

Experiences of illegal school exclusions in Wales: a qualitative study

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Section 1: Introduction and background to the research

This document explores families' experiences of illegal school exclusions and finds out from professionals how and why they are used. The research was commissioned by the Welsh Government and undertaken as a partnership project between SNAP Cymru and Barnardo's Cymru.

1.1 Defining illegal school exclusions

It is not lawful for schools to ask parents or guardians to keep their children away from school without the school giving formal notification of an exclusion. In instances when this does occur the correct term is 'unlawful exclusion' but it is commonly referred to as an 'illegal exclusion'. This research therefore uses the everyday term of 'illegal' as this is widely understood. Occasionally illegal exclusions are also referred to as voluntary exclusions and unofficial exclusions.

1.2 Why undertake research exploring illegal school exclusions?

The National Behaviour and Attendance Review, undertaken on behalf of the Welsh Government, received anecdotal evidence of illegal school exclusions. SNAP Cymru, Barnardo's Cymru, and the Children's Commissioner for Wales' Office have case evidence of illegal exclusions. These are families who had come to us for advice because they had received illegal exclusions.

The research provides evidence to inform the implementation of several active Welsh Government policies and initiatives and in particular:

- The School Effectiveness Framework.
- Inclusive approaches as set out in the 'Inclusion and Pupil Support' guidance document.
- Guidance on legislation and procedures set out in 'Exclusions from Schools and Pupil Referral Units'.
- The aim to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- The Behaviour and Attendance Action Plan, and specifically the action which states that the Welsh Government will assess and follow up with local authorities information collected by the Children's Commissioner on unlawful exclusions.

1.3 The specific aims of the research were:

- To discover to what extent illegal exclusion is used as a strategy for managing challenging behaviour.
- To hear the experiences of families who have undergone illegal exclusions, specifically finding out under what circumstances they occurred and how they are explained by schools to parents, children and young people.
- To learn more about the practice of managed moves, specifically when they work for a child or young person and when they are detrimental.

The three overall aims were broken down into the following five research questions:

- What information is passed from a primary school to a secondary school and how much knowledge do parents have of this ?
- Why and in what circumstances are schools choosing illegal exclusions as an approach ?
- When an illegal exclusion occurs, what information do parents have about their rights and the choices they have with regards to their child's education ?
- Where do parents go for information about rights and exclusion processes ? At what point, if any, do they become aware of the unlawfulness of exclusion ?

- What's the impact of illegal exclusions upon a family and a child or young person ?

1.4 Information about the children and young people discussed in this study

Using different methods, we collected information about 52 children and young people. Their background characteristics are given in the following three tables:

Ages of children

Ages	Number of children / young people
Exact age unspecified, but of primary age	11
Exact age unspecified, but of secondary age	19
Aged 11	2
Aged 13	3
Aged 15	3
Aged 18	1
Age unknown	13

Disability and additional learning needs information

Three children had dual diagnosis. The category of 'not known / none' is made up either of children and young people who are waiting for assessments and have no diagnosis, or who have educationally disengaged.

Type of additional learning need	number of children/ young people
Emotional and behavioural difficulties	2
Autistic spectrum disorder (incl. Asperger's and high functioning)	16
Physical bowel condition / incontinence	4
ADHD or ADD	10
Mild learning difficulties	2
Physical disability / diabetic / epileptic	3
Severe mental health problems	3
Not known / none	15

Gender of children

We did not have the gender of all 52 children because some of the information gathered from parents referred to a child without giving gender specifics. Out of data gathered on 27 children from interviews and focus groups with parents there were 21 boys and 6 girls, highlighting a large gender difference in experiences of school exclusions.

Children's age at first exclusion

This table details how old the children were when they received their first exclusion (illegal or official). This data exists for 23 of the 52 children.

School year child first excluded	Number of children/ young people
Nursery	1
Reception	1
5 years old / year 1	2
7 years old / year 3	1
Year 6	1
Age not specified, but in juniors	4

Age not specified, but in primary	4
11 years old / year 7	3
12 years old / year 8	1
13 years old / year 9	2
Age not specified, but in secondary	3

1.5 Overview of this document

This report is structured according to the main aims of the research and two main themes that came out of the data. All the sections integrate data from the professionals and data from parents; where necessary indicating whether the parents' data are from case evidence files or face to face data collection. The methods and research caveats are discussed in Section 2.

Section 3 examines communication between school and parents and the triggers for illegal exclusions. Section 4 offers detailed accounts of current behaviour support practice and how schools reintegrate pupils after exclusions. Section 5 details transition between primary and secondary schooling and Section 6 managed moves, which were two main investigation questions for the research.

Section 7 explores the sources within the education system from which parents get information regarding children's rights and entitlements and Section 8 details the impact of illegal exclusions upon the pupil and family. The report concludes with recommendations that relate to the main issues the research raises. However, there are also summary conclusions at the end of each section, relating to the specific issues discussed within that section.

Section 2: Research methods, ethics and caveats

We undertook qualitative research, aiming to examine experiences and practice that can answer the questions outlined in Section 1. This necessitated a consideration of appropriate research methods and ethics. There are some research caveats because the project was relatively small scale and as such cannot be regarded as entirely representative of the whole-Wales situation.

2.1 Research methods used

We used a variety of methods to gather the data from families and professionals. We could not ensure a representative spread of data but have achieved a geographical spread of participants from across Wales, with an urban – rural balance. A breakdown of the different research cohorts is as below.

2.1.1 Collecting data from families

Interviews and focus groups

We undertook 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews with parents and facilitated 3 focus groups with parents in different regions in Wales speaking, in total, to 25 parents. Two of these parents had two children who were experiencing illegal exclusions from school. Therefore, we have been told about the experiences of 27 children directly from parents' viewpoint. All of the families who took part in this research were known to the services of Barnardo's Cymru and SNAP Cymru, but were not necessarily using our services when interviewed. We focused upon families that had children who were of secondary school age as this gave us more information on the way that pupils' experiences can change over time, but ensured that our methods and questions would enable them to share and include children's primary school experiences. A few parents in the focus groups had children of primary school age.

Case evidence files

From service user files within SNAP Cymru and Barnardo's Cymru we compiled 25 case evidence files to complement the in-depth interview and focus group data from families. The case evidence files detailed the briefest information about events leading up to an illegal exclusion, how it was resolved, what information the family was given and the impact it had on the child and family. This evidence included children of primary age, as well as young people of secondary age. We have analysed key trends from this evidence alongside the information gathered from parents.

Families in diverse circumstances

In total, we gathered data from 50 parents regarding the experiences of 52 children. All of the parents in the study had experienced at least one illegal school exclusion between September 2008 and January 2010. In order to obtain a broad a picture as possible, we ensured that we involved diverse families, so we included young people with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural problems, poor mental health, and those who were educationally disengaged. We were not able to gather evidence from all families regarding family type but can confirm that the majority were in dual parent households, but that our sample also included lone parent mothers and fathers, grandparent guardians and children who were currently being transferred to foster care. Family circumstances are mentioned where appropriate throughout the report as it can give a context for children's behaviour. The children and young people attended a variety of different schools, with approximately one fifth being in specialist provision, 4 pupils attending PRUs and the rest in mainstream provision. This shows that illegal exclusions happen in all educational settings.

Geographical areas

Our case evidence data is from services across the country, and all regions were represented. Interview and focus group data for 27 children and young people was as follows:

Region of Wales	Number of children/ young people
North West Wales	3
North East Wales	3
Mid Wales	6
South West Wales	9
South central and valleys	6

Ethnicity and culture

This research included parents who were Welsh first language and parents from black and minority ethnic cultures. There was not enough evidence within our data to draw any conclusions regarding exclusions and language, religion and cultural heritage.

2.1.2 The voice of children and young people

We aimed to involve children and young people in the research and designed creative methods to engage with them through family interviews. However, most interviews occurred when children and young people were not present. Three young people were present, but two did not want to continue the interview because it was too upsetting for them to talk about school. One young person was interviewed alongside his father because of home circumstances. He was currently excluded and lived in a one room bedsitter with his father, and so ethically had to be included. An alternative project with different methodology would need to be implemented in order to specifically collect children and young people's perspective on illegal exclusions.

2.1.3 Collecting data from schools and local authorities (LAs)

We gathered the views and experiences of 15 education professionals who were known to our organisations through a choice of confidential telephone interviews or anonymous electronic questionnaires. These 2 methods asked exactly the same questions but enabled choice and flexibility. Whilst this data is not from a representative sample, it does provide insights regarding why and in what circumstances schools choose illegal exclusions, and what information is passed from primary to secondary school regarding specific pupils.

The 3 tables below summarise background characteristics of the 15 education professionals who participated in this research.

Geographical spread

Region of Wales	Number of professionals
North West	4
North East	1
Mid Wales	1
South West Wales	4
South Central and valleys	2
South East Wales	2
No region specified	1

Type of job

Type of job	Number of professionals
Head teacher	2
LA staff (e.g. Education Welfare Officer, head of service, inclusion support)	7
Other education associated professionals (e.g. YOT, behavioural advisers, educational youth workers, Children and Young People's Partnerships staff)	6

Length of service in education

Years indicator	Number of professionals
Under 10 years work in education	2
10 - 20 years work in education	6
20 - 30 years work in education	3
30 - 40 years work in education	3
Not specified	1

2.2 Ethical considerations

Barnardo's Cymru has written ethical procedures that were followed through the course of this project. This includes mechanisms for balancing confidentiality with child protection issues.

2.2.1 Informed consent

We gained informed consent from all the parents, children and young people and professionals who participated in this study. In focus groups informed consent was sought on an individual basis and confidentiality agreements were made before the focus group started. If parents were unsure about contributing in a group setting they were offered one to one interviews. Where parents chose not to continue to participate they were given the choice of either leaving or continuing to be present but not as active participants. Two parents in one focus group chose this latter option. Professionals were sent informed consent forms with the questionnaire and either completed it prior to telephone interviews or returned it with the completed questionnaire.

2.2.2 Anonymity

We have not used real names of either people or schools. Job positions have not been disclosed in the report and geographical areas are referred to by region rather than county. These steps have been taken to ensure anonymity for all participants. All case evidence information was compiled by the agency staff in the particular project they use. It omitted names of people and schools, and in some cases did not detail exact age or gender. This was to ensure that the main facts were available to the researchers but not information that should be held confidentially within services.

2.3 Research caveats

There are some caveats on the extent to which conclusions can be drawn from the research because the families who took part in the study were drawn from those who were receiving services from the researchers and due to the professionals being self-selected.

2.3.1 Representativeness and generalisability

It is not possible to design a sampling framework to provide a rigorous quantitative and representative study as illegal exclusions, by their very nature, are hidden from statistics. For pragmatic reasons Barnardo's Cymru and SNAP Cymru service users were approached

because they were known to have experienced illegal school exclusions. We balanced the lack of representation with a geographical spread and ensured that children and young people with a variety of support needs were included in the sample. The data offer a broad picture with insights into the use of illegal exclusions and can therefore be generalised to other parents who may have experienced illegal exclusions.

2.3.2 Self selected professionals

The professionals who participated were self-selected. Generally, people who self-select are people who need to say something on the topic. This means that the data from professionals may have a polarisation bias, with practice being described as either very good or bad with little middle ground. In reality, the data received appears to be quite balanced and professionals spoke candidly about situations that they face. The professionals that were involved were known to have expertise in the area of exclusion and so were invited to participate.

2.3.3 A qualitative not quantitative study

This research has entailed gaining the stories of 52 children and young people. Rather than just present these stories as case studies we have picked the main issues and themes that the stories have in common. Therefore, quotes and examples are cited where they highlight a common theme or issue.

2.3.4 Research bias because families were known to SNAP Cymru and Barnardo's Cymru services

The data from parents may be biased because the parents that seek help are likely to be those facing the most difficult circumstances. When families are involved with SNAP Cymru or Barnardo's Cymru services it is often because mainstream services have failed them and they are seeking extra advice and support. This means our data may omit the stories of families who are in less severe situations. However, as we have data from 50 parents whose experiences are very similar there can be lessons learnt for other families in similar situations and for families who may not be facing such difficult circumstances.

The data was collected by development officers and researchers. Some families were known to the development officers. This can affect what families say, but equally some people will feel more at ease talking about personal circumstances to someone who is already informed of the basic issues they have faced. The data was compiled and analysed by researchers who were not familiar with any of the families or professionals.

Section 3: The use of illegal exclusions and school communication with parents

6 of the 7 LA staff claimed that illegal school exclusions did not happen, stating 'I'm not aware of any schools using unofficial exclusions'; but no other professionals agreed with this position. This suggests either that the LA will not necessarily hear about illegal exclusions because paperwork was not completed and it happens at the school level, or that illegal school exclusions are controversial and not something to discuss with researchers.

Information about illegal exclusions not getting to the LA was discussed by other education professionals, who explained that:

'If welfare officers hear about an unofficial exclusion they urge the school to make it an official one.'

The data from LA professionals was clear that:

'LAs don't want them [unofficial exclusions] to be used and we have produced guidelines to stop their use.'

Whilst LAs have made strenuous efforts to prevent illegal exclusions being used and have taken a variety of steps to stop schools using them, it was apparent from case evidence, professionals who were not working for the LA, and parents' experiences, that they still occur. This section examines how parents understood and experienced illegal exclusions, and in particular how schools communicated with parents about exclusions. It ends with discussing what triggers illegal exclusions to be issued.

3.1 Multiple exclusions and parents' lack of clarity

All the parents involved in this research experienced an illegal exclusion at least once between September 2008 and January 2010, but when they talked about it, it was unclear as to when an illegal exclusion finished and became legal, when it became permanent or when it became agreed absence. When children and young people experienced difficulties at school to the point of being excluded, the whole issue of legalities and procedures was generally very unclear to parents.

From the 25 case evidence files, 10 children had illegal exclusions that led to fixed-term exclusions, 3 had illegal exclusions that ended in permanent exclusions and 9 had had previous illegal exclusions. This pattern of repeated exclusions of different types is backed up by the entire interview data, with only 2 of the 27 children discussed in the interviews receiving an illegal exclusion relating to a one-off incident. A part of parents' confusion when talking about different types of exclusion was due to their experience of multiple exclusions that merged together. When directly asked, parents in this study were aware of the different types of exclusions because they had been told by SNAP Cymru or another advisory agency but when talking about exclusions they did not always seem to make these distinctions as from the parents' experience the issue was about repeated and unexpected time away from school. The following quotes illustrate parents' experience of multiple exclusions:

'We haven't been able to keep track of how many days our son's been out of school. At first we were given work but because he was so ill he couldn't complete it and so the teachers that were supportive pulled back. We had some work through for his GCSEs just before Christmas. They didn't really have the facilities.'

'For my daughter in secondary it's been continuous and she never has a full week in school and it's odd days here and there. There's always more than one a week.'

'My daughter's now 18 and still studying. She was first excluded when she was 13. It got so bad she was home educated for 3 years. She's had tremendous support from CAMHS which has helped us sort the situation out.'

3.2 School communication with parents

Generally parents described poor communication between themselves and their child's school before exclusions were issued as well as during an exclusion. The data suggested that, in some instances, schools lacked adequate communication systems in their general partnership working arrangements with parents.

3.2.1 Schools' poor communication before an exclusion

All of the data from parents revealed that they had little contact or communication with schools before exclusions were issued. Parents of children with SEN had often not seen individual education plans (IEPs) and were not clear what support their child was receiving and how effective it was. The two quotes below are typical of parents' descriptions of communication with schools. The first quote is from handwritten notes of an interview and was not written completely verbatim.

'The school didn't understand how incidents lead to low self esteem and lack of confidence. They didn't listen to the parent about best way to support the child and didn't know about autism. They had an SEN statement, had a learning support assistant (LSA) and wanted him out at the first blip. He's at a special needs resource base, access to 25 hours per week support worker, but I don't know what they do because we have no link with the school.'

'He did have an LSA but I don't know how long for or if it was adequate. I haven't seen his IEP.'

3.2.2 School communication during an exclusion

Repeatedly parents reported that schools did not communicate well with them, and this was particularly the case during an exclusion or during the time lapse between issuing an illegal exclusion and that changing to be an official exclusion. Many parents described their communication with schools in a similar way to the two parents below:

'The school didn't get the paperwork done. I had a phone call from home education on the day he was due to go back. It was 4 weeks after he'd had the unofficial exclusion. No letter, no notification of how long off, no work etc.'

'The head of year would ring me and say they were thinking of excluding him. Sometimes there would be a letter. It takes two days or more to arrive and it would say work would be set two days after that, but by then the exclusion time would have passed. Once he went to the board of governors with his foster carer to explain himself. I don't know who contacts me, or what her role is.'

Most parents said that they would be told in a phone call about their child's exclusion. When letters were issued parents said they contained little information, usually only how long the exclusion was to last. Often letters arrived late, in some instances more than a month after the exclusion was issued which rendered the letter too late to be valid information. This was not only frustrating for families but affected their ability to plan as these examples show:

'From year 7 the head of year would phone me to say he'd been excluded, but no time

scale would be mentioned. A letter would arrive two days later telling me how many days it was. There was no work set or given.'

'The school would phone me to let me know she had been excluded the day before. She knew but I didn't so I would send her to school that morning. She could be anywhere. They had told her, but not me.'

3.3 School explanations of unofficial exclusions

The two head teachers in the professionals' questionnaires clearly stated that unofficial exclusions are explained as pupils needing time off without an exclusion being on their school record, and this seems to be the general reason for them. However, from the parents' point of view the way in which schools explain them is authoritarian and negative.

3.3.1 Official exclusion used as a threat

For many parents, once they had questioned the illegal exclusion, the school would suggest an official exclusion as a threat rather than a solution. The following two quotes explain this:

'There were no solutions given. They offered to make the exclusion official and pointed out that this would be for a week rather than just the day. It was like bullying tactics.'

'I was advised to keep him off school a lot longer rather than expelling him officially, and the idea of moving him to another school was suggested. They never said it was unofficial or voluntary. They didn't explain it to my child at all.'

3.3.2 Illegal exclusion presented as the only option

No one in the focus groups had been told that their children were receiving a voluntary exclusion or were given help to know what to do. Few pupils received letters and had work set. This was echoed throughout the data, with almost all parents of the 52 children feeling they were given no options to negotiate the course of action taken with the school, until they sought help from SNAP Cymru or another advisory agency. Unlawful exclusions do not enable letters to be sent home so parents will be unaware of what help and advice is available to them. The following two experiences were common throughout the data from parents:

'I was told he had calmed down after an incident but it would be best if he didn't come the next day. The next day I was phoned and told it was best he had some time - they didn't say how much - and that they would find another place for him. They said it was in my benefit to keep it unofficial so other schools wouldn't be put off. I had no options this is all the information I had.'

'I'd just get a phone call to pick him up because he was getting really upset. There was no mention of an exclusion and no letter ... He wasn't stated so they said there was nothing they could do.'

3.4 What triggers an illegal exclusion to be issued?

Parents discussed their children's behaviour that led to all types of exclusions whilst professionals also discussed why schools issued an illegal exclusion as opposed to an official one. There were felt to be 6 main reasons why schools used illegal exclusion:

- Illegal, rather than official, exclusions are in the best interest of the school
- To buy time for sorting out breakdowns in communication and support
- As a softer option than an official exclusion

- To respond to pupils exhibiting challenging behaviour
- For certain events or at certain times during the school calendar
- As a result of bullying incidents or difficult peer dynamics

Each of these is discussed in turn below.

3.4.1 Illegal, rather than official, exclusions are in the best interest of the school

This was not discussed by parents but by professionals. 6 of the 15 professionals mentioned that illegal exclusions left no statistical record and so, although they could cause confusion, they kept figures low. 5 reasons for illegal exclusions were identified as being in the school's best interest. These are presented as they were written on the questionnaires, compiling the professionals' words together.

1. To avoid paperwork.
2. To have an easy life.
3. They are used as a threat to the rest of the pupils.
4. They are used to keep exclusions figures low.
5. They are used to keep funding for the child while they aren't at the school.

3.4.2 Illegal exclusions buy time for sorting out breakdowns in communication and support

8 of the 15 professionals commented that illegal school exclusions eased difficult situations, relieved pressure on staff, enabled some cooling-off time, and gave time for pupils to focus on studying without disruption.

Four mechanisms for buying time and arranging support were identified. These are quoted as they were written on questionnaires, compiling the professionals' words together.

1. They appease parents and give time to meet with parents regarding behaviour issues
2. They give time to negotiate managed moves and solve difficult cases
3. They are used to enable time out or cooling off
4. Parents can agree to keep their child at home for a short period while support or alternative provision is being organised.

Parents' experiences were that sometimes an exclusion (illegal or otherwise) led to a change in support, but did not talk about them as buying time for the school.

3.4.3 Illegal exclusions are a softer option than an official exclusion

More than half the education professionals, including LA staff felt that an illegal exclusion was a softer option than an official exclusions and that they enabled the pupil to avoid the stigma of an official exclusion. LA staff were clear that they did not believe illegal exclusions occur, but if they were being used they would avoid stigma and enable flexibility in approach although there was acknowledgement that they deny rights, specifically the right to appeal. Half the professionals stated that illegal exclusions often become official; usually once other agencies are involved. However, they pointed out that the overuse of official fixed-term exclusions leads to permanent exclusions which is something schools want to avoid. There was a general adherence to the common misconception that the 45 day limit on fixed-term exclusions means that on hitting this schools have to permanently exclude the pupil. They also felt that an increase in permanent exclusions would mean more pupils being placed in PRUs rather than focusing on providing them with the support to enable them to remain in mainstream schools.

3.4.4 To respond to pupils exhibiting challenging behaviour

Behaviour management is discussed in Section 4, but parents and professionals said that when teachers are presented with behaviour that they either cannot manage or is very

negative an illegal exclusion is sometimes issued. Generally the data suggested that parents felt this behaviour needed better support to avoid an exclusion whilst most professionals spoke about exclusion as a consequence of actions.

3.4.5 For certain events or at certain times during the school calendar

Sometimes children were asked to stay off school when there was a particular event. The most common that parents mentioned were school trips, school inspections, school photo days and school concerts and plays. Education professionals also identified the use of illegal exclusions at certain times of the school year. Specifically they said that they occurred at inspection time, at the end of school terms, especially Christmas, and, unanimously amongst non LA professionals, before exam time in the summer term so that pupils can return to sit GCSEs. This means that pupils are told to go home and come back only for their exams.

It appears that some schools could not provide adequate behaviour support to children on non-routine school days or at pressured points in the school calendar. In some cases this had a huge impact upon the child or young person, as Section 9 details. One grandparent guardian explained this:

‘They told us because the school inspector was coming we had to keep my grandson home. That was the second time. The first time they said he was a danger to himself and so we couldn't take him to the Christmas concert.’

‘His exclusions usually happened around Christmas and his birthday.’

3.4.6 As a result of bullying incidents or difficult peer dynamics

Parents spoke of bullying, but as this can mean different things to different people to analyse this data the researchers are also using the more generic term of ‘difficult peer dynamics’ as they were not informed of the exact details of every case parents spoke about. Bullying and difficult peer dynamics could happen as a result of exclusion, but also lead to exclusion. 5 of the 25 case studies had bullying as a reason for illegal exclusions and this is backed up by interview data, with 6 interviews specifically mentioning bullying. This means that some form of bullying or difficult peer relations was behind the exclusions of one fifth of the 52 children and young people detailed in this study. Parents reported that their children had been picked on and retaliated or that they were sticking up for friends who had been picked on and were then labelled as bullies. One parent said that their child was bullying, but others reported their child was being bullied by other pupils because they had been singled out by repeated exclusions.

The quotes below give two descriptions of the issues:

‘My son's exclusions started in year 6 of primary. It got bad after he stuck up for one of his friends against another boy and the teacher saw it as his fault. The problems continued into secondary because he was with the same group of children.’

‘My son was being bullied in school and he retaliated. He was excluded from school for the rest of that day and the day after. I wasn't phoned or anything, I had no official letters whatsoever. It's happened quite a few times.’

3.5 Conclusions regarding when illegal school exclusions are used and school communication with parents

- There was disagreement regarding the use of illegal exclusions. LA staff stated that illegal exclusions did not happen and many cited the efforts that they had taken such as multi-agency initiatives, policies for schools to involve other organisations and good practice exchanges to avoid them occurring. LA staff agreed that illegal school

exclusions had occurred in the past and they highlighted the steps they had taken to stop the use of illegal exclusions. It is clear that they do not want illegal exclusions and are working hard to stop their use. However, the data from parents and the other education professionals overwhelmingly suggests that illegal exclusions are still a large issue. This does suggest that schools are not informing LA staff of all problems that are occurring and that parents do not have information regarding how the LA can assist in the education provision of their child. An excessive use of exclusion (official or illegal) can be seen to show that a school was struggling to implement its inclusion policy. Where exclusions were illegal this struggle was hidden from sources of support, such as external organisations and the LA.

- Illegal exclusions rarely occurred as one-off events.

50 of the 52 children discussed in this study experienced multiple exclusions. Illegal exclusions were often issued more than once, but there was little clarity regarding their use as they merged with official exclusions, permanent exclusions and authorised absence due to prolonged illness.

- Parents concerns were not focussed purely upon illegal exclusions.

Since illegal exclusions merged with other exclusions, parents perceived them as one aspect of behaviour management and they caused concern to parents in terms of the larger issue of their child's well-being within the education system.

- Illegal exclusions are used for different reasons

Whilst illegal school exclusions can be in the best interest of the school, including keeping their statistics low, they are also used for the benefit of children and their families to buy time or to give a softer option than an official exclusion. It was clear that schools wanted to avoid issuing official exclusions.

- Communication from the school to parents can be poor.

48 of the 50 parents found that communication from the school to them was poor on issues associated with exclusions. Communication with parents is poor prior to exclusions, when explaining exclusions, and when giving information to parents about exclusions.

- Schools struggle with behaviour on non-routine days

There was a tendency for pupils to be illegally excluded on non-routine days such as Christmas plays, exams, school trips and school photo days. Parents felt that this punished their children further and could cause identity problems with the school for their child. Some parents felt their child would be better behaved if they were included in these days. Parents reported how exclusion on these days affected the emotions of children and young people.

- Bullying and difficult peer relations are linked to exclusions

One fifth of the children discussed in this research had some bullying incidents or aspects of difficult peer dynamics. In instances where children stood up for themselves or friends against aggression or bullying they could be excluded. Additionally, several children were bullied when returning to school after having been excluded. These different dynamics do suggest that the complexities surrounding bullying or problematic peer relations are not being effectively solved. Exclusion may not be a good solution for dealing with bullying because if no other interventions are implemented the negative behaviour will continue upon return to school and it can continue outside of school in community settings.

Section 4: Behaviour management and educational support offered to pupils and parents

All of the data from the study indicate that behaviour management is a hugely important area. All the children and young people in this study were either struggling to engage with school, had conditions that affected their ability to conform to expected behaviour norms or had physical conditions that required some support. Therefore this section details current practice in behaviour management, concerns regarding teacher knowledge of managing behaviour and techniques schools used to reintegrate pupils after exclusions.

Parents talked at length about the problems their child faced in school, explaining that exclusion was just one aspect of behaviour management. Professionals discussed whether illegal exclusions worked and how they were integrated into wider behaviour management strategies. Correct support for their child's education was a long term consideration for parents. The following two quotes exemplify the way in which parents understood illegal exclusions to be linked to their child's behaviour more generally and were accepted as a part of their child's educational experience:

'It has been for the past 7 years. All the way through her school life. Several times a week it would happen. They'd call us, she'd had a big blowout and she'd be restrained and she'd be beside herself and that was a pattern.'

'My son has been sent home unofficially from school 40 - 50 times in a three year period. Sometimes 2 - 3 times a week. I've never received a letter confirming or explaining it. Sometimes it's for things like climbing a tree and not coming down, being considered a health and safety risk on a school trip.'

4.1 Exclusions are used as a behaviour management tool

Parents felt that correct behaviour support and the implementation of consistent behaviour management strategies would avoid the need for exclusions and that exclusions should not be used as a behaviour management tool. Unanimously parents felt that schools were using exclusions in an effort to manage behaviour and were therefore not attempting to avoid issuing exclusions. Amongst professionals there was acknowledgement that exclusions are used as a behaviour management strategy but no professional suggested that behaviour support needs to be improved so that the need for exclusion can be reduced. We did not directly ask this question, but it is of interest when compared to the parents' perspective where exclusion was automatically discussed as an intrinsic part of wider behaviour support.

The following two quotes explain this approach to behaviour management:

'They used regular suspensions to manage his behaviour with internal exclusions and other strategies used sometimes. Strategies and internal exclusions work much more effectively but they preferred these unofficial suspensions.'

'He refused to take an eyebrow piercing out and so they referred him to a PRU. They used unofficial exclusions to try and manage his behaviour.'

Amongst professionals there was little agreement as to whether illegal school exclusions worked to improve behaviour. There was a polarisation of opinion regarding their use as a strategy with half of respondents claiming that any exclusion was generally used as a behaviour management strategy and the other half claiming that there was no strategy because they are issued ad hoc and are reactive rather than proactive. One third of the

professionals pointed out that both illegal and official exclusions showed up schools that were unable to implement robust behaviour strategies. Illegal exclusions were viewed as particularly problematic because they hid difficulties from the LA. This meant that when an LA was approached for support or help they were not immediately aware of all previous difficulties.

4.2 Teachers lack knowledge to successfully manage behaviour

Many parents mentioned how teachers did not have the right knowledge to be able to manage their children's behaviour. They explained that this was not just a lack of knowledge about medical conditions and behaviour problems but also a lack of consideration of family background and home circumstances and how these can impact upon children's achievements and behaviour.

4.2.1 Poor teacher training with regards to specific conditions

Parents whose children had disabilities, poor mental health or a physical condition discussed how teachers struggled to meet their needs or know how to offer the right support. Parents were also frustrated because teachers would not employ the techniques that worked for parents and did not utilize the knowledge that parents had of managing their child's behaviour. Parents said things like:

'The teachers struggled with understanding his autism.'

'She had no support, even though she was undergoing mental health assessments. Teachers weren't trained to understand or deal with it. They would say to her "of course this is the XX [child's first name] show. You're just an attention seeker and if you were my child I'd slap you". Staff couldn't see beyond the presenting behaviours. She has conditions that you can work with, but they wanted to correct the problem seeing it as bad behaviour. At home she would say 'I've got to go, I'm too upset, I'll come back when I've calmed down.' Which was amazing and worked but if she did that in school, the shit hit the fan.'

'He would escape and hide from teachers if he was confronted or shouted at - they knew this from his transition information. They didn't handle him right and in front of the class would label him a bad boy and check he'd taken his medication. He had 1: 1 support in mainstream class and could go to the unit if his behaviour was bad. I don't know why they didn't pull him out of the class when his behaviour was getting worse.'

Physical conditions and chronic illnesses cannot be cured through behaviour management and all of the parents whose children had toileting needs, in mainstream and specialist provision, discussed how behaviour management techniques did not support their child's physical condition. This mother's story is the most concise example of this:

'My son had emotional difficulties and a bowel complaint. He was seen by a specialist nurse at the school but he was always coming home and at one point doing half days for a couple of weeks. They weren't allowing him to go to the toilet and things like that.'

4.2.2 Poor teacher training with regards to addressing challenging behaviour

Challenging behaviour manifested in various ways. Some children and young people were excluded for not having completed homework, for having an eyebrow piercing or other non-uniform appearance or for 'causing trouble'. Parents felt that some teachers could deal with this kind of behaviour very well, whilst some were not so well trained. One father said:

'There are those [teachers] who manage him fine and those who don't sympathise with

his situation. But just sending him home for 3 days is not the best option and there's no discussion of strategies for managing his behaviour. Reasons vary, but generally he's sent home once every 3 weeks.'

4.2.3 Poor consideration of difficult or chaotic family circumstances

Parents who were struggling with their parenting role and home circumstances spoke about how schools did not sympathise with difficulties that their children may be facing. For example, one boy was repeatedly excluded at a time when his mother in England was going to send him to care because she could not cope. He had just moved to Wales and lived with his father in a bedsit room. He had not spent time with his father before and had very poor living conditions. In another instance a mother was talking about how her son was getting into trouble at a time when the family had split up, finances had dropped, they had found out they had a step family and the mother was struggling alone. A few parents and carers commented how, in such instances, schools did not seem to have systems for assessing how extenuating circumstances may be affecting behaviour. One guardian summed this situation up:

'At secondary when they knew he wasn't being treated well at home and social services were involved but they'd still ring home asking for him to be taken out of school. I'm his guardian so it came to me to pick him up.'

4.3 Techniques currently used for behaviour management

This sub-section looks at main areas within learning support practice. Parents expressed many concerns about common behaviour support practices and questioned the coherency of strategic thought that was behind them. Parents particularly mentioned the use of internal exclusions, the consistency of positive strategies, the use of restraint and the use of physical contact.

4.3.1 The use of internal exclusions

4 case study evidence files, data from professionals and a few interviews with parents spoke of internal exclusions. The purpose, role and experience of these varied hugely between schools and so the same language was used to describe different practices. Some schools had a time-out room, whereby children who needed to be out of the classroom could remove themselves and go to a quiet room where they could calm down. Other schools had solitary sitting booths. Internal exclusions could involve children having to go to this room for break and lunchtimes but in some schools children spent all day in an isolation room. Internal exclusions were often used prior to other exclusions as a way of managing behaviour. The case evidence files and interview data suggests that pupils got very angry and upset at having full day internal exclusions.

4.3.2 Concerns regarding the consistency of positive strategies

There was unanimous concern from parents over a lack of coherent behaviour strategies. Many children were receiving a high number of multiple exclusions which suggests that they were being used even though they were not effective, possibly because there was a lack of other options. These two quotes from parents show a lack of strategic approach:

'There was no support and nobody with her. She got up to 39 exclusions.'

'The boy was just sent home. He had no support in school, no assessments were suggested, no paperwork was done and no work was sent home. They just removed him.'

'There is nothing in place for her attendance or behaviour so she truants and gets sent

home and it's all punished rather than strategies and solutions.'

Schools sometimes struggled to support the children and young people who were involved in this study. For example, 15 of the 25 case evidence files detail the school struggling with behaviour or with a child's physical needs because they had not got the right support mechanisms in place, resulting in parents repeatedly receiving phone calls to come and collect their child. The following two quotes explain how schools would do this:

'They said they could no longer cope, and made me feel like I was a bad parent'

'In his primary school we had been phoned on several occasions asking us to come and pick him up because he wouldn't join in. He was in a specialist unit, not mainstream school. It was commonplace and because my husband worked from home and I worked part time it was easy for us to comply and we didn't know that schools shouldn't be doing this.'

4.3.3 Use of restraint

For a minority of children and young people restraint was used as a part of behaviour management, particularly for those in specialist education units or schools. The explanation of restraint use below typifies what many parents said:

'The school kept using restraints for his behaviour. He has ADHD but thrives on praise. He doesn't get praise, he's just put down and threatened.'

'Every time we've requested 1:1 it has been refused. Her special school uses excessive force. Restraint is common but sometimes 5 people on our daughter. We removed her because we felt it wasn't safe.'

At least 5 parents detailed how the use of excessive or regular restraint on children caused them to lash out, contributing to an exclusion. This is summed up by two parents' comments:

'It was all due to poor behaviour management and they restrained him - anyone knows that's going to make things worse for a child with ASD.'

'My daughter's exclusions started when she was 13. On the second one, they tried to restrain her and she was so upset she lashed out.'

In these instances, the very techniques being used to control behaviour lead to worsening behaviour.

4.2.4 Use of physical contact

Some parents reported excessive physical contact contributing to more challenging behaviour. With reference to children with Asperger's and poor mental health, parents reported teachers grabbing children with enough force to leave marks. They felt that because this then escalated the child's challenging behaviour, the negative behaviour management undertaken by teachers was not questioned or challenged. In the instances of inappropriate contact, from the data, in every case the child had been receiving 1 to 1 support and so different techniques may have been possible. These are two parents' stories, typical of others' experiences:

'One time he was getting on a bus and the teacher grabbed the back of his neck. At the depths of his illness you can't do that so he told the teacher you can't do that, and he

was excluded. But he had red marks on his neck - we took photos.'

'My son has Asperger's and got upset at a teacher. He tried to go through the door to escape from the teacher but she blocked his way and grabbed from behind his shoulder and pulled backwards. He had an unofficial exclusion for about 4 or 5 weeks. I met with the head to decide what would be best but he wasn't allowed back in to the Asperger's unit. He was only allowed to go back into mainstream.'

4.4 School support for returning after an exclusion

Many parents described their children's anxiety upon returning to school after an exclusion. Practice varied widely as to how children and young people were reintegrated into school life. Common practices for reintegration included ensuring there was continued learning and links to the school during the exclusion, a change in LSA support, meeting with families and being put on report. Some parents did not experience any reintegration process. However, this contrasts sharply with the views of professionals. All of the professionals felt that there was support for pupils returning from illegal and official exclusions, although some felt that illegal exclusions had no positive use and that there was no consistent process for helping a young person out of or back to school. Mechanisms mentioned by professionals included individual behaviour plans, meetings to inform what had been put in place, pastoral support programmes (PSPs), reintegration processes, specialist behaviour teachers, retreat and social skills units and alternative education activities. This contrast may be explained by approaches to support provided to pupils returning after an exclusion being highly varied between schools and areas, but also that policies and procedures that are designed at the strategic level are not being implemented in practice.

4.4.1 Support from education services to continue learning during the exclusion

Once an exclusion was known about by the LA a minority of pupils received some home tuition or had work they could pick up from the school. For example, from the 25 case evidence files 2 pupils had 2 hours per week specialist teaching for literacy, and another 2 children received 10 hours of home tuition. A few children in the interview data also received similar tuition. However, some children did not receive any support from the school and some parents said they did not know they could pick work up for their children to complete. A few parents gave their own children school work to complete to try and ensure they would continue the habit of studying. 4 children from the case evidence had no study support at all and the following quotes highlight how separated pupils can become from the school in instances of long exclusions:

'The longest spell was 8 - 10 weeks. This was a phone call. We've had multi agency meetings, but the school hasn't attended. It's always in a phone call with no letter or follow-up.'

'4 years ago he stopped going to school. He had a letter saying how many days he was excluded for but he's had no home tuition, no follow-up and nothing in place since.'

Where pupils had maintained some school learning they did not become so separated from the school, making reintegration easier.

4.4.2 Change in support to enable reintegration

This strategy was found to work in many instances, but was not usually undertaken until multiple exclusions had been issued or a series of incidences had occurred. Only about one quarter of the children and young people in this study had experienced a change in support. Changes of support included measures such as enabling a time-out room so pupils could

remove themselves before an incident occurred, implementing 1 to 1 support or additional learning support, or enabling pupils to attend behaviour management sessions. For pupils with physical conditions mechanisms that worked included toileting on a needs basis and ensuring an extra adult could accompany a group on school trips. These steps that were tailored to a child's needs had been the most successful in managing behaviour.

4.4.3 Gradual return

A few pupils who had been out of school for a period of time had a gradual return to school arranged for them. The success of this strategy varied according to other factors, such as level of disengagement and the implementation of other behaviour management techniques. One mother explained her daughter's current situation:

'She just goes in as normal. There may be a meeting planned but that's not until the week after. She hasn't been [to school] since last September (5 months). She's at the behavioural unit one day a week now and if she's good she gets rewarded with a fun day. She's in school for just 2 hours so her return is gradual. She'll be with foster carers soon, so they will continue it.'

4.4.4 No discernable reintegration process

13 of the 25 case evidence files stated that upon return to school after an exclusion parents felt that LSAs were still unable to manage the behaviour that had led to the exclusions in the first place, that there were no clear strategies and behaviour plans were not followed. Almost half of the interview data supports this finding, with parents describing how there was nothing in place for their children on returning to school. This may be one of the reasons as to why exclusions happen repeatedly to the same pupils. If no change is made in the school environment then challenging or negative behaviour will not be addressed or changed. Two parents explained this phenomenon:

'My son just went back to school as normal on the Monday. There was nothing in place to settle him in, no meeting with us. The educational psychologist had been doing transition work with him and she was positive about putting practices into place, but nothing was done.'

'There was no provision or anything, this is in a special school. If he was naughty he would just be moved to a class of older children.'

4.4.5 Meeting between the school and parents

Parents of children who had experienced multiple exclusions talked interchangeably about meetings with the school, advisers and other agencies so it was often hard in interviews and focus groups to clearly follow the purpose of the different meetings that parents attended. The findings show that approximately one third of the parents had meetings with the school to specifically discuss their child's re-entry to the school. Some of these meetings were well planned and discussed pastoral support programmes (PSPs) whilst others were short and just a part of the procedures for reintegration. There was no consensus or pattern regarding children attending these meetings. The following examples explain how procedural the meetings were:

'They ask me to come in earlier than usual to meet with them and they do explain sometimes to X what's going on but mostly they just send him to class.'

'The only meeting I've had is me and the head teacher. There's nothing written down or anything.'

Where meetings do include PSPs and personalised behaviour strategies there was often a difficulty with ensuring that they were implemented by all teachers and over a reasonable length of time. Parents said:

'There were meetings arranged on his return with the Ed Psych and head of year to plan a strategy. I personally felt it looked good on paper was followed through for about a week and then everyone forgot about it.'

'We had an interview which I went to with her [daughter]. The deputy head arranged a get out card system, but most of the staff ignored it.'

4.4.6 Put on behaviour report

One tenth of the pupils in this study were put on report once they had returned to school. This system involved a card or book that each teacher had to sign after lessons. Parents felt this was an ineffective strategy although it enabled teachers to monitor behaviour closely. Parents mainly commented on the lack of other strategies to accompany the report system:

'They just put him on report when he returns to school, but he has no support for his behaviour and there's no strategies.'

4.5 Conclusions regarding key findings about educational support for pupils

- Poor behaviour management can escalate vulnerable pupils' negative behaviour. Parents felt that techniques such as physical contact, restraint and an inability to effectively resolve challenging behaviour could escalate a pupil's negative behaviour and increase the possibility of the child receiving an exclusion.

- There was a lack of strategy regarding behaviour management. According to parents behaviour management within the schools the children in this study attended often did not have any coherent strategies. In social care, behaviour support is about accommodating different behaviours and knowing how to manage behaviour that stems from medical conditions and circumstances. Parents felt that much of the behaviour management implemented was corrective rather than supportive. There was regular use of internal exclusions in the form of isolation units and restraint.

- There was disagreement among professionals on whether illegal exclusions work. Some professionals felt that illegal exclusions offer a warning, others felt that they were ineffective and denied rights. There was little discussion on how they fitted into wider behaviour management strategies. Most professionals felt that there were adequate mechanisms for pupils when returning to school after an exclusion.

- Teachers did not always have the knowledge to be able to give the right support at the right time. Teachers were not always informed about medical conditions, including mental health, or the affects of chaotic or difficult home circumstances. From the parents' and carers' view this often resulted in vulnerable children being punished or excluded for behaviour they could not prevent or in children being excluded at a time when they most need continuity and extra support.

- Support for returning after exclusions is variable. Extra support was often not implemented until a child had received multiple exclusions. Illegal

exclusions could hinder schools accessing the relevant finance for support because the LA may not have been made aware of the difficulties a child has faced. PSPs were sometimes not implemented over the long term. Some mechanisms such as meeting with parents did not prove to be effective and some mechanisms such as being put on report acted as further punishment rather than a monitoring mechanism.

Section 5: Transition from primary to secondary school

One of the main research questions was looking at what information passed from primary to secondary school and how the process of transition affected school exclusion. We have found that more than half the children in this study were first excluded when at primary school and all but 2 had received repeated exclusions. Therefore, an examination of transition is important.

5.1 Transfer of information between primary and secondary schools

Parents assumed that information about their child was held within school records and was passed from one school to another, and where things had not been good in primary they saw secondary as a new start:

‘The records follow from one to the other. On the first parents meeting I went down there and said she's had some problems but I want this to start afresh.’

Education professionals' questionnaires gave useful information about what information is passed between primary and secondary schools. 6 of the 7 LA staff stated that comprehensive information is passed from primary to secondary with close partnership working between the schools. The information includes the school inclusion services and details curricular needs, SEN behaviour and attendance information. However, this contrasts with 1 LA staff respondent and all the other education professionals (9 in total). These 9 education professionals said that information sharing varies widely between schools and local authority areas. It was pointed out that school records do not show unofficial exclusions, so unless it was done by word of mouth it was unlikely to be recorded and the full picture was concealed. There was also acknowledgement amongst these 9 professionals that information was sometimes limited or missing. Two respondents felt that:

‘information hits a wall in secondary school and isn't used in the way it should be’

and that:

‘a lack of information is used as an excuse for exclusions in years 7 and 8.’

5.2 Parents' experiences of education support, exclusions and transition

The main issue with regards to transition and illegal exclusions rests upon the school giving the right support. Problems mainly occurred when there was a removal of the right support or a continuation of the wrong support.

5.2.1 Removing support that had worked in primary school

Many parents explained how their child had problems in primary school until some extra provision or support was put in place at the primary school. Upon transition this support was removed which caused problems to re-emerge.

Two mothers explain the impact of removing support that had worked at primary school:

‘The primary school ... intended to exclude him, but then he was given a statement and 1: 1 support which helped. They still rang us to take him out of school though, but not so often. At secondary his support stopped until we hit a crisis.’

‘His 1: 1 stopped in secondary and at the end of the first term I was asked to take him out of the school. He was off for 2 weeks while they arranged 1: 1 support.’

5.2.2 Difficulties in primary lead to disengagement in secondary

For some families, a lack of support at primary level lead to worsening behaviour in secondary school, sometimes accompanied with complete disengagement, as these two quotes exemplify:

‘My daughter's exclusions started when she was 9, she's 13 now.’

‘At comprehensive school the damage had already been done for him. He was already heavily using cannabis, got in trouble with the police and there was a constant, he's done this and that, such as being caught smoking, and in the end he just didn't want to go to school.’

5.2.3 Moving within the same sector

There seemed to be some problems for children who move schools within the same sector and these parents were not sure what information had been transferred or to what extent the information had been implemented in the new school.

‘With us he transferred from secondary in England to secondary in Wales. I don't know what information if any was passed.’

‘My child has moved between 8 schools (primary) in 2 years and I insisted that information was shared and plans were in place to have the least impact on him emotionally, educationally and mentally. But it was apparent that they did not always translate targets and strategies into his IEP.’

5.3 Conclusions regarding transition between schools

- The exchange of information between primary schools and secondary schools varies
Parents assumed that information was exchanged but some professionals felt that the quality of information given to secondary schools from primary schools varied widely.

- Transition is linked to exclusions

It is known that some young people find the experience of moving schools and starting more academic subjects problematic. However, this study found clear evidence that exclusions occurred when the right support was not given. It was particularly apparent that exclusions occurred when the type of support received in primary school was removed in secondary; or when exclusions at primary level had led to educational disengagement at the start of secondary level.

- Exclusions over a prolonged period are damaging to children and families

Parents and children perceive education as a long process from 5 to 16, and so when problems that had been solved at the primary level resurface owing to bad support at the secondary level, it had an impact on self esteem and motivation. It may be that from the secondary schools' perspective this is a new pupil and a new difficulty that can be resolved, but from the families' perspective this is a repeated upheaval that rekindles difficult and distressing experiences, which they have already been through in their school life.

Section 6: The use of managed moves

Exploring the use of managed moves was a key research question. One teacher's description of a managed move was typical of all professionals' views. In their opinion managed moves took place:

'when a pupil is in danger of permanent exclusion from one school and a place is negotiated for them at another school.'

There was consensus among professionals that managed moves can be a new start for young people if undertaken well. Most parents however spoke negatively of managed moves, discussing how they can be used as a threat, enable schools to avoid responsibilities, have practical difficulties associated with them and are discussed without parents' knowledge. These four issues are explored in turn in relation to the data from all of the respondents in this research.

6.1 Managed moves used as a threat

Professionals and parents mentioned that managed moves can be used to threaten parents to agree to certain actions or to accept the nominated school. The consensus among parents is summed up in the following quotes:

'The school did talk of a managed move, but it was more a throwaway comment than an offer of support.'

'Schools without resources or support cannot cope and use illegal exclusions as a way of coping. None of us have been placed in the position yet where we have to move them but have all been threatened that it will happen.' (parent of child with ADHD in a focus group)

6.2 Managed moves to avoid responsibility

A few professionals stated that managed moves avoid responsibilities but help to keep the exclusion rates down. Most parents felt that a managed move would be detrimental to their child because it was an upheaval to move school but also because schools had responsibilities to children and so they should stand by them and support them. Parents said:

'It would mean the school avoiding their responsibilities. They never looked into why a teacher grabbed my son ... Another school would not be good for him because Asperger's children find change difficult. This is why I asked if he can stay where he is - it was the right decision.'

'The school would be avoiding their responsibility by sending him to a different school. They have suggested moving him but it won't help his behaviour. They should stick by him and show him some support. It could be a good option, but it's not the best idea for him.'

6.3 Managed move by parents and children

Some parents chose to move their children before the school had suggested a managed move. Parents sometimes acted at the request of their children and sometimes because they felt they were not achieving any progress with their child's current school. When parents moved a child they felt more involved in their child's education and there seemed to be more positive outcomes. Families' decisions for moving a child to a different school are explained in the quotes below:

'They didn't want my child at their school. A teacher suggested moving him, but this was not done officially because I made the appointment at the new school to discuss moving him, at my request. They do seem to have better strategies for managing his behaviour.'

'He changed school, at his own request. We had a managed move on a trial basis. It was more an escape route for him than a real solution.'

'She wanted the move herself. She said she wanted a different start so I called a few schools. She went there and was fine.'

6.4 Practical difficulties parents considered with managed moves

For many children and young people moving schools presented practical difficulties. This was summarised by one parent who explained that going to another school would take their son out of his comfort zone and that there were problems such as transport and travelling times. Another parent whose child had had a managed move was concerned about the length of her school day:

'She had to leave the house at 7.30am and not get back until 4.15pm so it's a long day'

6.5 Managed moves that occurred without parents' involvement

One third of the professionals described managed moves as changing school with the agreement of the head and three LAs had developed protocols for managed moves after consultation with schools. The data suggests that these professionals' responses focused upon the school needs rather than facilitating the involvement of parents. Parents were very dissatisfied in instances of managed moves where they were not consulted or able to have any input. The following interview extracts highlight parents' experiences of managed moves without their participation:

'They spoke to another school without us knowing, during the holidays, and then told us he could go there in September. I said he is going back to his normal school in September. He didn't want to have to make new friends - he's got so much going on his life already. If they'd have suggested it in year 9 it may have been possible, but not for year 11.'

'The school arranged for my child to attend a PRU without discussing it with me or our child. I disagreed with this decision and got help from the EWO, SNAP Cymru and CAMHS.'

'You are literally told in a phone call that a managed move will take place to a different school, there's no other option or placement for your child in the area. You're told and addressed like this, with no option to appeal.'

6.6 Conclusions regarding the use of managed moves

- Managed moves were felt to be detrimental to parents and pupils if they were not involved in the discussions and plans.

Parents felt that managed moves were used as a threat to coerce them to agree to school plans. Where parents were not involved they felt that managed moves were an attempt to avoid responsibility and remove their child from a school.

- Parents and children will consider managed moves as an option.

Parents and children often considered moving schools after a series of exclusions. This sometimes occurred without any support from external agencies, the school or the LA, but parents felt that this was an option which could work for their child. However, when they instigated and arranged the move they did not perceive it as a solution, but an escape.

- Managed moves worked best when all parties were involved.

Data from parents and education professionals suggest that managed moves worked well if the old school, new school, EWO, parents and pupil were involved in the discussions and the planning. One parent explained:

'We had a managed move, but we had full support, so we were very involved in the decisions.'

8 professionals from LAs, teaching and other areas of education agreed that managed moves work best when the schools, children, and parents discuss the decisions and processes and all parties want them to succeed. They felt that there needs to be more consideration of children's rights during managed moves and that they should be tightly monitored by the LA.

Section 7: Information available to parents regarding rights and choices within their children's education

Parents who had received information from an advisory organisation knew that an unofficial, illegal or soft exclusion was when a school excludes without going through the relevant procedures. However, before parents sought support from an advisory organisation they did not know what schools were legally allowed to do, the procedures schools should undertake and how they could complain about school decisions.

From all of the case evidence files, interviews and focus groups it was very clear that the parents in the study were not getting information about exclusion processes, rights or choices within education. This section examines parents' experiences and details what professionals have said regarding giving information to parents.

7.1 Sources of information for parents regarding rights and choices during exclusions

7.1.1 Parents who have had information from the school or LA

From the information that details the experiences of 52 children and young people, only 3 parents reported having information about correct procedures and rights within education from the school or LA. One parent did not see how exclusion helped his son, but described a good relationship with the school as follows:

'I keep in touch with the school and get him on the right track. We have a good dialogue between us. I understand why it's happening, but I just can't see how sending him home helps. There's no punishment, there's no consequence to his actions. That's what they taught me is important in the Barnardo's parenting class.'

These 3 parents received information about procedures and reported good partnership working with all agencies, but they still had to go to SNAP for information about rights and choices.

'I had exclusion letters and knew I could pick work up but nothing about rights and choices.'

7.1.2 Parents who have not had information from the school or LA

Overwhelmingly, however, 47 of the 50 parents involved were not told of exclusion procedures or their rights; and gained this information from friends, other parents who used SNAP Cymru services, or they used the internet and yellow pages to find out where they could get advice from. Few parents contacted the LA for advice and anecdotally did not seem to know they could receive information and support from the LA.

'The school never said it was illegal or voluntary, I was made aware of that when SNAP was explaining to me what was going on. The school gave me no information about my rights or my child's.'

'During the illegal exclusions I didn't have a clue as to what he was entitled to. It was only through SNAP that I found out he could get home tuition.'

Most parents had very little communication with the school regarding their children's education, and so when exclusion occurred there was no existing basis to enable constructive dialogue. Many parents felt the school was hostile to them.

'I received nothing at the time about his rights or choices. I only found that out from

SNAP Cymru. He did receive some help from an LSA but I don't know how many hours. I haven't seen an IEP to know what provision he needs and what he's getting.

'I was in a meeting with the head and I felt what do I do? Who do I go to? I've got to do what they tell me to do otherwise I'm a bad parent. It was totally frustrating and it made me feel really sick and angry. I didn't get any information about rights and choices in education. The only proper support I've had is from Barnardo's. The attitude was 'your son' or 'it's your fault you're a bad parent. We've done nothing wrong, we're perfect'. They make you feel terrible.'

Schools need good dialogue and partnership working with parents so that at difficult times, such as around diagnosis, effective support can be given and parents and schools can work together to support children and young people. One parents described how daunting it was when there was no partnership working between parents and the school:

'I've had no information about rights or procedures or anything. I had a meeting with the head and that's been it. I was in contact with SNAP to get some advice but the teacher said they didn't want anyone coming in telling them how to teach. The educational psychologist got her diagnosed and said she had autism. They gave me no more information and I didn't know if she was autistic, on the autistic spectrum or had Asperger's - they told me nothing and I had to go and buy a book to find out about it.'

Whilst parents received very little information regarding rights, choices and appeals, from the data, no information at all was given to the majority of the children. In one instance a child was informed about her exclusion but the mother was not informed. One of the case study evidence files details a child who was sent home at lunchtime but went to chat to Community First staff because there was no one at home. This child did not know why she had been excluded but described it as an afternoon off. Parents concern about the lack of communication with their children was summed up in the following comment:

'No one told us of rights and choices, I looked through the yellow pages for help organisations and on the internet. No one told us about choices, let alone told our daughter.'

7.2 Education professionals' understanding of how parents get information about rights and choices in education

The data from professionals regarding giving information to parents varied between LA staff and other education professionals. One of the reasons for this might be that the LA would not hear about unofficial exclusions. Whilst information was available from the LA, parents did not seem to know this and so did not request it from them. This created the situation whereby LA staff did have information and gave it out as required, but parents stated they did not get information about rights and procedures because they were not signposted to the LA. Most LA personnel mentioned a range of procedures available to parents and staff that supported their rights. These included education welfare officers, inclusion officers, education social workers, as well as asking the school for this information.

The other education professional respondents highlighted the problems of getting rights and complaints information to parents at the right time. The head teachers said that appeals and complaints procedures were on exclusion letters, but with unofficial exclusions no paperwork was undertaken so this information was not received. Additionally, it seems that some parents whose children have had official exclusions did not feel they have been given this information or it arrived so late that it was no longer relevant. One head teacher stated:

'Information about rights and complaints procedures are entirely random and sometimes given by unsuitable personnel.'

All other professionals were in agreement that parents do not get information about rights from education services, unless welfare and inclusion officers with particular skills and rapport are involved in the child's welfare. The problem here was summed up by two professionals:

'They [parents] don't get enough information. We need a communication and information strategy for all parents and pupils with regards to all exclusions. But schools should take more responsibility for this too.'

'Schools aren't open with the rights of parents or children. Maybe they're unsure of the processes themselves?'

7.3 The LA, schools and partnership working with parents

Generally, it would be assumed that the LA and schools need to have a good working relationship if pupils are to quickly have difficulties resolved. Additionally, they should be able to involve parents ensuring that they give them the right information and that they are involved in decisions regarding their children.

However, the partnership between LAs and schools was highly variable, in some areas seeming hostile but in others positive and effective. Their ability to involve parents was also variable.

7.3.1 LA and partnership working with parents

Some of the case evidence files detailed how the LA worked with parents to find solutions to exclusions. Generally there was a lack of written information for parents with schools and LA staff relying heavily on phone calls. This means that parents may not take all the information in, and not remember what had been said.

A minority of LAs were not acting according to procedures or good practice. The case evidence files from Banardo's Cymru and SNAP Cymru's work with parents contain examples of an LA advising a parent to keep their child at home after staff balloted a refusal to teach, and a different LA not attending school meetings regarding illegal exclusions unless the school invited them to. Where LAs refused to pay for support for a child, parents felt there were no other options to sorting out their child's educational problems. In some instances, although LAs were working with parents to get assessments or look for alternatives, children were not in receipt of any education provision, occasionally for as long as 6 months.

7.3.2 LA and partnership working with schools

Many parents felt either that the school and LA 'stand together' and do not listen to their viewpoint or that they are caught in disagreements between the school and the LA, mainly regarding levels of support. One mother described this:

'Request for support for our child was refused 5 times. Each time the school said they didn't want to exclude her and wrote justifications about why the support was needed. But the LEA won't listen.'

All professionals discussed the working relationship between LAs and schools in relation to partnership working and guidance to schools. Many LA respondents outlined how they guide schools and detailed the steps they had taken to stop the use of illegal school exclusions,

mainly reminding schools of the legal processes behind exclusions. Other education professionals stated that more training for head teachers and governors was needed with regards to giving parents information about rights and seeking support from organisations like SNAP.

There was some discussion of the role of the head teacher when issuing exclusions. Generally LA professionals stated that head teachers should not guide staff to issue unofficial exclusions but the two head teachers said that they need to be supportive of teachers working with difficult children as morale can go down and so may agree with a member of staff that it's the best course of action. The education professionals who were not in the LA or direct teaching practice did not comment on this.

7.4 Parents' feelings regarding appealing and complaining

Overwhelmingly parents were frustrated at schools' lack of behaviour management abilities and lack of adherence to behaviour plans. Some parents intended to complain but were so stressed with trying to solve problems with the school that they did not get around to officially complaining. Some parents did not complain because they did not know that they could, or found the process too overwhelming given the other events that were occurring in their families' lives. Even when parents knew they could complain they were very reluctant to do so because they were scared or felt that there was no point.

7.4.1 Parents who were scared to complain

Many parents said they were scared to complain because they may push the school into issuing a permanent exclusion or causing more difficulties for their children at school. Some parents had called a school meeting with the support of voluntary organisations. Parents described their fears as follows:

'I couldn't complain or appeal. They would all stick together. I felt I had no choice, options or strategies. I've only received letters twice detailing exclusions the other times there's been nothing formal.'

'When the exclusions were formal I had a letter telling me how to appeal. But I felt intimidated and didn't think I'd have any impact on the decision. When I did collect him voluntarily I didn't know I had any choice, I thought the school could follow their rules.'

'We didn't voice our disagreement, which we should have, but we were worried he might lose his education. We appealed at first when it all started ... We appealed based on information available in the admissions policy, not given to us because of the unofficial exclusions.'

7.4.2 Parents who felt there was no point in complaining

Many parents could not see an advantage to complaining as they believed it would not solve situations. Some parents reported that they were advised by other agencies not to complain. For example a mother said that a social worker advised her 'not to make a fuss'. The point here was that parents were not apathetic but they felt completely stuck and did not see current appeal and complaint procedures as helping situations or reducing the difficulties that they faced in keeping their child in school.

'I couldn't see an advantage to complaining. They weren't going to take him back into the specialist unit and the head of the unit had grabbed him from behind so wasn't capable of supporting him there anyway.'

'I did want to complain because they were doing such inappropriate work during the home tuition. I contacted SNAP and got advice but it was all instigated by me. I had nothing from education... I didn't complain in the end because I didn't want to rake things up for her.'

7.5 Conclusions regarding information for parents about rights and choices in their children's education

- Parents did not receive information about their rights and choices with regards to their child's education and support options

Whilst LAs had information to give to parents, 47 of 50 parents were not aware of them as a resource and were not getting signposted to them from schools. It appears that these 47 parents did not get any information from schools regarding the process of exclusions, appeals, right to work sent home or about decisions being written down and sent in a letter. There may be an issue here about information being given at the wrong time or in the wrong way. Such circumstances would lead to schools believing that they had given information but parents not feeling that they had had any.

- Children were not included in any dialogue regarding exclusion

There was no evidence from parents or education professionals that children and young people were included in explanations of exclusions, their own behaviour management strategies or in information about their rights to education. Some parents tried to explain it to their child, but in instances where the parents themselves were not clear as to what the education situation was, it was impossible for them to give accurate information to their child.

- LA partnership working and solution focused dialogue with parents and schools was variable

It was clear that partnership working between LAs, schools and parents varies according to area. Some schools did not seem to involve the LEA until an outside agency was supporting the parents involved; and could use their involvement as a threat rather than as a resource. Some schools and LAs were perceived as 'siding together' by parents, which made parents feel powerless and lacking in any choices.

- LAs and schools need a partnership approach

Many professionals felt that schools and LAs do not work in partnership closely enough. Generally, it was felt that schools felt under resourced to support challenging young people but that LAs felt their case load is too high and that schools do not take responsibility for individual pupils.

- Parents did not appeal or complain.

It was very rare for parents to complain or appeal for a variety of reasons. Generally these were because of a lack of knowledge, a feeling of being overwhelmed and a lack of time, that it would stir up trouble and not achieve any outcomes or they were scared. This therefore calls into question the validity of the current complaints procedures or the effectiveness of how it is put into operation.

Section 8: The impact of exclusions

This research found that exclusions, whether legal or illegal, had an impact upon the child and the family. Although specifically commissioned to examine the impact of illegal exclusions, this research found that much of what parents and professionals said regarding the impact of exclusions was applied to all forms of exclusion, legal and illegal. This section examines the impact of exclusion upon the emotions of the child, their education, the emotions of the parents and how it affected family life. All of the children in this study were vulnerable. They were either living with a disability, behaviour condition or other illness or had complex home circumstances that were either chaotic or affected by poverty. These were the very children who needed stability, understanding and support, rather than rejection and exclusion, even with acknowledgement that this could be hard to achieve.

8.1 Impact of exclusions on the emotional well being of the young person

The impact of exclusions upon the emotional well-being of children and young people was reported here from a parents' viewpoint. To get an accurate picture of the full impact from young people themselves a separate study would need to be undertaken whereby young people would be interviewed and discussions about participation in education would be held with them. Parents reported that their children experienced various aspects of emotional upset because of being excluded. In some instances children and young people had suicidal thoughts or expressed their emotions physically through self-harming behaviour or aggression.

8.1.1 Young people's emotional hurt because of repeated exclusions

For young people who had a chronic illness or disability the experience of illegal school exclusions deeply affected their emotional well-being. 7 of the 25 case evidence files described the exclusion as causing the young person severe upset or psychological distress. The following quote shows how bewildering it can be for a young person:

'He misses out on school trips. They won't take him so he sits by himself and has said 'Mum, I have had to sit in the school today all by myself while everyone went outside to have a nice fun day. Why wasn't I allowed Mum ?' I would go in and ask them why he couldn't go and some teachers said he wouldn't know the difference. He saw me looking at a school photo and said 'you won't find me in that Mum, I'm not a part of the whole school.'

8.1.2 Children and young people felt unheard in behaviour management strategies

Many parents pointed out that schools do not communicate to children about the reason for exclusions, the length and what will happen when they return to school. This either places anxiety upon the child or causes them to disengage with education. Both scenarios in many cases led to an escalation of challenging behaviour, particularly as children and young people felt unheard and excluded from the process or did not know what was happening with their education. One parent explained:

'He felt he was being picked on and targeted more than other children. He felt no one listened to him except me. He once over heard an LSA complaining about his behaviour, which upset him and made his behaviour worse. He's had difficulties since the exclusions and little help from YOT or social services.'

8.1.3 Suicidal and self-harming thoughts caused by repeated exclusions

A very small minority (4 out of 52) of children showed self-harming or suicidal thoughts, that appears to have strong links to their experiences at school. The three interview extracts below show how traumatic school life can be for a small minority of pupils and exclusion can feel like

a relief or the last part of a process of rejection:

'She was showing physical symptoms of anxiety, stopped eating, being sick, having headaches. She was supposed to go back to school after the Easter break, it was 1 in the morning and she just broke down and said 'I can't do it. I can't get on that bus.' She then shared how bad she felt and that it would be better if she was dead so we went to the GP and she never went back.'

'Teachers say in front of him you've done this, you've done that and he just comes home and hates himself and wants to kill himself. He'll say 'There's no point in my living because I'm a piece of S**t because that's what my teachers say I am.'

'I've had to put locks on the knife drawers for his own safety and keep calm at the end of every school day so I can talk him through what's happened so he's calm and feels better.'

8.1.4 Violent and aggressive behaviour because of exclusions

A minority of parents (6 out of 52) described their children's behaviour as worsening during an exclusion, describing it as aggressive or violent because of the anger from what was occurring in their school life. Some of these children may have had challenging behaviour prior to the exclusions, but it does suggest that exclusion did little to improve behaviour. Aggression was described as being aimed either at parents or siblings.

8.1.5 Social isolation

Many parents were very concerned about the social isolation their children experienced whilst excluded from school. This was particularly a concern for pupils who had regular repeated exclusions such as once a week, for pupils who had long term exclusions and for working parents who could not organize or afford childcare.

'He was very withdrawn in the house on his own. I had to go to work and his sister was at school so he was by himself watching TV and getting up later and later. He was very anxious at the thought of having to go back and it took a while to reintegrate him. He didn't receive any education for a month.'

'I received nothing to say it was voluntary and they didn't explain it to my child, he kicked off when I explained. He plays on his x box all day.'

8.2 Impact of illegal exclusions upon the education of the young person

Parents in interviews, focus groups and through case evidence files described the impact that illegal exclusions had on their children's education. Most of the concerns they expressed are equally applicable to legal exclusions. They discussed how exclusions made their children vulnerable, caused them to miss out on education affecting achievement, caused absenteeism and disengagement from education and learning processes.

8.2.1 Illegal exclusions which caused vulnerability

Parents of children who were not disabled and did not have a chronic illness talked about how exclusions caused their children to be put at risk. This was particularly the case in instances where schools had not rung parents to let them know a child had been excluded or where letters were so late that the exclusion had finished. For example, as referred to earlier, one girl went to the Community First office to chat to staff, and parents spoke about how their child could be wandering the streets and getting into trouble. This particularly affects working parents and parents with other caring responsibilities. One parent explained:

'She was always at risk because I didn't know where she would be. She would get up and travel all over Cardiff on the bus. The school knew and she knew she was excluded; but I didn't.'

8.2.2 Illegal exclusions which led to pupils missing out on education

All parents were aware that their children were missing out on learning and studying. This was particularly the case when issued with an illegal exclusion because work was not sent home and all tuition stopped. Most parents viewed this as a failure of the school because schools should educate all children and young people, not just those that are perceived as easy to teach. One parent explained:

'She's lost a hell of a lot of education and it's a failure of the schools. School didn't look beyond the behaviour or work out a system for working with her autism.'

8.2.3 Absenteeism and illegal exclusions

The data reveals a strong link between truanting, absenteeism and illegal exclusions. Absenteeism and truanting tended to affect children and young people who did not have a diagnosed disability, but may have had a behavioural condition such as ADHD, had poor mental health or a difficult home background. There also seemed to be an element of bullying or negative peer dynamics for children and young people who were absent.

Exclusions were related to absenteeism in three ways. Firstly, pupils received an exclusion for being absent without authorisation and secondly, pupils become disengaged and did not want to return after an exclusion. Lastly, pupils who have illnesses that fluctuated, such as poor mental health or some physical disabilities, were often allowed to take authorised absence but then were questioned when a number of days were missed. This section examines these three instances in more detail.

Disengagement leading to exclusion

There is anecdotal evidence in the data of a pattern involving illegal exclusions at primary school, and truanting at secondary school that leads to official exclusions. The data shows that some primary schools issue illegal exclusions that are marked as an absence. When those children enter secondary school they start to truant. These unauthorised absences in secondary school can then lead to exclusions. One parent explained:

'In primary, the school would ask him to stay off and mark it as an absence. In comprehensive it all kicked off again and the school was hassling me ... They kept blaming me saying I wasn't getting him there, I could drive him or walk him there but he wouldn't stay there. He was excluded for a day because he truanted and got caught'

Exclusions leading to educational disengagement

Many parents pointed out that repeated exclusions caused children to withdraw from school routines and learning. In instances where children were struggling with school work, exclusions could make them feel like giving up. Illegal exclusions were particularly damaging because no work was sent home and there was no recourse to any home tuition, as two parents explain:

'I'm frightened about him integrating back into school after being out of education for so long and with no work being sent to him from the school.'

'Because they've complained about his behaviour so much he just wouldn't go to school - he didn't attend for about 4 years. They tried him on a reduced timetable so he could

pick his lessons but a teacher had broken his confidence and he'd had enough by then.'

Agreed absences because of health

Parents whose children had illnesses with fluctuating symptoms found that schools did not understand that medical conditions were not always constant. In these instances it seems that schools would ring parents to ask them to take their child home but record it as an authorized absence. Parents reported that schools readily asked parents to take children home rather than administer medication or undertake appropriate physical support such as toileting needs. When agreed absences accumulated, some schools would then want to punish the child for poor attendance. This was explained comprehensively by one parent of a young man with poor mental health:

'According to the school, it [coming home] was always our son's decision, but they used to ring and say he wants to come home. I would ask them to give him his medication and see how he goes, but they would say they hadn't got the staff. His attendance report for year 10 says he has 158 authorised absences and only 9 unauthorised but they rung us and said his attendance was so bad that he's not entitled to an education at the school anymore.'

8.3 Professionals' viewpoint of the impact upon the young person

When asked what the impact of illegal exclusions, none of the 15 professionals mentioned the high level of emotional impact that exclusions could have upon children and young people. However, they did describe exclusions as damaging and having a negative impact upon a child's education in terms of disengagement and vulnerability.

8.3.1 Education professionals' explanations of how exclusions are damaging

A few professionals felt that exclusions would act as a deterrent for further negative behaviour. However, one third of the professionals involved described them as damaging. They said that illegal exclusions were used as a way of looking after a child's welfare but that they remove rights from the child. Generally the system for exclusions was seen as inflexible, with few legal options available to schools. All exclusions were described as causing confusion for a child and leading to a lowering of expectations.

8.3.2 Disengagement

Half of the education professionals felt that any exclusion led to educational disengagement. They pointed out that missing out on work and education routines led to a lack of interest in studies and school. One fifth of the professionals added that missing out on education was breaking children's rights. Some professionals could not see how illegal school exclusions could benefit a child, questioning how pupils would know that a recorded exclusion was worse than an unrecorded one.

8.3.3 Vulnerability

One third of professionals said that illegal exclusions left pupils vulnerable because they have no education status. However they were also vulnerable because they may have had no guidance or care during the day giving scope to get into trouble.

8.4 Impact of exclusions on the emotions of the family

Just as exclusions affected the emotions of children and young people they also impacted upon the emotional well-being of parents and upon family life. When a pupil was excluded, illegally or otherwise, parents had no time to themselves and had a huge burden of worry placed upon them. Parents talked to different degrees about being unhappy, anxious and frustrated. It should be noted that these emotions related just to the difficulties they were

having with their child's schooling. The impact of the exclusions upon family life led to other difficult emotions and situations that are discussed below.

Only 3 professionals commented on the impact exclusions have on a family. There was acknowledgement that families may struggle to find someone to look after their child and that illegal exclusions give no right of appeal. However, there was no discussion regarding how deep the emotional impact is on a family.

8.4.1 Feelings of unhappiness

Many parents spoke of being unhappy either because it had such a big impact upon their lives, because they felt they were unable to do anything to change the situation for their child or because of how their child had been treated under behaviour management strategies. One parent said:

'I haven't had a life because of it. It's totally ruined my life.'

Another mother summed up how parents can feel unable to find solutions:

'I have no input on any decisions being made. Meetings are difficult and they dismiss you as a parent. They talk in their own language about what they are going to do and what targets they are setting. Anything you ask they just look at you stupid. They don't care what you think and I'm a constant pain to the school, ringing them to get things done but they just ignore me.'

The following parent offers a consensus view about the upset parents feel when their child was restrained:

'What really upsets me is the way they restrained him and what they did to him, the thought of what he experienced and the panic he must have felt.'

8.4.2 Feelings of anxiety and stress

Almost unanimously parents talked about feelings of stress and anxiety relating to their child's experience at school. Many parents felt this stemmed from not being able to change things or disagreeing with the school's suggested ways of working with behaviour. One parent explained being in tears after meetings with the school, and this was not an unusual experience among the parents involved in this study.

'I was a teacher for 21 years, but the first exclusions she had I was in tears. I felt entirely intimidated. The school wanted consequences at home'

8.4.3 Frustration

Many parents felt frustration at the lack of behaviour management strategies and / or the lack of their implementation. This was common for all parents regardless of any medical diagnosis or disability. However, parents of children who had a disability or medical condition felt that their school was focusing upon trying to correct behaviour rather than finding ways to support behaviour to enable learning. They felt that illegal exclusions were the end result of not being able to correct behaviour.

8.5 Impact of exclusion on family life and finances

Most of the parents had experienced severe disruption to their lives because of repeated illegal exclusions. They spoke about its impact upon finances, siblings and everyday routines.

8.5.1 The impact of exclusions on family finances

20 of the 50 parents mentioned how repeated exclusions had led to them having to change working hours or give up work completely. In every instance it was the woman who gave up work or changed working patterns from full time to part time in order to look after a child who should have been in school. This was obviously a big issue for parents, and had many repercussions. Nine parents spoke of having severe financial difficulties caused by the loss of a wage, with 4 of these parents entering individual voluntary arrangements (IVAs) or bankruptcy situations. Working lone parents were particularly vulnerable and, where not self-employed, faced difficulties in giving up work because they may not have been entitled to any benefits. In these instances children had to be left at home alone if no family lived in the area or was able to care for the child. Recent Welsh poverty research shows that living on one income or reducing a family budget to benefit level will cause children to be living in poverty. This will cause more stress and difficulties for both the family and the child or young person. Additionally, our research found that giving up work had an impact upon parents' self esteem and quality of life.

Parents mentioned that some schools issued lunchtime exclusions. These often caused as many problems as full exclusions because a parent had a few hours in a morning and a few in the afternoon in which to work and undertake household activities. If the child was entitled to free school meals it also meant that a family living in poverty had to find the money for a lunch, that they had not been budgeting to provide. This issue was important and unanticipated, so there were multiple quotes from parents which explained the circumstances in which multiple exclusions had placed them and their family. These quotes are intended to offer examples of the many comments parents made upon this issue.

'I can't work because I have to look after my child during the day at unknown intervals.'

'I couldn't work now if I wanted to. When he was first ill I found it very hard because we were fostering too. I took a night shift so I could sleep during the day but with the school constantly ringing I just never slept.'

'I was trying to work and keep a roof over our heads, going to different schools because they [the children] were in different places - it was chaos. I had to stop working because it got to the stage where enough was enough. ... I've been on my own with no family to support me.'

'I home educated for 3 years. Every time there was an exclusion I had to leave work and pick her up. When she was home ed my husband works shifts and I'm flexible so we could work around it and plan ourselves. I went part time, and if I wasn't working for a charity I know it would have been much harder.'

'I haven't had the normal life a parent gets by sending their child to school and knowing they are there and being able to use that time to do other things that need to be done. I've ended up bankrupt with severe depression.'

'Financially we had to go into an IVA because we were now living on one wage.'

'We lost a business from it - I'm financially destitute because of it.'

8.5.2 Impact of exclusions on siblings

One tenth of families discussed the impact that exclusions had on siblings. Where siblings were very young, parents found they had to divide their time between older children and very

young children during the school day. Where siblings were both in the same school they often have to field comments from fellow pupils about their excluded sibling and felt they needed to protect them and stand up to negative comments. In two instances siblings were excluded at the same time, impacting on parents' time and younger children's lives.

8.5.3 Disruption of routine

Many parents spoke of the disruption to siblings and routines of family lives more generally. This was particularly the case for illegal exclusions when parents did not know how long the exclusion may last. Many parents struggled to react to a phone call to come and pick their child up as the following quotes exemplify:

'It's turned our family upside down. I got to the stage where I had a support worker and now a long term use of anti-depressants.'

'It's so disruptive. I work around my family commitments. So to have a phone call when I'm on my way to college and try and find someone to have her. I know she's 15 but I'm not happy with her being alone in the house all day alone. It's Ok for a few hours and I can phone her and things, but if it's the whole day then I have to drop my plans.'

8.5.4 Practical difficulties

Generally parents outlined many different practical difficulties in dealing with illegal and official exclusions. They explained that:

'I can't be more than 5 minutes away from the school - I don't go anywhere.'

Many parents were concerned about the lack of school work that their children had because they were not in school. In a few instances where work was sent home by the school parents said they struggled to help their children complete it, as they were not teachers or skilled in particular subject areas. This problem worsened with the length and volume of exclusions. Where work was not sent home, some parents tried to set homework themselves, but explained how difficult this was, particularly to fit in around other children and work:

'I was trying to set homework myself, fitting it around family life and full time work. He would do it, I set him maths from a book.' [lone parent]

8.6 Conclusions regarding the impact of exclusions on pupils and families

- Children were not involved in dialogue and decisions regarding behaviour strategies. Children and young people were left confused and emotionally upset because they were excluded from discussions between the school and their parents regarding their education.
- Exclusions had a negative impact on children's and families emotions. Exclusions had a major effect on child and young people's well-being. They also caused emotional upset and difficulties for affected families.
- Exclusions had a negative impact upon a child's education. Exclusions harmed a child's education because of the break in routine and missed lessons. This was increased when a child had an illegal exclusion because work and support was not available. Illegal exclusions often happened repeatedly for individual children, which increased the negative impact upon a child's education.
- Exclusions had a negative impact upon family life.

The disruption to family life, including upon its finances cannot be underestimated. Between one fifth and one quarter of the parents in this research reported having to reduce working hours, in some instances putting the family into poverty or onto benefits, which invariably created more problems and stresses for family life.

- Exclusions were linked to absenteeism

Exclusions increased a child's vulnerability and could cause them to not want to return to school and therefore play truant. In instances where children were truanting, issuing an exclusion reinforced their truanting behaviour.

Section 9 - Conclusions and recommendations

This section highlights the most important points from the research and offers recommendations that may solve some of the issues. One professional said:

‘Some schools in really deprived communities never exclude but others have high levels of exclusions - there’s no logic or reason behind this. If one can do it, so can another.’

These recommendations aim to take practice that works in some school and social care practice and apply it more universally. Some of the recommendations are reinforcements of good practice already set out in Welsh Government guidance, particularly in Circular 47/06: Inclusion and Pupil Support. No single recommendation will change the issues that this research has presented. Taken together they should enable schools to avoid the use of illegal exclusions.

9.1 Recommendations to address the fact that illegal exclusions are a problem that affects the whole of a child’s school life.

More than half the children in this study were first issued an exclusion during primary school. The data shows that exclusions often merge together between being illegal, official, voluntary and agreed absence; and generally happen repeatedly. Therefore illegal exclusions happen at all ages and in mainstream and specialist sectors. Repeated exclusions do huge damage to a child’s emotional well being, their chances of educational attainment and to family life.

Recommendation 1

Any action to tackle illegal exclusions must include primary schools. More attention needs to be given by the LA to how primary schools meet the support needs of pupils.

Recommendation 2

Multiple exclusions must stop. If a child experiences more than three exclusions they should be referred to an educational psychologist and have the support of external agencies. This data details children who have had 39 periods of exclusion in a year (some illegal and some not) and 50 periods of exclusion in 3 years. (A period is not days but the number of fixed exclusions as reported by parents). It seems obvious that the exclusions are not working but that they become used in a repeated cycle.

Recommendation 3

The family and child must be involved in creating a meaningful pastoral support programme (PSP) with get out strategies, rewards and sanctions. This plan should be more detailed than an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and look more like an essential lifestyles plan, as used in the disability field to enable individualised care. This would clearly explain how a child should be supported.

9.2 Recommendations to address the lack of strategies to manage the behaviour of individuals, and to encourage the use of supportive rather than punitive sanctions

Few professionals talked of exclusion in the wider context of behaviour whereas for parents it was a major aspect of behaviour management. Illegal exclusions must be seen in the wider context of behaviour management. Much of the behaviour management techniques discussed by parents were punitive and implemented after a negative event. This study also shows that schools are often currently ignoring a child’s home background. Many parents state how hard home was when their child started having poor behaviour.

Recommendation 4

Currently plans are not always detailed enough and not shared with parents or children. A PSP should involve family, and detail the techniques that work for the child in other settings, such as any activities, youth groups and when at home. Parents have expertise in how to successfully support their children and techniques employed by parents should be detailed in a PSP. There must be an expectation that all teachers follow the plan, not just a SENCO or class teacher.

Recommendation 5

There needs to be a change of focus onto preventative measures so that children are supported in a way that avoids incidents and therefore avoids the need for punishment. Some behaviour and physical conditions cannot be corrected and so they need to be accommodated and supported in a way that minimises disruption to other pupil's learning. Teachers could benefit from programmes such as the Dinosaur programme, designed to complement the Webster Stratton parenting course. This is run in a few schools in Wales. Schools could also have closer involvement with parenting courses to ensure that the same behaviour management techniques are used consistently in all aspects of a pupil's life. Teachers learning in behaviour management could link to Continuing Professional Development courses.

Recommendation 6

A chaotic family life, caring responsibilities, poor housing, and extreme poverty are not issues that schools can correct, but these issues will play out to different levels in children's lives and their behaviour. These children are vulnerable and have specific support needs which do not involve a statement of SEN. A mechanism of pastoral support needs to be created for these pupils and schools need to be able to acknowledge the impact a chaotic home background can have upon behaviour and work with individual pupils to address their support needs.

Recommendation 7

Schools need more flexible options for offering support. Illegal exclusions seem to occur when they do not know what else to do but do not want to issue an official exclusion. Schools need access to counsellors, play therapists, and LSA hours that can vary in intensity for those living with mental health conditions and other changeable chronic illnesses. This could be achieved through joint agency working. Flexible options should include some recognition for 'time out' days (for example one per term) so pupils can officially go home when things get to boiling point on the proviso of urgently reviewing behaviour support plans.

9.3 Recommendations to address the length of time schools and LAs take to implement action to support a child

Through issuing illegal exclusions schools are delaying proper support reaching a child. LAs wait for multiple negative incidents before support was put in place. The length of time this took enabled the problems to build up. Action taken by schools and LAs generally needs to be much quicker. The data shows some children waiting 3 or 6 months for support to be put in place. This is two thirds of the academic year, which will have a large effect upon a child's self esteem and achievement. Children experience time differently to adults. Six weeks is nothing in the service world, but to a primary school aged child it is the whole of a topic area missed. It is vital that interventions start to occur on children's timescales rather than adults.

Recommendation 8

All interventions should be implemented quickly to curb the downhill trend to disengagement, low self esteem, isolation and permanent exclusion.

9.4 Recommendations regarding illegal exclusions that are used by specialist support provision which are designed for coping with certain conditions or behaviours

The data details children with Asperger's Syndrome being excluded from the specialist unit because teachers cannot manage them, but the child goes on to achieve in mainstream provision. There are also a few children who are excluded from PRUs. There is not enough data to draw full conclusions or recommendations about this, but it does appear that in some instances specialist provision is failing the children it is designed to support.

Recommendation 9

Some further investigation should be undertaken into this issue. It does not seem logical that children are being excluded from the specialist institutions that are there to support them.

9.5 Recommendations to address the need for a coherent generic procedure for pupils returning to school after exclusions

There was no coherent approach for the pupils in this study returning after exclusions. This should be addressed as it is something that pupils and families worry about. There needs to be a procedure that parents and pupils can follow which aims to avoid exclusion in the future. This would be much harder to achieve with illegal exclusions because they are hidden but it should be aimed for.

Recommendation 10

Punishment rooms should not be used as a reintegration tool because this is punishing a child after they have been punished by an exclusion. A return to school procedure should involve meeting with the family and pupil, a PSP with implementation details or a plan review, joint agency meetings where appropriate, and referrals to specialist agencies for support.

Recommendation 11

The system of report cards should be changed so it does not feel like further punishment from the pupil's point of view. Report cards should be replaced with a paper based system that praises good behaviour, points out negative behaviour and forms an agreement between the pupil and the teachers. This system should involve the pupil monitoring their own behaviour with teachers.

9.6 Recommendations to address how to improve communication to parents from schools and LAs

Rights and choices are not being communicated to either parents or children. The role of LAs needs examining. It is apparent that they are currently not hearing about all the difficulties some schools are facing and are often only involved after crises have occurred repeatedly, with the consequent suffering to the family.

Recommendation 12

Schools need better dialogue with parents before problems start and that should include positive feedback as well as negative. Teachers should make links with support groups like those that SNAP Cymru has for parents with children who have ADHD to enable joint working between schools and parents and to gain parents ideas for school planning in behaviour management strategies.

Recommendation 13

Parents need much better information systems about rights, complaints procedures, exclusion processes, behaviour management and educational support before a crisis occurs. This should be easily available in multiple formats such as on local authority web sites, local

authority newspapers, booklets, pupils' annual planners, and signposting in school newsletters.

Recommendation 14

LAs need to be more proactive in reaching out to parents giving advice and information about support they can offer.

9.7 Recommendations to support pupils who have poor mental health

Pupils with poor mental health need support that is flexible because some days they will not need any support and other days they may need an intensity of support. Schools need to understand that mental health is an illness so a day off is due to illness not poor behaviour or awkward parents. Work needs to be undertaken with peers so they have an awareness of mental health issues which will prevent bullying upon return to school after a period of illness.

Recommendation 15

Schools need to work closely with CAMHS so that teachers have knowledge about mental health needs and how best to support them in the classroom. Mental Health specialists should be more involved in schools to support teachers and raise awareness with pupils about mental health generally.

9.8 Recommendations regarding the use of restraint

Restraint can often worsen behaviour and lead to illegal and official exclusions. If PSPs were written in detail LSAs, for example, would know not to stop a child running out of a room but to run with them, not to grab a child from behind but to talk to them face to face. A small minority of parents detail stories where more than two adults are restraining their child. This was hugely traumatic for the child and may be avoided if other behaviour management strategies are taught.

Recommendation 16

The use of restraint in schools upon vulnerable pupils is something that should have further research by behaviour specialists.

Recommendation 17

Restraint should not be encouraged within schools. Where it is used, it should be logged in an incident book recording the lead up to the need for restraint, how many adults were involved, and how the incident was resolved. There should be discussions about to avoid restraining that pupil in future and parents should always be informed that restraint had to be used.

9.9 Recommendations regarding the use of internal exclusions

Parents and professionals raised concerns about the increasing use of internal exclusions. A behaviour psychologist in this study explained:

‘Some secondary schools have started internal exclusions- solitary sitting booths- this does nothing for the welfare or rights of children. It can be from 8.30 until 4.30pm with no contact with peers at breaks or lunch.’

This practice may be a punishment but does nothing to deal with underlying reasons as to why the child behaved badly in the first place and, particularly for children with ASD and ADHD was likely to cause further behaviour problems. It also denies children's rights by effectively putting them into solitary isolation. Some schools have a time out room which does not comprise of sitting booths, but is a relaxed quiet room where children who can feel tension rising can remove themselves from the situation and go to the time-out room to calm down.

Recommendation 18

Internal exclusions should not be used upon return to school after an illegal exclusion as a reintegration tool because it is punishing a child after they have already been punished.

Recommendation 19

There should be some urgent guidance regarding the practice of internal exclusion, how they can be used positively and how they affect children's rights. Where they are used they should not be for a full school day, or for consecutive periods of days. This guidance should also detail good practice in using time out rooms to avoid negative incidents.

9.10 Recommendations to enable children and young people's participation and involvement in exclusion processes

Children were not included in any decisions, discussions, or processes surrounding illegal exclusions. Schools were not explaining to children what was happening or why. Schools should be adhering to the national participation standards for Wales, and children need to understand what is happening around them so they can share in the resolutions suggested. This situation urgently needs rectifying.

Recommendation 20

Children who are at risk of exclusion should have access to an advocate to help them know why there is an exclusion occurring, the complaint procedures and represent them at meetings. Schools should use person centred planning techniques where appropriate and use child accessible mechanisms to enable the child to contribute to their PSP.

Recommendation 21

Governments have a responsibility to inform children of their rights under article 42 of the UNCRC, which should include information about their right to an education and what happens when they are excluded. Children's rights and the participation standards should be included in the school curriculum so that children and young people are informed about rights and duty bearers outside of negative incidents occurring.

9.11 Recommendations to enable parental access to complaint and appeal procedures

Parents in the study did not use the current complaints and appeals process for various reasons outlined in the research. The whole process of appeals and complaints needs to be accessible, and not have a bias to schools and LAs. The current system is not used because parents feel it does not work to solve the issues they are facing and will have negative consequences.

Recommendation 22

Complaints and appeal procedures need to be given to parents with all other school information and be readily available upon websites, in booklets and in pupil planners. The system needs to be re-examined with parents and schools so that the worry of negative consequences is removed.

9.12 Recommendations regarding bullying

Bullying was behind many of the incidents that gave rise to exclusions. Schools must follow the Respecting Others 2003 guidance and skill staff to recognise and deal with bullying effectively. Exclusion does not deal with bullying as the problems will continue outside of the school gate and re-emerge once the child returns to school. Learning disabled children are particularly vulnerable in responding to bullies as research suggests they are more likely to

stand up for friends or experience peer pressure to stand up for themselves.

Recommendation 23

Schools must follow the Respecting Others 2003 guidance and skill staff to recognise and deal with bullying effectively. This means having proactive and reactive procedures that are given to pupils and parents.

Recommendation 24

Schools should work with disability organisations to effectively support learning disabled pupils when faced with bullying. Schools should work with community based organisations (e.g. youth and play clubs) to jointly address bullying in their neighbourhoods.

9.13 Recommendations to use transition in the best interest of the pupil

Transition could be used more effectively to end patterns of exclusion for individual children. Continuity of support from primary to secondary was critical, and withdrawing that support until an incident occurred was not in the child's best interest.

Recommendation 25

If a child has a history of exclusions in primary school extra support should be put in place before incidents happen at secondary school. Where support has been in place at primary school it should be maintained at secondary school. If the child's behaviour is not problematic the support can gradually be removed.

9.14 Recommendations to encourage closer partnership working between schools and LAs

Requests for more support at school often came from parents but were refused until a crisis happens. LAs resisted school requests which lead to, for example, lunch time exclusions, internal exclusions, etc. Without SEN statements schools will not act or say that they cannot afford to put support in place. Pupils fall down the gap when LAs and schools cannot agree regarding funding for support. It can take up to 6 months for support to be agreed which by that point has lurches a family and child into crisis and possibly poverty.

Recommendation 26

Improve school and LA partnership working with parents. Where parents request support for their child they should have a clear and quick response, with an explanation if that request is refused. If an incident then occurs at school the parents request should be reviewed, with the parents' involvement. Where parents are not active in their child's school life and home circumstances are chaotic an advocate for the child should be involved.

9.15 Recommendations regarding managed moves

Managed moves are perceived as a cynical side step unless all parties are involved in the discussions of a move from the outset.

Recommendation 27

Managed moves should not be rushed, and must involve the school, the new school, parents and pupil. Only when the pupil has fully settled in the new school should they be taken off the roll for their previous school.