



Hampshire
County Council

Virtual School

Exclusions and Suspensions: Guidance for Social Workers

When a child is excluded or suspended from school, it's more than a disciplinary action, it's a moment that can deeply affect their sense of belonging, safety and educational progress. Social workers play a vital role in challenging exclusions where appropriate, supporting reintegration, and ensuring the child's voice and needs are central to any response.

Why It Matters

Exclusions - whether fixed-term or permanent, can:

- disrupt learning and routines
- damage relationships with peers and staff
- increase vulnerability to harm or exploitation
- reinforce feelings of rejection or failure

Suspensions may be necessary in some cases, but they should always be a last resort, used alongside proactive support and clear plans for reintegration.

Key Questions to Ask the School

What were the reasons for the exclusion or suspension?

Are they clearly documented?

Was the child's context (such as SEND, trauma, safeguarding concerns) considered?

What support was in place before the exclusion?

Were relational or trauma-informed strategies used?

Was there a behaviour support plan or pastoral input?

What is the plan for reintegration?

Is there a clear timeline and support package?

How will the child be welcomed back and helped to re-engage?

Has the child been excluded multiple times?

What patterns are emerging?

Is there a need for a multi-agency review?

Providing Effective Support and Challenge

Advocate for the child's voice: Ensure they are heard in meetings and planning. Use tools like emotion charts or drawings to help them express their experience.

Challenge where necessary: If exclusions seem disproportionate or avoidable, raise concerns through appropriate channels.

Support the family: Help them understand their rights, attend meetings, and navigate processes.

Promote relational approaches: Encourage schools to use consistent adult relationships, predictable routines, and restorative practices.

Transitions After Exclusion

Returning to school after an exclusion is a critical transition. Children may feel anxious, ashamed, or disconnected. Social workers can help by:

- preparing the child emotionally
- coordinating with school staff to ensure a warm welcome
- monitoring the child's experience in the days and weeks that follow

Useful Tools and Resources

Day in My Life Tools – Help explore how home and school life interact: <https://www.hampshirescp.org.uk/professionals/toolkits/neglect-toolkit/practical-tools/day-in-my-life-tools/>

[Reach2Teach](#) & [PEP Toolkit](#) – Trauma-informed strategies and planning tools

[Virtual School Training](#) – Includes modules on pupil voice, transitions, and relational practice

[Transition Partnership Arrangements](#) – Support good Team Around the Child meetings

Terminology

In the English education system, **exclusions** refer to the formal removal of a pupil from school, either temporarily or permanently. The two main types are:

1. Suspension (Fixed-Period Exclusion)

A **suspension** is when a pupil is temporarily removed from school for a set number of days.

It can be for **up to 45 school days in a single academic year**, either in one go or cumulatively.

During a suspension, the pupil must not be on school premises and must not attend school-organised activities.

Schools must provide work and ensure it is marked.

If a pupil is suspended for more than five school days, the school must arrange suitable full-time education from the sixth day

Source: [School suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK](#)

2. Permanent Exclusion

A **permanent exclusion** means the pupil is removed from the school roll and will not return.

It is used as a **last resort**, typically for serious breaches of behaviour policy or where allowing the pupil to remain would harm the education or welfare of others.

The local authority must arrange suitable full-time education from the sixth school day after the exclusion

Source: [School suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK](#)

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Key Terminology

Exclusion: A general term that includes both suspensions and permanent exclusions.

Governing Board: Must review certain exclusions and has the power to reinstate a pupil.

Independent Review Panel (IRP): Can be requested by parents to review a permanent exclusion decision.

Managed Move: A voluntary agreement between schools, parents, and the local authority to transfer a pupil to another school to avoid exclusion.

Off-site Direction: A temporary placement at another educational setting to improve behaviour.

These processes are governed by statutory guidance from the Department for Education, most recently updated in August 2024

Source: [School suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK](#)

Still Need Advice?

If you would like further or more specific advice or guidance, contact us at virtualschool@hants.gov.uk (Children in Care) or VSExtendedDuties@hants.gov.uk (Previously Looked After Children, Children with a Social Worker and Children in Kinship Care)