

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 11 November 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor Carr (Chair), Councillors Brunton, Budd, P Rogers, Rooney and B Thompson.

OFFICERS: A Dawson, S Harker, C Kendrick, S Little, I Parker, N Pocklington and J Wilson.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Dryden, Mawston, McIntyre and J A Walker and Mr B Simpson.

****DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 30 September 2010 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

PROGRESS ON THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

There had been a national focus on the educational achievement of looked after children (LAC) for some years and the Government remained firm that the educational outcomes of this group were unacceptably low. This concern had been expressed as a statutory responsibility via The Children Act 1989 (as amended by the Children Act 2004) which placed a "duty" on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of LAC. Discharging this duty on a day-to-day basis meant that all local authorities should do at least what any good parent would do to promote their child's educational aspiration and support their achievements.

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 issues was the requirement of all local authorities to appoint a Headteacher of a Virtual School of LAC. The Adviser for Inclusion and Vulnerable Pupils, part of whose role included being the Headteacher of the Virtual School for LAC in Middlesbrough, was present at the meeting to give an update on strategic and operational developments.

One of the Virtual School Headteacher's responsibilities was to rigorously track the educational progress of every child in care, ensuring that schools knew when they had a child or children in care on their roll, and that the school was putting in place appropriate additional targeted provision. The Virtual School would actively intervene with children who did not appear to be doing as well as they could and help them get back on track.

It was likely that Middlesbrough would have a joint Safeguarding and Looked After Children OFSTED Inspection in 2011. One of the focus areas which the inspection team would have was the educational progress and attainment of LAC and the effectiveness of Local Authority support and provision, taking into account the requirements of the statutory duty. The Children Families and Learning Service Area had just reached the end of a Peer Review week and Inspectors had met a range of professionals, school staff and LAC to look at the good practice which already existed and to inform some areas that could be developed further in preparation for the full inspection in 2011.

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 plans were 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.

2. To ensure appropriately high ambition for LAC and eradicate any evidence of low expectations and introduce a raft of development work aimed at ensuring the best possible outcomes for these pupils. Much of this work was dependent on the achievements within Priority 1.

Within these plans there were a number of high priority tasks which included:

- Launching the Virtual School for LAC with Headteachers, so that there was clarity about the development work this year and the role and responsibilities of both the Local Authority and schools to ensure the success of this work.
- Launching the team around the Virtual School for LAC so that all professionals working for the Local Authority who worked directly or indirectly with LAC could understand the aims of the new provision and also consider how they might actively support the work of the school.
- Developing the role of the Designated Teachers of LAC so that they were aware of the changes being introduced, many of which affected their work with LAC in their care.
- Raising the awareness of Social Workers and other professionals with the same remit as above.
- Offering 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.
- Establishing a data tracking system that monitored LAC progress and attainment whenever they attended school, in or out of the Authority.
- Establishing improved LAC data systems for schools and the Local Authority so that Headteachers and School Improvement Partners could access relevant and accurate information in relation to this group of children.
- Embedding 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.

A copy of the Action Plan was available to Members if required. The gap between the attainment of LAC and their peers remained wide. However, there were many individual successes. The main brief for the Virtual School was to close this gap and make sure children all achieved in line.

A system had been established where every Middlesbrough School was submitting teacher assessment data to the Virtual School Pupil tracking system every half term. This system also allowed the collection of contextual information which might affect the progress of each child, positively or negatively. The Designated Teacher in each school was responsible for providing this information. Teacher assessment data in all out of Authority school placements was being collected as well. These systems were new and still under development. They were highly important as they allowed early identification of issues at school level and any concerns could be signposted to the appropriate professional in the Virtual School team.

In addition to the above, a new Personal Education Plan had been introduced with immediate effect for piloting this term. The new format included a strong focus on the issues around progress and achievement and factors that affected pupils' attendance, participation and learning. It was hoped that it would lead to more appropriate educational targets that would lead to higher achievement. It was acknowledged that the new document is not child-friendly and required further development in consultation with children and young people.

In order to support the new system the Virtual School Headteacher and Manager of the Looked After Children Team were personally supporting as many PEP reviews as possible for Y11 and Y6 LAC. The launch event for Headteachers was very well attended and it was acknowledged that the PEP was a significant change. Some Headteachers had been very receptive and others

were not so sure. The term would conclude with a review on how things had gone and any actions required to improve the system for 2011.

As part of the programme of awareness raising, briefing papers on all developments had been given to both primary and secondary School Improvement Teams and Partners. In addition, Governor training had been arranged and there was a briefing at the Governors' Forum.

It was noted that attainment by LAC in the current year was good and Members requested details of the results achieved. The success of the Virtual School would be measured by how much progress LAC were making.

With regard to LAC educated outside of the Borough, a data collection system had been put in place to track progress. Two full-time staff were due to be appointed and a key part of their role was data collection. In addition, the Virtual Headteacher was developing links with Headteachers in other Authorities and attending PEP reviews in as many schools as possible.

It was highlighted that monitoring of independent and residential schools was essential and a strategy needed to be developed. Regular collection and review of data would highlight any concerns which could then be challenged, for example if there was a dip in a pupil's attendance.

The issue of a Governing Body for the Virtual School was raised and reference was made to a well-established model in place in Camden where the Local Authority's Corporate Parenting Board took this role.

Reference was made to pupil exclusions and preventative steps which could be taken to avoid them. The Virtual School team included a wide range of representatives working in pupil support and behaviour and attendance. Individual cases could be brought to team meetings to establish what support could be offered. It was noted that some Local Authorities worked together to provide alternative school places for pupils who were at risk of exclusion and that this system would be worth exploring for Middlesbrough pupils.

In discussion, the level of support available to children who were out of school was queried and information was requested about the sanctions available to the local authority if a school was not providing a child with an appropriate level of education.

RECOMMENDED that:

1. the information provided be noted.
2. details of attainment and exclusions and comparative information for the last academic year be provided.
3. a report in relation to arrangements for establishing a Governing Body for the Virtual School be presented to a future meeting of the Board.
4. the viability of collaboration with other Local Authorities in order to prevent school exclusions, be explored.
5. information on the structure of the virtual school and the roles and responsibilities of the virtual school team be provided.