

Select Committee on Children's Services – 26 January 2011

Report of the Acting Director of Children's Services

Head of the Virtual School

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Select Committee on the work regarding support for Looked After Children in Dudley.

Background

Staffing

2. The virtual school for Looked After Children supports the education, learning and achievement of these pupils. The team works with the individual pupils, their carers/ guardians, a range of other agencies and schools to help ensure all Looked After Children reach their potential. The following report highlights some of the key activities that currently support our children.

Extra Tuition

3. The extra tuition programme provides up to 300 Looked After Children with one to one support. It is the third year of development. Feedback from the children and schools is very positive. However with success comes challenge in the case of this project the challenge is sustainability.
4. The success of this project has now reached Westminster. The Head of the Virtual School attended a committee meeting of Members of Parliament to give evidence as to why Dudley is so successful in educating its Looked After Children compared to other authorities. We are now considered to be one of the top four Local Authorities and this project has helped us get there. As a result Dudley have been asked to deliver a presentation to the House Magazine's conference for Members of Parliament, Councillors and civil servants.

Results

KEY STAGE 4

5. In 2009 **7%** of our Year 11 pupils obtained 5 GCSE's including Maths and English. The national average for Looked After Children is **13%** and the national average for all children is around 55%.

6. In 2010 our GCSE results rose to a very pleasing **25%** which is nearly twice the national average. Those children who received the private tuition the figure rose to a fraction under **40%** which is proof of the effectiveness of this work.

KEY STAGE 2

7. 33% of our pupils gained level 4+ in both English and Maths (either Teaching Assistant scores or SAT result) 41% of our pupils attained a level 4+ only in English (including the above cohort) 37% of our pupils attained a level 4+ only in Maths (included also in the result above)
8. The Government is now suggesting that young people should expect to make two levels of progress between their KS 1 Results and KS2 Results. Young people that have been in care for their KS1 and are still in care now, are as follows:
 - 50% of our pupils have made 2 levels of progress in both English and Maths
 - 63% of our pupils have made 2 levels of progress in their English(including the above cohort)
 - 60%or our pupils have made 2 levels of progress in their Maths(included also in the result above)

Attendance Matters

9. Following the appointment of a dedicated Education Welfare/Liaison Officer we have been able to monitor closely the attendance of our Looked After Children in Dudley, and take action wherever a concern has been raised. This has helped us to improve the attendance of our children, and therefore have an impact on their attainment.
10. We now have robust systems in place to monitor attendance, and will shortly be 'live' on Integris G2, which will enable us to be far more pro-active in supporting and improving attendance overall. This is another step forward in helping us to improve the outcomes for our Looked After Children in Dudley.
11. **The overall attendance for 2009/10 was 93.2% and for 2008/09 92.1%.** (These figures do not count Looked After Children who came into care for short periods during the academic year.)

Personal education plans (PEPS)

12. We continue to organise initial Personal Education Plan's for children coming into care (210 last year) and chase every Personal Education Plan that is overdue. We are confident that the actual number of children with a Personal Education Plan is always above 95%. We identify those that are late and pursue them relentlessly. The reported figures this year are higher than last year which is indicative of our focus on organising them for all Looked After Children in all circumstances.

Designated teachers for Looked After Children

13. Each school has a designated teacher and governor to oversee the progress of Looked After Children. We held a one day course for Designated Teachers which was extremely successful with approximately 70% of schools taking part. The theme this year was Attachment Theory. It gave schools an insight as to the behaviour of Looked After Children and how to help them overcome the difficulties. The feedback from the teachers was 100% positive as it provided practical help that they could take back to school and improve the support they can give the children.

Letterbox Club

14. This is a project in which young people receive a package through the post every month for 6 months of the year. It is to encourage a more positive educational outlook. In each parcel they receive a book; maths activity and stationary.

There are a number of projects that are available for different age groups.

- Yr 3-4
- Yr 5-6
- An 'extra' package available for young people with special educational needs

Approx 70 young people involved

15. Dudley were also invited to become involved with latest development of these packs designed for Yr 7 to 8 pupils - we have 5 young people on the pilot scheme and have been involved with this Book trust project since its inception 3/4 years ago.
16. Once again, this project faces the challenge of sustainability and the team are seeking ways to find the work.

Boarding School Project

17. Dudley joined a national project that sought to place some Looked After Children into boarding school as an effective way to meet some children's personal, social and emotional needs.
18. This continues to be a success with a Year 8 Looked After Children boy placed in the Royal Wolverhampton School as a weekly boarder. He was in danger of being taken from his grandparents who are his carers and he had been excluded from secondary school. If placed in a residential school the cost would have been at least 5 times greater than Dudley are paying for the Royal and the results for pupils at the Royal are considerably higher than emotional and behavioural difficulties residential schools. A Year 11 boy at Old Swinford continues to thrive and is on track to achieve a large number of A grades next year. Again the cost of this is minimal when compared to where he would have attended without this provision.

ICT

19. We continue to strive to provide children coming into care with the equipment to access the internet to support their. We have prioritised the older children and have been successful in obtaining the necessary equipment. Sustainability will be an issue for us in 2011/12.

Other matters

20. The play centre at Sycamore Green is now open and runs a youth club for Looked After Children between 8 and 12 years old on a Wednesday night. Numbers are rising slowly and there are currently 9 children attending regularly.
21. The Virtual School now has several copies of the Chatback DVD for circulation. Last week it won the Midlands round of the National Film awards and now goes onto the National finals. Chatback have received another two awards at the Children & Young Peoples NOW Awards that took place on the 18th November in London. They won the Stay Safe Category and the Volunteering and Participation Award. The awards were filmed by the BBC. Chatback have received offers from producers and other TV people who want to work with them.

Finance

22. The Virtual Head teacher post is currently funded from local authority budgets. The designated Looked After Children teachers are funded through schools delegated budgets. There is no longer any funding identified to support the one – to – one tuition of looked after children and these costs are a budget pressure of £65k in this financial year.

Law

23. The Government White Paper on Education published in December 2010 has included the support for the education of Looked After Children as a key function of Local Authorities and funding for the pupil premium for Looked After Children will be given to Local Authorities to distribute to schools.

Equality Impact

24. This report takes into account the Local Authority's Equality and Diversity Policy.

Recommendation

25. Select Committee note the contents of the report and the work undertaken in supporting Looked After Children to achieve their full potential.



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