SCHOOL EXCLUSION: TO EXCLUDE OR NOT TO EXCLUDE? A CRITICAL CONSIDERATION OF A RANGE OF PERENNIAL ISSUES

Dr Jonathan Beckett

ABSTRACT: *This paper reviews the notion of school exclusion. The use of narrative, biographical research has been employed to find out the feelings of children who has been excluded from school. Moreover, alternative perspectives were gained as I interviewed staff at the school about the exclusion process. Issues such as why an exclusion may be beneficial and why on the other hand it may not be of benefit will be considered. Logistical issues such as childcare and the holistic wellbeing of students and practitioners will be addressed.*

KEYWORDS: School Exclusion, Children, Range of Perennial Issues, Childcare, Student

INTRODUCTION

This study examines school exclusion. For the purpose of this study I have used pseudonyms as a way of protecting the identity of the participants. Data has been gathered from interviewing staff and students about their experiences in relation to exclusion. In so doing I seek to give students an opportunity to share their experiences and a platform from which their voice is heard. Additionally I interview some members of staff to seek to understand their perception of school exclusion. This gives staff the opportunity to discuss how they feel about the use of exclusion as a sanction.

Defining School Exclusion

School exclusion is a sanction which can be imposed upon a student by the head teacher on account of a singular act, or more often, a successive number of incidents of violent or disruptive behaviours. Exclusion may also be used for bullying, racism, vandalism and so forth. Fixed term exclusion is when the head teacher writes home to the pupil's parents and states that they are required to keep their child at home for a designated period of time. This would not exceed 45 days within one academic year. With an exclusion of more than one day, the school would then set work for the child, to be marked by their teacher. If a lunchtime exclusion is given this constitutes a half-day exclusion, meaning that the child would be excluded from the premises for the whole lunch period. For exclusions between 5 days and 15 days, the parent has a right to ask for a meeting with the school governors, whereby they may express their views. For an exclusion exceeding this period of time, the Pupil Disciplinary Committee (PDC) will meet with the child and parents, to discuss the pupil's record but no opportunity for appeal can be made. For a permanent exclusion, the head teacher writes to the parents / caregiver of the child and explains that they have been removed from the school roll; in this case the governors would meet to discuss and review this decision. Eastman *et al.* (2011:126) state: 'Many schools will exhaust all possibilities before a permanent exclusion.'

The parents of a child excluded may appeal against a permanent exclusion and ask questions relating to it. If the governors agree to uphold the head teacher's decision, the parents are entitled to lodge an independent appeal against the panel.

The appeals panel operates to decide whether or not to re-integrate the child into the school. If, on the other hand, the head teacher's decision is overturned by the appeals panel, a date would be fixed for the child to return to school and pastoral support and agreements will be put in place to limit or prevent any further occurrences of exclusionary procedures.

Interviews with staff and students

To foreground this work I shall give a thumbnail sketch of the student. Glen is a boy who lives with his mother and has infrequent contact with his biological father. He lives in a small house near to the school in an area of high social deprivation.

The National Research Council (1999:48) notes:

> Students who live in high- poverty and culturally diverse experience conditions at home, at school, and in the community that correlate with low academic achievement. The conditions endemic in many urban areas- high concentrations of poverty, family instability, crime, unemployment- complicate the process of education enormously.

Glen when interviewed said that he had been temporarily excluded from school due to his continual disruption. This is significant as it may be questioned what is 'disruption'? (O' Regan 2007). This is a subjective term which can be used for a range of behaviours. Rogers (2005) argues that 'disruption' is an umbrella term for inappropriate behaviour. Ruddock and McIntyre (2007) suggest that punishments can be unhelpful as they reduce interactions with students and may affect their self- esteem. As a critique to these remarks, they are generic and no formal experiments are cited to link self –esteem and exclusion. In Glen's case he informed me that during English he got bored, he was in the 'bottom set' and felt like a failure. Alexander- Passe (2010:268) suggests that from research findings those with learning differences can have poor self- esteem and can even suffer with depression: '...depressives feel dyslexia affects their life much more, they feel more helpless, less angry and feel more rejected from their peers than non-depressives.' Alexander- Passe (ibid) cites a number of qualitative and quantitative studies, in which he interviews people with depression and learning difficulties as well as those who have a low self-esteem. As a result, the work indicates a link between low self – esteem and finding school too challenging. However, in the conducting of the psychometric tests, there are no confidence intervals/ bands, which Graf (2005) suggests makes the validity and reliability of a test questionable as ascertaining the 'true' score of a participant is tentative.

During the interview it appeared that some of the work Glen was given was too difficult for him, at one point he said 'what's the point?' This comment referred to him bothering with school. Bennett (2010) argues that students should see the value of work and that it is of most benefit when time is taken to tailor it to their needs. To critique Bennett's (ibid) notion that a curriculum addressing the needs of an individual and by raising the standard of the lesson this will alleviate boredom is refuted by Turner (2011), who suggests that this is simplistic in its reasoning and impractical in its employment; highlights a more specific approach to managing a child's needs is required, such as whole class multisensory teaching, the use of ICT and age appropriate resources. However, Dix (2010) notes that regardless of specific provision there are likely to be children who are challenging in behaviour. Arnot *et al.* (2007) argue that through consultation with learners, their research reveals that a number of students felt that they had little control over their learning. Mc Namara (2002:114) states: 'The pupils' interest, motivation and rate of learning improved as they were encouraged to create and describe their

own methods and solutions to mental maths problems.' As a practice this approach may not suit all types of learner. For example Muijs (2011) found that some children enjoyed having the teacher set them challenges, rather than generating their own.

The interviews highlighted that Glen appeared to desire help, although he may not admit this, he also seemed to want to take control of his learning and make choices. Galvin (1999:145) states: 'The class should have some part in deciding what needs to be done.' This applied to Glen may allow him to make some decisions, which can be ratified by the teacher. A problem that became apparent was that Glen's perception of the teacher was that they did not care about him and were unwilling to help him access the curriculum as they felt he was a 'nuisance.'

Kinder and Wilkin (1998) suggest that dissatisfaction and disengagement need to be tackled by pupil conferencing, listening to the learner. Glen's self- esteem appeared to be low and he said that he was isolated and felt lonely 'without mates' who would 'hang around with him.' From Glen's home life, he said that most evenings were spent with his mother and when he went out he would end up in trouble. These sentiments infer that Glen was frustrated and when he went out with his friends he 'let off steam' perhaps out of inward tension and did things which were criminal or nuisance type behaviours (Reevy and Frydenberg 2011). Glen additionally shared that he felt unhappy at school and wanted to leave. These sentiments concur with Cooper (2002) who notes that young people who were dissatisfied with school and had been excluded were likely to want to leave school. Thambirajah *et al.* (2008) argue that students who are unhappy at school over a sustained period of time can become 'school refusers' and feel personally 'attacked' by criticisms of their peers or by their teachers. Mc Sherry (2011:114) on her self- management of behaviour sheet asks: 'can accept discipline without arguing or sulking.' On one occasion Glen was excluded for swearing at his Maths teacher because she was disciplining him and asking him to do something he felt he was unable to do. Glen argued that he felt victimised and 'picked on.' Therefore he had reacted badly to the teacher's request to comply with instructions and received a three day exclusion. Bruce and Pine (2010) argue that the type of reaction Glen gave needs to be measured against the task. Reflecting upon whether it was too challenging for him and subsequently setting him up for failure. However, Maasz and Schloglmann (2009) notes that Maths can be difficult for some people but is essential for life and therefore work should be challenging. A more balanced argument may be that the teacher needs to consider the task, Glen's capabilities and pre-empt possible behaviour difficulties (Kyriacou 2009, Hart *et al.* 2011). Chaplain (2003:4) argues the following points for practitioners to consider:

> The advantage of using anticipatory strategies (such as seating arrangements, removing temptation, clear rules) as opposed to deflection tactics (such as deliberately ignoring behaviour, praising peers, invading personal space) or reactive strategies (such as warnings, sanctions, exclusion) is the first are far lower profile than the other two and therefore less damaging to the teacher-pupil relationships.

From interviewing the teacher, Mr Smith explained that Glen's behaviour had deteriorated over the last few months and his attitude towards school was poor. This may be a result of lots of 'reactive strategies' employed in managing Glen's behaviour. Subsequently, Glen had been involved in low level disruption and more recently incidents of higher levels of disruption and acts of defiance. Crone *et al.* (2010) notes that the categorising of behaviour can be a complex task. However, by doing so it is possible to ascertain whether or not exclusion is necessary. Low level disruption, according to the school, involved deliberately taking long periods of time to complete tasks, talking at inappropriate times, kicking under the table, interrupting the

learning and wandering around the room. High level disruption, according to Mr Smith involved vandalism, out right repeated refusal to comply, bullying and severe disruption to lessons (verbally or physically). Mr Smith explained that teaching Glen over the last two weeks had been 'challenging' and he had exhibited continual low level disruption.

The research identified from Mr Smith that Glen had been struggling to access the curriculum in class despite having differentiated work. DENI (2006:1) defines differentiation as: 'the process whereby an attempt is made to provide learning experiences which are matched to the needs, capabilities and previous learning of individual pupils'. Moore (2000:144) states:

> Differentiation must be embedded in all aspects of teaching and learning. The principle of differentiation is fundamental to the success of mixed ability teaching. Work must be matched to the students' attainments and abilities.

This quote from Moore (ibid) identifies the priority of differentiation in Alex Moore's thinking. However, his work is not ratified by specific evidence and furthermore, practically this for every lesson may be extremely difficult to implement (O'Hanlon 1996).

Pennington *et al.* (1998) argues that differentiation within the curriculum varies from school to school. If differentiation is implemented efficiently pupils can have greater opportunities to access the curriculum. Simpson and Ure (1994) report that differentiation was not implemented in many primary and secondary schools, which gave sufficient opportunities for those with specific needs to be able to understand the task. However, this report is dated and may not reflect current practice, therefore I shall cite Dunn (2011) who suggests that the mark of an outstanding teacher is one who knows the children within his or her class and differentiates. Turner (2011) found that recent research into differentiation found that a significant number of schools were ineffective in this area. My research suggested that the school was seeking to enhance the provision of differentiation. Mr Smith was of the view that Glen needed booster sessions and 'catch up' groups. However, he felt unwilling to give up his time for Glen who sometimes did not work very hard in lessons. During the exclusion Mr Smith sent home some work for Glen to complete. After the exclusion Glen had only partially completed the tasks Mr Smith had set. This was followed up with Glen's parents. Roffey and O'Reirdan (2003:5) are of the view:

> We may not be able to do much about the causes of unwanted behaviour but we can do something about what is happening now. In order to do this, it is essential to formulate some idea of what is maintaining or, indeed, modifying the behaviour. Meeting with families would normally be part of the process gaining additional information which may be useful. As well as finding out about any concerns they may have, parents will be able to give their perspective and also valuable information.

As a result of meeting with Glen's mother and her partner as well as a separate meeting with his father, each person was able to share their concerns about why Glen had been excluded and why work sent home was incomplete. Glen's mother explained that she was unable to 'force' Glen to complete the work and he could be stubborn when he refused to do something. The school suggested the withdrawing of privileges, which as his mother agreed to do. However, Glen appeared disengaged with school and felt that Mr Smith should not have got the senior management team (SMT) involved and felt that the exclusion was unjust and unfair. Parry-Mitchell (2012) argues that school exclusion should be avoided as it creates a sense of injustice and can detrimentally impact upon a student's emotional health, making them angry or upset.

To critique these sentiments, Parry- Mitchell (ibid) approaches the subject of exclusion from a standpoint which is to avoid the use of exclusion. In his book he makes the case for anti-exclusion policies, without offering a balanced argument for possible alternatives. Additionally, Parry- Mitchell (ibid) has substantive gaps in his synthesis of literature and fails to critically synthesise a range of viewpoints. Furthermore, his work has been published by perhaps a less highly regarded publishing house among scholars, Lucky Duck and therefore may not have been subject to rigorous analysis.

From analysing the interview Parsons (2011) offers a pertinent point from biographical research with students. He argues that young people can become detached from school, not enjoy it and behave inappropriately if they feel they have been unjustly treated. During the interview Glen explained that another child, Billy had been pinching and kicking him and Mr Smith only noticed when he swore. Glen felt that the exclusion should also have been directed at Billy as he was specifically involved in this incident resulting in the exclusion. Rendall (2001) notes that often incidents go unpunished if they are not seen, which in turn can trigger a reaction which is then seen and subsequently punished. Thus, within this case the punishment is implemented upon the reaction rather than the cause of the reaction. This means that sometimes punishments are 'unfairly' given and exclusion can be used inappropriately. Perhaps it may be argued this was the case here, as Glen was not the only child involved in the disruptive behaviour culminating in a more serious incident? Moreover, the triggers of this case could be further investigated.

The SENCO explained that part of her role was speaking to students who were on the 'borderline' of exclusion or had been excluded and needed re-integrating. This work included arranging programmes of activities and setting small and manageable targets for these students. The SENCO was also involved in monitoring report cards for which Katie was on. Edwards (2011) argues that the SENCO is a prominent member of staff in helping students with special and behavioural needs. This can act as an important safeguard for managing inappropriate behaviour, ensuring other senior staff are available for other aspects of the day to day running of the school. As a senior member of staff the SENCO would be directly accountable to the assistant headteachers and would regularly feedback issues and concerns that had been raised. Hallet and Hallet (2010) argue that the description of the SENCO as a member of SMT is a result of flaws within the system. However, it is not my purpose to discuss these perceived flaws, which would deviate from my analysis of the SENCOs responses to this research project. Ekins (2011:128) notes that the role includes:

> Develop and provide regular information to the headteacher and governing body on the effectiveness of provision for pupils with SEN and / or disabilities to inform decision making and policy review.

Moreover, the SENCO appears to be a key member of staff in ensuring students are helped to avoid exclusion. For example the SENCO highlights issues which have arisen from pupil consultation and helps to form an action plan for dealing with potential problems. Additionally, the special needs area has some isolation desks and members of middle management which are there to help pupils who have been internally excluded or 'removed' from lessons. Cochran-Smith *et al.* (2008) note that research into student behaviour and resourced provision is an indicator of the school's success in helping students to comply with the rules.

I was fortunate enough to speak with a child, Oliver who had been sent to this isolation area for infringing the rules. Oliver's background is that he belonged to a family who had moved

to the school a year ago, from Lincoln. Both parents worked and had 'highly paid' jobs. Oliver lived in a three bedroom house close to the school in a more affluent part of the town. As a result of the finances his parents were generating, he had been given many worldly goods and had access to provisions, such as clubs and sources of entertainment. Giddens (2006:333) argues:

> Class continues to exert a great influence on our lives, and class membership is correlated with a variety of inequalities from life expectancy and overall physical health to access to education and well-paid jobs.

Oliver had struggled to settle into the new school. Oliver's response is similar to that recorded by Cooper *et al.* (2000:1) when interviewing Neil about his move from a Grammar school to a new area: '...Then I had to move... It was getting too much...sometimes I didn't go.' From my interactions with Oliver it appeared that Oliver did not find moving schools easy, similar to the experience of Neil, cited above, he desired to get friends and sought to do this by creating and directing attention towards himself by talking at inappropriate moments. The response of the staff had been to isolate him from the other students. Carlile (2010) notes that exclusion or isolation can be used for 'nuisance' behaviour. It appears that approach was adopted for Oliver. Oliver explained that he had been talking constantly through the input of the lesson. He explained that the lesson was uninteresting and uninspiring.

Further to this he had also incited others to disrupt the lesson and was asked to leave by the teacher. Rendall (2001) suggest that behaviour such as disruption and encouraging others do break the rules was a reason why some schools had used internal or external exclusion. Oliver had refused to leave the classroom and the SENCO had been called to ask him to work in the isolation area of the special needs unit. Oliver was very open with me about why he had been sent to the isolation desk but felt that if the lesson was more interesting and the teaching was more stimulating he may not have disrupted the session. Moreover, these sentiments concur with Palaniandy (2009) who suggests that often a well taught lesson with stimulating activities often manages behaviour by 'good' or 'outstanding' teaching. However, Gray (2002) argues that inspiring teaching alone is not always the panacea for promoting good behaviour and avoiding the use of exclusion. Additionally, it is important to remember that Oliver was trying to create attention towards himself, therefore even if the lesson was stimulating he may have disrupted it anyway. However, Oliver appears more engaged in his learning that Glen does. Kantabar and Rae (2010:12) state: 'Another challenge is for those involved in organising the learning process to promote positive engagement before disengagement sets in.' It is important to establish systems which motivate Oliver before he becomes less engaged and pliable to help.

The use of the isolation area appeared to be a prevalent part of school life, as a system of managing or pre-empting poor behaviour initiated by SMT (Davies *et al.* 2011). Additionally the unit was also used as a way of preventing the use of external exclusion. This has advantages and disadvantages. First, the advantages are that the students may avoid having an exclusion upon their school record and the school does not need to resort to using a fixed term exclusion (Millimet and Tchernis 2009). Additionally it provides a structured area for the student to work in, which is monitored by a member of staff (Lall 2004). However, the limitations of this approach are that this may be used instead of an exclusion, when in fact an exclusion should arguably be required, such as incidents of violence or severe disruption (Department for Education 2009). This may put other students and staff at risk of disruption and potential danger from violence or aggression. From my observations the unit appeared to be used effectively, however with one child I saw it could be argued that for this student a fixed term

exclusion may have been more appropriate as he continued to behave in an extremely inappropriate way whilst in isolation and disrupt other people in the unit, such as Oliver. Briggs (2011) infers that internal isolation can violate student's rights and may be seen as an 'unofficial exclusion'. On the other hand, Lloyd *et al.* (2011) explain that measures within the school can contribute to prevent an exclusion occurring. Within this case the isolation of a child, internally prevented them from external exclusion. It could be questioned: which one is more effective? Furthermore, how do staff and students feel about internal exclusion? This is a further line of enquiry which may lead to revisions being made of the exclusion policy and school effectiveness (Yu and Thomas 2008).

I was able to speak to one student about why he felt he had been sent to the unit. Jamie explained that he was angry with the school as he perceived that they had let him down. King (2011) writing about biographical research into student's experiences of exclusion noted that some of them felt isolated and angry and had a feeling of injustice. Jamie's sentiments support King's research as Jamie suggested that some of his teachers were 'rubbish' and had contributed towards him obtaining poor grades. He was of the opinion that they did not care about how they taught the subject and just gave him lots of questions to complete from the board, textbook or from a worksheet. Dunn (2011) suggests that the outstanding practitioner is a lively and enthusiastic teacher, who carefully plans and implements exciting and varied lessons and demonstrates pastoral care for the students. Perhaps this is not Jamie's perception of his teacher? However, it may be that despite the work of the teacher Jamie is still disengaged? Moreover, he now took pleasure in disrupting the learning as he perceived that the lessons were uninteresting and some of the staff did not care if he did well or not. Browne (2009) from analysing student behaviour noted that some of the most severe forms of disruption were linked to when students did not like the teacher they were taught by. In the remarks Jamie gives it is clear that he has interpreted that the teachers he has dislike him and therefore he chooses to behave inappropriately when taught by them. Jamie stated that during Science lessons he would 'muck around with the equipment' and not do what he was supposed to do. Additionally in Maths he said that some of the work was hard and pointless and had no relevance to real life situations. Rogers (2011:114) states the need for teachers to explain the learning objective and subsequent activities in the light of everyday relevance:

> One of the most basic aspects of effective (and competent) is that the teacher explains the purpose and relevance of what they are teaching and the particular learning tasks that flow from them.

From these sentiments Jamie appears to be 'switched off' from school and has subsequently adopted learned behaviour patterns of disruption (Steer 2009, Bear 2010). Jamie appeared deeply hurt and felt that he has been badly treated and subsequently has performed poorly in the tests. Black *et al.* (2009:31) describe some exams as: '...narrow high-stakes summative tests...' These exams, as the 'stakes' are appear high can be a significant pressure upon an individual, especially if when they receive their results they have not done as well as they hoped or were predicted (Assessment Reform Group 2002). Perhaps school exclusion may not be the answer for Jamie, as this may drive a larger wedge between him and the education system? I would postulate that an intensive support programme, building self- esteem may be more beneficial in this instance and reflecting upon how he may enhance his test scores in future, such as exam technique revision.

It appears that Jamie may also have a low self- esteem in that he manifests little respect for himself and others and finds curriculum access complex (Miller 1994). For the purpose of this

work I will adopt Sutton and Stewart's (2011:49) definition: 'Self – esteem refers to the value we attach to ourselves- our personal estimation of our worth as a person.' The use of an educational plan, which incorporates designated time with the pastoral support teaching assistant is being reviewed in terms of its efficiency to promote positive behaviour (Hollis 2005). Kearney (2011) suggests that support structures within school can provide stability and help for a child at risk of expulsion. Within this case these sentiments may be considered pertinent to Jamie's needs. However, some children may not respond, in the sense of improving their behaviour, to support structures (DENI 2006). This experience is similar to the research discourses by Arnold *et al.* (2009) in which Chip felt that the school had let him down and not supported him and was too quick to exclude before interventions had had time to be effective. Jamie and others like him are currently a concern for the headteacher and the school policy. When dealing with Jamie the school may need to consider how Jamie is feeling as a result of his exclusion (Quibell 2006).

Jamie appeared to be unhappy with the school and was angry at the times in which he had received a fixed term exclusion. Jamie stated:

> Schools crap cos they wanted me out... excluded for my behaviour, Mr Winder hates me... What good is it anyway? They just don't like me, its s**t! Didn't even do much.

From these sentiments it is evident that Jamie feels dissatisfied with life at school, assuming that the staff dislike him as a person, rather than some of the behaviours he manifests. It is perhaps needful that Mr Winder or another member of key staff in dealing with Jamie discuss that they do not feel a grudge towards Jamie rather they dislike the way he behaves at times. Through doing this separation is made between 'you are a very rude and naughty boy' to 'that behaviour was rude and naughty.' Thus, the behaviour is an act which is separated from the person (Grossman 2003). Docking and Mac Grath (2002:7) state:

> While some teachers personalise the situation by readily talking of 'problem pupils' or pupils that are 'naughty', 'disruptive', 'disturbed', 'devious', 'troublemakers', 'disaffected' and so on, others prefer to talk in terms of individuals' problem behaviour and its effects.

Palaniandy (2010) argues that understanding student perception is important in developing trust and positive behaviour. Fox (2001:4) argues: 'Every child needs to feel valued. You need to develop positive relationships with those children who find it hard to behave or settle to learning.' In this case if Jamie's misconceptions are challenged then Jamie is more likely to realise why he was excluded and not to take the issue personally. However, I would question the validity of Palaniandy's remarks as although an appreciation of trust is important it will not generate within itself positive behaviour. Sometimes over familiarity in professional relationships can breed contempt (Taylor 2005). Wallace and Gravells (2007) argue in relation to mentoring that a balance between professionalism and allowing your personality to show is an effective way of promoting a positive, working relationship. Newburn *et al.* (2005:1) summarise:

> Mentoring generally involves establishing a relationship between two people with the aim of providing role models who will offer advice and guidance in a way that will empower both parties.

From the interview with Jamie he stated that he felt that this sanction had not helped him to become better behaved or to reform his character. This is a concern as the current exclusion

policy is geared towards using exclusion as an ultimate deterrent / sanction, which in Jamie's case has not seemed to have worked. Hyams- Parish (1996) reflecting upon exclusion suggests that if a student does not improve their behaviour as a result of exclusion, this was not a beneficial course of action to take. Jamie expressed disappointment with the school as though they had given up on him. From the interview with Jamie he noted that some of the staff used to shout and sigh when they dealt with him. Additionally he suggested that some teachers appeared to 'hate' him. From analysing these sentiments it is clear that Jamie has a number of substantial issues which require attention and supportive intervention work may be required. This interview has been significant in developing professional practice as I now have a greater understanding of Jamie's needs and can suggest the implementation of changes through consultation with Jamie and other disaffected students. This adopts a similar approach to Kay Kinder's work (1998) in which she looks at pupil dissatisfaction and seeks to address their issues through narrative research (Kinder 1998). Thus, she discovered students who were unhappy with the education system and sought to make recommendations for improving professional practice through her research. These ideas have helped me to bring various considerations to the headteacher, for example, what are the steps before exclusion? Is there a system or process which can be used to engage those who are not currently engaged in school life? Perhaps policies need to be re-thought to integrate personalised learning opportunities, which stimulate students? (Hopkins 2008). To summarise Mac Grath (2000:4) makes the emotive cause for learning and satisfaction at school. The argument is based upon two perceptions of progress and happiness and therefore has flaws. However, the point raised is pertinent to studying the students I have interviewed, particularly in relation to dissatisfaction and the learning experience and the subsequent progress they may make:

> ...unless pupils are comfortable in the classroom, unless they have friends and are happy enough with the relationships in the class and unless they feel sufficiently at ease in the school they will not learn. In other words, unless their emotional well-being is considered progress will be severely hampered: children's feelings count.

Finally, I interviewed the headteacher of the school. This interview was specifically important as he is authorised to issue school exclusions. Additionally he has a considerable say in the formation of policies to which the staff and students are expected to comply with. Mr Barrington stated during the interview that the use of exclusion was a 'last resort' after many other attempts have been used to curb a student's behaviour. Cooper (2002) suggests that many headteacher's do not use exclusion in the way Mr Barrington states, as an 'ultimate sanction'. Which as Cooper (ibid) argues can lead to confusion and tension. Mr Barrington argued that exclusion was sometimes used as a severe sanction such as in cases of violence or extreme disruption. This implementation is in line with government guidance (Great Britain Department for Education 2009). It may be asked what is meant by the 'ultimate sanction'? Frederickson and Cline (2009) are of the view that other 'ultimate sanctions' are more appropriate. By contrast, Bracher (2003) argues that schools should be permitted to have and use exclusion if they wish to as the 'ultimate sanction.' Mr Barrington made an insightful comment noting that exclusion was not used in his school often and he preferred to use pastoral support plans and the unit as ways of managing challenging behaviour. Additionally the plans helped those with learning difficulties who may exhibit inappropriate behaviour as a result of their condition (Turner 2011). Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are defined by Blamires *et al.* (1999:3) 'the IEP communicates targets to be met and anticipated learning outcomes to all involved in its delivery.' Charlton and David (1989) suggest that students with specific learning difficulties may find curriculum access problematic as well as finding behaving within

the parameters of school rules problematic and therefore are at greater risk of exclusion. Mr Barrington echoed these sentiments by explaining that children with SEN are more likely to be excluded. However, he stated that the school tried to implement support for children at risk of exclusion.

The headteacher argued for some children this is an effective sanction, which 'shocks' them back and reforms them. However, he argued that for others exclusion is less effective in terms of being an effective sanction. Mr Barrington stated:

> Let's be clear from the beginning exclusion is a response to the 'end of the line' being reached. I would only use it after all other avenues have been explored and that without success. However, I won't tolerate disruption and those that do this see me or my Deputy. Our pastoral support plans and specific provision have been set up as ways of helping those with learning difficulties and as a way of managing those who are at risk of exclusion. ...For some children an exclusion works and it is right but for others it pushes them further away from a system they are already fighting... But as you know the whole school policy is subject to significant revision shortly...

Mr Barrington explained that exclusion could be controversial and some headteacher's were 'anti exclusion' whereas others actively supported it and would implement this. Searle (2001) suggests that there is a compelling argument that the education system has been established upon exclusion. Additionally, Kantabar and Rae (2010) note that support for disaffected students should be more prevalent in the education system rather than exclusion. They highlight that support which focuses upon the triggers of disengagement whilst taking into account the situatedness of the person within a culture and context. However, additional support costs money, time, resources and potentially the training of specialist staff, which as Nind *et al.* (2003) state are in short supply in schools. Wright *et al.* (2000:6) comment: '...reduced resources in schools for the support of children with behavioural difficulties...' As a result of this, Osler (2003) argues that some schools seek to permanently exclude a child. However, as Osler (ibid) notes, this does not solve the problem or detract the responsibility for educating these children, it just moves the 'problem' somewhere else. Rowley (2009) also argues that schools should avoid moving children to other schools by the use of exclusion. However, this argument appears to be based upon unsubstantiated foundations and does not consider the impact of exclusion. Perhaps a more significant point is made by Smith (1998) when he identifies that exclusion can cause detriment to children's emotional health. However, this still does not take into account the impact of the child being at school and disrupting the education of others and the emotional labour this creates for the staff (Skiba 2001). Dunham (1992:3) state: '...stress is concerned with both pressures and reactions and also with coping resources...' Travers and Cooper (2006:18) state: 'sources of teacher stress, e.g. disruptive pupils.' Lazarus and Folkman (1984) highlight the stress disruptive behaviour can cause to teaching staff and note that stress can cause teachers health problems. By contrast to Rae (ibid) McNamera and Moreton (2001) suggest that exclusion used proportionately and fairly is appropriate regardless of other circumstances. To synthesise these notions; what is meant by fairly or proportionately? One headteacher's idea of fair may be different to another (Carlile 2010).

Exclusion in Mr Barrington's view can also cause problems at home such as supervision issues of minors, which may inconvenience parents / primary care givers. These remarks are echoed by Cooper (2002) who suggests that exclusion can have a detrimental impact upon domestic life. Cooper (ibid) uses interviews which suggest the strain that has been placed upon families

that have had to look after their children during an exclusion. As Hallam and Rogers (2008) suggest, this can put potential barriers up between the school and home and cause difficulties in effective liaison. However, Knowles (2011) asks the perennial question: should exclusion be debated as a result of this? One child Mr Barrington told me a similar account to my own experiences, about was where he excluded a child for a week, for fighting and disruption. However, the single mother claimed she had no means of looking after her son. Therefore, she brought him back into school and went off to work. This evidently caused problems as the child was in school and the school had no way of contacting the parent. Mr Barrington explained in these situations exclusion needs to be considered carefully, reflecting upon the potential good it may do and weighing it up against the potential problems.

Additionally, Mr Barrington highlighted that exclusion was effective if parents supported the exclusion. If they did not, this could lead to the child being allowed to play at home instead of work. These sentiments concur with Clemson and Clemson (1990) who argue that exclusion is most effective when parents are supportive in their involvement of the process. Mr Barrington was of the opinion that in these cases exclusion was assessed and sometimes internal isolation could be more effective than one off site. Martin *et al.* (1999) suggests that if a student is excluded they may begin a downward spiral, which results in the individual getting into further trouble. By way of critique Martin *et al.* (ibid) make general remarks and do not suggest empirical evidence to ratify their emotive claims, their sentiments may be judged within the light of this. A further critique of my own objection may be to say as Thomas and Pring (2004:203) say: 'A lot depends on how one interprets the word 'evidence.'' The research indicated that Mr Barrington was of the view that sometimes students who are excluded either on a fixed term basis or permanently are more likely to become disengaged and be 'failed by the system.' Thus, exclusion in Mr Barrington's view has both potential pitfalls as well as positive aspects which need to be carefully synthesised before implementing.

A final point Mr Barrington made, which appears pertinent in the use of exclusion was that a decision taken to exclude temporarily (over five days) or permanently can be challenged by parents and the governors meet to discuss this (see Appendix 5).

Mr Barrington noted that the Pupil Disciplinary Committee, made up of three to five governors would meet and discuss with the parents and child the reasons for the exclusion and would either uphold them or re-instate them. If the parents disagreed with the decision they could ask for an independent appeal hearing. Kearney (2011) argues that this process allows for greater transparency and towards a system promoting inclusive education. This, however, raises questions about what is meant by inclusion, should all children be educated, regardless of need or behaviour in one place? (Warnock 2005). Moreover, Wearmouth *et al.* (2005: 3) state: 'Inclusion is a term which lacks adequate theorising or consensus about what it means in practice.' The Learning Trust (2004:6) offers these remarks:

> Sometimes "inclusion" is seen as something that works against, rather than with, the promotion of a positive learning environment. In other words, the inclusion of pupils in the mainstream who have challenging behaviour undermines the learning opportunities of others.

Therefore, does the appeals process actually promote inclusion or 'drag out' the inevitable?

Mr Barrington further explained that an appeals hearing was a 'long winded process' and if successful the student would be allowed back to school. This, he argued could be difficult and

needed to be sensitively managed. He noted that after an exclusion the child may not be able to settle back into the school and moving on and making a fresh start may be more beneficial to the student. However, Mr Barrington said that sometimes re-integration can work. Wright *et al.* (2005:15) notes from their research that: 'Many interviewees explained that they were ostracised when they attempted to reintegrate in schools.' This included being branded as a trouble maker, being ignored by some staff and students and given further punishments. Mr Barrington concluded by explaining that permanent exclusion was a carefully considered option that the school did not take lightly. From these sentiments exclusion appears to be a controversial area and requires sensitivity and informed decisions to be made. I would conclude by questioning the appeals procedure, whether this disempowers Mr Barrington or whether this is an essential human right and a promoter of inclusion? Mansell (2010) reports that Lewis Hamilton was wrongly accused of assault by mistaken identity and subsequently excluded from school. The appeals panel heard and overruled on a case of injustice. If this appeals panel was not in place Hamilton may have been wrongly excluded. Mansell (ibid) suggests that his human rights may have been infringed if this complaints procedure was not in place. However, on the other hand, does the panel have the right to overrule the head of the school? Dyke (2011:4) writes that the government plans to abolish independent complaints panels in an attempt to 'give the power back to the headteacher' and create a greater sense of justice. These are open ended matters which are not easily resolved.

In summary, I have found out through exploring and investigating educational practice that some students find school exclusion a difficult experience and have reacted in a number of ways, including feeling angry and upset as well as having a sense of injustice at the exclusion. It has been of importance to remember these sentiments when adjusting the exclusion policy. Some of the interviewees gave examples of why they were excluded. These included continual and / or severe acts of disruption, violent conduct or abusive language. From the interviews a key emerging theme was that some students were disengaged with school and others found the lessons 'boring' and subsequently lost interest and resorted to being disruptive. As a result of this the headteacher has commissioned senior staff to inspect lessons and use lead learners and visiting leading teachers to improve the quality of lessons, ensuring teaching is at least 'good' in all classes. This has additionally led to departmental changes and has helped to redefine class rules, the behaviour policy and has meant less exclusions being given. The rationale was working from the 'grass roots' upwards. If teaching was enhanced, boundaries understood, the behaviour code of conduct revised then learning would be much more meaningful and the use of exclusion reduced. Verhoeven (2012) suggests that the reasons for doing research are to benefit practice, which has been a significant part of this work. Moreover, this work has enabled me to critically evaluate the system of school exclusion, which has informed and developed practice.

A further point I noted was that the unit and special needs centre is used to support students with specific learning difficulties as well as provide a place of support for those who are on report or close to exclusion. This unit is monitored by senior staff and students who are significantly at risk of expulsion. Wilson (2005) writing about the use of a unit and solution – focused therapy for those at risk of exclusion explains that this process aims to support and help individuals work through problems by seeking to address their needs. It may be argued that the unit seeks to do this. From my research I found that many members of staff were willing to adopt a similar approach to that of Wilson's findings, based upon resolving matters and trying to find a way around potential or perceived problems. This is now something which

is to be written in the school policy, the use of solution- based practice, whereby individuals who are at risk of exclusion are helped to 'overcome' their difficulties.

I have adopted a critical understanding of the enquiry through using biographical research methods and have found out about school exclusion from the perspective of some staff and students. The information gathered is insightful, sophisticated, informing practical situations, which is both original and unique and contributes towards the body of knowledge in relation to what is currently known and understood about school exclusion. Arguably, this data has helped to understand the nature of exclusion, give an idea of emotional responses to it as well as to give an overview of one school's use of exclusion. Moreover, the features and characteristics of exclusion have been clearly manifest as responses have outlined a number of potential concerns with the use of exclusions and the use of internal isolation (the unit). The sentiments of the headteacher have shed light upon the potential dilemmas associated with exclusion, such as considering how beneficial exclusion is to managing inappropriate behaviour. This in the context of this project has enabled amendments to be made to the possible reasons for exclusion section within the school policy, which are to be further discussed within the staff training days, planned as a result of this research project.

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