

## School Exclusions and Their Wider Social Context

This Briefing will explore the impact of school exclusion and alternative provision on young people, especially those from some ethnic minority groups. It will go on to discuss the wider question as to how we support young people to feel they belong in a diverse society like the UK today.

Part one, by Asha Sidhu, will discuss the Timpson Review of School Exclusions. Part two, by Fr Phil Sumner, will discuss how we nurture identity and belonging among young people and how that supports them in their preparation for life.

These are complex issues, and the briefing will attempt to help readers find their way through this complexity, but those who want to become more deeply involved with the issues may want to consult some of the works listed in the bibliography

---

### School Exclusions and Alternative Provision – The Timpson Review By Asha Sidhu

To exclude a pupil is to change the life trajectory that pupil is on. For many pupils it is for the better - they can access high quality education and facilities (Alternative Provisions), with reputations for exceptional parental engagement which in turn leads to better outcomes than they would have achieved in a mainstream school. However, for others, it's for the worse - the pupil subsequently fails to secure any qualification and at the age of 18 falls into the category of NEET (not engaged in education, employment or training).

In March 2018 Edward Timpson (Conservative MP for Cheshire West and Cheshire Council), was commissioned to review school exclusion and in May 2019 The Timpson Review of School Exclusion was published. The review confirmed what many already knew: some student groups were more likely to be excluded than others, and there was variation in how fairly and consistently Headteachers used exclusions. In addition, some Headteachers even unlawfully excluded pupils.

However, like most, I believe that headteachers must continue to have some autonomy and discretion to use exclusion where appropriate, but only as a last resort when all other interventions and strategies have failed. Why? Simply because there are some children who, for whatever reason (be it in-school or out-of-school factors), are unable to meet the standard expected of behaviour and interaction in a mainstream school.

Timpson acknowledged this and concluded his review with thirty recommendations, then the pandemic hit. Although the government has made some progress and implemented six of the thirty recommendations, given the statistics, urgent action on the rest, is still needed.

The statistics:

1. Almost 50% of pupils in an Alternative Provision are in year 11

According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, most children in the UK will have missed over half a school year of in-person schooling since the pandemic hit. This equates to about 5% of a pupils' entire time in school. If this is the case, then some pupils in Year 11 will be excluded after having missed at least half a school year between Years 9 and 10.

2. Only 4.5% of Year 11 pupils in Alternative Provisions achieve a level 9 – 5 in English and maths compared to 65% in mainstream schools

As more data is generated following the pandemic, many good schools are revisiting their pastoral support of pupils and are committed to deliver targeted training for staff to help them get better at identifying earlier the signs of trauma, heightened anxiety, social disconnection, etc.

3. Over 40% of pupils in Alternative Provisions are eligible for Free School Meals  
According to Ofqual, there was a slight widening of the “long-standing results gap” in England between pupils in receipt of free school meals and those who are not in 2020. And what about the pupil premium funding which is there to help schools close the gap? The Sutton Trust says that 34% of pupil premium funding is being used to plug gaps in school budgets—to fix leaky roofs, for example. How many schools who do not use the funding exclusively for pupil premium students, exclude pupils eligible for Free School Meals?

4. 79% of pupils in Alternative Provisions have SEN (special educational needs), or a disability compared to 14.6% in maintained schools.

Even more concerning is the over representation of SEN in that 11.2% of pupils in Alternative Provisions have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP), compared to 2.9% in maintained schools. Current statistics indicate that remote learning was especially difficult for children with special educational needs and disabilities—in fact, it appears that disadvantaged pupils have, overall, experienced greater learning losses of as much as seven months in both reading and maths. Unfortunately, the statistics show that many pupils who have been excluded are more likely to go on to be identified as having SEN after the exclusion.

Doesn't this mean that schools have a moral obligation to focus on early identification, not least given the prevalence of SEN among young offender where 20% have identified learning disabilities, compared to 2-3% of general population and 60 - 90% of offenders have speech, language and communication needs compared to 10% of the general population.

5. Most pupils in Alternative Provisions are identified as having SEMH needs (social, emotional and mental health). Many of our children who are persistently excluded, come from some of the most disadvantaged backgrounds. They need help and support to develop their resilience and improve their life-chances through education – not exclusions. An NSPCC analysis of serious case reviews showed that 31% of serious violence victims had received a fixed-term exclusion.

6. Approximately 70% of pupils in Alternative Provisions are boys and Black-Caribbean and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are over-represented. In September 2017, The Lammy Review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System found that despite making up just 14% of the population, BAME men and women make up 25% of prisoners, while over 40% of young people in custody are from BAME backgrounds. In addition, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (GRT) are often missing from published statistics about children in the CJS, but according to unofficial estimates, are substantially over-represented in youth custody, for example, making up 12% of children in Secure Training Centres (STC).

If we return to schools, Edward Timpson found that children with several characteristics have multiple risks of exclusion including being a black-Caribbean boy. The statistics are extremely worrying as most permanent exclusions are for 'persistent disruptive behaviour'. As you can imagine, this is a very subjective term. It's even subjective at a classroom level. What I can manage in my class may not be what the teacher next door can manage.

Given this, surely all school leaders have a duty to ensure they have the right pastoral systems in place and to train all teachers to develop the right skills to deal with behaviour so that they consistently remain a calm and safe environment where all pupils can access the high-quality education they deserve. There is no doubt that the variation in behaviour management allowed at a teacher level, feeds into the variation in the use of exclusion between schools with some schools even going as far as practicing off-rolling.

Ofsted define 'off-rolling' as ...'the practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without using a permanent exclusion, when the removal is primarily in the best interests of the school, rather than the in the best interests of the pupil. This includes pressuring a parent to remove their child from the school roll.' In most cases that Timpson came across it was unlawful.

Out of all the recommendations Timpson proposed, I believe three raise some very serious questions for our schools. The first and most urgent must be a review of the total number of days a pupil can be excluded for in any one academic year. At present it is 45 days. Surely by day 10 or God forbid, day 20, the pastoral team and Headteacher have recognised that exclusion as a tool to tackle poor behaviour is not working with that pupil.

Perhaps Timpson realised that there must be stronger incentives to make some school leaders reduce the number of pupils they exclude and so he proposed a removal of the financial incentives to exclude. The head teacher can exclude a pupil on disciplinary grounds only. This decision must be lawful, reasonable, and fair. In addition, schools and LAs must arrange alternative provision from the sixth day of the exclusion of pupils of compulsory school age. However, if schools were made to fully fund the placement of a pupil in an Alternative Provision (fixed term or permanent), would exclusion rates drop?

And finally, the third recommendation, which I believe will be the most significant for schools, suggests that schools are made accountable for the results of excluded pupils. If this recommendation is fully actioned, will there be a noticeable drop in the number of exclusions and far less variation in exclusions between schools? Importantly, will this recommendation affect exclusions in Catholic schools? And if so, why?

The Religious Education Curriculum from the Catholic Education Service states that 'the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school.' .... Religious Education is central to the curriculum of the Catholic school and is at the heart of the philosophy of Catholic education. Pope Benedict said that 'education is not and must never be considered as purely utilitarian. It is about forming the human person, equipping him or her to live life to the full – in short it is about imparting wisdom.'

There are no facts or figures for us to see what proportion of pupils are excluded from Catholic schools. Nor do we know at which stage of their formation they are excluded. It's all unknown and perhaps not relevant. However, if our task is to 'impart wisdom' so that pupils in Catholic schools can engage fully with and contribute to society, surely school leaders must ask 'should we exclude even one of our pupils?'

### **Social Inclusion in Schools and in the Community - identity and belonging By Fr Phillip T Sumner.**

The demographics of our communities are continuing to change; immigration still impacts, providing both challenges and opportunities. Faith can no longer be presumed in our Church schools and yet many of the young people from the incoming communities are strong in their faith. The arrival of more multi academy trusts suggests that schools will become larger organisations and, therefore, perhaps in greater danger of losing some of their ethos and their connection with the local communities.

The area of Oldham, where I work as a priest, was written large in the Press twenty years ago as riots erupted on our streets. In the Government report about these riots (written by David Ritchie), Church schools were picked out for criticism in that they seemed to have enabled greater segregation between faith communities. Non-Muslim families were prepared to jump through the required hoops to avoid having their children go to state schools which, in some areas, were attended by a significant Pakistani/Kashmiri or Bangladeshi majority. In the years since, some of our Catholic and Anglican schools have opened more to Muslim children (and others) and have attempted to find ways genuinely to accommodate them and enable them to belong. But, as Church, we must also reach out beyond the boundaries of Catholic organisations. I work with a local Mufti (an Islamic lawyer) to deliver workshops in over forty schools or colleges in Oldham, exploring the similarities between faiths (as well as acknowledging the differences). In the process, we also model our own good relationship. Where faith has been perceived to be a problem, we have demonstrated that it can also be seen by local authorities to be part of the solution.

There's always been much talk about the Catholic ethos in our schools but when I ask teachers, during interviews, how they know if it is 'Catholic', there's often considerable consternation and confusion. What are the yardsticks we can use to evaluate Catholic ethos? Surely, they are Scripture and Tradition. In Scripture, Jesus lays out his objectives at the beginning of his mission: to bring Good News to the poor and those excluded from society (Luke 4:18). It's when schools live this that we see something of what has been called, "the Catholic ethos". And, in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, we read: "Church communities...offer themselves as places of communion...and as catalysts for the redemption and transformation of social relationships" (par. 52). Schools, as Church communities, should therefore be catalysts of communion, redeeming social relationships, not agents of division within the wider community.

To achieve more inclusive Catholic schools that enable children of every background to belong, we need governors, chaplains, teachers, and parents who have expertise in matters of race and/or religion. They need to have the confidence to challenge even the recommendations of Government reports when these are questionable or even erroneous. The recent Commission on Race and Ethnic disparities, chaired by Tony Sewell suggested, for example, that black people now live in an age of 'participation' in this country. Sewell contrasts the present age with two former ages: the 'heroic age' (what he describes as 'the Windrush generation'), and the 'age of rebellion' during the 70's and 80's. He provides data to demonstrate much greater participation of people now from black communities in the upper echelons of business or politics. But I suspect that most black people would hardly see themselves as having arrived at an age of participation. There are green shoots, but there's still so far to go.

The same report suggests that schools can address the failure of particular communities by simply increasing the hours of the school day for everyone: "Mainstream education to some extent, has recognised the benefit of more hours in school for children...This additional time should be a core offer for all, instead of an unequal opportunity dependent on school and funding choices.....The answer, therefore, is not about bespoke interventions that single out ethnic minority groups from the White majority. It is about collectively raising standards for all children based on what works to boost opportunity. A rising tide really can raise all boats."

We would do well not to lose the learning of another report by Lord MacPherson after the killing of Stephen Lawrence. He described a "colour blind" approach as an example of institutional racism. For him, it was important to make ourselves aware of the particular needs of people from different communities and so respond to those needs in the services we provide. I suggest that this necessarily requires 'bespoke interventions that single out ethnic minority groups from the White majority'. Sewell's approach also fails to acknowledge research carried out by Dr. Jocelyn Maxime, a clinical psychologist from London, admittedly quite a few years ago. She studied three distinct groups of African Caribbean children. The first group did nothing more than their peers and had no changes to the type of curriculum offered or to the way it was taught. The second group all went for extra lessons on a Saturday. The third group had teachers who knew how to nurture identity. The second group did improve for a while but too many did not maintain their motivation

for education beyond Year 9. The third group alone showed a continuing motivation for education right through to the end of the programme.

While Sewell does recognise the importance of teaching an inclusive curriculum, he seems to limit the scope of this approach. He writes of producing high-quality teaching resources, through independent experts, to tell the multiple, nuanced stories of the contributions of people from different backgrounds that have made this country the one it is today. But nurturing a sense of belonging requires us to understand identity in a wider sense. The choice of title for a popular black-interest comedy programme from the 1990's, "The Real McCoy", suggests this. Elijah McCoy was, after all, an African American of the 19th century, who, despite the racism that existed in his day, developed lubrication systems for locomotives. Railroad engineers began to request his systems by name, hoping to avoid inferior copies. Many believe that this was the origin of the phrase, "Is it the real McCoy?" Certainly, the choice of title for the television programme suggests that the story of McCoy's success can nurture the identity of others who share his black identity.

Addressing identity through education, and in every aspect of the curriculum, was seen, in many quarters, to be of great importance for about twenty years before 2011. The Leicester Education Authority developed a wonderful toolkit to assist teachers in this approach called "Young, gifted and equal". Other authorities followed their example. But then, in 2011, David Cameron, Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy all became critical of multiculturalism. It was seen to encourage segregation and to result in a failure to criticise illiberal behaviour that challenged British values. However, a closer examination of Charles Taylor's seminal essay, "The Politics of Recognition" (from which the concept of multiculturalism was developed) would show that dialogue and interaction are an essential aspect of multiculturalism. Taylor based his thinking about the need for political recognition on the dignity of every human person – something that is also at the heart of so much Catholic social teaching. Bhikhu Parekh, another of the proponents of multiculturalism, was clear, however, that respect for people of other cultures did not prevent criticism of elements of those cultures.

What David Cameron and others were criticising was a particular model of multiculturalism that had corrupted the original concept. Ted Cattle, in his book "Interculturalism: The New era of cohesion and diversity" (2012), recognised that, in practice, there are different models of multiculturalism. He wrote of a 'defensive model', a 'State model' and a 'progressive model'. The last of these finds expression in Canada, and there we see a multiculturalism that enables greater interaction. But it's the first and second models that are most open to criticism and that Cattle and Cameron reject.

It is also important to recognise that Cattle is a secularist and has a real problem with giving political recognition to religious identity. Whereas a person's colour or sexuality is not a matter of choice, it could be argued that religion is, and, therefore, has less right to demand political recognition. The identities that need most to be addressed are those which are 'necessary' and those which are 'stigmatised'. However, when a person is born and brought up in communities where almost all follow the religion of their families, the aspect of choice significantly diminishes, if not disappears. It's important, therefore, to understand the different dynamics involved in

the rejection, by many, of giving political recognition to identity. It might be because of a more secularist standpoint or because of a rejection of a whole concept resulting from corrupted manifestations of that concept.

In Oldham's Local Authority, the three pillars of their community cohesion strategy after the riots were defined as "Identity, Engagement (including both participation and interaction) and Equality". After 2011, the word "identity" was dropped but the word "belonging" replaced it. Dina Nayeri, in her book, "The ungrateful refugee" (2019) wrote of the essential nature of "belonging" for refugees. She wrote: "They need the dignity of becoming an essential part of a society...what they most urgently need is to be useful. To belong to a place" (TUR p.338). But then she goes on to stress that, to enable people to belong, a multicultural approach is necessary. She writes that it "...requires reciprocation. It is mutual and humble and intertwined with multiculturalism, never at odds with it..." (TUR p.342).

One of the ways that I have seen parish and school come together to nurture identity was through an art project. We asked a local black professional artist to work with some Year 9 pupils to paint a 6ft by 4ft artwork that we could display in the church to recognise and celebrate Black presence. That painting, over twenty years after I left the Parish, is still displayed in a prominent position on the wall directly opposite the entrance to the church. It's been a matter of justifiable pride for the young people involved and an important and effective statement of welcome.

Nurturing a sense of belonging in our pupils also requires schools to assist them in discovering literature where they can enter a world that they understand and one that understands them. Yes, something of the power of literature is its ability to transport us into different worlds but if those worlds always seem so alien, they can alienate. And, of course, it's important to introduce all pupils to the 'greats' of literature, but there are now several black or Muslim poets or authors who have entered that hallowed company.

OFSTED has recognised, at different times, the outstanding nature of creating links between the students in our schools or colleges and students in different countries. Parish and school communities now have great potential, in the families involved, to enable and sustain such links. However, it is always important that students are helped to recognise the dignity of the communities to which they become linked and not simply to see them as objects for pity.

When it comes to nurturing faith identity, this can be more complex in the context of a Catholic school, whose *raison d'être* is to nurture the Catholic faith as well as to provide an outstanding education. We could, however, take our lead from the Pope in this matter. Pope Francis chose his name because of wanting to associate himself with St. Francis of Assisi. Most people will know of St. Francis' option to accept a life of poverty but fewer will know of his crossing the battle lines during the crusades in Egypt to engage in interfaith dialogue. St. Francis had first tried to convince the 'Christian' crusaders to lay down their arms. He was ridiculed for his attempts. He then crossed the battle lines and, at great risk to himself and his companion, he asked for hospitality from the Sultan, Malik al Kamil. Amazingly, he was given that hospitality and, for a couple of weeks, he engaged in dialogue with the Sultan and

his entourage, gaining a great respect for them and from them. Early in his papacy, Pope Francis deliberately emulated the action of the saint when he visited the Grand Imam of Egypt. A real friendship developed from that meeting too.

In conclusion, if we are to create more inclusive schools, we need to provide an ethos that truly reflects Gospel imperatives, and we need to ensure the adoption of a curriculum that enables people to belong. With all the insistence on teaching 'British values', we need to remember that a person will only accept the values of a society or a school when he/she feels valued.

---

## **Bibliography**

**The documents below are listed in the order in which they appear in the text**

*Timpson Review of School Exclusion* (May 2019)

*The Lammy Review: an Independent Review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System* (2017)

*Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic disparities* (March 2021)

*The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny* (February 1999)

*The effects of positive self reference material on seven to twelve year old children of the African diaspora.* Jocelyn Maxime (1 Jan. 1989)

*Young, gifted and equal: Racial Equality Standards for Schools.* Obhi, Kamjit; Billingham, Clive; Cabon, Chino .

'the Politics of Recognition' by Charles Taylor in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* edited by Amy Gutman, 1994

*Interculturalism: the new era of cohesion and identity* by Ted Cantle 2012

*The Ungrateful Refugee* by Dina Nayeri, (2019)

---

**This *Briefing* draws on an earlier CARJ Workshop on School Exclusions which took place on-line on 13 October 2021. A recording of the Workshop is available from CARJ**

**CARJ, 9 Henry Rd, London N4 2LH. 020 8802 8080. [Info@carj.org.uk](mailto:Info@carj.org.uk). The Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ) is an independent charity committed to working with others of diverse backgrounds and beliefs to bring about a more just, more equal, more cooperative society.**