ROCKET SCIENCE

Neurodiversity, SEN and school inclusion, exclusion, and absence

Final report for the West Yorkshire Combined Authority Violence Reduction Unit.

March 2023

Contents

Executive Summary

In September 2022 Rocket Science were commissioned by West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) to undertake research in relation to school absence, exclusion, and special education needs (SEN) and/or neurodiversity. Three specific research questions were developed:

- To research whether there are significant links between exclusion and persistent absence for children with neurodiverse conditions and/or SEN
- To make recommendations from the research findings to inform inclusive policies and procedures for schools
- To make recommendations for feasible and cost-effective opportunities for staff training and/or support for young people at risk of exclusions or absence as a result of their diversity.

Rocket Science have taken a mixed methodological approach to answering these questions combining publicly available data and published research with qualitative interviews with young people with neurodiverse conditions and SEN, as well as with parents of children and young people with neurodiverse conditions and SEN and qualitative interviews with stakeholders including a range of teaching staff and leaders in education.

The research leads us to conclude that the elevated rates of exclusion, suspension and absence are as a result of systemic, structural and cultural issues that exist with the education and adjoining systems. Despite the substantial challenges that these present, acknowledgement of the elevated absences that exist, and the initiatives that are being undertaken across the region are promising.

We discuss however that this potentially presents challenges for the VRU to find a way that it can meaningfully support change whilst not replicating work already being undertaken and which clearly falls within its remit. Given this we suggest there are three possible recommendations/actions that the VRU can consider. These are:

1. System stewardship – There is a clear need for support in the coordination of initiatives and interventions in this area and significant opportunities for sharing emerging good practice and learning and ensure efficiency in the development of practice across the region.
2. Funding of mentoring and/or peer mentoring – There is a clear need to increase capacity for support in the system, and particularly for those young people at points of transition and stress. We would argue that there is also a role for this support to be provided by those with

lived experience and who can share their experiences to reduce isolation as well as share the techniques and adaptations that they have found useful in their education.

3. Funding early intervention support. Providing targeted support for those at risk of exclusion through a low threshold, needs led, service which schools can refer to is likely to have substantial impacts for young people in the region.

1. Introduction

In September 2022, West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit (WY-VRU) commissioned Rocket Science to undertake research to explore whether links exist between neurodiverse conditions and special education needs (SEN) and exclusion and/or absence in schools.

This research builds upon previous research in West Yorkshire which identified that high levels of school exclusion for those with neurodiverse conditions or SEN are likely to be risk factors for young people's involvement in, and experience of, violence. Nationally and internationally there is a solid evidence base that engagement in education is protective for young people against a range of adverse life outcomes including their experience of, or involvement in, serious violence[1,2]. Unsurprisingly this was also found to be the case in West Yorkshire[3,4], and as such can be considered a priority area for the VRU's public health approach to reducing violence and the impacts of violence.

The research therefore was commissioned with three specific aims:

- To research whether there are significant links between exclusion and persistent absence for children with neurodiverse conditions and/or SEN
- To make recommendations from the research findings to inform inclusive policies and procedures for schools
- To make recommendations for feasible and cost-effective opportunities for staff training and/or support for young people at risk of exclusions or absence as a result of their diversity.

From these aims a research framework has been developed and this can be found in Appendix 1. This report has been structured around the themes that have emerged from our research using publicly available data, surveys and qualitative research with young people, parents and carers, education practitioners and other professionals.

[1] Ministry of Justice (2018) Examining the Educational Backgrounds of Young Knife Possession Offenders. Link. Last accessed 30.03.23.
[2] Timpson (2019). Timpson Review of School Exclusion. Link. Last accessed 30.02.23.
[3] Crest (2021) Addressing the Root Causes of Serious Violence and Exploitation of Young People in West Yorkshire. Link. Last accessed 30.03.23.
[4] West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit (2021) Strategic Needs Assessment. Link. Last Accessed 30.03.23

1.1. Methodology

The research took a mixed methods approach, combining publicly available data[5] in relation to SEN, neurodiversity and school exclusion and absence with the experiences of young people, parents, leaders in education and other stakeholders gathered through qualitative interviews. Table 1, below, outlines the sources of information used to date:

Information Source	Number complete
Interviews/focus groups with young people	33
Interviews with education leads and other stakeholders	11
Interviews with families	11
Survey of SENCO staff	20

Our approach to the research would be best described as appreciative enquiry in which interviews have sought to identify good practice in relation to inclusion. Research tools, including interview topic guides, are available in Appendix 2. Young people and families were offered a £15 gift voucher in recognition of their contribution of time in participating the research.

The remainder of this report is set out as follows:

- Chapter 2 describes the current situation with school exclusion and suspension, including the rates nationally and at the regional level, along with the experiences of being excluded for the young people and their families.
- Chapter 3 explores the consequences of exclusion and suspension for young people with SEN and neurodiverse conditions.
- Chapter 4 identifies good practice in inclusion both nationally and within West Yorkshire.
- Chapter 5 draws the themes together to make conclusions and recommendations and consider the implications of this research for the VRU.

[5] We have also approached each of the local authorities to discuss what data they could make available in relation to absence and exclusion, particularly to identify schools with low levels to understand good practice in relation to inclusive practice and policy. To date we have been unable to obtain any data from these sources.

1.2. Defining neurodiversity

Neurodiversity, a term developed in the 1990s, refers to the natural differences between how peoples' brain works and processes information.[6,7] Neurodiversity includes conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, and Tourette's syndrome[2].Error! Bookmark not defined. It is believed that around 15% of the population is neurodivergent[2].Error! Bookmark not defined. However, neurodiversity is an umbrella term with no agreed or universal definition, so there is variation in what falls under this category.

Whilst the research seeks to clearly define neurodiversity, as far as possible, in order to ensure clarity in relation to the scope, scale, and prioritisation of need, we have resisted imposing an exact definition of neurodiversity. At this stage we felt it important to remain open and inclusive of the range of differences, strengths and needs that people experience. This is also in acknowledgment that identification of neurodiversity is not systematic, diagnosis is often difficult to obtain, and that misdiagnosis and co-occurrence of other types of conditions is not uncommon.

Overall, neurodiversity takes a strengths-based approach, promoting the positive qualities associated with the normal variations in the brain.[8] This being said, it must be remembered that society, and especially schools, are largely organised according to the needs and preferences of the neurotypical population. This means that neurodiversity can also act as a source of multiple disadvantage. [9]

Additionally, one does not need a specific diagnosis to be considered neurodivergent. However, most research and data sources rely on formal diagnoses in order to gather and analyse data. Therefore, throughout this evidence review, several of the sources will refer only to specific conditions that fall under the umbrella of neurodiversity or refer only to students who have been identified as having SEN.

SEN is defined in the Children and Families Act (2014) as '*a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special education provision made for him or her.*'[10] It was chosen to include these in the evidence

[6] ADHD Aware. Neurodiversity and Other Conditions. Link
[7] Revolving Doors. (2022). Exploring the Links Between Neurodiversity and the Revolving Door of Crisis and Crime. Link
[8] Day, A.M. (2021). Disabling and Criminalising Systems? Understanding the Experiences and Challenges Facing Justice Experienced, Neurodiverse Children in the Education and Youth Justice Systems. Link
[9] Revolving Doors. (2022). Exploring the Links Between Neurodiversity and the Revolving Door of Crisis and Crime. Link
[10] Child Law Advice. Special Education Needs. Link

review as the majority of the research in this area relies on the SEN classification and there is overlap between neurodiversity and SEN, making it a suitable proxy.

2. Experience of exclusion and suspension

This chapter explores school exclusion and suspension, examining the rates first nationally and then at the regional level, and then explore, from the perspectives of young people, their families and those working within education what are the contributing factors to these elevated levels.

2.1. The national context

Each nation in the UK has issued separate guidance around school exclusions. In England, there are two types of lawful exclusions: a suspension (or temporary exclusion) and a permanent exclusion.[11] A child can only be permanently excluded if

"there is serious breach of the school's behaviour policy and where it is felt that allowing the child to remain would harm the education or welfare of other children"[11]

According to the Education Act (2011) all informal and unofficial exclusions are unlawful.[11] These unlawful exclusions include: unofficial exclusions, part-time timetables, off-rolling, and gaming.[12] Off-rolling is when the school moves a student off the school roll without a formal exclusion, for example by encouraging parents to home educate. When a child is off-rolled, they no longer have the same protections of the formal exclusion process and support.[12] Gaming is when the decision to exclude a child is influenced by the school's desire to increase its performance in league tables.[12] These both constitute a form of hidden exclusions and are done for the benefit of the school not the pupil.[12] In 2016, almost 20,000 pupils fell off the school register between year 10 and 11, this represents 4% of all pupils in England.[11] To exemplify the scale of this problem, research has found that there are five-times the number of pupils in schools for excluded students than the number of pupils who have been officially excluded.[12]

---

[11] Martin-Denham, S & Donaghue, J. (2020). A Review of Fixed-Period and Permanent Exclusion in Children with SEN and no SEN designation in the City of Sunderland. Link
[12] Day, A.M. (2021). Disabling and Criminalising Systems? Understanding the Experiences and Challenges Facing Justice Experienced, Neurodiverse Children in the Education and Youth Justice Systems. Link

There is also evidence of schools intentionally not assessing children with suspected SEN in an effort to game school performance, as it is easier to exclude a child with suspected SEN than one with a diagnosis. [12] Moreover, from 2013 to 2017 there was approximately 75% increase (from 1.8% in 2013) in the number of schools who reported that they had encouraged parents to remove their children from school and home-educate.[12] This is because off-rolling students by schools has been reported as a method for schools to increase their test scores.[12] Several experts have argued that the current education system financially encourages the exclusion of children with SEN or complex needs.[12] However, schools face a significant funding gap to meet the needs of these students and subsequently may not have the resources to meet their needs sufficiently.

Therefore, when researching school exclusions, it is important to note that the research will only account for legal and recorded exclusions.[13] This is a limitation of the research, as these figures probably underestimate the frequency and severity of the exclusion of young people, especially in the case of neurodivergent or SEN students.[13]

Exclusion rates

Children with SEN and neurodivergent children have a much higher risk of being excluded than other children. In England and Wales, children with SEN are seven-times more likely to be excluded than a child without SEN.[12] In the 2018/2019 academic year, children with SEN accounted for over 80% of primary school permanent exclusions. [12] In addition, neurodivergent students and those with SEN are more likely to be persistently absent from school. [14] This rate of absenteeism is higher for students with ASD in a mainstream school than in a specialist school. [14]

Furthermore, a report from the Children's Commissioner found that there is little evidence of schools referring to the 2010 Equality Duties in their decisions regarding the decision to exclude SEN children.[15] By not considering these factors in their decision to exclude a young person, the schools ignore their responsibility to include these students in education. However, among children with SEN, those receiving SEN support are twice as likely to be excluded than children with an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP).[16] [12] This suggests that receiving more support from the school can reduce a young person's risk of exclusion.

---

[13] McCluskey, G. et al. (2019). Exclusion from school in Scotland and across the UK: Contrasts and questions. Link
[14] UCL. (2020). School Absence and Refusal High Among Students with Autism. Link
[15] Children's' Commissioner. They Go the Extra Mile. Link
[16] An EHCP is for any child or young person that has a significant and complex special educational need or disability. An EHCP is required when a child's needs cannot be met by the usual support that is available to them in their school.

Why are neurodivergent students being excluded more?

Previous literature has highlighted several ways in which students with neurodiverse conditions are more likely to be excluded. Some literature focuses on how students with ASD are more likely to have anxiety and demonstrate aggressive behaviour, which puts them at a greater risk of being excluded.[17] Additionally, previous research has also suggested that students with ADHD have lower academic performance than students without ADHD.[18] As previously discussed, the current system inadvertently incentivises schools to exclude students who are not performing well in exams, which may lead the school to exclude a higher proportion of students with neurodiverse conditions such as ADHD. [18]

In addition, neurodivergent students may be more likely to be absent from school due to refusal and reluctance to attend school. [19] Research on autistic students has shown that the most common reason for missing school was reluctance, with 53% of students with ASD and ADHD having refused to go to school at some point.[19] Moreover, 68% of these students, said they refused to go to school because of bullying.[19] This is a major concern for autistic and neurodivergent students, as between 46-94% of students with ASD and 43-65% of students with ADHD have been the victim of bullying. [19] As they experience higher rates of bullying, this will contribute to the student not wanting to attend school, and the school ultimately excluding the student because of this behaviour.

A typical school environment is not usually informed by, or designed to support, neurodiversity and young people usually have very little control over these surroundings, which may lead to behaviour they cannot control. [18] For example, the travel to school, structure of the day, classroom settings, and build-up of sensory challenges can be difficult for neurodivergent students. [20] Neurodivergent students may also find unstructured time, such as lunch and breaks, especially difficult. [21] This is further exemplified by the fact that one study reported that 40% of parents felt that their autistic child's needs were not met in school. [22] This can lead to students experiencing anxiety, frustration, and sensory overload which can result in behaviour problems[21]. For example, for children in Sunderland with SEN, disruptive behaviour was the most frequently cited reason (32%) for a permanent exclusion in the

[17] OECD. Trends Shaping Education Spotlight 12. Link
[18] Arnez, J. & Condry, R. (2021). Criminological Perspectives on School Exclusion and Youth Offending. Link
[19] McClemont, A. et al,. (2021). Brief Report: Predictors of School Refusal Due to Bullying in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder. Link
[20] Milne, C. (2021). The Experiences of Autistic Transgender and Gender-Diverse Young People. Link; Sensibility. Neurodiversity and the School System. Link
[21] Autism Education Trust. School Exclusions. Link
[22] Connolly, et al,. (2022). School Distress in UK School Children: Characteristics and Consequences. Link

2017/2018 school year. [23] The challenging and unsupportive environment in which the students find themselves can thus lead to disruptive behaviour and exclusion.

Additionally, other behaviours that neurodivergent students may exhibit to help concentrate or self-regulate, such as doodling or stimming (repetitive or unusual movements or noises), is misunderstood by some teachers to be distracting and taken as an indication that the pupil is not concentrating, resulting in punishment.[24] This creates a vicious cycle in which a young person who is in an environment that does not fulfil or understand their needs, is disciplined for behaviour which is triggered by environmental factors, or for behaviours which they cannot control.

The literature highlights that currently, school responses to unwanted behaviour place blame on the child and their family setting, without examining the root cause of the harm, and how the challenging behaviour may actually be the result of unfulfilled needs. [25] In the case of exclusions, it is argued that this simply transfers the child who has demonstrated challenging behaviour to another school, instead of supporting them in their current school and trying to understand what has led to this behaviour. [25] Additionally, punishing this challenging behaviour, often leads to more detrimental impacts as the young person is labelled, isolated, and no longer has access to the school's resources. Moreover, these periods of instability can exacerbate the challenging behaviour. [26] This can also significantly impact the young person's mental health. [26]

Additional risk factors

It has been established that neurodivergent students are far more likely to be excluded and this can have wide reaching impacts on a young person's future. This next section will explore risk factors which make a neurodivergent student more likely to be excluded. Although presented separately for clarity, it must be remembered that these characteristics will have an intersectional impact.

Public data is available for exclusions, suspensions and absence rates broken down by children with SEN, with the latest data coming from 2020/21. Across England, 0.03% of children without SEN were excluded and 2.8% suspended. For those with SEN or an EHC plan, the equivalent figures are 0.13% and 12.1%. In other words, children with SEN or an EHC plan were 4.3 times more likely to be excluded

[23] Martin-Denham, S & Donaghue, J. (2020). A Review of Fixed-Period and Permanent Exclusion in Children with SEN and no SEN designation in the City of Sunderland. Link
[24] Sensibility. Neurodiversity and the School System. Link
[25] Arnez, J. & Condry, R. (2021). Criminological Perspectives on School Exclusion and Youth Offending. Link
[26] Day, A.M. (2021). Disabling and Criminalising Systems? Understanding the Experiences and Challenges Facing Justice Experienced, Neurodiverse Children in the Education and Youth Justice Systems. Link

or suspended. There is also a clear difference in absence rates between those with or without SEN. In 2021/22, the absence rate for those without SEN was 6.3%, whereas those with SEN support were absent 9.1% of the time, and 11.6% for those with an EHC plan.

Ethnicity

Across different ethnicities there is some notable variation in exclusion and suspension rates including both SEN and non-SEN children. As shown in the table below, by far the lowest exclusion or suspension rates are for Asian background pupils. Compared to children of Asian ethnicity, those from mixed or white backgrounds are almost three times as likely to be excluded or suspended. The risk and protective factors for different ethnic minority groups are not fully understood at this time.

Table 1: National exclusion and suspension rates by ethnicity (2020/21)[27]

	Asian	Black	Mixed	White	Minority
Exclusion rate	0.02%	0.05%	0.06%	0.05%	0.04%
Suspension rate	1.65%	4.07%	4.88%	4.65%	3.04%

Research has also shown that race and ethnicity are correlated both with exclusion and diagnosis with social and communication disorders. For example, Chinese pupils and Black pupils are 33% and 28% respectively more likely to be diagnosed with autism than other children in the UK. [28] Moreover, for all pupils in the UK those from Black Caribbean and Traveller backgrounds are most likely to be excluded from school.[23] Previous research also suggests that race intersects with all risk factors of school exclusion, suggesting the race and ethnicity have a significant impact on a young person's vulnerability to school exclusion.[29]

Gender diversity

Between genders there are significantly more exclusions and suspensions among males than females. In 2020/21, male pupils were 2.9 times more likely to be excluded and 2.3 times more likely to be suspended than female pupils.

[27] Source: Department for Education – Permanent exclusions and suspensions in England (https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england)
[28] Newcastle University. (2021). Autism Rates Increase. Link
[29] Arnez, J. & Condry, R. (2021). Criminological Perspectives on School Exclusion and Youth Offending. Link

Previous research also examined the gender difference in school avoidance and exclusion among neurodivergent pupils. It was found that among neurodivergent pupils, girls were more likely to be absent from school than boys, however, boys were more likely to be excluded from school. [30] Among all pupils in England, boys are three-times more likely to be excluded than girls.[31]

However, gender has a complex interaction with both neurodiversity and school exclusions. First, there is a large difference in the diagnosis of ASD across the gender spectrum. Girls have a much lower rate of autism diagnosis; for boys, the prevalence of autism is 2.8%, whereas for girls it is 0.65%.[32] It is suggested that girls have lower rates of diagnoses ASD because ASD can present differently in girls and they might be better at masking behaviours.[33] However, gender-diverse and transgender individuals are three-times more likely to be diagnosed with ASD than a cis-gendered individual. [34] It is estimated that between 3.5-6.5% of gender diverse and trans adults have ASD, compared to just over 1% of the UK population. [34]

Moreover, it is also reported that gender diverse individuals with ASD also have worse emotional wellbeing and school functioning compared to gender diverse individuals who do not have autism. [34] For autistic individuals who have communication differences, this can impact their ability to self-advocate and express their gender needs, which also affects their mental health. [35] Differences in communication and expression, which are often associated with ASD, can make school environments particularly difficult for individuals on the ASD spectrum as they are more likely to face bullying and violence. [35] Previous research indicates that this poor mental health also contributes to school avoidance and reluctance. [35] The bullying, violence, worse school performance, and school absence all contribute to the neurodivergent student being more likely to be excluded from school.

Multiple conditions

Evidence suggests that pupils who have co-occurring conditions are more likely to be excluded. For example, evidence from Wales suggests that neurodivergent students with more than one condition are more likely to be absent from school, and this increases with each additional diagnosis.[30] This is

[30] John, A. et al., (2021). Association of School Absence and Exclusion with Recorded Neurodevelopmental Disorders, Mental Disorders, or Self-harm. Link
[31] Martin-Denham, S & Donaghue, J. (2020). A Review of Fixed-Period and Permanent Exclusion in Children with SEN and no SEN designation in the City of Sunderland. Link
[32] Newcastle University. (2021). Autism Rates Increase. Link
[33] Arky, B. Why Many Autistic Girls are Overlooked. Link
[34] University of Cambridge. (2020). Transgender and gender-diverse individuals are more likely to be autistic and report higher autistic traits Link
[35] Milne, C. (2021). The Experiences of Autistic Transgender and Gender-Diverse Young People. Link

important as research has also shown that neurodivergent conditions are often co-occurring. To illustrate, ADHD Aware UK found that approximately 90% of individuals with Tourette's also have ADHD.[36] In addition, approximately 50% of those with ADHD also have dyslexia.[36]

ADHD is also associated with reduced school performance. Children with ADHD had average grades 0.86 standard deviations lower than children without ADHD.[37] The effect of ADHD was found to be substantially larger than the effects of comorbid psychiatric diagnoses. However, children with more highly educated parents with ADHD experienced a lesser impact in absolute terms.[37] Therefore, parent's level of education can help mitigate the effect of low school performance, which can also be a protective factor against school exclusion.

Family factors

The family situation of the young person also influences the relationship between neurodiversity and school exclusions. A study conducted by the University College London found that among autistic students, those living with an unemployed or a single parent had a significantly higher risk of being absent from school than other students. [38]

Additionally, for all students, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds were also more likely to be excluded than their peers from a higher socio-economic background. It is estimated that children from low-income homes are up to four-times more likely to be excluded.[39] For example, over 50% of pupils aged 5-10 who were permanently excluded in 2017 were eligible for free school meals.[39] In comparison only 14% of the student population in England received free school meals in 2017.[40]

2.2. Exclusion, suspension, and absenteeism in West Yorkshire

Throughout the research we have approached all the local authorities in an attempt to obtain up to date data in relation to exclusion and suspension. Unfortunately, we have only been able to secure agreement from one area to provide this data, but we have not received this at the time of writing. Therefore, we are reliant upon publicly available data which is often only updated on an annual basis.

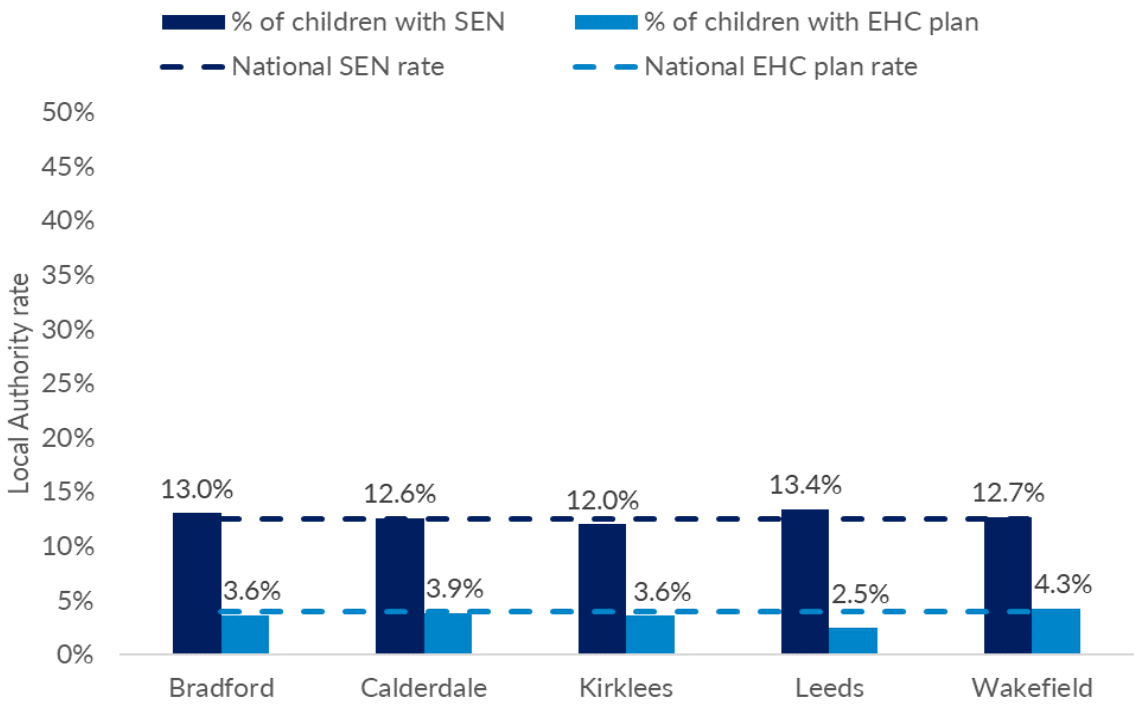
---

[36] ADHD Aware. Neurodiversity and Other Conditions. Link
[37] National Elf Service. ADHD is a substantial risk factor for poor academic performance. Link
[38] UCL. (2020). School Absence and Refusal High Among Students with Autism. Link
[39] Martin-Denham, S & Donaghue, J. (2020). A Review of Fixed-Period and Permanent Exclusion in Children with SEN and no SEN designation in the City of Sunderland. Link
[40] Department for Education. (2017). Schools, Pupils, and their Characteristics. Link

Public data analysis

The percentage of children in West Yorkshire with SEN is similar to the national average of 12.6%, with the highest rate being in Leeds (13.4%) and the lowest in Kirklees (12.0%). Most of the West Yorkshire Local Authorities have a lower rate of EHC plans than the national average, with the exception of Wakefield.

Figure 1: Percentage of children with SEN or EHC plan in West Yorkshire Local Authorities (2021/22)[41]



In West Yorkshire, the average rate of permanent school exclusion is in line with that of the English average, however, the fixed-period suspension rate is higher. Across England the rates of exclusion and suspension are 4.3 times higher for children with SEN. Within West Yorkshire, we find that disparity in the exclusion rates is even higher, with SEN pupils being 5 times more likely to be excluded than those without SEN.

The table below shows figures on exclusions and suspensions for pupils with and without SEN and indicates problematic characteristics of school exclusions across West Yorkshire. While the vast majority of pupils in all five areas are non-SEN, the numbers of SEN and non-SEN pupils being excluded

[41] Source: Department for Education – Special educational needs in England (https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2021-22)

or suspended are much closer. This can be seen most starkly in Kirklees, where the number of SEN students that were excluded is greater than the number of non-SEN students, despite only 15% of the pupils having SEN. We note that Leeds only has two exclusions in total for the year, which may be a reporting error.

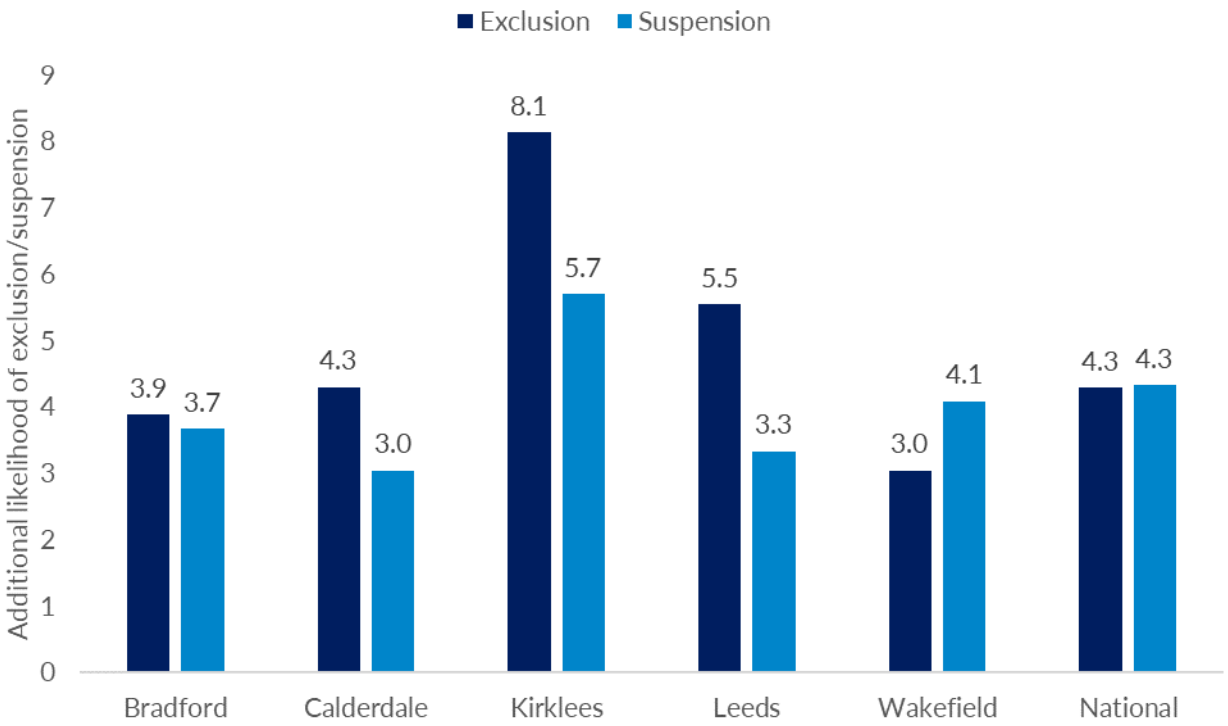
Table 2: Numbers of pupils, exclusions and suspensions by SEN (2020/21)[42]

	Total - SEN	Total - not SEN	Excluded - SEN	Excluded - not SEN	Suspended - SEN	Suspended - not SEN
Bradford	16,153	83,385	18	24	2,117	2,982
Calderdale	5,709	31,038	15	19	821	1,471
Kirklees	9,787	57,465	18	13	1,604	1,654
Leeds	19,524	108,164	1	1	1,855	3,088
Wakefield	8,290	45,356	10	18	2,080	2,789

What these figures imply is that there is a severe disparity in exclusion and suspension rates between pupils with and without SEN. This disparity is most extreme in Kirklees, where the exclusion rate among children with SEN is 8.1 times more than those without. In Bradford and Wakefield, however, the difference between exclusion rates of SEN and non-SEN pupils is less than the national level. For suspensions, four of the five West Yorkshire districts have less disparity between SEN and non-SEN children compared to the national level. The exception is Kirklees, where children with SEN are 5.7 times more likely to be suspended. This is illustrated in the chart below, which shows – for each Local Authority and nationally – how many times more likely a child with SEN or EHC plan is to be excluded or suspended.

[42] Source: Department for Education – Permanent exclusions and suspensions in England (https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england)

Figure 2: Additional likelihood of exclusion or suspension for children with SEN or EHC plan compared to those without (2020/21)[43]



Looking at exclusions and suspensions by ethnicity, most of the West Yorkshire Local Authorities show the same trend as at the national, with Asian background pupils having the lowest exclusion and suspension rates, with higher rates among mixed and white ethnicities. The exception to this is Calderdale, which has significantly higher rates of both exclusion and suspension among Asian ethnicities and has the highest rate of suspension for children from black ethnic backgrounds.

With regards to gender, the data suggests that the gap in exclusion and suspension rates between males and females is greater than at the national level. Wakefield and Leeds both have a lower gender gap than nationally, but the remaining three Local Authorities have a larger gap, particularly in relation to exclusions. Males in Bradford, Kirklees and Calderdale are 3.6, 4.1 and 4.5 times respectively, more likely to be excluded than females (compared to a national average of 2.9).

[43] Source: Department for Education – Permanent exclusions and suspensions in England (https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england)

Table 3: Exclusion and suspension gender gaps (2020/21)[44]

	Exclusion rate - male	Exclusion rate - female	Suspension rate - male	Suspension rate - female	Exclusion gender gap	Suspension gender gap
Bradford	0.07%	0.02%	7.37%	2.82%	3.6	2.6
Calderdale	0.15%	0.03%	8.63%	3.79%	4.5	2.3
Kirklees	0.07%	0.02%	6.90%	2.71%	4.0	2.5
Leeds	0.00%	0.00%	5.10%	2.58%	N/A	2.0
Wakefield	0.07%	0.03%	12.32%	5.69%	2.0	2.2
National	0.07%	0.02%	5.86%	2.58%	2.9	2.3

The rate of absences among those with SEN / EHC plans and those with no SEN in the West Yorkshire area is in line with the national levels. Absence rates for those without SEN in 2021/22 ranged between 5.8% and 7.1%. The rate was between 1.9 and 2.1 times higher for those with an EHC plan, and 1.4 to 1.5 times higher for those with SEN support.

To summarise, analysis of national data reveals the prevalence of SEN / EHC plans in each of the five Local Authorities is close to the national average. However, there is also significant variation within the same types of schools in different West Yorkshire districts. There is a large variety in exclusion and suspension rates for young people with SEN across West Yorkshire. Kirklees in particular has a substantially higher exclusion and suspension rate among SEN children. Overall rates of exclusion and suspension (regardless of SEN) in Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, and Wakefield are above national average. In Bradford, Calderdale and Kirklees the gender gap in exclusions is much higher than nationally, meaning males are four times more likely to be excluded than females.

Given what we know about the rates of exclusion and suspension for neurodivergent young people and those with SEN we will now share the experiences of young people and those working in education from our qualitative interviews.

[44] Source: Department for Education – Permanent exclusions and suspensions in England (https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england)

2.3. Exclusion and suspension in practice in West Yorkshire

"Everyone I've had to go through exclusion plans with, has had ADHD"- College teaching staff

It was almost uniformly accepted by those that we spoke to that children with neurodiverse conditions and SEN are more likely to be excluded than their 'neurotypical' peers. The lack of adequate resourcing and the diversity of resources required was often identified as a key barrier to being more inclusive. Where resources were in place in schools and colleges it was often accepted that these were insufficient to meet the demand.

Behavioural challenges that schools are ill-equipped to deal with were identified by a number of the stakeholders we have spoken to. Whilst the limited ability to manage disruptive behaviour was linked with resources, the individual culture, approach and leadership of the school was also acknowledged as a factor in how behaviour is managed.

"It's tempting to think of schools as a homogeneous…they really aren't. The school system is quite diverse within themselves. Huge organisations and have a different culture, they treat behavioural issues in different. I've had conversations in schools who say they do everything, but other schools are like 'we're education providers, we're not here to do other stuff'." - Project Coordinator

Again, whilst neurodiversity and SEN were seen as factors in increased absence and exclusion this was one of a range of factors, which included financial pressures on families and wider mental wellbeing of young people and families.

"The number of people being excluded for physical attacks has increased substantially since the pandemic- there are a range of factors schools are struggling, families are struggling, young people are struggling." - Service Manager

Whilst exploring the contributing factors to elevated rates of exclusion, suspension and absence three themes emerged. These were:

1. Systemic issues. For the purpose of this research we are defining systemic issues as ones that arise as a result of education policy and regulatory requirements however this also encompasses challenges within the health system, particularly around the identification and diagnosis of need.
2. Structural issues. These relate to the more local conditions (although it is acknowledged that these can result from fiscal policy) such as the school and classroom environment and resourcing pressures.
3. Finally cultural challenges can often be a result of both systemic and structural issues however relate to both the understanding, acceptance and approaches to inclusion for young people who experience SEN or neurodiverse conditions.

Clearly these are not three distinct categories but each have significant overlap and dependency upon each other and may be best viewed as a Venn diagram as illustrated in Figure 3. However, we would argue that each create conditions which make it more challenging to provide a needs led inclusive environment in schools. That all three commonly exist within education increases that challenge.

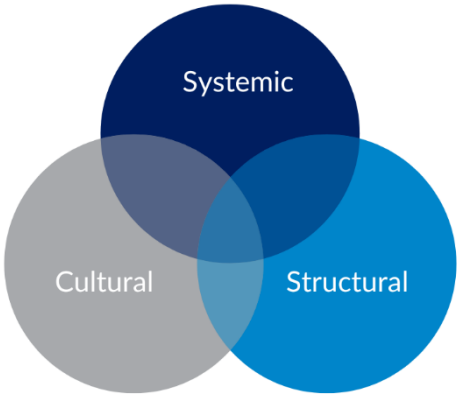


Figure 3 conditions for increased exclusion, suspension, and absence

We will explore each of these in turn.

2.4. Systemic challenges

Through our conversations with practitioners, young people, and their families it was apparent that pressures both on, and created by, the education system posed challenges for inclusive practice. It was particularly notable that these were recognised by the young people we spoke to who, even when they had poor experiences of inclusion, could empathise with the pressures those working in the system faced.

Performance and attainment

A number of the practitioners and stakeholders we spoke to identified the pressures on schools to achieve targets and the league table system often impacted upon young people directly as this pressure to perform reached down to them. For some this pressure to achieve was seen as a contributory factor

for absence, particularly as it created inflexibility within schools, as one person identified *"the curriculum and the demands of having to conform"* can result in challenging behaviour for those who are unable to meet the expectations placed upon them.

Despite, or perhaps because of, this pressure and consistent with the national trend, 16-17-year-olds in West Yorkshire who have SEN have a lower rate of participation in training and education than those without. The largest gap is in Leeds, where 87.7% of those with SEND (EHC plan or SEN statement) and 86.3% with SEN support are in education or training, compared to 92.3% of those who do not have SEN/D. By contrast, this gap is much narrower in Wakefield, where 92.1% of 16-17-year-olds with SEND and 89.3% with SEN support are in education and training (versus 92.4% without SEN/D).

Some evidence suggests schools intentionally do not do SEN assessments for children with suspected SEN in an effort to increase scores, as it is easier to exclude a child with suspected SEN than one with a diagnosis [12].

The academic performance gap between children and young people with and without SEN is considerable, with SEN students less likely to achieve expected and higher levels of academic attainment than pupils without SEN. In England for the academic year 2021/22[45], Key Stage 2 (KS2 - when pupils are aged between 7 and 11 years) pupils without SEN are almost four times more likely to meet expected level of attainment in reading, writing, and maths (combined). The odds ratio between pupils with SEN and pupils without achieving expected levels is similar according to gender[46]. Yorkshire and the Humber has a slightly higher odds ratio for expected levels than England overall. Within West Yorkshire, the odds ratio for expected levels ranges is also similar according to gender – with Calderdale having the highest and Bradford and Wakefield having the lowest.

[45] United Kingdom Government. (2022). Key Stage 2 Attainment. Link
[46] The number of pupils who are recorded as having a different gender to male or female are too low for analysis, and are suppressed by the Department for Education to protect anonymity.

Table 4: Percentage of KS2 pupils meeting the standard in reading, writing and maths (combined) 2018/19

	All Pupils			Girls			Boys		
	All SEN	No SEN	Odds Ratio	All SEN	No SEN	Odds Ratio	All SEN	No SEN	Odds Ratio
Expected Standard									
England	18.0	69.0	3.8	19.0	71.0	3.7	18.0	67.0	3.7
Yorkshire and The Humber	17.0	68.0	4.0	17.0	69.0	4.1	17.0	66.0	3.9
Bradford	19.0	67.0	3.5	20.0	68.0	3.4	18.0	66.0	3.7
Calderdale	16.0	70.0	4.4	14.0	73.0	5.2	16.0	67.0	4.2
Kirklees	16.0	66.0	4.1	16.0	68.0	4.3	15.0	64.0	4.3
Leeds	19.0	67.0	3.5	20.0	68.0	3.4	18.0	65.0	3.6
Wakefield	18.0	68.0	3.8	18.0	69.0	3.8	18.0	67.0	3.7

*Probability (%) of pupils without SEN meeting level divided by probability of pupils with SEN meeting level

The performance gap between students with and without SEN becomes less exaggerated in Key Stage 4 (KS4 - when pupils are aged between 14 and 16) compared to KS2. In the academic year 2021/22[47] within West Yorkshire, the odds ratio for all pupils achieving Grade 4 in English and Maths (E&M) (pass) ranges between 2.3 (Calderdale) and 3 (Kirklees). According to gender, the probability gap is smallest among girls – with girls without SEN in Wakefield and Calderdale almost two times more likely to achieve GCSE level 4.

Table 5: Percentage of pupils achieving GCSE English and Maths Grades 2021/22

	All Pupils			Girls			Boys		
	All SEN	No SEN	Odds Ratio*	All SEN	No SEN	Odds Ratio*	All SEN	No SEN	Odds Ratio*
Grades 4 or above English and Maths M GCSEs									
England	31.7	76.3	2.4	36.4	79.1	2.2	32	76	2.4
Yorkshire and The Humber	28.1	74.1	2.6	33.4	77.3	2.3	28	74	2.6
Bradford	24.6	67.4	2.7	27.6	71.0	2.6	25	67	2.7
Calderdale	33.7	77.1	2.3	42.2	79.8	1.9	34	77	2.3
Kirklees	24.9	73.5	3.0	35.6	78.0	2.2	25	74	3.0
Leeds	27.9	74.6	2.7	36.0	76.9	2.1	28	75	2.7
Wakefield	32.2	75.9	2.4	41.0	78.9	1.9	32	76	2.4

*Probability (%) of pupils without SEN meeting level divided by probability of pupils with SEN meeting level

Whilst there is no evidence of gaming or off rolling within West Yorkshire the attainment of young people with SEN, combined with the system pressures for schools to perform create the environments

[47] Department for Education (2023) Academic year 2021/22, Key stage 4 performance.

described in the literature where this has been found. As previously described, this is experienced by young people who recognised the system pressures schools are under and this contributes to the school culture described later. This performance pressure was also identified by some of the young people we spoke to as instigating support or reasonable adjustments in preparation for exams. Whilst additional resources or adjusting teaching methods were appreciated it was felt that this was not for the child's benefit but to increase the school's academic performance. As such these adjustments were described as *"too little too late*".

"I knew what support I needed, I was just never asked [until exam preparation]" -Young Person

A number of young people also described being prevented from choosing the GCSEs that they felt were right for them and particularly in relation to creative arts. It was identified that only those with identified learning difficulties were given free choice as to their options. For one young person who was directed to take certain subjects, it resulted in them dropping out of two of the three "options" she had available. It was felt that the greater emphasis in art subjects on the experiences rather than the attainment was particularly beneficial to those with neurodiverse/SEN. For those neurodivergent young people who were more academically gifted, they felt "ridiculed" for choosing art subjects by both their peers and teachers.

Regulatory demands

"Tolerance level with kids in schools is very very inflexible" - Neurodiversity Lead

Just as pressure to perform creates rigid expectations and a lack of flexibility in the education system, so do standardised behaviour policies which were identified as a particular barrier to young people attending and being included in education. This was also seen as a factor in the use of a disciplinary rather than pastoral approach.

The curriculum and the demands on children to conform, and pressures of inspection and the need to be seen as a good OFSTED school were also seen as contributing to this. One person we spoke to suggested that government policy has been significantly detrimental to the inclusion of children.

"I think they need to relax what pressures are put on teachers, like attendance…sometimes the fact that they are here is just better" - College teaching staff

"There's the big external pressures from Ofsted, they have to work hard to be 'good' - the temptation is to move those kids on – the government has created an indirect discriminate environment." - Teacher

Earlier this year OFSTED published equality objectives 2023-2027[48]. Within the equality objective 1 there is a commitment to create a SEND inspection framework to *"promote further improvement in the SEND system".* The improvements being sought will be key to this and whilst time will tell it is notable that currently the only reference to inclusive practice in the objectives is in relation to the workforce.

Diagnosis and identify need

A key challenge which must be acknowledged is the identification of need for young people. This is particularly relevant within what was often described to us as a diagnosis led (rather than needs led) system. In the West Yorkshire and Harrogate Integrated Care Partnership (WYICP), the average waiting time for children and young people between referral and first contact for mental health and learning disability services was 35 days in 2021/22[49]. This is lower than the average for England (41 days) and the North East and Yorkshire Commissioning Region (38 days). While the average waiting time in WYICP has increased since 2019/20 from 26 days, it has remained lower than England and North East and Yorkshire Commissioning Region [50, 51,].

There are no official statistics on the number of people who are Autistic or have ADHD in the UK. 1% of the population are believed to be autistic [52], and between 2% and 7% of young people are believed to have ADHD[53]. The NHS identify a prevalent co-occurrence of ADHD and autism in patients with a learning disability. A study by NHS digital found the percentage of patients with a learning disability who are also diagnosed with autism has risen considerably from 21.4% in 2017/19 to 30.7% in 2021/22 – rising faster than the number of patients without a learning disability diagnosed with ADHD [54].

---

[48] OFSTED (2023) Equality Objectives 2023-2023. Link
[49] NHS Digital (2022) Waiting times for children and young people's mental health services 2021 – 2022. Link.
[50] NHS Digital (2020) Waiting times for children and young people's mental health services, 2019 -20. Link.
[51] NHS Digital (2021) Waiting times for children and young people's mental health services, 2020-21. Link.
[52] Department for Education & Department of Health and Social Care (2021) The national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026. Link.
[53] Kipal, S. et al. (2017) ADHD in children and young people: prevalence, care pathways, and service provision. Link.
[54] NHS Digital (2022) Health and Care of People with Learning Disabilities, Experimental Statistics 2021 to 2022. Link.

In one Local Authority alone we were told by a senior leader that 10,000 children, approximately 18% of the school population, were identified as having SEND. In the same Authority, health services reported a waiting list of 7,000 for assessment for autism and ADHD. For some areas, this indicates that assessment and support for neurodiversity or SEN to be overwhelming the current system.

The challenges of identifying and diagnosing neurodiversity are well documented and were born through our conversations with stakeholders. The complexity of children's and families' lives and needs were highlighted by several stakeholders we spoke to and how the intersections of neurodiversity, developmental trauma and other needs often masked each other making it difficult for practitioners to identify what may be symptomatic of neurodiverse conditions or other needs. Similar challenges were also identified in the common and sometimes inappropriate use of labels such as ADHD or autism to describe "typical" or bad behaviour in children. It was felt by some that this almost created a self-fulfilling prophecy in children *"living up"* to the behaviours and expectations that adults had of them.

This is further compounded as young people are often good at *"masking"* their needs, often as a way to not draw attention to themselves or trying to *"put a front on"* in classes.

Stakeholders identified a lack of understanding of neurodiverse conditions, how they may impact upon behaviour, and how behaviour itself can be used as a form of communication was also seen as a barrier to identifying additional needs. This was also linked with using a punitive or disciplinary approach to managing behaviour when other approaches may be more effective or appropriate. A number of the senior education leaders we spoke with identified the need for a whole workforce approach to training to provide consistency in both understanding and response. Stakeholders said the child's own behaviour, and their awareness of this, was also often cited as a barrier to inclusion. However there was also acknowledgement that even when schools aspire to be needs, rather than diagnosis, led this does not always work, especially across systems which have not adopted the same approach.

For many parents/carers, there was a strong sense that mainstream schools were not incentivised to support young people with additional needs and were not in a place to effectively do this. The schools were not getting direction or leadership from local authorities on why they should be more inclusive of neurodivergent young people, nor were they given the resources to be able to make changes or adjustments or offer appropriate additional support to young people.

"I think for me, they way the education is set up it doesn't work for children with additional needs. To support individual learning it requires resources. It also requires a better understanding of neurodiversity." – Parent/carer

At the same time, there was felt to be a lack of provision of specialist schools, and that following exclusions, alternative provision like PRUs were about containing and controlling disruptive young people rather than trying to effectively meet the additional needs of those young people.

Where a young person has an EHC plan due to their additional needs, parents/carers also found that this was not always a guarantee that the support would be provided as agreed, though many found it was a useful tool for them to challenge schools with and hold them accountable to the agreed plan.

"Where we've had EHC plans, some schools follow them better than others, and it gives you the legal rights to challenge if they don't follow it. If school don't put the provision in place, then you can challenge that. But it's hard to prove whether they are or aren't following it." – Parent/carer

2.5. Structural challenges

Within the overarching category of structural issues we have identified a number of elements. Perhaps most significantly, and obviously, is the funding and resourcing that is current available within the system. However other factors include how young people are supported at points of transition, and how the wider school environment impacts upon neurodivergent young people must also be considered.

Funding and resources

The number of SEN students in schools is increasing. While increased awareness and diagnosis of neurodivergent conditions and extension of SEN services partly explains growing numbers of SEN children, this is also driven by population factors - including overall population growth and advances in care which led to improved survival rates for children born prematurely or with a disability[55]. Relative child poverty rose in the years leading to the pandemic and is projected to continue[56], as children who

[55] Perera, K (2019) High Needs Funding: An overview of the key issues. Education Policy Institute. Link.
[56] Cribb, J. et al. (2022) Living standards, poverty, and inequality in the UK: 2022. Institute of Financial Studies. Link.

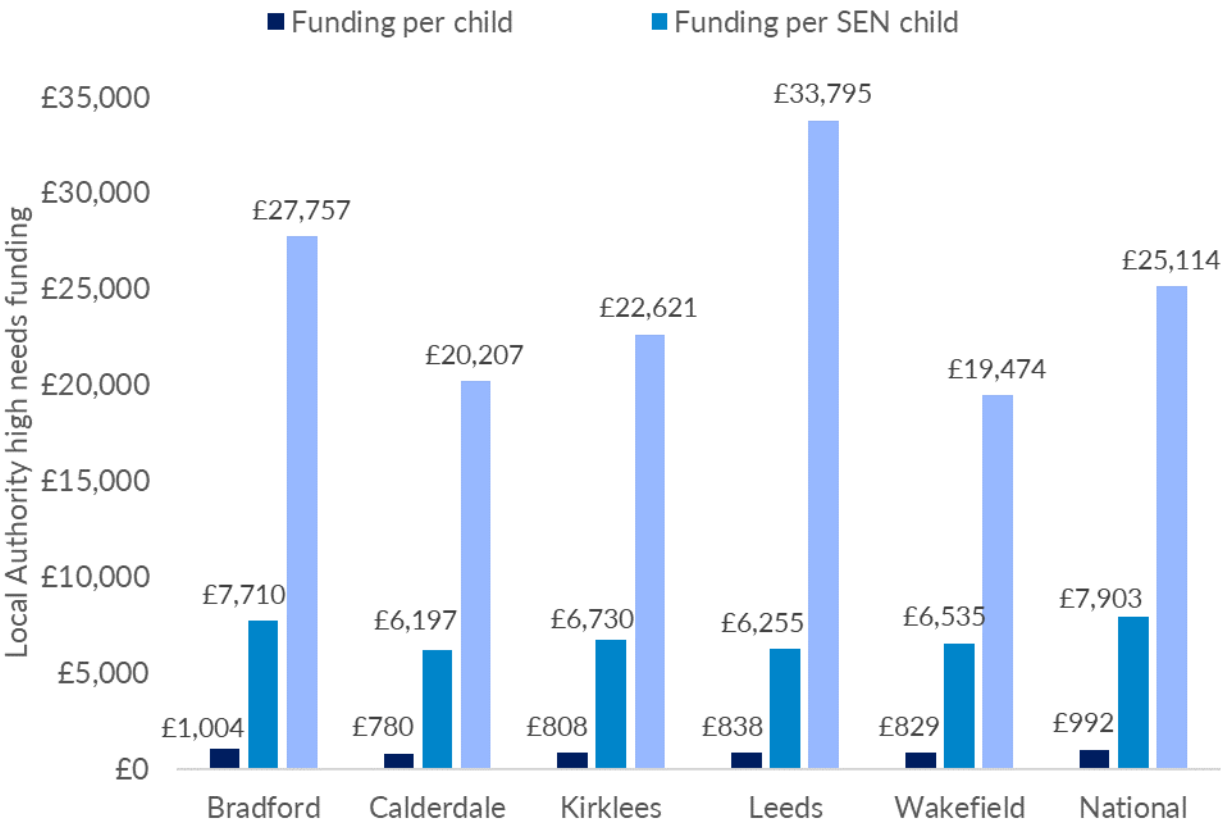
experience child poverty are also more likely to be disabled and/or be designated as having SEN[57], this is also expected to increase the number of SEN children and young people [58]. This means there is an increasing pressure on high needs funding to support children and young people with complex needs and to support in combination with an increasing number of students who have been permanently excluded [59].

We analysed data on Local Authority high needs funding for children who require extra support at school or alternative education provision settings, combining data on 2022/23 funding with the 2021/22 school enrolment and SEN figures. Average high needs funding per school child and per child with SEN[60] equates to £992 per child, £7,903 per child with SEN, or £25,114 per child with an EHCP (based on numbers from the previous year), with total national funding this year is slightly over £8.9bn. However, there is a considerable range between Local Authorities, with funding per child ranging from £649 (Rutland) to £1,706 (Lewisham), funding per SEN child from £5,393 (Oxfordshire) to £14,423 (Bexley), and funding per child with EHCP from £17,530 (Devon) to £47,685 (Nottingham).

In West Yorkshire, the area with most funding relative to the number of pupils is Bradford, while the area with the least is Calderdale – as illustrated in the chart below. This pattern is consistent with Local Authority funding across the country, where urban areas appear to receive proportionately more funding than rural ones. In all five West Yorkshire areas, the funding per child with SEN is below the national level of £7,903 per child, although the funding level in Bradford is above the national level when London regions are excluded.

[57] Shaw, B. et. al. (2016) Special educational needs and their links to poverty. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Link.
[58] Perera, K (2019) High Needs Funding: An overview of the key issues. Education Policy Institute. Link.
[59] Ibid.
[60] The number of registered school children generally only increases by around 1% per year, so using the school enrolment numbers from one year previous will still be accurate for this analysis.

Figure 4: High needs funding (2022/23) per child (2021/22)[61]



Resourcing to meet the needs of children was commonly identified by Stakeholders as a barrier for those who work in schools and particularly for those who do not have EHCP's.

"There's a lot of good practice out there but its more that everything's underfunded... In an ideal world, support needs to be bespoke to the young person, that's a pipe dream that'll probably never happen, you need to get as close to that goal as possible."- Teacher

"If you've recognised, they need support but don't have a plan in place, where does it come from because you don't have the staffing within school...however much you want to support that child you've got to be mindful of the other children who are with you" - SENCO

[61] Source: Department for Education – Special educational needs in England (https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2021-22); National funding formula tables for schools and high needs: 2023 to 2024 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-funding-formula-tables-for-schools-and-high-needs-2023-to-2024)

Neurodivergent young people we spoke to reported that they had mixed experiences with the teachers, especially in mainstream school. The majority of young people, however, felt that the teachers they'd had did not have the capacity or the capabilities to suitably support them. A few of the young people noted that this was because their teachers did not have the time to provide individualised support.

> *"Mainstream teachers have so much pressure on them. I don't give them enough credit, but they don't give me enough either."* – Young person

On the other hand, several of the young people felt that the teachers did not make an effort to accommodate their individual needs and felt that this was partially because their teachers did not have a good understanding of their condition.

> *"Teachers would blame me for little things, they'd scream at me, like getting sent out for dropping things. Whatever I did was never good enough, so I gave up."* – Young person

Finally, changes within the workforce as a result of austerity and the pandemic were also identified by stakeholders as creating additional pressures on resources. It was reflected that the teaching workforce was generally younger and a higher turnover of staff resulted in discontinuity within the system. Recruitment was also reported to be challenging, particularly to non-teaching positions, such as youth workers, aimed at supporting SEN pupils. NFER (National Foundation for Education Research) report that schools in England have posted 93% more vacancies so far in 2022/23, compared to the year before the pandemic[62], which is a proxy for high levels of turnover and staff leaving the sector.

The school environment

A further structural challenge that is identified by both the published literature and those we spoke with is the school environment which is a product of both the physical environment but also the leadership, policy, practice, understanding of neurodiversity and SEN and other factors.

[62] NREF Teacher Labour Market in England Annual Report Link

A number of the practitioners we spoke with recognised that the school was often not able to meet the needs of young people with neurodiverse conditions.

> *"It's –[exclusion] 100% correlated because children feel that their needs aren't being addressed in school..., when a child with a behavioural difficulty flicks a pencil on the floor a teacher might respond to that more harshly then a child who is more well behaved"* -Education Liaison Officer

Even where inclusive practice was implemented by specific teachers the variety can mean that reasonable adjustments made in one classroom are not consistently available across the school. The mainstream education school setting was identified as a contributing factor to absences from school, which in time, can lead to exclusions. Many students highlighted that the crowded corridors in mainstream schools were especially difficult. This was because they were very loud, busy, and often the students were pushed or shoved in the mass of people in the hallways between classes. Young people stated they found it difficult being in a classroom setting with over 30 other young people for long periods of time, and they also found it difficult to switch between teachers for each subject. Some especially found it hard if they didn't immediately *"gel"* with their teacher, and if they felt they immediately *"rubbed them up the wrong way"* they would be more likely to be absent from the classroom and get sent to isolation more often.

Transitions

Transitions were seen by Young People as a crucial point of need, and a point at which problems could occur due to changes in support structures. One young person described their EHCP being *"screwed up"* between primary and secondary education and that it took four years to resolve. As a result, the young person was often absent from school and unable to cope in the environment. She described herself as *"in hiding because of the lack of support".*

This was also reflected by parents/carers, with many saying that the transition between primary and secondary education had led to further challenges for their child, due to a changing environment and routine. They also noted that this often meant a change in the support arrangements in place for the young person to cope with their neurodivergent condition.

> *"The transition between schools was also more challenging, and then a lot of the support went away through covid and things. Support seems really inconsistent between the teachers as well." – Parent/carer*

Parents/carers also reflected that the cycle of suspensions and exclusions led to further transitions between mainstream schools, alternative provision, and time spent at home. These transitions between different education types further compounded the challenges young people faced.

Another significant, but often overlooked transition was for young people who returned to school after a period of absence. Stakeholders we spoke to recognised that for those who had been temporarily excluded or absent, returning to the classroom was challenging and children often experienced anxiety on return. Similarly, a return to school after the pandemic is still presenting challenges for educators. Some felt that this, for some young people, was linked to the sensory experience of school and having experience home and online education which may better meets their needs, so returning to an overwhelming environment is not attractive.

2.6. Cultural challenges

Teachers' aspirations for young people

It was felt by a number of young people that we spoke to that teachers did not have aspirations for those with identified SEN and that *"doing the minimum"* and behaving, was felt enough for them. One young person specifically described the need to be more *"pushed"* or *"encouraged"* by the school. It was felt that there is a stereotype that having a neurodiverse or SEN condition meant young people were less academically gifted.

In order to *"not have to deal"* with those who need a break from the classroom setting, teachers frequently remove young people from their classrooms. They are frequently placed in isolation, which can have a negative effect on their academic performance and cause them to fall behind with studies and become absent from school more often than usual. This was felt to be due to a lack of knowledge or willingness by teachers to understand or make time for young people with additional needs.

Parents/carers also felt that teacher aspirations for young people were different for those who were neurodivergent. Several parents/carers reflected that the schools were incentivised to focus on "easy" children who would have high attainment, and even would "write off" young people who were not felt to be able to attain the same exam results.

"I think there is an issue that the school, because it's an Outstanding school [Ofsted rating], they do want to focus on those higher achievers. The schools aren't being incentivised to treat all children the best they can. They are directly rewarded for focusing on high achievers." – Parent/carer

Bullying

Young people described experiencing a *"toxic culture"* and *"bullying"* within schools and that those who did access additional support were targeted by other pupils. Some of the students felt that they were bullied for being 'different.' For several of the students, they reported that the bullying only started after they moved from primary school to secondary/high school. This, along with stress related to performance, had negative impacts upon their mental health.

Additionally, several students highlighted that they were often targeted outside of the school grounds, which resulted in the school not being able to protect the young people or discipline the perpetrators. It was felt that there was too much distinction by school between bullying in school and at home, and that bullying is no longer limited to within the school location and often continues through social media. It was also felt by a number of young people we spoke to that repeated victimisation could be seen as an indicator of additional need (beyond being bullied) and that this was often not picked up by teachers and school staff.

Jack's experiences of education

Jack is 17 years old and emigrated from Europe with both of his parents when he was around five. Jack had a tough childhood and an unstable relationship with his father, which led to him participating in petty criminal activities at a young age.

Jack struggled through primary school for a variety of reasons. He experienced bullying during the early years because of his appearance and his *"quiet"* nature. The way he looked made him feel *"embarrassed"* in front of his peers and this led to him truanting in the later primary years as a result of this feeling.

"I started getting kicked out and excluded every day. My mum didn't know what was wrong with me and after some conversations with my teachers they put me forward for a referral and then I got my diagnosis."

He was thereafter diagnosed with both ADHD and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) when he was 13 years old. Jack talked about his experience of the diagnosis and stated, "*it didn't make me feel like I understood myself anymore, it makes you feel a bit more 'obvious' everywhere you go, every piece of paper says what I've been diagnosed with".* This made Jack's school experience daunting, especially the transition from primary to secondary, he found it particularly *"tough"* and felt like he was being *"constantly judged"* by different teachers.

At the start of the pandemic, when Jack was in year nine, he stopped attending school, at the same time, he moved away from home to live with other family members in a different Local Authority area in West Yorkshire. This caused him to lose his place in the education system in the area he was currently living in, and because there was no record of where he moved, the government did not chase up where he was at the time, and he fell out of the education system altogether.

"When I left the area they just took me off the list, so I fell off their records."

Now 17, this has meant that Jack has not been in education for over three years and because he did not gain the right qualifications, he is unable to attend a sixth form in his local area. He expressed that as he has matured over time, he wishes he had stayed in the education system and could attend college. Despite this, he has a part time job which he enjoys and wants to continue working in the future.

There were also concerns from parents that the stigma of being known as a child who was "difficult" or "misbehaved" would then not receive appropriate support or required adjustments from some teachers. They felt that school culture was designed to support students who would have high educational attainment, and that this stigma meant that staff responded unfairly to their children than they did to neurotypical children within the classroom. Parents felt that even where agreements were in place for reasonable adjustments to the classroom environment for neurodivergent young people, these were sometimes denied, or not used in the agreed manner, with some teachers persisting in the belief that behaviour due to ADHD in particular were deliberate acts of insubordination and therefore they would punish young people accordingly.

"These behaviours are part of their conditions. They [teachers and school staff] just don't get it. It seems like they don't want to try and get it. They feel like they don't have the time. It is too much paperwork for them." – Parent/carer

Young people with SEN felt that the bullying they have experienced in school has led to increased anxiety to attend school, and in some cases has led to depression. This, coupled with the lack of support students felt from teachers, has led to absences from school and falling behind.

Sometimes I get that stressed about coming in if someone's said something to me the day before that I'll just stay off and feel depressed on my own at home". -Young Person

"If someone's been bullying me or making me angry, I think the next day it's better not to come in because I don't want to lose my temper and get in more trouble". -Young Person

One young person discussed how he had turned to taking drugs as a way of *"release"* from his difficult school experience. He revealed he would smoke marijuana after an altercation with a teacher as a *"coping mechanism"* for the anxiety and anger he felt.

"Now I smoke weed and take it, so I calm down after difficult situations so I'm not as violent". -Young Person

The school environment, and the sensory elements of this, and the failure to meet young people's needs were also identified by stakeholders as causing anxiety and impacting on wellbeing, that were additional to neurodiverse or SEN conditions.

"It's not always the neurodiversity that causes absences – it's the anxiety caused by not having reasonable adjustments made" - Service Director

Case study: Alex

Alex is a young person with diagnosed and other suspected neurodiverse conditions. They were diagnosed while in mainstream school, however, they felt that the support they received at school did not change at all as a result of the diagnosis. They described how even when they were given extra support, such as using different devices or tools, it was up to individual teacher's discretion if these could be used in each class.

"I had to point out that my [neurodiverse condition] was a disorder and I can't control it, and she said, 'Well you'll just have to learn to!'"

Alex was bullied regularly in mainstream school and was often targeted by other students for being 'different.' They described how they had to frequently defend themselves against bullying and physical violence from their peers, and how these conflicts ultimately led to them being excluded.

"I feel like their system is failed and flawed and I'm one of the unfortunate people who fell through the cracks. People then end up bringing attention to it in a destructive way, because of that lack of support."

Since moving to an alternate provision (AP) school, Alex feels that they are doing better in school academically. However, they also noted that they had a strong support group of friends at their previous school and attending a different school from these friends is challenging. On the other hand, they feel more comfortable and supported by the teachers at the AP school. The more relaxed and informal environment has helped them connect with the academic and emotional support more.

Alex is optimistic about the future and believes that the support they are receiving will balance out the negative consequences of being excluded. Looking forward, they have ambitions to do a trade apprenticeship.

Attitudes and relationships in practice

Young people often struggle with building relationships with some of their teachers, especially in secondary school. This is somewhat due to a feeling of being *"misunderstood"* by some teachers, and teachers mistaking some of their actions in the classroom as *"rude"*, "impatient" or *"silly".* This often leads to young people being sent to isolation and can ultimately lead to school exclusions or absences from school. A number of the stakeholders we spoke to identified the tension that exists between accepting individual differences in children and, again, the strive for academic results.

"There is a dissonance around making reasonable adjustments and accepting difference and the narrative around educational excellence. A lot of schools adhere to a sense of behavioural zero tolerance" - Service Director

Case study: Avery

Avery has a neurodiverse condition and was diagnosed a few years ago. They described how although the process of getting diagnosed was straightforward, it was still a long and difficult process for them to go through. After they received a diagnosis, they felt that the support they received in school did not change at all. They had extremely negative experiences with the teachers and peers in mainstream school. The described how some teachers would refuse to let them use the extra support and tools that had be given to them to provide extra support.

"The school gave me a time out pass but didn't let me use it."

Avery also experienced significant amounts bullying, including physical and verbal violence from their peers both in and outside of school. They described how they felt that the school and their teachers did not do enough to protect them from the bullying or discipline the perpetrators.

"I complained to school, but they said they couldn't do anything unless they saw it for themselves."

These negative experiences with peers and teachers led to skipping lessons and ultimately exclusion. Avery felt that if their teachers had done more to understand why they were acting out, and how this was because of the challenges they were facing in their life. They wished that they could have been more supported to overcome the challenges they were facing instead of being punished for their behaviours.

"If a child is having bad behaviour talk to them... when I have bad behaviour I'm trying to cover up something hard."

When asked about the future, Avery described how they had goals to be an actor and a role model for other people. They also want to be able to give back to others and donate to charity, because of the number of other young people they see struggling.

"I want to be a role model for people."

There were also some good examples of support and some parents reflected having a positive experience. The success factors were felt to be around having an open dialogue with the school about the needs of the young person, and a willingness to make adjustments.

> *"We had an amazing experience at school. In our school they have listened to us. They have given space to listen to [young person]. [...] It is working with us, communication, and how best to support [young person]. And vice versa. We've had regular meetings. They have involved us in everything."- Parent/carer*

Likewise, a breakdown in communication between parents/carers and schools was felt to be a challenge that often caused issues to further worsen.

2.7. Chapter summary

That exclusion, suspension and absence rates are disproportionately high both nationally and within West Yorkshire is, unfortunately, an expected finding from this and previous research. That this is openly acknowledged and discussed however provides promise of the potential for this to change. The work that is being conducted across West Yorkshire is highlighted later in this report. From our research with those with lived experience however we suggest that the contributory factors to these high rates are a combination of systemic, structural, and cultural challenges which are present across the system. None of these are easily solved and together they present a formidable challenge across systems and places.

Having explored the rates, contributory factors, and experience of exclusion we will now consider the impact of this for young people.

3. Impacts of exclusion and suspension

Exclusion from school can have far-reaching and long-lasting impacts on a young person's physical and mental health, employment opportunities, as well as their social development.[63] It can limit their contact with peers, and negatively affect their relationship with their family. [25] Being excluded from school can also re-shape a young person's identity and self-identity, as they are labelled as a 'problem child' or a 'troublemaker.' [25] Previous research on Scottish students who were excluded has shown that young people find it difficult to re-cast their identity after being labelled. [25] This leads to excluded young people being targeted because they are considered the 'usual suspects.' [25].

As already described exclusion and absence from school also has direct links with involvement in serious crime and violence. The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions found that for individuals who had been excluded by age 12 were four-times more likely to be in jail as an adult, compared to someone who was not excluded. [25] Of those in prison for repeat offences, 91% had received a fixed period exclusion while at school. [64] Additionally, in youth custody it was found that over 90% of children met the criteria to be diagnosed with a communication disorder. [65] However, it should be noted, statistics concerning both crime and exclusions reflect only those that are reported and officially recorded. [66]

This chapter explores some of the impacts identified both within the published literature and what young people and families have told us.

Disciplinary Isolation

Stakeholders we spoke to have identified a reluctance or refusal for young people who have been suspended to return to school if they don't feel that the situation has been resolved with the school. Given this there is a recognition of the need for a reintegration process and the provision of support for those experiencing emotionally based school avoidance.

[63] John, A. et al., (2021). Association of School Absence and Exclusion with Recorded Neurodevelopmental Disorders, Mental Disorders, or Self-harm. Link
[64] Revolving Doors. (2022). Exploring the Links Between Neurodiversity and the Revolving Door of Crisis and Crime. Link
[65] Day, A.M. (2021). Disabling and Criminalising Systems? Understanding the Experiences and Challenges Facing Justice Experienced, Neurodiverse Children in the Education and Youth Justice Systems. Link
[66] Arnez, J. & Condry, R. (2021). Criminological Perspectives on School Exclusion and Youth Offending. Link

Isolation is an 'internal exclusion' where a pupil is excluded within the school for disciplinary reasons and is removed from their class to a separate room or booth within the school, with various terms such as "inclusion units, consequence booths, time-out spaces and calm rooms".

Many of the young people indicated how being isolated from other students because of their behaviour at school did not aid them in their studies, but instead caused them to fall further behind, become more frustrated and more inclined to desire exclusion.

"You have to sit on a bench with no back, I was supposed to do seven days of isolation, I only did four because I hated it, so stopped going into school". - Young Person

"They tell us to do other work in there, it's not engaging at all and it's more like worksheets than anything else". -Young Person

Some young people stated that they typically would receive worksheets to complete on their own and had little to no interaction with teachers whilst in isolation. They argued that this made school life *"boring",* and it was very easy to lose interest. As a result of this, some young people found it difficult to re-engage with the classroom environment after longer periods in isolation, and others preferred the option of permanent exclusion.

"I was given different sheets of paper that weren't engaging. It was just to keep me quiet; it wasn't going to contribute to any of the actual work we had been doing in class." - Young Person

Others also felt that isolation rooms themselves were challenging environments for them to be in for long periods of time. They discussed how spending a long time in a quiet room made them feel *"impatient"* and that they became increasingly frustrated the more they spent time there.

Parents/carers also felt that the use of disciplinary isolation was not appropriate for young people with neurodiverse needs, and that it could begin a vicious cycle that would lead to permanent exclusion. Several of the parents/carers interviewed reflected that a child acting in a disruptive way is communicating that they have an issue and their needs aren't being met. They felt that this was not widely understood by most teachers – who often responded as if neurodiverse behaviours such as a poor attention span, stimming, etc were deliberate acts of misbehaviour.

Once children are labelled as “disruptive” or “naughty”, many parents felt that schools started actively looking for reasons to exclude them, and did not use agreed adjustments to accommodate their differing needs, while also enforcing other rules more stringently than on neurotypical peers. One parent cited an example where their child was given detention for forgetting a pen, while a neurotypical peer was simply given an informal warning for the same thing.

In addition, parents/carers interviewed for this research reflected that the process of exclusions became a vicious cycle, with neurodivergent young people being more at risk during transition points of lacking support and displaying challenging behaviours. The process of exclusions and rapid transitions between PRUs, mainstream schools, and time at home without normal routine being even more challenging and high risk for a neurodivergent young person than for their neurotypical peers.

As a result relationships between school and parents can become fraught, and combative, with parents feeling schools are “giving up” on their children and want them out of the mainstream education system in order to not have to deal with the more complicated behaviour than with other pupils.

Parents reflected that exclusions, whether temporary or permanent, further disrupt routine and interrupt education. They felt that this was especially difficult for neurodivergent young people who rely heavily on routine as part of understanding their environment and not getting overwhelmed. They also had concerns about them dropping behind in attainment due to lack of consistent attendance in lessons.

Impacts for families and carers

Interviews with parents/carers highlighted the impact that suspensions and exclusions had on the whole family, affecting finances, family relationships, emotional and mental wellbeing, and even physical damage and risk of harm.

Parents/carers shared that they often had experience of researching their rights and advocating for their children in order to try and get diagnosis and support in place, and that these relationships with schools often were challenging even before the situation had escalated to discussion of suspensions and exclusions.

This advocacy placed a time, energy, and emotional burden on parents/carers, especially for single parents where there is only one adult to do this advocacy work.

> *"All the advocating I do for him has had a toll on my mental health. I feel defeated about meetings with the school and this has a terrible effect on my mental effect. I couldn't get up and face going to work. I know some other children whose parents who aren't as well-equipped for this and they fall through cracks. We shouldn't have to do this to get our children support." – Parent/carer*

Parents/carers talked about missing work, and even in some cases having to give up work in order to meet the needs of their child due to ongoing absence from school, having to collect children during the school day, and having to attend meetings and try to make alternative arrangements for their child's education.

> *"I've been unable to work. I've gone from earning a salary to being on benefits and living hand to mouth." – Parent/carer*

They particularly felt that the schools and local authorities offered little to no support for them in finding a suitable school that could meet their child's needs, and highlighted that children suspended or excluded from school were rarely given work to maintain their education even while not able to attend.

This created a further time burden and challenges for parents/carers and the wider family, with suspended or excluded children having no support or routine during this disruption. Parents/carers who had multiple children highlighted that their other children often perceived that they got less parental attention and support than their sibling during this time, potentially compromising their own wellbeing.

One parent/carer also talked about how a frustrated young person, who was struggling following school exclusion, would act out of frustration and cause damage to property.

> *"When [the young person] does have a bad day at school and comes home, they smash things, they attack us. It's a safe space. [the young person] has to mask so much of their behaviours and stims because they don't want to be bullied and don't want to act out at school but then they need an outlet for that at home." – Parent/carer*

Another parent/carer talked about their child's issues with mental health and suicidal ideation, which they felt was worsened by the lack of routine and exclusion from school. As well as being a problem for the young person themselves, these cause wider issues for the whole family, affecting their wellbeing.

4. Inclusion, equity, and good practice

4.1. National context

Although research has highlighted the vulnerability of neurodivergent students to exclusion and suspension, there is evidence of good practice which have been shown to better support neurodivergent students in education and change how schools approach exclusion concerning neurodivergent pupils.

National-level policy differences

National-level guidance on school exclusions is also influential as evidenced by the differences in school exclusion rates across the UK. Among the four nations, Scotland consistently has the lowest rate of both temporary and permanent exclusions. [67] Meanwhile, English schools are more likely to exclude pupils, and this rate of exclusion is rising. [68,67] For example, in the 2016/2017 academic year over 97% of the children who got permanently excluded were from English schools.

The graph below (Figure 5) shows the rates of permanent exclusions in state-funded schools across the four nations from 2010-2017. The figure shows how England has significantly higher rates of exclusion than any other UK nation, and this was increasing since 2013. Meanwhile Scotland consistently maintained low rates of exclusions. [68,67]

[67] McCluskey, G. et al. (2019). Exclusion from school in Scotland and across the UK: Contrasts and questions. Link
[68] Arnez, J. & Condry, R. (2021). Criminological Perspectives on School Exclusion and Youth Offending. Link

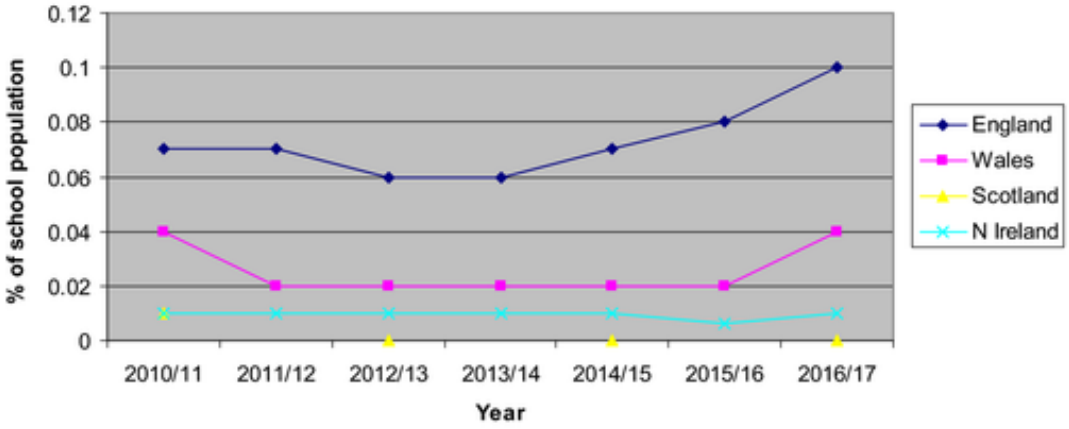


Figure 5 Rates of exclusion across UK nations- [67]

Research into these differences in exclusion rates highlights the different national guidance in each country. In England, policy advice concerning school exclusions follows the legal duties of the schools and offers advice on different punishments, but there is little discussion on alternatives to exclusion.[67] On the other hand, policy guidance in both Scotland and Wales focused on early intervention. [67] Additionally, the guidance in Wales includes what other factors need to be considered when making a decision on whether or not to exclude a young person, as well as highlighting alternatives to exclusion. [67] The researchers suggested that in nations where national guidance centred on inclusive and early intervention, exclusions are viewed only as a last resort measure. [67] These nations (Wales and Scotland) see lower rates of school exclusions compared to England.

Inclusive and personalised education

Inclusive education is based on the social model of disability and is when all students are educated in mainstream classrooms, through the incorporation of additional support, resources, and adjustments where needed. [69] This would allow for all young people to be educated in the classroom as they are provided with individualised support to fit their needs[69]. Educating young people in the same classroom can also promote positive opinions and challenge young people's stereotypes about their neurodivergent peers[69]. Inclusive school environments are characterised by the incorporation of behaviour management support and a recognition that the young person's family or caregiver also plays an important role. [69]

However, schools can face several barriers in the implementation and promotion of inclusive school environments. It requires sufficient resources, the commitment and training of teachers, and school-

[69] Winter, S. (2020) Inclusive and Exclusive Education for Diverse Learning Needs. Link

wide commitment. [69] To support all students in their classroom, teachers will need to be supported with the resources and training to make this a reality and dispel their apprehension. [69]

Other ways to ensure that neurodivergent people are more included is to tailor lessons and materials to fit the needs of individuals. This is sometimes referred to as 'personalised education,' in which small adaptions are made inside the mainstream classroom to fit the needs of a young person.[70]

One characteristic that is associated with ASD, is the tendency to have in-depth and specific interests.[71] For example, this could include anything from trains, film characters, or numbers,[72] Research from primary schools in England has shown how drawing on this skill can have several academic and social benefits for autistic young people. [73] This research highlighted how some teaching staff would refuse to change or offer alternative learning approaches, and instead blame the young person, or their ASD, for not wanting to comply with the task. However, it was found that incorporating their interests was critical. It was also found that communication skills also improved when they focused on the young person's interests.

Additionally, further suggestions on how lectures and teaching can be adapted to provide more allowances for breaks, and allowing students to do activities such as doodling in order to pay attention better. [74] They also recommend providing information clearly, and in different formats to accommodate a variety of learning styles.[74] For example by providing examples, highlighting key words, or ensuring to incorporate action verbs into directions, can make communications more clear for neurodivergent people.

School-level commitment

Crucial to supporting neurodivergent students through education is a school-level commitment to inclusion.[75] This includes having written policies and procedures in relation to efforts to reducing inequalities in exclusion rates.[75] It is also identified that schools with the lowest exclusion rates recognised issues early and worked with students before it could escalate to incidents requiring the

[70] OECD. Trends Shaping Education Spotlight 12: Neurodiversity in Education. Link
[71] Wood, R. (2018). Autism, Intense Interests, and Support in School: From Wasted Efforts to Shared Understandings. Link
[72] National Autistic Society. Obsessions and Repetitive Behaviour- A Guide for all Audiences. Link
[73] Wood, R. (2018). Autism, Intense Interests, and Support in School: From Wasted Efforts to Shared Understandings. Link
[74] British Psychology Society. (2022). Celebrating Neurodiversity in Higher Education. Link
[75] Children's' Commissioner. They Go the Extra Mile. Link

exclusion of the pupil. [75] Early intervention, especially when the school is committed to understanding and supporting the student to overcome underlying challenges that they are facing, which might be contributing to their behaviour, will reduce the likelihood that exclusion is the only option available.

In addition, good practice from the employment sector also emphasises the need for organisation-wide dedication to inclusion. For example, the Chartered Institute for Continued Professional Development (CIPD) highlights the need for senior leadership within an organisation to promote inclusion internally and externally.[76] This can facilitate more open communication where staff feel comfortable to discuss their needs and experiences. [77] Additionally, research on good practice from employment support suggests that to support the inclusion of neurodivergent employees, clear and easily-accessible policies should be in place. This can help ensure that everyone is aware of the support that can be made available and can help adjustments be made more quickly.[78] Similarly, research conducted with Head Teachers suggests for schools who were most inclusive, their Head Teacher emphasised the need for flexibility, to allow for learning and adaption. [75]

School-level adaptions such as creating quiet spaces for students to access, or modifying timetables, can lead to the school environment being more inclusive. [79] Additionally, actions such as ensuring that students requiring more support are in classrooms with the most experienced teachers have also been shown to improve outcomes. [75] However, of the schools which responded to the Rocket Science survey of SENCO teachers 70% of them said that they did not have any policies relating to the inclusion of neurodivergent young people beyond the legal requirements.

Physical environment

The British Psychological Society highlighted the importance of considering the physical learning space, and the importance of this for inclusion.[74] In their guidance they highlight the importance of considering the physical environment as this may create barriers, especially for those with sensory sensitivities. Aspects such as lighting, noise levels, and other devices and equipment can often create barriers or distractions for neurodivergent people, yet these can often be resolved with small adaptations. For example allowing the use of ear plugs to minimise noise distractions, or providing visual instructions along with written instructions for equipment can be small adaptations that can

[76] Chartered Institute of Professional Development. (2018). Neurodiversity at Work. Link
[77] The Head Teacher. Neurodiverse Staff- How Inclusive is Your School? Link
[78] Furr, P. (2023). Why It's Important to Embrace Neurodiversity in the Workplace (And How to Do It Effectively). Link
[79] Milne, C. (2021). The Experiences of Autistic Transgender and Gender-Diverse Young People. Link

make a space more inclusive. [80] Good practice from the employment sector highlights that crucial to this is having an environment where individuals feel comfortable expressing their needs.[78] The process of how to request specific accommodations should be clearly defined, simple and confidential. [78]

SEN status

In addition, SEN status was found to be a protective factor from exclusions. Research suggests that neurodivergent pupils who have SEN status are less likely to be absent or excluded compared to neurodivergent students without SEN status. [81] This suggests that diagnosis and subsequent educational support is important for supporting neurodivergent students in education. This is potentially because schools may have resources available to students who have diagnosed conditions, whereas students who have not been diagnosed, or do not meet the diagnostic threshold, are not eligible for this additional support.

Training and education

Training and awareness raising for staff, colleagues, and young people can also play an important role in fostering an inclusive environment. For example, the British Psychology Society (BPS) highlights the importance of staff training and understanding of neurodiversity to support inclusion. [82] Similarly, in their Teacher and Learning International Survey, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found teachers felt that teaching students with special needs was the most important area for their professional development.[83] This was also found in our interviews with young people and parents who expressed how they felt that teachers and educational professionals had very little understanding of neurodiversity and how increasing their knowledge could translate to increased understanding and inclusion. However, the data from the SENCO survey, revealed that almost one-third of schools had not held any training for staff or teachers on neurodiversity. 70% of schools surveyed in West Yorkshire had conducted at least one training session on neurodiversity.

Many parents/carers identified that the training was insufficient for teachers to have a strong understanding of what neurodiversity is, how to recognise it, and how best to support neurodivergent young people or appropriately respond to challenging behaviour that may stem from neurodivergent conditions.

---

[80] Chartered Institute of Professional Development. (2018). Neurodiversity at Work. Link
[81] Cardiff University. (2021). Research Explores Association Between School Absence, Exclusion, and Student's Mental Health. Link
[82] British Psychology Society. (2022). Celebrating Neurodiversity in Higher Education. Link
[83] OECD. Trends Shaping Education Spotlight 12: Neurodiversity in Education. Link

There was also a perception that when a young person had a specific diagnosis of a condition under the neurodiversity umbrella, some teachers would therefore expect that young person to behave in a specific way that they had seen other children with the same diagnosis behave, and not be aware of or understand the wide range of behaviour that might be part of the condition.

"Just because a child has the same diagnosis it doesn't mean they behave the same." – Parent/carer

"Teachers stop seeing them as an individual. They stop trying to meet their individual needs, they try to do a blanket 'this works for everyone' approach "– Parent/carer

Another parent/carer reflected that the training and awareness was only part of the issue, with teachers needing support to learn how to respond to behaviour in the classroom at a more practical level. In addition, the parent/carer reflected that the pressure on teachers and limited resources could make it challenging for teachers to be able to respond appropriately.

"Every child is different, and if they don't know how to respond to his triggers then things can escalate. But it's not just a training thing it's also them having the time and mental space to do that too." – Parent/carer

Peer mentoring and support

Research suggests that social inclusion, friendships, and self-esteem are important to facilitating inclusion in education.[84] The BPS recommends providing support, peer mentors, or buddies to help promote the inclusion of neurodivergent staff and students.[82] An evaluation of a peer mentoring scheme in the south of England, which promoted the development of social competencies among autistic students, found that the peer mentoring scheme resulted in increased self-esteem and reduced instances of bullying among autistic students.[84] The programme allowed the students to provide reciprocal support, and develop an understanding of each other, which reduced instances of bullying and increased their self-esteem.[84] This is significant for this research, as it was found in the interviews that bullying has been a major factor in the negative experiences of neurodivergent young people in school. Moreover, research from the employment sector has found that the use of peer

[84] Bradely, R. (2016). Why Single Me Out? Peer Mentoring, Autism, and Inclusion in Mainstream Secondary Schools. Link

mentors in the workplace for employees with disabilities found that these schemes increased productivity by 18%.[85]

4.2. West Yorkshire context

Despite the rigidity of regulation and the wider system, it was recognised by some stakeholders we spoke to that schools are not homogenous, and that approaches to inclusion and managing behaviour can vary significantly. For some this required schools to *"think outside the box"* to better meet the needs of children with SEN and neurodiversity despite the rigidity of the system.

Activity already taking place across the region:

From our conversations with stakeholders in local authorities it is apparent that there are significant resources and governance structures that go into monitoring and reducing exclusion. These include, for example, local inclusion panels which are specifically tasked to identify those at risk of permanent exclusion and reduce the risk of this. Success as a result of these panels is reportedly being seen as fewer young people with SEN are being reviewed by the boards due to their needs being picked up earlier. Targeted work has also been undertaken in schools identified as having significantly higher rates of exclusion. However even those working in the sector have described difficulties in obtaining a true understanding of rates and activity around inclusion, with some stakeholders telling us that it is more difficult to monitor suspension.

The need to improve the school environment is recognised in a number of the local authorities we have spoken with and action to address this has included capital grant funds, piloting of neurodivergent inclusive classrooms and promoting and supporting schools in consistency in reasonable adjustments across the school.

Throughout the research we have spoken to many stakeholders who are seeking to address the challenges that lead to greater exclusion within their own systems and services. Whilst we have not been able to develop a comprehensive list of this, below we highlight some of the current and previous activity in the region. Details of each of the initiative vary and we have included what we have been able to ascertain through our conversations. The need for a better coordinated approach across the systems, places, and people (including young people themselves and families) of the

[85] Deloitte. (2022). A Rising Tide Lifts all Boats. Link

combined authority area was recognised by a number of those we spoke to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste.

- Bradford:
    - Resilience passport, developed by Braford District Care NHS Trust the passport is aimed at children at points of transition or stress such as exams. Developed from an identified need for an early intervention tool to support the development of resilience, the passport is a facilitated reflection for young people encouraging them to consider how they can meet their needs and build resilience as well as their responsibilities and relationships with others. The 18-week programme is designed to be incorporated within PSHE and a pilot has found that young people were better able to manage their wellbeing during SATs. A video with more information about the passport can be found here
    - Piloting of neurodiverse inclusive classrooms. Neurodiverse environments consider the inclusive needs of all who access the setting. Bath University have produced a 10-step guide to considering the development of neurodiverse inclusive environments[86].

- Kirklees:
    - Spen Valley High School has implemented a whole school approach to trauma informed education and the introduction of relational, rather than education, policies. This was supported by the Timpson Foundation and in partnership with the Rees Centre, Oxford University.

- Wakefield:
    - Children's neurodiversity support pathways. There is a significant amount of work being undertaken by Wakefield District Health and Care partnership and Wakefield Council to increase needs led, as opposed to diagnosis led, support in schools. This has resulted in training 1820 education staff in 6 months with the aim of 150 schools being recognised as autism friendly by 2027. Support is being provided in 10 'champion' schools who are also working towards an inclusion charter mark.
    - Small scheme capital grants have been provided to improve the school environment including the building of sensory rooms

[86] University of Bath. 10 steps to creating a neurodiverse inclusive environment. Link

- Training, guidance and support for schools in relation to emotionally based school avoidance is being delivered across the local authority
- Key worker roles have been implemented to support transition, identify opportunities for apprenticeships and avoidance of young people becoming NEET after leaving school.

- Region wide:
  - ESRC funded research. A joint venture between the University of Leeds and University of York, funded by the ESRC, the Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre is focused on how vulnerabilities interact with and are shaped by policing[87]. There is a particular focus in this work on the vulnerabilities of young people, which will include neurodiversity, though it is not limited to this focus.

  - NHS West Yorkshire neurodiversity (autism and ADHD) deep dive review. This review in partnership with Touchstone seeks to understand the experiences of people with ADHD and autism with the aim of improving pathways and ultimately reducing the health inequalities people with neurodiverse conditions experience.

4.3. Young people's perspectives on good practice

Through our conversations with young people, we asked them to identify what had been helpful for them in relation to inclusion in school. Overall, those we interviewed who had experience of alternate provision reported much better experiences of inclusion than in mainstream school. They described several key differences, including the physical school environment and the knowledge of the teachers, which helped them to feel more supported.

School environment

In comparison to mainstream school, several of the young people felt that the physical environment of AP schools made them feel more supported. They highlighted features such as the smaller building and class sizes, which were able to reduce extra noise and distractions. For example, students reflected that having fewer pupils in hallways and having a smaller building to navigate made the

[87] University of Leeds (2023). ESRC Vulnerability & Policing Futures Research Centre. Link.

environment calmer and therefore feel more supportive. One student remarked how they felt that school was designed for them to do well.

"One thing I find that works really well is the fact that it's all quite small, the buildings small the classroom is small, I can really connect to the behavioural support." – Young person

Case study: Riley

Riley was diagnosed with a neurodiverse condition a few months ago after waiting a long time to receive their diagnosis. They were in mainstream school when they were diagnosed but they felt that the support that they received did not change at all as a result of their diagnosis.

They did not have a good experience in mainstream school and *"hated everything about school."* They struggled with the physical environment of the school, which was too crowded and overstimulating, especially when thousands of students were walking through the hallways. Their only experience of inclusion in mainstream school was from their support teacher, whom they felt was the only one to notice and support them when their behaviour changed.

In primary school, Riley did not get bullied, however, this changed when they entered secondary school. In mainstream school, they ended up skipping classes and they were sent out of class a lot. Riley felt that the school was waiting to exclude them, and they were ultimately able to do so.

"They were wanting to exclude me for ages."

Since moving to the alternative provision (AP) school, their experience in school has significantly improved and they now feel included by their school.

"It's calmer… and they understand my needs."

They highlighted that the calmer and less crowded school environment has been really important in this change. They also felt that the staff at the alternate provision school better understand their needs, which makes them feel more included. In the future, Riley would like to continue their education, and they have ambitions to become an architect or work as an interior designer.

Training teaching staff

The training and resources available to teachers on how to support neurodivergent students can also be critical protective factor against exclusions. [88] Of newly qualified teachers, less than 60% felt that they received adequate training on how to support students with SEN. [89] This can result in teachers being unable to identify and recognise the needs of the young person and not having the capacity to support them adequately. [90] This is also reflected in research from Northamptonshire, where 40% of parents of autistic children believed that their child was blamed for behaviours relating to autism and school staff relied on punishment to manage these.[90]Error! Bookmark not defined. Therefore, training teachers on identifying, working with, and including neurodivergent students will help ensure that they have the capability to identify and provide for a young person's individual education needs.

The young people in AP schools felt that many of their teachers were supportive and responsive to their needs. They felt that the teachers at AP school, compared to their mainstream school, had both more experience and skills and more capacity to support them. For example, one young person described that they could tell that the teachers had more experience in supporting young people who were facing similar challenges, which made them feel more supported.

"The teachers get a lot of students who are like me and struggling with similar things, so they know how to deal with it." - Young person

Additionally, several of the young people also felt that the teachers were able to take a very personal approach to working with them and are able to support them effectively to work on their behaviour and education. A few of the young people highlighted that they could tell they were doing better in school because of the support from their teachers.

"Teachers don't feel like teachers, they're like good family" - *Young person*

Young people were also asked what they think could be done to better support them or other people with neurodiverse conditions in schools. Most of the respondents felt that their teachers, especially those in mainstream schools, should be more knowledgeable about neurodiversity and additional support needs. The experiences of the students showed that some teachers did not have good understanding of neurodiversity and the support that the students might need. One young person

[88] Milne, C. (2021). The Experiences of Autistic Transgender and Gender-Diverse Young People. Link
[89] Children's' Commissioner. They Go the Extra Mile. Link
[90]Connolly, et al,. (2022). School Distress in UK School Children: Characteristics and Consequences. Link

felt that training on how to support students with SEN and neurodiverse conditions should be a fundamental part of a teachers' education. They suggested that training on neurodiversity and SEN should be a compulsory part of a teacher's training at university.

"There's one thing I feel should have been done already. To be a teacher, you have to go to university for 4-5 years, one of those should be to learn about people with SEN." - Young person

Better understanding and support for young people

Finally, and crucially young people also believed that support could be improved by paying more attention to the needs of young people and understanding the reasons behind their behaviours. This clearly resonates with the needs led approach that several practitioners we spoke with advocated for but recognised challenges in applying consistently. Several of the young people felt that they acted out because they were facing challenges in their life, were unsupported, and did not know how to cope. Some of the young people felt that if their teachers had better understood the challenges that they were facing and supported them instead of punishing them for acting out, this would have made a large difference.

"Just paying more attention." – Young person

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The report presents the findings of research across West Yorkshire into the exclusion and suspension of young people who are experiencing special educational needs and/or have neurodiverse conditions. It is clear from this and previous research, that there are significant systemic, structural and cultural challenges to creating an inclusive, and what was often described as "needs led" education system.

Systemic challenges include the performance and attainment systems that are created through national education policy. This drive for attainment creates pressure for educators, young people and their families and, in some instances, we are told drives young people away from being able to choose more suitable routes for them in vocational training and art subjects. This is compounded by a regulatory system which, many feel, could do more to promote inclusion and properly meeting the needs of young people. Even where needs led and relational approaches which negate the need for diagnosis are adopted within education the need to interact with other systems which do not share the same approach can negate the gains made.

Structural challenges include the inadequate resourcing across education and particularly in relation to SEN and SENCO support. This is compounded by workforce challenges, physical environments which are challenging and a lack of awareness and understanding of SEN and neurodiversity which results in reasonable adjustments being inconsistently applied or, in some cases, adjustments which further isolate the young person and highlight their difference.

Finally, there are clear cultural challenges that only a whole school approach can address. These inevitably include the reflection of stigma and misunderstanding that existing in the wider community, however we are told that this, for many in the close confines of school, results in bullying and lower aspirations or expectations of those with neurodiverse conditions or SEN. The need for clear, inclusive leadership has also been identified by a number of stakeholders we have spoken to. It would appear that the pressures created by the systemic and structural challenges can often result in the labelling and 'othering' of young people which in turn potentially makes suspension and exclusion easier than inclusion.

It is notable that the high rates of suspension and exclusion and these challenges to being more inclusive are not 'new'. They are all recognised by those working within the system, system leaders, young people and families. However just as these challenges aren't new, neither are the potential

solutions unknown. Throughout this research it is clear that a significant amount of resource, thought, research and care is being committed to addressing the disproportionate rates of suspension and exclusion. There are clear pockets of good practice and expertise across the region however it would appear that these are often happening within places or systems and not always visible across the whole combined authority area.

This potentially presents challenges for the VRU. The links between exclusion, suspension and crime are well evidenced and supporting inclusion within the region has the potential to significantly contribute to the reduction of violence and the harm caused by violence. However doing this in a way that does not duplicate existing efforts, is sustainable and is clearly within the VRU mandate needs consideration. Whilst the original remit of this research was to make recommendations in relation to training options, given the training programmes already in place, and the challenges of implementing training due to the systemic, structural, and cultural inhibitors we believe there are other potentially more effective actions that could be taken.

1. System stewardship – There is a clear need for support in the coordination of initiatives and interventions in this area and significant opportunities for sharing emerging good practice and learning across the region. We are aware that, to an extent the NHS West Yorkshire Neurodiversity (Autism & ADHD) Deep Dive Review is providing this, and that the VRU is a part of this. However, given the broader remit of the review, and the more limited definition of neurodiversity, we believe there are opportunities for sharing of practice, and potentially resource with a specific focus upon increasing inclusion in education.

2. Funding of mentoring and/or peer mentoring – There is a clear need to increase capacity for support in the system, and particularly for those young people at points of transition and stress. We would argue that there is also a role for this support to be provided by those with lived experience and who can share their experiences to reduce isolation as well as share the techniques and adaptations that they have found useful in their education. Mentoring and peer mentoring have existing evidence bases and have been used in areas within the region already and offer a more sustainable solution. The development of a low threshold offer which is needs, and not diagnosis led, is likely to support inclusion, adaptation and arguably support culture change within schools. There are existing resources in West Yorkshire such as the apprenticeship programme being delivered by All Star Entertainment and tools such as the Resilience Passport specifically designed for such points in young people's education journeys.

3. Funding early intervention support. As previously highlighted there has been targeted support for those at risk of exclusion within at least one local authority. Whilst the Youth Endowment Fund indicate that interventions to reduce exclusion have a low estimated impact on violent crime they acknowledge that the evidence base is complex and that there is evidence of a high reduction in school exclusion.[91] Our experience of these schemes being delivered in other areas has been that they have a positive impact upon both young people's mental health, school inclusion and attainment. Again, a low threshold service which schools can refer to based upon need would be recommended.

[91] YEF

Appendix 1 – Research framework

The West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit are looking to "explore the links between school exclusion, persistent absenteeism, neurodiverse conditions, and Special Educational Needs (SEN) in schools".

- Are there significant links between exclusions, persistent absenteeism, neurodiverse conditions, and SEN in schools?
- How can findings inform inclusive policies and procedures for schools as well as enhanced monitoring of bullying related to neurodiversity?
- What are feasible and cost-effective opportunities for training and/or support for young people to build resilience and communication skills to express emotion and explain their diversity?

The research requirements
1. Define neurodiversity to ensure clarity of scope and prioritisation of resources.
2. Summarise the landscape of exclusion and persistent absenteeism in West Yorkshire.
3. Are there significant links between exclusions, persistent absenteeism, neurodiverse conditions, and SEN in schools?
4. Understand the prevalence of SEN, including disability, and Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plans in schools. • Where are there high levels of permanent and suspensions across West Yorkshire? • Are young people with special educational needs more likely to be affected by exclusions? • Is there a data set on absenteeism available? Can we disaggregate this by SEN? • Can we get data on gender and ethnic differences in school exclusion and persistent absenteeism? • What data can we get on EHCP? Nationally? Locally? • Any data set on bullying in schools? Can this be disaggregated by neurodiversity / SEN? • Any data on in-year transfers between schools? • Diagnosis rates in young people? NHS digital

- A summary of risk factors specific to the research themes.
- Review literature regarding the exclusion and absenteeism of neurodivergent young people.
- A review of evidence-based interventions which aim to support young people at risk of exclusion or persistent absenteeism.
- An assessment of evidence-based interventions which aim to support young people to build resilience and communication skills to express emotion and explain their diversity.
- Recommendations of feasible and cost-effective training opportunities for services, professionals, teachers, and organisations to raise awareness of learning disability hate crime, neurodiversity, and SEN.
    - Link back to first neurodiversity research report – can we expand on risk factors (eg substance misuse, anti-social behaviour (don't duplicate previous work)? Anything on socio-economic profile of families?
    - Can we better understand the intersection of neurodiversity and socio-economic factors? And Gender and ethnicity?
    - Are there any data sets / evidence to back this up?
    - Consider permanent / suspension exclusions?
    - Is there a difference between primary and secondary schools / Local Authorities / Academies? Why is this? Are policies different?
    - What are/were young people who are neurodivergent experience of school, inclusion/exclusion and how do they attribute this to current circumstances?
    - Are there examples of inclusive policies and procedures for schools for young people with SEN or neurodiverse conditions? (How much is dependent on school or Local Authority policies?)
    - How is bullying monitored in schools? Can we see any evidence linking this to SEN and neurodiversity?

- Evidence-based interventions which aim to support young people to build resilience and communication what is out there?
- training opportunities (services, professionals, teachers, and organisations) to raise awareness of learning disability hate crime, neurodiversity, and SEN – what is out there.

Appendix 2 – Research tools

5.1. Youth practitioner topic guide

Hello, my name is xxxx and I'm from a research organisation called Rocket Science. We have been working with West Yorkshire Combined Authority on a number of projects over the past few years and one of the main focuses of our research has been around neurodivergent young people. This project is specifically looking at the experiences of neurodivergent young people and inclusion or exclusion at school and their wider experiences of education.

Everything you say to me today will be completely confidential and anonymised in our reporting. If you want to skip a question or stop at any point please let me know. The conversation should last no longer than half an hour.

Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

1. Can you tell me your name, job title and role as a youth practitioner?

2. What is the nature of the support you provide to young people and what are the demographics of the young people you work with?

a. Age / gender / specific conditions

b. How young people are engaged, recruited, or referred

(Prompt neurodivergent young people)

3. What are the main challenges faced by neurodivergent young people in a school environment?

a. Do the main challenges differ dependent on whether the neurodivergent young person has been diagnosed?

4. In your experience are young people with neurodivergent conditions more likely to be excluded, suspended, or absent from school than their non-neurodivergent peers?

5. What are the reasons for this?

Prompt for school structure, school policy, peer group influence, teacher understanding of ND etc.

6. What is the impact of suspension/exclusions/absence on young people who are neurodivergent?

7. What can cause neurodivergent young people to disengage from school? (ie not related to school structures etc)

8. What do you think the impact of transitions (e.g. primary to secondary, secondary onwards), and how does this impact differ by group?

9. How do neurodivergent young people experience GCSE selection and how can they be supported during this time?

a. What extra support is needed?
b. In your experience, do neurodivergent young people get the support they need from teachers?

10. What experiences of higher / further education or employment do the young people you work with have?

11. How could these young people best be supported in schools to ensure they are more included?

12. Are you aware of any current interventions or specific support initiatives in schools which aim to increase the inclusion of neurodivergent young people?

13. Are you aware of any effective training for practitioners and educators around neurodiversity? If yes what is this?

14. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Thank you for your time!

5.2. Stakeholder topic guide

Hello, my name is XXX and I'm from a research organisation called Rocket Science. We have been working with West Yorkshire Combined Authority on a number of projects over the past few years and one of the main focuses of our research has been around neurodivergent young people. This project is specifically looking at the experiences of neurodivergent young people and inclusion or exclusion at school and their wider experiences of education.

Everything you say to me today will be completely confidential and anonymised in our reporting. If you want to skip a question or stop at any point please let me know. The conversation should last no longer than half an hour.

Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

1. Can you tell me your name, job title and role within your organisation?

2. Can you tell me a bit about your role and your work around neurodiverse conditions and /or education?

(Prompt: they only know a small amount; they're an expert; they support people with neurodiversity etc.

a. Is there a focus in this on young people, or on all age groups/more generally? (ie do they work in a school/in education, with young people in the community, with all ages in the community)

3. What, in your experience, are the main challenges faced by neurodivergent young people in a school environment? [Note: knowledge level may vary a lot depending on role, can skip if not relevant]

a. Do the main challenges differ dependent on whether the neurodivergent young person has been diagnosed?

4. In your experience are young people with neurodiverse conditions more likely to be excluded, suspended or absent from school than their non-neurodivergent peers?

5. What are the reasons for this?

(Prompt for school structure, school policy, peer group influence, teacher understanding of ND etc)

6. What is the impact of suspension/exclusion/absence on young people who are neurodivergent?
7. How could neurodivergent young people best be supported in schools to ensure they are more included? Are you aware of any best practice or evidence based support?
8. Are you aware of any current interventions or specific support initiatives in schools which aim to increase the inclusion of neurodivergent young people?
9. Are you aware of any effective training for practitioners and educators around neurodiversity? If yes what is this?

Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you for your time!

5.3. Young people topic guide

Background information

My name is XX and I'm from a research organisation called Rocket Science. We have been working with West Yorkshire Combined Authority for some time now on various different projects. This project is specifically looking at the experience of neurodivergent young people and inclusion or exclusion at school and their wider experiences of education.

Everything you say to me today will be completely confidential and anonymised in our reporting. If you want to skip a question or stop at any point you can either say so or turn the card you have next to you from green to red, that'll show me you want to stop. The only time we would have to break your confidentiality is if you tell me something that makes me concerned about your safety or the safety of someone else. If this happens I would let you know what I would need to share and who I will share it with.

Our conversation should last around half an hour /
The focus group should last around an hour.

Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Intro questions

1. Could I get your name and age?

2. What is your current situation in relation to education / training or employment?

3. What are your goals and ambitions in the next couple of years?

4. How would you define someone who is neurodivergent?
a. (if unable to answer, give examples of ADHD, dyslexia, ASD, autism etc…)

5. Have you been diagnosed as having a neurodiverse condition?
a. If yes – are you happy sharing what your condition is and telling us a little bit about it?
b. If no – do you still consider yourself to have needs relating to neurodiversity, if so what are they?

Diagnosis (if yes to Q5)

6. What was your experience of being diagnosed with a neurodiverse condition?

(Prompt: wait times, support that was in place/not available)

a. How did you feel around this time?
b. How did you feel post diagnosis compared to pre diagnosis?

(Prompt: confusion, not understanding why they felt how they did…)

7. Were you in school when you found out about your diagnosis?
a. If yes - what support (if any) was available to you in school?

8. Was there any stigma related to your diagnosis from
a. Teachers?
b. Peers? (prompt for, do they/did they talk to their friends about their experience?)

Experiences in school

I'm going to talk a little bit about your experiences in school now.

9. What things do you think can lead to neurodivergent young people to have difficult experiences such as bullying or fighting in school?

10. Do you have any difficult experiences in school?

a. That has led to bulling or fighting?
b. Victim of manipulative behaviour?
c. Depression, anxiety
d. Frustrations ever lead to lashing out?
e. How were you in social environments?

11. (If diagnosed in school) Did you have any positive experiences after being diagnosed in school?

a. Prompt for changing behaviour from teachers, peers etc….

12. Are there points in time or specific moments when young neurodivergent people are particularly vulnerable to bad experiences?

a. Transition points (school?)
b. Leaving school
c. Peer pressure – inside school or outside school
d. Being excluded from school/struggling to keep up
e. Truanting/skipping lessons

13. What support or activities can prevent young people from having these difficult experiences?

a. Support groups
b. Family support
c. Friendships, relationships
d. Teachers

Education

14. Were you excluded and/or suspended from school? If you don't mind, could you tell me the circumstances around them were? What happened?

15. What led to you being disengaged in school and/or being excluded?

a. Were you ever put into isolation booths?
b. How did you find the school curriculum?
c. Staff support?

d. Interaction with peers?

16. Did you feel included by your school?

17. Did you receive the support you needed to participate in school activities?

18. Were you punished or reprimanded for behaviour or absences etc that would be liked to your neurodiversity?

19. Did you have any positive experiences of inclusion from your school?

a. If so, could you give me examples of positive experiences? What made them positive? How did it make you feel to be included?

Support

20. Did you have good support in school that made it a better experience for you?

21. What support do you think you would have needed in school to make it a better experience for you?

22. Is this currently available?

a. Probe on young people and support for their family, teachers etc

23. How can support be made more accessible to neurodivergent young people

a. Probe around family support workers, developing relationship with individuals to ease into support services

Training

24. Do you think the teachers/adults around you knew how to best support you?

a. Do you think they had the right training and skills they needed to help you?

25. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Thanks for your time!

Cherri Blissett, Director

James Ward, Assistant Director

Niamh Dunne, Consultant

Julia Allard, Consultant

Alasdair Coates, Senior Consultant

Laura McGinty, Consultant

Offices:

Newcastle
T: 0191 300 2589

London
T: 0207 253 6289

Edinburgh
T: 0131 226 4949

www.rocketsciencelab.co.uk

ROCKET SCIENCE

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE | Gold Until 2022