

Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

25 January 2025

Out of County Education – Final report

Purpose of the report

1. To present to the Children's Select Committee (CSC) the findings and recommendations from the rapid scrutiny exercise undertaken on Out of County Education (OCE).

Membership

2. Mr John Hawkins (lead), Cllr Jacqui Lay and Cllr Liz Alstrom.

Terms of reference

3. The aim of the rapid scrutiny was for the Rapid Scrutiny members to make a recommendation to Children's Select Committee on whether further scrutiny of this issue would be beneficial, based on the information received at the meeting.

Meeting

4. There was a single meeting held on Tuesday 3 December 2024.
5. The rapid scrutiny members, thereafter referred to as "members", were grateful to the following officers for their attendance and the information they provided at the meeting:
 - Kathryn Davis, Director, Education and Skills
 - Clara Davies, School Place Commissioning Lead
 - Karen Green, Team Manager, Education Welfare Service
 - Stephen Pitcher, SEND team manager
 - Karen Linaker, Strategic Engagement & Partnerships Manager Salisbury, Southern and South West Wiltshire
 - John Spring, Head of Targeted Education
 - Teresa McIlroy, Strategic Lead for alternative provision.
6. Members also received information from Jaki Farrell, Charity Director, Seeds4Success, both at the Rapid Scrutiny meeting and an additional meeting with the Lead Member for this exercise, for which they are very grateful.

Findings

7. Members received a very comprehensive report to provide them with a clearer picture of the issue around OCE (Out of County Education). Members wanted to express their thanks to all officers involved for the quality and detail of their report, which they appreciate had to be collated specifically for this purpose.
8. It must be noted that in this context OCE refers to young people for whom there is no choice but to attend an out of county school. The only school for which they are in the catchment area for is situated outside of the county of Wiltshire (please note that for the rest of this report young people / children / students / pupils will refer to those in the category described in this paragraph – unless otherwise stated).

Current situation / context

9. Members were informed that this applied to three schools attended by 486 Wiltshire children as specified in 8 above.
10. The numbers given are for children living in each Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) attending each out of area school. This was only for children who did not fall in the catchment area of any Wiltshire school. (It was noted that in one small area around Sutton Mandeville pupils are included in the catchment area for a schools in both Wiltshire and Dorset but this is the exception).
11. The LSOA boundaries do not completely align with the council's catchment area boundaries, but the information below is the council's best calculation of the number of Wiltshire children attending:
 - Shaftesbury School (Dorset), with 149 Wiltshire children attending.
 - Gilligham School (Dorset), with 325 Wiltshire children attending.
 - The Ridgeway School (Swindon), with 12 Wiltshire children attending
12. Members had expected the numbers to be higher, based on their local knowledge. It was accepted that these were best calculations. It was also recognised that it was very likely higher numbers of Wiltshire children were attending these schools, but it would include those attending based on parental preference. (*Recommendation 1*)
13. Although members received reassurance that pupils received the same services and support from Wiltshire Council up to their Year 7 "general" admission (applications for a September start in Year 7), they were concerned to learn that the pupil's record was not updated post Year 7 admission (unless the child had a social worker or was Special Educational Needs (SEND) or had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)).
14. Assurance was offered that there was tracking of Wiltshire children regardless of the county in which they attended school, in terms of Children Missing Education (CME). Schools in Wiltshire had a duty to inform the local authority of any starters and leavers. There was communication between local authorities to notify of school leavers. Any child (not only OCE) remains on Wiltshire Council's tracking system for CME until an education setting is

known or the child is no longer of compulsory school age. In answer to questions, it was confirmed that the data available did not show discrepancies / differences for CME in the geographical areas linked to this exercise.

15. It was also confirmed that there was no data on Elective Home Education of concern for the local authority for the geographical areas linked to this exercise (i.e. it was “within range” with the rest of the county).
16. The recording and monitoring of attendance was another area of concern, as this relied solely on transparency and agreements between local authorities to share that data. Members were informed that it was a national issue which officers had raised with representatives from the Department for Education (DfE). However, it was noted that Wiltshire Council’s effective approach to attendance monitoring had been recognised as the DfE attendance adviser had asked Wiltshire Council officers to provide support to another local authority.
17. Reassurance was offered that Wiltshire Council had the same data for these young people in terms of free school meals, NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), and missing education. The statutory responsibilities were not duplicated between the local authorities, but they are engaging in data sharing.
18. This was questioned as the external witness reported that she had been informed in the past that the data was not available. The data had been requested as it would enable charities to demonstrate needs to support funding applications. It was agreed that officers would, outside of the meeting, reach out to Seeds4Success to discuss the data that would support charities. (*Recommendation 2*)
19. Access to support at school (“below” SEND or EHCP level) was also raised as an issue. In Wiltshire this was enabled by funding having been devolved to schools to support interventions to prevent exclusion, but this was not necessarily a model adopted by other local authorities. This meant, on occasions, children were caught between two systems that operate very differently and families who experienced being “bounced” between the two systems. (*Recommendation 1*)
20. This was reported as having also been experienced by families in the process of requesting an EHCP or asking for changes to be made to an existing EHCP. The structure / process for these were different between the local authorities and this could leave families experiencing additional delays as they did not meet “conflicting” criteria / thresholds. Anecdotal evidence was given showing a “back and forth” for a family trying to have an EHCP reviewed and amended. (*Recommendation 1*)

Communication and consultation

21. Members received reassurance that communication was undertaken through other channels than schools. One of these channels was local charities who

support and engage with young people and their families, and thanks were offered to Seeds4Success for their willingness to engage with the council and disseminate information / consultations when requested. There would be around 50 occurrences of engaging with the community in a year. Other channels included the local youth network as well as the out of county schools. (*Recommendation 1*)

22. Engagement with young people from Area Boards included youth focus group, youth events, joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) conversations, regular grant liaisons, rural youth outreach additional activities and support and using “youth voice” to influence area board decisions and work programming.

23. It was also confirmed that community-led activities were available for young people in the catchment areas for Shaftesbury and Gillingham Schools, however it could not be said if the young people attending OCE were equally accessing these. (*Recommendation 4*)

24. Officers expressed their wish to be able to spend more time developing their relationship with out-of-county schools, which was fully supported by the members as, although other avenues of communication are used successfully, schools remain a “direct” way of communicating with most young people. (*Recommendation 5*)

Data capture – NEET (not in education, employment or training)

25. It was confirmed that the team support NEET young people based on their home address (i.e. if they are a Wiltshire resident) and was not linked to where they attend school, therefore there would be no difference of service and support experience by young people attending OCE.

26. NEET data was reported monthly to the DfE and Wiltshire was performing well, so was Dorset (where two of the schools concerned are located).

27. However, no data was available to answer a question around higher NEET rates in the geographical areas considered for this exercise. Officers were looking at different ways to utilise data in 2025-26 and were also working with all schools to support young people at risk of NEET. (*Recommendation 1*)

Transition and support at school / around education

28. Members were surprised by the locations (and distances) of EHCP school placements outside of Wiltshire (including special schools and residential schools). However, this was not considered further as catchment areas did not apply, and the focus was on the school best placed to meet the young person’s needs. (*Recommendation 3*)

29. Assurance was offered that Wiltshire had a robust process in place to support transition between primary and secondary school for SEND pupils and those with an EHCP.

30. It was also confirmed that it was Wiltshire's statutory duty to provide education for a pupil excluded from school who is a Wiltshire resident (regardless of where they attended school). Schools would have to manage the provision of education (can be via Alternative Provision) for suspensions.
(*Recommendation 1*)
31. It was reported that no disproportionate rates of permanent exclusion had been found for the three schools linked to this exercise. It was also reported that officers were not seeing evidence that there were differences linked to exclusion for Wiltshire young people who are attending OCE.

Conclusions

32. Members of the rapid scrutiny exercise concluded that a task group, at this point in time, would be unlikely to add value when considering issues linked to Out of County Education, however they identified actions as listed below to ensure that the committee remains informed of progress (or worsening issues) and that some solutions can be put in place where possible.
33. Members also asked for their concerns over the "static" records kept for pupils after Year 7 admission to be noted.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – that the Children's Select Committee ask officers to provide the following information at a briefing for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children's Select Committee to which members of the Rapid Scrutiny would be invited

1. Confirmation of the arrangements between Wiltshire and Dorset / Swindon to ensure that ("early help") support and interventions are available for young people accessing OCE who are not SEND or with an EHCP.
2. Reassurance of the commitment of Wiltshire Council to support any EHCP processes (applications, reviews, etc.) for young people accessing OCE and evidence of the clarity of process between neighbouring authorities.
3. Confirmation of the arrangements between Wiltshire and Dorset / Swindon to ensure that there are no additional complications or delay for EHCP processes (applications and reviews, etc.) for young people accessing OCE. It does need to be absolutely clear which Local Authority is responsible for the management of all EHCP processes for young people accessing OCE.
4. Data to confirm that Wiltshire Council supports young people that have been excluded from out of county schools in accordance with legislation (especially regarding provision being in place within 6 days) and confirmation that Wiltshire Council "becomes responsible" for these young people from the day of the exclusion.

5. To see communications plan and engagement rates for the areas considered as part of the rapid scrutiny, with the engagement rates for young people compared with the rest of the county.
6. To provide the number of students getting to the three schools, considered as part of this exercise, on a free school bus (as this could be an additional way of estimating the number of students for whom the school is their catchment school).
7. To provide NEET numbers mapped across Wiltshire and highlighting the geographical areas linked to this exercise. Alternatively, this could be included in the report the committee receives on NEET.

Recommendation 2 – that the Children’s Select Committee receive an update from officers on the process / system put in place to enable community groups, charities and any other providers of activities and support for young people in Wiltshire to access the data held by the council that can help them demonstrate need and support funding applications.

Recommendation 3 – that when the Children’s Select Committee receives information with regards to EHCP, it includes information on school placements outside of the local area.

Recommendation 4 – that the relevant Strategic Engagement & Partnerships Managers invite and encourage community-led activities providers in the areas concerned to record the school young people are attending (to provide some measure of equality of access for those attending OCE as transport / travelling time may be a barrier).

Recommendation 5 – that the relevant Director(s) consider supporting the Strategic Engagement & Partnerships Managers in releasing some of their time to enable them to focus on engaging with, and building a working relationship with, the out of county schools.

Mr John Hawkins (Lead) – Out of County Education Rapid Scrutiny
Report dated: 13 December 2024

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Background documents None.

Glossary

Children Missing Education ([CME](#))
Children’s Select Committee (CSC)
Education, Health and Care Plan ([EHCP](#))
Elective Home Education ([EHE](#))
Joint strategic needs assessment ([JSNA](#))
Lower Super Output Area ([LSOA](#))

Not in education, employment or training ([NEET](#))
Out of County Education (OCE)