

# SEN students left in exclusion limbo

**T**housands of children with special educational needs and disabilities are waiting for a school place or are being educated at home, and many more are excluded, prompting fears that schools in England are becoming less inclusive.

Department for Education statistics show that just under 4,500 pupils with statutory rights to special needs support were awaiting suitable provision or being home-schooled at the start of the year.

Campaigners say the real figure is far higher because the DfE data does not include SEND pupils who don't have a special needs statement or an education health and care plan, documents that guarantee their statutory rights to additional support.

More than 1.2 million children, or about 15% of all students in England have some kind of special educational need, but only about 253,000 have special educational needs statements or education health and care plans.

There is also growing concern that children with special needs are particularly vulnerable to being taken off the rolls by schools that are under pressure, both financially because of budget cuts and academically to improve their exam results.

"We are not sure to what degree off-rolling takes place, but the target-driven education system we have means teachers and headteachers don't want difficult children on their rolls," said one local government analyst.

"Pupils get excluded on tenuous grounds, or teachers will tell parents at open days, 'you shouldn't send your child here – they will get a better education at a school down the road.' It's subtle, but we know it happens."

DfE data shows the number of SEND students "awaiting provision", or waiting for a school place that meets the requirements of their plan, rose from 701 in 2010 to 2,060 at the start of this year. About 2,400 other students were not at school because their parents had



made "other arrangements", which generally means home education. This figure increased by 77% during the same period, up from 1,355 in 2010.

Children with SEND are also disproportionately removed from lessons as a result of exclusions. They made up 46.7% of permanent exclusions and 44.9% of fixed-period exclusions in 2016-17, but 14% of the student population.

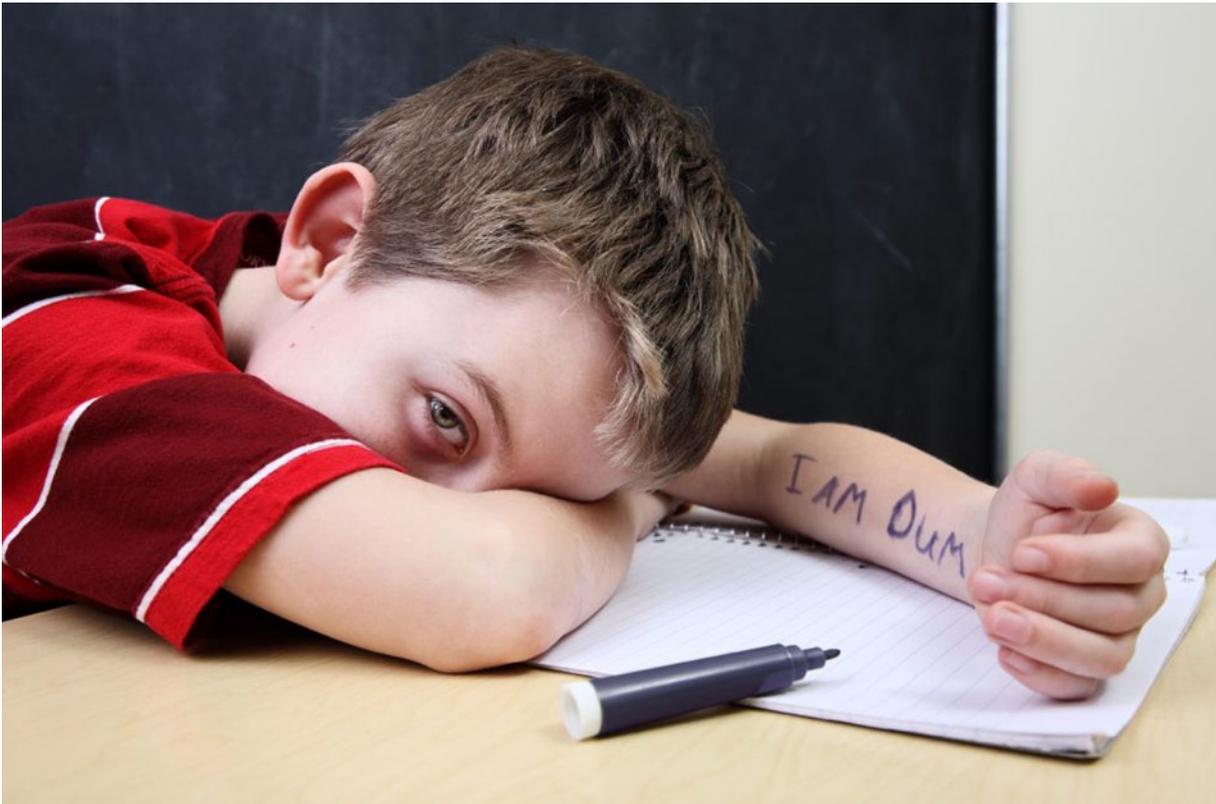
According to DfE figures, 0.35% of all pupils with SEND support were permanently excluded in 2016-2017, which is six times higher than the rate for their non-SEND peers.

More than 6.18% of pupils with Send support and 6.44% with Send statements or plans received a fixed-term exclusion in 2016-17 academic year, compared with just 1.63% of students with no Send. A fixed-term exclusion is a temporary suspension from school for a set number of days.

A DfE spokesperson said a government review of exclusions was under way. "All schools have a duty to meet the needs of any pupils with Send," they said. "Where an EHCP [education health and care plan] names a school, that school must admit the child and school admissions can still be arranged for those pupils waiting for their final EHCPs.

"It is not acceptable for schools to find ways to remove pupils outside of the formal exclusions system. Every school is a school for pupils with SEND – and every teacher is a teacher of Send pupils."

# Inequality causing children with learning disabilities to have shorter lives



**P**rof Sir Michael Marmot says that children with learning disabilities die 15-20 years earlier than other people due to poor housing, low incomes, social isolation and bullying.

He said 40% of people with learning difficulties were not diagnosed in childhood - and this had to change.

Learning disabilities affect 2.9% of the population.

But a quarter of young people in custody have learning disabilities, the report said.

Prof Marmot, from the Institute of Health Equity at University College London, estimates that shorter life expectancy affects 1,200 children and adults in this vulnerable group, who are also at higher risk of mental illness.

## 'Less discrimination'

He said more should be done to improve the lives of all children with learning disabilities.

"We can make sure the voyage through education is as good as it can be, we can make sure people

are not falling below the poverty line and we can educate the general population so that there is less discrimination against people with learning disabilities," he said.

And he said it was everyone's responsibility in society to take action.

"I want the society of which I am a part to do the right thing for the most vulnerable members."

Prof Marmot published a review of health inequalities in 2010, which recommended policies to allow a child to maximise his or her opportunity to lead as long and healthy a life as possible.

But he said 18-year-olds with learning disabilities today may not live long enough to draw their pension.

He said action should focus on:

- improving support to parents
- reducing poverty and improving living environments
- increasing work programmes for people with learning disabilities
- improving social integration and reducing bullying

# Use of taxis and private hire vehicles to transport SEND students to school on the rise

Councils spent more than £160m last year on taxis and private hire vehicles to transport children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to and from school, according to a survey.

England's county councils are warning that rising demand for SEND services is "creating budget risks" for local authorities, with school transport costs for children with special needs up by as much as 45% in some areas in the last four years.

The survey by the County Councils Network (CCN) shows that total spending on transport for pupils with SEND in 2017-18 was more than £323m across 36 county authorities in England, up from just under £250m four years ago.

Many children have to travel long distances to attend an appropriate school. Councils say they are being inadequately funded by central government and are calling for more money in next year's spending review to match growing demand.

Some local authorities have already started to cut any SEND transport services, which they believe they are not legally obliged to provide. North Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Leicestershire, and Buckinghamshire have all outlined cutbacks to post-16 free transport for pupils with SEND.

Families have launched legal action in a number of areas across England in an attempt to halt cuts to SEND budgets. Bristol council was forced to reverse planned cuts, and families in Surrey and the London borough of Hackney are awaiting judgments following judicial review hearings.

Other families are seeking to bring legal action against the government, accusing ministers of failing to provide adequate funding for children with special needs.

For many authorities, expenditure on private hire vehicles makes up the bulk of their SEND transport costs. Kent county council, which is one of the largest in the country, has the biggest spend on taxis and private hire, according to the survey. Kent spent £22.7m out of its total £24.9m spend on SEND home to school transport last year – a 45% increase since 2014.

Surrey was the second highest, spending £23m



on home to school transport for children with special educational needs – 32% up on 2014 – and Hampshire spent £19m, a 36% jump in the last four years.

Carl Les, the CCN spokesman for children's services and education, and the leader of North Yorkshire county council, said: "These services are a lifeline for our young people, particularly in rural areas, and the fact that these pupils with learning disabilities and special needs are living longer is something to be celebrated, but these services must be adequately funded.

"Regrettably, we are having to scale back the services we aren't legally obliged to deliver or reroute funding from other services because the current funding for school transport is not keeping up with demand."

The 23 county authorities which provided details of expenditure on private hire taxis and minibuses – which are necessary for pupils with specific needs – said they spent £166m on these vehicles last year, compared with less than £128m four years ago.

A government spokesperson said: "Local authorities are required to provide transport to school for children with special educational needs and disabilities if they would not be able to walk there.

"To support councils with this, the government will provide £90.7bn over the next two years to help them meet the needs of their residents which includes providing this transport for children and young people with SEND."