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TRANSCRIPT OF "FILE ON 4" – "*OUTCLASSED: THE KIDS EXCLUDED FROM SCHOOL*"

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PRODUCER: Alys Harte

EDITOR: Gail Champion

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MUSIC

GOLDBERG: Last year, more than six and a half thousand children were permanently excluded from schools across the UK and many will end up in a Pupil Referral Unit. Tonight we'll take you inside the schools where children removed from mainstream education come to learn.

MAN: Most of the students do want to learn, they do realise it's their last chance; they do realise that we are an opportunity for them to succeed in life rather than following in the family's footsteps or becoming jobless - and potentially homeless, some of them.

GOLDBERG: But what happens when these hard to reach youngsters misbehave? Tonight, we speak to whistleblowers worried about the levels of physical confrontation they face in these schools - and the levels of restraint used to combat it.

WHISTLEBLOWER: Some of these children are extremely violent and we're expected to restrain them until they are calm. I've been kicked, I've been hit, I've been head-butted, I've been spat at in my face.

GOLDBERG: Unlike in the police and prison services, there's little monitoring of the use of restraint in schools, yet our research shows it's happening thousands of times a year. And there's concern it's getting out of hand. Have you heard about young people being injured?

CAFFREY: Children that are getting their noses burst, you know, burst lips, musculoskeletal issues, sprains and strains.

ACTUALITY AT SCHOOL

GOLDBERG: Kids arriving for school - but this is no ordinary academy or comprehensive. This is Bradford District Pupil Referral Unit - the PRU. A school for 160 kids that mainstream education can't handle.

TEACHER: All right, young man? How are you?

BOY: I'm all right.

TEACHER: No handshake, no entry. Good lad.

GOLDBERG: Every day, more than thirty pupils are permanently excluded from school in England alone, and many end up in places like this or in other forms of what's known as 'alternative provision'. We've been granted rare access to these corridors and classrooms.

DYSON: So as we come through here, we are approaching a very different door to all the doors that you'll see. This is a steel door we had put in

GOLDBERG: The school's full time police officer, Tom Dyson, takes us on a tour.

It is a big, sturdy metal door. If you don't mind me saying so, it is like something you might get in a prison, isn't it?

DYSON: Similar, similar, yeah, not quite as good, not quite as strong. And that's its job really. You know, the other doors, the students will kick through them. If they want to kick through them, they will kick through them. We had mag locks put on when we first moved in here and we were told by the council that no child could ever get through them doors. Let me tell you, within thirty seconds there were children running round the school – straight through the doors as if the magnets weren't existing. I think it takes something like a Range Rover to pull it down, it's that strong. And the kids wanted this – they were fed up with other kids running into their lessons and causing problems, which might surprise you.

ACTUALITY IN CLASSROOM

MUSIC

GOLDBERG: We've just walked towards a group of kids in a classroom who are using software to build their own music tracks. What've we just been listening to there then?

NATSHOY: My track, innit.

GOLDBERG: You're quite good.

NATSHOY: I want to be better than everyone in this UK grime thing, innit.

GOLDBERG: Like who? Like Skepta?

NATSHOY: Like Skepta, Stonesy, every one of them, innit.

GOLDBERG: You might not want to answer this question, and if you don't want to you don't have to, but why are you here?

NATSHOY: Fighting and stuff.

GOLDBERG: You've been fighting, yeah?

NATSHOY: Yeah man.

GOLDBERG: So you ended up here in this school, yeah?

NATSHOY: Yeah, yeah.

GOLDBERG: And what's it like? What do you like about the school?

NATSHOY: You get to do stuff what you don't do in mainstream. You get to do like music tech and stuff. You don't really do them in mainstream, you get to go out and enjoy yourself, so it's a good school.

GOLDBERG: Did you get into any trouble at home for fighting at your old school?

NATSHOY: Yeah, yeah, yeah, obviously parents gave me a bit of bother, innit, but

GOLDBERG: If you don't make it as a rapper, as an MC, what else do you think you might do?

BOY [OFF MIC]: Drug dealer.

NATSHOY: Not no drug dealer, are you mad? I don't want to go ... but obviously ...

GOLDBERG: But you're going to do everything you can to be a big rapper, yeah?

NATSHOY: Yeah, yeah, standard.

GOLDBERG: How old are you now?

NATSHOY: 14.

GOLDBERG: Do you wish you were back at mainstream school?

NATSHOY: Well, a bit, cos I could get jobs, innit. Obviously some jobs I can't get, if I give them my CV, I've been in District PRU.

GOLDBERG: So, do you think that because you've come to the PRU, when employers see that on your application, they will automatically just rule you out?

NATSHOY: Yeah, they will, they will.

GOLDBERG: Have people told you that?

NATSHOY: Yeah, my mum told me that and my dad's told me that a million times.

GOLDBERG: Have you learned a lesson, do you think, by coming here and not being allowed to go to mainstream school?

NATSHOY: Well, it is better here, innit boys? But it's not good to be here. I haven't had a fight yet. Not yet.

GOLDBERG: That's good. You've got talent. I hope you do well.

NATSHOY: Yeah, man.

GOLDBERG: Some of the other kids at the PRU pose a risk; others are at risk – so before classes start, each pupil is checked with a metal detector. Lee Whitworth is the Associate Head.

WHITWORTH: So, kids are ... front of house, the children arrive here in the morning, they'll get searched. The reason we take the phones off the children is, let's say a lot of our children have, are involved in activities or have links outside the building

WHITWORTH (cont) : which are part of the safeguarding concerns that we have for them, so it might be drugs related, it might be that they're victims of abuse of some description or involved in inappropriate activities with adults, so actually the whole reason we take the phones off them is to give them the chance of being children, being students without those issues constantly bearing down on them in a classroom without their phone going off.

GOLDBERG: There are currently 15,000 kids in Pupil Referral Units in England - up 10% from last year - putting real pressure on staff. Despite the challenges, Bradford District PRU is rated Good by Ofsted, with pupil behaviour commended by inspectors. Staff here passionately believe that they make a difference to the lives of their pupils, who usually come from deprived backgrounds.

ACTUALITY IN CAR

GOLDBERG: Driving to an off-site class, Lee Whitworth again.

WHITWORTH: Many of the young people that we've got here have, before they've been formally excluded, have disengaged with mainstream education anyway for all sorts of reasons, you know, associated with family circumstances etc, so their referral to us is an attempt to get them to re-engage. If they don't re-engage with us, then we simply don't accept that. There isn't anywhere else for them to go, because we are the last chance hotel, if you like, trying to try to give them an education that isn't in a secure setting.

GOLDBERG: So effectively it's either the PRU or the streets, really?

WHITWORTH: I suppose that's true. Yeah, I mean, we do also have young people who might have undiagnosed issues - for example, autistic spectrum disorder. If those things get missed, in actual fact how they present will be seen as a behavioural issue, which means that they can then be referred to us.

ACTUALITY ON GRAY'S INN ROAD

GOLDBERG: Youngsters who become disruptive often have problems that haven't been diagnosed in mainstream schools. 80% of children in Pupil Referral Units have some form of special educational need. Now that might range from severe autism to mild dyslexia. So I've come now to Gray's Inn Road, this is in the heart of London's legal district. There's a swanky office block in front of me. This is the office of Matrix Chambers, and the lawyers here help families who believe their children have been unfairly excluded from mainstream schools.

PURCHASE: Exclusion should be a last resort in all cases, but the guidance recognises that there is a particularly strong reason in the case of children with Special Educational Needs not to exclude.

GOLDBERG: Matthew Purchase is a Director of the School Exclusion Project, which provides free legal advice to families of children facing exclusion. The vast majority of cases they deal with involve children with special educational needs.

PURCHASE: Unfortunately, what we do see, both in our experience on the project and in the national statistics, is that there still are extremely high proportions of children with special educational needs who are being permanently excluded. Sometimes those children can pose particular difficulties for mainstream schools, and that is why particularly vulnerable children like that deserve to have every effort made to allow them to remain in that sort of school environment, if that's what their parents want for them.

GOLDBERG: So, how common are illegal exclusions then?

PURCHASE: A significant number are overturned on appeal by the independent review panel - roughly 25%.

GOLDBERG: That's quite a significant number – one in four appeals against exclusions succeed. Presumably then because the children were wrongly excluded?

PURCHASE: Yes, exactly.

GOLDBERG: The Department for Education told us that schools have a clear legal duty not to discriminate against pupils, and that head teachers should, as far as possible, avoid permanently excluding any pupil with a statement of SEN. Yet in England, children with Special Educational Needs are seven times more likely to be permanently excluded than those without.

ACTUALITY IN LONDON

GOLDBERG: I'm just walking down an ordinary suburban street in London to see the family of a boy who has been excluded only this week from school - his family think unfairly.

ACTUALITY KNOCKING AT DOOR

GOLDBERG: Hello, it's Adrian from Radio 4. Hello.

MOTHER: Come in.

GOLDBERG: They want to protect their son, so they've asked us not to use their names - or identify the school.

FATHER: He is a popular and a helpful boy, but when he turned 14, he started getting into arguments with teachers, and teachers took a very hard line on that and disagreements started quickly escalating into conflicts, and as a result of that he was put on the Special Educational Needs register for social and emotional difficulties.

GOLDBERG: Remarkably, the family say they only found out that their son had Special Educational Needs when they got the letter from the school telling them he had been permanently excluded. They successfully argued that it was unlawful, because the school failed to properly meet those needs.

FATHER: As far as we're concerned, the school didn't use permanent exclusion as a measure of last resort, it was more a measure of first resort.

GOLDBERG: Why do you think your son's school is so keen to be rid of him?

FATHER: They seem to have no understanding of how to support a child with Special Educational Needs; they don't seem to be particularly concerned about supporting a child with Special Educational Needs. Schools seem to be able to act with impunity when it comes to excluding children. They are so focused on maintaining discipline and getting results that they have this kind of 'one size fits all' approach to all pupils. I can understand that from the school's point of view. It's devastating for the child.

GOLDBERG: So what of the lad himself? He says that when he returned to school after getting his exclusion overturned, staff attitudes towards him had hardened.

BOY: I felt like I kind of just wanted to get all of that kind of bad, being a bad boy, I just kind of wanted to leave it in the past, and I found that really hard because the way the teachers were kind of treating me was like I'm now in that kind of category, I'm now that bad kid in school, and I felt like it was hard. Like, for example, if someone was talking in line, they would kind of automatically assume that it was me or they would just treat me differently, and I found that kind of unfair.

GOLDBERG: A few weeks ago, after another incident, the boy was excluded again. You're in a situation now where you're out of mainstream education. You're coming to the point where exams start to loom for people of your age. How worried are you that you might end up with no GCSEs or that you might struggle to get back into a mainstream school for your GCSEs?

BOY: I worry about it a lot, because when you're in year 10, for most schools if you're expelled, they don't want to take you in any other school, even if they have a vacancy of students, they still don't want to take you in.

MUSIC

GOLDBERG: The boy's school told us that, while they can't comment on individual cases, they are aware of their statutory obligations towards pupils in any exclusion process. They say they are rated Good by Ofsted and are proud of the education and support they offer pupils with a range of academic and social needs. There have been calls for years to make schools take responsibility for a child's GCSE results, even after they have been permanently excluded, to prevent them excluding lower achieving pupils so as to climb the educational league tables. The Department for Education have told us this is now in the pipeline, but we have access to analysis from an independent research company which gives us an insight into what impact kids leaving a school can have on its vital GCSE performance. Philip Nye is from Education Datalab. He explained their methodology.

NYE: We basically produced reweighted league tables where we said, let's look at how much time a child has spent at your school. At the minute, the way the league tables work, if the child has left before Year 11, they're not going to count in your results. We said, actually if the child has spent 80% of their time with you, if they've stayed with you up till Year 10, let's count their results 80% to your results.

GOLDBERG: How significant a difference does it make then if you reweight the tables in the way that you have done?

NYE: In some cases, we found a really significant impact. We found that a school could change their pass rates by up to 15 percentage points, so we could be talking about a school where 55% of kids got five A* to C GCSEs, but actually, if we reweighted their results, that would drop to about 40% - so a really big impact.

GOLDBERG: They noticed a trend in one particular kind of school.

NYE: So we did see a range of schools losing quite considerable numbers of pupils. Several were sponsored academies, which are a particular type of school that is trying to turn round its performance, it's generally been a failing school that's been replaced by a sponsored academy, and in some of those cases we did see really quite considerable numbers of pupils leaving, and we think it's those cases that the Department for Education should take a closer look at.

GOLDBERG: What could be the reasons for the rather larger number of disappearing pupils than from sponsored academies?

NYE: Obviously, if you're trying to turn around a school, you have a very big incentive to try and show some improvement in your performance. We wonder if in some cases that is leading schools to behave in not the most ethical way.

GOLDBERG: The Department for Education said that any allegation that a school is directing pupils to alternative provision inappropriately would be taken very seriously and fully investigated. The research found that, in general, the departure of children led to relatively small improvement to a school's results - but for some, the impact was more dramatic. One which stood out was Darwen Aldridge Community Academy in Lancashire.

NYE: Darwen Aldridge is one of the ones that we see the biggest impact when we reweight the league tables; that's because it loses a very large number of pupils. In the year group who finished their GCSEs in 2014 and 2015, we saw a total of 35 children going off to alternative provision, and that's really high compared to a lot of other schools. In other cases, we'd be talking maybe single digits. So really we just would ask the question why it's so high, whether that is always being done in both the children and the school's best interests or whether maybe the school's best interests are coming first. This all had a very flattering effect on their league table results. In 2015, we actually think their results would have been closer to 40% rather than 57% for a pass rate that they actually got if we'd reweighted their results.

GOLDBERG: So an example of disappearing children, disappearing for whatever reason, their absence helping the school's academic performance and its standing in the league table?

NYE: To some extent, that's what you'd expect. The children who leave, who might be sent to alternative provision probably are less likely to be on track to get their good GCSE results, but this is a really large number of children going to alternative provision. We would ask why that's higher than other schools.

MUSIC

GOLDBERG: We wanted to ask them too, so we travelled to Darwen - a former mill town just outside Blackburn. Darwen Aldridge Community Academy - now housed in an imposing new school close to the town centre - was founded in 2008 and now has more than 1,300 pupils.

LOUGHRAN: I think it's important to understand the context of this town and this academy in this community.

GOLDBERG: Brendan Loughran is the Principal.

LOUGHRAN: One of the characteristics of this area are relatively high levels of what we describe as student mobility, but that mobility isn't just students who've been on roll at the academy and have moved out. There's also a fairly high level of mobility of students moving into the academy and into the area.

GOLDBERG: But you also are similar to other sponsored academies in that you're trying to turn around a school and you have - in inverted commas - lost more than the average school would of pupils. People say that's because sponsored academies like this one want to get rid of the troublesome and difficult pupils who might drag down your league table ranking.

LOUGHRAN: Well we wholeheartedly refute that challenge. We've got an absolute commitment to inclusion and equality of opportunity in this academy.

GOLDBERG: But the net effect of that mobility for the cohort taking their GCSEs in the year 2015, your league table ranking would have been 16% lower than it actually is.

LOUGHRAN: Well, I'm not certain how we know that. I think there are a number of assumptions built in to that perspective. If the child had have stayed here, how do we know they would have performed any worse or better?

GOLDBERG: The children who go to alternative provision, tell me about them. Tell me why you can't deal with them here.

LOUGHRAN: When students move into secondary schools, we quite often will recognise social need, emotional need, and that quite often manifests itself in behavioural challenge that we need to manage, and we do that and we do it incredibly successfully. There are many examples where we've seen many students through to get great results. I can give you examples of students who've been excluded from other schools, that have come to this school, have achieved incredible results and have gone off to university and are in great employment. I can give you those examples, I can give you those contacts, you can speak to those people. So we're absolutely proud of our approach with those particular people.

GOLDBERG: No pressure from you, no pressure from teachers, no suggestion that wouldn't your child be better off perhaps in the alternative provision school?

LOUGHRAN: None at all, we don't do that. We, our interest is the best interest of the child.

GOLDBERG: The statistics for kids in alternative provision make for bleak reading. Just 1% come away with five good GCSEs compared with almost 60% in mainstream. Many end up on benefits or in the criminal justice system. But at Bradford District PRU, getting the kids to turn up every day is a good start - and for some it's working better than mainstream school.

LUKE: To me, it were hard for me, like, I felt it were hard to do my lessons, do my work, because, like, I never used to get the help because I never asked for help and I never used to get the help I needed.

GOLDBERG: How many schools did you go to, how many secondary schools?

LUKE: I've been to how many secondary schools? I've been to two secondary schools and I've been to about three of these PRUs.

GOLDBERG: Oh, you've been to other PRUs before as well?

LUKE: Yeah.

GOLDBERG: Do you think of yourself as a bad lad?

LUKE: I don't, no. I really don't, no. Because even when I go home, I'm fine with my mum, you know. I'm fine with everybody, my friends and that. It's just, I don't know, I don't know what it were, really. I like this school. Like, they've got things that I can do, like mechanics and music and all that and sport.

GOLDBERG: What do you want to do?

LUKE: When I leave school, I want to produce music, write my own lyrics, and if that doesn't work, hopefully a mechanic.

GOLDBERG: Are you positive about the future? Have you got a bright future?

LUKE: Yeah, yeah, course I have.

GOLDBERG: You're a bright lad.

LUKE: Yeah, everybody says that.

GOLDBERG: At Bradford District PRU, they pledge never to permanently exclude pupils. That's no small promise, given that the most likely reason for exclusion from a mainstream school is persistent disruptive behaviour.

DYSON: My inspector tells me I do the most dangerous job in the whole of West Yorkshire and sometimes I believe him.

GOLDBERG: Police officer Tom Dyson is stationed full time at the PRU - and he's got the scars to prove it.

DYSON: I've been assaulted as many times as any other police officer. You know, a couple of weeks ago, I was involved in an incident where a student bit me quite severely.

GOLDBERG: Oh gosh, you're showing me your thumb there. My gosh, it's like there's a big bite mark all the whole way through your thumb nail. That's a really savage bite a couple of weeks on.

DYSON: That's five weeks old is that. It was black at the time. So yes, I do do a dangerous job, and I have potentially been in positions, but if it weren't me in the danger position, it'd be one of the teaching staff, and I'm more trained than the staff here. I have seven years of previous police and street training, if you like, as well as all the courses I go on, so I'd put myself in front of them in order to kind of protect the teachers, which leaves me obviously in harm's way, but that's why they pay me to come and work here, so I'm happy with that, and it's not an overly common thing. It generally goes in little stages, like nobody will assault anybody for weeks and weeks and then all of a sudden there'll be three instances where we're involved in a potentially dangerous situation. That's the worst we've had here and it just happened to be me who was on the receiving end of it.

GOLDBERG: When you do have to remove a child or restrain them, what kind of training is there for staff?

DYSON: The training we use is something called Team Teach. Now 90% of Team Teach is actually communication, be it verbal or kind of visual rather than actually going hands on with a child. Hands on with a child is the last kind of straw that we come to. It's something that we don't particularly want to do, but there is obviously times where it becomes necessary. We use various techniques which we've learned through the Team Teach programme to kind of guide them out. Other times, there are more serious, more kind of restraints that we use, where we physically have to prevent a child from going somewhere, whether it be trying to attack another child or trying to hurt himself or commit some serious damage, for example, where we'll have to potentially hold the child against their will. But as I say, as soon as the kind of potential for harming them has gone, or harming another has gone, we then ease up on the restraint we use and then we go into a kind of de-escalation programme.

MUSIC

GOLDBERG: Not every school has the issue of restraint under control. We've had email from a member of staff at one Pupil Referral Unit and I'm just opening it up again now. They say that physical restraints on pupils there – on children – have shot up over the last couple of years. There have been hundreds of restraints on these kids, and the staff have suffered as well. There have been injuries – punches, bites, bruises, the police have been called. So we have been to meet that staff member. As you can understand, they're worried that speaking out might cost them their job, so we've had their words re-voiced by an actor.

WHISTLEBLOWER: When I first started at the Pupil Referral Unit, I didn't once get involved in a physical restraint. I think I only ever saw one, and you'd see that in a normal mainstream school anywhere from time to time. Now a physical restraint is pretty much happening every day, if not several times a day. Some of these children are extremely violent and we're expected to restrain them until they are calm. But of course, when a child has got mental health issues and you've restrained them, in my eyes anyway it's going to take months to repair that. They might have been subject to physical abuse themselves, so it just seems to me that just holding them and restraining them and not allowing them to move could resemble something that's happened to them in the past.

GOLDBERG: Something potentially that might have contributed to their poor behaviour, which has seen them excluded from school?

WHISTLEBLOWER: Yeah, and it's a view of many of our staff. You just sort of feel forced into it, even though you don't want to do it and you don't feel it's right to be doing it, because this is coming from the top, you feel as if you're not doing your job. And sometimes when I've got involved, I've been kicked, I've been hit, I've been head-butted, I've been spat at in my face. It's not survival on a day-to-day basis – it's survival lesson-by-lesson.

GOLDBERG: What training have you had for this?

WHISTLEBLOWER: We do have limited short amount of training for this, but a few afternoons of training sometimes doesn't seem quite enough to prepare you. It causes us a lot of stress. I didn't go into a PRU to restrain kids; I went to get them back to school.

GOLDBERG: We spoke with a number of other staff from the school and they backed up the story. They said they were surprised that the overuse of restraint in their Pupil Referral Unit hadn't been picked up by Ofsted.

MUSIC

GOLDBERG: To find out if this was a problem in other alternative provision schools, we submitted a Freedom of Information request to 207 local authorities around the UK with safeguarding responsibilities. We asked the number of times restraints have been used on children at Pupil Referral Units in their council area - and on the occasions where they had, if staff or pupils had been injured. Fewer than a third – just 62 – gave us any information. The rest either said they didn't have it or they didn't respond. But this small snapshot revealed there had been more than 14,000 incidents of restraint in four years and there had been more than a thousand injuries.

CAFFREY: It's not untypical for some schools to report that they're in double figures every day in relation to restraints happening in their units. That does give me concern – that's a lot of restraints.

GOLDBERG: Joanne Caffrey is a former police officer and an expert in the management of violence and challenging behaviour. She trains teachers in over 200 schools across the UK in the use of restraint.

CAFFREY: It's quite shocking really with some schools. I often quote the Winterbourne View case, where it was deemed the high number of restraints were used there by the staff which averaged 1.2 restraints per day. But there's a lot of schools that I'm working with who are conducting far more than one restraint a day in the school, but yet no management systems are flagging that up. It's common practice in the culture within the

CAFFREY (cont): police and prisons that any intervention has a high risk of injury or potential death, but that culture isn't in the education system.

GOLDBERG: Why are so many schools using restraint so often?

CAFFREY: Partly because of the culture and the lack of knowledge of doing anything else. It's easier and it's cheaper to just do the restraints. Staff, they get a minimal amount of training, if indeed any, and then they're expected to put restraints on to children who are being volatile and unstable in relation to the movement and the risk of harm therefore is high.

GOLDBERG: What is the danger of not being, in your view, fully trained?

CAFFREY: A small amount of training can actually be dangerous, because the person then may believe that they are competent, but that could then give them a false level of confidence and then encourage them to go in more for restraints.

GOLDBERG: Have you heard about young people being injured?

CAFFREY: I have, yes. Children getting their noses burst, burst lips, musculoskeletal issues, sprains and strains.

GOLDBERG: So what's it like to be the parent of a child who is repeatedly restrained at school? This mum knows only too well. Her son has had a history of problems at his primary school. She didn't want to be identified.

MOTHER: He is bubbly, gorgeous, creative and full of life. He doesn't have a diagnosis of anything. He's possibly autistic.

GOLDBERG: But a few weeks ago, the school unexpectedly got in touch.

MOTHER: I got a phone call to say that my son had been restrained for a continuous period of time, not just little pieces of time, and I was absolutely horrified. And what they said was, it was nine or ten staff had actually restrained him for that time, and all I could think of was - and how does my child feel in this?

GOLDBERG: How did you feel about that?

MOTHER: Devastated. Absolutely devastated and heartbroken. No parent would want that for any child. The way I feel is if that happened in any other place in life, that you just wouldn't get away with it. But schools seem to be able to get away with it, because they have the law on their side that says to keep themselves safe, to keep the child safe, to keep the property safe they're allowed to do it. It just seems incredibly unfair to me.

GOLDBERG: What did your child say about the restraint?

MOTHER: He was very, very cross and he doesn't ever want to go back to that school or any other school – understandably.

GOLDBERG: And what would you say the impact on him has been?

MOTHER: He doesn't want to be away from me or other close members of our family. He's very fragile, he cries a lot, he doesn't sleep, he's just incredibly emotional.

GOLDBERG: How often has it happened before?

MOTHER: It's been happening once or twice a week for possibly about a year now.

GOLDBERG: In your experience then, has it been overused, inappropriately used?

MOTHER: Err yes, I think yes. As a parent, it's very difficult; if they use it once, it's one time too many.

PATERSON: Because we're not monitoring restraint, we don't know the extent in the nature of the problem.

GOLDBERG: In our Freedom of Information request, a hundred local authorities couldn't provide any information about the number of restraints at schools in their area; another 45 failed to respond, leaving a dangerous gap in knowledge according to Dr Brodie Paterson - an academic and clinical director of CALM training.

PATERSON: Schools tend to be wary of kind of washing their dirty linen in public; they don't want to be transparent about this. It's really important that schools are transparent about the use of restraint, it's really important this data's available nationally.

GOLDBERG: What do we know about the companies that teach teachers in the use of restraints?

PATERSON: One of the issues is about inadequate regulation of the companies that teach restraint. You could, should you choose tomorrow, go off and decide to set up a company and start offering restraint training to schools. There's absolutely nothing whatsoever to stop you doing that - you don't need any qualifications, you don't need any background in the area, you don't actually ever have to have worked in a school at all. You can

GOLDBERG: So there's no national overall governing standard for the teaching of restraint?

PATERSON: There is no mandatory framework covering the regulation of companies that provide restraint training to schools.

GOLDBERG: Does that concern you?

PATERSON: It concerns me hugely.

GOLDBERG: What's your educated guess as to the scale of physical damage being caused to young people by restraint?

PATERSON: I've certainly come across scenarios where I think the child was lucky to survive the restraint. I think to some extent we've been lucky, I think genuinely we've been lucky, I think we've had some near misses. I think we've had some very significant injuries. These injuries have been seen as isolated incidences as opposed to part of a pattern. I think what you're gradually seeing is increasing awareness.

GOLDBERG: Schools watchdog Ofsted has the job of identifying whether restraint has been used, well, with restraint, or whether schools have overstepped the mark when dealing with disruptive pupils. Sean Harford is their National Director of Education.

HARFORD: The inappropriate use of physical intervention is a serious safeguarding issue. It's actually true we've found inappropriate use of physical interventions in some registered alternative provision, as well as others, and where that's happened and it's been brought to our attention we will take firm action.

GOLDBERG: Do you routinely ask for restraint figures when you go into an alternative provision school as Ofsted?

HARFORD: Whether every inspector has asked for that every time, I can't say, but certainly it will be part of the kind of lines of enquiry within that kind of provision.

GOLDBERG: Sure, but it isn't an absolute routine guaranteed check that you would carry out?

HARFORD: Well, we don't write down a dot-to-dot for inspectors to carry out on inspection. Our inspections are based around lines of enquiry and of course that might be more appropriate in some types of AP compared with others, depending on the youngsters that the AP is providing for.

GOLDBERG: We've been contacted by people who say to us that they're very worried about the excessive use of restraint which wasn't picked up by Ofsted. How can Ofsted's report be at such variance with what staff are saying?

HARFORD: Well, what I'd say is, if those staff know that's going on, then they should actually bring that to our attention. We have a method through which people can whistleblow and can complain about schools, whether they are users of that school or they are staff at that school. So if they know that's going on, rather than wait till we've come and gone away, they should bring that to our attention and we can take that into consideration when we go and inspect those schools.

GOLDBERG: The Department for Education told us the decision to use restraint is down to the professional judgment of school staff, depending on the individual circumstances.

ACTUALITY IN PRU

GOLDBERG: Back at Bradford District PRU, praised by Ofsted for the outstanding care and support shown by staff, Associate Head Lee Whitworth is wary of the impact a physical restraint can have on the school's hard-won relationship with a student.

WHITWORTH: The majority of the children that we have here are in need of social and emotional support and development and therefore getting yourselves into a physical situation with a child is really going to unpick and destroy any relationship you have, and so we avoid at all costs losing that relationship. Every day is a fresh start here at District PRU, so whatever happens today, children come in and know that it's forgiven and forgotten.

MUSIC

GOLDBERG: So the task of teaching youngsters that mainstream schools were either unwilling or unable to handle continues. It's no easy feat achieving academic excellence with kids facing so many problems in their lives. But many of the children do respond positively, and amid the challenges and hurdles, there's determination and optimism too.

LUKE: Well, we've just been doing a bit of DJ-ing, you know, spitting a bit of lyrics, trying to make a song and that. When you get to get that qualification, I mean like you can go to clubs and DJ and do some lyrics.

GOLDBERG: So you think you could make a living out of this or it could help you make a living, yeah?

LUKE: Yeah, yeah. I enjoy school, that's why I come every day. Like, my other school, I didn't like it, so I didn't used to go.

GOLDBERG: But this is, this is good?

LUKE: Yeah.

GOLDBERG: Well it's great to see you enjoying it. I don't want to stop your pleasure. Go on – get back in there.