

# Joining the dots

The power of technology systems to transform outcomes for vulnerable children and young people

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AND **410,800** FIXED TERM EXCLUSIONS

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Schools play a vital role not only in the pursuit of academic outcomes, but also in enabling all children and young people to thrive by enabling protection against risk and vulnerability (the recent [serious case review for Jaden Moodie](#) provides a relevant backdrop as to the importance of schools in the lives of vulnerable children). Provisions can range from free school meals and uniforms, counselling, pastoral and special support through to the structure, opportunity and attention afforded by the school day. Some children, however, will falter at some point, through a collision of social circumstances beyond their control and then, if adults and services around the child are not aligned, they can fall through the gaps.



By evolving an evidence based partnership approach between parents/carers, schools, local authorities, community organisations, youth and youth justice workers, schools can build their support and play a crucial role in the life of their pupils beyond the school gates.

With suspensions, exclusions and children missing education on the rise across England, Wales and Scotland, it is imperative that schools are motivated and enabled to grow via collaboration, knowledge and information exchange. Evolving the input from external multi professional sources such as children's therapists, youth justice and mental health specialists regarding individual support for children will be an integrated part of this.

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen the role of schools in promoting the wellbeing of children being widely recognised. What has also been acknowledged, notably by the Children's Commissioner, is the need for children to return to education. This is seen as critical for more vulnerable children, with significant concerns for some related to both safeguarding and mental health issues.

## Children in care

According to data from the Local Government Association, 78,150 children were looked after in England in 2019. This represents a 28% increase in the number of children in care over the past decade. Furthermore, according to The Fostering Network, 56,160 of those children were placed with foster families. Aside from those children officially in care, Grandparents Plus estimates that some 200,000 children are living with relatives because their parents are unable to directly support them. For many of these children there are additional challenges, not least amongst these can be their multiple changes of school and peer support network.

**78,150** CHILDREN WERE LOOKED AFTER IN ENGLAND IN 2019

**28%** ↑ **56,160**  
 increase in the number of children in care over the past decade of those children were placed with foster families



**200,000** children are living with relatives



# School admissions

It is clear that the individual context and concerns of children with support needs to be considered carefully when it is decided which school they might attend. Yet, schools and local authority administrators and leaders are handling very large volumes of requests. Inevitably, there will be conflicts in priorities and variations in information available, lack of understanding and time to focus on contextual needs that will result in gaps.

This leads to circumstances where children are refused entry to their first choice of school, which can result in longer and more expensive journeys to school. For families which are already stretched, financially and emotionally, this can place a huge burden upon them.

For the 2018/19 school year, 1,510,912 school places were granted across the UK. Of these, 59,420, or 3.9%, were appealed. 45,855, or 3% of admissions were heard by an appeals panel. 10,177, or 22.2% of those appeals were successful.

For families in need, those odds will appear rather slim and that's before considering whether they have the emotional resilience or resources to do so. It is vital, therefore, that a child's wider circumstances can be linked to the educational response, particularly if we have evidence of the impact on longer term outcomes.

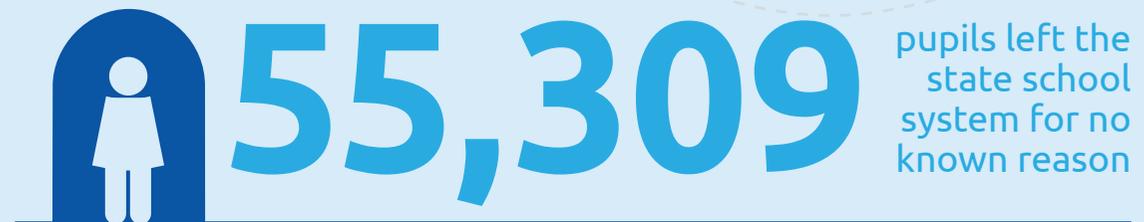


# Expulsions and suspensions

The Department for Education reports that 7,900 children were permanently excluded from schools in the UK across the 2017/18 school year. A further 410,800 were given fixed term exclusions. Data from the Education Policy Institute's *Unexplained pupil exists from schools* report, shows that 55,309 pupils left the state school system for no known reason. This highlights the recording of such instances and the lack of coherence and standardisation in the reporting, with data held variously at schools and local authorities, without a centralised record.

The most likely cause of permanent exclusion was persistent disruptive behaviour (34% of cases). This also accounted for 30% of temporary exclusions.

Greater understanding is required in this area as to the underlying issues driving such behaviour in students. With 55,309 unexplained school exits and 410,800 fixed term exclusions, there is an obvious data and support gap which speaks to 'upstreaming' the work in this area to enable earlier intervention which can effectively support a reduction in the number of cases of permanent exclusions. This is not an insignificant number of children. It further highlights the importance of linking a child's circumstances to the proportionate support needed to enable their continuing education. There is increasing evidence and concern at the extent to which exclusions lower a child's life chances and exacerbate a child's vulnerability including to sexual and other forms of criminal exploitation.



## Supporting children with SEND

The Department for Education reports that 1,318,300 school children have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in the UK. This represents 14.9% of all pupils. When it comes to exclusions, however, 45% of all permanent exclusions and 43% of all fixed term exclusions in the 2017/18 school year involved children with identified support needs. Again, there is an inconsistency of approach to SEND allocation, with it being largely dependent upon each individual school, rather than a commonly understood method of effective support relating to the characteristics of the children concerned. There is a need for an evidence base and systems to facilitate this, which would enable measurement of the issues and universal system behaviours and identifying the success or otherwise of responding to these. This could bring local authorities and schools together to be held to account to improve the capacity to respond to SEND effectively.



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school children have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in the UK

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# 45%

of all permanent exclusions



# 43%

fixed term exclusions



in the 2017/18 school year involved children with SEND

## Social deprivation

25.8% of children identified with SEND are also eligible for free school meals, highlighting a clear link between social deprivation and SEND.

This extends to school exclusions, too, with those pupils eligible for free school meals, with 13.65% of them being permanently excluded across the 2017/18 school year.

The Department for Education further reports that pupils in the 10% most deprived areas of the UK see a 0.12% permanent exclusion rate and a 7.1% fixed term exclusion rate. This compares unfavourably with the national averages of 0.07% and 3.41% respectively.

# 25.8%

of children identified with SEND are also eligible for free school meals

# 13.5%

of SEND children were permanently excluded in the 2017/18 school year

## Children missing education

The National Children's Bureau reported in October 2017 that 49,187 were missing education in the UK.

That number is startlingly similar to the number of unsuccessfully appealed school admissions. If we take the number of successful appeals, 10,177 from the total number of appeals, we're left with 49,243.

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## County lines

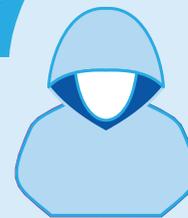
A further threat to vulnerable children exists in the form of county lines drug operations. The Children's Commissioner estimates that some 46,000 children in England are involved in county lines activities. Again, that number runs almost parallel to the number of children thought to be missing education.

Whilst county lines activity has grabbed a lot of media attention, vulnerable children are at risk of drifting into other unsafe activities. This can include petty crimes such as shoplifting, but also extend to being groomed for sexual exploitation and/or falling under the influence of criminal gangs.



# 49,187

children are missing education in the UK



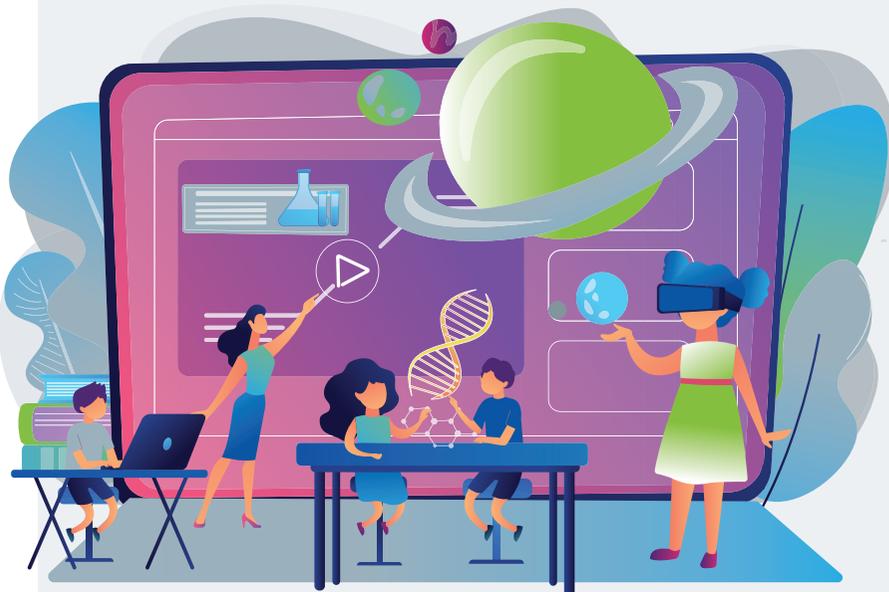
# 46,000

children are also involved in county lines activities.

## Ongoing disadvantage

The current way of doing things is compounding disadvantage for children from already disadvantaged backgrounds. Elements such as exclusions, both fixed term and permanent, are far more likely to occur for children from these populations. We can also see from the available data that such instances are far more likely to occur in deprived areas, too.

The serious case review for Jaden Moodie, highlighted above, sums up many of the challenges facing disadvantaged children and the cracks into which they can fall and get damaged. The lack of coherence across local authorities and schools is making things worse – the current system is not helping these children. Without any form of intervention, children too often move between areas, residences and schools without so much as a record sufficiently explaining why, let alone their basic learning experience and needs. Without a good enough record, how can we interpret any relevant data and begin to map out a plausible solution? How can we link the impact on the child's experience to the circumstances of the family and the child moving from school to school?



## Joining the dots

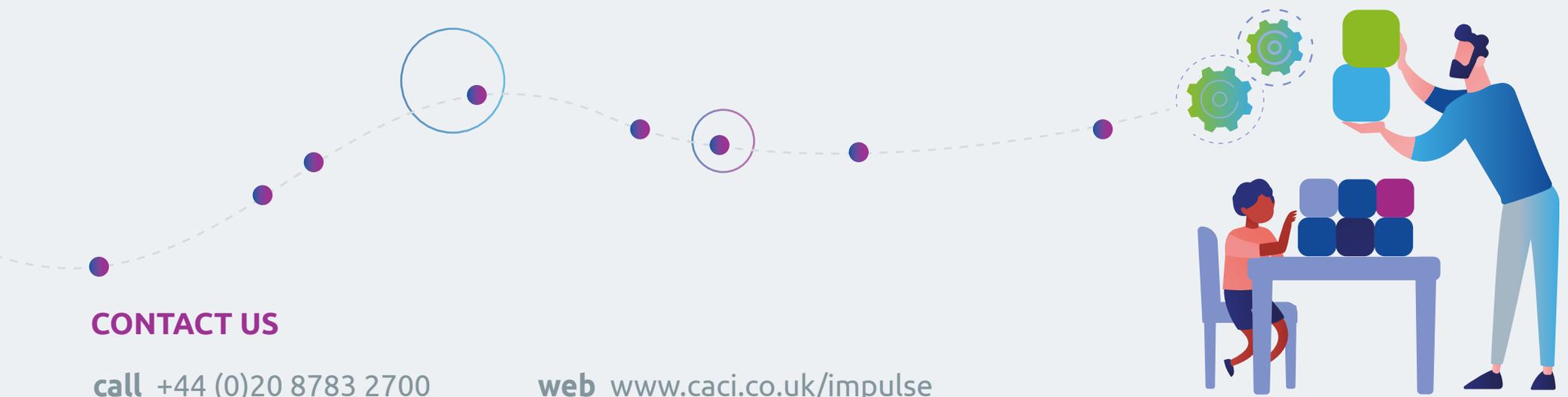
Schools can play a pivotal role in enabling protection and improved outcomes for children, but only if they develop capability and knowledge. Multi-professional services, for example Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, can prioritise support to where it is critically needed, but only if they develop capability and knowledge. SEND, social services and housing support can be prioritised around wider needs, but only if systems and processes build and enable access to relevant content. Further, rapidly emerging data and information can be matched and integrated. The reporting on this can be focussed on the practice data and content representing how well needs are identified and supported in a timely way compared to evidence of risk and historic outcomes data, in contrast to reporting the performance of processing referrals.

By creating the layers of contextual data, making the joins and being able to inquire and share rich data insights through dialogue, the partnership between schools and local authorities can be recalibrated. This will draw in other professionals such as mental health and youth justice workers to paint a picture and establish joint action regarding vulnerability and protection.

With direct access to the right systems organising collaboration around accessible structured and linked data, teachers and other professionals can more easily interpret information to take effective action and leaders can use the evidence to mobilise resources to reduce risk and build resilience.

This approach will help ensure all schools increase their social value to their pupils and the wider community. By more deeply understanding risk to children, the critical partnership between schools, parents/carers and support services can be positioned for all children to get the help they need to thrive.

For more information on technology solutions designed to help school partnerships improve outcomes for their pupils, please visit <https://www.caci.co.uk/products/impulse>



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