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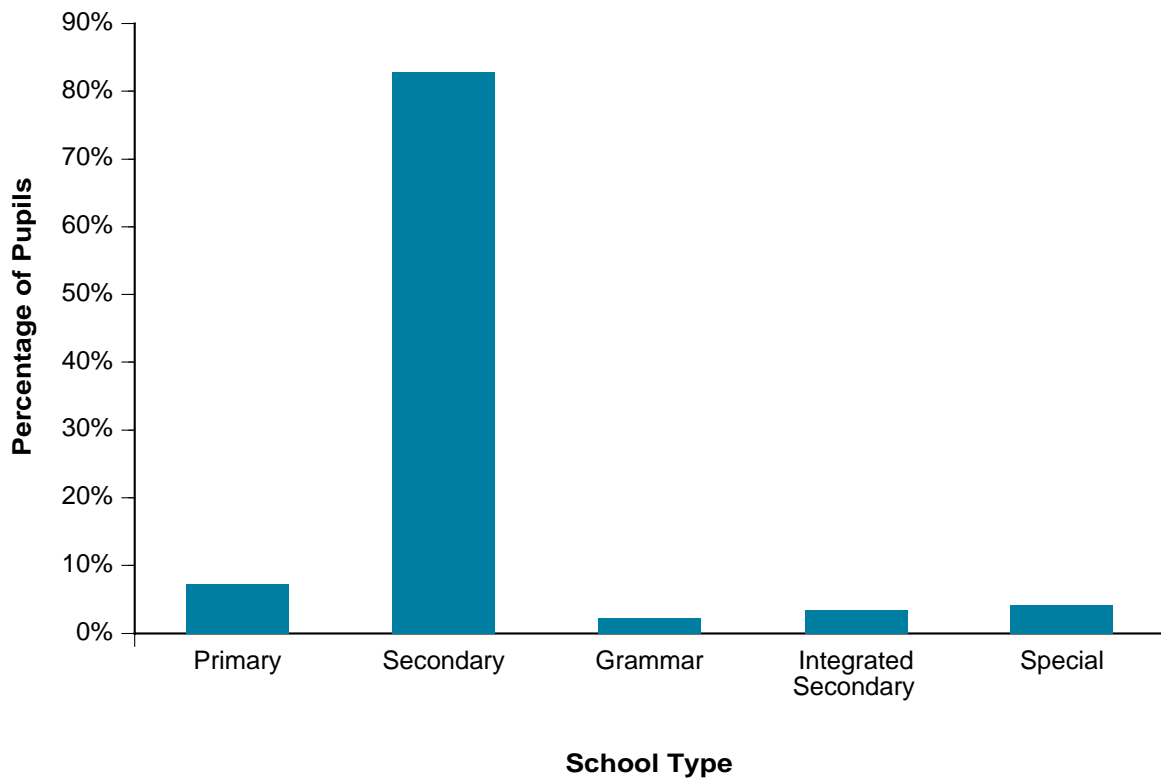
MULTIPLY-SUSPENDED PUPILS: THEIR EDUCATIONAL CAREER AND SUPPORT PROJECTS AVAILABLE TO THEM

KEY FINDINGS

- ◆ Of multiply-suspended pupils, over a third remained enrolled in their original school and approximately 10% were found places in alternative mainstream schools.
- ◆ Almost 17% of pupils with multiple suspensions ended up on home or group tuition.
- ◆ Just over a quarter of those pupils who had been multiply-suspended were subsequently expelled. Few expelled pupils returned to mainstream education.
- ◆ Strategies and projects aimed at supporting pupils who were out of school or having difficulty maintaining their place in mainstream education included: outreach from special schools; school-based projects; temporary withdrawal with the aim of eventual re-integration; and education other than at school (EOTAS). There was considerable variability both across and within ELBs in the level of and range of provision.

- ◆ Pupils reported that their experience of in-school projects was on the whole very positive, as it was with temporary withdrawal to an educational guidance unit or equivalent, and with EOTAS.
- ◆ While re-integration was frequently described as an important aspect of many of the projects, strategies to facilitate this were in an underdeveloped state in the majority of projects visited.

Figure 1: Pupils with Multiple Suspensions by School Type



INTRODUCTION

1. This report describes follow-up research to the Northern Ireland suspensions and expulsions survey conducted in 1996/97. The purpose of this stage of the research was twofold. Firstly, to explore in greater depth what had happened to the group of pupils who had been identified as experiencing multiple suspensions in the first phase of the study (see Department of Education Research Briefing RB1/1999) and secondly to identify and examine the range of alternatives available to pupils excluded from mainstream education.

2. The research itself was conducted prior to the introduction of the Department of Education's Discipline Strategy and the subsequent creation of the Behaviour Support Teams and the expansion of places in Pupil Referral Units and on alternative educational programmes. This latter provision has been the subject of considerable development following from the ETI report 'SSPPR/EOTAS' published in November 2000. Therefore, the impact which these initiatives may have had on pupil behaviour is not reflected in the current report.

3. Findings from the first phase of the investigation indicated that during the 1996/97 academic year 2,631 pupils were reported as having been suspended from school with the total number of suspensions being 3,748. While 74% of all suspended pupils received only one period of suspension, 11% of pupils experienced three or more suspensions. In this group of 281 pupils who were described as receiving 'multiple suspensions', males outnumbered females approximately 10 : 1. As may be seen from Figure 1 the vast majority of these pupils were attending the secondary school sector.

4. The report is divided into two sections:

- ◆ A follow-up study designed to trace the educational career of the 281 multiply-suspended pupils.
- ◆ The findings of a study aimed at giving a more in-depth view of the various types of alternative education outside mainstream education.

STUDY ONE: THE EDUCATIONAL CAREER OF MULTIPLY-SUSPENDED PUPILS

5. A number of pupils who received multiple suspensions in 1996/97 again received suspensions in the following year with approximately 7% suspended for periods in excess of 11 days. Some pupils who were suspended in 1996/97 had no suspensions recorded during the two terms surveyed in 1997/98. This may be due to increased maturity of pupils, changes in the composition of classes, timetable, teaching staff and/or the personal circumstances of pupils.

Primary Pupils

6. Because there were only 19 primary age pupils with multiple suspensions it was possible to carry out more detailed follow-up in the first two terms of the 1997/98 academic year.

7. In primary schools the majority of the 'multiple suspensions' occurred at Key Stage 2 and most pupils were receiving or had been in receipt of support from education welfare, education psychology, behaviour out-reach from a special school and/or social services. A small number were also receiving input from child psychiatry. Seven pupils had received either a 'caution' or 'warning' from the police and a further pupil was described as becoming involved in anti-social activities in the community.

8. The picture which emerged with the primary pupils who were multiply-suspended is in keeping with the findings of Hayden¹ who argued that many of the primary school pupils in her research could be categorised as either or both 'children in need'² or 'children with special educational needs'. It may be that the development of Children's Service Plans alongside the establishment of the Behaviour Support Teams will go some way to ensuring a planned, proactive, inter-agency approach to the needs of these young children.

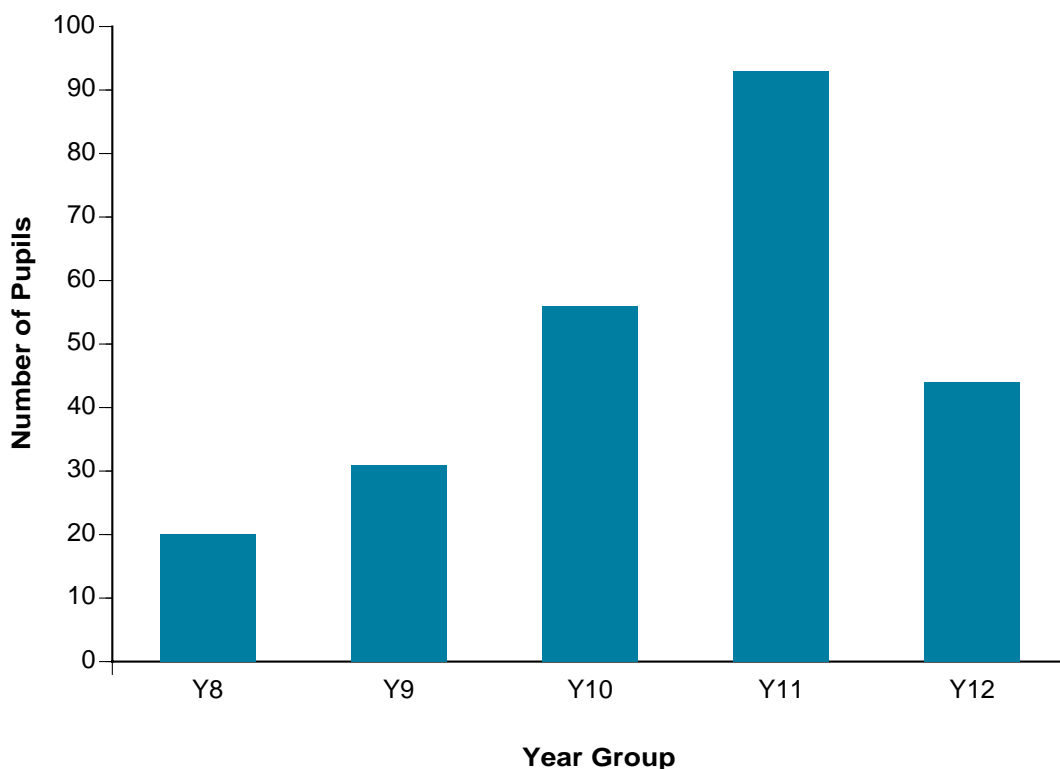
1. *Hayden (1997) Children excluded from primary school: debates, evidence, responses.* Buckingham. Open University Press.

2. 'Children in need' defined as unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development, or have significant impairment to health or development, without support.

Secondary Pupils

9. During the academic year of 1996/97 in the secondary level sector there was a gradual increase in the occurrence of multiple suspensions which peaked with Year 11 pupils who accounted for approximately one third of multiple suspensions. In Year 12 the occurrence of multiple suspensions dropped and indeed this was lower than in Year 10. However, this may be explained by Year 12 pupils ceasing to attend regularly³, or by the removal of a number of the more difficult pupils from the school system through expulsion or the provision of alternative education. There was also a considerable number of Year 9 and 10 pupils multiply-suspended (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Multiple Suspensions by Year Group



10. Of this group of 244 secondary level pupils with multiple suspensions for whom complete follow-up information was available it was found that 26.2% (N=64) were subsequently expelled over a period of 19 months with expulsions most frequently (N=26) coming from the Year 11 group.

3. *Education Welfare reported a number of instances where Year 12 pupils ceased attending school but expressed the view that recent changes in legislation (Children (NI) Order) left few options open for them to deal with the situation.*

Education Provision for Pupils with Multiple Suspensions

11. As may be seen from Figure 3 over a third of pupils remained enrolled in their original school and approximately 10% were found places in alternative mainstream schools. Although some pupils were reported as settling well into their new schools others experienced several school placements during the period surveyed and despite these 'new starts' a number were finally expelled from school.⁴

12. Almost 17% of pupils with multiple suspensions ended up on home or group tuition. Of these most had been expelled from school and the remainder were placed on home tuition by an ELB. ELBs appeared willing to provide home or group tuition⁵ for pupils nearing the end of their school careers who were at risk of expulsion and unlikely to be successful in an alternative school placement. Other pupils were on home tuition due to being withdrawn from school by their parents, pregnancy⁶ or were waiting for a placement in a special school.

13. A small number of the pupils with multiple suspensions were transferred into the special education sector, in particular schools which specialised in emotional and behaviour difficulties. Nine pupils were placed in training schools through the juvenile justice system during this period. Five pupils were receiving their education through 'shared packages'⁷ which were most commonly used with pupils in Year 12.

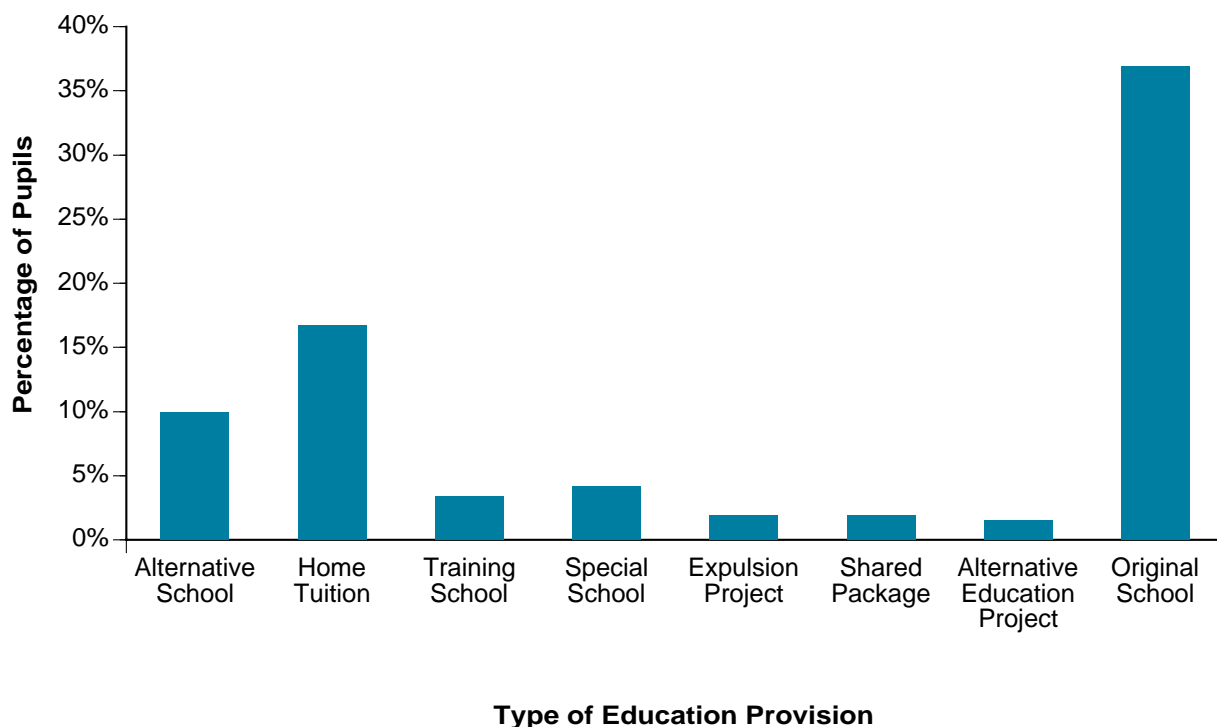
4. *Information about individual pupils was supplied by the Education Welfare Officer (EWO).*

5. *Home tuition could be offered on individual or group basis.*

6. *School age mothers go on home tuition at the direction of the clinical medical officer (CMO) and this depends on the medical circumstance of individual pupils.*

7. *A typical example of this would be work experience combined with attendance at Whitefield House or a similar project.*

Figure 3: Education Provision for Pupils with Multiple Suspensions



Preventative Measures

14. While the information about the provision of Educational Guidance Units (EGUs), and their equivalent, to pupils with multiple suspensions was incomplete, the data that were available indicated that most pupils with multiple suspensions did not have access to such units⁸.

Multiple Suspensions and Expulsions

15. At secondary school age just over a quarter of those pupils who had been multiply-suspended were subsequently expelled. This would suggest that the use of multiple suspensions, for this group anyway, had little impact on behaviour. It further reinforces the notion that pupils who are multiply-suspended might be better supported through pastoral care and/or special education needs systems within schools since their problems may be rooted in emotional and behavioural difficulties for which they have few or inadequate coping strategies.

8. *In some ELBs these are called Education Guidance Centres or Education Support Units, however the term EGU will be used in relation to all such centres.*

16. Few expelled pupils returned to mainstream education, with only two pupils returning to their original school after successful appeals against expulsion and five finding a placement in alternative schools.

STUDY TWO: SUPPORT UNITS AND PROJECTS

17. The research identified a variety of strategies and projects aimed at supporting pupils who were out of school or having difficulty maintaining their place in mainstream education. These included:

- ◆ Outreach from special schools aimed at supporting pupils and helping to develop behaviour management strategies.
- ◆ School based projects targeted at specific groups of pupils.
- ◆ Temporary withdrawal with the aim of eventual re-integration (EGUs).
- ◆ Education other than at school (EOTAS).

18. For those who found themselves outside mainstream education a range of provision was identified of which the most common was home tuition. In terms of educational input such provision cannot match that provided in full-time education. Such a situation could equate with adult unemployment in that it removes the young person from contacts and shared experiences outside the nuclear family (and in this case the peer group which is so important in adolescence) and a time structure to the day. These, it has been demonstrated, are extremely important in the maintenance of psychological well-being.⁹ It would seem important to consider a closer monitoring of home tuition and more in-depth analysis of its impact on the young people concerned.

19. There was considerable variability both across and within ELBs in the level of and range of provision. This meant that in some areas schools had little or no access to any alternatives (or support) for their most problematic pupils. However, even where schools did have access to these alternatives there was little indication that they appreciated the ultimate goal of re-integration into full-time education for these pupils.

9. See for example Kilpatrick R and Trew K (1985) *Lifestyles and Psychological Well-being among Unemployed Men in Northern Ireland*. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 58 207-216.

The Pupils

20. The research identified a range of reasons why young people might be out of mainstream education over and above expulsion. This included young people leaving the care and juvenile justice system. The pupils at risk of such exclusion are already in a highly vulnerable position.

21. Pupils reported that their experience of in-school projects was on the whole very positive as it was with EGUs and EOTAS. In relation to the latter two types of projects there were mixed views on remaining in such units with some pupils indicating that they did not wish to return to school while others stated that they missed certain aspects of school life. In either case there was little suggestion that the pupils understood that one of the aims of such projects was to re-integrate them into their mainstream school.

Staffing and Funding of EGUs and EOTAS

22. Lack of, and uncertainty about, funding made continuity and forward planning difficult for both projects and schools and this appeared to further exacerbate the situation. Many teachers and projects workers were on secondment and/or short-term contracts, which further complicated forward planning.

Mainstream School Perceptions of the Projects

23. Mainstream teachers and pupils not involved in projects did not always appear to understand fully the purpose of the projects and their aims and objectives. Both sometimes saw such projects as rewarding pupils who had poor attendance or behaviour.

Admissions Criteria

24. The admission criteria for EGUs and EOTAS varied greatly both across and within ELBs. In the case of the pupils in this survey it appeared to be somewhat of a lottery whether they were expelled or educated in a special school, through EOTAS or home tuition. A teacher in one EGU commented:

“We felt we had a lot of pupils being thrown at us and our resourcing was poor in terms of staffing ... we have been used as a dumping ground but I think we have to take some responsibility for that because those of us who had a managerial role have not until now articulated the need for clear guidelines about referral.”

Re-integration Strategies

25. While re-integration was frequently described as an important aspect of many of the projects, strategies to facilitate this were in an underdeveloped state in the majority of projects visited.

26. There would appear to be a number of young people, mainly Year 11 and 12, for whom full-time attendance at school is not in their best interest. There needs to be recognition of this by schools and the development of a planned strategy, which allows a small number of young people increased access to work experience, vocational training and courses organised by Colleges of Further Education¹⁰. A teacher in one EOTAS project commented:

“We get pupils who have been told that school does not want them. They have been expelled or made to feel they are not wanted. By the time they come to us they have no interest in school or learning. There is no point trying to re-integrate them back into a school as they will not go and schools don’t want them either. Someone needs to recognise that for the older pupils school is not always an appropriate option and to make alternative provision.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

27. ELBs should give consideration to monitoring suspensions to identify pupils at risk of being expelled (or multiply-suspended) from school¹¹. Once identified the needs of these pupils should be assessed and appropriate support put in place. The fact that already vulnerable young people (eg looked after children; children with special educational needs) are highly likely to be excluded is especially concerning. Schools need to be encouraged to consider carefully their reasons for excluding pupils on a long-term basis and ensure that the suspension/expulsion procedure is used appropriately.

10. *The Education (NI) Order 1998 permits increased work experience and allows pupils of school age to attend a College of Further Education.*

11. *Newham Borough Council (East London) has a system whereby groups of young people considered at risk of permanent exclusion are identified and ‘fast track’ assessment of needs is carried out.*

28. There is a need to ensure that young people with ‘special education needs’ and ‘children in need’ receive appropriate support and are not excluded from mainstream education via the disciplinary process. Closer liaison within schools between discipline, counselling and pastoral care and special educational needs teams is required alongside an acknowledgement of the possible relationship between disaffection, learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural problems. Such an approach requires a whole school approach and could be promoted through a more intensive and dedicated approach to INSET training in this area.

29. It would be important for the Department of Education and ELBs to consider ways of helping the parents of pupils who have been expelled from school to get their child enrolled in an alternative school as quickly as possible¹². The longer a young person is out of school the more difficult it may be to re-integrate them successfully¹³.

30. ELBs need to review their provision for pupils expelled from school. These pupils frequently have a long wait until a new mainstream place is secured. In the case of Year 11 or 12 pupils the chance of them returning to mainstream is poor. Therefore young people may be on home or group tuition for a long period of time and they should have access to a quality education¹⁴ which allows for social contact with their peer group.

31. From the research it appeared that it was only the very needy primary school pupils who received support and when this was offered it appeared to lack cohesion or clear direction. A review of the level of support provided at primary school level is required to help clarify this position and identify the extent and type of need in this sector.

12. *In LEAs in England, Exclusion Officers have the role of advising and assisting parents in this area.*

13. *The Education (NI) Order 1996 (article 42) permits ELBs to make a direction to a school to admit a child. However this is usually done only after the parent has gone through a complex appeal process. All of this can take an appreciable amount of time.*

14. *Under the new Education Act in England it will be compulsory for LEAs to provide full-time education for pupils excluded for periods longer than 15 days.*

32. ELBs need to re-consider their use of EGUs, especially in relation to the following areas:

- ◆ procedures for admissions
- ◆ the use of outreach prior to withdrawal from school
- ◆ maintaining contact with the referring school
- ◆ setting limits on period of withdrawal
- ◆ re-integration strategies to mainstream schools
- ◆ ensuring curricular delivery so pupils are not behind when returned to school

33. Clear policies need to be developed in relation to placing young people with behavioural problems in special schools, on home tuition, expulsion or other alternatives. The current situation appears to vary widely both within and across ELBs.

34. ELBs need to make an assessment of their current provision and establish some form of 'gate-keeping' which ensures admissions criteria are set and adhered to and that children and young people receive the support appropriate to their needs.

35. Given the concern expressed by the providers of alternative education regarding the lack of support services for children in need the ELBs should urgently review the level of therapeutic support available for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties at all levels of education.

36. There is a growing acknowledgement that there is a small number of young people (mainly in Year 11 and 12) for whom full-time attendance at school might not be appropriate. In the past some of these have been placed in special schools and EGUs, but this is unfair both to the young person and to an EGU or special school. For some of these young people, programmes consisting of part-time school attendance, work experience and vocational training need to be developed and ELBs should urgently consider their use of further education for these young people.

37. Much good practice was identified in the various projects which provided education for young people out of school. This good practice could be built on and closer links developed between this type of provision and mainstream education in terms of training and support.

38. While some in-roads have been made addressing the problems raised by behavioural issues and suspension and expulsion through the behavioural support teams in each of the ELBs, much work remains to be done. Additionally, as the expressed concern regarding children with emotional and behavioural difficulties grows it becomes apparent that there is a need for a co-ordinated approach to the problem. One means of ensuring such an approach would be to appoint an individual within each of the ELBs with responsibility for disaffected young people. Such a role would include the overall monitoring, management and co-ordination of suspensions and expulsion, attendance issues and the development of policies to address these issues.

METHODOLOGY

39. Of the 281 pupils who were suspended on three or more occasions in the academic year 1996/97 there were 18 pupils for whom it was not possible to access follow-up information due to the incomplete nature of the original suspension forms and thus the total number of pupils for this aspect of the research was reduced to 263.

40. The ELBs were asked to supply follow-up information on these 263 multiply-suspended pupils during the first two terms of the 1997/98 academic year. Given the time-table for the research it was not possible to include the third academic term.

41. The information, which was supplied by the officers responsible for suspensions within the ELBs, covered the following detail about individual pupils within the group:

- ◆ The number of suspensions
- ◆ The total number of days suspended

42. Initial findings appeared to indicate that a large number of pupils who in the previous year had been frequently suspended had no recorded suspensions during the period surveyed in 1997/98. However, when this was checked with the ELBs it was revealed that a number of these pupils had no suspensions because they were no longer in mainstream education.

43. As a result of this it was decided that the current education provision for all the pupils in this group needed to be checked. This was carried out through the education welfare service and/or schools who were asked to provide the following information:

- ◆ The pupil's education provision during 1997/98.
- ◆ Whether the pupil had been referred to an education guidance centre or equivalent for support.

44. Of the 263 pupils, 44 were school leavers in June 1997. In the case of 18 pupils it was not possible to determine their education provision due to difficulties experienced contacting certain education welfare offices and schools, thus complete information was available on 201 of the total of 263 pupils.

THE PROJECT

45. The project was carried out for the Department of Education by the Graduate School of Education at Queen's University, Belfast. This phase of the research cost £42,436.

FULL REPORT

46. The full report, entitled "Multiply suspended pupils: their educational career and support projects available to them", by Rosemary Kilpatrick and Alex Barr, is available from the Department of Education, price £5¹⁵.

This paper is a summary of the research report and as such any views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Education.

15. *Each educational establishment and library is entitled to one free copy.*

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