Exclusion from school in Wales
The hidden cost

#CostOfExclusion
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Introduction

In 2018 Samaritans Cymru published a report on the link between socioeconomic disadvantage and suicidal behaviour and how we can find a way forward in Wales. The connection between disadvantage and suicide is well evidenced, the question is what can we do to tackle it. Part of the answer lies in raising awareness among the many agencies who work with those experiencing both socioeconomic disadvantage and emotional distress. We set out ten recommendations for Wales in our report, one of which concerned addressing the cost of exclusion from school. We recognised that exclusion from school is a significant issue which is linked to factors that increase the risk of suicide. Its impact on the life chances of young people can be far reaching. We suggested that exclusion and the reasons for it should be identified and mapped across Wales so that we can better understand the patterns and trends surrounding it. We said that schools should be encouraged to share best practice in minimising exclusion and increasing engagement.

We have previously raised concerns arising from one of the specific findings of the 2014 Thematic review of deaths of children and young people through probable suicide for Wales. It found that many of them had not been in education, employment or training (NEET) when they died and as such received little or no support from services. It also identified that many had specific educational needs or had restricted educational achievement.

We wanted to explore this issue further and to engage with a range of informed individuals across Wales. In early 2019, we held a seminar which was attended by representatives from schools, local government, the health service, third sector organisations, universities and Welsh Commissioners. This report reflects their discussions and offers some points for consideration for next steps which can be taken in response to the issues which are emerging. Suicide is a complex issue and the actions of many individuals and agencies are required to reduce it. We need to know more about the situation of children and young people who are not in education, its impact on them and what works to address it. We also need to act now on what we do know. We understand that experiences of childhood adversity, negative life events and the cumulative effects of stress are associated with feelings of entrapment and hopelessness. Loneliness and isolation and the lack of belonging to a group, reduce the positive sense of belongingness we all need to experience; this springs from being an accepted member of society. This can result in extreme emotional distress including suicidal thoughts. We can learn from each other about what works to reduce exclusion, but the first step is to recognise the importance and great gain for individuals and society at large of doing this, particularly in acknowledging its links to inequality. Our report is a contribution to this much needed debate. We hope it will stimulate further thinking, understanding and action.

Finally, wherever they are, pupils need a voice and need to discuss how they feel. Co-production with children and young people is an area of crucial importance. We hope our report highlights this. This report is a summary of our own work, the findings of the roundtable discussion and some points.

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1 (2017) Dying from inequality: Socioeconomic disadvantage & suicidal behaviour – Summary report, Samaritans Cymru
3 O’Connor, R (2017) Dying from Inequality: Socioeconomic disadvantage & suicidal behaviour – Summary report, Page 14, Samaritans Cymru
for consideration which we believe are needed to address the issue in Wales. The quotes used throughout this report have been lifted from the roundtable discussion.

“If you’re out of school, you can be out of your only source of support and community”
Exclusion from school means that a child has been removed from school, usually due to behavioural issues, and is not allowed to return for a set number of days. This is known as a 'fixed-term exclusion'. However, if a child is excluded permanently, their name will be removed from the school register and they will not be allowed to return to that school in the future. This is known as a 'permanent exclusion'.

In the Welsh Government guidance on ‘Exclusion from schools and pupil referral units’⁴, it states that a decision to exclude a learner should be taken only:

• in response to serious breaches of the school’s behaviour policy and
• if allowing the learner to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the learner or others in the school.

In 2016/17, there were 165 permanent exclusions from maintained schools and pupil referral units in Wales. In addition to this, there were 836 fixed term exclusions (over 5 days) and 16,044 fixed term exclusions (5 days or less)⁵.

These most recent figures show a 51% rise since 2015/16 in pupils permanently excluded from schools in Wales.⁶

**Reasons for permanent exclusion of pupils in Wales (2016/17)⁷**

- Persistent disruptive behaviour 21.3%
- Verbal abuse/threatening behaviour against an adult 21.7%
- Physical assault against a pupil 9.2%
- Physical assault against an adult 3.7%
- Verbal abuse/threatening behaviour against a pupil 16.7%
- Less common reasons 8.6%
- Other 18.8%

There are other types of exclusion or known ‘alternatives’ to exclusion, for which there is a lack of data, but we understand they are frequently and routinely used throughout schools in Wales -

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⁷ Statistical first release, 2016/17, Welsh Government
**Self-exclusion**

Some young people self exclude because the school environment is causing them distress. Bullying can be a leading cause for this kind of exclusion.

**Lunchtime exclusions**

Pupils who misbehave at lunchtime may be excluded just for the lunch period. Each lunchtime exclusion counts as half a day. Lunch time exclusions should never continue indefinitely.

**Voluntary exclusion**

Voluntary exclusion is where schools ask parents/carers to keep their child at home as a way of dealing with behaviour. This is not good practice and denies pupils their rights to an education and denies both parents and pupils the right to appeal against this form of exclusion. Local Authorities should consider appropriate measures where schools are found to be using voluntary exclusion.

**Unlawful exclusion**

Unlawful exclusions, more commonly referred to as informal or unofficial exclusions, are unlawful regardless of whether they are done with the agreement of parents or carers. They refer to:

- sending learners home for disciplinary reasons, but not following the procedures required for formal exclusion
- learners being sent home for either short periods of time, or for longer indefinite periods which can sometimes result in the learner not returning to school at all.

**Managed move**

If a school feels that it can no longer manage the behaviour of a particular learner, the school may arrange, normally through the local authority, for another school to take over the learner’s education. This should only be done with the full knowledge and cooperation of all parties involved, including the parents/carers and the Local Authority, and in circumstances where it is in the best interests of the learner concerned. Parents/carers should never be pressured into removing their child from school under threat of a permanent exclusion, nor should learners be deleted from the school roll to encourage them to find another school place.

**Deregistration**

Deregistration happens when a parent or carer of a child instructs the school to remove a child from the school register either to send to another school or to home educate the child.

**Elective home education**

Elective home education is when parents decide to provide education for their children at home instead of sending them to school.
Exclusion: The hidden facts

“School leaders are increasingly frustrated that they can predict who may be affected by exclusion through their characteristics alone. They’re on our radar and there’s nothing we can do”

Exclusion is far more than the act of removing a child from school. Exclusion from school is linked to a much wider set of recurring inequalities, circumstances and consequences.

- Exclusion from school can result in loneliness and social isolation. We know that this is connected to a lack of belongingness for children and young people. This is the human emotional need to be an accepted member of a group or community.\(^8\) Loneliness and isolation can have a serious impact on physical and mental health and are a risk factor for suicidal behaviour and suicide\(^9\); loneliness and isolation are the second most common concern expressed in contacts from males and the fourth from females on our helpline across the UK and ROI.

- Research shows that exclusion from school is more common among boys, secondary school pupils, and those living in socio-economically deprived circumstances. Poor general health and learning disability among children and poor parental mental health were also associated with exclusion. There were consistently high levels of psychological distress among those who had experienced exclusion at baseline and follow up\(^10\).

- Based on surveys during six inspections by the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales in 2017/18, 89% of children reported exclusion from school before they came into detention, 74% reported previous truancy, and 41% said they were 14 or younger when they last attended school.\(^11\)

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\(^8\) (2017) *Dying from Inequality: Summary Report*, Samaritans
\(^10\) Ford, TJ; Parker, C; Salim, J; et al, *The Relationship between Exclusion from School and Mental Health: A Secondary Analysis of The British Child and Adolescent Mental Health Surveys 2004 & 2007*, University of Exeter, 2017
A large UK study on exclusion from school found that exclusion was more common among children of lower socio-economic status, boys, and those with language difficulties, lower educational attainment or special educational needs. Family characteristics, such as poor parental mental health and engagement with education, also predicted exclusion. It also found that children who were subsequently excluded were more likely to have a clinically impairing mental health condition or a social communication problem, as well as involvement in bullying as a perpetrator or victim, and poor teacher-pupil relationships.12

In the 2014 Thematic review of deaths of children and young people through probable suicide for Wales, the narrative review found that many of them had not been in education, employment or training (NEET) when they died and as such received little or no support from services. It also identified that many had specific educational needs or had restricted educational achievement.13

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12 (2017) Ford, TJ; Paget, A; Parker, C; et al, Which children and young people are excluded from school? Findings from a large British birth cohort study, the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC), University of Exeter

13 John, A; Heatman, B; Humphreys, C; Price, L Thematic review of deaths of children and young people through probable suicide for Wales 2006-2012, Public Health Wales NHS Trust, 2014
Roundtable discussion

The causes of exclusion in Wales: Patterns, trends & frontline experience

"Excluding children from school can deny them their life chances. There are consequences for us all"

The striking and overarching theme of our roundtable discussions was that exclusion from school is a major inequality issue. Whether we look at the cause or causes at one end of the scale, or the consequences at the other, the links between inequality and exclusion were seen as significant.

The following themes were highlighted by participants as the most prominent causes or issues affecting exclusion in Wales.

**Poverty**

"Poverty is often at the heart of what is happening to children and young people. We need a coherent strategy around poverty which includes exclusion from school – now more than ever"

Research shows that exclusion is more common among children and young people who are experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage. Poverty can create a cycle of inequality for children and young people, one in which opportunities and chances for success are already reduced.

In 2018, Wales was the only UK nation to see a rise in child poverty. Research shows that more than 206,000 (29.3%) Welsh children were living in poverty in 2017-18.14

Our roundtable participants noted that of the children and young people they were in contact with, a high degree of those excluded from school were from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds. It was noted that poverty creates a set of disadvantages for children and young people which can accumulate across important life stages. It was felt that it is important to recognise that children and

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young people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged are already more likely to experience other predictors of exclusion such as poor mental health, behavioural problems and low educational attainment.

Increased integration, bridging the gap between home, community and school, was seen to be beneficial by our participants. Understanding a pupil’s background was described as being key to understanding their behaviour. Irregular attendance, arriving at school hungry, a lack of concentration or hostile behavior are just some of the signs that a pupil may be experiencing poverty and schools must be equipped to identify and manage this. This is linked to a perceived stigma surrounding poverty in education. It was also noted that parents in areas of deprivation can feel talked down to and patronised because they feel unable to advocate for their child due to a lack of literacy or communication skills.

**Poor Mental Health and Behavioural issues**

“Escalating and difficult behaviour linked to distress in pupils can cause them to be expelled from their only community”

There is a recognised, but perhaps not widely known link between poor mental health and behavioural issues and exclusion from school.\(^\text{15}\)

When pupils exhibit behavioural issues, more often than not, participants said this was a signal of deep psychological distress. They said that despite widespread emotional distress and/or poor mental health, pupils are often unable to access the right level of intervention needed and instead, they can find themselves being escalated through various services, including Child and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHS). Pupils can encounter long waiting lists for services which they don’t necessarily need. These instances are often described as symptomatic of the ‘medicalisation of childhood’; poor mental health or behavioural issues which do not require medical intervention. It was also stated that despite investment, there aren’t enough counsellors in schools to meet the demand for support. This current system invariably means that many pupils fall through the cracks.

Self-harm and suicidal feelings were cited as an escalating problem. The myriad of distressing behaviour which pupils can exhibit was described as causing a culture of fear, with staff not knowing how to appropriately manage the situation. It was strongly stated that we cannot overestimate how difficult it can be for teaching staff to deal with this kind of distress without any training or guidance in the subject.

A critical feature of this discussion surrounding mental health in the school setting, was the need to focus on prevention rather than firefighting. Participants supported the recommendations of the Children, Young People and Education Assembly Committee’s report, ‘Mind over Matter’\(^\text{16}\). They highlighted the need to adopt a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing which encourages schools to view mental health and wellbeing as fundamental to its values, mission and

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\(^\text{15}\) (2017) Ford, TJ; Paget, A; Parker, C; et al, *Which children and young people are excluded from school? Findings from a large British birth cohort study, the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC)*, University of Exeter

\(^\text{16}\) (2018) *Mind over matter*, National Assembly for Wales, Children, Young People and Education Committee
culture. Participants stated this needs to include the pupil voice and resources need to be targeted at prevention, through the curriculum and teacher training.

**Additional Learning Needs (ALN)**

“Success isn’t something you can measure with some arbitrary line in the sand. Success is moving a child forward”

Pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) experience high rates of exclusion compared to their peers and are significantly overrepresented in rates in Wales. Approximately one in five learners in maintained schools in Wales have ALN.\(^{17}\)

Participants noted that there can be a significant lack of understanding and awareness of those with ALN in schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) which can lead to consequences including exclusion because staff cannot adequately deal with pupils exhibiting challenging or difficult behaviour. Participants discussed how the behaviour of those with ALN should always be viewed as the result of the support they receive – or critically, do not receive. This discussion also raised notable concern for children and young people who are ‘on the cusp’ – some are yet to be diagnosed or classified with ALN and therefore have an unclear future with a set of consequences which can include exclusion.

Those participants who work within the ALN sector stated that Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) feature most frequently in those with behavioural issues. It was felt that these disorders account for the main cohort of pupils who tend to go undiagnosed. However, this discussion also noted that funding tends to go into assessment and diagnosis rather than support, particularly at a community level. Teaching staff noted that some classrooms have 50% of learners with ALN and consequently, looking to diagnosis as the priority is not the right approach. Diagnosis in itself, without leading to effective support, was felt to be of limited value to the child or young person.

A more prominent feature of this discussion was the likely lack of opportunities for those with ALN. Organisations stated that there needed to be positive support for inclusive policies and actions to reduce exclusions.

**Young Carers**

“Young carers can be presented with a choice between caring and their education. All too often they can’t have both”

Young carers can experience varying degrees of educational disadvantage because of their circumstances. Young carers are more likely than the national average not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) between 16 and 19.\(^{18}\) Many of the issues which young carers

\(^{17}\) (2016) Dauncey, M. Additional Learning Needs (ALN) in Wales: Research briefing, National Assembly for Wales Research Service

\(^{18}\) (2013) Hidden from View: The experiences of young carers in England, The Children’s Society,
experience are aligned with coexisting factors for exclusion including educational difficulties, bullying and low educational attainment. Participants noted that time constraints can often result in absence, tiredness, lateness and difficulty joining extra-curricular activities or peer networks.

It was noted that self-exclusion is a huge issue for young carers. They are not eligible for carers allowance if they are under 16, in full-time education or if they are over 16, not studying for 21 hours a week or more. These financial constraints can impact on their chances at school.

**Home-life, parenting and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)**

“We need a new and innovative focus on supporting parents in the first instance to help with their child’s behaviour at home, instead of relying on teachers to fill the role of parents”

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can have a strong impact on a pupil’s experience of school.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic experiences that occur before the age of 18 and are remembered throughout adulthood. These experiences range from suffering verbal, mental, sexual and physical abuse, to being raised in a household where domestic violence, alcohol abuse, parental separation or drug abuse is present.

Evidence shows children who experience stressful and poor-quality childhoods are more likely to develop health-harming and anti-social behaviours, more likely to perform poorly in school, more likely to be involved in crime and ultimately less likely to be a productive member of society. As outlined in this report, these are all risk factors for exclusion and as such, ACEs should be treated as a cross-cutting topic.

In the discussion there was wide agreement that there is a lack of an adequate support system for parents and carers. Participants discussed how parents and carers experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, including poor housing and financial problems, alcohol and substance misuse and long-term mental or physical health problems can struggle to adequately support their child. This lack of support and stability can have a major impact on children and young people and can affect their entire experience in school and increase their risk of exclusion. One prominent example of this is a parent struggling to get their child to school on a regular basis which can result in non-attendance and exclusion. In some cases, this can result in parents or carers removing their child from school to avoid the fines for non-attendance. This is the cycle which reinforces and exacerbates disadvantage from generation to generation.

Participants raised concern that some young people are removed from the school register for reasons other than there being a good home-schooling option for them. For example, if the school is finding the pupil challenging or difficult to deal with. It was felt that there is an apparent lack of information in this area, including what the situation is like for young people who are not on the


school register. We currently have no central data on how many children and young people are being home schooled. In terms of being removed from a community, these hidden and potentially excluded pupils can be high-risk in relation to adverse effects in the same way as they be would to exclusion by other means.

It was noted that in terms of additional support for pupils, the onus tends to be on teachers to provide it, but we need to be able to upskill parents, so they can better support their children. Whilst there are many cases where this is not possible, the support and framework for this was still highlighted as a major opportunity. Parents and carers need to know where to turn for support and how they can do it.

**Funding, limited resources and training needs**

“Time and time again, most resources and provision are focused on firefighting, instead of prevention and early intervention. If we could change where our buck was spent in the beginning, then we could make savings long term”

A preventative approach with an investment in teacher training on mental health, behavioural problems and ALN could reduce the pressure on schools.

Many participants noted that schools are working increasingly hard to give adequate support to their pupils, but funding cuts have made a big impact on what schools are able to do and the resources they provide.

In terms of the best allocation for funding, preventative measures were heralded as the best solution to this.

It was noted that all too often, the lack of support and services for children and young people, and the lack of support and training for teachers, means that there is no apparent alternative solution other than exclusion. Prevention therefore, was highlighted as a way of addressing this cycle.

Accountability was highlighted as a major problem. Schools are expected to achieve in terms of attainment and educational reform and are therefore put under enormous pressure. A move towards a suite of accountability was thought by participants to be desirable in order to promote wellbeing in children and young people as well as outcomes for the school.
Minimising exclusion in Wales – Points for consideration

“Schools are a gateway to later life. The more resource you invest in schools, the better chance and opportunities our future generations will have”

The theme underpinning all our points for consideration is the need to shift our focus from firefighting to prevention across schools in Wales. Investment in being able to identify and help those at risk of experiencing exclusion is urgently needed. Investment in prevention and early intervention can reduce economic, social and most importantly, human costs.

1) We must recognise and promote understanding of the direct link between exclusion, inequality and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Exclusion from school is a major inequality issue. As this report demonstrates, children and young people are more likely to experience exclusion from school if they are experiencing social inequalities such as poverty, disability and/or exposure to ACEs. The adverse effects of exclusion are often the very same factors which predicate exclusion in the first place, along with loneliness and social isolation, risk of homelessness and declining mental health. Exclusion is often therefore part of a self-perpetuating cycle in which inequality is entrenched.

Welsh Government, educational leaders and staff, the health and social care sector and wider support agencies should recognise this link between exclusion and inequality. In order to develop ways of tackling and reducing exclusion, we must understand the prevalence of exclusion, the complexities of its causes, the methods through which it is carried out and its impact on individual young people and the wider policy aspirations for Wales.

School exclusion through whatever means is majorly linked to disadvantage. Addressing it also represents an opportunity to intervene in the cycle of ACEs. Avoiding exclusion should be understood as part of a wider ambition to intervene in cycles of disadvantage at a formative stage in a young person’s life. Intervention to reduce ACEs can have a major effect on health, poverty and exclusion in Wales and must be developed and promoted through public and professional awareness. Schools, local health services, local authorities, public services and the wider public sector must invest and work to reduce ACEs, their impact on individuals and, most significantly, understand the benefits of intervening in the cycle of ACEs.
2) **We must find out more about the experiences of children and young people who have been excluded, with a strong focus on pupil voice**

We need to gain a much deeper understanding of the experiences of exclusion of children and young people, including hearing the pupil voice focusing on their own experience, its impact on them and what could have been done differently.

A mapping exercise and study which could include qualitative and quantitative data, along with frontline input from teaching staff and pupils would be an important piece of work which could work to gain attention for this issue and help us understand the Wales context with clearer insight. If we had a better understanding of the children and young people who are being excluded, we would be in a better position to embed policy changes which could work to help those at risk of exclusion in the first instance.

3) **We must recognise that the current level of exclusion in Wales is not inevitable and share best practice to move us forward**

Our roundtable discussion highlighted that there is considerable variation between schools in the numbers of pupils being excluded and examples of where this occurs much less than in other schools. It is crucial that learning and best practice is shared between schools and teaching staff in order to understand what works to reduce exclusions. This should also include understanding and sharing the wider benefits of minimising exclusion, for the pupil and the school community itself.

During our engagement on the issue, we have been alerted to many examples of good practice and initiatives used to minimise exclusion. The practical knowledge and expertise is in our grasp but schools and educational settings need to find out what works through an established means of networking or regular communication.

4) **Welsh Government should explore mechanisms to ensure children and young people between the ages of 16 and 18 years are supported in education or training, which includes work-based training.**

In the 2014 Thematic review of deaths of children and young people through probable suicide for Wales, the narrative review found that many of them had not been in education, employment or training (NEET) when they died and received little or no support from services. The latest child death review is due to be released this year and we expect a similar outcome.

One of the recommendations within the review was a call to Welsh Government to explore mechanisms to ensure children and young people between the ages of 16 and 18 years are supported in education or training, which includes work-based training. As a result of legislation introduced in England in 2013, the law now requires that young people continue in education, employment or training until the age of 18. We believe this should be explored in Wales. A move towards this kind of legislation could reduce the adverse effects of loneliness, social isolation and lack of belongingness which young people who are out of education can experience, all of which contribute to increased suicide risk.

5) **We should work to minimise school practices and initiatives which exclude or shame children and young people living in poverty**
Children and young people living in poverty experience a major disadvantage in their learning experience. One of the less known disadvantages arises from the various practices and initiatives which routinely take place in schools across Wales and the UK that can leave children and young people feeling embarrassed and isolated due to their lack of inclusivity.

- Dress-up days, including ‘Christmas Jumper’ day
- School trips
- National awareness or festival days, particularly ‘World Book Day’
- School social events

A 2019 initiative from the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) released data that showed a ‘poignant’ spike in the number of disadvantaged pupils who miss school on Christmas Jumper Day due to financial constraints.

Whilst these practices are not intended to be exclusive, they can leave pupils feeling inferior and unable to participate or attend school on that given day in order to minimise feelings of shame. If we consider that poor attendance, a lack of engagement in education and loneliness and social isolation, are risk factors for exclusion, it is crucial we recognise and intervene in this cycle of stigma and inequality.

The ASCL project demonstrated that once a trend had been identified, schools could take action to address it. Inclusive school trips, awareness days and social events should be prioritised in order to treat all children and young people equally. We would encourage schools in Wales to link in with further information on this topic through the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) - www.ascl.org.uk

6) Schools must be equipped to adequately support young carers

Young carers are a vulnerable and disadvantaged group specifically mentioned in Estyn’s School Inspection Guidance (Estyn, 2016).

In order for schools to better support young carers and address exclusion rates, we would recommend that education professionals and teaching staff engage with the Young Carers in Schools programme, developed by Carers Trust Wales. This programme aims to make it as easy as possible for schools to support young carers and includes a ‘Step by Step’ guide, practical tools including templates, proformas and exemplars accompanying each step and additional resources offering a growing library of online materials.

Schools in Wales can get involved by visiting professionals.carers.org and searching for ‘Wales’

7) The Welsh Government should set out a Wales Poverty Strategy

As outlined in this report, children and young people experiencing poverty are more likely to be excluded from school and this is a major area of inequality.

Our previous work and report on socioeconomic disadvantage and suicidal behaviour highlights the ways in which growing up or living in poverty can have devastating consequences for individuals and communities. Poverty in Wales affects education, health, social mobility, child development and life expectancy. Most significantly, poverty can increase the risk of suicide.
Within this programme of work, we have called for a centralised strategy for poverty which promotes cross-governmental and cross sectoral involvement. We continue to believe this is imperative for such a major public health issue, which interacts with a complex range of co-existing factors including educational disadvantage and exclusion. We need a strategy which mitigates the impact of poverty on individuals and communities and sits alongside economic strategies.

In terms of school exclusion specifically, a strategy of this kind could work to implement a preventative approach to reducing high rates amongst those pupils who are most deprived who continue to account for a high percentage of the cohort.

8) We must invest in professional learning and teacher training

There is a major training gap in mental health and associated behavioural issues for teachers in Wales.

Existing teaching staff across all schools in Wales should be provided with basic mental health awareness to increase confidence in teaching the subject and dealing with pupils who are experiencing emotional distress. We should also be equipping new teaching staff with the confidence and skills they need by embedding mental health awareness in Initial Teacher Training (ITT). Recognising poor mental health and behavioural issues, and the causes and reasons behind them, could help reduce exclusion rates across Wales.

As we have already highlighted in previous policy calls, this improvement to teacher training or professional learning could be addressed during the phased roll-out of the new curriculum. Whilst there is increasing pressure on education staff in Wales, teacher training in these subjects is a preventative measure which could ease the overall pressure which staff are facing. This proposed investment in training is widely welcomed by education staff we engage with.

9) Mental health education should be statutory in the new curriculum

We must embed a public health approach to poor mental health and adversity experienced by children and young people by placing a primary focus on prevention rather than cure alone. Investment in prevention and early intervention can reduce human, social and economic costs.

Since the Donaldson review in 2015, we have continued to call for statutory mental health education in schools. Emotional health programmes in schools should be viewed as a form of promotion, prevention and early intervention which could reduce pressure on CAMHS, reduce specific mental health problems, increase academic achievement and reduce exclusion. We believe that mental health education should be awarded the same statutory status as Sex and Relationship Education (SRE).

The issue of reducing exclusion is rooted in the need for preventative measures. Mental health education could enable children and young people better to understand their emotions and emotional distress and develop coping strategies. Crucially, it can enable them to know when they need to ask for help. We must provide pupils with the tools they need better to manage their own mental health where possible.
Our thanks to all participants involved with our round table discussion and engagement on this subject. This report is based on these discussions; however, the points for consideration are from Samaritans Cymru.

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board
Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)
Cardiff Council
Carers Trust Wales
Carmarthenshire Carers
Children's Commissioner for Wales
Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services (CWVYS)
Education through Regional Working (ERW)
Equality and Human Rights Commission
Faith in Families
Llamau
National Assembly for Wales
National Union of Head Teachers Cymru
National Union of Students (NUS) Wales
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent
Portmead Primary School
Psychologists for Social Change - South Wales
Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH)
SNAP Cymru
Swansea University
Sylfaen Cymunedol Limited
The Prince's Trust Cymru
Vale of Glamorgan Council
Wrexham, Conwy & Denbighshire (WCD) Young Carers
Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)