

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny Review 2018/19: Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusion from School

Proposed Draft Recommendations

Islington has a high rate of exclusion. The exclusion rate is higher than the Inner London and England averages, and comparatively higher than Islington's statistical neighbours. This is not acceptable.

Exclusion is an equalities issue. Nationally, disadvantaged students, those with special educational needs and disabilities, and certain ethnic minority groups are significantly more likely to be excluded. Boys are far more likely to be excluded than girls.

Exclusion is a fairness issue. There is a significant variation in the exclusion rates of Islington schools which cannot be justified. It is unfair that children attending some schools are far more likely to be excluded than their peers attending other schools in the borough.

Exclusion penalises young people who have vulnerabilities, additional needs and experiences of trauma. Exclusion can have significant personal and financial impacts on young people and their families.

Exclusion has financial implications for the local authority which detrimentally impacts on our ability to provide services to children and young people.

The Committee believes that Islington's young people deserve better.

Education should be inclusive and exclusion should be prevented wherever possible.

Exclusion should only be used as a last resort. Fixed period exclusion is rarely an effective method of managing behaviour; permanent exclusion is often avoidable.

The draft recommendations set out below seek to prevent exclusion, help our schools to develop best practice, ensure that young people and their parents and carers are supported when faced with exclusion, and challenge central government on factors that are outside of the council's control.

Helping our schools to prevent exclusions and support young people at risk of exclusion

- 1. Schools should be encouraged to make referrals at the earliest opportunity to support services such as Educational Psychology, CAMHS, the New River College outreach service and Early Help services.** Officers in Pupil Services and School Improvement should liaise with service providers to ensure that they provide further guidance to schools on when it is appropriate to make a referral, including how making a referral can benefit the young person, their family, and the school. Officers in Pupil Services and School Improvement should do further work to continue to raise this as a priority issue with school leaders through relevant forums, conferences and meetings, as appropriate.

2. **Schools should be further encouraged to make best use of the whole-school transformation programmes offered by CAMHS, Educational Psychology, and the New River College outreach services.** In particular, schools should be encouraged to implement trauma informed practices in consultation with CAMHS as a method of better supporting children at risk of exclusion. To achieve this, officers in Pupil Services and School Improvement should highlight the benefits of these transformation programmes through relevant forums, conferences and meetings with school leaders, as appropriate. If required, these services should review how their transformative services are promoted to schools.
3. **Officers in Pupil Services and School Improvement should encourage schools to closely link their Behaviour Management and Special Educational Needs functions.** This will help to ensure that pupils with behavioural difficulties are assessed for special educational needs and can access support if required, and the special educational needs of pupils can be recognised in school behaviour management practices. Officers should encourage schools to make this change through relevant forums, conferences, and meetings with school leaders, as appropriate.
4. **Officers in Pupil Services and School Improvement should encourage and support all schools to form Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships.** These would support schools in taking a collaborative and strategic approach to addressing behaviour and attendance issues through the sharing of best practice. This may reduce the variation between school behaviour policies and practices, help to establish local standards for when exclusion should be used, and develop a shared culture of managing behaviour in Islington schools.
5. **School governors should receive training on how they can help to shape their school's culture and ethos, their role in the exclusion process, and how they can scrutinise school behaviour policies and practices.**
6. **To ensure that all school staff are well equipped to support young people at risk of exclusion, officers in the Children, Employment and Skills directorate should explore how information on pupil needs can be shared widely between support services and school staff whilst meeting confidentiality requirements.** This could be achieved through adopting a 'pyramid of need' approach, where a young person's needs are categorised without explicit reference to their individual circumstances.

Developing best practice in our schools

7. **Officers in Pupil Services and School Improvement should use the Committee's findings to produce a Good Practice Guide for schools.**

Specifically, this should include:

- An **aim** for Islington's schools to exclude no pupils;
- An **objective** for schools to avoid exclusions wherever possible, and not to use alternative provision as a substitute;
- A **challenge** for schools to work in collaboration with each other and the local authority to reduce Islington's exclusion rate;
- Details of the **support services** available to young people at risk of exclusion, how they can be accessed, and the benefits of making a referral at the earliest possible stage;
- Details of the **transformation programmes** available to schools and how they can help support pupils, including those at risk of exclusion;
- Examples of **successful inclusion and behaviour management practices** adopted by schools;
- The importance of **teacher wellbeing** and how to support teachers to manage behaviour effectively;
- The importance of **listening to young people and their parents** on behaviour and exclusion issues;
- That behaviour **policies and practices should be flexible** for pupils with additional needs;
- That schools should closely link their behaviour management and special educational needs functions;
- That **governors should receive training** on exclusion and behaviour issues;
- That parents have a right to **transparent information** on their child's exclusion, and issues related to school behaviour policies and practices;
- That schools should signpost pupils and their parents or carers **independent advocacy services** when they are at risk of exclusion (i.e. when they are excluded for more than five non-consecutive days in a school year);
- That schools excluding pupils should **provide comprehensive information to the pupil referral unit** on a pupil's behaviour, attainment, progress and needs.
- A **practical toolkit or checklist** to help schools in assessing and identifying support for pupils at risk of exclusion;
- A summary of the Committee's conclusions, the impact that exclusion can have on young people and their families, and the cost of exclusion.

Officers in Pupil Services and School Improvement should promote this guidance to head teachers, school staff with responsibility for behaviour management and special educational needs, and school governors.

8. **A 'Charter for Inclusion' should be developed with Islington Schools and New River College to affirm their commitment to supporting Islington's young people to stay mainstream education.** The Charter should make explicit links to the principles set out in the Good Practice Guide and should be developed in consultation with young people.

Supporting children and young people excluded from school

9. **Officers in the Children, Employment and Skills directorate should review the feasibility of attaching a named social worker to New River College.**
Providing New River College with this resource, even for a few hours a week, would enhance the support that is available to excluded pupils.
10. **To remove the stigma associated with attending a pupil referral unit, officers in the Children, Employment and Skills directorate should work with New River College to widely promote the successes of its pupils.** Targeted information should also be provided to parents at the point of their child's exclusion, emphasising that New River College provides a supportive and nurturing learning environment, and summarising the findings of New River College's most recent Ofsted inspection in which it was rated 'Good'.
11. **Officers in the Children, Employment and Skills directorate should engage with neighbouring authorities and schools in neighbouring boroughs close to the borough boundary, making them aware of this review and the support that is expected for pupils who are Islington residents.**

Supporting parents and carers

In response to evidence received during the review, officers have already implemented the following service changes:

- (a) The council now provides more comprehensive information on independent sources of support available to parents and carers on its website and in the initial letter which is sent to parents and carers informing them of their child's permanent exclusion from school.
- (b) Officers have asked Islington Law Centre to hold free parent workshops on the exclusions process. The first session was held in November 2018.
- (c) Islington Law Centre has offered to hold a series of monthly drop-in sessions, at no cost to the council, for parents and carers seeking independent advice on issues arising from their child's exclusion.

Urging Central Government to act in the best interests of young people

12. **Islington Council should lobby for national policy changes that would support children to remain in mainstream education;** including a broader curriculum, increased funding for schools to better support children with additional needs, addressing educational equalities issues, and reforming school league tables which encourage schools to compete rather than collaborate and incentivise schools to exclude. Lobbying efforts should be coordinated with teaching unions, neighbouring local authorities and others, if possible.

13. **Officers in the Children, Employment and Skills directorate should report back to the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee on the findings of the national School Exclusions Review led by Edward Timpson CBE, and detail if it is possible to implement its recommendations locally.** The Committee would also welcome information on the Government’s response to the Timpson review and any implications for Islington.

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