

## Excluded Lives Special Issue

### Editorial

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Prevention of school exclusion is a major UK policy concern in the COVID-19 era of economic uncertainty, speculation about the possible futures for social cohesion, and alarming reports about the prevalence of children's mental health difficulties and eroded sense of well-being and security. This Special Issue on school exclusion is drawn from the work of the multi-disciplinary and cross-jurisdictional research group Excluded Lives, founded in Oxford in 2014 and now involving the universities of Cardiff, Edinburgh, Oxford, Queen's Belfast and the LSE. It adopts a broad view of exclusion including those who are excluded legally and illegally and those who go missing from school. Permanent exclusions are much higher in England than in the rest of the UK and it disproportionately affects young people with SEND, living in poverty, and from particular ethnic groups. The eight papers in this special issue represent perspectives on school exclusion across the four UK jurisdictions and from different disciplinary perspectives.

The first four papers represent the cross-jurisdictional focus of Excluded Lives in exploring disparities in rates of exclusion across the UK. Gavin Duffy, Gareth Robinson, Tony Gallagher and Michelle Templeton present the view from Northern Ireland based on interviews with system level and third sector stakeholders. They argue that whilst there is a strong commitment to inclusion within the Northern Ireland education system, and hence lower exclusions than in England, there is also evidence of tensions between the perspectives of professionals at school and systems level. Sally Power and Chris Taylor explore policy discourse and enactment around school exclusions in Wales based on interviews with policy makers and practitioners. They argue that despite Wales being relatively successful in reducing school exclusions there are policy pressures that may lead to undocumented and hidden exclusionary practices. Ian Thompson, Alice Tawell and Harry Daniels focus on the disproportionately high rates of exclusion of pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs in England. Through an exploration of the existing literature and data drawn from interviews with local authority education officers they argue that perverse incentives in the system unresolved conflicts in professional concern of those involved in inter-professional work, may undermine practices of inclusion in schools and lead to the exclusion of pupils with SEMH. Finally, Gilleen McCluskey, Debi Fry, Sarah Hamilton, Albert King, Margaret Laurie, Lesley McAra and Tracy M Stewart look at the impact of COVID-19 on the experiences and attitudes of young people as students in Scotland. In particular, they ask young people about and the effect of school closures and exam cancellations on their mental health and wellbeing and ask what might be done to help them.

The final four papers are drawn from some of the cross-disciplinary perspectives involved in the Excluded Lives research group. Jill Porter and Jenni Ingram look at the exclusion of an under researched group: girls who disclose SEND. They report on the findings from questionnaire data collected on the barriers and supports to inclusion and girls' feelings of belonging in school that show that girls in the study with self-disclosed SEND felt less connected to school than other girls. Their findings suggest that it is the relational aspects of schooling that matter most for girls with SEND. The psychiatrists Mina Fazel and Danielle Newby look at the relationship between multiple levels of school exclusion and mental well-being. They report on data from a school mental health and well-being survey. The findings suggest that a significantly higher proportion of excluded pupils reported being

bullied at school and they felt their school dealt badly with bullying. They argue that the discourse needs to move away from individual vulnerability towards acceptance and inclusion. Jasmina Arnez and Rachel Condry present criminological perspectives on school exclusion and youth offending. They look at the relationship between school exclusion and youth crime and considers what criminological research can add to our understanding of the criminological implications of school exclusion. Finally, Lucinda Ferguson draws on the impact of the ongoing pandemic to highlight the failings of the English legal regime to adequately protect children's right to education, particularly for especially vulnerable children. She argues that the ongoing educational impact of the pandemic highlights the need for real reform of the law rather than revisions to statutory guidance and a focus on best practice.