

The independent effects of permanent exclusion from school on the offending careers of young people

David Berridge, Isabelle Brodie, John Pitts, David Porteous and Roger Tarling

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Executive summary

- This study aimed to establish whether, and to what extent, permanent exclusion from school had an independent effect upon the offending careers of 343 young people in six local authorities in England.
- The study analysed school and offending data held on official records as well as information from a number of voluntary sector 'exclusion' projects. A subset of 28 young people, together with a small group of six parents, were the subjects of in-depth interviews. The study was retrospective: in most cases the exclusionary episodes we analysed occurred over four years ago. This allowed an analysis of offending careers before, during and after their permanent exclusion from school.
- It is important to recognise that this was a retrospective study. The 343 young people had been excluded across a ten – year period, between 1988 and 1998, with the majority of exclusions occurring between 1994 and 1996. Consequently, it was not possible to take full account of the impact of the many initiatives relating to exclusion and truancy introduced following the Social Exclusion Unit's report on truancy and school exclusion in 1998.
- On the basis of 263 cases in which complete records were held by the police it appeared that:
 - 85 had no recorded offences prior to, or following, permanent exclusion from school
 - 117 had no recorded offences prior to permanent exclusion but had a record of offending following permanent exclusion
 - 47 had recorded offences before and after permanent exclusion
 - 14 had recorded offences before permanent exclusion but not after.
- Of these 263 young people, 13 began their criminal career in the same month they were permanently excluded.
- Because the study only considered the relationship between permanent exclusion and offending, it is not possible to identify the impact of permanent exclusion upon the 85 young people who offended neither before nor after exclusion.
- Evidence from interviews suggests that, for the 14 who apparently desisted from offending following permanent exclusion, exclusion represented a solution to problems encountered in school and associated with their offending.
- In 13 of the 164 cases where young people had committed offences after exclusion, offending commenced or intensified at the same time as the permanent exclusion. In the remaining cases, there was a time-lag between permanent exclusion and offending which makes any straightforward causal relationship between the two events difficult to establish. This time-lag was one year or more for half of the sample.

- However, qualitative interviews suggested that permanent exclusion tended to trigger a complex chain of events which served to loosen the young person's affiliation and commitment to a conventional way of life. This important transition was characterised by: the loss of time structures; a re-casting of identity; a changed relationship with parents and siblings; the erosion of contact with pro-social peers and adults; closer association with similarly situated young people and heightened vulnerability to police surveillance.
- Those whose offending commenced prior to exclusion tended to be older (almost 76 per cent aged 14+) at the point of permanent exclusion, while those whose offending commenced after exclusion tended to be younger (60 per cent aged –14).
- As other research has shown, the young people in our study suffered from pervasive social and educational disadvantage. This included child sexual abuse, frequent shifts between homes, parental violence, bereavement and homelessness. eighteen per cent of the youngsters in our survey had been 'looked after' by local authorities, 47 per cent were entitled to free school meals, a key indicator of social deprivation, 45 per cent were known to Social Services and 20 per cent to Youth Justice (now replaced by Youth Offending Teams). Eight of the 28 interviewees had spent time in Young Offender Institutions or adult prisons.
- Forty-four per cent of the young people we studied had been assessed for Special Educational Needs and 19 per cent had a Statement of Special Educational Needs. Fifty-eight per cent had experienced attendance problems at school.
- Youngsters who experienced problems in primary school found the transition to secondary school particularly difficult. The more impersonal structure of the secondary school, the need to develop relationships with a far broader range of teachers and fellow students and new rules, norms and heightened behavioural and academic expectations overwhelmed some interviewees.
- There was some evidence that black African-Caribbean students were greeted with greater apprehension by some teachers in secondary schools and subject to greater pressure to conform. In some cases the ethnicity of the student was found to be directly related to the decision to exclude.
- Interviewees noted that when their truancy was discovered, this tended to be by parents rather than teachers or the Education Welfare Service. Interviewees truanted as a result of conflict with teachers, 'boredom', or to be with friends. Truancy sometimes accompanied the onset of offending. Once apprehended, truancy appeared to be a significant factor in decisions made by police and the courts.
- There was no evidence that schools permanently excluded students for trivial or 'one-off' infractions. In the main, schools showed considerable tenacity, compassion and ingenuity in the face of some very testing behaviour.
- Permanent exclusion usually represented the culmination of a lengthy process of warnings and fixed-term exclusions. Nonetheless, few exclusions appeared to have been 'planned' in the sense that arrangements for the post-exclusion care and control of the young person had been made.
- Eight of the 28 interviewees who transferred to new schools in the wake of permanent exclusion were subsequently excluded again. This was due in part to the fact that their re-entry was seldom planned. In their second schools, neither the moment of exclusion nor the young person's subsequent educational career were planned.

- Students tended to be permanently excluded for defiance towards teachers and/or violence towards students and/or teachers. More girls than boys were excluded for defiance.
- Some apparently useful 'in-school' interventions, like small-group or one-to-one tuition were stopped as a result of lack of resources.
- While many students initially welcomed exclusion as a kind of resolution to the problems they faced at school, most came to regret it. They spoke of boredom, depression and a sense of disorientation.
- The time-lag between permanent exclusion and the provision of alternative education, a new school or home tuition could be as long as a year. In several cases alternative provision was organised by parents. It was often in this period that post-exclusion criminal careers commenced or pre-existing criminal careers escalated.
- For some excluded students, the project they attended in the wake of exclusion marked a positive turning point in their lives. They valued the individual attention and the fact that staff would respond to their social and emotional needs and their desire to be treated as an adult. For some of the most disadvantaged youngsters, the 'care' offered by such projects appeared central to their well-being.
- At the point of interview, seven of the 28 interviewees were working. However, they tended to have short-term, poorly paid, secondary sector jobs with few prospects. Five were attending FE college but only one was pursuing a college course which was likely to result in primary sector work. Twelve were unemployed. In these circumstances these young people continued to be vulnerable to involvement in crime.
- It was evident that large gaps in their educational careers, evidence of offending, residential care and custody, militated against these young people in the labour market. Even the two young people who had achieved higher-level qualifications felt that they were having to work harder in order to compensate for their past.

1.

Introduction

School exclusion and youth crime are issues with a high public profile at the present time. Both problems appear to involve similar groups of young people, and both are known to be costly to individuals, their families and the community at large. Increasingly, discussion of exclusion and youth crime has taken place as part of a wider debate about what has been termed 'social exclusion' (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998).

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of the relationship between school exclusion and the offending careers of young people. The existence of a link between problems of schooling, in their various manifestations, and later offending has long been recognised in criminological research (West, 1982; Farrington, 1996; Graham, 1988; Graham and Bowling, 1995; Rutter, Giller and Hagell, 1998).

Given that exclusion should be reserved for only the most serious acts of misbehaviour, it is unsurprising that there is an overlap between those who are excluded from school and those who become involved in offending. However, relatively little is known about the way in which this relationship unfolds, and the mechanisms through which it operates.

Both exclusion and offending involve complex social processes, and their incidence is affected by a wide range of factors. Any attempt to understand the interaction between exclusion and offending is, therefore, likely to be a complicated exercise. This research aimed to achieve this through an analysis of the social, educational and offending histories of 343 excluded young people involved in six voluntary sector educational programmes in England and Wales. Their exclusions had taken place between 1988 and 1998, with the majority occurring between 1994 and 1996. Although this appears a long time span, it should be remembered that some young people experienced more than one permanent exclusion. The retrospective approach was also necessary in order to trace the development of offending careers. Following a detailed investigation of the case files, more in-depth interviews were held with 28 young people and a smaller number of parents. The study therefore combines a quantitative analysis of the educational and offending careers of the overall sample with a number of first-hand accounts from some of the individuals involved.

This methodology was intended first of all to establish a profile of a group of excluded young people which included details of their offending histories. These data were then used to establish the sequence of events in the young person's life, in regard to family circumstances, educational experiences and offending. By developing an understanding of the timing of these various events, the research sought to develop understanding of the relationship between exclusion and offending. Existing evidence regarding both exclusion and offending suggested that the associated social processes were critical to an appreciation of this relationship. The qualitative interview data provided the opportunity to probe perceptions of the reasons for the way in which educational and offending 'careers' developed.

It is important to recognise, however, that the way in which both exclusion and offending are experienced are affected by the wider social context in which they occur. Even the statutory definition of exclusion has, for example, undergone a series of changes over the past two decades. Equally, the policy context relating to troublesome young people has changed considerably during the period of this research. The findings from this study need to be considered in the light of new approaches in both policy and practice.

This report begins by reviewing the relevant literature with regard to school exclusion and offending. Inevitably, only a portion of the extensive body of research relevant to each of these issues can be discussed, and only the evidence most pertinent to this project is examined. Chapter 2 describes the methodology employed in the study, issues arising and the composition of the sample of young people on whom the research is focused. Chapters 3–5 contain the findings and are organised as follows: chapter 3 describes the background and context of exclusion; chapter 4, the immediate reasons for exclusion and its aftermath; and chapter 5 the links between exclusion and offending. Chapter 6 summarises the main conclusions of the study.

Defining exclusion

Although children have always been expelled or suspended from school, it is only since 'exclusion' entered the statute book in the mid-1980s that the attention of researchers, professionals and policy-makers has focused on the issue as an important indicator of educational and social problems.

The term 'exclusion' was first introduced in the Education (No 2) Act 1986, which made provision for three types of exclusion: permanent, fixed-term and indefinite. Dissatisfaction with the use being made of indefinite exclusion (see, for example, OFSTED, 1993) led to the abolition of this category in the Education Act 1993, which also introduced a time limit for fixed-term exclusion of 15 days in any one term. The Education Act 1997 and subsequently the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 have extended the period of fixed-term exclusion to 45 days across the school year. In 1999, revised guidance on practice and procedures relating to school exclusion was issued (Department for Education and Employment, 1999).

In addition to the formal categories of fixed-term and permanent exclusion, frequent reference has also been made to the issue of 'informal' or 'unofficial' exclusion (Stirling, 1992; Department for Education and Employment, 1994; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; Brodie, 1999). This refers to cases where schools discourage students from returning to a school, or encourage parents to remove their children. While official guidance emphasises that this is unacceptable practice, there is evidence that unofficial exclusions continue to take place, though the scale of the problem is difficult, if not impossible, to determine. While schools' motives for excluding students in this way may be benign, it is clear that such manoeuvres afford young people and their families little protection and can have damaging long-term consequences (Brodie, 1999).

Extending the definition of exclusion is clearly awkward in terms of measuring the scale and nature of the problem. However, it is valuable in highlighting the fact that students experience exclusion other than through official procedures, and that 'exclusion' does not only refer to a decision which takes place at a single point in time, but is the outcome of a sometimes lengthy process. It is also helpful in conceptualising other ways in which children are prevented from participating in school – for example through truancy or membership of a marginalised social group (see, for example, Booth, 1996).

The scale of the problem

Concern has largely focused on the increase in the number of permanent exclusions taking place and what this indicates about the schools. Official annual records of the number of permanent exclusions in England and Wales first appeared in the early 1990s. In 1993, the National Exclusions Reporting System (NERS) showed an increase in exclusions from 2, 910 in 1990–91 to 3, 833 in 1991–92 (Department for Education and Employment, 1993). However, it seems probable that these statistics represent an underestimate of permanent exclusions for these years, due to lack of adequate data and under-reporting from schools. Since then statistics have become more reliable, as the collection of this data now takes place through the Annual Schools Census.

The statistics on permanent exclusion suggest that there has been an inexorable rise in the numbers taking place, at least until recently. In 1993–94 research indicated that the number of permanent exclusions stood at 11,000 (Department for Education and Employment, 1995). In 1995–96 the number had risen again to 12,500 and in 1996–97 to 12,700 (Department for Education and Employment, 1999). Statistics for 1997–98, however, show a slight reversal in the upward trend. During this year there were 12,300 permanent exclusions from primary, secondary and special schools, a decrease of three per cent (DfEE, 1999b).

In 1998–99 there was a further reduction to 10,404. Closer scrutiny of the statistics, however, reveals that this reduction is rather less marked in respect to primary school pupils. It should also be pointed out that, the increase in permanent exclusions notwithstanding, the number of pupils affected represented only a tiny proportion of the school population. Thus in 1996–97, for example, when exclusions reached their peak, fewer than two in every 1,000 students were permanently excluded. This does not adequately represent the impact of exclusions on either the young person or the school, but does draw attention to the fact that exclusion must be considered within the context of behavioural problems more generally.

However, when assessing exclusion statistics, it is important to retain a sense of exclusion as a phenomenon which predates the 1990s. Smaller, regional studies in the 1970s and 1980s highlight many of the concerns which continue to feature in debates about exclusion – for example, regarding disciplinary processes within schools and also the groups at greatest risk (see Grunsell, 1980; Galloway *et al.* 1982). These researchers also argue that the heightened regulation and formalisation of exclusion as a process tends to lead to an increase in the number of exclusions being reported, and it seems credible that similar processes have been at work at a national level over recent years. This does not mean, however, that an increase in exclusions has not taken place, merely that caution should be exercised in the interpretation of the increase. Nor does it detract from the fact that during the late 1980s and 1990s school exclusion has assumed a new social and political significance.

Changes in education policies in the 1980s have often been viewed as the key to understanding the greater use of exclusion as a sanction. These included heightened competition between schools, through the local management of schools (LMS) and measures such as national assessment tests and formula funding. It has been argued that, when schools are competing to attract students, there is little incentive to contain and manage difficult and disruptive students who are unlikely to enhance a school's image. It has also been suggested that tensions between education legislation and child welfare policies, such as the Children Act 1989 did little to encourage agencies to work together effectively to support children and families experiencing difficulties (Jones and Bilton, 1994; Sinclair, Garnett and Grimshaw, 1994).

Under the Labour government, elected in 1997, the emphasis of policy has changed, with discussion of exclusion from school taking place in the context of a wider debate on 'social exclusion'. Key to this debate is the view that educational disaffection, as manifested by exclusion and truancy, underpins many other social problems. A wide range of initiatives has been introduced in a concerted attempt to address the problem, including preventative work in the early years, literacy programmes and the development of policy in regard to groups known to be at educational risk, such as children looked after by local authorities. Reducing the number of permanent exclusions has become a target for local authorities and new measures are being introduced to ensure better data collection and thus improved monitoring of the issue (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; Department for Education and Employment, 1999a).

Young people who are excluded

Exclusions are concentrated at secondary school level, and specifically at Key Stages 3 and 4 (ages 14–16). More primary school exclusions have also taken place. That said, the proportion of students permanently excluded from primary school remains comparatively small.

Exclusion is essentially a male phenomenon. Boys outnumber girls at a rate of some four-to-one (Department for Education and Employment, 1999b). There is a lack of research evidence about the schooling experiences of girls who are excluded (Hayden, 1997). Research has consistently shown that exclusion rates vary between both schools and local authorities (Galloway *et al.*, 1982; Imich, 1994; Department for Education and Employment, 1995; OFSTED, 1996). OFSTED (1996) found some association between exclusion rates and the proportion of students receiving free school meals. However, as we note below, the relationship between levels of exclusion and a school's intake remains a contentious one.

Official statistics (Department for Education and Employment, 1999b) and research studies have consistently shown that African-Caribbean males are disproportionately excluded. Data collected during OFSTED inspections in 1993–94 showed that African-Caribbean students were excluded at almost six times the rate of white students (OFSTED, 1996; see also Gillborn and Gipps, 1996). Interestingly, there is evidence from regional studies undertaken during the 1980s which show similar patterns. In some cases the ethnicity of the student has been found to be directly related to the decision to exclude (Bourne, Bridges and Searle, 1994; Sewell, 1997) but the interaction between black students and their teachers is also thought to be important. More specifically, it has been argued that black boys are more likely to be perceived as aggressive, and some aspects of their cultural style misinterpreted as threatening (Gillborn, 1990). OFSTED (1996) also found that, in contrast to other groups of students at risk of exclusion, black boys were less socially disadvantaged, and they were less likely to have literacy problems.

While exclusions are concentrated at secondary school level, it seems that most of those involved have long-standing difficulties with education. They are also more likely than other students to have special educational needs, usually related to emotional and behavioural difficulties. In 1997–98, 18 per cent of all excluded students had statements of special educational need. This compares to 2.5 per cent in the school population as a whole (Department for Education and Employment, 1999b).

However, it is worth noting that while 18 per cent of permanently excluded students had statements, 82 per cent did not. Much more needs to be known about whether these students were in the process of being assessed at the point of exclusion, what these assessments covered and the extent to which schools had been able to support the young people concerned. There is a perception among professionals that schools may use exclusion in relation to a child's assessment, either to hasten external assessment or to signal the lack of sufficient resources to support the young person (Kinder *et al.*, 1997; see also Galloway *et al.*, 1994). Parsons (1994), in an in-depth, qualitative study of eleven permanently excluded primary school students, found that some assessments were out of date, in others discussions had taken place between the headteacher and educational psychologist but assessments had not been initiated, while in yet others assessment had begun but had not been completed. The issue of SEN assessment also needs to be considered in relation to the mobility of excluded students. This may occur through repeated exclusion or through the family circumstances of some groups, for example children who are looked after by local authorities may be particularly disadvantaged in regard to SEN assessment, as assessments are begun but not completed or information is lost along the way (Hayden, 1997; Brodie, 1999).

Social disadvantage

The feature which researchers have found to predominate in the backgrounds of children excluded from school is, however, extreme social and educational disadvantage. It is well known that the social backgrounds of students have a significant though not determining effect on student performance, and school factors – such as higher per student spending, smaller class sizes and a high quality of teaching – can intervene to make a difference (OFSTED, 1996; Sparkes, 1999). The importance of social disadvantage in influencing the likelihood that a young person is excluded or becomes involved in offending also highlights the way in which risk factors interact with the wider social and economic contexts. Social changes such as the effects of changing family structures, unemployment and poverty are therefore important elements in any understanding of anti-social behaviour.

Other experiences such as abuse are also likely to have a negative effect on a young person's behaviour and attainment (see, for example, Farmer and Pollock, 1998). To this extent the preponderance of excluded students with disrupted and stressful family backgrounds is not surprising. Hayden (1997), in relation to primary school children, found extensive evidence of child protection concerns, family disruption and contact with a range of external agencies including social services, the police and educational welfare. OFSTED (1996) comments that the backgrounds of excluded students often present a 'grim catalogue of misery', which includes parental illness and bereavement, poverty – often related to unemployment, racism, physical or sexual abuse and strained family relationships.

Following from this, it is not surprising that children looked after by local authorities should be disproportionately represented amongst those excluded from school. Young people looked after are known to have particularly disadvantaged backgrounds, often involving poverty, abuse and disrupted family life (Bebbington and Miles, 1989; Department of Health, 1998). A study of children living in residential and foster care (SSI/OFSTED, 1995) found that 25 per cent of those at Key Stages 3 and 4 were excluded or were not attending school for other reasons. It would be mistaken to suggest that being looked after is in itself a cause of exclusion; research suggests that many children enter the care system with already troubled educational careers. For example, Sinclair and Gibbs (1998) found that 40 per cent of young people in their sample had been excluded or had truanted prior to entering residential care. However, while there are examples of good practice regarding the educational support of children looked after (see, for example, Morgan, 1999; Firth, 1996), it would also seem that being looked after does little to promote the education of this group (Berridge and Brodie, 1998; Department of Health, 1998; Borland *et al.*, 1998). Aspects of the care experience, such as placement change, and certain types of care placement can also serve to hasten exclusion (Brodie, 2000).

Exclusion and the school

At the level of the school, the decision to exclude typically results from disruptive or difficult behaviour in the classroom, and is most likely to involve young people who have been socially and educationally disadvantaged. While there is evidence that more young people experience psychosocial problems than in the past (Rutter and Smith, 1995), this should not be taken as equating with an epidemic of uncontrollable behaviour in schools. Although media reports of exclusion often give rise to this impression, official enquiries such as that carried out by Lord Elton in the late 1980s (Department for Education and Science and the Welsh Office 1989) and subsequent research evidence do not bear out such a view.

At the same time, the impact of disruption within the classroom should not be underestimated, and schools often demonstrate remarkable resilience to the persistently difficult behaviour of a minority of students. OFSTED (1996) found that for secondary school students, the most common reasons for exclusion were verbal abuse to staff, violence to other students, the persistent breaking of school rules, disruptive behaviour and criminal offences, usually involving theft or substance abuse. Exclusion can, therefore, result directly from offending, though the extent to which the police are involved or schools use exclusion as a means to avoid police involvement is unknown. Hayden's (1997) findings regarding primary school exclusions were similar, but she comments that exclusion due to physical aggression seemed more common for this younger group. The preponderance of this type of behaviour is significant in relation to the gender differences in exclusion rates, as studies of classroom behaviour have shown that boys are more likely to be associated with overtly disruptive behaviour in the classroom (Wheldall and Merrett, 1988).

The reasons given for exclusion must also be viewed in the context of a pattern of behaviour which may include low attendance, volatility and periodic aggression, strained relationships with adults, and alcohol, drug and substance abuse (OFSTED, 1996). This pattern may begin at an early age – many of the children in Hayden's sample had experienced problems in infancy and at nursery school (Hayden, *op cit.*). Such behaviour has also been identified as a good predictor of later delinquency, for example, West (1982) found a rating of 'troublesomeness' by teachers and classmates of children aged 8–10 to be a good indicator of later offending (West, 1982). Low intelligence as measured by IQ has also been identified as significant by criminologists (West, *op cit.*; Farrington, 1996).

There is a danger, however, that a focus on the difficult behaviour presented by young people who are excluded obscures a recognition of learning and social needs. It has already been noted that a high proportion of excluded students have been assessed as having special educational needs, and that these are often related to emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is widely recognised that emotional and behavioural difficulties are inherently difficult to define, ranging from behaviour that is extremely withdrawn to that which is overtly disruptive (Department for Education and Employment, 1994a). While this problem appears almost inevitable when seeking to provide administrative categories for difficult behaviour, evidence regarding the family backgrounds of excluded students indicates that the link between stressful life events and emotional disturbance should not be overlooked.

Exclusion as a social process

Although the seriousness of the behaviour which many permanently excluded students present should not be underestimated, it is clear that there are differences in the way in which schools respond to such behaviour. Teachers and other professionals have a significant role in defining the behaviour that is unacceptable within the classroom and in deciding how this should be dealt with. Considerable attention, therefore, has been given to the nature of the school as an institution and the effects that this may have on student behaviour. Organisational features, the nature of the school curriculum and the composition of the student body have all been considered pertinent (Graham, 1988).

The view that the qualities of the school are important in terms of combating exclusion has become increasingly popular as policymakers and researchers have sought to identify those features of school organisation and practice which make for lower exclusion rates. Preventing exclusion has thus become associated with the more general drive to improve the standards of educational achievement. For example, Osler (1997) emphasises the need for a whole-school approach to behaviour, which involves students,

teachers, parents and carers in setting behaviour standards. School discipline policies, systems of pastoral care, work with parents, and, where appropriate, the modification of the curriculum have also been suggested as important factors in reducing the numbers of exclusion which take place (see also OFSTED, 1996; Munn and Lloyd, 1997). The standard of teaching in the classroom – for example, the organisation and planning of lessons, and the provision of material appropriate to different levels of ability – is also likely to be significant in creating an environment which is sensitive to the needs of different students. Anti-racist teaching, through both the curriculum and the ethos of the school more generally, is also crucial in view of the vulnerability of some ethnic groups to exclusion (Osler, *op cit.*). Students who are considered 'disaffected' frequently report a perception of the curriculum as irrelevant. Interestingly, most young people who are excluded report enjoyment of some classes and subjects, suggesting that different teaching styles are significant (see, for example, Kinder, Wakefield and Wilkin, 1997). The recent guidance on exclusion seeks to address this difficulty by emphasising the ways in which the curriculum can be modified for students experiencing particular difficulties (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a).

While organisational features are important, it is also evident that exclusion is a process in which individuals actively engage. The classroom is a complex social setting in which formal and informal rules operate, and in which individuals can act strategically to achieve certain goals. Young people have a sophisticated stock of knowledge about behaviour and the way in which this is likely to be perceived within the school environment (Marsh, Rosser and Harre, 1978; Woods, 1980). Relationships also develop across time, and students will thus acquire a particular identity. Students perceived to be 'deviant' can have this identity either affirmed or, alternatively, recast positively, through the interactions in which they engage. The peers with whom they socialise, the behaviour of older siblings, and the relationship between school and parents can influence this (Bird *et al.*, 1981). If children are already in contact with various welfare agencies, the contribution that other professionals make may also be crucial, as responsibility for the young person's difficulties is negotiated and allocated. For some students, the lack of a coherent identity within the school – deviant or not – may be equally problematic. Those who have changed school frequently, or had long periods outside the school environment, may lack the social skills through which to negotiate with staff, and their risk of sanctions such as exclusion may consequently be increased (Brodie, 1999, regarding children looked after by local authorities).

Research with young people certainly highlights important differences in the ways in which exclusion, or the likelihood of exclusion, is perceived. For some young people, exclusion is seen as part of a broader experience of victimisation or 'labelling' within school. Others may actively seek exclusion and work strategically towards this, while yet others are deeply unhappy at school and, while aware of the disapproval their behaviour elicits, do not feel able to change this (see, for example, Hayden, 1997; Pomroy, 1999). However, the young person's attitude to exclusion may well be related to past, as well as present, experience of education and it is therefore important that it is considered in relation to the student's schooling career as well as the nature of any one institution.

Exclusion and offending

There is nothing new in suggesting that educational problems, whether in terms of academic performance, attendance or behaviour, and offending are in some way related. Indeed, each could be seen as an element in a much broader pattern of antisocial and troublesome behaviour.

However, there is some evidence to suggest that the association is rather stronger than this. Certainly there is an overlap in the populations of young people who come to the attention of both the educational and criminal

justice systems. A survey by the Audit Commission suggested that 42 per cent of offenders of school age who are sentenced in the youth court have been excluded from school (Audit Commission, 1996). We should note, however, that prior to 1998, truancy and school exclusion were key factors in police decisions to 'caution' a child or young person or to refer their case to the Crown Prosecution Service for prosecution. As a result, a higher proportion of truanting or excluded young offenders found their way into court than their non-truanting or excluded counterparts (Graham, 1988). Studies of prisoners show that a high proportion have had disrupted and difficult educational careers, and that exclusion has frequently played a part in this (Devlin, 1996). However, here again, we must acknowledge that 'exclusion from school' may have as serious an impact upon police and judicial decision-making about a young person as the seriousness of their offences (Graham, 1988).

The problem with this data is that those who attract official sanction represent, if not the tip of an iceberg, at least only one dimension of the problem. As Rutter, Giller and Hagell (1998) comment, an understanding of the origins of delinquency require consideration of antisocial behaviour that is outside the realm of the law as well as within it (p.4). With some degree of inevitability, much of our knowledge relates to those young people whose misdemeanours have become institutionalised through either the educational or criminal justice systems. The processes through which sanctions are applied may also disadvantage some social groups.

Graham and Bowling's (1995) study of young people aged between 14 and 25 found a strong relationship between both temporary and permanent exclusion and offending. Eleven per cent of males in the sample had been excluded on a fixed-term basis and three-quarters of these had offended. Of those females who had been excluded on a fixed-term basis – four per cent of the sample – nearly half were offenders. Though numbers were very small, this relationship was even stronger in regard to young people permanently excluded from school.

Hayden and Martin's (1998) findings support this, and also offer some insight into the experiences of young people whose antisocial behaviour may not have resulted in police attention. The researchers questioned 171 adolescents living in a deprived inner-city area. Of this group, 26 (one in seven) reported either a fixed-term or permanent exclusion. All of those excluded said they had been involved in at least one of the nuisance behaviours or crimes listed, which ranged from graffiti to assault. This group was particularly strongly associated with physical assault and property crimes. They were also more likely to have been involved in using or selling drugs. More young people who had been permanently excluded committed these criminal or nuisance behaviours than those excluded on a fixed-term basis.

A later study (Martin *et al.*, 1999) examined the educational and criminal careers of 44 persistent offenders. To qualify as a persistent offender the young person had to have been convicted and sentenced by a court on three or more separate occasions. All but two of the sample were male. As expected with a sample of persistent offenders, many had begun committing offences at an early age. In all, 37 had been convicted before their 14th birthday. The sample also encountered problems at school, 30 had received fixed-term exclusions at some point and 24 (55 per cent) had been permanently excluded. From data subsequently made available to the research team, it emerged that the majority, 17 of the 24, had begun their criminal careers before being permanently excluded (Martin *et al.*, 1999). Seven, on the other hand, were permanently excluded before they committed their first offence.

Exclusion and offending careers

As this discussion has already highlighted, exclusion is a complex phenomenon which is not easy to define. The period preceding the exclusion is typically as important, if not more important, than the decision to exclude. In some cases, 'exclusion', in the sense of the student's gradual detachment from the school will begin many months or even years before permanent exclusion takes place. This may be linked to prolonged periods of absence or fixed-term exclusion.

The offending career is also a process which develops across time. It is well-known that a young person's experience of, and involvement in, offending shifts alongside other aspects of the life-course. Patterns of offending change as the individual grows older: Graham and Bowling (1995) found that the rate of self-reported offending amongst females declines substantially after the mid-teens, while for males the rate increases with age up to 18 and remains at the same level into the mid-20s. Offences may become more or less serious as the career progresses – thus the same survey showed that, for males, participation in some types of offending actually increases with age. Tarling (1993) emphasises the need to differentiate between different dimensions of the criminal career, when it starts and when it stops. Furthermore, a distinction must be drawn between participation in crime – that is the proportion of the population that has committed an offence – and the number and rate at which offences are committed. These distinctions are also important in relation to exclusion. For example, evidence from one local authority showed that 58 per cent of those children aged 11 or more who were permanently excluded offended either in the year before or the year after exclusion. This group committed 50 per cent *more* offences in the year after the exclusion had taken place (Audit Commission, *op cit.*). While this indicates an association between exclusion and offending, it is unclear whether the permanent exclusion was the key factor in generating this increase.

A plausible suggestion is that exclusion acts as a mechanism through which a young person has increased opportunity to begin or to increase offending. Indeed, the irony of school exclusion is the fact that it effectively causes vulnerable individuals to spend greater amounts of time within the same families and communities which are frequently considered to be the source of many of their problems. Concern has regularly been expressed at the poor educational prospects for students excluded from school (Department for Education and Employment, 1995; Commission for Racial Equality, 1997; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998). Under 40 per cent of permanently excluded primary and secondary school students return to mainstream education, and while local authorities have a duty to provide alternative education this can amount to as little as five hours a week (Parsons, 1996). A study for the Commission for Racial Equality (1997) found that 46 per cent of excluded students in three LEAs were 'continuing' cases – in other words the exclusions extended into the next year. The time which young people spend out of school can therefore be considerable. Inevitably, the need to provide day-time care for a child will also place families and carers under stress, and may require a parent to give up employment. In some cases entry to the care system may be precipitated (Cohen *et al.*, 1994; Parsons *et al.*, 1994).

If this is the case, it is necessary to take account of other students who spend varying periods out of school as a result of authorised and unauthorised absence. Truancy is known to be a widespread phenomenon, though it is not easy to measure (O'Keefe, 1993). In 1996–97, some 15 per cent of students in primary and secondary schools took at least one half day of unauthorised absence (Department for Education and Employment, 1999). Graham and Bowling (*op cit.*) found that the odds of offending of those who truanted were more than three times those who had not truanted. Interestingly, this survey also indicated that offending and truancy began at about the same time – the average age at which males first truanted from school was 14, while their offending started on average at 13.5. For females, both offending and truancy started at

13.5. However, as with exclusion, it is unclear whether truancy leads to offending or vice versa. The Audit Commission (1996) nevertheless ventured the view that reducing the numbers of students who are not at school for reasons of truancy or exclusion could significantly reduce the numbers of offenders in a local area (p.70).

Alternative education may be provided through Pupil Referral Units or through home tuition. Practice in PRUs is known to vary considerably, with some being criticised for the limited curriculum and quality of teaching provided (OFSTED, 1995; Commission for Racial Equality, *op cit.*). There are also various local and voluntary initiatives intended to support children out of school; these often serve as examples of good practice, but, overall, too much of this work is poorly co-ordinated and is carried out 'on a piecemeal and project-by-project basis' (House of Commons Education and Employment Committee, 1998). Alternative education has also been shown to be expensive, with costs frequently twice those of mainstream schooling (Commission for Racial Equality, *op cit.*). It should be noted that this issue is being addressed through a new Government target that requires all LEAs to provide full-time and appropriate education for children who are out of school for three weeks or more by 2002.

The evidence which exists relating to post-exclusion careers leads to the question of how young people who are out of school spend their time. Hayden (1994) found that the primary school students she interviewed were usually supervised by parents, and spent most of their time indoors. This does not, however, necessarily account for the way in which evenings and weekends were spent. Less is known about adolescents. Research into children looked after in residential accommodation and excluded from school found that young people were often outside the children's home for large parts of the day and that alternative activities were rarely available (Berridge and Brodie, 1998). These young people consequently appeared to be at some risk. Account must also be taken of alternative ways in which young people out of school may spend their time – for example by working in the informal economy (McGahey, 1986; Sullivan, 1989).

Being out of school may also increase the young person's contact with a 'deviant sub-culture'. Research has shown that such contact is important both in introducing a young person to offending and in sustaining their involvement (Sutherland, 1934; Hagan, 1993; Wikstrom and Loeber, 1997). This may relate to the young person's peer group, family or community. Unfortunately, the debate on exclusion has tended to focus on the individual behaviour of a young person, with little consideration being given to the wider social relationships in which young people are engaged. OFSTED (*op cit.*) found that having family members who were involved in offending was also a feature of the backgrounds of excluded students. Of all family characteristics, parental criminality has the strongest association with delinquency, though questions remain regarding the extent to which this risk is mediated by genetic or environmental factors (Rutter, Giller and Hagell, *op cit.*). Pitts (1997) has drawn attention to the growing concentration of poverty in certain neighbourhoods. A result of this, he argues, is that those most vulnerable to criminal victimisation, and those most likely to victimise them, have ended up in the same communal spaces. Such environments offer increased opportunities for young people who would otherwise grow out of crime to become embedded in their offending habits.

2. Research design and methodology

Ideally, to assess the nature of any causal relationship between school exclusion and offending, a cohort of young people followed through time is required. For each member of the cohort, details of their criminal behaviour would be recorded, in particular the type of offences committed and the dates when they were committed. In parallel, an 'education career' would be mapped in a similar way, noting, in particular, any temporary or permanent exclusions and any other signs of disruptive school behaviour. By constructing these 'event histories' for each person, it would be possible to identify how school exclusion and criminal behaviour are linked, whether one precedes the other, and whether one is exacerbated in some way by the other.

There are, however, two important drawbacks to this design. First, following a cohort prospectively takes time, in fact many years, before the necessary evidence is assembled. This problem can be overcome by constructing the cohort and the database retrospectively (although data are never as complete when assembled retrospectively from administrative records, which are not usually kept for research purposes). Second, in a representative cohort of the population there will be few offenders, perhaps no more than 20 per cent, and even fewer who are permanently excluded from school, probably no more than one or two per cent. Such disproportionality is inefficient in that inferences will be based on small numbers and the study will be relatively expensive because a good deal of information will be collected which is of limited value. There is no simple solution to this problem.

The research design adopted in this study was felt to provide the best compromise and entailed examining information on a group of 343 young people excluded from school in six local authorities. As our findings will demonstrate, the characteristics of this group appeared to correspond closely with other research information concerning young people excluded from school. The dataset was drawn from case files held by six voluntary sector projects working with young people already excluded from school, students at risk of exclusion and long-term non-attenders. The majority of the projects' work involves young people at Key Stages 3 and 4 (ages 14–16) who are placed on 'Bridge' programmes comprising a mix of college placement, personal tutoring and work experience. In some local authorities, 'Reintegration' projects, involving work with younger children (usually Years 7–9) to help facilitate a return to school, and 'Post-16' courses, weighted towards work experience, are also run. All these groups are represented in our final sample, for which a breakdown in terms of the programme areas covered is given in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: *Number in sample by area in which programme located*

Brent and Westminster	145
Cardiff	53
Cheshire	19
Kent	74
Liverpool	34
Stoke-on-Trent	18
Total	343

The six locations covered – Brent and Westminster, Cardiff, Cheshire, Kent, Liverpool, and Stoke-on-Trent – were selected in order to provide a geographical cross-section of local authorities and to ensure the inclusion of young people from different ethnic backgrounds. Young people who had been on programmes three or four years prior to the commencement of the research project were selected. This meant there was time before and after permanent exclusion in which offences could have been committed.

The research team visited project offices in each of these six areas and extracted information from files held on each young person. The files contained information on the young person's schooling, difficulties at school, when they were excluded and for what reasons. They also gave information on any other interventions in the young person's life, such as periods in local authority care, or accommodation, or under the supervision of social services, as well as some indication of the young person's family background and home circumstances. Figure 2.1 summarises the characteristics on which data were collected.

Figure 2.1: *The background characteristics of young people for which data were collected in the study*

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Family composition
- Involvement with welfare agencies
- Involvement with Youth Justice/Probation
- Previous or present registration/name on Child Protection Register
- Previous or present experience of public care
- Special needs assessment
- Involvement with other educational services
- Previous history of violence
- Drug/alcohol abuse
- Behavioural problems
- School attended, primary/secondary/special school
- Attendance
- Truancy
- Fixed-term exclusions
- Placement following exclusion

Like all 'administrative records' of this kind, there was a lack of consistency and some gaps. The quality of data on educational and family backgrounds varied considerably in terms of both quantity and quality. This variation can be attributed to factors including the recording systems in place at different points in the history of each project and whether the young person's most recent school had passed on records. Where such records were present, the letters, reports and examples of individual work they contained provided fascinating insights into the complicated, and usually troubled, experiences of the young people concerned. The complexity of the educational careers of a high proportion of the sample, while unsurprising, was one of the most arresting features of the experiences of this group.

Overall, it seems likely that the data collected from the project files understate the amount of time many of the young people spent out of school, by reason of exclusion, truancy or otherwise. An example of this concerned the young person's educational provision following exclusion, which usually involved a placement with one of

the 'exclusion' projects. However, projects did not always record the exit of a young person from their programmes, and consequently some individuals may not have been receiving any education for lengthier periods of time than it was possible for the researchers to detect.

It was originally anticipated by the research team that the projects' case files would contain information on both the educational and criminal histories of the young people. However, it soon transpired that the information on offending was incomplete and/or unreliable and that alternative sources had to be used. This information was obtained from the local police force, local Youth Justice Teams or the Police National Computer.

Research into school exclusion and offending is of course highly sensitive and has to be managed carefully. Throughout the research considerable attention was necessarily given to questions of confidentiality and anonymity.

Sample details

Table 2.2 breaks down the sample by ethnicity and gender. The majority of the sample as a whole were male, 261 of 343 or 76 per cent. However, a greater proportion, 43 per cent of the 72 young people who had been informally excluded were female. Twenty-seven per cent of the sample were from ethnic minority backgrounds (92) of whom ten had mixed parentage. The majority (87) of this group were from the Brent and Westminster project and comprised 60 per cent of those on that project.

Table 2.2: Ethnic composition of the sample by gender

Ethnic group	Male	Female	Total	Percentage of sample
White/European	171	60	231	67
African-Caribbean	32	7	39	11
African	10	4	14	4
Bangladeshi	7	1	8	2
Mixed parentage	8	2	10	3
Other	18	3	21	6
No information	15	5	20	6
Total	261	82	343	99

One of the most important methodological issues raised in the process of collecting data from case files concerns the definition of 'exclusion'. As discussed earlier, the statutory definition of exclusion has changed over time. Some of the young people in our sample were excluded from school prior to the Education Act 1993, and a minority were excluded on an 'indefinite' basis. More significant, however, is the issue of 'unofficial' or 'informal' exclusion, a category which lies outside the law and on which it has proved extremely difficult to collect evidence. The files produced evidence of instances where a school had discouraged a young person from returning, or encouraged a parent to transfer the student elsewhere. These young people were, in effect, permanently excluded. Consideration of these issues is important as it provides some insight into the much broader group of students who are 'out of school' and whose social and educational careers closely resemble those of permanently excluded students. Accordingly, and in an attempt to provide a more holistic insight into the nature of the relationship between exclusion and offending, this category of exclusion has been integrated into our analysis.

In all, 72 (21 per cent) young people in our sample were not formally permanently excluded from school. Although they were on a voluntary sector programme, having been referred by their local authority, their status was unclear. Some had been informally excluded, while others had been referred to programmes because of problems occurring in mainstream school which suggested the need for smaller groups and more attention. Many of those young people were on the verge of permanent exclusion at the point of referral to projects. The distinguishing features of this sub-group are noted in the discussion.

Case studies

In addition to the analysis of quantitative information, the research also sought to investigate the exclusion process and its aftermath as it was perceived by the young people concerned and their parents. All interviewees had been permanently excluded from school at least once, though not all had offended. In most cases the exclusions had taken place at least four years before the interview, thus allowing us to explore with them the highs and lows of their post-exclusion careers. This has not, as far as we are aware, been done before and these data add a new dimension to our understanding of the medium and long-term consequences of permanent exclusion from school.

These case studies were principally drawn from two of the areas covered in the earlier phase of the research, Brent and Westminster and Kent. These local authorities were selected following analysis of the quantitative data. This analysis suggested that these authorities contained a range of exclusion experiences, and should also enable us to talk to young people from different minority ethnic backgrounds. Access issues were also significant in choosing these areas. Letters were sent out to all the young people from these areas whose files we had examined, inviting them to take part in an interview. In addition, we wrote via the Luton Youth Justice Team to young people on their offending database who were recorded as having been permanently excluded from school within the past five years. In turn, those young people who were willing to be interviewed returned an acceptance slip to the research team. It proved impossible to contact some of this group and others decided not to be interviewed after further discussion with researchers. The remaining group consisted of 28 young people, 11 drawn from the Kent database, 15 from Brent and Westminster and two from Luton. This group were keen to participate in the study and were especially anxious that the findings contribute to improvements in official responses to other permanently excluded young people.

The case studies included young people aged between 14 and 20. Eight were female and 20 were male. Nineteen were White British, one was of mixed parentage, four were African-Caribbean British, two were Bangladeshi British, one was Kurdish and one was Moroccan. At the time of interview, 21 were living with parents or other relatives, three lived on their own or with a partner, one was living in foster care, one in a hostel and one in a Mother and Baby Unit. One interviewee described himself as homeless, although he was interviewed in his parents' home. A summary of the characteristics of the interviewees at the time of interview is provided in Appendix A. In this and in the discussion that follows, the interviewees have been ascribed pseudonyms for ease of identification and to ensure anonymity.

Although the London boroughs were selected to ensure that Black and Asian young people were included in the interviews, in other respects the qualitative sample was self-selecting and is therefore not representative in any statistical sense (its size, alongside practical and ethical considerations, made this impossible). Nevertheless, the interviews generated a wealth of detailed information regarding the educational and offending careers of young people excluded from school which adds considerable depth to the quantitative data we have for the wider sample.

As well as the interviews with young people, in six cases parents also agreed to be interviewed. Although this was a very small group, these interviews provided insights into the many difficulties for parents in coping with their children's behaviour both in and out of school, in challenging schools' decisions to exclude, in dealing with the consequences of exclusion and in finding alternative education following an exclusion. It had also been hoped to interview teachers and other professionals but in the event this was precluded by the fact that the events being investigated had taken place several years previously. However, in our examination of case files, we had been able to gain an official perspective on the young people interviewed through a perusal of school records, reports of social welfare and criminal justice agencies, correspondence pertaining to exclusions and the documentation submitted to meetings of school governors.

3. The background and context of exclusion

As we have noted, young people excluded from school frequently experience high levels of family disruption and social disadvantage (OFSTED, 1996; Hayden, 1997). In both the quantitative and qualitative elements of this research project, graphic evidence of such problems was uncovered.

Table 3.1 presents data on the disadvantages experienced by the 343 young people included in our investigation of case files. About half of the group were living in lone-parent households amongst whom the risk of poverty is disproportionately high (Bradshaw, 2000). A similar number were eligible for free school meals, compared to 17 per cent in the secondary school population of England and Wales as a whole (Department for Education and Employment, 1999b). Again, social services were involved at some point, in some way, with the families of one-half of the young people. Eighteen per cent had been looked after by the local authority at some time in their lives, which, although the duration and nature of a young person's care career can vary greatly, is a very high proportion. This should be considered in the light of other evidence showing that public care does not usually enhance a young person's educational prospects (Borland et al., 1998).

Table 3.1: Indicators of disadvantage for the sample of excluded young people

Characteristic	Number with characteristic	Per cent
Living with lone parent	156	45
Eligible for free school meals	160	47
Named on child protection register	28	8
Referred to or involved with:		
Social services	154	45
Mental health	28	8
Youth justice	69	20
Police	127	37
'Looked-after' by social services ever	61	18

It should be noted that these figures are necessarily an underestimate of the scale of the difficulties faced by the group. For many individuals, information was not recorded in the file and missing information has been assumed to indicate an absence of specified problems; an inference which may not always be correct.

The family backgrounds of the 28 young people interviewed in the second part of the study illustrate the depth and complexity of troubles behind the figures from the wider sample. Interviewees reported sexual abuse, addiction to drugs or alcohol, homelessness, parental violence, frequent movement between the homes of separated parents or other family members precipitated by marital crises, chronic asthma, educational crises, or crises precipitated by the young person's offending, the loss of a sibling through death or parental separation, the loss of significant members of the extended family through death, or as a result of relocation and/or family conflict, and the loss of friends and supportive community networks through relocation. Such events were found to have occurred, in different cases, before, during and/or after permanent exclusion.

Young people and their families had also, in a majority of cases, had contact with a wide range of educational, social welfare and criminal justice professionals. However, because of the disruption in their lives, they often experienced frequent changes of social worker, carers, psychologists and teachers. Research has shown that such fluctuating professional involvement is far from uncommon for adolescents 'in need' (Roaf and Lloyd, 1995; Department of Health, 1998).

The impact of the experience of being looked after ('in care') was also evident in the qualitative sample. In some cases care histories were extensive and highly disruptive. Darren, for example, had at least three foster placements and four or five placements in children's homes whilst Ian had lived in women's refuges, a children's home, and with a variety of relatives. Ali had lived in three secure units, several children's homes and was in a foster placement at the time of interview. Keith had lived in three different children's homes, having been moved from the second as a result of his involvement in street robberies perpetrated with other residents. There was, therefore, also evidence of an overlap between experiences of public care and offending careers.

Whether looked after or not, many of the young people's lives were punctuated by highly stressful events. Josh's father had been shot when he was 14, Carl's younger brother had died when he was four, both Darren and Kate's mother had a long history of alcoholism and they had moved frequently between the homes of their parents and care placements. Mike also drank heavily and, at the time of interview, he and his mother were attempting to transfer onto another housing estate because of a violent neighbourhood feud. Such home circumstances could not be expected to enhance an individual's life chances. As Kinder, Wakefield and Wilkin (1997) note, this can mean that they find the prospect of a relationship with peers and teachers too difficult or too daunting to attempt.

The sadness and disruption which the young people had experienced throughout their childhood is not in dispute. A key issue, however, is the way in which the occurrence of stressful events in home and family life interacted with the escalation of educational problems and, ultimately, with exclusion. Before addressing this issue, we turn to the educational careers of the young people in the sample.

Educational careers

The problems in the home lives of young people in this study appeared to spill over into their lives at school. Many also had learning difficulties and/or emotional and behavioural difficulties. As Table 3.2 shows, nearly half of the group had been assessed for Special Educational Needs and one in five were actually 'statemented', a process which as Parsons (2000) has indicated, tends to be both protracted, and often sporadic. The majority were not regular attenders and may have been out of school for lengthy periods.

Table 3.2: Indicators of difficulties at school

Indicator	Number of young people	Per cent
Assessed for Special Educational Needs	150	44
Having a Statement of Special Educational Needs	66	19
Attendance problems at school	201	58
Significant absence at any time	160	47

It should be noted that being out of school was not always an indicator of problematic behaviour as absence might have been due to illness or perhaps an extended visit to relatives abroad. Nevertheless 'out of school' was an indicator of a disrupted or interrupted school career. Information on schools attended was not recorded in most areas, but in Brent and Westminster, where information was routinely recorded, 32 per cent of young people had had four or more 'educational placements' – that is, school, home tuition, special school etc. There was little difference between those permanently excluded and those informally excluded in terms of their SEN profile but those informally excluded were more likely to exhibit attendance problems – 80 per cent as compared with 58 per cent of the sample overall.

The findings from the sub-sample of young people interviewed again add depth and substance to the quantitative data. Since the educational and social problems which culminate in exclusion often have a long history (see, for example, Galloway *et al.*, 1982), it is instructive, first of all, to consider the interviewees' experience of primary school.

Primary school

Almost all the young people interviewed said that they had enjoyed primary school. Nevertheless, most had experienced problems of one sort or another during this time with only three saying that they had had no difficulties. The severity of problems is evident in the fact that eleven of the sample of 28 had been excluded from primary school on a fixed-term basis, whilst one, Carl, had been excluded permanently. This is a high proportion, given the general rarity of exclusion in primary school in comparison to secondary school (Hayden, 1997; Department for Education and Employment, 1999). Harry, who was temporarily excluded every year from the age of five, Keith, Toby, Finn, Bazir and Mike all recognised that their problems at primary school were attributable to losing their tempers and/or aggression towards staff or other children.

Five interviewees identified a relationship between their behavioural problems at primary school and learning difficulties. Research and policy have emphasised the necessity of early intervention in preventing later educational problems (Sherman, 1997). However, there was considerable variation in the amount of help individuals had received. Four young people had been assessed as having special educational needs, but they did not always perceive the additional support they received as helpful. For example Keith, who was in more or less constant trouble in primary school, did not learn to read until he was nine. He was disparaging about the school's efforts to help him, despite the fact that they had referred him to an educational psychologist and offered one-to-one tuition. Billy was often in trouble and was eventually diagnosed as suffering from dyslexia after his mother took him to an independent psychologist at her own expense. He was educated in a special unit for dyslexic children but he felt that this made things worse for him, because of the stigma, and his behaviour deteriorated still further.

Other parents also had to take the initiative. For example, school records indicated that John experienced 'severe learning difficulties' and was unable either to read or write. However, his mother explained that, having tried in vain to make an impact upon the primary school, she had to bring these problems to the attention of the secondary school. Despite this, John was not referred for an assessment of special educational needs. The difficulties parents face in the assessment process have been recognised by, for example, Galloway, Armstrong and Tomlinson, (1994). It should be noted, however, that the young people we interviewed would not, in primary school at least, have been assessed under the 1994 Code of Practice on the Assessment of Special Educational Needs (Department for Education and Employment, 1994b).

Some other interviewees were more positive about the help they had received. Mike commented:

'What I did do was all right. Me and my mate were in the same boat, we both had problems, my mate had dyslexia and they knew it and they helped us a lot. There was one teacher in the last class called Mr A. He helped us and we used to go on the computers. Because I was like slow at writing he used to let me do all the work on the computer and type it up. They were good, they responded to what we had, they were good. Mrs B. and Mrs C. would stay behind for an hour with us to help out and it was good.'

The behavioural problems experienced by a small group of the interviewees may have been exacerbated by their learning difficulties, their feelings about these difficulties and/or the responses of their families and schools. Thus it was apparent to Keith's mother, for example, that his aggression in primary school and his willingness to be more outrageous than his classmates were attempts to divert attention from his reading difficulties. However, problems at home also appeared to be important. It is unfortunate that these case studies lack a 'professional perspective', which would help to throw light upon the ways in which schools sought to manage the problems of these students.

The transfer to secondary school

The difficulties associated with the transfer from the more nurturing atmosphere of the primary school to the much more complex institution that is the secondary school has been the subject of other research (see, for example, Cleaver, 1991). In our sub-sample, unsurprisingly, the interviewees who experienced the most difficulties in primary school appeared to be least equipped to deal with secondary school. It was clear in the accounts of Mike and Keith, and implicit in many others, that they found the structural and emotional complexities of secondary school very difficult to cope with. For young people who had been sustained, or at least contained, by the more nurturing environment of the primary school, the secondary school sometimes posed a significant challenge.

For some this challenge came very quickly. Early in his first year at secondary school Keith started to get into fights.

'We was new and the youngest and there would be bullying in the canteen. And I had a lot of mates from the estate, some older kids; and so if anyone had a go at us we'd fight them. But I was having fights in the classroom too.'

As a result of one of these fights, in which Keith and others 'rushed' another boy, he was charged with Actual Bodily Harm, fined and placed on a criminal Supervision Order. Keith was then withdrawn from his class, referred to a new educational psychologist, and placed in a group of three students with one special needs teacher. Although the educational psychologist noted that Keith could not cope with the conventional classroom situation, after two months the special needs teacher's contract came to an end and she had to leave the school. Keith was then returned to his class where, once again, he 'got into fights'. As a result, he was excluded permanently. It is important to note however, that what appeared to be a successful intervention with this potentially violent school student, 'failed' because of decisions about resources.

The other ten students who were the subjects of fixed-term exclusions at primary school, got off to a fairly bad start at secondary school as well. Elisabeth, for example, said that she was 'scared at first', but then 'it was OK', whereas her school indicates that she was in trouble from the start. Robert was offered a place at grammar school but went with his 'mates' to a comprehensive school. He notes that he was 'bunking off'

within two or three weeks, and was being 'kicked out of the worst classes anyway'. As a result of these problems, he was subsequently assessed for special educational needs to Stage 2 of the Code of Practice.

Other young people reported feelings of discomfort or stigma in the classroom. Peter, for example, said he was 'OK at first' but soon felt 'picked on' by teachers. This was not helped, he thought, by the fact that he had a classroom helper due to his statement of special educational needs for learning and behavioural difficulties. Harry's main memory of secondary school was of a 'classroom of people you didn't know'. Tony, however, simply 'hated it', although he liked some teachers and said he 'did OK' in English because he had a good teacher. Indeed, most young people were able to identify a subject and/or a teacher they had liked or whose help they had appreciated.

Toby disliked his Catholic boys' school from the start. It was, he said, very strict, and he felt that he and the other African-Caribbean boys were picked on unfairly because they wore fashionable haircuts and clothes. He fared no better at his next secondary school, where he was given seven fixed-term exclusions in his first year, either to allow time for his hairstyle to 'grow out' or to acquire a more conventional version of the school uniform. He believed that this was a 'wind-up' and said that at the beginning of Year 11 he was told by the head that he could leave voluntarily with a good reference or be permanently excluded. In the event, he chose to leave voluntarily but says he was given a 'very bad' reference anyway. This account appears to illustrate vividly a case in which 'cultural style' was diagnosed as a behavioural problem (Gillborn, 1990; Sewell, 1997). This was certainly Toby's perception, feeling that the school would only tolerate black students who were not 'too black'. At the same time, Toby expressed the – apparently contradictory – view that teachers at this school were not motivated by personal hostility towards, or suspicion of, black pupils.

Some interviewees said that their problems began in secondary school, though these were often linked to crucial changes in other areas of their lives. Samira, for example, returned to a new secondary school after spending a year abroad with her mother. She felt that this had adversely affected her behaviour:

'No one would talk to me, so I had to make something of myself – and it worked. Everyone wanted to know me and be my friend.'

Similarly, Ian started his new secondary school late and in a different area, following his mother's flight from her violent husband. These cases highlight the importance of considering the events which lead up to exclusion within the wider context of a young person's life, rather than solely in relation to the school or classroom situation. To some extent these may act as 'triggers' to a deterioration in the young person's behaviour.

Lack of family or professional support may be particularly important in this process. Thus Kate observed that the inconsistency of care and lack of direction she experienced in her children's home significantly exacerbated her problems at school:

'... the children's home, that was when it all started. Two people went to school, and one girl who refused. You get on with one of the workers, and don't get on with three, and the first one isn't in again until tomorrow. They never told you off, you just kind of did what you wanted when you wanted...'

Her problems were worsened when she was moved to a placement several miles further away from her new secondary school, which required her to undertake a bus and train journey, alone, something she had never done before. Similarly, in reply to a question about what was happening in his home life around the time of his final permanent exclusion, Mike answered:

'... probably my Granddad dying and my Step-Nan. No – not then – probably just arguing when my Dad died. My Mum has always been fairly good and my Aunty lived in the other block and my other Aunty lives in the square and my Nan lives in the flats close by. My Granddad lived round the corner and when he died my Nan moved to Scotland.'

Recognition of the importance of family circumstances does not, however, diminish the difficulties which young people presented within the school. As we have seen many were aware of having had learning difficulties at school. The vast majority of the young people interviewed also reported having frequently been 'in trouble' at secondary school and all had experienced fixed-term exclusions. From their perspective, this 'trouble' most frequently concerned disruption in the classroom and fighting in the playground. As other research has suggested, it is the accumulation of these incidents that creates levels of tension between the young person and teachers which the school eventually finds intolerable and which triggers exclusion (Galloway *et al.*, 1982).

Truancy

As noted above (see Table 3.2), 58 per cent of the overall sample of young people in this study were recorded as having attendance problems at school, a figure which is almost certainly an underestimate due to the lack of accurate information in a number of the case files. Certainly, truancy was an important component of the schooling experiences of the 28 students in the sub-sample, with 21 interviewees saying they had done so, in most cases regularly. While involvement in truancy is not a necessary predictor of exclusion, and research indicates that large numbers of students who truant are not excluded, it is a good indicator of a more general disaffection with school (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998).

Different patterns of truancy, familiar from other research, emerged strongly in interviewees' accounts (O'Keefe, 1993; Graham and Bowling, 1995; Department for Education and Employment, 1999). Thus young people had truanted from individual lessons, for days at a time, and for extended periods.

'Yes, I was hardly ever there ... started off with lessons, then got into it deeper and deeper ... The teachers told Mum, snitched on me, but I got used to it and after a while I didn't care. I would get up in the morning and make her think I'd gone, then leave when she came home for lunch.' (Angela)

'Sometimes for two weeks running ... (I) went in to sign the register, went back for my lunch ticket then went to play.' (Ali)

The parent of one interviewee attributed his son's truancy to a fear of being bullied, but this may have been a factor for other interviewees. Pitts and Smith (1995) for instance report that older white boys in secondary schools found it more difficult than other students to acknowledge fear of violent victimisation, and truancy may be one response to this. Elsewhere, Porteous (1998) observes that truancy rates amongst school students tend to be greater in schools where there are high levels of violent victimisation. In turn violent victimisation is particularly prevalent in schools with high levels of exclusion, and into which disproportionate numbers of excluded students transfer.

Truancy students were often surprised by how easy it was to 'skip school' and 'get away with it':

Interviewer: Did you ever get into trouble (for truancy)?

Mike: We got stopped a couple of times by the police, only because we were climbing over a wall or something and they would just tell us off.

Interviewer: What would happen when the teachers found out?
Mike: Well they never did but I reckon they would have told my mum.
Interviewer: They really didn't find out?
Mike: No.
Interviewer: So you never got suspended for that?
Mike: No – not for that.

Ali was eventually caught by his mother:

'The school didn't even find out – my Mum told them. It's meant to be the other way round, isn't it?'

Not surprisingly, perhaps, most interviewees were more concerned about their parents' reaction to their truancy than the school's. Indeed, in only one case (Mike) were parents apparently unconcerned about their child's truancy. Ali was more typical, observing with great feeling, 'When I got home, my dad, God, I got in trouble.' Interviewees stressed that their parents had done their best to keep them in school, albeit without success. Julie recalled her mother driving her to the school gates and presenting her to the teacher. But, like Julie's mother, despite their best efforts, many parents felt relatively powerless to keep their children in school. Pippa's mother ensured that 'she always went in – but whether or not she stayed, well that was another matter.' We gained the impression that in almost all cases, the parents of our interviewees had engaged in a protracted struggle to keep their children in school, not infrequently feeling unsupported in this task, and sometimes even jeopardising their jobs to do so. At the same time, it is notable that in three cases truancy was known to be a factor in the school's decision to exclude the student.

While truanting, young people spent their time hanging out with friends in local parks, and shopping malls or in friends flats or houses, while their parents were at work. Two interviewees, Susan and Thomas, who had both run away from home at times, also mentioned meeting older people, including 'alcoholics' and 'drug addicts'. Julie said she spent a lot of her time shoplifting with her best friend and claimed to have been making up to £200 a day. Just over half the interviewees who tranted admitted having engaged in minor offending, mainly theft and criminal damage, while doing so.

In the light of these findings, it is encouraging that considerable efforts are being made to address the links between truancy and offending. Information regarding good practice in preventing truancy – for example through first-day response systems and electronic registration systems – has been widely disseminated (see, for example, Department for Education and Employment, 1999c). Targets have been established for the reduction of truancy within LEAs, and legislation has given the police, often working in partnership with other agencies, greater powers to deal with truanting young people. Other developments, for example the fact that by 2002 LEAs must provide full-time and alternative education for young people out of school for more than three weeks, should also hopefully have a positive impact on truancy levels.

The other side of the coin is that truanting students, once apprehended, are more likely to be formally cautioned for low-level offences than their non-truanting counterparts, more likely to be prosecuted than cautioned for more serious ones, and more likely to be sentenced to custody than a community penalty. This means that their careers in the youth justice system may well accelerate at a faster rate than their criminal careers (Graham, 1988). The consequences of this disproportionate attention from the agents of the justice system for a young person's self-perception and their commitment to the conventional order, is discussed in the next chapter.

4. The process of exclusion and its aftermath

Across the sample, 271 young people had been officially and formally permanently excluded from school, whilst a further 72 had been 'unofficially' or 'informally' excluded. Some had been permanently excluded more than once – 30 had been permanently excluded twice in their school career, four three times and one young person had been permanently excluded no fewer than four times.

In addition, 124 (36 per cent) young people had a fixed-term exclusion recorded against them. Altogether this group had amassed 363 fixed-term exclusions – approximately three each. In reality many fixed-term exclusions were not recorded, the file merely noting that an individual had been excluded several times during his or her school career. Nevertheless, it is notable that young people had experienced fixed-term exclusions prior to permanent exclusion, suggesting that schools make use of fixed-term exclusions, prior to the decision to permanently exclude as a means of managing difficult behaviour.

Not surprisingly, of the 35 who had been permanently excluded more than once, the majority, 26, had been first excluded before their 14th birthday including nine before they were 12. All but three were male and African-Caribbeans were disproportionately represented (27 per cent) compared with their representation in the sample (11 per cent). The group did not appear to be more disadvantaged than the group as a whole as judged by the indicators in Table 3.2, though a disproportionate number had been assessed as having special educational needs. Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) had been assessed for special educational needs compared with 44 per cent for the sample as a whole (see Table 3.2 above) and 36 per cent had an SEN statement compared with 19 per cent overall. These statistics should, however, be interpreted in the light of the fact that statementing is known to involve a complex social process, which results in considerable variation in assessment practices between schools and local education authorities.

The age at which the young people were (first) permanently excluded is given in Table 4.1. The youngest was five and the oldest 17, but the majority were over 12 and under 16 at the point of permanent exclusion. There was little difference between males and females and little difference in ages between the different ethnic groups. The distribution of ages found in the sample is almost identical with the national distribution of the ages of young people permanently excluded from school (Department for Education and Employment, 1999). This latter finding reaffirms the representative nature of the sample of young people selected for this study.

The reasons for an exclusion (either fixed-term or permanent) were extracted from the files and are presented in Table 4.2. Often more than one reason was given for exclusion, more so in the case of permanent exclusion (on average a fixed-term exclusion merited 1.3 reasons and a permanent exclusion 1.6 reasons). It is evident that the reasons given for fixed-term and permanent exclusion follow similar patterns. Thus disruptive behaviour of different kinds, verbal abuse to school staff, defiance and disobedience and physical violence to peers predominate as reasons for both types of exclusion. To some extent this bears out what is already known about permanent exclusion, namely that it is often the sum of events rather than individual incidents which are important.

Table 4.1: Age at time of first permanent exclusion from school*

Age	Males		Females	
	Number	Percentage**	Number	Percentage
5	1	.5	–	–
6	–	–	–	–
7	1	.5	–	–
8	3	1	–	–
9	2	1	–	–
10	8	4	–	–
11	12	6	1	2
12	32	15	8	17
13	50	24	7	15
14	61	29	20	44
15	37	17	8	17
16	2	1	2	4
17	1	.5	–	–
Total	210	100	46	100

* For 15 young people their 'age at time of permanent exclusion' was not recorded

** Not all percentages will add up to 100 due to rounding

Table 4.2: Reasons for fixed-term or permanent exclusion from school*

Reason for exclusion	Percentage of Fixed-term exclusions	Percentage of permanent exclusions
Truancy	3	6
Verbal abuse to peers	5	10
Verbal abuse to school staff	18	19
Defiance and disobedience	17	26
Disruption (classroom/playground)	23	41
Bullying	5	5
Violence to peers	33	27
Violence to school staff	5	7
Drugs (smoking, alcohol, other)	2	3
Vandalism/arson	3	3
Theft	4	5
Other	10	8
Total number of exclusions	363	312
Average number of reasons per exclusion	1.3	1.6

*Young people were often excluded for more than one reason

There are invariably major difficulties in classifying behaviour, and there is no guarantee of consistency between schools or teachers regarding what is 'verbal abuse to school staff', 'disruption', 'bullying' and so on. The same label may also be attached to behaviour of varying degrees of severity. However, it can be argued that the similarity of the reasons for fixed-term and permanent exclusions indicates the importance of contextual and school-related factors in understanding how, why and when exclusions take place. Additionally, it was clear from the files that these young people had, in almost all cases, been given several warnings and discussions had taken place with parents or guardians. In many cases, discussions with, or referral to, social welfare, educational or psychological services, had preceded the decision to permanently exclude. Fixed-term exclusions appear to be a significant part of this process.

The fact that the majority of exclusions were for abusive, defiant, disruptive behaviour, affronts to authority and physical violence to peers corresponds with other research findings (OFSTED, 1996; Hayden, 1997). In comparison the incidence of bullying as a reason for exclusion appears low: it is possible that physical violence to peers includes some behaviours which could be construed as bullying. Certainly some of the incidents recorded in files concerned very serious and threatening behaviours between young people, often outside the classroom. Interestingly, however, a relatively small proportion of the reasons for exclusions other than physical violence to peers – that is, physical violence to staff, drugs, vandalism/arson and theft – concern behaviours which actually constitute crimes.

From the qualitative interviews, it was clear that most students were aware of their status as 'troublemakers' within the school prior to their permanent exclusion. Details of the truancy and exclusion records of the sub-sample are provided in Table 4.3. The majority – 26 of the sample – had been excluded on a fixed-term basis, often frequently. There is relatively little knowledge about the way in which fixed-term exclusion is used, though it has been estimated that a total of 135,000 take place each year (Smith, 1998). Interviewees appeared to consider fixed-term exclusion a commonplace feature of their school lives, and did not seem to associate 'suspension' with any other action being taken by the school to improve their behaviour.

Even where it appeared that a relatively innocuous infraction of school rules had led to permanent exclusion, this usually represented 'the final straw' in a long line of incidents. We found no evidence that students' first permanent exclusion was triggered by trivial, 'one-off', infractions. Indeed, some schools demonstrated considerable patience, compassion and ingenuity in the face of some very testing behaviour. As with the results for the wider sample, the type of behaviour which led to exclusion corresponded closely to other findings, with disruption and physical violence – either to peers or teachers – predominating (see also OFSTED, 1996). Interviewees tended rather to link exclusion to particular incidents, or a bad relationship with a particular teacher. However, some of the incidents that triggered exclusion were very serious and in themselves constituted criminal offences, as Carl's account indicates:

'I robbed some boy. I was pressurised by some older boys. I was in the 3rd year and they were in the 5th year. Because I was in a gang, like the Triads – they gave me a knife and told me to go and do it. So I did it and got grassed up. I did it on school premises as well. The school wanted to get the police involved but the boy didn't want to press any charges. Two weeks later the headmaster pulled me in and told me about the incident, said they couldn't tolerate me any more. I tried to appeal but it didn't work'

Table 4.3: Patterns of truancy, fixed-term exclusion and permanent exclusion amongst sub-sample (n=28)

Name	Fixed-term exclusions	Truancy	Number of permanent exclusions	Reasons for permanent exclusions	Year group of permanent exclusions
John	1	Yes	1	Drugs	9
Peter	3	Yes	1	Disruption	8
Susan	1	Yes	1	Encouraging another student to truant	9
Julie	1	Yes	1	Disruption, verbal abuse to staff, defiance, truancy	9
Elisabeth	4	Yes	1	Verbal abuse to staff	9
Robert	NK	Yes	1	Verbal abuse to staff, defiance	9
Harry	2	Yes	1	Violence to peers	8
Billy	2	Yes	1	Violence to peers, verbal abuse to staff, defiance	9
Tony	1	Yes	1	Disruption, violence to peers, bullying	9
Ian	Yes	Yes	3	Disruption, verbal abuse to staff, defiance	7, 9 & 9
Gary	2	Yes	1	Verbal abuse to peers and staff, defiance	10
Pippa	1	Yes	1	Disruption, verbal abuse to peers	8
Thomas	Yes	Yes	1	Truancy, defiance	9
Angela	NK	Yes	3	Disruption, disobedience	7 & 8
Ali	Yes – frequent	Yes	1	Theft	8
Samira	Yes	No	1	Disruption, vandalism	11
Kate	Yes	No	1	Violence to staff, disruption	11
Darren	Yes	Yes	1	'trouble'	NK
Ryan	Yes	Yes	2	Violence to peers	7 & 9
Carl	Yes	Yes	1	Attempted robbery of another student, threatening with a weapon	9
Hilary	Yes	No	2 (1 unofficial)	Defiance	8 & 9
Josh	Yes	No	2 (1 unofficial)	Violence to staff	7 & 8
Karim	Yes	Yes	1	Pushed student down stairs	10
Toby	Yes	No	2	Violence to peers	10 & 11
Keith	Yes	No	2	Violence to staff	10 & 11
Bazir	Yes	Yes	1	Violence to peers	NK
Mike	Yes	Yes	2	Violence to peers	10 & 11
Finn	Yes	Yes	2	Violence to peers	NK

Keith was permanently excluded the first time for an assault upon another student, which resulted in a charge of Actual Bodily Harm. His second permanent exclusion occurred in the second week at his new secondary school when he attacked a teacher with a fire extinguisher. The fight which precipitated Bazir's permanent exclusion from school was so serious that it resulted in a custodial sentence.

Insofar as gender differences can be identified, males tended to get into trouble for fighting with their peers and classroom disruption, while girls tended to be identified as being troublesome for defying teachers. Hilary, for example, said that she argued about 'everything' and teachers considered her to be confrontational and argumentative'. Paradoxically, perhaps, Hilary most resented not being treated as an 'adult' by her teachers.

While all the interviewees acknowledged that their behaviour at school had not been good, the incident which triggered the exclusion was sometimes viewed as not meriting exclusion in its own right.

'We were playing knock down ginger, and I knocked on the door, and kicked the door, and I think I damaged the man's door, and he must have seen me. I was wearing a silver puffa jacket and it stood out ... the headteacher said 'that's criminal damage, and we 're going to have to exclude you'. So I just walked out the school. I did so many things, but the headteacher just wanted me out of the school. Not for that, I was just playing knock down ginger.' (Samira)

Interviewees were often surprised when they were excluded from school. It was as if they had not understood how serious the situation was becoming until the moment of exclusion. Carl expressed this very clearly, speaking ruefully about the immediate aftermath of permanent exclusion he observed:

'I was surprised because I was getting away with murder at that school. I don't know what I felt. It was weird not being at school and not getting away with what I did.'

This feeling of having 'got away with it' was linked to the fact that many interviewees experienced fixed-term exclusion as something of a bonus, since it offered a legitimate reason for staying away from a school they did not wish to attend anyway. Robert said:

'It was what I wanted, I didn't think about the future, I was glad.'

Some interviewees were shocked when they were excluded and expressed great regret. Kate said:

'I was in tears. I knew I really didn't want to be excluded, because I liked school and I had lots of friends there and I knew I could do it. The social worker was saying I was in care and I wasn't at my best – but they still excluded me.'

Others interviewees were, initially at least, less regretful than Kate about being permanently excluded. Susan was eventually excluded for 'encouraging a friend to truant'. She said, 'In a way I was happy because I didn't like the school'. Pippa, who was excluded after a fight with a boy, said 'I missed the lads, having a laugh, but I wasn't bothered'. Pippa describes the period following exclusion (when she was 13–14 years old) as more like what 16 and 17 years get up to – 'out partying all the time'.

However, although several of the interviewees initially welcomed their exclusion, this was soon supplanted by a profound sense of boredom and the anxiety attendant upon having to find another school which would accept them.

'Oh no I did get upset, and I wanted to get back in. I tried to get into another school, I applied to School B but no one would take me because it was Year 11. It was really silly of them.' (Samira)

'It hit me, it really hit me. I thought, what am I going to do now? But in a way I was happy, 'no more school, man, no more school'. And they banned me from coming near the school. But after about two weeks, and all my friends were at school, it was boring. Unbelievably boring, and I wished I hadn't done it. And then I started trying to get into another school, any school.' (Kamir)

Interviewees tended to spend a great deal of time at home, which most of them described as very boring. Being banned from entering school premises was especially frustrating. Most spent their time watching television and 'just sitting around' waiting for friends to come out of school:

'I did a lot of housework. Used to help my mum all the time. There was nothing else to do. I watched a lot of daytime television as well.' (Kamir)

'It was just boring. I was just bored, bored, bored. Kind of depressed. Missing out on better things.' (Hilary)

As Hilary indicated, for some youngsters, the experience of permanent exclusion was both depressing and disorientating as many of the normal props to identity and self-esteem gradually fell away. Research has shown that considerable stress can be placed on other family members as a result of having to care for an excluded child (Parsons, 1994; Commission for Racial Equality, 1997). This was certainly true for the families in this sample, even though some parents made exceptional efforts. Keith's mother, for example, was insistent that he led a 'structured existence', 'getting up as if he was going to school, going to bed on time', and completing all the tasks set by his home tutor. However, Keith's mother worked full-time and Keith began to spend more time with the group of a dozen or so excluded or unemployed young people 'who hung-out on the estate'. The potential for getting into trouble was therefore considerable.

'Reintegration'

The qualitative dimension of the research afforded some valuable insights into the difficulties faced by students post exclusion. Considering attempts at reintegration first, this and other research suggests that only a small proportion of permanently excluded students return to mainstream school. Parsons (2000), for example, found that only 31 per cent of permanently excluded students in his sample transferred into another school. In the qualitative sub-sample of 28 young people in this study, only eight did so. They were all either permanently excluded again or withdrawn because they could not settle.

It is noticeable that second permanent exclusions tended to occur fairly soon after entering a new school. Toby lasted a matter of months and felt that staff were 'just waiting' for him to misbehave. Keith lasted just two weeks. Almost as soon as he entered the school he became enmeshed in a long-running vendetta between some African-Caribbean and Bangladeshi students and, in an altercation about this, he assaulted a member of staff. He felt that during this period all the teachers were waiting for him to 'step out of line' and that, when he did, they 'pounced' on him. As we suggest below, it may be significant that Keith, having been excluded from his first secondary school for violence, was accepted by a school which was itself experiencing serious problems of violence. Similarly, Hilary got into trouble on her first day at her new school. She was told she was a 'bully' and was put 'on report'. At lunchtime she was told to go to the back of the queue, but said she wanted to sit down and refused to move.

'The head teacher came and said you don't fit in with my school and you are not up to the standards of my girls. You are a fool and will never amount to anything.'

Brodie (2000) has observed that when young people with transient educational careers arrive at a new school, the school may have little information about their backgrounds and previous schooling and, as a result, may have difficulty assessing them or understanding and dealing appropriately with their behaviour. From our interviewees' accounts, it appears that, sometimes, in the absence of such information 'a one-dimensional knowledge ... in terms of the stereotyped label which we have fixed on him leads to a low threshold over which we will expel him ...' (Young, 1971). This problem can be compounded by the fact that young people themselves may be unprepared for entry to a new school and lack the knowledge of school systems and culture which would enable them to integrate (Brodie, *op. cit.*).

Although the research evidence is somewhat limited, it also appears that some schools admit higher numbers of permanently excluded students than others. It is notable that one segment of our quantitative survey sample was drawn from the borough which, in 1997, had the third highest rate of permanent exclusions in London. Our survey revealed that one secondary school accounted for 42 per cent of all permanent exclusions. According to the interviewees who attended this school, it was characterised by high levels of conflict and classroom disruption.

This situation corresponds to that described by Porteous (1998) in his study of permanent exclusions in an adjacent borough. Here, it was observed that the characteristics of the school to which the excluded student is transferred may have a significant impact upon whether that student can be maintained there. Of the six comprehensive schools in the borough, 'Burnell' school topped the exclusion league by a considerable margin. A range of factors including a narrowing catchment area, significant demographic changes in the large public housing estates served by the school and 'white flight' into the school, had contributed to the development of an increasingly transient school population, characterised by high levels of social disadvantage and special educational need. A further consequence of rapid student turnover was that Burnell school carried a large number of vacancies which placed them under considerable pressure to absorb students excluded, or wishing to transfer from, other schools in the borough. Thus Burnell school became both a net importer and exporter of previously permanently excluded students.

As Gewisty *et al.* (1995) put it:

'Exclusion, whether 'constructive' or formal is one mechanism for passing the buck, often leading to cost-shunting within and between uncoordinated agencies. The strategy means that under-subscribed schools, which are forced to accept as casual admissions students excluded from other schools, are faced with having to support disproportionate numbers of socially and educationally vulnerable children without the resources necessary to do it properly.'

It is important, therefore, that statistics relating to reintegration are considered in relation to the geography of the local schools' market. It is, of course, ironic that such 'destabilised schools' in 'destabilised neighbourhoods', already confronting formidable social problems, must nonetheless continue to import further problems as their capacity to deal with them is progressively undermined. Dobson and Henthorne (1999) have observed that:

'The admission of an excluded student from another school can present major challenges to the receiving school. It is, therefore, a type of student mobility which, though not large in overall terms, has a significance disproportionate to its size in the context of strategies to raise achievement. While a school may be able to make effective arrangements to support one in-coming child and avoid disruption to the education of other children, the admission of numbers of excluded children year after year can have a damaging effect on the whole school community and would seem to reduce the likelihood that the excludees themselves will succeed in making a fresh start.'

In the high-excluding London secondary school in the present study, and the one studied by Porteous, there appeared to be relatively high levels of violence and other types of offending, with a consequent heightened level of involvement of students in the youth justice system. These observations raise, once again, the question of what Power *et al.* (1972) have described as the 'delinquent school'. Farrington and West (1993) note that the proportion of students convicted in the schools attended by the boys in the Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development varied from 0.3 per cent per annum to 23 per cent per annum. Attending a 'high

delinquency school' proved to be a significant predictor of later convictions. However, the authors have argued that this can be accounted for by the fact that the most troublesome eight to ten year olds went on to attend the highest delinquency schools, suggesting that schools with high levels of delinquency were a product of the 'quality' of their intake. However, as Rutter *et al.* (1979) and Graham (1988) have argued:

'longitudinal studies have tended to neglect the influence of schools in the development of delinquent careers. Rutter et al. (1979) have pointed out that, on closer examination of the Cambridge data, some school variation independent of intake is perceptible, with a slightly higher tendency for boys with 'average' behaviour at primary school to become delinquent at high delinquency schools than low delinquency schools.' (Graham, 1988, p.16)

These are important issues, which merit further investigation. Although the present study is concerned with the effects of permanent exclusion from school on criminal careers, it appears that attendance at certain schools may play a significant role in both the onset and development of such careers.

Alternative educational provision

Turning to alternatives to mainstream education, the most common provision for permanently excluded students, at least in the immediate aftermath of exclusion, is home tuition. This was true for approximately half of those interviewed. Home tuition normally amounted to one, and less frequently two, three-hour sessions per week. However, most of our interviewees had not found home tuition particularly useful or relevant. Tony, for example, commented that:

'the work was too easy. The excuse she gave me was that they needed to find out what level I was at, but that seemed to take six months.'

However, the problem with home tuition was not primarily its sufficiency or its relevance but, rather, the inordinately long time it took to arrange. Similarly, Parsons (2000) found that permanently excluded young people received inadequate educational provision for long periods of time; for example at Key Stage 3 (ages 11–14), 57 per cent were out of school for more than one term and 25 per cent for more than two terms. As later discussion suggests, these delays appear to have had a significant impact upon those youngsters whose offending increased in frequency and/or severity in the wake of exclusion.

During interviews with parents as part of this study, it became apparent that some had sought help privately, having become frustrated by the delay and what they perceived to be an uncooperative and unsupportive education authority. Most other interviewees reported a significant time-lag between exclusion and their involvement in some form of significant alternative provision. John, for example, was out of school for six months before starting his 'exclusion' programme. Pippa was even less fortunate and was out of school for 12 months before alternative provision was offered. In the end, 'in desperation' her mother organised home tuition herself. She describes the period prior to this as 'a nightmare'. Pippa was subsequently accepted into another secondary school, from which she was swiftly excluded, and referred on to the 'exclusion' programme.

In contrast with the experiences of the eight interviewees who transferred to another secondary school, the majority of those who were referred to voluntary sector 'exclusion' projects regarded these positively. They thought the activities and programmes were enjoyable and useful and they valued the opportunity to gain the qualifications they should have taken at school. One-to-one tuition and small group work was also thought to be particularly helpful.

'It's better, when it's one-to-one you can learn more' (Ali)

Mike, who persistently got into fights at all his other schools, noted that 'I never had no fights at the Project'. Most interviewees believed that project staff cared about them and they particularly valued the fact that staff were prepared to 'put themselves out'.

'They even helped my Gran, like to sort out her rent. They helped me, like I never used to get a grant, then I got a grant.' (Samira)

Such demonstrations of commitment had a positive impact upon many of our interviewees, whose self-esteem was enhanced considerably as a result. Carl had been accommodated by Social Services at the age of 16 and he obviously relished the concern shown by his project worker. He said:

'I used to go on trips every week. Yes, it was good, we could see they cared for us, at least my tutor did. If I didn't turn up Sarah would be at my door making sure I got up and went to college. I did bunk off but then I'd get a bollocking off her. I'd rather stay at school than get a bollocking off her! She's worse than my mum.'

Similarly, John commented:

'You felt you were someone, you felt important. Sheila (project worker) was the only one who ever cared.'

Elisabeth, Robert, Gary and Susan spoke of having enjoyed their time at the 'exclusion' projects and relishing, in particular, the more 'adult' atmosphere. It is interesting that students valued projects because they were both nurturing and caring on the one hand and 'relaxed' and 'adult' on the other. It appears that these programmes operated a regime that was able to respond both to their emergent adult and their residual child. This links to Pomroy's (1999) conclusions regarding what students perceive to be the 'ideal' teacher-student relationship, namely one in which

'... their non-child status is recognised and responded to accordingly while, at the same time, their pastoral needs are met. The defining feature of the ideal teacher-student model which enables teachers to communicate 'caring', without inadvertently 'parenting' is dialogue. Repeatedly, interviewees would mention teachers who knew them, who would talk to and explain things to them, and who would listen. (p.447)

Three other interviewees who had also enjoyed their experience with 'exclusion' projects nonetheless complained, without irony, that there was too much disruption from other students which prevented them from learning.

'These other kids, they were there. I wanted to concentrate, but these other kids, they were really disruptive. I know I could have achieved so much; every day I regret it.' (Kamir)

The disruption notwithstanding, the support of the tutors was valued. Overall, it seemed that the close relationship that many interviewees developed with project workers was perceived by them to be 'the difference which made the difference'.

However, other youngsters drifted away from such programmes. Tony said that his project was okay but that it was 'dominated by the girls'. He left early to take a job as a labourer. Julie didn't attend the project she was referred to very often – preferring the company of her boyfriend.

It is in the nature of such projects that they bring together young people with high levels of need, a limited capacity for self-control and considerable illicit expertise. This can mean that involvement in such projects may, of itself, accelerate criminal careers. Fo and O'Donnell (1974), for example, cite an evaluation of a literacy project, which brought together relatively serious young offenders and non-offenders with learning difficulties. The result was significantly increased offending amongst those with no previous offences but significantly decreased recidivism for youngsters with prior offences. Similarly Harry, one of four interviewees who admitted offending with other excluded young people he met at a project, commented

'Although they got me out of the house, back into a regime, getting up, doing different things, and I felt treated like an adult, I met up with the wrong crowd and got involved in (more serious) offending through it.'

5.

Exclusion and offending

Of the 343 young people in the overall sample, 224 (65 per cent) were found to have been cautioned or convicted of a criminal offence at some time in their lives. As expected, more males committed offences (nearly three-quarters had done so) than females (just under one-half had been convicted or cautioned). There was little difference in offending between those from ethnic minority backgrounds and white young people. Those from ethnic minority backgrounds were slightly less likely to commit offences, 62 per cent had done so, compared with 67 per cent of those from a white European background. There was evidence of some variation between different ethnic groups. A higher proportion of African-Caribbeans and Bangladeshis had committed crimes than Africans, those of mixed parentage and those from other ethnic backgrounds. However, as the numbers within each ethnic group were small, too much emphasis should not be placed on this finding.

As Table 5.1 indicates, not only did fewer females commit offences but those who did had less extensive criminal careers than their male counterparts. Only 17 per cent had committed three or more offences. Males on the other hand, were more extensively involved in crime, 44 per cent had committed three or more offences.

Table 5.1: Number of offences committed

Number of offences	Males		Females	
	Number of offenders	Per cent of offenders	Number of offenders	Per cent of offenders
0	74	28	45	55
1	34	13	11	13
2	36	14	12	15
3	24	9	5	6
4	16	6	3	4
5 < 10	40	15	5	6
10 or more	37	14	1	1

Details of all offences committed by the sample were not recorded (only up to three per individual). Nevertheless, information was recorded on over 450 offences. Details are given in Table 5.2. The nature of the offences committed by this group were broadly what might have been expected for offenders of this age group, the majority being property offences (including offences against motor vehicles). The relatively high proportion of offences of violence against the person is somewhat surprising although this category includes many offences of assault and wounding.

The percentage found to have committed offences and the number of offences committed, are considerably higher than would have been expected in a representative sample of the population of this age group (Tarling, 1993). To this extent, school exclusion and criminal behaviour are linked in some way, in that those who have been excluded from school are more likely to have offended at some point.

Table 5.2: Type of offences committed

Type of offence	Per cent
Violence against the person	14
Sexual offences	1
Robbery	5
Burglary	9
Other theft and handling	27
Vehicle related crime	15
Criminal damage	14
Drugs	9
Other	5

The relationship between permanent exclusion and offending

The next stage of the quantitative analysis concerned the timing of events. To what extent did offending precede permanent exclusion or occur after it? The 72 young people who were not permanently excluded were omitted from the analysis together with seven others for whom the date of their permanent exclusion was not known and one further person for whom no dates of offences were available. This left 263 young people of whom 178 had committed crimes at some time in their lives and 85 had not.

Table 5.3 shows the extent to which the 'onset' of a criminal career (the first offence) occurred before or after permanent exclusion and the time between the two events.

Table 5.3: Time between onset of offending and permanent exclusion

Months	First offence occurring before permanent exclusion: no. of young people	First offence occurring after permanent exclusion: no. of young people
1 < 3	9	8
3 < 6	9	8
6 < 9	9	12
9 < 12	7	13
12 < 15	8	6
15 < 18	6	10
18 < 24	7	12
24 < 36	4	20
36 or more	2	15
Total	61	104
First offence occurring at the same time as permanent exclusion (i.e. within the same month)		13

In total 61 young people had begun offending before they were permanently excluded from school but considerably more, 104, were permanently excluded prior to committing their first offence. (The latter group includes two young people – one aged 8 and the other aged 9 – who were excluded before they reached the age of criminal responsibility.) In addition, 13 young people were permanently excluded and committed their first criminal offence in the same month.

Offending careers

The data in Table 5.3 indicates that it is difficult to draw clear-cut, causal, connections between school exclusion and offending. While it might be argued that more young people began offending after being permanently excluded from school, this does not take into account maturation and the development of criminal careers. A substantial body of criminological research tells us that a majority of young people begin their criminal careers in their late teens rather than in their early teens (Tarling, op. cit.). Thus, the sequence of events may simply reflect the age at which the young person was permanently excluded. Other things being equal, if the young person is excluded early in his or her school career, he or she will have had less time to commit offences beforehand. Conversely, the young person will have had more time to commit offences beforehand if he or she is permanently excluded relatively late in his or her school career. There was evidence of this pattern in the data. Of the 61 who offended before being excluded, nearly three-quarters were not excluded until after their 14th birthday whereas approaching 60 per cent of the 104 who offended after being permanently excluded were excluded before the age of 14.

Moreover, if it is assumed that if there were a causal relationship between permanent exclusion and the onset of offending occurring, we might reasonably expect the onset of crime to follow permanent exclusion fairly shortly afterwards. However, what Table 5.3 reveals is that, in many cases, there is a considerable gap between the two events. For half (90 of the 178 offenders) there was more than a year between exclusion and first offence.

The sample of 263 can be disaggregated into four distinct groups depending on how the young person's permanent exclusion was related to their criminal career.

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| A | Those who had no recorded offences prior to, or following, permanent exclusion from school, <i>non-starters</i> | (85) |
| B | Those who had no recorded offences prior to permanent exclusion but had a record of offending following permanent exclusion, <i>starters</i> | (117) |
| C | Those who had recorded offences before and after permanent exclusion, <i>persisters</i> | (47) |
| D | Those who had recorded offences before, but not after, permanent exclusion, <i>desisters</i> | (14) |

The rate of offending was calculated for each group by counting the total number of offences committed by members of the group and dividing this by the total time the group was free to commit crime. For group C, the persisters, it was possible to calculate their rate of offending both before and after they were permanently excluded.

The results are shown in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4: Number of recorded offences committed per year

Group	Before permanent exclusion	After permanent exclusion
Non-starters	–	–
Starters	–	1.8
Persisters	1.8	2.8
Desisters	1.5	–

It can be seen from Table 5.4 that persisters commit offences at a higher rate, especially after their permanent exclusion from school. To some extent the increase in their rate of offending in the second part of their criminal career will simply reflect the fact that they are older and that they started their criminal careers earlier. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note the extent to which their offending increases following permanent exclusion.

Each group was examined in more detail in order to identify any distinguishing characteristics. Surprising perhaps on the evidence available, with the exception of gender, there seemed little to discriminate between the groups. The non-starters and the desisters included a much greater proportion of females. Starters and persisters were predominantly male. The non-starters also included a higher proportion than other groups of African and 'other' ethnic minority groups although the relatively small size of this sub-group means that this finding is inconclusive and would need to be verified or otherwise through further investigation.

Applying the above method of analysis to our sub-sample of 28 interviewees produces three non-starters, six starters, 16 persisters and three desisters. The characteristics of these four groups are discussed in turn.

A. The non-starters

Neither Kate nor Samira had offended. Kate believed that exclusion represented an unfortunate blip in her educational career, which she had overcome because of her belief in her own ability and a remarkable degree of initiative. She felt that:

'... if you want to learn, you'll learn. I liked doing the work. I always did well, but then I got into a lot of trouble. After I was excluded I went home, then moved into shared housing. I wasn't doing anything there all day, and I thought, 'I'm wasted here'. I went back to college and got my GCSEs, and then I knew I wanted to do nursing. I was homeless then, so I went to live in Centrepoint and went through three hostels. I still managed to keep my job and keep my college place. I kept on going out – that was my stability. But when you're in care you're open to lots of things, drugs and that. But I still kept on going to college because that was my bit of respect. I think if you really want to do it you will. I never really got any help – we had a really crap social worker, they never helped. I just went to the college and asked. I know how to work it, and it's taught me like to do it for myself. Same like for housing benefit'

Kate was at university at the time of interview.

For Samira, the experience of exclusion, and her subsequent experiences at the 'exclusion' project appeared to have boosted her confidence and consolidated a positive sense of identity as a Moroccan woman. She said:

'I think it was a good thing. I made new friends and they're still my friends. I made Moroccan friends, and I really liked that. I do wish I'd done my GCSEs, maybe that would have helped me.'

As the quantitative data suggest, young women are less likely to become involved in offending, but the fact that both of these young women had a positive experience of education following exclusion may have contributed to their capacity to resist criminal involvement. In Kate's case, a remarkable degree of self-esteem appears to have sustained her through a set of circumstances with which few people, let alone a young person from local authority care, would have been able to cope.

The case of Angela illustrates some of the difficulties of establishing clear links between permanent exclusion and youth offending. We have placed her in the non-starter category because she has one recorded offence which took place several years after exclusion but appears unrelated to it. During the interview it emerged that she had also been in trouble with the police around the time she was excluded, but she was neither charged nor cautioned.

B. The starters

Four of the six post-exclusion starters amongst our interviewees felt that permanent exclusion projected them into offending because it meant that they fell in with the 'wrong crowd'. Karim, for example, committed all his offences at college where he was mixing with older peers. He has subsequently broken-off contact with them. Hilary began offending at the college she attended as part of her 'exclusion' programme. However, the nature of this offending, fighting and, on one occasion, racial harassment was similar to the behaviour which had led to her exclusion from school. She recognised that her 'confrontational attitude' was a problem. She said:

'If you get excluded from school, that makes you stereotype teachers, you think they're all the same. Not just teachers, anyone in authority, they're all against me, even if they're trying to help me.'

Both starters and persisters/accelerators discussed in the next section appeared to be subject to similar pressures to offend.

C. The persisters

There were 47 persisters in the quantitative sample and 16 in the qualitative sample. Persisters were young people who were offending before exclusion and continued to do so afterwards. The offending of persisters began at a relatively early age. This accords with the findings of Farrington and West (1993) and Graham and Bowling (1995) who found that early onset was linked with a protracted involvement in youth crime, lasting on average ten years. However, whereas persisters were offending at a rate of 1.8 recorded offences prior to permanent exclusion, this rose to 2.8 in the wake of exclusion.

Acceleration

Mike was a persister whose offending accelerated post-exclusion. He said:

'I did get arrested a few times when I was 15, for theft. That is when it started, and then I got done for GBH, Drunk and Disorderly, Possession of Drugs and that is all I have really been arrested for. And after that it was just being stopped in the streets and after that I got arrested for GBH. ... I don't know (why I did it), probably the people I was with at the time, my friends were getting done for burglary, car theft, everywhere I went people were getting arrested. Some days I would walk away but some days I didn't.'

A number of interviewees described the development of their criminal careers in similar terms. Characteristically, it started with shoplifting and criminal damage, before escalating to vehicle crime, burglary, robbery and violent offences. Property offences far outweighed violent offences. In some cases, however, offending careers did not 'develop', they suddenly erupted.

Ryan has over 30 recorded offences, for theft and vehicle related offences. He was recently released from prison. His offending began when he was truanting but became more serious following permanent exclusion. Ryan's mother attributes this to the fact that during this period Ryan spent most of his time out of the house and on the streets instead of in school.

Truancy or exclusion brought both accelerators and starters into close, or closer, association with other excluded or unemployed adolescents and young adults. Most accelerators agreed that being out of school tended to exacerbate their offending:

'... because I was out of school, I wasn't learning nothing and I was with the wrong people. And the only way I knew to make money was by crime. And then I wanted to do bigger crime – Rolexes and that' (Finn).

'Too much time, I had too much time on my hands. That's what most kids felt, they've got too much time, that leads to crime and all sorts.' (Thomas)

If associating with socially deviant peers and having too much time on their hands were 'negative' reasons for offending, it is clear that offending also fulfilled the desire for excitement and money. However, offending also helped young people to shake off the feelings of depression and disorientation which several interviewees experienced in the wake of permanent exclusion.

The experience of exclusion in which the young person was separated from school friends, at odds with both their parents and their school and yet partially freed from the constraints of both, appeared to precipitate what has been described as 'drift' Matza (1964). In this state the young person inhabits 'a limbo between convention and crime, 'responding in turn to the demands of each, flirting now with one, now the other' (p.29). However, commitment to the deviant enterprise is not a simple product of calculation or choice. Rather, it represents the conjunction of growing boredom, a sense of 'fatalism', of being acted upon by events and a desire to resume control by making 'something happen'; the availability of illicit opportunity; a rationale which legitimises the illicit act, and access, via more experienced peers, to the know-how, skills and techniques necessary for the commission of the illicit act. Ian said:

'When I came down here I was, like, hanging around with people my own age. There was nothing to do of a night-time. What we used to do was, like, we'd all meet up, we'd like go round, kick some bins over or something, throw some stones at some windows, that got boring. ... Then one of my mate's older brothers was nicking cars, driving round fast, and that, and a couple of times we'd jump in with someone that's nicked the car, just sitting there, passengers and that. So then you think, 'fuck it', I'll go and nick my own. Then I just started doing it more and more, because there's nothing else to do, rather than walk round the streets in the freezing cold, you might as well drive around in someone else's car.'

Similar accounts were given by Robert, Toby, Keith, Billy, Finn, Mike, Harry and Tony, all of whom said they got into trouble 'mucking about' with existing friends and older peers they met following exclusion. Both Keith

and Toby offended while at school but after exclusion they 'hung out', with a larger group of African-Caribbean boys and young adults on the estates where they lived.

'We smoked a lot of puff, pissed about, nicked things, sometimes we'd rob money off other kids. The police was always coming round and nicking us but usually for things we never done, so they had to let us go again.'

Once made, the initial commitment to deviance tended to be compounded as the neophyte was drawn further into the social milieu of those involved in 'the life'. As Hagan (1993) has argued 'through branching, snowballing and multiplying processes ... successive criminal acts and contacts may further embed youths in criminal networks that are isolated from the personalised networks of job-seeking.' This deepening 'investment' in 'crime' is paralleled by a progressive dis-investment in a conventional lifestyle as crime comes to constitute an increasingly important source of income, social organisation, identity and self-esteem (McGahey, 1986). However, this embeddedness may be compounded by the very forces which are ostensibly striving to prevent it.

The group of black young people Keith and Toby hung out with, some of whose members were involved in burglary, robbery and possession of soft drugs, had extensive experience of being stopped, searched and arrested, usually for offences they claimed not to have committed, however. John, Billy, Thomas and Ian told a similar tale. They all acknowledged having committed offences but this did not diminish their sense of injustice. Thomas said:

'Yeah, I nearly went down. It must have been six or seven months ago – that was my last offence. That was nothing to do with school or that. Its like I was stuck in Brackley Ring one day and my mate pulled up next to me. I didn't know it was nicked, it has keys in it, and I was a bit stoned and that, he goes, 'do you want a lift home?' So I just jumped in. I mean he had the key so I didn't think nothing of it, he was old enough to drive and that. And then we got to a nearby road and the police pulled out and put their lights on and a chase started. And then we sort of went round in this chase and then we get sort of back to my area, and then I goes to him 'what's happening' and he goes 'I don't know' and then he stopped and I got arrested for aggravated TWOC, and it wasn't even 'allowing to be carried', I didn't know that it was a stolen car and then I got done for aggravated TWOC.'

The police don't help you. ... They pull you over for no reason. Many time I've been just walking down the street and like they've stopped you, 'can I search you?', 'why?', and then they think for a little bit, 'oh there's been a burglary gone on' and you're not going to know if there's been or not so one time I asked them, I said 'can I check with your Sergeant' because I was being funny, because I knew this time right for definite there was nothing and they goes 'no its alright' and just drove off.'

On one occasion Keith was held in the police station overnight on 'suspicion' of rape and released, without charge, the following day. Keith and Toby understood why the group they 'hung out' with should be the object of police suspicion but felt that, often, the police were just 'rounding up the usual suspects'. This turned into something of a game, albeit a very serious one, which filled the time and added drama to the lives of group members.

This progression to the social margins tended to gain impetus if the young person was accommodated by the local authority:

'... in the children's home, I met up with this boy, and he was telling me about crime, and we did some crime. Everyone in the home was involved in crime, even the girls.' (Ali)

Following his second permanent exclusion, Keith was accommodated by the local authority. His first placement, at a children's home in the country, broke down fairly quickly because of Keith's aggressive behaviour and absconding. He was transferred to another home in south London. Here he fell in with a group of youngsters who were involved in street robberies and burglaries and his offending career escalated rapidly. He was eventually caught, fined, sentenced to an attendance centre, placed on a supervision order and required not to travel on the London Underground. Interestingly, on being transferred to another children's home as a result of these offences, he met a residential social worker who took an interest in him and his offending ceased. However, at 16 the local authority returned him to his father's home, despite Keith's mother's pleas that he remain at the children's home, and his offending resumed in earnest. At the time of interview he had recently returned from a spell in a young offender's institution.

However, for Billy, a sojourn in a secure unit caused him to desist from his serious and accelerating criminal career. Billy could see that his violent offending was intensifying as a result of association with the friends he met following exclusion. Eventually, following charges for ABH, GBH and burglary, he spent nine months on remand in a secure unit. Although he hated aspects of his life in the unit, he recognised that he needed to separate from these friends, two of whom are currently in custody:

'being there I had no contact with anyone, I couldn't associate with my old mates. If that hadn't happened, I'd have done something silly... I wouldn't be here now.'

D. The Desisters

The three post-exclusion desisters appear to have experienced psychological problems when they were very young. Both John and Peter were referred to a psychologist at primary school for reasons other than learning difficulties, whilst Susan was sexually abused at this time. Occurring several years later, exclusion may have reduced pressures towards offending because it represented, in some way, a resolution of underlying emotional difficulties.

For instance, John said he was unhappy throughout school, reflecting 'it was just not for me'. On the day of his permanent exclusion he met by chance someone who five years later when we interviewed him remained his closest friend. This person took on John as his assistant in a painting and decorating business which took them to the south coast and to London. When John joined the project several months later, he did so with renewed confidence and purpose and had subsequently obtained qualifications and found work.

In Susan's case, the exclusion coincided with a very difficult time at home from which she ran away on more than one occasion. In a letter to the LEA, Susan's mother indicated that she regarded Susan's problems at school as 'a direct result of the sexual abuse which happened at her primary school.' It was only in the aftermath of the exclusion, and following counselling, triggered by her behaviour, that Susan felt able to disclose the abuse. With this hurdle overcome, normality began to return, so that like John she was able to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the 'exclusion' project, complete the course and move into full-time employment.

Looking back, looking forward

Because many of the excluded students we interviewed were in their late teens or early twenties, we were able to develop a picture of some of the longer-term effects of permanent exclusion from school.

Employment and unemployment

Of the 28 interviewees:

- Seven were working. Two were waiting tables at restaurants, one was a barman, one was a factory hand, one was a shop salesman and one was a night porter.
- Five were at FE college pursuing a range of courses
- One was at university
- One was looking after her child in a 'mother and baby home'
- One was still in school
- One was excluded from school
- Twelve were unemployed.

It is striking that of the 19 interviewees available for work, twelve (slightly under 60 per cent) were unemployed. Home Office data for 1995 show that in the 16–17 age group 59 per cent of convicted offenders were unemployed compared with 26 per cent in the general population. In their self-report study of youth offending, Graham and Bowling (1995) found that among 'persistent offenders' only ten per cent of 16–17 year olds, and 50 per cent of males and 33 per cent of females in their mid-20s, had a steady job. Employment tends to promote desistance from crime because it enables young people to 'mature out' of it. (Graham and Bowling 1995; Farrall 1995). Farrington *et al.* (1986) found that rates of youth offending were three times greater during periods of unemployment, while Lipsey's (1995) meta-analysis of American studies found that:

"The single most effective factor in reducing re-offending rates, with a positive effect size of 37 per cent, is employment."

However, six of the seven interviewees with jobs were employed in relatively precarious, lower-paid, secondary sector jobs. Lipsey (1995) and Sullivan (1989) both found that, rather than secondary sector jobs acting as a bulwark against crime, young people in these jobs tended to derive their livelihood from a variety of other sources, including 'government transfers, employment and training programmes, crime and illegal hustles'.

College

It is, in part at least, a testimony to the 'exclusion' projects that five of the interviewees were attending college. However, from the late 1980s further education colleges have tended to become something of a repository for young people who have failed to win a place, or been rejected by, work-based schemes (Roberts, 1997). Nonetheless, our interviewees were generally positive about their college courses and believed that they would enhance their job prospects. At the point of interview, Toby, aged 19, had successfully completed a six month college foundation course, a six-month intermediate course, NVQ II Computing and was now embarked upon a BTEC in computer programming. He felt that permanent exclusion had cost him a great deal. He believed that he was three years behind where he would otherwise have been in his education. He had, he said applied for over one hundred jobs in the computer industry but was seldom interviewed, often being rejected on the basis of his application form alone. He said:

'They take one look at it and see that I was excluded from two schools and that I've got criminal offences and they don't want to know, even though now I get good marks and good reports from my tutors.'

To pursue Hagan's (1993) 'capitalisation' analogy, Toby by dint of his history of non-attendance, exclusion and offending now finds himself in a situation of acute educational 'negative equity', in which his qualifications, as a form of social capital or collateral, are devalued.

The benefits of permanent exclusion

Some interviewees viewed exclusion in a fairly positive light. Certainly it did not appear to have affected their attitudes towards education which were, in the main, very positive. Being excluded had led Carl into contact with professionals who had helped him. He spent one year at the 'exclusion' project then went to college to pursue a course in Health and Social Care. He had expressed a desire to become a youth worker, and he notes that 'I had a lot of people working to get me on the straight and narrow'. During this period his contacts with his 'gang' dwindled. He said 'I wanted to – it was getting me into too much trouble'. Having completed the college foundation course, however, Carl left college for work. He found that he wasn't getting anywhere with work and returned to college to try for A. levels, but dropped out because the course was 'too hard'. Reflecting on whether permanent exclusion might have been prevented, Carl said:

'No, because I didn't want to listen to them; I wanted to do my own thing. And they kept on saying, 'you'll have to learn by your own mistakes'. And I have. It's been hard. Social workers and youth workers did help. They did help, that's what did get me on the straight and narrow. It's only in the past year and a half that I haven't got into trouble – girlfriend, steady money. At the same time, if I hadn't got kicked out of school, and if I'd stayed in school, then I'd have got some qualifications and I'd be in a better job than I am now'.

Imprisonment

Eight of our 28 interviewees had spent time in YOIs and adult prisons. At the other end of the educational scale from Toby, Keith, who was also African-Caribbean, had no qualifications, but had improved his literacy skills during his last YOI, sentence. At the time of the interview, he was waiting to hear from the local supermarket about his application for a manual job there. He seemed unaware that the Probation Service, or organisations like the APEX Trust or NACRO, might be able to help him in his search for work. Like Toby, he had applied for many jobs but because he had no qualifications, an erratic educational career, a care history, convictions for a number of serious offences and a spell in a YOI, he was not optimistic. He said dolefully:

'I've been out of trouble for nearly a year but I can't get anything. What's the point?'

For Keith, the idea that his exclusion, his offending or his incarceration might have been avoided was a novel one. Talking about the past, he could identify no point at which he might have been able to do other than he did. Keith was equally fatalistic about the future, indicating that, 'if he gets the breaks' he would stay out of jail but, if not, he wouldn't.

Keith, and Billy whom we discussed above, were not alone in identifying a positive aspect to a period of incarceration. Some of the young people had found that custodial sentences offered them an opportunity to improve their educational skills and qualifications. Ryan, for example, observed that:

'one year in prison and I get more qualifications than I ever did, because there you have to do it.'

Other interviewees indicated that custody, or the threat of custody, had finally persuaded them to desist from offending. This was true of both Harry, who was sentenced to two years in custody when he was 16, and Julie, who at the time of interview was awaiting sentence for handling stolen goods, and had spent three days on remand. It would however be wrong to read into interviewees' accounts any simple message that custody works as a deterrent. As Ian observed:

'I think I was robbed. It's like, for my last sentence, the maximum sentence was six months, this was for nicking a car or something, doesn't matter what – if they wanted to give me three year they couldn't, the maximum sentence was six months, and I entered guilty pleas at the first opportunity, which means by rights they take a third off your sentence, so that's four months which means I serve two months, cos I was on remand and I think I'd served something like two months, two weeks. If I'd just done two months, they probably would have just given me a walkout from court, you know like 'Oh right you can go'. What they done is, no they could have given me, no like, all I'd have had to do was another two weeks to finish the whole sentence, whereas they goes, 'we'll let you today', so like I think, oh great, I ain't gotta do those other two weeks, but what they've done is, they've given me a £100 fine, so that's hanging over my head, soon as I get out I've got no money, no nothing, nowhere to live, I've got a £100 to find, and I've got to do 100 hours community service, I've got to do a year's probation, then I've got a three year driving ban, then I've gotta do an eight week drink driving course, when instead of all that I could have just done another two weeks inside and I'd come out and I'd have nothing hanging over my head, and they wonder why people keep going back in!'

6.

Conclusions

This report sought to examine the nature of the relationship between permanent school exclusion and the offending careers of young people. Drawing on a range of data, the research findings highlight the ways in which the complexity of each of these issues in their own right makes absolute statements regarding this relationship difficult.

One aspect of this concerns the fact that both offending and exclusion to some extent remain processes hidden from standard methods of official surveillance, and the relationship between them can be similarly disguised. The offending data in this study were based upon offences recorded by the police, which necessarily understates the actual incidence of offending. It is therefore possible that the 119 young people who appeared to have not offended either before or after permanent exclusion, and the 104 whose offending apparently commenced following permanent exclusion, may well have committed offences of which the researchers were unaware.

Also, an enduring theme throughout the study has been that of 'unofficial' or 'informal' school exclusion. There was evidence of informal exclusion in one-fifth of all cases. Truancy also featured prominently in the experiences of a majority of young people. Determining the relationship between permanent exclusion and offending inevitably becomes more difficult when the concept of exclusion itself has to be extended to embrace a much broader group of children 'out of school'. The complexities surrounding definition of the research problem, then, have significant implications for policies which are designed to target these groups.

These theoretical issues aside, the present study has confirmed earlier research in revealing that a substantial proportion of permanently excluded young people, 178 of 297, were involved in crime. This finding mirrors that of Martin *et al.* (1999) who found that a substantial proportion of youngsters persistently involved in crime had been excluded from school. However, both studies reveal that the young people in question were subject to many non-school risk factors associated with persistent involvement in youth crime (Farrington, 1996).

The research findings also confirm earlier research on the extreme social and educational disadvantage present in the backgrounds of young people who experience permanent exclusion from school and/or offending. Almost half were entitled to free school meals and 44 per cent had been assessed as having special educational needs. A high proportion had contact with welfare and criminal justice agencies. Although this finding is far from new, the extent of this neediness cannot be overlooked in the search for effective interventions. In these cases, it also seems that there is a need for professionals to be aware of significant changes in young people's circumstances which may exacerbate existing problems. There is no evidence that exclusions are unexpected to those involved.

This research also shows that successful interventions in the educational careers of young people who are eventually permanently excluded need to address the range of difficulties which these individuals experience. Difficulties at primary school, special educational needs and truancy feature prominently. In many cases, file data revealed extensive efforts by schools to assist the young person, while at the same time often revealing teachers' frustrations, especially at the difficulty of working with individuals who were rarely present and

whose families appeared unsupportive of the school. Unfortunately, this combination of problems tended to produce a picture of students with few redeeming qualities, and the body of evidence which helped generate permanent exclusion often appeared overwhelming. Fixed-term exclusions offered temporary relief but on the whole did not appear to resolve difficulties, and it is striking that data from this study show very similar patterns in the reasons for fixed-term and permanent exclusions.

This is indeed, therefore, a 'joined up' problem which needs to be viewed within a wider social and educational context (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998). The complexity of the needs presented by the young people in this sample indicates the importance of a multi-faceted strategy of intervention. It is encouraging that current policy initiatives allow for intervention at different stages of the individual's educational career – thus, for example, there has been investment in intervention through the Sure Start initiative, focusing on the early years, while the importance of support in the later teenage years is recognised in the Connexions strategy. Other proposals, and funding, have been announced for the intervening years. Crucially, recent guidance relating to young people also emphasises the importance of a multi-agency approach. Perhaps the best example of this mode of working in practice is the Youth Offending Team, where professionals from a range of backgrounds work as part of the same team to address the range of needs which a young person in trouble may present.

In terms of their offending careers, our survey of 343 young people found that the 61 young people whose offending commenced prior to permanent exclusion tended to be older – almost 76 per cent were aged 14 plus – at the point of permanent exclusion; while those whose offending commenced after exclusion – 104 in all – tended to be younger, with 60 per cent aged under 14. Moreover, where onset followed exclusion, there was often a significant time-lag. This time-lag was as much as one year or more for 50 per cent of the sample. This makes it difficult to posit a causal relationship between the two events, since it is not possible to separate the effects of permanent exclusion from the tendency of young people to 'grow into crime' in their mid- to late teens. What happens to the young person during this time-lag also requires further investigation.

If anything, then, it appears that permanent exclusion adds impetus to pre-existing youth offending careers and sets in train sequences of events which, in some cases, culminate in the onset or escalation of offending. This may be related to the fact that permanent exclusion from school, by projecting youngsters into closer association with other school-excluded and socially deviant peers, exposes them to new criminal opportunities, while rendering them more visible, and hence more vulnerable, to the attentions of the police. This appeared to be the case for six of the white youngsters we interviewed, but the 'visibility-vulnerability' factor was a particular problem for some of the African-Caribbean young people who participated in the study.

The issue of ethnicity is of considerable importance to debates concerning both school exclusion and youth offending and deserves some further consideration. African-Caribbean males are known to be disproportionately excluded from school. Minority ethnic groups are also disadvantaged socio-economically. By 1995, 40 per cent of African-Caribbean and 59 per cent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in the UK were located in the poorest fifth of the population. This contrasts with only 18 per cent of the white population. In London, by the mid-1990s, up to 70 per cent of the residents on the poorest public housing estates were from 'ethnic minorities' (Power and Tunstall, 1995). It is therefore highly likely that a disproportionate number of black and Asian young people will be 'hanging out' on these estates. This tendency will be exacerbated by the fact that young African-Caribbean men aged 16–39 are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as their similarly qualified white counterparts (Berthaud, 1999). Thus, by dint of their heightened visibility, these young people are particularly vulnerable to the special attentions of their local police force (Marlow, 1999). This was certainly the perception of some of our black interviewees.

The intensification of police action increased member's dependence upon the group, and hence the group's cohesion, uniting them in a shared sense of injustice. There is, of course, always a danger that what Young (1971) calls the 'self-theorisations' developed by group members to explain the group's predicament, then serve to heighten their sense of difference and separateness. In some cases, this appears to have had the effect of further distancing young people from the reach of informal mechanisms of social control. Some parents spoke of having 'lost' their children. This increasing investment in social deviance tended to be paralleled by a progressive dis-investment in conventional lifestyles. For some of our interviewees, this had serious long-term consequences by, for example, limiting access to employment and further embedding young people in criminal networks (Hagan, 1993).

This kind of overlap between educational and socio-economic disadvantage, together with an absence of alternative community identities, indicates one route through which permanent exclusion from school can lead to offending. While this perception of the issue had particular resonance for some of the black students interviewed, elements of it were echoed by white young people and their parents, who felt strongly that permanent exclusion strengthened links with delinquent peers within the community and thus increased the likelihood that a young person would become involved in offending or that their offending career would develop.

For these students, the administrative drift which appears to follow many permanent exclusions may contribute significantly to the onset or acceleration of offending careers. The time-lag this study has identified between permanent exclusion and onset of offending would appear to offer considerable scope for improved intervention. In this case, a planned exclusion, in which comprehensive alternative provision is put in place from the outset, may be the most effective bulwark against the development or intensification of youth offending. The positive validations of the 'exclusion' projects by many of the interviewees who attended them suggest the form such provision might take and the atmosphere and ethos it might attempt to achieve. At the same time it is clearly important that more detailed information on such initiatives is collected, in order to evaluate precisely the effects of different interventions.

Post-exclusion intervention of this type can, however, only be one element in any response to the fact that many permanently excluded young people become involved in offending. An issue raised by the data from this study is that of the small group of students who are subject to multiple exclusions, and those who, having been 're-integrated' into a new school, are swiftly excluded once again. More concentrated intervention appears necessary for this group; a 'fresh start' is not, for some, sufficient to overcome high levels of behavioural and other educational problems. The same is true for children and young people who are not formally excluded from school. Managed or planned exclusion and reintegration can have successful outcomes, if the appropriate supports are made available. For young people who already have some involvement in offending, such support may involve work by Youth Offending Teams and other agencies.

It has also been noted that permanently excluded young people can tend – depending on local geographies of educational provision – to gravitate towards schools with vacancies which were more receptive to 'challenging' students. These schools tended to be particularly hard-pressed in terms of the social problems with which they were required to contend. If successful re-integration is to occur, such schools may need additional support and resources. The negativism with which excluded pupils feel they are perceived does not improve their chances of successful integration.

It is possible to conclude this report on a relatively optimistic note, even while recognising the complexity of the issues involved. The study revealed that many schools and other professionals work hard to try to maintain a young person in school and, where this is not possible, demonstrate an ongoing support and commitment which young people themselves often recognise and appreciate. Young people can be remarkably resilient and in the course of time many break their associations with a delinquent culture and continue in education and employment.

This research has also been undertaken against the backcloth of a rapidly changing policy context. Although it is too soon to comment on the outcomes of the heightened policy emphasis and increased investment in the problems of children out of school, the attention being given to the issue is extremely positive. Many of the initiatives in place are congruent with the findings of this study, including the focus on early intervention, better support for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and better planning at the point when problems are escalating (DfEE, 1999a). Recognition of the needs of specific groups, such as children looked after, is also an important step forward (DfEE, 2000). In terms of the focus of this study, the provision of alternative education for children out of school will also be crucial if the link between exclusion, non-school attendance and offending is to be broken.

Appendix A

Characteristics and living circumstances of interviewees at time of interview (n=28)

Name	Ethnicity	Age at interview	Current education or employment status	Current place of residence
John	White	18	Barman	With parents
Peter	White	18	Unemployed	With mother and stepfather
Susan	White	18	Waitress	With parents
Julie	White	18	Unemployed	With mother
Elisabeth	White	19	Looking after (own) children	Mother and Baby Unit
Robert	White	19	Unemployed - starting college	With mother
Harry	White	19	Unemployed	Homeless
Billy	White	19	Factory worker	With mother and stepfather
Tony	White	19	Salesman	With girlfriend
Ian	White	19	Unemployed	With uncle
Gary	White	18	Unemployed	With father
Pippa	White	19	Night Porter	With mother and stepfather
Thomas	White	15	College student	With mother
Angela	White	20	Seeking work	With boyfriend
Ali	Bengali	16	No education or employment	Foster care
Samira	Moroccan	19	Seeking work	With grandmother
Kate	White	20	University student	Own flat
Darren (brother of Kate)	White	19	College student	Hostel
Ryan	White	15	No education	With parents
Carl	Mixed-parentage	19	Restaurant worker	With mother
Hilary	African-Caribbean	15	College student	With mother
Josh	African-Caribbean	16	School student	With mother
Karim	Bangladeshi	19	Newsagents + part-time airline training course	With parents
Toby	African-Caribbean	19	College student	With parents
Keith	African-Caribbean	17	Seeking work	With mother
Bazir	Kurdish	18	Probation Centre	With mother
Mike	White	17	Seeking work	With mother
Finn	White	14	Excluded from school	With parents

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