

## **EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 24 JUNE 2020**

### **UPDATE ON THE IMPACT OF WORK ON REDUCING SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS IN OXFORDSHIRE**

Report by Deborah Bell – Head of Service Learner Engagement

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

**The Education Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to consider and note this report.**

#### **Introduction**

1. Exclusions in Oxfordshire have been a cause for concern to Members, Officers, Parents, the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Board and Children’s Trust for several years. Education Scrutiny Committee commenced a deep dive investigation into the issues in 2018. Further data with detail will be presented in closed committee and is subject to a separate report to prevent the risk of identifying individual children which would breach their right to privacy.

#### **Update**

2. Exclusions of children from schools in Oxfordshire have increased in 2019-20 to date. This is reflected nationally. Head Teachers and Governors make the decisions to exclude children. Following Education Scrutiny Committee’s working party Deep Dive into Exclusions which commenced in 2018, significant work has been delivered by Oxfordshire County Council to support school leaders to minimise exclusions where possible. The children most likely to be excluded are those at SEN Support and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

#### **Actions to support schools in reducing exclusions**

3. Since the Education Scrutiny Committee deep dive, the sharing of school level data for school leaders to reflect on and support and challenge each other was not agreed. However, individual support and challenge conversations were booked with high excluding school leaders, although these have been suspended due to COVID-19.
4. The Learner Engagement Team has co-produced (with school leaders and parents) a behaviour pathway as a checklist to support schools to reduce exclusions.
5. Based on data received termly, schools that are high excluders are identified for ‘support and challenge’ conversations between senior leaders and the Head of

Service Learner Engagement or Education Inclusion Manager. These conversations needed to be suspended due the exceptional circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak.

6. An officer post was created to act as a 'blue light' advice provider for school leaders when they are at the point of exclusion. The Behaviour and Attendance capacity that was carved out from Easter 2019 from existing capacity has been retained as an early intervention and prevention offer to schools.
7. Restorative Practice training has been offered to all schools in the county at no charge alongside a new suite of anti-bullying resources and guidance.
8. Exclusions awareness and reference to inclusive cultures and ethical leadership are routinely referenced at Heads and Chairs termly briefings.
9. Thames Valley Police is working with secondary schools to avoid exclusion of children at risk of criminal activity.
10. Case work for children with behaviour that challenges sits with Early Help in Children's Social Care. There is limited support for schools unless they pay for traded services through Oxfordshire Schools Inclusion Team (OXSiT).
11. Revised Governor and Trustee training has been produced and delivered in February and May 2020. This highlights Governors' duties and responsibilities with Exclusions guidance. Uptake of the offer has been disappointing despite being widely publicised.

### **Impact of COVID-19**

12. It is too early to fully assess the impact of COVID-19 on school exclusions in Oxfordshire. To date, as might be expected, permanent exclusions ceased from 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020. However, a small minority of schools sought to exclude vulnerable children still attending school after that date. Learner Engagement services were able to reverse these decisions through preventative intervention and challenge under the exceptional circumstances. It is anticipated that there may be an increase in exclusions once schools are fully operation due to children's relationships with school staff having been fractured and the mental health and well-being impact of COVID-19 lockdown on children and staff. Learner Engagement services have tried to pre-empt these challenges by creating a 'one stop shop' of services for schools on immediate return, addressing longer term impact through the Learner Engagement and Early Help Board and creating new free training for all schools on methods to settle children into regular routines and structures.

### **Sustainability Implications**

13. None in addition to OCC and partners usual considerations.

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