



SUSPENSIONS: CHILD SAFETY PLAN CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH A SOCIAL WORKER

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‘For the majority of children who have a social worker, this is due to known safeguarding risks at home or in the community: over half are in need due to abuse or neglect. For children with a social worker, education is an important protective factor, providing a safe space for children to receive support, be visible to professionals and realise their potential. When children are not in school, they miss the protection and opportunities it can provide, and become more vulnerable to harm.

Headteachers should balance this important reality with the need to ensure calm and safe environments for all pupils and staff, so should devise strategies that take both of these aspects into account.’

Department for Education (DfE) suspension and permanent exclusion guidance, July 2022

Rationale

Our vulnerable cohorts, allocated to a social worker, can often present with behaviours that may not align with school expectations. These behaviours are frequently rooted in past experiences of trauma, neglect, or disrupted attachments, which can manifest in difficulties with emotional regulation, trust, and social interactions. Many of these children have experienced instability, placement moves, and loss, all of which contribute to heightened anxiety, hypervigilance, and responses that may appear disproportionate to everyday situations.

It is essential to recognise that exclusion from school—whether fixed-term or permanent—can further exacerbate these vulnerabilities. Suspension interrupts the structure, stability, and trusted relationships that school provides, increasing the risk of disengagement, isolation, and safeguarding concerns. For our most vulnerable young people, who often have a fragile sense of belonging, exclusion can reinforce feelings of rejection and abandonment, potentially leading to further behavioural challenges.

Where possible, the prioritising of strategies that uphold the child’s emotional well-being, educational continuity, and safeguarding needs while maintaining a safe and supportive learning environment would also be the preferred approach.

This assessment considers the risks linked to suspension and the importance of an approach that ensures that our practice and policies reflect:

- fostering strong relationships between the child and school (Relational Behaviour Policy)
- the therapeutic PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy) approach
- ETIPSS (Enfield Trauma Informed Practice in Schools and Settings)
- the Antecedent Behaviour Consequence (A-B-C) model:
Antecedents (A): what happened directly before the behaviour occurred?
Behaviour (B): the specific action(s) or behaviour of interest.
Consequences (C): what happened directly after the behaviour occurred?
(Thinking of behaviour in these terms helps to understand why a child is behaving in a particular manner. This allows more meaningful interventions rather than just trying to prevent the behaviour itself.) example chart: <https://www.solgrid.org.uk/eyc/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2024/03/ABC-Chart-with-guidance.pdf>

To conclude, decisions should always consider the broader context of the child’s care status, needs, and safeguarding vulnerabilities.

School Should Always Offer:

The Opportunity to Build Positive Relationships

- Establishing a foundation of trust and mutual respect between students and staff.
- Preventing escalation by resolving conflicts before they lead to suspensions.

The Understanding for and Implementation of Early Identification and Support

- Promoting proactive identification of emotional and behavioural needs.
- Facilitating targeted support and intervention—reducing the need for exclusionary measures.

The Use of Restorative Practices

- Enabling students to repair harm and rebuild relationships following incidents.
- Prioritising reintegration over removal, maintaining school belonging.

Promotion of Trauma-Informed and Empathetic Response

- Recognising behaviour as communication of need, particularly in pupils with adverse experiences.
- Encouraging a compassionate response rather than punitive sanctioning.

The Opportunity to Revisit Our Commitment to Inclusion

- Reinforcing that every child has the right to access education, regardless of behaviour.
- Reducing disproportionate exclusion of students with SEND, SEMH needs, or from minoritised backgrounds.

Accountability Through Dialogue

- Students are supported to reflect on their actions, understand consequences, and make amends.
- Building internal regulation, reducing repeat behaviours that lead to suspensions.

Consistency, Safety, and Predictability

- Ensuring clear, relational expectations are applied fairly across the school.
- Reducing student anxiety and opposition through predictable adult responses.

An Empowering Student Voice

- Involving students in co-creating behavioural expectations and solutions.
- Increasing ownership and commitment to positive conduct.

A Whole-School Culture

- Moving the focus from punishment to connection, growth, and shared responsibility.
- Reducing the reliance on exclusion as a behaviour management tool.

Alignment with National Guidance

- Supporting Ofsted expectations and Department for Education (DfE) guidance on inclusive behaviour policies and exclusion reduction strategies.
- Implementing this approach, supporting not only better outcomes for pupils but also a stronger, more connected school community

The Department for Education (DfE) emphasises that suspensions and permanent exclusions should be used as a last resort, particularly for vulnerable pupils such as those allocated to a social worker.

The DfE's guidance states that "permanent exclusion must be a last resort and in response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy; and where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others in the school."

DfE Statutory guidance: School Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions

Category Definitions of Vulnerable Groups:

CP (Child Protection Plan): A child is subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP) if they have been assessed as being at risk of significant harm under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989. This means that concerns have been raised about their safety and well-being, and a multi-agency plan is put in place to protect them. These children are often monitored through child protection conferences and social work interventions. Categories of abuse that may lead to a CPP include neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, or sexual abuse.

CiN (Child in Need): A Child in Need (CiN) is a child who requires additional support from children's services to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development. This is defined under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. CiN status does not necessarily mean the child is at immediate risk of harm, but they may have complex needs due to disability, family issues, or other significant difficulties. A CiN plan outlines the support required to meet the child's needs, but it is generally less intensive than a CP plan.

CiC (Child in Care): A child who is in the care of the local authority under a care order (Section 31 of the Children Act 1989) or who is voluntarily accommodated (Section 20 of the Children Act 1989). This includes children placed with foster carers, in residential care, with other family members under local authority arrangements, or in other approved settings.

PLAC (Previously Looked After Child): A child who was previously in local authority care but has since left due to adoption, a Special Guardianship Order (SGO), or a Child Arrangements Order (CAO, previously known as a Residence Order). These children often require continued support due to the impact of early trauma and instability.

Kinship Care: A form of care where a child is placed with a relative or close family friend instead of being placed with unrelated foster carers. This can be either formal (arranged and overseen by the local authority) or informal (arranged within the family without local authority involvement). Some kinship carers have Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs), meaning they take on long-term responsibility for the child while maintaining a legal connection to birth parents.





There is a profound negative impact that suspensions and exclusions can have on our most vulnerable children, affecting their educational trajectories and overall life outcomes.

All factors of a child's life must be considered very carefully, when deciding on how best to *positively* re-engage our young people.

- **Increased Exclusion Rates Among Vulnerable Groups:** Children from low-income households, those with special educational needs (SEN), and children in need are disproportionately excluded from school. [Tackling Child Exploitation Research Report](#)
- **Increased Risk of Criminal Exploitation:** There is a documented relationship between school exclusion and an increased risk of child exploitation, including criminal activities. [Tackling Child Exploitation Research Report](#)
- **Rising Exclusion Rates:** Permanent exclusions in England increased by 34% in the autumn term of 2023/24 compared to the previous year, with secondary schools accounting for 87% of all permanent exclusions. [Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions DfE Data Report](#)
- **Long-Term Health and Well-Being Issues:** Research indicates that excluded students are more likely to experience long-term health and well-being problems, including increased likelihood of smoking, sleep disturbances, reduced participation in sports, and lower life satisfaction. [NextStepsStudy.org](#)
- **Educational Disruption:** Exclusions contribute to significant learning loss, with a record 32 million days of education missed in the 2022/23 academic year due to unauthorised absences and exclusions. [IPPR.org](#)

The Importance of Notifying the Allocated Social Worker

In the case of a looked-after child or child with a social worker, the school and the local authority should work together to arrange alternative provision from the first day following the suspension or permanent exclusion” (Suspension and Exclusion Guidance, paragraph 94).

It is important to pre-emptively inform or promptly notify a child with an allocated social worker about considerations around potential suspension for several key reasons, rooted in safeguarding, emotional well-being, and stability:

1. Safeguarding and Protection

Children with a social worker are often identified as vulnerable due to concerns such as abuse, neglect, family breakdown, or other adverse circumstances. If they are suspended from school without immediate and clear communication, they may be placed at risk—particularly if their home environment is unsafe or lacks adequate supervision.

2. Professional Discussion (extended network)

A decline in behaviour can be indicative of extenuating circumstances for our vulnerable children. Informing the social worker (and any other relevant professionals) in a timely way allows for the network to hold an informed discussion around the risks at hand and interventions that could be put in place.

3. Continuity of Care and Support

Social workers play a crucial role in ensuring that vulnerable children receive the support they need. Prompt communication enables them to:

- Arrange appropriate supervision or care.
- Coordinate with other external services to update them re: changes in behaviour / significant incident (e.g., CAMHS, early help, or foster care providers).
- Provide immediate emotional support and help to the child and family.

4. Advocacy and Fair Process

Timely notification allows the social worker to advocate for the child’s rights and ensure that disciplinary actions are fair, proportionate, and mindful of the child’s specific needs and background. This includes making sure the child understands their rights and the reasons for the school’s concern.



Remember

The Department for Education’s statutory guidance (e.g., Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England) advises that:

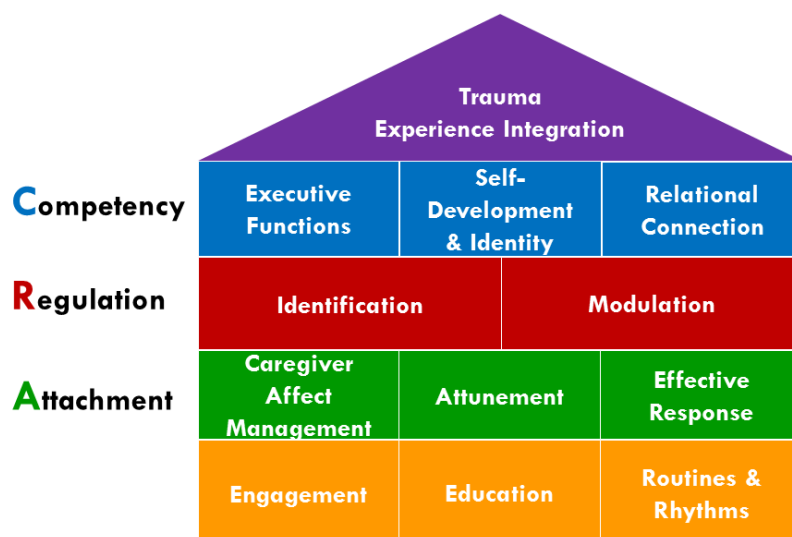
- Alternative provision should be arranged if the suspension lasts longer than 5 school days, **but even shorter suspensions merit support planning.**



As a trauma-informed local authority, we encourage embedding the ARC framework whereby schools can shift from *reactive* discipline to *proactive* support, ultimately keeping vulnerable pupils engaged and included in their education.

The ARC framework, (which stands for Attachment, Regulation, and Competency), is a trauma-informed approach that schools can use to support vulnerable pupils and reduce suspensions. Here's how schools can apply it effectively:

ARC Framework



Graphic by Jeremy Karpen, 2017; Adapted from: ARC, Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005

1. Attachment: Building Safe and Supportive Relationships

- Strong Staff-Pupil Connections: Assign key adults (e.g., mentors or pastoral leads) to vulnerable pupils to build trust and provide consistent emotional support.
- Safe and Predictable Environments: Ensure pupils feel safe by maintaining clear routines, fair expectations, and nurturing relationships.
- Family and Community Engagement: Work with parents/carers to develop a holistic support plan for at-risk students.

2. Regulation: Helping Pupils Manage Emotions and Behaviour

- Emotional Regulation Strategies: Teach self-regulation techniques such as mindfulness, breathing exercises, and movement breaks.
- Calm and Restorative Approaches: Replace punitive discipline with restorative conversations, de-escalation strategies, and therapeutic interventions.
- Flexible Responses to Distress: Recognise that behavioural outbursts often stem from trauma and unmet needs. Offer 'time-out' spaces, sensory rooms, or quiet areas instead of exclusion.

3. Competency: Developing Skills for Success

- Social and Emotional Learning (SEL): Implement programs that teach emotional intelligence, resilience, and conflict resolution.
- Tailored Learning Support: Use differentiated teaching methods and trauma-sensitive approaches to help pupils engage in their education.
- Empowering Pupils: Encourage participation in decision-making, school councils, or peer mentoring to build confidence and a sense of belonging.
- Additional Strategies to Reduce Suspensions
- Early Intervention & Multi-Agency Work: Collaborate with social workers, mental health teams, and special educational needs (SEN) staff.
- Restorative Justice Practices: Use mediation and conflict resolution techniques rather than punitive exclusions.
- Alternative Provision & Inclusion Units: Create in-school support hubs where pupils receive targeted interventions instead of being suspended.

NB. Completion of information below is not required for CiC as this should already be incorporated into the child's PEP

Student Name: _____

Date of Assessment: _____ **Assessor(s):** _____

1. Student Background Information

Year Group: _____

Child in Need (CiN): Yes / No

Child Protection (CP): Yes / No

Kinship Care: Yes / No

Special Educational Needs (SEND): Yes / No (If Yes, specify: _____)

Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP): Yes / No

Previous Suspensions: Yes / No (If Yes, provide details: _____)

Other relevant background information (e.g., social/emotional/trauma history):

Any other comments:

2. Risk Factors

(Check all that apply)

- Persistent disruptive behaviour
- Verbal aggression
- Physical aggression
- Bullying (including cyberbullying)
- Truancy
- Damage to property
- Substance misuse
- Peer influence/gang-related activity
- Family circumstances affecting behaviour
- Mental health concerns
- Learning difficulties or unmet educational needs
- Other (please specify): _____

Any other comments:

3. Risk Mitigation Strategies

(Consider actions to reduce the risk of suspension)

- Referral to school pastoral/support team
- Increased parental/carer involvement
- Meeting with allocated Advisory Teacher
- Meeting with professional network (social worker, advisory teacher, mentor, counsellor, etc.)
- Referrals made to relevant agencies (*Behaviour Support Service / SWERRL, Waythrough, CAMHS, etc.*)
- SENDCO involvement and review of support plans
- Implementation of Individual Behaviour Plan (IBP)
- Consideration of alternative provision
- Counselling or mental health intervention
- Mentoring or peer support programme
- In-class behaviour management strategies
- Temporary timetable adjustment
- Staff training to support child's specific needs
- Other (please specify): _____

Any other comments:

4. Next Steps and Actions

Actions to avoid suspension	Staff Responsible	Review Date

Checklist

Child Protection	Child in Need
Parent/Carer informed: yes / no	Parent/Carer informed: yes / no
Contact made with social worker: yes / no	Contact made with social worker: yes / no
Contact made with other key professional/s (e.g. advisory teacher): yes / no	Contact made with other key professional/s (e.g. advisory teacher): yes / no

Guidance Reference: This form aligns with the Department for Education's "Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from Maintained Schools, Academies, and Pupil Referral Units in England" ([link](#)) and should be used to evaluate and implement appropriate intervention strategies before considering suspension.