

REPORT FOR SCHOOLS FORUM DECEMBER 2021

PART 1: WIRRAL COMMISSIONED ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Despite the huge challenges presented by the Covid pandemic during the academic year 2020/2021, Wirral continued to build on the significant success of the test and trial pilot provisions for permanently excluded students in Key Stages 3 and 4, commissioned through Progress – Schools Ltd. A thorough and robust tendering process at the start of the year resulted in the award of the contract to this national and well-respected company who continue to perform at Ofsted rated ‘Good’. Thanks are due to Paul Smith and Catherine Kerr for their contributions to this time consuming process. It would be fair to comment that, in assessing each of the companies that chose to tender for the contract, the quality of the submission from Progress-Schools Ltd was outstanding, articulating a very knowledgeable and insightful proposal in addressing Wirral’s expectations with regard to meeting the needs and challenges presented by young people who have been permanently excluded from secondary school.

Obviously, the Covid pandemic and the lockdown arrangements for schools had an impact on numbers being permanently excluded as well as student attendance and engagement with education; despite the inhibiting factors faced, there are a number of positive aspects to have emerged, including:

1. The proactive engagement by the Local Authority in recognising the potential negative consequences of young people being disengaged from education for a prolonged periods and the positive work undertaken with schools to try to mitigate these circumstances.
2. The development of more ‘bespoke’ provision for young people who have been permanently excluded from school.
3. Improved outcomes for young people who have been permanently excluded from school.
4. Considerable resource expended to try to reduce the potential impact of young people becoming Not in Employment Education and / or Training (NEET) at age 16.

Progress – Schools Ltd operate from three bases within the Birkenhead area, delivering a range of provisions as directed by the Council including:

Key Stage 3 (KS3) Reintegration Programme: continuing to develop and embed the 12-week reintegration programme for excluded KS3 students, as preparation for students to re-join mainstream school. Over 80% of KS3 students who have been reintegrated back into mainstream education since 2018 have done so successfully; sincere thanks are due to our secondary schools who have worked in collaboration with Progress-Schools to secure the success of this project. Where it is deemed that a student will not successfully reintegrate back into mainstream school (most often students who are permanently excluded late in Year 9 and for whom the reintegration

programme has less impact), provision is made for the student to transition on to a different bespoke intervention - Progress Pathways – see below.

Progress Pathways: Offers a practical, vocationally based curriculum for permanently excluded KS4 students in conjunction with high quality local providers including Cornerstone and Tranmere Rovers FC. The vast majority of students who have accessed Progress Pathways this year have achieved some success as evidenced both by their achievement in qualifications and the destination data currently being collated. To date, 66.5% of 2020/21's Year 11 cohort have confirmed places in further education or work with training, with 12.5% currently NEET. Whilst it is extremely important that we continue to work towards reducing NEET figures further still, it must be noted that this data represents a vast improvement on the outcomes achieved by young people attending the previous Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) provision and strongly suggests that the direction of travel is both beneficial and good value for money.

A Nurture and Wellbeing Centre: Whilst still in its infancy, the development of a provision for permanently excluded children in crisis, requiring a strongly therapeutic approach is well underway. The curriculum is aimed at building resilience, self-regulation and anger management, with opportunities for practical and creative activities, as well core subjects.

Assessment provision: A small assessment facility is available for permanently excluded young people who present as having undiagnosed or 'hidden' SEND, leading to Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) 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 deemed more appropriate. It is worth noting that there have been permanent exclusions from Special school sector this term; whilst Progress-Schools Ltd are the named provider from the 6th day of the permanent exclusion, the provision is not staffed and resourced as a Special school and therefore a swiftly convened Annual Review meeting is required to ascertain the best and most appropriate provision to meet need.

Progress – Futures: These programmes are aimed at students in both Key Stages 3 & 4 who are not ready for reintegration, or who may have already experienced the KS3 Reintegration Programme/ Progress - Pathways and have not responded positively to the opportunities presented. These students require access to further learning experiences 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 progress, either through re-integration back to mainstream or on to the Progress Pathways programme. For Y11 students there is a significant emphasis on the need for intensive, high quality IAG, with opportunities for post 16 education/ training clearly signposted to avoid young people becoming NEET.

Despite the tremendous impact of the pandemic on all schools and young people, what has become increasingly transparent during the course of the past twelve months is that schools are extremely committed to using a vast array of strategies and

techniques to avoid the use of permanent exclusion. This has been particularly evident when young people have returned to school after a period of lockdown and where enforcing normal and established school routines has been a challenge.

PART 2: SCHOOL COMMISSIONED ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Despite the pandemic, during the academic year 2020/21, there were 277 referrals to Alternative Educational (AE) provision through the Council AE Portal, of which:

- 207 were boys
- 70 were girls
- 104 have some form of SEND
- 158 were Pupil Premium and
- 21 were CLA

This remains typical of the picture nationally and very similar to last year's data.

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

2018/19	2019/20	2020/21/
46	23 (NB 4 from out of area schools but Wirral residents)	21

Of course, whilst the reduced number of permanent exclusions in the last academic year could be attributed to the period of lockdown, this is not necessarily the case. Schools have been working diligently to develop their own adapted curricula for students at risk of permanent exclusion and using interventions such as Alternative Educational provision and managed moves in order to ensure that more young people remain engaged in mainstream settings.

Whilst the use of Alternative Education in Primary school settings is still at a very embryonic level, there are some early indications that suggest some positive impact. A pilot for 16 Primary aged children (Key Stage 2) who presented with Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) completed a time limited, fixed term programme of therapeutic intervention with WRAP, based at the Shaftesbury Youth Club centre. Of the Year 6 students involved with the programme anecdotal evidence shows that, when combined with enhanced Year 6 to Year 7 transition arrangements, children have been successful in making a positive start to their secondary school careers.

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)
Horizons Education (English and Maths tuition)
Impact Northwest (English, Maths, therapeutic intervention, SEN support, Arts Award)
Liviva (Hair and Beauty)
Reaseheath College (outdoor educational experiences for young people with SEN Year 9 and land-based qualifications KS4)
WRAP (Educational support, therapeutic intervention, vocational qualifications, KS4 study support)
Utopia Project (KS4 study support plus vocational qualifications and GCSE Eng and Maths)
Stride (English, Maths, vocational qualifications)
Tranmere Rovers Football Club (vocational qualifications through Progress Pathways)
Wirral Riding School (re-engagement of disaffected young people through equine activities including related qualifications through the British Horse Society)
New Horizons (specific age/ gender related projects to tackle identified local issues eg gangs, knife crime etc including vocational qualifications)

In February 2022 a new registered provider – Transforming Lives for Good – is due to open in Hoylake. This provision is planning to start with a 6 place base at a cost of £120 per day for young people in Key Stages 3 & 4 at risk of permanent exclusion. It follows the same well considered model of teaching combined with therapeutic intervention to achieve reintegration back into school, not dissimilar to the Progress-Schools Ltd KS3 Reintegration programme but available for schools to commission directly.

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 2021/22 are as follows:

1. Continuing to work collaboratively with schools to further develop the Alternative Education landscape and broaden the offer currently available for schools to commission.
2. Continuing to consider Alternative Education innovation as it pertains to the Primary school sector: models and delivery.
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, and other relevant agencies.

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