

**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

Progress on the Virtual School for Looked After Children

Executive Member for Children, Families & Learning: Cllr Mike Carr

Director of Children, Families & Learning: Gill Rollings

11th November 2010

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Board an update on the recent developments within the Virtual School and the current priorities which aim to secure improvements to the outcomes for Looked After Children.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to the development of educational systems and provision, including the Virtual School, which aim to promote the achievements of Looked After Children.

IF THIS IS A KEY DECISION, WHICH KEY DECISION TEST APPLIES?

3. It is over the financial threshold (£75,000)
It has a significant impact on 2 or more wards
Non Key

DECISION IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE

4. For the purposes of the scrutiny call in procedure this report is
Non-urgent
Urgent report

If urgent, please give full reasons.

BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

5. There has been a national focus on the educational achievement of looked after children for some years and the government remains firm that the educational outcomes of this group are “unacceptably low.” This concern has been expressed as a statutory responsibility via The Children Act 1989 (as amended by the Children Act 2004) which places a “duty” on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children.
6. Discharging the duty on a day-to-day basis means that all local authorities should do at least what any good parent would do to promote their child’s educational aspirations and support their achievements.
7. The DCSF paper “Promoting the Educational Attainment of LAC” issued earlier this year, offered further Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and one of the most important was the requirement of all LAs to appoint a Head Teacher of a Virtual School (VS) of LAC.
8. One of the Virtual School Headteacher’s responsibilities is to track rigorously the educational progress of every child in care, making sure in the first place that schools know when they have a child or children in care on their roll, and that the school is putting in place appropriate additional targeted provision.
9. It is likely that Middlesbrough Local authority will have a joint Safeguarding and Looked After Children Ofsted Inspection in 2011. One of the focus areas which the inspection team will have is the educational progress and attainment of Looked After Children and the effectiveness of Local Authority support and provision taking into account the requirements of the Statutory Duty.

DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROVISION FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

10. During July and August 2010 plans were developed to introduce a programme of intensive work in relation to educational systems and provision for LAC. These are based around two over-arching priorities:
 1. To ensure consistent high quality leadership and management of LAC systems and provision in schools and in Middlesbrough LA.
 2. To ensure appropriately high ambition for Looked After Children and eradicate any evidence of low expectations introduces a raft of development work aimed at ensuring the best possible outcomes for these pupils. Much of this work is dependant on the achievements within Priority 1.
11. Within the above, there have been a number of high priority tasks:
 - Launch the Virtual School for LAC with Head Teachers so that there was clarity about the development work this year and the role and responsibilities of both the LA and schools to ensure the success of this work.

- Launch the team around the Virtual School for LAC so that all professionals working for the Local Authority who work directly or indirectly with Looked After Children could understand the aims of the new provision and also consider how they might actively support the work of the school.
- Develop the role of the Designated Teachers of LAC so that they are aware of the changes being introduced, many of which affect their work with LAC in their care.
- Raise the awareness of Social Workers and other professionals with the same remit as above.
- Offer schools the opportunity to undertake a school audit of LAC provision and the role of the Designated Teachers so that they might consider what they might need to do to improve.
- Establish a data tracking system which monitors LAC progress and attainment wherever they attend school, in or out of the authority
- Establish improved LAC data systems for schools and the Local Authority so that Head Teachers and School Improvement Partners could access relevant and accurate information in relation this group of children
- Embed systems for monitoring and evaluating the LAC data available so that early interventions are put in place to maximise progression
- Re-launch the Personal Education Plan, and the process of regular review, as the key driver for achieving ambitious educational targets for LAC

CURRENT POSITION

12. A system has been established where every Middlesbrough School is submitting teacher assessment data to the Virtual School Pupil tracking system every half term. This system also allows the collection of contextual information which may affect the progress of each child, positively or negatively. The responsibility for providing this lies with the Designated Teacher in each school. Teacher assessment data in all Out of Authority school placements is being collected as well. These systems are new and still in development. But they are highly important as they allow early identification of issues at school level and any concerns can be signposted to the appropriate professional in the Virtual School team.
13. In addition to the above, a new Personal Education Plan has been introduced with immediate effect for piloting this term. It will require further development but the new format now includes strong focus on the issues around progress and achievement and the factors that affect pupil's attendance, participation and learning. As such, it is hoped that it will lead to more appropriate educational targets which lead to higher achievement.
14. In order to support the new systems outline above, the VS Head Teacher and manager of the Looked after Children Education Team are personally supporting as many PEP reviews as possible for Y11 and Y6 LAC. The term will conclude with a review on how things have gone and any actions required to improve the system for 2011.
15. As part of the programme of awareness raising, briefing papers on all developments have been given to both primary and secondary School

Improvement Teams and Partners. In addition, Governor training is arranged and there is a briefing at Governors' Forum.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

16. The work in developing the systems within the Virtual School have a direct impact on the systems in individual schools, especially in relation to target setting, tracking of progress and the expectations of achievement held by the school for each Looked After Child. All of this should support the development of further inclusive practices so that all Looked After Children can positively participate in school life and achieve as well as their peers. Despite the difficulties that some LAC face this aspiration for equality of opportunity is one that everyone should work towards.

OPTION APPRAISAL

17. Not applicable to this piece of work.

FINANCIAL LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

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

RECOMMENDATION

19. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to the educational achievements of Looked After Children and the development of the Virtual School.

REASONS

20. It is important that elected Members are aware of the work being undertaken to support the achievements of children looked after.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

21. The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report.
- DfES Statutory Guidance 'Duty of Local Authorities to Promote the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children'.
 - Children Act 2004
 - Care Matters; Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care Consultation document 9 October 2006
 - Children and Young Person's Act 2008

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