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WHO IS LOSING LEARNING?

FINDING SOLUTIONS TO THE
SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT CRISIS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Eleanor Harris, Cristín O'Brien,
Kiran Gill, Loic Menzies,
Efua Poku-Amanfo,
Kirsten Rooney and
Jenny Graham**

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IPPR
4th floor,
8 Storey's Gate
London
SW1P 3AY

E: info@ippr.org
www.ippr.org
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Eleanor Harris is head of campaigns at The Difference.

Cristín O'Brien is a senior policy advisor at The Difference.

Kiran Gill is a co-founder and CEO at The Difference and an associate fellow at IPPR.

Loic Menzies is an associate fellow at IPPR.

Efua Poku-Amanfo is a research fellow at IPPR.

Kirsten Rooney is research, impact and influence officer at The Difference.

Jenny Graham is director of research, impact and influence at The Difference.

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Elroy
Aidouni-Cahill



Juliette
Cammaerts



Patrick Cozier



Ellie Costello



Leora Cruddas



Pepe Di' Iasio



Professor
Carlene Firmin



Jane Fletcher



Dr Peter Fonagy



Bishop Rose
Hudson-Wilkin



Florence Kroll



Kiran Mahil



Sir Dan Moynihan



Tom Rees



Gerry Robinson



Liz Robinson



Rachel Sylvester



Jonny Uttley



Dave Whitaker

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SECTOR CONSULTATION

The report is based on rigorous engagement with the education and children services sector. This includes five meetings with the Who is Losing Learning? Solutions Council, eight workshops with over 100 professionals working in schools, local authorities, and the voluntary and community sector, as well as engagement with young people with lived experience of lost learning. It has also drawn on the policy and practice expertise of the coalition members.

The costings work underpinning recommendation 4 was undertaken by Alma Economics and a full breakdown of the analysis is available upon request.

GLOSSARY

Alternative Provision	Education that does not take place at a mainstream or special school. This includes pupil referral units, alternative provision academies, as well as independent and non-registered schools.
Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST)	An Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST) is a workforce model which builds capacity and skills in alternative provision schools by co-locating specialists on the school site.
Children in need (CIN)	Children who have been assessed by a social worker under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and have been found to need help and protection.
Child protection plans (CPP)	A plan drawn up by social care services under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 to protect a child who they feel is suffering or is likely to suffer from significant harm.
Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS)	An NHS provision for young people with emotional, behavioural and mental health needs.
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	The person responsible for safeguarding and child protection in schools.
Education, health and care plan (EHCP)	A plan drawn up by the local authority for a child with special educational needs under section 37 of the Children and Families Act 2014 that outlines the provision needed to meet their special educational needs.
Elective Home Education	When a child is not on the roll of a school and is educated at home. Some parents make the free choice to home educate but others do so because they feel their child's needs are not being met.
Ethnicity	A group that shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, language, history, traditions, and sometimes a common genetic heritage.
Free school meals (FSM)	When a child does not have to pay for a lunchtime meal at school because they are considered disadvantaged. Eligibility includes families in receipt of certain benefits, asylum support or sometimes when they have no recourse to public funds.
Internal exclusion	When a school removes a child from their typical learning environment into a different designated space within the school. The spaces may be referred to as isolation or behaviour units.
Internal truancy	When a child attends school but is unsupervised and does not attend lessons.
Looked after child (LAC)	A child who is formally under the care of the local authority (also known as a 'child in care') under section 20 or section 31 of the Children Act 1989.

Managed moves	A permanent move of a child from one school to another. This should only take place when it is in the best interest of the child and on a voluntary basis.
Mainstream school	All schools that are not a special or alternative provision school.
National Funding Formula (NFF)	How the Department for Education allocates money for all state-funded mainstream schools. The formula takes a variety of factors into account, such as the number of pupils a school has and its location.
Off rolling	The practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without using a permanent exclusion, when the removal is primarily in the best interests of the school, rather than the best interests of the pupil. This includes pressuring a parent to remove their child from the school roll.
Off-site Direction	A power in section 29A of the Education Act 2002 that allows maintained schools to direct a child off-site for their education for the purpose of improving their behaviour. Whilst the legislation does not apply to academies, they can arrange off-site provision for such purposes under their general powers.
Pupil Premium (PP)	Funding provided by the government to schools for children who have been eligible for free school meals in the past 6 years and children previously looked after by a local authority.
Progress 8	An accountability measure for secondary schools. It calculates scores for each child using their Key Stage 2 attainment data and then their attainment across 8 subjects at GCSE. A positive score shows progress.
Permanent exclusion	Permanent removal of a student from a school due to serious or repeated breaches of behavior policy, or to protect the welfare of that student or others.
Persistent absence	When a child misses 10 per cent of the school year or more.
Pupil referral unit (PRU)	A type of alternative provision, maintained by the local authority.
Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENco)	The qualified teacher in a school responsible for the day to day operation of the special educational needs policy.
Special educational needs and disabilities (SEN):	A legal term referring to a child with a learning difficulty or disability which calls for education provision that is additional to, or different from provision made generally available for other children of the same age.
School roll	The admission register of a school containing the details of all pupils in the school.
Special Educational Needs (SEN) support	Support provided by mainstream schools under section 66 of the Children and Families act to use their “best endeavours” to meet school-identified special educational needs.
Suspension	A sanction where a child is sent home for a period of time, up to a maximum of 45 days in a school year.

SUMMARY

A crisis of lost learning is sweeping across schools in England. This report is a follow-up to our report *Who is losing learning? The case for reducing exclusions across mainstream schools*.¹ Our first report outlined the scale of lost learning and how it disproportionately impacts children who already face barriers to opportunity: those living in poverty, with identified special educational needs, known to children's social care, and children experiencing structural racism, such as those from with Black Caribbean or Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller heritage.

Children cannot learn if they are not in school and not engaged. This means attainment cannot be raised further, employment outcomes cannot be improved, nor can the country's ambitious growth targets be met if a significant and growing proportion of children are unable to access a quality education. Reducing lost learning is, therefore, central to improving school standards and raising attainment.

An alarming number of children are missing out on the social and educational benefits of school. Lost learning occurs when a child is not at school, engaged in the classroom, participating in their education, or forced to move out of their local community setting. Suspensions and permanent exclusions have grown by a third in a single year; elective home education has increased by over 20 per cent; and absence levels are double pre-pandemic levels. New analysis has also found that for every child that is permanently excluded, 10 more invisibly move out of their school setting. This lost learning perpetuates cycles of disadvantage and stifles economic growth, casting a long shadow over the lives of children, families and communities.

To turn the tide of lost learning, the education system must evolve. Too often, the question of how best to improve behaviour, attendance, and support special educational needs have been seen as separate and unrelated challenges. For schools, this has often manifested in a costly siloed approach focussed on specialist support for children who reach a certain legal threshold - such as those who need education, health, and care plans, or child protection plans. This has led to a narrow definition of inclusion, with schools often seeing it as a separate objective, something that happens 'over there' perhaps by the SENCo, a teaching assistant, a safeguarding lead, or by special and alternative provision schools.

But the challenges of attendance, exclusion and the current special educational needs crisis are deeply related. They are symptoms of an education system where accountability incentives are misaligned, resources are locked behind thresholds, key expertise on inclusion and working with families is missing, and school data systems aren't set up to measure what matters most: whether the country's children are safe and well. We need to define inclusion in the broadest possible sense, so that all staff can support the learning, wellbeing and safety needs of all children, so that they belong, achieve and thrive.

Improving schools so they can meet a broader range of predictable needs could be transformative for a generation of children. Imagine a school where every child, regardless of their background, ethnicity or learning differences, feels a profound

¹ See: <https://www.the-difference.com/who-is-losing-learning>

sense of belonging. This is a school where inclusion isn't simply a policy, it is at the heart of the school's ecosystem.

New independent modelling conducted by Alma Economics demonstrates that early intervention can work. If the Department for Education invested £850 million in whole school inclusion, half a million children could receive quicker, more cost effective and dignified support over the next 5 years. This investment would pay for itself by 2030, by reducing the need for 35,000 EHCPs thanks to needs being met earlier.

While lost learning is a symptom of dysfunction, it also provides a benchmark against which future progress in education can be measured. This report sets out 10 recommendations for national government, local authorities, trusts and schools which, if delivered, would see a measurable improvement in inclusion, meaning fewer children would be losing out on learning.

The report sets out four principles of effective whole school inclusion.

1. **Inclusion is built from the universal up.**
2. **Inclusion is a culture that is led from the top.**
3. **Inclusion is community collaboration.**
4. **Inclusion is measurable.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our report provides 10 recommendations to deliver whole school inclusion.

1. **The sector needs a shared definition of measurable school inclusion.** The Department for Education, local government, trusts and schools should adopt this report's definition of whole school inclusion – “all staff supporting the learning, wellbeing and safety needs of all children, so that they belong, achieve and thrive” – together with our four principles for success.
2. **Schools' cohorts should reflect their local community.** The Department for Education, local authorities and school trusts should take an active role in identifying and improving non-representative schools.
3. **School accountability should support all children.** The Department for Education should reform headline measures by introducing multi-year averages, and revisit which subjects are included in Progress 8 scores. Additional measures reflecting children's longer-term outcomes and schools' context should also be developed.
4. **The vast majority of children's needs should be met through a combination of timely universal and targeted support, rather than being locked behind legislative thresholds.** The Department for Education should provide £850 million of additional funding for whole school inclusion over the next five years.
5. **Every school needs leaders with inclusion expertise to set the culture.** Trusts, local authorities and the Department for Education should support this in their professional development offers.
6. **The most underserved schools should be able to recruit and retain the best teachers.** The Department for Education should further tilt funding towards underserved schools and encourage spending on incentives for teacher recruitment and retention.
7. **Working with families and local communities should be seen as a domain of professional practice in schools.** The Department for Education should make sure this is reflected in its suite of professional

qualifications, and trusts and local authorities should prioritise professional development in this area.

- 8. Government must address the fragmentation of services for children and families, beginning with the development of a shared outcomes framework and the establishment of a governance strategy to monitor progress.** As a first step, the government should publish a plan to radically improve access to children’s mental health and speech and language support.
- 9. Every school should use data on student experience and lost learning across the continuum to develop a strategic response to all children’s needs.** Ofsted should increase its focus on the strategic use of student experience data and lost learning data in school improvement.
- 10. All pupil movements should be equally visible and accountable.** The Department for Education should introduce legislation that provides oversight of pupil movements off site and off roll.

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