

<b>Item No.</b> 10.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 13 July 2015	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Report title:</b>		Improving Educational Outcomes for Looked After Children	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Director of Education	

## RECOMMENDATION

1. That the committee note information provided in the report in relation to educational needs of looked after children in Southwark.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The corporate parenting committee have reviewed the educational outcomes of looked after children (LAC) in Southwark through the Virtual Head teacher's report at their meeting in November 2014. Following this, the committee have requested further information on the experiences and practices of other local authorities in improving educational outcomes be provided. This report highlights national best practice in raising LAC educational outcomes, the experiences of other London local authorities and Southwark's approach.

## KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

### National research and best practice case studies

3. A previous review of what works in improving educational outcomes for LAC undertaken by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children's and Young People's Services (C4EO) highlighted that:
  - A high proportion of children and young people see their entry into care as beneficial in relation to their education suggesting that in some cases, entry into care offers stability from a previous disruptive home environment, which allows children to concentrate on education
  - In seeking to improve educational outcomes, attention should be paid to all stages of a child's educational career, from early years through to support for further and higher education
  - Measurement of educational outcomes of the looked after group is complex, and improvements on the ground may not be reflected in local authority returns.
4. The C4EO study emphasises that improving educational outcomes is linked with overall improvements in quality of care and wider outcomes, and it is suggested that innovative approaches can be taken to raising educational attainment. Best practice case study examples include:
  - The use of therapeutic placements and interventions to address barriers to

- learning stemming from difficult or traumatic backgrounds
  - An out of hours learning offer (OSHL), which provide students with one-to-one study support and learning resources, runs Saturday English classes and offers extra-curricular activities, such as theatre trips, to help develop LAC personally. The virtual school is staffed by fully qualified teachers to ensure knowledge and understanding of curriculum matters, how schools and their wider services operate and how to galvanise support from them as well as bringing carers and social services on board
  - Using Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care in providing ‘wraparound’ care to intensively support the young people in all areas of their lives and help them develop better relationship and life skills
  - Targeting the borough’s LAC cohorts in promoting and implementing national initiatives such as the Summer Reading Challenge.
5. National research by Oxford University and the Nuffield Foundation is currently taking place examining the factors affecting educational progress of children in care. Preliminary conclusions from this research include:
- Reading at home with foster carers has a positive impact on outcomes;
  - Reducing exclusions increases the educational outcomes for looked after children (and all others)
  - A joined up consistent approach is essential in improving the educational outcomes for looked after children
  - Children and young people with input into their care plan will achieve better outcomes.
6. The research also draws on findings from international research regarding improving educational outcomes. Interventions include:
- Some foster carer training in behaviour improves education outcomes;
  - Improvements in reading using paired reading with foster carers and primary school children
  - Mentors, maximising placement and school stability, aggressively pursuing educational supports, and treating mental health problems that may act as barriers to classroom success.

### **Experiences of other London local authorities**

7. The following features have been adopted by other local authorities in London to raise educational outcomes for LAC.
8. Virtual school: LAC are worked with as if they were in a single school; the virtual school provides advice, guidance or direct involvement to support education of LAC, working with school staff, social workers and foster carers on a wide range of educational responsibilities. The virtual school is relatively small, in some cases with less than 5 staff members but work closely in partnership with other teams. Budget tutors, mentors and specific projects are commissioned as required either through pupil premium money or a separate education support. Southwark has adopted some features of the virtual school.
- Advantage: virtual schools provide an opportunity to use an integrated, multi-disciplinary approach to ensure that educational considerations are central in care planning and review of plans; this has been found to improve educational attainment, attendance as well as having a positive effect on

- wider outcomes
  - Disadvantage: Budget constraints had led to a significant reduction in the capacity of the virtual school in some local authorities and some authorities are uncertain about the future of virtual schools in their areas.
9. Support to encourage and improve reading: these include an initiative where volunteers hear LAC read in school; help for foster carers to help them embed good reading and learning habits in children in their care – Southwark has also adopted these measures to support our foster carers.
- Advantage: It has long been held that strong reading habits foster good educational outcomes and improve resilience and reduce frustrations with learning
  - Disadvantages: these initiatives will arguably have the most impact for younger children and may not be as effective in encouraging adolescents and teenagers. In addition, these may not improve educational outcomes in other areas, e.g. Maths, which may require different approaches.
10. Maximising educational opportunities outside of school: these have included a bespoke centre to provide 1:1 study support sessions, university tasters and inspirational speakers and graduates attending to talk to, inspire and motivate young people. Another initiative is an education 'champions scheme', where senior officers from the local authority, police and health take an active interest in the education of a child in care, promoting high academic expectations and 'opening doors' to additional opportunities. Southwark also promotes educational opportunities outside of school.
- Advantage: providing educational opportunities for LAC away from the classroom has shown to improve their outcomes by encouraging them to develop a range of out of school interests and hobbies that widens their educational base
  - Disadvantage: these initiatives will be most successful if long-term provision can be secured to ensure consistency. In a climate of budget restrictions, it has been challenging for local authorities to ensure the future of bespoke centres. It is also important that there are sufficient volunteer educational champions who are engaged with the process, to ensure each looked after child has this available to them.

### **Issues affecting Southwark**

11. Southwark is faced a number of challenges including that the majority of Southwark LAC are educated outside of Southwark, and live 20+ miles from Southwark. In addition, there is higher than average proportion of 16+ young people in care.
12. Southwark Virtual School has taken forward a number of initiatives to improve educational outcomes for LAC in Southwark, and further work is planned. These include:
- Commissioning 'Letterbox', a literacy and numeracy intervention at Key Stage 2 and 3. Foster carers are encouraged to read, and complete maths puzzles, alongside their looked after child
  - Advertising University Taster days via Southwark's Participation, Education and Training Team and Virtual School

- Working closely with schools to monitor school predictions in line with pupil's individual academic starting points, to ensure that schools generate realistic, achievable, while still ambitious, projections
- Identifying pupils at risk of disengagement through regular tracking meetings, providing support through a cross-service approach to maximise pupil retention
- Paired-reading intervention at Key Stage 3 (TextNow) for pupils and their carers
- Increasing supervising social workers/residential worker' early intervention regarding attendance and achievement.
- Increasing unannounced visits to education provision attached to residential care
- Continued delivery of specialist input by LAC education team to support social care service staff in achieving quality personal education plans (PEPs).

### **Post adoption support**

13. Any child who remains looked after continues to receive support from the Virtual School. The Virtual School endeavours to support education decisions that will best meet the child's needs once they are adopted.
14. Current resourcing does not stretch to meet the additional needs of the newly adopted cohort in Southwark. The Virtual School is looking to utilise an element of centrally retained 2015/16 Pupil Premium (LAC) to secure 3 fixed term posts. The remit for these Advisors will include early post-adoption support.

### **Policy implications**

15. Southwark's approach to raising educational outcomes for looked after children will be outlined in the forthcoming Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy. This includes priorities to improve educational outcomes through increased placement and school place stability. This work is in line with the Children and Young People Plan 2013-16 priorities, which is overseen by Southwark's Children's and Families Trust on behalf of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

### **Community impact statement**

16. This item will have an impact on the work that the council does with looked after children.
17. The decision to note this report has been judged to have no or a very small impact on local people and communities.

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

<b>Background Papers</b>	<b>Held At</b>	<b>Contact</b>
None		

## APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Lead Officer</b>	Merril Haeusler, Director of Education	
<b>Report Author</b>	Liz Britton, Head Teacher, Virtual School, Tasneem Mueen-Iqbal, Policy Officer	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	2 July 2015	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments Included</b>
Director of Legal Services	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services	No	No
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	No	No
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>	2 July 2015	