

School Exclusions Review – call for evidence



Anti-Bullying Alliance response – May 2018

About the Anti-Bullying Alliance

The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) is a unique coalition of organisations and individuals, who work together to stop bullying and create safer environments in which children and young people can live, grow, play and learn. ABA is hosted by the National Children's Bureau. www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk.

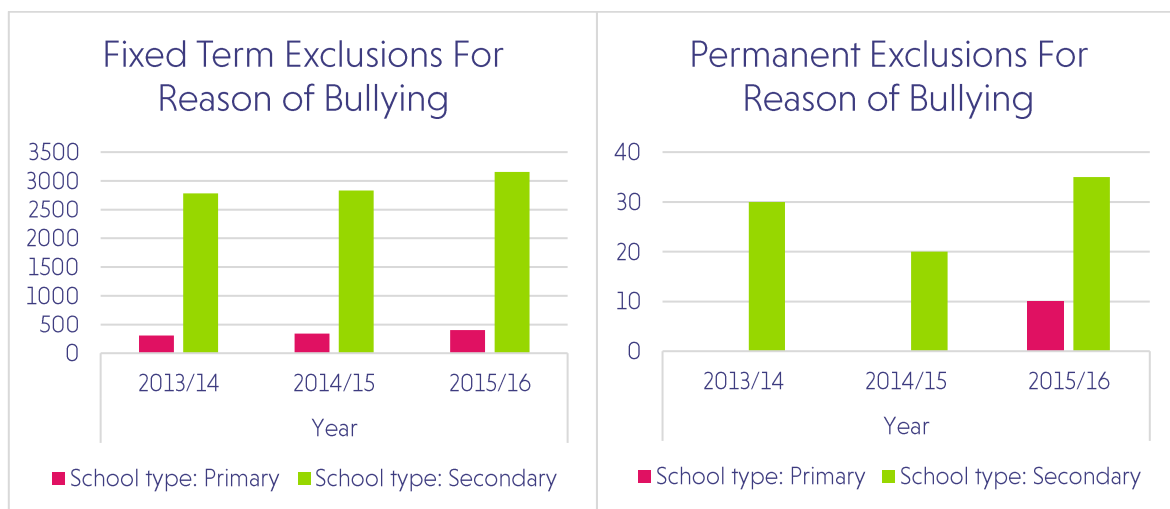
ABA are supported by an elected Advisory Group that includes representatives from the Office of the Children's Commissioner, NSPCC, the Diana Award, Stonewall, Childnet, Oxfordshire County Council and Ditch the Label. ABA coordinate Anti-Bullying Week each year.

Introduction

The relationship between bullying and school exclusions are often overlooked. In our response to the call for evidence we have considered the key research, evidence and testimony from young people/parents to formulate our response and recommendations. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further over the course of the Review. The Anti-Bullying Alliance supports the National Children's Bureau's wider response to this call for evidence.

Children who bully are more likely to be excluded

Children who engage in bullying are more likely to be involved in crime and be excluded from school (Ofsted, 2003; Monks et al., 2009). The number of children who are given fixed term exclusions for reasons of bullying has increased year on year for three years based on Department for Education statistics.



Evidence shows that bullying is often more nuanced than straightforward binary oppositions of 'bully' and 'victim' – bullying is multi-faceted, regularly involving groups; often impacted by the wider peer, school and social culture, and too often involving vulnerable children who both bully and are bullied.

Ditch the Label research¹ shows that 37% of pupils who have been bullied never tell anybody about it. Of them 23% don't tell anyone because they are worried that it will make things worse. Many young people tell us they prefer responses to bullying that support perpetrators to understand the impact of their behaviour and less so sanction based responses that can make perpetrators focus on their own punishment.

One disabled young person told us: ***"She called me a cripple. I told my mum and she spoke to the school. They sat us down together and we could talk about it. I think it helped her to understand why I got upset."***

A young person told us: ***"They need to understand how it makes the person they're doing it to feel. They need to be told how it feels."***

Department for Education research shows that restorative approaches mixed with sanctions (that include exclusions in serious circumstances) can be effective in schools².

Children who are bullied are more likely to be excluded

Children who experience bullying do not always display behaviours that show 'typical' signs of sadness or worry. The often 'act out' and can display similar behaviours to that of children who bully, may go on to bully others and can display poor behaviour.

We know that bullying has a significant impact on absence from school. Research on behalf of the Department for Education finds that children who say they are bullied every day are three times as likely, as children not being bullied, to be excluded³.

Young person: ***"I've been excluded when really they were far more in the wrong than me."***

One parent told us: ***"Not one child suffered an exclusion for a physical assault but my son did when he assaulted another child after much provocation. They said it was a two-way thing."***

Young person ***"I just got so angry I couldn't stand it anymore, so I just hit them"***

Disabled children / those with SEN, bullying and exclusion

Disabled children and those with SEN are particularly at risk of being excluded due to their involvement (both perpetrating and being a victim of bullying). Studies reveal that young people with SEN and/or disabled young people are disproportionately vulnerable to being bullied, as well as sometimes being perceived as being 'bullies' themselves. One study⁴ describes using a 'threat assessment' approach, which takes into account the social context of perceived threats and assesses the real level of danger they present. The authors note that when this approach is used, fewer young people with SEN and/or disabilities are excluded from school, presumably because their 'bullying' behaviour is better understood or is addressed through strategies other than exclusion.

Young person with SEN: ***"I got excluded because all the winding up like, it got ... it happened so often that I just got really angry and couldn't control myself anymore. Eventually I ended up taking my anger out on***

¹ Ditch the Label (2017) Annual Anti-Bullying Survey <https://www.ditchthelabel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/The-Annual-Bullying-Survey-2017-1.pdf>

² Department for Education (Goldsmiths 2011): The Use and Effectiveness of Anti-Bullying Strategies in Schools <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-use-and-effectiveness-of-anti-bullying-strategies-in-schools>

³ Sarah Lasher and Clare Baker (2015) Bullying: Evidence from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England Wave 2, Department for Education

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/570241/Bullying_evidence_from_the_longitudinal_study_of_young_people_in_England_2_wave_2_brief.pdf

⁴ Kaplan, SG and Cornell, DG (2005) 'Threats of violence by students in special education', *Behavioral Disorders*, 31, 1, 107–19.

someone ... and as a result I ended up getting excluded ... because I was considered a 'health and safety matter' by the school."

One parent of a child with SEN said: *"They [the school] refused to believe us, claimed we were lying and subsequently excluded our son due to his reaction to being bullied."*

Parent of a child with SEN from evidence taken from the Lamb Inquiry 2009: *"We moved him at the end of year five because of the bullying, which had resulted in physical injury. The bullying in secondary school was classified by the staff as 'regular teasing' and was therefore ignored. When he reacted to it, first by school refusal, then by minor acts of violence, then by significant self-harm issues, he was classed as having emotional and behavioural difficulties and was excluded."*

Recommendations for tackling bullying related exclusions

- Schools should consider whether or not a child who has shown aggressive and / or bullying behaviour have experienced bullying themselves before they are excluded
- School should have exhausted alternative responses to stop bullying of a child before they resort to exclusions unless others are at serious risk of harm
- Bullying should not be seen in isolation and the group dynamic should always be considered
- We would like to see the links between bullying and exclusions both for children who bully, bully victims (i.e. those who both bully and are bullied) and those who are bullied more explicitly stated in both the exclusions guidance and the anti-bullying guidance
- We would like to see the guidance state that schools should continue to investigate bullying of children even when they are on fixed term or permanent exclusions

Martha Evans – Director, Anti-Bullying Alliance
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