Suspensions and Expulsions: Key Issues to Address this System Failure in Ireland

Suspensions and Exclusions in Primary School; Developing an Action Plan
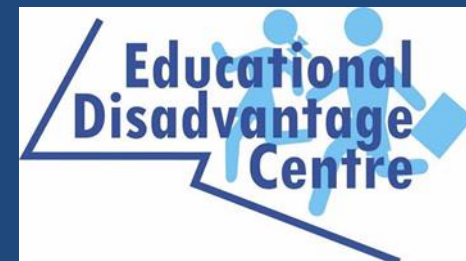Seminar November 24th 2020
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Suspension and expulsion: Trauma and Homelessness

Murphy, McKenna & Downes 2019

- 51 males : 29.6% of those in temporary/emergency accommodation in McVerry Trust

- 24.5% of homeless men in McVerry Trust Accomodation said that they had been temporarily excluded in the form of suspensions; 12.2% had experienced multiple or 'rolling' suspensions

- 18.4% reported having been permanently excluded or expelled from school

- 65.5% of permanent exclusions were due to non-violent behaviour; 37.9% were due to difficult relationships with teachers; 27.6% were due to poor attendance

- 34 of 51 questionnaire participants indicated that they had experienced 'traumatic childhood events'

The Irish post-primary figure of 5% for suspension, applied to the total population of 332,407 students equates to well over 16,000 students suspended from post-primary schools in 2005/6 (ERC/NEWB 2010).

13,169 students suspended 3.8% ERC/Tusla 2016-17

167 expulsions nationally in 2016-2017, 0.048% of the population. 35 expulsions nationally in primary school in 2016-2017, up from 19 in 2014-2015 (Millar, 2018)

Murphy, McKenna, Downes 2019: 18% of the questionnaire sample having resided as a child either in residential/foster care or with extended family, children in care are clearly overrepresented in the population of homeless men in Dublin.

* the current lack of DES/DCYA strategy for meeting the holistic educational needs of children in care.
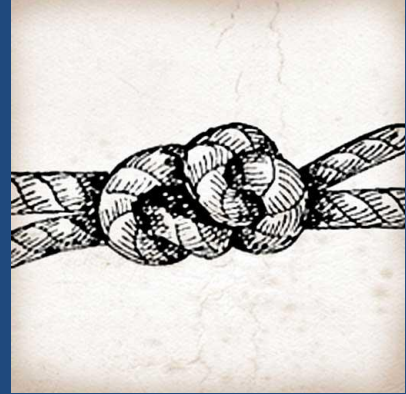
— *Beyond diametric structures of exclusion (Downes 2020): Alternatives to Strategies of Suspension/Expulsion through Multidisciplinary Teams*

American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement (2013):

'the adverse effects of out-of-school suspension and expulsion can be profound'

Such students are as much as 10 times more likely to leave school early, are more likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system

'there may be no one at home during the day to supervise the student's activity if the parents are working.
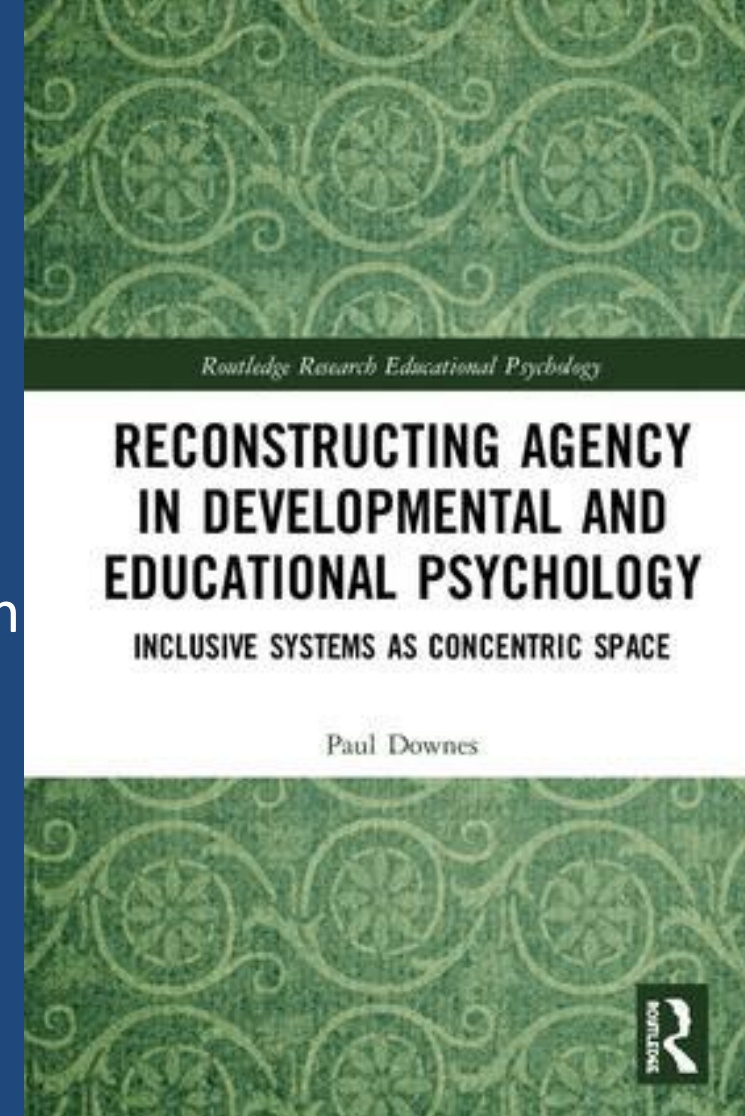
'They can also be very superficial if, in using them, school districts avoid dealing with underlying issues affecting the child or the district, such as drug abuse, racial and ethnic tensions, and cultural anomalies associated with violence and bullying' (American Academy of Pediatrics, p. e1002).

Suspensions and expulsions are the antithesis to inclusive systems. (Downes 2020)

From their longitudinal study in Finland, Sourander et al. (2007) conclude, "early crime prevention that focuses on bullying should be one of the highest priorities in child public health policy. Frequent bullying may serve as an important red flag that something is wrong and that intensive preventive or ameliorative interventions are warranted" (p.550).

A notable study on supports for students at risk of suspension/expulsion to prevent early school leaving is Markussen et al.'s (2011) longitudinal study following a sample of 9,749 Norwegian students over a five-year period, out of compulsory education (which ends at age 16) and through upper secondary education (age 16 to 19).

Markussen et al (2011) found that students with high scores on an index measuring seriously deviant behaviour were in fact less likely to leave early than students with relatively lower scores on this index. This last finding is explained by the extra resources, support and attention these students are provided with, making it less likely that they will leave. In other words, system level supports for inclusion can minimise early school leaving for those at highest risk.

The downward spiral of mental disorders and educational attainment: a systematic review on early school leaving: Pascale Esch, Valéry Bocquet, Charles Pull, Sophie Couffignal, Torsten Lehnert, Marc Graas, Laurence Fond-Harmant and Marc Ansseau. *BMC Psychiatry* **2014 14:237**

When adjusted for socio-demographic factors, mood disorders (e.g. depression) were significantly related to school dropout

Among anxiety disorders, after controlling for potentially confounding factors, social phobia was a strong predictor of poor educational outcomes

...as indicated by early school leavers themselves, were feeling too nervous in class and being anxious to speak in public, both representing symptoms of social phobia

TRAUMA FOCUS Donlevy , Day, Andriescu & Downes (2019)

"Emotional counselling and support is provided in a range of countries in order to help those suffering from serious emotional distress, including the Czech Republic, Belgium and Germany."

" In France, all pupils have access to the Psychologist of Education to for psychological support and career guidance. Emotional counselling is also available in Sweden, where all students have access to a school doctor, school nurse, psychologist and

school welfare officer at no cost and in Slovenia."

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Donlevy et al (2019)

"In some countries, emotional counselling is expressly backed by legislation. In Poland, legislation mandates for the existence of a system of support to students who are having significant difficulties at school, in the form of one-to-one academic tutoring and psychological support where required. "

"In Denmark, legislation states that school leaders can choose to recommend a student for pedagogical-psychological assessment, the results of which may initiate a process where the student may receive psychological support. Croatia and Bulgaria also have legislation in place that provides for emotional counselling and psychological support."

Ireland is radically out of step with many European countries who provide emotional counselling/therapeutic services in schools.

This is not addressed by NEPS or Career Guidance increases as neither provide or are suitable to provide ongoing individual therapeutic supports for trauma and complex emotional needs.
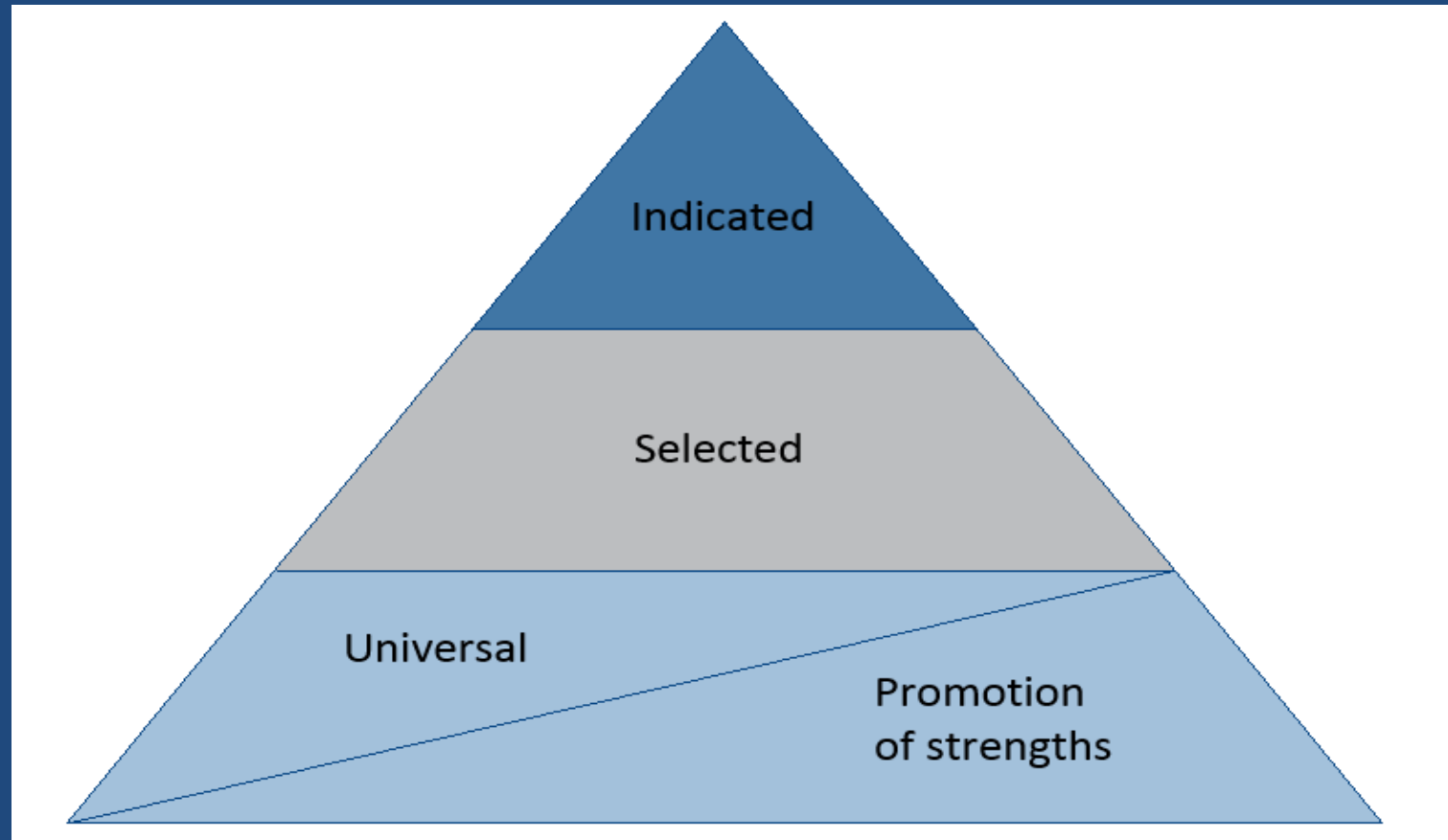
The National Wellbeing In Schools Policy 2018 of a teacher as 'One good adult' is no substitute for qualified emotional counsellors/therapists.

Differentiated Strategies in Place - for Meeting Individual Needs at Different Levels of Need/Risk for Transition

Universal – *All*
Selected – *Some, Groups, Moderate Risk*
Indicated – *Individual, Intensive, Chronic Need*

A Differentiated Approach to Involving Parents for Bullying Prevention: Family Support Services for High Risk Chronic Need

Systematic review by Lereya et al. (2013) involving 70 studies which concluded that both victims and bully/victims are more likely to be exposed to negative parenting behaviour, including abuse and neglect and maladaptive parenting.

DEIS Action Plan 2017

* No mention of trauma

"Implementing strategies to improve school engagement and reduce suspensions, expulsions and early school leaving" (14)

Behavioural Supports – under the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and planned Inclusion Support Service to cover both Primary and Post Primary Schools; (p23)

Programme for Government's (202) commitment to 'Improve access to supports for positive mental health in schools'

**Overcoming System Blockages as Fragmentation, Resistance and Exclusion– linking health and education**

- **Multidisciplinary teams: Chronic need indicated prevention level**
- **Family support services and parental involvement**

The *Alliances for Inclusion* report (Edwards & Downes 2013) 16 examples of cross-sectoral work from 10 European countries.
-A policy focus is needed to go beyond multiple agencies
 -Need to minimise fragmentation across diverse services 'passing on bits of the child' and family (Edwards & Downes 2013)
- Direct delivery multidisciplinary teams – not committee sitting

Territories
- Local rivalries across municipalities and schools an obstacle to sharing of good practice
- Local rivalries across agencies especially in a recession – to claim resources and credit for gains
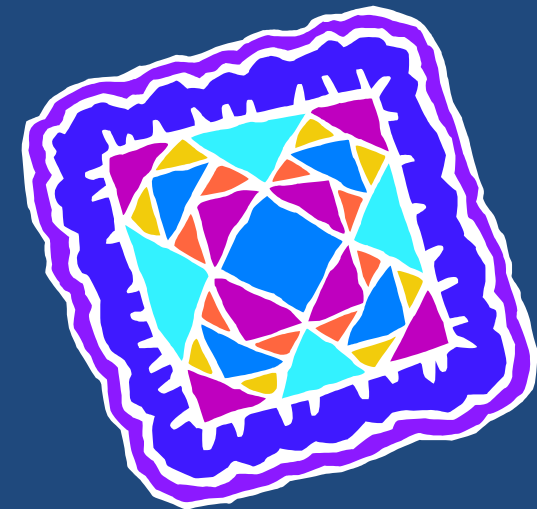
Key Elements of Strategy – For Louth and to inform National Reform
(1)Universal Level: Relevant training for school personnel (Restorative Practice etc)

(2) Inter-agency collaboration
Multidisciplinary teams: Chronic need indicated prevention
– Focus on Multidisciplinary teams (therapeutic supports for trauma, family support workers, speech and language therapists, mentors as advocates in schools) : Individual education and wellbeing plan as alternative to suspension

(3) Lobbying and advocacy on the issue
– emotional counsellors/therapists – build on Programme for Government wording
- Multidisciplinary teams – build on DEIS NCSE commitment at primary and postprimary

(4) Resources
- Fund play, art therapists, child therapists, emotional counsellors in schools
- Expand funding for former NBSS now in NCSE for multidisciplinary team supports

**Set a target of no student to be suspended or expelled**

Common system supports needed for bullying and early school leaving prevention (Downes & Cefai 2016)

A striking commonality of interests with regard to strategic approaches for bullying prevention in schools and early school leaving prevention:

- Direct and indirect effects of bullying on early school leaving relevant to perpetrators, victims

  - school absence,

  - negative interpersonal relations with peers and conflict with teachers,

  - low concentration in school, decreased academic performance,

  - negative school climate influences, lower school belonging, satisfaction, and pedagogical well-being, with the effects of bullying exacerbated for those already at risk of ESL

- Common systems of supports (transition focus from primary to post-primary, multiprofessional teams for complex needs, language support needs, family support services and education of parents regarding their approaches to communication and supportive discipline with their children, outreach to families to provide supports, addressing academic difficulties).

- Common issues requiring an integrated strategic response, including the prevention of displacement effects of a problem from one domain to another, such as in suspension/expulsion which may make a bullying problem become an early school leaving problem.

- Common causal antecedents (negative school climate, behavioural difficulties, trauma)
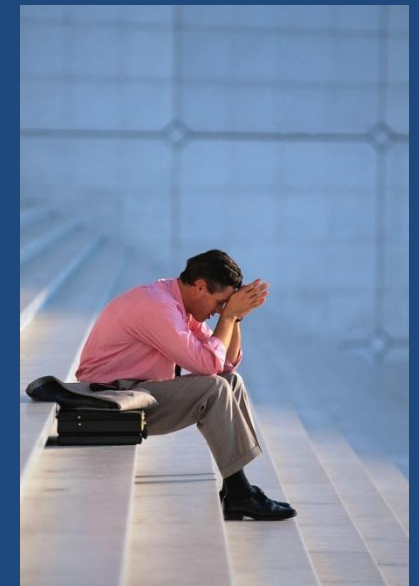
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