

Case study: SENDIASS support with exclusions

This case study and its timeline demonstrates the valuable role an IAS service plays to support parents of excluded children where SEN may be a factor.

Kevin was 14 years old and coming to the end of year 9 when I first met him at the end of June 2018. He and his parents were signposted to our service by an Education Welfare Officer who had recently started working with the family. Kevin had just been permanently excluded from school and the EWO was concerned there were some irregularities with the exclusion, along with some unidentified SEN. The EWO also recognised that parents were struggling to understand and engage regarding the exclusion.

Kevin had a well-documented history of problems at school. He had been diagnosed with dyslexia at the age of 7 and later interventions at primary school included emotional therapy with animals. He had been permanently excluded from primary school for bullying and spent some time in a PRU before beginning secondary school.

When he started at secondary school he was given extra support with both numeracy and literacy and various reading strategies were tried. A pastoral support plan was also in place to help him to establish, and, where necessary, to repair relationships with his peers. Initially things seemed to go well, but throughout years 8 and 9 his behaviour deteriorated and he had clearly become disengaged. Managed moves were discussed in May, but eventually he was permanently excluded on 7 June for persistent, disruptive behaviour, his second permanent exclusion.

The governors' meeting in early July was, by all accounts, acrimonious between headteacher and parents. The governors upheld the decision. It was at this point that I became involved. The family's EWO arranged a joint visit to the family with me, in order to introduce me and build trust. We talked about the option of an independent review and discussed why the governors' decision may be flawed. I explained my concerns as I understood the case, having read through the evidence provided for the governors' meeting:

- Kevin clearly had a number of difficulties with his learning and yet there seemed to be very little evidence of purposeful action to tackle them. Literacy strategies had failed and been discontinued and not replaced with alternatives.
- No external referrals had been made to Educational Psychology, CAMHS or a request for statutory assessment.
- Much of his support focussed around behaviour support plans. There was no evidence of exploring whether his behaviour was resulting from unmet needs. The lack of success of these plans was attributed to his lack of engagement, rather than whether the strategies were working.
- The lack of success was also attributed in part to the parents' failure to engage
- Parents were concerned that he had been excluded because of the failure to arrange a managed

move with a particular school rather than because of his behaviour. There had clearly been some discussion about this but when a particular **school turned Kevin down parents declined the proposed alternative. He was excluded the day after.**

They asked me to draft a letter for them to request an independent review of the governors' decision. We met again to go through the issues that I had identified and they agreed that they were happy that it was accurate. They had very little idea of what kinds of interventions might have been possible for Kevin and so were surprised and disappointed about all the things which could have been considered. They did not feel able to speak up at the meeting, without becoming emotional, and so asked if I would speak on their behalf. The summer holidays caused a delay in the process and the Independent Review took place in mid-September.

In the end, only Kevin's father came to the meeting as his mother was unable to face it. I put the family's views across for them, each time checking in with Kevin's father whether I had covered everything or whether he had anything to add. He was able to contribute some of his opinions to the panel. I understand that this meeting was much less hostile than the governors' meeting. I think this was due in part to Kevin's dad feeling that he was supported and that not everyone in the room was on opposing sides.

The independent review quashed the decision on the basis that the exclusion was irrational for a number of reasons, including the governors' consideration of whether everything had been done in relation to SEN requirements and whether Kevin's needs had been met and also that there had been a number of procedural improprieties with regard to the exclusion itself. Following the independent review the governors met again and reinstated Kevin in mid-October.

Currently Kevin is still being educated at the PRU on behalf of the school but conversations have now started between school and parents as to what the next steps should be. A number of options are on the table: returning to school, a managed move or a parent-led application. Each option includes referrals to EP, CAMHS and an application for statutory assessment. This has taken some time, mainly due to parents struggling to understand the different options available and there being very little trust between parents and school. However they have built up a trusting relationship with SENDIASS so I was able to meet with them and with Kevin in early November to discuss the options fully. They have just agreed to proceed with a managed move and school are now investigating those options. In addition school have completed an application for an EHC Needs Assessment and my next task is to gather parents and Kevin's views for this.

There is still a long way to go, but I am hopeful that Kevin is finally on the way to getting the support he needs in education and that parents can, with support, become more engaged in his schooling.

Conclusion

Impact on the family.

My involvement with the family is ongoing and so it is difficult to assess the full impact. I will be able to continue to work with this family to support them to ensure Kevin's needs are now properly identified and met. Hopefully this will keep him and his family engaged in his education and break the cycle of struggling and exclusions. I hope that parents and Kevin now feel that there is somebody listening to them and that they do have a role to play in the process and some control over the situation. We need to help them to establish a good working relationship with the new school so that everyone can work together for Kevin's future.

Impact on the service:

We have a valuable role to play in supporting parents of excluded children where SEN may be a factor as we are able to highlight to parents what alternatives there might have been.

This case demonstrates how our normal methods of advertising our service may not reach the most vulnerable parents. It is important that other professionals have good awareness of our service to ensure that those parents who need us most are put in touch with us. Vulnerable families such as this need a lot of intensive support in order to achieve a good outcome. I have learnt that some of that support has to be proactive at every step to ensure that they don't disengage again due to lack of understanding and fear of the situation. There have been a couple of times when progress has nearly stalled because I have not been available to support them at a crucial meeting or decision point because I haven't heard from them in a while. It is very difficult for a busy service to achieve this intensive, proactive support, but maybe being aware is enough: some parents are least likely to call **when they need us most**.