

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

26 JANUARY 2012

SUBJECT:	THE TRANSITION OF PUPILS FROM THE SANDERLING UNIT TO THE RESOURCE BASE, UNIVERSITY ACADEMY BIRKENHEAD
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	ACTING DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	CLLR ANN MCLACHLAN
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested a report on the progress of pupils who previously attended the Sanderling Unit at Rock Ferry High School and, upon the closure of Rock Ferry High, transferred to a newly commissioned resource base at the University Academy of Birkenhead.

Not all the students who were attending The Sanderling Unit transferred to the Academy. This was for a number of reasons detailed in 7.1 However, the majority of students who transferred to the new provision have done so successfully with only two requiring additional support from the Educational Psychology Service. The students have responded well to the new challenges they have faced and the new opportunities they are afforded and they and their families are to be applauded on how well they have responded to what was potentially a very difficult change process.

- 1.2 There is no Exempt information contained in this report.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

- 2.1 It is recommended that Committee note this report and extend their congratulations to the children and young people and families involved in the change and the teachers and other staff in the academy who have supported them through the process.

3.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 3.1 All significant change is potentially difficult and for many of this group of pupils coping with change is something that they are not terribly good at. They were often extremely anxious if not outright fearful at the prospect. In the end not only have they coped but many have positively blossomed and this needs to be recognised.

4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The Sanderling Unit was a forty place special educational needs unit which was housed in its own premises within the grounds of Rock Ferry High School. The unit, which was under the management of the head teacher of the main school, specialised in working with children and young people who, whilst broadly of mainstream ability, experienced not only specific learning difficulties but also additional difficulties e.g. social and communication difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, ADD/ADHD, dyspraxia, emotional/early mental health problems.

These additional problems frequently made the young people vulnerable within a mainstream setting and needing considerable extra support. The ultimate aim for the young people, however, was always inclusion as they were unlikely to warrant or receive additional support beyond school age. The support, therefore, needed to be tempered with challenge and the learning of new skills of resilience.

With the planned closure of Rock Ferry High as part of the review of secondary school places there was a need to consider alternative placement for the Sanderling pupils. Given the nature of the pupil's needs it was determined that something similar was required but no other secondary school on Wirral had the existing facility to replicate the provision at Rock Ferry. As it was envisaged that the majority of Rock Ferry pupils would transfer to the new UAB it was decided to commission the academy to provide for the Sanderling pupils and this proposal was included in the consultations on the closure of Rock Ferry and the opening of the academy.

The creation of a new provision within the new academy presented opportunities to rethink how the provision was structured and how it operated in achieving the best balance between nurture/support and challenge for the students. As the resource base would need to be within the main body of the school the Sanderling pupils would be far more 'included' than they had been previously. This brought with it difficulties of ensuring that students needs, academic, social and emotional continued to be met within an environment that was both challenging but also safe and secure.

A number of models were considered before settling on the one that is now in operation. This will be detailed in the presentation to members and the power point attached as Appendix 1. In summary, however, it entails the younger pupils (Years 7 and 8) being taught largely within the resource base (a suite of rooms adjacent to the school's assembly hall) by a reduced number of staff and with dedicated support staff (Achievement Tutors) from the resource base.

As the students move from Key Stage 3 to 4, which in the academy will take place in Year 9, they will move on to taking their options (GCSE/vocational subjects). Accordingly they will be taught more often in the main body of the academy and will receive support from faculty (subject specialist) achievement tutors. This model will not be fixed and, where necessary, may be adapted by the use of person centred planning.

Pupils who need additional literacy or numeracy support will receive this under the guidance of Orret's Meadow outreach services. For pupils who need it social spaces e.g. in the cafeteria have been designated for resource base pupils where support staff will be available.

The details of these arrangements and how they are working will be included in the presentation by the Assistant Principal of UAB responsible for the resource base (power point presentation attached as appendix 1).

From the authority's point of view they are working well. This was a major change exercise for a vulnerable group of young people and their families. Whilst there were some early difficulties regarding timetabling and provision of support, which were resolved quickly and there are two pupils who require in-going support there have been no major difficulties and already the pupils are demonstrating positive progress. This has been achieved largely by the staff of the academy, especially the responsible Assistant Principal, being prepared to be responsive and flexible in meeting student's needs and particularly by maintaining clear communication with families and authority officers and intervening early where necessary.

As part of this early review of the new resource base and how it is operating the academy were keen to gain the views of parents/carers and the pupils themselves.

All parents/carers were asked for their views regarding what was working well, what was working less well and what improvements could be made, by a letter home. Two responded, which tempts the view that the others were satisfied with how things were. One of the parents commented that "xxxxxx has coped really well socially and we are excited about his future" and felt that improved communication and understanding between school and home regarding her child's needs was beneficial. She also felt that staff needed more training around some of the more complex needs the children and young people experience. The other parent, whilst again commenting on the good communication and the inclusive opportunities, also felt that some staff were inexperienced in dealing with complex needs and that their responses sometimes exacerbate rather than help in some circumstances.

Pupils views were ascertained by academy staff but also by the school's educational psychologist and school nurse repeating consultations they had had previously as part of the change process. The pupil voice is given in the power point presentation.

These needs for improvement and additional staff training are already being

acted upon and will be included in the development plan for the academy resource base in the new-year.

A further review of the resource base and its effectiveness will take place at the end of the academic year as part of the commissioning agreement with the Academy. The immediacy of this review does not reflect any concerns on behalf of the authority regarding the academy's capacity to deliver but rather the novelty of the commissioning arrangement i.e. with an academy.

5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 5.1 The most significant risk that emerged during the consultation was that parents would not agree to their children transferring to the new provision in the academy. This did not transpire, however, and parents of prospective pupils for September 2012 are very positive about what is on offer.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 6.1 None.

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Initial consultations took place as part of the overall consultation process regarding the closure of Rock Ferry High School and the opening of the University Academy of Birkenhead. Specific consultations were held with parents/carers of pupils at the Sanderling Unit in September 2010 and January 2011. These were followed up with individual meetings by way of annual reviews of the pupil's statements of special educational need in April/May/June 2011. Where necessary/requested, further individual meetings were held. This was an understandably anxious time for the young people and their parents as it coincided with negotiations regarding the establishment of the new academy and many of their questions were hard to answer at the time.

The children and young people themselves were consulted independently by the school's educational psychologist and school nurse. Their comments and feelings were fed anonymously into the change planning process.

Through the Annual Process, which asks some searching questions about the appropriateness of the statement and the provision, it was determined, in agreement with parents/carers to change the provision for a number of pupils. Three subsequently returned to mainstream schools, 2 moved onto BESD provision, 2 to West Kirby Residential School and 1 moved with her family to Ireland. All but of one of these changes were fully supported by the local authority and in the exception it was determined that it would be appropriate to agree with parental preference. Such moves and changes are not unusual for the population group of the Sanderling though the high number in a short time scale was caused by the overall change process.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 8.1 There are none arising from this report.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

9.1 The forty SEN places as described are subject to a commissioning agreement with the University Academy of Birkenhead. Current funding is £372k per annum and will be reviewed in line with the Authority's procedures for the funding of specialist provision.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are none arising from this report.

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are none arising from this report.

11.2 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

(a) Is an EIA required? NO

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are none arising from this report.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are none arising from this report.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Power Point Presentation by University Academy of Birkenhead

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Not applicable

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date