

Case Study:

# HOW IS EAST SUSSEX LEVELLING UP BY REDUCING EXCLUSIONS FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL?

December 2022

# ADEPT

The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport

## INTRODUCTION

The government White Paper 'Opportunity for all' was published in March 2022, focussing on improving educational attainment. It committed to lift the attainment of all secondary pupils by setting an ambition to increase the national GCSE average grade in both English language and in maths.

The White Paper also set out measures to improve support for families and children at risk of falling behind. These included a new parent pledge and investment in support for things such as tutoring and mental health services.

A key levelling up intervention was the introduction of Education Investment Areas to increase funding and support to areas in most need. The White Paper acknowledged that *"Children who were disadvantaged or vulnerable, including those with special educational needs, were more likely to be amongst those missing out on key learning milestones. COVID-19 has exacerbated these challenges"*.

East Sussex is a diverse rural and coastal area with some affluent communities, low levels of free school meals, and some significant areas of deprivation. It is one of the 55 Education Investment Areas.

Reducing numbers of school exclusions became a strategic priority for East Sussex from 2016, when the Council had a higher level of exclusions compared to neighbouring authorities. In academic year 2018/19, 65 secondary school pupils were permanently excluded from state schools.

There are three area groups addressing the needs of schools and children in different parts of East Sussex. These are: Hastings and Rother, Eastbourne and Hailsham, Lewes, Coastal and Wealden.

Each area has its distinct issues to address. Some of the long-term issues across the county include multi-generational unemployment (particularly in coastal areas), reliance on the service / hospitality economy which is vulnerable to economic downturns, transport and connectivity issues in rural areas, drugs and the infiltration of gangs including links to county lines activities.

There are complex and high needs children and families in isolated rural and coastal communities. The local alternative provision (AP), College Central, has two locations in the county, Hastings and Eastbourne, which can be difficult to access for those living further away.



## REDUCING SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS IN THE SECONDARY SECTOR

East Sussex has developed an area-based approach to reducing school exclusions, working through multi-agency Inclusion Partnerships to identify appropriate local interventions at secondary level. These replaced the former 'Behaviour and Attendance Partnership' and recognise the need for a more multi-agency approach to address the needs of young people.

The Inclusion Partnerships bring together key services involved in supporting young people with school leaders. Members include: East Sussex Early Help service, Virtual Schools, East Sussex Behaviour and Attendance Service, SEND services, the youth justice service and senior leads from each school / Trust including AP providers.

The approach seeks to build relationships between different professionals and agencies, and develop a collaborative approach to planning services for children at risk of exclusion. This helps to overcome practical barriers around the sharing of information, and understanding of each other's roles as well differences in perspective around what success looks like.

Each Inclusion Partnership has responsibility for overseeing and agreeing the right form of support to address each young person's barriers to learning, whether that is additional support around them and their school, or a placement in an alternative provision setting.

This model was informed by Isos Partnership's [research](#) into models of alternative provision and recommendations around improving communication between agencies, and addressing the root causes of exclusion.

Every school, including those that are part of a Trust, is signed up to the model of collaborative working through Inclusion Partnerships. This will help to ensure that young people get the support that they need, reduce exclusions and suspensions, and ensure inclusion support and alternative provision are used effectively, leading to young people being reintegrated into mainstream schools when and where this is right for them.



Additional resources through the high need block, which is part of the dedicated schools grant allocated to local authorities from the government, has been set aside to support the work of Inclusion Partnerships and expand provision across the county.

A key priority is to improve the transition from primary to secondary schools and ensure that vulnerable children and schools receive the support they need to settle into new settings.

## REVIEWING THE EDUCATIONAL OFFER FOR EXCLUDED YOUNG PEOPLE

**In 2021/22 the educational offer at the AP, College Central, was reviewed so that it better meets the needs of children being referred, with an emphasis on social and mental health support as well as the core curriculum.**

There are apparent overlaps between children at risk of exclusion or in need of alternative provision, and those with special education needs (SEN). This puts the emphasis on the need for really precise identification of a young person's barrier to learning, including whether there is an unidentified or unmet SEN, and having the right pathways to support all additional needs. This has increased following the Covid-19 pandemic, which has increased pressure on all SEN and disabilities services.

Where appropriate and based on the needs of the young person, placements are intended to be temporary enabling a child to be reintegrated back into a mainstream school. If a child is nearing the end of key stage 4 (Year 11) they are likely to stay on at College Central and then be supported on to a post-16 college placement.

All children who finish their key stage 4 education at College Central are placed into a college course and there is strong focus on vocational pathways.

## WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW?

**The three Inclusion Partnerships will oversee the allocation of places and specific funding for their area. Over 2022/23 this will include a commissioning budget for addressing particular needs in each area.**

This could include bespoke services to focus on a particular group (including more active, sports-based content), specific services to tackle the rise of gang culture, or specific support focussed on social and mental health needs.

East Sussex is at the start of this process and is gathering intelligence around needs and gaps in provision. The analysis of the first term (Sept to Dec 2022) will feed in to the development of bespoke support.

East Sussex is also taking part in a three-year research programme led by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), which is looking at how local authorities can facilitate greater multiagency collaboration to make local education systems more inclusive and reduce preventable exclusions in primary schools.

## SUCCESS FACTORS

- **Strong local partnership working:** East Sussex has engaged all Trusts and local authority-maintained schools in the area via Inclusion Partnerships. They have created multi-agency teams working around each child at risk of exclusion.
- **Area approach:** East Sussex is focussing on local needs within the county area, developing bespoke interventions to enhance inclusion / alternative provision support and reduce exclusions.
- **Wider contextual factors:** East Sussex has maintained a focus on the wider contextual factors for exclusions including poverty, poor connectivity and more widespread social and mental health problems exacerbated by the pandemic and sought to adjust provision accordingly. There are strong links with the local authority Mental Health Team.

## CONSTRAINTS

- **It takes time to stimulate and commission new inclusion support and provision.** With stretched resources, there is only limited scope to test different types of interventions and support.

## LEARNING POINTS

- **East Sussex school and local authority leaders have taken a proactive, partnership approach** to reducing exclusions at secondary school level, focussing on inclusion and improving alternative education provision, to ensure that young people receive the right support at the right time.
- **Local authorities have an important role to champion the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people.** There is a strong levelling up thread in the government's proposals for education, SEND and youth services, focused around improving educational attainment in deprived areas. However, there are limited resources for the services needed to support the most vulnerable children, including for multi-agency working to reduce school exclusions.

## LINKS

East Sussex County Council People Scrutiny Committee, Schools White Paper presentation (July 2022), via:  
<https://democracy.eastsussex.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=26499>

Isos Partnership, Research into systems of inclusion and alternative provision in England, via:  
<https://www.isospartnership.com/apresearch>

RSA Preventing School Exclusions research programme:  
<https://www.thersa.org/projects/preventing-school-exclusions>

Building a Country that works for all Children Post Covid-19 (July 2020) The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd, via:  
[https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS\\_Building\\_a\\_country\\_that\\_works\\_for\\_all\\_children\\_post\\_Covid-19.pdf](https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS_Building_a_country_that_works_for_all_children_post_Covid-19.pdf)

Opportunity for all: Strong schools with great teachers for your child (March 2022) Department for Education, via:  
<http://www.gov.uk/official-documents>

SEND Review: Right support, right place, right time (March 2022), Department for Education, via:  
<http://www.gov.uk/official-documents>

A Youth Justice System that Works for Children (Nov 2021) The Association of Directors of Children's Services, The Association of YOT Managers, Local Government Association, via:  
[https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS\\_AYM\\_LGA\\_A\\_Youth\\_Justice\\_System\\_that\\_Works\\_for\\_Children\\_FINAL.pdf](https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS_AYM_LGA_A_Youth_Justice_System_that_Works_for_Children_FINAL.pdf)

Levelling Up the United Kingdom (Feb 2022), Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, via:  
<http://www.gov.uk/official-documents>

*During 2022, the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport led a project to explore how local authorities are levelling up through action to address disparities in multiple domains - public health, local environmental quality, exposure to climate risk and socio-economic deprivation.*

*This project was in collaboration with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, the Association of Directors of Public Health, the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Local Government Association, recognising the synergies between our work areas, and the links between wellbeing and place.*

*This case study is one of a series of examples which look at how local authorities are levelling up, across service areas.*

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