

Members Briefing

Proposal to close the Warwickshire Pupil Referral Unit

December 2011

Aims of the session

- To inform Members of the reasons for proposing the closure of the Warwickshire PRU
- To inform Members of the main points raised during the consultation period and the key risks identified

Outcomes for excluded pupils

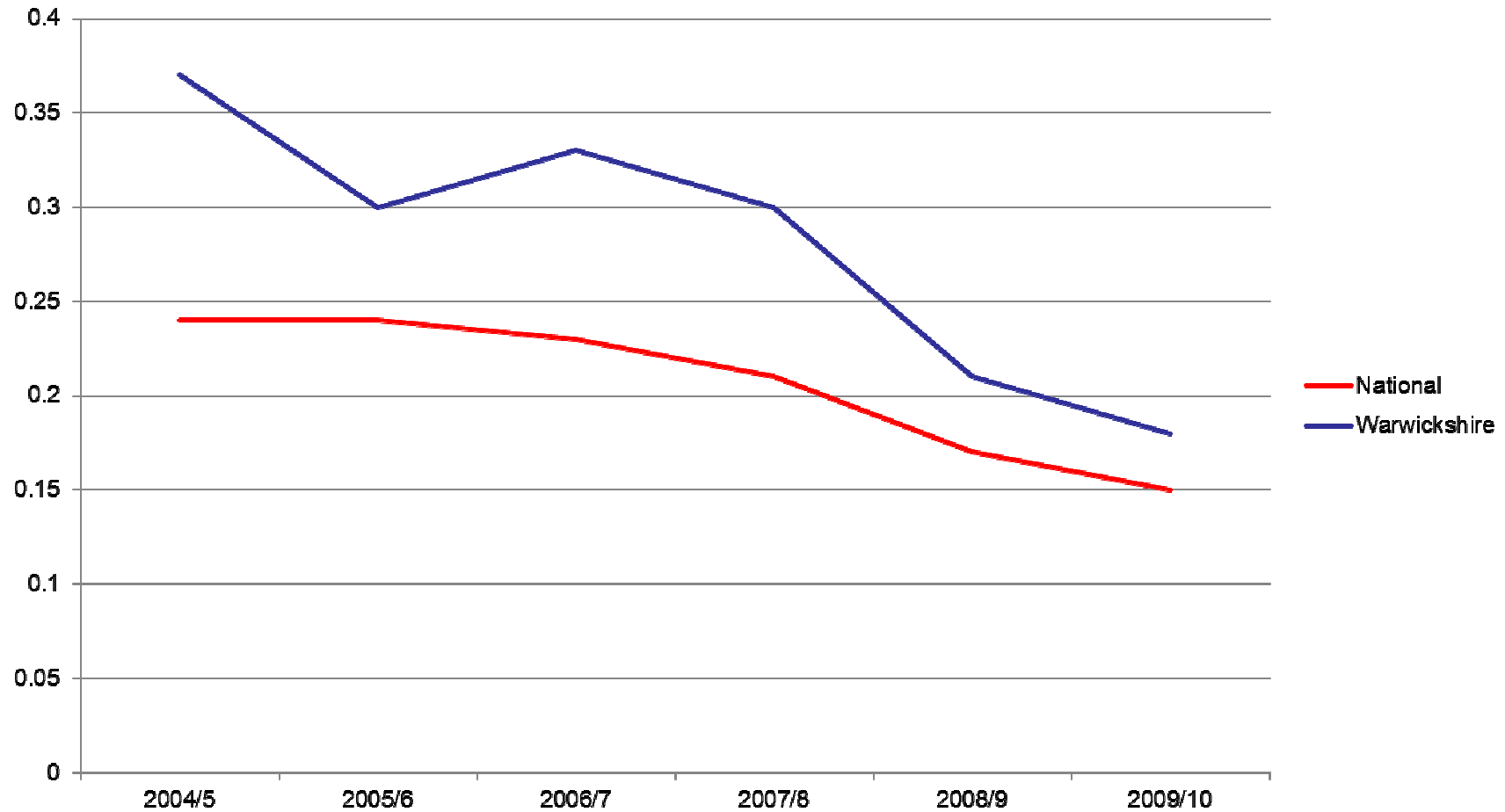
‘There is ...a wealth of experience linking exclusion from school with academic underachievement, offending behaviour , limited ambition, homelessness and mental ill health.’

House of Commons Education Select Committee, Behaviour and Discipline in Schools, para 17.3, 2011.

Why are Warwickshire adopting a new approach?

- Permanent exclusions are above the national average
- Better use of resources – the costs of a place at the PRU are high
- Quality of provision - the Warwickshire PRU is currently judged as inadequate

Permanent exclusions by percentage of secondary school population



Better use of resources

- PRU cost is £2.8m (Dedicated Schools Grant)
- Cost of a child in the Warwickshire PRU in 2009/10 was £26,000 per pupil per year

NB. Average cost of secondary school place is approx £4,000

Quality of provision

- Ofsted judgement in June 2010 on the Warwickshire PRU was that it required special measures.
- Monitoring visit in October 2011 said that satisfactory progress had been made – with positive comment on college provision.
- Major reorganisation has taken place and significant downsizing.

New approach

The main principles of this approach are:

- Devolving funding to schools
- Schools working collaboratively to:
 - fund early intervention support in order to avoid exclusion
 - implement the managed transfer process
 - purchase packages of education appropriate to the individual child from alternative providers.
- Pilot in 2011/12, £1.6m has been devolved to the four Secondary Area Behaviour Partnerships (ABPs).
- Proposal to Cabinet to close the PRU with effect from 31 August 2012

Responses to consultation

Support for proposal

- ***The current arrangements are not working.*** Pupils excluded from school are currently being failed by the local authority and new arrangements must be adopted to improve outcomes for this group of young people.
- ***The focus on early intervention is welcomed.*** Establishing a system that is equipped for addressing issues of concern sooner rather than later is considered to be better for the pupils and better value for money.
- ***It is preferable to keep children in mainstream school if at all possible.*** Inclusion in mainstream school for all pupils is considered highly desirable and positive in the development of young people.

Responses to consultation

Concerns

The focus should be on improving provision at the PRU rather than making system-wide change.

Comment

The issues presented at the PRU cannot be considered in isolation from the persistently high permanent exclusion rate. Where a pupil is excluded, the PRU is no longer considered an appropriate destination. The PRU brings together children who have been excluded, regardless of their individual needs and circumstances. The new approach enables schools to choose from a range of options appropriate to the needs of the pupil (eg. a different curriculum offer or specialist provision).

Responses to consultation

Concerns

There is not enough evidence to show that the new approach will work. More time is needed before a final decision is made on the future of the PRU.

Comment

- For the period 1 September – 30 November 2011, there have been 10 permanent exclusions from secondary schools and Academies. This compares favourably with permanent exclusions over the same period in 2008 (32), 2009 (11), and 2010 (28).
- The experience of placing PRU pupils in further education colleges is also showing encouraging signs of success.
- Should the PRU not close in August 2012, it is anticipated that the local authority would continue to provide inadequate education provision for a vulnerable group of young people.

Responses to consultation

Concerns

If there is not a PRU, what happens when a child is excluded?

Comment

- Head teachers still have the right to exclude.
- When a permanent exclusion does take place, the ABP has three options to consider.
 - For the pupil to be admitted to another school in the area
 - For the pupil to access provision from an independent provider
 - For the pupil to access a short stay assessment place, commissioned by the local authority, to allow time to consider more fully the first two options.
- Provision would be paid for using devolved ABP funding.

Responses to consultation

Concerns

The new approach proposed may have unintended consequences for other pupils. Some of the pupils concerned require specialist support and so retain them in mainstream schools could lead to disruption to the learning and progress of other pupils in the class.

Comment

- The development of Learning Support Units (LSUs) within secondary schools is a key part of the new approach. LSUs allow schools to make temporary arrangements for pupils who, for whatever reason, cannot participate in classroom settings.
- In addition to LSUs, schools may use alternative providers to provide a more engaging curriculum offer.

Responses to consultation

Concerns

The new approach proposed carries financial risks. What happens if Area Behaviour Partnerships overspend? Is the devolved funding level guaranteed?

Comment

- ABPs would be required to work within the overall budget allocated
 - Early intervention, through LSUs and part time alternative providers, are proving to be less expensive than providing a full time PRU place.
 - The level of funding for the new approach would be identified from that currently allocated to the PRU under the Dedicated Schools Grant, agreed by the Schools Forum.
 - It should be made clear that the proposal is not part of a cost-cutting exercise.
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Key risks

Area Behaviour Partnerships do not fulfil the expectations placed upon them.

- Agreements for the devolvement of funding were made and signed by secondary head teachers.

Funding for the new approach is reduced.

- Warwickshire funding through the Dedicated Schools Grant is currently protected by central government. The amount of funding devolved is dependent on approval from the Schools Forum.

There is not enough independent full time provision to meet the need.

- The local authority has hosted two alternative provider briefing sessions. In total, 45 alternative providers attended the briefings, 17 of which provide full time alternative provision. The local authority is in the process of establishing quality assured lists of alternative providers.

ABPs

- Different approaches in different areas
- So far, reduction in permanent exclusions
- Increase in use of part time alternative provision
- Increase in number of Learning Support Units

College placements - Ofsted

- ‘The pupils at college are positive about what they have learnt so far this term.’
- ‘Behaviour and attendance have improved significantly for the cohort who are attending college courses. This was exemplified by the mature way in which the pupils were able to talk to the inspector about their experiences.’
- ‘The opportunities provided by the colleges are helping to improve the pupils’ economic well-being and the links to their futures and the world are made clear. Pupils relish being treated in a more mature way and the vast majority rise to the high expectations of their behaviour.’

Outcomes

- Inclusion
- Improved behaviour, attendance and attitude to learning
- Educational progress and attainment
- Reintegration to school
- Positive destinations
- Improved well-being through working with other support services (eg. CAMHS, family support)
- Meet statutory duties