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## Rise in exclusions for autistic pupils in England

4,340 autistic pupils received [at least one fixed period exclusion in England in the academic year 2015-16](#) (Department for Education (DfE), 2017). This represents a 20% increase on the previous year. Although the numbers are far lower for permanent exclusion, there has been a 36% increase in the number of autistic pupils permanently excluded from school (DfE, 2017).

Autistic pupils are three times more likely to be excluded for a fixed period or permanently than pupils with no special educational needs. Even when viewed in the context of a growing population of autistic pupils in schools, these statistics are alarming<sup>1</sup>.

Autistic pupils receiving at least one fixed period exclusion			
	Number of pupils on roll	Number receiving at least one fixed period exclusion	Percentage receiving at least one fixed period exclusion
2009-2010	56,255	2,250	4.00
2010-2011	54,340	2,480	4.56
2011-2012	55,720	2,750	4.90
2012-2013	70,140	2,720	3.88
2013-2014	76,020	3,030	3.99
2014-2015	90,780	3,610	3.97
2015-2016	100,010	4,340	4.34

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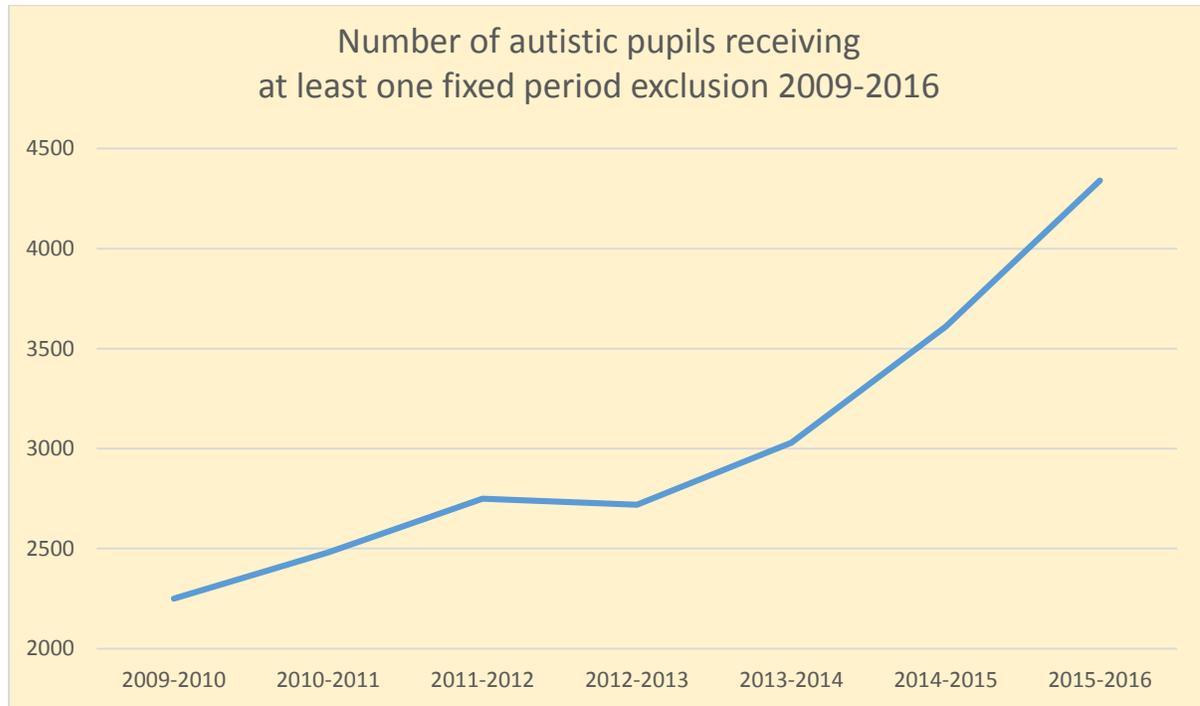
<sup>1</sup> The January census 2016 found that there are now 100,012 autistic pupils in maintained schools in England, a 10% increase on the previous year.

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*Figures are presented for pupils with a Statement of SEN, Education, Health and Care plan, School Action Plus or SEN support.*



### Reasons for exclusion

The most common reasons given for excluding a pupil on the autism spectrum nationally are:

- physical assault against an adult (24%)
- physical assault against a pupil (18%)
- persistent disruptive behaviour (20%) (DfE, 2017).

For neurotypical pupils (those who are not autistic), one can often argue that all behaviour is a choice. They may therefore be more likely to stop short of attacking a member of staff, perhaps realising the consequences of their actions – that overstepping the line in such a way would result in exclusion and perhaps incur the wrath of their parents.

For an autistic pupil who feels extremely anxious and stressed – experiencing sensory overload and overwhelmed by social demands and interactions, for example - their choices may be limited to a fight or flight response: either trying to run away from the source of their anxiety or to lash out at people who are in their way. They may not deliberately hurt others.

Indeed parents often report to the [National Autistic Society's \(NAS\) School Exclusions Service](#) that their child has no recollection of their meltdown and that when their child is told that someone has been hurt as a result of their actions, they are full of remorse or feel disengaged from their actions. It is this lack of any intention to harm others that might indicate that their behaviour is a direct consequence of their autism.

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However, some schools still label the autistic pupil as *naughty*. Clearly every pupil on the autism spectrum is different and there is a complex combination of factors that come into play in any incident:

- the pupil's upbringing
- health
- personality
- character and so on.

Which factor is coming to the fore in each occasion can be difficult to assess. But permeating all of these is the person's autism.

### **Preventing exclusion**

One of the 'headlines' from the [Department for Education Guidance on Exclusion](#) is: *'Disruptive behaviour can be an indication of unmet needs'*

There are a number of **steps** that schools can take for any pupil who is at risk of exclusion. These include:

- asking the local authority to make an assessment of the pupil's education, health and care (EHC) needs
- calling for an early/emergency annual review, if the pupil already has an EHC plan
- seeking the advice of the local authority and other professionals' advice and support (e.g. educational psychologists, local autism advisory service)
- autism training for staff
- arranging additional or different support
- making 'reasonable adjustments' to policies and practices, [under the Equality Act 2010](#)

There is a wealth of information and resources available for teaching and supporting autistic children. The NAS website has a section for [Teachers](#), including free resources from [MyWorld](#).

The Autism Education Trust also has information and resources. Their [Tools for Teachers](#) is a practical resource to support teachers to work effectively with pupils on the autism spectrum.

They have also produced a parents' guide [Working together with your child's school](#), which is intended to help parents identify what they feel is important in terms of their child's education, including how a school could best meet their child's autism needs and what reasonable adjustments might be necessary. These priorities can then form the basis of discussions and highlight what to focus on, encouraging a positive and constructive relationship.