



School Exclusions - Task and Finish Group report

Introduction from Group Chair, Cllr Redman.

I would like to begin, as Chair of the Task and Finish Group, by thanking everyone that took time to contribute to this report, we have had more than 100 interactions, whether that was face-to-face or electronic. This information gave us a really great base for us to be able to see and hear about some innovative and in some cases inspiring ways schools are working, to include rather than exclude.

As well as being a Local Councillor, I am a Governor of a Primary School, I recognise the current education environment is challenging, but we can all agree that schools should be calm and safe places. Head teachers when considering exclusion have a tough choice to make, I know that they try to weigh the profound implications that exclusion can have on a young person's life with the interests and needs of pupils and staff in their school community.

To help inform our review we requested a data report to show exclusion rates locally and nationally. It demonstrated just how diverse numbers are for exclusions across our County and it confirmed Somerset as amongst the highest areas for excluding school children in England. Although exclusions rates are rising nationally and Somerset is following this trend, our high numbers must be a concern. We set out to look for reasons why Somerset would sit so high on the list of exclusions nationally. During our review we have seen good practice, we have seen weaker practice, but one of the things we are hoping to do is see how we can all work for the best for our young people. We recognise that in Somerset it is important that no child be left behind.

It would be too easy for us to tell head teachers what to do, we have tried to paint a picture that we hope will help guide staff.

Our report has identified excellent practice across Somerset, however we also found too much variation in exclusion practice, a simple first step would be a clear commitment to ask, as many schools do 'what could we have done differently to prevent this from escalating and to prevent this happening again'. However, the perception of many of the excluded students and their families we spoke with is that this is not the case.

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. The 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.

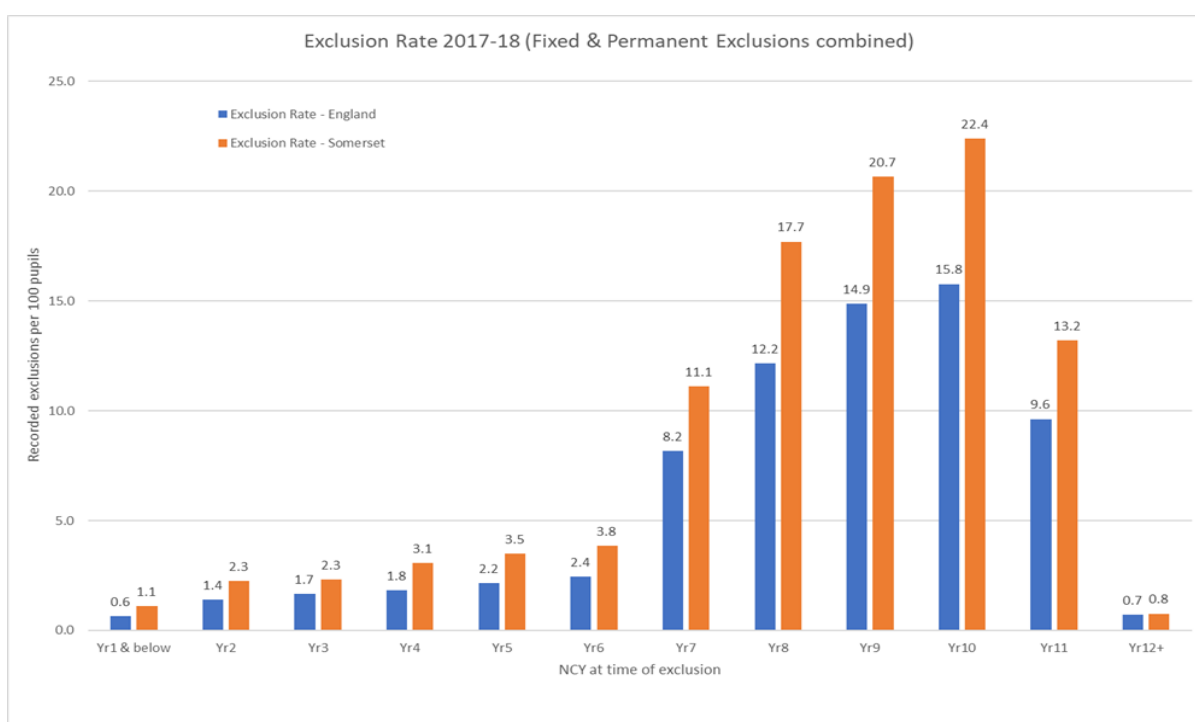
Our review was tightly defined and had a short time period from start to end. We were tasked with examining the reasons, drivers and impact of school exclusions on children, young people and their families including those who may have special educational needs and disabilities in Somerset. We wanted to understand what inclusive best practice looks like and enable that to be shared across Somerset. We have considered a small but carefully selected part of the provision across the county, but would suggest that further work be considered to examine the education that Somerset children receive following exclusion.

Our Task and Finish Group was made up of co-opted Committee member Ruth Hobbs of the Parent Carer Forum, and Councillors Leigh Redman and Rod Williams. David Simons of Sky College joined us to provide specialist education input. Helen Mayne of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIAS) also helped the review by liaising with parents. The group was supported by Officers Samantha Baker, Neil Milne and Penny Johnson.

Overview of our review

Our review was proposed as it was recognised that in Somerset permanent exclusions from mainstream schools were much higher than those in comparable authority areas and appeared to have been increasing steadily. We noted at the outset of our review that the Council has limited powers in this area as 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. However, we felt it was worth exploring why Somerset was the 24th highest out of 152 local authorities for permanent exclusions.

The graph below shows how Somerset's secondary exclusion rates compare against the England rate, differentiating by year.



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.

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.

We wanted to understand what inclusive best practice looks like, as it was clear that there were differences between Somerset schools, and if those examples could be shared across Somerset it would benefit all schools. During our review we were mindful that the local authority's working relationship with the majority of schools in Somerset has changed as many schools are now Academy schools and/or part of Multi Academy Trusts (MAT's) making them similar to standalone businesses and as such the local authority can only try to influence inform and support. This means that whilst this report raises issues and tries to present an alternative perspective, and makes recommendations, if the Cabinet chooses to support these recommendations it cannot enforce them with academy schools in Somerset.

We have found that there is more that can be done to ensure that exclusion is always used consistently and fairly, and that permanent exclusion is always a last resort, used only when all other parts of the graduated response have been exhausted. Much of the evidence we heard from Primary and Secondary schools concerned the impact of a period of reduced funding and the detrimental effect that had on support services available to children requiring additional support that schools could not provide, at all ages and stages. It may therefore seem that some of the information we have gathered during our review and our recommendations may sit outside our original remit. However, as discussed above, task group members feel that the discrepancies in practice within Somerset settings around permanent exclusions are not specific to the process itself but also involved local community and wider societal factors.

Although Somerset is a beautiful rural County in the West of England it contains several areas of high deprivation and Schools told us that support for troubled families was crucial as a successful education was the product of a partnership between child, parents and school. In many cases of children that were excluded, the relationship between the school and family home was poor. Helping to improve a positive parental attitude towards the value and importance of school and help introduce acceptable boundaries and behaviour at home will be a key driver.

On talking with professionals, it was evident that some see challenging behaviour as either a choice or the inevitable consequence of a lack of boundaries and, some who perceive it as the communication of unmet needs. The truth is undoubtedly more complex and specific to each child, however our report also highlights the need for effective behaviour management in schools (to establish and maintain high expectations) and the requirement to understand and respond to individual children (so they are supported to meet those expectations). The result of funding reductions and the changed landscape of support services has meant that increasing numbers of children with intersecting vulnerabilities are being excluded as schools have told us that support previously available to support children is now much harder or impossible to access.

We don't seek to make recommendations that undermine or attempt to second guess the decisions of Somerset Head teachers as they have to balance and consider the best interests of the wider school community. It was clear that Head teachers feel that for some children the school cannot provide all that the child requires and we want the local authority to better enable and support schools to be able to access those crucial additional resources. We expect schools consistently to have the right systems in place and teachers to have the right skills to manage poor behaviour and provide support where children need it, however we recognise the importance of equipping them with the right tools, capability and capacity to deliver against this expectation. We noted that the quality of teaching at all stages appeared to be the single most important factor in reducing exclusions, even though there did not seem to be a correlation a School's Ofsted rating and the number of exclusions.

We also noted that Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and Special Schools have inadequate capacity although our review showed that they fulfil a vital role in the Somerset educational system. We heard there are too few places in Somerset PRUs, and this might be contributing to the length of time some children had before a return to mainstream education. For example, instead of returning children to mainstream education in 12 weeks, some PRUs have some children for 40 weeks or longer. This seemed to be exacerbated by the lack of a Somerset-wide approach to returning children to mainstream education and whilst we recognise that every child's circumstances will be unique, many PRUs are unable to carry out the role envisaged for them in Somerset.

We heard that the reduction across Somerset of Early Help services e.g. Sure Start has had a much wider detrimental impact on communities and was also cited by Head teachers and SENCO's as effecting exclusion rates. Primary School Head teachers told us that many Somerset children were ill equipped and not ready to start school. Secondary school Head teachers reflected that those underperforming primary school children were now coming through the system into secondary and they warned that Somerset should be prepared for exclusions to continue to increase, particularly amongst primary school age children, over the next few years. All professionals we spoke with noted that children who struggled at Primary School and reached Secondary School as being not 'ready to learn, we were told, unfortunately, were also easily identifiable as being highly likely to struggle when they transition into adulthood and beyond.

Schools also told us that the sustained reduction in support services and their reduced availability from the local authority, such as Educational Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, Speech and Language Therapist, Early Help, Social Care, Health has led to Somerset Schools not being able to

cope and feeling as if they are being regarded by the local authority both as a catch all and cure all for everything. This has contributed to and resulted in an increase over recent years in the number of exclusions as schools and teachers feel they are increasingly being called on to be holistic child development centres and not just places of learning.

Professionals reported to us a growing recognition of mental health being a key factor for children, such as anxiety, and how difficult Somerset Schools find it to access children's mental health service. They told us they have little support or detail and are unable to provide time to pupils because funding reductions have resulted in pastoral teams being much reduced. We also noted that internal exclusions in the school, particularly those that lasted for a lengthy period, had a detrimental effect of mental health. The result of funding reductions and the changed landscape of support services has therefore meant that increasing numbers of children with intersecting vulnerabilities are being excluded.

The fantastic work of School Special Education Needs Co-ordinators (SENCO) in Somerset Schools should be recognised and we heard about several informal working partnerships that existed amongst SENCO's. We think the Local Authority should actively encourage and facilitate greater liaison between Somerset SENCO's. This would help them to attain the profile and priority they deserve within different settings and enable them to collaborate effectively and share successful outcomes. We also acknowledge that SENCO's appear to be most effective in each school/setting when they are part of the Senior Leadership Team, as recommended by the SEND code of practice.

Our review identified that there is no explicit understanding of best practice for intervention shared across Somerset schools or a process to manage extra support to deal with disruptive children.

Schools reported to us the negative impact that had resulted from what they described as a narrowing of the curriculum. The local authority should encourage schools to be brave in their outlook with regard to the curriculum, so that Somerset children are provided with a balanced education that also includes time for social and emotional elements to enable every child to flourish and meet their full potential.

Our Recommendations

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

the 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.

What we found out

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.

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.

The morale of some school staff is low. Although there may be several reasons for low morale, the risk is that temporary low morale becomes normal. Staff with low morale are unlikely to deliver a high-quality education. Possible reasons for low morale include, a history of funding cuts; poor parental engagement; shortage of staff; local concentrations of deprivation; perceived isolation from other elements in the educational system; poor contact with and support from the local authority; and perceived low pay and little recognition for school staff. We also noted there was not a uniform methodology for recognising and rewarding excellent performance in school staff, children or parents beyond arrangements in individual schools to link teacher performance with pay.

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.

The Somerset educational system shows weaknesses. The system is 'process-led not people-led'. Schools, SCC staff and other agencies are dominated by the mechanics of the process rather than the needs of the individual child and we discovered there is no coordinated Exclusion practice across the Somerset educational system and/or liaison between Somerset schools.

Some schools feel isolated from each other meaning, the educational stage before and after their own stage and from the Local Authority. Some Head Teachers gave us the impression of having to 'fight a lone battle.' Every school should feel better connected and Head Teachers should be able to call on faster, more tangible support. The demands on a school of dealing with the problem cohort 'in the present' has an opportunity cost in that it prevents time, thought and action being devoted to improving the future learning environment and the child's future learning experience.

Collaboration Among Local Schools. Collaboration could be improved in two ways: between the Pre-School – Primary – Secondary stages and between mainstream and PRU/Special Secondary Schools. A child's poor transition between educational stages is an indicator that predicts an increased likelihood of exclusion. It was clear from our evidence gathering that, at induction to

Secondary School, a child should be preceded by a transition report on its time at Primary School. Some Secondary School Head Teachers complained that not only was this information not made available at induction at the age of 11 but it was difficult to obtain long after. There was a consensus of opinion that understanding and managing poor behaviour at Secondary School could be helped by a better knowledge of the child's behaviour at Primary School.

Regarding collaboration between mainstream and PRU/Special Secondary Schools, the Head Teachers of the settings we visited agreed that closer and more up-to-date knowledge of nearby mainstream schools would help them to judge the readiness of a child to return to mainstream school and would help them to advise on the most suitable school.

Children's Behaviour at School. A minority cohort of children behave poorly, disrupt and underachieve and we recognise that it is a great skill amongst Somerset's teachers in diagnosing bad or 'distressed' behaviour, and being able to manage it.

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.

Young people's mental health is a key factor in reasons for exclusion. Elements such as anxiety, trauma with no access to children's mental health services and little support or detail or time given to pupils because of pastoral team cuts. We also noted that internal exclusions in the school, particularly those that lasted for a lengthy period, had a detrimental effect of mental health and we thought that this could be supported through better mental health training for teaching staff.

The reduction in services available from the LA such as Educational Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, Speech Assisted Learning, Early Help, Social Care, Health has led to Somerset Schools not being able to cope and being a catch all for everything. A quicker solution for some is to exclude. The result of funding reductions and the changed landscape of support services has meant that increasing numbers of children with intersecting vulnerabilities are being excluded.

Lack of early help services e.g. the loss of Sure Start has had an impact on the exclusion rates, especially as the primary school children were now coming through the system into secondary. We heard that children arrived at schools with vast differences, to hear that some children are arriving at Primary School unable to communicate or in nappies places increased burdens on the school. We heard that although later interventions to help poorly performing children can be effective in general the most effective and cost-effective way to help and support young families is in the earliest pre-school years of a child's life.

A project operating in Bristol, encouraged Schools to work collaboratively as they had to pay a fine (with money going into a secured fund) when exclusion was the only option. That money is then used make the child's 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. This is captured in our recommendations: we are all in this together.

Independent or Alternative Provision (AP) appeared to be heavily oversubscribed or they were needing to hold on to pupils that could be in mainstream provision. We heard stories of schools being told they had to hold on to pupils, even if there was an EHCP in place that indicated a specific AP and we heard of AP's that could not move mainstream ready children back into schools. Non-school provision works better for some children, a short stay to support a specific need has been shown to help get a child back into mainstream.

Supporting Parents. In some Secondary Schools, about 7% of parents refuse to engage with the school or take an interest in their child's education and this 7% accounts for about 90% of the children at risk of exclusion. Many schools try to reach out to parents living in deprived areas. If this small cohort of parents could be engaged more effectively, exclusions would be radically reduced.

More support, from schools, the local authority and other sources, would greatly help this outreach to parents succeed. At the Pre-School and Primary School stages, parents could be offered enjoyable and attractive school briefings on the opportunities for their children, the importance of them taking those opportunities for their life chances, and how parents can successfully handle difficulties with their children at home. As well as equipping parents better to motivate their children at school, this would directly strengthen the partnership between parents and school. We are hopeful that the new Family Safeguarding policy to be adopted by the local authority would assist in this endeavour.

Boarding. We heard that Boarding or 'away-from-home school time' can benefit some children. One setting we visited explained that Boarding between Monday-Thursday each week is used to great benefit of the children. We think that further consideration could be given to enhancing boarding capacity in Somerset as this could be a means of reducing exclusion and accelerating the return to mainstream education but also of improving educational and social achievement for more Somerset pupils.

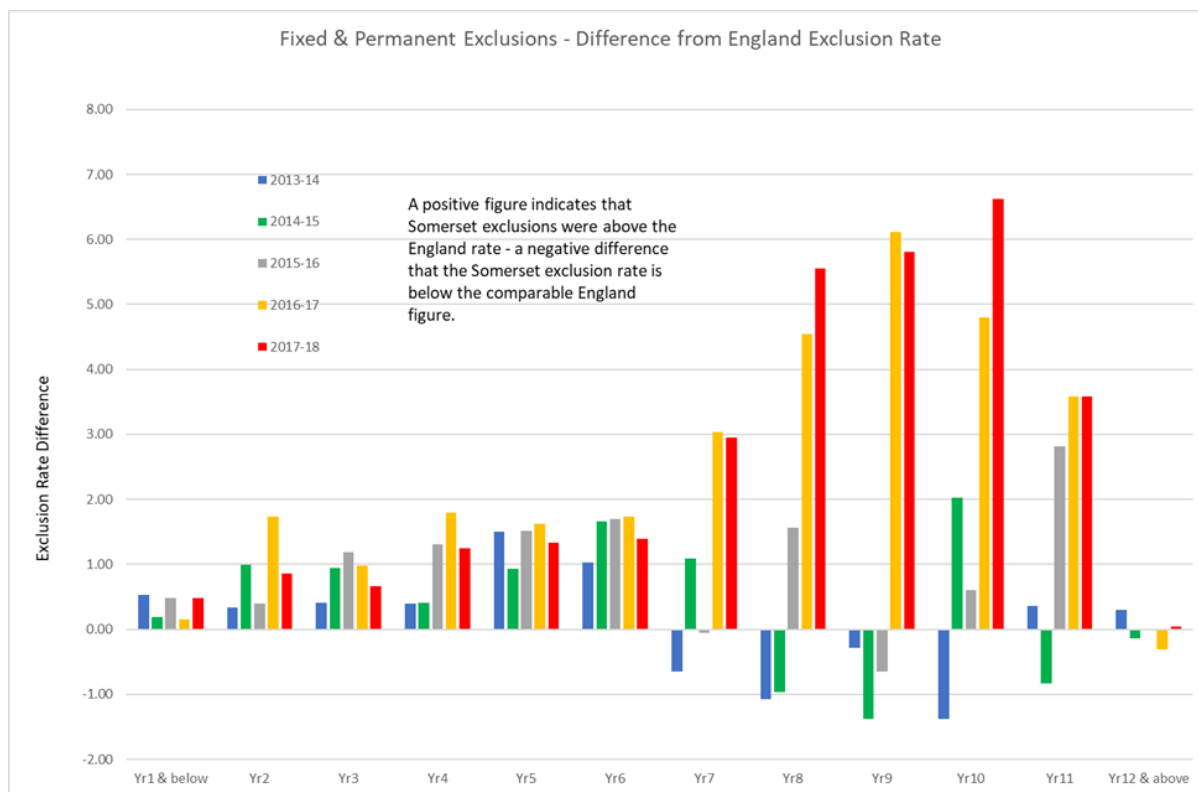
Correlation and Causation Between Behaviour and Deprivation. There is a clear correlation between a lack of parental engagement with schools and those families living in a deprived area. However, being housed in a deprived area does not necessarily cause poor parenting and nor is poor parenting exclusive to deprived areas. Although we recognise that correlation is different from causation, we feel that the local authority and all schools should be encouraged to help engage and support families wherever they live.

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.

Drivers and Reasons for Exclusions

We asked Officers to compile a report capturing exclusion data across Somerset to help inform our review. We carefully considered the information that was presented as we wanted to identify if

there were any connections or links to help us identify the drivers and reasons for exclusions, as there appeared to be some trends that showed exclusion rates varied between pupils with different characteristics.



The graph above shows how Somerset’s exclusion rates compare against the England rate.

The data showed that children in Somerset with some types of SEN, boys, those that had been supported by social services or lived in deprived areas, were all consistently more likely to be excluded from school than those without these characteristics. Exclusion rates also vary by ethnicity. While drawing firm conclusions on why individual characteristics impact the likelihood of exclusion is difficult, the data was clear that there were certain groups of children who may already be facing significant challenges in their lives outside of school, and they were most likely to be excluded.

The evidence gathered for this review indicates that there are a range of interwoven, local factors that give rise to these differences in rates. Some are in-school factors (policy and practice in schools and the wider education system) while others are out-of-school factors, both those related to place such as high levels of poverty or substance abuse in the community, and those related to the child and family’s individual circumstances, such as the effect of trauma in early life. At one meeting with representatives from secondary schools it was noted “that early help only exists on a form in Somerset” and there is a feeling that it is increasingly difficult for schools to help children at risk of exclusion against a background of a much-reduced offer of specialist help that schools can use when required.

Schools told us that they felt the local authority view was that schools alone should help children overcome the wider challenges they may face in their lives. Although it seems as if many schools in Somerset know the children in their schools and the interventions that will prove most effective for them the local authority should be supporting all schools to work with other schools, LAs and local

partners in their area. This would allow them to understand what is driving local trends, and to use that understanding to properly plan and provide the right support for those children at greater risk of exclusion.

We also heard of the importance of good teaching and in particular about a way of teaching, adopted by some schools in Somerset called Quality First Teaching (QFT). This method meant a high-quality inclusive approach to teaching with continuous whole school processes for assessing, planning, implementing, tracking, monitoring and reviewing each child's progress. High-quality teaching, an essential element of QFT, meant an approach that was differentiated for individual pupils, and was the first step in responding to pupils who have or may have SEN. Quality first teaching was best practice teaching where all the needs of the pupils in the class are met through careful planning and support.

Our data report also showed that for Somerset children with SEND there were much higher rates of exclusion and this was increasing so that the gap between Somerset and England SEN exclusion rates continued to increase year on year. The exclusion rates in Somerset for children with an EHCP is almost double that of the England rate. This clearly demonstrated that the current approach in Somerset for SEN children was failing.

Some Somerset Schools had adopted a behaviour management system called "Ready to Learn". This is a system of behaviour management some schools have put in place that shows a zero tolerance to any kind of mis-behaviour- from uniform infringements to talking in class to low level disruption. The child is then internally isolated from the rest of the school for periods of time, until behaviours improve. If the child doesn't improve, the child is excluded as part of a stepped and tariff driven approach to behaviour management. However, this of course does not support the repeat offender and rather than asking the child why they might be behaving in this way, can lead to vulnerable pupils quickly being excluded permanently.

Impacts on children of Exclusion

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.

Some comments made by excluded children:

"Had many chances at school, but never thought they would be excluded".

"In isolation for weeks and had no "return to learn/reintegration" when coming back from isolation".

"Overwhelming sense of shame at what had happened and the impact that it had on their families".

"Not understood by adults and they felt the adults had given up on them".

“Felt agreements were not always kept because of capacity at school”.

“Did not get consistent support to help deal with emotions”.

“Would do anything to get back in to mainstream”.

It was also clear to us the disruption that a poorly managed exclusion can create for children, i.e. what happens to the child after they have been excluded from a school and it was not just about the excluded children missing the social aspect of school and friendship groups. What was interesting was how well the majority of excluded children settled in to PRU's and those children told us that environment was better suited to their needs and they appreciated less pressure on results at PRU. Although it is the case that there will be lots of different reasons why children are excluded, a common thread appeared to be the schools not being able to address/meet the underlying pupil need. We acknowledge this was mainly due to the schools not being able to access the additional support and resource they recognised the child needed in most cases, not through a lack of understanding by the school.

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.

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.

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.

Our proposal for a Somerset Code of Responsibilities and Rights

Responsibilities

- Every parent should be encouraged to be jointly responsible for their child's behaviour at school, and for working in partnership with the school to facilitate their child's education and exercising a positive influence on their child.
- Every child should be encouraged to be responsible for their behaviour in school and behave in line with the school's code of behaviour, cooperate with the school and be ready to learn.
- Every teacher should be encouraged to be responsible for getting to know every child, educating them through well prepared and delivered lessons and activities, and providing leadership to children wherever they have contact with them, to complement existing policies.

- Every Head teacher should be encouraged to be responsible for enabling teaching and non-teaching staff to run successful lessons and activities, for promoting the partnership with parents and children, and for their school playing its part in the Somerset educational system.

Rights

- A parent has the right for their child to be safe at school and given every chance to learn. Encourage parents to positively take responsibility for their child's attitude and behaviour in school and engage with the school in a productive partnership. Parents can play a key part in recognising and rewarding good performance by the child.
- A child has the right to be safe and to be helped to learn in an enjoyable way.
- A teacher has the right to teach in safety, in an environment favourable to learning, and be supported by specialist expertise when necessary.
- A school has the right to support from Governors, parents and SCC.

Consultations undertaken and Fact finding

Evidence gathering

We have held an intensive enquiry period to gather and examine relevant local evidence and this also included an overview of national research and best practice in respect of fixed term and permanent exclusions. We have visited a number of schools (primary, secondary and PRU), across the County and used those opportunities to speak with various staff and pupils. This has provided us with valuable first-hand experience of those that have experiences of exclusion. We have also engaged other stakeholders such as Public Health, Clinical Commissioning Group, Young Somerset and FE providers.

We held a day of a series of evidence gathering meetings with representatives from primary schools, secondary schools, special schools, FE Colleges and parents. We used this opportunity, whilst meeting groups separately, to ask each group a series of agreed questions to try and obtain a point of view from different perspectives. This exercise was arranged as we thought that it was important for us to be able to meet on a face to face basis and have a discussion with a wider group of stakeholders. These open discussions were very interesting and informative and not only helped provide us with more information to support with the writing of this report but also highlighted a commonality between primary and secondary schools regarding the challenges faced.

Our review began with an online questionnaire that was open for responses between 13 January and 25 January. We wrote to the Somerset Association of Secondary Head teachers (SASH) and the Somerset Association of Primary Head teachers (SAPHTO) and the Special Educational Needs Somerset Expertise. (SEN.se) to invite their members to participate. After considering the collated data we decided to visit schools and a pupil referral unit in deprived areas that had low exclusion rates to obtain an oversight of what they did. We also decided to hold a day of round table

meetings with separate sessions with representatives from primary schools and secondary schools and some parents of children that had been excluded.

Visits to Schools and Pupil Referral Units

On 3 February 2020 we visited a Primary School; on 6 February we visited a Pupil Referral Unit; on 7 and 11 February we visited Secondary Schools. The notes from that meeting, anonymised are available as a background paper.

Meeting with Primary Schools Secondary Schools and Parents

On 24 February 2020 we meet with Head teachers, SENCO's and representatives for a variety of Somerset Primary, Secondary school and a Pupil Referral Unit. We also held meetings with parents of excluded children. The notes from these meetings, anonymised are available as a background paper.

Related findings but out of scope of our review

We heard from secondary Head teachers that they felt that what they described as a narrowing of the curriculum had contributed to the increase in fixed term and permanent exclusions. An example provided was that Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PHSE) was not taught in Somerset schools. The PHSE lessons helped to promote children and young people's personal and economic wellbeing; offer sex and relationships education; prepare pupils for adult life. We were pleased therefore to note the Department of Education has enacted a statutory guidance policy which will assist schools in England with providing PSHE when it becomes compulsory in September 2020.

Aligned with the concerns about the narrowing of the curriculum we heard from primary schools about the negative impact of the pressure arising from standard assessment tests (SATs). Schools reported that the one size fits all approach to education was not suited to an increasing minority and many of the problem's children faced occurred because educational settings were expected to try to get them to fit in to the current rigid process.

Secondary schools told us about their concerns regarding the proposed English Baccalaureate (EBacc) saying the current cohort of Somerset children were ill prepared for its introduction, and that many problems would be encountered placing undue stress on some children. Thus, adding to the poor behaviour levels seen in schools by some pupils. We noted that the EBacc was not a qualification in its own right, rather it being a combination of core GCSE subjects designed to give pupils access to a full range of employment options when they leave secondary school and the broad knowledge that employers are looking for.

Much of the feedback from schools highlighted that there seems to be an increasing expectation now on teachers to be multi-disciplinary experts, and not just educators of specific subjects or class/form tutors' masters. Although outside of the scope of our review we did consider if benefit might result from a meeting of key stakeholders to outline a clear set of expectations and principles outlining a shared approach amongst schools in Somerset, although this would be complicated due to the variety of schools.

There is no coordinated, consistent means of recognising and rewarding excellent performance in school staff, children or parents beyond arrangements in individual schools to link teacher performance with pay, made more complicated by academies. We noted there are Performance management processes in schools but they may have different objectives and expectations.

Our review has highlighted the increased chance that excluded children had of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) or becoming involved in criminal activity. We noticed that there were differences in the education received by excluded children, and that being excluded from a school should not mean they are excluded from education. Therefore, we feel that Somerset children, particularly those that have been excluded, would benefit from this aspect, post exclusion education provision, being further investigated.

Many professionals highlighted what they described as the short-sighted nature of reductions to educational support services, and primary care for children in their local areas such as sure start and school. There seems to be a link, such as the social cost in later years, when these NEET pupils continue to be a burden on society as they are not in education employment or training. There is a clear link between excluded pupils and economic inactivity, which will cost society far more in the long term, than providing these services within communities. Part of the solution is a community-based response that supports parents to engage in their child's education, and in the way that they act in the local community.

The establishment of our Task and Finish Group

The formation of our Group was agreed at the Committee's meeting on 15 November 2019 following. The work of the review began with a localised overview of fixed-term and permanent exclusions in the context of National trends with examples of best practice which are being used or could be considered to be adopted locally.

This timeframe meant that task group members could only meet with a small number of Headteachers, and students who have been permanently excluded. Whilst this does mean that this report does not offer a statistically significant view, it does offer a qualitative perspective on permanent exclusions. The witnesses to the task group were assured that their comments would not be attributed, and their anonymity respected.

Before embarking on our review we wanted to understand the wider context of exclusions. 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.

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 in our report could be picked up through the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee workplan.

Background papers

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](#)