

Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Suspensions and Exclusions Update

Wards All

Service: Access Service

Portfolio: Councillor Kaur, Education and Skills

1. Aim

The aim of this report provides an update of on how Walsall continues to meet its statutory responsibility in regard to suspensions and exclusions from schools.

2. Recommendations

That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the contents of this report and decides whether there should be further information or updates

3. Report detail

3.1 Exclusions

For many pupils, exclusions may not be necessary, as other strategies can manage behaviour. However, if approaches towards behaviour management have been exhausted, then suspensions and permanent exclusions will sometimes be necessary as a last resort. This is to ensure that other pupils and teaching staff are protected from disruption and can learn in safe, calm, and supportive environments. Schools and local authorities should not adopt a 'no exclusion' policy as an end in itself. This can lead to perverse incentives for schools not to exclude even when exclusion may be a way for a pupil to access Alternative Provision which will help ensure an excluded pupil remains engaged in education. In some cases, a 'no exclusion' policy can present safeguarding issues and expose staff and pupils to unreasonable risks. Instead, schools and local authorities should work to create environments where school exclusions are not necessary because pupil behaviour does not require it.

3.2 Walsall School Suspensions and Exclusions

The government supports headteachers in using suspension and permanent exclusion as a sanction when warranted as part of creating calm, safe, and supportive environments where both pupils and staff can work in safety and are respected. To achieve this, suspension and permanent exclusion are sometimes a necessary part of a functioning system, where it is accepted that not all pupil behaviour can be amended or remedied by pastoral processes, or consequences within the school.

Only the headteacher of a school can suspend or permanently exclude a pupil on disciplinary grounds. A pupil may be suspended for one or more fixed periods (up to a maximum of 45 school days in a single academic year), or permanently excluded.

A suspension, where a pupil is temporarily removed from the school, is an essential behaviour management tool that should be set out within a school's behaviour policy. A pupil may be suspended for one or more fixed periods (up to a maximum of 45 school days in a single academic year).

A suspension does not have to be for a continuous period. A suspension may be used to provide a clear signal of what is unacceptable behaviour as part of the school's behaviour policy and show a pupil that their current behaviour is putting them at risk of permanent exclusion. Where suspensions are becoming a regular occurrence for a pupil, headteachers and schools should consider whether suspension alone is an effective sanction for the pupil and whether additional strategies need to be put in place to address behaviour.

A permanent exclusion is when a pupil is no longer allowed to attend a school (unless the pupil is reinstated). The decision to exclude a pupil permanently should only be taken:

- in response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy; and
- where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others such as staff or pupils in the school.

For any permanent exclusion, headteachers should take reasonable steps to ensure that work is set and marked for pupils during the first five school days where the pupil will not be attending alternative provision. Any appropriate referrals to support services or notifying key workers (such as a pupil's social worker) should also be considered.

3.3 Walsall support

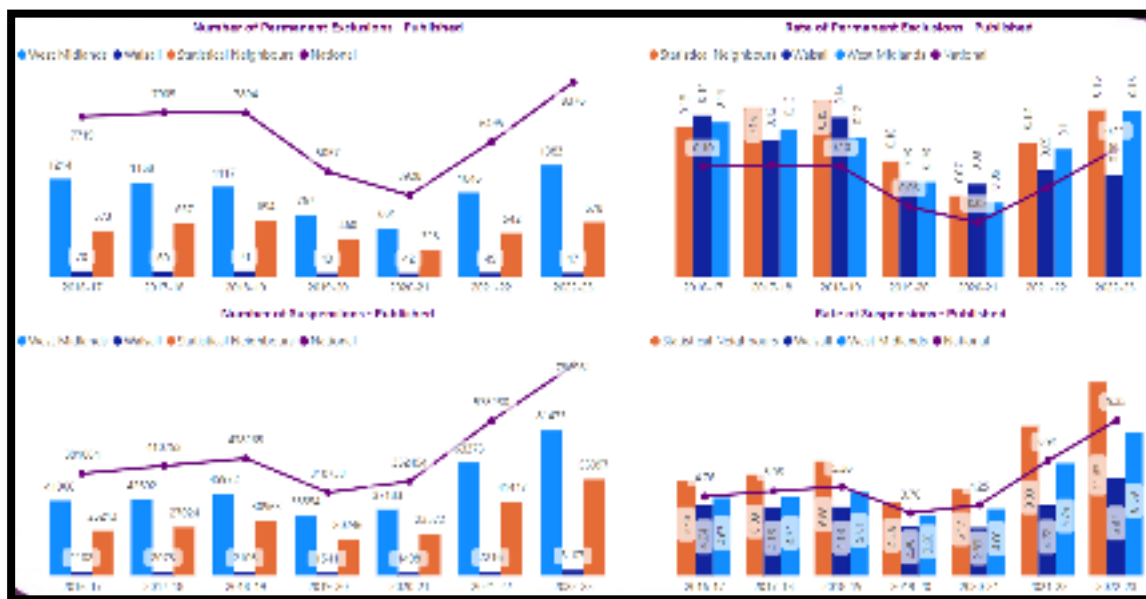
As part of our engagement with schools to review existing and to help reduce future exclusions, officers from both Access and Inclusion and the Early Help Service have reviewed and updated Walsall's existing exclusion policy and processes.

This is to ensure there is clarity about:

- The processes that need to be followed by both schools and the Local Authority in terms of notifying all relevant parties about suspensions (fixed period) and permanent exclusions.
- the levels of support that should be provided by both the Local Authority and Walsall schools to children, young people and their parent and carers prior to, at the point of and post exclusion, dependent on whether the exclusion is fixed period or permanent.
- The level of support and, where appropriate, challenge that should be provided by the Local Authority to schools prior to, at the point of and, post exclusion, dependent on whether the exclusion is fixed period or permanent Plan and SEN Support Permanent

In addition, the Inclusion Hub have recently extended their role to include support for those young people at risk of permanent exclusion from schools and to work with schools, families and other professionals to reduce the need for pupils to be excluded.

3.4 Published Data



In the most recent published statistical data from the DfE for 2022/23 academic year, the permanent exclusion rate in Walsall has remained at 0.09% which is no change from the 2021/22 academic year.

By comparison the rate for national – 0.11%, West Midlands – 0.15% and Statistical Neighbours – 0.15% have increased and are all above Walsall.

Similarly with suspensions, Walsall's rate of 5.87% is lower than national – 9.33%, West Midlands – 8.59% and Statistical Neighbours – 11.63%

As with previous years, the most common reason across all permanent exclusions is persistent disruptive behaviour. The same reason is also the most common across all suspensions. Boys continue to have higher number of suspensions and permanent exclusions than girls. Suspensions peak in year 9 with permanent exclusions peaking in year 10.

As part of the Local Authority support and challenge with schools within Walsall, it was identified that a higher number than average of permanent exclusions was from one Academy Trust. A focussed project of support was provided by our Early Help service, working with the Trust to identify and support pupils and families where permanent exclusion was identified as a risk. Outcomes of this work include:

- Alternative Provision education at Community Footprints – girl's sessions for hair and beauty
- Accessing school nursing core offer that was not previously taken up
- Summer transition planning through HAF for September 2024 year 7 intake
- Opened a new internal support centre within the school for young people put forward as a concern
- Joint home visits from school and family support worker to better understand the young people and their families needs
- School based meetings with young people and early help staff to better understand the young people voice and how this impacts on their learning where they may be experiencing trauma or have their own individual needs.

The project is continuing into the next academic year and it is anticipated that a reduction in permanent exclusions will be seen.

3.5 Walsall Learning Alliance

The Walsall Learning Alliance is a strategic group comprising representatives from all sectors of education in Walsall, that recognises a collective responsibility and accountability for improving the outcomes of all Walsall's children and young people.

The Alliance has several priorities - one of which is inclusion/exclusion. The aim - to reduce suspensions and exclusions in Walsall and for all schools to be fully inclusive. To address this priority, the group considered what is already known about suspensions and exclusions in Walsall, initially this was data driven, and then identified what further information is required and through breaking into workshop groups, identified possible next steps. Further information was shared, considering research and learning from external reviews (drawn from case studies of individuals).

As a result, a smaller focus group has been formed, this group includes representatives from a range of sectors. Colleagues have been included who are not members of the alliance but who are known will have a valid contribution to make. One of the key areas of focus for the group was to bring schools and other professionals together in one place to discuss how Walsall can reduce suspensions and exclusions work towards an inclusion agenda by developing a 'belonging' approach for all pupils and making 'belonging' a reality in Walsall.

The event took place in April in the Town Hall and was the first time in Walsall that we have brought colleagues from a such a wide range of sectors all under one roof, to look at our common goals, and what we can achieve by working together collaboratively, and across sectors and specialisms.

The day allowed us time to collectively think, listen and learn about the experiences of our vulnerable children and young people in the borough, how we can help shape their futures, and how we can ensure they feel valued, wanted, and listened to.

We had the opportunity to hear from some of our children directly, who draw upon some of their personal insights and experiences. We also heard the voices of their parents, and from professionals who support them daily, to ensure they feel a sense of belonging in their school and in their community.

A real focus of the day was around suspensions, exclusions, CME, EHE, school attendance and SEND.

The outcome from the event was a refocussed and energised group of professionals who all re-affirmed the belief to 'belonging' and would continue to work together towards supporting young people to remain in their schools, accessing specialist support where appropriate and a genuine commitment making 'belonging' a reality in Walsall.

4. Financial information

There are no direct financial implications of the report but all pupils who are permanently excluded from schools go 'on roll' at the New Leaf Centre for assessment and provision of education. The funding for New Leaf comes from the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant through the high needs local funding formula.

5. Reducing Inequalities

Our aim is to work towards the position where the needs of all young people are addressed in school or alternative provision and parents leading to reduced suspensions and exclusions.

6. Decide

Scrutiny may decide to note the current position.

The Committee may decide to request further information or assurance in respect of the progress of elective home education.

7. Respond

Any recommendations made by the Committee will be assessed against the Access and Inclusion work programme and performance board.

8. Review

All areas are under constant monitoring and assessment via Children's Services Performance Board.

Background papers

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