

Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 31 January 2024

Attendance

Members of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Stephanie Haynes (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Carol Hyatt
Cllr Qaiser Azeem (Chair)
Cllr Jenny Cockayne
Cllr Jane Francis
Cllr Jeszemma Howl
Cllr Lamina Lloyd
Cllr Christopher Haynes

Co-opted Members (5)

Wolverhampton Youth Council

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
Helen Bakewell	Head of Inclusion & Empowerment
Phil Leivers	Head of Education Excellence
Darren Martindale	Service Manager – Vulnerable Learners
Jameel Mullan	Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager
Lisa Preston	Head of Service, Adoption@Heart
Brenda Wile	Deputy Director of Education

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Welcome and Introductions**
Cllr Qaiser Azeem, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised it was also being live streamed to the press and public.
- 2 Meeting procedures to be followed**
The Chair explained the process to be followed during the meeting and for asking questions.
- 3 Apologies**
Apologies were received from the following members of the panel:
 - Cllr Sally Green
 - Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre

Apologies were also received from the following:

Cllr Jackie Coogan, Cabinet Member for Jobs, Skills and Education
Alison Hinds, Director of Children's Services

4 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 **Minutes of the previous meeting (22 November 2023)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6 **SEND and Inclusion Strategy (pre-decision scrutiny)**

The Chair invited Cllr Lovinyer Daley to read a prepared statement on behalf of the Cllr Coogan, Cabinet Member for Jobs, Skills and Education, who was not able to attend the meeting.

The Chair invited Brenda Wile to introduce the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2024-27 for pre-decision scrutiny. The Deputy Director invited Helen Bakewell, Head of SEND and Inclusion, to give the presentation. A copy of the presentation is attached.

The Head of SEND and Inclusion listed the key questions for panel members to consider when reviewing the plans. The panel were asked to endorse the strategy and recommendations detailed in the report to Cabinet.

The Chair thanked the presenters for their report and presentation. The panel were invited to comment on the report.

A copy of the presentation is attached.

The panel were invited to endorse Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Inclusion Strategy 2024 - 2027 and the recommendations detailed in attached report for Cabinet. The panel were invited to comment on the report and presentation.

A panel member queried a possible contradiction between priority 3 and 5 in the keys aims of the SEND and Alternative Provision Plan and highlighted concerns about the issue of funding and reports from teachers that they are struggling to provide the very best for children. The panel member added that more and more children are coming to school with complex needs and wanted reassurance that teachers would get the training needed as referenced in the report.

The Head of SEND advised the panel that a working group is currently reviewing training development and offered reassurance about the level of training support being planned both locally and nationally to support teachers.

The Head of SEND highlighted the development of a SENCO website which details the range of training and support available to teachers.

The Head of SEND advised that the Council is also working with colleagues in NHS and Public Health to look at options for co-ordinating the training offer across the City and using free training offered as part of Continued Professional Development (CPD) schemes.

A panel member queried the reference to the comment following a monitoring meeting in November 2023 where the DfE and NHS England that the strategy would be further strengthened by representation from schools and highlighted the lack of evidence in the initial consultation which shows how the voice of schools have been captured and reflected in the strategy. The panel member commented that they would have liked this to have been clearly set out in the report.

The Head of SEND and Inclusion accepted the importance of involving teachers when developing the work plan and reassured the panel that was a priority. The Head of SEND gave examples of the current and future work with the support of colleagues to engage with schools during the consultation stages to find out the concerns of teachers. The issues highlighted have fed into the thinking about services and support needs to be developed in the future.

The Head of SEND and Inclusion commented that she is very passionate about making sure everyone's voice is heard and highlighted the recent conference in November 2023 on SEND and Inclusion which was offered only to schools, as an example.

A panel member queried the reference in the strategy to the importance of providing environments that can appropriately meet the needs of children, young people and adults and expressed concern that this was not happening in practice. The panel member highlighted the refurbishment of play equipment in a local park which was felt to be less inclusive than before. The panel member suggested that those responsible for the purchasing inclusive play equipment consult more closely with local councillors and residents when making decisions.

The Deputy Director of Education acknowledged the challenges facing the City in terms of the provision of specialist play equipment for young people with SEND or complex needs who may not be always able to access it. The Deputy Director commented on the situation where a child or young person is on a waiting list for a place at a special school and that additional funding from mainstream schools can be used to provide the additional specialist support needed.

The issue of the suitability of play equipment in parks is an issue that member of Voice 4 Parents group raised several years ago, and the service is working with colleagues in Public Health to improve the situation.

The Deputy Director of Education commented on the plans for a new play facility in West Park that will provide fully accessible equipment across the entire equipment range. There is a focus now on ensuring that each play area has some equipment that is accessible for children with varying needs and disabilities including those who are mobility impaired.

The panel member expressed concern about the provision of new play equipment in the area within the ward, which was not considered to be inclusive.

The panel member highlighted the lack of handrails as a safety risk and stressed the importance of meeting the needs of all children and young people when deciding what to install.

A panel member expressed significant concerns about the drafting on the strategy informed by responses from 80 parents. There are reported to be 8882 pupils with SEN Support or EHC plans in Wolverhampton.

The panel member was also concerned about the phrasing of questions and the comments which highlighted difficulties in completing the survey form because of the language used.

The Head of SEND and Inclusion advised the panel that the wording in the strategy document was changed in response to comments received from parents to the consultation. The service has worked with members of Voice 4 Parents and HY5! (11- to 25-year-olds from Wolverhampton with experience of SEND services) to confirm what they would want included in the strategy. The Head of SEND and Inclusion added that Voice 4 Parents service had 400 responses to their public consultation exercise which was also considered when drafting the strategy.

The Panel Member reiterated concerns about the survey response and highlighted a comment in the report which stated that the language used in the strategy did not feel collaborative or transparent and overall was considered to something being done to families instead of with families.

The Panel Member commented on the reference to the consultation with statutory bodies when drafting the strategy and suggested that the focus of the consultation should be on the views of service users and their children.

A panel member expressed concern that the panel were being asked to comment on the changes to the DSG High Needs Block funding budget. The panel member wanted further details about the pressures on the fund referenced in the report and an understanding of the implications proposed changes to the budget.

The Head of SEND and Inclusion advised the panel that the pressures on the High Needs Block budget were due to the placement costs for children in schools, particularly in independent schools out of city which has risen exponentially. There is a similar situation within social care placements which is another financial pressure on the budget. The level of demand for support far exceeds the additional funding recently awarded by Government.

The Head of Inclusion added that the proportion of requests for EHC needs assessments is more than previously anticipated and the level of Government funding was not considered enough to meet the needs of families in Wolverhampton.

The Head of SEND and Inclusion reassured the panel that the service has been successful in managing the High Needs Block budget when compared to other local authorities but highlighted the challenges of the being charged hundreds of thousands for special needs placement for a child and increasing numbers of children wanting support.

The Head of SEND and Inclusion also highlighted a further challenge in supporting increasing numbers of children with delayed speech and language development.

The service is also managing children with much more complex needs than before which adds to the difficulties in sharing the funding across the different age groups.

The panel member commented that the first option for children with special needs should not always be a mainstream school and highlighted the example of the disruption caused to the whole school in having to care and support a child with special needs needing one to one support.

The panel member asked for more details about the High Needs Block grant changes and impact of the challenges referred to in the report before the panel could properly scrutinise the revised approach to using the fund to achieve the priorities in the draft strategy.

A panel member queried the impact of the changes in the support arrangements for young people with SEND moving to adults services as a result of the strategy and suggested there was a need for further information to help explain the impact.

The Head of SEND and Inclusion advised the panel that the service has been working closely with members of HY5! to look at how communication with young people about the strategy can be improved.

The Head of SEND and Inclusion added that the service is aware of the need to do more in this area and commented on work being done to develop action plans to help young people prepare for adulthood, for example, making sure there are clear pathways to support. The service is keen to involve children and young people in developments that affect them.

A panel member commented that only 35 people who responded to the survey were either a parent or a carer and suggested that future reports should make this clear and include the different ways used to consult with the public.

A panel member asked for clarification about how the service works with schools to ensure families get the early support they need before they go into the education system.

Lisa Preston, Deputy Director Social Care, referred to the Childrens Pathfinder report that was previously presented to the panel in November 2023 where there was an emphasis on plans to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND at an early stage. The Deputy Director added that the offer will include extra resources in the Family Hubs to provide support for parents by giving them access to one-stop information at the right time and at the right level. This work will be supported by health navigators based in the Family Hubs who have links to school and will provide families with early access to support from the local authority.

A panel member queried the reasons for families not taking part in the survey and what more could be done to improve the current figures.

The Head of SEND and Inclusion commented that work has not been done to find out why people have not taken part in the survey. The service is working with colleagues in the data analytics team to look at how to the extend the survey.

The service is also working with colleagues in Public Health to add some questions to young people survey to get feedback directly on an annual basis from young people about what their concerns are and how the service can respond to them.

In response to an earlier comment about involving the public more in the consultation and the service will be working with Voice 4 Parents to share future survey findings before publication to check that it reflects their experiences.

The panel were asked to consider and approve the draft recommendations as listed on page 84 of the papers.

A panel member commented that more information was needed to understand the implications of planned changes to High Needs Block funds and suggested that the service contact families of children with EHC plans directly for their feedback on the draft strategy to increase the number of responses.

The Deputy Director of Education agreed to provide the additional information requested by the panel about High Needs Block funding and the implications for future spend of the proposed changes. The Deputy Director welcomed the suggestion of contacting the families directly and agreed to report the findings to the next meeting of the panel. The Deputy Director added that this would mean a delay in the report being presented to Cabinet for approval.

The Scrutiny Officer queried if there would be any implications as a result of delaying the report being presented to Cabinet. The Deputy Director reassured the panel that this would not be an issue.

The panel thanked the presenters for the report.

Resolved:

1. The Deputy Director to provide further information on the implications of changes to how High Needs Block funding is spent in the future.
2. The Deputy Director to contact families with EHC plans to ask them to take part in the survey and to report the findings to the next meeting of the panel.
3. The panel comments on the draft Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Inclusion Strategy 2024-27 to be noted.

7 **Education Performance in Wolverhampton Schools and Settings 2022-2023**

The Chair invited Phil Leivers, Head of Service Educational Excellence, to present the report to the panel on the Education Performance in Wolverhampton Schools and Settings 2022-2023 annual report.

The Head of Service Educational Excellence invited panel members to join in celebrating the performance of schools and young people at each Key Stage in the summer 2023 educational assessment results.

The Head of Service Educational Excellence outlined the range of work being done to support children, young people in schools in line the Council Plan goal of wanting children and young people to grow up well and achieve their full potential. A key priority for this is improving educational outcomes so young people can engage in further education and move into employment and training in the future.

The Head of Service Educational Excellence advised the panel that during 2022-2023 academic year Ofsted carried out 39 inspections or monitoring visits to schools and academies across the City.

At the end of 2022-2023 it was reported that 89 per cent of Wolverhampton schools were judged by Ofsted to be rated as either 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. This represents a 19 per centage point improvement in performance of schools and academies since 2014.

The Head of Service Educational Excellence gave a presentation summarising the educational performance of children and young people at each of the Key Stage. A copy of the presentation is attached.

The Head of Service Educational Excellence commented that the service has teams visiting schools to offer both support and challenge and to help them prepare for an Ofsted inspection. The improvement in educational performance is a result of this collaborative and partnership working, aimed at achieving the best outcomes for children and young people in Wolverhampton.

The Head of Service Educational Excellence commented on the key questions for scrutiny members to consider and the relevant background information to the development of the strategy.

The panel were invited to endorse recommendations outlined in the report and to comment on the presentation.

The Chair highlighted the achievement that 91 per cent of schools in Wolverhampton were rated as being 'Good' or 'Outstanding' at December 2023 and wanted to congratulate the work of the team involved in supporting schools and the appreciation of this to be noted.

The Chair invited the panel members to comment and ask questions about the report and presentation.

A panel member expressed concerns about the A - Level pathways referenced in the report and commented that schools were not offering the range of A level subjects wanted by some young pupil. The panel member highlighted the challenge of having to move between schools to study as a result. The panel member also queried the action be taken to reduce the educational performance gap between boys and girls, and specifically work being done to encourage and support boys when choosing pathways and to extend the range of subjects they study. The panel member welcomed the improved educational attainment results.

The panel member endorsed the comments about the pride in the educational achievements of children and young people particularly when considering the results were achieved following the response to the challenges presented by Covid 19.

The panel member referenced the section in the report which commented on the attainment gap between boys and girls for reading, writing and maths and that the national comparison figures were missing for girls. The panel member asked for further details about the work done and or planned to reduce the educational gap at Key Stage 2 that will help boys catch up.

The Head of Service Educational Excellence, agreed to check the figure but suggested it was like that for boys at 60 per cent girls nationally reaching the expected standard for reading, writing and maths. There are some areas of the country where boys are doing better but acknowledged the importance of working with colleagues in the Head of SEND and Inclusion to prevent children falling through the gap and providing in support.

The Head of Service Educational Excellence added that every maintained school has a visit from one of the team on a timely basis and the issue has been on the agenda in meetings with the Head Teacher. There is a focus on improving educational performance. In addition, there are a series of working groups, on topics such as mathematics where schools are challenged to evidence how they are adapting their curriculum so that it is accessible and adaptable to the development needs of young people.

The Head of SEND and Inclusion added that the service has a SEND specialist who has been involved in doing self-assessments with schools to help review how they are meeting the needs of these children, including those with High Care Needs.

The Head of SEND and Inclusion added that as part of the national standards programme the aim will be to support schools by providing clear pathways for children and young people to access health and SEND support services. This approach will help ensure that schools have the right resources available when needed as there is awareness that mainstreams schools are finding it more difficult to support children.

The Head of SEND and Inclusion reassured the panel that the service is in regular contact with schools to ask how they can be supported further.

A panel member queried if there was any difference between maintained schools and academies in terms of educational attainment performance. The panel member also expressed concern about progress in reducing educational performance between boys and girls and the level of parental involvement, which has not yet returned to pre Covid 19 levels. The panel member suggested that this issue is monitored, and an update provided in six months.

The Head of Service Educational Excellence agreed to provide a response to the issue and report the findings to a future meeting. The Head of Service also agreed to check the interventions schools are using to engage with parents.

The Head of Service Educational Excellence commented that in terms of the difference in educational performance between academies and maintained schools. The majority of secondary schools in Wolverhampton are academies and there is little difference in terms of education attainment results. There are some academies where there are concerns about their educational performance and this has been discussed with DfE.

A panel member asked for further information about the Progress 8 score reported should be interpreted, when considering the impact of Covid 19 in the results.

The Head of Service Educational Excellence advised the panel that the Progress 8 score for the last academic year is based on the scores achieved by primary school children at Key Stage 2. However, it will be a challenge to present this information as there will be in gap as the service will not have Key Stage 2 data.

The Head of Service accepted there was need for improvement and added that the analysis was based on unvalidated data available at the time in November 2023. The validated results will be published by Government tomorrow and this will allow an updated analysis to be done and further report provided to the panel based on latest data.

The panel thanked the presenter for the report and presentation.

The panel requested an update Progress 8 score presented to a future meeting and the additional information shared with the panel when available.

Resolved:

1. The Head of Service Educational Excellence to provide an update on educational results following publication of validated results.
2. The Head of Service Educational Excellence to share information requested by the panel when available.
3. The panel agreed to formally put on record their congratulations to schools and everyone involved in supporting children and young people in achieving excellent attainment results.

8 **Virtual School Head Annual Report 2023**

The Chair invited Darren Martindale, Virtual School Head, to present the report.

The Virtual School Head advised the panel that the report provides highlights of the educational outcomes of Wolverhampton's children and young people in care and care leavers for the academic year September 2022 – July 2023.

The Virtual School Head gave a presentation detailing an analysis of the characteristics of the pupils and a summary of the support offered and the education attainment at Key Stage 4 and post 16 achievements.

The Virtual School Head advised the panel that in 2021 the DfE announced funding and guidance which extended the responsibilities of the role to all children with a social worker. The Virtual School Head outlined the Council response to this change.

The Virtual School Head commented on the achievements of young people and specific areas of improvement, for example, improving attendance and no exclusions.

The Virtual School Head outlined the service priorities for 2023 – 2024.

The panel were invited to comment on the briefing paper and the presentation. A copy of the presentation is attached.

A panel member suggested that the report should have been delayed allowing for the validated educational attainment results to be presented to the panel.

The Virtual School Head advised the panel that national educational attainment data for children and young people in care is not published till the end of March 2024. The data referenced in the report is the most recently available data.

A panel member asked for further details about plans for increasing engagement in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects by young people and whether the plans for promoting the take up have been confirmed.

The Virtual School Head advised that a panel that a recent STEM event took place at British Aerospace was attended by several young people. The young people took part in engineering related group work and problem-solving activities. A further event is planned in the future.

A panel member queried if the budget for using the company Welfare Call represents value for money and asked for more details. The Virtual School Head advised the panel that there are no cheap options for daily monitoring of attendance by young people as the majority attend different schools and settings. The local authority has a statutory responsibility for monitoring the attendance of vulnerable children.

In the past this required a colleague contact the organisations daily, which was major administrative burden for the service. As a result, there was limited time for the colleague to do the analysis of the results, which was the main focus of recruiting them to role.

The Virtual School Head advised the panel that the use of an external company do this work has been the approach taken by other local authorities facing similar challenges. The work is funded by pupil premium. Welfare Call is based in Barnsley is the largest and best established in this area and has also been commissioned to monitor out of city provision for young people in care. The use of the company is the most cost-effective way for the Council to meet its responsibilities.

A panel member queried the number of 16–24-year-olds who are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in Wolverhampton compared to the national figure. The Virtual School Head agreed to check and share the information. The data is periodically reported to the Corporate Parenting Board.

A panel member expressed concern about the eight suspensions from school due to alcohol or drugs misuse and asked for a comment on this. The Virtual School Head advised the panel that the cases typically involve a young person either taking cannabis into school or being given it while at school. The situation is taken seriously by the service and schools. The Virtual School Head added that the cases are typically involve one-off incidents and could be an example of bravado, but it is something that is monitored.

A panel member queried the responsibilities of the Designated Teacher for completing the Personal Education Plans (PEPs) audit and if the process would include input from the social worker and the young person. The panel member also queried the training provided to schools to further improve the quality of PEPs.

The Virtual School Head advised the panel that the completion of the audit is a joint responsibility of the child's social worker and the Designated Teacher to ensure that PEP is in place. The service will ask the child's foster parents and really encourage

young people to contribute to it, plus anyone else who might be appropriate. The members of the team attend meetings to discuss the PEP.

The Virtual School Head commented on the challenges in achieving 100 percent target and reassured the panel that the service has invested heavily in training and audit moderation to make sure decisions about completed PEPs have been checked and that they are robust and consistent. The process of colleagues in the team challenging each other judgements about PEPs has been helpful in reaching more consistent decisions and improving the quality.

The results might show an initial reduction in the quality of audits in the short term but longer term the situation is expected to lead to an improvement in quality.

A panel member queried the reasons why the cohort of children being educated outside the City is so large, particularly considering the previous report which highlighted the excellent attainment scores across Wolverhampton schools.

Lisa Preston, Deputy Director Social Care, advised the panel the reasons are complex, and will depend on where a child is living. The Deputy Director reassured the panel that the priority is to get as many children as possible to study in Wolverhampton but there may be reasons where this would not be possible. The service will work to meet the needs of a child as detailed in their care plan.

A panel member queried what further was being considered to reduce further the level of persistence absence below 16.5 per cent for 2022-2023. The panel member commended the service on the provision financial education by a charity to help young people prepare them for independence.

The Virtual School Head thanked the panel member for the positive comments on the support offered to young people. The Virtual School Head advised the panel that the service is working closely with colleagues in the attendance team in recognition of the need to avoid silo working and to build links again.

The Virtual School Head that only a small cohort of young people are persistently absent and commented on the issues that may cause a disruption, for example, having to move school following a change of address. In other situations, young people may have high levels of SEND and the service is finding it difficult to find the appropriate level of specialist provision needed. The lack of specialist provision was highlighted as a national issue for young people with high levels of SEND.

The service is developing better alternative provision in place even more quickly, for young people with have higher levels of needs. The Virtual School Head added that the issue is not just for young people not attending school and it is linked to their complex difficulties. In response to this, joint visits to schools with the attendance team are done to help improve the situation.

A panel member commented on the great achievements detailed in the report and expressed her pride in the work being done across the Council to support look after children and young people in care. The panel member highlighted the achievement of zero permanent exclusions of young people in care during the period. The panel member asked for more details about the reasons for reduction in suspensions and commented that most relate to persistently disruptive behaviour.

The panel member queried how these results compare to the whole school cohort across Wolverhampton.

The Virtual School Head commented that for children and young people in care the results are typical with the persistent disruption and higher levels of verbal abuse, threatening adults involving this group. The Virtual School Head added that psychological issues were also a factor in this type of behaviour. The Virtual School Head was not sure if the results were comparable to the general school population.

Jameel Mullan, Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager, confirmed that nationally the main reasons for suspension were also for disruptive behaviour and similarly for cases involving physical assault against an adult which has led to increase in the number of exclusions and smaller increase for suspensions.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager added that schools with a zero-tolerance policy to offensive weapons and drugs has meant that those reasons have increased for suspensions, however the rates overall for Wolverhampton are lower compared to regional and national figures.

The Chair thanked the presenter for the report and commented on the positive work being done to support children and young people in care and thanked everyone involved.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.

9 **School Exclusion and Suspensions - update on local data including plans to further reduce the number of school exclusions and suspensions.**

The Chair invited Brenda Wile, Deputy Director of Education, to introduce the report.

The Deputy Director explained the background to the presentation and asked Jameel Mullan, Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager, to give the detailed briefing to the panel.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager advised the panel that the data relates to exclusions and suspensions in Wolverhampton schools in 2022- 2023. The report was being presented in response to a request from the panel to provide a progress report following the publication of the national data. The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager listed key questions for panel to consider at the end of the presentation.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service advised the panel that the overall trend is fewer exclusions and suspensions reported than compared pre-pandemic period, but the current figures are still considered to be too high.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager commented on the extensive work being done with colleagues in Violence Reduction teams to provide support, training and strategies to support schools. In addition, schools are encouraged to seek support for individuals and groups of students where changes are noticed of increasingly disruptive behaviour at an early stage. The aim is to provide the necessary interventions to help avoid possible future exclusions or suspensions.

The panel were invited to comment on report and the presentation. A copy of the presentation is available.

The Chair thanked the presenter for the report and invited panel members to question and comment on the information.

A panel member congratulated the presenter on the performance of the service in working to reduce the number of exclusions. The panel member highlighted the importance of the work being done to improve the life chances of young people at risk in Wolverhampton. The panel member asked for further details of the method used to share best practice with teaching staff and queried if the scheme has also helped to improve staff retention rates.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager advised the panel that since the model was developed three more schools have expressed interest in introducing a similar scheme as they have seen evidence of the difference it has made in other schools. The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager added that at present five children have not been excluded from school and the hope as the scheme expands that it is possible in the future that 25 or 35 fewer children will benefit from it.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager commented that schools, particularly primary schools have found the scheme incredibly useful in helping to provide a forum to be able to share the challenges and the frustrations that they might be facing at any time and leave with tangible solutions which gives them more confidence when they go back to their schools.

A panel member queried if the scheme was open to all schools in Wolverhampton.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager confirmed that the scheme is open to all schools and there is evidence of an appetite among new headteachers to engage with other across Wolverhampton, which is very much to be welcomed.

A panel member queried the missing appendix referenced in the report detailing an analysis of data based on protected characteristics. The Deputy Director of Education agreed to share the missing information.

A panel member commented on the importance of the work in demonstrating that young people can be successfully reintegrated back into mainstream school after a period in Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and hoped the impact of work being done to support schools will lead to fewer children being referred.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager commented on recent email from a parent thanking the service for support which allowed her child to return to school after a period in a PRU and to complete their exams. The support offered is based on the philosophy of working everyday with colleagues in schools to give every child to opportunity to learn in a mainstream school setting and to further enhance the current offer.

The Head of SEND and Inclusion added that across the service areas there has been a shared vision about what SEND inclusion means and the fact that lot of children excluded have SEND and the importance in recognising link between this and the exclusion numbers. The service is working closely with schools to listen to their needs and to support them. The approach taken is very much based on what schools and families are saying and working together.

A panel member shared personal experiences of a local school where a change in policy led to the exclusion of several pupils and there were also examples of some pupils not attending school. The panel member was reassured by the work being done to support schools and work being done to reduce the number of suspensions but queried the level of influence the authority can have on possibly larger multi-academy trusts in the future based outside Wolverhampton and their willingness to work together to build on the progress reported. The panel member also queried the willingness of headteachers to consider accepting a child or young person who has been previously excluded and resist any pressure from the authority.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager commented on the change in the behaviour of schools since he was appointed about 18 months ago. In discussions with schools during visit there has been a focus on pupils. There was acceptance during the early months of the situation where schools were protective and cautious of accepting or considering an application from an excluded pupil.

The situation has changed considerably, and schools see the benefits of doing this and the support provided to help to reintegrate a young person back into mainstream education.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager added that previous informal discussions have been replaced with a clear and robust assessment process which shows the attainment through different stage. In addition, young people have shared poetry which they have read or recorded a video to show how they have changed.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager commented that in discussion with schools there is a shared understanding that we are all working together to support Wolverhampton children, which would not have been the position 18 months ago.

The Deputy Director of Education advised the panel that Wolverhampton is in the fortunate position that most academy trusts are based locally, and the Council is working closely with them as a part of the family schools. The Deputy Director of Education gave an example of collaborative with a local academy offering its pastoral resource to other schools and was confident about schools continuing to work together well in the future.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Director of Education and other contributors for the report and appreciation on behalf of the panel for the excellent work being done to support children and young people in what are very challenging conditions. There is evidence that progress is being made, while acknowledging further continued action will be needed in other areas but was confident that the work is moving in the right direction.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the report and presentation be noted.
2. The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager to share the missing information for Appendix 1 with the panel.

10 **Children and Young People - Draft Scrutiny Work Programme**

The Chair invited Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, to present the report.

The Scrutiny Officer commented on the future agenda items on the panel work programme.

The panel discussed the panel work programme.

The Chair invited panel members to submit suggestions for the panel work programme.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.