

From the Office of
Peter Davies
Mayor of Doncaster

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PD/JB

30th April 2012

Councillor Chris Mills
Chair – Schools Children and Young People
Overview and Scrutiny Panel
Directorate of Resources
Scrutiny Offices
2 Priory Place
Doncaster
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Dear Chris

EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN CARE

Thank you for sending me the Schools, Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel review report on 'Education of Children in Care'.

Please find below, details of the action that will be taken by the Children and Young People's Service, in respect of the recommendations made in the report.

- A. That the foster care role includes 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.**

There has been a range of education training available to Doncaster and Independent Foster Carers. This is as a result of a questionnaire to analyse their specific need. Examples of training include how to support a child learning in numeracy/mathematics and literacy/English. In addition, Doncaster foster carers who are new to the role receive some basic training on education.

The Children & Young People in Care Education Service and the Fostering Service are committed to working in partnership and raising the profile of education for foster carers.

This will include reviewing the training programme for foster carers, and further incorporating key Children & Young People in Care Education Service training opportunities.

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A meeting date of 2nd May has been arranged to review the current offer and a programme for improvement. This will include, as suggested, the development of a partnership working group. The resulting programme will be evaluated, and a report will be produced, analysing its effectiveness and future recommendations.

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.

I am aware that during the last two academic years, 81 schools in Doncaster have been represented at governor training which aimed to ensure that governors were aware of their responsibilities, in relation to Children in Care. In addition, governor forums were attended by the Virtual School Head to update governors on the importance and function of the Personal Education Plan required for Children in Care, on roll at their school. An item identifying the responsibilities of the governors on Children in Care is always included on the governor's term agenda, produced by the Local Authority.

In response to your recommendation, a key milestone in the Children & Young People Improvement Plan is the production of a programme to support school governors, and to further develop on the actions highlighted above. This will take a variety of forms, including those suggested in the overview report, after consultation with governance and representatives from school governing bodies. A key focus will be to support governors to challenge their schools to provide appropriate support. This will be delivered before the end of March 2013, and an evaluation report will be produced to determine its effectiveness.

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

Thank you for your ongoing support. This will serve as an important message to schools. The percentage of Children in Care (CiC), admitted on roll at a school within 15 days of entering care, or changing a placement, was agreed as a local performance indicator for 2011/12, in order to monitor schools' compliance with guidance and improve attendance of CiC. This had not been tracked previously.

This tracking and appropriate challenge made to schools in respect of individual cases will continue. Where patterns of non-compliance appear, this information will be used as an indicator in the inclusion aspect of the school's risk register, as produced by the Local Authority. If necessary, this will be reported to the appropriate responsible agency, for example, the Department of Education.

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D. A review be undertaken into what access is available and required for Children in Care to IT equipment and game consoles (for example, Xbox, Wii and Playstation).

A review, as described, will be undertaken with the Service Manager for Residential Homes, and a rolling programme of improvements produced.

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

The Children & Young People in Care Education Service, Fostering Service, and other relevant professionals, will meet in June 2012 to audit the present provision provided for CiC and their families, and produce a plan for increased participation.

In order to make sure that it is 'fit for purpose', foster carers, key workers, parents and young people will be asked to evaluate current provision and opportunities, including barriers, and offer their opinions on how this might be improved. The Children in Care Council will be consulted, and they may wish to take a lead on this work.

An investigation into how transport arrangements impact on additional activities/additional learning classes, managed by the schools, will be included as part of this work, included in the action plan and improvements made, based on any recommendations from the report. In the interim, the Fostering Service are also working to ensure all children in care have the opportunity to engage in an organised weekly activity, such as Cubs, Brownies, Swimming clubs etc, with an expectation that all children under 11 years do so.

Councillors will receive a report in March 2013 evidencing the actions described, and an evaluation of the impact as appropriate.

I trust the above is helpful.

Yours sincerely



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