

Plymouth Commission - Strand 3.1 Reducing Pupil Mobility

A Summary of the Work so Far and a Proposal to be Presented to Schools Forum, 11 November, 2020

Richard Woodland (rwoodland@westst.org.uk)

Introduction

Since September, I have been seconded from Westcountry Schools Trust to Plymouth City Council to work on one of the perceived barriers to secondary educational attainment across the city, namely pupil mobility driven by high rates of exclusion and elective home education, exacerbated by a lack of breadth and depth in the quality of alternative provision available to schools to keep pupils in mainstream settings. An implementation plan has been developed and remains an 'ongoing' piece of work as this is an area of policy and practice which is notoriously fluid (e.g. proposed amendments to the School Admission Code could bring further changes to the city's Fair Access Protocol).

This paper sets-out the vision, values and principles that need to be adopted across the city if pupils with challenging behaviour are to be more successfully integrated in mainstream schools. It goes on to promote a model of 'inclusion support bases' based around the three emerging clusters of secondary schools that could be set-up in partnership between the LA, schools and other agencies (see Appendix A for summary).

These bases should not be seen as another alternative provision offer. Rather, they should be seen as part of a graduated response to inclusion that offers school leaders another option for supporting pupils' long-term success in mainstream settings through specialist assessment and intervention for a period of time, but crucially with the notion of maintain relational links to the 'home-school' throughout any placement. The role of these bases is related to wider system change, in particular the need to promote workforce development and CPD that enables all schools to be more trauma-informed and inclusive whilst maintaining the calm, safe and well-disciplined classrooms in which teaching and learning can thrive.

A Vision for an Inclusive Plymouth Education System

Plymouth schools will work cohesively within the wider-system to ensure an inclusive culture that meets the needs of all learners. We aspire to become a "zero exclusion" city. This will be achieved by:

- Plymouth schools having an ambitious, supportive and inclusive culture where academic and personal success is built around positive relationships.
- A commitment from all stakeholders to sharing best practice and resources; working collaboratively for the greater good of the young people of Plymouth.
- Staff and pupils in Plymouth schools being self-aware and socially literate. They will be able to self-regulate and communicate effectively, even when facing challenges, and as a result teaching and learning will flourish such that pupils make good progress and are able to transition successfully to the next stage of life.
- Plymouth schools having behaviour policies and support programs, designed around the city's graduated approach to inclusion¹, that are consistently and fairly applied, and which ensure all staff and pupils benefit from a calm, safe learning environment.
- Teachers and support staff being highly skilled at recognising pupils who may need additional support, and this being provided through effective early intervention and high-quality alternative provision.
- School leaders and pastoral staff having easy access to a skilled team of specialists who can provide bespoke solutions to meet the needs of Plymouth's most vulnerable learners.
- Staff working in challenging situations having easy access to professional supervision and wellbeing support.

¹ <https://www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com/article/2669/Assess-Graduated-approach-to-Inclusion-SENCO-Guide>

Values

- The safety and wellbeing of children and staff is the most important driving factor in our city-wide approach to inclusion.
- All children have an equal right to access the educational opportunities provided in Plymouth schools. This does not mean all children will be treated exactly the same, as some will require specific support to overcome the challenges they face.
- Staff have high expectations of all children, in all areas of academic and personal development. *Where children struggle to meet these expectations, staff have due regard for individual circumstances. However, circumstances are not allowed to become excuses for poor behaviour or poor academic progress.*
- Schools will take a trauma-aware stance when dealing with those pupils who present challenging behaviour as a result of adverse childhood experiences.

Principles that Guide Inclusive Practices

- By relentlessly focussing on improving the quality of teaching and ensuring behaviour for learning policies are fairly and consistently applied school leaders can promote a safe, inclusive learning environment for all children.
- All teachers are teachers of special education needs²; they should seek support from specialists (e.g. SENDCO) to develop their practice but recognise their own responsibility to include pupils with SEND.
- School leaders should work proactively with their staff to create an environment which helps pupils to develop the executive functioning and self-regulation skills necessary to be successful at school.
- When things go wrong, as they will sometimes do when working with children, all parties will be treated fairly and compassionately, with an emphasis on restoring relationships.
- Exclusion, whether fixed-term or permanent, will only be used as a last resort.

A Graduated and Integrated Approach to Inclusion

“Students learn best when they are in school, where their needs are being met and there is continuity of provision. This stability will give them the best start possible in life. Any student movement from a school should be a last resort.” Summary from roundtable discussion on reducing pupil mobility in Plymouth, February 2020

This quote succinctly captures the core purpose of what the reducing pupil mobility strand of the Plymouth Commission Strategy is about – a focus on getting it right in schools. It, therefore, interfaces to the other strands which are seeking to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the city. When pupils experience high quality teaching, supported by a high-quality pastoral provision and a graduated approach to inclusion that meets their individual needs, they will want to stay in school.

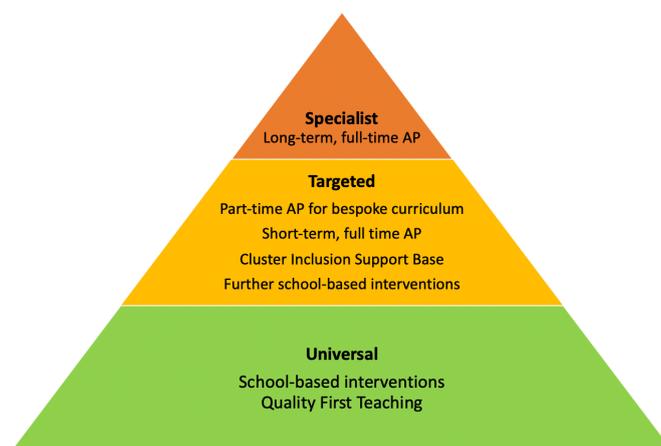
However, whilst the city continues on its improvement journey the needs of all pupils may not be met solely in school. For some pupils, the right provision will be outside of their ‘home’ school. They may benefit from alternative provision which is:

- Short-term and part-time, e.g. an afternoon a week with a youth worker to work on self-regulation or resilience;
- Short-term and full-time, e.g. an intervention and re-engagement programme at another school or alternative provision;
- Long-term and part-time, e.g. providing a bespoke curriculum, delivered through an appropriate approach, or through a vocational course not available at the home school;
- Long-term and full-time, e.g. a move to single registration status at an Ofsted registered alternative provision, who can provide an appropriate specialist response.

Taking these ideas, and superimposing them into the graduated response and tiered-approach produces, a starting point for a model which could be further developed through collaborating with stakeholders across the system, as shown in Figure 1.

² DfE (2015) SEND Code of Practice for 0-25 Years

Figure 1 - A Tiered Approach to Inclusive Education across Plymouth



Ensuring that there is a sufficient high-quality alternative provision offer across the city is a priority, and forms part of Strand 3.1. However, there is work that can be done on how individual schools, and clusters of schools, can improve the support for individual pupils within mainstream settings *before* a change of mainstream school or a move to long-term alternative provision is considered. Although the early work in this strand has focussed on the Fair Access Protocol it could be argued that this was “putting the cart before the horse.” Pragmatically we are where we are, but there is an urgent need to consider proactive measures to support inclusion, and thus reduce pupil mobility. For example:

- Upskilling all staff (not just teachers) in their own self-regulation, de-escalation and trauma-aware practices. Reducing conflict in school, whilst maintaining high expectations of academic success and personal conduct, is possible and is likely to reduce pupil mobility. This workforce development can be supported by an appropriate CPD programme. This work should integrate with the work already begun by the Plymouth Trauma Informed Network³.
- Supporting school leaders to ensure that behaviour systems are simple, fair, proportionate and consistently applied. These systems need to incorporate a graduated approach to support the needs of pupils with SEMH, particularly where the impact of ACEs/trauma is affecting behaviour.
- Providing a mechanism for behaviour leads to consider the recent literature from the like of the EEF⁴, Tom Bennett⁵ and Paul Dix⁶. The Plymouth Commission Strategy portal and/or a network may be a way forward with this. Schools wishing to evaluate their current practice could use the DfE Behaviour Audit Tool.⁷
- Developing the skills of all staff to better support the needs of pupils with SEND. Whole School SEND Gateway⁸ is a good starting point for training materials. The Plymouth Local Offer signposts other providers who can support.⁹
- Outreach from other providers already operating in the City, e.g. Courtlands School to School Support¹⁰ has been developing a model across Plymouth’ Primary Schools which could be replicated at secondary by them or other providers (e.g. ACE School Plymouth?)
- Ensuring schools, or clusters of schools, have access to appropriate ‘in-school’ inclusion bases with suitably skilled staff who can ensure pupils with challenging behaviour and/or complex needs receive the right blend of support to work on self-regulation and self-efficacy alongside continuing their work. It is important to re-iterate that the underlying principle of such bases must be on providing temporary additional support to the pupil, and the staff in the ‘home-school’, such that in the long-term the pupil re-engages successfully with their mainstream placement.

³ <http://www.plymouthscb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Trauma-Informed-Plymouth-Approach-FINAL-April-2019.pdf>

⁴ EEF (2019) *Guidance Report Improving Behaviour in Schools*

⁵ Bennett, T (2017) *Creating a Culture: How School Leaders Can Optimise Behaviour*

Bennett, T (2020) *Running the Room*. John Catt.

⁶ Dix, P (2017) *When the Adults Change Everything Changes*. Independent Thinking Press.

⁷ Available to download at <https://www.cpdportal-sw.org/18-19-school-improvement-commission/guidance-for-nles-nlgs-and-system-leaders/nle-behaviour-audit-tool>

⁸ <https://www.sendgateway.org.uk>

⁹ <https://www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com/plymouthlocaloffer/secondary>

¹⁰ <https://www.courtlands.acemat.uk/page/?title=SCHOOL+TO+SCHOOL+SEND+SUPPORT&pid=48>

- Providing schools with a suitable ‘crisis response’ function that can prevent a rapid escalation to exclusion when a pupil appears to be ‘heading off the rails.’ If this response can encompass a multi-agency, family-centred response that is located within the ‘home-school’ so much the better;
- Ensuring that ‘early help’ offer across the system is responsive to schools’ needs and does not disproportionately rely on schools themselves to provide lead professionals and resources for EHATs etc.;
- Considering the benefits of short-term and part-time alternative provision to help re-focus, support or engage a pupil who is struggling in full-time mainstream classes.

Only when these types of in-school or across-cluster support processes have been fully exhausted should schools ask whether a change of setting may help. As far as possible, schools need to ‘hang on in’ with their more challenging pupils. Anecdotally moving schools has a low-rate of success¹¹, perhaps due to the challenges of pupils adjusting to a new setting and having to form new relationships with staff.

Where it becomes necessary for a pupil to move schools, there needs to be appropriate support mechanisms in place to maximise the chances of success. These are likely to include:

- A collaborative approach to transition planning, with staff from both schools working with the pupil and their family on an agreed support plan and understanding of what success looks like;
- A recognition that the receiving school is likely to have invest considerable resource to make the move work (thus, over time, clusters of schools need to develop trust and commit to being both ‘givers and receivers’ of support)
- Regular reviews, involving all stakeholders, during the transition phase¹²;
- A clearly identified mechanism to hold an ‘emergency review’ if it looks like the move is not progressing successfully.

Exploring the possibility of inclusion clusters employing ‘transition workers’ could be worthwhile, and such workers could be based within the inclusion support bases outlined below, but maintain regular contact across each of the schools within the cluster. As a starting point the job description might be shaped around:

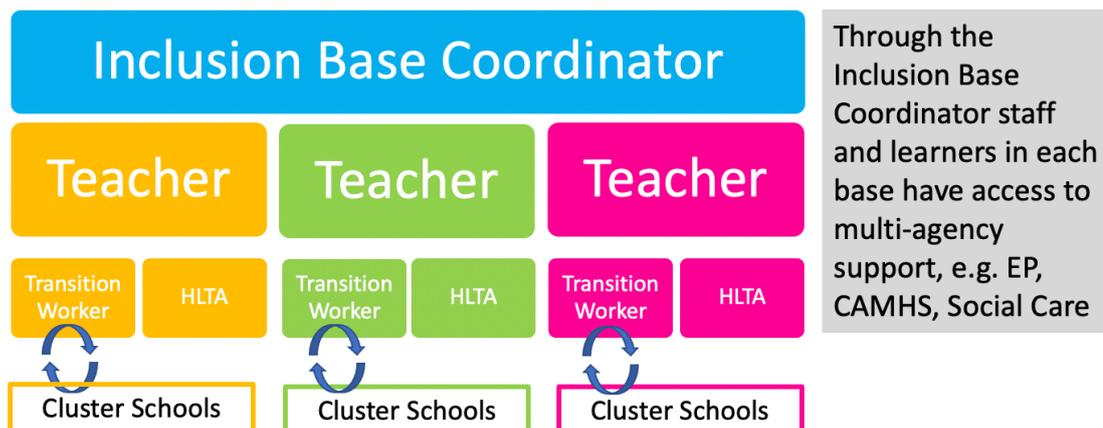
- HLTA type skill-sets (NJC Grade D);
- Working across all schools in the cluster as part of their day to day role so that they become familiar with systems, staff and pupils who are ‘surfacing’ in each school;
- Working more intensively in a school, with a pupil at the point of transition;
- Being available to go into alternative provision and meet pupils who will soon begin the re-integration process back into mainstream, and thus beginning to develop a relationship before the move takes place.

A Proposed Way Forward: Cluster-based Inclusion Support Bases

I propose that Plymouth explores the possibility of setting-up Inclusion Support Bases for each cluster. These could be akin to ‘The Bridge’, which has been set-up as partnership arrangement between schools and the Local Authority in Exeter. However, there is the potential for the model to be developed further than my understanding of ‘The Bridge’ by ensuring that a multi-agency approach is integral to the proposal from its inception. This is illustrated in Figure 2.

¹¹ Between September 2019 and March 2020 only 53 (55%) of 96 pupils allocated to other schools through the Secondary Placements Panel remained on-roll of the receiving school.

¹² In a phone call to discuss this paper the city’s Principal Eps explained to me how work across current settings/provisions has shown that often insufficient attention is paid to the processes by which pupils transition in and out of settings.

Figure 2 - Outline Proposal for Inclusion Support Bases


So far, this model has only been costed with a 'basic level' of teaching and teaching-assistant staffing, as shown in Figure 3. The salary cost here suggest that in order to be viable in the long-term this will need to be a partnership approach with both the LA (from the HNB) and schools contributing to set-up and ongoing costs.

Figure 3 - Indicative Staffing Costs (education) for Inclusion Support Bases

Role	Grading Assumption	Approx. Cost (inc. on-costs)	Number of Posts	Total
Coordinator	UPS3 + TLR2 max	£61,748	1	£61,748
Teacher	MPS 6	£46,940	3	£140,821
HLTA	NJC Grade D	£24,541	3	£73,623
Transition Worker	NJC Grade D	£24,541	3	£76,623
				£282,617

To function as part of a wider integrated system it would be best for the support bases to have access to dedicated support from other agencies. I am in the early stages of conversations about what this might look and cost but:

- One experienced social worker could support across the three clusters, at an indicative cost of £40k, with two main strands to their role: (a) liaison with any casework open to children's social care to ensure that the approach in the inclusion support base fits in with wider family support and (b) direct interventions with pupils where appropriate, e.g. motivational interviewing, solution-focussed therapy and journey tool evaluations.
- There is likely to be sufficient work generated across these three bases to require a full-time Educational Psychologist. They would have a remit based around creating a reflective practice community for the staff involved in the bases, professional supervision for the teams as well as specialist assessment of pupil's needs and evaluation of the efficacy of the interventions delivered within the support bases and through the re-integration period. An early conversation with the city's Principal EPs has suggested a model similar to that commissioned by the virtual school, a 0.4fte/0.6fte 2-person job share. As part of the PCC traded offer this would cost approx. £90,720 (based on the current, advertised revenue-funded rates)
- The interface between these support bases and CAMHS needs to be clarified. It is likely to be helpful if there is a named point of contact that can ensure timely and accurate flow of information around any CAMHS support being received by pupils who are being educated in the inclusion support bases.

In order for this work to fit in a more inclusive school culture I would propose that we look at commissioning trauma-awareness training for senior leads in all schools as well as identifying a cohort of practitioners (including all the staff working in the inclusion support bases) who could complete a more in-depth training programme. An obvious

source of this would be Trauma-Informed Schools UK¹³ although it may be possible to use local expertise to provide this training. Indicative costs are shown below:

- TISUK 2-day Senior Leader Training¹⁴ is £3100 for a cohort of 15+
- TISUK 10-day Diploma is £

In Conclusion

The historic data concerning pupil mobility across the city is well known and demands an urgent and well-resourced system-wide response. This paper has sought to bring together knowledge gleaned from the literature base alongside the views of a wide range of stakeholders with whom I have engaged in recent weeks to present a vision for an integrated and graduated response to the needs of our more vulnerable pupils, who to date have often found themselves excluded from the mainstream education system. I am advocating that the LA (through delegation of funds from the High Needs Block) work in partnership with schools to create 'inclusion support bases' that will support the long-term success of pupils with challenging behaviour in mainstream settings by offering bespoke placements, designed around a detailed assessment of individual need. The success of these bases will depend on a number of key factors, each of which will require more detailed planning if a broad agreement for partnership working in this manner can be agreed:

- Leadership at all levels being resolute in the purpose of these bases as an additional means of support for supporting the long-term success of pupils in mainstream settings. *These bases must not be allowed to become a 'dumping ground' for pupils whose behaviour makes them 'undesirable' in some mainstream settings, but whom have the ability to succeed in school when provided with the bespoke support to meet the needs which underpin their challenging behaviour;*
- Recruiting highly-skilled staff to the bases and ensuring that they have clearly defined roles¹⁵;
- Ensuring that those staff have adequate support, e.g. through professional supervision and access to a reflective practice community, to maintain high quality relational-based learning¹⁶ over extended periods;
- Ensuring that the needs of individual pupils are carefully assessed and matched to individual learning plans rooted in the graduated response to inclusion and relational-based learning plans;
- Developing, in partnership with other agencies, a holistic and family-centred approach to meeting need;
- From the very outset all stakeholders understanding how a period of support at the inclusion base fits into a successful reintegration back into the 'home-school' or, on rare occasions if appropriate another mainstream setting.

Richard Woodland
November 2020

¹³ <https://www.traumainformedschools.co.uk>

¹⁴ https://www.traumainformedschools.co.uk/images/Senior_leads_Nov_2019.pdf

¹⁵ I am grateful to colleagues at the Ted Wragg Trust who have provided job descriptions and person specifications that would serve as a useful starting point.

¹⁶ For example, <https://www.babcockldp.co.uk/inclusion-and-ehwb/relational-learning>

Appendix A - Summary of Secondary Inclusion Proposal

Overview of Resources Required

- Each inclusion cluster locates, within or very near one of the cluster schools, an appropriate space to set-up as a support base for approx. 8 pupils.
- Each support base is staffed by a qualified teacher and an HLTA working full-time, during term-time in the base.
- In addition, each cluster has a transition worker who will work both in the base and across the cluster schools with a job remit including working with the family (alongside other agencies).
- The full-time inclusion base staff will be supported by 'central' staffing who will work across the three bases and in schools as necessary:
 - Co-ordinator (qualified teacher with TLR)
 - Full-time social worker
 - Full-time educational psychologist
 - Link CAMHS worker (no costs as yet)?

Indicative Costs

Item	Grade / Assumptions	Number	Unit Cost (£)	Sub-total (£)
Co-ordinator	UPS3 + TLR2a	1	61,748	61,748
Teacher	MPS6	3	46,940	140,820
HLTA	NJC D	3	24,541	73,623
Transition Worker	NJC D	3	24,541	73,623
Social Worker	1.0 FTE	1	c. 40,000	40,000
Educational Psychologist	1.0 FTE	1	90,720	90,720
CAMHS Link	TBC	1	TBC	TBC
TISUK Training: 2-day SLT	2 per school	1	3,100	3,100
TISUK Training: 10-day diploma	All base staff	6	TBC	TBC
Assessment Tools (TBC), e.g. Boxall Profiling, SDQ, Outcome Stars	Boxall Profiles on 100-unit tariff*	3	120	360
Budget to support bespoke curriculum opportunities	£500 per learner	144 ⁺	500	72,000
				555,994+TBC

* Assuming 8 new learners per base per half term, each requiring an entry and exit assessment gives a requirement for 288 assessments per annum.

* Assuming that there are 8 new learners per half-term so 144 learners