

**SCHOOLS CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
PANEL**

**Education of Children
in Care**

23rd March 2012

Foreword by the Chair of the Schools Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

This is one of the last two review reports to be undertaken by the Schools Children and Young People Panel this civic year 2011/12. As I have explained in my earlier reports, Members agreed to look at three or four specific areas in detail.

The Panel split the last areas into two specific issues, education and health of children in care. This review focuses on the education element. I am therefore delighted to present the findings where the Panel presents its recommendations in response to some key questions raised by Members.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the review. Councillors, young people, schools and Local Authority officers who gave up their time to support the work of this group and who are much appreciated.

I look forward to receiving the response to our findings and recommendations made.

**Councillor Chris Mills
Chair of the Schools Children and
Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following recommendations have been made by the Schools Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel (SCYP) and the reasons for the recommendations are detailed later in the report.

The Executive is asked to consider:-

- A. That the foster care role include mandatory regular training/meetings with the local authority. For Example, the possible introduction of a monthly meeting/partnership working group and include training specifically aimed at improving educational attainment.
- B. Exploring possible meetings for existing and new school governors, with a representative(s) from the Children in Care team, to address their specific role and responsibility and how to challenge schools with regards to the educational needs of looked after children.
- C. Ongoing support to the Council's leadership in ensuring all schools accept children in care onto their registers.
- D. Increasing the IT equipment provision in children's residential units.
- E. Investigating the availability of access for children in care to educational internet websites.
- F. Investigating how access by children in care to after school activities/additional learning classes is affected by fixed home to school transport arrangements.

FOCUS OF THE REVIEW

1. To consider why children in care underachieve in education and are performing less well than those who are in stable family settings.

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

2. Members of the Schools Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel considered the areas they wished to explore as part of the review. It was agreed that Members would gather evidence from officers, school staff with responsibility for children in care, social workers and officers at children's residential units.
3. 12th January, 2012 Meeting with Doncaster MBC officers, social workers and school staff with responsibility for children in care; and
4. 23rd January, 2012 Meetings with staff at two children's residential units.
5. 16th January 2012 Schools, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel meeting – final discussion of work undertaken and develop recommendations.

TIMESCALE

6. It was agreed that the review would be undertaken during January and February with the final report being presented to Members at the formal meeting on 23rd March.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE SCYP SCRUTINY PANEL

Councillor Chris Mills (Chair)	Councillor Sue Wilkinson
Councillor Hilary McNamee	Councillor Kevin Rodgers
Councillor Andrew Bosmans	Councillor Rachel Hodson
Councillor Linda Curran	Councillor Richard A Jones
Councillor Doreen Woodhouse	Councillor Pat Porritt
Councillor Pat Knight	
J R Parkes – Primary School Parent Governor – Co-optee	
John Hoare – Diocese of Sheffield Church of England – co-optee	

7. The review was opened up to the whole panel and the following Members took part in the review:-

Councillor Chris Mills (Chair)	Councillor Kevin Rodgers
Councillor Hilary McNamee	Councillor Pat Porritt
Councillor Doreen Woodhouse	Councillor Pat Knight
Councillor Andrew Bosmans	
Councillor Sue Wilkinson	
John Hoare, Co-optee, Diocese of Sheffield Church of England representative	

CONTRIBUTORS

- Jo Moxon, Assistant Director Children and Families
- Christine Hargreaves, Head Teacher, Virtual School for Children and Young People in care.
- Sarah Issa, Social Worker
- Tina Dickerson, Social Worker
- Carolyn Jones, Social Worker
- Julie Wragg, Head Teacher Stirling Primary School
- Sarah Marshall, Assistant Head Danum School
Children and young person's residential units
- Carol Oliver, Manager of a semi-independent unit
- Nichola Dawson, Deputy Manager of a transition unit

BACKGROUND

AIM:

To explore:-

- a) why children in care underachieve in education;
- b) the barriers to attainment; and
- c) how children in care are supported through their education.

CONCLUSIONS:

Members highlighted and kept in mind that by the age of 10, some children in care may have had a change of home, area and school on more than one occasion and the extent of how this affects a child is difficult to measure. It was recognised that a child may struggle to separate themselves from the problems they experience at home and carry on as normal during school hours. It is reasonable to expect some kind of disruption.

It was accepted that when a child is placed out of the local authority area it generally means they will need to change school. It was recognised that school placement stability was imperative for a child in care but this was not always possible and therefore difficult for them to reach their educational potential. It was stressed that other issues in a child's or young person's life takes priority, for example, their safety.

It was outlined that children in care do undertake GCSE's but results had generally been poor with a few exceptions. Members addressed why it was difficult for some young people to achieve the Government's benchmark of 5 A-C grade GCSE's and move on to higher education. It was highlighted that sometimes when a child spends a period of time in care it was difficult for them to study due to other traumatic circumstances in their lives.

However, it was recognised that if a child is in care for a long period they do tend to achieve good GCSE results and therefore acknowledged that there are no reasons why a child in long term foster care, in a strong family unit, should not achieve good results.

Planning, consistency and knowing the young person's needs are imperative to assist with any issue a child or young person is facing, not just education. It was accepted that there are no quick fixes and that the needs of each individual would always be different. It was stressed that if a young person had not gained statutory qualifications or reached their full potential at the age of 16 it did not mean they could not continue or start to study at this point and throughout the remainder of their lives. It was also highlighted and recognised that education was not solely about gaining qualifications but vitally important that skills for life were achieved and are part of the wider education for a child in care.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Executive is asked to consider:-

- A. That the foster care role include mandatory regular training/meetings with the local authority. For Example, the possible introduction of a monthly meeting/partnership working group and include training specifically aimed at improving educational attainment.

Reason: This would provide an opportunity for the local authority to provide essential training, and give foster carers the opportunity to meet and if required develop support mechanisms.

- B. Exploring possible meetings for existing and new school governors, with a representative(s) from the Children in Care team, to address their specific role and responsibility and how to challenge schools with regards to the educational needs of looked after children.

Reason: Discussions with the children in care team would provide governors the chance to receive extra support and training and in turn assist with challenge at School Governor meetings. Local Authority school governor representatives were aware of their responsibility as Corporate Parents and wished to ensure this role was being undertaken to its full potential. The group felt that possibly the School Governors' Forum meetings could be used for this purpose.

- C. Ongoing support to the Council's leadership in ensuring all schools accept children in care onto their registers.

Reason: Members were of the opinion that schools need to be challenged if there is found to be a culture of not accepting children in care onto a school roll. Members held a strong opinion that any child should be accepted into a school and as Corporate Parents other practices would not be accepted.

- D. Increasing the IT equipment provision in children's residential units.

Reason: The two units visited by Councillors had a single computer for use by the children and young people and on occasions it could cause a difficulty if everyone wished to use the facilities at the same time. Members wished, if possible, to see an increase in equipment provided.

- E. Investigating the availability of access for children in care to educational internet websites.

Reason: Some revision techniques for school and college courses are in the format of games through internet sites, but access to these sites may not be permitted and blocked under the Doncaster MBC internet security system. Such educational facilities make learning fun and interactive. The group wished to ensure that the maximum facilities were available for use by children and young people in care.

- F. Investigating how access by children in care to after school activities/additional learning classes is affected by fixed home to school transport arrangements.

Reason: The group wanted to ensure that children and young people in care had the opportunity to attend after school activities, but were concerned that this could be affected by home to school transport contracts being arranged at fixed times.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Schools Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny panel would like to thank for their time and information the following people:

Jo Moxon, Assistant Director Children and Families
Christine Hargreaves, Head Teacher, Virtual School for Children and Young People in care.
Sarah Issa, Social Worker
Tina Dickerson, Social Worker
Carolyn Jones, Social Worker
Julie Wragg, Head Teacher Stirling Primary School
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