



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Response to the Estyn thematic review on raising the attainment, achievement and aspiration of children who are looked after

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

OGL

Digital ISBN 978 1 4734 6995 2
© Crown copyright July 2016
WG28054

Report title:

Raising the attainment, achievement and aspiration of children who are looked after

Report details.

The review was commissioned by the Support for Learners Division of the Welsh Government's Education and Public Services Department to identify effective practice across education services in schools, local authorities and regional consortia to support looked after children.

Context

The Welsh Government's national strategy to support the education of looked after children in education – *Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales* – was published in January 2016. The report is a joint education/social services strategy to reflect the intrinsic relationship between the social context of the child and their educational attainment, but focusses on those actions which can make a lasting impact on the ambitions, aspirations and educational performance of this vulnerable group of learners.

This strategy identifies targeted action to better support educational attainment, and is supported by an accompanying action plan. The Welsh Government is working with the regional education consortia, local authorities and schools in particular along with a range of other partners whose works impacts on the lives and outcomes of looked after children to monitor progress against the plan on an annual basis.

The Welsh Government has established a National Strategic group comprising key partners to help drive this work.

The strategy is underpinned in 216-17 by just under £4 million which is available through the Pupil Deprivation Grant. Regional education consortia are working with local authorities and schools to support children who are looked after in education.

We are grateful to Estyn for developing this report, which will help further support our approach to supporting these learners in Wales.

Recommendation 1

Schools should:

R1: Build on best practice in line with the features of effective schools identified in this report.

Welsh Government response:

Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales recognises that there is a need to strengthen collaboration between the Welsh Government, regional education consortia, local authorities and schools to ensure that decisions impact positively on learners. To support this, we have already identified a need to ensure that excellent practice is identified, promoted and shared where it exists.

The regional education consortia have a key role in facilitating the sharing of good practice, knowledge and skills which will highlight local strengths and build capacity and the national strategy identifies actions which will positively promote this aim. Through the implementation of the strategy we will develop this area of work further, and in particular we will:

- explore with stakeholders the development of a *community of practice* to facilitate the sharing of good practice across education services and to particularly encourage school to school support
- in conjunction with the regional education consortia and local authorities, we will ensure that the designated lead member of staff for looked after children in each school is made aware of the best practice in the Estyn report, and other areas of good practice that are identified, and
- in developing good practice guidance for the designated lead member of staff we will ensure that a key function will be around the dissemination of good practice to embed excellent practice within the school.

Recommendation 2

Local authorities should:

R2: Build on best practice in line with the features of effective local authorities

identified in this report.

Welsh Government response:

The Welsh Government will write to education and social services departments as well as the Association of Directors of Education (ADEW) and the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru (ADSS) to ask how they will ensure that the good practice identified will be fundamental to their existing corporate parenting arrangements

The National Strategic Group for looked after children in education – with representation from local authorities - has been established to help ensure consistent practice in supporting looked after children which includes strengthening arrangements and partnerships between education and social services to ensure effective joint working takes place.

The recommendations from the report will be shared with the group and will be discussed as part of the group's ongoing programme of work.

Recommendation 3

The regional consortia should:

R3: Improve how they plan for the PDG/LAC to make sure that schools are clear on the priorities for the use of the grant and that their plans take enough account of the complex needs of children who are looked after.

Welsh Government response:

The regional education consortia have strengthened arrangements to retain a strong strategic focus on looked after children in education. Expertise is being developed within each region to ensure the PDG/LAC delivers an agreed, strategic programme of work based upon local and regional priorities.

The regional education consortia have applied more robust rigour in planning for the financial year 2016-17 and have set out proposed expenditure in a more detailed way. Each of the spending plans includes a funding provision (bursary) for schools to meet the individual needs of learners. Schools have been informed how the grant will be administered and they are aware of the process to access funding which can be used to support the needs of pupils.

To help improve communications around the use of the PDG/LAC, each regional education consortia has arranged 'information days' for head teachers, teachers and local authority personnel. Delegates were given the

opportunity to suggest the type of services to support looked after children that they would wish to see commissioned through PDG/LAC and delivered in their area. The feedback from these events has informed the programme of work the regional education consortia will take forward in this financial year.

Recommendations 4 and 5

The Welsh Government should:

R4: Consider broadening performance measures to include progress that is relative to the child's starting point and extends beyond statutory school age.

Response:

The Welsh Government has highlighted in its strategy *Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales* that schools should set realistic, but challenging targets, in consultation with children and young people and recognise that additional support may be required because of the impact that adverse childhood experiences will have had on their ability to succeed in education. This information must be formalised within the Personal Education Plan (PEP). Education plans must also monitor and record the personal development of the child using both academic and 'social' related targets.

This is linked to our plans to improve tracking to monitor the educational progress of looked after children and ensure meaningful education plans and individual development plans. While the Welsh Government's strategy focusses on the attainment and achievement of compulsory school age children, it also addresses issues of transition to further and higher education or employment and we are developing arrangements to strengthen and monitor better transition.

Professor Donaldson's report, *Successful Futures*, provides the Welsh Government with the foundations for a twenty first century curriculum which will embody higher standards for all. Pioneer schools are at the heart of the design and development of the new curriculum. Our ambition is that the new framework will be made available to schools and settings from September 2018.

R5: Make sure that the regional consortia's spending plans are appropriate to local need and based on a sound analysis of the needs of children who are looked after

Response:

The Welsh Government continues to support the regional education consortia, to encourage cross consortia working, ensure that spending plans are robust and the PDG/LAC is effective in supporting the needs of looked after children in education.

We have ensured that governance arrangements around the administration of PDG/LAC are robust and spending plans for 2016-17 were scrutinised and approved by the Welsh Government. Welsh Government officials meet regional education consortia regularly to check progress and provide help to overcome any issues or barriers. To assist the regional education consortia, local authorities and schools, the Welsh Government has produced guidance which explains how the PDG/LAC is administered and how the eligibility criteria must operate. This has been communicated widely through a variety of channels.

The Welsh Government is currently considering options to review and evaluate the effectiveness of the first year (2015-16) of the revised funding arrangements. A key focus of the review will be how the current reporting process can be strengthened to better track and monitor expenditure.

Publication details.

The report has been published on Estyn's website on 5 July 2016.