



Northumberland County Council

SCHOOLS' FORUM

21st November 2018

Children Permanently Excluded from School

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the rising numbers of permanent and fixed term exclusions within Northumberland schools and academies.

Recommendations

School Forum members are asked to note:

- **The content of the report paying particular attention to the impact on the lives of Northumberland children and the increased pressure on Council's resources.**
- **That the Families and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee have agreed to establish a task and finish group to investigate the causes of the substantial increases in both fixed and permanent exclusion and to develop recommendations on working with partners, targeting resources and developing strategies to significantly improve the current situation.**

Key issues

1. There has been a rapid increase in the number of both fixed and permanently excluded pupils in Northumberland, with permanent exclusions increasing by 203% and fixed term exclusions by 209% over the last three years. This upward trend has continued in the first half term of the academic year 2018-2019. Northumberland is not unique, as these levels of increases are also being reported nationally, but the geography of the county makes this a particularly worrying issue.
2. There is significant financial pressure on high needs funding with the exclusion element being overspent, despite recent restructures of the team.
3. The lack of capacity in special schools and alternative providers also results in excluded pupils traveling further to expensive out of county providers.

Exclusions

During the recent visit to Northumberland by the Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds expressed his concerns and was keen to understand why the increases in exclusions have risen so sharply, and what his department could do to reverse this trend. He has also recently warned that he is prepared to change the law in order to crack down on schools with high numbers of exclusions.

The impact of exclusion is long lasting for a child, having permanent and negative implications on

their education as well as on social outcomes and physical and mental health.

Exclusions data indicates that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups are disproportionately represented in permanent and fixed-term exclusions. Excluded pupils are twice as likely to be in care, three times more likely to be children in need, four times more likely to be growing up in poverty and seven times more likely to have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Those pupils identified with SEND and living in care are 18 times more likely to be excluded.

The table below shows Northumberland's three year trend summary in relation to both permanent and fixed term exclusions for all pupils. The table below also identifies that exclusion rates are disproportionately high for disadvantaged pupils and for those with SEND. Again Northumberland mirrors the national picture in this regard.

	Permanent Exclusions			Pupil population	Fixed Term Exclusions		
	Total	EHCP	SEN Support		Total	EHCP	SEN Support
2015/16	41	0	26	39349	1270	221	704
2016/17	75	3	39	39609	1967	133	767
2017/18	115	6	53	39827	4514*	291	1347

* 2409 fixed term exclusions from one school

In 2017/2018, 70% of permanent exclusions were issued by schools categorised by Ofsted as 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate'. These schools are under significant pressures but the link between exclusion and school improvement was not borne out by the 2018 Key Stage 4 GCSE data.

As a result of this upward trend in exclusions, Northumberland County Council has started the current academic year with 135 permanently excluded pupils in alternative provision placements (Alternative Provision) compared to 70 the previous year.

This number is increasing every week and, in the current academic year 2018/2019, we have already had 27 permanent exclusions compared to 18 in the same time period in 2017/2018; this is the equivalent of one permanent exclusion each day that schools are open, with no indication that the rate of exclusion is slowing down.

Of permanent exclusions in 2017/2018, 76% were issued by academies. Unfortunately the LA is not represented at most of these exclusion review meetings (unless invited) and is therefore unable to inform governors of interventions and alternatives that should be considered before an exclusion is sanctioned. Similarly, academies tend not to use LA services and opt to appoint internal 'equivalents' which results in an autonomous way of working. The LA has the benefit of being able to hold maintained schools to account for inappropriate decision making or unlawful practice but is unable to do this with academies.

Alternative Provision

As a result of the increase in permanent exclusions, fulfilling the council's statutory duty in relation to providing full time education for all eligible children and young people is proving to be increasingly difficult. In the Summer Term 2018, virtually all of the council's 12 approved alternative education providers were at full.

Northumberland does not have a Key Stage 4 Pupils Referral Unit (PRU) or Alternative Provision (AP) Free School and therefore relies solely on alternative providers to educate pupils excluded in Year 10 and Year 11. Similarly the only provision for primary aged students is the PRU at Hepscoth Park. When that is full, the council has had to use supply teaching agencies for individual 1:1 tuition or 'spot purchase' places from providers off framework or in other local authorities. The 135 permanently excluded pupils in the alternative provision placements at the start of this academic year created an immediate capacity issue for any new exclusions from September 1st 2018.

Reintegration

It was hoped that the introduction of the Northumberland Pupil Placement Panel in 2016 would identify new school places for permanently excluded pupils and support mainstream reintegration. For a small number of pupils (22 over the previous two academic years) this has been successful; however, the resources available to support with transition and reintegration are very limited.

Most excluded young people have complex backgrounds coupled with social and emotional barriers to learning. In order to return successfully to mainstream education, appropriate intervention is often required. Resources are limited although the inclusion support workers within the education team and the early help team work together with families to support the children and young people back into school. There is not, however, equitable access to SEND support services as many of these rely on schools purchasing these via a service level agreement and are therefore inaccessible to excluded pupils.

Financial Position

The LA is statutorily committed to providing full time education for permanently excluded pupils and is therefore responsible for all associated placements and transport costs.

The budget is funded from the high needs block with the current budget allocation being £1,099,220 per annum. As a result of the rise in permanent exclusions the 2017/2018 budget was overspent by £267k and is projected to overspend by £670k for 2018/2019.

With pressure on all of the council's budgets and the implementation of the national funding formula some services to schools have had to be offered on a commercial basis with the schools having to pay for services that once were provided free of charge to the individual schools. This change of arrangements seems to be having the greatest impact on SEND pupils with SEMH (social, emotional, mental health) in mainstream schools

Back in 2010, Barnardo's provided the quantifiable costs of exclusion to the public purse and to the individual. The government calculated that one place in a pupil referral unit (PRU) or alternative provision cost £15,000 on average per year. Initiatives like a part-time vocational alternative to school, or a term-long inclusive learning programme followed by support to get back into school, were found to be highly cost-effective. The cost of supporting a young person to stay in school for a year averaged at £1,696 and recorded creditable success rates in restoring young people into

education. It can be concluded that prevention is therefore better than a cure, it is better for the child to be supported in a mainstream setting and this is also proven to be the most cost effective solution.

The challenge in Northumberland is how to best target the funding and resources we have to prevent exclusions in the first place.

Inclusive Practice

There are disproportionate numbers of pupils with SEND and underlying mental health difficulties being permanently excluded within Northumberland. Schools appear to identify these concerns but are struggling to implement the appropriate interventions within a timely manner. Discussions whether there are enough opportunities for school staff to access training in these areas and whether this could be improved by a more coordinated approach across services need to be instigated.

Often, when young people reach the point of exclusion they are open to several agencies but the challenge comes with how to bring everyone together to take joint responsibility for keeping these children in school.

In recent years the LA has invested greatly in Early Help and has expanded the services on offer to families and young people. Early intervention can often prevent exclusions by identifying causes of poor behaviour before they escalate.

BACKGROUND

The LA is responsible for providing full time, suitable education for every permanently excluded pupil within six days of their exclusion. Students are placed either into the Pupil Referral Unit or into quality-assured alternative education providers. In order to join Northumberland's alternative provision framework, providers go through a rigorous tendering and procurement exercise and are visited biannually by a School Improvement Partner with an HMI background.

NEXT STEPS

Meetings have been held with the Northumberland Association of Secondary Heads and it has been requested that we establish a task and finish group of elected members, officers and representatives from schools and academies to better understand this issue and to come up with solutions that can be implemented from September 2019. The work of the group should be to:

- Investigate the causes of the substantial increases in both fixed and permanent exclusions.
- Identify good practice models both locally and nationally for inclusion.
- Make recommendations as to where the Council's limited resources should be targeted to have the greatest impact.

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