



Report of the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 14 September 2023

Vulnerable Learners Service Looked after Children

Purpose:	To consider the educational support given to children who are looked after and their progress in school.
Content:	An overview of the support provided for looked after children in schools.
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided and give views.
Legal Councillor:	Cabinet Member for Education & Learning
Lead Officer & Report Author:	Kate Phillips, Head of Vulnerable Learner Service Kate.Phillips2@swansea.gov.uk Helen Howells, Team Manager for Pupil Support Helen.Howells@swansea.gov.uk

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Swansea Council is committed to providing an 'excellent education for all by working together'. Our aim is to ensure that all our children and young people have an equal opportunity to reach the highest standards. We believe that a child's access to appropriate education should not be determined by their personal circumstances, and our inclusion strategy aims to drive equity of experience by removing barriers to education for vulnerable children, including those who are looked after.
- 1.2 Welsh Government recognises that educational outcomes for looked after children rarely compare favourably with other children and young people. In Swansea we are aware that many of our learners will have suffered disrupted learning and may have missed extended periods of school. The gaps in their learning, and in many cases the emotional impact of their experiences, are likely to have become significant barriers to their progress. The complexity of this fragmented experience needs to be considered when providing support, effective educational experiences and assessing outcomes.

- 1.3 The Education Directorate ensures that all looked after children are prioritised in the admissions process, to ensure that education is not disrupted more than necessary when a child is moved. Schools in Swansea will promote an appropriate curriculum which is geared to the child's ability, and also aim to create a learning community which promotes a trauma informed ethos.

2. Current Position

- 2.1 On 1 July 2023, there were 293 looked after children of statutory school age who received education in Swansea schools. 75 of these are children looked after by other Local Authorities. A further 91 children are looked after by Swansea and receive their education in other Welsh authorities. Additionally, 17 children are educated and placed in England. This is a changing position; therefore, this is a snapshot in time.
- 2.2 During the 2022-2023 academic year, 20 children and young people (CYP) children living in the area and looked after by Swansea were provided with Education Other than at School (EOTAS). Nine CYP are educated at the pupil referral unit (Maes Derw) and 11 currently receive an offer of education from the home tuition team. Nine CYP have been allocated a place in either a maintained special school, independent special school or specialist teaching facility.
- 2.3 For those children looked after by Swansea but living outside the area, 20 are provided with education either via EOTAS or other specialist provision. The education of every child is monitored through their Personal Education Plan (PEP) and we hope in the future we will be able to monitor their progress using an electronic solution, namely, Swansea Virtual School. These monitoring arrangements are critical because they enable us to champion the needs of these vulnerable learners and advocate for them. By careful monitoring of progress and provision we are able to undertake our corporate parenting role effectively by ensuring that a high quality and effective education offer is in place. The Swansea Council Education LAC Coordinator has developed strong links with counterparts in other local authorities in Wales and beyond to ensure that our LAC placed out of county remain highly visible to us and we are able to champion their progress.

3. Personal Education Plans (PEP)

- 3.1 The PEP is a record of the child's education and training. It documents the agreed action to help them to fulfil their full educational potential, it is an integral part of the care and support plan. In the last academic year 46 children became looked after, only 18 of these were statutory school aged. 100% of CYP who are looked after have a PEP at present.

- 3.2 Cross directorate working is robust and is embedded through PEP quality assurance processes which are undertaken every school term. Pupil voice is captured through PEPs therefore it is imperative they are completed to a high standard (Appendix A).
- 3.3 We are in the process of developing a Swansea Virtual School which allows for an ePEP. This will ease processes for schools and officers, ensuring accuracy and more timely responses. The ePEP also allows tracking of new attainment performance indicators.

4. Support and provision in schools for Looked After Children

- 4.1 We know from our monitoring of provision for looked after children that schools have undertaken the following activities:

Literacy and Numeracy Interventions

Many of our LAC learners have fallen behind with their learning due to inadequate home environments in their early years. Schools have invested in many interventions to allow their learners the opportunity to catch up. Many have used their PDG LAC to offset against staff costs, so they are able to run numeracy and literacy sessions in school. Others listed online resources to benefit their learner, such as 'Mathletics' and 'Doodle Maths' used in Tre Uchaf Primary School. Additional licences were purchased by Cwmrhydyceirw Primary school for 'Reading Eggs' and 'Seesaw online portal'.

Nurture and Wellbeing facilities and equipment

Children are unable to learn unless they feel safe in their environment. Nurture and Wellbeing facilities can help provide that support for children who are looked after, and their carers, to give them the skills they need to do well at school and deal more confidently and calmly with the challenges of everyday life. Significant investment is being made by schools to ensure they have adequate equipment for the nurture and wellbeing of all their vulnerable learners.

Previous use of grant funding has provided 'Derbyshire play activities' by both Portmead and Morrison Primary Schools. Glynollen Primary School used the grant to aid implementation of the Resilience toolkit, while Tre Uchaf Primary School has purchased the 'Adventure' programme to promote resilience. Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Tirdeunaw has purchased the 'CosyCloud' programme to support mental health through meditation and mindfulness. Mindfulness resources have also been used in Portmead Primary School, while Cwmrhydyceirw Primary School has purchased a 'Book of Besties' programme to promote wellbeing. The pupil referral unit has purchased equipment for a sensory room to allow the learner a safe space to practise de-escalation techniques.

Transition activities

The transition from primary to secondary school is a difficult time for all learners, but especially so for those children who have experienced trauma and upheaval in their young lives. In a few cases, schools have been the only constant in a child's life so leaving a place of safety and comfort can be traumatising in itself for our vulnerable LAC learners. All schools recognise this and aim to provide additional support in this area. One example of good practice is where Family Liaison Officers are used to support transition for looked after children.

Use of dedicated grant

All schools receive an additional allocation of funding for looked after children via the Pupil Development Grant. This money is issued by Welsh Government to be used as a school improvement grant, to "disproportionately advantage" care experienced children. Schools have used the money in different ways but we monitor this centrally to ensure effective use and to identify good practice. An example of good practice identified is a cluster of schools combining resources to deliver a cluster project. This ensured most effective use of the resource and was able to fund a dedicated LAC lead teacher for the cluster who can work with all the looked after children to offer mentoring, completing PEPs and aiding the transition process. This lead teacher works across the cluster and so children can identify a trusted adult when they move from primary to secondary school.

Another secondary school used their grant to help provide learning coaches who worked with LAC learners to provide individual catch-up plans and bespoke timetables.

LAC Designated Teacher

It is a strength that all schools in Swansea have a named LAC designated governor and LAC designated teacher, this is the case even if the school does not have any looked after children on its roll. The role is to promote the educational achievement of children who are looked after, through encouraging high aspirations. Welsh Government guidance states that the role of the designated person for looked after children should be afforded the same prominence in school as other key roles such as the designated senior person (DSP) for child protection. LAC designated teachers are added to a HWB network, to ensure we have the correct information and so that timely information can be communicated.

- 4.2 Schools take their duties as corporate parents seriously, and behavioural issues are dealt with in a multiagency context, with exclusion avoided in as many cases as possible. In the last academic

year fixed term exclusions for looked after children did increase slightly, however this was in line with national averages.

5. Additional Learning Needs Provision

- 5.1 The Additional Learning Needs Education and Tribunal Act 2018 (ALNET) places the responsibility on the home Local Authority to decide whether a child they look after has an Additional Learning Need (ALN). Statements are in the process of being replaced with Individual Development Plans (IDPs). Currently, nearly 70% of Swansea children and young people who are looked after either have a statement, IDP or are in the process of being assessed for an IDP.
- 5.2 A dedicated officer from the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Team has responsibility for the development and monitoring of the Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for LAC. This ensures we are meeting the legal requirements for children and young people we look after and who have an ALN which in turn means that children moving outside the authority have less disruption to their education provision and ensures there are strong transition arrangements in place.
- 5.3 As designated coordinator they assess, prepare, and maintain the IDP for all children and young people we look after regardless of where in Wales they are placed. An IDP is a critical document which details the additional learning provision learners need and ensures this is reviewed and revised as necessary. This reflects the commitment of the Education Directorate to our role as corporate parent and ensures that looked after children's additional learning needs are given high priority and visibility. Via this arrangement we can have effective oversight and understanding of the needs of this cohort and ensure there is effective support, strategies, and intervention to support looked after children to achieve their full potential.

6. Education Performance

- 6.1 We hold data on key performance indicators for our looked after children, but we know we need to apply caution in our interpretation of results. Size differences of the groups of learners make comparability almost meaningless. As with every set of data some children have performed well academically, some are more suited to vocational studies. Comparing such a small group of learners to a huge data set means all contextual information is lost. For instance, 22 looked after children moved school in the last academic year due to placement breakdown, which affects consistency and stability in their learning and so the usual key performance indicators are not helpful. Data which evidence wellbeing and progress is much more helpful to consider. This includes attendance and destination data.
- 6.2 Attendance performance is good and in primary schools is 2% higher than LA averages. Attendance was low in KS4, but in line with LA

averages. This is a national trend. Inclusion and attendance strategies have been developed to encourage good attendance for all through person centred approaches. This encourages schools to consider the needs of the looked after child when developing their education provision.

- 6.3 The destination of year 11 children is an important performance indicator. In the last year, we have received information to tell us that 100% of those in a mainstream school or EOTAS had secured a placement in either further education, employment or training. This is critical because while the disruption in the education journey of looked after children may not always enable them to secure the highest results enabling them to progress to meaningful next steps is a significant success. We are currently working with our IT providers to discuss ways of using the virtual school solution to gather more data for post-16 education to understand even better the aspirations of our looked after children and how we can strengthen the pathways to progression for them.

7. Training and Future Developments

- 7.1 A small amount of funding for all care experienced children is awarded to schools through LAC element of the wider Pupil Development Grant. By retaining part of this funding our education region, Partneriaeth, provide a variety of professional learning for schools. The LA works well with its region and have influenced decision making, for instance mental health first aid is now being offered at the express wish of schools in Swansea. In house training is also offered for school governors, carers and teaching staff.
- 7.2 An opportunity for school staff and officers to undertake a Trauma informed diploma has been organised. Currently 80 school staff have or are still completing their diploma. It is too soon to understand the impact at present. However, 2022-2023 academic year has seen a significant decrease in permanent exclusions compared to this time last year. The embedding of Trauma informed practice within schools is a key priority, and will be a common thread through a number of key policies, such as Physical Restraint, Reducing Restrictive Practice, Behaviour and Pastoral Support Programmes.
- 7.3 Future developments are framed around the virtual school model, which are based on Sir Alastair MacDonald's recommendations to Welsh Government. Good communication with other local authorities has been developed, and Swansea compares favourably in our journey towards re-launching as a Virtual school.
- 7.4 Language guides for schools are being developed and further liaison with the CMET youth council is being organised to present to headteachers regarding the power of language.

7.5 A role has been created, and an officer seconded, to encourage education engagement through use of bespoke packages. Providing the right education at the right time to children to ensure the best outcomes for the individual. This has been very successful in the trial phase; we are confident that this will continue to grow and become embedded within schools and EOTAS.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 There are no legal implications within this report.

9. Financial Implications

9.1 There are no financial implications within this report.

10. Equality & Engagement Implications

10.1 The report is for information and not for decision.

Background papers:

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-11/making-a-difference-a-guide-for-the-designated-person-for-looked-after-children-in-schools.pdf>

Appendices:

Appendix A: PEP Audit Report