

Division(s): N/A

CABINET – 17 APRIL 2018

EDUCATION SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP REPORT ON SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS

Report by Assistant Chief Executive

Introduction

1. This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations resulting from the Education Scrutiny Committee's working group on school exclusions.
2. The working group report and recommendations were considered and endorsed by the Education Scrutiny Committee on 14 March 2018. The report contains a number of recommendations for the Council, which are highlighted below.
3. Cabinet is asked to consider and respond to these recommendations.

Background

4. From September 2017 to February 2018 a working group of Education Scrutiny Committee members, led by Councillor Gill Sanders, investigated the increased use of fixed term and permanent exclusions across schools in Oxfordshire.
5. The working group's objectives were to:
 - Develop a greater understanding about the underlying reasons for both fixed term and permanent exclusions in primary and secondary schools.
 - Understand what support is available for schools in managing pupils who are at risk of exclusion and where there are gaps in this support.
 - Identify which aspects of the exclusion process are working well and which are not.
 - Identify good practice in schools where rates of exclusions are low or are reducing significantly.
6. To ensure the working group's recommendations would have the greatest impact, members agreed their key lines of inquiry would focus on areas where exclusion rates have continued to be high and are increasing:
 - Among primary aged children,
 - At the point of transition from primary school to secondary, and
 - School Years 10 and 11

7. The working group gathered evidence through meetings with County Council officers, Headteachers, Governors, school behavioural leads and Special Educational Needs Coordinators. Members of the group also observed In Year Fair Access Panels for allocating places in alternative provision for those at risk of exclusion; reviewed relevant policies, information and data; and sought the views of the Children in Care Council on the experience of Looked After Children who have been excluded.

Outcomes of the working group review

8. The key findings of the working group were:
- It is important for school leaders and governors to have a strong focus on inclusion and preventive work with pupils at risk of exclusion. A system-wide agreement on an approach to preventing exclusion would be helpful and governing bodies need to be well equipped to scrutinise headteachers' decisions to permanently exclude.
 - In Year Fair Access Panels are providing an effective forum for peer challenge and it was evident that schools are working in the best interests of the pupils they refer to these. However, the availability of alternative provision for primary aged pupils at risk of exclusion is severely limited and competition for access to secondary aged provision is fierce.
 - The most common reason for fixed term and permanent exclusion in Oxfordshire is persistent disruptive behaviour. Managing challenging behaviour can be resource intensive and schools highlighted the need for greater support to do this, particularly where pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs.
 - Schools indicated the funding they receive for specialist support and adjustments to meet the needs of vulnerable learners (e.g. pupils with Special Educational Needs or Looked After Children) is not enough to cover the cost of bespoke provision. There are good examples of innovative school-led initiatives to address the gap in special school provision. Support from the Virtual School for Looked After Children and Care Leavers was commended.
 - The readiness of children entering primary school and transitioning to secondary education can affect their risk of exclusion. Earlier identification and preventative work via Health Visitors, Primary Child and Adolescent Mental Health services (PCAMHS), and Early Years teams was considered key. Many schools also had specific transition programmes for vulnerable learners, but felt the quality of information shared by primary schools about these pupils could be improved and more training to support vulnerable learners through this period would be helpful.
9. The full report is attached in Appendix 1. It contains a total of 14 recommendations, which if implemented, the Education Scrutiny Committee believes will help to reduce the use of fixed term and permanent exclusions in Oxfordshire.

Recommendations for the Council

10. The recommendations the Cabinet is specifically asked to consider are:
 - (a) The Council should ensure training for school governors is fit for purpose and emphasises their role in monitoring school exclusions and challenging headteachers on their strategies for reducing exclusion.
 - (b) The Council should develop effective mechanisms for sharing good practice and expertise around inclusion and rewarding schools that successfully manage challenging pupils without resorting to exclusion.
 - (c) The Council should take steps to improve the timeliness of Education, Health and Care Plan assessments to reduce the risk of pupils with SEN and disabilities being excluded, including revising the funding mechanism to secondary schools.
 - (d) The Council should facilitate the development of more alternative provision for primary-aged pupils, informed by a review of the needs of primary aged pupils who have been permanently excluded.
 - (e) The Council is asked to develop a behaviour strategy that promotes inclusion, and encourages schools to strive for the Inclusion Quality Mark and share best practice.
 - (f) The Council, and schools, should give specific attention to developing the personal resilience of vulnerable pupils and driving up their educational outcomes at Key Stage 2 to support a smoother transition to secondary school.
 - (g) The Council should work with the Schools Forum as a sounding board, to ensure Local Authority funded support services are fit for purpose, promoted and well used.
 - (h) The Council should more robustly challenge schools over their use of reduced timetables to manage pupils with additional needs or challenging behaviour, so that a more consistent and appropriate approach is adopted across all schools.

Monitoring Progress

11. A report on the Cabinet's response to these recommendations will be reported to the next available Education Scrutiny Committee meeting.
12. It is anticipated that the Chairman of the working group and scrutiny officer will ensure that a review of progress against accepted recommendations is scheduled into the future work programme of the Committee. Usually a progress report will be requested by the Committee within 6-12 months after actions have been agreed by Cabinet.

Financial and Staff Implications

13. The financial or staffing impacts arising from this review are dependent upon whether and how each working group recommendation is progressed. The Cabinet may wish to ask for more detailed work to be undertaken by the Education team before considering its response to each of the recommendations set out in this report.

Equalities Implications

14. Through its investigation of the underlying causes for the increase in school exclusions across Oxfordshire the working group identified that a high proportion of pupils at risk of exclusion were vulnerable learners and those with additional needs or disabilities.
15. The recommendations arising from the review aim to ensure that adequate support and training is in place to promote inclusivity and equality for these learners. It is expected that equalities implications will be considered when Cabinet responds to the recommendations and implements those that are accepted.

RECOMMENDATION

16. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**
 - (a) Consider the recommendations of the Education Scrutiny Committee Exclusions working group for the Council;
 - (b) Agree which recommendations the Cabinet will accept; and
 - (c) Ask the Director for Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Education, to prepare a response for the next meeting of the Education Scrutiny Committee.

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