

Supporting Looked After Children - Public Submission

A submission received for consideration by the Panel

Sent: Tuesday, March 26, 2019 3:11 pm

Subject: Urgent Attention // Supporting Looked After Children

Dear all,

To introduce myself, my name is T. I am Youth Ambassador for The Fostering Network, Student Leader for LAC at Reaching Wider, and the occasional representative for Voices From Care Cymru. I am also a Care Leaver and across all of those roles, it is my duty to represent the voices of young people in care when they feel they need to be heard.

I am contacting you because I have met many of you at various events across the years, such as the Down To Earth project and the Proud to Be Me days. I know you have supported children and young people over the years and I am hoping you can support us one more time.

I am getting in touch with you on behalf of a number of Swansea's looked after children, all of whom have received bespoke, tailored 1:1 support these last few years and now, due to cuts in funding, they wish to share with you their individual experiences of the organisation as well as their worries about how this significant loss could impact their lives.

In short, after 13 years of positive feedback from over 500 care experienced students, The Looked After Children's Education Swansea (LACES) Team has now had to make their three Project Workers redundant. This is a result of the LAC element of the Pupil Deprivation Grant being diverted from specific LAC-centered support directly into mainstream schools instead. The young people have been assured that support will still be available for those in care, however a recent report has shown a previous attempt at this did not work out please see page 137 of the attached document file "Evaluation" (Evaluation of the implementation of the Pupil Development Grant for Looked After Children).

The children are having difficulty accepting this abrupt change in dynamics, and feel that (in conjunction to Article 12 of the UNCRC) they have not had the opportunity to have a voice and say in such an important, life-changing decision - a decision that may have adverse impacts on their respective futures and maybe even most of their early adult lives. Not only is Article 12 being breached in this case, so are Articles 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 13, 19, 26, 28, 29, 31, 36, 39... Please see the attached document "UNCRC" for a summary of each Article. That is more than 25% of the UNCRC. Surely this alone should be enough to at least halt the decision?

The decision to move the PDG was made by the Joint Committee of ERW (Education Through Regional Working). On ERW's website, the first statement to appear on their About Us page is, "ERW has a clear mission of actively working together to improve teaching and learning to secure the best outcomes for all learners". The young people feel they are not included in this statement under "all learners" due to their bespoke support and respective best outcomes being taken away from them. The aims and values of ERW <https://www.erw.wales/about-us/erw-aims-and-values/> seem to reflect the opposite of this decision as they are removing a system that already works so brilliantly for these "vulnerable learners", as it has done for students in the past and as it will have done for students in the future.

These young people are already going through the tumultuous transitional period known as "puberty" and the sudden loss of something so positive and consistent is already too overwhelming for some of them. They have established strong relationships, built on respect, trust, and integrity with the current workers, who themselves are passionate about their roles in supporting care experienced students and have become truly invaluable to the team. The young people do not feel that the schools could replicate this and wish to exercise their right to be heard before the funding-diversion decision is formally ratified.

I have also attached one of LACES "Newsfeed" newsletters as it perfectly shows off how extraordinary the supported students really are with their achieving of awards nationally and internationally, such as The Diana Award, The High 5 Award, and so many more. I personally have witnessed these incredible individuals become more confident, both in life and in their selves, they are brighter, warmer, and their aspirations have grown exponentially. All from the consistent, bespoke support they received from not just the key workers, but also from each other. One could liken such an experience to the phenomenon known as "family".

The children and young people are looking for your help and support to keep this unconventional family together. They would like to be listened to and they wish to discuss their worries over losing such significant support with the people who can help maintain consistency in their lives for that little bit longer.

Please can you consider meeting with the young people as soon as possible? They know how busy you are therefore they are all willing to travel down to meet you in person whenever and wherever would suit you.

We all appreciate your time.