The 2021 Appreciative Inquiry into Inclusion Practice in BCP Schools
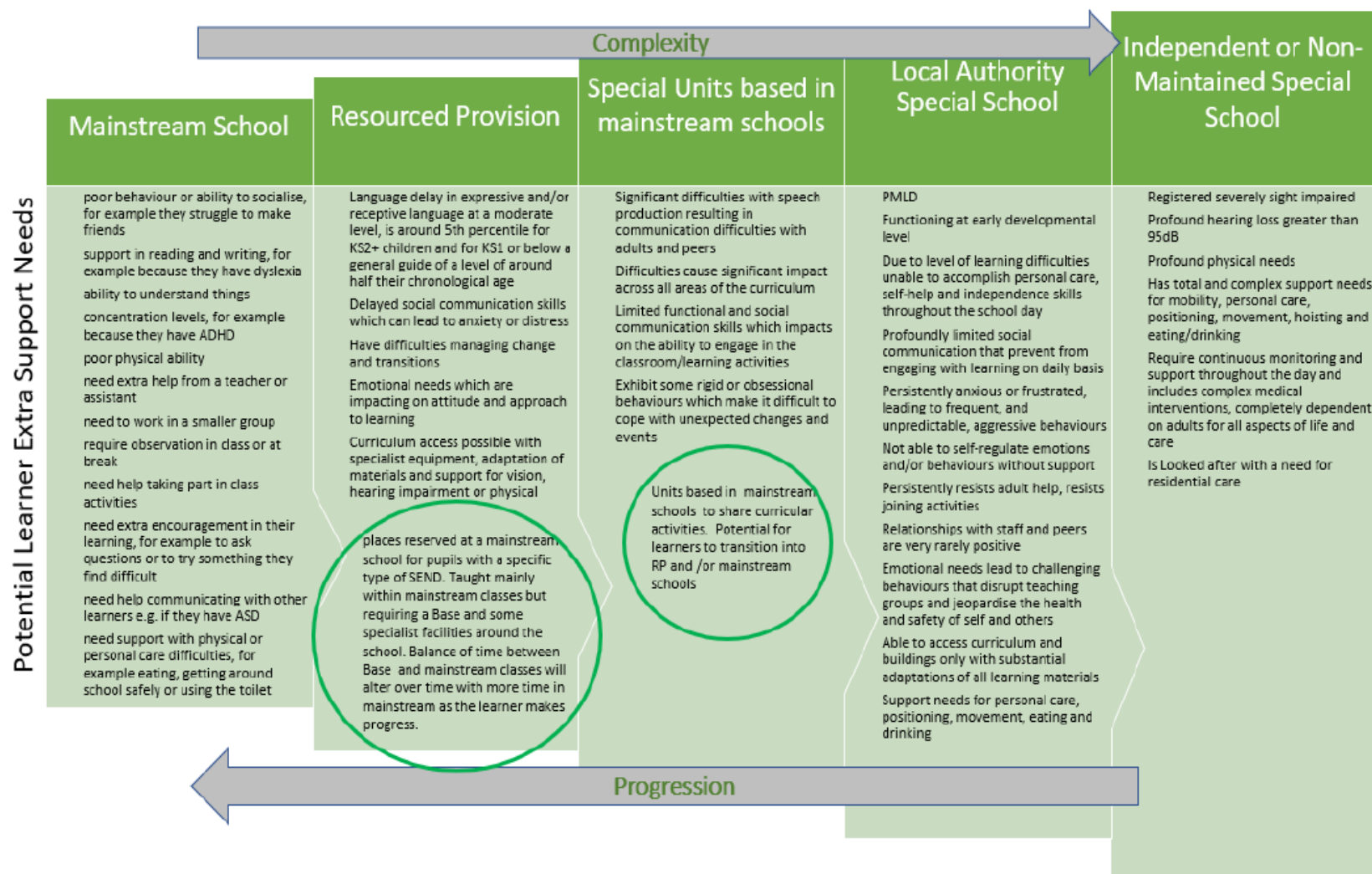
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1. Executive summary

1. BCP needs a vision, a strategy and a 5-year plan for education, including a statement of intent which gives **inclusion practice** equal status with academic results and with keeping children and young people safe in education. We have concentrated on inclusion yet that is only one part of a comprehensive education strategy. At present, the sum of the parts in BCP is much greater than the sum of the whole. Inclusion practice should be a priority for the whole Education community in BCP, not just for a small number of willing schools. Collegiate and collaborative leadership across the sector will be the only way to forge a consensus about how to transform local provision to become more inclusive and ambitious for all children. Such a transformation and culture change will take up to 5 years, so there is no time to lose. A mechanism needs to be established for the entire BCP schools and college network to work together at a leadership level effectively to realise the transformative power of education for all children and young people in BCP.

2. Delivery of an education plan such as the one we propose will need perseverance and determination within a high-trust framework and using a multi-agency improvement plan – all agencies have a stake in getting this right. This may be the last chance to restore the level of trust and confidence needed between all of the relevant agencies. Speed and momentum are crucial if leadership of the sector is to become collaborative with BCP Council and all Academy Trusts having equal status and a shared stake in what happens. School leaders and system leaders should build a learning culture based on 'unconditional positive regard'. As a CEO of one multi-academy trust said, "We need to build an outstanding universal service". The Inquiry found this is an achievable goal if the pre-conditions for inclusion and ambitious outcomes are put in place.

3. Innovative strategies like collaborative commissioning and resource pooling are needed to make best use of scarce resources and to enable the system to deliver the policy imperative of educating more children with special needs in mainstream schools. This is the only sustainable resourcing strategy for the education community. The world of education is changing fast. As one Head Teacher said about BCP, "We're not in Kansas anymore".

Meeting Future Demand: The Provision Required

Peopletoo
it works better with you

Complexity →

← Progression

Potential Learner Extra Support Needs

Mainstream School	Resourced Provision	Special Units based in mainstream schools	Local Authority Special School	Independent or Non-Maintained Special School
poor behaviour or ability to socialise, for example they struggle to make friends	Language delay in expressive and/or receptive language at a moderate level, is around 5th percentile for KS2+ children and for KS1 or below a general guide of a level of around half their chronological age	Significant difficulties with speech production resulting in communication difficulties with adults and peers	PMLD	Registered severely sight impaired
support in reading and writing, for example because they have dyslexia	Delayed social communication skills which can lead to anxiety or distress	Difficulties cause significant impact across all areas of the curriculum	Functioning at early developmental level	Profound hearing loss greater than 95dB
ability to understand things	Have difficulties managing change and transitions	Limited functional and social communication skills which impacts on the ability to engage in the classroom/learning activities	Due to level of learning difficulties unable to accomplish personal care, self-help and independence skills throughout the school day	Profound physical needs
concentration levels, for example because they have ADHD	Emotional needs which are impacting on attitude and approach to learning	Exhibit some rigid or obsessional behaviours which make it difficult to cope with unexpected changes and events	Profoundly limited social communication that prevent from engaging with learning on daily basis	Has total and complex support needs for mobility, personal care, positioning, movement, hoisting and eating/drinking
poor physical ability	Curriculum access possible with specialist equipment, adaptation of materials and support for vision, hearing impairment or physical	Units based in mainstream schools to share curricular activities. Potential for learners to transition into RP and /or mainstream schools	Persistently anxious or frustrated, leading to frequent, and unpredictable, aggressive behaviours	Require continuous monitoring and support throughout the day and includes complex medical interventions, completely dependent on adults for all aspects of life and care
need extra help from a teacher or assistant	places reserved at a mainstream school for pupils with a specific type of SEND. Taught mainly within mainstream classes but requiring a Base and some specialist facilities around the school. Balance of time between Base and mainstream classes will alter over time with more time in mainstream as the learner makes progress.		Not able to self-regulate emotions and/or behaviours without support	Is Looked after with a need for residential care
need to work in a smaller group			Persistently resists adult help, resists joining activities	
require observation in class or at break			Relationships with staff and peers are very rarely positive	
need help taking part in class activities			Emotional needs lead to challenging behaviours that disrupt teaching groups and jeopardise the health and safety of self and others	
need extra encouragement in their learning, for example to ask questions or to try something they find difficult			Able to access curriculum and buildings only with substantial adaptations of all learning materials	
need help communicating with other learners e.g. if they have ASD			Support needs for personal care, positioning, movement, eating and drinking	
need support with physical or personal care difficulties, for example eating, getting around school safely or using the toilet				

- Increase the number of Resource Bases
- Convert the Satellite provision into Resource Bases or SEN Units
- Reduce the overuse of Maintained Special Schools with learners with less complex needs and place them in Resource provision
- Focus the maintained special schools on pupils with the most complex needs
- Increase the number of placements appropriate for SEND learners in the general post 16 provision

2. Setting the scene

4. Inclusion is every school's business. Our Inquiry starts with 3 positive examples. The first is about how a selective school transformed the life of a boy and his family. The second is about how a primary school continued to support a boy with special needs at a desperately difficult time in his life. The third highlights quotes from parents about how a resource base in a mainstream primary school made a positive difference. The examples show that mainstream schools can look after children with the most complex needs and challenging behaviour. Sadly, not every school is committed enough to <u>all</u> children to do this.

5. In terms of inclusion, our Inquiry found that schools can be divided into the following 4 categories in terms of inclusive practice:

    - Those who are able and willing
    - Those who are unable yet willing
    - Those who are able yet unwilling
    - Those who are unable and unwilling

A vision and strategy for education in BCP should have 'able and willing' inclusion practice at its heart.

> Alli suffered childhood trauma which left her unable to learn. She went in and out of care. By the time she got to secondary school, she had profound unmet needs. The school provided her with care and support, operating as a therapeutic day service as well as a school. Other agencies rebuffed the school when they requested their involvement and intervention. They feel that agencies failed to appreciate Alli's level of difficulty, especially that 'every day matters' to a child like Alli living in a state of constant fear at home. Professionals took weeks and sometimes months to respond, minimising Alli's complex and painful daily struggle. Alli became more disengaged and made suicide attempts. She also showed more than enough challenging behaviour to have been excluded but the school took the view that the more she challenged them, the more they should identify creative ways to help her. So they bought her a guinea pig – Alli loved animals. They reached out to her when she suffered more abuse and neglect at home, when she started sleeping in parks and when she was at a great risk of being exploited because she was wandering the streets looking for positive affirmation. The Deputy Head said, "this girl broke our hearts in so many ways". They fed her, bought her uniform and bought her presents to give to her brothers and sisters on their birthdays. The school had created a small unit for children who were struggling and in Year 10, Alli started to go in there to support Year 7s. She started to mentor and buddy younger children on the edge of disengagement. Through all this, she clung onto her education, just. The school stayed with her and alongside her through 5 tough years. She is now at College studying animal husbandry which is her dream career given her love of animals. The school concluded that individual children can change services systemically through being understood. Some of the strongest inclusion practice takes place in small and intensively supported units in mainstream schools.

Karim passed a local selective school's entrance exam in Year 6 at his primary school. However, just before the end of his last term at school, he was diagnosed with a brain tumour. He lost part of his vision and experienced hearing loss. Due to brain injury, he was set back to approximately the Year 4 level and was not selective-school-ready. Despite this setback, he started at the selective school. They supported him throughout his school career, including during and after 6 relapses and periods of sickness and stress. When he was in Year 11, he could only manage to take GCSE Design and Technology. This was his favourite subject. He then stayed onto Year 12 and worked on his Mathematics and English Language GCSEs. With one-to-one teaching and the support of a dedicated team of teaching assistants, he achieved good passes in 3 GCSEs. He hopes to go to college in September to take a photography course. He and his family were delighted with his progress and the commitment of his school to stay with him through such pain and recurring difficulties.

Ross started at his 3rd school placement in Sept 2020, in Year 2.

His new school welcomed him and were proactive in contacting his previous schools for information on how to support him, as well as any triggers to avoid. Ross had a high level of support at his previous school, which was possible during lockdown with lower numbers in school.

His new school allocated an adult to him. His behaviours were extreme. He invaded bubbles, smeared faeces on walls, ran out of the building, scaled fences, including into the school perimeter and a pond area, jumped on staff cars and climbed onto sheds, ripping the felt off.

In mid-October Ross was excluded for 2½ days, a decision the school found hard to take. He returned on a 2 afternoon a week timetable. The school ensured he had his own space and the same consistent adult to support him during this time. Challenging behaviour and non-engagement continued. The school persisted. Weekly meetings were held between professionals to discuss strategies. A BCP outreach service said they had no further advice or support to offer and that the school were doing all they could to support Ross.

The school wrote an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), which was difficult to complete as Ross was only with them twice a week and he was not engaging in any academic work.

Ross was moved out of the local area as his foster carer gave notice and nowhere locally could be found for him. The school continued to keep his place open for him and were willing to have him back when he returned.

He has now returned to school 2 afternoons a week and the length of the sessions has increased. He has been down to his classroom to visit his teacher. Weekly professional meetings continue, with the school liaising with a life mentor to ensure Ross has consistent messages. All are working together to support his needs whilst beginning to introduce academic targets for the first time.

During Ross's time at school, they have continued to focus on his positives, and on small steps, seeing him as a child who has a lot to offer but who is currently unable to access learning. His school remains positive and wishes to support Ross in his internal battle to become more stable.

> **Impact on Parents and Carers of feeling included in a BCP School**
>
> "I didn't think my son would be able to sit his SATs, but he has done so well because of the support given in the Primary Resource Base."
>
> "I just wanted to email and say thank you so much for everything you have done so far for (my child). We have never felt included in anything before and no-one's ever really asked questions about him. His birthday card from everyone was so lovely and thoughtful!"
>
> "I feel like I'm going to manage this whole process much better than I thought because the support and consideration you have already shown has given me confidence."
>
> "My son's confidence in reading has grown so much since joining the Primary Resource Base. He now reads to his brothers, which has never happened before."
>
> "I cannot believe the support I have been given from the staff. They have helped me with new strategies to help him become more independent!"
>
> "I really thought that he would have to go to a special school, but the Primary Resource Base has helped him to regulate his behaviour and now he is focusing for longer to do his work."

3. Methodology

6. Our Inquiry took written submissions in response to our letter inviting participation. The letter can be viewed at the end of our report at Appendix 1. The main evidence to the Inquiry was drawn from structured conversations with school leaders from all types of school across BCP. These were mostly Head Teachers and SENCOs. Discussions were also held with a number of council officers. The limitation of this methodology was that only a small number of conversations were held with children, young people, their families and other agencies. Schools, like any other single agency, do not always know what is best for children. When a child has complex needs, a team around that child consisting of many professionals and family members is needed to understand and plan well for that child.

7. Early years services were out of scope. This would have been another important dimension to include had time allowed. For example, some young children need specific equipment in order to access a pre-school or nursery which is not readily available and more strategic joint-funding partnerships with Health need to be established. We encourage the Director of Children's Services to satisfy herself that inclusion practice in early years provision is in line with the best practice we showcase in our Inquiry (**Recommendation 1**).

8. Similarly, we did not inquire deeply into special schools, for two reasons. Firstly, they are rated good or outstanding, they are popular, and we heard no significant concerns or criticism about them. Secondly, our focus quickly moved to what we thought was the main issue at stake – how to educate children with special needs safely and positively in mainstream schools – the SEND offer. Our time was taken up with how to achieve this.

9. We have deliberately not mentioned individuals or schools by name. We came to the view early on in our Inquiry that as the culture in BCP is so competitive, it would fuel competition to say x is good and y is poor or that x is better than y. An open transparent culture more able to acknowledge shortfalls and less keen to blame others needs to be driven through by stronger sector-wide leadership over the next few years.

10. We also decided against suggesting there is best practice outside of BCP. There is of course. No local area can claim exclusive expertise. However, we wanted to maintain a focus inside BCP, both about what is happening and what needs to happen next. We wanted this to be done without creating any sense that inclusion is handled better somewhere else. Inclusion practice in BCP is as good in pockets as it is anywhere else, and this is a platform to build on.

4. The challenge

11. We found almost complete agreement that the only sustainable resourcing strategy for the future is to reduce the use of independent and non-maintained schools for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and for those who show complex and challenging behaviour. We think this can only be achieved by limiting the capacity of special school places to the existing level of provision; by increasing the quantum of alternative provision (AP); and by increasing the ability of mainstream schools to educate children with special needs and challenging behaviour up to a much higher threshold before the need for a special school place or AP is unavoidable or where it is clearly in the child's best interests.

12. In truth, this has been the policy objective of BCP Council since it was established in April 2019, but it has never been set out as a vision, as a strategy or with a plan. The only strategic dialogue with the sector seems to have been discussion in the Schools Forum about increasing the percentage of Government Grant going into the High Needs Block to manage both demand and the deficit. This percentage has remained at the 0.5% agreeable locally. It has not gone higher given the need for the Secretary of State's agreement which it has been assumed – probably correctly - would not be forthcoming.

13. Despite the difficulties associated with this strategy, the only option is to accelerate progress towards its delivery. In our view, this can only be done by all education providers working collaboratively and inexorably towards this policy objective. This will not be easy – see below.

This year we have supported 3 children who cannot access the classroom – we have had to fight from day one to get the EHCPs. Funding does not go beyond band B. We have requested support and we still get nowhere. BCP has no behaviour service for schools to access. There are no youth workers who can come and AP is being used as a sticking plaster. Exclusion will only be reduced if BCP works with schools and families and supports them with the right provision, funding and access to training.

This year we have had 8 children in one cohort with EHCPs. All but 2 were significantly delayed. Funding doesn't cover the support in place. 5 of these children need to go to special schools. Funding is not adapted to recognise this or to help the school. The BCP team should be going over and above to ensure these children get the provision they need until they move to the specialist setting.

14. The absence in BCP of a vision, a strategy and a long-term plan for education is constraining the ability of system leaders to work together across BCP with a common purpose. As a result, despite many examples of outstanding inclusion practice, the sum of the parts is greater than the sum of the whole. The pre-conditions for good to outstanding inclusion practice are not in place. As a result, performance on inclusion lags behind teaching outcomes and results whereas they should be part of the same strategy and practice. A coherent vision and strategic plan for an outstanding and universal education service in BCP would attract support from all education providers. The plan should emphasise educational quality and the creation of effective learning environments for all children (**Recommendation 2**).

15. Too many schools avoid taking responsibility for inclusion. This means children with additional needs are nudged towards certain schools who are seen to be 'inclusive'. Children report being told, "You're not going to get on very well here" as opposed to the opposite message if they have high scores - "*if you want to go a school that is outstanding, come here"*. This takes us back to the days when teams were picked according to perceived merit in the school playground. A more inclusive model of selection is needed.

16. Parents are sometimes manipulated to go to certain schools by other schools who game the system with tactics such as 'capping practice' in order to minimise the number of students with additional needs they take. Capping is a crude attempt to outwit and circumvent the statutory admissions code and leads to 'selection by stealth'.

17. The voices of children, young people and their families are close to being absent in the entire process. They should be given space on centre-stage. Periodic skirmishes between schools and the local authority must give way to a collaborative culture which gives more space to children and families to influence policy and practice (**Recommendation 3**).

18. Front line agencies like the Council, the NHS and the police should put in place a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) within their organisations for all providers, in order to restore the trust and confidence that has been put on hold by schools because of confused pathways or an excessive churn of staff which has meant that accessing support has become either too hard or impossible. All front-line agencies need to be more agile and responsive to

children with complex needs and challenging behaviour and to work together with schools and the College less bureaucratically and more pro-actively (**Recommendation 4**).

19. With dynamic collegiate leadership, inclusion outcomes could be transformed within 2-3 years. The case for change is compelling. Paradoxically, the pandemic has helped by demanding and generating a higher level of co-operation amongst education providers. Some schools have the best attendance levels ever, including the attendance of vulnerable children and young people. There is much to build on. Most children and young people in BCP go to good or outstanding schools and most disadvantaged children go to improving schools. If the joined-up approach across and between schools, settings and council teams was equally impressive, then exclusions would virtually disappear.

20. The biggest challenge is resources. Demand, need, complexity, rights and expectations are all increasing. Budgets in all agencies are under severe pressure. Government allocations are insufficient to meet new demand, hence agencies have to find ways of working smarter or managing demand down within the resources available. This too often means reducing the resources for early intervention and prioritising the needs of the most complex – and the most expensive – children and young people. Inevitably delays in the provision of services result. Two parents described the impact of delay on them.

> Parents called a review for their child who had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). His diagnosis was Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This was in November 2020. Paperwork was sent to the SEN team. It took 2 months for an Educational Psychologist to contact them. The parents and school found the assessment to be spot on but when it went back to the SEN panel, the school were asked to submit additional information before a decision could be taken. This extra information included more behaviour logs which the parents and school thought was unnecessary as they had submitted many months of logs already. In May 2021, a decision on future provision was still to be taken. The parents and the school remain convinced that the delay is a disguised attempt to manage resources and demand rather than the system acting in the child's best interests. As a result, the parents and the school have lost confidence in the integrity of the system.

21. The resources challenge is another factor in inclusion policy and practice. Resources need to be pooled wherever possible to go further. Where value for money can be shown in one part of the sector, the rest of the sector needs to learn from it. Economies of scale can only be understood and realised if all spend across a system is transparent. A move to collaborative resourcing is the only way of maximising value for money (**Recommendation 5**).

5. Lived experiences

22. The lived experiences of all concerned in the education system are as variable as you would expect with around fifty thousand children and several thousand professionals involved. However, lived experiences and the pupil voice are given scant recognition. They should be understood and built into policy and quality assurance across the education system in BCP. Some examples below illustrate why and they shape our sixth recommendation (**Recommendation 6**).

Example 1: "*We don't have bullying at our school. If it was to happen the teachers would take this very seriously and there would be serious consequences. Even if the bully has something going on in their life, it is not acceptable to take this out on others. Both the bully and the victim would be supported by our teachers and the Head*."

Example 2: "*She feels that the teacher makes fun of her when she feels short of breath when she has an asthma attack as well as ignoring her complaint that she felt too cold in an outdoor activity. It was 2 degrees C and she had forgotten her sweater. When I went to get her, she was pale with pain in her body and crying a lot. Not being used to the cold, it was a torture session. I don't understand the purpose of this methodology.*"

Example 3: "*I followed Policy during the School enrolment process and spoke to the Medical Administrator in June. Over the following weeks I couldn't understand why myself and the Epilepsy Specialist Nurse were not getting anywhere with school and the plan that was needed for Kris. We got lots of vague reassurance that there was always 'lots of adults around' and 'always a first aider' near him. School advised that no staff would be undertaking the highly recommended Epilepsy Awareness Course because there was no training budget available. Having an emergency mobile phone with him at all times was also advised to be against Policy.*

Whilst Kris' school had some experience with some types of Epilepsy, they did not have an understanding of Focal Seizures and continued to refer to Absence Seizures for quite some months. As a parent who understands these present very differently, I had no faith that Kris' school were able to take care of my son and therefore he did not start school as expected.

I was put in touch with the Senior Inclusion Officer at Children's Services by my Local Councillor. It was soon realised that Epilepsy was not included in the school's Medical Conditions Policy, nor was it in the First Aid Policy. The Senior Inclusion Officer got the right people together. We were advised by the school management team that the Medical Conditions and the First Aid Policy were now being updated to include Epilepsy. The staff who would see Kris daily, including lunchtimes, would now receive Epilepsy Awareness Training. The mobile phone policy was again challenged and Kris' potential need for immediate medical assistance was deemed to justify an exception to the current policy and a phone was purchased.

Now Kris has a new teacher there is a huge change in him. He's now extremely keen to learn, and doesn't want to leave school for the weekends."

Example 4: "What's helping me is the shorter, smaller concise lessons in smaller groups. The school now supports my needs."

Example 5: "It's been good. I trust the teachers."

Example 6: One parent said of their junior school - 'They helped me to see the problem from my child's perspective.'

Example 7: A group of children comment

- School finds my behaviour hard to manage
- I'm on a part-time timetable
- I might get permanently excluded because of my behaviour
- I can't go to school because I'm so anxious
- I'm being electively home educated and it's going really well
- My attendance at school is really low
- I'm being electively home educated but it's not working
- I care for my dad at home
- My Mum doesn't know how to help me manage my behaviour
- I go to an alternative provider but I'm ready to try mainstream again now
- School doesn't work for me so I'm not going
- I'm nervous about my new school – I haven't been at school for ages

23. Few children on the edge of exclusion have their story collated, understood and used as the basis for future planning in conjunction with the child's family. Helping a child to tell their own story should be the starting point for an inclusive intervention. The lack of structured preventative work with a child can lead the child to lose faith in the school and to distrust school leaders.

24. Colleges, with their proportionately larger cohorts, may understand children even less. As one Principal said, "Often colleges have a limited understanding of disability and expect our young people with SEND to 'fit in' to existing systems. Cases reach crisis point before staff are aware that a young person is struggling. This is usually related to emotional well-being or mental health issues or when young people are unable to attain the standards necessary to complete their course". On the other hand, the College's bespoke provisions with alternative providers like Thrive and Onwards and Upwards are person-centred services and are tailor-made around the needs of the young person. We think that the need for alternative provision could be reduced if the colleges were more able to recognise and respond to the needs of SEN young people at an earlier stage. This points to the need for a far more joined-up transition pathway and service.

Example 6: PB's Story: the impact on his family

PB's family say his additional needs were under-recognised by services since he was 2 years old. They feel a response of 'we'll keep an eye on him' meant he did not receive the services he needed at an early age. By 4 his behaviour was increasingly and severely challenging, including violence, inflexible thinking, ritualistic behaviour and difficulties in sensory processing. The family were told nothing could be done without a diagnosis. They were told that 'you'll have to battle first'.

The family say the school took a Year Zero approach rather than practising co-production with the family. When Mum advised that he would need one to one support she was told by the school 'we don't provide that kind of support here'. By now, PB was in reception and there were incidents on most days of him attacking other children and damaging his immediate environment. Some other children were terrified of him. The family asked for risk assessments to be carried out but they weren't. They say referrals were of a poor quality and that no attempt was made to give PB a school plan so that all who came into contact with him knew what they should do and what they shouldn't do in order to minimise his difficulties and the adverse repercussions on others. Consequently, he has been excluded from school numerous times although he is not yet 5.

The family say some individuals gave them strong support, like SENDIASS and a specialist nurse, but that their experience is of a few brilliant individuals working within a 'shocking system'.

Finally, an outreach worker from a special school came to see him and recognised his needs, reinforcing that he should carry his sensory bag around with him to help him regulate his emotions. She reinforced that he needed an EHCP which is now due to be arranged.

25. These examples show the importance of understanding lived experience by making efforts to understand the meaning of a child's behaviour and their needs, however complex those needs might be. Inclusive practice takes time. It is a statutory responsibility. It is also a moral purpose of educators.

6. The context

26. An important context to bear in mind is that nationally about 0.1% of children and young people at school are permanently excluded, so 'one in a thousand' – although 2.4% receive one or more suspensions (last published figures in 2018/19). The infographic below is in the form of a dashboard about the lives of children and young people living in BCP.

If the BCP area had 100 children

51 would be male
49 would be female

92 - 95 would be attending schools or early years providers that are rated as good or outstanding

75 would go on to higher education

51 would achieve a strong pass in GCSE English and Maths (grades 5-9)

24 would have experienced some form of bullying in the last 6 of months

15 would have a special education need or disability, 3 of them have an Education, Health and Care Plan

11 would live in poverty

11 would be regularly absent from education

8 would have a mental health problem

5 would not be in any form of employment or training at age 16

1 would be in care or have a child protection plan

1 would receive targeted Early Help Family Support

1 would be a young carer

1 would be living with parents where domestic abuse, substance misuse or mental health concerns impact their daily lives

1 would get into trouble and need support from the youth justice service

27. Difficulties at school usually correlate with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The first question a school should ask when a child starts to attract concern is 'what has happened to her or him?' (see below)
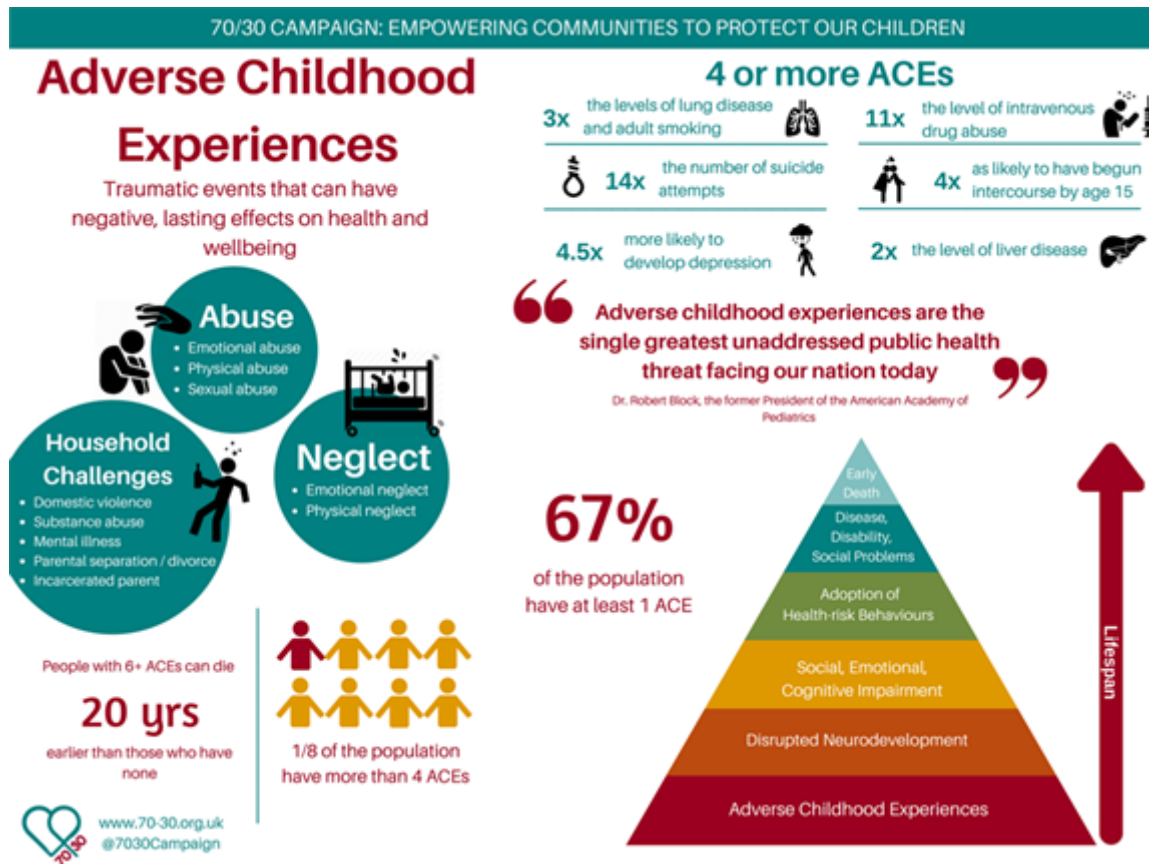
28. The next context to be aware of is the correlation between difficulties in school and social and economic disadvantage. This is neither an automatic nor is it a universal link because poverty and problems in school do not always go hand-in-hand. However, poverty and deprivation are ACEs and make it harder for many children to participate in learning (see below):

THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

DRIVERS OF GENERATIONAL POVERTY AND MATERIAL DEPRIVATION

What are the biggest childhood predictors of poverty?

1) Low educational attainment

2) Growing up in a workless household

What are the biggest childhood predictors of future material deprivation?

1) Low educational attainment

2) Growing up in a single parent household

3) Growing up in a household with 4 or more children

4) Parental unemployment

So what are the biggest childhood predictors of low educational attainment?

1) Father's level of education

2) Mother's level of education

3) Growing up in a household with 4 or more children

4) Growing up in a household with 3 or more adults

5) Growing up in a single parent household

6) Growing up in a household with 3 or more children
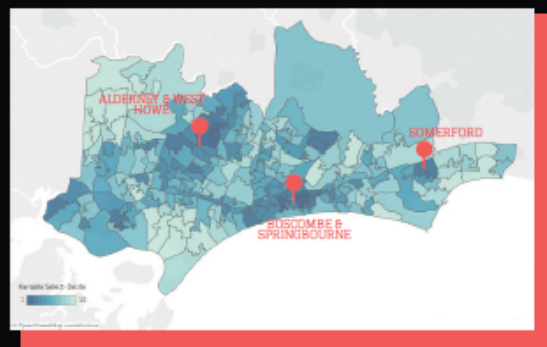
Deprivation in BCP
(Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2015)

Taken from "Intergenerational transmission of disadvantage in the UK & EU", Office for National Statistics, 2014

Covid

29. Finally, the impact of the Covid pandemic on the local education system cannot be under-estimated. Helping children to recover and restore their learning trajectory is likely to be a continuing challenge in the next few years. (See below for a summary of the inclusion-related impacts, to go alongside the academic impacts).

COVID implications

There is a hidden impact for children on the affects of COVID:

- ❑ More children have started to self harm
- ❑ Children are deeply anxious
- ❑ Increase in children having panic attacks
- ❑ Children losing motivation for the future
- ❑ 67% children have said the lockdowns have had a negative impact on their mental health

"All of my work is overshadowed by the outside world and whether any of it matters anymore. I see no future."

"The first few lockdowns, whilst emotionally taxing and anxiety inducing, felt time-limited with a taste of freedom to look forward at the end. This one feels unrelenting, time moves slowly and nothing captures my attention/interest. I amrelying on binge eating and alcohol a lot more this time."

30. These impacts on children are because of the wider impacts of the pandemic. In BCP, schools stayed open and the majority of their staff stayed on site. Attendance in BCP schools for many vulnerable children was good. The impacts on children were not all negative. Many children loved being in year group bubbles and it created mini-schools for some pupils in transition. This huge variation in lived experience is illustrated by a BCP Equality and Impact assessment in the summer of 2020 carried out during the Covid pandemic, found the following:
    - Just under half of those surveyed said that their views were fully included when their child's support was planned. More than half said they weren't;
    - Just under half said their child had achieved the outcomes set out in their support plan;
    - 38% said the support their child had received over the previous year has made their life worse

Findings using the POET tool (Personal Outcome Evaluation Feedback tool), Summer 2020

7. The current situation

31. Demand for inclusion services is steadily rising, a trend intensified as a result of the Covid pandemic. Some schools are over-subscribed. Others have falling rolls, more due to parental choice than demographic trends. Special schools are full and mainstream schools are often stretched to the limit, especially those who are more open to taking children with complex needs and challenging behaviour.

32. Many schools and the College have continued to expand their pastoral care and special needs services which is enabling higher levels of inclusion. Schools buy in their own extra support if statutory services cannot assess or intervene in time. This includes emotional literacy support assistants (ELSAs), educational psychology advice, play therapy, art therapy, music therapy and Occupational Therapy support. This is easier for multi-academy trusts as they have a larger combined budget and infrastructure. Some are self-contained educational eco-systems.

33. The lack of resources in the community for children needing an inclusion service is always limited by agencies who are facing either a short-term crisis, a longer-term crisis or both. The shortage of SEN caseworkers in BCP council, community paediatricians and CAMHS means that the team around the child is often incomplete and the professionals and the skill sets needed to make a difference to that child are just not there when they're most needed.

34. A worrying trend is that many Tier 1 prevention services are looking after children with Tier 2 or even Tier 3 (much more severe) needs, because of the absence or shortfall of services at lower tier levels. Schools often fill the gap. "Saying a school is just a school is like saying Amazon is just a book company" said one Head Teacher. Another head said his school has become like a 'mini-NHS'. A third said, "schools are becoming a mixed bag of social care, counselling, housing and mediation which ultimately squeezes on capacity in all areas". Some schools provide services to their local community such as food banks. Schools have always been rooted in their local communities and this is becoming even more important as other caring professions are less visible on the ground.

35. Another important context is Local Government Re-organisation (LGR). In the 2 years since BCP formed, it has not been able to deliver the economies of scale including greater quality that was a main objective of the merger. The well-catalogued difficulties BCP has faced are common to all new merged organisations, yet the length of time it is taking to deliver meaningful change has dismayed partner agencies who look to BCP for leadership and for a range of skills such as brokering the support they need. BCP now needs to quickly win the confidence of agencies on the ground. As one Head Teacher said, "a burning platform means you have got to do something about it". Constant change is of course a fact of life. The development of the new Integrated Care System (ICS) covering all aspects of the health service in Dorset is a new transition underway which will inevitably present new challenges even before existing challenges have been met and overcome. Restructuring often weakens inclusion services as they are often seen to be preventative services which can be cut, unlike statutory services. Cuts to the BCP Council Early Help Service in 2020 are an example of this.

36. BCP's academic results continue to out-perform the national average on nearly all measures. That in itself makes a tremendous contribution to inclusion, as many children and young people have the choice of better futures because of better results. For example, children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), as well as children with no identified need, attain and progress better than their peers throughout England.

37. However, BCP also has more school exclusions than the national average, more young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), and a higher use of external specialist provision which is extremely costly. These are all indicators of the systemic as well as the economic need for a greater level of inclusion within BCP schools and communities. BCP sends a 'vulnerable list' to schools twice a month. These are children who are either open to children's social care, open to early Help, have an EHCP (see below for the definition) or an assessment in the pipeline or who are young carers. 6,412 0–25-year-olds were on that list in May 2021. This approximates to 5% of the 0-25 population. Scaled up for the 51,751 children in schools suggests that any one time there are around 3800 vulnerable children in BCP schools at any one time. Many of those children will have been subject to adverse childhood experiences, sometimes with lifetime consequences.

38. An even distribution of those children and young people would mean each school in BCP would take 40 vulnerable children. Of course, vulnerable children are not evenly spaced out geographically and they tend to live in clusters in areas of higher socio-economic need. However, even allowing for geography and a matching process, a number of individual schools could and should show much more commitment to the most vulnerable children, including children with SEND, not just those on EHCPs: children in care, children subject to child protection plans and children at risk of being exploited.

What is an EHCP?

IPSEA
Independent Provider of Special Education Advice

An Education, Health and Care plan ("EHC plan") is a legal document which describes a child or young person's special educational needs, the support they need, and the outcomes they would like to achieve.

The special educational provision described in an EHC plan **must** be provided by the child or young person's local authority.

This means an EHC plan can give a child or young person extra educational support. It can also give parents and young people more choice about which school or other setting the child or young person can attend.

An EHC plan can only be issued after a child or young person has gone through the process of an Education, Health and Care needs assessment.

BCP Council

Claire O'Brien June 2021

Dorset and Hampshire schools

39. A small number of schools in Dorset and Hampshire, close to the conurbation's borders, are educating a significant number of BCP children and young people in their schools. BCP children are disproportionately subject to suspensions compared to Dorset and Hampshire children in those schools. A secondary school in Hampshire made the following suggestions to us which we print in full in the interests of transparency.

- Strengthening of processes to prevent frequent systemic off-rolling of low-achieving children ahead of commencing Year 11, presumably with the motive of manipulating performance data;
- Working sympathetically with parents who feel their children are being bullied rather than refusing to acknowledge reasonable concerns and treating them as troublesome;
- Addressing the culture prevalent in certain BCP schools whereby it is seemingly acceptable to coerce parents and carers to electively home educate children to circumvent proper processes in relation to permanent exclusion;
- All schools engaging equitably with managed move protocols;
- Challenging all governing bodies and academies to work collaboratively and with integrity in relation to in-year and fair access admissions;
- Recognising school leaders who act with conspicuous professionalism placing the needs of vulnerable children ahead of personal or institutional reputation;
- Making full and proper transfer of comprehensive educational records in a timely manner to ensure continuity of welfare and academic progress.

40. Whilst these comments come from outside BCP, they echo comments made by many we spoke to inside BCP.

8. Inclusive practice

A BCP-wide inclusion standard (suggested from within the sector)

Outreach	Whole class reading	Nurture groups	Special provision within Mainstream
Visuals for all	Carefully thought out individual timetable	Team working	PACE
Adapting room for a child's physical needs	Signalong	Safe spaces	Co-production
BOOST	ELSA	Speech language & communication – ELKLAN resource	Reasonable adjustments for SEMH
Provide easy read documents	PEIC-D	Adoption of whole class delivery (ie gap fill rather than expecting students to take notes)	Visual household – cleaning schedule for a family with LD
Total communication approach	Classroom support to encourage inclusion with peers	Flexible provision to support needs	Study skills groups
Adapt and respond based on speech and language need	Play based learning	Staff training	Dual placement with specialist school into our mainstream environment (child now attends)
Key worker- child-parent relationships	Mixed age group non-curriculum weekly sessions	Supporting SEN TAs working together with outside agencies	Total communications approach – visuals
John Thornton charity	Creating sensory area for children to have sensory breaks	Listen to voice of child	Using resources
Advice and support from educational psychology	Social stories for learning about situations or context	Preparing for adulthood from the earliest years	The guidance of specialists and specialist outreach teachers in developing mainstream
Being included in decision making	Staff CPD on SEND areas of need and inclusion	Residential trip planning for blind student (outdoor adventure)	Use of social stories to help prepare for things
	Spell framework	Knowing the children and building relationships	Differentiation
		Teacher differentiating lessons (resources & level of questions) so all children can access	The John Eggings Trust

41. Most schools and colleges provide a great number of opportunities for their students. They go out of the way to make their life in school as rich and fulfilling as possible. Many involve children and young people in decision-making and give them a stronger voice within the school, promoting their rights.

42. However, for the most vulnerable students, there is no single clear and accepted definition of inclusion for BCP schools. The strategic and policy void in BCP about inclusion has adverse consequences for children. The view below from one school is typical of the view of schools who contributed to the Inquiry:

When we were part of Dorset, we were considered a highly regarded school. SEND/Inclusion/ Attendance teams knew we didn't ask for resources we didn't need. As a school we did problem-solve and we worked with students inclusively and equitably. Our permanent exclusion rates were negligible.

Since joining BCP and sitting on IYFA (in-year fair access) meetings we have on occasions been surprised by how easily some schools move students out, often without a personal support plan being in place and how easily children are pitched into a cycle of suspensions and a pattern of moving from school to school. I now realise that this is often because structures, systems and processes for accessing support are not always clear and equitable. Some schools are doing this simply because they are unable to cope.

43. We recommend the adoption of a BCP-wide Inclusion Standard. This would be stronger than the voluntary Inclusion Quality Mark (IQM) being planned with some schools though the principle is the same and much of the material can cross over. The Inclusion Standard should set out a clear accountability for the Head Teacher and the Chair of Governors in each school, in the same way that diversity champions often need to be the people at the very top of an organisation when a culture change is required. We recommend co-producing an Inclusion Standard and negotiating a sign-up from all education providers in BCP, building on the sign-up to date for the IQM (**Recommendation 7**).

How a team can build inclusion practice into its daily work: the Virtual School and Colleges

44. The Virtual School and College (VSC) is responsible for overseeing the education of all children in care in BCP, care experienced children and young people (care leavers) and previously looked after children who are now adopted or subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO). From September 2021, the VSC's responsibilities are being extended by the Government to include oversight of the education of all children with an allocated social worker. How this will work in practice is yet to be decided but it will need to be a collegiate and collaborative endeavour across the sector.

> **Impact of the BCP Virtual School and College**
>
> A PEP (Personal Education Plan) meeting was held for a young man in Year 11 and the following issues became evident. School was not communicating with his carer. There had been no additional support put in for the young person to help him catch up with his learning ready for his GCSEs. The young person was disengaging with education and school was not utilising any of the funding available to them. During the PEP meeting the above issues were discussed and a plan was put in place to address them. As a result, tuition was arranged to allow the young person the opportunity to catch up. The young person is now re-engaged and is making good progress. The school now regularly communicates with his carers and funding is being used directly for the young person, with school having the confidence to secure this level independently.

Leaning into schools in order to support inclusion practice

45. We found that a number of services were widely seen as helpful in promoting inclusion. Here are some examples.

> *The impact of BOOST-funded training*
>
> - I identified children in my Reception class who have speech and language difficulties and pinpointed which sound I would need to focus on in the first instance. I used the knowledge gained from the course and the very helpful notes, including the notes from a speech and language assessment from one child in my class, to help me plan an intervention. Progress was made and I could also share with parents what they could work on at home with their children.
> - Since the training was completed in September, staff have shown an increased awareness of the needs of children with ASD and are seeking to understand the underlying needs that children are trying to communicate, rather than focusing solely on their external behaviour. It has also raised the importance of other strategies in school. Staff are more consistently using visual strategies such as visual timetables and social stories. All staff are more aware of traits that they notice in children who do not have an ASD diagnosis and are more sensitive to these needs.
> - We found this training to be extremely valuable because it improved the understanding of all staff with children who have an autism diagnosis. It was interesting to be introduced to the different children and adults who have autism and the way they felt about having autism. We have ensured that language is clear and concise without any jargon or idioms. We have worked on our classroom environments to ensure they are not too distracting. The impact is very positive on those children and young people who have autism.

Extending outreach in mainstream schools to support inclusion

46. If the strategy of increasing the use of mainstream schools and decreasing the use of special schools is to be realised, all mainstream schools must be able to tap into outreach services at the point of need. The two case studies below illustrate the importance and impact of a targeted and responsive outreach service.

Example 1: A student with ASD and high-level sensory needs was well below average reading age. He could not access the curriculum alongside his peers. He found the classroom environment overwhelming and would shout, cry and run out. The school already had a good level of supportive strategies in place. The student had sensory circuits, frequent breaks and his own work area set up at the back of the classroom. As the outreach worker, I identified areas to change. For example, they were using 'brain breaks' as his 'reward time' after he had completed his work, rather than as a

structured part of his timetable for movement and sensory input. He needed a more visually, consistent reward system. He needed a structured, visually based work system to foster some independence skills. The class teacher, TA and SENCO visited my (special) school with me to see first-hand some of the strategies and suggestions I was making in action. They all reported that this visit was invaluable. The SENCO has used strategies that we put in place for this student during the outreach input with other students across the school and has reported that it has been very successful.

Example 2: A very able student with ASD and high anxiety levels frequently went into a 'shut down' mode in school when overloaded. This student would frequently run away from class and be in shut down for several hours. During our outreach planning meeting, which included the parents, we established the key elements that contributed to her overload and subsequent shut down such as her struggle with perfectionism, low self-esteem and sensory overload from noise. We were able to address these issues in a range of ways and to set up a number of strategies for her to use which are scripted out on an emotional regulation scale. She can now identify when she needs to work outside of the classroom and will take her work out to a space in the corridor and work there if she needs to. She also has a place to run out to in the playground where she can go to and use calming strategies if she gets too overwhelmed indoors. The flexibility of the class teacher and SENCO have enabled this student to be able to engage in whole class learning again as she has a range of strategies in place that she can use when she feels the classroom is too much for her.

The impact of supportive individuals

47. Many schools we spoke with mentioned the same names over and over again when we asked them whose support they valued. Sitting in different agencies but united by their responsiveness, these individuals excelled at relationship management, in that they were described as unfailingly and unstintingly reliable, helpful and supportive – "she will act on anything immediately". The churn and periodic chaos outside of schools – "I've never seen the same person twice" and "she was the go-to person but then she disappeared" - contrasts with the stability inside most schools. About other less responsive professionals, they say "all the heads would like him to return an e mail" – though we found that 'he' was usually not given this feedback. The problem with excellent individuals is that everyone wants them to solve their problem. The risk is they become exhausted with the demands made upon them. Teamwork and distributed leadership is the only way to successfully manage increasing demand and complexity.

A Lead Accountability model of peer support

48. We were struck and impressed by the untapped potential across the BCP education system. Some schools and some school leaders have spent years honing their skills and developing projects and programmes that would benefit children and young people in other schools, not just their own. We think that identifying these champions and ambassadors and creating an environment in which they can help and support other schools without any negative or competitive undertones, would be one way of rolling out

proven inclusion initiatives across BCP. An example is the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme. This is extensively used already as an engagement opportunity for young people at risk. In fact, one BCP school is the leading provider in the South West and would be happy to use their knowledge and experience to support other schools to offer more places. Other schools would be happy to take the lead, using their proven expertise, for issues as diverse as working with gypsy traveller children, dyslexia screening, complex communication difficulties and speech and language support. Establishing a lead accountability matrix for peer support would be another example of positive network management supporting the sector (**Recommendation 8**).

The team around the school

49. The Team Around the School (TAS) model in BCP is only as good as the team around the highest priority children in schools. The expectation of schools is that TAS can lever in the right resources to help an individual child stay in mainstream schooling at the point of crisis. Schools' experiences so far are mixed. Some TAS meetings have been experienced as supportive. Others were perceived to leave schools with the same problems they started with, despite them having spent time preparing for the meetings and having their hopes raised. Too often the agencies who need to be at the meeting do not turn up, despite the model being a positive one which if run better, could be scalable. For the Heads with the latter experience, one said "No one gives me a solution. I'll kill the next person who tells me I'm doing a good job and there is nothing else they can do".

50. To be effective, the Team Around the School needs to be able to bring the multi-agency team in to support the highest risk children. This would mean children's social care, CAMHS, community paediatricians, the mental health teams in schools, to name just a few. Decisions like stepping up or stepping down a child in need from one level of support and intervention to another, should be shared with schools in advance so there is a dialogue, even where there is disagreement. Direct access to specialist health professionals without the need to refer to the community paediatrician could speed up access to appropriate support. For example, SENCOs have to make referrals to the Child Development Centre yet GPs are able to refer into the right department directly. For other situations, GPs can't make referrals and every concern is routed through the SENCO. Referral pathways between agencies should be clarified and simplified. The MAISEY model in Early Years provision is a good example to learn from (**Recommendation 9**).

51. Concerns about the Team Around the School model are expressed by one school below. We also heard during the inquiry that BCP Council was planning to change the model again. We urge them strongly to do this through a consultation process with schools and not to make decisions on their own, telling the sector afterwards.

> We understand that TAS meetings have their place and are vital in enabling effective support and communication for families. However, in our experience, information is just not being relayed well enough to be able to share at these meetings. Inclusion workers often attend without being able to offer much more than services to signpost us to. School staff are continually expected to chase and follow up information that would previously have been easily accessible through family outreach workers. It is proving to be a time-consuming process for all concerned, often with little positive impact. We believe that the best people to be able to attend these meetings are the professionals who have been into the family home or who have built a trusting relationship with the families concerned. Due to the time constraints of their roles, they are often unable to do so. The current system in place does not provide a joined-up approach.

52. Another plea from those schools who do not have the level of problems faced by schools in areas of social and economic disadvantage was that they still need help sometimes. They asked that programmes such as Mental Health Teams in schools operate through a locality hub model, not just in a single school. This would allow schools with occasional problems to make contact for occasional support rather than all the support going into one school. This is also a resourcing challenge for the Mental Health in Schools programme. We agree that such pilot programmes should use a locality hub and not a single school model (**Recommendation 10**).

53. We think that multi-agency locality hubs could be the organising principle for collaborative commissioning and collaborative casework, including some existing services provided BCP-wide at the moment. BCP is a large conurbation with a need to plan carefully which services should be centralised and which should be delivered from an accessible local base.

Learning resources and a learning hub to support schools

54. Including all children through the inclusive teaching of an inclusive curriculum within an inclusive classroom needs a discrete skill set. We were struck by the number of separate individual approaches and initiatives about this which could usefully be brought together into a single taught and supported model about positive inclusion practice. In different schools, the 4 pillars of practice, differentiation, THRIVE, trauma-informed practice and whole school approaches, to name just a few, are taught passionately and intensively to a single school's workforce. We see an opportunity to develop a BCP-wide method of inclusive teaching, through a collaboration between the sector, the teaching hub for the South West (operational from September 2021) and other specialist providers including charities. For example, support for specific cohorts of children can become stronger through evidence-based approaches to teaching and learning. Dyslexia and dyspraxia are good examples (see below). Understanding how to be inclusive with children with dyslexia can be deepened through working with charities like *Made by Dyslexia*. They offer a free

two-hour training programme with dyslexia experts that aims to raise awareness and change the predominant narratives about dyslexia. Standards for supporting children and young people with autism produced by the Autism Education Trust (AET) are free to download. Resources could be brigaded by a BCP-wide Learning Hub though this would need to be resourced (**Recommendation 11**).

> A child with dyspraxia will need more time to complete tasks, including in exams – 'Dee has dyspraxia. This affects her hand-eye co-ordination. It also impacts on her ability in fine and gross motor tasks, including writing. She cannot produce legible handwriting so we must support her with a laptop. Sadie wants her teachers to know that when she does not maintain eye contact, she is not being rude, she just finds it easier to concentrate that way. She likes to be given therapy putty when she is struggling to concentrate. She likes to sit on a wobble mat, so we have one she can use in every class'

55. We heard about a great number of inclusive initiatives which schools, families and indeed other organisations could learn from. There are too many to list but here are two. The first is a primary school which gave the whole school a theme to think about and develop each term, like …. Where did we all come from? (Term 1): Fascination (Term 2); and Expressing (Term 3). Each class pursued a different aspect of the common theme. The second example is where children becoming disengaged worked in a small group and were tasked with being secret agents in order to carry out 'acts of random kindness' throughout the school. Their parents were informed, of course, the objective being re-engagement.

56. It is not only teachers who can inspire children. A local man with bushcraft skills has worked in a BCP school for years, calming down many distressed children and teaching them an unusual set of skills like how to keep a pond in good order, which has helped them to stay in school. Inclusion has to be approached creatively. 'SoundStorm' and 'Wave' are the brand names for the BCP Music and Arts team which works in 95 schools from KS1 to KS5 to support music and art classes. There are countless programmes like this which need to be brought together coherently into a 'BCP Inclusion Offer'.

An inclusive environment

57. Schools work hard to design, build, renovate and adapt child-friendly spaces in their buildings and to make 'reasonable adjustments' when needed as they are required to do by law. This extends to the design and layout of sensory rooms, break out spaces, auditory improvements in classrooms, dyslexia and dyspraxia-friendly classrooms, the presence of therapy dogs, measures to support children on the autistic spectrum to carry autism awareness cards, use of welcome language screening toolkits, aids and adaptations like fully accessible handrails and ramps plus wheelchair access and welcoming arrangements. The visual below from a special school, designed by the Head Teacher, shows how messaging throughout the school can influence attitude and behaviour positively. More could be done about this, so we make 2 recommendations. The first is to make design and layout in all BCP schools a lead accountability, to be allocated to the school who is 'best in

class' at it. This would be part of the proposed lead accountability matrix. The second is to develop a team of Young Inspectors who are trained and supported by BCP's participation team to inspect school buildings for child-friendliness against a set of standards co-produced with the sector. (**Recommendations 12 and 13**).

Inclusive transitions

58. Children and young people must go through several transitions during their journey through education, each of which they might need help to negotiate. Transitions include starting in nursery or reception: moving between academic Key Stages: moving into junior (Year 2 to 3): moving into secondary (Year 6 to 7); and moving into the sixth form or going to college (Year 11 onwards). Children face other transitions during the 12 – 15 years of their life they spend at school. The adults around children will also be going through their own transitions or rites of passage. During their time in school, children can move house, they can have siblings, their parents might separate or divorce, they may have to move schools and they can experience events in their life which either bring joy or cast a long shadow. We say this in order to emphasise the importance of handling multiple transitions well – and inclusively.

Five bridges of transition

59. Best practice in transition includes supporting the child either side of the transition. For example, a secondary school engages with its local partner primary or primaries from year 5 onwards to support transitions into their school. The model used is 'warm handovers'. They have a Transition Co-ordinator with a small staff team to support this work (see below). Children with EHCPs are offered tailored support with a specific member of the school team. A parent said how valuable a tour of the school was to her child with ASD who needed to become familiar with any environment she was going into in advance, in order to avoid becoming overwhelmed. Another secondary used a big brother and big sister buddying system for new Year 7s.

One secondary school has a Transition Co-ordinator with a small staff team who in-reach to primary schools for those children in Year 6 about to join them. They make sure each child with SEND has a named teacher to support them during their transition. Individual tours of the schools are offered to children and parents in Year 5. They aim to continuously improve their transition practice. All staff in the school are seen as ambassadors for inclusion. They have replaced the role of TA with learning coaches and introduced specialisms for speech and language, ASD and for physical disability and a child's medical needs.

60. Transitions frequently bring with them major issues. For example, many services children receive in a smaller primary cannot be reproduced in secondary so are not sustainable. A warm handover means avoiding a cliff edge between Year 6 and Year 7. We heard of a great number of children who went over this cliff edge with the primary and secondary schools then blaming each other. Sometimes the consequences of a poor transition were not understood until Year 9 or 10 in terms of challenging behaviour. By then it was often too late to effect a change. Parents have very strong views about the impact of major transitions at school on the lived experiences of their children (see below).

I hear far too often the concept that a child does not need an EHCP in primary school yet will need one in secondary school. I think this makes a mockery of our education system. BCP secondary schools sadly are just not doing enough to welcome and cater for SEND children. Simple adaptations made in primary schools (fiddle toys, uniform adjustments, safe spaces) are deemed inappropriate in secondary schools - why?? Better and safer transitions from KS2 to KS3 could really help reduce the number of EHCP applications. I suspect this comes down to a combination of perception of the school alongside a feared lack of funding to help support EHCP children. If primary schools are funding voids like the one in my example above (finding not just the £6k base funding but adding another £7k), if secondary schools then lower their investment to follow the EHCP funding pound for pound, these children will fail in Year 7 and drop out of the system - either off rolled, moved to specialist provision or permanently excluded. Another perspective on this issue is that primary schools often fail to prepare children for secondary school.

The transition out of school

61. BCP has around twenty small 6th forms, some of which may not be viable over the next few years. A clearer post-16 strategy would help students to plan ahead. Provision would be increased with a clearer offer to 14–16-year-olds, many of whom would prefer accredited courses in motor manufacturing, bike maintenance, engineering or hairdressing which give more employability skills "than learning Spanish"- a Head Teacher. An increase in Applied Stage 4 provision would undoubtedly lead some young people to remain engaged with education (**this is already covered by Recommendation 2**).

62. Some schools told us they would worry that doing this would compromise their Progress 8 results. However, the young people we have in mind will probably not be doing well academically so we think this anxiety is misplaced. We spoke to one school about a small cohort of Year 10 children who are on the edge of suspension and who might be re-engaged with a tailored curriculum more geared to life and employability skills, based on work experience, supported internships and traineeships plus continuing to study essential subjects like English and maths. We think that Keep On Track programmes or their equivalent should be delivered to year 11 pupils who are at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). Students could be identified by their schools and participate in a series of workshops to explore issues around self-esteem, mental health, rights and responsibilities, interview skills and CV development. Another outstanding service is the Classroom in the Heart of Industry provision developed by a special school, which has led to a high level of secure employment for participants. To build on these positive programmes, we recommend the Director of Education leads on the development of an Apprenticeship Strategy for BCP, including T levels, linked into the proposed Learning Hub and aligned with the Local Enterprise Partnership. We think this should use a 13-25 age banding, not the current post-16 framework, starting with the early identification of the need for a vocational pathway for a particular young person: then varying the curriculum to support this pathway: identifying a pathway co-ordinator who can support the young person through transitions using the 'warm handover' framework when transitioning; and continuing with supported internships and

apprenticeships. This is a 'team around the apprentice' model. All agencies should play their part in this strategy. At present some agencies are missing from the table, usually because they say the work or the young person does not fit within their eligibility criteria. This is immature multi-agency practice which needs remedying. (**Recommendation 14**).
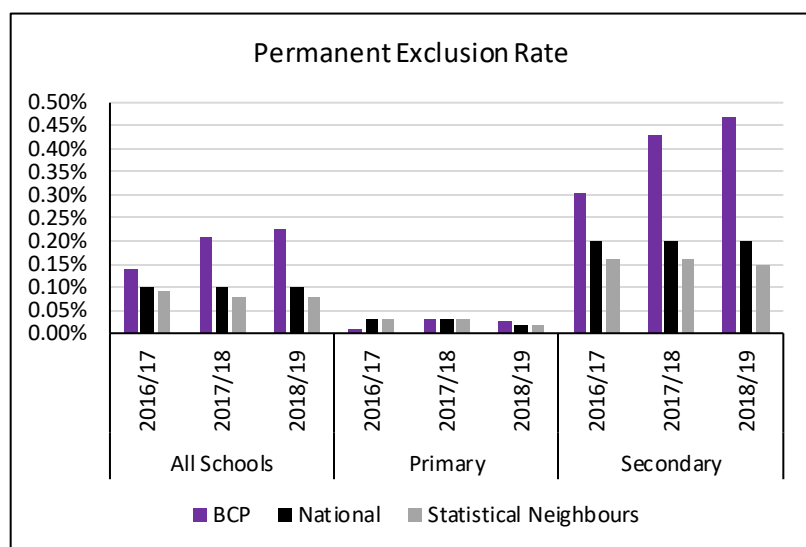
9. Exclusions

63. Exclusions from school can have serious and preventable consequences. For example, there is a correlation between permanent exclusions and the marginalisation of young people, subsequent gang affiliation and the fact that young people create gang associations because they don't seem to matter otherwise in their communities. Permanent exclusion dramatically increases the risk of a child or young person becoming exploited by predators.

64. The data and analysis below sets the scene about exclusions and absences in BCP schools. Nationally, exclusions are likely to be highest in the groups who receive the pupil premium grant; who are children with SEND (boys especially); who are usually boys in primary schools; and who are both boys and girls for persistent disruptive behaviour, the major reason for excluding children and young people.

The following information has been produced from the school census. Any figures for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic year are for the Autumn term only. Statistical neighbours are those assigned to BCP in 2021.

Benchmarking

Data for the three academic years prior to the covid pandemic shows that BCP has historically had both a higher than average permanent exclusion rate and a significant increase each year which has not been mirrored in that of the national or statistical neighbour rates. The permanent exclusion (PEX) rate in BCP more than doubled in the three years going from 0.14 to 0.23 in all schools, 0.01 to 0.03 in primary and 0.30 to 0.47 in secondary.

Permanent Exclusion Rate

Due to the pandemic there is limited comparable data available that can be used to identify the more recent trend. So by using the Autumn 2020 term data only and looking at the biggest contributor to exclusion numbers, the secondary schools, it can be seen there is a significant decrease in the percentage from Autumn 2019 to Autumn 2020 with the number of permanent exclusions in secondary schools falling from 46 to 13.

Autumn PEX Rate (Secondary)
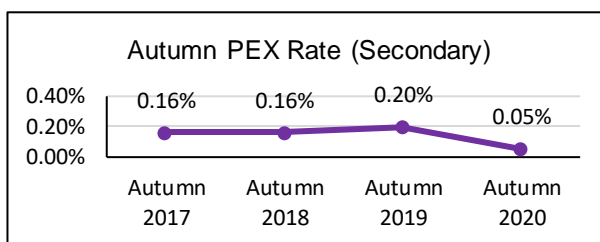
The fixed term exclusion rate – now called the suspension rate - has increased nationally from 2016 to 2019. The BCP rate has remained both higher and increased at a steeper rate than that of national or statistical neighbours. The increase has been universal across both primary and secondary schools. The primary FTE rate in BCP of 2.4 is over two-thirds higher than the national at 1.4. The secondary rate in BCP is 15.0 compared to the national rate of 10.7.
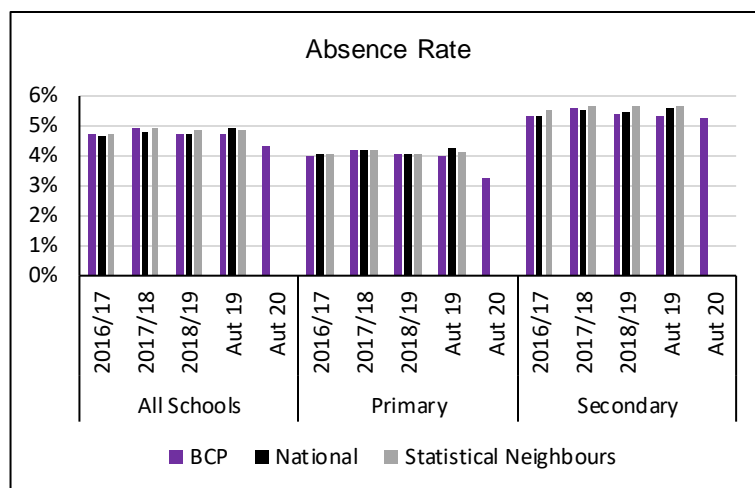

Fixed Term Exclusion Rate
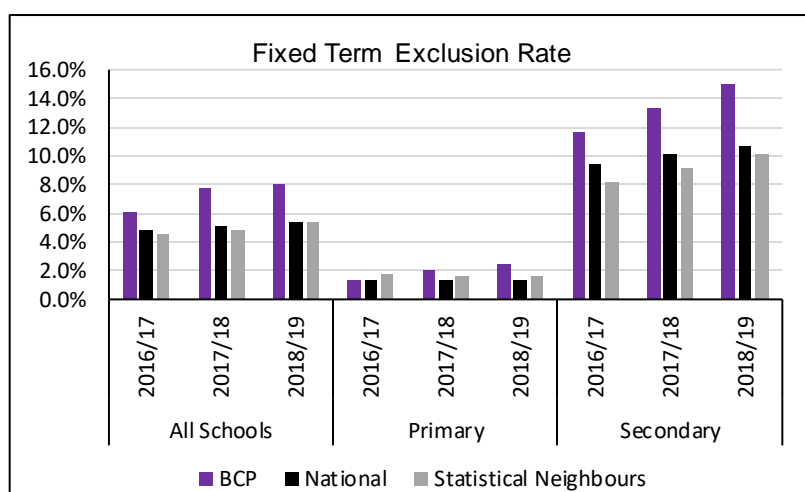
Taking Autumn 2020 figures as an indication of this years' whole year exclusion trend then this may be the first year over the last four that will show a decrease in the FTE rate. Autumn 2020 primary exclusion rate is 0.72 and secondary is 5.9 compared to 0.97 and 5.7 in Autumn 2019.

Autumn FTE Rate
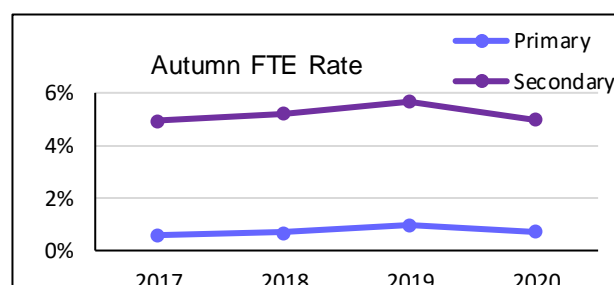
BCP has been consistently lower than national in the percentage of enrolments who are persistently absent over the last 3 whole years academic data. This is across both primary and secondary schools.

The absence rate across BCP schools went up a little in the 2017/18 academic year but returned to their previous level again in 2018/19. Using the Autumn data from 2019 and 2020 it is probable that the absence rate would have continued to drop if the pandemic had not occurred. In the 2018/19 data BCP was only 0.03 higher than national but when split by phase the primary was the same as national and secondary was 0.06 lower as the increase was due to special schools.

Absence Rate chart — categories: All Schools, Primary, Secondary, each showing 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19, Aut 19, Aut 20 for BCP, National, Statistical Neighbours.

What does the data show?

It is clear that permanent exclusions are a greater issue in secondary than in primary. When looking at permanent exclusions in primary schools there are no schools that have been consistently above national with their exclusion rate over all three years, showing that there are no specific primary schools that have a more pronounced culture of permanent exclusion. A small number of primary exclusions has a large impact on whether an LA is above or below national. For BCP to be in-line with national they would need to drop from 7 exclusions to 5. The culture of permanent exclusions seems to be more prevalent in certain schools when you get to secondary age with 6 (23%) of BCP secondary schools issuing 58% of the permanent exclusions. So what does looking at the situations of these 6 schools show?

Suspensions are significantly high across both school phases. There are 6 primary schools who between them issued 54% of the primary FTEs in 2018/19 despite only being 9% of the schools in BCP. With suspensions in secondary schools, there are 6 schools who issued 59% of the 2018/19 suspensions.

Although there are a small number of schools who are responsible for the majority of the BCP suspensions, it cannot be ignored that there are nearly 40% of primary schools and 42% of secondary schools who had higher than national exclusion rates in 2018/19 suggesting that the frequent use of suspensions is widespread across BCP.

When looking at what behaviour is resulting in the issuing of these exclusions, it is clear when using the 2018/19 data that both suspensions and permanent exclusions have similarities. The reason for persistent disruptive behaviour (PB) is the most prevalent (PEX 52%, FTE 48%) followed by physical assault against a pupil (PEX 9.6%, FTE 13%). Nationally the most prevalant is also persistent disrptive behaviour but the percentage is lower than BCP with 35% in permanent and 31% in suspensions but higher than BCP with physical assault against a pupil with permanent at 13% and FTE at 16%. With permanent exclusions, a drug and alcohol related reason is second most common in BCP (20%) however they don't feature so high in fixed terms. Verbal abuse/threatening behaviour against an adult was the third largest proportion of fixed terms (12%).

Significantly, not all schools have had increased exclusion rates in the last three years and more recently there have been improvements in the autumn term data over the last four years up to and including this current academic year. Four secondary schools have shown significant decreases in the PEX rate. The highest contributor to the BCP FTE rate has actually reduced their rate from 61.3 in Autumn 2019 to 19.0 in Autumn 2020. This shows that regime change can produce a strong impact. We will need to wait for the first set of post-lockdowns figures to note any changes to underlying trends but this shows that historic practice is reversible with strong leadership and support..

Commentary about exclusion

"Permanent exclusion (PEX) can be a life-changing event for the worse" – a Head Teacher

65. It is widely accepted that PEX has a detrimental impact on pupils' mental health as well as their life chances and can lead to a disengagement from civic society as well as from schooling. PEX also puts additional strain on families, sometimes pushing them to breaking point.

66. Some children are 'pushed-out learners', pushed out because they are seen as too much trouble. Schools who do this need a check and balance in place to stop an unfair exclusion. There are still far too many children being excluded by some schools who would remain on roll in other schools.

67. BCP Council has 6 days to place a PEX in Alternative Provision (AP). There is not enough AP in BCP. Many excluded children do not get the 25 hours a week provision they are entitled to.

68. Thresholds for exclusion vary from a minor misdemeanour in some schools to serious physical assault in another. Internal or concealed or unofficial exclusions are also common practice in BCP. Excluding a child can be part of a gaming strategy (see more in the section of our Inquiry about culture) - "I had to exclude him to get him into the specialist provision he needed", said one Head Teacher. A social worker asked a school to exclude a child in order to open the gate for support. "A permanent exclusion opens up more opportunities" she said.

69. Unofficial exclusions in BCP are not measured. A number of children are missing out on their education (CMOE). Some are being educated at home, either through parental preference or because the school has pushed the parents to do this – see below. Other children are scarcely in school at all – perhaps in for lunch one day or to sit in occasional lessons or they may be receiving some home tutoring. Whilst these arrangements can be exclusions by another name, for some children it is the only way they can be prevented from dis-engaging completely. They may be off-rolled but they are not abandoned which is better than the situation when some schools let children drift away without reporting it, leaving them to become the 'educationally disappeared'. A drop in attendance is often the first sign of difficulty and this needs far more sustained attention that it receives. Schools who do not adhere to the pupil registration regulations may be acting unlawfully. Ofsted defines off-rolling as the removal of a pupil from the school roll when this is done without a formal exclusion and when it is in the interests of the school and not the pupil. We heard of a number of situations clearly falling within this definition.

My son is in year 10. We have had a lot of problems with him within the school setting. There have been different things that have been tried and failed. We have been told this morning he is probably looking at being permanently excluded. During the meeting with his head teacher today, we discussed about home schooling. The headteacher actually thinks this maybe a better option for my son. My son has confirmed ADHD and ODD. Could someone contact me please? I would like some help, support and information regarding how I start the process of home schooling, what support is there, what I need to be able to provide etc?

NB EHE has been subtly suggested as the best option but unless this is set up properly, the learning outcomes are usually poor.

Multi-agency working

70. We found that exclusion has such potentially adverse consequences that a formal model of early intervention is needed once a child reaches the threshold for permanent exclusion. This threshold would need to be carefully managed so that schools do not apply it as a device to gain more support for children who in reality are below that threshold.

71. We think that a formal pre-exclusion conference should be established so that those agencies who might have to pick the pieces after an exclusion become involved beforehand and commit to a package of support for the child and if necessary, for her or his family, aimed at preventing the exclusion. Multi-agency pre-exclusion conferences are mandatory in the SEND code of practice for children with SEND but this is not happening in practice. A pre-exclusion pathway could also define how a graduated response in respect of an exclusion should work in practice across BCP.

72. An example where this could help is with the number of children for whom the underlying cause of aggressive or challenging behaviour is a speech, language or communication disorder which is not recognised by their school. Since the pan-Dorset Youth Justice Service has recruited two speech and language therapists, paid for by Dorset CCG, they have supported a number of schools to work differently with particular young people, thereby preventing exclusions (**Recommendation 15)**.

73. This model could be rolled out across all schools to good effect. This is one of many examples where an individual agency could help by exporting its specialist skills. For example, the police could play a part in a number of ways such as training teaching staff in de-escalation strategies and mentoring particular young people about the risks they are running (**Recommendation 16**).

74. Some packages of support will be expensive but this will still be a fraction of the costs that would be incurred later on if the young person in question enters the criminal justice

system, the mental health system or if she or he needs a specialist care placement (see below).

Rohan's story (so far)

Rohan was last in school fully in Year 8. He has average ability but became involved with the wrong crowd and disengaged completely from education. His attendance during these 3 years was around 20%, 1 day a week. Outcomes were dropping. In Year 11, he went into alternative provision in BCP, but this quickly broke down. He was heading towards being NEET – not in education, employment or training. A package of support was identified for him on a construction course with academic input in English and maths plus mentoring so he would be apprenticeship-ready. He wanted to do this but the Council would not fund the 40K a year package. At the time of writing, the young man is on his own, at risk of re-offending and criminal exploitation. He says, 'I don't care anymore. I'll hurt anybody". It seems like we have lost him and lost the chance of connecting with him in a 'reachable or teachable' moment.

E's story

E was traumatised after his brother was killed in a police chase, having stolen a car. The whole family was traumatised and has not received sufficient help for a variety of reasons. All of E's siblings are in specialist settings because of extreme behaviours. E is only in school for 'social time' at lunchtime. When he is in, he is 'baby-sat' by 2 Teaching Assistants. The arrangement could be criticised for failing to give E a proper education and not spending limited resources but the school feel there is no alternative. The longer E is out of school, the harder it will be to get him back in.

E's distress upsets other children. Whilst he is being re-traumatised, others are being traumatised for the first time through being in school with him and not understanding why he is behaving as he is.

Many children need a highly skilled Level 3 TA and support from other specialists in school who are trained to practise therapeutically. E's school assess that a realistic package to keep him and others safely in school would cost circa 30K. But then what would the alternative costs following an exclusion amount to?

Behaviour policy

75. We found that behaviour policy ranged from zero tolerance to unconditional love. The best policies and their application in practice are based upon understanding the meaning of behaviour and responding with trauma-informed and attachment practice, to name just two. On the other hand, we found that some behaviour management regimes crossed the line between tough love and unwarranted punishment. Tough love produced examples where children have been turned around by a strict regime with high expectations which motivated those children to develop ambition and a confidence about their education for the first time.

76. The creation of a clear rules-based behaviour policy can contribute to meeting the needs of the most challenging children and young people in the school setting. Their ability to learn or even function can be radically compromised by the ambiguity or disorder they have in a school without clear boundaries. Constructive use of discipline creates expectations and sets limits for all children. It plays a vital role in maintaining fidelity to schools being fundamentally a place to learn, develop and thrive personally.

77. However, we also heard examples where children were humiliated by the school publicly advertising their academic performance in rank order by displaying league tables on the classroom wall. Whilst rank order assessment is common practice and, done properly, can produce a striking effect on achievement, some children are unduly and unnecessarily wounded by the practice. Another child was suspended for wearing trainers when he was sofa surfing through no fault of his own and could only get to school on time wearing the shoes he had with him. Another example was putting children with communication difficulties in isolation expressly forbidding them to speak for an entire day. One parent told us, 'My son spent a day in isolation. For a child with poor memory and organisational skills, to be treated like this for forgetting a pen and a particular sized ruler was so unnecessary. And for a child with anxiety and sensory difficulties, a day in isolation is cruel' – a parent responding to a survey about inclusion (BCP Educational Psychology Service, 2020). Some children who find themselves in this position have problems with cognitive overload, pathological demand avoidance (PDA) or emotional dysregulation which means their condition needed to be understood before a rule-based behaviour policy can be applied.

78. If punishment is to be used for children, it should follow rehabilitative or restorative principles. A good behaviour policy achieves positive outcomes, including a reduction in bullying, a reduction in sexual harassment or other important social or educational outcomes. It should not push children and their families into desperate measures.

79. We heard that in general terms, primary schools fit in with the child, whilst secondary schools expect the child to fit in with them. Although this is a generalisation, it is worth schools reflecting on.

80. Before it is adopted, a behaviour policy needs to take into account the impact it will have on children's mental health as well as their conformity and academic performance. It should also have an accompanying equalities impact assessment to make sure that BAME

children and young people and other minority groups are not further disadvantaged as a direct result. We recommend that system leaders put in place three model behaviour policies which schools are encouraged to adopt – one for primary, one for secondary and one for special schools. The model policies should emphasise the need for contextual and customised responses to children's behaviour and not to be excessively concerned with rules, uniformity and consistency. This can best be achieved through a child-centred policy which becomes part of the school's fabric – 'the way we are around here' (**Recommendation 17**).

Elective Home Education (EHE)

81. 675 children were being electively home educated at March 2021, a 29% increase since April 2020. Covid has been cited as the reason for 10% of children. The local area has strong and active EHE communities that offer parents support, advice and guidance and organise activities for families.

82. Current legislation states that parents are under no obligation to inform the local authority that they have elected to educate their child other than at a school. LAs can only make informal enquiries. Parents are also under no obligation to provide details about the education they are providing. BCP council is made aware of children being home educated through the school admission process, from enquiries made by the council when a child is due to start school, on changing school and when schools adhere to their statutory duty of informing the local authority that a parent has written to them stating their intention to home educate and asks for their child to be removed from the school roll.

I've been called up to my son's school so many times over the years, I'm really fed up with it all. I feel the school have left me with no choice. It was either pull him out or have him permanently excluded! At primary school my son was diagnosed with speech, language and communication difficulties. He can't read very well and finds writing hard. He was supported very well at primary, but when he went to on secondary school, he didn't get the same support and he fell further behind. He's now in Y9 and doesn't get any help.

He hates going to school now and I've now been told he doesn't turn up for lessons. He's told me he doesn't care anymore. He couldn't understand what he has to do and if he asked for help, he's often told '*I've already shown you. Get on with it*'. I know he's no angel, but like any child, he got fed up, bored and he messed about. He was constantly being sent to isolation. I kept having meetings with the school and lots of plans for extra support were put in place, but nothing happened. He even missed his speech therapy sessions at school because he wasn't there as he was home on a part time exclusion.

Every year I hoped things would get better, but they didn't. Enough is enough. I've just had another meeting with the school and they said they've done all they can. During this meeting I felt they didn't want him there any more …. they've had enough too. They kept saying his attendance is very low and due to his behaviour, he will be permanently excluded next.
I don't want this for my son. I want him to be happy and to be learning. He's not and he's just in trouble all the time. It's like he is a square peg and they are trying to squash him into a round hole. What choice do I have when he doesn't fit ?

I've decided to pull him out. What other choice do I have? Please can you help with what I need to do now.

83. Lifestyle choice remains the most common reason cited for EHE (63%). However, when the LA has been able to explore this with parents, many have stated that they felt they had been left with 'no choice' and chose 'lifestyle choice' as a way of describing how they were helping their child, or to illustrate a combination of reasons.

We are about to elect for our son (Y8) to be home educated and to be enrolled with an on-line school due to the challenges he has experienced over the last two years at school with social anxiety. This specifically relates to being unable to physically attend his current school. There's a lot more background to his circumstances. Please could someone contact us as it would be easier to speak with someone to talk this though and to help us with our next steps.

Discussion log:

During a meeting with the school, the mother said she was told that the school has no further support available for her son and that they have tried everything. They also told her that they don't have 'specialist anxiety professionals' and didn't have any provision for anxiety or counselling that they can offer her son.

The mother said she felt pressurised into making the decision to EHE. School insisted that a decision to take him off roll had to be made by the end of the week otherwise they would need to fast track an attendance penalty notice if he doesn't start attending.

School told the child's mother that she has had plenty of time already to make her decision. The mother felt the school put words in her mouth about making a decision and by a set date, so she didn't agree to it.

The mother said she had contacted the school every day about his absence and had sent notes made by a psychiatrist to explain his absence, so felt the school knew all about his struggles. Previously the school were understanding, but she said that they have suddenly started putting her under pressure.

Mum said she told the school she felt very alone and that there is no book to tell her how to cope with a child with severe social anxiety. She has tried CAMHS services but the waiting list for appointments is so long, her son won't get to see them for many months. Her GP can't help either. She is trying to source a private psychiatrist, but there are delays in this too.

It was suggested to the school that as he struggles with large class sizes, perhaps the school could find a different place on site for him to work. Their reply was that it would drain their resources to provide a teacher to separate him from other classes.

School suggested that with CAMHS reports he could possibly go to AP. Mum said she told the school that she didn't want that type of environment for him.

Eventually mum said she felt that she had no choice but to do as they wanted. No one was helping her, only adding to the pressures that she was already under.

Her son has very recently become EHE and is now using a private online provider. The parent said her son seems more relaxed in himself and she is happy with the tuition. It is not what she wanted for her son and she said that if doesn't work out she will contact the EHE team again to ask for support from an Inclusion Officer for a return to mainstream school.

84. In both case examples, the decision made by the parent to opt for EHE appear to have been made under pressure and as the last resort. EHE is a parental choice and unless BCP has sufficient factual evidence that describes it is unsafe for a particular child, or unless

the child is being kept at home for nefarious reasons, the Council has little control over the practice. During the last year, 158 children have returned to a school from EHE. 93% of these children returned to a mainstream school. However, the number of EHE children known to BCP Council remains high and is increasing.

85. Increased public health awareness and advice is needed to remind parents that a child of compulsory school age must by law receive an efficient and full-time education. If not, then the life chances and opportunities of a child who is poorly educated, or not in receipt of an education can decrease. The actual education provision and subsequent life chances and opportunities remains a parental responsibility to judge and determine. By opting for EHE, parents take full responsibility for their child's education provision and for all the financial costs this may incur.

86. School and system leaders should work with parents and they should support any child who needs to be in school to make a smooth, successful and permanent transition from EHE to mainstream school. This would minimise the 'school-hopping' and brokered managed moves so prevalent in BCP. Leaders should also recognise and consider trends in home education in a wider strategic context, such as identifying shortcomings in local school provision and alternative provision settings, as well as failures by schools to manage attendance and behaviours properly.(Ref: page 8 DfE EHE guidance for LAs -April 2019).

10. How the system works

First quote: *"If I don't understand BCP systems, how can anyone else?" - a CEO of a MAT about the wider system.*

Second quote: *"I am punished for being inclusive. Other schools divert parents my way because we have a reputation for being inclusive" – a Head Teacher*

Example 1: A Head Teacher talks about Marie who is 15. "She has an EHCP for ADHD and was wrongly taken off roll in Year 7 at secondary school. She is now in Year 10 and has spent 4 years failed by the system. She used to receive a couple of hours maths and English tuition per week in a coffee shop but craved attending school like other children her age. Feeling desperate to be normal, she sadly attempted suicide 3 times within 6 life-critical months. When she previously applied to return to school, those BCP secondary schools selected responded saying they could not meet her level of need.

I decided to personally advocate for her. In the space of a few weeks she is now attending her Secondary school every Friday, supporting her old Junior School as an unofficial apprentice TA in the morning Monday to Thursday and receiving maths and English tuition in the afternoon in a safe space at the primary school. This is costing a fraction of a full-time place in specialist provision. She is happy and she has a career path as a future Teaching Assistant. She is so happy and since this has been in place has made no further suicide attempts. It shouldn't take a Head Teacher who sits completely outside of this child's normal loop of stakeholders to come up with a creative, budget-friendly and child-centred solution"

The In-year Fair Access Panel

87. Fair Access Panels allocate school places to those children who do not get places through normal admission arrangements. The Fair Access Panel is an important formal means of operating inclusivity for children whose behaviour is challenging. We heard a lot about how the Panels operate. One of us observed a Secondary Panel. We heard many concerns that some schools take a disproportionate number of children with extra needs, whilst other schools sit on their hands and cite reasons why they cannot take a particular child. Schools which do take more could, we were told, equally cite reasons why they couldn't. The current system is unfair to those schools who are more open to supporting vulnerable children. This risk is they become overwhelmed whilst others take little responsibility.

88. These concerns were expressed much more intensely about the operation of the independently chaired Secondary Panel.

89. Most children get the places their parents seek for them and parental preference is at the heart of the statutory system. The numbers of vulnerable children about whom there are concerns are statistically small but significant in terms of impact.

90. Turning to the Secondary Panel, we have three main concerns. Firstly, the paperwork we saw about individual children was nowhere near good enough to inform evidence-based decision-making about a vulnerable child. At worst it was a 'rap sheet' of bad behaviour. At best, it set out the child's circumstances but did not focus on what was in her or his best interests. This was not the fault of participants as often they were not given an assessment of need with an analysis of options and a rationale for the suggested school.

91. Moving a child has at least equivalent risks to maintaining the status quo. A child who is moved and then runs into a completely different behaviour system will often fail. We heard about many moves that were made with the full knowledge they would almost certainly fail. Some moves didn't survive the first meeting with the Head Teacher. One school told BCP Council that if they insisted on sending a particular child in Year 10 to them, they would appeal to the Secretary of State for Education and that by the time this was determined, the young person in question would be in Year 11 with little that could then be achieved. This example illustrates the Panel's lack of teeth without a values-led consensus.

92. The Secondary Panel should be run as a 'best interests' meeting or review about the child in question. Moving children between schools needs to be thought about with the same strength of thinking applied to moving children between foster homes and primary carers. The child's best interests have to be paramount in an inclusive education system. We sensed too much horse-trading or bartering, though some schools were willing again and again to take vulnerable children, even when they were over-PLAN.

93. We think the existing Panels need to be overhauled, introducing a child-centred reviewing template. The child's story and the meaning of their behaviour should be routine in the paperwork as well as what they have done wrong. The matching of a child to a school

should be approached from a starting point that every school is inclusive and willing to take – or keep – every child.

94. We also think a SEND Fair Access Panel should be established to improve the quality of decision making for these children. Schools are too often not being consulted about children whose needs they could meet. All Panels including the SEND panel and the Special Admissions Panel need to ensure the alignment of the placement decision and its cost (see the 2 examples below). It would support the achievement of the main policy objective if the current system of Panels is rationalised and overhauled (**Recommendations 18, 19 and 20**).

Changing the threshold between mainstream and special schools through extra support

Outreach support has helped a primary school with their inclusion strategy this year. From September, they wish to offer places to three children with EHCPs who would normally go to a special school. To do this, they need £20,000 worth of outreach support. This is about one quarter of the cost of using special schools. A SEND Fair Access Panel with Head Teachers and SENCOs involved, operating within a revised banding system, could make this happen.

An opportunity to invest in mainstream schools (the view of a SEN case officer)

A BCP school set up an extra class within the main school offering specialist provision. Children from the main school have been able to access this provision when they have struggled in classes. For all pupils this has had a positive impact. In some cases, it has highlighted the need for a more specialist provision and for others it has acted as more of an intervention/turnaround type provision. The parents of one child were on the verge of requesting a special school but having been placed in the school's pod for part of this year they now feel she is able to return to her mainstream class in September with enhanced support.

Wouldn't it be great if we could do more of these intervention/re-integration groups within our mainstream schools by temporarily putting in place a more specialist type provision with a view to reintegrating children into their mainstream class?! Not exactly a base but an inclusive group for those children who are borderline mainstream/specialist or perhaps school refusing/highly anxious and heading towards specialist/AP.
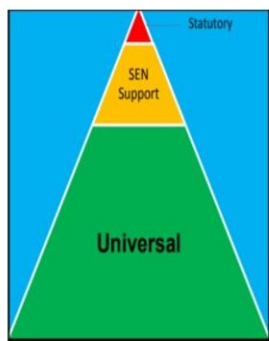
Anyway, I know it's probably utopian, but I did want to flag how well it has worked this year. Sadly, funding will not allow for this to continue next year.

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95. Another reason for change is that many schools have little faith in the Fair Access process so that the only way they think they can transfer the child to another school is by permanently excluding them. This is one of many examples of 'gaming the system'. Another is when the SEND graduated pathway is rushed through by a school without following any of its stages in order to exclude a child. Yet another is the 'capping' argument in which capacity is cited too readily as the reason why a child cannot go to a particular school. Of course, every school has to be aware of the potential risks to other children and indeed to staff from a child who has been violent. The education of other

children is always an equal priority. However, this is an argument for a more robust child-centred process than we have at the moment.

96. Gaming behaviour is only possible where the system allows it. It shows a lack of system leadership and compliance with acceptable inclusion standards. This is why an inclusion standard outlawing gaming is so important. Another example of gaming we are concerned about is advice being given to some parents by some schools and by some agencies to request an Education, Health, Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) in order to bypass the graduated response process which should be followed by schools – and which is mostly followed (see below) This leads to more unplanned use of valuable Educational Psychology (EP) hours as the EP's input is an indispensable and statutory input to every assessment.

BCP Graduated Response

Statutory: (EHCP) Only a small percentage of children with SEND will require the support of an Education Health and Care Plan. When a child's needs are complex, severe and long term and an education provider cannot meet their needs from within their own resources, and they have exhausted all SEN support options, a statutory assessment of the child's needs will be undertaken.

SEND Support: (Universal Plus) Where quality first teaching approaches have not been sufficient to meet the child's needs and they now require more focused, targeted support, they will be identified as having SEND: 'A pupil has SEN where their learning difficulty or disability calls for special educational provision, that is provision different from or additional to that normally available to pupils of the same age.' Quality first teaching, including evidenced, robust use of the assess, plan, do, review cycle, rigorous early years practitioner/teacher oversight, and close liaison between the setting and family will continue.

Quality First Teaching: (Universal) Quality First Teaching and the use of personalised, differentiated approaches form the universal offer for all children and young people in educational settings. This will include the robust use of the 'assess, plan, do, review cycle', rigorous early years practitioner/teacher oversight, and close liaison between the setting and family

National average is 3.1% with an EHCP (2019)

Claire O'Brien June 2021

97. Another adverse impact is that it undermines the strategy to support children in mainstream schools rather than special schools. Whilst this often gets played out as a conflict about parental choice, which has legal backing, and local system priorities, it is not the way to prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable children in BCP. Parents understandably fight for the rights of their child, but this always has to be balanced with the needs of all children in a local area where individual parents are not in position to reconcile conflicts and address priorities. All advice to circumvent the graduated response process is rogue advice. We recommend strong guidance is issued to prevent the practice (**Recommendation 21**)

Consults for placement under s39 (4) of the Children and Families Act

98. Effectively, this allows BCP to place a child with an EHCP in a school. The school can object but only if it sets out precise adverse impacts of the proposed admission. Schools have raised two issues. The first is the absence of dialogue. They feel a formal letter out of the blue from BCP Council is poor partnership working and that a phone call should come first. We heard countless criticisms of BCP failing to contact someone individually but instead sending fairly blunt standard letters which were often perceived as uncaring. The second is the time it takes to respond to a 'consult' or a 'direct' from the local authority. One SENCO told us that it takes her four hours to read and write a response to a 'consult'. She says there is no regard for when the consultations are sent and received. She often receives multiple consults in the same week and has to drop everything else to meet the statutory deadline for a response. She says that saying no to a proposed placement results in a lengthy and combative process, not a mature discussion about what is in the best interests of the child. She also says that multiple case officers consult with the same setting, seemingly not having an overview of what pressures the settings are placed under as a direct result.

99. We mention this in some detail as it shows why the low-trust culture in BCP cannot be allowed to continue unchecked by system leaders. Where a child is placed could be determined in a faster, less bureaucratic way and with more trust, even though the process is legally defined. Of course, BCP Council has to act on behalf of the child, and the parent/s, to make sure the child goes to the best school possible. We have already set out why schools feel that the better they perform at inclusion, the more likely they are to be allocated a disproportionately high number of children compared to another school that is barely ever contacted. We suspect these tensions are heightened because of the rise in referrals causing much more pressure and the fact that the system has not developed a culture of inclusivity in all schools over the last 5-10 years so it is neither ready nor is it resilient enough to manage demand fairly and equitably across the system. We recommend that the process for consultations under s39(4) of the 2014 Children and Families Act is reviewed by the new Director of Education and the Head of SEND (**Recommendation 22**).

100. A positive example of supporting a child to stay in situ is set out below.

> **The hardest people to convince are sometimes the parents**
>
> One of many BCP schools that is completely committed to not giving up on a child took in a girl with autism as a standard admission. She quickly became violent with property. Children and teachers were sometimes hurt by collateral damage. Parents of other children campaigned, saying 'the girl must go'. Sometimes, those parents were angry and threatening. The girl did nearly 'break the school' (the words of the Head Teacher) but they stuck with her, worked intensively with her including to help her with her language and communication difficulties. By half-term, they had turned her around and all of the problems had disappeared. The Head had the support of the Governors and in turn supported his staff group. Parents were also reassured. As a direct result of this experience, the school created break-out spaces and smaller specialist provision within the school to support other children with special needs. The Head Teacher said 'Our school changed for the better as a result of this child'.

101. We also heard of many child-centred approaches to school admissions. For example, a child in care who went to live in another part of the country, possibly but not necessarily on a permanent basis, remained on-roll at his school in BCP as well as at another school in the area he had moved to. Dual registration was maintained to allow for both future scenarios.

Use of professional time

102. Systems and processes in BCP are traditional and have never been systematically reviewed for effectiveness. This is now a priority because increases in demand and complexity mean that resources are over-stretched. Each service needs to think how it can operate more effectively with less bureaucracy. For example, the Educational Psychology service wished to feed into EHC assessments rather than to always send in written advice. This would be a much more economic use of their valuable professional time. However, lawyers expressed concern that if the advice was not written with a clear audit trail, it would be hard to show it had happened, particularly if the parent/s went to a SEND Tribunal. Much more use could be made of video reviews, as takes place in many other sectors. At times, the system is characterised by defensive rather than defensible decision-making. Working practices in BCP have not changed as a result of the pandemic as much as in some other local systems where a united leadership has driven through change, aware of the cost savings it can bring

Structures

103. We have emphasised the importance of moving to a local education service based upon collaborative leadership between all key players – the Council which has a clear leadership role for some functions in law; all schools, whatever their type; and the College and
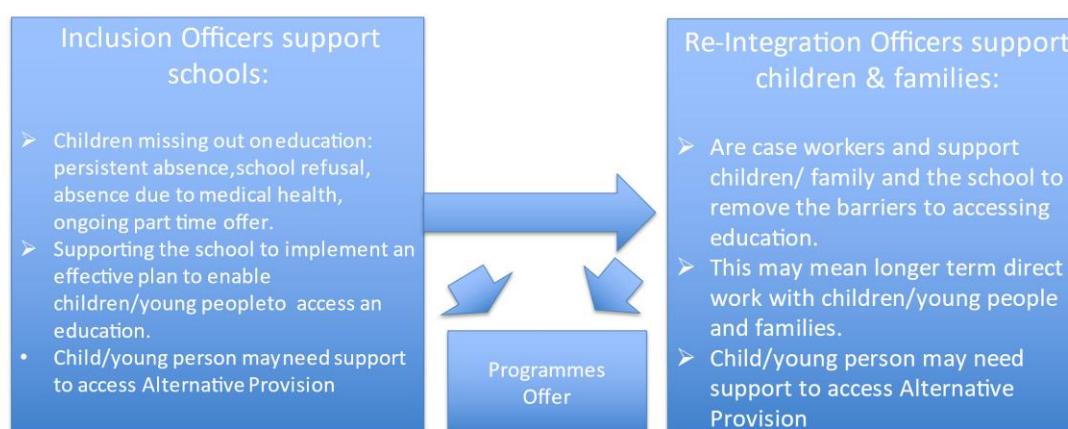
Universities.

104. This means an end to top-down approaches by the Council – the Council still tends to announce changes it is making rather than consulting and agreeing on them with the sector; an end to some Trusts regarding themselves as superior to others; an end to gaming behaviour which divides schools – and children – from each other; and an end to blanket policies like forced academisation – at least locally. Collaborative working means respecting, allowing for and promoting diversity and treating each child, each school and each situation on its merits. It may well be that some single academy trusts would be better off in a multi-academy trust (SATs into MATs), but this should never be a blanket policy. It might well be that some maintained schools should change status, but this should only ever be because it is in the interests of that particular school at a particular point in time and into the future.

105. BCP Council needs to restructure its education service to facilitate strong and collaborative system leadership. Where local authorities are in 'enabling' or 'convening' mode, or where they are delivering a particular service to clearly agreed standards, they have the capacity to add significant value. Where they try to determine and impose a strategy on an area with multiple providers, there is a risk they do the opposite.

106. The introduction of a BCP Director of Education role is a positive first step as until now leadership was distributed in a bewildering way with a lack of clarity about who was leading any aspect of the service. We think that another pillar of the council's structure should be to facilitate collaborative commissioning. The Council is developing a Centre of Excellence for Commissioning. This is a useful model to replicate in the education sector. For example, we have seen aspects of school improvement that would best be led by the council and aspects that would best be led by a particular MAT, SAT or a maintained school. Developing lead accountabilities for specific aspects of improvement would in our view lead to stronger improvement outcomes. This could be through a maths hub linked to the Jurassic Maths Hub, a lead responsibility for speech and language support, supporting and understanding autism in boys, and so on. Mechanisms like an Alternative Provision Commissioning Board, using collaborative commissioning principles, could take steps over time to increase the amount of AP in BCP. (**Recommendations 24**).

107. The local authority role in commissioning would best be provided through a new role of Education Commissioner. A new structure should be built around the two roles of Director and Commissioner. Some functions must remain with BCP Council because it has the statutory responsibility to provide them, such as school finance and capital spend; admissions; pupil place planning and fair access arrangements. We also recommend a small education policy team is part of the core structure in the council - see the section on Policy below (**Recommendations 24 and 25**).

108. We recommend that as well as the BCP structure, in which its statutory functions are put under a single command, a matrix structure is developed for school improvement which makes use of the skills and resources in the sector. Deciding whether the Council, a MAT or a SAT should be responsible for specific areas of improvement should be decided through a collaborative commissioning approach. The Council, through the Director and Commissioner, would have a clear leadership role and co-ordinating responsibility. The structure should be

built around an outcomes framework. Existing specialists should work within this framework (**Recommendation 26**)

109. The Council also has a key role to play in promoting the inclusion and re-integration of children in mainstream schools. The teams responsible for these crucial functions should in our view remain under the control of BCP Council as this is part of the Council's community leadership role and its leadership of place. It should inspire the sector to be inclusive . To do this it needs the active involvement of inclusion specialists in the sector. The responsibilities of the two teams within the Council are set out below. These teams should manage a network of inclusion officers from across the sector into a powerful and much more impactful inclusion network, available to all schools and which works through dialogue with those schools with a clear inclusion deficit. Another potential network supporting the changes recommended in our Inquiry is an Education Officers network, which could be supportive to education officers in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), the Youth Justice Service and the Education Safeguarding Advisers. A third is a SENCO network, extending the current SEN leadership network (**Recommendation 27**).

Inclusion Officer & Re-Integration Officers

Inclusion Officers support schools:

➢ Children missing out on education: persistent absence, school refusal, absence due to medical health, ongoing part time offer.
➢ Supporting the school to implement an effective plan to enable children/young people to access an education.
• Child/young person may need support to access Alternative Provision

Programmes Offer

Re-Integration Officers support children & families:

➢ Are case workers and support children/ family and the school to remove the barriers to accessing education.
➢ This may mean longer term direct work with children/young people and families.
➢ Child/young person may need support to access Alternative Provision

11. Leadership

110.   We have emphasised the importance of a single point of leadership in BCP Council; the importance of collegiate and collaborative leadership across the sector; use of a lead accountability matrix for school improvement; and giving more recognition to inclusion leaders within school leadership teams.

111.   Some Academy Trusts have reporting lines outside of BCP, either regionally or nationally. The regional and national leaders of the Trusts concerned need to be included and consulted about the proposed changes. They should be invited to be equal partners in the development of collaborative leadership locally. Some local Trust leaders already operate outside of BCP to good effect. One Trust CEO is currently leading on the setting up of a CEO/SAT leaders' network for BCP and Dorset. This has come about as she sits on the South West MAT Leaders Development group and BCP lacked an up-and-running network for cascading purposes across the South West. Given the amount of work that BCP is now doing across many areas, she thinks it would be useful to explore how developments in BCP can influence the South West and vice versa.

112.   Significant changes in leadership in any sector benefit from leadership coaching. The changes we recommend to develop stronger BCP-wide approaches would benefit from a leadership development programme, accessible to all school leaders. This would have to be a targeted programme designed for experienced local leaders about the local context, not a generic programme. We recommend this is developed as part of the transformation programme recommended by our Inquiry (**Recommendation 28**).

113.   Leadership by BCP Council needs to be strengthened. One service manager told me she had never been asked how her specialist service could best be used to support the widest possible level of inclusion in BCP schools and colleges. As a result, she determined which initiatives she would develop and put time into. The failure to structure the work of those supporting the education system has resulted in 'a thousand flowers blooming' but no single coherent system and structure in which everyone knows the part they play in a model of inclusion. It is a failure of leadership when priorities are not set. Leaders must work with those they manage to help them to determine priorities. Too many people we spoke to during this Inquiry talked about unproductive meetings, wild goose chases trying to arrange help for a child and time spent in recounting the child's story to different people in the same team or service as if previous conversations had never taken place. These are all examples of leadership failure or the failure to set up a coherent BCP-wide education service with clear priorities.

114.   The view we formed during our Inquiry is that a number of changes can be made in each school to give inclusion more status and significance. The first is to always give the Head Teacher the lead role for inclusion in the school and to advise that this should only be delegated when inclusion practice is embedded in the school. The second is to always make the SENCO a member of the Senior Leadership Team in the school. The third is to designate a Governor as the school's Inclusion Governor in the same way governors are designated as the SEND Governor or the Safeguarding Governor (**Recommendations 29, 30 and 31**).

12. Culture

> **A youth justice manager's view**
>
> I have had significant concerns about inclusion for some time - children excluded and set adrift from school with no apparent adequate provision in place for months, sometimes years. A lack of inclusion for us as a service makes a difficult task even more difficult in trying to help children develop positive future plans that will steer them away from offending.
>
> A child without a stake in the community, a child not invested in and valued enough to have a decent education is a child that may well struggle to find where they fit in. A knock on of this can be anti-social behaviour and offending. From my perspective the alternatives to mainstream education are often very limited. Part-time timetables with no aspiration to support the child to excel and continue to have 25 hours a week of education input. Put bluntly some of these children are given up on.

115. The 2014 SEND Code of practice gave parents meaningful rights for the first time, especially the right to request an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment for their child. The Code of Practice was never resourced properly, so it raised expectations far above the ability of local systems to meet justifiable expectations and demands. The public clamour for greater transparency in society is also having an impact. For example, the advice from educational psychologists about a child subject to an EHCNA is being increasingly challenged by parents, either when they want changes to the text or want to request a full EP assessment or a cognitive assessment, which objectively may not be needed. Increased demands by parents are also a feature of some other services like community paediatrics. We think opening up professions to more scrutiny and expectation is positive, despite the extra pressures this brings with it.

116. The SEND Code of Practice plus the greater transparency expectation means that professionals need to become more open about what they are doing, both with parents and with each other. The dominant culture can only be 'unconditional positive regard' for everyone with each other, given the pressures, the stresses, the disappointments and the fact that at any one time, one part of the system will be unable to do what it should do and this will hold everyone else up. Resource deficits and a lack of inclusion competence are the main reasons for breaks in the chain. Unforeseen or even unforeseeable events are another. At these times, relationships in BCP have sometimes broken down, giving way to aggressive behaviour borne out of frustration, or negative stereotyping and 'unfair reputational tails' – said by one Head Teacher.

117. We could find little if any training or mentoring about 'outstanding partnership behaviours'. We think this would be of great benefit, especially if it leads to agencies helping each other out more in a crisis and not hiding behind rigid eligibility criteria and reasons why flexibility is impossible. Of course, flexibility cannot mean anything goes but we did not find sufficient flexibility in the BCP system for it to be able to deal competently with mounting pressure. We recommend training is organised through the proposed

Learning Hub (**Recommendation 32**).

118.   As these quotes illustrate, BCP can descend into a low-trust, high-criticism system at times. At other times, we came across examples of outstanding partnership working. The inconsistency was notable. BCP needs to take active steps to become a 'high trust, high support and high challenge system' all of the time.

"In a low trust system, everyone feels 'second class citizens'" – a Head Teacher

"Stop e mailing, just make a phone call" – requested by several Head Teachers. In particular on this point, it would be relatively easy to set Communication Standards. Some of the standard letters we have seen are stiff and cold. Some written requests come to schools during the school holidays still expecting a response within fifteen days. Lengthy written referrals are demanded instead of brief referrals backed up with a phone call. Amending existing templates to show more warmth and humanity in the tone, even when difficult messages are being conveyed, is an easy step to take. It is the difference between being official and officious. An overhaul of processes to be more like contacts and less like processes would help to build more reliable channels of communication (**Recommendation 33**).

119.   The BCP education community still has its clubs and cliques, some of them left over from the structurally separate Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole eras. Some were stronger than we have now. Many Head Teachers have their own friendship groups. Others, especially women, feel isolated at times and raise their eyebrows about a 'rugby club culture'. Legacy cultures, legacy clubs and legacy cliques survive and prosper because BCP has not yet developed its own strong and inclusive culture and identity as a more attractive proposition for local school leaders. Whilst a culture takes time to build, strong and effective leadership based upon making the system work well for everyone involved could speed up the process. We should remember that 'culture eats strategy for breakfast'.

120.   The absence of a strong positive culture means that insiders go outside for support. Head Teachers' support systems are sometimes in their own Trusts but often outside of BCP in regional or national professional groups or friendship groups of ex-colleagues. Whilst this is quite normal, we were worried by the absence of strong formal support networks inside BCP across the 100 schools and colleges. One Head showed me 15 posts in a morning before 9 o'clock about grade inflation on a regional WhatsApp Group of which he was an active member. I think BCP could develop its own local, managed network amongst Head Teachers, Inclusion Leaders and SENCOs which would help to keep the network up to date and up to speed with inclusion issues across BCP and more widely (**Recommendation 34**).

Gaming

121.   Gaming behaviour has a multiplier effect, increasing the quantum of gaming in a system. For example, hand-offs and demand management by one professional group encourage the same in others. We heard that a GP had told one parent, who was concerned about her child's mental health, that "I don't deal with mental health issues". Paediatricians do not

accept referrals from GPs even though they work in the same service. Too many parents in BCP report being told to go somewhere else, a somewhere else that often doesn't exist. Too many schools spend and waste time chasing support. Inevitably in a culture like this, parents and agencies 'up the ante' to try to secure the service they think their child needs and deserves.

13. Policy

122.   This Inquiry is not about the politics of inclusion. That may disappoint some readers, given the importance of politics to inclusion practice. We are satisfied that local politicians are committed to inclusion and are keen to understand how best to move forward with improving inclusion services and balancing budgets. It is crucial that the proposals we make will make a positive difference and that they are affordable. There is always room for campaigning. Inclusion is only becoming more prominent now because of past and present campaigning. One of many examples of policy issues to take up suggested during the Inquiry, is a request for more flexibility from Ofsted for children and young people with SEND, in terms of age-appropriate rather than stage-appropriate progress measures.

123.   We think it is the role of the BCP Children and Young People's Partnership Board to identify public-sector wide policy issues relevant to inclusion practice and to take those forward collaboratively. This includes the major policy issues about SEND. A Government review of SEND was launched in September 2019 but is yet to report. The national High Needs Block overspend stands at over a billion pounds. The National Funding Formula for Schools needs re-working. In fact, most aspects of education policy remain under continuous review. BCP needs to play its part in this. Our view is that a collaborative model between all schools, their Trusts and the Council could break new ground if the outcomes we propose for children and young people are delivered (**Recommendation 35**).

124.   Our Inquiry suggests that local strategy should be to use all available resources to support vulnerable children being educated in mainstream schools and for the threshold for entry to a special school to move to a much higher level of need than it is now. At present, there are a number of perverse incentives which have resulted in a shift to more specialist provision. Policy should be to create the conditions for a greater level of inclusion. The starting point has to be to develop a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) which as well as demographic planning through public health and through pupil place planning builds an inclusion model into the JSNA (**Recommendation 36**).

125.   Few schools in BCP have an inclusion policy setting out commitments in detail though inclusion is often mentioned in more general policy documents. There are more behaviour policies but most concentrate on how the school will react to persistent disruptive behaviour (PDB), not how it will try to prevent it and how it will seek to understand the meaning of a child's behaviour. One of the recommendations we have made is for the development of BCP-wide model behaviour policies. A focus on inclusion will require the following changes in policy to be written and agreed:

- Inclusive admissions;

- An inclusive curriculum;
- An inclusive school culture between staff and with children and young people;

To upgrade all policies in this way and to produce a suite of model policies for use BCP-wide will need a full-time policy specialist to be built into the recommended matrix structure for education.

126. Many schools have policies relating to SEND but less to social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) which is relevant as most children on the edge of exclusion are experiencing difficulties with their social, emotional and mental health. Commendably, BCP's Educational Psychology Service is trying to embed the Sandwell Whole School Approach to well-being across BCP. This is currently being delivered in a small number of BCP schools, based upon developing SEMH provision at a whole school level. Participating BCP schools have seen a reduction in staff sickness, a small increase in pupil well-being and increases in staff well-being. These schools had above 25% increases in emotional processing promotion, social participation and staff self-esteem. If staff are happier, children tend to follow suit.

127. Small changes to policy are important, as issues arise. For example, tutoring is used increasingly, both for catching up and for children at risk of being off-rolled. Some children are being tutored in community locations like cafes as the only way to engage them. Access to tutoring without requiring an EHCP can build confidence as a bridging service to a return to school. For all of these reasons, a policy for tutoring featuring safeguards and best practice is overdue. This is another reason why a small policy team will be a crucial in a new BCP education structure (**Recommendation 37**).

128. There is a lot of good work for a policy team to build upon, including the following documents:
- Well-written and informative papers produced by the BCP Educational Psychology Service such as Covid 19 Advice on Transition and Return: and surveys gauging the views of children like 'Staying Connected';
- The BCP Early Help, Family Support and young People's Strategic Framework: 2020-23;
- The BCP Children and Young People's Plan (2021-24);
- The 2021-24 SEND and Inclusion strategy. This was co-produced by BCP Council with Dorset CCG, Parent Carers Together and Community Action Network. The strategy is being delivered as part of the SEND learning and improvement plan, which is being monitored by the SEND Improvement Board for BCP;
- The SEND graduated response toolkit (2019, updated in 2020). This drew heavily on the Poole Graduated Response and toolkit developed in 2018. Compliance with the Graduated Response needs to improve which is why as much attention needs to be given to the implementation of policy as developing it in the first place

129. There are other significant policy developments underway which support inclusion practice. For example, an Inclusion Quality Mark (IQM) is being developed for BCP, based upon similar work in Portsmouth which has been successful. This work started with a conference and workshops in November 2019. Its progress has undoubtedly been slowed down by the pandemic. The work programme includes a quality assurance programme to

audit and review levels of inclusion. In respect of this development, more account needs to be taken of related work underway in BCP outside of the council, such as the development of an Inclusion Charter by one of the MATs. This Trust has thirteen schools within BCP so is a sizeable provider.

130.   Children and young people are rarely asked to jointly lead developments. Involving children and young people in all aspects of a service makes a profound contribution to changing the culture of that service for the better. There are almost no child impact measures in place – nothing about the impact of an exclusion, a managed move or the regime within a school. At any one time, 50,000 children are being educated in BCP schools. They are a policy workforce in waiting. The proposed policy team could begin to involve children and young people more in policy, for example in a SEND young people's network, helped to do so by BCP Participation Officers. (**Recommendation 38**).

131.   Finally, and most importantly, inclusion practices and policy need to be brought together in a vision, strategy and plan for education across BCP. Two years after LGR, this should now be a political and a corporate priority. During our Inquiry, we found a clear appetite amongst providers to do this, especially a vision which focuses on high expectations for all children and young people, including standards of conduct and behaviour; the best academic results possible for all children; and the highest support possible for all children in a high trust system based on equal status between all providers. We recommend a strategic plan for education covering the next 5 years is developed in time for decisions to be taken for the 2022/23 financial year (**this is already covered by Recommendation 2**).

14. Funding

132.   Base funding for schools has not changed since 2008. Many schools find that the per pupil grant and the additional funding from BCP council for children with SEND falls well short of what is needed. First, the school has to find a notional £6000 out of its general grant (the Schools' Block of the Designated Schools Grant (DSG). This is a national funding formula, not a local one, although the size of the notional budget is set locally. If approved by the SEND Panel, BCP then tops up the notional budget of £6000 by up to £5000 giving a maximum of £11,000. It is rare for a child to attract the top level (Band D) and it is usual for the top-up to be one of the lower bands between £1000 and £2000.

133.   When banding was reduced for mainstream schools to make savings in the High Needs Block, it was obvious this was going to reduce the ability of mainstream schools to meet that need. It is clear that policy direction needs to be reversed. Schools need to feel able to meet children's needs with the resources they have available to prevent further use of specialist provision and increased exclusions.

134.   If a school has a high number of EHCPs, then the notional SEN budget will not be sufficient to cover the £6000 for all of their children on EHCPs and for all needs below the EHCP level. A budget of £60,000 for 'exceptional funding' is available though in the last year it was only

paid to 5 schools, hence it only meets a fraction of the need. This methodology was put in place for 1 year only when BCP was formed. By now it is extremely overdue for review. We think that a model of collaborative commissioning using a cash-limited budget would be a better distribution model for funding than the current banding system.

135. Other bandings are set out in a schedule, e.g. for alternative provision, for special schools and for resource bases. The experience of two schools set out below is typical.

> **The structural budget shortfall: one school's numbers**
>
> Our notional SEN funding is £138,000. £96,000 (the first £6000 of each) is committed to existing EHCPs or those in process, which is 70% of our budget. This leaves only 30% of the budget to meet the needs of other SEND children (50) and children attracting the pupil premium (61). With complex needs, there are additional staffing requirements that are not fully met by the £6000 or any top-up.

> **A primary school head-teacher and his budget**
>
> I have a child in Year 4 with global delay. He is a wonderful boy but many years behind his peers. He requires 1:1 TA support throughout the day to help with all aspects of his daily life, including intimate care. Where he is now in Year 4, the academic gulf between himself and his peers is significant and beyond reasonable adaptations to the timetable. For the past two years his funding has been cut to just £7,925 including a top up on the schools £6k. This does not even come close to covering the cost of his TA (£21,000), let alone the other services he requires to access our school. We have spent 18 months trying to get the LA to address his funding gap to no avail. His family are now looking at specialist provision for September 2021 to give him the education he really deserves.
>
> Plans are apparently being considered to cut other LA services like speech and language. Speech and language provided by the NHS is so poor that I already invest £20,000 of school funds annually on our own private speech and language therapist. This is being seen as best practice, but in reality it is deploying already scarce school resources to plug LA and NHS gaps. Cutting back on these resources will further exaggerate the challenge of keeping children in mainstream schools.

136. At present school resources are often having to be used to support these highly vulnerable children at the expense of others because no funding can be allocated until an EHCP plan is in place. Many children are either waiting for an assessment, waiting for the SEND panel to agree to an EHCP or else the child is slightly below the threshold for an EHCP but still has complex needs requiring specialist help. One Head Teacher told me 'I feel very much on my own if a child doesn't meet the threshold'. As one school said, *'We are currently supporting 5 children who are agreed specialist on the highest band of £5,000 + notional. This is a significant difference to how much a specialist school would cost for the LA. This has been for a whole academic year and for many of these children funding was not agreed until a*

final EHC plan was issued. The LA should be supporting schools to meet this need whilst they await placement. It should not be at the loss of resources and the efficient education of other children. At present, school resources are often having to be used to support these highly vulnerable children at the expense of others. Schools receive no funding until a final draft is in place, so they continue to support high needs on minimal budgets. It would be great if funds were made available to schools once EHCPs are agreed and draft plans are being finalised and once agreed, that funding is based on the provision needed, not a banding'.

137.   We have made a series of linked recommendations about incentivising mainstream schools to educate a significant number of children who currently go into special schools including independent non-maintained provision. We have also recommended this should be at the heart of a new education strategy. Any strategy needs to be funded. We are clear that the current banding system needs to be overhauled and a new structure for funding special needs in mainstream schools put in place. Whilst this is urgent, it is clear to us that changes on the scale needed cannot be put in place until the start of the academic year starting in September 2022. There is a huge amount of work to do, in consultation with the sector and with the Schools Forum, to arrive at the best commissioning framework possible and to identify where the money will come from. We believe such a system is viable financially but it will need a lot of work within the sector and a lot of goodwill to pool resources, including how overheads are treated by providers, how services are traded with a common approach to charging and how existing resources can be used to best effect, including in-kind resources (**Recommendation 39**).

138.   Decisions about funding also need to be made transparently. At the moment, how the council distributes discretionary funding is treated with suspicion within the sector – why them and why not me? We heard disturbing stories about how schools had offered low-cost value for money schemes to the council and had been ignored. One secondary offered BCP 8 extra places at low cost in an inclusion unit the school had built in its grounds with its own money, which had a proven track record. The school did not receive a reply. Another secondary had offered BCP ten places in an inclusion unit in the school, for children from other schools to access, and offered to do this with no extra revenue cost apart from the cost of ten computers. Their offer was turned down. We are convinced that if such offers are treated positively with open arms, many more vulnerable children across the conurbation can be included in mainstream schooling and that Inclusion Units and services can become a standard service in all schools.

139.   Finally in this section, an example of a school that used its resources to become more inclusive and to prevent exclusions. Our vision as a result of this Inquiry is for this practice to become universal across BCP.

> A small group of children were struggling to cope 3 years ago, showing disturbing behaviour, including being curled up under the stairwell, shouting and swearing at staff and showing major attachment issues. This led the Head Teacher to spend 70K turning a run-down building in the grounds into a Learning Centre. Prior to developing this provision, the children would have gone to a stand-alone learning centre eleven miles away. The Centre works with 8 students with 2 teachers. They now have the capacity to take on students from other schools who are at the edge of exclusion (for a 6–12-week stint, though one original student is still there). The purpose is for children to return to mainstream school and education. Students still have the same broad curriculum plus some add on classes like mindfulness (English, Maths, History, Science, Geography plus horticulture). The Head Teacher is in part influenced by his parents' Salvation Army background. He worked in a night shelter whilst at university and teaching has been his lifelong passion and commitment

15. Workforce development

140.   'We're all trying to do our best' (words spoken by a senior council officer). The challenges to staff at the moment, especially teachers, are considerable. This has been heightened by the growing complexity of the teaching and learning environment because of the Covid pandemic. The rise in child mental health problems like anxiety since the return to school has placed extra pressure on children and young people, their families and on schools. This is another reason to spend time on developing and maintaining an inclusive culture. Mental health difficulties are often invisible and do not always lead to challenging external behaviour. Often the challenging behaviour and thinking is inside the child. An inclusive culture puts a team around the child and those directly responsible for the child, to maximise the chances of helping the child. Staff need training to be able to do this.

141.   Techniques such as non-violent resistance (NVR) and conflict resolution strategies can also support inclusive teaching and an inclusive classroom and could be taught in BCP more systematically. The Council should make its training programmes available to schools. At present, some courses, like motivational interviewing, are only available for Council staff. Similarly, MATs could make some of their programmes more widely available.

142.   Whole-school approaches to inclusion like the Sandwell Whole School Approach can support stronger inclusion practice. Only a small number of schools have signed up to this development. This is an example of a fragmented approach to the development of the BCP teaching workforce. Teachers are trained in different behaviour management approaches, different teaching styles and different methodologies, about differentiation for example. Individual schools buy in different people or companies to deliver their learning and development offer. We do think the Learning Hub we have proposed could put together a coherent training offer to all schools. If it became good enough, we think the vast majority of schools would buy into it. In the same way that we think school improvement should be

commissioned collaboratively, we think that a Learning Hub could be hosted by a school or a Trust or by more than one hub e.g., a BCP-wide primary learning hub and a BCP-wide Secondary Learning Hub. The learning hub/s could also be a resource base and could perhaps be co-created with a local University or a consortium of providers led by the Teaching Hub whose role is specifically to build a stronger teaching workforce (**Recommendation 40**).

143. Working inclusively cannot easily be defined as taking a day or 2 days a week, whether for a Head Teacher, a SENCO, a DSL or even an Inclusion Leader. It has to be a way of working and approaching the professional task throughout the working week. However, responsibility for inclusion could be written into job descriptions for those operating across the system. Given multiple roles and multiple employers, a standard clause could be inserted into every job description by agreement between employers, along the lines of

'**You will be expected to comply with the BCP-wide Inclusion Standard, based upon each child being unique and each child having a unique and changing set of needs which will be supported though inclusivity'**.

144. Workforce development also means seeing children and young people as the workforces of the future. We heard about a number of children, now 15 or 16, who had been out of school and out of meaningful education for 2-3 years, who were supporting younger children in the same way TAs or learning coaches do. One young person who was helping out in such a way at a primary school was also being re-integrated into a secondary school so as to gain as many qualifications as possible even at a late stage. We commend both schools for their inclusivity.

145. Specific inclusion-related roles could be prioritised in terms of workforce development. The role of Consultant SENCO was suggested to us in which a small number of experienced SENCOs would mentor and advise unqualified or inexperienced SENCOs. This role would support high quality SEN practice through which it would indirectly support many children with special educational needs and disabilities in those schools whose numbers are low but who nevertheless need advice and help from time to time. We recommend a Workforce Development Manager should be a core role in the new BCP structure for education. Part of this postholder's responsibility should be for developing the education workforce of the future in BCP through developing policy alliances with local universities and the new local Teaching Hub. Some schools could play a crucial role in this, especially the many schools who have retained and internally promoted their own leaders over the last 10-15 years and who understand talent management and succession planning. These schools have also extended the skill-set of their staff to be 'teachers plus', with skills and confidence in many aspects of child development, not just academic performance. Another development area is the role of Teaching Assistants or Learning Coaches, on whom so many vulnerable children depend for support (**Recommendation 41**).

146. The new Director of Education for BCP has a key role to play in taking the workforce development aspect of inclusivity forward. One clause in her job description is 'to promote inclusion, including through the development and delivery of an authority-wide model for inclusion and to challenge schools where pupil exclusions are unreasonable, identifying mechanisms to keep permanent exclusions to the irreducible minimum'. This is a clear mandate to do what needs to be done.

16. Data, evidence bases and quality assurance

147. Using data can prevent exclusion by helping to identify those children who need early intervention. Predictive analysis can be used to look at children who are at increased risk of permanent exclusion and those at risk of NEET. This can prompt discussion with schools to arrange packages of support to protect children from educational disengagement. This is one reason why it is so important to develop the capability across the BCP education system to collate and analyse data and metrics. A positive example of the importance of data is the BCP Management Information Teams system to track the destinations of students from GCSE onwards so that schools can report at a pupil level the destination of each young person who has learnt in their setting.

148. Improving performance on inclusion requires accurate data which measures change in the right variables over time. BCP council is the only agency able to do this and to collect and collate the requisite management information. Currently, there is very little data about inclusion so the first step is to develop an Inclusion Dashboard (**Recommendation 42**). This would be for schools to use internally, not to be used externally for purposes of comparison. This would risk sparking competitiveness and denial in our view. Initially, proxy measures will have to be used. Existing measures collected like the number of disadvantaged children compared with the national average or the number of children eligible for free school meals do not tell enough of a story about inclusion. The measures will be difficult to define but doing so is in our view an essential task for data analysts across the sector.

149. All schools should make their data available to BCP Council so that it can produce an Inclusion Dashboard and a Strategic Plan to inform future planning and action. All schools should sign up to automatic imports from their pupil management information system (MIS) into Synergy. Automatic imports will provide BCP council as the co-ordinating body with up-to-date information about pupils on roll, new starters, leavers, sessional attendance (attendance registers) and data on exclusions. This enables the accurate recording of pupils moving on and off roll and 'real time' attendance data. 70% of schools share information in this way. However, many information-sharing agreements with individual schools were signed years ago, hence the need to produce a detailed and up-to-date Information Sharing Agreement by all schools with BCP Council. Data-sharing would help to make the important school workforce census more accurate (**Recommendation 43**).

150. In a similar vein, we recommend that a standing Data Group is formed, including data specialists from within Trusts as well as the local authority e.g., from the regional or national MATs, so that whole-system data is more readily collected and analysed **(Recommendation 44)**.

151. More work is needed to improve the interface between software systems, so that recording can be uploaded and shared more readily, e.g. by the Inclusion Team into the workflow on Mosaic (the main case management system in children's social care).

152. Quality assurance needs to be strengthened across the system so that the system is supported to 'know itself' (**Recommendation 45**).

17. Resources

153. A Deputy Head told us about a boy with special needs: "Today, I met with a mother who is sending her child to us in September. He is a wheelchair user with very limited mobility. I have had a list as long as my arm of all the adaptations we will have to make, including buying three chairs at a cost of £3500 each. His total EHCP is £3,600 per year! So the school will have to find the additional £25,000 to fund the TA and all of the equipment. These are all normal things that we deal with – we have never turned a student away!".

154. We have already recommended an urgent review of the banding system so in this final section of our Inquiry, we wanted to end with expressing the strong view we reached that the only way to fund inclusion properly and sustainably is to develop and transform the informal matched funding that is taking place in every school every day of the year into a formal resource pooling strategy. Maintained schools, single academy trusts, multi-academy trusts, selective schools have needs to meet and resources to deploy. As well as cash, they have access to a huge amount of potential in-kind support where expertise, not money, could change hands. We repeat our view there is huge untapped potential in BCP which needs stronger leadership to bring the total aggregated resource together for a common purpose (**this is already covered by Recommendation 5 above**).

155. Moving to collaborative commissioning and resource pooling would be a major piece of work in its own right. Our Inquiry ends with the recognition that our recommendations will need to be prioritised and that some will need extra funding. This will not be easy. It is extremely hard to base an investment strategy on delivering savings in a few years' time as those future savings can never be guaranteed. The first step is to put a 5-year plan together, worked up collaboratively with the sector, in time for 2022/23 budget decisions to be made. Within this process, the resources needed to deliver the highest priority objectives for Year 1 of the plan should be identified, aiming to build momentum from there.

And finally, we hope our Inquiry report gives the Director of Children's Services and the Director of Education, working with the sector, a clear mandate to transform inclusion practice across BCP. Our recommendations are in line with major programmes in public policy such as the development of Integrated Care Systems in the NHS, with its emphasis on strengthening collaborative government on the ground.

18. Recommendations

1. Be assured about inclusion practice in Early Years provision;
2. Write, through a co-production with the sector, a vision, strategy and plan for Education in BCP covering the next 5 years, including a clearer post-16 stategy;
3. Enable children and young people to have a say in the way the education system in BCP is run;
4. Front-line agencies should give each school in BCP and the College a single point of contact (SPOC) to facilitate access to support and for general communication purposes;
5. Move to collaborative resourcing;
6. Incorporate the lessons from lived experiences into policy and practice, through practice guidance;
7. Co-produce then negotiate sign-up to a BCP-wide Inclusion Standard;
8. Develop a lead accountability model for peer support between schools;
9. Clarify and simplify referral pathways;
10. Use a locality hub and not a single school model for piloting inclusion initiatives;
11. Develop a Learning Hub to build a BCP method of inclusive teaching;
12. Promote best practice in inclusive design and layout of schools;
13. Recruit, train and support a team of young inspectors to inspect schools for being child-friendly environments;
14. Develop a BCP apprenticeship strategy;
15. Introduce a formal and mandatory pre-exclusion case conferencing system;
16. That all front-line agencies consider how they can best support pre-exclusion practice;
17. That model behaviour policies are developed: one for primary, one for secondary and one for special schools;
18. That the current Fair Access Panels use a 'best interests of the child' Terms of Reference;
19. That Fair Access Panel paperwork is changed to be more child-centred;
20. Establish a SEND Fair Access Panel;
21. Issue advice to prevent 'gaming the system' behaviours;
22. Review the workings of s 39 (4) of the 2014 Children and Families Act;
23. Establish an Alternative Provision Commissioning Board;
24. Restructure education services in the Local Authority, basing the structure around the roles of Director of Education and Education Commissioner;
25. As part of the new Education structure in BCP Council, establish a small education policy team;
26. Extend the school improvement function in BCP Council into the sector and run it on collaborative principles using a collegiate leadership model;
27. Establish 3 managed networks – one for Inclusion Leaders, one for Education Officers and one for SENCOs;
28. Develop a leadership programme with coaching input for the sector as part of strengthening a collaborative culture;
29. Give Head Teachers the lead role for inclusion in their school;
30. Ensure school SENCOs are always on a school's Senior Leadership Team as core members;
31. Each Governing Body to have an Inclusion Governor;
32. Offer a training package on 'outstanding' partnership working and behaviour, organised through the Learning Hub;
33. Review the templates for communication with partner agencies and families to ensure they are user-friendly;

34. Offer Heads membership of a local managed network for Head Teachers if one can be established which adds value for them;
35. Develop a collaborative model of provision between all schools, their Trusts and BCP Council;
36. Update the JSNA to say more about the education component, referencing inclusion needs;
37. The proposed policy team to co-produce a policy on tutoring, featuring safeguards and good practice;
38. Via the BCP Participation Officers, involve children more in developing local education policy and establish a SEND young people's network;
39. Change the current banding system so that mainstream schools can afford to educate the maximum number of children who would otherwise need to be educated in a special school;
40. Incorporate workforce development into the Learning Hub Terms of Reference and offer;
41. Establish a role of Workforce Development Manager in the new BCP education structure;
42. Develop an Inclusion Dashboard;
43. Share data without exception between all schools and BCP Council;
44. Form a Data Group across the sector to make best use of data and to provide the sector with insight, intelligence and analysis on a commissioned basis;
45. Strengthen Quality Assurance across the whole system.

Finally, we end with some success stories. We have tried throughout our Inquiry to combine praise and constructive criticism. We hope we have succeeded. Only time will tell. We would like to thank all those who contributed to this Inquiry. We hope we have done justice to the issues you raised and the experiences you shared.

Success stories

Amy was out of school for virtually the whole of Year 7 and Year 8 but was successfully re-integrated in Year 9. She was never abandoned by her school, who kept in touch with her throughout and gradually encouraged her and supported her back in.

Malak was permanently excluded in Year 8, moved into Alternative Provision and is now hoping to attend university to become a teacher.

Luke was moved between secondary schools after carrying out a violent assault on another young person in Year 9. His life was spiralling out of control. However, with the wrap around support of his new school, he is now in Year 11 and he is about to go to horticultural college to study gardening.

In Year 9, **Robert** punched a boy, leaving him in a coma. After the inevitable permanent exclusion, he spent most of year 10 disengaged but he was re-integrated into a new school in Year 11 and is now working hard to become an apprentice. The new school and his re-integration worker have helped him to make one of the hardest transitions – to get back into the mainstream after having left it psychologically.

Anthony Douglas CBE   Councillor Nicola Greene

DfE Improvement Adviser to BCP Council   Portfolio holder for Covid resilience, schools and skills

19. Glossary

AP	Alternative provision
ASD	Autistic spectrum disorder
BCP	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole
EHCPNA	Education, health and care plan needs assessment
EHE	Elective Home Education
JSNA	Joint strategic needs assessment
LAC	Looked after child (a child in care)
LGR	Local Government Re-organisation
ODD	Oppositional Defiant Disorder
PDA	Pathological demand avoidance
PEP	Personal education plan
PLAC	Previously looked after child
SEMH	Social, emotional and mental health
SEND	Special educational needs and disabilities
TAS	Team around the school
VSC	Virtual School and College

20. Appendix 1

1 April 2021

To everyone with an interest in inclusion practices in BCP schools and colleges

An appreciative inquiry into inclusion practices in BCP schools and colleges: to be carried out during April and May 2021

In April and May, we will be conducting an inquiry into inclusion practices in all BCP schools and colleges. Our vision is to see best inclusion practice in all BCP learning institutions. We are keen to hear all views and to understand and showcase best practice examples. We will also be focusing on the problems to be solved. We hope our inquiry will have an immediate application in BCP and that it will also support service improvements across the South West.

I am leading and co-ordinating this Inquiry in my role as independent Chair of the BCP Children and Young People's Partnership. We have recently produced a strategic plan covering 2021/24 aimed at improving the life chances and well-being of all children and young people living locally.

Here are the 7 issues we will address in our Inquiry:

1) The voice of the child, their story and their lived experiences is not always being heard or understood;
2) Inequalities widened during the pandemic and gaps need to be narrowed;
3) Too many children and young people are being avoidably allowed to dis-engage from mainstream study or training, either through a passive acceptance of disengagement: by actively pushing a child away; or by a failure of other agencies to get involved and to play a part in problem-solving;
4) At times, we see a focus on attainment without an equivalent focus on well-being, when both are vital to outstanding education provision today;
5) Data shows BCP has more than the national average for school exclusions - we are unashamedly aiming to secure a signed agreement by all schools and colleges to keep exclusions in the future to the irreducible minimum and to create a BCP-wide pathway to support that;
6) There are significant local barriers and disincentives to schools and colleges being inclusive – our intention is to put in place a change programme to dismantle them;
7) We will aim to identify extra benefits from our Inquiry for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

We have all come through a difficult year which is unlikely to get much easier during the coming months. We think this is a good time for our Inquiry, as we can build on the greater openness and collaboration which was present throughout the year of the pandemic.

We are mindful of related reviews taking place simultaneously, such as the High Needs Block Review which aims to create a better future for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Given the over-representation of children and young people with

SEND in the problems we are addressing, we need to co-ordinate our programme of work with that of others working to the same end in the same space.

We do not want our Inquiry to be burdensome, yet we do want to give everyone with a view the chance to contribute. This letter - which will be widely circulated - serves to open our Inquiry and also to act as a call for evidence. By evidence, we mean proposed solutions to the 7 issues in focus. Submissions can take any form. Whilst we will read and note all submissions, ours is a solution-focused Inquiry so inevitably we will give more consideration to suggested ways forward. The problems are sufficiently well-known and well-evidenced for us to take them as read. Sometimes children's stories or a family's story can tell you the way forward in the sense of not making the same avoidable mistake again, so our ears and eyes will be open for that.

We will be talking to children and young people directly affected, their parents and wider family members as well as professionals. We will also be looking at other local systems with a positive reputation for being inclusive like Portsmouth, Bridgend and Halton. Considerable work has been undertaken already in BCP about strengthening inclusion practices which we intend to acknowledge and build upon. We will be showcasing existing best practice in BCP which I have seen already at schools I have visited. I have seen programmes and support for individual children and young people which is of the highest quality.

We hope you feel able to contribute to our Inquiry by one means or another. We completely understand the pressures you are under at the moment whatever your role in the system – as children, young people, parents and professionals. We promise not to take up anyone's time gratuitously.

We aim to publish our findings in June and then to roll out the lessons through the BCP Children and Young People's Partnership Board.

Please contact us directly at appreciativeinquiry@bcpcouncil.gov.uk (Live from 6 April 2021)

Best wishes,

Review team

Anthony Douglas CBE (lead reviewer)
Independent Chair of the BCP Children and Young People's Partnership and DfE improvement adviser to BCP Council (leading and co-ordinating the inquiry)

and

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Supported by

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