

From: Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform

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To: Education and Young People's Services Cabinet Committee – 01 February 2017

Subject: Report on Reducing Exclusions and Improving Attendance in Kent

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: none

Electoral Division: All

Summary:

Following the establishment of the new Inclusion and Attendance Service as part of Early help and Preventative Services, the service has developed effective new approaches to supporting children's maximum access to education by reducing school absence and exclusions. The Committee is asked to note and endorse the service's new approach of refocusing on preventative, advisory and outcomes-focused support for schools and families while streamlining the enforcement interventions to provide an effective and consistent county-wide service.

Recommendations:

That the Cabinet Committee note and endorse:

- (i) the development of a more preventative and advisory approach in supporting schools to improve attendance and to reduce exclusions;
- (ii) the revised Code of Practice for issuing education related penalty notices and a streamlined attendance enforcement team to ensure consistency and effectiveness across Kent;
- (iii) the positive impacts that the new Service has made in improving attendance and reducing exclusions.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The LA's statutory functions in relation to school attendance and exclusion are discharged by the new Inclusion and Attendance Service.

- 1.2 In May 2015, the new service was established to become an integrated part of the Early Help and Preventative Service. The service was redesigned as a significantly leaner structure by reducing the number of school attendance staff from 46 FTE to 15 FTE (School Liaison Officers). The staff deployed for managing exclusion and reintegration were slightly reduced from 7 FTE to 6.5 FTE. The attendance and exclusion staff, who were not re-employed in the service were mostly re-deployed as Early Help Workers in the Early Help Units across Kent.
- 1.3 As a consequence the service delivery model had to change in order to provide a better service with a leaner structure and reduced resources. The service has since adopted a new approach refocusing on preventative, advisory and outcomes-focused support for schools and families, while reconfiguring the six enforcement intervention hubs to form a single county wide enforcement team, and make the legal process more agile, consistent and effective.
- 1.4 The design of the new approach was based on shifting the intensive interventions in relation to attendance and exclusions, which Education Welfare Officers and Exclusion Officers traditionally carried out, to be delivered in the Early Help Units.
- 1.5 In order to make schools' access to the service easier and the legal process for taking court action in relation to attendance more outcome-focused, the service has piloted and implemented the Digital Front Door and the new Code of Conduct for issuing education related penalty notices.
- 1.6 Smarter datasets for school attendance and exclusions were developed to better inform the improvement strategies both of schools and KCC, as well as monitoring effectiveness and identifying targets for co-ordinated support.
- 1.7 The improved use of data analysis also helped to identify that children's illness is often the most common reason for missing school, while family holidays in term time is less so.

2. Digital Front Door

- 2.1 The purpose of having a Digital Front Door is to identify and implement the following
 - County wide improved processes for the tracking and monitoring of pupils excluded from school and those at risk of exclusion from school;
 - County wide improved processes for the tracking and monitoring of pupils persistently absent from school and those at risk of becoming missing from education or persistently absent from school;

- Reallocation of resource supported by the implementation of improvement opportunities allowing staff to focus on prevention;
- Maintain or enhance the public value of the service;
- Reduction in pupil exposure to risk through appropriate tracking and monitoring;
- More information recorded allowing for greater reporting, analysis and managerial oversight.

2.2 After a six months' pilot in 56 schools, the Digital Front Door was fully rolled out to all Kent schools in September 2016 and has achieved the following improvement in its first three months in operation:

- A secure school (or other agency) to LA pathway has been implemented which
 - works effectively to streamline the referral process and allows for robust recording of information
 - captures all work of staff (cases were previously managed and stored in a variety of ways developed across individual areas)
 - complies with Information Governance regulations (service was considered to be non-compliant at point of review)
 - has received positive feedback from staff and schools across the county
- The service supervision and delivery model is now more closely aligned with EHPS models of working
- From September the service is largely paperless
- And it has reduced the amount of failure demand and administration time across all teams.

2.3 The outcomes that are attributed to the project are:

- A reduction in permanent and fixed term exclusions
- A reduction in the number of pupils persistently absent from school
- A reduction in the number of statutory processes instigated relating to school attendance

3. The new Code of Conduct for Issuing Penalty Notices

3.1 After a period of consultation with Kent schools and the Police, KCC published its new Education Penalty Notices Code of Conduct in November 2015.

- 3.2 The main change is that the use of Penalty Notices will not be limited to family holidays but for all unauthorised absence which is deemed applicable because there is persistent unauthorised absence from school.
- 3.3 Under the new Code of Conduct a Penalty Notice for unauthorised absence is only issued where a child has an overall attendance of 90% or below (persistent absence level) or where there are aggravating factors such as removing a child from school during a period of examination.

4. The New Ways of Working in Reducing Exclusions in Kent

- 4.1 The re-organised PRU arrangements have made a clear contribution to the reduction in permanent exclusions over time. This has been achieved through a review of the local offer, an improved curriculum and a commitment on the part of schools to find positive alternatives to exclusion and clearer pathways to post 16 training and learning.
- 4.2 The Inclusion and Attendance Advisers adopted more preventative approaches to focus their interventions on the factors that make a difference to children's behaviours, which in turn affects the rates of permanent and fixed term exclusions.
- 4.3 These factors include the effectiveness of school practice and in-school support; the cooperation of schools in the local 'In Year Fair Access' arrangements; the alternative curriculum provision and support for schools by the Pupil Referral Units; the availability of support to Primary schools for challenging behaviour; the early identification of special educational needs and the use of the LIFT process; and the use of support through Early Help notifications.
- 4.4 There are eight Primary phase projects, partially funded by KCC to provide effective support to schools in managing pupils with challenging behaviour.

5. The Outcomes

- 5.1 The effective approaches adapted by the new service have had positive impacts on Kent's school attendance with the latest school census data confirming that Kent's attendance has improved, with Primary schools' attendance reaching 96% and Secondary schools being close to 95%.
- 5.2 In comparison with 2015, the exclusion data shows that there is a continuous trend of reduction in overall permanent and fixed-term exclusions, which is very welcome. Permanent exclusions have been reduced from 109 to 64, a reduction by 45 while there are 704 fewer fixed-term exclusions.

- 5.3 Since September 2016, while there is a general trend of fewer exclusions in many Districts, South Kent has so far made the most reduction in exclusions with an impressive reduction in Ashford schools' fixed-term exclusions.
- 5.4 One year ago 70% of permanently excluded pupils were eligible for free school meals (FSM). This figure has now been markedly reduced to 46.9%. There is also a reduction in the proportion of FSM children involved in fixed-term exclusions.
- 5.5 The proportion of permanently excluded children, with special educational needs and with an Education Health and Care Plan has been reduced from 9.2% to 6.3%.
- 5.6 Since the introduction of the Digital Front Door schools have used the new digital system to report 892 cases of children missing education. 87% of the children involved were found and contacted by School Liaison Officers and returned to school within two weeks.

6. Recommendations:

The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse:

- (i) the approach of moving toward a preventative and advisory approach in supporting schools to improve attendance and to reduce exclusions;
- (ii) the revised Code of Practice for issuing education related penalty notices and the streamlined attendance enforcement service to ensure consistency and effectiveness across Kent;
- (iii) the positive impacts that the new Service has made in improving attendance and reducing exclusions.

7. Background Documents

- 7.1 School attendance: guidance for schools
From: Department for Education
First published: 25 November 2013
Last updated: 2 November 2016

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/564599/school_attendance.pdf

- 7.2 Statutory guidance: School exclusion
From: Department for Education
First published: 20 June 2012
Last updated: 10 February 2015

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/269681/Exclusion from maintained schools academies and pupil referral units.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/269681/Exclusion_from_maintained_schools_academies_and_pupil_referral_units.pdf)

7.3 KCC Code of Conduct for Issuing Education Related Penalty Notices
Published: November 2016
Effective date: 1st January 2016

http://www.kelsi.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/62126/KCC-Code-of-Conduct-Penalty-Notice.pdf

7.4 KCC Guidance on School Exclusions and Re-integration, August 2016
<http://www.kelsi.org.uk/pru,-inclusion-and-attendance-service-pias/exclusion-and-reintegration/guidance-on-exclusion>

8. Contact details

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