

WIRRAL COUNCIL

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM 2022

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

Wirral Home and Continuing Education Service

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.

The Home and Continuing Education Service is an Alternative Provision for Children and Young people who are unable to attend school due to health needs. HCES delivers part of Wirral's statutory responsibility/ duty to provide a suitable education for children who cannot attend school because of their medical needs. The great majority of pupils suffer with poor mental rather than physical health and many have both.

This report summarises the aim of the service and highlights some proposed changes to the current venue and the eligibility criteria. It references the effect of Covid-19 on the referral rate and demographic of pupils. In addition, it provides feedback about the positive effect last year's funding increases have made and alerts schools to the fact that the service delivery may be affected/improved by the SEN Review Green paper which proposes a single system encompassing SEND and AP.

The Service is being managed on an interim basis until the end of this academic year. (31st August 2022).

3. BACKGROUND

The Home and Continuing Education Service is an Alternative for children whose health creates a barrier to education. It does this by:

- Providing a suitable education for the children of Wirral who have medical needs that prevent them from attending school by ensuring that they make the best educational progress they can and access the most suitable pathway to preparation for life.
- Providing sufficient hours of continuing education in line with statutory guidance; the equivalent of full-time or for the number of hours the child's health condition allows. "Full-time education" is not defined in law, but it should equate to what the pupil would normally have in school.
- Developing a multiagency graduated response for children with health needs.
- Since March 2021 the service offers Enrichment Activities every Thursday afternoon. This was made possible by last years agreement to transfer the Pupil Premium for eligible year 11 pupils.

4. Changes of Venue

The Service moved from being on site at Hilbre High School in September 2021 to Fishers Lane in Pensby and will be moving to Pilgrim Street in July 2022.

5. The Effects of Covid-19/school closures on the Service

The school closures initially led to a decline in the number of referrals to the service. It also hindered transition to post 16 provisions meaning that last year we had a small number of year 12 pupils who remained with us.

Since September/October 2022 the referral rate has climbed with an average 2/3 requests for service per week. The number of referrals from pupils in year 7 and 8 has increased with the narrative that transition to secondary school alongside the closures was just too difficult alongside the mental health challenges some pupils faced.

There are 115 pupils currently receiving teaching with 36 in year 11.

There are 4 primary aged pupils.

6.Changes to Policy/eligibility criteria

In January 2020 there was a Local Government Ombudsman directive regarding the Eligibility Criteria for HCES. Previously School referrals had to be supported by medical support from a consultant or senior CAMHS practitioner. Following the directive this has been widened to include other medical teams to avoid delays. GP supportive information will be accepted as an interim measure whilst more specific medical evidence becomes available.

Budget Position

In 2020-2021 the budget position indicated an overspend of £100k. There was no increase for the 2021-22 budget. Schools Forum agreed to the increase from £80 per week to £125 per week for 2021/2022. This meant an annual total cost to schools of £4875 (apart from the pupil's first year which costs £3375 as the first 12 weeks are free). Year 11 pupils are currently paid for by transfer of the AWPU. **School Forum may wish to consider a change to this system. Continuing the weekly charging system for all year groups may simplify things.** During 2021 schools agreed to keeping year 11 pupils on their role meaning they no longer need to be placed on the AP census.

Having had a £100k overspend (as explained) in 2020-2021 it was paramount that the budget came in line with the amount allocated, which it did. Careful financial management together with the increase of charge to schools has enabled the service to recruit some additional staff, deliver Enrichment Activities and respond to the increased demand following the pandemic.

Charges for 2022-2023 are forecasted to remain the same as this year, and that income will increase due to the growing number of children we have with our service. We currently have 115 children, which is a third more than the previous year.

School Forum may wish to consider a change to the funding of year 11 by continuing the weekly charging system for all year groups rather than transfer of AWPU IN YEAR 11.

The benefit of Pupil Premium has really made a difference to the service and our children. The monies have been used for various activities from rock climbing, bowling, and laser quest, to name just a few. The numbers attending Enrichment is growing all the time. The benefits to the children both socially and emotionally are huge.

9. SEND Review

The SEND review has called for a reformed and integrated role for alternative provision within Local and National SEND landscape. This will create a springboard for improvement and development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Forum note the report

Consider replacing the transfer of AWPY in year 11 to continuing the weekly charging system as for all year groups.

Continue transfer of Pupil Premium where appropriate.

If the Forum wishes to express any views in relation to this increase, they are invited to inform the Local Authority.

Julie Hudson