

BRIDGING THE GAP: A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE EDUCATIONAL REALITIES OF ALN LEARNERS IN WALES

Over the last few years, we have seen the rollout of the new ALN Act (Welsh Gov, 2021) and I, like many others, am increasingly concerned with the complex interplay between additional learning needs (ALN) and school engagement in Wales. The data before us paints a stark picture of the challenges faced by ALN learners in our educational system, one that demands our immediate attention and thoughtful analysis.

Since the introduction of the new ALN Act and post-pandemic, we've observed alarming trends in persistent absence, exclusions, and alternative educational provisions for school-aged children, particularly those with ALN. These figures are not mere statistics; they represent real children and young people whose educational journeys are being significantly impacted. Of particular note is the disproportionate representation of learners with specific neurodevelopmental conditions such as Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in exclusion rates.

As we delve into these numbers, we must remember that behind each percentage and ratio are individual stories of struggle, resilience, and potential. Our task is to unpack these figures, understand their implications, and forge a path towards more inclusive and effective educational strategies.

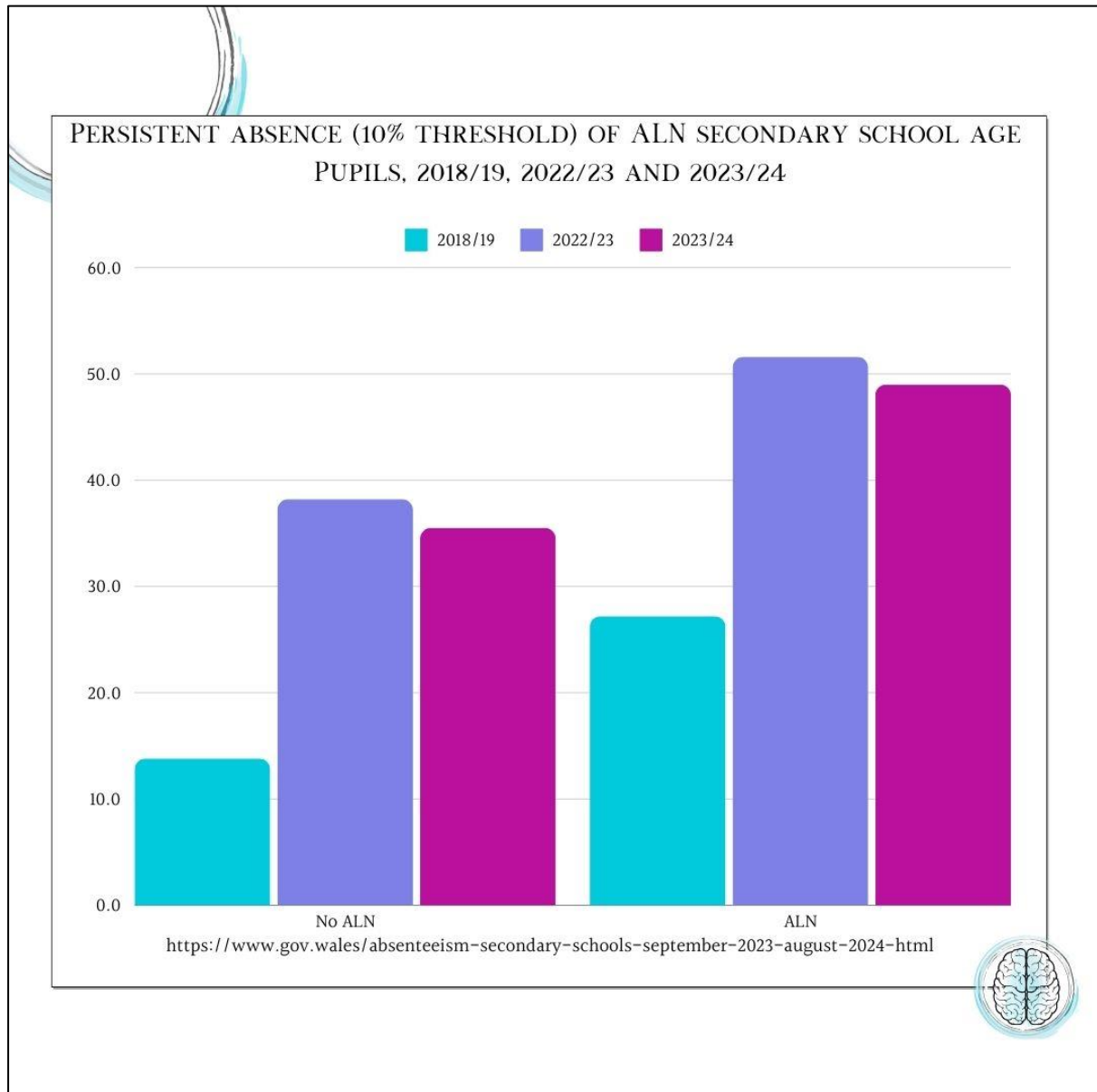
This analysis aims to shed light on the multifaceted challenges facing ALN learners in Wales, exploring the intersections between different types of additional needs, attendance patterns, and disciplinary actions. By examining these relationships, we hope to identify key areas for intervention and support, ultimately working towards an educational system that truly serves all learners, regardless of their additional needs.

Prevalence of ALN

With 11.2% of pupils in Wales identified as having ALN, it's clear that this is a substantial portion of the student population. The fact that 20.7% of ALN learners have ASC and 4.9% have ADHD highlights the significant role these specific conditions play within the ALN population. (Welsh Gov, 2024)

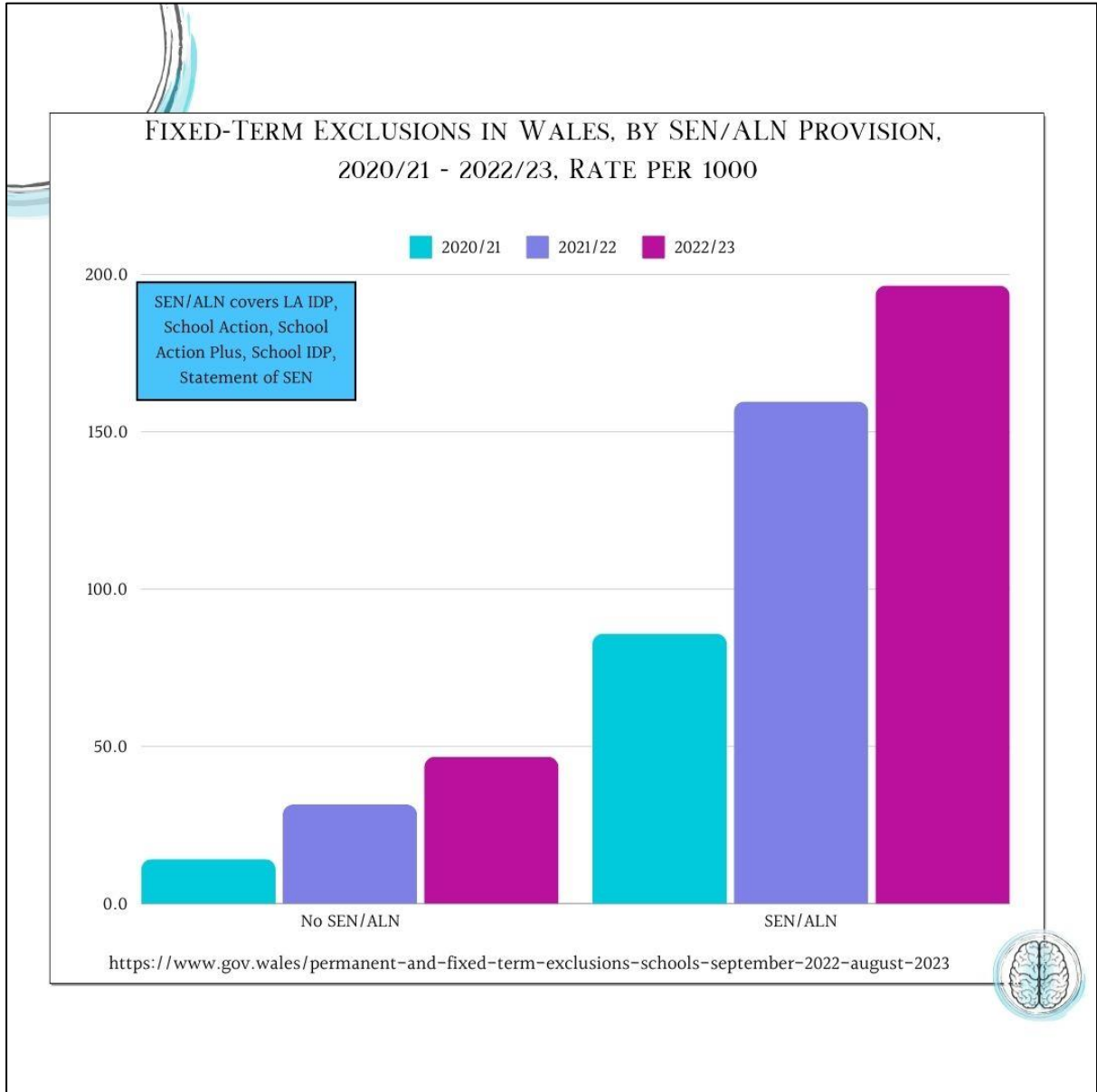
THE DATA

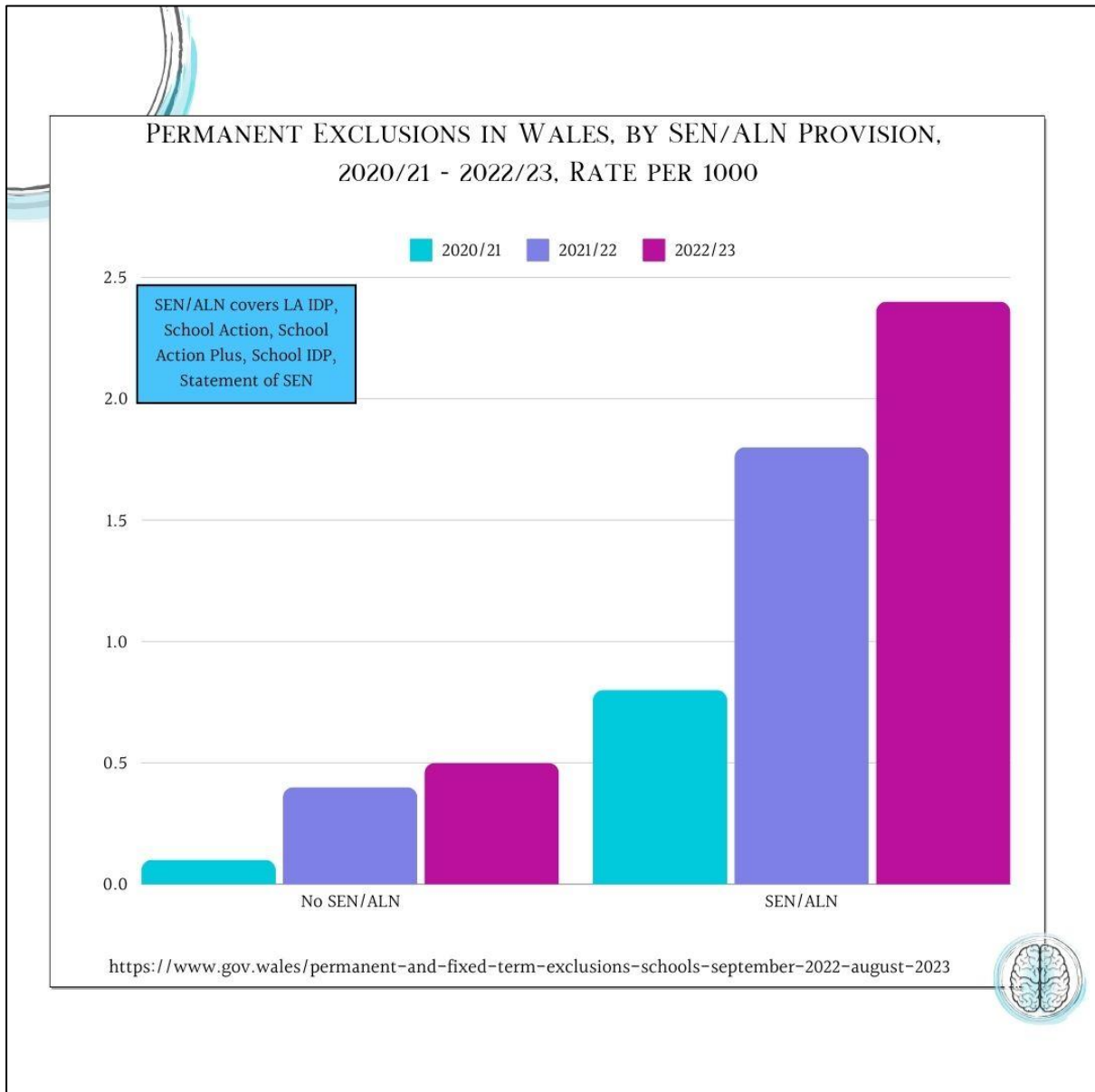
Persistent Absenteeism and ALN



The high rate of persistent absence among ALN learners, 49% in 2023/24, is a significant concern. This suggests that nearly half of students with additional learning needs are missing substantial amounts of school time, which can severely impact their educational outcomes and social development. This is higher than those without ALN, 35.5%. Both have come down since 2022/23 but are still significantly higher than 2018/19. (Welsh Gov, 2024)

Exclusions and ALN





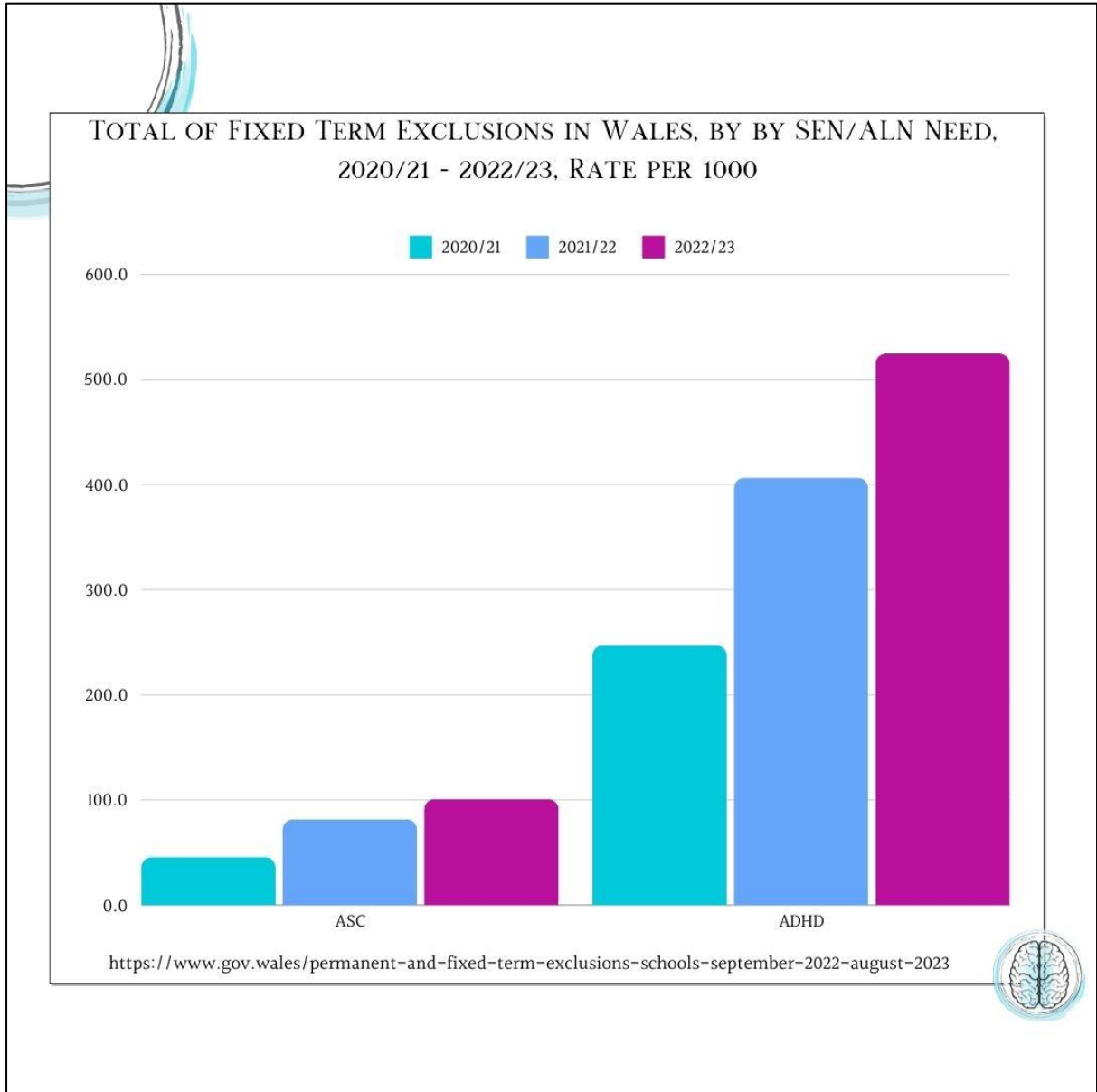
The data shows that ALN learners are disproportionately affected by fixed-term exclusions, in 2022/23:

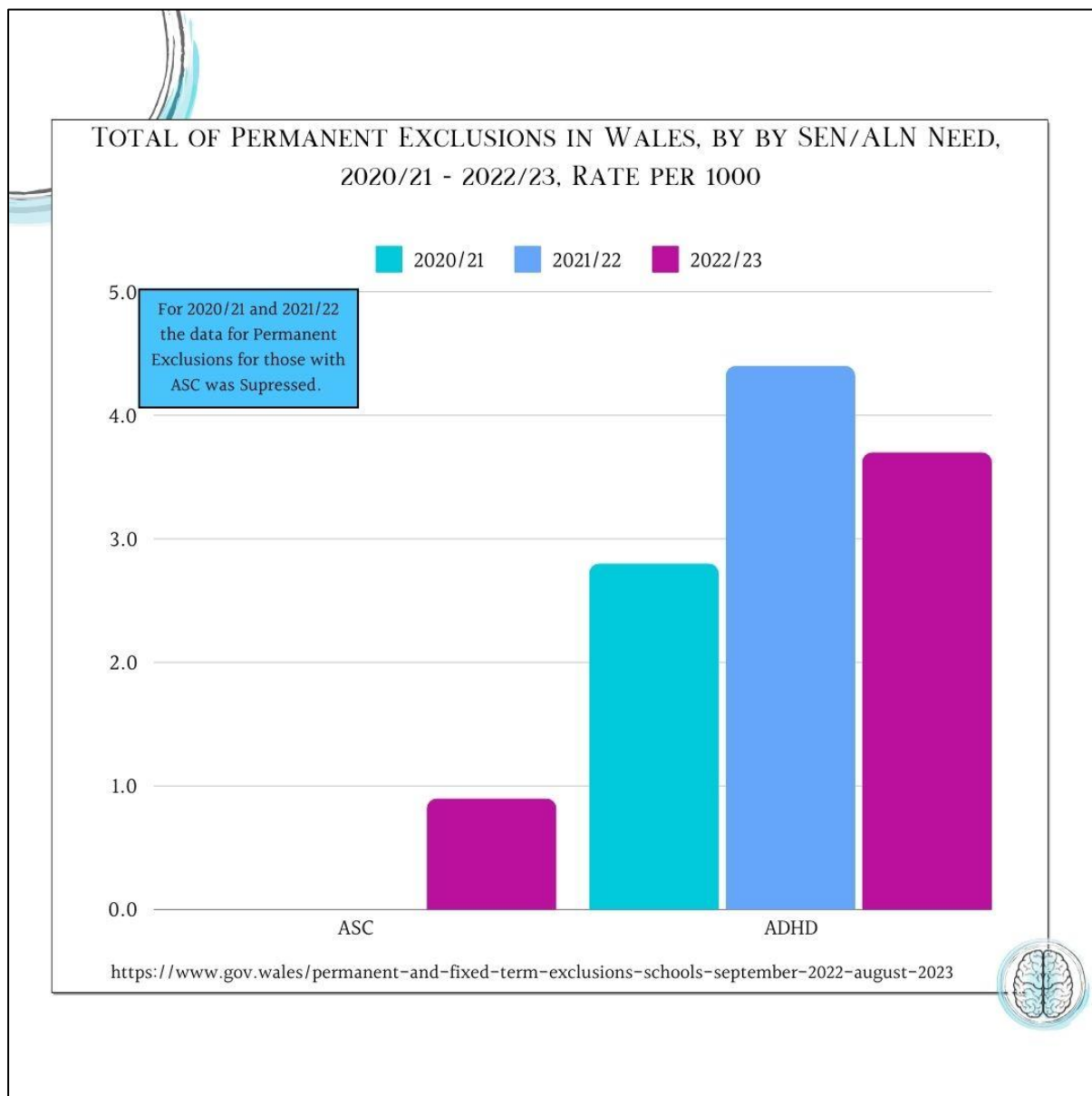
- 196.5 per 1000 ALN pupils received fixed-term exclusions
- 2.4 per 1000 ALN pupils were permanently excluded

These rates are higher than the general student population, indicating that ALN students face greater challenges in school behaviour and engagement.

Whilst exclusions have continued to climb for all learners, the rate for those who are ALN is still significantly higher than those without ALN. (Welsh Gov, 2024)

Exclusions and Specific Neurodevelopmental Conditions



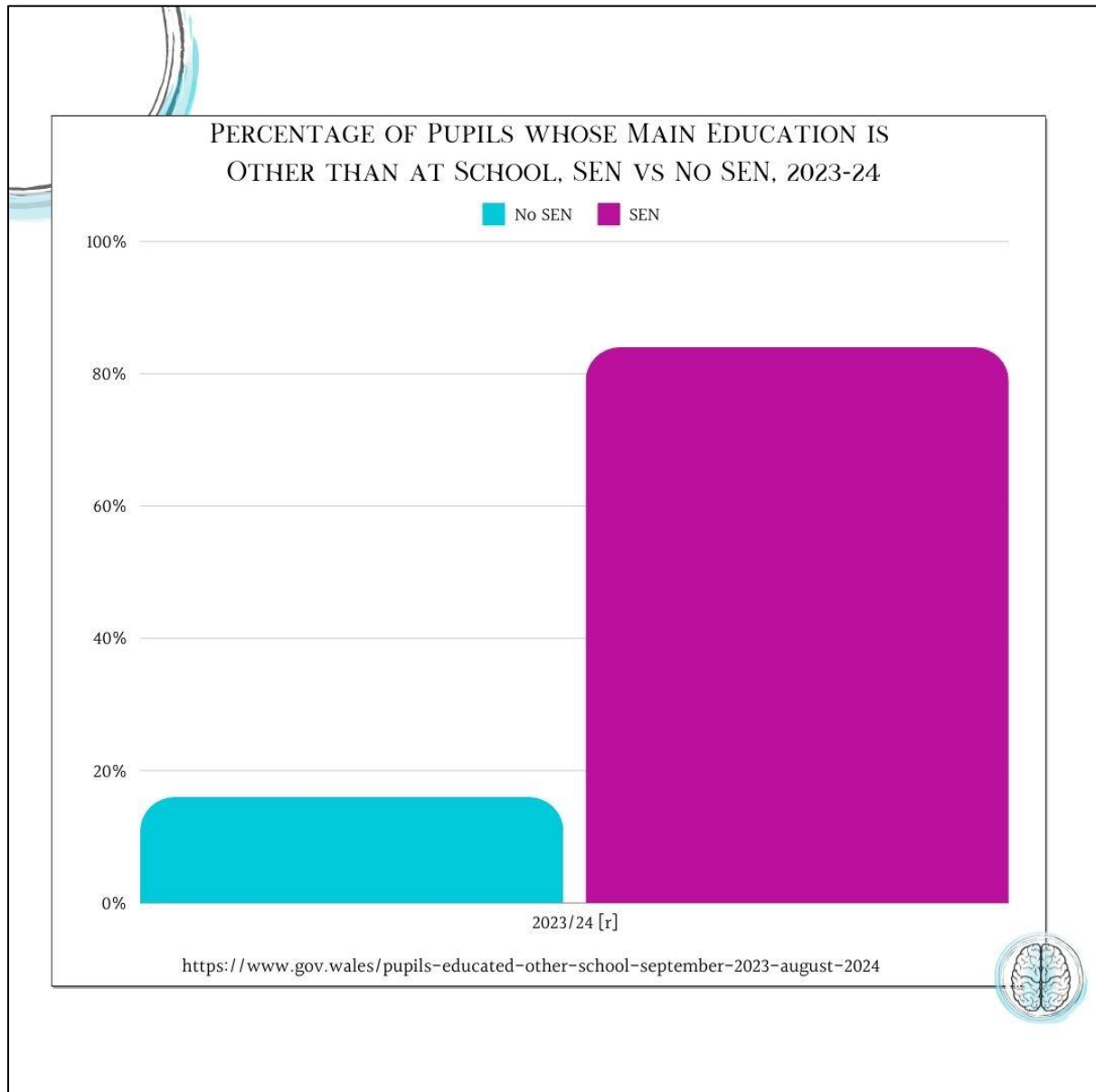


The data for Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) learners reveals striking differences:

- ASC learners: 100.8 per 1000 received fixed-term exclusions, 0.9 per 1000 were permanently excluded
- ADHD learners: 524.7 per 1000 received fixed-term exclusions, 3.7 per 1000 were permanently excluded

ADHD learners appear to be at significantly higher risk for exclusions compared to ASC learners and the general ALN population. Permanent exclusions have reduced between 2021/22 and 2022/23. Overall, this suggests that ADHD symptoms may present particular challenges in the school environment. (Welsh Gov, 2024)

Education Other Than At School (EOTAS)



The high proportion of EOTAS learners with ALN (84%) indicates a strong correlation between additional learning needs and alternative educational provisions. This could suggest that mainstream schools are struggling to meet the needs of many ALN students. (Welsh Gov, 2024)

OVERLAPS AND IMPLICATIONS

The educational journey of learners with ALN is marked by significant challenges that extend far beyond traditional academic barriers. With nearly half of ALN learners experiencing persistent absence and disproportionately high exclusion rates, we are confronting a critical issue that demands comprehensive understanding and innovative solutions. These statistics are not merely numbers but represent real students struggling to engage with an educational system that may not fully accommodate their unique learning requirements.

The stark disparity in exclusion rates, particularly for learners with ADHD, reveals a profound systemic challenge. Where ADHD learners experience substantially higher fixed-term and permanent exclusions compared to other neurodevelopmental groups, we see a clear indication that current educational approaches are inadequately designed to support their specific needs. This suggests an urgent requirement for targeted interventions, specialised teacher training, and a fundamental reimagining of behavioural management strategies that can effectively support neurodivergent learners.

The significant proportion of ALN learners in EOTAS provisions highlights a critical gap in mainstream educational support. This statistic is not a condemnation, but an opportunity to critically examine how our educational infrastructure can be redesigned to create more inclusive, adaptive learning environments. It signals the potential need for additional resources, specialised training, and a more nuanced understanding of how different learning needs can be effectively supported within traditional school settings.

The prevalence of ASC and ADHD within the ALN population underscores the diverse and complex nature of additional learning needs. These figures demand a shift from generic support models to highly personalised, condition-specific interventions that recognise the unique cognitive, social, and emotional landscapes of neurodivergent learners. It calls for a holistic approach that integrates academic support, behavioural strategies, and social-emotional development.

Fundamentally, the data reveals a complex interplay between additional learning needs, behavioural challenges, and educational engagement. This intricate relationship cannot be addressed through simplistic, one-size-fits-all approaches. Instead, it requires a sophisticated, multi-agency strategy that views each learner as an individual with unique strengths, challenges, and potential. Schools, families, healthcare professionals, and policymakers must collaborate to create adaptive, supportive ecosystems that enable ALN learners to not just participate in education but to truly thrive.

The implications of these findings extend beyond immediate educational outcomes. They represent a critical opportunity to reimagine inclusive education - a system that doesn't just accommodate difference but celebrates and supports it. By developing comprehensive, tailored support strategies, we can transform educational experiences for ALN learners, potentially altering life trajectories and challenging long-standing systemic barriers.

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The approach must be rooted in empathy, evidence, and a commitment to understanding the complex needs of every learner. The data presents not a problem to be solved, but a profound invitation to create more responsive, compassionate educational environments that recognise and nurture the potential of all students, regardless of their learning profile.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Rob Jones".

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