

# ***‘Why not just live for the moment?’ Poverty, schooling and the future lives of excluded girls and boys***

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## **Abstract**

*School policy and practices are firmly rooted in the orthodoxy of the school improvement movement (SIM) which has dominated policy and practice in Scottish education and elsewhere in the UK for decades. The SIM has offered the possibility of better educational outcomes for pupils without the need to tackle the deeply intractable problem of social class and educational inequality. For a wider public, school improvement messages allowed economic, social, and cultural factors to be marginalized in educational debates, sometimes even to be characterized as mere excuses for educational failure. And yet, official statistics are very clearly structured by those factors, for example, by poverty (as indicated by free school meal entitlement). Drawing on data from a recently-completed PhD project, this paper considers schooling in relation to the wider lives of excluded pupils, focusing on the impact of economic disadvantage. The relationship between poverty and exclusion from school is probed and the impact of both on girls’ and boys’ constructions of their futures is considered. Two questions are addressed here: -*

- *How does poverty contribute to exclusion from school?*
- *How is the future constructed by girls and boys experiencing both poverty and exclusion from school?*

*The material deprivations of poverty were found to undermine pupils’ engagement with schooling, as did social and emotional pressures arising from poverty. Girls’ and boys’ constructions of their futures arose from the circumstances of their present lives, and for the most part were not shaped by experience of school. The secondary schools in the study had highly developed systems of pupil support but structural inequality had ensured that children and families were differentially positioned to schooling and had limited the scope of schools in fostering some pupils’ engagement. Nevertheless, increased participation, particularly in curriculum planning, was found to be a worthwhile and realistic aim for schools seeking to minimize school exclusion*

## **Background**

Concern expressed by the Scottish Government about another rise in school exclusion statistics (Scottish Government, 2008) represents one strand of continuity between the minority Scottish Nationalist administration, formed after the elections in 2007, and its

New Labour predecessor. For the New Labour Executive, school exclusions had contributed to a series of targets and milestones by which progress towards social inclusion might be charted (Scottish Executive, 1999). The target-setting exercise for school exclusions was halted in November 2003 when exclusions started to rise but the policy link between social exclusion and educational exclusion remained in the Executive's intention to address social disadvantage by re-connecting communities to mainstream services and opportunities, principally through one of the hallmark strategies of social inclusion – the delivery of integrated services to young people and families. This was to be achieved primarily through the New Community Schools initiative (Scottish Office, 1998). School inclusion has also been a main theme in the policy discourse as Scotland has moved towards the inclusion of pupils with additional support needs (Riddell *et al.*, 2006) The Standards in Scotland's Schools, etc (Scotland) Act 2000, codified the rights of all pupils to be included in mainstream schools. Section 15 of that Act required that local authorities (LAs) provide schooling in mainstream settings unless an exception could be made under any one of three stipulated categories. A further Act commenced in November 2005, the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 encompassed a much broader range of pupils as meriting additional educational support and, crucially, viewed pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) as part of the additional support needs (ASN) clientele along with other groups new to this form of statutory provision, such as children from the Gypsy/traveller community and children assessed as having high levels of ability. Further initiatives such as *Ambitious, Excellent Schools* (SEED, 2004) sought to support and lift the performance of nominated schools, many of them in '*challenging local circumstances*'. A new and developing 3-18 curriculum framework, *A Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive, 2004), seeks to offer greater flexibility to schools and teachers in planning and implementing a curriculum suitable for a diverse pupil population.

Initiatives to increase participation in schooling and improve outcomes for very disadvantaged groups have been pursued within an overall 'standards' agenda, a context thought by some commentators (Hayden, 1997; Ball, 1999) to be inimical to greater

inclusion. Overall pressure to meet attainment targets has been seen to create an exclusionary culture in classrooms and schools:

The introduction of published league tables of examination results and other indicators of performance in schools has created a climate less likely to be sympathetic to children not only producing no positive contribution to these indicators, but who may also prevent others from doing so. (Hayden, 1997: 8)

Commentators are not in agreement that raising attainment in schools need always have an exclusionary effect. Through empirical studies, Florian and Rouse (2001) have explored whether inclusion and raising attainment are mutually exclusive and have found this to be not necessarily the case. This debate has recently become more pointed in Scotland with the publication of the OECD review *Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland* (OECD, 2007). The report commended the strong overall performance of Scottish schools in relation to other developed countries whilst commenting upon achievement gaps in primary schools and uneven participation and completion rates in secondary schools. The problem for Scotland, the review group indicated, was not unequal access to good schools but unequal capacity to use good schools well (p.59):

The school system itself is not divided into sites of very unequal quality and opportunity. Rather it is the relationship of schools in their generality to children from less well-educated and poor families that is problematic. This makes the goal of tackling low achievement more elusive and seemingly more intractable. The barriers are embedded in the normal ways in which schools tend to work – schools independently assessed as good or very good. (p.62)

In spite of recent educational and social inclusion initiatives, then, there remains the long-standing problem of working-class underachievement in the education system, a problem which previously dominated the sociology of education. For example, in a seminal ethnography first published in 1978, *Learning to Labour: How working-class kids get working-class jobs*, Paul Willis analysed the processes through which masculine, working-class identities were negotiated in a school setting. Willis described how a group

of secondary-school 'lads' become increasingly resistant to school and explained this resistance in terms of their need to develop the protective layers of a culture which would allow them to withstand the impact of life in the labour market. The strong messages from sociological research about the importance of social class in educational achievement have been ignored in policy and elsewhere (Whitty, 2001; Ball, 2003; Reay, 2006; Evans, 2006). The UK government's social inclusion policy has favoured instead the '*new sociology of education*' with its emphasis on school effectiveness and school improvement (Whitty, 2001: 287), an approach which continues to fail the working class.

This paper aims to illuminate the problem relationship between schools and some working-class children, taking as its starting point the experiences of secondary pupils who were formally excluded from school. The focus for discussion here is not the practice of formal exclusion from school but economic disadvantage and its impact on the schooling of some working-class young people. Social class can be a slippery concept even when it is articulated (and it tends not to be in the policy literature in Scotland). The OECD report recognises social class, although its terminology shifts from the term '*low socio-economic status*' in the first half of the document to '*working-class*' further on in the report. As in the OECD report (OECD, 2007: 60), the discussion here recognises that social class entails cultural, as well as economic differentiations (Kane, 2006) but the focus is narrower here: only economic disadvantage is considered in analysing why some groups are over-represented in exclusion statistics.

### *Exclusions and poverty*

Exclusions are governed by Scottish Executive Circular No 8/03 (SEED, 2003) which sets out procedures and requirements for administering and reporting exclusions. Around 3% of Scottish pupils are excluded annually: in 2007/08, 22,777 pupils were excluded with 19,136 of those from secondary schools, 3,138 from primary schools and 503 from special schools. Interestingly, the rate of exclusion is highest for special schools: statistics show an exclusion rate of 76 per thousand pupils in special compared to 61 per thousand pupils in secondary (Scottish Government, 2008: Table 20). For both girls and boys, exclusion rates rise throughout Primary 1 to Secondary 2, peaking in S3. Pupils with

additional support needs and those looked after by the local authority all had higher exclusion rates than other pupils. Boys accounted for 33,848 exclusions in the 2007/08 session and girls for 9,736 exclusions. The overall gender ratio of 4 male exclusions to 1 female exclusion has been a fairly consistent feature of published statistics, although there have been indications of an increase in the number of girls excluded from primary schools with girls still forming a very small proportion of the total (Scottish Executive, 2006, 2007). In addition, statistical data have shown the link between school exclusions and poverty: children registered for free school meals (FSMs) in Scotland are two and a half times more likely to be excluded (Scottish Government, 2008). Some 240,000 of Scotland's children live in poverty, that is approximately 16% of all children (Scottish Executive, 2006). Although commentators have discussed the impact of poverty on the lives of children and particularly on their experience of school (Reay, 1998, Ridge, 2005), young people's own views of the impact of poverty are still relatively under-researched:

Although we have an abundance of statistical data that can tell us how many children are poor and for how long .....we still have little understanding of what poverty means for children, or how they interpret its presence in their lives. (Ridge, 2005: 23)

This discussion which follows considers the impact of poverty on the lives of girls and boys who have been excluded from school, and focuses particularly on how they construct their futures.

### **Research methods**

The study discussed here considered how the negotiation of particular social class and gendered identities caused some pupils, mainly working-class boys, to be excluded from school. The focus is narrower here for only economic disadvantage is considered in drawing upon the second phase of the study. A case-study sample of twenty excluded pupils in four secondary schools in the West of Scotland was used to investigate the reasons behind inequitable patterns of exclusion evident in official exclusion statistics (Scottish Government, 2008). Case study pupils were identified through a process of

discussion with school staff, for example, Behaviour Support teachers, and with young people themselves. Experience of school exclusion, interest in the study and preparedness to participate were the main criteria governing the construction of the sample. There was no intention to represent a particular gender balance in the sample but, as it happened, there were seventeen boys and three girls, roughly the same gender balance indicated by national exclusion statistics (Scottish Government, 2008). The pupils were drawn from S1 to S4. Nineteen of the pupils were white and Scottish, one boy was black and Scottish. Ethnicity was not an aspect of identity considered in this study in any depth; neither was religion, although one of the schools in the study was a Catholic denominational secondary school. Case study pupils' experience of exclusion ranged from a single exclusion (all three girls were in this category) to multiple and extended periods of exclusion. Three kinds of data were used to construct the case studies: interviews, analysis of pupils' behaviour files and classroom and other observation. These different kinds of data allowed methodological triangulation but there was also triangulation in the capturing of multiple perspectives on each case study pupil. For each case study, the intention was to conduct a series of interviews with the pupil him/herself, with key teachers and other professionals (such as social workers) supporting the young person, parents and peers. In total, 122 interviews were conducted ranging in length from 1.5 hours to just 10 minutes when some teachers gave a little time at the ends of lessons to comment on what had just passed, before the next class arrived. Interviews with case study pupils were conducted on school premises, sometimes during the school day and at other times during less formal after-school sessions, such as the support group meetings organised by Home/School Link Workers. Parents were interviewed in their own homes.

## **Findings**

### *How does poverty contribute to exclusion from school?*

In this study, seven case study pupils were registered for free school meals (FSMs) and there were further indications coming through from interviews that a number of the case study pupils were living in poverty. Disparities exist between eligibility, registration and uptake of FSMs (Scottish Executive, 2007) so it is possible that additional case study pupils were eligible but had opted not to register. This unwillingness has been attributed

mainly to the stigma of being labelled as poor (Storey and Chamberlain, 2001; Granville *et al.*, 2006). This section will examine how economic circumstances undermined participation in schooling for some of the case study pupils. Poverty impacted negatively on case study pupils' experience of schooling in a number of ways through:

- a lack of material possessions,
- shame and embarrassment,
- stress on family relationships, and
- disruption to the regular routines helpful to participation in schooling.

Each of these is examined in turn below.

Lack of material resources exerted a pull away from school because some case study pupils had to earn money for themselves or to contribute to the family income. Some were working a significant (and illegal) number of hours. Pupils themselves cited their satisfaction that they earned income. One such pupil was Jack. In S3, he had already started to earn a living, working in a chip van two nights a week from 4.00 – 10.00pm. For these twelve hours he earned £30.00. Jack was the eldest of five children and his father had struggled to maintain the family in their own home after his wife's death. Jack indicated that when he was not at school, he helped his father with the shopping and with other household chores. Unlike many of the boys in this study, Jack was a loner and there were indications that his self-exclusion or withdrawal from the social networks related to poverty. The whole group of case study pupils had very low involvement in school activities such as sport, music or drama and school trips. Schools are often aware of the economic conditions of pupils' lives but, in offering a range of extra-curricular activities to pupils, are sometimes not aware of the costs entailed, for example, for transport. Poverty had the effect of limiting participation in the social life of the school for some pupils but that did not mean that they were not part of very strong social networks, based in their own neighbourhoods. For adolescents, those locally-based networks were more attractive than anything offered by the school, irrespective of costs.

For pupils living in poverty, their homes did not afford the social space that would enable them to have friends to stay or even to visit. The physical restrictions of home were a

disincentive to using it for social purposes but also coming through was embarrassment about furnishings. The Family Support Worker reported that Kat, one of the case study girls, was in this position:

...I think she feels embarrassed at the home situation, sort of furniture-wise, because it is very poor inside. I mean it is as clean as mum could possible keep it but, obviously, she is limited with the income. (Family Support Worker)

The limitations of home as a social space may have particular repercussions for girls who generally did not access public spaces as easily as boys, although there were signs in this study that girls used their friendships with boys to sponsor their social participation in outside spaces such as streets and parks. Few other social sites would have been open to young people because many such places levy charges.

Survival issues dominated the lives of case study pupils and their families. Pupils' participation in schooling was affected by material deprivation itself but also by the stresses arising from poverty caused by poor housing, alcohol and drug abuse, mental health problems and very limited opportunities for recreational or social life. Most of the young people, and all of the girls, were closely aligned with their families and some of them took very practical responsibility for them, for example, by working part-time, helping with housework or caring for a parent with mental health problems. One girl's family received support from the Social Work Department, mostly in relation to welfare rights and benefits but also to make sure that *'mum was okay and that the family situation was settled'* (Family Support Worker). Stress and emotional insecurity loomed large in the lives of case study pupils, rendering some of them edgy and angry and shaping their engagement with schooling. Where the girls perceived their mothers to be vulnerable, or relationships affecting them to be fragile, there was an impact on their participation in school. Sometimes, this impact took the form of non-attendance whilst at other times it was apparent in challenging behaviour. Lorraine's fraught relationship with her mother was the cause of her exclusion. Having been referred to the Deputy Headteacher (DHT)

for not wearing full uniform, she felt this was unfair. However, the situation escalated when the DHT phoned Lorraine's mother to say she was being sent home to change.

... I was pulled up for something... I think it was my uniform. Mr M was phoning my mum at work and my mum doesn't like people phoning her at work, like, about me...I swore at him so he phoned my mum and said I was to go home. (Lorraine)

Lorraine's exclusion arose from her anguish that further pressure would be put upon her mother as a result of her transgression.

In addition, poverty affected family routines and made difficult the patterns required for regular participation. A number of the boys in this study exercised considerable control over their personal lives, sometimes well beyond what would be accorded to other adolescents, and in marked contrast to the scope for control offered by their schools. Although their parents seemed to be endorsing their children's disengagement from schooling, the circumstances in which they were living their lives offered very little by way of choice. There were indications that boys, in particular, were moving beyond the influence of their parent(s), especially where those parents were pre-occupied with survival issues. Ross's attendance in S1 had been poor. His record showed 129 absences from a possible 369 openings at time of interview, giving an attendance rate of 65.04%. Only two of Ross's absences were unauthorised, indicating that his mother knew about, and had sanctioned, his frequent non-attendance. Ross reported in interview '*My ma is dead soft, she gives in too easy*'. Similarly, twelve-year old Craig lived with his mother who had mental health problems and who had great difficulty in helping her son to organise his life. Craig reported that when he or his brother were excluded, they were allowed to go out because their mother

...doesn't like to keep us in. She likes us to go out and all and play football and stuff. She likes us to go out. She doesn't like keeping us in. She doesn't feel it is right if she keeps us in. (Craig)

The boys' mothers were reported as being very responsive to school contacts but their personal circumstances made it very difficult for them to exercise control over their sons. Personal, social and material resources are needed to establish and maintain the routines required to ensure continuity of school experience. For families living in poverty those resources are undermined.

The main gender difference in exclusions is in the overall pattern where year after year boys predominate. Explanation for this was sought partly in considering if and how poverty impacted differently on boys and girls. There was some evidence from the case study that girls' poor attendance, though no worse than boys', might have been for different reasons in that they experienced more of a pull to be at home. Commentators have noted how often girls' non-participation in schooling culminated in withdrawal to the home, in contrast with boys (Osler and Vincent, 2003; Ridge, 2005). The social isolation of some girls, then, is a matter for concern, reflecting in some cases the experience of a number of young women lone parents in this study who were described by the Family Support Worker as withdrawn and hard to pin down for appointments and other social and support arrangements. The next section will consider pupils' constructions of their futures.

*How is the future constructed by girls and boys experiencing both poverty and exclusion from school?*

Across the four schools there was a high level of consistency in the occupational choices of pupils. The boys in the study almost all cited working-class jobs as their preferred future occupation. Although a number of the case study pupils were recognised as bright by their schools, only one of the seventeen boys indicated his intention of proceeding to higher education. This was Ewen, the only middle-class pupil in the study, who did not specify a preference for a job but he did convey a sense of having choices and being in control of his future:

Well, I want to get a good job and settle, well, I might not settle down too quickly.....There is so much I want to do. (Ewen)

Given the wider circumstances of their lives, it is possible that the occupational choices the other boys were making were realistic constructions of their futures. Boys themselves saw traditional routes for working-class boys, including the armed services, as a desirable option. Eddie wanted to join the RAF when he left school. This had always been his ambition because his Uncle Tam had been in the RAF and had gained a great deal from it. Eddie cited three advantages of joining up:

...it's good pay, you get a lot of education from it and like if I need a house, because I have done honour for - don't know how to put it - because I have done honour for the - I can't get it out - ....If I work well in there and I need a house, instead of waiting 17 years for another house, instead of waiting that long they put you up fast instead of waiting....because I have honoured Scotland and whatever. (Eddie)

Shortly after, Eddie remembered a further reason for joining the RAF:

...like there is another reason I have always wanted to go to the RAF because say if I have got a car I can take it in and I can get the mechanics and the engineers and all that to fix it for me, do it up. (Eddie)

The advantages cited by Eddie point to his valuing security of home and job and to the importance in his eyes of acquiring marketable skills. Similarly, Sam's mother indicated that he had shown some interest in joining the army and that, should he pursue this option, she would support him:

The way I look at it is, they are in the army, they are disciplined, they are going to get a career. They have got everything they want in the services. (Sam's mother)

As previously indicated a number of pupils were earning and the boys in particular spoke of the need to get a good job and cited this as a main reason for continuing in school. 'A good job' meant a trade. Many of the boys interviewed aspired to have a trade - car

mechanic was mentioned by three of the boys as what they hoped for in the future. Andy wanted to be a plumber and said that he was prepared to stay on at school to help achieve this. Andy was exceptional in the group of boys because his academic performance had held up in spite of several periods of exclusion. He was in some Credit classes in S4 and was expected to do Highers in S5. For other boys, the pattern was a gradual falling away in attainment and engagement with schooling. There were fears for Ross who was in S1 and just twelve years old. The concern was that he would make wrong choices:

Ross will probably be running a gang in Glasgow when he is twenty one.....He is not at the stage yet when he needs to choose but soon, he is going to have to decide 'What way am I going to go?' (Deputy Headteacher)

For the school's part, the DHT felt that there were a small number of staff who would be prepared 'to go the extra mile' because Ross was very bright but that he was uncertain whether the school would be able to engage Ross, commenting '*It is in the balance*'. In primary school, because he was good at maths, Ross and his mother had thought that he would become a chartered accountant. Now, at twelve and because of his interest in motor bikes he thought he might become a mechanic.

There were only three girls in this study and so it is not possible to detect patterns in their choices. One teacher commented that, in general, girls were more focused in school because their futures were clearer to them. They knew they were going to be a teacher or a nurse, whereas for boys, many of the traditional options had been closed off for them. This view was justified in relation to one of the case study girls, Gill, who indicated that she intended to stay on until S6 and then she planned on going to College. She wanted to become a midwife. She was aware that she would first need a nursing qualification before going on to specialise. She seemed very focused and very clear about how to reach her goal. It was interesting that her teachers were quite unaware of these ambitions. They believed that, in spite of Gill being bright, she would not stay on after S Grades. All three girls were acknowledged to have a range of abilities but their schools did not predict career paths for them, even for Gill who had her own career path mapped out.

There was little practical institutional support for boys either in moving towards their preferred occupations, although all four schools offered a great deal of personal support to pupils in difficulty. Teachers saw boys' aims towards jobs as car mechanics or scaffolders as a result of pupils' limited horizons and believed schools had a part to play in raising the aspirations of boys:

I keep saying to C---, 'Why don't you just get your head down, pick something you would really, really, love to do' and he can't see why a scaffolder isn't the best thing he can ever do. And obviously, education has a part to play in that. (Principal Teacher)

The boys themselves generally saw school as instrumental in helping them to get the kinds of jobs they hoped for but they had very vague notions of what was needed by way of qualifications. Several cited contacts amongst friends and family as the means by which they would get a job. School, then, served very unclear purposes for the boys in the study, exerting over them an arbitrary authority but offering limited help in their preparations for the future.

Sometimes, the reality of their predicament was beginning to become clear to some of the boys who had been excluded. Joe hoped to be a joiner but he recognised that it would be difficult for him to get the qualifications because he was no longer allowed into the Technical Department. Similarly, Charlie had hoped to be a PE teacher or a boxer when he was older. He recognised that he would need Highers to pursue his ambition to be a teacher but he did not think things at school were settled enough for this to be realistic. In fact, staff had expressed doubts that Charlie would finish his schooling in St Thomas's such was the level of disruption he caused. For other boys, too, there was some pessimism. The DHT was fearful for the future of two of the case study boys as there was a strong possibility that they would be taken into the care of the LA. Placement in a residential school would perhaps be the most likely outcome for them. Such a placement would not necessarily be a bad thing for the boys but the school certainly saw such a decision as, at least in part, indicative of the school's failure.

Commentators have noted that the social and economic changes of the past twenty or thirty years have led to a heightened sense of risk and a greater individualisation of experience among young people (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Giddens, 1991). Insecurity now marks all transitions from childhood to adulthood. Ross articulated his own sense of insecurity about the future:

I know for me I don't think. I just take life as it comes....you don't know if you are going to be here in four years' time so why not just live for the moment?

Because you don't know if your family... and you don't know if you are going to be there. (Ross, S1)

## **Discussion**

In facing uncertain futures and highly individualised choices, the boys in this study differed from Willis's 'lads' whose futures in industrial capitalism were all too evident to them and who moved towards those futures as a group. The individualisation of experience of transition from school to adult life contrasted with the strong collective identities valued by both boys and girls, for example, in their strong sense of community and locality, and in their support of football teams (Nayak, 2003). Education can open up options for pupils but the real circumstances of their lives may motivate against pursuing those options. For example, considerable financial resources are required for participation in higher education, resources not available to most of the families in this study. There was a sense in which the pupils in this study were moving into adult life more quickly than their middle-class counterparts who would expect their transitions into adulthood to be more extended, scaffolded for them by their families through, for example, continued financial support.

There were echoes of Willis's *Learning to Labour* in the ways working-class boys in this study constructed their futures from their experience of the lives of those around them. Case study pupils were moving towards independence, speaking of joining the army or becoming a car mechanic, jobs which, for some of them, marked a lowering of expectations as adult life approached. Family and community could be seen as limiting the aspirations of girls and boys – a view articulated by teachers. Alternatively, the paths

pupils were trying to map out for themselves could be the only paths open to them, offering them financial independence in their teens and security into the future. Willis's analysis has been criticised as attributing no individual agency to the 'lads'. The same economic determinism operated on the future lives of most of the pupils in this study in spite of the recognised quality of the secondary schools they attended.

Analyses of social exclusion (Gormley, 2003) have argued that gender and class inequalities are unchanged and continue to ensure the reproduction of advantage and disadvantage among the younger generation. The OECD report emphasises the importance of school as *the key institutional point at which the transmission of disadvantage has the most chance of being broken* (OECD, 2007: 110). Questions are opened up, then, as to the role schooling should play in the lives of young people living in poverty. There were signs that case study pupils were moving away from schooling as they reached adolescence; their formal exclusions were part of a wider pattern of disengagement from schooling (Lloyd, 2005). The challenge for Scottish schools, according to OECD (2007: 60) is how to maintain its overall high level of performance *while substantially improving the capacity of poorer children to benefit from school*. The political challenge is clear: the abolition of child poverty is likely to extend the benefits of schooling to a wider group. In the meantime, the educational challenge remains.

Initiatives arising from *Better Behaviour, Better Learning* (SEED, 2001) have had a positive impact. As noted in other studies (Boyd, 2007; Stead *et al.*, 2007), Home/School Link Workers in particular had gained the trust and confidence of some of the case study pupils who were experiencing greatest difficulty in their home lives and whose parents may have been further alienated from school as a result of their child's exclusion (Parsons, 1999; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; McDonald & Thomas, 2003). As a result of the support they received, young people were perhaps less angry and brittle in school settings, more able to deal with the stresses of their lives, and had access to an adult who could mediate on their behalf with the school. While this helped maintain pupils' connection to schooling, and reduced exclusions, it did not assist with their participation in the curriculum. The flexibility offered by systems of behaviour support has been

helpful for schools (Munn *et al.*, 2000; Head *et al.*, 2003; Kane *et al.*, 2004) but it has also increased their capacity for curricular exclusion. More flexible ways of organising the curriculum could help pupils to make the most of positive connections some pupils had with some teachers. A core plus options curricular structure, separated out from age and stage correspondences, would enable all pupils to spend more time in areas where they were doing well and where their motivations were higher. According greater scope to pupils and families generally in planning their curriculum, within more diverse curriculum pathways, would be consistent with increasing participation in schooling more generally. Dyson *et al.* (2003), having reviewed the literature on school inclusion, identified the need for schools to build close relations with parents and communities based on developing a shared commitment to inclusive values. Progress towards *A Curriculum for Excellence* offers an opportunity to enable greater diversity and flexibility within the curriculum and thereby increase the participation in schooling of pupils and families.

## **Conclusion**

Poverty was seen to undermine pupils' participation in schooling and to deny them the benefits accruing from education, including formal credentials. Support structures left pupils still on the margins of schooling, attached but not involved. Greater flexibility of provision for all pupils is likely to help, as are much stronger attempts to engage pupils, families and communities in articulating the purposes of schooling and in designing curricular paths related to those purposes. This would provide a more consistent and a more committed attempt to address the impact of poverty on schooling but still seems unlikely to solve the problem. Educational inequality requires a political commitment going well beyond improving the effectiveness of schools; lifting children out of marginalisation within schooling, requires that families and communities are lifted out of relative poverty.

In 2007, with 16.2% of its children living below the poverty line, Britain was placed at the bottom of a children's well-being league table of advantaged nations (UNICEF, 2007). The argument here has been that poverty is one of the causes of school exclusion

because of the stresses caused to pupils and families by material deprivation. Policy constructs the relationship between school exclusion and social exclusion as a causal one: school exclusions are seen to undermine pupils' education and to damage their prospects of gaining the skills and the credentials needed to gain more than low-skill jobs. The causal relationship between school exclusion and social exclusion is two-way, however. Poverty also causes school exclusion but this side of the relationship is less conspicuous in policy. Families living in poverty are disadvantaged in their engagements with schooling: higher rates of exclusion are symptomatic of that disadvantage.

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