



**Report for the Department of Education's
School Exclusions Review - 6th May 2018**

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Introduction

Background – the need to include the perspectives of those with ‘lived experience’

Special Guardians and Adopters Together are a peer led, peer supported campaigning group. We formed in August 2017, when two adoptive mothers wanted to form a campaigning and awareness raising group that could provide an authentic collective voice for adoptive parents, some of whom have had extremely difficult adoption journeys. In raising awareness about the challenges we have faced, we have no wish to deter anyone from adopting a child. Far from it. It is a great privilege and honour to adopt a child, and it can be one of the most humbling, and most rewarding of parental choices. But our journeys can also go badly wrong when there is a lack of understanding on the part of those who provide us and our children with social care, therapeutic support and education.

In October 2017, several special guardians wished to join our group and we decided to include them. We were interested to learn that special guardians faced many similar challenges to us, and some different ones. We changed our name in February 2018, to Special Guardians and Adopters Together (SG&AT), as we felt we could only properly and fairly represent the interests of special guardians, with them also named, and we did not want them to believe, for one minute, that their interests were not considered of equal importance as those of adopters in the group.

The aim of SG&AT is to raise awareness of issues that affect our respective communities, and to try to work together with government and relevant organisations and charities to find workable solutions to extremely complex multi-layered social problems. We seek understanding of problems first and foremost – because solutions to problems will always elude without this. We are not researchers – although some of us may have received training in research and/or research experience. We are stressed time poor parents and carers with heavy family demands, and we often struggle financially - just to keep our heads above water – so we do the best we can. That is what we have done here. We hope this report will be of value to the government and the Department of Education for the Review on school exclusions, led by Edward Timpson.

As parents and care-givers of some of the UK’s most vulnerable children and young people, we seek to be part of the conversation about what might constitute ‘best practice’, or beneficial support intervention for our children and families, and lead to positive outcomes for our children. We feel it is important that we can be part of this dialogue – at a decision making level. We believe government and the organisations appointed by government, need to far more greatly involve, and listen to, those with ‘lived experience’, who are affected by legislation, policies and guidance – than currently happens.

School Exclusion – incidence, and impact on families

According to figures from government, the most common reason for a permanent exclusion is ‘permanent disruptive behaviour’, and the most common reason from a special school is ‘physical assault against an adult’. The latter reason accounts for a third of exclusions from special schools and a quarter of exclusions from all schools. The rate of permanent exclusions across all state-funded primary, secondary and special schools was 0.08 per cent of pupil enrolments during 2015-16 (8 pupils per 10,000). The rate of permanent exclusions in secondary schools was 0.17 per cent in 2015/16 (17 pupils per 10,000). The rate of permanent exclusions was the same as the previous years in primary schools (0.02 per cent), and it decreased in special schools from 0.09 per cent in 2014/15 to 0.08 per cent in 2015/16¹.

Whilst little is known about the rate of school exclusion amongst special guardianship children, a survey conducted by Adoption UK in November 2017, with 2000 respondents, suggested that permanent school exclusions were 20 times higher for adopted children than the general population, measured over the same time period². Other statistics of interest from this survey³ were:

- Adopted children were five times more likely to be temporarily excluded from school
- Adopted children were 16 times more likely to be temporarily excluded in the first three years of primary school
- Adopted children were nearly 12 times more likely to have to change school because their needs were not being met
- 12% of adopted children had been home educated because of a lack of educational provision
- 12% of adopters had been told the only way to avoid exclusion was to change schools
- 15% of adopted children had been temporarily informally excluded.

Such high rates of exclusion from school means adopted children are a very interesting population group for further study. Much can be learned about what sort of children are being excluded, why children are being excluded, and what might improve exclusion rates, through studying populations where incidence is high.

It is through the buffering of trauma – through healthy relationships, and through connection with family, community and culture, that our children can be potentially healed (see, for example, Bruce Perry⁴). As parents and special guardians, we may struggle to find what works for our children who can be extremely difficult to care for. Our confidence and resilience, in what is for some, a challenging and demanding role, can easily be eroded by professionals who take a critical approach with us, and/or have poor understanding of the realities of parenting or caring for a traumatised child. This may be because they have limited knowledge and training; little time to spend with us; no parenting/caring experience of traumatised children themselves to draw on; the child may present differently to them than to us, or ‘normal’ parenting and caregiver methods that may be advocated

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/645075/SFR35_2017_text.pdf accessed 5/5/18

² <https://www.adoptionuk.org/news/adopted-children-20-times-more-likely-be-excluded>, accessed 5/5/18

³ https://www.adoptionuk.org/sites/default/files/AUK-Infographic_V2.pdf, accessed 5/5/18

⁴ Drummond, Jennifer ‘**Doctor in the House**’ Interview with Bruce Perry, Children in Scotland, Aug/Sept 2016

for us to deploy, or even the different parenting/caregiving approaches that are supposed to 'work', may prove ineffective for us. We may however, ourselves, gain tacit knowledge of what can be helpful or not, through years of parenting and caring for our children. If we know something does not work and can see it triggers a stress reaction, we can choose to stop doing it. This is not the case for head teachers and schools who have much less flexibility. On top of this, school exclusion, which may be caused by a traumatised child's fight and flight stress responses, may itself become a major source of stress for previously looked after children (and for their families). Any form of exclusion may, because it is experienced as rejecting and shaming, potentially trigger an 'overwhelmed nervous system' response. This means an escalation of fight and flight behaviours, or an increase in dissociative and 'withdrawal' type responses⁵.

Shameful feelings are particularly difficult for traumatised children to deal with. In this context we reference here a potentially useful infographic from the National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioural Medicine (NICABM)⁶ and ask all those involved in the education of our children to take time to consider this information in a very serious manner. It is now known that shame is an earlier emotion to develop than guilt. The 'shame' of an exclusion may act as a trauma trigger to early shaming experiences and memories of neglect or punitive parenting, for children with extremely difficult early life experiences, attachment issues and multiple early life care placements.

Problems that occur outside the home are played out within the home and the repercussions of school exclusions are manifold for parents/caregivers and the siblings and families that support adopted and special guardianship children. When a child is excluded from, or refuses to go to school, a parent/care-giver, depending on the age and emotional state of the child, must take time out, and perhaps take time off work, to pick the child up from school and provide support. Often our children are younger in terms of their emotional age than their chronological age anyway and suffer with developmental delay.

Since exclusions from school may impose considerable stress on us as parents and caregivers, we asked about school exclusions in a survey we conducted in January 2018 about parental and caregiver stress and wellbeing. We also asked about school anxieties/self-exclusion in the context of a range of difficulties we might have to deal with as parent/caregivers. We were ambitious in the scope of our survey and respondents were invited to provide comments, as well as answer multiple choice questions through ticking boxes. The volume of data generated was considerable, and we hoped and envisaged, after identifying top level academic and clinical collaborators and supporters, to obtain support for the analysis from the Department of Education. However, interest in our survey has seemingly been low, to the extent that no one from the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board has been in touch after we submitted an Interim Report to the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families and Children's Commissioner at the beginning of March⁷, when we also met together with the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families for a very positive meeting. In view of the lack of interest and support, we decided that we must just take our time to look at the data, fitting the analysis into our lives as best we can.

⁵ Supin, Jeanne. *The Long Shadow: Bruce Perry on the Lingering Effects of Childhood Trauma*. **The Sun** 4-13, Nov., 2016

⁶<http://www.nicabm.com/guilt-vs-shame/> accessed 5/5/18

⁷ <https://specialguardiansandadopterstogether.com/interim-report-of-a-peer-led-survey-on-stress-health-and-wellbeing-of-special-guardians-and-adopters-march-2018/> accessed 5/5/18

Our first report, on professional trust building, was completed at the end of April 2018⁸ and may be of interest for this review. This is because we found professional trust building with our children (as perceived by parent/caregiver), to be correlated with school exclusion, i.e. respondents who reported their children had been excluded, were more likely to perceive that trust building with their child on the part of professionals had been difficult to establish with their children.

When we started to look at school refusal, comparing rates of exclusion between adopters and special guardians, we found there were significant differences. A problem arose, when analysing the Stress and Wellbeing Survey, for associations between school exclusion, and other factors that we had explored. For many of the questions asked we had gathered data on each child individually, asking about 'child 1', 'child 2' up to child 5. This meant the numbers within each category, where associations might be expected were too small to find them.

We therefore decided that it would be worthwhile to further explore some of the findings of interest discussed above, and investigate potential associated factors, in a second survey, more sharply focussed on school exclusion.

We will describe the findings of both the surveys in this report.

⁸ <https://specialguardiansandadopterstogether.com/professional-trust-building-with-special-guardianship-and-adopted-children/>

Methods

The Stress and Wellbeing Survey was piloted on group members during December 2017 and conducted anonymously (using Survey Monkey), to enable respondents to feel able to answer questions freely. No questions were compulsory. Email addresses were provided, if wished, by respondents for a prize draw, to incentivise participation, and were used solely for this purpose. We explained how the data would be considered and used to participants, and put a statement of confidentiality and ethics on our website in February 2018, to keep respondents updated and informed⁹. Data was collected from 1st-31st January 2018 and is stored anonymously in accordance with GDPR on Survey Monkey. The survey was promoted using social media platforms of Facebook and Twitter. Qualitative data was extracted from Survey Monkey, and analysed thematically.

The Partnership Working, School Exclusion and School Refusal (Self-Exclusion) Survey was developed at the beginning of May 2018. Sylvia Schroer put the survey together and two group members, one adopter and one special guardian piloted it, and made suggestions for improvements. The survey went live from the afternoon of the 2nd May to 5pm on the 5th May, and was promoted using social media platforms of Facebook and Twitter. For this survey we were more interested in exploring associations and correlations with school exclusion. A better understanding of these factors can potentially lead to the development of targeted and appropriate interventions to support those affected by school exclusion.

⁹ <https://specialguardiansandadopterstogether.com/stress-and-well-being-survey-statement-of-confidentiality-and-ethics/> accessed 5/5/18

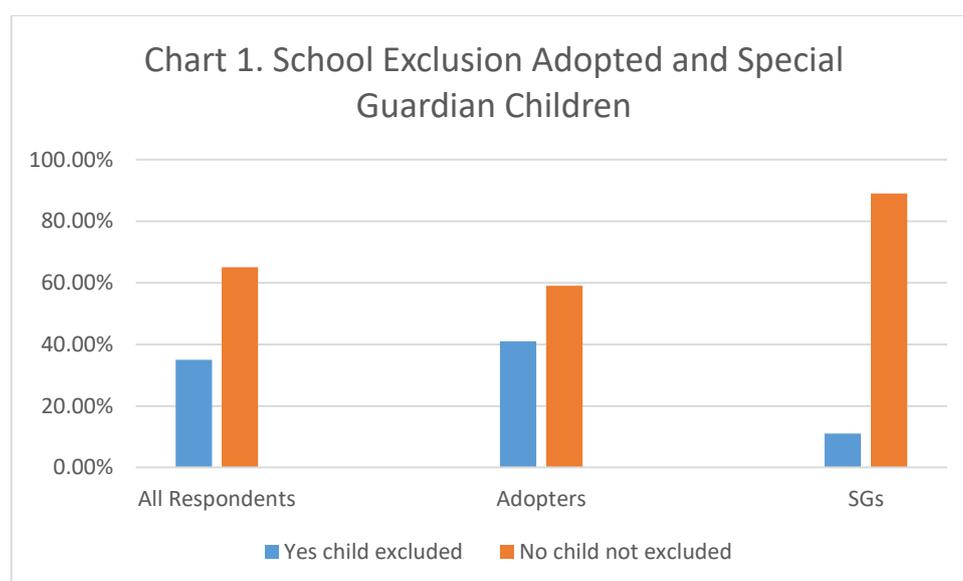
Findings

Findings of the Stress and Wellbeing Survey – statistical data

403 respondents completed the survey on Stress and Wellbeing, of whom 389 were eligible and included in the analysis. Not all questions were answered so we have reported the number of respondents answering each question separately. 331 respondents answered the question about school exclusion. Rate of school exclusion was significantly lower statistically amongst special guardianship children than adopted children (see Table 1 and Chart 1).

One must not conclude from the high rates of school exclusion that were identified in our survey, that these are reflective of the incidence figures or rate of school exclusion, for adoption or special guardianship, since there is the important issue of respondent bias. This was a survey about Stress and Wellbeing, and as such it seems likely that adopters and special guardians at the more extreme end of the stress spectrum would have self-selected to take part. With school refusal being a high stress factor for parents and care-givers one would expect to find high rates of exclusion. Respondent bias does not totally invalidate the scientific merit of this survey. It simply tells us we must be cautious about interpreting the results and viewing them as being representative of the wider adoptive and special guardianship population. The issue of respondent bias does not affect the associations and correlations, which were found to be statistically significant.

	All Respondents N= 331		Adopters N= 269		SGs N=65	
Yes	35.00%	116	41.00%	109	11.00%	7
No	65.00%	215	59.00%	160	89.00%	58
Total		331		269		65



Since the number of special guardianship children who were excluded from school was so low (N=7), we decided to group together adopters and special guardians i.e. look at all those who had answered 'yes' to the question about ever being excluded from school together, comparing these respondents with respondents who reported their child had not ever been excluded. It may be possible to analyse the data in a different way through the application of statistical techniques and packages that we do not have knowledge of or access to, and we would welcome further assistance and support if this is of interest to government or researchers.

Statistically significant associations¹⁰ were identified for a number of factors when we compared respondents who had ever had a child excluded from school and those that had not, and we report on those we identified below. All associations/correlations are significant to the 95% level (P=0.05), unless stated.

1. With so many tests done it is possible that by chance alone some findings of statistical significance will be found and this may be an explanation for what seems to be a rather 'odd' finding – namely that parents/special guardians with annual household incomes of over £60k, were associated with having a child who had been excluded from school. This finding may also be explained by the fact that these parents/caregivers were less involved with their children and more involved with work, or by what some US researchers have described as the 'Adoption Paradox'¹¹:
2. Child ever been excluded from school and social care professionals, CAMHS professionals, children's school professionals, specialist therapy providers and 'other' professionals who were perceived (by respondents), to find it difficult to build trust with special guardianship and adopted children.
3. Child NOT ever being excluded from school and social care professionals and education professionals who were perceived (by respondents), as NOT finding it difficult to build trust with special guardianship and adopted children.
4. Child NOT excluded from school and the question about social care professionals, CAMHS professionals, children's school professionals, specialist therapy providers and 'other' professionals NOT being applicable to the child/family.
5. Child ever been excluded from school and respondents feeling 'extremely dissatisfied' with social care professionals' appreciation and understanding of the child's needs
6. Child ever been excluded from school and respondents feeling 'extremely positive'; 'dissatisfied' or 'extremely dissatisfied' with CAMHS professionals' appreciation and understanding of the child's needs
7. Child NOT excluded from school and CAMHS professionals not being involved – respondents answered 'Not Applicable'
8. Child NOT been excluded from school and Child's school's appreciation and understanding of the child's needs being 'acceptable'.
9. Child ever being excluded from school and respondents being 'dissatisfied' with child's school's appreciation and understanding of child's needs
10. Child ever been excluded from school and specialist therapist's understanding and appreciation of child's needs perceived as 'good' by respondents.
11. Child NOT ever been excluded and no involvement of specialist therapist – respondent answered 'not applicable'

¹⁰ Survey Monkey uses the 95% significance level for associations/correlations.

¹¹ <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-paradox-of-adoption/>

12. Child ever been excluded from school and respondents feeling 'extremely positive' about 'other' professional's appreciation and understanding of child's needs
13. Child NOT ever been excluded and no involvement of 'other professionals' – respondent answered 'not applicable'
14. Child being 'well supported' and needs understood by school to an 'acceptable' level, and child NOT ever being excluded from school
15. Child ever being excluded from school and respondent being 'extremely dissatisfied' with school's support and understanding of child's needs
16. Parents/special guardians having a 'good' or 'dissatisfactory' experience of obtaining an EHC Plan and child ever being excluded from school.
17. Child ever been excluded from school and accessing the Adoption Support Fund
18. Child ever been excluded from school and Local Authority providing match funding with the Adoption Support Fund
19. Child NOT being excluded from school and NOT accessing the Adoption Support Fund
20. Child being excluded from school and relationship with partner suffering.
21. Child NOT being excluded from school and relationship with partner NOT suffering
22. Child being excluded from school and friends and community NOT showing understanding towards respondents.
23. Child being excluded from school and friends and community NOT showing understanding towards the child.
24. Child NOT being excluded from school and friends and community showing positive supportive attitudes towards the child.
25. Child NOT being excluded from school and family members showing positive supportive attitudes towards child.
26. There was a significant correlation between respondents feeling worried about the future and school exclusion, and a converse association for the reverse scenario
27. There was a significant correlation between Carer's Allowance ceasing when a child re-entered care and a child ever being excluded from school
28. There was a significant association between having to use Section 20 and a child being excluded from school
29. There was a significant association between having had a child who was excluded and currently being 'extremely dissatisfied' with the following professionals: Social Worker; an Independent Assessor; Education professionals; CAMHS professionals, Independent Reviewing Officer.
30. There was also an association between being currently satisfied with the social worker and having had a child who was excluded, and having an 'extremely positive' relationship with a CAMHS professional and a Non Statutory therapist. There was no association for SENCOs or Cafcass Guardians or members of the Judiciary i.e. the two groups – those with children who had been excluded or NOT excluded were not statistically significant.
31. There was a significant correlation between a child having ever been excluded from school and having a 'bad experience' with the following professionals: Independent Reviewing Officer; CAMHS Professionals; Mental Health Professionals; Educational professionals, SENCOs, Legal professionals. The percentage figure for having a 'bad experience' with a social worker was equally high, at 80%, for both groups – those whose children had been excluded or NOT excluded from school.
32. Ongoing Formal Complaints were significantly correlated with having a child who had been excluded from school whilst not having ever made a Formal Complaint was correlated with having a child who had NOT been excluded from school.

33. Ongoing care proceedings were significantly correlated with having a child who had been excluded from school
34. There was a significant correlation between having a child who had been excluded from school and rating the following 'stress factors' as 'extremely stressful': Supporting child in the family home; Difficulties 'Parenting/caring from a distance'; Coping with child's challenging behaviour; Impact of child's behaviour on their siblings; Dealing with child's school; Family time if child living away from family; Demands of multiple caring role; Differences with partner; Worries about the Future; Lack of Understanding from Friend's/ Family/ Community; Professionals finding it hard to build trust with children; Professionals not appreciating and understanding child's needs; Difficulties and obstacles to access support provision; Being discriminated against when trying to access services; Lack of understanding from professionals; Legal issues; Formal complaints; Court proceedings.
35. Having a child who had been excluded from school was significantly associated with respondents having ongoing depression, anxiety, secondary trauma, 'blocked care', an ongoing PTSD diagnosis and having had a stress or mental health breakdown. Having a child who was NOT excluded from school was associated with NOT having stress problems or NOT having had a stress breakdown.
36. Having a child who had been excluded from school was significantly associated with respondent's having a cancer diagnosis, and also high blood pressure. 4 respondents (nearly 8%) had Cancer compared if their child had ever been excluded from school, with less than 1% having Cancer if a child was NOT excluded from school.
37. We identified a significant correlation between having a child who had ever been excluded from school and the following problems for parents/caregivers in terms of their child's behaviours: Anger and rage meltdowns; Child to parent/caregiver violence; Emotional dysregulation; Stealing; School refusal and school anxiety issues; Drug and alcohol problems; Suicidal ideation and suicide attempts; Being bullied at school or on social media; Being groomed for sex; Targeted by drug dealers; False allegations about parent/special guardian, partners or family members; Sexually problematic behaviour, acting out their trauma; Going missing from care; Going missing from home; Child being arrested; Child being arrested after re-entering care; Sibling trauma bonds/violence towards siblings

Qualitative findings from Stress and Wellbeing Survey

Adoptive parents had a lot to say about school exclusions and special guardian rather less, with just five comments made. One of these comments was in regards to the school not being aware about special guardianship, despite repeatedly being informed about it. It seemed relevant to report about this because in our social media discussion group, a recurrent theme is the lack of provision and understanding about special guardianship in Local Authorities. Knowledge about special guardianship and provision of services appears to be far weaker than adoption.

“The eldest has become VERY close to being excluded. No one knew that he was on SGO despite my telling them over and over and over again. This in itself should ring alarm bells for the school”

We highlight four emergent themes from adopter’s comments about school exclusions below:

Adopters taking a more empathetic view of the child than school

The language of parents was in terms of the child ‘not coping’ or not being able to cope, of too much being asked and expected of the child, of the child being put in situations that were distressing, but school viewed problems in terms of ‘bad behaviour’ or violence.

“Currently excluded for 11 days. School describe fight / flight response as violent attacks. Disregard for SEN understanding is a disgrace.”

“There were a couple of exclusions but he has not been able to cope with school since the age of 12 and has had tutors - after 18 months of no education”

School staff ‘not coping’; experts that were out of their depth.

There were numerous comments about exclusions being given because school could not cope with the child’s behaviour:

“Daughter was excluded for 9 school days as school couldn’t cope with her behaviour. I didn’t send her back and found a new school for her that better understood her needs”

“It was a constant battle to keep him in school. His behaviour was very difficult, but the school frequently didn’t handle situations well e.g. on one occasion his TA was suddenly ordered to deal with a situation that had kicked off with a group of other boys, our son became dysregulated as a result of this sudden transition and he ended up being excluded. So unfair!”

There were views expressed that suggested that adopters thought the school was over reacting, or used exclusion as a sanction when it was in fact the school that could not cope as well as the child:

“Excluded following staff stress/trauma after she threatened to jump off balcony and it took 3 members of staff to restrain her”

Specialist schools or head teachers who were highly rated by Ofsted were out of their depth with adopted children, yet parents felt unheard, or found the child was handed back to them. The impact of exclusion was bad for the child, bad for the relationship with the family, and bad for the child’s future:

“Child 1 was excluded from School, a school for children with attachment difficulties, and returned to our care because they couldn't cope with her behaviour!!”

“Head is a disgrace to the teaching profession but rated outstanding by Ofsted. SEN kids routinely off rolled. School say 1:1 support given as stated in EHCP but it's not true. Criminalising disability seems perfectly acceptable in our LA. Ed Psych doing statutory minimum, it's a joke. Inclusion panel talking about youth offending team support rather than mental health support, it's complete injustice for mental health disabled children. Child being failed & everyone ok with it apart from parents, whose voice is being disregarded”.

“Permanent exclusion aged 8. This was followed by LA and health funding a very expensive residential school which was nothing more than a holding placement, then he was without a school for six months before going to a special school for just a few hours per day. Left at 15 with no qualifications”

Despite not knowing what to do, schools seemed unwilling to listen to parents, who had researched how to manage their child's behaviour:

“Eldest (excluded), on a regular basis, almost to the point of permanent exclusion, even though we have given them literature to explain why exclusions to not 'work' with her.”

School refusal as self-exclusion

From the adopter's perspective not attending school was a form of self-exclusion and for this reason we have chosen to consider school refusal alongside school exclusion in our second survey, to see what can be learned about both:

“Although one could say they have in essence excluded themselves through not being able to cope”

“Mainly self-exclusion but has been asked to stay at home, although not formal exclusion”

Illegal practices and managed moves to shift the problems

Numerous comments were made about the legality of exclusions. A managed move was a way to avoid exclusion but its use potentially eroded confidence for parents:

“Exclusion was mostly avoided by use of a managed move”.

“Managed out of 3 schools who said they couldn't meet his needs”

“Constant school exclusions from aged 6. Experiences managed move in year 6 - permanent exclusion by another name just doesn't appear on the stats”

Impacted on the relationship between the child and family

Several adopters commented that school exclusions had a considerable negative impact on the relationship with their child and on their ability to support and care for them. This could potentially have devastating consequences, and might lead to the difficult decision to put a child in care who could not be safely cared for in the home:

“Nightmare. Ruined my relationship with eldest which was very fragile. Daughter should have gained more support. At home supposedly doing work Too much stress all round. No benefits at all. Totally destructive”

“At a previous school who within 3 months of starting had our daughter excluded multiple times, finally for 8 days. They had no idea on her needs, and didn't want to know. We moved schools, as otherwise we may have ended up disrupting the placement, as the stresses had become so great on the whole family”

Findings of the Partnership Working, School Exclusion Self-Exclusion Survey

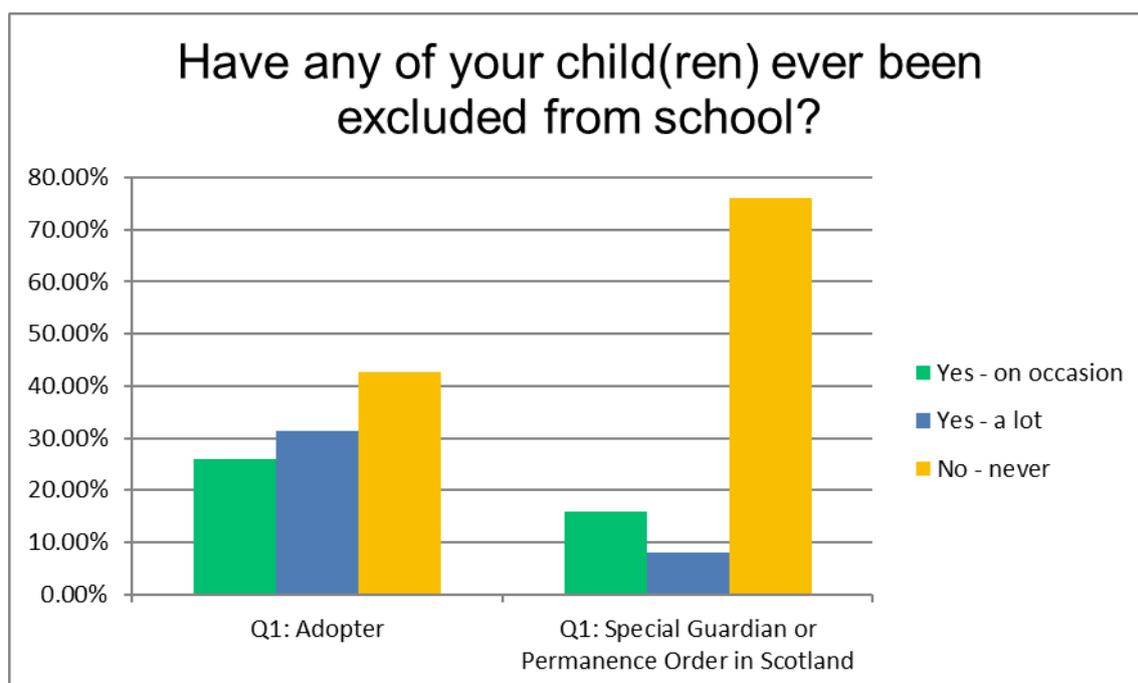
The survey had 148 respondents of whom 145 were eligible. 96 were adopters and 50 were special guardians. One respondent was both an adopter and a special guardian.

A significant difference was again found between adopted and special guardianship children being occasionally or frequently excluded from school and never being excluded.

Table 2 Percentages for Adopters and Special Guardians in response to School Exclusion of Children

	Total N=145	Adopters N=96	SGs N=50
Yes – on occasion	23%	26%	16%
Yes a lot	23%	31%	8%
No – never	54%	42%	76%

Chart 2 Bar chart showing school exclusion for Adopted and Special Guardianship Children



Other statistically significant correlations ($p=0.05$), in regards to school exclusions, and in regards to disparities between special guardians and adopters (some of which may potentially account for the differences in school exclusion), are described below:

1. Age range of children: More special guardians cared for children under 4, and 4-7 years. More Adopters parented children who were 12-15, 16-17 and 18+ years. In terms of frequent school exclusions more children were NOT ever excluded from school within the 4-7 age range – only 3 children were excluded from school frequently in this category. For 8-11

year olds there were no statistically significant differences between those who were excluded frequently and children who were never excluded. For the older age categories there was a significant difference between the groups: frequent school exclusions were greater in 12-15 year olds, 16-17 year olds, and 18+ than not ever being excluded. The pattern for occasional school exclusions was similar. For the younger age category, the number of children who were excluded occasionally or frequently was significantly less than those who were never excluded. For the 8-11year age category, there were no differences found between the groups. For the older age categories, the trend is reversed: less children have never been excluded than have been excluded frequently across all two age categories (12-15 years and 18+ years), and for 16-17 year olds there was a significant difference between frequent exclusions and never being excluded, with frequent exclusions being significantly higher.

2. More adopters parented children who had often refused to attend school, compared with special guardians caring for these children. The reverse was the case for children who never refused school – where significantly more were parented by special guardians. When looking at the relationship between school refusal and school exclusion the only statistically different finding was that children who never school refused and were never excluded from school (N=48) was statistically higher than children who had occasionally been excluded from school and had never refused school (N=8).
3. More special guardians had an annual household income of £20k or less and more adopters had an annual household income of £40+K. More special guardians struggled to cope financially. In terms of the relationship between struggling financially and school exclusion, those who struggled financially were more likely to parent/care for children who were never excluded from school (N=51) than children who were occasionally excluded (N=14), or frequently excluded (N=12). Respondents who did not struggle financially were more likely to parent and care for children who were excluded from school occasionally (N=64), or frequently (N=58), than those who had never been excluded (N=35). This is the opposite to what one would expect based on government reports that free school meals are associated with school exclusion, so it is an intriguing finding.
4. We found no relationship between school exclusion and child's ethnicity but numbers of children who were not 'white British', were low in this sample. 126 respondents said their children were white British, seven respondents reported that their children were white European and numbers for other ethnicities were lower – just one to three children in ethnic groups other than these two with four respondents ticking 'prefer not to say'.
5. Adopters parented more children diagnosed with anxiety and complex developmental trauma. 42 adopted children had complex developmental trauma compared with only four special guardian children. However, there were no differences between rates of school exclusion and any mental health diagnosis. More children with ADHD were excluded than never excluded (occasional exclusion N=15; frequent exclusion N=12; never excluded N=5) but this was NOT significant. There were high levels of mental illness found in children who were frequently excluded, had never been excluded or had been excluded occasionally.
6. More adopted children had re-entered care compared with special guardianship children. 12 adopted children had re-entered care compared with only one special guardianship child. In terms of school exclusion, more children were in mainstream school who had never been excluded than had been frequently excluded, whilst more children who had frequently been excluded had re-entered care or were in a residential school. No children in residential school had 'never been excluded' from a school.

7. Children who had re-entered care were more likely to be frequently excluded from school than never being excluded or occasionally excluded. In terms of supporting parents/caregivers when a child had re-entered care we found this was significantly higher for adopters (only one special guardian child had re-entered care), where children had been excluded from school frequently, compared with occasional exclusion or no exclusion. This may be because of the higher numbers of children who were excluded frequently re-entering care.
8. More special guardians described family life as 'positive and relatively problem free'. More adopters described family life as 'extremely difficult'. In terms of school exclusion family life was described as 'extremely difficult' for respondents whose children had been excluded 'a lot', whilst 'ups and downs but managing' was more often used to describe family life for respondents whose children were never excluded from school.
9. In terms of problems encountered in parenting and caring for adopted and special guardianship children differences were found for the following with adopters experiencing more problems with: emotional dysregulation; self-harm; drug and alcohol abuse; child to parent violence/abuse; social anxieties; being bullied at school or on social media; being groomed for sex; suicidal ideation and suicide attempts; lying and stealing; sexually problematic behaviour and going missing. No differences were found for sleep problems, sibling trauma bonds/violence to siblings or false allegations made about parent/carer, partner or family members. Looking at school exclusion, significant differences were found between children who were excluded a lot or never excluded for: child to parent/caregiver violence/abuse; being targeted by drug dealers; lying and stealing; false allegations about care giver, partner or family member and for sibling trauma bonds/violence towards siblings. More children were frequently excluded from school than were occasionally excluded for: suicidal ideation or attempted suicide and being groomed for sex. More children were excluded from school occasionally or frequently than had never been excluded for: drug and alcohol problems; sexually problematic behaviour/acting out their own trauma and also for going missing/running away.
10. More special guardianship children were in mainstream school up to 16. More adopted children were in a special school up to 16, a special school or educational programme for 16-19 year olds, or NEET. In terms of school exclusions there was no association with the different types of school, education or lack of education/training (NEET), however more children were NEET who had been excluded 'a lot' (N=12 – 41%, compared with those who had never been excluded N= 3- 4%), but this difference was NOT significant.
11. More adopted children were on DLA/PIP, or with applications pending, than special guardianship children (58% compared with 22%). In terms of school exclusions, no differences were found between groups for children on DLA/PIP or with an application pending (occasionally excluded; frequently excluded or never excluded).
12. More adopted children were described as SEN or had an EHC plan pending than special guardianship children (64% compared with 34%). In terms of school exclusion there was a difference found between children who were frequently excluded and never excluded and SEN/EHC plans, with more being frequently excluded with plans (81% compared with 38%), and less being never excluded with no SEN/EHC plans (19% compared with 62%).
13. More adopters had accessed information and advice from the Virtual Head. The converse was true for special guardians. In terms of school exclusion there were no differences found.
14. Significant differences were found for 'finding trust building with children difficult' and frequent school exclusion, compared with never having been excluded - for social care professionals (80% vs 52%), and school professionals (84% vs 46%). For social care

professionals there was a significant difference found in terms of these professionals not being applicable in terms of frequent exclusion (28%), compared with no exclusions (10%). In terms of school professionals, differences were found between not finding trust difficult to build, and frequent school exclusions (13%) compared with no school exclusions (37%).

15. In terms of positive and supportive working with adopters and special guardians and school exclusions, the survey results showed adopter/special guardian dissatisfaction with the approach taken to be correlated with frequent school exclusions compared with no school exclusions for social workers; Independent Reviewing Officers and Child's school – education professionals.
16. In terms of professionals having a satisfactory appreciation and understanding of the child's needs (as perceived by the parent/caregiver), and school exclusions, we found that frequent school exclusion compared with no exclusions was associated with understanding being considered unsatisfactory by respondents for the following professionals: Social care professionals; Independent Reviewing Officers; CAMHS professionals; Child's school/education professionals; Specialist Agency support providers.

Discussion of findings

Although statistical significance ($P=0.05$), was identified for the factors and associations we have reported on, we would really welcome the opportunity to have our findings checked by statisticians and also greatly appreciate funding support from the Department of Education/ Adoption and Special Guardian Leadership Board, and/or support from academic institutions to verify our findings. We apologise for the presentation of findings - it was the best that could be done under the time constraints, to meet the deadline of the call for evidence.

Summary of findings

With low incidence rates of certain factors, in a relatively small survey population, such as cancer, or some of the more extreme behavioural problems that were asked about, a cautious interpretation of findings is needed. We do not, in any way, wish to, or intend to 'sensationalise', and we hope our surveys act as an impetus for further investigation, which we can continue to be involved with. Having the perspective of those with 'lived experience' is so important when it comes to formulating research questions. Those that live it know it, in a way that others cannot.

Our two surveys have shown

- School exclusion is significantly lower for special guardianship children than adopted children
- School exclusion is greater for older children but young children are being excluded at concerning levels.
- Children with behavioural problems, which parents and caregivers must deal with in the home, and find stressful, are more likely to be frequently or occasionally excluded from school.
- School exclusion is associated with higher levels of children's suicidal ideation/suicide attempts.
- School exclusion impacts on the whole family and may put families at risk – a child may have to re-enter care.
- School exclusion is correlated with children needing to re-enter care
- Family life is experienced as harder to cope with higher levels of school exclusion
- School exclusion is associated with professionals being unable to appreciate or understand a child's needs, finding it difficult to build trust with the child and not providing support to respondents' children in a satisfactory way – from the perspective of adopters and special guardians.

Our Stress and Wellbeing Survey has shown

- School exclusion is correlated with higher levels of parental/caregiver illness including: Stress; Mental Stress Breakdown; Secondary Trauma; 'Blocked Care'; Depression; Anxiety; PTSD, Cancer and High Blood pressure
- School exclusion impacts on relationship with a partner

- School exclusion is associated with poor understanding and support from friends, family and community
- School exclusion is associated with respondents making more formal complaints
- School exclusion is correlated with stress being exacerbated, or experienced as 'extremely stressful', for a range of issues associated with adoption and special guardianship.
- Schools, including specialist schools, struggle to cope with adopted children, and to a lesser degree, with special guardianship children. Exclusions which are not always legal, and managed moves shift the problems.
- There may be poor awareness of special guardianship in schools
- School exclusion is a source of tension between adopters and professionals. However, when children 'had ever been excluded' there was an association found between this and 'extremely positive' views expressed about the working relationship with CAMHS professionals and Non Statutory professionals. There was also an association found between 'child ever been excluded' and currently being 'satisfied' with the relationship with the child's social worker. These findings suggest that positive working relationships can come about when there have been school exclusions, even though these exclusions, and the challenging behaviours the child exhibits, have such serious ramifications for the child, the family and for professionals -

Our Survey on partnership Working, School Exclusion and School Refusal has shown:

- School exclusions are associated with a child being SEN/having an EHC plan

Concluding thoughts, and a suggestion for building shared understanding around the child

Adopted and special guardianship children/pupils are disproportionately affected by school exclusions. In the same way that 'normal' parenting approaches are not effective, our two surveys have suggested that school exclusions may not be beneficial. School exclusion may in fact be harmful to adopted and special guardianship children, to their parents and special guardians, and to their families. School exclusion may be associated with previously looked after children going back into the care system, with serious negative health outcomes for children including increased child/teenage suicide, and with stress related illness, and with a higher rate of cancer for parents and caregivers.

Schools struggle to cope with our children. Exclusions may move the problems but do not appear to solve them. In moving the problems this may assist the school, and the academic learning of other pupils, but it seems greater pressure is placed on families and vulnerable children by exclusions, which may be extremely detrimental with far reaching life changing negative consequences.

The unalterable fact is that children who are excluded from school tend to be harder to care for than those who have not. It does not matter whether the exclusion comes first, or the challenging behaviour, approaches are needed that calm the situation for all involved and reduce conflict and tension between all those involved with the child.

High levels of dissatisfaction were found amongst parents and special guardians of school excluded pupils. This was in regards to all types of professionals that provided services. This was not simply a

case of disgruntled angry parents and carers as our Stress and Wellbeing survey showed that respondents were able to appreciate support services that were given when their children had been excluded from school, especially from Non Statutory providers. Reasons for this appreciation may be usefully further explored through other more appropriate research methods such as interviewing and focus groups to identify areas of good practice.

It seems from the comments our respondents provided to our survey on Stress and Wellbeing, that part of the problem may be the different perspectives of parents and carers, compared with professionals. Shared understanding of problems is needed to reduce tension and conflict and bring about more harmonious working relationships. Even if problems cannot be solved, the parent or special guardian will feel supported and less disempowered with better shared understanding. There are potentially a number of ways to bring about shared understanding. A unified team approach that involves parents and special guardians, as they are key support providers for the child, could be developed. Using parents and special guardians as a resource, even when children re-enter care, would bring those working to support the child together. We suggest that all those supporting and working with us and our children need to find ways to integrate and come together rather than separate and fragment – leaving us cut off from the team, feeling professionals do not understand. This is not healthy.

In searching for a creative solution to the development of shared understanding, we turn now to the concept of ‘enablement’. Enablement goes beyond measures of satisfaction, which we have found to be poor in our surveys. No parent or care-giver is likely to feel ‘enabled’ by a professional that does not appreciate their child’s needs, takes a punitive approach to their child, looks for fault with parents and care-givers, or criticises one’s parenting or care. We see the use of a measure of enablement as a potential method to bring professionals of all types together with those who parent and care for a challenging child. We propose a measurement instrument simply because what gets measured tends to improve. It is a simple solution to a complex multi-layered problem.

Patient enablement, which incorporates both ‘empathy’ and ‘empowerment’, can be measured using the Patient Enablement Instrument¹² or PEI. To further explain, patient enablement is a process outcome measure that has been used in health consultations, with GPs, and other health professionals, and in a wide variety of health contexts. It is not illness specific, i.e. it can be used for illness in general. It is a brief six question measure that indicates the extent to which a patient understands their health problems and feels able to cope with them as a result of their consultation. The six questions are very simple, the measure takes two minutes to complete, and it can be used repeatedly to see whether the sense of enablement is experienced as a result of consulting or meeting with various types of health professionals as time progresses. The PEI is not suitable for use without adaptation. We suggest that this measure of ‘health enablement’ might be modified to the different context of ‘enablement’ of parents and caregivers of traumatised or challenging children, as a way to evaluate shared understanding. It could for example, potentially be used as a proxy measure of ‘relational empathy’, and it might be utilised in this context, as a performance indicator for empathy building.

The use of an adapted PEI, or similar, might, we suggest, change the focus of the professional’s role, and shift it towards relationship building with parent/care-givers. Instead of moving the problems, the problems are potentially shared and it becomes the professional’s responsibility to nurture and

¹² Mercer et al. BMC Family Practice 2012, 13:6 <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2296/13/6>

build positive relationships. If relationships do not matter, as is currently the case, they will not be prioritised by time poor professionals, with a heavy caseload and poor accountability.

Developing positive empowering relationships with parents and caregivers under great stress, and bringing these in as the central focus of a professional's work for hard to reach children, will potentially transform adoption and special guardianship.

Taking away the fault, from parents, guardians and especially from the previously looked after children we care for, this is the way forwards – rather than high risk strategies that involve shaming and exclusion of vulnerable children.

We hope this report is useful for the Department of Education's School Exclusions Review and apologise for its length – there was a great deal of data to try and make sense of, and we hope this making sense has, at least to some degree, been achieved. Please email Sylvia Schroer, adopterstogether@gmail.com to discuss or elaborate on the findings of these surveys and the ideas put forwards.

Authorship of report

The report is authored by Sylvia Schroer PhD. Sylvia is the elected Chair of Special Guardians and Adopters Together. Sylvia's Health Sciences doctoral research was on the treatment of depression in primary care.