

Exclusions and Looked After Children

Our 'GOOD FOR ME' priorities

London Borough of Bexley is committed to 'reducing the number of looked after children who are excluded from school on a fixed-term basis, working in close partnership with schools and Headteachers. There must be no permanent exclusions from school for looked after children.' (*Looked After Children & Leaving Care Strategy 2017-2012*)

'As well as having disproportionately high rates of exclusion, there are certain groups of pupils with additional needs who are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of exclusion. This includes pupils with EHC plans and looked after children. The head teacher should, as far as possible, avoid permanently excluding any pupil with an EHC plan or a looked after child.'

Schools should engage proactively with parents in supporting the behaviour of pupils with additional needs. In relation to looked after children, schools should cooperate proactively with foster carers or children's home workers, the local authority that looks after the child and the local authority's virtual school head.

Where a school has concerns about the behaviour, or risk of exclusion, of a child with additional needs, a pupil with an EHC plan or a looked after child, it should, in partnership with others (including the local authority as necessary), consider what additional support or alternative placement may be required. This should involve assessing the suitability of provision for a pupil's SEN. Where a pupil has an EHC plan, schools should consider requesting an early annual review or interim/emergency review.' (DfE, 'Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England: Statutory guidance for those with legal responsibilities in relation to exclusion, Sept. 2017, p.11)

Our 'GOOD FOR ME' actions

Prevention

The team around each Looked after Child (Designated Teacher, Social Worker, Foster Care, Virtual School) must ensure that timely communication aids discussion about emerging concerns, and that when necessary an urgent **risk of exclusion meeting** is called to avoid further escalation of concern. The **Personal Education Plan** and Annual Review processes should also be used effectively to review areas of need, such as challenging behaviour which is often a symptom of other underlying difficulty. When necessary an interim Personal Education Plan review will be called to review the child's needs, and to ensure Pupil Premium is being used purposefully to provide support that can improve the child's behaviour and engagement in learning in order to avoid risk of exclusion. **Teacher Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaires** will also be used to screen for areas of difficulty, and repeated when necessary to ensure that underlying difficulties are measured and understood so that consideration can be given to more diagnostic assessment or intervention. If the child has an **EHC plan**, then an Interim **Annual Review** will be called when there is a concern that the current EHC plan and/or named school is not meeting the child's needs. In both cases, it is essential to engage the voice of the child to ensure that their views and feelings are understood.

Fixed-term Exclusions

At times, pupil behaviour may warrant internal or external exclusion in keeping with the school's behaviour policy. If a school determines that a Bexley Looked After Child must receive a fixed-term exclusion, then the team around the child must work closely together to act as a good corporate parent; understanding the incident that has taken place, engaging the voice of the child and working with the school to ensure that restorative justice has taken place. This typically involves a return to school meeting, where there should always be discussion about the child's support needs and consideration given to the need for an interim Personal Education Plan review or interim Annual Review of the EHC plan.

What happens when a Looked After Child receives a fixed term exclusion?

Designated Teacher

The Designated Teacher will ensure the team around the child is updated about the incident and exclusion. The Designated Teacher will also ensure that the post-exclusion meeting involves the appropriate persons and will initiate a further review meeting when required.

Foster Carer

The Foster Carer is the first responder when things go wrong at school, and is called when a child needs to be sent home for a fixed-term exclusion. The Foster Carer plays an important role in supporting the child to reflect on their behaviour and well-being after an incident, and to alert professionals to any underlying issues causing concern. Foster Carers will need to ensure that the child is not in a public place during the period of exclusion, and to support the child at the post-exclusion meeting. The Foster Carer should ensure that other professionals have been made aware of the post exclusion meeting date and time, and contact their supervising social worker when they need direct support for this.

Virtual School

The Virtual School receives next day notifications from 'Welfare Call' when a child has been sent home on fixed-term exclusion. Notifications are monitored by the Virtual School Head against ongoing case discussion to ensure that all fixed term exclusions are responded to appropriately. If the Virtual School have not received direct communication about the exclusion, then the Education Support Officer will alert the social worker to the exclusion and contact the school and foster carer to find out what has happened. Where possible the Virtual School will attend the return to school meeting or establish the need for an interim review in consultation with others. An interim review will be used when necessary to discuss what extra support might be needed and the resources needed to achieve this, such as Pupil Premium. The Education Support Officer will ensure that key professionals are informed and consulted when there is a need to consider changing the child's education provision. This will involve consulting with the foster carer, social worker, Team Manager, Independent Reviewing Officer and Virtual School Head when there is a need to consider changing the child's education provision; such as a move to an alternative mainstream school, or where it is appropriate and necessary to consider alternative education, such as a pupil referral unit, home based learning, other alternative settings or a managed move.

The Allocated Social Worker

The allocated social worker will contact and if possible visit the child and carer on the day of the exclusion, or within 24 hours to understand the child's views and feelings and to provide guidance. The allocated social worker will consider whether or not there are other underlying issues; including but not limited to low self-esteem, learning difficulties, bullying, peer pressure or risk taking behaviours that need further assessment or escalation. The allocated social worker will contact the school within 24 hours of being informed of the fixed-term exclusion and confirm/arrange a suitable time so they will be able to attend the return to school meeting with the child and carer. If the allocated social worker is on annual leave, the supervising manager should attend on their behalf. The allocated social worker will keep Virtual School informed of the matter and its conclusion, and seek advice if concerns around the child's education are not resolved.

Permanent Exclusion

Bexley's Looked After Children's Strategy sets out our clear commitment that no Looked After Child will be permanently excluded and this is cultivated through strong partnerships with schools. However, should a school determine that a permanent exclusion decision must be issued, then timely communication between the Headteacher of the school and the Virtual School Head is required to ensure that the matter is considered promptly in line with statutory guidance. The Virtual School Head will advise corporate parent professionals on the permanent exclusion process, and ensure that all avenues for support, appeal or managed move (when appropriate) are exhausted through robust discussion with the school before any permanent exclusion decision becomes binding. The corporate parent, through its foster carers and social workers will also support children with social, moral, spiritual and cultural learning, ensuring that Looked After Children are supported to give their views and feelings, but also challenged around rules and consequences.