

# Exclusions Policy

## 1. Introduction

The Ambitious about Autism Schools Trust offer a specialist education for autistic children and young people. We believe our pupils/learners best learn, thrive, and achieve, in a positive, ambitious, nurturing environment where all members of our school community feel safe and supported. Young people are often placed in our schools having experienced multiple exclusions.

The decision to exclude, whether for a suspension or permanent, is a very serious consideration which will only be used as a last resort when a range of other strategies has been exhausted. Only the Head of School or, in their absence a member of the Senior Leadership Team, acting with the authority of the Head of School, can exclude a pupil/learner. Pupils/learners at risk of suspension or exclusion are enabled and encouraged to participate at all stages of their education, including suspension or exclusion, considering their age and level of understanding.

The Trust is committed to following all statutory procedures where a suspension or exclusion is applied. Additionally, this policy is applied in a consistent, rigorous and non-discriminatory way.

## 2. Applicable Law and Guidance underpinning this Policy

The principal legislation relevant to this policy is:

- the Education Act 2002, as amended by the Education Act 2011.
- the School Discipline (Pupil Exclusions and Reviews) (England) Regulations 2012.
- the Education and Inspections Act 2006.
- the Education Act 1996.
- and the Education (Provision of Full-Time Education for Excluded Pupils) (England) Regulations 2007, as amended by the Education (Provision of Full-Time Education for Excluded Pupils) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014.

This policy is consistent with the Trust's duties under the [Statutory Guidance from the Department for Education: Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement 2022](#) and the [DfE Guidance on Behaviour in Schools \(Sept 2022\)](#),

Additionally, the Trust is aware of its duties under the following:

- The Equality Act 2010
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- Keeping Children Safe in Education
- Working to Safeguard Children 2023

## 3. Links with other Trust Policies and Procedures

This policy should be read alongside the following organisational policies:

- Behaviour Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures

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- Adult at Risk Safeguarding and Protection Policy and Procedures
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy

#### 4. Understanding Exclusions and Suspensions

An exclusion or suspension (formerly known as a fixed term exclusion) is a disciplinary sanction where the pupil/learner is not allowed on the school premises. There are two types of exclusion:

- a suspension (previously known as a fixed term exclusion) where the pupil/learner is not allowed on the school premises for a fixed period of time.
- Permanent exclusion where a decision has been made that the pupil/learner is not permitted to attend the school.

##### 4.1 Suspension

A decision to suspend a pupil/learner will only be taken as a last resort (see Section 5). Where the Head of School issues a suspension:

- The school must inform the parents/carers explaining the reason for the suspension and the period of the suspension (see Section 7);
- For the first five days of the extension the school should provide resources/activities for the pupil/learner;
- If a suspension is longer than five days the Governing Body will ensure arrangements are made for alternative education from the sixth day. Alternative education in this policy refers to suitable education that is arranged for a pupil/learner during a suspension;
- During the suspension the pupil/learner must not be in a public place during school hours except where there is reasonable justification. Parents/carers are responsible for the whereabouts of their child/young person;
- Prior to returning to school there will be a reintegration meeting planned (see Section 8).

##### 4.2 Permanent Exclusion

A decision to permanently exclude a pupil/learner will only be taken exceptionally and as a last resort. Where the Head of School permanently excludes a pupil/learner:

- The school must notify the pupil/learner's parent/carer of permanent exclusion and the reasons for the decision (see Section 7 below);
- The school may consider offering to provide resources or activities for the first five days;
- It is the duty of the Local Authority to provide an appropriate education for the pupil to begin no later than the sixth day after the exclusion;
- The responsible Local Authority will amend an EHC plan to change the placement in Section I. The Authority is also required to identify an appropriate educational placement. Parents retain the right to express their preference for a school or college in line with the Children and Families Act 2014.

##### 4.3 Cancelling exclusions

The Head of School may cancel an exclusion where it has not been reviewed by the Governing Body. Where this occurs the parents, Governing Body, social worker (where there is one) and

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Virtual School Head (VSH) will be informed without delay. Further, the parents/carers will be offered the opportunity to meet the Head of School to discuss the circumstances that led to the exclusion being cancelled.

## 5. The Decision to Suspend or Exclude

A decision to suspend or exclude a pupil/learner permanently will only be taken as a last resort:

- In response to serious or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy; and/or
- Where allowing the pupil/learner to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupils/learners or others in the school including staff;

Serious breaches are those that have a significant impact on others in the learning environment. Examples include:

- Physical assault against a pupil;
- Physical assault against an adult;
- Verbal abuse or threatening behaviour against a pupil;
- Verbal abuse or threatening behaviour against an adult;
- Use, or threat of use, of an offensive weapon or prohibited item that has been prohibited by the School;
- Extreme bullying;
- Racist, sexual or other abuse;
- Damage to property;
- Persistent absconding
- Smoking, illegal drugs (possession and/or use) or alcohol (consumption or possession)

Only the Head of School (or acting Head) can suspend or exclude a pupil/learner from school. Before deciding whether to suspend or exclude a pupil/learner the Head will:

- Consider all the relevant facts and evidence relevant to the incident and events leading up to it;
- Allow the pupil/learner to give their version of events and provide the necessary support to help them do so as necessary;
- Consider the nature of the pupil/learner's SEND and specifically their competence and level of understanding in relation to their own conduct.

When establishing the facts and making any decision, the Head of School must apply the standard of proof in civil legal cases which is on 'a balance of probabilities' i.e. it is more likely to be true than not.

A suspension cannot be changed to a permanent exclusion unless, exceptionally, new relevant information comes to light.

## 6. Values Approach

Aligned with the Trust's values to provide a high-quality education for autistic children and young people, is the commitment to support them remain in education. Pupils/learners are never excluded on the basis their special educational needs cannot be met.

Where a school has concerns about a pupil/learner's behaviour it will work quickly to identify whether there are any causal factors and will intervene using a range of measures to provide

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appropriate support. The school will ensure early intervention is in place to address any underlying causes of disruptive behaviour to seek to reduce the risk of exclusion or suspension. Parents/carers will be proactively involved in this process and kept informed of progress. Typical intervention and support involves:

- Discussions with parents/carers and local authority;
- Implementation of targeted support and monitoring;
- More intensive work within the pupil/learner’s trans-disciplinary team to provide more targeted support, interventions, programmes and monitoring;
- Increased review and reporting of progress;
- Working in partnership with external professionals;
- Holding an early annual review of the pupil/learner’s EHC plan to consider whether the needs, provision and support levels are appropriate or need amending.

However, there are rare circumstances where an exclusion may be necessary as an immediate response to a sudden extreme event which requires urgent action to protect the safety and welfare of other pupils/learners and staff.

The Trust is aware of the duty of its schools under the Equality Act 2010 to prevent discrimination and to ensure reasonable adjustments are made for disabled pupils/learners. The Trust, Heads of School and Governing Bodies also ensure all school policies and practices do not discriminate against pupils/learners by unfairly increasing their risk of exclusion.

The Trust, Heads of School and Governing Bodies are aware that ‘informal’ or ‘unofficial’ exclusions such as sending a pupil/learner home to ‘cool off’ or reducing the length of a child’s day in school are unlawful whether they occur with the agreement of the parents or carers. Any exclusion of a pupil/learner, even for short periods of time, must be formally recorded.

## 7. Roles and Procedures

### 7.1 Informing parents/carers

If the Head of School makes a decision to exclude, they must inform the pupil/learner 's parents/carers without delay by telephone or in person. This must be followed up in writing. The following information must be provided in writing. This information can be sent electronically where permission has been given for this form of communication, or sent to the usual or last known address:

- The reason for the suspension or permanent exclusion;
- The period of a suspension or, for a permanent exclusion, the fact that it is permanent;
- The parent/carer’s<sup>1</sup> right to make representations about the suspension or permanent exclusion to the Governing Body, and who these should be sent to and how;
- The right of parents/carers to request the meeting be online;
- The arrangements for the pupil/learner to continue his/her education during the first five school days of the exclusion;
- Any arrangements in respect of national curriculum tests or public exams;
- Where the pupil/learner is of compulsory school age the Head of School must notify

<sup>1</sup> In this policy the term parents/carers can also be taken to mean a pupil/learner who is 18 or over with mental capacity.

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the parents/carers of the days on which they must ensure their child/young person is not present in a public place during the school day unless there is a reasonable justification. These days are the first five days of a suspension or permanent exclusion or earlier if full time alternative provision is in place.

- If alternative provision has been arranged in time for the notice, then details of the times, location and any other key information should be included (this information should be provided in a separate notice where it is not available within the time frame of sending the first notice).
- Confirmation that the responsible Local Authority has been notified of the suspension/exclusion.

The Head of School will be mindful in all communication with parents/carers that they fully understand the reasons why the decision has been made. In ensuring clear communication, the Head of School will consider any additional needs of parents/carers with whom they are discussing the suspension or exclusion.

### **7.2 Informing the pupil/learner's social worker and/or virtual School Head**

Where the pupil/learner has a social worker and is at risk of suspension or exclusion, the Head of School must contact the social worker. Where the pupil/learner is a child that is looked-after and is at risk of suspension or exclusion, the Virtual School Head (VSH) must be informed as well as the social worker.

Where a decision is made to suspend or exclude a pupil/learner with a social worker or VSH they must be informed without delay of the following:

- The decision to suspend or exclude
- The reason for the decision
- The length of the suspension or the fact that the exclusion is permanent
- Where the suspension or exclusion affects the pupil/learner's ability to sit a national curriculum test or public exam, the fact this will occur.

The social worker/VSH will be invited to any meeting of the Governing Body about the suspension or permanent exclusion.

### **7.3 The Governors**

The Head of School will, without delay, notify the Chair of Governors of any permanent exclusion or suspension and report on these terms to the Governing Body

The legal duty rests with the Governing Body to ensure to arrange a suitable full-time education for pupils of compulsory school age on the sixth day of their suspension. This duty will be carried out by the Head of School who will keep the Governing Body informed.

The Governing Body has various duties in relation to hearing representations from parents/carers/learners. (see Section 9).

### **7.4 The Local Authority**

The Head of School will ensure the relevant Local Authority responsible for maintaining the EHC plan is advised immediately about a pupil/learner's suspension or exclusion.

In the case of a pupil/learner who is permanently excluded, the Local Authority is responsible for arranging a suitable full-time education to begin no later than the sixth day of the exclusion.

## **8. Reintegration Following Suspension**

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A programme of reintegration will be put in place following a suspension to successfully support the pupil/learner back into class full-time and reduce the risk of further suspension. The details of the programme will be discussed with pupils/learners/parents/carers at or prior to the reintegration meeting.

The reintegration meeting will be held with school staff, parents, the pupil/learner and any internal or relevant external professionals to discuss how to support the pupil/learner on their return to school. This will include considering what measures can be introduced to prevent further suspension or exclusion. The meeting will be conducted by a member of the Senior Leadership Team on or before the pupil/learner returns to school.

Following the meeting, a programme of reintegration will be developed and agreed to support the pupil/learner's return to school. Reintegration programmes are likely to include input from a number of school professionals and may comprise:

- A phased transition back into School;
- Having one-to-one provision made on-site with gradual reintegration into class. This will usually be reviewed on a weekly basis;
- Placing the pupil/learner on an amended, individualised timetable. This will be regularly reviewed on a weekly basis.

## 9. The Governing Body's Duty to Consider Reinstatement of a Pupil/Learner

The Governing Body has a duty to consider a parent/carer's representations about a suspension or exclusion. The extent of this duty and how it is exercised depends on the length and nature of the exclusion.

The Governing Body **must** consider the reinstatement of an excluded pupil within 15 school days of receiving notice of the exclusion if:

- the exclusion is permanent;
- it is a suspension which would bring the pupil's total number of school days of exclusion to more than 15 in term; or
- it would result in a pupil missing a public examination or national curriculum test<sup>2</sup>

If the pupil/learner has been suspended for a period of more than five school days but not more than 15 in a single term, the parent/carer can request that the governing body consider reinstatement. The Governing Body must consider the reinstatement within 50 school days of receiving notice of the suspension. Whilst reinstatement may occur after the suspension has been completed, the school records should be amended to show the pupil/learner's suspension had been overturned.

Where a suspension which does not bring the pupil/learner's total number of days of suspension to more than five in a term, the Governing Body must consider any representations made by parents, but it cannot direct reinstatement and is not required to arrange a meeting with parents.

The Head of School will provide an exclusion report for the committee chair. This will include:

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<sup>2</sup> Where an exclusion would result in a pupil missing a public examination or national curriculum test, there is a further requirement that the Governing Body consider exclusion before the date of the examination or test. If this is not possible, the Chair of Governors may consider the exclusion independently and decide whether or not to reinstate the pupil.

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- The pupil/learner's name, age, gender and ethnicity;
- The length of the exclusion;
- The reason for the exclusion and any associated reports;
- Whether or not the pupil/learner is a child that is looked after;
- For a suspension of pupils/learners of compulsory school age, where the exclusion is for more than five school days, what alternative provision has been put in place for pupil/learner.

The committee chair of the Governing Body will contact at least two other governing body members (at least one of whom will be a trustee) to form a committee to consider the parent/carer/Local Authority's representations at a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the representation(s).

The committee chair will determine the date the committee will meet and ask the parent/carer/Local Authority to provide any written statements one week in advance of the meeting. Parents/carers can be accompanied by a friend or advocate if they wish. The meeting can be online if this is the parent/carer's preference. The committee chair will circulate the Head of School's report and any written statements prior to the meeting.

**9.1 Meeting to consider a LA or parent/carer representations about an exclusion.**

Below is a description of the process where the Governing Body is holding a meeting to consider reinstating the pupil/learner. This process does **not** apply if they are meeting with the parents to discuss a suspension which has resulted in the pupil/learner being suspended for five days or less in the term. This is because the Governing Body does not have the power to reinstate the pupil/learner.

The meeting will be convened by the chair within the agreed time limits or as soon as possible thereafter by mutual agreement. The following people are invited to the meeting to make representations:

- The parents/carers;
- Head of School;
- Social worker for a child who is looked-after;
- VSH.

The Governing Body is required to:

- ask for any written evidence in advance of the meeting
- circulate any written evidence and information, including a list of those who will be present, to all parties at least 5 school days in advance of the meeting;
- allow parent/carer's to be accompanied by a friend or representative;
- identify the steps taken to ensure the pupil/learner is encouraged to attend the meeting to speak or participate by other means if attending the meeting is not possible.

The Governing Body will consider the following:

- the interests and circumstances of the excluded pupil;
- the circumstances in which the pupil was excluded; and
- the interests of other pupils and people working at the school.

When establishing the facts in relation to an exclusion decision, the Governing Body will apply the civil standard of proof 'on the balance of probabilities' i.e. it is more likely than not that a fact is true. In reaching a decision on whether to reinstate a pupil, the Governing Body should consider whether the decision to exclude the pupil was lawful, reasonable and procedurally fair, taking account of the Head of School's legal duties.

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The Governing Body should ensure that clear minutes are taken of the meeting as a record of the evidence that was considered by the Governing Body. These minutes should be made available to all parties on request and the record of discussion should state clearly how the decisions have been reached.

Following consideration of the evidence the Governing Body can either uphold the exclusion/suspension or direct reinstatement of the pupil/learner immediately or on a particular date. Where reinstatement is not practical the Governing Body must still consider whether the Head of School's decision to exclude the pupil/learner was justified based on the evidence.

Following the decision, the Governing Body will notify parents, the Head of School and the Local Authority of the decision in writing and without delay, giving reasons. In the case of a permanent exclusion, the Governing Body's notification must also include the following information:

- the fact that it is permanent;
- notice of the parent/carer's right to ask for the decision to be reviewed by an Independent Review Panel (IRP);
- the date by which an application for a review must be made (i.e., 15 school days from the date on which notice in writing of the Governing Body's decision is given to parents);
- where and to whom an application for a review, and any written evidence should be submitted;
- any application should set out the grounds on which it is being made;
- the right to require the Trust to appoint a SEN expert to advise the review panel;
- parents may, at their own expense, appoint someone to make written and/or oral representations to the panel.
- in addition to the right to apply for an Independent Review Panel, if parents believe that the exclusion has occurred as a result of discrimination, they may make a claim under the Equality Act 2010 to the First- Tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability) in the case of disability discrimination, or the County Court in the case of other forms of discrimination;

## 10. Independent Review Panel

If the Governing Body uphold a permanent exclusion, parents/carers have the right to request that their decision is reviewed by an Independent Review Panel (IRP). The application for a review must be made:

- within 15 school days of notice being given to the parents/carers by the Governing Body of their decision to uphold a permanent exclusion;
- where an application has not been made within this time frame, within 15 school days of the final determination of a claim of discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 in relation to the exclusion.

Parents/carers may request an IRP even if they did not make representations to the Governing Body. They will be required to submit written representations and any supporting evidence, when lodging their application. The IRP can quash the decision of the Governing Body and direct they consider the exclusion again.

Further information on the IRP process followed by the Trust is contained within the [Statutory Guidance from the Department for Education: Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement 2022](#)

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## 11. Monitoring Arrangements

This policy shall be reviewed by the Director of Education and approved by the Education and Care Committee every year.

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