

8 September 2017 • No. 5265 • £3.50

tes

Revealed: the academy secrets the DfE wants to hide from you

Five tips for a successful maternity-leave return

Education psychologist John Sweller on why we have got teaching wrong

The falling pay forcing college lecturers to quit



Behaviour special

- **Why rewards and punishments don't work in the classroom**
- **Exclusion rates rocket**
- **How one school is using boxing to knock out pupils' bad habits**



Investigation

Exclusions 'skyrocket' by as much as 300%

Academic and financial pressures blamed for huge rise in students being removed

DI BLOOM

A punishment that can damage a pupil's chances for life and leave a blot on a school's record, a permanent exclusion is supposed to be an absolute last resort.

But new figures obtained by *Tes* reveal that, over the last year, the numbers of pupils who are being subjected to this ultimate sanction have dramatically increased in some parts of the country.

In one local authority, permanent exclusions have risen by more than 300 per cent between 15-16 and 2016-17.

Three areas saw their permanent exclusions triple during the course of a year, numbers at least doubled in 12 authorities and a total of 25

local authorities saw permanent exclusions increase by at least 50 per cent.

Behaviour and exclusion experts attribute these rises to increased pressures on schools, both in academic and financial terms.

'Incredible' numbers

"For exclusions to be skyrocketing like that, it has to be biting somewhere," says behaviour expert Jarlath O'Brien.

The greatest proportional increase nationally was in Slough, where 22 pupils were excluded last year, compared with five

pupils the year before – an increase of 340 per cent. Elsewhere, Redcar and Cleveland and Newcastle both had increases of more than 200 per cent.

"It's incredible, isn't it?" says O'Brien (pictured, inset). "Some local authorities are doubling in more than one year. These are places that are demographically very different from each other."

"Schools have much fewer staff than they used to. If you have to lose £700,000 in a year, you lose an awful lot of support staff and attendance officers."

"So schools may feel that they have less capacity to handle issues. Instead, they're excluding pupils."

Freedom of information requests were sent to all 152 local authorities in England; a total of 118 responded with the relevant data.

The information shows there was an average 12 per cent rise in the numbers of pupils permanently excluded between September 2016 and 30 June 2017, compared with those excluded during the same period the previous academic year.

Like O'Brien, Colin Harris, a retired primary headteacher who has worked as a consultant at a pupil-referral unit, says that lack of funding has led schools to respond more harshly to pupil misbehaviour.

"The last two years have focused the lack of finance," he says. "When cuts are made, the people supporting mental-health needs, behavioural needs – they get cut back first."

"So what you've got is situations where children are not being supported in the way



The impact of poor scores

The Department for Education has said that it is going to change the methodology used to calculate Progress 8, after concerns that it has been triggering backdoor exclusions. Headteachers have claimed that a school's overall score could be distorted by poor performance from a handful of pupils, who could end up being unofficially excluded, because their results were bringing down their school's average. Stephen Tierney, chief executive of the Blessed

Edward Bamber Catholic MultiAcademy Trust in Blackpool, has said that the Progress 8 scores at his schools had dropped because of a few students "whose lives imploded" after experiencing extreme home events.

"Some schools may worry about accountability and try to lose [the most vulnerable students]," he told *Tes* earlier this year. (bit.ly/vunpupils)

A report, published by Education Datalab in January, suggested that this practice of backdoor exclusion – known as

"off-rolling" – was a significant problem.

It found a previously unidentified group of nearly 20,000 children left on mainstream secondaries rolls who went on to destinations where their outcomes were poor.

The DfE has said it will work with schools this autumn to determine the best approach to Progress 8 data and ensure that Ofsted, regional schools commissioners and local authorities are aware of the potential impact on individual pupils with extremely poor scores.

12

How boxing is giving some of the hardest-to-reach students a second chance

16

Politicians and unions criticise DfE secrecy over headteacher board decisions

20

One former teacher on her new role as an MP holding the government to account

24

The serious effects of a lack of school support for staff who fall victim to false allegations



GETTY

Outwood Grange in focus

The number of permanent exclusions in Redcar and Cleveland, in the North-East of England, rose from seven in 2015-16 to 22 in 2016-17 – an increase of 214 per cent. This is the second-highest increase in the country, behind Slough.

Simon Kennedy, North-East regional organiser for the NASUWT teaching union, attributes this partly to new academies – belonging to the Outwood Grange chain – in the area.

"This particular chain of academies tend to have a spike in exclusions in the first months, while the children learn to understand what the rules are," he says.

"But we're also seeing a rise in bad behaviour, hence there are more exclusions – more difficulties with the parents of children, as well. A school might think, if I've got a difficult problem, I can get rid of it by permanently excluding a child. Obviously, that passes the challenge on to another school."

Outwood Grange Academy Trust runs one academy in Redcar and Cleveland, and supported another last year, prior to taking it over formally on 1 October this year.

These two schools had one permanent exclusion between them in 2015-16, and nine in 2016-17. The nine pupils were excluded for a number of serious

assaults, including one which a pupil set fire to someone's hair, according to the trust.

A spokesperson for Outwood Grange says that it sponsors schools after they have been placed in special measures. "In our experience, these schools also have ineffective behaviour-management systems and policies resulting in a climate of chaos," she says.

"On the introduction of new systems, some students take longer to manage the change in expectations, drawing a line where none has existed before. But over time, and as students move through the academy, the practice becomes the norm and exclusions fall."

Sue Jeffrey, leader of Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, says: "We are always disappointed when a young person is excluded. Until two years ago, our schools, working in close partnership with each other and the local authority, achieved a zero permanent exclusion rate and that had been the case for several years."

"The borough's 10 schools and academies have a strong partnership with each other and the local authority, and we will continue to work together to try to avoid excluding any young person from school."

they were. That will lead to behavioural issues. And – most importantly – to less tolerance for maintaining children with behavioural issues in schools.”

And, Harris says, there has been an increased focus on academic achievement and results in the last two years.

Ofsted still dominates every headteacher's thinking day,” he says. “Even if you get an ‘outstanding’, you’ve so far to fall. The thought is that the majority of heads who I’ve talked to say that the Ofsted report is based on results on attendance.”

Of course, Ofsted looks at exclusions. But there's no doubt that they're looking at the overall data far more importantly. It appears that heads are not concerned about getting slapped on the wrist for not supporting a child. Children are very much more quickly excluded and out the door.”

Enough Council says that it will be looking at its 340 per cent rise. “The increased number of permanent exclusions in Slough is set in a context of rising school rolls,” a spokesperson adds.

Academy rates

In the northeastern borough of Redcar and Cleveland – where there were a total of 26 permanent exclusions in 2016-17, an increase of 214 per cent – other explanations have been suggested.

Simon Kennedy, North-East regional organiser for the NASUWT teachers' union, says that the increase can be attributed in part to changes in a few local schools.

In the first few years of academies opening, “they tend to have higher exclusion rates,” he says. “Their behaviour-management processes mean that a child can get a permanent exclusion quite quickly.”

Academy chain Outwood Grange ran one school in Redcar and Cleveland in 2016-17 and began supporting another, which it will take over formally this year. There were nine exclusions in 2016-17 at these two schools, compared with only one in 2015-16.

The local authority points out that, until a few years ago, schools in the borough had had “a zero permanent exclusion rate” (see p. 9).

Newcastle, meanwhile, had 22 permanent exclusions in 2015-16, rising to 68 in 2016-17: an increase of 209 per cent. John Hall, NASUWT branch secretary for Newcastle on Tyne, blames the conditions that schools have to work under.

The accountability agenda has kind of forced schools to permanently exclude pupils, so that they don't impact upon the rest of the students, and on [overall] exam results,” he says.

The impact of poor scores

The 25 local authorities with the greatest percentage increase in permanent exclusions between 2015-16 and 2016-17

Local authority	Number of permanent exclusions 2015-16	Number of permanent exclusions 2016-17	Percentage increase
Slough	5	22	340%
Redcar and Cleveland	7	22	214%
Newcastle	22	68	209%
Swindon	22	56	155%
Isle of Wight	6	14	133%
Bracknell Forest	3	7	133%
Doncaster	6	13	117%
Knowsley	8	17	113%
Central Bedfordshire	26	53	104%
Newham	26	53	104%
Stockton-on-Tees	17	34	100%
Cambridgeshire	6	12	100%
Halton	25	48	92%
West Berkshire	17	32	88%
Bournemouth	21	38	81%
Bexley	36	62	72%
Hull	31	53	71%
Northumberland	41	69	68%
Southend	8	13	63%
Bradford	29	47	62%
Dorset	19	30	58%
Stoke	39	61	56%
Sutton	21	32	52%
Reading	25	38	52%
Essex	104	156	50%

The 10 local authorities with the greatest number of exclusions in the academic year 2016-17

Local authority	Number of permanent exclusions 2015-16	Number of permanent exclusions 2016-17	Percentage increase
Lancashire	313	364	16%
Norfolk	252	279	11%
Birmingham	257	273	6%
Staffordshire	159	228	43%
Essex	104	156	50%
West Sussex	120	150	25%
Lincolnshire	172	150	-12%
Sheffield	167	148	-11%
Worcestershire	102	140	37%
Derbyshire	100	126	26%

Source: Responses to a Tes Freedom of Information request

O'Brien believes that the introduction of the Progress 8 accountability measure last year also contributed to the rise in exclusions.

“If your school's Progress 8 score is looking shaky, a few kids here or there can make quite a big difference,” he says. “Undoubtedly, that's happened on occasion.”

The Department for Education has pledged to change its methodology for calculating a school's Progress 8 scores, so that they can no longer be distorted by the performance of just a handful of pupils (see box, above).

But, says Harris, the tactical use of permanent exclusions to improve results raises questions about their fundamental purpose. “Who is exclusion for?” he says. “It's certainly not for the child.”

“It's set up purely in order to get the child out of the way, because of results or attendance. Often, there's no attempt to get to the bottom of what the child's problem is.”

The greatest number of permanent exclusions nationally was in Lancashire. There were 364 in 2016-17, up 16 per cent from the previous year.



'Shocked by the increase'

Anna Cain, headteacher of The Boxing Academy in East London, winner of the Tes award for alternative provision of the year:

"I'm shocked by the increase in permanent exclusions, but not surprised. Schools are under so much pressure about what their data looks like, what their outcomes will be. It's very obvious that the first casualties of that will be the children who don't fit.

"Exclusion is an incredibly damaging and negative process. Parents lose jobs over this

process, because it's so stressful. Families break up over it.

"Kids are invited into a governors' panel, where they hear the case against them. That's a very difficult process – very tough. People look at these children and, because they've been excluded and they're often quite large, they assume they don't care.

"And it can be up to three months before they get into another placement. That, in itself, is a massively damaging experience. They're going to

have to get back into the habit of getting up on time, going to school. They're going to be hard to motivate, because they have a negative view of themselves.

"We had a number of kids this year who got their five GCSEs, including maths and English, and they're on their way to college now. And we had a lot of tears from these quite large boys, saying, "Miss, school has saved my life."

"Don't get me wrong: their behaviour is often completely unacceptable. But there's usually a reason why. The problem is that

schools don't have the time or money to do that work.

"Teachers aren't trained properly to deal with really challenging behaviour.

"Exclusion is the most pointless exercise to me, in terms of outcomes for everyone: for what's best for all our children and all our schools.

"Most children who aren't going to cope well would be better if they were referred earlier to alternative provision. Schools can probably identify them half a term into Year 7."

Norfolk had 279 permanent exclusions: an increase of 11 per cent. Birmingham had 273 permanent exclusions: 6 per cent higher than in the previous year.

By contrast, the borough of St Helens had two permanent exclusions that same year. Darlington had only one.

A spokesperson for Birmingham City Council points out that it is the largest authority in the country. And a Lancashire County Council spokesperson says that her authority has more schools than any other.

Dan McCarthy, who is the NASUWT member for Norfolk, believes that the fact that his is a rural area has contributed to its high number of exclusions. "In Norfolk, we don't have many roads," he says. "You cannot do a managed move to the nearest school, because that school can be very hard to get to. You can't say you've got to go to go to another school if it's not on the bus route."

Thirty-four authorities either failed to respond to *Tes'* freedom of information request or responded with incomplete information.

A DfE spokesperson says: "Any decision to exclude should be lawful, reasonable and fair. While exclusion can be used as a sanction for schools to deal with poor behaviour, permanent exclusion should only be used as a last resort, in response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy.

"The law is clear that excluding pupils due to academic attainment is prohibited." ●

How one school is using boxing to teach self-discipline to hard-to-reach pupils: page 12



Tes Schools Awards

A fighting chance for 'unmanageable' students

Hackney's The Boxing Academy – winner of the Tes alternative provision school of the year – is teaching self-discipline alongside GCSEs

JOSEPH LEE



YOU MIGHT think that the last thing you'd want to do with kids at risk of exclusion for violent behaviour is to show them how to throw a punch properly.

But the real surprise of The Boxing Academy – the winner of the *Tes* Schools Award for alternative provision school of the year – is that many of its streetwise, tough students aren't keen to learn how to fight.

"Ninety per cent of the kids say they don't like boxing," says principal Anna Cain. "Most of them don't do any exercise. There's a lot of sitting on the sofa playing PlayStation."

That isn't necessarily out of laziness, Cain suggests. Many of them face confrontations with territorial postcode gangs if they stray out of their neighbourhood to use leisure facilities that middle-class families around them take for granted.

But if they're reluctant to get in the ring, how does boxing inspire them to re-engage in education?

The academy's results certainly seem to suggest that many of its students' lives take a new direction in this cramped building down a side street in Hackney, East London.

Their behaviour, which had been unmanageable in mainstream settings and even in PRUs, was described by Ofsted inspectors last year as "outstanding".

Every student at the academy continues education or training after they leave at 16 and their grades are above average for comparable schools nationally, with 15 per cent getting A* grades in the academy's strongest subject, PE.

"Boxing has a long history of being exceptionally effective with disaffected teenagers," Cain says. "But it's almost not about the boxing; it's about relationships."

It was a close relationship that brought Cain to the job of principal: she was working in a corporate career when her son was excluded from his school and referred to the academy's former premises in Tottenham, North London.

That experience means she knows the "shattering" toll that exclusions can take on families. Amid all the stress and extra meetings in school, she lost her job. The academy asked her to come in and take some ICT lessons, and the rest is history.

"It's a school first and foremost: there's a timetable, we have teachers, we do GCSEs," Cain says. Students take exams in English, maths, RE, citizenship, science and art, as well as a Health and Fitness V Cert, which replaced the PE GCSE after an unwelcome specification change. "It's all very ordinary, but the ratio of staff in this school is very different to mainstream."

There are five classes of eight students – mostly boys, with a handful of girls. They



The tale of the tape

- The Boxing Academy started out in a shed in 2007 as a small boxing gym attended by four excluded pupils. Since then, it has gone from strength to strength and now supports 40 students in Hackney.
- When students step through the door, they receive a fresh start, regardless of where they have come from or what they have been through before.
- Results suggest the approach works: 80 per cent of pupils achieved five GCSE passes in 2016 – well above the national average for alternative provision.
- The *Tes* Schools Awards judges said the academy "demonstrates how a brave approach to behaviour can pay off".

have five teachers and eight of what the academy calls "pod leaders". Dressed in black, wearing earpieces like bouncers, these are the competitive boxers turned educators that make The Boxing Academy unique.

They coach the daily boxing lesson, then follow their students into their other lessons as TAs, mentors and behaviour co-ordinators. Cain says that the person most responsible for the way they work is the head of boxing, Jermaine Williams.

Williams has a life story many of the students can relate to. An undocumented immigrant

from Jamaica who arrived in South London as a child, he fell in with the wrong crowd, one that committed robberies, carried knives, fought in the street and sold drugs.

A spell in Feltham Young Offenders' Institution, where another inmate tried to strangle him, was his wake-up call. On the outside, he resolved to change his life, volunteering and eventually joining a boxing gym nearby.

He describes the coach there as a figure like *The Karate Kid's* Mr Miyagi – small enough that Williams mistakenly thought he could beat him in the ring. The coach soaked up his punches before immobilising him with a single blow to the ribs: it was an unforgettable lesson in the power of patience and discipline.

"Without me even knowing, it was changing my whole perception of life. The people in the gym were like brothers and sisters, and the coach was like the dad, giving me structure," Williams says. "This was the first time I felt like I belonged somewhere."

A sense of belonging and patience are two of The Boxing Academy's tools. That patience even extends to the rare threat of violence.

With the boxing staff trained in de-escalation, dodging punches and even taking them, the academy can afford not to exclude students for assault. That ends up removing much of its power – they even let students settle arguments with sparring under controlled conditions.

"If you're struggling to access the curriculum and you kick off, you get sent home for five days. It's like a reward for these kids and



My personal statement about miserly admissions tutors

WE ARE in personal statement season again – that circuitous period in the year when many of our Year 13 students devote the best part of autumn and early winter to writing and then repeatedly rewriting their 47-line pitch for a place at university.

Why is it seemingly becoming an ever more tortuous and time-consuming process, not just for the students but for everyone else sucked into it – teachers, form tutors, parents? I blame many of those over-venerated university admissions tutors and their countless, well-publicised “Do and Don’t” decrees.

While much of that online advice is plainly useful, a lot of it comes across as merely the whining and grumping of tired and cynical people who have perhaps been doing the job for too long.

They are far too ready to condemn what they consider to be “hackneyed”, “ clichéd” or “insincere”, forgetting that personal statements are generally written by 17-year-olds for whom the activity is new each year. If an admissions tutor happens to have grown weary of certain adjectives, sentences and sentiments recurring each year then it is surely their problem, not the fault of the student.

They apparently have particular beefs, for example about the word “passion”, which they say is “over-used”. Well, not any more, given that most schools have faithfully kowtowed to those hallowed admissions tutors and banned their students from ever going near the word again. “But I *am* passionate about history,” said one of my tutees last year when I dutifully advised her to strike it out. She looked distinctly disillusioned when I explained why.

Similarly, words like “adore”, “fascinate” and “relish” are all apparently too over-blown. Why? Maybe the admissions tutors who say

this do not feel deep emotion any more, but surely an expression of youthful, unqualified enthusiasm is of a young person’s most endearing qualities? I wonder, how do some of these tutors respond to their partr saying, “I love you”? “Oh, not that again! Try something a little more believable and measured.”

Consider the tired cynicism of the admissions tutor who has written

“If I read about *Freakonomics* once more, I’ll scream

Has she or he

considered that I

book (and similar

is likely to be full

and inspiring for

17-year-olds? You

should a student

avoid mentioning

it simply because

a cantankerous

academic is bored with

such a reference?

We are advised that admissions tutors treat with derision any student who begins with a starter such as, “I’ve been interested in geology ever since I wandered along a beach with my parents at the age of 3 and found a fossil,” or who writes that their interest in medicine began from “watching episodes of *Casualty*”.

What if these statements are actually true, as they often will be? And the list of strictures inevitably grows each year, as more features of the personal statement naturally become – in the tutors’ eyes – too commonplace. In recent years, for instance, tutors I have advised against “attempts at humour” (as they miserably put it) “quirly openings”. Eventually there will be nowhere at all for the applicant to

Too many clichés? Too tired and hackneyed? At the very least, this certainly seems to be the case with too many admissions tutors. ■



Stephen Petty is head of humanities at Lord Williams’s School in Thame, Oxfordshire



BOXING CLEVER: (clockwise, from above): Boxing Academy principal Anna Cain; coach Henry with his students; a pupil is mentored by head of boxing, Jermaine Williams

they learn how to play that system. We don’t do that,” says Cain.

For Williams, working with the behaviour of these kids is more like the psychological battle in boxing than the physical struggle.

“You have to be very disciplined, that’s what boxing teaches you,” he says. “You have to be patient and clever. It’s like a game of chess where you try to outsmart your opponent. You have to be quicker, because they always try to get one over on you.”

Unable to make use of their usual disruptive strategies, the students knuckle down, accepting punishments such as 25 press-ups or being forced to do the washing up. Every detention also comes with a heart-to-heart talk.

Eventually, students say that this mix of discipline and compassion begins to change them. Ali Delidogan, 15, is one of them: excluded for fighting from his old school, he asked to come to The Boxing Academy instead of a PRU.

“The pod leaders are always with you, throughout the day. As soon as you make a mistake, they don’t just shout at you or give you a punishment – they’ll pick up on it. If you do get a punishment like push-ups, they’ll just be there, talking to you,” says.

“Since I’ve been here it’s made me reflect on what I can actually do, instead of wasting my time. I’m not perfect right now, but I’ve changed a lot since I’ve been here. I’m still working on it.” ■

@josephlee