Quick Guide for Headteachers: Suspension and Permanent Exclusion

Purpose: This quick guide summarises the key Headteacher duties when considering, issuing and managing a suspension or permanent exclusion under the DfE statutory guidance effective from 26 July 2026. For full details and more in-depth information and letter templates please refer to Suspension and permanent exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement and Shropshire Guidance- Exclusion and Suspension

1. Before Making a Decision

- Only suspend or permanently exclude on disciplinary grounds.
- Ensure the decision is lawful, reasonable, fair and proportionate.
- Consider all available evidence and apply the civil standard of proof: “on the balance of probabilities”.
- Take account of SEND, vulnerability, safeguarding concerns, pastoral context and any contributing circumstances.
- Where a child is looked after or previously looked after the Virtual School Head must be consulted before making a decision
- Where a child has a Social Worker the Designated safeguarding lead and social worker must be consulted prior to decisions being made
- For permanent exclusion, ensure both statutory limbs are met: a serious breach or persistent breaches of the behaviour policy, and serious harm to the education or welfare of the pupil or others if the pupil remains in school.

2. When Issuing a Suspension or Permanent Exclusion

- Inform parents without delay and explain the reason for the decision, the length of any suspension, education arrangements, and their rights to make representations or request a review where applicable.
- Notify the governing board and local authority in line with statutory timescales.
- Notify the child’s social worker and Virtual School Head where the pupil is looked after or has a social worker.
- Notify the EHCP team if the child has an EHCP
- Keep a clear written record showing the evidence considered, the reasons for the decision, any mitigation considered, and why the sanction was necessary.

3. Education, Support and Reintegration

- Set and mark work for the first five school days of a suspension.
- Work with the local authority and providers to ensure suitable education is arranged from the sixth school day where required.

- For looked-after children or children with a social worker, ensure education planning is urgent and coordinated with statutory partners. The school and the local authority should work together to arrange alternative provision from the first day following the suspension or permanent exclusion
- Plan reintegration following suspension, including pastoral support, behaviour support, reasonable adjustments and SEND provision where relevant.

4. Alternatives, Governors and Cancellation

- Consider early intervention, managed moves and alternative provision where these may prevent exclusion and better meet the pupil's needs.
- Ensure any off-site direction or alternative provision complies with statutory requirements.
- Provide governors with all relevant evidence and attend governing board meetings to answer questions about the decision-making process.
- A Headteacher may withdraw or cancel an exclusion before governors have met to consider reinstatement; parents, governors, the local authority and other relevant parties must be informed without delay.

Headteacher Checklist

Check	Action
[ ]	Decision is disciplinary, evidence-based, lawful, fair and proportionate.
[ ]	SEND, safeguarding, vulnerability and mitigating circumstances have been considered.
[ ]	Parents, governors, the local authority and relevant statutory partners have been notified without delay.
[ ]	Education arrangements, reintegration planning and reasonable adjustments are in place where required.
[ ]	Governors have received a clear evidence bundle and rationale for the decision.

Briefing summary: Headteachers must ensure that suspensions and permanent exclusions are lawful, fair and proportionate; notify parents, governors, the local authority and relevant statutory partners promptly; arrange appropriate education and reintegration support; consider alternatives to exclusion wherever possible; and provide clear evidence to support exclusion decisions.

Resources:

Suspension and permanent exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement

Contacts

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If you need to discuss any advice around suspensions or exclusions, please call the REACH hotline on 01743255989 or 07816204706.