



15 January 2025

Title	Schools Suspension and Exclusion Update
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	Brian Grady, Director of Education
Lead Councillor	Councillor Wendy Griffith; Councillor Ruth McEwan
Corporate priority	Inclusive Economy
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That ACE Committee note the improved position regarding school exclusions and the position regarding suspensions from schools. 2. That ACE note the further actions being taken regarding suspensions from schools. 3. That ACE invite the Chief Executives of priority Trusts to attend ACE Committee to share their plans to promote school inclusion and to reduce suspensions from schools.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a national concern and national priority to re-engage children and young people in education and to ensure that all young people, including those most vulnerable, are securing positive destinations into adulthood through employment, education and training. This priority is a challenging one. This report updates ACE committee on the current position regarding two areas of priority in terms of performance improvement and invites the Committee to consider what further action can be taken to collectively support our children and young people thrive and succeed.
- 1.2. In summary, ACE committee are invited to consider some key headlines from this analysis (see Appendix 1), which include:
 - Persistent Disruptive Behaviour and Physical Abuse/Threat to Adult is the primary reason for SEND suspension. This might also be described or understood as distressed behaviour from children with SEND, and often with experience of trauma too (Reading has seen a greater rise of children looked after (CLA) with SEND than the national or South East picture, from 50.3% to 63.4%), who are struggling to cope in school and becoming significantly dysregulated.
 - The majority of children (63%) were not receiving support before suspension.
 - 18% of our children experience 50% of the suspensions, enabling us to target our system support to schools on these children.
 - The analysis enables us to see how many children are known to children's social care and to Youth Justice, which enables us to start to initiate pan-BFfC thinking and response and coordinate preventative activity.

- 20% of these children are eligible for Free School Meals and living in a wider context of poverty. Overall suspensions of students that are identified as being in receipt of Free School Meals has reduced by 14% at this point this academic year, when compared with 23/24.
- We see a potential disproportionate suspension of children with particular ethnic and cultural heritages, in line with the national picture, which requires specific local action (please see below).

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. **Suspensions from school:** Children engaging with and attending school is one of the key national challenges we face following the pandemic. As a result, there is a real tension between children being ready to learn in school and regulating well, the need for children to be in school, and the pressures on Headteachers from responding to dysregulated behaviour of some pupils (which can sometimes cause safety risks for other pupils and for staff) and government guidance and regulation which actively promotes a "behaviourist" response to child dysregulation (punishing the child because of the behaviour). In Reading, we take a trauma – informed approach to behaviour, which seeks to address root causes rather than punish incidences of behaviour.
- 2.2. Only the headteacher of a school can suspend or permanently exclude a pupil on disciplinary grounds. A pupil may be suspended for one or more fixed periods (up to a maximum of 45 school days in a single academic year), or permanently excluded. A pupil's behaviour outside school can be considered grounds for a suspension or permanent exclusion. Any decision of a headteacher, including suspension or permanent exclusion, must be made in line with the principles of administrative law, i.e. that it is: lawful (with respect to the legislation relating directly to suspensions and permanent exclusions and a school's wider legal duties); reasonable; fair; and proportionate.

3. The current position

3.1. Suspensions

- 3.2. Suspension rates are a key area of concern in our local education system. Whilst permanent exclusions performance has improved over the past four years and remains relatively stable, suspension rates have increased. Suspensions in some schools are concerning and impact outcomes. As suspensions are actions taken by the Headteacher of the school, improvement requires a partnership response with all school leaders. The Education Partnership Board have reducing suspensions as a key priority this academic year.
- 3.3. Suspension rates have increased rapidly over the past three years throughout the whole of England. In Reading, suspensions have increased by a slower rate and for 2022/23 the suspension rate in Reading (7.32) was lower than the suspension rates in England (9.33) and the South East (8.19). The permanent exclusion rate in England has grown just as rapidly over the past three years and the permanent exclusion rate in Reading has grown even faster albeit starting from a lower base. In 2022/23 the permanent exclusion rate in Reading (0.05) is half the exclusion rate in England (0.11) and similar to the South East (0.6).
- 3.4. School leaders identify the availability, affordability, and quality of alternative provision as a contributing factor, alongside the need to recruit and retain staff and secure community confidence in behaviour and safety. Approaches to risk management are under review to ensure that schools can implement best practice approaches consistently but also to ensure that they are not left unable to mitigate risks and prevent harm and injury. Systems to support risk assessment and risk prevention for children at risk of Suspension or not in receipt of full-time education (including bought back behaviour support offer) are being enhanced with the Education Partnership Board being asked to endorse and promote a one-Reading approach to suspension reduction

across all Reading schools, regardless of whether they are an academy or a Local Authority maintained school.

- 3.5. Suspensions rates have continued to rise in Reading. The table below shows month by month performance for the academic year 2023/2024. It shows significant increases in suspensions but with some important variations, including for vulnerable groups. National comparator data is not yet available for last year; however, colleagues report through regional and national performance groups similar levels of increase

Fixed Term Suspensions		LY	Academic Year 2023-24											YTD Variation	
			Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24		YTD
Total No. of Suspensions	Days Lost	3665	508	513	810.5	439	545	559	732	342.5	435	399.5	402.5	5686	55%
	Incidents	1857	240	233	366	201	288	271	395	167	246	252	218	2877	55%
Primary	Days Lost	689	50.5	65	95	49.5	55	61	103	31	48.5	48.5	59.0	666	-3%
	Incidents	443	39	43	58	33	39	40	75	24	37	39	39	466	5%
Secondary	Days Lost	2976	457.5	448	715.5	389.5	490	498	629	311.5	386.5	351	344	5020.5	69%
	Incidents	1414	201	190	308	168	249	231	320	143	209	213	179	2411	71%
CLA	InBorough	26	1	4	5	3	6	4	3	1	5	5	4	41	58%
	OutBorough	25	5	2	7	3	7	4	6	4	8	3	0	49	96%
SEN EHCP	Days Lost	775.5	89	71.5	100.5	38	62.5	74	87.5	36	39.5	44	64.5	707	-9%
	Incidents	378	49	40	64	23	40	40	57	20	27	34	36	430	14%
SEN Support	Days Lost	1637.5	222	203	336	179.5	193	193	299	128	119.5	150.5	112	2135.5	30%
	Incidents	850	104	89	149	84	106	101	162	65	67	97	64	1088	28%
SEN (No. of Pupils with at least one FTE) Cumulative over year	SEN Support	308	76	110	160	181	204	221	259	269	288	307	319	319	4%
	EHCP	138	34	54	80	91	107	115	129	133	136	143	148	148	7%
FSM	Days Lost	2015	290.5	290.5	458	238	309	302.5	381.5	171	221.5	197.5	188.5	3048.5	51%
	Incidents	988	145	134	210	108	171	149	211	81	127	121	108	1565	58%

- 3.6. Overall, suspensions reported so far, this academic year indicate the picture has improved on incidents and days lost compared to the same period last year. The current picture indicates that this academic year:

- Suspensions as reported have reduced on the same period last year on the amount of days lost on across primary (35%) and secondary (17%)
- Incidents of suspensions for children in receipt of SEND support has reduced by 27%
- The number of days lost due to suspensions for children in receipt of SEND support has reduced by 30%
- The amount of children in receipt of SEND support issued with one or more suspensions has also reduced by over 100% (76 last year – 31 so far this year)
- Performance for children with an EHCP has not improved at the same rate and has declined in some areas. The number of children with an EHCP issued with one or more suspensions has reduced by 3%. The number of days lost due to suspensions for children with an EHCP has increased by 7%. Incidents of suspensions for children with an EHCP has increased by 14%.
- Children who are looked after also have been suspended more frequently this year, with 10 suspensions last year compared with 16 suspensions this year in the same period.

- The ethnicity of children who are suspended and excluded is reviewed regularly. In 2023/24 children of mixed ethnic backgrounds represented 19% of the suspended and excluded cohort, whereas the representation across school rolls is only 12%. The highest global majority population represented disproportionately is children of White and Black Caribbean ethnicity. These children and young people represented 14% of suspensions and exclusions, whereas only represent 4% of the population across school rolls. In 2024/25 so far, the disproportionality remains the same.
 - The overall position of permanent exclusions has improved from 2023/24. Permanent exclusions have improved on the same period last year with 4 this year compared to 14 in 2023/24. The population of children in receipt of SEND support within this cohort has reduced to 0, however there is one child identified with an EHCP and 3 children with no SEND identified.
- 3.7. Suspensions remain a key area of concern. Education Leadership Team have undertaken a deep dive analysis to establish Key Lines of Enquiry regarding suspensions and a summary of this work is included in Appendix 1. This analysis is informing action being taken by Education Partnership Board and school community clusters across Reading, in particular targeting services to support schools who are not currently engaged in Local Authority support services such as the Educational Psychology Service.

What difference is the learning making?

- 3.8. The learning has led to a series of changes in our system including:
- The 2024/25 Education Strategy sets out a clear strategic intention to reduce suspensions from school.
 - The RISE service has added prevention of suspensions as a targeted and focussed element of its offer; the new regulation support service (behaviour support) has been similarly focussed in this area.
 - The highly respected Educational Psychology Service in Reading has proactively highlighted the importance of EPS support in advance of suspensions and Chairs of Governors have been encouraged to invite school leaders to make good use of their EPS time to support.
 - In partnership with School Effectiveness and two nominated Headteachers, Culturally Humble questions have been co-designed and will be explored with every SLT in each school (see Appendix 2, Director's Briefing, for examples).
 - In partnership with the Director of Education and the Team Lead for RISE, all Chairs of Governors have been briefed on our learning (see Appendix 2 for the slides) and asked to help us with reducing suspensions and embedding cultural humility leadership reflection in our schools. We have a parallel interest from health economy, which the DCO is supporting us to explore.
 - Following the Director of Education's presentation to CMT, RBC's Chief Executive will be inviting Chief Executives of Academy Trusts where suspensions are highest into dialogue about impact on outcomes for children.
 - Family Help and Safeguarding Leadership Team held focussed discussion on SEND with the SEND Strategic Lead on the 3rd December 24, which will include considering this analysis and how that informs both Family Help strategic developments (e.g., Family Hub model) and Youth Justice preventative offer, recognising the connectivity between suspension from school and Serious Youth Violence. In addition, specialist Autism training has been proposed for Family Help and Safeguarding workforce, also on the 3rd December 24.
 - Workstream 2 will turn their attention to this analysis in December 24, to mobilise the whole system (this is a broad partnership group) in planning to help reduce suspensions, and promote inclusion, of SEND children.

- In summary, the audit and analysis activity in SEND is informing a learning system approach to underpin system adaptation, targeting of resources and increasing integration.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. Reducing suspensions will directly improve engagement of young people in education, and as a result engagement in employment and training. These actions and outcomes will directly contribute to the strategic aims of the Council regarding Thriving Communities and an Inclusive Economy.
- 4.2. The Council's new Corporate Plan has established three themes for the years 2022/25. These themes are:
 - Healthy Environment
 - Thriving Communities
 - Inclusive Economy
- 4.3. These themes are underpinned by "Our Foundations" explaining the ways we work at the Council:
 - People first
 - Digital transformation
 - Building self-reliance
 - Getting the best value
 - Collaborating with others

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. Not directly applicable to this report. "Green Jobs" are being promoted to young people through REDA.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. Key areas of engagement relevant to this report have been with young people directly and the business community of Reading, both through REDA and the careers fairs referenced in the report and appendix.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. Support for young people with the additional protected characteristic of disability is a key feature and priority of this report.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1. Not applicable to this report.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1. Not applicable to this report.

Appendices

1. **Brighter Futures for Children NEET performance and data report**
2. **Suspensions analysis – Key Lines of Enquiry**