

Research Briefing
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School exclusions in England

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Overview

Recent years have seen a significant rise in the number of school exclusions in England. Research has found that exclusion numbers are highest among vulnerable children, those from less affluent backgrounds, and children with special educational needs.

There has also been a rise in concerns about pupil behaviour since the covid pandemic. Research has found the pupils who are excluded from school can have worse future prospects, in physical and mental health as well as employment.

The government announced [new RISE Attendance and Behaviour Hubs](#) in May 2025 to address related issues, and has said that the schools white paper expected in autumn 2025 will include plans to tackle bad behaviour.

This short briefing sets out some key statistics on the rise in exclusions in recent years, as well as some recent related research and government policy. It does not aim to be exhaustive but instead to outline the extent of recent increase and its potential causes.

Education policy is a devolved matter and this briefing relates to developments in England.

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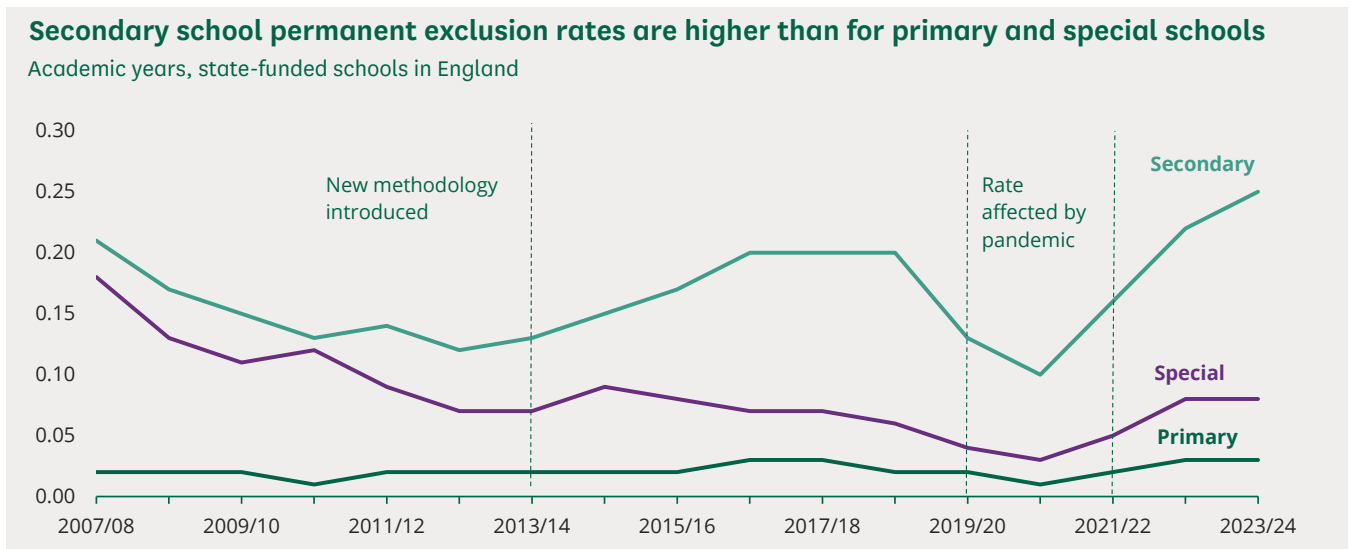
Statistics

2.1

Suspension and permanent exclusion rates have been rising sharply

In the 2023/24 academic year, the overall rate of permanent exclusions in England was 0.13 per hundred pupils, or 0.13%. There were 10,900 permanent exclusions in this academic year. Between 2006/07 and the early 2010s, the overall rate followed a downward trend reaching a plateau at 0.06% in 2013/14, and then beginning to steadily increase in the years before the coronavirus pandemic.¹ This upward trend has continued post-pandemic.

Permanent exclusion rates are much higher for secondary schools, than for primary and special schools. The rates are highest for pupils in school years eight to ten – normally the second year of secondary school to the first year of the GCSE phase.²



Source: Department for Education, [Academic year 2023/24, Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England](#), updated 1 September 2025, [custom table](#); Department for Education, [Permanent and fixed-period exclusions in England: 2008 to 2009](#), published 29 July 2010, “national tables” csv file

¹ Department for Education, [Academic year 2023/24, Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England](#), updated 1 September 2025, [custom table](#); Department for Education, [Permanent and fixed-period exclusions in England: 2008 to 2009](#), published 29 July 2010, “national tables” csv file

² As above, [custom table](#)

The most common reason recorded for permanent exclusion was persistent disruptive behaviour, accounting for around 39% of all recorded reasons.³ More than one reason can be recorded for each permanent exclusion.

2.2 Which groups of pupils are more at risk of permanent exclusion?

Some groups of pupils have much higher exclusion rates than others. In 2023/24, the following groups were more likely to experience permanent exclusion:

- Boys – with a rate of 0.18% compared to 0.08% for girls
- Those eligible for free school meals (FSM) – with a rate of 0.33% compared to 0.06% for those not eligible. Nearly two-thirds of all permanently-excluded pupils were eligible for FSM.
- Those from particular ethnic groups. For example, Gypsy/ Roma pupils had the highest permanent exclusion rate of any group – at 0.46%. Chinese pupils have the lowest rate, at 0.01. Small absolute numbers of Gypsy/ Roma pupils, however, mean less certainty around the data.
- Pupils receiving SEN support (rate of 0.41%) and pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans (rate of 0.26%), compared to those with no identified special educational needs (rate of 0.08%). More than half of permanently excluded pupils had identified SEN.⁴

Geographical variation

There are differences in permanent exclusion rates by area, which may be partly explained by other differences in pupil cohorts between areas – for example, higher proportions of pupils who are disadvantaged and therefore more likely to be excluded, or higher proportions with identified SEN. In 2023/24:

- The overall rate was lowest in London, at 0.07%

³ Department for Education, [Academic year 2023/24, Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England](#), updated 1 September 2025, main text

⁴ Department for Education, [Academic year 2023/24, Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England](#), updated 1 September 2025, [custom table](#)

- It was more than three times higher than this in the region with the highest rate, the North East, at 0.25%.
- Overall exclusion rates by local authority ranged from nil in Milton Keynes to 0.40% in Middlesbrough.⁵

2.3

Suspensions

As for permanent exclusions, suspension rates have also followed an upward trend in recent years, having been relatively flat since the 2006/07 academic year until just before the pandemic.⁶ The suspension rate in 2023/24 was 11.31%, or equivalent to 1,131 suspensions per 10,000 pupils, up from 5.36% in 2018/19. A pupil may be suspended more than once during an academic year.

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Rising exclusions: who is affected and possible causes

In September 2024, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) published the report [Who is Losing Learning?](#) which highlighted rising numbers of exclusions and made the case for reducing these levels.⁷

The report identified trends among the exclusions numbers:

- Students who receive free school meals are far more likely to be permanently excluded or suspended than their peers
- The poorest areas of England have the highest rates of lost learning through unauthorised absences and suspensions
- Children from some ethnic minority backgrounds are disproportionately being placed in alternative provision
- Children with mental health needs are three times as likely to have to move schools than their peers

⁵ Department for Education, [Academic year 2023/24, Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England](#), updated 1 September 2025, [custom table](#)

⁶ Department for Education, [Academic year 2023/24, Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England](#), updated 1 September 2025, [custom table](#)

⁷ IPPR, [Who is losing learning?: The case for reducing exclusions across mainstream schools](#), September 2024

- Children interacting with social services because their lives are unsafe are permanently excluded at eight times the national rate
- Children with school-identified SEN are five times more likely to be permanently excluded than their peers without SEN.⁸

A January 2024 report from the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), [Suspending Reality](#), similarly noted that “vulnerable pupils are markedly overrepresented in these statistics.” Part 2 of the report, which explored the reasons behind the rise in exclusions, found:

- a sharp rise in complex needs amongst pupils since the pandemic, meaning fewer pupils seem able to engage within a mainstream classroom setting
- Worsening mental health issues and the cost of living crisis had exacerbated those complex needs and resulting behavioural issues, particularly for those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, with many mainstream schools not equipped to identify need
- Current attainment and accountability metrics for mainstream schools and trusts fail to incentivise inclusive practice
- Rising rates of exclusion means that alternative provision (AP) risks being overwhelmed
- Partnership working between local authorities, multi-academy trusts (MATs) and the AP sector was not sufficiently collaborative.⁹

In March 2024, Teacher Tapp published a survey of teachers which found [rising concerns about behaviour at schools](#):

- Respondents saying they were ‘not concerned at all’ about behaviour affecting learning in secondary school dropping from 64% in February 2019 down to 52% in March 2024.
- At primary level, 44% of respondents said they were not concerned at all, compared to 60% in February 2019.¹⁰

In April 2025, the NASUWT teachers’ union said that its survey of teachers had found that in the previous year:

⁸ IPPR, [Revealed: School exclusions and suspensions rise by a fifth last year, finds new report](#), 5 September 2024

⁹ Centre for Social Justice, [Suspending Reality Part 2: Exclusion rates and inclusive practice in multi-academy trusts](#), January 2024, p5

¹⁰ Teacher Tapp, [Behaviour, Ofsted and fining parents](#), 12 March 2024

- 20% of teachers surveyed have been hit or punched by pupils and 38% had been shoved or barged, with 25% of teachers experiencing pupil violence at least once a term
- More than 60% of threats of assault with a weapon come from pupils of primary school age
- 95% of teachers experienced rudeness from pupils, with more than 25% suffering verbal abuse at least several times a week
- 62% of teachers experienced stress as a result of pupil aggression, and 52% subsequently considered leaving the teaching profession altogether
- 70% of teachers do not believe they have the resources, support and knowledge to meet the behaviour needs of all their pupils, and 78.8% say the number of pupils who do not receive adequate support has increased
- 76% of teachers say that pupil behaviour issues could be alleviated if affected pupils were moved to specialist facilities, but places are often scarce¹¹

A [report from the University of Oxford](#) published in May 2025 identified that school exclusions and suspensions “have profound negative medium- and long-term consequences for affected pupils’ future job prospects, physical and mental health, and behavioural outcomes.”¹²

4 Government action

4.1 Government guidance

Statutory guidance is in place relating to [School suspensions and permanent exclusions](#).

Separate guidance is also in place on [behaviour in schools](#), to support schools in delivering their behaviour policies.

4.2 Recent policy announcements and schools white paper

In May 2025, the Department for Education announced [new RISE Attendance and Behaviour Hubs](#) “to support hundreds of schools in tackling absence and

¹¹ NASUWT, [Teachers declare pupil behaviour emergency](#), 18 April 2025

¹² University of Oxford, [New report calls for action on school exclusion in England](#), 2 May 2025

poor behaviour.” The hubs would “work with the 90 lead schools to develop and support networks, and once fully implemented will support around 5000 schools.”¹³ A programme of [behaviour hubs](#) was also in place under the previous Conservative government.

In August 2025, the government announced that [800 schools would have access](#) to the new hubs from the start of the new term.¹⁴

In the same announcement, the government said that the schools white paper that is planned to be published in autumn 2025 would include the government’s plans to tackle bad behaviour.¹⁵

¹³ Department for Education, [How we’re helping children and teachers with their mental health and wellbeing](#), 16 May 2025

¹⁴ Department for Education, [Government to crackdown on bad behaviour and boost attendance](#), 31 August 2025

¹⁵ Department for Education, [Government to crackdown on bad behaviour and boost attendance](#), 31 August 2025

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