

Media release

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Government initiatives fail to bring down truancy levels

Truancy levels in schools have shown no improvement over the past decade, despite the government spending more than £1bn on a plethora of initiatives to tackle poor attendance and behaviour, according to a new report out today.

The report on truancy and exclusion, *School's Out?**, is published by New Philanthropy Capital (NPC), an independent, non-profit making organisation which advises donors on how to give more effectively to charities.

The report shows that not only have rates of unauthorised absence from school failed to come down but the number of pupils permanently excluded from school in the UK has risen by 20% since 2000 and now totals more than 10,500 each year. At least 70,000 children are also truanting every day. This does not include pupils who register for school but miss particular lessons, something which two-thirds of pupils admit to.

The report points to the enormous social and economic cost of truancy and exclusion. Alternative state-run education for excluded pupils costs over three times as much as normal schooling while persistent truants are more than four times as likely to be out of work at 18 years old than non-truants. They are also much more likely to suffer poor mental and physical health and resort to crime. Nearly three-quarters of young offenders are regular truants or have been excluded from school.

Martin Brookes, Head of Research at NPC, said: "Truancy and exclusion result in huge costs to society. There is a big economic incentive for society to tackle this issue, quite apart from the human suffering involved."

Brookes said that the poor results of government policy showed that more early intervention work was needed, and charities were often better placed to provide this than statutory agencies.

"It is essential to tackle the causes of truancy and bad behaviour in schools before a crisis develops. Charities that work closely with pupils, parents and schools can often help to reduce the incidence of bad behaviour and truanting by providing kids with the emotional and practical support that is often lacking in their family lives," said Brookes.



NPC attributes the failure of government policies to have more of an impact on reducing truancy and exclusion partly to lack of clarity over who is responsible. "No single local or national agency has clear overall responsibility for tackling the problem of truancy and exclusion," the report says.

The report also says that the introduction of league tables and parental choice under the Education Reform Act 1988 has made schools more likely to exclude pupils: "This creates a disincentive for schools to support those pupils with higher levels of need, who will place greater strain on their resources, since these pupils are seen as less likely to achieve academic success."

Another reason for higher exclusions is the need for schools to be seen to be taking tough action against truants and unruly pupils. "There is an increasing tension between the need to be seen to be tough on problem behaviour and balancing the needs of all pupils", the report says.

NPC highlights how charities can have a significant impact on reducing truancy and exclusion rates by working in schools and communities with children and parents to address problems in advance. Behavioural and emotional difficulties, which affect an estimated 15% of all children in the UK when they start school, are a frequent cause.

NPC recommends a number of charities that do good work in this area including the Advisory Centre for Education, which runs a national helpline for parents and Chance UK, which provides mentors for vulnerable children. Extern works with socially excluded children in Northern Ireland, where truancy rates are double those in England. Friends United Network provides children with trustworthy adult mentors they can talk to.

* *School's Out?*, along with some examples of recommended charities, can be downloaded free of charge from www.philanthropycapital.org. Copies can also be ordered from Central Books, telephone 0845 458 9910.

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For further information about NPC, its research reports and charity recommendations, or to arrange an interview please contact:

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Notes to Editors

1. New Philanthropy Capital advises all types of donors on how to give more effectively. It identifies examples of charities with highly effective approaches to tackling problems in the sector. By recommending these charities to potential donors, NPC aims to increase the quantity and quality of resources available to the charitable sector.
2. NPC focuses on human welfare, including problems in communities and families, education, and health and disability in the UK. NPC has published research on sectors ranging from cancer to older people, and domestic violence to special educational needs.
3. NPC develops a detailed understanding of social problems by talking to policy-makers, practitioners, academics and other experts. Its charity recommendations are arrived at after visiting and analysing charities across the sector. Assessments are made of the achievements, the need for additional funding, the financial structure and fundraising potential, as well as the risks.
4. NPC uses its research and experience to help donors ensure they have high impact and a rewarding experience. This can involve developing a tailored giving strategy to meet specific goals, selecting which charities to support and reporting on impact. Donors can also access NPC's research and some of its recommendations at no cost on NPC's website.