

Department for Education,  
Sanctuary Buildings,  
Great Smith Street,  
London,  
SW1P 3BT

Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2018

Dear Edward Timpson C.B.E,

I am writing on behalf of YoungMinds to provide a response to the call for evidence as part of your review into school exclusions.

We are delighted that the Prime Minister has commissioned you to carry out this important review and we hope that within the review you will examine the specific challenges and barriers faced by students experiencing mental ill health, childhood adversity and trauma.

As you know, YoungMinds is the UK's leading charity championing the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. At YoungMinds we are in a unique position as our insights and solutions are informed by the experience of children, young people and parents, as well as evidence and data we have collected.

This submission will draw heavily on the insights and lived experiences of the children, young people, parents, carers and professionals that we work with.

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## **1. Children and young people who have a mental health disorder are more likely to be excluded than their peers.**

Evidence shows that students with social, emotional and mental health difficulties are significantly more likely than other groups with a Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND) to be excluded from school. In 2013/14, one in five students with an identified social, emotional and mental health difficulty received at least one fixed period exclusion (26, 600 in total); whilst 1, 510 (over 1%) received a permanent exclusion<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, students with an identified Special Educational Need or Disability, but who are ineligible for specialist support (for example from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) are amongst the highest rates of permanent exclusions:

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<sup>1</sup> Department for England (2014), 'Children with Special Educational Needs: Absence and Exclusions' - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sen-absences-and-exclusions-additional-analysis>

representing 59% of all exclusions<sup>2</sup>. This is worrying, given that current NHS projections indicate that less than 30% of children and young people with a diagnosable mental health condition currently receive NHS treatment or care<sup>3</sup>.

**2. There is a disparity in the awards, assessment and funding of EHC Plans, which means that many children with mental health disorders are unable to get the support they need at school.**

The most recent figures show that 17.3% of the students with an identified social, emotional and mental health difficulty receive some SEN support, and 12.4% have a statement or an EHC Plan<sup>4</sup>. However, there is a chronic lack of recognition of mental health problems within the application of SEND requirements.

In 2017, there were 186,793 pupils across state-funded primary and secondary schools with special educational needs, whose primary need was a social, emotional and mental health difficulty<sup>5</sup>. However, the most recent prevalence data suggests that three children in every classroom have a diagnosable mental health condition, which equates to 750,000 children across the country<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, many teachers suggest that at least one in four of their students are experiencing mental health problems at any one time.

It is clear, therefore, that there are thousands of children across the country who are experiencing significant mental health needs, but are not considered to have special educational needs or disability, and are subsequently not benefitting from the additional protections and support available under SEND legislation.

**3. In some cases, schools are abdicating their responsibilities to support children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties, which is leading to 'illegal exclusions'.**

At YoungMinds, through our Parents' Helpline and engagement networks, we have heard from parents and families who feel like some schools are abdicating their responsibilities to support children and young people who experience mental ill health

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<sup>2</sup> Department for Education (2015) Permanent and Fixed-period Exclusions in England (national tables): 2013 to 2014: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/449439/SFR27\\_2015\\_National\\_Tables.xlsx](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/449439/SFR27_2015_National_Tables.xlsx)

<sup>3</sup> *Implementing the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health*, NHS England (2017);

<sup>4</sup> Department for Education 'Special Educational Needs in England: January 2017' -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2017>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Green, H., McGinnity, A., Meltzer, H., et al. (2005). *Mental health of children and young people in Great Britain 2004*. London: Palgrave.

and emotional distress. Other parents tell us that they are not confident that the school was able to meet the needs of their child.

Similarly, there have been concerns raised by the NUT, and others, that the prominence of academic attainment within accountability measures has been shown to mitigate against inclusion and has made some schools reluctant to take on disadvantaged and SEND pupils, as they are concerned this would lead to lower exam results<sup>7</sup>.

We have heard from parents about school managers actively encouraging home schooling to deal with temporary and permanent exclusions that result from emotional distress, a mental health condition, or co-existing learning disabilities or autism.

This is a concern that is echoed in the findings of the first year of Ofsted and CQC local area SEND inspections, which reported that:

“School leaders had used unofficial exclusions too readily to cope with children and young people who have SEND. Across nearly all local areas inspected, an alarming number of parents said that some school leaders asked them to take their children home. This was in addition, or as an alternative, to fixed-term exclusions. It is illegal”<sup>8</sup>.

#### **4. Exclusions need to balance the need to manage behaviour for the benefit of the whole class, with identifying and meeting the needs of individual pupils.**

From speaking to children, young people, parents and school staff, we know that fixed-term exclusions, and seclusion or isolation rooms, can, in some circumstances, have benefits for some vulnerable pupils with additional needs.

There is a variation in the way that fixed-term exclusions are handled within schools. Beyond temporary exclusions from the school environment, some schools use isolation rooms or units that are well-supported and staffed by adults who have the time and space to get to know students and to discuss issues that they may be facing. Many schools have also developed on site facilities for students at risk of exclusion, or returning from a fixed-term exclusion where they are on a part-time timetable or planned re-integration.

Of course, behaviour management is important in schools to ensure that the classroom environment enables all pupils to be able to learn without significant disruption. However, it is also important that pupils with additional needs, which may

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<sup>7</sup> National Union of Teachers (2015) Exam Factories? The impact of accountability measures on children and young people. <https://www.teachers.org.uk/files/exam-factories.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Ofsted and CQC (2017), ‘Local area SEND inspections: one year on’ - [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/652694/local\\_area\\_SEND\\_inspections\\_one\\_year\\_on.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/652694/local_area_SEND_inspections_one_year_on.pdf)

exhibit as challenging behaviour, have their needs identified and met, so that they are able to continue, and get the most out of, their education.

## **5. Challenging behaviour can be indicative of childhood adversity and trauma, or an unmet mental health need.**

Too often children with the most complex and difficult upbringings are judged on their behaviour, which, while challenging, may be a normal response to what they've been through. This means they are more likely to be excluded from school, and less likely to receive the support they need – which can have a lifelong effect on their mental health.

Research has shown that one in three lifetime mental health problems are directly linked to Adverse Childhood Experiences - including abuse, domestic violence, prejudice or bereavement<sup>9</sup>. Whilst, young people who have experienced four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences are four times more likely to have low levels of mental wellbeing and life satisfaction<sup>10</sup>.

## **6. It is important that children who have experienced childhood adversity and trauma are given appropriate support and are not re-traumatised.**

At YoungMinds, we are calling for a public health approach to childhood adversity and trauma<sup>11</sup>. In schools, this would mean that all professionals who work with children should have training about the effects of trauma on behaviour and clear guidance about how and when to ask about traumatic experiences. This would be a clear step in improving the identification of the mental health needs of students who have experienced adversity and trauma.

Beyond this, we recommend that isolation, seclusion or exclusion units should be designed in an adversity- and trauma-informed way, to ensure that students are not re-traumatised by their experience of exclusion. For example, we have heard of exclusion units in which excluded young people have been forced to wear grey tracksuits that mirror prison uniforms, which can be stigmatising or re-traumatising for young people who have experienced prejudice or abuse in their lives.

## **7. More still needs to be done to rebalance the education system, so that all schools are supported to be able to prioritise student mental health and wellbeing.**

At present, as most teachers agree, the education system is unbalanced with a much greater focus on academic attainment than the wellbeing of students<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Kessler, R (2010) 'Childhood adversities and adult psychopathology in the WHO World Mental Health Surveys' *British Journal of Psychiatry* 197(5): 378 – 385.

<sup>10</sup> Hughes, K., Lowey, H., Quigg, Z, and Bellis, M.A. (2016) 'Relationships between adverse childhood experiences and adult mental well-being: research from an English national household survey', *BMC Public Health* 16:222

<sup>11</sup> Summarised in Bush, M (Ed), [Addressing Adversity](#), YoungMinds (2018)

<sup>12</sup> Blow, M., Cowburn, A. [Wise Up: Prioritising Wellbeing in Schools](#), YoungMinds and NCB (2017)

At YoungMinds, we are delighted that the recent [Green Paper on children and young people's mental health](#) recognised the role of schools as part of an integrated approach to children's mental health, and introduced proposals for the increasing the capacity of early intervention provision in schools. These are welcome steps, however, more needs to be done, as has been alluded to in this submission.

We hope that throughout the implementation of the green paper proposals there is an emphasis on supporting children and young people with identified or emerging mental health problems to be able to self-care and self-manage, to ensure there is not an unnecessary escalation of their needs. Improving the processes for identifying mental health needs and ensuring that schools are able to facilitate extra support to those students who need it, could play a significant role in reducing the number of exclusions and ultimately ensuring that more children are able to benefit from continuing their education.

Beyond this, all schools should be supported to be able to prioritise student wellbeing and mental health, through increased resources and greater recognition of the work they do on wellbeing within Ofsted inspections.

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If you require any additional information or would like to speak to us further as part of the review, please do let me know.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Blow,

Policy and Government Affairs Manager,  
YoungMinds