

## **Virtual School Children in Care Update for Governors March 2016**

'Children in Care' or 'Looked After Children' are amongst the most vulnerable in our city. The Virtual School – the head is a statutory post in any LA [Children and Families Act 2014] - works with 820 children in care and care leavers aged 0-25, in over 150 different settings. How can governors make a difference to the lives of these young people and the schools that support them? You can find more information on our website [www.stokevirtualschool.org.uk](http://www.stokevirtualschool.org.uk) and details of training via [gsu@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:gsu@stoke.gov.uk) or by phoning Karl Lawton – Governor Support Manager - on 01782 236889.

The circumstances that bring children into care - loss, neglect and abuse - have a huge effect on them. Nationally, in 2007, the government's 'Care Matters' paper found that Children in Care were: five times more likely than average to have to move school; 30% were without employment; they were 60 times more likely to become homeless.

How do we work together to help these young people do well in school and go on to live happy successful lives? These are questions for all of us: head teachers, Ofsted and governors.

Firstly, we should celebrate the excellent work done by many schools.

- Since 2009 we have not had a single permanent exclusion for a Child in Care: despite many challenges we have worked together to support the child and the school to find better solutions.
- Our current fixed term exclusion rate is a third of the national – a testament to the work done by and with schools to provide the right support at the right time.
- Because of the circumstances that bring them into care, our children are often behind their peers; our schools make a difference, for example, last year:
- 17% of 5 year olds met the national benchmark and yet by 7, 47% had achieved the expected Level 2s.
- By age 10, 80% had made at least 2 levels of progress.

However, catching up takes time and support as the case studies below show [NB there is a more detailed one on our website]:

### **Making a difference: what works?**

#### **Case Study F**

- F came to the UK as a refugee, having been trafficked.
- F's mother suffered serious mental ill-health and was not able to look after F.
- F spoke very little English and had no experience of our education system.
- Her school working with the Virtual School provided one to one support though F's GCSEs.
- F went on to Stoke VI College where she gained distinctions.
- F was successful this year in gaining full a scholarship to study Bio-Medical Science at Keele University.
- NB The Home Office has not yet agreed her right to remain in the UK.

#### **Case Study S**

- At 12 S was living out of the city; fixed term excluded weekly; attendance was 25%: she was not expected to achieve any GCSEs
- S returned to a city school and Local Authority small group home.
- The school, Virtual School, carers and social worked together to support S.
- Through intense incidents reduced from weekly to two in one year, handled skilfully by the multi-agency team.
- At the end of year 11 S achieved 8 GCSE's A\*-G grades, attendance was 99% and she is successfully following college course.
- We continue to support her.

## **What governors need to know about the Children in Care**

### **Ofsted**

Ofsted recognises that the work done to support Children in Care is a good overall indicator of a school's leadership and management, safeguarding and ability to help vulnerable young people make good progress. Ofsted may look at these issues during an inspection.

### **Designated Teacher**

All schools must have a Designated Teacher for Children in Care and we strongly advise that there should be a designated governor. The 2009 statutory guidance - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-teacher-for-looked-after-children> states:

*The governing bodies of all maintained schools are required under the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 (the 2008 Act) to appoint a designated teacher to promote the educational achievement of looked after children who are on the school roll.*

### **Annual Report and Model Policy**

We have a standard report form that ensures that all key issues are covered with governors and ask that this is returned to the Virtual School by July of each year.

*As a minimum governors must consider an annual report from the designated teacher.... and act on any issues it raises....*

We have also designed a model policy for Children in Care to capture best practice. Many schools have signed up to. It provides a high level of challenge and support to schools and captures best practice. A review of the impact of this policy can be very helpful.

### **Making Progress: PEPs and Premium**

A key question for governors and Ofsted is: 'how are individuals supported to make good progress?'

*Inspectors evaluate the experience of particular individuals and groups, such as ...looked after children ... Inspectors.. look at a small sample of case studies about the experience of these pupils.[Ofsted Inspection handbook 2015]*

For governors, a good starting point is to ask for an anonymised case study about how the school supports individuals. The case study on our site was seen as 'Outstanding' in a recent Ofsted inspection.

All your Children in Care must have an up to date 'PEP' [Personal Education Plan – part of the statutory Care Plan]. The PEP is reviewed termly in school with the carer and social worker. The plan ensures support is in place and the child is safeguarded. Not having a plan may put the child at risk and can mean they do not get the support they need.

Financially, Pupil Premium for Children in Care (different from free school meals pupil premium) is requested via child specific targets in the PEPs.

### **Attachment, Trauma and Recovery**

Children who have experienced loss, neglect or abuse will be profoundly affected by this. We often say these children have 'unmet attachment needs'. In 2015 NICE [the National Institute for Clinical Excellence] published a guideline on attachment that stated:

*'Schools and other education providers should ensure that all staff who may come into contact with children and young people with attachment difficulties receive appropriate training on attachment difficulties.'*

Children who have experienced trauma may find it hard to feel safe and may easily go into 'fight, flight or freeze' when faced with new challenges and new learning. This vulnerability is compounded by worries about their families and changes in care placements. When things go wrong, we often find it is because there has been one change or challenge too many. The child ceases to cope and that huge outburst in school is a result. Prevention is better than a cure and a key prevention factor is ensuring that staff in school understand attachment and how to 'read' and respond to the child's needs.

To address these issues we offer schools specific training, through our 'Attachment Aware Schools' programme. This can be funded through Pupil Premium and further details can be found on our website in the 'Attachment Aware Schools' section.

### **Training**

We offer:

- Core Children in Care training for governors. This is a two hour session that covers the issues above and aims to give space for governors to discuss and share their experiences.
- We are able to offer specific training to governors on attachment, trauma and recovery, highly relevant to Children in Care and many others.
- We would be pleased to meet with governing bodies to discuss Children in Care.

For all your training needs please contact: [gsu@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:gsu@stoke.gov.uk) or ring Karl Lawton - Governor Support Manager – on 01782 236889

### **Thank you**

Finally, thank you for the work you and your schools do to make a difference to our young people. It matters and it changes lives.

Tony Clifford

Head of the Virtual School for Children in Care and Care Leavers