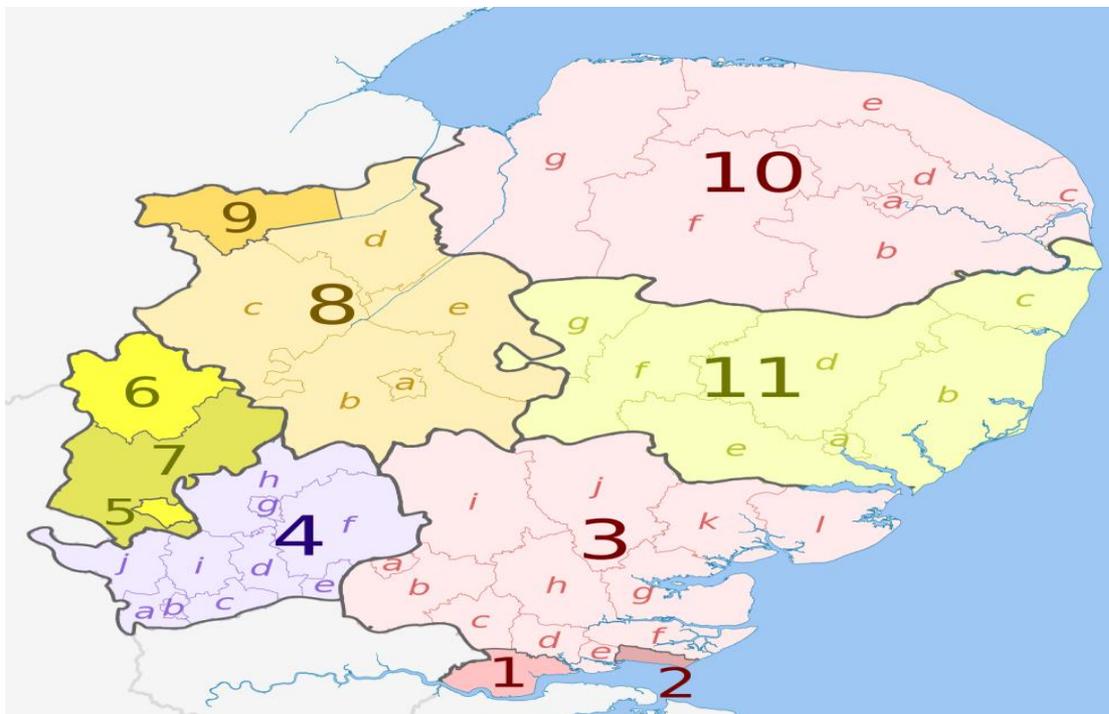


Peer Review focused on rising exclusions
for Essex LA

On behalf of the East of England Education
Network Group



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Findings from the peer review focused on exclusions for Essex Local Authority

Overview

Essex Local Authority commissioned a peer review focused on exclusions from a team of colleagues from Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Norfolk. The review was undertaken on 3rd and 4th April 2019 and the findings are included in this report.

The Eastern Region Education Leads Network Group have agreed a common focus for peer review for the next two years. The methodology for the review has been developed by a working group of LAs to address a key question for all Local Authorities who are facing the similar challenge of rising numbers of permanent exclusions. The agreed overarching question for all 10 Local Authority reviews will be:

What are the current challenges facing the LA and schools in tackling rising numbers of exclusions and what are the possible solutions beginning to emerge?

The peer review process will seek in each LA to:

- review the current context, policies and strategies and their impact;
- engage with all representative stakeholders to canvas their perceptions of the current approaches, the reasons for increasing exclusions and potential future solutions;
- discuss with the LA the emerging responses from stakeholders;
- work collaboratively in the feedback session on identifying potential future solutions.

This report includes the following sections:

- A. Introduction, including the key questions and methodology for the review;
- B. Context of the LA;
- C. The LA's self identification of factors and potential solutions;
- D. Emerging themes and questions from the documentary evidence;
- E. Findings from focused discussions: reasons for the rising exclusions and strengths of current approaches
- F. Potential solutions for the future;
- G. Support from other Local Authorities;
- H. Effective practice from Essex Local Authority to be shared with other LAs.

On behalf of the peer review team, I would like to thank colleagues from Essex Local Authority for their engagement in the process of the review and their openness to share documentation and developing practice.

Sally Rundell: Manager of the Eastern Region Peer Reviews

Peer Review Team: Tania Rawle (Hertfordshire), Sebastian Gasse (Norfolk), Rosemarie Sadler (Cambridgeshire)

A. Introduction

The overarching focus for the review was:

What are the current challenges facing the LA and schools in tackling rising numbers of exclusions and what are the possible solutions beginning to emerge?

The review involved:

An initial scoping meeting to define the focus groups to be involved.

A preview stage:

- review and analysis of documentation including: description of Essex LA approach to Alternative Provision; exclusion data; the funding context; policy documentation; outlining messaging on inclusion and excluded pupils; LA analysis and thinking of current reasons for increasing numbers of exclusions/managed moves and part-time timetables; strategies and approaches to tackling rising numbers of exclusions; monitoring offers to students who are excluded from school; strategies and approaches for re-entry; partnership working across agencies to prevent exclusions; behaviour support strategies and approach; and emerging solutions outlined by the LA.

2 days in the LA including:

- an initial discussion with senior leads focused on the themes and key questions emerging from the pre-review documentary analysis;
- focus groups and interviews with stakeholders including: school leaders from all phases of the system; PRU Leaders, Representatives from BAPs, Assistant Director for Quadrant, Education Access teams, Specialist support teachers, Education Psychologists, Safeguarding leads, Senior LA Officers, Director of Education, Portfolio Lead. A visit was made to Heybridge Academy PRU
- interim feedback discussions with the LA to ensure further refining of evidence;
- a final feedback meeting to discuss potential solutions, identify effective practice to be shared across the region and discussing offers of future support from the peer review LAs.

This report outlines:

- The key question and methodology for the review;
- The context of the LA;
- The LA's self-identification of factors and potential solutions;
- Emerging themes and questions from the documentary evidence;
- Findings from focused discussions: reasons for the rising exclusions and strengths of current approaches
- Potential solutions for the future;
- Support from other Local Authorities;
- Effective practice from Essex Local Authority to be shared with other LAs.

B. Context of the LA

The LA provided a contextual presentation at the beginning of the two days of the peer review, which is summarized below:

The context of the Essex Local Area

- The official estimate of the population of Essex is 1,468,177 (2017 mid-year population estimates, Office of National Statistics).
- The 0-17 estimated population is 308,028.
- With an area of 3465 sq. km, and a density of 423 per sq. km, Essex is a mix of very urban areas through to very rural areas
- In 1998, the boroughs of Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock were granted autonomy from the administrative county of Essex. Essex local authority now consists of 12 districts.
- Essex is less deprived than the England average (being ranked 101st of 152 local authorities). However, the county has areas of extreme deprivation with Jaywick in the district of Tendring being the most deprived area of England (2015 Indices of Multiple Deprivation).
- Around 41,000 children in Essex live in poverty (End Child Poverty, January 2018)
- 91% of the population of Essex are White British (National Census, 2011). Recent migration has changed the county population and the most recent School Census files show pupils speak more than 170 different languages as their first language.
- Between January 2010 and January 2018, the number of pupils in Essex primary schools rose from 104,289 to 120,044 (+15%). Over the same period secondary pupils rose from 81,883 to 85,161 (+4%).

The School Landscape

	Academy	Community	Foundation	Voluntary Aided	Voluntary Controlled	Total
Nursery		2				2
Infant	18	20	5	3		46
Junior	23	10	4	4	1	42
Primary	158	92	23	41	46	360
Primary Total	199	124	32	48	47	450
All through	1					
Secondary	73		1	3		77
Special	12					
PRU	2	4				6
TOTAL	287	134	34	51	47	547

Summary:

- The school population is over 205,205 pupils
- There are 547 schools with 52% of schools with Academy Status
- 94% of Essex secondary schools with Academy Status

Alternative Provision: PRUs

Name	Area	Place	Offer	Status	Sponser
Aspire	West Essex	103	Behaviour	AP free school	TBAP
CSS	South Essex	198	Behaviour and Medical	LA	Maintained school
CSS	West Essex	59	Medical	LA	Maintained school
HCA	Mid Essex	115	Behaviour and Medical	AP Academy	K-Cat
NEECA	North Essex	152	Behaviour and Medical	AP Academy	K-CAT

Exclusions data and reasons for exclusions identified

Year	No of PEX	PEX rate	National Average	No of FTEX	Rate of FTEX	National Average
14/15	50	0.03%	0.07%	6560	3.28%	3.88%
15/16	77	0.04%	0.08%	7008	3.46%	4.29%
16/17	105	0.05%	0.10%	8262	4.01%	4.76%

As of 22nd March 2019 133 pupils have been permanently excluded from Essex schools. This is broken down as 5 in KS1 including 3 in Reception, 24 in KS2, 46 in KS3, 54 in KS4, 18 with an EHCP. For the same period in 2017/18 102 pupils had been excluded.

Exclusion reasons have been analysed and ranked in order of frequency with the most significant being Disruptive Behaviour:

- Disruptive Behaviour
- Drug and Alcohol related
- Physical assault to pupil
- Physical assault to adult
- Verbal abuse /threats to adult
- Verbal abuse /threats to pupil
- Other
- Sexual misconduct
- Theft

Analysis of exclusions by vulnerability highlights a high number of SEND support pupils within the permanent exclusions. Analysis of exclusions to date by year group highlight Year 9 and 10 as high incidence year groups.

Current strategies and approaches to tackling the rising numbers of exclusions

- An Education Access team has been in place from 1st June 2018 holding the statutory duty to meet the LAs duties under the S19 of The Education Act
- Provision has routinely been offered through Essex PRUs. The commissioning/provider model is still evolving.
- Admission to the PRUs for statutory pupils is by direct referral from Education Access

- Non-statutory/preventative places involve school referral to a multi agency admissions panel
- Schools pay a termly fee for a preventative behaviour place
- There is currently conflict between statutory duty to offer appropriate full time education and the PRU offer in some areas
- Increasingly Education Access will commission provision outside the PRUs

Strategies to ensure alternatives to PEX

- Developing model of support through quadrants
 - Specialist teachers
 - EPs
 - School effectiveness partners
 - Attendance specialists
- Strong managed move process at secondary and developing at primary
- Referrals to GROW / ARC / Canvey restart for primary
- Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships (BAP)
- Positive referrals

Strategies to ensure alternatives to positive referrals

- Alternative Provision directory
- Alternative Provision forum
- Youth service and complementary education

C. The LA's self identification of factors and proposed solutions

In the pre-review stage the LA conducted a self-evaluation of the factors impacting on the increasing numbers of exclusions and identified the following factors:

- Cost of AP / PR – financial rather than provision decision
- Lack of funding for support staff / interventions
- Ofsted judgements around AP
- Progress 8 / attainment
- Inflexibility of curriculum
- Conflicting advice from LA colleagues
- Lack of patience / slow response from other teams
- Schools passing the problem to the LA
- Mixed outreach offer

The LA's proposed solutions to reducing exclusions

In the pre-review stage the LA presented their current thinking on emerging solutions to the issues of rising numbers of exclusions, which are presented below:

- The County Inclusion Statement
- Strengthened quadrant model for early intervention
- Review of PRU finance models – Simon Carpenter
- Strengthen and remodel BAPs
- OD 3 – SEN / SAS
- LA managed move protocol to be developed
- Opening of new special schools / provisions
- Remodelling of PRUs
- Revised fair access protocol

D. Themes and questions emerging from documentary analysis prior to the review

Six themes and associated questions emerging from documentary analysis

1. Clarity of message of the LA policy, offer and expectations of schools

- Are expectations of schools made clearly enough in terms of what they should be doing to meet needs and prevent exclusions?
- How did the consultation and collaboration with ASHE and EPHA lead to in terms of an Essex wide approach?
- Given the Essex Statement of Inclusion outlines the views of Headteachers and the LA how is this being used in practice with schools?
- Are parents clear about the offer and do they understand what an exclusion means for their child?
- How successful are the Fair Access and Managed Moves Protocols?
- The documentation for Fair Access and Protocols for managed moves is very clear how is this impacting on reducing exclusions?
- How are the focused meetings with ASHE and EPHA clarifying expectations across Essex?

2. Tensions in the newly proposed approach

- Is there potential risk of a fractured system in the new proposals for increasing places?
- How will the new suppliers work with the existing suppliers in the new process?
- How will the procurement framework meet the legal obligation and which school roll would these pupils be on?
- What is the link between placement decisions and place planning?
- How effectively will the new system be quality assured and pupils monitored?
- Is there a tension between schools and the LA competing for places?

3. Inequalities across the Essex quadrant system and impact analysis

- Spending is high and particularly in the south on AP. Is this high spend making the difference the LA wants?
- What are the reasons for the higher exclusions in South Area?
- Why are exclusions in Chelmsford district higher than other districts?
- Why is there the highest involvement PEX for medical needs in the Colchester area?
- Is there any link with high proportions of service children?
- Innovative bids of AV1 robots but what impact has this had?

4. Learning from evidence led initiatives and effective practice in schools

- A number of policies are changing – is there a secure evidence based that has prompted these changes?
- Has there been any analysis of the individual schools that have lowered exclusions?
- The SEND peer review identified the need for a school-led approach to benchmarking excellence has this been implemented?
- How has the LA addressed its priorities for potential solutions outlined in the draft report from Simon Carpenter?
- What is the analysis of those schools with high exclusion rates and the specific factors causing high rates of permanent exclusions?
- How is the LA ensuring schools have a strong understanding of evidence-based practice to reduce exclusions?
- How is the Trauma Informed practice project to be monitored in terms of impact and then how will learning shared across schools?
- How is the LA influencing headteachers and governors to a common understanding of the type of school cultures that are most likely to result in fewer exclusions and better meeting of needs?
- How are the most effective schools adjusting their timetables and curriculum to suit the needs of their pupils?

5. Rising primary exclusions issue and consistency of thresholds

- Although there is clear presentation of the exclusions context there is little information provided of the analysis, conclusions and actions
- Is there a consistent threshold established across the county for all primary schools?
- What is the role of EPHA in challenging primary schools?
- What are the systems for support and challenge by the LA for high excluding primary schools?

6. Vulnerable groups: Over representation of specific groups

- There is over representation of boys in PEX- what are the strategies to address this?
- There is high representation of girls with medical needs- are schools aware of this over representation and how are they being challenged?
- What is being done to reduce exclusion of pupils with medical needs?
- Is there an overrepresentation of SEMH masking unidentified SEND needs?
- Given the high levels of medical need in girls in Colchester is there an identified link with service children?

E. Findings from focused discussions: reasons for the rising exclusions and strengths of current approaches

Reasons for rising exclusions

The LA identified a series of reasons they believed might be underpinning the rise in exclusions, which are outlined earlier in this report. On the evidence received during the review from focus groups, the review team identified a further set of reasons underpinning the rise in exclusions, which are specific to Essex, which were discussed with the LA during the review and are listed below:

- The disincentive of the current financial models for reducing exclusions and reintegration
- The high mobility of families moving into and across Essex
- The high numbers of foster families caring for looked after children in specific coastal areas e.g. Clacton
- High incidence of domestic violence
- Delays in accurate assessment of identified needs underpinning the behaviour that triggers exclusions

Similar to other LAs in the East of England Essex faces the following challenges, which have impacted on the national rise in exclusions:

- Budgetary constraints across the Local Authority and schools impacting on support to children and young people;
- Reduced services to families;
- Teacher recruitment and retention issues;
- Curriculum changes and changes to the examination system which have not been supportive for some groups of students;
- Increased issues in terms of mental health of students and families;
- A standards agenda, which may have worked against an agenda for inclusion.

Overall strengths

In the course of the review a significant number of strengths were identified:

- Universal commitment to the priority to reduce exclusions across Essex and to meeting children's needs
- Representatives of all stakeholders are eager to be part of the developing solutions
- PRUS see themselves as central players for finding solutions drawing on their expertise and experience
- LA commitment to long term funding for developing innovative practice through Educational Psychologists and schools
- The potential for the quadrants to deliver improved coherence and challenge across Essex
- Trauma Informed Practice (TIP) provision which is securely evidence led provides an excellent model for further development in Essex and across the region
- Developing whole school CPD based on TIP developments to build capacity will provide a strong support to the LA and schools in building capacity
- Model of the SEMH panels for primary provide a highly effective means of ensuring effective tailored provision and advice to primary schools
- Reporting structures for Independent Providers are secure and ensure accountability

F. Potential solutions for the future

A workshop was held with senior leaders of the LA including the Director of Education and the Portfolio Lead to consider the four improvement themes emerging from the findings of the review which are listed below:

1. Communication, Coherence and Consistency
2. Commissioning
3. Challenge
4. Building capacity in mainstream schools

As a result of the collaborative agreement achieved in this workshop the review team sought to develop a range of potential solutions for the LA to consider which are organized under the four themes.

1. Communication, Coherence and Consistency

- Consider a workshop of key players including PRUs to discuss the proposed solutions from the Peer Review
- Co-construct the practical implementation of the Inclusion Statement with stakeholders
- Assistant Directors of quadrants to develop an overview of the range of support offered to schools and to ensure all teams communicate the full offer of support to schools
- LA to focus on ensuring consistency of expectations for all stakeholders across Essex e.g.BAPs, SEMH panels
- Urgently rewrite the Fair Access Protocol drawing on models provided from other LAs to clarify expectations for vulnerable pupils
- Improve the communication to schools of pathways for support to ensure timely support to children drawing on the established networks across Essex
- Improve the timeliness of the offer through the quadrant system based on accurate assessments of need

2. Commissioning

- Review the current funding models to incentivize reduced exclusions and increase rates of re-integration
- Redefine the commissioning for PRUs to ensure clarity of expectation
- Redefine the commissioning with PRUs to ensure provision for individual students is detailed, timescales and outcomes and expectations for reintegration

3. Challenge

- LA to agree the challenge needed at PRU and school level to reduce exclusions and improve re-integration
- Quadrant leads to use RAG rating for inclusion as a means of challenge and consider how this information is shared with schools and Ofsted
- Consider how Headteachers Associations can develop a greater challenge role
- Develop BAP models to ensure the appropriate level of challenge between schools
- Explicitly challenge social care to agree the expectations around multi-agency involvement at individual case and strategic level

4. Building capacity in mainstream schools

- Redefine roles of specialist staff and EPs to ensure support for whole school staff development to build capacity
- Plan for extending CPD programmes such as the TIP across Essex
- Explore the role of Teaching Schools in building capacity
- Map the mechanisms for building capacity across the system

G. Support from other Local Authorities

Cambridgeshire: Share SEMH review work and remodelling provision, Share Fair Access Panel work

Hertfordshire: Share Fair Access Procedures, Commissioning Models

Norfolk: Share Fair Access Procedures, share information about annual conversations with MATs & others, Data profile on Schools in relation to Inclusion

H. Effective practice from Essex to be shared with other Local Authorities

Whole School CPD for developing Trauma Informed Practice is an excellent model that should be shared across the region as a mechanism for building capacity in mainstream schools.