Interventions to reduce school exclusion are intended to mitigate the adverse effects of this school sanction. Some approaches, namely those involving enhancement of academic skills, counselling, mentoring/monitoring and those targeting skills training for teachers, have a temporary effect in reducing exclusion. More evaluations are needed to identify the most effective types of intervention; and whether similar effects are also found in different countries.

What did the review study?
School exclusion is associated with undesirable effects on developmental outcomes. It increases the likelihood of poor academic performance, antisocial behavior, and poor employment prospects. This school sanction disproportionally affects males, ethnic minorities, those who come from disadvantaged economic backgrounds, and those with special educational needs.

This review assesses the effectiveness of programmes to reduce the prevalence of exclusion.

What studies are included?
Included studies evaluated school-based interventions or school-supported interventions to reduce the rates of exclusion. Interventions were implemented in mainstream schools and targeted school-aged children from four to 18, irrespective of nationality or social background. Only randomised controlled trials are included.

The evidence base covers 37 studies. Thirty-three studies were from the USA, three from the UK, and for one study the country was not clear.

What are the main results in this review?
School-based interventions cause a small and significant drop in exclusion rates during the first six months after intervention (on average), but this effect is not sustained. Interventions seemed...
to be more effective at reducing some types of exclusion such as expulsion and in-school exclusion.

Four intervention types - enhancement of academic skills, counselling, mentoring/monitoring, and skills training for teachers – had significant desirable effects on exclusion. However, the number of studies in each case is low, so this result needs to be treated with caution.

There is no impact of the interventions on antisocial behaviour.

Variations in effect sizes are not explained by participants’ characteristics, the theoretical basis of the interventions, or the quality of the intervention. Independent evaluator teams reported lower effect sizes than research teams who were also involved in the design and/or delivery of the intervention.

What do the findings in this review mean?
School-based interventions are effective at reducing school exclusion immediately after, and for a few months after, the intervention (6 months on average). Four interventions presented promising and significant results in reducing exclusion, that is, enhancement of academic skills, counselling, mentoring/monitoring, skills training for teachers. However, since the number of studies for each sub-type of intervention was low, we suggest these results should be treated with caution.

Most of the studies come from the USA. Evaluations are needed from other countries in which exclusion is common. Further research should take advantage of the possibility of conducting cluster-randomised controlled trials, whilst ensuring that the sample size is sufficiently large.