

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

9 MARCH 2010

SUMMARY OF CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL'S FINAL REPORT: SUBSTANCE MISUSE EDUCATION

Purpose of the scrutiny investigation:

In its 2008 report to Government the national Drug and Alcohol Advisory Group stated:

“Drug and alcohol misuse damages children and young people, their families and communities. By providing effective drug and alcohol education we can help to protect children and young people, supporting them to avoid harm in the first place or to get help and support before problems become too serious. We can also direct those who need it into treatment as swiftly as possible.”

Substance misuse education is the planned provision of information and skills relevant to living in a world where drugs, including alcohol, are commonly misused. The term covers a wide range of strategies for helping children and young people engage with relevant drug-related issues. Such education aims to enable children and young adults to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to appreciate the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and promote responsibility towards the use of drugs. It also provides opportunities for young people to reflect on their own and others' attitudes to drugs, drug usage and drug users.

The scrutiny panel sought to assess how substance misuse education is being delivered to children and young people across Middlesbrough and also to assess the impact of this provision.

Terms of reference:

The terms of reference of the scrutiny investigation were as follows:

- a) To examine substance misuse education provision to young people of statutory school age (ie up to age 16), including how the effectiveness of this provision is assessed.

- b) To examine substance misuse education provision for young people aged 16 and 17 in further education services, including how the effectiveness of this provision is assessed.
- c) To examine Tier 1 and Tier 2 of substance misuse education delivered by universal and targeted services within informal settings. This should include how the effectiveness of this provision is assessed.”

Findings:

The scrutiny panel considered detailed information regarding the background to substance misuse education and in respect of the way in which this is delivered in Middlesbrough. It was found that substance misuse education is being delivered according to national guidance. However, the panel does wish to highlight some issues which it has identified during the course of its work and these are reflected in its conclusions and recommendations, as outlined below.

Conclusions:

Based on the evidence considered during its investigation, the panel made nine conclusions. These are shown in full in the final report and relate to:

1. The strong emphasis on substance misuse education in Middlesbrough.
2. The downward trend in drug and alcohol use among young people in Middlesbrough, with alcohol misuse being a problem for significantly more young people than drugs.
3. The need to deliver the National Treatment Agency’s expectation that drug education services for young people will move towards a model of provision where substance misuse is ‘everyone’s business’ and that appropriate early intervention is provided.
4. The current weakness in drug education provision in that this is not yet statutory in any setting and the expectation that the inclusion of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education in the national curriculum from 2011 will address this.
5. The fact that although a review of the quality of drug education in Middlesbrough was identified as a gap in the current treatment plan, this has not yet taken place.
6. The success of the ongoing drug education project at Middlesbrough College and St Mary’s College and the need to identify funding for its continuation.
7. The need to ensure that Platform’s existing initiatives and posts (such as the Peer-led Co-ordinator and College Drug Worker) can be maintained.
8. The need to strengthen systems to record brief interventions by universal and targeted services.
9. The need to begin delivering basic drug awareness courses at Middlesbrough College following the provision of training to staff.

Recommendations:

The scrutiny panel's final report contains seven recommendations. These are shown in full in the report and relate to the following:

1. Ensuring that all Council services/departments involved in delivering services to children and young people, together with all other relevant agencies, should adopt the approach endorsed by the National Treatment Agency of making this "everyone's business."
2. Developing a process to ensure regular reviews and an accountability process in relation to the number of brief interventions delivered by each local authority service/department and any other relevant organisations.
3. Encouraging schools to seek advice from Platform's school drugs co-ordinator regarding the suitability of any external agencies or individuals before they are commissioned to deliver drug and/or alcohol education.
4. Encouraging schools to teach Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) as a separate subject as favoured by OFSTED and ensuring that those teaching the subject have appropriate training.
5. Undertaking an evaluation of the quality of drug education in Middlesbrough.
6. Seeking funding to continue (and if possible expand to other further education settings) the drug education course being run at Middlesbrough College and St Mary's College and also providing an academic qualification on completion of the course.
7. Encouraging Middlesbrough College to deliver basic drug awareness courses as soon as possible now that staff have been trained in such delivery.

The Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel's full report on this topic is attached for the Overview and Scrutiny Board's consideration.

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