



**SURVEY OF TEACHERS
WORKING IN PUPIL
REFERRAL UNITS 2012
SURVEY FINDINGS**



PRU TEACHERS' SURVEY

SURVEY FINDINGS

2012

Overview

The survey was completed by forty one teachers employed in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). This allows an insight into forty PRUs around the country.

Many of the respondents recognised that they would like to have more information about proposed changes within their sector. There has no significant progress made since the Labour Government's 'Back on Track' Green Paper in terms of bringing PRUs into the family of local schools in a way which makes teachers in PRUs feel connected and informed about local developments. The need to clarify the role of PRUs- identified in 'Back on Track'- is still a pressing concern in 2012 which needs to be addressed by the DfE. The request at the top of the 'wish list' of teachers in PRUs was ring fenced resources to enable them to work collaboratively with their colleagues in mainstream schools with challenging pupils. This identified priority is unlikely to become a reality because of the DfE approach to the funding of PRUs and to their future role.

Teachers in PRUs revealed in their responses the pressures which undermine their ability to focus on teaching and learning in relation to their students. Teachers in PRUs equally recognised that their teaching colleagues in mainstream school face a set of challenges which may be different but which can be more challenging. The respondents in this survey recognised the impact of the inflexibility of the curriculum in mainstream schools. 49% of respondents said it would be beneficial if there was less pressure on teachers in mainstream schools to show linear progress for all pupils. It is clear from this survey that there need to be local mechanisms for teachers in PRUs and teachers in mainstream schools to learn from, and support, each other and to engage in professional dialogue and shared reflective practice. This is not likely to be delivered by requiring PRUs to become Alternative Provision Academies.

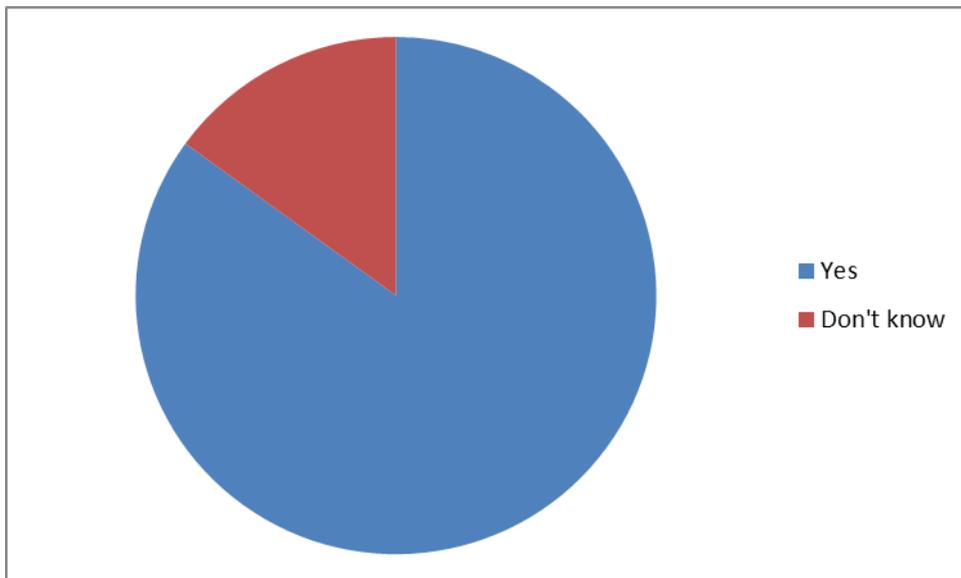
1. Background Information

Medical Needs	18
Teenage mothers	13
Pupils with BESD	30

Pupil referral units vary in nature and are specialist settings for different groups of pupils. We asked teachers to confirm what type of PRU they are employed in. Some respondents indicated that their PRU has specialisms in more than one areas.

2. Role of Local Authority

2.1 Do you think pupil referral units should be part of local authority maintained provision?



Yes No Don't know

'Anybody who UNDERSTANDS the sector could not even question this!'

There was an overwhelming view held among the respondents that pupil referral units should be maintained by local authorities. 85% believed that these schools should be part of local authority provision. The main arguments expressed by respondents were that this structure was important for retaining local accountability and for ensuring that PRU provision was responsive to local needs and to changing levels of need.

The respondents believed on balance that local authority oversight would provide greater stability for PRUs and was the best model for facilitating multi agency input. One teacher summed up the feeling of other respondents by saying '*this should be a provision that children who need the PRU facilities should be able to access, rather than what their schools are able to provide*'.

Respondents believed that it is right that local authority oversight enabled PRUs to provide challenge to schools and to enter into robust discussions about what is the most appropriate provision for individual pupils. Local authorities have the overview across all schools and can make a balanced judgment about the best provision for pupils, including where re-integration will be possible. They can also plan provision strategically for pupils educated other than at school. One teacher said '*the status helps to provide challenge to schools*'.

There was concern expressed about the alternative to local authority provision and private providers because it was feared this would lead to the use of unqualified teachers and fragmentation.

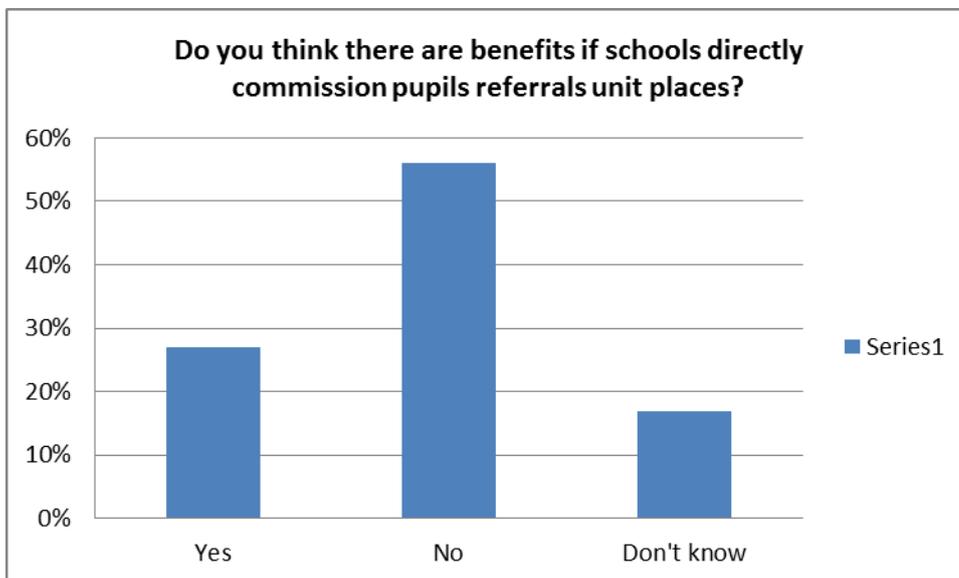
'Pupil referral units deal with borough-wide issues so should not be put out to tender – otherwise money and costs become a factor – not quality.'

In particular, teachers felt it was essential to safeguard PRU funding to meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable pupils in the school system. Respondents were very worried that removing PRUs from local authority oversight will result in pupils being taught by people who are not qualified teachers. Respondents explained the value which is added by the current structure and the way in which referrals can be assessed to ensure schools have attempted appropriate interventions.

Comments from the respondents included: -

- *‘Local authority can co-ordinate needs of pupils in borough.’*
- *‘In a small PRU, we rely on the local authority to support us and supplement what we can offer.’*
- *‘Local models reflect who we are and how we need to develop.’*
- *‘To main stability, continuity and development of experience in planning and provision. Long term perspective on standards and funding required; joined-up thinking.’*
- *‘I consider that it is really important that PRUs remain part of local authority – support, accountability, overview, resources, remaining part of ‘the whole picture’. The Behaviour Support Team also is the main referral agency which means referrals are monitored, e.g., interventions will have happened in the school.’*
- *‘Pupils in these settings are among the most vulnerable. The provision needs to be properly resourced, democratically accountable and supported by the local authority, not left to the vagaries of the market.’*

2.2 Benefits of commissioning by schools



Yes 27% No 56% Don't know 17%

Only 27% of respondents identified benefits to schools from commissioning and nearly two out of every three respondents failed to identify any benefits.

Some teachers believed that if schools were paying for a place and arranging the placement then they would take more responsibility for pupils in alternative provision. Some believed the opportunities for successful re-integration of children and young people to mainstream schools would be enhanced. The benefits of commissioning

were seen to include:-

- *‘Can be good if school maintains contact and responsibility for pupils. Allows opportunities for mutual support and development and respect. Can reduce isolation of PRU.’*
- *‘It would be a more co-ordinated service with pupils in referral units sent back to mainstream after a set period of time. Schools should maintain responsibility for these pupils.’*
- *‘Avoids permanent exclusion. Contact continues with school. Student can continue to access curriculum at school.’*

All respondents could see the benefit of closer links with schools but the clear majority (56%) did not think commissioning was the way to achieve this, because of the inherent and significant risks attached. Teachers were worried that once schools were commissioning places that cost would become the determining factor; and that qualified teachers would soon be seen as too expensive. Respondents did not believe that schools have the expertise for commissioning or the appetite for this.

‘Schools are reluctant to commission. Schools do not have the expertise for commissioning. Schools are used to a system that appears ‘free’. No school will opt to commission directly.’

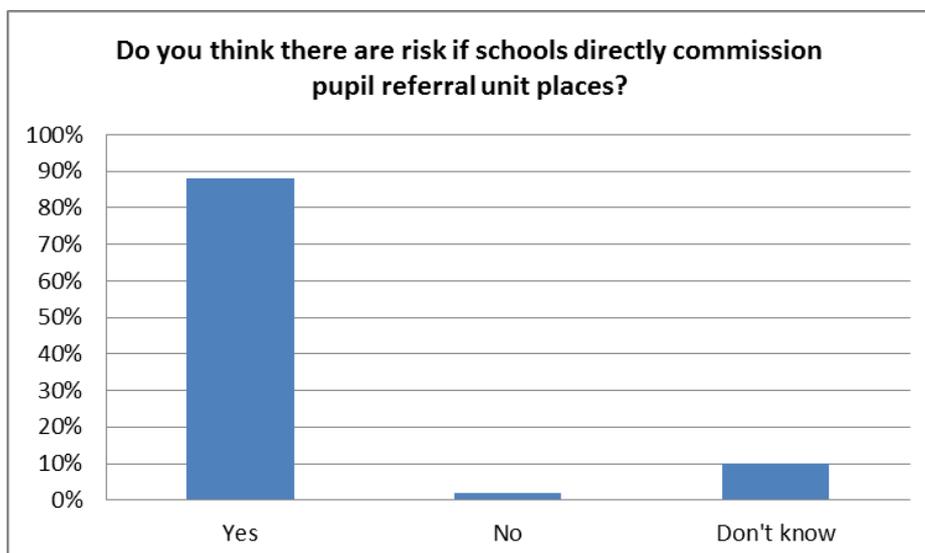
‘They will go for the cheapest option therefore not qualified teachers.’

‘Business managers in schools are likely to lobby for the cheapest provision rather than the best. Schools need to be compelled to support local authority PRUs and thereby have an investment in making sure they achieve high standards.’

The respondents also highlighted practical issues about why commissioning is incompatible with planning and running alternative provision, including staffing and timetabling and how it would be difficult to operate for wide ranging commissions. One respondent had a query which others also raised:

‘Also ‘gate keeping’ – if schools directly commission PRUs can they then ‘tell us’ we have to take pupils? Presently we can look at the whole picture, e.g., what strategies have been tried in school.’

2.3 Risks of commissioning by schools



Yes No Don't know

'The needs of the schools will come before the needs of the pupils.'

'Schools do not have the overall picture. Schools will go for the cheapest option. Schools do not have time/manpower to monitor Alternative Provision.'

Almost all respondents (88%) could predict risks attached to moving to a system where PRU places and alternative provision are commissioned. The major concern was funding and how unstable the future of a PRU would become if commissioning is introduced. There was also a view that cost rather than value would become the determining factor and that this would dilute the quality of education for this group of pupils. Comments included:-

- *'Risk of withdrawal of funding. Change in number of places required?'*
- *'Demand from one school is likely to vary from year to year – making resourcing that provision very difficult unless it is shared by several schools – as in local authority provision.'*
- *'Because they will go for the cheapest option – or not bother with specialist support if costs are too great.'*
- *'Schools will not put forward pupils who need specialist PRU provision because of financial implications.'*
- *'Budget driven – “we can do better for our pupils”; reduction in scrutiny and proper accountability. Very difficult/impossible to restore universal, local provision once it has gone.'*
- *'Funding, staffing levels and consistency are likely to impact negatively on pupil behaviour and outcomes.'*

It was argued by many that the current structure enables local authority PRUs to challenge mainstream heads and ensure that decisions are made for the right reasons and after schools have tried appropriate strategies. Teachers in PRUs appreciated that teachers in mainstream schools have a wide variety of pressures and expectations exerted on them from DfE education policy. Comments included:-

- *'Financial dependence puts PRUs in a weak position. They could be dominated by secondary heads' agendas rather than holistic needs of kids.'*
- *'Lack of challenge, inferior provision especially academically, lack of regulated provision, e.g., regarding safeguarding'*
- *'Some schools will abuse the system: local authority acts as a gatekeeper and ensures (or tries to) equity.'*
- *'Schools finding it easier to get rid of pupils without trying intervention. Schools being more interested in results/attendance figures.'*

There were a host of queries raised by respondents about who would quality assure the nature of the education provided by settings other than LA PRUs. These were linked to comments made by respondents about the specialist expertise found within LA PRUs and the expert teaching which students received.

- *'The expertise is not in schools, it lies with the PRUs.'*
- *'PRU is not a satellite of school. It is important for PRU to retain autonomy and its own distinctive culture.'*
- *'As schools exclude at various rates year on year, places in PRUs could*

be lost permanently if this became the case. This would lead to loss of experienced staff and the temporary staff who replace them might not have the dedication or expertise to work in PRUs.'

- *'I already know of an academy in my local authority that is looking to charge other schools for AP – the 'unit' is going to be staffed by two teaching assistants, it seems!'*
- *'Authority needs to maintain tracking and supervision of all students in their area. Increased potential for 'disappearing' students if delegated completely to schools.'*

3. Impact of the Academies Programme

3.1 Has the number of secondary schools or primary schools converting to academy status had an impact on the viability of SEN/BESD services provided by the local authority?

Yes – significant impact on viability	22%	Don't know	12%
No – most academies still buy back services	10%	Too soon to tell	56%

Most respondents felt that they could not yet provide a view about what the impact on SEN and behaviour and emotional support services (BESD) has been as a result of the academies programme. 56% said that it was 'too soon to tell'. There are other threats to the viability of these services including funding reductions at LA levels and local authority re-organisations which respondents wanted to report. In an NUT survey of special educational needs co-ordinators in 2011, SENCOs reported significant reductions in support to schools from local authorities in the field of SEN.

Already, however, 22% of respondents in this survey believed they could identify a threat to the viability of SEN/BESD services in their area as a result of the growth of academies.

It is positive news that, as at June 2012, 10% of respondents confirmed that academies are still buying back into SEN and BESD services.

Collaboration between Schools

3.2 Do the mainstream schools in your area collaborate through behaviour improvement partnerships?

Yes	46%	No	22%	Don't know	32%
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Nearly half of respondents were aware of behaviour improvement partnerships in their area (46%) but 22% said that there were no such approaches to joint working between local schools.

Some of the networks created under previous DCSF strategies are still surviving but the arrangements vary widely in relation to each local authority. Managed Moves were reported as operating in a number of local authorities although not much detail was provided about this. Respondents highlighted that where head teachers retained close links and worked collaboratively, it was easier to arrange managed moves and placements for pupils who were 'hard to place'.

- *'Hereford Heads meetings includes PRU heads as well.'*
- *'Local high schools have agreed a 'managed moves' protocol. There is also a 'cash point' system, although with the very recent conversion of local schools to academies, it is unclear whether this will remain in place.'*
- *'In Year Fair Access Protocol – high school heads meet regularly to distribute pupils without school places. Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships operate for groups of schools and inform planning regarding strategy.'*
- *'They have regular heads meetings, Fair Access, run by local authority is area where 'cases' are brought and decisions about places made. We encourage visits from SMT of local schools and learning opportunities for TA from these schools.'*
- *'Hard to Place Panel, includes all local secondary schools, and PRU. Federation (all local schools) has an Inclusion Working Party. Managed cases are filtered through the Hard to Place Panel.'*
- *'Regular meetings take place with BESD units and mainstream school.'*
- *'Managed transfers- both formal via the local authority and informal through good relationships between head teachers- are relatively common.'*
- *'Through the national strategies. These have now been disbanded but the network remains.'*

PRU teachers value and benefit from networks or forums which allow them to meet with teachers in mainstream settings, exchange information and receive or deliver training.

- *'Primary level specifically – joint training means that PRU staff are part of academic communities – PRU staff sometimes provide training for school colleagues.'*
- *'Whilst these partnerships are not formal – during the years I have worked at the PRU good working relationships with primary schools have been nurtured. This has been specific projects inviting 'mainstream children' to specific sessions of our PRU, by providing training on our behavioural management strategies to all primary schools.'*

Several respondents specifically highlighted the pressure on schools to compete as a factor which undermined collaboration for the good of vulnerable pupils.

- *'Collaboration is at a minimum in Sutton (grammar schools) – competition is the issue. It's always been a slightly fragmented system.'*
- *'Parts of the county are collaborating, one region is not collaborating and still exclude even when the PRU is about to close.'*
- *'Academisation', or fragmentation of the education service will damage and undermine support for excluded pupils anyway.'*
- *'This could be problematic as the schools often have other priorities, i.e., exams, league tables etc. There would be little quality control and vulnerable pupils would be disadvantaged.'*

Greater Information Sharing from Schools from which Pupils have been Excluded

3.3 The previous Government considered introducing 'information passports' to address the problem that insufficient information passes with pupils when they are referred to PRUs. In particular, teachers in PRUs want more positive information about pupils strengths, likes and

achievements as well as the information relating to why they are now being educated other than at school.

- *'I think schools are really glad and relieved and appreciate the work we do regarding provision for permanently excluded pupils. It needs specialist provision with skilled staff.'*
- *'As part of the transition it would be helpful if the schools did provide support for the move.'*

4. Outreach Services to Mainstream Schools

What would enable your PRU to play a greater part in supporting pupils in mainstream schools at risk of exclusion?

Centrally employed behaviour advisory teachers	39%
More ring fenced funding to enable outreach	51%
Greater flexibility around curriculum in mainstream schools	49%
Less pressure on mainstream colleagues to show linear progress for all pupils	49%

51% of respondents thought their PRU needed more ring fenced funding to enable outreach as the best way to prevent exclusions.

- *'Link workers attached to PRU to liaise with school intervention/learning centre services etc.'*
- *'Funding to set up a proper mentoring system.'*
- *'More staff to help with reintegration programmes.'*
- *'Funded posts for mainstream link teachers at PRUs and mainstream schools.'*

39% of respondents believed that centrally employed specialist teachers are important and that this was the best way to ensure more pupils stay engaged in their current school and were not excluded.

The other main suggestions on how to support pupils to remain in mainstream when at risk of exclusion included a greater focus on behaviour management skills for mainstream teachers and greater opportunity for shared provision. Comments included:-

- *'Behaviour management should play a greater part in teacher training.'*
- *'Change funding for dual roll students.'*
- *'Referrals assessed by schools on regular visits.'*
- *'Improved communication and collaboration in partnership arrangements.'*
- *'Quality CPD in schools. Inclusive practice in schools.'*
- *'Shared training facilities for practical subjects – PRUs could use some days/high schools others.'*
- *'Shared provision/behaviour management.'*

PRU teachers are experts in behaviour management and de-escalation techniques. Local arrangements should facilitate outreach work and when the funding system changes in April

2013, it will be vital that LA PRUs are funded in a way which enables them to provide outreach services.

5. Ofsted Inspections

'Think the inspection process should be more geared to PRUs – targets are not always very compatible to the work PRUs do and ways we manage and teach pupils.'

'The overall outcome was good for this PRU – largely down to stable, experienced staff with a good mix of teachers and support staff. There is no guarantee that this is sustainable, especially if the PRU is forced to become an academy with consequent restructuring.'

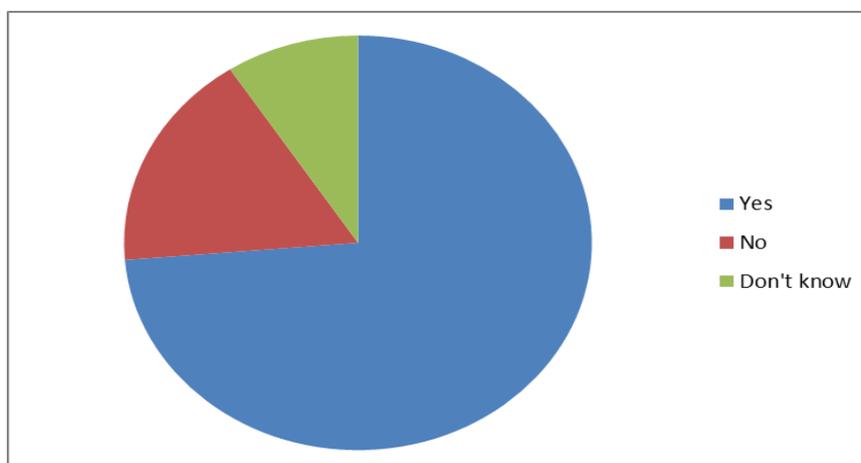
5.1 Have you been inspected since January 2012?

Yes No Don't know

39% equated to 16 schools. 16 PRU teachers confirmed that their setting had been inspected within that time frame period. The 16 teachers who had been inspected gave the responses below.

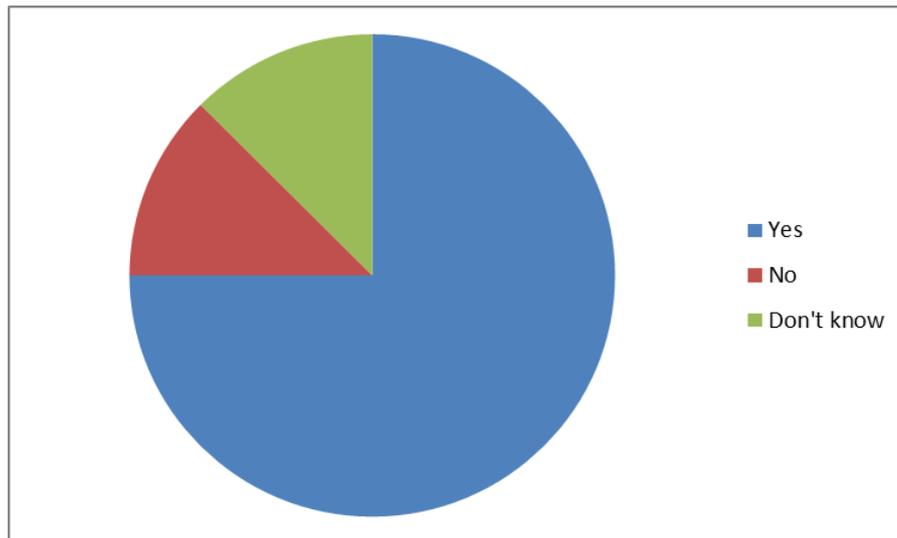
If you have been inspected by Ofsted since January 2012, please answer the following questions:

5.2 Was there an inspector included within the inspection team who had experience of working in a pupil referral unit?



Yes No Don't know

5.3 Did you have confidence that the inspectors understood the context of your pupil referral unit?



Yes 75% No 12.5% Don't know 12.5%

- *'Ours is an extremely complex setting with little PRU management control of some providers. Inspectors had difficulty fitting findings into reporting framework.'*
- *'After an explanation!!'*

5.4 Did you feel the inspection process gave your setting an opportunity to show the way that you add value to your pupils' lives?

Yes 63% No 25% Don't know 12%

5.5 Generally half of the comments suggested that the inspection process had been deemed to be suitable for the pupil referral unit. For a setting of this nature, the attitude of the lead inspector was one of the determining factors.

- *'We had a very understanding inspector who believed what was said and didn't expect graphs and spread sheets for our very small cohort.'*
- *'Observed the full range of services offered. Good inclusion of different data and opportunity to present areas of strengths.'*
- *'Always stressful but team allowed opportunities for reflection, discussion and feedback which made more constructive.'*
- *'As far as Ofsted goes, very fair and reasonably good experience.'*

However, in 5 of the 16 inspections, the approach was not suitable and did not take account of the setting.

- *'Framework not helpful. Mainstream for a non-standard setting. Context and case studies would enhance value added.'*
- *'Year 11s were on exam leave and some students on residential so Ofsted didn't get a full picture.'*

- *'We were inspected using the criteria for mainstream schools which was totally inappropriate and demotivating.'*
- *'The inspector could not accept individual data but insisted on group data which makes no sense in a transient small setting.'*
- *Inspectors were having difficulty reporting true findings into inspection reporting framework – it doesn't fit PRUs.'*

School Improvement for PRUS

'PRUs can be challenging environments and staff can feel isolated. A properly funded national support network that allows PRU staff and leadership/management to share and develop best practice should be available. Partnership and support is needed to help address issues identified by Ofsted. Ofsted replaced by HMI with BESD and PRU backgrounds.'

6. The Secretary of State has suggested a number of solutions where PRUs have weaknesses which have been identified, primarily among these, conversion to Alternative Provision academy status.

PRU teachers have strong views on what their settings need to assist them to deliver excellent teaching and personalised learning. Chiefly, they want support. They want opportunities to learn from other similar PRUs and to combat the isolation they can feel. They want a realistic core budget. They want less uncertainty and conditions of service which value teachers. They want their school to be visible and valued because they value their students and work hard to teach them and to re-engage them with learning.

Comments included:-

- *'Support and advice from local authority. Links with outstanding PRUs. Continued good practice sharing.'*
- *'Increased communication between PRUs across county boundaries.'*
- *'Pressures of inspections being changed into supportive and mentoring experiences.'*
- *'Support from local authority. Regional PRU advisory service. PRU networking.'*
- *'Raised status by the borough and more link opportunities with mainstream school – even academies.'*
- *'More collaborative CPD between mainstream schools and PRUs – also sharing of best practice between PRUs.'*
- *'Criteria should be more contextual, i.e., attendance and behaviour, reflecting the role and purpose of a PRU.'*

7. Local Authority Cuts

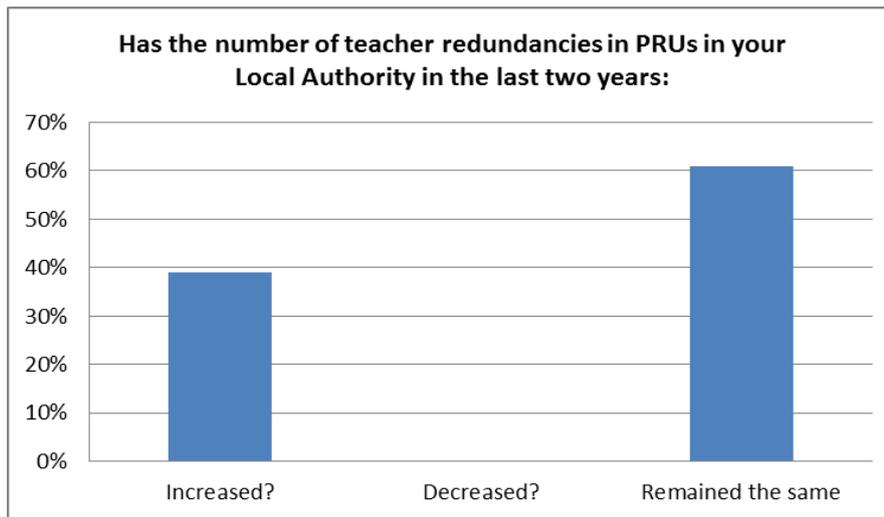
'Direct support stayed the same but support services for our pupils have almost all gone. This means we have to plug a lot more gaps.'

'Reduced budgets. Pay cut for support staff – leads to low staff morale.'

7.1 Has the amount of support from the local authority to your PRU in the last two years:

Increased?	17%
Decreased?	43%
Remained the same?	40%

7.2 Teacher Redundancies



Increased?

39%

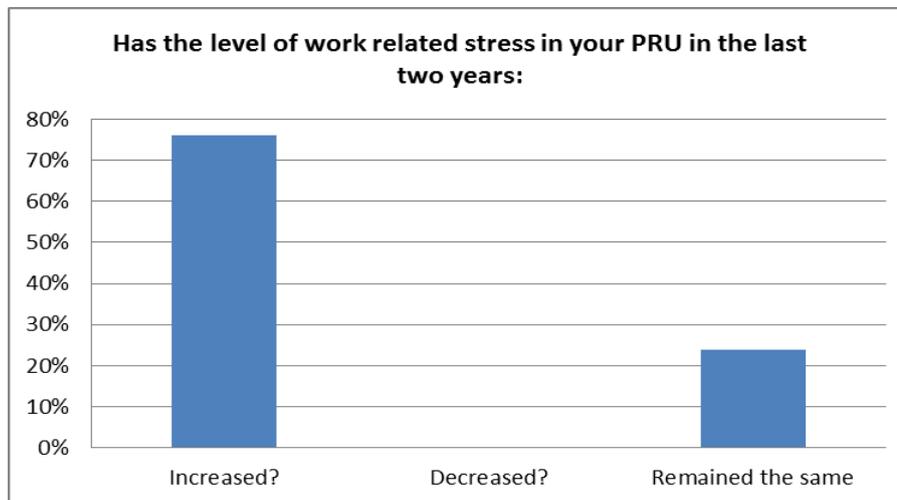
Decreased?

0%

Remained the same?

61%

7.3 Work Related Stress



Increased?

76%

Decreased?

0%

Remained the same?

24%

7.4 Nearly half of respondents (40%) said that the support from the LA had decreased because of cuts. 39% of respondents said this had increased the number of teacher redundancies in PRUs. Nearly three quarters highlighted that work related stress in their PRU has increased in the last

two years. Taken together, these three statistics show the link between the cuts and the education on offer for pupils educated 'other than at school'.

Pupils in PRUs need stability, continuity and highly motivated and energised teachers, not teachers who feel their jobs are at risk and who do not know whether their school will exist in the next twelve months. PRU teachers are feeling stressed about the future of their settings and what they will be able to offer students.

- *'Staff have left/retired and not been replaced, this has limited the range of curriculum options available.'*
- *'Many enhancement activities not possible due to cost.'*
- *'The PRU is about to close, the local authority are employing charities, volunteers, colleges and youth workers as educators. They have appointed someone part-time to monitor progress. They are also using education land for housing.'*
- *'Stress not caused by cuts but by current Government funding/commissioning proposals. The local authority/PRU/schools in my area have worked extremely well together to this point.'*

7.5 PRUs are schools which excel at providing child-centred planning and multi-agency interventions. Many PRUs employ family liaison professionals for parent support. The children and young people in PRUs often require support from a variety of agencies. PRUs are therefore one type of school most affected by the cuts. PRU teachers reported the impact of the cuts in services:-

- *'Far fewer agencies working and supporting individuals. Therefore the level of need for pupils in the PRU system is higher. There are more referrals of looked after children – SEN (Statemented) and Children in Need.'*
- *'The greatest single impact was the closure of the Connexions Service. The second most important impact was the closure of the Youth Service. We worked very closely with both these services to support young people and their families.'*
- *'Cuts in services supportive of vulnerable families have meant an increase in mental health issues. Disestablishment of Youth Service (spring 2011) means less positive opportunity for pupils outside school.'*
- *'Outside agencies that we use to enhance our curriculum, e.g., in terms of healthy lifestyles, drugs, alcohol, etc., are all increasing their fees which impacts on our budget and hence access to them for our students.'*
- *'Support agencies – education welfare reduced, attendance – healthy schools, behaviour support teacher – gone, supply staff decreased. Finance reduction: £60,000 from Teenage Pregnancy strategy – gone.'*
- *'Working with vulnerable pupils, we are seeing resources being cut in social care – we are losing our allocated social worker in September to the detriment of our pupils and their families.'*
- *'Outreach services have reduced. Advisory service reduced by 50 per cent. SEN support and budget reduced.'*

7.6 PRU teachers rely on multi agency support for their students and often for their students' families. With the impact on other services around the PRU, this leads to extra pressure on PRU teachers at a time when they are expected to do more with less.

- *'Funding – our capitation has decreased. We pay for all the 'outside learning' (trips) including an outdoor residential – luckily one of the local authority officers has agreed to fund this for 12/13. Our children rarely get opportunities to experience theatre, films – even walks in the parks! Very important part of the curriculum we offer. Staff have talked about fundraising and applying for grants.'*

- *‘Staff reduction in terms of teaching assistants. Increase in meeting time. Internal provision of CPD, eroding ‘gained time’ with impact on preparation/planning.’*
- *‘Recruitment freeze – having to use agency staff. Scale of individual need – learning and behaviour – increasing along with greater numbers of younger children requiring support following incidents in school.’*

8. Local Authority Re-organisations

8.1 Has there been a **reorganisation** of pupil referral unit provision in your local authority within the last two years?

“Provision unchanged but use of agency staff, due to the recruitment freeze, has implications for behaviour of our pupils for whom stability and continuity are both very important.”

Yes No Don't know

8.2 Impact of reorganisations on staff

In one third of cases, respondents confirmed that their LA children and family services department has been reorganised within the last two years. There has been a reduction in numbers of frontline staff in these specialist schools, and additional responsibilities given to remaining staff.

- *‘A very high turnover of staff included an unwanted redundancy. High levels of stress now experienced. Two new employees leaving within a year.’*
- *‘Some staff redundancies. All staff job specifications changed. Some downgrading. Some people’s place of work changed.’*
- *‘Additional workload; longer hours; staff required to change location, teach different or additional subjects or another key stage’.*
- *‘Some of our best support staff have left.’*
- *‘Previously we combined teaching at the PRU with outreach in schools, now the outreach has ceased.’*
- *‘Increase in staff/student ratio (two less staff required).’*
- *‘Staff have been relocated, temporary contracts not renewed, possibility of redundancies.’*
- *‘Working outreach and in centre – changed job description – locations and pupils altered.’*

Some reorganisations had been welcomed and had improved outcomes.

- *‘Greater autonomy with clearer focus and direction’.*

8.3 Impact of the reorganisation on pupils

Some of the respondents could identify positive outcomes from the reorganisations for their pupils, including:

- *‘Accommodation much improved.’*
- *‘Greater structure and engagement.’*
- *‘We are in a newly refurbished building – this has proved a better learning environment for the students and has helped us gain more effectively in some ways.’*
- *‘Now places allowed for short stay alternative to permanent exclusion placements in the PRU for pupils. Reduction in permanently excluded from 100 two years ago to 30.’*
- *‘Wider options of subjects and sensitive management of transition issues.’*

Overall, very few respondents could identify positive outcomes but could readily talk about the negative consequences and their fears for the future.

- *‘Students from the Thetford area now have to travel for over an hour to receive a service previously provided nearby. There is far less outreach possible. Provision in the remaining bases however is having a more positive impact on learning.’*
- *‘Massively increased permanently excluded in mainstream ➔ pressure on PRU. No stability.’*
- *‘Reduction in provision, e.g., nursery places will be fewer (30 to 12).’*
- *‘Our PRU now has over double the amount of pupils it had 12 months ago and as a result class sizes have increased.’*
- *‘Larger settings that are likely to feel less safe for pupils.’*

PRUs for Pupils with Medical Needs and Teenage Mothers

9. PRU teachers in these settings raised additional issues:-

- Lack of knowledge of future requirements. I run a good/outstanding PRU, well supported by the local authority and schools. We are told we must ‘change’ but there is no indication of why, or what, that change will look like. Becoming a ‘school’ and entering into the ‘pilot’ at the same time is causing huge stress and lack of ability to plan, or reassure staff. There is no feeling that commissioning will benefit pupils in any way. A simple cut in provision would at least allow planning to take place.
- Reorganisation – reducing down to only 3/4 units instead of 6/7. ‘Visionary process’ – heads of mainstream schools deciding. Finance – pupil support, e.g., 28,000 plus 28,000 from mainstream – all uncertain. Taylor Report – ‘academy’ proposal. BSF.
- Possible changes to funding levels and delegated budgets from 2013. Schools in my local authority value our service greatly but numbers fluctuate from year to year so it is vital that we are funded adequately for our maximum number of places. Raising the Participation Age – we are lucky in that we receive EFA funding for our post-16 work. I know of other PRUs for teenage parents who are in this position and who are possibly not represented here today and yet who work with such students.
- This is currently the most expensive area of alternative provision as it involves 1:1 tuition some of the time and small group teaching. I know the local authority is considering introducing more online and distance learning to replace home tuition. There are safeguarding issues here, i.e., less real contact between staff, pupils and families.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The survey findings indicate that:-

- PRUs should continue to be maintained by the LA. 85% of teachers in these schools want this support and could argue coherently and persuasively about why change is unnecessary and counter-productive. The DfE should think again about outsourcing PRU provision and removing PRUs from local authority overnight.
- 56% of respondents could not identify any benefits from schools commissioning PRU places and 88% said there were risks to the viability of PRUs and the education of their students from moving to a commissioning model.
- Academies have an impact on the viability of local services. 22% of teachers said in their area they could identify a threat to the viability of SEN/BESD services because of the number of academies. 56% said it was too soon to tell.

- The outreach services provided to mainstream schools must be safeguarded by LAs when the funding changes take effect in April 2013. 51% of respondents identified that ring fencing funding for outreach services would have the greatest impact in terms of supporting pupils in mainstream at risk of exclusion.
- Ofsted inspections of PRUs should be carried out by inspectors who have worked in PRUs or alternative provision and guidance to inspectors should ensure the framework is adjusted so that it is relevant to PRUs rather than expecting PRUs to adjust their practice to 'fit' a mainstream framework.
- PRUs and the teachers working in them need support; higher status and the opportunity to network. The level and quality of support which PRUs receive from their LA will play a large part in determining their effectiveness and how they fare in terms of school improvement. PRU teachers feel isolated and this must be addressed. Information sharing must be improved.
- PRUs address and meet the educational needs of their students but these students and their families are often accessing support from other agencies too. The funding cuts impact on PRUs disproportionately compared to other schools because PRU teachers have to plug the gaps and deal with the consequences of cuts to others services.
- PRUs need stability, secure funding and high status.