

# Exclusion of violent pupils in city schools at new low

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**THE number of times violent or abusive pupils have been suspended from state schools in Glasgow has plummeted by 53% in the past four years to its lowest ever level.**

New figures published by Glasgow City Council have shown incidents leading to temporary exclusion in primary and secondary schools have fallen from 7399 in 2006/07 to 3450 in 2010/11.

The biggest inroads have been made at secondary level, where there has been a 48% reduction, while the number of exclusions in primary schools has fallen by 30%.

There has also been a decline in the most serious incidents where permanent exclusion was used as a sanction.

Since 2008/09, the number of incidents where pupils have been expelled has fallen, from 139 to 92 this year.

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Council officials said the decrease has come as a result of a new strategy to support disruptive pupils in school, rather than excluding them.

They said schools have not tolerated violent or abusive behaviour but, where a pupil was guilty of such an offence, strategies employed included sin bins, the involvement of campus police officers and restorative justice techniques.

However, teaching unions warned exclusion should always be an option – particularly where pupils represented a risk to their peers or staff.

The dramatic decline, revealed in a council report published this week, followed a call by Scotland's chief inspector of prisons for schools to end the policy of exclusion. Brigadier Hugh Monro said on Tuesday fewer young people would end up in prison if schools worked with young people instead of excluding them.

Yesterday, Jean McFadden, Glasgow City Council's executive member for education, welcomed the figures. "If children are not in school they are not learning," she said. "This was an issue that needed to be tackled.

"There will always be the need to exclude some pupils, but by adopting a more inclusive policy and by taking steps to better meet the needs of the young people, Glasgow has been reaping the benefits."

Eileen Prior, executive director of the Scottish Parent Teacher Council, said that, in the past, schools had been too quick to exclude pupils. "Exclusion has to be a last resort, but there were

undoubtedly cases where pupils were being excluded for not very much. “It has to be brought forward on a case-by-case basis.”

However, Ann Ballinger, general secretary of the Scottish Secondary Teachers’ Association, said the priority should always be the safety and well-being of the other pupils and staff. “It is always unacceptable to risk the education and safety of others for the well-being of an individual pupil or to improve statistics,” she said. “Anecdotally, we hear in Glasgow and other authorities that, in some situations, pupils are returned too quickly while exhibiting the same behaviour.”

A spokeswoman for the Educational Institute of Scotland union added: “We support a positive approach, but there is no point returning a violent pupil into the same situation without a proper risk assessment.”

The turnaround on exclusions began four years ago when officials decided Glasgow was excluding too many pupils compared to other local authorities and embarked on a new strategy. The council argued the previous approach of simply moving a pupil from one school to another did nothing to resolve their underlying problems.

The key to the strategy was the operation of so-called learning centres, which were set up with the aim of rehabilitating violent pupils who were at risk of exclusion. The centres have provided immediate support for pupils with emotional and behavioural problems and helped youngsters reintegrate into mainstream education. Individual schools have been using a host of other means that have resolved difficulties before they escalate. These have included support units within schools, the input of campus police officers and the wider use of restorative justice techniques, where pupils who have harmed or abused others have an opportunity to discuss what went wrong. Part of this approach has also seen schools working much more closely with parents to alert them to problems as they emerge and get them involved in improving their children’s behaviour.