

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

22 January 2020

Report title	The Culture of Belonging Programme
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds
Wards affected	All
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services
Originating service	Inclusion Support Service
Accountable employees	Rob Hart Head of Inclusion Support Tel 01902 555256 Email Robert.Hart@wolverhampton.gov.uk

**Report has been
considered by**

Recommendations for action:

The Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

Provide comment and challenge on the attached report detailing proposed actions to establish the Culture of Belonging Programme.



Children and Families Together Board

5 March 2020

Report title	The Culture of Belonging Programme: promoting inclusion, engagement and educational outcomes for vulnerable children and young people	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds Children and Young People	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services	
Originating service	Inclusion Support Service	
Accountable employee(s)	Rob Hart	Head of Inclusion Support
	Tel	01902 555256
	Email	Robert.Hart@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report has been considered by	Transforming Children's Services Board	28 November 2019
	SEND Partnership & Commissioning Board	15 January 2020
	Project Assurance Group	9 January 2020
	Children, Young People & Families Scrutiny Panel	22 January 2020
	Children and Families Together Board	5 March 2020

Recommendation for action:

The Children and Families Together Board is recommended to:

- Endorse the proposal to establish the Culture of Belonging Programme as a means to promote inclusion, engagement and educational outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

“Children will do anything to be included, anything from wearing school uniform to marching with political youth groups; anything from joining an inter-house litter pick to beating up their dearest friend.”

(Kate Clanchy, *Some Kids I Taught and What They Taught Me*, 2019)

1.0 Purpose

1.1 This report proposes the establishment of the Culture of Belonging programme – a co-ordinated, whole system programme of activity which aims to promote and improve educational engagement and outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

2.0 Overview

2.1 Too many children and young people in Wolverhampton are excluded from school. In 2017-2018 Wolverhampton had the fourth highest rate of permanent exclusions in the country. Accompanying this, the number of children being educated at home in Wolverhampton has nearly trebled over the last five years. In Wolverhampton, the West Midlands and nationally, there are increased concerns about youth violence, child exploitation and gangs. Disengagement and exclusion from education has been linked to these growing issues.

2.2 In March 2018 a proposal was agreed by Children and Families Together Board to establish a Task Force focusing on school exclusions and related issues. This work ultimately fed into the Citizen Lab project that was undertaken between January and November 2019 with West Midlands Combined Universities, to explore these issues and identify potential solutions.

3.0 Background

3.1 From 2013, over a period five years, Wolverhampton went from being one of the lowest excluding areas in the country, to having one of the highest rates of permanent exclusions – twice the national average.

3.2 Since 2017-2018, the number of permanent exclusions has begun to fall as table one below shows.

	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Primary schools	29	22	15
Secondary schools	93	97	89
Total	122	119	104

- 3.3 Over the same time period, there has been a three-fold increase in the number of children who are being educated at home, from 91 in September 2013 to 293 on 1 September 2019.
- 3.4 While for some families this is a positive and informed choice, that is not the case for all. The highest rate of growth of elective home education (EHE) has been among children and young people in years 9 to 11 (age 14-16). There is concern that some of this growth represents off rolling, which OFSTED define as “the practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without a formal, permanent exclusion or by encouraging their child from the school roll, when the removal is primarily in the interests of the school rather than in the best interests of the pupil”.
- 3.5 Exclusion and off-rolling impact some groups of children and young people disproportionately. In Wolverhampton the following factors increase the risk of a child being excluded or leaving school to become educated at home:
- having a special educational need or disability
 - coming from a black or minority ethnic community
 - being aged 14 to 16
 - being a child in need of help or protection
- 3.6 As the numbers of exclusions and rates of EHE have increased in Wolverhampton, there has also been some changes in the types of incidence that are leading to school exclusion. For a long period the most common reason for permanent exclusion was persistent disruptive behaviour. While this has declined over the last year, there has been a marked increase in the number of permanent exclusions due to one-off serious incidents, particularly those involving drugs or physical assaults, and to a lesser extent, weapon-related incidents.
- 3.7 Exclusion from school cannot be isolated from wider social factors. According to the national Serious Violence Strategy (2018), evidence suggests that school exclusion is linked to an increase risk of victimisation, violence perpetration and also substance misuse. Children excluded from school are over-represented in young offender populations. They are also over-represented as victims of serious violence.

4. What has happened in response to these challenges?

- 4.1 *The Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Plan*
The SEMH in Schools Plan was developed following engagement with school leaders, and was approved by Children’s Trust Board in September 2017. This identified four priorities to improve the identification and support in schools for children who experience SEMH needs:
1. Ensuring that there is a clearly understood and locally agreed graduated response to identifying SEMH needs in schools;

2. Ensuring that schools have access to appropriate, high quality training to help to develop a workforce that are highly skilled and confident at supporting pupils with SEMH needs;
3. Ensuring that schools are able to access support services, such as the special school outreach service and the Inclusion Support Service with appropriate skills and expertise to address SEMH needs.
4. Reviewing and providing guidance on the roles and functions of off-site and on-site enhanced or alternative provision for pupils with identified SEMH needs.

4.2 Much has happened in response to the SEMH Plan, specifically the development of the "Getting it Right" approach, with guidance and training for schools about identification and support for SEMH needs, and the review of outreach provision to increase capacity to support schools, and align this to the Getting it Right approach. A briefing outlining progress in relation to the SEMH plan was presented to Children and Families Together Board in December 2018.

4.3 *Alternative provision review*

Linked to the SEMH Plan, as a part of the wider SEND Strategy, a review of alternative provision was undertaken in 2018, led by Tom Knott (SEND Commissioning Officer), and its recommendations were approved by Children and Families Together Board in September 2018. This identified a number of challenges and areas for improvement in relation to alternative provision in the city, notably in relation to: planning and commissioning of provision; awareness of the Alternative Provision (AP) offer and consistent pathways into it; the breadth and appropriateness of the city's AP offer; and, quality assurance. There were five overarching recommendations:

1. The City of Wolverhampton Council's commissioning of alternative provision is aligned to that of specialist educational provision and informed by both an annual needs assessment and provision gap analysis.
2. The City of Wolverhampton Council explores opportunities to develop local provision to ensure sufficiency.
3. The City of Wolverhampton Council supports effective transitions into and out of alternative provision.
4. The City of Wolverhampton Council develops a range of support for schools to improve the delivery of joint responsibilities in relation to the use of AP.
5. The City of Wolverhampton Council develops a clear graduated response and provision pathway for children who require alternative provision.

4.4 *Culture of Belonging Summit*

In November 2018 a summit event was held bringing together school leaders, key strategic partners and local authority officers. Head teachers, chairs of governors, or other senior leaders, attended from around forty of our schools, alongside representatives from mental health services, Wolverhampton Clinical Commissioning Group, voluntary sector agencies, alternative education providers, local authority children's services, youth offending, and youth services. Following this event, we have a commitment to working together to reduce school exclusions.

Some of the key actions following this summit that we will be working on over the next year include:

- establishing agreed processes that schools should implement for children who are at-risk in order to avoid exclusion and ensure that it is only used as a genuine last resort, and ensure that there is comprehensive pupil information available if children do move schools;
- establishing a head teacher-led panel to oversee access to alternative provision and commissioned support services, so that there is transparent accountability, support and challenge where children are identified as being at-risk of exclusion;
- working with Wolverhampton Safeguarding Board to develop model policies about banned items in schools;
- rolling out restorative practice training across our partnership, through the Safeguarding Board, including working with schools to find restorative alternatives to exclusions; and,
- agreeing and implementing our 2019-2022 Serious Violence and Exploitation Strategy, following consultation that started on 17 December 2019.

5 Citizen Lab

5.1 Between January and November 2019, City of Wolverhampton Council has worked with Birmingham City University and University of Wolverhampton on to undertake a “Citizen Lab” focusing on school exclusions and related issues.

5.2 The Citizen Lab Approach has been developed by West Midlands Combined Universities. It is a programme of work seeking to support councils to innovate; bringing council teams, their citizens and stakeholders to work collaboratively to imagine challenges from a collective perspective.

5.3 The Citizen Lab comprised three main elements: analysis of local and national data; focus groups with young people from Wolverhampton; and a Citizen Lab Workshop bringing together a range of key stakeholders on 2 and 3 October 2019 to discuss the problems, share insights and identify potential solutions in relation to school exclusions and associated issues. The findings from the Citizen Lab have been summarised in a written report (see background papers).

5.4 Analysis of exclusions data for Wolverhampton yielded some notable insights. While the national rate for permanent exclusions in England is 0.2 per cent, in 2017-2018 there were three schools in Wolverhampton which permanently excluded more than one per cent of their pupils. Features of schools with higher rates of exclusion included:

- secondary schools – 87 percent of permanent exclusions in Wolverhampton were involved pupils attending secondary schools;
- high incidence of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) – five of the nine schools with FSM greater than 20 percent had above average exclusion rates;
- high incidence of pupils eligible for pupil premium (PP) – six of the ten schools with PP levels above 33 percent had high exclusion rates;

- low attainment – five out of six schools in which fewer than 50 percent of pupils reached the floor standards at Key Stage 4 had above average exclusion rates; and,
- high incidence of special educational needs (SEN) – four out of seven schools with SEN rates above 15 per cent had above average exclusion rates.

- 5.5 While these features were indicators of schools with a higher exclusion rate they did not determine them entirely. There are schools in Wolverhampton which do not fit with these trends, and have lower rates of exclusion at the same time as having, for example, higher rates of pupil premium or SEN.
- 5.6 Although data suggest that pupils from certain ethnic groups are more likely to experience both permanent or fixed term exclusion from school, at a school level higher proportions of black and minority ethnic pupils were not associated with higher levels of exclusions.
- 5.7 Focus groups were held involving 40 young people. These included pupils from a pupil referral unit (PRU), who had experienced permanent exclusion, as well as young people from the Youth Council, Children in Care Council, Care Leavers' Forum, and HeadStart Ambassadors.
- 5.8 Young people attending the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) reported that they felt more listened to in the PRU than they had at previous schools, and that staff cared for them.
- 5.9 Themes from the focus groups with all the young people identified the importance of being listened to and understood at school, and the importance of having somewhere they felt that they belonged. In addition, being treated fairly was seen as very important, and young people identified the need for structures in schools to support this. Some were critical of approaches to reward systems which focused on tangible, extrinsic motivators (e.g. points, money) and were not felt to be meaningful.
- 5.10 The Citizen Lab workshop brought together stakeholders including parents, people with lived experience, professionals and academics. There was much discussion about the problems with trying to make all children access a "one size fits all" education system. Recommendations from this workshop included:
- a need for better training of school staff to support children who may be at risk of exclusion;
 - clearer pathways for intervention;
 - a clearer, more comprehensive offer of support for children with social, emotional and mental health needs; and
 - the need for a more responsive "emergency" process for responding when things go wrong, including a "complex needs service", integrating mental health and social care support.

5.11 Across the Citizen Lab three key themes were identified as central to responding to the challenges that were being discussed. These were:

- How to build trust with young people
- How to connect and supporting parents
- How to create valid alternatives to the current educational offer

5.12 The Citizen Lab report identified five recommendations:

- User journeys - undertaking “user journeys” with people navigating the system to better understand the ecosystem of support and pinpoint where there are further opportunities for change.
- Managing emotions – exploring how emotional capacity can be enhanced across the system, so the children and young people, parents/ carers and professionals are all better able to cope with difficult situations.
- Different and targeted provision – developing a different and positive educational offer for vulnerable children and young people that learns from what works within the current system and extends this to design radically new offers with other providers such as community, voluntary and arts organisations.
- Communication – undertake further research to consider how to overcome communication barriers between young people and teachers, and how to prevent language being a barrier to building trust.
- Immediate actions – a variety of possible immediate actions or quick wins were identified during the lab, which should be explored further to identify which should be pursued or developed further.

6. Proposal

6.1 As has been outlined above, there has been much activity in relation to exclusions and associated issues, in terms of trying to improve systems and processes, better understand the underlying issues, and build a whole system partnership and response. Given the magnitude of the issues and the level of the challenge, it is important to bring these things together so that a joined-up, co-ordinated response can be implemented. Going forwards it is proposed that the activities and recommendations outlined above be co-ordinated as one over-arching programme, called the Culture of Belonging Programme.

6.2 The vision motivating this programme is one where all children and young people grow up experiencing a positive sense of belonging that enables them to engage positively and achieve educationally. At the heart of the notion of a culture of belonging are four key elements:

- Being accepted and understood
- Having a purpose
- Feeling and being safe
- Being heard

- 6.3 The aims of the Culture of Belonging Programme are to promote inclusion, promote educational engagement and improve educational outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.
- 6.4 By inclusion, we mean more than not being excluded or not being segregated. Inclusion involves being able to participate as an equal, whether that be in learning or play or decision-making. It relies on systems and organisations taking steps to understand people’s differences and being flexible, responsive and adapting to individual needs and differences.
- 6.5 The Programme will focus on educational engagement as opposed to other related notions or measures. Engagement in education matters because it is a human right, and because it is a well-established means to improving the lives of children and young people, whether it be social inclusion, financial stability or mental and physical health. Exclusion is one way that a child’s engagement in education can be interrupted or reduced, but there are a number of others, including: frequent school moves or “fresh starts”; inappropriate elective home education; reduced timetables; internal isolation or segregation; and, persistent absence. Promoting engagement means focusing on all of these.
- 6.6 The programme will comprise a number of projects and activities as outlined below:

CULTURE OF BELONGING PROGRAMME		
Inclusive schools	Pathways to support	Alternative provision
<p>Inclusive schools pilot – exploring, testing and learning from novel school-led approaches to promoting inclusion.</p> <p>Improving processes for identifying, challenging and supporting schools where there are concerns about inclusive practices.</p> <p>Implementing the right continuous professional development offer for staff working with vulnerable learners.</p>	<p>Inclusion support and alternative provision panels – to identify the right support for children at risk of becoming disengaged.</p> <p>Developing a multiagency support offer for children where needs are more complex and to respond to crises.</p> <p>Back on Track – a pilot YOT project to support children at risk of exclusion and involvement in the criminal justice system.</p>	<p>Development of an alternative provision framework so that the right offer is available for all children.</p> <p>Reviewing the finances associated with alternative provision, so that the offer is viable and sustainable, and there is more clarity about funding.</p> <p>Undertaking an annual needs assessment and provision gap analysis to inform commissioning.</p>

<p>Sharing best practice and learning from schools where there are more successful outcomes, in spite of key vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Engagement and participation – finding ways to ensure that all children are heard and feel included.</p> <p>Work with the Police and Schools Panel to maximise the benefits of partnership between police, schools and the council.</p> <p>Review of the Council’s universal and traded support offer to schools, to ensure best practice in promoting inclusion.</p>	<p>Inclusion Support Team – development of targeted interventions to work with children and families at risk of becoming exclusion/ non-engagement.</p> <p>Connecting and supporting parents/ carers – identifying ways to maximise use of existing networks (e.g. parent champions, early help navigators) to build capacity and support parents where educational engagement is at risk.</p>	<p>Ensuring the right frameworks are in place for quality assurance of alternative provision</p> <p>Ensuring robust processes are in place to monitor the use of modified timetables or personalised learning programmes to ensure children’s needs are met.</p>
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6.7 The programme will be set up within the Council’s Verto system, and there will be strategic oversight of the delivery of the Programme through the Transforming Children’s Services Board.

6.8 A Culture of Belonging Programme Board will be established to pull together the strands of activity and monitor implementation of projects and actions.

7.0 Financial implications

7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any costs associated with the Culture of Belonging Programme will be contained within the overall approved budget for Children’s Services of £51.5 million.

7.2 Further financial analysis will be undertaken as part of the process of establishing this programme and will be the subject of a further report.

8.0 Legal implications

There are no direct legal implications relating to this report.
[TC/14012020/W]

9.0 Equalities implications

9.1 As detailed above, evidence both locally and nationally suggests that certain groups of children and young people are more likely to be affected by factors such as exclusion or becoming electively home educated. These include those with protected characteristics, such as children and young people with a disability or special educational need, and those from black and minority ethnic communities.

10.0 Environmental implications

10.1 There are no specific environmental implications.

11.0 Human resources implications

11.1 There are no human resources implications.

12.0 Corporate Landlord implications

12.1 There are no corporate landlord implications.

13.0 Health and Wellbeing implications

13.1 There is a strong association between educational engagement and a range of significant health and wellbeing factors, including community safety, mental health, experience of adverse childhood experiences, and later life outcomes.