

By email: [cfe.behaviour@education.gov.uk](mailto:cfe.behaviour@education.gov.uk)

## **ADCS response to the Department for Education call for evidence on behaviour management strategies, in-school units, and managed moves**

1. The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd. (ADCS) is the national leadership organisation in England for directors of children's services (DCSs) appointed under the provisions of the *Children Act (2004)*. The DCS acts as a single point of professional leadership and accountability for services for children and young people in a local area, including children's social care and education. ADCS welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department for Education's (DfE) call for evidence on behaviour management strategies, in-school units, and managed moves.
2. Schools and education settings played a vital role during the past 18 months in keeping vulnerable children and young people safe. Schools are the eyes and ears of the safeguarding system and so keeping vulnerable young people in our education system must be our priority. ADCS members believe we must strive for an inclusive education system that enables all children, whatever their ability, background or faith to realise their ambitions, providing learners with greater opportunities to learn from, and relate to, their peers.
3. However, the call for evidence appears contrary to other, welcome, messages from the DfE in responding to the pandemic. For example, the recent announcement around the extension of the role of the Virtual School Head is clear about the impact of adversity and trauma on children who have experienced complex family circumstances. Schools will already have policies in place to respond to behaviour issues but providing guidance and support to allow schools to effectively support those pupils who are coping with the effects of a year of disruption and uncertainty would be of far greater value. The pandemic and ensuing lockdowns will likely have exacerbated ongoing issues that existed prior to the first lockdown, such as rising child poverty and disadvantage, increased domestic violence and reductions in children's mental and emotional health and wellbeing. It is these vital issues that we should be focussing our collective attention on.
4. ADCS is concerned that the growth of 'zero tolerance' behaviour policies in schools and an emphasis on 'expulsions' does not serve these children and young people well. However, in the context of reduced funding and an accountability system that prioritises academic attainment, the stakes are high for school leaders who wish to adopt inclusive approaches. ADCS members agree that it is important we have high expectations and aspirations for our children, but this is also wholly consistent with adopting inclusive practices and compassion in schools. It would be welcome if DfE were to share examples and best practice of where schools have successfully adopted inclusive approaches that have driven down the number of exclusions, such as 'poverty-proofing' the school day. ADCS is concerned that a focus on the disruption caused by mobile phones in schools detracts from the more pressing issues that students will face in the coming academic year and beyond.

**The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd**

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5. According to DfE figures, the number of fixed-term exclusions across all state-funded schools increased from 410,800 in 2017/18 to 438,265 in 2018/19, while the rate of permanent exclusions remained the same. However, the overall number of permanent exclusions in 2018/19 (7,894) is a significant increase from 2014/15 where 5,795 children were permanently excluded. Exclusion has historically been reserved for only the most serious acts of misbehaviour, however, persistent disruptive behaviour is currently the most common reason for permanent exclusions in all state funded schools (likewise for fixed-term exclusions). Children who are aged 14 are more likely to receive a permanent or fixed-term exclusion, as are those eligible for free school meals or those who have a special educational need; this is very concerning. ADCS would welcome a re-visiting of the Timpson review of school exclusions in order to implement some of the recommendations made two years ago.
6. Alternative Provision (AP) offers a valuable alternative to mainstream schooling for children and young people who, for a variety of reasons, find it difficult to access a full-time timetable or the national curriculum as well as those who have been excluded from school. For some, AP is the right place to be, however, AP should be used as an intervention to stabilise poor behaviour, understand suddenly emerging complex needs or to provide additional help and support in times of crisis. In-house AP maintains the learner's sense of connectivity with the school community. It should not routinely be considered as a destination in itself. The best AP units enable learners to stay for short periods during which the demands of a fulltime timetable are too great e.g. during family breakdown.
7. Education recovery remains a key priority for schools and education leaders. As the call for evidence document acknowledges, some children will have had a more challenging time during national or local lockdowns than others and this may mean they present more challenging behaviour when returning to their education setting. It is important that our collective focus remains on how we support these children through an ambitious package of recovery that prioritises mental health and wellbeing and not just academic attainment. The past year has highlighted the impact time away from school can have on a child's educational progress and we have rightly ensured that those learners who need our support the most have remained in schools where possible. ADCS would therefore welcome a greater focus on providing the right support for these children and young people
8. ADCS would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the points raised in this response in further detail. Please contact [matt.cunningham@adcs.org.uk](mailto:matt.cunningham@adcs.org.uk) to arrange.