



ISLINGTON

**Permanent and Fixed-Period Exclusion
from School**

**REPORT OF THE
CHILDREN'S SERVICES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

London Borough of Islington
April 2019

Foreword:

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 pupils from 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 Committee's recommendations 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.

Cllr Theresa Debono
On behalf of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Permanent and fixed period exclusion from school

Aim:

To examine the use and impact of fixed period and permanent exclusion from both primary and secondary school, and make recommendations that will enable more children and young people to remain in mainstream education.

Evidence:

The Committee commenced the review in July 2018. Evidence was received from a variety of sources:

Evidence from Council Officers:

- Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services
- Gill Sassienie, Principal Educational Psychologist
- Ruth Beecher, Head of Early Help Services
- Gabriella Di-Sciullo, Head of Admissions and Children Missing from Education

Evidence from young people and their families:

- Visit to New River College and focus group with excluded pupils
- Focus group with parents of excluded pupils
- Follow-up focus group with parents of excluded pupils

Evidence from others:

- Peter Gray, Independent Expert and Government Adviser
- Dr Helen Aspland & Jane Stephenson-Glynn – Child and Adolescents Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Patrick Mildren, Head Teacher, Canonbury Primary School
- Jamie Brownhill, Head Teacher, Central Foundation Secondary School
- Nigel Smith, Head Teacher, New River College Pupil Referral Unit

Documentary evidence:

- Exclusions Data
- Briefing note: Government review of pupil exclusion, and a statement on alternative provision
- Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England: Statutory guidance for those with legal responsibilities in relation to exclusion (September 2017)
- Department for Education: A Review of School Exclusion: terms of reference
- Behaviour and discipline in schools: Advice for headteachers and school staff (January 2016)
- "They never give up on you" Office of the Children's Commissioner School Exclusions Inquiry (2011)

Summary of Main Findings:

Islington has a high rate of exclusion in comparison to other London boroughs and its statistical neighbours. The borough does not compare favourably in national rankings. Although Islington has a high level of exclusion, there is a significant variation between the exclusion rates of Islington's schools.

While it is accepted that exclusion can be necessary in some instances, there is no need for Islington's exclusion rate to be as high as it is. All schools have broadly similar cohorts and any variation in the demographic profile of schools is not significant enough to validate such substantial differences in their exclusion rates.

The Committee believes that exclusion is a fairness issue. Exclusion can have serious negative consequences for young people and their families; exclusion impacts on educational attainment, family wellbeing, and limits the opportunities available to young people. It is unfair that children attending certain schools are far more likely to be excluded than their peers attending other schools in the borough.

The Committee received evidence on the range of support services available to young people at risk of exclusion. Overall the Committee was satisfied with the range of support services available, however, the Committee considers that schools should be further encouraged and supported in making referrals to support services at the earliest possible opportunity and to make best use of whole-school transformation programmes offered by them.

The Committee heard concerns that some pupils with special educational needs and learning disabilities may not be receiving adequate support to stay in mainstream education. The Committee consider that closely linking special educational needs and behaviour management functions would assist schools in supporting pupils with additional needs that also have challenging behaviours. This may also result in an earlier diagnosis of special educational needs.

The Committee would like to see a more joined up approach to managing behaviour and exclusion in schools. Establishing behaviour and attendance partnerships would provide a forum for schools to share best practice and problem-solve together. Additionally, this may help to standardise practice between schools and develop a shared culture of managing behaviour.

School governors are crucial to the exclusions process, but the Committee heard that not all governors were confident in dealing with exclusion issues. The Committee suggests that governors would benefit from specific training on exclusion issues and on reviewing school behaviour policies, ethos and culture.

More sophisticated data sharing arrangements, developed with due regard to Data Protection requirements, would help school staff to better understand the needs of young people.

The Committee recommends that the council produce a 'Good Practice Guide' for schools; a practical document which provides schools with relevant information on exclusion matters, including clear expectations and a strategic vision for schools to reflect on.

In addition to the Good Practice Guide, the Committee recommends that all schools should affirm their commitment to inclusive education by signing a 'Charter for Inclusion'. This should be developed in consultation with schools, New River College, and young people.

The Committee was impressed with the work of New River College. The Committee welcomes the 'Good' rating that New River College received in its most recent Ofsted inspection. The Committee would like the council to support New River College in challenging the stigma associated with attending a pupil referral unit.

Many parents felt that they needed help in navigating school and local authority processes and did not know how to access independent sources of advice and advocacy. Further work is needed to support parents in accessing advocacy services.

The Committee believes that the national increase in school exclusions is partly attributable to national education policy. The Committee would welcome coordinated lobbying with teaching unions, neighbouring local authorities and others to highlight the impact of the government's education policy and to campaign for changes that would support children to remain in mainstream education.

Conclusions:

The focus of this review has been on exclusion; the impact that exclusion can have on young people and their families, the exclusion practices of local schools, the services available for pupils facing exclusion, and the reason why the number of exclusions has increased in recent years. Considering the range of evidence received, there is no single straightforward solution to prevent exclusion; exclusion reflects a plethora of complex and interconnected factors, institutional, personal and social, that lead to a child facing the trauma of exclusion from school. However, what seems clear is that exclusion can be challenged by focusing on **inclusion**. Taking an inclusive approach is key to supporting pupils with additional needs and challenges. Inclusivity should underpin the work of all services involved in ensuring that young people remain engaged in education. The Committee hopes that its recommendations will contribute to an inclusive approach to supporting young people across the borough.

The Committee concludes that Islington's exclusion rate is too high. The significant variation of the exclusion rates of Islington's schools is not justified and further focused work with the highest excluding schools is needed. This work is important; exclusion is a fairness issue that is having a real impact on young people and their families.

Fourteen recommendations have been made in response to the evidence received. These are related to preventing exclusion, developing best practice in schools, supporting young people excluded from school and their parents and urging central government to act in the best interests of young people. The Committee would like to thank all the witnesses that gave evidence in relation to the review. The Executive is asked to endorse the Committee's recommendations.

Recommendations:

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 undertake 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, 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 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.
7. **The Securing Education Boards should consider if any of their processes can be amended to offer additional support to pupils at risk of exclusion.** The Committee heard evidence of local schools working effectively to promote inclusion and avoid exclusion. The Committee would welcome the support of the Securing Education Boards in promoting examples of good practice to all schools so that all of Islington's pupils can benefit from this preventative work. For example, the Boards should consider if they can help schools in identifying support for pupils at risk of exclusion at an earlier stage, and if they can further support schools in identifying and implementing trauma-informed and solution-focused approaches for pupils at risk of exclusion. The Boards should also consider if their processes can be expedited for pupils at imminent risk of exclusion.

Developing best practice in our schools

8. **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 to **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.

9. **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 in 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

10. **Officers 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.
11. **To remove the stigma associated with attending a pupil referral unit, officers 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'.
12. **Officers 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

13. **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.
14. **Officers 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.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP - 2018/19

Councillors:

Councillor Theresa Debono (Chair)
Councillor Vivien Cutler (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Santiago Bell-Bradford
Councillor Rakhia Ismail
Councillor Michelline Safi Ngongo
Councillor Marian Spall
Councillor John Woolf
Councillor Kadeema Woodbyrne (to December 2018)
Councillor Phil Graham (from December 2018)

Co-opted Member:

Mary Clement – Roman Catholic Diocese Representative

Substitutes:

Councillor Satnam Gill OBE
Councillor Mouna Hamitouche MBE
Councillor Angela Picknell
Councillor Nick Wayne

Acknowledgements:

The Committee would like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence to the review.

Officer Support:

Candy Holder – Head of Pupil Services
Gabriella Di-Sciullio – Head of Admissions and Children Missing from Education
Jonathan Moore – Deputy Manager Committee Services

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The review was held between July 2018 and April 2019. The overall aim of the review was to examine the use and impact of fixed period and permanent exclusion from both primary and secondary school, and make recommendations that will enable more children and young people to remain in mainstream education.

The Committee also agreed the following objectives:

- To understand how the school exclusion process operates and the work undertaken at school and local authority level to prevent exclusions.
 - To review the support available to excluded pupils, and to scrutinise if this is effective.
 - To explore the reasons for exclusions, and the reasons why Islington schools have higher rates of exclusion than the Inner London average.
 - To evaluate the impact of permanent and fixed period exclusion from school for all stakeholders – the young person, their parents and family, the school, the Pupil Referral Unit and the Local Authority.
 - To assess the effectiveness of school based provision and work being done by schools to improve behaviour and reduce exclusion, including access to effective support services.
 - To examine the variability in readiness to exclude across Islington schools, and the perception by some parents whose children have been excluded that some schools are giving up on their children too soon and at too young an age.
 - To review alternative interventions and approaches to fixed period and permanent exclusion and evaluate their effectiveness, informed by national and local good practice in successfully reducing exclusion.
 - To evaluate provision for children and young people for whom mainstream education may not be appropriate.
 - To review how all Councils services and functions can be utilised to reduce exclusions.
 - To understand if and how the council can work with academies and Trust Boards on their exclusion practices.
- 1.2 In carrying out the review the Committee met with young people, parents, head teachers, council officers, independent experts and representatives of support services to gain a balanced view. The Committee also considered statistics, statutory guidance and other documentary evidence.

National context

- 1.3 Exclusion from school is a national issue with significant implications for young people and their families. Nationwide, 7,700 pupils were permanently excluded in 2016/17. This was an increase of 1,000 over the previous year and continued a trend of year on year increases since 2010/11. Fixed period exclusions increased to 382,000 in 2016/17, an increase of 40,000 on the previous year. Nationally, boys are almost four times more likely to be permanently excluded than girls.
- 1.4 Nationally, exclusion disproportionately affects ethnic minority pupils, pupils from lower income households and pupils with special educational needs. In 2016/17, Black Caribbean pupils were permanently excluded at nearly three times the rate of White

British pupils. Pupils eligible for free school meals were four times more likely to be permanently excluded than their peers. Pupils with special educational needs were five times more likely to be permanently excluded than those without a diagnosed special educational need.

- 1.5 In response to concerns around school exclusions, in March 2018 the Government appointed Edward Timpson CBE to lead a review of school exclusions. This review will make recommendations to the Government and will conclude in 2019.

Local context

- 1.6 Islington has a high rate of exclusion in comparison to other London boroughs. There were 34 permanent and 1,251 fixed period exclusions in 2016/17. 679 pupils received one or more fixed period exclusions. Islington’s overall permanent exclusion rate was 0.14%, higher than the Inner London average and the average of Islington’s statistical neighbours (both 0.09%). The number of fixed period and permanent exclusions in Islington increased annually between 2014/15 and 2016/17 and the borough does not compare favourably in national rankings.

	National Ranking 2015/16	National Ranking 2016/17
Secondary fixed period exclusion as a percentage of school population	128 th /150 local authorities	109 th /150 local authorities
Secondary pupils with one or more fixed period exclusions as a percentage of school population	136 th /150 local authorities	124 th /150 local authorities
Secondary permanent exclusion as a percentage of school population	125 th /150 local authorities	101 st /150 local authorities
Primary fixed period exclusion as a percentage of school population	107 th /150 local authorities	133 rd /150 local authorities
Primary repeat exclusion as a percentage of school population	107 th /150 local authorities	143 rd /150 local authorities
Primary permanent exclusion as a percentage of school population	Not ranked.	102 nd /150 local authorities

- 1.7 In Islington, the most common reason for exclusion is “persistent disruptive behaviour”. This is consistent with the national picture. There is no common definition of what constitutes persistent disruptive behaviour; this will be determined by individual school behaviour policies and staff expectations.
- 1.8 In Islington, the majority of exclusions are issued to boys, however a higher proportion of girls are excluded in comparison to national statistics. A disproportionate number of Black Caribbean and White British pupils are excluded in comparison to national averages. Pupils eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs tend to receive fewer exclusions in comparison to national averages.
- 1.9 Although Islington has a relatively high level of exclusion, there is a significant variation between the exclusion rates of Islington’s schools. Not all schools are high excluders; 13 of the borough’s primary schools did not issue any fixed period exclusions in 2017-18;

whereas two issued fixed period exclusions to over 10% of their school roll. Five of the borough's secondary schools issued under 100 fixed period exclusions in 2017/18, whereas one issued almost 300 and another almost 800. There is a similar variation in the number of permanent exclusions.

- 1.10 Nationally, sponsored academies have a higher rate of exclusion than local authority maintained schools. However, in Islington, there is no particular trend in academies, faith schools or community schools being more likely to exclude than other types of school.
- 1.11 Evidence received from council officers suggested that there was no justification for the significant variation between the exclusion rates of different schools. All schools have broadly similar cohorts and any variation in the demographic profile of schools is not significant enough to validate such substantial differences in their exclusion rates. The main difference between high and low excluding schools therefore seems to be a matter of culture, ethos and approach to behaviour management, rather than other factors.
- 1.12 Islington Council is committed to fairness. The Fairness Commission in 2010 and the Fair Futures Commission in 2018 examined the serious challenges and inequalities faced by Islington residents and made recommendations to make Islington a fairer place. Islington Council's Corporate Plan sets out a vision of fairness for the borough:

We're determined to make Islington fairer and to create a place where everyone, whatever their background, has the same opportunity to reach their potential and enjoy a good quality of life.

The Committee believes that exclusion is a fairness issue. Exclusion can have serious negative consequences for young people and their families; exclusion impacts on educational attainment and family wellbeing and limits the opportunities available to young people. It is unfair that children attending certain schools are far more likely to be excluded than their peers attending other schools in the borough. The disproportionate effect that exclusion has on young people from Black Caribbean and White British backgrounds is unacceptable.

- 1.13 Given that the borough's high exclusion rate seems to be attributable to a small number of schools, it is considered that targeted work with the highest excluding schools would be more effective than radically altering the borough's approach to supporting schools and pupils at risk of exclusion. However, the Committee also considers that all schools could benefit from further guidance and the sharing of best practice. It is hoped that the Committee's recommendations will be helpful in guiding future work with schools and will result in a reduction in the borough's exclusion rate, as well as helping to address the fairness issues connected to school exclusion that have a real impact on young people and their families.

2. Findings

The impact of exclusion from school

- 2.1 The Committee reviewed the impact of exclusion on young people and their families. The evidence received indicated that exclusion can have a very serious negative impact on young people and can last for many years. Some children who are excluded do not successfully re-engage with education; their lack of qualifications limits their life chances and embeds a disadvantage in comparison to their peers. National statistics indicate that young people who have been excluded from school are more likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) and are more likely to be involved in offending.
- 2.2 The Committee held focus groups with young people and parents to learn about the impact that exclusion had on them. A number of examples were given of exclusion having a serious detrimental impact on young people. Some parents said that their child had withdrawn entirely from education following their exclusion and were experiencing mental and physical health issues. Some parents said that their children were not set work while serving fixed period exclusions and their parents were concerned about the impact that this would have on their education. Some parents were concerned that exclusion from school had made their children vulnerable to grooming by gangs. Parents were worried about their child's future, their education and employment prospects.
- 2.3 Parents also said that exclusion had a negative impact on their life, their employment and their wellbeing. It was commented that exclusion could feel like a punishment for parents. Parents had to stay at home with their children while they were serving a fixed period exclusion; this meant that parents could not go to work, attend appointments, or take part in other activities outside of their home. Some parents said that their employment was in jeopardy because they frequently had to stay at home with their child while they were serving repeat fixed period exclusions. This was putting families at financial risk, and was putting parents under considerable stress, which could impact on their physical and mental health.
- 2.4 The Committee asked young people at New River College about their experiences of the exclusions process. Many of the young people interviewed accepted and understood why they had been excluded from school. They were reflective about their experiences and spoke with regret about the incidents that had led them to be excluded. Some said that they did not accept the reasons for their exclusion. Some said that they had served multiple fixed period exclusions prior to their permanent exclusion, and cited seemingly trivial incidents to which fixed period exclusion appears to be an excessive and unjustified response. It is not possible or appropriate for the Committee to form an opinion on particular cases without having full knowledge of the circumstances, however, fixed period and permanent exclusion should only be used as a last resort and the Committee would be concerned by schools using exclusion as a punishment for minor breaches of the behaviour policy.
- 2.5 Some of the young people interviewed said that they felt powerless and frustrated by the exclusion process; they felt that they did not have a voice in the exclusion process or an adequate opportunity to defend themselves.

- 2.6 Some pupils said that following their exclusion they did not trust schools or teachers. One young person said that he had been told by a teacher at his school that the teaching staff wanted him to be excluded. Another young person commented that his mother did not speak fluent English and he felt the school “tricked” his mother. The Committee heard examples of young people being promised additional support prior to their exclusion, such as access to a mentor, however this support either did not materialise or was not implemented successfully prior to their exclusion.
- 2.7 Parents were keen to emphasise that fixed-period exclusion was not an effective punishment for their children. Parents of children with certain special educational needs, or of young primary age children, said that their child could not comprehend why they had been excluded. It was commented that these pupils considered having time off school was a reward rather than a punishment. One parent said that their child had been issued with multiple fixed period exclusions and suspected that they may have been purposefully misbehaving to spend more time at home. Some parents said that they respected the school’s decision to exclude and wanted to discipline their children at home, however could not do this effectively without having school work or educational activities to set them. Some parents commented that their children were not supported when returning to the school after a fixed period exclusion and said that a reintegration process would be beneficial.
- 2.8 Exclusion can also have an impact on siblings. Some parents reported that the siblings of pupils who had been excluded were unfairly stigmatised by their school. Some siblings had been warned not to misbehave, otherwise they could be excluded too. This was causing them unnecessary worry and stress.
- 2.9 Exclusion also has a detrimental financial impact on the local authority. While the impact on young people and their families is the most pressing concern, it must be noted that exclusion comes at a cost to local authority budgets. The administration of the exclusion process and the cost of placing young people in the pupil referral unit is considerable. In the context of decreasing local authority budgets and increasing demand for services, the expenditure on exclusion is effectively diverting much needed funding from other services for young people.

Why is Islington’s exclusion rate so high?

- 2.10 The Committee was keen to explore why Islington’s exclusion rate is so high in comparison to its statistical neighbours and other London Boroughs. The Committee received evidence from a range of witnesses on the factors which may be contributing to Islington’s high exclusion rate.
- 2.11 Islington has relatively high levels of deprivation; the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation shows that Islington is the 24th most deprived borough in the country. 35% of children under the age of 16 live in low income households, the third highest nationally. Over a quarter of children live in households where no one is in employment. National statistics indicate that schools in the most deprived areas have the highest levels of exclusion.

- 2.12 The Committee also heard that schools which adopt a 'zero tolerance' behaviour management approach tend to have higher rates of exclusion. Some of Islington's schools have adopted such approaches in recent years. The Educational Psychology service thought that schools should allow a level of flexibility in their behaviour policies for pupils with additional needs. Similarly, CAMHS representatives commented that behavioural systems that don't allow for differentiation based on children's individual needs effectively set vulnerable children up to fail. This is consistent with evidence received from parents. Parents considered that some schools were not adequately meeting the requirements of those with special educational needs and disabilities and said that their children had been excluded for behaving in a way that was consistent with their additional needs.
- 2.13 Witnesses spoke of the importance of school ethos and culture. Representatives from the Educational Psychology Service commented that schools which had a nurturing ethos and involved parents in their work tended to exclude fewer pupils than schools that had a stronger focus on enforcing rules. It was also advised that schools with higher rates of staff wellbeing tended to have lower rates of exclusion. Similarly, evidence from CAMHS suggested that stressed and overwhelmed teaching staff could lead to escalating, reactive and punitive behaviour management practices. CAMHS officers said that some behaviour management techniques can be triggering to young people with mental health issues.
- 2.14 The Committee heard evidence on the new challenges that schools faced in Islington. Schools had observed that the behaviour of pupils had become increasingly challenging in recent years. There had been an increase in the number of violent incidents, and there was an increased pressure from parents to exclude pupils for violent incidents. It was also noted that teaching unions had concerns about pupils remaining in mainstream school after violent incidents, emphasising the importance of the health and safety of school staff and pupils.
- 2.15 The Committee also received evidence regarding why there had been a national increase in exclusions over recent years. One such reason was thought to be changes to the exclusion appeals process. Under the previous process the Independent Appeals Panel was able to review a school's decision to permanently exclude and overturn the decision if they considered it appropriate. New regulations introduced in 2012 gave school governors greater responsibility for exclusions and replaced the Independent Appeals Panel with the Independent Review Panel. The Independent Review Panel may only quash a decision to exclude when public law principles are contravened. The Panel can request that governors reconsider the decision to exclude, but have no power to compel them to do so. Since the change in regulation, the number of successful exclusion appeals in Islington has reduced from 57% to 21%.
- 2.16 The Committee also considered that national policy changes may have introduced perverse incentives for schools to exclude pupils. For example, it was suggested that the increasingly limited funding available to schools may contribute to decisions to exclude. Supporting a disengaged child to remain in mainstream education is very resource intensive, whereas excluding a pupil does not present any additional costs to schools. Similarly, it was suggested that the introduction of the new school curriculum and the increasing focus on academic performance in school league tables may incentivise some

schools to exclude low attaining pupils, although issuing an exclusion for academic reasons is unlawful. The current framework for ranking school performance does not reward schools for being inclusive. The Committee did not receive any specific evidence of these issues being a contributing factor to exclusions in Islington, however it may not be coincidental that the national increase in the number of exclusions since 2010 has occurred alongside sustained government cuts to school budgets and major changes to the curriculum. This context may be useful in helping to understand the factors which have led to a national increase in school exclusions.

- 2.17 The above factors may have contributed to Islington's high rate of exclusion; however, the Committee does not consider that these reasons justify Islington having a higher rate of exclusion than its statistical neighbours. As already noted, there is a high level of variation in the exclusion rates of Islington's schools, but there is not a sufficient difference in their cohorts to justify such significant variation in their number of exclusions. In addition, evidence from the Educational Psychology Service suggested that some exclusions appeared to be avoidable. It was commented that a lack of support for teaching staff and training on how to manage behavioural issues in an inclusive way may be contributing to the borough's exclusion rate.
- 2.18 Although it is accepted that exclusion can be necessary in some instances, the Committee concludes that there is no need for Islington's exclusion rate to be as high as it is. The Committee respects the autonomy of local schools and understands that the council cannot direct schools to revise their behaviour management practices. However, it is not acceptable that young people are being excluded, with serious implications for the young person and their family, if there are alternative courses of action available. Exclusion should only be used as a last resort and should be prevented wherever possible. The Committee would therefore want to set a challenge to the whole borough to accept that the current situation is not good enough and to find solutions that will support schools in preventing exclusion and offer greater support to excluded pupils and their parents. Islington Council cannot achieve this alone; improvements will only be achieved through comprehensive and constructive partnership work between the local authority, school leaders, governing bodies, teaching staff, support services and others. The remainder of this report focuses on possible solutions identified by the Committee in relation to the evidence received.

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

- 2.19 The Committee received evidence on the range of support services available to young people at risk of exclusion. These included Early Help services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Educational Psychology, the New River College Outreach service and services commissioned or provided by schools themselves.
- 2.20 Early Help services work collaboratively with schools, council services and partner organisations to support the early identification of children and families requiring additional support but who do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention. Practitioners work with families on a range of issues, including access to education. Early Help services are able to mediate and advocate for families in schools; facilitate meetings between young people, their parents, the school and other services and

support parents in implementing boundaries, routines and appropriate responses to their child's behaviour. The services seek to take a positive approach and focus on a family's strengths rather than their weaknesses. An Early Help worker is linked to every school in the borough; the service is present at parent evenings and sometimes informal engagement events are held, such as coffee mornings for parents.

- 2.21 CAMHS is a multidisciplinary service with representation from a range of psychologists and psychotherapists. The service has a basic core offer for schools which is funded by the Islington Schools Forum. This provides all primary schools with access to a CAMHS worker for half a day a fortnight for 5/6 half terms, and all secondary schools with access to a CAMHS worker for a day a week for 5/6 half terms. In addition to the core provision, schools may buy in additional CAMHS services. Six secondary schools and 12 primary schools in the borough had agreed a SLA with CAMHS which expanded on the core offer. The service provided support to young people, including direct clinical assessment and intervention, intervention groups, workshops for parents and individual parent consultations. CAMHS officers advised that young people at risk of exclusion were particularly vulnerable and often had multiple and complex needs, which could include mental health issues. This could include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autistic spectrum conditions, developmental issues and issues developed in response to experiences of trauma.
- 2.22 The Educational Psychology service provides a core funded service which includes assessments of pupils at serious risk of exclusion, assessments of vulnerable young people, assessments of children under 5 with complex needs and contribution to the development of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Additional traded services could be purchased by schools, including consultations and assessments for pupils with special educational needs and direct interventions for individuals and groups. Assessments were used to inform interventions which may be delivered by the school or other services. These could focus on developing a young person's social interaction skills, how they regulate their own behaviour, emotional development and building positive relationships with adults in the school.
- 2.23 The Committee heard that schools also make use of the outreach service offered by New River College. The head teacher of New River College advised that the service was received well by schools and the schools that used the service the most tended to have lower rates of exclusion. This was supported by evidence from Canonbury Primary School which considered that the support offered by the outreach service had been very effective in helping to prevent exclusion. The support offered included assessment of children with behavioural and emotional needs and interventions with individual pupils and groups of children. Some pupils at risk of exclusion in mainstream schools also had temporary placements at New River College, attending for two days a week.
- 2.24 All of the support services providing evidence to the Committee emphasised the importance of early intervention. The Committee was advised that pupils engaging with support services were less likely to be excluded, and if they had to move school, then this process would be managed more carefully with professional involvement. However, some services also expressed concern that pupils were not being referred for support at an early enough stage. In particular, the Educational Psychology service noted that they only had contact with five of the 32 permanently excluded pupils in 2017-18 and two of

those had only accessed the service after their exclusion. Although this limited involvement could suggest that the service was effective at preventing pupils from being excluded, officers thought that they should be involved in more cases. It was commented that services were sometimes asked to develop interventions for young people already on the cusp of exclusion when it was often too late for the intervention to make a meaningful difference.

- 2.25 The evidence received from schools indicated that head teachers understood the benefits of early intervention. In particular, it was agreed that providing support to pupils with additional social, emotional and behavioral needs from a young age would help to minimise the development of more severe behavioral issues. However, it was advised that schools could find it challenging to identify the pupils in need of support at an early stage. Sometimes it was only apparent that young people needed additional support after their needs and behaviour had escalated.
- 2.26 Overall, the Committee was satisfied with the range of support services available for young people. However, the Committee considers that schools should be further encouraged and supported in making referrals to support services at the earliest possible opportunity. This may require the council to provide further guidance on when and how to make a referral. In some instances, it may be necessary to restate the benefits of early intervention.
- 2.27 **Recommendation 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 undertake further work to continue to raise this as a priority issue with school leaders through relevant forums, conferences and meetings, as appropriate.
- 2.28 The CAMHS, Educational Psychology and the New River College Outreach services emphasised that they did not just provide interventions for pupils but whole school transformation programmes which seek to develop the policies and practices of schools to enable them to better support pupils with additional needs.
- 2.29 The New River College Outreach Service helped schools to develop their own support and interventions for pupils at risk of exclusion. This was beneficial to teaching and non-teaching staff who would feel better equipped in supporting young people with challenging behaviours. Work with schools could include staff training on behaviour management strategies; development of behaviour support systems; the development of small groups focused on anger management, social skills, and self-esteem and support with developing a more nurturing environment in school. One school had used the outreach service to carry out a behavior audit. This involved observing lessons and developing a staff training programme in response. Since the audit, the school had not permanently excluded a pupil for several years.

- 2.30 The Educational Psychology Service provided workforce development and policy development sessions to schools. The service also worked directly with teachers on how to embed different approaches for pupils with additional needs. It was particularly useful for teaching staff to have a basic understanding of adolescent psychology and attachment issues as this helped them to recognise and understand their pupils' behaviours. The service also helped to support staff wellbeing by giving them the capacity to manage stress, the emotional impact of their role, and to help them to de-escalate situations in the classroom. The service also worked with head teachers on developing a school ethos that was inclusive and supportive for vulnerable pupils. This could include developing pastoral care and improving relationships with parents.
- 2.31 The Committee noted the bespoke transformation work offered by the CAMHS service. In particular, CAMHS staff were passionate about taking a 'whole school approach' which involved working with schools, public health and school improvement officers to develop trauma informed practices in schools. Officers commented that this had a real impact on how schools worked with young people and helped to promote wellbeing and resilience.
- 2.32 During the course of the review CAMHS was working with nine primary schools, two secondary schools and New River College on the Islington Trauma Informed Schools Pilot (ITIPS). This pilot was working to embed trauma informed approaches in schools to enable them to better support vulnerable young people, including those at risk of exclusion. Trauma informed approaches recognised that young people with additional needs, including those at risk of exclusion, tended to have experienced traumatic events earlier in their life. This could include domestic violence, parental substance abuse, neglect, family break up and a range of other adverse experiences. Traumatic events impact on child development as they result in the young person prioritising skills and responses which help the child to survive their environment; for example, self-defence, provoking conflict, controlling behaviour and attention seeking. The result of this is that children do not prioritise learning skills which are less immediately relevant to survival; this includes social skills such as sharing and listening, problem solving and learning to manage their emotions. The trauma informed approaches pilot was therefore working with school staff so that they could recognise the symptoms of trauma and more effectively support young people who had traumatic experiences.
- 2.33 CAMHS also provided more generalised training to school staff on how to support young people with mental health issues. However, CAMHS officers had noticed that the same staff routinely attended their sessions. It was suggested that it would be beneficial for a wider range of school staff to develop their skills by attending the training on offer.
- 2.34 Evidence received by the Committee indicated that transformative work with schools was an effective and sustainable way of supporting young people at risk of exclusion. Furthermore, embracing trauma informed approaches is likely to have a broader beneficial impact on young people and may help to prevent young people's needs from escalating further. However, evidence from support services also indicated that not all schools were accessing the transformation programmes available, or were not using them as extensively as they could be. The Committee therefore considers that schools should be further encouraged and supported to make best-use of these programmes.

- 2.35 **Recommendation 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.
- 2.36 The Committee heard concerns that some pupils with special educational needs and learning disabilities may not be receiving adequate support to stay in mainstream education. Some parents advised that their child had been disciplined, or even excluded, for behaving in a way that was consistent with, or a result of, their additional needs. Some parents believed that their school had not successfully implemented their child's Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and said that some schools were not willing to make reasonable adjustments to their behaviour policies for children with special educational needs and disabilities. One parent had raised this with their child's school who had responded to say that they would consider making adjustments to their punishment methods, but not to how their rules were enforced.
- 2.37 Some parents advised that their children were only diagnosed with special educational needs after their exclusion from mainstream school. Parents thought that if their child's special educational needs were diagnosed earlier then they would have received support in school and may not have been excluded. This was supported by representatives from Educational Psychology and CAMHS who indicated that some pupils at risk of exclusion had undiagnosed special educational needs. It was commented that some of these young people had multiple and complex needs but they may not have previously met the criteria for formal diagnosis or may not have been referred or engaged with SEND services.
- 2.38 CAMHS officers noted that some schools had a structural disconnect between their special educational needs and behaviour management functions. These schools may not see a child's behaviour in the context of their special educational needs and therefore may not provide them with the support they need to manage their behaviour effectively. Similarly, pupils with challenging behaviour may not be assessed for special educational needs when they may be eligible for additional support. The Committee consider that closely linking special educational needs and behaviour management functions would assist schools in supporting pupils with additional needs that also have challenging behaviours. This change may also lead to the earlier diagnosis of special educational needs in young people at risk of exclusion.

- 2.39 **Recommendation 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, 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.
- 2.40 Evidence received from Peter Gray, an independent expert on school exclusion, advised that there had been a nationwide decrease in exclusion between 2006 and 2010. There were various factors which contributed to this, one of which was the formation of 'Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships' in which schools took collective responsibility for coordinating and commissioning services for young people at risk of exclusion. Since 2010 the majority of these partnerships had been disbanded or incorporated into other forums.
- 2.41 The Committee welcomes that Islington already has well established school partnerships through the Schools Forum, the Community of Schools and other forums. However, the Committee received evidence that it would be beneficial for schools to take a more collaborative and strategic approach to behaviour issues. Given that some Islington schools have high levels of persistent absence, it would be beneficial for these partnerships to cover attendance issues also.
- 2.42 Officers from the council's Early Help services explained that it was challenging to work across schools that had very different behaviour policies. Different rules at different schools made it difficult to give parents consistent and helpful advice on how to support their child in managing their behaviour. In addition, some parents queried why some behaviours were punished more severely in some schools than others. The fact that schools have such different approaches to managing behaviour may be the cause of the high variation in the exclusion rates of Islington schools.
- 2.43 The Committee would like to see a more joined up approach to managing behaviour and exclusion in schools. Establishing behaviour and attendance partnerships would provide a forum for schools to share best practice and problem-solve together. Additionally, this may help to standardise practices between schools and develop a shared culture of managing behaviour. It is important for these partnerships to be school-led, to ensure that the partnership addresses the issues which are important to schools and takes collective responsibility for behaviour and attendance issues.
- 2.44 **Recommendation 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.

- 2.45 School governors are crucial to the exclusions process, however the Committee heard that not all governors were confident in dealing with exclusion issues.
- 2.46 Schools are required to convene a Governor Hearing to review a head teacher's decision to permanently exclude. The governors may decide to either uphold the head teacher's decision or reinstate the pupil. If the decision is upheld, the parent can request a review by the Independent Review Panel. The Independent Review Panel does not have the power to reinstate a pupil, unless the governors' decision is quashed for reasons of illegality, irrationality or procedural impropriety. The Panel can recommend that governors reconsider their decision to exclude, however it was thought that some governors would always choose to support a head teacher's decision.
- 2.47 Governing bodies also have a key role in shaping a school's culture and ethos, particularly in relation to behaviour management. Governors are responsible for setting objectives for the school, agreeing the school's behaviour policy and holding the head teacher to account. A school's culture and ethos appear to be crucial factors in determining whether a school is a high or low excluding school. A school's ethos will shape how support for pupils is commissioned and provided, standards for behaviour and how rules are enforced.
- 2.48 The Committee suggests that governors would benefit from specific training on exclusion issues and on reviewing school behaviour policies. If there are concerns about the high level of exclusion in Islington schools, then these concerns should be shared with governors so they can challenge and review their school's practices in a constructive and informed way.
- 2.49 **Recommendation 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.
- 2.50 CAMHS officers suggested how support for pupils at risk of exclusion could be improved. It was suggested that more sophisticated data sharing arrangements, developed with due regard to Data Protection requirements, would help school staff to better understand the needs of young people. CAMHS officers advised that some areas had adopted 'pyramid of need' approaches, where a young person's needs were categorised without explicit reference to their individual circumstances. This allowed a wide range of school staff to be aware of a young person's needs and how best to support them, without having sensitive information or details of their personal circumstances.
- 2.51 Some of the parents interviewed suggested that there should be greater information sharing between schools, the police and the local authority, commenting that schools may be able to better support pupils if they had a more detailed understanding of the challenges they faced outside of school. The Committee would welcome greater information sharing if it would lead to school staff being better informed on how to support young people at risk of exclusion.

2.52 **Recommendation 6:**

To ensure that all school staff are well equipped to support young people at risk of exclusion, officers 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.

2.53 The Committee considered what else could be done to support schools in identifying support for young people at risk of exclusion. It is suggested that the Securing Education Boards may be able to offer further assistance in promoting best practice and identifying solutions at an early stage, with particular reference to trauma informed practice.

2.54 There are two Securing Education Boards, one for primary schools and another for secondary. The Boards include representatives from Children's Social Care, New River College, CAMHS, Targeted Youth Support, Pupil Services, School Improvement, the Educational Psychology Service and Schools. The Primary Board is chaired by a head teacher on a rotating basis, and the Secondary Board has an independent Chair. The Boards meet monthly to consider the placement of pupils in difficult circumstances. This includes those at risk of exclusion, those with medical needs, and who have disengaged from education. Schools make referrals to the Board and the Board makes a recommendation on how the child can be supported to stay in education or where the child should be placed if it is necessary to arrange a move. Sometimes this results in a move to another mainstream school, or a managed move to New River College, rather than through exclusion. Officers commented that all schools are well engaged in the work of the Boards.

2.55 The Committee welcomes that schools have access to a multi-disciplinary board for assistance with difficult to place young people. However, it is queried if the Boards could amend their processes to offer further support to young people at risk of exclusion at an earlier stage. It would be helpful if schools could call on the Board for advice on best practice and to help them problem-solve for pupils who are not engaging with other interventions. The Committee recommends that the Boards are asked to consider this further, including if their processes could be expedited for pupils at imminent risk of exclusion.

2.56 **Recommendation 7:**

The Securing Education Boards should consider if any of their processes can be amended to offer additional support to pupils at risk of exclusion. The Committee heard evidence of local schools working effectively to promote inclusion and avoid exclusion. The Committee would welcome the support of the Securing Education Boards in promoting examples of good practice to all schools so that all of Islington's pupils can benefit from this preventative work. For example, the Boards should consider if they can help schools in identifying support for pupils at risk of exclusion at an earlier stage, and if they can further support schools in identifying and implementing trauma-informed and solution-focused approaches for pupils at risk of exclusion. The Boards should also consider if their processes can be expedited for pupils at imminent risk of exclusion.

2.57 **Finding solutions: developing best practice in our schools**

- 2.58 The Committee received a great deal of evidence that does not directly lend itself to a specific recommendation but would be helpful for the council to communicate to school leaders and governors. The Committee also considers that it would be helpful for the council to set clear expectations in relation to exclusion and a strategic vision for schools to reflect on. The Committee recommends that this information is codified into a 'Good Practice Guide' for schools; a single, accessible and practical document which provides schools with relevant information on exclusion matters.
- 2.59 The guide should include an aim for Islington's schools to exclude no pupils. While it is accepted that some exclusions are necessary, the expressed aim should be to keep all of Islington's young people in mainstream education. This should be supplemented by an objective for schools to avoid exclusions wherever possible and not to use alternative provision as a substitute for exclusion. The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee has previously reviewed alternative provision and has made recommendations to reduce its use.
- 2.60 The guide should include clear information on the support services and transformation programmes available to schools, as well as examples of successful inclusion and behaviour management practices. The Committee considered examples of good practice in Islington schools, however other schools may also have effective or innovative practices that should be shared with our schools. Examples of good practice considered by the Committee included: the use of 'nurture hubs' in schools where children with high levels of need can learn in a different environment with more intensive support from school staff; the use of therapeutic interventions; restorative justice approaches; evaluating behaviour incidents and changing school practices to 'design-out' such incidents; the use of digital 'help buttons' so teaching staff can discreetly call on additional staff to assist with a behaviour incident and the use of mentors for pupils so they have a positive relationship with a trusted adult.
- 2.61 The Committee also heard that some schools made use of 'inclusion' as an alternative to exclusion, with pupils effectively serving a fixed period exclusion in isolation within the school. Serving an exclusion within school may be appropriate in some instances, however the Committee also heard from parents that pupils can find this very challenging and this is not an effective punishment if they are not invited to reflect on their behaviour, are not provided with adequate work and are not supported when reintegrating into the classroom. While 'inclusion' is preferable to fixed period exclusion, guidance should be provided on how to make such practices work effectively.
- 2.62 The guide should emphasise the importance of teacher wellbeing. Teaching staff may need emotional and wellbeing support in order to manage challenging behaviour effectively. CAMHS and Educational Psychology are able to provide support in this area, although other sources of support are available.
- 2.63 The guide should emphasise the importance of listening to young people and their parents. Some of the young people interviewed said that they felt powerless and frustrated by the exclusion process. Some parents felt that they were not being listened to, or their views were being ignored. Some of the parents interviewed suggested that

schools should have 'Parent Panels' to work with the school on developing their processes and policies. Developing positive relationships with young people and their parents is important to allow honest conversations to take place.

- 2.64 The guide should emphasise that parents have a right to transparent information on their child's exclusion. Some parents provided the Committee with letters from their child's school which did not provide a detailed explanation of why their child had been excluded. Parents felt that they could not work with their child on improving their behaviour without having detailed reasons of why their child had been excluded.
- 2.65 The guide should specify that schools should signpost pupils and their parents and carers to independent advocacy services when they are at risk of exclusion. Some of the parents interviewed did not know how to access advice or support and felt that they needed independent support on navigating school and local authority processes. It would be helpful for schools to signpost parents to this support when necessary.
- 2.66 The guide should highlight the importance of providing comprehensive information to New River College on a pupil's behaviour, attainment, progress and needs. New River College took a highly personalised approach to working with children and young people, recognising their individual needs and challenges. This was informed by the information received from mainstream schools. New River College commented that the information received from Islington schools was generally very comprehensive, although from time to time further information was necessary.
- 2.67 The guide should also include a practical toolkit or checklist to help schools in assessing young people's needs and identifying possible sources of support.
- 2.68 The Committee recommends that the guide should be promoted to head teachers, school staff with responsibility for behaviour management and special educational needs, and school governors.
- 2.69 **Recommendation 8:**
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 to **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.

- 2.70 The Education Select Committee, in their report 'Forgotten children: alternative provision and the scandal of ever increasing exclusions' recommended that a 'Bill of Rights' be adopted for pupils and parents. It was recommended that this specify that schools should not rush to exclude pupils, parents and pupils have a right to know how often schools resort to exclusion, parents deserve more information when their children are excluded and pupils and their parents should have someone in their corner. The government has not yet adopted a 'Bill of Rights' approach, however the Committee considers that Islington Council could develop something similar locally to confirm the rights of parents and pupils.
- 2.71 In addition to the Good Practice Guide, the Committee recommends that all schools should affirm their commitment to inclusive education by signing a 'Charter for Inclusion'. Schools should be nurturing environments where everybody is welcome, which support pupils to remain in mainstream education and which are flexible to pupils with additional needs. The Charter should link to the principles set out in the Good Practice Guide and should be developed in consultation with schools, New River College and young people. It may be appropriate to consult with New River College pupils and the Youth Council. It is hoped that the Charter will lead to a more unified and fairer approach to exclusion across the borough.

2.72 **Recommendation 9:**

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 in 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.

Finding solutions: supporting children and young people excluded from schools

- 2.73 The Committee received evidence on the role of pupil referral units and visited New River College to talk with students and staff about their experiences.
- 2.74 The Committee was impressed with the work of New River College and had positive discussions with staff and students. The school has implemented personalised and trauma informed approaches and has high aspirations for its pupils. New River College is clearly committed to supporting young people with additional needs and has achieved good academic results in a challenging context. Staff work hard to identify pathways for young people; in the previous year no New River College pupils had become NEET and for the past three years fewer than ten pupils had become NEET. New River College also involved parents in their work and held sessions to develop their relationships with parents as well as pupils. The Committee welcomes that New River College Secondary received a 'Good' rating in its most recent Ofsted inspection dated November 2018. Approximately 30% of pupils attending New River College were reintegrated into mainstream education. These were typically pupils in Year 9 or at the start of Year 10. It was unlikely that pupils in Years 10 and 11 would be re-integrated as they would struggle to catch up with their GCSE studies.
- 2.75 The pupils interviewed said that they liked New River College, that they felt supported and they welcomed the additional flexibility they had in comparison to mainstream school. Some parents spoke very highly of New River College. One parent said that their child was excluded from primary school and had been in New River College since Key Stage 2. New River College had taught their child to read and write, had helped the child receive a special educational needs diagnosis and was now providing the pupil with additional support as detailed in their EHCP. Another parent said that their child was excluded at age 16. Although they were initially worried about their child attending a PRU, they were now very happy with the provision, commenting that New River College was welcoming and supportive and gave their child the additional help they needed. Parents said that New River College engaged with pupils in a way that they could relate to and teacher-pupil relationships were based on mutual respect.
- 2.76 New River College works closely with support services. A CAMHS worker is fully integrated into New River College, working with pupils three days a week. The Committee asked New River College if they needed any further support from Islington Council. In response, it was commented that it would be helpful to have support from a social worker. This would enhance the offer of support available to young people. The Committee recommends that this be explored and provided from within existing resources if possible.

2.77 **Recommendation 10:**

Officers 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.

- 2.78 The Committee heard that young people face stigma for being excluded and attending New River College. Some parents said that they were worried about what they would tell friends and family, what their child would list on their CV and how other people would view them. If children are re-integrated into mainstream education, some then had a reputation for having attended "a unit".
- 2.79 The Committee found that there was a misunderstanding of New River College and of pupil referral units more generally. The Committee spoke with parents whose children were at risk of exclusion who expressed concern about PRUs; they were worried about the quality of the provision and of the impact of placing a large number of excluded children together in the same setting. This contrasted with parents whose children already attended New River College, who generally spoke positively about their experiences.
- 2.80 New River College acknowledged that some people had negative perceptions of pupil referral units. Although pupil referral units could be challenging settings, the reality was that New River College was a nurturing and supportive school. However, New River College was concerned that this negative perception was having an impact on their students and was detrimental to their wellbeing. New River College was working to challenge the perception of pupil referral units but this was not an easy task.
- 2.81 The Committee would like the council to support New River College in challenging the stigma associated with attending a pupil referral unit. The successes of New River College should be promoted in the local community and targeted information should be provided to the parents of excluded pupils to reassure them and explain that New River College is a nurturing and supportive environment.
- 2.82 **Recommendation 11:**
To remove the stigma associated with attending a pupil referral unit, officers 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'.
- 2.83 The Committee heard that only around half of New River College pupils had previously attended Islington schools. Children are only eligible to attend a pupil referral unit in their home borough and around half of New River College's pupils had attended schools in neighbouring boroughs prior to their exclusion.
- 2.84 The Committee recognises that many pupils living in Islington attend schools beyond the borough boundary. Although the council does not have a formal relationship with those schools, it is recommended that the council engage with neighbouring authorities and

schools close to the borough boundary to make them aware of this review and the council's expectations for pupils living in Islington.

2.85 **Recommendation 12:**

Officers 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.

Finding solutions: supporting parents and carers

- 2.86 The evidence received from parents was very useful in understanding the impact that exclusion had on young people and their families. During the focus group, parents were clear that they needed more support. Many parents felt that they needed help in navigating school and local authority processes and did not know how to access independent sources of advice and advocacy.
- 2.87 Officers attending the focus group considered that there were actions that could be implemented immediately to help parents. Approval was received from the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families to immediately implement three actions, listed below.

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.

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

- 2.88 The Committee recognises that schools and the council cannot prevent all exclusions in Islington. Nationally, the number of exclusions has increased in recent years and this is largely due to factors beyond the control of local authorities.
- 2.89 Schools face increasingly severe financial pressures which is having a real impact on staff resources, as well as access to support services and extra-curricular activities. A recent national survey found that only 2% of head teachers believed that the top-up funding they received was sufficient to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. The move towards a narrower curriculum leading into exams and the decline in opportunities to study arts and vocational subjects has led to some young people disengaging from learning. League tables are incentivising schools to compete rather than collaborate and

may be providing perverse incentives to exclude lower attaining pupils.

2.90 The Committee believes that the national increase in school exclusions is partly attributable to national education policy. Some of the changes to the education system introduced since 2010 have been detrimental to the wellbeing of young people, their families and school staff. The Committee would welcome coordinated lobbying with teaching unions, neighbouring local authorities and others to highlight the impact of the government's education policy and to campaign for changes that would support children to remain in mainstream education.

2.91 **Recommendation 13:**
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.

2.92 The national review of school exclusions, chaired by Edward Timpson CBE, was due to conclude in late 2018. It was hoped that its conclusions would be published within the review period and the Committee would be able to consider its findings. However, at the time of writing the Timpson review has not yet concluded. The Committee would be very interested in the findings of the review and the government's response and would welcome a report on this to a future Committee meeting.

2.93 **Recommendation 14:**
Officers 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.

3. Conclusions

3.1 The focus of this review has been on exclusion; the impact that exclusion can have on young people and their families, the exclusion practices of local schools, the services available for pupils facing exclusion and the reason why the number of exclusions has increased in recent years. Considering the range of evidence received, there is no single straightforward solution to prevent exclusion; exclusion reflects a plethora of complex and interconnected factors, institutional, personal and social, that lead to a child facing the trauma of exclusion from school. However, what seems clear is that exclusion can be challenged by focusing on **inclusion**. Taking an inclusive approach is key to supporting pupils with additional needs and challenges. Inclusivity should underpin the work of all services involved in ensuring that young people remain engaged in education. The Committee hopes that its recommendations will contribute to an inclusive approach to supporting young people across the borough.

- 3.2 The Committee concludes that Islington's exclusion rate is too high. The significant variation of the exclusion rates of Islington's schools is not justified and further focused work with the highest excluding schools is needed. This work is important. Exclusion is a fairness issue that is having a real impact on young people and their families.
- 3.3 Fourteen recommendations have been made in response to the evidence received. These are related to preventing exclusion, developing best practice in schools, supporting young people excluded from school and their parents and urging central government to act in the best interests of young people. The Committee would like to thank all the witnesses that gave evidence in relation to the review. The Executive is asked to endorse the Committee's recommendations.

SCRUTINY REVIEW INITIATION DOCUMENT (SID)
Review: Permanent and fixed period exclusion from school
Scrutiny Committee: Children's Services Scrutiny Committee
Director leading the review: Mark Taylor, Director of Schools and Learning
Lead Officer: Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services
<p>Overall aim:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To examine the use and impact of fixed period and permanent exclusion from both primary and secondary school, and make recommendations that will enable more children and young people to remain in mainstream education.
<p>Objectives of the review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand how the school exclusion process operates and the work undertaken at school and local authority level to prevent exclusions. • To review the support available to excluded pupils, and to scrutinise if this is effective. • To explore the reasons for exclusions, and the reasons why Islington schools have higher rates of exclusion than the Inner London average. • To evaluate the impact of permanent and fixed period exclusion from school for all stakeholders – the young person, their parents and family, the school, the Pupil Referral Unit and the Local Authority. • To assess the effectiveness of school based provision and work being done by schools to improve behaviour and reduce exclusion, including access to effective support services. • To examine the variability in readiness to exclude across Islington schools, and the perception by some parents whose children have been excluded that some schools are giving up on their children too soon and at too young an age. • To review alternative interventions and approaches to fixed period and permanent exclusion and evaluate their effectiveness, informed by national and local good practice in successfully reducing exclusion. • To evaluate provision for children and young people for whom mainstream education may not be appropriate. • To review how all Councils services and functions can be utilised to reduce exclusions. • To understand if and how the council can work with academies and Trust Boards on their exclusion practices.

Scope of the review:

The review will focus on:

- Exclusion trends/characteristic in Islington, including the different rates of exclusion between boys and girls, and the disproportionate representation of some minority ethnic groups; the interaction between these characteristics; why do certain groups appear more likely to be excluded?
- If pupils eligible for free school meals or with special educational needs are more likely to be excluded than the remainder of the cohort
- The effectiveness of exclusion in addressing disruptive behaviour, both for the excluded young person and across the school.
- The factors which influence schools' decisions to exclude, and their interaction with other services whose interventions, in partnership with the school and the family, might otherwise have helped to avoid exclusion.
- The impact of support, monitoring, challenge and intervention mechanisms from the Local Authority / Academy sponsors on schools' exclusions practices.
- The role of governors and Trust boards/Chief Executives in endorsing school policies, providing scrutiny and challenge of exclusion decisions by schools.
- The extent to which permanently excluded children and young people are able to return to mainstream education, and the challenges this presents for all stakeholders.
- Examples of good practice in managing children identified as being at risk of exclusion (e.g. Islington Schools with zero exclusion), and in reducing exclusion rates (including between different groups of pupils).
- If there are any common factors among pupils who are excluded and those who are persistently absent.

Type of evidence:

The Committee will:

- Hear the views of individuals affected by the exclusion of a child from school and their real-life experiences and observations of the exclusion process
- Be fully briefed on the current exclusion process including arrangements for appeal
- Visit New River College (Pupil Referral Unit) - the main destination for permanently excluded children and young people - to meet staff and young people
- Observe a Head Teachers briefing (all Islington Head Teachers) and discuss their views
- Receive witness evidence from national advisers

It is proposed that witness evidence is taken from:

- Children and young people excluded from school and their families
- Representative Headteachers
- Peter Gray, Independent Expert (Government Adviser)
- Gabriella Di-Sciullio, Head of Admissions and Children Missing Education
- Nigel Smith, Executive Head of New River College
- Gill Sassienie, Principal Educational Psychologist
- Head of Early Help Service
- Representative from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Written evidence will include:

- Annual report on Schools and Learning (June 2017)
- Department for Education (DfE) statistical release: permanent and fixed period exclusions from schools and exclusion appeals in England 2016/17 (July 2018)

- Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England; Statutory guidance for those with legal responsibilities in relation to exclusion (DfE) (Sept 2017)
- Behaviour and discipline in schools; Advice for headteachers and school staff (DfE) (January 2016)
- 'They never give up on you' – Office of the Children's Commissioner School Exclusions Inquiry (2012)
- A Review of School Exclusion: terms of reference (May 2018) Edward Timpson for DfE (due to report to the Prime Minister by the end of 2018)

Additional information:

In carrying out the review the committee will consider equalities implications and resident impacts identified by witnesses. The Executive is required to have due regard to these, and any other relevant implications, when responding to the review recommendations.

Witness Evidence Plan

Committee Meeting – Monday 16 July 2018	
Who / What	Area of focus – Introductory Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny Initiation Document 	For the Committee to agree the aim, objectives and scope of the review.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services 	Introductory presentation to include exclusions data; processes; the legislative framework; the roles and responsibilities of schools, the local authority, young people and their parents; and an overview of the impact that exclusions can have on young people, their families, schools, the Pupil Referral Unit and the Local Authority.

August Recess	
Who / What	Area of focus – Background Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written Evidence 	Written evidence will be circulated to members over the August recess. This will include background information that may be of interest to members; i.e. previous reviews carried out at national level, statutory guidance produced by the Department for Education, national statistics and so on.

Committee Meeting – Thursday 13 September 2018	
Who / What	Area of focus – The Council’s Role in Prevention and Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gill Sassienie, Principal Educational Psychologist 	The role of the educational psychology service in preventing exclusions and supporting pupils.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ruth Beecher, Head of Early Help Services 	The role of early help services in supporting pupils staying in school and preventing exclusion.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representative of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services 	The mental health support available to young people at risk of exclusion, and to those who have been excluded.

Scrutiny Visit – 2 October 2018	
Who / What	Area of focus – The views of parents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus Group with parents of excluded pupils 	To discuss exclusion issues with parents, their experiences and views on how schools and support services operate, the impact of exclusion on the family, how they think services and processes could be improved to better support young people and prevent exclusions.

Committee Meeting – Thursday 18 October 2018	
Who / What	Area of focus – The National Context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peter Gray, Independent Expert and Government Adviser 	The national context and work underway across the country to prevent exclusion and support excluded pupils. To include best practice from other areas, and details of the government’s Review of School Exclusion, due to conclude in late 2018.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gabriella Di-Sciullio, Head of Admissions and Children Missing from Education 	The exclusion appeals process.

Scrutiny Visit – 21 November 2019	
Who / What	Area of focus – The experiences of young people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visit to the New River College Pupil Referral Unit to meet excluded pupils and Nigel Smith, the Executive Head of New River College 	To talk to excluded young people about their experiences, to assess provision for excluded pupils, and to discuss the review with the Executive Head.

Committee Meeting – Thursday 22 November 2018	
Who / What	Area of focus – The views of Head Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patrick Mildren, Head Teacher, Canonbury Primary School Jamie Brownhill, Head Teacher, Central Foundation Secondary School Nigel Smith, Head Teacher, New River College Pupil Referral Unit 	To discuss their approach to exclusions and their views on processes and support.

Committee Meeting – Thursday 10 January 2019	
Who / What	Area of focus – Any outstanding matters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concluding Discussion 	For the committee to discuss their thoughts and conclusions on the evidence received, prior to developing recommendations.

Committee Meeting – Monday 4 March 2019	
Who / What	Area of focus – Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft Recommendations 	To agree a set of draft recommendations that will form the basis of the committee's report.

Scrutiny Visit – 5 April 2019	
Who / What	Area of focus – The views of parents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow up focus group with parents of excluded pupils 	To discuss the progress of the review with parents.

Committee Meeting – Thursday 30 April 2019	
Who / What	Area of focus – Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final Report 	To agree the final report, summarising all of the evidence received, and explaining the reasons for the recommendations. The report will then be submitted to the Executive.