

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
Date: September 2021
Report for: Information
Report of: Director of Education, Standards, Quality and Performance

Report Title

Response to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish Group Review into Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and School Exclusions.

Summary

Following the publication of the Task and Finish Group Review, Trafford officers have produced a response to the information and recommendations made.

Recommendation(s)

Scrutiny to note the responses made as requested.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

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*For non-confidential reports to Executive add the following **mandatory** information:*

Background Papers: The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish Group Review into Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and School Exclusions.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 At the beginning of the Municipal year 2019/20, the Committee agreed to form a Task and Finish Group to look at SEND and School Exclusions.
- 1.2 The review encompassed the following activities:
- Scrutiny of information and data from Council Officers
 - Meeting with a representative from Trafford Parents Forum (TPF)
 - Meeting with the manager of Trafford SEND Information and Advice Support Services (SENDIASS)
 - Meeting with the Headteachers of Trafford High School and Egerton High School

A report was then published by the Task & Finish group.

2.0 Trafford Services' response to the Task & Finish Group's Review

Understanding the Context

- 2.1 Officers would like to thank the Councillors for their detailed report and for sharing their findings of discussions and meetings with a range of stakeholders. The report was an informative read and we remain committed to listening to these views and proactive in our endeavours to work in collaboration with children, young people, families and professionals to improve the available support and experience of our pupils.
- 2.2 Trafford Education Services pride themselves on the positive relationships they have with all of their schools and settings. Senior leaders from a range of providers are represented on a number of boards, as well the Strategic SEND Board, enabling us to gain a representative picture across the landscape of mainstream and special educational provision, particularly as different schools have very different areas of expertise and practice. In addition, Trafford's SENDIASS service (previously PPYPS) is represented on the Strategic SEND Board, as well as the Communication and Engagement Group. This provides an opportunity for regular performance reports to be shared and issues to be presented as they arise.
- 2.3 Officers are in agreement that there has been an increase in the number of young people with SEND being excluded from Trafford schools over the period of 2014-2019. However, it is pleasing to note that there has been a drop in the last reporting period of 2019/20 as reflected in the three year trend data presented below.

| | | EHCP PERM EX | EHCP FTE* | SEND PERM EX | SEND FTE* |
|---------|----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| 2017-18 | Trafford | 0.15 | 15.27 | 0.50 | 8.95 |
| | Nat. | 0.11 | 15.95 | 0.33 | 15.10 |
| 2018-19 | Trafford | 0.34 | 17.35 | 0.53 | 8.48 |
| | Nat. | 0.16 | 16.09 | 0.32 | 16.81 |
| 2019-20 | Trafford | 0.25 ▼ | 16.16 ▼ | 0.14 ▼ | 4.84 ▼ |
| | Nat. | 0.10 | 11.34 | 0.21` | 11.59 |

*FTE: Fixed term exclusions

Current data would suggest that through the period of 2020-21, there were a total of 23 permanent exclusions from Trafford schools. Of those, three were pupils with an EHC plan and seven pupils were at SEND support.

- 2.4 Officers also welcomed the support of members to acquire a new data system to enable ease of access to data and analysis. Current proposals would suggest that this system would be available to the service in July 2022.

3.0 Support Services and Families' Perspective

- 3.1 Officers would agree that significant improvements have been made in meeting the 20 week deadline to the submission of an EHC plan, although this is not as a result of any investment in a Vulnerable Students Unit. Despite the growth in requests for EHC Needs Assessments and EHC Plans, officers have worked relentlessly to ensure processes are in place to maintain effective timeliness through increasing the frequency of panels, ensuring robust preparation takes place outside of the meetings to assist with efficiencies and strengthening the membership of panels so that decision-making is robust.

Our last reported data shows an improvement from 15% to 81% completion rates within timescale.

- 3.2 Members concurred in the report that the school curriculum factors in levels of pupil engagement. When inspections take place in schools, Ofsted want to know the extent to which all pupils have access to the school's full curriculum and will make a judgement on the quality of education. This involves a scrutiny of the effectiveness of the following:

- That leaders take on or construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give all learners, particularly the most disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or high needs, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life
- That the provider's curriculum is coherently planned and sequenced towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for future learning and employment
- That the provider has the same academic, technical or vocational ambitions for almost all learners. Where this is not practical – for example, for some learners with high levels of SEND – its curriculum is designed to be ambitious and to meet their needs
- That learners study the full curriculum. Providers ensure this by teaching a full range of subjects for as long as possible, 'specialising' only when necessary.

The vast majority of Trafford secondary schools follow a 3 year KS3 and 2 year KS4 in order to keep the breadth of the curriculum in place for as long as possible to meet the curriculum requirements above, but also to give equity of opportunity to all pupils. This does mean that pupils make their option choices approximately half way through year 9 and continue to study subjects they know they will not be following at GCSE; this always presents a challenge to keep some pupils engaged towards the end of year. Smaller high schools find it more difficult to offer the same range of option subjects as larger schools and these impacts on the choices pupils have and in some cases leads to pupils moving schools. There are also schools that have specific option subjects not offered elsewhere in the authority as a legacy of historical specialist school status or a specific demographic make-up.

- 3.3 Officers would agree that Trafford has some highly effective SENCOs in our schools. Indeed, our most recent SEND Peer Challenge reported that, "SENCOs are well

regarded across all settings...and they felt valued and well supported.” The termly SENCO forum that is facilitated by the local authority is well attended and provides a mechanism for both professional development and information sharing to ensure that resources and good practice is disseminated across the borough.

3.4 It is disappointing that some families and children with SEN feel like they have not received support from their schools which has led to an exclusion being implemented, and officers agree that early intervention is critical in preventing situations escalating. Trafford Team Together, our innovative partnership working to change the way that Early Help is coordinated and supported, is designed to ensure that children are provided with the right help, at the right time, by the right professional and pilots for this work are underway in Partington and Stretford, with a view to a wider roll-out in the near future. Schools and families are welcoming the support that is being provided during these meetings and we are confident that this will have a positive impact on some of very vulnerable children and young people. SEND teams such as the SEN Advisory Service, Educational Psychology Service, Sensory Impairment Support team and Longford Park Outreach Service work with schools on a daily basis to support the inclusion of children and young people with SEND and offer support and challenge to schools struggling to meet need and so prevent many exclusions escalating.

3.5 Our SEND Ambitions Plan includes a priority to develop the quality and capacity of early years providers, schools and colleges to meet the needs of local families and their children with SEND. This includes:

- √ Establish a clear agreement about what mainstream inclusion across the system looks like
- √ Implement a clear offer of capacity-building support to ensure there is a consistency of practice and be responsive in finding out what professionals need
- √ Link inclusion support to whole-school improvement

A further priority is focusing on reducing the number of exclusions of pupils with SEND which aims to:

- √ Enable operational leads and practitioners across the Local Area to understand their role in delivering SEND reform and have the necessary knowledge and skills to do so
- √ Ensure that the SEND experience for all our children and young people is a continuum of support from Early Years through to Adult Services
- √ Understand the lived experience for young people who have been excluded to inform prevention and targeted intervention.
- √ Embed a cohesive Social Emotional and Mental Health offer to enable early identification of need and appropriate support and intervention

4.0 Feedback from the Front Line

4.1 It was helpful to hear the feedback from Trafford Alternative Education Provision (TAEP) and Egerton High School and officers would agree that early identification of SEN needs is critical to ensuring improved outcomes for all our children and young people. As TAEP has now relocated to a larger site, the provision has real potential to expand and enhance its provision. The number of pupils on site at both Trafford High and the Medical Education Service has increased, although the local authority is clear that exclusion is a last resort and officers work with headteachers to ensure where possible, it is avoided.

- 4.2 We are aware of a number of students who, when attending TAEP, go on to receive an EHC Plan and there is ongoing work to monitor and track this data.
- 4.3 The Trafford Inclusion Charter has now been rolled out to schools and presented to all Headteachers at their conferences. This Charter was developed in partnership with parents/carers, SENCOs and officers to share our ambition for inclusive practice throughout all our schools. Five key principles have been devised with a commitment statement, which we have asked all our schools to sign up to. These principles are as follows:
- ❖ Local schools and educational settings in Trafford are committed to meeting the needs of children and young people in their local community
 - ❖ Outcomes are child-centred, measurable and achievable
 - ❖ Communication is regular, clear and appropriate
 - ❖ We are all **Accountable** and responsible for supporting inclusion in Trafford
 - ❖ We are mindful of how we use **Language** to include, describe and involve all

The Peer Challenge referred to the Charter as a vehicle to look at cultural competence and outline the entitlement of children, young people and families.

Further information about the Charter is available in **Appendix 1**.

5.0 Recommendations

Officers have welcomed the findings and recommendations from the Task and Finish Group and would like to provide the following reassurances:

5.1 A) All Trafford SENCOs receive appropriate training to support them in their role in schools in enabling the early identification of children and young people with SEND through a number of ways.

Trafford LA has successfully delivered the National Award in SEN Coordination in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University since its inception in 2010. All SENCOs have to be teachers and have to be suitably qualified. The regulations state that this means any SENCO who had not been in post for at least 12 months before September 2009 has to complete the Award within 3 years of taking the post. Training on statutory duties for schools and SENCOs is also covered as part of the National SENCO Award and SENCO Induction training in Trafford.

In addition, Trafford's Graduated Approach which includes an early years version, was co-produced with settings and is used well by SENCOs. It provides good practice for education providers working with children and young people with SEND and explains the support and provision the Local Authority (LA) expects to be available in mainstream settings without recourse to an Education, Health and Care Plan.

The recent peer challenge reflected on the comprehensive training offer to practitioners and partners from a range of partners including Occupational Therapists, Educational Psychologists and other professionals. The reports states, "All training is valued, and SENCOs have been able to contribute their expertise to this training."

Officers are committed to continue to deliver a programme of support to meet any emerging needs to ensure our children and young people receive the best possible support at the right time.

5.2 Promote the Trafford Inclusion Charter

All schools have been provided with the Inclusion Charter Pack with a view to signing up to show each school's commitment to the Charter. In this pack, each school will receive;

- The Trafford definition of Inclusion (*In Trafford we believe that our Inclusive ethos will promote equal opportunities for all children and young people, whatever their age, gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, attainment and background. We recognise that we need to be mindful of the provision made for each individual child and young person so that they are able to achieve their best outcomes*)
- The 5 principles of the Trafford Inclusion Charter
- A 'we will' so 'you can' set of statements
- A commitment agreement as part of the sign up process
- A set of resources and links to support ongoing reflective practice on how inclusion is developing in each setting

We look forward to linking with all of our schools going forward, to build on and share the wonderful inclusive practice we know there is across many of our Trafford schools. An article about the launch of the Charter featured in the LINK newsletter for parent/carers.

5.3 Procure a data system that allows systematic and periodic monitoring of all SEND students' experience of education in Trafford

Currently, there are a range of mechanisms to monitor the experience of young people with SEND, but principally through Liquid Logic. The Local Authority is responsible for the experience of those with an EHC plan for SEND but is obviously interested in the view of those at SEN support too. We gain pupil views when they are supported by our services such as Sensory Impairment Support Service and at points of involvement with the Education Psychology Service and the SEN Advisory Service. We will work with schools and parent groups as part of the Trafford Inclusion Charter work to review how schools and services monitor the experience of those at SEN support through questionnaires and reviews and assessment. Those with an EHCP have Annual Reviews and should receive a questionnaire at the end of the EHC needs assessment process.

In addition, our SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment provides an overview of a number of reported outcomes to support future strategic planning for SEND, including commissioning. We are delighted to report that a comprehensive SEND Dashboard is being developed in partnership with a range of officers which will be overseen by the Strategic SEND Board and will be used to analyse and monitor performance and outcomes.

Finally, the implementation of a new data system will bring together several management information systems, allowing us to cross reference exclusion reports with current SEN status and other relevant factors. This will have several benefits including enabling us to identify and evidence emerging trends at a much earlier point, and being far less labour intensive, making more officer time available to act upon any findings.

5.4 Consider increased funding for independent SENDIASS support and advisory services for parents and families

There is a draft proposal linked to a staffing restructure to allocate an additional £9k of council core budget to SENDIASS to support with capacity development within the service. This is in addition to recent changes which developed support capacity within the Family Information Service, permitting SENDIASS to delete their dedicated business support post and replace it with an additional Caseworker role to improve capacity.

5.5 Facilitate opportunities for Trafford schools to capitalise on the existing expertise of SEND professionals in Trafford by sharing good practice

Officers are committed to system-led improvement and already work with Bright Futures Teaching School Hub, Trafford Together School Alliance and Alliance for Learning, to ensure training and support is available, as well as linking with Inclusion officers. Trafford is keen to develop communities of good practice as well as look at opportunities for outreach support. Ambition 3 of our SEND Strategic Plan is focused on developing the quality and capacity of early years providers, schools and colleges to meet the needs of local families and their children with SEND. This includes strengthening inclusive practice across all provisions.

The Virtual Mental Wealth Hub (VMWH) was formed in the summer of 2020 to provide a 'one stop shop' for schools to source advice or support around mental health and reflects the collaboration from all services and agencies within Trafford. Since then, professionals from many agencies have collaborated to deliver training and support to schools which include Wellbeing for Education Return training, Mental Health Support Teams in schools and to form a School Mental Health Leads Network. Surveys and feedback from schools has informed the delivery of commissioned services including Kooth and Trafford Sunrise to children and parents/carers.

5.6 Encourage all schools to ensure that, except in the most extreme cases, any child at risk of permanent exclusions has had adequate and appropriate assessment, including an EHCP, prior to a "managed move" to a school with specialist provision and before a school makes a final decision to permanently exclude

All schools are encouraged through the Vulnerable Children's Service Handbook to bring any child at risk of Permanent Exclusion to the attention of the Local Authority. Upon being notified, appropriate assessment is advised and sometimes funding alongside an EHC needs assessment is provided to schools requiring additional resources. Schools use Step Out places at Longford Park School and Trafford Alternative Education Provision where the risk is high, and those provisions add to the assessment information. For a child or young person with an EHC plan, the Educational Psychologist should be involved alongside school, parent and others known to the child as part of an emergency annual review to check all assessment has been completed and appropriate provision can be sought in a timely manner.

Our message is always that exclusion should be a last resort when all other strategies have been exhausted. The Behaviour and Attendance officers have good relationships with schools and encourage headteachers and pastoral leads to contact them to discuss options before making any decision to permanently exclude a pupil. Permanent exclusions can be withdrawn by the headteacher before the disciplinary panel meets and this does happen after intervention in some cases.

5.7 Enable parents to report on the Council's website their concern about their child and get advice on what to do if there is not action from school

We are really privileged to work in partnership with Trafford SENDIASS who provide free, confidential, impartial advice and support to parent carers, children and young people aged 0 - 25 in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) who live in Trafford. The service manager of SENDIASS sits on the Strategic Board for SEND and provides a report which enables officers from across the partnership to be cited on not only the number of contacts made by parents and carers but the reasons for the calls. This is really helping all partners to be fully briefed on the concerns being raised and how we can work together to provide solutions.

The Trafford Communication and Engagement Group which has representation from Trafford Parent/Carer Forum and their members, is also committed to ensuring our Local Offer is helpful, accessible and engaging so that parents, carers and young people know what to do if they require advice and support.

5.8 Ensure all EHCPs are of good quality and legally compliant. This will involve ensuring assessments are also done in a timely manner and to a good standard. Quality should not be replaced by quantity.

Whilst we recognise that officers have worked hard to achieve improvements in timeliness, we would also agree with this recommendation and indeed, this was validated in our recent Peer Challenge. Ambition 2 of our Strategic Plan states our commitment to ensuring high quality statutory assessment process which meets timescales and ensures that children and young people with SEND, and their parents and carers, are considered at every stage of the process.

A Quality Assurance Framework is being established through the support of the Strategic Lead for Practice Improvement & Learning in Children's Services which is designed to ensure a robust standards framework is applied by all partners from across Education, Health and Social Care. A timetable of moderation and audits of plans will be devised which will be reported to each Strategic Board.

5.9 Continue the provision of the Step Out Program

The step-out programme was used to prevent permanent exclusion historically where there were empty places in the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). We have rarely been below PAN in the secondary PRU for some years, so we established a "roll-on-roll-off" place available to each High School and 6 similar places were made available across primary schools (who had far fewer permanent exclusions) at Longford Park School. The programme ran for 2 years at a cost of £180,000 pa to the High Needs Block. However, there was insufficient evidence that they were being used effectively to prevent exclusion across the board. Whilst some secondary places went unused, there was competition for places in the primary PRU for children awaiting SEN assessment, rather than as a result of the risk of exclusion. Therefore, this is something we would need to consider in the future subject to demand and funding.

