

Background information on pupil suspensions and expulsions statistics in Northern Ireland.

Introduction

All schools must have a scheme in which the procedures to be followed when suspending or expelling pupils are set out. The matters that must be covered in the scheme and the authority responsible for its preparation are prescribed in [The Schools \(suspension and Exclusion of Pupils\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 1995](#). The Education Authority (EA) prepares a scheme specifying the procedures to be followed in relation to the suspension or expulsion of pupils in controlled schools in its area the Council For Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) prepares a scheme to be followed in relation to the suspension or expulsion of pupils by all Catholic maintained schools. The Board of Governors of each voluntary school, grant-maintained integrated school and Irish-medium school must prepare a scheme specifying the procedure to be followed in relation to the suspension or expulsion of pupils from the school. The Department [circular 1995/09 - compulsory rule 99 - regulations 1985 \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#) specify the matters to be included.

The EA must be notified by schools when suspending and expelling pupils using an e form [Notification of pupil suspension to Education Authority - online form | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#). The form is accompanied by guidance notes to assist schools in completing the form. When completed the form is uploaded through AnyComms. The form must be completed by the school principal or a suitable deputy, who is responsible for the accuracy of their school's return.

The EA collate all schools' returns before sending to the Department for processing and publication of the *Official statistics in development* publication "Pupil Suspensions and Expulsions in Northern Ireland".

Historically, the pupil suspensions and expulsions statistics data were available as Management Information and comprised five data tables relating

to suspensions and separate text relating to expulsions and no notes for readers. From the academic year 2021/22 the publication was developed to include additional analysis to meet users' needs. Including for suspensions time series data, disaggregation by geography (EA region), pupil's age, Special Educational Needs (SEN) status, Children Looked After (CLA) status and duration of pupils' suspensions. In addition, the EA provided where possible the pupil's Unique Pupil Number (UPN). The UPN was then used to match a pupil's suspension record to their School Census record allowing suspensions data to be disaggregated by variables commonly requested by users; Free School Meals Eligibility (FSME), Newcomer status and religion. However, the UPN at this time was not a field in the notification form and was assigned to the pupils using the EA's matching routines. This methodology did not result in 100 per cent of pupils being assigned their UPN and there were further issues with the quality of those UPNs that were assigned. As part of the Department's review of suspensions and expulsions from the 2023/24 academic year the pupil's UPN will be a field in the notification form and must be completed by schools for all pupils suspended and expelled.

Role of the school

DE produced comprehensive guidance for schools in relation to defining and recording pupil attendance in DE Circular 2015/19:

[Notification of Pupil Suspension to the EA - circular and form.pdf \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

All grant-aided schools have a compulsory requirement to immediately inform the Education Authority (EA) of both the duration and reason for each pupil suspension and this circular advised schools of the new Notification of Pupil Suspension form and the school's requirement to consider repeat suspensions.

Role of the Education Authority (EA)

The EA provide the AnyComms software and guidance on how to use it [AnyComms Plus - Suspension and Expulsion and Consultative Meeting Files | Education Authority Northern Ireland \(eani.org.uk\)](#). The EA also provide bespoke email support for suspensions and expulsions queries from schools suspension.queries@eani.org.uk

The EA undertake coverage checks and validation of the data. Suspensions and expulsions data relate to pupils in Years 1 – 14 and within the applicable academic year. The data are checked by the EA for completeness e.g., EA student number for each record and a single reason for each suspension. Validation includes: The length of suspension first and continuation records to be a minimum of 0.5 days and a maximum of five days. Internal cohesion checks. The recording of SEN, CLA and Disability is checked and unlikely variations between returns queried. For example, on the first suspension record a pupil is recorded as SEN stage 3 then recorded as no SEN in a continuation record.

The relationship between suspension records, a continuation record must have an new suspension record is checked by the EA with errors that cannot be resolved internally queried with the school

For the expulsions, internal EA records i.e., the outcomes of Consultative Meetings, are compared with the expulsions notified thorough AnyComms to ensure that all expulsions were notified to us through and if not chased up.

Role of Statistics and Research Team (SRT)

Currently only one Deputy Principal Statistician is responsible for validating and reporting pupil suspensions and expulsions data collected by the EA, with the Grade 6 Statistician quality assuring reports prior to publication.

Since pupil suspensions and expulsions data collected by the EA is wider in coverage than the Department's information needs in that pupils that are not of compulsory school age and pupils who were suspended or expelled while attending an EOTAS centre are included syntax is written to remove such pupils from the dataset on which the publication is based. From this dataset syntax is written to create:

- a pupil level suspension dataset; and
- a suspension occasion level dataset.

The pupil level dataset is a count of all pupils suspended in a year with no duplication and as a pupil may be suspended on more than one occasion the suspensions occasions dataset contains multiple records for the number of times the pupil was suspended. The pupil level dataset is matched to the School Census for pupils with a UPN.

Frequencies are run on key variables to ensure that all values entered are valid. Data cleaning routines then recode non-valid values.

Validation routines compare year group and school type and Key Stage. Where variables are contradictory, and the pupil(s) data has been matched to the School Census, the contradictory variables in the suspensions dataset are replaced with the corresponding variables from the School Census. If the UPN is not available a query is raised with the EA to validate the data.

Syntax is written to calculate length of each suspension; the number of times pupils were suspended during the academic year and the total length of time a pupil was suspended during the academic year. Validation is run on the total number of days pupils were suspended and if any pupil's value is greater than 45 days, the legal maximum, a query is raised with the EA to validate the data.

Syntax is written to add the values for each individual suspension code, therefore creating the reason for each suspension occasion. Any occasion with multiple reasons is queried with the EA to validate as only one reason per occasion is permissible.

The pupil level dataset is aggregated to create a school level dataset.

Legislation

The regulations relating to the suspension and expulsion of pupils are contained in the Schools (Suspension and Expulsion of Pupils) Regulations (NI) 1995 as amended by the Schools (Suspension and Expulsion of Pupils) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 1998.

The Department is registered with the Information Commissioner as a data controller under the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 - General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and processing carried out by the Department is compliant with the GDPR.

Processing of personal data is lawful under Article 6(1) (e) of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) 2018 because the collection and processing of the information is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest while exercising a function of a government department. The lawful basis for processing Special Category personal data is Article 9, 2(j) of the UK GDPR 2018: processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes.

Uses of the data

Schools, EA, and DE use these data to monitor the instances of suspensions and expulsions and associated reasons. These data also enable insights into pupil characteristics that are more commonly found amongst suspended and

expelled pupils than the pupil population as a whole. The DE policy area particularly concerned with attendance is Additional Educational Needs Team (AENT) which is responsible for related policies and guidance to schools in relation to suspensions and expulsions.

The EA use these data to assess the need for services in certain areas. Restorative Practice support services are directed to key clusters with high suspension trends along with Peer Mentoring. The data is shared across Children and Young People Services functions to target support provisions.

The data are also valuable to Northern Ireland Departments other than Education, for example Department for Communities, Professional Services Unit.

The data are also of interest to the private sector for example journalists, academics and the public.

Link to recent publication

[Pupil Suspensions and Expulsions in Northern Ireland 2021/22: Experimental Statistics | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

Pre-Release Access List

In accordance with Protocol 2 of the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Official Statistics, the following individuals were granted 24-hour pre-release access to these National Statistics releases:

Minister for Education for Northern Ireland Department of Education (DE)
Permanent Secretary DE
DE Deputy Secretaries
Head of Education and Training Inspectorate, DE
Director Raising Aspirations, Supporting Learning, Empowering Improvement
Director of Qualifications, 14-19 Strategy and Youthwork Policy
Grade 7, Additional Educational Needs Team, DE
Principal Information Officer, Communications Team, DE

Contact details

Statistics and Research Team

Michael Woods, Statistics and Research Team, Department of Education,
Rathgael House, Balloo Road, Rathgill, Bangor BT196NQ Tel: 02891279616
michael.woods@education-ni.gov.uk