

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date of meeting:** 12 December 2023

**By:** Director of Children's Services

**Title:** Scrutiny Review of School Exclusions. Observations on the Scrutiny Committee's report

**Purpose:** To provide the Cabinet with the opportunity to comment on the response of the Director of Children's Services to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review of School Exclusions.

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Cabinet is recommended to:**

- 1) note and welcome the report of the People Scrutiny Committee; and**
  - 2) advise the County Council that, in considering the report of the Scrutiny Committee, the Council be recommended to welcome the report and to agree the response of the Director of Children's Services to the recommendations and their implementation as set out in the action plan attached as appendix 1 to this report.**
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## **1. Background**

1.1 In March 2023, the People Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a scrutiny review into school exclusions to address the recent increase in the number of schools exclusions in East Sussex and, in particular, concerns about the number of vulnerable pupils being permanently excluded, including those in receipt of Free School Meals, and those with special educational needs (SEND).

1.2 The Review looked at preventative strategies and whole school approaches which schools and trusts could adopt to reduce the number of exclusions, as well as appropriate responses to pupils who were at higher risk of exclusion. The Review also looked at the Council's messaging on the need to reduce, and the benefits of reducing, school exclusions.

## **2. Supporting information**

2.1 The Scrutiny Review of School Exclusions is welcomed by the Department, in particular the opportunity afforded by this review to demonstrate the work the Department is undertaking to deliver more support and resources to schools and its renewed focus on and commitment to addressing school exclusions through the recent restructure of the Education Department.

2.2 It was considered by the Review Board that the Review builds on identified areas of focus, including promoting a graduated response to behaviour and increased support at transition, as well as on projects that are already in place such as the Royal Society of Arts and the ISOS projects.

2.3 The Department welcomed the opportunity to visit key mainstream school settings with the members of the Review Board. These visits enabled the members to give relevant

and targeted recommendations, while understanding the strategic and operational pressures the education system is facing. Officers involved in the Review process found this to be an interesting and positive experience and would like to thank the Review Board members for their input, insight, engagement, and enthusiasm.

2.4 The Department welcomed the input from the young people, their honesty in talking to the members of the Review Board and the value that was placed on their reflections and contributions.

2.5 The findings from this Review will be used to inform the Department's ongoing support for schools, building on the existing positive relationship between schools and the Department.

2.6 Throughout the Review, the Review Board and the Department recognised the increased level of need in schools, and the challenges in striving to meet this need, which in turn has resulted in the Department recognising the need to review its offer to schools.

2.7 The Department's response to the Review Board's recommendations is set out in the action plan attached as appendix 1.

### **3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

3.1 The Scrutiny Review has highlighted a range of recommendations, many of which recognise the work already underway and the need to continue to build on that.

3.2 It was identified that there are opportunities to work with schools to develop a range of preventative measures and targeted support. This will involve working with all stakeholders, multi-agency support and with parents so that the response to behaviour identifies the reason for the behaviour and appropriate support can be implemented.

3.3 The Review Board also identified several areas that can be developed on how training is presented so the guidance is clear and understood by all stakeholders. This will be reflected in how existing platforms are used to effectively cascade key information and training.

3.4 All of these recommendations are considered positive and reflective of the direction of travel for the Department, and the Department considers that the recommendations are realistic and achievable.

3.5 It is recommended that the Cabinet agrees to the implementation of the action plan as detailed in appendix 1.

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