

"The Tip of the Iceberg": A Deep Dive into SENDIASS Support for Exclusions

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Executive Summary

Introduction to the research

In June 2019, the Information Advice and Support Programme (IASP) commissioned the National Children's Bureau's (NCB) research team to carry out a 'deep dive' into exclusions support provided by Information Advice and Support (IAS) services. The purpose of this research was to understand the level and range of support for exclusions across IAS services, including how definitions of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) can affect access; gain an understanding of common concerns and changes over time; and inform the approach to future exclusions provision.

The review consisted of two data gathering exercises:

- An online survey open to all IAS services in England (65 respondents)
- Telephone interviews with 21 IAS staff

Reach of advice and support

The exclusions support provided was varied and often dependent on the capacity of individual teams. There was also some outstanding confusion amongst IAS staff over eligibility for children with and without SEND. The vast majority of respondents (85.8%) provide some form of exclusions support to anyone who calls their service and this may include signposting for those without SEND. Only 14.3% of respondents filter out those without SEND at first contact. It was also recognised that it can be difficult to draw the line between children with and without SEND, especially when needs have not been identified and/or met by the school. Many participants believe excluded children will always have some level of unmet need at the root of their behaviour.

Nature of exclusions support and impact of capacity

Over four-fifths of survey respondents (87.5%) provide support for exclusions at intervention

levels 1–4. Frequent types of support include providing telephone and face-to-face advice, online information/factsheets, and training for parents and professionals. Where services have more capacity, some prepare parents for and attend exclusions meetings, including governing body meetings, independent review panels and reintegration meetings. Many note that exclusions support forms a significant proportion of their workload. In terms of changes over time, 60.7% have seen an increase in exclusions work in the last five years. However, it was noted that what IAS services are seeing is just the 'tip of the iceberg'.

Common experiences and concerns

There was a range of common challenges faced by families. These included the impact of 'zero-tolerance' school behaviour policies on rising exclusions, in particular within academy schools; increases in fixed-term and unlawful exclusions; impact of undiagnosed SEND and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs; and the encouragement of elective home education. From the perspective of IAS staff, further trends observed over time include increases in exclusions of younger children and in relation to certain flashpoints at the end of school terms, and increased challenge of schools from both IAS staff and parents.

Impact of exclusions support

IAS staff believe their support for exclusions has had the most significant impact on individual children and families – with over three-quarters (76.6%) indicating the long-term benefits of their support. Over one-third (35.0%) said that their support has a long-term impact on local authorities, and only 18.3% said their exclusions support has had a long-term impact on schools. This is a clear area for development, whereby activities such as exclusions training for school staff and governors could make a meaningful difference.

Future exclusions provision and recommendations

Increase capacity to offer beyond the mandatory provision for exclusions

- Recommendation 1 – test out an enhanced offer of exclusions support with a sample of IAS services in an 'exclusions pilot', recognising the increased capacity needed to go beyond the mandatory provision and the increasing numbers of exclusion cases in recent years

Increase awareness of IAS provision for exclusions and develop closer relationships with other partners

- Recommendation 2 – any 'exclusions pilot' should take a whole systems approach, taking into account the impact on all relevant partners

Develop consistency and guidance around the remit of IAS support for exclusions

- Recommendation 3 – provide some universal element for all cases, e.g. level 1 support to anyone with concerns about exclusions, regardless of whether the child has SEND

Provide services with increased support to prevent and challenge exclusions

- Recommendation 4 – any 'exclusions pilot' should explore the options to prevent and challenge exclusions, testing whether both can be delivered concurrently and effectively
- Recommendation 5 – any local testing should take into account the number of academy schools and a need for additional resource

Increase exclusions knowledge amongst IAS staff and related partners

- Recommendation 6 – develop and deliver an exclusions training package for all IAS staff, schools, and parents

Chapter One: Introduction and background

Information Advice and Support Services (IASS) are required to provide information, advice and support to young people with known or suspected Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the families of children and young people with known or suspected SEND. This includes providing information, support and advice when these children and young people have been excluded from school. The Timpson Review of School Exclusion (Department for Education, 2019a), in its conclusions, suggested that the role of IASS in supporting those affected by school exclusion could be strengthened and broadened. This report sets out the findings of a 'deep dive' review into current practice, capacity and perspectives on this issue amongst local IASS, in order to inform how this might be taken forward. The research was commissioned by the Department for Education in summer 2019 and carried out by the National Children's Bureau's (NCB) research team.

Research approach and methodology

Evidence and perspectives were gathered from local IASS via two main routes.

- An online **survey** open to all local IASS, to which sixty-five valid responses were received. More detail on the methodology is set out in Chapter Two.
- **Interviews** of local IASS staff. A sample of respondents to the survey were invited to take part in a 30-minute telephone interview. Twenty-one such interviews were carried out.

In particular, the survey and interviews focussed on the following issues:

- Provision of support for exclusions, including decisions on eligibility and level of provision
- Nature of support for exclusions, including most frequent sources of support, support in addition to mandatory provision
- Changes over time in relation to exclusions support
- Measuring impact of support for exclusions

The design of the survey and interview topic guides was informed by consultation with the IASP team and review of relevant government, academic and charities' reports. Key points from these reports are summarised under context below.

The process for school exclusions in England

The law around exclusions is largely set by legislation dating from 2012. This is complemented by Statutory Guidance that was last updated in 2019. Only head teachers can make the decision to exclude a pupil and this must be recorded even if the exclusion is for a short period. Statutory guidance states that a decision to exclude should only be taken:

- In response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy; and
- Where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others in the school.

The guidance also requires consideration of a range of contributing factors in decisions and early intervention to understand and address any emerging behavioural issues.

The law provides the scope for parents and carers to be able to ask for any decision to exclude to be reviewed by the school's governing board or academy trust. In the case of permanent exclusion, parents and carers also have a right for exclusions to be considered by an independent review panel. The panel can direct schools to reconsider, but cannot overturn decisions. Parents and carers of children with SEND may request the presence of a SEND expert to provide advice to the panel, and those who believe an exclusion was the result of disability discrimination may appeal the decision at the First-tier Tribunal.

Trends and evidence on exclusions practice

After several years of previous decline, rates of both permanent and fixed-period exclusions

from schools in England have been increasing since 2013/14. There were 7,905 permanent and 410,753 fixed period exclusions recorded in the year 2017/18. (DfE, 2019b).

Pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) are around three times more likely to receive a fixed-period exclusion and one and a half times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion than the average for all children. Pupils with SEND but no EHCP – SEND Support- are three times more likely to receive either type.

Over this period of increasing exclusion rates, research and reports from a range of organisations have raised concerns about the practice of some schools and the experience of affected children and families. For example, a survey of parents and carers carried out by the charity Contact in 2013 highlighted the experience of illegal exclusions of children and young people with SEND. Practices included sending children home during break times or whilst school trips were occurring because of a lack of support for these children to participate. Children being asked to go home for an afternoon to 'cool off' after an incident, or because they were 'having a bad day', and children were being put on a part-time timetable. The survey highlighted the knock-on impact for children and families, including children and young people falling behind on their school work, on the parents' ability to work and the overall wellbeing of the family.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner (2013) estimated that at least one school in every local authority encourages carers to educate their children at home as an alternative to a formal permanent exclusion.

In 2017, NCB carried out research into the experience of families of children missing education. Many felt the biggest problem they faced was where children were still 'on roll' at school, but the school was not educating them and did not want them to attend. Local authorities explained how they faced challenges around monitoring and supporting young people who were on the school roll but unofficially excluded. As informal exclusions meant that pupils were on roll but not going to school or learning elsewhere, the young people did not have the same strong legal rights for education provision that came with official exclusions. As such, the local authority felt they had very little

legal standpoint to support them. The research found that children and their carers were not always made aware of their rights around education, such as unofficial exclusions.

Furthermore, a recently published report by the Education Policy Institute (2019) highlighted an increasing number of children and young people who have been removed from school rolls without a clear reason and suggested that this may be influenced by an 'off rolling' of pupils with additional needs or low attainment.

IASS role regarding exclusions

The SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DH, 2015) states the scope of IASS should cover initial concerns or identification of potential SEN or disabilities, through to ongoing support and provision. This should be delivered by signposting children, young people and parents to alternative and additional sources of advice, information and support; individual casework and representation for those who need it, and, crucially help when things go wrong, such as by arranging or attending early disagreement resolution meetings. This makes IASS a key source of information support and advice for children and families affected by school exclusions where the child involved has known or suspected SEND. Around one in ten IASS customers responding to a recent customer satisfaction survey (carried out concurrently with this Deep Dive) said that they had approached their IAS service for advice around school exclusions (NCB, 2019).

The Timpson Review of Exclusions

In 2018, the Department for Education asked the former Children's Minister Edward Timpson to carry out a review of exclusions. This review published its findings and conclusions in 2019. It found wide variation in exclusion rates and practices. It also heard evidence from those who felt the rules have not been applied fairly in many cases. It highlighted the importance of parents and carers having the knowledge they need to engage with complaints and appeals processes. To address this it recommended that:

"Local authorities should include information about support services for parents and carers of children who have been, or are at risk of, exclusion, or have been placed in AP, in their

SEND Local Offer. DfE should also produce more accessible guidance for parents and carers. In the longer term, the government should invest resources to increase the amount of information, advice and support available locally to parents and carers of children who are excluded or placed in AP." (DfE, 2019a).

In its response to the exclusion review, the Government (DfE, 2019c) said that it accepted these recommendations in principle and would consider how to meet them.

It is important to note that the review and its recommendations relate to all children and young people who have been or are at risk of exclusion. It is clear in its suggestion of enhancing what already exists, including through IASS support. This raises the question of exactly what the role of IASS should be in taking forward this recommendation.

This report aims to help answer this question. Further steps may include piloting a series of models of enhanced IASS services. Models may include, for example:

- Enhanced support for existing customers (where SEND is known or suspected)
- Offering a limited service to a wider group of children, young people and families – all of those excluded or at risk of exclusion – for example including only signposting or legal information, but not casework support
- Offering all levels of support to all exclusion cases

Note on terminology – illegal exclusions

Parts of this report may describe or imply practices or policies of schools that may be unlawful. We have not sought to comment on the lawfulness or otherwise in each case. For information on known practices and their lawfulness readers should refer to the Statutory Guidance (DfE, 2017) and the guide produced by NCB, Association of School and College Leaders, and IPSEA (2019) School exclusions: What is legal?

Structure of the report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter One: Introduction and background information** – introduction to the research approach and methodology; process for school exclusions in England; trends and evidence from recent literature; clarification of the IASS role in relation to exclusions and implementation of the recommendations from the Timpson review on exclusions
- **Chapter Two: Exclusions survey** – a mix of quantitative and qualitative findings from the survey of IAS practitioners and managers
- This is then followed by four chapters that explore in more depth the key issues discussed in the qualitative interviews, including:
 - **Reach of advice and support for exclusions (Chapter Three)**
 - **Challenging schools and impact on families (Chapter Four)**
 - **Changes over the last five years (Chapter Five)**
 - **Themes from best practice (Chapter Six)**
- **Chapter Seven: Conclusions and recommendations** – summarises the key themes identified in the deep dive and outlines a number of recommendations for IAS services and other stakeholders to consider.

Chapter Two: Exclusion survey analyses

Methodology

The survey was developed in consultation with the IASP team. It consisted of six closed and four connected open questions (as well as five items of respondent information), and sought views on the following areas of practice:

- Provision of support for exclusions, including decisions on eligibility and level of provision
- Nature of support for exclusions, including most frequent sources of support, support in addition to mandatory provision
- Changes over time in relation to exclusions support
- Measuring impact of support for exclusions

All members of the IASSN received the survey by email, with no restriction on which or how many staff from each SENDIASS should complete it. The survey was open from 19th July 2019 until 13th September 2019 (see Appendix 1 for the survey questions).

Respondent information

Sixty-five individuals returned valid survey responses. Whilst there was an element of self-selection in the sample, respondent information suggests variation amongst respondents in terms of geography, role, and whether their service is outsourced or not (see Appendix 2 for a breakdown of respondent information).

Just under a third of survey respondents (30.8%, n=20) were front-line employees and just under two thirds were service managers (63.1%, n=41).

Provision of support for exclusions

Eligibility of support for exclusions

The majority of services offer some form of exclusions support to everyone who calls (85.8%, n=54). This breaks down to 42.9% of services (n=27) helping everyone who calls, regardless of SEND status, and 42.9% of services (n=27) supporting those with SEND, but signposting those without SEND to other

services. A smaller proportion – 14.3% (n=9) screen out those who do not have SEND.

In the free text responses, one respondent talked about their service implementing a broader definition of SEND that includes unidentified needs and social, emotional and mental health difficulties:

“Although we say we only help with exclusions where there is an element of SEND, we interpret this quite broadly and will often explore whether the exclusion is a sign of unidentified additional needs, including SEMH.”

Some services would also like more guidance about who to support when it comes to exclusions:

“Confusion if we should be providing this service for children without SEND or only for children with SEND – how do we make that decision?”

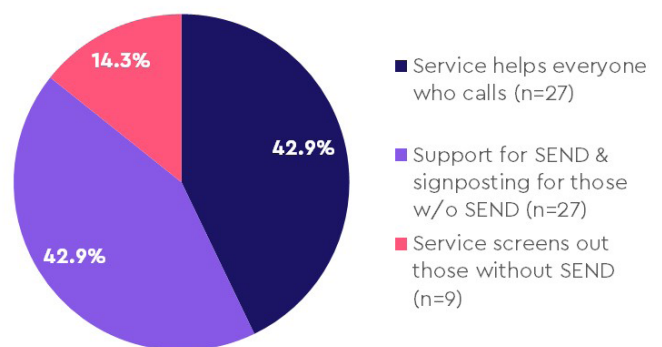


Figure 1: Eligibility of support for exclusion (N=63)

Level of support for exclusions

Over four-fifths (87.3%, n=55) reported that their service offers support at all intervention levels from 1–4. Two respondents reported providing support at level 1 only (3.2%, n=2) and only one respondent at levels 1 and 2 only (1.6%, n=1). Four respondents reported providing support at levels 1–3 only (6.4%, n=4). One service provided an 'other' response and said that they did not have a specific service approach at that time.

Nature of support for exclusions

Most frequent types of support

Respondents were asked to rank which type of support their service most frequently provides

for exclusions from 1–5, with 1 representing the most frequent type of support offered for exclusions and 5 representing the least frequent:

1. **Telephone advice** (reported as no. 1 by 80.0%)
2. **Face-to-face advice** (reported as no. 2 by 61.0%)
3. **Provide information on SENDIASS website** (reported as no. 3 by 50.0%)
4. **Training for parents** (reported as no. 4 by 61.5%)
5. **Training for professionals** (reported as no. 5 by 72.2%)

In the free text responses, many services noted that exclusions support forms a significant proportion of their workload.

Additional support provided by SENDIASS

In addition to the mandatory provision for exclusions support (i.e., information on IASS website; telephone advice; face-to-face advice), respondents also mentioned several other ways that they support families and professionals. However, there is considerable variation across services in terms of their capacity and resource for providing additional exclusions support.

"Exclusions are another area that needs large amounts of staff time which services do not have."

Many services recognise the value of taking a proactive stance to exclusions support, but are not always able to dedicate time to this.

"We don't get chance to promote our exclusions work with families and don't have capacity to run workshops for parents or professionals, which could also reduce the amount of SEND Exclusions and the illegal exclusions that are occurring."

There is also an important outstanding question about managing expectations around what the SENDIASS role is.

"Explaining exclusion processes is very different from "challenging" decisions made by a head teacher in a Governors/IRP meeting, from an impartial angle."

"Further guidance would be useful regarding which exclusions IAS should / should not be involved with."

Where services do have more capacity to go beyond the mandatory provision for exclusions, some of the sources of additional support include:

- Provision of exclusions resource packs/ leaflets
- Raising awareness through newsletters and on social media
- Preparation and attendance at exclusions meetings, i.e., Governing Body meetings; Independent Review Panels; reintegration meetings
- Refer/signpost on for more specialist support, e.g. from Inclusion Support Officers; School Exclusions Project
- Informing (and sometimes challenging) local authorities about concerning trends, e.g. schools with high rates of exclusions; instances of illegal exclusions

Changes over time

Increases in exclusions support

Respondents considered how their work on exclusions has changed over the last five years, since the introduction of the Independent Review Panels for exclusions (see Figure 2 for a visual breakdown). Under two-thirds of respondents (60.7%, n=37) reported an increase over time; 16.4% (n=10) were unable to give an answer; and 11.5% (n=7) said there had been no change. Only 3.3% (n=2) said that their workload in relation to exclusions had reduced. However, this may not necessarily mean that exclusions have reduced in these areas, as one respondent commented that their referrals from the LA inclusion service have "dried up" because they are now an outsourced SENDIASS and perhaps not as visible to the LA officers.

In terms of the five 'other' responses, two were not applicable as their service was not operating 5 years ago and the other had only worked in the service for 3 years. The three remaining 'other' responses reported increases in complexity of cases, rather than in volume.

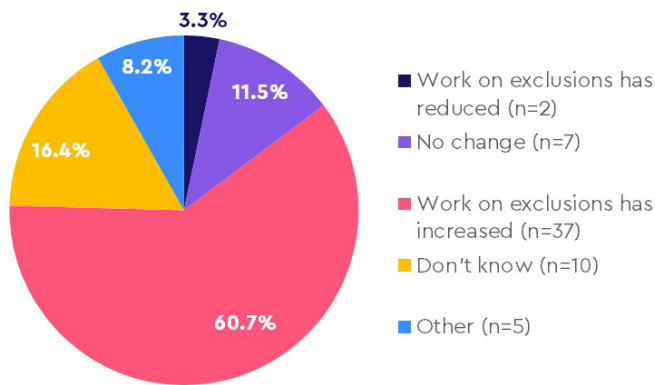


Figure 2: Changes in exclusions support over last 5 years (N=61)

Nature of changes over time

In terms of the types of changes noticed over time, these include:

1. Increases in support for certain types of exclusions

- **Informal and unlawful exclusions**, including part-time timetables; sending home at lunchtime/early; managed moves; parents encouraged to keep children off role and/or home educate as needs cannot be met by school

2. Trends in specific populations

- Increases in exclusions of **primary aged children**
- Increases in exclusions of **children with SEND** (often with no available or suitable provision given as an alternative)

3. Trends in relation to time of year

- Increases in exclusions support at the end of school terms

4. Increased challenge of schools

- **Increased challenge from both SENDIASS and parents** due to awareness raising of unlawful exclusions
- Increase in **decisions being overturned with SENDIASS support**

Measuring impact

Gathering data on exclusions

Three-quarters of respondents said their services collect data on exclusions support (75.0%, n=45); 18.3% (n=11) said no; and 6.7% (n=4) were not sure if any data was collected.

In the free text responses, respondents discussed the types of data collected, including numbers supported in relation to exclusions and intervention level required (also compared with overall referrals to the service), types of cases (numbers of fixed and permanent exclusions), and a record of schools involved. One service discussed cross-referencing their data on a monthly basis with their local authority's data (with families consent). However, not all services collect a detailed range of indicators and some only record the number of referrals to the service.

The services gathered exclusions data for several purposes:

1. Internal monitoring and reporting

- Provide information for annual reports, inform SENDIASS casework and highlight areas of support and prioritisation
- Inform senior management, SENDIASS funders, commissioners
- Used as evidence during inspections

2. To influence local policies and practices

- Share trends with local authorities, local SEND board, Education SEND group, Education Other Than At School (EOTAS)
- Local trends shape content of training with parents and professionals

3. To hold other agencies to account

- Evidence challenges to local authorities about individual schools and unlawful exclusion practices

Impact of support for exclusions

According to survey respondents, the impact of their exclusions support varies across individuals and agencies. SENDIASS staff reported that their

work has most significant impact on individual children and families, with over three-quarters (76.6%, n=46) indicating the long-term benefits of their support.

Over one-third of respondents (35.0%, n=21) said their support has long-term impact to local authorities. However, over a quarter (26.7%, n=16) of respondents did not know the impact that their work has on this agency.

In terms of impact of SENDIASS support for exclusions on schools, only 18.3% of respondents (n=11) said their work has long-term impact and over two-thirds (35.0%, n=21) said their support has no or minimal impact on schools. This is clearly an area for development, whereby activities such as exclusions training for school staff and governors could make a meaningful difference.

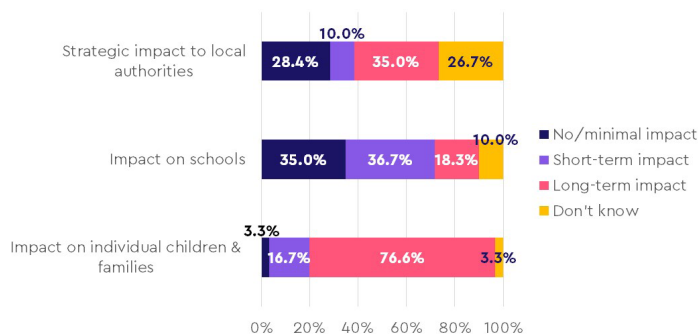


Figure 3: Impact of exclusions support on families, schools, LAs (N=60)

Additional comments/themes

A few respondents discussed having particular difficulties with academy chains in their approach to exclusion and with SEND. There are "worrying trends" whereby academies are "quick to exclude"; using internal isolation practices without describing children as being excluded; and offering to go with parents to meet with alternative schools. Services have challenged schools and made "clear this is not good practice and only parents can make this decision."

"Academies are a big issue and while some are good, others appear to think the rules do not apply to them. In addition, some have a very hard line approach not recognising the link between SEND and poor support and inappropriate behaviour."

Chapter Three: Reach of advice and support for exclusions

Eligibility and screening

The majority of IAS services will provide initial advice to any parents contacting them with concerns about their child. While their remit is to provide support for children with SEND and their families – in reality it can be hard to draw the line between children with and without SEND. Services also mentioned the crossover with social, emotional and mental health needs, and that these in particular can be difficult to categorise. Difficulties around isolating SENDIASS support for SEND only is especially apparent when parents suspect there is an undiagnosed need that the school have not noticed.

"Lots of people ring in. We would always give first-line advice if somebody rings us to – we won't give casework support for somebody who doesn't have SEND, but we would give first-line advice for somebody who called just to get initial advice about what they could do."

"Our remit is SEN, but it's very difficult. You can't have a tick sheet at the beginning of the conversation when you've got somebody crying on the end of the phone going, 'Yes, but can you tell me, have they got SEN?'"

Therefore, in the majority of cases, services do not screen before providing initial phone support to parents and offer support to anyone who is "struggling in school, for whatever reason". Professionals working in IAS services can often identify when a school may have been unable to put the pieces of the puzzle together, in order to understand the reasons behind an individual child's behaviour. Interviewees reported that most of the parents who contacted their service had children with specific unmet needs, regardless of whether or not they had a diagnosis of SEND.

"Often, the children have a special educational need but the school hasn't identified it and then we will support the parent. That will be our thrust at any challenge that actually they fail to take into account, as required by the legislation, that child's SEN or whether they might have an SEN."

Several interviewees raised the issue of co-occurring mental health and behavioural difficulties and that their service provides support for individuals with multiple needs if there was a suspicion that the child may have SEND.

"Some people will ring with a query about educating a child that they think might have SEN. If they think they might have SEN, we'll give them all the information regardless of if there are other underlying difficulties."

Some services also provided support based on social, emotional and mental health difficulties alone.

"Quite often we get calls about exclusions and when we say is there any SEND apparent, they'll say, no. Actually having talked to them, it might be that there's social, emotional, mental health difficulties that haven't been recognised by educational professionals and we would take that on."

However, the support that services were willing to provide in these cases varied across different local authorities and depended on the capacity of the individual teams.

"Due to capacity issues we simply do focus in on those children and young people who have special educational needs and disability."

"We have a caseload of about 1,400 anyway, with less than three members of staff. We are one of the least-funded, least-staffed services in the country, and preparing for an exclusion, even a governing body, can take up to 20 hours."

At the other end of the spectrum, there were also IAS services that had much greater capacity to offer support to all children and families who contacted the service. Some participants mentioned that when it comes to exclusions, they believe that there is always an unmet need at the root of the child's behaviour.

"I actually think that the majority of children that are being excluded have underlying needs and that's resulting in their exclusion. We don't,

I don't think we ever get calls from parents of children that haven't got SEND."

Ideas for supporting those without SEND

Bearing in mind the difficulty of categorising children into binary groups of either with or without SEND, in situations where parents of children who definitely did not have any SEND, IAS services are able to provide signposting to other services, and provide information about the law regarding exclusions. Furthermore, the services with more limited capacity have methods for signposting families to other information providers. Some participants mentioned signposting families to the Advisory Centre for Education (ACE), a website and helpline providing support to families about current education law and guidance. ACE covers state funded education for children aged 5–16 years in England.

"If they don't [have SEND], we would signpost them to things like the Advisory Centre for Education."

"I will signpost the family to the, there's the ACE, has got a really good information on exclusions in the booklet."

Another service which participants signpost families to is the Child Law Advice Service, operated by Coram Children's Legal Centre. They provide specialist advice and information on child, family and education law to parents, carers and young people in England.

"The Child Law Advice Line, yes, they've got really good information."

Some of the IAS services had created their own exclusions fact sheets that they would provide to any parents of an excluded child. The fact sheets include information about the relevant legislation regarding exclusions and outline families' legal rights.

"If somebody had a permanent exclusion, I've also got a very clear checklist of how to approach the governing body... The sorts of questions, the sort of things you need to be looking for which could be provided to anybody."

Some participants highlighted that the IAS services themselves were well placed to provide information regarding exclusions, because of their extensive knowledge of the relevant

legislation and statutory guidance. However, the ability for all the services to be able to provide support for families of children without SEND would require greater funding of IAS services.

"We are services that know not just about exclusions, but also about school admissions. Therefore, we can help plot your way through the next stage. It's not always the disaster that some people may think it is just because your child's been permanently excluded... In that respect, and I think the people that work within IAS services – I extrapolate info for people that I've met and my own team and you've got the skills to build that relationship with the parent and, perhaps, the young person sometimes to help them find what the next stage is for that young person's journey."

Type of support offered	Brief description
Helpline	Each IAS service can be contacted by telephone, usually Monday – Friday during office hours. Professionals provide legal guidance, sign posting, advice regarding next steps and potential next steps.
Email	The support available on the phone is also available over email.
Website and online factsheet	IAS websites often include fact sheets explaining the law regarding exclusions and the variety of support available to families.
Attending meetings	IAS staff will often accompany parents to meetings in schools to provide support.
Support workers	When support is going to be provided to a family over a period of time they will usually allocate a specific case worker to provide support for the duration.
Providing transition advice	When children are being moved to a different education setting, such as a pupil referral unit, IAS staff will support children and families during the transition. They will also provide transition advice for next steps, such as moving on to further education or work.

Type of support offered	Brief description
Courses and Workshops for Parents and Carers	Some IAS services provide free courses for parents and carers about behaviour, exclusions and SEND, and Education Health and Care Plans.
Challenging schools	When IASS staff are working with a family and identify that a school has acted unlawfully they assist parents and carers with challenging the school. They may act as a mediator between the family and the school when the relationship has broken down.
Drop in Service	A few IAS services offer a weekly drop in service where parents can go in to the office and receive advice from the staff.
Independent Review Panels	Staff will encourage parents and carers to take their child's case to an IRP if they believe it would be helpful. They will support them throughout the process.
Training volunteers	Some IAS services train volunteers who can then go on to support children, parents and carers experiencing difficulties at school.
Paperwork assistance	If parents are required to complete paperwork to support their case IAS service staff can offer support with completing it.

Common experiences/concerns

Behaviour policies leading to exclusions

Many services discussed the impact of stricter behaviour policies on rising exclusions. One interviewee gave a stark example of a child who was recently given a fixed term exclusion for two and a half days for wearing the wrong shoes.

Furthermore, schools changing from local authority run to academies has reportedly had a significant impact on exclusions in some areas. Academies are able to set their own specific behaviour policies, which could be particularly impactful for children with SEND, both diagnosed and undiagnosed.

"Because the children that are affected by any changes are the children with SEND because they don't understand what these changes are... they're told if you talk, or you don't line up quietly, or whatever rules people bring in, they don't really understand them, so they end up being the children that break the rules. There isn't enough differentiation and understanding about what that child's needs are to then, for the senior staff in the school to be flexible with the, you know, how they manage that child's behaviour."

Because children's individual needs are often not taken into account in the enforcement of behaviour policies, any issues they might be experiencing can escalate. Schools are failing to address the root causes of behaviour, which is contributing to increased exclusions of children and young people.

"Implementation of the behaviour policy without reasonable adjustments being applied is resulting in these situations where you end up with exclusion."

Fixed-term, grey and illegal exclusions

In an attempt to reduce the number of reported exclusions, some schools have been using 'grey' exclusions. This is where children are being educated off site in alternative provision, placed in isolation rooms, or on a part-time timetable. These so-called 'grey' exclusions are masking the true numbers of excluded children, and the real figures are likely to be much higher.

"I think that on paper and probably statistically it will be appearing as though there are less exclusions. I think in reality they're perhaps recording where children are educated off-site and in alternative provision and virtual schools and that kind of thing instead!"

"The biggest thing at the moment is probably what they call grey exclusions, is the ones which just get you off roll or part-time, so probably... Although it is an issue of fixed term solutions etc., are a big thing."

In some cases, schools are excluding children illegally by regularly sending them home unrecorded, causing children to miss out on their lessons while still technically "on-roll" at the school.

"Parents who come in saying, 'My child is constantly being sent home', which is the unlawful and informal exclusion still happens an awful lot, and part-time timetables that are undocumented, happen a lot."

Undiagnosed SEND, SEMH/needs not being met

A commonly reported issue was schools failures to provide support for children with SEND and often co-occurring social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. This is even the case for some children with an Education, Health and Care Plan, because schools do not have the capacity to support them. Participants reported some school staff had not received adequate training about how to meet children's needs.

"They find our children who have autism or socio-emotional mental health issues very hard to manage. Often, the support that that child needs is just not available. It doesn't matter whether it's in their plan."

"If appropriate support was put in place, if staff were properly trained in schools in order to meet those needs then I think the outcomes for some of those young people would be different."

This highlights the possibility that many exclusions of children and young people with SEND are avoidable if efficient training of staff was available, with appropriate ongoing support and supervision.

Interviewees discussed the change in culture needed to see exclusions as the last resort, rather than the first resort. In order to influence these shifts in mind-set, there is a need for a greater understanding of how underlying SEND can manifest itself and the importance of early intervention to avoid getting to the point where behaviour is worthy of an exclusion.

Schools encouraging elective home education

An issue brought up by some participants was schools encouraging parents of children with SEND to home educate. Schools frame the issue in such a way as to present it as the best option for some children to have their needs met. However, parents are often not aware of the fact that parents electively home educating receive limited support from their local authorities.

"A parent might phone up and say, 'I'm thinking of home educating. I was given your number to discuss it.' We'll go, 'Okay,' and we'll talk to them and say, 'Well why are you thinking of home educating?' 'Well, my son's not getting the support he needs.' 'Oh, okay. What do you mean he's not getting the support he needs?' 'Oh, the school are rubbish. He's got these problems and now the school are just saying that he should be home educated.' Then we'll go, 'Right, okay, well you know that you don't have to home educate.' Then we can start going through it and then say, 'Well, how are they not supporting him?' Then we can look at it. Like I say, more often than not you find out that they've got underlying SEN issues that have just not been identified."

Chapter Four: Challenging schools and impact on families

The following section focuses on the experiences of challenging schools – both directly and indirectly. Issues discussed include the rise of academisation, the provision of training and awareness-raising initiatives, the different positions taken by IAS services towards the process of challenging schools and the impact of support provided on families.

Experiences of challenging schools

There was a mixture of reported approaches in terms of challenging schools about excluding a child with SEND. The different approaches range on a spectrum from those services that adopt a more adversarial tone to those which describe a partnership approach – working with the school to achieve the best outcome for the child. One interviewee described how the service sees its role as preventing schools from using 'loopholes' to exclude young people with SEND. Another service described the hostile reaction that a school can have when they find out that a representative from an IAS service will be present at exclusions meetings. In addition, another service described how their usual conciliatory, 'bridge-building' approach to working with schools changes when attending an Independent Review Panel:

"I don't get Christmas cards from the schools I've beaten at an IRP, I tell you."

The 'bridge-building approach' was more likely to be referenced by services that describe their work as adopting a partnership style:

"...we take a partnership approach with the school then, to actually say, 'Let's work together. We absolutely feel that the parent has agreed with your reading of the situation, we have evidence from the parents, we have a diagnosis, we have the pattern of strategies that haven't been put in place or especially that haven't been involved, so let's work together'. Because ... is a very established service within the city and one that has that reputation for being able to take that approach, it's received okay from schools. It is not one where they say, 'Well, actually we're not going to talk to you

now'. Most schools will respond at that stage with a level of, 'Let's all work together to get it right for the child or young person!'"

Such a partnership approach relies to some extent on the history of the work that the service has built up in the local area. The reintegration meeting was referenced by several interviewees as a key opportunity to get consensus from the different people involved in the school life of the young person.

"We'll try and encourage both the pastoral and the special needs side to be there, because I think we've found that they live on two different planets and never the twain shall meet, heaven forbid that they might communicate with one another, particularly in secondary schools. You try and get everybody around the table to talk about that young person's needs and how they might best be met. It's an interesting dynamic."

The reintegration meeting can be an important step in helping to break the cycle of exclusion for some young people with SEND.

"Well, we support parents with reintegration. We feel it's really important because if we've not looked at the reasons why this child's excluding, particularly if we're getting a lot of fixed-term, then we need to then default to that reintegration where we can check that the correct support is in place so the child succeeds."

Another interviewee described trying to encourage schools to take a 'graduated' approach in managing the behaviour of young people with SEND, as opposed to rigidly adhering to a 'zero-tolerance' behaviour policy.

The cuts to schools' funding and the independence of funding priorities allowed by academisation was seen by many as instrumental in the 'off-loading' process of excluding young people with challenging behaviour from schools.

Where a service sits on the 'adversarial/supportive partner' spectrum in terms of challenging a school's exclusion practice also

has an impact upon the extent to which a service sees itself as an impartial actor in the process.

"Even though we are supporting parents, the impartiality is important. When schools know you, they will accept things better than if it's somebody that doesn't know you, because they know that you will be fair in that, if you feel that they're doing something that's right, you will explain that to a parent, but in the same way you will explain to them if you feel that they're not being fair, you know, they're not carrying out what the law says they should be doing for the children."

However, another service described the difficulty of retaining an impartial position when they perceive the school to be acting unlawfully or contrary to the published guidance.

"It's hard, sometimes, for us to keep that impartiality ... Well, it's collecting the evidence and it's when it's reported for hoping, not hoping, but expecting that it will be acted on."

Support for challenges

Many interviewees highlighted the impact which academisation has had on the ability to challenge schools, both on the drafting of their policies and on the implementation of policies, especially related to behaviour. Stringent behavioural policies can lead to a 'revolving door' of a young person with SEND being in a constant state of sanction, which can have a resulting impact upon behaviour, leading to additional sanctions, in a never-ending cycle.

"On one school we have here, they join the sausage machine as it is. They get sent to "ready to learn", where they have a reflection in the room for a while, then they're sent somewhere else to go and do a bit of homework, and then if they don't do that, they're then on a detention for the next day. When they come back into the lesson they will have missed everything that they should have done, so it's just a circle, round we go again. It is totally appalling, and it is not inclusive."

This 'zero-tolerance' approach enshrined with behavioural policies, often with little or no adjustment made for young people with SEND can be especially problematic in areas where an academy chain effectively has a monopoly

on locally available secondary schools. This can make it difficult for families to find alternative educational provision and it also makes a challenge more difficult:

"A lot of schools are a law unto themselves. They're academies. They've got a great big academy and Trust behind them, and they go, 'Well, I've got to listen to my academy Trust, my chairman. I'm not listening to the local authority because what do you do for me?' They're a little local authority to themselves, aren't they essentially?"

The quote above highlights the perception of a lack of power and control that families – and even local authorities – can have over the decision-making process of an academy chain. One interviewee described the impact that an academy's policies can have on the school experience of a very young child:

"Last school year we had a five-year-old child that was excluded for five days ... They were actually excluded by the executive head teacher of the Trust, who happened to be in school on that morning, when that five-year-old had a meltdown ... His background was in senior schools, he had no experience with five-year olds. Certainly, not five-year olds with autism. There was nowhere in that exclusion that followed any policy, any exclusion guidance at all ... and a lot of the time you have no access to the senior management of the Trust to explain why you think their policies are wrong."

Interviewees also highlighted the limited influence that a local authority can have where an academy trust has control over provision in an area.

"There's a couple that are independent Academy Trusts and actually they're the worst because they do exactly as they please, but on the whole, they're part of quite large MATs now. So it is very difficult for the local authority to challenge that."

Where a local authority can sometimes offer support is in ensuring that schools are accurately recording their cases of exclusion, so that young people are not being recorded as 'being educated off-site' (when they are not).

The role of training is key in helping schools to know what they can and cannot do under the guidance.

"We've written a training module on exclusions that we deliver to school staff. Now it's generally the head teachers that come along to that as opposed to the SENCOs at the schools, even though it's sold as SEND training. It's quite surprising how many of the head teachers don't have an understanding of the statutory guidance. So we deliver that because it's beneficial for us to do that, because if they understand it, hopefully they won't get it wrong."

Some interviewees mentioned how key it is to get the school's head-teacher on board with any changes in practice around SEND exclusions. Moreover, this might involve encouraging a new head-teacher or a member of SLT to attend relevant training courses:

"The school where they've got the new head and deputy head, I've spent a lot of time with that head teacher, explaining to him about the needs of autistic children, encouraging them to access training courses that the local authority puts on through their advisory teaching staff ... so that they're learning about the needs of the children and understanding why children might behave in the way they do ... you would expect that somewhere in their experience before they become a head they would have learnt that ... They need a lot more training on how to differentiate, how to meet the needs of these children."

One interviewee even described an instance where a deputy head-teacher had requested that the IAS service intervene in a case where the head-teacher at the same school had a limited understanding of SEND.

"I got called to support a family for a child who was very much at risk of permanent exclusion. So the family asked me to come in and be with them at this meeting, and it was very strange, because the deputy head rang me, and said, 'Can you say some things at the meeting?' I was a little bit, 'I don't like the sound of this,' and actually what she asked me to do was explain ADHD to the head teacher. They were all getting frustrated because the head teacher has this very fixed view, I think his comment was, 'We have 17 children in this school with ADHD, they all manage.' So I had to go, 'Well, that's lovely

for them,' and the other comment was, 'We have strategies and they are good strategies.' I can't disagree, they are good strategies, but they're not going to work for everyone."

In cases such as that detailed above, IAS services highlight how key it is that schools are encouraged to make reasonable adjustments. In addition, support for that encouragement can come from the role of parent/carer forums or parent champions who have 'lived experience'. Such support can also directly help other parents in their challenge of schools.

"Parent champions ... work with us closely, as well. The woman who is charge of it, we can commission her to do certain pieces of work that will support parents, but not necessarily SEND. We're just about to commission her now to do some courses for us, regarding get your voice heard. So how to attend meetings, how to put your case forward without losing it, for want of a better word, because some of these meetings can be very emotional."

Some interviewees highlighted how families had been encouraged by other members of the community to ask for governor involvement in their child's case. However, services also described how the move to academisation had impacted a) upon the extent to which governors are seen as independent and b) the extent to which governors have the needs of the child uppermost in their list of priorities.

"A lot of our schools' governing bodies aren't actually governors anymore, they're trustees. So the people who are sitting in front of you at a hearing are trustees of the Academy Trust, not of governors particularly of that school. So again, they've kind of got a more corporate approach and it's a corporate approach to behaviour and discipline and not an understanding of the needs of the particular child sitting in front of you ... Whereas, if you've got a governor that is in the school, understands the school, it does make a slight difference, I feel, especially when you've got some kids who have really tested the boundaries and you're saying to the families, 'You need to throw yourself on the mercy of the governor, because he was in the wrong'. That's easier to do with a governing body that is still a school's governing body, rather than trustee of a chain."

Impact of services' support for exclusions on families

A first (relatively) simple step in supporting families was to encourage them to be assertive in their knowledge that parents/carers do not have to collect a child early from school unless they have been formally excluded. One service described how parents have lost their jobs because of repeatedly leaving work early to collect their children from school.

Another practical way of IAS services supporting families is in encouraging them to not just accept a school's premise that a young person with SEND should be educated at home.

"There's a lot of encouraging home education ... It's the ones who are saying, 'We don't want to exclude little Johnny, so why don't you educate from home?' We hear those stories and the parents obviously don't want an exclusion on their young person's record, as it were, so they say, 'Oh, okay then.' Then they ring us and say, 'When are we going to see our tutor because we're home educating?' 'Um, right, okay, err... Right, I think we need to start again here.' Yes, things like that are an issue."

The pressure to home educate can be significant on those families where a young person has SEND. IAS services are therefore enabling families to challenge those schools who are playing on the fear of those who do not wish their children to have an exclusion on their educational record.

Several interviewees referenced the ways in which services can act as vehicles for empowering families and can encourage parents/carers to have the confidence to challenge a school decision. Some services, for example, have representatives who physically attend meetings with parents whereas others adopt more of a 'hands-off' approach, encouraging and enabling parents, often via training, to make the challenge themselves.

Services described their role in encouraging schools to look at any undiagnosed or not formally identified SEND issues that may have an impact on behaviour in the school environment. Encouraging parents to seek support for a young person's unidentified SEND issue was also highlighted as key in helping to challenge an exclusion. One example was given of a young

person with dyslexia whose 'managed move' had broken down, partly because of a previously unmet need.

"Young man's got dyslexia. He was always getting into trouble for behaviours, fidgeting, lack of concentration. Somebody finally listened to them. They got a paediatrician involved and he's got ADHD. Then, he was recommended by the dyslexia special teacher to also have a vision test, and he's got an eye-tracking movement problem. Then, as a result of that, he had a hearing test, and he's got a slight hearing impairment. You think, well actually this young man has got some significant difficulties being able to engage in education, but nobody had ever taken the time to sit down and find out what's going on for him."

Chapter Five: Changes over last five years

The following section focuses on the changes that SENDIASS staff have noticed in relation to exclusions support over the last five years or so, since the introduction of Independent Review Panels for exclusions. Interviewees corroborated common themes that came up in the survey, including an increase in the volume of exclusions-related support; increases in the complexity of cases and level of intervention provided; and trends related to younger ages and important transition periods. They also reflected on potential reasons for changes over time and cross-cutting issues around increasing academisation; changes in school behaviour policies; and pressures on school budgets were also discussed.

Patterns and trends

As reflected in the survey findings, the majority of interviewees also reported a rise in the number of families seeking support for exclusions, as well as a rise in informal and illegal exclusions. One interviewee reported their service is getting an average of two to three calls per day in relation to exclusions, whereas a few years ago they received two or three per week.

"Yes, I would say that it's the amount that has increased, so that's meant that our work has increased while we try and support those young people."

As well as an increase in the volume of exclusions-related support, SENDIASS staff also noted an increase in the complexity of cases coming for support. They often have to do some "detective work" to understand the school's response to often persistent, unmet needs. The crossover with SEND and social, emotional and mental health needs was a common theme discussed by interviewees, with examples of a number of children ending up with permanent exclusions whilst they were waiting for a CAMHS appointment.

Coupled with this complexity, staff discussed an increase in the number of IRPs that SENDIASS are supporting and/or attending with parents. This stands in contrast to the exclusions support offered a few years ago, which focused mainly

around advice giving. However, some of this change in practice also reflects the growth in knowledge and expertise of the SENDIASS staff around exclusions.

"We wouldn't even really go to the GDC with parents, we would just generally talk them through putting together a case for their child not being excluded. We didn't have the knowledge that we've got now."

Where staff have not seen a noticeable rise in referrals for exclusions in their area, one interviewee noted that it is not because people are not in need of support; it is more to do with how their service is advertised, including the information given to parents by the schools.

"I do think that the number of direct referrals we get now for exclusion has reduced... and I think some of that is down to the communication when schools are excluding, as to what information is actually sent out in the first place."

Furthermore, SENDIASS staff are not seeing the full picture of all children being excluded – what they see is the cases where parents know about their service and have been able to access their help. A couple of interviewees used the same phrase to describe this phenomenon and noted that they are just seeing "the tip of the iceberg" in relation to exclusions.

Interviewees also noted time trends in relation to specific populations – including significant increases in exclusions support for primary aged children, children with SEND, and during important transition periods such as the transition from primary to secondary school, with more year 7 and year 8 pupils being excluded.

"In our area, a lot of the secondary schools they're all academies and they're massive, so we have a big rise now from pupils that are in Year 7 and 8. They've had the support in the primary schools because their needs have been met at SEN support. They've gone into these massive secondary schools with all sorts of sensory stuff affecting them and exclusions after exclusions, so we get quite a lot of Year 7s."

The rise in exclusions in primary aged children were noted by some services to have occurred

as young as reception. One service gave an example of a child who was given a fixed term exclusion the second day after starting school for what was described as "cheeky behaviour".

"I've seen it maybe five years ago, it was more prominent in secondary, but we are seeing primary school children at a very young age being permanently excluded."

Increases in exclusions were also observed at certain times of the year – notably at the end of school terms and, in particular, in the lead up to Christmas. One interpretation is that this is when the school timetables become more unstructured (e.g. preparing for Christmas shows, increase in school trips, etc.) and behaviour can become more difficult to manage. One interviewee discussed a spike in the lead up to Christmas last year where the majority of reception children had settled by then, but those that had needs that perhaps were not yet identified, had not settled down and were being excluded.

Reasons for change

Interviewees reflected on their reasons for any observed changes over time, with some understandable overlap with discussions had over current challenges. Several talked about the negative impact of increasing academisation. In many areas, academies make up 80–90% of schools, and in these settings, there is a noticeable lack of local authority involvement and diminished power to challenge. Academies set their own behaviour policies that could be particularly impactful for children with SEND, both diagnosed and undiagnosed.

"Academies are definitely more likely to say, 'Well this is our policy and this is what we do.'"

Many discussed the impact of changing school behaviour policies on rising exclusions, especially those that may disproportionately disadvantage children with SEND, e.g. strict rules regarding uniform for children with sensory issues.

"Some of their policies actively meant that a child with ASD would end up falling foul of behaviour policies because of the nature of their actual special needs or disability."

Also, linked to this is the "struggle" that some

schools face around supporting inclusive education within mainstream settings. Often, the support is just not available for children with SEND, even if it has been written into their EHCP.

"Actually sometimes for some schools, it's easier to get them out, than to keep them in and support them."

Furthermore, increasing pressures on school budgets and the lack of investment in schools is having a deleterious impact on all children, and especially those children who require additional resources. One interviewee noted that this is undoubtedly contributing to the rise in exclusions and another mentioned that excluding to an alternative setting may sometimes be the only way for that child to get the support they need.

"Yes, we wouldn't see the amount of exclusions that we have if the schools had money, they could buy additional resource, additional training and be able to support these children in the right manner. I can't expect all of them to disappear, but a high proportion of these would disappear."

Perhaps more positively, some of the recent increases in relation to exclusions-related support also reflect the increasing awareness amongst parents of what constitutes an unlawful exclusion. One interviewee noted that parents in their area are more likely to seek support for exclusions and challenge the schools that play on parents' fears of having an exclusion on their child's educational record.

"I think parents are more informed, so they're more likely to come to us for support than they would of before."

Because of the increase in school challenges, both from parents themselves and by SENDIASS directly, there has also been an increase in the number of overturned decisions, although this is still quite a rare occurrence given the number of exclusions overall. It was also noted by one interviewee that their service has a better success rate with the governors' meetings, and as yet, have not been able to influence a decision at the Independent Review Panel stage.

"We've sent parents who are not particularly confident or educated parents, we've sent

them to the governing board with our questions and our way of doing things, and they have managed to get it overturned on their own. It's about understanding the process and being able to challenge it."

Improving future exclusions provision within SENDIASS

In the interviews, SENDIASS staff reflected on what they needed in place to improve their support of the exclusions agenda over the next few years. Several suggestions were made around the consistency of their offer, improved awareness, and increased resource and training.

Several interviewees discussed the need to improve consistency about the remit of SENDIASS support for exclusions. Staff would like to feel more confident about being able to spell out exactly what parents could expect to receive (and what they would not receive) if they contacted the service with a concern around exclusions. One interviewee believes the local authority should set this out. They should decide what the exclusions support offer from SENDIASS should be and to whom it should be available.

"One of the things that would be really useful, I think, would be for people to be aware of exactly what it is the service does... what the exclusions remit is."

Linked with improving the consistency of the offer is also raising awareness of the SENDIASS offer amongst families, schools, and other relevant agencies, including developing closer relationships with the inclusions team within the local authority. SENDIASS staff also requested more support from their local authority and local schools in promoting their service, especially if it is decided that exclusions support will be provided for all families. Closer relationships with the local authority also mean increased data sharing, and one interviewee discussed the potential for triangulating data collected at their service level with local authority data on exclusions. Furthermore, services would like to join forces more with their local authority to challenge some of the questionable decisions of multi-academy trusts.

Unsurprisingly, issues around funding and capacity were raised, in particular around the capacity to do more preventative work, such as preparing and delivering training for schools and offering drop-in sessions for parents worried about potential exclusions. However, it was also noted that this additional support would only be effective in the long-run if it is also accompanied by more investment in schools so that schools are able to put the advice into place.

"Around exclusions with SEN or otherwise, well straight answer is funding."

"If the school, were they to say, 'Little Johnny is wobbling here. Can you have a word with him?' Then hopefully we could maybe stop an exclusion happening. If we're able to start digging deeper first off, but that would require obviously a lot more capacity than our team currently have."

Some services also felt the need for more staff training around exclusions, especially for new support workers. A more hands-on, interactive training approach was said to be useful. One example given was to include role-play of what happens when you are in an independent review panel meeting and the steps and processes for formulate a case against an exclusion.

Others noted the benefits that having a dedicated staff member for exclusions support within SENDIASS team would bring.

"We've always had it [exclusions] as part of our work, but unless it's there as a specific 'this is the exclusions team' that is within IASS that families can access, it's very, very tricky."

One way to implement the integration of exclusions support within IAS services and to make it more clear to external stakeholders that they offer this type of support is to consider a potential re-brand of IAS services to be known as 'IAS and Exclusions' services. One interviewee talked about having "a set specialist function related to exclusions and not just an add-on because it's such a crucial area now."

Chapter Six: Themes from best practice

Multi-agency working

Multiple IAS services quoted the success of their approaches to multi-agency working as an area of good practice, e.g. through developing positive relationships with schools and local authorities. The IAS service WESAIL based in Wakefield will advise on a wider remit than purely education, supporting the families with issues such as housing, having established wider networks.

"We're not, we don't always just purely deal with the school issue, or they might be dealing with the school issue and something to do with housing, and all the other related issues."

Participants found having positive working relationships with other education and family services to be beneficial for everyone involved. They were happy to provide advice to other professionals and inform them about best practice and the law. The following quote is from a professional based at the IAS service in East Riding.

"I think we've got a really good, close working relationship with the local authority's exclusions and reintegration officer, who is excellent, excellent lady, who has many, many years' experience... she has a really, really good understanding of children with SEND and she will challenge the school as well. She will say, 'No, I'm sorry, this is not on, can't do this,' and really challenge them to rescind the exclusion... We're really proud of that relationship that we have together. I'm really quite proud of, we've also recently introduced, where children are made permanently excluded and they're out of education, there've appointed a new SEND link worker for tuition until they get back into permanent education. If there's any cases working out, they will work on making sure that child gets education."

Workshops and training

A few IAS services have delivered workshops to parents about exclusions, utilising the knowledge they had gained from previous cases. The IAS service in Manchester provided the following successful example.

"We ran some workshops for parents on exclusions. One, to give them that wider knowledge of what they're about. At first when we did it, we recruited those who had gone through that process, who we'd worked with,

who'd had the experience of exclusion. To get them to go through the process, then to say what would have worked better for them, to look at that."

The SENDIASS based in Torbay had successfully delivered training to school governors about exclusions, which led to a drastic decrease in exclusions of children with SEND.

"I did give exclusion training to a governor of one school in T* and that was last year. Since delivering that training, the exclusion rate of children with SEND has gone down by 72 per cent."

Holistic support

A key strength cited by participants about their IAS services' was the holistic support they provided to families, from the first phone call for as long as they needed. They empower parents by sharing their knowledge and expertise regarding the law on exclusions and can act as a mediator between the family and the school where a relationship has broken down. Allocating a family their own caseworker was regarded as best practice so parents did not have to repeat their story multiple times. The example below comes from the IAS service in Worcestershire and Herefordshire.

"I'm pleased that you've got a personal touch, if you know what I mean. People know that they've only got to say their story once and they get the support that they need."

Including children's voices

The IAS services in Birmingham and Sheffield have been focusing on ways to include children's voices in meaningful ways. Children often feel intimidated coming to meetings about them, therefore IAS practitioners will support them to garner their views and help them have their voices listened to. They believed this was most valuable because it enables the child to contribute to the solution, rather than being the cause of problem.

"Making sure that the child's voice is heard within all of this and encouraging the child to go to that meeting or even just be part of it and having somebody working with the child and getting his views on what's happened. I think, like I say, it's still in its infancy but I do think we're heading in the right direction to have some really good practice around it."

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and recommendations

This report has explored the perspectives of local IASS on school exclusions and their contribution to informing, advising and supporting children and families. This included inquiring as to what they currently offer, challenges to schools, changes over time and what a future enhanced offer might look like. It is clear that many IASS already see themselves as playing a key role in this area, and individual staff are keen to make a difference to excluded children and those at risk of exclusion. As a next step in implementing the recommendations of the Timpson Review, options for a strengthened IASS offer may be tested in an 'exclusions pilot' involving a sample of services. The findings set out in this report suggest that there are a number of key considerations to take into account should this approach be taken forward.

Demand and Capacity

As set out chapter two, the majority of IASS already assists everyone who contacts them with concerns about exclusions. Where there is no SEND, this support is limited to signposting to other services in about two fifths of IASS. Only a small minority filtered out those without SEND at first contact. Furthermore, as seen in the 2019 SENDIASS customer satisfaction survey (NCB, 2019), cases that concern exclusions appeared to make up a small proportion of cases handled by IASS at any one time. These two findings suggest that formalising a universal offer on exclusions may have limited capacity implications for IASS. However, other perspectives gathered in this research suggest that this may not be the case. Firstly, although IASS may only be handling a limited number of exclusions cases at one time, staff reported that due to the intensity of support required, this actually accounts for a significant proportion of their workload. They also suggested they had limited, if any, capacity to do additional work on top of offering the mandatory level of support for exclusions. Any increase in exclusion referrals without investment in additional capacity may therefore mean that services would struggle to meet demand. It is also important to note that IASS staff generally reported a trend of increasing numbers of exclusions cases. The

potential for this trend to continue needs to be considered in any medium or long term planning of resources and capacity.

Recommendation 1: Testing of any enhanced offer of support on exclusions should include making provision for extra capacity in IASS, and contingency for further increases in demand of the course of any multi-year trial.

Involving other partners

Improving information, advice and support for families affected by school exclusions may not just have an impact on the demand faced by IASS. Depending on the model of support, other parts of the support pathway may be impacted. For example, if IASS served as a universal 'front door' for families, signposting in cases where there was no SEND to other services, this may increase demand on those other services. Examples given by IASS included the Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) and Coram Children's Legal Centre. Other partners may include local authority's education welfare teams and the national helpline run by Contact as part of the current IASP contract. These other services should be consulted, if not directly involved, in the trialling of any relevant models. Such consultation may also prove useful for those IASS that indicated a desire to have more clarity on their role and the role of others (regardless of any specific new models being trialled).

Demand for information, advice and support on exclusions is likely to be impacted by the practices of schools. IASS pointed to a number of things that schools, local authorities and other partners could do to reduce the numbers of exclusions. These are summarised in Box 1. There was scepticism, however, about whether any rapid change could be delivered in the context of financial challenges faced by schools. In the case of individual students, schools could be impacted by increased numbers of exclusions being overturned, as they may have to put in improved support for children being reintegrated back to their setting.

Recommendation 2: In testing any enhanced offer, local implementation should take a whole systems approach, taking into account the impact on all relevant partners.

Box 1: Wider changes suggested by IASS to reduce exclusions

Awareness

- Better awareness amongst schools of the exclusion rules and guidance
- More support for children to understand their own behaviours and behaviour policies

SEND identification and coordination

- More effective early identification of SEND
- Consistently clear EHCP plans so that schools understand what required of them
- More consistently resourced SENCO posts
- Schools taking more responsibility for meeting the needs of all their pupils

Behaviour policies

- More proportionate and reasonable behaviour policies i.e. only sanctioning when there is genuine disruption to learning and allowing for reasonable adjustments
- Better early intervention in disruptive behaviour i.e. understanding triggers, looking for what helps children concentrated better and accommodating this

Planning local services

- Ensuring access to required mental health services before schools feel compelled to exclude affected children
- Early help for children whose behaviour may be affected by problems at home
- More specialist placements available locally

Partnership working

- Peer challenge between schools
- Schools working together to provide support off site to children at risk

Who should be eligible for information, advice and support on exclusions?

As discussed in chapter three, the fact that the many IASS provided at least some support to anyone who contacted them with concerns about exclusions, was partly out of necessity, not just by design. They felt that it was hard to tell if the child concerned had SEND or not, and that unidentified SEND may lay behind some of the behavioural problems that culminate in exclusion. It is of course worth noting, as set out in the introduction, that children with identified SEND account for a significant proportion of exclusions, and this proportion would be larger if those with SEND not formally identified were included. This may all suggest that it may not be practicable, fair, or beneficial to apply eligibility criteria to initial advice from IASS. Due to capacity issues highlighted above, it may be appropriate for higher levels of support to be more targeted.

Recommendation 3: Any enhanced offer should include some universal element for individual cases. This support could be offered at intervention level 1 (as set out in the IASSN guidance (IASSN, 2016)) to anyone with concerns about exclusions, regardless of whether the child has SEND.

An enhanced role in preventing exclusions

Some IASS staff suggested that they had developed promising arrangements for increasing knowledge amongst schools staff about their responsibilities regarding exclusion decisions. This included training for staff on the law and practice on exclusions and SEND. It also included advising schools on individual cases of reintegration or managed moves to avoid repeat exclusions of children with SEND. More training and advice to schools staff was suggested as something that IASS could provide as part of an enhanced offer on exclusions. However, it was also pointed out that this would require more resources, with current capacity being targeted at meeting the needs of individual families. As some IASS did not feel clear on their own role in supporting individual families on exclusions, not all IASS may feel equally equipped to implement this.

Box 2: Current practice and suggestions from IASS for enhancing exclusions support

- Provision of exclusions factsheets
- Raising awareness through newsletters, social media campaigns
- Designated support workers for exclusions
- Drop-in sessions for parents
- Attending exclusions meetings with parents
- Providing transition advice (including for reintegration and managed moves) to schools and families
- Courses and workshops for schools, parents and carers
- Supporting parents and carers to formally challenge decisions

An enhanced role in supporting parents to challenge exclusions

Some IASS pointed to potentially unlawful practice by schools and a lack of awareness amongst parents about their child's rights. Example were shared of parents being persuaded to take their child home for short periods without this being properly recorded as an exclusion, or encouraged to home educate without appropriate support from the school. Rules around exclusions are covered in training for parents by some IASS. It was suggested that this could be developed to be more 'hands-on', so that exclusions meetings could be role played, for example. Some IASS also described how they had supported parents to challenge schools' decisions, and we heard of some success in overturning decisions to exclude in cases where a child's SEND had not been properly identified or catered for.

Managing relationships with schools

IASS reported that the success or level of challenge in their work on exclusions could vary between schools. Recruiting school staff onto training, or cooperation in planning reintegration or managed moves, for example, would require a good relationship with the school in question. Whilst we did find at least one example of where support and challenge to schools had been combined (East Riding, Chapter 6), other IASS suggested that a role in challenging exclusions had negatively impacted their relationships with the schools in

question. It may therefore be more practicable for some IASS to focus any additional work on either a prevention or challenge role (as described above) but not both. Whether both can be consistently achieved warrants further investigation.

Recommendation 4: Any testing of an enhanced offer outside of level 1 support should explore the relationship between prevention and challenge roles and whether both can be delivered concurrently and effectively.

Some reported that their role was more challenging when this involved academy schools. Particular issues included having to navigate multiple individual behaviour policies, a perception that Academy Boards were less likely to reconsider exclusions than governors of maintained schools, as well as a general resistance to working with the local authority (of which most IASS are a part). The role of the senior leadership of academy chains was another issue to navigate.

Recommendation 5: Local design of trials should take into account the number of different academy chains operating in the area, with additional resources to navigate additional policies and relationships. Differences in school governance should be covered in any training for IASS staff or parents.

Several participants discussed the positive benefits that delivery of exclusions training has already brought and could bring in their areas. To ensure all IASS staff have the same level of knowledge around exclusions, a package of training should be developed to clarify and confirm the minimum universal offer, as well as up-skill staff to offer potential training and advice to school staff and parents.

Recommendation 6: Training for IASS staff on exclusions should be developed and offered. This should aim to ensure all IASS staff feel equipped with the knowledge to deliver:

- A minimum universal offer as described in recommendation 3
- Potential training and advice to schools to support prevention of exclusions
- Potential training and advice to parents to support challenge of exclusion decisions

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Appendix 1: IAS Exclusions Survey

Introduction

The National Children's Bureau's (NCB) research team are carrying out a piece of research to understand the work that IAS services are doing to support the exclusions agenda. This work will support 'next steps' in relation to the Timpson report and contribute towards the potential development of an IAS service 'exclusions' pilot with a sample of IAS services.

The research includes an exploration of questions around young people's access to exclusion-related advice via the IASP, and in particular, how definitions of SEND can impact upon access. The data collection approach includes this survey and telephone interviews with a smaller sample of IAS sites who are interested in taking part.

All information collected via this form will be fully anonymised before being shared outside NCB's research team. This research is completely separate to any monitoring that may be carried out as part of the IASP programme.

Part 1: About you and your service

1. In which region are you based?

- North East
- North West
- Yorkshire and Humber
- West Midlands
- East Midlands
- East of England
- London
- South West
- South East

2. Which IAS service do you work for? (optional)

[Free text]

3. What local authorities does your service cover? (optional)

[Free text]

4. Is your service delivered 'in-house' (by people directly employed by a local authority), is it outsourced (delivered by an independent organisation that has a contract with the local authority), or a combination of the two?

- In house
- Outsourced
- Mixed

5. Which of the following best describes your role?

- Volunteer
- Front-line employee
- Service manager
- Other (please specify)

Part 2: Provision of support for exclusions

6. How does your service decide who is eligible to receive information, advice and support on exclusions?

- We help everyone who calls our service
- We ask a set of preliminary questions and screen out those who do not have SEND
- We state from the outset that we can only provide support for those with SEND (but signpost on to other services)
- Other (please state)

7. How does your service decide what level of support to provide on exclusions?

- We provide support at intervention level 1 only
- We provide support at intervention levels 1 and 2
- We provide support at intervention levels 1, 2 and 3
- We provide support at intervention levels 1, 2, 3 and 4
- Other (please state)

Part 3: Nature of support for exclusions

8. What type of support do you most frequently provide for exclusions? Please rank the following in order of frequency from 1 – most frequent type of support offered for exclusions to 5 – least frequent type of support offered for exclusions?

- Telephone advice
- Provide information on IASS website
- Face-to-face advice
- Training for parents
- Training for professionals

9. In addition to the mandatory provision for exclusions support (i.e., information on IASS website; telephone advice; face-to-face advice), are there any other ways that your service provides support for exclusions?

[Free text]

Part 4: Changes over time

10. How has your work on exclusions changed since the introduction of the Independent Review Panel (IRP) for exclusions (around 5 years ago)?

- Work on exclusions has reduced
- No change
- Work on exclusions has increased
- Don't know
- Other (please state)

11. What changes have you seen in terms of your work on exclusions over the last 5 years, including any changes in relation to support for unlawful exclusions?

[Free text]

Part 5: Measuring impact

12. Does your service gather any data on support for exclusions?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

13. If yes, how does your service use this data?

[Free text]

14. What impact does your exclusions work have on the following?

(5-point Likert scale: No impact / minimal impact / some short-term impact / some long-term impact / significant long-term impact, & option for 'don't know')

- Impact on individual children and families
- Impact on schools
- Strategic impact to local authorities

Part 6: Further comments

15. Please add any additional comments about IASS support for exclusions.

[Free text]

Part 7: Consent for further telephone interviews

16. Would you like to be involved in a telephone interview with a member of the NCB research team which will ask more detailed, qualitative information about the nature of your work around exclusions?

- Yes
- No

17. Please provide your contact details so we can send out further information about the telephone interviews.

Name –

Job title –

IAS service you work in –

Email address –

Telephone number –

Appendix 2: Survey respondent characteristics

In which region are you based?

Region	Number (total n=65)	Percentage of survey sample
North East	4	6.2%
North West	12	18.5%
Yorkshire and Humber	8	12.3%
West Midlands	7	10.8%
East Midlands	4	6.2%
East of England	3	4.6%
London	10	15.4%
South West	6	9.2%
South East	11	16.9%

Is your service delivered 'in-house' or outsourced?

Service type	Number (total n=65)	Percentage of survey sample
In house	50	76.9%
Outsourced	15	23.1%

Which of the following best describes your role?

Role type	Number (total n=65)	Percentage of survey sample
Front line employee	20	30.8%
Service manager	41	63.1%
Other	4	6.2%

Appendix 3: Interviewee characteristics

In which region are you based?

Region	Number (total n=21)	Percentage of survey sample
North East	1	4.8%
North West	3	14.3%
Yorkshire and Humber	4	19.0%
West Midlands	3	14.3%
East Midlands	2	9.5%
East of England	1	4.8%
London	0	0.0%
South West	4	19.0%
South East	3	14.3%

Is your service delivered 'in-house' or outsourced?

Service type	Number (total n=21)	Percentage of survey sample
In house	17	76.9%
Outsourced	4	23.1%

Which of the following best describes your role?

Role type	Number (total n=21)	Percentage of survey sample
Front line employee	4	19.0%
Service manager	16	76.2%
Other	1	4.8%

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