

## EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 27 JUNE 2018

### RESPONSE TO THE EDUCATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS IN OXFORDSHIRE

#### Report by Director for Children's Services

#### Introduction

1. In April 2018 Cabinet received a report from the Education Scrutiny Working Party into Education Exclusions in Oxfordshire (Annex A). The working party was in response to the increased numbers of fixed term and permanent exclusions in Oxfordshire schools and academies.
2. The subject of exclusions was also an issue in the recent Ofsted inspection of services supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and is a focus of work of the OSCB. The prevention of exclusion is high priority in the current work of Children Education and Families. The investigation and focus by Education Overview and Scrutiny made a valuable contribution to the ongoing focus in this area.
3. The Working Group undertook investigations into schools with high numbers of exclusions and those whose inclusive practice results in very few children being excluded. Members also looked into the process of Fair Access to prevent exclusions and the current policies and procedures used. They also spoke to the Children in Care Council.
4. The report included 13 recommendations, eight of which were for the Cabinet. The recommendations have been considered by senior managers and the Cabinet Member for Education and Public Health. Enclosed is the response to the recommendations and a plan of action. Some of the recommendations overlap with current work. Some are discreet and will be addressed in addition to the wide range of inclusion projects already being undertaken.

#### **The Cabinet Member for Education's Response to the 8 Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1: 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.**

5. Training for governors is on offer for all schools and academies, co-ordinated by the small team of officers in Governor Support Services. As a result of the recommendation there will be more bespoke training for governors on reducing

exclusions and sharing best practice on inclusion. The newly drafted Local Authority Inclusion Strategy, when complete, will provide a timely focus for new training and awareness raising for governors.

6. The Local Authority advocates strong leadership through the challenge and support it gives to schools, annual risk assessments of school performance on inclusive measures and the commissioned work of the Teaching Schools Alliance. In maintained schools the Local Authority has most influence on leadership, not least of all by the presence of senior officers during the final interview process for Headship. The recently introduced Breakfast meetings every term for Headteachers has added value to the important focus on inclusion and reinforced key messages and shared targets to reduce exclusions.

**Recommendation 2: 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.**

7. Improving Inclusion is a high priority in Children, Education and Families (CEF) demonstrated by the creation of and recruitment to the Head of Service post for Learner Engagement. The inclusion services currently distributed across a range of services in CEF will come together under discreet leadership to support the new Inclusion Strategy. The 'Fit for the Future' project management of Learner Engagement is focusing work on reducing exclusions and working with Headteachers to seek earlier intervention and develop a collegiate approach to supporting children at risk of exclusion by changing policy and process. Pilots are already underway and the outcomes will inform wider reforms in the way fair access panels work.

**Recommendation 3: 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.**

8. There is already a focus of the post Ofsted Action Plan for SEND. The Programme Board chaired by the Lead Member for Education meets monthly to oversee ongoing improvements. The Department for Education (DFE) also monitors progress in line with the published plan. The funding for SEND pupils in secondary schools is under review as part of the recommendations linked to the revision of the High Needs Block resource. A change in the formula may help schools to prevent exclusion and allocate resource more effectively.

**Recommendation 4: 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.**

9. The new Head of Service for Learner Engagement will have the task of reviewing the current offer of alternative provision and seeking to commission a

wider range of support for children at risk of exclusion, particularly at Primary age where more local options are needed. Arrangements for funding will have to be agreed with schools, but the Local Authority can act as the broker in consultation with schools and partners.

**Recommendation 5: 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.**

10. A new Inclusion strategy is being launched which may include a quality mark, but will certainly provide guidance and state the shared expectations for inclusive practice in all schools and academies. Progress towards targets for reduction of exclusions will be published monthly and shared with schools via Schools News. Celebration of best practice will also be a feature of communication with schools and governors as part of regular updates and briefings. This will include reports on pilot projects and new approaches such as the Mulberry Bush.

**Recommendation 6: 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.**

11. The Cabinet Member is supportive of whatever the Council can do to develop teaching and learning approaches to encourage resilience. The recent Government green paper on mental health and wellbeing provides a welcome opportunity to seek funding and trial new initiatives with partners to raise awareness of the importance of mental well-being and the contribution it makes to inclusion. A summary has already been presented to Heads as part of the regular Breakfast Briefings.

**Recommendation 7: 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.**

12. The ongoing work of the Schools Forum and its sub groups ensures that services funded from the high needs block are challenged to provide good value for money. The Lead Member for Education attends the Schools Forum and has been involved in approaching the DFE to appeal for fairer funding to Oxfordshire for SEND. The review of High Needs Block will make recommendations to the Schools Forum for consideration. Some of these relate directly to better for children at risk of exclusion.

**Recommendation 8: 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.**

13. Work is ongoing as part of the Learner Engagement project to improve the processes for schools to report the use of part-time timetables to the local

authority. A lead officer is working on the project and reporting progress on a regular basis. New ICT systems are being put in place to improve information exchange with schools. The local authority will then be in a stronger position to challenge schools to reduce the time children are subject to part-time learning and to increase their education to full-time as quickly as possible. The appointment of 3 new Inclusion monitoring officers working to improve attendance has improved resource to challenge and support schools to reduce the use of part-time education.

14. The proposed actions to address the recommendations are contained in Annex 1.

### **Financial and Staff Implications**

15. The delivery of the recommendations will require changes to staffing arrangements to target additional resource where it will have most impact. All the adjustments to roles and responsibilities and the positioning of additional attendance officers in localities has been managed within existing budgets. The proposed service reorganisation to manage relevant services for inclusion under the leadership of a new Head of Service post for Learner Engagement has also been managed within existing budgets with a proposed change of line management for the relevant services.

### **Equalities Implications**

16. The equalities implications were addressed in the original report.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

17. **The Education Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to note the response to the recommendations and support the delivery of the action plan and the ongoing reporting of progress to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

### **COUNCILLOR HILARY HIBBERT- BILES**

Cabinet Member for Education and Public Health

Background papers: School Exclusions Working Group Report, Cabinet 17  
April 2018

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