

## Reducing the risk of exclusion through better understanding and meeting the needs of children with SEMH or ACEs

A Case Study into the value of a strategic local authority wide approach to meeting the needs of children with SEMH and a tiered approach as part of a Town Wide Inclusion Strategy



## Background and Context

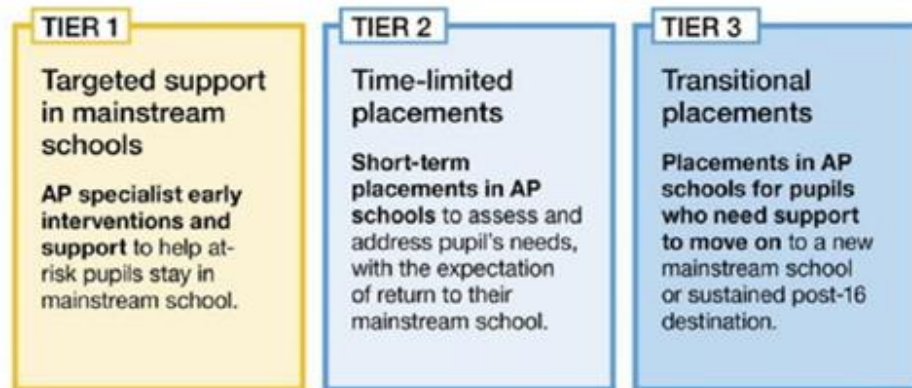
- Luton is a superdiverse community with high levels of poverty and socio-economic disadvantage
- In the years following covid, permanent exclusions and suspensions were on the increase
- The local authority lacked an overall strategy or pathway for SEMH, with individually funded 'Behaviour Provisions' managed and organised by their neighbourhood schools and used for 'holding children' and respite for schools
- Consequently, there was often rapid escalation of behaviour and cases of dysregulation into Behaviour Provisions and AP, with limited plans for reintegration
- The investment into the 5 Neighbourhood Provisions was significant and impact was unremarkable and financial audits flagged concern



## Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)

A good practice guide for schools and support services in Luton

### A Three Tier Model for alternative provision



Outreach Service



Multi-disciplinary Specialist Team



New SEMH Special School

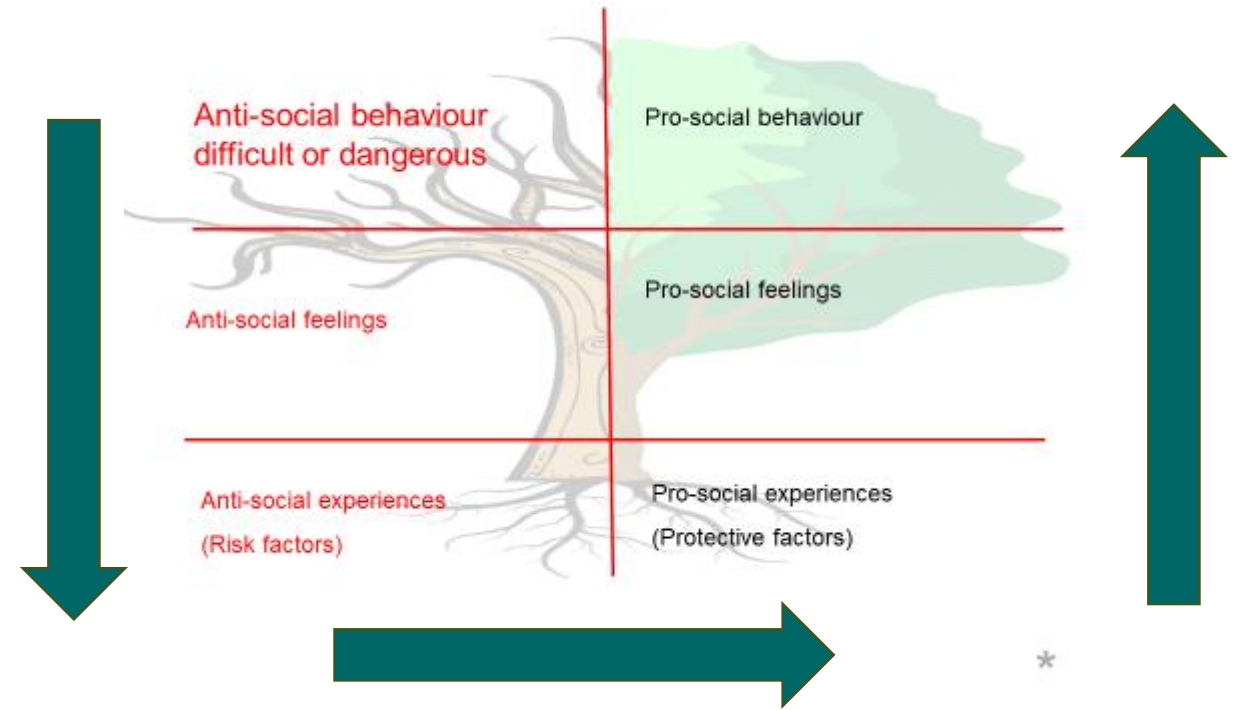
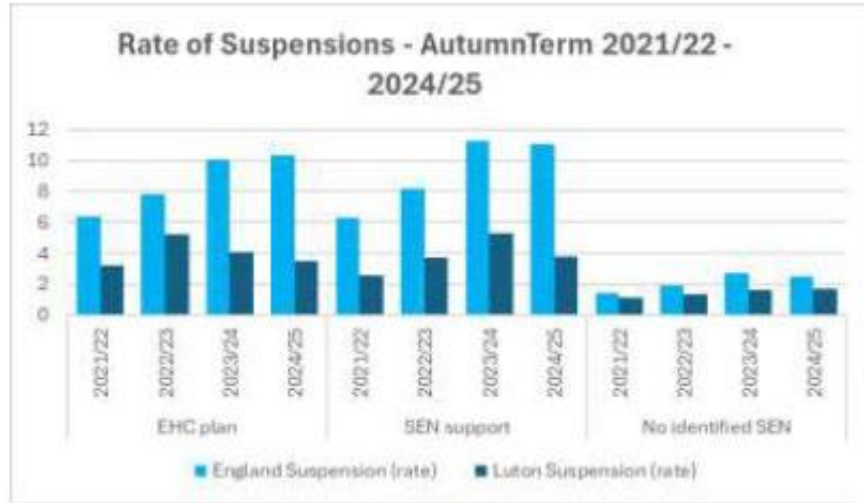
Multidisciplinary Specialist Team



Compass EBSNA Centre

# Luton: The time to move on

# What has the Impact?



- Therapeutic Thinking has led to a significant change in direction in schools
- Co-ordinated SEMH Specialist outreach has helped increase capacity and expertise in schools
- Behaviour Curriculum has been established explicitly alongside a Therapeutic Approach
- PEX are on the decline and have fallen by 33% in 2026 compared to the same point in 2025
- Suspension of SEND is declining and well below national averages
- EBSNA pupils supported through the Compass Provision are showing significant improved attendance
- Changes to primary SEMH support has reduced HNB costs of £1.7mill per annum

## Queen Elisabeth High School

- Large maintained secondary school to the East of Luton
- Trained on Therapeutic Thinking Spring 2025

Behaviour Policy explicitly changed and introduced in September 2025 – teaches children how to do things right rather than focusing purely on what happens when they do things wrong



## Case Studies

*“Therapeutic thinking has allowed us to have focused holistic review of all aspect of our behaviour management systems. We have embedded the core principles within our current behaviour management systems and curriculum, this has improved our behaviour interactions, decision making and sanctions we have applied. The whole staff training we have disseminated has empowered staff and further enhanced their relationships with students.”*

### Impact

- Suspensions fell from 99 in the Autumn term 2024 to 29 in the Autumn term of 2025.
- At the end of the Spring term 2025 there were four permanent exclusions. There have been no permanent exclusions so far, in this academic year (April 2026)

## Cutenhoe Primary School

Large maintained primary school to the South of Luton

Trained on Therapeutic Thinking Summer 2024

Behaviour Policy explicitly changed and co-created with staff and pupils. It was introduced in September 2025 with new rules: **‘Be safe; Be kind; Be positive’**



## Case Studies

*‘Therapeutic Thinking is firmly established in the culture of the school. Weekly Therapeutic Thinking briefings are held in addition to those for safeguarding and termly behaviour workshops are held for parents. Implementation of Therapeutic Thinking was consistently revisited over the first year and modified with input from pupil parliament and staff.’*

### Impact

- No part-time timetables and no child accessing learning off-site
- In 2024-2025, there was 1 day lost to suspension (1 pupil- no further suspensions to date)
- In 2025-2026, there has been 1 single half day suspension (1 pupil, no further suspensions to date)
- Previously 2022-2023 there were 23 suspensions



## What was our learning?

### Learning

- Need for a very clear strategy with incentives to engage schools
- Build an alternative model with a clear rationale and invest in the changes in advance of change
- Bring in changes step by step and build the momentum for change rather than be pulled back by a few vocal critics
- Putting the local authority in strategic leadership of the pathway
- Investing in the right staff and schools that could drive and influence others
- Action research and sharing outcomes and impact



# What are our next steps?

## Next Steps

- Sharing examples and showcasing impact
- Embedding consistency
- Introducing an Early Years Therapeutic Thinking Model
- Supporting capacity building
- Introducing Therapeutic Thinking RPI Training as a further development
- Strengthening the Compass EBSNA Centre outreach capacity building
- Looking at a similar structure of capacity building and a Three Tier approach to the Experts at Hand and other Specialist Outreach
- Opening an SEMH Specialist School in 2027



QUESTIONS

