

A parents' guide to the exclusion process

Suspension

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This guide is designed to support parents/carers whose children are educated in Hampshire schools. The Department for Education has published a guide for parents about school behaviour and exclusion in England which is available at: [A guide for parents on school behaviour and exclusion - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/a-guide-for-parents-on-school-behaviour-and-exclusion)

1. Why am I receiving this guide?

You are receiving this guide because your child has been suspended for over 15 days in a term. This means that the school must hold a meeting which is known as a '15+ GDC'. This can be a very upsetting, difficult, and worrying time for you and your child. This guidance explains:

- what you can do if you want to talk to the school about the suspension(s).
- what you can do if you disagree with the suspension(s).
- what you can do to prevent further suspensions.
- where you can go for further advice and support.

Government guidance is contained in a document called '***Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement***' (July 2026) [referred to as '*DfE Exclusions Guidance*'].

www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-exclusion

2. What does Suspension mean?

It means that a pupil is not allowed to attend school or go on to school premises for a specific period of time. The Local Authority (LA) and schools work with parents, children or young people, and a wide range of other agencies to help prevent suspensions. Headteachers may use suspension as a way of managing the behaviour of pupils. It is also used as a way of giving clear messages to the pupil involved, and the whole school community, that certain kinds of behaviour are unacceptable.

- Suspensions will be for a fixed number of school days – headteachers must not exclude for an indefinite number of days. An individual suspension should be for the shortest time necessary, bearing in mind that exclusions of more than a day or two make it more difficult for the pupil to reintegrate back into the school.
- Suspensions must not exceed 45 school days in an academic year – either issued as a single suspension or as a number of shorter suspensions added cumulatively together.
- Suspensions may be for lunchtimes but not for too long a period – other ways of dealing with the problem should be worked out. A lunchtime exclusion

counts as a half day suspension. If your child has free school meals, the school must make other arrangements such as a packed lunch.

- In exceptional cases headteachers may issue a further, separate suspension. If this happens, the headteacher must write to you again giving the reasons for the change.
- You can ask for a suspension to be reviewed by governors (see page 6 for your rights for different lengths of suspension).

3. Should my child have been suspended?

Your child can be suspended for behaviour inside or outside school, even out of school hours and during the holidays, if the headteacher feels there is a clear link between that behaviour and maintaining good behaviour within the school, therefore bringing the school into disrepute.

Your child must not be suspended:

- simply because they have additional needs or a disability that the school feels it is unable to meet.
- for low academic attainment/ability.
- for anything you, as a parent, have done or not done – for example refused to attend a reintegration meeting following a suspension.
- if they refuse to agree to specific conditions for a return to school following a suspension.

Only headteachers (or the nominated member of staff in their absence) have the authority to suspend a pupil. The headteacher should not suspend your child in the heat of the moment, unless there is an immediate threat to the safety of your child or of others in the school.

The headteacher may suspend your child if they feel that on the '*balance of probability*' (not the criminal test of '*beyond reasonable doubt*') your child did what they are alleged to have done. The more serious the alleged behaviour and the possible sanction, the stronger the evidence against your child needs to be.

When deciding to suspend your child the headteacher should:

- make sure that a thorough investigation has been carried out.
- offer your child a chance to say what happened and, preferably, to write their own account in their own words.
- ask staff and pupils who witnessed the incident, or were involved in it, to provide written accounts.
- check whether your child was provoked into acting as they did.

- think carefully about the evidence available and apply the behaviour policy when deciding the sanction.
- ensure that the suspension is for as short a time as possible.
- take into account the *DfE Exclusions Guidance* and all relevant school policies (Behaviour, Exclusions, Special Educational Needs, Drugs) and, if appropriate the *Equalities Act 2010*.
- if necessary, consult others, such as the chair of governors or the Local Authority, but **not** someone who may be involved in reviewing the suspension.

4. How will I be contacted?

The headteacher or their nominated representative will let you know immediately (generally by telephone) about the length of a suspension and the reason for it. If relevant, your family support worker, social worker, and virtual school headteacher will also be notified. This will be followed up as soon as possible with a letter which includes:

- the reason for the suspension.
- length and time of the suspension and date for return.
- how your child's education will continue.
- details for setting and marking work for your child to do during the first five days of any suspension.
- details of alternative provision the school puts in place from Day 6 of longer suspensions.
- your right to challenge a suspension, how to do this and how your child may be involved.
- the phone numbers of the local authority (LA) Inclusion Support Service (ISS) which can offer information and advice.
- your rights under the *Equality Act*.
- Child Law Advice contact details.

If a suspension of over 15 days is issued, or if a suspension takes the total number of days over 15 in a term, the letter will also include details of the 15+ GDC meeting.

5. What should I do now?

If your child has been suspended, you can support them to get back on track and to be successful. Work will be set by the school for your child to complete at home during the first five days of the suspension – it is your responsibility to ensure completed work is returned to the school for marking.

It is good practice for schools to arrange a reintegration meeting for you and your child following any suspension. The purpose of this meeting is to enable a successful return to school for your child. The school cannot refuse to allow your child back to school if you do not attend such a meeting, nor can it insist that you or your child agree to conditions before your child returns. During a reintegration meeting, the school should communicate to the pupil that they are valued, and their previous behaviour should not be seen as an obstacle to future success.

A reintegration meeting gives you the chance to support your child's return to school. Examples of how you can do this could include:

- getting involved in planning and setting targets for your child if they are suspended.
- looking at a home-school book or report every evening which tells you how your child is doing, and you can also use it to let the school know about anything happening out of school which has upset your child, or about new/changed medication.
- talking to your child about their learning and progress, and praising success.
- making sure that you support the school's behaviour policy by using similar rules at home and letting your child know that you will not accept poor behaviour.
- attending parents' meetings and contacting your child's tutor/teacher when problems arise.
- letting the school know what strategies you use at home and what seems to work with your child.

During the first five days of the suspension, you may receive a penalty notice from the LA if your child is present in a public place during school hours without good reason, for example a doctor's appointment.

6. What can I do if I disagree with a suspension?

Ask for an appointment with the headteacher to talk about your concerns and ask them to reconsider the suspension.

Ask governors to review the decision by writing to the clerk to governors at the school as soon as possible after you get the suspension letter.

- **0 to 5 days** of suspension in total in one term – the governing board must consider any representations made by parents. There is no deadline for this meeting to be arranged, however, if this does occur then it should happen within a reasonable amount of time. The governing board must consider any representation made by parents, but it cannot direct reinstatement and is not required to arrange a meeting with parents.

- **5.5 to 15 days** of suspensions in total in one term – governors must hold a formal meeting if you ask for one. Governors have 50 school days to hold this review.
- **15.5 + days** suspensions in total in one term – governors must hold a review within 15 school days of the date of the suspension which pushes the total to 15.5 days or more. (See Section 6 below.)

In either case, prepare what you want to say. The questions below will give you an idea of some of the areas you may like to consider. Alternatively, you may choose to use the pupil and parent voice form which has been sent to you along with this guidance. You can either send the form to the clerk to share in advance of the meeting or bring it to the meeting.

What does your child say about the suspension?

Talk to your child as soon as possible and take down what they say, in their own words. If you need more details, ask questions such as:

- Where were you when the incident happened?
- What led up to you doing what you did?
- Who else was involved?
- Who saw what happened?
- What did the teacher(s) say?

Was this a serious breach of the school's behaviour/discipline policy?

If you do not think it was, explain why. Your child's view of the incident is very important, and your child should have been given the chance to write an account of what happened before the headteacher made the decision to suspend them. If your child wants to use this as a chance to apologise for something, they could do so in writing and/or do so at the meeting if you and your child are attending. Your child may need to think of ways of putting things right if possible.

What do others say?

You have the right to see all the written accounts made by staff and by other pupils. Look at what the headteacher says, look at what others say. Did the school take statements from your child and witnesses before your child was excluded? Do any of the accounts support your child's version of events? If there are important disagreements between the statements, highlight them. Has there been a misunderstanding?

You may want to say a little about your child

What sort of person is your child? Imagine you are describing them to a stranger. Remember their good points. Are there any positive reports about your child? Is there someone official, like a playgroup leader, youth worker or employer who might write a letter about them? Describe your child and add anything that

explains why your child behaved as they did, or which you think shows that the suspension may not be fair, reasonable, or proportionate in all the circumstances.

Think about your child at the time of the suspension

Was anything upsetting your child at school or at home? Was there pressure from others? Could anything else have affected their behaviour? Have they been bullied, racially or sexually harassed, or faced discrimination inside or outside of school? If drugs are involved, is your child more likely to be in contact with drugs through not being in school? If your child was at school instead of being excluded would this seriously harm the education and welfare of your child or of others?

Think about the incident

If others were involved in the same incident, how fair is the sanction for your child **and** of others involved in the incident. It is for the headteacher to decide in each individual's case, and taking all their respective circumstances into account, what sanction(s) are fair, reasonable and proportionate – which may mean that the pupils receive different sanctions.

Check your child's school record

You have the right to see your child's full school record. Does it include information which is new to you and may affect your case? There may be information relating to your child that is confidential to the school (for example, Police Intelligence which is not part of your child's record, and which cannot be shared with you).

Consider any special circumstances

The *DfE Exclusions Guidance* says that certain groups of pupils are more at risk of suspension or permanent exclusion and headteachers have to consider whether pupils in those groups need extra support in school. These groups include pupils:

- starting primary or secondary school.
- with special educational needs or who have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP).
- from minority ethnic backgrounds, including the Traveller community.
- in care (looked-after).
- in receipt of free school meals.
- who are Young Carers.
- in families under stress.
- who are pregnant or are parents.
- who are unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Even if your child is in one of these groups, they may still be suspended if the incident is so serious that the headteacher decides there is no appropriate alternative.

Does your child have emotional and behaviour difficulties and/or a learning difficulty?

If your child's behaviour is very challenging and disrupts their schoolwork, they may have emotional and behavioural difficulties which are affecting their learning, and they may need extra support at school. If your child does not get the support they need, this may lead to poor or worsening behaviour. Further information is in the *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice*, which is available at: [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25-years)

If your child has special educational needs (SEN), schools should use their best endeavours to put all reasonable adjustments in place to avoid suspension.

Were drugs involved?

Check the school's policy on drugs. The headteacher should consult the school's drugs co-ordinator and take account of the school's Drug Policy and the precise circumstances of your child's case.

Was discrimination, harassment or bullying involved?

Check the school's Behaviour and Equality Policies. If you feel bullying, discrimination or harassment were involved in the incident, give details.

Does your child have a recognised disability?

If so, do you believe that the suspension was as a result of behaviour related to that disability?

Schools have a legal duty not to discriminate against disabled pupils by suspending them from school because of behaviour related to their disability. A person does not have to have a formal diagnosis to be considered disabled under the *Equality Act 2010*.

Suspension of a disabled pupil for a reason related to their disability can only be justified if there is a material and substantial reason for the sanction. If reasonable adjustments could have been made by the school and were not, the school may not be able to justify such a sanction.

Where there is an allegation of discrimination under the *Equality Act 2010* in relation to a suspension, you may make a claim to the First-Tier Tribunal (disability discrimination) or a County Court (other forms of discrimination).

Consider strategies used to improve behaviour

Schools should work with you and your child to avoid suspension. Any problems should be discussed with you at an early stage and an action plan to improve behaviour agreed with you and your child. Other strategies, such as a managed move, referral to an Education Centre (EC) or other form of Alternative Provision (AP), restorative justice, mediation, and internal suspension, could be considered

and discussed with you. Has the school done all it could to support your child and avoid suspension?

If, despite using strategies to change behaviour, your child had several suspensions and was at risk of permanent exclusion, the school should put in place a Pastoral Support Plan (PSP) or an Individual Behaviour Plan (IBP) and talk to you about the risk of permanent exclusion. You should be involved in the setting up of a PSP or an IBP. The school can also seek advice from the LA Inclusion Support Service and, for primary pupils, the local Primary Behaviour Support Unit or, for secondary pupils, the local Education Centre.

Sources of further advice and guidance are listed on page 14 of this booklet.

7. The Governors Discipline Committee meeting (GDC)

The role of the GDC is to review the headteacher's decision to suspend your child. Governors will consider whether the suspension has been carried out correctly and that the decision takes account of your child's needs. The GDC's role is **not** to rubber stamp the headteacher's decision.

The clerk to the GDC will write to you confirming the date and time of the meeting. The clerk will send the school's evidence pack to you and everyone else attending the GDC. The evidence pack should arrive at least five days before the meeting and will include all or some of the following:

- a written summary by the headteacher.
- written accounts by staff and pupils who saw, or who were involved in, the incident for which your child was suspended.
- a written account by your child of what happened.
- a behaviour log.
- academic reports.
- details of any special educational needs your child may have.
- an Individual Education Plan, if relevant, setting out your child's needs and the strategies and support in place to address these, as well as information about any other services or agencies involved.
- a copy of any PSP or IBP, which may include the involvement of other agencies for children or young people who have been, or are at risk of being, permanently excluded.
- attendance records.
- relevant school policies.

The following people will attend the meeting:

- **three governors**, one of whom will act as chair of the GDC.
- a **clerk** to take minutes and advise on procedure if necessary.

- the **headteacher** and any other relevant staff members (for example SENCo or head of year, who may be able to answer very detailed questions about your child's school history).
- if applicable, your family support worker, social worker or a representative from the virtual school can also attend.
- your child – if they want to give their views and you, and your child, are comfortable doing that. You may want to agree with them before the meeting what part they will take if they do attend. For example, do they want to answer questions, make a statement, or just be present.

The meeting will follow a clear agenda which will be sent to you with the invitation to the meeting. The LA has a standard agenda, which most GDCs follow but may alter the order of questions:

- Introduction by Chair of the Committee and explanation of procedures
- Submission by headteacher
 - Questions by governors
 - Questions by parents/carers
- Submission by parents/carers
 - Questions by governors
 - Questions by headteacher
- Summing up by headteacher
- Summing up by parents/carers
- All parties, except clerk and governors, leave the meeting
- Decision by Governors Discipline Committee. Governors will discuss the evidence they have seen and heard during the meeting and make their decision. None of those attending the meeting should be on their own with governors before, during or after the meeting, except the clerk who stays to record the decision and reasons for it, and then sends you a letter giving that information. The letter should be sent without delay.

The Governors must consider:

- whether, on the balance of probability, your child did what they are alleged to have done, and which school policies were not followed by your child.
- whether the correct procedures were used by the school and whether the school applied its own policies and the *DfE Exclusions Guidance*.

- the seriousness of the incident and whether the length of the suspension or suspensions were in proportion to what your child did and to any sanction given to others involved in the incident.
- any relevant previous breaches of school policies.
- the support provided by the school, when it was put in place and whether it had been in place long enough to have had a significant impact on your child's behaviour.
- any special education needs and/or disability your child may have.
- whether your child is in a vulnerable group, as defined by the *DfE Exclusions Guidance*.
- any reasonable adjustments the school should have had in place for your child.
- any mitigating circumstances, such as being provoked or having had new medication prescribed or a change of medication.

The Governors can only choose between two decisions:

- uphold the suspension
- or**
- direct reinstatement.

The second choice will usually be made after your child has returned to school at the end of the suspension. In that case, governors may choose to add a note to your child's school record giving their decision.

You can ask for a governing board meeting to be held via the use of remote access technology, such as video conferencing software. However, remote meetings should not be the automatic choice and face-to-face meetings should always be encouraged.

When deciding whether to request a remote meeting, you should consider:

- your internet connectivity, whether it is good enough and not intermittent or slow.
- if you have a suitable space, free from distraction, to enable you to fully take part.
- whether a face-to-face meeting may be better.

Each person attending the meeting should be able to hear and be heard and (where using a live video link) see and be seen throughout the meeting.

If the governing board does not think that a meeting can be held fairly and openly via remote access, they should talk to you about how a face-to-face meeting can be arranged that will be convenient for you.

If you wish for the meeting to be held remotely you must inform the school within **3 school days** of receiving written notification about the exclusion.

8. What should I bring to the GDC meeting?

These are things that might be helpful, but you do not have to bring them:

- your copy of the school pack.
- a pen and paper to make notes during the meeting.
- any extra information that you would like to share at the meeting. (This can also be sent to the Clerk in advance of the meeting, so everyone has time to read it.)
- some ideas of questions you want to ask the headteacher about the school pack.
- a statement you have prepared to share at the meeting. (This could be done using the form sent to you with this guide.)

9. What happens next?

You do not have the right to any further review for suspensions if you do not agree with a governors' review, whether that was a whole governing board review or a formal GDC.

A reintegration meeting with you and your child, during or following the end of any suspension is good practice but is not a legal requirement. However, putting an agreed plan in place for your child's return to school can be helpful in preventing further suspensions, as can the following:

- keep in regular contact with your child's class teacher, tutor or SENCo.
- ensure that you and your child are involved in any meetings, especially those to agree or review an Individual Education Plan (IEP), IBP or PSP.
- find out from your school whether there are any other agencies who could assess and support your child with their behaviour. These agencies might include:

From the Local Authority:

- Primary Behaviour Service (PBS) (primary schools only) which has staff who can support your child either in school or at the local PBS centre.
- Inclusion Support Service.
- Education Centre (secondary schools only) which has staff who can support your child either in school or at your local centre.
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Education Psychology Service (HIEPS).

- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Team.
- Early Help Hub.

From the National Health Service:

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) via your family doctor. CAMHS provide family support and counselling and can refer for assessments of underlying mental or physical health issues.

10. Further information, advice and guidance

Inclusion Support Service

Children's Services, Hampshire County Council, Elizabeth II Court, The Castle, Winchester, Hampshire SO23 8UG

☎ 0370 779 0123

exclusion.queries@hants.gov.uk

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/educationandlearning/educationinclusionservice>

The Coram Children's Legal Centre aims to provide free legal advice and information to parents/carers on education matters

☎ 020 7713 0089 The advice line is open from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday, except Bank Holidays and 24 December to 1 January

<http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com>

SENDIASS

Hampshire Special Education Needs & Disability Information, Advice & Support

[Hampshire SENDIASS | Impartial SEND Advice & Support](#)

IPSEA

Independent information and support on the suspension and permanent exclusion of children with SEND

[Independent Provider of Special Education Advice \(IPSEA\)](#)

DfE

Department for Education Statutory Guidance on exclusions is published online

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-exclusion>

Department of Education guide for parents:

[A guide for parents on school behaviour and exclusion - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Equality Advisory and Support Service

☎ 0808 800 0082

[Equality Advisory and Support Service \(equalityadvisoryservice.com\)](https://equalityadvisoryservice.com)

SEN and Disability Discrimination Tribunal

☎ 01325 289 350

[First-tier Tribunal \(Special Educational Needs and Disability\) - GOV.UK](#)

Talk to Frank drugs helpline

☎ 0300 123 6600

[Honest information about drugs | FRANK \(talktofrank.com\)](#)

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