

WIRRAL COUNCIL

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM 5th JULY 2017

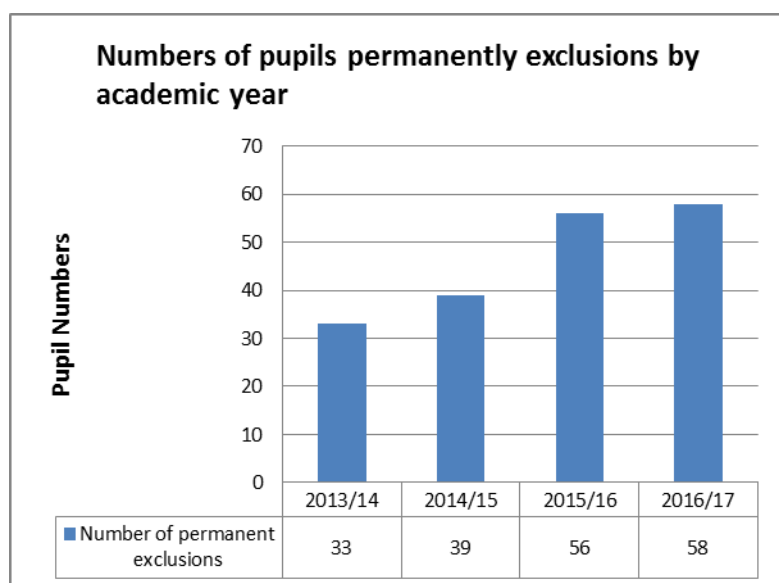
REPORT OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Against a backdrop of rising numbers of Wirral students being permanently excluded from school, Alternative Education is being viewed as an increasingly important tool in helping young people to remain engaged in mainstream education. The chart below illustrates the Wirral trend in numbers of pupils permanently excluded from school.

Chart 1. Wirral Pupil Permanent Exclusion Trend



(Source: Wirral Council, Data & MI Team, June 2017)

Alternative Education supports by extending the traditional school offer through vocational education pathways, and by offering educational and therapeutic interventions when students face extensive barriers to learning in order to facilitate a smooth re-engagement with school.

There is a strong commitment to providing high quality, safe and supportive Alternative Education within Wirral, with the intention of developing the range and breadth of provision on offer.

Whilst schools remain the commissioners of this provision, the Local Authority is now in a much stronger position to:

- (a) exercise its duty of care towards young people who do not access all of their education within mainstream schools
- (b) lead and shape the development of extended alternative educational provision with a view to meeting local employment opportunities and reducing NEET figures and

- (c) ensure that young people have high quality alternative educational provision augmenting mainstream education in order to impact effectively and positively on the rising numbers of Wirral students permanently excluded from school, thereby improving our young peoples' well-being, employability and life chances, as well as reducing associated costs.

2. BACKGROUND

During the academic year 2016/17, the Wirral Guild of Alternative Education has been established as a means by which disparate, independently funded alternative education providers can be monitored for quality and safeguarding, as well as ensuring that students continue to access services available to their peers attending full time, mainstream education.

There are currently seven Alternative Education providers who form part of the Wirral Guild of Alternative Education. They are:

- Beechwood Community Trust
- Cornerstone Training
- Livava
- The Engineering College
- The Vocational College
- Utopia Project
- Wirral Respite Alternative Provision

Additionally, Tranmere Rovers Football Club is affiliated to the Guild, and has shown significant interest in offering educational opportunities through the field of alternative education, although this is still under review and development. Shaftesbury Youth Club and Tranmere Community Project both ceased offering alternative education this year, although Shaftesbury Youth Club's position is also under review following the appointment of a new Chief Executive Officer.

Of the seven core providers, five offer vocational courses and qualifications to Key Stage 4 students including construction, plumbing, carpentry, sport, hair and beauty, catering and engineering, although new courses are constantly under consideration, with a specific focus on local employment and economic development opportunities. The other two providers support a range of Key Stage 4 students in their study towards GCSE qualifications, as well as working with Key Stage 3 pupils who are preparing to re-integrate back into mainstream schooling, following a period of intensive intervention.

From the start of the academic year 2016/17, all processes governing student referrals, quality assurance and safeguarding monitoring have been standardised, including agreed documentation. Additionally a new, bespoke, interactive web-based Wirral Alternative Education Portal has been developed, through which schools submit referral documentation, monitor student attendance and increasingly record students' progress and behaviour against agreed targets. The Portal also enables the Local Authority to maintain an overview of this fluid and mobile population within the wider educational landscape.

From September 2016 to date, 290 students were registered through the Wirral Portal with approved Alternative Education providers.

Of these students:

AE Provision Type	Total Pupils	Gender		SEND	LAC	Pupil Premium
		Male	Female			
Schools directly commissioned AE	290	200	90	132	22	147
PRU: Emslie Morgan Academy	95	67	28			
The Hospital School	74	44	30			
TOTALS	459	311	148			

(Source: January 2017 Schools Census and Wirral Alternative Education Portal (June 2017 snapshot))

The nature of the cohort, whilst fluid, tends to suggest that students from more disadvantaged backgrounds, with a range of SEND are more likely to find themselves accessing Alternative Education at some point during their education. The high ratio of boys to girls is also a concern, particularly when considered against the number of boys who have been permanently excluded from our schools so far this academic year (43 boys/ 15 girls).

One of the significant developments arising from our more pro-active and sophisticated application of Alternative Education has been the enhanced use of the Government's AP Census arrangements, as a further means of avoiding Y11 students from being permanently excluded from school. Robust systems for monitoring admission on to the AP Census have been established through the Wirral Fair Access Panel, chaired by the Schools Commissioning Manager, with clear and transparent criteria supporting the Panel's decision making. The 14-19 Team undertake regular and rigorous monitoring of students on the AP Census, working closely with schools and other appropriate agencies.

Finally, Wirral has been instrumental in creating a Liverpool City Region Alternative Education forum which meets termly to discuss common concerns, maintain awareness of national policy development, and facilitate the sharing of best practice, with a view to developing the quality of provision across the City region.

3. THE FUTURE

As part of the drive to continue developing and shaping a high quality Alternative Education offer within Wirral, there are two exciting new developments on the horizon:

- (a) The establishment of a new, independent, 35 place school in the Birkenhead area. This new school will be responsible for providing a 12 week programme for Key Stage 3 students who are permanently excluded from school, with a view to re-integrating them back into the mainstream school population.
- (b) Planning for a Key Stage 4/5 AP 50 place (in the first instance) Free School with an emphasis on vocational skills and qualifications within the fields of hair and beauty, business management/administration and customer service, as well as core qualifications in English and Maths. The Free School is particularly focused on establishing a formal vocational pathway through to post – 16, working on reducing NEET figures and providing good quality work experience through traineeships and apprenticeships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To support emerging developments within Wirral's Alternative Education landscape in order to further enhance the breadth, range and quality of the provision on offer to some of our most vulnerable young people.
2. To continue to explore and research best practice in how other regions, both locally and nationally, utilise the opportunities afforded by Alternative Education as a means of reducing permanent exclusion.
3. To continue to lead strategically on shaping and expanding the local Alternative Education offer, both through identification of provision 'gaps' and as determined by local intelligence regarding local employment and economic need.

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