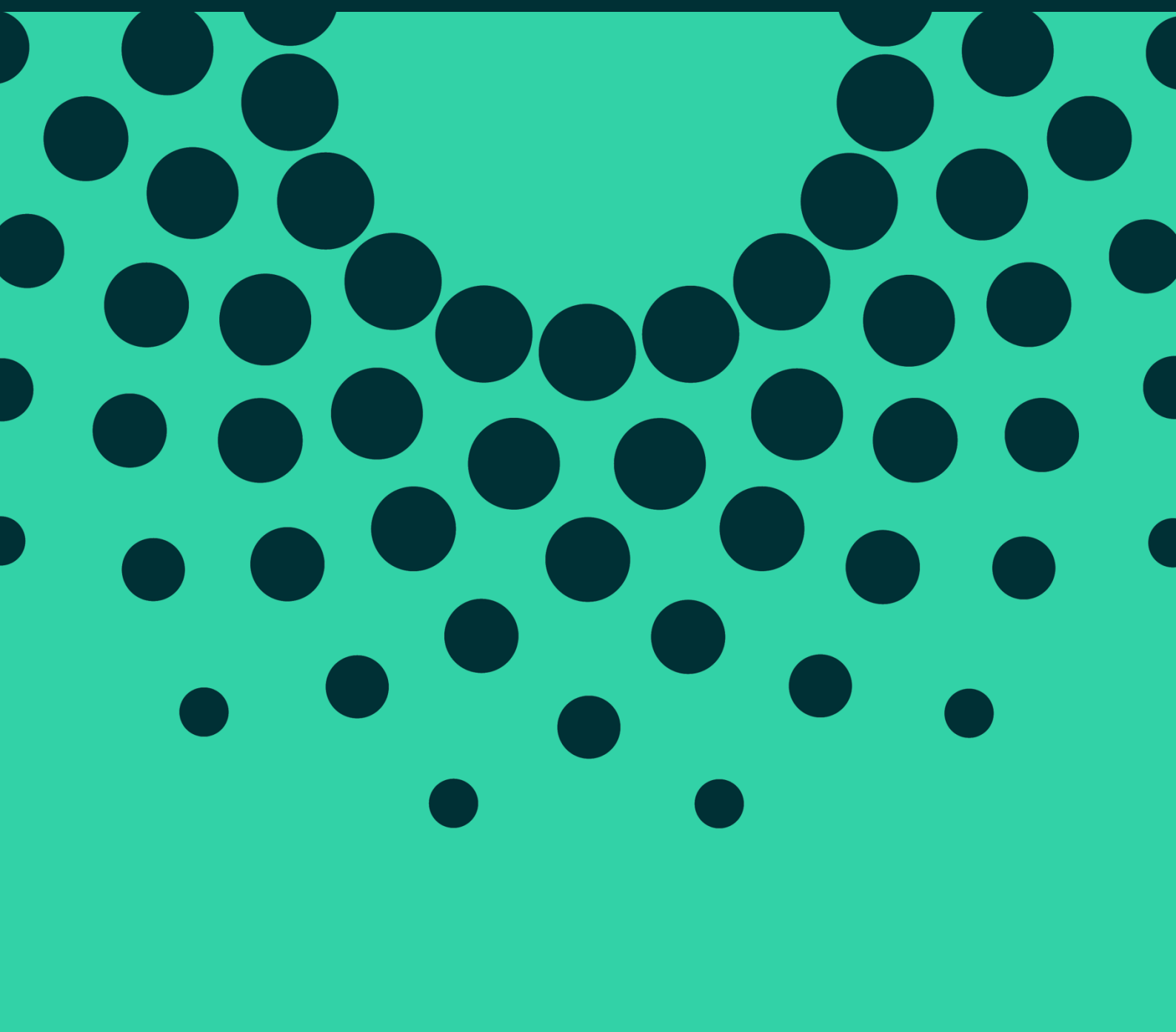


School exclusions and criminal justice system involvement

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Summary

This Data Insight explores the relationship between school exclusions and offending in England. We used the Ministry of Justice and Department for Education linked dataset which included de-identified data from the Police National Computer (PNC) and National Pupil Database (NPD).

The analysis presented here estimates the probability of excluded school pupils being involved with the criminal justice system. Specifically, it considers the different types (and number) of school exclusions (temporary and permanent), along with a range of socio-demographic factors to examine their relationship with criminal justice system involvement.

We used de-identified data from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) - Department of Education (DfE) linked dataset involving 263,374 excluded schoolchildren born between 1st September 2000 and 31st August 2003. This included a range of socio-demographic factors, educational data recorded throughout compulsory schooling, along with offending records until December 2021; analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple binary logistic regression.

Our findings show that both temporary and permanent exclusions are related to criminal justice system involvement. The odds of pupils who had received at least one permanent exclusion were 2.41 times higher than those with no permanent exclusion of being involved with the criminal justice system. When considering temporary exclusions, this difference was more pronounced as the number of temporary exclusions increased. When compared to pupils with 1 temporary exclusion, the odds of those with between 2 and 4 exclusions were 2.46 times higher of any criminal justice system involvement. The odds increased to 4.71 times higher with between 5 and 9 exclusions, and to 6.59 higher for those with 10 or more temporary exclusions.

We conclude that, alongside permanent exclusions, temporary exclusions and, importantly, their rates, are key indicators when considering the criminal justice system involvement of school pupils. Moreover, an escalation in temporary exclusions should be treated as a serious cause for concern.

What we did

We used the MoJ-DfE de-identified linked dataset to examine socio-demographic factors (age of first exclusion, gender, ethnicity, free school meal (FSM) eligibility, Special Educational Needs (SEN) status, Local Authority, socio-economic deprivation (as measured by the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index¹ (IDACI)), school-related factors (temporary and permanent exclusions, exclusion rates, attainment), and offending factors (convictions, cautions).

We selected three cohorts of school pupils born between 1st September 2000 and 31st August 2003 (a period for which most school-related variables of interest were available), along with offending variables up until December 2021.

¹ The IDACI is a relative, area-based measure of poverty and measures the proportion of all children aged between 0 and 15 years old living in income-deprived households. Income deprivation relates to low income due to being out of work, or in work but having low earnings (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019). The higher the score, the more children in that area live in income-deprived households (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2025).

Background

Permanent and temporary exclusions are an integral part of the school system in the UK and are used extensively, particularly in England. Figures show that pupils from certain backgrounds are disproportionately represented in the school exclusion statistics ([Gov.UK, 2025](#)). The connection between school exclusions and offending has been noted as a serious concern ([Arnez and Condry, 2021](#); [McAra and McVie \(2010\)](#)). Excluded pupils are more likely to experience future negative outcomes such as being in care, growing up in poverty, and experiencing mental health issues ([Gill et al., 2017](#)).

This study draws on the linked Ministry of Justice-Department for Education dataset to examine the relationship between school exclusions and offending throughout the school journey into early adulthood.

Extraction of data from this period, which maximises the availability of variables of interest, gives scope for expansion of the current parameters of research in this field, which to date is largely limited to measuring the effect of exclusion without discriminating by type or rate of exclusion.

Measuring school exclusions & criminal justice system involvement

School exclusions data was extracted from the National Pupil Database (NPD) which contains all records for school pupils attending state schools in England. We then linked these pupils to the Police National Computer (PNC) to enable us to identify those who had offending records. This study focuses on school pupils with at least one school exclusion accrued throughout their schooling. For each pupil we obtained detailed information for each exclusion record, which included date and type of exclusion. We were then able to analyse the relationship between exclusion types and rates and offending. For temporary exclusions, we split the number of exclusions per pupil into four categories: 1 exclusion, between 2 and 4 exclusions, between 5 and 9 exclusions, and over 10 exclusions. This enabled us to compare each category with the reference group, which in this case was those with one temporary exclusion. For permanent exclusions, we created two categories: those with no permanent exclusion, and those with one or more.

Crime-related variables were created using records from the Police National Computer (PNC) up until December 2021. We merged NPD data with PNC records for all excluded school pupils from age 10 onwards with at least one caution or conviction. This enabled us to create a binary variable for excluded pupils; those with no recorded caution or conviction and those with one or more cautions or convictions.

Other predictor variables

The following pupil-level variables were obtained via the NPD:

- Gender: Male or female.
- Ethnicity: we reduced over 100 ethnic categories into 13 categories (Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Asian other, Black African, Black Caribbean, Black other, any mixed heritage, Irish, Gypsy/Irish Traveller/Roma, White British/English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish, any other ethnic group).
- Free School Meals eligibility (at any point throughout school): Yes or no.
- Special Educational Needs (identified at any point throughout school): None, SEN support, Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan/Statement.
- Attainment (Achieved Grade A-C or 9-4 in Maths and English by compulsory leaving school age): Yes or no.
- Age of first exclusion (age at start of academic year²): this was grouped into 3 categories (between 4 and 10 years, between 11 and 12 years, 13 plus years).

We only used data for the geographical variables below where it preceded the first offence or caution:

- Local authority districts: we categorised local authorities using the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2021) rural and urban classifications: 'Urban' (less than 20% rural population), 'Intermediate urban' (over 20% but less than 35% rural population), 'Intermediate rural' (over 35% but less than 50% rural population), and 'Majority rural' (50% or more rural population).
- IDACI score: categorised into 50% and below, and above 50%. Higher scores indicate that more children in that area live in income-deprived households.

We undertook multiple binary logistic regression to estimate the probability of excluded school pupils receiving a caution or conviction by December 2021 when the pupils were aged between 18 and 21 years old.

² Ages are based on the age at the start of the academic year as recorded by the school census. Ages 4 to 10 therefore include those who turn 11 at some point throughout that academic year until August 31st. Likewise, ages 11 to 12 include those who turn 13 at some point throughout that academic year.

What we found

The findings are based on school pupils with at least one exclusion born between 1st September 2000 and 31st August 2003. The sample comprises 263,374 excluded school children matched to offending records until December 2021. We found 16.7% of excluded school pupils (n=43,853) had at least one caution or conviction from age 10 onwards. Table 1 below shows the percentages of pupils who were permanently excluded with at least one conviction or caution. From those pupils who were permanently excluded, 4.6% had no conviction or caution compared to 18% with at least one conviction or caution.

Table 1: Percentages for permanent exclusion and offending

Permanent Exclusion	No conviction/caution N	One or more conviction/caution N	Total
No	209,429 (95.4%)	35,953 (82.0%)	245,382
Yes	10,092 (4.6%)	7,900 (18.0%)	17,992
Total	219,521 (100%)	43,853 (100%)	263,374

Table 2 below shows the percentages for temporary exclusions and offending. Eighteen percent of pupils who received one temporary exclusion received at least one caution or conviction. The percentage of those who offended increased to 31.9% for those who received between 2 and 4 temporary exclusions, 27.5% for pupils excluded temporarily between 5 and 9 times, and 22.6% for those who received 10 or more temporary exclusions.

Table 2: Percentages for temporary exclusion and offending

Number of Temporary Exclusion	No conviction/caution N	One or more conviction/caution N	Total
One	105,070 (48.0%)	7,868 (18.0%)	112,938
Between 2 and 4	71,049 (32.4%)	13,908 (31.9%)	84,957
Between 5 and 9	28,304 (12.9%)	12,006 (27.5%)	40,310
Over 10	14,564 (6.7%)	9,852 (22.6%)	24,416
Total	218,987 (100%)	43,634 (100%)	262,621 ³ (100%)

³ The totals for temporary exclusions are slightly lower than shown for total in Table 1 due to 753 pupils only receiving a permanent exclusion and no temporary exclusions.

Table 3 overleaf shows the probability of criminal justice system involvement once all predictor variables are taken into consideration. We found that exclusions had the largest effect on the likelihood of criminal justice system involvement. The odds of those with a permanent exclusion having at least one caution or conviction were 2.41 times higher than those with no permanent exclusion. Notably, we found that as the number of temporary exclusions increased so did the odds of being involved with the criminal justice system. When compared to pupils with one temporary exclusion, the odds of those with between 2 and 4 temporary exclusions were 2.46 times higher of having any criminal justice system involvement, this increased to 4.71 times higher with between 5 and 9 temporary exclusions, and 6.59 times higher when pupils had 10 or more temporary exclusions.

Table 3: Odds of criminal justice system involvement for excluded school pupils (adjusted model)

Criminal justice system involvement (one or more caution/conviction)	Odds ratio	SE	p-value	LCI	UCI⁴
Gender (reference (ref) category: female)	2.25	0.02	<0.001	2.18	2.32
Age of First Exclusion⁵ (ref category: Ages 4 – 10 yrs)					
Ages 11-12 yrs	1.13	0.02	<0.001	1.09	1.17
Age 13 years and older	1.04	0.02	0.025	1.01	1.09
Ethnicity (ref category: White British)					
Bangladeshi	1.29	0.06	<0.001	1.16	1.44
Chinese	0.80	0.31	0.468	0.43	1.47
Indian	0.94	0.08	0.387	0.81	1.09
Pakistani	0.97	0.04	0.436	0.91	1.04
Asian other	1.26	0.06	<0.001	1.11	1.42
Black African	1.28	0.05	<0.001	1.16	1.41
Black Caribbean	1.65	0.03	<0.001	1.55	1.76
Black other	1.16	0.03	<0.001	1.09	1.24
Any mixed heritage	1.53	0.02	<0.001	1.46	1.60
Irish	1.43	0.11	<0.001	1.16	1.76
Gypsy/Irish Traveller/Roma	1.29	0.06	<0.001	1.14	1.46
Any other ethnic group	1.22	0.03	<0.001	1.15	1.29
Free School Meals Eligibility (ref category: Not eligible)	1.33	0.01	<0.001	1.29	1.36
Special Educational Need (ref category: None identified)					
SEN Support plan	1.16	0.02	<0.001	1.13	1.20
SEN EHC/Statement	1.24	0.02	<0.001	1.19	1.30
Attainment (ref category: Achieved)	2.17	0.02	<0.001	2.08	2.26
Local Authority (ref category: Urban)					
Intermediate Urban	1.11	0.02	<0.001	1.07	1.15
Intermediate Rural	1.09	0.02	<0.001	1.05	1.13
Majority Rural	0.94	0.02	0.008	0.90	0.98
IDACI 50% and above (ref category: below 50%)	1.06	0.02	0.003	1.02	1.10
Number of temporary exclusions (ref category: one)					
Between 2 and 4	2.46	0.02	<0.001	2.37	2.54
Between 5 and 9	4.71	0.02	<0.001	4.53	4.89
10 and above	6.59	0.02	<0.001	6.30	6.88
Permanent Exclusion (ref category: none)	2.41	0.02	<0.001	2.32	2.50

Note: Pseudo-R²=0.21 (Nagelkerke). Model X²=31406.63, p=<0.001.

⁴ OR = Odds Ratio; SE = Standard Error; p-value = significance; LCI = Lower confidence interval, UCI = Upper confidence interval.

⁵ Ages are based on the age at the start of the academic year as recorded by the school census. Ages 4 to 10 therefore include those who turn 11 at some point throughout that academic year until August 31st. Likewise, ages 11 to 12 include those who turn 13 at some point throughout that academic year.

In relation to other predictor variables, we found that gender, some ethnicities, FSM eligibility, SEN status, and attainment were also related to increased odds of criminal justice system involvement. Excluded males were more likely to be involved with the criminal justice system (OR=2.25) than excluded females. When compared to White British excluded school pupils, Black Caribbean pupils and those with any mixed heritage were more likely to be involved with the criminal justice system (OR=1.65 and 1.53 respectively). Irish (OR=1.43), Bangladeshi (OR=1.29), Gypsy/Irish Traveller/Roma (OR=1.29), Black African (OR=1.28), Asian other (OR=1.26), and Black other (OR=1.16) excluded school pupils were also more likely to have criminal justice system involvement than their White British counterparts. Excluded school pupils eligible for free school meals were more likely (OR=1.33) to be involved with the criminal justice system than those who were not eligible, and pupils who had a SEN Education, Health, and Care Plan/Statement (OR=1.24) or SEN Support (OR=1.16) were more likely to have criminal justice system involvement than those with no identified SEN. Excluded school pupils who did not achieve grades A-C or 9-5 in Maths and English were over twice as likely (OR=2.17) to be involved in the criminal justice system than those who did achieve these grades.

When considering geographical characteristics, our findings show that excluded school pupils in an intermediate urban and intermediate rural local authority area are more likely (OR=1.11 and 1.06 respectively) to have any criminal justice involvement than those in mostly urban areas. Whilst those in majority rural local authority areas were less likely (OR=0.94) than those in mostly urban areas to be involved in the criminal justice system. We found that relative, area-based poverty - measured here using the IDACI - had a very small effect. We found that those living in areas with 50% or more 0- to 15-year-olds living in income deprived households were more likely (OR=1.06) to be involved with the criminal justice system than those living in areas with below 50% of under 15-year-olds living in income deprived households.

Key findings

Exclusions are strongly associated with involvement in the criminal justice system. Around one in six excluded pupils had a caution or conviction, with the likelihood notably higher among those who experienced more severe or repeated exclusions. Permanent exclusion is particularly significant, and there is a clear pattern showing that as the number of temporary exclusions increases, so too does the likelihood of offending. Even after accounting for a wide range of other factors, exclusions remain the strongest predictor of criminal justice involvement. Other characteristics—including gender, some ethnic backgrounds, disadvantage, special educational needs, and lower attainment—are also linked to higher likelihoods of offending, though their effects are smaller. Overall, the findings highlight a strong and consistent relationship between exclusion from school and contact with the criminal justice system.

Why it matters

School exclusions are the most severe form of school sanction: removing children from the school environment either on a temporary or permanent basis. Schools have statutory duties to safeguard children; therefore, having a deeper understanding of the experiences of excluded school pupils can help schools identify vulnerabilities to criminal justice system involvement. This analysis shows that temporary and permanent exclusions are related to an increased likelihood of criminal justice system involvement, which increases markedly in relation to increases in temporary exclusion rates. The concern regarding excluded school pupils therefore exceeds the school environment and should be a matter of concern for wider society.

The value of this analysis lies in recognising that school exclusions increase vulnerability; we propose that both permanent and temporary exclusions – particularly as these escalate - should prompt a safeguarding approach. Moreover, schools should use (and be supported to use) alternative strategies wherever possible.

What next?

Group-Based Trajectory Modelling has also been conducted to examine the different trajectories of excluded school pupils based on the number of cautions and/or convictions they received until age 18. This analysis considers unauthorised absences from school, temporary and permanent exclusions, attainment, age of first criminal justice system contact, most severe offence type, most severe penalty, number of convictions, and a range of socio-demographic factors also used in this analysis. The final stage of the project will use binary logistic regression to examine the differences between offending outcomes of pupils who remain in mainstream education and those educated in Pupil Referral Units following permanent exclusion. This will consider offending (violent/non-violent offending) within 1-year post-exclusion as well other predictor variables used in previous models. Finally, engagement with a group of young people with lived experiences of school exclusions and offending is planned at the end of the project to co-produce an output based on their reflections of the findings.

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