



Department
for Education



Thurrock SENDIASS: Supporting a child excluded from school which helped to ensure access to education

The context

PATT SENDIASS is a commissioned outsourced statutory service. When the LA commissioned the service, Exclusion Support was specifically highlighted as a service that was expected to be offered to all YP and families that have been excluded from school, both fixed term and permanently. PATT is very aware that many students that are excluded have an element of unmet SEND need, so every exclusion support request received is screened.

PATT has a dedicated “Exclusion Hotline” number and specific Exclusion leaflet, and an area on the website with general exclusion information and links to justforkidslaw.org, and childlawadvice.org.uk. Students without SEND needs that have been excluded for “non-negotiable” issues (drugs, weapons, assault) are signposted to these organisations for more specific legal advice.

Any permanent exclusion of a CYP with SEND or suspected unmet need, PATT endeavours to support the family and/or YP with preparation for the governors meeting and will attend whenever requested. PATT will also provide support to lodge and attend an Independent Review Panel (IRP).

In the period 1 April 2020 – 31 July 2021, PATT supported 28 students with exclusion issues (including “informal” exclusions and undocumented part-time timetables). Given that this period includes months of lockdown and school closures, this figure is very concerning.

The issue

“Tommy” had always struggled in school, but it took until he was in Y9 to get an EHCP. It was a poorly written document that did not adequately identify Tommy’s barriers to learning. By this time, many of his behaviours were ingrained and he was being constantly ‘served’ with fixed term exclusions. The school Tommy attended commissioned their own alternative provision and Tommy was offered this as an alternative to permanent exclusion. This offer only extended to 2 days per week and the school refused to allow Tommy into school for the remaining 3 days, preferring him to study unsupported at home. Tommy’s behaviours were often a result of him being unable to articulate his lack of understanding of work given, and because he was seen as able, this was interpreted as defiance. Unsupported home learning was not going to meet his needs. Whilst waiting for the LA to find the requested change of placement, Tommy was subject to a Child in Need plan. At one meeting mum reached the end of her tether, Tommy was getting into bad company as a result of his wanting to belong and not being in school 3 days a week. There were safeguarding concerns raised but the school were adamant they would not allow him back into school, but they did not wish to exclude him because he had an EHCP. This left Tommy in limbo and his vulnerability (not recognised by the school) left him at risk of exploitation within the community. Mum took the unprecedented step (in PATT’s experience) of begging the school to exclude him. That way, he would have access to 5 day a week schooling at the Pupil Referral Unit and someone in authority would have eyes on him 5 days a week. Whilst attending the PRU he had an altercation with an inexperienced member of staff which led to him being excluded from the PRU and being given 5 day a week home tutoring whilst a suitable specialist provision was found.

The support provided by IASS

PATT were initially contacted by the family for support with the fixed term exclusions and then got involved with a request for change of placement and an EHCP annual review. PATT had also supported mum in making a complaint because the provision in the EHCP was not being delivered. PATT was already working with the family when the school permanently excluded Tommy. PATT supported mum to prepare for the governors hearing because although she had requested the permanent exclusion, she felt that it was the

school's failure to recognise Tommy's needs and support them appropriately that led to his current situation. The first hearing was adjourned as the packs issued to all parties varied and some were missing information. Eventually, the hearing went ahead, and as expected, the governing body upheld the head teacher's decision claiming Tommy's behaviours were a result of wilful defiance and nothing to do with the lack of support offered. The family felt that there had been so many problems and issues with the hearing that they requested an IRP. PATT supported mum to prepare her case for the IRP and attended the meeting with her.

Whilst Tommy was being home tutored, PATT supported Tommy to ascertain his views for his annual review using PATT's "Preparing for Adulthood Workbook" and helped mum to identify and visit suitable specialist provision. PATT worked with the family and the new school to ensure that Tommy's EHCP was re-written using new S< reports.

The difference made

Currently, Tommy is attending an out of borough SEMH specialist provision. Mum contacted PATT recently to say thank you for the support that had been provided to get Tommy into his new school where mum feels he is finally understood and getting the support he needs. The school commissioned a speech and language report which has identified his expressive and receptive language skills at around 8 years of age (he is now in Y11). He is awaiting an ADOS assessment, which the school have helped mum pursue as she has always felt he may have ASD as well as his current diagnosis of ADHD. Mum feels that Tommy's EHCP is now fit for purpose, and they have secured him a place at the school's 6th form provision so that he can continue to build on the progress they have started to see.

Mum has said that without PATT's support, she feels that he would have remained in mainstream school on a part-time timetable and have been labelled a badly behaved child rather than someone with significant needs or excluded and possibly left without appropriate provision. Whilst PATT was unable to help mum secure better outcomes at the exclusion hearing and IRP, mum felt that the support PATT had provided her with had given her the confidence and understanding of the process to ensure that she was able to fully represent her son to the best of her abilities.

It is rare that a governor's hearing results in the head teacher's decision being overturned, and it has been suggested, that if there is little likelihood of "winning" that SENDIASS should not expend time on this work. However, many of the CYP that PATT supports with exclusion hearings, go on to be supported in requesting EHC needs assessments and, subsequently, find suitable specialist provision. PATT feels, therefore, that time supporting CYP to get better educational outcomes and parents to gain a more informed understanding of SEN processes and the confidence to advocate for their children, is time very well spent.

Contact details

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