



To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 29th November 2018

Subject: Social, Emotional and Mental Health in Schools Task and Finish Group

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To inform the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board of the outcome of the Social, Emotional and Mental Health in Schools Task and Finish Group.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board and the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, work in partnership with Primary and Secondary networks across the City, to facilitate a Celebration and Shared Learning Event. This would showcase some of the excellent practise being undertaken by Schools across the City in supporting children and young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and be targeted at a cross section of the school's workforce.

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 The Task and Finish group was established by the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board at the beginning of the municipal year to look at Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) from a schools perspective. The topic was chosen as Members reported concerns about the help available to young people and wanted to support Headteachers across the City who are desperate to see a better service to support pupils with SEMH issues, as without it, vulnerable young people risk not achieving their full potential.
- 3.2 Officers brought to the Group information on exclusions from Coventry schools. The data showed that the age range of children being excluded was widening, to include key stage 1 (5 and 6 year olds) and violence was increasingly cited as a reason for exclusion.
- 3.3 Whilst concerned that exclusions are steadily rising within the City, Members noted that Coventry's exclusion rates remain below the national average.
- 3.4 The exclusion data included a range of case studies, which listed the number of services the young people had been involved with, before they were excluded as well as the range of interventions schools and partner agencies had put in place before the exclusion occurred.
- 3.5 This data clearly highlighted an inconsistency in the support being offered to young people in need by schools. It is acknowledged that there may be many reasons for this differential practice including financial limitations, impact on attendance and academic progress measures and culture. It was noted that Coventry City Council in partnership with Headteachers has established fair access panels at both primary

and secondary phase, which provides a peer support and challenge forum, aimed at negating the need to permanently exclude a child. The Council's Children Missing Education Team (CME) has been established to offer an additional layer of support. The team, alongside other support services encourage schools to exhaust all options before determining that a child should be permanently excluded. This is because an exclusion can have a lasting impact on a young person - a report published in 2017 showed that exclusions can amplify pupils' psychological distress and encourage behaviour it intends to punish¹.

- 3.6 The Task and Finish Group met with representatives from Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust (NHS), who are responsible for the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in Coventry. They heard about the application (an app) which they are rolling out, called the Dimensions Tool. This tool is designed to help parents and schools identify needs early and signpost to the support available, including self-help for young people who may not yet reach the threshold for CAMHS support.
- 3.7 The Task and Finish Group decided to undertake visits to schools to understand the challenges they face in an environment with diminishing financial resources and see some examples of practice in the City first hand. Members visited two schools who are recognised for their positive focus on supporting pupils with SEMH. They were looking for examples of good practice, which might be shared for adoption encouraged elsewhere in the City. It is emphasised that these schools are not alone in demonstrating exemplary practice, but unfortunately time was limited to undertake multiple site visits.
- 3.8 The first school the Group visited was Spon Gate Primary. The Headteacher is Chair of the Inclusion Network (a subgroup of Primary Partnership). The schools emphasis on supporting it's pupils is evident in this extract of its recent OFSTED report
- 3.9 *'Your school values, including, 'respect', 'courage', 'perseverance' and 'aspiration' are central to the ethos of the school. You and your staff take the time to get to know pupils as individuals...The provision for vulnerable pupils is particularly strong... pupils with complex behaviour or emotional needs are extremely well supported and integrated into the school.'*²
- 3.10 The second school the group visited was Lyng Hall School, which is part of the Finham Park Multi-Academy Trust. The schools Headteacher is Chair of the Secondary Schools Forum.
- 3.11 The visits highlighted a number of similarities between the two schools in how they support, not just pupils, but also their families. Whilst the tools, techniques and strategies were not the same, the ethos of both schools was striking similar. Both schools are led by established Headteachers who drive the vision for the school, and have the support of the staff behind them. Both schools also use the resources available to them innovatively to fund additional support staff with expertise in supporting pupils with challenges and their families. They seek to understand and respond to the reasons for the young person's behaviour and to provide support wherever possible, rather than react to the behaviour. It is noted that both Headteachers were aware of the impact being 'inclusive' can have on external progress measures and the pressure that places on schools.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/aug/19/school-exclusion-linked-to-long-term-mental-health-problems>

² <https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/2735101> OFSTED Short Inspection Letter October 2017

- 3.12 Members of the Task and Finish group recognised that there is a lot of good practice going on in schools on to support pupils with SEMH, but, as evidenced by the exclusion cases studies, the level of support across schools is inconsistent.
- 3.13 Therefore, the Task and Finish group recommends that a celebratory event is held to showcase the fantastic work Primary and Secondary schools are undertaking and use this event to facilitate some peer learning opportunities for schools who may like to further develop their provision for pupils with SEMH needs.
- 3.14 Hosting a combined event for the City's schools would also enable schools to look at ways to support the successful transition of pupils as they move from Primary to Secondary school.