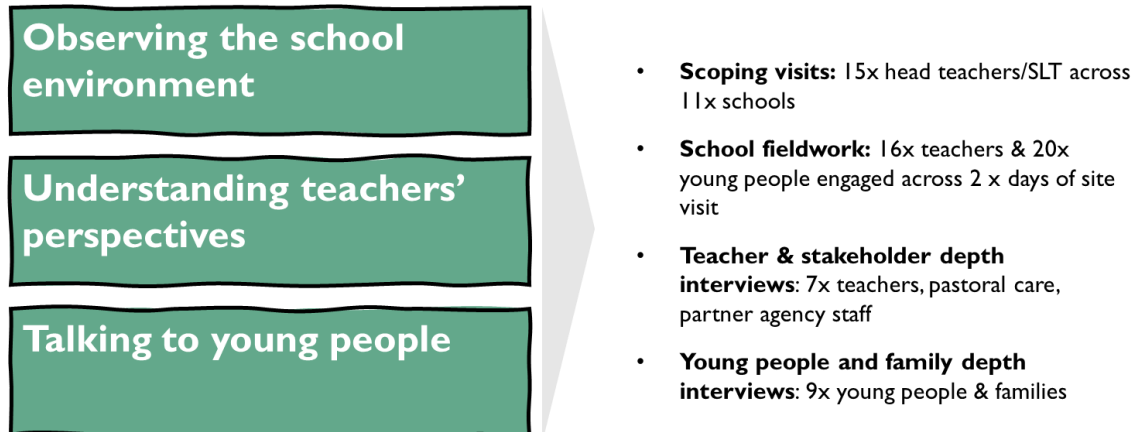
There is a risk these problems will grow worse as the targets become further embedded. Goodhart's Law is an established principle<sup>9</sup> demonstrating that if one target or measure for success is prioritised, people can become more concerned with hitting the target, rather than thinking more broadly about what the target represents, and how they can develop success towards the goal more broadly.

When it comes to permanent exclusions, there are of course many factors at work, including wider underlying issues relating to deprivation and other forms of inequality that we cannot solve here. However, focussing on what we can address, we propose rebalancing the scales of 'what success looks like' in schools, so that the motivation and ability to regulate behaviours can be given the attention they need, bringing about better futures for more disadvantaged students in the long term.

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<sup>9</sup> This principle is called 'Goodhart's law': When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure <https://marketbusinessnews.com/financial-glossary/goodharts-law/>

# Annex – Research methodology



## Research with young people

Researchers explored the educational journeys and wider contexts of nine young people. They carried out in-depth interviews over video call with nine young people and their families. Researchers explored their experiences of school and mapped their journeys to exclusion - as well as understanding the wider context of their lives and upbringing.

## Who took part

- The young people interviewed were aged between 12-16, including a range in ethnicity and locations across the West Midlands.
- All of the young people in the sample had been excluded (temporarily or permanently) from school due to violent or disruptive behaviour.
- The sample comprised a mix of genders with a weighting towards boys in line with the data on exclusions/violence.

*Full breakdown below*

## Young people and families

<b>9 young people</b> 7 parents, 2 older siblings/guardians	<b>Gender</b>	Male x 7 Female x 2
	<b>Age</b>	12 x 1 14 x 1 15 x 3 16 x 4
	<b>Ethnicity</b>	White British x 4 Black x 3 Asian x 2
	<b>Location</b>	Birmingham x 6 Wolverhampton x2 Coventry x 1
	<b>School experience</b>	All young people have been one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temporarily excluded</li> <li>• Permentant excluded</li> <li>• Pupil Referral Unit</li> </ul>

### Researching the school environment

Researchers carried out eleven 'scoping visits' across a range of schools in the West Midlands. Spending time in schools was essential, to understand the environment and observe young people's real-world behaviours.

During scoping visits, researchers interviewed head teachers and the senior leadership team exploring their experiences and reflections on violence and disruption in schools. Following this the research team spent four days at a secondary school in Birmingham, where they spoke to 16 teachers, interviewed 20 young people and observed a range of classrooms, playgrounds and educational settings.

Schools visited were across the West Midlands region – including some specialist schools such as a Catholic school, SEN school, college.

### Understanding teachers' perspectives

After the school-visits, we carried out in-depth interviews with teachers, pastoral care and partner agency staff to understand the wider context of violence and aggression in an educational setting and the current support and systems in place.

We included a range in teachers' professions - including senior leadership team (SLT), head teachers, behaviour management, pastoral care, counsellors.