PEER ACTION COLLECTIVE: RESEARCH FINDINGS

THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR IN YOUTH VIOLENCE:
EXPLORING YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF SUPPORT DURING EXCLUSIONS AND SUSPENSIONS IN LONDON

Contents

The London Peer Action Collective Team.

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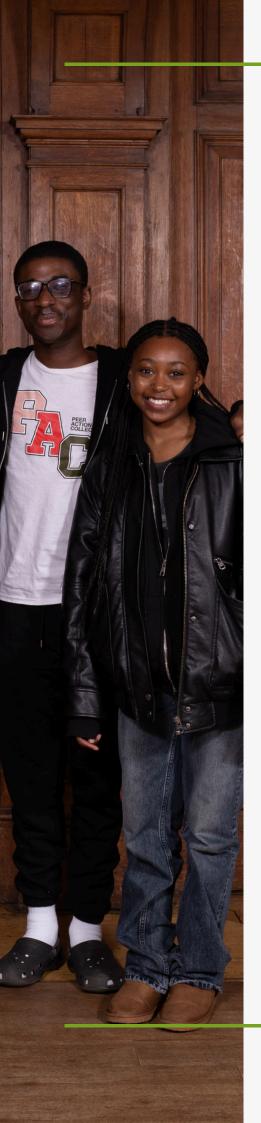
About the project

The Peer Action Collective (PAC) is a £12.7 million programme, which aims to give young people the chance to make their communities safer, fairer places to live. It is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund, the #iwill Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and the Co-op Group.

PAC is a ground-breaking network of peer researchers; social action leads and changemakers. The network is driven by young people with lived experience of violence finding out what needs to happen to make their area a better place to live, and turning these insights into action. This includes work such as influencing school practices, improving local mental health services, co-producing violence reduction strategies or supporting more young people into employment.

McPin and the Peace Alliance are working together as the Delivery Partners in London (2023-2025). Our work aims to further grow youth lived experience leadership, undertake research driven by experiential knowledge, and carry out social action that results in on-the-ground change in Haringey.

Each PAC delivery partner has a topic area; our partnership is working on education. We are led by our team of young peer researchers and social action leads over what questions need answering about education and youth violence, and we support them to develop social action projects that addresses the issues identified.

Summary

What we did

Our team of 12 young peer researchers explored young people's views on how schools can help protect their students from youth violence. We chose to focus on students affected by school exclusions, who may be at higher risk for experiencing violence. Through in-depth interviews and focus groups, 71 young people in and around London shared how they think schools can best support students before, during, and after any form of school exclusion.

What we found

- Young people had mixed views on whether exclusion was a useful tool for schools to use, and which types of exclusion were most/least effective. Some felt there was never a need to exclude, whilst others felt it was needed where there were serious issues such as violence, or threat to other people's safety.

- Young people shared mainly negative emotions associated with exclusion. The most common was anger, but they also described anxiety, stress, embarrassment, confusion, and low mood. Some told us they felt a sense of liberation or relief.

- Young people believed that exclusions may push young people towards violence. An increase in unstructured time may lead to more opportunities to become more involved with bad influences (such as gangs) or to watch online content promoting violence. Being excluded and feeling labelled/abandoned also was described by some young people as a factor that pushed them towards negative influences.

What we found continued...

- Young people felt that schools should focus on understanding and addressing the root causes and wider context to poor behaviour (e.g. home life, mental health issues, bullying). By understanding these issues, it was suggested schools could help protect young people from becoming involved in violence by supporting them more holistically.

What needs to happen now

Our research is intended to inform direct action in our communities. Our findings suggest that:

- A holistic and personalised approach to supporting students is needed before, during and after an exclusion to make young people feel more valued, supported and understood by the school.

- De-escalation and open conversations between teachers and students should be prioritised, allowing time for reflection prior to exclusion, and if needed, afterwards. Both teachers and students will need support to achieve this.

- Schools should support young people to engage in hobbies that connect them to the school or wider local community, as well as ensuring opportunities to work with mentors or take part in programmes that support young people's development, alongside academic work.

Young people need to be involved in the decision-making processes around exclusions and be given choices as well as support to understand why schools use exclusions at all.

What needs to happen now continued...

- Young people need to be involved in the decision-making processes around exclusions and be given choices as well support to understand why schools use exclusions at all. Reflecting school culture and values, this might include a 'contract' between school and student about when and how exclusions are undertaken. Additionally, any decisions should account for wider issues that a student may be experiencing and context such as exam periods, impact on learning and safety.

- Schools should take an active approach to youth violence by spotting the early signs and supporting those who are involved, to avoid students feeling labelled as a 'lost cause' or excluded without the school fully understanding the context of why they might be struggling.

- Schools need more support in order to protect their young people from youth violence. Young people recognised that some of the challenges associated with exclusion, and access to support around exclusion is outside of their school, or teacher's control. They felt that it was important to recognise that funding and staff levels can play a role in how exclusions are actioned – and wanted more investment for schools to provide holistic support, that increased opportunities for development and employment. There needs to be a connected systems response from local authorities, central government, education, the private sector, the third sector and communities themselves.

Schools should take an active approach to youth violence by spotting the early signs and supporting those who are involved, to avoid students feeling labelled as a 'lost cause'.

Recommendations for Schools

Three key reccommendations for schools have emerged from our research.

Recommendation 1

When exclusions are necessary, schools should act with an awareness of:
- the risk of pushing young people towards youth violence
- the opportunity to provide support around the exclusion that acts as a protective factor from youth violence.

Support needs to be holistic and focus on the root cause of behaviours, and be provided before, during and after exclusions.

Recommendation 2

Involve young people meaningfully in the discussions and decision-making surrounding both exclusions and youth violence.

Recommendation 3

Take an active preventative approach to youth violence. Schools should work to have personalised approaches that meet young people where they are in relation to youth violence (not involved, at-risk of becoming involved, or being involved).

Schools need to invest in understanding the root causes and young people's experiences of youth violence, in order to inform their approach.

Introduction: Setting the scene

Youth violence, occurring between children and young people, includes a range of acts from online or offline bullying and fighting, to physical assault and homicide (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2015; WHO, 2023). Youth violence can result in deaths, injuries, disability and long-term physical and mental health consequences.

A survey undertaken by The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) found that in the previous 12 months, 1 in 5 teenage children had been victims, and 1 in 6 had perpetrated violence in England and Wales (YEF, 2024). This survey also found that 52% of young people reported having made changes due to fear of violence, or that fear of violence had impacted their wellbeing (YEF, 2024).

Youth violence is associated with higher rates of school absences and exclusions, linked to reduced opportunities for young people to learn and contribute to their communities (WHO, 2023).

10% of young people said that they skip school due to fear, this increased to 26% amongst young people who were victims of violence (YEF, 2024). Since the Covid-19 lockdowns, 1.8 million children in England have not returned regularly to school (Children's Commissioner, 2023).

The YEF Children, violence and vulnerability report also notes that 1 in 20 of the young people they surveyed had carried a weapon in the previous year. Two-thirds of London-based knife offences involve young people aged 10 to 25 years old (Bentham, 2019; Grierson, 2020) and research using major trauma data in the UK found that stab injuries of those under 16 occurred most frequently in an area close to school, in the time immediately after school (Vulliamy et al., 2018). In 2023 there were 51 homicide victims aged 13-19 and 82% teenage victims were more likely to be killed by a knife or sharp instrument then victims of all ages in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2023).

Alongside this issue of youth violence, rates of both temporary and permanent exclusions have continued to increase. In 2019 exclusions in England rose by 5% in the autumn, compared to the same time the year prior, whilst suspensions increased by 14% (The Commission on Young Lives, 2022). This was the context to the Timpson Review in 2019 for the Department for Education and accompanying research (see Martin-Denham et al., 2020; Martin-Denham, 2021). Exclusions have further increased on average in England from 2021/22 to 2022/23, in both primary and secondary education (Department for Education, 2024). School exclusions refer to a range of disciplinary measures that schools may take to manage students' behaviour and maintain the safety of school communities.

Temporary exclusions can include internal exclusions (where a student is permitted to attend school with restrictions) or suspensions (where a student is not permitted to attend school for up to a maximum of 45 school days). A permanent exclusion means that the student cannot return to the school, and their local council must arrange alternative full-time education from the sixth school day. Notably, YEF (2024) recently reported that 32% of young people are persistently absent from school, and 53% of those suspended from school and 74% of those excluded from school are reported to perpetuate violence in England and Wales.

Defining different forms of school exclusion	
Lunch Time Exclusion	Student not allowed in school lunch and break spaces, but does attend classes
Internal Exclusion	Student completely separated from others, including classes, within the school.
Suspension	Student cannot attend school premises for a fixed number of days.
Permeant exclusion	Student is not allowed back to the school.
Managed move	Student attends a different school, which can become permeant.
Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)	Alternative education provision if student is unable to be placed in a mainstream school.

Furthermore, national statistics show inequalities in which children from marginalised groups face higher risk for experiencing school exclusions, raising urgent questions around inclusive education in England. For example, in 2022/23, children with Black Caribbean heritage and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children were more likely to experience school exclusions than White British children (Department for Education, 2024). Similarly, children eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs were more likely to experience exclusions than those without, as were boys compared to girls (Graham et al., 2019).

In London, research suggests that exclusions have been increasing since 2012 (Mayor of London, 2024). However, in Haringey where our work is focused, rates fell below the national average in the 2022/23 alongside neighbouring boroughs Hackney, Islington and Enfield (London Borough of Haringey (LBoH), 2024). The permanent exclusion rate is 0.11 nationally, but 0.01 in Haringey with only 2 pupils permanently excluded at the time of writing.

Despite the permanent exclusion rate in Haringey reducing, there remains concern about how exclusion impacts young people in the area with 1968 recorded suspensions in 2022/23. Demographically Haringey is a diverse borough; approximately 38% of residents are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups and 26% identify as 'white other' (LBoH, 2019). This is not unimportant when statistics show that young Black men are more likely to be excluded then their peers, and that reports suggest ongoing structural racism within the exclusion process (The Commission on Young Lives, 2022, p.15).

Further, Haringey's rates of violence remain high, with data showing it has the 13th Highest rate of Crime across the 32 London Boroughs in the 12 months prior to September 2023 (LBoH, 2023): Knife crime in the borough had risen 14% over the past year, while gun crime was up 8%. (LBoH, 2023). Serious violence affecting young people in Haringey rose by 15% in the 12 months prior to April 2023, which was higher than the overall London increase of 10%. Haringey also had the 3rd highest rate of serious violence offences affecting young people per 1000 youth population in London in 2023. The largest group of both perpetrators and victims were under 25 years old, with those under 17 years old being the largest youth victim group (LBoH, 2023–2024). In one study, connected to East London 65 out of 85 reports collected by young volunteers stated they were either "Fairly worried" or "Very worried" about victimisation. In these reports, 11 incidents took place in Haringey (Skarlatidou et al., 2023).

The relationship between school exclusion and violence is complex. There is evidence that there is an association between exclusions and youth violence offending and that children who are excluded from school face further adverse life experiences (Arnez & Condry, 2021; Department for Education and Ministry of Justice, 2023; Holt, 2011). However, the nature of this association is unclear. In 2022 a joint report by the Department for Education and the Minister of Justice found "59% of children that had ever been permanently excluded were also cautioned or sentenced for an offence. 22% of children that had ever been permanently excluded were also cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence, and 21% were cautioned or sentenced for a prolific number of offences." (p.11).

Furthermore, recent research using longitudinal methods has found associations between exclusions and weapon use/carrying (Ministry of Justice, 2018; Smith, & Edward Wynne-McHardy, 2019; Villadsen & Fitzsimons, 2021). Villadsen & Fitzsimons highlighted several factors in early adolescence (11-14 years) that were related with carrying a weapon at age 17. Notably one of these included exclusion, alongside self-harm, substance misuses and peers who use multiple substances (Villadsen & Fitzsimons, 2021).

In 2017 a study by Gill about adult prisoners in the UK found that 42% had experienced permanent exclusion and 63% temporary exclusion and that children who experienced exclusion were more likely to be victims of serious violence. In the juvenile context, in 2021 a report found that 60% of boys of Black or Mixed Heritage backgrounds subject to court orders had been excluded (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2021). Notably, boys of Black or Mixed Heritage backgrounds also remain over-represented in the juvenile justice system. It could be argued that these figures suggest a critical need to find solutions that address exclusion rates, especially for marginalised youth, and provide more culturally appropriate support (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2021).

There has also been an important effort in recent years to better understand the perspectives of parents and caregivers, teachers and head teachers as well as pupils towards the process of school exclusions (Martin–Denham, 2020). Martin–Denham emphasize the importance of systematic thinking and solutions including conversations about mental health and neurodevelopmental factors in the context of social exclusions. This quote from one parent provides an example:

> " 'She had a thing for make–up and she had a huge problem with how she looked. They talked about body dysmorphia with her as well. Because she has this real view of how she looks, and her make–up was her mask almost, and you try to explain to teachers and say that… Then they used to get her into school and then they would make her wipe the make–up off in school and it would just cause her so much anxiety. I get it; I understand that they have rules and they have to adhere to the rules, but you know just the difficulty…' p. 52.

This evidence is of concern to the government, educational policy makers and providers as well as the families and young people impacted by this issue. There is an opportunity to better understand the positive roles schools can play in relation to exclusion through the youth lens. Particularly, how schools can most effectively support students during and after the process of exclusion to avoid repeat or permanent exclusion experiences and encourage positive engagement with school spaces.

> "As a young person working on this project, I believe researching youth violence and schools was crucial because educational environments play a significant role in shaping young people's lives. By understanding how schools can impact youth violence, we can identify key areas for intervention and support, ultimately creating safer and more nurturing spaces for students to thrive. This research informs our project's action plan, enabling us to develop targeted strategies that address the root causes of youth violence and promote positive change in our communities." – Kyan Alves Nicholson, Peer Researcher at London Peer Action Collective

Our team, the London Peer Action Collective, have been working to explore young people's experiences of exclusion and the role these play in youth violence as one of seven Delivery Partners in the Peer Action Collective (PAC). Through PAC, young people are working to make their communities safer, fairer places to live. The Peer Action Collective is a £12.7 million programme, which aims to give young people the chance to make their communities safer, fairer places to live.

It is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund, the #iwill Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and the Co-op group. PAC is a ground-breaking network of young people with lived experience of violence working together to find out what needs to happen to make their area a better place to live and turn these insights into action.

Our team is led by 12 young people who live in, or are connected to, Haringey. This team of young people is supported by the McPin Foundation and Peace Alliance. The McPin Foundation team provided research training, supervision and research delivery support. The Peace Alliance provided pastoral and wellbeing support, social action training, supervision and delivery. Our team's mission is to generate robust youth-led evidence to inform youth-led change in our local community, with a particular focus on 'presence in schools'.

Our team is made up of 'peer researchers.' This means that we are people who have lived experience of the thing we are researching, and have been trained to conduct the research.

For our foundational research project, the team worked together to develop a question to better understand the intersection of youth violence and education. We did this through weekly sessions where we explored the group's own experiences, sourced relevant literature and media, and learnt from external speakers with their own lived experience of youth violence or professional experience in supporting young people. During this time the young people peer researchers in our team undertook weekly research training that covered ethics, research design, data collection, confidentiality, safeguarding and qualitative data analysis methods. Peer researchers also learnt about social media dissemination and undertook mental health first aid training to support other young people engaged with the project. There were many important areas we could have chosen to explore in our research project; however, we decided to focus on:

Q **"What support helps young people before, during, and after a form of school exclusion to be protected from youth violence?"** **Q**

Methods

Participants

We collected perspectives from 71 young people aged between 12 – 23 years. Young people were recruited through schools and youth centres local to Haringey, North London, and through online social media posts, circulars to the McPin Foundation Young People's Network, and word of mouth.

Young people in London (97% of sample) and the Southeast of England (3% of sample) who had an interest in sharing their knowledge and perspectives around school exclusions and youth violence were invited to do so through a range of online and in-person activities, depending on their preference. Around a third of our participants were from the London Borough of Haringey, with just under a third from the neighbouring Borough of Hackney. The following methods were used: a creative body-mapping workshop (nine participants, one workshop), focus groups (38 participants, eight focus groups), and an online survey (29 participants, one survey). All forms of data collection were designed and facilitated by the young peer researchers on our team, to foster trust and comfort for the research participants. All in-person activities started with an informal icebreaker, tailored to the group age and dynamic (i.e., either a group game or informal introduction questions).

Informed consent was recorded for all research participants before data collection commenced, with parental consent also collected for participants under 16 years of age. All participants were thanked for their time with a shopping voucher (£20 vouchers for workshops and focus groups) or entry to a prize draw (four £100 vouchers to be won by survey participants) and were signposted to local young people's services should they require support for any of the topics raised. Our procedures were externally reviewed for ethical considerations prior to data collection by members of the Young Foundation.

Participants' self–reported demographic characteristics (N=71)

Age	Number (%)
<16	**21 (29)**
16 – 18	44 (62)
>18	2 (3.5)
Unknown	4 (5.5)
Gender	
Woman	39 (55)
Man	25 (35)
Non–binary	1 (1.5)
Unknown	6 (8.5)
Gender same as assigned at birth	
Yes	56 (79)
No	4 (5.5)
Unknown	11 (15.5)
Location of residence	
London	69 (97)
Sussex	2 (3)

Race or Ethnicity	Number (%)
Asian/Asian British: Indian	1 (1.5)
Black/Black British: Black African/Caribbean/British	13 (18)
White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	27 (38)
White: Any other White background	5 (7)
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian	3 (4)
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black African	2 (3)
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black Caribbean	3 (4)
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Any other Mixed background	5 (7)
Other	5 (7)
Unknown	7 (10)
Looked after / care experience	
Yes	11 (15.5)
No	50 (70.5)
Unknown	10 (14)

Experiences of school exclusions and/or youth violence known to us (NB participants could select more than one experience, and not all participants reported on any/every item)

Experience of exclusion	Number (%)
Permanent exclusions or alternative provision	8 (11)
Temporary exclusions	30 (42)
Risk of exclusion, but avoided it	7 (10)
Peers being excluded	26 (37)
Being absent a lot from education	6 (8)
Affected by serious youth violence (directly or indirectly)	6 (8)
None of the above	11 (15)

Body Mapping Workshop

We adapted the body mapping protocol from Barnes et al., (2024) to explore young people's lived experiences of how it feels before, during, and after any form of school exclusion, and what supports can help young people during these times. Students split into groups of three or four, and each group was allocated to focus exclusively on experiences either before, during, or after a form of school exclusion. One member of each group lay on a large piece of paper so that their body profile could be traced by their peers. The group then used coloured markers to draw and annotate within the life-sized body outline the ways in which a young person would feel in relation to their exclusion.

Next, the group surrounded the body profile with annotations for what could support a young person to navigate these feelings and help protect them from experiences of youth violence. Group members were encouraged to write collectively or independently on the sheets, so that opposing ideas and perspectives could be documented without requiring group agreement. Written annotations, which largely consisted of stand-alone single words or phrases, were typed up for each body map after the one-hour workshop.

Focus Groups

We used the same semi-structured topic guides in all focus groups, designed to ask young people how school students feel, and what can support them, before, during, and after a form of school exclusion. Question prompts were designed to encourage participants to consider experiences related to all types of school exclusions and school settings, and to reflect on how the support suggested could help protect young people from serious youth violence. Focus groups were scheduled for a maximum of one hour each and could take place in person or online. Focus group recordings were transcribed and then manually checked for accuracy and anonymised.

Online Surveys

Participants aged 16 years or older (i.e., able to self-consent to take part) were invited to submit their perspectives in written form online if they could not join a focus group or workshop, or if they didn't feel comfortable disclosing their experiences in a group setting. Our online survey questions mirrored those asked in the focus groups, involving 14 questions with raw text answer boxes probing young people's perspectives around how it feels and what can help young people before, during, and after different forms of school exclusions.

Data Analysis

Our resulting qualitative data was analysed thematically using a systematic Framework Method (Gale et al., 2013). First, we organised data from the body mapping workshop (i.e., single word or phrase answers) into categories to summarise participants' perspectives around how it feels (reported in our feelings section) and what can help (reported in our solutions section) before, during, and after a young person's exclusion from school. Subsequent categories of feelings and solutions were then used to form our analytical framework for coding the focus group transcripts and survey response data. In this way, our framework was entirely rooted in the perspectives of young people (i.e., both research participants and our team of youth peer researchers).

Focus group transcripts and survey responses were then analysed line by line, coding each point raised under the categorised feelings and solutions in our analytical framework. New codes were created and added to the analytical framework if new feelings or solutions emerged in the data. Finally, coded data was charted into a framework matrix, which involved summarising the data by category from each transcript, and then across transcripts. Summaries were accompanied by quotes to illustrate the data in the matrix. Summarising the data during charting is a practical way to reduce the data, while affording all members of a multi-disciplinary team the chance to offer their perspectives and engage with the findings.

Findings

Views on different types of exclusions

> *"Sometimes I feel like exclusions can be quite unjust, especially if it's a student that's already known for bad behaviour. I feel like they're labelled and that's not good." Focus Group (FG) Participant*

The young people we spoke with had mixed views on exclusion. Some shared they felt that exclusion was not the right approach to supporting young people in any situation.

> *"To be honest, I feel like exclusions are not necessary and I feel like they don't teach a child a lesson. I feel like they just make the child miss out important information that they need." FG Participant*

Others felt that there were some circumstances where exclusion may be the right choice – for example where there was a high risk to fellow students or where a managed move might give someone a 'fresh start'.

> *"I don't disagree with them. I think that it makes sense why certain people get excluded for certain things." FG Participant*

> *"Maybe managed move, yes. It depends. Like I said, it all depends on the severity of the situation but if it's a really, really bad situation, I feel like a managed move, a fresh start for the student would be the best." FG Participant*

Many of the young people felt that short–term exclusion such as a suspension was the least beneficial. There was a sense that they didn't feel all young people took these seriously. Some young people shared that home environments where parents do not care about suspensions or a lack of support at school on return could result in these forms of exclusions not acting as a deterrent, lacking in positive impact or allowing more free time to become involved with people or activities that may bring them closer to violence.

> *"I think suspensions are ineffective sometimes because let's say your parents don't really care, then it's literally like just not going to school for one day so I think that's ineffective." FG Participant*

> *"It doesn't really help because if you do something really bad then you go home, say it's a one day suspension, you're going to go back the next day and you're still going to be bad." FG Participant*

Comparatively some young people felt that in school exclusions, such as lunchtime detention were more impactful than suspensions, giving time for reflection and less opportunities to see friends/undertake activities that were seen as more fun than school.

" *"I think out of school exclusions aren't really that useful because students probably see it as a break from school. If it's in school, then they probably would be less encouraged to do the same thing again." FG Participant*

" *"I feel like with me, what didn't help me was permanent exclusions because I would go to some schools where I actually already knew the people. It felt like the school was annoying anyway. So, when I had time away, I was happy, I had my friends from the other schools there so that didn't really help. But I feel like with the internal exclusion, as I said it drained me, so I feel like in my head I was like I'm never doing this again." FG Participant*

Many of the young people we spoke to who had experienced 'in school' exclusion also shared how it was a better option as it had less impact on their education and attendance. It was also noted that they felt these types of exclusion have less impact on mental health and stress levels for young people than suspensions and permanent exclusions.

" *"I think lunchtime exclusions make more sense because it's not super, super severe to where a student is missing out their education, but they are missing out their breaktime essentially." FG Participant*

" *"Like lunchtime exclusion is not really the end of the world. If you mess up and then you get punished for it, it's annoying but you can move past it. But I think things like suspensions and permanent exclusion can cause a lot of stress and probably bad for some young people's mental health, especially if you're already naughty, which might mean that you already have bad mental health." FG Participant*

" *"I think that half days are good because it's not going to make your attendance look bad because you've only been suspended for half a day. So, you're suspended for half the day, then you can just go home for the other half of the day and just start again tomorrow." FG Participant*

Some of the young people felt that the type of exclusion was not always clearly linked to, or appropriate for, a young person's behaviour. We were told that young people had experienced or knew of suspensions or exclusions for what they perceived to be less serious actions – and that in turn these exclusions were not useful as they disengaged young people from school. Examples included mildly disruptive classroom behaviour, lateness, absence, dress code violations, vaping and using phones. They also felt that exclusions for being gang affiliated where no unsafe activities had taken place in schools was also negative – and could result in young people being removed from a space that could help them. This reflects similar findings by the Partridge et al. who noted that 'Parents/carers, teachers and young people… frequently suggested that rising exclusions were, in part, the result of shift to stricter and more inflexible approaches to behaviour management in school.' (2020, p.32)

" *"I don't think students should get excluded when they're in gangs because if a student joins a gang, clearly, they need help rather than just kick them out and abandon them like most schools do. As soon as a school finds out a child is affiliated, they'll kick them out instead of helping them which I think is wrong."* FG Participant

" *"I mean in my old school a lot of the exclusions were just because people were behaving badly towards the teacher and in the classroom so was disrupting the class. So if they're still in school but they're doing their lessons like in a different room, I think that would probably help more than being outside of school because then they'll just enjoy being away from school."* FG Participant

" *"If they're not disrupting education or potentially harming someone, I don't think that's necessary to internally exclude someone, no matter what they've done. They could easily just have a lunchtime detention or an after school detention."* FG Participant

From some of the young people who had experienced alternative provision such as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), we heard that they felt that the current ways in which PRU's work is not always effective. Some shared experiences on lack of structure. Others suggested the teaching approach was not the same as mainstream schooling, impacting good engagement and development for young people.

" *"They were separate. So, if you go to the unit permanently, you get actual lessons, but I was there for six weeks, so I was just in one room and did nothing. So, I only went in for two days."* FG Participant

" *"Units? I hate units. Units are not really nice… you're just staying in one room, and you don't do anything. They just give you a test, a sheet of paper and they expect you to do it yourself. There's no one else to help you around. The teachers don't even help you."* FG Participant

" *"We just played Uno every day."* FG Participant

We also heard that young people felt that being at a PRU could play a role in whether someone engaged in violence – through both the lack of structure but also through allowing young people who are struggling to network with each other. It was felt this networking could influence young people to become further involved in gangs and other anti-social behaviours and increase disengagement from school. This was noted as a higher worry for young people who were at PRU's for 'less serious' issues/behaviours.

" *"I've been there twice, when I went there, the students were free. There were no proper lessons. In most rooms there was no teacher, you can do whatever you want to do literally. I feel like it just gave the child more space to act out bad even more. So yes, it's not like mainstream. Mainstream there's more of a timetable, a structure, more learning, more discipline. But PRUs, I feel can worsen a child's behaviour in a sense, yes."* FG Participant

" *"When I was in unit, there was a bunch of bad kids. I wouldn't say they were bad kids but sometimes they were misunderstood kids. They just felt like no one was listening to them, so they acted out type of thing. Some of them, obviously I was lucky because I was able to change and start to focus on school, but others weren't as lucky to make it. It all stems down to this because the teachers at PRUs or units aren't really like teachers. They're not there to teach. They're just there to look after a bunch of kids in a room. So, it kind of defeats the whole purpose of alternative education because they're not getting an education, they're just there as students and they're kind of like outcasts from the rest of the school and society. It kind of trains children for the prison system as well in a way because when I was in the unit, it was essentially like a prison, like you clock in and clock out, all of that type of stuff so yes."* FG Participant

Exclusions and decision making

Even where young people felt exclusion could be the right option, they strongly felt that it should not be done 'to' the young person. Instead, it should be driven by an open conversation between the school, the young person and any support networks they had.

" *"There should be a meeting between the leading team in a school and the student, but not in a way where the student is being basically maybe put on trial or something similar to that, but just a genuine conversation about what led to the behaviour and what they can do to help them. Because obviously if a student is about to get excluded, maybe if they were asked, oh, what do you want to happen? Instead of just saying, oh you're excluded, I think obviously the student would give a reasonable thing. They wouldn't want to be excluded."* FG Participant

Key finding

Young people told us that they want to be involved in how schools decide on punishments and exclusions. The young people we spoke with told us how schools decide on punishments affects how the student feels, the long-term impact of the punishment and the sense of belonging that the student has at the school. They shared that they want to be more included in the processes around exclusions in order to feel listened to and have a sense of agency in their own progress. The four things we identified in our data that young people felt schools should do during the decision-making process were:

- Involving the student, and potentially parents, as early as possible in the decision

- Ensuring a consistent approach for similar issues across all students

- Having a supportive and open conversation to hear the perspective of the student as well as perspectives from teachers and other students before making a decision

- Exploring alternatives to exclusion to allow students to remain connected to their school community.

" *"There's been times where I think exclusions have been the first resort when that shouldn't be necessary. There's a better way to handle it. Especially when it's like something that's so trivial."* FG Participant

Alongside this, young people shared the following key areas that they felt should be considered during the decision-making process:

- The root cause, including the student's home life and wider circumstances

- Short-term consequences including safety of peers, impact on exam periods and learning

- Long-term impacts

- How the student will reintegrate

- The safest form of punishment for a student, taking into account social environmental factors such as home environment/availability of family support, walking home in the dark from late detention, increased time with people who may be a negative influence/increase exposure to violence.

❚❚ *"It's a drag, because you going to spend the rest of your afternoon, when you could be studying for your exams, you know, with exams coming, you have to spend your time in detention until 5:15pm. I feel like they should set it for 30 minutes or an hour. That would be more sensible... I feel like we could improve on that, instead of going two hours. Then I'd be more down." FG Participant*

How young people feel before, during, and after a form of school exclusion

We heard how young people feel before, during, and after different forms of school exclusions, and how they think schools could support them during these times.

Many young people discussed cycles of anger and resentment in relation to exclusions. Many young people expressed how anger can lead to bad behaviour that then leads to their exclusions, and that anger can remain towards the school and teachers when they return. If there is no disruption to this cycle, or space to process, then bad behaviour can escalate and get more extreme, severing relationships between the student and the school community.

❚❚ *"I think when you get excluded, especially if you feel it's wrong or whatever, even if you don't feel like it's wrong, I think the first reaction is you're quite angry." FG Participant*

> **"** *"It's kind of like maybe like one punishment, like one small thing. Like it could be like getting a bad behaviour point, and then it becomes like a form of injustice, or like you want to fight your case, or you feel like you kind of deserve a word to say something, then you get sent out. Then maybe you refuse to go out or maybe then you're in that place where you don't really get sent out and you get angry, you get annoyed with the injustice and then you get sent to internal exclusion, and then at that moment you're just like 'I'm not doing this'. They don't give us time to comprehend. They just put us in there for the whole day and then they make us do like two hour detentions and sometimes we just refuse because they don't know our situation." FG Participant*

Alongside anger, young people discussed experiences of anxiety, stress, confusion, and low mood in relation to school exclusions. These feelings stemmed from young people feeling powerless in relation to their exclusion, not knowing what the next steps would be, and being isolated from their community and peers.

These negative emotions were further linked in young people to a loss of confidence and motivation, impacts on their social relationships, and feeling labelled. Experiences of school exclusions made many young people feel unfairly targeted, humiliated, judged and abandoned by their school, and not cared about.

Key finding

Many young people we spoke with also felt that exclusions left them unfairly labelled by the school, which could have a deterministic effect and further impact their motivation to change. These labels were often described in the context of racist stereotyping and discrimination. Additionally, we heard from young people that this stereotyping could lead to further risky behaviours that could contribute to youth violence, particularly for young Black men. This finding is important, suggesting that young people's day-to-day experiences reflect findings that suggest those with certain characteristics are more likely to be excluded. In England it has been found that Black Caribbean boys are four times more likely to be permanently excluded (Mills, 2022). Further, 60% of Black or Mixed Heritage boys across nine youth offending services in England were found to have been excluded in research undertaken by the HM Inspectorate of Probation (2021).

> **"** *"Sometimes there's a stereotype that teachers give to students. So once a student is known as bad, the teachers will always see them as bad. Even if the student isn't being bad, they will always think that the student is being bad even though they're not." FG Participant*

> **"** *"I feel like exclusions lead to a domino effect in a sense because if a child, let's say ethnic minority, especially black boys let's say, keep on getting excluded and they have this certain label put on them by teachers and they just are not getting anywhere in school, they will go for the easier route, for example like going into gangs, selling on roads to get money easily because they know that if they put their full potential in school, no one is going to hear them out, they're not going to get anywhere, they're not going to achieve as much as they can achieve. So, I feel like yes, that can also be a huge issue."* FG Participant

Many young people discussed the difficulties that come with being excluded not just from education but from your social network, and how this could have long term implications for their friendships after the exclusion. The breakdown of relationships inside school and with parents could push students towards new relationships with external people who have negative influence and can lead to involvement in youth violence.

> **"** *"Yes, at the time it was fun but then real time now, deep in that, it's not really fun because you're missing out on education. I'm meant to be sitting there in class after my mum and dad bought me clothes, I'm meant to be day-to-day learning."* FG Participant

For some young people, exclusions felt like liberation or relief from the school system, or something that they did not feel was a big deal. In contrast, others described a sense of liberation and relief when they were able to return to their school routine. Similarly, while some young people emphasised that exclusions did not help them to process or reflect on their actions, others described feelings of guilt and shame after a period of reflection on their actions, and motivation to change for the better.

> **"** *"Coming back after exclusion, it feels a bit like, sometimes I feel a bit embarrassed because all of my peers were learning and that, but I've been isolated and chosen to miss school and that. Obviously, you might be behind on work and stuff. So, it's kind of like you might feel a bit embarrassed and a bit relieved to be back in your normal habitat because at the end of the day, you spend five days a week in school and you're spending that from Year 7 to Year 11 and then obviously college afterwards. So yes, it's like a relief."* FG Participant

Many of the feelings young people shared are difficult ones to experience, and several raised the impacts of mental health and emotions on pathways to, and pathways following, an exclusion. This was reflective of previous research where mental health has been associated with experiences of exclusion. For example, in 2020 a study proposed poor mental health acted as both a cause and effect of exclusion, that boys who enter school with poor mental health were at higher risk of exclusion during primary school and that "boys and girls excluded between the ages of 15 and 16 years may have poor, and in the case of girls, deteriorating, mental health" (Tejerina-Arreal et. al. 2020, p.217). The young people we spoke to raised the need for more support around mental health to reduce exclusions and support integration. This reflected Tejerina-Arreal et. al's finding that early support from education and mental health providers may prevent exclusions and improve educational and health outcomes (2020).

What good support looks like for young people at risk of, or experiencing exclusion

The young people we spoke with felt that schools need to take a proactive and preventative approach to addressing bad behaviour and involvement in violence. Our analysis suggested that most of the young people we spoke with felt that providing early support for young people and preventing exclusions where possible would reduce the young person's risk of becoming involved in violence. This mirrors previous research which has noted the need for early and continuous assessment for learning and social and emotional needs (Partridge et al., 2020). Our analysis revealed the following priorities from young people:

- spotting the early signs and providing support
- increasing one-to-one educational and emotional support for at-risk students
- supporting engagement in the school community, including social activities such as sport
- providing training to teachers for how to deal with violent situations by supporting the young person
- prioritising the understanding of the root cause of students' violent behaviour instead of only punishing them
- providing programmes including anger management, mental health support, aspiration building, academic support and help groups

"Teachers might have to get to the root of the problem, actually talk to the student, ask them why they're acting up the way they're acting instead of just constantly shouting at them, giving them exclusions." FG Participant

Holistic support

Young people told us that they wanted schools to not only view them as their grades or behaviour but prioritise understanding their wider context – including home life, mental health, friendship groups, self-care activities and future aspirations. This is notable as previous research has recognised the impact of wider societal factors on exclusions (Partridge et al., 2020). Our analysis suggested that young people want a holistic approach to be embedded in education that provides support for wider issues that impact young people inside and outside of the school context. Young people felt a holistic approach can be used:

- before exclusions have happened to support prevention
- during an exclusion to ensure the students has a safe and positive environment, and an optimal environment to support reintegration tonto school
- after an exclusion to utilise positive influences and minimise negative influences from a young persons' wider environment to support their progression (personal and academic).

// *"I feel like behaviour teachers need to find new strategies because obviously when it comes to a child's behaviour, let's be real, sometimes, the majority of times it all stems from a place. It always stems from a problem. Sometimes it might be family issues, it might be just personal issues." FG Participant*

// *"Therapy. I feel like it all stems down to if they have a place they can confide in and express their true emotions. Obviously, children, everyone goes through different internal conflicts and that, depression and just their own stuff they are battling with. So, I feel like if they're slowly healing in certain areas, they will be able to fit in certain environments more."*

Our data suggests a holistic approach includes:

Providing teaching support that is personalised, holistic and inclusive by catering to different learning styles to engage young people in education, especially for young people with disability and learning differences

Supporting young people affected by gangs, rather than removing them from the school environment

Schools and teachers having systems that recognise and understand how an individual young person looks after themselves and their mental health.

Resources to ensure there is sufficient school staff support to keep students engaged with these positive activities – before exclusion to reduce the likelihood of this occurring as well as during and after an exclusion to help with their wellbeing and process their emotions.

Collaborate with key adults and organisations in a young person's life (e.g. parents, youth workers, mentors and other organisations) to identify and address where issues may be occurring that are impacting behaviour.

Alongside academic and learning supports – providing access to socio-emotional support and activities.

Relationships

The young people we worked with identified that the relationships they have with their teachers are one of the most influential factors of their school experience. This reflects research by the Education Endowment Foundation, that noted that, "every pupil should have a supportive relationship with a member of school staff." (2019, p.6). Young people in our research suggested that teachers need to prioritise positive connections and relationships with students as it can motivate students to avoid exclusion. They also felt that these relationships may help during and after an exclusion with desire to change behaviour and maintain wellbeing. It was shared that student–led plans are important, as some students may want contact with teachers during the exclusion, some may not. However, it's important to highlight that previous research has recognised the strain on teachers, and subsequent impacts on relationship building. In particular, "that it is particularly difficult for secondary school teachers to build strong relationships as they have less time with each pupil and substantial reporting requirements" (Partridge et al., 2020).

// *"In our exclusion room where we would have, where basically you'd go if you were bad or whatever, there was a behavioural teacher in there who specialised in looking after kids that maybe behave less well and stuff like that. Then when she builds a relationship with them, a lot of them would get quite upset if they got excluded because they wouldn't want to disappoint her kind of thing. So, I think that improves a lot of student's behaviour, so I think that's a really good way to stop or lessen exclusions." FG Participant*

// *"Definitely having parents or carers having your back is super important. If it's school exclusion, then having teachers that can understand you or friends is important. So, it just depends on whether at home or at school but just having a support system in general is important." FG Participant*

Young people described positive relationships being characterised by:

- a sense of trust in the student
- a strengths-based approach – not looking for a students' negatives, but building on their strengths
- a personal connection between student and teacher
- calm teachers who aren't reactive or explosive
- empathy for the student
- a sense of the student feeling understood, cared for, valued and accepted.
- teachers with an understanding of how to support students' mental health.

Young people also felt that there was a need for social conversations with trusted people to help build these relationships, and that they need to be able to have regular conversations with somebody who can support them, including with their mental health. Students need to be able to trust that the conversations will be kept confidential. These conversations need to happen before, during and after an exclusion. Young people told us that they need to feel like they are seen, heard, respected and cared for by at least one person in their school network. This could be a teacher, mentors, pastoral staff, peers with shared experiences, parents or external support staff. Positive peer relationships were felt to be particularly important, to not only prevent behaviours that could lead to exclusion, but to support meaningful reintegration after exclusions and potentially reduce the risk of young people developing new relationships that negatively impact them.

> *"It's a kind of necessary to raise a good system in terms of connecting them to students who are more social and ensuring that there is a good social dynamics between these people and still keeping in touch with the friends, and they have these feelings of inclusivity while they're being excluded." FG Participant*

Space for reflection

We found a clear theme related to young people feeling they needed spaces and time that supported them to process their actions and emotions, and that this would encourage positive change. Notably it was felt that prioritising de-escalating behaviour and providing opportunities for in-the-moment reflection through time-outs might reduce the need for exclusions.

> *"I would say instead of instantly giving you the corrections and suspending you or something like that, they should give you time to calm down. If you don't calm down in that time they should just end up giving you the corrections. They should give you time to calm down before they're given to you." FG Participant*

Further, young people told us that supporting students to understand and reflect on their actions throughout during and after exclusion could improve the likelihood of improved behaviour. Young people felt that this was often lacking in their experiences of exclusion, and they often came back to school with little space for reflection or supported reintegration. This lack of reflection was noted as having the potential to further compound emotions like anger.

> *"It can almost make you reflect your choices or maybe have something to look forward to or instead of almost wanting regret or wanting to go out and almost revenge, it could almost change your perspective, and it could calm you down and it could give you something to do." FG Participant*

Reintegration

If a student does get excluded, our research suggested that providing personalised reintegration plans that include academic, social and emotional support may contribute to the prevention of future exclusions and improved outcomes in school. Suggestions for reintegration plans included a discrete process that does not alienate a young person from their peers, providing adjustments such as class/task structure and timetable changes, peer support and socio–emotional support from staff with specialist training and knowledge. Linked to holistic support and positive relationships, involvement of all key adults in a young person's life was seen as important, alongside opportunities to rebuild relationships with teachers involved in the exclusion process.

> *"I think social reintegration, it's quite very necessary, maybe providing a support group where a student can kind of feel comfortable with their fellow peers, maybe people who may have had similar experiences. I think that way a student may not be alone, and I think that the connection of having similar experiences really boost the confidence of a student getting back into a social aspect of the school. There should be a parent's involvement and family involvement and commitment between the family and the teachers to kind of talk about things and kind of learn about the re–entry process, how it would be like to support their child in terms of transitioning back to school." FG Participant*

> *"I would say inclusive environment when we promote acceptance, cultural acceptance while students are coming back to school, and, I would say individualised support plan when teachers support each student that are coming back. They have been excluded or are coming back to school and each teacher supports them, and academically and socially and emotionally." FG Participant*

Limitations of support in schools

Importantly, we heard from the young people that they recognised that some of the challenges associated with exclusion, and access to support around exclusion can be outside of their school, or teacher's control. These young people felt that it was important to recognise that funding and staff levels can play a role in how exclusions are actioned – and wanted more investment for schools to provide holistic support, that increased opportunities for development and employment. Similarly, it was felt that improvements to PRU structures and how they are funded could improve outcomes for young people.

> *"I think a lot of schools take it because they're so underfunded and understaffed and they don't have the necessities to deal with students that need extra help. I think they see exclusion as an easy route of controlling a child. But I think if they took more time into considering why the child's been acting this way instead of excluding them, I think there would be less exclusions, 'cause obviously if you exclude a child just because, oh, they didn't attend the lesson, instead of figuring out why they didn't want to attend that lesson, I think it's just going to create more problems every time. So by reducing the exclusions, they're just going to get positive students." FG Participant*

How support at school can help protect young people from youth violence

The young people we spoke with felt that being excluded could contribute to young people becoming involved in, or increasing engagement with violence, and other crime such as theft.

> *"You'll be like this happened, it's unfair, I'm angry and then you might just do something out of pure anger. No one is there to supervise you. Like if you rob a shop or something." FG Participant*

As previously mentioned, we were told that experiences of exclusion may push young people towards violence because they have more opportunities to become involved with bad influences, such as other people already engaged in criminal activity. They also discussed that students often feel angry and resentful towards the school which disengages them from education and positive influences.

> *'When you're sent to one of the schools, you are able to meet new people and start a networking type of thing which may not be the best type of networking. When you're sent to PRU and all of that, other stuff or units and stuff, you are placed in a place where there's many other bad kids for example. You all are put in one space. Students are easily really influenced and stuff so it can easily influence them to start doing bad stuff. I feel like yes, that's it." FG Participant*

"It depends, maybe your home life and who you're chilling with, they can influence on you to do stuff, to go and chill with people outside that is dangerous and do bad things. People get influenced really quickly nowadays." FG Participant

It was also shared that being excluded could also increase the risk of being a victim of violence due to young people being out in public spaces when they would normally be at school. Several young people specifically noted the risk of phone theft and becoming a victim of violence in London after detentions that finished later in the evening.

"Well, if they are getting suspended it's more time to almost, like if you're in school, if you're learning, if you're actually doing stuff, like I don't think you'll get into violence. But if you're off school all the time walking down the street or missing school or not doing anything or just riding round on your bike, you might almost become like a victim." FG Participant

Young people told us that implementing better support before, during and after exclusions linked to schools may prevent young people becoming involved in youth violence and support those already involved to have other positive experiences and connections. It was felt where this support made a young person still feel valued, understood, cared for and believed in by the school it would act as a protective factor to reduce their chance of becoming involved in violence.

"As I said, if teachers take an even approach on the children and avoid more exclusions and avoid them getting in trouble a lot, I feel like that would even stop gun violence and knife crime especially because I feel like they have more chance now. They have more potential to do well in school and get into certain places, like example uni or going to do an apprenticeship or to find a nice job or invest in something. But obviously when the child is having bad labels throughout secondary school, then they end up getting bad grades, it's harder for them to get more opportunities which obviously then again leads to gun violence and knife crime. So I feel like yes, just letting the child have a good environment to stay." FG Participant

This is supported by other research which also found that the cumulative effective of negative experiences at schools can result in "student's alienation from the education system, aggravating pre-existing risk factors that lead a vulnerable personal towards chronic criminal offending." (Sutherland, 2011) A young person being excluded from school has been found to be one of the most persistent and well-established risk factors for future criminal activity (Valdebenito et. al. 2018).

This highlights the opportunities that schools have to interrupt the pathway to becoming involved in youth violence through spotting early signs and intervening appropriately, including around the exclusion pathway.

It was evident in the conversations we had with young people that they saw being at school and engaged in connected activities like sport or spiritual spaces acted as a protective factor/safe space.

> "They can channel their energy into something that's actually useful instead of wasting their time being on the roads, just getting up to mischievous or deviant activities. So, like if they have maybe football, they actually have to dedicate time and go maybe on a Saturday in the morning instead of going outside and being hoodlums. That helps them to stay away and focus on one thing. They might even want to go further in the sport or something, so it gives them something to actually work hard and to pursue seriously rather than to be wasting their time because when you play a sport, you have to invest a lot of time practicing as well. So, the students might practice away from it which leaves them less time to commit more violent crimes and stuff or to even get involved in that type of stuff." FG Participant

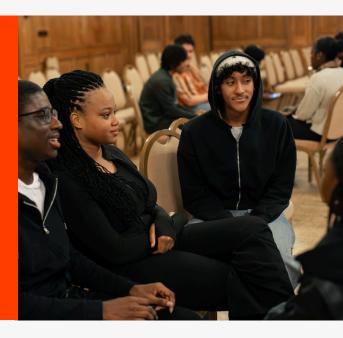<div style="border: 1px solid orange;">

Key finding

Being engaged and included in school was suggested as being a contributor to reducing the likelihood of young people getting involved in violence, as well as reducing opportunities to make connections with people that might influence them to engage with violence. Schools and linked recreational spaces that provide opportunities for good role modelling and mentoring can act as a positive influence – facilitating hope, connection and ambition. It was especially evident that having people to talk to at school was seen by the young people as being a protective factor against engagement in violence. It was also felt that space in school environments for conversations, guidance and advice about violence, including people with lived experience, could prevent students getting involved in violence or gangs.

</div>

> "Oh yes, because when you're heard, you're not going to look for those types of people because on the road people listen to you. Those types of people that are bad people, they could listen to you. They all go through the same things as well. So, if they are being listened to by people outside of schools that don't have the best interest for them at heart, then they're going to more likely want to be these people, they might look up to them as their role models or stuff like that. So if your school is aiming to be the place that a child will be able to speak or definitely reduce the violences and stuff, all that built up frustration that people here have can turn into violence and if schools listen and understand and properly help then I'm pretty sure exclusion rates will fall down, violence will also fall and people will attend school more." FG Participant

Finally, some of the young people we spoke with noted the long-term impacts of being excluded on their wellbeing and life opportunities and how better exclusion systems within their schools could reduce these negative impacts. This is notable as previous research has highlighted that not addressing exclusions has economic impacts for young people.

Partridge et al. reference the Institute for Public Policy Research, estimating that exclusions cost the UK £370,000 per young person in lifetime education, benefits, healthcare, and criminal justice costs and that the money associated with lost time at school could be better spent on supporting young people to stay in school or providing learning that better suits their needs (2020).

It was evident in the conversations we had with young people that they saw being at school and engaged in connected activities like sport or spiritual spaces acted as a protective factor/safe space.

Conclusions

There are opportunities for schools to shift the way that they support and intervene with young people at risk of and with living experience of being involved in violence. For many young people, they believe that exclusions push them towards youth violence. However, it's clear that schools also have an opportunity to use exclusions where necessary to purposefully respond to a young person's behaviour by providing holistic support to understand and address young people's feelings and actions. Schools are a key touch point in young people's lives that have the potential to make them feel valued, understood and supported to thrive, even when they have been excluded.

This report contains valuable insights into what young people say they need from schools to support them better through the exclusion journey, which may in turn protect them from becoming involved in youth violence. Our findings align with previous research and guidance in this area (YEF, 2024) – but adds unique insight through a youth lens. We are not claiming that improving the support around exclusions will fix youth violence, as it is a complex problem that requires a complex solution. However, if schools were to embed some of the solutions highlighted in this report, the support offered to young people would respond to what they say they need to have positive relationships with school and education.

It is important that we continue the conversation with young people about how we support them in schools to protect them from violence. As the people who are at the receiving end of our education system, policies and practices, they must be meaningfully involved within decision-making and design processes to ensure these systems fulfill their duty of protecting young people from social issues, including youth violence.

Our team of young people has developed two key infographics to share the key conclusions from our research findings, detailed below – along with an accessible short format report with a card activity for those working with young people to understand feelings and solutions that can support a better exclusion journey. These are best used printed out and used in classrooms and meeting rooms.

Reccomendations for Schools

Schools are not the only ones capable of or responsible for tackling youth violence – it requires a systems response. However, our research focused on what young people say they need from schools to protect them from youth violence. We encourage these reccomendations to be actioned within a wider collaborative effort to address youth violence.

Recommendation 1

When exclusions are necessary, schools should act with an awareness of:
- the risk of pushing young people towards youth violence
- the opportunity to provide support around the exclusion that acts as a protective factor from youth violence.

Support needs to be holistic and focus on the root cause of behaviours, and be provided before, during and after exclusions.

Action to take:

- **Follow the 'Better Exclusion Pathway' (page 37) from this report to inform the processes, decision-making and support surrounding each exclusion.**

Recommendation 2

Involve young people meaningfully in the discussions and decision-making surrounding both exclusions and youth violence.

Action to take:

- **Use the 'Feelings and Solutions' cards in the short report) to have open and collaborative discussions surrounding exclusions and behaviour.**

Recommendation 3

Take an active preventative approach to youth violence. Schools should work to have personalised approaches that meet young people where they are in relation to youth violence (not involved, at-risk of becoming involved, or being involved).

Schools need to invest in understanding the root causes and young people's experiences of youth violence, in order to inform their approach.

Action to take:

- **Use the 'How Schools Can Help Reduce Youth Violence' infographic (page 36) to inform an active approach.**

- **Engage with London Peer Action Collective's social action movement based on these findings – Xcluded: an intereactive film and workshop. Contact the authors of this report for details.**

How schools can help reduce youth violence

Based on findings from London PAC's research with 71 young people

Young people who are not involved in violence	Young people who are lightly involved or at-risk of becoming involved in violence	Young people who are known to be involved in violence
Schools focus on preventing involvement	Schools focus on detecting and addressing early signs	Schools focus on supporting with positive influences and interventions

Example actions

Involving students in decision making and the approach taken to actions

Mental health support and education

Education around youth violence

Understanding the root cause of behaviour

Aspiration and goal building

Holistic support within a young person's network and wider context

Social conversations with those involved in violence (e.g. prisoners, police, gang members)

Create opportunities for reflection (e.g. with peers, teachers)

Possible impact

Enhanced support and education at school may prevent young people becoming involved in violence by interrupting the pathway to violence.	Spotting the early signs of becoming involved in violence and providing holistic, personalised support could stop young people becoming more involved in violence	Taking an active approach to supporting those known to be involved in violence may provide the motivation, support and tools to avoid violence

A 'Better' Exclusion Journey

Based on findings from London PAC's research with 71 young people

before exclusion

1 Schools takes an active approach to supporting those at risk of and already involved in violence

"I feel like the school actually believes in me and wants me to find a better path in life."

Schools focus on the prevention of exclusions by understanding the root causes of behaviour and providing support

2 *"My teachers don't punish me straight away, they understand that behaviour is normally caused by something else, and they try to understand what is going on for me."*

during exclusion

"Whilst I'm excluded, my behaviour mentor called me to check in on my mental health and that I've got everything I need to do the work."

3 Young people receive personalised support from trusted adults during their exclusion

Schools ensure there is effective communication before, during and after

4 *"It was made clear to me and my parents why I was excluded, how I can change and what is going to happen now and afterwards."*

after exclusion

"When I went back to school my teacher took the time to ask some questions about the exclusion and how I feel. We spoke about how I can behave better next time. She also connected me with other students who are struggling with their behaviour but trying to be better."

5 Schools create meaningful opportunities for reflection

Schools create personalised re-integration support plans with reasonable adjustments to help the young person thrive

6 *"I was allowed to go back to school on an altered timetable and take time outs to make sure I didn't have another outburst."*

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