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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE:

Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour

About NUT Cymru:

NUT Cymru represents primary and secondary school members and is the largest teaching union in Wales and the UK. We welcome the opportunity to contribute evidence to the Children and Young People's Committee's Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour.

For ease of reference the response is divided into the headings used in the Committee's invitation.

Strategies and Support in place to address Behaviour and Attendance:

We have no evidence that trainee teachers securing placements in schools are less well prepared in terms of managing pupil behaviour than they have been in the past. While some Headteachers report that the number of outstanding trainees has decreased, the overall standard remains good and possibly somewhat improved over the last decade.

Provision for pupils educated otherwise than in school vary significantly from Authority to Authority. In the worst cases, there is a very limited number of places available in one or two centres in a rural Authority which creates transport difficulties for the pupils and where placements are often opposed by parents. This is an area which requires further investment but given the

economies of scale of a number of local authorities, such investment is extremely unlikely.

The use of exclusion also varies significantly from school to school and Authority to Authority. We do not see the differences in policy are necessarily problematic, as it is for the Governing Body to establish the overall policy and ethos of the school, and the Senior Management Team led by the Headteacher in each individual school to implement the policy and operate it on a day to day basis. This will naturally give rise to different interpretations of situations and responses that are in keeping with the school's ethos and circumstances, the merit of the case and the needs of individual pupils rather than any attempt to adhere to local or nationally established criteria.

We do not believe that the achievement of complete consistency and approach is possible and seeking to impose a rigid framework at national or LEA level would not be supported. While exclusion statistics vary significantly from school to school, behavioural problems are sometimes masked by an excessive use of temporary or fixed term exclusions rather than seeking alternatives such as a managed move or ultimately the use of a permanent exclusion. We hear of instances where pupils receive up to 10 or 11 fixed term exclusions where it is quite clear after 3 or 4 that this is a strategy that is not likely to modify the pupils' behaviour. It is also quite possible for a school with a higher number of permanent exclusions to have a lower number of days lost to exclusion than others because schools either use repeated fixed term exclusions (see above) or extend for unnecessarily long periods.

We do not believe that there is extensive evidence of illegal exclusions or of parents being forced to withdraw their pupils from school as an unofficial alternative to a permanent exclusion. There are instances where parents either do not understand or will not co-operate with managed move policies and interpret this as an ultimatum to withdraw from school.

There is too much variation in the quality of Education Welfare Services. Where these are effective, they provide good support for youngsters and families but where they are ineffective, there is no evidence from school data of improvements to exclusion or attendance rates.

Schools increasingly report, even in the foundation phase, problems with youngsters who do not have the basic age-related social and interpersonal skills that would have been taken for granted a generation ago, with increasing number of youngsters joining infant/nursery schools who cannot use basic cutlery and feed themselves, have no experience of toys or picture books and do not appear to be able to play collaboratively. This problem is exacerbated by a small but growing minority of parents who do not share the values of the school and are unwilling to support them.

Teacher training and development needs to be part of initial teacher training and further training. The question is who will provide this training? If schools are more and more responsible for training teachers then they will train them in what is right for their school but not look at the wider issues. Once teachers are in post, who should be responsible for providing further training? Should it be a statutory right to continue to receive training? Should it be a wider issue with a whole school approach through LEA's etc?

Parental engagement is vital to ensuring pupils attend school while parental awareness of children's nutritional needs is vital if teachers are not to spend their time worrying about who has had breakfast and what pupils have for lunch. Issues raised about joint agency working need to be explored for all pupils not just those with additional needs.

Support for pupils with Additional Learning Needs in respect of Behaviour and Attendance:

This again varies too much from Local Authority to Local Authority. These services often suffer from diseconomies of scale arising from the preponderance of small Local Authorities, and the drive to increase delegation to schools, has led to a number of Authorities looking to delegate behaviour support funding to individual institutions. While in some respects, this is likely to be welcomed because it places control over funding directly in the hands of the school, it also comes with a number of difficulties including determining whether the funding is allocated on a per capita flat rate or a mixture of the two. An over emphasis on per capita funding can lead to small schools to have insufficient funding to make any significant additional staffing appointments, whereas reliance on flat rate or making flat rate a significant element of the delegated funding disadvantages larger institutions who therefore can appoint relatively few staff

or purchase additional resources compared with the scale of the problems they may face. We again believe that provision here is too varied and in many authorities, under resourced.

Collaborative Working Arrangements:

It is not entirely clear what is meant by this heading. Most schools have a good working relationship with their Authority but heavily dependent on the resources available from their Authority. Relationships between schools, particularly where collaborating on managed moves is concerned, remain too variable. We also have evidence of schools, in some cases supported by their Local Authority, refusing to admit pupils with behavioural difficulties even if they live in the Authority or within the catchment area and the school has not reached its standard number in that year group. It is unacceptable for young people to be placed in limbo by schools, actively or passively supported by their Authority, declining to carry out their statutory obligations.

Joint working with agencies is also variable. There is evidence of more youngsters with learning and behavioural difficulties and some research suggests a link to foetal alcohol syndrome. The hardest pressed services seem to be Education Psychology and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS). In the case of CAHMS in particular, in some Local Authorities there is an excessive waiting list with unacceptable delays between referrals being made and pupils being seen. Support from Social Services is also an issue. Schools often complain that the feedback they get from Social Services after referrals are made is late, inadequate or non-existent. There is, however, evidence of good practice where schools hold regular multi agency meetings to share ideas and good practice in relation to the provision for individual pupils. However, the success of meetings depends entirely on the commitment of individual agencies and services to consistently send the same member or members of staff to meetings.

Relationships with the police are generally good. Police Liaison Officers are generally welcomed in schools and make a positive contribution. There is, however, evidence in some cases of a different approach being taken by the police and Youth Justice Services, with the latter sometimes seen as too reluctant to act in cases where youngsters are clearly not co-operating with plans put in place.

Concluding comments:

If we are to improve attendance at compulsory school age then the work needs to be done before pupils start school, through playgroups, crèches, Health Visitor clinics, local play workers and teachers employed by LA's to promote positive attitudes towards school and education. Home school links between schools and playgroups are essential and funding to release teachers from class needs to be identified. These home school links need to be driven by teachers and staff working with pupils in school to build relationships with parents and children.

Positive attitudes towards education from parents always results in better attendance of pupils. If parents show respect and value education then their children will too. It is very difficult for a child to develop a positive attitude to school if they are in a family where the adults do not value education. It is essential parents treat school and staff with respect and have time to learn alongside the child.

This is where the health visitor role (or similar) is vital in supporting those families and children who, whilst not "at risk" or have some form of ALN, need additional time and support.

Despite periodic stories in the press and media suggesting that pupil behaviour is poor and that teenagers are the principal cause of the "broken society", we do not believe that the majority of young people behave in a less acceptable manner than they did 10, 20, or 30 years ago. Young people in many cases show far greater concern and awareness for those in society around them both locally and globally and often become more actively involved in charity and community work than might have been the case in the latter stages of the last century. They are better able to form reasoned opinion and to express it coherently and confidently with adults and the creation of School Councils has in many respects had a beneficial effect on schools ethos and environment, as

well as making young people feel that their views are valued. However, the downside of the above is that some pupils are more read to assert what they believe to be their rights even though they do not understand them and are also prepared to assert rights that they do not have. This leads a minority, but a growing minority, to challenge teachers' authority on the basis of what they believe teachers can and cannot do.

Such problems are exacerbated by parents who increasingly support their children against the school, even when their children are clearly in the wrong and who are prepared to challenge the school's policies and authority, even though they were aware of them when they sought admission for their child to the school and in the worst cases, schools have to deal with parents who do not appear to have any significant value system at all. Disproportionate amounts of time are spent on parents who are prepared to complain when they believe that their children have been treated unfairly but who are less willing to support the school in dealing with behavioural issues when the school can demonstrate that it has acted in accordance with its own agreed procedures.

Support from Local Authorities is too variable and too susceptible to diseconomies of scale. While we would oppose vigorously any attempt to fetter schools' right to exclude pupils either temporarily or permanently, we regard it as inappropriate that schools seek to avoid their statutory obligations through the use of unofficial exclusion. However, unless there is evidence that this is a widespread practice, then it should be dealt with on a school by school basis rather than tarring all institutions with the same brush.

Schools are increasingly susceptible to broader social problems and for some children are the only oasis of order and stability in their lives. Drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and poor parenting can have a catastrophic impact on the life chances of children and significantly increase the problems schools face. Schools also report growing problems with social media where there are not only instances of dispute arising between pupils on Facebook etc. but also disputes arising between pupils and other family members or members of other families. These often spill over into school and are not easy for schools to deal with.

The review does not appear to be looking at the link between good teaching and a suitable curriculum on pupil behaviour. Both should be at the heart of effective school provision. We are concerned, however, particularly in the 14-16 cohort, that the reduction in grants to 14-19 partnerships is likely to lead to the demise of a number of collaborative courses in FE Colleges which will be too expensive for schools to sustain. Schools report that it has been possible to retain a number of pupils on roll who are in danger of exclusion because it has been possible to tailor a curriculum for them with some vocational provision at a local FE College. This will be under threat if funding is cut.

The growing emphasis on School Performance Data, including banding and the initial assessment by ESTYN prior to inspecting a school, can lead to a curriculum and a range of qualifications which are skewed to suit the institution rather than the needs of individual pupils. There is evidence of numbers of pupils in a number of schools being entered for vocational qualifications in Year 9 simply to boost the school's performance position and the emphasis on those schools' performance thresholds is likely to lead to schools targeting more of their resources at those pupils whose performance in external examinations and assessments can be pushed above such thresholds rather than those individuals who may need additional support.

Also, it may be worth mentioning the successful NUT Supporting Behaviour CPD and the popularity/ high take up of these courses, indicating an on-going need in the profession to seek support in this matter, and the importance of such courses being made widely available to teachers at all stages of their careers, not just those in ITT, Induction or Early Career Development.