Images From the Edge: Girls’ Experiences of Being at Risk of Permanent Exclusion

Emma Clarke
The context:

- Year-on-year increases in permanent exclusion (PEX) since 2012/13 (DfE, 2019)

- PEX rose by 300% in 2017/2018 with some secondary schools excluding up to 20% of their pupils (UNISON, 2018)

- For the autumn term of 2019, PEX increased by 5% (to 3200) compared to the same time the previous year (DfE, 2021)
Girls and permanent exclusions

• In the autumn term of 2019, girls’ PEX grew by 7.8% compared to 4.8% for boys (Agenda, 2021)

• Findings from 2014-2019 show PEX for girls increased more rapidly than for boys (Agenda, 2021)

• The Timpson Review noted a year-on-year increase (from 1.83-2.53%) since 2012/13 (DfE, 2019b)
Girls and permanent exclusions

• Girls are more likely to experience self-exclusion, informal exclusions and ‘off-rolling’

• Criticisms that government policy consistently emphasised boys’ PEX fostering misleading narratives that ‘girls are not a problem’ (Arnot & Mac an Ghaill, 2006; Osler, Street, Lall & Vincent, 2002; Ringrose, 2007)
Girls’ issues – are they different?

• Research suggests girls at risk of exclusion face multiple, complex forms of disadvantage including mental health, abuse, discrimination and poverty (Tejerina-Arreal et al., 2020)

• The Timpson Report (DfE, 2019b) made explicit links between girls’ rates of PEX and experiencing social care – a trend not associated with boys
What is the problem?

Despite increasing numbers of girls at risk of PEX:

• there are limited appropriate support services

• schools are reluctant to refer girls to provision which does exist

• girls’ responses can mean they do not take up the help available (Osler et al., 2002)
Over 20 years ago the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Osler et al., 2002) report warned girls were ‘an underestimated minority’ and not a priority in thinking around behaviour and exclusions.
• Archer (2004) contended a ‘crisis of masculinity’ meant girls’ education had ‘fallen off the radar’, with issues perceived almost exclusively as a male problem

• Osler and Vincent (2003) noted a ‘lack of interest’ in girls’ experiences from policymakers and research funding bodies

• Lloyd (2005) highlighted an emphasis on boys’ experiences as well as the preponderance of male authors
# Participants and methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Year group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loller</td>
<td>PRU</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unicorn</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peta</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topsy</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timmy</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aimee</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevaeh</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data set 1</th>
<th>Data set 2</th>
<th>Data set 3</th>
<th>Data set 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual image – either drawing or internet sourced image</td>
<td>List of challenges and resources</td>
<td>Annotated ecomap of challenges and resources</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first question in the interview was simply – tell me about your picture
Only 2 were hand drawn
School in my
eyes

I love
hammers!
What does this tell us?

Several key themes emerged from the interviews and maps.
Resources and challenges:

Challenges - Frequency of mentions

- Teachers: 7
- Family: 3
- School uniform: 3
- Other pupils: 4
- Calls home from school: 2
- Food at school: 1
- Boyfriend/girlfriend/partner: 2
- Internal isolation/suspension: 1
- ‘Fitting in’: 1
- Support from school: 1
- Sensory overload: 2
- School rules: 5
- Job outside school: 2
- Boyfriend/girlfriend/partner: 1
Resources and challenges:

Resources - Frequency of mentions

- Friends: 8
- Teachers: 4
- 'Time out' arrangements: 2
- Pets: 3
- Job outside school: 2
- Family: 3
- Music: 2
- Phone: 3
- Walks: 1
- Good food: 1
- Boyfriend/girlfriend/partner: 1
Teachers….

• “…think everything revolves around them, they have favourites or pick on students and say they don’t…”

• …should know my problems before they shout at me…

• …some know what they’re doing, but other teachers make things worse…

• …let boys off with so many things it doesn’t make sense…”
Teachers....

• “...boys are badly behaved for fun, girls are upset and angry, not all girls....but some...

• ...when they shout it doesn’t mean we’re going to listen, we’re going to shout back...

• ...why should I bother about them when they ain’t bothered about me?”
Friends...

“...sometimes school can be an unsafe environment and lower your self-esteem, some girls aren’t nice, they leak pictures, even nudes and people call you a slag, your face will be everywhere, and a girl will hate you because she’s seen you on social media or hear a conversation...”
Friends....

• “If you’re in the school corridor and bump into someone, their friends come and start a fight over one stupid reason. I’m not all about the drama, it happens to other girls and some of my friends...

• ...talking each other into going to lessons and telling each other anything...”
Osler and Vincent (2003) made these recommendations twenty years ago:

• Review pastoral systems, including the option of self-referrals

• Anti-bullying policies need to include all forms of bullying including verbal and psychological

• Increase students’ abilities to have a say in how the school runs

• Develop approaches to support behaviour and pupils that are more democratic.
My recommendations would be the same but...

* issues in teacher recruitment and retention
* issues in funding
* increased marketisation
* super-performativity for staff
* hyper-behaviourism in schools
References:


Any questions?