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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Some schools break the law as they struggle to combat disruptive pupils

And a number of primary school pupils carry weapons for protection, says the CSJ

Children as young as seven are carrying weapons such as knives in some of Britain's poorest schools, according to a shock new report, which also reveals a profound failure on the part of some schools to respond to disruptive behaviour.

The report, *No Excuses: A review of educational exclusion*, exposes the extent to which some children feel unsafe in schools, and the impact of gang culture on their behaviour and education. At one primary school cited in the report children aged 9-11 regularly turned up to class wearing the colours of their local street gang.

The CSJ urges ministers to use its report as a blueprint for radical reform on exclusion, in line with its commitment to transform education in failing schools.

The review highlights the climate of fear gripping many pupils who feel unsafe in school, and on their journey to and from it.

"The extent to which pupils in some of our schools are feeling unsafe and the impact that weapon-carrying street gang activity and conflict is having on their behaviour is staggering.

"During evidence to the CSJ, the head of a primary referral unit cited a number of examples of 7-11-year-olds being sent to the PRU for having brought knives into their primary school.

"Often the children said that they had brought the knives in because they were being bullied in school, to scare someone, or because they were being bullied by older children or, in one example, by someone's father, on their way home from school.

"One witness to our review informed us that some pupils who truant may be doing so because they are getting robbed or bullied on the way home from school."

Some schools try to hide their gang problems because of fear of damage to their reputation, the report says.

The CSJ's report has been informed by a group of expert education advisers, including two Academy Principals, the leading UK schools lawyer and a charity chief executive specialising in young people at risk of exclusion from school.

It will be launched at **Pimlico Academy in London** – an example of excellence in tackling disruptive behaviour – **on Monday September 12 at 2-30 pm**, with Nick Gibb, the Schools Minister in attendance.

CSJ Executive Director Gavin Poole said: “It is vital that unscrupulous and sometimes illegal practices indulged in are confronted head on. The money for these ‘ghost pupils’ is retained by the school, but don’t attend, with some schools failing to provide any suitable education or support to these children.”

“This report reinforces the need for early intervention. It is tragic that 320 young children were excluded below the age of 8 between 2009-2010”

Another of its key findings is that many schools are ill-equipped and ineffective in dealing with disruptive behaviour.

Measures currently used include permanent exclusions (expulsions), fixed-term exclusions (suspensions) typically lasting a few days, transfer to off-site pupil referral units (PRUs) or other “alternative provision” by means of processes such as “managed moves”, “referrals” dual registrations (where a pupil is on the roll of 2 schools), and the use of part-time timetables.

The report calls for a “standardised, simplified and cohesive approach” to helping vulnerable young people in place of the current patchwork of arrangements.

Mainstream schools, PRUs and alternative providers from the charitable and private sectors should develop better and more detailed knowledge about the circumstances and needs of individual pupils. This could be achieved by an ‘education passport’, the CSJ believes.

Primary and secondary schools should be able focus on building relationships with pupils, explaining their rules and laying the foundations for behaviour.

Heads and teachers should receive special training in conflict resolution and police officers should be trained to work in schools with problem pupils.

According to the latest official figures, in 2009/10 there were around 5,700 permanent exclusions and 330,000 suspensions out of a pupil population of 8 million.

After action by the previous Labour government, permanent exclusions have fallen.

Yet the official figures do not provide an accurate picture in some schools. For example, fewer pupils are being excluded but it seems more are being educated outside mainstream schools and sent to PRUs (twice as many in 2007 as a decade earlier) and other alternative provision. Some will have been illegally excluded from their mainstream schools.

There is currently no way of knowing how many pupils are being illegally excluded.

The report warns that some schools are acting illegally or unscrupulously, and that their practices are allowed to remain hidden within systems that are either completely unregulated, or that are subject to very little transparency and monitoring:

“Some schools are failing to comply with their legal obligations in respect of official exclusions, are carrying out unofficial illegal exclusions, or are otherwise failing to provide an acceptable level of pastoral care and education.

"In doing so they are failing to comply with their child protection and safeguarding obligations in many cases...The weaknesses in the current system are being manipulated by some schools in relation to some of society's most vulnerable children and young people."

The CSJ report identifies a number of deep-seated factors that cause disruptive behaviour often leading to exclusions in response.

Family breakdown and domestic abuse are among the causes. The report cites previous CSJ research showing that a child not growing up in a two-parent family is 75 per cent more likely to fail at school.

It also cites NSPCC research showing that almost one million secondary school children had been physically attacked by an adult, raped or sexually assaulted, or severely neglected at home.

Lack of nurture and communication in the first three years of life when the human brain is developing rapidly is cited as another underlying cause of later severe behavioural problems.

It found some children were starting school who communicated with grunts, couldn't use a knife and fork because they didn't use them at home, and who were routinely aggressive.

Key recommendations include:

- **Government and Ofsted must address the issue of unofficial exclusions and promote transparency**
- **Electronic education passport model:** Mainstream schools, special schools, PRUs and other alternative providers need to develop an informed understanding about each pupil's circumstances and educational requirements. The CSJ believes this could be achieved through the development and introduction of an electronic education passport model
- **Reaching and engaging parents with the voluntary and community sector:** Mainstream schools, special schools, PRUs and other alternative providers should engage with effective voluntary and community sector organisations running evidence based programmes
- **Dedicated police officer engagement in schools should become more specialised, and joint training (with schools) should be provided**
- **Effective conflict resolution training should be provided for head teachers and as part of initial teacher training and Career Professional Development**
- **Restorative justice approaches should be promoted in all secondary schools and research should be conducted with respect to its use in primary schools**
- **Recommendations to assist teachers cope with the impact of disruptive behaviour**
- **The Government should recognise the specialist skills that are required to work with pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD):** The Government should consult on the potential for teachers to train and qualify in BESD schools, and on creating a conversion course allowing teachers to transfer back to mainstream schools in the future, should they wish to do so. The best BESD schools should be allocated with a 'Kite' mark entitling them to provide such training.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The Centre for Social Justice is an independent think tank established, by Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP in 2004, to seek effective solutions to the poverty that blights parts of Britain. In July 2007 the group published *Breakthrough Britain: Ending the Costs of Social Breakdown*. The paper presented over 190 policy proposals aimed at ending the growing social divide in Britain. Subsequent reports have put forward proposals for reform of the police, prisons, social housing, the asylum system and family law.

Other reports have dealt with street gangs and early intervention to help families with young children.

The Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP stood down as Chairman of the Centre on his appointment as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in May 2010 and is now the Founder and Patron.

ENDS