

Meeting:	Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Sub-Committee
Date:	19 October 2005
Subject:	A Better Education for Children in Care - Social Exclusion Unit Report - September 2003
Responsible Officer:	Paul Clark, Director of Children's Services
Contact Officer:	Mark Gillett, Group Manager, Strategic Commissioning and Business Management Gladys de Groot, Principal Educational Psychologist
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Margaret Davine, Portfolio Holder for Health and Social Care
Key Decision:	No

Section 1: Summary

Decision Required

To note and comment on the report

Reason for report

The report outlines responses to the social inclusion report – A Better Education for Children in Care and gives information about GCSE results for 2004 and 2005

Benefits

To monitor progress in this area

Cost of Proposals

Not Applicable

Risks

Children Looked After continue to perform less well than their peers.

Section 2: Report

2.1 Brief History

Government targets for children in care were set out in the letter **Improving Educational Outcomes For Children In Care: Targets For 2006** and taking regard of the recommendations laid out in the social exclusion unit report **A Better Education for Children in Care** which the prime minister commissioned in March 2001.

The report culminates in an action plan of recommendations for implementation by central and local government. The 39 areas for local action focus on planning, prioritizing children in care, supporting children in care, advocacy and appeals, training and support for social workers, carers and teachers and information.

The Academic Attainment of Children Looked After Group (AACLA) was set up in January 2004 to draw together services within the new People First Directorate (set up in September 2003) and other partners to focus on the academic achievement of Children Looked After by Harrow. An audit of the 39 areas of recommendations was undertaken and disseminated, highlighting areas for development as well as noting good practice. The self-audit is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

The targets contained within the SEU report have since this time been broadened out in the new **DfES Statutory guidance; Duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children**, which is out for consultation and due to be published in October 2005. A consultation exercise was undertaken within Harrow and a full response was given. The consultation document states that "The measures of a local authority's success in promoting the educational achievement of the children they look after are:-

1. for looked after children to achieve educational outcomes as good as their peers;
2. to demonstrate throughout the local authority an active commitment to ensuring the highest educational outcomes for looked after children;
3. to have in place and to follow clear and robust procedures and protocols which encourage them to have high expectations of themselves and to achieve their full potential. "

Five key factors are identified to account for underachievement

1. *spend too much time out of school* – this highlights a need to tackle exclusion, lack of school places, disaffection, schools unable to meet needs, low expectations, ethos of family or children's home.

2. *too many young people's lives are characterised by instability* – this relates to number of foster and school placements as well as other within-family factors.
3. *children do not have sufficient help with their education if they get behind* – one focus has been to try to link resources to SMART up-to-date PEPs (Personal Education Plans); virtual school data is used to predict results; soft data e.g. PASS (Pupil Attitude to Self and School) data showing up vulnerabilities of future attendance, disaffection and mental health issues used to focus preventative work.
4. *primary carers are not expected, or equipped, to provide sufficient support and encouragement for learning and development* – this has had clear links to training of social workers, designated teachers and carers.
5. *children have unmet emotional, mental and physical needs that impact on their education* – this links to training, assessment, continuity of placements and information. Also to pastoral systems in schools and other resources for young people such as CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services)

The AACLA group has worked with the Gatsby Project and LPSA group to put in place a range of measures and recommendations. The Harrow context is as follows:-

- There were 120 school-aged children and young people looked after by Harrow last academic year. Of these 65 live in the borough and 55 outside i.e. 46%, some in neighbouring boroughs but others further afield. Nationally only 29% of children are placed outside of their home authority This number remains fairly constant with a proportion of the group joining or leaving, sometimes on several occasions. There is a significant group that has remained in care for a number of years.
- The number of children in care is low compared to other London boroughs and national statistics.
- 32 were in years 10 or 11 in the academic year 2004-5 and are due to take their GCSEs in 2005 or 2006
- 14 were in years 5 or 6 and due to take Key Stage 2 SATS in years 2005 or 2006
- There are 36 who have statements of special educational needs; this represents 30%, which is above the national average. Some of these children and young people live outside of the borough and if they have a statement of special educational needs are subject to the Belongings Regulations. The up-keep and decision making is thence done by the receiving authority. Not all authorities are as inclusive as Harrow and in other boroughs children may be more likely to be placed in non-mainstream provisions including PRUs (Pupil Referral Units) for social and emotional difficulties.
- Some children and young people are known to support services because of issues around attendance or SEN, for example. All children should have access to the usual support services available to children who have difficulties at school. CLA sometimes miss out if they move frequently or if papers are not passed on.
- Personal Education Plans (PEPs) were introduced by the Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care

(DfEE/DOH 2000) There are clear guide lines around the purpose and timings of the PEPs and they are seen as the main planning and reviewing tool for the education of young people in care. They bring together the school, carer and social worker to support the young person. Posts have been established within Children's Services to enable the implementation of effective PEPs and a post have been established at Silverdale to support the education of the children there. These are funded through LPSA funding until March 2006.

- Preferential treatment is being given for CLA within the admissions system except for casual admissions during the year when a school is full. The protocol is in the process of being changed in line with the new DfES guidelines
- All children have an allocated social worker .
- Corporate parents have access to detailed guidelines on vulnerability factors and resilience factors, which have been widely disseminated and understood, and awareness has been raised considerably.
- A number of teams within People First have corporate parenting principles built in and they are now an embedded focus of day-to-day work.
- Group and individual work is on-going by the specialist educational psychologist and educational psychologists in the team to increase the resilience of CLA in Harrow.
- Resources have been available to provide e.g. mentors, tuition, teacher assistant and teacher posts, materials, access to I.T. PASS Project (pupil attitudes to self and school) and Welfare Call for the LPSA cohort. The LPSA funding finished at the end of the 2004 /2005 financial year.
- The Gatsby project has been in the forefront of raising awareness and establishing a number of initiatives including the very successful Tate Project .
- The multi-disciplinary "Making a Difference" conference held in February 2005 raised issues, provoked thought and was very well received.
- The AACLA group will continue to meet regularly and make recommendations about implementing the guidance and continuing to make progress.

The attendance of Children Looked After and their attainment at GCSE are Key Performance Indicators. There are related indicators which are applicable to care leavers. These indicators feature significantly in Business Plans across Children's Services, including the Performance Directed Business Plan.

'Close the Gap for Children in Care', a report published by the children's charity NCH, finds that 6% of children in care gained 5 or more GCSEs at Grades A* - C. The figures for Harrow were 7.7% (2003/04) and 10% (2004/05). While Harrow's performance in these 2 years was above the national average, this compares with a national average of 53% for pupils overall. A summary of attainment at GCSE is attached as Appendix 1.

2.2 Options considered

Not Applicable

2.3 Consultation

Not Applicable

2.4 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

2.5 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

2.6 Equalities Impact

This report deals with equality issues for Children Looked After.

Section 3: Supporting Information/ Background Documents

Background Documents

1. A Better Education for Children in Care - (Social Exclusion Report 2003)
2. DfES Statutory guidance: Duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children (Consultation Document)

Appendices

1. Attainment at GCSE of Children Looked After (2003 – 2005)
2. Self Audit of Government Recommendations for Local Action - A Better Education for Children in Care, Social Exclusion Unit Report
3. Harrow Council's Statement of Corporate Parenting Principles For the Education of Children Looked After