

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS IN EAST SUSSEX – ACTION PLAN		
Scrutiny recommendation	Director's response and action plan	Timescale
<p>R1 a) The Lead Members with responsibility for Children's Services and Learning and School effectiveness, and the Director of Children's Services, should promote a clear vision to leaders in all our schools setting out our expectation that every school should aim to be amongst the lowest pupil excluders.</p> <p>b) All Council Members should be encouraged to support and promote the vision when in conversation with their local schools and in their role as school governors.</p>	<p>Evidence from Local Authorities where levels of exclusion are low is that a political steer and expectation are a common factor. We would, therefore, agree that this report provides us with a good opportunity to adopt this approach and provide a strong message to schools across the county that levels of exclusion across East Sussex are too high and that we should have greater aspirations for all of the children who we provide for. As a vehicle for this, the CSD proposes that we develop a revised policy on exclusions that draws on good practice nationally and highlights the negative impact that disproportionate exclusions have on the wellbeing and attainment of school aged children.</p> <p>One of the key statutory roles of both the DCS and Lead Member, as highlighted in recent guidance, is to advocate for vulnerable children. A strong steer in relation to exclusions and excluded children, many of whom face additional challenges both in and out of school, aligns well with this requirement. It is important, however, to remember that the influence on school practice is much wider than just with the CSD and elected members have an influential role in their local schools. As leadership and school ethos has such a key role to play in determining levels of exclusion, we endorse the view that elected members should promote the same vision, especially within the role of school governors (see response to recommendation 3).</p>	October 2012

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<p>R2 East Sussex County Council should aim, when working with schools, to promote:</p> <p>a) improved, more inclusive, SEN assessment and support practices with greater emphasis on preventing school exclusion;</p> <p>b) good communication between schools: particularly between secondary schools and primary schools, and primary schools and children’s centres to enable schools to be better prepared to manage any children with behavioural or learning issues;</p> <p>c) a well developed offer of services and training, within the Services to Schools offer, to ensure schools are confident and better equipped to manage a wide range of pupil behaviour; and</p> <p>d) effective special provisions within mainstream schools for children who are less able to learn.</p>	<p>With the changes in SEN processes, as outlined in the DfE ‘next steps’ document, we do have the opportunity to discuss with schools both how children with SEN will be assessed, but more importantly how they will be supported. We will support schools and academies in drawing up their local offer for children with SEND and help them make the best possible use of the resources that will be available to them in the future.</p> <p>Partnership between schools is key to securing the best outcomes for all children, particularly those who are vulnerable to exclusion and underachievement. We feel that this recommendation aligns well with projects that are underway (e.g. the DfE Exclusions Trial) and our future direction. It is essential, however, that schools take on board their new responsibilities as well as their greater freedoms to ensure that good communication is fostered between educational institutions and the Local Authority.</p> <p>The CSD has set out its aspiration to provide high quality services that schools value and help deliver positive outcomes for children and young people. We will ensure that this offer includes comprehensive training on all aspects of behaviour management. Ensuring that individual schools have a range of provision on offer to meet the needs of all children, including those presenting with behavioural challenges is key and we welcome this recommendation. It is essential that schools strike the right balance of appropriately skilled staff and an appropriate curriculum which helps children to engage with learning. Systemic problems with behaviour management in schools often go hand-in-hand with poor planning and ineffective use of unskilled staff to support those with the greatest needs. There is evidence of good practice within the county that should be effectively disseminated.</p>	<p>January 2013</p>

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<p>R3 The support, training and communication with school governors should aim to promote an active governing body role in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) endorsing policies that focus on supporting challenging pupils within the school; b) providing robust scrutiny and effective challenge of exclusion decisions by the headteacher; c) monitoring the use of mechanisms such as part time timetables to ensure they are not being used as a means to exclude pupils unofficially; d) monitoring Special educational Needs (SEN) practices and exploring any link with exclusions; and e) seeking and responding to the views and experiences of parents/carers of excluded children, and of the youngsters themselves. 	<p>The role of governors in the exclusion process is not just within the context of Discipline Committee Meetings, but also in providing general scrutiny of exclusions in terms of evaluating statistics, identifying any overrepresentation of vulnerable groups (e.g. those with SEN) and challenging patterns of exclusion which appear anomalous or unnecessarily high. The overall level of governor challenge to school practice in relation to exclusion is patchy and, in many cases, nonexistent. Many governors view their role, within the context of exclusions, as supporting the headteacher's decisions rather than as providing objective scrutiny. Where governors do provide greater scrutiny, there is evidence that overall practice in relation to exclusions has improved.</p> <p>The CSD, therefore, welcomes this recommendation and we will revise our governor training programme to include within it wider issues for governing bodies to consider within the context of exclusion, as well as their role on Discipline Committee Meetings. This will include the changes in the governing body role within the revised statutory guidance on exclusions which comes into effect in September 2012.</p>	<p>November 2012</p>

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<p>R4 The information provided by East Sussex for parents and carers of excluded children is good, but this is an opportune moment to review it to ensure that it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) remains easily accessible and readily available; b) includes information on what 'behaviour support' and 'Special Educational Needs (SEN) support' in schools should look like, including information about the Education Support, Behaviour and Attendance Service (ESBAS), Information for Families and any other relevant services; c) includes information that is 'preventative' rather than focused on the relatively limited options once a child has been excluded; d) states simply what children's 'entitlements' are so that parents and carers can understand whether part-time timetables or other mechanisms are being used to exclude their child inappropriately; and e) meets the needs of people with low levels of literacy, less confident communicators, people under severe stress and people with health problems: groups that are represented amongst excluded children's parents and carers. 	<p>With the changes to exclusion legislation and the new role of schools and the local authority, it is timely that revised guidance for parents and carers is developed. Parents who are well-informed of both their responsibilities and their rights are in the best place to work with schools to help their children meet expectations, but also to ensure that schools follow the correct guidance and challenge them if they do not.</p> <p>The changing remit of supporting children with SEN means that parents will have much greater freedoms and scope to question schools in relation to the provision that will be made via the school's 'Local Offer'. It is essential, therefore, that any guidance to parents brings together these two strands to empower parents to request the right support for their children in relation to supporting their individual needs.</p> <p>The CSD will redesign its guidance to parents and carers, bringing together different strands of parent advisory services within the department, to provide guidance which is both relevant and accessible.</p>	<p>December 2012</p>