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# Evaluation of Education Provision for Children and Young People Educated Outside the School Setting in Wales

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## Introduction

This research was commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2012. Its aim was to examine the process of exclusion from school in Wales and the delivery, planning and commissioning of education provision for children and young people educated outside the school setting (such provision is commonly known as EOTAS; education otherwise than at school). The research team was also asked to make recommendations for policy development.

## Context of the research

The research followed on from issues and concerns which emerged from recent research (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008; 2009; 2011), reports from the Welsh school and care inspectorates (Estyn 2011; 2012) and voluntary organisations in Wales (Butler, 2011). These issues included:

- Evidence of unlawful exclusion from school.
- Significant variation in the policy and practice of managing actual and potential exclusions.
- Significant variation in the quality of education for pupils educated outside the school setting.
- Concern about the punitive use of physical restraint and isolation with pupils in EOTAS.
- Low rates of reintegration following exclusion and/or education in EOTAS.

## Evaluation methods

There were four main strands to the design of the evaluation:

- Statistical and policy analysis.
- Interviews with key stakeholders.
- Survey of local authority representatives.
- Interviews with young people, their families and a range of professionals working in education provision outside the school setting.

Policy documents relevant to the process of exclusion and educational provision outside the school setting in Wales were analysed. The statistical analysis examined publicly available data on additional learning needs, exclusions, provision made for pupils on the 16<sup>th</sup> day after exclusions and EOTAS. Face-to-face individual interviews took place with 16 key stakeholders and a telephone survey was conducted with 26 representatives from 21 of the 22 local authorities in Wales. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 9 local authority respondents in order to explore some issues in greater depth. The research team also visited 8 examples of EOTAS and interviewed 15 parents/grandparents; 12 face-to-face and 3 by telephone. We also interviewed 48 children and young people individually, in pairs or in small groups.

## Key findings on school exclusion

Rates of both permanent exclusion and fixed term exclusions of more than 6 days had decreased over the last 10 years. Rates of exclusion for 5 days or fewer had been increasing but the most recent statistics (2011/12) indicate that this rise may be slowing. In common with the rest of the UK, it was found that most excluded pupils were male (around 75%), that a disproportionately

high number had special educational needs (around half of all exclusions in 2011/12) or were 'looked after children'. The research confirmed that there was wide variation in reasons given for exclusion and in rates of exclusion across the country. It was clear that unlawful exclusion continued to be an issue but also that many local authorities were working hard to address it, for example, through inter-agency working. Most local authorities were using 'managed moves' to avoid exclusion and felt this was successful in giving pupils a 'fresh start' in a new school but some key stakeholders we interviewed were concerned about the family's lack of right of appeal if the managed move was not successful. Interviews with parents and carers revealed that they often felt that exclusion processes were poorly explained, too complex and unfair.

## **Key findings on education outside the school setting**

The number of pupils educated outside the school setting has remained largely unchanged in recent years, although the EOTAS statistics as currently collected are likely to represent an underestimate of the numbers educated outside the school. Nearly 90% of pupils in EOTAS were found to have special educational needs and nearly 70% were entitled to free school meals. Three quarters were boys. EOTAS provision was very varied and included, for example, FE college, work-related education, education arranged through training providers and 'individual tuition'/'home tuition'; though definition of these latter terms was often unclear. Forty per cent, the largest group, were educated in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

We found that EOTAS provision was highly variable between authorities. The number of available places varied between authorities, as did the quality of education on offer, the accommodation, the costs, and nature and purpose of the provision. Referral criteria varied, so that, for example, in some areas, children identified as 'school phobic' were placed in pupil referral units, while in other areas they were supported through their mainstream school. There had been a widespread practice of placing pregnant young women in PRUs, but this was now rare.

There was also considerable variation in the ways EOTAS provision identified its aims and purposes, though some local authorities had recently restructured and developed provision with clearer aims and with very clear referral criteria and processes. There was also variation in the quality and amount of education received by pupils in EOTAS; from 2 hours per day through to a full 25 hours per week, although most authorities were moving to offer 25 hours per week for longer fixed term exclusions, permanent exclusion and in EOTAS generally. Some PRU provision we visited offered strong support and unconditional positive regard for pupils, with very good individual management but the research also highlighted significant concerns with leadership, scrutiny and support in PRUs in general.

Pupils and their parents valued EOTAS, especially where staff took account of difficult personal circumstances but at the same time had high academic aspirations and offered concrete opportunities for success. Parents found it helpful when they knew there was a clearly identified individual professional responsible for their child. Some EOTAS settings had constant positive communication with parents about their child's progress. Parents contrasted this strongly with infrequent and negative communication from previous schools. Young people who participated in the research valued the support for their learning and the positive approaches to behaviour management and relationships in EOTAS. They valued the respect shown to them in some EOTAS settings but did not always feel fully involved in decision making and planning about their lives. However, not all experiences were positive and there were also concerns from a range of participants about excessively punitive use of restraint and restrictive isolation.

Reintegration rates from EOTAS have been and continue to be very low overall but we found that some authorities have now established clear policies and procedures to encourage successful reintegration of younger pupils into schools and of older pupils into mainstream or alternative curricula. We visited some very imaginative and creative examples of re-integration with education. Some authorities have improved the quality of assessment and planning information provided by schools on referral, and provided by EOTAS on reintegration.

In summary, the research found evidence of significant shortcomings in the practice and provision of exclusion and EOTAS. However, the findings also reveal that some authorities were responding positively to these challenges with substantial change and attention to improving the quality of EOTAS.

## Recommendations

Based on the research findings, we were asked to make recommendations for policy development. The recommendations focused on ways that the Welsh Government and local authorities could address the negative impact of exclusion and improve education provision outside the school setting overall. The key recommendations were that:

- The Welsh Government should emphasise the use of exclusion from school as a sanction of last resort and, in the longer term, move away from the use of exclusion as a disciplinary sanction.
- Consideration should be given to the development of a national strategy to support staff training, communication and development in positive behaviour management, children's rights and wellbeing.
- An information leaflet on exclusion and pupils' rights in the exclusion process should be available to all children in all schools.
- A good practice guide on strategies to support children and young people at risk of exclusion from school should be developed.
- The use of 'managed moves' should be monitored and evaluated.
- In the interests of equity and consistency, a National Appeal Panel should be established.
- Clear national guidance should be developed on the use of isolation and seclusion in mainstream schools and in EOTAS.
- The Welsh Government should continue to encourage local authorities to develop clear aims and purposes for EOTAS provision, particularly pupil referral units, and benchmark frameworks for evaluating outcomes and value for money.
- Standardised systems for reporting and monitoring local authority costs of EOTAS should be introduced so that comparisons can be made across Wales, between local authorities and increase value for money.
- Advice should be issued on recognised effective strategies for promotion of behaviour management and the further development of positive relationships in EOTAS; such strategies should both support staff and respect pupils' rights.
- Good practice in EOTAS provision should be identified and promoted and regular meetings of providers should encourage dissemination of good practice. This should include sharing of examples of curricula which meet current standards, and of effective child-centred behaviour management.

- The Welsh Government should ensure monitoring of appropriate support for girls in EOTAS, where they are often in a minority.
- Data on reintegration should be gathered and disseminated, along with accounts of effective reintegration strategies developed in some local authorities.
- Data on education outcomes and post-school destinations of excluded pupils and those educated outside the school setting should be gathered and disseminated.
- The Welsh Government should clarify and harmonise terminology used in policy and statistical reports relating to school exclusion and educational provision outside the school setting, for example, in relation to the terms, ‘individual tuition’/‘home tuition’.

## **Conclusions**

The findings of the research suggest that school exclusion and EOTAS continue to contribute to poor educational outcomes for children and young people in Wales. These young people are often already disadvantaged through poverty, or through having special educational needs or being ‘looked after’. Boys are over-represented in exclusion statistics and in EOTAS provision and this should also be examined more closely. Many parents felt the exclusion process was poorly explained, too complex and unfair. While many pupils value EOTAS provision and some feel they benefit from it, there is still significant inconsistency across local authorities and too few opportunities for pupils to achieve success. There is evidence of change and improvement in some areas and in some aspects of the exclusion process and EOTAS. It will be important to build on the examples of good and promising practice found in the research so that such change becomes embedded and sustained more broadly.

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## Further information

Further information about the project is available from Gillean McCluskey, CREID, Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ, [gillean.mccluskey@ed.ac.uk](mailto:gillean.mccluskey@ed.ac.uk). The full report is available at [<http://edin.ac/1e5KiYp>](http://edin.ac/1e5KiYp).

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