

Item No. 20.	Classification: Open	Date: 20 October 2020	Meeting Name: Cabinet
Report title:		Education Response to Exclusions and Alternative Provision – Report from the Education and Business Scrutiny Commission	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools	

FOREWORD – COUNCILLOR JASMINE ALI, DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND SCHOOLS

I welcome this scrutiny report on school exclusions in Southwark and all of its recommendations. I am very grateful to Councillor Babudu and everyone else who has put time and effort into this timely report.

As Southwark’s Lead Member for Children, Young People and Schools, keeping children safely in school could not be a greater priority. We will of course work hard to implement all of the report’s recommendations.

This report sets out a bold aspiration to end school exclusions. With this I am in full agreement. In Southwark we are very fortunate to have 93% good and outstanding schools that help our children and young people to achieve their potential just as well as their counterparts in well-heeled boroughs.

But as this report recognises it is deeply disturbing that:

- children who are looked after are around 2.3 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than children who have never been supported in social care
- children with social and emotional and mental health needs are more likely to be permanently excluded
- boys, children who are looked after, living in poverty, have special education needs or from certain BAME backgrounds are disproportionately excluded from school
- there is a high and disproportionate exclusion of children who have special educational needs. Official statistics show that children with special needs represent 14% of the state funded school population but account for half of permanent exclusions.

Spurred by this report we pledge to tackle school exclusions once and for all. While we got off to a good start in February when we worked with head teachers and schools at our Keeping Children in School conference, the Covid-19 pandemic meant that this work had to be paused. As the Council, schools, parents and pupils move cautiously towards a new normal, the priorities are making sure schools are safe, that gaps in learning are narrowed and that school inclusion is realised. This report is helpful as it can reignite our work to bring an end to school exclusion.

In June of this year our response to racial injustice was developed through the Southwark Stand Together programme. One of the commitments in this is to aspire to end all school exclusions by asking schools to share information that will better enable us to build an evidence base that in turn helps understand the experience of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students and develop a strategy that can help eliminate school exclusions for all.

The council's prioritisation of children's mental health will also help. We pledged to surpass NHS targets to support a mere 35% of children with mental health needs by working to support 100% of such children and young people. We've put a £2 million investment into mental health prevention in schools and have opened a free child and adolescent mental health drop in.

Our Youth Offending Service shows us that pupil referral unit (PRU) are Ofsted good, but we know there is a correlation between PRUs and re-offending, so we are looking at this with some care. We have our Keeping Families Strong work – which is led by a new parents' alliance.

Below, our officers from early help and education respond to the report's recommendations.

We look forward to advancing this work, including with a new review of home education and the addition of a review of all our alternative provision including pupil referral units in order to find more effective ways to keep our children in school.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the cabinet note education and children's services comments to the exclusions and alternative provision report from the education and business scrutiny commission.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Summary

2. The scrutiny commission has provided an excellent opportunity to spend time over the last year focusing on the issue of exclusions particularly permanent exclusions from school, including what happens to these young people and the alternative provision available.

3. During the time the commission met we also held the Keeping Children in Education Conference in collaboration with schools. This highlighted the willingness for our schools to engage in developing a better response to children who are at risk of permanent exclusion.

Recommendations	Comments
<p><i>100% inclusion</i></p> <p>1. Southwark Council should champion a 100% inclusion commitment in conjunction with schools, embodied in a mutually agreed Charter and an annual inclusion report to track progress against its 100% inclusion target.</p>	<p>This work on achieving this ambitious but achievable goal was started in February 2020 after the Keeping Children in Education Conference. An officer/school leaders task and finish group began work on agreeing to devise a model of provision that would offer high quality meaningful pathways for children and young people and therefore eliminate exclusion and increase school inclusion. Alongside this we agreed to commission Achievement for All to enhance and further explore in school strategies and provision that would result in reducing the risk of exclusion. Whilst we agreed that this should have an ambitious timeline in the inaugural session the development of this has been hampered by lockdown due to COVID 19. We now need to recover some lost ground.</p>

Recommendations	Comments
<p>2. The Council should conduct an action-focused review into the disproportionate representation of BAME and SEN children in Southwark's exclusion statistics</p>	<p>The data in the report should be treated with caution as data sets may have been conflated and comparisons between data sets referenced in the report do not always compare like with like. This is important to note if we wish to aim for accuracy. Key areas of concern centre around disproportionality of ethnic groups and permanent exclusions. Although permanent exclusions of BAME young people are high in Southwark, they are not statistically disproportionately so, given that Southwark itself has a high BAME population. For this reason it is difficult to compare ourselves to a 'London' rate or to other boroughs, as our demographic profiles are significantly different.</p> <p>If we are concerned about school exclusions we should calculate the BAME proportion of all young people of statutory school age – as they are the only ones who can be permanently excluded from schools and use this to work out the disproportionality rates for permanent exclusions from Southwark schools (and relating to Southwark young people). The scrutiny report uses a very different age and demographic profile (up to 24 years old) and thus is not comparing like with like. However, it is agreed that a focused review needs to be undertaken and this will sit alongside the actions of the task and finish group referenced in recommendation 1 and refocus of the team in recommendation 9.</p>
<p><i>Off-rolling</i> 3. The Council needs clearer procedures in place for identifying off-rolling and be more ready to challenge bad practice by schools.</p>	<p>The council has been using the Ofsted methodology to help determine the off-rolling position of each school since early 2019 and continues to challenge any unacceptable practice. This approach sits alongside a range of strategies which is resulting in the exclusion rate in Southwark drop from 51 to 15.</p>

Recommendations	Comments
<p><i>Home education</i></p> <p>4. The Council should conduct a comprehensive review of children currently being home educated to identify possible cases of forced home schooling, and where this is identified, help parents/carers to reintegrate their children into mainstream education.</p>	<p>This is an important focus especially in the light of the gradual increase in notifications in the last three years. A review was about to be commissioned prior to Covid19 and lockdown. Since the return to school in September 2020 we have seen a further sharp increase in notifications which has introduced a new and added dimension to the review we must conduct.</p>
<p><i>Alternative provision</i></p> <p>5. The Council must rethink the delivery and aims for alternative provision, moving towards a nurturing model with continued registration of children at mainstream schools wherever possible.</p>	<p>This is a fundamental part of the remit of the task and finish group set up in February and dovetails with the aim of 100% inclusion. An in-depth review of current provision was scheduled for April 2020. However, we will now need to reschedule this for the earliest opportunity.</p>
<p><i>Data</i></p> <p>6. The Council must be clear on which schools are under or late-reporting mandatory data to the Council and escalate these concerns more quickly.</p>	<p>The primary relationship for data sharing is now directly between schools and the Department for Education. The council and schools are clear on the limited data sets that schools are required to share with the Local Authority. Our goal is for schools to sign up to a Charter of information sharing through the work of the task and finish group (recommendation 1).</p>
<p><i>Regulatory reporting</i></p> <p>7. Where school conduct or data concerns are identified, the Council needs to escalate these more quickly with the appropriate regulatory body.</p>	<p>Any concerns will continue to be escalated as per the usual procedures</p>
<p><i>Schools</i></p> <p>8. Schools should be actively encouraged to work together to peer review exclusions performance.</p>	<p>The purpose, form and protocols of this will be examined further by the task and finish group.</p>

Recommendations	Comments
<p><i>School-Council partnership</i></p> <p>9. To underpin a shared 100% inclusion vision, the Council should pursue a bold new partnership with schools, including greater information sharing from schools and resource allocation for “at risk” children as well. As part of this renewed partnership Southwark should create a fit-for-purpose equivalent of an Inclusion Officer.</p>	<p>The Keeping children in Education conference has served as catalyst for a bold new partnership with schools and providers. The Education Inclusion Team with a Team Manager and 3 Senior Education Welfare Officers was created during the Family Early Help reorganisation in 2018. Since the 2017/18 school year permanent exclusions from Southwark Schools have reduced from 51 to 15 pupils (unpublished)</p>

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

4. Since the commission reported our latest data on permanent exclusions indicates a positive reduction in the number of children from the peak of 51 in 17/18 to 15 in 19/20 (unpublished). There is also the impact of C-19 to be considered within any next steps given the initial primary focus on getting children back into school.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Education and Business Scrutiny Commission Agendas and Minutes 2019/20	Southwark Council Website	Fitzroy Williams 020 7525 7102
Link: http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=518		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix A	Education and Business Scrutiny Exclusions Report

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Member	Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools	
Lead Officer	David Quirke-Thornton, Strategic Director of Children's and Adults' Services	
Report Author	Nina Dohel, Director of Education and Jenny Brennan, Assistant Director Family Early Help and Youth Justice	
Version	Final	
Dated	8 October 2020	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		8 October 2020