

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE - 6 FEBRUARY 2001

ALTERNATIVES TO EXCLUSION UPDATE

Report by Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform members of the progress being made in relation to alternatives to exclusion from school

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The management of exclusions from school takes account of a number of different sources of guidance. The principal of these are SOEID Circular 2/98 which provides guidance to schools and local authorities on the exclusion process and related policy matters. In East Ayrshire this has been incorporated into the management document known to schools as Standard Circular 8. This Standard Circular has been recently revised and issued taking account of Section 41 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act, 2000 that gives children "of sufficient age and maturity" the right to appeal their own exclusion.
- 2.2 Through the Excellence Fund for Schools Core Programmes, the Authority is committed to working towards the government's target of reducing exclusion by 30% by 2002, as compared to the 1999 figures. This funding has allowed additional staff to be deployed to schools, and has enabled a variety of other approaches to be supported. The New Community Schools initiative assumes as one of its principles that the schools benefiting from additional funding will work towards reducing exclusions towards 0%.

3. EXCLUSIONS IN EAST AYRSHIRE, THE CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1 In primary schools, the number of exclusions is small. In the session 1999-2000 there were only 160 exclusions. Exclusions in primary schools tend to very specific in relation to the needs and difficulties of individual children. It is therefore almost impossible to draw meaningful conclusions from trends.
- 3.2 The general success of primary schools in managing sometimes extremely difficult cases is worthy of congratulation, and the dedication and professional approach taken by individual teachers, ancillary staff and headteachers deserves particular praise.
- 3.3 In secondary schools there is a higher volume of exclusions and it is therefore more meaningful to examine trends. In 1997-98 there were 8299 openings lost which related to 1042 exclusion incidents. Significant progress has been made to manage this figure downwards with an overall reduction of 9%. Some schools have reduced their exclusions significantly, while others are still developing approaches.

- 3.4 The way data was collected was changed nationally in 1999, it is therefore possible for 1999-2000 only, to give a further breakdown of exclusions (see Table 1). The definitions used in Table 1 are those that are identified by the Scottish Executive. In reading the figures, it will also be apparent that not all incidents that may lead to exclusion can be easily categorised. Equally, headteachers are encouraged to use their professional judgement taking account of all of the circumstances in a particular case.

Table 1: Exclusions by Circumstance (All sectors)

Reason for exclusion	Percentage
General or persistent disobedience	20
Verbal abuse of staff	18
Fighting	15
Physical abuse of fellow pupils	13
Aggressive or threatening behaviour	10
Insolent or offensive behaviour	9
Other	9
Physical abuse of staff	2
Drug related incidents	2
Verbal abuse of fellow pupils	1
Racist incidents	1
Lack of parental co-operation	0
Not known	0

- 3.5 Table 1 shows that persistent disobedience is perhaps the major problem. This category accounts for 20% of exclusions.

4. CHANGES IN THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- 4.1 The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act, 2000 imposes a duty on authorities to ensure that any young person who is excluded from school is able to continue to benefit from education. Guidance from the Scottish Executive on this section of the new act is still awaited. However, early indications are that a child who has been excluded should be in receipt of provision that is equivalent to their mainstream school. This obviously has significant implications both for practice and resourcing. A number of issues related to this development in the law will require some further consideration by the Authority.

5. FUTURE WORK

- 5.1 The data included in this report has been circulated to schools.
- 5.2 Some schools have clearly developed good practice from which others can learn. It is proposed that in order to support this process, a strategic group will be established. This group will assist in devising policy in relation to the relevant resources available to the Authority:

- Excellence Fund Core Programme – Alternatives to Exclusion
- Youth Care Strategy
- New Community Schools
- Social Work resources

5.3 This strategic working group would devise an overall strategic plan by Easter 2001 with an implementation plan by Summer 2001 ready for deployment from August 2001. The group will consist of representatives from secondary schools, primary schools, special educational needs, Psychological Services, Youth Care Strategy, outdoor Education and Social services. In all cases, representation will be at headteacher level or equivalent. There will also be consultation with parental groups as identified in the Authority's strategy for consultation under the terms of the new Education Act.

5.4 Psychological services in partnership with schools and other services are currently evaluating a model known as "Framework for Intervention" that has been used successfully in Birmingham. Early reports indicate that this may be a significant support to staff. It is planned that as part of their deliberations, this strategic group will consider the merits of Framework for Intervention and how it might be implemented in East Ayrshire. This development will be the subject of a separate report to Committee.

6. POLICY/LEGAL/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS Nil

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members :

- (i) note the approach taken on the management of exclusion within the Authority;
- (ii) approve the establishment of a strategic working group to plan further development in alternatives to exclusion;
- (iii) request that the Director of Educational and Social Services bring further reports on alternatives to exclusion to the Education Committee at the relevant points of development; and
- (iv) otherwise note the contents of this report.

John Mulgrew
Director of Educational and Social Services

GRS/DL
18 January 2001

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS Nil

Members requiring further information should contact Graham Short, Head of Schools (01563 576089).

Implementation Officer: Graham Short

AGENDA