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Longitudinal trajectories of school exclusions among children in Welsh mainstream schools and their impact on attainment

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Objectives

This study examines the long-term impact of school exclusions on pupils, exploring how effects vary by timing and the cumulative impact of multiple exclusions throughout their education.

Methods

A record linkage study combined education records, including attainment at age 11 (end of primary school) and age 16 (end of secondary school), with annual school exclusion data from age 11 to 16. Latent class growth analysis was used to construct longitudinal exclusion trajectories. Pupil characteristics, including the timing of special educational needs (SEN) identification and longitudinal free school meal (FSM) eligibility, were also analysed.

Results

Five exclusion trajectories were identified: no exclusions, low-level exclusions, early-rise exclusions, high-level age 16 exclusions, and late-rise exclusions. Pupil characteristics, particularly SEN type and provision, were strongly associated with frequent early-stage exclusions. Experiencing multiple exclusions at any stage significantly reduced the likelihood of passing any subject at age 16. High exclusion rates, particularly in early education, were linked to SEN status and lower attainment at the end of secondary school.

Conclusion

These trajectories suggest that underlying factors driving school exclusions that may not be reflected in official records or school reports. Identifying these patterns can help policy-makers and practitioners develop more targeted national and local guidance on school exclusion policies.

