

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK on Tuesday, 27th January, 2026 at 2.00 pm

Councillors Present

County Councillor Alistair Neill, (Chair)
County Councillor Rachel Buckler, (Vice Chair)

County Councillors: Jill Bond, Steven Garratt, Meirion Howells, M. Newell, Paul Pavia, Peter Strong, and Su McConnel substituting for John Crook

C. Werrett

Officers in Attendance

APOLOGIES: County Councillors John Crook

1. Declarations of Interest.

Councillor McConnel declared a non-prejudicial interest as a member of the school Exclusion Panel at King Henry VIII school.

2. School Exclusions update - To scrutinise the latest figures and the Council's performance. Report to follow.

Dr Morwenna Wagstaff introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Hugo Hutchison, Kelly Waythe and Rachael Roach-Rooke:

Why have the number of exclusions and days lost increased so much, and how does this compare to Wales, the UK, and globally? How many are repeat exclusions and what happens to those pupils?

The increase is attributed to more challenging behaviours post-pandemic, with national trends showing similar rises. Repeat exclusions are tracked, and most exclusions are short-term. Each exclusion is a unique decision, and most pupils do not have repeat exclusions. Support includes restorative meetings and multi-agency plans to prevent recurrence.

How are permanent exclusions rescinded, what is the process, and what happens to those children?

Permanent exclusions are rescinded through collaboration between the school, local authority, and family, often by creating a support package, managed moves to other schools, or intervention via the pupil referral service. The process is based on agreement and tailored support for the child.

Is there opportunity for more proactive support to help young people build resilience and prevent exclusions, beyond staff-focused approaches?

The meeting acknowledged the importance of proactive and preventative strategies, with ongoing professional learning for staff and embedding trauma-informed practices. There is emphasis on building capacity in schools and multi-agency support, with positive impacts starting to show, especially in primary settings.

What happens to a pupil during and after exclusion; specifically, what support is provided to prevent repeat exclusions, and could more be done to assist schools in this area?

The process involves communication with families, restorative meetings, and multi-agency involvement to support reintegration and reduce repeat exclusions. It should be emphasized that most pupils do not reoffend and that internal exclusions are also used as a preventative measure.

What is the significance of the exclusion numbers (noting 5% of pupils are excluded, with an average of about four exclusions per excluded pupil), and is the current trajectory sustainable? Is more/different action needed?

Exclusion is a last resort, but sometimes necessary for safety; numbers have risen due to societal changes, but recent data suggests a possible levelling off. Autumn term data shows a decrease in exclusions, and primary exclusions are often concentrated among a small group of pupils with complex needs.

Can you clarify the process and rationale for rescinding permanent exclusions, and what happens to pupils in these cases?

Rescinding permanent exclusions involves collaboration between the local authority, school, and family to develop alternative support packages, such as managed moves or pupil referral service interventions, aiming for reintegration and transparency in reporting. The Headteachers can cite examples of successful managed moves and would highlight the importance of trust and dialogue between schools and the local authority.

Is there specific support or packages to help excluded pupils return with a different approach, and is there more that could be done to support schools in this?

Support is tailored to individual pupils, often involving collaboration with the local authority to access additional funding and resources. There are examples where bespoke packages have led to significant reductions in exclusions for specific pupils. The inclusion network and multi-agency collaboration are key to providing effective support.

What specific interventions work best to reduce repeat exclusions and days lost (e.g., pupil referral unit, early intervention, managed moves, trauma-informed training, inclusion network)?

Effective interventions include multi-agency collaboration, managed moves, trauma-informed training, and the inclusion network, which enables resource sharing and professional support. No single intervention is universally effective; success depends on individual circumstances. Managed moves, trauma-informed training, and the inclusion network are highlighted as valuable, with multi-agency collaboration and bespoke support packages often leading to positive outcomes.

What formal escalation occurs when exclusion practices differ between schools, and how is disproportionate exclusion in some schools addressed?

The local authority monitors exclusion data and challenges schools with high or increasing exclusions. Formal escalation includes meetings with headteachers, senior leaders, and governors, and exploring professional learning and support strategies. Issues are discussed collectively in the inclusion network. Variation between schools is expected due to differing circumstances and Headteachers would caution against judging schools solely by exclusion numbers.

How early do prevention strategies in primary schools begin, and how are problems identified before they escalate?

Prevention in primary schools involves early monitoring of exclusion patterns, providing support packages, and multi-agency reintegration meetings. Professional learning and capacity building for staff are emphasized to address challenging behaviours before they escalate, and the team was established in response to increasing demand for early support.

How do we tackle increasing parental disengagement and the prevalence of smartphones among young children?

Schools are working to build relationships with parents through direct communication, shared expectations, and community support. Monmouthshire schools have adopted a policy advising parents not to give smartphones to children until Year 10, with positive feedback from families. Schools aim to set clear expectations for parental responsibility and provide signposting to support services. – ACTION: to provide members with a report on smartphone use among pupils

What about trauma-informed training?

Schools and the local authority use a trauma-informed approach to exclusions, recognising that the exclusion process itself can be distressing for pupils and families. Staff trained in trauma-informed practice focus on responding sensitively to incidents, centring the child's voice, and putting clear follow-up plans in place with parents and, in primary schools, the local authority. Schools aim to reduce anxiety by improving communication, ensuring children stay connected to learning, and offering wellbeing check-ins during exclusions. Overall, the approach seeks to minimise additional trauma and support pupils to return positively, reducing the likelihood of repeat exclusions.

Why does the report lack a breakdown of exclusion reasons, and could future reports include more detail on types of offences and parental involvement?

The omission was acknowledged and it was agreed that future reports should include more detail on exclusion reasons and parental involvement.

What happens to a child during a typical exclusion period, including supervision, support, and safeguarding?

Excluded children are the responsibility of their parents during the exclusion period; work is sent home, and the local authority maintains communication for reintegration and support. Schools ensure parents are informed by phone before formal letters, and exclusions are not issued if there are safeguarding concerns about the child being at home. Internal exclusions or alternative arrangements are used if needed.

What is the impact of school budget cuts on exclusions, specifically have reductions in support staff led to more exclusions, especially in primary schools?

It is acknowledged that budget pressures and reduced support staff likely affect the ability to manage challenging behaviours, making it harder to provide preventative and relational support, though no direct correlation is quantified. Monmouthshire schools are adapting creatively, using professional learning and flexible staff deployment, and there is new funding redirected to secondary schools for targeted support of at-risk learners.

Is the new curriculum in Wales sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of pupils at risk of disengagement and exclusion, or does it impose a new rigidity similar to the old national curriculum?

The new curriculum offers opportunities to tailor learning to individual interests and abilities, but successful implementation will require investment and time. The curriculum provides greater flexibility for schools to design diverse pathways, including academic and vocational options, which can re-engage students and support inclusion, provided schools make the right decisions.
– ACTION: to invite Headteachers at a later date to discuss the effect of the new curriculum

What is the importance of consistent coding for exclusion reasons across schools, how do headteachers ensure accuracy, and how do governors scrutinise exclusions and lost days?

Exclusion reasons are clearly coded and communicated, with governing bodies regularly scrutinizing exclusion data, trends, and support measures through well-being committees and professional discussions with the local authority.

Are there local authority officer capacity pressures due to rising demand for support tasks, and has a business case for additional resources been made?

Officer capacity is indeed under pressure and a budget request for increased capacity has been submitted, with robust systems in place for monitoring exclusions and managed moves.

How are managed moves between local authorities monitored to ensure successful reintegration and minimal impact on the hosting school?

Managed moves are monitored through inclusion panels and review meetings, and cross-border moves can be challenging but progress is being made in collaboration with other authorities.

As well as scrutinising the effect of the new curriculum, can we also scrutinise how Welsh students who wish to go to an English university is managed? – ACTION (FWP)

Chair's Summary:

The Chair thanked officers and particularly the Headteachers for attending today, and extended the members' thanks to their teams for their hard work. In addition, the Chair highlighted the importance of the latest Estyn report on school exclusions and school health research, noting it is a strong report that reflects positively on the council's work and should be recognized and celebrated by residents. He congratulated the council's education team, while also noting that there is still work to be done to improve outcomes compared to other counties.

3. Schools Health Research Network - To inform the committee about the data and insights from the SHRN work led by Cardiff University relating to pupil well-being.

Emma Taylor introduced the report, delivered a presentation and answered the members' questions:

What is the extent of multi-agency involvement, specifically the role of counselling and psychoeducation for pupils, and do young people receive proactive support to understand and regulate emotions before issues escalate?

School-based counselling is available in all secondary schools and play therapy is available in primary on a needs-led basis, but the service sits within Social Care, not Education. Multi-agency support (including educational psychology and the education support team) is provided as needed for excluded pupils. – ACTION: to provide a response from Social Care

How is best practice (such as resilience and emotional regulation initiatives) shared and implemented across schools?

Best practice in areas such as resilience and emotional regulation is shared primarily through the local authority's Wellbeing in Schools Forum, where schools and the local authority collectively identify actions and exchange examples of effective approaches. In addition, cluster-based wellbeing lead groups enable primary and secondary schools within each cluster to share methods, initiatives and practical experience. When a child requires additional support – such as following an exclusion – multiagency practice is applied on an individual basis, involving options like schoolbased counselling, the Education Support Team, and Educational Psychology. These agencies work together to identify any specific interventions the child may need to process difficulties and develop healthier coping strategies, with the aim of preventing future behavioural issues.

Why did not all 30 primary schools participate in the survey, and why were Pupil Referral Units not included?

It was clarified that 28 primary schools participated (correcting the figure of 27 in the report); of the two that did not participate, one was ineligible due to only having foundation phase learners, and one had insufficient consent from families. Pupil Referral Units are currently part of a pilot to test survey suitability.

Are teaching staff sufficiently trained to deliver mental health and resilience education? Is there a potential risk of pathologizing normal stresses?

Secondary schools increasingly have specialist departments and staff receiving extra professional learning to teach these topics, with well-written resources available and ongoing monitoring of new initiatives to ensure positive impact. Monitoring and evaluation are integral when schools introduce new processes, and non-specialist delivery (e.g., during tutor time) is being addressed through more specialist approaches.

Is the reporting focussed on process or outcomes?

This wellbeing dataset is only one source of information and is mainly used to give a broad picture of school ethos, trends and provision. Schools hold other, more detailed data that tracks individual pupils, so this report should be seen as part of a wider set of tools rather than the sole measure of outcomes.

What structure or support exists for excluded pupils and PRU learners?

PRU learners are included within the same expectations as all schools under the new curriculum's Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning. Staff in the PRU also teach this curriculum and gather pupil voice data in line with mainstream schools. The system is therefore not absent, but forms part of ongoing professional development and datagathering across schools and the PRS.

What does it mean that these learners will now be included, and is the structure clear?

Their inclusion relates to using the same anonymised, comparable data sources across all settings – including the PRS – so the local authority can identify themes at school, cluster and county level. This dataset provides a highlevel picture rather than individual tracking, offering consistency in how information is monitored.

Are issues like sleep difficulties being explored, including factors such as physical activity?

Wellbeing themes (including those raised in the survey such as sleep) are identified through data and then explored by schools and the local authority. Earlier surveys showed pupils didn't know how to access wellbeing support, prompting schools to strengthen signposting and community links, showing that identified wellbeing issues do lead to targeted action.

What is the overall aim of this work, and are we prioritising problemsolving over process?

The aim is to build a reliable, longterm picture of trends to inform school and LA action. Officers emphasise caution about drawing conclusions from only one or two years of data, as anomalies can occur, but over time the dataset helps identify issues – such as truancy or school pressure – for further investigation. The emphasis is on using layered evidence to identify and address real needs rather than relying on process alone.

Could the data set be used across the curriculum, including student analysis and ownership of health improvement initiatives?

Schools use the data in curriculum activities and track trends over time, with secondary schools able to monitor improvements using their historical data.

Does the survey account for students giving socially desirable rather than truthful answers?

The concern about response honesty is acknowledged, as some learners might give answers they think are expected, especially on subjective well-being topics, so this is a fair comment.

Chair's Summary:

Thank you to the officers for the data and their time and responses today.

4. Additional Business: Strategic Risk Assessment - To inform members of the authority's risks, and for the committee to consider any areas for further scrutiny.

Questions from members to be received by emailed and passed to the relevant officers for a response. – **ACTION**

5. Next Meeting: Tuesday 10th February 2026 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at **4.46 pm**