

A “Transformative” Look at Pupil Referral Units in England

By Jennifer Spindler, MPhil, Education Department

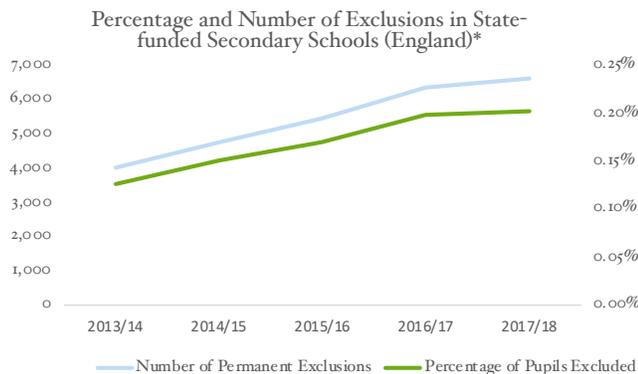
Research Question:

What is the role of PRU’s in the current mainstream inclusive agenda in England?

Inclusion is interpreted as a policy that ensures all children receive a high-quality education. Although the UK government touts an “inclusive agenda”, permanent and temporary exclusions, or removal from mainstream schools, are on the rise in secondary education in England (Dfe, 2018). Concurrently, attendance in alternative provisions outside of mainstream schools like Pupil Referral Units (PRU’s) continues to increase, as

enrolled pupils are those who are excluded (Malcom, 2018). Research demonstrates that the types of pupils placed in PRU’s are considered the most vulnerable in England, and yet the exact educational objectives of PRU’s remain vague.

The Problem: More Pupils Excluded Than Ever Before



*My study answers the call for more contextual evidence and clarity on the education occurring at PRU’s to understand their purpose and direction. Since the Pupil Referral Unit is a “referral” location meant to be temporary, I also ask:
Is the ultimate goal of PRU’s is to re-integrate young people into mainstream schools?*

Thematic Analysis : My Findings

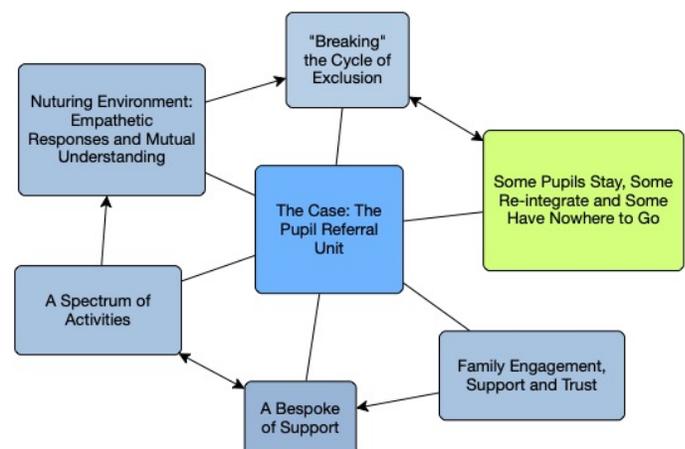
Methodology: “Transformative” Analysis

I problematize the pupil referral unit as a case study, using two data collection techniques to qualitatively analyze the case.

1. First I analyzed policy documents to understand how pupils are excluded from mainstream schools and placed in PRU’s. I examined how local processes decide placement and policy.
2. Second, I spent three days observing a PRU, and interviewed PRU educators, assistants and mentors. I triangulated data to create themes.

I will discuss:

- Who holds power in these “inclusive” policies?
- How does the empirical evidence differ from policy documents?
- How do debates about inclusion connect to my findings?



I present themes derived from interviews, triangulated through observations and field notes. I coded interviews according to frequency and the emphasis of participants, and then created larger ideas that connect to policy like the limitations of mainstream and the importance of family engagement.