

Item No. 8	Classification: Open	Date: April 2 2009	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		New approach to improving attainment for children in care	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Rory Patterson Assistant Director of Children's Specialist Services & Safeguarding	

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. To note the range of activities and support to promote the best possible educational outcomes for Southwark's looked after children.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. Attainment for looked after children remains one of the highest Southwark priorities.
3. Previous reports to the Parenting Committee have shown that over the last 4 years there has been a steady improvement in the GCSE results for looked after children in Year 11.
4. The Corporate Parenting Committee have also had reports relating to University support (further education) and the work of the Adolescent and Aftercare Service to support 16+ and care leavers successfully accessing education, employment and training.
5. The committee noted that the appointment of a Virtual Head Teacher of the London Borough of Southwark had only been for a 12 month period and wanted further information relating to day-to-day support processes and monitoring activity.
6. The government reporting framework and Young Southwark priorities identify a number of key indicators which are used to track education progress for looked after children. These being:-
 - GCSE achievement
 - Numbers of children at school action, school action plus and where they are statutory assessment of special education needs
 - Attendance (percentage having more than 25 days in an academic year)
 - Percentage of children at 16 and 19 who are accessing employment, education and training
 - Key Stage 2 SATs results
 - Delivery of individual educational planning (PEPs)
 - Southwark's performance concerning the above performance indicators are provided for the Corporate Parenting Committee in the performance report.
7. Since the introduction of quality protection in 1998 southwark used a proportion

of the allocated grant to provide a co-located team of teachers to work alongside social workers to provide support advice whilst driving up standards. This team is headed up by a dedicated educational psychologist and an advisory teacher for looked after children with leadership responsibilities for inducting and training named governors and designated teachers in each school for looked after children.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

8. The planning and oversight of delivering year on year educational improvements for Southwark's looked after children is responsibility of a joint steering group. Chaired by the Head of Looked After Services this group has representation from key operational and education departments across the service including management information systems, special educational needs, advisory teacher, educational psychology and senior operational managers.
9. The Steering Group produce an annual work-plan with clear targets for service improvement which is integrated into the children looked after business plan and Young Southwark.
10. The Steering group receives its own detailed dataset tracking key performance and attainment information as well as ensuring that every operational manager receives detailed reports relating to the delivery of PEPs and school attendance.
11. Since January 2009, the CLA Education Team have adjusted the way they deliver day to day support to social work teams by allocating a named education advisor (teacher) for each looked after team. Having a named teacher sitting alongside social workers in each team enables immediate access to advice and clear leadership responsibilities for the teacher to track every child of school age in their given team (virtual class). Given that Southwark has 306 school age children which represented a significant monitoring challenge for the virtual head teacher (who was only able to track the most worrying children) it is felt this arrangement will enable all children to be effectively monitored rather than just those who are presenting the most challenge.
12. The role of the team education advisors to support social workers in delivering better education outcomes is achieved through the following ways:-
 - Identifying education resources
 - Negotiating with education providers
 - Individual complex case working with other professionals to achieve the best possible educational outcomes
 - Working with designated teachers and school staff to ensure that children remain in school (including advocacy)
 - Encouraging PEP completion (attending PEPs where there are significant/complex issues or dispute)
 - Supporting the team by identifying all the children in their named social work team as a (virtual class) and tracking their progress
 - Attending team meetings to share new developments relating to exclusion procedures, appeals, new qualifications etc
 - Support PEP audit processes
 - Produce PEP monitoring and tracking reports for the team

- Identify children in the team (“virtual class”) who may be falling further behind in their level of attainment and help develop targeted education support plans to raise attainment
13. The CLA education team provide a key focal point within each team and across the whole CLA service to maintain an effective overview of every child’s progress and deliver effective intervention where required.
14. In addition to the work of the team, the Steering Group have commissioned a number of key initiatives to improve education outcomes, these being:-
- Commissioning of an independent organization called Welfare Call who telephone the schools of every looked after child in Year 10 and 11 to check for their attendance. The results of these calls are summarised and sent to a named person in the CLA Education Team by mid morning on the day in question. This then enables the education team to liaise with relevant social work teams and ultimately foster carers to check why a child is absent. This initiative was introduced from April 2008 and had a significant impact upon overall school attendance. Research had indicated that the looked after children most likely to miss more than 25 days education were in Years 10 and 11.
 - Commissioning of a home tuition service to deliver weekly curriculum support at home for looked after children sitting GCSEs. This project has been in place 9 years and has been recognised as delivering crucial additional support to enable young people to complete their GCSE course work and prepare for exams. It is proposed that using a modest amount of care matters grant this scheme will be expanded to include pupils in Year 9 who wish to access the service.
 - Through developments of CareFirst (children’s database and partnership with MIA Education data service) it is proposed that from April 2009 all historic education achievement data for newly looked after children will be inputted onto CareFirst. This will then become “benchmark data” whereby the service can track education progress following the point the child entered the care system. Reports will be provided by CareFirst which will track education progress and the extent to which the gap between expected attainment and actual attainment should narrow. The role of the team education advisors (outlined above) will be to monitor each child’s progress from their arrival in care to ensure they are narrowing the gap and to intervene where this is not making sufficient progress.
 - From April 2009 Southwark will implement a scheme whereby children can access additional funding (personal education allowance) where it is identified a child is making insufficient progress. This additional expenditure will be identified from a number of sources including care matters, extended school programmes, home tuition budgets and fostering activity budgets.
 - Each year the CLA service runs a celebration achievement which recognises the hard work young people undertake to achieve qualification at various levels.
 - In partnership with the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Southwark’s fostering services have undertaken a pilot reading project aimed at children in care at key stage 2 to help foster carers support reading development of children in primary school. This is going to be evaluated over the summer period with an expectation that the learning can be mainstreamed from the beginning of the 2009/10 academic year.

- The CLA education team also provide pre-approval training for foster carers to promote home learning and are available through foster carers to offer day to day advice relating to bullying, exclusions and how to access the best performing schools in their locality.
- School admissions and transition at Year 7 to secondary school are key events which if not managed properly can have a significant impact on a child's educational progress. In partnership with education services, the CLA education team play a key leadership role on admissions panels to ensure looked after children obtain their first choice of secondary school (Southwark children in care seeking a Southwark secondary school place). The team also tracks each child in Year 6 living outside the borough to ensure foster carers apply promptly to obtain places in the best performing schools in other London authorities.
- The admission process is also implemented should a child (regrettably) experience a placement breakdown in the middle of an academic year. The steering group receives reports as to any child who has experienced a school disruption in this way and the number of working days (maximum of 20) it has taken to provide a new school place.
- Since April 2007 the CLA service have undertaken bi-annual audits of personal education plans to ensure the quality of education plans is of a high standard. The audits are undertaken currently by the CLA education team and relevant managers (primary and secondary school age). Learning outcomes are then fed back to the teams.
- The CLA education team is headed up by a dedicated educational psychologist. About 50% of Southwark's 304 school age children have an statutory assessment of special educational needs or are receiving additional support provided by the school under school action or school action plus. It is not uncommon for their to be confusion or delay in delivering assessments to access additional classroom support as looked after children sometimes change education authority and placements. Additionally, there are complex rules relating to lead responsibilities and funding for looked after children who are placed outside the borough. Through having an educational psychologist involved in the education team, staff can access specialist advice as to how to make progress or exceptionally a direct intervention can be offered to accelerate the process.
- From March 2009 CLA services have introduced their requirement that any request for a placement change for a school age child must include a contribution from the named team advisory teacher outlining the impact of the placement change upon the child's education and school placement.
- The introduction of free leisure access through partnership with Fusion from September 2008 is also part of an overall strategy to support education as research has indicated that looked after children who are fit and actively engaged in sport and constructive recreation are more likely to do well at school and be motivated to learn. Looked after children who are positive about school and being healthy have higher self esteem and are therefore, more resilient to disruptive issues relating to substance misuse, teenage pregnancy and youth crime.

Policy implications

15. There are no policy implications contained in this report.

Community Impact Statement

16. It is recognised that looked after children and care leavers who are engaged in education are more likely to have access to the world of work, contribute to the local economy and make a positive contribution to Southwark.
17. Children and young people who enjoy school have been found through research to be more likely to experience placement stability (just as a good foster placement is more likely to promote stability at school).
18. Any of Southwark's looked after children who enter the care system aged 12 and above do not begin to fully settle and make sense of their lives until they are nearing the age of 16. It is therefore, being recognised that the Adolescent and Aftercare Service should support looked after children accessing education well beyond their 16th birthday. Partnerships with Connexions and the looked after children's university policy are targeting support for those looked after children who wish to make educational progress after achieving the statutory school leaving age.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

19. The CLA educational team, home tuition project, Welfare Call, personal education allowances, university support, foster carer training, after school clubs and Saturday schools are all funded through resources allocated to the CLA Business Unit. The care matters grant has been awarded to deliver enhanced outcomes for looked after children across all 5 areas with additional statutory requirements being introduced. None of these services have been included in the 5% budgetary constraints introduced for the 2009/10 financial year.

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Rory Patterson, Assistant Director Children's Specialist Services and Safeguarding	
Report Author	Chris Saunders, Head of Services for Children in Care	
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Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Strategic Director for Legal and Democratic Services	Yes	Yes
Finance Director	Yes	Yes
Executive Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional/Community Council/Scrutiny Team	March 24 2009	