

# Browne Jacobson's School Leaders Survey shows exclusions and suspensions at an all-time high

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Almost half (45%) of school leaders have reported an increase in suspensions and exclusions over the past 12 months, according to a new Browne Jacobson survey.

In contrast, only 22% have noted a decrease, with the remainder saying there had been no change or they were unsure.

Findings in the UK and Ireland law firm's summer 2025 School Leaders Survey – which also highlights the issue of deteriorating pupil behaviour – are revealed as schools await publication of the government's delayed annual national behaviour survey.

These correlate with the latest Department for Education data, which shows suspensions rose by 12% annually to 295,559 and permanent exclusions were up by 2% to 3,107 in the 2023/24 spring term.

Nearly 200 trust and multi-academy trust leaders – including CEOs, executive headteachers, trustees and governors – representing more than 1,700 schools and responsible for almost a million pupils in England, completed the survey during May 2025.

Philip Wood, Principal Associate in the education team at Browne Jacobson, said: *"Exclusions and suspensions are near an all-time high, but this is a reflection of underlying issues.*

*"Principal among them, as highlighted in the survey, is SEND and the balance for schools fundamentally between inclusion and the disadvantages posed to other students by a minority of poor behaviour.*

*"That behaviour has gotten worse since the pandemic is clearly highlighted by the survey."*

The survey also illustrates that:

- Four in five (79%) leaders say pupil behaviour has deteriorated since the Covid-19 pandemic, with a third (33%) reporting it has got significantly worse – compared to only 4% believing it has improved.
- Balancing behaviour management with inclusion is regarded as the biggest challenge in managing suspensions and exclusions by 38% of respondents, followed by the lack of alternative options (33%) and a lack of support for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (16%).
- Only one in five (19%) leaders believe alternative provision for excluded students effectively supports their educational outcomes, with 55% saying it is sometimes effective and 27% feeling it was rarely or never the case.
- Three-quarters (74%) of leaders said alternative provision to permanent exclusion was used but this fell to 58% for managed moves, the other main external alternative. Seven in 10 (71%) also used restorative justice in some form.

Philip added: *"A theme of the responses was the difficulties in getting timely support, including the use of cost-effective quality alternative provision, to avoid the need to permanently exclude pupils.*

*"We hear frequently how there can be a perception – or, in some areas, explicit advice – that permanently excluding a pupil will open access to further support or a timelier consideration of other options.*

*"This reactive approach doesn't feel like a sustainable one. Developing a more proactive system characterised by early intervention would be in the best interests of pupils at risk of suspension or exclusion."*

The full School Leaders Survey report for summer 2025 can be found at [www.brownejacobson.com/school-leaders-survey](https://www.brownejacobson.com/school-leaders-survey).

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