



INFORMAL EXCLUSIONS FROM SCHOOL

A ROTA Research report

INDEX

<i>Foreword</i>	2
<i>Preface</i>	3
<i>Terminology used in this Report</i>	3
<i>Executive Summary</i>	3
<i>1. Context to the research on informal exclusions from school</i>	18
<i>2. The problem</i>	18
<i>3. What should be done?</i>	19
<i>4. How the problem was approached</i>	19
<i>5. Methodological considerations</i>	20
<i>6. Findings</i>	21
6.1. Findings from the desk research	21
6.2. Findings from the Freedom of Information Requests to Local Authorities.....	23
6.3. Focus Groups with young people.....	26
6.4. Illustrative Case Studies derived from the Focus Groups.....	32
6.5. Interviews with teachers and other professionals	42
<i>7. Conference and Round Table Discussions on Informal Exclusions from School</i>	68
<i>8. Recommendations</i>	77
<i>10. APPENDICES</i>	93
APPENDIX 1	93
APPENDIX 2	94
APPENDIX 3a: Interview Schedule.....	97
APPENDIX 3b: Modified Interview Schedule.....	98
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	99

Foreword

From Maurice McLeod, Chief Executive, Race on the Agenda.

When I was at school, incidents of my classmates being sent to 'cool off' in the library or sent home and told to 'take tomorrow off' were commonplace.

They happened so regularly, that they just seemed part of normal process of schooling. I was too young to come to any robust social analysis of what was happening, but we still knew which kids were more likely to face these informal actions.

But that was a long time ago and so it is important to understand what is happening in schools today and what impact it is having on our children.

In 2013, ROTA's Shaping the Future Workshops revealed young people's experience of exclusion from school and how it had adversely affected them. ROTA realised that racial discrimination appeared to be a factor in the disproportionate exclusion of pupils from Global Majority and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. More research was needed to verify these and other accounts emerging at the time.

ROTA remains concerned that informal exclusions from school, many of which are unlawful, were still being carried out in 2021 and continue to have adverse effects on those who are excluded in this way. The follow-up research which began in 2018, includes a limited amount of data collected from Local Authorities and from the Department of Education. The Report gives an insight into why information on informal exclusions is so elusive. It also presents the experiences of informal exclusion from parents, carers, teachers, youth leaders and young people themselves.

Despite the interruptions of Covid-19, the closures of schools and youth projects and associated difficulties, I am pleased to present ROTA's most recent findings.

I wish to personally thank Eleanor Stokes, Sasha McKoy and the many volunteers who have helped bring this important work to publication.

It is my hope that this Report will help to bring about a more complete awareness of the issues around informal exclusions and explain more clearly how the system might be challenged and changed.

Maurice McLeod, Chief Executive

Preface

This Report presents findings from desk research, Freedom of Information requests, interviews, focus groups and round table events conducted by Race on the Agenda (ROTA) from July 2019 to August 2020. Among the participants were parents, teachers, youth leaders and young people who had experienced informal exclusions from school. Their perceptions, views and experiences of informal exclusion are not necessarily found in other statistical or official evidence, and in some cases contradict it. Many of those with whom we spoke come from the Global Majority (formerly referred to as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic or BAME) and Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller communities. For some who took part, particularly the young people, this was the first time they had been asked about informal exclusion from school. Their voices which are sometimes under-represented in other research, express feelings of injustice and unfairness about the way informal exclusions are carried out and the effect on them as Black, Asian, other ethnic minority and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. The Report endeavours to present their views.

ROTA's research was interrupted by circumstances beyond our control – notably the COVID-19 pandemic and the closing of many schools and youth organisations – a situation which delayed publication for up to a year. Since 2021 we have continued to monitor and reflect on developments in relation to informal exclusions. We have included references to more recent policy documents, statistics and research although it has not been possible to incorporate them all or to update the original findings of this report. It is ROTA's intention to continue research in this area to further our aim to challenge and change the system of informal exclusions from school.

Terminology used in this Report

The term Global Majority is used to describe people from Black, Asian and Other Minority Ethnic communities, updated from previous ROTA publications and reports. It replaces the term BAME or BME and more accurately reflects current thinking on identity and race. For Traveller, Irish Traveller, Gypsy, Roma or Show People, we use the term Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT.)

Executive Summary

What makes an exclusion an informal exclusion? Unlike permanent and fixed-term exclusions, which parents have an opportunity to challenge and appeal against, informal exclusions can take place without parents or carers knowing when or why a child was informally excluded and how the decision was made.

Informal exclusions, as the Department for Education makes clear in Section 14 of the Statutory Guidance for schools, are unlawful:

‘Informal or unofficial exclusions such as sending a pupil home to ‘cool off’ are unlawful, regardless of whether they occur with the agreement of parents and carers. Any exclusion of

a pupil, even for short periods of time, must be formally recorded.’ (Department for Education. 2017.)

Instances of schools not acting within the law regarding informal exclusions have been emerging in the media since the Department for Education Guidance was issued. (BBC News. 2018.) Despite news coverage, the practice continues. ROTA believes that schools should be better informed about the legality of different forms of exclusion and that parents and young people are entitled to better knowledge and awareness of informal exclusion and their rights to question the practice. ROTA also believes that schools should record information on race and disability in relation to informally excluded pupils to identify whether their practices are affecting some groups of young people disproportionately.

Knowledge, awareness and parental rights

It was of concern to ROTA that some teachers and schools appeared to be unaware of what is and what is not lawful about exclusions of all types. Findings from the JUSTICE Working Party in 2019 reported a lack of clarity about different forms of exclusion and how and when these could be used. It proposed mandatory training for school Governors and leaders on the law governing exclusion powers and better communication between school, pupils and parents/carers, coupled with initiatives to inform parents and young people about their rights. (JUSTICE. 2019.)

Informing parents, training teachers

ROTA’s research with parents, carers and young people revealed uncertainty about what constitutes an informal exclusion and the actions that schools can legally take. At ROTA’s Conference and Round Table event in January 2020 it was thought that where specific groups of children were suspected of being disproportionately excluded from school a legal challenge could be made more difficult if schools did not record information on race and disability in relation to informal exclusions. For many parents, the legal route is not affordable or accessible although some organisations such as Just for Kids Law has a School Exclusions Hub which offers advice and support for parents seeking information. The Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA) likewise gives guidelines on exclusion and advises on the rights of parents whose children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) have been excluded or who are at risk of exclusion from school. There was a clear need for legal, community and voluntary organisations to work with schools and parents to challenge and change the practice of informal exclusion.

Participants at ROTA’s January 2020 conference had concerns that school leaders and Governors were not being made aware of the issues around informal exclusion, particularly when embarking on their role. Newly appointed school governors would not necessarily know about the practice if couched in terms of ‘behaviour strategy’. Better training within the teaching profession was the subject of an Institute for Public Policy report emphasising the importance of working with schools to break the link between school exclusion and social exclusion. (Gill, K. 2017.) The report was followed by an initiative between schools and specialist teachers to develop preventative strategies and alternatives to exclusion. (The Difference. 2019.) Teaching assistants and other conference delegates who had worked in schools speculated that ‘many schools’ carried out frequent informal exclusions without

recording them - or knowing that they should be recording them. ROTA's research aimed to find out whether data existed that might indicate how widespread informal exclusion is.

Statistical information

Ascertaining how many schools were carrying out informal exclusions from available statistics was hampered by an absence of formal recording and reporting. A scrutiny of literature and official sources of statistics appeared to show that many forms of exclusion were missing from the data. The Children's Commissioner reported that 'estimates only' could be obtained from the DfE, from Ofsted and from Local Authorities regarding pupils sent to Alternative Provision or Pupil Referral Units without being recorded; unreported home education referrals; AP/PRU referrals that could not be accurately assessed; exam-year absences and other 'unaccountable' absences. (Children's Commissioner for England. 2017.) The Institute for Public Policy Research also reported that the data on informal exclusions gathered from Local Authorities went nowhere near reflecting true numbers. (Gill, K. 2017.) The Royal Society of the Arts made similar observations (TheRSA. 2020.) The lack of statistical data – and specifically statistical data by ethnicity - made it difficult to tell whether some groups of children were disproportionately affected.

As an organisation concerned with equality of educational opportunity and measures to eliminate discrimination, ROTA sought to establish which young people were experiencing informal exclusion. Teachers, educational support workers and parents/carers whom we interviewed observed that all types of exclusion tended to be used more frequently with children who were already marginalised. We knew from the Department for Education's statistical releases for 2017/18 and 2018/19 which were available at the time of our research, that pupils from some Global Majority and GRT communities were disproportionately affected by permanent and fixed-term exclusions (Department for Education. 2019a, 2019b, 2020a.) Evidence from the Traveller Movement suggested that GRT children may have been disproportionately affected by informal exclusion too. (Traveller Movement. 2019.)

Freedom of Information Requests to Local Authorities on pupils informally excluded broken down by ethnicity

To explore whether some groups of young people were experiencing informal exclusion more frequently than others clarification was sought on whether data collected by Local Authorities included any figures on informal exclusions and if these could be broken down by ethnicity.

Freedom of Information requests (FOIs) were made by ROTA to all London Local Authorities on the number of children who had received permanent, fixed term and informal exclusions by ethnicity, the type of exclusion and the reason for exclusion. Questions were also asked about children who had received home education and whether they had been in receipt of free school meals, about children who had been transferred to Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and about children who had been de-registered from sixth forms. (Appendix 1.)

Fewer than one third of Local Authorities responded. Of those which did, their responses did not help to identify whether there was a disproportionate effect on children from minority ethnic communities who had experienced informal exclusion. Information on lunch time exclusions, managed moves, home education, PRU referrals and absences from sixth forms broken down by ethnicity and reason for exclusion was only partially provided, or not at all. In some cases, we were directed to other sources, such the Department for Education, private/outsourced agencies, individual schools and PRUs. Some data held centrally by the Department for Education could be accessed from links provided in the FOIs. Our research could not extend to approaching individual schools, although there is clearly a case for doing so in order to obtain more complete information on the scale of the problem.

Understanding the experience of young people and informal exclusion

Focus groups with young people were conducted to gain a better understanding of who had experienced informal exclusion, the reasons for excluding and the effect on those excluded. The focus groups were composed of pupils from secondary schools and 6th form colleges in a region outside London with whom ROTA had previously established connections.

Discrimination

Pupils described instances of discrimination and marginalisation of some Global Majority and GRT pupils. Some Black students described being seen as 'potential trouble-makers' both inside and outside school, with unwarranted attention from the police. They thought there was a degree of negative 'stereotyping' particularly of Black boys. It was reported by young people in the focus groups that children of Somali heritage were treated unfairly by some teachers from other ethnic or cultural backgrounds. There was a perceived increased risk of informal exclusion among these students. Negative stereotyping and cultural misunderstandings of Somali pupils by teachers was thought to be a factor leading to exclusions in a report by the Somali Youth Development Resource Centre. (SYRDC. 2019.)

Informal exclusion was thought to be used more frequently for Global Majority pupils as a sanction for minor incidents. Examples were given of Black girls being sent to an isolation room for wearing coloured braids in their hair and of Black students being sent out for talking or being loud. ROTA notes that the concerns of young Black women about discriminatory school policies on hair style were discussed in 2019 (Dabiri, E.) and have since become the subject of media debate, with schools in some instances changing their uniform policies and adopting the Halo Code. The Halo Code Collective campaigns on Twitter for an acceptance of Black hair choices, styles and cultural traditions. (Halo Collective. 2020.)

There was a divergence of opinion regarding the treatment of GRT students. Some pupils in the focus groups thought that GRT students were treated more leniently and 'got away with things' compared with other students; others observed that although Roma children seemed to be sent to isolation more frequently it wasn't because they misbehaved more than other children. It appeared to some focus group participants that children from GRT communities were sometimes separated 'as a group at the back of the class' not because of behaviour, but because there was a perceived lack of engagement with learning. A

dismissive attitude was mentioned by some focus group participants towards GRT pupils whom it was thought 'would drop out of school anyway'. There did not seem to be any measures put in place by the schools attended by focus group participants to counteract this perception.

Excessively harsh and punitive measures

Pupils mentioned extended, unsupervised periods outside the classroom. Conditions in isolation were harsh - viewed as a form of 'imprisonment' with examples of restrictions on refreshment, food breaks and toilet breaks. There was a view that informal exclusion could escalate to fixed-term or permanent exclusion or 'exile' from all other schools: 'Nobody wants you'.

ROTA considers that conditions in which young people are held in isolation and which give rise to feelings of deprivation, hopelessness, social isolation or banishment may be counter to the duty of care which schools should provide. Such forms of punishment can be administered for comparatively minor transgressions e.g. where schools operate a 'zero-tolerance' approach to behaviour.

The National Education Union took the view that a zero tolerance approach to punishment can drive up exclusions and that 'the race and class disparities regarding who is excluded are of concern.' It was further observed:

'Zero Tolerance systems of sanctions have had a highly negative and exclusionary impact on Black, SEND and FSM pupils' (NEU.2021.)

The National Education Union acknowledged the need for teachers to feel safe and supported in classroom management. It was thought that a different approach to behaviour and sanctions was needed, such as a review of behaviour policies that would focus on supporting positive behaviour and fostering a sense of belonging in a school environment that would challenge racist bullying and language. Key documents on preventing and reducing permanent and fixed term exclusions through supportive behaviour strategies were published on the website of the National Education Union in June and July 2021. (NEU. 2021.)

The Children's Society was also of the view that zero-tolerance behaviour approaches could, by not permitting any discussion about perceived infringements of the rules, create an atmosphere of disempowerment and frustration. (The Children's Society. 2021.) Isolating pupils can appear more suited to offender institutions and may add to apprehensions about a 'school to prison pipeline' discussed elsewhere in this Report.

The Department for Education guidelines point out that a fundamental duty of care towards pupils is to do 'what is reasonable in all the circumstances to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils.' (DfE 2020b.) ROTA argues that extended, unsupervised periods in isolation should be called into question and reviewed by all schools which use these measures.

A lack of provision for pupils to continue their education

It was of concern that some schools were not making adequate provision for the continuing education of informally excluded pupils. Young people reported having been shut out of lessons with nothing to do, sitting in a room doing nothing and 'Being forgotten'. Informally excluded pupils have a right to continuing educational support. Focus group research suggested that this is not always given to young people who are sent out of the classroom.

ROTA agrees with the view that schools which send children out of lessons should be clear about how they are meeting their legal obligations, regarding 'Age, health and how, where and with what resources their education is being provided' (NEU. 2021.)

Addressing social and educational isolation

From the focus groups a picture emerged of informal exclusion as an experience that was not just socially isolating for young people but one which could close down learning and educational opportunity if not followed up with adequate support. At the time of carrying out the research, some programmes such as The Difference, had begun working with schools to develop strategies to bring down the number of exclusions e.g. by identifying children most at risk at an early stage and giving them additional support. (The Difference. 2019.)

Previous research carried out by ROTA suggested that some supplementary schools have been working with mainstream schools to help bring down exclusions. (ROTA. 2018.)

Cultural programmes which are developed in partnership with mainstream schools can enhance the understanding of how children at risk of exclusion can be supported socially and educationally.

During the period 2019-2020, initiatives with mainstream and supplementary schools were suspended due to Covid-19 school closures. One supplementary school which provided learning support for Eastern European students and their families reported that just maintaining contact was difficult as many did not have the resources to learn at home and were at risk of further social isolation. (ROTA, 2020)

ROTA had concerns about how returning to school after the Covid-19 closures would affect pupils already excluded or at risk of exclusion. This concern was shared by Social Finance UK, which feared that higher exclusions would be likely if vulnerable children with high needs were not properly supported (Social Finance UK. 2020.)

It was ROTA's view that better consultation with young people and their families was needed in order to gauge the kind of support required. The Covid-19 closure curtailed opportunities for follow-up interviews with young people in the focus groups.

Perspectives from teachers and other professionals on the practice of informal exclusion

Interviews with professionals working with informally excluded children aimed to gauge the degree of knowledge and awareness about the practice of informal exclusion, the characteristics and circumstances of pupils who had been informally excluded, factors influencing decisions to exclude and whether there was an unconscious bias against race.

Those interviewed were teachers and support workers who had contact with young people and their parents/carers from predominantly Global Majority and GRT communities.

Informal exclusion as a means of avoiding on the record exclusions

Interviewees observed that informal exclusions were taking place 'under the radar'. They referred to many types of exclusion that were not recorded, such as pupils 'sent home to cool off' or sent to the school's 'naughty room'. Exclusion from lunch time activities, detention, being sent out of class for extended periods were reported by some participants as 'commonplace' and that schools used them to avoid on-the-record fixed term or permanent exclusion orders. In some cases interviewees thought that undue pressure had been put on parents by the school to remove a child to home education.

The practice of 'off-rolling' arose during interviews. Off-rolling, as identified in a YouGov survey for Ofsted, is the unlawful removal of pupils from the school register to exclude children who are not thought likely to achieve the optimum exam results for the school and that the 'real reason for schools to off-roll is to manipulate the league tables'. (YouGov. 2019.)

Incidents of 'exam leave' were mentioned by interviewees and by focus group participants. Examples were given of children being sent home pre-GCSE, prior to an Ofsted visit or when others were visiting the school.

ROTA acknowledged the difficulty in tackling off-rolling because of the lack of data on pupils off-rolled and notes that promises made by Government to address this problem should be honoured e.g. in the formal response of the Department of Education to the Timpson Review in May 2019. (Department for Education. 2019c.)

The characteristics of informally excluded children

Children who had been informally excluded were most frequently referred to by those whom we interviewed as being from disadvantaged backgrounds or in challenging circumstances. Economic hardship and deprivation were thought to be in the backgrounds of many children. Some specific examples were given, such as an unsettled experience in the care system, the imprisonment of a parent, refugee status, trauma, depression, mental health issues, hunger and tiredness. Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), learning difficulties such as Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia were also thought to contribute to the informal exclusion of children. Amongst the GRT community, learning needs of children with SEND were sometimes not picked up through the usual processes.

Bullying and sexual intimidation of pupils by their peers was mentioned as a factor that could be overlooked by schools in cases where young people excluded themselves from lessons.

ROTA considered that citing individual and family circumstances as a contributory factor in the exclusion of young people might detract from the need for schools to examine their attitudes or preconceived notions about children at risk of exclusion.

Unconscious bias against race

Young people from the focus groups had given examples of discrimination and race bias as a factor in some pupils being singled out for informal exclusion. This was in contrast with the perceptions of interviewees who had worked in schools.

Although aware of statistics on Global Majority pupils being disproportionately excluded, interviewees who had worked in schools did not think that an unconscious bias against race was an adequate explanation. Participants at ROTA's 2020 Conference thought that 'unconscious' race bias by its nature was not often detectable. However, discussing informal exclusions for parents and children of Black heritage was made more difficult when the teaching staff were predominantly White. Interviewees who had supported young people who had been excluded or at risk of exclusion thought that 'stressful home circumstances' were frequently cited by teachers, possibly masking other reasons.

Attributing 'family problems' or other external circumstances as a factor in excluding some pupils might shift the gaze away from institutional racism, discrimination or prejudice. One interviewee thought this could be the case with the informal exclusions of GRT children. There was reluctance among other interviewees to accept that a degree of unconscious race bias by teachers might influence decisions.

ROTA holds the view that acknowledging race bias is complicated by some schools appearing not to have taken on board the fact that informal exclusion is an illegal practice and should not be used, or justified, for any pupil.

The needs of children at risk of informal exclusion

Interviewees reported that informal exclusions could be carried out for a range of 'behavioural' factors, from uniform transgressions to arriving late or skipping school and for disruptive incidents such as fighting in class. The needs of children exhibiting these types of behaviour were not necessarily picked up by teachers. Learning difficulties could be missed in some cases; hunger, fatigue and depression could also be overlooked by teachers in children unable to concentrate or engage with activities. There were mentions of children missing lessons because they were being bullied.

The needs of children from backgrounds different to those of their teachers could result in cultural misunderstandings. It was observed by an interviewee that sometimes Irish Traveller children, who tended to be treated as adults in their community from the age of thirteen or so came up against the social norms of the school which regarded them as juveniles. Other evidence such as that from the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, indicates that the expectations of Traveller families for their sons often focuses on their role and responsibility to work with their fathers in the family business as soon as they are old enough. (House of Commons. 2019.)

Misinterpretations of the way children acted when at odds with what the school expected of them could lead to unrecorded or informal exclusions. The Royal Society of Arts reported a lack of cultural sensitivity of children's backgrounds. Behavioural norms that were misunderstood by teachers who lacked cultural awareness could result in a 'discriminatory

application of behaviour policies' and more young people of Global Majority and GRT backgrounds being penalised compared with their White peers. (TheRSA. 2020.) The Children's Society referred has also referred to the importance of building relationships of trust between pupils from different ethnic communities and teachers attuned to their culture. (Children's Society. 2021.)

ROTA takes the view that schools should look at their behaviour policies to see whether these can be improved in terms of a better understanding of the needs of children whose behaviour causes concern. There is also a question of whether some teachers lack cultural knowledge and sensitivity towards children from different ethnic backgrounds.

Furthermore, ROTA suggests that if schools appear to blame a child's or parent's culture or their way of 'not co-operating' with the school is part of the reason to exclude, this detracts from the fact that unrecorded exclusions should not be taking place.

Breakdown in home-school communication

It was thought by interviewees that where parents were not contacted about concerns at an early stage and were not always sure of their rights, situations could escalate. Participants at ROTA's 2020 Conference similarly thought that informal exclusion when disguised as a 'disciplinary' matter, was difficult to challenge, especially when parents were already anxious that confronting the school could jeopardise their child's education and create a hostile environment. The importance of communicating with parents was seen by interviewees to be a key factor in preventing an escalation of events that could lead to permanent exclusion or removal to a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and a risk of juvenile offending.

The reasons communicated by schools for excluding pupils could be at odds with the perceptions of parents and young people as to why they had been excluded. It was of interest that the same views voiced at ROTA's 2020 conference had also been expressed in a previous series of seminars with young people. (ROTA. 2013)

In other situations excuses, not reasons, were offered. Some interviewees spoke of children with SEND being sent home or sent to cool off because the school 'did not have the staff available to support them' or was not able to cater for their needs. It was not possible to verify from the interviews how much classroom assistance, specialist teachers or other support was available for children with SEND. Although funds are allocated to schools according to the number of pupils on roll with statements of special needs, it could be speculated that a lack of provision might be affected in some schools by difficulties of recruitment or shortage of teachers with expertise, or other reasons. However, these explanations were not considered legitimate or acceptable by interviewees.

ROTA's view is that the difficulties a child has in the classroom should always be discussed and communicated to the parents or carers at an early stage. If the child is subsequently excluded, the parents have no way of getting support or knowing what the grounds for exclusion were, or how to discuss or challenge the decision.

Informal exclusion as a behaviour management strategy

Formal exclusions can be carried out legally as part of a school's disciplinary strategy at the discretion of the head teacher. Their use, which must be recorded, was endorsed by the Department for Education: 'The Government supports head teachers in using exclusion as a sanction where it is warranted.' (Department for Education. 2017.)

In a Parliamentary Debate held on the Timpson Review of School Exclusion at Westminster Hall on 16th September 2021, members of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Alternative Provision gave support for the view that exclusion should remain an important behaviour management tool for schools to use at their discretion. This was qualified by a wish to see a reduction in exclusions through capital investment to schools for developing better support and preventative measures. £30 millions of new Government funding was to be allocated, for example, over the next few years for additional resources and support to help reduce the probability of vulnerable young people being excluded. (Hansard. HC Deb September 2021. Col. 421, 435.)

Evidence was gathered by ROTA between 2014 and 2018 which suggested that informal types of exclusion too were part of many schools' behaviour management strategies. Behaviour Policies scrutinised on school websites confirmed that statements on the use of informal exclusion for disruption or persistent disruption were more commonplace in schools outside the control of the local authority such as free schools. (ROTA. 2014, 2018.)

From 2018 up to the shutdown of schools in the 2020 Covid-19 outbreak, ROTA continued to monitor behaviour policies published on school websites. All the indications were that informal exclusion, including isolation or seclusion rooms remained part of behaviour policies. (ROTA. 2020.)

Statutory Guidance in Behaviour and Discipline in Schools endorsed the use of seclusion or isolation rooms as part of the school's behaviour policy. (DfE. 2016.)

Interviewees described forms that informal exclusion often took. Schools might use different terminologies- 'cooling off time', 'parking', 'exam leave' 'naughty room' 'isolation' but they amounted to the same thing. Pupils were taken out of class and sent elsewhere, on or off school premises as part of a school's behaviour management strategy for 'disruptive' pupils. It was noted from interviews and focus groups that sometimes young people could be put into isolation without proper access to food or toilet breaks, in contravention of statutory guidance.

It was of concern to ROTA that schools could put pupils into seclusion or isolation rooms as part of their behaviour policy without officially recording their use. It was of interest that the Covid-19 lockdown, during which the risk of pupils disengaging with education altogether was at its height, prompted the DfE to issue new guidance to schools to revise their behaviour policies on 'disciplinary exclusion' for when pupils returned to school (DfE. 2020c.)

ROTA's view is that schools should publish any revisions to their policies on their websites once schools reopen and say whether they have discontinued the use of isolation rooms.

Informal exclusion and perceived links with juvenile offending

The question of juvenile offending was included in the research because of reports circulating that suggested a link between exclusion and juvenile crime. (Home Office, 2018, National Crime Agency, 2019, Children's Society, 2021.) Persistent media references to a 'Pipeline to Prison' for young people excluded from school had tended to reinforce this view. The perception had been contested by the Institute of Race Relations which argued against judging young people in Alternative Provision as on a trajectory to criminal activity (IRR 2020.) Participants at ROTA's conference in January 2020 were similarly concerned that young people, particularly those from Global Majority and GRT communities, could be labelled as potential offenders. The interviews aimed to explore the subject further.

There were indications from the interviews that informal exclusion as a risk factor for juvenile offending should not be looked at in isolation from a range of other factors. These factors were parental absence, a lack of support for families struggling with adverse circumstances and insufficient involvement from schools in keeping young people safe and aware of dangers.

A negative view of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) as places where young people risked being drawn into criminality was voiced by interviewees. This perception has been reported elsewhere, e.g. 'PRUs are built like prisons, so you act like you are in prison' (Children's Society, 2021.) This was a particular concern for parents of GRT children, some of whom would prefer to withdraw their children from school rather than have them sent to a PRU. Young people in the focus groups had also gained an impression that a PRU was 'where the bad people are'. One interviewee who supported young people who had been excluded pointed out that describing PRUs and the children sent there in 'unhelpful and pejorative language' served to demonise young people. The difficulty of interviewing PRU teachers on the record at the time of intense media interest was noted.

ROTA is concerned that decisions to refer children to Alternative Provision and PRUs can be unclear and not well communicated to parents. There is a distinct lack of evidence on how decisions are made, which raises questions on why Global Majority children are disproportionately referred.

Pressure to home educate

ROTA's research on elective home education began before the extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in all – or almost all – children being educated at home as schools closed. Elective home education can be a legitimate choice for parents to withdraw a child from mainstream education, but if pressure is put on parents, it is not legitimate.

Evidence from the interviews suggested that in some cases, parents experienced undue pressure from the school to remove their child. This could happen where a child had been bullied and the school had failed to address or resolve the issue, leaving 'no choice' but to home educate. It was thought that some parents had the resources to carry out home schooling. Many had not. With no statutory duty for Local Authorities to monitor home-

educated children the DfE considered that ‘many of these children were not receiving a suitable education’. (DfE. 2019d.)

The number of children being home educated prior to Covid-19 was on the rise. According to the Local Government Association, keeping track of them was hampered by a patchy system of registration, making it difficult ‘to ascertain exactly how many children are being home-schooled and where they are located’. (LGA. 2020.)

Where parents were put in the position of removing a child to home schooling, the responsibility for providing an education was shifted away from the school. In ROTA’s view this was an unacceptable option especially where the school had not provided adequately for the pupil in the first place.

ROTA notes that where there is no monitoring or follow-up by the school or by the local authority once the pupil has left, it is difficult to know what the situation is or whether there are any concerns.

Girls and self-exclusion

During the interviews, concerns were expressed about girls self-excluding from school. ROTA’s review of literature indicated that the issue of girls self-excluding had been picked up nearly a decade earlier by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in a report which cited reasons for girls’ non-attendance. These included pregnancy, healthcare and childcare needs; depression, eating disorders, self-harm and sexual exploitation. (Joseph Rowntree Foundation. 2002.)

In 2020, Social Finance UK reported on girls who had gone missing from the official statistics which did not always record instances of early exits, school change or ‘other circumstances.’ (Social Finance UK. July 2020.)

From the interviews, ‘other circumstances’ affecting girls were thought to include bullying. It was mentioned that girls who had suffered harassment, intimidation or abuse of a sexual nature might retreat from lessons rather than be in the same classroom as their abusers. The literature indicated that sexual bullying was of concern to a range of agencies including the NSPCC. It was reported that around one tenth of sexual assaults happened at school (Dean. 2019.) The National Crime Agency (2019) reported that girls who had withdrawn from school could be at risk of being drawn into sexual exploitation or drug activity such as County Lines, the extent of which is not yet known due to difficulty in gathering information.

It was thought by interviewees that some girls exiting school in Year 11 could be going into employment. There was a perception that some girls from GRT communities were dropping out because of low teacher expectations of Traveller girls and a lack of encouragement to stay on and continue their education.

ROTA concurs with Social Finance UK that not enough is known about girls excluding from school. National data should include informal exclusions statistics as there is a risk that girls who self-exclude will remain ‘invisible’ in the data and in responses to support them.

Pre-admission exclusion

In 2014, ROTA examined school admission policies and fair access protocols, which indicated that some schools – particularly free schools and academies – were operating pre-admission procedures which discriminated against some pupils, either directly or indirectly. (NASUWT. 2014.)

Schools and Admissions Authorities are required to operate Fair Access Protocols (Department for Education. 2012.) Disregard for compliance with Fair Access Protocols in the admissions policies of some schools outside the control of Local Authorities, such as Academy schools, was reported by a Schools Week investigation (Schools Week. 2019.)

The Local Government Association (LGA) considered there to be a weakness in a system which could not ensure that schools should not operate policies which could exclude children with learning or behavioural problems or who had been excluded by other schools. (Local Government Association. 2020.)

It was observed in the interviews that if schools feel constrained from informally excluding pupils, this might lead to admissions policies designed not to let the children in, in the first place. At ROTA's 2020 Conference participants claimed that pre-admission exclusions seemed to be happening at an earlier stage in education than previously thought and may be linked to discriminatory practices.

ROTA believes that there is a case for councils to use their statutory powers to oblige schools at all levels of education including academies and free schools, to admit pupils who need a place, irrespective of any previous history of learning or behavioural difficulties or exclusion.

Examples of good practice in bringing down informal exclusions

Interviewees were asked about examples of good practice, intervention and support which were helpful in bringing down informal exclusions. Cultural awareness programmes and multi-agency initiatives were cited. An example was given of group activity involving parents, social services, police and youth support services to work with the families of children excluded or at risk of exclusion. The outcomes in preventing exclusion were positive for children attending the schools which had signed up.

Peer mentors in academic subjects providing free extra tutoring one evening a week was an approach taken by one youth organisation interviewed. The success of this was reflected in a waiting list. Developing good relationships with local neighbourhoods was thought to be successful in supporting the social development of young people and reducing exclusions, but the closure of youth clubs put this work at risk.

Key findings

- A lack of awareness and knowledge among some teachers and school leaders that some of the practices to informally exclude children may be unlawful contributes to a failure to support young people who have been informally excluded.
- There is an apparent lack of transparency and data from schools, local authorities and Government, and as such, a lack of statistical evidence about informal exclusions. Interviewees and participants in Round Table events observed that this made it harder to challenge the practice at a systemic level.
- Numerical and statistical data between 2017-2019 on children who have experienced informal exclusions, although derived from official sources including the Department for Education, Ofsted and Local Authorities can only infer how widespread the problem might be. The data does not always yield sufficiently detailed information about the ethnicity of children affected.
- Equalities data obtained from local authorities and the DfE for the period 2017-2019 revealed a lack of consistency in the way that data is gathered and disaggregated.
- Young people interviewed were concerned that racial discrimination can play a part in the informal exclusion of some groups of pupils.
- Forms of informal exclusion such as being sent to isolation were viewed by pupils as excessively harsh and punitive.
- Young people who had been informally excluded reported missing out on learning with no provision made for them to catch up.
- Increasing social and educational isolation resulted from informal exclusions.
- Exam leave, lunchtime exclusion, isolation on the school premises, the 'Naughty Room', managed moves and temporary placements elsewhere were known to interviewees and participants at ROTA's 2020 conference as ways of informally excluding pupils.
- Teachers and other professionals interviewed observed that informal exclusions tend to take place 'under the radar' and cannot easily be quantified. Schools were thought by interviewees to use informal exclusion to avoid on-the-record fixed term or permanent exclusion orders.
- Children who were informally excluded were often described by interviewees as having learning difficulties such as ADHD and dyslexia or behavioural problems that arose from difficult home circumstances or other external factors.
- Interviewees, Conference and Round Table participants thought that where informal exclusion was described as a 'disciplinary' measure, it was difficult to challenge. This was made more difficult for parents anxious that any confrontation might jeopardise their child's education and create hostility.
- Interviewees mentioned that external factors in young people missing lessons or disengaging with activities could be overlooked by teachers. Hunger, tiredness, depression and mental health issues were mentioned.
- Interviewees observed that institutional racism is a factor which cannot be ignored in the apparent disproportionate number of exclusions among Global Majority pupils. Pupils who participated in focus groups and interviewees who worked with GRT children perceived an unconscious bias against GRT children.

- Participants at ROTA's Conference and Round Table discussions thought that although race bias might not be explicit, discussing informal exclusions could be especially difficult for parents and children of Black heritage, where the teaching staff are predominantly White.
- Participants at ROTA's Conference and Round Table discussions indicated that the needs of children at risk of informal exclusion were not being picked up by teachers. A lack of communication between school and parents was given as a factor in situations escalating to exclusion.
- Interviewees cited instances of 'disruptive' pupils taken out of class and sent elsewhere, on or off school premises as part of a school's behaviour management strategy. Schools could put pupils into seclusion or isolation rooms as part of their behaviour policy without officially recording their use.
- Views from interviewees on links between informal exclusion and juvenile offending were at variance. The likelihood of young people not in school and left alone at home was acknowledged as a risk factor for being drawn into offending, but there are other factors to be taken into consideration. These may include a lack of parental boundary-setting, a disruptive home life and a lack of support for families struggling with adverse circumstances.
- The media-generated view of a 'school to prison pipeline' that is, a progression to offending amongst young people excluded from school, was thought unhelpful, pejorative and counter-productive by participants in this research.
- Elective home education can be a legitimate choice, but evidence from the interviews suggests that pressure is put unlawfully on parents by schools to remove children and home-school them instead. This appears to happen more frequently to parents of children who were bullied. Once out of school, the responsibility lies with the parent, often with insufficient advice, resources or support to home educate.
- Self-excluding and girls self-excluding was mentioned by interviewees as an issue seldom addressed. It was thought by that more could be done to understand why girls from some Global Majority and GRT communities dropped out of education.
- Participants at ROTA's Conference and Round Table discussions mentioned that if some schools feel constrained from informally excluding pupils, this might lead to admissions policies designed not to let the children in, in the first place.
- There was a view from Conference participants that free schools and academies were more likely to be operating pre-admission procedures which discriminated against some pupils, either directly or indirectly. ROTA's research findings had indicated that this was the case when the issue was explored in 2014. (NASUWT. 2014.)
- Interventions and strategies cited by interviewees and Conference participants which were thought might be helpful in bringing down informal exclusions included: cultural awareness programmes in conjunction with schools and local communities: multi-disciplinary sessions with parents, schools, social services, youth offending teams and mentors; peer mentoring; a sensitivity towards the well-being and self-esteem of young people in difficult circumstances.

1. Context to the research on informal exclusions from school

ROTA's research focuses on informal exclusions with specific regard to Global Majority and Gipsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities.

The differences between formal and informal exclusion are essentially that:

Formal exclusions of pupils from mainstream education are officially notified and recorded. Parents are told and have a right to appeal against a decision to exclude children from school. Alternative educational provision must be made for excluded pupils.

All local authorities are obliged to keep data on formal exclusions.

Informal exclusion of pupils from mainstream education happens when pupils are removed from class unofficially. This can take various forms, from being sent to a separate classroom, sent out of school, taken off roll, put on 'exam leave', moved to another school by arrangement, sent to a Pupil Referral Unit for an 'interim' period or sent home as part of an 'elective home education' deal.'

Between 2014 and 2018 ROTA gathered evidence from interviews and discussions with young people, teachers and professionals working with young people who had experienced, or were at risk of, informal exclusion from school. This was to explore and discuss the use of informal exclusion, which pupils were most affected, the reasons for excluding, its impact on young people and their families and to gauge the level of awareness of the use of informal exclusion. A limited number of Local Authorities were also sent Freedom of Information Requests about the data held on informal exclusions and whether this information could be broken down by ethnicity.

This work was the foundation for the current research which began in July 2019.

2. The problem

Findings from research previously conducted by ROTA strongly suggested that informal exclusions disproportionately affect some groups of Global Majority pupils, such as those from Black Caribbean, Somali, Gipsy, Roma and Traveller communities. (ROTA, 2018.) A literature search found very little other research, and no reliable data, on informal exclusions and young people from these communities. ROTA acknowledges that informal exclusions, by nature of their informality, poses difficulties for investigating the practice. Where some data does exist - such as that collected by Local Authorities - the difficulty is compounded by it not being broken down by ethnicity in sufficient detail to be able to say definitively that ROTA's findings on disproportionality can be corroborated by statistical evidence.

Statistics from the Department for Education for 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 showed that permanent and fixed-term exclusions were more prevalent among pupils with statements of Special Needs or Disability and with pupils from Gipsy, Roma and Traveller and Black Caribbean heritage. (Department for Education. 2019a,2019b,2020a.) Figures for informal exclusions are not included in the data. ROTA has speculated that one of the reasons for the omission is that although schools must record permanent and fixed-term exclusions, which are legal, many types of informal exclusion are illegal and any obligation to record them can be overlooked by schools.

ROTA's research also revealed a lack of transparency from schools, local authorities and Government, giving rise to a situation where little can be gauged about how extensive the use of informal exclusions is. Furthermore, there was a lack of awareness and knowledge of the illegality of some forms of informal exclusion and a failure to support young people and their families experiencing informal exclusion. For example, initial findings from ROTA's research suggested that pressure was exerted by some schools on parents to home educate or risk a permanent or fixed-term exclusion, without adequate support or follow-up.

3. What should be done?

From the research conducted by ROTA in 2018, these points emerged: there needs to be a better understanding of the extent to which informal exclusions are used and for which pupils; that those directly affected by the experience of informal exclusion should be given a voice; that the illegality of the process of some forms of informal exclusion should be exposed and that ways to change and challenge the system should be developed.

4. How the problem was approached

In 2019 ROTA began research to explore the issue more fully, through a mixed-method study involving the examination of available data, policy and legislation; focus groups, interviews and round table discussions with young people, parents, carers, teachers and other professionals working with young people informally excluded or at risk of exclusion. To this end, the following activities were undertaken:

Desk research reviewing official documentation, data, statistics and survey material relating to informal exclusions. Policy and guidelines for schools were also examined, as were research reports from other sources. This was to ascertain what data on informal exclusions is available, how it is recorded and whether it can be used to discern which groups of pupils most frequently experience informal exclusion and in what circumstances.

Freedom of Information Requests to 32 London Authorities and the City of London to ascertain what data they hold on informal exclusions and whether broken down by ethnicity (Appendix 1.)

Focus Groups to explore the experiences of informal exclusion with young people, their parents and carers and the impact of informal exclusion on young people.

Interviews with teachers and other professionals working with young people to explore which children are most affected, the forms informal exclusion takes, reasons for excluding and whether any support is available for children excluded, or at risk of exclusion. (Appendix 2a)

A Round-Table Event/Conference with teachers, youth leaders, parents and concerned individuals to raise awareness of the illegality of many forms of informal exclusion, to explore specific topics and to discuss new strategies to counteract the use of informal exclusion.

5. Methodological considerations

Prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, it was apparent that many teachers were reluctant to speak openly about informal exclusions. This had been predicted to some extent, as the practice of informal exclusion is unofficial, goes largely unrecorded and can be unlawful. In the light of initial contacts and some off-the-record conversations with teachers it was decided to change our approach to the interviews. The interview schedule was modified. Instead of asking teachers directly to describe what they knew about informal exclusions the interview questions focused on schools' behaviour policies and how sanctions were carried out. This, it was hoped, would engage teachers more confidently in discussing the issue and the subject could be explored in the context of classroom management. (Appendix 2b)

The choice of questions for teachers was refined by examining a sample of schools' Behaviour Policies on their websites, which in some cases referred to sanctions that indicated the use of informal exclusion. A scrutiny of behaviour policies was first carried out by ROTA in 2014 and again between 2018 and 2020. It was apparent that informal exclusion continued to be used as a classroom strategy to moderate pupils' behaviour.

The interviews with teachers were interrupted by the closure of schools on 23rd March 2020. It was anticipated that interviews would resume, using the modified interview schedule, when schools re-opened (for selected year groups) in June 2020. NB *The date for all schools re-opening to all pupils was revised by the Government in June 2020. In England, schools were scheduled to re-open in September 2020.*

The Covid-19 outbreak forced the closure of youth centres and other organisations for young people. Further focus group activity and recruitment of volunteers to take part in training and workshop sessions, scheduled from April 2020, was curtailed.

6. Findings

6.1. Findings from the desk research

Review of official data and statistics on informal exclusions

There was a limited amount of data available from official sources which could give an overall picture of informal exclusions. From the information that exists, and from surveys and research reports from other sources, we were able to establish the following, summarised here:

- **Numerical and statistical data on children who have experienced informal exclusions, although derived from official sources including the Department for Education, Ofsted and Local Authorities, could only yield estimates.** Most of the data available was for permanent and fixed-term exclusions, as seen in headline facts and figures from statistical releases for 2018-2019. (Department for Education. 2020.)
- There was an absence of formal recording and reporting of informal exclusions such as managed moves; off-rolling; ‘unaccounted’ disappearances and ‘other unofficial or illegal practices’ to remove children from school.
- **Establishing which groups of children are most affected by informal exclusion revealed inconsistency in the way that data is broken down.** For example, reports from the Children’s Commissioner (2017, 2019a, 2019b) focused predominantly on children with SEND; data from the Department for Education in 2016 identified thirteen groups of young people ‘more likely than the rest of the population to be missing from education’ but did not specify gender, FSM eligibility or ethnic group. A later Statistical Release from the Department of Education for 2017-2018 did but did not relate it to the groups previously identified. (DfE. 2019a, 2019b.)

The Education Policy Institute confirmed that ‘Black Caribbean students have been disproportionately subject to permanent exclusion from school’ and that ‘ethnic factors and SEN’ appear to be predictors of how likely a child will be excluded from school. (EPI 2017.) It was acknowledged however that establishing whether and how evidence on permanent exclusions aligns with informal exclusions is problematic.

- **On the forms informal exclusions take, the focus is mainly on ‘off-rolling’. Other forms of informal exclusion are known, but statistics were not being routinely, consistently or widely collected.** Off-rolling is the removal of pupils from the school roll without a permanent exclusion, when the removal is more in the interests of the school than that of the pupil. (House of Commons Education Committee Inquiry into Alternative Provision. 2018. YouGov for Ofsted. 2019.) Off-rolling was explored by Education DataLab which identified instances of pupils being off-rolled from mainstream schools in the autumn or spring of the GCSE year. (FFTEducation DataLab. 2017.) Evidence gathered by the Education Policy Institute on ‘unexplained exits’ from school found that around ten percent of children in Year 11 had been

unaccountably missing from school at some point in their secondary education. (EPI 2019.) IntegratED similarly reported gaps in the official data which meant the true scale of pupil movement could only be measured accurately if official Government data on exclusions rates included all moves to Alternative Provision. When looking at data on pupils off-rolled from school, unexplained exits were estimated to affect one in eight young people from Black ethnic communities (IntegratED 2020a, 2020b.)

- **Pre-admission exclusion and self-exclusion** It was useful to know that data on off-rolling and unexplained absences were becoming available, but there remained a gap in the reporting of other forms of informal exclusion, such as pre-admission exclusion and self-exclusion. The issue of pre-admission exclusion, particularly in free schools and academies was identified by ROTA in a report to NASUWT in 2014. Figures on the number of young people who had been discriminated against in this could not be verified easily. ROTA's scrutiny of schools' admissions policies revealed a practice operated by some schools to manipulate the intake e.g. through parent interviews, pupil aptitude assessments, auditions or difficult or complicated written application requirements. (NASUWT. 2014.) These practices are not permitted by the School Admission Code or Fair Access Protocols. (Child Law Advice. 2020a) and do not fully comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation Report in 2002 had identified a form of unauthorised absence known as 'self-exclusion' about which very little data was known then or has been gathered since. Social Finance UK reported on these forms of absences in 2020. It was noted that information about girls who self-exclude was frequently missing from official statistics.
- **Reasons for informal exclusion given by schools were, unsurprisingly, rarely reported.** Exploring the reasons for informal exclusion has often been hampered by the difficulty in gathering on-the-record evidence. Reasons for fixed-term and permanent exclusions are more commonly reported than informal exclusions, with the most recent and extensive evidence presented by the Timpson Review of School Exclusion (Gov.UK 2019.) The Review looked at the reasons for fixed-term and permanent exclusions of children with SEND and SEMH (Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs.) For children with SEMH excuses for sending them home were variously cited as 'anger management problems' 'persistent disruption' 'lack of staff expertise and time to deal with them'. Reasons for internal exclusions or removals from lessons were explored by the Royal Society of Arts which reported on a survey of 1,500 teachers. 77% of teachers surveyed cited behavioural reasons and disruption to lessons. (TheRSA. 2019.) Evidence gathered from ROTA's interviews, focus groups and conference round tables indicated that young people were informally excluded for a range of behavioural reasons, from minor infractions of rules to repeated disruption of lessons and more serious incidents.
- **Parents contested the reasons given by schools for informal exclusion.** ROTA's interviews and round table discussions suggested that parents of children with SEND and other conditions were not satisfied with the reasons given by schools. For example, a child with autism or ADHD could be sent home from school on the grounds that 'their needs cannot be met'. If needs cannot be met, a review should

be carried out and the pupil should not be sent home prior to this being arranged. The parental view that schools were not appreciating or meeting their children's needs was apparent in the interviews. For Gipsy, Roma and Traveller children, reasons given by schools for carrying out informal exclusions included a lack of parental engagement and constantly moving around, whereas parents referred to a 'hostile environment' within schools, racist bullying, low teacher expectations and a curriculum the young people cannot relate to. Interviewees thought that schools should look at ways to improve their systems of review regarding the needs of children with SEND, autism or ADHD. Parents of children from GRT communities requested that schools should provide them with information and include them in the discussion from an early stage to ensure that cultural needs are understood and met with sensitivity, not hostility.

- **Reasons for self-exclusion or unexplained absences among girls** In an early report by Joseph Rowntree Foundation a range of reasons for girls dropping out of school emerged, from pregnancy and caring responsibilities to bullying, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harm and a suspicion that sexual exploitation was taking place. (Joseph Rowntree Foundation. 2002.) Between 2002 and 2020, few statistics were available on girls self-absenting from school, or their reasons for doing so. In 2020, Social Finance UK reported on girls who had gone missing from the official statistics that did not always record instances of early exits, school change or 'other circumstances.' (Social Finance UK. July 2020.) It has recently been suggested that County Lines activity may account for some girls and young women going missing from school. County Lines involves the recruitment and exploitation of young people by gangs which distribute drugs from metropolitan areas to other parts of the country. The National Crime Agency reported that gathering statistics on the involvement of school-age girls and young women in County Lines has not been altogether successful. (NCA, 2018.)

6.2. Findings from the Freedom of Information Requests to Local Authorities

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) there is a duty on local authorities to gather data disaggregated by the different race and ethnicity codes used by the DfE in order to identify any disproportionate, adverse impact. Where disproportionate impact is identified, there is a duty upon the local authority to take proportionate measures to eliminate discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations.

The methods used to informally exclude are not in, and of themselves, unlawful. It is often the way they are used and the disproportionate impact on Global Majority pupils that makes it unlawful. For example, it is not unlawful to choose to home educate a child. However, it becomes unlawful if a school puts pressure on parents to choose home education as a way of removing the child from school.

ROTA sent 33 Freedom of Information Requests (FOIs) to 32 London Local Authorities and the City of London, enquiring about permanent and fixed-term exclusions, managed moves,

elective home education, lunchtime exclusions, referrals to Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and Alternative Provision (AP) and removals from sixth forms broken down by reason and ethnicity, using the Ethnicity Codes (Department for Education.2019e) See Appendix 1. Questions to Local Authorities.

The responses received were listed in a table. See Appendix 2. Table 1. Responses from Local Authorities.

Only thirteen (just over one in three) responded despite follow up requests. An initial analysis of the Freedom of Information (FOI) responses showed a very clear lack of data gathered by local authorities that would help them identify informal exclusions and its disproportionate effect on Global Majority pupils.

Because this finding was of concern to ROTA, checks were carried out on the analysis of responses against the information sent by each Local Authority and found to be accurate. A further check was carried out on the sources to which Local Authorities had directed or referred us for data which they stated could not be provided from their own records. Although some Local Authorities had contracted out their data collection to external companies, the main source to which we were referred was the Department for Education.

A check was carried out on whether the information from the Department for Education on all types of exclusion - permanent, fixed term and informal - was in a form which could be broken down by ethnicity and the reasons for the exclusion. It was apparent that it was not.

Other checks on the information sent back by the Local Authorities found gaps in data. For example, where data on lunch-time exclusions was held by Local Authorities or by other sources to which ROTA was directed, it did not appear to be broken down by ethnicity and reason or, if broken down, it was by one and not the other.

The gaps in data were not limited to informal exclusions. Depending on the type of school, there were differences in the way that statistics on permanent and fixed-term exclusions - which all schools are required to record – were being collected. It appeared from the FOI responses given by 12 of the Local Authorities that not all data that schools were required to collect had to be submitted to Local Authorities: schools outside LA control, academies, free schools and Alternative Provision made returns on exclusions direct to the DfE by way of the COLLECT system (Department for Education. 2019f.)

Other Local Authorities contracted out their data collection services to private providers. Sixth forms, Sixth form colleges, PRUs and other APs hold this data themselves. Contacting other sources including individual schools to find out whether the data they held can be broken down by ethnicity and reason for exclusion was flagged for future research.

Summary of responses from London Local Authorities

- 13 Local Authorities provided information in response to our FOIs
- Of the 13 Local Authorities which provided information, none provided complete data.

- One of the 13 Local Authorities, Islington, was able to provide a more complete dataset than the others. This enabled an analysis to be carried out on data relating to Elective Home Education and free school meals eligibility for that Local Authority.
- 11 Local Authorities did not record data on the number of pupils on free school meals prior to being referred for Elective Home Education
- 9 Local authorities did not provide a breakdown of the number of pupils undergoing a managed move because the information was held by schools.

The reason given most frequently by Local Authorities for not providing information in the form requested was 'no data held'.

The explanations given by Local Authorities for not holding the data:

- One LA could not break pupil data down by the ethnic categories requested (Q1.)
- Three LAs did not hold data on the number of permanent exclusions by ethnicity (Q2.)
- One LA did not hold any data on the number of fixed-term exclusions. One LA said there was no requirement for schools to provide this data. One LA could not provide data in an unsuppressed form due to the small numbers of pupils (Q3.)
- Four LAs could not provide a breakdown of data on pupils referred to Elective Home Education by ethnicity. One LA could not find the data. One LA could not provide data for all the years requested/was unclear as to which years the data was required (Q4.)
- Eight LAs did not collect/record/hold data the number of pupils referred to Elective Home Education by Free School Meals (FSM.) One LA said the data was held centrally elsewhere (Q5.)
- Two LAs did not collect any data on lunchtime exclusions. One LA said there was no requirement for schools to provide this data. One LA could not provide data in unsuppressed form due to small numbers of pupils (Q6.)
- Seven LAs said that data on managed moves could not be provided because the information was held by the schools. It should be noted that the Local Authorities did not confirm that the schools would have this data (Q7.)
- Three LAs could not provide data on referrals to PRUs because they did not break the data down by ethnicity; Three LAs said that the data was held elsewhere; three LAs said that schools or PRUs held the data. One said there were no PRUs in their locality and one gave no reason (Q8 & Q9.)
- Seven LAs could not provide data on sixth form exclusions because this was held by schools. One LA said they did not break this data down by reason or ethnicity. One said there were no PRUs in their locality. (Q10.)

One Local Authority (Islington) provided a more complete set of data, for the period which, on analysis showed the following for the period 2015-2017:

- There was a very strong correlation between pupils in Elective Home Education and Free School Meals¹.
- Up to 39% of all pupils in Elective Home Education had previously been in receipt of FSM.
- For White English pupils in Elective Home Education, up to 60% had previously been in receipt of FSM.
- For other ethnicities, numbers for each ethnicity code were low compared with White English but for the ethnic group Mixed White and Black Caribbean, up to 83% of pupils in Elective Home Education were previously in receipt of FSM.

The data from Islington showed a marked rise in the number of pupils in Elective Home Education from 63 pupils in 2013/14 to 112 pupils in 2017/2018. Some of this increase may be accounted for by an increase in pupil numbers overall but it is nevertheless of some concern that the number of pupils in Elective Home Education almost doubled over a three to four-year period.

The correlation between pupils in Elective Home Education and Free School Meals is of interest as it suggests that some families who are in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM being used as a proxy measure for economic disadvantage) may not have sufficient resources or access to sufficient support for home education.

The finding on Elective Home Education and Free School Meals was based only on the data provided by Islington and not for any of the other Local Authorities.

6.3. Focus Groups with young people

Two focus groups were held with young people from a youth organisation with whom ROTA had an established link. The participants had attended, or were attending, secondary schools within the same geographical area on the outskirts of London.

The purpose of the focus groups was to gather the views of young people on informal exclusion. Informal exclusion as experienced by young people themselves, throws light on the practice in ways that are rarely talked about openly by teachers or other professionals.

Very little information about exclusion has been gathered directly from young people. The Children's Society (2021) interviewed a small number of pupils (11) who had experienced exclusion of all kinds and were aware of the limitations of intensive research with such a small sample size but reported that it could, nevertheless, afford valuable insights into the issues.

ROTA's objective was to gain a better understanding of the effect of informal exclusion and the challenges facing young people and their parents or carers in combating the practice. Our research also explored direct or indirect discriminatory practices around exclusion,

¹ Correlation coefficient of 0.94

which other reports have not done to any extent. The focus groups also aimed to raise awareness among young people that informal exclusion is illegal and to discuss ways that the practice can be challenged.

Material from the focus groups was developed into two illustrative case studies.

Focus Group Methodology

The target population was young people who had been informally excluded from school or who were at risk of informal exclusion. The sample was drawn from a youth organisation with whom ROTA had an established link. Discussions took place with senior members of the organisation on the aim research and methodological considerations relating to young people and their participation in the project.

12 young people were recruited to take part in focus groups. Although the sample was small, it was thought to be an optimum size for effective focus group activity with young people likely to need a high level of support in gaining their trust and developing confidence to explore issues that they might find difficult or challenging. For this reason work was to be carried out with one or two sessional workers who had the trust of, and credibility of young people.

Each focus group was set up with numbers not exceeding six or seven young people. Because of the likely vulnerability of some participants, research protocols were drawn up and reviewed at regular intervals, on confidentiality, data protection, ethics and safeguarding procedures. This was to ensure that confidence was developed in individuals, that their contribution was valued and that good group cohesion and trust developed.

Participants were encouraged to guide or contribute to the discussion about informal exclusions in a manner they felt at ease with, in an environment they were familiar with, facilitated by the focus group leader. Focus groups were conducted broadly in line with Participatory Action Research methodology, which is designed to elicit discussion and solutions to problems by and from the communities affected. (Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. 2007.)

The material gathered from the focus groups was developed into two illustrative case studies, to inform research and policy on informal exclusions from school. The rationale for adopting this approach was based on instrumental case study methodology (Stake (1995) which looks at the particular elements and the elements in common for two or more cases. The aim of this approach was not to produce generalisable outcomes, but to illuminate the problem of informal exclusions from school through the accounts of young people who had experienced exclusion.

At the exploratory stage, observations were made of the young people and their interactions in a focus group environment, taking into consideration validity and potential

bias. (Yin, 2014..) The research acknowledged some likely limitations of focus group activity, namely that accounts given by participants could not necessarily be verified; that some opinions or observations given by participants might be influenced by hearing the opinions or observations of others in the group; that some participants would choose to underplay or exaggerate their experiences of a personal nature in a group setting.

In the light of these considerations, it was anticipated that some individual focus group members would be invited to take part in follow-up interviews and one-to-one discussions, giving them the opportunity to talk outside the group if they so wished. This option would not be offered without careful consideration of protecting anonymity and accessing advice or counselling for any young person in need of support. In the event, no interviews were arranged, due to external factors.

It was intended that the focus groups would be followed up with additional discussion groups, workshops and training. These would equip young people with the knowledge and skills to challenge the system of informal exclusion and to formulate strategies and alternative solutions to informal exclusion.

This phase of the research was interrupted by the Covid-19 lockdown of schools and youth groups from March to September 2020. Re-establishing links with the focus group participants during lockdown was not possible. Many of the young people in the focus groups were already vulnerable prior to Covid-19 – through having been excluded or at risk of exclusion – and became more so during the lockdown. Access to their usual learning and support networks diminished. The learning mentors and focus group facilitators with whom ROTA had begun the research did not have the capacity to continue as other challenges faced them, including making alternative arrangements for learning. For this reason, ROTA's research was re-focused towards investigating what educational provision and support was being made for the most vulnerable young people during lockdown and for when the schools re-opened.

A preliminary report on the effect of Covid-19 on the most vulnerable was published by ROTA in August 2020. The Report is available from ROTA's website: <https://www.rota.org.uk/content/rota-may-2020-covid-19-and-issue-informal-exclusion-school>

The findings of the Focus Groups with young people

Focus groups were audio recorded and the material was transcribed. A critical analysis of the transcripts was carried out, developing the material into illustrative case studies (Hamilton. 2011.)

The young people who participated in the focus groups revealed their concerns around discrimination and marginalisation in school and in wider society. In discussions about informal exclusion, the reasons for being informally excluded were explored. Serious

incidents could result in informal exclusion, but less serious rule-breaking such as hair styles and talking too much or too loudly could also result in informal exclusion or isolation. Exclusion was talked of as a threat. The most stringent conditions in isolation were likened to prison or solitary confinement, with food brought in and no social contact. Similar observations have been reported by young people in the Children's Society research, with mentions of being 'trapped' or shut in confined spaces with 'walls on each side' for long periods of time. (Children's Society. 2021.) For some pupils who had been informally excluded multiple times, school became intolerable. Permanent exclusion - to home schooling for example - could be an escape route. For other pupils, this route was a form of exile – no schools would have them, they were unwanted.

Instances of discrimination and marginalisation were described by focus group participants, in school and in wider society. Black boys, it was felt, could be perceived as troublemakers or potential troublemakers in ways that White students were not. There was perceived marginalisation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) pupils, at school and in the community. Children from some Global Majority communities did not feel accepted by other communities or social groups in the school but even more so outside the school environment. Within the school, participants reported bias by teachers against some groups of children such as those from Somali/Arab backgrounds.

The perception of focus group participants that discrimination played a part in the informal exclusion of some children from Global Majority and GRT communities deserved a closer look. Statistical releases from the Department for Education for 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 revealed that the highest overall rate for permanent and fixed term exclusions by ethnic group was for Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller and Black Caribbean children. It could not be established from official statistics whether similar patterns applied for informal exclusions. Evidence from organisations such as Traveller Movement indicated that some groups of GRT young people do appear to experience informal exclusion more frequently and that this is often attributed to cultural misapprehensions, direct and indirect discrimination. (Traveller Movement. 2019.) The Royal Society of Arts suggested that teacher bias may be a factor in informal exclusion. This could be countered by training across ethnic backgrounds for teachers and a drive towards better representation of Global Majority teachers in schools. (TheRSA. 2020.) The Children's Society similarly commented on the importance of building relationships of trust between young people from different ethnic backgrounds and teachers attuned to cultural sensitivity. (Children's Society. 2021.)

ROTA takes the view that insufficient attention has been paid to the issue of racial discrimination, even in reports on school exclusion commissioned by the Government. The Timpson Review of School Exclusion for example acknowledged a need to scrutinise the reasons why children with SEND are disproportionately affected by exclusions of all kinds. ROTA's evidence suggests that ethnicity also plays a role in exclusion. This has not been explored in sufficient depth, due to a lack of data on ethnicity and exclusion which makes it difficult to discern with accuracy which groups are affected more than others. ROTA believes that further research on the data on exclusions for Global Majority and GRT young

people, and the reasons why they appear to experience exclusions more frequently is needed.

Pupils from some Global Majority and GRT backgrounds were more at risk of informal exclusion than others. Students from some Global Majority backgrounds thought they were more at risk of exclusion for breaking the rules than White students. Opinion was divided as to whether GRT students were treated more favourably by teachers or whether they were more likely to end up excluded for behaving badly - or differently. What came across clearly was that where GRT children were being separated out from other pupils - for whatever reason – measures were not being taken to promote better cultural understanding.

Separating or grouping GRT children together within the classroom or taking them out of class for learning support can put up barriers to their integration within the school and with their peers. ROTA urges that positive measures should be taken by schools to integrate GRT children so that they are not seen as 'other'. Otherwise, there is a risk that attitudes and prejudices in the classroom will be reinforced.

Incidents resulting in informal exclusion were described. Participants regarded some behaviour as warranting exclusion – fighting, assaulting a teacher, being found with a weapon for example – but for lesser transgressions, such as hairstyle or talking in class, there was a sense that sanctions were being carried out disproportionately and unfairly.

The endorsement of permanent and fixed term exclusion as a behaviour management tool in specific circumstances and at the discretion of the school was referred to in the Timpson Review and in subsequent debate on its use. Other organisations have been critical of the practice and campaign against its use in any circumstances, asking for a moratorium on all types of school exclusions. (No More Exclusions 2020.) ROTA noted that during the Covid-19 shut-down of schools, the Department of Education urged schools to re-examine their behaviour management strategies for pupils returning to the classroom after lock-down (DfE. 2020.) It was thought that some pupils might exhibit unusual or concerning behaviours which needed a more understanding and supportive approach. ROTA takes the view that there is an opportunity for all schools to re-think their use of exclusion as a sanction. (ROTA. 2020.)

The form informal exclusion took could be a period of more than one whole lesson, unsupervised and out of class. Being sent out of class was reported by several participants, for forty-five minutes, or longer 'if forgotten about'. It was not clear how or whether any provision was made for pupils to catch up with the lesson if sent out. Students sent out of a lesson were largely unsupervised. Some would wander around the school on their own.

If children are sent out of class for any length of time, or multiple times, it is the duty of the school to ensure that there is continuity of learning. If exclusions are not recorded, it is unlikely that formal provision for learning or catching up can be monitored.

The form of informal exclusion known as off-rolling was familiar to focus group participants who reported incidents of being sent home prior to exams or prior to Ofsted coming to the school. Despite the DfE and Ofsted being aware of this unlawful practice, it continued to

occur. A lack of tracking or follow-up of off-rolled pupils made it difficult for local authorities or Ofsted to monitor what learning support was in place, if any. ROTA considers that, post-Timpson Review of School Exclusion, any measures the Government can put in place to prevent off-rolling will be a welcome development.

Conditions in isolation were likened to imprisonment. Being sent to an isolation room, focus room or school-based unit was described in terms more commonly associated with prison: ‘solitary confinement’ ‘prison food’ and no speaking/communication allowed. Informal exclusion could be used as a ‘threat’ against pupils. Pupil Referral Units were seen in an even worse light - ‘all the bad people are there.’

The focus group discussions confirmed ROTA’s view that when pupils were placed in isolation, their sense of being denied social interaction, the restrictions put on them and the fact that learning support was often inadequate could and did lead to further risk of exclusion. This view was supported by the Royal Society of Arts which concluded that although the use of isolation was contentious, most secondary schools had these facilities. (The RSA, 2020.) The Children’s Society was also critical of the use of isolation, with children feeling trapped or semi-incarcerated. (Children’s Society. 2021.) ROTA believes there can be little justification for punitive measures which to many young people seem exceptionally harsh and threatening.

Informal exclusion could escalate to a fixed-term or permanent exclusion

Participants had seen that the behaviour of children informally excluded, especially when isolated, could worsen and lead to permanent exclusion. Permanent exclusion was perceived as a form of exile: they would not be allowed back, and no school would have them: ‘Nobody wants you’.

Although not explicitly stated, there was a sense that permanent exclusion could be an escape route for some pupils for whom school had become intolerable. They did not care if they did not come back to school. This view was also held by a teaching assistant interviewed as part of the study. She said that for some children, school was not a place where they felt secure or safe. Findings from ROTA’s other interviews and round table discussions suggested that there were some children who chose to stop coming to school due to feeling threatened, bullied or harassed – situations which were not picked up or addressed by the school.

It has been suggested that coercion from influences outside school may also be a factor in putting children at risk of self-excluding. This did not specifically arise in ROTA’s research. It was however, mentioned in a Parliamentary Debate on the Timpson Review that took place in Westminster Hall (September 2021) in which evidence was heard by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Alternative Provision. Concern was voiced that some children were at risk of being coached into exclusion:

‘Some children are trained by gangs as to how to become excluded in the first place, freeing up time for drug-running and more’. (Hansard. HC Deb September 2021. Vol 700. Col 433.)

Knowledge and awareness of informal exclusion

In the focus groups conducted with young people, there was a lack of awareness that the practice is unlawful. However, when pupils spoke about informal exclusions taking place, there was a sense that it was being carried out unfairly in some circumstances. This was evident from the way some pupils in the focus groups expressed sympathy when hearing about other children's experiences of exclusion for what were considered minor incidents. An element of humour also came across from some pupils, who made joking remarks when hearing about confrontations with teachers over the use of mobile phones for example and seemed unsurprised when exclusion followed these altercations. These reactions were not uncommon and could be taken to indicate a normalisation of the practice.

A need to raise awareness of illegal exclusions and find ways to counteract the practice

ROTA believes that ways should be found to make young people and their families more aware of the illegality of some forms of exclusion e.g. where there is no learning support for pupils, where they are left unsupervised for extended periods, where pressure is put on parents to take their children out of school, where pupils are sent on 'exam leave' or off-rolled. This would help to change a situation where unrecorded and unofficial exclusions are routinely used and rarely challenged by parents. Schools themselves have a role in communicating with parents if their children's behaviour is causing concern, to gain an insight into any difficulties the child is having and to prevent escalation.

6.4. Illustrative Case Studies derived from the Focus Groups

The case studies present the perceptions that young people have of informal exclusion, based on their own personal experiences and observations. ROTA considers it important to present these case studies, which are derived directly from focus group transcripts, as they give voice to young people, particularly those from Global Majority and GRT communities, whose stories are seldom represented in discussions and debates on informal exclusion. It is encouraging that since ROTA's study, more research has been carried out on the experiences of exclusion from the perspective of young people (The Children's Society. 2021.)

ROTA's case studies shed light on discrimination and discriminatory practices which schools carry out when informally excluding pupils; reasons young people get excluded and why these often seem to be applied unfairly to children from some Global Majority and GRT communities; the different forms of informal exclusion and the effect they can have on learning, social interaction and behaviour; the conditions experienced in isolation.

The case studies serve to illustrate that schools should record details of race, ethnicity and disability for pupils who they informally exclude so that they can monitor and guard against groups of pupils being disproportionately affected; that schools should question the effect of frequent or multiple informal exclusions on pupils and develop strategies which do not cause further disengagement from learning or escalate to permanent exclusion; that where

pupils are informally excluded, the school carries out its duty to provide continuity of learning and pupil support; that schools should review their behaviour policies on the use of isolation rooms which appear to exacerbate anxiety, social alienation and disrupt the pupil's learning.

Illustrative Case Study – Focus Group 1

Focus group 1 was composed of secondary school students from schools in a region outside London

The group was led by a ROTA interviewer and facilitated by a youth group leader

The group was asked about experiences of exclusion from school.

Discriminatory treatment of pupils within school and in wider society

Young people in Focus Group 1 spoke about being marginalised, a problem which was not confined to school. One said:

‘As a person who is mixed race, white and Asian you find that, because of your skin colour sometimes...’cos I’m more of like on the pale side, and then when I try converse with, like, people who have more of - I don’t know, darker skin tone and something - I find myself excluded from that social group’.

This participant thought that even though there could be points of contact culturally, it was difficult to be accepted by other groups from different ethnic backgrounds:

‘I could try to relate, but they won't even try that.’

This was echoed by another participant of mixed Pakistani and African heritage, who said that outside school it was more difficult to be accepted. In school there was less of a problem making friends.

Some students thought that at their school, GRT pupils were treated more leniently, going out more often on school trips and not being put into detention for not doing homework. One participant commented that Roma pupils needed more learning support.

‘They get a lot of support when it comes to ESOL English for example. Like, say they’ve just come to the country. I’m not saying just the Roma community but however when I went to [a named school] there were some people that had just come to the country, and they couldn't do the English GCSE they were given ESOL classes to give them more support to learn English language.’

Reasons for exclusion

Fights, fights outside school, bad behaviour outside school, defiance and aggression were mentioned.

Fighting was frequently mentioned by participants in Focus Group 1. There was resentment that some pupils caught fighting managed to avoid getting disciplined or were ‘let off’.

If they refused to write a statement about their involvement in a fight, which would lead to them being sent to isolation, they were seen to ‘get away with it.’ Not writing a statement was a way of playing the system to avoid exclusion.

Other reasons for exclusion were throwing things at a teacher, assaults by another pupil and blame put on pupils who had not been involved.

The issue of hair styles came up. For having close-shaved hair boys got sent to isolation until it grew longer. It was commented that this used to happen to Muslim pupils who had been on pilgrimage but the school had since changed and no longer did that.

Participant: 'So, if you go on pilgrimage, you have to shave the head off and for example – well - you would be put in isolation until your hair grows back.

Interviewer: Seriously?

Several voices: Yeah.

Participant: Yeah, that's with any haircut shorter than nought point 5.

Interviewer: So. Isolation until your hair grows back?

Participant: Yeah. Until it's pinchable.

Interviewer: It doesn't matter what reason it is? Like let's say it was because they went to Mecca? Do they ask you the reason your hair is that short?

Participant: No.

Several voices: Now they do!

Participant: But before it was like 'Your hair is short. Go in isolation'.

Form exclusion takes

Different forms of exclusion were mentioned by the group:

'Sitting in a corner of a room to do homework or look at BBC Bitesize on computer'; sitting in a room with other pupils...divided by screens no talking/contact; sitting it in a room on your own – 'like Solitary Confinement'.

Conditions in isolation

One participant described how, in one school, food was brought in and toilet breaks allowed.

Another participant mentioned that there was no computer in the isolation room, that pupils were allowed 'only to read a book' and have a toilet break only when other students were not around. The whole day 'sitting doing nothing, just sitting' was given in another example and being 'shut out of lessons'. Being shut out of lessons involved standing outside the classroom with nothing to do.

Length of time spent in isolation

Length of exclusion could escalate from one day plus an hour after school, 2 to 3 days, up to 2 weeks, then, instead of being sent home, sent to a PRU.

One participant described a situation where a shortage of staff had led to pupils who had been sent out of class being left unsupervised within the school for extended periods of time.

‘I remember - so - for most of my year 8 and year 9 year there weren’t any teachers. We were just left wandering around the whole school with no teacher and they - we’d be told to get back into class sometimes, like quite rarely, by wandering teachers in the hallway but then kids would ignore that that because we had no lesson to go back to.’

Isolation was used as a threat/sanction - this is what happens if you don’t change your behaviour.

Illustrative case study: Focus Group 2

Focus group 2 was composed of secondary school students from schools and 6th form colleges in a region outside London

The group was led by a ROTA interviewer and facilitated by a youth group leader

The group was asked about their experiences of exclusion from school.

Discriminatory treatment of pupils within school and in wider society

Some Black students described a feeling of being viewed as potential trouble-makers, inside school and in wider society in a way that White students were not. Examples were given of being followed around in shops by security guards who thought they might be stealing:

Participant: ‘Yeah, I got accused of stealing something that wasn’t even in the shop. Like, it was a drink that they didn’t sell. So, I said how can I steal it if you don’t sell it! And they were like, you’re banned, get out, all of this.’

Another participant described being stopped and searched by the Police for no discernible reason except that the pupil and his group of non-White male friends were wearing black clothes with hoods.

It was thought that groups of Black pupils could experience discrimination in school in a way that groups of White pupils did not.

Participant: ‘I think in my school, they like, of course there’s a big group of black boys and I think teachers pay more attention cos’ there was like a really big group, like we were outside, and there’s a really big group of white boys – I’m not just saying that – that’s always like that but yeah – and then, like, a big group of black boys and the teachers were only keeping their eyes on the black boys as, like, they were doing something. But they were both like, in, doing the same thing, just talking to each other. But there was like way more eyes on them on the black group of kids. So, I think it’s like, they just have a stereotype of us. Not of us, but you know...’

Another participant who was at 6th form college remarked that Black students got singled out and given a warning in the security guards' office for 'making a bit of noise or we got hoods on and stuff' in the library where 'other races are just told to quieten down'. The banning of certain hairstyles such as coloured braids worn by Black girls was thought to be racially discriminatory. If girls refused to change their hair, they could get sent to an isolation room, sometimes for extended periods.

A participant commented:

'So when I have braids, I wanna get – I don't wanna get just black braids – I wanna get coloured braids. But they banned that. But I saw another girl walking round and she dyed her hair bright red and she doesn't get in trouble for that, so, yeah...they have like, they have certain colours – natural colours that you're allowed to have. But, if, when it's braids then they look like, oh it's the worst colours.'

Another participant agreed and added:

'I remember my braids were only like, an off-tone of brown, like it was a bit of a lighter brown, and they were like, oh, if you don't - like - end up taking them off - then you can be in the focus room for, like, a whole week.'

A participant gave an example of another way Black pupils could be treated unfairly by some teachers and threatened with isolation for talking in class. In a lesson where everyone was talking, a group of Black students she was with were singled out and she was made to leave the room.

The question of whether some pupils were put into isolation more often than others was discussed.

Interviewer: Just wondering, do you feel that there is a difference when it comes to isolation, or threats of exclusion, is there a difference in the treatment of minority ethnic or black minority ethnic pupils.

Participant 1: Yeah! Because teachers will pick on that one. And it doesn't even matter, the teachers will pick - they think black people are, like, the loudest in the classroom.

Participant 2: True

Participant 1: So, if you say something, you'll be the one that gets in trouble

Participant 2: Cos there's so much bad stick about black people...I've noticed that at college as well

Participant 3: Already, yeah, so basically black people are the worst type and they, like, try to, like, put more pressure on you than a white kid

Interviewer: And you're sent to isolation more than a white kid?

Participant 1: Yeah, definitely.

One participant gave an example of having noticed that there were more Black pupils in the isolation room 'the place where they keep them' - than White pupils and that they were sent there for longer than White pupils.

Participant: 'Every single time I went past [the isolation room] I literally just saw black people. And I asked them what they did, and they tell me their situation. They said that someone else with a different race- colour - done the exact same thing but they just got like a ten-minute and they got isolation and stuff.'

The school from which this participant came had 'a lot' of Black pupils in Years 7 and 10 and fewer in Years 8 and 9. When asked whether Black pupils were seen to get into trouble in class more often than their White counterparts, one participant, from a Somali background, described a situation where teacher bias seemed to influence the way pupils from different backgrounds were treated:

Participant: There's lots of White teachers and Pakistani teachers, and basically, and basically, they treat their own race a little bit differently than the blacks and the Arabs. I don't know if they consider Arabs to be terrorists or black people as nothing. But they treat us differently.

In this participant's previous school, the situation there was described as 'worse':

Participant: It was worse because all the teachers, they were all Pakistani, and majority of the class would be Pakistani as well. So, like we'd be talking, me and my Somali friend and my Pakistani friend, but me and my Somali friend would be the ones getting into trouble. We actually got sent out and she didn't. And whenever I mentioned it, they're like, whenever I mentioned it, oh you treat us differently from the others, they're like, no we don't, she wasn't talking. She was talking right in front of the teacher but the teacher chose to ignore it because of her race.'

The discussion amongst participants towards pupils from GRT communities revealed that this group of young people were thought less well integrated into school life. They were more likely to spend time in isolation, either at on-site units or in the classroom itself, or to drop out of school altogether.

Participants spoke of pupils being sent to on-site isolation units or PRUs where there were more children from GRT backgrounds than from other ethnic groups. Pupils discussed whether the young people in the unit – all boys - were from Romanian, Roma Gypsy Traveller or Roma Traveller communities. One participant said:

'There's like five of them. And they're all in like – I think one of them is in – two of them are in year 10 but then the rest are all in year 9. And it's just, like, most of the time, they're always there. So, like there's no time that you see them not being in the PRU and stuff.'

Some participants thought that although Roma children seemed to be sent to isolation more frequently, 'most of them don't actually misbehave'. By the time they reached Year 11, many Roma children had dropped out of school. One participant said that those in Year 8 appeared to spend time separated from other pupils at the back of the classroom, with more opportunity to 'misbehave':

Participant: 'They like, for example, just recently last week, they were sitting in the back of my maths class and they were face-timing their cousin in Romania. And then, and then Miss told them to put away their phone, and he was just like no. Then afterwards they started playfighting and one jumped on the tables and started running'.

There was a view that teachers did not take things further with some Roma pupils because they went on to repeat the same behaviour and would in any case absent themselves from school.

Participant: 'You can't stop them...they'll continue. Most of them drop out anyways.'

Another participant commented 'They're all on the streets.'

The issue of teachers not taking preventative action with some pupils was discussed among the group. There was one view that teachers would too readily send a pupil out of class, possibly as an example, to prevent further disruption. There was another view that teachers were intimidated by some pupils and were reluctant to risk confrontation. These issues were explored further with teachers and other professionals who worked with excluded young people.

Reasons for exclusion

Students described disagreements that escalated into fights; fighting; talking back to teachers; arguing; swearing - 'that kind of rude stuff'; assaulting teachers; throwing furniture; setting off fire alarms. Participants knew of students who had been violent or had brought weapons or alcohol into school which had resulted in a longer or a permanent exclusion. Some students expressed a mixture of surprise and disapproval that these incidents – which were viewed as serious - had taken place: 'Who slaps a teacher? Who does that!'

Participant: 'I haven't experienced exclusion but one of my close friends has. But she done something that was like, really bad. She like, start swearing at the teacher cos the teacher took her phone away. And she slapped him...she slapped him in the face. She had her phone on. You're not supposed to have your phone on. So, he took it, and she was like 'you can't be taking my phone' de-de-de-de-de. And she just jumped. And then she got exclusion for about three days.'

The participant described that when the pupil came back into school for a meeting to discuss the incident, she reacted in a way which resulted in a permanent exclusion.

Participant: 'Then, she was supposed to have a meeting to try to... but when she came into the meeting, her skirt was like here, she had really long nails, she wasn't – she was like – when they were trying to speak to her, she was like 'yeah' 'whatever' – like she didn't care. So, so I don't think she's allowed to come back to school anymore.'

Exclusion was not necessarily seen as a deterrent in situations where a pupil had done something 'really bad'. It could also be used as a threat:

Participant: Like if you do something really bad they just try to put peer pressure on you. Do you want to get exclusion? Do you want to get exclusion? To get you really, really scared. And really like, oh what shall I do?

Interviewer: But can you like, think of one example of when they would use this threat on you? Like what type of situation?

Participant: Oh, if you throw a chair at the teacher.

This contrasted with the experience of other participants in the group, who described being excluded for less serious reasons, such as hair styles or talking too much in class. Participants were asked whether they knew of instances where young people were 'off-rolled' - that is, asked not to come into school prior to Ofsted visiting or in other circumstances.

Although there were differing opinions as to whether this took place, there was a general opinion that pupils would be threatened with isolation if they did not agree to certain conditions, such as 'not talking': 'They'll be like Ofsted, Ofsted's coming. Yeah. You have to be silent' and 'When Ofsted come, you have to be very quiet or you're getting a detention, isolation'.

In some instances, the threat was carried out:

Participant: 'They [Ofsted] were coming around, and one of this - this boy - had an argument with another boy, and he got put in isolation. Because he was, you're, you're supposed to set a good example and whatever. '

Participants were aware that teachers made efforts to present the school in a good light, but that they also did not report some incidents which would have brought Ofsted along to investigate: 'Something bad happened at my school [description of a safeguarding incident] and I think they didn't wanna tell anyone'.

Form exclusion takes

Being excluded from a lesson was mentioned. A participant who had been 'sent out' for talking, stood outside the classroom for forty minutes. She commented that being sent out was a common practice. In some circumstances, the teacher would forget they were there. Students who had been treated in this way could walk off and maybe get into trouble in the school.

A participant described the 'Focus Room' as a room where pupils could be sent in isolation, sometimes for as long as one week.

Participants spoke about a form of exclusion that involved being sent to a 'Behavioural School'. An example was given of a girl who had been 'beating people up', for which she was put into isolation, then threatening another pupil with a knife, for which she was sent out of school. The place she was sent to (a local PRU) was described as 'not working for her' because it was a 'Behavioural School, but all the bad people are there.' One participant remarked that 'they [the bad people] are all mixed up with each other, so it's much worse.'

The pupil referred to was subsequently 'forced into' elective home education because 'no school would accept her'. It was thought by participants that if she had returned to the area, she would have been at risk of arrest. The situation ended with a permanent exclusion and home schooling.

Another example was given of a girl caught drinking alcohol at school who was immediately excluded and then refused admission to other schools, resulting in home-schooling.

Participant: 'She went to basically, all the schools in [a named area] and they all said that they don't want her. She had to go, like, try find a school in [another named area] but obviously all the schools kind of tell each other what's going on, so no one accepted her. So, she had to start doing online, online school. 'Cos no one wanted her.'

There was a perception amongst the group that 'once you're kicked out of a school' no school will want you, only the 'really bad schools'.

Participants knew of instances where pupils had been sent to a PRU for short periods of time or for part of the school day:

Participant: You're there for 2 weeks interim, you're there for 2 weeks where they sort out your behaviour and then you go back to your normal school. It is, it's different, it varies, you can be at [a named PRU] like completely, it's not necessarily for kids who are bad, badly behaved, it's a mixture of people's anxieties, it can't be in social situations, things like that, it's a PRU for, like, young people basically'.

Another participant knew of a pupil who was in 'the isolation place' which was essentially part of, or linked with, a PRU on the school premises. This pupil would spend part of the school day, or longer, with meals brought into him.

Participant: 'He's not in form times, like, ever. So just recently, just today, he came, but like sometimes the teachers, like choose if they want him to go the lesson or not because it's like, they keep them in the isolation place, but he's not in isolation, he's in the PRU. So, it's in the same place as the isolation, but he's like doing the PRU thing'.

Another participant described on-site isolation units as an 'internal base that...if behaviour can't be managed, they are like, escorted'- similar to an internal exclusion but for extended periods:

Participant: 'It's a long-term thing, they can be there. They're on shorter timetables. They're escorted to lessons. Or they're there, the work is given to them and it's a smaller class, effectively, just for them'.

Conditions in isolation

Pupils sent to an isolation room were there on their own, they did not have a lunch break and food was brought to them. The choice of food was limited, such as a sandwich, while other pupils in the school who were not in isolation had the usual choices.

Participant: 'They go, they bring, they give you, like, in my school they give you two choices – no three. Cheese sandwich, cheese and butter, chicken and cheese. And then they give you some like cucumbers or something'.

This participant commented that 'It's like prison food.'

Length of time in isolation

Time standing outside the classroom could be forty minutes, or more if 'forgotten' by the teacher:

Participant: 'My teacher, sometimes she sends people out and she forgets about them. Like, we'll have a long lesson and it will be like, a long like, at the start of the lesson, they'll be sent out. And they'll be out there for like 40 minutes. And I'm like Miss, do you remember that they out there? She's like 'I'm sorry!' (Laughs among everyone.) And she goes out. Like how can you forget a child? And then by the time she goes out, they're gone somewhere. They're gone. Like, cos' they're not just gonna stand there for 40 minutes. You're gonna like – you're gonna like -
Interviewer: So, when they're gone, then what happens? Do they get into trouble for it?

Participant: They get into more trouble'.

After-school detention might be for one or two hours. Students were aware that these forms of exclusion could escalate to being sent home for three or more days. Permanent exclusion might follow. Exclusion was used as a threat.

6.5. Interviews with teachers and other professionals

The aim of the interviews with teachers and other professionals was to obtain insights into how and why schools were carrying out informal exclusions and what interviewees thought about the practice. Interviewees were asked about their awareness of the practice, which pupils were affected, how decisions were made and the form exclusion took. The objective was to gather information that could be used to influence and change policy and practice on informal school exclusions and by doing so, help to bring down the number of exclusions and suggest alternatives.

Methodology

A semi-structured interview schedule of nine questions was drawn up to be used in face-to-face or telephone interviews. (See Appendix 2.) The interview schedule could be tailored to the professional backgrounds of participants.

Participants contacted included teachers and support staff from mainstream and supplementary schools, youth work, juvenile offending institutions, voluntary organisations supporting young people from specific ethnic communities, a Pupil Referral Unit and an Alternative Provision centre.

Thirty-three individuals from thirteen organisations were contacted for interview. They came from organisations with whom ROTA had previously established links and who had expressed an interest in contributing to the research. Because informal exclusions often take place unofficially and are therefore difficult for practising teachers and others to talk about openly, research protocols, ethics and guidelines were drawn up to protect the confidentiality of participants.

Participants were briefed by email prior to interviews taking place and sent the interview questions in advance, with the opportunity to have a telephone call to discuss aspects of the research in more detail.

All names and organisations were anonymised.

Interviewed - 6

Refused – 5

Withdrew – 3

Postponed/cancelled - 19

Eighteen of the postponements, including participants who had agreed to be interviewed, occurred when the Covid-19 outbreak closed schools, youth centres and other educational provision and furloughed staff on 23rd March 2019. Links could not be re-established.

Participants were interviewed face-to-face or over the phone, using a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 2a.)

Interviews were audio recorded.

Analysis

A thematic analysis of data from the interviews was carried out, based on the responses to the questions and topics explored in the interview schedule (Appendix 2a.) The analysis sought to relate, or corroborate perceptions given by the interviewees with statistical evidence and research findings from a range of sources including governmental reports and reviews from the Department for Education, the Timpson Review of School Exclusion, Ofsted, the Children's Commissioner, the National Crime Agency, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Alternative Provision and Exclusion and a range of independent or voluntary sector organisations with an interest in school exclusions including the Royal Society of Arts, the Children's Society, JUSTICE, the Institute for Race Relations, Social Finance UK, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and others.

Knowledge and awareness of interviewees about informal exclusion

Participants were asked what they knew about the practice of informal exclusion, that is, circumstances where there is an absence of formal recording and reporting, as in managed moves, off-rolling, unaccounted disappearances and other, unofficial or illegal practices to remove children from school.

There was a perception that informal exclusions tended to take place 'under the radar' and could not be easily quantified. It was thought that some schools excluded pupils informally more frequently than others, with a tendency for Academy Trusts to be the 'worst offenders'. (Organisation A.) Schools which are academies were thought by interviewees to carry out more exclusions of all types. This perception was explored by the Royal Society of Arts. Drawing on data from the DfE, the RSA concluded in an article published in August 2019 'pupils are 1.5 times more likely to be permanently excluded from a sponsored secondary school and twice as likely to be fixed-term excluded' than those from a local authority maintained secondary school. (TheRSA. 2019.)

One interviewee knew of the problem of informal exclusion through working directly with parents of predominantly Irish Traveller and English Gypsy families. The organisation she worked for assisted families needing help with legal aid and it took up issues of discrimination. Some work with schools had been undertaken but usually 'at the point when communication has broken down'. It was observed by this interviewee that schools use informal exclusion to avoid on-the-record fixed-term or permanent exclusion orders. It tended to be used with GRT children to manage behaviour; to address non-attendance; in instances where children are being bullied. Bullying often featured in calls from parents. (Organisation A)

One interviewee had worked as a teaching assistant and tutor, supporting children who had experienced exclusion or who were at risk of exclusion. This interviewee observed that when children absented themselves from school, meetings were usually set up with parents, carers and the pupil to discuss the matter. However, in some instances establishing contact failed and she knew of one case where a child had been 'lost to the system'.

An interviewee from a youth organisation working closely with families and children from a local community remarked that schools use informal exclusion as a way of navigating, or getting round the system to avoid scrutiny:

'There is no paperwork to speak of and it tends to go under the radar...schools do not acknowledge the practice – they avoid making reference to it.' Organisation B

She added that informal exclusions are not 'vocalised' by schools. She had rarely heard schools mention them. (Organisation B)

One of the reasons why decisions to exclude are unclear and schools are reluctant to discuss them with parents may be attributed to confusion around what is and is not lawful. ROTA is in favour of any proposals which enhance better training for teachers and school leaders on forms of exclusion which schools can/cannot lawfully take, as advocated by JUSTICE (2019.)

The background of young people who have experienced informal exclusion

Participants were asked what they knew, from their professional experience, about the background of young people who had been informally excluded or who were at risk of informal exclusion.

The purpose of this was to explore participants' perceptions and attitudes towards pupils who had been informally excluded and whether they knew of, or were aware of, an unconscious bias towards specific groups.

When participants mentioned the race or ethnicity of pupils who had been informally excluded, it was often in conjunction with other factors going on in the background of their lives.

One interviewee who had worked as a teaching assistant said that she mainly supported children from disadvantaged or minority ethnic backgrounds. She said that children she had worked with who had been informally excluded sometimes had troubled backgrounds or were in stressful situations which affected their learning and social relationships.

The Teaching Assistant who was interviewed gave an example of a girl who had been moved around the care system. The pressure of being with a new adoptive family and attending a

new school at which she felt other pupils did not accept her, was difficult to cope with. She started to miss lessons, then school, a situation which was not picked up by the school until it was too late to intervene and support her.

The Teaching Assistant also knew of a child whose father and brother were in prison. There appeared to be little support for the family, resulting in the child missing school for longer and longer periods.

An interviewee from an organisation which worked with children from Eastern Europe mentioned that some of the young people who had been informally excluded were in care. She also knew of asylum seekers and others in very challenging circumstances whose first needs were for food and basic necessities e.g. during the COVID-19 crisis. They had minimal, or no access to the internet or other online services. (Organisation C)

Some interviewees said they were aware of a common perception that young Black boys appeared to experience informal exclusion the most often, but that this did not always hold true. An interviewee, who had worked in many schools that had a diverse ethnic and socio-economic intake observed that there was 'no specific group of children' she could say was disproportionately affected. She said:

'There is a prevalent view - it seems 'typical' - for Black boys to get excluded, but in my experience, children from other ethnic groups also experience informal exclusion, including Asian girls who got suspended from one of the schools I worked in.'

Interviewee, (Organisation D)

A persistent view of GRT boys and girls as being 'outside the system by choice' was acknowledged by one participant as a commonly held view. However, the interviewee, whose organisation supported GRT young people who had been excluded, cited other factors in their backgrounds to consider apart from ethnicity. Although it is known that GRT pupils account for a high number of exclusions from school - both formal and informal - their backgrounds can be very diverse. Economic disadvantage had an influence on some children - mainly boys - dropping out of school after Year 9 to pursue work opportunities but this could be offset by educational opportunities that included apprenticeships. A commonly held view - or stereotype - reinforced by the media, of GRT girls leaving education early was not necessarily the case. The interviewee knew of mothers, from all kinds of family backgrounds, who were very keen for their daughters to remain in school and obtain formal qualifications. (Organisation A)

Although the interviews indicated a perception that children from some ethnic communities were excluded more frequently, it was difficult to pin this down as a significant contributory factor. Other factors – their backgrounds or domestic circumstances - were cited.

The participants interviewed were aware of the statistics on Global Majority pupils and exclusion rates but did not think that this was an adequate explanation for them being

disproportionately affected. The Department for Education's Statistical Releases for 2017/18 and 2018/19 reported a higher rate of fixed-term and permanent exclusions among pupils from Somali, Black Caribbean, Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities. (DfE. 2019a, 2019b, 2020a.) Statistics for informal exclusions among these groups were elusive and could not be used to prove or disprove doubts expressed by teachers and other professionals interviewed by ROTA that race is not a factor with much bearing on decisions to informally exclude.

However, the focus groups with young people indicated that an unconscious bias against race was thought responsible for some groups of pupils being singled out for informal exclusion.

ROTA acknowledged a difficulty in reconciling these views, as there was very little substantiating literature available. The Royal Society of Arts reported that if there was a degree of bias in the way exclusions were carried out, it might be attributed to some teachers not being fully aware of their duty under the Equality Act 2010 'not to discriminate against a pupil by excluding...on the basis of a protected characteristic'. A difficulty that could be countered by training across ethnic backgrounds for teachers, coupled with better representation of Global Majority teachers in schools. (TheRSA. 2020.) This is a view with which ROTA agrees.

The circumstances of young people who have been informally excluded.

Participants cited a range of external factors influencing decisions to exclude and referred less directly to the question of race discrimination or bias. Disadvantage/deprived circumstances, learning difficulties and 'troubled' backgrounds of children experiencing informal exclusion came up frequently. The Children's Society also considered whether there could be factors in a child's background that were more likely to predispose them to being excluded from school. (Children's Society. 2021.)

In exploring this aspect, interviewees thought it was important to consider whether explanations about the individual and family circumstances of young people who have been informally excluded might seem to shift the blame away from institutional racism, discrimination or prejudice. The research recognised the need to maintain the focus on the disproportionate impact of informal exclusion on Global Majority pupils and the fact that the practice is illegal. The argument that individual and family circumstances are a contributory factor in young people experiencing exclusion might justify the behaviour of school.

Disadvantage, adverse home circumstances, trauma, depression and mental health issues were mentioned in the backgrounds of young people who had experienced informal exclusion or who were at risk of exclusion. Learning difficulties or SEND were thought to be contributory factors in some, but not all, cases. In the Traveller community, some young people were in receipt of FSM, but not all were eligible and the take-up was thought probably not as high as with other communities.

It was observed by an interviewee from a youth organisation that many young people did not fit the mould of having been diagnosed with SEND or ADHD or other learning difficulties, but tended to have something in their backgrounds that was troubling:

'Family break-ups or they had witnessed or been in fights or seen friends knifed – the 'usual things' we have got accustomed to hearing about'. (Organisation D)

One interviewee who was a Teaching Assistant said that children she had worked with who had been informally excluded sometimes had troubled backgrounds or were in stressful situations which affected their learning and social relationships. She gave an example of a pupil whose stressful home situation contributed to his informal exclusion. The father and brother of the pupil were in prison and there appeared to be little support for the family, resulting in him missing school for longer and longer periods. She said:

'[There was] a student whose home life was very tricky as well and his father and older brother were both in prison and his mother... didn't... seem to be present most of the time, if not all, and because this student was, as far as the mother was concerned, going to school and would naturally turn up at the school. And we couldn't... when we realised that this was what was happening - because he would bring some notes from his mother and when we tried to call the mother never picked up...so, what happened was that, you know, the students have reported that they've actually seen him in school uniform but he wasn't turning up.' (Teaching Assistant)

Another example was given by a Teaching Assistant of a girl who had been in care and was going through an unsettling adoption process. She was thought by the interviewee to be in a situation 'that was quite vulnerable for her'. Her adoptive parents seemed to be the only ones she could turn to for help when she joined the school. She had not felt welcome in the class, where the behaviour of some children seemed unfriendly and unkind.

'She would say oh I haven't been in the school, so I don't feel comfortable being in class. I don't feel comfortable with being with the other students, because the students don't...they don't look at me nice, they don't treat me nice.' (Teaching Assistant)

The pupil started to miss lessons, a situation which was dealt with by the school allowing her to go off on her own with a book to the school office or another room where she felt more at ease. Little provision was made for her to learn: 'even then, she wasn't being taught'. Instead of dealing with what was going on in class, the school seemed to attribute her discomfort to other factors in her background. (Teaching Assistant)

The retreat from lessons to the school office or elsewhere in the school was known to the Teaching Assistant to take place with other pupils as well. In some cases, however, external factors had very little to do with the pupils not being in class. The real reason for their withdrawal could be overlooked by the school, even when evidence was emerging of bullying, harassment or intimidation by peers, rather than some 'external' circumstance. An

example was cited by the Teaching Assistant interviewed, where one pupil had been subjected to such bullying that she could no longer stay in the classroom or the school because of the trauma she had experienced.

One interviewee said that during the COVID-19 crisis, she knew that some young people at risk of exclusion, or who had experienced exclusion from school were reporting depression and mental health issues. (Organisation C)

In young people who had been diagnosed as having experienced trauma, one interviewee thought that this was something which could be overlooked by professionals. In her own capacity, having carried out research into the subject with reference to 'behaviour as communication' she realised that there was a lack of training for those dealing with trauma and a lack of awareness of the 'containment of emotions' aspect.²

ROTA shared the concerns of those interviewed that resources and programmes of support for young people at risk of exclusion were needed. However, it did not seem from what was said that many schools had taken on board the fact that informal exclusion is an illegal practice in the first place, that should not be used, or justified, for any pupil.

Factors influencing the decision to informally exclude

The processes by which decisions to exclude are made are ill-defined. This goes for permanent, fixed-term and informal exclusions, with a 'growing concern around the quality of decision-making' that was remarked upon by the JUSTICE working party in 2019. The basis on which the judgement to informally exclude a pupil was explored in the interviews with teachers and other professionals working with young people.

Participants were asked if they knew of the reasons or factors which led to pupils being informally excluded, and to give examples.

Behavioural factors

Behavioural factors leading to informal exclusion were cited by interviewees. Examples given ranged from non-attendance and arriving late for lessons to not wearing the right uniform. The reasons behind these behavioural factors were thought to be complex and were explored further in the interviews. One interviewee observed:

'Arriving late or not having the right school clothes might be due to home difficulties, financial hardship, other disturbances in their lives or cultural factors.'
(Organisation D)

It was noted that some schools appeared to issue sanctions for relatively trivial transgressions – operating what is known as the 'zero-tolerance' approach. This has its critics. Opportunity for discussion about any rule-breaking, no matter how small, is

² This interviewee referred to a programme of support focusing on how those affected by trauma can be helped to deal with their feelings/distress so that they have some control over how they express their emotions

automatically closed, with the effect that pupils feel unable to respond or explain. (Children's Society. 2021.)

One interviewee said she was aware that 'there are significant periods when exclusions seem to occur – end of term, exam terms, Years 9, 10 & 11 especially.' The reasons were thought to be 'behavioural', with examples given such as 'skipping school' 'being confrontational or disruptive' and in stricter schools, not having the right kit/equipment. (Organisation B)

Another interviewee cited 'persistent disruption' as a factor/excuse leading to exclusion with Irish Traveller children. Children from these communities, it was thought, tend to be treated as adults from the age of 13 or so and have status as such in their community. The interviewee commented that

'Being treated as juveniles at school is at odds with their self-image and can result in cultural misunderstandings at school.' (Organisation A)

Another interviewee who was a Teaching Assistant said that 'fighting' was a frequent reason for pupils being removed from the class, as was 'repeat behaviour' that could escalate to informal exclusion.

Learning difficulties

Learning difficulties, such as ADHD and dyslexia were thought to contribute to the informal exclusion of some pupils. Statistical evidence indicates that a disproportionate number of children with SEND experience informal exclusion.

The Children's Commissioner in 2017 pointed out that in the official statistics from the Department for Education 'Over three quarters of pupils in PRUs have some form of special educational need; that they account for 'half of all permanent exclusions despite only representing 14% of the overall school population' and speculated that children with SEND may also be 'disproportionately affected by illegal exclusions' (Children's Commissioner, 2017.)

Among GRT children, it was observed that learning needs were not being picked up through the usual assessment and statementing processes. One interviewee observed that an unconscious bias against GRT children appeared to be a contributory factor in exclusion. (Organisation A)

An interviewee who worked as a teaching assistant had supported some children who had no learning difficulties at all and were in fact considered above averagely intelligent. She said:

'We had one student who was in year 9, and the situation is a little different, but she was a very good student in the sense of 'good' in this kind of like ideal student when it comes to things. The school record, uh her attendance was good, her uh you know her work was good, and uh she was quite active and engaging but she lacked the social skills so she couldn't get on with the other students.' (Teaching Assistant)

The reason why this pupil was not in lessons – and sometimes not in school – was because, having been subjected to bullying and sexual intimidation, she withdrew to a ‘safe’ office space to do her work, or sometimes went home to work. The pupil’s needs had not been picked up by the school. There was some indication that the school attributed her behaviour to external circumstances and not to the fact that she was being bullied at school to such a degree that she had been traumatised.

A lack of communication

A lack of communication was cited as a factor in putting children at higher risk of being informally excluded. Individual accounts were given with examples where a lack of communication between school and parents or carers had caused anxiety and frustration. Parents had not been informed about the process of exclusion, or not contacted about accessing support or had not been told their child was at risk of exclusion. There were instances where communication had broken down completely.

In the view of one interviewee, a common factor for those at risk of exclusion was that parents were not always sure of their rights and schools were not always forthcoming with communication and support:

‘Meetings would be held [about the exclusion/potential exclusion] with two or three teachers present but the parent would be there just on their own’. (Organisation D)

Parental communication was key to preventing situations becoming so serious that pupils were excluded.

One interviewee, a teaching assistant, described a breakdown in communication which led to contact with the pupil completely dropping off.

‘We tried sort of like... bringing him in, give him a mentor, tried to make it much easier for him... but it got to the situation where - there was - after we – there was no way to get in touch with the parent. And maybe because she realised that we could only formally exclude him if we - if she's aware of it. If we had spoken with her, if we had taken measures like to kind of like deal with the situation including the parents, the councillors, the mentors...but she chose not be in touch with the school at all. So there's nothing we could do uh - it happened to sort of like we - suggested moving him to another school possibly that he might turn up to but... we would have liked to suggest a school but we couldn't take any actions without the parents at all. So, uh, there's nothing we could do and then that was that. That child sort of ended up being lost to the school. And to the parent to be honest.’ (Teaching Assistant)

Being kept in the dark about what was going on in the classroom was thought to escalate the situation towards exclusion. This was mentioned by two participants who had personal experience of their child being informally excluded. Parents could be unaware of difficulties their children were having at school, prior to being excluded, and subsequently not aware of how to go about getting support, or what the grounds for exclusion were, or how to discuss the situation/challenge it. It was observed that some schools were not forthcoming in communicating, or even contacting parents about concerns.

This view had been expressed by participants in a previous study by ROTA (2012) which indicated many instances where information about informal exclusions was not forthcoming to parents and where records were not being kept.

In Local Authority maintained schools and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), according to the Children's Commissioner's Briefing Report (2017) there was an 'absence of formal recording and reporting' for Managed Moves, off-rolling and disappearances from school that could not be accounted for. The Children's Commissioner also referred to other educational settings where statistics were not being collected or reported in a way which reflected the true picture of who was being excluded and why, including Alternative Provision, Home Education and unregistered schools.

The Royal Society of Arts similarly found accountability wanting in the obligations of schools to monitor and report instances of exclusion, including internal exclusions. (TheRSA. March 2020.)

A lack of communication or transparency at all levels and in all types of educational provision appeared to characterise informal exclusions. This was seen in the responses to ROTA's Freedom of Information Requests to Local Authorities. It was apparent that data collected from schools on informal exclusions broken down by ethnicity was often incomplete, insufficiently detailed or communicated in different ways by different sources. It resulted in a difficulty in discerning with any degree of accuracy whether some groups of children from ethnic minorities were being disproportionately affected. This is important because if the data is not well communicated, it cannot be used by teachers to improve their practice or by parents to challenge informal exclusions.

ROTA would like to see Local Authorities and the DfE ensuring that schools keep records on informal exclusions and that the data is broken down by ethnicity in a way that makes it easier to discern and communicate disproportionality with greater accuracy.

Other external factors thought to increase the likelihood of informal exclusion

In 2020, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported that up to 550,000 children in the UK were living in poverty hunger. (JRF. 2020.) Hunger affects the ability of young people to cope with daily emotional and educational challenges as well as impairing cognitive ability. It was one of the external factors that interviewees thought could affect children's behaviour - 'ignoring the teacher' or 'not responding to the lesson' leading to them being informally excluded.

Children disengaging with learning - characterised by sustained inattentiveness or lack of concentration for example - could result in sanctions such as detention or being put into isolation at school. The reasons for children exhibiting these signs were not necessarily picked up. (Organisation C)

One interviewee thought that hunger was a contributory factor for some young people, as was tiredness. Her organisation tried to address this by giving them a meal and finding out what they needed to help them learn. (Organisation B)

From the interviews, there were concerns that there were cases where schools were not thought sufficiently alert to the signs of hunger or fatigue in children. These assertions were based on the observations of a small number of interviewees and may not be representative of the wider picture.

However, child hunger was clearly a concern of Government, which pledged an extension of the 2018 free Breakfast Programme for children of school age to 2023. Schools were invited to apply to the fund in January 2021. (DfE. 2021.)

Awareness of links with juvenile offending

When looking at factors associated with informal exclusion, the subject of juvenile offending arose. Interviewees were asked about their awareness of links between juvenile offending and exclusion. This question was prompted by media reports and other research such as that from the National Crime Agency (2019) suggesting that young people who had been excluded from school, whether formally or informally, were at risk of being exploited, groomed or drawn into criminal activity.

Other research – and media reports - have tended to reinforce this perception and continue to do so. It was of interest that a perceived link between school exclusions, crime and exploitation was the subject of Children’s Society study in 2021, which asked pupils what their thoughts were on the issue. It appeared that some young people made this association, referring to ‘gangs’ or ‘gang kids’ who had been excluded from school, some of them to Alternative Provision or PRUs. (Children’s Society, 2021.)

When talking to interviewees, it was emphasised that the view is open to challenge, and has been contested by the Institute for Race Relations:

‘Those working with excluded young people are rightly concerned about what has been described as the PRU to Prison pipeline – a concept which provides ‘a useful way of describing an alarming trajectory of the criminalisation of young Black students’ (IRR. 2020.)

The IRR argued that instead of tacitly accepting a view of young people in Alternative Provision as on a ‘predetermined journey to unemployment and eventual criminality’ that immediate action should be taken to stop the ‘ever-expanding exclusive education system’.

Informal exclusion may in some circumstances increase the risk of involvement with offending for some children. On the other hand, children who may be involved in, or at risk of being drawn into offending, might be at increased risk of informal exclusion. The issue was explored from these two perspectives.

One interviewee said she knew of informally excluded pupils who have been involved in juvenile offending, from her time working with the Youth Offending Service. She said:

‘Children get sent home from school, they are alone at home, often parents are working and...they are unsupervised.’ (Organisation D)

Juvenile offending of a serious kind, such as that involving weapons or drugs – was thought no more prevalent in GRT families than in other populations, possibly less so, although ‘petty offences’ were probably on a par with other teenagers. (Organisation A)

It was thought by one interviewee (Organisation D) that young people informally excluded from school and left to their own devices whilst alone at home is one risk factor for being drawn into offending behaviour. However, informal exclusion should not be looked at in isolation from other factors which have bearing. These include a lack of parental boundary-setting or a disruptive home life, together with a lack of support for families struggling with adverse circumstances.

The vulnerability of children informally excluded from school and on the street was emphasised by the interviewee from Organisation D, who regarded them as ‘easy prey’ for others involved in criminal activity, which might include theft, weapons, drugs, county lines or sexual exploitation. She said:

‘Vulnerable children on the street are only human in their need for friendship and security and can be picked out and exploited [by those already involved in offending].’ (Organisation D)

This interviewee added that such children can ‘get drawn in – they are targeted outside school’.

The problem was further explored in terms of the schools’ responsibility for keeping young people safe and aware of the dangers. It was observed that there are sometimes assemblies on ‘danger factors’ but these are not always effective. In summary, teenagers might be aware of what constitutes a danger, but ‘don’t always think they might end up in a harmful situation personally. (Organisation D)

The role of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) was raised by one interviewee, who reported that among the GRT community, there was a negative view of these units in terms of keeping children safe. To summarise, it was thought that there was a distinct wish from mothers to avoid their children being sent to PRUs, so consequently children end up not at school. Families are highly protective of their children and fear they will get caught up in crime associated with PRUs. They want them to remain in education, where they are safer. (Organisation A)

Pupil Referral Units as places to avoid was also a view held by Focus Group participants, who thought they were ‘where the bad people are’. Similar views have been expressed elsewhere. Some children who were interviewed in the Children’s Society study of 2021 made observations about the ‘prison’ like aspect of PRUs which had the effect of making them want to behave as if they were in prison. (Children’s Society. 2021.)

Those who were interviewed were aware that that Pupil Referral Units can provide specialist learning support for some young people. Pupils can be legitimately sent to Pupil Referral Units, in circumstances where they might struggle in mainstream education and where the PRU can offer one-to-one support not otherwise available. This is not always the

case. There is a perception that some pupils will get sent to a PRU for ‘behavioural reasons’ and once there, they stay.

‘They are told, if they behave, they will get sent back to their mainstream school. But this never, or rarely happens. It is an empty promise. Even if they try to improve, this will not result in them going back.’ (Organisation D)

To explore the role of PRUs and experiences of people working in them more fully, three teachers from PRUs were contacted during the course of the research. It was not possible to conduct any on- the-record interviews, for reasons of permission not being given by the PRU (one teacher) and promotion/move to another job (two teachers).

It was thought that instances of GRT communities’ involvement in criminal activity tend to receive disproportionate media coverage that perpetuates stereotypes. One interviewee commented:

‘Juvenile offending of a serious kind – weapons, drugs – is no more prevalent in GRT families than in other populations, possibly less so, although petty offences are probably on a par with other teenagers’ (Organisation A)

One interviewee knew of young adults, with whom she had previously worked, who were once in situations where they had been involved in offending. She was aware of the perceived link between exclusion and offending but said:

‘School to Prison Pipeline’ which is a phrase I have come across, that gives a skewed impression of progression from behavioural problems at school inevitably escalating’. (Organisation B)

It was her view that young people could be demonised, vilified, labelled by the media and said:

‘I am concerned about the ‘pejorative language’ used to describe young people who are in bad situations. Even the term ‘gang’ is unhelpful.’ (Organisation B)

The ‘Pipeline to Prison’ issue was further discussed by participants at ROTA’s conference in January 2020 (See section on Round Table Discussions.)

The form that informal exclusion takes.

Informal exclusion was often thought to take the form of behaviour management.

The issue of permanent and fixed-term exclusion as a behaviour sanction was explored. It was clear that the Department for Education supports exclusions as part of a school’s disciplinary strategy:

‘The Government supports Head Teachers to use exclusion as a sanction where warranted’ (DfE. 2017)

Acceptance of this position can be found among education providers and other education experts in debates on the subject. Members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Alternative Provision who took part in the Parliamentary Debate on the Timpson Review on

Exclusions (September 2021) were inclined to agree that exclusion needed to be kept as an appropriate behavioural measure for schools to use at their discretion, albeit with caution in the case of children with SEND, in social care or otherwise thought of as vulnerable.

It is worth noting that an anomaly exists between policy and practice, as statistically, children with SEND and from some ethnic minority communities, continue to be over-represented in permanent and fixed-term exclusions.

The Children's Commissioner in 2017 reported that in official statistics from the Department of Education 'Over three quarters of pupils in PRUs have some form of special educational need' and that they account for 'half of all permanent exclusions despite only representing 14% of the overall school population'. The lack of data on informal exclusions was noted but it was speculated that children with SEND may also be 'disproportionately affected by illegal exclusions.' (Children's Commissioner. 2017.)

The use of informal exclusion as a behaviour sanction was explored in the interviews with teachers and other professionals working with young people.

Behaviour and Discipline in Schools (DfE. 2016) mentioned that disciplinary action or sanctions can take the form of missing break time, detention – for which parental consent is not required - during lunchtime, after school or at the weekend and temporary or permanent exclusion. Ofsted's stated position was that seclusion or isolation rooms should be in the school's Behaviour Policy. However, there was no mention that any of these sanctions should be recorded.

Interviewees were asked to describe forms of informal exclusion that they had witnessed or carried out. It seemed that the use of informal exclusion as a sanction against pupils seen as 'disruptive' was commonplace in some schools.

A Teaching Assistant interviewed remarked that for some pupils who struggled with certain subjects, or with teachers that they did not get on well with, it came to the point 'where the policy was if they seem disruptive, remove them from the class'.

Exam leave, lunchtime exclusion, isolation on the school premises, managed moves and temporary placements elsewhere, such as to a PRU, were mentioned in interviews.

An organisation working with Traveller families found that the most practised form of informal exclusion is 'cooling off' or sending home from school at lunch time or for half a day. Bullied children are often sent off site, and managed moves are probably more common with GRT communities, particularly in conjunction with SEN/disruptive behaviour. The interviewee commented that

'Multi-Academy Trusts have a higher rate of informally excluding GRT children and manage to avoid Fair Access Protocols³ in a way which is quite concerning.'
(Organisation A)

³ Fair Access Protocols are guidelines to schools for ensuring that the school's intake reflects a proportionate balance of children with Protected Characteristics

One interviewee identified the practice of 'exam leave':

'Being sent out of school pre-GCSE. The young people who have been sent home [might/do] come in for the exam, but no provision has been made for them to study or revise at home. They are not followed up, no tuition is provided.' (Organisation D)

An interviewee who was a Teaching Assistant mentioned 'parking' - a way of sending a child out of class to the school office or elsewhere in the school. There would be very little in terms of teaching or learning support, so pupils would often wander off around the school, getting into more trouble. This view was echoed by Focus Group participants.

'And then what happens is that the child would see that you know, I'm not really doing anything, I'm not really learning anything. So, instead of turning up to the office that they've been parked in - because nobody is going to run after them if they don't turn up - they would, they would just go around the school and... that would kind of like add a level to their behaviour record.' (Teaching Assistant)

The use of isolation in booths or secluded rooms was one of the more troubling measures spoken about by interviewees.

One interviewee knew of secondary school students being sent to the 'Naughty Room', a facility where they had to remain for a period that could be 'two or three weeks' sometimes, and in her view, was 'over-used, as are all forms of informal exclusion'.

It was further thought that most schools used internal 'isolation' tactics, referring to them by different terminologies, but amounting to the same thing. This interviewee had not personally seen the use of 'isolation booths' (where students must sit in a small booth facing the wall with minimal social contact) so could not be sure whether these were in use. She had seen rooms where students were sent to, to sit in silence around a table or tables, in a different part of the school, sometimes for extended periods. (Organisation D)

One interviewee who had worked as a teaching assistant gave a description of an isolation room and the conditions under which children were isolated. She said:

'They're removed from having interactions with the students. They're put into a room virtually by themselves with a member of staff and for the whole day... a person can go home for oh, a couple of days, a couple of weeks, depending on what the situation is like - a kind of, well, like a punishment, for whatever the child has done but...it - it didn't seem like, didn't work effectively because all you did was remove them from people. You didn't teach them how to deal with the situation better.' (Teaching Assistant)

Another interviewee was highly critical of the form 'detention' takes and what it constitutes. She had heard of the practice of 'isolation' being used by schools and commented:

'It is the language of prison. It is punitive language. This way of describing measures to deal with pupils can affect the social development of young people who are subjected to it' (Organisation B)

ROTA had concerns that harsh and punitive forms of informal exclusion as described by interviewees, were taking place. The fact that statutory guidance from Ofsted did not refer to any obligation for schools to record instances when isolation rooms are used does nothing to discourage the practice. Interviewees questioned whether the use of isolation did anything to improve pupils' 'behaviour' when the cause of the behaviour had not been looked into or discussed with parents or carers.

It is of interest that during the Covid-19 lockdown, a new checklist on behaviour and attendance was issued. (DfE 2020.) It advised schools to revise their behaviour policies and consider the effect of the lockdown on pupils, whose disengagement with education could result in increased incidence of poor behaviour. The fact that the checklist reminded schools that 'any disciplinary exclusion even for short periods must be consistent with legislation' is to be welcomed. Furthermore, the return to school offers an opportunity for schools to improve engagement with parents and carers of pupils at risk of disengagement through absence or poor behaviour, and to provide specific support.

ROTA takes the view that a renewed emphasis on understanding the underlying causes of behavioural changes and a promise of better support is a positive move in reducing the use of informal exclusion.

Off-rolling

There was speculation from those whom ROTA interviewed that some children were being removed from class in an unlawful practice known as off-rolling. 'Going on exam leave' 'sent home to study' 'home schooling' were referred to by interviewees. Some knew that it was 'probably' being carried out but did not have direct experience or specific examples.

ROTA speculated that because off-rolling can take different guises and the extent of the practice is difficult to gauge, interviewees were less likely to be aware of it or to have concrete evidence. At ROTA's conference a presentation drew the practice of off-rolling to the attention of delegates, who subsequently discussed ways to make others more alert to it happening.

The problem of off-rolling however, was of concern to the Timpson Review of 2018.

In 2018, The Timpson Review published its report on School Exclusion, focusing on permanent and fixed-term exclusions. It acknowledged that off-rolling or 'exclusions in all but name' was taking place.

In the Government's formal response to the Timpson Review in May 2019, it was stated:

'We will work with Ofsted to define and tackle the practice of 'off rolling' whereby children are removed from school rolls without formal exclusion, in ways that are in

the interests of the school rather than the pupil'. (Department for Education. 2019b.)

The difficulty for the Government to 'define and tackle the practice of off-rolling' was the lack of data on children who had been off-rolled.

Ofsted's analysis of school census data for 'exceptional levels of pupil movements' for the period between January 2017 and January 2018 stated that the destinations of 'about half' of the 20,000 pupils leaving state-funded secondary school between Y10 and Y11 were 'unknown'. There had been an increase in the number of schools that had 'exceptional pupil movements' from 300 schools in 2016/17 to 340 schools in 2017/18, but it was added, 'not all exceptional moves' could be attributed to off-rolling. 'Being unable to track pupils with the data currently available' was made clear by Ofsted. This was also true of off-rolled pupils becoming home educated, whom it was reported also 'cannot be tracked.' (Ofsted, 2019.)

The House of Commons Education Committee Inquiry into Alternative Provision (2018) considered that off-rolling had come about partly because of increasing pressure on schools to keep their academic scores up, as measured in a framework known as Progress 8 Scores. The issue of Progress 8 Scores as a contributory factor in a rise in exclusions was noted by the Centre for Social Justice (2018.)

In a survey conducted by YouGov on behalf of Ofsted in 2019 it was stated:

'Half of those [teachers] that responded to the survey said that the real reason for schools to off-roll is to manipulate the league tables' (YouGov for Ofsted. 2019.)

The House of Commons Education Committee Inquiry in 2018 considered that although it was up to Ofsted to ensure that schools did not off-roll pupils, it was not solely their responsibility:

'We do not think that Ofsted should take sole responsibility for tackling off-rolling. Off-rolling is in part driven by school policies created by the Department for Education. The Department cannot wash its hand of the issue, just as schools cannot wash theirs of their pupils.' (HoC Education Committee Inquiry. Para 34, p. 14.)

The problem in addressing 'the interests of the pupil' is the lack of guidance and support for parents to understand what their rights are and how to resist off-rolling. Survey data from YouGov indicated that teachers who were aware of the practice were concerned about this aspect:

'Parents are pressured to accept off-rolling and many teachers think more support is needed for them, especially for those with the least understanding of their child's rights and/or Education and Language (EAL) needs' (YouGov for Ofsted. 2019)

In cases where children were off-rolled, in order to avoid a permanent exclusion for example, parents and carers took on – or were persuaded by the school to take on - the

responsibility of home educating. This was a topic which was of concern to many of those interviewed.

Elective Home Education

Elective Home Education can be an informed decision taken by parents. A picture emerged from ROTA's interviews – and from the Round Table discussions at ROTA's January 2020 Conference - of a range of circumstances whereby pupils might be home educated.

In some instances, it was thought that pupils might be referred by the school or other professionals, for elective home education – if a pupil is physically unwell or has mental health problems or other conditions requiring rest, support and recuperation out of school for example.

The Local Government Association reported that a rise in exclusions was contributing to an increase in the number of children educated at home. Keeping track of children who are being home schooled is hampered by a patchy system of registration:

‘It is difficult to ascertain exactly how many children are being home-schooled and where they are located’ (LGA. 2020.)

There is limited oversight of children educated at home. The Local Government Association has pointed out that Local Authorities have ‘no statutory duty’ to monitor the quality of Elective Home Education unless there is reason to believe that parents are not providing suitable education. This applies to children in full-time home education and to those in part-time or ‘flexi-schooling’ arrangements.

It was thought by interviewees that access to educational resources and support could vary considerably. This would affect the quality and suitability of provision. This has been acknowledged by the Department for Education, which noted a ‘very significant increase’ in the number of children being educated at home and added that:

‘There is considerable evidence that many of these children are not receiving a suitable education’. (Department for Education. 2019d.)

The financial responsibility for home schooling rests with parents. Some parents are part of a home-schooling network providing tutoring, online learning, activities and events for children being home-schooled. Interviewees thought that other parents were likely to struggle to find the finance, resources and contacts to educate at home.

There can be legitimate reasons for parents to withdraw a child from mainstream education to be home schooled. However, if pressure is put upon parents to do this by the school, this is not a legitimate reason. Evidence from the interviews suggests that pressure upon parents is exactly what is happening in some cases.

Participants were asked what they knew about elective home education and the circumstances under which it took place.

Bullying by other children came up time and time again as a precursor to children being home-schooled. This was particularly true for children from GRT communities. Where schools were not seen to be attempting to resolve bullying incidents, this would result in parents withdrawing the bullied child from school, because no other option was open to them. (Organisation A)

This view was echoed by other interviewees. One said:

'Elective Home Education seems to be mostly associated with children who are bullied at school – they are taken out of school, sometimes because there are safety issues, and the school cannot meet their needs.' (Organisation B)

'There are Elective Home Education networks, but ... I have concerns about inadequate support, regulation and safeguarding the quality of EHE.' (Organisation B)

A teaching assistant interviewed said that bullying was a distinct and contributory factor to children being home-schooled. She gave an example of a pupil whose parents had become so concerned about the bullying and intimidation that they withdrew their child from school to elective home education. Although this was something which the parents had expressly asked for, and were in a good position to provide, the school had been remiss in not being able to address the bullying, even when it became a police matter.

The interviewer described how the situation had developed, from the pupil withdrawing at lunchtime, to missing class, to feeling unable to go to school at all:

'She was lacking friends...she didn't feel comfortable in a classroom with other students and well, there was nothing happening in front of the teachers to actually kind of like protect her from other students. It was something that happened at break time or lunch time. And so it got to the point where at lunch time she would come to an office and like we had lunch for students who were feeling quite uncomfortable or vulnerable within the school system. They could come there and have lunch. So she started spending most of her time there and then things got to the point where she refused to go to class because she didn't feel comfortable with the other students.' (Teaching Assistant)

A teaching assistant was assigned to 'go through lessons with her' while she was away from class. However, being out of class meant that she was not receiving the same teaching and learning as the other students. There were meetings with the parents, but the reason behind her being isolated - that she had been subjected to bullying of a sexual nature, inside the classroom and on social media – took a while to emerge. Because of the transitory nature of digital media such as Snapchat, there was little that could be proved. The situation with the students who had been involved 'did not really get resolved'. The parents, one of whom was a teacher 'took it on themselves that they wanted to home school' until the pupil took her Year 11 exams. The interviewee commented:

'Okay, it's bad to remove her from the class. But she was one of the lucky ones whose parents would engage with the school, whose parents would take measures

to actually look for alternative forms of education for her. It kind of worked out in the end. I remember she did get into college to pursue her education.’ (Teaching Assistant)

Although this was considered a reasonable outcome, the onus was on the parents to find an alternative form of education. Even in circumstances where parents have the resources to do so, it shifts the ground of responsibility away from the school. This cannot be viewed as an acceptable option, especially in situations where the school has failed to provide adequately for the pupil in the first place.

One participant said that as a parent herself, she had first-hand experience of having been pressed by the school into ‘home schooling’ her daughter at a crucial stage in her education. She said:

‘Because I knew the system, I pushed for an alternative and succeeded in getting my daughter into a different college, but other parents who are not so savvy feel threatened into elective home education’. (Organisation D)

She further commented that once parents have agreed to taking their child out of school, ‘they are left to their own devices to sort out home schooling.’ (Organisation D)

Another interviewee made a similar observation, in that parents are directed to Elective Home Education, but ‘there is no doubt they do not fully appreciate what this involves in terms of costs, resources and support. (Organisation A)

The support offered by the school can be inadequate, with very little follow-up and no monitoring of what is happening: a situation which appears more frequently in schools outside Local Authority control.

‘Some schools, mostly those outside Local Authority control, mainly Academies, have more pupils referred for home schooling than LA-maintained schools.’
(Organisation A)

‘Parents are pushed into it, if they consent, it becomes their responsibility’.
(Organisation D)

A statement with which ROTA concurs, issued by the Local Government Association, points out that:

‘A duty on parents to register home-schooled children with their local authority would help councils to monitor how children are being educated and prevent children from disappearing from the oversight of services to keep them safe’. (LGA. 2020.)

Self-exclusion and girls self-excluding

Self-exclusion is ‘informal’ in the sense that instances of pupils who refuse to attend school or who have dropped out of school rarely appear in official records or data.

In ROTA's interviews with teachers, other professionals and young people, self-exclusion from school was mentioned on several occasions, particularly for girls and young women dropping out or self-absenting.

The issue of girls disappearing from school was identified as early as in 2002 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation:

'Girls may become excluded from school either officially or unofficially. Those who have disengaged from learning are effectively excluded, whether or not they have drawn attention to their needs through behavioural problems.'

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation report cited pregnancy, health and childcare needs as the most 'visible' reasons for young women to stop attending classes, but a range of other issues emerged. These included anxieties, depression, eating disorders, self-harming and caring responsibilities, along with sexual exploitation.' (Joseph Rowntree Foundation. 2002.)

Social Finance UK's study of pupil exclusions in Cheshire and Chester West in 2020 concluded that although more boys were given permanent and fixed-term exclusions than girls, girls were more likely to be informally excluded:

'Girls are more likely to experience informal exclusions where there are no accountability measures – early exits and school moves' (Social Finance UK, 2020)

Early exits - where pupils drop out or discontinue their education- and cannot be followed up is of concern. The 'invisibility' of girls who absented themselves from school, although based on the evidence of one region, was thought to be a more widespread problem across the country as a whole:

'Nationally, we need to use data to look beyond only formal exclusions. Otherwise, we risk keeping girls 'invisible' in our data and in our responses. We cannot allow gender bias to prevent girls getting the vital support they need.' (Social Finance UK, 2020.)

ROTA's interviewees mentioned that that bullying was a reason frequently given for girls missing school.

'Bullying' can cover a range of behaviours such as verbal or physical threat or assault, psychological pressure, on-line abuse, racial abuse, sexual harassment, domestic abuse or violence. There was some evidence from ROTA's interviews with teachers that girls who have suffered bullying in the form of harassment, intimidation or abuse of a sexual nature may retreat from lessons, especially in a co-educational environment where the perpetrators were known to the girls.

There was other evidence that abuse of a sexual nature could happen on school premises. An analysis of Freedom of Information Requests made by the NSPCC in 2018 to the police

revealed that around one-tenth of sexual assaults happened at school. Responses from 38 of the 43 police forces contacted in England and Wales showed that between 2014 and 2018, there were 30,000 reports of sexual assaults committed by children, 2,625 of which were carried out on school premises. (Dean, 2019.)

Girls who experience bullying or abuse and who stop going to school may also be at risk of being drawn into offending by other young people and adults.

It was commented by some of those interviewed that 'County Lines' might contribute to some unauthorised absences. County Lines is an activity instigated by drug-dealing groups or gangs. It was thought that their targets could be vulnerable young people in some schools, PRUs and Alternative Provision. The extent of this problem was not known.

The Home Office reported that signs of children getting caught up in County Lines could include persistent absence from school and a marked drop in school results and performance. Other indicators of vulnerability to exploitation, for boys and girls, were discussed in the report (Home Office. 2018.)

To date, attempts to gather statistics on the involvement of girls and young women in County Lines have not been altogether successful.

In 2019, the National Crime Agency reported that 'females may be under-represented as both offenders and victims of exploitation in this form of criminality' (NCA, 2019.)

It was of interest that the exploitation of young people through recruitment to, and training by gangs, was referred to as a factor in exclusion in a Parliamentary Debate on the Timpson Review in September 2021 in which evidence was heard by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Alternative Provision. (Hansard. HC Deb September 2021. Vol 700. Col 433.)

However, ROTA considers that over-emphasis on involvement in criminal activity as a factor in self-exclusion risks drawing the attention away from other reasons why young people drop out, and for which schools themselves should accept some responsibility, as mentioned in the interviews. One interviewee commented that:

'Girls who self-excluded or who were at risk of dropping out of school often had low expectations/poor self-esteem.' (Organisation D)

Where young women did not get sufficient satisfaction from, or support in continuing their education, the prospect of a job could be a better option. Girls were thought more likely to drop out for this reason – and be more successful in obtaining work – than boys of the same age.

'Girls find it easier to self-exclude, they can get a job - for example, Year 11 girls can move on'. (Organisation D)

Another interviewee referred to a problem of low teacher expectations of Traveller girls, who were lacking encouragement to continue their education. This situation was compounded by the way the traveller community had been depicted in the media.

'The media has not done Traveller teenage girls any favours...programmes such as My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding, and other depictions of girls and women in GRT communities.' (Organisation A)

Pre-admission exclusions

Previous research by ROTA for the NASUWT on school admissions policies and fair access protocols indicated that some schools – particularly free schools and academies - were operating pre-admission procedures that might discriminate against some pupils, either directly or indirectly. A form of 'informal pre-admission exclusion' was identified by ROTA in a report to the NASUWT in 2014.

Some free schools and academies were found to be requesting information about home circumstances, socio-economic status and other information not permitted by the Schools Admission Code or Fair Access Protocols. Others held pre-admission meetings, events or 'informal' interviews with parents. Some had pupil aptitude assessments, written tests, auditions and interviews with the potential risk that this may lead to indirect exclusion of certain groups of pupils. Such practices do not fully comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. (NASUWT, 2014.)

These admissions processes were thought to make enrolment more difficult for children from deprived or socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and for children identified as having learning or behavioural problems. They most often took place at the transition stage from primary to secondary school and could be perceived as a pre-emptive move by secondary schools to reduce the exclusions record.

A parent who spoke to ROTA off the record said that from her personal experience informal pre-exclusion was happening at an earlier stage in education, e.g. in transition from nursery to primary school. Whether this was happening more widely is open to speculation, with further evidence needed to explore the issue.

The point was made by one interviewee that issue of schools if schools are prevented from informally excluding, the focus would lead to 'admissions policies designed not to let the children in, in the first place'. (Organisation A)

This observation indicated that there could be a disregard by some schools for Fair Access Protocols. All Local Authorities have Fair Access Protocols with which all schools, including academy schools, must abide by (Child Law Advice, 2019.)

Fair Access Protocols are intended to ensure that no child can be refused admission to a school on the grounds that their academic achievement, or need for additional support, will

have an adverse effect on the exam results of the school. Children who have been excluded should not be refused admission to other schools. (NASUWT. 2014)

ROTA's findings from the interviews, Conference Round Tables and focus groups with young people suggested strongly that, against guidance, efforts to find schools for some pupils who had been excluded were unsuccessful – whether within their area or outside. This was thought by interviewees and Round Table participants most likely to happen in areas where there were many academy schools. It was reported that some pupils had ended up 'unwanted', with no school to go to. It was claimed by young people in the focus groups that word got round to other schools, that found excuses not to take pupils who had been excluded.

Concerns that academy schools are more likely to refuse pupils who have learning or behavioural difficulties or who have been excluded were noted by an investigation into Fair Access Protocols (Schools Week. 2019.)

It found that in some local authority areas in England, academy schools were less likely to comply with the protocols. If an academy refuses to comply, the Local Authority can appeal to the Secretary of State to intervene. It was estimated that 'hundreds of pupils' throughout England had failed to secure a school place after their cases went through Fair Access Panels. The exact numbers were not available:

'The Department for Education does not have a central record of how many requests it receives from councils' (Schools Week. 2019.)

The Royal Society of Arts noted that 'Academies are less likely to participate in Fair Access Protocols' and made clear in its report that 'the Department for Education should issue fair access guidance to all schools' – whether local authority maintained or academies. (TheRSA. 2020.)

There remains some doubt about how far local authorities can use their powers to ensure that schools abide with the protocols (that is, before having to intervene through an appeal to the Secretary of State.)

This issue was identified by the Local Government Association in a Parliamentary Briefing Paper to the House of Commons in February 2020. It noted that councils cannot direct academies and free schools to accept pupils, including those who have been excluded from other schools and recommended that:

'Councils should be given the power to protect the interests of all pupils, including the power to direct academies and free schools to admit pupils that need a place'. (LGA. 2020.)

Although this applies predominantly to pupils on fixed-term or permanent exclusion from school, ROTA believes that in some circumstances it might also apply to young people who have experienced informal exclusion and as such should be further investigated.

Strategies and interventions to help prevent informal exclusions

Interviewees gave examples of interventions and support thought helpful in bringing down informal exclusions.

One interviewee whose organisation had contacts with Traveller children gave an example of a teacher in a north London borough who had instigated a cultural awareness programme which led to fewer exclusions. It was also mentioned that schools and further education colleges which allow boys to gain academic qualifications while following a trade, is of value in keeping young people from GRT communities engaged with education. However, it was thought that much depends on funding, with London well-resourced compared with other parts of the country. A loss of arts and cultural programmes in schools has been detrimental. (Organisation A)

An interviewee who worked with a parenting team and was a Youth Offending Service practitioner mentioned her involvement with Parenting Forums with other professionals from Social Services, Police, Youth Support services. She was holding monthly sessions to inform and assist families and young people who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion. She said:

'A list of children is sent to me [to work with them/ their families and schools.] Some schools do have an interest in improving the situation, and there are some great outcomes for these, but only two out of thirty schools have signed up, the others don't take part. There are reasons, including time factors, teacher cover and so on.' (Organisation D)

She did however have concerns about progress:

'There has been no improvement on informal school exclusions since 2009, 2011. Informal exclusions are carried out repeatedly, but though it doesn't work, it continues to be used. It is madness. There is something in the system that is not working. It needs a different approach, an innovation.' (Organisation D)

It was thought by interviewees that additional support for teachers could help meet the needs of young people experiencing trauma, anxiety or depression and bring down the number of informal exclusions. The Royal Society of Arts referred to a survey which found that 54% of teachers asked for additional expertise and professional advice to help reduce sendings-out of lessons for children with mental health problems. In September 2019 it was anticipated that government resources would be allocated to a programme of training for Emotional and Mental Health Professionals (EMHPs) to work with schools. (TheRSA,2019.)

From the point of view of one interviewee, her organisation was not set up as a funded AP but offers educational support, with Peer Mentors, in academic subjects (Maths, Science,

English) providing a one-to-one tutor for one hour on a Monday evening. Regarding the work done with schools, this interviewee said:

'There is a waiting list. Young people self-refer, they attend with minimal parental involvement, and take part in other activities as well.' (Organisation B)

Talking about the language used working with young people, which should be sensitive and respectful, she said:

'Our organisation knows the neighbourhoods, we have developed good relationships and we are aware of the needs of the young people & their families. Their wellbeing and self-esteem are a concern.' (Organisation B)

She considered that the role of Youth & Community organisations in supporting the social development of young people is at risk. In the light of reduced funding, with youth clubs and centres closing, an increase in violence is an issue. (Organisation B)

The effect of COVID-19 on children excluded or at risk of exclusion

Interviewees described one over-arching, external factor that was having consequences for children who had been excluded from school – formally or informally - or who were at a greater risk of exclusion. This was the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced all schools and educational institutions to close.

The Children's Commissioner commented that 'Only 1 in 20 children identified as eligible to attend some form of schooling during lockdown were doing so' and that pupils not attending might include 'Children previously at risk of being excluded or who had high levels of absence'. (Children's Commissioner. 2020.)

An interviewee referred to depression and mental health issues which interfered with the ability to learn and could lead to young people disengaging with school, or self-excluding. These difficulties had been exacerbated by the pandemic. Her Supplementary School was trying to ensure some continuity of learning that would not be a burden for the young people to access during the COVID-19 outbreak. (Organisation C)

This interviewee further commented that for some young people not attending school, the COVID-19 lockdown had made it 'OK not to come to school'. Although it seemed as if 'school had ceased to matter anymore' her organisation was helping the young people to keep communicating in other ways, such as through online focus groups. (Organisation C)

Throughout the COVID-19 lockdown, additional resources were pledged by Gavin Williamson, the then Secretary of State for Education, to support vulnerable children in their learning, such as accessing online resources. A statement was issued by Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education on May 15th 2020 clarifying which children would be eligible:

'We have not changed the definition of vulnerable children but we have provided further examples of what types of children might be considered 'otherwise vulnerable'

The examples given referred to children and young people on the edge of receiving support from social services; adopted children; those at risk of becoming NEET; those in temporary accommodation; younger children and others at the Education Provider's and Local Authority's discretion of vulnerable or otherwise vulnerable. An associated publication was issued (Gov.UK. 2020.)

The definition of 'vulnerable' or 'otherwise vulnerable' did not mention children who had been excluded from school – informally or otherwise - prior to the lockdown. Nor did it mention refugee children, asylum seekers or children from GRT communities, whom ROTA had identified as being at particular risk of being left unsupported.

7. Conference and Round Table Discussions on Informal Exclusions from School

A Conference and round-table event was held in January 2020 with teachers, youth leaders, parents and individuals from voluntary sector organisations. The aim was to raise awareness of the illegality of many forms of informal exclusion, to explore specific topics of concern and to discuss new strategies to counteract the use of informal exclusion.

Speakers from ROTA, Just For Kids Law, Simpson Millar Solicitors and Education Policy Institute made presentations which informed the debate. To summarise:

Poornima Karunacadacharan, Senior Policy Officer from ROTA spoke on the issue of challenging informal exclusions and the disproportionate impact on Global Majority young people. The difficulty of obtaining data on informal exclusions, even through Freedom of Information Requests to Local Authorities, is an obstacle to understanding the extent of the problem. Different types and forms of informal exclusion can be used to remove pupils from the school roll. Parents and young people may be unaware that these practices are illegal. There is a case for using the Public Sector Equality Duty to challenge informal exclusions by requiring local authorities to collect and make available data on exclusions broken down by ethnic group.

Alex Temple from Just for Kids Law addressed the lack of advice and support available to parents to challenge informal exclusions. Attention was drawn to the illegality of informal exclusions. There are some ways that parents can use the law to challenge informal exclusions but accessing legal advice and financial support to take legal action is an obstacle. Some sources of advice and support for parents were identified, including the recently set-up School Exclusions Hub.

Dan Rosenberg from Simpson Millar Solicitors explained the legal position regarding a form of exclusion known as off-rolling. This is where pupils who are not expected to do well can be removed from the school roll prior to exams, so that league table results are not affected. Pupils who are off-rolled may end up in Elective Home Education. This practice has been identified and criticised in the 2019 Ofsted Inspection Framework. Using the Equality Act 2010 and the PSED can bring pressure to bear on schools to stop

the practice. It takes time and can be costly to do this. The only realistic challenge to the practice is through Ofsted enforcing measures.

Whitney Crenna Jennings from Education Policy Institute addressed Unexplained Exits from School. There is a lack of official statistics about pupils who leave school without explanation, absent themselves or are de-registered. Some data has been amassed by EPI. This gives an idea of pupils at the greatest risk of disappearing from school without adequate recording of their absences or follow-up of where they have gone. Unexplained exits seem to occur more frequently with pupils from large Multi-Academy Trusts and some local authorities. The lack of accountability suggests that there should be better data and regulation carried out, at school and local authority level. Pupils should not disappear from one school without provision being made for them at another. Some schools are not following this procedure. A scrutiny of Fair Access Protocols and Managed Moves is called for.

Round Table Discussions

Participants at the Conference were invited to take place in one of three Round Table Discussions. The aim was to explore main issues of concern and to suggest interventions or actions to challenge or change practices on informal exclusion.

Each Round Table Discussion consisted of up to twelve participants, led by a ROTA facilitator. Participants agreed to the sessions being audio-recorded. Anonymity was preserved unless individuals specified that they would like their name/organisation to be named.

Round Table Discussion Topics

- **Round Table 1: What are the experiences of pupils and parents of pupils who have experienced informal exclusion from school?**
- **Round Table 2: Exploring the intersection of race and disability in informal exclusions**
- **Round Table 3: How the law can be used to challenge informal exclusions from school**

Round Table 1: Participants were asked to describe their experience of informal exclusion as Global Majority parents, pupils, teachers and other professionals and their experience of challenging it

A lack of awareness about informal exclusion prevents it being recognised and confronted by parents and in some case, school Governors. It was reported by a school Governor that when he started in this role, he had not heard of Informal Exclusions - it was an area that was new to him. He and other participants agreed that parents, or other people acting as governors would not necessarily hear about it either, it being unofficial and unrecorded. In his experience as a new Governor, he came to realise that 'informal exclusion' was not recognised by the school as being 'exclusion' – it was a 'strategy' the school used for dealing with 'behavioural issues'.

Interventions or actions to be taken to increase awareness and to support school Governors. Participants considered the following actions should be taken; that it is important for school governors to be in a position to support schools in developing behaviour policies which do not result in children being informally excluded; to be able to advise parents about informal exclusions; to encourage better training and awareness of staff, support staff and governors of why informal exclusion should not be a tool for classroom management and why unofficial and unrecorded exclusions are illegal.

Informal Exclusion can be disguised as ‘Behaviour Management Strategy’ Participants thought that if this is the case, it is important to ask schools what their behaviour management or behaviour policies consist of. Parents should also ask about how many children have been sent to the ‘Exception Room’ as part of the school’s behaviour strategy and how many have left the school and where they have gone. An example was given by a participant who was the parent of a Black child who had been singled out for a ‘behaviour-related’ incident which equally involved another, White child. Only the Black child had been isolated: that is, they were made to work alone, apart from other children in the class, a form of internal exclusion. There was a suspicion that discrimination played a part in the decision. The school, together with Social Services, had only approached the parent about the behaviour of her son, not of the other child and described her son as lacking social skills and unable to form friendships. This was at odds with how he behaved outside school.

Interventions or actions to be taken to inform parents about the use of informal exclusion as a behaviour strategy and to question any practice which appears discriminatory. Participants suggested that parents should be able to find out what is in the school behaviour management policy and what the sanctions are. If sanctions include isolating children in the classroom, sending them to a separate room in the school or other forms of informal exclusion which are not recorded, parents should be able to question these practices with the school. Schools should be open to discussion with parents and demonstrate that they are actively working to find other solutions.

Challenging an informal exclusion, or a practice that looks like it, can result in parental anxiety that they may be jeopardising their child’s education or putting them in a hostile environment. Participants observed that in some cases, parents who take issue with schools can be branded ‘aggressive’. Where there is antipathy towards parents, this can affect the way the child is treated, resulting in social exclusion within the school. It was thought unsurprising that parents are reluctant to confront or challenge the school if they think it will have a detrimental effect on their child’s education. An example was given by an Advocate for parents of children who have experienced informal exclusion. She knew how parents feel when raising a complaint, with many finding it very difficult to complain, are worried about the effect complaining might have on how their child is treated by the school. However, another side to making a complaint was that if the issue relates to your own child, you can gain strength from standing up for them.

Actions or interventions to be taken to ensure that parents concerned about informal exclusion should be able to freely discuss or complain to the school. Participants thought that better support should be available to parents, in the form of advocacy for example, to challenge informal exclusion in a way which enables them to stand ground while not feeling they will be provoking hostility from the school. Schools should ensure that they do not put up barriers or make it difficult for parents to discuss legitimate concerns around informal exclusion.

Parents should be able to initiate dialogue about an informal exclusion, because schools do not communicate or want to discuss it. A school Governor and Chair of a Race Equality Council described parents approaching him about exclusions and reporting cases of children kept in school, but in situations where they were isolated, although not excluded as such. It was always difficult for parents to get information from schools about these practices. It is even more difficult in Free Schools, which are not under Local Authority control and do not have to account for their practices in the way the LA schools do. Participants spoke about instances where the refusal by schools to discuss things was thought to be a particular problem for parents and children of Black heritage, where the teaching staff were predominantly White. At one such school, it was reported by a participant who was a parent that the teachers and head could not communicate with Black parents and children and that this started from Primary level. A participant who worked as an Education Advocate observed that there were four key areas for promoting better communication and resolving concerns – intervention, access to intermediaries, sensitivity and use of terminology which is not confrontational.

Actions or interventions to be taken to improve transparency about informal exclusion and promote better communication with the school Participants were clear that at school level, instances where children have been informally excluded should be recorded. This is to improve transparency about which children have been affected, the form exclusion takes, the reason and any apparent disproportionality in the exclusion of certain groups of children, e.g. from ethnic minorities. Schools should consider measures to improve communication with parents from ethnic minorities. This may include increasing diversity of the school workforce to ensure that there is better representation of teachers from ethnic minorities; to instigate staff training in cultural awareness; to ensure that parents have access to intermediaries or advocacy to help resolve concerns.

Informal exclusion affects Global Majority children of all ability ranges and does not only happen to Global Majority children with SEND, ADHD, learning or behavioural difficulties. The parent of a Primary School child with a high IQ reported personal experience of this. Her child was made to sit to one side, on his own in the classroom, doing colouring-in. She had told the school her child was exceptionally bright when he started there, but this seemed to have been used as an excuse to leave him to his own devices ‘so that the others could catch up’. She disputed this explanation, suspecting that the school did not believe her until a formal assessment of her child confirmed what she had said. Which led her to conclude that it is not just under-achieving Global Majority children who get informally excluded, exclusion happens to very bright children because schools ‘cannot be bothered’ to make

provision. Another participant emphasised that it is important for schools to make 'reasonable adjustments' to accommodate the needs, for example, of children with SEND or other difficulties, so that they are not excluded. The same principle applies to children with exceptional abilities. It was mentioned that the Equality and Human Rights Committee (EHRC) is interested in receiving evidence/cases where reasonable adjustments have not been made, and can provide support and finance, within certain constraints, for parents, e.g. if there is a clear indication of discrimination. The issue goes wider than exclusions.

Actions or interventions to be taken to ensure that the needs of high-achieving Global Majority children are met with appropriate educational provision. Participants thought that failure to understand the needs of children who learn at higher levels of ability should not be an excuse to exclude them from group activity. Primary schools should adhere to the principle of ensuring adequate provision and reasonable adjustments for exceptionally able children, as they would do for children with learning difficulties or SEND. This should be discussed at the outset with parents, without bias or preconception based on class, race, ethnicity or socio-economic background.

The 'Pipeline to Prison' issue is contested. Although there may be some links between exclusion, PRUs and juvenile offending, labelling children as perpetrators or prospective perpetrators can be detrimental. Anxiety was expressed by a parent of a child in a school in a rural community that had a population of GRT children. It was thought that the poor educational experience of some children from who were being excluded could result in them being drawn into offending – the 'School to Prison Pipeline'. The perceived link could be deceptive. It was remarked by another delegate that Global Majority children seem to get caught up in the PRU system disproportionately, but that this perception of the 'pipeline' was wrong - children are not born as perpetrators of crime, they become victims of it and get 'sentenced by association'. It was of interest that divergent views had also been expressed in interviews conducted with professionals working with young people.

Actions or interventions to be taken to counteract the view that links excluded children with offending. Participants observed that the perceived link between informal exclusion and juvenile offending should be treated with caution. Some research reports, e.g. from the Children's Commissioner and media sources have tended to bring the issue to wider attention in the context of County Lines for example, whereby school-age children are reportedly recruited from Pupil Referral Units to sell or deal drugs. However, it cannot be established that children who have been informally excluded from school are on a trajectory towards offending behaviour and it is unhelpful to make this assumption.

Pre-admission exclusions

Pre-admission exclusions emerged in other interviews with professionals, and in ROTA's previous research on admissions policies and fair access protocols. Participants expressed concern about the early stage at which informal exclusions were taking place. It was mentioned by one participant that when her child was at Nursery, she was told there was 'no place' at the Primary School. Parents of other Nursery children had been told there were places available, suggesting that her child was being discriminated against, although this

would have been difficult to prove. Questions from other participants were raised about discriminatory practices and 'pre-Admissions exclusions'. ROTA has found evidence of it happening at Primary-to-Secondary transition, but not at Nursery-to-Primary level, which was a new and concerning development.

Actions or interventions to be taken to address discriminatory pre-admission practices

Participants thought there was a need for more evidence on nursery-to-Primary admissions practices that appeared unfair and discriminatory. It was agreed that further research was needed see how widespread the practice is at this level. Additional information should be sought on pre-admissions exclusion practices, and further examination of schools' Admissions Policies and Local Authority Fair Access Protocols.

Round Table 2: How the law can be used to challenge informal exclusions at a systemic level

Parental awareness of informal exclusions and knowledge of the Public Sector Equality Duty as a tool to hold schools to account was discussed. This was thought key to equipping parents and carers whose children had been informally excluded with the knowledge and confidence to legally challenge the system. However, there are obstacles to bringing legal challenges, including access to legal aid. The importance of parental awareness of what types of exclusions were and were not lawful was similarly brought up by participants in one of the other Round Tables and emerged as a main factor in combatting informal exclusion.

Actions or interventions to be taken to ensure that schools are held to account for informal or unlawful exclusions *Participants observed that using the Public Sector Equality Duty to hold schools to account in cases where informal exclusions are being carried out was thought to be one route into change. However, if schools do not comply, there is a question of whether they should be subject to sanctions or penalties.*

Taking a challenge directly to a school may depend on how much information the school holds on pupils who have been informally excluded, and whether it could be shown that certain groups of pupils are subject to informal exclusion disproportionately. Participants discussed whether, in instances where records were held, but the school was not taking any action to counteract disproportionality, this could form the basis for a challenge. However, it was pointed out by some participants that schools do not record information on race and disability in relation to informal exclusions.

Actions or interventions to be taken to counteract an impression that informal exclusions are disproportionately applied to some groups of children *Participants thought that schools should be encouraged to collect and record informal exclusions data in relation to race and disability, to improve transparency and to help develop measures to counteract any disproportionality.*

Approaching the local authority for information held and any actions taken on unexplained exits from schools was discussed. Participants referred to the difficulty in obtaining this kind of data. The Round Table Facilitator pointed out that ROTA's FOI requests to local authorities revealed that there is no data being recorded which can show evidence of any disproportionate impact of informal exclusion on specific groups of young people – although the Equality and Human Rights Commission are known to have collected some evidence on disproportionality. The hindrance to using local authority data is that academies and free schools are outside local authority control. Although required to record information on pupils informally excluded, participants were concerned that these schools are not accountable for submitting data to the local authority.

Actions or interventions to be taken to access data on unexplained exits from all kinds of schools including Academies and free schools. Participants thought that Local authorities should be encouraged to improve the data they currently collect on informal exclusions so that it shows whether any specific groups of young people e.g. from Global Majority or GRT communities, or with SEND or learning disabilities, are over-represented. Even with the absence of data, the Department of Education needs to be made aware of the problem in hand, through a policy or structure providing information broken down by pupil characteristics including ethnicity. There is a requirement on local authorities to provide statistical information to the DfE but no requirement to give further details that would reveal any disproportionality.

Approaching Ofsted to act against schools gaming the exam results league tables by off-rolling or sending pupils on 'exam leave' was discussed. This is a practice which Ofsted has criticised. A participant observed that neither Ofsted nor the Government wants to see young people out of school in vulnerable situations on the street, maybe involved in drug dealing or other offending – so there is an incentive to engage with Ofsted about informal exclusions. Participants discussed claims they had come across, either anecdotally or from media sources, that indicated exclusion from school appears in the backgrounds of quite a few young people in prison. Some participants suggested that the 'pipeline to prison' factor should be viewed with caution, a view which had been echoed by some of ROTA's interviewees.

Actions or interventions to be taken to stop the practice of off-rolling Participants thought that there is a case for engaging with Ofsted to see whether schools can be dissuaded from – or compelled to abandon - practices such as off-rolling or 'exam leave' for pupils who are thought unlikely to achieve the requisite GCSE grades and who may become vulnerable to social isolation or adverse influences.

Round Table 3: Exploring the intersection of race and disability

Communication challenges presented by the intersection of race and disability were discussed. Participants discussed that a breakdown in communication can lead to Global Majority pupils with learning difficulties or other disabilities being informally excluded at

school. There are social communication challenges which lead to social isolation, in numerous settings – family, school, workplace and wider society – where not being able to communicate is of concern. One participant observed that for Global Majority people living with disability or hidden disabilities, speech and language is important for expressing needs and having them understood. There is a question of how this is to be addressed – not just with children in an educational setting, but with older people. Some terminology, or labels used to describe forms of learning difficulty, such as ‘dyslexia’ or ‘Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)’ are not helpful, or well understood by some Global Majority people.

Actions or interventions to be taken to address the needs of Global Majority children living with SEND. Participants thought there was a case for improved understanding of the needs of Global Majority children with SEND. This applies in all areas – diagnostically, support-wise, through additional funding and through specialist teaching in mainstream schools. It was thought by one participant that Hidden Disability Champions can be helpful in establishing dialogue in a culturally sensitive manner, working together with schools. Participants agreed that schools should increase awareness of how to assess different learning styles and support children’s strengths as well as weaknesses. Communicating well about the ‘language’ of disability e.g. where terminology such as ‘dyslexia’ or ‘ADHD’ or other labels are being used - can help improve dialogue between schools and parents Global Majority children with learning difficulties and reduce the risk of informal exclusion.

Training and awareness of race and disability

Participants discussed whether lack of training and awareness of race and disability issues can lead to inappropriate actions, including exclusion and isolation when dealing with young Global Majority people who have special educational needs. Ignorance, prejudicial attitudes and cultural insensitivity were mentioned, which were not necessarily tackled by teacher training institutions. Participants raised concerns about Global Majority pupils being given medication, when conversations about their needs would serve them better. One participant cited cases she had known where physical restraint or physical removal of pupils from class had been used, and in some instances written into the school policies.

Actions or interventions to be taken to enhance teachers’ awareness of race and disability issues and how to counter discriminatory practices. Participants thought that there should be a way of influencing teacher training, to promote a better understanding of race and disability. If those intending to teach have preconceptions or prejudices about the needs of Global Majority pupils with disabilities, there is a question of how these attitudes can be addressed. Training institutions might look at the suitability of trainees to become teachers, where prejudiced attitudes are entrenched. The issue is whether the education system itself is equal to carrying out measures to counter discriminatory attitudes and practices. For example, restraints policy needs to be addressed by all schools. Equalities and human rights organisations, such as ROTA, should use their influence on Government to promote an

inclusive attitude, awareness and respect for the individual needs of Global Majority children with disabilities.

Improving specialist diagnosis and care

It was thought by some participants that some young Global Majority people do not get a proper SEND diagnosis and are even viewed as somehow ‘undeserving’, while others get a SEND label they do not know about. There was a perceived lack of specialist care in schools and in Pupil Referral Units, which it was thought do not have any statutory requirement for a SENCO. Participants discussed whether opportunities were missed for early intervention and care. One participant commented that there was also a problem with identifying children who are the young carers of family members with disabilities. Such children may come into school late, tired or unable to concentrate and may absent themselves due to caring responsibilities that the school is not aware of. Participants discussed misconceptions about Global Majority boys and young men in the school system, which can add to a risk of informal exclusion. One participant mentioned the ‘adultification’ of young Black and Brown men’ which may delay or prevent referral to the appropriate children’s or adolescents’ services.

Actions or interventions to be taken to improve provision for young people needing specialist support and care and who are more at risk of being excluded.

Participants thought that schools, where parents have expressed disquiet about their children’s SEND needs, should scrutinise their policies on Global Majority people with learning difficulties or disabilities. This is so that these children get proper diagnoses and subsequent support, whether in mainstream schools or PRUs. The needs of young Global Majority carers of people with disabilities can be overlooked. Schools should become better at identifying these young people. The problem is not exclusive to Global Majority young carers but may be exacerbated by communication challenges e.g. where English is not the family’s first language, or where there is difficulty in accessing disability services or alerting relevant organisations. Participants wanted to see better mental, physical and social support from statutory services and Voluntary Sector Organisations which have a role in highlighting this to Local Authorities and Government. It was thought that VSOs which support carers could use their influence to bring to the attention of LAs and Government the needs of young Global Majority carers of people with disabilities.

8. Recommendations

ROTA's recommendations are derived from findings gathered from the following sources:

- Desk research and review of available data, statistics, research reports and policy documents on informal exclusion from school.
- Responses to ROTA's Freedom of Information Requests to Local Authorities on informal exclusions.
- Interviews with teachers and other professionals working with young people who have been informally excluded or who were at risk of exclusion from school.
- Focus Groups with young people who have experienced, or who have been at risk of informal exclusion from school.
- Round Table Discussions with teachers, teaching assistants, parents, voluntary organisations and other individuals with an interest in informal exclusions.

1. *For school Governors*

- School governors are in a good position to support schools to develop behaviour policies which do not result in children being informally excluded; to raise awareness among parents and teachers about why unofficial and unrecorded exclusions are illegal and to instigate training for governors, teachers and support staff.
- Approaches for training relating to exclusions and behaviour policies may be made by school Governors to their Local Authority, Multi-Academy Trust or to other national or local providers e.g. who are contracted by the Department for Education to offer development programmes for school governors. (Department for Education. 2020.)
- Governors, together with school leaders, might review the representation of people from ethnic minorities on the staff team and the Governing body. Although inclusive recruitment practices may be in place, and are required under the Equality Act 2010, there may be a need to scrutinise measures in other areas. For example, ensuring that there is diversity of members on Appeals panels on exclusions, or that access to advocacy is available for parents from ethnic minority communities whose children have been informally excluded.

2. *For schools*

- Behaviour Policies should be available to parents to find out what is in the school behaviour management policy and what the sanctions are. If sanctions include isolating children in the classroom, sending them to a separate room in the school or other forms of informal exclusion which are not recorded, schools should ensure that parents can discuss or question these measures and actively work together to find alternative solutions.

- Schools should review the conditions and circumstances under which pupils are sent to isolation rooms or booths. There is a case for considering removing this form of informal exclusion all together. It is not only seen to be unduly punitive, but is thought to be ineffective in changing behaviour, can damage the social development of young people who experience it and disrupt learning. With any form of informal exclusion, adequate provision for continuity of learning must be made by the school.
- Consideration should be given to whether decisions to informally exclude some groups of children for behavioural issues may be influenced by cultural misunderstandings or mis-readings. There may be a need to provide additional support for teachers in managing classroom dynamics between pupils from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Linking with organisations that represent young people from specific ethnic backgrounds, with the aim of developing cultural awareness programmes may help to reduce the risk of informal exclusion for these groups.
- Assumptions that domestic or family circumstances explain why some children are more likely to be informally excluded ought to be approached with caution and measures taken to resist attributing blame. For example, these may include a review of policies and practices that combat possible institutional racism, discrimination or prejudice.
- If a parent or carer believes that a child has been unlawfully excluded, they are within their rights to pursue the matter, or make a complaint to the school. This should be acknowledged by the school. Barriers should not be put in the way of parents wishing to discuss or challenge decisions about informal exclusion, but recognition that there may be a need for support from an advocate in order to help parents through the process. If the incident is not recorded, parents cannot do this easily. For this reason, schools should keep a record of the incident, the enquiry or complaint and the response.
- Without compromising confidentiality or data protection, records should give an indication of all instances of informal exclusions, the form it takes, the reason and the ethnic background of those who have experienced informal exclusion. This is to improve transparency about which children have been affected. By using this data, schools are in a better position to review whether some groups of young people such as those from ethnic minority communities, are being disproportionately affected and if so, to take measures to change their practice. The recording of informal exclusions can help schools develop alternative strategies and interventions and to eliminate informal exclusions.
- There are measure which can by taken by schools to improve communication with parents from ethnic minorities. For example, early discussions with parents of that a

child's behaviour may be causing concern can help teachers to gain an insight into any difficulties the child is having and to prevent escalation of problems that might lead to exclusion. Parents need the opportunity to discuss behaviour policies and sanctions and to work together with teachers to find alternative solutions to informal exclusion.

- Ways should be found to disseminate better information to parents on the process of informal exclusion so that they can access support or challenge decisions. Where communication appears to have broken down, alternative approaches might be considered to enhance contact and communication with parents, e.g. by allocating a Home Liaison contact or similar individual who can develop a relationship of trust with parents who are thought by the school to be hard to reach.
- There are ways that schools can take to improve their systems of review regarding the needs of children from ethnic minorities who have learning difficulties, SEND, autism or ADHD. The possibility of unconscious bias in deciding to informally exclude young people with learning difficulties who come from different ethnic backgrounds ought to be addressed as part of teachers' professional development and training. For example, support and training may be available from organisations such as supplementary schools or other voluntary groups who work with different communities and who can be approached to assist mainstream schools in an advisory capacity. Advice from individuals such as Hidden Disability Champions or organisations with experience of SEND can help to improve teachers' understanding of the needs of children from ethnic minority communities and reduce the risk of informal exclusion.
- The needs of children who learn at higher levels of ability should be assessed in a way that ensures they are not excluded from group activity. There are actions that Primary Schools can take to ensure that adequate provision and reasonable adjustments for such children are made, as they would do for children with learning difficulties or SEND. Discussion with parents can enable a better understanding of the needs of high-ability children without bias or preconception based on class, race, ethnicity or socio-economic background.
- Positive measures can be taken by school leaders to integrate GRT children so that they are not seen as 'other'. For example raising cultural awareness among teachers reduces the risk of reinforcing attitudes and prejudices that they, or children in the class may have about children from GRT communities. Parents of children from GRT communities should be included in discussions from an early stage to ensure that cultural needs are understood and met with sensitivity, not hostility.
- School leaders are in good position to instigate discussions about whether low teacher expectations of some young people, such as girls from some GRT

communities, discourages them from continuing their education and whether better support could be put in place to engage them.

- Where concerns are raised that young people are being drawn into offending such as gang-related or County Lines activity, ways should be found of discussing the respective roles and responsibilities of parents and schools in keeping children safe. For example, consideration might be given to how to approach the issue with young people and whether extra support and training for teachers is needed, e.g. to deliver workshops or assemblies to raise awareness of risk factors and involve young people themselves in the debate.
- Schools may find that by engaging with community services such as parenting forums, social services, youth support and police, a wider understanding can be gained of problems and pressures facing young people inside and outside school. There is evidence that where schools take part in multi-agency initiatives, these can be effective in improving support and outcomes for children at risk of exclusion.
- Over-emphasising involvement in criminal activity as factor in self-exclusion is to be avoided. Until there are sufficient statistics to back this perception up, particularly regarding girls' absences, it risks overlooking other reasons for non-attendance which schools should be on the lookout for and accept responsibility. For example, when young people appear to be missing lessons or not turning up, bullying, sexual harassment or intimidation may be factors leading to them dropping out altogether. A review of anti-bullying policies, together with strategies for teachers and support staff to be alert to such situations can help prevent escalation. The Anti-Bullying Alliance offers free CPD training and advice to schools, including cyberbullying, sexual bullying and racist bullying. <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk>

3. For Local Authorities

- Data collection should show whether any specific groups of young people e.g. for Global Majority or GRT communities, or with SEND or learning disabilities, are over-represented.
- For Local Authorities more evidence is needed on practices which may lead to pre-admission exclusions, which are not permitted by the Schools Admissions Code or Fair Access Protocols and which do not comply with the Equality Act 2010 or the Public Service Equality Duty. Further evidence is also needed on self-exclusion, so that these figures are included in the official statistics.
- Local Authorities should work together with schools to ensure that they review unexplained absences more thoroughly and put in place better measures to follow up and record cases where young people go missing from education.

- Local Authorities and Multi-Academy Trusts, in conjunction with organisations that offer training for teachers might consider ways of developing programmes to increase awareness of the law regarding informal exclusions as part of teachers' professional or in-service education.
- Organisations can be approached which offer training to help schools develop a programme of support and training across ethnic backgrounds for teachers, to counteract any bias, unconscious or otherwise, that might result in some groups of pupils being singled out for informal exclusion more than others.
- Discussions between Local Authorities, MATs and school leaders may be useful in developing measures to improve the representation on their staff and Governors of people from Global Majority and GRT communities.
- An approach to Elective Home Education should be developed by Local Authorities and MATs that would prevent parents being unlawfully pressured into taking this step, e.g. to avoid a permanent exclusion. Where parents have taken children out of school, better support should be available for those who are home educating that does not require parents to pay for provision e.g. for home tutoring, educational materials, online resources and other associated costs which, if their child was at school, would not need to be paid for.
- Once children are taken out of school, there should be systems in place to ensure their safety and educational needs, such as follow-up visits, family support and a way of monitoring learning progression, social needs and wellbeing. This may involve, for example, an educational plan drawn up between Local Authority, school and parents/carers.
- Local Authorities working in conjunction with schools should enhance their data collection processes of recording instances of self-exclusion. For schools outside the control of Local Authorities, MATs should similarly enhance their process of recording and following up self-exclusions so that better programmes of support can be developed for pupils at risk of dropping out of school.
- Discussions between Local Authorities and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) should take place to establish what measures might be taken to ensure that pupils who have experienced permanent, fixed term or informal exclusions from a previous school do not come up against discriminatory practices in placing them at other schools, whether inside or outside the control of the Local Authority.

4. *For policy makers*

- A perceived link between informal exclusion and juvenile offending should be treated with caution by policy makers. Assumptions that children who have been informally excluded from school are on a 'trajectory' towards offending behaviour is unhelpful. For example, policy makers, expert panels or Government appointed bodies such as the Children's Commissioner should avoid referring to children in PRUs or AP as being on a pathway to juvenile offending. This is a view that has been expressed in the media and elsewhere. It is open to question by professionals who work with young people excluded from school, it causes anxiety for parents whose children who attend AP and it diminishes the work of well-regarded AP institutions.
- Terminology such as 'school to prison pipeline' that demonises young people who have been excluded/are at risk of exclusion should be resisted by policy makers, education providers and others involved in debates on education, not least because it reinforces a negative stereotype, particularly regarding young people from some ethnic or GRT communities.
- The Covid-19 lockdown of schools from March to September 2020 exacerbated disadvantage and worsened the situation of children who had been informally excluded from school. Some children, due to traumatic experiences prior to or during lockdown, will exhibit changes in behaviour that affect their learning and social relationships on return to school. Policy makers should take the opportunity to support schools in reviewing their behaviour and exclusion policies. For example, it should be emphasised that informal exclusion, if used as a threat or a sanction, can increase anxiety and adversely affect mental health and wellbeing.

5. *For the Department for Education*

- As statistical data provided to the Department for Education by local authorities is not sufficiently detailed to reveal disproportionality, efforts should be made by the Department to put in place a policy or structure requiring better recording and reporting of informal exclusions. Local Authorities and Multi-Academy Trusts should be asked to provide information to the Department for Education broken down by ethnicity so that any disproportionality can be detected and measures taken to address it.
- Attention should continue to be paid to the issue of whether racial discrimination plays a part in the informal exclusion of children from Global Majority and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, whose exclusions from school have been mentioned in the Government-commissioned Timpson Review.

- Children who arrive at school hungry are more likely to disengage from learning and lose concentration, which can result in them missing lessons or being informally excluded. The continuation, and enhancement of Government-funded programmes which help to address food poverty should be supported for as long as there is a perceived need.
- The definition of ‘vulnerable’ or ‘otherwise vulnerable’ children deemed eligible for additional educational support should be expanded. For example, it should include children previously excluded from school; refugee children; asylum seekers and children from GRT communities, all of whom have been identified as at particular risk of being left out of educational provision during, and after COVID.
- Pupils at risk of being off-rolled include those not thought likely to achieve good exam results, with the consequence that the school’s academic scores would be adversely affected in the league tables. In the light of this, policies which seem to make it easier for schools to off-roll pupils should continue to be reviewed.
- Consideration should be given to developing measures jointly with Higher Education and Teacher Training institutions to promote a better understanding of race and disability for trainees and to address preconceptions and prejudices.

6. *For Ofsted*

- Ofsted should use its powers to find ways of enforcing measures by which schools can be stopped from carrying out practices such as off-rolling or ‘exam leave’ for pupils who are thought unlikely to achieve the requisite GCSE grades.
- Unwillingness by teachers to discuss informal exclusions suggests that they take place mainly under the radar. This should be addressed through clear advice from Ofsted to school leaders that many forms of unofficial exclusions which are not recorded are unlawful and that this should be conveyed to teachers.
- Ofsted should clarify its position that the use of seclusion or isolation rooms as a disciplinary sanction should be recorded.
- Off-rolling is illegal and should not be carried out. For example, it should be made clear to schools, whether Local Authority or Academies, that admissions practices which appear to discriminate against and exclude certain pupils unfairly, do not comply with Fair Access Protocols and should be reviewed by the school.
- Although Ofsted has limited resources to identify or inspect all alternative or unregistered learning spaces, concerns that many such schools are operating illegally warrants further investigation. Ofsted should be able to extend its powers to inspect

suitability of premises, qualifications of educators and suitability of learning materials and resources and child safeguarding practices and to notify the local authority of schools acting outside the law. Action can then be taken to bring them within the law or to close them.

7. *For voluntary sector organisations*

- Voluntary Sector Organisations which campaign against exclusion can help families to become more aware of the illegality of some forms of exclusion. For example, VSOs can highlight unlawful practices, such as where there is no learning support for pupils, where they are left unsupervised for extended periods, where pressure is put on parents to take their children out of school, where pupils are sent on 'exam leave' or off-rolled. This would help to change a situation where unrecorded and unofficial exclusions are routinely used and rarely challenged by parents.
- Voluntary sector organisations which campaign against exclusion can publicise the use of the PSED as a tool to hold schools to account for carrying out unlawful exclusions.
- Equalities and Human Rights organisations can use their influence to encourage governmental organisations to develop more inclusive policies on the needs of children with disabilities who come from minority ethnic communities.

For further research

- Research on a wider scale is needed to ascertain whether children with SEMH are being informally excluded from school for reasons associated with lack of staff expertise or resources to support them. Such reasons are not valid. Further research should therefore focus on ways to enhance training and support for classroom teachers, assistants and other staff so that interventions can be put in place which do not result in children with SEMH being excluded.
- Academy Schools, Free Schools, Sixth forms, Sixth form colleges, PRUs and other APs should be approached to find out whether the data they hold can be broken down by ethnicity and reason for exclusion. This will help researchers to develop a more complete picture of which groups of children are being informally excluded from these type of schools and institutions and whether there is any disproportionality.
- Additional research should be carried out with young people who have experienced informal exclusion from school, through discussion groups, workshops and training. An element of training embedded in the research would equip young people with

the knowledge and skills to challenge the system of informal exclusion and to formulate strategies and alternative solutions to informal exclusion.

- The 'invisibility' of girls who absented themselves from school, although based on the evidence of one region by Social Finance UK, was thought to be a more widespread problem across the country as a whole. There is a case for this research to be extended across other regions to establish whether the findings on school exits by girls can be generalised to a wider population.
- Further evidence should be sought on whether discriminatory pre- admission practices can be discerned at the Nursery to Primary transition stage. A starting point would be a further examination of schools' Admissions Policies published on their websites in relation to Local Authority Fair Access Protocols.

9. References

Child Law Advice 2020a Advice on Fair Access protocols. Updated June 2020.

<https://childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/fair-access-protocol/>

Child Law Advice 2020b Advice on all exclusions. Updated June 2020

<https://childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/school-exclusion/>

Children's Commissioner for England. 2017. Briefing. Falling through the Gaps in Education. November 2017

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/BRIEFING-Falling-through-the-gaps-in-education-CCO.pdf>

Childrens Commissioner for England. 2019a. Skipping school: invisible children. February 2019.

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/cco-skipping-school-invisible-children-feb-2019.pdf>

Childrens Commissioner for England. 2019b. Children Excluded from Mainstream Schools. May 2019. <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Exclusions-cover-merged.pdf>

Childrens Commissioner for England. 2020. Tackling the disadvantage gap during the Covid-19 crisis. April 2020.

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/cco-tackling-the-disadvantage-gap-during-the-covid-19-crisis.pdf>

Children's Society. 2021. Youth voice on school exclusions. Donya Lamrahi, Helen Maitland, Cath Morris and Jo Petty. 20th April 2021.

[youth-voice-exclusions.pdf \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/youth-voice-exclusions.pdf)

Dabiri, Emma. 2019. Don't Touch My Hair. Google Books.

[Don't Touch My Hair - Google Books](#)

Dean, Emma Banister. 2019. Handling incidents of sexual assault in schools. In *SecEd* 16th January 2019.

[Handling incidents of sexual assault in schools \(sec-ed.co.uk\)](https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/handling-incidents-of-sexual-assault-in-schools)

Department for Education. 2012. Fair Access Protocols. Updated August 2021.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/275580/fair_access_protocols_departmental_advice.pdf

Department for Education. 2016. Behaviour and Discipline in Schools. p12, Sections 42&43. January 2016.

[Behaviour and Discipline in Schools - A guide for headteachers and school staff final draft.docx \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Department for Education. 2017. Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England. Statutory Guidance for those with legal responsibilities in relation to exclusion. Section 3. Point 14 *Informal exclusions* September 2017.

[Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Department for Education. 2019a Statistical Release. Pupil absence in schools in England: 2017 to 2018. 21st March 2019.

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-2017-to-2018?utm_source=2e8b883d-c218-44a5-8ca3-71a8cac46d29&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

Department for Education. 2019b A guide to the statistics on pupil absences. March 2019. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/787314/Guide_to_absence_statistics_21032019.pdf

Department for Education. May 2019c Timpson Review Literature Review on the continued disproportionate exclusion of certain children. p72 Managed moves. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/800028/Timpson_review_of_school_exclusion_literature_review.pdf

Department for Education. 2019d. Elective Home Education. Guidance for local authorities and schools about children education at home. Department for Education. 2nd April 2019.

[Elective home education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Department for Education. 2019e. School Census Codes. Ethnicity. 2019.

[Find a school census code - Complete the school census - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Department for Education. 2019f. COLLECT guides for schools and local authorities. Updated 2021.

[COLLECT guides for schools and local authorities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Department for Education. 2020a. Statistical Release on permanent and fixed-term suspensions in England. 2018-2019. Headline Figures. 30th July 2020.

[Permanent exclusions and suspensions in England, Academic Year 2018/19 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Department for Education. 2020b. Keeping children safe in education.

[Keeping children safe in education 2021 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Department for Education. 2020c Checklist for school leaders to support full opening: behaviour and attendance. June 2020

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/899384/Checklist for school leaders on behaviour and attendance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/899384/Checklist_for_school_leaders_on_behaviour_and_attendance.pdf)

Department for Education. 2020d Training providers: governance leadership and clerking development. Updated 1 May 2020

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/licensees-professional-development-for-school-governors>

Department for Education. 2021. National School Breakfast Club Programme. March 15th 2021.

[DfE tender 2021 | Magic Breakfast](#)

Education Policy Institute. 2017. Social Mobility and Vulnerable Learners. Policy Analysis. Why are so many vulnerable children excluded from school? EPI. 14th May 2017

<https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/many-vulnerable-children-excluded-school/>

Education Policy Institute. 2019. Unexplained Pupil Moves from English Schools. Further analysis and data by multi-academy trust and local authority. Jo Hutchinson and Whitney Crenna-Jennings. October 2019

[Unexplained-pupil-moves_LAs-MATs_EPI-2019.pdf](#)

FFT Education DataLab. 2017 Who are the pupils in alternative provision? Admissions, pupil demographics and structures. Dave Thomson. 11th October 2017

[Who are the pupils in alternative provision? - FFT Education Datalab](#)

FFT Education DataLab. 2019. New Exclusions Data. Philip Nye. 25th July 2019.

[Two things to bear in mind when looking at new exclusions data - FFT Education Datalab](#)

Gill, K. 2017. Making the Difference. Breaking the link between school exclusion and social exclusion. IPPR.

<https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-10/making-the-difference-report-october-2017.pdf>

Gov.UK. 2019. Timpson Review of School Exclusion. May 2019

[Timpson Review of School Exclusion \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Gov.UK. 2020. Supporting vulnerable children and young people during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. 15th May 2020.

[Withdrawn] Supporting vulnerable children and young people during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Hamilton, L. 2011. Case Studies in Educational Research. British Education Research Association.

[Case-studies-in-educational-research.pdf](#)

Hansard. HC Deb (16th September 2021) Vol 700. Col 433. Available at:

[Timpson Review of School Exclusion - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

Hansard. HC Deb (16th September 2021) Vol 700. Col 435, Col 421. Available at:

[Timpson Review of School Exclusion - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

Home Office. Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults. County Lines Guidance. September 2018.

[Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance \(\[publishing.service.gov.uk\]\(http://publishing.service.gov.uk\)\)](#)

House of Commons. 2018. Committee on Education. Forgotten children: Alternative Provision and the scandal of ever increasing exclusions. HC342. 25th July 2018

[Forgotten children: alternative provision and the scandal of ever increasing exclusions \(\[parliament.uk\]\(http://parliament.uk\)\)](#)

IPSEA. Guidelines on Informal Exclusions

<https://www.ipsea.org.uk/pages/category/exclusion-from-school>

IntegratED. 2020a. School exclusions rates: a new methodology. Alice Wilcock. Centre for Social Justice.

[School exclusion rates: a new methodology - IntegratED](#)

IntegratED. 2020b. Annual Report. Fewer Exclusions, Better Alternative Provision. Sabrian Hummel and Alice Wilcock. 2020

[IntegratED Annual Report 2020](#)

IRR. 2020. Institute of Race Relations. How Black Working Class Youth are Criminalised and Excluded in the English School System. A London Case Study.

[How-Black-Working-Class-Youth-are-Criminalised-and-Excluded-in-the-English-School-System.pdf \(\[irr.org.uk\]\(http://irr.org.uk\)\)](#)

Joseph Rowntree Foundation. 2002. Audre Osler, Cathy Street, Marie Lall and Kerry Vincent. Girls and Exclusion from School. JFR Report. 9th January 2002.

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/girls-and-exclusion-school>

Joseph Rowntree Foundation. 2020. Destitution in the UK

[destitution in the uk 2020 - findings \(2.\)pdf](#)

<https://www.jrf.org.uk>

JUSTICE.2019. Challenging School Exclusions. A Report by JUSTICE. Chair of the Working Party. Professor Richard de Friend. November 2019.

<https://justice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Challenging-Report.pdf>

Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (2007) Participatory Action Research. Communicative Action and the Public Sphere. In Denzin, Norman K. & Lincoln, Yvonna S. (Eds.) Part Three. Strategies of Inquiry. The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research. 2007 Ch. 10 pp 559-603

https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=X85J8ipMpZEC&pg=PR5&source=gbv_selected_pages&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false

Local Government Association. 2020 Briefing Paper to the House of Commons on School Exclusions. February 2020

<https://local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/School%20exclusions%20House%20of%20Commons%2026%20February%202020.pdf>

NASUWT. 2014. Free Schools and Inclusion. A ROTA Report. Eleanor Stokes for the NASUWT.

https://www.rota.org.uk/sites/default/files/webfm/nasuwt_012948.pdf

National Autistic Society. (2020.) Unlawful and unofficial exclusion. Grey Areas in Exclusion.

[Unlawful and unofficial exclusion \(autism.org.uk\)](#)

National Crime Agency. 2019. County Lines Drug Supply, Vulnerability and Harm 2018. NAC (19) 095 January 2019

[file \(nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk\)](#)

National Education Union. 2021.

Key Documents:

Preventing and reducing exclusions. NEU. 23rd June 2021

Behaviour. NEU. 29th June 2021

Racism Excludes: Why schools need to make the difference. NEU. 9th July 2021

Racism and Exclusions. NEU. 16th July 2021

Permanent Exclusions and Suspensions. NEU 29th July 2021 Available at:

[Site Search | NEU](#)

Ofsted. 2016 Guidance. Behaviour and Discipline in Schools. January 2016 updated 2020.

Behaviour and Discipline in Schools - A guide for headteachers and school staff final draft.docx (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Ofsted. 2019. Exploring Moving to Home Education in Secondary Schools. 1st October 2019.

Exploring moving to home education in secondary schools (publishing.service.gov.uk)

ROTA. 2013. Shaping the Future. Getting the best for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Children and Young People. Seminar Series Report. December 2013.

https://www.rota.org.uk/sites/default/files/webfm/researchpublications/shaping_the_future_getting_the_best_for_GlobalMajority_children_and_young_people_f.pdf

ROTA. 2014. Inclusive Schools. The 2nd Report of the Free Schools Monitoring Project.

ROTA (September 2014) Inclusive Schools: The 2nd Report of the Free Schools Monitoring Project | ROTA - Race On The Agenda

ROTA. 2018. Unofficial, Unrecorded and Illegal. What can be done about informal exclusions in schools?

Informal Exclusions | ROTA - Race On The Agenda

ROTA, May 2020/ Covid-19 and the issue of informal exclusion from school.

<https://www.rota.org.uk/content/rota-may-2020-covid-19-and-issue-informal-exclusion-school>

Schools Week. 2019. Investigation: Fair Access? Hundreds of pupils shut out. By Kathryn Snowdon. Friday 19th July 2019.

<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/investigation-fair-access-hundreds-of-pupils-shut-out/>

Stake. Robert, E. 1995. The Art of Case Study Research. Sage Publications. ISBN 978-0803957671.

SYDRC. 2019. School Exclusion among Somali Children in Camden. Somali Youth Development Resource Centre.

SYDRC School Exclusion Report.pdf

TheRSA. 2019. School Exclusions: the teachers' perspective. Laura Partridge, Danni Mason, Fran Landreth Strong and Hannah Webster. September 2019

[rsa-school-exclusions-the-teachers-perspective.pdf \(thersa.org\)](rsa-school-exclusions-the-teachers-perspective.pdf)

TheRSA. 2020. Pinball Kids, Preventing School Exclusions March 2020

<https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/reports/2020/the-rsa-pinball-kids-preventing-school-exclusions.pdf>

Social Finance UK 2020. Invisible Girls. Why School Exclusions are not Gender Neutral

<https://medium.com/social-finance-uk/invisible-girls-why-school-exclusions-are-not-gender-neutral-fa732d64c1a9>

The Difference. Impact Report 2019-2020.

[The+Difference+Impact+Report+2019-2020.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)

Traveller Movement. 2019. Good Practice Guide for improving outcomes of GRT children in education. April 2019.

[Good-Practice-Guide-Education-2019-short-version.pdf \(travellermovement.org.uk\)](#)

Women and Equalities Committee. *Tackling Inequalities faced by Gipsy, Roma and Traveller Communities*. Gender roles and their effect on the education of Gipsy and Traveller Children. 7th Report of the Session 2017-2019. 5th April 2019. HC 360

[Tackling inequalities faced by the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities \(parliament.uk\)](#)

Yin. Robert, K. 2014. Case Study Research Design and Methods. Thousand Oaks. C.A. Sage. 2014. ISBN 978-1-4522-4256-9

YouGov 2019. Survey conducted for Ofsted. Off rolling. Exploring the issue. 10th May 2019.

[Exploring the issue of off-rolling \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Sources and websites

BBC News. 16th November 2018. Report by Noel Titheradge

[Schools admit informally excluding pupils - BBC News](#)

Halo Collective. @thehaloclvtv

Halo Code. @thehalocode

Just for Kids Law. School Exclusions Hub.

<https://www.justforkidslaw.org>

No More Exclusions.

<https://nomoreexclusions.com>

10. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Freedom of Information Requests: Questions to Local Authorities

I would be grateful if you could send me the following information, using the DFE reason codes and the DFE extended ethnicity codes attached. Please also provide this information in the format shown in the example templates attached.

1. For the academic years of 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 can you please provide the total number of pupils broken down by ethnicity. (Please use the ethnicity codes)
2. For the academic years of 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 can you provide the total number pupils who received permanent exclusions from schools, with this figure broken down by reason and ethnicity. (Please use the ethnicity codes and provide the reason against the ethnicity code.)
3. For the academic years of 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 can you please provide the total number of pupils who received fixed-term exclusions from schools, with this figure broken down by reason and by ethnicity. (Please use the ethnicity codes and the reason code against the ethnicity code.)
4. For the academic years of 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 can you provide the total number of pupils who received Elective Home Education in your borough, with these figures broken down by reason and ethnicity. (Please use the ethnicity codes and provide the reason against the ethnicity code)
5. For the academic years of 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 please provide the number of pupils who were on Free School Meals prior to being on EHE. (Please use the ethnicity codes and provide this information against the ethnicity.)
6. For the academic years of 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 can you provide the total number of pupils who received lunch time exclusions from schools, with this figure broken down by reason and ethnicity. (Please use the ethnicity codes with the reason against the ethnicity code.)
7. For the academic years of 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 can you provide the total number of pupils recorded as undergoing a managed move from schools, with this figure broken down by reason and ethnicity. (Please use the ethnicity codes and the reason against the ethnicity code.)
8. For the academic years of 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 can you provide the total number of pupils enrolled in Pupil Referral Units with this figure broken down by reason and ethnicity. (Please use the ethnicity codes and the reason against the ethnicity codes.)
9. For the academic years of 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 can you provide the total number of pupils who have been on roll in Pupil Referral Units for over 12 months, with this figure broken down by reason and ethnicity. (Please use the ethnicity codes and the reason against the ethnicity codes.)

10. For the academic years of 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 can you provide the total number of sixth form pupils removed from the admissions register, both voluntarily and involuntarily. Please provide this information broken down by reason and ethnicity. (Please use the ethnicity codes and the reason against the ethnicity codes.)

APPENDIX 2

Table 1 Responses received from 12 London Local Authorities in answer to Freedom of Information Requests

Council	Questions not answered
Hackney	Q1: We have not broken the census data down to reflect all of the ethnic groups listed by the DfE. We estimate that to do so would exceed the appropriate limits. Q2: Hackney Learning Trust does not hold this information. We estimate that to do so would exceed the appropriate limits. Q3: Hackney Learning Trust does not hold this information. As above, to date, Hackney Learning Trust has not produced a breakdown of all pupils excluded on a fixed term basis by ethnicity using the extensive list provided by the DfE. Q4: Hackney Learning Trust can provide the number of children known to be receiving Elective Home Education in these years, however, we do not collect information about ethnicity. Q5: Hackney Learning Trust does not hold this information.
Kingston	Q4. Unable to find data Q5. We do not collect this data. Q6. We do not collect this data, schools would need to be approached directly. Q7. This data is not collected centrally. Schools would need to be approached directly for the data. NB. Local Authority cannot confirm schools have this data. Q8. & 9. Overall numbers of pupils at PRUs can be found here but not by ethnicity. Q10. This information is held by schools as 6th Form admissions are managed directly by schools.
Richmond	4. We do not record ethnicity and do not have records prior to September 2014. 5. We do not collect this data. 6. We do not collect this data, schools would need to be approached directly. 7. This data is not collected centrally and schools would need to be approached directly. NB Local Authority cannot confirm schools have this data. 8. & 9. Overall numbers of pupils at PRUs can be found here but not by ethnicity: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-school-and-pupil-numbers 10. This information is held by schools as 6th Form admissions are managed directly by schools.

Windsor and Maidenhead	3. There is no requirement for schools to provide this data to the local authority. 5. This data is held centrally by the local authority's data team. 6. There is no requirement for schools to provide this data to the local authority. 8. & 9. Data held by the commissioned service: RISE (Respect Inspire Succeed Engage) Alternative Learning Provision. 10. This information is held by schools as 6th Form admissions are managed directly by schools.
Barnet	7. Please note this data is not collected by the Local Authority. You will need to contact individual schools. NB cannot be confirmed that schools have the data. 8. We do not hold this information. You will need to contact the Pupil Referral Unit: 9. We do not hold this information. You will need to contact the Pupil Referral Unit: 10. Please note this data is not collected by the Local Authority. You will need to contact individual schools.
City of London	5. Information not held. 6. Information not held 7. All managed moves are agreed from school to school; therefore this information is not held 8. There are no pupil referral units located within the CoL 9. There are no pupil referral units located within the CoL 10. There are no pupil referral units located within the CoL
Bexley	5. We do not hold this data in an accessible form 7. In Bexley we do not hold managed move data centrally. Schools arrange managed move between themselves and all secondary schools are academies so this data belongs to them. NB Local Authority cannot confirm that schools have this data. 8. please contact our PRU which is an academy https://www.newhorizonsfederation.org.uk/horizons/home 9. please contact Horizons https://www.newhorizonsfederation.org.uk/horizons/home 10. This data belongs to our secondary schools, all of whom are academies.
Ealing	4. Ealing Council is unable to provide EHE reason against ethnicity as our data is taken from a 'snapshot' of a live database, and not retained once we've obtained the stats we need. 5. Ealing Council does not keep a record of this information. 7. Ealing Council does not keep a record of this information, this is held by schools. Please contact individual schools directly for this information. NB Local Authority cannot confirm that schools have this data. 10. Ealing Council does not hold this information broken down by reason and ethnicity code.

Sutton	4. We do not hold this information based on ethnicity and reason code, however we can provide the number of pupils receiving Elective Home Education. These are the numbers are based on the end of the academic year. 5. We don't record free school meal status at the point of EHE, we therefore do not hold this information. 7. This is not centrally held data, schools maintain their own records, we therefore do not hold this information. NB Local Authority cannot confirm that schools have this data. 10. This is not centrally held data, schools maintain their own records, we therefore do not hold this information.
Lewisham	7. We do not hold this information you will need to contact the individual schools directly. NB Local Authority cannot confirm that schools have this data. 8. No reason given 9. We do not hold this information you will need to contact the individual schools directly. 10. We do not hold this information.
Hounslow	2. Not possible to provide within appropriate time/cost limit 3. Not possible to provide within appropriate time/cost limit 5. Unable to provide within time limit 6 Unable to provide 7 Unable to provide 9 Unable to provide 10 Unable to provide
Waltham Forest	Q2 – Data suppressed as small number of pupils Q3 – Data suppressed as small number of pupils Q4 – Cannot provide for each year/unclear Q5 – Data not held Q6 –Data suppressed as small number of pupils. Not able to answer. Q7 – Data not held Q8 – Data held elsewhere Q9 – Data not available in form requested Q10 – Schools hold this data

APPENDIX 3a: Interview Schedule

Interview questions for Professionals working with informally excluded children

Name

Organisation

Job title

Role

1. Please can you describe what knowledge you have of informal exclusions

e.g. legislation relating to informal exclusion/how informal exclusion differs from permanent or fixed-term exclusion/in what circumstances schools might use informal exclusion

2. What contact do you have with young people who have experienced informal exclusion?

e.g. Teach/mentor/work with schools/youth clubs/young offender institutions/supplementary schools/other

3. Please describe the young people you work with – how old are they, are they boys or girls, what ethnic background do they come from.

4. What do you know about their personal circumstances?

e.g. do they live with a parent or carer/in care/do they have a statement of SEND/ADHD/in receipt of FSM/have they experienced, or been diagnosed as suffering from trauma/other

5. Can you describe the factors leading up to exclusion/reasons for exclusion

e.g. non-attendance/non-compliance with school rules/behaviour

6. Do you know whether any informally excluded pupils have been involved with juvenile offending?

NB There is no implication they have been informally excluded possibly due to juvenile offending, but it may be a factor leading up to exclusion. We would like to know whether informally excluded pupils become involved in juvenile offending such as knife crime, as a result of being informally excluded and ending up on the streets for example.

7. What form does exclusion take?

e.g. off-rolling/exam leave/lunch-time exclusion/seclusion within school/managed move e.g. to another school or to a Pupil Referral Unit/elective home schooling

8. If elective home schooling, please can you describe what this involves

e.g. is pressure put on parents e.g. to avoid exclusion/what support is offered e.g. to ensure that parents have the resources and capacity/that students are followed up and monitored

9. For children who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing informal exclusion, please describe what intervention, support and funding is available

Other issues

APPENDIX 3b: Modified Interview Schedule

Questions for teachers and others working with informally excluded children

Name

Organisation

Job title

Role

1. Please can you tell me about your experience of developing and implementing behaviour management in the classroom e.g. written policies or guidelines; approaches and methods; skills and experience

2. Please describe the support needed by teachers to help children with learning or behavioural difficulties e.g. to prevent the escalation of problems

3. Are you aware of any sanctions that might be used as part of classroom behaviour management?

4. Please describe whether these include internal exclusion e.g. being sent out of class/detention/isolation/other

5. What reason/circumstances might internal exclusion be used?

6. Do you know whether instances of internal exclusion are recorded or monitored?

7. Other issues

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the organisations and individuals working with pupils excluded from school who contributed to this research and to the young people themselves who took part in focus groups. Their names have been anonymised, but their contributions to the debate about informal exclusions are included in this Report.

We are also grateful to the Centre for Social Justice, the Education Policy Institute and the Department for Education for their help and insights interpreting the data on informal exclusions from school.

Thanks are also due to ROTA staff member Sasha McKoy who assisted with drafting and advising on content and to volunteers Angela Loum and Nazma Miah who assisted with verifying information and sources. Saifur Valli, Lee Pinkerton and Alba Kapoor contributed to proof reading, formatting and dissemination of the Final Report.

Eleanor Stokes

ROTA Education Policy Researcher
eleanor@rota.org.uk

INFORMAL EXCLUSIONS FROM SCHOOL

A ROTA RESEARCH REPORT

JANUARY 2022



Resource for London
356 Holloway Road
London N7 6PA

Tel: 020 7697 4093
Website: www.rota.org.uk
Email: rota@rota.org.uk

Facebook: facebook.com/ROTA.org
Twitter: twitter.com/raceontheagenda

