London Borough of Merton

Report and Recommendations arising from the scrutiny review on Provision for vulnerable young people excluded from or not participating in school.

Children and young people overview and scrutiny panel – September 2011

Task group membership

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina
Councillor James Holmes (Chair)
Councillor Miles Windsor

Co-optees:
Ravi Kurup
Andrew Boxall

Acknowledgements

The task group would like to thank all the people who
contributed to this review and shared their views on how to improve services for
pupils who are not in school. We would also like to thank young people,
teachers and council officers who provided written information and came to
meetings to discuss their work with us.

Executive Summary

The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel set up this task group to investigate primary and secondary school pupils who live in Merton and are out of school due to truancy or persistent fixed term exclusions. This review looked at the measures in place to tackle this and what more can be done.

Young people who have been excluded are more likely to be in receipt of free school meals, have special educational needs or be a looked after child. Once excluded young people are more likely to get involved in anti-social behaviour and crime.

The number of fixed term exclusions has increased over the last three years and Merton's rate is higher than the national average. The focus for this review has been how to reduce school exclusions and improve the use of alternative education.

The task group looked at the importance of school behaviour policy noting that it is important that it provides support for those who struggle with poor behaviour in school. We also looked at the importance of early intervention to tackle poor behaviour before it escalates to the point of exclusion. Schools are encouraged to draw upon examples of good practice that exist within the borough and provide additional support and training for teachers.

Alternative education provision was also a key focus for this review. Task group members were informed that to place a pupil in alternative education costs up to three times more than in school. The review highlights that this high cost provision is not the best solution for all young people. It is recommended that schools maintain stronger links with pupils when they are in alternative provision with a view to them returning to school if possible. Also that Merton schools consider collectively commissioning alternative education provision to reduce costs and enable better planning.

Finally the task group considered the role of work experience and apprenticeships for young people who wish to pursue vocational education. The task group believe that vocational education should not be viewed as inferior to academic qualifications but as a credible opportunity for those whose skills and abilities lie in this area. The borough should provide a high quality provision, which is monitored and linked to a training provider. The report recommends a variety of measures to improve the provision of work experience and apprenticeships in the borough.

Chairs Foreword

The underlying premise for this review is the importance of a good education as a means to enable children to grow academically, develop social skills and prepare for a successful future. If young people are out of school, employment or training this can impact on their ability to reach their full potential.

We began this review with a broad look at what can be done to support young people who are out of school for reasons ranging from truancy, exclusion or because of medical conditions. It soon became apparent that there was much work to be done in the area of exclusions, not least because fixed term exclusions are particularly high in Merton. We also identified a number of areas where changes could be made which could lead to significant improvement in the lives of young people.

During this review we have tried to speak with as many witnesses as possible. We have met with teachers, education professionals, alternative education providers and of course young people themselves. We have been inspired by many of the people we have spoken to and the projects we have visited where professionals are working tirelessly to ensure that young people get the best out of the education system.

There has been a genuine cross party approach to conducting this review and I would like to thank my fellow task group members for their commitment to this important piece of work.

As Vice Chairman of the Children and Young People's Panel, I will also play a role in ensuring that the recommendations that we have put forward are implemented over the coming months. We would like to see the new good practice adopted in Merton and also shared across other boroughs.

Councillor James Holmes, task group Chairman.

List of task group's recommendations

	Responsible decision making body
Recommendation one (paragraph 39)	
We recommend that the Secondary Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships share good practice with behaviour co-ordinators about projects to support pupils at risk of exclusion.	Cabinet/schools
Recommendation two (paragraph 40)	
We recommend that there is a forum for teachers, particularly behaviour co-ordinators to meet and discuss behaviour and exclusion issues, this should place at least once a year	Schools
Recommendation three (paragraph 41)	
We recommend that schools are encouraged to draw on the support of Melrose and the Smart Centre for developing projects to deal with pupils with behavioural issues. Melrose and the Smart Centre should engage with schools to agree such projects	Cabinet
Recommendation four (paragraph 46)	
We recommend that all Targetted Youth Support Panel meetings should have a multi-agency approach involving relevant internal and external partners.	Cabinet/Schools
Recommendation five (paragraph 47)	
We recommend that schools review processes to ensure early identification and planning aiming to reduce the use of fixed term exclusions.	Schools
Recommendation six (paragraph 52)	
We recommend that training for teachers to deal with challenging behaviour and opportunities to consider different approaches is built into the supervision process	Schools
Recommendation seven (paragraph 53)	
We recommend that teachers can access information on reflective practices through on-line training, and material that can be downloaded from the internet	Schools
Recommendation eight (paragraph 54)	
We recommend that an on-line forum is developed so that schools can share good practice about how to improve behaviour in	Schools

school	
Recommendation nine (paragraph 56)	
We recommend that each school determine the number and length of fixed term exclusions that will trigger an in-depth assessment of that pupil's situation. Schools should share the results of this process with the council. Advice should be sought from the Education and Youth Inclusion Manager on where the trigger could be set.	Schools
Recommendation ten (paragraph 66)	
We recommend that schools are encouraged to maintain links with pupils and their families in alternative education and develop a plan to re-integrate them back into the school where possible. Attention should be given to the level of pastoral care that the pupil will require on re-intervention.	Schools
Recommendation eleven (paragraph 67)	
We recommend that schools should also consider whether a pupil would benefit from bi-weekly/monthly meetings within the school with the alternative education provider for an agreed period of time once they have completed a period of alternative education and whether such an agreement would reduce the need for longer term exclusions.	Schools
Recommendation twelve (paragraph 68)	

We recommend that the Council should consider finding ways of making schools carry more of the financial burden if pupils are in alternative education for more that six months. This will have the effect of encouraging schools to re-integrate pupils back into school as quickly as possible	Cabinet
Recommendation thirteen (paragraph 73)	
We recommend that Merton Schools jointly commission alternative education provision, where this can be demonstrated to be more cost effective and focussed on the needs of pupils.	Schools
Recommendation fourteen (paragraph 76)	
We recommend that the lead for alternative education in all schools should also be involved in quality assuring the alternative education process and be consulted on what form alternative education should take.	Schools
Recommendation fifteen (paragraph 77)	
The council should consider if more alternative education could be provided from within the authority if this is cost efficient.	Cabinet
Recommendation sixteen (paragraph 84)	
We recommend that Merton Council increase the number of apprenticeships in the borough, by developing further links with local businesses and within council services and by reviewing incentives for business to take on apprentices from Merton. Merton to seek innovative ways to encourage council departments and other service providers to take on apprentices through the commissioning process and by other means.	Cabinet
Recommendation seventeen (paragraph 85)	
We recommend that thought should be given to creating a post to support the creation of links to business and creation of apprenticeships	Cabinet

Exclusions task group report

Introduction

Purpose

1. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel set up this task group to investigate primary and secondary school pupils who live in Merton and are out of school due to truancy or persistent fixed term exclusions. This review looked at the measures in place to tackle this and what more could be done.

2. The task group membership included:

- Councillor James Holmes (Chair)
- Councillor Miles Windsor
- Councillor Agatha Akyigyina
- Andrew Boxhall
- Ravi Kurup

3. **The tasks group's terms of reference were:**

4. To investigate the causes of, and interventions to reduce pupil absence from school due to truancy or fixed term exclusions

5. To investigate the services available to pupils who are not in school due to persistent truancy or fixed term exclusions

6. To make recommendations which reduce the number of pupils absent from school due to truancy and exclusions

7. **What the task group did**

8. The task group had eight meetings where a wide range of evidence was considered including:

- Taking evidence from the Director of Children and Families and Senior Officers in the department
- Taking evidence from Young People
- Taking evidence from the Specialist Systemic Psychotherapist
- Taking evidence from the School Improvement Adviser 14-19 Strategy Manager
- Visited the YMCA in Wimbledon
- Taking evidence from Head Teachers at Melrose and the Smart Centre
- Ongoing advice from the Education and Youth Inclusion Manager

- Wrote to all schools in Merton inviting them to provide written submissions for the review

9. Policy context

10. Young people who have been excluded are more likely to be in receipt of free school meals, have special educational needs or be a looked after child. A report by Barnardo's entitled :*Not present and Not Correct*[1] found that school exclusion is strongly linked to poverty and disadvantage. Boys are most likely to be excluded, with African Caribbean boys and mixed black Caribbean and white heritage are three times more likely to be excluded than white boys. Gypsies and Traveller children are three to four times more likely to be excluded. Once excluded young people are more likely to get involved in anti-social behaviour and crime.

11. A report by the Centre for Social Justice, looking at street gangs in Britain entitled *Dying to belong*[2] identified a number of common characteristics in gang membership and exclusion from school was found to be a prominent factor.

12. Successive governments have sought to reduce the high rates of exclusion through a variety of interventions. At the time of writing this report, there is an Education Bill going through parliament, which has implications for exclusions policy. The Bill gives teachers more power to discipline pupils through a new statutory 'right to discipline' which makes it lawful for a disciplinary measure to be imposed when pupils fall short of expected behaviour, this also includes off the school premises, where reasonable.

13. Provisions in the Bill also enable teachers to search pupils for forbidden items and anything they believe might cause harm, and removes the requirement for teachers to give a day's notice of a detention.

14. The Bill reforms the process for reviews of permanent exclusions, and establishes new 'review panel' with significantly different powers from the previous appeals panel. The review panel can recommend or direct a responsible body to reconsider their decision, but cannot order reinstatement.

15. Schools will be responsible for finding and funding an alternative school for a pupil they exclude and Pupil referral units, will be able to become academies.

16. What we currently do in Merton

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[1] Not Present and Not Correct: Understanding and preventing school exclusions, Barnardo's, 2010.
[2] Dying to belong, an in-depth review of street gangs in Britain, Centre for Social Justice, February 2009.

17. There are two types of exclusion from school:

18. Permanent exclusion is removal from the school roll

19. Fixed term exclusion – is for a set number of days, not totalling more than 45 days in a school year.

20. **School exclusions in Merton**

21. There were nineteen permanent exclusions in 2009/10, this figure is on a downward trajectory. All permanent exclusions were pupils of secondary school age. The main reason for this type of exclusion was Persistent Disruptive Behaviour' which accounted for 42% of incidents.

22. The number of fixed term exclusions has increased over the last three years and Merton's rate is higher than the national average. In secondary schools it has increased by 1.4%. The predominant reason for exclusion was 'Persistent Disruptive Behaviour' (33.6%), followed by 'Physical Assault against a Pupil' (23.7%) and 'Verbal Abuse/Threatening Behaviour against an Adult' (11.6%).

23. Year 10 had the highest number of pupils excluded, 205 pupils (367 exclusions), followed closely by Year 9 with 176 pupils (319 exclusions).

24. The average length of exclusion has reduced from 2.7 days (2008/09) to 2.5 days (2009/10).

25. There is a range of alternative provision in place for pupils who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion;

26. The Smart Centre is the local authority pupil referral unit and they use a range of alternative education provision.

27. Melrose school provides support for behavioural and emotional social disorders. Pupils must have a statement to go there. Melrose use Face Youth, and other alternative education provision

28. The council also commissions Alternative Education through the youth service and Face Youth, training provision as a buy back from schools.

29. Many schools use in-house provision and have developed a range of projects to support pupils who may be at risk of exclusion.

30. Schools have Targetted Youth Support Panels (TYSP's). This is a multi-disciplinary group of staff that identify vulnerable pupils and develop a range of support packages to meet their needs. This is linked to the Common Assessment Framework process and team around the child meetings.

31. Task group findings

Below is a collection of thoughts and comments by the task group

32. School Behaviour Policy

33. A re-occurring theme during our discussion with witnesses was the role of behaviour policy in schools. Our witnesses informed us that there is currently felt to be a one-size fits all approach to behaviour in some schools, which some pupils cannot adapt to. While schools are under immense pressure to attain good exam results, there is concern that some behaviour policies can lead to some pupils being excluded rather than included.

34. Research conducted by academics from the University of London argues that the market philosophy introduced into education has led to an increase in competition between schools, leading them to aim to present a more favourable image to consumers. Schools may therefore tighten up thresholds of acceptable behaviour to present an attractive image to parents.[3] However good behaviour is essential for learning.

35. On the other hand we were informed that alternative education providers are often well placed to tackle behavioural issues. There are a number of approaches that make alternative education successful including a trans-disciplinary approach, personalised learning and partnership with families.

36. Amongst things the task group were told include; mainstream schools are more likely apply a rigid behaviour policy whereas alternative education can more flexible in dealing with challenging behaviour. For example if a pupil swears at a teacher in alternative education setting, the teachers are more likely to take a holistic view and consider the pupils circumstances. In mainstream school, behaviour of this nature could lead to exclusion.

37. Furthermore, Alternative Education provision in many cases is small and has developed a relationship with the pupil's family. There is often a recognition amongst staff that pupils are still working through a process and as pupils are treated individually, teachers are able to deal with issues as they arise. In contrast mainstream schools are big and can be impersonal and often have little contact with the wider family. However in some cases staffing is allocated in mainstream schools so that the tutor and members of the pastoral care teams will have more contact with the family.

38. We were informed that Merton rarely qualifies for pots of funding available to London schools to tackle exclusion; therefore spending in

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[3] Reducing exclusion from school: What really works, Hallam & Castle, University of London 2000.

our schools has to be taken from existing budgets. Despite this we heard that there are an innovative range of projects happening across the borough, which support pupils who are at risk of exclusion. They are often able to address some of the more intractable problems that pupils are dealing with and they take on a more individualised approach. We believe that all schools would benefit from hearing about these projects and this good practice should be shared.

39. **Recommendation**
We recommend that the Secondary Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships share good practice with behaviour co-ordinators about projects to support pupils at risk of exclusion.

40. **Recommendation**
We recommend that there is a forum for teachers, particularly behaviour co-ordinators to meet and discuss behaviour and exclusion issues, this should place at least once a year.

41. **We recommend that schools are encouraged to draw on the support of Melrose and the Smart Centre for developing projects to deal with pupils with behavioural issues. Melrose and the Smart Centre should engage with schools to agree such projects**

Early intervention

42. We were informed that most exclusions occur in secondary schools during years ten and eleven. Our investigations found that early interventions in years seven and eight could help to prevent challenging behaviour escalating to exclusion. We were told that Raynes Park High School is a very good example of a school that invests in early intervention

43. The Specialist Systemic Psychotherapist informed us that good schools provide extra curricular support structures for the pupils that they are concerned about. They also provide transition services for pupils when they are transferring to secondary school. Some outside agencies are also involved in this transition process.

44. There is a concern that we rely too much on 'tier two' services, which are community based and include youth and voluntary sector workers. Children are often held in this sector for too long, we need to involve the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services at an earlier stage. Effective support for children in years seven and eight could include; anger management, self esteem groups, and academic help. **A plan needs to be mapped out for children with challenging behaviour at an early stage. Schools need to be supported and encouraged to think systematically and find out which agencies has been involved in the young persons life up to the point of referral and school**

based intervention. We were informed that although good practice does exist across the borough, more work needs to be done to integrate early intervention projects within schools.

Case studies

The Early Years Inclusion Team alerted the Virtual Behaviour Service that a child in a Private, Voluntary or Independent setting, with challenging behaviour was going to a Merton Primary School. The Early Years Inclusion Team start a Common Assessment Framework. At the same time Team Around The Child Meeting called at school. At that meeting it was agreed that:

- The school would buy in the Language, Behaviour and Learning Team (LBL) for Behaviour Support Teacher to give advice and a Behaviour Support Worker to work alongside school staff to develop strategies to support the child.
- The LBL was bought in to deliver training for identified staff on Safe Handling of Children and Young People
- The school to refer to The Supporting Families Team because of concerns beyond the school that were identified at Team Around The Child meeting (support around domestic abuse/housing etc)
- All agencies including Supporting Families Team worker attend the Team Around The Child review
- The Family Support Worker meets with parent following Team Around The Child Meeting to liaise with all agencies to:
  - secure an injunction against her abusive partner,
  - clarify her housing situation,
  - carry out structure play sessions with mother and children encouraging fun, interaction with a 'feelings' perspective
  - identify strategies for managing behaviour and implementing effective boundaries at home

This plan and these interventions ensured that the pupil remained in school and was not excluded.

Secondary school case study

Rhianna* is a year 9 pupil whose behaviour had been causing her school concern for some time. She truanted from school, her punctuality was poor and when in lessons would regularly disrupt classes. Rhianna said she did not want to be in school and hated the place. Outside of school Rhianna was becoming involved in anti-social behaviour and her mum was saying she was out of control.

The school had tried various strategies to improve Rhianna's behaviour in school but became increasingly concerned that they would have little choice but to exclude her from school. In

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order to try and address this, the school undertook at CAF to assess her needs and look at things not only from a school perspective but also to try and address issues at home and in the community.

The assessment led to a parenting support being put in place to provide support to Rhianna's parents in maintaining boundaries at home; a referral to Turnaround to provide a keyworker work with Rhianna on addressing the anti-social behaviour in the community; and a place was sought at an alternative education provider for her in year 10 to provide a more vocationally based curriculum in a smaller setting that was more in line with Rhianna's interests and aspirations. This plan avoided exclusion and provided tailored support that meant Rhianna's needs in school, at home and in the community were catered for.

*Rhianna is a fictional name and this case study is a composite made up from a number of young people and how the school responded.

45. Secondary schools hold targeted youth support panel meetings (TYSP) to discuss pupils who are a cause for concern. **These meetings are a useful early intervention tool, however they should be multi-agency but in some schools they are not. It is important that all agencies are represented at the meeting as some agencies are good at signposting to different agencies A multi-agency approach, which includes external organisations, brings a wealth of experience to the discussion.**

46. Recommendation
   We recommend that all Targetted Youth Support Panel meetings should have a multi-agency approach involving relevant internal and external partners.

47. Recommendation
   We recommend that schools review processes to ensure early identification and planning aiming to reduce the use of fixed term exclusions.

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49. During our discussions with witnesses it became apparent that a reduction in exclusions would only be achieved through a cultural change, in which there is recognition amongst professionals that some pupils struggle with behaviour and this can be due to difficulties they are facing in their personal lives or for medical reasons. We need to change the way we view these pupils. Schools recognise that pupils with

learning difficulties need support. This also should be the same for pupils with behavioural difficulties; we need to understand that some pupils will struggle with standard expected levels of behaviour.   Schools could do more if they had a better training and understanding of conditions such as Autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), as well as empathy for those students struggling with distressing or stressful home and personal situations – leading to emotional and behavioural issues.

50. We heard about the benefits of using supervision sessions and reflective practice for teachers, to look at how their response to a situation affects the pupil and the final outcome of the situation. This model helps professionals to think about their own behaviour and how they might do things differently. Supervision would also be more effective if done by a neutral outside facilitator – therefore the teacher doesn't feel that their salary or promotional prospects are under threat should they admit difficulty in dealing effectively with a students behaviour issues. They could receive help and mediation assistance apart from their professional in-house supervision and reviews.

51. We were told that many in the teaching profession feel that they do not get supervision and time for reflection, which would help them to share expertise and think about different approaches. It is more common in other professions it is important there is not a blame culture and criticism of individual practice if we want to realise the benefits of this method.

52. **Recommendation**
    We recommend that training for teachers to deal with challenging behaviour and opportunities to consider different approaches is built into the supervision process

53. **Recommendation**
    We recommend that teachers can access information on reflective practices through on-line training, and material that can be downloaded from the internet

54. **We recommend that an on-line forum is developed so that schools can share good practice about how to improve behaviour in school**

55. The *Not Present not Correct* report argues that repeated use of fixed term exclusions, as may be the case in Merton given that the statistics are so high, are an ineffective tool. *"their repeated use indicates they do nothing to improve behaviour in the long term and give young people the unhelpful message that they can miss school"*. We agree with their view that all schools should put measures in place to investigate further if problems in a pupil continue to re-occur. The report calls for three fixed term exclusions or more than six days exclusion to prompt a review, however we recognise that individual schools may wish to set targets in line with their own circumstances.

56. **Recommendation**
    We recommend that each school determine the number and length of fixed term exclusions that will trigger an in-depth assessment of that pupil's situation. Schools should share the results of this process with the council. Advice should be sought from the Education and Youth Inclusion Manager on where the trigger could be set.

We were informed by a number of alternative education providers that they would like to provide early intervention support for pupils who are showing signs that they are not able to cope in the school environment. However schools only contact them once a pupil has already been excluded and they are looking for alternative provision. Melrose and Smart Centre can provide a range of services to schools and we believe that schools could find them beneficial in identifying and tackling behaviour problems at an early stage. This is the case with face youth who are often contacted to intervene before a student reaches exclusion point.

Alternative education

57. Alternative Education is provision for pupils who are not in mainstream schools or special schools but whose education is publicly funded. Pupils are transferred to alternative provision if they have been permanently excluded or they may go for a period of time if they are at risk of exclusion. *Alternative Education provision is expensive and will cost about £15,000 per pupil each year while school costs around £4,500.*

58. **Link between school and alternative education**

59. We found that the vast majority of pupils do not return to their school once they have been put into alternative education. Schools tend to have little involvement with the pupil other than to check attendance and exam results. Lines of communication between the school and alternative education provider are sometimes poor.

60. We are very concerned about this practice. We believe that schools should be working to re-integrate pupils back into the school where possible as many pupils benefit from the school environment.   One of the young people that we met was very upset that she was only able to take three GCSE's at alternative education, others told us that they missed their school friends and did not participate in any extra curricular activity.

61. **We would like to see schools maintain contact with pupils, invite them back to participate in specific events and award ceremonies, where possible. We heard that many pupils in alternative education**

make significant progress; this should be celebrated in the wider school community. Although we recognise that this will not work in every instance, this should only happen as an exception rather than the majority of the time, which is currently the case.

62. Alternative Education providers told us that they find it difficult to engage and build relationships with mainstream schools. They felt that there is often no real intention to take the pupil back to the school. The providers that we spoke to were keen to work to try and get pupils back into school. However it was clear for it to be successful the school would need to engage with the pupil and their families. Pupils need to be welcomed back to the school and not be labelled.

63. The Think-tank Civitas in their report: *A New Secret Garden? Alternative Provision, Exclusion and Children's Rights*[4] argues that schools are under pressure to reduce permanent exclusions so opt for referrals to alternative education instead. It claims that the current reduction in permanent exclusion figures are a "statistical illusion" and schools use alternative provision to offload pupils who are disruptive or struggle in the mainstream classroom. One local authority co-ordinator in the report claimed " *many schools throw their students out to alternative education and whatever they get in their project gets added to the school record. It's like a bonus on the school statistics because they weren't going to achieve anything anyway. And this saves the young person from having a permanent exclusion on their record*"

64. The task group are keen to see pupils re-integrated into the school after a period in alternative education. We came across some good practice that other schools could benefit from; The Smart Centre has developed a good relationship with secondary heads with the aim of getting pupils back into the school. Pupils attend the smart centre for a short period of time then go back to school, this allows smart centre teachers to engage with the school. As a result 93% of Key Stage 3 pupils from the Smart Centre go back into mainstream school. They also have a higher learning teaching assistant who works with pupils to re-integrate them back into mainstream school. There is still difficulty in cascading this information to the wider school community. It is also difficult to get progress reports from the school on how pupils are doing.

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[4] A New Secret Garden? Alternative Provision, Exclusion and Children's Rights, Civitas, Ogg and Kaill, 2010

65. **Recommendation**
66. **We recommend that schools are encouraged to maintain links with pupils and their families in alternative education and develop a plan to re-integrate them back into the school where possible. Attention should be given to the level of pastoral care that the pupil will require on re-intervention.**

67. **We recommend that schools should also consider whether a pupil would benefit from bi-weekly/monthly meetings within the school with the alternative education provider for an agreed period of time once they have completed a period of alternative education and whether such an agreement would reduce the need for longer term exclusions.**

68. **We recommend that the Council should consider finding ways of making schools carry more of the financial burden if pupils are in alternative education for more that six months. This will have the effect of encouraging schools to re-integrate pupils back into school as quickly as possible**

69. **Collective commissioning of alternative education**

70. We found that schools across the borough individually purchase alternative education as and when they need it, rather than adopt a planned approach. The need to secure provision as quickly as possible may mean there will be less scope to tailor it to the individual needs of the pupil and it will be more expensive. However if all schools across the borough collectively commissioned provision they could benefit from economies of scale, share expertise and help to ensure that it was of a high quality. We were informed that some schools find it difficult to pay for the Smart Centre and budget for other alternative provision.

71. A review of alternative education in Merton commissioned by Secondary Heads in 2008[5] found that collective commissioning should be used for alternative education. The report found that there is a funding shortfall to meet the need of alternative education; this could be met through collective commissioning. There is also recommendation that schools reduce the need of alternative education by managing the needs within school. The report also stated that " *there was a need for secondary schools to make policy decisions about the most effective use of their own budgets to meet the growing costs of educating the (increasingly diverse) range of young people on the school roll in Merton, who do not succeed at school".* As far as this task group is aware these decisions are yet to be taken.

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[5] Review of Alternative Education in Merton by Deborah Den Associates, 2008.

72. It was reported that there was little appetite among Secondary Heads to adopt a collective commissioning approach. However changes in legislation and pressure on budgets may be an opportune time to reconsider this issue.

73. **Recommendation**
We recommend that Merton Schools jointly commission alternative education provision, where this can be demonstrated to be more cost effective and focussed on the needs of pupils.

74. We were informed by the School Improvement Adviser 14-19 Strategy Manager, that alternative provision is not subject to OFSTED inspection, however Merton council conducts its own quality assurance process , which in the past has resulted in contracts with some providers being discontinued.

75. We have a Merton 14-19 Partnership Quality Assurance Framework which schools are given as a tool to help them quality assure alternative education provision. There is also a Merton approved list of alternative education providers. However this process needs to be strengthened by greater co-ordination, we believe that there is a greater role for the alternative education lead based in schools to share good practice with each other about the provision they are using. The Lead should also be involved in quality assuring new provision. This process could be part of the existing 14-19 network.

76. **Recommendation**
We recommend that the lead for alternative education in all schools should also be involved in quality assuring the alternative education process and be consulted on what form alternative education should take.

77. **Recommendation**
The council should consider if more alternative education could be provided from within the authority if this is cost efficient.

Work experience and apprenticeships

78. We also considered the role of work experience and apprenticeships for young people who wish to pursue vocational education. We believe that vocational education should not be viewed as inferior to academic qualifications but as a credible opportunity for those whose skills and abilities lie in this area. The borough should provide a high quality provision, which is monitored and linked to a training provider.

79. The task group members have worked in various capacities within the education sector and found that some of the young people that they

have met who have struggled in mainstream education have thrived in a vocational setting and gone on to develop success careers. We recognise that some young people with behaviour challenges are pushed down the vocational route and we do not endorse this practice.

80. We were told that Merton is the largest employer in the local area and currently provides around eleven apprenticeships a year and has an ad hoc approach to providing work experience. We found that this process is far more developed in our neighbouring borough of Sutton who have 40 apprenticeships. However as Merton and Sutton now share a human resources service, there is a good opportunity to develop apprenticeships in Merton. We would like to see innovative ideas developed in the borough such as linking apprenticeship opportunities with our commissioning process.

81. A recent review of vocational education by Professor Alison Wolf, looking at how to improve vocational education for 14-19 year olds has placed this issue high on the national agenda and it is widely thought that many of the recommendations from the review will be implemented. The review found that with many vocational courses:

82. *" Their programmes and experiences fail to promote progression into either stable paid employment or higher education and training in a consistent or effective way."*

83. The report also found that employers value work experience (including apprenticeships) for which demand greatly exceeds supply and too little is being done to assist young people in gaining genuine workplace experience and employment based skills.

84. **Recommendation**
We recommend that Merton Council increase the number of apprenticeships in the borough, by developing further links with local businesses and within council services and by reviewing incentives for business to take on apprentices from Merton. Merton to seek innovative ways to encourage council departments and other service providers to take on apprentices through the commissioning process and by other means.

85. **We recommend that thought should be given to creating a post to support the creation of links to business and creation of apprenticeships**

86. **Conclusion**

87. This review has come at a critical time and it is our hope that the findings in this report will spark a debate about school exclusions and about alternative education provision. The new legislation will mean that schools will have to pay for this expensive provision and there are real concerns that while it delivering excellent pastoral care and vocational

courses, it may not be enabling our young people to fulfil their academic potential.