

## REPORT OF THE PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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The People Scrutiny Committee met on 13 November 2023.

Present: Councillors Sam Adeniji, Charles Clark, Penny di Cara, Kathryn Field, Nuala Geary, Johanna Howell (Chair), Wendy Maples, Stephen Shing, Colin Swansborough and John Ungar (Vice Chair)  
Mr John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative)  
Mr Trevor Cristin (Diocese of Chichester Representative) (via MS Teams)

Also Present: Councillor Bob Stanley, Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability  
Councillor Bob Bowdler, Lead Member for Children and Families (via MS Teams)

### 1. Scrutiny Review of School Exclusions

1.1 The People Scrutiny Committee has completed its Scrutiny Review of School Exclusions. A copy of the Committee's full report is attached at Appendix 1.

1.2 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 school 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).

1.3 The Scoping Board was encouraged by the work underway by the Children's Services Department to reduce the number of exclusions, however there were concerns that vulnerable pupils, including SEND pupils and those facing additional external challenges, 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 concluded that these issues could benefit from closer examination by scrutiny through a review.

1.4 The Scoping Board agreed to focus on the following areas:

- preventative strategies and whole school approaches to reduce the number of exclusions;
- appropriate responses to pupils who were at higher risk of exclusion; and
- council messaging on the need to reduce and benefits of reducing school exclusions.

1.5 The Review found that the Department was progressing a number of projects and initiatives to reduce permanent exclusions and concluded that there was a strong commitment from most schools and trusts to achieve this. However, the Review Board also learned that schools were dealing with increasing demands and complexity of needs of children and their families post pandemic, including mental health and SEN and there was concern that some schools were using part-time timetables to manage behaviour. The Review concluded that clearer guidance and support was needed to help ensure appropriate use of part-time timetables was consistent across all schools and trusts. Although the Review recognised its limitations, as the decision to exclude is a school one and academies are wholly

outside of the remit of the local authority, it also concluded that there were approaches the Department and schools could progress further to reduce the number of permanent exclusions, including whole school relational approaches and adaptive teaching of the curriculum that would benefit all pupils; targeted additional support for pupils identified as at risk of exclusion, including effective use of alternative provision; and strong engagement with, and support for, families. Council messaging should focus on the benefits of reducing school exclusions, as well as the support available.

1.6 The People Scrutiny Committee **recommends** to the County Council that –

1.6.1 The Department should utilise area-based teams to identify and support schools and trusts to provide a graduated response to behaviour.

1.6.2 The Department should continue to encourage schools and trusts to attend training on whole school relational approaches and develop trauma informed practices so pupils feel safe at school and develop positive relationships. This training should include how to communicate key aspects of these approaches with parents and carers to ensure continuity and support at home.

1.6.3 The Department should work with schools and trusts to review and make use of available data to:

- a) identify pupils who are at risk of permanent exclusion and identify available support at Inclusion Partnership meetings; and
- b) monitor pupils identified by the Attendance Support Team who are absent from mainstream education, either through part-time timetables or internal exclusions, and assess what alternative support could be put in place.

1.6.4 The Department should develop training for schools and trusts to share best practice on how adaptive teaching can deliver the curriculum to support needs of all pupils, including SEND pupils and pupils facing additional external challenges. This should include developing guidance on assessment to ensure the use of Additional Needs Plans and Personal Education Plans support and address the needs that have been identified.

1.6.5 The Department should work with schools and trusts to promote the benefits of extracurricular activities, including:

- a) where provided through Early Help, the Holiday and Food Activity Programme, Family Hubs, and Youth Centres, activities which engage pupils throughout the year and incorporate support for families; and
- b) summer programmes which support transition.

1.6.6 The Department should work with schools and trusts to support pupils transitioning into Early Years in primary and Key Stage 3 in secondary by:

- a) working with pre-school settings and primary schools to identify pupils who may need additional support when transitioning to primary/secondary school and referring them to appropriate support and programmes; and
- b) communicating successful approaches and support at the point of transition at all phases to ensure continuity of provision.

1.6.7 The Department should encourage schools and trusts to increase the use of youth voice in preventive strategies and responses to children at risk of permanent exclusion by providing training and guidance for schools and governors on how to embed youth voice into all areas of school policy.

1.6.8 The Department should work with schools and trusts to further develop and embed parental engagement to ensure all stakeholders understand how and why a child is at risk of permanent exclusion, including the parent/carer and the child, and include parents and carers with decisions around alternative provision, including all available options.

1.6.9 The Department should embed its multi-agency response, including the use of the new level 2 keywork team in Early Help focused on supporting attendance to:

- a) promote targeted support, including wider family-based issues, to pupils and families who have been identified as at risk of permanent exclusion and multiple suspensions due to a lack of engagement with the school as a result of persistent absence; and
- b) promote to schools and families parenting programmes that support interventions and preventative measures in schools.

1.6.10 To accompany the Alternative Provision Directory, which is to be shared with schools and trusts, the Department should develop guidance on:

- a) how to make best use of alternative provision, including good communication and ways to provide consistent support once a child reintegrates; and
- b) how alternative provision, including onsite alternative provision, can be used to prevent permanent exclusion and support pupils with additional needs, including those facing additional external challenges.

1.6.11 The Department should continue to provide ongoing support and training for governors including whole school training on SEND needs, mental health issues and inclusive behaviour policies, and produce guidance on how to conduct inclusive Governor Disciplinary Committee meetings that prioritise youth voice.

1.6.12 The Department should develop clear and consistent guidance to share with schools and trusts on the benefits of reducing school exclusions, and the support available, including:

- a) key findings from the RSA 'Rethinking Exclusions' and ISOS projects;
- b) using Primary and Secondary Boards to communicate to schools and trusts the benefits of inclusive policies and share best practice for reducing exclusions and agree to a shared responsibility to reducing exclusions; and
- c) on the appropriate use of part time timetables to ensure these are not being used to manage behaviour. Part-time timetables that are in place must be for the shortest time necessary and reviewed regularly with the pupil and their parents.

[See also Report of the Cabinet – 12 December 2023]

13 November 2023

JOHANNA HOWELL  
Chair