

Analysis supports urgent need for policy reform to limit school exclusions in England after COVID-19

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The multi-disciplinary Excluded Lives Research Team, led by Professor Harry Daniels and Associate Professor Ian Thompson from the

University of Oxford, has today (5/10/2020), launched three new reports with recommendations to prevent school exclusions in England in the context of COVID-19 and beyond.

Ian Thompson, Associate Professor of Education at Oxford said: "There is a risk that exclusions of all kinds will increase if the infrastructure and culture of schooling in England that emerges post COVID-19 is one that emphasizes [high performance](#), zero tolerance and funding limitations rather than well-being, attainment, attendance and safeguarding."

The reports state that in order to mitigate exclusion risks, deliver the DfE's four pillars of attainment, attendance, safeguarding and well-being, foster inclusion, and meet the requirements of the 2010 Equality Act policies need to: Foster a nuanced understanding of vulnerability; recognize and promote well-being as fundamental for all children and young people; and, identify and resolve policy and practice contradictions.

A nuanced understanding of vulnerability would recognize the diversity of children and young people including those whose pre-existing vulnerabilities have been overlaid with COVID-19, those who have become vulnerable due to COVID-19, and embraces the risk factors and children and young people's views on their needs moving from a focus on [vulnerable children](#) and young people to focusing on vulnerable contexts. This can be supported through:

- Engaging with children and young people using a Children's Rights based approach.
- Learning from the positive benefits for some children of COVID-19 schooling identifying implications for teaching and learning and the factors affecting sustainability.
- Producing granular, live data at both local and national levels to monitor the movement of policy into practice including

attendance across all types of settings, absences and exclusions.

Recognizing and promoting well-being as fundamental for all children and young people would enable them to attend consistently, engage with learning to catch up and attain; and ensure continued safeguarding, including mitigating the risks of exploitation. Policies need to foster long term, strategic approaches which:

- Communicate the principles and practice implications of the DfE pillars in accessible, consistent and sustained ways across government departments, Local Authorities, Multi Academy Trusts, educational settings including all professions working with children and young people, schools and communities.
- Take a joined up contextual approach to safeguarding and well-being building on existing provision including mental health support, school nursing and designated safeguarding leads within schools and Violence Reduction Units working in local areas.
- Support all schools to review their culture and values within pedagogy, curriculum (including the arts and implications of the Black Lives Matter movement) and pastoral care.
- Develop guidance on whole [school](#) approaches to well-being including social and emotional aspects of learning, understanding trauma and a focus on relationship building at all levels including supporting the well-being of teaching and support staff.
- Provide evidence informed guidance, including a focus on prevention and early intervention to support schools to adopt a holistic approach to contextual safeguarding.
- Strengthen Initial Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development and the availability of resources for understanding social and emotional aspects of learning, trauma informed practice, approaches to supporting well-being and mental health.

Identifying and resolving policy and practice contradictions requires

acknowledging the way legislation is enacted within and across government departments and services at all levels including consideration of:

- The means to resolve the existing fragmented, performance dominated system and bring existing disparate education structures and partners together to develop an effective middle tier to ensure coherent, consistent and sustained support for vulnerable [children](#) and [young people](#).
- The policy and practice risks of the current accountability frameworks and the pressure from the culture of high performance, zero tolerance and funding shortfalls.
- Revise accountability frameworks in ways that promote well-being and collaboration.
- Develop collaborative support and challenge across services and partners ensuring partners (including Local Authorities, Multi Academy Trusts, youth offending and police services, [social care](#) and health services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health services etc) engage share data and are resourced.

Harry Daniels, Professor of Education at Oxford University, commented that: "Well-being and attainment are inextricably linked and we need to achieve a better balance in the attention all schools give to them. The key message is the need for policies that promote intervening upstream. To do this we need to ensure that the necessary infrastructure, resourcing and professional training and on-going support is in place, enabling schools and related services to identify needs and provide effective early intervention and support."

More information: The reports:
www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/excluded-lives/

Provided by University of Oxford

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