

## School Exclusions – Task and Finish Group report

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### 1. Summary

- 1.1. This report sets out the work and final recommendations of the Task and Finish Group since its creation last November. We have made recommendations that seek to increase communication across the whole education environment, encourage cooperation across all schools (regardless of status), give all staff the tools to act appropriately, provide a resource that can in good time support users. Our final report is attached as an appendix as is the Data report.
- 1.2. Our hope is that each of these recommendations should help ensure that permanent exclusions are used consistently and appropriately but as the last resort, so that Somerset schools can continue their work to create the best possible conditions for every child to thrive and progress. This is what teachers, parents and children themselves have told us they want too.

### 2. Issues for consideration

- 2.1. Members of the Committee are asked to support our recommendations to the Director for Children's Services, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families / Cabinet Member for Education and Council Transformation.

**We are all in this together:** A clear pathway needs to be developed for all children in Somerset Schools that ensures continued support where necessary, particularly during transition between schools/stages, meaning children are appropriately supported across education.

If the local authority can facilitate a protocol that centres on the child first and develop better coordination and cooperation between Head teachers who can agree measures and protocols to try avoiding exclusions, for example through negotiated transfers, this will be a great start. This could develop into a forum where representations are made by all schools, and children who are at risk of exclusion are discussed and if a pupil is agreed by all heads are "hard to place" then they have the ability to place pupils at provision that is appropriate for that child at that time.

**Joint working:** Agree a simple, transparent 'Somerset code of responsibilities and rights' that schools, parents and children would benefit from knowing that can be applied firmly and consistently by Somerset Head Teachers. Our proposed

Code is included later in the report.

**Get in early:** It was clear that the lack of early help support has had an impact on the exclusion rates. SCC needs to ensure that all early help practitioners and resources can be accessed in a timely manner, an up to date register, open to everyone would increase supply.

**Power for Heads to decide:** We suggest that the local authority could coordinate a dedicated team of specialist support staff, time managed by the local heads network, that will allow each school to have appropriate access to Educational psychologist, Occupational Therapist, Speech Assisted Learning, Early Help so schools and children can benefit from improved certainty and continuity of support resources.

**Ability to act:** The SENCO is key to a solution, but often they are not given the profile or priority within a school to get their job done. We recommend Heads give SENCO the time and support to lead and the LA/academies encourage and value SENCO's to enable them to meet and share best practice. Another useful resource would be a phone helpline to offer support or answer questions.

**You get back what you put in:** The funds available from all partners need to be managed in meaningful manner that will offer opportunities. We heard how for example non-school provision would work for some children. Consideration needs to be given for the development of vocational centres that offer a completely different curriculum, which are not left to the free market to provide; and to allow for development of and support for schools to set up specialist units that can support the whole school population- not simply isolation spaces, with highly trained relational workers that understand elements of trauma and anxiety within schools. It would be helpful if the Local Authority could commission a pilot?

**Give Heads the tools to succeed:** Schools & Academies should ensure there is well-evidenced, meaningful and accessible training and support for new and existing schoolteachers & leaders to develop, embed and maintain, positive behaviour cultures.

**Inclusion not Exclusion. Children first, Change the outlook:** Recognition that the impact on the young person and their family of being excluded is huge and a support mechanism should be set up to reintegrate the child back into school at the earliest opportunity. Although PRU capacity is currently inadequate, care needs to be taken to ensure that an enhanced PRU capacity and availability does not make schools more ready to Exclude into a PRU. Part of the solution will be ore schools to create innovative types of intervention that obviate the need for Exclusion.

**Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCP's):** The process for applying for a

statutory assessment needs to be reviewed with SENCO's and families to ensure this is easily accessible. The supporting documentation for the EHC process needs to be reviewed and redesigned to improve its effectiveness in supporting positive outcomes for the child or young person.

**What makes a good policy:** We have seen and heard about excellent examples of good practice in Somerset where schools work hard to create environments that are inclusive for pupils and have flexibility to make small adjustments. We also wish to highlight how Bristol Schools are encouraged work collaboratively as they pay a fine (with money going into a secured fund) when they exclude each pupil. That money is then used make the child's future schooling possible by other means, the benefits were multiple, schools are encouraged to work closer together to prevent exclusion, and good practice would be more readily shared. It would also mean the exclusion would not remove a child from education.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1.** Before going into the detail of what the task group discovered through its work, it is important to place permanent exclusions in a wider context. We recognise that only a Head teacher can decide to exclude a pupil permanently and the reasons for that exclusion will be individual and specific to each child and setting therefore it would be too simplistic to conclude if the exclusions process was being used appropriately, or whether some schools were using exclusions as a means to remove disruptive and underperforming young people from their roll.
- 3.2.** We are aware that the timescale allotted for our review has precluded our ability to go into as much detail on some issues as they would have wished. These other issues are addressed at section 6 of this report and we suggest that these issues are picked up through the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee workplan. The regulations are clear that a meeting is not limited to those present in the same place, but includes electronic, digital or virtual locations (internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers).
- 3.3.** We feel that it is important to recognise that exclusion – both fixed period and permanent – can be part of an effective approach for head teachers to manage behaviour in schools. However, our review has shown that in some cases we need to support schools to understand and respond to individual children more effectively– particularly children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), Children in Need of additional help and protection as well as children who are disadvantaged – who may need additional support, and who might otherwise find themselves at risk of exclusion. Also, across various settings in Somerset it will be crucial to ensure that improvements are made so that exclusion from school does not mean exclusion from education, so that all children are able to access the education they deserve.
- 3.4.** We noted that every Head teacher we spoke with stated they excluded a child

with great reluctance, and that some only took that decision as they saw it as being the only way of obtaining the support the pupil needed. This in itself seems to be a perverse incentive to exclude. Our review highlighted that many of the problems that children presented in schools, resulting in permanent exclusions, were not specific to the process and the school itself but also included local community, wider societal factors as well as immediate and extended family behaviours. We heard that the number of children in Somerset with intersecting vulnerabilities was increasing.

- 3.5.** We have seen and heard about excellent examples of good practice in Somerset where schools work hard to create environments that are inclusive for pupils and have flexibility to make small adjustments. We also wish to highlight how Bristol Schools are encouraged work collaboratively as they pay a fine (with money going into a secured fund) when they exclude each pupil. That money is then used to make the child's future schooling possible by other means, the benefits were multiple, schools are encouraged to work closer together to prevent exclusion, and good practice would be more readily shared. It would also mean the exclusion would not remove a child from education.

#### **4. What we found out**

- 4.1. Each child is different**, and even with the best training there will be times when teachers need advice and guidance on how best to support them. PRU's reaching out and supporting schools, the opportunity to have a helpline or network where teachers or support workers can ask for help or just a friendly voice to listen and let them know they are not alone.
- 4.2. The direction of a school is set by the Head & their Senior Leadership Team**, a strong Head with a clear inclusive agenda will result in an inclusive school, asking "what can we do to support the young person?" or "how can we make the young person not feel troubled?" meaning that a school environment is created that will make it less likely that a young person "kicks off" and be excluded.
- 4.3. Intervention Best Practice.** We heard that the number and quality of interventions were key to avoiding Exclusion. Sharing best practice among Somerset schools can be especially valuable and better collaboration between schools should be encouraged by the Local Authority.
- 4.4. We heard that children with SEND or SEMH needs** were often diagnosed late and too often unreliably with early indicators being missed that led to exclusion. We heard that the disruption caused by a minority of children who misbehave imposed a disproportionate cost on school staff and if not adequately addressed could set a damaging example to the other children as the authority of the school and its staff would be reduced. It seemed as if there was a relatively small window of opportunity to identify the causes of poor behaviour and then put in place measures to support misbehaving or disruptive children.

- 4.5. Off rolling is not right.** We feel that the local authority should make it clear that in Somerset the practice regarding 'offrolling' should be absolutely avoided. It should not be confused with exclusion and used as means of removing children from the school. It should remain the school's responsibility to work with the child and get them back to school as soon as practicable.

## **5. Implications**

- 5.1.** Although the result of a permanent exclusion might seem obvious for the school, we wanted to understand what being permanently excluded meant to the child. We had the benefit of speaking with parents and carers of excluded children, and children in Pupil Referral Units (PRU) in Somerset during our review. What particularly struck us was the magnitude the effect of being permanently excluded had, not just on the excluded children, but also their family and how those effects had a long-term impact.
- 5.2.** We also noted that available evidence suggests that excluded children have worse trajectories, than non-excluded children, in the long term. Over one third of children who completed Key Stage 4 in alternative provision, such as a PRU go on to be NEET (not in education, employment or training). Exclusion also appears to be a marker for being at higher risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of crime, as 23% of young offenders sentenced to less than 12 months in custody had been permanently excluded from school prior to their sentence date.
- 5.3.** However, it would be wrong to suggest that we have found evidence that exclusion of any kind causes crime or that preventing the use of exclusion would prevent crime. There are many factors that may lead a child to becoming involved in criminal activity, and for some children these factors may well have been a part of the cause for them to have been excluded from school.
- 5.4.** We do feel that it is right to recognise exclusion as one indicator, among others, of a higher risk of exposure to and involvement in crime, and we should therefore fully consider the form and content of the education a child receives following exclusion. We therefore feel that Somerset children, particularly those that have been excluded, would benefit from this aspect being further investigated.

## **6. Background papers**

- 6.1.** Report to our 15 November 2019 meeting.

To aid our understanding Officers helpfully compiled a reading list for us. We are including this below so you can see the background information we have read. There were three broad categories of reading: i) What's driving exclusion; ii) The impact of exclusion; and iii) How exclusions might be reduced.

### **What's driving exclusion?**

[DfE \(2019\) School exclusion: a literature review on the continued disproportionate](#)

[exclusion of certain children](#)

[DfE 2016/17 Permanent and Fixed Term Exclusions in England](#)

[Exclusions review: Call for evidence Written evidence from The Children's Society The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2018/19](#)

### **The impact of exclusion**

[Parliament UK \(2018\) Forgotten children: alternative provision and the scandal of ever-increasing exclusions](#)

[Pippa Allen-Kinross \(2020\) Article - Hold schools 'responsible' for excluded pupils who join gangs, says children's commissioner](#)

[IPPR | Making The Difference Breaking the link between school exclusion and social exclusion](#)

[TES Off-rolling: Free school 'pushed home education'](#)

### **How exclusions might be reduced**

[All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime \(2019\) BACK TO SCHOOL? Breaking the link between school exclusions and knife crime](#)

[Children's Society \(2018b\) Transforming children & young people's mental health provision: The Children's Society's response to the departments of Health and Education's green paper](#)

[Centre for Social Justice \(2018\) Providing the alternative: How to transform school exclusion and the support that exists beyond](#)

**Statutory Guidance:** [DfE Statutory Guidance School Exclusion](#)