

Report to: People Scrutiny Committee

Date: 13 November 2023

By: Chair of the Review Board

Title: Scrutiny Review – School Exclusions

Purpose: To present the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review and make recommendations

RECOMMENDATION:

The Committee is recommended to consider and endorse the report of the Review Board, and make recommendations to Cabinet for comment and County Council for approval.

1. Background

1.1 In 2019 the People Scrutiny Committee examined the key issues relating to school exclusions in East Sussex, including that East Sussex was an outlier in terms of the proportion of pupils who were excluded from school and that reducing the number of permanent exclusions was a key target for the County Council. A Scoping Board concluded that there was scope to develop effective recommendations to help reduce school exclusions in East Sussex, however delivery of the review was subsequently paused due to the coronavirus pandemic and the limitations this placed on the capacity of the Children’s Services Department, schools, and school leaders to engage with the Review.

2. A further Scoping Board was held in in January 2023 to consider the latest position on school exclusions in East Sussex. Data showed that whilst there had been an improvement in county-level data for permanent exclusions, with a reduction in the rate of permanent exclusions for all schools combined (primary, secondary, and special) to below the national average, suspension rates (previously called fixed term exclusions) for all schools combined remained above the national average.

3. The Board concluded that whilst they were encouraged by the work underway, there were current concerns, including that vulnerable pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those eligible for Free School Meals, remained more likely to be suspended than their peers; and that there had been an increasing number of decisions to exclude very young children at primary phase; and these issues could benefit from closer examination by scrutiny through a review.

1.5 The Scoping Board agreed to focus on the following areas, which were subsequently agreed by the committee as the basis for the scrutiny review:

- preventive strategies to help reduce the likelihood of exclusion including how the council could join up early help and education services;
- appropriate responses to a child who is at risk of exclusion including appropriate responses to very young pupils and vulnerable pupils at secondary phase;
- how the Council could develop its training and advice for governors; and
- Council messaging on the need to reduce, and benefits of reducing, school exclusions.

2. Supporting information

2.1 The Scrutiny Review Board was comprised of Councillors Sam Adeniji, Kathryn Field, Johanna Howell, Wendy Maples and John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative). Councillor Adeniji was appointed as the Chair of the Review Board.

2.2 The attached report (Appendix 1) contains the findings and recommendations of the Review Board. Copies of evidence papers listed in the report and other support documentation are available on request from the contact officer.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The Committee is recommended to consider and endorse the Review Board's report for submission to Cabinet and County Council on 12 December 2023 and 6 February 2024 respectively.

Councillor Sam Adeniji
Chair of the Review Board

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