

Reducing Permanent School Exclusions in Surrey

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Executive briefing, October 2021

This briefing sets out key facts and findings from new research that identified:

- 1 – characteristics and outcomes of children and young people permanently excluded from school in Surrey.
- 2 – areas for improvement in the practice of permanent school exclusion in Surrey.
- 3 – systemic issues related to inter-agency working, funding of services, support and interventions for children and young people at risk of permanent school exclusion.

What is permanent school exclusion and why is it important to reduce the practice?

There is a statutory right for all children to have access to education and be included in schools. Permanent exclusion from mainstream schooling and vulnerability to dropping out of subsequent provision are reasons why some children are missing education. Exclusion is known to be a method of behaviour management that is used to address challenging behaviours. However, systemic issues such as inter-agency working and funding of services, and preventative support and interventions for children and young people are key considerations in reducing permanent school exclusions. Reducing exclusions is important because, nationally, children and young people excluded from school are known to have poorer life opportunities than their in-school counterparts. This is reflected in factors that make some children and young people vulnerable to exclusion (e.g. a history of adverse experiences, SEN, the subjective experience of social exclusion) and also vulnerabilities as a consequence of exclusion (e.g. increased vulnerability to exploitation and serious youth violence).

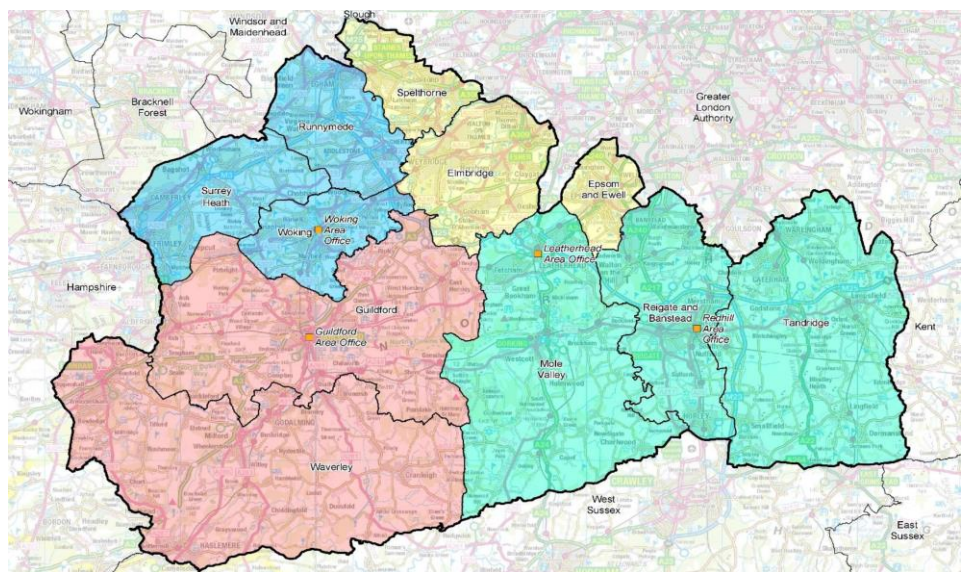
Why a focus on permanent school exclusion in Surrey?

Surrey is an affluent county offering opportunity and a good quality of life. However, within the county sit pockets of deprivation where some of the most disadvantaged children and young people live and school. The Community Foundation's *Surrey Uncovered* 2017 report (*recent data are due to be published*) set out that 13 neighbourhoods in Surrey were in the 20% worst areas nationally for income deprivation, and in 17 neighbourhoods 30% or more of children lived in poverty. Department for Education data reflect that almost half of children and young people in Surrey in alternative school provision have free school meals (often used as an index of deprivation), in comparison to 18% across the South East. Furthermore, the number of children in Surrey with SEN is increasing, yet educational attainment for pupils with statutory plans is poorer than for young people in comparable counties. Nationally, high exclusion rates occur in schools serving deprived communities. In Surrey, the subjective experience of social exclusion (e.g. living with deprivation, schooling next to affluence) could exacerbate other known factors for permanent exclusion, such as poor mental health.

What we did to understand more about permanent school exclusions in Surrey.

- 1 – We created a sample of 200 children and young people permanently excluded from schools in Surrey between September 2018 and December 2020, and sourced data from education, social care and police/youth justice. Our data set is unique because it provided the first opportunity to explore a multi-agency perspective of permanent school exclusions in Surrey. Data were explored in the context of county quadrants and boroughs, as well as the characteristics of the children and young people.
- 2 - We conducted 37 interviews with educational professional stakeholders (including headteachers, CAMHS and SEN leaders, educational professionals in Surrey County Council), parents, caregivers, and young people with experience of permanent school exclusion. Through these interviews, we identified concerns about the practice of permanent school exclusions in Surrey, and practical, feasible approaches to reducing permanent school exclusions in the county.

Map of Surrey including quadrants: North East (yellow), South East (green), South West (red), North West (blue)

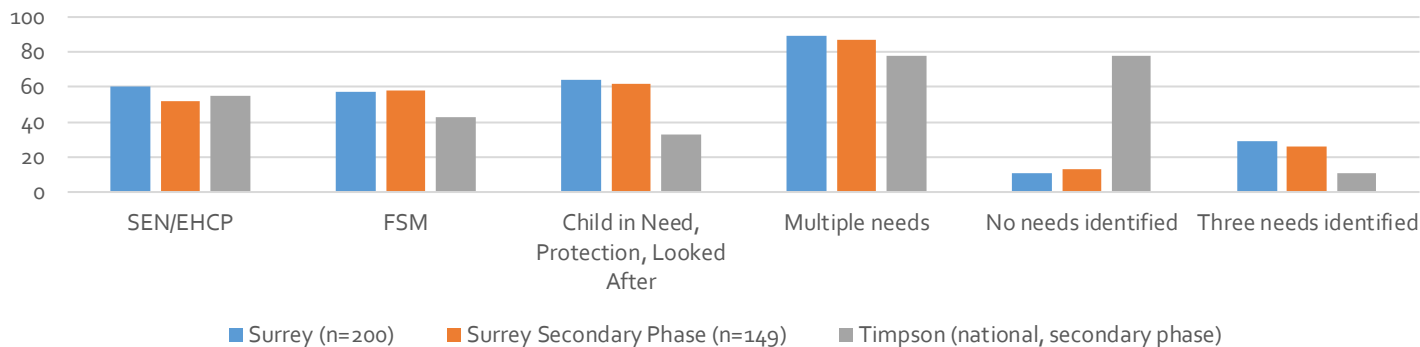


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Some Key Findings and Recommendations

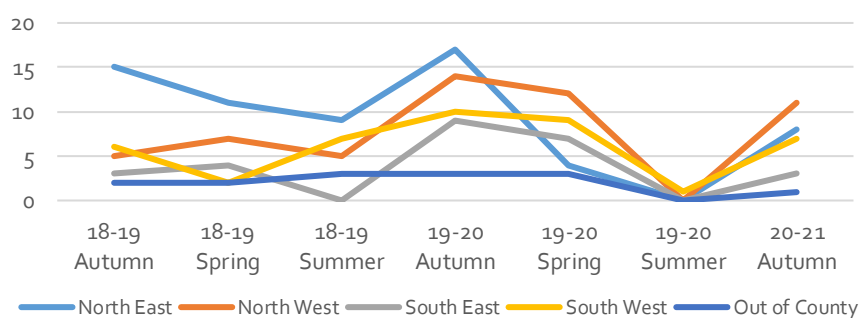
The 200 children and young people excluded from schools in Surrey were similar to children excluded throughout England in terms of age, gender, behaviour that led to exclusion, and prevalence of special educational need and having an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). However, there were key points of difference between Surrey and the national data as presented in the 2019 *Timpson Review on School Exclusions*. Children and young people permanently excluded from schools in Surrey presented with multiple and possibly complex needs and vulnerabilities relating to possible deprivation (as indexed by free school meals), mental health (SEN/EHCP) and social care, and at a higher level than reflected in the national data. For most of the young people in Surrey, systems of support were not in place at the point at which they were permanently excluded from school.

SEN/EHCP, Free School Meals and Social Care:
Surrey and Timpson Review Data



- Ethnicity** 78% of the children and young people excluded were White British. 2% were Gypsy, Romany, Traveller, 4% Black and 3% Asian. There is a lack of data from which to assess whether children and young people from minority ethnic groups in Surrey are over- or under-represented in our sample.
- Justice involvement** Most children and young people who were justice-involved had their first contact with police and youth justice services before or at the time of permanent exclusion. Half of children and young people who continued to be justice-involved after exclusion had all three needs relating to free school meals, SEN and social care.
- Practice across the county** The North East had the highest frequency of exclusions (32%); the South East the fewest (13%). This most likely reflects differences in practice across quadrants, such as how the Surrey Alternative Learning Programme (SALP) boards operate. SALP is a coordinated approach to support children at risk of exclusion and holds headteachers to account for decision-making. SALP resources are used with support of the PRUs to access alternative support for young people. One interviewee commented *"in the North East, capacity-wise ... there are real gaps in the landscape in terms of alternatives to exclusion ... There are very few respite places ... if you do get a child onto respite ... do they get some genuine therapeutic input ... so they can come back and be successful? ... The PRUs in all four quadrants need an agreed and equitable offer for schools"*.

Exclusions by academic year/term and Surrey quadrant



Caregiver of a child excluded from school *"He'd gone through some trauma when he was living with his parents ... At school ... They didn't know how to help him. In a classroom full of 30 kids, they just couldn't do it ... They didn't have the time, or the resources ... to help him, so in the end he got expelled from school and he was only five ... I do sympathise with the teachers; they don't get the training ... I don't know if it's possible for him to go back into mainstream ... But the damage is done. He absolutely hates school ... on top of his trauma from [pre-school age], he's now got trauma related to school"*.

Experienced teacher with Surrey-wide leadership and governance role talking about the need to build capacity in schools to help children and meet their needs: *"The question is, how much of that behaviour is driven by their needs, or the school setting not being able to meet their needs, and so the behaviour follows? ... We desperately need additional expertise ... in mainstream settings, to provide guidance on support for these students ... not just for five minutes, but tracking, monitoring, spending a day with them every so often, demonstrating strategies themselves, working with staff and parents and carers"*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enhance implementation of SALP across the county quadrants.
- Ensure continuity of support for children and young people with multiple needs (e.g. SEN).
- Bring statutory and third sector services to the school; work together to support families and intervene earlier for SEN.
- Protocols to ensure close communication and collaboration should be established for the transition from primary to secondary schools for vulnerable children.
- Ensure information sharing and collaboration between services; consider having a local champion in each school/agency.
- Ensure 'critical patterns' of at-risk behaviours and events about children are shared between agencies to prevent escalation to 'critical incidents' that require a justice response.
- Accept permanent exclusion as a public health issue; nurture, understand and support behaviour as a form of communication.
- Consider creating leadership and governance roles to support an agenda to reduce exclusions and monitor progress against outcomes of this research, such as a named Cabinet member, local authority Lead, headteacher, Governor and Police/Youth Justice Representative.
- Create a Surrey Collaborative Implementation Plan with agency-specific actions; measure impact and continually improve provision.