

Too young



to leave behind

The long-term negative impact of exclusions
and suspensions in primary school

Executive Summary | April 2024

“When my son was in reception, he was excluded 17 times... If I didn’t get a call by 10am I knew I could eat my breakfast.” Parent

This is Daniel. He is too young to leave behind.



"My son Daniel was in reception when he was first excluded. Although we had met with the school a few times before he started school and he had been identified as having special needs, at that time we didn't have an official diagnosis of Autism. As soon as he started primary school his behaviour went from bad to worse. He couldn't sit still, he couldn't concentrate and so he was made to sit in a corner on his own. When I would go to pick him up he would say to me, "I want to go back to nursery. No-one understands me. I'm so sad."*

By the time we eventually got an Autism diagnosis, Daniel had been excluded over twenty times. It just went on and on. He wouldn't sit still and listen, so he'd be removed from the class and would have to sit on his own in the school office.

Sometimes he would have tantrums and rip things off the wall and shout. That's when I would get a call and he would have to be picked up and usually he would miss a day or so of school. It got to the point that he just didn't want to go to school and he would beg me not to take him. When a six year old says to you, "Mum, do you think I'm a bad person?", it breaks your heart.

Even after his Autism diagnosis, Daniel was excluded a further ten times at primary school. Eventually we were referred to Chance UK and Daniel was matched with a mentor who he really loved being with. He built a really strong bond with his mentor and his behaviour improved so much. On the day that he would see him, he was so much happier - it really boosted his mood. To be honest, he never wanted it to end as he found it so supportive.

Now I have learnt to take each day as it comes. I am concerned about what will happen as Daniel gets older and especially in his teenage years. I'm scared of him going out on his own, especially as people won't realise he has Autism. He is such a kind boy but because of his Autism he can be very difficult. I just hope that now that he is at a school that understands his diagnosis that he will get the support he needs".

Post-Covid, we are seeing more and more children struggling in the classroom and suspensions and exclusions in primary schools are rapidly increasing, with children as young as five being excluded from school. The latest data shows that suspension rates for primary school children are now at the highest level since 2006*. Over 22,000 children aged six years and under were excluded/suspended in primary schools in England in 2022**.

Excluding children, whether permanently or temporarily from school, does not solve any problems. An exclusion also follows a child throughout their school life and beyond. Our new research reveals for the first time the long-term impact of suspensions and exclusions at primary school and it's devastating to see the substantial negative impact on both attainment and attendance in secondary school. Permanent exclusions and suspensions in primary schools are also being used disproportionately with certain groups of children, including those with special educational needs and those from families from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

This research shows that we must act now to support children who are struggling, many of whom have social, emotional and mental health needs. We know early intervention works - 80% of children mentored by Chance UK improve their school attendance and a far higher number have improved behaviour at school and home. This is why we need to prioritise early intervention to ensure children get expert help, preventing a lifetime of struggle and ultimately creating a more inclusive education system and society for all.

About this research

This is the first time that research on this scale has been done into the long-term impact of primary school exclusions and suspensions on children and young people. Using the National Pupil Database, FFT Education Datalab

followed five year groups of children across their school life, from when they entered reception right through to taking their GCSEs.

This study included data from **3.2 million pupils** in England. Of those **4687, (0.14%)** were permanently excluded from primary school and **74,306 (2.3%)** were suspended. This means that over **2.4%** experienced a permanent or temporary exclusion from primary school, which is **about one in every 40 children**.

"I am worried about what will happen at secondary school. My son says to me 'what if I can't get into school', I know he's scared and I have to fight back tears when I think about it. I don't want them to look at his past and think about that rather than his future." Parent

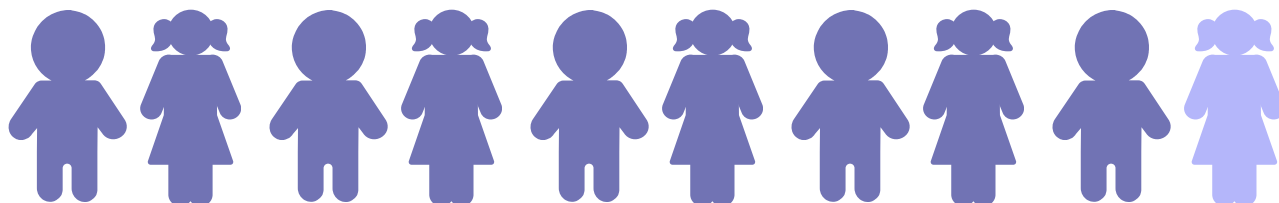
*Source: Department for Education <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/7008fff4-b3dd-45e4-3198-08dc4d92a08a>

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Key findings

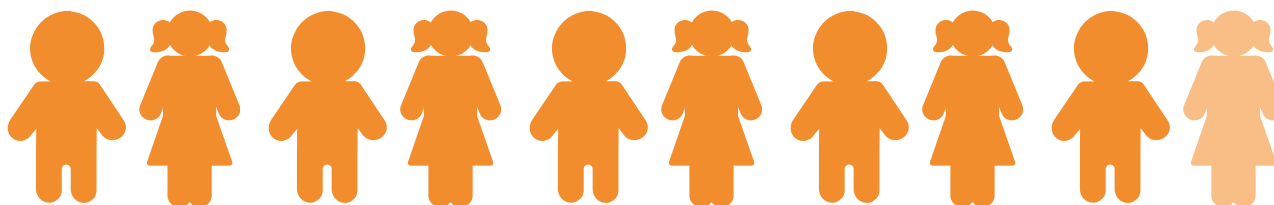
Exclusions at Primary school can have a devastating impact on academic attainment

Over **90%** of children excluded at primary school **don't pass GCSE English and maths** (a pass being a Grade 4 or above).



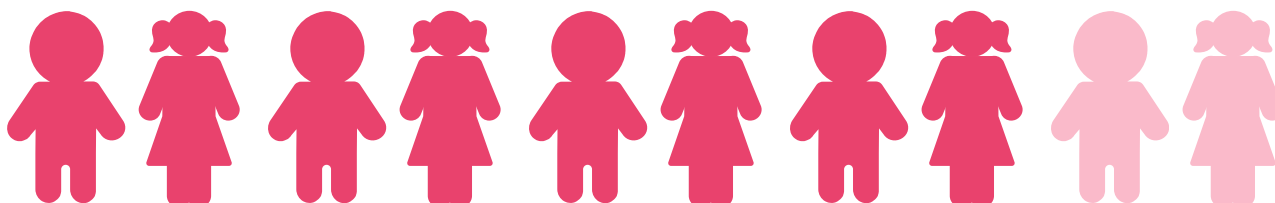
The children we see at Chance UK have a lot going on in their lives, whether that's domestic abuse, bereavement or special educational needs - often going for years without a diagnosis or support. By the time we met Chris he'd already been excluded twice. With support from our youth workers, he got what he needed: a bit of time and a bit of extra help. He has not been excluded again.

88% of children permanently excluded in primary school do not achieve a Grade 4 in English GCSE.



In comparison, for those children never excluded or suspended, only 25% do not achieve a Grade 4 in English GCSE.

80% of children permanently excluded in primary school do not achieve a Grade 4 in maths GCSE.



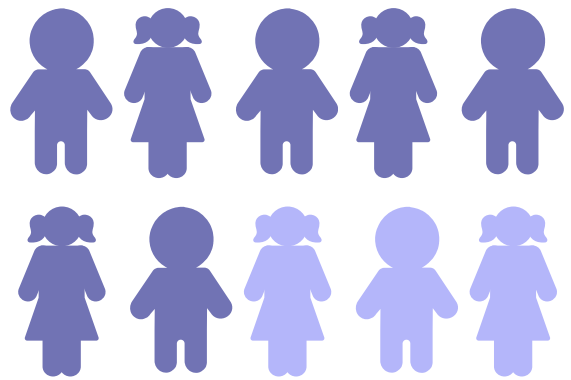
In comparison, for those children never excluded or suspended, only 27% do not achieve a Grade 4 in maths GCSE.

Key findings

Exclusions affect certain groups of children substantially more than others

Zach, age 10, has been excluded every year of his school life. Yet he wants to be in school. He told us: "I am trying my best, but I don't know how to be better".

67% of pupils with an exclusion or suspension at primary school had also been on **free school meals**.



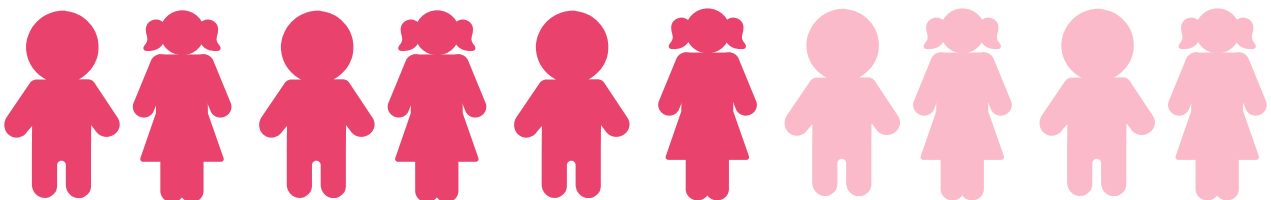
97% of those excluded at Primary school had a **special educational need or disability (SEND)**.



Around 1 in every 40 children were excluded or suspended in Primary school.

That is almost one per classroom.

59% of children who were excluded/ suspended were identified as a **'Child in Need'** by social services during their school life.



Key findings

Exclusions start a devastating never-ending cycle of difficulties for the child

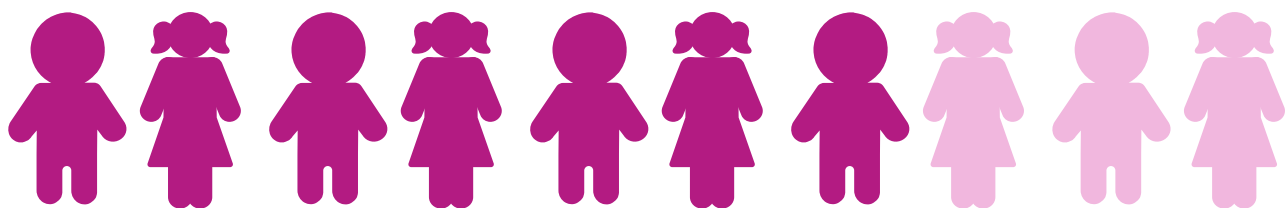
By year 10, **64% of excluded children are persistently absent***.



This falls to 16% if children had not been suspended or permanently excluded at Primary school.

"My son was just five years old when he was expelled from his first school. Eventually he got another school place but over the next year he was excluded many times for his behaviour. It was so stressful." Parent

69% of children excluded in Primary school received at least one suspension in Secondary school.



This falls to 14% for those children not suspended or excluded in Primary school.

*This is based on the 2008/9 cohort

Exclusion doesn't work: we need to act now so that children don't face a lifetime of struggle

Our research shows that an exclusion or suspension at primary school can have a devastating long-term impact on a child's life and their school journey. We know that post-Covid **more and more children** are facing complex challenges in their lives and we are now seeing a **rapid increase** in suspensions and exclusions in primary schools. We need to **act now**, so that some of our youngest children get the support they need. For too long the focus has been on secondary school exclusions, yet in the Autumn term 2022-23, there was a **67% rise** in permanent exclusions in primary schools, compared to the previous Autumn term; over the same time period, permanent exclusions in secondary schools only rose by 48%*.

What needs to change?

Prevent: We know early intervention works – 80% of children mentored by Chance UK improve their school attendance and a far higher number have improved behaviour at school and home. We should invest in and embed early interventions services, such as Chance UK, as soon as children show signs of needing support.

Target: We should provide regular statutory training on best practice to reduce exclusions to all school staff and trainee teachers and also provide specialist mental health support with dedicated funding in primary, not just secondary school.

Support: After a child has been excluded or suspended, an individual plan of support must be put in place involving specialist support to reduce the risk of exclusion.

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Exclusions simply do not work – they just pass the problem on. We are asking for better funded early intervention to prevent problems before they get too big. We know it works: 80% of children mentored by Chance UK improve their school attendance and behaviour.

Have you or someone you know been through primary school exclusions or suspensions?

Tell us your story – we want to build a bank of voices to speak up about the realities of exclusions in primary schools.

Together our voice is stronger.

Join us: visit chanceuk.com/exclusions

Do you know a child who is struggling?

Are you based in London? Get in touch with us. We can help.

Visit chanceuk.com/make-a-referral/