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## **CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 10 November 2005.

**PRESENT:** Councillor Brunton (Chair); Councillors P Thompson and A E Ward.

**OFFICIALS:** J Cooke, D Johnson, C Kendrick, S Little, I Nicholls.

**PRESENT AS OBSERVERS:** Mr B Simpson (Foster Carer).

**\*\*APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors McIntyre, B Taylor, J Taylor and B Thompson.

**\*\*DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:**

No Declarations of Interest were made at this point in the meeting.

**\*\*MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 8 September 2005 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

### **ENJOY AND ACHIEVE OVERVIEW**

The Head of Pupil Support gave a presentation on the education of Children Looked After entitled ' Enjoy and Achieve'.

It was acknowledged that the achievement of Children Looked After in Middlesbrough was relatively low. Although raising achievement was made difficult as funding was usually short term, progress had been made, including the identification of a designated teacher with responsibility for Children Looked After in every School and the production of a Personal Education Plan (PEP) for each child.

It was considered essential that Schools took responsibility for the education of Children Looked After and understood the relevant issues, including the use of budgets. Finding School placements for Children Looked After and dealing with exclusions presented a challenge to the Education of Children Looked After Team.

The Board was advised that the Team had received a mainstream budget of £80,000 over the previous 12 months and it was hoped that this would increase in future. In addition, data analysis was becoming stronger although there were still improvements to be made.

Plans for the future development of Enjoy and Achieve were outlined as follows: -

- Greater emphasis would be given to the responsibility Schools had for the education of Children Looked After and the Team's role as advocates would be developed.
- Budget and pupil tracking systems would be developed.
- A protocol for the admission of difficult to place pupils to Secondary Schools was being produced and would develop over the next 12 months.

Discussion ensued and reference was made to the following points: -

- It was considered important that institutions and service providers such as Schools were challenged if their responsibilities to Children Looked After were not being met.
- Ensuring each School's Governing Body had a designated Governor for Children Looked After was identified as a priority. It was suggested that a letter be written to all Schools who had not done this, either by the relevant Executive Members or the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board.

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## ENJOY AND ACHIEVE – CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

The Team Manager, Education of Children Looked After presented a report giving an overview of the Every Child Matters Outcomes Framework, with reference to Enjoy and Achieve for Children Looked After.

Background information was provided regarding the responsibilities of the Local Authority for Children Looked After both as Corporate Parents and under Section 52 of the Children Act 2004. Statistics were presented to illustrate the increasing disparity between the educational attainment of Children Looked After and children overall. The Board was advised that despite Government funding and numerous initiatives, the educational achievement of Children Looked After remained relatively low, both locally and nationally.

Statistics produced following a survey in Middlesbrough in 2003, illustrating young people's views about education were outlined. It was highlighted that 96% of children and young people looked after thought that education was important, usually for future employment. Further information regarding young people's views was being gathered and would be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board in early 2006 in the form of a video.

Reference was made to a report of The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) entitled 'A Better Education for Children in Care. The report outlined five key reasons why children under achieved in education, which were detailed in relation to Middlesbrough as follows: -

- **Stability**  
It was stated that finding and keeping a suitable care placement was key to stability; however, limited placement choice and finite resources inhibited this, especially for adolescents. Although changes were relatively simple for Primary School age children, the more complex procedure at Secondary School age could lead to delays and lack of provision in the interim. In Middlesbrough during the academic year 2004/2005, 26% of Children Looked After had had at least one change of School placement outside of normal admission times.
- **Time out of School**  
The Board was advised that although most school aged Children Looked After were in stable School places, a significant minority were in non-mainstream settings. As previously reported, the numbers of Children Looked After who missed more than 25 days of education, had increased during the academic year 2004/2005. Data on fixed term exclusions for that period had not yet been released. Systems for earlier identification and tracking of the most vulnerable children were being developed to address these issues. These included ensuring the Education of Children Looked After Team were notified of any exclusions by designated teachers and members of the Team attending all pastoral support meetings. However, this placed high demands on the Team due to the number of issues arising.
- **Help with School Work**  
It was recognised that Children Looked After often required extra support, either because they had missed out on schooling or because they had Special Educational Needs. Various statistics illustrating the proportions of Children Looked After in Middlesbrough with Special Educational Needs were given. Overall, 42% of Children Looked After were assessed as requiring extra classroom support.

Connexions provided two dedicated personal advisers for young people aged 16 – 19 in care or leaving care. Negotiations were underway to secure dedicated provision for Children Looked After aged 13-16, a role currently undertaken by the Personal Advisers attached to Schools. In addition, varying levels of mainstream support were provided within Schools, such as learning mentors, which could be very effective. Designated teachers played a pivotal role in ensuring looked after children's educational needs were met. It was anticipated that this role would become more demanding and accountable with the introduction of new legislation.

- **Help and Encouragement from Home**

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It was indicated that children whose carers and social workers showed an interest in their education, had high expectations and supported individual learning achieved better educational outcomes.

Personal Educational Plans (PEPs) were identified as a key tool in monitoring progress and improving educational achievement. These brought those with an interest in the child's education together and provided essential information to all concerned. In order to be effective, PEPs needed to include at least one academic (learning) target and to be adequately resourced, as well as responsibility being taken for their implementation.

- Health and Well Being

The strong influence of a child's emotional, mental and physical health on educational achievement was recognised, as was the effect School could have on improving confidence and self-esteem. Some children were only able to attend School part time, which affected the level of support they received. Support was also provided to some Children Looked After by CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service).

Educational Psychologists were identified as a key resource; however, it was noted that as a bought in service, Schools prioritised referrals. When children were placed out of the authority, access to some services, such as educational psychology, became more difficult and incurred greater workload. Planning for, and supporting children's education in out of area placements was particularly challenging; however, a protocol for sharing information with local authorities where Children Looked After had been placed was being developed. In addition, records of Children Looked After by other authorities attending Middlesbrough Schools were being improved.

The Board discussed the information presented and the following issues were raised: -

- It was considered important that foster carers were encouraged to support children's education, however it was recognised that time constraints and children's other commitments were limiting factors.
- The value of the Educational Psychology service was acknowledged and the ways in which children were prioritised were discussed. It was noted it was sometimes thought that Children Looked After were provided with additional support out of School when this was not the case.

**RECOMMENDED** as follows: -

1. That the content of the report be noted.
2. That the Executive be advised to note the information provided relating to the education of Children Looked After by Middlesbrough Council.

## **MIDDLESBROUGH FAMILY PLACEMENT PANEL – ACTIVITY REPORT FOR APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2005**

The Deputy Head of Children, Families and Learning presented a report to provide the Board with an overview of the activity of Middlesbrough's Family Placement Panel during the period 1 April to 30 September 2005.

The current role of the Family Placement was outlined, however the Board was advised that this was being reviewed in line with the Adoption and Children Act 2002 which would come into force on 30 December 2005. An independent Chair was to be appointed and staff and Panel Members would be undergoing training on the Act's implications.

Members were informed that the Family Placement Panel had met on 11 occasions during this period and had considered a total of 83 items. A breakdown of the number of items considered in various categories was included in the report. It was noted that 6 foster carers had been de-registered during the period and the reasons for this were outlined.

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It was reported that the number of new foster carers had been low during the proceeding 18 months. This was a national issue, however there were specific problems for Middlesbrough, including the payment structure and competition from other local authorities and independent agencies. A working party was considering the issues and possible solutions and would report in the near future.

The Deputy Head of Children, Families and Learning was thanked for her contribution and the information provided and the important work done by the Panel was noted.

**RECOMMENDED** as follows:

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the Executive be advised to note the information relating to the Family Placement Panel.