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Policy Brief

Out of sight, out of mind? Managed moves in England

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Summary

Children move schools or enter alternative provision without an official exclusion through a process known generically as a managed move (Hutchinson and Crenna-Jennings, 2019). Managed moves have been defined in previous Government guidance as a process that enables a child to have a fresh start in a new school; when their current school place is no longer deemed to be viable due to the child's behaviour (DCSF, 2008) and/or a breakdown in relationships with teachers (Muir, 2013; Craig, 2015; Bagley and Hallam, 2016).

This policy brief shares the findings from freedom of information (FOI) requests that were sent to 149 Local Authorities (LAs) in England. The questions asked were:

- Does the LA record data on managed moves?
- How many children have had one or more moves in the last two years?
- How many of the managed moves in the last two years were successful?
- What was the reason recorded for the new school placement failing?

¹A permanent exclusion is defined as 'when a pupil is permanently barred from school premises' (DfE, 2017b, p.56)

Why are managed moves used?

Current research suggests managed moves are the main approach used as an alternative to excluding children from school (Gazeley et al. 2015; Mills and Thomson, 2018; Craggs and Kelly, 2018). They are believed to be an alternative for children who are on the edge of permanent school exclusion and are thought to give children the opportunity to form new relationships, escape previous reputations and experiment with new behaviours in school (Flitcroft and Kelly, 2016). As early as 2004, the DfES raised concerns regarding managed moves, reporting that they did not address any underlying difficulties children may have. This view is supported by research that found managed moves are commonly used where a child displays behavioural difficulties linked to special educational needs (SEN) and/or social, emotional, mental health (SEMH) needs (Chadwick, 2013; Craig, 2015; Hoyle, 2016; Atkinson, 2017).

Who agrees the managed move?

The managed move process should be a voluntary arrangement between the child, caregivers and the admission authority for the new school (DfES, 2008; DfE, 2017). However, research from the Children's Commissioner Office (2019) and Hutchinson and Crenna-Jennings (2019) found that some families felt pressured into agreeing to a managed move to prevent their child being permanently excluded.

What are the issues with managed moves?

Since 2008, concerns have been raised over the increasing use of managed moves despite their frequent failure (Gazeley, 2010) and use across England without Government monitoring (Messeter and Soni, 2017; Martin-Denham, 2020); causing some children to be lost in the system (Ofsted, 2010). More recently, Ofsted (2019) called for the Department for Education to collect data on managed moves as the exact number was unknown. They added that nationally they do not know how many children were 'managed moved' to a different school, why they moved, how long for, or with what effectiveness. Hutchinson and Crenna-Jennings (2019) raised concerns that there is no transparency over the cause and prevalence of managed moves. They added that there are varying processes and a lack of knowledge of how supportive caregivers are of the process.

Method

For this policy brief, we sent Freedom of Information Requests (FOI) to 149 LAs who were educational authorities for their area. Of the 149 authorities, 55 were Unitary Authorities, 36 were Metropolitan Districts, 32 were London boroughs and 26 were County Councils. The request contained questions on the number of single and multiple managed moves, the success rate and the reasons for the managed move being unsuccessful (see Appendix). The requests were sent between January and February 2020.

Findings

Part A. Number of Local Authorities that record data on managed moves

The findings section is split into five sections, each relating to one of the questions from the FOI request. All data are available to view on a supplementary table online.

Of the 149 LAs that were sent FOIs on managed moves, 133 (89%) responded in time for publication (35 working days after the initial request). Of these, 71 (53%) held data on managed moves, 58 (44%) did not hold any information and 4 (3%) refused to share their information on economic grounds. Of the LAs that held data, 51 (72%) were able to report the number of managed moves and 20 (28%) reported partial information, for example they only:

- Answered one question
- Reported one year's worth of data
- Reported one phase of education
- Reported some LAs within catchment area

Part B. Number of children who have had at least one managed move

There were 54 LAs who reported they held data for 2017/18 and 56 LAs for 2018/19. The analysis showed that 4,190 children across England had one managed move in 2017/18, increasing to 4,720 in 2018/19. All LAs acknowledged that as schools are not legally required to record and share managed move information, their data would have significant inaccuracies.

Part C. Number of children who had multiple managed moves

There were 40 LAs who reported they held data for 2017/18 and 43 LAs for 2018/19. In 2017/18, there were 182 children who had more than one managed move which increased to 185 children in 2018/19. To protect the identity of children, there were three LAs that responded with either <5 or <3 for 2017/18 and five for 2018/19; these were not included in the totals.

Part D. Number of managed moves that were successful

There is difference in the managed moves protocols of LAs as some deemed a placement successful when the child enrolled onto the receiving school beyond the 12-week period. Whereas others reported using managed moves to give school staff a short break, allowing pupils to return to their original school after a short period of time.

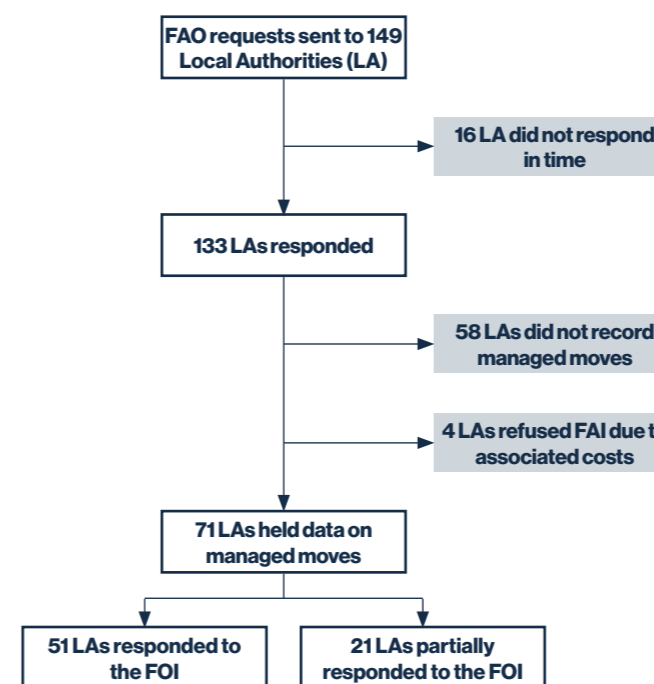


Figure 1. Local Authority response to the FOI request (2017/18)

2017/2018

Based on the data collected using FOIs, the average success rate for managed moves in England in 2017/18 was 42%. The success rate ranged from 3% (City of York) to 100% (Plymouth City). Figure 2 presents the top ten LAs with the most and least successful managed moves in 2017/18.

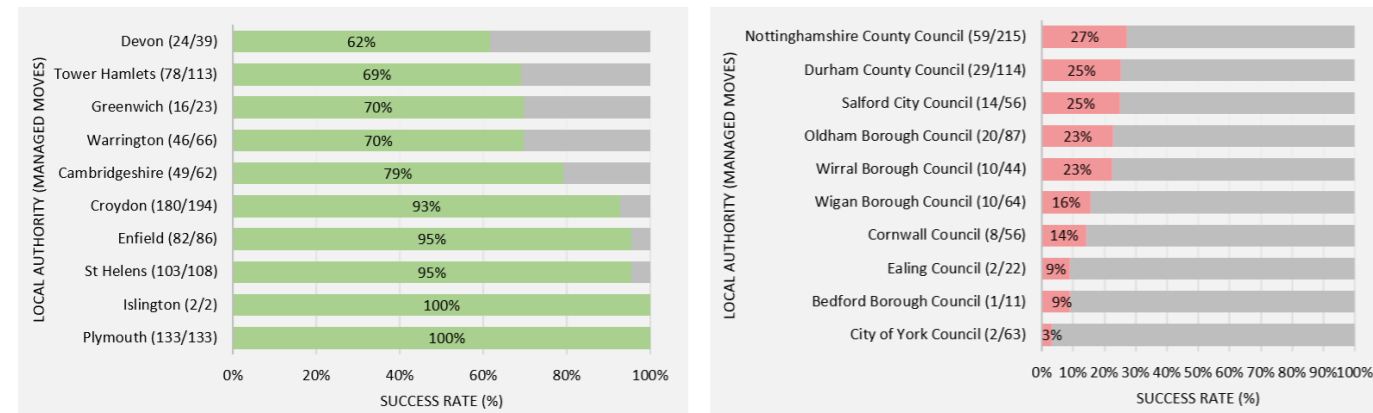


Figure 2. Local Authorities with the most (left) and least (right) successful managed moves (2017/18)

2018/2019

For 2018/19, the average managed move success rate decreased from 42% to 38% and ranged from 0% (Windsor and Maidenhead) to 100% (Plymouth City). Figure 3 presents the top ten LAs with the most and least successful managed moves in 2018/19.

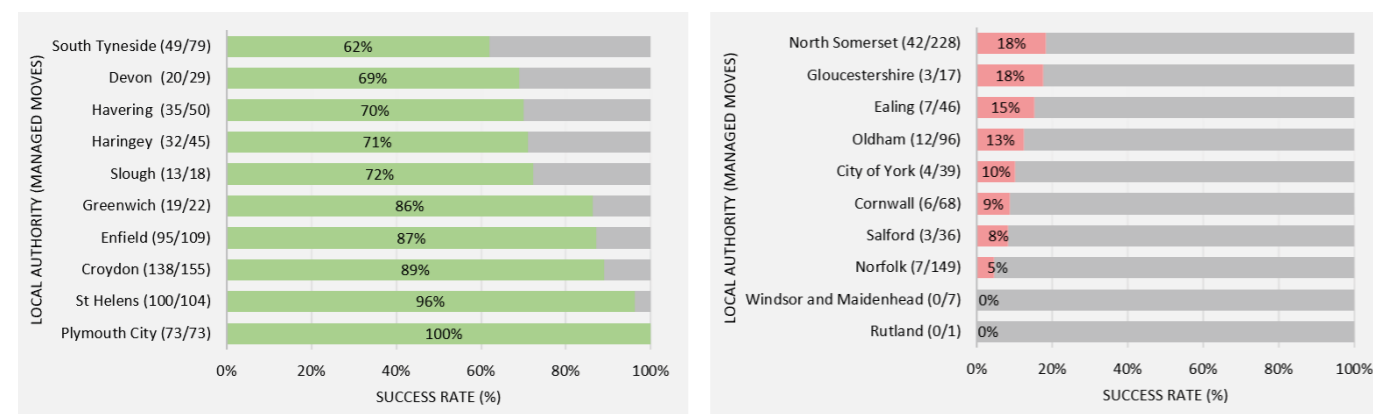


Figure 3. Local Authorities with the most (left) and least (right) successful managed moves (2018/19)

Part E. The reported reason why the managed moves were unsuccessful

Of the 71 LAs, 15 were able to report the reasons for unsuccessful managed moves. The LAs that recorded this data generally used published exclusion reasons (DfE, 2020) and additional reasons such as:

1. poor behaviour
2. student not complying
3. disruptive behaviour (separate from persistent disruptive behaviour)
4. increasing disruptive behaviour (separate from persistent disruptive behaviour)
5. young person was unhappy
6. poor social engagement with peers
7. fireworks
8. school behaviour policy breach
9. returned to home school
10. failure to follow instructions
11. extremely unhappy and impacting on mental wellbeing
12. parental choice to return
13. behaviour escalating
14. truanting
15. defiance
16. refusing to attend the new school
17. moved out of the area
18. one-off serious incidents

There appears to be some crossover with statutory exclusion reasons (DfE, 2020) and the above as the exclusion reason 'persistent disruptive behaviour' appears to be similar to the 'poor behaviour', '(increasing) disruptive behaviour', 'behaviour escalating' and 'defiance'. However, what is quite concerning, is that schools were able to terminate a managed move for a range of reasons that are not properly defined in legislation nor recorded universally.

Concluding remarks

This policy brief set out to better understand the extent and success of managed moves in England. One of the most significant findings from this research is that there is variability across England in how likely a managed move is to fail or succeed. It is important to acknowledge that due to a lack of accountability, this piece of research is unable to share the full extent of managed moves in England due to clear gaps in administrative data capture.

The findings show that less than half of the LAs held any data on managed moves, and approximately a third were able to report the number of managed moves over the last two years. This suggests that there is a lack of data captured by local areas, so the effectiveness and justification for the managed move protocol cannot be evaluated at a local or a national level.

The FOI requests identified that a managed move can be terminated for a range of reasons that include statutory exclusion reasons (DfE, 2020), but also minor reasons such as 'poor behaviour', 'young person was unhappy' and 'defiance'. With limited data on this issue and no clear guidelines on when to terminate a managed move, schools will continue to have the power to potentially end placements for unclear reasons. This study has raised important questions about the nature of the managed move process and further evidences the need for improvements in administrative data.

Recommendations for policy

Recommendation: The findings of this research compliment those of Hutchinson and Crenna-Jennings (2019) who suggest managed moves should be recorded and reported on in a similar manner to legal school exclusions. A key policy priority should be to add managed move data to the school census return.

Limitations

This research is based on FOI requests that were sent to local authorities. Legally, schools (including maintained schools and academies) are not required to record or share data on managed moves with their corresponding authority (Messeter and Soni, 2017; Hutchinson and Crenna-Jennings, 2019; Ofsted, 2019; 2020). This means that reported data and the data within this brief is subject to significant inconsistencies.

The FOI did not request information on the destinations of children following a managed move to keep the cost of the FOI down for each LA. However, some authorities acknowledged they did not record managed moves when a child moved to a school in another locality.

Further research opportunities

Further research should investigate the true prevalence and success rates of managed moves by collecting data directly from schools. This should also include an investigation into the reasons why the managed move was necessary and the reasons for any failed placements. Research should also attempt to learn from the LAs that reported high managed move success rates to justify the protocol.

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Appendix

Freedom of Information Request

Please can you provide the following data in relation to managed moves in schools over the last two academic years (2018/19 and 2017/18 or equivalent – please state where this is the case):

- number of children who have had a managed move
- number of children who have had more than one managed move
- number of managed moves that were successful (i.e. where children remained in their school beyond the 12-week period)
- the reason why the managed moves were unsuccessful (if recorded)



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