

# **RE-SHAPING THE ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION LANDSCAPE IN WIRRAL**

## **REPORT FOR SCHOOLS FORUM JUNE 2019**

### **PART 1: WIRRAL COMMISSIONED ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The past two years have seen significant developments in the way in which the education of permanently excluded students has been managed and delivered in Wirral. Where previously the LA had solely depended on commissioning the services of the local PRU (Emslie Morgan Academy), a number of factors have led to the development of wider services which have impacted positively on the outcomes and life chances of some of our most vulnerable and often challenging young people. These factors have included:

- The urgent need to address rising numbers of students being permanently excluded from school
- The importance of ensuring that young people can be effectively re-integrated back into mainstream education if and when they are ready
- The need to establish appropriate pathways for those who are unable to return to mainstream education to ensure that they have the skills, knowledge, attributes and worthwhile qualifications necessary to make a positive contribution to society and support themselves financially
- The fact that the local PRU is in Special Measures with little improvement evident (Ofsted monitoring visit March 2019)

In addition to this, it has become increasingly difficult to place certain categories of students including:

- CLA students who are exhibiting behaviours which mainstream educational settings find particularly difficult to manage
- Students on the edge of care and others who are experiencing challenging or traumatic issues within their family life or domestic arrangements, and who cannot cope with school until such issues are resolved, or they have had chance to build resilience and/or coping strategies
- Students transferring into Wirral from other Authorities who were previously placed in PRUs or similar provisions and for whom mainstream educational settings may not be suitable
- Students presenting with possible undiagnosed SEND who require an urgent assessment place in order to ascertain whether an EHCP would be beneficial, or

the level of support or suitable strategies required to enable the young person to be successful in education, either in a mainstream or special school setting.

## **PROPOSED DEVELOPMENTS**

In light of the information that Emslie Morgan Academy will be closing at the end of this academic year, the Local Authority has acted rapidly in considering how best to develop commissioning arrangements which will cater for students who need to be re-allocated into suitable alternative educational placements in 2019/20. There are approximately 30 KS4 students and 10 KS3 students based on current numbers and possible further permanent exclusions during the latter half of the Summer term 2019. The closure of EMA also gives Wirral an ideal opportunity to re-shape the local educational landscape to include other students who may need some form of alternative education as part of short term/ longer term provision due to circumstances listed in the introduction section of this document.

Based on the evidence provided through pilot projects in Wirral as well as good practice in other Local Authorities, the plans for 2019-2021 are as follows:

**Progress -Schools (Birkenhead):** to continue to develop and embed the 12 week re-integration programme for KS3 students, as preparation for students to re-join mainstream school. Over 90% of KS3 students who have been re-integrated back into mainstream education have done so successfully; thanks are due to our secondary schools who have worked in collaboration with Progress-Schools to secure the success of this project.

### **12 places**

**Progress - Pathways:** to continue to offer a vocationally based curriculum for permanently excluded KS4 students in conjunction with high quality local providers including Cornerstone and Tranmere Rovers FC.

### **35 places**

**A Nurture and Wellbeing Centre:** the development of a provision for children in crisis, requiring a strongly therapeutic approach. The curriculum would be aimed at building resilience, self regulation, anger management, with opportunities for art, craft and PE, as well core subjects. This provision is planned as short term (6 weeks), with the emphasis on re-integration back into the student's home school facilitated as early as possible.

### **15 places**

**An Assessment Centre:** the creation of a small assessment facility aimed at rapid assessment of students who present as having undiagnosed SEND, leading to EHCPs where appropriate. On conclusion of assessment, students who demonstrate that their needs would be best met through special school placement would be facilitated; students who do not meet the threshold would be supported through strategies identified during the assessment process to either re-integrate back into

mainstream school or allocated a place at Progress Pathways, if that was deemed to be more appropriate (KS4 only).

## **10 places**

**Pre-reintegration programmes:** With the final 40 places released from the closure of EMA, there will be students in both Key Stages 3 & 4 who are not ready for re-integration, or who may have already experienced Progress Schools/ Progress Pathways and not responded positively to the opportunities presented. These students will require continuing educational programmes with the effective delivery of English and Maths at an appropriate level, a curriculum with a strong practical bias, and interventions designed to help them to become ready to access education either through re-integration back to mainstream or to progress on to the Progress Pathways programme. For Y11 students there will be a need for intensive, high quality IAG, with progression opportunities for post 16 education/ training clearly signposted to avoid young people becoming NEET. In some cases the programmes will need to have a higher academic content, for example, for students permanently excluded from Grammar schools and who need the added stimulation from a more challenging curriculum.

This provision will split into two separate facilities, one for KS3, one for KS4, nominally **15 places for KS3 and 25 places for KS4**, with flexibility to adapt according to need.

## **40 places**

This is an exciting, strategic challenge for Wirral. There is no doubt that, by moving away from a 'one size fits all' model and creating smaller, more bespoke provisions, we have a real opportunity to shape an improved educational service for some of our most vulnerable, often challenging young people. These proposals will be run as pilot projects in order to assess their success, both in terms of educational outcomes for young people but also the value for money they provide. Key Stage 3 and 4 provisions will be registered separately with the DfE to minimise any potential risk in having a single provider overseeing the project.

In terms of benefits, the following can be evidenced from our experience of working with Progress-Schools Ltd:

1. They have developed our confidence and trust by working closely and collaboratively with named representatives of the LA, responding to any concern or constructive criticism positively. As a commissioned service, they are responsive to our needs as a client and are constantly aiming to develop and improve the quality of the provision on offer. Their OFSTED inspection reports are uniformly 'good' both locally and nationally, and they are continuously striving for 'outstanding'.
2. By having a single leadership group overseeing all provision, it will be much easier to move students between facilities, according to their need. For example, a KS3 student who presented as aggressive and uncooperative would be deemed to be suitable for the pre-reintegration programme, but as soon as the student's behaviour modified suitably, she/he would be transferred on to the

Progress-Schools re-integration programme in readiness for return to mainstream school.

3. As a fully commissioned service, the issue of finding suitable accommodation etc is not the responsibility of the LA. Once the SLA is agreed, it is the company's responsibility to deliver the package.
4. We have well established means of communication with the company, including regular review meetings which enable both parties to share concerns and to act proactively for the benefit of the students. This ensures that any issues are addressed at an early stage and are not allowed to become entrenched.
5. Progress-Schools Ltd has regularly demonstrated its capacity to respond quickly and effectively to our needs, even in the most trying of circumstances as evidenced with the unexpected closure of The Vocational College in 2018. Their proven track record inspires confidence and their local infrastructure is already in place, making a September 2019 start both realistic and achievable.

## **PART 2: SCHOOL COMMISSIONED ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION**

2018/19 has not been the easiest of years for Alternative Education in Wirral, or indeed nationally; the pressures on school budgets have seen a number of Provisions close as they have not been financially viable, and Providers that have seen cuts from their post-16 budgets which have historically supported 14-16 work have also removed provision or ceased trading altogether.

Nevertheless, in Wirral from the start of this academic year to date there have been **303 referrals** to Alternative Educational provision through the Portal, of which:

**207 are boys**

**96 are girls**

**107 have some form of SEND (85 'K' code)**

**170 are Pupil Premium and**

**23 are CLA**

This is fairly typical of the picture nationally.

In terms of secondary school permanent exclusions, the following three year trend has emerged:

<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19 (to date)</b>
<b>64</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>46</b>

Despite the slight increase in number this year, Wirral has succeeded in sustaining the downward pressure on permanent exclusion numbers. This has been achieved through close collaborative working with schools, identifying students at risk of permanent exclusion and putting effective intervention into place, often including the pro-active involvement of alternative education.

In an interesting development, we have welcomed Evolve Enterprise, based at the site of Hillside Primary School, who are offering a purely therapeutic package for

children in Years 4, 5 and 6, in order to build resilience, and support self regulation, self calming and anger management in younger children, especially in readiness for secondary school transfer. Currently, there are 9 full time equivalent primary school children attending for one or two days a week. Early indications suggest some positive impact.

Other Providers who continue to support Wirral schools and who are affiliated to the Wirral Guild of Alternative Education are as follows:

Cornerstone Training (Construction)

Liviva (Hair and Beauty)

Michael John Academy (Hair and Beauty) – closing July 2019

WRAP (Educational support, therapeutic intervention)

Forte (Construction offered through WRAP at Co Op Academy Bebington)

Utopia Project (KS4 study support plus vocational qualifications and GCSE Eng and Maths)

Tranmere Rovers Football Club (vocational qualifications through Progress Pathways)

Reaseheath College (land-based qualifications) – pilot commencing September 2019

The challenge for the next academic year is to continue to develop the growth of safe, high quality provision in Wirral, enhancing the breadth and range of our offer.

## **ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION IN WIRRAL: FUTURE PLANS**

Moving forward, the key objectives for 2019/20 are as follows:

1. Reviewing and evaluating the success of the newly commissioned provisions replacing Emslie Morgan Academy, ready for tendering arrangements in 2020/ 2021
2. Continuing to work collaboratively with schools in order to further develop the Alternative Education landscape and broaden the offer currently available for schools to commission
3. Ensuring that students who access the bulk of their education through Alternative Provision are not disadvantaged in any way, establishing better coordinated services with health, social care, CAMHS and other relevant agencies.

Jan Levenson  
June 2019