
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel was held on Monday 18 January 2021.

PRESENT: Councillors S Hill (Chair), P Storey (Vice-Chair), A Hellaoui, T Higgins, T Mawston, M Nugent, M Saunders and G Wilson

OFFICERS: C Breheny, R Brown, S Butcher, C Cannon, D Collingwood, E Cowley, J Dixon, T Dunn, G Moore and M Stelling

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors D Jones

20/28 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

20/29 **MINUTES - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL - 7 DECEMBER 2020**

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel held on 7 December 2020 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

20/30 **BEHAVIOUR, DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING IN SCHOOLS - FURTHER EVIDENCE**

At the meeting, the scrutiny panel received further evidence to inform its review of Behaviour, Discipline and Bullying in Schools.

Officers were in attendance to provide:

- detailed information on the causes of pupil behaviour problems e.g. unmet educational or other needs;
- data on the characteristics of excluded pupils (whether permanently or for a fixed period); and
- case study examples demonstrating how certain factors could impact on behaviour, from a child or young person's perspective.

The Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Specialist Support Services advised that the Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist; the Head of Inclusion, Assessment and Review and the Assessment and Quality Assurance Manager were in attendance to present the information requested by the scrutiny panel. It was explained that the presentation would cover the influences on pupil behaviour, the picture in Middlesbrough, the voice of the child in respect of exclusions, the voice of the child and parents in respect of the assessment centre/alternative provision and links to strategic outcomes.

The Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist advised that the nature of the influences on behaviour were both complex and interactional. Members heard that a range of characteristics may interact with other factors, resulting in the permanent exclusion of a child or young person. The child characteristics that appeared to impact on permanent exclusions included being a boy, having Special Educational Needs (SEN), being looked after by the Local Authority and being involved with social services. However, it was explained that those characteristics, in isolation, did not mean that a child or young person would be at risk of exclusion, exclusion occurred when those characteristics interacted with other factors. Other factors included:

- **Family** - family circumstances e.g. living in poverty, levels of deprivation, conflict within the family.
- **Peers** - peer groups being poor role models and becoming more influential e.g. displaying antisocial behaviour, drug-taking or criminality.
- **School** - the child or young person's relationship with their school e.g. the philosophy of the school and its leadership style.
- **Community/wider systems** - high levels of poverty and unemployment within a population and how communities perceive education.

All of the factors discussed could interact with each other increasing the likelihood of exclusion for the child or young person.

In terms of developmental experiences, for a child with SEN, difficulty with learning could impact over time and school could be perceived as a place where they experienced failure. That could then lead to disaffection and poor behaviour, impacting on the child's relationship with their school and ultimately resulting in exclusion.

The Head of Inclusion, Assessment and Review advised that the Timpson report, published in 2019, had highlighted the importance of effective behaviour management in schools and the need to understand and respond to individual children's needs.

Members heard that, in England, for the period 2014/15 to 2018/19, the number of permanent exclusions had dropped in 2015/16. However, generally, permanent exclusions had stayed at a similar rate over the five year period. For the northeast region, permanent exclusion rates had also dropped during the 2015/16 academic year, which mirrored the national picture. However, for the northeast region the rate of permanent exclusions had been increasing year-on-year up to 2018/19.

In terms of Middlesbrough's statistical neighbours, there were several other local authorities that had similar characteristics e.g. demographic profile, levels of deprivation and socio-economic characteristics. In comparison to its statistical neighbours, in respect of the number of permanent exclusions over the 5 year period, Middlesbrough ranked between 3rd and 6th of the 11 local authorities.

In terms of Middlesbrough's permanent exclusion rates, Members were shown a graph that demonstrated the number of exclusions by academic year over a ten-year period between 2010 and 2020. Whereas nationally there had been a reduction in permanent exclusions for the 2015/16 academic year, Middlesbrough's had experienced a peak in rates. However, the following academic year (2016/17), Middlesbrough had experienced a dip in rates. Middlesbrough's rates were not too dissimilar to national trends, the reduction was merely experienced a year later. It was explained that Middlesbrough's peak in 2015/16 could have been a result of many different factors. During that period, a number of schools had become academies, which had resulted in a significant period of change for those schools. It was explained that the peak in rates could have been due to the changes that were occurring in the wider education system.

The graph demonstrated that the number of permanent exclusions was decreasing year-on-year. It was envisaged that the drop in permanent exclusions, since the 2015/16 academic year, was due to the collaborative work that the Local Authority was undertaking with schools. The Local Authority had also invested in developing the new Inclusion, Assessment and Review Service in an attempt to address inclusion issues and tackle permanent exclusions. However, it was clarified that with 2020/21 being the current academic year, only partial data had been recorded. It was also highlighted that Covid-19 could have had an impact on exclusion rates for the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21. Although the rates were decreasing, exclusion

rates in Middlesbrough were still high and there was a need to focus on implementing preventative measures and providing appropriate support to ensure those rates decreased even further.

In terms of the reasons for excluding pupils, categories had been identified for reporting, by the Department for Education. For the period September 2019 to December 2020, data demonstrated that the main reason for permanent exclusion was disruptive behaviour. It was explained that, for those categories where the number of pupils was reported as less than 5, the exact data was redacted to ensure individual pupils could not be identified against those descriptors. For that period, 45 pupils had been excluded. In terms of the characteristics of those pupils, 10 were registered as having special educational needs (SEN) and 8 pupils were open to social care services.

The Assessment and Quality Assurance Manager advised that, in terms of experiences of exclusion, the Local Authority worked hard to seek the views of both pupils and parents. Feedback from pupils and parents was collected three times a year, firstly when the child or young person was initially excluded and their education became the responsibility of the Local Authority, secondly when an alternative long-term placement had been identified and the child or young person was about to transition to that placement (e.g. another mainstream school or a specialist setting) and thirdly, during regular review meetings once the child or young person had transitioned.

The panel was shown a series of quotes which demonstrated the impact that exclusion had on the social, emotional and mental health of children and young people. It was explained that children often felt that they had failed and were unable to succeed in education. Quotes also suggested that children did not fully understand the reasons for being excluded and the process that followed a permanent exclusion. In an attempt to address those issues, the feedback had been conveyed to schools via the meetings of the Pupil Inclusion Panels.

Members were also shown the positive feedback received from pupils who had attended the assessment centre. The focus of the assessment centre, which was based at the Middlesbrough Community Learning Centre in Acklam, was to ensure that a child's academic needs were being met and identify and address the issues that may have led to the permanent exclusion. The foundation of that work focused on building positive relationships with the child and their family, ensuring that the child's holistic needs were being met and that the most appropriate longer-term placement could be identified.

The panel was shown feedback received from parents once their child had transitioned from the assessment centre to a new longer-term setting. Comments clearly demonstrated that children who had been permanently excluded from school were able to continue their educational pathway, achieve good outcomes and have a positive future.

The Head of Inclusion, Assessment and Review advised that in terms of priorities and outcomes, there was a desire to:

- continue the collaborative work with schools and build on those partnerships further;
- ensure that the needs of those with SEN were identified at the earliest point and that provision to support those needs could be accessed at the earliest of stages;
- ensure that the inclusion model was holistic, taking into account the social and educational needs of each child;
- make sure that all services were well-coordinated and that data and feedback

- was used to plan and inform delivery of services;
- achieve a further reduction in the number of exclusions; and
- improve outcomes for children and young people as they move into Post 16 education and beyond.

In response to a Member's query, the Head of Access to Education and Alternative Provision advised that schools were obliged to provide the Local Authority with their fixed-term exclusion data. It was explained, however, that some schools had encountered technical difficulties and were unable to automatically submit data to the Local Authority, as they did not use a Capita Information Management System (IMS). That had resulted in the need for manual returns to be submitted, causing a delay in the data being received. Members were advised that the Data Team was well aware of the issues encountered by schools. It was also added that, for the majority of schools, the submission of data was seamless.

A Member asked whether exclusion rates were highest for those schools located in the most deprived areas of Middlesbrough. The Head of Inclusion, Assessment and Review explained that a lot of Middlesbrough's schools had a catchment area that included children and young people from deprived areas of Middlesbrough. However, without doing an in-depth analysis of data, the Local Authority was unable to predict which postcode areas resulted in higher exclusion rates. It was commented however, that those schools located in the most deprived areas did experience higher rates of exclusion. The Head of Access to Education and Alternative Provision added that Unity City Academy had been successful over the past year/18 months in significantly reducing the number of fixed-term exclusions, as the school had adopted a different approach to behaviour management. That suggested that the management and leadership approaches adopted by schools did impact on exclusion rates. Recently, schools had been exploring the possibility of using alternative strategies and methods to exclusion.

A Member queried whether, in terms of Middlesbrough's statistical neighbours, the Local Authority had been working collaboratively with those local authorities that had seen a positive decrease in the number of exclusions. In response, the Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Specialist Support Services advised that work had been undertaken with other local authorities to consider best practice and research had been undertaken to identify the factors that could impact on exclusion. That work had ultimately resulted in the development of the new Inclusion, Assessment and Review Service. The Head of Access to Education and Alternative Provision added that there was a regional group whereby key individuals from the northeast region met to discuss exclusion trends, approaches to alternative provision and different models of support. That platform enabled the local authorities to share innovative practice.

The Director of Education, Prevention and Partnerships advised that in terms of the strategic outcomes outlined, it was envisaged that Children's Services could work collaboratively with the scrutiny panel to ensure those priorities were progressed.

A Member raised concerns that one carer had felt intimidated when meeting with the school to discuss the exclusion of their child. The Assessment and Quality Assurance Manager advised that the feedback received had been communicated to the Pupil Inclusion Panel, enabling the school to address the issues raised.

AGREED

That the information presented at the meeting be considered in the context of the scrutiny panel's investigation.

Education and Covid-19 Recovery

The Executive Director of Children's Services advised that, as part of the Improvement Plan, a request had been made that Members be kept informed of the progress made in responding to Covid-19.

With the Chair's agreement, it was planned that updates on education and Covid-19 recovery would be provided at each meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel.

Members were advised that all schools were open to vulnerable children and children of key workers. The attendance of Middlesbrough's vulnerable children was monitored. The definition of a vulnerable child was a child who had an assigned social worker. There was a dedicated phone line, which enabled schools to alert the Local Authority when a vulnerable child was missing education. Once notified of a child's non-attendance, the Local Authority would undertake a risk assessment to determine whether action was required.

When children were not in school, systems were in place to facilitate remote learning. It was advised that school heads were under a tremendous amount of pressure as they were essentially providing leadership for two schools, a remote school and an actual school. The Local Authority held regularly meetings with schools.

In terms of school meals, a voucher system had been launched and those vouchers were redeemable at most supermarkets.

In terms of laptops, schools had been receiving laptops directly from the Department for Education. In respect of sufficiency of laptops, there had been a focus on providing laptops to vulnerable children.

The Director of Education, Prevention and Partnerships advised that with the closure of schools, the quality of remote learning had become critical and gaining access to a digital device was very important. It was advised that Ofsted was conducting inspections in respect of the quality of remote learning packages and the Local Authority was working with school heads across the borough to share best practice.

The Director explained that some children had encountered difficulties with gaining access to a digital device and/or the internet. As a result, the Local Authority had developed a scheme to distribute laptops and the DfE had distributed thousands of laptops across Middlesbrough, focussing on those pupils from disadvantaged families. In addition, schools, private businesses and third sector organisations had also been accessing their budgets and working to provide devices to pupils. The Local Authority aimed to track the distribution of laptops and ensure that schools received the number of laptops they had requested.

The Executive Director of Children's Services commented that the Local Authority would continue to work collaboratively with schools.

Next Meeting

The Chair explained that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on 22 February, which was the day that the schools were anticipated to return after half term. As there was a requirement for the scrutiny panel to receive evidence from schools, it was proposed that the meeting be rescheduled for the following week on Monday 1 March.

NOTED

