

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD
10TH NOVEMBER 2005**

**ENJOY AND ACHIEVE – CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER
BY MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL**

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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to present an overview to Members of the Every Child Matters Outcomes Framework, with reference to enjoy and achieve for Children Looked After.

BACKGROUND

2. Looked After Children have a right to expect the same outcomes we all want for every child – that they should be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution to society and achieve economic wellbeing. To achieve these five outcomes for Children Looked After, Local Authorities as their "Corporate Parents" should demonstrate the strongest commitment to helping every child they look after achieve the highest educational standards he or she possibly can. This includes their aspirations to achieve in further and higher education.
3. In 2004, Government statistics highlighted the huge disparity between the educational achievement of children in care, 6% of whom left care with five or more GCSEs in comparison with 53% of pupils achieving the same overall. Since 2000, the gap has risen by 2%, illustrating further the urgent need for action, not just because all children are entitled to achieve to their full potential but because helping them to do so is our duty as a 'Corporate Parent'.

4. Section 52 of the Children Act 2004, places a duty on Local Authorities to promote the educational achievement of Looked After Children. This means that they must consider the educational implications of every decision they take about the welfare of all Children Looked After by them, regardless of where the child is placed. The statutory guidance accompanying this duty is expected to be released this autumn.

CURRENT POSITION

5. The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) report 'A Better Education for Children in Care' was released for publication on the same day as Every Child Matters, the report's findings informing the new duty arising from The Children Act 2004.

This report identified five key reasons why children in care underachieve in education:-

- (i) Too many young people's lives are characterised by **instability**.
- (ii) Young people in care have spent too much **time out of school** or other place of learning.
- (iii) Children do not have sufficient **help with their education** if they get behind.
- (iv) Carers are not expected or equipped, to provide **support and encouragement** at home for learning and development.
- (v) Children in care need more help with their **emotional, mental or physical health and wellbeing**.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS

6. The SEU report noted that despite the common perception that children in care are 'uninterested in learning' the vast majority (97%) considered education to be important, with nearly two thirds (61%) giving future employment as a reason. A local survey in May 2003 involving children in care, reiterated this finding, with 96% of the respondents saying they thought education was important.

STABILITY

7. Finding and keeping a suitable care placement is key to improving stability. Limited placement choice and finite resources inhibits this, impacting on the Social Worker's ability to minimise disruption to the child's education.
8. During the academic year 2004/05, 47 children/young people were noted as having at least one change of school placement outside of normal admission times. This equates to 26% of the total Children Looked After cohort.
9. For children of primary school age, the process for transferring schools is relatively simple and easy to follow. For children of secondary school age, the procedure is more complex, resulting in delays in identifying an

appropriate placement and either an adequate or complete lack of provision in the interim.

TIME OUT OF SCHOOL AND TIME IN EDUCATION

10. Most school-aged children in care are in stable places in mainstream schools. A significant minority is in non-mainstream settings, with some only receiving a few hours tuition per week.
11. The academic year 2004/05 saw an increase in the numbers of Children Looked After who missed 25 days plus education, as reported to Corporate Parenting Board on the 10th March 2005.

This increase is attributable to:-

- young people not having a school place.
- young people not attending regularly (planned or unplanned).
- exclusions including unofficial exclusions.

Systems are being set up this year, for earlier identification and tracking of the most vulnerable pupils in an attempt to redress this.

12. During the academic year 2004/05 only one child looked after is noted as having received a permanent exclusion, with fixed terms exclusion data not, as yet, being available for reporting.

HELP WITH SCHOOLWORK

13. Children in care may need extra support in education, either because they have missed out on schooling or because they have Special Educational Needs (SEN). At the end of the last academic year 51 children (28%) had an SEN statement compared to 4.2% of children locally and 3% of all children nationally. 26 children (14%) that we know of, were noted to be at the School Action Plus stage of the SEN process, being provided with additional in-class support to assist with learning and or behaviour. Collectively, this equates to 42% of the children in care population being assessed as in need of extra in-class support.
14. The Connexions service provides a priority (tier 1) service to all children in care aged 13 years plus. A provisional agreement has also been reached whereby all children in care/leaving care aged 16-19 years will be allocated one of two named, dedicated, personal advisers whose case load will be the focus of this group of young people.
15. As well as Connexions advisers, children in care can benefit from whole school support systems such as learning mentors, anti bullying initiatives and out of school hours activities. Children in care are not an homogenous group however, and as with all children, their likes and needs differ immensely.

16. The designated teacher within each school plays a pivotal role in monitoring the progress of children in care and communicating effectively with others, to ensure their educational needs are met. The role of designated teacher is evolving and is set to become more demanding and accountable once the statutory guidance on the *'Duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievements of looked after children'* is released.

HELP AND ENCOURAGEMENT FROM HOME

17. There is much evidence to support the fact that better educational outcomes are achieved from children whose carers and social workers show an interest in their education, have high expectations and support individual learning.
18. Effective personal education plans (PEP's) communicate to children, and to those who work with them, that their education is a priority. The planning process should have the effect of bringing together social workers, foster carers and schools, as well as other professionals, and provide essential information for all concerned to enable the child to progress.
19. In order to ensure that the PEP process is fully effective, it is essential that PEPs are prioritised and funds allocated to resource the implementation of the targets they contain. To assist in this process the education welfare officer working within the education looked after team is to become more actively involved in co-ordinating the initial PEP of all children coming into care.
20. The importance of PEPs as working tools is increasingly recognised and valued and noted in detail in the statutory guidance arising from Section 52 of the Children Act 2004.
21. In Middlesbrough the most recent audit of PEPs completed on 30th September 2005, notes 78% of children as having a PEP in place, 55% of these being completed within the past 6 months. 22% of children in care have no PEP at all.

HEALTH AND WELL BEING

22. Educational outcomes are strongly influenced by a child's emotional, mental and physical health. Schools can boost a child's health through raising self-confidence and self-esteem, enabling participation in sports and access to health education. Educational Psychologists provide a key resource within schools in assisting/advising professionals to provide more individual support tailored to each child. Being a bought in service, schools themselves prioritise the young people to be referred for consideration.
23. It can be difficult for children placed out of authority to access educational psychology services for example, the belonging regulations (in England) specify that a child belongs "to the Education Authority area which coincides with or includes the area of the Local Authority which looks after him".

Reviewing and working with children placed out of authority can therefore incur some considerable extra workload for the Educational Psychology service.

24. Out of authority placements can make all aspects of planning for, and supporting, children's education particularly difficult and is an area that has yet to be addressed fully for our most vulnerable young people.

OPTIONAL APPRAISAL

25. Not applicable to this piece of work.

FINANCIAL/LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

26. There are no financial, legal or ward implications arising from this report.

RECOMMENDATION

26. The Corporate Parenting Board is asked to advise the Executive to:
 - a. note the information relating to the education of children looked after by Middlesbrough Council.

REASONS

27. This recommendation is supported by the following reasons:
 - a. The effectiveness of the Local Authority as a Corporate Parent, the priorities it sets, and the attitudes of those working within it, all affect the education attainment of children in public care. Elected members have a responsibility to support the education of children in care and enable them to achieve.
 - b. Local Authorities have a duty under the Children Act 2004, to monitor and promote the educational achievements of looked after children.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

28. The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:-
 - a. Social Exclusion Unit Report (SEU) 'A better education for children in care' September 2003.
 - b. DfES Statutory Guidance – 'Duty of local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children' Consultation document – June 2005
 - c. Children Act 2004

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