

# Policy Conversations: School Exclusions after COVID-19

Conveners: *Harry Daniels, Ian Thompson, Hilary Emery, Jill Porter and Alice Tawell*  
Department of Education, University of Oxford



[Link](#) to new report: *School exclusion risks after COVID-19*



Economic and Social Research Council

## Summary:

Between May-June 2020, members of the Excluded Lives Research Team spoke with 70 practitioners, policy makers and professionals from across 26 Local Authorities in England, about what they perceived to be the potential new risks for school exclusion after the COVID-19 pandemic. Expertise spanned health, education, social care, criminal justice, and the voluntary sector. The following three questions were posed:

1. What are the heightened risks for exclusion as schools restart? Which students are at risk?
2. How can we mitigate these risks? Who needs to act, when and how?
3. What is happening to currently excluded students including where there is no alternative provision?

The cross sector conversations revealed both the acceleration of risk in known vulnerable groups, and the emergence of new forms of risk of formal, informal and self-exclusion amongst a diverse group of young people. This suggests a rapid growth in the numbers of young people with diverse and fluctuating mental health and learning needs that will need to be carefully considered in order to encourage and maintain engagement when transitioning back to school. Our full report sets out some of the policy and practice implications including:

- Linking disciplines and agencies both operationally and strategically: screening for and identifying at-risk young people through the use of key questions and joined-up working in order that plans and interventions can be put in place in advance; creating multi-agency clinics for schools, parents and young people to refer to; and an acceleration of data sharing, including careful analysis of attendance data;
- Facilitating a more thoughtful approach to risk management and GDPR;
- Enabling school staff through training and professional development programmes to more confidently interpret and understand trauma related behaviours, adopt a holistic approach to investigating underlying factors, make reasonable adjustments/endeavours, and ensure their decisions comply with the Equality Act;
- Recognising the way in which new regulations (changes to school exclusion policy, behaviour policy guidelines, and EHCP legislation) are impacting on discharging duties and timelines;
- Enabling parents and carers to understand their legal entitlements, and training schools and governors to have good knowledge of due processes and procedures;
- Developing curricula and assessments that can be adapted to meet diverse academic and social needs and foster a sense of connectedness;
- Creating a system for quality assurance of new programmes and school based strategies designed to address trauma and Social Emotional and Mental Health needs.

## Purpose of the proposed policy conversations:

To talk to a range of national policy makers across education, health, social care and the police to further understand the policy implications of our report, and propose ways in which we can mitigate the potential risks of formal, informal and self-exclusion for children and young people following COVID-19.

## Key questions for discussion:

1. What policy changes need to be introduced to prevent a possible increase in school exclusion post COVID-19?
2. What do you see as the barriers and enablers to implementing the policy changes we have proposed in our report?
3. Are you aware of other factors and/or policy changes that we have not picked up on which may affect school exclusion post COVID-19?

## Policy briefing:

We will produce a short policy briefing as a result of the policy conversations, which we will share initially with attendees before publishing and circulating more widely.