

adoptionuk
for every adoptive family

**Adoption UK'S Schools & Exclusions
Report
November 2017**

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Adoption UK is the leading charity providing support, awareness and understanding for those parenting or supporting children who cannot live with their birth parents. More than 8,000 members provide a strong, supportive community and the largest voice of adopters in the UK.

In October 2017, we conducted a UK-wide survey asking adoptive parents about their child(ren)'s experiences in school with a particular focus on exclusions. This report includes analysis of the survey results and policy recommendations based upon our findings.

Sir Kevan Collins, the Department for Education's 'Evidence Champion', recently said: "Let start with what we know, rather than what we think we know."

In light of Sir Kevan's words and the results of our survey, we are asking government to collect and analyse data on adopted children in education. Exclusion and performance statistics for adopted children are not collected and analysed by government. Our survey results indicate that they are more likely to be excluded – temporarily and permanently – than their peers. This has an adverse impact on their school performance and ultimately their life chances. Before outcomes can be improved, we must know the extent of the problem.

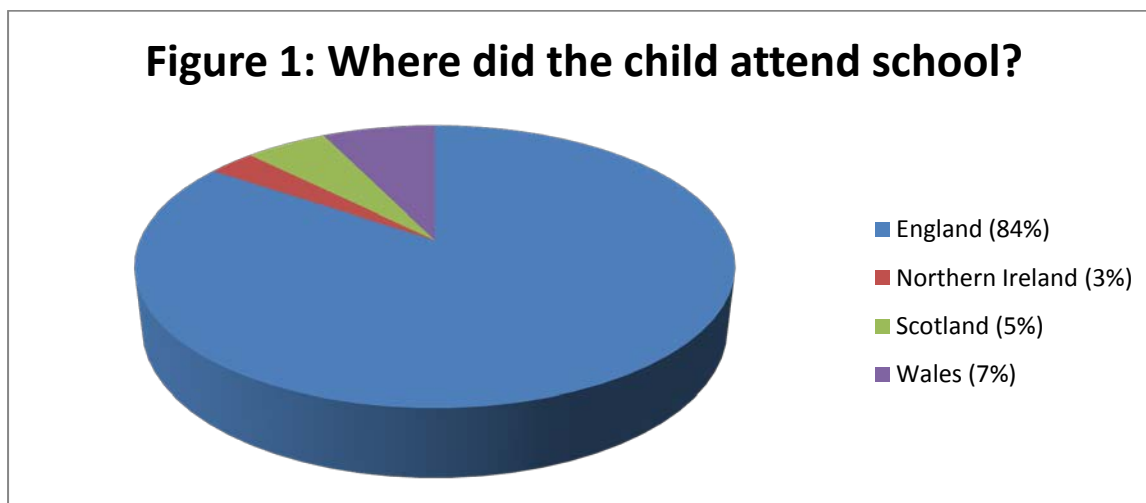
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Introduction

This survey was distributed to Adoption UK members via direct email, and circulated more widely via social media and Adopter Voice networks from Thursday 12th October to Tuesday 17th October 2017. There were 2,084 responses, each relating to one individual adopted child.

Of these responses, the majority related to children who attended school in England. However, we received a number of responses from children educated in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales as well (see Figure 1).



Over 63% of respondents reported that their child had been living with them for more than 5 years. For 83% of respondents, their child came to live with them aged 1 year or older. These two figures combined suggest that a significant number of respondents have had several years of experience of having an adopted child in school.

Respondents were asked to fill in the survey separately for each of their adopted children. Therefore all figures represent individual adopted children, rather than adoptive families.

A reasonable concern about surveys such as this is that the validity of results is reduced because respondents are self-selecting and may only complete the survey if they have had a bad experience with education.

To mitigate this somewhat, we encouraged respondents to complete the survey for each of their children, whether they had ever been excluded or not. Over three quarters of children represented in the survey had never received a fixed term exclusion. We then asked a series of general questions designed to elicit background information on the entire cohort of respondents so that a fuller picture could be gained of the varied experiences of the children represented in the survey which could then inform analysis of the results.

Summary of Results

Special Educational Needs:

- Nearly half of all adopted children represented in the survey have a recognised SEND/ASN
- 60% of the adopted children with SEND have an EHCP plan or equivalent compared to figures for England showing that just over 20% of all children with SEND have an EHCP, suggesting that adopted children have comparatively more high level support needs
- Children with an EHCP are six times more likely to receive a fixed term exclusion (DfE exclusions data 2015-16), and adopted children are over-represented in that cohort
- 45% of adopted children represented in the survey have social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) as their primary area of need compared to 16% for all SEND pupils in England (DfE)
- Children with SEMH needs are 10 times more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion (DfE) and adopted children are over-represented in that cohort
- The profile of SEND for adopted children is significantly different to that of the SEND cohort generally

Exclusions:

- 23% of children had received a fixed period exclusion and 14.5% of these had been excluded more than ten times in their school career
- 4.7% of adopted children represented had been permanently excluded
- 23.5% - nearly a quarter - of children had been illegally informally excluded
- 29% of children had changed school as a result of their needs not being adequately met
- 12% of children had been home educated because their needs were not being met in school
- 12% of parents indicated that their child's school had suggested to them that the only way to avoid permanent exclusion was to voluntarily remove their child (sometimes known as a managed move)

In 2015-16:

- 15% of adopted children represented had been illegally informally excluded, of which almost a third had been informally excluded five or more times in that year
- 12% of children had received a fixed period exclusion, of which 18% had been excluded on five or more occasions, and 10% had received an exclusion of six days or longer
- 55% of children who had been excluded received no learning support at all during the exclusion period
- 1.63% of children had been permanently excluded
- Of the children for whom exclusions were likely, 36% of parents felt that their school had not worked with them to avoid situations that might lead to an exclusion

National Comparisons:

- Higher levels of fixed period and informal exclusions for adopted children were recorded in Scotland than in the other nations, despite falling numbers of exclusions in Scotland as a whole

- Compared to national statistics from the DfE and devolved governments, adopted children are over-represented in exclusions statistics in all nations

Comparison to 2015-16 DfE data for England only:

- The children in our survey were permanently excluded at a rate just over 20 times that of the general pupil population
- The children in our survey were five times more likely to receive a fixed term exclusion than the general pupil population
- Adopted children are more likely to be excluded at younger ages. At Key Stage 1 (years R-2) an adopted child is 16 times more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion
- There is a peak of fixed period exclusions of adopted children during the first three years of secondary school – this does not follow the national trend.

Results: Full Data and Analysis

Special Education Needs and Disabilities

Just under 48% of 2,024 respondents indicated that their child has a recognised SEND (or ASN in Scotland) (Q4).

DfE statistics (England only) on exclusions indicate that children with identified SEND Support needs account for half of all fixed period and permanent exclusions. Pupils with identified SEND Support needs are seven times more likely to be permanently excluded than children with no identified needs.

Of these, 60% have a Statement of Special Educational Needs, or an Education Health and Care Plan, or equivalent. According to the DfE (England only), just over 20% of children requiring SEND Support also have an ECHP plan.

The much higher figure in our survey response indicates that the children of our respondents have significant high level support needs, above the level of the general student population. It could be extrapolated from this that adopted children have a higher frequency of SEND generally and, of those who do have SEND, their needs are more likely to be at a higher level than children who are not adopted. Additional data would be needed to form a firm conclusion.

DfE statistics (England only) on exclusions indicate that pupils with an EHCP are six times more likely to receive a fixed term exclusion.

Question 6 asked respondents whose children have recognised SEND to select all categories of need which apply to their child. There were 937 respondents.

63% of respondents selected Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs. This was by far the largest category. Other significant responses were: Speech, Language and Communication Needs (28%); Moderate Learning Difficulty (25%); Specific Learning Difficulty (21%); Autistic Spectrum Disorder (20%).

Question 7 asked parents to select their child's **primary** area of special need. There were 936 respondents. These results (nationwide) are compared to 2017 DfE statistics (England only) in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Primary Area of SEND Need, compared to DfE Figures (2017, England only)

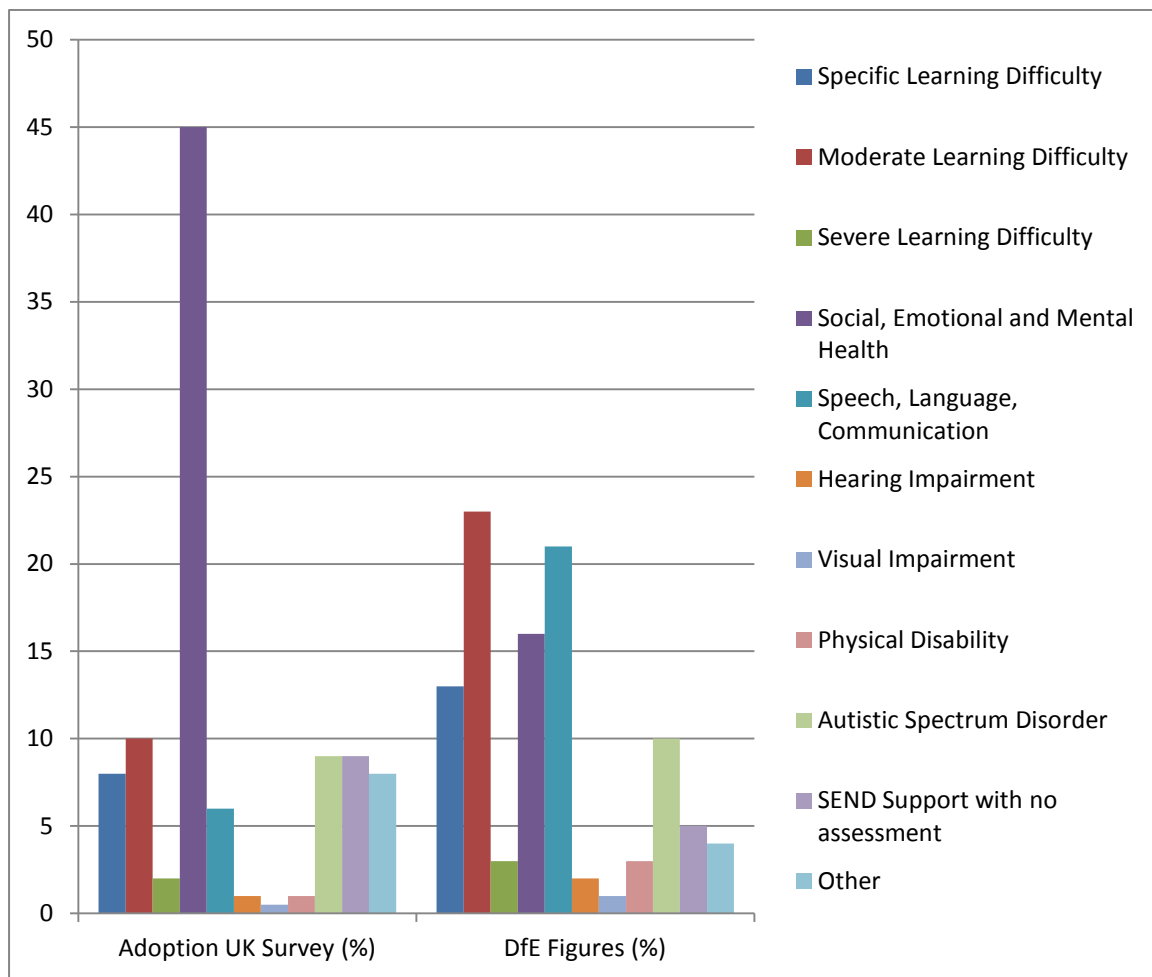


Figure 2 demonstrates that the **profile of primary SEND need in adopted children is quite different** from that of pupils with SEND from the general population.

Most significant is the very high proportion of children for whom **Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (SEMH)** are identified as the primary need (45%, compared to 16% nationally in England). A comparison of responses to question 6 and question 7 indicates that a large proportion of these children are likely to have other additional needs, such as Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD), Specific Learning Difficulties (SLD), Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties in addition to their SEMH needs, but SEMH needs are considered most significant.

9% of respondents noted that their adopted child was receiving SEND Support but with no formal expert assessment of their need, as compared to 5% in the DfE figures. As several conditions common to adopted children (e.g. attachment difficulties, developmental trauma, FASD) are not widely understood or even formally recognised (from anecdotal reports) it might be conjectured that this accounts for the relatively high figure of children with no formal assessment.

A significant proportion of respondents (8%) selected 'Other', as compared to 4% in the general population. Communications from a number of adoptive parents and campaign organisations following the survey release demonstrated that parents whose children are diagnosed with Foetal

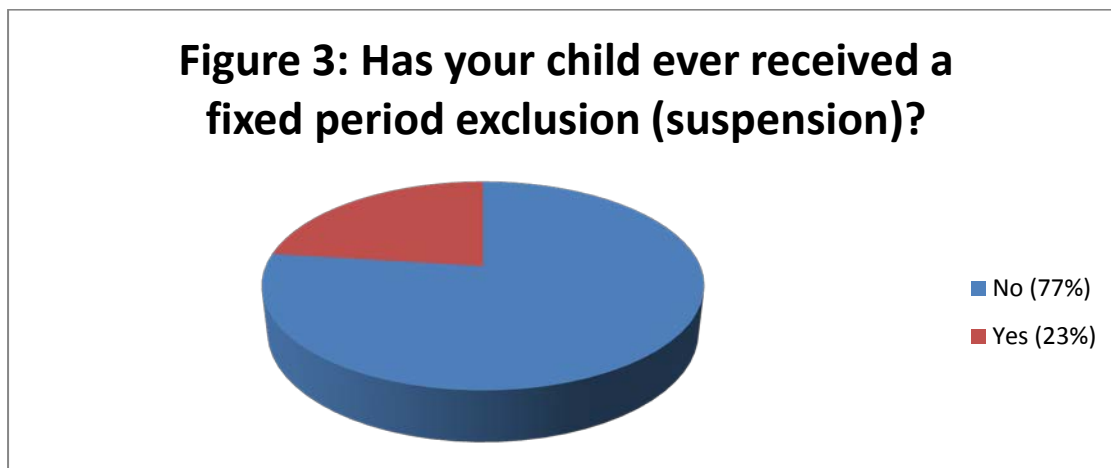
Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) felt that none of the categories provided by the DfE accurately described their child. It is possible that some of these respondents selected 'Other'. However, it is possible that their child's school would have indicated one of the existing categories, e.g. MLD, or SEMH needs, in their records.

In a recent Adoption UK survey (in conjunction with the BBC), 30% of adoptive parents were told that their child was at risk of FASD, and 15% had been told after adopting that their child may actually have FASD. A small-scale study in Peterborough (Gregory et al, 2015) found that 75% of children undergoing pre-adoption medicals in the community paediatric clinic in Peterborough had a history of pre-natal alcohol exposure.

Exclusions – General Experiences

Respondents were initially asked a series of questions about their child’s whole experience of education, across their entire time in school.

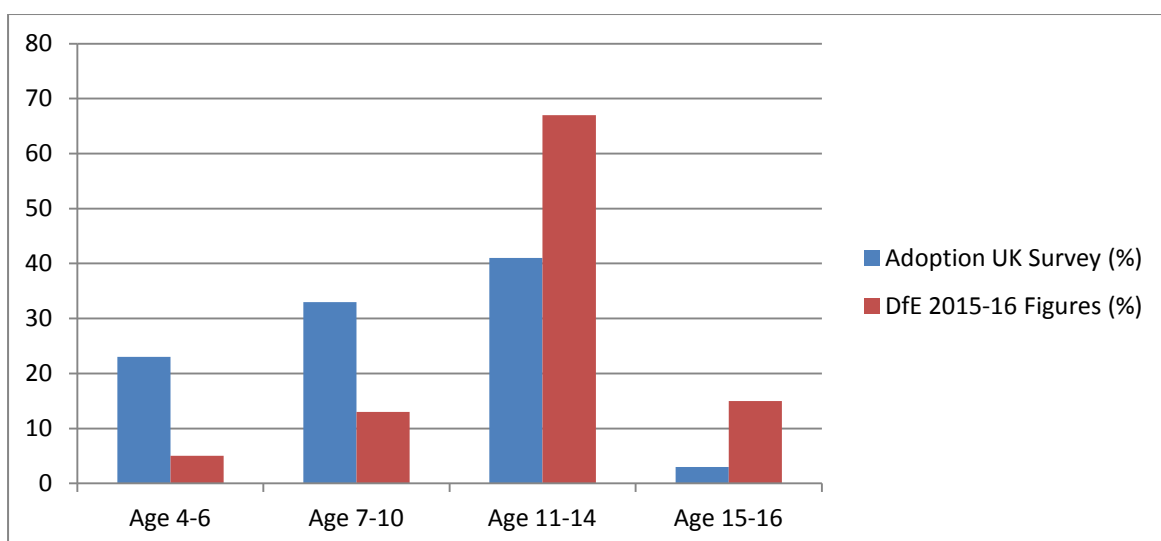
Over three quarters of children represented in this survey had never received a fixed period exclusion from school. We do not propose to compare these figures to national statistics as they represent a child’s entire school history, whereas national statistics represent a snapshot of one specific year. However, the large proportion of respondents whose child had not been excluded does add some level of validity to the subsequent results, indicating that this survey was not completed only by those who had had significant experiences of exclusions.



Question 9 asked respondents to indicate the age of their child at the time of their first fixed period exclusion. There were 461 responses.

The answers are shown below in figure 4, compared with similar data from the DfE for the year 2015-16 (England only).

Figure 4: Comparison of age at first fixed period exclusion (Adoption UK survey) with ages of fixed period exclusions in 2015-16 (DfE, England Only)

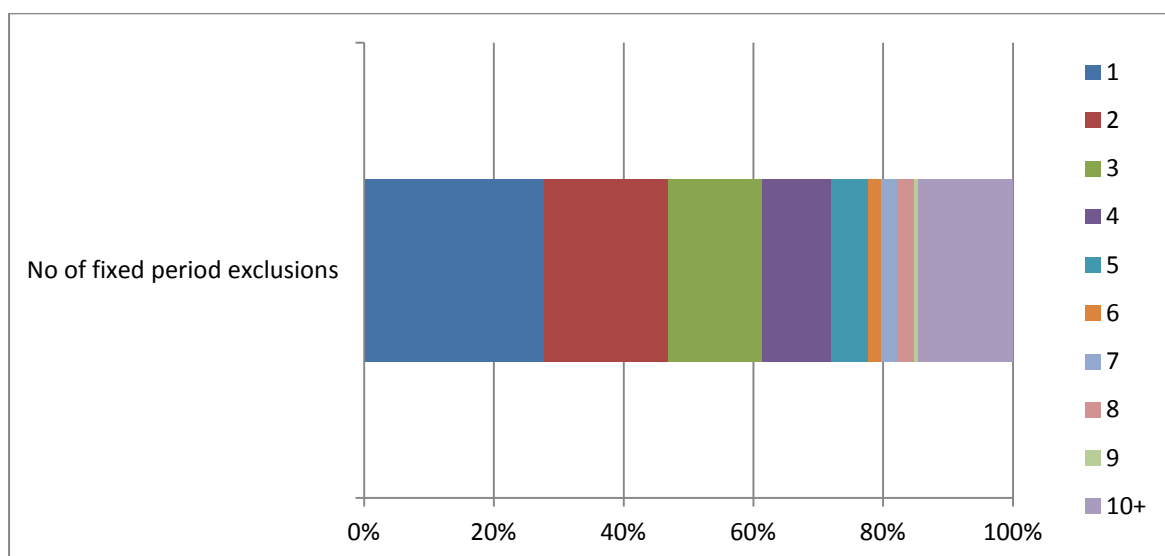


In England, half of all permanent and fixed period exclusions occur in Year 9, when the children are 13 and 14. This is reflected in the figures above from 2015-16. However, our respondents indicated that just over 23% of their children had received their first fixed period exclusion aged 4-6. As the percentage of fixed period exclusions applied to that age in England in 2015-16 was a little under 5%, there is some indication here that adopted children are disproportionately likely to be excluded at a younger age. The picture is similar at age 7-10. However, this conjecture would need to be supported by snapshot evidence from 2015-16 which is gathered later in the survey.

Question 10 asked respondents to indicate how many times their child had received a fixed period exclusion during their time at school. There were 440 respondents.

28% of children had received only one fixed period exclusion. However, a worrying 14.5% of children (65 children) had received 10 or more fixed period exclusions during their time in school (see Figure 5, below).

Figure 5: How many times in total has your child received a fixed period exclusion?



Question 11 asked respondents to indicate whether their child had ever been permanently excluded from school. Again this question was designed to elicit background information on our survey respondents and to strengthen the validity of the results. Of 1,950 responses, 1,858 children had not been permanently excluded (95.28%) and 92 children had been permanently excluded (4.72%).

Question 12 asked respondents to indicate whether their child had ever been informally excluded. It was answered by 1,953 respondents. 460, or 23.5% of children had been informally excluded. Asking parents to remove their child from school, or to not send them in on a specific day, without recording this as an exclusion, is illegal.

This is evidence that significant numbers of adopted children are being temporarily excluded from school and missing out on their education, but this is not being formally recorded anywhere. The problem of adopted children being excluded is therefore likely to be more serious than official statistics (if they were collected) might suggest.

Question 13 asked respondents to indicate whether they had ever changed their child's school because they felt their needs were not adequately being met. There were 1,951 respondents, of which 560 (28.7%) had changed their child's school for this reason. This is a higher number of children than have received a fixed period exclusion (463).

This is significant both because of the significant proportion of adopted children whose education is being disrupted by school moves because their original school could not meet their needs, and also because it demonstrates that exclusions data alone does not fully describe the extent of the difficulties that adoptive families are experiencing.

Question 14 asked respondents to indicate if they had ever home educated their child because they felt their needs were not adequately being met in school.

Of 1,953 respondents, 241 (12.3%) of children had been home educated for this reason.

Considering that this is occurring because of perceived lack of ability of the school to adequately meet a child's needs, the question could be raised as to what support is offered to families who feel forced to home educate their children under these circumstances.

Question 15 asked respondents to indicate whether their child's school had ever suggested to them that the only way to avoid permanent exclusion was to voluntarily remove their child (sometimes called a 'managed move').

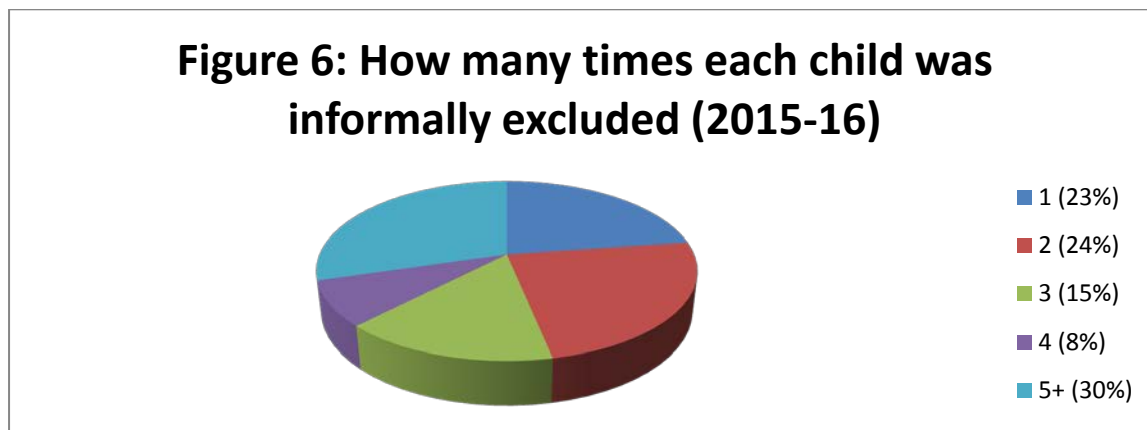
There were 1,949 respondents, of which 230 (11.8%) answered 'yes'.

Again, this suggests that adoptive families are facing significant pressures in schools that exclusion statistics alone will not reveal.

Data for 2015-16: A Snapshot of Exclusions

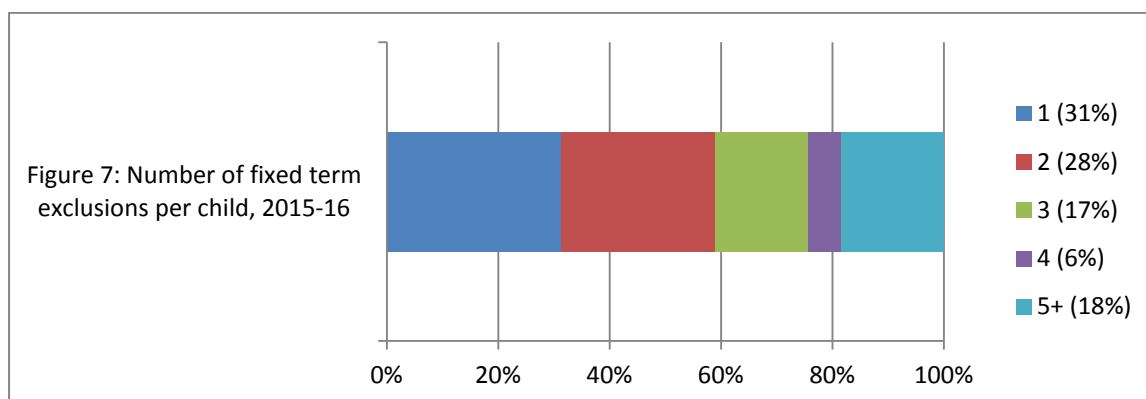
Of the 2,084 respondents who began the survey, 1,588 reported that their child had attended school during the academic year 2015-16.

In 2015-16 alone, 235 children were informally excluded from school (15% of respondents). For 69 children this occurred more than 5 times in one academic year (see Figure 6 below).



This is 69 children whose education was severely disrupted (in a climate where a parent can be fined for taking their child on a term-time holiday) by informal exclusions of which no official record has been made.

187 children (12%) received a fixed period exclusion during 2015-16. Of these children, 35 were excluded 5 on five or more occasions (see Figure 7, below).



Of the children that received a fixed term exclusion during 2015-16, 23 lost 11-15 school days, and another 23 lost 16 or more school days. Most children's longest exclusions were 1-3 days long, but 9 children received a 4-day exclusion, 29 children received a 5-day exclusion, and 19 (10.3%) reported that their longest fixed period exclusion was 6 days or longer.

When asked whether their child's learning was supported during the exclusions, 55.4% of respondents reported that their child's learning had not been supported at all, with a further 18.4% reporting that it was supported on some occasions but not others. Where learning was supported, the most common approach was for work to be sent home.

On returning to school, just over 51% of respondents reported that a re-integration meeting involving both parents and child had been held. However, 23.3% of respondents noted that no re-integration meeting had been held, and a further 17.3% reported that such a meeting had been held on some occasions but not others.

Of 1,533 respondents in this section, 25 (1.63%) indicated that their child had been permanently excluded from school during 2015-16.

Finally, respondents were asked whether they felt as though, during 2015-16, their child's school had worked with them to avoid situations that might lead to a fixed period or permanent exclusion. Of 1,525 respondents who had children in school during this period, 752 (49.3%) answered 'not applicable', indicating that such a situation did not arise during the specified period.

Of the other respondents, 496 (64%) felt that their school had worked with them to avoid situations that might lead to an exclusion, which is encouraging. However, 277 (36%) answered 'no' to this question, indicating that a substantial proportion of adoptive families feel as though their child's school is not offering sufficient support to prevent situations that could lead to a fixed term or permanent exclusion.

Once a child breaches the school discipline code in such a way as to merit an exclusion, schools may feel that they have no choice due to a number of factors (including 'no excuses policies', appearing to be fair, protecting the safety and learning of other students, protecting the safety of staff members) but to exclude. It is therefore vital that school staff, parents and other appropriate professionals work together to identify situations that might arise, and formulate strategies for preventing or mitigating these situations where possible.

Results of the survey were also analysed to compare exclusions data across different types of school. Data on children attending pupil referral units is excluded from this analysis as the numbers of respondents were so low as to create ethical concerns regarding anonymity.

The large majority of respondents reported that their child was attending a maintained state school during 2015-16 (1,136 respondents). There were 211 children attending an academy school, and fewer than 100 each in free schools, independent schools and special schools. These low numbers must be taken into account when interpreting results.

Figures 8, 9 and 10 (below) show comparisons of respondents' experiences of informal exclusions, fixed period exclusions and permanent exclusions, compared by school type.

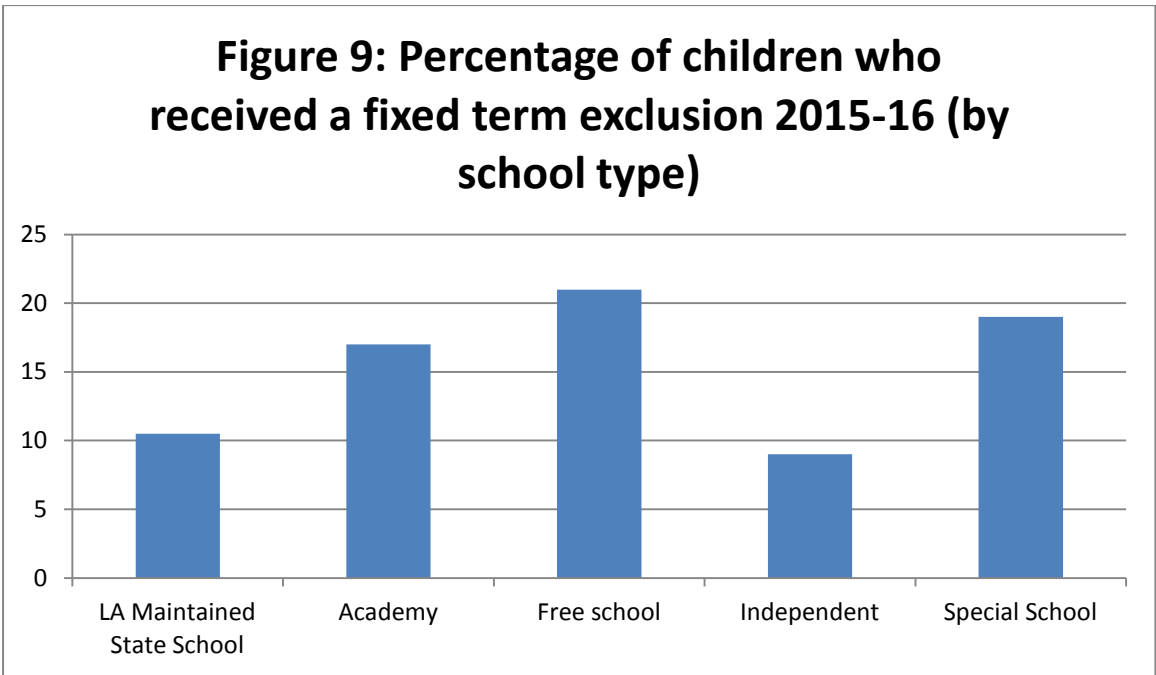
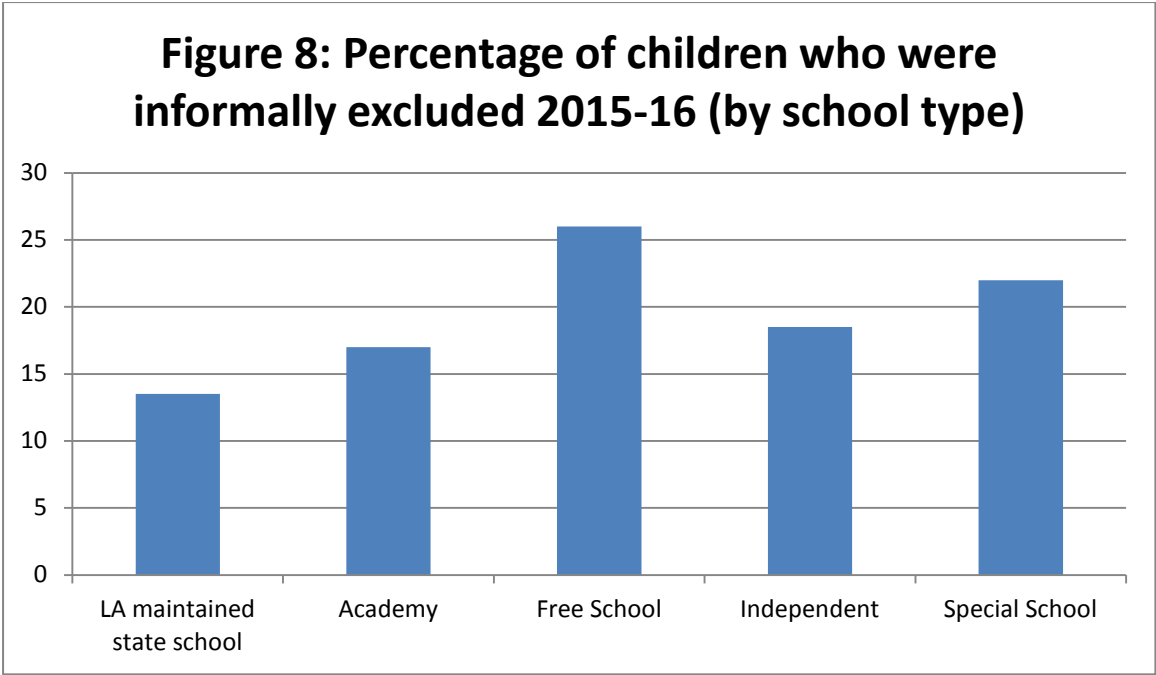
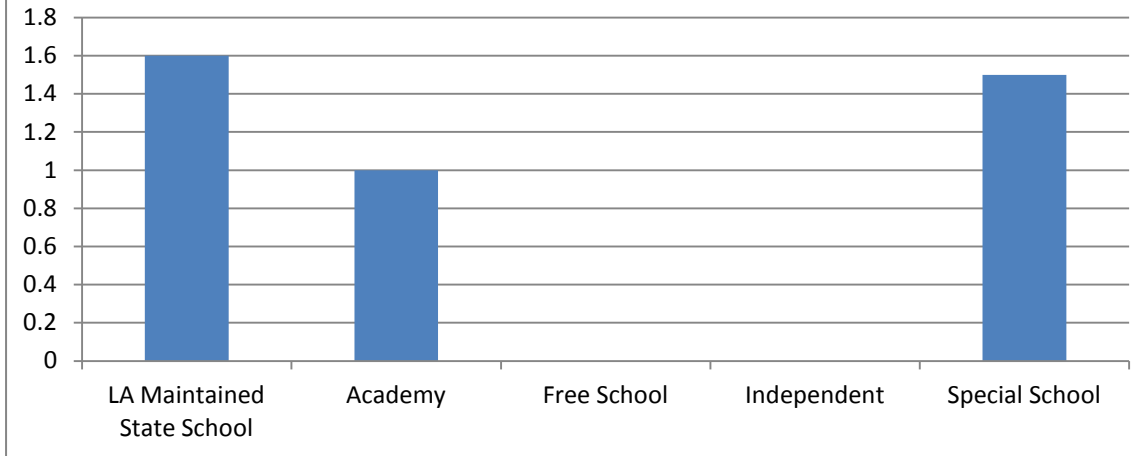


Figure 10: Percentage of children who were permanently excluded 2015-16 (by school type)



While the numbers of respondents across school types were very uneven, and the numbers were too low in some school types to be accurately compared, a comparison between the figures for LA maintained state schools and academies does indicate that, at the least, it would be worthwhile collecting more reliable data to ascertain whether fixed period exclusion rates for adopted children are indeed higher in academies.

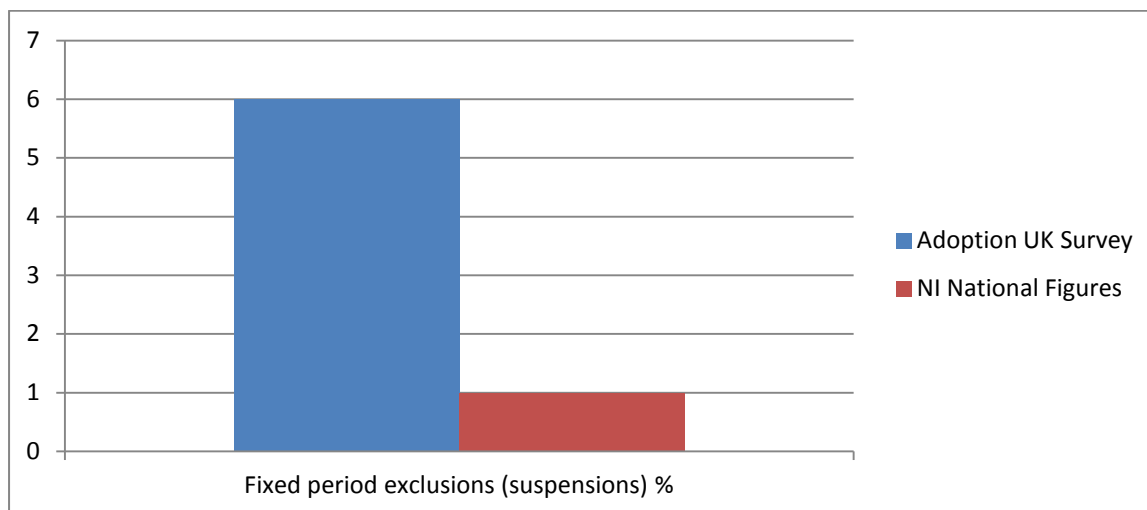
Concern among adoptive parents about the willingness of academy schools to accept pupils with SEND, and to effectively support SEND pupils and children adopted from care has been evident anecdotally, and was also expressed in comments in the survey. This has no doubt been exacerbated by a number of news stories in recent years highlighting selection processes and exclusion rates in academies (e.g. “Academies turn away children with special needs” – Independent, 2/1/16; “Academies ‘illegally excluding’ vulnerable pupils” – Sky News, 8/11/15). Accurate data is needed to determine the full picture on exclusions and admissions of adopted and permanently placed children in academies.

Nation-by-Nation: Comparison to National Statistics

Northern Ireland

There were a total of 63 respondents from Northern Ireland, of whom 49 attended school during 2015-16.

Figure 11: Comparison of the Rate of Fixed Period Exclusions 2015-16



There were 48 respondents to this question. The statistical validity is therefore low, but the result needs to be seen in conjunction with UK-wide results and case studies and anecdotal reports. The totality of evidence seems to indicate that adopted children are **at increased risk of fixed period exclusions** (suspensions).

In Northern Ireland, there were a total of 19 permanent exclusions (expulsions) during 2015-16. None of our respondents were among this figure.

Scotland

There were a total of 110 respondents from Scotland, of whom 76 attended school during 2015-16.

The rate of fixed period and temporary exclusions has been falling in Scotland since 2005-6.

N.B. The latest national data available is for 2014-15 as this information is collected biannually.

Of 76 respondents from Scotland whose children were in school during 2015-16, 13, or 17% of them reported that their child received a fixed period exclusion during 2015-16. The national fixed period exclusion rate for Scotland during 2014-15 was 2.7%.

This data indicates that adopted children may be **significantly over-represented** in fixed term exclusions in Scotland.

In 2014-15, Scotland recorded a total of 5 permanent exclusions (a reduction from 21 in 2012-13). Due to ethical considerations, we cannot report the number of permanent exclusions reported by our survey respondents.

The rapidly falling rate of both fixed term and permanent exclusions in Scotland as a whole may be worthy of further investigation, especially considering the relatively large percentage (21%) of respondents who indicated that their child had been informally excluded during 2015-16 in Scotland.

Wales

There were a total of 151 respondents from Wales, of whom 114 attended school during 2015-16.

In 2015-16, there were 109 **permanent exclusions** in total, representing a rate of 0.2 per thousand pupils. Out of 108 respondents to our survey, three reported that their child had been permanently excluded during that academic year – representing a rate of 27 per thousand.

Fixed term exclusions of 5 days or fewer were recorded in Wales for 2015-16 at a rate of 3%. Fixed term exclusions of over 5 days were recorded at a rate of 0.14%.

13.7% (15 of 109 respondents) indicated that their child had received a fixed term exclusion during 2015-16.

When asked how long their child's longest single period of exclusion had been, 13 responded 5 days or fewer, and 2 received exclusions of more than 5 days.

Our survey indicates that adopted children are over-represented in fixed term exclusions statistics of both short and long durations.

England

Statistical information for England has higher validity because of the significant sample size. In addition, the Department for Education provides a comprehensive breakdown of exclusions statistics for comparison. The total number of respondents in England was 1,757 of whom 1,348 attended school during 2015-16.

The following section compares survey results for England only, with DfE data covering England only. All data relates to 2015-16 unless otherwise stated.

Permanent Exclusions

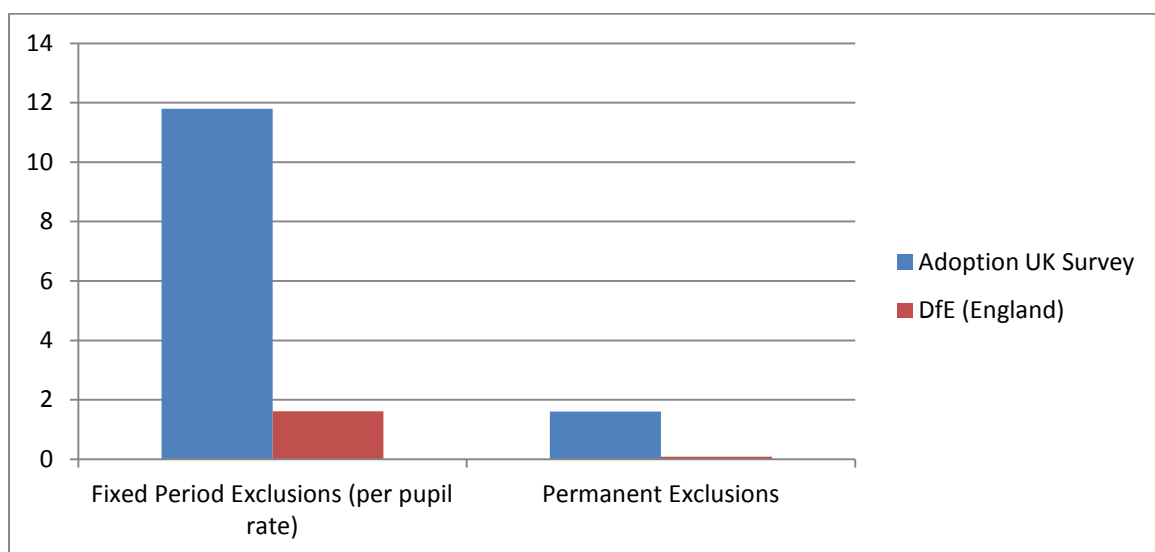
The total number of permanent exclusions in England in 2015-16 was 6,685, representing a rate of **0.08%** of the total pupil population. Of 1,303 survey respondents, 21 reported that their child had been permanently excluded during the same period, representing a rate of **1.61%** of total respondents (see Figure 16). The children of our survey respondents were permanently excluded at a rate **just over 20 times** that of the general pupil population.

Fixed Period Exclusions

Fixed period exclusions in England occurred at a rate of 4.29%. However this figure does not account for individuals being excluded several times during the year. The more accurate figure for comparison with survey data is the per pupil rate, which records the number of individual pupils who were excluded any number of times during the year. The per pupil rate is **2.11%**.

Of 1,321 respondents, 156 reported that their child had received a fixed period exclusion during 2015-16, representing a per pupil rate of **11.8%**. Children of our survey respondents were more than **five times more likely** to receive a fixed period exclusion than the general pupil population (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Comparison of the per-pupil rate of permanent and fixed period exclusions 2015-16



Earlier data suggested that adopted children were receiving fixed period exclusions at younger ages than the average. A comparison of fixed term exclusions rates in England by Key Stage supports this earlier data (see Figure 13). According to our survey respondents:

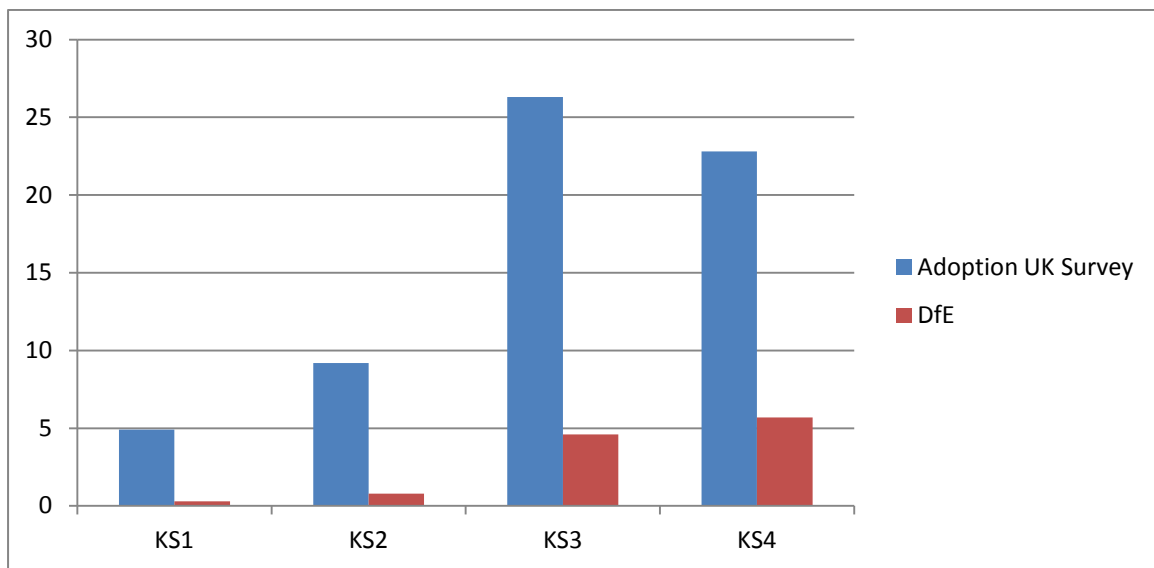
At Key Stage 1 (Years R-2) an adopted child is 16 times more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion

At Key Stage 2 (Years 3-6) an adopted child is 11 times more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion

At Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9) an adopted child is nearly 6 times more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion

At Key Stage 4 (Years 10-11) an adopted child is 4 times more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion

Figure 13: Fixed Term Exclusions – Comparison with DfE per pupil rate by Key Stage



While adopted children appear to be over-represented in fixed term exclusion figures at all ages, the comparison of figures for the first three years of schooling is striking, strengthening the case for early support and intervention.

The rate of exclusions for children at Key Stage 3 (first three years of secondary school) is also high. It is higher than that at Key Stage 4, which differs from national trends. This raises questions about transition support and whether adopted children's needs are sufficiently being met as they move into the very different environment of secondary school.

Conclusions

We already know from surveys, from feedback from adoptive families and social care and education professionals, and anecdotally, that adopted children experience significant challenges in education. This survey supports the general view that adopted children are over-represented in both SEND/ASN and exclusion statistics, as well as confirming and revealing several other significant issues.

Special Educational Needs and Adopted Children

That adopted children are more likely to have SEND/ASN, and more likely to have social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) will not be surprising to many. However, this survey also reveals that the SEND profile of adopted children is significantly different to that of the SEND/ASN cohort generally.

Adopted children seem to be significantly more likely than other SEND/ASN children to have an EHCP or equivalent, implying that the needs of this cohort are at a higher level. When asked to select all SEND/ASN categories that applied to their children, 937 respondents made 1,996 selections. Therefore, many of the children represented in this survey have needs in more than one category, and some will have difficulties covering several categories.

The nature of the effects of early loss, trauma, abuse and neglect can explain this. Children experiencing the effects of insecure attachments, developmental trauma, FASD etc. will tend to experience difficulties in a number of areas, and may be hard to categorise. For instance, FASD alone can result in hyperactive behaviour, poor memory, poor mathematics skills, specific language difficulties, difficulties with executive functioning, sensory impairments, sensory integration difficulties, and more (source FASD Network).

Therefore, existing categories of SEND/ASN reporting used by schools are insufficient to record the specific needs of adopted children, as recording only one primary area of need means that the complexity of need of children with spectrum conditions is not fully acknowledged. This may well also be true of other vulnerable children, children in need, looked after children and permanently placed children. There is also concern that some adopted children who are not classified as having SEND/ASN, perhaps because their attainment is not a cause for concern, might still be struggling to cope with school, experiencing hidden anxiety during the school day, but not receiving additional support because they appear to be 'managing'.

By far the most common primary area of need according to our survey was SEMH, which was recorded at nearly three times the rate of the general SEND/ASN cohort. This raises questions about how adopted children are perceived in the educational environment. While many adopted children will at some point face mental health challenges, some of their initial difficulties are not intrinsically behavioural or mental health difficulties. It must be considered whether lack of awareness, or inappropriate interventions for difficulties caused by attachment, trauma, sensory integration disorders, FASD etc. can result in children responding with inappropriate behaviour, or difficulties being exacerbated or escalated, even leading to mental health problems. It is not clear that categorising adopted children as having SEMH difficulties is really getting to the heart of their challenges.

Figure 2 clearly reveals that adopted children with SEND/ASN do not fit the profile of the SEND/ASN pupil population at large. Training of education staff, planning of interventions, implementation strategies and evaluation of outcomes must all take this into account. Adopted children are not just like other children. They are distinct cohort and recognition of this is vital.

The Search for the Right Education

Our survey revealed that many adoptive families have struggled in their search for a school that can understand and cater for their child's needs. Significant numbers of adopted children are changing school solely for the reason that their current school is not able to meet their needs. This incurs a cost to these children in terms of lost education, not only due to the difficulties they experienced at their original schools, but also because of the impact of changing school.

In 2013, the RSA study 'Between the Cracks' showed that moving schools mid-year markedly affected children's attainment at both KS2 and GCSE level. Significant numbers of children do not find a new school place quickly, and the study identified that 20,000 children (out of 300,000 mid-year admissions) had waited more than one whole term for a new school place. These difficulties also need to be seen in the light of the significant number of adoptive parents who experienced 'managed moves' where children may have been withdrawn to avoid permanent exclusion, with no alternative school placement arranged.

It is clear that changing school mid-year, even in an attempt to find a more appropriate school, can have a serious impact on a child's educational attainment. For adopted children, the situation is particularly damaging as they are likely to have experienced much disruption and loss in their early lives. As a result of this, they may not be able to recover from the disruption involved in the loss of their school community as easily as a child from a stable, secure background might. Therefore, it is vital that all schools are getting it right for adopted children from day one.

Just over 12% of children in our survey had spent time being home educated because their schools had not been able to adequately meet their needs. This is over 240 families where at least one parent was unable to work full time outside of the home because they were forced to educate their own child, in a system where none of the financial support that is available for schools, e.g. PP+, is made available to home educating families. This is also the case for the nearly 5% of children in our survey who were attending independent schools. If PP+ in England is designed to support adopted children in their education, surely a case could be made for making it available to them regardless of where they are being educated.

Exclusions – The Official Story

Nearly a quarter of the children represented in the survey had received a fixed period exclusion. 65 of these children (over 14%) had been excluded 10 or more times in their school career. Almost 5% of children in our survey had been permanently excluded from school.

When the data from our survey on children's experiences of exclusion in schools in England in 2015-16 is compared to that produced by the DfE, it is clear that adopted children are being excluded more than other children. Many are being excluded several times in one year, and for long periods

of time. Support for learning during exclusions is, at best, patchy and, at worst, non-existent, and over a third of parents whose children who were at risk of exclusion felt that the school had not worked with them to prevent situations that might lead to an exclusion.

Pupils with identified SEND support needs are seven times more likely to be permanently excluded than children with no identified needs. Children with EHCPs are six times more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion. Children with SEMH needs are ten times more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion than children with other SEND. Adopted children are over-represented in all of these categories.

If a child is excluded five or more times in the course of one school year, then it is clear that this strategy is not working in terms of achieving desired outcomes for that child. This is not only applicable to adopted children, but, as DfE statistics on SEND and SEMH show, exclusions are disproportionately affecting other specific cohorts of children. While the defence for exclusions may be that they are necessary in situations where other children or members of staff need protecting, or where the learning of a whole class is being significantly disrupted, it has to be acknowledged that for a significant number of children, repeated exclusions are doing nothing to change their behaviour or improve their outcomes. What are we going to do for these children?

The survey also demonstrated another important distinguishing factor relating to adopted children and exclusions: that adopted children are receiving fixed period exclusions at younger ages than other children. The majority of adopted children received their first fixed period exclusion while they were still at primary school. In 2015-16, children represented in our survey were 16 times more likely than their peers to be excluded during their first 3 years of primary school.

In the general school population, most exclusions occur during the final two years of secondary school. In our survey, most exclusions of adopted children occurred during the first three years of secondary school.

There are implications of this data in terms of how children are being supported at the beginning of primary and secondary school. With average age of adoptions in England and Wales at around 3.5, many adopted children will be starting primary school within a year of being adopted, or even with adoption orders not yet in place. At the same time as processing their transition to a new adoptive family, they are processing the new world of education. This is in addition to any challenges they may face because of their early experiences. Adoptive parents may be new parents, relatively inexperienced in the world of education, and without the benefit of four years of parenting networking behind them. Many report that once the adoption order is signed and the child is no longer looked after, support from both social care professionals and education professionals drops away sharply. A significant number of adopted children are experiencing severe difficulties in the early years at school. Support must continue post adoption order, flexibility in school starting ages must be considered, and there must be a presumption that every adopted child who starts school will have additional needs.

The spike in exclusions during the early part of secondary school raises questions about how effectively transition is being managed between primary and secondary school, and whether the implications of the different environment of secondary school are being fully taken into account when planning and delivering support for adopted children. Anecdotally we know that children who

may manage quite well at a nurturing primary school with a well-established system of key staff members acting as attachment figures, can flounder in the large, impersonal world of secondary education. Again, on entering secondary school, there must be a presumption that an adopted child will have additional needs and require additional support.

Exclusions – the Unofficial Story

The survey results on exclusions and adopted children are significant enough, but our survey revealed that what is recorded on exclusions statistics may be only part of the picture.

The percentage of children who had ever been ‘informally’ excluded from school was virtually the same as that of children who had ever received a fixed period exclusion. The proportions were similar in the snapshot statistics for 2015-16 – in fact more children were informally excluded than formally excluded. Informal exclusions, where a school asks the parent to take the child home during the day, or asks them not to bring their child into school, are not legal and are not recorded on exclusions statistics. The problem of adopted children being excluded may actually be twice as serious as official records would demonstrate were they to exist.

However, we also acknowledge that, working together, schools and parents have used informal means to help a child to cope and seek to prevent escalation to formal exclusion. One adoptive parent praised their child’s school for working with the family, and removing the child from situations that were likely to escalate. Although he missed a lot of school with the school’s agreement, he was never formally excluded and eventually left school at 16 with ten GCSEs at grade C and above. The key factor in this case study was the way the parents and the school worked together, in close communication and agreement, in the best interests of the child. This was not a case where a child was being frequently informally excluded without consultation with parents.

The frequency of informal exclusions, coupled with the 12% of parents who reported that their school had suggested to them that voluntarily removing their child from the school was the only way to avoid a permanent exclusion, suggests that official exclusion statistics, if they were collected, would only show part of the challenges faced by adoptive families. This is an issue that must be addressed as it is likely that adopted children are not the only ones affected by these practices, as was evidenced by recent news stories about ‘off-rolling’ children who were likely to do badly in GCSEs.

Priority Policy Areas

1. Seeing the Whole Picture

Ensuring that accurate data is collected and shared on the educational outcomes and specific needs of adopted and permanently placed children, and the strategies successfully employed to support them.

- The DfE and devolved governments to begin collecting detailed data sets on exclusions and SEND/ASN for adopted children and those achieving legal permanence through kinship or other placements, e.g. under SGOs, CAOs or equivalent legal orders.
- The DfE and devolved governments to review SEND/ASN classifications so that they accurately reflect the range of challenges faced by children in need, looked after children, adopted and permanently placed children, e.g. specifying spectrum conditions like FASD, which have implications across several categories.
- A requirement on schools to report their PP+ spend as a separate category to general PP spend, and a duty for Ofsted to inspect PP+ use and outcomes of the PP+ cohort specifically, rather than as part of PP generally (England only).
- Routine mental health assessments and FASD screening for every child prior to beginning an adoptive or other permanent placement, with an expectation that this information would be shared with any future school, with the parents' or carers' consent.
- A review of existing provision, both in-school, and in alternative provision, for children with identified SEMH needs, with the aim of addressing the high level of exclusions for this cohort and ensuring high-quality alternative provision that is tailored to addressing specific SEMH needs.
- A review of current procedures concerning school starting age, with a remit to consider flexibility on age at first entry to primary school, and the possible beneficial uses of flexi-schooling.

2. Equipping Education Professionals

Ensuring that all educational professionals have access to initial high quality training and continuing professional development to enable their school to more effectively meet the needs and realise the potential of adopted and permanently placed children.

- Inclusion of training on the specific needs of looked after and adopted children, and those achieving legal permanence in kinship or other placements as part of Initial Teacher Training, and a programme of CPD for education professionals to include training on attachment, the impact of abuse and neglect on pre-natal and infant development (especially brain development), the impact of pre-natal drug and alcohol abuse, the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), the implications for these for learning, and practical classroom and whole-school strategies.
- Mandatory training for School Governors on the specific needs of adopted, looked after and permanently placed children, and a designated link governor with responsibility for ensuring the school can properly support those children.

- A review of current guidance to schools on exclusions which considers the specific challenges faced by adopted, looked after and permanently placed children, and children with SEND/ASN (especially SEMH), and the application of exclusions procedures in light of the SEND Code of Practice and the Equality Act 2010 and other relevant legislation specific to each nation.

3. Support for Children, Families and Teachers

Creating systems that are designed to ensure continued support for adopted and permanently placed children throughout their education, promote constructive communication between schools and families, and enable teachers to provide the very best educational opportunities for all children.

- Automatic continuation of PEPs/IEPs or their equivalents for adopted and permanently placed children, predicated on the assumption that they will have additional needs that will not disappear as their legal status changes and that these needs may change throughout their school career.
- Ensure that the expanded role of virtual school heads (currently England only) includes a duty to provide support to adoptive parents, guardians and kinship carers at the point of choosing their child's school (both primary and secondary), utilising local knowledge to support them in selecting the school that is most likely to be able to meet their child's needs, with the aim of reducing the number of adopted and permanently placed children who have to later change school.
- Ensure that the expanded role of virtual school heads and designated teachers (currently England only) includes a duty to provide transition support prior to starting school at primary and secondary, and a commitment to source or provide specific training and specialist support to school staff commensurate to the child's specific needs either before they enrol, or during the first year of their education at the school.
- Ensure that the expanded role of virtual school heads (currently England only) includes a duty to meet with the school and the parents/carers at the first instance of a child's formal or informal exclusion and formulate a child-specific plan for avoiding future exclusions.
- Adopted and permanently placed children to have priority access to mental health services, and school SEND/ASN support services including in applications for statements and EHCPs or their equivalent.
- More routine contact between school and adoptive parents, throughout the child's attendance at school, not just at crisis point.
- Dedicated mental health provision in schools to include availability of trained counsellors and therapists, as well as a safe base in every school staffed by trauma and attachment trained staff.
- A commitment from schools to consistency of staffing where possible for children who have experienced loss, trauma and disrupted attachments, and investment in the training of teaching assistants and pastoral staff who support these children.

4. Ensuring Parity of Provision

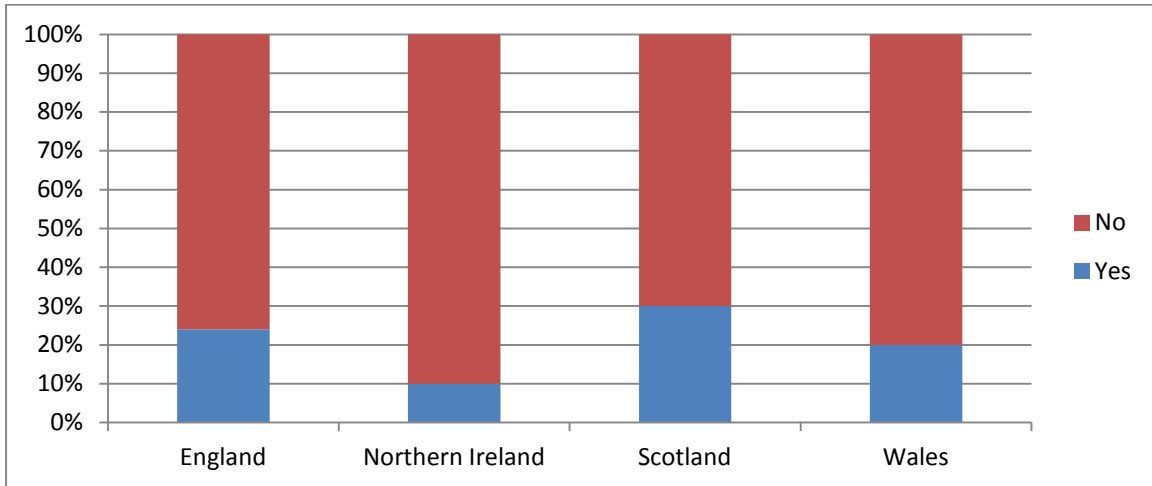
Ensuring that, wherever a child is educated, the level of support, expertise and financial provision is consistent.

- Expansion of the current PP+ arrangements in England to include children adopted from Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as those from England and Wales.
- A review of the allocation of PP+ (currently England only) to include explicit consideration of the needs of adopted children who attend independent schools or who are home educated, as our survey and anecdotal reports indicate that a substantial number of these children are receiving this alternative education as a result of not being able to find a local school that can meet their needs. These families can incur considerable financial hardship, while saving the schools budget thousands of pounds per year.
- Creation of 'virtual schools' or development of an existing equivalent statutory role to include adopted and permanently placed children, in devolved nations.
- Creation of 'designated teachers' or development of an equivalent statutory role to include adopted and permanently placed children, in devolved nations.
- Creation of PP+ or development of an existing equivalent fund to support the education of all adopted and permanently placed children, in devolved nations.
- Adopted children in Scotland to retain the rights to support of care experienced children, of automatic assessment of need and additional support requirements within their educational placement, and to be identified as a group requiring support from the existing Pupil Equity Fund for support in school.

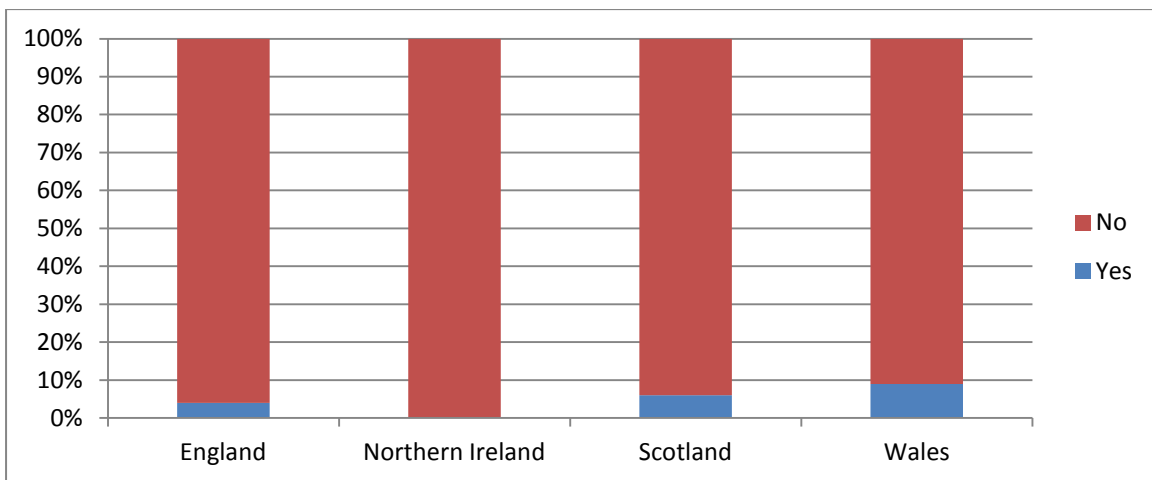
Appendix 1

Nation-by-Nation Key Questions Comparisons

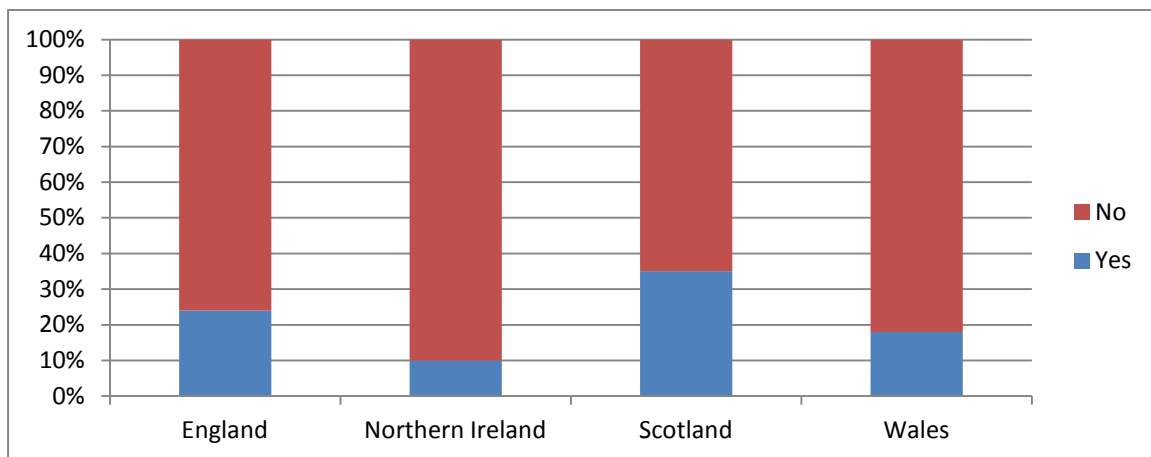
Question 8: Has your child ever received a fixed period exclusion?



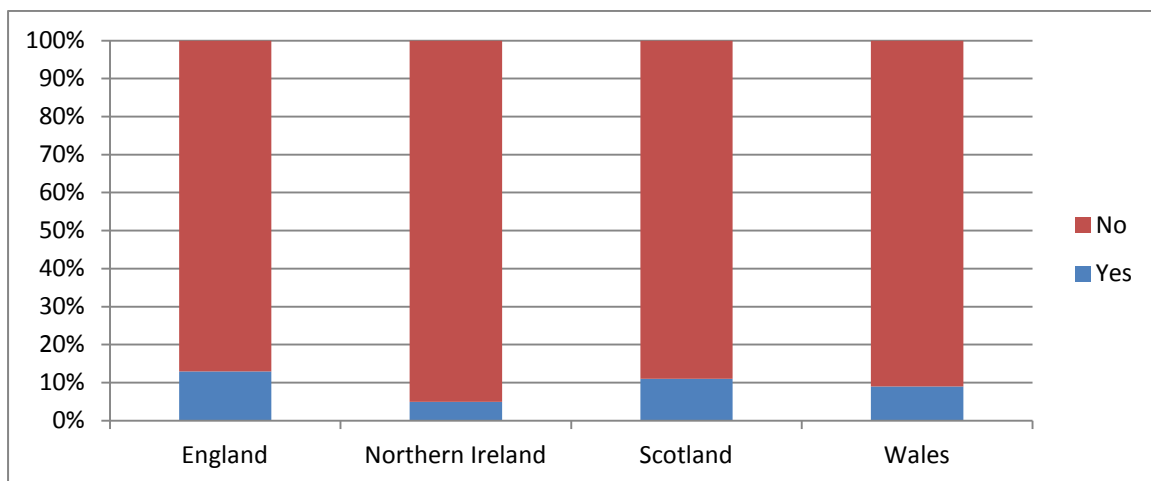
Question 11: Has your child ever been permanently excluded from school?



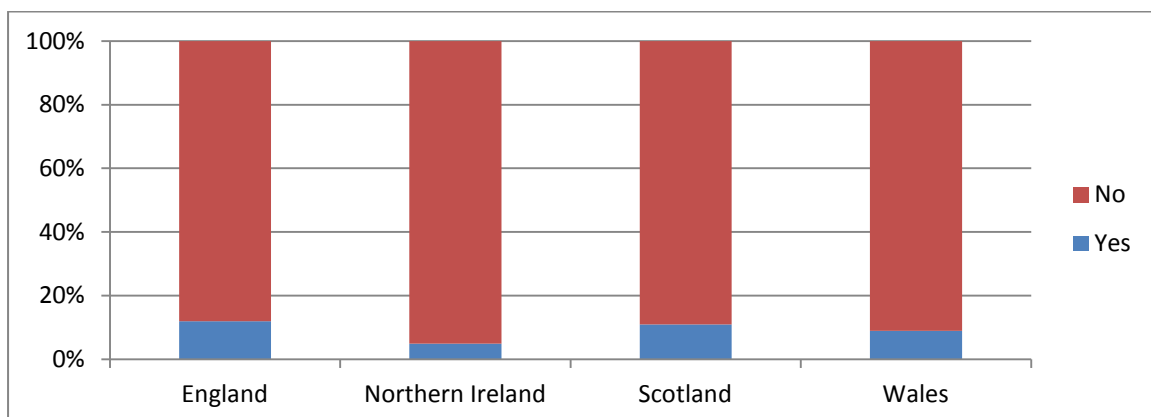
Question 12: Has your child ever been informally excluded?



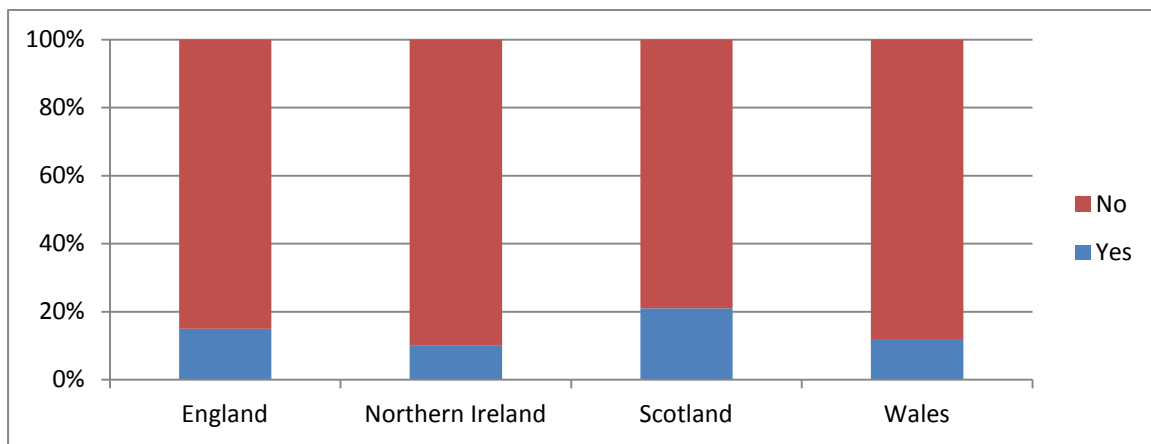
Question 14: Have you ever home educated your child because you felt their needs were not being met in school?



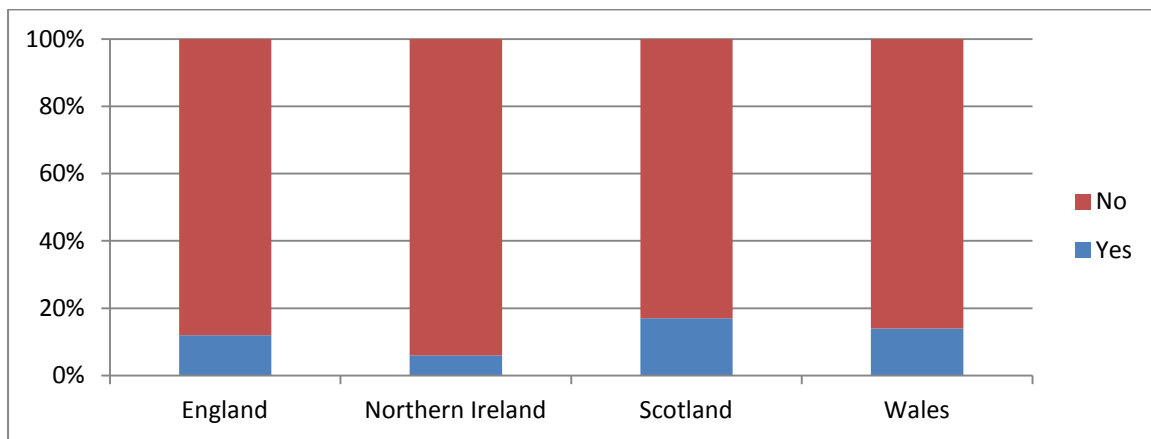
Question 15: Has your child's school ever suggested to you that the only way to avoid exclusion was to remove your child from the school voluntarily?



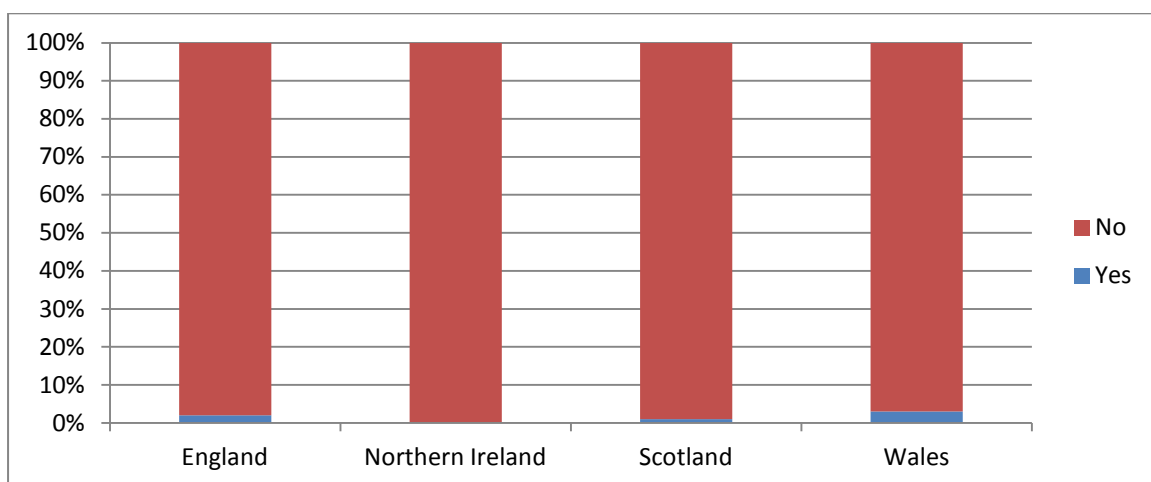
Question 19: Was your child informally excluded during 2015-16?



Question 21: Did your child receive a fixed period exclusion during 2015-16?



Question 27: Was your child permanently excluded from school during 2015-16?



Appendix 2

Glossary of Abbreviations and Key Terms

ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
ASN	Additional Support Needs
CAO	Care Arrangements Order (formerly Residence Order)
DfE	Department for Education (England only)
ECHP	Education, Health and Care Plan (England only)
Exclusion	In this document, the term Exclusion is sometimes used inter-changeably with Fixed Term Exclusion to indicate a temporary exclusion from school
Expulsion	A disciplinary measure where a child is permanently removed from the school roll (see also Permanent Exclusion)
FASD	Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
Fixed Period Exclusion	A disciplinary measure where the child must not attend school for a fixed period of days, at the decision of the head teacher
IEP	Individual Education Plan
MLD	Moderate Learning Difficulties
PEP	Personal Education Plan
Permanent Exclusion	A disciplinary measure where a child is permanently removed from the school roll
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SGO	Special Guardianship Order
SLD	Specific Learning Difficulties
Statement	Statement of Special Educational Needs
Suspension	A disciplinary measure where the child must not attend school for a fixed period of days, at the decision of the head teacher (see also Fixed Period Exclusion)

Appendix 3

Selection of Respondents' Comments

"Our daughter is a very bright girl but because of all these internal exclusions and neglect by teacher, her performance and confidence decreased dramatically."

"School has been brilliant, it helps that they work closely with the parent to reduce child's anxiety."

"[Exclusions] become a shameful self-fulfilling prophesy for children experiencing attachment trauma."

"They are a very good school and listen to the parents"

"Exclusion is a very blunt instrument which achieves very little for adopted children for who punishment has never worked. It makes life really difficult for parents if we are working and achieves nothing except missed education and a confirmation of shame and guilt."

"There was no support from social services to these [kinship care] families and the school just chose to deal with behaviour, repeatedly excluding these children and/or moving them to another school or suggesting managed moves." (A former academy primary school governor)

"I just learned that [my son's] school had 11 exclusions since the start this September!!! Some of them are now managed moves. Again, an academy with the added pressure to turn around a poor Ofsted reputation!!!" (A former academy primary school governor)

"They send a list of suggested work. In the beginning I would ensure she would do some work which created conflict between us. The work was never looked at when she returned to school. Consequently I have stopped asking her to do school work during exclusions."

"There is a fundamental lack of awareness/understanding/possibly interest in developmental trauma – and how the behaviour that results comes from a different place to other types of behaviour other types of children may display. Presumably this goes right back to teacher training. Endorsed by metrics and limited qualitative engagement with the support of these children. The neuroscientific evidence base and its teachings are not evident in schools."

"The local authority letter that is sent to you, as a parent, informing you of the fixed term exclusion is most upsetting. My child's mental health suffered enormously whilst being schooled in mainstream because he could not conform and so was punished as a way of getting him to be compliant."

"First being excluded from our village primary at the age of 6 was ridiculous – unfortunately it also results in exclusion from peers and the local community as we then had to find a school elsewhere. Start of a damaging downward spiral."

"Too much further damage is happening in schools through lack of training and responses. Mindsets need to change."

“Our three children are in years 6, 4 and 3 – they do not have the specialist help they need and will soon move to independent school where we believe their needs will be met.”

“It’s interesting that now [my son] is in a school that caters for his particular needs, his behaviour is much, much better at school.”

“My son has foetal alcohol syndrome and mainstream schools don’t have the experience to put correct strategies in place so he was home schooled then went to special school.”

“My child is highly conforming and goes ‘under the radar’ in mainstream schools. I stopped sending her to mainstream high school four terms in, when she was chronically ill, distressed and exhausted having been unable to sleep for 18 months.”

“I feel fortunate that we haven’t been close to this as relationship between home/school good and understanding of attachment and trauma difficulties strong.”

“My daughter has a lot of ‘inclusion’ and after school detentions. I am very, very unhappy about these.”

“My husband changed jobs to be at home to support our son when not in school . . . my son lost 10 or so weeks of school because we had to change schools.”

“Most weeks I was phoned to collect her early.”

“My son was given what was called an informal suspension, which allowed him onto school property. He had to get all lessons in the base and was not allowed any communication with other students.”

“She likes to be excluded and behaves in ways that achieve it.”

“Teaching staff although sympathetic to my child’s past, do not fully understand the complexities for my child, nor are they equipped or trained. I am also very aware of this because I am a trained teacher who has had no professional training in these matters.”

“Child’s current school . . . is really proactive at supporting adopted children.”

“There needs to be an alternative to exclusions for children who are simply not coping with school and acting out because of this.”

“Exclusions only serve to add to feeling of low self worth for an adopted child.”

“Our daughter was illegally excluded every day of Reception and sent home at 10.20. She was officially excluded twice. She was 4 years old and on early years action plus awaiting a statement. We removed her to home educate under huge pressure and threat of permanent exclusions . . . She began to smear faeces and bite herself. She was self harming and pulling her hair out.”

“My son was diagnosed with PTSD and at serious risk of suicide as a consequence of his schooling – his school experience 2011-2014 was identified as the sole cause of his mental health condition.”

“The biggest problems were in year 7 due to difficulties in managing transition to secondary school.”

“While it was stated that my daughter may have to be excluded we all worked very hard to get the support she needed so that this did not happen. She now has 1:1 support which means she no longer has the opportunity to hurt anyone.”

“It was exclusion by stealth. He was held in from playtime, excluded from school trips and after school clubs. He was made to feel very bad about himself.”

“We didn’t get to exclusion stage. We removed him to home educate. It was the best decision we have made.”

“I really think schools should have more training to better enable them to deal with adopted and looked after children.”