

Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee



Reading
Borough Council

Working better with you

18 March 2025

Title	School Suspensions update
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 note the establishment of a Task and Finish Group regarding suspensions from schools.2. That ACE receive updates at the March ACE Committee from the Task and Finish Group and local school Multi Academy Trusts on their plans to promote school inclusion and to reduce suspensions.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Adults Social Care, Children's Services and Education (ACE) Committee on 15 January 2025 received an update on rates of suspensions and exclusions in Reading schools.
- 1.2. At this meeting, ACE Committee noted the improved position regarding school exclusions, the position regarding suspensions and the actions being taken to reduce school suspension rates in Reading.
- 1.3. This update confirms the next steps being taken to support efforts to reduce suspension rates in Reading, in particular:
 - ACE invitation to the Chief Executives of priority Trusts to attend ACE Committee to share their plans to promote school inclusion and to reduce suspensions from schools.
 - The establishment of an ACE Task and Finish group to consider what other actions can be taken to reduce suspensions from schools

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 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). 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. Task and Finish group

- 3.2. A Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish Group has been drafted and is appended to this report. The membership of the Task and Finish group is to be agreed by the Chair of ACE Committee in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Services, the Lead Councillor for Public Health and Education, and the Leader of the Council.
- 3.3. As well as working with officers to review causes and potential solutions regarding school suspensions, the Task and Finish Group will engage directly with local Academy Trust secondary schools and undertake visits to better understand practice and challenges, as well as collaborate on solutions. The Task and Finish Group will also engage wider partners and stakeholders to secure change and improvement for Reading children.
- 3.4. The Director of Education, Brighter Futures for Children has presented the Task and Finish group proposal to the Reading Secondary and College Leaders group and has invited all Reading secondary schools to engage in this process. A number of schools have confirmed their interest in hosting visits of the group, including The Wren School and JMA.

3.5. Invitation to priority Trusts to attend ACE Committee

- 3.6. Greenshaw Learning Trust, the new host Trust for JMA school, and Excalibur Trust, the host Trust for The Wren School, have been invited to attend March ACE Committee, to discuss their inclusion approaches and to answer councillor questions regarding their plans to promote school inclusion and to reduce suspensions.

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 applicable to this report.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. Key areas of engagement relevant to this report have been with Reading Secondary and College Leaders Group.

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. Draft Task and Finish group Terms of Reference

Appendix 1: Draft Task and Finish group Suspensions and School Attendance Terms of Reference

Introduction

Following agreement at its meeting on 15 January 2025 the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education (ACE) Committee agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to receive updates on the work being undertaken in schools in Reading regarding the increased rate and number of school suspensions.

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. 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 was lower than the suspension rates in England and the South East. However, suspension rates remain a key area of local concern.

Scope/Role

The Group agrees to:

- (1) To act as a consultative Group on the development of school-led responses to suspensions.
- (2) To consider work being undertaken to reduce the risk of suspensions and to consider what further action can be taken to collectively support our children and young people to thrive and succeed.
- (3) To review best practice to inform local practice
- (4) To make recommendations to ACE Committee and other decision-making bodies, as necessary, on reducing the risks of school suspensions.

Membership

The proposed membership of the Task and Finish Group will be agreed by the Chair, ACE Committee in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Services, the Lead Councillor for Public Health and Education, and the Leader of the Council.

The Task and Finish Group may invite officers and members when relevant to discussions. The Task and Finish Group will also meet with school leaders and visit schools to observe and understand better current practices, and engage with relevant stakeholders and partners to help contribute to the most effective solutions.

(A table of membership to be added once decided)

Meetings

The meetings will take place via Teams when necessary. School visits will be in person, Updates will be provided to the ACE Committee at its meeting in March 2025.

Confidentiality

All materials and information shared with the Group are assumed to be confidential, unless otherwise stated.